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# An interview with Martha Muelder conducted by Lee Carpenter

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*Boston University*

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ANNA HOWARD SHAW CENTER ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Title: Interview of MARTHA MUELDER  
(Interviewee)

by Lee Carpenter  
(Interviewer)

Date of Interview: October 25, 1988

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Interview  
with  
MARTHA MUELDER  
Newton, Massachusetts  
October 25, 1988  
Interviewer: Lee Carpenter

Oral History Project  
Anna Howard Shaw Center  
Boston University School of Theology

CARPENTER           The first question I am going to ask you is, what does the middle initial in your formal signature stand for? I left it out. I just said Martha Muelder, and I should say...

MUELDER             Martha G. Muelder stands for Grotewohl, nice good old German name.

CARPENTER           And that's your maiden name?

MUELDER             Yes.

CARPENTER           And where were you born? And when were you born?

MUELDER             Well, I rather hate to tell you that. I was born in 1907 in Burlington, Iowa.

CARPENTER           And how long did you live there?

MUELDER             Well, I lived there, off and on, most of the time until I was 20, when I went off to the university.

CARPENTER           And what was your family like? How many were in your family?

MUELDER             My mother was born in Sweden, came over when she was 11, the oldest of a family of four...so they had a rough time. My father was born in Wapello, Iowa, and his parents had both come from Germany. I had one brother, who is not living, two years younger than I, and I have to this day a sister, a wonderful sister, who lives in Galveston, Texas.

CARPENTER           And when you were eating dinner, where did you all sit around the supper table?

- MUELDER                    We probably ate in the kitchen in those days, unless we had guests.
- CARPENTER                  And did you always eat in the same seat?
- MUELDER                    Yes, yes we did. My father, of course, always took the head. In those days this was just understood.
- CARPENTER                  Would you say that he had the most influence on you or was there somebody else in your family who had a greater influence on you?
- MUELDER                    Well, my father had a very big influence on me. He was a very outspoken person. He had to stop school early in order to go to work, but he worked himself up until he was the owner of a plumbing and heating company, so that he became a contractor in the plumbing and heating field. And he was outspoken. He was very helpful. Both he and my mother had to have their education cut off because of the need of going to work. So they were very anxious that I, being the oldest in the family, go to college. And so everything was delegated--work around the house in that respect-- so that I would not have to be taken away from getting ready for my school work and especially for music. They started me in piano, taking piano lessons, from a very interesting, elderly German man who was a musician, had come here from Germany. And so I was allowed to live in that family without doing much work, without doing much help in the kitchen, just so that I could pursue both music and be tops in school work.
- CARPENTER                  So your music was really encouraged and your school....
- MUELDER                    Oh, yes, yes. Fortunately, in my home there was a piano. My family had...I didn't live in this house in Burlington, Iowa when I was born. I lived across the city. But the Grotewohl family had built this house; and so we finally moved into this house which was a Grotewohl use.
- CARPENTER                  What would you say your religious family life was like? Can you kind of describe it?
- MUELDER                    Well, interestingly enough, my mother having come from Sweden was naturally of Lutheran background, but my father had grown up in a very devoted Methodist family. His father, my grandfather, was very devoted. As a matter of fact, after the church was over every Sunday he would take any bulletins that were left over from the church and go down on the street corners in Burlington, Iowa and pass these bulletins out.

CARPENTER That's wonderful. Did you ever do that with him?

MUELDER No! I was embarrassed, even then I was.

CARPENTER I see. That's one thing that would happen on Sunday. What was a typical Sunday like?

MUELDER Well, our family was not quite as strict in some of these respects as some other of my friends' families. We didn't have to sit and read the bible and be so pious on Sunday as many. Probably because my father was out in this kind of world...[chuckle] in the business world. So we were allowed to play ball on Sunday. Many of our friends were not allowed to play ball on Sunday. So he would go out and play ball with us. And, of course, I always had to practice...the piano. [more chuckles]

CARPENTER Did you ever....

MUELDER Oh, pardon me, again I must remember...in those days we always had an evening meeting, too. Yes, there was an Epworth League. So we had to go to the young people's meeting first before another regular church evening service. And there was also an evening service on Wednesday night.

CARPENTER A prayer meeting?

MUELDER Yes...a prayer meeting--that was what it was called.

CARPENTER So all day Sunday was filled with activities, except for the ball playing.

MUELDER That's right.

CARPENTER And then there was Wednesday, too.

I would like to go back to your school studies and your mention of the fact that your parents really encouraged you. So would you say that your goals and expectations for life after high school were pretty much the same as your parents' goals and expectations for you?

MUELDER Well, my expectations were certainly as much as theirs, but it went way beyond that in my older life when I was privileged to take...because of the way the field in which I married was able to get outside the ordinary living in a small town like Burlington. So, yes, my life expanded.

CARPENTER When you went to the university you were planning to be a teacher?

