

UNCG CENTENNIAL ORAL HISTORY PROJECT COLLECTION

INTERVIEWER: Anne R. Phillips

INTERVIEWEE: Franklin D. Parker

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[Begin Side A]

AP: I'm going to ask you about how—something about your background also, and what brought you to Woman's College [of the University of North Carolina]. Could you tell us about that?

FP: You're ready now?

AP: Yes. That will be fine.

FP: All right. I came here, it seems to me almost by accident, but it wasn't really entirely by accident. It was not because of my Latin America specialty, as I remember it, at all because for the first year I taught no Latin American history. The reason I think, that I was hired—although I was never told this officially—was that I had had a year's experience as a graduate student at the University of Illinois [Champaign-Urbana, Illinois] teaching in the general studies program there. And our chancellor, Chancellor [Edward Kidder] Graham [Jr.] at that time in 1951 was very interested in introducing a general studies program at Woman's College, and he knew that I had had the experience, as had others. Not only me. Not only myself. But I had had that experience. And I believe that influenced him to get me. Also, they needed a person in history, and I was in history.

But I had submitted my papers to the personnel office at the University of Illinois, and in them I had stressed this year of experience along with my interest in Latin American history and in recent world history. All three of those things were in my papers, and I believe it was the first one of those three rather than the other two that made him interested in me. He contacted a friend, a personal friend of his, at the University of Illinois, one of the history professors, and asked him if he knew my name. He had my name on the papers evidently, and the professor said, "No." He didn't know me. He had never had me in class, and he went and told the head of the department at Illinois the next morning and the head of the department, according to the story he told me, said, "Yes, you do know him." And he told him who I was and how to get in touch with me, and the very next evening I had a call from him to please come up to his home, which was about twenty-five miles from where I lived, and to receive a phone call there from Greensboro, North Carolina. I talked to the chancellor that evening. He asked me if I would come to Woman's College and told me that he would give me twenty-four hours to think it over. I could have told him "yes" at that moment because I was wanting a job. And yet, I didn't.

I waited and thought it over, and he said, "Send me a night letter tomorrow evening."
And I did, accepting the position. So that's how I came to be here.

AP: And the year was?

FP: The year was 1951. I was a replacement for that year for Dr. John Beeler, who was called back into service because of the Korean War [1950-53, between the Republic of Korea (South Korea), supported by the United Nations, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea), at one time supported by the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union], being a veteran and being in the reserves. And while he was out that year, I filled his place in ancient and medieval history. And then the following year, I picked up my first Latin American history course, when I stayed on.

AP: Oh, I see. So, was there any Latin American history being taught here when you came?

FP: Yes. There was one semester being taught. The young man who taught it left here at the end of my first year and went to Pennsylvania. He was from Pennsylvania, and he went back there. And when he went there, well, I fell heir to his semester of Latin American history and expanded it over the period of thirty-one years to quite a few semesters all together.

AP: I see. That would be quite a few semesters. When you came, you mentioned Dr. Graham wanted to institute a program of more general studies. And how was that received? How were his ideas received on campus?

FP: Well, I would say, generally, not very well. But I think they would have been received much better if he, himself, had not been an unpopular chancellor. He had a style that drove people to frenzy, you might say. [laughs] And he kept offending senior members of the school. I could see that from day to day soon after I arrived that he offended so many people with whom he was in committee meetings. Because I was there at times when he did it, and I could see how things he said would rub them the wrong way.

AP: Was he aware that he was offending, do you think?

FP: I don't really think that he was totally aware of it. I think that he was just young—he was quite young—and not well trained in behaving smoothly toward other people. [laughs] And he did leave here not long after I came. After a year or two, he was gone. And I think the general studies program, more or less, met such great opposition that it never materialized. I'm not sure—I don't think it ever materialized as he envisaged it at least.

AP: I see.

FP: There were other requirements put in, but as he envisaged it, I don't think it ever did materialize. I think it might have if he could have gone about it differently.

