



Faith Sweetser Barry

Ben:

All right. So I guess one of the first questions I should ask is how did you hear about this event pertaining to the common app project and what made you decide to come today?

Faith:

Okay. So I am part of the Lighting The Way online seminar that Kathy is doing, and that's how I came to know about it.

Ben:

I see. So what work have you done for the museum or any interest that you have in it that-

Faith:

Okay. So I grew up coming to the Whaling Museum, but it was basically almost the original building and the downstairs with the Lagoda sitting in the middle of it. And then I lived away for a while and when I moved back here with my children, then they would come on school trips, et cetera. My parents were one of the first people to support the Old Dartmouth Historical Society. I grew up in New Bedford on County Street. One of the first people to Old Dartmouth Historical Society. One of my sisters worked for Richard Kugler who was a mover at a shaker curator for the museum in the '70s. And she actually became an architectural preservationist. And my brother, Peter, has restored many of the antique ship models that the museum owns. They had a ship model exhibit about six years ago I'm going to guess. Pandemic makes time weird, doesn't it?

Ben:

Yeah.

Faith:

I'm going to say it was about six years ago, I'm sure you can figure that out. He did the restoration so I was here watching him do that. My parents were long supporters and now my oldest sister she donated the money to build that porch that overlooks the Harbor. It has my parents' name on it. I was a New Bedford girl, so it's always been part of our thing. Me personally, I'm too lazy for that.

Ben:

Yeah. So going after that, what about New Bedford is something you find interesting or what experiences have you had in the city that you've really looked at in a very thoughtful and just makes you feel connected to the city?

Faith:

Well, I think growing up in historical city and growing up in a privileged situation, in other words, I didn't have to start thinking about if I was going to start working in the mills, for example, because I'm 65, in the mills when I graduated from high school. That was not something had to be on my... I didn't have to even work. My father was an orthopedic surgeon in Bedford. One of the things of interest for telling the story is when my... I was born in the 50s, my parents moved here in the late 40s. My father as I just said to Kathy was the first board certified surgeon in New Bedford. And he had an office next to our house up on County Street, and fisherman... Obviously whaling,



et cetera, was gone.

Fisherman and mill workers would come to him with a broken hand or one of the hooks from the nets had gone through their hand or whatever for my father to take it out. And a lot of them hadn't been paid yet or were paid and didn't have a lot of money. So they would bring him a bushel of scallops, or from the mills. They would bring him something from the mills. One time when my parents were moving to a new house, one of the foreman of the mills, this was when the mills were starting to shut down, had transported a stone from the base that was about this big, and about this thick, that was probably laid there in the 1800s to have in their house. That's how they paid him because they didn't have extra money. They were supporting a large family.

The other thing to know too, and it's part of my history is that when I was a kid in the 50s, we don't see it so much anymore, there's a huge... Because of our Portuguese neighbors and the French Canadians who came to work in the mill. And the Irish. There's a huge Roman Catholic population. I wouldn't have said to you if you were kids with me, "Where do you live?" You'd say, what parish are you in. I was in Holy Name Parish. And you rarely were friends with people who were not in your parish, just because those are also neighborhoods, right?

Ben:

Yeah.

Faith:

And my best friend now who became my best friend when we moved to Dartmouth, and her family also moved to Dartmouth, she was at St. James. I could tell you I never laid eyes on that girl, and our parents were friends. So community of kids were your Catholic school you went to. So what was I saying that... Oh, so it was my father was paid by money, it was before a lot of people had health insurance was paid with cash, but he was often paid with fish or scallops. Or when my parents died, there are seven of us otherwise I'd be a wealthy woman.

There was all of this scrimshaw and historical artifacts that we have in our family now, three whale vertebrae that are this big. I have one, my sister has one, my brother has one. And they're this big and this tall that a fisherman, they got off the bottom of the ocean when they were dredging and gave to my dad as payment. Until he was sued because Blue Cross Blue Shield Association said, "We're going to sue you if you don't start making people pay you money." But anyway. So yeah, that's my connection. It's the history of work, the history of fishing. And go to a place like... Have you ever been to Worcester, MA?

Ben:

Yeah, I believe I was at some-

Faith:

At some point it's like, why would anybody live there? It's so boring. That's what happens to us. We're getting used to this and you think, oh yeah, this is nice. Then you go someplace Hartford, Connecticut and you're like, there's nothing to look at. They're known for being the insurance capital of the East Coast, who cares? So that's what I mean. I came back here after I got married and have children because it's just a much more interesting historical place.

Ben:

Yeah. Over the past... Just even this century, I mean, so many things have happened in this community that I feel doesn't really get talked about.

