

Mary Sloat

Interviewed by Rebecca White

March 15, 2014 at 11am

Hanover, NH

Rebecca White: First would you just mind saying the name you were born with and when and where you were born?

Mary Sloat: Mary Boutin Edgerton. That's E-D-G-E-R-T-O-N in Haverford, Pennsylvania 1937.

RW: We'll start with just a little bit of your childhood. What kinds of life lessons did you learn from your parents?

MS: From my parents?

RW: Yes

MS: Probably to be very calm, if you had to pick one thing. I had four older brothers, that's why I asked from my parents.

RW: So were you the youngest?

MS: I was the youngest. My brothers were two years apart I was seven years younger than my youngest brother.

RW: So where did you go to elementary school or grammar school?

MS: I went to Oakmont School public school for the first three years. And then I went to Haverford Prep School, Quaker School for two years. Then I went to the Baldwin School in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania for the next seven.

RW: What kind of hobbies did you have as a kid?

MS: Well I liked to play outdoors; I liked to play in the sandbox and things like that. I had dolls. With four older brothers, I had very interesting things that I learned. I was allowed to go to my oldest brother's dark room. I sat on my hands and watched what he was doing so I wouldn't get in trouble for opening the wrong drawer. I watched my next brother rebuilding cars. The next brother had all kinds of animals so that was fun. And the youngest one was into airplanes so by the age of 11, 12, 13, something like that I was able to fly a plane by myself.

RW: What was your first flight like?

MS: Oh it was just fun. He had said to me what would she like for Christmas knowing he had to give me something not knowing what to give a sister. I said I wanted to go flying and then his attitude changed abruptly. He was very happy to take me flying.

RW: Who was your best friend from childhood?

MS: Well... up to about third grade it was my next door neighbor and after I got to Baldwin it was probably Dee Dee Walker.

RW: What kind of things would you do together?

MS: Well... when I was younger it was play dolls and rolling on the hill and things like that. With Dee Dee we played a lot of tennis among other things.

RW: Is tennis your favorite sport?

MS: At that point in time at that particular season. In the winter I figure skated as I got into eighth or ninth grade. And I also played hockey and lacrosse.

RW: Did you do any traveling, going on any family trips?

MS: I was born before the Second World War so the furthest we got was the Jersey coast. And we could go there by train because there was no gasoline during a lot of my younger years to go places. The first time I got to New Hampshire was in 1948 when I was 11 and my uncle was the manager at the Crawford House and we came up to visit there.

RW: So you might have already said this but what was your junior high and high school?

MS: Baldwin was from sixth grade on, so I was there for one year of elementary school, three in middle school and three in the upper school.

RW: So it was a junior/senior high school kind of?

MS: It went from kindergarten through senior year. By the time we graduated fifty percent of our class were boarding students from all over the United States.

RW: Cool. Did you have a favorite subject you loved?

MS: I always liked math. It was easy.

RW: It wasn't as complicated as it is now?

MS: It was one of those things that came automatically till I got into college and got into calculus then I might have to study it and I thought "oh... I think I don't like this as well as I thought."

RW: Were there any teachers that had a lasting effect on you that inspired you?

MS: Well we had incredible teachers at Baldwin. I guess Miss Jackson who was a history teacher was quite good, actually they all were amazing. And the group of kids I was with were and we spent an awful lot of time as seventh and eighth graders trying to figure out questions that the teacher couldn't answer.

RW: Did you listen to any music?

MS: Yeah I had a record player.

RW: What kind of music did you listen to?

MS: Any of the popular songs at the time. And I liked Broadway musicals. And I took piano lessons also which I was not ever a star student at piano; I had bought five years of lessons.

RW: What would you do in your spare time for fun?

MS: Well at what age?

RW: Well teenage years.

MS: I was figure skating a great deal at the time. I spent... by ninth grade I was spending about three or more hours a day on the ice before and after school.

RW: Would you go to competitions?

MS: Yes, I got as far as the Middle Atlantics which was New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania.

RW: What year did you graduate high school?

MS: 1954

RW: So what was it like going to school in general during the war?

MS: See during the war I was probably in first, second, and third grade, that's when I was going to the public school. And we had air raid drills and we all went and sat in the basement against the wall. I rode the bus to school, there was no parents taking and picking their kids up from school, there was no gasoline for it. My brothers also went to the public school at that time.

RW: So they weren't old enough to be in the draft?

