

Securities and Exchange Commission Historical Society
Interview with Beverly Fleming
Conducted on November 12, 2013 by William Thomas

WT: This is an interview with Beverly Fleming for the SEC Historical Society's virtual museum and archive of the history of financial regulation. I'm William Thomas. The date is November 12th, 2013, and we're in Sarasota, Florida. So, thanks very much for talking with us today. We usually begin by talking a little bit about your personal background. I understand you're from Florida, is that right?

BF: Yes, I'm a Floridian. I grew up on Boca Grande, which is on Gasparilla Island just south of Sarasota.

WT: Okay, so tell me a little bit—you sent us along a bio, but for the sake of the recording why don't you tell us a little bit about how you developed your career over time. I understand you didn't start out at the SEC.

BF: No, I didn't. I started right after high school, in fact, working in offices. My aunt hired me to help her in her office, and this was a beginning of a career that involved more office work, dealing with the public, and I also worked with Yarnall Warehouse here in Sarasota as an office manager. It just started from there, and then we moved to Maryland in '69.

WT: Why did you go to Maryland?

BF: My husband was transferred to Maryland, and there were more opportunities for me to find a job. I worked at a lady's dress shop, Nat Lewis, in Maryland. When they opened a store in Frederick, Maryland, I went up and helped open it, doing the hiring and setting up, and so I was manager there for about a year. I started working at the SEC in 1973, when I applied for a job and I was hired as a clerk-typist Grade 3. I worked with Division of Enforcement first, and Stanley Sporkin was the director at the time.

I determined that I wanted to get out of the clerical field, I wanted to do more administrative work. I took a class in business administration to further my knowledge and advancement. I modeled for a while and I started ballroom dancing, as I was trying to fill my life as much as possible with what I enjoy doing.

My husband and I divorced and I continued to pursue my work at the SEC and tried to advance and learn as much as I could. I've enjoyed trying different things, because it does build on your self-confidence. So I worked Enforcement, and my art also took a big leap at the SEC because of the opportunity that some of the directors, persons in the Commission that I started hanging my art in different places.

WT: At the SEC?

BF: At the SEC. Stan Sporkin told me to have facilities come and take the posters down that were in his outer office and wanted me to put my paintings there, so I did. I started taking commissioned work, and it just grew. Then the crafters and the artists met to

discuss having a show at the SEC. We asked the Commissioners if we could have an art show and have it in the Commissioners' conference room, and they were all for it. They were great. They said, "By all means, we'll try it."

We did it for a couple of years, twice a year. And then of course that was my start in that, I could work with that along with my job at the SEC. But I began to search for different jobs that I would be interested in and make sure that I had the experience. I took shorthand so I could apply for a steno job. I got that position, and then I applied for the administrative aide's position and I was selected for that in Enforcement. The travel budget was computerized and I would work with the General Counsel's Office to help set it up. I managed the budget, collecting the travel papers of trips and submitted for processing.

We moved offices and I was responsible with helping set up the move to a new building, located on Fifth and E Streets. I was approached by the director of Personnel and asked if I would be interested in going up to Investment Management and filling in, because the administrative assistant there had become ill and she was unable to be at work for a while. So as it worked out, she didn't return back to her job and moved out of town. Kathie McGrath was the director at that time, and Kathie was a wonderful leader, a wonderful director, but you knew you had to do your job. You made it known that you were there for her, and I was very proud to be her administrative assistant.

When the other administrative assistant said she was not coming back, Kathie told me to post the position. The position was posted, several were interviewed, and I was chosen. It was such a wonderful experience. You meet so many different people. There were more accountants and lawyers—of course there's always lawyers in Enforcement we had them there, too—and you just form a bond with these divisions because of the work that it entailed and it was important.

WT: Could you describe the work a little bit?

BF: In what I did?

WT: Yes.

BF: I worked with Personnel setting up interviews for the division to hire attorneys and accountants. I met with the secretaries to make sure they were happy in their jobs, and that they were contributing. The secretaries in Investment Management were upset because they felt like they didn't have much say and they just didn't feel good that nobody really cared about them. So I talked to them, meeting with all of the secretaries in a conference room.