- MUELDER Oh, yes, I was majoring in mathematics, minoring in French, and the reason that I didn't minor in music, or major in music, was that our living expenses were very limited and the university had such an extra charge for people in the music field, to take music lessons, and it was more expensive. So I settled for math and French, but I also was involved, very much involved. I was accompanist after try-outs for the university glee club. So I did have the opportunity to go ahead with my music.
- CARPENTER Well, that's great. I am really excited to hear about this music, and I would really like to hear you play. But you don't have to play on this tape right now.
- Did you then pursue your teaching career after graduating from the university?
- MUELDER The first offer I took, of course, which was to teach math and English, which I had not majored in, but it was in a small town in Revere, Missouri. It was a small town where students came to that consolidated high school for five miles around, some of them on horseback, in order to get a high school education. And so there were many things I had to do besides just teaching mathematics. I had to--because they soon learned that I did have some experience in music. I had a lot of accompanying to do. And I actually directed a chorus. So that my life was full. It wasn't just teaching one or two hours a day. It was a day's work.
- CARPENTER And you included the music in your life...that you hadn't been able to...
- MUELDER Oh, yes, I forgot, there were people that wanted music lessons so I did..I had...I gave music lessons...piano lessons, pardon me.
- CARPENTER This is a strange-sounding question, but what were some of the things you learned from your teaching job? I know you taught a lot.
- MUELDER Well, you see, I had two different kinds of experiences. The first was in this small town. I was only there two years because my father died in the meantime and my mother needed a great deal of support and help. So I accepted a position back in Burlington teaching geometry and algebra at a junior high and a senior high. So that my experience was quite different in this place, which was my hometown. And my family had been broken. Well, I learned an awful lot about young people, that is certain. And I learned that there were many, many people that didn't have the religious experiences that I had had in my family.

CARPENTER                    Were you attending church at this time in your life?

MUELDER                      oh, yes, yes. Attending church? From the time I was about four years old I was expected to go to church, to Sunday School. My mother wasn't quite so positive in this area. She had been Lutheran, as I said. So her change meant that she wasn't as much of a devotee to this church as my father. And my grandfather was still living, and he was very pious. And he lived only a block away from us, with my aunt; so I had plenty of "push" to stay in church and help out. And I did a lot of music as I grew up. Yes..as a matter of fact, that is where I first learned to play the organ and we had in our church an organist who was very very outgoing. She..a female..and she gave me organ lessons and would sometimes let me play the church organ for services...

CARPENTER                      Oh, that's wonderful.

MUELDER                      ...so I started on the early side.

CARPENTER                      ..and that's quite different from piano.

MUELDER                      Well, it is.

CARPENTER                      I have only just recently discovered that.

                                    When did you and Walter meet?

MUELDER                      Well, that's interesting because his father came as our minister to that Burlington church, which was the St. Paul's German Methodist Church. So you know the background of that church...many, many German people. And my husband's father and mother had both been born in Germany. His father already had had a Ph.D. from Boston University; so ..but he preferred to stay within the ministry. So he came as our minister when Walter and I were in high school. So we dated all through high school, and then we finally separated for four or five years when he went to Boston University...first to Knox College, then to Boston University, and I went to junior college first in Boston...in Burlington, pardon me, and then to the University of Iowa in Iowa City.

CARPENTER                      When did you see each other in this time?

MUELDER                      Well, during those high school days we saw each other much too much.

CARPENTER But when you went off to the university....?

MUELDER We only wrote to each other, we did keep in contact, and then we finally came together again after years.

CARPENTER After both of you had graduated?

MUELDER Oh, yes, and he had already...well, in those days it was so important--your education--that he wanted to get his Ph.D. before he ever married. So, we waited, although we really were engaged four or five years before we were married. We were married at the age of 27. We were both...21 days apart in age.

CARPENTER That's great. Now, you married when you were 27 years old.

MUELDER Uh huh.

CARPENTER Did marriage--how did marriage change your plans or alter your life?

MUELDER Well, it altered it greatly because his first teaching position was in Berea College, Berea, Kentucky, and that is...so we married just before he went to teach at Berea. Berea was a new life in Appalachia.

CARPENTER And you left your mother behind. She was still living.

MUELDER She was still living, and my sister by this time was growing up. My brother also, although my brother died much too soon. And so I didn't have to stay home. Now, it is true that when they left mother really needed somebody; so she came to live with us while we were still in Berea. We were in Berea six years. The depth of the depression. Thirty four to forty...nineteen thirty-four to forty. And in those years education was such a high-priced affair that we did not live alone for six years after we were married. We had some one of the family with us. We brought them down, sisters and brothers, one after the other, to finish their school, or to start it, whichever was in then way in Berea College. So we were not alone--this would be hard for many people today to understand. So my mother came. And at one time my brother was out of work so he came. So we had family with us, both his sistes and brother and mine, not all at once, except my mother and brother.

CARPENTER Now, your sister and his sisters and brother, were they attending college?



