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Debra Snyder [00:00:04] Take it from there and I'll just prompt you as I see you're needing more questions or you're running out of something to talk about in that area, I'll give you another question.

Ruth Osborn [00:00:15] Okay, all righty.

Debra Snyder [00:00:22] I'm just as nervous as you, so don't worry.

Debra Snyder [00:00:25] [Laughter]. Well.

Debra Snyder [00:00:27] Are you ready? Okay. I forgot my cue. We're continuing the series on living histories at Montana State University. I am here today with Ruth Osborne. She is, was - excuse me - a professor at Montana State University in textiles and clothing. Ruth if you could just give us a little bit about your background and how you became interested in the area of textiles and clothing.

Ruth Osborn [00:00:53] Alright, I was born and raised, in fact, I came from this place, a farm community in Ohio near Cleveland. I became interested very early in clothing and textiles, very early. One of the things my mother tells me, as a preschool child, I wanted to - I was very interested in fabrics and design and so forth and wanted to do it myself. And so I um... said I'd like to make a pair of pajamas for my doll and mother looked rather strange but she brought the box of scraps and so forth and materials I would need and she was quite amazed without a pattern without anything that I could create something for the doll that really looked like pajamas. And so that just was one incident where I became interested in this area. Then, of course, I later wanted to express it in leathers and furs and things like this. And I not only made clothes for my doll, but I designed little hats and things like this and worked on that.

Debra Snyder [00:02:29] Okay.

Ruth Osborn [00:02:31] And so, at that time, as I was growing up, I had an older sister who was in 4-H, and I thought that was where I wanted to start and do some work, in clothing and textiles. And I was eight years old at the time, and that was really too young. You were supposed to be nine in our community before we joined 4-H. After a few meetings of the 4-H club, they decided that I could come and observe and do things. Well, pretty soon they decided I might continue and be a full-fledged member.

Debra Snyder [00:03:25] Yeah.

Ruth Osborn [00:03:25] So one of the first things I made was this little project. I was at eight at that time.

Debra Snyder [00:03:33] Okay.

Ruth Osborn [00:03:34] And so it went in the county fair and got a first place ribbon. So that started me off in my interest in fabrics.

Debra Snyder [00:03:50] When did you, where did you receive your education at?

Ruth Osborn [00:03:53] I went to, of course the high school was in Eaton, Ohio, North Eaton Ohio. And then when I finished high school I decided that I did want to go on to college with a home ec major. So, I went to Kent State University, which was 50 miles from our home.

Debra Snyder [00:04:18] Alright.

Ruth Osborn [00:04:20] And went into home economics there. When I graduated, I decided to teach a course that was an interest too. And so I went into teaching in another rural school, not too far from where we lived, but so I commuted back and forth. And this increased my interest in home economics, but, of course, as you probably are aware, you teach most anything. That was what was happening to me. I was teaching more than I wanted to. And not that I didn't enjoy the students in the classes, but I felt that I wasn't getting in the area that I really felt I was most interested. So I went ahead and... Decided that I would stop teaching after five years of teaching in this one school. I decided to go ahead and do some extra work and get my master's degree. I went to New York City, to Columbia University, and I knew that it was an area that had prospects of a job that I might be interested in. So my major was home economics and business instead of teaching. On the other hand, I was still going to be prepared to teach if I wanted to, so I took a lot of education along with that. And by the time I finished my master's degree, I had gone several places in the city and decided this really wasn't what I wanted. I wanted to be with young people that were interested and start from the beginning again. So at that time I came to Montana.

Debra Snyder [00:06:44] Mmm.

Ruth Osborn [00:06:44] And I stayed in Montana all the time. Well, let me see... what did I do? My major professor in New York was a friend of our dean here, our head of the department and dean, Katharine Roy.

Debra Snyder [00:07:06] Okay.

Ruth Osborn [00:07:07] And so I really did come sight unseen.

Debra Snyder [00:07:13] Mm-hmm.

Ruth Osborn [00:07:14] With her recommendation, I'm sure.

Debra Snyder [00:07:18] That's great!

Ruth Osborn [00:07:18] And came here. I had chosen the area that I thought I wanted to come to.

