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Recommended Citation

Trawick, Kerstin, "Interview with Mary Bohurjak (transcript)" (1988). *Oral History of Case Western Reserve University School of Law*. 4.

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Mary Bohurjak
Retired Assistant Director of Admission
Interview with Kerstin Ekfelt Trawick, September 30, 1988
transcription by K.E.T.

What have you got in those notes? You came all prepared!

I started to work here on December 14, 1953. I come from a small town in southwestern Pennsylvania, originally.

That's where you went to high school, I take it?

Yes, and I went to business school in Washington, Pennsylvania. I came to Cleveland and I answered an ad in the Sunday Plain Dealer. They were advertising for secretaries at, then, Western Reserve University. Since I always loved school and the academic atmosphere, I thought, gee, that sounded interesting, something I would really like. But in the meantime I had interviewed with other firms, other companies. They did offer me jobs, but I just felt it wasn't quite what I wanted. In the meantime I had had a kind of substitute job, let's call it that.

I answered the ad on Monday morning, a snowy Monday morning, and came to the personnel office. It was an office no larger than this. There was a very lovely lady there who was head of personnel and did all the work for the university at that time. There were two openings, one in the English Department, and one at the law school. Well, I took the various tests that they required, and after the tests she thought that the law school would be best suited to me and decided to send me up to the law school. When I went up there, the first person I saw was Miss Goff. She informed me that all the faculty were at a faculty meeting, which they did at that time. They went down to the barracks here--there used to be a barracks where they had a cafeteria--and they would reserve a room. They conducted a faculty meeting religiously every Monday. And so when I walked in to interview, this is where they were. I waited until they got back, around two o'clock.

They come marching in, and they're all so jolly and happy. I'm observing these men and I thought, "Gee, they all seem to get along so well!" The old building was nothing in comparison to what we have here, but there was an atmosphere about it that really appealed to me. Even though I had interviewed in nice new modern offices downtown, this old building really appealed to me. And this group of men--the fact that they all seemed so genial and joking and teasing one another!

Miss Goff took me into Dean Andrews' office. And Assistant Dean King--they both interviewed me. I immediately loved Dean Andrews, he was a dear man. I thought, working with someone of this calibre! You could just pick him out. He was so outstanding. They told me, more or less, that they would give me the job. They had interviewed others, but they thought they would like to have me. But they had to go through the formalities of having references checked. That was on a Monday. By Thursday they had done this, and they informed me by phone that they had chosen me for the position. Well, I was tickled. I

started the following Monday as the faculty secretary for about ten or eleven men. They had a girl, Vivian Langille, and she took dictation and was secretary to Dean Andrews and Professor DeWitt, who was a very noted professor.

How big a staff was it--just you and Miss Goff and Miss Langille?

That's right, just the three of us. And we took care of the faculty and the dean.

Miss Goff was the registrar?

She was everything. She was the chief administrative person. She took care of the budget, registration, the building-- I mean, she was THE law school person to get anything done administratively. She was fantastic. And she kept everything up in her head.

I worked for Cook, Sonenfeld, Bensing, Schroeder, Culp, King. I didn't work for DeWitt as yet. I had to work up to that. I had to gain his confidence. And Ross, Probert. We still have Ross and Schroeder. Shanker came a couple of years after I was on the staff.

I loved my work there. I really did. I loved working for the men. I had to learn how to juggle my work, working for that many. I had to learn how to be flexible. I had to learn who put the greatest demands on you! You had to learn how to prioritize your work, according to your personality and their demands. I had to learn the personality of the man, and know how far I could go with him.

That must have been a good time to go to work for the law school, because I gather that the 50s were pretty happy years.

They were happy years, but they were also years when Millis had a tight hold on the pursestrings. They just couldn't do much. Dean Andrews would get so frustrated. He tried to get raises for the faculty and staff, and he was so frustrated because he was so limited in what he could do. But he would make up for it in other ways. For instance, with me-- The first year I was there I was only entitled to two weeks' vacation but he gave me three, because of the fact that he couldn't do it monetarily. He was a dream of a man to work for. That only comes once in a lifetime, in a working career. I have worked for other fine, fine people. But as a dean, he was outstanding. You had to know him to understand what I'm saying.

When Dean Andrews retired, Assistant Dean King became dean of the law school. Well, things unfortunately didn't work out well. It became a low point at the law school.

I gather he had a breakdown.

