

**Oral History Interview with Debbie Boutilier**  
**Conducted by Angela Baker, May 28, 1993**  
Transcription by Denise Beaubrun

AB: All right. So we'll start off with just a little bit of background information on you. Could you state your full name?

DB: My full name? Deborah Joanne Boutilier.

AB: Okay, what is your date and place of birth?

DB: My date and place of birth. March the 14<sup>th</sup>, do you want the year?

AB: If you don't mind.

DB: 1952, and Cape Breton.

AB: So how many years have you been associated with St. Mary's?

DB: Over 17.

AB: Over 17? And so what capacity were you hired in when you first came.

DB: Secretary of Personnel Services.

AB: So your role has been the same since you came here.

DB: More or less. My job has changed but I've been affiliated with this office the whole time.

AB: Okay, so what was it like to be a staff member when you first arrived? Has that changed over the years since you've been here?

DB: Yes, when I first came I was, I only had a few years of experience. I had worked for about a year and a half when I came to the University. I worked for a different supervisor at that time. He was in the office for about two, two years, a little over two years then he resigned. So...[] campus.

So we've been working together for the last 15 years almost. He'll be here 15 years this month or I should say next week. And when I first came, my role has changed. I hired to be a secretary, do typing, and of course over the years and the implementation of computers, that type of thing, I've had to learn more over the years and with two of us in the office, in our function has changed. It's a, a lot different. I was green when I came; I didn't really know what the world was all about, really.

AB: So how do you feel the University has changed over the years?

DB: Well, it's grown. As I say the role that we have here is certainly changed. We're more involved, more with benefits; we're more involved with the contact with all employees, not just certain segment of employees. We've got the computer now so

we're more involved with the payroll system directly, before we used to just so much, now we're putting more into the system. And there's of course more staff. Staff has certainly increased over the years. So that means our responsibilities in terms of what we're doing is more. Its, it's just grown. You know staff has changed a lot. We've seen a lot of people come and go over the years. Seventeen years, it's to be expected.

AB: So how has the relationship between the staff and the faculty, and the staff and the students changed since you've been here?

DB: Between the staff and the faculty? (AB: Hum) I wouldn't that has changed any great deal. I would think it's pretty well the same. I wouldn't see a change there except in maybe the faculty has grown as well, you know, there's more classes and there's more involvement with the staff too. The support staff in those departments to help our faculty. But I wouldn't say there's any change in any other way or shape.

AB: I see. As far as the student population goes, have you noticed any changes in terms of gender, ethnic origin and age since you've been here?

DB: They just seem to get younger every year. I look at them and I say, my word was I ever that young? Well the student body has certainly grown over the years. I believe when I first came we were looking at maybe an enrollment of 4000, now there is more or less double the, or more than double since that time. But don't think the students changed much, maybe their dress has changed. But they're all eager, they're all, you know, the first couple of days on campus they're all trying to find, find themselves and the eagerness is there, every year, for the first, you know, the freshmen as they're called. I've always found the students to be polite. And I don't see any change other than the volume of the number of students. Of course you have to realize too is this office isn't really involved with student population, we're personnel, we deal with the staff.

Okay, so we just see students in the hallway or students come in here, they need to make application for a job on campus, so we don't get the involvement with students that the faculty gets or the Registrar's office or Admissions or some of the other areas. So I guess our involvement is just visual. We just see all those kids moving around but we don't, we don't see them on a regular basis, we don't sit down and met with them or you know discuss how they're doing in class or anywhere like that, 'cause we just don't know these, they just don't have any need to come here other than to put in applications.

AB: So how would you describe changes in the nature of the personnel here, in terms of the same type of things, gender, ethnic origin and age.

DB: (Pause) I'm just trying to think. Thinking back, when I first came here, (pause) a lot of the secretaries were just using typewriters. Now of course we have people who are skilled in different types of computers and have various software, training, they're sort of thing. So we're, we're probably...

(Someone interrupts. Mr. Stone: "I am going to have to interrupt.")