Debra Snyder [00:07:24] Mm-hmm.

Ruth Osborn [00:07:24] So this was actually the only place I applied, although there were other possibilities. But I got this one.

Debra Snyder [00:07:32] You obviously liked it.

Ruth Osborn [00:07:33] And I liked it and have been here ever since.

Debra Snyder [00:07:37] Did you meet your husband in Bozeman?

Ruth Osborn [00:07:39] No, I'm not married.

Debra Snyder [00:07:41] Oh, you're not married.

Debra Snyder [00:07:43] What difference do you see between your coursework at Kent State and Columbia as opposed to the coursework that's currently being taught in home economics? Is there a major change in what's being taught? An emphasis?

Ruth Osborn [00:08:02] Emphasis, perhaps in certain areas, but I think basically it's quite similar. Of course, my work at Kent State University filled me in on a lot of areas, and so too at Columbia.

Debra Snyder [00:08:34] So you came out here to teach when you first came, that was your position, was a teaching one or were you working on a...?

Ruth Osborn [00:08:40] No, I came to teach. I came as an instructor to teach. Came to the Home Economics Department here and my first office mate the day I came, I met her the first day I was here was Mrs. Paisley, Marje Paisely. And then I... She took me all around the campus and introduced me to many people, including the president, at that time was Dr. Renne, Dr. Roland Renne.

Debra Snyder [00:09:17] Mm-hmm.

Ruth Osborn [00:09:18] And I was impressed because every time after that I saw him, he knew me by name and called me by name. And that's something he had a fabulous memory...people's names. And I might tell you a little bit, I was glad to meet all the staff members. And the building itself was quite different than it is... arranged differently and a lot of things have happened.

Debra Snyder [00:10:01] What was it like in those years?

Ruth Osborn [00:10:04] Well, let me see. There was Home Economics and Art in our building. Home Economics had the ground floor and the what we call the main floor, perhaps, upstairs. And then on the top floor was the Art Department. At that time, let's see, what can I tell you about the... Well, let me see, textiles was downstairs in the bottom floor.

Debra Snyder [00:10:45] Mm-hmm.

Ruth Osborn [00:10:47] As you come in, and don't know their name, numbered the same. It was in 114, actually, if it is by number. But anyway, that's where we had textiles, and we did more textile research, too.

Debra Snyder [00:11:05] Mm-hmm.

Ruth Osborn [00:11:05] Than I'm sure they are doing at the present time. In other words, we used chemicals and so forth to make identification of fabrics, fibers. So that's where the textile part was taught. And then it didn't stay there even while I was teaching there, because that was several years. We went from there to... The upstairs eventually moved, the textiles moved up to the main floor and was taught in what is one of the clothing labs now.

Debra Snyder [00:11:53] Okay.

Ruth Osborn [00:11:56] We used some office space back there in later years for closets for textile materials.

Debra Snyder [00:12:11] How many years did you teach at MSU?

Ruth Osborn [00:12:14] 35.

Debra Snyder [00:12:16] Oh that's a long time.

Ruth Osborn [00:12:17] Yes, it is a long time.

Debra Snyder [00:12:19] Could you elaborate a little bit on your teaching style? How did you make textiles become real to your students? And can you discuss that a little bit?

Ruth Osborn [00:12:32] Well, textiles... I was a collector of materials and so forth and used those as illustrative material a great deal. And so they knew fabrics by name when they saw them.

Debra Snyder [00:12:50] Mm-hmm.

Ruth Osborn [00:12:51] And there were many... I used visuals, slides, and so forth that would relate to things that we didn't have in our department. So there was identification as well as visuals.

Debra Snyder [00:13:19] Did you use a lot of hands-on probably, touching the cloth, pulling it apart and working with it?

Ruth Osborn [00:13:25] Indeed so. Of course, that was only one area that I taught, one subject, once a quarter. But then there was the clothing, beginning construction, and family clothing, and clothing for all family members. And, um... There was one area that I perhaps spent a little more time on because the department people were interested in that for their students and that was children's clothing. And they had at that time a nursery school, that at the time I was thinking of... A nursery school there, and were interested [unintelligible], so they used that.

Debra Snyder [00:14:27] Yeah, good. What other courses did you have?

