

MOVING AND LIVING ABROAD



A Complete Handbook for Families

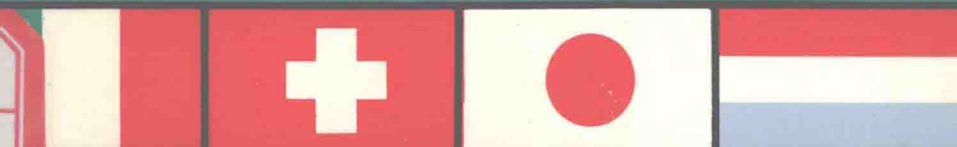
Sandra Albright • Alice Chu • Lori Austin



COMPLETELY REVISED
by Sandra Albright &
Chase de Kay Wilson



- The Decision to Live Abroad •
- Moving Preparations • Choosing a Mover •
- Buying and Renting a House Abroad •
- Learning the Language • Culture Shock •
- Schools for Your Children •
- Health and Happiness in Other Countries •



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**Sandra Albright
Alice Chu
Lori Austin**

Revised By
**Sandra Albright
Chase de Kay Wilson**

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MOVING AND LIVING ABROAD

*This book is dedicated to those women
and their families
who traveled our path before us and with us,
and who will do so after us.*

Acknowledgments

ALTHOUGH CONCEIVED BY THREE AUTHORS, *Moving and Living Abroad* has truly been nurtured by many more. We wish to express our gratitude to the hundreds of expatriate wives around the world who took the time to share their years of experience with us so that others might benefit.

Most importantly, we would like to acknowledge the exceptional efforts of Chase Wilson, whose skill as an editor, patience as a friend and indomitable perseverance made that which was conceived a reality.

Foreword

WITH ABOUT THREE MILLION AMERICANS living abroad, an enormous subculture exists which has been relatively ignored in literature and the media. The adaptation of this expatriate group to its foreign environment is a critical element in the success or failure of U.S. business overseas.

Corporations spend significant time, effort, and money to assure effective selection and training of the people, mostly men, chosen to manage their international operations. Given the fact that most expatriate employees are men, their wives play a fundamental role in the success or failure of the expatriate experience. Yet the executive's wife, who performs the critical role of establishing and maintaining the family unit, is frequently forgotten. Most companies will candidly admit that if the wife fails, her husband is also likely to fail. If the wife is unprepared to cope or unable to adapt, the resulting destabilization of the family can have serious business consequences.

Despite the importance of the expatriate wife's role, few corporations are adequately prepared to counsel and assist the expatriate wife. It's not that a policy exists against such activities. Many companies simply do not have the necessary experience, expertise, or resources on staff.

The basic aim of *Moving and Living Abroad* is to assist in the preparation of the expatriate wife and family. The

handbook will also assist unmarried expatriates, both male and female. This handbook has been written from the expatriate wife's unique perspective and focuses on the critical issues she will confront: first, in anticipation of an overseas assignment; and second, in adapting once her family is situated. Unlike available literature and travel guides, this book probes deeply into both the joys and frustrations of establishing a new life style in a foreign locale. The book also addresses the issue of jobs for women abroad after the expatriate family has settled into its new home. Although this handbook has been written with the expatriate wife in mind, it is a tool for all people who are or will be expatriates.

For the novice about to be transferred overseas, this handbook will serve as a primer on what to anticipate, identifying the "do's and don'ts" of managing the transition and explaining how to maximize the benefits of a foreign assignment. For the veteran expatriate wife, *Moving and Living Abroad* will serve as a refresher course on the prospects and pitfalls of living overseas, using the experiences of other seasoned pros.

With thirty years of international experience among them, the authors are eminently qualified to address the complex, sometimes sensitive, subject of moving and living abroad. As expatriate wives themselves, they experienced the problems and opportunities first-hand. Also, to supplement their own experiences, more than three hundred expatriates were polled by means of in-depth questionnaires and personal interviews and the resulting information was used by the authors in writing this book. The expatriate wives who were polled ranged in age from early twenties to mid-sixties; the expatriate children, from six to nineteen; and their families had experienced from one to twenty-five moves.

The book begins with an examination of one of the

most critical decisions a family may ever make—the decision of accepting or declining an overseas assignment. The book also reviews the advantages and necessity of a candid dialogue with an often untapped resource—the company. Then the move itself is examined—an event which without planning and preparation can prove to be the most traumatic and stressful experience in the entire process of living abroad. Culture shock, an often discussed but little understood phenomenon, is also explored in detail, as well as such fundamental issues as the rearing and education of children in a foreign location, personal safety, security, and sanitation. Other topics interwoven into the fabric of living overseas and discussed in this handbook are: functioning in and learning a foreign language; finding, training, and keeping household help; and finding work or otherwise combatting boredom after the overseas living pattern has been established.

