

**RBRL OHD 006**

**RBRL Oral History Documentary Series**

**Margaret Bennett**

Margaret Bennett Interviewed by Iêda Siqueira Wiarda

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WIARDA: This is January 30, 2006. We are at the Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies at the University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia. I am Iêda Siqueira Wiarda. I am a professor here at the University of Georgia and I am also on the staff of the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. I will be interviewing Margaret R. Bennett, the widow of the former ambassador William Tapley Bennett. It is not only a pleasure, but it's an honor for me to be interviewing her. I have been talking with her for a few minutes during breakfast and I have learned a good many things about her. And my appreciation of her after having seen her CV and her husband's CV, I am now even more impressed. So it is just a delight to be here and to have this conversation about herself, about her husband, who was, I believe the longest serving diplomat in the diplomatic core, which is really quite an honor.

BENNETT: I don't think he was quite the longest serving, but at the time, he was the longest serving.

WIARDA: Yes, and probably that is still there. I wouldn't be surprised. I am very happy to be here, very honored to be here and this will be a conversation. So that people know where I am coming from, I am a Brazilian, but I have been working with the American Government in various ways at the Foreign Services Institute. I was telling Mrs. Bennett that the first time I came to this country as an exchange student was the first time that I was on or given a television

interview. I must have passed because I was chosen and lived with a family in Houston, Texas. That was, to this day, and I have had many other good experiences, but to this day living with an American family was really extraordinary. So I come with a very open mind toward the United States. The United States has been very good to me and it is an honor, truly an honor and a pleasure, to be interviewing Margaret Bennett. So I would like to start by asking you a few questions. I hope she can tell us a little about herself and a little bit about her role as a diplomat's spouse, because she has been in many of the countries that I have been and I am always interested in the nuances in her own experience. The first thing that I would like to ask you, is there a way, if there is such a way, I don't think there is, but maybe you are going to tell me there is, to prepare you to be a diplomat's spouse abroad?

BENNETT: Well, first of all before we get into that I would like to thank you for your gracious words and particularly for your appreciation for the U.S., because I think in this day and age I think we in the U.S. don't necessarily feel that we are appreciated and we do try. [WIARDA laughs] Getting back to preparation -- I would be put to it to say that there is such a thing as preparation for living abroad it's a matter, I think a great deal, of the individual. I was lucky because my parents were in the Foreign Service and their first post abroad that I remember was Buenos Aires which happened between the time I was seven and eleven. And then we went to Berlin, which was Hitler Germany. And in both countries I was plunked in the schools of the countries so I had to learn the languages. And that is the way to learn a language quickly, because if you like to talk, which I do, you obviously want to be able to express yourself so you learn the language. Then my parents were assigned to Calcutta for four years. My father was Consul General there, and that was the day of the Raj so he had the whole of India and was

assigned to Afghanistan as well. They traveled there. I had a summer visiting them there, and then they had five months in Tangier, and then came back for about two months leave while he went through the senatorial process for Minister to Haiti; at that time it was a legation. And then when the legations were all raised to embassies he became the first ambassador to Haiti, and then went on to be ambassador with Peru. And they were very annoyed with me for getting engaged and planning my wedding in June of '45 because they had planned a nice leisurely trip around the southern hemisphere, but that didn't happen. Then my father, after a few months in that sort of place where they declassify documents, things the State Department does, they retired completely. They retired to Maryland and tried to build a house. Wartime restrictions had not been lifted, so you could only remodel. There was a broken-down shack on the premises, and they used that, then added on to it later. Of course, you have to remodel to begin with and then you can rebuild it. It became my children's home away from home. It was the house with the attic. In a way I was prepared for the life, I believe my first sentence was in four languages, four words, and so I was prepared for the fact that different people thought differently. And I think that is an essential thing that you need to find...think about, because a lot of people go abroad and the first thing they say is, "why don't they have a complete drug store, and why don't they have a..." well, now supermarkets exist almost everywhere but back in my day they didn't.

WIARDA: Wal-Mart is everywhere.

BENNETT: My parents really traveled, they had to take their own supplies with them everywhere. And I suppose if you were assigned to Kirgistan now, it would be more like what the postings were like in those days. So have I answered your question?

WIARDA: Well, yes. Your first words to me, not only do I appreciate, but I have to tell you something. How, even before that interview for coming to the United States, I used to go, I am from Belo Horizonte, I used to go to the Lincoln Library, U.S. Brazilian Institute. I remember, as a very young girl, I would go to that library and I would just marvel at the books they had there. I would marvel at the books, but also they smelled good. [BENNETT laughs] I remember the clean smell and that is where I learned my English. In high school you had to have four years of English and so on, but I really wish ... and this ... I am going to put in a plug right now. We really need to bring back those bicultural centers, because that is the best face of the United States. You have films, you have classes in English, and you have all kinds of exchanges, especially the books. As you know a few years ago, for whatever the reason ... I don't know ... the administration closed the centers down. People miss them; I know I miss them, and lots of others who were exposed to America: literature, art, culture and history. They don't find that anymore. You don't find those nice smelling books.

BENNETT: We were traveling in I guess '85, after my husband had retired. He was making speeches on behalf of the government around Australia and we fetched up in Sydney. The Consul General was a friend of ours and he said, "I am going to take you to dinner tomorrow night. It is an occasion I think you will find entertaining." And I said, "grr" about it.

[WIARDA laughs] But anyhow off we went, and we went to the oldest pub in Sydney which

dated back to convict times. It looked like a real English pub. And there was, he may still be, the Prime Minister of the South Wales, but at that time he was just an MP. And he didn't have enough to do so he had organized the Chester A. Arthur trivia club. They used to go to the U.S.I.S. Libraries and you would pick up questions about American Presidents, and then the person who won the quiz would get to talk about his favorite President. We lucked out because we heard about Harry Truman, but the winner of that evening was going to talk about Nixon the next time. I thought to myself where else, where in the United States would you find a club devoted to the trivia of say, the British Monarchy. It might be the British Monarchy and you might possibly get something about the French, but I cannot imagine any other ... anything like that anywhere in this country. Anyway, getting back to our mutttons.

WIARDA: No, I still miss the center whenever I go abroad. I go abroad quite often. I still miss not being able to visit those bicultural centers because they were really a great face for the United States. Let's hope they come back. Now getting back to your own experiences and so on, for a young person, a diplomat's spouse or partner, would you give ... what kind of advice would you give, even though I know that things have changed both in the United States and abroad and the relationships now are in many ways more complex and more daunting, but what advice would you give from your own experiences?

BENNETT: Well, you have to realize that, and as you said things have changed, in my day the ambassador and the ambassador's wife definitely set the tone, wives were expected to be part of the team. We figured in the efficiency reports, and you expected to do things, and you felt proud to be part of the United States team. In 1972 because of the excesses of three ladies, who

shall be nameless, [WIARDA laughs] one of them had ordered a junior wife to iron her table clothes because she didn't think her servants could do it. That was a bit much to put it mildly and things like that, so the department said from now on the wives are not to be mentioned in efficiency reports. So we weren't part of the team anymore, we were just nothing. Different people took it different ways. Some of the middle level wives said "Oh well, we aren't going to go to the ambassador's receptions anymore. We don't count so therefore we won't go." Which was cutting off their noses to spite their faces because then they complained because they didn't meet people from the country. I think my real advice would be to be outgoing, but not to expect people necessarily to respond to overtures right away, but to certainly be friendly at all levels and to have good manners. [WIARDA laughs]

WIARDA: That always helps. There is no doubt about it. I have been impressed talking to you that obviously you had a very keen appreciation for the cultures. I would not be surprised, when your husband was assigned to a certain place, a certain post, a certain country, that you read about the culture. You tried to become familiar with it before you went to prepare yourself. I am sure you did.

BENNETT: Well, we didn't really have much time in most of our postings because when we finally went abroad we went to Vienna and I mean ... I had had a certain amount of world history and I am a history buff, which helps. We got there, and I did speak German before I got there so but it is not the same German, you just went on and met the people you had to meet, and you treated them like people of interest and so on. Then we thought we were going to Rome and Tap actually got there for a month. I went down because our chargé was giving a

party to introduce us to the Romans two weeks into the assignment. That day I was taking a bath and Tap burst in and said, “It’s a good thing you are lying down because I have just been transferred to Athens and I have to be there next week.”

WIARDA: The other Athens.

