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Recommended Citation

Songy, Barbara and Institute of Child Nutrition. Child Nutrition Archives., "Barbara Songy" (2009). *Oral History Project (all interviews)*. 1.

https://egrove.olemiss.edu/icn_ohistories/1

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Barbara Songy Oral History

Barbara Songy is a native of London, England, but has spent many more years in Louisiana feeding that state's children than she ever spent in the United Kingdom. Barbara came to the United States as a war bride, having met and married a Louisiana airman during World War II. Displeased with what her first child was being served for lunch, she set about not only improving the menu, she raised the funds to build a new cafeteria. When the person who was supposed to manage the new cafeteria suddenly had to resign she agreed to take on the job temporarily. She retired fifty-five years later. Melba Hollingsworth interviewed Barbara in January 2009.

MH: This is January 29, 2009, and I am here at the New Orleans Archdiocese in beautiful New Orleans, Louisiana, and I'm here with...

BS: Barbara Songy.

MH: Barbara Songy. Would you tell us a little bit about yourself and where you grew up?

BS: I'm a native of London, England. I met my husband during World War II. He was with the 8th Air Force. I taught ice skating as a pastime and he came to the rink for me to teach him to ice skate. And you know as well as I do you can't teach people in Louisiana to ice skate, because there's no ice here. But I didn't know that; I didn't know that we didn't have snow and ice in Louisiana. Anyway, I'm a convert to Catholic faith through his staunch Catholic background. I came over here in 1946 and settled in Kenner, and enrolled my child in Catholic school in Kenner. And thus began the history of my association with school food service.

MH: So what's your earliest recollection; that's your earliest recollection of the child nutrition program?

BS: Oh yes.

MH: When you went to school in England was there something like a lunch program?

BS: Yes. I can well remember that around 10:30 in the morning we would each have a bottle of milk. And we had to drink that milk; that was our snack. And then at lunchtime they provided us with a sandwich lunch. I thought it was great, because by that time I was hungry. It was not like the program we have here. It just provided something for a hungry child.

MH: Can you tell us a little about your educational background; which schools you attended?

BS: I'm just a high school graduate; that's it. But I've learned a lot through my association – fifty-five years I was associated with school food service – and I've learned a lot in my association with them.

MH: So tell me how you got involved with the profession, and was there a mentor that directed you?

BS: I'll go back to the first parent meeting I attended, which was a couple of days after my child got in school. And they asked me if I would run for an office of Treasurer for that organization. And I said, "Anything I can do I will be glad to do, but of course you know, you don't know a thing about me and I could abscond with all of your money." And they laughed and they said, "Oh, but we don't handle the money. The priest handles all the money." So I said that was alright. "I'll still be involved." "Will you come and help us prepare the lunch?" I said, "Oh, I'd love that." Of course I lived not too far, and I had another child who was not ready for school yet, and I said, "Can I bring him?" and they said, "Yes." So I was all excited. The next day I went down there to help with the lunch. I figured some good soul had made a pot of soup, and maybe a sandwich or something, and oh I was very happy to think that they'd have something like that. When I got there I saw all the baskets lined up, and I said, "What do you put in the baskets?" "Oh, we're going to make Spam sandwiches." Well, having gone through the war in England, I well knew about Spam. It wasn't for my children. And then they brought a bottle of root beer. My kids had never had soft drinks. I said, "Well, you know, this is going to be an education for me. So I helped them that day and I went right to the principal the next day and I said, "You know Sister, we've got to improve that. That's not a lunch. That's horrible." I said, "Why can't we make soup or something like that?" She said, "Well you know Barbara, about four years ago they started a national lunch program because so many of the men were 4F. They were not nourished properly, so they started a lunch program. And let me tell you something. If you have a place the government will give you all the equipment you need, and you could have a hot-lunch program." I said, "Well tell me more." So she said, "And it will only cost you 15-cents and that would include their milk too. You would have a balanced meal." Well I couldn't wait so I said, "Tell me more about it." So she went on and on. I was delighted. I said, "Well let me go tell Father and I know he's going to be happy." So I got on the bus and went back home; went over to see Sister first. She said, "Well honey, you have to go talk to Father." I said, "Well I'll be glad to talk to him." So I went over to talk to Father. And I said, "Father I've got some good news." I said, "You know, we can have a cafeteria in our school at no cost to us." And I went and told him the whole story. "Where are you going to put it?" I said, "Well, in the basement." The school was 150 years old, but it was still a good old school. It had a nice basement down below. He said, "You can't use the basement for that. We have bingo two times a week. You can't have a lunch program in there. If you want a lunch program then you build a cafeteria." Well, he told that to the wrong one. I went back to Sister. I said, "Well, looks like my job's going to be to build a cafeteria." So she said, "Well you know Barbara, we can do it." She said, "I can tell you, we can have lots of penny parties." I said, "Wait a minute. Hold it right there Sister." I said, "You know, I've been in the United States long enough to know it takes a hundred pennies to make one dollar." I said, "How long are we going to have to work at penny parties to make enough to build a building, to build a place?" She said, "Oh, we don't sell everything for a penny. We charge 25-cents, 50-cents; sometimes a dollar." Well I bought into it. I said, "Well maybe it's a good beginning." So then I said, "Well my job would be