I wanted to give them a good feeling about their job, that they weren't there just to be tied to their typewriter or filing. They needed to feel important, which they were, very important. So they thought that was exciting, so we did that. And I think that boosted

the morale of the secretaries, that they did matter, other than being at their desk all day. So we worked on that, and I really felt good that they would come to me with some of their issues and dealings, and I tried to help with training. Personnel would offer workshops and I would talk with the supervisors and suggest approving the secretaries to attend. I made sure the proper paperwork was completed and taken to Personnel to schedule a time.

I oversaw all of the paperwork for Personnel from the division, to have the papers done, signed, and they could participate in these different workshops and programs. I worked closely with the travel budget, and when I was in Enforcement they started developing a new system of travel and money and so I worked with the chief counsel's office to develop the travel budget for Enforcement. I worked with the Personnel office in filling out travel vouchers and submitting their travel expenses and filling out forms.

WT: And you went there originally in '73 to the SEC.

BF: Yes, I was there twenty-two years, and I decided after twenty-two years I would come back home to Florida and retire.

WT: Just when you went over to Investment Management.

BF: I can't remember the exact date – about 1984. The division moved to the 10th floor and I worked with the facilities to have all of the rooms designed, made sure that all the

employees filled out their room layout, everything had to fit, working with the telephone situation, as we had a new telephone system come in, which I had to work through, learning that and then helping to develop it within the division. There were so many things that you're busy.

Then I worked with the awards. I worked with the managers, directors, associate directors, and so forth, making sure all of the award papers were submitted and made sure they were done properly and submitted to Personnel. When I wanted to become an administrative officer I wanted to further my knowledge, and the SEC approved my going to some classes on business administration. I went to the high school in my town—I lived in Laurel, Maryland, at the time—to those classes which helped me further my knowledge and secured me in knowing I could do it. And that was an opportunity that I think the SEC did that helped me along, and many others, to pay for these classes or workshops that would help their employee to grow and do better and know their job.

WT: Do you think that was unusual at the time?

BF: Well, I had not worked in a government agency before, and I had not been exposed to much of that, but I thought it was unusual, and I was surprised that I was able to do these things and they approved them. That was why I decided I wanted to continue. SEC was a smaller agency than DOE and all these huge agencies, to where it was more close-knit people. You interacted with most of them at any time.

We had a good relationship with other divisions. We had our softball league, we'd go play softball, and I think it just gave the employees, I know it gave me, a sense of belonging and knowing that they do look after you. You've got to work hard, you must keep on your toes and learn new things, and the opportunity was there for us and all we had to do was ask or go to Personnel or different places and find out what's being offered. So when I went up to Investment Management, that was in '84. I was in Enforcement about ten years or so and then I went to Investment Management in '84.

When I retired I was at a 12, Step 5, and I was so excited that I could have my career there for as long as I did and be able to have the friends, and working with the different offices. The Securities and Exchange Commission is I think one of the finest agencies in the way that they work and work with their employees, and what we did is very important.

WT: I'm interested in the office culture. You mentioned there were people who were interested in art and there was a softball league. Was it the case that office staff and some of the lawyers and accountants would all be involved in that, or was it only the staff?

BF: Oh definitely, yes. Because we would go over to Anacostia, to the ball field after work, the whole division, Investment Management, and we went over and played ball and then we had pizza delivered. But no, it was camaraderie among the staff that everybody was welcome to be a part of. Not everybody played, but we enjoyed it. And there was a lot of interaction with the professionals and the clerical staff, in that I think all of them there

were there for each other and to have this bond. During the holidays, we celebrated by having a Christmas lunch. Staff brought in food.

And then when we had the arts and crafts show, with my painting and then some of the other people that were crafters, we decided we would really like to have the show and that pulled everybody together. There were professionals in there and the staff showing their artwork and crafts. For the Commissioners to approve that was incredible because it was a wonderful thing. And everybody in the Commission would be there at one time or other to see what there was, and to see the different talents in the different arts and crafts. Like I said, we did that a couple of years. But anyway, we had a big success with it and the Commissioners were delighted to have something like that that the employees could do and everybody enjoy, so we did that for a couple of years.

WT: So one of the things that we're interested in is the place of women in the SEC, and so I imagine that most of the office staff were probably women at that time.

