

# Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project

Smith College Archives  
Northampton, MA

*Ruth "Boots" Mathews Leiter, Class of 1951*

Interviewed by  
Sunny Lawrence, Class of 2017

May 20, 2016

## **Abstract**

In this interview, Ruth “Boots” Mathews Leiter traces her time at Smith through her relationship with the French department. Having lived in the French house, and participated heavily in the department, her knowledge of the language has continued to serve Leiter to this day. The interview also highlights the social and political scenes at Smith during the late 1940s and early 1950s.

## **Restrictions**

None.

## **Format**

Interview recorded using Sony EX1R camera, XDCam format.

## **Videographer**

Video recorded by Kate Geis.

## **Transcript**

Transcribed by Audio Transcription Center.

## **Bibliography and Footnote Citation Forms**

### *Video Recording*

**Bibliography:** Mathews Leiter, Ruth “Boots”. Interview by Sunny Lawrence. Video recording, May 20, 2016. Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives. **Footnote:** Ruth “Boots” Mathews Leiter interview by Sunny Lawrence, transcript of video recording, May 20, 2016, Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives.

### *Transcript*

**Bibliography:** Mathews Leiter, Ruth “Boots”. Interview by Sunny Lawrence. Transcript of video recording, May 20, 2016. Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives. **Footnote:** Ruth “Boots” Mathews Leiter, interview by Sunny Lawrence, transcript of video recording, May 20, 2016, Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives, p. 3.

Alumnae Oral History Project  
Sophia Smith Collection  
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Northampton, MA

Transcript of interview conducted May 20, 2016, with:

RUTH “BOOTS” MATHEWS LEITER  
Northampton, Massachusetts

by: SUNNY LAWRENCE

LAWRENCE: So I’m Sunny Lawrence, and I’m conducting an interview for the Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project. It’s May 20, 2016. Thank you so much for agreeing to be here. Can you just say your full name and your graduating year?

MATHEWS LEITER: My full name is Ruth Mathews Churchill. My legal name is Ruth Mathews Leiter, but what I go by is Boots. And I graduated in 1951.

LAWRENCE: So could you just say a little bit about what your life was like before Smith, and how you came to Smith?

MATHEWS LEITER: I went to a fabulous high school in a very small town. The entire school was in one big building, kindergarten through high school. And that high school is still fifty-seventh or something on that *Forbes* list of good high schools. But it was a public school, and we were integrated in high school. The black students went to a different elementary and junior high, and then joined us in high school, and we got along fine, we danced together, we had a great time. And so how I came to choose Smith is hard for me to remember, but the older sister of a friend of mine had gone to Smith — Cynthia Safford, and I think I admired her, and so I decided on Smith. And I was happy to get in, but I was terrified, because I thought, “All these girls will have gone to private boarding schools, and they’ll be so much better prepared. I was far better prepared.” (laughter) Because we had written a full-term paper with outlines, and notes, and cards. In high school we had a teacher who had us do that. So, I felt I learned that I was very well prepared, and I got on the dean’s list the first semester. Never again. (laughter) I started having too much fun. But I certainly loved Smith — I’m so glad I made that decision. And my sister Catherine Mathews, who we called Kitsy — she’s five years younger than I am — and she decided she wanted to go to Smith. The counselor at our high school said, “Oh, you’re not Smith material.” Well that was all she needed to hear to be determined to go to Smith. And she got here, and she hated it, but she was not going to prove that teacher right. So, she stayed all four years.

She was in Gloria Steinem's class whom she knew slightly. My sister was a fabulous studio artist, made huge wood cuts and studied with Leonard Baskin, so she enjoyed aspects of Smith. But she wasn't a giddy girl. So, anyhow, ever onward and upward. What I want to talk — do you have another question?

LAWRENCE: You can keep talking. Go for it.

