

**THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO**  
**INSTITUTIONAL MEMORY COLLECTION**

INTERVIEWEE: Deborah “Debbie” Kahn Rubin

INTERVIEWER: Hermann Trojanowski

DATE: June 11, 2013

HT: Today is June 11, 2013, and my name is Hermann Trojanowski, and I’m at the home of Deborah Rubin in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and we’re here to do an oral history interview for the UNCG Institutional Memory Collection. By the way, Mrs. Rubin is Class of 1964. If you could tell me when and where you were born, we’ll get the interview started by that question.

DR: Please call me Debbie.

HT: Okay.

DR: I was born in Columbia, South Carolina in 1942, and I actually attended WC [Woman’s College of the University of North Carolina], as we knew it, from 1960-1962 so I was only there two years, but very important years.

HT: Well, tell me something about your early life in, I guess it was Columbia. You lived there most of your life before you went to WC.

DR: Yes, my family has been there four generations. So Columbia, of course was segregated in the ’50s as I grew up, and although I didn’t have any interactions with African Americans other than servants or people in stores and that sort of thing, but my father had served on a secret mayor’s committee, probably in 1958 or ’59. The mayor of Columbia wanted to integrate the stores because they didn’t want the disruption of business that Greensboro had experienced, and it was a secret committee because it was dangerous to be known as someone who was for integration. It was not a moral decision. The committee was based on business decisions, but for my father, it was morally right, as well.

HT: Did your father own a business in Columbia?

DR: My father—My grandfather started a construction company in Columbia that still exists and my father’s main business was M. B. Kahn, K-A-H-N, M. B. Kahn Construction Company, which still exists, but he also owned businesses such as the Studebaker [or] Packard [Motor Car Company] business, and he also owned a radio and television

station, and a plastics plant; so, yes, he had one foot in business and one foot in construction.

HT: And how did that affect you—his being on this committee, or were you aware of this committee?

DR: I was aware, although we didn't discuss—Integration was not a topic that we discussed. What we discussed more than integration was any perceived anti-Semitism because we were a Jewish family. And I must say, I felt almost no discrimination because of my Judaism, but in the city in the '50s, there were social barriers. So I guess I thought of discrimination as any discrimination.

HT: Well, where did you go to high school, and what type of subjects did you take, and what influenced you to take them?

DR: I went to Dreher High School [Columbia, South Carolina], Class of 1960, and it's the large—At that time, it was the largest high school in South Carolina.

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DR: I took English mostly, any classes that had to do with reading and literature is what I enjoyed. I was not good in math

HT: And when you started looking around for colleges to attend—I know you attended Woman's College for two years—what made you decide on Woman's College, and did you apply to other schools?

DR: In 1960 I wanted to stay somewhat close to my home in South Carolina. My brother was at Duke [University], and I had dated at Chapel Hill my senior year of high school, but I chose WC because it was a woman's college, and because it had a really good academic reputation. And because it didn't have sororities. Another option for me would have been Sweet Briar College [Sweet Briar, Virginia], and I didn't like the elitist feeling of Sweet Briar.

HT: So I assume you had visited both Woman's College and Sweet Briar prior to—

DR: I did, and American University [Washington, DC], and Georgia. I looked around at both coed schools and woman's colleges.

HT: And when you came that first day in the fall of 1960—I guess it was—what was the school like in those days?

DR: I loved the feeling of all-women. I had a funny experience my very first moment on campus. My mother wanted to take a picture of me, and she said, "Go stand next to that

tall girl with the red jacket.” Later I realized jackets denoted class, and the girl turned out to be Emily Herring Wilson [Class of 1961] who was president of the student body, but I didn’t know it, and she let me stand next to her. And that was in 1960, and in 1977 when we moved to Winston-Salem, I met her again, and she’s become a very dear friend. But she didn’t know me. She was a big wheel; I was a lowly freshman. And I was put into a dorm room. I was assigned a roommate who was also Jewish, and we found that almost all of the Jewish girls were assigned Jewish roommates.

HT: Oh, really.

DR: Looking back on it, I think it was done deliberately. It was too high a percent for it not to have been done deliberately.

HT: I know all the African Americans students in the early days were all roomed together.

DR: Yes, and I’ll get to that when you ask me, because I had a unique experience with the African American students.

HT: And what did you think of your roommates?

DR: Well, my roommate was fine. We didn’t have a lot in common, and I became very close to another Jewish girl, and when there was the opportunity—When I realized that in Coit Dorm the seven—I think it was seven, maybe eight African American girls were in a section all by themselves with two empty rooms, my good friend, Ellen Berman [Class of 1964]—the other Jewish girl who I became friends with—and I asked the administration to let us move down into the African American section of Coit. I was in Gray [Residence Hall] prior to that. I wasn’t trying to be a revolutionary; I wasn’t trying to integrate anything. I wanted a single room, and the administration said, “You would have to get permission from your parents,” and my parents—It was fine with them. I didn’t have to coerce them; I just explained and they signed a letter, and Ellen and I moved into single rooms in Coit in the African American section of the first floor that was divided by the lobby, so that their wing would have its own bathroom.

HT: So you had your own room.

DR: I had my own room.

HT: That was very unusual in those days, wasn’t it?

DR: Well, I thought it was crazy for people to be doubled and tripled when there were empty rooms.