AP: So he wanted more general work. Was the faculty quite divided or how—

- FP: There was sharp division in the faculty. Some supported him because of the principle of the thing in which they believed, and others just couldn't take it because he supported it, I think, more than anything, really. And most of those people are deceased now. They were older faculty members, and they are gone now and can't speak for themselves. But I would think that mostly, he just personally offended one after the other of them until he ruined his own program in that way.
- AP: I see. So—but in the meantime, you were doing your teaching of Latin American studies. What was your interest, in the first place, in Latin American work and study?
- FP: Well, I had taken an interest in history while I was an undergraduate in school, but I hadn't thought about Latin America particularly at that time. Then I became married, and during the war, World War II [1939-45 global war] that is, I lived in Indianapolis [Indiana]. I was working in a war defense plant for General Motors, Allison Division airplane motors in the cost accounting department, far from history, and working hard, thirteen hours a day sometimes, and seven days a week very often. And then my wife and I sought recreation in the movies whenever we could. And we saw one movie—this is a very odd beginning for a specialty—but we saw one movie that we liked awfully well and saw six times altogether. It was a Walt Disney film [*The Three Caballeros*] about Donald Duck visiting Latin America in the company of a Mexican rooster and a Brazilian parrot. It was full of Latin music, which we loved. We had not had much experience with it, but we loved the soundtrack in that movie, and we saw the film so many times. And I got to thinking about, "When I go back to graduate school after the war, maybe I'll do some studying of Latin American history." And by the time the war was over, I had decided that would be my specialty. Just like that. It started with one crazy movie. [chuckling]
- AP: Does the Smithsonian [Institution, Washington, DC] know about this episode in your life? If not, they probably should. That has to be one of the more interesting ways that one could determine a future.
- FP: We took Spanish in evening school later on during the war. We were able to sandwich some of that in, and the first year after the war was over, the first summer after the war was over, we traveled to Mexico and lived down there for the summer and that just whetted my appetite a little bit more.
- AP: About what year then?
- FP: That was in '46 we went to Mexico. And in '47, I started to graduate school at the University of Arizona [Tucson, Arizona] with Latin American history in mind as a specialty. And after one summer, I transferred back to the University of Illinois and stayed there from '48 to '51 specializing in Latin American history and deciding especially to concentrate on Central American history, five countries between Mexico and Panama, because I thought—I think this is the chief reason—I thought I'd rather be a big toad in a little puddle than a little toad in a big puddle, at the time. [chuckling]

AP: I see. So that was and is an important part of the world to study. Perhaps not enough people understand that. I mean, realize that.

FP: Well, we pay a lot more attention to Central America today because of the news from there—Nicaragua and other news from there—than we used to. And people used to hardly know it was there, but of course I noticed it, and I also was very much attracted by the fact that they were planning to open the Pan American Highway as far as Central America soon. And we were down there the first year they opened it. In 1955 we drove down and stayed the whole year.

AP: Oh, my goodness. Where did you go? Where did you stay?

FP: Well, we stayed in motels and hotels. Wherever there was a motel we stayed in it, but a lot of places there are no motels, and we stayed in hotels all the way down. And we stopped first in Honduras to rent a home for a couple of months; then to Costa Rica for a couple of months. Rented an apartment there and came back to Guatemala. I was on a scholarship that I had applied for—a study scholarship. And we spent the last half year in Guatemala in an apartment.

AP: I see. What part of the country were you in?

FP: We were always in the capital city. I located there because of the archives. We visited though. We drove all over everywhere we could—dirt roads, tiny roads where hardly anybody ever went in an automobile. We went there.

AP: How were you received by the people there?

FP: Always very friendly. We never were in any danger that we felt. We were treated awfully well wherever we went. If we had to change a wheel, people would come up and help you change it and so forth. And we had to do that every once in a while. And things of that sort impressed us very greatly, the kind of friendly attention we received. We did get in some places so wild—not very many, but a few places back in the mountains—so wild, that although there was a dirt track—two tracks through is a road—the Indians who would see us would run away like a frightened horse because they weren't used to seeing motorized vehicles.

AP: Oh, I see. Oh, my. Yes.

FP: That was a strange experience to see that.

AP: But they were not hostile?

FP: Not hostile. No hostility.

AP: They did run away.

FP: In the towns where people had seen busses usually, we received very friendly treatment anywhere, everywhere. We were always delighted with the treatment we received down there.

AP: And so those were good times. That was a good time—

FP: It would be very dangerous today to make some of the trips that we made then, especially in El Salvador and Guatemala would be very dangerous. You'd be taking your life in your hands to do what we did—travel with our two little girls down there.

AP: With the children?

FP: We'd be taken hostage or something now for sure, somewhere along the way. But—

AP: When did things begin to change, as you see it, in Guatemala so drastically?

