

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Women's Herstory Project

Personal Experiences

O. H. 704

MARY HULME

Interviewed

by

Danna Bozick

on

August 10, 1987

YOUNGTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: MARY HULME

INTERVIEWER: Danna Bozick

SUBJECT: mail carrier, teacher, mother, work history,  
women and work, childcare

DATE: August 10, 1987

B: This is an interview with Mary Hulme on Women's Herstory for the Women's Resource Center in conjunction with the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, by Danna Bozick. This interview is being conducted at 1520 Ohio Avenue on August 10, 1987 at approximately 6:45 p.m.

I want to ask you some questions about how work relates to your life. What were some of the first kinds of jobs that you had? Do you remember the first type of work that you did?

H: Yes, the first job I had was as a waitress at Howard Johnson's on Market Street. My second job was as a page at the public library. Then I went back to Howard Johnson's for the Summer. I went to Ohio State and worked at the luncheon counter at the Ohio Union there. I graduated as a high school teacher in French and Spanish. I started working in an Italian restaurant in Columbus. I moved to Boston and worked at a famous restaurant there for a year. I went back to Youngstown and worked at Alberini's as a waitress. I had a thirteen year waitressing period in my life. The same time I was working as a waitress, I was substituting in the city schools. They had added my name on the list to carry mail. The most important link of all is that the way I got through college in the Summers was I was a letter carrier.

B: Did you do that on the program where they hired students?

H: Yes.

B: Did you like it?

- H: Yes, I did like it. I was always attracted to the aspect of working outside. It was the getting paid to exercise type of job. Well, probably most of all, what attracts me to my job is that it is like the Sesame Street song "A Mailman is a Person in Your Neighborhood, a Person That You See Each Day." I think that it is one of the last vestiges of personal service we have in this country. It is the one person that comes to your house every day. It is really an old-fashioned form of communication that has withstood the changes that technology has made in our lives. I see a lot of romance to it in that way.
- B: Do you think that your parents see it that way too?
- H: Yes, I do. You are like the neighborhood bartender, so to speak, if you care to be and if you choose to be. I do. I always call myself a snoopy mailman because I always read all of the postcards and when I had them to the people, I say, "Who is this? Why are they in China? That is interesting what they said." They always laugh and nobody has been offended by it yet. In fact, I was reading a postcard one day to someone that said, "Well, I am sure some pimply-faced such-and-such postal worker is probably reading this postcard right now." I wrote on the postcard--Great postcard, your mailman. I think people do, although as in all things in life there is the yin and the yang of that. The postal service has a horrible reputation in this country. It is kind of like the national joke. The people use the postal service as a scapegoat for forgetting birthday cards and not paying bills on time and all sorts of things like that. It must have gotten lost in the postal service. You know the postal service. It is late because you know the postal service. It is a yin and yang thing. When it comes right down to it though, people love their mail. It brings them news that they can get in no other way. People love their mailman too.
- B: Do you get evidence of that?
- H: Do I get evidence of the fact that they like mailmen?
- B: Yes. Do you get good feedback?
- H: It is different. I see it change every year. It used to be that there were more people outside and there would be more interaction with the public. I call my route my research laboratory. I get more material in the Summer and on Saturdays than I do during the week. That is the result of women working. Because women are working there is not that personal relationship with the home as there used to be because there is no one home during many instances. Of course, there are still a lot of people home, but there are less and less.
- B: You said you were a waitress thirteen years before you got the postal job.

H: Yes.

B: How long during that time were you waiting for the postal job?

H: I waited for three years. I took the test along with seven thousand other people. I remember thinking to myself when I sat down to take it--This means in some ways the rest of your life; do as well as you can. I was substituting in the daytime and I was waiting tables at night. I was tired. I was in a very unhappy marriage. I was looking for some relief. This job was that for me.

B: So when you got it, it was . . .

H: It was good news.

B: How did you find substituting?

