

Zach Bower
History 650
Dr. Barbara Allen
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INDEX

Narrator: Mary Butler
Interviewer: Zach Bower
Time/Date: 1:30 PM/April 1, 2013
Location: Classroom in Olney Hall at La Salle University

ABSTRACT

Mrs. Mary Butler was employed at La Salle University for twenty-nine years where she was hired as an Office Manager in the History and Foreign Languages Departments and then later transitioned to the University Communications (then called the News Bureau) Department. Mrs. Butler was born in King and Queen County, Virginia in 1942. She moved to Philadelphia when she was thirteen years old to live with her relatives and attend school. After graduating from Kensington High School for Girls in 1960, she married in 1963 and moved to West Philadelphia. Her and her husband had twin daughters born in 1965 and another daughter 1974. In 1966 Mrs. Butler and her husband purchased and moved to a house a few blocks northwest of La Salle University, close to what today is The Shoppes at La Salle shopping center. She began working in the History and Foreign Languages Departments in 1978. Mrs. Butler accepted a position as Administrative Assistant and Office Manager in the University Communications Department in the early 1980s and remained in this role until she retired in 2007. Mrs. Butler and her husband continue to live in their home that is located in the neighborhood of La Salle University.

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- 00:01 Standard interview introduction. Date, Narrator’s name, and permission to record the interview.
- 00:20 Discusses being born in Plainview, Virginia (located in King and Queen County). She was closest to her relatives on her father’s side of the family. Her father got money for their family by working on the farm owned by her grandfather (Archie King Sr.). She is the oldest of four children.
- 02:58 “I enjoyed that life looking back on it now.” Butler describes in vivid detail some tasks that her and her siblings were responsible for on that farm. She started working when she was about six or seven years old. There was no machinery on the farm, so everyone in the family helped with tasks such as planting and picking crops. The fields were close to her family’s home. The harvested crops would be transported by her relatives to the market in Saluda, VA, which is about ten miles from their farm in Plainview.
- 07:05 “Back then everyone could almost be your parent.” Living close to and working with relatives (father’s side) meant that there were many older relatives that taught, guided, and disciplined Butler and her siblings. A couple strong memories from her childhood when she fell out of a tree and got stung by yellow jackets. An example of her Grandparents’ response to those kinds of teachable moments was, “See I told you... we have been here long before you.” Butler won awards at the local 4-H Club for raising chickens.
- 12:16 Describes siblings. When her parents died, her and her siblings kept the farm that used to be her grandfather’s (father’s side). She is the oldest and was born in 1942. Her oldest brother was born in 1943 and currently lives in Philadelphia. Her other brother was born in 1951 and currently lives in Clinton, Maryland, but continues to assist in taking care of the family farm property in Plainview. Her younger sister was born in 1961. Her younger sister was the flower girl at her wedding.
- 13:45 “When you’re kids growing up, you always think your parents are mean or something, but surely after I’ve gotten married and have become a parent myself, I see the difference of what they were trying to tell us.” Her mother died in 1981. “I was able to tell her I was glad I was born when I was, and I thought she was the best mom.” Taught her and her brothers how to cook, wash, and clean. Her father worked with a team of horses in the fields, but always helped with homework. Sister always loved music and is a music teacher today.
- 16:02 Left Virginia and went to school in Philadelphia in 1955 for 8th grade. Attended Plainview Elementary School before leaving. Only seven in 8th grade graduating class. Three of the seven left VA for the “North” to attend other schools. She

went to live with her father's uncle and his wife in North Philadelphia (13th St. and Norris St.- currently Temple University). Rough transition because in Plainview she was surrounded by relatives. "So many of us we could make up our own baseball team."

