

PATRICIA FAIRFIELD-ARTMAN ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Josie Nance "Nancy" White

INTERVIEWER: Patricia Fairfield-Artman

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[Begin CD 1]

PFA: A narrative from J. Nancy White. Okay and the question I'm asking is: Tell me the story of your life?

NW: That's a broad statement.

[laughter]

PFA: That it is.

NW: Okay. I don't know where to start except that when I was born and that was in Statesville, North Carolina on December 22, 1925. So, that makes me right now today seventy-eight years old. I was an only child, had a wonderfully happy childhood. My dad died when he was very young and in fact right after the [Great] Depression. So [clears throat], excuse me, it was Mom and me the rest of our lives [chuckles]. And she lived to be almost ninety-eight. Died three years ago and we just had a wonderfully happy growing up together.

I went to Mitchell Junior College. It's now a community college, but then it was a junior college, Presbyterian and I served as president of the senior class [chuckles] and then I transferred to Woman's College [of the University of North Carolina, now the University of North Carolina at Greensboro], and it is the woman's and not the women's, in 1944 and graduated from UN, from WC [Woman's College] in '46. From there, I went to Salisbury, North Carolina and taught the first grade in the public schools in Salisbury for five years. Returned to my alma mater and taught in the Curry School, which was then the School of Education's demonstration school. So, I taught first grade three years, kindergarten one year and second grade two years. The children that I had in the first and second grades said it was too bad I didn't know enough to go to the third grade—

PFA: [chuckles]

NW: —and that they would miss when they got to the third grade. So, I never knew enough to get to the third grade. And I stayed there for five years and then went into academic

teaching in the, in the School of Education where I taught the curriculum courses to the elementary education students. And I stayed there until 1961.

Naomi Albanese, who was then the dean of the School of Home Economics. Naomi and I were faculty advisors for the Golden Chain [honor society] and I think people who don't know is, that the Golden Chain is similar to Mortar Board [honor society] on the various campuses. So, we were sitting there one night waiting for the students to make their decisions on the new members and Naomi said to me, "What are you doing next year?" She said, "We have a new program. We have a doctorate that we will be offering in child development." And I said, "Well, Naomi, I did my undergraduate work here and my master's degree at [University of North Carolina at] Chapel Hill and I think I better go somewhere else and I've already been accepted at Florida State—

PFA: Yes.

NW: —and I plan to go there the next fall." So, she said, "Well, I was hoping you'd be interested in an assistantship." Well, about a week later, I got to thinking about that and I thought gosh, that would really be better because I'm interested in the younger children and families and not that I don't stop loving them when they're in the fourth grade, but I don't want to work with them. So, I called her, and she said, "Yes, the offer was still there." So, I enrolled with five or six others. We started as guinea pigs in the doctoral program in child development/family relations. So, one or two got married and somebody had a baby and I kept going—

PFA: [chuckles]

NW: —and did receive my PhD in June 1963 before we became the University of North Carolina at Greensboro in July. So, I have the only claim, my only claim to fame is that I have the only PhD from WC—

PFA: Yes.

NW: —and I am in the archives [laughs] and in the picture book and didn't do anything to get there but everybody was so excited because this was a new program and so forth and so on. I remember [clears throat] Helen Yoder worked in the chancellor's office and they called to tell her I'd passed the Spanish exam and what have you and I went over there. Chancellor [Otis] Singletary was in a meeting and in Washington. So, Helen called Washington to the chancellor and she said, "She made it. What about the hood?" because they didn't have a hood for Woman's College. [chuckles] So they sent me a hood from Chapel Hill—

[laughter]

NW: —and so, Dr. [John W.] Kennedy, who was then the dean of the Graduate School said he wanted a copy of my diploma to put in the Graduate School. So, my mom found it in a

cedar chest in Statesville and ironed it and sent it to me and I took it over to Dr. Kennedy and he called me later and said it was, it was a diploma from Chapel Hill. They had to borrow one—

[laughter]

NW: —because they didn't have one made so there was a lot of to-do over this degree and, of course, after that, I had the decision to make whether I stayed and taught in child development or I went across the street and they had held my job for me at Curry. So, I told someone it was like trying to decide whether to go from Maine, to Maine or to California. Right across the street. I stayed in child development and worked there until I retired.

