

Methodist University Community Oral History Project
Methodist University
Fayetteville, NC

Brenda Mitchell

Interview conducted by

Pauline Bynum

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Interview of

BRENDA MITCHELL

Interviewed by

PAULINE BYNUM

1:23

BYNUM: Do you like working here? Do you like your job?

1:25

MITCHELL: I do.

1:26

BYNUM: Is that what you dreamed to be doing?

1:30

MITCHELL: I always wanted to be a teacher, and so higher education is something I wanted to try. So it's definitely up there with things on the bucket list; things I wanted to do. So I am very excited to be here.

1:38

BYNUM: Do you see yourself doing this for the rest of your life?

1: 42

MITCHELL: Perhaps, maybe even getting a PHD, and going from there; kinda of work my way up the ladder.

1:47

BYNUM: Still in Speech?

1:49

MITCHELL: Maybe in Speech, maybe in Teacher Education, maybe English. I don't know.

1:56

BYNUM: Is that what your parents planned for you? Are your parents okay with you being a speech teacher?

2:01

MITCHELL: Oh, absolutely. My parents encouraged me to do whatever, I, you know, wanted to do. As long as I worked hard, and, you know, achieved whatever goals I wanted to achieve, they support me.

2:13

BYNUM: You've also mentioned in class that you do some gymnastics. Can you tell us more about that?

2:18

MITCHELL: [Laughs.] Sure, it's kind of like gymnastics. I never have done gymnastics as a child. I did a little bit of dance class, but when I first moved down here to Fayetteville, my friend said, "Hey, you wanna try trapeze class?" and I said, "Oh, sure, okay, that sounds good," and she took me to this class. It was in the climbing place which is downtown Fayetteville. And I—it was this little lady and some silks hanging from the ceiling, a trapeze, no net, no anything. You don't get hooked up to—you just climb. It's kinda like being a kid again. So it's like circus, like Cirque du Soleil type of stuff. And I've been doing it for six years now. So yeah, it's a great workout. I had no idea what I was doing at first, and I had no idea what she was taking me to, but now I love it, and I couldn't imagine not doing it.

3:11

BYNUM: So it's like a hobby?

3:12

MITCHELL: Oh yeah, exercise, hobby, yeah.

3:17

BYNUM: You know, let me ask you about your teaching philosophy. What's your teaching philosophy?

3:18

MITCHELL: My teaching philosophy is that every student is able to learn. Some may learn in a different way or it might take them a little bit longer, but every student is capable of learning, and every student is capable of being

successful. It just might take a different route, you know. Especially since when I was teaching high school, I had to keep that in mind, because you get all sorts. So it is definitely good to keep that, you know, in mind while you are teaching.

3:48

BYNUM: And I can see that you are expecting.

3:52

MITCHELL: [Laughs.]

3:53

BYNUM: And you also mentioned that you were married. How do you balance work, family?

3:58

MITCHELL: Well, since working at Methodist, it's been very easy to do that. Because my husband and I actually just moved to this side of town. So we're very close to home. He works at the bank on campus, so he is very close to home as well, so we're able to spend a lot of time together. So, so far so good. We'll see how it works when our new addition comes. But I think it will be fine.

4:21

BYNUM: Are you guys super excited for his arrival?

4:23

MITCHELL: Oh yes, oh yes, (laughs) we are.

4:28

BYNUM: Do you think the female professors at Methodist University are given the same opportunities as their male counterparts, when they are teaching the subjects?

4:43

MITCHELL: That's a really interesting question, because I've only been here for about, what?—four months or so, maybe a little less, three months. I haven't really had a whole lot of opportunity to really observe that. I mean, I feel like, yes, from what I've noticed, but I don't know a hundred percent, just because I haven't been here very long. Do I feel like I've had the same opportunities? Yes. So, I mean, I can't see why that will be different in any other discipline. But I don't know. I don't have a solid answer for that yet. [Laughs.]

5:13

BYNUM: Since you are pregnant and you are expecting, have you looked into Methodist University's maternity leave program?

5:24

MITCHELL: Absolutely. That was actually one of the biggest things that I had to consider when I took this job, because I was already pregnant when I accepted to work here.

5:34

BYNUM: Yes, ma'am.

5:36

MITCHELL: One of the biggest things is they have the FMLA, which is Family Medical Leave Act, which is a big thing in the United States, where women get six weeks paid leave—

5:46

BYNUM: Okay.