HT: Empty rooms, right. Do you recall which administrator you went to, to get permission to do this?

DR: I think it was either Mereb Mossman [Dean of the College] or Katherine Taylor [Dean of Women]; either dean of students or dean of the college. I did not go to the chancellor.

HT: Do you recall what their reaction was when you first requested this? Were they surprised, pleased?

DR: The fact that I can't remember leads me to believe that it wasn't a big deal, but it was a first. Now, African American upper classmen—I think they came in '58—

HT: The first African Americans came in '56.

DR: Fifty-six.

HT: Right, because JoAnne Smart Drane and Bettye Tillman graduated in the spring of 1960.

DR: That's right; of course it was. But first-year students had been [housed] separately. [As upperclassmen, African Americans] merged with the student body.

HT: Right, but they were still sort of semi-segregated because they were put in former counselors' rooms in the various dorms that had their own bathrooms.

DR: Even after—

HT: I've forgotten—

DR: Even [in] 1960?

HT: Yes.

DR: Well, I'd like to believe—I'd like to believe, but I can't prove it—that after Ellen and I moved into the African American section, that from then on [the administration] didn't segregate, but I—You would have to tell me.

HT: Well, as you know, I've talked to some of these other ladies, and that's what they remember from the early '60s. I don't know when the change actually took place, but several of them were housed in Mendenhall-Ragsdale [Residence Hall] in those corner rooms that a former counselor had lived in because it had its own private bathroom, and so I guess by the mid-sixties that probably went by the wayside as well, because there were enough African American students on campus that they couldn't do that anymore. So they just had to—

DR: I'd like to know for freshmen because—And it would be in the archives, but [there] were freshman dorms: Gray and Coit and a couple of others. What I would be interested in knowing is: in 1961, the year after Ellen and I essentially integrated that African American area, if they continued to segregate the freshmen. But, at any rate, that was what it was, and I became very close with one of the girls—African American women.

HT: And who was that?

DR: Diane Oliver [Class of 1964] who unfortunately, after she graduated, she died in a motorcycle accident at the University of Iowa where she was taking a graduate writing degree. But I remember not being—not feeling that African American girls were in any way different from me. I remember we all worried about boyfriends, and we all worried about our complexions; and—

HT: And probably the clothes you wore, and studies, and things like that; the typical—

DR: And studies.

HT: The typical freshmen or sophomore worries that any college student has.

DR: And the other thing that surprised me: They played whist [card game], and they learned it from their parents. They said their parents and grandparents played that, and my grandfather played pinochle, and it turned out to be a very similar game, so I thought, “Gosh, we were very similar.” I don’t know their backgrounds, but I know Diane’s background. Her father was a principle of a high school in Charlotte, and so [her background] felt very much like my background.

HT: I know many of the African American alumni that I’ve spoken to came from families where [either] both parents or one parent was a teacher, so education was always very important. And one of the reasons they came to WC was because it had such a good reputation. They felt like they could receive a good education there, and I think one of the things that many of them say is that they regret that there was no social life for them on campus, or very little social life. They had to find that over, usually, at A&T [North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, Greensboro, North Carolina] because that’s where the African American boys were. And there was also a little bit of controversy between the girls who attended Bennett College and the WC African American students, for one reason or another.

DR: I’m familiar with those feeling as the girls talked to me about them.

HT: Well, tell me something: What kind of interaction did you have with the African American students once you moved into their wing?

DR: It was just like any other suite. We pranced around in our pajamas, and visited with one another in our rooms, and studied together, and—Never having been to college before, I can’t compare it to what it was like, but for me, it was very comfortable.

HT: And what was the reaction of the white students?

DR: Initially, the other white students were fixated on the bathroom. They kept saying, “How can you stand to go to the same bathroom,” which didn’t make any sense to me. But that was initially, and soon after I joined two student organizations, and so my friends, you

know—One of the organizations was the theater group, and you know, theater folks are sort of artsy, and they—In fact, there was a girl named Lily Wiley, W-I-L-E-Y [Class of 1962]. I don't know whether you know her.

HT: I've seen the name. I think she, too, has passed on.

DR: Really. She was a wild woman, very energetic and artsy, and dressed flamboyantly, and outspoken. I loved her. And she was semi-involved in the theater. And then the other organization I joined was the literary magazine, so we all had our friends but we would come back at night. And I didn't move in until sometime a couple of months after—I don't know whether it was after—I think it was after fall break, but not after Christmas break, but I'm not 100 percent, so really I only had a little more than a half a year. But I became friends with Diane, and stayed friends with Diane. In fact, she came and visited me in Columbia, South Carolina.

HT: And so you recall how you met her?

DR: She was in that—

HT: Right, was she living in the next door to you?

DR: Yes, she was one of the—I call it a suite because our doors were always open. We were in and out one another's rooms. At least that's the way I remember it.

HT: Well, what do you recall about the reaction of the, I guess, housemother, counselor who lived in the dorm?

DR: Absolutely no reaction. I never was called in to be advised on how to behave or any implication. It was very matter of fact. There was one incident where Ellen and I were going to go to the movies down at the corner, and I asked Diane to go, and she said, "Well, you know I won't be able to sit with you, and I can't go." I think she had to enter another entrance and sit in the balcony, and that was the first time I realized that there were limitations. I'm not proud to say, I went ahead and went to the movies, even though she couldn't go with me. But then Ellen and I made up a petition to boycott the [corner]. There was a restaurant, I think, a cleaners, and the movie theater.