FP: Well, mostly in the late '70s in a big way. Prior to that, there'd been some trouble in Guatemala. And, of course, we saw some trouble while we were there. There would be things happen that would be very extraordinary in Greensboro. But nothing where we felt we were in danger. But in the '80s, particularly, it's become just a very dangerous place, particularly in two countries, Guatemala and El Salvador. So many people have been killed, and others kidnapped and disappeared and it's very sad. And some of those people are foreign people. Most of them are natives, of course. Am I speaking loud enough, do you think?

AP: That's fine. It's very good. I know that in Guatemala there's—I'm familiar with the Rigoberta Menchú [indigenous activist, author and politician; won Nobel Peace Prize in 1991] book about the Quechua Indians—the fight for land reforms. Were you there when any of the land—what was going on as far as the Indian versus Spanish people?

FP: Well, we were there in '55, and the president of Guatemala had been deposed in 1954. And there was much bad feeling remaining from that. He was deposed in a sort of engineered way. It was engineered largely by our Central Intelligence Agency here, and there were Guatemalans who opposed him and we cooperated with them against him, President Árbenz [Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán, president of Guatemala from March 1951 to June 1954]. And he had undertaken a great deal of land reform for the Indian people, and that land reform ran up against the opposition of the United Fruit Company and other wealthy interests in Guatemala and our government, I think unfortunately, decided to stand up for the rights of the United Fruit Company rather than the rights of the—

AP: —the land reform.

FP: The people who would be helped by the land reform. And I feel sorry that that happened because Guatemala has been a very difficult—had a very difficult time of it ever since then. I believe they would have done much better if we had allowed things to go on as they were.

AP: I see.

FP: The two governments just before that, from 1945 until 1954—one that lasted six years and the other one, we stopped it after the first three—were not only for land reform, but they were the first to educate, to build schools for the Indian people and to recognize their right to vote. They had never had the right to vote before. And we were, in a sense, stopping all of that in its tracks—all that reform in its tracks, when we did that. And I think we just didn't give any thought to what we were doing.

AP: I see.

FP: Too bad, from my point of view.

AP: Yes. Generally, do we think of the United States government as carrying a big stick some time? Did you—well, as you are explaining—I don't—

FP: I remember working in the archive in Guatemala City, and there was one fellow there who knew the archives so well. He wasn't the director. As you know, there's always one other person that really knows the place. And this is a younger man who worked for a poor salary, and yet he knew every book in that place and every record so well. And he could always put his fingers on whatever I wanted. And he was doing work there himself too. And I asked him one day—because I knew he had a family and I knew they lived out near the oil tanks that were bombed, like our oil tanks out near the airport—they were bombed during that deposition effort.

And I said, "What did you think during that time? How did you feel about that?" And he looked at me, and I could see there was anger inside of him though not directed at me, but he was expressing the feeling of anger. He said, "How would you feel if you looked up and saw an airplane marked with United States markings and knew that the pilot of the airplane was from the United States? A man you had known who lived in Guatemala City just a few months prior to this, you knew he was piloting the airplane and dropping the bombs, and you were over here in the archive and your family was over there around at home close to the oil fields." He said, "How would you feel?" That's the only answer he would give me because he felt so emotional about it, you know. And I could understand why he felt that way.

AP: That was a remarkable interchange and very sad and terrible, but—

FP: We had a lot of contacts with the people that way that impressed us, and some of them had to do with politics and others didn't.

AP: And so then that year, that was a study time or year or more? How much of the time were you there?

FP: I studied all the time I was there. We were there for about fourteen months, so extended the year a little bit, second summer. And the [Henry and Grace] Doherty Foundation

[Harrison, New York] sponsored that year of study for me. We applied there, I remember, because they had a policy of giving more if your spouse went along with you, and I wanted my wife and daughters to go with me. [both chuckle] And they did give more, not double, but they gave about half again as much if your spouse went with you. They felt that way about things, I guess. And that was the reason that we applied to Doherty and—

AP: That seems a revolutionary idea in a way. [laughs]

FP: Well, my wife helped me tremendously, of course.

AP: Well, that the foundation would have that view of the importance of going.

FP: Oh, yes. We liked that very much. [laughs]

AP: So that took you up to the time period of what?

FP: That year was 1955-56.

AP: Yes. And then you returned here?

FP: Yes. I always came back from the beginning—the Woman's College until it became UNCG [The University of North Carolina at Greensboro], and I changed my loyalties over.

