

TRANSCRIPT (uncorrected)

An oral history effort forming part of the 1996 Rice University Women's Conference, hosted by the program then known as Rice University Women's Studies
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Linda Driscoll: First question, uh, I'll, I'll tell you some things about the questions if you'd like ***** concern is. It helps people locate memories and times, sometimes ***** place.

Barbara Forester Coleman: Mm hmm.

Linda Driscoll: ***** start with your favorite place and okay this is Linda Driscoll. It's February 11, 1996 and I'm about to interview Barbara Forester Coleman, that's Forester with one R, F-O-R-E-S-T-E-R or rather without a double R, who graduated in 1957. Okay what, what was your favorite spot when you were here. The campus looks somewhat different now.

Barbara Forester Coleman: Right, uh, I really liked to be down in what we considered was the poop. It was down in the basement of the library and I spent a lot of enjoyable time there.

Linda Driscoll: Um, can you tell us a little more about what that looked like because I came the year you left. I know what that is, but my daughter never heard of it.

Barbara Forester Coleman: There was a, a, small lunch counter and then there were a lot of tables around and so you could sit or read or talk or meet people and we would meet for lunch there and it was sort of a base for me 'cause I did stay at home. I do remember something and, and as you mentioned places recall, uh, one of my favorite professors, Dr. Mackillop, used to be down there and a lot of times I would see him and he used to have, seemed to me that he had cheeseburgers and he would be sitting there, um, looking at the papers that we had written in the, uh, blue books and just really enjoying them and, uh, he said that he just looked forward to see all the ideas that we had written and, uh, that's a fond memory.

Linda Driscoll: As I remember Dr. Mackillop, he wore thick, round glasses and so he, when he looked at things he always looked as though he was truly peering intently at them and, uh, and he had a really wonderful smile.

Barbara Forester Coleman: I, I, it seemed to me that he lived close to Rice and several times walking I would see him putting out the garbage. But a, a fine man.

Linda Driscoll: Uh, what brought you to Rice?

Barbara Forester Coleman: Well, I, uh, I lived very close. I lived right over in West University and I went to Lamar. Um, I was very pleased to be accepted into Rice and I think in those days we didn't have all the options or at least we didn't feel that we had and, um, of course my family we were all very elated, particularly on the idea that we were on full scholarship. Uh, now I think there must have been more options, but I'm not sure they really were available, um, because of our situation I could have perhaps gone to up to Austin College. We're Presbyterian

and they had taken me up there to look at the college. Our minister always took the seniors that in, uh, our senior year whenever it was appropriate.

Linda Driscoll: Mm hmm.

Barbara Forester Coleman: Um, when I was there, um, it seemed more regulated although, uh, I was sort of a quiet person, but it was more regulated than I wanted and there actually was, was no choice because I could now live at home and so financially ****. Uh, I was very, very excited because of course living in West University and going to Lamar so many of the people in our area either taught here or people that we knew in the neighborhood. So it was almost like a continuation if you could do it.

Linda Driscoll: Shall we go into the next – there's more background noise than I thought.

Barbara Forester Coleman: Okay and I don't always pick up real –

Linda Driscoll: I don't have to ask you what your first impression of the school might have been because you lived so close in the neighborhood that you would have seen it.

Barbara Forester Coleman: Right.

Linda Driscoll: Uh, and you said you lived here while you were in school.

Barbara Forester Coleman: Right. Even I can remember, uh, when I was walking around this time going to a football game as a Girl Scout in the old stadium. It was some kind of a pro team or something that we were invited as a group.

Linda Driscoll: That's neat. Um, I've seen pictures of the old stadium. What did you like best about the first year? Can you remember that first year you were here?

Barbara Forester Coleman: Oh, oh I do. Um, I like the courses and I liked the discussion. I liked being, uh, in, in sort of an academic atmosphere, uh, where I could discuss **** and do this type of thing.

Linda Driscoll: As I recall, Lamar was a very good school at the time so you were coming from a good high school. Was there much of a change?

Barbara Forester Coleman: Probably not as much as I thought there was going to be. I was very, very concerned about making it at Rice.

Linda Driscoll: Mm hmm.

Barbara Forester Coleman: And, um, found that I was, I think, very well-prepared and I think particularly in my English Lit. It turned out I remember thinking it was very similar to what I had had in high school so that was – it was with Mrs. Webb who was very good and then, um, I, I, I was, I was fortunate because I had **** -

Linda Driscoll: *****

Barbara Forester Coleman: - most of my time in high school. They had me tutoring the football team or something.

Linda Driscoll: How much time did you have to spend studying when you were here?

