

Interviewee: Pat McCall
UoS Dates: 1970 - 1974
Role(s): Undergraduate, BA Hons English Studies



Interview summary:

Summary of content; with time (min:secs)

Start 01:37 – Applied to Dundee University before Stirling but was told the Professor of English at Dundee would not tolerate middle aged women. Took Highers at Perth College. Applied to Stirling and was successful.

03:27 – Left school before 15. PM's English teacher was upset at her leaving and tried to convince her to stay. PM knew she could manage studying. Had two children at University and one about to go when she decided to educate herself.

04:45 – Attended Stirling in 1970, travelled in on the bus from Perth every day.

05:56 – Had done two Highers at Perth College in English and History. Got A's for both. Stirling would accept two Highers but PM knew they required ordinary undergraduates to have three subjects and didn't want to be admitted with less. Went to Dundee College to do A level English, Economic History and French. Did very well in French so was bumped up to A level. Good at translation and worked hard at French. Fell in love with French literature. When PM came to Stirling she chose English, History and French. The French Professor thought she could do a double but this would require time in France which PM couldn't do. Neighbours thought she was neglecting her husband.

11:22 – Sister resented that PM went to university until Grahame Smith told her PM was one of the best students he ever taught.

13:01 – Studied French culture which fascinated PM. Would have liked to have completed a degree in French. Feels success in French was due to being good at English. Michael Alexander said that English was the best broad education you could get.

14:16 – Liked History and should have done well in it but it was a disaster. Had to rush from a French tutorial in Pathfoot to History in Cottrell. Cottrell was still being built, workmen would help her over the building site. Tutor was Dr Chitnis. At the end of the first semester there was a written exam for which PM was late on account of a late bus. In her panic she missed the questions on the reverse of the paper. Dr Chitnis told her it was a disaster and that he expected better. PM dropped history and continued on with French.

17:22 – First semester in English was The Novel. Tutor was Michael Alexander, read *Dubliners*. Was very insecure, waiting to be "found out". Thought her success was a fluke

19:04 – Alasdair Macrae once called PM a charlatan as a joke but this greatly upset her. Thought she had been finally caught out as a con. Thought of giving up but Grahame Smith talked her out of it. Several lecturers thought her essays were done with great ease and were too polished but PM spent a great deal of time and work on them. Michael Alexander said her essays had a light-heartedness to them that some didn't like. Robin Mayhead once called an essay of PM's literary journalism but wouldn't explain the comment to her.

23:44 – Other students were limited in tutorials and PM helped the tutors get students to join in, especially Scottish

students who were more reserved than English students. Would talk to students and try to encourage them. Thought she would be ignored by other students but wasn't. Was the first time PM wasn't somebody's wife or somebody's mother, simply a student and the other students treated her as such.
26:02 – There weren't many older women there.
27:31 – Resented having to leave school and considered herself uneducated. Going at that age gave her an advantage as she had read much more than young students. Wasn't ignorant and was self-educated but couldn't think of herself that way. Needed reassurance.
29:25 – Options. Remembers choosing the criticism option. Was completely at a loss with poetry, especially the terminology. Found it difficult to write about poetry. Also chose Dickens as she had read a lot of it. Would travel in on the bus with another mature student named Peter. Peter had taught himself for four A levels. His wife said all they did was sit about and read storybooks which amused PM as that was heaven to her.
32:49 – Wrote her dissertation on George Eliot's <i>Middlemarch</i> and Gustave Flaubert's <i>Madam Bovary</i> which share the same subtitle. Compared the two and argued that <i>Middlemarch</i> was a riposte to <i>Madam Bovary</i> , which was contrary to what critics at the time thought. Michael Alexander later told PM that an article had been published in the Modern Language Review which argued the same. The dissertation did well.
36:09 – Stuart Dorian was another student on the Dickens course and was a complement and contrast to PM. They got on very well. Iain Banks and Jackie Kay were former Stirling students that had done very well.
37:56 – Travelled every day from Perth. The French Department looked after PM. If there was anything on in the evening Professor Lockerbie insisted PM stay with him so she could take part. Difficult to have much of a social life in Stirling. Struck up a friendship with Lockerbie's aunt who had been a musician and travelled Ireland during the First World War.
40:41 – The first years of the MacRobert were exciting under the directorship of Anthony Phillips. PM couldn't take advantage of this but would drive through with her husband for special occasions such as to see Ian McKellan do Chekhov.
41:26 – The idea that her degree would benefit her never occurred to PM, she was in education for education's sake. At that time teachers were wanted and PM thought she could teach eventually but didn't want to go to training college. As she got her degree she applied for a position as a teacher of English Language and Literature at Perth College. Thought she had no chance. Said in the application that she expected a 2:1 and the large interview panel that was made entirely of men said she showed great self-confidence in predicting a 2:1. As she didn't expect to get the job she spoke her mind in the interview. It was an all-male panel. The interviewers seemed to be down on further education and PM mentioned this. Got the job. Found out she had achieved a 1 st but her boss wouldn't take her word for it and asked to see the certificate. Afterward someone told her it was an amazing interview.
46:53 – Taught at Perth College for seven years and loved it. Nervous at first. Once again it was sitting talking about storybooks. Became very interested in the language side.
48:50 – Taught English to the secretarial class and one or two asked to join the Higher class. Gave them coaching at lunchtime which some staff disapproved of. One woman told her that she had changed her life. PM would have liked to have gone on teaching forever.
51:29 – Lecturers at Stirling did everything they could for PM. Her Director of Studies took a great interest and invited PM and her husband for lunch. Students now don't get the same level of care and are not asked to do as much.
53:00 – Peter, the man who had taught himself, became a teacher at Perth High but didn't last beyond the first term. Couldn't control the class. He had achieved a 2:1 and was very involved in university life.
[Ends 57:03]

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