AP: I see.

FP: And I didn't teach a lot of Latin American history at first. None the first year and only a little after that for a while, but gradually I asked permission to introduce a second semester. And then a new course and then an alternative new course for another year and like that. And built it up with—particularly with graduate students and undergraduate students mixed in more advanced courses. And I had taught those, quite a few of them, one every semester, I guess, before I left here along with the survey course—

AP: I see.

FP: —every semester. And also, before I retired—quite a while before I retired—I got together with the others in other departments who were interested in Latin American studies, and we put together a Latin American Studies program, where we team-taught one course. Fourteen teachers, I think it was, for one course.

AP: Oh, wow. [chuckles]

FP: And we also required special seminars in that, Latin American Studies, and I taught some of them. And we had a lot of extra activities. We used to pack forty people sometimes—forty adult persons. The children were left in the front room here. We always said, "Bring the children if you want to." Most of them did, and they were teachers, students and

community people interested in Latin America. We'd meet out in the back room here, and we always had a program, and we always had food. We called it "Pan y Pensamiento," "Food and Thought" ["Pan" is bread, but may also refer to food in general]. And we had a good time during those meetings. It was very—a very good thing.

AP: How often were the meetings?

FP: Well, we usually had them once a month, I think, for several years while we were active doing that.

AP: Oh, that's wonderful.

FP: When I retired, we didn't try to keep that going. I didn't want to assume too much in the way of continued involvement—there particularly, because I lost my vision. But then, more than that because another teacher was coming in, and I didn't want to appropriate that role.

AP: But what a wonderful time.

FP: We still know most of those people. They are still mostly in town. That is, all but the students, who have moved away for the most part. Still know some of them too. They keep in touch, some of them.

AP: So you were involved with not only political thought and history and theory, but cultural—cultural studies and music, food, language?

FP: Yes. I tried to do quite a bit. Not much with language, but with music, I often played recorded music. Brought them over here sometimes and played records on this stereo because we couldn't get anything quite like it over there. And we'd just hold class here. And we just did that infrequently, but that's one of the things that we used to do. And I used literature and music and so forth in addition to political history. Enjoyed doing that very much. I consider it's all a part of history myself.

AP: Absolutely.

FP: I feel that political narrative is important, but that other things are just as important—to follow the development of ideas among people and so forth. And so I've always enjoyed doing that.

AP: Yes. I think it's very hard to separate these ideas and maybe even useless, just not as good if we separate the life of the people from government. I don't think we can do that very effectively and study very comprehensively for the cultural history of any country, any people. So the students came here and liked that and enjoyed it. On this team-taught course then—how was that received and how—did students like that very much?

FP: We always had good enrollment. We think the students liked it. We always had a good

coordinator, and it depended a lot on the coordinator. And we tried hard to find a coordinator who would be well received by the students. I never served as the coordinator of that course. We had two or three different ones during the course of the years, and then each one of us offered something in his or her specialty. And we did quite a bit, even with dance and things like that. We even went further into the cultural realm in that than I went in my regular history courses.

AP: Well, who were some of the coordinators for that?

FP: For a long time, José Almeida, who is Mexican-American, born in Texas. His wife is Columbian, and he teaches Spanish [professor of romance languages] and she teaches at Guilford College. And Jose, or Pepe we call him, or Joe, was the coordinator for a long time, and he was very popular. He knew Spanish awfully well, of course, from birth. And so he did a good job that way. I remember one day over there he was playing a bunch of records, and my wife and I were visiting the class, I think, on that day, and I wasn't doing anything. I was just visiting, and there was a girl named Raquel, I won't tell you her last name, I guess. [both chuckle] Not Raquel Welch, but another Raquel, was a very good looking girl from Venezuela there. I think she was from Venezuela. Yes, she was. And I could see that she was twitching in her seat with the dance rhythms, and when it came—when they played the Venezuelan joropo she actually got out of her seat and danced in the aisle. [laughs]

AP: Oh, wonderful. Classes should be more that way.

FP: Well, she felt that uninhibited in our presence that she could do that. Of course, she was sort of an uninhibited girl anyhow.

AP: I see.

FP: But things like could happen. I won't say they happened every day in a course like that, and it was enjoyable.

AP: Oh, that's wonderful. How did she get here to school? What was her interest in coming?