Barbara Forester Coleman: I spent most of the time studying. I really did. Um, I would come over early in the morning and we would sort of, we would have separate, special places where we left all of our books and things in the library.

Linda Driscoll: Mm hmm.

Barbara Forester Coleman: And then I would go to class from the library and then back to the library and then I'd go down and eat and then studied 'til pretty late 'til I went home. I sort of just like lived in the library.

Linda Driscoll: The library, the library was clearly one of the centers –

Barbara Forester Coleman: Right, right.

Linda Driscoll: Was it air-conditioned then?

Barbara Forester Coleman: I don't know that it was. It may have been air-conditioned in parts. I, I don't remember feeling hot. Of course I'm not even sure we had air-conditioning at home even at that time. We probably had, we had an attic fan and we did have some of those window units.

Linda Driscoll: Mm hmm.

Barbara Forester Coleman: But, uh, we didn't even think about the weather.

Linda Driscoll: Um, we're pretty pampered today.

Barbara Forester Coleman: Mm hmm.

Linda Driscoll: Did you know from the beginning what you wanted to major in?

Barbara Forester Coleman: Um, originally I thought I was gonna major in math and, um, I don't remember all the details, but I still feel a little bit unhappy because after my sophomore year when you had to have everything okayed –

Linda Driscoll: Mm hmm.

Barbara Forester Coleman: Uh, I went on and finished in English.

Linda Driscoll: All right. Um, did you have an advisor at the time?

Barbara Forester Coleman: I don't remember that we had advisors. I **** sort of on our own.

Linda Driscoll: Did you, how did you go from being a math major to, to being an English major? Did somebody tell you that would be a good idea?

Barbara Forester Coleman: It seemed like ****. It's hard to remember exactly, but then like after your sophomore year or somewhere in there –

Linda Driscoll: Right.

Barbara Forester Coleman: - that you had to talk to someone and then they okayed your major.

Linda Driscoll: Right, that, that's the process.

Barbara Forester Coleman: And –

Linda Driscoll: How did you get –

Barbara Forester Coleman: They felt that it would be – I do remember them saying they felt there was no future for women in math and when I think back I may have not done as well as I thought and I think I mentioned to you, thinking back, my freshman year in the spring I had the mumps.

Linda Driscoll: Yes, yes you told me that.

Barbara Forester Coleman: Right and, and, uh, they were very nice and sent the, the finals home.

Linda Driscoll: Mm hmm.

Barbara Forester Coleman: And I think maybe I did the English one, but I was so sick and so hurting and crying that I did not finish those and so I went back and took them in the fall and perhaps did not do as well. I may not have **** several times, but so there may have been that also. But I still enjoy math and I do now. I do finance for our business and I do finance with school districts and a bunch of things, but I'm pretty well self-taught or I take some community college courses and my children have done well in math.

Linda Driscoll: Have there been, have there been any, uh, do you remember if there were any clubs for women, say, or were there any math clubs or –

Barbara Forester Coleman: Oh no, no. I, I don't remember anything, anything.

Linda Driscoll: Um, what, what did you do here that you were most proud of? What's the high point being at Rice?

Barbara Forester Coleman: I would **** just studying and making the grades and graduating.

Linda Driscoll: Were you ever in a, in a play or a –

Barbara Forester Coleman: I was in some of the plays for the Literary Society. They were fun. We did Rain, Somerset **** Rain.

Linda Driscoll: Which lit were you in?

Barbara Forester Coleman: I was in SL, Sarah Lane Literary Society and I think she was still here or she was there at the time.

Linda Driscoll: She was here for a long time, yes. Of course I was in ***.

Barbara Forester Coleman: Oh, okay.

Linda Driscoll: ****

Barbara Forester Coleman: I think an interesting thing I did my freshman year, but I really wasn't, um, it was something that was more quiet. I had, uh, I was a swimmer.

Linda Driscoll: Mm hmm.

Barbara Forester Coleman: And I, I already had my water safety instructor and so when we took freshman, uh, PE and at that time it was somewhat of a survey course and you had to do things. Well you had to put down what you had and I already had my water safety instructor. So they put me over teaching lifesaving to mainly the Rice football team.

Linda Driscoll: Wow.

Barbara Forester Coleman: And I was very skinny and very quiet and the whole day was very, uh –

Linda Driscoll: Daunting?

Barbara Forester Coleman: Well sort of, but of course I, I did it and I, I have done it and, um, had taught before and since, but I went over there and I remember I would just very quietly go down to the gym and do it and come back and I really didn't say anything. But I, but I really, I felt I had no choice and it was, it was fine and most of them were very, very nice to me. I did have one who when I said he had to do so many laps he said who are you, a direct descendant, descendant of Simon **** of something. But, um, it, it, it worked out, but I mean I, um, I did not really know him except in, in this context and would just very quietly go down there and put

on those skimpy suits and a sweatshirt and do it and then come back 'cause I was more of the studios ****.

