Alyssa Pacy (AP): OK. This is Alyssa Pacy and today’s date is Thursday October 23, 2208. I'm with Barbara Beatty and Cindy Brown at the Lesley University Archives in the…in University Hall in Cambridge, Massachusetts to discuss Barbara Beatty's tenure at Lesley University. This is our first interview. This recording will be deposited in the Lesley University Archives at Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Welcome.

Barbara Beatty (BB): Thank you.

AP: And like I said just…just to place you in historical context if you could just tell me briefly what year you were born.

BB: I was 1946. I was born in Stanford. My father was Dean of Men at Stanford when I was born. And then he moved to Pamona College in Southern College where he was also Dean of the students and I grew up there.

AP: OK great. And I guess we'll just launch right into your years here at Lesley. And Cindy please interrupt me if you have any questions at all. So you arrived here in 1973.

BB: Right.

AP: And could you talk a little bit about your arrival.

BB: Sure. Um…I…I…after graduating from Radcliffe in a very tumultuous year 1968 was when the entire world was…um…I don't even have the words to describe it…um. Instead of going on to graduate school in part because Harvard was such a sexist place, I had…this is just to get you here…I had…I was a Spanish major and at that time at Harvard my father had…I had lived in Columbia…my father had been on a Fulbright in Spain as a child and at that point there were only two people majoring in Spanish, which says something.

Cynthia Brown (CB): Wow.

BB: Which says something.

CB: Hard to imagine, isn't it?

BB: Yeah, but…
CB: But yeah, it says something about what…where

BB: Just it says something about our country…

CB: and where we were.

BB: And where we were. There was two people, maybe three and I had done very well in Spanish. The point of this is…Harvard generally and I ended up graduating Phi Beta Kapa….the point of this is to tell you actually how sexist this place was. When I went to ask a graduate…one of my professors…for um…a…fellow…you know…a recommendation for I think it was a Marshall or whatever. He said wouldn’t you rather marry a graduate student than be one. Actionable today but…

CB: Of course.

BB: And then I found out later that he’d been hitting…but anyway…so also to tell you pre-feminism. I was devastated. I mean Instead of sort of realizing…thinking, you know, hey I was totally devastated. So I completely dropped all my plans to go on to grad…this all turned out to be wonderful but I dropped all of my plans to go on to grad school and because the world was in flames and falling apart I…um…I decided, you know, to do something and one of my best friends was…um…there was a teacher crisis at that point. There were teacher shortages.

CB: Yes.

BB: And she had found out that you could get a job teaching in the Boston Public Schools on an emergency credential. And I had always liked kids. I had…classic…loved babysitting and all that kind of stuff. But it was not a part of me because of status issues. It was not something that I thought as being, you know, a…you know, a career at that point. It…I was doing actually what today would be called social justice work. Um, I had been…I wasn’t actually in SDS but I had gone…I was kind of an SDS hanger on. I had when…you know when McNamara came to Harvard, I’d helped hold him…I…I mean I with other students helped hold him prisoner in…you know…I think it was Quincy House and then when the Dow recruiter…you know Dow and napalm…had come…you know…I had sat in the science lab at but always in the back.

CB: Yeah.

BB: I…I was never arrested but I did actually march on the Pentagon. So there was a…there was a kind of…there was a social justice.

CB: Sure.

BB: And I had grown up in a very liberal family. You know, college professors, who were all…so that had been part of my…my upbringing and my…there…and you know…sort of my values. And it was certainly in the water. So I went into teaching as I say more social justice work than as thinking about it as a profession. I’ll do this for a little while. And teaching…and of course I…I wanted…with my…you know I wanted…this was the time when people were also going into the Peace Corps and things like that. So I wanted to teach
in Roxbury. And I…um…and I heard…I’d read Peter Schrag’s book, *Village School Downtown*, and so I’d heard that the Boston Public Schools were controlled by folks who taught at Boston State. So I knew that I should go to Boston State because that would be a good way.

CB: To get into that network.

BB: To get into that network.

CB: Yeah.

