

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Early Education Project

Learning and Teaching Experiences

O.H. 167

BETTY HOFMEISTER

Interviewed

by

Caroline Wilms Hall

on

May 14, 1980

BETTY HOFMEISTER

Betty Hofmeister was born on November 9, 1918 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the daughter of Harry and Byrd Mason. When she was three years old, her family moved to West Middlesex, Pennsylvania. Here, she attended grade school and high school in a town school. She began piano lessons when she was eight years old and when she was a senior in high school she also took organ and voice lessons.

Betty studied music education at West Minster College, graduating in 1943 with a Bachelor's Degree. In 1945 she graduated from the University of Michigan with a Master's Degree in Music Education.

Included in here total thirty years of teaching are three years in Warren County, Pennsylvania Schools, where she taught from 1940 until 1943. In the years from 1943 until 1946 she taught at Austintown Fitch schools in Ohio. Her last teaching job was 24 years in the Salem Schools of Ohio from 1955 until her retirement in 1979.

Betty married Walter S. Hofmeister on December 18, 1943 and they have four children. She attends First United Presbyterian Church and is a member of the Historical Society, D.A.R., Leornian's Book Club, and the Church Circle. Her hobbies are antiques, church, and music.

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INTERVIEWEE: BETTY HOFMEISTER

INTERVIEWER: Caroline Wilms Hall

SUBJECT: Parents; school days; Westminster College-cost; courses, social restrictions, sorority, student teaching; Warren County Schools Pennsylvania-experiences; Austintown Fitch-experiences; changes in education.

DATE: May 14, 1980

CH: This is an interview with Betty Hofmeister for the Youngstown State University, Early Education Project by Caroline Wilms Hall at her home on Goshen Road on May 14, 1980 at 4:20 p.m.

All right, Betty, would you tell us something about your parents and your family home life?

BH: Well, I was born in Pittsburgh and that's where my mother and father had both worked in the Carnegie Library as bookbinders. My father had been going to Carnegie Tech, which is now Carnegie Mellon, at night for five years to become a chemist. He had two or three chemistry jobs in the Pittsburgh area. My mother had been raised in West Middlesex, a little town near Mercer County, Pennsylvania. The woman who raised her--because she had been an orphan--was there and in need of help and protection. She was older, and the farm was going downhill and so forth. My father and mother moved from Pittsburgh to West Middlesex and my father found a job as a chemist nearby in New Castle, Pennsylvania; so that they could move back to West Middlesex, which they both loved, and take care of this older lady who had, at one time, been very kind to my mother.

I was about three when we moved to West Middlesex, Pennsylvania near Sharon and New Castle. And in a year or two, we built our own house, which was my home, which I loved and have sold since my parents' death. I was an only child and I never knew that was a bad thing. That's all. I was perfectly happy.

And I had, in addition to my father and mother as parents--wonderful parents--my mother's maiden sister who still worked in Pittsburgh, but came to us always for holidays and every special occasion. I called her Aunt Sissy and she loved me very much. And I loved her and it was as though I had three wonderful parents always helping me along. I think of it often, because they just encouraged me, and helped me and loved me and were friends to me and I was always in church and with neighbors, and our relationship with all the people I grew up among were always kindly, good, honest neighborly relationships.

My father and mother were well-wishers. They were concerned about their fellow associates and I never remember any criticism or backlash or bad talk in my house against other people. I think that's very important.

CH: All right, what were your school days like?

BH: I walked a mile and a half each way down into the town of West Middlesex. I was a skinny little kid and my mother was always taking me to the doctor to see what was wrong and why I was so undernourished-looking. And now I wish I was skinnier. But then I was a skinny, frail, little gal and always had a million colds every year. My mother and father, having been in the city and having been leaders and doers of cultural things, thought it better that I walk to town school. So, they paid tuition for me rather than have me go to the little one-room country school I would have gone to if I would have stayed in our township.

So, some of the neighbors didn't like that real well. They liked my mother and father so they tolerated it, but they really were a little resentful that they thought that their child should go to town school. But I went and I walked with another little girl over the hill. And it was often cold and one lady on the way would take us in on very cold days and warm our hands and make sure we were bundled up properly and called our mothers on the telephone and say, "They're

on their way. They're all right." And these were the things that were nice.

It was a little school where everybody knew everybody. I liked my teachers and I was the "A" girl. I was always making "A's", but once I got my paper torn up and a big fat "F" because I had my paper pushed over to the side to help a boy I liked to get the answers. That was in seventh grade. I cried that time. And one time in third grade I was slapped violently across the face by a woman teacher that I liked very much because I talked too much. I was talking all the time. So, she really let me have it and I remember it still.

One time in high school I was singing a lead in an opera and I must have made some smart crack, which I never should have done to the teacher in the wings and he slapped me across the face just before I went on stage to sing a song. So, I sang the solo with my eyes full of tears. But he was the music teacher that trained me in my school years. He had a vicious temper and a horrible disposition. And yet, I don't think I've ever taught any child as much as he taught me because he was a taskmaster. He was really rough on us. So, most of the kids just hated music and hated him. But I had music lessons and I had my dad and mother loving music and I sang in the church choir with my dad from the time I was eleven. I held down the alto part in the little church choir. So, he couldn't stop me from liking music. Once I was so bratty I told him it wasn't his fault I wanted to be a music teacher. I really was kind of bratty in those years and kind of a smart aleck and I'm sorry.