MUELDER Oh, yes, my sister got her final degrees from Berea College and one of Walter's brothers did, and several sisters. They went on after we left Berea for the University of Southern California.

CARPENTER Is there anything else but those Berea years that you want to...

MUELDER Well, I want...really I must say at first, something I will never forget...I failed to mention, because I think people today don't understand what life was like in those depression years. Before I was married and was teaching in Burlington I had to sign a contract that said this contract is null and void if ~~the~~ bearer of this contract marries. And this was because there were so many people on the bread line--especially men-- that the aim was to have at least one breadwinner in a family. So I signed a contract that I would not marry. That was very difficult for our daughters to understand in this era. But I said everybody would have done it, you would have done it.

CARPENTER And that was when you were how old?

MUELDER Well, I was teaching in ...I was about 22.

CARPENTER That is different. Of course, now people are waiting later to marry, but that is a different reason to wait to marry because...

MUELDER Oh, oh...

CARPENTER ...you signed a contract that said you would not marry.

MUELDER The contract is null and void.

CARPENTER Wow!

MUELDER Now, we will go back...go ahead. But I had forgotten to say that and I had meant to. In Berea there was plenty to do without earning money while I was doing it. You know, I mean women were...wives were pretty much active within the college. They had what they called a women's industrial in the town. And this was very interesting and I became even the director of the women's industrial after a couple of years. This was a society within the church and the community which helped poverty-stricken and needy people out in the hills. We... for example, they would come in once or twice a week and sew and work in some fashion on contributions that had been given by

both the college people and the community--cast-offs, I'd say, and so they came in and worked and I became the chairman of that industrial. So I was very active in that, and we also had quilting parties. I learned to quilt. And we had, and I belonged to that, the Mountain Maternal Health League, and we did what we could to go out into the area and bring health advice. And, oh, yes, one thing I wanted to say that when Walter signed the contract to teach in Berea, it said this is understood that the relation of the faculty wife to the school is as a minister's wife to the parish.

- CARPENTER And that was clearly understood exactly what that was...
- MUELDER That was clearly...well, it was written down...in the contract. So you see...
- CARPENTER But there was clear understanding in those days of what a minister's wife's role was.
- MUELDER Exactly.
- CARPENTER And could you describe what that meant?
- MUELDER Well, certainly, she did not have another job, paying. She was very active in the church, as I had had to be. It was understood. I am sure that I never knew a minister's wife in those days who had an outside position. And it did not cost as much to live as it does now. For example, when I taught full time in Berea...no, pardon me...taught full time in Revere, Missouri for a lot of work outside in this music deal. I got \$1,200 for the year. Walter with his Ph.D. had gotten \$600 for two churches, seven miles apart. This was a year before we were married.
- CARPENTER For the entire year?
- MUELDER For the entire year! So we couldn't get married, you see, any earlier.
- CARPENTER I see.
- MUELDER (Laughter) Not until we got to Berea.
- CARPENTER Right. So as a faculty wife you were expected to have the same obligations that a minister's wife would have?
- MUELDER Yes, exactly. Now, I am not sure that's true...Walter says Berea has changed a great deal, of course.

CARPENTER But at that time...

MUELDER Not true today.

CARPENTER in the late 30's that was true.

MUELDER We were there from '34 to '40. And then came the call to go to the University of Southern California, and we were there five years and that was difficult, too...because ...terribly difficult because of the war being declared in '41, you know. When the Japanese were responsible for Pearl Harbor. Now, when we went there in '40 in the church and in the school we had very friendly relationships with the Japanese people. We had actually one Japanese man who married one of the faculty's daughter and we were very close friends. This all became a very sad situation when war was declared. I never will forget. I ran across to the neighbors after hearing this on the radio...ran across and said, "Well, they've done it." And so, from then on, those next four years we were ...well, we were very disturbed by the treatment of the Japanese. In '41 they took them all out of the area, all of them, and put them into what we call today and did then "concentration camps"--all kinds of sheds, horse sheds, it was really a very unhappy time, and in our church we felt it was very much of a duty for us to help them as much as we could. So we would feed them at our church in the morning. They would come to our church. We women would give them their breakfast before the cars and trucks and buses would take them out to so-called concentration camps. Now, I grant, the government did not call them that, but that's what we called them.

Walter did a lot of outside lecturing in those days, and it was...our lives were very, very busily involved in outside needy things to be done.

CARPENTER What about your family? When did your children come?

MUELDER Well, we had two children, two daughters, born in Berea, and one born in L.A.--Los Angeles. The interesting thing is there that our second one was six weeks old when we moved from Berea to Los Angeles. And our third daughter, Linda, was six weeks old when we moved from Los Angeles to Boston. So we said that we neither...no time again would we dare either move or have another baby because it meant a double situation.

CARPENTER           That's a lot of stress...to move and have a brand-new baby.

MUELDER             And I came alone, all alone, all the way from Los Angeles to Boston, while Walter brought my mother, who had come out to help us move, brought my mother and the other oldest daughters, Sonya and Hilda. See, he drove them all the way, of course.