to find out how much something like that was going to cost and where could we build it?" She said, "Well, we own that lot across the street." So I said, "Is there anyone in this community you know that has money?" She said, "Well, there's an Italian settlement here, a lot of Catholics; you know Italians have money." I said, "Well, is there any society the men belong to?" She said, "Oh, they have the St. Rosalie Society, very old, very old, very wealthy." So I said, "Well, if I can find out how much it costs, then maybe I can get an outlet, a possibility to raise some money." So the next thing I do was to find out someone in the community who can help me as far as contracting; what we would build and how much it would cost; just happened to have a man in the community that had a lumber yard there. So I went to see him, another Catholic man, and he said, "You know Mrs. Songy, I believe I can help you with that." He said, "Give me a little while. You're going to need something about 150 feet this, and about fifty feet this way." I said, "I don't know how large it has to be, but," I said, "We have about 200 kids in the school, and if they're going to eat lunch, you know, you're going to have to sit them down in a place. We've got to have a kitchen too." He said, "Don't worry. I'll get an idea and I'll call you." Which he did, and he said, "I think we can put up a building, it will be a cinderblock building, but it'll be very sturdy. He said, "We can do it for about twenty thousand dollars." That was the 1950s, now. It was a lot of money. So I said, "Well, Mr. Laceux, you think that if I could raise the money, that you could do it?" He said, "Oh, yes, absolutely." He said, "I'll tell you what I'm going to do." He said, "I'm going to chip in with some of the cost." I said, "Well that's fine, fine. Thank you very much." So I went back to my friend and I said, "Now who is the man that runs the St. Rosalie Society?" She said, "His name is Uncle August Christina. Call him Uncle August because he likes everyone to call him Uncle August, and he lives right by the school." So I called him and he said, "Come on over and talk to me." So I went over there that same day and I said, "You know, I have a problem." And I told him all about it. He said, "Well, you know, it's mighty nice of you to be interested in the children in that school. You don't know them." I said, "No, I intend on getting to know them." So he said, "I tell you what we're going to do." He said, "You have your penny party, and whatever you raise, we'll match it." He said, "And then, anytime you have a fundraiser, come back and we'll match what you make." So, we had the penny party and we made five thousand dollars – a lot of money. So Sister got all excited. She said, "Honey, we can have another one in the spring, but we'll make it like a pageant; we'll sell ads in the book. Well, we had eleven sisters in that [convent] at the time, and only two hundred kids in school. You know how lucky we were. So we put on this pageant; we made about twelve thousand dollars that pageant. And I went back to my benefactor and he came through with the money, so in 1954 we built our cafeteria. We could seat 180 kids in it, but of course they came in shifts, you know. We found somebody who could run it for us. She had two children and the daughter was going to graduate from one of the Catholic schools in New Orleans, so she said, "I'm going to have a little time." And I know the lady. She was one of the few friends I had at that time because I hadn't been there that long. And I knew she was a very methodical person, very organized, and very involved in the Church. So she said, "I'll be glad to run that program." And I said, "Well talk to Sister." Well, that was a big thing, someone to run the program. And I said, "I'll come and I'll help you every day." Well, her daughter decided she was going to go into the St. Joseph Order, so they wanted to move into New Orleans to be close to her. She said, "Barbara, I can't take that