MATHEWS LEITER: Well, what I want to talk about is, a class I took my freshman year that influenced my years and has brought such great pleasure to my life. And it was unique to Smith at that time, it was French 11, which was a double introductory language class. It was designed by a Smith professor — I wish I knew her name (the woman who designed it) — but it was some total immersion, except we lived in her our own dorm. But we met five times a week, and a sixth time in the middle of the week for French conversation. We didn't see a single written word until December. You acted it out. The teacher would say, "Levez-vous," you know, Stand up. And, "Asseyez-vous," Sit down. We acted it out, and so we learned it by ear. We learned nice accents, too. I loved it, I really enjoyed it.

So then, sophomore year, I moved from Wilson House in the quad, to French house. And there, you don't eat if you don't speak French. They had a dictionary in the dining room, and you could go look up words and things that you needed. So I really learned to speak French, and I learned quite a bit. As a matter of fact, probably my junior year — I used to volunteer at the People's Institute, I tutored kids in Latin one year — but I had the pleasure of teaching the Russian wife of one of the Russian professors, to speak English. I didn't speak Russian, but she spoke French and I spoke French. So, I taught her via speaking French. I don't remember how well she learned to speak English in my tutoring, but I certainly enjoyed the experience. So then years went by. I always went to La Causerie Française — that is an organization that has various levels of French language that you just do for pleasure.

But my first husband and I were in the fabric business, and our business grew, and we moved from our store into direct sales. We ended up having 3,000 representatives across the country, in Puerto Rico, and in Hawaii, and so we were having to buy fabrics in much larger quantities. We bought designer fabrics — we always sold beautiful fabrics in our store. We were known for our fine fabrics. So, we traveled to — the first place we went was Frankfurt. There was a huge trade show of fabrics from Italy, France, Germany, everybody was there. You can imagine a trade show. They all have their little rooms, somewhat like this. A small room where they have samples. Well, when we first started going, not everybody spoke English. So my French was invaluable there. We wouldn't have been able to buy the fabrics we needed if I hadn't spoken French. Of course, it made all of our trips more interesting because I spoke French, and my husband did

not speak French. He later learned some, I think. But it was such a wonderful way to learn, to learn by ear.

When I was a sophomore, I should have taken the grammar course. I didn't want to bother with that. So I talked the college into letting me go immediately into literature class with Madame Saleil, you may have heard of her. She was a character and a wonderful teacher. In a way, I realize I shouldn't have skipped the grammar part. But I can write in French, passably. But living in French house of course reinforced my facility with the language, and I made nice friends there. But I decided that I missed my friends at Martha Wilson house, so I only lived there a year, which I think was a disgrace to the French house. How could she do such a thing? Leave the French house? I won't tell you why — yes, I will tell you why I left. A senior at French house was very politically oriented, and she thought communism was superb. She was touting communism at breakfast in French. And I thought to myself, You wouldn't be here if we were in a communist society. Your parents wouldn't be able to send you here if you were in a community society. It just infuriated me to have her preaching communism when she was benefiting from capitalism. So I thought I'd had enough of that, so I went back to Martha Wilson house.

But as I say, my first husband and I were in the fabric business, and traveled all over Europe buying fabrics — in England, Scotland, Ireland, and of course the French was most useful on the continent. It brought me great pleasure. My present husband — I remarried — has family — his daughter is married to a Frenchman from Marseilles. And so that re-introduces French into our lives. And my husband speaks French, he studied the Rassius method at Dartmouth, which is a total immersion program. But this woman — the professor at Smith who, as I say I wish I knew her name — she started that wonderful French 11 course (this class was referred to as “French one one”). It wasn't total immersion, but it was immersion to a degree. But my son-in-law's parents don't speak English, so when they come to visit from Marseilles we, again, are forced into speaking French. Of course, I love it, and it's good practice for us. Keeps our French active and lively.

LAWRENCE: So you said you had a professor in the French department who was a real character. Do you want to say a little more about that?

MATHEWS LEITER: Mademoiselle Saleil. She wrote a book called *A House in the Cevennes* about where she grew in southern France in the Cevennes area. The French house — on Thursday nights, invited the French department to come for dinner, and then we would sing French songs after dinner. Monsieur Guyet, Mademoiselle Saleil, I can't remember all the others, but she was very chic — actually she grew up in the Cevennes, but she seemed Parisian in her attitudes and manners. She was an excellent teacher, and I enjoyed knowing her.