CARPENTER           How did you and the baby come?

MUELDER             By train. We came by train. And it was something...

CARPENTER           All across the country?

MUELDER             All across the country...and when I got here (chuckle)-- was it that day? I can't think exactly. Anyway, we got here to the station where Walter was going to meet us I said, "Here, she's yours!" (more chuckles)

CARPENTER           I think I can understand why you would say that. How many days did it take to come across the country on the train?

MUELDER             Well, fortunately, we had...my father's sister was...had been living in Denver quite a long time. So we had a little two-day stop-over in Denver, to make it a little easier for me. So we did...I did have that respite. But I was nursing in those days. I just couldn't hand her over to anybody...

CARPENTER           Even though you wanted to.

                      Now, you came to Boston because Walter had a position...

MUELDER             He was invited to come as dean to Boston University School of Theology...in '45.

CARPENTER           And where was the school located at that time...

MUELDER             On Beacon Hill, and he was really brought here, part of the responsibility was even given to him then to help move the school from Beacon Hill down to Commonwealth Avenue. So we went through all of that and...uh. ---- [slightly inaudible short section]. That was not...uh...

CARPENTER           I'm wondering...I've heard about your advocacy of birth control. I am wondering if that started in the Boston area?

MUELDER No, it started back in Berea because...no, pardon me...it started a little earlier in Burlington, before I was married. That's right. Because, it was generally frowned on--oh, and it wasn't easy to get contraceptives at all. My own physician was not going to take the risk. So I went to a doctor who was a good neighbor, in the next block, and he secured for me birth control materials. So, it wasn't easy. No, it wasn't accepted, of course, generally speaking.

CARPENTER: I didn't think so, especially at that time. Now, you were concerned for your own family planning. Did you talk about it with some of the groups in Berea--that Mountain Maternal Health League.

MUELDER Oh, yes, that was one of our projects.

CARPENTER Is that something you started?

MUELDER I don't think I can take the credit for that. I'm not sure. At this point I really can't remember (laughter).

CARPENTER And then when you came to Boston were you involved in any birth control advocacy activities?

MUELDER No, I wasn't. I think they kind of accepted it...itself... the community accepted it. There as no great deal.

CARPENTER That was in 1945.

MUELDER Yes, that was 1945.

CARPENTER So it was really in the 30's...

MUELDER Oh, oh, yes...

CARPENTER It was such a new and unacceptable...

MUELDER Unacceptable, yes.

CARPENTER I wanted to ask you about your marriage, and I think I know the answer to this question: with respect to your own development and growth do you see your marriage as opening doors or closing them?

MUELDER Very definitely opening them, especially in the ecumenical field. Walter always had a bent this way, good relationships with the Catholics, Protestants, Orthodox...

CARPENTER            So that your exposure to and relations to all kinds of groups...was brought about by...through Walter?

MUELDER              Well, I don't know what I would have done if I had had another life, of course, but surely it has had a lot to do with it. Now, when we came to Boston, after we had been here--see, Walter at that time was very vocal, doing a lot of lecturing; he came under quite a lot of criticism at times because he was what today they call liberal. In those days they actually called it socialist...and, in February 1950, that would mean after we had moved here down to the Commonwealth campus, the Reader's Digest had an article called "The Pink Fringe of Methodism." It was by Stanley High and it just...oh, it was a very angry article. The first person in that article--we still have it today--that was mentioned was Walter, for the way he was speaking in those days. And so we were going--I must tell you this--we were going to have a get-together at the school as we always did every Spring, quite a big community affair, and what Martha did--the Pink Fringe had just come out--the article--so I took some pink material, really soft, very soft material, and this party--it was really a party--I had Walter wear that. And I fringed it all around so that it became quite a piece of subject at Boston University.(laughter)

CARPENTER            Did the local news media pick that up?

MUELDER              Well, the school did...I am not sure...I don't remember.. I don't seem to have any record of what the public said about it?

CARPENTER            Well, what did you wear?

MUELDER              I can't remember; I'm sorry.

CARPENTER            Do you identify yourself with this "pink fringe"--did you share Walter's beliefs at the time?

MUELDER              Oh, yes, I was angry anyway about the article, too, because it desecrated Walter....

CARPENTER            And what he stood for...

MUELDER              It accused him--that's a better word. Accused him of.... (sigh)

CARPENTER            Well, it sounds as though you were able to turn a not-good situation into a funny one.

MUELDER                    That's right. We had a good time.

CARPENTER                  I'm glad.

MUELDER                    And then there is one other thing--well, not just one--but something else I must mention. IN March of 1951, the Boston University Women's Council honored Mrs. Marsh. She was a lovely person, very much involved in what was going on at the university, especially in the School of Theology, she was the president's wife. And, so, we were honoring her by saluting eight distinguished women and one of them was Anna Howard Shaw, and I was...I still have a picture of me today--that was published at that time being Anna Howard Shaw. I forgot to tell Margaret Wiborg this.