5:47

MITCHELL: —but you have to be working at that institution or company for a year. So for me it was a little bit difficult, because I wouldn't have already been here for a year yet. But we were able to work with something, we were able to work out with something. And it was really awesome because they were so, like, I don't know, accommodating for me. Because they knew I wasn't going to be here the whole year, but they knew that I wanted this job, and they knew they wanted me for this job. So it actually worked out. So I'm still getting six weeks, but it's not with FMLA, it's more with something that— It's still FMLA, but not like the whole thing behind it. But we were able to work something out to work for me and for them.

6:29

BYNUM: So you sound like you are happy with the maternity leave program at Methodist University?

6:38

MITCHELL: Yes, yes, I am.

6:39

BYNUM: So that means that you think that it's enough?

6:42

MITCHELL: Six weeks? Oh, I mean, that's not— I don't think that's Methodist University's fault. [Laughs] That's just the Family Medical Leave Act and that's the United States. I feel that the United States should think about extending leave for women, just because it's so important to bond with your child for more than just six weeks. So that's an America thing [laughs], not a Methodist thing. But I felt that Methodist would accommodate if I felt like I needed more time; I think that they would be accommodating. So I'm not too worried about that.

7:14

BYNUM: How do you feel about women's rights?

7:18

MITCHELL: How do I feel about women's rights, as, like, the overall thing?

7:20

BYNUM: Yes, ma'am.

7:21

MITCHELL: Well that's interesting. I mean, I feel that over the years we definitely have improved as far as the United States go. I grew up and my mother was an engineer for Ford, and she put up with a lot of stuff when she was starting out in the seventies and the eighties working in a predominantly male field, where even where she worked there wasn't even female bathrooms. So she had to deal a lot with that. So just seeing her go through stuff and seeing how much better it is now, I know that it's improving and, you know, getting a lot better than it was, like more rights, more equal rights. I'm not so much worried about women's rights. I'm just worried like equal rights for everybody. Because, you know, I mean it's— I don't think women should have more. But I feel like we all should be equal. On the same playing field.

8:12

BYNUM: Did she tell you how she handled that situation?

8:15

MITCHELL: She did. She had to put up with a lot of stuff. And she— Obviously she persevered. She is retired now from Ford. She worked there for thirty years. And she was very successful. So she dealt with it, and she learned a lot about herself. You know. And she [didn't lose her job], so that's good, right? And so, yeah.

8:42

BYNUM: Do you consider yourself a feminist?

8:45

MITCHELL: To be perfectly honest, there's a lot of definitions that go around with the word "feminist." And to me, a feminist is more of someone that, just—not just women's rights, but equal rights for everybody. So I guess yes. Maybe loosely. But I think that word has a lot of negative connotations to it, because most people think it's like "down with men, up with women" kind of thing, and that's not how I see it. I think, you know, it should just be even playing field for everyone. So if that's what it means, if that's the definition we're going by, then sure. But if it's the one where we hate men, then no, absolutely not. Because we need both; we need everybody's help to make the world go round. So.

9:33

BYNUM: So you seem big on equal rights. Did you do some activism when you were in college?

9:39

Mitchell: No, not really. I'm just a humanitarian by nature, so, I just, I always try to look at any issue where people are involved. You know. Looking at more from the outside in and not trying to pick one side before I know everything about what's going on. So.

10:01

BYNUM so you're saying that you are a humanitarian? How do you express that?

10:09

MITCHELL: Well, I guess by, just by, you know, an issue pops up, looking at it from all the sides. You know. So any type of current event where people are fighting for one side or the other. Before I pick a side, I look at the whole situation before deciding what's right and what's wrong in my opinion. But I am for human rights. So. [Bangs hand on the table] Eh. [Laughs.]

10:39

BYNUM: I understand you are not big on feminism, do you think it's needed in the Twenty-First Century?

10:48

MITCHELL: Like more women rights?

10:49

BYNUM: Mm-hmm.

10:50

MITCHELL: Well, I mean, I really think that we still need to strive for equal rights for everyone, you know. Women's rights, men's rights, you know, different races, everything, like disabilities. There's still a lot of improvement that can be made, definitely. It's not something we should put aside. It's something that we still need to think about. Especially if people feel that their rights are not being considered. So everyone should feel like they have a voice no matter what gender they are, color, disability, doesn't matter.