BF: There were quite a few women. I'm not sure whether it was equal or not, but it was pretty close with as many women as men. We had a lot of female attorneys, accountants, secretaries, a variety in every office. Personnel had a lot of female personnel, and I think our opportunities were good with the SEC. My daughter also was with the government, she was with the Department of Energy, and so she was given a lot of opportunities also to advance. But the SEC, I think, recruited especially servicemen. When they came out of service, we gave them the first opportunity on finding jobs.

I thought it to be a very good organization, or business. I know the government was putting out guidelines to hire veterans or military when they came back, and we had lots of secretaries—well, there were some that were male secretaries, so there was a good mix in opportunities for most anyone that was interested in coming, and the SEC embraced it with no qualms about gender or anything.

We did take a class or program on—well, I've got to think of the word—harassment, sexual harassment. The SEC set up a program that all the employees were to go, so that there would not be any instances of harassment, where everybody understood what it meant and what it entailed.

WT: Was this early or later on while you were there?

BF: This was I think later on, because I think I was with Investment Management, and this was something fairly new. You had to go, you had to sign in and it was mandatory. But there was always the changing of rules and developing new guidelines. Anyway, I guess I was with Investment Management when I had the most ability to lead. I had a position where I did a lot of important things in the housekeeping department, or whatever—I want to say setting up appointments, interviewing, I would interview secretaries, and I took care of making sure travel and different forms were done properly.

WT: Was there a lot of travel in the office? I would imagine, having to do all the investigations and stuff.

BF: Oh, yes, yes, a lot of traveling. Of course, there would be different accountants and attorneys going out and appearing at hearings or other offices, meeting and having workshops for them, or meetings to develop new things. Also, they had a trip to get away and mingle with everyone in a relaxed way, but then working also. So it was a lot of travel.

WT: Was it difficult to schedule it all in, or was it pretty manageable would you say?

BF: Oh, no, it was manageable. Everybody knew what they were to do, and I made sure that I all the forms were signed properly. It was something that was very important, because you have to account for all your expenses and travel. And then we also had some counseling on regulations and travel and filling out forms and certain things that you couldn't put against your travel expenses, and the secretaries pretty much put them together and we handled it. So that was a learning experience, dealing with that, because it can get very complicated. In fact, one time the secretary for the director was having a problem and they asked me to go up and help with his travel. But it was a very important part, and everybody knew it was important to do these things properly.

WT: Was there any particular sense of because you were at the SEC, which manages the disclosures of other companies and so forth, that it was especially important to avoid embarrassment in these positions?

BF: Oh, definitely. Yes, and we had our offices that wouldn't talk to anyone, they were working on something, they did not want any phone calls, and I would get calls every now and then to my office asking me could I please get a message to this person or that person, they need to talk to them. And I said, "Sir, you have to call his office or her office. I don't handle those. But they are kind of closed off now, they're working and they will return your call as soon as possible." And you have to deal diplomatically with the public, because they don't understand sometimes that there is protocol, there are times that you can't speak to someone, and so I had to deal with the public to let them know that there are certain times that they couldn't take calls. I never disclosed anything about what was going on in any case.

I think it was on a particular matter anyway, and people were just trying to go around the system, but you do have to protect and make sure that rules are followed, and you don't just talk to the public about a lot of things. But it was exciting for me, I guess, in dealing with so many professionals that I had not had that experience before when I first started working with all of them. They each had their own part, and so there are a lot of things you have to consider in speaking to people when they come in to give deposition. You don't become their best friend, in other words. You respect what they're doing there, plus the investigation of the SEC.

WT: Along that same theme, I know that the Civil Service has its own personnel regulations. Of course, you've gone through the promotion procedures and that sort of thing. Do you have any impressions of the personnel side of things, as far as bureaucratic matters are concerned? I know you had to deal with the secretaries and so forth, so presumably you had some oversight there.

BF: The Office of Personnel was very helpful in helping us solve our problems or meeting them, and there were times that—well, I can't go into that, I'm sorry—but Personnel was where we went for assistance. They were there for us in hiring, writing job descriptions, and not discriminating against anyone coming in for an interview or setting up. There were certain things that you had to relate to each department that you're dealing with, and most of them, Personnel was very helpful. They helped us set up classification and training with Personnel. The people were very helpful, the staff, in dealing with issues that would come up, that someone would file a complaint or grievance or something that was tough to handle, they were there to help us determine what was the best thing to do.