LAWRENCE: Did you have anybody, either a professor, or an older student, who was kind of like a mentor figure for you, or a role model?

MATHEWS LEITER: No, I don't think so. Not really.

LAWRENCE: It seems like you had a lot of friends, both in French house and in Martha Wilson house. Can you talk a little bit about some of the friendships that you made here?

MATHEWS LEITER: Well, my roommate at French house is a lifelong friend. And I want to mention at French house, we were on our honor to speak French in our rooms, and we were — we wouldn't have dreamed of speaking in English, even in our bedrooms. But Sally Miller-[Wages?] was my roommate, and we are still good friends. I am going to see her for lunch on Sunday with her son. We have kept in touch, and as a matter of fact — this is part of the French saga. She was getting her PhD in art history, and I believe her subject was the influence of Italian painting on Dutch painting — using Italian paintings as background for Dutch paintings. She was hesitant to speak French. I guess I was more brazen, I just charged right in and started speaking French. So, I drove and I did all the speaking for her — filling station, the hotel, talking to the people in the museums where we went. So, that was great fun for me. She did finally finish her dissertation and got her PhD.

And the cook at French house — Mrs. Reilly — was wonderful. If I had had too good a time on Saturday night, she'd bring me breakfast in bed on Sunday morning, that kind of thing. And then at Martha Wilson, I guess those are my lasting — but Sally, too — my lasting friends. We were very close and we took many trips together after graduation. We'd go to Santa Fe, or we'd go — about every three years or so we'd get together at some place of interest. One year I took all of my family to France, my children and grandchildren, and one of my Martha Wilson friends joined us, Nancy — and Anne —. I think my youngest grandchildren were maybe three years old, so I'm sure they don't remember. But they had a wonderful time. And this was with a French family. We stayed — there used to be an organization called Les Amies, and they had a booklet of all the places you could stay, and I had stayed with this family in 1981. I wanted to go someplace where no one in the family spoke English. Often one of the couple — the husband or wife would speak English at some of the places Les Amies offered. And so I stayed in Puylaurens, a small town in southern France with the Salliers. And oh, he was an artist, he made furniture, and she was a wonderful cook, and I just had a fabulous time with them. And then I took my family back and they loved it. They had a playhouse up on the hill behind the house where we were, and it had a costume trunk. The minute we'd get home, my grandchildren would race up to that house to play dress ups. They had so much fun. All my children speak French.

Oh, I forgot to tell you. One year we — we lived in an area in Kanas City — we lived right across the street from the country club we

belonged to, and I found it a little provincial, or a narrow group, and I wanted my children to know that there's a whole big world out there. You don't have to marry somebody from Kansas City and live in Kansas City. So because my husband and I were going to Europe to buy fabrics, it was possible for us — we decided to take the whole family. So, we rented a chalet in Villars-sur-Ollon, which is at the other end of the lake from Geneva, and my two older children went to an English school, and then my middle child went to a French lycée, and my youngest child went to an adorable first grade — first or second grade. She would hike up behind our chalet and then ski down — not ski down, sled down to her school. So that was a wonderful experience for my children. Of course before we left, my one daughter was saying, "I told you I'm not going. You all go ahead." The house was rented and airline tickets purchased. I'm not going, you all just go on without me. Well, of course we weren't going to leave her. But my son would have been a senior in high school, but he kind of felt he'd done everything. He didn't need to be there for his senior year. They had a wonderful time, they skied every day — part of the school program — went back and had tea and then had classes until seven. I skied everyday and it was a wonderful experience. They didn't want to come home. They enjoyed Villars-sur-Ollon so. It was an eye-opener for them. And they all travel, they all love to travel, they all speak some degree of French. My son has learned German in the meantime, too. So, anyhow.

LAWRENCE: I would love to back up to your years at Smith and talk more about that. I'm interested in the story of your housemate who was a communist. You were at Smith during the beginning of the Cold War and the McCarthy era. What was that like?