H: I was kind of combination substitute teacher and real teacher because what would happen was I would start the year substituting and then a teacher somewhere would get pregnant or quit. I would move in. For four years I had both experiences. I found it wonderful. As a matter of fact, I deliver mail to the superintendent of the schools who whenever he sees me says, "Mary, you are underemployed. I am getting your file back in active. I am just going to keep on working on you until we get you back in the school system. We need you in the school system." I just talked to him Saturday. As I was crossing the lawn thinking about what I would talk to you about he was riding by on his bike and he said, "How are you?" I said, "Well, it is a coincidence because just as you were riding by on your bike I was thinking to myself what part of my life teaching was and how sometimes I forget that that is what I am and I am a teacher and how I integrated that into my job as a mail carrier." He is the one that always tells me, "You are wasting yourself." I think to myself--Well, in many ways I am, but in the way that I am not is I have taken my desire to teach and because I am such an aware person I can end up teaching in many ways instead of how I did it in the classroom. For instance, I'll walk up on a porch and there will be a baby there. It would have a bad rash and it would be crying. I'll say to the mother, "What is the matter?" "He is having problems with the formula. He is always spitting up." I can see that. "Did you ever consider goat's milk?" I have done this many times with babies. I have encouraged them to go down to the health store and get some goat's milk. I tell them the formula to make it. A little lactose and goat's milk in the water. They have done it. I will go back a couple of weeks later and they would be singing high praises. I have a great interest in health and nutrition. I encourage older people to take a little walk every day. I really interact . . .

B: It sounds like you really like the contact with people.

H: Yes, I do. I get a lot back from it too.

B: Why do you work?

H: I work to support myself and my daughter. I work because it is a place for me to go every day and be alive and get out of my rooms.

B: It sounds like you sort of fell into it by having the experience when you were in college, but in some ways it sounds like you made a choice away from teaching.

H: I did. I found that teaching at that point of my life, maybe not now, at that point of my life I was very drained because I was working full-time at night. I could never get a steady job. I would always have to keep the waitress job to keep going. I was working all day and all night and even further than that because I was a dedicated teacher. I was up until all hours of the night. That was always on my mind. My last job was at Rayen High School where I taught French I, French II, French III, French IV, English II, and English III. Every time the bell rang, it was a whole new show. My mind was stressed to the max. I was in a very unhappy marriage. Everything was at the limit. That was one direction I saw that I could go in and ease the burden. It did do that for me.

B: As far as taking tests and all of that, you had good background . . .

H: The test is not a matter at all of intelligence. It tests exactly what the job requires, that is speed and accuracy skills.

B: Was there any time in there when you weren't working since you started?

H: When I had a child. That was two years into my job as a mailman I took three months off.

B: Were you pregnant during the time that you were carrying mail?

H: Yes.

B: How was that?

H: It was a very unusual experience. I don't think it had ever been seen in Youngstown. I remember one day I went to get gas in my jeep and I was very physically pregnant. I had to wear a man's mailman shirt. I had to take a pair of mailman's pants and take scissors and cut them up. I had to cut a half circle out and paste the piece of material on it.

It was so funny the day I did it. I remember the man who owned the gasoline station saying to his attendant, "What is wrong with that girl's husband? He lets her do this." At that point in my life there really was no husband. It was not a matter of that at all. I carried mail until about three weeks before she was born. It was inninety degree heat. I remember going to McDonald's on Mahoning Avenue so many times every day. It got to the point that when they would see my jeep come in, they would fill up three of the biggest glasses they had with water and they would be sitting there. I would go and get them. I would drink them all. I would go out and work some more and come back. That is how I kept going. It was very hard because I was on my feet five hours a day carrying that bag up and down steps. It was ninety degrees. I had some physical results from that, but I was able to do it.

B: You had one sort of negative reaction. Did you have other positive reactions?

H: No, I don't remember any positive reactions. I remember my boss saying the day I told him, "You know that we will expect you to take a leave of absence as soon as you start to show." I remember telling him, "You expected wrong. I will be here until the last day that I can be here."

B: Did you feel pressured to . . .

H: Yes, in the beginning. They had never dealt with this before. When I started carrying mail in Youngstown as a woman, there had been a few other women, but it was here and there. I was one of the first of the real influx of women in the postal service. That was seven years ago.