- 18:05 "This is why I can enjoy everything that I have now and I am appreciative of it." Describes living conditions of home in Plainview, VA. Grandparents (father's side) were first to get television in their family. No telephones or running water. She found moving to Philadelphia hard because she could not go outside as often, compared to living in Plainview.
- 19:08 "I grew up in Church." Aunt (on father's side) would take her and her cousin from Camden, NJ to church. Looked forward to times she could go home to her parents in VA on holidays. She would take the train back to her parents most of the time by herself. From North Philadelphia station to Richmond, VA it would take about six hours. She did not know too many relatives on her mother's side of the family. Her grandmother (on her mother's side) lived in Trenton, NJ and had asthma, so could not visit the family farm in Plainview much. She comments how in VA the distance between everything was always so far a part.
- 22:05 "I never heard of double-dutch until I came here." Describes games her and her siblings would play growing up. Games would include horseshoes, marbles, jump rope (never double-dutch, used clothes lines and when there were not enough people for regular jump rope), and softball. Some chores that her brothers did was fetch water from the well so she could wash dishes. Sometimes she would play tricks on her brothers and let them burn their hands in hot water. She also made beds, swept and scrubbed the floors. She got along well with siblings. Appreciates that their parents raised them all with a healthy amount of discipline.
- 25:48 "We all went to church." Relatives held leadership positions in their church. Her and her siblings participated in church and youth events. "The church was involved in seeing that there were activities for us to do." Her family attended Union Prospect Baptist Church and First Baptist Church. Both churches alternated services with each other. Church would be utilized for "revivals" and meals for church community. She continues today to go back to Union Prospect Baptist Church when she returns home. She was married in 1963. Attendance at Union Prospect Baptist Church has changed and there are not many older members that attend. There are younger members at the church now.
- 31:10 "It was nothing short of my mother doing two to three hundred jars of applesauce." Describes her childhood some more and explains some of the differences to how things are now for youth today. With no electricity her family had to use an icebox, package food in jars, and prepare meat so that it would be preserved. Her family would do a lot of canning, especially applesauce (two to three hundred jars of applesauce per season). "The kitchen was so hot" and the food drew the flies indoors. No air-conditioning and no fans. Her family did get

electricity when she was about eleven or twelve years old. Her and her siblings had to walk eight to nine miles to school with books that were similar in size to dictionaries. She got pulled to school in 1st grade in a little red wagon. School busses did not start to pick up students at the “main store” in Plainview until the 1960s. She still had to walk three miles from home to Plainview. Her mom worked on a committee of community members to get the buses to Plainview (she cannot remember the name of the committee). Three years later the buses began to pick her and her siblings up at their home. She explains that this was during the time of segregation and the buses that were used were always hand-me-downs from Caucasians (“better than having no bus”).

- 37:26 “He became interested in me.” After graduating from Kensington High School for Girls in 1960, she was hired at The Blum Store (corner of 13th St. and Chestnut St.). She “kept the books” on sold merchandise. Her husband also worked in the store, as a “porter” (someone who emptied trashcans). Her husband switched floors with someone so that he could work on her floor. They married in 1963 and moved to West Philadelphia on 63rd St. and Market St.
- 39:55 “I just didn’t understand how people are livin’ on top of one another.” Housing in the city made up the biggest differences in living situations between Philadelphia and Virginia. She was always happy to travel South to go home to her parents on Holidays (would pack a week ahead of time). Her husband and her would take their daughters to Virginia to her parents to visit. Daughters had gotten used to having corner stores in Philadelphia.
- 42:55 “You always speak when you come into the house.” Butler explains values that were intentionally taught to her daughters: important to be respectful when addressing people; going to church, and being active in the church, were very important for their family. Her daughters would be asked to go play at someone’s house and her and her husband would make sure they knew the families of where they were going. Made sure her daughters’ homework was done. Bedtime was strict (especially during the school year). Her daughters did not understand the strict rules when they were younger, but Mary told them they would eventually.
- 45:35 Leadership roles in the church: children’s music leader; ushering (her daughters did as well); sang in the choir; cooking. Daughters grew up really enjoying church and continue to appreciate church and religious music (especially gospels and spirituals).
- 47:34 “I’ve been doin’ that (helping the church bowling groups) for like twenty-five, thirty years... cookin’!” Description of grandchildren being involved in the church. Oldest granddaughter learned how to dance in the church, which led to a trip to Disney world. Her grandson would like to help act like a security guard in the church. Butler continues to help with church youth group bowling. Group goes to local bowling alleys and on the first Saturday of May trophies and awards are given to youth. Basketball and volleyball are also played by their church

group. Difference in today's generation, to Butler, is that parents are not encouraging children to be as involved in the church. Her youngest grandson is currently five years old and does enjoy the bowling activities with the church. She scored a 155 when recently bowling with him. Mary currently bowls every Wednesday morning at 9:30am, every Thursday night at 9:30pm, and plays volleyball every Saturday from 1:30-4:00pm.

