Nancy Mayer-Whittington Oral History
Interview Session II
February 10, 2011

Ms. Woodbury: Good morning. Today's date is Thursday, February 10, 2011. Nancy, for today's interview session, I would like to begin with your experience in high school and if we have time today, your work with the court here in D.C.. Where did you go to high school?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: I went to the Academy of the Holy Cross, which is located in Kensington, Maryland.

Ms. Woodbury: What year did you start?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: I started there in 1967.

Ms. Woodbury: At that time, how big was the Academy of the Holy Cross?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: Oh, it had about 500 students and it was an all girls' Catholic high school.

Ms. Woodbury: Did it cover grades 9 through 12?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: Yes.

Ms. Woodbury: Looking back on it now, what was the best part of your high school experience?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: I think the best part was the friendships and camaraderie. It was a really good experience for me being in an all girls environment, having grown up in an all girls family. It was kind of a natural continuation of that and it was a school that challenged me. I really grew academically They had a lot of tough classes and thought provoking assignments. I had good relationships with the teachers and ended up learning a lot and being very well prepared for college.

Ms. Woodbury: Nancy, you said that one of the things that was positive for you about the school was that it was an all girls school. Did you regard that as valuable to you

at the time, when you were going, or looking back on it?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: Well both. Probably more valuable looking back on it. I was not as reflective when I was living it. I was very shy at this time in my life and having all girls in my classes was great -- they were very supportive and would not make fun of you. When I was in the 5th and 6th grades, I attended a public school and sometimes I was afraid to make a mistake in front of the boys because they would make fun of me. Also, I was the one that would raise my hand and wait patiently to be called on while the boys yelled things out. Sometimes I'd think I knew an answer, but I didn't get my turn. At Holy Cross, the environment was very supportive with everyone taking turns and respecting someone's initial reluctance to talk and letting them talk when they were ready. Not nearly as competitive as in a coed environment.

Ms. Woodbury: Was there any part of your years in high school that you didn't like or looking back that was not a good experience?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: Well yes, in high school you were expected to get up and present papers and positions, in an effort to develop presentation skills. I was afraid of my shadow back then and sometimes. I would get so nervous that I would trip over my words. I hated that part of high school. I hated the whole idea that I had to get up in front of people. Ultimately, looking back, it was the beginning attempt to try to get over my fear of public speaking. But I still dreaded every time I had to get up in front of everyone, despite the fact that other girls were very supportive of me. I had this physiological reaction of a rapid heartbeat and stumbling over my words - and it took me quite a while to feel comfortable

speaking in public. Looking back that was an aspect of high school that I didn't like.

Ms. Woodbury: While you were still in high school did you develop skills to help you get over that or did it ever get easier while you were still in high school?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: Not really because you were expected to do presentations at various times. It wasn't so much that you ever got so regular with it that you felt comfortable. It wasn't until I was starting at the courthouse and had to regularly give the orientation speech to new jurors that it got a bit easier. I did it so often, that I finally got to the point where I wasn't in mortal fear of giving the presentation. In high school there were just enough speeches that helped me get organized, but not enough practice in doing it.

Ms. Woodbury: Were there any other things about your high school years that, looking back on them, you think of as being very good or being negative?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: Well, in spite of my intense fear of speaking in front of people, I joined the drama club and I would like to think it was because I thought if I did that more often I would be better, but it really wasn't that. I joined it because I liked working behind the scenes. I liked helping with the lights and I liked helping with the different aspects of the production to the point where I became stage manager for most of the plays we presented. Ultimately, I became vice president of the drama club in my junior year and president of the drama club in my senior year. All the while never having had to perform a role on stage because that was not my interest. But I learned how to organize things. I learned how to direct people to do things and got that type of experience and I thought, "I kind of like

this."

Ms. Woodbury: Were there other people in your family who were interested in drama? What was the catalyst to make you sign up for the drama club?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: It just looked like a lot of fun. And Holy Cross had a good reputation for having really good theatre productions. It didn't hurt that my boyfriend was on the stage crew at Our Lady of Good Counsel which was a boys school. We had lots in common to talk about. Our cast parties would sometimes overlap and we would just have a good time. My oldest sister wasn't interested in the drama club, but my younger sister, who was a year behind me, did some of the behind the scenes things too. Not on the stage but helping with the production. When we did the "King and I" my youngest sisters, who were twins and five years old, played the part of the King's youngest children. They actually went on the stage!

