

of patience and understanding which supports the family during the period of change and uncertainty.

In general, you:

- complete the inventory and organize the packing;
- close down community contacts, and direct family farewells;
- protect, collect and preserve family memorabilia, routines and rituals;
- locate education, medical, employment, cultural and leisure resources in the new environment and re-establish family routines and rituals; and,
- find the means to pursue your own personal development and maintain your individual identity.

As a spouse your position may be either privileged, prohibitively prescribed, or completely undefined depending on the position of the employee. Your freedom of choice decreases the closer you approach being the spouse of the head of mission, whereupon your options become even more limited. Inevitably, while you are at post you will be the spouse of someone and not yourself, at least for all representational and official purposes. To a certain extent you are always representational, even while doing the groceries or playing a casual set of tennis, but on other than official occasions you will have to create your own status and establish your own identity within the community.

There is another little wrinkle at a post that no one talks much about these days: there is a post hierarchy. Every employee has a rank within it and the spouse shares that rank. For some people, rank rankles; but it differs little from the pecking order in any company, association or organization. It determines many of the activities, social contacts and responsibilities you have, and it can be an unpleasant surprise to find yourself treated according to your rank, or lack of rank, and not as a person.

Living as a member of a diplomatic community makes the protocol hierarchy something to be aware of, and sometimes adhered to, but it can stifle your enjoyment of a posting if it becomes a preoccupation. The employee is probably more comfortable with this situation than the spouse.

The spouse, as well as the employee, needs a means of relaxation, a diversionary activity to counteract the stress of mobility, provide continuity with the past and create opportunity for social contact outside official business. These are hobbies or sporting pursuits, interests or activities carried on outside your main occupation. They may be long standing or deliberately selected and cultivated, but their value should not be underestimated. At a post they can be a lifesaver. The only criterion is that it must be something you can pursue anywhere and under