

## UNCG CENTENNIAL ORAL HISTORY PROJECT COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Susannah Thomas Watson

INTERVIEWER: Missy Foy

DATE: February 7, 1991

[Begin Side A]

MF: This is Missy Foy. It is the 7<sup>th</sup> of February 1991 and I am in the home of Susannah Thomas Watson. Let's see. So you're from Wadesboro, [North Carolina] originally, right?

SW: Yes.

MF: And that's the county seat of Anson.

SW: Right.

[telephone rings]

MF: Let me stop this. Okay. And we were saying where you were from and then you attended Woman's College [of the University of North Carolina, now The University of North Carolina at Greensboro] from 1935 to 1939.

SW: Yes.

MF: Okay. And if you could talk a little bit about student life, sort of generally.

SW: All right. Well, it was a woman's college and that fact dominated everything except that for a good many of the students, the absence of the male was as much of a factor in their lives as might have been the case if it had been a coed school. It was a different emphasis entirely. But for a lot of girls, meeting boys or men or getting an invitation to UNC—over to Chapel Hill, or Davidson [College], or not so much Duke [University] then, as Davidson and [North Carolina] State College and [unclear]. But then there was a large group who practically never had a date and made their social life completely with other women. In fact, that was a good bit of the social life of all of us. And I was certainly of the number that didn't have any multitude of dates. Anything but that. And I didn't really want them because I was too involved in what was happening there on campus.

It was a lively place to be, really. It may sound strange, but it was dominated by—well, all of us were poor, but the girls from the North seemed to have more money than

we did. I don't know if they really did, but they seemed to have it. So the [Great] Depression [a severe worldwide economic depression that took place during the 1930s] was very much a part of our lives, but because everybody was poor, you didn't really get hung up about it. Social life would be involved in these clubs that I told you about. And when I—the societies didn't mean a thing to me. But they did to a lot of people. They really did. I went to the dances, but—and I went to probably a meeting if I had to, but it wasn't anything I ever—they bored me to death. But, there were other—the International Relations group there, who—the Interfaith Council, the YW[CA], these things were very important to me because they were all involved in social relationships and I just—I had a real interest in that and came to school with one. So it wasn't something that just burgeoned. Of course, it burgeoned, but it wasn't as if I hadn't had any exposure before—

MF: Right.

SW: — that because I certainly had. And a lot of social life would be tied in with that.

I'm suddenly thinking about things that the Y did and International Relations groups did. They would bring in—you'd have seminars and there'd be students from other campuses who'd come over and you'd meet people that felt like you did and you'd talk about subjects together. It was fun. A lot of fun. And then you might follow up with you being invited over for a date or something later, but—or it might not. And you know that wasn't the object of it. Now, the beginning of the year, there were—and I think the Y sponsored those, but I'm not sure. We had busses that would take a group of us over to another campus and it would be a structured afternoon dinner—supper, rather; a picnic kind of thing and a dance afterwards and then we'd be brought home. Well, that was done for the purpose of introducing us to people and having some sort of exposure with social life.

And the person responsible for getting that sort of thing going on our campus was Harriet Elliott [history and political science professor, dean of women, public servant, political figure].

MF: Oh, yes?

SW: She was a tremendous influence for—oh, the place was pretty bleak—the dormitories were, when she got there, and she was able to get women like Laura Cone [Class of 1910] interested in getting the dormitories fixed up so they didn't look like battlements.

MF: Yes.

SW: And get the parlors, as they were called, with new draperies and—re-covered. And it was just great.

Now, we were talking about—then I wanted to mention a lot of social activities took place—and I may be repeating myself—with women groups. And it improved as time went on, and we all got terribly interested—not all of us, by any means, but some of us—in what was happening in Europe, because you see, by '37 that was a real ferment, and I remember so well walking with a friend of mine from Connecticut. She was supposed to go to Radcliffe [College], I believe, but money kept her from it. And we

were just—I caught up with her or she with me and we were walking down toward Spencer [Residence Hall]. I was—neither one of us lived in Spencer, but I remember very well exactly where I was, and I looked at her. We were talking about—I think that was when [Adolf] Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia, but I'm not sure. [Editor's note: Germany invaded Czechoslovakia on March 15, 1939.] History major, and can't tell you to save my life. But I looked at her and there were tears in her eyes and for the first time I realized she was a Jew. And it floored me, because I had never had any—I didn't distinguish which sounds like I was really about as naive a country bumpkin as you can come upon. But it made an impression because it just hit me: this bores home.

