

UNCG CENTENNIAL ORAL HISTORY PROJECT COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Betty Lou Mitchell Guigou and Bobbie Minton

INTERVIEWER: Missy Foy

DATE: May 10, 1991

MF: This is Missy Foy. Today is the 10th of May 1991 and I am in the Alumni House with Betty Lou Mitchell Guigou and Bobbi Minton. I guess the best way to start is some general information. Betty Lou, do you mind if I call you Betty Lou?

BG: No.

MF: Okay, if you could start with some background information about where you were from and when you attended WC [Woman's College of the University of North Carolina]. And then, Bobbie, we'll get some background information from you as well.

BG: I'm from Burlington [North Carolina]. I came all of twenty-one miles to college and that was—really then, I mean, I felt like I was going to a different world. Sure was. And now, what else do you want for background?

MF: When you attended WC.

BG: Oh, when I attended. From '47 to '51.

MF: Okay. And you, Bobbie, you were from?

BM: I was from Greensboro. I graduated from Greensboro Senior High School and came to—

MF: Which is now Grimsley, right?

BM: Right. And came to Woman's College. And I was a town student for all except one semester. I walked to school every morning from south Greensboro and took the bus home at night sometimes at 11:00 [pm], but it was not dangerous at that point to go home on the bus by yourself.

MF: Yes. And you were here from?

BM: From '37 to '41.

MF: And during the time that you were here, Bobbie, there was a lot of events going on in Europe at the time. And do you remember how that atmosphere affected you?

BM: Well, actually up until about '39, I don't—I think we were fairly insulated from the war. And it's surprising how much I didn't know until Katherine Taylor [Class of 1928, dean of women, dean of students, dean of student services and director of Elliott Hall] was going to take a bunch of students to Europe in the summer. And I was trying to go, but finally could not get up enough money and didn't get it—didn't get to go but her group were stranded in Europe.

MF: Oh, no.

BM: And had to come back one at a time in places because I think the ship that they were supposed to come back on was torpedoed or whatever. But at any rate, that was my first real knowledge of what was going on in Europe.

MF: Yes. But then now in retrospect, for Betty Lou then, you attended college after the war was over and looking back, how did the end of the war seem to—? This war, just major war had been fought. How did that seem to affect campus life for you?

BG: Well, we had some returning veterans. In fact, there was a wooden building right beside the Alumni House. I think it was Dr. [Julius I.] Foust's [President] old home.

MF: Right.

BG: Anyway, it was a residence and that's where they lived. And so they were older students, and they were in class with us. And I can see them now going around campus in their navy topcoat or things like that. They wore parts of their uniform. But still there wasn't a lot of—the girls dated fellows who were in service. Some were still in service at the time.

MF: Yes.

BG: As for the war really affecting us, I don't think there was.

MF: Almost like an atmosphere that—

BG: Were—yes.

MF: It was over and it was—well, excuse the pun, but it was history.

BG: And the older—. Well I had two brothers that were in service. Well, they were home. That was about now, the real connection, but—

MF: Okay. And then—

BG: But now, the Korean War [1950-53 war between the Republic of Korea, supported by the United States, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, supported by China and the Soviet Union] started right after—a year or two, didn't it?

MF: Oh, well, some of the events over there, yes.

BG: So—

MF: Dien Ben Phu [climactic confrontation of the first Indochina War between the French Far East Expeditionary Corps and Viet Minh communist-nationalist revolutionaries that took place from March to May 1954] was '51? I think. I may be wrong. I hate to say that. I don't want to say—history major and say the wrong date. [laughs]

BG: [laughs] Yes, it was.

MF: '51 or '52, I think, yes. So there were a lot of events in Southeast Asia starting at that time because Korea was at that time and then Dien Ben Phu was shortly thereafter; maybe it was five years after, but, anyway, a lot of events.

BG: Well, I know like it's—well, not like at Davidson [College, Davidson, North Carolina]. At some of the boys' colleges they had, I guess, it was a type of ROTC [Reserve Officers Training Corps]. A lot of the fellows were in that, whatever it was then.

MF: Okay, yes.

BG: But really, the major thing I think was to have the returning veterans who did go to class.

