

AL 97

Interviewee: Jackie McGriff

Interviewer: Connie Llewellyn

Date: March 11, 1988

L: This is Connie Llewellyn, and I am interviewing Jackie McGriff at her home in Gainesville, Florida. Today is March 11, 1988. The subject of the interview is the Junior Welfare League of Gainesville. Good afternoon, Jackie.

M: Good afternoon.

L: I would like to start today by getting some biographical information from you. Where were you born?

M: I was born in central Louisiana. We moved to Florida when I was about ten or eleven years old, and I have been here ever since. I moved to Gainesville in 1936, I believe, when I was in school at FSCW [Florida State College for Women in Tallahassee, presently Florida State University]. Other than a couple of trips off with Uncle Sam's army and then to Mississippi for a year, we have been here ever since. I have two sons, William A. III and John. William A. III lives in Jacksonville, and John is in Atlanta. I have five delightful grandchildren, one of whom, William A. IV, is a sophomore at the University of Florida.

L: Where were your parents from?

M: About five miles apart on Bayou Rapides in Louisiana. They had known each other all their lives.

L: What was your father's name?

M: John A. Texada.

L: And your mother's maiden name?

M: Lillian Haworth.

L: So they had grown up in central Louisiana.

M: Yes. They are two enormous families. I have no relatives in Florida whatsoever, but I have hundreds of them in Louisiana [laughter].

L: How long did you live in Louisiana? You said you moved to Florida, but I did not get when.

M: I was about ten years old.

- L: So the first ten years of your life you lived in Louisiana.
- M: Yes. We moved to Madison, and I went through the last couple of years of elementary school and junior high and high school in Madison. Then I went off to college. I went to Sophie Newcomb [College for Women, affiliated with Tulane University in New Orleans] for a couple of years, and then I transferred to Tallahassee.
- L: Tell me the earliest thing you can remember from your childhood.
- M: I was born on my grandfather's plantation, and to me it was heaven on earth. That is where I would like to have spent my entire life. We moved into a small town, but he sent for me every Saturday. Frequently a black man came in a buggy [to pick me up]. One of my earliest memories is being at Castile as a small child on the weekend. I remember pitching a tantrum when I had to go home on Sunday [laughter]. I loved it out there.
- L: I am sure it was lovely. Then when you moved to Madison, you went to school in Madison?
- M: I guess I went to the fifth and sixth grades at the elementary school, and then I went on through junior high and high school. I graduated in Madison. Then my mother and father sent me back to New Orleans to go to Sophie Newcomb. I lasted two years [laughter].
- L: And then you went to Tallahassee.
- M: Yes.
- L: From Tallahassee, you moved to Gainesville?
- M: Yes. My parents moved here in 1936. I went to [FSCW in] Tallahassee and graduated in 1939. I taught school in High Springs for one year, and then I married. Gus and I have lived in Orlando, Miami, Chipley, and Daytona, but we came back to Gainesville in 1950, I believe it was, and we have been here ever since.
- L: What is your husband's full name?
- M: William A. McGriff, Jr.
- L: When you came back to Gainesville in 1950, what size town was it?
- M: When we came here in 1936, it seems to me it was 12,000 or 14,000. Then, of

course, after the war is when it really exploded. I do not really remember how big it was in 1950. You know, the [Junior Welfare] League did the house-to-house campaign when the United Way was first formed.

L: Is that the Mother's March on Polio?

M: No, this was what is now United Way. It was called the Community Chest then. It seems to me we were talking about a town that was 30,000 or 40,000, maybe more.

L: What year was that when that started?

M: It must have been 1955 or 1956, somewhere around there. It was shortly after I was president of the League. That was the usual. I am sure that you have heard "now that you are no longer president and are out of the League, you have time to do so-and-so" [laughter].

L: So you were active in the Community Chest.

M: Yes, we did the house-to-house campaign. We divided the town into what we called "quadrants"--we divided it into five sections--and literally did it house-to-house. We were the pride of the campaign. We raised \$17,000.

L: My word! That is a lot of money.

M: It was in that time. It was really very funny. I was looking [in the scrapbook] at what the Follies made and what the Thrift Shop made and what we collected walking our legs off on the Mother's March on Polio, and it really points out the difference, the change [in times].

L: So your goal was to canvas every house in the community.

M: That is right, and we came very close to it.

L: Did the League man this operation by themselves, or did they have help?

M: No, the League really was not the sponsor of it. It was a separate organization. But in those days, anytime they wanted to get anything done, they got the League to do it. Also in those days, no one was afraid to go anywhere. We canvassed every area of town, every little pocket of town, and it never occurred to anybody to be afraid, that you might not be properly supervised or something might happen to you. There was nothing like that.

L: That is an interesting comment on the times.

M: We were white ladies--nobody was going to bother us. Isn't that amazing, the difference?

L: That time is gone forever, I think.

M: That is kind of bad.

L: In what year were you invited to join the Junior Welfare League?

M: 1947. I had a small child.

L: How would you describe the reputation that the League enjoyed in this community at that time?