MF: Yes.

SW: And it was all sort of theory until then. As interested as I was in it, well, here was one of my really dear friends and a Jew and was just as upset as she could be on a personal basis.

But, the war certainly influenced us before we finished school. It did not influence us as a freshman or a sophomore. But people, I mean, they would be enough—there were marvelous speakers that came to the campus, and that was something that was really emphasizing, a lot of people went. I don't mean—I'm not talking about the mob scene, because the mob scene was never anywhere except in the dormitory. But for people who really were sort of on their toes and wanted to know what was going on, the various sponsored lectures that took place—Aycok [Auditorium]—in small groups, really were a tremendous factor. And that's a social thing also.

Then I want to mention faculty. Faculty-student relations if you wanted it, could be very close.

MF: Yes.

SW: And for me, it was one of the greatest things that happened because I had some very warm faculty friendships and maybe I'd be invited to a faculty home for waffles on Sunday night. Or I remember going on an Easter when we didn't have anything—we didn't have any holiday. I went to the sunrise service—the Moravians—with a faculty member and she took two of us over. We got over there in time for the sunrise.

MF: Oh, my. That's early.

SW: Yes. But there were—there was a lot of that that went on, if you wanted it and faculty were interested in doing it. Now most faculty were—well, I won't say most, but there were a lot of women faculty members who had never married. And really, they were remarkable women. And made—oh, they made such a—they had such an impact because they were interested in students. They didn't have any children or husbands and so they gave more of themselves. Not just academically, but socially.

MF: Yes. Do you remember some of the faculty?

SW: Oh, yes, I certainly do. Bernice Draper [history professor]. I know you've heard her

name. She—

MF: I have a fellowship in her name.

SW: Really? Well, that's great. She and I—

MF: It's the Draper-Gullander-Largent [Editor's note: Graduate Fellowship named for history professors Bernice Draper, Magnhilde Gullander, and Vera Largent].

SW: That's great. Well, Miss Largent was one of my friends. But Bernice and I became such close friends that—

[information redacted at request of interviewee]

SW: Mildred Harris [health professor] was a person who was so interested in students. She taught hygiene, which was about—done about as [unclear] and without any—oh, well, I think about it; it was just perfectly ridiculous how everything that was important was skirted. Then, for me, there was a man and his wife, they were so nice to me, Dr. [Leonard B.] Hurley. He was an English professor. Then Helen Ingraham [biology professor]. Then there's one, I don't want to waste your time. Maybe I'll remember it later, but right this second her name has left me and that's just silly. She would—she and Bernice Draper bought a house together and lived in it for years and years and years.

MF: I can't think who that would be.

SW: Well, I'll be able to tell you in a minute. She taught French. I know very well who it is. It's just—I've just pulled a blank, but—

MF: I can think—yes—but I can't think who it was. Yes, I think I know who you're talking about.

SW: Katherine Taylor [Class of 1928, French professor, dean of women, dean of students, dean of student services] was so interested in students. She, at that time, was a house mother and taught French. Then for me, there was a woman that I had a very close relationship to and that was Wilmina Rowland, who was brought on campus as a director of religious activities and taught Bible. She was excellent. She was—she had a doctorate from Yale [University], the first woman to get a doctorate in divinity at Yale

MF: Oh, wow!

SW: And I was her secretary and she had a great influence on me. So I was in and out of her apartment which was over on Walker Avenue.

MF: Yes, a lot of the faculty at that time stayed living very close to the—

SW: Very close by. Yes. That's all I can think of just at this moment. Oh, Miss [Louise] Alexander [political science professor].

MF: Oh, yes.

SW: Terrific person. To be in a class with her was just spellbinding. And she was an anglophile if there ever was one. And when the Duke of Windsor—I don't want to say resigned, but I can't think of a better word at the moment—abdicated, yes—abdicated the throne. [Editor's note: King Edward VIII abdicated the British throne on December 11, 1936.] She had the radio on and tears in her eyes and called—a number of us just clustered around her for that event and just forgot all about classes and just stayed there with her and we were all just—it was just a tremendous thing that was going on and she made it so dramatic. But then, she made everything that was important to her dramatic. She was quite a Democrat and a—you've probably heard that from somebody else. She taught government and she taught it with passion.