BENNETT: Athens, Greece. Oh yes, we had Vienna west and east, and we have had Athens east and west, but anyway my only thought was why the dickens couldn’t they have told us sooner then I would have organized the packing differently. But Tap was crushed. He had really fallen in love with Rome and all that. We had been studying Italian from German, which is not the most felicitous combination. We had carried the servants of our predecessor for six months and the apartment had come with the job, so we didn’t have to house hunt, but it was a tight squeeze. Actually we were peeling off our eldest to boarding school, but even so holidays. I was rather thinking this was too good to be true, and it was. Tap hung on by his fingernails and said he wasn’t going to leave until after Queen Elizabeth’s state visit. And it turned out he was acting chargé that evening because the chargé developed tummy trouble, so had his wife, so we went and actually got to meet Queen Elizabeth and Prince Phillip. And at that time Prince Phillip was very much carrying the ball socially, and she looked rather frightened. Now it is a different story. [BENNETT laughs]

WIARDA: I was going to say, things change.

BENNETT: Things changed considerably. The last time we met them at NATO, Phillip was definitely relegated to the lower ranks.

WIARDA: I have seen both of them and I agree.

BENNETT: We went directly to Athens and we certainly had no preparation for that. I think in a way that was the post I got the most out of, because I worked terribly hard at learning Greek. I had an arrangement with my teacher that he would come at twelve noon and stay until Tap got home for lunch which was sometimes three o'clock. So I really worked hard at my Greek and the Greeks are extremely friendly and hospitable. It was a lovely relief to get there because Austria was extremely hierarchical, despite being a republic, and it's also an inland country and the Danube is no substitute for the sea. So all told, I just felt like I had been liberated when I got to Greece and every man there knows it's just the luck of the draw, that he isn't Onassis, and he is just as good as everyone else. For instance, the driver would bring the children to somebody's house for a parade or something like that and he would go around and shake everyone's hand. Which would not have been done in Austria and then he wouldn't stay but everybody knew him and it was quite accepted. That was such a pleasant change. Then from Greece we went to the Dominican Republic direct, and there again one always read what one could about the posting and...

WIARDA: You were also very fortunate you had your family history. So in many ways your pre-marriage kinds of experiences really had a very positive impact.

BENNETT: Oh yes.

WIARDA: You pretty much knew somehow to behave yourself, what to expect, and above all to really be, as the wife of the ambassador, the face of the Americans right there, and that is tough.

BENNETT: It was really funny because my father joined the Foreign Service in 1914 and he was supposed to go to Mexico as his first posting. Then Pancho Villa acted up and so Mr. Wilson would have none of it, so instead my father's first posting was the Dominican Republic. And he had been in charge very shortly because his minister had been called home for speculation.

WIARDA: There is another word for that right now. [WIARDA laughs]

BENNETT: Yes, but anyway, he had a revolution to deal with and he had to ride out to Santiago and he had pointed out.

WIARDA: Santiago de los Caballeros.

BENNETT: Yes, well actually it was Vega I think he rode out to. And he pointed out to the rebelling general that if he fired on Santo Domingo that there wouldn't be much left for him to take. And I think this was all done in a very civilized fashion. Tap's revolution wasn't quite as easy.

WIARDA: Because at this time ... this was during the time the Marines were sent in to the Dominican Republic.

BENNETT: The Marines, I think came in twenty something ... I think it was in the '20s. I know because my father was ... being a minister to Haiti, we had the other side of the island too. One of the Haitians told my father, "The trouble with you Americans is that if you would had just left us alone, our presidents would have embezzled what they embezzled in reason because otherwise they knew we would chop off their heads, but you came in and so now they just take the whole country." [WIARDA laughs]

WIARDA: One of the things that is very clear from what you say is that you were very conscious that maybe some of the people you were meeting, not necessarily as the wife of the diplomat, but when you were with the chauffeur and so on, that you may have been the first and only American that they had ever met. And they may make a conception about America based on the way you behaved and how you related to them and so on and I am sure you are aware of that.

BENNETT: Subconsciously.

WIARDA: No, I am sure.

BENNETT: But actually, when it came down to it, our closest friends we had were our employees: the chauffeur in Greece and the household in Lisbon, in the long run. The other relationships tended to be more formal, but you really knew those people.

WIARDA: I wanted to ask you what you found that was most useful in different situations. First I was going to say to break the barriers, but that is not a good image and I know this is not exact metaphor. I like better to say melting the barriers because if you break the barriers you are going to have some pieces left on the ground, so breaking the barrier is not as good as melting them, trying to present yourself as the American. There is a question and you try to put yourself in that person's position and to what extent can you come to some sort of an agreement or at least not come to blows?

BENNETT: Well, I suppose when we were in Lisbon, which was after the Dominican Republic, this was in the last two years of the dictator Salazar's time. Tap met him a couple of times, but he was pretty much of the recluse then and our dealings were more with, well, we knew President Tomás who was nice, a former admiral, and the foreign minister, who was a prickly character, Franco Nogueira. But I found that the Portuguese were very hospitable in a way, but much more reserved as a society than the others that we had met. And it might have been because I was older than when we went to Austria, but in Austria it was somehow easier to break into. I use the words "break into" the group because it wasn't so much melting. You either got in or you didn't. It was a very formal society, and very interesting to me in some ways. We had a social secretary, which was the first time I had ever had such a thing, and it was really quite something. But it was really helpful and her

family really was extraordinary, because they had managed to outlive any regime that came along and they were infiltrated in all branches of the government, so they knew exactly what was what.

WIARDA: How to survive.

BENNETT: It was very convenient. I was never to sure how indiscreet I could be around her, but she was very helpful. One time ... we had a wonderful time because there is a Pinto Basto family there and they must have about well at least two hundred members who circulate. And they seem to take it in turns as to who is going to do what with whom. The secretary was away, so I called up and we wanted to get Mr. Anselmo Pinto Basto, for lunch, his nickname was Rob Roy, so I called up and asked if I could speak to Mrs. Pinto Basto, and she said, "speaking." It didn't sound like Donna Teresa's voice but I didn't think anything of it, so I invited them to lunch. I said, "I will send you a reminder", which I duly did, addressed to Anselmo and Senhora. Well, lunch came and in walked two younger Pinto Basto's and, obviously, the family had decided that the lunch was more suitable for them than the older. They knew exactly what had happened. The only thing that was ever said afterwards was I bumped into Rob Roy subsequently and he said you know you have a very nice handwriting. [Laughter] That was it. We didn't seem to get out so much in the provinces in Portugal as we had elsewhere. The Portuguese at that time were very much on the defensive because of the...

WIARDA: Civil Wars in Africa. Yes, Yes.

BENNETT: Independence movements and wars in Mozambique, but we were very lucky because they always wanted ambassadors to travel around to the overseas territories, as they call them, so we did get to visit a large part of Angola and certain amount of Mozambique and so on, which are huge parts of the world.

WIARDA: Sure, yes

BENNETT: Getting around, we had to accept the use of planes of companies and that sort of thing that our government was frowning on, but how else do you get around. But that said, one of the things that has struck me around the world is when you get out of the capital cities into the provincial cities, they are very similar the world over and particularly if there is a Latin origin you find that it, as in Angola and Mozambique, most of the officials' wives couldn't speak anything but Portuguese, and I was so happy I could at least murder Portuguese. Of course it ruined my Spanish. But it was always ... if you had children it was such an advantage, because you could babble on about children, but if they didn't have children that took out a whole topic of conversation. You could talk about gardening, not that I was a gardener anyway. I remember on a visit to Izmir, when we were in NATO, we stopped and there was a large luncheon and I was plumped down between, I forget who was on my left, but on my right was an Air Force General. Being Turkish, I don't think he was accustomed to making polite conversation with the female species, but anyway, there we were.

WIARDA: He struggled.

BENNETT: The interpreter was across the table from us so I said to the general, “What do you do in your spare time?” and he said “I like to garden.” I thought thank heavens. So I asked him every flower I could think of. [Laughter] I don’t know what the poor interpreter said to him, but the general seemed to be quite happy and I was certainly happy.

WIARDA: You could have talked about tulips because tulips are supposed to have started in Turkey.

BENNETT: Well, we got into all that, but I was never quite sure what the poor colonel was doing because I don’t think his language training had included gardens particularly.