CARPENTER                  I didn't know you played the part of Anna Howard Shaw either That's wonderful!

MUELDER                    I'd forgotten it frankly until I started looking at my scrapbooks. I am a great scrapbook keeper. And I...my mother started me on this way, way back. I've got a dozen of them, of scraps I cut out of the newspapers, notices of Walter's speeches, and the church bulletins where he spoke, and all that kind of thing. When our daughters were in musical events. I have all these in scrapbooks. So, you see, I was just recently looking through these scrapbooks to kind of refresh my memories of what the days were in the past and here was a picture of Martha as Anna Howard Shaw.

CARPENTER                  That's wonderful. Now, what was this Boston University Women's Council that you were a part of?

MUELDER                    Well, that was a wives group across the whole university; it wasn't just the School of Theology. The Women's Council--well, also, we have today, you know, an active Women's Guild. We have the two across the university..the two groups. In those days I don't remember that there was a guild. I think it was just the council.

                              Anna Howard Shaw was the first woman to get a medical degree.

CARPENTER                  From Boston University?

MUELDER                    Well, I understand that. I'm not too sure how far that extended, but at least that's the first from B.U.

CARPENTER

I have a light flashing which I believe is telling me that we are coming to the end of this side of the tape and so before we continue I think we will turn the tape over.

CARPENTER

This is Lee Carpenter. I am talking with Martha Muelder about her life, and we have just been talking about experiences at Boston University School of Theology in the mid 40s. And I would like to ask you, Martha, about the Edith Buell Club and how you got involved with that.

MUELDER

Well, after my youngest daughter was in school, which was about 1950, I had more time to give to activities in the school. And I was previously very much involved in parent-teacher associations within Newton Centre because of the older two girls. And now that Linda was in kindergarten I could devote more time to Boston University School of Theology. So the Edith Buell Club became one of my big interests. The purpose of the founding of the Edith Buell Club in 1902, as stated by Edith Buell herself, the wife of Dean Marcus Buell was to prepare the theological students' wives "socially, educationally, and spiritually" for Christian service. Many had no previous parish experiences. Also, very few had any work responsibility outside the home or church in those days. As stated in the amended constitution of '48, women students were also to be included, not just the wives. The members were very active and conscientious in working toward the above-stated goals. The club contributed greatly toward the feeling of community which pervaded the school of theology in the 50s and early 60s. As early as 1949, when the school was moved from Beacon Hill to the present Commonwealth Avenue campus, there were 166 members in Edith Buell Club. The monthly publication--the so-called "Edith Buell Bylines," which was the name of the publication contributed much to the feeling of a community committed to service. Not only were some of the issues of "Bylines" outlets for artistic talent in sketches and illustrations--if you were to look at them now you would know what I mean--but they kept students and faculty aware of relevant university and city-wide events. They recognized new marriages within the school, baby arrivals, illnesses, occasional family needs. They all made toward a caring community.

Early in the seminary years the monthly Edith Buell programs were outlined in an attractively organized brochure. There were lectures, potluck suppers, bake sales, kiddy-capers -- that is, baby shows -- and workshops in creative arts and crafts, in liturgical



dance, in religious arts and drama, as well as in choral music. And one of the most popular features was a series of non-credit courses, volunteered by the faculty members to orient their wives to the ministry lying ahead for them and their husbands.

The program even gained publicity in the November 19th, 1952 issue of the *New York Times*.

The first annual faculty retreat, including spouses, was held in 1954, at Sargent Camp in Peterborough, New Hampshire, with 200 persons in attendance. So helpful and inspiring was this experience that immediate plans were made for a second one in the fall. And also in that year a booklet called "The Edith Buell Cooks," containing prize recipes was published.

By 1961, the club members developed a deep service commitment to the community and to certain human needs in the Boston area. There were such projects, under the direction of the social service chairperson of the club, outstanding projects were responsibility at Morgan Memorial Church of All Nations--for arts and crafts with children, recreation for Camp Fire Girls under 12 years of age on Saturday afternoons, volunteer assistance to the New England Association for Retarded Children, the stuffing of envelopes for the tuberculosis association, and the making of doll clothes for several Boston hospitals. Such service commitment to the school, as well as to the outside community, were excellent preparation for the future parish ministry. During these years of great activity the contribution of Edith Buell Club members to the quality of life within the school of theology can never be overestimated.

CARPENTER                    That sounds like a wonderful organization. What happened to it?

MUELDER                    Well, in the 60s, the late 60s, women had new ideas. The name actually was changed--the nature of the Edith Buell Club changed about 1966, in response to the shifts in academic and social roles of women in American society. Now, these upheavals resulted in the reformulation of the purpose and the changing of the name to "Theo Wives and Women," instead of Edith Buell.

CARPENTER                    Were you a member of Theo Wives and Women?

MUELDER                    Oh, yes, I stayed with it. And then in the 70s--you see we retired in '72....

