

Global Link

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“Best Practices” for FS Bloggers

There are three types of people in the Foreign Service: those who blog, those who don't blog, and those who are wondering what all the fuss is about!

The medium itself is relatively new. When I started my blog (<http://emailfromtheembassy.blogspot.com>) back in 2007, there were only a handful of Foreign Service bloggers out there. We blogged under the radar, with little or no attention paid to us by the Department of State or by our colleagues.

I used my blog as a way to keep grandparents and other family members up-to-date on our growing family, but I quickly discovered a broader FS blog community. Before too long, I'd acquired “virtual friends:” Jill (<http://theperلمانupdate.blogspot.com>), Kolbi (<http://www.adaringadventure.typepad.com>), Jen (<http://www.dinoiafamily.typepad.com>), and others. I grew to rely on my blog colleagues for all sorts of advice and assistance as we traveled the globe together.

As more and more State employees and family members started blogging, however, the Department became concerned. We bloggers began to talk amongst ourselves about whose blog had attracted negative attention, whose spouse had been reprimanded and which bloggers had decided to shutter their blogs. The blogging community grew nervous as talk of State “tigers”—people who are supposedly employed to monitor and discipline bloggers—grew louder.

Some bloggers went so far as to ask: what are the rules? Bloggers grew increasingly frustrated with the arbitrary nature of the process. We don't think we're doing anything wrong, yet some of us are being called in and scolded, while others blog in peace. Why is that?

We needed rules. But no one at State wanted to give them to us. It seemed as though they just wanted bloggers to go away.

Look, people are going to blog. More and more and more, you will have employee bloggers, spouse bloggers and even kid bloggers. We've built this community, byte by byte, and we turn to each other for advice and support and laughter. We rely on each other, and we're not going to go away.

Don't get me wrong: if some senior official gives me a call and tells me that either I take down my blog or my husband loses his job, there isn't even a question but that my blog will be gone tomorrow. I'm not willing to fight that fight if my family's livelihood is on the line.

But does that have to be the choice? Why not give us some basic rules, FAM-style, so we know where the lines are drawn?

Continued on page 4.

What is a Blog?

Blog (noun): a Web site containing the writer's or group of writers' own experiences, observations, opinions, etc., and often having images and links to other Web sites.

Blogging (verb): to maintain or add new entries to a blog.

Blogger (adjective): one who blogs.

Origin: 1995–2000; shortening of “Weblog.”

From Dictionary.com.



From the President's Desk

Happy holidays! Whatever and wherever you celebrate, I hope this time of year will be very enjoyable for you, with loved ones gathered together (at least on Skype if not

in person) and a mix of old traditions and new local discoveries.

In this issue of *Global Link*, we explore the fascinating and sometimes controversial phenomenon of Foreign Service blogging. Foreign Service spouses and partners have always documented their experiences abroad, in diaries, letters, e-mails, oral histories, art and photography. But now, for the first time in history, our personal observations can easily be published, day by day, for the entire world to see. What are the consequences of this, and how can we

ensure that our privacy and security (as well as our partners' careers) are protected? Thoughtful writers and bloggers Donna Scaramastra Gorman and Kelly Bemby Midura offer a range of useful suggestions.

The New Year promises to be a good one for AAFSW, with expanding membership (due to Livelines and many other initiatives), energetic volunteers of all ages, and a healthy financial position after a highly successful Art&BookFair. Our social events in the DC area, such as speaker presentations, museum visits, musical programs, Playgroup, Foreign-Born Spouse gatherings and Oakwood Happy Hours, continue to be popular and successful. Our newly redesigned website is user-friendly and packed with information. And we are moving ahead on so many fronts, from the CLO Alumni Association to a new network of overseas representatives.

Throughout the coming year, Foreign Service family members will continue to journey across the world to new places, new challenges and new adventures. As they do, AAFSW will be there to provide advocacy, mutual support and a sense of community. Thanks for joining us!

Patricia Linderman
AAFSW President
president@aafsm.org



At the AAFSW Awards Ceremony, December 5th: from left: Dorman Award winner, former AAFSW President Faye Barnes; SOSA winner Matthew David Meredith; Jessa Farquhar, representing her mother, SOSA winner Chong O. Farquhar; SOSA winner Edward "Mick" Davis; Deputy Secretary of State William J. Burns; SOSA winner Nam Anandarooa Nguyen; SOSA winner Maria Del Carmen Miller; SOSA winner

AAFSW Program News

November Program Review

On Thursday, November 17, AAFSW members visited the Embassy of Tribal Nations in Washington, D.C. November is the American Indian/Alaska Native (AIAN) Heritage Month and this year, the focus is on Native American and Alaska Native Youth. NCAI Communications Director, Thom Wallace, welcomed the group. He was followed by Sherry Salway Black, Director of Partnership for Tribal Governance, and Malia Villegas, Policy Research Center Director.

