

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Youngstown State University

Personal Experience

O.H. 1916

BARBARA BROTHERS

Interviewed

by

Lori Martz

on

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M: This is an interview with Dr. Barbara Brothers for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Youngstown State University's 30th Anniversary, by Lori Martz, on December 12, 1997, at DeBartolo Hall, at 1:00 p.m.

Dr. Brothers, where did you grow up?

B: I grew up in Austintown and in Youngstown. My grandparents lived in Youngstown on Marshall Street. That is one set of grandparents.

M: And the other set of grandparents?

B: They lived out in Austintown. When my daughter was in grade school in Canfield, a German family moved into the area. She wanted to know where her grandparents came from, on both sides of the family. One set of her grandparents, my parents, both graduated from Austintown Fitch. And her father's mother and father graduated from South High School. She decided we were a very boring family. [laughter]

M: When you were finished with high school and thinking about college, did you consider moving away to go to another college or did you know you wanted to go to Y.S.U.?

B: I had a scholarship to go to Miami in Oxford and decided, because I was dating a boy from high school, that I did not want to go that far away. So I spent my first year at Kent State and had a scholarship to Kent State and then decided that I would transfer to Youngstown, a decision my parents were very unhappy with, and then graduated in two years.

M: And for your graduate degrees?

B: I did that work after I was married. You should say I was a dog tied to a chain, and it could only stretch to Cleveland, Kent, or possibly Pittsburgh. When I did my master's degree, Case Western offered me a full-ride scholarship. And so, with an 18-month-old baby, I did full-time graduate work and would have liked to have gone straight through for my Ph.D. But it was obvious that my health was not good by the time I finished my masters; I tried to burn the candles at both ends for too long. So I decided to wait until I had another child, and then when they were both in school I would finish the Ph.D.. By that time, the program at Case Western had really deteriorated seriously in English. In the area that I was interested, that was modern British, there was really somebody good at Kent State. That was convenient, affordable, and that is where I went.

M: What brought you back to Y.S.U.? Did you know that you wanted to teach college when you were in college?

B: No, the problem was that when I was an undergraduate I finished up with a 4.0 in 1958 in three years. My advisors then wanted me to go on, apply for Woodrow Wilson, and do graduate work. And I said, "But I am getting married in another year. What would I do with that? I am just going to teach in high school." When I taught in high school, even if you were properly married, you could not continue to teach if you were pregnant. So when I got pregnant with my son after teaching for a year and a half, I had to quit in the middle of the year because you simply could not be a teacher in the school and, as they put it, "be showing."

During my maternity leave, they called me from the university to teach. I only had my bachelor's, but they needed somebody to teach freshman comp and they wanted me to do that. And so I taught a couple classes and I loved it. It gave me flexibility in work scheduling unlike what is true in most jobs. I was able, after I finished my master's degree, to teach a two and then a three day schedule and really raise the children myself and not use extensive child care. I could do my paper grading and other things at home. So it really suited me, but I really knew from the beginning then that I would want a Ph.D. because, as far as I was concerned, even though there were a number of faculty here at that time that just had their master's degree, you were not real until you got your union papers, which was your Ph.D..

M: Did you know you wanted to stay here at Y.S.U.?

B: I did not really have a choice. [laughter] If you are married, and at that point my husband had a local business, that was all you could do. So, actually, I turned down a number of offers to go elsewhere. When I was divorced, I thought I would indeed take advantage of some of those offers. Then, I got remarried to someone else who was on the faculty here, so it seemed like moving was not a very good idea. I am not unhappy with that decision. I think it is nice to have spent my whole career at the same institution, even though that is not a typical pattern for somebody who ends up in administration. Usually you have to move. I turned down those opportunities. I am glad I have had the opportunity to do academic administration, but I never was unhappy enough with what I was doing to make it worthwhile to uproot everyone for the sake of some kind of a stepping ladder career. And it has the advantages that you become a part of the institution. I guess it is sort of like a family. You get really attached to the institution, in trying to make it the very best that you can. Warren Young, whom I have known for years and is the chair of the physics department, said to me, "You are here for the same reason that I am here, Barbara. The opportunity to really leave a lasting impression and make a difference in what the institution is

like." That is really true. I mean, I do not have to be here. I am here because I want to be.

