

**Oral History Interview of  
Gail Barbara House**

**Interviewed by: Lynn Whitfield  
August 11, 2015  
Lubbock, Texas**

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## Transcript Overview:

This interview features Texas Tech home economics professor, Barbara Gail House. House discusses her time at Texas Tech in the home economics department, her involvement in various conferences on the topic of aging, and her Lubbock business, House Bronze.

**Length of Interview:** 00:55:59

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## Keywords

gender roles, home economics, Lubbock, Texas, Texas Tech University

**Lynn Whitfield (LW):**

This is Lynn Whitfield. It is August 12, 2015, and I am talking to Dr. Barbara Gail House. Good morning.

**Gail Barbara House (GH):**

Good morning.

LW:

Can you tell me a little bit about where you were born and your early family life?

GH:

I was actually born in Hockley County. My dad worked on the slaughter ranch in the farming operation, and we lived in a little four-room house just outside of Whiteface. That was where I started to school was in Whiteface.

LW:

When were you born?

GH:

I was born in 1936. The Depression was still full blown, I guess. Because we lived on the ranch, we had our meat provided, had a milk cow. We had a big garden. There was a big pond out beside our house that the cows drank water out of that flowed from the windmill, and the windmill water was piped into the back porch which was enclosed, and that's where we got our water, from the windmill. And we did not have an indoor bathroom as most people who lived out in the country didn't have in that time.

LW:

What were the names of your parents?

GH:

My dad's name was Robert Lee Ellis. My mother's name was Daisy Mildred Carter Ellis.

LW:

And did you have any siblings?

GH:

Yes, I'm the eldest of three. I have two sisters. The second sister was Kay Ann, K-a-y-a-n-n, and the youngest was Bobbie Lynn.

LW:

Where did you go to school?

GH:

I started to school in Whiteface; that was 1941. And I remember that at night we had a wind charger which powered our radio, and we would listen right after the dinner hour. And I remember December seventh really well because my parents got very upset when it came over the radio and President Roosevelt was speaking to the people of the United States and talking about Pearl Harbor. I knew something serious had happened, but I didn't quite understand. At the end of that year, my mother was diagnosed with cancer. And we moved to Lubbock to be near her doctors and Drs. Hunt and English took care of my mother, and she was in and out of the hospital for three years and she died in 1944.

LW:

And so you started going to school in Lubbock?

GH:

Yes.

LW:

Which school?

GH:

I started as—no—where the city offices are now was a grade school. I think it was called Montgomery Ward, I think? Anyway, I went there and then they built a new school at what is now Arnett Benson addition, and I went there, and then later on I went to Sanders which is now closed. It's not used anymore. My dad remarried in 1945, and our step brother was with us thirty-seven years. During the timeline— (pause in recording) Before we leave 1941, when I first started to school, I got my lessons by coil lamp, and before we left the ranch, the co-op, Rural Electric Cooperative, put in electricity in our house, and we had a single light bulb in each room. It's amazing that we've become so accustomed to electricity and we just thought it was remarkable that we had it. One light bulb, and we still listened to the radio powered by the wind charger. So I don't seem that old, but I'm old enough to remember, you know, and we did most of our shopping at Morton Texas. Isn't that interesting?

LW:

So that was the closest town?

GH:

Well, either that, or at the time whatever we needed, we went to Morton and that's in Cochran County, instead of Hockley. Our house was right on the line of Hockley and Cochran County. Anyway, from '41 to '44, we were attended pretty much by our maternal grandmother. She had four daughters, I had four aunts, and we spent a lot of time with those aunts during that time who lived on a farm, and irrigation was first in and we would swim in the irrigation ditches. So anyway, that's a memory that I have of the times. And I remembered my mother that would buy flour based on the flour sack, the pretty, pretty flour sacks, and that's what she made our dresses out of. She made the best biscuits that I remember. And then from that, she would make bread pudding. At that time, sugar was rationed. I don't know if raisins were, but somehow she found raisins, and I can still smell the bread pudding that she made. It was wonderful. Then we moved, my dad remarried in '45, and we moved to Crosby County, Crosbyton, in 1948.

LW:

And what was the name of your step mother?

GH:

Estelle, E-s-t-e-l-l-e.

