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INTERVIEW WITH MARY CURRAN (MARY LOUISE WORTMAN)

BY R. FRANKLIN THOMPSON

March 13, 1979

T: Were you born here in Tacoma, Mary?

Mary: No, I was born in Olympia and came up to live with my aunt who taught at Stadium at that time, and I walked to school from her apartment down at 3rd and G.

T: Did you graduate from Olympia or from Stadium?

Mary: From Olympia High.

T: What year did you come to the College of Puget Sound?

Mary: 1932.

T: And about how many students were here then?

Mary: We had close to 600, I believe.

T: What did you major in?

Mary: I majored in Business Administration/Economics and minored in Psychology.

T: You took work, then, with Charles Battin.

Mary: What a special friend! He made all the difference.

T: Tell me about Charles Battin.

Mary: He was unique in his ability to involve the students and we became friends in my freshman year. About my sophomore year, he realized that even with my aunt's help, I was going to need more, and in those days there were WPA grants and opportunities to work for professors so I probably graded senior papers for Charles Battin that I didn't have any business grading.

T: He was certainly one of the outstanding personalities that we've had through the years. You know, he got a new car every year and he took the debate squad
in that car all over the United States. I always wondered how he could do that.

After he died, when his brother from Kansas was here, he talked to me after the funeral and I told him how much we appreciated Dr. Battin and said, "Would you like to establish some kind of memorial for him here?" He said, "Doctor, I think you should know that for years I have been buying his cars and subsidizing his trips all over the United States." He was a Kansas farmer and he had been sending Charles enough money for his car and contributing to his programs and I think that was very fine.

Mary: I hadn't heard that story. That's a good one.

T: You majored in Psychology. Was Professor Sinclair here at that time?

Mary: Yes, I've forgotten the names of his sons, but I think they were named Robert and Lewis and students talked about whether to take "Robert and Lewis 21." That was because he always used them for examples.

T: In his earlier days, when you were a student, was he a pretty good professor?

Mary: I thought he was.

T: I kept getting an awful lot of repercussions about his work when I came because they said he took the psychological tests of the freshman class and put it along side their names and if you got a certain psychological grade, you couldn't get above it. Then the students came in and said that he hadn't really corrected a final exam in years; he just took a look at the grade in the book and that's how he did it.

Mary: I never knew what he used for mine, but somehow I got A's.

T: He must have liked you. Tell me about Dr. Todd.
Mary: Well, in those days, of course, we had "social functions". We were not really allowed what we later termed the "normal evening dance" and there was no smoking allowed on campus. The faculty, administrators, and the students would sneak around behind some of those big fir trees to have a puff!

T: I take it that he was very much involved in the money raising end of it and not so much in the academic end of it.

Mary: I didn't see him, as the man that I knew you to be--involved with students. How you managed both, I'll never know. Well, I do know--you extended your hours, of course. I didn't know Dr. Todd that well. I knew Lyle Ford Drushell very well.

T: She was Dean of Women, wasn't she?

Mary: She was Dean of Women and she taught English.

T: She came to the campus about a month ago and wanted to talk to someone. Unfortunately, I didn't know she was coming. She said she had had her 90th birthday. She was a very attractive women.

Mary: And she still is.

T: She really is. She was very attractive and the students seemed to have a great regard and affection for her.

Mary: She was a member of the local Sorority that your Lucille and I joined, but I always felt Mrs. Drushell was careful not to show favoritism. I got called in many times when I was President for what I thought were rather minor "Theta" infractions.
T: Mrs. Carolyn Schneider was there then. Do you remember her?

Mary: Yes.

T: I just had word the other day that she fell and broke her hip. She's 92 or 93, but she was an institution all her own, wasn't she?

Mary: She was indeed.

T: I always thought the girls who were in Andeson Hall with Mrs. "S." as housemother must have had a very unique experience.

Mary: I'm sure. The one who would have meant as much to me probably as Dr. Battin was Anne Crapser, who later married a man named Pope and went to California to raise chickens, as I recall!

T: There's quite a bit of reference to her in Dr. Todd's history. I never knew her and never met her. Tell me about her.

Mary: She was like Lyle--she was special. I was not a strong foreign language student, much to my aunt's dismay for she taught Latin at Stadium; but she was an advisor to the freshman class along with Dr. Martin, the math professor, when I came to campus. And she was also the advisor of our local sorority. She was a very warm person. Of course she could be less "professional" in her meetings with students than Lyle Drushell.

T: She must have come after Miss Reneau. Did you know her?

Mary: I did not know her.