MF: Right, right.

BG: Female veterans.

MF: Oh, sure, I understood what you—they were in like Army Nurse Corps and—

BG: Yes, or the WAVES [women's division of the United States Navy begun during World War II].

MF: WAVES?

BG: Or WACS [Women's Army Corps].

MF: WACS, right.

BG: In fact, we had one in our class. I'm sure she'll be here. She always comes. And she has said that she would not have been able to go to college if she hadn't had whatever she got from the government to—

MF: She was in WAVES?

BG: GI Bill [Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944 that provided benefits for returning World War II veterans].

MF: They got the GI Bill as well?

BG: Yes.

MF: Oh, okay. I didn't realize that. All right. I thought that was sort of strictly for males. I don't know why I thought that. Okay. What about student life? How would each of you—what kinds of things come to mind when each of you think of student life? Now you were a dorm student, and you were a town student.

BM: Lived in town, yes.

MF: Right, right.

BG: Well, we had to sign in and out every time we left the dorm, and when you went downtown you were your hat and gloves. I guess that was, I say when we left—

BM: We didn't have to do that.

BG: But we had to do that. That was one of the first things they told the freshmen: that when you go downtown you wear your hat and gloves, and we did because if we were from WC. We were supposed to be ladies. And we had—on weekends there were busloads of students going to [University of North Carolina at] Chapel Hill because Chapel Hill always had these wonderful dances—

MF: Football games.

BG: Football games. And there were buses lined up out on Spring Garden Street, and we went down on the weekends. Of course, the boys came too because we always bragged that we were right in the middle of all the eligible males in North Carolina.

BM: All the eligible males—

BG: [North Carolina] State [College, Raleigh, North Carolina], Wake Forest [College, Winston-Salem, North Carolina], and Chapel Hill.

MF: Yes, a good location.

BG: And they really congregated right here.

MF: And they still had busloads going down to Chapel Hill?

BM: Yes. In fact, at the first of the year you had sort of mixers. You know, two or three busloads would come here, and then you would go there.

BG: And they would bring us back. Well then, see the fellows really didn't have cars like they do

now. I mean, if one car would come from Chapel Hill, well it would at least be completely filled with—

BM: With boys. So there really wasn't the transportation, but everybody rode the bus.

MF: Sure.

BG: There were no cars.

MF: There were still—reminiscent of the First World War [major war centered in Europe that began in 1914 and lasted until 1918; involved all the world's great powers; Allies were United Kingdom, France, Russia and eventually the United States; Central Powers were Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy], there was some gas rationing in the Second World War [1939-45 global war eventually forming two opposing military alliances—the Axis were Germany and Japan and the Allies were United States, England, and France], wasn't there?

BG: Oh yes, during the war.

BM: I didn't have a car, so it didn't affect me. [laughs]

BG: Yes.

MF: Oh, right. [laughs] I think there was and other types of rationing as well. I think sugar and milk.

BG: Shoes.

BM: Food.

MF: Food, yes, yes. Bobbie, since you were a town student for a while—during the time that you were a town student, how did you feel as far as your connection to campus? Did you feel a little bit disconnected or—?

BM: Well, most town students say that they did, but actually I didn't because I was a joiner and I got into just about—

BG: I can't find her—the one that you told me. By the time I got there, she was gone.

MF: Oh, that's fine.

BM: I had joined everything from—and, therefore, I think I knew as many people as the people that lived on campus, so I really did not feel the least bit neglected or different.

MF: Yes.

BM: But a lot of town students say they did.

MF: Yes, there was a town student lounge.

BM: Yes.

MF: I think I've heard that was mostly the bridge [card game] room.

BM: Bridge, and girls went down there to smoke.

MF: Oh right, that's right. You were allowed to smoke on campus by that time. I think that occurred the year before you came here, I believe.

BM: I don't know.

MF: I think that was '36.

BM: I don't know because I didn't smoke.

MF: Right, apparently. I remember interviewing somebody who was involved in this big—well, not big—but relatively speaking big, sort of protest where the girls had decided they were going to march into Aycock [Auditorium] and light their cigarettes.

BM: It never happened. No.

