

AL 135

Interviewee: Sandra Taylor Olinger

Interviewer: Connie Bieber

Date: February 6, 1991

B: This is Connie Bieber. Today is February 6, 1991, and I am interviewing Sandra Taylor Olinger at her home in Gainesville, Florida, on the history of the Junior Welfare League of Gainesville. Good evening, Sandra.

O: Good evening.

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

O: I was born in Fort McPherson, Georgia.

B: When did you come to Gainesville?

O: I came to Gainesville as a freshman at the University of Florida in 1961, but prior to that I had lived in Gainesville as a child and had gone to kindergarten here, because my father is from Gainesville. This is his home.

B: I see. Now, what year were you in kindergarten?

O: Oh, goodness. It would have been 1948.

B: OK. And you say your father is from Gainesville?

O: Right.

B: His name is?

O: Charles Eugene Taylor.

B: Where is his family from?

O: They were from here.

B: His parents were born here, also?

O: No. His mother was born in Heard County, Georgia, and his father was born in Franklin, Georgia.

B: And your mother?

- O: My mother is from a little town right outside Atlanta called Fairburn, Georgia.
- B: Is her family originally from Georgia? Were they from the same town?
- O: My grandfather was from Fairburn, but my grandmother was from North Carolina. She was raised in Wilson, North Carolina. My great-great-grandparents were from Germany. They actually spoke German.
- B: On which side is this?
- O: On my mother's side. It was my [maternal] grandfather's grandmother and grandfather.
- B: So was German spoken in the house when you were growing up?
- O: No, not at all.
- B: So you were here just for the kindergarten year only?
- O: Well, my father came back after World War II. He had been in the war and came back to complete his education at the University of Florida on the G.I. Bill. We lived here for that period of time while he finished. Then we moved.
- B: Now, kindergarten was not part of the public school system then, was it?
- O: It was in Gainesville.
- B: So what school did you go to?
- O: I was not at Kirby-Smith but the one across from where Pam Green lives.
- B: J.J. Finley.
- O: Yes.
- B: There was a kindergarten program there?
- O: Yes.
- B: I was not aware that there were kindergartens in public schools in Gainesville then.
- O: Yes, there were. I know the exact room I was in.

B: Tell me a little about it.

O: Oh, it is still there. It is on the right side as you face the school.

B: On 7th Avenue?

O: Well, the original front of the school, not where the playground is, but the other side. We had a great big room, with lots of big toys to play with and kitchen equipment, and all kinds of things. It was a good place to go to.

B: What was your teacher's name?

O: I cannot remember. I wish I could.

B: Can you picture her?

O: She was young and pretty. Mother probably knows her name, but I cannot remember. I do not think we got report cards then. I never saw a kindergarten report card. I have all the rest of them, so I think I would have it if they had done them.

B: It is interesting thinking back [to when you were] that young. What is the earliest thing that you can remember?

O: Let me think. I can remember when my father was gone during the war and my mother wanted me to learn a particular song to sing when he came home. She made me this blue dress that I could wear to sing for him when he came back. I remember practicing that song. I was little then; I was probably two and a half or three.

B: Do you remember what the song was?

O: It was "Kiss Me Once and Kiss Me Twice."

B: That is darling. [laughter] That is a very special memory to have. So you came back here for college, but in the interim you lived somewhere else.

O: My father was in the service, so we lived in different places around. From here we went to Georgia [and] spent a year there. Then we were in Hawaii for three years. Then we went back to Georgia, and we stayed in and around Columbus, Georgia. We moved in my eighth grade year when my father went to Korea, and we moved to Fairburn (my mother's home), then we moved back to Columbus, Georgia, and stayed there through high school. Then I came here.

B: So the largest portion of your growing-up time was in Columbus?

O: Yes.

B: How did you feel about coming back here to school?

O: It was the only place I had applied, and it was just a foregone conclusion that I would come here. Prior to that, I always thought I would. I thought at the time I was going to major in journalism, and they had a really good school of journalism, and still do. In the interim I changed my major; I did not wind up majoring in journalism. But that had been the thought. My parents went to Germany halfway into the year of my freshman year, and I had an aunt who lived in Gainesville, so that was a little bit of a home base for me and a place that they could feel a little bit [more secure about me]. We had some people here that would be aware that I was in town.

B: A good support system.

O: Yes.

B: So did you go straight through undergraduate school?

O: Yes.

B: Then what did you do when you finished college?

O: When I finished college I went back up to Columbus, Georgia, because my parents [by] then had come back from Germany. I was engaged at the time. We had planned to be married in August, but then changed our plans because of the confusion of coming back. I went to Germany in the summers when I was in college. I would go over [on] space-available on flights or on boats. I went twice on a boat and once on an airplane.

Basically, when they came back, we went back to Columbus, and I taught school. I taught second grade, although I was not prepared to teach second grade. They hired me because the principal, who used to be my principal in high school, was now the superintendent of schools, and he remembered me and thought that I could handle a second-grade class. That was way before the time when everybody was so concerned about certification. I could not go into a high school because they were going through a review of some kind in high school, although I would have been more prepared to teach high school, having been an English major. Anyway, the upshot of it was I taught, and then we got married in December. Bill was a lifelong resident of [Gainesville].

B: This is your husband?

O: Yes. Bill grew up here. He was not born here, but he grew up in Gainesville. He moved here when he was seven years old and has lived here all his life. So after we were married we lived in Gainesville, and he started into the life insurance business and I taught school for two years. Then we started raising a family.

B: Now, that is Bill Olinger.

O: That is Bill Olinger. William David Olinger II.

B: Thank you. You say you started raising a family. Tell me a little bit about your children.

O: All right. I have two boys now. Will is the older of the two, and he was born in 1969. Charles is the second child, and he was born in 1972. So right now they are twenty-one and nineteen.

B: So they are finished [with] high school.

O: Yes. Will is a senior at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and Charles just started at Georgia Southern University in Statesboro, Georgia.

B: I bet that is a big change for both of them from Gainesville. What year was it when you came to Gainesville as a freshman in college?

O: 1961.

B: And then you returned in 1965 or 1966?

O: In December of 1965.

B: I bet Gainesville was very different then from what it is now.