Taught there until I retired in '88 and had fun because of the program, I always wanted on campus for us to have the, the elem, the primary school—

PFA: Yes.

NW: —what, they called, my degree is in primary education, which meant then one to three. And I always wanted to work with younger children and I wanted the child development people to work with older so, I did work through a program and because I had been in education, they trusted me. [chuckles] I had a little advantage and worked out a program whereby child development majors could get certified in early childhood and the early childhood majors could get a minor in child development. So, that worked well.

One of my guinea pigs in that program was Mary Martin and Mary and I are still in close touch. Her husband, Tom, had just retired as the first male president of the Student Government [Association], I mean the Alumni Association. And Mary was a tremendous help to me in my move out here to River Landing [retirement community]. So, we kept in touch and it's fun, you know, to keep up with these former students. And Christmastime I still get the cards and the hugs and the brownie points. So, it was, I had just a wonderful career and retired from there in '88. I don't know how much to tell you, you wanted all this? I'm just giving you—

PFA: It's great.

NW: —I'm just giving you the highlights here.

PFA: Yeah!

NW: So, I had, you know, a lot of happy moments and memories and received a lot of the of the whatever you want to call them, brownie points—

PFA: Yeah.

NW: —through the, Alumni Teaching Excellence Award and the Outstanding Alumni—

[Editor's note: The award is called Alumni Distinguished Service Award] and Gladys [Strawn] Bullard Award for service to the university. So, I feel like that nobody that I know had a better career than I did. [chuckles] I was not, I did not get my full professorship because my chief concern was working for—working with undergraduates and seeing that they didn't fall through the cracks. And that's where they were headed because so many people—I had tenure, so I did not worry about tenure and so many of my colleagues did have to worry about tenure—

PFA: Yes.

NW: —and the pressure on them to write and publish and so I remember Jim Watson, who was chairman of the department, asked me one day if I would consider just taking over the undergraduate department and I said I would be delighted. So instead of getting involved in how many brown-eyed children are born in Guilford County in 1968, I spent my time advising and counseling the students and loved it! And reaped many rewards from that. So, I remember I asked my mother one time, I said, "Mom, would you be disappointed in me if stayed at UNCG all these years and never became a full professor?" She said, "I don't even know what you are."

PFA: [laughs]

NW: And I thought, you know, it doesn't really matter [chuckles] as long as you're, as long as you're doing something that's going to help. And the students would come to my office and I'm not meaning this in any negative way about the people who had to be in research and publish, but I happened to be on the University Promotions Tenure Committee for six years.

And my dean, Dean Naomi [Albanese] they wanted me so much to go forward for promotions. And I said, "No, I'm not going to do that." I said, "I know that, you know how they write, how they look at the publishing, I'm not—I've spent too many hours over there evaluating other people and I am not going to do that." She didn't like it and I think Naomi, bless her heart, we were great friends, I think she didn't like it mainly because somebody bucked her and didn't do what she wanted them to do. [chuckles]

Anyway, be that as it may, I retired in '88 and have had a wonderful life ever since traveling, playing bridge, reading, and I enjoyed gardening when I was in my home and so forth. So, decided kind of quickly that it was time for me not have to worry about who was going to cut the grass and wash the windows and put the roof back on when the storms hit—

[laughter]

NW: Rosemary McGee [physical education professor] and I agreed, we came out here and looked and bought an apartment right away. So, that's a brief history of '25 to '88—

PFA: Yes.

NW: —and I know there's some in-between things but—

PFA: How was the transition from women's, Woman's College, one woman—

NW: Woman with an S, W-O-M-A-N-S. Woman's College. [laughs] There are always people who say, "women's." [laughs] The transition, I don't remember it being too difficult. I'm sure there were difficult times—

PFA: Yes.

NW: —we teased Jim Allen about becoming the dean of, no, it was Clarence Shipton who became the dean of men and we said, "He was the dean of man." Because in, in '63, I think we had one or two males, but it's built up, of course, now.

PFA: Yes.

NW: —I thought the transition was smooth.

PFA: Yes.