MF: And now, Betty Lou, you were a dorm student the whole time, right?

BG: Yes.

MF: Do you remember what the girls who lived on campus all the time, what their relationship was with the town student population?

BG: Well, my freshman roommate happened to be a Greensboro girl and—. No, no, I'm mistaken. She was sophomore. She roomed in our dorm freshman year and one semester sophomore year. And then she moved back home and so—one of my classmates, we were in several lab classes together, was a Greensboro student so she moved in with me so then we were roommates. So really, there were quite a few girls in my freshman dorm who were Greensboro girls who just lived on campus one year. I don't know if that was to get to know people or what, but the ones I knew were fairly active in activities on campus.

MF: Yes, yes.

BM: Well, I lived on campus free of charge.

BG: How'd you do that? [laughs]

BM: Rita DuBois [now Fitzgerald, Class of 1941, 1946 Master of Science in home economics education] was in the home management house for home economics, and so the semester that she was supposed to be—or she was supposed to be there six or eight weeks—and so her roommate asked Miss [Katherine] Taylor, who was dean of women—

BG: Or something—I've forgotten.

BM: —if I could come and stay at the dorm while Rita was in the home management house. And Miss Taylor allowed me to do it. I paid for my meals but I [unclear]—and then Rita stayed an extra four weeks, and so I lived the whole semester on campus free of charge. [laughs] Otherwise I couldn't have gone.

MF: Oh, that's interesting. There was a lot of that, I guess, both during the time that you were in school here, Bobbie, and I guess still some of the time you were here in school here also, Betty Lou. There was a lot of—if you had a problem with anything associated with your time at Woman's College, you could usually go to the administration and they would work something out.

BM: Oh very—

BG: Oh, yes, you could—we respected them and held them for—but we weren't afraid of them, I don't think.

BM: We would—it was a very personal relationship.

MF: Yes.

BG: Yes.

BM: I mean I knew Miss [Harriet] Elliott [history and political science faculty, dean of women], and I knew Katherine Taylor as friends.

BG: I knew Miss Taylor and—

MF: Well, now what was Miss Elliott like? I like to ask people their impressions of her and then the stories they remember.

BM: Well, I always felt like she was so smart that I was almost afraid to talk to her. [laughs] That was my impression. But yet I felt that she was interested in me, and I was not afraid of her. It was just that when you are in the presence of—

BG: Greatness.

MF: She was quite a lady?

BM: Well, yes. Well right after that—I think it might have been while I was still here that she

was asked to come up to Washington [DC] by Franklin Roosevelt [32nd President of the United States] to—it was right after I graduated—to Washington to be on his cabinet [to serve on the National Advisory Defense Commission in 1940] or whatever.

MF: And she had quite an impressive list of accomplishments.

BG: Then she had just come back to campus when I was here, and then Miss Anderton, Laura [biology professor]—

MF: Anderton?

BG: Yes, she had—I can see her now. She was counselor in one of the dorms, and she wore one of the WAVES coats [laughs], top coats. I can see her now going across campus in that thing.

MF: She's giving a lecture—

BG: Lecture. Yeah, I saw her. Well, she's over there.

BM: Tomorrow?

MF: Today? Oh was it today?

BG: Today, yeah, I saw her in Elliott Center.

MF: Right. Yeah, I think on the women's study?

BM: No, she was talking about endorphins.

MF: Oh, okay.

BG: Biology.

BM: Yes, yes.

MF: I think she's also giving— talking with Jodi Bilinkoff [history professor] about the women's study.

BM: I was a biology major, so I saw her a lot.

MF: [laughs] Also, I'd like to ask each of you why you picked WC when you were—when you came off to college?

BG: Well, I was the first one in—the only one in my family to go to college. Well, no, no, my brother, one brother, went to Elon [College, Elon, North Carolina] as a day student. And then my sister had gone to nurses' training. Well, that's when you didn't go to college before.

And it was the college, I'm sure, and, of course, the reputation. And then one of the neighborhood girls was the—attending school—she finished in '47, and she finished it. And I think I was sort of a homebody, and it wasn't too far from home. But even then it had such a good reputation that so many people that would talk to me about it, it would be NCCW. "Oh, you're going to NCCW."