HT: The Cinema [Theater].

DR: The Cinema—and we made it up. My name is on it, I think my handwriting, and Ellen's, and we got about twenty or twenty-two names. I gave a copy of that petition to the archives so it should be at UNCG in the archives. Anyway the administration called me in and said, "There's so much going on downtown with the Sit-ins that we really don't want you to do this right now. There's enough going on," and so we withdrew the petition.

HT: I think that area—the restaurants and Cinema Theater—as best I recall, were not integrated until about 1963 because there were several protests that happened in '63 and it finally happened at that point so it probably happened about a year after you left. But at least you started it, which was great.

DR: Well, started and stopped it, but I really didn't have a choice. I mean the administration really did not want us to continue it.

HT: Was this the chancellor or the—Do you recall who asked you to stop?

DR: I don't recall. It was not a chancellor. I was looking at—The chancellor who, from reading the newspapers, the Greensboro newspaper, Dr. W. W. Pierson, the chancellor of Woman's College from '56 until '57, was really the chancellor who was the least in favor [of integration]. I wrote a paper at Wake Forest [University, Winston-Salem, North Carolina] about integration at WC, why it went so smoothly, and was so early, and in digging in the archives, Pierson—The *Greensboro Daily News* reported things such as, "Negro girls are here by the decree of the Federal Court, not by the consent of the governed, or the will of the people. They were not sought." I think probably the person who asked me was either Mereb Mossman, dean of the college, or Katherine Taylor, dean of the students.

HT: That would make sense.

DR: It was not one of the chancellors.

HT: You mentioned the [Woolworth] Sit-ins a second ago. Do you have any recollections of the Sit-ins because the Sit-ins in Greensboro happened in February 1960—?

DR: Before I came.

HT: —which was several months before you got there. So you were still in Columbia, but they spread that summer throughout the South, so do you have any recollections of the Sit-ins at all?

DR: Strangely enough, I have none. Again, I was not a crusader for integration. I just was someone who didn't see the point of it—of [segregation].

HT: Well, what kind of courses did you take while you were at WC?

DR: Oh, my favorite professor was Dr. Arthur Dickson, who was an English professor, and I loved him. First semester I did not do really well; I just didn't know how to study so obviously my favorite professor would be the course I did the best in. But I also remember Dr. Franklin Parker who was a history professor, and he was in favor of integration, and—But he was the only professor who ever mentioned it. I had a Dr. [Harry] Finestone for English, and his wife for French, and I remember my English professors the best.

HT: Did you have or know Dr. Randall Jarrell?

DR: I did not have him. It was very difficult to get to take one of his classes, but I knew his daughter, and I knew who he was. What I loved about Dr. Arthur Dickson: He was a Yalie and he wanted us to call him Mr. Dickson, not Dr., and I was very interested in art, and he, Mr. Dickson, was good friends with Gerald Coble of the Coble family of Greensboro, who was an artist. And Mr. Dickson invited me to his home to meet with Gerald Coble, and, quite frankly, wanted me to buy something of Gerald Coble's. I mean, he didn't say it, but there were all these paintings for sale, and I remember we had—For lunch we had cheese and bologna sandwiches on white bread, which I thought was just so ordinary. Anyway I did buy one of Gerald Coble's paintings. It's quite small, but it was what I could afford, and I liked it, and I have it to this day.

HT: Now speaking of art, did you take any art classes?

DR: I did. I had a professor for art history. It was something like Miss [Witkowsky?]. I believe she was German or maybe Polish, and I loved taking the art history. Thank you for reminding me. It was art history and English that I—And I loved going to the Weatherspoon [Art Gallery]. I hung out there a lot. Anytime there was a change of exhibitions, I was there, and it was a respite from study to go and look at the art. That's remained with me.

HT: So it sounds like you've always been interested in art history and art.

DR: I have, and even in high school, I volunteered at the Columbia Art Museum, and my family—My mother was on the board there.

HT: Do you paint or draw?

DR: I cannot. I am untalented, but I'm an admirer and I—In 19—In 2005, I got a master's in liberal studies from Wake Forest, and took most of my classes in art history, so that was just recently I went back.

HT: Well, speaking of the Weatherspoon, I guess you knew that Weatherspoon is named in honor of Dr. McIver's sister, younger sister?

DR: I did not.

HT: Elizabeth McIver Weatherspoon. She was an art teacher on campus for a number of years, and so in 1941, they named the gallery in her honor. Gregory Ivy was the art professor. Did you know him, by any chance?

DR: Oh, I remember Mr. Ivy, Gregory Ivy.

HT: Did you have him for any classes, by chance?