LW:

Okay.

GH:

She had the most wonderful parents. They had a farm north of Rawls, and we spent from '45 until they moved to Crosbyton in '48, the summers on their farm. It was wonderful.

LW:

Was the Rawls Project going on during that time when they were moving families into Rawls, Texas?

GH:

I don't know that.

LW:

And so you stayed in Crosbyton. How long did you live there?

GH:

Well, I graduated high school there in 1953.

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LW:

And what happened after that?

GH:

I went to work for General Telephone Company in Ralls, Texas, that summer. When I graduated I was actually sixteen, and I was seventeen shortly thereafter. At the end of that year, they, being General Telephone Company, transferred me to Killeen, Texas, which was then setting up Fort Hood because we were in the Korean War. And I remember driving a '39 Ford from Ralls, Texas, to Killeen. I had never ever driven that far. It was my first experience of reading a road map, and I got there and didn't have a place to live. I was to report to work the next day, and I drove into town and Killeen was still very much a rural community outside of Fort Hood. They were fast trying to build motels. I drove up to this motel and it was being built by a couple. You can imagine a seventeen year old staying there wanting a room. They had one room ready, and the wife said, "We will rent that room to her and help her get lodging." And so they knew people in the town of Killeen, and an older lady with a two-story house rented me a bedroom with kitchen privileges while I was in Colleen working for the telephone company. They were so rural they still had a number please board, that it was not electronic yet. So that was quite an experience for me.

LW:

So how long did you stay in Killeen?

GH:

It was through '54.

LW:

Okay.

GH:

—returning, I think, early '55. And I married a Crosby County person. And we moved back to Crosby County and leased a farm, a section of land, over on what is called the East Plains.

LW:

And was that 1955 when you moved back?

GH:

It was either early '55 or late '54.

LW:

Okay, and what was his name?



GH:

His last name was Brewer, B-r-e-w-e-r, and we operated that farm during the drought of 1950. In the meantime, I went on the Member Services Advisory Board of the Lighthouse Electric Cooperative in Floydada which powered our electricity on the farm, East Plains. A mentor of mine emerged, her name was Nancy Markel. She was the home economist for the Lighthouse Electric Cooperative. She helped me get the home service advisor position with South Plains Electric Cooperative here in Lubbock. It was one of my, as I recall, one of my most favorite employment opportunities. And I worked there from '62, I believe, till 1965.

LW:

What did you do at the Cooperative?

GH:

Well, as a home service advisor, or the translation would be home economist, although I did not have my degree then. I served them by working with home demonstration clubs, young homemaker clubs, high school home economics programs, and selling electricity. And I loved it; I really did. And in that time period, Mr. Brewer and I divorced, and I believe that was '63. In late 1964, I met Jerry House. And we married in 1965.

LW:

And what did Jerry do?

GH:

He was employed at Texas Tech as the purchasing agent in the administration. And he eventually progressed to contracts for the whole university, contractual officer. It was in '65 that I took my first work at Texas Tech and my degree program in home economics.

LW:

Okay, so you started classes then?

GH:

Yes.

LW:

Towards a master's degree?

GH:

No, towards a bachelor's degree. And I went part-time earning my first degree in 1970. It took me five years because I was still working part-time. I was working part-time at Texas Tech.

LW:

So would it be '65 to '70 when you went to school?

GH:

Yes.

LW:

And what was your major?

GH:

It was in home management, what was then one of the degree programs, and in the area of home and family life.

LW:

Who were some of your professors?

GH:

I loved Dr. Elsa Wolf, W-o-l-f, and Ms. Billie Wolfe, W-o-l-f-e. They were great. I had Ms. Strude; she was very disciplined and expected discipline of her students. I didn't always agree with the way she handled some students. Thank the lord she liked me. Anyway, she had her favorites, and if you were not her favorite you knew it.

LW:

What was Elsa and Billie like?

GH:

They were very supportive, great mentors. Dr. Wolf introduced me to Phi Kappa Phi because I had the grades that would allow me to be inducted into Phi Kappa Phi. Tech did not have Phi Beta Kappa at the time, and so that was the chapter that you would go into if you had the grades to make it into Phi Kappa Phi.

LW:

Were you involved in the Home Economics Club, too?