NW: I'll have to admit I didn't want to do it. I didn't want to lose the Woman's College—

PFA: Yes.

NW: —and there's some who still resent having to lose—

PFA: Yeah.

NW: —the Woman's College. And I think my situation was different because I never left here, and I just went right along with the flow. But, I recall in '63 when my class had a reunion and my classmates could not get over the sign on the wall in the dining room that said, "Do not throw food on the floor." [laughs] And, you know, we had sat at a table and been served when we were students except during the war [World War II] when, during that period of time, each dormitory took turns serving in the dining room. So, for two weeks a semester, my dorm served in the dining room and the other weeks we just sat down, and somebody waited on us. So, my friends could not get over that sign, "Do not throw food" and they said, "What is happening to this place?"

[laughter]

NW: And I said, "Well, it's the same as your, your, your young boys and girls, sons and daughters are going to school." We had some hard times and I'll have to say Jim Allen then became instead of the dean, he became the vice chancellor and it was, he did a marvelous job.

PFA: Yes.

NW: Yeah, just holding things together. He was great with the students—

PFA: Yes.

NW: —and was very good in this transition and, of course, [Chancellor] Jim Ferguson was just wonderful—

PFA: Yes.

NW: —and so the two of them worked very closely together. I give them a lot of credit and I think it went very smoothly. Took a little while to get people used to that. I mentioned Tom Martin a minute—Mary Martin a minute ago.

PFA: Yes.

NW: Her husband Tom was on the first men's basketball team that we had, and he's gotten a lot of publicity over that and then, he, he—He is very fond of the university too.

PFA: Yes.

NW: So, he was one of the first men but, but we had some good men and it grew. Well, I think as rapidly as anyone could except in that period of time. There's still people, and friends of mine, who very much resented the change but I, I guess I did in a way, but I had to see that it was necessary—

PFA: Yes.

NW: —and being, and being in the middle of all of it, I could see how necessary it was—

PFA: Yes.

NW: —so—

PFA: Why do you think it was necessary?

NW: Well, [chuckles] to get the, you know, research money and so forth to support it.

PFA: Yes.

NW: We were, for a long time, everybody thought we were the "little sister" to [the University of North Carolina at] Chapel Hill and [North Carolina] State [University, Raleigh, North Carolina]. Now this, of course, was before we were the sixteen campuses—

PFA: Yes.

NW: —and it was State, Chapel Hill and Carolina who, and State, Chapel Hill and Greensboro that were the three until we got and there were a lot of people who did not think we should have evolved into universities, sixteen universities. But, there again, they needed money and I think the financial part of it has always been a struggle. And I think today [Chancellor] Pat Sullivan realizes that it still is and I guess that's why I said it almost had to be.

PFA: Yes.

NW: And I think we have come a long way under her leadership too. She's not only in the physical appearance of the campus but in the reach, outreach and things that she has helped us go through—

PFA: Yes.

NW: —so, I would say that the transition went as smoothly as anyone could expect. It took a little while to get the men but, with the athletics and that's another thing that I think we had to realize that students nowadays are going where they can go to a basketball game or a soccer game and, of course, we excelled in the soccer and to some degree in the basketball—

PFA: Yes.

NW: —so, here again, Jim Allen led the entourage, which was going for, [chuckles] for Class A.

PFA: Yes.

NW: I don't know. It's just like, you know, I've been on this campus from the time I was sixteen years old to well, not actually on the campus. I am now serving my third or fourth year on the Human Environmental Sciences Foundation Board—

PFA: Oh, my.

NW: —and have been active with the alumni groups so I'm still back and forth and feel much love and respect for this university.

PFA: Yeah, yeah.

NW: Yes.

PFA: One other question: Did—You were there on campus during the Civil Rights Era? Were you not?

NW: Oh, yes.

PFA: How did that—?

NW: Well, of course, we had the streaking and we had a lot of publicity about the, the young student [clears throat] diving nude into the spaghetti pond [chuckles] and had a lot of sit-ins. [Editor's note: In January 1971, two art students designed a pop-up art display in the UNCG Art Gallery. The display consisted of a child's plastic swimming pool full of eighty pounds of cooked spaghetti and meatballs covered with eight gallons of ketchup. Later, a female student jumped nude into the spaghetti and was arrested for indecent exposure.]