M: Excellent. Of course, at that time, Connie, it was a very selective organization. You had to be *invited* to join, and once you were invited to join, it never occurred to you not to accept. It was quite an honor. I really think that is one reason why we worked as hard as we did: we were proud of having been selected. It was not something that we went out and just joined. We had been asked to become a part of this organization, and we were very proud of our organization--and we worked like dogs. Numbers of the closest friends I have in Gainesville right now are people that I worked with so closely in the League. We made excellent friends and had an awfully good time, but we did work.

L: How was this selective way of choosing members viewed by the community?

M: That is the way things were done in those days. Everything was discriminatory. Remember, I am talking about the 1940s. Everything was by selection.

L: So this was the norm for groups at that time.

M: Oh, yes. The Junior Women's Club was discriminatory. Everything was. That idea had never entered anyone's head at all. That is the way life was in those days.

L: Tell me a little about how you were selected and how you found out you were selected. Did you get an invitation?

M: I got a telephone call telling me that I had been elected or selected. The person that called me knew that I had a small child--John was just a few months old--and wanted to know if I felt that I could handle it before I got the invitation, rather than having to say no. But I said sure. Then, of course, I got a formal invitation asking me to join, which I did.

L: Since you did join and later became a part of the group, what can you tell me about how the group went about making those selections?

M: We voted. Names were proposed, and we voted on them at the meetings.

L: Did the entire group make the selection, or was there an admissions committee?

M: It was the entire group. If you wanted to propose someone, you did. Then the names were presented at a regular monthly meeting, and the whole membership, which, at that time, remember, maybe numbered thirty-five to forty-five people, voted. Some people did not get in. Some people did. But the League stayed in that range of number of members well into the 1950s, when it got so big.

L: At this time, then, as small as it was, was there any problem of some of the members not knowing a person whose name was put up?

M: Very little, Connie. Gainesville was still a small town. See, this was also right on the heels of World War II. We had all just gotten back from the service. Some people in Gainesville whose husbands did not go into the service had to drop out because the League got so small they did not have enough people to do everything. Of course, at this time, the delight of having a maid to take care of your children became a thing of the past. I have some good friends who dropped out during the war and were a little annoyed about it. Certain things had to be done, and there were just not enough people to do them.

L: What do you mean by "a little annoyed"?

M: Well, they were upset that special concessions were not made to them. Because the rest of us were off fighting the war, we got out of League work, and they did not.

L: That left a special burden for those who stayed.

M: It left a tremendous burden on them, because the projects that we had had to continue. Then when we came back and the League really got going again is when it really blossomed out into real community service, like all of the clinics--well-baby clinic, cancer clinic, and all those things that were started.

It was then, and, of course, still is, a great organization. We used to laugh about it: if that was your job, you did it. We used to wonder why am I doing this? But you did it because you were a member of the League, and this was the League's project. I am sure you have heard of our delightful pink slips [laughter].

L: I was going to ask you about that.

M: If you missed an appointment, you got a slip, and you made that appointment up or had to have a pretty good excuse. I have forgotten what the blue slips were for, maybe for missing meetings. But the threat of a pink slip descending you had a little to do with your devotion to duty [laughter].

L: Increase the expectation.

M: I had totally forgotten about pink slips until that minute.

L: After you were invited to join, what did you do after you accepted your invitation?

M: The League had a provisional training course that we went to, and then we were assigned our project in the League, placement, you call it now. That is what we did.

L: During this provisional training course, what did you learn?

M: We had to take a test on the "blue book," which was about this big [fifteen to twenty pages]. We had to learn the history of the League, its background, and what we were doing (the projects).

L: Then you had a test that you had to take at the end of the provisional course.

M: Yes. We were also given an overview of the League's projects; we were introduced to them.

L: Let us talk a little more about what the projects the League was involved with at that time.

M: As I said, there were various clinics--the cancer clinic and the well-baby clinic.

L: Did they still have a prenatal clinic?

M: Yes, that is the one I was trying to think of. We also did other things as the need arose. For instance, we raised the money and refurbished the pediatric ward over at Alachua General [Hospital]. When that was done, we put it aside.

Then something else would come up in the community that needed doing. And, as I said, if they wanted it done, somebody would get the League to do it. We did just whatever needed to be done. I am trying to think of some of the other projects that we did. Of course, we did all the drives. We did the cancer drive, the polio drive--all of them. By "doing them," I mean we did the house-to-house campaign. It really got to the point where we were a little burned out with knocking on doors. We came to feel that people would open the door and think

oh, no, not again. But those were the kinds of things we did.

We co-sponsored Gainesville's centennial. We sponsored the Pi Delta Theta/Sigma Nu football game. We did those kinds of things.

L: That [football game] was a money-raising project.

M: Oh, yes. The centennial was not; it was just a celebration. If you want to know the brutal truth, it was a total flop.

L: Oh, really? Well, the League helped sponsor a dance, I believe.

M: We used to have a New Year's Eve dance every year.

L: I mean about the centennial.

M: Oh, yes. Chester Yates and I were the co-chairmen, and it really was a colossal flop. We spent years trying to figure out why.

L: Was there any enthusiasm among the citizenry for any of the centennial events?