O: It was very different. We lived out on 13th Street at NW 42nd Avenue. The little duplex that we bought and lived in is still there. It was just an interesting observation to me that the nicer subdivisions in Gainesville did not have paved roads. It was almost like a reverse status symbol *not* to have a paved road at that time. I guess the roads were limerock underneath, so they could be graded. It was just interesting that lots of streets were not paved.

Gainesville, of course, did not have much shopping. At that time we did not even have the Gainesville Mall. The old Belk-Lindsey was still there, but a lot of the

shopping still happened downtown around the square. Wilson's [department store] was there, and there was a nice dress shop there. Silvermann's [men's and women's clothing store] was downtown. It was thriving.

B: People actually went downtown to shop.

O: People actually went downtown to shop. [laughter] I remember in college there were quite a number of nice shops along University Avenue where you could go and buy things that were pretty nice. That was a difference. Of course, there was only one large high school in the town at that time. P. K. Yonge, of course, [was open, but it was quite small]. Gainesville High School was the only white high school. We did have Lincoln High School for black students at that time. When I taught in 1966-1967 at Gainesville High School, they had just barely begun to integrate the schools. I had taught the year before that at Howard Bishop Junior High School, and I maybe had three black students in my classes. They were there by choice. The next year at Gainesville High School I taught, and there were a few--but not many--black students.

Then the very next year after that, when I did not teach, they closed Lincoln High School, and integration happened in full force. That was a very difficult year for Gainesville in terms of people being very tense, and the school was very tense. But it worked. People worked through those tensions. It was not awful; I mean, we did not have to have the National Guard come in. But there were certainly some tensions. And the black students resented having their school closed. They resented losing their identity with their school, and I can certainly sympathize and empathize with how they felt at that time, because they were thrust into another milieu, which was not of their choosing.

B: Right. I had the opportunity to talk to several people who were teaching at that time who have stated a lot of the same opinions that you just have in terms of what was going on.

O: The year that I taught at Gainesville High School there was a walk-out, which I think is interesting. Some of the teachers walked out during that year, so the school was put on double or triple sessions--I cannot recall exactly--to accommodate the students. The teachers who did not walk out [stayed] and substitute teachers were hired to come and hold up the educational process.

B: Can you tell me a little more about this walk-out?

O: Well, it was at the very beginning of the unionization of teachers. For many, many years teachers had not gotten very good salaries, as you probably well remember. I think when I started teaching at Howard Bishop my salary was something below \$5,000. Maybe it was \$3,000. It seemed all right at the time,

because I remember when I went to buy my first groceries--and we are talking about staples, flour, sugar and things that you just buy once in a while--I think my whole bill was something like \$7.62. I went home and said, "Bill, do you think I spent too much?" [laughter] I do not think I have had a bill that low since!

B: You cannot eat dinner for that anymore.

O: No. But economically it was a very different time then. But all over the state of Florida the teachers who had been teaching for quite a number of years [went on strike]. It was not just in Gainesville that this happened. There was just a lot of concern and a lot of conflict amongst the teachers, some of whom felt that they should support the walk-out and go out to force the issue of better salaries and respect for teachers, while others felt that teachers were a professional group and should not leave their posts. So it was quite tense at Gainesville High School that year in terms of teacher conflict.

B: I can imagine. Are you saying, then, that the walk-out was caused more from economic issues than from the integration?

O: Oh, integration had nothing to do with that.

B: It just happened to be coincidence.

O: That was the year before integration. It had nothing to do with integration at all. It had everything to do with teachers' salaries and the building anger felt by teachers who had taught for many, many years. I know there were some teachers at Gainesville High School at that time who had taught Bill, and many of them walked out. A few of them did not walk out, and the ones who did not walk out and the ones who did walk out had to work through even being able to talk with each other. I was one of the ones that did not walk out. I would have, probably. I was just such a young teacher I would have probably been influenced to go had the walk-out occurred earlier in the year. But as it occurred almost into May--it probably was in April--I just felt like that was too close to the end of the year to close schools and jeopardize seniors' graduation.

B: I see.

O: I just could not within myself think that the timing was right, so I did not leave.

B: It was an interesting period of time to be teaching.

O: It was, and as a young teacher, too. The English faculty at Gainesville High School at that time was excellent. There were just so many good teachers and so many people who were dedicated to their profession that it was a good time to

teach. But [it was] also a confusing time. [It was] hard to make those decisions.

B: I can imagine. I am interested in knowing what role the University played in the life of the town at this time.

O: There was a schism at that point between "town and gown," which you have probably heard. Of course, from my standpoint, the University was really important, because I had been at school [there]. That was my life, and I had a lot of ties personally with the school and had gone back to graduate school that summer. In terms of the town of Gainesville, I do believe that at that point there was much more of a division between old Gainesville--who had lived here a long time--and those who were part of the University system. There was not as much interplay between the two groups.

B: Economically, would you say it played a very large role in the community at that time, because Gainesville was smaller, but the University was probably smaller, too?

O: Oh, I would think it would have definitely played a large economic role from the time that it came here, even when it was very small.

B: You were talking about unrest, and I cannot help but think of what I have read about the student barricades in the late 1960s. When I say student, I mean University student. Did you have any exposure to that?

O: Not a whole lot. As I told you, my father was in the service, so I guess my own orientation, coming up as a service child, an army brat, [was to be] more conservative, probably more ready to support my country and try to do what I thought was "right." So when I was at the University of Florida from 1961 to 1965, the campus itself was very, very conservative. The people there were very interested in their education, but also interested in the social aspects. They were not particularly politically aware, for the most part. [That was true for] most of the people. I was active in student government, and I knew a lot of the people who were political on the campus. But in terms of being politically far-reaching and looking at issues, there just was not a lot of that going on. I remember the Students for a Democratic Society, the SDS, wanted to come on campus my senior year, and there was great horror. "How could we [allow this]? This could never happen!" Well, two or three years down the road, the University of Florida was a hot-bed of political activism, and [there] was a very, very different kind of feeling.