Faith:

Yes.



Ben:

A lot of people who don't really remember or know about. But yeah. So your time here, were there any specific events that you had, any historical events that happened here that have stayed in your mind since they happened?

Faith:

I was saying earlier to somebody that I remember in the early... And I was young. But I remember in the early mid 60s that my father and my mother and other of their friends were really concerned about the building of the dike because it would bring pollution into the harbor. And of course that's exactly what happened because it was obstructing the natural flow that would flush out the crap that was coming down the cushion at river. I remember that, and also they were furious about separating the city from the waterfront by putting route 18 which also happened when the world became more historical and less modern brutalist architecture.

So I remember those things. What I think about as part of my history for the 20th century is there were a lot of people like my parents who came to live in New Bedford for various reasons, post World War II. Huge professional influx that they didn't want to live like my dad. He didn't want to live in Boston. He was that grade of surgeon, but he didn't want to live in Boston and New York. He wanted to live in a city that had some history and some depth to it. When you look at the 50s, you'll see all of these professionals that came in, I mean it's crazy. I'm trying to think of... I was pretty oblivious for a long time. You have to jog my memory. I'm trying to think of... I can't think of anything off the top of my head besides what I've said to you.

Ben:

I know that there was some things that happened in the late 60s with riots in the city. I know that was pretty brief but it was just something that I feel that... I mean that was happening across the country at the time, but given the city's history, it seems just odd to me at least that would happen in a community like this, at least with the history of abolitionism and then just-

Faith:

Oh, yes. But just when president Obama was our president, we saw this decline in general, not specific, but general racism. And then those ugly people who were pissed off that whole time got to raise their heads and speak out and be agitated when Trump allowed it. That's what happens. So you had the 60s were a time of a lot of agitation anyway in the United States. We didn't have social media, even cell phone, any of that stuff for communication across the borders. But people were still being oppressed, all right? The people of color. And I'm not sure... I don't know. I was scared. I'm not sure that our Cape Verdean neighbors felt that way. But other people of color certainly did feel they weren't getting a fair shake and they were reacting to news that they saw from other parts of the United States.

And because Vietnam had people so stirred up about... Before that, my elder sisters... My oldest sister is 77. She would never have spoken back to my father in the 60s, let's just say. If that had all come about in the 70s, I was young enough that I had been led to see, you can speak up, you can fight back against what's bugging the crap out of you. And then of course there's always people who would just want to get in on the fights. But the riots... But see, I had moved, my family had moved to Dartmouth. I'm the youngest of seven. My family had moved to Dartmouth by then and that was one of the reasons I'm sure. Although they didn't state it. My parents could see that the city was changing and my father was a physician to everybody, didn't matter what their color was or their financial et cetera.

And he could probably see from his patients that people were starting to get a little annoyed at the oppression across the United States. So they moved us. We lived right on the corner of County and Franklin Street and right above State Street. So that's probably why I moved. While I knew that there were things going on, as you say, it



wasn't that huge and it didn't last that long but it was still there. And we've always had that in New Bedford though, haven't we? When the factories were huge and stuff that.

Ben:

Yeah. So you said that there was a period where you had not only... So like you said, you moved out of New Bedford to Dartmouth, but during the time period where you were out there, any other places that you... What were you doing in that time?

Faith:

When I was a kid in New Bedford?

Ben:

Yeah. And when you eventually came back and you were an adult when you came back to-

Faith:

Yeah. I still live in Dartmouth. I live in Dartmouth.

Ben:

I see.

Faith:

And I came back to Dartmouth because my husband and I got married. We lived outside of Boston and my husband was from the Boston area. And he said, "What better place with all the history and being able to ride your bike and all of that stuff." When I was a kid in New Bedford, all of those movie theaters that they talk about getting rejuvenated, the state, the Capital, the Zeiterion, those were all open, that's where we went to the movies. Sitting in the back row, make it out with your boyfriends kind of thing. When I was a kid, the streets to New Bedford, I thought of it this morning as I drove here, because Union Street was almost empty. There were always tons of people on the streets of New Bedford. Keystone Furniture, do you know where that is?

Ben:

No, I don't.

Faith:

It's not there anymore. On Union Street across from the Old Star store, the UMass, there's big, empty lot and they've put a mural up on a fence that says Black Lives Matter. Do you know where that is? It's between Purchase and Pleasant.

Ben:

Yeah, I think so.