MATHEWS LEITER: Well, I think people were somewhat frightened of the Russians in the United States. We weren't sure whether they were going to possibly attack us. I don't think I ever thought they were going to attack us, but they were spreading communism in the Pacific area, in Vietnam, and Cambodia, and all that area. And so, it was a little unnerving, nervous making.

LAWRENCE: What was the — keep going.

MATHEWS LEITER: That was just more of my being annoyed with her talking at breakfast in French.

LAWRENCE: Did a lot of students talk about politics?

MATHEWS LEITER: Yes, we did some. That's an interesting question. I think we did in college. In Kansas City, people do not talk about politics, just as the truism, Don't talk about religion or politics. And it used to drive my sister Catherine, who later came to live in Kansas City — it drove her

crazy that people wouldn't talk about interesting subjects. My second husband Jim also is aware — has picked up on that, that people don't seem to want to talk about politics. You can talk about politics and still be cordial and amicable. With his daughter and French son-in-law — his parents talk about politics all the time. (laughter) And also other burning issues. We have a wonderful time. My stepdaughter, married to the Frenchman said, "If you don't have a hot conversation at dinner, it's considered a failure of a dinner party."

LAWRENCE: Did you feel like you were political when you were at Smith?

MATHEWS LEITER: No, I wasn't. I grew up in Ohio, and everybody was a Republican in Ohio back then. I really wasn't very politically minded, but I have become politically minded and supported some candidates I like, and I am not a Republican. But I am still registered as a Republican so I can vote in the primary, and try to choose the sanest Republican, the most reasonable.

LAWRENCE: So, it's been said that during your time at Smith, the college kind of took on a role as a parent, and was kind of — did you feel like there were a lot of rules that you had to follow as a student here?

MATHEWS LEITER: There were, but — I think we had to be in at 10 or 11, something. On the weekend, you had to say where you were staying if you went away for the weekend, which I did often. But my sister went to Pine Manor, and they had — they were so strict. If they didn't put the period — if they were going to be back at 8 p.m., and they didn't put the period after the p and the m, they were docked. They couldn't go out. I mean, it was ridiculous. So by comparison to Pine Manor — and I went to visit her a couple times from Smith down to Wellesley where Pine Manor was — I couldn't get over it. I thought, This is like kindergarten, they were treated — and I didn't feel that way. However, I will tell you a story. I met my first husband — I guess I met him my sophomore year. But I was dating somebody else, I didn't have time for him. Finally we ran into each other in the railroad station in Buffalo, and he said, Well, how about a date in January when we get back? And so I said, OK. So, we enjoyed each other so much, so I spent a lot of time up at Dartmouth. My senior year, Ms. Terwinkel, our dean, called me in and just said, "Now, exactly where do you expect to get your degree, Smith or Dartmouth?" (laughter) Because I'd call and say — we'd go skiing, and we didn't want — I didn't want to come back on Monday, and I'd call and say, Well, I won't be back until Tuesday, or Monday night. (laughter) So I did spend a lot of time away. In a way — it was great fun and I loved it — but I missed out on doing things with friends on the weekend. I was a bit boy crazy.

LAWRENCE: It seems like a lot of Smithies would spend their weekends at their boyfriends' colleges.



MATHEWS LEITER: Yes, because there were no — Amherst was the only men's school around. I don't remember UMass. It must have been there, but I don't remember that. But we considered Amherst — we'll go there on Wednesday night, but certainly not on weekends. Yes, we did, because — and all the men from the other men's schools, where they had girls, or women, around, would come to Smith, and they'd be looking for blind dates and things like that. There were lots of blind dates. That was quite different from — I mean, you have the five-college exchange now, so you see men.

LAWRENCE: Were Smithies very concerned with finding men to date? Did it feel like you were, like, starved for male contact in this women's bubble?

MATHEWS LEITER: - friends. Well, I had a boyfriend down at Yale, and over at Amherst, and — no, I had a very nice mixed social life, you might say.

LAWRENCE: What did you feel like was expected of you as a college woman?