- DR: No, I only took one art history, I believe. You know, you have to take divisionals [during] freshman year.
- HT: If we can backtrack just a minute about dorm life. You talked a little bit about the roommates and that sort of thing. What about the rules and regulations? Do you have any recollections of what that was like?
- DR: Oh, absolutely. I'm going to surprise contemporary folks, but I thought it was very important to have quiet hours between eight and ten, and of course we had to be in the dorm at ten, and twelve midnight on weekends. We had to sign out to an approved house. I was dating someone in my brother's fraternity at Duke, and I had to sign out to an approved house to go away, and trench coats over your pajamas if you went to breakfast, because you could not be seen on campus with anything but dresses or skirts or trench coats. Some people thought those [rules] were silly, I didn't care one way or the other about the dresses, but I thought that freshmen—Or let me put it personally: I needed quiet hours where kids were not running up and down the dorm halls.
- HT: Of course, in those days, not everybody had earphones or all this type of music that you can see the kids with today, and so I guess it was important to have those quiet hours. And people needed to study, and I, personally, don't see how the kids are able to study today, because they have so much else going on with the computers and the iPhones and iPods and everything else. There are so many distractions.
- DR: I'm involved deeply at Wake Forest, and not only does Wake Forest require, you know, a good GPA [grade point average] to continue and to have a major—B average in your major, but then Wake wants you to volunteer and be pro-humanitate, and I don't know how they do all their extracurricular and social life and academics. It's almost too much.
- HT: Well, we talked a little bit about some of your professors and the administrators, and I think you probably had more contact with administrators than most students at the time, because of the petition you signed, and the request to move into the former all-black area of the dorm. Do you have any other recollections of administrators, like, oh, chancellors or vice-chancellors, or anybody like that?
- DR: No, but I had one exchange very early on with the dorm mother of Gray. I grew up sort of doing—making my own decisions, and I remember there was a dorm meeting and I said to the dorm mother, "I really don't feel like going." And she said, "Well, whether you feel like it or not, we want you to go. And you don't have to speak up, but you must attend." That was the first time in my life that I had ever been told that I had to do something. I was a pretty good kid. I mean, I didn't get into any trouble at home, but I'm such an extrovert that once I got to the meeting and they began discussions, I was raising my hand and I was talking as much [as I always did], but it was a lesson to me in doing something that you didn't want to do, but you had to.

HT: That really makes a lot of sense. If we can backtrack to the time that you helped integrate the dorm, and that would have been fall of 1960. Did you continue living in the dorm in the spring of '61, and for the rest of your time at WC?

DR: [Yes, I stayed in Coit Residence Hall in the spring of '61.] Well, after freshman year, students no longer lived in the freshman dorms, so I went to Strong [Residence Hall] which was an upperclassman dorm, and the African American girls were disbursed among the dorms so except for my friendship with Diane, I didn't really keep up with the other girls. And then we weren't living together anymore, but I did keep up with Diane and I think it's important because it was unique. When I asked her to come and visit me, she rode the—Can I talk a little bit about that?

HT: Sure.

DR: Her parents allowed her to ride the Greyhound bus from Charlotte to Columbia, which wasn't very far. I remember at the Greyhound station when I picked her up, she was—I mean we caused stares because no young white girls greeted and hugged and got in the car with young black girls in 1961, and she came home with me and I remember my—We had a cook who was African American, and I remember she wasn't sure that she was in favor of that, of having Diane come. And I don't know what Diane thought about it but I remember my friends—I took her around, and we visited with my friends who, of course, were fine, but we did not go out to dinner. We ate at the house, and she stayed, I think, two nights, three days. And then she invited me to her house, but my father felt that while nothing would happen to Diane in my home, because we would be protected, he felt that it would put a lot of pressure on her family because they couldn't guarantee [all of our safety]. And so he didn't let me go. And then the next summer was when I transferred to George Washington [University] in Washington, DC. I didn't transfer because I didn't like WC; I transferred because I had had a wonderful two years at a woman's college, but I was ready for a larger city, a larger experience, and my brother was getting an MBA [master of business administration] in Washington and so—

HT: So you transferred in the fall of '62, is that—

DR: Exactly.

HT: Fall of '62.

DR: So I was at WC the fall of '60 and the fall of '61.

HT: And was the process of transferring difficult? Or what kind of process did you have to go through to transfer from one institution to another?

DR: It wasn't difficult at all, just a straight—They accepted all of my coursework.

HT: Let me ask you something about the traditions at Woman's College. There were quite a few. Do you remember anything about Rat Day? Do you have any recollection of that?

- DR: I remember the name, no I don't remember. I remember one huge deal when I was a freshman and that was: We were supposed to return the Coca Cola bottles that we got from the Coke machines, and we didn't do it and so the Coca Cola company wouldn't replenish the Cokes because we kept all the—Each room had about fifteen Coke bottles in it, and one night we piled—The word went out for everybody to bring their Coke bottles and dump them—I've forgotten where—in front of the Administration Building, I think. It was a huge mound of Coca Cola bottles.
- HT: I have heard other people speak about that. [laughter] Well, didn't the dorm mothers say something about some sort of privilege would not be forthcoming if the Coke bottles were not returned.
- DR: Yes, there was some retribution, but a couple of things that I remember so well: what's now the Alumni [House] building was a small snack shop—
- HT: It was the Soda Shop
- DR: Soda Shop, thank you. And I remember they had a great chocolate—Excuse me—peanut butter cookies and orange juice and I realized after a couple of months, I'd better stop eating peanut butter cookies every eleven o'clock to tide me over to lunch.
- HT: Well, speaking of food, what did you think of the dining hall food?
- DR: I thought it was fine. I didn't—Some of it was so Southern. I remember there was one thing for dessert: it would be a Ritz Cracker with a little bit of cream cheese and a dab of grape jelly, and that was just so Southern to me. And I don't recall any problem with pork. I suppose if we had a choice of some kind of ham or chicken, I would have eaten the chicken. But I don't remember it being—I did not eat a ham at that time, but there was no problem for me.
- HT: And so the food was adequate, and nutritious, you thought. I've heard other students say that they gained, like, twenty-five pounds in their first year because of eating so much, particularly the desserts.
- DR: I was accustomed to having dessert after dinner, and so I think my walking so much, I didn't gain weight there. I took a summer class at [University of North Carolina at] Chapel Hill, and I lived in a dorm which had—dining was all in the dorm, and I gained weight that summer. But, no, I didn't gain weight, but I remember going home at Thanksgiving and thinking I had been gone so long from September to November.
- HT: I guess in those days, students didn't go home too often, just on holidays and that sort of thing.
- DR: I went home Thanksgiving and Christmas. I don't remember going home spring break, but if there was a spring break, I'm sure I did.

