

**Oral History Interview with Heather Davis**  
**Conducted by Angela Baker, 1993.**  
Transcription by Sarah Brennan, 2000.

AB: Ok, well, let's get started, could you state your full name please?

HD: Heather Davis (D.A.V.I.S.)

AB: And your place and date of birth.

HD: Uh, Halifax, Nova Scotia, April 14, 1939.

AB: Ok, when did you come to Saint Mary's?

HD: Ah, September 30, 1968.

AB: '68..and what were you hired as originally?

HD: I came here as, uh, the First Secretary of the Departments of Biology and Chemistry and it was the years that the Science Building opened.

AB: I see, so there hadn't been Departments of Chemistry and Biology?

HD: No, no.

AB: How is your role at the university changed over the years ... that you've been here?

HD: You mean my position? Ah, I was in the science area for about 8 months, er, no maybe a year. It's hard to say, but maybe a year and then I went from there and I became the First Secretary of the Academic Vice-President at Saint Mary's University, and I was there approximately 20 to 21 years and I served 5 academic Vice Presidents and from there I came to serve as Secretary to the Senate Office.

AB: So, how long have you been here?

HD: About , 5, 4 years, 4 and a half years.

AB: Do you recall the names of the Academic Vice Presidents that you served?

HD: The first one was Doctor GW Tate, and he, he was a Jesuit, and uh, the next one was Dr, Hugh Gillis, and Father Stewart, and then Dr. John Owen and then Dr. Joseph Jabra.

AB: Ok, um, so you were hired around the time that the Jesuits were giving over administrative control and Saint Mary's was becoming public.

HD: Yes, that's right.

AB: What changes did you notice when that happened... in the school?

HD: Well, obviously, the first change that strikes everyone was the fact that it became co-ed and uh, this was proven to be a good thing, since it has grown with the male and female genders. Let me see what, there were so many many changes. Changes as well, various opening as came like in that Commerce, Commerce area and different departments opened up at ah, it almost like expanded, like, like a hand, like the fingers of a hand, type of thing, like an opening .. and uhm the um, room was made for disabled people which had not been made before in the line of ramps and things like that and an awful lot, maybe too many in a sense of foreign students came.

AB: You didn't notice very many foreign students when you first came?

HD: No, no, not at that time but that doesn't represent Saint Mary's University. I think that what happened was that the world changed then and Saint Mary's university didn't change by itself - SMU changed with the growth of the the world like years ago you used to go over to London England to have your vacation but now you can sit around your dining room table with a group of Englishmen and have tea. Like, the world itself has changed. It has grown and has not been stifled anymore in the sense that uh, the global world has opened up and people have become equal to equal type of thing and that's Saint Mary's University in itself expanded with the world. I don't know if you know what I mean...

AB: I can see what you mean, more kind of a interaction...

HD: Yeah, yeah, Saint Mary's University didn't expand by itself. All universities did, because if you did not, you were stifled and you were uh, you were, you really became meaningless because you didn't really serve the purpose of what the growth was, was doing.

AB: Um, how did the university change when women started coming here?

HD: Uh, I, I honestly didn't notice any dramatic change because I was accepted. I think they grew into an acceptance ... uh... um... I don't know if there was any change. I know that when I went to classes uh, at Saint Mary's I was the only girl in a group of boys and then uh, I thought it was odd, uh, but I suppose the classroom in itself expanded with the girls and the girls brought in their own, uh, woman's ideas and before then I suppose, woman's ideas were not thought of type of thing, but uh, I suppose in a sense its the same with the world too, you know, years ago when you turned on television you had all men and uh, you have a choice of women or men and uh, I think the was a very good thing that it went co-ed. because if it didn't go co-ed I think I would have been lost in the shuffle.

AB: Yeah, why's that?

HD: Well, people don't accept the fact that ah, institutions are only for one gender anymore.

AB: So, since you've mentioned the great growth in size the university has had since 1968, what effects does that have on the kind of school that its been?

HD: Well, many areas were opened out, opened up, and it grew, you know, for instance, you know, for instance the international growth of, of over in China and you would have things like that. Before then it didn't have an international outlook, so the expansion probably opened up that, uh, different avenues...

AB: How? So when there were only a couple thousand students here and now its tripled, do you feel that that's changed? Just the number of bodies on campus?

HD: Yes, definitely, yeah, When I came to Saint Mary's I would say that I knew the name of every student, uh, mostly every student. I'd be lyin' if I said every student, but mostly every student, I knew the name, but mostly every student I knew the name, but now you pass people in the corridor and you don't know if they're student of Saint Mary's or Dal or if they're visitors and you just don't know them because you don't know everybody and in fact I suppose in a sense you don't want to know everybody. But, uh, the small family atmosphere has certainly expanded into a much wider universe.

AB: Ok, um, so let's see, have you noticed an changes in student population in terms of their age?

HD: Oh yes, yeah, there's an awful lot of older people here and ah, years ago, Saint Mary's only provided courses to students of say 16 to 23 years of age. That in a sense as well, all universities are equally the same in that years ago a college education usually only went to people of that age, but now people are feeling that they're not dying when they're 50 years old, they're reborn, or whatever they're feeling and that they can go out and take courses every undergrad courses at that age.

AB: So, when unionization took place, do you feel that that changed your job at all?

HD: No.

AB: No?