MATHEWS LEITER: Well, to behave properly. (laughter) I guess I was mostly influenced by my parents in my behavior. But as a college woman, you were expected to study, and as a matter of fact, that freshman year if a professor said — and some did — I expect you to put in three hours for every hour in class, I did that that first semester. But never again, unfortunately. I wish I had studied more while I was here.

LAWRENCE: What did proper behavior look like?

MATHEWS LEITER: Well for one thing, obeying the rules of the college. Another thing, not being promiscuous. We weren't at all. We might have a hug and a kiss now and then, but that was the extent of it.

LAWRENCE: So you didn't feel like — did you know students who were having sex, or was it just not heard of?

MATHEWS LEITER: I think my senior year I thought — or my junior year, Hm, there's something going on there, she's coming in the back door rather late. I was too innocent really, to think about that. Something I especially enjoyed in Martha Wilson, we had very nice bedrooms on the first floor, and they were reserved, I believe, for foreign students. We had two sisters from India, and they wore beautiful saris, and they were just charming. We had a lot of fun, especially with the younger sister. One time some of us got her to put on western clothes, blue jeans, and I can't really quite remember. Her older sister came back and was horrified that we had gotten her to do that. Anyhow, it was OK.

LAWRENCE: When Smithies weren't going off to see their boyfriends on the weekends, what did you do for fun with your friends here?

MATHEWS LEITER: We'd go down to [rehearse?], and also some of my friends were dating, and so we'd do things together as couples, you might say, even though — yeah, it was couples. I didn't study together with my classmates at the \_\_\_\_\_(?). Some people had a room in the basement where people studied, and I usually studied on my own. And I didn't cram, I did the work along the way, and when it came to exam week I'd think, If I don't know it now, I can't cram it in. But a lot of people did do that.

Well, we'd go to Green Street to the coffee shops there and sit there and talk about classes and what was going on. We did do a lot of socializing in that way. Then, after dinner, we had after dinner coffee in the living room with Mrs. Goodenough our housemother, and that was delightful. We'd all sit around, often on the floor, having little demitasse coffee. It was very sociable. Sometimes we went to the men's schools together. We'd take the train. We did quite a bit together. But as I say, I'm in a way — in retrospect, I'm sorry I spent so much time away, because I missed some of that. Hanging out together on the weekend, and so on.

LAWRENCE: Yeah. Were there any traditions Smith is — we love traditions here — are there any traditions that you really enjoyed, or that you really look back on fondly?

MATHEWS LEITER: This isn't quite a tradition, but we had — oh, she was a year behind us, and she was — Pug Henry was her name. She was a wonderful piano player, and she'd play the piano in the living room and we'd sing. I loved that. My mother was a wonderful pianist too, and we sang a lot at home, so I loved doing that with those in Martha Wilson. Another tradition of course, was bridge. We'd get back for lunch and go into the bridge room, sit down, and deal a hand. If somebody bid just one of something, we threw the hand in. I mean you wouldn't know we were playing bridge. We did not keep score. We played bridge at every opportunity, a very sloppy version of bridge, but we learned. That was great fun. I made a lot of friends in that way.

LAWRENCE: You mentioned that there were two girls in your house from India. Did you know a lot of — did you feel like it was a very diverse community?

MATHEWS LEITER: I wouldn't say so. Nothing like what it is today. I know there were some foreign students, but nothing compared to today. I don't know — I mean, we were fortunate that we had those rooms for — it might have been that her older sister was a graduate student, and so they felt that she should have her own nice room, and then since her sister was with her, she came too. But I don't think other houses had foreign students living with them. I don't know, but I loved getting to know them.

LAWRENCE: Did you always feel like you fit in here? Was there ever a time you felt like you didn't?

MATHEWS LEITER: When I first came I had a wool skirt on, and I had let the hem down and sewn it, and the hemline — you know, you could still see where I didn't press it well enough. And I thought, Oh, I look terrible. And it was hot and my clothes didn't come for a day or so, and I just felt totally out of it. Everybody had Bermuda shorts on, and they knew what to wear (laughter) and I felt completely out of it, in the beginning.