HT: I'm assuming you did not have your own car.

DR: No cars. No, even upper classmen couldn't have a car. My brother was at Duke so we drove together.

HT: Well, a few minutes ago you mentioned walking a great deal. Did you take any PE [physical education] courses; physical education courses at Rosenthal Gymnasium.

DR: I can't remember, but I think I did. It didn't make a big impression on me.

HT: I know I've talked to other former students who said they would take tennis, and bowling, and they even had fencing.

DR: I remember fencing classes. I didn't take them, but I remember it. I'm going to say volleyball, but I may be wrong. That might have been a high school—I think there was a requirement but because I transferred, I might not have taken it. But I was just walking all the time.

HT: Did you ever walk downtown?

DR: Yes, we walked—I'm not sure if it was downtown. It was a deli that's still there, I think. It had corned beef sandwiches, and they opened a branch here in Winston. Isn't that funny? I can't remember it, but that was the big treat, was to walk to this delicatessen.

HT: Now there was a Jay's Delicatessen in Greensboro at one time. And Lox, Stock, and Bagel but I'm not sure there are—

DR: Jay's, that might have been it.

HT: There's a Jay's—I think there's still a Jay's at Friendly Shopping Center, but I can't remember if they were in existence at that time.

DR: That doesn't sound quite right.

HT: I know the Boar and Castle was—But that wasn't a delicatessen.

DR: No. But I would walk—We would walk—That was a long walk. I can't remember where it was, but I remember it was off-campus. But there was—In my mind, I went off campus every Friday night. Certainly by Saturday morning, I was gone and didn't come back until Sunday night, either with my brother or with my boyfriend, so I was happy to stay on campus. There was lots to do.

HT: Well, tell me something about your life up in Washington [DC] after you transferred to George Washington University.

DR: I don't know how long you want to have this interview, but one thing that I do want to go into is how my experience at WC led to my taking part in other integrated situations.

HT: Sure.

DR: When I went to GW [George Washington University], I essentially just took classes and pretended I was just a resident of Washington, DC. I just—I went to the Phillips Gallery; I went up to Dumbarton Oaks; I went to all the museums; and I didn't think the English classes were nearly as good as WC. After I graduated, I went to graduate school at the University of Pennsylvania. My actual degree was MS [master of science] in education/English, and I did my practice teaching at an integrated sort of inner-city high school called Bartram.

HT: Is that B-A-R—

DR: —T-R-A-M. Bartram High School. And I was able, I think, to feel very comfortable at the integrated high school because of the WC experience. After getting my master's, my husband and I, who was also a University of Pennsylvania graduate—I got my MS at Penn, and he got his MS at Penn. We moved to Richmond, and I applied to teach high school English, and of course I had this master's degree, and the interviewer asked me if I would be willing to be the first white person in an all-black high school. This was in 1966. They wanted to integrate the Richmond Public Schools. Because I had had teaching experience in an integrated situation—black students, we changed from African American to black—and because of my experience at WC, and because I was Southern, and I wasn't some Yankee coming in, telling the Richmond schools how to integrate their schools. I mean I sounded Southern. I began in 1966 teaching at an all-black high school, Maggie Walker, and so it really is a direct line from WC to my practice teaching, to my teaching.

HT: And how were you received at Maggie Walker?

DR: Wonderfully well. I was almost protected. I think there was one other white teacher. He didn't stay. He was teaching math, but I stayed three years, and during that time, I was the only fulltime white teacher. They—neighborhood black kids came to my classroom after school to talk to me, and feel my hair, and just talk to me, and the school—I was always in the class plays as a teacher, and I was always, you know, encouraged to take part of everything, and when Martin Luther King [Jr.] was killed, I was invited, my husband and I, to a black church, so I felt integrated. In fact, sometimes when I went home, I looked in the mirror, and I looked so white. I mean, I looked washed out compared to the faces that I saw every day.

HT: And what age kids were you teaching at that time?

DR: I taught some ninth grade, but mostly tenth through twelfth, and I must say we had essentially an AP [advanced placement] class every year that I taught, and they were as smart as the master's kids I was with at Penn. That year, 1969, our black high school sent

kids to all the Ivy Leagues. The Ivy League schools wanted black kids, and there was one experience—I know that’s not about WC so I’ll, if we have time later, but there was one girl who went to Yale and got in with the Black Panthers and they convinced her to give up her Yale education. It was traumatic. She should—I don’t know what she’s done now, but—Anyway back to WC. WC enabled me—My experience enabled me to continue working in integrated situations.