M: Not a lot. The men were supposed to grow beards, and not many did. The centennial just never really got off the ground here. It should have, because the University was participating in it. We had the dance at the University gym. It was lovely; the only problem was no one came.

L: Oh, what a shame. And there was a parade, too, I think.

M: I do not remember that. There could have been.

L: You were talking about the New Year's Eve dance. That was another money-making project?

M: Yes.

L: Where was that held?

M: Several times we had it at the little American Legion hall on University Avenue, next to the old library. One of the provisional chores was we had to do the serving; we had to serve the drinks and set-ups. It was a money-raising affair.

L: Was it a very popular event?

M: Yes. It was a lot of fun. It was not confined to League members, of course.

We sold tickets. It was just one of the things in those days that people looked forward to--the New Year's Eve party.

For several years, we had a benefit ball for polio on Roosevelt's birthday, January 31. We sponsored that a couple of times.

L: Was it successful?

M: Yes.

L: I guess it also increased awareness about polio.

M: That was the idea.

L: Another money raiser was the Salvage Shop.

M: Yes. The Salvage Shop has a marvelous history. It is a parking lot now, but it was down in a row of little buildings down on what is now 2nd Street, I guess.

L: In the next block down from Rice's Hardware?

M: Well, one of them was there, going west from Rice's Hardware. Then we moved up on a street, not an avenue; I think it was 2nd Street. There was a great big building on the corner that was Rutherford's [jewelry], and there were little shops in back of it. We had one of those little shops. Then for a while we had it in Louise McMullen's garage on 3rd Street, with the dirt floor and so forth. Then we went into Mrs. Bund's building on 4th Avenue, behind the old Commercial Hotel. We were all over town.

L: You did have a lot of trouble during that period staying in a building.

M: Yes. We never had anywhere to light. We were at Mrs. Bund's building down on 4th Avenue--it is now Eddie Dugger's insurance office--for quite some time. I forget where we went after that. Eventually they bought the building they are in now.

L: Right behind where Penney's used to be downtown.

M: Yes. I understand they need to move now because everything around them has closed.

L: I guess it never ends.

M: No. You have to move with the times.

- L: Now, the Salvage Shop was open during what portions of the week?
- M: Just Saturday. It really was a rummage sale. You brought what you had to sell, and it was sold. That was it.
- L: And League women volunteered to keep it open.
- M: League women were assigned to keep it open [laughter]. You had a salvage quota to meet. That is the way we did it. Each new chairman would upgrade it a little bit. I remember when Mary Parrish was chairman, we laughed at her so. She insisted that everything be cleaned, pressed, and on hangers, whereas before we had just brought the articles in and dumped them. We were ready to kill her, but we did it Mary's way [laughter]. But it was open only one day a week. I do not recall if it was closed during the summer or not; I do not remember. During that time, not everyone went off to either Crescent Beach or the mountains in the summer.
- L: Some of the League did continue through the summer?
- M: Yes, and meetings continued. Another thing is we met in a number of places. When the city hall was across the street from Holy Trinity Church, we met down in the police basement. We met in that place that is now the restaurant on University Avenue, across from what used to be the library. I think of the name of it is the Melting Pot or something like that.
- L: Now, what building was that at that time? Is that where the chamber of commerce was?
- M: It was the chamber of commerce, and we met in their back meeting room. Then we met in what was the county health department.
- L: Where was that located?
- M: Right behind Alachua General.
- L: Oh, is it that little brick building?
- M: The building is still there.
- L: I think the Family Resource Center is there now.
- M: Oh, is that where it is?
- L: I believe so.

- M: Well, after I got out, they met at one time at that church on the corner of NW 5th Avenue and 17th Street. It is a community church of some sort.
- L: The United Church of Gainesville, I think it is.
- M: Yes. We, too, as well as the Thrift Shop, moved all around as we got larger.
- L: Was it during this period of time that the name of the Salvage Shop was changed to the Thrift Shop?
- M: Connie, I do not remember. It probably is.
- L: I believe I read that in the minutes. I was just wondering if there was a great deal of attention paid to changing the name. How did that come about?
- M: If so, I do not remember it.
- L: I also noted in the minutes when I was looking through them that there were several instances where the Salvage Shop or the Thrift Shop chairman reported that so-and-so's family had been burned out or had had some kind of disaster. What did the League do in that situation?
- M: We opened the Thrift Shop to them. We clothed them and rounded up household goods and things.
- L: So it was not only a money-making project, but it served the community, as well.
- M: It was a service project. At one time in Gainesville, there was a countywide organization, the Central Welfare Committee. Lottie Schafer was the head of it. It was an overviewer of all the service and charitable organizations in town, and we always had a representative on that. So we knew what was going on and what needed to be done.
- L: I believe that the League had a long history of working with the Central Welfare Committee, judging from the minutes.
- M: We did, we worked with them for years and years. As I said, through that and through the monthly meetings, we were kept aware of the needs in town.
- L: Was that strictly a community-based organization, or was that part of the "federal government" infrastructure?
- M: No, it was purely community, a county thing that was formed, as I remember, for that specific reason, to have some coordination of what was going on. There

was no point in having four organizations in town doing the same thing, so it worked out like that.

