The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project
Foreign Service Spouse Series

FRANCES MCSTAY ADAMS

Interviewed by: Jewell Fenzi

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Q: This is Jewell Fenzi interviewing Frances Adams at the Women's National Democratic Club on Wednesday, April 17, 1991. I had planned to do a tape on the Foreign Service. However, having read Frances's Curriculum Vitae this morning, I realized that her activities have been so entwined that we will go back and forth between the Foreign Service and the Democratic Party. My first question, because the answer doesn't appear in your biographical data, is, where did the marvelous interest that has sustained you for years, your interest in women's issues, humanitarian issues, civil rights, originate?

ADAMS: I was interested in a lot of these things when I was younger, when I was in college.

Q: So it was an interest that began in college.

ADAMS: Well it began actually long before that because my father died when I was six years old. My brother was five; my sister four. You know I got terribly much involved. I did work my way through college. My mother wasn't well, then lost everything during the Depression, every piece of property. I always felt that my mother was having a terribly rough time. Anyway, I think some of [my interests in women's issues] started there in the family with losing one's father and seeing what happened as a result of death in the family and all these things. So I was always interested and I worked on a lot on things that involved me with older people when I was quite young.

Q: I noticed he was a businessman but I could not read the name of the business.

ADAMS: Janney Semple Hill.

Q: And what did he make?

ADAMS: Well, they were a large company, one of the big distributors of hardware in the Middle West. It's a big outfit in Minneapolis. I'm sure there are many more. But their hardware was pretty extensive and then they developed other items during the years that went by.

Q: And that all fell apart in the Depression; also, because he had died.

ADAMS: He had died, yes.

Q: So you worked your way through college?

ADAMS: Oh, yes, and I worked a little bit to help my sister and brother through, too.

Q: The thing I don't seem to have on here is when you got your B.A. at the University of Minnesota.

ADAMS: In 1936.

Q: So that was right in the midst of the Depression.

ADAMS: Yes, during the 30's.

Q: So what did you do?

ADAMS: I was working all the time when I was a student. I worked for the head of the Journalism Department. I was majoring in Journalism. I worked there every day for a couple of hours. I worked with him on a book. I didn't do any of the writing. I did annotation for him at the library, collecting microfilm, all those things.

Q: On that little salary, you were able to survive?

ADAMS: No, I had other jobs, too. I worked for the Association of Fraternities on the campus and I did press releases. And then I went up to Duluth where my mother was. My mother had re-married and that's really where all the economic problem started because the marriage didn't work out and it was terrible and my mother lost the land she'd inherited in Minneapolis. But anyway, I made money. I went up weekends to help my mother who had a hard time. And I knew loads of people in Duluth as I did quite a lot in Minneapolis. Seeing all these people's lives, the miners coming down in the Depression and the bread lines down in Michigan, influenced me a lot in my growing up.

Q: And then you went to Chicago to Leo Burnett?

ADAMS: Yes, it's the largest [advertising] agency in Chicago now. When I went there it was very small. We had Letro and Wacey. The way I got the job - not that this is pertinent - but the way it happened is that I made a point of finding out what was the advertising agency for "Real Silk Hosiery." A boy at school invited me to go to a football game at Northwestern. And I said I would love to go because I would love a free ride to Chicago because I wanted to try to get a job. This was during school, of course.

And so I rode down with him and his sister and they went to the game and I went down to Leo Burnett and walked in there cold. Mr. Burnett was there by himself. We had a long chat. He asked me all about school, what I was studying, what I wanted to do. Mostly I wanted to get a job! Anyway, he hired me. Not immediately. He saw that I was on the Minnesota Daily and he wanted me to sign Daily back and all that. But anyhow, that's how I happened to go to work for Leo Burnett.

I first started out with doing research work on the North Shore on Hoover vacuum cleaners which was one of the accounts. And then I got into a lot of other accounts and then they made me Research Director. I was 23. So by then, I knew Wes. He was in graduate school. And we got married when I was 24.

Q: In Evanston. And then you came to Washington or New York?

ADAMS: Washington.

Q: Washington. Then where and how did you meet Eleanor Roosevelt and Esther Peterson? Because you worked with both of them at that time, didn't you?

ADAMS: Well I knew Esther. I think I met her first in ADA [Americans for Democratic Action]. I got involved in ADA when we got back from Ecuador. I'm pretty sure that's where I first met her. We were talking about this one day not so long ago. Was it at ADA or was it at one of those consumer meetings? I was working with a consumer group, too. And we're not quite sure, because we were involved in several of the same things and I admired her enormously. I thought she was just wonderful.

I met Mrs. Roosevelt in a very funny way. I did free-lance radio. I did auditions in order to get these radio jobs. And I met her on the Brazil Coffee Hour. (laughter) She was being interviewed on the program and, for the ad, I was playing an airline hostess going to South America with a silly voice and a lot of those things. But Mrs. Roosevelt thought I really was an airline hostess! I had on a gabardine suit, a greenish one. And she thought I was. But then I met her later through the organizing of ADA. Her daughter's a member of the club here.

Q: Oh, yes, I know.

ADAMS: Ellie Seagraves.

Q: Her granddaughter?

ADAMS: Granddaughter, Anna's daughter, yes.

Q: So Mrs. Roosevelt must have had a profound influence on you.

ADAMS: Oh, I just thought she was absolutely superb, wonderful. How marvelous to be like that.

Q: She was a real role model for American women at the time.

ADAMS: Oh, yes. And she did so many things for the President. She traveled all over. She acted as eyes and ears for him. She was wonderful. I have a few photographs of her.

Q: Oh, yes, I've seen them. I was just reading the book, Modern First Ladies about her and some of ththings that she did to promote women's issues. She would only let women reporters come to her briefings so that the major agencies had to hire women reporters if they wanted to cover her.

ADAMS: I'm on the Eleanor Roosevelt Val-kill Committee. I didn't even put that down.

Q: What kind of committee?

ADAMS: The Eleanor Roosevelt Val-kill committee. Val-kill was the name of her cottage up at Hyde Park. We have a small committee here where we raise money to send it up there to Hyde Park. I'm on the National Board, so that's interesting.

Q: What were some of your activities in ADA at that time?

ADAMS: When we got back from Ecuador, I wanted to get involved with some kind of local group. Anyway, through some people I'd known here, I met several people who were interested in the General Motors strike at that time. That was a big strike. They asked me if I would come and help. They needed some work on preparing press releases and things like that. Through that I met some of the people in ADA like Joe Raoul, Wallace Cohen and Edgar Hollander and a number of these people. So anyway, they got me to join ADA which I did. It wasn't called ADA at that time. It was UDA. During that next year, ADA was created by people including Eleanor Roosevelt, Hubert Humphrey, people from the AFL-CIO and a number of others. I was just on it. I was doing dog work, you know, that sort of thing.

Q: Administrative support, we call it today.

ADAMS: Yes. Well I did all kinds of things. I went to Mrs. Pinchot. I helped get sponsors, and all those things. But I learned a lot doing that.

Q: What did UDA stand for?

ADAMS: Union for Democratic Action. But then they broadened it to bring in labor. ADA was much more representative than UDA which was much smaller.

Q: But you say you were just doing the administrative support work and helping out. But you must have learned a lot and that must have helped.

ADAMS: Oh, yes. I was down at the ADA offices everyday and learned a lot.

Q: Did you have children at that time?

ADAMS: Yes.

Q: Who took care of the children?

ADAMS: Well, I had an arrangement in McLean Gardens where we were living at the time. There was an elderly woman named Mrs. Paine and she helped me. She knew I was going out and doing this and she helped me. She'd come by and take care of the children.

Q: So you went everyday and worked as a volunteer at the ADA? Where was it?

ADAMS: Down on Connecticut Avenue. I've forgotten the number. It was a couple of blocks from here. Some of the people I met then are still among my very good friends there. When we'd come back from overseas, I'd come right back into this group. Because I was getting involved with Civil Rights with a lot of people here in the city, too.

Q: That was just after the War. Now you were here during the War, too?

ADAMS: Oh, yes.

Q: You were doing freelance radio?

ADAMS: My first son was born in '42 and I thought I wouldn't be working for a while. Then, I heard from Leo Burnett who was here conferring with somebody in the State Department. He called me up and said he had recommended me for a job as Nelson Rockefeller's Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs. And I went to work then when my first child was nine months old.