Linda Driscoll: I can remember those suits.

Barbara Forester Coleman: Oh yes.

Linda Driscoll: Um, what was the most difficult or the threatening part of being here? Any aspect of it?

Barbara Forester Coleman: Um, I think probably the worry of, uh, of making the grades and staying in this time I think.

Linda Driscoll: Is there anything you wanted to do that you couldn't do? You said you were a swimmer. Uh, there weren't any swim teams.

Barbara Forester Coleman: I think really at that time, uh, we, we didn't think about the options. We really didn't. I know there was no swim – there really were no things for women at that time and we weren't on campus that much. I don't, um –

Linda Driscoll: **** women facilities on campus.

Barbara Forester Coleman: There were no women facilities. Uh, I remember I still, I'm very pleased that I went to Rice and just to have an opportunity, but I remember thinking it would have been very nice to have been able to go away to school. So I worked very hard and was a camp counselor and so then I could go to UT one summer because we had to get extra education courses and I also wanted a teaching degree and, uh, so that I could be able to go away to school a little bit and so I sort of envied the people who were in the apartments and that type of thing and I didn't have transportation. I either took the bus or walked and so I really had to get home at a certain time or get a ride home. So it was a different situation. So we were almost – it was different because we were commuting students really.

Linda Driscoll: Well you probably answered this, but then what was your social life like when you were here?

Barbara Forester Coleman: I think the social life was good. Um, I think people had a good time. Um, I may not have been, you know, as involved in it, but there may not have been as much going on ****.

Linda Driscoll: But you were in the Literary Society and you were in productions and –

Barbara Forester Coleman: Yes I was in them, I did them. Oh I also had, I had to play on their basketball team. We did have that. We had games between literary societies.

Linda Driscoll: I didn't know that.

Barbara Forester Coleman: Or else it was maybe a class thing. Um, I was very tall. I mean I'm relatively tall and, and, then and I had to do it. I really was not that enthused about it. I mean I didn't – of course I just did things and didn't really say anything because I was not that type of athletically inclined. I was really sort of thin and awkward **** and that type of thing. But I do that and basically because it was a must that I be tall. I was also in A Chorus Line. I can remember going to productions and then, what is the name of the production or something that was done.

Linda Driscoll: **** I mean there, there were follies.

Barbara Forester Coleman: Oh the follies, okay. I did, uh, I did the mambo to **** or something, yes. And I did the **** with ****. I, I did some things.

Linda Driscoll: Yeah. Well, I was wondering, how, what happened that got you from being a pretty quiet, studious person –

Barbara Forester Coleman: Mm hmm.

Linda Driscoll: - to being somebody that runs school districts and, and does the finances for the company and –

Barbara Forester Coleman: I think it was just a development thing that I think a time when you peak or you don't.

Linda Driscoll: So this happened after you went to Rice?

Barbara Forester Coleman: Yes, yes and then later I, I got married. I married a wonderful, wonderful person who's been extremely supportive and, uh, who, uh, is very active and I think perhaps brought out all the good things in me.

Linda Driscoll: Great, well that's terrific.

Barbara Forester Coleman: I was fortunate to have the – and I think Rice gave me that basis. I really do. I think they –

Linda Driscoll: Gave you preparation.

Barbara Forester Coleman: They gave me the prep. They widened my horizons, gave me the knowledge, uh, so I think the more knowledge you have you more you can truly enjoy life, that type of thing and, uh.

Linda Driscoll: I mean you look like a very happy person.

Barbara Forester Coleman: Oh I am, yes.

Linda Driscoll: Okay.

Barbara Forester Coleman: Yeah, very happy.

Linda Driscoll: Um, what was, what was the most important thing you learned about life here? What, what did you learn from Rice? You say it sort of gave you a foundation and all that. Is there anything in particular that you remember as a turning point?

Barbara Forester Coleman: No.

Linda Driscoll: Nothing, okay. Um –

Barbara Forester Coleman: I think it was also gradually.

Linda Driscoll: If you could design a T-shirt that summed up your experience at Rice, what would it say on the front?

Barbara Forester Coleman: I'd have to work on it, but something like learning as much as you can is wonderful or there is a lot to be learned.

Linda Driscoll: This sounds consistent with what I've been hearing **** the last couple of days ****. And it doesn't sound like you're not finished yet.

Barbara Forester Coleman: Oh no, no, I'm looking for something else.

Linda Driscoll: All right, thank you a lot.

Barbara Forester Coleman: Oh you're welcome.