Yes, he did. It was all because of the fact that he couldn't fight Millis. That's putting it bluntly. He felt completely frustrated, I think. But out of tragedy comes good too. What happened there-- The faculty and staff felt a closeness, there was a loyalty to one another. You felt you wanted that school to survive. People worked

hard. We wanted to do what we could to help the school. They appointed Schroeder as administrative dean, Culp as academic dean, and I worked for both of them.

When Vivian Langille retired, I became Dean Andrews' secretary. I forgot to put that in. After a year and a half she retired--not retired, but she quit to have a baby that they had always longed for. She became pregnant at age 37! Then I was chosen to be Dean Andrews' secretary, and that was a highlight of my career. He was such an interesting person. He knew people all over this globe practically. He knew influential people in D.C., and of course all the topnotch people downtown. Our dictation sessions would take three hours, because of all the phone calls that he would get from all these people. I never knew who he was going to be dictating a letter to. It could be somebody in the White House, it could be some very famous person.

You always tried to do your best for him, to have it letter perfect. Letter perfect. When you would present all the letters to him, after you had typed them up, he would get his pen and he would go over every word. His English and his grammar were precise. I didn't dare change a word, because he was so perfect. I learned so much with him. I loved taking dictation from him and doing his correspondence. By being so precise and so correct, he made you in turn-- bring that potential out in you. That's why I loved working with him so much.

When Culp and Schroeder became co-deans, I worked for both of them. Then Schroeder became more or less the acting dean. They appointed a committee to study the law school, and so we had the Bok report. And so they followed the recommendations in the Bok report. Schroeder, I would say, was instrumental in laying the foundations for what we have now. He was a dynamic dean. It was exciting working for Mr. Schroeder. Then they had a dean search committee, and they had various candidates come in. At that time I worked with Miss Goff, down in the front office, and I helped Miss Goff a lot with her administrative duties. So I saw these candidates march in and out. They finally selected Lou Toepfer, who I understand didn't really want to come but was more or less forced by Derek Bok to come and at least look the place over. I don't know what made him decide to take it; maybe it was the challenge, or maybe it was because his middle name was Adelbert.

When he came, he brought in a lot of new faces. He brought in Picker-- I can't remember if Austin was hired by Schroeder and Culp. Picker has a great story about coming here to the law school, if you ever want to hear it. It shows you the character of Dean Toepfer, and how he was able to lure people. And he brought Professor Katz, Gabinet, Coffey, Gaubatz, Junger--and others who have left. Ovid Lewis was hired by Schroeder and Culp. They also were building up the library, and they brought in Simon Goren.

At this point they started to enlarge the staff. Gradually, from about 1963 to 1966, they probably brought in about two more people. When Toepfer came, one of the stipulations in the Bok report was that they decentralize. They had central admissions, central placement.

It was all centralized. Toepfer started in July, but he came in and out before that. Miss Goff was on the verge of retirement. She stayed about a year after that. He wanted an administrative person that could learn Miss Goff's job. He interviewed Blanche Lansky, and she fit the picture of what he was looking for. She tailed Miss Goff all over the place. Actually Toepfer was afraid, because here's this woman with everything up in her head. So she really tailed her. She'd come back and say, "Do you know what she does on her lunch hour? She goes and does all her errands, like depositing checks." I have to chuckle at that remark right now, because that's the way I spend my lunch hours.

Miss Goff took it very well. I do admire her for the spirit in which she took it. You know, Miss Goff worked until she was 70. She worked until March of that year. So Blanche had from May until March really to learn the system, to learn everything.

They brought up admissions, and Dean Toepfer decided that he would give me that position. He had interviewed me, and asked what I thought I would like to do there, and he asked whether I would consider being the admissions secretary. In the interim period they had started to bring some things up, and I was doing admissions work, and I liked it. So I told him I thought that would be very interesting and I'd love to have it. So that's how I became admissions secretary.

I still was in the office with Miss Goff. And there was the dean, Blanche-- Do you know the front office? As you walked in the front door, it was on your right. The first person you would see would be Miss Goff. I sat in the corner. Blanche was in the inner office, then Dean Toepfer.

They brought in a secretary to take dictation for Dean Toepfer. With all the faculty they had brought in, they had a pool down the hall with about four or five girls. They brought in Bernice [Howard] at that time, and gave her the flexwriter.