CARPENTER           And then you were no longer a member of Theo Wives and women?

MUELDER             Well, sometimes Walter or I would be asked to take certain parts, have certain responsibility...but, no, I was not a regular member.

CARPENTER           And you were the officer of the Buell Club.

MUELDER             Well, I was the permanent--if you look in something I have written someplace--permanent honorary chairperson. I think that's the way they delegated me.

CARPENTER           At one time...were you always honorary chairperson or was that after you had held active office?

MUELDER             Well, I'm afraid I don't remember exactly.

CARPENTER           We can look that up because we are writing a history of Edith Buell...that will be easy to do. Thank you.

                      I have been wanting to find out more about the Edith Buell Club and that was really helpful. I would also like to know how you saw your role as the wife of the dean of Boston University School of Theology and where that took you...and where you have gone since then.

MUELDER             Well...I'll back up just a moment. One more thing about the directorship of the Edith Buell, as it comes to my mind now. There were always two faculty wives and myself--see, I was permanent--two faculty wives every year, and we were the advisory committee and they were changed every year. So the faculty wives took a great responsibility in those days in the school of theology. And they had teas regularly for students.

CARPENTER           And every year there would be two different faculty wives...

MUELDER             That's right. Yes...

CARPENTER           ...who would work with you on all of the activities...

MUELDER             Yes, that's right.

CARPENTER           O.k.

MUELDER             And you can see that there was a great program--all these various activities.

CARPENTER How would you compare your role as the wife of the dean of Boston University School of Theology with your role as the wife of a faculty member of Berea College? Are they very similar? Did you have the same kinds of obligations?

MUELDER Well, I felt that I had more obligations when Walter was dean. Oh, I'm sure, I was much more internally involved within the school. In Berea I had a lot of relationships with the community. You see, these were all community things that I mentioned for Berea.

CARPENTER Now, did you find yourself entertaining...for the school of theology community?

MUELDER Oh, well, a lot. For years we had every Friday entertaining of students was one of our programs, when we were free. And especially seniors..we would go through the senior class and issue invitations. So, yes, that's one reason why they say that the Martha Muelder Scholarship Fund was established because I had entertained so many, many students during those years.

CARPENTER And so they established a scholarship for a student...

MUELDER Yes...

CARPENTER In your name?

MUELDER Yes.

CARPENTER As of about two...

MUELDER No, four or five years now. Because now we have the fourth one.

CARPENTER O.k. Were there other responsibilities connected with being the wife of the dean?

MUELDER Well, there were responsibilities across the whole university. There were many events, you see, involving deans' affairs, women's guild, women council, to which I belonged, both of them, and that was across the whole university.

CARPENTER What about for yourself...were there things that you did that were not connected with being the wife of the dean in that time period? Did you have time to do things for Martha or for your church or something like that?

MUELDER Yes, I remained fairly active in church, especially in the United Methodist Women. But, no, I couldn't do as much as I had before.

CARPENTER And what church were you affiliated with?

MUELDER Well, in those days, it was in Newton Centre. The United Methodist Church here in Newton Center, But then it merged with the United Methodist Church in Newtonville, where we now live in a merged situation. Which is very good.

CARPENTER O.k. Let's move from Boston University School of Theology to what happened after that.

MUELDER Well, during that time, not after, during that time when Walter was very much involved with the World Council of Churches, he had many responsibilities outside the school, and we were privileged to go to many world conferences.

CARPENTER And what date would this be?

MUELDER Well, in 1951--these are the World conference I went to--now, Walter went to more. 1951, Rolle, Switzerland, to prepare for the Evanston Conference which was going to be in 1954 at the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches. 1953, Walter had a sabbatical leave--this was wonderful, I almost forgot about that--had a sabbatical leave from Boston University, and so we and the three daughters all went to Switzerland and we were there six months. Walter taught at Bossey, which was the Ecumenical Institute location outside Geneva, and two of our girls went to the school.

CARPENTER And you lived...

MUELDER We lived there for almost six months.

CARPENTER And did you speak french?

MUELDER Well, I had a lot of preparation beforehand. I worked on it, and I could get around all right. But I really discovered how much French I had forgotten, since I was a minor in French in college. And there were a lot of these people with whom we were involved who could speak English, too.

And then in 1961, there was around the world trip to New Delhi, India, where the third assembly of the World Council of Churches. Now, we were gone five weeks there in India. Well, let's back up a little. We did stop along the way at various places. Well, now let's see...Paris...all along the line we had many stops to New Delhi. And then coming back we had a very interesting time, we stopped in Seoul, where we had so many alumni, and we stopped in Tokyo where we had so many alumni. So we visited along the way many former students that we had had. That was on our way home.

Then in...that was 1961..1963, went to Montreal for Faith and Order. 1964 was the Vatican Council. Now, I am going to stop there and do that in more detail. The Vatican Council was the--as everybody knows, I am sure, by this time--was the Catholic Council which had met now for the second time and as an observer's wife at the Vatican Council I had some very interesting experiences, and it was certainly a new vision that I had of ecumenics. When I came back I think maybe I can tell you a little more about it by reading something--excerpts from something I had to write when I came back.