FP: She just came here. We had quite a few Latin students who came. They were usually from more well-to-do families who wanted to send their children to the US, and we just got a small share of them somehow. And we always made their acquaintance as soon as we could and had them over here and so forth. She was one of those. And she married a Greensboro boy, actually.

AP: Is that right?

FP: And then they divorced; they split a few years later.

AP: Oh, my. It would seem important that students did come from other countries. It would be wonderful for native born students. Did you feel in those days, in the '50s and '60s, there

- was a great percentage of North Carolina students here?
- FP: When I first arrived, practically every student was a native of North Carolina, and I used to kid them a little. They all spoke different languages, not just one southern dialect, as we say, but I'll name a name here. I guess it's all right. She won't mind. Josephine Hege [history professor], one of my collaborators, one of my colleagues at that time, said she could tell which county they were from in North Carolina by listening to them talk. [both chuckle] I never heard—developed that ability—but I used to have a lot of fun with those girls because they had not been around. And I remember I told them a story the first year which I can't believe I did now. But I came back from Christmas in Illinois with a bad cold. We'd gone up there to visit Jenny's folks and came back with a very bad cold, and I told them, said that I was walking out through a tunnel in front of my in-laws home—I said, “one of those snow tunnels,” you know, like that, and they all believed me. And I said, “The tunnel fell in on me. And I lay there several hours before people noticed that I was under there. And that's how I caught such a bad cold.” And you know, those girls all believed me. They really did. [laughs] I hope you won't resent that because you were once a North Carolina farm girl.
- AP: No. That's the good thing about being a native of the state, that one can poke fun or love and respect the state all at the same time.
- FP: I told them immediately that it was a false story, but I could see that they all believed it. And that there really were snow tunnels like that. We had very little snow there in Jenny's hometown, but a lot of ice. Something like here in bad winters, and they just were willing to accept that because they didn't know that much about living in [unclear].
- AP: I see. So they'd really never been away very much at all?
- FP: When we first went to El Salvador with a student group in 1967—we took—1968, I guess it was. We took student groups down there two summers, and when we first went down, one of the girls rode in our car, and we said something to her about, “Well, sometime tomorrow you'll be along the gulf and you've never been there before, have you?” And I said, “In a few more days you'll be in Texas and Mexico.” And she said, “I'm already in a new state, and South Carolina's brand new to me.”
- AP: Oh, my goodness. She'd never been out of the state.
- FP: And she was headed for El Salvador with us. She didn't even know the words “gracias” and “buenos días,” yet, when she went. And she was speaking quite fluent Spanish when she came back six weeks later. She stayed with a Spanish home—in a Spanish home—and when we left her there the first day after we arrived, we said, “Well, Linda, it's either speak Spanish or starve.” And she was a game girl, you know, and she learned it fast.
- AP: She learned it fast. [chuckles]
- FP: They didn't speak English at that home.

AP: Isn't that something? What a wonderful experience.

FP: Yes. They were struck most of all—the students were—by the poverty. That really hit them hard. They saw beggars out in front of the boarding house where we all spent the first night because we arrived after dark that night. And they noticed a woman and two children out on the steps begging as we went in. And some of them went out at five o'clock the next morning being excited, being in a new city, a new country, and they saw the same woman and the two children asleep there, and they realized that was their home. And it gets chilly there. It doesn't get below freezing, but it gets cold, in the thirties and forties at night. And they realized then—they said for the first time—what real poverty meant because they'd never seen anything like that in North Carolina.

AP: I see. Yes, yes. Although our state, certainly in many areas, in rural areas, there is a great deal of poverty.

FP: There is a great deal.

AP: I tend to think that in rural areas we've never really had much money, but by comparison we are really quite rich and quite privileged.

FP: Usually not so many beggars, at least, and not so many people maybe really starving. There may be some people that are hungry from time to time.

AP: Yes. Yes. Well, when the young women came back, Woman's College women came back, what reaction did they have or what did this experience do to them? Did it change their lives, do you feel?

FP: I think for some of them, according to their own testimony—. We had a public meeting here one year when we came back, and several of them testified to the fact that it had changed their lives tremendously to have those new experiences, particularly seeing how other people lived and living with people whose ideas were different for a period of time. They all lived with families, and they said that the experiences there had matured them or had changed them in certain ways that they would never be unchanged from. And I believe that was true. We had a war emergency our second year. We had to abandon El Salvador because they went to war against Honduras. It was a short war, but it just happened to hit our last day—our last days of school—and we had to transport the students to Guatemala, which was okay at that time, and finish up the courses there. And that impressed them tremendously because bombs fell around the night before we left. There were bombs that fell on different parts close to them and that impressed them very much. Impressed us too.