WT: How much knowledge at the staff level did you have to have of things like the various rules and legal procedures that are the bulk of what the SEC does?

BF: Would you repeat that for me again?

WT: In Enforcement, for example, there would be investigations going on. To what extent would you have knowledge of the substance of the investigations, exactly what strategies were in place in Investment Management? There's a separate set of protocols that the SEC oversees, and to what extent would you have knowledge of those or to what extent would it be more straightforward office work?

BF: Well, this was mostly straightforward for different positions. We knew that, say in Enforcement, I met some people because I was sitting at the front desk as they came in the room to meet with Stanley Sporkin, and you do not discuss anything. I worked as a secretary, and possibly some personnel, that you do not divulge any information about a case, you just knew, it was instilled in you that you do not go out and tell what's going on in any particular case. I know that we held the status that we knew a lot of what was going on.

WT: You were privy to the details.

BF: Yes, in some cases. But we just knew, you learned that you don't discuss anything about a case to anyone because this could ruin the whole thing, and you would be fired, of course. But no, everyone was very careful in being discreet.

WT: If I can return to the theme of women in the office, you mentioned that there had been sexual harassment training. To your knowledge, was there any incidence of that sort of thing? It doesn't sound like it was in the culture.

BF: No, that I can recall, there was never a sexual harassment case. It may have been something minor that was not very detrimental to the work or the SEC, so I don't recall any there. I think it was at the time that this was coming into recognition in the workplace, and this was when it started, you hearing more and more about harassment. The agency then decided to hold a workshop or a program where they could come in and a speaker would explain what could be—sexual harassment had so many little different things that somebody could do something and it'd be perfectly normal, but in this program of sexual harassment it would be very bad. But I really don't recall any sexual harassment cases. I'm sure there were grievances here and there, but nothing that I can recall.

WT: I know that the Director of Enforcement after Sporkin, in the early 1980s, was eventually forced to quit because he mistreated his wife. Was there every any sense that extended to women at the office?

BF: I could tell you a few things, but I don't know what you want to hear here.

WT: Well, whatever you feel comfortable telling us about.

BF: I was administrative aide at that time in Enforcement and I recall him, and he was very intimidating and I felt uncomfortable. He never did anything physically. He did talk to me once about a personal matter that I thought was none of his business, and he called me

to his office and started asking me questions, and I said—I don't want to say his name, right?

WT: It won't be hard to find out, but it doesn't matter.

BF: Well, anyway, he was talking to me about my personal situation. I was divorced, but anyway, he was getting into my private life and I just politely said, "I'm sorry, but I don't think you have the right to question my life and what I do with my life, and I have things to do." And I got up and left. And there were times that he was very demanding, very intimidating. He wanted me to go into the Xerox room and get on my hands and knees and pick up staples out of the carpet, and I said, "There's no way."

I spoke to him, I told him "I'm not getting on my hands and knees or crawling around looking for staples. I will call Facilities; they'll send someone up and they will pick them up and clean it up." "I want it done right now," he said. Well, I told him, I said, "I'm sorry, I am not going to do it." I left, and the next thing I knew the administrative officer was in there on her hands and knees picking them up. But I thought that was a little beneath her or me. I was not a facilities cleaning person. They had their job; I had mine. And I just politely told him, "No, that's not my job, and I cannot get on my hands and knees and do this. I can call to have it done." So he just went to the administrative officer and I guess threatened her and whatever.

It was very uncomfortable working there at that time, and I was there when he left and it was really a very sad thing to have happen. To have this man that had come this far and have this job—and I was friends with his secretary so I knew a lot that was going on. She just told me certain things as it started developing, you know. But it was hard to get your work done, everybody was on their toes, and it was just a very unhealthy atmosphere because of the attitude that he had toward people. And I think he finally, hopefully, overcame that and went on to work somewhere else. But yes, he was asked to leave.

WT: A real contrast from Stanley Sporkin?

BF: Oh, Stanley Sporkin was the most wonderful human being, the most intelligent administrator, director. He was totally human, but he was the shining star of Enforcement because he was so well respected. He knew the rules. He knew everything. And, like I said, he treated you with respect no matter who you were. And we had some fairly big cases with people coming into his office for meetings, and, in fact, I can't name them, but there were famous people, or people in the news that came in and one was a movie star and it was wonderful. He hung around and just talked and it was nothing real big, but we met a lot of different types of people.