BB: And…and to sort of understand it.

CB: Yeah.

BB: So I graduate from Radcliffe and like three days later I’m at Boston State.

CB: Very different.

BB: Right (laughs). As you can imagine.

CB: I can only imagine. Yes.

BB: In those days Boston State really…I mean…there were a lot…there were…a lot of nuns in my class. They were actually fabulous. They were terrific. They were smart ladies and funny and with it. But what happened was that I…it was a memorization course. You took notes and you memorized them. You…you…you know…you...she lectured and Louise Boylin…and you…it turned out that she was the head of the primary department of the Boston Public Schools. And so I thought I was going to be a first grade teacher because I was sort of interested in literacy.

CB: Younger children.


CB: Yeah.

BB: And so I memorized all my notes from her class and I took her exam and I got…I did really well on her final exam. And then the next day I think it was or two days later Boston used to have its own teacher tests so I took the Boston Teacher Test in the basement of Boston Latin. And there was an interview afterward. So I had to go to the Goodwill and buy white gloves because…

CB: Because you didn't have those.

BB: I had been a…I had worn short skirts and long hair and dangly earrings so I had to…you know…put my hair up in a bun and take out my earrings.

CB: That’s come back you know. Current presidential campaign.
BB: Yeah (laughs). So I had...you know...and I had...it felt like a costume. I had to go...and I...and I...actually had one...I took out the hem in my...you know...glace brown and I worn a white blouse underneath it and I wore my...you know...and I... and I actually went to the Goodwill and I got a ladies pocketbook and I got some white gloves (laughs) and put them in it. I mean this was 1968 that was still what you did because you were going for an interview.

CB: Right, right.

BB: At any rate it turned to my great surprise and nobody else's that the examine for the Boston Teacher Exam was the identical exam that I had just taken for...

CB: Louise Boylin.

BB: For Louise Boylin (laughs) because she wrote the exam probably (laughs).

CB: Oh yeah.

BB: And everyone else knew that's why you took her course (laughs). Right. And it's like...I mean...this is...there were looking at me like...so I...I went that...because I'd gotten such a high mark on the exam, I think I might have gotten the highest or like the top...that means that you got to the top of the list in terms of being hired. So I went down to School Committee and for my...oh and I had interview in the basement. All that went very well. And then I went down to School Committee to...for my interview to get my...to get a job. And even so Boston was still behind the eight so this still you know this was already like late July. And at that point they said, “oh we don't have any...”...but first I went with my best friend, who was Jewish, now this was her side of the story. She says that they wouldn't even interview her.

CB: Wow.

BB: And I'm not sure if that was true and she says it's true and I believe her. And I have an Irish...Irish-y last name and I look...

CB: Yes. Right.

BB: I never knew that. I grew up in Southern California.

CB: Yes. So you didn’t know that.

BB: I had no idea.

CB: Yup.

BB: When I got...I was given an identity when I came down here.

CB: Right, right.
BB: Never gotten…never got a police ticket…never got…I was…I was told, “Oh you have the map of Ireland on your face dear (said in an Irish brogue).” I mean…I grew up in California. I’m a mongrel…everything….at any rate. So the woman says, “Oh come on up.” And my friend is still sitting down there. And she says, “Oh I’m very sorry we don’t have any…you know…first grade jobs today.” She said, “But…you know…can you play the piano? Are you creative?” And I said I wasn’t very good with piano but I did like to do things with clay and stuff. She says (claps), “Kindergarten.” (Laughs)

AP: Wow.

CB: Kindergarten. The good old days of marrying.

BB: Right So she says…so she says, “alright.” So because I’d done really well on the test. And she said, “Oh and look your last name.” She was Miss Baine and I was Beatty. “Oh you pronounce it the same way. It’s the same Irish root.” I’m just sitting there smiling. And she says, “Oh I have a really nice white school for you in West Roxbury.” And I said, “No I want to teach in Roxbury.” And she looked at me here she was giving me this plum.

CB: Plum…right…yes….right.