AP: Oh, you must have been apprehensive a bit yourself.

FP: Oh, I was. Yes.

AP: And the year of that or the season?

- FP: That was '69, the second year we were there with students. And we gave it up in '70 because things were getting to the danger point in Guatemala, and we had to pass through Guatemala to get anywhere else. We had been going to El Salvador, and we decided not to try it again.
- AP: To the capital city in El Salvador [San Salvador] or other places out—?
- FP: We stayed in the capital city, but we always visited other towns so that they could see more of the Indian culture and so forth.
- AP: So that was a wonderful thing, to take the students.
- FP: Well, we enjoyed that very much and felt it was a really worthwhile experience for them and for us, both.
- AP: So when you were here in the '50s and '60s, tell me a bit more about the student body, especially, the coming of coeducation. What did you think about it, personally, and what did other faculty members think about coeducation?
- FP: I think there was a group of the faculty that opposed it, felt that it was going to change the uniqueness of the school, that we had been a women's college always, and had a name as a women's college, but that we would become less well known as a coed college. Be just another coed college. And there were others who welcomed it. I used to kid about it more than anything because I felt that it was just coming, no matter what, because that was a trend of the times. And I said "I'm happy with all this many girls. I like girls myself. " And I always felt that way. I was always a pro-woman person. I said, "I have three women at home and several thousand more over here, and I like it that way." But I didn't feel any regret when the fellows came in. Although our first men who came were almost all commuters, and they didn't average out as well, probably, as students for a while, but that changed gradually. And I would say that the saddest thing about it, as I saw it after it happened, was that some of the girls tended to defer to men in class, more than they would have. And that was one of the things that was pointed out by the opponents—that women would defer to men if men were present in quantity in class. And I think that did happen to some extent, though not with all the women because the women's movement came along and helped them to feel their own dignity more and not do that so much. But I think there was some tendency toward that for a while in the sixties.
- AP: I think that's traditionally—that's a hazard. That has been a hazard when women's colleges go coed.
- FP: But there are hardly any women's colleges left today, as I understand. There are a few, but not very many. And I think it was just one of those things that was bound to go. And I didn't do anything active to oppose it. I didn't take any stand, verbal stand in public, against the change. I just used to kid about it some—that I was satisfied with the way things were.

AP: Well, I like your assessment. [chuckles] What about—tell me a bit also about—
FP: Am I speaking into your microphone well enough?

AP: It's fine. It's just fine. About civil rights times when blacks became to come to this school, but also, how do you view the civil rights struggle here in Greensboro? How did you view it at the time? The sit-in at Woolworth's [1960 nonviolent protests in Greensboro which led the Woolworth Department Store chain to reverse its policy of racial segregation in the United States] or town-and-gown?

FP: Well, from the beginning—the beginning for us was when a young lady named Josephine Boyd went to Grimsley as the first black student at Grimsley High School, and the board, the school board, had just decided to allow students to go the high school of their own choice. And most of them didn't have the nerve to do it. And this girl's parents were willing to let her do it, and she wanted to do it. She was a very bright student. And she went to Grimsley, and we learned very soon that she was having things thrown at her, that she had to quit eating in the cafeteria and had gone to the library for refuge. So the librarian had told her she could come in there and eat her lunch there. And my daughter and Charles Adams' daughter—Charles Adams was our librarian at the time. He lived around the corner here. And another neighbor here who lived right across the street went to school together, shared a car together to go to Grimsley at that time and they talked to Josephine and told her they would eat lunch with her if she would come back to the cafeteria. And they did, and they found themselves the object of stone throwing and spitting and things of that nature for quite a while.

And we spoke to the principal and assistant principal, who we knew personally, about it and they finally did something about it. They told us what terrific pressure they were under from segregationist groups who would send them all sorts of pictures showing what would happen if whites and blacks mixed and all of that. And they said, "Don't forget. We're under terrific pressure this way." But it wasn't most of the students at Grimsley. It was just a few boys who were roughnecks anyhow, I think, who were doing it. And they were just permitted to do it for a while. Finally, a youth group from the West Market Methodist Church decided that they were going to come out, not to eat lunch with these four, but—oh, a German exchange student had visited, had joined the group before and that made five of them—and these West Market young people were going to form a ring around them to protect them. So they weren't going to eat with them because their parents didn't want them to. And so they did that, and that helped to ease it a great deal and then the principal stepped in and got it all stopped.