GH:

Yes, and I went onto work with the area agency on aging. It was through the area agent on aging that I received my first major grant proposal. At the time, the larger towns like Lubbock and Plainview, and the home health aides, nurses, didn't have it in the rural areas or any kind of program for the rural people. So between the area agency and myself, I wrote a proposal to Washington to the Administration on Aging, proposing a model for a two-year model in a fifteen

county area around Lubbock. It was funded through Texas Tech. And I was working on my master's at the time. And so we put together a model and trained local people like in Eula, Texas, in Martin, in Roaring Springs, up through Hale County, Southland County. Anyway, it was a successful model, and we proved our point that with the training of local aides who would be like LVN's, they could provide home health aide in the area. For example, we trained an aide in Eula, Texas, who had five clients. Now Eula is a very small area on the other side of Morton, but it was successful. And from that model then, nationwide they began to offer more home health service to the rural areas and today it's all over.

LW:

Is that how you ended up getting selected my Governor Clements to be on the Texas delegate for the 1981 White House Conference on Aging?

GH:

Most likely.

LW:

What did that involve?

GH:

Well of course it was in Washington, D.C., and I honestly don't recall that there'd been held another White House Conference on Aging, but we went there and I was on the Texas Aging Program Board at that time, and I represented Texas as one delegate; there were others, of course. But it was illuminating to me to find out what was going on and what was not going on in this nation to represent our older population. And out of that conference came a lot of programs that we now have. And then, because I was a home economist with a bachelor's degree, the national office of home economics called and asked me to represent the International Association of Home Economists at an international conference in Vienna on aging. That was really interesting. There were 159 NGOs, national governmental agencies, that met in Vienna. We met in March to set up what the program would be, and then the actual conference was held in July in Vienna. Our desk, and we were set up at the second home of the UN which is in Vienna. And each desk had six translations, language translations, whatever you needed in those six. And our desk was set up next to the Holy See's desk in Vienna, a memorable time for me. A lot of work had been going on in Scotland, for example, on aging that hadn't even been going on here. So out of that delegation there was a group in Washington that took twenty-two of us on a trip tour of England, Scotland, Norway, and Sweden to see what was going on with the aging population in those countries. It was amazing, absolutely amazing.

LW:

Back tracking a little bit, can we talk about your career at Texas Tech and the changes you went through? I think you started in 1979 as a part-time instructor?

GH:

No, it was before that, '73.

LW:

Seventy-three, okay. And how did you end up teaching at Tech?

GH:

Well, going back to the grant that I was responsible for, Dean Longworth, who was dean then, asked me to teach some courses, selected courses as an instructor beginning in '73, I believe. And then I taught as an instructor, I guess until '79 maybe? I don't know what your records would reveal.

LW:

That's about right. I think somewhere around 1980 you became an adjunct professor?

GH:

Well, that was another grant that I had that put me over for two years in the medical school. We were hoping to have a larger office in aging in the medical school, but it didn't happen. So when Dean Haley came in 1981, she put me on the faculty. I taught, essentially, the core course for the college which would have to do with family economics and management. And I was in the home management department, which was collaboration between home management and interior design. And we were the home management group that put together with Bill Gustafson at the head of it for the family financial planning area that is there now. So that's essentially what I was teaching while I was there. And from '81 to was it '86 that I achieved tenure? That's unusual because I have all of my degrees from Texas Tech. You don't see that very often, but I earned tenure.

LW:

What did you write your dissertation on or for?

GH:

I was very interested in the research of the economic status of women as a result of divorce in Texas. And my population was Lubbock County, and this was before the attorney general took charge of child support requiring that whoever was supposed to pay child support paid it. And also, Texas is one of eight community property states, and I felt that women didn't get their fair share. I knew from experience. My research proved that women only got half the community

property on the average as we, here in this state, and many did not get child support. It wasn't too long after that that the attorney general went after the people who needed to get child support. I never got child support, never. And that's why I was so interested.

LW:

Did you have children from your first marriage?

GH:

Yes, a daughter.

LW:

And what was her name?

GH:

Debra, D-e-b-r-a, D'linn, D-'l-i-n-n. I never got a penny of child support. And this study certainly fit in with family economics in management and family financial planning, which emerged after that.