I remember back 17 years, when I first came here. Okay, as far as age goes, I mentioned earlier about the computers. I think we're more directed towards younger secretaries 'cause they're coming out with all these computer programs. And of course when we, I first came here it was all materials, no age range it was all ages.

And, but that's not to say that there aren't women more mature coming out of the programs as well, but we find sometimes you get more people who have it in a younger age group because they're being trained in it now, but I would say that if we look at the age range around the University, I would say most of the age is between over 30 for secretaries. I'm trying to think right off the top of my head, and it's hard.

AB: That's all right, just your perceptions.

DB: Yeah, we have a fairly diverse segment of ages here. So secretarial staff and [], we're they're all female. We do have one male.

AB: Oh, you do?

DB: Yeah, we never had that when I first came but we do have a male secretary. And I think it depends on the job too, the number of males there are versus females. I mean we have a...

(Hello. Hi there.)

The question over again. I think if you look at the secretarial staff, you're going to find there's still a variety of ages. You can't say they're all in their 20s, they're all in their 30s, we have some that are in their fifties and we do have one male secretary. A lot of the jobs in our trade are male dominated. 'Cause carpenters, plumbers, painters, stuff like that. I think it depends on the need where the change has taken place, where the increase in staff is taking place as per say, whether the male or female increase in staff. Surprisingly enough the University hasn't really grown as for a staff has grown over the years. Not to the extent that the student body has grown. In proportion to the student body, I wouldn't think that our staff has grown all that much. And couldn't tell you the exact numbers, you know all the increase in staff from 17 years ago till today. I would, I would imagine that we have a few extra secretarial people you know, where before there used to be one secretary in some offices, now there's two and in some instances three. [] More faculty here, at least in the part-time segment, people working 9 months. I wouldn't think, I can't, I can't remember what the full-time segment of faculty had been back 17 years ago. I know that it's around roughly today full-time. So there's probably been an increase in faculty and I think of where else, a few extra people in the maintenance area, I think our custodial staff has increased just a little bit but not much. And of course, we have an athletics department that brought in a few extra jobs with the creation of the facility, and the relocation of different student service building.

AB: Ok, what change have you noticed in the actual buildings on campus?

DB: The athletics department has been added to the University since I've come. The football field was just dirt now we have the astro-turf. Well our offices have relocated since I've been here, we've had larger facilities from when I just came. There's been cosmetic changes to a lot of the offices over the years, making more efficient, some of the offices are quite populated with staff (Stone: "excuse me") but they're, going to there... A fine example would be the Registrar's Office. They had cosmetic changes there two years ago which certainly makes it look better for everybody. What other buildings have changed? (Pause) The Auditorium has changed after I got here, the Gym wall, Computer Services moved downstairs, the Basketball Court's now over in the Athletics Center, Physical plant department has changed. I mean if

anything, I think the biggest problem the University has is lack of space to accommodate any kind of growth in any office. Physical plant when I came was a two-person office, and they had a few other offices scattered out throughout buildings, wherever you could find space. Now it's a neat well-organized office and they're all working in the same area, and so I think it's a lot better for them from that aspect. Computer Services they had a small operation over in the Science building. They relocated to where the University Gym used to be. They have a nice operation. Their staff I think that's one of the areas where there's been a big increase in staff. I think when I came there was just about 3 or 4 in the office, now there's 14. Now there's 14 staff members in that department. I suppose there's been growth in some of the areas that are there you don't think about until you sit down and talk to someone and say "Changes that have taken place" The Registrar's Office has changed as well as staff growth over the years. Those are some of the major areas, but there's also required areas where you need to see the growth because of the constant changes that are taking place in the University. I think the computer labs are more prominent.

AB: Specifically in the personnel department, how has services that were offered over the years changed?

DB: Well we changed. We're more involved with the faculty than we used to be. We're more involved in the benefits program than when we first started out. When we first started here the operation it was basically to just deal with the support stuff, segment of staff, you know to do files on them, to take care of salary increase, to make sure everyone was on a list, salaries get categories of people, but over the years we're more involved not with the faculty, we're more involved with the benefits program, for everybody not just one segment of staff So we're totally administrating the benefits here and also the salaries.

AB: Have the benefits themselves changed?