But, really, my dad was the one who acted all through law school at Catholic University's Hartke Theatre. He had a great speaking voice and the best sense of timing in delivering a line. We never saw him perform, but we did see him speak publicly very often. He had pictures of his performances in an album that my mother put together. It's funny but when we were growing up we always put on shows for our relatives, everything from plays, to skits that we wrote, to talent shows. My grandfather wanted us to become the next "Lennon Sisters" because we all had fairly good voices, but that fear of a truly public performance kept my grandfather's wish from being pursued.

Ms. Woodbury: It became a shared family experience?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: Yes and that's how I met some of my friends at Holy Cross who joined

the drama club and either performed or worked behind the scenes with me.

Ms. Woodbury: Over the time you were at Holy Cross were you on balance a good student or did you strive to be a good student?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: Yes, I was a good student. I was on the honor role all the time. I wasn't a straight "A" student but I didn't have to work extremely hard to get good grades. My older sister, Mary Pat, worked really hard and was a straight "A" student. My parents were really big on education. There were not many excuses for not bringing home good grades because they felt like we had enough time to study and encouragement to study. My dad had gone to law school and my mom had gone to nursing school and they had both continued their education. In our family, it was just assumed that you were going to work hard in school and do the best you can.

Ms. Woodbury: Were there certain subjects or teachers that you liked best or who were favorites for you?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: I loved all my English classes. I love reading and I like to write. And one nun, Sister Thomas Aquinas, was just amazing. She was able to present a novel with both the ability to tell you what you should look for, when and where the author lived and their background and how they came to their points of views while still enjoying reading the book. She always made everything come to life. She was really good. I also had a world religion teacher, Miss Homorsky who recognized there were religions outside of Catholicism. We learned about Buddhism, and we learned about Islamic practices and Protestant and Jewish faith traditions and that was really an eye-opening experience for me and it was

presented very well.

Ms. Woodbury: At that time were other religions, say from Asia, Africa also covered in the high school curriculum?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: Yes

Ms. Woodbury: So you learned about Buddhism and Hinduism as well?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: Yes

Ms. Woodbury: Was your English teacher someone you had for more than one year or was it just a single year?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: I had her for two years. I can't think of the names of some of my other English teachers, but I just consistently liked that subject and I did well in it too. And I liked creative writing and that was explored in our junior and senior years.

Ms. Woodbury: Was the creative writing class a separate class? For example, to write stories or how was that done?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: It was just a sub-set of the English classes, not a separate class but they did encourage everybody to try different mediums. I know that when I was a junior, I was a runner-up in a national poetry contest. But, I had to read my poem in front of an audience and I wasn't really thrilled about doing that. I almost wished I hadn't won because I still had such of fear of public speaking.

Ms. Woodbury: Where did you have to go to read it?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: Down at St. John's College High School in Washington, D.C. in an auditorium with lots of people. But I got a trophy for my poem and my family came to the presentation and everyone was very proud of me – so I guess it wasn't so bad.

Ms. Woodbury: Did you continue writing poetry or doing creative writing after high school? Was that an interest that continued?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: Yes, when I was in college, my grandfather who was 94 at the time passed away. He was kind of a character and big influence on me and all of our family so I wrote a poem about him. He died in June and I wrote the poem and gave it to my mother the next year as a St. Patrick's Day gift since that would be our first St. Patrick's Day without him. My mom, in particular, was thrilled about it, and my aunts and uncles and everybody thought it was wonderful. It was not a work of art or anything close to that but it captured some of the essence of my grandfather and it gave me and the rest of our family something concrete to remember him by. I wrote some other poems about our family from time to time and sort of became the one who captured family events in poetry. I wrote a poem for each of my sister's weddings. They were read at the church initially by one of my sisters, and later as I got over my fear of public speaking, I was able to read them. The poems created a little bit of a chronology of our family history.

Ms. Woodbury: When you were in high school, apart from your work with the drama club, were there other extracircular activities at the school that you were involved in, in or outside the school?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: Not really at Holy Cross because I was in a car pool and that limited my after school activities. But when you have nine sisters and you live down the street from your eight cousins and you live next door to a family that has seven children, and then you have lots of things going on in the neighborhood that keep you busy. There was also lots of home work. And then I started working when I

was 16.

Ms. Woodbury: What did you do?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: I worked as a sales clerk at Montgomery Ward two afternoons a week and Saturdays. Everyone in our family pretty much started working when they turned 16.