BB: Right because I was…because I was the same with the last name…the whole deal. And so I’m guessing she thought, “what’s with her…what’s this.” So my first job was teaching at the Farrugut in Roxbury and I taught K-1 because in those days Boston had pre-Kindergarten. It was two years of Kindergarten Boston had. So I taught K-1, which is four-year olds and um I had morning and afternoon. So I had, you know, 25 kids in the morning and 25 kids in the afternoon. No aid. And I had to get them in and out…this is before Velcro, so I had to get them in and out of those horrible yellow slickers and because they were their older brother hand-me-downs, the clasps were broken. They wore lace-up shoes with little thin socks and they would get wet. And so then the knots and the knots in the little shoe ties would be forever.

CB: Oh, boy.

BB: And then their galoshes didn't fit because they were their brothers’ and sisters’.

CB: Sure.

BB: And so getting them in…you can imagine. It was horrible. So I…um…as you can see…I’m sort of…I…their parents I got to know some of the parents. I’m just gonna tell you so you get a sense of me.

AP: No problem.

BB: I just loved it. It totally changed my life. Totally changed…it was the hardest thing I had ever done. Harvard was a complete breeze – a summer vacation in comparison. It completely transformed me. I absolutely adored the kids and I loved the parents. And I loved…so I got known as…I made a lot of home visits. I had parents’ groups started, which in those days was very radical. But I got parents coming in to help me in my classroom because getting 25 kids in and out of those things…you know…those winter
gear. God. Winter. So parents were helping me and it was terrific. So my second year… um… was when the Boston… BTU went out on strike. It was the first strike that they had about education issues. It’s a famous strike. They were striking for more reading teachers. They were striking for more, smaller special ed sizes. I mean it was the first one that wasn’t just about money. It was a very big deal in the history of the BTU. So this would have been in (whispers 68, 69) 70.

CB: Spring of that second year.

BB: Yeah, spring of my second year. And the second year was easier. And… um… so I remember the strike and I remember going around and visiting all of my parents and telling them that… you know… I wasn’t going to be there and if they were concerned about their kids… you know… safety.

CB: Yes.

BB: We’d made May baskets and I gotten to the flower market and I had to give them the flowers. At any rate, so there was the strike and it was really… you know… it was… it was… I did strike and I remember standing up… what’s the hall down at Neponset Circle? And saying… we have to… what about the parents? I became known as that… that… that teacher who talked about the parents. But after the strike, I was even closer to my parents. Most of them actually didn’t send their kids in because they made other arrangements.

CB: Yeah.

BB: And I’d given them time to do that. Umm… I got… you know… word about these parents who were coming in to help me. And the principal of the Tobin, which was the big school up on the hill. We were associated with the Tobin.

CB: Okay… okay.

BB: And the Farragut was like the little, smaller school. She showed up in my classroom one day and she said, “I hear you have these parents coming in.” You know, yeah. And she said, “I want you to stop that. They are…” So this is the Boston Public Schools right before Deseg.

CB: Yes.

BB: Okay. So she said, “I want you to stop that.” She said, “They are illiterate, Southern field hands with no more than a second grade education.” And then she looked around the classroom… and this was when the New York times had just started having pictures, multicultural pictures.

CB: Yes.

BB: of kids of obviously different cultural backgrounds in their kids fashion pages. You know playing together. So I put up all these pictures of multi-cultural children. She told me to take them down. She said she wanted the kids to see nice, white images. And I broke into tears and I am not… I’m not sure that I called her a racist to her face because the whole
thing is so completely…the whole incident is so emotional for me. But I obviously…I may have in some way shape or form let her know that I really found what she was saying…

CB: Offensive.

BB: Offensive and racist. So she stormed out of my classroom. And then I get my sub principal…the principal of my building came down and told me five minutes later that I had to go to School Committee that afternoon. So I was…god…and you know again I hadn't thought about what could have happened in which I could have been fired and my kids would have had subs.

CB: Yeah.

BB: And that would have been worse.

CB: Yes.