MF: Yes, I've heard similar—

SW: Then Dr. [Walter Clinton] Jackson [chancellor from 1934 to 1950] had a personal relationship with us. It was just a—we thought we were an enormous class—I mean, not class, but campus—because there were twenty-two hundred of us and it was one of the largest women's colleges in the country. And now twenty-two hundred sounds like nothing. But it was big, and yet Dr. Jackson—we were known. Faculty knew you. I don't think I was ever in a class where I wasn't known. Doesn't that seem strange?

MF: Yes, that's—yes, it does, because that's quite unlike my college experience.

SW: Of course.

MF: One question I guess I'd asked you earlier when the tape wasn't working. [chuckles] There was a great difference between the dorm student life and the town student life.

SW: Very different. Very different. The town students had what was called the town students' room and I believe it was in the basement—it was in the basement—I believe it was in the basement of the Administration Building [now the Foust Building].

MF: Yes.

SW: Well, I'm surprised I remembered it. But the town students stayed to themselves and we pretty much stayed to ourselves, particularly during your first two years. But as you got more on campus, I mean, everybody got to know each other better and classes got smaller and yet, I was—Emily and I—Emily [Harris] Preyer [Class of 1939] and I were friends, but then she was a friend of everybody, so I don't think I had any particular [laughs] claim on that. She was just a grand person. [Dorothy] Dot Truitt [Class of 1939] was a day student in my class. But really, we didn't—we really didn't know each other.

MF: Yes. The dorm students, I guess, were more involved in campus life.

SW: Oh, decidedly. And the town students had their own—they'd been through Greensboro High School together and they just—it was the most natural thing in the world and nobody attempted to make it different that I have any recollection of.

MF: Yes. Nobody sought to force the town students into campus life.

SW: No, or us into them. I mean, it just—if you happened to end up with the same interest, you would have a relationship, but then that was—no, there really was very little. And sometimes students moved on campus for their senior year and then you'd get to know them better.

MF: I wanted to backtrack just a little bit. There was an organization that you had mentioned called the International Relations Club. And what did—what was that for?

SW: Well, that actually became an important aspect of campus through Billie Rowland's efforts. She was a very socially conscious person. She saw religion as very much a part of life as it's lived. It was not a cathedral experience, so far as she was concerned. She was a—I'm sure she was a devout person, but that was not—her interest was more in—in relationships and she saw religion as a way of bringing together people in understanding. She was just as involved in racial relations and trying to help that and sort of wake us up, as she was in international relations. And she was such an intellectual person that faculty became interested. And whereas, traditionally, faculty didn't have much interest in religious activities on the campus, and there were primarily denominational groups, like there was a Methodist group and a Presbyterian group, Baptist. I've forgotten what the names of them were now. Episcopal church had the Saint Mary's house, which did attract—that—I, being Episcopalian, I knew more about it than I did about the others.

But I think Billie set that campus on fire. And she—the International Relations Club, I don't think it amounted to anything before that, but with faculty—well, Mereb Mossman [sociology professor, dean of instruction, dean of the college, dean of faculty, vice chancellor for academic affairs]—I was forgetting her. Well, she was a terrific influence and Mereb had come from China, I believe in '37. She and I became devoted friends, also, that lasted the rest of her life. But she worked a great deal in the international aspect, and the most important thing that groups did was to—and the YW was way involved in all of this—was to sponsor International Relations Weekend, where students were brought in from seven or eight different campuses for the weekend and there were seminars by students and by faculty and by the visiting—usually visiting people that were brought in.

So, I said "club" just because I was getting warmed up in the subject. I think I should have said, "International Relations Affairs" or "International Affairs" were so emphasized. But it was primarily instigated by Billie Rowland and Mereb Mossman and Bernice Draper and I can't this moment think of a man in that—a male faculty member—but I'm sure there was. Oh, and another faculty member who was so involved with students was Dr. [Key L.] Barkley, he was a psychologist. And he was so generous with

his time. He taught me more about human relationships than I ever learned—and male-female relations—than I ever learned in a hygiene class, because again, it was the Y, usually, that would sponsor them. And these would be Sunday evening discussions. And then they'd always end up with inevitable cocoa and cookies. [both laugh]

But those—then, the—in the racial relations, that was an interesting thing. Dr. Jackson was chairman, I think, of an interracial commission in Guilford County. And he was academically interested, but he, being political also, he was scared to death every time the students got involved in any way in race relations because it would go right back to the legislature and the legislature might cut our appropriations. And I have a lot more sympathy now for his caution than I did at the time. I loved Dr. Jackson, but I didn't—I felt like he was scared. And I hate to put that on a tape because I thought the world of him.