HT: So it sounds like it had a huge impact on your life.

DR: It did.

[telephone rings, recording paused]

HT: I think we were talking about the impact that WC had on your life. It sounds like it was a lifelong impact.

DR: One of the impact elements was the fact that I met very smart African American women, and prior to that, I think the prejudice in the South was that they weren’t very smart, and I can remember being helped in biology class by one of the African American women, and certainly Diane made better grades in English than I did and was a better writer than I. So if you don’t integrate, if you don’t have any contact with someone else of a different whatever, you could easily have a misperception, and, of course, the black students I taught, who were tops in their class, were smarter than I ever was. I would never have been able to get into Yale [University, New Haven, Connecticut] or Mt. Holyoke [College, South Hadley, Massachusetts], or Vassar [College, Poughkeepsie, New York]. I don’t think anyone went to Princeton [University, Princeton, New Jersey]. MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Massachusetts], one of my students, one of my black students, went to MIT.

HT: Now what type of school was this? Was it low-income or—

DR: The high school?

HT: The high school. Was it middle-class or—

DR: It drew from pretty much middle-class and lower socio-economic, but the strength of the all-black school was that the faculty members knew the parents of the students, and there was a strong sense of community. And the administrators were all black, so there wasn’t any issue of “Why are you picking on me?” or “You don’t understand me:” that strength of community. And also in Richmond, Virginia, in 1966 through ’69, because businesses were segregated, there was a black middle class that profited by the fact that black students and black families would patronize them. Once the theaters opened, and the restaurants opened, a lot of those black businesses disappeared, and the black administrators—when integration came—did not go and be administrators in white

schools, for the most part. I don't know anybody who was. So we lost a whole strata of black middle class through integration. It was an unintended consequence.

HT: I think the same thing happened through urban renewal. I know in Greensboro, when they started urban renewal in the historically black areas in east Greensboro, it just wiped out black businesses wholesale. It was terrible.

DR: Yes, exactly, and that disrupted the whole community.

HT: Exactly, right.

DR: The other thing that—There were so many unfair things about the all-black high school. If I had known Diane then, I would have been able to talk with her about it, but we got used textbooks, when the white schools had finished using their textbooks, we got them. The typewriters for the business classes were always used. One time—and our library was completely inadequate. One time the business part of Maggie Walker was supposed to get new typewriters and they came in and the business department signed that they had received them. And the next day or two, they were gone so it looked like we got them at Maggie Walker, but we didn't. I mean, it was an unfair period.

HT: And you say you stayed three years.

DR: Yes.

HT: And why did you decide to leave after three years?

DR: Well, I got pregnant, and my husband was in his last year of medical school, and we took an internship in England, and—It was only because of beginning my family.

HT: So did you go back to teaching after having the family?

DR: I didn't but all through the years I've done things. For example, when we moved to Winston in 1977, I got a master's in counseling from Wake Forest, and I became an adviser to the black women's organization on campus, and I helped teach in the summer. High school students would come to Wake as an experience in college, and they were predominantly black students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and I taught them time management. Really, it was a wonderful idea: bring students on campus; house them in the dorm; let them see what college is like. And the best of the students would hopefully come to Wake Forest.

HT: So have you been involved in that sort of thing recently?

DR: I have been a trustee of Wake Forest Board of Trustees for seven years. That's not why. I actually was placed on the Board at the time Reynolda House, of which I was chair of the board, affiliated with Wake Forest, and the way I started on the Board was as liaison. And then I've just remained.

HT: Seven years is a long time to be on the Board.

DR: Well, [at] Wake Forest you're on the Board for four [years], you have to go off for a year, and then you may be asked back. I'm in my second four-year term.

HT: Right. And how often do you meet?

DR: Quarterly, for the big meetings, and then committee meetings. It's not terribly onerous, but the great advantage of being in Winston-Salem is, I can attend the Humanities Council or speeches or talks or—And in fact I'm in my second year of being on the admissions—in the admissions department interviewing prospective Wake Forest students, and I have had African American students to interview.

HT: So this is face-to-face interviews?

DR: Yes, on campus in the admissions building.

HT: Now you say you've been with Reynolda House for a number of years. It sounds like that's probably one of your favorite jobs.

DR: I volunteered and then I was paid in the education department, and then once you get on the Board, you can't hold a paid position, so I chose the Board and stayed on the Board. And then when I was chair, the first thing I did was put in term limits because I feel that even term limits for the Board chair, because there [are] wonderful people who serve and if they feel like they can never be chair, you know, what a waste for the institution. And also people get tired, and ideas are tired, so I wanted new ideas and a new Board.

HT: And fresh ideas.

DR: Fresh ideas. So then I rotated off after my six year—Well, I was on the Board longer than six, but from the time that I put in instituted term limits.

HT: So it sounds like you've lived—You mentioned earlier that you were living in England at one time. Your husband was there for medical—

DR: Medicine.

HT: For medicine. And so what did you think of living in England?

DR: Oh, well, we lived there twice: once when I had an eight-week-old child, and that was—It was cold and wintry, but I loved it, and then we went back for a year, and two of my children were in school in England. And I thought that English education emphasized reading and writing, even as a first-, second-, third-grader, more than our schools. I thought they were advanced, and I loved England.