NCAI was founded in 1944 with the mission of “protecting tribal sovereignty” following assimilation policies that the United States had previously forced upon the tribal governments. Every tribe is recognized as a nation with its own language, political organization, and issues.

Native Americans represent only 2% of the total American population. After years of steady decreases in their population, Native Americans are currently experiencing a low but sustained increase. There are now 217 reservations and over 300 Native languages in the United States.

There is a sense that our Native American tribes are isolated and that they live life apart from the rest of the country. The truth is that native influence can be seen to varying degrees depending on which part of the U.S. we visit. In places like North Dakota, Alaska, Virginia, Oregon, and California the influence is more evident. However, Native American presence is undeniable in all of our daily lives. For example, we forget where we got corn, beans, peanuts and chocolate, which are part of our modern diet.

AAFSW members left the Embassy of Tribal Nations with a desire to understand in greater depth all the challenges faced by the Tribal Nations, and a hope that someday all Americans will realize the importance of recognizing and understanding our Native cultures.

Roselix Quinones-Mercado
AAFSW Member

Foreign-Born Spouses January Program

Happy New Year! The Foreign Born Spouses Group will start the New Year with a presentation by the State Department’s Family Liaison Office (FLO). Topics of discussion will include employment at home and abroad, unaccompanied tours and U.S. citizenship naturalization for foreign-born spouses. Questions on other topics are also welcome.

Please join us on Wednesday, January 18 at 11:00 a.m. the Capital Room of the Oakwood apartment building. You are welcome to join us for lunch afterwards. RSVP to Ana Luisa Gallardo or Sheila Switzer at fbspouses@aafsw.org or 703-623-6695.

Ana Maria Gallardo
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CLO Alumni Association is Launched

On Saturday, December 3, the CLO Alumni Association met at the home of Donna Ayerst, group chair, to kick off the holiday season and discuss ways to move the group forward. After a lively discussion revolving around issues common to the Foreign Service lifestyle, the group agreed that in order to get the momentum going, we will meet quarterly. Hopefully, this will prove to be a positive direction for the association.

If you are a current or former Community Liaison Office Coordinator (CLO) and are in, or returning to, the D.C. Metro area, please contact Donna at clogroup@aafsw.org to be included in future social events, networking opportunities, and chances to share your ideas.

Donna Ayerst
CLO Alumni Association Chair
clogroup@aafsm.org

Next Oakwood Falls Church Happy Hour January 24, 2012

Please join us in the Capital Room at Oakwood Falls Church on Tuesday, January 24 at 7 p.m. for an AAFSW happy hour. The idea is to reach out to new spouses in the DC area for A-100, specialist or other training, help them feel welcome, answer their questions, match them with mentors, and encourage them to join AAFSW and Livelines. RSVP to office@aafsw.org.

So You Want to Blog, from page 1.

So here they are: The Rules. Written by bloggers with no departmental clout whatsoever. Let's call them "Blogging Best Practices."

Rule One: Don't Bite The Hand That Pays You.

All of us, employees, spouses and children alike, represent the United States government every time we walk out our doors. I might be "just" a spouse with an EFM job and not much say-so in the Embassy, but when I'm overseas, to many of my neighbors out in the wide world, I *am* the US government. So as a blogger currently posted in Amman, I am not allowed to criticize the work that the Department of State is doing, in Jordan, in the region, in the world, even. That's not my place. I won't do it at a dinner party, and I certainly won't do it on my blog. Doesn't matter what I think of our position on Palestine: if it differs from the USG-position, I can't put it on my blog. Even if it's the same as the USG position, I'm likely going to avoid discussing it, anyway. This is a personal blog, after all, not a government-sanctioned one, so those types of discussions really don't belong here.

Rule Two: Use the Past Tense.

If you're going somewhere tonight, don't tell me about it until tomorrow. It doesn't make sense to advertise your whereabouts to complete strangers, through your blog or any other means. It's like cancelling your newspaper before you go on vacation, so no one realizes you're gone. It's just safer that way.

Rule Three: Limit the Details.