T: Well, I would call on her on many occasions because she owned quite a bit of property on the edge of the campus. She had 13 cats and she didn't air the place very much, and you went in with regret and came out with regret, but
she had the genuine love of the students. Dick Wasson and some of those say that she was a very great person and that she was very student oriented and Miss Crapser must've been that way, too. Can you tell me what kind of organizations there were? Were the sororities here?

Mary: There had been local sororities for some time: Alpha Beta Upsilon, Delta Alpha Gamma, Kappa Sigma Theta and Lambda Sigma Chi. It was about 1904-1910 I've been told, that the literary societies flourished. My own local, Kappa Sigma Theta, was the Boyer Literary Society originally.

T: I think that was named after a professor.

Mary: I've read that Professor Boyer was quite active on campus, taught English, and was a Vice President of the University. Theta, under the leadership of Mrs. Dix Rowland, was organized in about 1908. It was almost 1948 before there was much activity in regard to the possibility of nationals coming on our campus. You were involved with that, Dr. Thompson.

T: You were very much involved with that, too, weren't you?

Mary: Some of us were on a committee to get out the mailings, and we wanted to contact Kappa Sigma Thetas all over the nation to see if they would like the opportunity of affiliating. Of course we needed to petition Pi Beta Phi for a charter. Then in 1948 the chapter came on that Fall.

T: As I recall, we had some help from Cleon Soule.

Mary: He was the son of one of the twelve founders of Pi Beta Phi.

T: Did we have much trouble getting those nationals on campus?
Mary: I don't know that we did. "Theta" was the first to go national. It seemed to some of us that the national Kappa Alpha Theta would want Kappa Sigma Theta, the local. They didn't respond to our overtures right away so we then turned to a sorority that actually was founded before Kappa Alpha Theta--Pi Beta Phi.

T: You helped the others come on, too, didn't you?

Mary: Yes. Soon we added Alpha Phi, Chi Omega, and Delta Delta Delta. It was much later that we added Kappa Alpha Theta and Kappa Kappa Gamma.

It is of interest, I believe, to follow Richard Dale Smith's thinking and it certainly was borne out. He felt that the experience that two of the fraternities had had in growth (after they had gone national) was a good guide; that for a long time the local sororities had stayed approximately the same size and had not given opportunities for other young women to join. Because we were growing in enrollment as a University it was Dick's thought that a little competition would help. Also it would be an opportunity for nationals to become involved with their own alumni groups in Tacoma and the alums with our campus. The sororities grew then to close to 75 members. The Trustees felt that was a goodly number. We'd had probably 40 members at the most in the days when we had the locals.

T: You graduated from UPS in 1932?

Mary: I came in 1932 and finished in 1936.

T: What did you do right after that?

Mary: Well, I had been working for Dr. Battin at college. In those days, there were very few men who knew shorthand and Dr. Battin knew that I did, so he asked if I would teach shorthand. There were some good jobs down in the
Port area, in the waterfront, and in the mills, but the jobs were best suited for men, as it was hard to get to them. I had several young men students and as I recall they paid the school $20.00 a semester. I think I received $10.00 for each student. In my senior year when I knew that it didn't matter too much if I recieved grades a little lower than I had been used to, I went down to Radio KVI, at Dr. Battin's suggestion. There I became secretary to the president of KVI, a Mr. Doernbecker. You probably know of the Doernbecker Hospital in Portland. I became his secretary and also worked as a bookkeeper. Following me from our campus was Dorothy Ann Simpson Wilson. Another was Betty Kuhl Richards. Also, Morrie Webster. He was student body president at our school and went on to become one of the vice presidents at Columbia Broadcasting. I've lost track of Morrie now. Another was Norm Runions.

T: When did you come back to work at the University?

Mary: I was a member of the Alumni Board for awhile but I didn't come back until 1957.

T: Is that when you came back to work for Dick?

Mary: Yes, I came in, hoping to earn a little tuition money to take some college courses. At that time our oldest daughter was planning to enroll at UPS. I thought I might take courses so I could be cerified to teach but, although I took most of the courses, plus some graduate work I never did teach. I started work in Admissions first.
T: Tell me about Dick Smith, who was so wonderful.

Mary: Well, of course, it was my privilege to know Dick well. He made work for him real fun even though we worked hard. He was there early, so we got there early. He couldn't understand why anybody would have to arrive later than eight o'clock, even if we had been up late counseling or attending meetings. It was a fun job, working for Dick. He knew of course we were going to make mistakes, but he always said, "Try to clue me in a little ahead if you think you really goofed, so I will be prepared when Dr. Thompson calls me." He was and is quite a man.