Q: And that nice woman in McLean Gardens took care of him?

ADAMS: No, that was another person because I had to have all day care. Mrs. Paine would come in just an afternoon or a morning. This was before we went to Ecuador. Because of working with the Office of Inter-American Affairs and Nelson Rockefeller, I was recommended for working in the field in Quito. So that was the connection with working there.

Q: I was asking you about the babysitter arrangement because you had to have babysitters to work and I was wondering what one did in Washington during the War.

ADAMS: Oh, yes. I found this woman through an ad in the paper. And she was wonderful. It was marvelous.

Q: You have to have that security at home before you can work when you've got a little one. So then what did you do? Let's see. Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs for Nelson Rockefeller. What was he doing? What were you both doing, let's put it that way.

ADAMS: Well, President Roosevelt had known Nelson Rockefeller and knew about the family's interest in Latin America. And so what Rockefeller's office did was what was done some years later except his was a really bigger outfit. I was doing reports from the field and preparing materials for illustrative charts for meetings. We had inter-agency meetings that I helped prepare material for. But it was a lot of contact with the fieldworkers. We had real "Dear John" letters, that kind of thing. So I really learned quite a bit about what was done in those various countries. We were trying to sell the war effort to them and trying to line them up because, you know, they weren't really lined up with us initially. We always had a distrust of Latin America. Not Latin America. I mean Argentina.

Q: And didn't we have listening posts in Guatemala looking for U-boats?

ADAMS: Yes, we did. We had listening posts in Ecuador, too. That was one of the things I had a staff member for, for monitoring.

Q: Now, do I have this right? In 1942, you worked on Community Action and Civil Rights? Picketing theaters, pools? That early? Civil Rights during World War II?

ADAMS: Oh, yes. I worked on it at various times. Before we went and when we came back, I worked as a member of a committee coordinating these activities in the city. And we worked on all kinds of things. Now picketing the National Theater was a little later. I'm not exactly sure. Some of these things I might better check, but '42 was when Tommy was born. He was 9 months when I went to work with the Coordinator. But I was involved with various Civil Rights things. We were working on playground areas and swimming areas. Unemployment. You know they weren't hiring Blacks in the department stores, even. And the newspapers were full of ads that separated people who were wanted. Negroes or white and all that sort of thing. And of course in public places it was very hard to get lunches arranged because so many restaurants wouldn't let you have a mixed group. Some of us just plowed in there.

Q: Was that through ADA?

ADAMS: Well some of it was through ADA and some of it just through some other people I knew. There were a couple of church people who were very active on this, both in the Black and white churches. And it gradually built to more of these coordinating groups.

Q: But these weren't big massive demonstrations like in the '60's, were they? Weren't there just a handful of you? I'm rather fascinated because I didn't realize this had happened so early.

ADAMS: Oh, well the National Theater attracted a lot of people to come and picket. There were Trade Union people. And there were Stage Door Canteen people. I was at the Stage Door Canteen and we got a lot of people working on it from there. And people who were with AFRA, [American Federation of Radio Artists], the union, of which I was an early member. A lot of our union people picketed. ADA people helped with that, too.

Q: Now I'm interested. I did not know that Civil Rights began this early. Was that a result of World War II?

ADAMS: Well I think there are just so many things that young people don't realize. The Women's Movement, after all, started a long time ago. Look at the women who were championing votes for women and the women who were working in all kinds of areas in the 19th century. And there were people who were working in Black churches particularly. And people in white churches who were very concerned and tried to get members accepted into their churches who were "of color," as they were saying at that point.

Q: So there were activities. Was that a bipartisan thing, or was it predominantly Democratic?

ADAMS: Well, there were some Republicans, too, but it was predominantly Democrats.

Q: And so then you were whisked off to Quito?

ADAMS: Yes. You see my husband was very keenly interested in the Foreign Service. He did economics as his major and then in graduate work he worked on international relations. The first time he took the exam, he flunked the oral, not because of anything he did wrong, but they thought he was too young. He was a little bit upset about that.

Q: How old was he?

ADAMS: Probably 21 or 22. But he had in his mind that he wanted to do something international. He started with Rotary International and he got his master's degree writing programs in international areas. It was just a block away from where I was working in Chicago at Leo Burnett. And I met him on the elevated. No, I met him in the library first. And then we ran into each other on the elevated.

Q: And it went from there?

ADAMS: Yes.

Q: How nice. So did they tell him to come back later when they didn't pass him when he was 21 or 22?

ADAMS: I think they probably did, but he was pretty discouraged at that. However, we decided that we were going to get married and we were going to leave Chicago and we were going to do something else with our lives. We had to get permission to go out of the country because of the draft. We went to Mexico for three months and we studied Spanish and we traveled around Mexico and we decided that maybe we should go back and see what might be possible. We should go to Washington. So we just came here, you know.

Q: And then he took the exam again?

ADAMS: No, he didn't. He first entered the Department without the exam, the Foreign Service. And I just cannot remember when he did the exam again, but it was sometime when he was working on that initial wartime job concerning foreign agents and then aid, particularly to Britain. It was not a terribly long time and then in 1943 he was assigned to Quito.

Q: Still during the War.

ADAMS: Yes. My brother was killed in '44, so I know the War. My two cousins, my mother's brother's two children were killed as well. Almost all of the boys in the family. All those things strengthened my feelings about war and about trying to get along with conflict management, although I realize that Hitler was really terrible and my brother felt so strongly about it, too.

Q: Was Charles Lindbergh involved in ADA here in Washington, or was he just speaking around the country?

ADAMS: He wasn't involved with ADA ever to my knowledge. No, he was involved in America First. It was an isolationist thing. And I really don't know how much Lindbergh changed. I think he did because Anne Morrow had a real affect on him in seeing that the America Firsters were really extreme isolationists. Some people joined because they felt strongly about trying to have a peaceful solution, which was of course how we all felt. But no, Lindbergh wasn't involved I don't believe, unless it happened sometime when I wasn't here, and I think I would have heard of it.

Q: I guess he was just speaking around the country.

ADAMS: He was for America First.

Q: Yes, I was mistaken. I confused the two. I knew he'd been involved in one or the other. In Quito you were Radio Director/Coordinator, Inter-American Affairs. Were you still working with Rockefeller?

ADAMS: Well the thing is that there were a number of centers all over. There was one in Brazil. In fact I think there were two in Brazil where you served.

Q: In Recife.

ADAMS: Yes, and then in Rio. But these little "servicios" were all over and there was press and there were films and there was radio, and I worked on the radio service trying to put on the shortwave. That was to transmit the shortwave that was coming from the States. And also developing local programs in Quito. This was when I got to see that selling the war effort was not the best way to win friends there. They were much more interested when I myself got people to come in on child health and we set up some demonstrations where people came, and we worked all around the country. They bathed children.

Q: Did you do that on your own?

ADAMS: Yes, I did it on my own, but the office knew about it. I was in the office but I went to work with these others. I used some of those people in radio. We had a health program and it was broadcast all around the country. It went with our [health] demonstrations. Those were volunteer things and I did them with people who were from other countries and from Ecuador, too.

Q: People are always more interested in something that affects them personally, so I can see how your efforts to go out with him and work in the community on child care and whatever [might have worked well...]

ADAMS: And it tied in with my thinking of what we ought to put on radio locally also. Because we had pretty good luck in getting things re-transmitted. And there were transcriptions. You know they were those great big platters that they used before they used the kind of thing that they do now, tapes and all sorts of things. So I got stacks of transcriptions and put them on at different stations. It was really great fun.

Q: And you had a feeling that you were involved. Now were you paid to do this?

ADAMS: I was paid to work in the "Centro," yes. Not very much, but anyway. When I was in Washington, I was on a professional staff level and I had a different categorization. You see I wasn't really sent [down there for a position]. Washington wrote and recommended that they use me because they didn't have anybody for radio. One of the officers at the Embassy, the First Secretary, thought it was terrible that an Embassy wife worked. I said, "I've always worked Mr. Bonnet, you know." I mean I had worked at one thing or another all the time and I think that women need to work as well as men.

Q: I was going to ask you if there was any resistance because that was early. Well, but then again it was during war and things began changing.

ADAMS: No embassy wives were working. Some really wanted to. Yes, they did.

