

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Peace Corps/Foreign Missions Project

Peace Corps Experience

O. H. 847

CAROLYN HEUSSER MOORE

Interviewed

by

JOSEPH G. ROCHETTE

on

December 8, 1984

CAROLYN MOORE

Mrs. Carolyn Moore was born on January 27, 1927 in Youngstown, Ohio, the daughter of Thomas F. and M. Louise Lamb. She graduated from high school, having attended Rayen School and Villa Julianne. Mrs. Moore spent two years at Miami University (1945-47) where she met her husband.

Mrs. Moore went to live in the Gold Coast (Ghana) in 1952 with her husband who was working for a Texaco overseas program. The environment of pre-independent West Africa provided for some interesting experiences. The sharp contrast of colonial wealth to local poverty left a lasting impression.

Mrs. Moore has three children: R. Thomas Heusser, Karen D. Gasino, and Ellen L. Moore. She presently lives in Youngstown, Ohio. She has worked at the Girard Free Library since 1981. She is a member of St. Edward's Church and the Garden Club of the Little Flower. Mrs. Moore's hobbies include gardening and reading.

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INTERVIEWEE: CAROLYN HEUSSER MOORE

INTERVIEWER: Joseph G. Rochette

SUBJECT: Gold Coast, colonial period, diplomat-
corporate lifestyle-viewpoint

DATE: December 8, 1984

R: This is an interview with Mrs. Carolyn Moore for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Peace Corps/Foreign Missions Project, by Joe Rochette, at the Girard Free Library, on December 8, 1984, at 9:15 a.m.

The best thing to start with is just a personal history, where you are from and all that kind of stuff.

M: My name is Carolyn Heusser Moore and I was born in Youngstown, Ohio and grew up here. I went to Miami University where I met my husband who was from New York and he was connected with Texaco when we graduated, an overseas division.

In November of 1952, we left by freighter for Accra, Gold Coast, which is now Ghana. It took us three weeks to get there. Many instances aboard the ship. . . It was a Norwegian ship called the Fern Gulf. It carried eleven missionaries, a woman that imported rhesus monkeys in Sierra Leone, and myself and two children ages three and five and my husband.

On the way out we stopped at Sierra Leone so I spent a day there seeing Portuguese steps that the Portuguese had built for the slave traders. I don't know if you even want to know about this, but each step is made so that when the slave was linked together the step is made so high so he can put one foot in front of the other.

Now I didn't spend enough time in Sierra Leone to really know anything about the people. I was interested in the compound we were taken to. These people's livelihood was these rhesus monkeys which are sent here to the United States for medical purposes. That's what they did, they raised them.

We went from there; we stopped at Monrovia in Liberia and only spent a few hours there so I have little knowledge of that. We finally arrived on Christmas Eve at Takoradi because to go into a car by ship they can not unload you. The tides are too bad. They have to anchor way out.

R: One thing I was thinking of, was there anything that you had to go through before you left over? Did they give you any kind of introduction or were you prepared in anyway?

M: Not really. The only preparation that we made, on the suggestions that were offered by the company, were that we take domestic goods. Clothes were not available there; a lot of foods that we were accustomed to weren't; toilet paper was not what we were used to. So, when we left--we went for a twenty month tour the first time--we had to bring coffee, toilet paper, sheets, pillowcases and almost all articles of clothing because they told us we would not be satisfied with the things that we could find there.

R: Was there any kind of medical, like shots?

M: Yes. We received every kind of shot you could possibly think of, like the coming thing against malaria there. Other than that there wasn't a whole lot of indoctrination other than talking to other people that have been there. It was just kind of a trial by error. You were sent out. There were, of course, many Americans out there by the time we got there.

R: You sort of had to learn the hard way.

M: Yes. They could tell you anything they wanted to about it. We were most grateful for being told what to bring out there. Everything in the way of clothing, sheets, pillowcases and any kind of food that you were accustomed to had to be brought.

R: While you were there did you have any medical problems or times that you got really sick?

M: I fortunately never was sick. My daughter was an asthmatic and she did have problems with that several times. She also developed large, I'll call them car-

buncles. I thought that it was from the soil. When we finally found a very knowledgeable lady who was a British doctor there she said that I had spent so much time giving her baths and scrubbing her clean skin that I had taken the oil out of her skin. She put her on zinc pills which the British are great for feeling they're a cure-all and it did cure it.

