

# Bedell Terry Interview

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## SPEAKERS

Interviewee: Bedell Terry

Interviewer: Fatemeh Rezaei

### Fatemeh Rezaei

This is Fatemeh Rezaei. It's May 13, 2024, at 4pm. I'm with Bedell Terry. We're on the online Zoom platform. And we are going to begin our oral history interview for the University of Baltimore Stories: The 100 Anniversary Oral History Project. The purpose of this project is to celebrate the university's Centennial by preserving the memory of those influenced by the University of Baltimore over the years. We will be creating a digital archive and exhibit and making these recordings available online.

Thank you so much, Mr. Terry, for being here and willing to talk to us. I will start with some basic questions. So, where and when were you born?

### Bedell Terry

I was born in Red Bank, New Jersey, a small town in Central Jersey near the ocean. A long, long time ago. 1950 I was born. Red Banks. 10,000 people. Your stereotypical small town.

### Fatemeh Rezaei

What was your family life like growing up?

### Bedell Terry

I'm the oldest of six children. We range from-- Two brothers which sandwich four sisters. I'm the oldest. Then there were four girls. And then there was my brother who's 15 years younger than I am. So, we covered a long period of time. My mother was a teacher. My father was a truck driver. My mother's still alive. She's 97 and lives on her own. But it was a typical middle class growing up in the 50s and 60s, which are a lot different than now. So, it was me and a lot of girls. So, [laughs].

### Fatemeh Rezaei

Are you close to your sisters?

### Bedell Terry

I'm close to a couple of my sisters. Things were different then. Boys were boys, girls for girls. There wasn't as much mixing of the two when it came to growing up. You know, the town is so small it had one Grammar School we all went to, one high school we all went to. It's just a little, little town. And we grew up pretty easily. I mean you were safe. My mother would send us out of the house early, and you came back into the house when the streetlights went on. I don't know that she knew where most of us were at the time, but we survived.

**Fatemeh Rezaei**

Right. [laughs] Where did you go to college?

**Bedell Terry**

I went to college at St. John's University in New York.

**Fatemeh Rezaei**

When was that?

**Bedell Terry**

That was 1969. I had a scholarship and--

**Fatemeh Rezaei**

[Inaudible]

**Bedell Terry**

--pardon me?

**Fatemeh Rezaei**

What was your major?

**Bedell Terry**

Oh, my major was communication arts. Advertising, TV, radio, entertainment. It had nothing to do with anything that I've ever earned a living at. But it was what I wanted to do at 19. You know, I'm a believer when you're 19 you should just take the basic classes and not have to pick a major because when you're 19, you don't know anything at all.

So, it's kind of silly to pick a major at 19 when you don't know what you're going to do with your life. And that was 1969. There was a war going on. Vietnam, upheaval on the campuses, sort of like it is now, today, but everywhere.

So, it was a different time. But I learned how to run a radio station, run a TV station, and do advertising. And I completed four years, but I was nine credits short, and my scholarship ran out, and I had to go to work to survive. You know, there were five kids still at home. So, my parents weren't going to support me, couldn't. And I was 23. Time to support myself. So, I got a job and figured I'd go back to school and complete the degree later. So, 45 years later, I came into UB and completed the degree.

**Fatemeh Rezaei**

So, tell us about your first job. When did you start and how long did you work at that job?

**Bedell Terry**

I started working for the Internal Revenue Service in 1974, and I worked there for 30 years. All over the country. Like I said, I'm from New Jersey, but the job took me to California. Clearly to Maryland. I went to San Jose, California, San Francisco, California, Fresno, California. And my first job was a Revenue Officer, a federal officer. Then I went into management.

About 10 years in, I became a manager. Then I became a program manager. Being a manager, I oversaw 12 people. Being a program manager, I oversaw programs in the western region. And finally, when I left, I was in charge of the call centers for Internal Revenue Service. And there are 20 Call centers throughout the country, from Puerto Rico to California and somewhere around 5000 people.

So, it was pretty intense. We got millions of phone calls, and we had to answer millions of phone calls and correspondence. So, I did that for 30 years and then retired at 55.

**Fatemeh Rezaei**

At that time, the retirement, were you living in California?

**Bedell Terry**

I was living in Baltimore.

**Fatemeh Rezaei**

Baltimore, okay.