The fundamental tenet of *Moving and Living Abroad* is the authors' firm conviction that the expatriate wife performs a critical role in establishing and maintaining the family unit in a foreign environment. If she fails or is unable to adapt, there is a high probability that the employee will fail as well. Conversely, if she is adequately prepared, knows what to expect, and benefits from the experience of other expatriate wives, her probability of successfully navigating the rapids of international life is excellent. The rewards of creating a stable, supportive environment at home and capitalizing on the unique cultural and educational opportunities of living abroad are outstanding—and well worth the effort. The objective of *Moving and Living Abroad* is to help the expatriate wife and her family to succeed.

Rather than cover the subject of moving to and living in any one particular country, the authors cover all subjects that would be common to almost all international moves.

The authors' aim is to give the expatriate wife and family a foundation, a beginning, and a helping hand as they begin their expatriate careers.

Throughout each chapter are the words of women who have faced the same problems, the same challenges, and the same rewards that any potential expatriate wife is about to face. It is hoped that this insight will help make the transfer as exciting, efficient, and painless as possible by providing the warnings, solutions, wisdom, and humor that have been developed over the years by experienced international wives.

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CHAPTER I

Why People Move

DESPITE THE FACT THAT WE LIVE in the space age, man hasn't significantly changed his behavior patterns over the past hundreds of years. The driving forces of his life remain his social, economic, and psychological interdependency with his wife, family, and occupational environment. One of the key dynamics in this relationship is location—often raising the questions of: When and why does a man choose to move? What is he searching for and what does he hope to gain? Every man and every family will have their own unique answers to these questions. No two are ever likely to be the same.

The average American family moves once every four years. For the majority, relocation takes place within the boundaries of the United States. However, a significant percentage of the population opts for international relocation—to a new land, a new culture, and a new language. These people are characteristically more adventuresome, exploratory, and expansive. The men tend to be managers, professionals, and technicians—moving on behalf of large corporate organizations, foundations, or governmental institutions. Their wives come from all social, cultural, and

economic strata. However, the one thing these women all have in common is that they are *expatriate wives*. As such, they are a group in themselves and, while far from stereotypical, they all confront the same dynamics of international life.

What Are the Reasons for Moving?

Obviously there is no single answer to this question for all people. Nor is there usually a single, simple reason for any individual family. However, there do tend to be several key factors that influence the decision: survival, boredom, and life style.

Clearly, survival is one of the major reasons for migration. For many, psychological survival is as important a factor as economic and physical considerations. Stress and its causes tend to precipitate one of two reactions: total inactivity, or activity that will eventually allow the individual to solve his or her problems. This activity may not always be rational, but often the activity results in a change of venue. Those who have been burdened by family pressures, job pressures, advancing age, or societal prejudices have discovered that relocation is an ideal response.

For some people, movement is a fountain of youth. Movement represents an answer to their boredom—be it with themselves, their families, friends, business associates, or environs. Life overseas offers excitement, new challenges, and a chance for new directions. For some, it is a simple case of being restless by nature. Whether it is innate, inherited, or learned, no one can deny that some of us just have a yearning to move, to move again, and to keep on moving.

Believe it or not, I was bored in the States. Sure, it's

my native land and I would never change my citizenship, but suburbia holds no appeal for me. I didn't enjoy shoveling the snow in the winter, fertilizing the lawn in the spring, or passing my days at neighborhood coffee klatches. I didn't want to keep up with the Joneses. I wanted something new, exciting, different.

The opportunities for expanded cultural horizons afforded by living overseas are also alluring. Such a move promotes the acquisition of a new language and cultivation of new friends with diverse ethnic backgrounds. Hand in hand with living abroad is the opportunity to fulfill one's fantasies for travel, glamour, excitement, and adventure, virtually at the expense of someone else. What could be better?

We are both in our thirties and we own several houses and a couple of condominiums. We take lengthy vacations, stay at the best hotels, eat in the finest restaurants, and have accumulated many fine pieces of art work—all because we chose to live overseas. When we married we were in debt. Our financial future looked dismal at best. But now all that has changed. Sure there are drawbacks to living overseas, and I have no idea when we'll ever live in our dream house in the States, but at least I now know I'll have that dream house.

For many people the prospect of a better life style is the incentive. A move may result in extra funds, which can provide better schooling for the children and the opportunity to have household help and ensure the eventual purchase of the family's "dream house." Such moves can often result in the husband spending less time away from

his family and a greater chance for close relationships among family members.

I went because we had our children exactly one year apart. Therefore, we are looking forward to four children in college at the same time. There is no way that we could come up with the sufficient funds if we remained in the States, even if I worked. But, with the fringe benefits we receive by living abroad—company car, housing, and federal income tax deductions—not only can we put our children through university, we can live comfortably at the same time.

What's in It for the Wife?

A wife's reasons for making an overseas move may be the same as those of her husband. For some wives the sole purpose of an overseas move is to acquire sufficient financial reserves to fulfill a dream. For other women, life in the States has lost its meaning, or life abroad may appear to hold the key to solving personal or professional problems.

My husband is a highly skilled technician, but unfortunately he chose a field where the supply for his talents was far more than the demand. We really didn't have much of a choice; we had to move to places where he could obtain work.

For others the transfer may offer an escape from dominating in-laws.

Our parents were forever interfering in our marriage. Neither set seemed to believe that we knew how to take responsibility for our own lives or raise