Ms. Woodbury: Do you remember what department you were in?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: Children's wear.

Ms. Woodbury: Did you enjoy that experience?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: You know, I did because I liked the idea of working with parents and children. I felt like I knew a lot about children's clothing since we had such a big family. So, when parents came in and were not sure about sizes, I had some feel for that. But I was still growing out of my shy phase. From time to time, I would work in the back room stocking merchandise and taking inventory. I would work for hours by myself and get a lot done and not have to interact with customers. I remember thinking at one point when I was working in the stockroom that this might be a good career for me. I could stay out of the public eye and feel satisfied with my work and get paid for it. What more could I ask for?

Ms. Woodbury: But, you also have contact with customers? Were those contacts pleasant?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: Yes, and I had a really, really tough supervisor. Her name was Miss Raugh, I remember to this day that she was really hard to please and so there was always a little bit of tension whenever you worked with her. She never actually yelled at me, I just saw her yell at other people and I saw the way she handled

herself and that made me nervous. That's another reason that the stockroom had such an appeal for me. But eventually I realized that I did like helping people and that was a big part of the job. So, after learning how to run the register -- in those days there was no bar code or anything, you had to input the information yourself and that was also part of their inventory so you had to be careful to key in everything correctly - I started to really enjoy the work. I did like interacting with people and lots of the customers brought their children with them and I liked helping them find clothes, so I think that was a good fit for me.

Ms. Woodbury: Overall it was a good fit? Did you develop any interest at that point in business? I don't know that management would be the right word, but in how they ran the children's department or how they ran the company or the store?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: Well, I liked when they asked me what I thought about something. I liked that I had some input in the decision making in the department. I liked arranging things and setting up displays. But I never thought about a career there because I realized that there was a lot of night and weekend work. I felt like it was something to do to make money, but I don't think I ever thought about a career in sales.

Ms. Woodbury: I wanted to ask whether that from the time you started high school was it assumed or encouraged that you and your sisters would go on to college?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: Yes, it was really very much assumed. My parents, especially my dad, weren't the kind who preached a lot. He didn't sit down and tell us what to do as much as he would tell us about his experiences and how valuable a college education was and how valuable it is to keep learning. But it was just assumed

we were going to go to college. It wasn't a matter of, if you were going to go, it was where you were going to go.

Ms. Woodbury: Nancy, when you were still in high school did you have any idea what you wanted to do when you got out of college or what kind of classes you wanted to major in while you were in college?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: I had the idea that I would like to be a writer and in particular I wanted to be a sports writer. I had an aunt and an uncle who were brother and sister and they had season tickets to the Washington Redskins. When they had a couple extra tickets they would take turns bringing some of us to the games and I just got hooked on the Redskins. I followed the Washington Senators until they left town and then the Baltimore Orioles. When I went to college, I started attending football and basketball games and fell in love with the Maryland Terrapins. I would read the sports page and figured out how I could have done a better job writing the story. So I had a vague idea that I would like to be a sports writer or any kind of writer. But to be quite honest, mostly I wanted to be a graduate. I hate to say I didn't have a burning passion to be a doctor or something like that… I just kind of wanted to go through college and see where it led me. I think even then I knew it would be hard to make a living being a sports writer or just being a writer. I had done a little research on that. Unless you had a syndicated column you were considered a freelance writer and that wasn't what people did right out of school. So as much as I thought I would love to be a writer I knew I would probably have to do something else to earn a living at least right after college. That was my state of mind - I would just have to see what comes up.

Ms. Woodbury: During your high school summers, did you have a job or jobs?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: From the time I was 16, I worked during the school year a couple days and then Saturdays and during the summer I worked as many hours as they would give me.

Ms. Woodbury: In the children's department?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: Yes, at Montgomery Ward

Ms. Woodbury: Did you ever see if you could find a job relating to sports writing while you were still in high school?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: Well, no because at that time there weren't any women sports writers. I had written some letters to the editor at the [Washington] Post about some things… I actually got one of them published one time.

Ms. Woodbury: About sports issues?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: Yes, why they didn't have a "Sonny Jurgensen Day" at RFK stadium to honor Sonny upon his retirement from the Washington Redskins. The Redskins had held special ceremonies at halftime of other games to celebrate the careers of a players who had retired. I wrote to the Post to see if they could find out what was the reason behind the decision not to hold a retirement ceremony. Parts of my letter made it into a sports writer's column – I felt like I had actually been published! What a thrill!