And one time I almost got expelled from high school; I'm trying to think what that was. The principal called me in and said that if it hadn't been that he respected my parents so much, he would have expelled me. I forget what I did. I think I talked back to a teacher like I shouldn't have. He's still my friend. Whenever we get together, once a year at a reunion, he always comes to me and says, "Remember the day, Betty?"

My father and mother were very respected, loved people in the little village. They were older. My mother was 35 when I was born. Since I was the only child, they put an awful lot of stock in me and awful lot of hope in me. They were determined that I would love music and be trained in it because they both loved it so and hadn't had any chance to study it.

CH: Okay, what was this town school like since you didn't go to the one room school? How was it different?

BH: Pretty bad, pretty bad. Except there was a first grade and a second grade. There's one class of each. And in the country school all these grades were in one room. You're probably too young to remember those, but we had them still although they were going out in those days. This was 1928 to 1936. But the town school was pretty bad. It was the same building my mother had graduated from years before. In 1901 she had graduated and I graduated in 1936. But we loved our teachers and it was a wonderful spirit of unity. I loved my high school teachers. The music teacher caused me the most trouble because I resented his disposition so.

CH: How many were in your graduating class?

BH: Thirty-three. I was second.

CH: Were all twelve grades housed in this one building?

BH: Yes. It was a run-down building. But we were all there, high school and junior high and elementary. We didn't even call it junior high. We called it seventh grade and eighth grade. But I went there from first grade on. I went all those years to that school.

CH: So, how many were there approximately in the whole school while you were attending?

BH: I don't know. But if there were thirty some in each class and there were twelve classes, that was it. And there was no kindergarten. It was first grade through twelve.

CH: But your parents felt that this was better than the one room?

BH: Oh, it was. I'm sure it was. (Laughter) I loved music so and I was always getting to sing the lead in some musical show and getting to accompany soloists and so forth. I wouldn't have had any of that chance until I got into high school if I had gone to "country school." I had lots of those chances when I was in grade school. One girl always resented that I got the lead. I'm sorry for it: they should have shared them out, but they gave them always to me.

CH: You said you took music lessons?

BH: Piano.

CH: Did you take singing lessons?

BH: My senior year I took organ, piano and voice lessons at a Catholic convent high school over in New Bedford, which is ten miles maybe from West Middlesex, near New Castle called Villa Marie. Girls from here still go there. And when I entered Westminster College, I think that is why I became of interest to the recruiting man, whom I came to like very much, a Mr. Johns. He would always say, "Oh, here comes the little Presbyterian girl with the Catholic background." He always thought that was delightful: that my mother had taken me for lessons to the Catholic systems.

When I was eight she had taken me to Sharon to a convent to start my lessons, determined that I would be a piano player. I started lessons on a big old-fashioned square piano. It was made in 1845. There were seven keys that wouldn't work but it was the beloved family heirloom. But the sisters wouldn't take me because my arms wouldn't reach to the two edges of the keyboard. So, they sent me instead to a woman who had graduated through their courses. She was my teacher for five years and she was a superb teacher.

My mother made a terrible sacrifice for all that. She would walk to town a mile and a half on Saturday mornings with me and we'd climb on a streetcar and ride to Sharon, Pennsylvania and we'd get off and walk several blocks, winter and summer to this lady's house for my piano lesson. Every Saturday was shot taking me to a piano lesson. It was the money that they really couldn't afford lots of times, but they were both determined that I would have music training.

CH: How did your parents raise the money to finance these lessons?

BH: Well, my father always had a good secure job until the Depression hit and knocked everybody out, but still they were trying to redeem this farm of this lady who had raised my mother. Back taxes and all those things had piled up. Fences were broken. They were trying to rebuild that farm and pay for their own new house. My poor dad loved to travel so and he loved books so. He worked in New Castle and he would ride the train back and forth because he didn't like the worry of the car. He'd

do his reading on the train. He always had a book or two out of the library. It was always a strain, a financial strain. His salary wasn't enough to keep two houses going and help everybody, but he did. He worked hard.

CH: Why did you decide to become a music teacher then?

BH: Because I loved it. When I was a sophomore in high school, I decided and I never worried. First I loved music. I already could see I loved working with children. One of the main inspirations was probably a young woman in our little church who was the organist and a super piano player and I liked her very much. She would be like six or eight years older than I and she took an interest in me, and would invite me over to Westminster where she went. Sometimes my parents would take me over to a concert or something that she was in. I admired her the way a young girl of junior high age looks up to an older one. And that was when I said some nasty thing to my man music teacher because he said, "I'm glad to hear you're going to be a music teacher, Betty." And I said, "Well, it certainly isn't your fault," bratty as could be, I'm ashamed of that still.

CH: Did any of your teachers from grade school or junior high or other high school teachers have an effect on your decision to become a teacher?

BH: Oh, I think that they were glad for me because I was always the one that excelled in music in the class. And it wasn't that I was so smart. It's that my parents were giving me such good training. But I was always the one who could lead and who could sing the alto against twenty sopranos and who could read the part like a wiz because I had had so many good lessons.

When I was about a freshman in high school I thought I'd like to teach languages because I loved Latin and French so. But I settled on this music business and I remember in college thinking, now if I don't get along with this, if I can't do it or something, then I'll go another year and be a librarian. That was my second choice by that time because my mother and father were so inclined toward books and we had wonderful books in our house. My dad taught me to respect books and use the library. "Use the library," he would always say.

CH: Where did you take your training for your music degree to teach?