My son had malaria while we were there. We really couldn't tell why because our company homes were all screened and our children were always in bed or at least in the screened section of the house by sundown because that is when the malaria mosquito comes out, after dark. We had lived in one company house that had a great staircase with a hiding place under, and we feel that maybe playing hide-and-go-seek with the other children he had hidden in there and there was mosquito that had bitten him. Relatively, we remained very healthy.

R: Lucky. That leads into another thing, what was it like raising a family in a different culture, not being in the United States? Were there any other advantages or disadvantages that you can think of?

M: I think perhaps the one advantage that they had was that they started school earlier. They went to a British military school there and the British are great for starting their children earlier. I felt they had learned a great deal from them. I also feel they learned things that they will retain a lifetime, which they both have: the culture of the people there, the people who worked in our houses. The Africans are quite fond of children so they spent a lot of time maybe telling the children things that they wouldn't tell us.

They got to see things that they never in their lifetime will forget. We traveled also out of Africa through Europe several times. This helped the children in their upbringing. They both came home with very British accents. They also learned to speak pigeon English, very well. I don't think it did any harm, I think it was great for them.

The custom there was--and that's one reason I came home-- once the children reach eight, there is no more schooling for them. The British send their children home and the wealthy Africans send their children to England or Switzerland to school. It became a problem as to what we would do. Being a typical American mother I was not about to end it there or send my children abroad to school, which maybe was the wrong attitude but it was mine.

R: While you were there, there was a strong British influence?

M: Very much so. It still belonged to the British. Now the last two years we were there, in fact I left just before they got their independence, things were not quite the same. We had trouble with the help in the house and got some strange answers. We had a driver and I said to him, "Well, what do think you are going to do when the British finally pack up and leave and you have your independence?" He said, "I'm not going to have to work the rest of my life and they are going to give me a transistor radio."

The uneducated African, this is probably not the thing to say, is very much like a small child. He kind of trusts and. . . Nothing is going to bother him about what happens tomorrow. The British did a great deal toward educating, I felt. I understand that it wasn't popular with the world that they more or less dominated a country that didn't belong to them. They did do a lot towards educating them. The missionaries were very prevalent there and did have schools.

We had one steward boy that was from Nigeria. He came to us and I used to help him with his homework. One day I came home and there was this little note:

Dear Mrs. Heusser, I now have a position at the local asylum. I feel that this is going to better me and I thank you so much for helping me with my work.
Bernard.

Everybody laughed; they said, "After working for the Heussers for a few years, the local asylum was a step up in the right direction." It was for him. It made more money for him. I don't agree with the way the British paid them, the Americans paid them more which may have been a mistake because we found after we were there a while the African himself kind of thought we were simple. Seriously they thought, well, these people don't know what it is all about.

Anybody that you had working for you, you were responsible for their health. We took care of them, sent them to the doctor if they were sick, paid them wages that were unheard of here in the United States; it was ridiculous, I really don't know how they lived on what they did. They were accustomed to the kind of food that they ate, which incidentally wasn't anything grown locally. Most of their diet consisted of rice and sardines which was imported.

We had plenty incidents. We had a laundry boy. When

we first went out there, I had what they called a permanently pleated dress; it was guaranteed never to lose its pleats. I hung it in the bathroom one day and he had come that morning and presumed that it had to be ironed. That evening I came in and here is this dress with half the pleats in and half the pleats out and this little note:

Madam, No can get all the wrinkles out.
Sorry. Joseph.

I had wanted to write to Du Pont Nylon and say that somebody had finally discovered a way to remove their permanent pleats.

R: Did you ever have any trouble, now this is from my personal experience, people who work for you taking something that was yours and not telling you and maybe just assuming that that was okay.

M: Very definitely. The first year I was there I have to say I was robbed blind. I had a nanny that took all my underwear. We had a cook that we had hired without a passbook. Things are a lot different now than they were then. They had to carry passbooks. In other words, they carried a book with them saying they had worked with so-and-so and their services had been satisfactory. We hired a cook that spoke French and German. Now he didn't speak English too well, but, my heavens, he was magnificent. He did not have a passbook. He told us he had lost it, but we hired him. He was a character. He did steal all our coffee and all our toilet paper. This was something that was beyond me. I just didn't feel that this was happening until we kind of took. . . After about six months you kind of look around and say, "Where is this and where is that?" They don't feel that is wrong.

R: That is interesting.

M: I don't think they do. They see all this and they think, look how much they have, they aren't going to miss it. We had to let him go and I missed him. He was very much of an aristocrat among those people because he had worked for many influential people and had been taught to cook many French dishes, many German dishes. He would ask me each time we did a great deal of entertaining over there, "Who is coming to dinner?" So one night he had asked me this and I told him, "Joseph." The fish arrived on the table. Afterwards, I found out he really disliked one of the couples that were coming and this was his way of showing his disapproval of who we were entertaining that evening.