By the time the late 1960s happened, I was a young matron with a child, very entrenched in the community, wanting to do volunteer work, concerned about my family. I was very much removed from all of the unrest that was going on in

terms of the Vietnam situation. [I was] not removed from Vietnam, certainly not, because when I taught at Gainesville High School, that very year my own father went to Vietnam as an active military officer, so I was quite aware of that part of it. But I was not marching for peace. That was just not where [I was]. I was not in favor of the war, particularly, but I was certainly not an activist. So I was really removed from all of that in terms of my own physical being.

B: I was curious about how invasive the disruption was to the community, whether it was possible for the community to be really removed. I was not trying to ask whether you were in favor or not in favor. I just mean were normal passers-by able to go about their regular routines without being disrupted?

O: Well, if you did not go over to the University area.

B: It was largely confined to the campus, then?

O: Yes. That is my memory of it, Connie. What I do remember is that I was nervous and afraid of some of the people that I saw. There was so much real hatred. I felt physically scared when I would go around people who were "peaceniks," because they were violent peaceniks! If they felt that somebody had a different opinion, they were really ready to shout and yell. So I sort of kept a low profile at that point.

B: So it did affect people who were on the sidelines to the extent that you just described, that it caused you to change your routine or to stay away from those areas?

O: Well, I just did not want to get into any kind of confrontation with some of those people.

B: I remember reading in the newspaper that there was a barricade somewhere along University [Avenue] or 34th Street, but I am uncertain as to where it was.

O: I cannot remember that, either. I honestly cannot.

B: How long had you lived in Gainesville before you joined the Junior Welfare League?

O: Counting the time I was in college?

B: No, counting the time you came back in 1965.

O: I had been here for four years.

B: So that means that you joined in 1969.

O: Yes.

B: Can you tell me a little bit about that? How were you invited to join, or how did you choose to join?

O: Well, at that time we had a secret policy in terms of inviting people to membership, so now I know there was a series of parties given that I was invited to. At the time I did not realize why I was actually going to some of these functions, but in retrospect I realize what was happening was that I was meeting the members of the admissions committee. Of course, I did not know that I was being considered for membership, and that was the norm at that time. All I knew was one day [I received a visitor when] Will was a baby, an infant. He had been born in October, and this was probably in December, so he was very young. He had slept late that morning, and I had slept late. He was just a good sleeper and sometimes just did not get up that early. A knock came on my door. I opened the door, and there was Judy Lang standing there with a big smile on her face. Of course, she looked as coiffed and beautiful as she always looked, and there I was in my robe saying, "Good morning," holding this baby. [laughter] She said, "Oh, Sandra, we are so excited. Here is something that I want you to open." She handed me an invitation. I opened it, and that was my invitation to membership to the Junior League. Of course, I was happy. I was thrilled. I knew the people who were in the league and had thought that I had a lot of contact with some people who worked with it, and I was excited about becoming a member.

B: Now, Judy Lang was a member at that time. Was she on the admissions committee?

O: No, she was my sponsor, or one of my sponsors. At that time I guess that is what they did--they gave the sponsor the letter and asked them to deliver it personally and explain what the league was about and prepare the person for what was coming if they did not understand or know what was happening.

B: So then you had the opportunity to accept or not to accept?

O: Right. Then you had the opportunity to say, "I want to become a member," or "This is not a good time for me," and decline. Or I think at that point, since it was secret and people could not just change their life commitments overnight, you could hold your membership for a certain length of time--a year, perhaps--and then come in with the next provisional class. When she gave me the membership invitation, I was supposed to be at a meeting in January, and this was in December, probably before Christmas. I had that much time to get my

act together and be at a provisional meeting starting the first of January.

B: So that is the way, if you chose to accept, that your membership would begin, as a provisional?

O: Yes.

B: Can you tell me a little bit about that?

O: OK. [This is] the way that the provisional class was handled at that time. We met in homes, in the home of our provisional chairman. My provisional chairman was Barbara Agee, and we met in her home--Margaret Zena was the assistant--and had many people from the community come in and speak to us about various facets of the community. We did some visiting through the community. I remember going to see the suitcase museum at J.J. Finley.

B: Now, that was a project that the league had at that time?

O: Yes. It was a suitcase that had different artifacts in it. We also had organs in a suitcase museum.

B: Organs?

O: Human body parts that people explained to the students in the school and showed them the different things, like a heart or a kidney. Of course, they were preserved. I think it was taken mostly to fourth-grade classes, and, of course, they really enjoyed that. At the time we did not have things like videos. The kinds of scientific information that is available more readily now was not available then, and this was a very interesting and helpful tool for teachers.

B: So it was a real enrichment program.

O: Yes.

B: And this is one of the volunteer programs that the league was currently working on.

O: At that time, yes.

B: How long does the provisional period last?

O: That provisional period lasted until May, so it was from January to May. In May we went to the May dinner meeting, which I think at that time was in June. [laughter] But it was still called the May dinner meeting. We performed a skit for

the membership, and at that time our provisional membership was officially over and we became active league members.

B: So were you sort of on approval during that period of time?

O: I do not know if I remember correctly or not, [but] I think there was a pro-forma acceptance of the provisional membership, the people in the provisional membership, by the board of directors. I do not believe I ever remember anyone not performing up to snuff. Now, there were some people who self-selected out, but not in my time. A little bit later people started beginning to think through things maybe in a more personal way. It seems to me that most of the people who came in in my provisional class stuck it out the whole way through the provisional class and became active members and worked in the league.

You have to look at it in a historical perspective. It is hard for me to believe, but it has been twenty-one years, because that is how old Will is. At that time, women [did] just as I did. It was an accepted thing for people to work for a couple of years, maybe teach a couple of years, and then "retire" to raise a family and devote themselves to the family, the home, and working with community organizations such as the league. From my standpoint, the league was a wonderful outlet and educational forum, because I did have a lot of interest in what was going on, and I certainly wanted to contribute. Bill and I also had made a commitment to our kids. Our children were very important to us, and, frankly, looking back on it, I am happy that I had the outlet of the league, and also happy that I was able to spend the amount of time I was with my own children and not feel the push-pull of having a job, because I was not pressured to do that at that particular time.

Things are just different in this period for women. There are more options for women. When I went to college, the two professions that women really were going into--and this is the truth--were teaching and nursing. They were not branching out into business. It was a very rare person that was a doctor. The sex-role stereotypes were very much in force at that point. But from a personal point of view, I am not unhappy that that happened, because during the latter part of my life I have developed other talents and skills and have gotten the other part, the working part, too.