I quit doing the faculty work when Vivian Langille left and I became Dean Andrews' secretary. I also did work for Professor DeWitt. In the meantime I had gained his confidence. He was tough! But once you gained his confidence, he was a really good person. I typed up manuscripts for him, for his books. One of the things that I did for Culp when I first started there-- The internal revenue code was changed drastically, and they held a seminar downtown. Culp was in charge of that. I typed up I don't know how many of those long multilith things we used to do and took them over to the printshop. Hundreds and hundreds for this seminar! Then I took charge of the registration. We had between six and seven hundred people. It was held at the Statler. That was a good introduction, that was when I first came.

Getting back to Toepfer's reign: he really did a lot. He searched out faculty, brought in a lot of people, good people. You could just see the growth, and it was exciting. They had the architect come in with plans for the new building, and there were fund drives going. It

was just so exciting, really, to be a part of that.

How did the admissions process work in those days? Was there a faculty committee?

Yes, right from the beginning they had a committee. Professor Katz was on the very first committee. It was funny. We used to have a scale on the wall. I have the figures somewhere-- When admissions was brought up, we had a very small committee, three or four people. Dean Toepfer brought in Earl Leiken--a Harvard grad, a fine guy. He was the first admission director--director of admission, placement, financial aid. I worked with Earl, and I worked a lot with Dean Toepfer. It was interesting working with Dean Toepfer, because he was really in charge of admissions at Harvard before he came here. He had a lot of knowledge about the admission process. If I had a question I could go to him. He would never give me a direct answer, but he gave me enough that I could go on. He wanted you to use your potential. I loved the way he worked. He would just throw things out. Or he would come nonchalantly by your desk.

Then we had the student uprisings in the 70s, and they took Toepfer as acting president. At that time Gabinet was acting dean. Admissions was growing; we were getting more applications, and I really didn't have enough space there in that central office. We had taken over the apartment building next door--that's how fast we had grown--and the people who lived in the apartments had to move. They made them into offices for faculty. Gabinet had a lovely big office over there, with a fireplace and French doors leading out onto a balcony. He saw the situation that it was so crowded I just didn't have the space, so he put me over in his office. I got his nice big office. And I loved it there. Gaubatz was there, Coffey was there, the Law Review was there. I just loved that office, and I hated leaving it when I had to.

Up to that point I didn't have any help per se. I had student help. One of the students that really helped me was Kerry Dustin. He's an alumnus, has his own business now. He set up a good system for me, a good bookkeeping system for financial aid. It was a terrific system. As long as I handled financial aid, I kept it up to date. I don't know what's happened to it since. But it was a good system.

All they required was the LSAT score, and we would get little slips with their scores on. And we would get the transcripts. One of my jobs that I didn't particularly like but I had to do was analyze the transcript, take out all the nondescript courses, and compute averages. That was a big job--computing averages all by hand. I got some student help. Kerry Dustin was the BEST person I had! He was a mathematician. And I had other good student help. But student help is-- They have other obligations, and their main purpose there was to go to school and gain their degree, not to come in and work for a little extra money.

I remember taking all these files home and sitting in bed and computing averages at night, with files all over the bed. Just to keep up! Finally they did get me a permanent person, Agnes Fernbacher. I wanted somebody that liked detail work, and Agnes loved

detail. She was a good organizer. She worked ten years with me. Applications kept rising. In October of '71, that's when the big move was made down here. Prior to that move, when school started in early September, they brought down-- They were able to use the classroom area, but the main administrative portion of the building wasn't completed yet. They brought down the second- and third-year people here to take classes. But they needed a vanguard, someone in advance administratively. They selected me to come down and Agnes, and Professor Howe--another person that Toepfer had brought in, a very fine man. So Professor Howe and Agnes and I were the first ones down here. The office where Professor Schroeder is now--that was the first administrative office. So the second- and third-year people were here, and there was someone to take care of them. In October, when the big move was made, I went upstairs.

Leiken left, and they brought in Jo Anne Wharton from Ohio State. She was a little bit upset, when Toepfer left to be acting president. She said, "The main reason I came up here was because of him!" She was here two years or so; she was a fine person to work with. Then Gaubatz became chairman. After that was Mike Magness. Those were the big heavy years. Then after that Dan Burns. Then applications began to decline. Then Susan Frankel, and Barbara Andelman, but I didn't work with Barbara that much. She would have been eight. With each person, I had to have the flexibility to adapt to each person's wants and needs, and the way they wanted the admission process handled.

Tell me a little bit about those years of student unrest from your point of view.

I had a young lady who came to my desk one time. She stood there, very upset, and said, "If we don't do something now-- This is our opportunity for the revolution. This is our great opportunity!" I looked up at her and I said, "You can revolt all you want, honey, but it's going to stand."