[Laughter]

WIARDA: Oh that is interesting, what you say about Portugal. You see, my husband and I also lived in Portugal for a time. My youngest child was born there and language of course was not a problem. It is probably the most reserved country I have ever visited or lived in and I have lived in many places. Not as many as you, but [the] people are very reserved, even after their called revolution in the 1970s. And I go there every other year or so, they are still very very reserved. They don’t open up. They are very very friendly and proper.

BENNETT: It's a surface...but we would go over to Spain and we didn't know what had hit us because the noise level was just unbelievable whereas in everything in Portugal then was so quiet. That has changed a bit.

WIARDA: Yes, it has changed.

BENNETT: It is a much more open society. In our day you didn't have a single billboard on a wall now you have all sorts of posters up and...

WIARDA: Some good, some bad, some...

BENNETT: As they say, that's their privilege. [Laughter]

WIARDA: When I was there a couple of years ago, [it is] still more reserved and it is about the only place that I'm always called madam ... and I am always trying ... people call me madam. It is a little bit daunting for a Brazilian to be called madam because I am just not used to that. Were you able to visit, I am sure you were, visit some of the galleries there? They have some extraordinary things.

BENNETT: Oh yes, I used to go out to Queluz. I love that palace there, which was part of the Gulbenkian. Then they built the new building just before we left. I think it was before we left. I used to go to all the galleries and we did travel around a great deal, we just didn't meet people; it was mostly just travel. We didn't meet people upcountry. Occasionally we did. We

had one gentleman in Oporto who took us around. His name incidentally was Russell and he looked rather like Senator Russell too, which is really rather amusing.

WIARDA: Russell, Russell. Russell Wood?

BENNETT: No, no, no. He was Portuguese his sur name was Russell [de Souza].

WIARDA: Okay, because Russell Wood has written several books about Portugal.

BENNETT: No, no, no. This was not someone who has been published. He was just a local gentleman.

WIARDA: As you know in Portugal there were quite a bit ... and still there are a number of firms that have wonderful wine that they are all named well, they all came from England.

BENNETT: Oh, I know. The consul, Juan Gorrell's daughter married the ... I forget which winery it was ... but she married into a wine company and we did make very good friends with a couple who were with the...

WIARDA: Sanderman?

BENNETT: No, no, no. It is the one that has quite good port, and it will come back to me [Quinta do Noval]

WIARDA: It will come to you in the middle of the night.

BENNETT: I am sorry this has been happening to me more and more recently.

WIARDA: All of us I am sorry to say. Now to what extent, once you came back to the United States and your husband had pretty much retired I mean...

BENNETT: It is always culture shock coming back to the U.S. and it is always culture shock going abroad. But I think the thing that everyone notices the most is when you move abroad, there are helping hands you can call upon to help you move in. When you come back to the States you are on your own, and that part is difficult. Moving for instance, moving abroad when we first went to Vienna, we had five children plus collie dog with us, and we were plunked in a pension on the fifth floor.

WIARDA: No elevator?

BENNETT: There was an elevator but anybody under the age of twelve could not ride unaccompanied. So it was sort of like the goat and the wolf and the bag of feed crossing the river, with only room for two. I finally said nobody was going to ride up we were all going to walk and I must say it was good for the figure. [Laughter]

WIARDA: But when you came back to the U.S., not necessarily the time you were retiring, but at what point were you also involved in the briefing and specialty briefing and having an exchange with the wives that were going to go abroad. Because that would have helped them, I have no doubt about that.

BENNETT: Well, I didn't get any briefings for going abroad. I am not sure how much was available, but I didn't avail myself of it. I did get to a briefing for chiefs-of-missions wives that was given and it wasn't ... I didn't feel it taught me very much. Maybe I was feeling a little bit superior because of having grown up in it, but as I say I just didn't get very much chance to do it and I was never asked to brief other wives.

WIARDA: I wish you should, you know...

BENNETT: What we did do in my day ... you used to have ... you did have meetings of the wives in the post. I remember putting out a protocol booklet for the wives, one provision of which was ... having just come from the Dominican Republic where all the domestics would put their hair in pink curlers and half the time would meet you at the front door in the pink curlers, but some of the wives did too, so I said that nobody will be seen in public in pink curlers. Well, we had the political counselor's wife was at the hair dressers one day and there was some kind of fire alarm or something so she was under the dryer and so they motioned her out. She carefully took her hair down because she said, what would Mrs. Bennett say?

[Laughter]

WIARDA: In case her picture had been shown in the paper. You know. That would have been disastrous.

BENNETT: I found that frequently this wasn't a good idea because quite frequently things had changed by the time I had gotten there, and I was still going on the old thing. I unwisely did it a little bit early on. Nobody suffered unduly as a result.

WIARDA: Again I think it is the idea that you have, tell me if I am wrong, that especially if they are American, they are the face of America and so they have to be careful. They have to dress in a certain way. They have to express themselves in certain ways. They have to censor themselves in certain ways, so that what others perceive of America because they are the American, this is the only American some people will ever meet.

BENNETT: Well, we ... I mean that part I was very conscious of and that is one reason why we did have the protocol notes in the areas and the posts that I went to. But as I said once, I don't know what happened after 1972 because when we went to NATO it was such a very different posting. It was seventy percent defense and thirty ... or maybe only sixty percent defense and forty percent state. It was very interesting because I would try to have a wives meeting and of course now the wives felt they didn't have to do anything. Some of the old timers would turn up and I would have a coffee, I mean purely social. The State Department wives almost never came except for one or two and the defense ladies all came very dutifully. Of course it has a lot to do ... you get this with volunteer societies too. When we were at the UN there was a women's club and we took it in turns to have a national, we had a

monthly tea, and each nation would take it in turn. Well, it came to be our turn and my husband was deputy Chief of Mission, but I was also secretary of the organization so I was looking around for some help and I got a very nice Major's wife who volunteered to do the food so afterwards I said to her, "I hope you'll give me a list so I can pass on the do's and don'ts." And she said, "you know when my husband joined the Army we junior wives had to hop to and do everything -- now I want to know where are the junior wives?" [Laughter] That's the story everywhere now in this country and everywhere else.

WIARDA: Oh yes. It is a very different kind of set up and expectations from all sides.

BENNETT: It is interesting too because while we ... just about the time we went to NATO other countries were having problems with wives, and should you pay wives to attend a function or to give a dinner, and in that case how much. And it actually is impossible to deal with really as I see it, because you cannot divorce your meals from your official function.

WIARDA: Sure. I know you have been very involved in various ways with the National Cathedral in Washington. And I was thinking whether, for example, in the Dominican Republic I recall if I am not mistaken, there was an Episcopal church there. To what extent did you go to different churches, or try to be part of some of the meetings they had and community kind of outreach? Or you did not do that because it was not wanted or expected of you?

BENNETT: I would go to services at the cathedral and we knew the Bishop and his wife quite well. And they were very involved in things and I asked if I could help, but they were chancy times and I didn't get very much involved then in that. What we did in the Embassy, the wives, I had a meeting of the wives and I said we need to do something, but I know from experience that everything that the previous ambassador's wife did is never done by the succeeding ambassador's wife. One's predecessor is a rogue and something else and is incompetent. Each person likes to do something different and so I would like you to pick something if it doesn't matter too much if it isn't continued. So what they decided to do was to take on the children's ... the babies ward in Robert Reed Hospital, and so some of us went and cuddled the babies and fed them to just give them a little more human touch because there were I think four nuns dealing with the whole ward.

WIARDA: Hundreds of babies.

BENNETT: They tried, but obviously they could not do everything. And then those who had small children and felt that they shouldn't go and give germs or go and get germs would do the sewing for them. We had quite a busy operation in doing that. First time I went there the culture was that you only went to the hospital if you had exhausted all other possibilities and you really went because you were going to die, that was the mentality. These were the babies of the very poor people. And they probably had been fed on tea the whole time so they were completely emaciated. You have seen the pictures of the starving children in Darfur and so forth, very similar, like little skeletons. And the sad part was you would get them nursed back to almost health and then the bed would be needed for somebody else and they

would be let go just a little bit too soon. Of course you would try to tell the mothers to give them solids and you would tell them what, but they didn't have the money and it sometimes was just the problem that the parents were not married and the father, the more children he had the more the more macho he would be perceived.

WIARDA: And more wives.

BENNETT: And so he would play around of course too. And the mother would try to hold on to him so she would give him all her earnings which would be spent on everything else, so the children would suffer according. It was a very sad circle. We would get the babies back maybe twice and then the third time the baby wouldn't come.

WIARDA: And if the mother or the father was a Haitian, as often is the case in the Dominican Republic, then it was, as you know, even more profound.