They did have personalities all their very own. We had

a nanny that came to me and she only stayed a year. She had come from up in Kumasi. She just arrived at my gate one day and we didn't have one at the time and she slept on a bed, which was unusual, in the children's room. Most of them slept on a mat at the foot of the bed. She was such a lady that our steward boys took orders from her. She made the children say their prayers, brush their teeth. She kind of ruled the household and when she left I could have just really died. Then I found out later that she was married to a Swiss man who had gone home on leave. So while he was on leave or gone for the year she had come down into Accra and worked. It is a matriarchy there; the only help you have in the house that are women is the nanny who takes care of your children.

R: What do you remember about the foreign community, as far as Americans?

M: The American foreign community consisted of mostly oil companies, and tractor, Pan Air, very few other things, just really mostly oil. There were quite a few Mormons there, but they weren't in Accra themselves, that worked in the lumber industry. They owned a lot of the lumber manufacturing things down in the south. There were quite a few of them there, but they were in the bad country, they weren't in Accra itself. There were quite a few Swiss, predominately British.

We ran around with a mixed bag of people. There were quite a few Syrians, Lebanese, and Indians, who were almost all merchants. That was their mainstay and most of our merchandise was bought from them other than. . . There was a British company that has been. . . As long as there has been an empire, this company existed. There was a Swiss store and a French store, like what we would call a department store.

There was a club there, called the Accra Club. The Americans were invited to join and you had British and Swiss, but that was it. They did not consider the Greeks, the Syrians, and the Lebanese white, and so therefore they were not members of the club. Every Saturday was the courier meal, every Saturday night was the formal dance with long dresses and a full tux for the men or whatever they considered full regale. Every Sunday night was the band concert with high tee. We played a great deal of golf, there were two nice golf courses there. The British never went down; regardless of where they went they kind of took home with them.

R: Did you notice, did they have feelings of superiority over the Africans?

M: Well, I would have to say yes; to a large extent, yes.

A lot of them, towards the end of our last tour there, were from India. That had become independent so this was their way of stronghold. They could be very arrogant. I just feel that they considered the natives children. To an extent, some of them were. They had never received an education.

We also entertained some very high officials there. Their names are beyond me other than Nucruma who we got because he graduated from the University of Pennsylvania. Eddy Chapman's wife was his official hostess because Nucruma was not married. He was another thing that you go into the store; he was the one that they wrote the book The Triple Cross about. His wife was Nucruma's official hostess. Now Nucruma was very Americanized to the fact that he never stopped chewing gum. He was also a very smart man. When he lived at home with his mother, he reverted to all his native habits. They ate on the floor, out of the same pot, and with their fingers. It was interesting that they could trade back and forth between these two cultures.

Some of the judges and magistrates we met there were brilliant men, graduates of Oxford. What can I say, it was just a nation of complete contrast. You had your few handful that were extremely well-educated and then the majority of the people weren't, other than the mission schools that did try to teach them. For the smart one who could go ahead and do it, he was way ahead.

R: It is almost as if there were a class of black Africans that were British.

M: Very British, very British. If you were to be behind a screen and heard them speak, you would not know; I mean there would be no color connected with it at all. However, the British saw to it that that was not anything that was ever, you know, you never stepped the boundary.

Another strange thing I found because the Americans are a lot more liberal, when we would, as I say, do a lot of official entertaining and these people would come to our houses, they would never bring their wives. Whether that was a custom among them you didn't want to say to them, "Why don't you do this?"

You asked me about nationalities. There was a small group of Italians there. Rather than being from Italy, they were from up around Ethiopia. I don't believe they were actually from Ethiopia, but they had been born and raised there around Libya, and were extremely wealthy; their wives wore Paris gowns.

There are so many things I could probably tell you. The beggars that sat outside the grocery stores that had leprosy. It was very difficult to cope with. This was something I had never seen before and they were very mutilated. Now I understand that there was a place about ninety miles out of Accra where missionaries did run a hospital for them. I don't know, I think that possibly they've got a cure for it now. These people were so mutilated and they would beg outside the grocery stores when you would go shopping. It was very hard to ignore them, you couldn't.

R: Maybe another thing that would be good, could you describe Accra a little bit what it would be like to go into the town, things you would see.