T: He was one of the most wonderful people I've ever known. He was a good administrator and he had a lot of insight. When the history of the University is written, his influence should be written large. I would try out ideas on him and he would try out ideas on me and for 15 years we talked about that law school. He was very strong and very powerful about it.

Then, Mary, you started advising freshmen and other students and then you became Assistant Dean of Women.

Mary: Yes. About that time, Dr. Walker had an opportunity to go down to Cal Western at San Diego, I believe. We had brought in a woman from Mason Methodist Church the year before to work with Dr. Walker. That lady's name was Dessel Hamilton. I heard about her through Dorothy Greenwood whom I had hired to help us in the Admissions Office some two years before that. Dorothy knew Dessel very well and recommended that we hire her.

T: Dorothy is Don Shotwell's sister. Tell me about Dessel. She is really a very unusual person in the history of the University.
Mary: I always called her our "Poor Woman's Philosopher". She talked a different language often and it took me a long time before I could always be sure exactly what she had in mind. Some of our compatriots were never really sure!

T: Didn't she have an unusual hold over the student body?

Mary: She did, and sometimes I felt that if she would just ease up we could probably get rid of some sad and forlorn young lady I thought belonged at home. But Dessel wouldn't give up and that girl would get back into class and survive! And they still come back to see her and bring their children. She still sees and hears from them often.

T: She was much beloved. I always had a feeling that she knew exactly what was happening between the floors of the dormitory and the inner circles. . .

Mary: A very healthy grapevine!

T: She knew enough to counsel when they needed the counselling and let them alone when they needed to be let alone, and I think of all the poor ones that wanted their hands held and how she held them far into the night.

Mary: She was non-judgmental, and they knew it. They spotted her as being a real friend. She was not a phony.

T: Did she go to CPS?

Mary: Yes, she started there.

T: Do you remember what her maiden name was?

Mary: Davis. And Jack Hamilton, her husband, and Dorothy Shotwell Greenwood—they attended too, but not more than a year or two. I remember Dorothy telling about taking home economics courses from Mrs. Stevens.
T: Miss Stevens. There's a long story about her, but I'll not go into it now.
You helped in counselling and then you were Assistant Dean of Women and then
you were Dean of Women too, weren't you?

Mary: About a year after I had been called Director of Women's Affairs, Dick
said, "Why don't we just call it Dean of Women?" He asked your permission and
the Trustees gave it to you. I continued with Admissions all the time, and
became Associate Director, working first with Jim Nelson, who set such a
high standard in Admissions. I was delighted that Jim left my own University
Place School system, much to the dismay of the superintendent, and came to
the University. He made an outstanding Admissions Director.

T: He and Dick and you set up the standard and the quality of the enrollment
went up immeasurably. Of course, Jim went on to become.

Mary: A member of the National College Board. He actually worked more in
the College Scholarship Service area, I believe.

T: With the headquarters at 475 Park Avenue in New York.

T: If Jim had had a Ph.D. he could have gotten his own school.

Mary: I think Jim would have made a wonderful college president.

T: He made a very, very good administrator. Can you summarize the changes
in student attitudes that you saw while you were here?

Mary: I was thinking of that a little today and recalling that even in the '60s we
were still having dormitory hours. Finally, the Associated Women Students,
working on this with the Dean of Students' office, decided that seniors or women
over 21 might have extended dorm hours, then juniors. Finally arrangements
were made to issue keys to those young women. Of course all of us knew that the
little rock left in the door could always do the trick, if someone didn't have a key. We in Admissions had the thought to match roommates by finding what some of their needs were for roommates. One question we always found amusing was, "Do you smoke?" or "Do you mind living with a student who does?" Well, the answer depended on whether Mother was looking over the shoulder when the form was filled out. Often when we had given a room where there was to be "no smoking" the girls lit up immediately. Yes, those were interesting times. Of course, now the smoking has moved to different ingredients. We had, in the 1940's and 50's, I'm sure, many campus activities that were enjoyed because there just wasn't that much opportunity to go back home for weekends. Now some students fly to California for a weekend date. We had Campus Days and Clean Up Days. You remember how we got that campus slicked up and how the Spurs would feed the crews. That was a fun time! Spurs, at the time of our May Day celebration actually made long daisy chains and Seniors girls would come from their high schools to be in our Queen's Court. It didn't matter that we had a Homecoming and May Queen then. The word "Queen" now has sort of lost its thrill.