I felt a loyalty to the administration. There were some staff who didn't feel that loyalty. There were students all over our lawns. When you looked out, Kerstin, you couldn't believe the way they just sat there. It was just the beginning of an era-- I would sit back and look at these kids and think, what is wrong with them! But they were protesting. They were protesting. When the Kent State killings occurred, and that was really really rough then, when you came down to the campus and saw these army tanks, it was frightening--to think it's coming to this point, I don't believe this! We had some very, very radical students at that time. At the height of it, one of the students brought in white sheets. She had Irene Tenenbaum, in that front office, tearing the sheets into strips, bandages, and put them around their arms. I remember saying, "Irene, what are you doing?" And she said, "And what are you doing for the cause?" I said, "I'm certainly not doing what you're doing."

Did you and Irene manage to stay on friendly terms through all that? It must have been a bit of a strain.

It was a strain. Not only was I upset, but I think the administration

was upset with her actions. But they were calm about it. I think they were very lenient. But they were angry about it. But don't put that in. That's confidential.

How did others feel? Were there others like Irene?

Probably there were a few, but they're not here now. The old guard won--like I tried to tell the young lady. You just can't bring down a government that's stood all these years. But she said, "This is our great opportunity! If we don't do it now, we'll never do it!" Tears are coming down her face." I looked at her and thought, "Oh, you naive little soul." But you know, those were terrible years, because all over the nation there was unrest. There was civil unrest, there was the civil rights movement. I could see a lot of good coming out of those years too. But I didn't like seeing the changes in the students, in their attitudes, showing disrespect. For instance, walking by a classroom, here would be students in the front row with their feet up on the desk, with holes in their stockings, and the professor right in front of them, staring at that foot. I thought that was great disrespect. In some ways, they were a little too daring. But Irene got along very well with those radical students. Let's say I was more aloof from that.

But there were some good causes there, that had to be addressed. So a lot of good came out of it too.

In those years, by the time Christmas came along I knew every student--when I was in the front office. When I came into the new office, it was built differently. We were separated. I didn't have the student contact then; my contact was with just the admission process. I didn't know them well, after they were here. Irene knew them well. Once they were in, they were her babies. She's the one that really dealt with the students. Once they were here-- I mean, I was always a background person. With the exception of a few. There were always a few friendships.

But I enjoyed that type of work. I enjoyed knowing that I wasn't working just with paper. You knew there was a real person behind this file, who was concerned about getting into law school. One of the things Toepfer did impress on me when he gave me the job, he said, "Mary, we have to sell our school, we have to build up our school." And he said, "Kill 'em with kindness." And so I tried to base my philosophy on that--to be of service, to be kind to them, to try and help them, to do as much as I could in that capacity. That was the philosophy, and everyone else who came after that fell in line with it.

Agnes retired. I saw her not too long ago. She told me it was ten years that she was here. That was in 1978. We got Vivian [Pavilonis] in before that as a part-time person. Instead of a student--I needed someone more reliable. She worked two years at part time, and then when Agnes retired, Vivian went into that position. Vivian has done a terrific job. She's efficient, she's very bright--there's not much that passes her by.

I'm going to ask you a rude question which you don't have to answer. How old are you?

You won't put this in, will you? I'm 65.

What made you decide not to go on till 70? Presumably you could have. What told you this was the time?

In one's working career--Kerstin, you'll find this out--you know the time. You know when it's a good time for you to go. I have been through seven admission directors before Barbara came. The last two years have been really strenuous. It took a lot out of me, it really did. I myself feel that I could probably work for another two or three years, but I just feel this is the time now. I needed a little respite, and I decided, since I'm 65, why not just--

They were such years that-- I've blotted a lot of it out. I've had to. Tonight if you watch 20-20, Mike Tyson is going to be on, and he had the type of problem Susan had--just one thing that she had, the manic-depressive problem. And then she had also the behavior problem, the obsessive thinking problem. This is what we worked with, and it was difficult. Kerstin, I can't tell you how difficult it was.

It must have been very hard for you and Vivian.

It was very, very hard, extremely hard. Susan would make all these calls at night to people. It was so sad and so hard. To hear her plead with that doctor! Before she could go down to see the dean, she had to talk to this man. She had him held up as her god. Oh, it was awful. To see somebody go through this, and to try to help them.

Was Susan difficult from the very beginning?

No. It came on in the last couple of years. And of course we wanted to protect her. We didn't want everybody to know about this problem; it was a personal thing. But you know, she was so bright. When she was functioning, she could put the whole picture together.