B: Have you felt any other sorts of discrimination along the way that really stand out because you were a woman?

H: I feel it everyday. I feel it because I work in a largely male work force. It is something that I deal with on a daily basis. It is a hard thing to do. You get the remarks all the time. In these days, you get a lot of unspoken resentment. Before it was more verbalized than it is now.

B: Do you think that ties up to the economic situation in the valley?

H: Yes. It is just assumed by some women and men. It is from women too. I have women say that to me too--You are taking a job away from a man. They just assume that you have a husband at home and this is a supplementary thing. You are using it to buy Corvettes and nice clothes.

B: Did you ever turn to the benefits?

- H: No. I used up all of my sick leave and all of my vacation time.
- B: Can you get benefits?
- H: No. I had to use up my accumulated sick leave. The policy has not changed. If I had a child today, I would still have to use up all of my sick leave. If you mean would they let me stay a little time extra without pay, yes, they did.
- B: You didn't get time off with pay?
- H: No.
- B: Did you have medical coverage?
- H: Yes.
- B: What kind of arrangements do you have for your child while you work?
- H: I am very fortunate. Because of the neighborhood that I live in, my daughter is qualified to attend Mill Creek Community Child Care Center. As far as I am concerned, it is one of the foremost child care centers in the country. It is the biggest blessing in my life.
- B: Is that on Glenwood?
- H: Yes.
- B: You are satisfied how that works out for you?
- H: I think the word would be grateful.
- B: It is a real worry to make sure that they are well taken care of.
- H: Day care is my personal crusade. One of my present goals in life is to institute the first government-sponsored child care center. That is my present goal. I am just beginning to feel it out. All of the feedback I get is that I am completely crazy. I am going to keep working at it. This pompous attitude of our government that we should be caring for ourselves. . . Dependable institutionalized care for our children would make our lives so much better, which would make the whole planet better, that is one thing that we never do. We leave that burden to parents and individuals. We all suffer from it.
- B: What happens when Kelsey is ill?

- H: Kelsey is never ill. She is so fortunate. If she is, my mother lives two blocks from here and my family and friends. Debbie Pesce has received my daughter at her door without even a phone call ahead of time many times.
- B: So you are lucky to have support.
- H: I sure am.
- B: Do you think that it makes a really big difference in being able to be there every day on the job?
- H: No question. I see what other people go through. In fact, one of the most interesting experiences I have ever had was I am one of the two letter carriers in Youngstown that trains new employees. Through the last couple of years, I have seen a veritable army of young men enter the postal service. I am an interviewer by nature. When we walk down the street all day and when we go to lunch I ask them questions, "Are you married? Do you have children?" I think the biggest thing that affected me this year was that in every instance the men that I trained, they were thankful for getting this job because they were subsisting on low-wage jobs. The first thing and the most emphatic message that kept coming across from everyone of them was, and most of them had been unemployed, "I am concerned now with how my children will be cared for." I could go on and on about the poignant stories they tell me about interviewing and the scores of people that find someone that they can rely on so they could be at this job every day. They knew that in the beginning stages of getting this job, everything depends upon being there every day and working their head off. As a basic sub in the postal service I would link it to basic training in the Marines. If you can't cut the mustard, you are out the door. There is no mercy. They know that there are a million people waiting out there and they are going to get the hardest workers they can. They do. That is the rap I give these new employees. I prepare them for the worst. I just saw this movie "Full Metal Jacket". The sterling performance in it is the drill sergeant. All I could think of when I was watching was that is what I do to these young people when they are hired. I read an interview with the man who played the drill sergeant today. Many people are shocked because this is their first real experience of what basic training is. I suppose most women are because we never have experienced anything like this. The quote today in People magazine had a mailman saying, "I want to apologize to all you ladies and all you mothers out there in this country, but the fact of the matter is I had either two choices: I could be easy on your sons and they could come back in a bag in two days or I could teach them how they might be able to stay alive." I am not justifying that approach towards training, but it is certainly something to think about.



B: How about other adjustments that you had to make to make work possible?