Ms. Woodbury: There weren't that many openings [for girls]?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: No, Christine Brennan was probably the first female sports writer in the Washington area and she would periodically decry the absence of other female sports writers. I remember standing around talking about sports with a group of

guys when I was in high school and most of the guys were in disbelief that I knew something about football, basketball and baseball. And they were even more surprised when I expressed an opinion. It was clearly not the norm for a woman to discuss sports.

Ms. Woodbury: Unusual for a girl or woman to have that interest or knowledge?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: Right, and then to want to take it to the next level and actually write about it. Well, that was unheard of……

Ms. Woodbury: Were the aunt and uncle who took you to the Redskins games; were they both very knowledgeable about sports?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: Yes. And my father who was very knowledge about sports.

Ms. Woodbury: What year did you graduate from high school?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: 1971

Ms. Woodbury: Did you then go straight to college?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: Yes.

Ms. Woodbury: Where did you go?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: The University of Maryland.

Ms. Woodbury: Where you living on campus or were you living at home?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: I lived on campus the first year in one of the high-rise dorms in Cumberland Hall. I remember I was paying for some of my college education even though the tuition at Maryland was cheaper than at Holy Cross, but the room and board was expensive. But yes, I lived on campus the first year and then I came home for the second year, somewhat because I was home a lot during the first year.

Ms. Woodbury: You mean it was a waste of money?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: Yes, a little bit. And of course, I had a boyfriend and he was two years older and he was living at home too at that time.

Ms. Woodbury: In your neighborhood?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: No. The boyfriend I dated in high school lived next door, but this was someone else. But I was going home a lot on weekends. It's kind of hard to explain, but in a big family there is always something going on, there is always someone's birthday, or anniversary or some other event. When I lived on campus, I would find myself missing out on some of that, and I wanted to come home. I really didn't give myself an opportunity to meet a lot of people on campus that year because I was dating a guy who was going to school there so I just hung around with him and his friends. So the second year I came home and lived at home for my sophomore year. Then for my junior and senior years, I got an apartment off campus with a friend.

Ms. Woodbury: After you graduated from high school and started college did you stay in contact with friends you made and teachers from your high school years?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: No, not teachers really. Somewhat because I still had sisters going to school there so I would hear about what was going on with the teachers I knew. But I didn't have contact with them. My two best friends from high school were Patricia Farrell and Anne Baldwin. Patricia went to Dayton University and Anne went to the University of Arizona. We kept in touch and still keep in touch to this day, but nobody that I was close to in high school went to Maryland. I went from a 500 population school at Holy Cross to a 35,000 population school at

Maryland. This was what I wanted. I wanted the whole big school experience after having a very small high school. I did make some new friends at Maryland.

Ms. Woodbury: Was your older sister at the University of Maryland?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: No, she went to Frostburg State because she wanted to be a teacher and they waived your tuition if you going to be a teacher and work after graduation for the state of Maryland. So she went there for her four years of college.

Ms. Woodbury: Once you were enrolled at the University of Maryland what year were you at the time you were asked to declare a major?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: You didn't have to declare until your junior year. When I first started I wanted to be journalism major. I started taking classes with this in mind. But then they made this new requirement that you had to take a foreign language. Even though I had taken French for four years at Holy Cross, and therefore didn't need a foreign language in college for the general requirement, I did need one to be a journalism major at Maryland and I remember thinking I was not good at languages. I didn't have a really good ear for languages. I had worked hard at Holy Cross to get through French. It was probably very shortsighted, but I was not going to do a major that required a foreign language. So I made that my minor and I declared a history major.

Ms. Woodbury: Was there a particular field in history that you wanted to specialize in? American History or European History?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: American History and I had a professor who was outstanding. He is one of the main reasons that I became a history major.

Ms. Woodbury: Who was that?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: His name was Gordon Prange

Ms. Woodbury: What was his specialty?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: American history in particular World War I and World War II. He was a special attaché to General MacArthur. He wrote the book . This book was about the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. It was the screenplay for the movie *Tora, Tora, Tora*. He was an older professor but he was a dynamic speaker. He had interviewed many of the major participants to World War II and he could give firsthand accounts of their personalities and their views of the war. Dr. Prange was absolutely amazing! Students would stand outside his lecture hall to hear him talk. They would be hanging in through the windows to listen to him because his classes were so popular and they would fill up so quickly. When I learned that the administration gave preference to his class to students that were history majors, that made my decision about my major an easy one. He made history come alive.