BENNETT: Well, I never knew who the parents were, but I took my twins and helped out there. And one of them considered it a very important part of her life that she had done this, and she adopted a 22 month old Romanian, and this is my skating grandchild.

WIARDA: The one you just went to? Oh that is wonderful.

BENNETT: It has meant a great deal to her.

WIARDA: So the tradition is going to continue through you. Speaking of tradition, I know you and your husband have been extremely generous and involved in the University of Georgia. How did it come about that he gave his incredible papers that are so valuable in so many historical diplomatic ways? They are here in this building am I right?

BENNETT: Well, he was a great admirer of Senator Russell's to start out with, and he was an admirer of Dean Rusk. At one point they had hoped that he would come to be the Dean Rusk or whatever that professorship is, but that didn't work out at the time so Marty Hillenbrand came instead. Tap was an associate professor here after he retired and I guess, Sheryl can answer that better than I can. I don't really know why, I guess they asked for them.

WIARDA: Also, he was an alum right?

BENNETT: Oh, he was an alumnus of the University of Georgia.

WIARDA: His family was also from Georgia?

BENNETT: Yes, I mean he was Georgian from the word go.

WIARDA: So there was that connection?

BENNETT: Yes, he used to get a great deal of mileage saying when we went to the Dominican Republic they had signs on the wall saying “Yankee go home.” He said he knew they didn't mean him.

WIARDA: He was a Confederate. It could be. That is interesting I never thought about that.

BENNETT: Another thing he used to enjoy was “get out and take me with you”, that was on one of the signs.

WIARDA: Oh sure, sure. You were not bodily present when things blew up in the Dominican Republic?

BENNETT: No, I was up in the States because...

WIARDA: In 1964-65.

BENNETT: ...the four older children were all in, well, one was in college and the other three were in boarding school, and I had come up because they were all having staggered Spring vacation. They were all at different places. I'd stayed on because Tap kept saying he was coming up. We knew we were sitting on a volcano, and he knew if he was going to come up, he was going to have to come up soon. So he did come up finally and got here, went to a wedding in Atlanta, and was driving out to Carnesville where his parents live when

he heard on the radio that the Revolution had started. Which apparently it was not meant to do that weekend, but someone had jumped the gun.

WIARDA: Word leaked out or something.

BENNETT: He promptly went back up to Washington where I was more or less, and we had friends who had a revolution erupt under them when they were in Cyprus, so they were most understanding. We stayed with them.

WIARDA: They gave you advice.

BENNETT: They lived around the corner roughly from where our house was in Washington, so we stayed with them. And then Monday Tap said to me ... I mean, I saw him when he put his head on the pillow and when he took off in the morning ... so he said to me "I don't know what my life is going to be so you go ahead and have your own." So I was taking my best friend, who also lived around the corner, and I was taking her out to my parent's place which is on Kent Island, Maryland, an hour and fifteen minute drive roughly. We went out and had lunch and then we came back into town and she said "Come back and have tea." And I said "No, I think I would rather get back and see what is going on." I arrived round the corner and there was the official car and Tap was coming down the steps to be flown back to the Dominican Republic. So I piled into the car with him and we had to drive down to Andrews Air Force Base, and then they very kindly brought me back again. And then he was put on the [U.S.S.] Boxer and went ashore, and I think that most of his

movements have been documented since. But it was really rather grim because the planes were no longer flying so mail didn't go. I guess you could write via by the pouch. In hindsight, I know darn well what I should have done. I should have organized all the wives who had been evacuated and so forth, but my only thought was to not be a nuisance to the department. I had been told so long, my whole childhood, do not rock the boat. So I did not gather the wives together and try to make their morale better and etcetera etcetera, but I would have Dominicans calling me up saying "Can't you do something more about my family," etcetera etcetera. Well, I'd say "I'll be glad to pass it along, but I am afraid that I don't think anything is going to happen."

WIARDA: Would you communicate regularly with your husband?

BENNETT: The only communication we had was, which was something we had started sooner because of my father-in-law's chancy health, we would have ... we had a very nice Baptist pastor and he had a HAM radio thing. So he would patch us in and then Mr. Tally in Lilburn, Georgia would then patch in on the other end, so we could communicate by HAM radio at six a.m. And that was very unsatisfactory because you want to react to what somebody says and you have to wait until that person to says "over." And then you talk and you have to remember to say "over" and you know that everybody, but everybody, is listening in, so the conversations would go something like "How are things going for you?" "Well, I am alive." That sort of thing, "Well when do you think I can come down?" "Why don't you book on the next Pan Am flight, next week?" And well of course...

WIARDA: The flights, they were not going.

BENNETT: They weren't going, but we were just keeping up this idea, which was very unsettling. And so for about three months we went through this charade.

WIARDA: You were here?

BENNETT: I was in the States, sort of going around from relative to relative and very unsettled, then finally they let me back into the Dominican Republic in June.

WIARDA: Excuse me, by yourself or with children?

BENNETT: No, the children were back in school. I did have my youngest, who had finally been evacuated. She spent the first five days of the revolution down there with this charming young woman I had gotten to be her companion, Kendall Montgomery, no she was Kendall Bailey. She stayed on and she was running the household and the Admiral McCain would come in, father of the senator, would come in and say what are your orders ma'am?

WIARDA: The senator, I didn't realize that.

BENNETT: She would order the food.

WIARDA: This young woman.

BENNETT: She was about 25 at the time and she would order all the food and the Admiral would put the order in. People were sleeping, all the Embassy personnel, the Foreign Service people, would come in, first come, first serve. So the first people would get the sofas and then the rest of the people would be like stacked cord wood on the dining room floor as a dormitory. They would bring their own pillows and that was it. That went on for quite some time apparently.

WIARDA: You were able to fly in or how did you get there?

BENNETT: Oh, I flew in. Yes, I flew in and then by this time there had been an attempt on Tap's life, so President Johnson had ordered extra security put on and he had the CID people, a team of about eight young men, we used to call them CIDneys, and they lived in the house and three would be on duty with Tap. I had one who would take Victoria to school and back and she would always try to escape him so they always had a lively time with her. There were fun moments too, but it was...

WIARDA: It must have been very daunting. When did you hear about this attempt on his life?

BENNETT: I didn't hear about it until I got down there. It was interesting because I never worried about his safety. I knew he'd be looked after that way. I worried about his getting enough sleep and getting enough food. His mother was firmly convinced that every bullet in

the Dominican Republic was aimed at him, so I think that contributed a great deal to her final illness. She was quite ill at that time. By the time I got back our life had resumed a certain amount of normalcy. We were giving dinner parties, the household had been very well trained that at the first sight of trouble they were to bolt the front door. The house itself was not very defensible because it's largely French doors and sun porch and spreads out. We were giving a dinner party and all of a sudden there was a huge, what sounded like bangs going on. The front door was shut. Well of course guests were still arriving so they were frantic to get in, and one of the wives who came was vastly amused by me because I went "Whee." [Laughter] So as I said we occasionally came under fire and contrary to what was written up ... Neil Morgan, who was an Episcopal priest but also a journalist at the time took photographs of the holes in the residence building and the office building where we had been fired on. And we had one on, I think it was New Year's Eve that year. There was a tremendous sort of fusillade I guess you could call it, and the CIDneys came rushing in saying "Get away from the window ma'am. Get away from the window." And I said "But that is just firecrackers." And they said, "No, ma'am, those are bullets." Because we had had an episode before the Revolution where the same sound had happened and I thought we were being shot at and it turned out to be firecrackers because the Dominicans had won the baseball game, so after having the experience [Laughter]. Because I felt that I shouldn't put these young men in a position of danger when it wasn't necessary, the only outings I did, other than when I went out with Tap for functions, I would go play golf. Which was marvelous fun because it was a very nice golf course and I would have it all to myself, there might be one other player on all eighteen holes. I got really spoiled that way. The caddy master would come and try to teach me and then the regular caddy would try and teach me

something else. I never became a good golfer, but I thoroughly enjoyed the experience. And of course people would pass on requests and I would tell the Consul General, "I know good and well I am not supposed to be doing this, I will just send you my card saying that I am enclosing so and so's card and I have promised to try to help and you'll do...I don't expect you to do anything." People seem to have the idea that anybody will help them and it doesn't work that way.

WIARDA: Then again, in that kind of culture, often they have to count on family first and then on friends and they know that those...

BENNETT: It's all for the family, I know.