job.” It just so happened that that girl, she became the Mother Provincial of the entire order, not only in the United States, but [internationally]. She is a very gifted woman. So, it was a good sacrifice I had to make, but of course, there was no one to run the cafeteria. So Sister said, “Barbara, why don’t you do it?” I said, “Me? I don’t know how to cook. I’ve never seen half this food that they have here.” I never saw green peppers; I never saw corn; that was all foreign to me. I said, “I don’t know how to cook for these people.” She said, “But you could learn.” I said, “Well, who’s going to teach me?” She said, “We’ll teach you.” I said, “Well, I’ll tell you what I’ll do. I’ve got a little girl a year and a half. I’ll have to find someone to take care of her. If I can do that, I’ll come and I’ll do it temporarily.” She said, “That’s good enough.” By the way, we’ll take your little girl over at the convent. We’ve got eleven sisters over there. They can babysit that little girl for you.” So, I got hooked into it. And I thought I did pretty well until one day the third grade teacher came into the cafeteria and she said, “Mrs. Songy, who plans the menus?” And I said, “Well, I do. Is there a problem?” She said, “Well I have a problem.” Now this was a woman who was six feet one; I think she must have weighed about 250-60 pounds. And she said, “Well you know, you never serve corn with spaghetti and meatballs.” And I said, “Oh really?” I said, “Well you know, I got feedback from the teachers and the parents.” I said, “And they told me those were two of the items the kids LOVED, so I put it at the same time.” I said, “Now, whether it’s according to [hoil] I don’t know, but I will certainly try to avoid that in future. But the kids really love it.” So she was very nice but I thought to myself, oh, I was so embarrassed. I know so little about food planning. I’m never going to make it at this job. I’m going to have to find someone to run it. But sisters pitched in and so fifty-five years, fifty-five years. So.

MH: What was one of your typical days?

BS: What do you mean, from hours?

MH: Yes. When you came in.

BS: Oh well, we don’t talk about that, because my husband claimed I was married to that job. I’d take my children in the morning. Of course they had a little preschool program. I’d put them in there and then I’d get busy about my work. The problem was that two years after we started we went from feeding about 180 to 1,113 kids. We had 200 kids in school there; two years later we had 1,113 children in the school. We were renting the theater, the old theater over here, we were renting that; we had kids hanging from the ceiling we had so many kids. Those were all the Baby Boomers coming to school. And we were delighted, because at that time we were the mother parish. Now those other parishes, they built houses and young couples moved there and they had children. So by degrees other parishes were formed so we got less and less. But we did end up, when we moved into our new school that we built in 1961, we planned it for 800 children. It was a magnificent school, just right across the street from where the old school was, and we thought we were going to do very well. However, the first year we opened we were the first school to integrate, which was a very, very difficult time for us. People, Catholics, good Catholics were challenged, and they didn’t respond as we thought they should, so we lost quite a few children. However, we saved the program, and to this day we’ve had a

very, very good school there; a mixture of all sorts of children, Black, Vietnamese, Spanish, and it's just a very beautiful family, it really is. And I think we learned at that time, we went through a very difficult time, but we went through it the right way, and with the help of God we came through it and never had any problems.

MH: So you went from 200 children until when you left how many children?

BS: When I left it was fifty-five years later, but we went up in two years, we registered 1,113 children. I worked for 17 pastors in Kenner, and that many principals. One of the more recent principals, they had a gathering at the Sisters of Mercy, and I did an English tea for them. And some of the old sisters came back, and one of the younger sisters said to me – I was telling them about it – I said, “You know, we went from 200 kids to 1,113 kids at school in two years.” I said, “Just think, the challenge we had.” Sister said, “No, we never had 1,113 kids in the school.” I said, “Oh yes we did.” I happened to see Sister Madeline, who was there when I first started, and she said, “Miss chere,” She was so French, she just rattled away; she was so glad to see me and she said, “You know, it's hard to believe that we educated - at one time we had 1,113 kids. I said, “Thank you Sister. Thank you Sister.” She made a point that she might be old, but she remembered. So it was a challenge, and I mean it was a busy time. I can't tell you what I did in a course of a day, but I knew everything I did was connected with school food service. I tried to teach myself a lot about the foods.

MH: What were some of the challenges, like for example the food? How did you get the food? Did you have to go to the market; did you order it, or what?