Ms. Woodbury: Given how popular he was, his classes were probably large. Were you able to have any personal contact with him? Do you go to his office hours or go to a seminar?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: I talked to him several times after class because he would make himself available for questions and discussions after class was over. I remember my first class with him was my second semester of my freshman year. I signed up for classes as early as I could and I lucked out and got into his class. I didn't know much and I didn't really read my syllabus thoroughly. We had to choose a history book and write a report about it. It wasn't until I was finished with it that

I realized that the book I had chosen, *The Guns of August*, was required reading for the class and that you weren't supposed to….

Ms. Woodbury: Choose one of those?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: Yes. But I had finished the report and I wasn't sure what I should do. I am sort of panicking and thinking maybe I am going to have to drop the class because he will know I did not read the syllabus and he will wonder what kind of student I am. So I waited until after class and I got into the line to talk to him. I was the last person to talk to Dr. Prange because I let people go in front of me, so nobody would know how dumb I was. When I told Dr. Prange what had happened he took my paper from me and "Did you do a good job"? I said "I think so." And, he said, "Well, that is all that matters to me."

Ms. Woodbury: How nice of him and how supportive. That's a very nice story to hear about a professor with these huge classes -- that he was interested in his students at that level and wants to encourage them.

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: Yes. I got an "A" on the paper and I was like….

Ms. Woodbury: Floating?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: Yes, actually, and I was thinking "Oh my gosh" this is the best possible experience I'm ever going to have. It made me appreciate him as a person not just as a professor. He taught four classes Pre- World War I, World War I, Pre-World War II and World War II and I took all four of his classes. He made such an impression on all of his students – he was a legend at Maryland. I hated taking my World War II class with him because I knew it was the last class I would be able to have with him. On my final exam in my last class I got my first "A+"

from him. He said he had never given an "A+", usually just "A's".

Ms. Woodbury: That was also a high point?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: Absolutely! I still have that exam in my memory box because he wrote at the end of my paper, "Your work justifies a professor's existence." I was so humbled and appreciative of his words and even more on the impact he had on my academic life at Maryland. About 10 years after I graduated from Maryland, I received a note from one of Dr. Prange's teaching assistants. He told me that he had found my name on the rolls of students who had taken Dr. Prange's classes. Dr. Prange had been diagnosed with a terminal illness and his former teaching assistants wanted to put together a book of letters to Dr. Prange from his students letting him know how he had impacted our lives. I wrote to him about his reaction to my mistake in writing a report on *The Guns of August* and how he had made me feel good about my report – not bad about the mistake. I told him how much I loved his lectures that were really storytelling at its best. I let him know that his words on my final exam were the highlight of my time at Maryland. It felt really good to be able to let him know, again, how much I had learned from him and that it wasn't just about history. He died a year later after sending out a thank you note to all of his students who had contributed to his memory book. Even now, so many years later, I feel a glow and can't help but smile when I think about him. He was really one of a kind.

Ms. Woodbury: Were there other teachers from your college years who made a big impact on you in terms of either a personal relationship or their being able to communicate their love of their subject?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: I took a creative writing class when I was a senior and, of course, I don't remember the professor's name. He was so encouraging and so open to trying different things. I really enjoyed that because he wanted to help us take risks with our writing. He wanted to see us get a little more depth in our writing, and to remember there are no rules. He would say, "You know, you have got to write from your heart." I found a new way of expressing myself in that class. That has helped me with sideline of writing creative non-fiction stories through the years.

I had some other good teachers, I had a good teacher who taught family history and that was really fascinating. But, I guess what I do remember from my time at Maryland was that I could count less than five teachers who I thought were not up to the task. The majority of my professors were quite good!

Ms. Woodbury: Looking back, do you regard college as a good experience? Positive?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: Yes. I'm coming from this small Catholic high school where the Viet Nam war was going on and we debated that in the classroom and we had opportunities to express ourselves, but it was much more subtle, subdued. Then I go to Maryland and there's tear gas and there's marching on the administrative offices because they had fired a quirky professor or they had changed some rule that got everyone up in arms. College students were actively trying to influence their environment and I was impressed with their knowledge and passion. The Viet Nam war was the biggest catalyst for student marching and the war seemed to go on forever. One day you have the students marching and protesting and tear gas being used to break up the crowd and then another day you would have this big art festival going on with all these really fabulous student created works of art

and another time you'd have people playing ethnic music and there would be lots of dancing. I just thought it was so amazing that attending a big university could mean that all of this could co-exist and appeal to so many different people. It was so cool.

