



# Carousel

Diplomatic Service Families Association Magazine

By Miriam Pearson from the FCO and Jane Wood, Property Location Agent

## Finding the right property back in the UK need not be a nightmare, as one FCO family found.

**I**t was early May 2002. In our Washington DC home, I had just put down the phone after a short conversation with Wandsworth Local Education Authority. According to them, I was too far away for our discussion to continue.

Two weeks previously, my husband Nick and I had heard that our – very enjoyable – posting in Washington DC was to end unexpectedly early and we were due back in London in three months.

Fact 1: we had a house in London, near Waterloo, but it had been bursting at the seams before we left; in Washington we'd added another child and all the implied clutter to the family. Fact 2: we knew we wanted to move to Putney but had to sell our house near Waterloo first. Fact 3: we had a five-year-old who needed a UK school place by September.

However, in two weeks of my phoning London, no private school had come up with a place – let's face it, May is not the best time to start looking for a school. Moreover, the secretaries at the state schools were pretty unimpressed when we said we wanted a place but admitted not having an address in their area. And now Wandsworth LEA wouldn't discuss school applications until we were physically in their borough.



"Property location requires you to know an area like the back of your hand," says Jane Wood, pictured here with clients, Nick and Miriam outside the house in Putney

It was a bit of a low point and, yes, I blubbered. Howled, indeed.

One thing going our way was that we were able to put our house on the market immediately, as we had been planning that anyway. But how to go about finding one when you are a continent away? The internet is all very well but in a hot market if you can't pop round and view a property pronto, you slide off the estate agents' priority lists.

### New business

At my weekly Mums and Tots group I shared my woes. "I've got a friend in London who's starting up a property location business," said Sarah, one of the mothers. "She's done a couple of searches for friends. Do you want her number?" And so a casual remark and a fortunate

contact became key to resolving our nightmare.

Nick and I agreed that it made sense to put money into finding the house we wanted to live in immediately rather than renting for months in London and making yet another disruptive move. A couple of e-mails to Sarah's friend, Jane Wood, and a phone conversation later, we engaged her to start a search for us.

"At the time Miriam called me, I was in the middle of finding a property for a British couple based in Mexico, who were interested in the whole of West London," says Jane. "Miriam and Nick already knew the area they wanted to move into fairly well. After the call, I was able to put together a very specific list of requirements around the property itself, such as the space required, the



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style of the property, the renovation or redecoration work that Nick and Miriam would be prepared to undertake but also the schools, the transport network and of course the ideal timing of the relocation."

### Division of labour

In order to make our move happen in the very limited time available, Nick and I had decided on a division of labour: house sale and schools to be done by me, house purchase by Nick. By the end of May, Nick managed to squeeze in one particular Saturday of viewings in Putney after a couple of days of meetings in London.

"My challenge was to make that day as productive as possible," says Jane. "That meant researching the Putney property market ahead of Nick's visit and lining up enough suitable properties to view on that day. The goal by the end of the day was for Nick and Miriam to have a first choice and a few back-ups."

"I saw 10 houses that day," Nick remembers. "Jane was very professional, excellently organised and on target as regards our needs. There were three possibilities, one of which was my clear favourite."

At home in Washington the next evening, Nick and I made our choice from what he'd seen, using photos and estate agent particulars. For my part, it was a bit of a paper experience but necessarily so under the circumstances. Funnily enough, we chose Nick's favourite. The house decided, Jane helped us the next day to put an offer forward, which was 5% under the original asking price. It was accepted. This was ELEVEN days after my first phone call with Jane. On July 4th, our daughter was offered a place in a good Putney church school; our firmly accepted house offer was a big help.



Miriam, Nick, Anna and Finn settling in



The new home in Putney

Our house sale and purchase were completed three weeks later. And, yes, I do like the new house very much.

### Passion for property

Jane has spent the past 13 years living in West London renting, buying and selling assorted properties, many of them necessitating complete renovation. Over this time, she has developed a real passion for property and successfully combined it with her

ability to spot profitable investments. Her flair for recognising the potential of a given space and seeing through the obstacles of wall partitions, challenging colour schemes and tired pot plants has been the key to her success.

"Property location is all about knowing the prospective buyer, what makes them tick, what is key to them and what their long-term stimuli are," explains Jane. "It also requires you to know an area like the back of your hand, which is why I limit myself to West London. The made-to-measure service that I take pains to provide demands a particular approach: cover a small area and know absolutely everyone and everything there is to know on the property market."

Today, we are enjoying living in Putney. The suddenness of our relocation from Washington did not make the move easy but it could not have gone better under those circumstances. Using Jane's services reduced the costs we would otherwise have incurred in terms of storage, time, flights, temporary accommodation and desperately frazzled emotions. Most importantly, it meant we achieved what in early May looked like an impossibility: to move into a new house in Putney by mid-August, with a good school for our daughter lined up for September.

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