**Bedell Terry**

Because we came from California to Baltimore. I worked in Baltimore. Then I worked in the national office in Washington, DC. And that's where I retired from when I was in Washington DC. But I stayed home for about a year. Played golf a lot.

**Fatemeh Rezaei**

When did you retire? Like what date and year?

**Bedell Terry**

I was 55. So, it was 2005.

**Fatemeh Rezaei**

So, what motivated you to continue your education after you retired?

**Bedell Terry**

Well, I retired then, but I also got another job right after that working as the director of compliance for the District of Columbia. So, I worked for the District of Columbia for 15 years. And I oversaw the tax office for the District of Columbia. Why did I want to go back to school?

**Fatemeh Rezaei**

Yes.

**Bedell Terry**

Because I wanted to finish. I didn't want to leave that. When you get to a certain age, you want to finish what you started. And I started, you know, my college education in 1969. And I wanted to go back to school. I was bored. I had always been doing something from the time I was 14 on, and sitting around the house and playing golf every day was not terribly inviting. So, I found out that in Maryland, if you're over 60, and you're retired, you can take two classes a semester for just the cost of fees. You don't have to pay the tuition.

They call it the golden ticket. And I looked into it and said, 'Oh, I can go back to school and finish my degree!' Because I thought it would only be another 12 credits. Little did I know that to finish your degree, you need to do like 36 credits at the school you finally get the degree from. So, I looked around. And I looked at the state schools. I looked at Towson, but Towson University is a very big school. And I had gone to a very big school. St. John's was a very big school and had somewhere around 25,000 students in St. John's, and I wanted a smaller school. So, I looked at Coppin.

I looked at Bowie State, and then I looked at UB, and it was smaller, convenient. I could just drive, park, and walk into school. So, I said I'll take some classes there. And that's how I wound up at UB. And I think that was 2017. Yeah.

**Fatemeh Rezaei**

And you are living in Baltimore City, right?

**Bedell Terry**

I'm living in Baltimore County. I live in Towson. It was a short drive downtown to the campus. It was a small school, so I didn't get lost. I was a little nervous about going back to school after 45 years. Things have changed a bit. [Laughs] You know, when I started school, there were no computers. There were no calculators. I know how to use slide rules. I can still use a slide rule and three by five note cards that you wrote all your notes on. And having to go into the library and actually go into the books and the Guide to periodic - Oh, what did they call that?

**Fatemeh Rezaei**

Are you talking about reference books?

**Bedell Terry**

Yes, yes. So that's how I wound up at the University of Baltimore. I stayed because I found that out that the teachers actually take care of you at the University of Baltimore. When I compare the professors at St. John's to the professors at University of Baltimore, I had classes at St. John's that had 200 people in it. The most people I had at University of Baltimore in the class was maybe 15. So, the professors could actually look at what you were doing, spend some time with you, and get to know you as a student. So that's why I stayed.

And I also found that I really should have majored in history. And that was my major at the University of Baltimore, it was history. And I found out I loved it. And the professors there when you're taken as your major, they really concentrate on you. And I had one professor who especially kind of mentored me, which is odd when your mentor is the age of your children, but Josh Davis, Dr. Davis, really mentored me and kind of pushed me, which is something I needed. I could have gotten through, just glided through, but Dr. Davis expected more from me. And that helped.

### **Fatemeh Rezaei**

Do you have any specific memories of your time at UBalt? Could you tell us a little bit about the topic that you worked on for that project?

### **Bedell Terry**

Oh, mainly the fact that the professors cared. Dr. Davis and the other professors in the history department kind of pushed me, and there were a few of us that they kind of expected more from. There was a contest given by the library for papers and studies and all of that. And Dr. [BoRam] Yi kind of moved me into preparing a paper for that, and I did, and it got recognition. The topic was using the archives.

I used the letters from a World War I soldier from Baltimore who went to Canada to enlist because the United States hadn't gotten into World War I yet. And this gentleman went to Canada to enlist so he could fight in World War I. And he sent all these letters back home. And what the letters did was it told you where he was in all of the stages. He wrote letters back from England when he got to England. He wrote letters back from Persia when he was in Persia.