At Boston University the Women's Council used to publish a paper called "The Council Window." So they asked me to write an article in one of their issues for March 1965 about my experiences at the Vatican Council. So I have a few excerpts here which make it clearer than if I just labored along at it.

The title is "An Observer's Wife at the Vatican Council" since my husband was a delegated observer. "Ever since the convening of Vatican Council II by Pope John XXIII in October of 1962 much has been written by delegated Protestant observers to the first and second sessions about the unique role that was theirs in this great historic event. As far as I know, nothing has been written by any observer's wife who may have been in Rome during these sessions. (Now, you have to remember, pardon me, these are the parentheses, you will have to remember this was back in '65. So there may have been a great deal written since.) "Therefore, when I realized that I was to have the privilege of accompanying my husband, a delegated observer from the Methodist Church to the third session, I had little idea of the rich ecumenical experience which lay ahead. I expected to have to spend much time alone, for I knew that only observers of the Vatican task force could attend the daily plenary sessions of the Council fathers. I was thrilled with the

prospect of living for six weeks in Rome, a city whose culture and historical resources are inexhaustible. On September 13, 1964 we arrived in Rome. The Vatican Secretariat for Christian Unity, which is a committee set up by Pope John and continued by Pope Paul VI to promote the ecumenical relations of Vatican Council had reserved two floors of Pension Castello for most of the observers. There were six wives of American and six of European observers at the Council. We roamed Rome as I never had roamed Boston." [Oh, it was a wonderful experience. We were free from any other responsibilities and so I have often felt since I got back that I knew, let's say, Rome better than I knew Boston at that time.]

"For the very first morning of the opening exercises at St. Peter's Basilica we realized that we were not to be lost in the overwhelming mass of males--about two thousand five hundred of them--but that on numerous occasions we would be identified with our husbands. On this first morning we were extended every possible courtesy, special passes, an escort from the secretariat who led us through crowds of spectators in St. Peter's, to seats reserved for us very near the high altar under the beautiful Michelangelo dome." (And here is an insert: we do have some wonderful pictures still of that experience.)

"The setting was dramatic in colors and rich fabric. History of centuries was before us in the panorama of Swiss and Roman guards, in the diplomatic corps resplendent with ribbons and medals, and in the great variety of ecclesiastical vestments. Series of choirs during the mass thrilled us. Toward the end of the Pope's address, he said, "And now we turn to you, the observers, with reverence and esteem, for you have once more accepted our invitation to attend the Council. We welcome and we thank you.

"On two Saturdays the observers and their wives were guests of the City of Rome on two bus trips, way up into the mountains, 54 miles from Rome. Benedictine monasteries and Scholasticus monasteries, Sisters of the Benedict, dedicated the Sister of the Benedict. We were

served a sumptuous six-course dinner in the monk's refectory. Both the food and the visitors would have shocked the simple Benedict.

"It goes without saying that these two trips were no mere tourist attractions but rare opportunities to have fellowship with monks in cloistered retreats rich in ancient manuscripts, frescoes and religious artifacts.

"I shall never forget the social occasions with the Association for American Women in Rome. They have special associations there, and we were invited to their meetings, with the American ambassador and Mrs. Frederick Reinhart at their beautiful Italian villa, with the Catholic sisters of St. Felicia in their new convent, with the guild members of the Catholic Church of St. Susannah, and especially frequent fellowship with the Catholic Bethany Sisters of Holland, an order devoted to promoting ecumenicity by maintaining a hostel and guide service for non-Catholics." [I remember them so well because they were very attentive to us.]

"But the most indelible experience of all for nine of us wives was the invitation from Pope Paul for an audience in his newly-decorated private apartments. We shall never forget his kind words and gracious manner or the petition that we pray for him as he would pray for us and our families."

After that experience in Rome, Walter and I returned to our home ecumenically convinced that the bridges of understanding among people of diverse doctrines and cultures had become much more firmly established.

Now that was probably as wonderful an experience as any of the rest of the trips we had. In '66 we went to a conference on Church and Society in Geneva. Geneva is one place in the world...Geneva and Rome I feel I know better than any place else because I have attended three or four of these conferences in Geneva, and it is the headquarters of the World Council of Churches. So we...and we lived there through Walter's sabbatical, as I said, for a whole semester.

CARPENTER

And you liked Geneva?