Ruth Osborn [00:14:30] And then I taught tailoring. And then, I went into fashion, merchandising, history of costume.

Debra Snyder [00:14:39] So you really did the full spectrum, didn't you?

Ruth Osborn [00:14:39] So I kind of did quite a bit in that area. I wasn't the only one, however.

Debra Snyder [00:14:45] No, that's good.

Ruth Osborn [00:14:46] There was another person, even at the time I first came.

Debra Snyder [00:14:51] Mm-hmm.

Ruth Osborn [00:14:52] Mrs. Vivi [Elizabeth] Birong was the person that taught with me and taught other areas, but she taught other design areas.

Debra Snyder [00:15:05] Mm-hmm.

Ruth Osborn [00:15:05] And, uh... Care and selection of clothing and things of this type. It's almost hard to tell what subject she taught.

Debra Snyder [00:15:17] Mm-hmm.

Ruth Osborn [00:15:18] I can't remember without...

Debra Snyder [00:15:19] Yeah.

Ruth Osborn [00:15:21] A catalog or something.

Debra Snyder [00:15:24] Were professional organizations at that time helpful to you in keeping current on what was going on in the industry?

Ruth Osborn [00:15:32] Oh yes, indeed. So we belonged to the western region, clothing and textiles, and went to their meetings whenever possible, once a year if we could make it, one or the other of us, or sometimes both. And it certainly kept us in touch with what other people were doing.

Debra Snyder [00:15:58] Yeah. Is there any change you see between how textiles and clothing are taught now as compared to when you taught it?

Ruth Osborn [00:16:14] Well, I think every person perhaps has their ways of teaching, for example, in our clothing. I like to sew along with the girls and use my materials as illustrative for what I would like them to accomplish in a project. Perhaps that was just one technique. I don't think that this followed by many people. Certainly not in any of the classes that I took.

Debra Snyder [00:16:50] Mm-hmm.

Ruth Osborn [00:16:52] We were a tailoring class and I often, and I didn't say every quarter, but I tried as often as I could to sew along with them. If it was tailoring, I might make a suit or a coat at that time and try to keep it up to the areas-

Debra Snyder [00:17:11] Mm-hmm

Ruth Osborn [00:17:12] -that they were assigned.

Debra Snyder [00:17:14] I guess I was thinking of, in the clothing and textiles area, they're getting into functional apparel, like for firefighters or for handicapped people, that clothing that meets their needs.

Ruth Osborn [00:17:29] Well, I think that came out pretty much in my, of course, in family clothing.

Debra Snyder [00:17:35] Okay, good.

Ruth Osborn [00:17:36] In all areas of all individuals. However, more is being done on that at the present time, I think...I was... Dr. Salusso is teaching home economics, clothing and textiles now, and she has men in her class, and that was something we didn't have...

Debra Snyder [00:18:01] Uh-huh

Ruth Osborn [00:18:01] in this area...

Debra Snyder [00:18:03] Right.

Ruth Osborn [00:18:04] ...clothing and textiles. But they were designing, and of course... you know our designers, and they were designing ski wear and all different kinds of outfits, and I was most impressed.

Debra Snyder [00:18:21] Yeah.

Ruth Osborn [00:18:21] With this.

Debra Snyder [00:18:23] That's good that men are becoming more active now.

Ruth Osborn [00:18:25] Mm-hmm.

Debra Snyder [00:18:31] What do you feel was the most useful course that you took during your college years? Can you pinpoint one or maybe a few that really stuck in your mind?

Ruth Osborn [00:18:45] I don't know that I have one, I really enjoyed my classes very much. Of course, as I say, I enjoyed them more when they were in one area, and clothing and textiles was my interest.

Debra Snyder [00:19:08] Mm-hmm. So those classes were the ones that were really...

Ruth Osborn [00:19:12] Although, we needed the others to give us a rounded background.

Debra Snyder [00:19:17] Mm-hmm.

Debra Snyder [00:19:29] How did the textiles and clothing curriculum change while you were at MSU, from when you began to when you retired, the changes that took place during those 35 years?