Q: So you see the wife wanting to work abroad is nothing new.

ADAMS: No. But getting the opportunity to work abroad is harder, you know, although it's certainly improved. I think it has. Definitely improved. And now you've got women Foreign Service officers who are assigned where their husbands are. I think that's just great really.

Q: Apparently that's not the total answer, but it's certainly a step in the right direction.

ADAMS: Oh, sure. It's improved a lot. The group in the Department has worked very hard on that as you know, I'm sure.

Q: Oh, yes. Women's Action Organization is the name of that group. And in 1946, after the War, you came back and you were working with ADA again on the National Organizing Committee. You were the founder and director of ADA study trips abroad-England, Scandinavia, Germany. Did you get to go on those trips?

ADAMS: Oh, yes, I directed them. When I started those trips, they said, "You could do it. It doesn't cost ADA any money." And we made a little.

Q: So how did you make money?

ADAMS: By the people who paid to go. We did it at very low cost. Fritz Mondale was on the first one we did to Britain. And then I got two people to help me. One took a group to Scandinavia the second year. The third year I got somebody to help because we were being transferred to Cairo and I had to get somebody to take it over. She's in the Club here. She's an old friend of mine, too! Doris Foster. And so we kind of angled together during the years. Her husband was in the Department and so we saw them when we came on home leave. Doris did some programs and I did some. Even though we were overseas, I helped a bit.

Q: When you took these young people, I take it they were students, or was it just everybody?

ADAMS: Some were students and some were not.

Q: What was the focus of the trips? To study?

ADAMS: The idea was really to learn about the politics particularly of the countries that we visited. In Britain, the Labour Government was in power and we were getting a publication through ADA of Britain under Labour or in Labour Government or something like that. The man who edited it is here, a member of this Club, David Williams. Anyway, I went the first summer to Labour Party summer schools and Fabian summer schools. And it was then that I got this idea of making it a group program. So I used the same organizations where I'd met the people the first year by myself. And then we met all kinds of people. We met ministers, we met professional women, we met all kinds of people who were very helpful because they hadn't had a group like us. There are more groups now that do this kind of thing.

Q: That must have been very early on. That was just right after '46. Did you go by ship?

ADAMS: Oh, yes. The first time we went by ship. I went by myself. I got free passage over and back on the World Student Service. Although I hadn't been to Europe, I was on the team. It was a mixed Dutch and American team going over and back. We went over on the Tibinta and back on the Holendamme.

Q: So there again you must have had someone taking care of your children.

ADAMS: I took the children to England.

Q: Oh, you took them with you?

ADAMS: I took them with me and then I put them with families. But you know, my work on the organizing committee for ADA was in 1946. Some of that other material that I told you happened then. I'll have to correct that.

Q: I wasn't quite sure whether it was Washington-Quito-Washington or Quito-Washington.

ADAMS: I don't blame you at all. I was having rheumatoid arthritis at that time and it took me a lot of therapy to get over it. Right after Danny's birth, that second son, I got this terrible rheumatoid arthritis in my legs and arms and neck and everything. But I was very fortunate to get on top of it. It was terribly difficult and painful, but I went to Group Health and they worked on me. I had to go to therapy. My older son called it "Arthuritis." (laughter)

Q: Well, I notice in spite of all that, you were involved in the League of Women Voters, in civil rights and home rule while you had two small children and rheumatoid arthritis. I'm staggered by all this.

ADAMS: We had a discussion group at McLean Gardens on techniques of leadership, all of that kind of thing. And I was interested in the League [of Women Voters] anyway, although I was really more partisan, but I thought the League did excellent work in education. So I joined that group. I've always been grateful for it. It was very good, very helpful.

Q: I think by personal example at this point you were showing that women can do equal work. Perhaps not for equal pay. But did you have a sense at that time of moving the Women's Movement forward?

ADAMS: I didn't think of it as the Women's Movement, but I knew enough women who were doing things to think that that was the right thing to do. And the way I started selling Real Silk Hosiery was I was looking for a job in the summertime. And I needed to do more than I was doing. And there was an ad in the paper that said, "Young man wanted for travel." And I answered the ad saying, "I'm a young woman wanting to travel." Crazy, you know. They then gave me a case and samples of Real Silk to sell. But I did pretty well with it.

Q: And how much traveling did you do? Just around the Midwest?

ADAMS: Just in town. It was hardly travel. It was a really misleading ad. Although I think sometimes some of those people did go out of town. But that appealed to me. "Young man wanted to travel." (laughter)

Q: That's wonderful. Now we go back to 1946 in Washington. You were here a long time!

ADAMS: We were here '46 to '50. Because in '50 we went to Cairo. It was really between '46 and '50 that I did most of those things with ADA.

Q: And then in 1950 you went to Cairo?

ADAMS: I did some work with the Inter-American Education Foundation in that period. I worked on textbook materials and so forth for Panama, and did several things in Nicaragua. It was one of those things where my connections with the Rockefeller thing helped.

Q: Did you run into any resistance in any of these things that you did because you were a woman? It seems to me that you were almost charting new territory?

ADAMS: I think that every woman who has worked professionally has run into some difficulties at some time. If there's a meeting and you're the only woman there, you're the one who brings the coffee. You know, that sort of thing. Occasionally I would run into it. But I would say not severely so. I did, as have other women, notice differences in salaries for the same level of work. The same requirements and so forth. Of course you couldn't help but notice that.

Q: I wonder how much of this was your attitude. You said you had to go to work, you had to work. You were in Washington at a very exciting time during the War when women were doing things and I wonder if part of it was your attitude. That you just expected to be part of the work force and do something creative. And I wonder how much that carried?

ADAMS: Well that probably did, too. I also found work for my sister to come here. She came and stayed with us and then I got her an apartment. And she was working with the British Purchasing Commission which was a war job. It was for Britain, but it was here. No, we did have the feeling, because a number of our friends were working on real war jobs. Working as a riveter like "Rosie" and all that.

Q: And tell me in 1942, where did you live in Washington?

ADAMS: In Washington we lived at 2720 Wisconsin Avenue. I always tell my elder one, Tommy, that that's where he was born and every time we go by there, he says, "Yes, I remember." (laughs)

Q: Calvert Street? Wisconsin and Calvert?

ADAMS: No, it's before Wisconsin and Massachusetts. It's south of Massachusetts a couple of blocks in the Cathedral area. It was a brand-new building. We had been in the tourist place up just into the Maryland line and I went down [to the Cathedral area] on the streetcar at different times, and I saw that building. And I told Wes, "I know where I'd like to go. I want to live in the District. Don't you?" "Oh, yes," he said. "But don't take that building. It'll be too expensive." (laughs)

Q: But you did.

ADAMS: It wasn't that expensive. I priced it and it was surprisingly reasonable. So that's where we were.

Q: Now we had gotten to Cairo. What were you able to do in Cairo to further women's issues in the Arab world? (laughter) Talk about challenges.

ADAMS: Well, actually there were a lot of very active Egyptian women and have always been. I did get to know some of them. [For example] in the Fulbright Program, when I was briefly helping the person who was doing it before. And then when she left, I became the director. I was able to get a program for teachers and they were practically all women. It was interesting to have them. We had weekly get-togethers of all the Fulbright scholars and we shared experiences they were having. But the men also had experiences about women.

Of course we knew that a lot of the women didn't have a chance, especially in the rural areas, to go to school. Primary schools weren't available and still aren't in many places. I was very much a believer in early education for literacy because I worked in Quito. I had done enough of those [adult literacy] programs myself to see how much forgetting there is when you worked with adults in literacy. You've probably had some experience with that yourself. I feel it's so much more important to get little girls in school. They may forget things but not to the extent that it occurs when you take a woman who has never had any education.

Q: Right. Had Nasser come in as the president?

ADAMS: No, when we were there it was King Farouk.

Q: Did Nasser come in while you were there?

ADAMS: Just after. You see, we were there for the burning of Cairo and we were there during all this business of the Muslim Brotherhood when they were marching on the streets. I had gone to walk over to a Fulbrighter's home in the afternoon with my little boy and I saw the mob coming. And we went and hid behind an apartment and, fortunately, they didn't find us. Because they were after foreigners. They were doing graffiti all around. They were crossing out any words that weren't Arabic. There was a lot of this kind of trouble going on before the King had to leave, you know.