B: Right, and I want to be sure that we touch on that before we finish.

O: The balance.

B: But I want to go back to something you said a minute ago when you were talking about what opportunity the league provided for you. We see the league as a volunteer organization, an opportunity to help society, but it sounds like to me

that you are also saying that it was a nurturing group for women and almost a network, in a sense.

O: Absolutely. There were so many opportunities for women to do important things in the community, and I think when you look back at the scrapbook and realize the kinds of projects that the league has fostered over the years and the successful projects and the things that are still going on in our community because there were women of foresight and of education who took the time to do the things that they did, [you cannot help but see that the league has been a positive force in this community]. The [public] library was one of the early league projects. As we look at the new library today, you can see how that has grown.

B: Right.

O: The Thomas Center in my era was one of the big interests of the league. At the time that the Thomas Center was being pushed by the league--and by other organizations as well, of course, not just the league--it had fallen into total disrepair. The roof had slanted in and was cantilevered over. A few more months of maltreatment and that building probably would have crumbled. As you look at that edifice today and how beautiful it is and what a plus it is for Gainesville to have such a lovely building and lovely grounds, I feel a real sense of pride that the league was there in the beginning and that the league office was there for a while and that we were able to support that in that kind of a way. [The same is true with] Historic Gainesville. The league was in on the ground floor of doing some preservation to help our community recognize its historical roots. Morningside Nature Center was a big project of the league. Really, without the work of Carolyn Coleman and some other league members, it would not be there. It just is very exciting to me to see what the league has done.

B: What I hear you saying is that because of the sexual stereotypes, in terms of career and because during this era there was a group of women who were economically able not to have to be a bread-winner while they were raising their children, we had a pool of labor that was untapped in the career market but on a volunteer basis was making available talents and things for the community, and that is how all of this has come about.

O: Well, I think that was probably true. Today you have the same kind of people who are working two jobs now. They are working their volunteer job and are working their paid, career job.

B: Because the career field is so much more open.

O: Because it is a lot more open and just a lot different. I would not say that the quality of volunteer work then was any better than it is now. There was just more

time to do it. There was more time for me and for my friends, most of whom honestly did not work at that time. We had time to have play groups for our children and to do league [work]. Our league meetings at that time were all in the daytime. There was a split, because there were some people who worked. But, I mean, at time we are talking fifteen or twenty tops out of a group of probably 100 actives, I would guess. Maybe a few less than that. We were the daytime actives, and they were the "professionals."

B: How did they meet?

O: Their meetings were at night, and they met at the home of the vice president--that was a tradition--because it was such a small group. They were the renegades of the league. They had their own set of ideas, and they had a different way of looking at things because of their orientation with their careers.

B: And because of their lack of discretionary time.

O: Yes. It was always a lot of fun to go to the professional meetings. Things happened quick. [laughter] You did not spend a lot of time. An interesting thing that I remember that always struck me was that the daytime actives would vote on an issue, and we would not know the outcome, oftentimes, until the evening actives [voted]. If it was a close vote, the evening actives could swing the balance. But sometimes it was so clearly already voted and decided, that their vote just happened.

B: It really was not enough to make a difference in the outcome.

O: No. But that is interesting. I guess the league started having evening meetings, much, much later. Much later than even when I was president, which was 1978-1979. We were still having some daytime and some night meetings. We had a few. But our board meetings were almost all in the daytime, which precluded some people from serving on the board. As things became more 50/50 working and then probably 60/40--I do not know what it is now--that became impossible to continue. Things have to change. I do not know how they do the board meetings now. I am not really sure. I have not kept up, Connie.

B: Well, I would think that would have been one of the challenges that a volunteer organization would face in the light of changing economic profile and changing career profile of women.

O: Absolutely.

B: [It was a challenge] to still try to vie for those women's discretionary time in their organization and to try to divvy up the work into pieces that were small enough

for them to be able to handle, because as you said earlier, while the quality, I am sure, of the volunteerism did not change, the amount of time they were able to give would certainly be diminished.

O: Certainly.

B: By the time you were a member of the league, did they still have the rule about seven years of active membership, or had that already gone to [age] forty?

O: No, they had that rule, because some people that I knew who were fairly young who had been in the league already seven years and were sustainers, I guess, at that point, or into the inactive phase.

B: Was it obligatory at the end of seven years?

O: No, no, not at all. That was just an option that you could certainly take if you wanted. You have to remember that some of these people had come into the league at a very early age--twenty, twenty-one--and by the time they got to seven years, some of them were pretty tired because they had put in a lot of hours and a lot of emphasis on the Junior League of Gainesville, at that time the Junior Welfare League. I think that when we became a member of the Association of Junior Leagues, which was in 1975, that was when we had to have the rules of the national organization.

B: So then you abandoned the seven-year active membership. Now, what about those people like you who were already members who had joined under seven years? Were you all transferred to where it was necessary for you to stay active until you were forty?

O: Yes. That is my remembrance of it, anyway. I do not think there was any discussion about the seven-year plan after that point. I am not really positive if when I came in [that was the policy]. I do not remember exactly. That is a little fuzzy.

B: Let us go back and talk about something you touched on a little earlier, which is the projects that the league was involved in at that time, the projects that they were doing for community service. I understand that you were very actively involved in the nature center at Morningside.

O: That is right.

B: Can you tell me a little bit about that?

O: That was a very interesting and wonderful project. What happened was the site

for Morningside Nature Center had been set aside originally for a site for the VA hospital. When the VA hospital was built, it was decided not to build it way out on the Lake Road. Then that property became available, and the City of Gainesville, I am assuming, acquired that property. The original plan was to have active recreation--golf course, swimming pool, and quite a lot of planned recreation.

The league became involved and brought the Audubon Society to do a study. It paid I think \$3,000 for the Audubon to do quite a comprehensive study on the site, and it was found that Morningside was a refuge for the red-cockaded woodpecker. It was also one of the last few remaining stands of virgin longleaf pine in northeast Florida. It just became very evident to us that even though that property there, when you look at it, is not what you would call beautiful property, it is the kind of property that is very indicative of what is available in this area [in the way of native environment]. As more and more land gets used for other things, for shopping centers and what have you, we are losing that kind of land. So it was set aside as a nature center. It was not a real fight, but [it was] a lobbying proposal to get that done, and the league was very instrumental in working through that.