I might tell you my street is narrow and crowded and full of Land Rovers, but I won't tell you if it is three streets up from the Embassy, right side, next to the Mexican restaurant. That's too much detail. I'll show you photos of my house (assuming it's presentable), but only from the inside. You won't see the front of my house. You won't see photos of my alarm system. You won't see photos of any of the measures that keep me safe here at post. And speaking of pictures...

Rule Four: No Pictures without Permission.

Don't post pictures of non-family members without their permission! If your colleagues ask you not to their pictures, don't do it. And don't post their names, either. First names are generally okay, but again, with permission! If you're not sure if they'd like it, don't put it out there.

Rule Five: No Gossip.

Watch what you say about those colleagues of yours. I, for one, have had the privilege of working with some smart, talented, funny people over the years. (Also some odd ones, but hey: you'll find those strange birds in any profession. Just don't call them out on your blog!) Even if what you want to say about someone is a compliment, you really ought not to talk them up without permission.

Rule Six: If in Doubt, Leave it Out.

Write your post and wait awhile before you hit "publish." Take a hard look. What do you think? Will you be embarrassed if your boss reads it? If your child's teacher reads it? If your mother reads it? If you aren't sure about the post, don't publish it. Or send it to a blogging friend for a second opinion. If it gives you pause, there's a good chance it doesn't belong out there in the blogosphere.

So there you have it: Don't discuss policy; don't endanger yourself or others by posting details of upcoming events; don't post pictures that show the front of your house, or the school, or the car; don't talk about colleagues; don't post photos of colleagues without permission.

Whatever you do, don't stop blogging. Someday, this record you are making of your life in the Foreign Service will be your most valuable souvenir.

Donna Scaramastra Gorman is a Foreign Service spouse and freelance writer whose work has been published in Newsweek, The Washington Post, The Christian Science Monitor and the Foreign Service Journal. She blogs at <http://emailfromtheembassy.blogspot.com>.

Related Article

AFSA's *Foreign Service Journal* recently ran a "Speaking Out" piece by FSO Matt Keene with specific and constructive suggestions for developing more State Department guidance for bloggers. Read it online here: <http://www.afsa.org/FSJ/1211/index.html#/15/zoomed>

Privacy 101 for Bloggers

As controversial as they may be in some State Department circles, Foreign Service blogs are here to stay. Donna Gorman has offered some excellent general advice for bloggers in her article. Building on that, here are a few tips for fine-tuning your blog.

Privacy can be, and should be, a concern for all FS bloggers, especially for those posted overseas. It should be noted that no information that you decide to post online can be considered to be 100 percent secure. If Chinese hackers can steal industrial secrets from corporate databases, for example, they can certainly find anything you've put behind a password on your personal blog—if they can actually be bothered to do so.

All that said, there are a few prudent measures that you can take to give yourself a measure of privacy online. How much privacy you want will depend on your job, your spouse's job, your current (or future) post, and your own comfort level. Take all these factors into account before “putting it all out there.” As Donna points out, until the State Department issues some practical and realistic guidelines for blogs, we have to come up with our own!

Consider blogging anonymously. Or, using just your first name. Of course, anyone who really wants to can probably figure out who you are. But why make it easy? Ask yourself: do people have to know exactly who you are in order to enjoy your blog?

If you decide to blog anonymously, don't link your personal email address to the blog. Especially if your email address includes your name! Establish a new email account solely to manage the blog (you can always automatically forward the email to your main account if you like).

You may want to keep your personal photos off your blog. There are, after all, many other, more private, venues for sharing photos of your family: Facebook (with privacy controls in place), Picasa, etc. Your travel photos of people and places at your current post are probably more interesting to a wider audience anyway.

If your blog is mostly for sharing family photos – sometimes known as a “mommy blog” – you might want to just password-protect the whole thing. The major blogging websites, [WordPress](#), [Typepad](#) and [Blogger](#), make this easy. Just give the password to your family and friends and you are all set.

Another option might be to password-protect only a few posts. This is also simple in Wordpress and Typepad. Blogger is a more basic platform and does not allow for protecting individual posts without special third-party software (known as a “plug-in”) or coding skills.

If you have some thoughts to share, but you'd rather not make them available to the general public, you might want to “blog” by sharing private Notes on Facebook with your friends. One of my friends documented her transition into FS retirement and subsequent drive across the U.S. in this way. (Or just create an email list and send out a group email now and then. Not as much fun, but more private.)