MF: Yes, well, that wasn't an uncommon feeling.

SW: No, no. Of course, it wasn't uncommon. My father felt the same way. He was in the legislature and I think I scared him to death. [laughs]

MF: What kinds of things were going on on campus with the students and all as far as these racial relations?

SW: Well, we went over to Chapel [Hill]—I had my first conversations with black men in college. I'd never—that is, on an equal basis. I had never had any conversation with a black person except as he was a servant.

MF: Oh, okay.

SW: Now, that's a really—that sounds strange today, but of course, there were no blacks on campus. And there were—I remember going over to a Presbyterian church where there was a very liberal minister to an interracial day. And I had never had a meal with a black person until I was in college. But I didn't have one on our campus. I went—I was on another campus.

MF: Do you remember what campus?

SW: I guess Chapel Hill.

MF: Oh, okay, yes.

SW: Well, I mean, in the town of Chapel Hill. I—these things make an impression and yet, you can get kind of vague about them, too. But there were black students who came to something like an International Relations weekend or a peace—we were very much concerned about peace and that was—I remember on Armistice Day [November 11<sup>th</sup>], there was a sunrise service on Armistice Day to—in the name of peace. And you'd stand out there in the cold and the fog in November and it made quite an impression. But I jumped the subject, instead of staying on racial relations.

MF: No, well, that's okay.

SW: But all these things that now seem to be taken for granted, were just such an eye opener. And you had to do them almost in spite of yourself because you had all your inhibitions from the mores you'd grown up with, and then you had this feeling that that was all wrong and you'd be trying to accommodate yourself to where you were intellectually, but socially, you were still a Neanderthal woman. [laughs] No. That would be wrong because they didn't know anything about race, but you were certainly a little Wadesboro girl.

MF: And you say Dr. Jackson, you think, was chairman of a committee—

SW: I know he was because—

MF: Oh, okay.

SW: — I went down to the courthouse to attend some of the meetings.

MF: What kinds of things were going on then?

SW: Well, you know, it's funny. I can't really remember a specific thing.

MF: Right. But just generally, what was going on?

SW: Well, it was to try to—it was all to get better understanding of black people, both ways, and then for blacks to understand whites better. That's what it was all about. And Guilford County had several—well, it had A&T [North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State College] and Bennett [College]. They were—so you had a campus—if you did anything with the campuses you would have some contact there. Now I had more contact with Bennett than I ever had with A&T. I guess that's because that's because it was a woman's—it was women. It was easier. But the fact of the discrepancies in the schools, the dominance of the sharecropper in North Carolina, the prejudice—I remember there was a man named Kirby. I think I'm right. He was a—from away, but he had been involved with blacks and whites working—well, there was a lot of emphasis on blacks and whites working together to improve agriculture—to improve the sharecropper's situation, or do something with the poll tax. It's sort of coming back to me now. But those were issues. And segregated schools were an issue because the black schools were just so inferior. But I don't think anybody was particularly talking about there ought to be one school system as the fact they were talking about that the black schools had to be brought up to be equal.

MF: Right, okay.

SW: Am I giving you any idea of what—?

MF: Yes. I was wondering just like what was going on that would make—that would, like,

create a racial relations committee and create some feeling that, on Dr. Jackson's part, that he needed to do something. You know what I'm saying? What brought that issue onto campus?

SW: Well, I don't think he brought it onto campus. I think Billie Rowland brought it onto campus.

MF: Okay, yes.

SW: And he would—but already—I don't want to knock—I'm not trying to downplay him in any way.

MF: No. I realize that.

SW: He was a terrific person. But as I said in the beginning, he was for these things intellectually and academically, but practically speaking, he was hesitant.

MF: Hesitant. Yes.