M: How long did you teach here? Just teaching.

B: Well, I became the dean in 1993. And so I have taught since 1960, even though I was chair of the English department for 18 years, I taught all that time. I have even taught one class since I was dean. You know, there is a lot of change going on and a lot of things to be done. It really makes it kind of hard to find time to adequately do that. It was pretty crunched, but I have absolutely decided that I do not care. I am going to teach next year and the year after that.

M: So you miss teaching?

B: Yes, I do. I really do. I mean, I like administration, and administration, to me, is about teaching. You have the opportunity by serving in the administration to impact not just those 15, 20, 30, or whatever it happens to be, students in your classroom, but what goes on in all the classrooms in the college. So I do not consider that it is something different.

M: That is a good way to look at it. You said you became dean in 1993. What do you think has been your greatest achievement as a dean?

B: One of many things that I wanted to see us accomplish and change here was our attitude towards ourselves and Y.S.U. For example, I always felt that people would say that we are a teaching institution. But instead of saying it with pride, they would say it apologetically as the excuse for why one has not published more or one has not done x more. So it was really a negative, not a positive, and I really wanted to see us be proud of the fact that our mission is to be a teaching institution. I never did see that as meaning that you were not active with scholarship or that you were not applying that scholarship to the community. I think, through a number of things, I think we have made real strides. My sense of things, with not only the new faculty we hired but with a number of the faculty who are like myself and have been here for a long time, is that we have changed. I do not hear people being apologetic for who we are. At least they know not to say it in my presence. So I think that is true. I suppose that is the thing I am most proud of.

I also feel very, very good about the fact not only of our accomplishments in the number of grants that we are getting and our increased productivity in scholarship, but also in the fact that there is more working together. The college, I think, is beginning, no, not beginning, has established some sense of cohesiveness, of the departments seeing themselves as working together as a whole rather than being in competition with each other. That is really important

to me because I think you get so much more done. Plus, I see the department as a kind of box, very important for the disciplinary integrity of things. But so much of what is really interesting goes on between and among a number of different disciplines. I think the idea of people working together, of team teaching or team developing courses, is where much of the excitement is. I often feel, in my own research, whether it is history or art or the other arts, much of these disciplines are a really important part of doing literary studies. I think we make too much of narrow specialization. I do not think that is good for either ourselves or our students. Plus, I think you can get so much more done if you work collaboratively with somebody else. You do more than you would otherwise. You may want to just go to bed and say, "I cannot do that." But you cannot let down your partner. [laughter]

M: That is a way to look at it. [laughter] What do you think has been your biggest obstacle?

B: You mean as dean?

M: As a dean, yes. Not so much as a teacher, but as an administrator.

B: I guess I find disturbing the lack of commitment, on the part of some people. How much disruption they cause because they seem to have only political agendas! Instead of being really concerned with how can we work together to become as good as what we can be, they are into playing other games. I do not have much use for politics. That is not to say that an administration can be politically stupid, but I really do not like the politics that sometimes goes on. I do not mean just in administration as administration, but also with some faculty. That just seems to be so unnecessary and so time-consuming. We ought to figure out how to get on with what we want to get done and be honest about our disagreements, but they ought to be intellectual ones that arise from real differences about how to achieve the same end, which should be exciting.

M: What about as a teacher? What do you think your biggest obstacle was as a teacher or a faculty member, or a teacher of English?