MF: Right. It was the North Carolina College for Women.

BG: Right. The name had not been changed for very long.

MF: For very long, yes. And then, Bobbie, now why did you?

BM: Well, I really wanted to go to Randolph-Macon [College, Ashland, Virginia] because a friend of mine was going to Randolph-Macon, and I had a scholarship up there. But that was very expensive, and about a week before school started, my mother said, "Bobbie, we really cannot give you the money to go to Randolph-Macon." And so I called on the phone to Miss [Mildred] Newton [secretary to the registrar], who was the director of admissions, and she said, "Well, just give me fifteen minutes, and I'll call you back as to whether you're admitted." And she called the high school and they [laughs] said I was a good student, so she called me back and she said, "Come right over and fill out your papers. You are admitted." [all laugh] And after I got here, I was glad to come here.

MF: Why were you glad? What kinds of things—?

BM: Because I loved it. As soon as I got here, I loved it. I thought it was just wonderful. See, I even get teary eyed even now. [laughs]

BG: Well, I can imagine growing up here in Greensboro, you see women passed through somewhere else.

BM: And two of my friends were going here.

BG: And that's the way—

BM: As I said, as soon as I got here—

MF: Yes.

BM: I was very, very happy.

MF: Also there were a lot of girls from up North attending school during the time—

BM: Oh, yes. Extremely.

MF: And what kind of impressions did you have of some of the Northern girls?

BM: Well, most of the ones were very, very brave, that I knew. I mean, we were small town and they did well. I was really surprised at the—as many Northerners were here. I wasn't expecting that.

MF: Yes, yes.

BM: And it was cheaper. I don't know how it is now, but at that time it was cheaper for them to come here than attend the state university where they were.

MF: It's even more so that way now. It's cheaper for someone from New Jersey to attend school in North Carolina as an out-of-state student than to attend school there as an in-state student.

BM: We had an awful lot from New York and New Jersey.

MF: Now, I guess at the time, Bobbie, that you were here it was—there were still eleven grades in most of the North Carolina schools.

BM: Yes, and they would all have twelve grades, and we would have eleven and so for the first time, I had to work when I got to college.

MF: Right. They have one more year of education and were a year older.

BM: [laughs]

BG: They were, like she said, they all seemed to be extremely smart.

MF: I guess it would take a certain student to—a certain type of student to leave home and go to school so far away.

BM: Well, until I got to UNCG [The University of North Carolina at Greensboro], WC, I didn't realize what a good reputation this institution had. It was very well known up in the North, Northeast.

MF: Right.

BM: And it was considered one of about the four best women's colleges in the United States.

MF: Right.

BM: Well, particularly in certain areas. The schools—a whole bunch of them were very outstanding. Oh, see, I didn't know that. A high school student—I didn't know the college was that well known.

MF: Oh, that leads me to another question I was going to ask. When Woman's College became coeducational, a lot of alumni that I speak with say they felt something was lost. And then a lot of other alumni or alumni that I speak with feel that something was gained, and so I'm

wondering for each of you what your impression is?

BM: At that time I was in the Office of Admissions. I came back here and worked for twenty-seven years in the Office of Admissions. And I was very upset when we became coeducational because Chapel Hill put out this [laughs] proclamation, I would say, that they would accept only two hundred girls the first year. And so, of course, they wanted only the very best, so that, in itself, makes people want to go somewhere.

MF: Right, that kind of competition.

BM: So we felt as though they were taking the cream of the crop off of our students because we had previously gotten all those brilliant students, and we were very upset with their attitude.

MF: Right.

BM: How they said we'll take only the very best. So I didn't like it when they first—I didn't want it to be coed.

MF: Right. Is there something special that you feel you received in your education at a women's school?

BM: Oh, yes really, because we were trained to be the leaders, and we were—as soon as the boys got on campus, that began to change.

MF: Yes, yes.

BM: I think it was very different when it was coed; I mean, when it was a women's college.

MF: Did it bring a new feeling of competition for women attending school to have men in classrooms with them?