L: So it was funded by the county, then?

M: Yes, and by the participating organizations. It used to be in our budget. It was not a lot, but we contributed to it.

L: I read something about the blood bank.

M: Now, that was after my day. I do not remember the blood bank.

L: What about the Civic Roundtable? What can you tell me about that?

M: We kept a representative on it. I never served on it, so I really do not remember much about it.

L: That was originally set up, I think, by the Pilot Club.

M: I think it more or less addressed civic projects that needed doing in town, whereas the Central Welfare Committee was literally for the welfare projects that needed tending to.

L: I understand that it was through the Civic Roundtable that the League was made the coordinator or organizer for the Centennial Ball, so maybe that is the sort of work that it did.

M: I had forgotten that. Yes, that is the kind of thing that the Civic Roundtable would have sponsored.

L: What was the Empty Stocking fund?

M: It was a Christmas stocking-filling project. We gave toys, food, time, and money to fill empty stockings. It is the same thing that [Judge] Dorcas Drake has done in Jacksonville for years and years. They literally packaged Christmas things for indigent children, and the stockings were usually given out down here at the rec center. We were not the only ones that did it. Everybody in town participated. The firemen used to repair the toys, and all that kind of thing.

L: Was there a particular group that was responsible for this, or was it an independent project?

M: I do not know whether there was any particular group or not; I really do not remember. I know a lot of organizations participated. I can remember hauling

leftover things to the fire station, as our children grew older.

L: And they still request things every Christmas today, so maybe that is an outgrowth of that same project.

M: Oh, yes, they still repair things. I think it is an outgrowth.

L: I also saw where the Welfare League became very interested in children's books for the library.

M: We were. We formed the children's library. At that time, the mezzanine floor of the recreation center was empty, and Dot Hampton, Wayny Cannon, Emily Stringer, and a couple of other people really got busy and taught themselves to be librarians. We furnished the money and set up a children's library. We had story hours and so forth. Here again, after we got it organized and well run and well stocked, we gave it to the public library. The library at that time was across the street, on the creek where the traffic court is now; it was in that little building. They moved it all over there, and it became part of the public library.

L: Did you continue that as a project?

M: I do not think so, but I do not remember for certain. People may have worked there because they liked it, but it was not a League project. It became a part of the Gainesville public library. We must have spent three or four years on that project.

L: Was there a library set up for the Negro children through this same project?

M: I do not remember that.

L: I read that the Carver Library for colored children was set up.

M: I guess they set up one over there in the Carver recreation center on 1st or 2nd Street, but I really do not remember that. Of course, at that time, Negro children were not allowed to use the white library.

L: Right. From what I discovered, the funds were made available for the books, and the books may have actually even been purchased. They did not man the library with the story hour the way they did the one at the recreation center.

M: No. We did some work at the Carver recreation center over there, but I am sure it was probably financial aid.

L: I do not know exactly what location you are talking about.

M: It is a recreation center. It is a yellow, concrete-block building, and it must be in about the 500 or 600 block of NW 1st Street, in that section over there. In front of it is an empty lot and a couple of basketball courts. It used to be old Eli Witt [Company warehouse], but it is empty now. It is right behind the Sun Bank and up about a block.

L: You were still operating the clinics at that time?

M: Yes.

L: Is that when the interest for the premature babies grew, in that section near Alachua County Hospital?

M: Yes, and somebody (I do not remember which pediatrician) pled with us that they absolutely had to have an isolette.

L: What is an isolette?

M: It is the forerunner of a good incubator. It was a very revolutionary idea at that time. It had sleeves, and the nurses could put their hands through and work with the babies without taking the baby out. We raised the money and bought a couple of those.

We spent a lot of time in Alachua General on the various clinics and projects like that. Once again, when we finished the Ella Mae Canova ward, we turned it over to the hospital. It was the hospital's then, not ours.

L: You also had a project in the hospital, I believe, about magazines.

M: I guess this was the forerunner of the "Pink Ladies." Yes, we did. We had a magazine cart. That particular group used to push a cart with magazines, toothpaste, and the like up and down the halls. I do not remember when the Pink Lady, the hospital auxiliary, was formed, but they took it over.

L: I think I read that the group turned it over to the hospital in 1952.

M: That is about right.

L: Then there was some interest in the quality of movie films that were being shown. I think that for a while you may have worked with the Better Films for Children project.

M: We probably did. I do not remember it, but we probably did. We were greatly involved in anything that involved children. Children were not as highly

organized and regimented as they are now. They did not have something that they took or did every afternoon of the week, so the League mothers--90 percent of the League members were mothers at that time--did all those kinds of things.

L: There is one more thing that I noticed in the minutes, and that was the Alachua County Citizens Commission on Education.

M: I have no recollection of that at all.

L: I was going to ask you what it was.

M: I have no recollection of that.

M: They asked the League to send two members to sit on their board. I do not know if it still exists today.

M: Probably the reason I do not remember is because so many of those things were going on in town. If the couple of people sent were not involved in your project, you were so busy with your own project that you really did not pay much attention to it. I am sure those people made a report at every meeting, but I just do not remember.