Ruth Osborn [00:19:42] Well, I think we went more into a business area than we had done before, and so we added merchandising in the sixties at some point in the sixties perhaps and students at that time in that area went out into the field and did an internship or worked in the field. There were a few places in Bozeman, not too many. Chambers-Fishers worked with us at that time and, of course, that... name has changed, but it was Chambers-Fishers while we were teaching. Then we went to other places like Billings, the Hennessy's in Billings and the Hart-Albin in Billings had students. Then we we went out of state in some places. I'm sure there are lots of others but we went Denver and some of our students did their internship there.

Debra Snyder [00:21:03] How long were internships at that time? Were they a semester or?

Ruth Osborn [00:21:07] They tended to do the internships in the summertime. Instead of taking any summer courses, they went ahead and worked so that it was a longer internship perhaps than just taking a quarter off. That would mean so many different subjects that they would be missing.

Debra Snyder [00:21:31] Right. Okay. What other kinds of changes took place?

Ruth Osborn [00:21:39] Well, um... Let me think. We're trying to think what the change was. Weaving was certainly added in the sixties. And Mrs. Afanasiev, who did a great deal of weaving, came to the department and taught it. And then later on, one of our clothing and textile teachers, Mrs. Clara Fink, taught weaving. And then it has continued. A very important part of this area.

Debra Snyder [00:22:25] Yeah.

Debra Snyder [00:22:28] I imagine now in Bozeman there are more opportunities for internships with Patagonia being here and other designers and like the Bon being here, it's probably changed a little bit since.

Ruth Osborn [00:22:42] Well, I'm sure it has, but I really don't know that I can tell you much about what has happened recently.

Debra Snyder [00:22:52] Is there anything else you would like to add that you can think of?

Ruth Osborn [00:22:59] Well, I don't know.

Debra Snyder [00:23:03] When was the new lab designed?

Ruth Osborn [00:23:07] Well, I can't tell you the exact year as again, it was in the late 60s or early 70s probably that we had new clothing labs. It was very interesting how such things as sewing machines changed, how much different they are today from what they were at this time. I remember one of the oldie machines that was a historic machine, perhaps, was a treadle that made only chainstitch. And I found we'd get it out occasionally in our tailoring class where they were making their garments up into muslins first and to get a perfect fit. And how they'd want to rip them out, and how easy it was to rip a chainstitch out. So they'd like to use this machine, but of course there was only one. But it was fun to do that. And then how machines changed, that was interesting too. I can't think of them by number now, but one of the first machines that I bought when I came to Bozeman was a small machine. I saw it the other day when I was downtown at a Bernina shop and it was selling for \$400 while some of the much newer machines were only selling for, I mean as a sale machine, for \$100. There was quite a bit of difference there.

Debra Snyder [00:25:06] Must be a very good machine.

Ruth Osborn [00:25:08] So, what I'm saying is there were a few of those around at the time when I first came too. Well, they advanced and there were lots of changes. Now, the Surger is the...

Debra Snyder [00:25:24] It's been introduced a lot.

Ruth Osborn [00:25:26] Introduced into the lab, but that wasn't my time.

Debra Snyder [00:25:32] What about some of the historical costumes?

Ruth Osborn [00:25:36] Alright, certainly we collected costumes over the years. And people, town people, would tend to want to give their collection to us. Perhaps now to give some to the museum as well.

Debra Snyder [00:25:56] Mm-hmm.

Ruth Osborn [00:25:56] But this was a good place to, and we tried at that point to preserve them and have them for discussion and particularly in our family clothing area.

Debra Snyder [00:26:12] Good. Good. What year did you retire from it?

Ruth Osborn [00:26:16] In 1980.

Debra Snyder [00:26:18] 1980. That's recent.

Ruth Osborn [00:26:21] Well, I was here for 35 years.

Debra Snyder [00:26:25] That's great. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Ruth Osborn [00:26:30] Well, I can't think of anything, but it was a wonderful experience here and I enjoyed everyone, the staff and the students as well.

Debra Snyder [00:26:40] That's great. Well thank you very much for your time. It's been a pleasure to meet you and have you share your life with us.

Ruth Osborn [00:26:48] Well, thank you for coming.

Debra Snyder [00:26:50] Yeah, thank you.