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Interview by Steven Schoenherr with Mary Elliot at the University of Delaware Women's Gym, August 22, 1973.

A August the 22nd, 1973, 10:00 daylight saving time. An interview at the Women's Gym Building in the secretary's office on the campus of the University of Delaware, Newark, Delaware. I was interviewed by Mr. Steven Schoenherr, a graduate student in the History Department at the University of Delaware.

*Boletus* Mary A. Watson, born on New London Avenue, Newark, Delaware has lived here most of her life. Coming from a large family, she started out to work at an early age. Her first day's work was after school. Then in June, 1929 worked at the Old College kitchen washing glasses and silverware, and odd jobs in general. I later took a recess and returned back to the University of Delaware, June, 1945 for house cleaning of the dormitories on the campus and the like until February 11 when I recessed again because of being overworked in too many buildings. Returned in June, 1951 in the following buildings: Sussex, New Castle, Topsy, Turvy, *Boletus*, Warner Hall and Robinson Hall. These were the dormitory buildings to be cleaned. Next was the white faculty house across from the new Morris Library to be cleaned daily upstairs and down. Following this was Kent Kitchen, an Old College kitchen, where I washed glasses and silverware and odd jobs. And the main building was the Women's Gymnasium, which is a classroom building. My chores here were cleaning, laundry and telephone answering and assisting with odd jobs. A few years later Sussex, Kent, New Castle, Topsy, Turvy and *Boletus* and the Academy green painted dormitories were torn down and remodeled. After this remodeling period, I was stationed to work in the Women's Gym in the general school months, and worked with other maids going from building to building to do cleaning in the summertime. Prior to this, most maids and myself were laid off of work from May until September again. For a number of years this went on every school period, up until ten years ago. From 1929 to 1965 the wages were under \$1.00 per hour, so people were constantly coming and going, just as they're doing today. Later, the college officials got together and decided on award pins. I myself received an award pin for fifteen years in October the 19th, 1967. Then another award pin for 20 years in October, 1971. The awards at this time were issued in the Kirkbride Room at the student center on the first floor. For these particular presentations, by the president of the University in 1967 and 1961 (sic--1971). Doughnuts and coffee was the usual menu. And as time progressed, I married and now formally Mrs. Mary A. Elliot. So back in 1968, loneliness inspired me to write poetry. The first were a series for the Women's Gym faculty newsletter, one of which they would--which they said was gratifying. And from then on, until the faculty newsletter stopped being printed, I went on my own initiative further in this field of my characterizations of people, people's life, and the world conditions and the like. I will now read you one of my poems in reference to college, entitled "College Moments."

Sing a song of college, a bowl full of gold;  
If and when you finish, you'll be changed from  
young to old.

However, the man in factory or shop, who rises quickly to the top  
Is he who gains what can't be bought--intelligence and careful thought.

And so ends this brief interrogation from Mr. Steve Schoenherr, a researcher on the History of Delaware, by Mrs. Mary A. Elliot.

Q O.K. Thank you very much. Can I ask you a few questions about some of the things you talked about?

A Just what I talked in there, that's all.

Q I wanted to ask you about your family--your mother and your father. Did they always live in Newark?

A Um hmm.

Q Do you know anything about where they came from, and when they came to Newark?

A My mother used to live in Chesapeake City, Maryland. I don't know where my father came from.

Q Did you yourself come from a large family?

A Um hmm.

Q How many brothers and sisters?

A Well, twelve all together. I couldn't tell you which was which now. They was a little ahead of my time, but some had died before I came along.

Q And do you still live in the same area?

A On the same street, the same street.

Q New London Road?

A New London Avenue. When you say New London Road you go across that blinking light down there, and that's New London Road, and on this side it's Avenue.

Q Do you belong to a church here in Newark?

A Um hmm.

Q Which church?

A St. John's Methodist Church.

Q Who is the pastor of that church right now?

A Rev. Major Medley.

Q Medely?

A M-e-d-l-e-y.

Q How long has he been pastor there?

A He's only been here a few years. See, they change ever so often you know--they don't keep the same one, the Methodists.

Q Do you belong in any church activities?

A Oh, yeah, I belong to Senior Choir, and the Stewardess Club and the Pastor's Aid Club, and oh, I help on big programs....

Q Now, what would you say about the students here at the university. I suppose you meet the students every year.

A The ones that I had met--they were the best ones--they're all gone. But in the past two years they haven't been very friendly. I hate to say it, but that's the truth.

Q Can you guess why this change?