LW:

And so did you actually work to build that set up at the center?

GH:

Well the whole faculty helped write the proposal, but Bill became the director of financial planning and it is very successful and he deserves all the credit that we can give him.

LW:

And so sort of back to your teaching career, so you received tenure and how was your career going from the time you started to then? Kind of changes you've seen.

GH:

I was very pleased and happy, and moving forward I had graduate students that I truly enjoyed working with, master's and doctoral students, and still teaching the core course for the college. In the auditorium I had two hundred eight students each semester, and I enjoyed them very much, but that was the undergraduate level. And then it was the summer of '87, I believe, that the National Association of American Home Economics was looking for an executive director, and one of the members of the team that was recruiting for executive director called me from Iowa and said, "We'd like for you to put your name, your credentials in as executive director." I said, "But I'm very established here." And they kept working on me, and my husband and I, Jerry and I, talked about it, and I said, "Well, it'd be neat to have the experience. I don't expect I would be picked." And that's the way that I took it. And that fall, they had hearings in Washington at the



association. I just had both feet operated on, and I went up there on a walker and went through the whole experience and never thinking that I would be offered the job. I was dumbfounded because there were some good candidates. Anyway, I came home and Jerry and I discussed it and we went back to Washington, D.C before I accepted it to look at the living and also discussed how it would work. And my son was born in 1970, and this was the fall of '87.

LW:

And what was your son's name?

GH:

Jay, J-a-y, Cameron House, and he was a senior in high school at Frenship. And we sat down as a family and discussed it. I was hesitant because it was his last year in high school. So anyway, final analysis, we just decided that I would do it on provision that I was told that I would be flying across the country meeting with the different state associations, and I would sit down in Lubbock, especially if they came west or my family would come up every six weeks. We did that for two years.

LW:

So you were on leave from Tech?

GH:

I was. I had a one year leave, and then it was extended the second year. I had accomplished most all of the goals and objectives that were laid out for me at the association, with the exception that I needed to finish one. And because I had enough years in Teacher Retirement, because I also worked for the Crosbyton Independent School District and paid into the system back when we lived in Crosby County, and so I was nearing retirement, and so I resigned my position at Tech and with much hesitation because I felt that I was so close to achieving the goal, the one goal that I thought was lacking. Everything else had been achieved, and I did that, and I came back home in 1990 from Washington, D.C, and my husband and I in 1972 had established House Bronze, that foundry. So I came back and worked in House Bronze, and we both decided, we being Jerry and myself, to officially retire in 1992. What is interesting, during that two year interim, I was invited back by Agriculture as a consultant to work with them on several programs in '90 and '91. My last research contract went through Texas A&M. All of my teaching and most of my research was done at Texas Tech, but Teacher Retirement says, "Wherever your last contract is from, that's where you will be retired from." So I'm actually a retiree of Texas A&M, very different, very different. But Jerry retired January of '92, and I retired in February of '92, officially as a retiree of Texas A&M. No one understands that, but it's Teacher Retirement.

LW:

So the foundry was established in 1970?

GH:

Seventy-two officially.

LW:

And let's touch back a little bit on—so you had a daughter and you had a son. Are those both your two children?

GH:

The two children and these are my two grandchildren, Jay's children. My daughter has no children.

LW:

Okay, I did want to ask you about—it's interesting because home economics then human sciences, for decades only had women administrators more or less. Then was it Longworth came?

GH:

Don Longworth, he was hired during the tenure of Grover Murray. That was an interesting time because it was felt like home economics had served its time, with the exception of nutrition, and nutrition was scheduled to be transferred over to the medical school. But the home economics alums coalesced and they saved home economics. Don Longworth couldn't do away with it.

LW:

Well did he want to do away with it?

GH:

He was hired for that purpose.

LW:

Oh, okay.

GH:

I don't know if it's ever been said, but I was a part of the alums and alumni association, and they really went to bat.

LW:

Was it the Texas Tech Alumni Association or home economics alumni?

GH:

Home economics alums— (pause in recording) Okay where were we?



LW:

We were talking about Dean Longworth and some of the changes that were trying to take place.

GH:

Yes, and that didn't happen, so he remained dean. I've forgotten when he came, but he retired in '81 when Elizabeth Haley came as dean of home economics. And then during her tenure the name was changed to human sciences.