L: What were some of the offices that you held in the Welfare League? You were the historian at one time.

M: And I was provisional chairman twice. Of course, I was vice-president. [D. R.] "Billy" Matthews got elected to Congress, and he and Sara went off to Washington, and I finished out her term. Then I served my own term [as president]. So I was president for a year and a half. After I was finished with that, they were in such desperate straits that I was provisional chairman again. Shortly thereafter, I finished my seven years.

L: What is the significance of seven years?

M: That is how long you stayed active.

L: That is the time of your membership.

M: Yes. The age bit never got into it. After you had served seven active years, you could become a sustainer.

L: What was the general age range of the membership?

M: They were not quite as young as the rules say now, but it seems to me you had

to be maybe twenty-four. There was no cut-off age at the upper end, because no matter how old you were, you stayed in for seven years. When they changed it [the mandatory retirement age] to forty, I remember the loud cries of anguish, because some of the people had been in for seven years and were only thirty years old, meaning that they had to go another [ten years].

L: So there was no special provision made for them?

M: I am sure there was. This happened after I got out, but I am sure that they made some special provision for them. But that was what the seven years was about.

L: What other local membership requirements were there, besides just the term being seven years?

M: Oh, you had to be in town as least three years at that time, and you had to have one person, I believe it was, propose you and three people endorse you. If you had lived in Gainesville, moved away, and then came back, your first residency in town counted.

L: So that is what happened to you.

M: No. See, when I graduated from college, I never did live here until we came home after the war in 1946. I went in in 1947. But there were some people who had not lived here for three consecutive years but had been born here, and that counted in their favor. They were acceptable; they were not outsiders.

L: You were chairman of the reservations for the state Council of Welfare Leagues when it met in Gainesville in 1952.

M: Yes, I remember that. Sometime during my time in the League the state organization revived, and we went to state meetings. See, we were all either service leagues or welfare leagues. I think Orlando, Jacksonville, and Tampa were probably the only Junior Leagues in the state. Maybe Miami was, but I do not know. Anyway, there were eight or ten of us that were service leagues, and we met in Clearwater one year, in Daytona one year, and here one year. It was really a day-long thing. I believe the word now is "networking." We had never heard of that word, but everyone shared their ideas, projects, and problems.

Then people began to petition to join the national organization, and I believe Clearwater and Tallahassee were two of the very first ones.

L: There was a lot of interest in becoming a part of the national organization?

- M: At that time, yes. One of the big reasons was the population began to be so transient. People began to move up in their professions and so forth and were moving around, and it was delightful to be able to transfer.
- L: I see. That would be a privilege you would enjoy if your home league were a member of the national organization.
- M: Yes. Gus and I moved to Greenwood, Mississippi one year, and they had a service league. They invited me to join after I had been there a year. Well, we did not stay there a year, so I never did join. But when I went to Daytona, they invited me to participate there.
- L: As an affiliate of the Junior Welfare League.
- M: Yes. But when I came home, of course, I went right back into the Gainesville League.
- L: I noticed that one of the discussion groups for that 1952 meeting of the state council was national affiliation.
- M: It was a very controversial topic at that time. What is in existence now is an exaggerated form of what we were afraid of then, that it would become a national organization and that we would lose, one, our autonomy, and, two, our participation in local affairs. At that time, we were much more interested in what was going on here and what we could do to make Gainesville a better place to live than we were what was going on in New York and Washington. Now, maybe we were wrong. Maybe we were provincial, but our goal in life was to improve the living conditions in the city of Gainesville, not just for ourselves, but for the community. Of course, the League has lost some of its autonomy.
- L: From what you are telling me, then, it was not something that everybody was interested in doing.
- M: Oh, no. There was a lot of controversy. Then, in true League spirit, once the decision was made, people pitched in and worked themselves cross-eyed to come up to the standards of the time and become acceptable.
- L: Did the Gainesville Welfare League affiliate with the national league during this time, in the 1950s?
- M: I do not know when this League joined the national organization. It must have been in the 1970s.
- L: But they attempted to join during that time.

M: It came up now and then. As I said, Gainesville itself was not large enough. At that time, the population requirement was 100,000, and we did not come anywhere near that.

L: You probably did not have fifty members at that time, either.

M: No, I am sure we did not. When they did join the national organization, they had to do all sorts of things like make the sustainers eligible to be sustaining members of the national league and so forth.

L: It sounds like it was complicated.

M: Talk to Betty Alsobrook! [Laughter.]

L: Now, as far as fund raisers go, did you all put on the Follies at that time?

M: We put on a Follies in 1954 (maybe it was 1955), and it was the first one the League had sponsored in about ten years, so we really started from scratch. We gave months to it, practically twenty-four hours a day, but we had an awfully good time doing it. We rehearsed at Kirby Smith because it had a stage and a playground--we could bring the children and put them out on the playground.

L: Good point [laughter].

M: Why, sure! When we put it on, at that time [Dennis Keith] "Dutch" Stanley was the dean of the College of Physical Education [and Health]. Do not ask me how, but we persuaded Dutch to let us have the University Auditorium. They have never done it since, and I am sure he got in trouble. Anyhow, we put on the first Follies in the big University of Florida auditorium, which meant we only had to do it one night. I do not know any group of people who worked any harder or had as much fun as we did, because it was totally new. Nobody had done it in such a long time. Lord, it was work.