BH: At Westminster College, which is a small United Presbyterian School between New Castle and Sharon. The Depression had hit. I came out of high school in 1936 and my father had finally lost his job in 1932. That was one of the bratty awful things I said. When you're sixty you remember some things you did to hurt your parents awfully that you wish you hadn't done. My dad came home white as a sheet on Good Friday of 1932 and said, "I finally have been laid off." Other men had lost their jobs right and left. My dad was one of the few men in the town still working about three days a week. I said, "Oh goody, I won't have to take any more piano lessons." Now, that was an awful thing for me to say. I am ashamed of it still. My mother and father were struck with: "What are we going to eat? To feed our family?"

But my father, being such a worker, had always raised an enormous garden and my mother canned. We didn't have a freezer. She canned and canned and canned. Also, he raised chickens. He had quite a little egg business on the side. He delivered dozens of eggs to a certain set of customers. He built that up and when his work gave out he expanded that. He took out a vender's license and bought eggs from Amish farmers on the way to New Wilmington, where there's an Amish settlement. Then he charged a nickel more a dozen and carried them to his customers and expanded and got more customers. He worked horribly hard and terribly long hours and made a hundred dollars a month. He held us together those four years that way.

Then I started to Westminster in the fall of 1936. There was no money for me to stay there, but I went back and forth with my dad, who had gotten back to work then. He started driving rather than ride the train. New Wilmington, where the college was, was halfway between our house and New Castle, so I got off and on enroute. I carried my lunch in a bag and I went to school and waited in the communter's lounge until he came home at night and picked me up and took me home. This went on for two years and by then they were back on their feet and the Depression was getting pretty well over and they were able to let me stay there. So, the last two years I lived there at the college and was a regular student. I worked in the library as an aid. I stayed in a lodge type place where you could earn a hundred dollars off your board by working an hour a day.

CH: Okay Betty, what did it cost you to go to school?

BH: Oh, about \$400 the junior year when I stayed there and helped, and only about \$600 the year I stayed in the dorm and was sorority president and didn't do anything except a little bit of library work part-time. I can't honestly remember what the two first commuter years cost. The total cost the senior year when I didn't work except for a few hours in the library was only about \$600.

CH: Did that include all your books?

BH: I don't suppose so. I don't know. I think that was probably what we paid the college for tuition and board and room.

CH: What kind of courses did you have to take to get a teaching degree in music?

BH: We had music methods courses on how to teach children music from probably the sophomore year on. We had to take language and English and all those other things, too. I remember how I struggled with a physics course. They said we had to have one science course and I never had any luck with science courses. They just were murder for me. Finally, the head of the music school went and begged the administration so we got to get out of it. That was going to be awful for me. But I took all the English courses and language courses I could squeeze in because that was a big interest.

There was one English teacher, a Virginia Everett, Dr. Virginia Everett, who was tremendously inspirational to me. I remember the time I went to her and said, "I don't know what to do about this." We had to write something about religion. And I said, "But I've gone to Sunday School and church all my life, but I don't believe there's a heaven or a hell and I don't believe that God is seeing everything I do." And I went on like that. And she said, "Betty, relax." Almost every young person goes through that in the college years."

The maiden teacher, Dr. Ada Peabody, who directed all our teaching procedures and who was in charge of all the courses that we took to learn how to teach music, was absolutely fabulous. When I went later to the University of Michigan, I really didn't learn anything in the methods courses for elementary music there that she hadn't already taught us. I seemed to have a much better training than most of the people that landed there for master degrees. She was marvelous. We thought she was horribly

thorough. We knew that she was teaching us well but we thought she was hard on us.

CH: Okay, were your teachers in college single teachers or were they married?

BH: I think they were mostly single in those days. That was 1940. But of these two women that I speak, one is still a retired maiden lady, but one did marry. It seemed to me they gave night and daytime to the job. I mean they were always available if you needed to ask them something. They were the kind of teacher that just lived entirely for the job and the students. They inspired me.

CH: Do you remember most of your teachers--especially the women--single as you went through school?

BH: Yes, I think so.

CH: Was this because they chose to be single or because it was a requirement for the job?

BH: No, it was no longer a requirement. But for high school teachers in our little high school, we'd be inclined to get the young teachers right out of college in our little town. They were wonderful; they were delightful. They loved us and we adored them, and they were fine teachers. Still, forty years later or forty-five, I meet them sometimes and it's as though we're friends. I think it's because we were such a small school.

Like the French teacher I remember, Mary Purvis was a very attractive young lady, very lady-like young woman and a fine French and English teacher. She would only have about a hundred kids in the high school to deal with. So, of course, she knew us all and she was dedicated to helping us. It was a very close-knit thing.

CH: Okay, music was your major then.

BH: In college, yes.

CH: And did you have to carry a minor too?

BH: English. But the first year I got a job, I had to teach eighth grade English and I didn't do it very well at all. I hadn't had enough courses and I was so interested in music, I was tipped that way I think. And it was too big a job. It was a horribly big job.

CH: Okay, do you recall any social restrictions that you encountered in college?

BH: Oh, we had to be in at a certain time and we had to sign in the out and all that.

CH: What time did you have to be in?

BH: Oh, I don't know. Probably 9:00. I don't remember. But that didn't trouble me much because I never was very adventurous.

CH: And you said you had to sign in and out?

BH: Oh, yes. In the dorm you always had to say where you had gone and with whom and when you'd be back approximately. Oh sure. Things have changed, Caroline. This was the late 1930's.

CH: Okay.

BH: And this was a small church school. We had to go to chapel everyday. You'd be marked absent and after a few of those they wanted to know where you were.