H: My job is physically exhausting. I have to be at work at seven o'clock in the morning. I have to be prepared to case mail for two or three hours and then walk the rest of the day and carry up to thirty pounds. I have to walk up and down steps all day. There is all kinds of weather. My job is designed for a man to do it. What I carry on my shoulders is what has been designed for a man to do. I think that it takes a little bit more out of me in some ways physically than it does men, although they all say that they are exhausted at night too. I have to get my sleep. I come home as all women and their families do to another job. I laugh at work when the guys at work say that their wives have dinner on the table for them when they come home. I notice that their shirts are always nicely ironed and their pants. They have their little lunchboxes. This is a joke in the post office. I get to work every day one minute, two minutes late every day of my life. They are always saying, "Why don't you just get out five minutes early?" It just doesn't matter when I get up as I am going out the door I can count on it five days a week, something happens and I can't get to work on time whether it is I forgot her bracelet that she has to wear that day or she will just die. Or I get to my mother's who puts her on the bus and gets her dressed every day and I forgot her shoes. I swear I am not exaggerating. I don't know how this can be true, but five days a week something happens. My daughter goes to visit her father for six weeks in the Summer. When she is not here, I have not been late one day. It is proven. It seems to work like that.

B: Does a bus pick her up?

H: A bus picks her up over at my mother's in the morning and drops her off here at night.

B: So you don't have to get her all the way down there at least in the evening?

H: I am living in a child care fantasy. I know it.

B: I didn't realize that they had such a wonderful service.

H: It is all due to one woman, Sister Jerome. It was her vision and it is her character that has made this dream come true. I think it has a real impact on hundreds of children's and families' lives.

B: So you find that you really have to adjust? You can't stay up late?

- H: No. It is a joke with my friends because no matter where I am, and especially in the Winter, I find the Winter really exhausting, at a certain time at night I am asleep whether I am at the movies or at a party or in a car. I notice that people plan their time with me early. If they don't I am just a sleeping body there. That could also just be me. I am a morning person.
- B: It doesn't sound like you are interested in changing jobs because of restrictions.
- H: No. I am very fortunateto have my job. I thank the spirits every day for it. It has been a real stabilizing force in my life. I have my mornings when the first thought I have when I open my eyes is all the things that I am going to have to do before I can get back in that bed that night. It has its grime aspect like any job does and its repetitive aspect like any job does. I have moments when I just think I am going to scream because I am so bored with it and that has a lot to do with the interactions going on with the people I work with, whether it is good or bad, which is the same with any job. That is how we get through everything. It is either with each other or without each other. That is what the work-place is; it is the interaction of people there. Most jobs, no matter how exciting, are repetitive at their very base.
- B: How do your friends and family respond to you being a letter carrier?
- H: That is an interesting question. My parents think I have settled for a good paying job and completely walked away from my potential. Although, my father has a great pride in the postal service and always brags about it. I don't think my friends have ever said much to me about it. They laugh at all my stories. Men that I go out with, I get the same thing. I am always getting the "you're settling" routine. "You are settling because it is well paying. You walked away from your potential," said most of the men I've seen.
- B: But I hear from you real satisfaction.
- H: Yes. I have entered a stage in my life where I know that I could have done anything I wanted to do. This is what I ended up doing for a lot of reasons. There is a lot of good in it. I am trying in these days of my life to be more affirming about everything that I can. I don't think there is any answer to whether I made the right decision or did I make the wrong decision. It is more--this is what has happened and I am going to make the most of it if I can.
- B: Could you see yourself doing something else? Do you have some other dream?

H: When I was in college, all of my literature professors used to tell me, "You will be a writer." I used to think--Sure I will be a writer. I read so much that I have never considered writing because I am always so impressed with everything I read. So why would I ever try to do that? I had one friend who always said to me, "You will start writing some day." I have written little things here and there. I always write retirement speeches for the men I work with. I spend a lot of time on them. If I am getting ready for a retirement speech I might spend five days in a row all day long doing nothing but brainstorming while I am walking around remembering this person's life, and how it is affecting me, and how I have watched them through the years. I carry a little piece of paper with me. I take it out all day long every time I get an idea so I won't forget it. I have done that. I consider this writing. I have written remarks at weddings and family occasions. I have written some eulogies for family members who have died. Just this week I wrote two pieces. That was the first writing I have ever done.