HT: And then I think you said you lived here in Winston-Salem since the mid-seventies.



DR: Seventy-seven.

HT: That's quite a long time, so I guess this is home for you now.

DR: It is.

HT: Well, Debbie, I don't have any more formal questions. Is there anything you'd like to add about your time at Woman's College, and the impact it had on your life, and that sort of thing?

DR: I think when I wrote my paper on why did WC integrate so early, and with so little fanfare; the faculty played a huge role. Franklin Parker [history faculty] and Mr. [Warren] Ashby [philosophy faculty]—It was mostly history and political science and philosophy departments. They put together a statement. I don't know what it would have been called, that said—[papers shuffling] I'm trying to find the name for it—that said they were in favor of integrating WC, and also the female student legislature, following the faculty's lead, in 1955, before I got there, the student legislature passed a resolution supporting integration, 24 to 0. [There were many reasons we integrated so easily.] I think it being a Southern girls' school—Southerners being lady-like—and an all-girls school—meaning that the problem of integrating dating was removed. There was no dating; there were no men. So I think the women of WC integrated early and were open to it because of both the faculty's lead, and the students' legislature. I don't think it was chancellor-driven, and, in fact, of the three chancellors who were chancellor between '55 and '64, two acquiesced and went along with it; one was—Dr. [William Whatley] Pierson [chancellor]—was absolutely not in favor of it. There was one quote that I found in the *Greensboro Daily News*: Dr. Pierson said, "Undoubtedly they, the Negro students, are entitled to just and fair treatment as students, and will receive it," but he enumerated four factors in the situation that might be problematic. And what I found was the attitude and conduct of the newcomers is what he thought might be problematic, and of the white students and the attitudes and practices of the faculty, and again he said, "White students will be expected to avoid the extremes of either hostility, or exaggerated humanitarianism." So do I think the administration was supportive? Not [everyone].

HT: Not at all. I know during the Sit-ins—and they were in 1960—there were several—We know of at least three students, white students, who went downtown to Woolworths and wore their class jackets.

DR: Oh, I remember that [unclear, both talking]

HT: And there was huge debate about them wearing their class jackets, and the effect it had on Woman's College, and its reputation, and that sort of thing. And it was a big assembly, and Chancellor Blackwell, I believe it was, said to them that they should not be doing this because the school's reputation was at stake. And of course other students went down as well from Bennett [College, Greensboro, North Carolina], from A&T, Guilford, Greensboro College, but they didn't have the jackets that readily identified

them as Woman's College students. And several Woman's College students went down, both black and white, and didn't wear their class jackets—

DR: Right.

HT: —so they were not as readily identifiable, but I think his reasoning was that they were afraid something would happen, and there were—I've talked to several of the students who did go down, and they were threatened. They got hate mail, telephone calls. One student, Eugenia Seaman Marks' family's business was almost lost. Her dad was a contractor in Florida, and it made the national news, and it affected his business because of that.

DR: Oh, dear.

HT: So there were consequences, and, as you said, the administration was not very happy about that.

DR: No.

HT: So it took a long time for the change to occur.

DR: But I know that Frank Porter Graham, who was chancellor of, I think, the entire system, but certainly Chapel Hill—

HT: The president, right, the whole system.

DR: President, I don't know the years that he was president.

HT: I think it was until about 1950 because he ran for the [United States] Senate, and my assumption is that he would have given up the presidency to do that, and I think he lost the senate race in the early fifties sometime. I can't remember. It might be '52; I can't remember.

DR: Right, he lost. My husband has written his master's thesis on immigration and the impact of quotas on the admission to medical school, in particular for medical schools in North Carolina. Of course, East Carolina being the most recent, and didn't have that history in the fifties and the sixties. But Mike found that a student had been rejected who was Jewish, rejected as an applicant to Chapel Hill Medical School, and he was tops in everything: tops in grades, tops in recommendation, tops in MCATs [Medical College Admission Test]. And the father of the student went to Frank Porter Graham and asked just why did this student not get accepted. Porter Graham went to Manning, Dr. Manning who was the director or the chancellor of the medical school—dean of the medical school—and the dean said, "Well, you know we have forty students, and this applicant was the fifth. We already had four Jewish students and he was the fifth, and, you know, we have only ten percent." And Frank Porter Graham said, "What!" And Manning resigned. You know, Manning Avenue that runs through Chapel Hill?

HT: There's a Manning Hall, too.

DR: And Manning Hall. He actually resigned because Frank Porter Graham refused to maintain quotas against Jewish students. So all the way through higher education, there have been those who have been very supportive and forward thinking, and those who have dragged their feet.

HT: And that's a constant battle, even today, I'm sure.

DR: Well, affirmative action. We're going to have that vote on behalf of the white student at the University of Texas who wasn't accepted. The funny thing is now we have a problem—quote, problem—with so many Asian American students that now there's sort of a benign quota of “We've got so many Asian students in medical students—twenty, thirty percent—that we've got to give others a chance.” So it's an ongoing academic issue.

HT: Well, I guess to sum up, can you give me your thoughts about your time at Woman's College and the impact it's had on your life and what you'd like people to know about your thoughts about your time there.