The Audubon study was done, I think, in 1969, so a few years later we built the nature center building, and then the Junior League became very involved and sent some of us over to Jacksonville for a nature center workshop. Out of that workshop came a lot of ideas of how to utilize Morningside and what it should be and what it could be. The boardwalk was built, and things began to happen out there.

Then in late 1974 or early 1975, plans began to get underway for the bicentennial celebration in 1976, and we had the opportunity to acquire an old cabin from the 1880s.

B: Now, is this the Clark house?

O: That is Hogan's cabin.

B: OK. I have read something about the Clark house, and I did not know [if that was the cabin that you are talking about].

O: Hogan's cabin is what is out there, and that was a cabin near Micanopy. The city of Gainesville got a \$20,000 grant to restore Hogan's cabin and also to make an 1880s farm, which we were calling at that time a "Cracker Farm." So work began, and it came to fruition on July 4, 1976. The Cracker Farm (now called the 1880s farm) was opened to the public with a big celebration. The league was very instrumental in working through that.

- B: Well, when you say very instrumental, [what do you mean?]
- O: We gave a lot of money--\$15,000, I think--over a period of time, and probably closer to \$20,000 when you add in all the different things that we did that were not involved in the grant. We were the original committee. We worked on the bicentennial. We went out to Hogan's cabin and helped locate the cabin itself, and also members got other donations from other places, like the split-rail fencing and the barn, the livestock that was originally out there. The pigs that first came to Morningside came in the trunk of a Mercedes. [laughter]
- B: That is pretty good!
- O: They were brought in fine style. So league members just worked in all different capacities. At that time the Nature Center Commission was commissioned by the City of Gainesville, and there were quite a few league members who served on the original committee and commission. They stayed with it for a number of years to help oversee the direction of the nature center and the building of and continuation of the 1880s farm.
- B: Now, you said that a good bit of money--I think you said \$15,000--was donated. Where did the league get that money? How did the league fund its projects?
- O: The league's funding is the most wonderful thing in the world, because unlike many organizations [and] board, the Junior League does fund raising only once every four years, at least the Junior League of Gainesville. That, to me, is a real plus. Fiscal planning has always been a really big part of the Junior League and continues to be so. Funding comes from the follies that happens every four years.
- B: Follies?
- O: The Junior League Follies has been a tradition for, I am not sure how many years, but I know that for many, many years. It is a musical theater production. We get a group out of New York to come down and bring us a director. The director plans the show, recruits local talent, pulls it all together in two or three weeks, and puts on [a show]. I believe next year they are having another one out at the Center For Performing Arts center.
- B: Is that going to be completed by then?
- O: Well, that is what they tell me.
- B: That is some marvelous planning.

- O: Hopefully. It is only going to be one night this time instead of the usual two to three nights, because that center can seat so many more people they will not need to have a double performance.
- B: Surely they do not make all that money selling tickets to the Follies.
- O: No, no. Grants are solicited from businesses and corporations in the community to underwrite various facets of it.
- B: It sounds like quite an undertaking.
- O: It is, but it is a wonderful thing, because then the members of the Junior League are not called on to go out and nickel-and-dime it around the community, asking people to give for this project and for that project. You do it once every four years, you get your money in the bank, you invest wisely, you use it, and you can really have a five-year economic forecast for your organization. To me, that has been the real difference in serving on any other board of directors for any other organization. So often your board becomes a fund-raising group for the organization rather than a planning group. With the Junior League, everybody pitches in one time, once every four years, to fund the organization and its projects. And then after that you could actually work on a project without having to worry about where the next dollar was coming from. To me, that is a real boon, and it is very different from the way that most organizations function.
- B: And the community is willing to ante up these kinds of donations without knowing specifically what they are going to go for.
- O: Sometimes they are earmarked, sometimes they are not. Most of the time, in the history of this Junior League, I believe that they have not been earmarked, that the community has recognized that the Junior League has traditionally pitched in and decided to do things, [that it has] been on the cutting edge of what needed to be done for the community. So it is a leap of faith on the part of the community.
- B: I want to go back specifically to the Morningside project, the nature center project, and ask you how you--I want to use the word disposed of--the project. Once the league got involved and accomplished what they wanted and set things into motion by the donation and the actual programs, then what did the league do?
- O: Well, you have to remember that that project had the luxury of always being a city project. It was not just a Junior League project. It was the Junior League in conjunction with the City of Gainesville. We had worked so hard and so diligently that the city really listened to our input, and we (we being the Junior

League) had a lot of decision-making power or control. We had just worked so well with them that they listened to us. We continue to be involved. But underneath that always was the financial underpinning of the city. The league never had total control of that project. So when it came time for the league to withdraw its volunteer support, [it was not a difficult thing to do].

As in any other project, the membership of the Junior League is not going to want to do the same project year after year after year for twenty or thirty years. That would be unrealistic. The membership changes, it grows, it is a living entity itself, and the leadership of the league always has to be aware of where its membership is and how it is reacting. I think the league does that better than most organizations, taking the pulse of its own membership and trying to figure out exactly how to meet the needs of the members. Just like the league was important to me, because I felt like I was getting as much as I was giving. It has to be that kind of give and get, particularly with women today.

So with Morningside Nature Center, there was always the financial underpinning of the city, and the same with the 1880s Cracker Farm. Every time I see the Morningside Nature Center in the paper, I am just thrilled and amazed at the number of programs that Morningside has to offer, at the diversity of programming. The staff at Morningside is wonderful and professional. They know what they are doing. They continue to preserve the property and to make it a living reality for kids to go out and see. I am thrilled when I see that, because that is what we want. When I was active in the league, our goal was to present projects to the community that would continue to be viable even when the league physically left the project, that the community would want it so much, that it would be such an integral part of the community that [it] would continue to live.

The financial reality is, however, that when you are planning a project, you have to look ahead to how that is going to live and sustain itself after the very vigorous support of the Junior League is no longer there. I think that now the league membership probably is going to be less likely to take on a mammoth, all-encompassing project as it would have been, say, even five, six, or seven years ago.