B: Were they stories?

H: One was "A Letter To My Unborn Son." It is a reflection on my conviction that the parents of this world, and especially the mothers, have to give more attention on how they raise their sons. It is an imaginary letter to a son. I added how I would want to affect his experience in life. The other one was called "Watching Mr. Tebay Die Towards Another Definition of Love." It is about my neighbor dying of Alzheimer's disease and watching his wife care for him.

B: Are you thinking of trying to publish the pieces?

H: I have always said that my one goal in life is to get an article published in Ms. magazine. I said that to a man I had been dating recently. He said, "Well, Mary, have you sent anything in to them? Do you think that they are going to come to your door and ask you for them?" When he said that, I said, "Thanks for the support." I still feel that way. He gave me no support. It is ironic that he was the person not directly, but indirectly, that because of knowing him, I was possessed to write this "Letter To My Unborn Son," so that men in the future might not treat other women like he treated me.

B: Are you going to send it in?

H: I read it to all of my mailman friends at work. The one said to me, "That sounds like 'My Turn' in Newsweek." I will try both. I have to flush it out a little bit more and work on it. My second one about the man with Alzheimer's disease is the best one I have ever written. I don't know how to do

this. I just wrote them this week. I can't believe I did it. I have been blocked all of my life. I am pretty excited about it.

B: That is great. I hope something comes of it.

H: If nothing even comes to it, the few people that I have read them to have given me real positive feedback.

B: Once you find out or not if they are going to be published maybe you would want to give us a release to print them in the Women's Center Newsletter.

H: I have read that. I think you did a great job on that. I do need a forum to see if it is worthwhile to other people. As in all of our thoughts, we are limited by our own perception of it. That is really why I have been reading it to people. I always seek out people who give me a hard time about my attitude and see what they say to me. It has been an interesting week.

B: While we are talking, you are folding laundry. How does that work in with working, your responsibilities at home?

H: Well Danna, look around here and you will have your answer. I ran the sweeper before you came. I took the cover off the couch. I was not going to hide the laundry. I do not want to give you a false impression of the fact that there is a lot of dust in this house. For me, housekeeping is more of a function of how I feel about my life. If I feel good about my life, I am keeping my house nice. It doesn't have that much to do with work. I almost enjoy housework, but if I am depressed, I don't do it. That is separate from work. On the other hand, if I didn't work I would have more time for housework.

B: Have you found tricks and ways to . . .

H: I read all of those articles, but I don't think that I do any of those things. One thing that I started doing was getting my daughter's clothes ready at night. I think I did that a couple of times. That was definitely a good idea. I ought to do that more often so that in the morning everything is ready to go. Am I one of those people who I know exists out there--They have the lunches ready and the clothes all ready? No. My ironing board has been known to be up in my living room for weeks at a time.

B: Did you come from a family of workers?

H: Yes, very hard workers. My mother was a nurse. My father is a fund raiser. I am the oldest in the family. My brother, Eddie, sells audio-video equipment. I have four other brothers

and sisters. My other sister is a banker in Philadelphia.

B: You said your mother was a nurse. Did she work when you were young?

H: Yes, she did. She was home for our growing up years. As a matter of fact, she just quit a job. She is home this Summer. I was thinking to myself the other day as I was carrying mail--It is almost comforting to know that she is home now during the days. I can call her at any time and she is there. That must have been the feeling that I had as a child, that she would always be there when we were coming home from school or if we got sick at school or fell down or whatever. She was always there. This is the first time in many years that she is sitting on the porch all Summer.

B: Do you think that was important to you that she was there?

H: Yes, I think it was. I just read Bruno Bettelheim the other day. The book is called A Good Parent. He said that all of his years in psychotherapy, psychoanalysis, and all of the people who have passed through his doors, he has heard endless litanies from parents of their guilt about working and the effect on their children. He has never had a child comment on the fact that his parents working had a negative effect on him. I thought that that was a pretty powerful thought. I think that it is probably true. As humans, we are experts at creating reasons to feel guilt instead of taking our lives as they are and making the most of them and recognizing that there is as much good as bad that comes from us working and maybe more so.