L: How would you define what the Follies is?

M: Well, at that time, it was a stage production. All the participants were local people, and the object was purely and simply to raise money. The amount of money they raise now staggers the mind. I do not remember the figure, but it seems to me that we raised \$6,000 to \$8,000, and that was an awful lot of money.

L: It sure was.

- M: The Thrift Shop raised \$2,000 or \$3,000 in a year. But that is what it was. It turned out to be a great cooperative effort. People had a lot of fun and made some good friends and did some things that you just wonder now why on earth [we do not do those things anymore]. I just loved looking at these the other night.
- L: In the scrapbook?
- M: We had forgotten what complete fools we made of ourselves, but everybody was doing the same thing.
- L: Now, how did you solicit the talent?
- M: We had a talent party, and large numbers of people have a great deal of ham in them. We had a huge talent party, and the director did some pre-work and had gotten up a few acts. People just sang and danced.
- L: So the talent was open to the whole community?
- M: Oh, yes. We had one chorus line that was a Charleston group, and those of us that were in the Charleston group were the various committee chairmen because we literally did not have time to do anything else. This director told us if we could remember how to do the Charleston, we could do it in two or three rehearsals. Gus was in one of the dances. They rehearsed every night for weeks! They rehearsed in people's private homes, anywhere they could find a corner.
- L: Who did you hire for a director?
- M: His name was Lee something, from Cargill [talent agency].
- L: Oh, out of New York?
- M: Yes, out of New York. I do not know who they have now, but we never had anybody but Cargill.
- L: Did they provide the costumes, also?
- M: They provided the costumes and the director. Of course, we had to get talent and the band. We had to refurbish the costumes, get them clean and mended. We did the scenery, we did the publicity, we sold the tickets--we did the whole thing. That is why it became so tremendously time consuming.
- L: That is a large undertaking.

- M: Especially for that small a group of people. We only had maybe forty or forty-five people in the League.
We got great support from the town. I will never forget one of our local businessmen whose wife was in the League. We all sold ads--we had to, there were not enough of us not to. I went into his place of business and gave my little spiel and asked, "Would you like to buy an ad in the Follies program?" He looked me in the eye and asked, "Do I have any choice?" [Laughter.] This was the way the League was. He knew he had to. Well, I said, "No. What size do you want?" [Laughter.] That was the way things were done. We really worked at it.
- L: So you had a program, and that is where the ads appeared?
- M: Oh, yes, that is the big black program in there.
- L: So you made money by selling tickets and by selling ads in the program.
- M: Yes. And we had those little things that runs across the stage, where somebody comes out with a placard. I have forgotten what you call them. And we had patrons.
- L: Now, what is that?
- M: They still have them. We selected people and invited them to pay an extra amount for their tickets. They were sponsors.
- L: I see. And their names were listed separately in the program?
- M: Oh, yes. Once again, if you were approached, there really was not anything you could do except say how much?
- L: So the League members sold the tickets, sold the patron tickets, sold ads, and performed in the performances.
- M: We did all the advertising, did the scenery--literally painted the scenery; Cargill did not furnish any scenery--put on the talent party, put on the cast party--we just did the whole thing.
- L: Well, I can see it was a large undertaking.
- M: Well, it was for that many people.
- L: When it was over, how did the membership feel? Was it a never-again thing, or

were they enthusiastic?

M: Well, the day after, [their attitude was] "we will never do this again." Of course, they did, I think, two years later. But everyone had such a good time doing it--acting, singing, dancing, performing. We just had a marvelous time. But we did not do it two or three years in a row. I think the way they do it now is every four years. I think that is a splendid idea. Then, of course, you know we did the horse show for two or three years.

L: Yes, I would like you to tell me something about that, too.

M: It was the same thing. They were trying to get the horse show here on the circuit, and they needed some sponsorship to really get it going. There were two or three people in the League at the time that were very interested in horse shows, so we sponsored it. Once again, we sold box seats and tickets, and we got the program up. This is just when I was getting out, and I do not remember how many years they did the horse show, but it got on its feet.

L: Was it a successful money-making project, too?

M: Yes, it really was very successful. As I remember, the people that were interested in that sort of thing were very pleased to get on the circuit and become part of the Florida Horse Show.

L: That was in the late 1950s?

M: Yes.

L: I saw where at the end of the year 1953 there were forty-three active [members] and twelve provisionals. You were talking about the size of the League.

M: That is right. See, it was two years after that that we did the first Follies. I think it was 1955.

L: No, it was 1954.

M: Well, that is the group we had to work with. I hate to admit it, but even in those days, we had some who did nothing. I never could figure out how they got by with it. But by and large, it was a hard-working group. The pink slips would get you [laughter].

L: I figured that it must have been a group that was really serious about the work, because I read where this one person was having difficulty meeting appointments or making appointments, and this matter was brought before the

board. It was decided that she would need to make up those two appointments that she had missed plus two more. She was notified of that, and it was agreeable [to her]. Then she was not able to do that, so she resigned.