DR: The first thing that strikes me is what an excellent academic school it was. I can't compare it to other Southern girls' schools like Sophie Newcomb [College, New Orleans, Louisiana] or Hollins [College, Roanoke, Virginia] or Sullins [College, Bristol, Virginia] at the same time, but I suspect it was one of the best. In every way, it was a close community which is what liberal arts institutions today aspire to. If there's not a close community, why not have all education on line, and have everything in MOOCs [Massive Open Online Courses], these mass online college courses. So I believe in a liberal arts institution that sustains a sense of community, that has small enough classes to have discussion, and WC was that. [pause] Nowadays every college is putting up, like, recreation centers with indoor pools and outdoor pools and all these other accoutrements. We didn't have any of that at WC, and it didn't bother me that I was in a very old dorm that didn't have air conditioning. Only the newer dorms had air conditioning, or maybe they were window units later. But, for me, those are extra and maybe unnecessary.

HT: Well, have you been involved with—It was called Woman's College in those days—UNCG in any way since you left?

DR: Not really. I came over to Jackson Library and used it for the archives when I wrote my paper. To be honest, you can only serve so many masters, and Wake Forest is the school that I have remained close to. And I don't know what kind of school [UNCG] is now with its coed classes.

HT: Well, it's a very large school because we have almost 18,000 students which is—

DR: It was three thousand [in 1960].

HT: Three thousand when you were there. It's mainly a commuting student's school, drawing from the metropolitan area of the triad. I think there are a fair number of international students there but I don't know what the percentage is. It's probably fairly small since, you know, the total population of 18,000 students. But it's very diverse; I think it's the most diverse school in the whole UNC [University of North Carolina] system. It's about thirty percent minorities, I think—maybe a little bit higher. It's still predominantly female: about seventy-thirty [percent].

DR: Is it?

HT: Yes.

DR: That's good to hear. I don't know if percentages do anything to create that all-women's—

HT: Of course, Woman's College, I think, had a national reputation for excellence. It was, I think, the second largest residential woman's college in the United States until it changed over to being coeducational in the early sixties. I think it's sort of lost some of its academic standings when it became a coeducational [school], which is unfortunate.

DR: You can't be everything to all people, and what it was in 1960—First of all I was lucky to get in; I really was. I mentioned that I wasn't good in math. It—What—For me it's not a matter of—Well, I was a woman therefore I didn't think I could be good in math. I actually don't have a math gene. But it's not stopped me from getting three master's degrees, but I can't do, you know, higher math or anything above—

HT: Your talents are elsewhere. [laughter]

DR: My talents are definitely not in math, but I was actually on academic probation my first semester, and I felt like I had all the support that I needed. They weren't ready to throw me out; they didn't want to throw me out.

HT: They were willing to give you a chance.

DR: Yes.

HT: Because they probably knew you could do better.

DR: And I eventually—

HT: Well, that's not uncommon for freshman students. I hear that all the time from some of the ladies I've interviewed: some of the African American ladies, and some of the other women I've interviewed who attended WC. It's a huge change going from high school to a college, and if you don't know how to study and apply yourself, because you are on your own. Mom and dad are not there to help you, so you have to rely on yourself, and that's tough so you have to learn how to do that.

DR: I didn't have good study skills going in.

HT: I didn't either.

DR: Where did you go?

HT: I went to Greensboro College.

DR: Oh, that's right, You told me that.

HT: And so you have to learn if you want to stay in school: how to apply yourself, and go to the library and study, and not goof off and watch TV or whatever.

DR: Well, I think WC was a unique place because it walked the line between being a Southern woman's college; not being Sweet Briar, not being elitist at all, not emphasizing lady-like virtues like teas and manners. It was an intellectual institution.

HT: Well, I think our founder, Charles W. McIver, wanted the school to be very egalitarian and not elitist, because the girls who attended the school when it was first founded in the 1890s came from all walks of life there. There were some who had prior college education; there were some who had as little as five days of formal education, so he wanted a level playing field as much as possible, and I think that thought carried on through the years, even to the time that you were there.

DR: I went back and read a biography of McIver, and also read some other newspapers' articles at his death because I wrote my master's thesis on the interpretation of Reynolda House, and Katharine Smith—as you mentioned, Katharine Smith Reynolds, having been influenced by McIver, I felt that she was more influenced by McIver, both for her philanthropy and for her strong education. After she died in 1924, her two daughters had a much more lady-like education. RJR [RJ Reynolds, American businessman and founder of the R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company] had died in 1918; Katharine died in '24, so Nancy and Mary Reynolds' Uncle Will, who was their trustee, didn't really believe in educating women. He didn't see the point to it.

[End CD 1—Begin CD 2]

DR: There was one really funny story about, I think it was Nancy, who was in England, and she wanted a [book written by Galsworthy]—a book that was a first edition, and I think it was [the English author John Galsworthy], but at any rate she wanted the first edition, and she wrote to her Uncle Will, and he said, "Twenty-five dollars for the first edition. Can't you wait for the second one?" He just had no concept [that] a first edition of a book would be more valuable, and why she would want it.

HT: That's great. Well, thank you so much.

DR: Oh, it's been a pleasure.

HT: It's been great meeting you and hearing your stories about Woman's College, and your life in general.

DR: Thank you for coming.

HT: You're so welcome. Okay, thanks.

[End of Interview]