Most blogging platforms offer an option for listing on search engines—or not. If you choose “not,” that means that only people who have the direct link for your blog should be able to read it. It's not 100 percent guaranteed to keep the wide world from finding your blog, but it will certainly cut down on traffic and comments that you are probably not interested in attracting anyway.

If you want to attract a targeted Foreign Service audience, you can request a link on www.aafsw.org by emailing webmaster@aafsw.org with your URL and a brief description of your blog. There is also a Foreign Service blog “bundle” ([http://www.google.com/reader/bundle/user/09508229435504742565/bundle/FS blogs](http://www.google.com/reader/bundle/user/09508229435504742565/bundle/FS%20blogs)) with over 400 links managed by a member of the FS community. Subscribers receive links to the latest posts on every included blog in chronological order, either in an RSS reader or as a headline on their browser home page (My Yahoo, iGoogle, etc.) To add your blog to this bundle, email the creator, Hannah, by clicking her name at the top right of the screen.

Finally, and for family members only: yes, we do represent the U.S. to a certain degree, if only in an unofficial capacity. While it seems prudent to avoid commenting directly on host country politics and policies, I believe that we do have much more leeway than an officer would have to comment on daily life at our post, on American politics, or on general conditions in the Foreign Service. However, if you have something to say, remember to say it as YOURSELF, with copious disclaimers to that effect. If your spouse has opinions to share, they can start their own blog!

Kelly Bembry Midura is a Foreign Service spouse and editor of Global Link. She blogs with the merest veneer of privacy at <http://wellthatwasdifferent.wordpress.com>.

Youth Awards and Scholarships

DACOR Bacon House Foundation Scholarships for Foreign Service Children at Yale and Hotchkiss for 2012-2013

Several scholarships and fellowships will be available in academic year 2012-2013 for children and grandchildren of Foreign Service officers, active or retired, for study at The Hotchkiss School and Yale University. These awards, sponsored by Diplomatic and Consular Officers, Retired (DACOR) Bacon House Foundation are made possible by a bequest of the late Ambassador Louis G. Dreyfus, Jr.

Hotchkiss will select one qualified enrolled student for a \$5,000 scholarship. Applicants should contact the Director of Financial Aid, The Hotchkiss School, Lakeville, CT 06039-0800, providing evidence of a parent or grandparent's Foreign Service status.

Awards to Yale students, based on merit, will be made by the Foundation in consultation with Yale. Awards will be applicable to university-billed expenses only. Aspirants may apply for the Dreyfus awards at the time of their application for admission to Yale. Any Dreyfus award would be contingent upon confirmation by Yale University that the student has been admitted or is in good standing. Awards to undergraduates may be up to \$5,000. There is no restriction as to the field of study but if there are many applicants, preference will be given to students pursuing a master's degree in a field related to foreign affairs.

To apply, students should send a copy of the parent's or grandparent's most recent Foreign Service appointment or promotion document, a brief letter of interest with full contact information, resumé, most recent transcript and one-page statement of academic goals, work experience, awards and non-academic achievements to DACOR Bacon House Foundation, Attn: Fatma Hocaoglu, 1801 F Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20006. Applicants for graduate fellowships should include a page outlining career goals.

The deadline for applications is **March 12, 2012**. For more information, contact Ms. Fatma Hocaoglu, at (202) 682-0500 x. 17 or prog.coord@dacorbacon.org.

The Foundation separately grants scholarships and fellowships for Foreign Service dependent and graduate students of international affairs.

AAFSW Scholarship Award Applications Now Available

The American Foreign Service Association, in combination with AAFSW and DACOR, announces that applications for both Academic Merit and Financial Aid Scholarship are now available on the AFSA website. The deadline for these applications is **February 6, 2012**. It is intended that AFSA serve AAFSW and the applicants by providing a "one-stop-shop" application process; therefore, all applications are to be sent to AFSA.

Associates of the American Foreign Service Worldwide sponsors a \$2,000 Merit award, and also may bestow 4 undergraduate Financial Aid Scholarships. AAFSW or AFSA membership of the parent or guardian is required for a Merit Award; no such membership is required for Financial Aid Awards.

Complete details of the AFSA Scholarship Program, including eligibility and applications for these scholarships, may be viewed on the AFSA website at <http://www.afsa.org/scholar>. Please note that only tax-dependent children of Foreign Service employees are eligible for these scholarships.