CH: What do you remember of a typical college day?

BH: I don't remember very well. I really don't.

CH: Do you have a recollection of when you started in the morning?

BH: I remember I could study much better in the very early morning. I know we had the meals, first in my junior year in the lodge and my senior year in the big old-fashioned dorm that is still standing there. We had three meals a day and they weren't cafeteria buffet. You sat down and were served. In the junior year where I was in this lodge type place, two lodge-type buildings ate together and there was one woman over the two of us. We had to be in our places at meals and it was served to us. Certain girls were servers.

CH: Did you have to dress for dinner?

BH: Pretty much at the dorm year, the senior year. Once I was impatient about eating my half orange and I picked it up and began to suck it out of the shell and I was given a real bawling out for that. We had to pick it out with a little spoon like a grapefruit. That irritated

me badly. I was in too much of a rush for that. That was forbidden. That was a bad thing I did.

CH: Do you remember any other little things like that?

BH: When I was president of sorority, the sorority had a certain suite of rooms in the dorm. Five rooms were assigned to our sorority. I had around me my very best friends that year, the senior year. That was nice because we all had a suite of rooms in the dorm under the regular dorm rules, but the sororities could kind of house themselves together.

CH: Were there many sororities?

BH: I can't remember how many, maybe six. And ours wasn't a national. It was like most of the music girls went to this one. And they were my friends anyhow. The conservatory was a long building, kind of ramshackly. Music majors had to practice so many hours in different practice rooms that I think that we were more friendly with each other and closer to each other and more like a club all through school. The girls of that sorority asked me to join and at first I didn't, thinking it would cost too much money. And then about the sophomore year I did. Then about my junior year, when I was about to become president, we became national. We became part of a national thing. And I remember all the hoopla when the national executive came--the teas and installations and all that. Once I was sent, that year I guess, to Excelsior Springs, Missouri. My expenses were paid to a big national convention just after that because I was the president.

CH: Well, was your sorority basically for social purposes?

BH: Yes, it was not a music thing, but as I said, it happened that most of the music girls were in it. I don't think it was restricted to music majors, but it had kind of been that way, but then it became more a social sorority.

Each sorority put their candidate up for May Queen and each sorority put their candidate up for this and that. And it was a lot of rivalry. I remember Chi Omega was there and Kappa Delta. I can't just remember how many. But in this lodge in which I lived my junior year, a lot of us were sorority girls and very good friends among the sororities. Not so much rivalry until you tried to get pledges in rush week at the end of, I think, the freshman year. Then we would all make floats in competi-

tion for homecoming and all those things that kids do when they're in college.

CH: Was there a separation between the sorority or the Greek colony as they call it and the independents or the people that didn't belong to the sororities?

BH: I didn't feel it, but some did. To be tremendously popular, honestly, never seemed to be my first goal. I wasn't way out in left field. These little rebellious things I tell you about were very rare incidents in my life. That's probably why I remember them so keenly. I was generally getting along with everybody and liked everybody and didn't feel cross or sour at people. Dr. Sulio, the woman doctor in town here, was in Westminster when I was and she and I were friends, but not close friends. But she was of an independent group that chose not to go into any sorority. I don't feel that I felt that I was better than she for that. They just had their group of friends and I had mine.

CH: Did the sorority itself set any restrictions on you?

BH: Oh, I remember times when I was ashamed of the blackballing somebody did to some girl to keep her out and I didn't like it and I finally rebelled against that. I remember discussions when they would try to sharpen up one of the girls. Maybe I was one of them, but I don't remember that, so they must have been kind to me. But times when they thought that one of our members wasn't dressing as sharply as she should or wasn't as classy looking as she should be, they would give her discussions and sometimes suggestions. But I imagine that my group was freer of critical nastiness than most. I really feel they were. I don't remember horrible fighting, nasty critical times among the girls.

CH: Did they encourage you to date certain fraternities?

BH: I think there was some of that, but I wasn't very popular as far as having boyfriends in those days. I had boyfriends but took it very casually. I wasn't much interested. The husband I've had for 36 years lived ten miles away and he was my beau about my sophomore and junior year back and forth. I thought I loved him very much and you see I did, because I married him finally and we've been happy for 36 years. But in my junior year when I became president I had to have an escort at things and he wouldn't dance! He wouldn't dance.

And I finally just got fed up with it and told him I would not see him anymore. I remember the occasion, I wanted to go with someone who would escort me to a dance and dance with me and not stand on the side. I wasn't ashamed of him but I was so sad because I wanted to be in the swing. I wanted to be having the fun the rest were having. So, my junior and senior years I dated always somebody, but none of it was very serious. Generally a fraternity that was called Alpha Sig had most of the music major boys in it. I don't know why, it just did. I think they were a less drinking group than some of the other fraternities. I liked that type better. Many of those fellows were my friends but I didn't have any serious romance in college at all because I was always leaning toward Walter back in West Middlesex, hometown boy.

CH: What was your student teaching like?

BH: Oh, it was pretty thorough, I'll tell you. In our junior year at the half of the year, we had to go to a little town of Pulaski. Now West Middlesex was little and New Wilmington was little, but Pulaski was littler yet. It was named for a general in the wars. Miss Peabody, the teacher I liked so much, took us all when we were juniors, first half of the junior year, and we went back and forth to this elementary school, which was in a fire-house or somethings and we had to plan a class lesson for the children--who didn't have a regular music teacher--under her supervision. Then we had to make a Christmas program with the children of the grade school. And I have used that program several times since in the years I've taught because it was so well planned. She sent us all out of that year with a copy of that program she worked out and others with the songs we used and so forth.