M: Accra was all dirt, I mean all dirt road. My understanding of it is that there were no women ever sent out to Accra from Britain until after the Second World War in 1947; so it was still fairly a primitive place. When we got there in 1952, I think that there were possibly in all of Ghana or the Gold Coast only 5,000 whites. My figures may be a little off, but I understand at the time 2 million Africans. We were very much the minority even though we ruled in such a burdened land, I guess.

The town had stores, maybe two stories high, maybe most of them weren't even two stories. As I said, all dirt roads. They had a fascinating market that most of the British would not go near with a ten foot pole; your cook usually went. We did go to the market occasionally to buy things. We thought it most colorful. The women there are extremely colorful. They wear cloth which incidentally is made in England and Switzerland. That is what they wore. What they wear today I don't know. They wore it rapped around their middle and often wore American or English glasses on top. If they were married they covered their heads in the cloth. They are the bread-winners of the family. They make much ore. They are the business people in Accra and in Ghana. I understand that this succession, the money passes not from father to son, but from mother to daughter. It's always kept on the woman's side of the family.

The town wasn't too large. It had a lot of little shops almost like a bazaar you would find somewhere. There was kind of a section where the Indians had their shops and the English and the French and the Swiss had theirs. We bought local produce and had to soak it. We occasionally got our produce in from South Africa, maybe once a month. Lettuce at that time was \$1 a head. The eggs we ate locally we really couldn't eat. We had to wait for the boats to come in because they

fed the chickens fish and the eggs definitely tasted like fish.

I really can't get politically into it with you because I wasn't involved too much in the politics of the country except that I felt that they, perhaps, moved too quickly for their independence, because there were too many of them still uneducated. Just from what I've heard since I left there, this has proved to be true. The leaders took the country, built great arches to themselves, closed down the Accra Club, built huge hotels, and then made just a general hash of the whole thing. There has been nothing but discord. The poor people that were there are not as well-off as when they were employed by the British or the Americans or the Swiss because at least they got their medical care, at least they were sent to school. There was some, little hope for them. I don't feel they have done such a marvelous job on their own. I don't even know the answer to that.

R: Maybe there isn't.

M: People that we know that have been in Monrovia said that is a real eye-opener. That was American slaves who started and founded that and they are treated most cruel there than the majority of the people. It is run by the Tubman's and a few people you know, the founding families. They say the poverty there and the discipline, and talk about segregation, it is very rampant there and that is an all African country.

R: Did you ever feel because you were either a foreigner or white, any kind of prejudice?

M: We got a great deal of that towards the end. You have to understand when I first went there, there was no prejudice; they must have felt it all inside. But, none of them would ever have uttered a sound. The last tour we were out there the independence was in its beginning stages and I had steward boys that refused to do things that I would ask them to do in the house. I had one of them tell me one time that they only take orders from master and not from me. That is when he would be sent away for something and he became quite old.

Taking my daughter to a nursery school one day towards the end of our last tour there, I had clods of dirt thrown at my car with a chant, "Americans go home." The feeling became very prevalent that they wanted the foreigners, the white people, out of the country. In some ways they were justified and in other ways it was their own doing.

I hated the cockroaches, which you must have seen too, that invaded the house no matter what you did. I truly liked the people. As I say, I really didn't get to know other than our help.

I had an interesting thing, Bernard who came to us when we first started there. I showed him how to set the table, he knew how to make popcorn, all the things that you might teach him that you want him to do. We went home on leave and we were only gone four months. Do you know when we came back it was like he had never learned any of it? I'm serious. It was like I had to say to him all over again, "It goes this way, this way, this way."

We had a very interesting night watch. We had what we called compounds. We had bungalows that had brandise that went all the way around all four sides because of the heat, only the ceiling fans service, no such thing as air conditioning. The kitchens were out in the backyard. The Americans did think this was terrible so they built one in the house which was a disaster, it should have never been there. Our homes were concrete, but this night watch, we had was from Kano. He was about six foot two with this little pair of beads, and he walked. His job was to guard the compound all night against intruders. The kids used to taunt him because he did not speak English. Our sleeping quarters were all done with burglar proof wire and screens. He would try to talk to them. "Pickens, you go to bed; you are up. Naughty, naughty, naughty," and then they would laugh and laugh at him.

The children teased them. They had a tendency to tease the Africans who worked for us. They teased their nanny terribly. We had friends that had our Victoria while we were home on leave and the kids said to her, "Victoria, let's play hide-and-go-seek." She said, "Yes," and they said, "You hide in the cupboard, Victoria; we'll hide somewhere else. When the family came home, there was Victoria locked for four hours in her cupboard.