WIARDA: I teach here, and I often tell my students that in this country, and for very good reason, nepotism is a very bad word but, in the Latin culture if you are not good for your family or your friends, what kind of person you are? So they expect [this of] you, even if they have just met you occasionally, "Oh she is my friend and I have met her. She knows me and she is going to try to do something for me."

BENNETT: Which was one reason I always thought it was a very poor idea to send somebody as ambassador, or even lower ranks, who had a spouse or was originally of the country they are assigned to because it puts you in a very invidious position. I remember one, actually they were colleagues of ours in another country, but the wife was assigned to ...

they were assigned to a country of the wife's origin. Of course her family was all in opposition, and he was assigned to the Government, and it was a terrible position to be put in.

WIARDA: As you know, the families are hundreds of people and they all can all claim, "I am your second or third cousin."

BENNETT: Families are hundreds of people. We had John Latsis who is now, (or became for a while), one of the biggest Greek ship owners [and] at that time was just starting up, and he had bought a P&O liner which [was] for the Greek trade between Athens and Sydney. And he decided to have a short cruise from Tinos and back from Piraeus, and he sent out an invitation for "You and your family to come." The ship took ... it was supposed to take twelve hundred people in the passenger manifest and I don't know how many crew they had, and we got aboard and there were two entire villages for one person's invitation.

WIARDA: It is true they are all connected.

BENNETT: I don't know how many we ended up being. The food supply gave out well before, and we didn't get back until one a.m. after leaving at about one p.m., and it was a nice cruise and very crowded.

WIARDA: Extremely crowded. It's relatives, is was all relatives.

BENNETT: Very Greek and rather fun. The food gave out and I will not comment on the state of the restrooms. And then we finally got back. Well, when we finally got back there was a stampede to get off, so Tap and I decided to walk down the stairs which was very wise because we looked at the elevators, which had an open reel effect, and saw the despairing look on our French opposite number because he was stuck between decks because... there were too many people in the elevator.

WIARDA: So he just went down. So going back to the Dominican Republic -- did you or your husband write up memoirs or notes about that period? I know the Dominican Republic quite well and I still maintain that what happened there in the 60's was really seminal, seminal to what the Dominican Republic is today. The Dominican Republic today is really a beacon of light, of democracy, fairly good relations with the United States. Representative Rangel from New York has very good relations with the Dominican community in New York. I really go back to what happened in the 1960s that really turned things around.

BENNETT: Well, Tap used to keep a line a day and I used to keep a line a day, but mine ... I had a tendency to loose things, so I don't know if I still have mine or not for that period because we had five year books. I think Sheryl [Vogt] has most of that period.

WIARDA: So it would be here?

BENNETT: It would be here. [The Russell Library]

WIARDA: I have been told that before too long we have to cease and desist any last minute words of wisdom that you can impart to us about your experiences as a former daughter of diplomats and wife of a diplomat and now with your daughters and sons also involved in...

BENNETT: They didn't want to have anything to do with the Foreign Service. The closest was my second son who went into the Navy JAG Corps, but no they didn't want anything to do with it. I think because they wanted roots. And that is ... the only thing they had for roots was at my parent's summer house. Advice – well, I used to tell the young foreign service couples coming in for heavens sakes cultivate your state representatives and state senators because that was one of the things that Tap always did and coming from a state like Georgia this thing is more expected and understood of you. And I don't think maybe the culture on Capital Hill has changed considerably, but maybe not. But I would say to them, do that, because it will be helpful and it will also help the Foreign Service if you do. That would be one thing that I would advise them, the second thing I would think I would say is don't expect things to be the same as they are in the States.

WIARDA: For good and for bad.

BENNETT: The world is getting much more homogenized, but...

WIARDA: Mrs. Bennett I know you have five children as far as I know, three daughters and two sons.

BENNETT: In the opposite order.

WIARDA: Well, but five total, and one of the things I am always intrigued in, especially because you are going from post to post in different cultures and so on -- were they sent to the American or English schools or did they go to the public schools? How did they cope with day to day? And with you as the mother, how did you help them out?

BENNETT: Well, fortunately for me and them I suppose, we didn't go abroad as a family until the youngest was five. They were at two year intervals and we had twins as number three. Our first posting as a family was Vienna, and I did to them what had been done to me and I plunked them in Austrian schools. They got lessons in German at home, but they had to either sink or swim and so they really got German tapped down pretty well, and the schools were good. And my eldest had been made to skip a grade in the States before we went abroad and I thought well, we will be going abroad so it won't make a difference. But when he went back to boarding school at home it turned out he had had such good preparation that he continued being a year ahead of himself which he was not really socially prepared for, so he had a rather hard time in boarding school and worked out better in college. But we went abroad by ship, and I feel so sorry for people going abroad on postings now because they have to fly. This means you pack up your belongings and then you're off, and then you arrive and you have to go straight in. Whereas when you went by ship you had time for what I call your soul to catch up to you. And so you could say goodbye to your previous posting and you would have time to adjust to the idea.

WIARDA: You would have ten days or so.

BENNETT: It would take at least a week and you didn't see your belongings before you left them. We took the American, arrived and stopped by the American Export Line. It was wonderful because there were 75 children in first class, so they had a separate seating for children. So we were asked to introduce our children to their dining steward, and he would say "Do you have any orders to take?" And I said, "Look if you could get some meat and potatoes and vegetables down them that is fine but if they only want the ice cream I don't really care."

WIARDA: For two weeks.

BENNETT: For two weeks that is perfectly fine. We only saw the children when they were in bed. I remember coming in at night, and the girls and I were in one cabin and Tap and the boys were in another cabin and Anne, one of the twins, would be sitting propped up, ostensibly reading, to Victoria. Ellen, who was always the trouble maker, would be pretending to be asleep, but that is all I really saw of them. It was one of those wonderful things because people still put their shoes outside to be polished, and of course one of the things the children would do would be to mix the shoes up.

WIARDA: Just for fun.

BENNETT: And they would ride up and down in the elevators, I mean they had a glorious time. That is what it ought to have been. But then the next time we went abroad when we came back there weren't that many children and it wasn't nearly as much fun. And shipping got ... we had to start going by plane and it wasn't anything like it, but I was fortunate because by that time I didn't have as many children to be with. When we first went abroad Tap had this engaging idea that each child should have a bag that he or she was responsible for. Well, that was much more trouble than letting me be responsible for it all. But anyway, we landed in Genoa and spent three or four days there and we had our collie with us, and the movie or TV Lassie had just hit Italy and people would just fling themselves across the street in the face of traffic saying "Lassie, Lassie", and hugged the dog. The dog was so happy to be on firm ground he didn't mind, but it was quite something. Then we took the train up on a Sunday and we did have seats, but we didn't know the ropes well enough to get our lunch tickets. So they announced lunch and we thought we would go to the second sitting, but by that time the train was so crowded that you couldn't even move through the corridors if you tried. So we ended up taking sandwiches through the window at the next stop which turned out to be salami, and the children did not like salami; the dog thought it was sheer heaven. But anyway we had to change trains in Milan and, well actually we stayed in the car, but the train changed engines or something and Tap knew this was going to happen and he warned me, but he went off with all our tickets. I think I had our passports and he had the money and the tickets. And suddenly our train started to pull out and the twins and those of us who had stayed on the train were simply miserable with John and Tap and the dog out walking someplace. Everybody was thoroughly convinced that we would never see Tap again. I began thinking this wasn't so smart not having some passports with me, but the trains met up

again and we got back together. The embassy met us and of course in those days it was always the family idea. Your section of the embassy would all come out to meet you, and look after you and take it in turn. And you had to pay calls in those days, so they would take you around and transport you for calls. It was much easier than it would be now where there is the family liaison office which is supposed to do all these things, but it was a much ... you got to know people much faster I think in those days.

WIARDA: Because of the security considerations now.

BENNETT: Oh I know, I am so grateful that we were where we were when we were because we escaped most of that security aspect or being worried about it.

WIARDA: Now the other thing is the opposite way. I understand, and I know that your husband had several postings in this country, the UN, Maxwell, and so on.

BENNETT: Yes. When we left Portugal we had the choice of the Industrial College in Fort McNair in Washington or the Air War College. And I had ... we visited in Montgomery because one of his fraternity brothers had an older sister in Montgomery. That visit was so wonderful because they were so hospitable and they even explained the family "in" jokes to you. And I thought anyone who has the patience to do that, I thought it was perfectly lovely. So when we were given the choice I said for Heavens sake, let's take Montgomery.