Then my senior year we went three mornings a week to Mercer, Pennsylvania, which would be ten or fifteen miles away. The college transported us. All of us music teacher trainees went and she was our supervisor. We taught music under and in cooperation with a man teacher who was the music and elementary music person in Mercer. His name was Cec Boles and he could play the Rhapsody in Blue like you never heard it except in a concert stage. He was an outstanding musician.

CH: How do you spell his name?

BH: Don't know. I think it was Cecil, but we said Cec; probably Cecil Boles. He was a very up and coming, a

good music teacher, I think. She had approached him asking that she bring her student teachers who would teach under him at his school. We were always terrified of the awfully tedious lesson plans she made us do. I mean they were hard. But now I know that was very good training. She was always kind and fair, but very firm in her criticism of us. I think she was a superior trainer and as I said, in my Master's work--four summers at the University of Michigan--all the elementary music courses I took, I seemed to know better how to approach it than most of my fellow students. I think it was because she had taught us so well.

CH: All right, you said you had to student teach three mornings a week?

BH: Three I think it was.

CH: Just in the mornings?

BH: I think it was a half day. And we had to pursue a regular schedule of classes. When I taught with you, Caroline, I had about ten or twelve classes a day, about ten finally. We would have four or five classes we had to go into and teach. Miss Peabody would be in the back watching and writing. I'm sorry she was writing! That always scared us. She was writing down what we did--good or bad. And then the next day in class she would show us what we had done wisely or what she thought we should have done differently. We were very frightened. In front of the class we were embarrassed and nervous. There were only ten of us all the time going through the music education courses together all four years. Ten of us started and nine of us finished.

One fellow, who played the most marvelous piano and organ, marvelous; his name was Clayton Taylor and he finally got me my first job in this town. He couldn't sing at all. His singing was dreadful. That was always a fun thing because Clayton would try to sing these little kid's songs and he couldn't do it. But he could sit down at the piano and charm the whole school.

Then there was the friend who has become a doctor of religion and has done all kinds of important things but I remember the day he got cross at something and fired his books across the room and stomped out! We had lots of fun and close times in the music school.

CH: Okay, then if you were just student teaching three morn-

ings a week, did you have classes the other mornings then?

BH: Yes we did. That was hard because we had to carry our regular load. Our schedules were set up so we'd go to school afternoons or two whole days. We used to think that we had it much harder than the regular academic people who, for instance, were training to be high school teachers. They didn't have to keep practicing in the choir and practicing in the band and taking lessons and practicing. They only went a six week block as I remember for student teaching, but we had to go a year and a half. We were run ragged but the training was good.

CH: So, for a year and a half you were in and out of the classroom?

BH: All the time and I think it's very valuable. Then we were also carrying a regular load back on campus because it was all close and we could go back and forth.

CH: So, then your student teaching wasn't done in one block?

BH: No.

CH: It was done in small segments throughout this year and a half?

BH: Yes. That was very good because the next day in class we could always assess what we had done. We could appraise what we had done that seemed to work and what hadn't worked. It was a constant "do" and then analyze what you've done. I think that's a very superior way to train teachers.

CH: And then you had all elementary grades?

BH: Yes.

CH: Is that one through six?

BH: I don't remember any kindergartens, but I think it was one through eight. Then I guess we were supposed to get high school choral training from the choruses and choirs and ensembles and things we ourselves sang in because I don't remember more than maybe two or three courses in my whole training on how to conduct a choir and be a chooser of right music and so forth. I think that's too bad. My youngest son is also a music teacher

and also graduated from this same college. I don't think he got anything like the training I did. I think that our elementary training was far superior to that which we were given in junior and senior high courses.

CH: So, then your major was in elementary music?

BH: No, my degree was supposed to be one through twelve. Anything vocal. I was not prepared to teach band instruments although we had to have a semester of clarinet and a semester of violin and all that stuff. My degree reads: vocal music one through twelve. I think it was top-heavy on the elementary end of the training. That was lucky for me since that's what I chose to do. I don't think we had nearly as good training at the senior high level.

CH: Did they have the same teachers for the senior high level?

BH: No. I don't even remember who they were. I can't remember, so you see, it wasn't a very vivid thing for me. My son had one man, a Mr. Groves, who's over near Sharon now and he came down to the college and did some high school chorale methods that were most important to my son. And he does a super job I think at high school chorale work because of that man. He's the one that Salem got this February for the county festival. And somehow he taught a great deal to Kirk, my youngest son and inspired him.

CH: Okay, when did you get your degree then?

BH: 1940.

CH: 1940. What do you remember of your first year of teaching?

BH: Oh, I really loved it. First I couldn't find a job. Here were the nine of us coming out. You will be shocked, but my first year's pay was \$1,000. The one who got the highest pay of us nine graduates got \$1,400. He got the biggest job. I'm still his friend and we write back and forth and see each other occasionally. But I couldn't find a job. I was going for interviews as people do and finally this piano player friend of mine called and said that they were hunting a music teacher in Warren County, Pennsylvania to begin a new type of job under the county board and circle four schools where they had never had a public school music teacher before. He said he thought

I'd be just the one for the job and if I'd like to come up he and his dad would go and recommend me to the school. We were friends from Westminster and he thought I could do that job. So off I went to Warren, Pennsylvania to his home and his dad and mother were lovely to me. Clayton and his father took me and introduced me to the school board members and said, "We think this girl would do well in your job." I was hired and I taught there three years and I loved it.