B: Well, actually, I was chair of the English department for so long I never knew exactly what it was like to be just a faculty member. [laughter] In 1973 and 1974, I was elected chair of the English department. So I did not get much of a taste of life totally apart from administration. I suppose the same kinds of frustrations that I find now. Although, at that point, there became a whole lot of things that you could not get done because there was, for a long time around here, an attitude that "If it is not broke, do not fix it." So if you wanted to make changes, it was very difficult to make them. On the other hand, I have had the same

frustrations now that I had before. That is, people who are not really interested in some kind of positive agenda and seem to really want to do nothing except make problems. Somehow that is how they get their kicks. And they take up so much time. I find it very, very, very frustrating. I used to phrase it as saying, "I really do not like having to deal with professionals who are not professional."

M: What do you think is the connection of the university to the community, and what do you think are the university's responsibilities to the community?

B: Well, you have to remember, I was part of the English department at the start of the English festival. There was a history even before the English festival of our working to establish a lot of in-service with the teachers in the school, which is kind of natural to the English department. I believe in the fact that we are part of the quote "food chain," if you will. That if we do not like the preparation and the things that our students know when they come here then we ought to be doing something about it. We are responsible through our training of the teachers and by our interactions with them when they are there. So I do see ourselves as part of the education team. I do not really think that is different for the other disciplines.

I think we have become much more sensitive to the fact that there are real educational needs in business and, in the other professional areas, that we have some obligation to discover what those needs are and to find appropriate means for addressing them. The meeting that I just came out of that ran late was the graduate studies committee. And the last part of the meeting and the reason why we ran on a little longer than usual is we were talking about the need to create variable topics, special topics courses that would give departments the flexibility to address needs in education and in a variety of areas. In other words, mathematicians might offer a workshop to deal with some kind of applied statistics for business people, or philosophers might run ethics workshops for lawyers. They could be for graduate credit in professional writing or editing or historic preservation for that matter. Different disciplines will have to think about what those things might be. That is why I was a little late.

M: And that is a definite community connection?

B: Yes. We established as a college this fall a community partners group. We have 14 area people from business and law and banking and most of them are our graduates. One is a publisher, one is a former librarian who has given a great deal to people here at the university who is not now working. They are drawn from western Pennsylvania, Cleveland, Akron and the Steubenville area south of here. And the idea is that we are trying to figure out how we can work together to help them understand better what the resources are that we have to offer them. At the same time, we are listening to them about what kinds of

resources they have to offer us, whether it is opportunities for things like internships or whether it is a need for delivering courses to them. We just had our second meeting. We meet quarterly. They have been exciting discussions in which we are really learning a lot. Their enthusiasm and willingness to do this, you know, is kind of amazing. They are not getting paid, and they certainly are not getting any prestige. Not like being on a board of trustees. No, no. I mean, you know, they are just real volunteers giving their time to help us learn better how to do what we should for students and for the community.

M: It seems to make a lot of sense. [laughter]

B: Yes, I hope.

M: How much contact do you have with students now that you are an administrator?

B: In this job? Since I have been dean I do not have very much at all because of the way in which the office is organized. Most of the things that have to do with the advising functions are things that either Joy DeSalvo and the other advisors that work with her or the other assistant deans handle. My contact with students is things like this today, when there happens to be some opportunity. I did a presentation for the women's history group and have worked with some women getting ready for a career in science workshop. But not very much. Very little.

M: Do you miss being around students and teaching students?

B: Yes. I miss the classroom because I loved my subject area and I love the interaction that goes on in a classroom. So I guess mostly all I do is get to see former students anymore. [laughter]

M: You mentioned giving a presentation for the women's history classes. As a woman, do you make an extra effort to not spread the wealth, but to encourage women students or faculty members?

B: Yes. I think it is really important to not be what a friend of mine, Carol Heilburn, refers to as the "token woman." It is not easy to become a woman faculty member. I am not even saying it is because of other people's attitudes towards us. It is our attitudes towards ourselves. If you look at my career pattern, I know, in fact, it was in the 1980's and, actually, I was on a search committee for an upper level administrator. I said to myself, "My gosh, you look at these applicants and you could see they had a career pattern mapped out for themselves. They do x for a time, then they move on to x, and it is consciously chosen and done." And I said, "You know, I do not suppose I have ever thought of myself as having a career." And I do not think I really did. I just did something

I loved to do. I did not really think of myself as having a career, and I suppose that is probably still true, though less true than it was.