SW: But what a person like Billie was trying to do, was to develop understanding, which is the first place you have to start. Communication. It didn't really make much difference what you talked about, as long as you were communicating something as equals—yes, as equals instead of talking to an inferior. And I had—my relations with blacks had always been that they were inferior. Even though my parents were very forward thinking people, we were still part of the mores of our society. And I say, Dr. Jackson wasn't a bit more afraid than my father was. [laughs] And yet, he was very much for their rights. He was a country lawyer and he was always advocating equal treatment under the law. But for carrying it any further—

MF: Right. Yes. Then you got into a whole new—

SW: You got into a whole kettle of fish that we just weren't prepared to handle then. The [American] Civil War was just too close to us. I thought it was so far away, but after I've gotten some age on me, I've realized that some of these people who would get so upset about this, that and the other, they were really too close to it.

MF: Yes. I don't mean to jump around on topics, but—

SW: Well, I think you need to. I don't mind at all.

MF: But what about Student Government [Association]?

SW: Well, Student Government was—that's, again, Harriet Elliott. She just did a tremendous thing about bringing out Student Government. She was just so for it. We got the Judicial—now, I'm not sure—I'm certain we had rudiments of these things before. I mean, everything didn't happen while I was there. That's absurd. But a lot did happen

because people like Harriet Elliott and Billie Rowland and—made a tremendous difference on that campus. Really did. And, of course, they were reflecting the times. [President Franklin Delano] Roosevelt was a revolution. And they were all—and Harriet Elliott was on first name terms with him. So naturally, she'd bring that sort of enthusiasm to the campus and she imbued in the students who were involved in Student Government, a great sense of democracy and representation and collective thinking.

MF: Yes, yes. Her reputation's still—[unclear]

SW: Yes, right. And of course, she opened up that campus socially. I mean, we were—before I left, there was far more freedom for students than there'd been when I got there. Now of course, that just kept on growing.

MF: Oh, sure. Sure.

SW: Kept on growing. But she really was. She really was a pioneer.

MF: Before I forget, I see one thing written on my paper here that I want to make sure I ask you about. Well, several things. One of them is with the Depression, some people have told me that they were allowing some men to attend classes as day students. [Editor's note: men students attended the college for the academic year 1932-1933.]

SW: That's correct. But I have no more impression of them than a baby. [MF laughs] I don't think I was in a class with a one ever.

MF: Okay. All right. We'll go on to another one, then.

SW: That did not last the four years. I think it was true, maybe, when I was a freshman or sophomore. But I'm not sure about that. I say I had no impression of them either way.

MF: Yes, okay.

SW: Oh, and we always regarded them as sort of—yes, you would see them in the Game Room. Now that was something Harriet Elliott did. She had a room down in Spencer on the basement floor and it was one of my jobs I had. I was paid to supervise that game room one year and it was—and after supper, we had a nickelodeon and it was free. I don't remember how in the world we had it cranked, because—I mean, it wasn't illegal. It just was free for us and you—women danced with each other. That's how we all learned the new steps. Now that sounds funny now, but there wasn't a thing funny about it. We just did. I can remember some of the best dance partners I ever had in my life were women I danced with right down there. But then—Now it was my job—if you knew a man—you couldn't let any man in you didn't know.

MF: Okay.

SW: But they could come in without a date for that thirty-minute period when the place—it

was open for dancing. And then it closed—maybe it was an hour. But then it closed down and everybody was supposed to go to school or study. But she started that. Of course, she wanted men on campus.

MF: Yes.

SW: And I know that there were some town men who came and some of them were pretty dopey and you had to be—and some of them were real nice. And there weren't very many of them. And some of them were probably students. But I don't know. I could name some of them by name right this minute, but that's not important. But I don't think those were students. In fact, I know they weren't.

MF: Oh, okay. Also, staying on the subject of the men on campus, and I guess it's a more recent question, really. Is—with the school, when it changed to a coeducational school—as a woman's college it had a national reputation. Everybody had heard of it and it had a really good reputation and now as UNCG, as a coeducational institution, there are many people who have never even heard of UNCG and I was wondering what your impression of that change in status, I guess, if that seemed to be a reflection of changing to a coeducational institution, or if maybe perhaps, it just entered a different ball park?

SW: That's a really good question. We were very proud to be graduates. Now Greensboro didn't think—Greensboro hadn't waked up to the fact that—how good the school was. And the town-gown was certainly not—well, we didn't have the relationships we had at that time and I'm—that's utterly changed, so the respect this community had—has—for UNCG is far greater than it was at that time. So they didn't know what we had out there. But we who were there were very proud of the school. And I did know it had a national reputation and I know that when I was on the Alumnae Board when there was so much discussion about whether we should go coed or not. And there were women who came here with tears in their eyes to plead that we never become coeducational because our distinctiveness would be lost and they felt that women could develop better on campus without men.