CH: Did you have to interview with all the members of the board?

BH: He took me to each board member's house and whether I had to go before a meeting, I don't know. It might have been that I had come 120 miles and that's why they did it that way because it was about 120 or 130 miles from my house to Warren, Pennsylvania. But I arrived and, oh, I was so excited and so delighted and so enthusiastic. I bought a little car for \$300. I had to have a car to circle these four schools. There were no kindergartens; one through eight. I was scared. I was just twenty-one; some of the eighth graders were nearly as old as I. There weren't very many years difference, six I think. But certain families--about three or four out of those three years so long ago--are still my friends and write to me and come to visit me and I call on them. It was a delightful town.

I got a room in a house of an old, old couple that should have been in an English novel. They were very picturesque and interesting. I paid \$4.00 a week for my room and we were allowed to fix breakfast in our rooms. Then I would have my lunch near the school wherever I was. Then I would go up town. It was just about a block from the main street. Warren is a very nice town about Salem's size, I would think. I knew a couple of good restaurants and I would get my supper "out".

Two other girls had rooms there, too. This old couple had converted their house to take in roomers. It was right across from the Presbyterian Church. Sometimes we three girls would go off and eat together. They became my friends. Then Mr. and Mrs. Pickett, the people who had taken us in, announced that if we wanted to, they would make a dinner to which we could come in the evenings if we would pay 50¢ apiece. Now, this is terrible to think that we ate up their delicious meal

for 50¢ apiece. Sometimes it was roast lamb, I remember that. I remember "Floating Island" which is a custard with globs of meringue on top that were toasted. It was just delicious. Mrs. Pickett was probably 75 by then. We girls called her Lizzy Jane. "Lizzy Jane, do let us help you with the dishes before we hurry off to work." "No, I don't want to do them now." And she would make a pouty face. "I just don't want to look at them now." And we'd say, "But we can help you now. We have to go to meetings." We always had P.T.A. meetings galore at four schools. And she said, "I've just worked to make the dinner and I'm not going to do them now." So, she and he would do them much later in the evening. She'd just have to sit down awhile.

She finally got to like us enough I guess and she put out doughnuts in this beautiful old-fashioned doughnut jar with a sterling cup and leave the coffee made and we'd sometimes have that for breakfast. It was a very pleasant place. I think the County Board of Education told me about it, suggested it. And as I was a Presbyterian I went across the street and sang in the choir right away. People in the church became my friends.

CH: How far did you have to travel between the four schools?

BH: I suppose the farthest one wasn't more than six or eight miles. The nearest ones were two. They surrounded the town. I never taught for the Warren borough. I taught for the county board of which Warren City is in, right in the middle and Warren County goes all around it. I had four schools where they had never before hired a music teacher. In the first fall, each school had a principal. The principal at one of the schools and his wife--she was at one school and he was at another--became my very dear friends. But at the school called Pleasant Township, the principal called a special meeting to have me fired when I had been there about two months. I heard this on an afternoon when I was there teaching. You know how you'd feel. He said I didn't teach music the way his sister did, who was a music teacher in some other city. He said I didn't know the things she knew and it would be better if they got rid of me right away. I had known that he wasn't pleased with me. I don't think I was a very strong disciplinarian. It never was my thing. When I got older and more confident, it didn't trouble me like it did then. But even so, that was pretty cruel of him I think. It might have been October or maybe November.

My father was always my encourager. I called him crying, "What do I do?" And this is what he told me: "Betty, I've dealt with people like this before. You get in your car right now and go to his house and tell him to go to hell. Just stand there and say, 'You go to hell.'" Say, "You're not giving me a fair chance. If your sister was in my place, she wouldn't accept the treatment you're suggesting. You'd better cancel the meeting. Don't wait for his answer. Just get back in your car and drive home and cry it out." So, the next morning it had all blown over and the meeting had been cancelled. That might not have worked, but that's what my dad advised me to do. He said, "He's intimidating you. You go back and just keep up the good work." So, that was a narrow escape. I don't know whether the school board would have listened to him, but he had called the meeting to discuss getting me out before I'd get more deeply into the job.

CH: And you taught there for three years?

BH: I loved it. Oh, I loved it. It was a wonderful place.

CH: Okay. You mentioned discipline. Was there a problem with discipline?

BH: Yes, I always had trouble trying to be sure I was right. I was scared! I wasn't very sure of myself. And here I was with thirty or thirty-five seventh and eighth graders to teach and govern. I think it's the same still. If somebody is very sure of themselves, they can manage other people better, but if you're not sure that you're right and you don't feel brave, then your timidity shows.

I had this other man principal, who became my advisor, Archie Hunter. He was wonderful to me. And I finally got so I could go to him and say, "What do I do about this? How do I handle this?" He would help me. He just died last year. He and I and his wife were writing letters all these years, forty years back and forth. He helped me so. I think in every young teacher's life there surely needs to be somebody whom they can trust to give them good advice and to bolster them when they feel really unable to go on.

CH: Okay, but then after you had gotten through the first year or two?

BH: Well, they must have liked me because they urged me to stay and they cried when I left. When I go back there to visit over the years they say, "Nobody ever got kids to sing like Betty Mason," and things like that. They gave me wonderful recommendations, but the discipline was always harder. I knew my subject, I knew my music. I remember the end of the first year I had to present a sixth grade choir in a county festival or something and I was terrified. I thought I could never get through that: to go up in front and lead my choir at a big thing. I think I had an unusual shyness and lack of confidence in certain ways.