But Stanley, I believe, was one of the best, most respected, knowledgeable, and then after he left the SEC he became a judge in D.C. It was like you were walking down the street and I'd be going to lunch, and passing me, "Hi, kid, how are you?" That's the way he was. And it wasn't disrespectful; it was a friendly hi, and that's the way he was.

WT: Did you ever notice any changes in your own work with some of the changes in concentration in the office, like Stanley Sporkin was known for concentrating on the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, and of course in the 1980s it was insider trading, did that change your work at all when those things became big?

BF: Not to my knowledge, no. I was so much involved with the administrative part of my position that I may have known what was going on at the time, but it wasn't something that I can just recall.

WT: Okay. And also, once again we're turning to the theme of women, of course you've mentioned Kathie McGrath, and of course you would have seen over your time there more and more women appearing the higher echelons of the SEC.

BF: Yes, I did. There were some wonderful—there were also some very, I don't know, there was a director in Investment Management that was disliked. Now, I had some dealings with her that maybe I had some dislike more than others, but she was a very outspoken person. I was trying to get a position posted and trying to get the job description written, and the assistant director was to give me the paperwork to get it done, tell me what things he wanted this person to do.

Well, I was told by this associate director at the time that if this person that they wanted didn't get that job she was going to have me fired. I looked at her and I said, "I really

don't think that's possible, but it's not my place to have something done. I can't see that this person is selected. She has to be qualified to be selected, and so that's the office that's developing this, is to see. It's not my job to make sure this person gets the position." And I went to the director and I just told her that I was very upset about what this person had said to me, threatening me, and she just told me, "No, she's just going through a hard time; she will not fire you. No one will ever fire you. If you get fired it's going to be by me, and you don't have a thing to worry about." But anyway, there were people there that I think just disrespected their staff or thought they were so much better, and they were just very rude. But dealing with most of them, they were good. They were very helpful in my position.

I had attorneys that I worked with trying to get a report done to give to the director, and some of them, "Oh, Bev, if you have any problems, let me know," and they would help me decipher what to do. But overall, I think the majority of the employees were hard-working, respectable people, and you're going to have at times certain ones that come in and for some reason they're just not suited. But anyway, no, I remember Enforcement was really the one that impressed me the most with what went on with Stan and the other director.

I had a very wonderful experience there at the SEC. I didn't deal with a lot of rules that I had to be involved in that much, but I'm sitting there trying to help the whole division through the secretaries and through anything that we went through in moving, paperwork, things that you try to keep under control.

WT: It sounds as though with the increasing number of women in the higher positions that's it's really more dependent on the individual rather than the overarching trends as far as setting the culture of the office is concerned, would you agree with that?

BF: Pretty much, yes, because everybody has their way and the women were very strong and I admired most of them. We had women in associate director, all the attorneys, spread out, the whole SEC, and on the whole they were respected. They had this problem—I don't know if it was a problem pretty much—but it was about maternity leave. And when that first came about, that the attorney was pregnant and they worked out a rule about how much time that they can take off for maternity leave. The husbands thought they deserved the same treatment even though they weren't pregnant. They had to go and do something, fulfill something for their wife, and if she has the baby then he needs some time to be there, and that worked out. They agreed to that. Let the men have this time, that they can be given time, maternity—well, I don't remember what we called it at the time, but yes, that was something that was worked out. And I think the women pretty much took care of themselves in what they thought needed to be done.

Also, we had an attorney come in that was blind. I don't know if that's too blunt, and she had her dog, and she needed special equipment. Well, she came into my office to be introduced to me, that I would be helping her set up her office and the equipment that she would need. She was a delightful woman, her name was Linda Schneider. Everybody loved her dog, they respected her and her dog. We were able to get the equipment that

she needed. This is a time that new technology was being developed, too, with the seeing-impaired, or blindness.

WT: I don't think there's any—

BF: Politically correct.

WT: I don't think we're stumbling over anything.

