The Unofficial Diplomat
A Memoir

JOANNE GRADY HUSKEY
The Unofficial Diplomat: A Memoir, Joanne Grady Huskey, New Academia Publishing, LLC, 2009, 0982386729, 9780982386729, 208 pages. The book describes the author's experiences in China during the 1989 "Beijing Spring." It moves to India, and then Kenya at the time of the American Embassy bombing in Nairobi. "From the Chinese army's crackdown in Tiananmen Square to Al Qaeda's terror attacks on the American Embassy in Nairobi, Joanne and Jim Huskey have been on the front lines of some of the most dramatic moments in recent history.Jim as a U.S. Foreign Service officer, Joanne as his intrepid partner. A compelling political thriller, colorful adventure story, and well-written travel-ogue, The Unofficial Diplomat provides a revealing behind-the-scenes glimpse of what life is really like for our diplomats and their families as they face the challenges of representing the United States while seeking to carve out a semblance of normal existence in a tumultuous world. A wonderful read." MIKE CHINOY, former CNN Senior Asia Correspondent "This book provides a wonderful insight into the highs and lows, the exuberance and terrors, of a life well lived in the Foreign Service. Read the part about the al Qaeda bombing of the Nairobi embassy in 1998 and you will understand how the mindset and personal leadership of community members like Joanne helped us accomplish extraordinary things against great odds. The Unofficial Diplomat makes clear why Foreign Service spouses and family members deserve such respect and affection." PRUDENCE BUSHNELL, former U.S. Ambassador to Kenya and Guatemala "The Huskeys brought enthusiasm and exuberance to their two China postings, backed by a profound interest in the history and culture of China. And when faced with the tragedy of Tiananmen in June 1989, while Jim Huskey performed brilliantly, applying his creativity and adventurous spirit to get the account right, Joanne was with him all the way. Her diverse talents and humanity brought two worlds closer together. Both understand the importance and appeal of Taiwan and yet clearly know the power of China in our future. A very good bookread it!" JAMES R. LILLEY, former U.S. Ambassador to China and former Director of the American Institute in Taiwan.

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The right hand of power , Ural Alexis Johnson, Jef Olivarius McAllister, 1984, History, 634 pages.

From Watergate to Hugo Chavez An Ex-Diplomat's Memoirs, Gonzalo T. Palacios, 2009, Biography & Autobiography, 132 pages. FROM WATERGATE TO HUGO CHAVEZ, AN EX-DIPLOMAT'S MEMOIRS consists of a selection of experiences beautifully written by their protagonist, Dr. Gonzalo T. Palacios. The stories ....


Nine lives a Foreign Service odyssey, Allen C. Hansen, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Nov 12, 2007, History, 436 pages. This work describes how the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) conducted its varied media, cultural, and educational exchange programs in nine countries during the Cold War ....


Beijing A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette, Kay Jones, Anthony Pan, Nov 1, 2005, Reference, 252 pages. Whether you are conducting business, traveling for pleasure, or even relocating abroad, one mistake with customs or etiquette can leave a bad taste in everyone's mouth ....

Moon Living Abroad in China Including Hong Kong and Macau, Barbara Strother, Stuart Strother, 2009, Travel, 439 pages. If you have always dreamed of living in China and are ready to take that step, Moon Living Abroad in China delivers what you need to know about your move in a smart and ....
Remember, Barbara Taylor Bradford, 1991, Fiction, 416 pages. Certain that the face she has seen on a news broadcast from Rome is that of her dead lover, English aristocrat Charles Devereaux, television war correspondent Nicky Wells....

Muqtada Al-Sadr and the Fall of Iraq, Patrick Cockburn, Feb 1, 2009, History, 301 pages. Muqtada al-Sadr's men are killing more British troops than any other group in the world today. Cleric, militia leader and fiercely anti-American politician, Muqtada's....