WIARDA: That was Maxwell.

BENNETT: Maxwell. So we lived on base, we had a house assigned and we were on Generals row. And what was very nice was that approach to the tenth tee on the golf course was right across the way. So my next door neighbor, whose husband was the Commandant of the War College, and I would get the breakfast dishes done and then we'd go tootling across with our clubs and we would play and we would never have to wait. The only day we didn't do this was Saturdays and Sundays when the men got the golf course. I found it a perfectly delightful assignment and because of [unintelligible] Holmes's sister we knew a lot of people in Montgomery, so we played both town and gown and I really have the most fond memories of that.

WIARDA: That's great. I know another one was of course in New York in the UN.

BENNETT: The UN and we had the rather unusual thing of serving under five different chiefs.

WIARDA: Mixed blessing.

BENNETT: Well, a lot of them were very nice. Our first ones were George and Barbara Bush, and you couldn't have asked for nicer people to serve with. They were wonderful and they were marvelous representatives of the U.S. because they were outgoing and they were courteous. I mean, they were fantastic when it came to writing thank you letters, they would have them written within twelve hours of the event and that takes some doing. Both George

and Barbara did that and they did that through their entire time even when he was Vice President. We had them for a family dinner one time and one of the twins said, “Gosh, I wish everybody were like them.” [Laughter] I remember at the time there was some kind of ... it was a sale of African artifacts. And we went there, and I was with Mrs. Bush and I thought well I have to buy something, but everything seemed rather expensive and I finally saw a hair or ankle bracelet, something like that, and I asked what it was and he said it was four. I said oh, well, then I’ll take it, thinking it was four dollars. Before I said I’d take it, Mrs. Bush said “I think dearie, that it is four thousand.” So I shrank back as if I had been stung by a wasp. [I] said “no I guess I won’t take it.” She knew from her African travels but I didn’t as I had not visited the “bulge” countries of Africa – Tap got to one or two. It was wonderful being under them. Then we had John Scali, who was the journalist who had been so instrumental in China. They were rather new to this business, but very nice people and different style, of course. But we were very cordial and certainly he was a good chief. And then we had, subsequently Senator [Daniel] Moynihan and he didn’t have much use for the Foreign Service and he did things his own style having been in India and so forth.

WIARDA: And sometimes he was very frank.

BENNETT: He was very effective and she wasn’t very much underfoot so that I tended to carry things for the female side of things then. Then after them we had the Scranton’s, and he was a prince of a man and she was absolutely lovely. There again it was a real pleasure to serve under them. And then we got a couple months of Andy Young, but by that time we knew we were leaving and so it was very...

WIARDA: And Andy Young also came from Georgia.

BENNETT: Yes, but anyway he was bringing in his whole new team of his people. It was rather interesting because I was born in New York. And when we came home from abroad we would always come and stay with my grandmother who was in New York and she lived at Park Avenue and 67<sup>th</sup> Street. My parents, after they retired, eventually got an apartment at 72<sup>nd</sup> and Park, and even though that was only a five block difference it was almost a different New York. We lived on the East Side when we were in the UN and that really was a different thing. I had to learn New York all over again. It was rather curious that way, but it was delightful and most of the diplomats enjoy New York because they can be very anonymous there. They don't feel they are in the goldfish bowl the way you do in almost any foreign assignment -- of course when you are double parked that is another story. A Turkish colleague, whom we subsequently had as an opposite number at NATO, was a wonderful gentleman and we were sitting minding our own business on a Sunday afternoon with the windows open and we kept hearing a lot of noise on York Avenue. And I said, "Gosh, that is a lot of noise." And the phone rang and it was Ambassador Olçay saying ... Tap was the man in charge of host relations ... "Mr. Ambassador, I am terribly sorry to bother you, but there is a whole group of Greek Americans and they seem intent on attacking my embassy, the offices, and the police don't seem to be doing anything about it. Do you think you could do something about it?" Now right there he was wonderful because any other Ambassador there would have said, "You gosh darn well do something." The whole approach was different. So anyway, then he called about ten minutes later to say the matter

was under control. What had happened was there had been a Greek American rally over in Brooklyn and they had all come over and were parading up and down and acting up for the television cameras. But his style was just so wonderful. Then I sat next to him at dinner not long afterwards and he said, "I do have one problem here, and nobody seems to be able to solve it for me. I have a reserved parking space, but it doesn't seem to matter what time I arrive, one of our colleagues always takes it. I have tried putting notes and nothing happens." I said, "Well, if you really want to get rid of him, just let all the air out of his tires. He will get the message." [Olçay says] "Oh, I couldn't do that." [Laughter]

WIARDA: So, it was not solved?

BENNETT: It wasn't solved.

WIARDA: But you gave him good advice.

BENNETT: Then another Turk [Sinan Korle] who was in the secretariat, his wife had been one of the many granddaughters of the sultan, she was a television person. I forget what job he had in the secretariat, but I think he might have been protocol. But anyhow he lived right around the corner from us and we did have occasional cases of muggings and so forth in New York. One night he had to park further away from his apartment than he usually did, so he was on the absolute corner. Apparently he came back fairly late and he was jumped by somebody who tried to hold him up. Instead of submitting meekly, he took his lighted cigarette and put it on the man's cheek, and that took care of that.

WIARDA: Well, this day and age I would not try that.

BENNETT: He is a fairly big, burly man so it worked. New York was fun in its own way, but it was an intense pace because we would have to do something like four cocktail parties an evening. I call them cocktails, but they were receptions officially, and then probably a dinner on top of that. The only thing that made it possible was having a driver and a car.

WIARDA: Sure.

BENNETT: That, unfortunately, has been taken away, due to economy, from people. It's false economy really; because it's...you were expected as the U.S. to appear at these things. One wonders what good they do, but...

WIARDA: Again, you are representing the country and it's a face so that the diplomats and their wives and their staff become acquainted with them. And that may facilitate when there is an impasse. If they know each other as friends, they may not agree, but it is not going to be as heated a debate.

BENNETT: One was very conscious of that in NATO because it was such a small group and we all knew each other well. It was small and you were working towards a specific goal, and you worked together. The then Secretary General, Joseph Luns, who was the grand old man of Europe at the time, called it a club. When the Turk [Kirça] who was there when we

arrived, left to go to the UN, exchanging with our friend, Olçay, Luns said “Mr. Ambassador, you are leaving the club for the circus” It comes out better in French. [Laughter] And it was so true.

WIARDA: Yes, absolutely, I can see that.

BENNETT: Luns had a way of calling a spade a spade and he apparently got off the line that of all animal sounds Dutch was the closest to human or something like that which did not endear him to his compatriots.

WIARDA: Well, of course I can see that.

BENNETT: Most people said, “You didn’t come back to Washington all that time?” And I say, “No we had two postings in the U.S., but we only had Washington assignments in the beginning and the end.”

WIARDA: Because you had Maxwell and the UN.

BENNETT: Then we had Washington in the very end when Mr. Shultz asked Tap to stay on in the Congressional Liaison job, and that when you have 435 or something like that...

WIARDA: Plus a hundred.

BENNETT: Plus a hundred. 535 masters it is a little difficult.

WIARDA: Sure.

BENNETT: But, we really enjoyed New York. There is that wonderful picture that was taken the year that China was admitted. The five people huddled and Tap had his chin on his hand. I think he was sound asleep at the time, but the unofficial caption was always: "What is the name of a country with five letters?" China.

WIARDA: They had nearly a billion people by then.

BENNETT: No, they were very tumultuous years in the UN. One time Tap was responding to the Cuban and said something about horse feathers and that completely mystified both the Cuban and Soviets and they went around trying to find out what that meant. They had never heard it and of course, it is not in any dictionary. Tap got great pleasure out of that. The moving from abroad back to the States was really almost more of a culture shock than it was going abroad because you expected things to be different abroad. In the interval, though we had come home on leave, we weren't living there and then to come back and suddenly be confronted with no help to unpack with and so forth and having to get organized. When I say no help I just mean not having another body to help unpack because Tap was always in the office.

WIARDA: Sure.

BENNETT: I remember coming up from Maxwell. We had a fair bit of silver and I didn't want to bring it to New York because we didn't expect to be there very long, but Tap said "Oh no we are going to bring the silver, I'll polish it," he said very grandiosely. So on the first Saturday we were there, we had unpacked the silver and I put him there with the silver polish, and the silver, and the newspapers and so forth. He picked up the rag and the phone rang and that was the end of his silver polishing.