- B: Well, the economic climate of local government's funding is very different.
- O: Absolutely, as is state funding at this point. We are all going to have to be real aware when we are spending community dollars that are hard-earned. I think the league has to look at the reality of the future and build programs that then can be utilized and [can] continue to be a real viable force.
- B: At what point did the Friends of Morningside get developed?

- O: That is a support group, and it was pretty early on, probably 1974 or 1975.
- B: So it was really developed from the beginning of the project. It was not something that was set up to take over when the league stepped out of the picture?
- O: No, not at all. It was a support group more like the support group for the Florida State Museum.
- B: That is an excellent analogy. Tell me a little about that, because I know that the league was instrumental in setting up that project.
- O: That is true. That was not one of the things that I worked on, although I have been really interested in the Florida State Museum for a long time. That support group was set up to help the Florida State Museum but in no way to take over the running of it or the operation of it. The same [is true] with Friends of Morningside. The Friends of Morningside is more of a support group that does some fund-raising and does some recognition of volunteers and that kind of thing. But it is never going to be the kind of group that can make mega-bucks. I think probably the Florida State Museum Associates do raise a lot of money. They have some fairly significant fund-raisers that do a lot of fund-raising. But they are not a decision-making body for the museum. Neither is Friends of Morningside.
- B: They were never intended to be.
- O: That is right, and neither is Friends of Morningside. The Nature Center Commission was the decision-making, planning body.
- B: But were the associates of the Florida State Museum an outgrowth of the league project to start a docent program for the museum?
- O: Yes, it was.
- B: And in the same way with the Santa Fe Community [College] art gallery? Now, that was during the 1970s.
- O: Santa Fe Community College approached the Junior League to become involved in their art museum, and the Junior League was excited about doing so and took on the challenge of becoming docents and helping to support that art museum.
- B: Now, you mentioned earlier the Thomas Center and historical preservation and Historic Gainesville, and the league was involved in that from the very beginning.

- O: Right. It is my memory that around 1974 the Junior League brought in a group of consultants to help the community look at historic preservation and how the community could get involved in historic preservation. Mary Barrow was very instrumental in that group and probably could give a lot of real detailed information. Sarah Dryley was also, if I am not mistaken. I think that she went to a conference at that time, and the consultants came and helped get people started. Out of that grew a coalition for historic preservation.
- B: Right. The following year I believe that the league cosponsored with the City of Gainesville the Hotel Thomas museum workshop, where they brought experts in.
- O: That may be what I am thinking of. That may be the year that I am thinking of when the consultants came.
- B: No, I believe you were correct initially with 1974, because in 1974 the league sponsored a visit by the executive director of the Landmark Society of Western New York to consult on historic preservation.
- O: That is what I am thinking of.
- B: What was the outcome of this in terms of what the league was going to do?
- O: Well, there was a group in the league that was very, very interested in historic preservation and also in presenting period rooms to the community to explain the architecture and the furnishings of the time of the Thomas Center. So what the Junior League did was prepare a period room which is still extant at the Thomas Center. They found an Audubon print that the sustaining group at that time presented to the city. It might be two prints. I cannot remember. They are hanging in the period room. This was to give people who were walking through the Thomas Center a chance to see a room that was done in that period, and there were docents who worked with that.
- B: Now, is that a part of the league's program?
- O: That was a part of the league's program. At this point, I guess that had probably taken over by the Thomas Center Associates. The league is not actively involved in that. But, once again, it is still there.
- B: I need to interrupt our talk about projects just a minute to get you to clarify a point that you just made about the sustainers. That is a different class of membership from provisional and active?
- O: Correct. Women of a certain age [laughter] attain the status of sustainerhood. That means that when you are a sustainer, you are no longer an active member

of the Junior League. You continue to pay your dues, you continue to participate in whatever fashion that you wish, but no longer are you required to give a certain amount of goods to the Thrift Shop; no longer are you committed to give active volunteer time to the membership. Traditionally the age was forty, and then they raised it to forty-two, and then to forty-five. Now they have raised it to fifty. So I do not know what the upshot is going to be. It all depends. If you came into the league at twenty, perhaps by forty you could say, "I have had enough of volunteer work." People who come into the league later [could still have a chance to contribute a significant amount of time and effort to the league]. They also have been raising the age limit at which people could come into the league. At one point it was quite a bit less [than it is now]. I think it was thirty-five. I do not know what it is now.

B: The upper age limit at which you can join?

O: Yes, the upper age limit. So if somebody came into the league at thirty-five, by forty-five they may not have done all the things that they wanted to do with the league and may still have a lot of energy and vitality and be raring to go. Perhaps [they] would want to be president and, who knows, go on to greater heights and glories. [laughter] The upper age limit has gone higher.

B: Thank you for clarifying that for me. Back to your projects. It appears to me that there is a slight change in the mid- to late-1970s in the focus of the community projects, and I would really like your comment on that. I notice that they begin to have advocacy committees.

O: Yes, I really wanted to touch on that, because that was a big focus. This league has always been involved in projects for the welfare of children. That has traditionally been, I think, the backbone of what this league was about. Now, we have, of course, sallied forth into fine arts and historic preservation, but all that will touch back on children in some manner. In the mid- to late-1970s the whole country began being more involved in the welfare of children, and our league was no exception. We began by sending three very active members (J. Ella Harris, Carole Zegel, and Audrey Schiebler) to a conference in Boston on the welfare of the child. From that conference has grown a number of advocacy projects for children. I think that most of the membership of this league is very concerned about children and would be concerned about children in any event. I think that is probably the reason that advocacy was so important to our league. We worked on a number of projects that did not have any kind of physical result. You cannot point to something like the Morningside Nature Center or the Thomas Center and say, "Look, this is there because the Junior League worked on it." But I think the infrastructure of the community has been undeniably changed, and the emphasis on what is important to us as a community I think the league has contributed to.

One of the projects that the league did that did not get a lot of fanfare but was important was day care. As women began working more, there were very few day care centers available. I know that when I was looking to do something early on in my [active membership it was difficult to find quality day care for my children]. I guess Charles was a baby--so this was about in 1973 or 1974--and I was looking for a place for him to be for just part of one day a week. I could not find a place that I would have felt comfortable leaving my child for any length of time in Gainesville. I mean, I remember visiting all these different places, and there would be lots of kids, many of them in cribs and maybe two to a crib. The conditions just were not at all ideal.