Missionary for freedom the life and times of Walter Judd, Lee Edwards, Aug 1, 1990, , 364 pages. Chronicles the life of the Minnesota Congressman, including his years as a medical missionary in China.

Saturday night in Baoding a China memoir, Richard Terrill, Mar 10, 2006, History, 163 pages. 

The Diplomat, Robert Charles Scanlan, 1st World Publishing, Jan 31, 2007, , 188 pages. If you've got a brilliant sense of humor, a live-and-let-live attitude, then this book will have you in stitches from start to finish. (Not recommended for readers with narrow....

The book describes the author's experiences in China during the 1989 "Beijing Spring." It moves to India, and then Kenya at the time of the American Embassy bombing in Nairobi. "From the Chinese army's crackdown in Tiananmen Square to Al Qaeda's terror attacks on the American Embassy in Nairobi, Joanne and Jim Huskey have been on the front lines of some of the most dramatic moments in recent history" Jim as a U.S. Foreign Service officer, Joanne as his intrepid partner. A compelling political thriller, colorful adventure story, and well-written travel-ogue, The Unofficial Diplomat provides a revealing behind-the-scenes glimpse of what life is really like for our diplomats and their families as they face the challenges of representing the United States while seeking to carve out a semblance of normal existence in a tumultuous world. A wonderful read." &lt;em&gt;MIKE CHINOY, former CNN Senior Asia Correspondent "This book provides a wonderful insight into the highs and lows, the exuberance and terrors, of a life well lived in the Foreign Service. Read the part about the al Qaeda bombing of the Nairobi embassy in 1998 and you will understand how the mindset and personal leadership of community members like Joanne helped us accomplish extraordinary things against great odds. The Unofficial Diplomat makes clear why Foreign Service spouses and family members deserve such respect and affection." &lt;em&gt;PRUDENCE BUSHNELL, former U.S. Ambassador to Kenya and Guatemala "The Huseys brought enthusiasm and exuberance to their two China postings, backed by a profound interest in the history and culture of China. And when faced with the tragedy of Tiananmen in June 1989, while Jim Huskey performed brilliantly, applying his creativity and adventurous spirit to get the account right, Joanne was with him all the way. Her diverse talents and humanity brought two worlds closer together. Both understand the importance and appeal of Taiwan and yet clearly know the power of China in our future. A very good book!" &lt;em&gt;JAMES R. LILLEY, former U.S. Ambassador to China and former Director of the American Institute in Taiwan

Hers was an eventful, exciting and productive lifestyle in the foreign service. Sharing how she gives back to each posting, whether it's establishing her own company, Global Adjustments, to chairing the American Women's Association where she raised money to aid Nairobi bomb victims, Joanne exemplifies the epitome of giving of herself.

Nothing made me happier than when Joanne Grady Huskey succeeded in publishing her extraordinary story and experiences as the wife of an American diplomat in China, India and Kenya. "The Unofficial Diplomat: A Memoir" (New Academia Publishing) released in late 2009 was truly twenty years in the making.
I met Joanne when we were both posted in Beijing, China in the early 1990s. But I arrived a year after that country's political turning point of 1989 and the crackdown in Tiananmen Square. Joanne, however, was right in the thick of it and writes superbly about the events people only saw from CNN. She offers perspective literally from the ground level. I also was fortunate to carry on some of her work with the Beijing International Volunteers, which she created to assist with disabled Chinese orphans (many of whom had the sole disability of being girl-babies.) The first time I saw the youngsters performing in wheel chairs was extraordinarily moving, and it was all due to Joanne's fine work (her own background is in dancing) and commitment to them.

From China, Joanne and her family moved to India (where she started a cross-cultural business and what eventually became the American School of Chennai where coincidentally, I lectured in 2008!) and to Kenya, where she once again got caught up in political events when the American Embassy in Nairobi was bombed. As a writer (and not Joanne's stalker!) I would say these kinds of circumstances lead to great reportage but Joanne never exploits her experiences, but rather informs and enlightens the reader of both world events in the larger view, and daily life for a diplomatic spouse in more intimate day-to-day living matters.