BS: No, no, no. We had one lady who was in charge of everything, Catholic school, public schools, and everything. So I made an appointment to see her and she told me basically what we would have to do. And of course it was a loosely knit program – then. Not what we have now where it's really scrutinized and they've got their thumbs on everything that's going on now – which is the way it should be. They didn't teach us anything. There was no one to teach us. They didn't have the funds to do that. So we had to learn by trial and error. I went to the parents; that was my biggest aid. I said, “What do you[r] kids like to eat?” and they told me, so I made the menus. And I made some not-so-good combinations sometimes, but you learn that way. And we always had about 75 percent of the children in our school that ate hot lunch program. And of course you went from a fifteen cent lunch to when I retired it was a dollar and a half, I think.

MH: When did you retire?

BS: Right before Katrina.

MH: Oh, really?

BS: I decided in March that I would retire and Katrina hit in August. I said, “Thank you, Jesus” that I didn't have to go through that, but it was hard.

MH: Do you remember other challenges that you had?

BS: One of the biggest problems that I had was trying to keep some form of decorum in the cafeteria. When my children ate at home they ate and then went and did what they wanted to do and played and talked and everything. But when you get 180 kids in a cafeteria and they're all just talking – noisy. And then of course it goes from that to something else, and then to something else, so I really felt like the supervision of the children was not my responsibility. It should have been taught to them in the classroom, because it's part of their education. That was one of my goals, to get it all part of the child's education. And I was very successful, because what wonderful cooperation. Then with that came little rewards; so when I gave little rewards, I always gave things out that were very nutritious to eat, but they were good. And I said, "You see what you get when you behave? You get a nice treat and it's a healthy snack that you're getting." So it worked out very well, and as challenges arose, you know, we met them. But I always had to go to people involved with the education of those children. Those were primarily my interest.

MH: What was some of the uniqueness of some of the foods concerned? You had the experience of England but now you're in New Orleans, so what're some of the unique menus that you found interesting?

BS: At that time, we didn't have Spanish foods. We had a lot of Creole foods, and then of course in that particular school we had a lot of Italian food. But then the branching out - I tried to introduce other foods that were served elsewhere in the world. I think if you did enough thought and planning and preparation before – don't just spring it on the kids – "What's that, what's that?" – but you kind of led up to that; then they'd ask you, "When are we going to have that Spanish food?" or "When are we going to have that Vietnamese food?" And now they incorporate that into the different types of foods.

MH: What did they eat on Fridays?

BS: There was No Meat Fridays. And of course at the public schools they respected that. Of course we did our own menus for a long time, so I never served meat on Fridays or on those days in Lent that were very special to us.

MH: What things were served that day?

BS: There were always fish sticks, there were fish sticks; baked macaroni and cheese; and what else? Of course we couldn't buy seafood because that was too expensive.

MH: Fish sticks, huh?

BS: Fish sticks and tuna fish, egg salad, things like that. We managed, and we always managed to find something they liked because we always served a very good percentage of the children in the school. That was my barometer. When I saw those lunch counts go down – "Wait a minute, hold on; this is not something they like."

MH: You kept yourself on the pulse, huh?

BS: Oh, yes.

MH: What changes have you seen in the child nutrition profession over the years?

BS: I always had days for the alumni to come back and eat at school and they'd always say - we had a salad bar, we had a sandwich bar. All of these things came over the years – and they'd always say, “How come we didn't have that when we were at school? We had to eat everything on our plate. I mean everything. And if we didn't do it Sister would make us go sit down and eat it.” And of course there were always the jokes of what they did with the food, where they hid the food. And one time somebody hid it in his sock, and his sock was all green from spinach. These are the things that happen. You've got to keep up with the kids; stay one step ahead of them all the time.

MH: What do you feel has been your most significant contribution to the field?

BS: [long pause] There's so many aspects of that that I really – I thought menu planning was my – that's the thing that I love to do more than anything else because I did a lot of work with that. I tried to be creative, but yet meet the needs of the children. I thought it was very important. And then of course you've got to try a media thing on them because they're not going to try anything they don't know about. So it was constantly thinking creative ideas. How do we introduce this? And then after it goes over, it goes over well, then we say, “That was a big success. We're going to repeat that.” But if it went flat, we say, “Well, we'll push that in the corner and we'll work on that.” The menu planning to me was the thing I took the greatest delight in and worked hard at.