M: You did your appointments and your job without question. Now, we covered for each other some, which was perfectly acceptable. As I said, no one had any help in those days, and we all had children. There were maybe six or eight of us up and down this street in the League at the same time, and we all had little children, so we covered for each other. But you really met your appointments and did what you were supposed to do.

L: What portion of the League was mothers at home at that time?

M: Oh, the vast majority. There was not even a professional group until years after I got out of the League. The huge majority of us were housewives.

L: Well, I noticed when you were talking about the different places where the League had met, the meeting places, that normally it was held in the evening.

M: Oh, yes. That was primarily so the daddies could baby-sit and so the few working people we had could come. But the main reason, I am sure, was because the husbands could baby-sit.

L: I had not even thought of that. I was thinking that it was a conciliatory move toward the working people.

M: Well, I am sure that entered into it, but, Connie, back then the use of baby-sitters was not as prevalent as it is now, particularly at night. If I were not able to be at home with the boys, then Gus was here, and the few times we went out together, I had a mother and so did he here in town [that baby-sat for us]. My mother said she earned an honorary membership. I had a three year old and a one year old, not quite one, when I went in. My poor mother!

L: She did her part.

M: She did her part, I will tell you [laughter].

L: I did notice that the board meetings were held during the daytime hours much of that time.

M: Sometimes, but sometimes we had board meetings at night, too. We used to have board meetings at individual homes. The board was not anything like the size it is now, of course. But as I remember, we had board meetings at night, too.

- L: I will bet you are right. I must be thinking of another period of time. Do you remember what the dues were?
- M: Dues were something like \$2.50 or \$5 a year or something like that. It was very reasonable. When I mentioned patron tickets for the Follies, I think the patron tickets were \$5. It seems to me at the last Follies they were \$50.
- L: Something like that.
- M: Of course, nobody had any money then, either. We were all trying to get ourselves together and start all over after the war.
- L: We were talking about project placement and pink slips and blue slips. I read somewhere where you had regular hours and "potential" hours. Do you remember anything about that?
- M: I remember the terms, but I have forgotten what the potential hours were. I had totally forgotten that. But I do remember that we had regular hours and potential hours. It could have been that regular hours were your regular project, and you got potential hour credit for things like the March of Dimes or the cancer drive. That could be.
- L: That sounds reasonable.
- M: Yes. The word does not fit, but I cannot think of anything else it could have been.
- L: I saw it in several places, but I never could get a grasp from the context exactly how to define it.
- M: I suspect maybe that was it.
- L: I also noticed that in 1949, instead of having a certain number of hours required per year, which I believe had been the case up to that point, they changed to a new system.
- M: Well now, I was gone that year; I was gone the latter part of 1948 and all of 1949. I do remember when I came back it was different, but I had forgotten [the specifics].
- L: Instead of having a number of hours, I believe it was based on the project.
- M: Oh, that is right, your project. They were more or less graded. You got more

credit for some projects. Also about then they did give the president, the secretary, the treasurer, and what not credit for that. You had to do the Thrift Shop once or twice a year, but you did not have to have another project. Prior to that, they did work like the rest of us. This was a long time ago. You are straining my brain [laughter].

L: I think you have an excellent memory, Jackie. Tell me again about the membership make-up of the League. Did you find that at this point in time it was made up mostly of "Gainesville people"?

M: Yes.

L: There were not a lot of people who moved in?

M: Well, as people came to town, particularly University people--that is when the University really began to grow after the war--we began to take lots of University people. When I first went in right after the war, it was 90 percent [Gainesville locals]. Of course, when you say Gainesville people, some of them had been here for years with their husbands and their professions. But it was literally (I hate to say this) the upper echelon. They were the ones who had the time to do it, that is who could afford to do it, and that is who had the interest to do it. That is why we were there. We were all more or less compatible. Our squabbles and fights were not basic differences. We were "of a group," as it were.

L: You were really very homogeneous.

M: Very.

L: What sorts of things did you disagree about as a group? You were talking about your squabbles.

M: Oh, I am sure [we had active discussion on] what to spend the money on, what project to take up next and what one to drop, and that kind of thing. We fought bitterly over whether or not to have a Follies.

L: Was there a lot of opposition to that idea?

M: A lot of people did not want to be bothered, but once we got it going, they were the most enthusiastic, as usually is the case. I think some of our basic differences back then were because Gainesville began to grow. The number-one thing that the charter group needed to do was feed the children in the schools. The number-one thing we needed to do was the clinics and that kind of thing. Well, as Gainesville began to grow and those things were taken over by state organizations and state programs and organizations, we moved

into other areas, and sometimes the area we were headed for did not suit everyone. Nothing suits forty-five or fifty women, as you well know [laughter].

L: What would you like to talk about that pertains to your years in the Welfare League that we have not already touched on?

M: I think we have done a pretty good job of covering it. As I said, it has been a long time ago. I have stayed interested in it, obviously, since I go to the sustainer things and so forth.