MF: Not having to compete with men?

SW: Right. And that all your top offices and what not would go to men and your women would take the secondary ones and it—because women would be—this is the only word I can think of, but it's a word I loathe—would be subservient. They would be the second sex. And to a certain extent, that happened. I was one of the people who felt that we could not hope to compete for money and students if we did not go coeducational. So I was for the coeducation. But I have seen over the years since then, that that did create some set of problems. Now, have I answered your question? Have I even touched it?

MF: Yes. Like what set of problems do you think it created?

SW: Well, I don't think women had the leader—learned the leadership.

MF: Right. That they did when it was Woman's College?

SW: Right. Yes. No. I'll just leave it like that. Yes, I think it curtailed leadership. On the other hand, it may have made for more intellectual stimulation, because you had the male point of view. But I don't know that, because I'm not in class.

MF: Right, right. Yes, it is a difficult question. I don't think there's any right or wrong answer. I'm just trying to see—get a feeling for what people think as far as that's concerned.

SW: I think when I was there, if the student body had had a chance to vote on whether they brought in men, and it became coeducational, I believe they would have voted against it.

MF: Yes, that's the impression I get from most alumni that I speak with.

SW: Now, I'm talking about students. I believe they'd have voted against it.

MF: Right. I know.

SW: And I know the women faculty would have voted against it because I got to know too many of them well to know how they felt about it.

MF: I guess right now with Chancellor [William E.] Moran at the university, some people—well, some people very vehemently disagree with his policies and others feel that he's working to pull the university's reputation up to a higher status.

SW: It slipped somewhere along the line. I think it did.

MF: Yes, I don't disagree with that at all. Yes, it's obviously—has a different status than it did when it was Woman's College.

SW: Well, it was a terrific place to be when I was there. I'm really serious about that. It really was.

MF: Yes, I guess what I'm trying to find out from people that I speak with is the reputation of the school—I mean, I'm sure it had something to do with the faculty, but I'm trying to find out just how much it had to do with the fact that it was a woman's college also and what got lost when it became a coeducational institution.

SW: I think one thing that happened—well, at least some of the women faculty felt that it was happening in that the—well, just take the matter of department heads. Men began to be brought in as department heads.

MF: Right, okay.

SW: Now whether those men were as good or better than a woman—than a woman with her credentials would have been as a dean replacement or a department head replacement, I don't know. I really don't know. I know that the women felt that the faculty was hurt by

not seeking top flight women instead of bringing in men. And we really did bring in—we were bringing in—at one point, it looked like everybody who got to be anybody was going to be a man out there. I think there's been a little change in that now.

MF: Yes.

SW: The pendulum is swinging back a little. I believe it is.

MF: Yes, I think that might have something to do with the times that we're in.

SW: Oh, sure. Of course, it has all to do with the times.

MF: Yes. What about with Chancellor Moran? I don't know how active you've been in the Alumni Association recently.

SW: Well, I have been—I haven't been active in the last few years. I had—

MF: He's quite a controversial figure right now, though.

SW: Moran is. Oh, I know that. I had some—I've had a lot of physical problems in recent years and I haven't been able to be as involved, but oddly enough, I hope I become more involved again because I think health-wise, I'm very optimistic.

MF: Good, good.

SW: And I'm not—I'm in a retirement home, but I feel like I'm simply in an apartment that's got an umbrella because I, in no way, feel that I've retired from the scene. It's just that my doctor wouldn't let me stay at home by myself because of my back and some related problems.

MF: Do you know much about what's gone on between Chancellor Moran and the Alumni Association?

SW: To a degree, yes.

MF: Well, I'm an alumna of the university, but I hate to say, whatever I've learned of the situation I've learned from talking to other people.

SW: Well, there's been a lot of bitterness about it. Are you wanting me to comment on it? Is that the—

MF: Sure.

SW: Well, I think there was right on both sides and there was wrong on both sides. And I think a lot of the problem stems back to—this goes far beyond Dr. Moran.

MF: Oh, sure.

SW: I mean, see, it goes, the first problems—I was on the board at that point—the first problems that I remember that really came about was Otis Singletary [chancellor from 1961-1964 and 1966-1966] who was a great fellow, but—where is this tape going? I mean, who's going to be hearing this tape besides you?