- 54:00 “I was one of the most happiest people to know that La Salle and all were workin’ to try to get something (grocery store) up here in this area.” Description of location of house and neighborhood based on location of La Salle University. Butler and her husband have lived in their house for forty-seven years. The opening of the Fresh Grocer in the Shoppes at La Salle complex in August 2009 made it so that Mary and her neighbors were no longer forced to drive to a grocery store.
- 55:54 “... but then I wanted to be home to raise my children.” Description of employment before working at La Salle University. She was employed for four years by the state of Pennsylvania and worked with mentally handicapped children. After she gave birth to her twin daughters they began to search for a larger house with a big yard for their kids. In June 1966 their search led them Germantown and the neighborhood north of the campus of La Salle University. Working for the state she worked in a secretarial pool and would get to interact with the mentally retarded children.
- 58:58 Description of acquiring positions at La Salle University in April 1978. Prior to employment at La Salle, Butler worked part-time at The Ivy-League School. Investigated opportunities at La Salle so that her daughters could have more opportunities for college when they would get older. History and Foreign Language Departments each had openings. She received a call back with a job offer the same day she interviewed. She was very happy. She worked for John Rossi in the History Department for the morning shift and in the Foreign Language Department during the afternoon (8:30-12:00; 1:00- around 4:00). Comparison of working for the two different departments. Worked at La Salle for a total of twenty-nine years.
- 1:04:34 “I think I am a people person.. I enjoy talking as you can tell”. Transition to the News Bureau Department (today this is called University Communications). She was able to meet more people because of the tasks associated with the News Bureau. Comparison to working for the History and Foreign Language Departments. Mention of History professors she worked for.
- 1:06:53 “I didn’t have to make coffee and that kind of thing.” Description of typical day in the History and Foreign Language Departments. In addition to her typical responsibilities, she was also in charge of work study students.

- 1:09:14 “They were their own departments.” Reflection on the best and most challenging things of the History and Foreign Language Departments. Butler enjoyed learning about the history of Germantown from the History Department (specifically from Joseph O’Grady about a 250 year old tree that her and her husband needed to have removed from their back yard). Fascinating description of the size of the tree. Butler describes the professors as being very good people. Only one situation that she could remember where an issue had to be resolved between departments regarding the work she was asked to do.
- 1:16:45 “It was nice to really see the red carpet put down...”. Description of position in the University Communications Office. She was able to meet lots of people from the local media through this job. On October 29, 1999 President Clinton visited La Salle University for a campaign rally for John Street. Butler describes how the University Communications Department, and her personally, handled the many phone calls from Alumni protesting the event. According the James O’Neill of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* in his October 28, 1999 article, La Salle University received close to a hundred calls in protest.¹ President Michael J. McGinniss personally thanked Butler and the department for their handling of the phone calls.
- 1:21:25 “Many of ‘em would say to me, they keep saying, “there’s something different about you... well, like, what church do you go to?””. She remembers other memorable events at La Salle, including when Lionel Simmons La Salle University basketball team qualified for the NCAA tournament. Detailed description of her “typical day” in the News Bureau Office. Appreciation for Robert Lyons. Speaks to the transition of the office after Robert Lyons retired. Joe Donovan was the last person that Mary worked for in the office before retiring.
- 1:27:49 Description of working with George Stow, John Rossi, and other History Department faculty members. She also worked with students that were a part of the work-study program and other reasons. She thinks some of the students looked at her as a “motherly figure”. One foreign language student would hear her talk about her family activities and said, “I wish my family would do this... I wish my family would do that.”
- 1:32:38 “This reminded me of, like, you need to start from grade school!” Comments on how technology changed during her time working at La Salle. “The computer was definitely better than the type writer.”
- 1:34:31 “I was always a person that smiled... I always like working with people.” Her response to Bob Lyons commenting that “Mary ran a great office.”² Explanation

¹ James M. O’Neill, *Clinton’s Planned Local Visit Protested Some with Ties Are Upset That La Salle University Will Welcome The President. They Cite Religious Matters* (October 28, 1999).

² Phone interview, Bob Lyons, March 6, 2013.

of her philosophy of why she considered smiling and hospitality as a central part of her work philosophy.