AP: About how long did that go on?

FP: Oh, I think altogether, it lasted several months, unfortunately. And that was a tough time for our daughter, and I'm sure for all the others concerned and especially for Josephine Hege, not Hege, but Josephine Boyd.

AP: Boyd. It was very brave of your daughter to do that and—

FP: Well, we encouraged her. We didn't tell her she had to do it or anything. She did it on her

own, and it was the three of them that made the decision to do it. But we certainly supported her, and we supported all these efforts. We knew many black people at A&T [North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University, Greensboro, North Carolina] and Bennett [College, Greensboro, North Carolina] at the time, had had an active part in both student and teacher cross-campus groups that had met since way back in the '50s. In fact, I guess we joined them first when we first came here. We didn't found them; we joined them. And these were groups that met on five [Greensboro] campuses alternately. UNCG—Woman's College, Guilford College, Greensboro College, A&T and Bennett. And we would take turns in hosting and meet and have programs and discussion. And it wasn't any attempt to do anything except just to be together across campuses and across color lines, but we weren't fighting for black liberation at that time or anything or desegregation. We weren't working at that. We were just having—following themes of mutual interest like musical programs, theater programs, and talking about books and so forth.

AP: To share ideas and simply to meet, get to know each other.

FP: That's right. That's right. And the faculty group from that grew and grew. The student group stayed the same for a long time, which is pretty good-sized, but the faculty group grew to about two hundred. I remember our poet, Randall Jarrell [American poet, literary critic, children's author, essayist, novelist, and the 11th Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress, a position that now bears the title Poet Laureate], speaking to about two hundred out at Guilford College. Wonderful group meeting we had out there. It was very much black and white and very fine questions from people who knew what they were talking about, and it was very stimulating. We always participated in those things and felt very happy about desegregation coming to Greensboro. There were some details of what happened downtown that we didn't learn until later and didn't have anything to do with. We read about the demonstrations to open the theaters, of course, and the Woolworth's, originally in the papers and heard about them other ways. But there was one thing we heard of just recently that three UNCG—Woman's College—students went with the A&T people at the Woolworth's Sit-in after a few days.

AP: I heard that also.

FP: And that they were disciplined by the chancellor for having done that. I didn't know that.

AP: Oh, is that right.

FP: They were campused. They weren't expelled. He said, "I should expel you, but I'll just campus you."

AP: Now who was chancellor at that point?

FP: I'm not sure. Well, I think I know, and I can't think of his name.

AP: The year—that was '60 and so—well, after Dr. [William Whatley] Pierson—Dr. Pierson

came in for a year after Dr. Graham and then Dr. [Gordon] Blackwell, 1957 to '60, and he said that he should have—

FP: That's what we heard. I can't tell you that officially, but that's what we heard just recently— that he told them he should expel them, but he would just punish them on campus instead. And they said—what we heard was that that was—the reason for his feeling so strongly about it was that they wore the Woman's College jacket, which was very widely worn by Woman's College people at that time. And they wore that down, and he said that's like representing the college at the Sit-ins, and he just felt pressures too. I know he did. I liked Chancellor Blackwell. I got along well with him. But when I heard that story, I was little surprised.

AP: Yes. I'm sure you were. Do you feel that he thought the legislature was going to take this as almost a personal affront or that parents would be upset or—?

FP: I think he thought he would hear a great deal from parents whose children—whose daughters attended Woman's College and that he expected an inundation of mail from them. That would be what I'd guess because I know of a few similar instances where that was certainly the case.

AP: I wonder if the young women went on their own?

FP: Those three, I'm told, went—just simply decided they wanted to go on their own. They weren't inspired to do it by anybody. But I'm not sure of that. I didn't know the three girls.