We had mostly a social life up there. I mean I had a social life. My husband went to work in the morning at 7:00, came home at noon. Then the offices were closed until 2:30 and then closed again at 4:30 because of the heat.

We all had beach huts. Every company owned a beach hut down on the ocean, where you went only in the morning. Nobody ever tried it there in the afternoon because the sun being so hot.

As I say, we met many political figures and mingled

with them socially, but politically, no, it wasn't our part in the country. An interesting thing while we were out there, the U.S.I.S. suddenly discovered that all the books in the library were Communist.

We knew the American, I'm going to say ambassador--that is not right; he may have been an ambassador; I know his name was Lamb. He was what we call an old coaster. We consider ourselves old coasters. I still refer to myself when I'm among the people. . . We feel this way about it. He had shot an elephant and had the elephant bracelet.

Like we do everywhere, we had a mixed bag of people. We didn't just stay with the Americans and it made it kind of an interesting life. You learned a lot of customs from other countries. I would like to think that I learned a lot from the Africans. I maybe just can't express it well.

I think perhaps until I went to Africa, I was very prejudiced. I think I have far less prejudice now. A very good friend of ours, who was a frequent visitor to our house was Nucruma's secretary. She was from Jamaica and was part Scottish and part Jamaican. A truly lovely woman and very knowledgeable; she had been educated in Scotland. I think I left there with far less feeling of a color barrier than I did when I went there. It did change possibly when my kids were growing up because I don't think I like to see that mixture. Seriously, this was the one thing that as far as the entertaining we did. . . They really don't have any color. Suddenly everybody's color kind of blends when you are talking to people who are perhaps better educated than you are.

I was astounded that the people that we hired to work in our house really weren't educated, other than what the missionary did. They came from different places and they had worked for different nationalities. They were very bilingual. I will truly tell you that I never learned to speak their language, but they did their best to speak mine. A lot of them spoke German, French, Portuguese, because of people they had worked for. That made them a lot more intelligent when it came to languages and we never attempted to say anything in their language.

R: Maybe just to close things up, if someone you knew of was going to a country such as Ghana or like a third world country, never had really traveled, too much before. They were going over there to live and they came to you and told you that, what things do you think maybe you would say to them to do? I don't want to say advice.

M: I think I would tell them to go with a very open mind. Also, I think that I would tell them not to try to change the things that are there too readily. If they could be of help, fine, but to try and introduce customs, laws, and religion that is foreign to have people who already have their own customs, their own religion and have done very well with it. . . . If you are asked for help then give it, but if you are not asked for help then don't barge in and say, "Well you aren't doing this right. I'm going to show you the correct way to do it." I think this is our big mistake. I always have thought that. I feel that if you are asked for the help then by all means. When the steward came and said to me, will I help him with his math, "Yes, I would be glad to." But to say to him, "The church you go to on Sunday, Bernard," or "The way you dress," or "The way you live is so wrong," it isn't wrong. I mean, they have a lot more culture than we do, really, when you stop and think about it. Their laws are probably much more just than ours even though they are a little bad. I think we befuddle them. I think we set them back by trying to impose everything that we as Americans or English or any nationality. . . .

I imagine it has all changed; I don't even think you can get into Ghana now. I think they are very leery. There are no Americans left there. It has all been turned over to the natives. I doubt that there will ever be. Some of the British we knew stayed on there. I should just pose this one story.

R: Go ahead.

M: You have to understand that when I lived there it was still fairly primitive. We had a great friend there. His name was Neval Hill. He had come from Malaysia. He was part Irish and part Malaysian. He worked in her majesty's service. His steward boy came to him one night and said, "Master. . . . Now Neval was probably sitting down having a pre-dinner drink or something. He was actually a very smart man. He said, "Master, if you found your wife was cheating on you,"--now Neval was a bachelor--"what would you do?" He said, "I think I would chop off her head." The next day, one of the servants in the compound next to Neval, they found his wife with her head chopped off. He had a hard time getting over that. It was something said off the cuff like you might say to another American or Englishman at a party. But he said this to this African who felt that Neval was above and beyond all beings and that any answer he would give him would be the correct one. You have to temper what you say because they do not think like we do. A lot of them look to you for furthering their education and if we stop and listen to them, we

can prove them ours. This is how I feel about it.
Also, I would like to go back and visit someday.

R: I would just like to say thank you very much.

M: I don't know that it has been any help. I rambled on
and on.

R: That is what we want.

END OF INTERVIEW