Ms. Woodbury: Very exciting.

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: So exciting, yes I loved it.

Ms. Woodbury: Did you carry on your interest in drama when you went to the University to Maryland?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: No. No, because I ultimately realized I was more interested in arranging things and organizing people and projects than I was in actually being a part of the drama group.

Ms. Woodbury: Were you involved in any extracurricular activities at the University of Maryland that allowed you to develop those skills further?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: No, not really because I was still working…

Ms. Woodbury: At Montgomery Ward?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: Yes, at some point in college I transitioned to a place called Memco, which was a forerunner for Costco. It was a big retail store in Rockville where you had to show a card to get in. You had to be a member. It had groceries and clothes and household items, and I was working there because they paid me more money than I was making at Montgomery Ward. I had a friend who started working there and he said you have got to come here. It was also a little bit closer to my home.

Ms. Woodbury: Did you work there all the years you were in college?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: No, I didn't work the first year of college when I lived on campus. I worked at Montgomery Wards during the summer all the time and then in my sophomore year I worked at night again. I started working for Memco in my junior year.

Ms. Woodbury: During your college years did you have any discussions with your father or your mother about what your future career might be or were you thinking about that on your own?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: I was thinking generally that I wanted to work for the government, the federal government, because my dad was an attorney with Federal Trade Commission and he really enjoyed his job. He thought that working for the government was a good way of giving back. He said it is not necessarily the best paying job compared to some jobs in the private sector but you get to work on lots of interesting things that come across your desk. He said there were a lot of opportunities for work with the government since we lived right outside of D.C.. So I thought that is what I would like to do. I thought maybe I would go to law school at some point, but that was just sort of a vague idea. I didn't know how I would pay for law school and I wasn't really passionate about practicing law. My parents were really good about suggesting I should try different things and see what interested me.

Ms. Woodbury: See what was a good match for you?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: Yes.

Ms. Woodbury: Did you ever think about going to business school while you were in college?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: No, not really. Some of this thinking originated at Holy Cross. There were two tracts that students could follow. There was the college prep path and the business school path. I knew I was following the college prep path and I had a lot of assumptions about the business school path that were not necessarily accurate. To me, the main things you were going to learn in business school were how to type faster, how to take shorthand and how to be a good assistant. I made the decision, and I didn't really share it with anybody, that I wasn't going to work very hard to be a good typist. I wasn't going to be anybody's secretary. I would have a secretary someday. I didn't know what I was going to be doing, but I had this general idea that I wasn't going to be a secretary. A lot of women in those days went to business school and that was the career path. I had two aunts in the work force. Both of them were secretaries. And although my one aunt always went to work with gorgeous pearls and high heels, I liked how she dressed but I didn't want to be a secretary. I took typing classes at Holy Cross. I think I sabotaged my efforts to type well because I didn't want be good at typing and wind up with a secretarial position. But I didn't think any of this through very well because my poor typing skills made it very hard to type my reports and term papers. My thinking was very shortsighted.

Ms. Woodbury: Was your concern in high school that being interested in business was going to channel you as a girl, as a women, into a kind of narrow secretarial path rather management?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: Yes, because I don't think in high school that I really knew a lot of women managers. I didn't have a lot of role models of female managers. I didn't

see a lot of examples of that. I saw more women in traditional roles of nurses, my mom was a nurse, or teachers, or saleswomen for Avon products. The role models for people who had leadership roles were all men. My dad headed a bureau for the Federal Trade Commission. The dad of the big family who lived next door to us was a CPA for the Government Accounting Office. Our neighborhood had a lot of government workers but not a lot of role models for the business world.

Ms. Woodbury: Of women doing that kind of work or what they might do?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: Right.

Ms. Woodbury: What year did you graduate from the University of Maryland?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: 1975.

Ms. Woodbury: And you ended up with a BA in History?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: Yes.

Ms. Woodbury: When you graduated did you have any plans to continue with graduate school or were you planning to get a job out of college?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: I planned on getting a job. I was ready to work.