AP: Was there much talk on campus? I mean—I guess I'm asking how white was—how segregated was the place? What were attitudes? And you've already touched on—

FP: Aycock Auditorium was segregated. Blacks were allowed, but they were given a special place to sit when they came until all of a sudden when the [United States] Supreme Court made a certain decision, well, they were allowed to sit anywhere. And I can remember when the first three—[coughs] Pardon me—students came to—first three black students came to Woman's College. I don't remember now what year it was, but when the first three came, they were lost in a sea of white faces, of course, but there was required chapel at that time. And Chancellor Pierson was here as acting chancellor, maybe the second time. He was here twice as acting chancellor. And he told them, as much as told them as I had heard it at the time. I wasn't there. But as I was told, he apologized to the white students for the black students present and said that we hadn't wanted them, but had been forced to accept them.

AP: He said this?

FP: And I thought that was unnecessary.

AP: He said this in a public place?

FP: He said that at required chapels with the three girls sitting there among all the others. That must have made them feel dreadful, I would think.

AP: Oh, my. Well, now were faculty members—did faculty members go? Were you there?

FP: Some faculty members were there, and some of them told me. I don't think I was there. I don't remember it in person.

AP: That's hard to imagine, I mean, in these days and times that—

FP: It's—you have to remember the times in order to explain all of those things. Dr. Pierson tended to be a conservative about most matters of that sort, and he was an older man and he just felt he had to say that to be a gentleman to the white ladies, I think. I mean, to apologize to them for what had happened. But most of the faculty that were there, I think, felt that they wished he hadn't said it. We had black students in our classes for a long time, just one or two in a class, and they were all girls. And I remember I had one class with one black girl in it, who sat at the end of the table. I was meeting in the seminar room in the library—fairly small class, about fifteen, sixteen people in it. And one white girl came up and spoke to me after class one day. She said, "I like that girl so much," and she named her. I've forgotten their names now, both of them. She said, "I like the girl so much who sits at the end of the table." She said, "If my parents knew how much I like her, they wouldn't let me come back home."

AP: Oh, my goodness.

FP: And she said—she used the word "love," but she didn't mean anything lesbian or anything like that.

[End Side A—Begin Side B]

FP: The white woman sat next to her, I think, or close to her on the side, and she spoke to me after class and said how much she respected her and loved her, really. And she said, "If my parents knew how I felt about her, they would not allow me to come back home. They would just not let me in the house." And I think she really meant that. [laughs]

AP: Could not come back home. I'm sure she did.

FP: That helped to bring it home to me, you know. Some of the feelings that some of the white students had, too, that they had to contend with. And they were very difficult times for black as well as white. Some of the black students told me occasionally that they felt some white student in class was not wanting to sit by them or something like that. And I just tried to talk to them and tell them not to pay too much attention and to sit somewhere else unobtrusively if they wanted to. But that they had to remember that the white students all came from backgrounds that were very antipathetic toward blacks. Not all of

them, but a lot of them did. And then if they carried some of that over into school, it was just natural for them to do so. Didn't mean they were bad people, necessarily, because they were that way, but that was something big for both black and many whites to deal with for some time. Then I think when more blacks started entering classes, when you got to having three or four in one class out of twenty, maybe, something like that, then it became less of a big thing. And they were accepted more widely and it wasn't thought so unusual to be sitting beside one or something like that.

AP: I see. And things, I guess, in society and outside—off campus—things were beginning to change some. I mean, as you say, it's been so gradual.

FP: It changes gradually, I think, off campus. I always said it changes faster on campus than off, but that didn't include everybody, and it didn't include quite all of the teachers either, I don't think, really, to be accurate about it. But most of the teachers responded very well, and I'd say three-fourths of them welcomed the change when it came. Three-fourths of them believed in integration or desegregation and welcomed black students in their classes. The others, I think, for the most part, accepted them. And there were only a few that maybe never did quite give up on the matter, never did feel at home completely. That's natural too.

AP: Yes. And yet, as you say, I hope or I wish—it seems the university should always be the most liberal place. Sometimes it is, sometimes it isn't in society, but it's made up of individuals, so—

FP: Well, I knew many old-timers, who, when I first came here and some of them were amazingly liberal. They weren't all from the North by any means. A lot of them were North Carolina liberals, and they were liberal on this matter, and it impressed me greatly when we first moved to Greensboro how many people shared our outlook on the racial question. And we had come from northern countries—northern states—I grew up in Pennsylvania and my wife in Illinois, but a lot of the people here were from the North, quite a few of them. And quite a few from the South too. And in both cases, they seemed to be amazingly liberal. And that's one of the reasons we felt at home here from the beginning. That was the case.

AP: That was a good thing, and I'm sure quite welcome. It was a happy time.

[End of Interview]