WIARDA: You almost wonder whether he had programmed something.

BENNETT: Well, I mean I knew it wasn't going to last, but it was always fun.

WIARDA: Then when you moved to Washington, he still came to the University of Georgia and he gave lectures from time to time.

BENNETT: We stayed in Washington and he would come down and lecture. He would work it out to where he would be probably three days or a week at a time.

WIARDA: And you came?

BENNETT: Sometimes. Sometimes I didn't. It depended on how long it was and what I was doing. That was one thing. I began being my own person when we retired.

WIARDA: And not somebody's wife.

BENNETT: I said to him, I married you for life not for lunch. He would stay home for lunch so he would get a sandwich and a salad. I remember that David Acheson, the son of Dean Acheson, and he were great friends and I said you have lots of friends you can go out to lunch. So anyhow he and David were lunching together one time and David said to him, "I am so tired of salad." His wife, David's wife, had the same attitude. But being home was wonderful as far as I was concerned too because I had a place that I really belonged. You have to realize, up until we got home I had never lived as long in one place and in the same house as I have now. I think the longest I had lived in the same house for my entire life before that was nine years. It is wonderful even though my vote is only for president and it really doesn't count much, still.

WIARDA: Had you remembered what you wanted to say?

BENNETT: No.

WIARDA: In the middle of the night it will come. And we will have to come back and tape it at that time.

BENNETT: Yes, it will. I think you had also said something about, or at least Sheryl [Vogt] did, about some of the people that we met that were interesting. Well, I think one of the really impressive people we met was Joseph Luns, who was the Secretary General. He was a

great big tall man and he was a real history buff. Anything to do with the Napoleonic Wars he could tell you. And he knew the uniforms and every outfit there ever was, and he also had an almost inexhaustible fund of jokes. In fact it was only after three years that I heard him repeat a joke. Which I think is quite a tribute to somebody. Of course Scranton and George Bush were very impressive people. We met a lot of people who have become prominent in one way or another.

WIARDA: Did you have any relations with Dean Rusk?

BENNETT: Oh well, Dean was the one who really ... Tap went to him. Tap had great admiration for Dean, as did I. And he went to him I guess for advice and Dean said, "Take NATO because it is one of the last places left where you will have input on policy." Which was the case and of course when we were there they were trying to get the small nuclear bombs...

WIARDA: Non-proliferation.

BENNETT: Yes and we were trying to get them in Europe and that was quite difficult because there were demonstrations, not only in Europe but in the States, about them and there were a lot of issues going on there. And as I say I did not get very much involved in the political aspect because that was my father's training. People would ask me well, what does Tap think about this and I would always say I haven't asked. They would always look at me, but it was true. I never asked. I had a pretty good idea but I was not going to

volunteer it. Tap met Salazar, I didn't. We had a funny time in Portugal with President Tomas' daughter. He had an unmarried daughter who was in her forties I guess and we were giving a dinner party for her. And we were going to invite a couple, a particular couple, and our social secretary said, "You can't do that." And I said "Why not?" and she said, "They are divorced," and I said "What has that got to do with it?" And she said, "She's the President's daughter." That was the way ... an interesting aspect because I think subsequent to the revolution then the rules on divorce got very much liberalized and that conversation would not have occurred. We knew the tops of the people and in Greece we knew the Karamanlises quite well, and she was very much younger and a very live wire too. They were great fun. Then of course we had Jackie Kennedy's semi-official visit to Greece, which in a way are the worst kind, not her's because she was such a wonderful export. People just clamored to see her and all that but just from the logistical backup angle they are very difficult, but she was really wonderful.

WIARDA: So, did you meet the Onassis at that party?

BENNETT: We did, but at that time we were not, I never quite understood it, but we were supposed to stay at arms length from Onassis and from Niarchos. So we didn't really get to know them. But it is very interesting, when Kreisky was foreign minister, which was when we were in Vienna, he came to lunch one time and I guess he wasn't foreign minister yet. Our eldest, who was about thirteen at the time and very gung ho, I mean he knew what was going on and was introduced. So I think Kreisky was having fun playing and he said well, who do you think is going to win the election, or something like that. And Tap and I were

sort of going this way, literally terrified of what might come out, and young Tap said well that is for you to tell me, you're the politician. [Laughter]

WIARDA: He was already [a] diplomat even if he didn't go into Foreign Service.

BENNETT: He was quite good at fielding things but one never knew for sure.

WIARDA: But that is a very diplomatic kind of answer.

BENNETT: I was totally relieved and so pleased.

WIARDA: He had good training. He observed both of you and knew what to say and not be offensive because he could not say, I don't know.

BENNETT: He would have been quite capable of saying "Well, we are conservatives, of course" or something like that.

WIARDA: That is very good. Good training. It went from your parents, and then to you, and then with your good husband, and off to your children even though they never wanted to be in Foreign Service.

BENNETT: One of the things I will say is the children were troopers. We took four of them with us at our expense to Angola, on the trip to Angola and Mozambique, which the

Portuguese government always wanted you to visit the overseas territories. And we flew, Tap and I flew at Uncle Sam's expense and that was made very clear, that we had to try to pay our own way. And we would go to these towns in ... I remember we were in some small town in Angola and the local hierarchy, all of whom were Portuguese, they would have a dinner and we would be seated according to rank and the children would be sitting down at the end. Andrew, a young man who was brand new in his career said to Anne accusingly, "You don't speak Portuguese?" and she said, "Well, I am only here for the summer." He just couldn't understand. She was making do with a mish-mash of Spanish and French, I think she had had three or four lessons in Portuguese, but I mean she was only there for the summer. She was really trying and she was really outraged with his attitude. I mean the children knew enough that they had to work too, that it wasn't all fun and feathers, which may be one reason that they decided not to go into...

WIARDA: Into the Foreign Service yes.

BENNETT: But they haven't kept up their languages too well, and of course they have the disadvantage of being five, so were not forced to speak other languages at home as I was. I was an only child, in my day you tended to have a governess, and I did. She was Swiss-French, so she and I always spoke French together and at lunch if my parents were home we all spoke French. And then I spoke English to my parents. My French was tamped down early on and then my German and again, of course because I didn't have the others, I learned to speak better in all my languages than they have. But that said they can still communicate which is the main thing.

WIARDA: You probably also have Latin did you not?

BENNETT: I am sorry.

WIARDA: Didn't you probably have Latin? I am sure.

BENNETT: Oh yes, when we went to Germany for instance I was plunked in the German school, but had lessons on the side. That German school was a private school which was run by either the daughter or the niece of Theodore Mommsen, the historian, and it was run for the Army officer's children and the noble class and so forth. It was run in the ground floor of an apartment building and it went from Quarta, which would be about I guess the sixth grade, up to twelfth probably. My class was a class of thirteen, the smallest class in school, two Americans, one of them the daughter of our Assistant Military Attache, who was my best friend, and then an assortment of a couple of "von's."

WIARDA: Von's. [WIARDA laughs]

BENNETT: One of whom was the daughter of, her name was Von Spiegelberg, which meant that she [was] Jewish and when we first went in there was no problem with that whatsoever. One of the interesting things was that the Mommy, what we would call her behind her back, had a very German or Prussian caste mind because she assumed that because my father was a ranking American that therefore I should be responsible for the

activities for my fellow Americans. Well there were several Americans further up the line in the classes whom I didn't know at all. I remember one recess I was called in and put on the carpet by Mommy for the misdeeds of my fellow Americans, so I was saying yes ma'am, yes ma'am sort of thing, and then went out and was grabbed by my American sidekick in the class, and she said, "We are not talking to Gerda and I will tell you about it later, but we are not saying anything to Gerda and Anna Marie." Well they sat right in front of me, so it turned out that during that recess, Gerda was a Hitler mädél, and she had been told that she had to do something about this Jewish girl, so in the middle of recess she had started calling her names. Well, Irena apparently burst into tears and the whole school sent Gerda to Coventry, which was extraordinary, and for the rest of the year the only things ... Anna Marie would talk to her because they were good friends, but the rest of us the only things we would say to Gerda was "pass the pencil please," or something like that. Now the next year that would not have happened because Mommy had to introduce Nazi teachers, and the handwriting was on the wall for the school too, and fortunately or unfortunately the Air Force took over the building and then the school folded. But I did get back on my way to India and saw the girls still, but I often wonder what happened to them because one I know was working as a nurse in a mental hospital. Very frail, so I had always wondered why she chose that.