T: You had May queens; you had homecoming queens. Do you remember how Martha Pearl Jones used to trim the trees to use in those chains for the queens? Mary: I remember working on them. I also remember a time when Dr. Larry Heggerness, now a dentist, decided that it would be a wonderful opportunity, one May Day, when the sun was out and everybody was seated out in that plot between Jones and the Music Building, to scale the building on the outside. Were you on campus at that time?
T: I was. I remember him coming over the parapet end of the Music Building and swinging out, and I said to myself, "That kid's going to kill himself."

Well, the first thing I knew, he went hand-over-hand and came down and I said to him, "Larry, what are you doing?" He said, "Oh, Dr. "T.", I'm practicing rappelling." There was another time when he did it and Dr. Regester was there and Dr. Regester didn't know him, so he called the police and the police came and talked to Larry, in sort of a fatherly way, and suggested that he not do that unless he let somebody know about it first. Dr. Regester was not too amused.

Mary: When I first came, we had Dean Raymond Drury.

T: Do you remember him very well?

Mary: Not too well.

T: Was he an older man?

Mary: No, but I felt he was rather set in his ways. He had a list of degrees an arm long. I didn't find that he made much impact on my youthful thinging at the time, though. I was impressed, though, with Dr. Regester. I was also impressed with old Senator Davis. I didn't have a course from him, but he was a most wonderful man and helped many students financially.

T: Mary, we were going to talk about Dr. Williston. Do you remember him?

Mary: Dr. Williston was always striving to improve his class lectures, and he became interested in hearing what he actually was saying. At that time, of course, we had no tape recorders. So he called me in one time and said, "Mary, what I'd like to have you do is to take notes for about three weeks, three times a week, of my lectures in History--I've forgotten the course number."
That, I will tell you, was a challenge! His vocabulary was beautiful and I would sit there and try to take, in shorthand, every single word he uttered verbatim, and he was a speedy talker. Then I typed them up for him so he could know exactly what he said and how he had presented the topic. I thought this was rather unusual and yet typical of his desire to give his students his best.

T: Evidently, he really was serious about improving himself. He must have been a very interesting teacher. He went from here to the University of Washington, and I think he had a year's leave of absence in one of the Far Eastern countries and then returned to the University of Washington. He gave us his Far Eastern library after he retired. Did you know Shafer in sociology?

Mary: I only knew him because Marvin was the uncle of a friend of mine who came out from Nebraska. The coed was my "little sister" in my sorority—Clarke Oberlies. She later married Gregory Smith. She passed away this past fall. Clarke was one of five daughters and one of her sisters married Marvin Shafer. Clarke came out from Oberlin after a year or two there, and lived with the Shafers. She told a funny story about walking behind Marvin Shafer one morning heading to the campus and couldn't decide what was different about him. Then she noticed that Marvin had put on two hats—one on top of the other! She didn't ever manage to catch up with him to let him know.

He was a well liked professor.

T: Clarke Oberlies was named for her father, Clarke Oberlies, and when I was a student at Nebraska Wesleyan, Clarke Oberlies was the most popular speaker we had in chapel. He was assistant to the mayor in Lincoln, Nebraska.
Mary: Many, many times I would sit up there on the second level of Jones Chapel and Clarke would say, "Oh, dear, they needed a substitute again," for there was her Dad!

T: It's funny and interesting because he was telling exactly the same stories 20 years later that he had told 20 years before. But they went over and the students liked him. Tell me about chapel.

Mary: When I came in 1932, we had chapel five days a week. There was a tendency to have a rather religious type chapel one of those days and usually I think it turned out to be Friday. Then we became a little bit more lenient and decided Monday, Wednesday and Friday would be sufficient but we took roll. Later what really changed our requirement was that we had so many students we couldn't possibly get them all in Jones, and the students realized it.

T: That's right. I recall we had 620 seats, counting all those in the balcony, and we were having 800 or 900 students and anybody that sneezed would get an excuse from chapel. But I think chapel was an interesting experience because it allowed us to have one time when we could get all together, within reason, to make announcements.

Mary: It was a good communication tool. We hated to have it go by the wayside. It was the time when freshmen women and freshmen men were tapped for hororaries. They did it differently for the Knights of the Log but the freshmen women were tapped for Spurs in chapel. This was, of course, our sophomore service group, advised by Martha Pearl Jones.

T: It was really quite an experience. I remember how emotional some of those kids used to get when they got tapped. Now, I guess, they opt for it and apply for it.
Mary: They do apply now since it is an activity that requires quite a bit of time. Apparently some of the girls who were tapped didn't have the time to give in required service.