BM: You see, I was not in the classroom at that point. I was in admissions, but for the first few years of when we became coed, most of our men students were either in the art department or the music department.

MF: Right, right.

BM: We had very few in liberal arts or sciences. And so we had mostly music majors and arts majors, that sort of thing then. I don't mean to be taking over the conversation.

MF: Oh, no.

BG: Oh, no. I just agree with you that I think that the leadership training or encouragement that we got we would not have gotten it if there had been men students. And I felt like it was all I heard of from the head of the student government offices, and everybody became men when it did go coed. And, I don't know, I sort of liked it all-women. I think you could develop

your leadership ability. You didn't have to—I don't know. It wasn't that—I don't know exactly how to say it. In class, there wasn't that—you weren't trying to impress the boy or act dumb so he would—I just—. And there were plenty of boys on weekends. It wasn't that you—it hampered your social life.

MF: Right. Oh, there was expected female behaviors when you didn't have to—

BG: Yes, yes. We could be ourselves. And I don't mean appearance wise or anything because—

MF: Right.

BG: Because we had to dress in skirts and all that.

MF: There were certain expected behaviors, right?

BG: We couldn't go on campus in pants and all, but I think—

MF: There's a certain sort of social expectation.

BM: —of a woman when a man is present.

MF: Right. I think a lot of that in our society has changed in the last ten, fifteen years, but it was quite true still, still until say around late '50s, early '60s.

BM: Are there any coed dorms on campus?

MF: Yes.

BM: Someone was asking me. I didn't know.

MF: Yes, yes. There's Coit [Residence Hall]. It became coed.

BG: Miss [Laura] Coit [Class of 1896, college secretary, general assistant to the president] would turn over in her grave. [laughs]

BM: Quite a few would.

BG: Several, several times.

MF: I don't know if that's still coed. That was the first coed dorm on campus, and that occurred in '85, I believe. I may be wrong, but I believe that was '85 that occurred. And the graduate student dorm, of course, has always been slightly coed, but that's on a different level. Phillips-Hawkins [Residence Hall] is one building, but the dorm is sort of divided, and it's never been a true—never been a truly coeducational dorm. The only thing that they share is a lobby.

BM: And really, the first time I was aware of men visiting rooms, I guess maybe that was before it became co-ed. That really—I didn't believe that.

MF: Do you know anything about Mary Foust [Residence Hall], the residential college?

BM: Yes.

MF: Okay, now, that's always been coed, but on a different level than Coit.

BM: That's always been coed, yes.

MF: I'm not quite sure exactly how it works, there but that's always been a coeducational atmosphere, yes. And as far as men being able to visit in women's rooms, that didn't happen until late '60s—maybe '69. And there was a rule about it. You had to have one foot on the floor and the door at least halfway opened. Well, you could—it doesn't take too much thought to figure out what the idea was there.

BM: Yes.

BG: Yes.

MF: [laughs] Also, I don't know how active either one of you have been in the—with the Alumni Association, but I wonder if you are aware of some of the controversy that's been going on the past year or two.

BG: Yes. Well, I've just gone off the board [member of reunion class committee] so—

MF: Oh, okay.

BG: I hope it will be settled. I think they're spending too much time on that, and they're magnifying things to be emphasizing. And we have always—I mean, we used to raise our own money. I worked for the annual giving door-to-door canvassing and all that. And when we—the money came here. Our budget was always met, and then the rest was always given to the college. I never did quite understand, even after the money went to one central place, why it was that our budget could not be met when the alumni raised—I mean, sent in more money than—. It would have covered our budget and had excess, and yet our budget couldn't be met. But I really appreciate the work that the people have put into it who have been trying to draw us together because I know how much time we have spent.

MF: Yes.

BG: And I just don't know if we go independent—we're going to be competing for the same monies for both places.

MF: Do you see some trouble with that?

BG: Yes, I do.

MF: So even though they say the situation—

BG: It may be that we have to go independent. That may be the only way we can survive.

MF: So even though this—there's supposed to have been a settlement—the feeling I get from—I get more and more of a feeling that people still feel there's unsettled issues.

BG: I think maybe the settlement was reached just to—that they worked on it so long and—

MF: Just to get it over with?