Ms. Woodbury: You were?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: I wanted to earn some money. I didn't have a car at the time. No actually I did have a car. I had a second hand car, but I didn't have much money left over after I paid my rent on my apartment and help pay for my tuition. So I wanted to work so I could earn some money and get a better car and maybe a better location in which to live. But, at our commencement the speaker was T. Boone Pickens, who said "Congratulations to all the future taxi cab drivers and wait staff and

messengers of the world because there are no jobs for you."

Ms. Woodbury: That was a very unusual message for a commencement speaker to deliver to a newly graduating class.

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: It certainly was depressing. He said the economy was so bad, the worst it had been in nearly 20 years for new college graduates. Ultimately, his message was that you have got to be entrepreneurs. You have got to think outside the box. But all I heard was no jobs. Although, I do have to admit that I was not listening very carefully. I had a transistor radio and I was listening to the Baltimore Bullets' basketball game that day all during my graduation. I really, really liked sports and it was the third game in the championship series.

Ms. Woodbury: By the time you graduated had you pretty much given up on the idea of being a sports writer as a career?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: Yes.

Ms. Woodbury: At the time you graduated had you already lined up a job or were you just starting to look?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: I was starting to look, but I was severely handicapped by my inability to type 40 words a minute. Plus, the federal government job register was not open. They had no job openings. The preferences were for veterans coming back from the war so they really weren't hiring. My plan had been to work for the government and then I had a double whammy that they weren't hiring and they were looking for people who could type. So I started looking for jobs that required no typing which was very limiting. In the meantime, after I graduated, I could work full time at Memco and they were somewhat unionized so that you

got fairly good wages, but I would look every day in the classified section of the newspaper for jobs and I would follow-up and call and send my resume. I always got this polite little "sorry" we're looking for somebody with experience. Of course, I couldn't get experience without a job. The whole thing was very frustrating. I graduated in May of 1975. I sent an application in December of '75 to *The Washington Law Reporter* and they called me back for an interview and I went down for an interview and got the job. No typing required.

Ms. Woodbury: No typing required?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: No typing required and it was a kind of an odd ball job. *The Washington Law Reporter* was a family run very small, legal newspaper located in Washington D.C. Every day I would go down to the Federal Courthouse, the Superior Courthouse and the Tax Court and write down all the new cases that were filed the previous day. I would write down just the caption of the case, the case number, the amount in controversy and whether it was a jury trial or not and the judge to whom it was assigned. Then, I would pick up slip opinions from the Courts of Appeals, both the D.C. Appellate Court and Federal Circuit, and then pick up notices for publication from the Register of Wills. I would write all of this down by hand on a legal pad. I would often have to wait because someone else was looking at the document I needed to record. At that time the court only made one extra press copy, they didn't make…

Ms. Woodbury: Multiple copies?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: Right. You didn't have computers on which to look things up. At least not ones that were available for the press or the public to use. When I was

finished collecting the information, I brought all that information back to the *Law Reporter*. At the office, someone would take my hand written notes and make a mock- up of the paper using a type cast machine. Then, I would proof read the mock up. While I was waiting for this to happen, I would be proof reading some other notices for them.

Ms. Woodbury: Your father was lawyer and practiced in D.C.. Did you have any familiarity with courts before you started this job?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: No. No, I didn't. I knew the word "court" but I was much more familiar with the Executive Branch or Legislative Branch just from television and that sort of thing. But no, I really knew nothing about the courts.

Ms. Woodbury: Internal workings of the court?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: Right

Ms. Woodbury: How long did you stay in this job?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: I stayed at the *Law Reporter* for about 18 months. It is funny but when they first offered me the position my father thought it was crazy to take it. He said you're making more money right now where you are, at Memco, you work ten minutes from where you live and now you're going to have to take a bus all the way downtown to make less money. I said I know that, but I have to get my foot in the door somewhere. I can't be pushing a broom at night while I'm on the late shift at Memco. I have a college degree I want to start using it. So I started at the *Law Reporter* in February of '76, and that was my first exposure at the courts really because I got to go to the courts every day.

Ms. Woodbury: Did you get to know people at the courts?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: Yes, I did. I met people at the new case desk in the District Court. Superior Court was a different experience because they were so big. Case information was handed to you through a glass window and you had to scramble to find a seat to record the information. I didn't really develop as much rapport with them as I did with the people at the Federal Court. The Federal Court had a much more civilized environment. I hate to say that but…

Ms. Woodbury: The Federal Court?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: Yes. Sometimes when I went to the Superior Court I couldn't find a place to sit down and write, I would be writing balancing on the window sills. It was a very busy court and it had a lot more traffic going through it than the Federal Court. The two courts were like night and day. But I enjoyed the work and the opportunity to learn more about how the local and federal courts worked. It's funny when I was at the *Law Reporter* it was owned General Millard Lewis and the managing editor was Colonel Twaddell, they were both retired military.