MS: My oldest brother in 1941 went into the navy.

RW: Did he fight in any of the theaters?

MS: He was in the B12 which was an officers' thing and then he ended up in Chicago with a group that were training to be frog men. They were swimming under water, under burning oil and things like this. He ended up being medically discharged with multiple sclerosis, an interesting research topic for somebody; apparently a lot of his group were medically discharged for multiple sclerosis. But from the age of 21 on he had multiple sclerosis and he actually lived here at Kendal [retirement community in Hanover] before oh... he and his wife moved in 1992 when they first opened here.

RW: What did you do after high school?

MS: I went to Mount Holyoke College.

RW: And what years were you there?

MS: 1954-1958

RW: So right there during the communist/Cold War era?

MS: A little before that I would say

RW: What was your major, your main focus of study?

MS: I majored in geography, minored in economics.

RW: What made you pick those?

MS: Because I liked it. It's a really fascinating subject because everything you learn affects everything you do every day. I mean I could look out here and its climatology.

RW: So what was the atmosphere like you were at college like were there any big events that happened in the country or throughout the world?

MS: I think the Hungarian Crisis occurred at about that time. It didn't affect me too much but I know when I was in graduate school they were getting to the point where there was a lot of marching for peace and things like that. And although I was brought up a Quaker I wanted absolutely no part in being put in jail for going and picketing. That was not my idea of anything though I had a lot of friends who did that.

RW: Did they get arrested or anything?

MS: No they didn't but it wasn't something I wanted to take a chance on.

RW: So what did you do after college?

MS: Went to graduate school at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and I did city and regional planning.

RW: Then what did you do after that?

MS: After my first year there I worked for two years. I could see very quickly the advantage to having worked in the field before studying it. And where I was just coming from an academic situation just had to learn everything and everything was fine. But the people who had been working in the field knew what was important to learn.

RW: So you got like on the job training?

MS: Yeah. I worked in Manchester, NH actually with city planning. I was working for the city of Manchester.

RW: Did you work on any particular projects?

MS: Ohhh yes! One of the ones I did, I did a number of things. I was only there for a year. But I designed when you go down route 3 and you go off route 3 to go to the airport, I designed that whole part of the highway. It goes across there. It's terrible you know it's that awful mess when you're coming in from Bedford. I don't think anyone figured there'd ever be so much traffic and never thought the airport would really amount to anything. But anybody driving from the north going across their course now they have that new entry into the airport. Anyway that was my part.

(Quick break to check on the donuts she was baking)

MS: I worked for a consulting firm in the summer before I worked in Manchester I had done an internship from the college in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. That was fun and interesting. And then I went back to graduate school after two years.

RW: So what year did you finish graduate school?

MS: '62

RW: What degree did you get?

MS: Well I didn't quite finish because I didn't quite finish my second round of my thesis. The problem being that the man who was my advisor left and went to the University of Cincinnati and I was given another professor and she was doing her PhD dissertation on the same subject as I was doing my master's thesis. So when I went back down after I was married, I was married at the end of May in '62. I went back down to Chapel Hill for what was to be a couple of months she kept just wanting me to read more and more and more and finally I had...

RW: Probably to do her research for her?

MS: Yeah and that was... I left in tears. But it was not something... well she said to me "One should never ever let their married life interfere with their profession." It was just this disconnect that I couldn't tolerate anymore.

RW: So how did you meet your husband?

MS: I worked for the Appalachian Mountain Club the summer of 1956 and he was dating one of my friends and then so when I was working in Manchester friends of ours out in Bedford got us together because he was working for Sanders Associates in Nashua.

RW: When and where did you get married?

MS: In Haverford, Pennsylvania at my parent's home in 1962 in May.

RW: Where did you first live together?

MS: Pinkham Notch, we lived there for nine years.

RW: Is your husband from New Hampshire?

MS: He was born outside of New York and New Jersey.

RW: Were there any kind of changes you had to make after you got married?

MS: I had to quit smoking. I quit smoking 20 minutes before we got married he said it was grounds for divorce. Then it was the first time I lived more than 5 minutes from a major university or college library that was a little different.

RW: And it gets a little more rural.

MS: Like living in the middle of the White Mountain National Forest, it was fun I enjoyed it.

RW: I know you have mentioned to me that you have a grandson, how many children do you have?

MS: We have two sons. We had a third who is deceased.

RW: What did they add to your life?

