

MARIE- LOUISE BLOUNT INTERVIEW



Marie-Louise Blount, former Chairperson Towson University Occupational Therapy Department

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Interview questions

Marie-Louise Blount AM, OT, FAOTA

*Lecturer and Administrative Assistant (1973-1974), Occupational Therapy Curriculum, Towson State College, Baltimore, MD.*

*Chairperson (1981-1988), Associate Professor (1981-1988), Program Director (1976-1981), Occupational Therapy Department, Towson State University, Towson, MD.*

*University Merit Award (1986), Towson State University*

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### *Recognition of Excellence--for outstanding contribution to occupational therapy education in Maryland (1979), Maryland Occupational Therapy Association*

The importance of Marie- Louise Blount to the Maryland Occupational Therapy Community becomes clear once you are familiar with the Towson University Occupational Therapy Program and the Howard University program. In a wide-ranging interview Marie- Louise shared her background, experiences, how she came to Towson and Maryland, philosophy of involvement in occupational therapy and impact of mentors upon her career

Marie-Louise Blount retired from New York University's Occupational Therapy Program in 2005. She continues to have a relationship with NYU and has been instrumental in mentoring others through their Master's and Doctoral work. Her relationship with Towson spans many decades and includes teaching, advising, grant writing, program director, mentor, and serving on a doctoral dissertation committee. Many in the occupational therapy community are familiar with her as Co-Editor of OT in Mental Health. She is a happy mother of two and grandmother of three. She travels frequently to Tel Aviv to see her daughter and her daughter's family. She has also done some volunteer occupational therapy work in Thailand.

In high school, Marie-Louise told her parents that she wanted to become a religious missionary. Her guidance counselor and parents talked her out of being a missionary. She was given the Kuder Preference interest test which showed a high interest and aptitude for science and the arts. Her parents thought you needed to have some sort of goal. Coincidentally, her father knew a student at Tufts- BSOT and she was introduced to this student who showed her around the school. The education of occupational therapists has changed. Marie-Louise noted, looking back upon her own OT curriculum. There are many differences in what students learn today when compared with what she learned. Science, including physics; crafts; liberal arts courses; jewelry; photography; parliamentary procedure; bacteriology and, after two years, full-time in occupational therapy courses. She noted that during her schooling, there was not much in the way of theory. as Gail Fidler and her husband Jay Fidler had written their 1<sup>st</sup> book and Willard and Spackman was in its first iteration. When she was in school there were no math or language requirements. Marie Louise's career began when she graduated in 1957 from the Boston School of Occupational Therapy (BSOT)/ Tufts University. Unlike today's curriculum, Occupational Therapy was a 5-year program with 12 months of fieldwork. Students in her program were sent to five (5) different places including 4 months in mental health and then 4 other 2-month affiliations. She was fortunate and did her last fieldwork in England. Her placement was in a Day Hospital and her interest in mental health stems from that placement. When she finished school, she was very interested in mental health and wanted to work with children in mental health settings. At the time of seeking her first job, there were no positions in children's mental health settings.

As noted, there were no mental health jobs working with children or adolescents. She began her career working at the Liberty Mutual Insurance Company Rehabilitation Center in Boston, Massachusetts. Many of her cases included work rehabilitation, workman's compensation insurance cases, and employees with traumatic amputations.

Over the course of many years there have been several students, patients and occupational therapy colleagues have had an impact upon her. Marie- Louise Blount related the story of a male patient

## MARIE- LOUISE BLOUNT INTERVIEW

she provided therapy to while working at Liberty Mutual. The man was a Postal Service employee with diabetic ulcers that did not heal. He was at the rehabilitation center **as a leg amputee and was** to be fitted for a prosthesis. The goal with this patient was working on standing tolerance. The gentleman was not interested and probably somewhat depressed. He had experience doing woodworking. The facility had a great woodworking studio; however, the patient complained about the wood as it was of poor quality and had not been seasoned. Better wood was ordered including some maple. The patient made a cutting board in the shape of a whale. He began to be engaged. He completed the project before the leg was healed. The patient gave Marie- Louise the cutting board