LAWRENCE: Did you feel like there was an image of a typical Smithie? Maybe a stereotype?

MATHEWS LEITER: Somewhat, in Bermuda shorts, confident, riding a bike around campus. I had a wonderful bike on campus, I loved it. I wish I had brought it home, but I gave it to some lower classmen. And I think of good students as an image of Smith students. Some more serious than others, but still, good students. One of my good friends did not succeed freshman year, she had to drop out. But she came back then — she went someplace else in Providence, and then she came back for our junior year. I was glad she was able to come back, because I enjoyed her very much.

LAWRENCE: Were you in any clubs or other groups?

MATHEWS LEITER: Well I played squash, and I was on — we had a newspaper called *Current*. I don't know — you know, what is the other?

LAWRENCE: The *Sophian*.

MATHEWS LEITER: *The Sophian*. No, that was — isn't that more poetry and literary?

LAWRENCE: No, I think there was one called the *Grécourt Review*, or *Grécourt* something that was -

MATHEWS LEITER: That may have come later. *SCAN* was the established student newspaper, and we started *Current* newspaper, which was a competing newspaper. I sold ads for it. I'd go down to Northampton and sell ads and stuff, and I finally became managing editor with Cato Lawrance, who was the literary editor. I loved that, working on the newspaper and cutting it — you know, you had to fit it — and proofing it. So I did that. As I say, I know I played squash, and I may have played tennis. I didn't play on the tennis team, but — I know, I did play — we had house teams, and I did play sports on those, maybe volleyball and basketball. They were house teams, they weren't -

LAWRENCE: Yeah, you would play against each other, right?

MATHEWS LEITER: No, we played against other houses.

LAWRENCE: Yeah, that's what I mean.

MATHEWS LEITER: And I don't quite know who organized that but — you could call it a club team.

LAWRENCE: I'm so interested in the newspaper, because I didn't know we had another newspaper at the time. Do you remember what it was like to be starting a new newspaper?

MATHEWS LEITER: Well yes, it was kind of difficult, although people were excited at the idea of having a different newspaper with a different slant. And I can't say I remember what our slant was versus *The Sophian*. But I was competing to sell ads. That's how I started, was in selling the ads. So the people on *The Sophian* were doing the same, but the merchants around Northampton were very supportive. I think — it was exciting to be part of a new newspaper. And it continued, but I don't know how long it continued.

LAWRENCE: Were you interested in journalism?

MATHEWS LEITER: Not really. I like to write now, but I think I didn't realize that I could write pretty well.

LAWRENCE: Did you end up majoring in French?

MATHEWS LEITER: I had a minor in French. I majored in sociology.

LAWRENCE: Oh really?

MATHEWS LEITER: Which to me, is common sense made difficult. It's not the science that they like to think it is. But the reason I chose sociology was I wanted to do social work, and I always thought I would come back and go to the Smith School of Social Work, which is highly regarded. But instead, I got married and had four children. But I did do social work when I first got out of college. I worked at a state mental hospital. There were 3,000 patients, most of them custodial care. But I worked in the office where the new patients came, and I was in the social work department, and we interviewed the patients' families, and we interviewed the patients, and the psychiatrists of course interviewed the patients, and then there were psychologists who interviewed them. We would have a meeting and discuss whether the patient should be kept — this was a state hospital, and the people were remanded by the courts. People had either run out of money and couldn't send them to private hospitals, or they were violent, or various reasons. It wasn't a sanatorium, it was a major psychiatric hospital. But so, we would meet

— social workers, we would present our results from the interviews, and the psychiatrists would present their results, and the psychologists would present their results, and determine whether the person could be in a place where they could come and go, or whether they needed — not off the grounds, but could walk around the grounds of the hospital, or whether they needed to be behind secure bars — so, I saw them the first 30 days they were there. And then a decision was made as to their treatment, or whether they could be released. If they weren't bad. It was very interesting, but a rather brutal eye-opener for a young girl. You know, sad things, and — the head of my department was misusing the young men, I learned later. I was so naive and innocent, but I did finally realize what was going on. Isn't that horrible?