Q: That could have been very dangerous.

ADAMS: Oh, yes, it was. It really was. We had record concerts, [playing] recordings in our place for friends, for Egyptians, for other people. We were having a Mozart party when they were burning the city of Cairo. But some of the guests came anyway even though it was terribly dangerous on the street. We didn't think anybody would come.

Q: Did they stay over or did they go home?

ADAMS: Well some were our friends up above us in the building. They didn't want to go up to their apartment even. So we kind of stayed up just about all night. We were a little afraid that they might start torching the place where we were, but they didn't.

Q: And you weren't evacuated?

ADAMS: No. There were some evacuations, but not the kind that took place in '67. There were many more later.

Q: I notice in Cairo you were the Director of the Fulbright Program. Was that for the Americans coming to Cairo or the Egyptians?

ADAMS: It was both ways. We processed people for placement. You see what we did was get the information from the institutions, the universities, the colleges for the kind of academics they were looking for. Then we had applications for openings in the States. So we processed both. We didn't really process, but we approved what came from the States for the Americans to be in Cairo. We actually interviewed and we had teams of people to help. Specialists in different areas to interview Egyptians.

Q: Now was that a paid position?

ADAMS: Yes.

Q: Now that's another thing we haven't marked here. When you go over this again, you can mark which of these arpaid. Now obviously the Embassy's wives things are volunteer.

ADAMS: Oh, yes.

Q: We won't go into that now, but you can add that. But I really am very impressed that you had all these jobs.

ADAMS: I was very fortunate.

Q: Were you oftentimes the only one in the mission working?

ADAMS: In Egypt there weren't very many. There was a nurse who did some work and there was a woman who was doing teaching. But there were other teachers there. You know it didn't work one way or the other. But Ambassador Caffery was there. You've probably heard of him.

Q: Yes, I have.

ADAMS: And I had quite a time...

Q: He wasn't exactly sympathetic to women's issues.

ADAMS: But, you know, he was very nice to me. But that's about all, you know? You see, there was a bi-national commission. The head was a very well-known historian. His name was Shepi Korbal. And he had never been invited to the Embassy. And some Egyptians told me about this. "How does it happen that he's the head of the American-Egyptian Committee and your Ambassador has never met him?" So I found out that the reason he hadn't been included was because he had never made a call, left his cards at the embassy. Can you imagine? So I worked it out. The protocol man was a Lebanese. His name was Hedad. And I later got to know a lot of his family in Lebanon. But we worked out a way that this could happen. I took his cards and gave them to Hedad and Hedad told the Ambassador. The Ambassador knew that Shepi Korbal was the Chair. [The protocol man] said that we would like to suggest that he would have an opportunity to meet with the Ambassador. The Ambassador invited him. I tell you. I was so glad about that, because I didn't know if it would happen. But Hedad really facilitated it.

Q: But still, you carried the cards!

ADAMS: Yes.

Q: Jefferson Caffery was very protocol, very old-school.

ADAMS: But you know he was very courageous when there was trouble.

Q: Then you went from there to New Delhi? You were there with George Allen?

ADAMS: Yes. George Allen was there. Bowles was there first.

Q: And you were there both with the Bowles and George Allen.

ADAMS: George Allen. Did you know George Allen?

Q: No, but hadn't he been with USIS?

ADAMS: He went afterwards to USIS. He had been in Yugoslavia. He was a really lovely man.

Q: I remember his being USIS and I thought his interests must have coincided with yours. It must have made it easy to work with him.

ADAMS: Oh, yes. He was wonderful.

Q: Let's see, now what did you do in Delhi? Delhi was in '53. Here we are. Member Fulbright Selection Committee again. Coordinator, evaluator of USIS films.

ADAMS: That was a paid job.

Q: That was paid?

ADAMS: Yes. That was money from USIA that was granted to Delhi USIS to make what I believe was the first evaluation of all of the films in the whole film library. There were about 550 of them. We did them in eight languages so we had people in these language teams. It was fascinating comparing what different people in different parts of the country felt about some of our films. We found some of our films were downright offensive.

Q: Can you give me an example?

ADAMS: Well, one was about a meat-packing company. And you can imagine. They had cattle. And they were showing this film.

Q: But how did that film ever get to India in the first place?

ADAMS: That's the problem. You see we learned quite a bit about this. My husband and I were very fond of a couple in USIS. He was second to the PAO [Public Affairs Officer] and he had no idea. He said, "The Department accepts a lot of films that are given to them and they just use them. They don't even look at them before they do." So the person who did evaluation in the Embassy was a woman who was terrific. Emily Ailey, her name was. I had met her before in the States because she was on the Philadelphia team for ADA. So I worked with her and Barbara Harrison. I don't know if you know Sig Harrison who's with Carnegie. Barbara is his wife. Well they worked in Delhi when we were there. [We all had] the same question, "How could they send these films without looking at them?" So one of Emily Ailey's main recommendations was have a panel look at the films that you send from the States, for goodness sakes! That's the least you can do.

Q: Did they do that?

ADAMS: We don't know how many if any of those recommendations were followed, because we all had different ones. We took them from the teams.

Q: You know most of the people that you were working with this entire time from Ecuador to Cairo to New Delhi, were Democrats, weren't they? The Foreign Service was mostly Democrat...

ADAMS: Well, the way I got the job in Cairo was through a man who was definitely no partisan in anything. He was a Navy person, but he knew about my work in Quito and recommended me for the job in Cairo. But it is true, a lot of them were Democrats.

Q: I wasn't thinking so much about your getting of the jobs, but just your contacts and the people you saw all the time. You know, you had this rapport. My last post, I think I and one other person were the only ones who voted for Fritz Mondale. Everybody else was a Republican. It wasn't much fun. It hadn't always been that way. I noticed that you started right out in New Delhi by being president of the American Women's Club.

ADAMS: I didn't start out. I did that fairly soon.

Q: What I meant was that this was the first time that you've mentioned an American Women's Club on here. So did you belong to the American Women's Club in Cairo? Was there one?

ADAMS: Well, Mrs. Caffery had the Embassy Wives. But in Cairo, I worked more with the international group plus Egyptians, particularly for the Palestinians and Palestinian students.

Q: So I assume that Mrs. Caffery just had the ladies over for tea and things like that.

ADAMS: Yes, and she would invite several of us when she was inviting the wife of a minister or the wife of an Ambassador from another country. She was always very nice to us, but she could be high-handed. It was absolutely de rigueur that you had to send flowers if you went to anything there, you know.

Q: At the Residence?

ADAMS: Yes, you had to send them. And you must wear a hat for lunch. The [wife of the] second man in the Navy command there didn't wear a hat to lunch once and she never invited them back to the Residence in the time they were serving there. Didn't wear a hat.

Q: Didn't wear a hat. Gloves? White gloves?

ADAMS: Well she should have worn gloves, but I don't know about that. I remember it was because of the hat. She didn't wear the hat.

Q: Did they send out a notice saying you were to send flowers?

ADAMS: Your sisters told you in the embassy. (laughs) Passed the word along. But we all knew that the Cafferys were kind of rigid.

Q: Well, you know, the Service was smaller in those days and I'm sure they had a reputation, a "corridor reputation" I think they call that today. It was easier to keep track of who expected what in those days than it is now.

ADAMS: Besides, I don't think that ambassadors' wives are apt to be as rigid as they were at that time.

Q: I don't think so. Because society isn't as rigid anymore. I think that's a step for the better, really. I don't think that there are any dragon ladies today. I mean they have no way to be dragon ladies. And that's good. That's one good thing that came out of the '72 Directive. But I was just interested to see that your first American Women's Club involvement, you just marched right in and became president.

ADAMS: Well I guess I was president after I'd been there for a while. I think it was the second year I was there, I was president. But I worked on a committee before. We did a lot of liaison...

Q: Yes, liaison with refugee centers, schools, hospitals. Now there again, I needed to look up my dates. When was the partition with Pakistan?

ADAMS: '48.

Q: '48. So that had happened.

ADAMS: Yes, but there were still many refugees from that time. My husband had been there on the Kashmir Commission in '48. He saw so much of what was happening. Terrible things, you know. All the killing and terrible suffering. But there was still a lot of suffering when we were there in terms of people not having adequate housing.