MH: Marketed.

BS: I really did. I marketed, yes I did.

MH: Do you have any memorable stories of the children, or your workers?

BS: The thing I remember most about the kids is when the kids would come and I would say, “You don't look so good today. You look like you're kind of sad today.” “My Mama and Daddy are fighting.” I said, “That's between Mama and Daddy.” “No, but I've got to go live with Grandma now.” So I said, “Well look, why don't you come on in my office and let me get you a little something, a little snack?” I'd give them a graham cracker or something, and they'd talk. They'd pour out their little hearts to me. And that I think - I took the role of a second Mom in a lot of instances. And that was a great deal of satisfaction for me because I felt those kids felt they had a friend. And I knew more about those families than they knew I knew, but they poured out their little hearts and I was like a sounding block I guess for the kids. The other things were that when there was a need in the family and they were so proud they wouldn't ask, and I would have to do a little delving into it. I'd find out - help them get free lunches for the children. The parents

couldn't pay for it. To me that was the saddest thing – for a child to come there and have a sandwich or something in his bag – God knows what he had in that bag – and he'd look at that food as he came through the line and I'd say, "It looks good, huh?" And he'd say, "Um hum." "Would you want to taste it?" "No, I've got my lunch." But then I'd go afterwards and I'd say, "I've got a little extra. Would you like to taste that?" "Oh, yes." And they'd eat away. And I know it broke the rules in some instances because there are set rules and they're set there for a purpose. Sometimes I broke those rules, but I broke it with a good heart, because the need was there for that child to get something to eat.

MH: What advice would you give someone who's thinking about going into this profession?

BS: The greatest, the greatest job in the world. And you have to be patient. You have to be willing to learn. You can't go in like gangbusters and now I know it all, because you don't. It's a whole different education for you. But to me it's the greatest, greatest challenge in the world, and it's the greatest gift back to you. Because now, for instance, I was in the restaurant where we get breakfast about two weeks ago and the men, there were a lot of men sitting at the bar, and someone called out to me, "Hi Mrs. Songy." And I looked and I saw this young – I guess he must be in his forties – and I went over to tell him hello. I figured, you know, "I know my face never changes; it gets older, so you can remember me, but I can't remember you, because I must have known you when you were much younger." And he said, "I just wanted to let you know, Mrs. Songy, that we miss you at that school." He said, "We really – the kids really miss you." And I said, "Well, I miss them too." He said, "No." He said, "They had a Mama at school there they could talk to. And if something was hurting them they know where to go. They had a Mama, a second Mama at school." I said, "Well, I thank you. That's the greatest thing you could tell me; the greatest compliment you could pay me." And that goes on all the time no matter where I go, I always see someone that came to our school. He says, "I was the chair boy Mrs. Songy. You remember how you used to feed us? You used to let us come back and get seconds after everyone was served." He said, "I never left that school hungry."

MH: Good memories.

BS: Wonderful memories, wonderful memories, wonderful memories - and it went on. I was responsible with Archbishop Hannon for establishing the first home for domestic violence for mothers and children in New Orleans thirty years ago, because there was a need. They were sleeping in their cars; nowhere to go. It's the children that get me all the time, you know. So Archbishop Hannon said, "Barbara, if we're going to include the children it's going to be a much more difficult thing to take care of. We will have a hard time establishing that program, because where children are concerned there's a lot of red tape." I said, "I don't care. If we don't care for the children, we have no program." And one of the first clients that came to that house after we got it established was a family from our school. And it was some years later that she said to me, "When I opened that door first," she said, "Mrs. Songy, what are you doing here?" I said, "Well you have an advantage over me. I don't know who you are." She said, "I'll never forget you because

when I made my First Communion you took me out and bought me my First Communion dress, and my prayer book, and my rosary, and I'll never forget you." She said, "That was the most beautiful dress I ever had." I said, "Those are the things that come back to you." You know, you say, "Thank you Lord for putting me in that place at that time." I just feel that school food service is an absolute necessity in a school. Now another little story – I don't want to take all your time -

MH: Go ahead.