CH: Why did you finally decide to leave Warren County?

BH: Oh, because I was going to marry Walter. This was 1942 and he already had been in the service about two years. He was from my home town of West Middlesex. We had grown up together. I also thought I would like to try high school teaching. I hadn't had anybody above eighth grade in Warren. I decided to come home and hunt a job near home so that I could live with my family--my parents whom I adored--while Walter was finishing the service years. It was a mixed feeling. I wanted to marry him but I hated to uproot myself from my own house where my mother and father were. I loved them so. I didn't want to draw away from them.

I got a job at Austintown Fitch, which was about eighteen miles from my house. The war was on and Walter was already stationed in Mississippi and Virginia. We were anticipating that he'd have to go overseas very soon. I got a job in Austintown and it was back-breaking. I never worked so hard, but I liked it. They were nice to me. I had twenty-one rooms full of elementary children. I covered twenty-one classes a week plus all the seventh and eighth grade general music classes. I think there were seven sections. That's the year I also had to teach some English classes, which I never would have made it through except for Edith Lynn, a wonderful teacher some of the Youngstown people may know, who guided me. Then I had high school chorale groups, a boy's glee club and a mixed choir ensemble.

I gave four big concerts a year. I produced "Pinafore." I worked like mad, and I rode back and forth from West Middlesex everyday. I was real thin and real tired all the time. I started there at \$1,340, I remember. Having started in Warren three years before at \$1,000. I don't

remember how much I got up to there in the three years.

CH: Were all these children you mentioned, the twenty-one classrooms, were they all in one building?

BH: Austintown Fitch would be known to some of your Youngstown associates as big and flourishing. But in 1942, every child from Austintown Township went to the Fitch School which is now right there on Rt. #18 beside the Strouss Store. We all were there. The bandman was my friend right away. Glen Snell was the bandman and I was the chorale person. He was a good supportive friend all the time I was there. I liked very much Red Rickert, who was the Superintendent. One time I couldn't seem to get the boys to behave themselves in my boy's glee club. I liked them and they liked me, but that was a big picnic. I went to him and said, "What'll I do?" I also wanted more boys. He said, "Well, we'll get some football boys. We'll get some football boys into your choir that will draw other boys into it." So, I said I had enough boys to make a separate glee club.

One of the highlights of my career there was Big Bill Foster, who sang marvelously and was a jack-of-all-trades. He ran the tapes and ran the mikes and ran everything for me. He's the one that has something to do with Stereo 99 now, the music from Youngstown that I always listen to.

That first year Mr. Rickert said, "If you have any problems with the elementary music, Betty, you go to Miss Switzer." She was a third grade teacher and she's still my friend. He just lassoed her with me and had her take charge of any questions I would have about the elementary music. She wasn't a principal or anything, but he trusted her to guide me and she liked music and she's still my friend. I had lunch with her Monday.

CH: How much parental involvement was there in the music programs?

BH: What do you mean?

CH: Were you seeing parents very often because of , , ?

BH: Problems?

CH: Problems or questions or anything like that?

BH: No. I don't remember much of that, but the P.T.A. was active. I remember always going to the P.T.A. and often

having my group sing. Judge Woodside--for whom the Woodside Mental Hospital is named--was an important man in that area and his daughters were in my choirs. Mr. Rickert became the judge. He was the Superintendent, but was always preparing for law. So, he became a judge in Youngstown. Those two men were powers in the area. You could count on them for honest help and support.

CH: You were saying that the P.T.A. was active. Did the children do, through you, monthly programs whenever they had their P.T.A. meetings?

BH: I can't remember how often it was. I regretted, when I came to Salem, the years when we were never allowed to have any children at a P.T.A. meeting. That seemed wrong to me because I had been to these other two schools where a lot of very fine discussion and support came from the parents who came partially because their children were involved. But under Thelma Thomas and Roma Reese and Miss Smith and some of the women principals, especially that I had at Salem in the first years I taught, I was not allowed ever to have any children perform at P.T.A.'s. No group was allowed to. Now they are going back to having the programs sometimes at night. The fathers were cut out in those years completely. It seems to me that fathers are awfully good support and that makes for good public relations.

Of course, it makes it tiresome for the teacher to have to perform her students several times a year. But I just worked, I worked night and day at the job in those years. In Salem I seemed tired lots of time. I'm sure it was exhausting, but I never worked as hard as I did in Austintown. It was a back-breaking assignment, but I loved it.

CH: What major changes have you seen in education?

BH: The one I remember especially is that I used to think seventh grade was about the year when kids got kind of smart acting and didn't want to listen to the teacher and so forth, but now it seems to have gone down to sixth and fifth in the years I've been teaching. You could handle sixth graders always, but they always scared me a little.

I used to go to conventions of music teachers. I always tried to go to those state things. In discussions, teachers were always saying, "I can't get my sixth grade

boys to sing." I would always say, "I have good luck, I really do." I did, but the last three or four years I taught, I was older and I was heavier and I think the TV made the children more wise, more sophisticated or something. I began to notice the change the last three or four years I taught.

That's why I was so glad when I had a chance to teach Kindergarten through three. It was better for me the last five years to do that. I think older students appreciate a younger, prettier teacher by far. I think it is important to them, whereas the little children are still accepting a mother or grandmother image and it does not trouble them. I think I was very successful with little children the last few years I taught, where I would not have been with the fifth or sixth graders.

CH: Do you think that there ought to be more men in music education in the elementary grades?