The thing that I remember best about the League was its cohesiveness, its dependability. When the League took on a project, it did it. It got it done. We loved the position, if you will, that we held in town. We were a respected organization. Some people accused us of being hat-and-white-gloves tea drinkers--nothing could have been farther from the truth--and for being exclusive, but we just did not let that bother us. We knew we were a hard-working service organization and that we were doing a lot of good. And we managed to have a good time doing it.

As I said, we made good friendships and learned to work together. I learned an awful lot in the League through things like the Central Welfare Committee. At that time, I doubt we would have participated in that if we had not been led into it by the League. That is why I really hate to see the League lose its esprit de corps, if you will. If you get absorbed into a national organization, you lose your autonomy.

L: And you think there is a danger of that?

M: I am afraid so. Of course, that may be what needs to be done. Connie, Gainesville had gotten so big and so diverse that maybe that is what needs to be. I am glad to see them open the membership to other people and bring in more women. I think most of the people that have come in have contributed ideas and different viewpoints. But very few things are "like they used to be." As Gus says, "Old 'used to' is dead." I think things evolve as the times require them. Certainly my church is not what it used to be. But that is the thing I remember best about the League. We were really proud of ourselves, of our League. Did you happen to be at the fiftieth anniversary celebration of the League?

L: Yes.

M: Do you remember that thing that Gretchen Brill read? You were there when she listed many league activities and accomplishments.

L: That is right.

M: That was the kind of thing that--I just have to say it--we were very proud of. We got the job done. I took a deep breath when I got out [laughter].

L: Now, the fiftieth anniversary was celebrated in 1985.

M: Yes, that is right.

L: Fifty years of the Welfare League in Gainesville. I do want to ask you one more question. You were saying what a deep breath you took when you got out. My question is about your sustainer years and the sustainer organization. I understand there was not a sustainer organization at that time.

M: No, I do not remember that there was one. I do not remember when it was actually formed.

L: It was in the early 1960s, I believe.

M: Yes, I guess so. It is like any other organization, Connie. There are some of us that have stayed interested and some that could not care less. I read every word of "League Lines" when it comes out, and I know people that do not even remember that they got it in the mail.

L: That is the newsletter that the League puts out.

M: Yes. Some just pitch it in the trash. They are not interested in the League anymore, but I am, and some of the sustainers are. The sustainers could do a lot more than they do. I belong to an alumni group. At Chi Omega alumni, we could do an awful lot more than we do. We do not do anything. But Gainesville stays so busy.

L: What is the role of the sustainers in this League?

M: It is just a support group, as I see it. I think some of the sustainers are active in seeking out new members and promoting new members. I have not proposed anybody in years. They have all gotten so young that, really, I do not know them anymore. But I think [the sustainers are] really a support group.

L: They still pay dues, is that right?

M: Yes. We pay dues, and we have two sustainer functions a year, and then one where we entertain the provisionals. That is about it.

L: Does the active organization make an attempt to keep the sustainer group

involved?

M: Yes, they have done a marvelous job of trying to keep the sustainers interested and active, but it is just a bunch of lazy old women. We do not respond. Like this thing Wednesday. The past presidents are supposed to be the advisory committee. Well, I think there were only six of us there. That is all. But that is better than none.

L: So the sustainers do have vehicles through which they can still make a difference in the League through what you are talking about, this advisory group or through communications to active members?

M: I do not know that we could make a difference, but we could at least voice an opinion. Up until now, it has usually turned out that what we do is support the way they feel. Whether that will remain true, I do not know. When the Thomas Hotel was remodeled, they asked the sustainers for help.

L: What part did the League have to in re-doing the Thomas Hotel?

M: [We worked on] that period room there on the southwest corner. I do not remember whether Judy Brill was a sustainer or an active at that time, probably still an active, but a lot of us worked on it. We raised the money for the Audubon print in honor of Aunt Carrie [McCollum, the "founder" of Gainesville's Junior Welfare League]. We raised the money through solicitation for the president's desk in the office when they moved into the new offices.

L: That are in the Thomas Center?

M: Yes. But that is about it.

L: Was Aunt Carrie still the sponsor for the Welfare League when you were involved? Was she able to be very active? What sorts of things did she do?

M: She told us what to do [laughter].

L: Did she?

M: "My girls" she called us. By the time I got there, Aunt Carrie was not nearly as active, but she used to come always to what was then the June dinner meeting and make a speech. She promoted us in every possible way in town. She was into everything in Gainesville. She was quite a remarkable lady. She would say, "My girls do this," and "My girls can do that."

L: I understand she was quite a club woman.

M: She was, and quite firm in her convictions of how it ought to be done. I am sure you noticed that when the League was born, when they had their pictures taken, every one of them had on a hat and white gloves. That is how you did things in the 1930s. If you were going out in the afternoon to have your picture taken, you dressed for it. That was Aunt Carrie. She never let down the standards. "League girls," as she called us, did things this way and "my girls did it." And we loved it!

L: I bet that was quite an association.

M: It was. She was quite a lady.

L: Well, I want to thank you for talking with me this afternoon. I have thoroughly enjoyed it.

M: Well, I have, too. I am sorry my memory has gone on some areas, but as I commented, it has been a long time.

L: Well, I think your memory is very fresh myself.