Q: Did you go to Kashmir, too?

ADAMS: Yes. I didn't go with him on the Commission, but I went later when we were in India.

Q: Because you were arrested in Kashmir, I understand. (laughing) I was told to ask you.

ADAMS: Really there was an arrest in Ecuador, too. But in Kashmir, they wrote me up in the press, "especially Mrs. Adams," they said, because they said I gave cookies to the children in the craft shops.

Q: Well, wasn't that all right?

ADAMS: No, they thought I was bribing them to say things. It was such a silly story, but all the embassy just thought it was hilarious, you know. (laughs) I wasn't arrested. Actually though, Wes was arrested, and I was with him, in Ecuador at the border. And he spent a night in jail.

Q: Why was that?

ADAMS: We were expecting a revolution and actually there was one. They thought that he was involved with Nazis. It doesn't make too much sense. Anyway, he was in jail overnight and I was at the hotel. I was working with the radio station people. And Wes often went with me to these places I went, these towns. This was Tiuacan, just up near the Colombian border. So that was something. That was very scary. But once we got out of that, Wes said, "How does it feel?" "I'm afraid to see a policeman!" (laughter)

Q: Your husband must have been very supportive of all these activities.

ADAMS: Oh, yes. He thought it was great. He just always was saying to me, "Just don't do too much." But no, he was very supportive.

Q: You mean don't overextend yourself or don't go too far out into the [radical activities]...

ADAMS: No, he meant don't work too hard. Because there was always the usual things you do. The entertaining and all these duties.

Q: Because you do that as an Economic officer's wife. You have a great deal of...

ADAMS: Oh, yes. Because you must maintain these contacts with the various ministries.

Q: ...and in the business world, too, and things like that.

ADAMS: And I was involved with the school in India. I was in the founding group. Our group really did found the school. I noticed that you had Calvert System, wasn't that on your [resume]?

Q: No, I helped found the American School of Rotterdam which is now the American International School.

ADAMS: Ours was an international school, too, in India. But we used the Calvert System when we first started, and we ordered it from the States.

Q: Yes. I forget what we used. I can't remember if we used the Calvert System or not, because I didn't teach. I just helped set up the school. You researched propaganda programs by the U.S., Great Britain, Germany, France, U.S.S.R. for the Rockefeller Committee in India, too.

ADAMS: Yes. That was not Nelson Rockefeller. That was a different Rockefeller. You know how many different hands and feet there are in the Rockefeller groups. An old friend of mine, a Unitarian minister who had worked on the Civil Rights thing was out there in India with this Rockefeller group. And he got me to do this research work for them. And I went around and found out what [the embassies] were doing. What language teaching they were doing, what musical things they were doing, what people they were bringing out, and also what newspapers in India they were giving assistance to, and what they were doing with students and people studying in their countries. It was fascinating.

Q: And you didn't run into any resistance from the Indians while you were poking around here and there?

ADAMS: No, not really.

Q: That's wonderful.

ADAMS: They expect Americans to be a little bit. . . .

Q: To be different. Well, that's true. I found that you could capitalize on that in my career, too.

ADAMS: They would occasionally even say such a thing. "But you're an American."

Q: Yes. Well then after exciting places like New Delhi, Cairo and Quito, you came back to nice, staid London. And had quite a few years there. Four years there. And worked with, again, the American Embassy Women's Club.

ADAMS: That's where I did a lot of the work with liaison with social services. I was so interested and so were a number of people. A number of Americans wanted to do this sort of thing. We just had to get together. And we got together the British women who were in charge of the different things and we did interviews with them and asked if there was any opportunity that we might learn. We tried also to be careful that we didn't look like Lady Bountiful, going into these things. But we had some of the women who went regularly on Meals on Wheels. I did the Health Center most of my individual time, but we all got together and compared notes on our volunteer activities.

The American Women's Club was something Mrs. Whitney asked me if I would try to get a few people in the Embassy to join. It was a very staid kind of club. They were mostly women who had married Britishers. And they were ultra-conservative and very limited in their knowledge or understanding of people of other races. And, you know, Britain is full of people from the Caribbean, Pakistan, all over. But they would not allow any woman who was married to someone from Asia to join the club. We had the black marble. [A system for secret balloting against candidates for club membership.] I had never even seen this kind of thing before, although I know it had existed in the U.S., too. But that just wasn't the kind of club that attracted me. But anyway, I found out with an American Black woman friend of mine who was married to a Swede, that they were definitely discriminated against; they wouldn't allow them to join. I told Mrs. Whitney. She was an honorary president and you know, on the advice of her PAO, we got together one time. I brought several of my friends in. We told her [about the discrimination] and she resigned as Honorary president.

Q: They didn't change their ways?

ADAMS: Well, I think they did later. But they were so shocked.

Q: Later. But not to keep her they didn't?

ADAMS: They were so shocked. She wouldn't [have stayed]. I don't think she even gave them a chance. She was so put out about this. She thought it was simply terrible. And she hadn't known... Of course, this is really why she wanted a few Embassy women to join it, to see what they actually did.

Q: To see what it was like.

ADAMS: She was lovely, Betsy Whitney. She was really a lovely person. Is.

Q: You started the embassy briefings for wives in London?

ADAMS: I started that in India. Then we got a lot of people in it. Have you ever heard of Evelyn Hersey? Because she thought it was terrific and she took over when we left. In fact she did a lot of it when I was there. We had a kind of group on that, too. You always find people who like to do some of these things. We did some briefing in Britain. We had several orientation programs and because [when I was] on the ADA, I had arranged things at Parliament and with the political parties, it wasn't hard to do at all. But we did have some of those briefings at the embassy. Not as long lasting as what we had in India. Like this would be maybe a week instead of six weeks.

Q: Did you have senior embassy officials come and talk to the women, too?

ADAMS: Oh, yes.

Q: And then you had people from Britain, also? Government officials...

ADAMS: ...and writers, yes. We did a lot of consulting about speakers [with the Embassy officers.].

Q: How did the embassy officers react to that?

ADAMS: Very favorably.

Q: They were happy to come and talk?

ADAMS: Yes, yes.

Q: Because I remember going to a briefing like that in The Hague at one point. That was considerably later than this, about 1970, I think. And the Country Team members came in and told us what they did in the embassy. Is that the kind of thing that you did?

ADAMS: Yes, that's what we did, too. They's talk about their main responsibilities, and some of the problems involved. I don't think those people [Embassy officers] are hostile. You know, sometimes you consider that they are looking at women and, thinking "Oh well, you know." But we didn't feel that way about it. When they felt that the women were really interested and they were intelligent in their questioning, [they took their audience seriously.]

Q: Well, I think this is important, too. I've always thought that people like you and I who spent so many years abroad may have done things for the women's movement in our own little way. You did them in London and I perhaps somewhere else where it didn't have any direct impact here. No one's ever going to point to this and say, "Oh, Frances Adams set up these orientations." But that was important because it took women out of the tea party, hats and gloves role and showed that they had a right to know what was happening in the country and in the Embassy on the same basis as the officers. I thought that was very important. I remember thinking what a great step forward that was when I went to that briefing in The Hague.

ADAMS: I think that is important.

Q: And do you think yours in India was the first one that was ever done?

ADAMS: I don't know about that. The film evaluation was the first, I believe. I'm not sure about the briefing. We thought maybe it was the first.

Q: Because that was a long time before I went to mine in 1973. And even the one in London would have been seventeen or eighteen years before. And that was in the '50's. That was in the Eisenhower years when women were still just supposed to go along as women. (laughs) Not make waves.

ADAMS: You see Chester Bowles was very interested in that. Of course George Allen was, too. And George Allen was there when I had this marvelous bit of luck to do Adlai Stevenson's whole schedule there through his handler, you might say. It's not very good to call him that. Anyway, I had known him [the "handler"] through the Fulbright Program. He had visited Cairo. Anyway, he wrote to me from somewhere along the way - I think maybe Kuala Lumpur - about the dates that he was going to be there with Stevenson and he wondered if I would be willing to help set up some appointments with people in political parties. So I cleared that, of course, at the embassy, to be sure. Ambassador Allen said, "Of course." And when he came, we had him speak to the whole embassy, all the embassy personnel, Indians as well as our own. And George Allen in introducing him said, "If he had run here, he would have won."