MS: They were a barrel of monkeys. Three boys are a three ring circus. Let's see we moved to Lost Nation outside of Lancaster, New Hampshire in 1971. And that was when our second son was maybe 6 months old 7 months, and then our third son was born when we were living there.

RW: So what year did you start living up north?

MS: After I was married in was '71. I had lived in Manchester in 1960 essentially, '59/60 in that period. Then I was in Providence until September of '61 when I went back to graduate school.

RW: What kind of work did your husband do?

MS: He at the time we were married he was the assistant manager at the Appalachian Mountain Club. And he had been working at engineering, test engineering and what not when he was at Sanders Associates when we were dating. Then when I was working in Providence he was asked to be assistant manager at the Appalachian Mountain Club.

RW: So is there anything in your background like family that connects you to the White Mountains?

MS: Well my Uncle Dick was manager and part owner of the Crawford House. And so from the age of 11 I was coming up. And we usually would come up in September after most of the guest had left and the hotel was not totally full at that point. Before school started we would be up here.

RW: Do you remember your first trip to the White Mountains, like what did you do?

MS: Well my youngest brother was working as the sports director for Uncle Dick at the Crawford House so we hiked, so that was the beginning of that. Next youngest brother the following year worked AMC hiking. They were doing a rebuild at the place in the Clouds hut. When came back up that year we also... you know where I was up there I would hike which I like.

RW: Where was your first hike?

MS: Probably up Mount Willard which is a little tiny bump at the end of Crawford Notch in that area.

RW: What was it like? What did you love about the hike?

MS: Actually that was back when they still had a carriage road up Willard and my mother, father, the whole family were up there and my cousins from Chicago. We were all up at the Crawford House at that point visiting. And actually I think my next oldest brother well maybe it wasn't that time but later that he and his wife were there also with us in September.

RW: So how does your work or life connect you to the Mountains?

MS: I have lived in the White Mountains for 9 years plus the summer that I worked at Pinkham. And I have lived abutting the White Mountains National Forest from 1971 until 2007 when we sold our place in Lost Nation. So we actually have owned a piece of land in holding in the National Forest that was about 3.2 mile walk from our house and 2000 vertical feet. And the kids have always liked the outdoors whether it was cross-country skiing or walking up through the beilds, climbing trees.

RW: Do you have a favorite area or section, or mountain of the region?

MS: I've always liked the Crawford Path from Crawford Notch up over Clinton and over to Jackson and that area and back.

RW: Do you hike a lot?

MS: A lot through the years. That was one of the earlier hikes I probably did. One of the first hikes I remember doing with John was going up Willie Field and Avalon and of course he and this fella would just run and I would just prop prop prop along. When I caught them they'd start again and run and I think it's one of the steepest trails in the White Mountains so it's not something one forgets quickly.

RW: What are good things about the White Mountains, like characteristics?

MS: There is a great variety. They're beautiful and the flowers are incredible, the wild flowers in the spring. When we lived at Pinkham I was able to go up and follow the hikes they had out of Lakes of the Clouds up the Barrett and the Sunapee out on flowers cause that was always fun for me. I also got to follow along after the Hand to Hand Society of the National Organization of my colleges, anyway mushroom pickers is what it really boils down to. But they had their National Convention at Pinkham Notch several years so that was very interesting to find and follow along. Then there were always different things going on that I could go along after the group. I know I went on cross-country skis half way up Mount Washington across the Jackson road and up the auto road to where it goes above timberline.

RW: Do you like the mountains better in the spring and summer months or in the fall and winter?



MS: I've never known a weed to grow in the winter. I love them all but I do love skiing. I got into that shortly after we married, I worked for Carroll Reed at Wildcat Mountain and assisted the woman in charge the first year or two then ran it for about 3 or 4 years.

RW: When did you first start skiing?

MS: In College. There was a course; we had to take gym, which is never a difficult thing from my point of view; it's nice, but one of the options was skiing. I did that my freshmen and sophomore year. They had wood skis at that point, before Christmas at the beginning of that semester as far as sports went, sports were on a different schedule than the college classes but we took these skis and we sanded them, we tarred them, we scraped the tar off, and we waxed them not like skis you have today.

RW: Is there anything you don't like about the White Mountains?

MS: No.

RW: Do you know about Title IX?

MS: You mean the sports thing for women?

RW: Yeah.

MS: I don't know too much about it cause I've always been in schools that were until graduate school were all women and we had wonderful sports.