BS: When I was president of the Houma School Association here for school food workers, I found that a lot of the schools that we had meeting at, that there was educators [gestures to her right], and there was cafeteria ladies, [gestures to her left] and never the twain shall meet. And I said, "Well how sad, because they're all involved in the overall education of the child, so he could work to his best potential all the time." So I said, "We're going to have to do something about this." So I said, "Why don't we do a high tea, an English high tea with fine china – everything?" I said, "And we'll do it in honor of all the principals of all of the schools in the Archdiocese." I said, "We can use our talent." because the women working in school food service are multi-talented.

MH: Absolutely.

BS: You don't see the work that they're capable of doing in their everyday lives, but they have great talent. I said, "This will give us an opportunity to do all of these things that are so English. We can teach them how to do it if they don't know how, and we'll put this on. And we did. The last one was our sixteenth, so we've been doing it for sixteen years. And we put on the biggest high tea – beautiful – that you ever saw. And the principals came, and I think we kind of shocked them – this is sort of a classy thing. And we all made it a point of letting those principals know the people in the cafeteria did all this work. They made all of these fancy sandwiches, all of these [things] that are so English. Of course we served tea. We were sort of building a bridge to bring two factions together, and that way there's no end to what we can do for that child. And then the state picked it up and they said, "Would you put on a demonstration of that tea at the state convention?" We did that too.

MH: Wow!

BS: I gave them a booklet. I had everything step-by-step. I said, "You can do it for ten people. You can do it for a thousand people. But you just have to use the formula I'm setting up here for you, and then multiply it." It really was a tool. I thought it was a great, terrific tool for us to use to bring everyone together. It is the best-attended thing that we ever have.

MH: Is this the sixteenth year?

BS: Going to be the seventeenth next year.

MH: Wow; and when do you have it, what month?

BS: December. What else but in December, where everyone's in a very giving mood – right at the beginning of Advent – we do it the first week in Advent. We send out invitations to the principals and ask them to bring their guests with them. They can bring their assistant, or their secretary – whoever they want, and a lot of the men come too, a lot of the men principals come. So it's a big, successful thing.

MH: Wonderful.

BS: I love doing it. I love doing it. I haul all my teacups and saucers and my teapots from my house. The first year I thought I was being so smart. I said, "You know, I've got all that English china that I brought with me from London. I'm going to give some of them a teacup and saucer." I thought we'd have maybe ten, twenty at the most. I gave away forty-two cups and saucers. I depleted my collection. I said, "What did I do?!" But we give them something which is symbolic of the high tea as a little souvenir, a little thank-you to them. I had the Superintendent of Schools in Houma/Thibodaux tell me, "Barbara," she said, "I made me a shadow box, and I put everything in that shadow box that had to do with the tea, and that's my teatime memories." I'm telling you it was just a wonderful, wonderful thing, you know?

MH: Thanks you so much for coming.

BS: Well you're more than welcome. I know a lot of that stuff is a lot of talk.

MH: No, no. You bring so much to the program.

BS: I love it and anytime I have an opportunity to do anything I do it.

MH: Everybody said, "You have to do Barbara Songy. You have to, have to." And then just by miracle we were able to catch you. But you know, there are no miracles; it was just by -

BS: That's right. Now how would I ever have come over here from London, England? I remember I dated my – I tried to teach him to ice skate, but you know, there was no way I could teach that man to ice skate.

MH: A Songy.

BS: A Songy. And he was such a good boy. We were married for fifty-four years, so you know he was a good man, but he painfully went through that for a couple of Sundays, and then he sat me down and said, "Wouldn't you like to go to the theatre maybe one weekend, instead of going to ice skate?" And I thought to myself, "Well, I can't afford the theatre in the West End, but I will be glad to go if you're going to take me." So he took me, and I'll never forget, of course you're much too young to [know] about this, it was The Indian Love Call - Rosalie, and I sat there enthralled. And of course we went to