Ms. Woodbury: Military?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: Yes. They had very successful military careers but seemed out of place managing the *Law Reporter*. My first day on the job I was trained by the woman who had been in that position, she was moving out of the area. She took me down to Judiciary Square and introduced me to people at the court and then she stayed with me for a two week period. We would usually get back to the office around 2:00 or 2:30 and then send the notes back to be type-set. Then we would proof read it and that would take the rest of the day. After she left, I was on my own. I would finish right around lunch time. The General and Colonel told me if

I finished around lunch time to go ahead and get something to eat and come back after lunch. The first time I came back right after lunch they said "Are you sure you're going to all the places and getting all the information?" When I said yes, they couldn't understand what was going on. They said, "You're back an hour and half ahead of when Lindsay used to come back." So after two weeks of coming back earlier than Lindsay with all the correct information, General Lewis called me in to his office and said, "Hey we just figured out what has been happening. Lindsay was taking her time and going shopping on our time."

I didn't know what Lindsay had been doing, all I knew was when I finished the job I had been given and had eaten my lunch, it was time to go back to the office and do the work they had there for me. They were so impressed that I was back earlier and that I could do more for them. They were happy I could do more to help them and embarrassed a bit that they had no idea how long the work should take.

Ms. Woodbury: I was going to ask if they expanded your job to fill your day.

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: Yes. They published petitions for people who wanted to change their name. These were big money makers for the paper and they wanted to see if they could increase the number of names they were receiving as recently they had noticed that more petitions were going to a rival paper. When I went to the office in Superior Court where petitions were handled, I asked the clerk if there had been any changes recently in their procedures. The clerk said there had not been any changes. I got the information from the box and sat down to make my notes. Another clerk came out from the back and said the first clerk I had been speaking

with was directing petitioners to the rival paper. She told me to write down the number of petitions the rival paper was getting and compare them with our numbers and have someone from our office call the clerk's manager. I took that information back to the *Law Reporter* and the General called the clerk's manager that afternoon. The issue was resolved, the clerk was let go and the numbers increased for the *Law Reporter*. I helped the woman who did the typesetting get all the information from the petitions that were often handwritten. Because I was able to help the typesetter, she was able to leave earlier and not put in so much overtime. The *Law Reporter* started getting more revenue from the petitions, the typesetter got to go home earlier and the paper cut down on overtime expenses. My reward for my help was a chocolate Tootsie Roll pop! My expectations for any monetary reward were short lived. But, I still remember how good I felt when the General was giving me the lollipop and telling me what a great job I was doing for them. This so resonated with me that it was a constant reminder in my later days as a supervisor and manager for the courts that recognition of a job well done can be more important than any monetary reward.

The staff of the *Law Reporter* was very small so that everyone relied on one another to get the job done. They had an office on 16th Street and I took the bus back and forth from the courts and then I rode the subway the first day it opened because it opened in March of '77 and I was still working there.

Ms. Woodbury: Beautiful new subway?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: Yes it was and so much quicker than the bus. But sometimes not as much fun, there were always characters on the bus. But as a result of going to the

courthouse I met the new case clerk who at the time was Miss Evelyn and her assistant was Greg Hughes, who is now the Chief Deputy at the court. They would say to me…. "You should apply for a job down here, you could do this work." I decided finally that I had to disclose that I could not type. The jobs were very clerical.

Ms. Woodbury: Did you say: "well I can't type"?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: Yes, I said I can't type. I can do other things but I can't type. Then one day they said to me there's an opening in our jury office and all you have to type are lists. They said you really should think about it. So, I did. I applied for the job and I took the typing test and I think I typed 26wpm with 13 errors.

Ms. Woodbury: Was the typing test part of the application?

Ms. Mayer-Whittington: Yes. And so I thought "Well, that's history." I took it on a manual typewriter. I forgot to hit the return bar. I clearly did not have my best foot forward there. I remember leaving thinking there's no way I'm going to get this job and then thinking to myself… "Well, maybe you need to take a typing class because this is going to continue to be a problem."