Not only does she advance 'the cause' by educating those who think diplomatic and expat wives are just along for the ride as 'expensive luggage' (the designation I used to cheekily write on my landing cards when I was a not-terribly-diplomatic-Canadian foreign service spouse), but she is an extremely intelligent writer who asked a lot of question, and always engaged fully in the culture of her host countries. She tried to be an agent of change, unofficially of course. Read more ›

This is a page turner. Joanne Grady Huskey is no ordinary expat wife. She is one of those people who try to BE the change they want to see. From starting the now 700 strong American school in Chennai, to raising money to help victims of the Nairobi Embassy bombing in which she too (and her kids) were involved, to learning the language and making friends with the locals everywhere she and her husband have lived, the author is one in a million. She doesn't dabble in amateur dramas, she takes shows on the road. She does not help a few newcomers to settle in she founded what is now a relocation company with 40 employees. From China to India to Kenya and Taiwan, you won't believe the experiences of this 'normal' diplomatic family. Joanne is a great writer too, who tells her story in a compelling way. Her descriptions of each of the places and people leap off the page. I loved this book and immediately felt I wanted to shake the hand of this amazing woman. If you thought expat wives drank gin fizz and had their nails done all day then think again. If you think expat wives are just 'trailing spouses' and have to sit out their charmed life in golden handcuffs unable to fulfil their career, read this, you will soon realise you can do anything if you set your mind to it. Joanne did. If you want to write your memoir of life abroad this one will show you how it’s done.

I read this book because I am an American who lived in Kenya and was interested to hear about another woman's experiences living abroad. I couldn't put this book down. Joanne has lived through some of the turning points international history (Tiannamen Square, Nairobi Bombing) and hearing her stories from the point of view of a mother, businesswoman, and diplomats wife was fascinating. I highly recommend this book for anybody interested in foreign policy, travel, and reading about a strong, resourceful woman. Very inspiring.

"In today's world, we need not only the professional diplomats who serve in our foreign services and represent our country to one another. We need the citizen diplomats who realize that there is no escape. We are in this together. We may have profound differences, but I am reminded that as we learn more from science about the human genome, we recognize that we are 99.9 percent the same. As you look at our DNA, you don't see religion or race; you see humanity." Hillary Clinton, Secretary of State. New Delhi, India, 20 July 2009.

From being inside the US Embassy with her children in Nairobi when it was bombed, to being on the ground in Beijing during the sad events at Tiananmen Square in 1989, to acting in Bollywood, co-founding a relocation company and an international school in India, volunteering for the Chinese Disabled People's Foundation, being stranded in the Kenyan bush and more, Joanne has seemingly
done it all. Which is why her book is so interesting...

But we are now here in America and the adjustment has taken some time. Our lives were so rich in Taiwan, our previous post, and all of a sudden in just a day all of that vanished. It is hard to make sense out of your life and to hold onto your experiences. Sometimes each posting feels like a complete lifetime distinct in itself.

I think that is why I wrote a book. I wanted to record all that had happened in each place I had lived, so that I could hold onto those detailed memories forever. Also, I wanted to put my life into some sort of whole narrative that was cohesive and made sense to me and my family. And, of course, I wanted to share all of this with other people, so that they would understand me in a more visceral and meaningful way. Writing the book has helped make the experiences concrete. Sharing the stories out loud with others, both in writing and orally, keeps the memories alive.

Joanne: Each time I re-tell what happened to us in the bombing of the US Embassy in Nairobi, I am thrust back there and emotions well inside me. There are no words to describe what it feels like to find yourself on the floor in the dark with your children strewn around somewhere in the destroyed basement room. At first I was stunned, it took me a moment to realize what had happened... and then, it hit me that we had been bombed. I scrambled to find my kids and grabbed them to me and then told them we were going to get out of there. They held my hands and we crawled under the cement dust over the broken glass and rubble.