But I really do think that I have an important role to play in terms of getting women to understand about using their potential and understanding the difficulties they face if they want to raise a family and fulfill all kinds of family responsibilities in addition to having a career, being supportive of them, knowing that they have someplace to go when the atmosphere is a little chilly. In the classroom sometimes and certainly in this office, I try to work with the different groups and people to raise the level of understanding attitudes toward women are a part of our culture and so you are not really necessarily accusing people of some kind of crime when you indicate that they are not really sensitive to their prejudices. They are often unaware of them.

I had a post doctoral fellowship to Yale and was in a group that was indeed highly selective; 15 people had been selected from some 200 applicants. I remember one day, very vividly, sitting and realizing that when this one man talked in the seminar I never paid any attention. You know how you wake up to the fact that your mind is someplace else and you are not listening to what somebody is saying. I thought, "Well, this is really dumb." He was from the South, actually from the Tennessee area, and had a very heavy accent. And I do not know how, but there was all of a sudden there was this point of realization. What are you doing? You are not listening to what he is saying. When he starts to talk, I click out, and I realized that was a reflex. And I had to work very hard to pay attention to what he said. Obviously, he had a Ph.D. too, and he was a very bright person. Yet, I had to work hard to actually listen to him. I think that taught me more about what happens because of people's unanalyzed assumptions. I became aware of, in a moment of drifting, something happened that made me ask why is this happening so that I analyzed what was going on. That has helped me understand what frequently happens to all of us.

I have been very active professionally. At meetings, I do not know how many times I have thought to myself, "I guess I did not express myself very clearly," when someone else is credited with my contribution. I do not think it is that. They just do not hear. Or they hear with a difference. But it is human. It is because of the assumptions that are there. So I just think for those reasons I feel a real strong commitment to the fact that as an administrator I have a special responsibility to women to be supportive - not to advance them when they have not earned it, and not to give them special perks - but to be supportive, getting them to understand what potential they have and how they need to work at using it and encouraging them when things are not all that they should be.

M: Do you think the climate has gotten a little friendlier or warmer?

B: Yes. Well, you have to understand, after I got my master's degree, I was one of a group of six women at this university who had their master's degree but who

were not a part of the full-service faculty. We were called adjunct limited service. We taught a full-time load, which was then 15 hours a semester, and advised students. I even created the honors freshman composition program, which is still around, and did everything that the full-service faculty do. But I was on a year to year contract where men with their master's degrees were tenured and even full professors. We even hired single women who did not have the Ph.D.. And I was told, point blank, by then Dean Karl Dykema whom I have had as a teacher and whom I thought a great deal of, "Barbara, you are married. Where else are you going to go? No, it is not fair but that is it." In fact, his own wife only had her master's degree and she was a full professor in the foreign language department. When we became a state university, that was dropped. Much of the overt kinds of discrimination, I think, have disappeared. Nevertheless, the only woman chair of a department right now is in the English department. When I walk into the conference room for an Arts and Sciences chairperson's meeting, there are no other women, other than Sandy Stephan, who are chairs of departments. [noise] That is our new computer labs downstairs.

M: Really?

B: Yes, five of them going in.

M: Wow, that is a big accomplishment.

B: That is music to my ears. [laughter] So yes, I am the first academic dean. We had a woman dean in the graduate school, but everyone knows that is the deanship that frequently universities pass out to women because it does not have a faculty and, therefore, does not have a large budget. That is typical. If you look at research institutions, there will not be another woman around. But the graduate office will be their token woman administrator.

M: The token woman, yes.

B: So yes, things have changed.

M: I think we have two other female deans. Is it two?

B: Oh, yes. So we are half.