RW: Did it affect your relationship, directly or indirectly, with the White Mountains at all?

MS: Well sports... not, other than I really enjoyed being outside and getting exercise and doing things like that. But certainly the sports I did growing up were not what I got up here. Things like figure skating transfers over to skiing pretty quickly cause you have the first day perhaps but after that I don't think I was ever a "beginning" skier cause you have all the same balance and same brain telling your foot what to do that people who have not been doing that thing would have problems with. The prep school I was in had absolutely amazing physical education and we had a swimming pool even and I think it was put in in the 1930s. When I was in sixth grade we were swimming at least one day a week in class and things like that so I guess the things like Title IX helped people in other places. Also the Philadelphia area is noted for sports compared to, Philadelphia, Baltimore the girls I knew that had come from those areas had much much better backgrounds in sports than people from the rest of the country.

RW: Where did you work in the White Mountains? I know you have mentioned Pinkham Notch and where else did you?

MS: Well we lived in Pinkham Notch so therefore my husband was working for the Appalachian Mountain Club and at that point in time they just assumed that I would help out with anything that was going on so I did. In the winter I had a job working for Carroll Reed at Wildcat Ski Area and Carroll Reed was a top notch ski shop so it was a wonderful group to work for. I did that until Bruce [her husband] took over as manager of the Appalachian Mountain Club and he thought it was silly that I was going over and working for Carroll Reed when I could be doing things to help him. So I did the buying and things for him; the AMC at that time.

RW: Did you work in the huts?

MS: I was in and out of them all the time with my husband. I did things like helping train and teach the fellows to cook. We'd go into open huts and everything had to be washed and everything had to be cleaned so I just worked along with the crew.

RW: Were you welcomed and integrated pretty easily when you first helped the AMC? Were there any tensions or prejudices or anything?

MS: Nope, none. There were no girls working in the huts only at Pinkham Notch at the time, well before we were married and then until after Bruce left. He didn't feel that he wanted the responsibility of any problems.

RW: Did you agree with that or disagree?

MS: Well I could understand his point of view. There had been a woman that was I think killed going into Nancy Brook and he just didn't want to be responsible for that kind of thing. And obviously if you have girls who are in the huts they are going to be running all over the mountains alone.

RW: So what was it like in the huts? Were they small like what was the setup?

MS: Are you familiar with them at all?

RW: Not particularly.

MS: Ok Lakes of the Clouds holds over 100 people guests at night. At the time I was involved with them you got breakfast, lunch, and dinner and a bunk bed. There would be a big bunk room for women and another big bunk room for men. In some of the other huts there are smaller bunk rooms. I think the smallest two huts were Zealand Falls and Galehead with around 38 people. Carter Notch was not much different size than that and then Madison was larger. Mizpah was built, my husband built that one and was in charge of the building of that and it has around 70 something to 80 people. And the crews when they go in the fellows were responsible for everything, they didn't have telephones, they didn't have radios, they did have all these conveniences of quick contact "now what do I do?" type things that exist today. They were responsible for medical emergencies, they were responsible for food and if they didn't take in

all the food that they needed that was their problem to deal with. They made all their own bread, desserts, baked turkeys; we took some of the hut masters to New York City for the hotel show one fall and that was a lot of fun. They were looking over all these fancy stoves that were there at our hotel and usually they say when chief come in "I need x number of burners and I need this" and they'd be looking at the stoves and saying "gravy, mashed potatoes" they were looking at the stove from the point of view of what they are used to cooking cause they were all college kids.

RW: Did they have like a stove at all?

MS: Oh yeah they were gas.

RW: Would they cook over an open fire or would they use the stove?

MS: It was a commercial gas stove that they were using. In some of the huts I think initially at the time we got married they may have had a hot plates, gas hot plates and they also had wood stoves they could bake in but that was changed very rapidly when my husband was manager.

RW: Were there any memorable stories or things that stuck out while you were with the AMC?

MS: The biggest problem occurred when there was an accident. The only telephone in the whole Pinkham Notch camp, which again had about 100 guests when it was full and they again had family style meals there and go up hiking and come back. But the biggest problem was the only telephone in the whole place was in our bedroom that rang at night. And when you had a serious, you know when somebody was lost, when somebody was feared killed, whatever, and that did happen the phone would ring at like 2am and I would be the one who'd have to answer it. The press can be really nasty and start asking questions in such a way that if you aren't really sharp you'll say the wrong thing and maybe let out more information than you should. So that was always something sure to deal with.