T: I remember Martha Pearl, the advisor, used to rule with an iron hand. You were up at six in the morning and you were dressed in your uniform and you did such and such and there was no changing.

Mary: They practiced their songs and their yells right over Dick Smith's Office and the stamps and yells they went through would send him out complaining.

T: We talked a little about Martha Pearl. She was a very diminutive person—about 4'5"; yet she had more spirit and more dynamic drive... I remember her mother was a typical Southern lady and they used to have us down to their house for dinner, and the students would come and sit on the floor, and she had Southern fried chicken and biscuits the size of softballs! They were so loyal and so dedicated to the University that it was sort of incredible.

Mary: Do you remember the time when Dick Smith and maybe you, too, felt it would be wise, since we knew that she was going to be turning over the reins of the Spurs, to have someone work with her that last year? I don't know if it was your job or Dick's to approach her on that; but, at any rate, she said, "Never." While she was in charge, she was in charge and nobody was going to work with her that last year.

T: I remember Dick and I talked about that many times. Then we had Toby.

Mary: Yes, Frances Tarr McDonell from our P.E. Dept.

T: Toby was one of her girls and she had helped some from time to time, but you are absolutely right. Martha didn't want to give it up.
Mary: Just you served as President of our university, she had been advisor for National Spurs longer than any other woman advisor in our country.

T: She had a national reputation, too. She took the girls to the national meetings and they always out-performed the rest of them, according to the reports I got.

Mary: Do you remember that we had, at one time, on our campus, both the National President of Spurs and the National President of Associated Women Students--the same year.

T: Do you remember who they were?

Mary: I remember that Kitty Zittel was the Spur and I've been trying to think of the cute Alpha Phi's name. I believe it was Sally Jo Vasicko. She was a go-getter.

T: We had a bunch of students that had a sincerity that carried them through in relationship to other students on other campuses, and a quality and depth because we were small enough to give that kind of value and yet large enough to give a very good education. I think that carried through on many occasions.

As you think of your years at the University of Puget Sound, would you like to summarize and say anything special?

Mary: I think perhaps what you said just now really does cap it--that we were small enough that a person who came as green as I did to that campus and very, very immature could have a chance to become acquainted with such a wonderful faculty with great minds inspiring people. Tears come to my eyes even now when I look at Dr. Battin's picture. He was always there to give you a little boost when you needed it, often it was financial. He asked me many times to work with his debate group and I became quite well acquainted with many of those debators. Of course, we had the chance to take leadership roles.
In my own sorority, I had the opportunity to be President in my senior year, and to be secretary of the student body. I remember that Dick Smith ran against Chuck Zittel and he was just nosed out by Chuck, who later became Tacoma's Chief of Police. We had an office on the lower floor of Jones, and we had sorority rooms on that floor, too. If we hurried real fast during intermission between classes we could get in a hand of bridge. In those days not--contract. It was strictly auction. But you're right--we could find an opportunity to take various leadership roles and establish friends. I still have those friends today. Recently I had a reunion of some of those young women I started to school with. One came from Boston, one flew up from San Francisco, and one from Boise and we sat looking at the old Annuals in tears and laughter.

T: All through it, there was a happy time--a kind of a sense of fun in the business of living and developing.

Mary: One other thing I would like to add was the wonderful opportunity I had to finalize my working career at UPS by moving into a totally different area from student activities and admissions work into Personnel. Dick Smith had asked me to handle Personnel concerns in Admissions and in the Dean of Students office, but I had not, of course, had any opportunity to become involved with the campus as a whole. Of course, the Federal Regulations brought that need to our attention, and in 1972 we established a Personnel Dept. And that was a final thrill to me. I missed the students, but I became better acquainted with all the staff, the wonderful custodians, dedicated gardenters, etc. They are people now that I still see and enjoy knowing, that I never had time to know before. All the women in the library and the kitchen workers over with
Dick Grimwood, so it was a good way to finish up my working days.

T: Mary, you were one of the great ones to work with. You were a part of the team that made it go and students had great regard and affection for you, as did all of us, and we certainly appreciated your leadership. Your name, like that of Dick Smith's will be writ large when the history is written because you span the years from 1932 until 1975. Think of all the friends you made and all the lives you touched and think of all the influence you had with people and, you know, this is what we live for. In the deep recesses of the heart, this is what means so much and we certainly appreciate it so very much.

Mary: Thank you for giving me the opportunity to work for you.

T: Thank you for working with me. We all made a great team.

Tape material edited by Mary Curran