M: Since you have been the first.

B: Yeah.

M: So you are pleased with the progress?

B: Yeah.

M: Do you think there is still a whole lot more that needs to be done?

B: [laughter] I have become aware, since I have been dean, of a lot more overt sexual harassment that goes on. I am not talking about what I have experienced, but about what others have experienced. That surprises me. [noise] They are going to wonder what that is.

M: How about special programming that is up and coming? Not even just programming. We can hear the computer labs going in. That is new to this building.

B: After all, when I became the dean, all we had were the computer labs in Meshel Hall. Of all the colleges, we are the furthest along. When these are done, we will have about 25 computer labs. As you may know, all of freshman composition will be taught in computer labs. Word processing will be incorporated into the first course, and research on the Internet is incorporated into the second course. They have been redesigned. The math department also has a new lab this fall. Chemistry department is also getting a new lab this fall. The Chemistry one is going in right now. So we have really, I think, made wonderful strides in two things. First is incorporating what I call computer-assisted instruction into courses, learning how can we use technology in the classroom to effect better student learning. We also have an obligation to meet in providing students with certain computer skills in order for them to get jobs. There is a wide variation in the skills needed for the job market.

M: What about the new programs coming out of this college? Environmental studies?

B: Oh, yes. There is an ethics certificate, a certificate for ethics and the ethics center. It is funded. We have the first endowed chair, the chair of Islamic Studies. The American Studies program has been revitalized. It should be endowed by over \$100,000. So we have been very successful at fund raising and at getting grants. Tom Shipka has taken the lead in the college for fund raising. Historic Preservation is a new program. As you said, Environmental Studies is a new program. We are working on a program in photonics with physics and electrical engineering. That at least should be at certificate program level before the end of the year I hope. Computer science should have their master's program proposal done and ready for looking at by graduate studies committee in the winter quarter. Let us see. They are not programs in the sense of a degree, but we established a poetry center. I forget how many of these centers I counted up the other day the college has running around. Enough of

them, that is for sure.

But as excited as I am by the new programs, I am really excited by the fact of the rethinking that is going on of the existing programs. The emphasis is really shifted to what should students learn. How can we put together a set of courses that does that? So rethinking within the disciplines both about the curriculum and about teaching. We just put in a grant for several hundred thousand dollars to NSF that would support us in our efforts, which we are going to do anyway even if they do not give us the money, to create an investigative science course for general ed that will be jointly developed by all of the science departments. The same course objectives will apply. It will simply be that geology or biology or whatever will be the content through which those objectives are met so that it will be a course, but you might take it in geology or biology or wherever else. So it is that kind of rethinking and of getting people to work together that seems to me to be the best evidence that there is a lot going on. That is really what interests me. How can we take advantage of what we are already doing and do it better? Do it in a way which will better meet the needs of the community.

M: Are you pleased with the progress you have seen over the last 30 years?

B: Oh, yes.

M: Do you think it is on track? Do you think it is following a time line at a pace that is acceptable?

B: Yes. I think that we were sort of on hold for a period while we were searching for a president. It was sort of up in the air. Certainly we are moving now on a number of fronts. You know, I am concerned about the resources that the university has to do all it is attempting to do right now. It makes it very hard because we are short on resources to do all of the things as carefully as they really need to be done because much of the stuff represents a big investment. If you do not think about it carefully and make the right choices, you will make the best use of the limited dollars. It is sort of like, if you are on a strict budget, you really cannot afford to spend your money on empty calories for lunch. Yeah. Unfortunately, part of this stuff is the enrollment crunch. I mean, I think we would be doing what we are doing even if there were not an enrollment crunch. Actually, that is making it harder. But then maybe it is also forcing some people to think more carefully. [noise] And the enrollment crunch is what other urban institutions in places like ourselves are really all facing.

M: Dr. Scanlon and Dr. Cochran talked about a new plan for going beyond the Campus 2000 plan. They are talking about 2008. Where do you see, or hope to see, Y.S.U. in 2008?