RW: Were there more accidents in the winter compared to like hiking season or were they about equal?

MS: The bad ones tend to be in the winter with avalanches or change in weather; people would decide they to go the side of Mount Washington on Tuesday January 2 or something and it doesn't matter what the weather is they made the decision they were going to come from wherever and they were going to do this. I know Bruce knew you can't tell young twenties and teenagers anything anyway, so he would suggest get up to the top of Lion's Head and have a sandwich before they went further. This way if it was really brutal, you know subzero temperatures, they'd be so cold they'd turn around but if you said do not go they would have charged. It's just nature of the age group.

RW: Have you ever been up Mount Washington?

MS: Oh yeah I've been up with the dog, not this one the one I had before. I'd just hike up.

RW: How long would that take?

MS: My best time was 2 hours and 45 minutes going up Mount Washington. But I had a standard poodle when we were in Pinkham and we would, Bruce would usually get up around 5/5:30 and start making the rounds of things needed to be done and he'd come back for breakfast around 7:30 or 8. So I would take the dog and we'd go up to Tuckerman's and back many many many mornings and that's over 2 miles steep up there and back.

RW: Would you ever take the Cog Railway?

MS: I went up that when we were at the Crawford House. The owners were good friends of my uncle and went up the Cog quite a bit with my parents too at some point early on. When I worked in the huts sometimes we would ride up on the front platform.

RW: Has anything helped change how feel about the White Mountains over time in a good way or a bad way?

MS: You miss them when you're not in them. I mean living down here is very very nice, we're terribly spoiled but it's always refreshing to get back up north of Littleton.

RW: Do you love living up north in New Hampshire compared to the southern half of the state?

MS: I'd say we are very spoiled here. You want to do something it's going to be available. Like this afternoon this one gentlemen who walked by a little while ago had asked, I guess I was telling him I had seen the Women's Figure Skating in the Olympics but I had not seen the men's and he said "oh I've taped the whole thing wouldn't you like to come see it" so later this afternoon I'm going to go see the rest of the Olympics and it was always on at like 1030 and by then even if I was awake I was not functioning very well.

RW: When you were figure skating did you ever have those aspirations?

MS: I didn't start seriously skating until I was in 9<sup>th</sup> grade and you have to start younger than that if you're going to, the same thing with skiing or anything if you are really going to achieve a certain level. Now I was fully aware starting when I did that I would never make nationals level. In order to figure skate competitively you had to skate in the summer and at that point in time it cost about \$2000 for summer skating, which heaven knows what it would be now cause that was in the early 50s. I just never felt it was fair to ask for that kind of money to be spent on my skating knowing I would not get to the national level because I just was starting too late. But I had a good time.

RW: But you love just watching the sports?

MS: I still enjoy watching them but I mean I was able to compete I was over in Princeton and places like that when the Middle Atlantics were there.

RW: Did you have a favorite routine or a trick that you would do?

MS: I liked to spin, that was fun. Actually one thing that was very interesting about doing it well you had your figures, which they don't do anymore, that are the outlines in the ice. When you did your program you could take the records that you wanted, a piece from this and a piece from that, and go down to a studio and they would cut the part of this record and a part of that record and make a new record for you the length of the program. So you not only designed your own skating routine but you figured out the music you wanted and that was fun.

RW: Was there any type of music you enjoyed skating to?

MS: You have to have slower things and faster things for the different parts of it so it's a matter of figuring out what's going to work.

RW: Is there any other overall comments you'd like to make or say about the White Mountains in general?

MS: Well I think that living at Pinkham Notch was wonderful fun because we met so many people all the time. If you like living in a goldfish bowl it was the place to be cause there was always just, privacy was not factored into that job; you'd be having a dinner party and somebody might arrive that had just gone from Pinkham to the bay station and back and thought he should be coming into the manager's home to be entertained, you accepted what happened. But the variety of people and the number of people we met, just absolutely fascinating people made it a really neat place to be. And the fact that I could get out and be going around the mountains, we didn't have children till we had been married about 6 years or so, and so therefore I got to spend a lot of time chasing after my husband. I might say been up in a hut and if he was doing something or some sort of work all day or something, I could just take off and leave and go to Jackson and play tennis and then return to where ever he was later in the day or stay at Pinkham, whatever. It was fun.

RW: Well thank you so much for having me and doing this interview for my class.

MS: Did it help?

RW: Oh yeah it did.