MF: Oh, in the near future, probably nobody. [chuckles] But eventually, what we want to do is put the transcripts in the archives and it will be a chance for history students to do first hand research on the university that they are attending and stuff like that. But any portion of a tape that you want restricted, is easily taken care of.

SW: Well, no. The thing is, that a lot of this was personality.

MF: Oh, sure. With political things, that's—

SW: Yes.

MF: —what it boils down to a lot of times.

SW: But it certainly—there was so much tactlessness there. When we got the Development Office—you see, the Alumni Office had really done development, but it had been done on a very meager, personal first name basis. They developed a strong alumnae—no, I take that back—a small but vocal alumnae, but the—lots and lots of women went in and out of those doors and never wanted to hit the campus again or have anything to do with it. And the—so, I think development has been a really good thing—great thing. When first the administration wanted to begin to take over some of the [Alumni] House that was resented. And I think Barbara Parrish [Class of 1948, director of Alumni Affairs, executive director of the Alumni Association] felt that she was being usurped. And I think she—the Board felt that way about it and then after Singletary, things began getting into trouble then. Then let's see. We had [Edward Kidder] Graham [Jr., chancellor from 1950-1956], but I won't even mention that two or three years because that was certainly a disaster.

MF: That was in the '50s, right?

SW: Yes.

MF: Were you on the Alumni Board when Graham was here?

SW: Yes, I was on the Alumni Board on a couple of different occasions. I mean, you know, the—

MF: Graham was a character.

SW: Yes, he was a character. Yes, I had a—really a strong role out there in Alumni Affairs. Then I was on the Annual Giving Council. And then at one—another time, I was on the

Editorial Board, you know, where they have some—student—alumni—

MF: Was the Alumni Board involved—?

SW: I don't mean the Alumni Board. I'm talking about the Editorial Board for the magazine.

MF: Oh, for the *Alumni Magazine*?

SW: Yes, but I was also on the Alumni Board.

MF: Okay, yes, right. Was the Alumni Board involved in the hearings with Ed Graham just before he was—?

SW: No.

MF: Okay. See, there were some transcripts of those hearings that nobody seems to know where they are.

SW: I don't think so. I was not on the Board at that particular time. There had—my husband knew him and he came out to talk to us—well, I guess we invited him to dinner—but he was exposing a lot of his ideas. His wife was absolutely charming and lovely.

MF: Yes, oh, I've heard wonderful things about his wife.

SW: But he was sort of a—he was pretty brash and—yet, he had some good ideas. He was a bright man. He had some good ideas. But he just didn't know about relationships.

MF: Yes, I heard that he was very—well, that encounters with him were not always—didn't always have the expected outcome.

SW: No, they did not. He was a—he was quite a—sort of smart-alecky, brash, tactless, bright, bright, [and] insensitive. Now let me get on to the next—it was after him we had [James S.] Jim Ferguson [acting chancellor from 1964-1966 and 1966-1967, chancellor from 1967-1979].

MF: Yes, okay.

SW: And Jim was a terrific mediator. But problems—I think the Alumni Association would like never to have heard of annual giving except through the Alumni Association. And so, there were sort of snide things said that would have been a lot better unsaid.

MF: Right.

SW: And it just kept growing. And then under—but I think the alumni loved Jim Ferguson. And I don't think he exacerbated anything, really. But it's sort of like an untouched bacteria. If you've given it a culture, it will keep on going. [MF laughs] So, things—there

was a little undercurrent there all the time because it looked like more and more of alumni duties were being taken over outside and with the administration.

[Side A Ends—Side B Begins]

SW: [unclear] what was happening. And I'm glad they've reached an understanding because it was just—it was going to be a disaster—

MF: Oh, sure.

SW: —if something hadn't happened. And whoever the people are who've been able to arbitrate that thing and—

MF: The Center for Creative Leadership [leadership development and training organization located in Greensboro, North Carolina].

SW: Well, I know that, but I was thinking about—I was using the word "arbitrate" in a different way. I mean that the persons—the participants—in the arbitration.

MF: Yes, I guess so. Yes.

SW: My compliments to them because I didn't know how they would ever work it out.

MF: Right. I'm sure a lot of people felt that way, too. But apparently—I don't know what the agreement was that they reached, but apparently both sides seem happy with it.

SW: Yes.