and she still has it. Picture here

Participation in MOTA and AOTA gave her a chance to influence the profession or the community we serve. The Maryland connection and Towson were fortuitous. She came to Maryland with her husband. They lived in Bethesda. One day as she was reading the MOTA newsletter an article indicating the start of an occupational therapy program was highlighted. Marie Louise knew the consultant Dr. Patty Maurer from their time together teaching at BSOT and they had worked together at Tufts. Marie Louise called Patty and was told by Dr. Maurer that a part-time position was available to help with a planning grant to develop the program. Not only did she work with Dr Maurer but the Advisory Board included such occupational therapy luminaries as Ruth Brunyate Wiemer, Wilma West, and Charlotte Seltser, COTA. Marie-Louise was offered a full-time job to teach at Towson but turned it down because of the commute between Bethesda and Towson. She also knew that Howard was starting an OT program and connected with Naomi Wright who was the Program Director. During her time at Howard Marie-Louise worked with Gail Maguire (later Hills), an OT interested in gerontology, who later became Chair at Howard, and Joyce Lane (one of the Founders of the Black Caucus). Unfortunately, the work environment at Howard was not good. She quit Howard and soon thereafter got a call from Towson University. They needed a new program director. Diane Stein (Maslen Gibson) was the current director but she was leaving Towson. Marie-Louise Blount took the position and stayed at Towson for several years (1976-1988).

## MARIE- LOUISE BLOUNT INTERVIEW

In response to the question “has your career been as fulfilling as you thought it would be. If so how?” Marie- Louise Blount shared the following: “Absolutely. I’m glad I became an OT. I identify as an OT. It has been very rewarding. I have enjoyed teaching in several universities and I have made many good friends.” Over the years Marie-Louise has been influenced by many mentors. She noted Patricia Laurencelle, formerly the OT Chair at the University of Indiana, whom she met in grad school at Boston University and who had been a great influence upon her career. One lesson that Dr Laurencelle passed along is that there are issues in the larger world of OT and health care that should be known and addressed. Pat urged her to become active in the profession and to do things nationally at AOTA. Other mentors included Harriet Warren, Towson OT, department Secretary Betty Wall, Charlotte Exner, and NYU faculty Jim Hinojosa, Sally Poole, and Karen Buckley. Marie Louise also indicated that learning comes from many places and from many people including students. She noted that “Students were amazing”. She was proud to say that she knew all the names of the students she was teaching at Howard and Towson. At NYU the classes were bigger, but she was close to many of those students.

After she retired from NYU, Marie-Louise volunteered to spend a month in Thailand. While there, she spent time at an institution for very disabled men and boys near Bangkok. Mornings were spent teaching English to department heads. In the afternoon she worked with the OT, who was originally from Canada. It would be hard to find a more skilled and caring therapist than Dorothy Klynstra. Marie-Louise also spent a week in Chiang Mai, Thailand and visited and spoke to the faculty of the OT program at the university. All of the Thai people whom she met and spent time with were very warm and welcoming.

Because her sister knew the American Consul stationed in Chiang Mai, she even got to have dinner with the Consul at her residence, which had formerly been the home of a Thai prince.

In closing the interview, we discussed thoughts on how to make membership and service to the association a source of pride and commitment. Marie Louise very strongly said that this is important. “You can’t change anything until you get involved. Until you understand what the profession is and how it fits, you will not have influence. You will stay in a rut”. Her words to the therapists who are working today is that “we must put more effort into those coming into the field about the importance of involvement.” Unfortunately, for some there is a disconnect. “All they want to do is related to immediate job requirements. Indeed, there is a need to do more to make the profession and professional associations attractive. As an example, she cited the number of journals AOTA could help expand our world and readership by having agreements to offer them at discounted rates. She noted that her concern about younger occupational therapists and occupational therapy students is sometimes the lack of focus on the profession caused by many, many, many competing priorities.

In closing the interview Marie-Louise was happy to be part of Maryland and Towson and felt that her years working in Maryland and being an active part of MOTA and AOTA had been very rewarding.