What he did, the people he was in the army with, what he did in the army, explaining that he was in London and could hear the explosion of bombs going off in Paris. That's how loud they were. And so, I wrote the paper to show Baltimore's connection to World War I. And this gentleman's connection to Baltimore and, really, shows the history of mail because when you look behind it, there were hundreds of thousands of soldiers on the front fighting, but they got their mail, and they sent mail home. And you're in the middle of a war getting bombed, you're in trenches, and you still get your mail.

So, what kind of organization has to be behind that to make sure that these people are getting their mail, and their mail is coming home? So, the people at home know they're still alive and is still doing well? So, I found that really interesting. So that was one of the papers that I did for the contest. And the other paper was my senior - you have to do a senior project - and that was on the Korean women who were captured by the Japanese and used as sex slaves for the Japanese soldiers.

And that was a big paper. And I also used that paper to get into graduate school. They want a sample of your writing. So, I used that. Between that paper and the recommendations from the history professors, and Dr. Davis making some calls for me, and Dr. Yi writing a letter of recommendation, that got me into UMBC graduate school for history.

### **Fatemeh Rezaei**

And you are still in this program, right? And what is your research topic now?

**Bedell Terry**

The research topic is black businessmen in Baltimore between 1945 and 1955, the postwar years, and right at the beginning of the Civil Rights push. That 10-year period was where Black Business bloomed in Baltimore. Since Baltimore was heavily segregated, Blacks had to have their own barbers, tailors, grocery stores, banks, restaurants. You couldn't go to a white restaurant. You couldn't go to a white clothing store. A black person couldn't try on anything in a white clothing store.

You could buy something, but you couldn't try it on, because then they couldn't sell it to somebody who was white. So that was a prime period for Baltimore businessmen. So, it's a lot of research to find out who was doing what. Who were the main business people? How did they do it? What did they do? What businesses did they run?

**Fatemeh Rezaei**

So, this is your dissertation, right?

**Bedell Terry**

Pardon me? Yes.

**Fatemeh Rezaei**

Your dissertation topic?

**Bedell Terry**

Yes, and I've got one chapter and a little more done. I've got to go. Two and a half. But I'll get it done. I had to take some time off for medical reasons so I'm a little behind.

**Fatemeh Rezaei**

How is your experience studying at UMBC?

**Bedell Terry**

It was hard. It was hard going from-- There's a big jump between senior year in college to grad school. In grad school, they expect a lot more from you. A lot more research, a lot better writing. I thought I was a good writer, but I'm an okay writer in grad school. [Laughs] You know, you get a lot of a lot of strict feedback. And a lot of reading. All the professors throw reading at you like you got nothing else to do in your life. You know, "We'll meet again next Thursday here. Read these 400 pages by then." That was quite a surprise. But it's a good school. It's hard, and it keeps me engaged. The same thing that happened with the University of Baltimore kept me engaged.

But it's coming along. It's coming along. But I have to thank the professors I had at University of Baltimore for making sure that they pushed me because they knew I wanted to go to graduate school, and they knew what it was going to take to complete graduate school. And if you just go in with the mentality that I can do like I did in my senior year in college, no, you can't. No. It's a lot harder as you know. But, I mean, I owe University Baltimore a lot. It was very good to me, and I owe it a lot.

**Fatemeh Rezaei**

So, you joined UB, UBalt, in 2017, and then you graduated, when?

**Bedell Terry**

2021.

**Fatemeh Rezaei**

2021. So, you were at UB during the pandemic, right?

**Bedell Terry**

Yes.

**Fatemeh Rezaei**

How was that?

**Bedell Terry**

Very strange. Very, very strange. I'm not a great proponent of online classes, but we didn't have any choice. Again, some of the pandemic, I was doing some of the non-history classes and had to do a statistics class online. Oh, that was--

**Fatemeh Rezaei**

I actually had statistics course this semester, and I found it very difficult doing it online.

**Bedell Terry**

It was very difficult. And then we had biology online. So, you had to grow the plants at home, measure them, and take pictures of them with your cell phone and forward them to the professor. And I get more from being in a classroom setting. I want to hear what the other students have to say. I want to ask the other students questions. And some of the classes online, you could do that where they had a Zoom class with 15 people in it. And you could see the people, and you could hear them.

But that was hard. That was hard. But it was a quick change from classroom to online for University of Baltimore, and I imagine for all the other universities, too because you didn't have a lot of time to build a new online program. You had Zoom, and you had to figure out how to do it, and some of the professors who engaged with the class more than a lecture had a difficult time moving from classroom to Zoom. But yeah, I was there during the pandemic when we couldn't leave the home, and I'd much rather be in class than be on Zoom when it comes to online learning.