When this began happening with Susan, were you and Vivian the first to know? You must have been.

We picked it up. She didn't tell us right off the bat; but then she confided in us. You know, we had questions in our mind. I really didn't pick up on the manic-depressive right away, but gradually we picked up on that. You know, we couldn't understand what we were working with. I can understand a lot better now than I did at that time. It was sad. It tore us apart.

Was anything in your whole working career any worse than that, Mary?

That was the hardest thing; I can truthfully say that. That was the hardest time.

Let's end this on a happier note. What are your best memories?

I think the best memories were up at the old law school building, when we were building the school up. Those are my happiest memories. Working with Toepfer and Gabinet. And Schroeder. Those were my very happiest times.

Those are a good triumvirate. For one thing, they're just such funny people. They're humorous.

Yes, humorous. Another happy time was when I was working directly with Dean Andrews.

I take it that you didn't work so directly with Lindsey Cowen. By then you would have been more compartmentalized.

Yes. Being that we had a director of admissions, they would work more directly. Dan Burns worked directly with Dean Cowen. But Dean Cowen really gave us a lot of flexibility. The admission committee really ran the admission office. Of course we kept the dean apprised of all that was going on. But they more or less ran the admission process. And it grew. Oh my gosh, when you think of it. When I came down here, the volume was so great. I couldn't carry the financial aid any more. That's when they had a financial aid person. They hired a financial aid secretary, and she was also secretary to the assistant dean or associate dean. It depended on who the chairman was, and whoever happened to be his secretary. Dan Burns, for instance, had Mary McLaughlin, and she was financial aid secretary. She wasn't the first. It goes back to Gaubatz really.

What's your life going to be like now, Mary? Do you have a house in Parma?

No, I just have an apartment. It would be nice to have a garden to putter in, but I can go to my brothers' and putter around. I have two brothers here in Cleveland, and a brother in Warren. I intend to keep busy. There's a lot of things out there to do. My social life has been mainly on the west side, with my church and with other friends. There's always things to do. You don't even have to look for them; they're there.

Are you a traveler? Are you planning any trips?

I hope to. But--not many people know this--I have an inner-ear disorder. I've worked with this affliction all these years, and it's not very pleasant. It affects especially air travel for me. So this limits me. But I've managed to work all these years with it, though I've had some rough times. It's frightening when you get these spells. But you manage. I always think it could be worse.

What's the admission office going to do now? Is Vivian's role changing?

Vivian will be working directly with Barbara in the same capacity as I did with Susan. She will be doing what I did. You see, also in the interim years, we became very involved with the LSAC services. They provide us with a lot of information, from information that we give to

them. That has just grown like a mushroom. That has helped the admission process a lot. In turn they want a lot of information from us too. The paper work there has really-- I handled 2400 applications more easily than handling, say, 1200 applications. That's just to show you how complex it's become. The admission process is really complex right now, because we really have to sell our school. We have to do a terrific selling job, because we're a private school. We lose to Ohio State, to Cleveland State. We have to put in ten times more of the effort. And the paperwork is just unbelievable! The reports that are required! Being computerized has helped tremendously, but on the other hand it's created more work too.

Sure, I know about that. So Vivian, if not in name, is going to be the assistant director?

She's getting a promotion, but I don't know if they've decided on the title yet or not. And Amy continues the financial aid. She is so capable, she is so bright. She's taken like a duck to water with financial aid. And we love her dearly. And Susan, who was Barbara's secretary down at Benesch Friedlander, will be taking over Vivian's functions--as well as being Barbara's secretary. She'll be a very busy girl. She has a big job. I'll miss it. I'll miss the people mainly. And Kerstin, when you were upstairs, Vivian and I really enjoyed working with you. You were a nice neighbor.

Well, thank you. Now, have I given you a chance to talk about everything you wanted to talk about?

Yes, and it was easy talking to you.

Well, this is something I've wanted to do for years. I kept thinking, I've got to sit Mary down and get her to tell me all about these things.

At one time I kept a file of some humorous things that kids wrote in their files. They were absolutely candid. For the life of me, I don't know what I did with it. I'll ask Vivian, if she runs across it, to let you know. I had to quit at one point, because the workload got too heavy. I didn't have time to copy the statements, or run down to Xerox. But they were funny. You had some really funny moments. You know, reading the files could become burdensome, but then on the other hand you'd get a file that would just throw you for a tizzy.

I know, there are always files that just leap out at you.

Over the years there have been those files, and there have been those people that were admitted to law school that leaped out at you. Those people were always kind of special to me.