BB: So here I was being this…you know…passionate, young teacher but I hadn't thought about my kids, which is retrospect I say to my students…you know…so I went to School Committee and actually I saw Fran Condit, who was the head of the Kindergarten Department, who was this amazing woman. And she really liked me because I was doing all this…I did…my kids did beautiful art work and she took the art…and I was creative…she took the artwork and put it on display down at...

CB: Interesting.

BB: City Hall, down at Court Street. And was gorgeous stuff my kids painted. So I think…Fran Condit said that I had to apply…I had to apologize. I'm not going to say the name of the…apologize to her. And I…she didn't see…sort of…I think what happened was that I broke out in tears again probably (laughs) and said that I wasn't going to apologize. And…um…and so I didn't know what was going to happen and what I think happened was that Fran probably behind my back probably smoothed things over and said that it was okay. That was so exhausting.

CB: Yes.

BB: I decided that I needed a year off. So I took…those days you could take a year's leave for study and travel. So I took a year off and went to Europe and traveled around Europe with the classic with a boyfriend with a Eurail pass and the whole thing.

CB: Yeah, yeah.

BB: And had an awesome time. Got as far as Istanbul. It was great. And came back and got in touch with the Kindergarten department again and Fran Condit by then knowing what I was like gave me…she said, “I have this fabulous new program. I just got a grant from Title I to start an all-day Kindergarten program for out of school children.” So that new grant…that new book…How We Go To School in Boston.

CB: Yes.
BB: Had just come out about how many kids by...I'm blocking his name...he's at BU. He's an amazing guy who...about how many kids were out of school. So she had gotten a grant for me to actually go find out of school kids. And the cool part was that instead of being inside of a school and controlled by a principal I had this little portable classroom. It was halfway between the old Jefferson, which was still existing and the...it was on Heath Street right by Roxbury Crossing where JP and Roxbury Crossing. And it was for the Bromley Heath Project. And so I had an aid and we went down to like Martha Elliot Health Center and got suggestions. But basically we walked up and down the stars of the Bromley Heath looking for kids.

CB: Wow.

BB: And that was...it was tough. We found kids locked up in apartments without clothes.


BB: Alone with smelling.

CB: Yeah.

BB: And I found kids...because I speak Spanish...I was able...a lot of these families...this was just after Cuba so there was a lot of immigrants and there...and so...and so I speak Spanish so I was trying to convince parents. And their kids hadn't had their shots so they couldn't get...you know...well I'll go with you to Martha Elliot and we'll get your kids shots. But a lot of times I'd come back and no one would even open the door because...you know...it could be...

CB: It could be anybody.

BB: It could be anybody. It could be immigration.


BB: Exactly...exactly. But...so eventually I found some parents in fact some parents heard about us (laughs) and took their kids out of the traditional Kindergarten and wanted their kids to be with us...

BB: Oh interesting...interesting...yeah...yeah.

Because they liked the fact that there would be a lot of parent involvement and it was all day. So I was...I was the first teacher of Boston's first all day Kindergarten program. And it was on this Title I grant and so I went in the morning and had got...breakfast food for them and I would go pick up lunch and we stayed until full school hours until 3. But some of the kids were really, really, really, really...had desperate, desperate situations. I mean the Bromley Heath in those days...Bromley Heath is still a really tough place. I mean I just read the paper again this morning...you know...kids getting shot. I heard gunfire during the day. And I had one child in particular who I should have had referred. And it was just having so
many kids with special needs was really overwhelming. Because the kids in my regular school had needs…I mean these were kids who were out of school for a reason.

CB: Yes, right. At least one reason. Yeah.

BB: Most of them. Yeah. So it was just overwhelming so at the end of the year I was completely…


BB: And I was demoralized. Badly demoralized and so I…what…what had happened though was that I had…I was running a summer program. And so this really cool lady and I’m blocking her name from Bank Street had gotten…Bank Street had the contract to evaluate the summer program right…Cause it was a Title I and you had to have an evaluation.

CB: Yes.

BB: So she came and she spotted me and she said, “You know…You’re really good at this.” And my kids got had gains because I was doing all kinds of things

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