LW:

Did she make any other changes?

GH:

Well, she probably, it's my recollection, she rearranged the departments in their names of departments. When I was in Washington, D.C at the national headquarters, as I recall, there were fifty-eight different names on universities for the field of home economics. It was hard to find them sometimes. I think they're still scattered in the name at Texas Tech as Human Sciences. And at the time, and I'm assuming it's still the same, Texas Tech has one of the more successful programs in home economics or human sciences.

LW:

Yeah, they seem to have a long, strong record at Texas Tech.

GH:

Yes.

LW:

And I think a lot of it had to do with the women in the early years who ran the program.

GH:

Well, we had Dean Weiss [?], who I didn't have her as the dean. I did have Dean Willa Vaughn Tinsley as my dean in undergraduate study, and then Longworth during my master's and my PhD study because I earned my PhD in '79. It's an interesting time for the evolution of what started as home economics. One of the first areas of study at Texas Tech: agriculture and home economics.

LW:

Yeah, and the school of home economics was very active in the community, I think. They went out and did programs and other things.

GH:

Absolutely. And at home management houses, they had children come in from the community.

LW:

Yes, and you were telling me about—I think they did home visits with the married students?

GH:

Yes, they started it the year I was supposed to go to home management, but they changed it, and Ms. Drew came to my home in Lubbock. I worked for weeks getting everything organized specifically to the point of taking all my cast iron skillets up in the attic because cast iron is not a good conductor of electricity. That would have been a demerit had she found my cast iron skillets.

LW:

That's so funny because in the South, you know, cooking with a cast iron skillet, the flavor is supposed to be so much better.

GH:

Yeah, and I always did my pot roast and other meals in a cast iron skillet.

LW:

So how many house visits did she make?

GH:

I'm quoting from memory, and I only remember that one afternoon. It was a thorough visit.

LW:

Did you have to do other types of projects then to fill in the rest of the course requirement?

GH:

Well, of course we had to attend a class, and her exams were hard, so I don't remember doing any other projects.

LW:

I didn't realize that there was a class that you also attended.

GH:

Oh yes, it was home management, whatever. I've forgotten the number. Her course was a difficult course.

LW:

And did she teach from a textbook or did she use different resources, do you remember?

GH:

There was a textbook, but she had other resources as well.

LW:

The only one I've found so far that had a textbook was University of Michigan, and it was specifically in home management, and I actually found one on eBay.

GH:

I remember a textbook, but I don't remember the name of it. And she had guest speakers in, too, from the community. Like in the area of electricity, how it's conducted, etcetera, the ohms, all of the verbiage that we had to know.

LW:

Did you work with a child?

GH:

Of course, I had my own children.

LW:

Because you weren't in the house, that's right.

GH:

That's right. And I found some of her notions about child rearing very interesting.

LW:

She didn't have any children, did she?

GH:

No, was never married.

LW:

Interesting. You worked with Bess Haley there for a while. Could you talk about what your impression of her was?

GH:

Well actually, I taught part-time and I was part-time assistant dean for external relations under Bess Haley. You always knew where she was going with her, whatever she was working on. I

felt she was a very good administrator. She was able to dot the i's and cross the t's. And she expected that out of her administrators as well. And she brought home economics forward I felt very well, especially for her age. She was only, as I remember, thirty-two or thirty-three when she came to Tech from Louisiana Tech. And that to me was amazing as well. And I always felt she was fair, and she certainly treated me well. I earned tenure during her time. She supported me by giving me two, one year leaves for my service with the American Home Economics Association. I couldn't say that she mistreated me in any way, I mean good mentor, and I see her on occasion and we have fond memories with each other.

LW:

She helped it become a college.

GH:

Yes, well we were always a college, Home Economics, College of Human Sciences.

LW:

Is human sciences sort of what the profession is moving towards as far as a title?

GH:

Not necessarily. I wouldn't be surprised if you found the scattered names as I found when I served at the national level. And some of those units have closed now.

LW:

Were you teaching during the Cavazos years?

GH:

Yes.

LW:

I was wondering if you had any thoughts on that.

GH:

Let me see. Let's double check. (looks through papers) Kindly translate for me because I just had cataract surgery. Which president of the university?