Faith:

As you're going up, Union it's on the right hand side. That was where the Keystone building was, which was a family business owned by the Kavanaugh family. That's with a K. That was there for 100 years. And then when the downtown failed, the family got out of it and nobody bought the building and eventually they tore the building down, which is unfortunate because it's a historical building. But anyway, the streets that on Union Street, this is me remembering. So I'm going to say from the 60s and 70s, early 70s, me remembering on Union



Street alone, there were two banks that I could picture, Maybe three, there were multitude of sandwich shops. There was on the corner of Union at Pleasant, there was a leather store called Cushings where not only could you buy things made out of leather, purses and they had suitcases and stuff, but they would also make things for you.

There was a very well known photography shop. There was one, two, three, four dress stores independently owned. There was the Star Store as I already said. There was just a lot of independent industry, whether it's retail or people making things. And then when the 70s came and walls were built and cities got emptied, that's when you started to see either empty shops or these odd. You know what I mean? They pop up and the next time you go to go there they're gone. So it was different than it is now.

It was a different scene. I always wonder then if there was the same amount of homelessness as we have now in New Bedford. And I just was in my old world, I didn't know it. Brown's drug store, which is now the New Bedford Hotel, that hotel on the corner of... What is it on the corner of Pleasant and Union on this side, on the south side. That was a huge drug store and Mr. Brown only three or four of them around greater New Bedford. And they went out of business and et cetera. What was I just thinking? I was going to say and the senior housing place now that's next to the Post Office. You know where the big Post Office is?

Ben:

Yeah.

Faith:

Okay. And next to it is a big tall building and that's where the senior housing, that was a hotel that was very popular with a ballroom on the top floor. Post World War II there was a lot of excitement and a lot of people were happy to be alive and... So there was a lot going on in the 50s, 60s and 70s, and then urban sprawl, et cetera, and malls took it away but anyway.

Ben:

Yeah. Well, what was the favorite spot that you had at that time that you would to maybe just hang out or just stay.

Faith:

When I was a kid?

Ben:

Yeah.

Faith:

Well, first of all back in the 50s and 60s, we didn't have to hang because we just... All you had to do was be home before the street lights came on in New Bedford. And anybody my age will tell you that. And whatever parish you were from, you were with... I'd be walking or riding my bike up to your house. And as soon as the street lights came on, you were late so you scooted home. But where the Common is, what is it called now? Clasky Park?

Ben:

Yeah, Clasky Park.

Faith:

We just called it the Common. That was much nicer than it is now. I know that they put in a cool playground and stuff but everything was better taken care of because everyone that lived in the city from the poorest to the



wealthiest had more money. Now just the wealthiest. But everybody had a job and so...

Ben:

Yeah. It just seems to me like this... I mean, even though this part of downtown is having artistic revival. Just generally over that period of time. I mean, New Bedford has just always been a city that has just had a... I don't know, just periods in which... I mean, I just see with going from the 50s to the 80s or the 90s, just that decline I think had a large impact on just not only the standard of living in the city, but also the reputation that the city has.

Faith:

Absolutely.

Ben:

Yeah. And I don't know. Going to other parts of Massachusetts, I mean, from what I've heard, there is not that much. I mean, some people will know that it was the whaling city and that stuff, but other people will just surmise it to what they've heard on the news or just generalizations and that kind of stuff so-

Faith:

Well, sensationalization is what makes the papers, right?

Ben:

Yeah.

Faith:

So there was the rape of the woman on the pool table that totally colored everybody because of the fishing industry which was and is booming at the time that drug use became more apparent, more rampant. Lots of drugs were coming in on the fishing boats. And so it was known as a drug capital, even though if you and I have been the same age, it's not people were standing on the corner doing LSD or something. It was not the way it is now. It was a bigger deal then and it was written about.

I agree with you. And that's why I actually said about Ann Brindle, because I believe... This may not be true. I believe that one of the things that helped turn the corner for tourism and the arts, but mostly tourism was Ann Brindle along with some other members of the New Bedford community pushing for the national park status. That changes everything. When something isn't just a nice little museum in a funky city but it is a national park, starts to be more acceptable. Honestly, Lowell has national park status now where the mills are. Nobody ever went to Lowell before that, because it was you think New Bedford had a bad reputation, Lowell was even worse. It brings acceptance, I guess is the way to say it.

Ben:

So what do you think the future of the city is in? Are you hopeful that-

Faith:

Yes.

Ben:

Of where it's going?



Faith:

I think because of the arts, not just UMass and some of the art installations and stuff, but also because... For example, the Zeiterion is increasing the availability of different types of artists. If you ever look at the Zeiterion's schedule, there's a huge range of artistic endeavors going in there from theater to music, to the next month, the Moth is going to be there. Have you ever gone to any of those?