MF: I'm supposed to meet with Brenda [Meadows] Cooper [Class of 1965, director of Alumni Affairs] sometime to interview her again.

SW: Brenda is a very good person. A very good person.

MF: Yes. I've interviewed her once, but I need to interview her with respect to her role in the Alumni Office.

SW: Barbara [Parrish] spent too much time on little things that a lot of us call busy work instead of—you see; I think the Alumni Association ought to be very much involved in what happens in [unclear] on campus. I remember when some of us on the Board years ago wanted to start a seminar for alumni to come back and go to school again for a weekend or three days or whatever, as any number of schools do. Some do it in connection with commencement and some do it in connection with something else. And I'm very fond of Barbara and I hate to say this, but she was utterly negative. She said it just wouldn't work. Well, of course, we're doing a little of it now with the McIver

Conference and that has worked magnificently.

MF: Oh, I hear people talk about the McIver Conference all the time.

SW: Well, I don't really know who's responsible for getting that thing started. But it's a great, great thing. And I think the fact that Barbara did not aspire to an intellectual role for herself or for alumni had a way of denigrating her in the eyes of the administration. She was more of a girl scout. And I don't think that helped the thing any. But she—she was terrific. Was the only person on campus that a person could come back and believe there was somebody who would know them. And Barbara would know you. Or she would know something about you. She just had a remarkable ability there and that can't be minimized.

MF: Yes, she knew people.

SW: Yes. Well, see, now of course, somebody had to know them. The campus was getting so big and so strange that people didn't know anybody. But they knew Barbara.

MF: Yes.

SW: And she was interested in them. And of course, one person can't be everything, but I'm saying that I think her own personality and her own demeanor affected this whole thing in very subtle ways.

MF: Oh, like I'm sure everybody's personality did.

SW: Yes, but I think this was—you see, hers was a constant. I've named at least three people who were a great influence for good and bad with the alumni-administration relationships, but there's only—there was only one in the alumni. And that was Barbara.

MF: Right. Yes.

SW: So, she was a given. And she didn't change. I mean, she absolutely didn't change.  
[laughs]

MF: Right. Okay. Well, let me hurry up and move on because we had the problem with the tape. Sorry I'm going to have to rush through the rest of this now.

SW: Well, I'm talking too much anyway.

MF: Oh, no you're not. One thing I want to ask you is if there are any names of other alumni that you think would be real helpful to interview.

SW: Well, I have a very dear friend, [Margaret E.] Pat Knight [Class of 1936]. I think she would be a good person. She would be listed in the book as M.E. Pat Knight, I believe on Cornwallis. Have you interviewed [Elizabeth Yates] Bibi King [Class of 1936]?

MF: No.

SW: Have you interviewed Adelaide [Fortune] Holderness [Class of 1934]?

MF: Yes.

SW: Have you interviewed—?

MF: Bibi King?

SW: Bibi, B-I—Mrs. Walter King.

MF: Okay. And she's in Greensboro?

SW: She's on Cornwallis, yes.

MF: On Cornwallis, okay.

SW: I thought you meant Greensboro people.

MF: Yes, yes.

[pause]

SW: Carolyn [Weill] LeBauer [Class of 1936]. These are all—LeBauer. L-E- capital B-A-U-E-R. Maurice LeBauer. I know you've interviewed Emily Preyer.

MF: I didn't interview her, but she's been interviewed, yes. I didn't get the chance to interview her. I think Dr. [William] Link interviewed her.

SW: Well, that's—

MF: Okay. Yes. That's good. All right. Great. I appreciate your giving me this time. I'm sorry that we had to—

SW: It's over.

MF: Yes, because the tape wasn't working. Sorry about that. But I know you'll probably have about a million things you'll think of tonight.

SW: Always.

MF: But if there's anything you think of that's really important, you can send a little note to the history department and I'll put it in with the—with the Centennial Project. Everything is going to the [University] Archives together. All the written stuff. So—

SW: This has been exciting to me because it's fun to roll back time.

MF: Right, okay. Well, if there's anything else you think of, please send us a note or something.

SW: Well, you're stimulated by a person like you. Just out of the blue, I don't know what I would think of.

MF: Okay. But if you think of something, let me know. Okay.

SW: Well, if you come up with something for some reason you'd like to particularly ask me, I would be delighted.

MF: Okay. Great. All right.

SW: You must go.

MF: Yes.

[End of Interview]