- 1:36:41 “Oh, that’s the girl that sold the Avon!” “The whole twenty-nine years, I really sold my Avon here.” “I call myself like the Santa Clause helper.” Butler sold Avon while working at La Salle and attributes this to how she was able get to know so many different people at La Salle. Never sold to students but was able to learn how to sell to employees. Continues to sell Avon to La Salle employees today. Thankful she has been able to sell Avon over the years. “I believe in treating people the way I would like to be treated.”
- 1:40:46 Description of processing her retirement and her daughters’ connection to La Salle University. She was able to maintain structure in raising her children because she could work so close to home. College and career choices for her daughters. One of her daughters graduated from La Salle.
- 1:49:38 “We not only live here, but when people come to your house, they see your front first.” (Mr. Butler) Vivid descriptions of the neighborhood that Butler and her family have lived in since June 1966 northwest of La Salle University’s campus. Description of how the neighborhood transitioned from being “very nice” to having neighbors that would not assist in keeping the street clean. She explains how intentional her and her husband were with how they raised their children in their neighborhood.
- 1:56:43 “Why should another institution have to come up and clean our area.” La Salle University had an impact on the neighborhood. Butler appreciated the student groups that would come to help clean their street but also had trouble understanding why others should need to come in from outside the neighborhood to help keep things clean. The Third Eternal Baptist Church experienced student involvement. Flyers for school events were made visible and Athletic department gave her tickets for sporting events to distribute to neighbors and her church.
- 2:00:20 “It really helped the community a lot.” She is very appreciative of how the Shoppes at La Salle shopping center was introduced into the neighborhood. Dwight Evans (La Salle alumnus and Member of the PA House of Representatives from the 203rd district since 1981) instrumental in getting shops and also closing 20th street to make it safer.
- 2:01:20 “How many people get to find a job like really, really, right at home.” Butler is thankful for being able to work so close to home. She could walk to work easily and go home for lunch. She continues to keep in touch with people she would have worked with through selling Avon.
- 2:04:40 “I see them (grandchildren) all the time.” All of her daughters are married and they have five grandchildren. The oldest grandchild is twenty-eight years old and

the youngest is five. She stays very connected to her daughters and grandchildren. The family gets together often for family dinners.

- 2:07:37 “You see those young men on the corners? We are not having any of that... no way!” Her grandchildren have many more things to be involved in compared to what she had growing up in the South (many more educational and employment opportunities). Butler and her husband always encouraged her daughters and grandchildren to get involved and stay active with appropriate things. Good information of old family stories and funny memories from her children and grandchildren.
- 2:14:24 “I don’t think there is anything about my life I would change.” Stays very active with Avon, grandchildren, and being a housewife. She tells her kids how she continues to think about how her dad would respond to situations. Family tradition and teaching is important to her. Plans to live longer with her mother living to be ninety-eight years old and her father living to be ninety-one. “You really have to make yourself happy.”
- 2:17:45 Her favorite Presidents are John F. Kennedy, Bill Clinton, and Barack Obama. Nixon was her least favorite President.
- 2:20:33 “I think we just all remained sad for a period of time.” Describes where she was on the morning of September 11, 2001 and the tone of the La Salle campus throughout the day. She had a couple family members that worked in Manhattan but they were not harmed. Also describes changes she has seen with security with flying since 2001. Prayer and staying aware of your surroundings are important in response to being scared of these types of events. “I have strong faith. I’m gonna stay prayed up.”
- 2:26:38 “They set up a beautiful retirement party for me.” Continues to have trouble remembering names of some of her colleagues in the University Communications Department. Describes her retirement party that was planned for her. Held in the Union Building on campus and family and friends were invited. Joseph Donovan and others in her office coordinated for Butler to travel to Harrisburg for two days to help witness the drawing of the lottery numbers. “Mary you know so many people!”
- 2:29:41 Describes her favorite spot on La Salle’s campus. South campus and on the quad. Expresses appreciation for the grounds crew that takes care of the campus.
- 2:31:23 “Just stay grounded.” Shares advice for the interviewer and her oldest grandson. More helpful words describing values that she hopes to pass on to children. “I love all my grandkids.”
- 2:33:56 “Brother Michael was the one that always said to me, “your always smiling.”” “Brother Joseph Grabenstein was one of my favorite people.” Brother Joseph

Grabenstein saved Butler a brick from a building on campus that was demolished. She continues to use that brick as a doorstop.