B: How does Kelsey seem to cope with the type of schedule?

H: There would be an example of a child who has been, in a sense, working since she was two months old. She has been wrested from her bed in ten degree below weather and ninety degree Summer mornings and sent on her way from the time she was an infant. How has she responded to it? I would say almost ninety percent of the time she never complains. She just accepts it as the way her life is. The only time I have problems is when she comes back from a period when she is not in a routine when she goes to visit her father, or vacations. She is at the age now where she knows that not every kid has to get up and go to school every day as we call it. She is starting to play that for all it is worth.

B: How old is she?

H: She is going to be six in October. She is trying to figure out ways to get out of it now.

B: Is she in school?

H: She goes to this day care center all Summer long. We call it school. She will be in kindergarten this Fall.

B: Is it half-day?

H: No, it is a whole day.

B: She will be able to go there too?

H: She will go to kindergarten, then she will have to go to a day care center after kindergarten.

B: Do they transport them?

H: It is right next door. I am very fortunate.

B: You are in a good situation.

H: My costs will increase noticeably for child care because I have gotten a big break. Where she goes now is a federally funded place, although I pay. Other children's families do not pay. I pay, but I pay much less than I would if I was sending her to a private one.

B: I would like to know more about what you do.

H: I have some mailman stories. I thought about doing my favorite mailman stories. One centers around dogs, which are a perennial plague to the mailman. I have always been afraid of dogs. That has been a problem for me and still is to this day. I am afraid of dogs. I don't have the right instincts to deal with them. I have a lot of favorite mailman dog stories. The only dog that I have ever sprayed was the one that was just coming over to sniff me and say hello. Its tail was wagging. I sprayed him. I will never forget it. My only dog bite was by this little, tiny, white, yappy thing that got me on the ankle.

A couple of weeks ago was my favorite dog story. There is a dog on Carlotta that is a vicious German hepherd. He is chained to the garage with the biggest, thickest chain I ever saw, which is alert number one. There is a reason why these people have this dog chained. Stay away from this dog. As soon as I approach that house every day I am like a soldier in combat looking over my shoulder. Dogs that are chained every day have times some way or another that they get loose. This dog would bound at me every time I delivered mail. My heartbeat would go up. I always would have my hand right on the mace when I went by that house. A couple of weeks ago I was cutting across the lawn to this house. I saw a German shepherd in the bushes three feet from me. Every time I am confronted by a dog, I do the same thing. I throw the mail all over the yard and I start screaming. That is my immediate

reaction. I never hold onto the mail, I throw it. After whatever occurs occurs, I am always shaking from head to toe. I have to get down and put all of these hundreds of pieces of mail back in order while the people who own the dog are outside watching me do it. They are talking to me. My voice is quivering. I can't talk. I can hardly get the mail. This day I see the German shepherd in the bushes. I throw the mail; I start screaming, and I got my mace. It stands up and starts hobbling out. Here it is the old German shepherd across the street. The vicious one is still tied where it always is. There was this whole crew of men putting aluminum siding on a house five doors away. They were laughing their heads off. I am embarrassed to death because there I was quivering.