B: Well, I would hope that we have expanded graduate programs, for example. One of the things that I would identify is the need for post baccalaureate education, and not in the traditional way. We have to redefine master's programs, as in you have a bachelor's degree, you get a master's, and a master's leads to a Ph.D.. We need master's programs for people who will not go on for a Ph.D.. Some people respond as I did when I was told about going on - "Well, what does one do with a master's degree? It is sort of like nowhere." The fact is that more professionals need graduate-level work.

I like to use myself as an example, I would like to have a graduate level computer literacy course, not what used to get described as computer literacy when you worked from DOS systems. The interface things, the user systems were so unfriendly to a lot of people that they needed to get some training in order to feel that they could use the machine. What I need to learn about are the networking and the support personnel and the choices about which are the best ways to do those things, those are decisions that I have to make. Not actually doing the layout, but there are lots of other things. Well, do you buy this or do you buy that? There are differing opinions, and you really need to understand better how you are going to use them and the implication of your decisions. I would say that I need a manager's level computer literacy course. I think there are a lot of other people that need such a course. I think that is typical in a lot of areas. So I think what I call either just some advanced courses or else a terminal master's degree is certainly an area in which we need to expand. That is one of the areas that has largely been ignored.

I also feel that we have been positioning ourselves right to attract more and more students from elsewhere. And I think that is important, not because of not seeing ourselves primarily as a regional university, but the world is a global world. And unless you have a mix of students and abilities and where they come from, you will not introduce students from this area into the world in which they are going to work. So I think that the efforts being made are important, not only when we expanded the dorms, not only with the University Scholars program, but also with the village concept and having some private dorms. Very, very important, not just for numbers, but also to the kinds of education we will be able to offer the students that do come here.

And I think more and more, it has been said for 20 years now that we have to choose what programs to offer and to emphasize. As a matter of fact, when I was doing my post doctoral work in the 1970's at Yale, they already were not able to buy all the books in their library. That had been true at places like Yale for a long time. The books were already so expensive that Harvard and other universities have had to say, "We cannot offer this anymore." People have to examine the programs to say, "What is it that we need to offer? What is it that we have the expertise to offer?" Many new areas cross lines, so you can give a particular spin or emphasize things because you have a faculty in this area and this area and this area, and they will combine to enable you to offer a kind of

new emphasis. Basically what we have done in the environmental studies program. I think that is the areas in which we are going to become better and better. There is no way to compete by just being an English department or a History department. I mean, everybody has those things. That does not give students a reason to come here as opposed to someplace else. I think we have to look for those. Primarily, that is where I see us as being in 2008. We will have done some of those things that will have meant we are going to look different.

Of course, I have wild visions of classrooms without teachers. I do not feel that education is threatened by technology. It seems to me that there are always students who are going to want to come to a place, participate in the regular traditional classroom experience or whatever you call it. But, to me, I think classes in the future will be much more flexible. Not this meet four hours a week or three hours a week in the same classroom, but students working in groups, meeting through and conversing through the Web, and I should say communicating, through the Web, and other things. And working in groups collaboratively, as we know they are in businesses, will indeed make a huge difference in the way education is delivered. Not all distance, but indeed that the classroom itself is going to become less and less like a lecture classroom. You will see less and less of that. I do not understand how we have done that anyway because even the British system, which used lectures, just had students attend a lecture. They did not call it a class. And we are really very odd, it seems to me, in gathering students four times a week to sit and listen. They can do that over a television, for heaven's sakes. I think we will be a lot more flexible. In addition to our regular classes looking different, I think we are going to be involved in a lot more flexibly scheduled classes and delivering the education in a variety of means. Sometimes over the net, sometimes to certain audiences by maybe having produced CD-ROMs. Who knows?

M: Interesting. Things sure have come a long way from 30 years ago. [laughter]

B: Yes.

M: Well, thank you very much.

B: Thank you.

End of Interview