FSYF Merit Scholarship

The Foreign Service Youth Foundation is now accepting applications for the 2012 GEICO Foreign Service Youth Foundation (FSYF) Academic Merit Award, jointly sponsored by GEICO Insurance and FSYF. The winner will receive a one-time only prize of \$4,000. He/she will also be honored at a youth awards ceremony in July 2012.

The award is open to Foreign Service dependents who are currently in their senior year of high school and are members of the Foreign Service Youth Foundation. The award will be based on academic merit: the student will be judged on their grade point average, higher level classes taken, standardized test scores, a two-page essay, activities participated in while in high school including community service, and any special circumstances.

Email fsyf@fsyf.org for instructions, the essay question and an application form. Submissions must arrive at the FSYF office no later February 1, 2012.

Not yet a member of FSYF? To join, please go to <http://www.fsyf.org>. A 3-year family membership costs only \$30 and it only takes moments to join.

Classified Advertising

AAFSW now offers free classified advertisements to its members. The *Global Link* is sent by mail and electronically to our members and to Community Liaison Offices worldwide for a sizable total monthly readership.

Do you have a business or service that you would like to advertise to the Foreign Service community? Send a brief notice (100 words or less) to office@aafsw.org for approval with the subject line AD FOR GLOBAL LINK. If you have a business website, it can be hyperlinked in the electronic version of the newsletter, so please include your URL. Advertisements will run on a space-available basis for one month at a time and will rotate in order of receipt.

We also accept classified advertising for real estate rentals and sales, as well as sales of other items (cars etc.) on our website, www.aafsw.org. View or submit ads here: <http://www.aafsw.org/classified/classified.htm>.

Not a member of AAFSW? Join now! Apply online at our website: <http://www.aafsw.org/aafsw/membership.htm>.

Educational Consultant

RNG International Educational Consultants, founded by Rebecca (Becky) Grappo, M.Ed. and Certified Educational Planner, offers advising on any and all issues having to do with raising kids overseas. This includes guidance for college, boarding schools, therapeutic and special needs schools, and transition and resiliency issues for Third Culture Kids.

Rebecca (Becky) also speaks on TCK issues to audiences around the world, writes for various journals, and is known as an expert in international education. A veteran FS family member, she has lived in 10 countries.

Visit the website at <http://www.rebeccagrappo.com>, follow RNG on Facebook at <http://tinyurl.com/6m5batd>, or email her at info@rebeccagrappo.com.



We Love Your Photos!

AAFSW publishes photos of our activities and events in the *Global Link* newsletter, on our website, www.aafsw.org, and on our [Facebook page](#). If you are a member of an AAFSW interest group, or are attending one of our activities, please take a few photos to share!

For publication in the *Global Link*, photos must be taken at "print resolution" or at least 1024 x 768 pixels in size. For the website or Facebook page, "web resolution", or less than 640 x 480 pixels is acceptable. Using a flash for all indoor shots is also very helpful!

Please email your photos to newsletter@aafsw.org. Include your name, the name of the event or group, the date taken, and any captions that you would like to include. Identification of the people in the photos is optional: in general we try to include names for the *Global Link*, but we understand that some people would prefer not to be named on the website or Facebook page.

Thank you for sharing your photos, and helping to "connect the Foreign Service community at home and abroad!"

Mentors Wanted

AAFSW has begun a pilot program of one-on-one spouse mentoring, created primarily for new A-100 spouses and first-tour spouses. We are trying to match mentoring volunteers from our AAFSW membership with mentoring requests from the "newbies" based on as many points in common as possible: ages of children, languages spoken, areas of professional interest, and the like.

We have over a dozen mentor/mentoree pairs at the moment, and we are eagerly awaiting feedback from those involved. Of course, we need lots more volunteers, especially those whose spouses are still active duty, and are still likely to be serving overseas.

This program has the potential to do two wonderful and worthwhile things - help people who are new to the Foreign Service with their many life challenges, and create the next generation of AAFSW leaders.

If you know of anyone who might want or need mentoring, or if you are interested in becoming a mentor yourself, please send an email to mentor@aafsw.org. Thanks!



Shop Amazon.com and Benefit AAFSW!

This holiday shopping season, please remember to click through the Amazon links on our website, www.aafsw.org. AAFSW nets several hundred dollars every year through our affiliation with Amazon.com. It's a quick and easy way to help, and we really do appreciate it!



AAFSW is on Twitter!



AAFSW will now be able to send short "tweets" with our news and events. You can also send us instant feedback! Visit <http://twitter.com/#!/AAFSW> and follow us today!

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