Q: In India?

ADAMS: Yes.

Q: That's very nice. Well, let's see. We were still working our way through London. North American Service writing and voicing, BBC.

ADAMS: Yes, the BBC. I didn't get paid for that. You know the problem in London. You have to have a work permit. I just did it.

Q: As a volunteer, just for the experience.

ADAMS: Yes. Because I knew somebody who was there. And I've always admired the BBC so much. I was thrilled to have the chance to work with them at all. It was wonderful.

Q: Then you went from there to Baghdad and walked into a bunch of coups and attempted coups in '63.

ADAMS: Oh, yes, yes.

Q: That was quite a time to be there, wasn't it? Were you there...

ADAMS: We came back here from London. We were here from '59 to '63.

Q: Here we are. Associate Director, Centennial Observance, National Association of State Universities.

ADAMS: That was the centennial of the Morrill Act which created the land grant colleges.

Q: So you worked with the state university on the land grant centennial observance, and then you were Director, International Programs, American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU)?

ADAMS: That was when we came back after Pakistan.

Q: That was after Pakistan?

ADAMS: Yes. Naturally they were paid jobs.

Q: Of course, of course. Now when did you join the Club? [The Women's National Democratic Club]

ADAMS: Well I had come to the Club from time to time, but I had thought I wouldn't be joining it until we came back to Washington because you don't know where you're going next. And also the jobs I had were very difficult. Although they were quite close by here. Both of those associations are now at Number 1 DePauw. And the second one, AASCU, was there when I was working there, but the other one, Land Grant, was right around the corner on Massachusetts Avenue. But no, I joined the Club when we came back from Maine. I suppose it was '71. But I had come here now and then with friends and they were pushing me to join. But I really didn't think it made much sense to join at that time.

Q: In Baghdad, what was your relationship with the Iraqi women?

ADAMS: The Iraqi women again are terrific. There are many of them American-educated. While I had several very good contacts in social services, I also knew the woman doctor who headed one of the hospitals and she was very good on some of the programs we did when we were doing this "Iraq Today" program. I think I mentioned that I did help some writers who came there looking at what women do in Iraq.

Q: Yes. "Developed 'Iraq Today.' Program for U.S. Women."

ADAMS: And then [I also assisted] some of the writers and researchers that came in at the embassy. They suggested that we get together. And in that way I learned a lot, too, because I started making myself a little directory on women's organizations and people I'd met. We brought the writers in to some of the things we were doing. Arranged visits. We went lots of places. A whole lot of places.

Q: Oh, it says, "schools, factories, hospitals, professional Iraqi women, courts, social services."

ADAMS: Yes, we did the courts. That was interesting, too. And how they handle children and these various things.

Q: Now was that just for embassy women?

ADAMS: It was for the American community.

Q: Or for the American women married to Iraqis. Did you have contacts with them?

ADAMS: Oh, yes, we did. Quite a lot of contacts with them. Some are pretty sad. Sometimes the couple would split up and the man wouldn't let the woman have the children. So she left and went back to the States. Some of these people did do that.

Q: And left their children behind because they couldn't take them out of the country.

ADAMS: Couldn't take them period. One of them called Wes so many times. "Can't you help us?" We felt terrible, but we couldn't. There wasn't any way really.

Q: So they had the choice of either staying there and being unhappy themselves to be with their children, or to look at it and say, "If I'm going to survive, I have to leave," and leave their children behind.

ADAMS: So some of them did. Now some of them, certainly, just stayed in. You never knew whether they were happily married or not. You didn't know what was going on with their family. These people who married sometimes didn't take any trip out [to Iraq] to take a look first to see.

Q: They probably married when their husbands were students.

ADAMS: Studying in the States, right.

Q: And what about the coups and the attempted coups and the fighting?

ADAMS: Well the big revolution was in '58 when the King and all these people were killed. Then Kassim came in and he was killed not too long before we were there.

Q: April of '63, I do know that.

ADAMS: '63. I knew it was spring. That's about the time, April or May or sometime around there that we knew we were going to Baghdad. Then after that, during that period of at least six months or so, there was just all kinds of shooting all the time. The Guard was fighting the police and then the old Army and then these different factions of the Boch party and it was really something. You kept hearing shots all the time. At night, not in the daytime. The Indian Ambassador became a good friend of ours. We had known a friend of his here and that's how we got to know them. He was in the bathroom when they shot into his bedroom. He says, "I was lucky I was in the bathroom."

Q: Wasn't he lucky? Were they after him?

ADAMS: I doubt it. They were running around that area. There was a guard center not too far from the Indian Residence. He didn't ever think they were after him either. Nor did his wife. But she was terrified. Right into the bedroom, the shots.

Q: Was it when Kassim was assassinated that the children were safe-havened in the American embassy?

ADAMS: Yes, some of them were. Some of them had already gone to families who were in other places in the country. Or let's say a village where they had some connection. But some were safe-havened in the Embassy, yes.

Q: And no telephones working, so it must have been a bit frantic.

ADAMS: Yes. It was very hectic during that period. You hardly knew how to designate it because it was almost like anarchy. Although the ministries were working, the hospitals were working and the schools were working, although sometimes they had to shut down.

Q: But there was no anti-American feeling as today?

ADAMS: Well, there's always been anti-Americanism in any Arab country because of Israel and the Palestinians. But we didn't feel that, really.

Q: I guess what I'm saying is today there is overt anti-Americanism. But in spite of all the coups and attempted coups, we weren't at fault. You were just there and you didn't. . . .

ADAMS: There were people who felt keenly about our role out there.

Q: Because of Israel.

ADAMS: Yes. And also the whole business of the way the area was divided up after World War I. There were people who would tell you some of these things. Sometimes you never knew how people felt about things. And some of the younger women that I knew in the social services were so pro-American, I always thought. You never can be sure 100 percent. But I saw a good deal of them in their homes and in our house. It's hard to know. After a while you don't feel that much [negative] attention.

Q: You do what you have to do.

ADAMS: Yes. And when you make friends among those people, it's so much easier. When you first meet them, there's a kind of stand-offishness, but you meet them and they are very much interested in the role of women. I had one good friend in the Agricultural Bank in Iraq and she had been here in the States. She got a masters. I don't remember where it was, on the East Coast someplace. But anyway, she was younger than my friends in social services. She liked the way American women lived. She really did. She felt in Iraq a lot of women lost any independence they had when they got married.

Q: Was she able to sustain that feeling when she got back to Baghdad?

ADAMS: Oh, yes, she did pretty much. I think her parents really were very supportive. I met them on a couple of occasions and I felt that they really were.

Q: They would almost have to be, wouldn't they, for her to be able to function in society that way over there. Interesting. Then you went on to Amman and you developed the "Jordan Today" program for U.S. women that involved schools, factories, hospitals, professional Jordanian women, courts.

ADAMS: Same type of thing. Naturally there are some different things and also we wanted to know as much about the Palestinians in Jordan as possible. But we couldn't do any formal trips to the camps, the Palestinian refugee centers. Not with groups. So I knew that we couldn't do that really. That could have created some incidents for people going in. We had very much sensitivity to that.

Q: But you did studies with Jordanian women or of Jordanian women, their professional, political and volunteer services.

ADAMS: I guess that's right, because I did the same thing in Iraq. Getting information. There were several writers who came, and researchers. You know Mark Childs, the columnist. We knew him here and his daughter came out and she was writing about American women in the Middle East. And we had really a great time working together. I dug out a lot of things for her and I went on some of the interviews. And she was just great. A very good writer. She died as quite a young woman, unfortunately. But she came back here after she'd been in the Middle East some months.

Q: And what kinds of things did you uncover about?

ADAMS: Well she was very interested in people who were working professionally. She could see what else there was. After all there are a lot of women who aren't professional women. . . .

Q: I was going to say, the number of professional women in Iraq and Jordan in those days couldn't have been too high.

ADAMS: Well, it was more than I expected, I must say. I was surprised at some of the women who had been sent to the States by their government. That girl in the bank, she was.

Q: Government scholarship.

ADAMS: And there was more than at least I had expected from what I read, you know. There's one thing that you wish they would do more of, and maybe they are doing it now. You wish that some of these women who were so good and well-educated and self-respecting could have done more for women out in the rural areas particularly. But then, you know, we know ourselves how hard it is when you're working here full-time. You don't go out over to Northeast Washington.