**Fatemeh Rezaei**

The commute is not bothering you right? [Laughs] No, no! I commuted from Baltimore to Washington DC for over 15 years, and that's two hours each way. Did you drive?

**Bedell Terry**

I drove from my house to the train. That's 20 minutes. Then an hour on the train. And then two subways to get to work. Two hours each way.

**Fatemeh Rezaei**

Wow. That's long.

**Bedell Terry**

So, driving 20 minutes to the University of Baltimore was nothing. It was quick. And there was a great place to park and just walk down the hill. I was there when they were building the new library. And we were still in the old building where the police are now. We still had classes there. And it was fun. You'd see President Schmoke walking around the building. I imagine he still does that. So, the campus has changed. And I think they're still looking at how the university is going to change.

I think in '17 it was still mainly a night school and mainly for the senior and junior years. They didn't have that many freshmen and sophomores. It is mainly juniors and seniors. We were getting people who were coming back to college who were coming from community college. That's why I love President Schmoke's idea of Baltimore City College where University of Baltimore would be the senior part of it. And I thought that was a great idea. But I've seen the university change, for sure.

**Fatemeh Rezaei**

So, you have been involved in the 100 Anniversary Oral History Project, this project, at UBalt archives, and you have talked to many faculty members and staff online. And what are some key observations or themes that emerge from the stories that you heard about this university? Could you summarize what you have learned about the university through this project?

**Bedell Terry**

The professors who I've interviewed really loved the University of Baltimore, really were engaged with the University of Baltimore, and passed up other universities to come to the University of Baltimore. They were professors at other universities and came to the University of Baltimore and stayed. I think the University of Baltimore gave them the freedom to pursue outside interests while still working as a professor in the University of Baltimore.

The students showed me how much the university had changed from the 40s and 50s until today. So, the basic summary is it's a small school, and the people involved in it want it to be a small school. They don't want it to be Towson University with 30,000 students. I think at a university that big; the professors get lost too.

So, I really enjoy being part of this, doing the online interviews. I want to do Kurt Schmoke. But the University of Baltimore has a history, and I'm a historian. I think that history is important, and I think the University of Baltimore is important. So, I'd love to see the history department get bigger. [Laughs] One of the things I've seen is a move away from the humanities to more of a business school. And I can understand that, but I still think there's a need for all university students to know something about the humanities.



You don't want to send out just accountants, you want to send out accountants that know there was a history, that can use a library, can talk about literature. These are all things I think, make you a more rounded student and a more rounded person. So that's one of the things I've seen in my time, not only in the university, but doing the interviews for the Centennial Anniversary, is that every chance I get, I push to have the humanities expanded, and I will continue to do that. [Laughs]

**Fatemeh Rezaei**

I should also thank you for helping us with this project, and you are one of our best interviewers.

**Bedell Terry**

Well, I like to do it. I like talking to people about their lives, and we've had some interesting people. But I still want to get Kurt Schmoke. [Laughs]

**Fatemeh Rezaei**

We're going to do that interview very soon.

**Bedell Terry**

I'll be glad to do that. But from the time I came into University of Baltimore until now, I've really learned that they've made an investment in me, and I've made an investment in them. So, I'm more than glad to do the interviews. I want to stay connected to the university not just as an alumnus but participating. If the University of Baltimore had a master's in history, I would have never left. I even considered doing a master's in something different just to be able to go to University of Baltimore. But I love history. So, I think they should have a history master's, and I will tell that the Kurt Schmoke when I talk to him.

**Fatemeh Rezaei**

[Laughs] So is there anything else that you would like to share with us about your time at UBalt?

**Bedell Terry**

University of Baltimore made it easy to come back. People don't realize after 45 years of not being in school, coming back to school with people that are the age of your grandchildren is not necessarily easy, but University of Baltimore is set up to really accept anybody. Whether you're coming from a long time away or you're coming from Community College, or you're coming from a different college, I think the university really makes it easier to go into that. So that's my big takeaway from my time there, that the school is really accepting. So, I liked it.

**Fatemeh Rezaei**

Thank you.

**Bedell Terry**

Well, thank you for having me. I look forward to my next interview. And I imagine that's it.