WIARDA: Well, one of the things that have always interested me is how people meet. In my case I met my husband as a graduate student. Both of us were graduate students, very poor, at the University of Florida. Florida is not exactly the best name here at the University of Georgia.

BENNETT: No.

WIARDA: But anyway that is how we met. How did you and your good husband meet?

BENNETT: I had been introduced by all sorts of people by various members of the family. Now you have to bear with me with a bit of a genealogy because Tap's great-grandfather had three wives and my father in law came down from the first wife and one of the daughters of the second wife married, no -- her daughter married my mother's first cousin. He was in the Navy so I guess they met somehow that way, but Adelaide was from Montgomery originally, and I think her father was a newspaper man, but anyway. So she decided that she would have a try at having us meet. She was living in Richfield, Connecticut and I was in New York and Tap was coming up to New York for something, or he was in the Department, and anyway, she invited us up for the weekend. I was working on Newsweek and my weekends were Tuesday-Wednesday and I was desperately hoping to be moved up from the clip desk to research assistant in the foreign affairs department so I didn't particularly want to rock the boat, famous last words. But anyhow I arranged because she insisted so hard, and then he couldn't come, and she made the mistake of showing me his photograph from when he was sixteen when he was most unphotogenic and I thought "For that she hauled me up here?" So two weeks later...

WIARDA: She did say, "But now he looks much better?"

BENNETT: Well, he became much more photogenic, but anyway two weeks or so later she said “He is coming this time, can you come?” and I said “No”, so that was that. Then the phone rang on Monday, no, Sunday evening and it was this nice southern voice, explained who he was and wondered if I would be free to lunch on Monday, so that was possible. So we went out for lunch and I enjoyed it and he said he was due to go to Panama, and if he didn't go to Panama he would like to show me around Washington, so I said well fine, I didn't hear and thought that was that. I would chalk it up to experience.

WIARDA: Sure, just do that.

BENNETT: Then, suddenly, this telegram arrives in the office, which of course everyone read with great interest, saying that he would be in Washington.

WIARDA: No privacy.

BENNETT: So I went down to Washington finally and stayed with my Aunt and Uncle and the first night one of my second cousins had come home from the Navy and so my Aunt and Uncle had assembled all sorts of people and it was a grand mish mash of people and Tap, being accustomed to this sort of thing and also having had four aunts, was quite accustomed to this thing. So he sat through dinner very nicely, and then he said rather plaintively, “Do you suppose we could go out alone tomorrow,” So we went out and we went to what was then the Carlton I think, or something anyhow, then we walked all over Washington, the whole night until six a.m., and we knew it was it, but we also thought that we had very

conservative parents and that we'd better let it simmer. So it simmered until December when I went down to stay with my parents in Peru and I left it up entirely to the gods. I booked my passage December 5 to Miami, because you didn't fly overnight, December 6 to Panama, December 7 to Peru. Because there were priorities, I got bumped from New York to Miami and that rather agitated me. But then I was very lucky because the plane to Panama developed engine problems so I was still able to get on it the next night. But of course I had missed my Lima connection completely. The ambassador in Panama, who was very kind, Tap had been staying with him until he got his own digs and he had taken Tap with him essentially. They were quite good friends of my family, so they put me up. So at this time with Panama being one of the two places you could still enlist, Tap had very bad eyes and the Navy hadn't wanted him, and he had gotten waivers from Admiral Leahy [FDR's Medical Aide], but they said you still have the eyes, no thank you. So he was able to enlist in Panama and he was out at Ft. Colby and he had left his car with a friend in the embassy with strict instructions not to drive it down town. Well, it had been driven downtown and been in an accident and had just come out of the shop and so I was to drive it over to Ft. Colby. But I was going up to change my clothes at the embassy and I had noticed that it had gotten very hot. So I said to the embassy driver who was guiding me around in his car, "I don't think there is any water in there you might want to check the thing." It never occurred to him to do anything but put water in, which he did. I noticed it was getting very hot just as I was getting to the Canal to go across the Canal, which is where he was abandoning me. So I stopped for a while and he came and looked and couldn't see anything wrong, so then it started again so I went zooming across the canal so as not to be caught in the middle when a ship came. Got to Ft. Colby with steam coming out of the car and the Marine guards or whoever they were just

sort of pushed me out of the way so I wouldn't explode. There wasn't one bit of grease on that engine. What had happened was they hadn't closed the cock down below.

WIARDA: I see.

BENNETT: I can't remember, but we were engaged about five days after that. Then I went on to Peru and he went up to Washington. Now he would have said that we met at 42<sup>nd</sup> street and Broadway.

WIARDA: Okay. Wonderful.

BENNETT: It was a great deal of fun, the business of life, and we both enjoyed it. I don't know that I would want to do it again now under the present way of doing things, but then I really enjoyed it and I must say I have enjoyed life ever since, so...

WIARDA: But also, it always gets back, to the family you had before then. That made a big difference. If you had totally been educated in this country....

BENNETT: Oh, stone cold. I might not have enjoyed it nearly as much. I mean I was very fortunate because when my mother went to Caracas as a young bride my father had had a number of postings before that. She was fourteen years younger than he and she went as a young bride. She was called on by somebody in the business community, someone who had been there for something like twelve years or something, a long time, and didn't speak a

word of Spanish. She thought she was only going to be there six months. My mother decided right then and there, that is not the way to go: I am going to arrive and I am going to act as if I am going to be there the rest of my life and the first six months I am going to do everything I can to get close to them. She trained me in that.

WIARDA: Sure. She obviously gave you excellent training and I am sure that this was an asset to your husband's career in many ways...

BENNETT: Very little. Very little.

WIARDA: Well, you probably don't give yourself as much credit as you should; I bet he would say otherwise.

BENNETT: I think one of the reasons for his success was that we both patently enjoyed being in the place we were and, if we didn't, we certainly put on a good act. [Laughter]

WIARDA: That's essential.

BENNETT: I think you get as much out of a place as you put in, which is one reason I think I enjoyed Greece so much, because I worked so hard on my Greek. Because I did I was able to understand more and I really enjoyed it more.

[End of Interview]

## Biographical Data

RBRL OHD 006

Margaret White Bennett

b.1922

### Occupation:

Diplomatic Wife/housewife

Spouse of retired AEP, Assistant Secretary of State

Entered Services: 1922      Left Service: 1985

### Posts:

#### With Parents:

1922 Caracas, Venezuela

1923 Prague, Czechoslovakia

1924-26 Riga, Latvia

1927-28 Washington, D.C.

1928-33 Buenos Aires, Argentina

1934-36 Berlin, Germany

#### With Husband:

1947-57 Washington, D.C.

1957-61 Vienna, Austria

1961-64 Athens, Greece

1964-66 Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

1966-69 Lisbon, Portugal

1969-71 Air University, Maxwell Field, Alabama

1971-77 United Nations, New York

1977-83 NATO Brussels, Belgium

1983-85 Washington, D.C.

#### Positions Held At Post:

Children's Friendship Fund, Vienna

Vice-President Hellenic-American Women's Club, Board of AWOG, Lyceum Club,  
Eureka in Greece

Secretary then Treasurer of the UN Delegates' Wives' Club, UN, NYC

#### In Washington:

Late '40's and '50's Board of Georgetown Co-Op Nursery School

Membership Committee and fund raising for National Symphony

Since '83, 3 years on Washington Cathedral Building Committee

Board of International Student's House

## Subject Analysis

RBRL OHD 006

Margaret White Bennett

- Anecdotes about Wiarda coming to America
- Anecdotes about Bennett's early life as the daughter of Foreign Service workers
- Bicultural Centers
- Anecdotes about being an ambassador's wife, ambassadors wives and their relationships with each other
- U.S.I.S. Libraries
- Queen Elizabeth and Prince Phillip's state visit to Rome
- Dominican Republic Revolution
- Life and Culture in Greece, Lisbon, Austria, Australia, Italy, the Dominican Republic, Turkey, Mozambique, Angola, Portugal, Spain, the United States, and Panama
- Civil War in Africa
- Tapley Bennett's time at the UN
- Community outreach and humanitarian work of ambassadors abroad
- The affect being an ambassador's child had on the Bennett children
- The Bennett's time at NATO
- Tapley Bennett's connection to the University of Georgia
- Tapley and Margaret Bennett's early life and marriage

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