Adrenalin rushing through me, I was determined to find a way out. The mental map of where the halls went and where a door ought to be was all I had to go by. Nothing was recognizable: there were walls down, cement all over, wires hanging, glass on the floor. My children silently followed me. Finally we saw a hole into the garage. We climbed out only to find a wall of fire where our car had been. It was not until then that I realized the extent of what had happened.

My mind flew to worry about my husband, who was on the fourth floor of the destroyed building. But miraculously, just as we rounded the building, he frantically rushed out of the front door and our children ran to him, slipping through the iron fence surrounding the embassy. Once I was squeezed through the fence, we all ran down the street away from the burning building. It was not until we were thrown into a car that whizzed us away, and my husband ran back to help others at the embassy, that we all began to cry.

You never completely recover from an event of this magnitude. The sadness of the trauma and the loss of all the friends who died will remain with me forever. I only hope that the visceral knowledge of what terrorism really means will help me be a catalyst against it and an agent of peace and understanding in the world.

Joanne: I know, after having made eight major moves, just how challenging and disorienting a move can be. In your new location, you have no nest, no roots, no definition, no friends and no community. This feeling of transience makes you feel sick, uncomfortable, scared and emotionally empty. It takes courage and stamina to take the first steps out of this isolation and begin to build a life for yourself. Every time I did it, I hated the feeling of losing control. It was not until I made myself a home, made some good friends, joined some interesting groups and found some productive work that I began to feel like myself. It is a normal, but daunting, process. They do not call it culture shock for nothing, it is shockingly hard!

Joanne: When you begin something from scratch, it always feels daunting at first with no resources and perhaps no models to replicate. In India, there were no destination services companies when I moved there. Having experienced my own difficulties moving to India, I actually wondered how expatriates from businesses were able to survive without help. Luckily, I invited a friend of mine to be my partner, who was smart, connected, savvy in business, and had the time and interest to begin a business. Working with a local partner made all of the difference in the world. At first we had no clients and had to risk spending money assuming the clients would come. They did, of course come and have continued to for 15 years.
Starting a school is complicated. One of the greatest risks we took was believing that it would succeed and going ahead and hiring American teachers and an American Head Master before we had any students paying tuition. Once we invested in good people and developed a good curriculum, the students came and their families were willing to pay the tuition. Assuring quality, even when we had only a few students, was our key to success. Our reputation grew rapidly. We filled a real need in Madras. Beginning a school allowed foreign business to move to Madras, invest in the country and improve the lives for many in the city. Little did we know that the school would grow from 18 students to more than 800 in ten years.

Expat Women: Flash forward to your time in Washington DC, just before your final posting to Taiwan. You did the unspeakable: as a foreign service officer's wife, you were so opposed to the US foreign policy decision to bomb Iraq that you wrote a full-page article published in the Washington Post, using words like "You are wrong, Mr President". Did you or your husband experience any personal/social/career backlash over such a bold, brave move?

Joanne: When I sent the letter against the invasion of Iraq to the newspaper, I did not know whether it would be published, but I could no longer remain silent. The day the article came out in the Washington Post, I opened the paper and found that it was a full page editorial with a big photo of children in Iraq. I called my husband at the State Department and told him that he might want to open the paper and I hoped it did not cause him any trouble. When he went into his first meeting, which was to plan the contingencies for the follow up after Saddam Hussein was ousted, most of the people in the State Department meeting had read my article. The Undersecretary of State said, "We saw your wife's article, Jim." But that was all. Jim, actually, took it pretty well. He said that I didn't work for the State Department and had the right to my own opinion.

For my part, it was amazing. I received almost 60 phone calls from people I did not even know - all expressing their solidarity with my opposition to the war. Priests, business people, soldiers, an ex Ambassador to Iraq and even a Congressman called me to thank me for writing the article. Several of them said that they felt the same way, but were hesitant to speak out in opposition to the Administration. To this day I feel it was the right thing to do and history has proven me right.

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