A The change is because of the--what do you call it?--I'll say racial conditions, just between you and I. It's racial conditions why these things have changed, and since those important men got killed, like Kennedy and King and so on, you know--this has brought about a lot of that stuff, you know. And then, too, parents sit around and talk to their children, talk to their company--people like visitors come in--they sit around and talk about the different races and the different people that they meet, how they act, "Well, I wouldn't like so-and-so because of this..." and don't speak to them, you know? I mean, I know that...

Q Here in the gym?

A Girls come right here, yeah. But it doesn't make any difference. I mean, I'm a Christian, I pray every day for people who despite they use me, and then it don't bother me. Because I believe in prayer. God answers prayers every time. So that's what keeps you happy--prayer and trying to be--trying to think as clean as you can, live as clean as you can, and do the right thing. And that's it. And those kind of people, the next time they see you, they don't bother you, they just go on in some other direction. Because they know they're wrong. I know I'm right. I know that. But that's the world over, not only Newark, not only this college here--the world over. 'Cause I've talked to people from various other places, like Baltimore, Wilmington, and in-between places.

Q So you would say that this racial tension is getting worse?

A I think so. I don't know, maybe it's just my--well, I see it right here in Newark, I can't say about any place else, but in Newark, I do know that.

Q Can you think of any faculty members that stand out in your mind while you've been here?

A Oh, Mrs. Janet Felary, <sup>Pholeric</sup> Mrs. Barbara Rothecker, and Mrs. ---there's another nice one, and I can't think of her name to save my neck. <sup>Rothker</sup>

Q Who was Janet <sup>Pholeric</sup> Felary?

A She was from Wallingford, Pennsylvania.

Q She taught here at the gym?

A Mmm--they all were gym teachers here. I can't think of one other's name to save my neck--she was very nice. And the secretary we had here a year ago--she was very nice to me, too. Her name was Mrs. Dorothy Fisher. She's over at the Student Center now--down at the book store. You seen here over there, have you?

Q Probably. I have.

A She sits back in that other far little ending, back on the other end there. Oh, I can't think of that woman's name. She was nice to me...mmm...can't think of it. Been so many...oh, and there's Miss Beatrice Florshime--she died here last year. She had a heart attack. And Miss Mary <sup>Hartshorn</sup> Ann Waltz--she was very nice.

Q Can you remember anything unusual that's happened to you while you've been at the university?

A In what respect?

Q Oh, you know, anything unusual or different--outside of your normal routine. Something someone special has done for you, or...

A Oh, a lot of them have done special things for me. The one I'm trying to think of now, I can't think of her, she's one of them.

Q What did she do for you?

A She was always giving me things. When she went to London and Paris she sent me back a basket of fruit, and she sent me cards while she was over there. I met her two summers ago--she came back here to see if I was still working here. And Miss Barshoring--she always sent me money every Christmas, for a Christmas present. And Miss Rothecker--she always gave me something for a Christmas present, birthdays--they both gave me birthday and Christmas presents. In fact, all the faculty that was here at that time done that. Every birthday we had cake and ice cream and sodas or fruit juice...

Q They had this affair at work?

A Yeah, at lunch time we had a ball. And they were very nice to me, that's all. The secretary she was nice to me, always giving me something.

Q They don't do that any more, huh?

- A We just...finishing up this last semester, last--you know--year in...when school closed.
- Q June...May?
- A No, it was last May, 1972, we had fun. I had a good time anyhow.
- Q What does your husband do?
- A Oh, he died in December.
- Q Mr. Elliot died?
- A Um hmm. The last day of December. He was retired anyway.
- Q Do you have any children?
- A Mmm mmm.
- Q How long have you known Frank Miller?
- A This year and last year.
- Q When did you write that poem about him?
- A Last year.
- Q Have you gone to hear his singing?
- A Have I did what?
- Q Have you heard any of his performances where he sings.
- A Oh, yeah, up at the Baptist Church here on New London Avenue.
- Q What inspired you to write the poem about him?
- A About who, him? Oh, he just asked me 'cause he knew I was writin' poems whenever I had a rest period. A rest period's from 10:00 to 10:15, or 10:15 to 10:30, or if you're doin' a job and you don't see where you can leave it, you can go on and finish it and take your fifteen minutes anyhow. So, if I had gotten caught up before that time came, I had time to sit down and right something. I'd scratch some now, and I'd scratch some more at home. So that's how that happened.
- Q O.K. Do you want to add any other things to the interview? You've been very nice. I wish you'd read more of your poetry--you're too shy.
- A I don't like to talk too much any way.

End of interview.