BG: Yes, yes. I think they were completely worn out, and I don't know what will happen. We'll just have to—

MF: What kind of—?

BG: Wait and see.

MF: What kinds of thoughts do you have, Bobbie?

BM: Well, I sort of agree with her. She probably knows a lot more about it than I do, although I read all about it.

BG: It's hard to understand how we paid for this building, gave it debt free to the university, and yet, until last year, the whole downstairs was off limits to us. It was developed. They kept encroaching on us from there. And it's hard to make—especially the older ones, who this has always been like home to think, well, we don't even own it. Of course, I understand, it's state property.

MF: Yes. But they got sort of a feeling of betrayal?

BG: Yes, yes and—but I think everybody has worked hard to try to reach an agreement, and I sincerely hope they do.

MF: Yes.

BG: I don't know how—well, it—and there will be money being spent from the university and from us to raise money and yet we are going to be competing for the same dollars from a lot of alumni.

MF: Yes. I guess also I'd like to ask each of you what you see for the future of the school. Bobbie, I guess you—what do you see?

BM: [laughs] Well, I'm very happy. I think it's certainly growing. As I said, I was there for

twenty-seven years in admissions.

MF: Right.

BM: And I came through the beginning coeducational and the beginning of integration, and I saw lots and lots and lots of changes. I think for a time the scholarship went down, down, down, but then started back up and I hope that it's—I hope the very best for it.

MF: Before I ask you what you see for the future, there's one question I think I had an oversight with for Bobbie here. Since you worked in admissions during the time that the school integrated, I wonder what kinds of issues came up in the admissions office when applications would come in for black students?

BM: Well, we bent over backwards to be fair.

MF: Yes.

BM: And, of course, very soon after integration we were told that we had to admit more and more blacks but actually—

MF: Oh, I know the type of permits people really noticed. But this is all as far as integration goes. That's what my thesis was in—school integration. This is all stuff that everybody knows.

BM: Everybody knows. We had to admit students who were not qualified.

MF: Right.

BM: But we did the best we could [phone rings] because we had to have black students [phone rings], and maybe they heard us in admissions. [laughs] Even though I had been there for a while and had seen all the good, wonderful changes that we had made, really made, to see our level of scholarship go down because it definitely went down.

MF: Right. So how—I know it was quite an issue to grapple with and how would you decide who to admit and so forth. And I suppose there must have been just, just dozens of meetings trying to—

BM: Well, actually, we did admit all those who were clearly admissible. And then the ones who were borderline and who were clearly inadmissible, we rejected. And then there was this great cloud in the middle that we agonized over and had meetings and meetings and meetings.

MF: And so did you usually—I suppose I may be wrong, but I guess I would assume then from that point, first you admit the ones who were clearly admissible and then from that point you would try to select a certain number? After a few years that one had said you had to admit more black students. Then suppose you had to admit more of the gray number in your thing, and they said, "Well, you know, maybe we should—"

BM: Well, not exactly that because—you're always able to admit because you always have people who, after about four tries, you can't clear but one school.

MF: Oh, yes, that's right.

BM: We over admit so you just—we just try to take the ones who you thought had a chance—

MF: Right.

BM: —of being successful.

MF: Okay. Do the best you can?

BM: Do the best we can.

MF: Okay.

BG: You know, I'm supposed to be somewhere.

MF: And I was just about to finish too. And I was going to ask you, briefly I guess, what you see for the future?

BG: I know growth is a good way to measure something, but I really hate to see the campus getting so large and, well, it's just growing so fast. I guess I want it to stay small and maybe more of the personal—. It's just getting so large, but that's the way the animal grows, I guess. [laughs]

MF: Right.

BG: You see all this area—it's just getting so big. I hope it can keep the same feeling that it's had all these years.

MF: I hope so as well.

BG: And what Bobbie was saying—I agree with her too that I really don't think we need to get into engineering. I think we should remain a good, strong liberal arts—.

MF: Yes.

BG: Be known for that because you can't be tops in every field.

MF: Right.

BG: [unclear]

MF: Okay, well, thank you both very much.

BM: Well, thank you. I hope we were of some help.

[End of Interview]