a nice restaurant to eat afterwards, and I said, "Well, this is not so bad, you know." And then after a few times I asked – have you got time for me telling this? – one Saturday night we were going out and he said, "You know," he said, "I've got to go to church tonight." I thought to myself, "Church – why would you go to church. You go to church on Sunday." He said, "Well, I'm going to confession." Well, this was all new to me. I had no religious background at all. So he said, "You can sit in the back of church". So I sat in the back of church and I'm sitting there and he's over here praying. And then I see this man come in with a little hat on his head and a long black dress. And I looked and I said, "Well, I wonder who he is." Then I saw him go in behind this curtain. And then my – well it was my husband later – he got up and went in there with that – and I thought, "Oh my God, what sort of religion am I getting myself into? What is going on in there?" Well anyway, I was worrying about all of this and I was there in the big city of London, and I'm sitting in a church I know nothing about, and he came out, and it was like he never saw me. He went straight down to the front of the church and knelt by the altar. And he was there for about, I'd say about ten minutes, and I thought to myself, "I wonder if he forgot he brought me? It looks like he doesn't even know I'm here." And I agonized over that, and then he finally came back to me and he said, "Are you ready to go?" And I said, "I'm glad you asked me because you brought me here, and I thought maybe you'd forgotten you brought me here." So anyway, we went to this restaurant, beautiful restaurant in London, and we waited our table, and then they sat us down. There were two of us and it was a table set for four or six, I forget. And then they brought a black man, an airman just like my husband. He had a lady with him, and they sat him down by us. My husband was squirming and I said, "Well, what's wrong with you?" I said, "We don't know them but that's ok. They've got room for them at the table." And he said, "But we don't sit with black people to eat." Now you know, this is the 1940s, and even in the service they didn't mix. And I thought, "This is a strange challenge." I said, "This is really – why, why would there be a difference?" But as I got to know him I realized this was the way he was born and raised. He was raised in the country; one of ten children, and that was the way he was brought up. But anyway, I had to ask him more about this religion and I asked him so many questions he said, "I can't answer all the questions you ask me. Why don't you come see the chaplain?" He said, "I'll take you to see the chaplain. I know he can answer all those questions." So I went to meet the chaplain a couple of times; a very nice man. And he said, "Barbara, you're so interested in this Catholic faith." I said, "Well, it mystifies me, because I've never been exposed to that before." It was so structured. So anyway, one of the times I went back to the base and the chaplain was there, and he said, "Barbara, I want to ask you something." He said, "Are you in love with this guy here?" And I said, "What do you mean in love – in love, get married and go to the United States?" I said, "Oh no indeed. I'm never going to leave England. And I'm never going to become a Catholic." I said, "I think it's a wonderful religion, but it's not for me." And I convinced myself of that. Well, a year later I was back with the chaplain again and he said, "Now, I'm going to start giving you instructions because I know you are getting married because Dutch told me you are getting married whenever they give permission for girls to get married – I was a foreign girl. So anyway, he gave me all my instructions and then he said, "They might ship me off to Germany, but I want to marry you." And it was a little church by Kew Gardens. Do you know where Kew Gardens is?

MH: Yes.

BS: Pretty little church there. So that's where we got married. I just think by his example – he was such a good man – he didn't have to talk to me about the Catholic faith, he lived it. And I [said] it was so special for him. I made my Communion, I made my Confirmation and my Solemn Communion one weekend, and six weeks later I was married at a Nuptial Mass. And the chaplain said, "Barbara, I'm going to marry you at a Nuptial Mass." I said, "What is that Father?" I said, "Is it going to cost more money?" He said, "BARBARA!" He said, "Let me tell you about the Nuptial Mass." He said, "Many graces come with that. It's a special mass." He said, "When you get married I'll marry you at a Nuptial Mass; there's a lot of graces that you're not going to need right now, but they're going to be put in the bank, just like you would if you were saving a few dollars of your salary, you put it aside for a rainy day. Put those in there for a rainy day and anytime in your marriage that you have problems those graces are going to come up like a fountain and refresh you." He was, I'm telling you, I swear that happened. I never had a problem that I couldn't resolve in my married life. We had problems but we always resolved them, and I know it was because of that faith; I really do, so I thank my husband for that.

MH: Thank you. You have been just an inspiration.

BS: Well, you've been in school lunch. I have a daughter that never had anything to do with this, but she is a Registered Dietician and she specialized in tube-feedings for special children.

MH: Oh, really.

BS: And that's her life. She does contractual work with the state, and then with Magnolia School. She feeds all the children over there. I had nothing to do with that, but this is what she does, and she puts in long hours like I used to, but it's the same thing I had. She said, "Mama, I am an advocate for those children. And if I leave them who's going to take care of that?"

MH: Wonderful. See? More graces.

BS: That's right. [To cameraman] And hasn't he been patient sitting here listening to all this?

Cameraman: That's a beautiful story. You made me cry.

BS: Oh, now let's not push it. Let's not push it.