Ben:

I've gone to a few plays before, but I haven't seen-

Faith:

The Moth is spoken word. I should just give you my tickets because I'm not going to be here. It's really cool and you would like it. People stand up and talk about whatever. Lydia Grinnell Brown might stand up and say, "This is what I did," or they'll tell a tale. It's really cool. So yes. And then I think tourism because of places like... I mean this museum honestly been is four times bigger than it was when I was your age. Four times. Absolutely this whole building we're sitting in is brand new as far as I'm concerned. But yeah, it's four times bigger. And bringing people like Kathy Saunders with her background, we never would've gotten somebody like that 30 years ago. It would've been too rinky-dink. So yes I do. I think that embracing tourism, it's becoming a food place which that happened in Portland, Maine. Portland, Maine became known as a foodie center and that brought tourism in.

And Portland is a similar type of city that went through really tough times, Urban Decay and everything. So yeah, I am hopeful. So I think the thing is my story is not about me, but my parents came here because my mother... I mean, I have a lot of historical connections to the city. My mother's roommate in prep school and junior college was Beatrice Duff. Mrs. Duff's daughter. My parents met at the Duff house. My father's from Maine. He was a doctor serving at the beginning of the war and Otis air force base and he came to visit some friends and met my mother. And they decided to come here after my father finished his training, which was post World War II, post a lot. He did a lot until before he came here and started a family along with other people who had served. Whether they were from this area or not came back to live as I said.

And my father was the first board certified surgeon in New Bedford. So before that, you got your broken leg fixed by somebody who knew how to do it not by somebody who had been trained. And that made a big change because he was a back specialist, especially, you didn't have to go to Boston to have your back. That changed things. Then he encouraged my mother who started something called the homemaker service, which before the homemaker service, if your grandpa was sent home from the hospital, they just sent him home. Whether he had somebody to take care of him or not. With the homemaker service, my mother went forward with a friend and said, "We need to have a safety net for people going home from the hospital."

Now if your grandpa is going home from the hospital, they grill you. Do you have somebody? Can you walk? Can you... My father told my mother about this. Also he brought physical therapy, all the things we take for granted. My father hired a woman of color to be his physical therapist not only in his office, but in the hospital, which his physical therapist, her name was Blanch Perry, and she said to me, "It was unheard of." All the doctors were white guys and this petite woman of color she'd call my father from St. Luke's and say they're calling from the emergency room, there's been a car accident let's just say, and my father would say to her, "Okay, go down, give an assessment and call me back." That was crazy that somebody did that. So I'm not speaking, I'm just talking about my specific family.

My sister did research that changed the way they did a few things at the museum. My brother came restored, crinkled, old ship models. It's been a family thing, which I think you'll find in Massachusetts, in New Bedford. The Bullard family, all of those families were all friends with each other. The Bullard's et cetera. They all came in and made a difference in small ways and in large ways post World War II. Because you had a lot of educated people especially the women who were having all those Catholics, they didn't practice birth control. I'm the youngest of



seven. But the women that were smart like my mother, my mother was a mathematician. They found something to do and what they did made a difference. I think you are on the right track.

I told Kathy and she has it about Marion Mitchell. I don't know if she passed that on to you to research or not, but Marion Mitchell, did you get a thing about her? She's a journalist.

Ben:

Maybe a while.

Faith:

Okay. So I just talked to Kathy about her the other day. She died about 10 years ago I'm going to say. She was a woman not from New Bedford but who moved to New Bedford with her husband who was an attorney? They lived in Fairhaven. She was by training, she had gone to college, et cetera. She was a journalist, so she came. But she wrote for the Standard Times for many, many years. All of that is very interesting but what's really interesting about Mary Mitchell is that at the end of World War II, she went to school to be taught Japanese. She was embedded in allied to occupied Japan after the bombing of Hiroshima, when MacArthur landed and everything.

And she was about this big. She was a journalist embedded in Japan sending back stories about things that were going on. And then she came back to New Bedford. I mean, really interesting. She drove a Jeep by the way from Fairhaven to New Bedford when the Standard Times was more in the center of the city. She was a lady, but she drove around in her Jeep because that's what she had driven during the war. It's very interesting. So there's a lot of interesting people and I'm glad that you're interested in that in the 20th century.

Ben:

Yeah. Definitely. From what I've seen, everybody in the city, that's what makes this city what it is. It's just the individual stories that just so unique. I mean that's the basis for everything and why this city is the way it is. I mean, there's...

Faith:

I mean, it's like a woven thing of people of different types.