LAWRENCE: Yeah.

MATHEWS LEITER: And they let him go, but he probably just went to the next state. It's horrible.

LAWRENCE: So you left that to get married?

MATHEWS LEITER: Yes. I just did that for a year — year-and-a-half, maybe.

LAWRENCE: How long were you married to your first husband?

MATHEWS LEITER: Twenty-five years. And I saw him the other day, and he said that he was very sad that it didn't last.

LAWRENCE: Really?

MATHEWS LEITER: I won't go into that, I'm not — there were things that I -

LAWRENCE: When did you get divorced — what year, if you don't me asking?

MATHEWS LEITER: Let's see, I was married in '52, and so it was '70-something.

LAWRENCE: Seventy-four?

MATHEWS LEITER: Twenty-five years.

LAWRENCE: Seventy-seven?

MATHEWS LEITER: We were finally — no, it was longer than — it was — yeah, it must have been '77, but we weren't divorced until '79.

LAWRENCE: Yeah. Did you know a lot of other women who were divorced?

MATHEWS LEITER: It was a — my first husband and I had so much fun together. We really did. And our children did. We did a lot of interesting fun

things, travelled, and skied, and had a lot of fun. So people were shocked when we got divorced. And then several others — parents of students in my children's classes began to get divorced, and that was the beginning of a lot of divorces, which was too bad.

LAWRENCE: Did you feel like there was a stigma around it?

MATHEWS LEITER: No. Well, I don't know. Maybe I did. I was sad it hadn't worked out, because we had had good times. But there were things about him that were difficult. Of course, I was perfect. (laughter)

LAWRENCE: Do you feel like you've taken your Smith education and experience with you into the rest of your life?

MATHEWS LEITER: I do. I have taken classes all my life. I did start on a master's degree in art history, and took some classes at Kansas University. They had a campus in Shawnee Mission where I lived. Then I was offered a wonderful job at The Nelson-Atkins Museum, and I told the director, I said, Oh, well I'm taking — I'm getting my masters in art history. He said, Oh, don't do that, you'll be too overqualified. He didn't want me to be a curator. I managed openings, and all the special events, and I loved it. I did huge bouquets of flowers for openings and things like that, which I loved doing those. People say, Oh, I would love to work for you. Doing the flower arrangements was a small part of my job. It took great detail, and I loved working with the staff at the museum, they were wonderful to me.

LAWRENCE: We're coming to the end of our time, and I'm coming to the end of the questions that I have. Is there anything else that you wanted to talk about in this interview?

MATHEWS LEITER: That I'm very proud to have gone to Smith. As a matter of fact, in Kansas City, there are many people who went to Smith, because the headmistress of a girls' school called Sunset Hill — the Headmistress didn't go to Smith, but she had a friend who was a professor here. And say, there would be 16 people in the senior class. She'd say to 12 of them, You're going to Smith. They had no choice. You're going to Vassar. But she sent so many to Smith. So, there are many Smith graduates in Kansas City, which was very nice. We had a very active Smith club, and we had an antiques forum as a fundraiser, and held it at the Nelson-Atkins Museum, where I worked. As a matter of fact, when I worked there, I told the director — there were two other people from Smith on the staff — and I said, You're surrounded by Smith, you can't do anything without our approval.

LAWRENCE: I have one last question before we go, which is how did you get the name Boots?

MATHEWS LEITER:           When I was first learning to talk — I was, what 18 months old? Two years old? — I had a very deep voice. I don't have a deep voice now. They said it was in my booties. My voice was in my booties. She it became Bootsie after that, and I always went by Bootsie. Then when I got older I thought, I can't introduce myself as Bootsie, so I go by Boots. But my mother did say to me, "Are you still going to be Bootsie when you're 80?" Well look, I am.

LAWRENCE:                Thank you so much for being here.

MATHEWS LEITER:           Oh, well I enjoyed it. So, was that — did I talk an hour?

LAWRENCE:                Forty-five minutes or 50, yeah.

MATHEWS LEITER:           I'm not surprised. (laughter)

END OF INTERVIEW

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