The Junior League did work with day care and the licensing of day care centers and was very instrumental on a state level for advocacy projects for children. The Florida Center for Children and Youth is an outgrowth of work that Junior Leagues--not just our local league, but all the leagues--have done. [It is] a very important work, and I think that there are other people who could speak better to it because there are people who have worked with it. Carol Zegel, Audrey Schiebler--either one of those would be very good to talk to about that facet. But it was very important.

B: How is that connected to the Guardian Ad Litem program or the child advocacy state programs today? Is there any connection?

O: Oh, yes. I think that both of those programs are outgrowths of work that our league members have done. The Guardian Ad Litem program was begun as a pilot project in this county.

B: As a pilot project?

O: Yes, in this county.

B: For across the nation, do you mean?

O: A pilot project for Florida. Because that program was so successful here, it is now a model program for the rest of the state, and the nation as well.

One of the projects that we worked on during my time was the Court-Community Service project. That was in lieu of serving jail time. People who had committed misdemeanors could become involved in volunteer work. They were interviewed by Junior League people who worked on that committee, and they were matched up with a volunteer agency where they could serve their time and feel that they were really giving something back to the community and contributing instead of just paying a fine or serving some time.

B: And the name of that project is?

O: That was the Court-Community Service project. That has been more or less institutionalized. If you look in the paper now, people do that all the time.

B: It is through the court system?

O: Yes. If you look in the paper now in the For the Record section, [you will see that] people are serving ten hours of community service instead of [doing jail time]. But it was not that way in 1974, 1975, 1976.

B: I want to ask you about a couple of other projects or institutions that the league donated money to during this time. One is the Opportunity Center.

O: I have not thought about that in a long time. That was for mentally handicapped people who worked. Let me see if I have this right. They did a job, or a task, and they were paid a certain amount of money for doing that. There is an agency now, Exceptional Industries, that actually has . . .

B: Funding?

O: Yes. They are funded by the United Way.

B: It started out as a gradual thing. Is that the one over on Waldo Road?

O: Yes. And I think that they are moving to a new location [that] I believe is out by Santa Fe Community College. I think that is where I was told. I had not thought about the Opportunity Center in a long time.

B: Another one was the Community Crisis Corner.

O: Well, the Crisis Corner is now the Crisis Center.

B: I thought that it must be.

O: The league members were very much involved in that. Caroline Coleman is a former league president. In fact, she was president the year I came into the league, so that was in 1969-1970. She was the chairman or the president of the Crisis Corner at that time. Just as anything else, mental health back in those days was not looked at. It was not as accepted to go to therapists or counselors or to have problems. People had problems, but there was still the 1950s mentality that everything should be smooth and wonderful. So it was quite a bit of work to get that sort of service accepted and looked upon as a valuable and viable service, and Caroline was really instrumental in working with that. Now it

is the Crisis Center, and, as you know, the Crisis Center is renowned for its wonderful programs and its wonderful ability to help save lives and help people who are under a great deal of stress come through.

B: So these are examples of other recognized groups that the league donated funds to.

O: The Corner Drugstore is another one. In fact, that was a big fight in the league, because there were some people who did not understand drugs. We are talking about the early 1970s at this point, and people were very frightened of drugs. If we knew then what we know now, we would have been even more frightened of them. But even the name "the Corner Drugstore" really turned some of our members off. They felt that was a far-out kind of a group for us to be supporting. Others in the membership were working closely with what that organization was trying to do, in terms of helping young people and saving lives and helping to get them off drugs. But at the time that the Corner Drugstore was begun it was in a house near the University, and the house was painted in all different colors, so it looked psychedelic. [laughter] It just was not organized-looking; it did not look totally like it was together, and I think that our league had a hard time coming to grips with it. But we gave money and we helped that organization get its start, and now you see what the Corner Drugstore means to Gainesville and what its programs offer. It is very strong.

B: Yes, it is. I have a question about one more program that the league supported-- I believe this was developed within the league--called the Career Development Program. I believe that is something that was started in the 1970s.

O: It was. That was [the brainchild of] a woman named Alena Morris. She was one of the forerunners in terms of getting women to think about themselves as being more than support persons, having goals and dreams and hopes and ambitions of their own and not always sublimating their talents to other people's talents. Alena Morris came to Gainesville [to speak]. People went to hear her and thought she was wonderful, and she was brought to Gainesville. There was a training program for people within this league to become career development trainers, and the project was to help league members and other people in the community look at their lives and decide what kinds of talents they had and what kinds of areas that they were particularly interested in.

One of the tenets that I remember [of] Alena Morris that really made a big impression on me was that she encouraged women to build their lives around themselves--not in a selfish way--instead of putting all of your emotional eggs in the basket of a relationship, which all of us know can be a transient thing, no matter if it is a mother/child relationship or husband/wife. These things can end. She encouraged people to look at their own strengths and really be a person for

yourself. Be happy with yourself, whether you are alone or in a relationship, and not feel that everything has to stem from a relationship. I think that was an important issue and one that is difficult for people to grasp. Particularly in that period of time it was quite different, quite novel, because everything was supposed to be "happily ever after."

B: So maybe this was a reflection of the consciousness-raising of women throughout the country.

O: Definitely.

B: Did the league after that institute a program for career development for its members?

O: Yes, there was a program. It was a training course offered to the membership. For a while every member was required, more or less, to take part in that course at some point in her league career.

B: I am interested in something that you said earlier in the interview when we were talking about what Gainesville was like back in the 1960s. I would like to relate what you said to the membership of the league. We have talked a little bit about the age range and how it has changed over the period of time from the late 1960s to now. The comment that you made had to do with the fact that there was a very pronounced difference between people who were old Gainesville or inside people and people who had moved in, probably with the University largely at that time, but who were not [longtime Gainesville residents].