BH: I tried to get my sons to go into it because I think they would be naturals. I've seen some men elementary music teachers that were marvelous. I don't believe that the fact that they sing an octave or two lower would matter now because of the very wonderful records with which we teach.

Here I am very confident at the piano and can play all these little songs with a lot of zip, but mostly I didn't have a piano. Lots of times I taught by the records. The records make a wonderful accompaniment, the good records that are available now. It used to be it was all singing. Songs were sung and led with the voice rather than the piano. I didn't always have a piano.

CH: Are you referring to here in Salem or in all of your schools when you taught?

BH: In all of my schools. I think I went buzzing from room to room with my pitch pipe. My voice was good then and it was all right, but as I got older my voice got much worse. I was very lucky there were sometimes pianos available and all these good records available. I think a man in the primary grades of music wouldn't dare wish that little children could copy his lower voice. He had to have them sing in the upper voice then. So, it's a blessing that there are such good records.

One of my sons taught elementary music for five years,

I thought that he should stick at it, but he just hated it so he's out of it. The other son that's a music teacher loves the high school chorale. He's doing a good job. I believe that men music teachers could be a wonderful success in primary and elementary music. I really do. I don't think that the voice problem should worry them because of the records available.

CH: Are there any other changes that you would like to see?

BH: One of the major things I would like to hoot about is that I think the university courses that elementary teacher trainees have to take are absolutely wrong in the way they are geared. I think if someone was preparing to be a fourth grade teacher they would have to take three music courses. That's usual I believe--one in basic music and one in methods and one in appreciation. If I weren't so tired at 61, I would love to teach the methods course and the appreciation course. I know from my daughter's experience in her appreciation course in training to be a primary teacher that she was made to study symphonies in a very, very detailed way. That's wrong. It would have been much better for her when she took a teaching job if, in that same number of hours, a knowledgeable person who had dealt with children would have taught her the record listening or tape listening that a child at a certain grade level could appreciate and respond to, and would have set her out with a collection of we'll say, forty records that were surefire successes, tasteful and good, and that had been proven that children on second-grade level like this one, and somebody in fourth grade could get some emotional release out of this one or some happy response. I find that student teachers I've dealt with aren't really prepared at all in what appreciation lessons a child of a certain grade level would really be able to participate in.

I think that the basic music course probably has to be about the way it is. I think that the method courses some places are fine and some places are a complete loss. They obviously haven't ever dealt with droves of classes of elementary music. Especially I find that student teachers coming under my supervision in the last ten years have never heard of Hap Palmer or Adventures in Music or some of the tried-and-true things that we now have that are a complete delight in forming the musical background for children.

CH: What about the regular elementary teacher, like myself?

Do you feel that we need to have those three courses?

BH: That's what I was saying.

CH: That's what you're referring to?

BH: I think that there is a terrible need for people who are training to be regular elementary teachers to have at least ten, we'll say, recorded or taped pieces in their heads that they know will be a delight to the class even at break times or special times regardless of whether the music teacher takes on the whole program or not.

CH: Do you think it's necessary for a regular classroom teacher to learn chording on the piano, to play a recorder and an autoharp?

BH: (Laughter) I think it helps them, but I don't believe that an average college young person who has no piano experience can learn maybe enough in those busy years to have any fun with it. But it surely makes you more able to do certain things. The autoharp is so easy, I guess I'd really make them learn that. It's a perfect thing to fall back on if you don't play the piano or the guitar, and it's tremendously easier to learn. Of course I love the recorder. I've played the recorder in groups and taught at one time 150 recorder students at noon hour. I think the flutophone and the recorder are an ideal crutch through which you can get a child to learn to read the treble staff and I think it's a much surer way than just to sing songs, because then the lead singer hauls the rest along. But in playing a flutophone or recorder each kid has to find his notes himself.

My own four children, who should have been taught by me how to read music were really not. I was too busy earning the living. So, they all can read a part and sing in church choirs and sing in ensembles beautifully because they played an instrument and had to read the notes by themselves.

My experience is that flutophones are easier for an average class to play at the third or fourth grade level than a recorder because of the ease of getting D and C's, whereas on the recorder they're very hard. The low D and C are hard to get. I would, if I were the superintendent, insist that all third graders from Christmas on, have a flutophone. They would probably do that

until fourth grade Christmas. Then I would take out the kids who really look as though they are going to be the instrument players and put them on a recorder for about a year, and then onto a regular instrument. A flutophone is easier for the average or below average child to get started on. They sound horrid at first. But I can make a flutophone sound very sweet and so could they after awhile. A recorder is nicer, but it's harder. That's a method in England and Ireland.

I was in Ireland in October and every child in the elementary primary school has lessons on a recorder. Specialists come, hired by the government for teaching the recorder. And I'm all for that. They also have Irish dance lessons by specialists that the government sends. They're government schools.

I think we don't have enough dancing in our elementary schools. I'm sure of that. There ought to be more dancing as a release and there ought to be little break times. Classroom teachers ought to be made to give their primary classes little stand up times--marching around times, respond to a five minute record time, little breaks. If my child or grandchild has to sit six hours in a chair and do just dogged work and never get a break, I'm going to be yelling. I'm going to be down there yelling. I don't think it's right. We let kindergarten kids move around many times. When they come into first grade, they have to sit and work. There's no relaxed movement some days at all, I'm afraid.

CH: If we get this dance in our elementary program, who would be responsible for teaching the dance?

BH: A dance specialist.

END OF INTERVIEW