HD: No. .... I was never, I was not, in the Union when I was in uh, well, of course when I came here, their Union didn't exist. There was no Union of course and uh, I suppose it began when I was in the Vice-President office an umm, at that point I

wasn't eligible to be a member of the Union, but I am in the Union now, and um, I think perhaps if the Union was wiped out tomorrow it wouldn't be a loss to, university. I don't really feel there's any need for a staff union at Saint Mary's university, if I want a day off, or something of that nature, I uh, usually deal with the Director of Personnel, Mr. Dan Stone who uhm, ... who certainly is doing an excellent job and uh, I don't know what purpose the Union serves. So, you know, it's probably a nice little social group but, there are dues of course that you pay from your pay cheque and you wonder if its money down the drain, uh, you know like the university is functioning the same as far as the benefits type of thing, as it has years ago. I mean the benefits have increased but, so, have the benefits in the outside world increased and I don't know if the Union, if that is the result of having a staff Union at Satin Mary's University, I honestly don't feel that they're of any use.

AB: So do you think, you were mentioning before all the different expansions that have happened at the school. Do you feel that the opportunities for students at Saint Mary's have changed over the years?

HD: Oh, they've increased yes, yeah, certainly a wider choice, yes, in that way.. I think that as far as their usefulness in the outside world there are much more courses being offered that you can use. Years ago, of course I majored in Philosophy, but, years ago that was the main trend of having the basics English, French, Math and uh, Philosophy and now there's much more like, for instance there's International Development Studies thing like that of interest to a what, a much wider group of people.

AB: When did you come to - when did you attend classes here?

HD: I was attending classes when I came here but I graduated in Arts in 1974.

AB: Oh, I see, so you were working and taking classes?

HD: Yes, yes, but I had most of my courses from Mount Saint Vincent before I came to Saint Mary's but I finished my degree at Saint Mary's and got the Arts degree in '74.

AB: Was that a general trend? Did a lot of women start at Mount Saint Vincent and move over?

HD: No, no it was very different from the average.

AB: So, how about research facilities and actual physical buildings on campus - what changes have you noticed in that area?

HD: The ... . when I came here of course, there was only this building here and the Science building and the other buildings have since been built. So, you know that

expansion has taken place but, you know the Tower, for instance accommodates the recreation and of course the library, they accommodate the, the needs of the research in the library, you know - if you're studying so, as far as the physical site is concerned buildings have popped up everywhere, yeah.

AB: Do you feel that there had been a big change in the recent facilities?

HD: I don't know, I don't know, not a lot of people eh, facilities seem to go in for that type of thing but uh, I know there are a lot of research grants provided and offered to faculty and they seem to be able to do their own thing.

AB: What changes and growth have you noticed in the staff over the years?

HD: Well, when the new departments came up, the staff was employed to fill them, so as ah, an area grew, the staff grew. I can remember when I first came here we had a tiny little room - it was called our lunch room and we used to play bridge in that room - there was only a few of us who were staff members and now there are quite a number of staff members and you know have that same sort of Birthday party group uh, to play bridge with, so they've expanded.

AB: And you say that your staff benefits have increased? In what way?

HD: Well, not only at Saint Mary's, but the world has changed, you know, as far as, like when I came here um, there was this, a caste system, and staff was not permitted to join the pension plan uh, but it was available to the faculty and to the administration, Now, since that time, although I didn't have the benefits of being, in all my years at Saint Mary's it has become available to people who enroll eh, staff at Saint Mary's that that is one major, change, that people now have the benefits of having a pension whereas it was not offered to staff when I came here. We were not permitted to join it.

AB: Did the ways the staff interact socially change... over the years considering the growth in size, that kind of thing?

HD: Umm, I suppose it's the same as in any institution, uh, I suppose you're right, see when I came here there was only a small people, a small amount of people and everybody knew what everybody was doing but I really can't speak for the social life of the, of the rest of the clan now, but years ago everybody knew what everybody was doing.

AB: Close knit?

HD: Yeah.

AB: And did you go out together as a group, kind of thing?

HD: Um, yeah, yeah, I've maintained friendships with people I worked with 26 years ago, uh, who who are now gone from Saint Mary's, but, I people who are employed now at Saint Mary's, they come and go, and sometimes you don't even know their first name. Ah, it ah, sometimes a fast entrance and exit, but years ago it wasn't the case.

AB: Well, that's about all I wanted to cover, unless you can think of any other changes over time that stand out.

HD: Uh, see now, I think you've covered everything. Angela, I know the Jesuits who were in administration, when I came here have maintained a close relationship with them all these years and, you know they've come to my home and they've been to my families home - my mother's home and uh, I've never broken the tie of those Jesuits, so, even though they left the administration, I didn't seem to leave them, or they didn't seem to leave me. So, in a sense, although they've gone from running around the corridors, I still see them on the outside world and I've never really felt they've left in a sense, uh, let's see now.. I think that's basically everything. I mean you can go on for hours and hours about memories but it may become repetitive for you, like most people have similar memories, yeah, you know...

AB: Are there anything in particular that stand out in your mind? Events and that kind of thing?

HD: Oh dear, you mean good or bad or ugly?

AB: Yeah (chuckle)

HD: (Chuckle) Let's see now, I don't think I can think of anything striking, uh, you know there's so many. I know that I became a very good friend of Father Burke Gaffney, the Astronomer at Saint Mary's and when he became ill and old, and went to the Saint Vincent's Guest House, I also went there numerous times to visit him um, I suppose his relationship with me and my relationship with him was probably the highlight of my life at Saint Mary's, I would think, uh, I would think that some of the people that I met here throughout the years, was the most striking part of working here at Saint Mary's. Not the day to day, answering phone calls and responding to peoples mail and things like that because in a sense you can do that anywhere. I think that the people that I met and the people that I came to have a close relationship with, that was my most valued, uh, point at working at Saint Mary's. I don't know if I've said that correctly but uh, I know that some of the people I have met at Saint Mary's have died now. Their memory will never leave me and perhaps if I was not working at Saint Mary's I would never have met these people, and uh, say Father Burke Gaffney, he did become my best friend and, I enjoyed his company very much, eh, as a scholar and as a friend.

**Tape Ends**