BF: But she was very capable, very friendly, likeable, and believe it or not, I did five paintings for her while she was there, and she was blind. But she came into my office and said she heard through different people that I was an artist and that I had paintings in here and she says, "I just feel so wonderful being around your paintings." And this is the way she was, and so you helped different individuals with different needs, and the SEC saw that it was imperative that we provide the staff with what their needs were, like Linda and other people.

And so it was learning about different regulations, and what can be public, what can't be public, in dealing with the people on the outside, and it helped me and I appreciated everything that I gained knowledge at the SEC. Of course, like I said, there are certain times that there are some little bad apples that go on or appear, but we resolve it and go on. But it was a wonderful experience, and I wanted to stay longer but I thought at that time it was time for me to come back to Florida, to my home.

WT: Why don't we talk a little bit about you personally? I mean, you mentioned in your bio that you gave us, too, that of course your painting career has been your main thing since you've moved back here to Florida. You mentioned you did a little bit of modeling as well. Was that before you came to the SEC?

BF: Yes, in Maryland I was modeling, and it was a company that was local but it involved several states so I was asked to model at one show and then it just continued. So I traveled to Newport News and Baltimore, and appeared on a TV show with the owner being interviewed. That was an interesting part of my life, to model. We modeled at the Shoreham Hotel for the Cabinet members' wives. I also started ballroom dancing, taking private lessons. I appeared in a video for Mary Chapin Carpenter in 1994 in D.C.

WT: Why don't you tell us a little bit about what you paint, and did that develop as a business while you were in D.C.?

BF: In D.C., I was in the process of developing a career in art. I come from a family of artists, from my mother and grandmother on, and beginning to be more recognized at the SEC, I continued to want to own my own gallery at one time, so when I retired, moved back, the opportunity came that some property was available in Sarasota and it was in an artists' colony, a little group of buildings in an area that's called Towle's Court Artist Colony. I bought a corner lot that had two buildings, and I opened a gallery and I also had other artists come in and show their work. And I was there six years. It was a

wonderful experience, because you get out to the public and it just keeps growing, and mine did keep growing.

I have two daughters, also, that are artists, one here in Sarasota and the other up north. But I do anything. I have always said I will try anything and if you're not happy with it, you don't have to buy it. And I've never had that happen. But I grew up on Boca Grande Island, south of Sarasota, and it was secluded because there was no bridge when I was growing up. There was a train once a day, and we had a ferry. But I was just surrounded by all these birds and foliage, so I learned by studying books, buying art books. And then I joined an art league, and I joined the Southern Maryland Art League when I was in Maryland and I won best of show with my clown.

I've had these times in my life that's been so rewarding, so I will do anything, I will paint anything anybody asks me to, within reason, you know. But no, I've been pretty successful at this. And I do birds. In Maryland, I did a lot of Eastern Shore paintings, and I even had a friend that tore a barn down and made frames for me out of some of the wood. But it's always been a challenge, and then I learned to do experimental art in water media, and so I've been working in that area a little bit, but I've done more realism. But through the SEC, it gave me such a wonderful experience in being able to advance in my position, advance in my art, and meet wonderful people and continue on. An officer in Personnel had a daughter that jumped horses, and he asked me to paint her on her horse, jumping.

I belong to the Arts and Culture in Sarasota, and the National League of American Pen Women, which includes art, music, and letters.

WT: You mentioned the Pen Society before we started. It's quite an old organization.

BF: Yes, it is. The National League of American Pen Women was founded in 1897 by Marian Longfellow O'Donohue. I became the president of the Sarasota branch in 2013. The League is comprised of members engaged in creative work in letters, art, and/or music. We meet once a month in either a yacht club or restaurant and have programs: we present speakers and presentations; we have an awards program for outstanding senior students in art, letters, and music. Every year we give out incentive awards to these young people. In March, we have a luncheon and invite the students, teachers and parents; the students show and talk about their work. It's a wonderful organization and I'm very proud to be a part of it.

WT: All right, well I think I'll just conclude then by asking whether you've kept in touch with people at the SEC. You left there in '95, was it?

BF: Yes I have, in fact I'm Facebook friends with several of them, Nancy Rappa, Debbie Abernathy, and others. It's nice to have friends throughout the years that you've shared times with.

WT: It's a great tool.

BF: Yes, it is.

WT: All right, well thank you very much for your time. It's been a very nice interview.

BF: Well, thank you. I do appreciate it.

[End of Interview]