DB: Ah, yes. Yes over the years they've been improved. When I first came here there was an insurance plan for me, it covered, there was an insurance plan for faculty and administration and there was an insurance plan for custodial, but people in my position, there was nothing there for us. So we had no security in the sense that of long term disability if we, if I got ill. Then they had sick leave at that point was only 20 day max and so I was unprotected. Now we have an insurance plan that's very, very good. A long term disability benefit that's excellent, we now have a sick leave policy that enables me to build it over the years and if I don't use it then it's sitting there. So I'm protected all on a full salary so that if something happens, the pension plan has improved. When I came you had to be 28 to be eligible to get into it, now you're eligible at 25, it's compulsory at 30. This is a protection for staff so that people that might say, "well I don't want to get it and somewhere down the road they're wishing they had gotten into something because some day we're all going to retire. And it's gonna be nice to know you've got something to fall back on financially, that you're not totally gonna be dependent on the government, cause there's no guarantees with the government these days. And benefits have improved for things like tuition waiver. All staff can have tuition waiver discount at 50% and for a while it used to be you had to be here a year before you were eligible, now it's automatic; and it's also 50% tuition discount for your dependent spouse and dependent children. Vacations have improved, we used to, I think it, it used, I'm trying to remember what it used to be. I think it was two weeks, then three years, and then four years tops, and now we're up to five.

Okay the benefits packages have definitely improved and we've become more involved with the administration of these benefits over the years. We had very little involvement and then all of a sudden we are totally responsible for administering it here at the University, making sure that staff are aware of what they've available to get into, making sure that they fill out the necessary enrollment forms correspondence with the carriers and implementing any change through the course of time. For example if someone came on and doesn't get in to a benefit or isn't eligible, we ensure that when they become eligible they're made aware of it, they fill out the necessary form at that time and we enroll them. And then if they terminate, they have to make sure that they're cancelled and that the company knows of it, you know we just, it's just a sort of circle. So yeah, I would say the benefits are probably one of the biggest changes, I've noticed over the years, and it's all for the betterment of staff. Tuition discount we went over, vacation has improved. We still get our Christmas holidays here which is Christmas closure for everybody, which is something. I've always enjoyed because I don't live in Halifax, well I live in Halifax but I am from Cape Breton, so I always like to go home over the holidays and visit with my family, and we have ample time to do that, it's not just one or two days and you got to rush back. And of course, we're trying to improve in other areas; employee assistance, employee seminars, training programs, that type of thing. We're getting more involved with other Universities in trying to have what is an inter-University program so that it is, what's made available to St. Mary's is also available to Dal or to the Mount Saint Vincent or TUNS. So I guess we're getting more affiliated with the other Universities in that regard. I'm sure I'm going to remember some things after you leave the office. (Laughs)

AB: Well I'll come back...

DB: Probably not hearing any of this, I would say the benefits have definitely been an improvement over the years.

AB: Okay, is there anything else you can think of that you would like to add?

DB: I guess we're just, we've been together for 15 years, (laughs), my bosses and I, so that's 32 years between us. I think the thing I like about the University is its flexibility. It's a lot different from the public sector goings and working for someone like Maritime Tel & Tel. We have seen a lot of changes over the years in regards to when I first came we had no Union for support staff, now we have a Union, the office has, we've only been two seventeen years. We try to keep up with the increase in our workload, sometimes it gets a little hectic in here, the air starts to turn blue. But I think we're both willing to sacrifice our time if we are needed to stay late, work weekends, whatever is necessary. And we try to provide a top quality service to the University. And I think we're going to see more changes over the years, especially with things that are being considered by government, that type of thing. We just hope that we're both around to enjoy those changes.

I think in the mentioned earlier, the thing I like about the University; it's like a community atmosphere. A lot of people you know, you meet each other, you know each other, there's no isolation there, especially in this office where we see them come through here first. So we know them, we know each and every employee and we have an open door policy here. We hope employees come if they have a problem and that they know that when they come here, it's totally confidential. I guess that's about it. I just think this is a great place to work.

AB: Great!

DB: I would be here for seventeen years otherwise. That's it.