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Beatrice Chait interview, Professor, College of Education and Human Services, and Former Associate Dean and Director of Teacher Education, Wright State University

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Beatrice Chait

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WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY
Retiree Association Oral History Project

Interview date: July 5, 2003

Interviewee: Beatrice F. Chait, Professor Emerita, College of Education and Human Services, 1965-1979, Former Associate Dean and Director of Teacher Education

[Recording of original interview was damaged/ corrupted. The interviewee was provided with a list of the original interview questions and provided the following responses]

I am a native of New York City where I attended the public schools and graduated from Hunter College of the City of New York with a BA in Political Science, a minor in Economics as well as having met the requirements for a teaching certificate. I hold an MA from the University of Michigan with additional graduate work at the University of Illinois and the University of Chicago.

I was married to William Chait, (now deceased) for 65 years. He was Director Emeritus of the Dayton and Montgomery County Public Library System. I have one son and two grandchildren. My family and I left New York City in 1948 and lived most of our lives in the mid-west, Wisconsin, Michigan and Ohio, before retiring to Hilton Head Island SC. In each case the move was because of job advancement. This made for an interesting teaching career.

My teaching experience included the following: Kalamazoo Public Schools, Western Michigan University, Miami University (OH) and Wright State University. During the 1969-70 academic year, I was on leave from Wright State University and taught at the International School in Tehran, Iran where my husband was a Fulbright Professor at the University of Tehran. After retiring to South Carolina, I taught as an adjunct professor for the University of South Carolina for five years. I was appointed by former governor Reilly to serve on the County Higher Education Commission and did that for five years as well as serving as its chair for one year. While I finally retired from teaching, I still remain very active in community affairs and work as a volunteer.

I joined the Wright State University during the 64-65 school year when we had two parents, Ohio State and Miami University. As I look back to those days when we were all in Allyn Hall, I remember a faculty that had close ties to each other. Most were young and full of innovative ideas. There was great collegial relationship- all working toward becoming independent from our parents and building a new university. We also had a close relationship with the administration. There was hardly a day when one would not encounter Fred White or Warren Abraham in the halls of Allyn and have a conversation about university or personal matters.

During the summer session of 1965, Norwood Marquis, dean of the College of Education, went off to teach summer session at San Jose University. Several of the newly hired faculty would not be arriving until fall semester. That left Roger Iddings and me to advise students. I had never met Roger before but I knew at once that I could seek his counsel and enjoy working with him. This held true for my remaining years at Wright State, especially when Roger was Dean of the College of Education and Human Services.

Advising students in the early days was really a problem. There were many students who were not the "typical college student". Here were women who had interrupted their college work to have families or work. They were not in a position to leave their homes to attend college elsewhere. We had military retirees seeking another career. Also, many came with a great variety of completed course work- much of it taken many years ago. We had to consider what they had, the validity of the courses, how long ago they were completed as well as how these courses would fit into requirements of our parent universities. Advisors then had to plan the remainder of the students' program so they could graduate in a timely manner. In the case of students in teacher education programs, we needed to offer all that was required for teacher certification as well as for graduation.

Faculty meetings in those early days were anything but dull. The young, energetic faculty wanted to move ahead quickly. We were busy working on what should be the mission of this university when it became independent, its policies, its place in the state system and in the greater Dayton community as well as matching the plans made for us by our parent universities. I especially remember one meeting when the question of discussion, it was decided that football was not to be an activity at WSU. Apparently, that was a solid decision that remained throughout the years.

There were many memorable occasions during my tenure at WSU. There was the ground breaking for each additional building, complete with silver shovel, hard hats and state dignitaries, including one governor whose speech indicated he thought he was dedicating a vocational school. Another landmark was when we arrived at a name and became independent four-year university. To mark independence, the students held a mock funeral at which time they buried "The Dayton Campus" of Ohio State and Miami University. (It was filmed- wonder if the tape is still around.)

An especially memorable event for me was our first commencement. When I saw the graduates walk across the stage near the reflecting pool at Allyn Hall, all I could think of was, "They actually made it"! They met all the requirements for graduation in spite of the early difficulties in advising students. It was a beautiful day. Tickets to commencement were not limited so many family members were there. A good number of these students were the first in families to ever attend college. This may not have been possible without the presence of this new university. I must also mention as memorable the search for and the arrival of our first President, Brage Golding and his wife, Hinda. His inauguration was quite an event, attended by representatives from colleges and universities across the country as well as many dignitaries. A tent was set up on campus for the actual inauguration ceremony. There were also festivities the day before and the day after.

There was an early organization as “The Faculty Wives”. They added the social life of the university. There were times when social events had to be moved to the Dayton Art Institute since we had no venue large enough on campus. The organization provided an opportunity for faculty wives to get to know each other since so many were new to the area. The faculty celebrated some occasions, such as Christmas, with what was more or less a potluck affair in a double room in Allyn Hall. Some faculty men showed their skill in preparing food in electric skillets brought from home. Someone would always volunteer to bring the “bubblic”.

Independence brought changes. As new buildings appeared the faculty was scattered and we lost some of the close relationships we had. With independence came the need to be accredited by various regional organizations that involved muck work in preparation for their visits. Faculty rapidly became involved in their various professional organizations, many in leadership roles. We participated in community activities in the Dayton metropolitan area as well as in the state and nation. When some of us attended national conferences, we found people did recognize the name WSU and no longer placed us in Kitty Hawk, NC. We had arrived!

During the 60’s and 70’s, with the war in Vietnam, there were troubling times on campuses across the nation. Ohio students felt the effects of the tragedy at Kent State University deeply. There was some degree of unrest on the campus. WSU had its share of bomb threat. We were evacuated from all the buildings and had to wait in the parking lots for the buildings to be searched and the “all clear” signal given. Sit-ins were threatened. There was one day when some of our students, plus those from neighboring colleges, protested by blocking the highway leading to campus and Wight Paterson Air Force Base. Rumors of impending trouble abounded. Somehow we managed to weather it all!

During the early days, I believe, we were able to know our students well. There was a personal relationship with them as well as a professional one. I still hear from some of the early students. Although I have kept in close contact with WSU, I have not been on the campus in recent years but I imagine much of that closeness was lost as the university grew to what it is today. Also, there are so many new challenges for students in the 21st century. Right now there is great concern about finding employment upon graduation. Technological advancement has made for many changes in a student’s preparation. Teachers today need a solid background in a content area whether they plan to teach in elementary or secondary schools. With the growing immigrant population, some expertise in a foreign language becomes necessary. Students need “hands-on” preparation in dealing with more diverse populations in our schools. Just a BA hardly meets requirements of many professions. Graduates must look ahead to continuing their education to meet the many responsibilities of professions today. Some may learn that they have to retool to meet demands of a new career in order to secure employment.

You want to know what I would do if I had an opportunity to do something over. This is hard for me to answer. Being a faculty member at WSU was a happy experience for me. I made lasting friends among the faculty and students as well as in the community. I faced many challenges with the growth of the university and my own professional

advancement. I am grateful for those opportunities and look back at them with fond memories. In all, I would say that my tenure at Wright State, as well as tenure at previous institutions, was both professionally and personally rewarding. What more could I ask for in a teaching career that spanned thirty-years?