Q: That's just what I was going to say. There's a definite parallel there.

ADAMS: There is. Because they were taking care of a home and a family. They all have help, of course, more help than we do now. But they also have larger family commitments than we do, I think, as a rule, too.

Q: Now, you put down "Volunteer activities at Consulate." Swimming instruction for blind children.

ADAMS: Did I put Consulate? Oh, I know, it was the residence, that's what it was. We had all kinds of groups come to the Residence. It was a lovely, beautiful Residence in Lahore because it was thought that it was going to be the capital after partition. And so our government had a team go up.

Well, anyway, they had got this beautiful house, these people who went over to the India side. It was a lovely big place, lovely grounds, beautiful swimming pool, everything. So we had those grounds to use. And the scouts did things out there and we had some musical performances there. And then we did use the pool a lot for recreation for the American school that came over. But the interesting group that I felt so much for were the blind children. And I got our young people who would teach swimming. And they taught these kids and it was wonderful to see how much they enjoyed the water. It was fun.

Q: Andrew Corey had been there not just prior to you, but he was...

ADAMS: Let's see, was it one or two?

Q: Two, probably.

ADAMS: I did a big thing about the Consulate and put down all the people who were Consulate General. Andy was in Delhi when we were there, with his mother. He was Minerals Attache.

Q: Didn't he leave a collection of records and didn't he leave books?

ADAMS: He left some marvelous books.

Q: And didn't he leave a lot of his mother's things?

ADAMS: Yes, he left the room just as it was when she died. It was eerie. It was. We just did what we could with it. Of course he left marvelous records.

Q: He was doing that in Freetown, too. That was his way of saying, "Thank you." Because he had no family.

ADAMS: And he had some of his silver there as well as that provided by the Embassy. Lots of things. I made a little pamphlet, too. I tried to credit him enough. I sent it to him for him to see if it was correct and he corrected me on a couple of things.

Q: Oh, he would!

ADAMS: Absolutely, absolutely.

Q: Do you have a copy of the pamphlet still?

ADAMS: Oh, yes, I have.

Q: Because it would be just wonderful to have some of your documents to back up, to fortify this.

ADAMS: It's terrible how I put them away and have never gotten them out. I have a framed, sort of scroll-like thing with a big photograph and then the list of the items. But now the little folder, I wonder where that is. It's probably up in the file drawers up in the attic which I haven't gone through at all. And I've had a kind of funny feeling about not doing it. I'm involved in the present, but now I'm starting to deal a little more with my husband's things because he had so much paper.

Q: Oh, I can well imagine. Well let me ask you. You really did a great deal with women's issues, health, maternity, morale abroad. How did you then translate that into women's action in the United States when you came back in 1971?

ADAMS: Well I did work on the Decade for Women. Did you know Irene Tinker at all?

Q: No.

ADAMS: Well, she was working on a doctorate in India. That's how I met her. But anyhow when I came back, she asked me. She had a contract to have some papers prepared, and she asked me if I'd work on education in developing countries. So I did write material for the Women's Decade on that. But I was interested anyway. I joined several of the women's groups like NOW and the Woman's Political Caucus and a number of these things. Women's Equity Action and those groups. I joined at different times when I happened to know somebody who asked me to join and I went to some of their [events and meetings]. I brought some of those people here to the Club when I did women's issues here. But as you said, it isn't something you were actively...

Q: You were not conscious of thinking, "Now I am doing something for the Women's Movement."

ADAMS: But you do think and you do know, but you don't feel that you're just, as you say, doing this for the women's movement. But I was very interested in having that chance to work with Irene. She had a team of people. Arvan Fraser was the person who was bringing together some of these sources. Have you seen the Washington Directory on Women? People involved in women's issues? I haven't the most recent one, but I have one from about three years ago I think. Anyway, Arvan helped with a lot of this sort of thing. She would find a person or find a group that was working on women's issues and she would support them with a grant as much as she could, you know. But certainly that was good for me, at least, to have a chance to study all that material that's put out about literacy, about school attendance, about school-leaving age, about changes that happen in families when the woman is educated. What happens both to boys and girls. Irene had a lot of that material in her office and then she had a pretty good idea where you could find what she didn't have. It was an education.

Q: So what are you doing now at the Club? What is your main focus?

ADAMS: Well at the [Women's National Democratic] Club, I'm working on the seminars. One's starting next Tuesday on "After the Gulf War, Winning the Peace in the Middle East." And that's four weeks on Tuesdays.

Q: Who's going to speak at that?

ADAMS: I should give you a program. We've got some here. I'll get you one. I usually carry one because every now and then somebody asks me for one. But I'll get you one because there's one upstairs. Wait a minute. I have one.

Q: Good. Because it will be nice to have that in.

ADAMS: We had [a seminar] last fall. A wake-up call for Democrats. We've been kind of doing one every fall and every spring. One spring we did two of three weeks each, but the four-week ones we're doing, it takes quite a while to get these things put together. Think out what you're going to do and then to get the speakers worked out and so forth. I had the misfortune of getting ill for a while during this. Quite a while actually, because it was in November. I'd gone and I had this bad thing. So we thought we were going to take a little time off in December anyway. Anyway, it wasn't easy this time because we felt that the subject of the Gulf War maybe was getting worn to death, but. . . .

Q: Oh, but winning the peace. That's probably even more pertinent now than when you started...

ADAMS: Anyway, we so far have 84 people. I've got to check upstairs. 84 was yesterday. So we're very pleased about that.

But when I first joined the Club, they asked me to be on the International Speakers Luncheon Committee and I was working at One DePauw Circle at that time. We had just come back here and I thought I could join. I didn't do very much on that. Half the time I was out at some college some place.Now I come every Tuesday to work on the seminar. But then when I was at my job, it was harder to do that. So anyway, then in '75 I was appointed a Trustee of the University of the District of Columbia and I was really working on that everyday. A lot of the trustees were. But I did get involved in the Club with a few things. Not as much as I did later when I got involved in women's issues. And then I got to be secretary, an officer of the Club. And then on the seminars.

Q: Well, I'm learning how the Women's National Democratic Club functions and what questions we really should ask women about their participation in the Club and how they feel that they've made an impact.

ADAMS: It's hard to know [when there's an impact made]. I had felt when I started working on women's issues in our PPC, Political Policy Committee, that our first thing was to try to reach out and find out what the women's organizations were doing. So we brought different people in and they sat around at either the little or big table. Downstairs is the big table. And we learned about what they were doing and a number of us are invited to practically all those functions of the people who came here. We worked on a fund for NOW for a while. We had it set up downstairs in the front hallway when they were working on some legislation. They were coordinating a lot of it. And then we had a gathering with the Women's Political Caucus, the Democratic group, and we had them here. So the idea was to have people learn as much as possible. Some people did join some of those, one or other of those groups.

Q: Members of the Club.

ADAMS: Yes. We took part in several of the demonstrations on Lafayette Square which were on women.

Q: What year would that have been?

ADAMS: I think it was the early part of the '80's. I could probably find out what group and what year because we went to several of them. We took a big WNDC sign with us. We also went to the South African Embassy. We joined the picketing up there. I would say that the Women's Issues Group felt that there were a number of things in human rights that concerned women as much as men.

I think some people might say that perhaps there is an impact on the Club itself, to have Women's Issues. Because a lot of people would make these remarks about "women's issues!" almost turning up their nose. "I got where I am by myself and other people can do the same." I mean there's some of that attitude that you find. I think maybe some of that has changed, not because of us, but we might have been one factor. That some of the WNDC women were keenly interested, were coming, were meeting people, were suggesting people to come. On the business of violence to women, we had one of our people in one session who knew a woman who was working here through a church and she provided some films. About four or five very good ones. Quite a number of people came to it. And we had a very good discussion on violence...

Q: Violence against women or just violence in general?

ADAMS: Violence against women. The sort of thing that happens in every income category. It was interesting. Those films were very interesting. I don't know how much you can say, but I think there was some influence, at least in the Club, and also there was some interest among some of those groups that they felt that there were people in this Club who cared.

Q: So it was really a two-way thing. The Club benefited and the community benefited.