O: Yes. There was not a lot of business and corporations; there were few corporations in Gainesville at that time, so it would have been mostly University people. Interestingly enough, a few provisional classes before my provisional class, the Junior League took in a provisional membership of three members, [laughter] which is totally foreign to the memberships that we take in today and the way that it has evolved over the years. I do not want to characterize this in any way that is not right, but my perspective of the Junior League at that time was that the people came into the Junior League were daughters of people who had been in the Junior League or were daughters-in-law of people who had been in the Junior League, and it was mostly a self-perpetuating group, which is not all bad. These people had the time to do what they did, and there was not a large pool of people in Gainesville to draw from. Diversity was not a goal of the organization at that point. A lot of good work was done.

Through the years, through the 1970s, I believe that this league became greatly diverse and very open to members of all different kinds of thought processes and backgrounds. I have seen a great difference in the league. I served on the

admissions committee early in the 1970s and saw the struggle that the committee went through to admit people who were just a little bit different from others. But that committee at that time worked through a lot of areas of dissent, and I think that we came out with a really good mix of members. [It is a tribute to the Junior League when you consider] the fact that the league moved without too much prodding from a secret membership deliberation admissions to an open admissions [policy] where people are aware, of course, that they are being invited to the league and are fully cognizant of what is going on and have some choice in the matter. It is not just somebody knocking on their door. That was real acceptable to me at the time that it happened, but today I would be horrified, because how could I plan my life? Most women now would not be able to have that kind of flexibility to drop everything and be going to a meeting every Wednesday evening (provisional classes were held at night). That is just unrealistic.

B: I believe today you can even apply to become a member on your own initiative, which is another change. So it is evolving.

O: Yes, it is very different. Personally, I think that the mix of members is wonderfully strengthening to the organization. But at the same time I recognize how much the membership of the organization did for the city of Gainesville and this community through many, many years, when it was more or less [considered for the elite]. Gainesville's answer to being a debutante was being a member of the Junior League.

B: How do you feel that the community perceived the group at that time, and do you see their perception of the group changing as the composition of the membership changed?

O: Well, I am not sure how the community perceived it in the years before I was a member, because, frankly, I was not aware of the league prior to that time. I was really not aware of it. But I think that through the years that I have been a member, people are more and more aware of the league as an organization. For many years we were confused with the League of Women Voters and the Junior Woman's Club and all kinds of other organizations that were primarily for women. I think today the Junior League has a much more distinct being and perception as an organization, and that is probably due to the fact that we have a larger membership and more of our members know more people because they are drawn from many different walks of life.

B: Did you know Aunt Carrie, and by Aunt Carrie I am referring to Mrs. J. H. Palmer [Carolyn Julia La Fontisee McCollum Palmer], who was the organizer of this Junior Welfare League?

- O: I really did not know Aunt Carrie personally. I just met her at Junior League functions that she would come to.
- B: She was still active when you became a member?
- O: Oh, yes, she was still coming.
- B: This is a question that we may have already touched on in another aspect, but I do want to ask it in this regard: What changes or differences, if any, do you see as a result of the Junior Welfare League's becoming a member of the Association of Junior Leagues, which makes it a part of a national body?
- O: Well, from my standpoint, I have seen very positive changes happen for this league in that the educational information that you get as a member of an organization like the Junior League, which is not only national but international in scope, gives us the ability to network with people from all over the world about problems and get information and become aware of trends before they happen. So in order to prepare yourself as an organization, I feel like that has just been very positive. I have always loved going to meetings and conferences that are sponsored by the Junior League.
- B: Then you see the national group, or the international group, as a resource?
- O: Absolutely. I think that our league has always been very capable of taking the information that comes in, synthesizing it, and bringing it to our local issues. That is very important. But to me, going to Boston, which I did in 1976, and being in Boston in the bicentennial year for a conference, was just one of the highlights of my life. I have been to advocacy meetings--we did not even really touch on advocacy that much--in Washington, DC, where you meet with all kinds of famous and knowledgeable people. As a local organization we would not have those kinds of contacts, and we would not be able to participate in that scope of activities. I found that exciting and invigorating. I would not give anything for having had the opportunity to work with other women in other places who are doing exciting things.
- B: I have one final question I want to ask you, and that also touches on something that you talked about earlier, and that is your career now. You talked about the fact that you were pleased to be able to have the time with your family and volunteer organizations when your family was growing up, and then you said something about what you are doing now. What are you doing now?
- O: What I am doing now is I am a guidance counselor at a high school. I went back to the University after my kids were a little bit older and got a specialist's degree in counseling. I have worked for the past six or seven years in that field. I feel

very fortunate to have been able to do that and find that the contacts that I made and people that I know, particularly from my volunteer experience, have just reaped so many benefits for me in my particular job now when I am trying to help individuals and families have a better life. I would not have known what I know about the community had I not worked in the Junior League. I find that my background is really rich in information and knowledge, whereas people--and this is the truth--who have worked in the field, but have not had the scope of contacts, do not know the things that I know, because I know. [laughter] I have worked with them. It is wonderful. So I think that my Junior League experience has just enriched my life and probably is enriching the lives of the people that I work with and my clients, because I have some inside information that I would not have had other than working with the league.

B: How do you find that having a paid career affects your volunteer time?

O: Well, I will be honest with you. I do not have the time to participate. I have to limit myself, because I have my own professional organizations that I need to give my time to in terms of working with boards and committees. Right now I am limiting myself to one board membership, and I find that is about all I can handle. [laughter] I do not know how I would have handled working full-time and working in the league. I think it would have been really difficult to make an impact.

B: I can understand that. Well, is there anything that you would like to tell me about the Junior Welfare League or the Junior League of Gainesville that we have not already talked about tonight?

O: Well, I think that probably for me a point I would like to emphasize is that working with the people that I have been able to work with in the league has been a highlight of my life. I would not ever exchange that opportunity. I am talking about from older sustainers who are in this community, who have worked with us on different projects, to people now that I run into and meet for the first time who are maybe beginning their league careers. I feel like those kinds of links are what makes a rich tapestry of life. I am glad that the Junior League has been what it was and has evolved to what it is. I am just really proud of its history and proud of what it is doing now and glad that I was a part of that in some small way and continue to be so in a sustaining capacity.

B: So you are a sustaining member?

O: Oh, yes.

B: Thank you very much, Sandra, for talking with me.

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O: Thank you, Connie.