Here again, things did not seem to get out of hand and I, I credit Jim Ferguson and Jim Allen again with, with making this go as smoothly as it did. There were lots of, in fact there was some publicity, you know, with the [Greensboro] Sit-ins downtown that the administration on campus was making threats to the students, but that was not true. I mean, you know, during those days I think the press picked up anything they could pick up and when it was printed, it may or may not be accurate, you know.

PFA: Yes.

NW: Sometimes they got a little bit, I started to say, a little bit aggressive and their opinions were not always too accurate as far as I could tell.

PFA: Sure.

NW: So, I would say on a scale from one to ten with adjusting to civil rights, we were kind of at the top—

PFA: Yes.

NW: —probably an eight, you know.

PFA: Yes.

NW: There were some things, I'm sure the administration would have liked to have done differently or had done, but here again, you had to work with the students as well as [unclear]. There were sit-ins outside of the chancellor's door but and I remember one time they went to his front door at 10:00 or 11:00 at night and he invited them in [chuckles] to just come in. So, they didn't get the hard knocks that I think maybe they were looking for. So, I would say it went as smoothly as it could.

PFA: Yes.

NW: We had a few years of upheaval here with one of the chancellors and that kind of made a break in the campus—

PFA: Yes.

NW: —but we soon got over that one. And probably that chancellor was ahead of his time.

PFA: Yes.

NW: And there had been rocky roads. I'm not saying everything was smooth and certainly, after I retired, I wasn't in the middle of all of it. I did work for twelve or fourteen years as advisor to the Student Government Court and I got a good liberal education from the students. [chuckles] As a matter of fact, it got to the point that I thought I'm getting to—I, I, I've got to get out of this. [chuckles] I can't, I can't condone—

[laughter]

NW: —some of the things that are going on right now. And I remember there was one student on the court, oh, there were a lot, and you know, to this day, when they have reunion, and those girls come to see me on Sunday morning.

Last time they had a reunion, I ate dinner with them [coughs) excuse me. I guess about ten of them came and spent the morning with me on Sunday. So, and I've got a scrapbook of letters from students that I wouldn't take anything for. So, I've kept in touch with, with a lot of them.

But there was one in particular and I thought she was the cutest thing and just great. And I thought she must think I'm out in left field because I just can't go along with some of them. And, to make a long story short, when they graduated, she was an art major and the next thing I knew, she had come to my door of my office in child development and said she wanted to come back and get her master's in child development. So, from then on, I was her advisor in child development and she still. I sounds like I'm bragging, and I don't mean to, she still tells me that I changed her whole life, but she is now working with atypical children, special needs children and well, has done has just, just kept in close touch. And I had guests here over the weekend, two couples, and she came out the day they were coming and brought each one a bag of cookies. So, she's still very much, and this is one that I thought I had turned off as an undergraduate, you know—

PFA: Oh dear.

NW: —so, I've had more than my share of rewards from students. Some, we were talking out there about families and I said, "I had no family, no brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews but I have some wonderful friends." And I do. And these two girls that I've just mentioned, plus another two are like my adopted daughters. So, you know, I just—When anybody talks about the university, I just swell with pride—

[laughter]

NW: —and loyalties and love. So—And it was being on the faculty was an honor for me, one that I really enjoyed. And I didn't have the pressures that we didn't then—

PFA: Yes.

NW: —that the faculty, some of the faculty have now.

PFA: Yeah, that's true.

NW: And when I first came here, we had a sit-down dinner every night, not every night. The first of every year, all the faculty, our first faculty meeting was a sit-down meal in one of the dining rooms. When I came here as a student, I think there were 3,000 students and I believe now we are over 14,000. So, I've seen a lot of change—

PFA: Yeah.

NW: —take place during those years. Surely, I couldn't cover all those years in thirty or forty minutes but—

PFA: I appreciate this.