MUELDER

Oh, I loved it! Yes..yes..yes. I..We got so well acquainted we didn't mind that we didn't have any car. We walked and we bussed (chuckle); then in '68, we went to the Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Uppsala, Sweden, and that was wonderful because we combined it with a trip visiting up in Smaland, the church in the area from which my mother and her family came. We also went to Helsinki for our first experience in that part of the world, and we spent a lot of time, as part of the conference meetings, in Stockholm. It was a wonderful feeling to be back in one's origins. In '71, I went with Walter to the Faith and Order Conference in Louvain, Belgium. We were there a month, and we crossed the country by bus and train several times. We just really got well acquainted with Belgium. It was a very great experience. Now, there I could practice my French. (chuckle) In '77 it was no longer an ecumenical trip. We visited England and Wales, took a bus trip up to northern Wales, and this was just about our first trip without any responsibilities for my husband and me, ecumenically.

CARPENTER

This was a vacation?

MUELDER

Uh huh. This was a vacation in '77.

CARPENTER

Wonderful....!

MUELDER

And then in 1980 we had the privilege of being invited...Walter had the privilege of being invited and I followed...to speak in Innsbruck and Salzburg. We had way back...this takes us back a little bit..in the 50s an international student living in our home for the year while two of the daughters were in high school. We had a girl from Vienna, Brigitta Schazler, and so she became very well educated, graduated, got her doctorate from University of Vienna and had invited us back....she was the first woman dean in Austria...and she had invited Walter back to lecture at Salzburg and Innsbruck. So that was a memorable experience.

CARPENTER

Martha, I wanted to ask you about the effect of ecumenicity in your life, or on your life. I'd like for you to tell us how you would compare Martha Grotewohl and her religious life with Martha Muelder and where she is with her religious life today.



MUELDER

Well, I can certainly say that way back, when I was Martha Grotewohl, in high school and elementary, high school, even college days, I would never have dreamed that my religious life involved anything but Methodism. Of course, in a small town we were involved in the church. And then I was also very much involved in music--so I was the accompanist for this person and that person. Accompanist for the choirs. I was used as a piano soloist in high school when we had visiting singers come. I was the accompanist in high school for operettas. I even was on radio and I frequently accompanied a talented violist at restaurants during the dinner hour. But all this time I thought in terms of being Methodist as far as the church was concerned. Now, what the ecumenical movement has done for me, and I am sure it would do for anybody that had these opportunities would be to bring me out of my Methodist shell and appreciate how many other ways of worshipping and of devoting my life. And so I feel that this has been one of the widest experiences of my life, this experience of seeing churches around the world and people around the world worship certainly has enlarged my view of the Spirit that's in the universe.

CARPENTER

I have some tough questions that I want to end our conversation with, but I thought I would ask an easy question first. I would like to know what role music plays in your life today? You have accompanied people when you were younger, and I know you play the piano beautifully because I heard you when I knocked on the door this morning. So, when do you play and how do you play and what does it do for you?

MUELDER

Well, it still is there, but my fingers don't operate quite as well as they did ten years ago, let's say. I still have the privilege of accompanying occasionally, down at church. I play simplest things--hymns for the women's society...the accompaniment for hymns. And I...but the regular thing that brings me much joy in the field is that almost every Saturday our youngest daughter, who is a flutist and plays in an orchestra, comes over with her two young ones and she brings...we both have music, and I do her accompanying. Sometimes she brings it; sometimes I pull it out of the cupboard. And so we play together almost every Saturday. And, of course, in between, when I'm not cooking, doing housework, or running around the neighborhood doing some other jobs I do practice. But I realize that the year of '81 has done something for my dexterity, my finger dexterity.

CARPENTER

Now I would like to ask you what you believe the greatest challenge of your life so far has been?

MUELDER

I think that would rather answer in terms of challenges, rather than the greatest challenge. Certainly, way back before I was married and when I had to change teaching positions for the sake of my mother, to be with her because my father died, and my father died too early in age, at the age of 59, and left us and her with financial problems as well as our loss. As I have grown older I think that a challenge that has been hard to meet and adjust to is the fact of the illnesses of two of our grandchildren. We have a grandson who at the age of 18, he is now 20, at the age of 18 developed glandular cancer, Hodgkin's Disease. And so, after ...during seven months of chemotherapy he was so ill so much he couldn't finish high school. So the next year he went back and finished and he is now -- we've met that challenge and now we have hopes that this will never recur again. He is now in a state of remission. Finished high school and is now out in the work world.

We have another grandchild who at the age of eight, almost nine, cannot talk because he is autistic. Both of these have been challenges to us, to adjust to and to do what we can to relieve the situation. So it has been...we still have the latter problem, but we still have hopes because of the great experiences and advances that have been made now in the last ten years in the treating of autistics.

Then, of course, there was my husband's heart attack ten years ago. But we have lived through all of these and so I hate to designate any one as the greatest challenge.

CARPENTER

For my last question, I would like to ask you how or for what you would like to be remembered?

MUELDER

Well, that's not an easy question. But I certainly hope that I have served a great many people in times of need. I hope that I have been able to share some of the great advantages of my life, which have been many, as you can know. I hope that I have been able to help some other people over problems that they may have had. I think that is one of my hopes. Probably my biggest hope, that I will have been of some help in this world to many people, especially to my family. Amen,

CARPENTER

Amen!