I would just like to tell you one day that I had which was coincidentally this last Saturday, which was the quintessential mailman day. It was a beautiful day. It wasn't too hot. It was in the summer. I started off on Broadway, that would be Brier Hill in Youngstown. That was the street that my father was born on. Recently, I was working there. I struck up an acquaintanceship with the woman who lived there. I was always telling her that that was the house that my dad was born and raised in. She said to me, "Mary, we are moving. They bought the house and they are going to tear it down." I thought to myself--I have to take my dad and my aunt to see this house. She said, "Sure, bring them over any time." I did do that. It was quite an experience to walk in with my dad and my aunt and see the home that they lived in all of those years, which they had not been in for forty years. I am walking down Broadway. I am thinking to myself about that day, the thought that I would not have even known that that house was going to be torn down unless I was a mailman. It has since been desecrated after the people left. This was the house that my grandparents paid four thousand dollars to have built. Every little detail they had planned. There it was in ruins. I rounded the corner and went to put mail at 1303 Covington which is right on the corner of Broadway. A woman said, "You are Mrs. Hulmes' granddaughter, aren't you?" I have never been called Mrs. Hulmes' granddaughter because Mrs. Hulme, my grandmother, died before I was born. I never knew her. This woman proceeded to tell me that she used to sit on the porch and talk to my grandmother. She proceeded to describe her to me as a human dimension. She had always been described in stern, unfeeling, unloving type terms. She liked my grandmother. They lived next to a store. She was a young mother then. Whenever she would go to the store, she would sit on the porch and talk to my grandmother. When my grandfather was dying of heart disease, she said she would go over there and help my grandmother turn him over in his bed. I proceeded on down Broadway. I moved up on Oxford. I went down the street and I saw Ella Carr, 716 Oxford. She is a woman that I have watched over the years. She has gone through several

nervous breakdowns. She is a single parent. I have been noticing that the last couple of years she seemed okay every time I saw her. Every time I saw her and she was okay I felt good. She has been able to go to a good place, at least not such a chaotic place. I noticed that I was delivering all of these U.S. Steel papers. I was thinking to myself--Well, these neighborhoods have maintained well. They are in better shape than my neighborhood. I am delivering all of these U.S. Steel papers. I thought--that is because in all of these neighborhoods, the majority of the people that live here are retired steelworkers. They are getting a pension check every month that I bring to them. They are in a good financial place. I kept walking and I went down the street; I was on Fairmont now. Everybody said I was early today; I was. My problem with being a mailman is I love to read. It is like an alcoholic working in a bar. My boss said that I have probably read more on the job than anyone in the history of the postal service, which is without a doubt true because of the standard lines to me, "Mary, this isn't a library." In fact, one man at work who always wants to take me out said to me, "Mary, if you just go out with me one time, I will buy you a year's subscription to U.S.A. Today." He sees me reading that. I will get out to the route and there would be all of these magazines.

B: We were just going to finish your typical day.

H: That moment of truth that I face every morning when I am in the jeep and all of those magazines are one foot away from me, it is either just read one or two articles to face the day. That is what I always say to myself--This will get you ready for the day or just get up, get out, and get going. What I have been trying to do recently is get up, get out, and start delivering the mail because I am just seduced by these magazines. On the other hand, the days when I do read it, it does set the tone for that street. It gives me something to think about. I went up to Oxford and I happened to see Ella Carr, 716 Oxford. She is a woman who has had a hard time over the years. I have watched her go through several nervous breakdowns raising her daughter. I had very poignant conversations with her over the years. I noticed that in the last couple of years she seemed to be at a good place with herself. That is a real element of being a letter carrier. I call myself the mailman, but I call myself a letter carrier also. There is a great continuity in lives; that is something that comes across over the years. You watch children being born and go to school and graduate from high school. You watch marriages go through the stages. You watch life go by. You are in a unique position to intersect with lives if you choose to do so.

I went up to Fairmont. A lot of people were out on their porches. I noticed that the Anderson's were painting their