LW:

Mackey, okay you were there Mackey. Mackey is an interesting one. He wasn't there very long.

GH:

No, and it's just my observation. I don't think he was that successful. Cavazos may have been president during a part of my tenure when I was in Washington.

LW:

Okay, so you probably missed some of the controversy with faculty tenure and all that that went on during his time.

GH:

Yes.

LW:

Okay, is there anything else that you'd like to touch on that we haven't touched on?

GH:

And this is mostly my time at Tech. I was co-owner of House Bronze Foundry in 1990 when I wasn't in Washington doing consulting work, I was essentially our CFO, chief financial officer, for the foundry, and we operated the foundry from 1972 to 2009. And we had sculpt artists come from all over the nation to Lubbock, Texas, which is amazing. I enjoyed that work and served—my husband Jerry became ill in May of 2009. He died in July of 2009. And I kept the foundry running during his illness and five months after because some of our staff wanted to establish their own business over on East Broadway, and they were able to come up with the money and I turned it over to them in October of 2009.

LW:

Okay, is that the foundry that is connected to the professor in art who passed away?

GH:

Teeters.

LW:

Teeters, Steven Teeters.

GH:

Yeah, Steve Teeters, and six of our staff established the foundry on Broadway and then he died.

LW:

I actually got to visit the foundry.

GH:

Did you?

LW:

Yeah, we were trying to interview Andy Dixon.

GH:

Andy Dixon was one of our sculptor artists for whom we worked.

LW:

How did you get involved with that? I mean, it's so different from what you and your husband did.

GH:

It was 1968 that Jerry met a fellow named Forest Fenn, F-e-n-n. Forrest was head of the flight whatever at Reese—

LW:

The flight school?

GH:

—at Reese Airforce Base. He was shot down in Vietnam. And we were to meet him when he got home that Christmas and we got a call that he'd been shot down and might not make it back. So December 26, 1968 our phone rang, and it was Forrest Fenn. He was picked up by helicopter and the Red Cross was going to bring a number of the soldiers back from Vietnam, and so they just sent him immediately home. His wife had not even been notified that he'd been picked up and he appeared on their doorstep, quite a story. But Forrest had a part-time hobby of casting bronze statuary in the red barn where Otto's Granary is now. And Jerry went over to visit with him and became totally enamored with the process, and then he began working with Forrest in the evening and on weekends. And then in 1971, I guess it was, Forrest and Peggy Fenn moved to Santa Fe and established Fenn Gallery, which has become Nedra Matteucci Gallery, I believe, anyway one of the major galleries there. And because Forrest was actually casting for some of the sculptors in the area, they came to Jerry and asked him to set up a foundry because they weren't going to Santa Fe. And in '72, we officially incorporated House Bronze Foundry, and it grew from that to a major foundry in the nation. We had—you see President Reagan and George H. W. Bush, those are the maquettes that from which the larger statue was established. And we worked with the Reagan presidential area in California and they sold fifty of the Reagan statues to pay for the statue—the larger-than-life that went to Washington, D.C. We did a number of President Bush forty-one, and we installed the eight-foot statue of Bush in Houston. And we've done a number of larger statues and of course, table top. I still have a few scattered around here,



but I don't have very much room for bronzes now, but that through the nineties, and until Jerry died in 2009 was a major part of our life and in this area, in fact.

LW:

Is it normal to cast smaller models?

GH:

Oh yeah, that's the way many artists make their living by casting and selling editions of the smaller bronzes. Of course, they make a lot more money on the larger statues. Anyway, it was a major part of my life.

LW:

That's fascinating.

GH:

Now I have to introduce Jocelyn. Do you want to tell her your name? What's your full name?

Joslyn House (JH):  
Jocelyn Claire House.

LW:

And how old are you?

JH:

Six.

LW:

Six?

GH:

And can you tell Dr. Whitfield what your name is? Can you tell her? If you won't tell her would it be all right if I Jocelyn tells? What is her full name?

JH:

Harper Jayne House.

GH:

And it's J-a-y-n-e, Jayne, after her dad. And Jocelyn is named for her mother's grandmother, Jocelyn.



LW:

Thank you so much.

GH:

Thank you.

***End of Recording***



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