ADAMS: And Pat Schroeder had some very good luncheon programs. That's a while back, too. The women from here who went took part in the discussions. Some of these things are hard to measure. I think [the discussions] help to clarify your thinking. We put out a paper, for instance, on poverty and how women really fall into the pocket of poverty, especially if they're divorced, separated, whatever. And we did a paper on that for the Club. And that was taken to one of the conferences that the President went to. That was quite good and we updated that.

Q: What were some of the conclusions that you arrived at?

ADAMS: Well, we arrived at the fact that pay equity is extremely important. We had a pay equity group here that met after work once every two weeks and some of the people came from outside the Club. We met in the library, I think it was six o'clock, every other Friday. Anyway, that was one of the areas-pay equity, comparable pay for comparable work...had a lawyer in here who told us a good bit about the cases in Minnesota and the State of Washington, and California also had a case. So some of [the conclusions] were reflected in that paper; that equal pay is extremely important.

And then the special health problems of women. And then that poverty affects the whole thing, children, everything. We got into affordable housing. Then some of those branched out. You know the ways these things work. We've got a group that now is working exclusively on housing. There are some very good people in the Club who have had good professional backgrounds and who enjoy working on some of the things. Like in our committee on the seminar, we have a woman who was in statistics in the Department of Labor for a long time and she loves to work on statistical things. Anytime we've got something involving statistics, she loves to work on it.

Q: Wonderful.

ADAMS: And there's a very good woman on environment who has prepared some very good statements for the Club. She checks them out with others. There are others, too. But she's especially good. So that there is an impact in people working together. Did you hear Bill Moyers when he spoke at the Democratic issues meeting in March?

Q: No, I didn't.

ADAMS: I have the tape for it right in my bag here. We played it yesterday for our committee, and at the Board Meeting I had suggested to Shirley that maybe we could open it up so anybody in the Club could hear it who wants to come, so we're going to schedule it. But that's wonderful. A very inspirational thing. And how senators and congressmen who voted against Bush on the war shouldn't be apologizing all over the place. What were they voting for? They weren't voting to kill the Kurds or anything like that.

Q: I get furious when they waffle on that.

ADAMS: Isn't this awful.

Q: I mean, they sit up there for their ability, but they're always so afraid politically. We've got to do something about campaign financing. We should limit terms in office. I don't know. Something has to be done.

ADAMS: There are many suggestions being made that we should be considering. Moyers is terrific in this thing. When we run it for members, we'll put it in the newsletter. Do you look at the newsletter?

Q: Oh, yes, oh, yes, yes. Usually we try to come to one or two speaker luncheons a month. The last one we came to was Bob Keeley.

ADAMS: Oh, I was here, too. That was the first one I went to. I hadn't come to any luncheons.

Q: Oh, I thought he was excellent. It made one very happy to be associated with the Foreign Service.

ADAMS: He was wonderful.

Q: I am supposed to get a copy of his speech from Shirley because I thought one of the things that we might wind up each interview with women for the Club Oral History Project with is what can we do to get the women's vote in 1992?

ADAMS: Right. Because the women are very important.

Q: Of course. There are more of us than there are men. Now whether more of us vote than men, I don't know. I don't have all of those statistics at my fingertips. It just seemed to me that if we could somehow skirt the abortion issue, we could work on what is out there that will universally attract women.

As I guess you were saying with your paper, there's not just one issue. There's education, there's childcare, there's housing, there's pay equity. We need a package to present to the American women. You also have to keep in mind the Phyllis Schafleys [and those] who want to stay home and be housewives. To placate them, too. Maybe life has just gotten too complicated.

ADAMS: Well, it seems to me that I'm not hearing so much about the abortion issue, are you? Of course there was the Maryland situation.

Q: The Supreme Court has made it a state issue now so maybe there's more local ferment going on than we see here.

ADAMS: That's probably right.

Q: Because the District, of course, is always going to vote for it if they ever get a chance to vote.

ADAMS: Right. I think we do have to put these things together for women to win in '92. Shall we have a woman run?

Q: Yes, yes. Who? Who should run?

ADAMS: I used to think Pat Schroeder, but you know I lost my feeling for her. I had seen her in situations where she was so good and yet there were situations where she broke down. You know, unfortunately, emotional as we all are, we can't do that really and run for office. Edmund Muskie found that out.

Q: No, Geraldine Ferraro held up very well when you consider what she went through and what she's been through, but I think she's out of the question.

ADAMS: I really don't know. I really don't know.

Q: I don't know. Would the Middle American woman out in the heartland... Would she vote for a woman? Is she going to vote for a Black? Is she going to vote for Doug Wilder?

ADAMS: I don't know. In fact, I don't know about Doug Wilder. Do you really?

Q: No.

ADAMS: I feel a little uncertain about some of his attitudes. You know, the Virginia, VMI [Virginia Military Institute] thing. I really wonder about that. I don't know. I think he's being played up as a possibility.

Q: I think he enjoys being played up!

ADAMS: I think so too. In this videotape I have at that gathering where Moyers spoke, Wilder is shot time after time. It seemed to me every few minutes. I think it was done on purpose. Well it will be interesting.

Q: Yes, and I don't know who else. Shirley said a number of women signed up or were interested in doing an oral history program. But what we need at this point is a good solid series of questions.

[At this point Fenzi and Adams go on to talk about volunteers for the oral history project.]

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BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Spouse: J. Wesley Adams

Spouse Entered Service: 1941Left Service: 1971You Entered Service: Same

Status: Widow of Retiree

Place/Date of birth: Minneapolis, Minnesota, December 19, 1914

Maiden Name: McStayParents (Name, Profession):

James Thomas McStay, Janney Semple Hill, Hardware Distributor

Elizabeth Odell McStay

Schools (Prep, University): BA, University of Minnesota, 1936

Profession: Director of Research, Leo Burnett Advertising, Chicago, Ill.

Date/Place of Marriage: Evanston, Ill., July 8, 1939

Children:

Thomas McStay Adams, 1942

Daniel James Adams, 1946

Kathy Odell Adams, 1954

1943-44Quito - Radio Director/Coordinator, Inter American Affairs, CentrUSA Ecuatoriana

1946Washington, DC - ADA (Americans for Democratic Action) National Organizing Committee (1946); Vice President for DC projects; Founder and Director of ADA study trips abroad (England, Scandinavia, Germany, USSR, Austria, Yugoslavia, Italy, France, South America, India, etc.); League of Women Voters, Civil Rights and Home Rule

1950-52Cairo - Director, Fulbright program; Volunteer, American Embassy Wives' International Group assisting Palestinians, particularly students in Gaza area

1952-55New Delhi - Member, Fulbright Selection Committee; (Pd.) Coordinator, evaluation of USIS films shown in India; President, American Women's Club; Officer, International Women's Club - liaison with refuge centers, schools, hospitals; Researched propaganda programs by US, Great Britain, Germany, France, USSR, for Rockefeller committee; Committee member, founding of American School, now International School

1955-59London - Committee, American Embassy Women's Club, organized volunteer program with British services (Health Centers, Meals on Wheels, Citizens' Advice Bureaus), Maternal & Child Health Center; BBC, North American Service, writing and voicing; Coordinated Hungarian Refugee assistance by American women; Member, US Women's Speakers Bureau. London, summer school, Labor Party, Fabians, Workers Education, etc.

1960-63Associate Director, Centennial observance, National Assn. of StatUniversities and Land Grant Colleges

1963-65Baghdad - Developed "Iraq Today" program for US women, involved schools, factories, hospitals, professional Iraqi women, courts, social services; Coffees for Iraqi and US women; President, American School Board

1966-67Amman, Developed "Jordan Today" similar to Baghdad program; Research assistant in studies of Jordanian women and their professional, political and volunteer services; Developed volunteer programs in hospitals with Jordanian organizations, individuals

1967-70Lahore - Pakistani/American International Women's Club; Volunteer activities at Consulate residence; Swimming instruction for blind children; Organized special programs on death of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy

1971-74Director, International Programs, American Assn. of State Collegeand Universities

1975Papers on education of women in development, Women's Decade, HomRule

1975-78Member, Board of Trustee, University of DC

1978-PresentMember, Martin Luther King Commission, DC; Ward 3 Democratic Committee; Woman's National Democratic Club, Women's Issues Chair, Club officer, member and chair of Seminars and Special Studies Committee

End of interview