NW: Is there anything else that I—

PFA: No, that's, that's—

NW: —I've just rambled but—

[tape skipped, recording paused]

NW: —back up a little bit. When we were talking about the Golden Chain and I mentioned that Naomi Albanese and I were advisors to the Golden Chain and I was made honorary member of the Golden Chain. See my little golden chain. And [chuckles] the students would go around in white sheets with candles and tap people. Now I don't think they do that anymore, that was back, way, way back in the '60s. And they came to my house one night, one late afternoon and they had on these sheets and they got out of the car and were lighting candles down in the corner of my lot and the little paper boy came to deliver the afternoon paper and they said he took off like a bat out of hell like he'd never seen anybody—

[laughter]

NW: —I never did get an evening paper that day. But they came to the door and, of course, I

knew exactly who it was and tapped me into the Golden Chain, which was a thrill for me. And a lot of these were students who had served on the Court. And so, they, they came in. [chuckles] I was going out that night and I had a chicken in the oven and they came in and fixed their own supper in my house while I went out. So, that was—We were very close group because sponsors, I mean advisors for the Student [Government] Court in those days was not an easy thing. I remember getting out of court one morning at 7:00 and having an 8:00 class. You know, I just stretched out on a couch in the dorm for about an hour and— [laughter]

But those, those were the things that you remember, and I have a poem that I wish I had it, that the Court wrote me. Something about it's 7:00 on Monday night and time for court to begin. There are only nine of us and there really should be ten. No need to call and count the roll for it is quite easy to see that Dr. White is the only one who is not where she should be—

PFA: [laughs]

NW: —and it went on. We, we really, we had a great time. And my mind wandered because I thought of something else when I was talking about the Golden Chain. But my memory of the, of the student connections there was just really special. And so, this little golden chain has made me happy through life. I wear it all the time because I thought I don't know what would have happened to me if I'd gone to Florida State, you know.

PFA: Yes, that's true.

NW: Maybe it'd have been better. I don't know. I don't think it could have been much.

PFA: Yeah. That's great.

NW: So, I don't know, I may think of something else—You want to flip that back—?

[tape skipped, recording paused]

NW: —was my doctoral advisor and we got interested became interested in child care, good child care for the children of employees and so, [chuckles] we went all out and Mr. Connor down in the eastern part of the state built us a double-wide mobile unit for a model child care center on campus.

And we worked with Mr. Kaplan who was an educational supplier in Winston and we thought we had this tremendous [Carter] Child Care Center. And then they had to move it because they needed—We were on the back end of the Curry [School] playground so, they had to move it because they needed that for something else and so they moved us down across from the old Nursery School. Then they had to move us again because the—They built a parking garage there.

PFA: Yes.

NW: So, now it is across the street. But I remember one time after I had retired, I went into, I went for a number of years, for a long time to all the child development staff parties and things. I went in one time and Jim Watson, who was the department chair was talking with Garrett Lange who had been. And they saw me coming and I heard one of them saying, "You tell her." And the other one said, "No, you tell her." And I said, "Don't either one of you bother. I know they're moving the Carter [Child Care] Center again." [laughter] So, neither one wanted to tell me about they were moving us. But, it served a great purpose and still is but, it is not the one at the Curry center.

Now the interesting thing and I think it's very interesting now because I feel like that, that we did this to a great degree back in the late '60s and early '70s and that was when they coordinated the, the early childhood program with child development education. But they now have a certificate, birth through K, and that is a big boomer now. And so, they—Deborah Cassidy is doing a great job with that program. And so that, that's the one at Curry—

PFA: Okay.

NW: —and then the Nursery, the one that was the Nursery School that is now the [Carter] Day Care [Center]. And it needed to be the day care because the Nursery School had the children of parents who could put them anywhere and it was a model and it was a good model—

PFA: Yes.

NW: —but it didn't, it didn't serve the need of the people who needed the care. If that makes sense—

PFA: Oh, yeah, yeah.

NW: —but there were, it was a good program and served it's need then but the day care was—because you could see so many people just crying for good day care centers. And so, we built this with the idea of big industry buying day care and putting it on their property. And we got a little, a little support then and I think it didn't just take off, but I think people are doing it now. Especially hospitals, you know. So, that was—That was a big one for us. But it was not the current one that's in Curry now.

[recording paused]

PFA: Dr. J. Nancy White conducted July 15, 2004.

[End of Interview]