house. I noticed all week the colors they chose. I had never seen a combination like that. That is one thing that I like to notice. I make a study of house colors. It depends what is going on at my house at that time. If there is a hole in my roof, I look at roofs. If my spouting is falling down, I look at spouting. If I am painting my house, I study house colors. They picked the color that the man told me was beechnut and this mauve trim. It was very unusual. I have never seen anything like it. It had such a soothing effect. I was very taken by it. It was Saturday. I was going up the street and going across the lawn. I saw that they were painting all of the bricks in front of the house the color fire-engine red. All of the flags went off in my mind. I said to myself, "Oh no, not fire-engine red on a serene house." The woman was painting the bricks. I said, mostly directing my comments to the man, "Why are you using that red paint?" He said, "I ran out of the brown." I said, "You can get more of it mixed up." He said, "Oh, no, we will just go ahead with this red." I said to him, "No, I think I have been sent here to change the color that you are painting the bricks." I got resistance from him while the woman who was doing the painting was just laughing her head off. Everybody in the neighborhood was listening. At that point I always go into my persuasive mode and use analogies. That would be my teacher mode also. I said, "Imagine you have nice brown pants, a nice pink shirt, and you put on bright red shoes. What is everybody going to think. No go, it does not work." He was looking at me with all kinds of resistance. The woman was laughing. I said, "All week I have really enjoyed the feeling that I get from the colors that you have chosen. It is true that unless the exterior of your home is calm, the interior . . . This is important. This is important to the future of your family and your marriage. You have to stop painting those bricks fire-engine red." He was still resisting. The woman was doubling over laughing. I was getting nowhere with him. I said, "I am not leaving until you give me the can of paint." She was laughing some more. He said, "No, no, no." I said to him, "Okay the bottom line is no more mail on Fairmont because it will just upset me too much to deliver mail at your house looking like this." He did what I least expected him to do. He looked at me and he said, "You know, you are right. It really does not look too good." I forgot to say that right in the middle of my arguments, I turned to everybody and said, "Come on everybody, what do you think of these red bricks?" Everybody started laughing. It kind of hearkened back to the old days in the Summer. Everyone gathered around the corner. There was a neighborhood feeling there with us all. I will never forget it.

B: It sounds like you helped to tie it together.

H: Yes. I had fun. Those are the moments that you always remember. When he said it, I started to laugh. When I retold

the story later that day to a friend of mine, he said, "What will be most interesting to see is on Monday what color they are." I didn't do that. I forgot. I was going to do it on my way home.

My last little story is, I was on Lora. I heard a woman across the street saying, "Well, Jerry, we didn't get any mail today. The mailman didn't bring us any mail again. I guess she does not like us today. I am sure that we will get some mail another day." I turned around. There was Mrs. Jones holding a tiny baby. I said, "My heavens Mrs. Jones, is that your grandson?" She said, "No, it should be, but it is my son." Without even thinking, I blurted out, "Well, how old are you?" She said, "I am forty-five." I said, "What happened?" She said, "You tell me what happened. I went to four doctors. I just couldn't believe it." She had been separated for a year. She had her daughter twenty-eight years ago. She tried to get pregnant for ten years. She never did. I said to her, "What is the reaction from your friends?" She said, "They have given him everything that he needs." I said, "That is nice." She said, "Yes, they are glad that it is not them." I said, "What about your daughter?" She said, "She is telling everybody, 'My mom had her own grandbaby.'" I said, "How about for you?" She said, "Mary, it is really hard. I would normally be out at garage sales or to breakfast. I love him with all of my heart and soul, but this is really hard." I tried to remember other instances that I knew of women having children when they were older. I remember meeting women similar to that while delivering mail. They all said much later when their children were all grown up, "That was the best thing that ever happened to them." I did tell her that. She said, "I hope you are right."

In closing, last week I talked again with Mrs. Battisti. She lives on 1921 Guadalupe. I have talked to her a few times. She is in very poor health. I always encourage her to get out a little bit every day. She is always in her home. She never goes anywhere. I say, "Just maybe five minutes up and down the street right in front of your house with your cane. I think the air will do you well." I know that she takes twenty-eight pills a day. I can tell when I talk to her about it that she does consider it. Every time I see her, I say, "Have you started doing your walking?" She said, "No." That day she told me the story of her marriage. She was married for sixty-three years to an immigrant from Italy who was a tailor. They never had any children. She told me about the day he died in her arms. I commented on the flowers in front of her house. She said, "I plant those every year in memory of my husband. He had been dead for three years. They were beautiful when he planted them. They are not now." I said, "Sure they are. How do you live with this terrible loss?" She proceeded to tell me how much she misses him and that is when she told me about the day he died. We were talking back and forth. I shared a little bit what was happening in my life at the time

with her. I will never forget the last thing that she said. This was at the beginning of the day. If I get into my prolonged conversations at that point I pay. She looked at me and said, "Thank you so much for stopping." I think that the word stuck in my mind because that is always the choice that you have in any conversation with anyone. You can stop everything that is going on and have it or not. I usually choose to have it. It is always worth it.

END OF INTERVIEW