

AL 148

Interviewee: Dr. Sue Legg

Interviewer: Stuart Landers

Date: August 4, 1992

[Ed. note: Because both interviewer and interviewee share the same initials, Legg will be denoted as L: and Landers as S:.]

S: This is an interview with Dr. Sue Legg being conducted in her home in Gainesville, Florida. Today is August 4, 1992, and my name is Stuart Landers.

Can you tell me your full name?

L: One would think that would be an easy question, but my name is Sue Legg. I go by Sue M. Legg; the *M* stands for my maiden name, which is McMullen.

S: As you said earlier, you prefer Sue to Susan.

L: Right.

S: When and where were you born?

L: In Oakland, California, in January 1940.

S: Can you tell me a little bit about your parents – their names and what they were like and where they were from?

L: My parents were both native Californians, both born in the San Francisco Bay area. My father's name was Edward McMullen, and my mother's was Mary. They were high school sweethearts and were married before my mother graduated from high school. Then she went back and graduated from high school after they were married. The family story there was that my mother came from a college-educated family. Her father was an engineer at Standard Oil. Her mother was also college educated. My father was an Irish Catholic, and no one in his family had a college education. So she ran away to Reno and married my dad against her mother and father's wishes, and it was a great family scandal.

S: What was her maiden name?

L: Tuttle.

S: When we spoke earlier, you said that Oakland, California, was a boom town during the Second World War when you were growing up.

L: Well, I went to Richmond High School, and if you know the San Francisco Bay area, Oakland is right across the bay bridge from San Francisco. As you go north, there is Berkeley and then El Cerrito and Richmond, which is kind of one big community. In fact, the whole thing is one community; you cannot tell one city from the other.

I went to Richmond High School, and in the San Francisco Bay there was a big dock in Richmond. It used to be a whaling station for years. Then in the Second World War the Kaiser Aluminum Company built the Minute Men ships there. Those ships brought in enormous numbers of semiskilled and unskilled labor – a lot of that from the Southwest, both black and white – into the town of Richmond. So Richmond went from what was essentially a Standard Oil company town with relatively small population (I think under 20,000) to a town of around 100,000 in about three years. That meant that there were great tracts of federal housing projects that were slapped up. They had no foundations. They were built on [pillars] very much like you see in these southern, rural homes [that are] built up on blocks, except these were just long dormitory-style things where you would have whole families living in one or two rooms.

Of course, after the war those people did not leave, and they hit the school system about the same time I hit the school system. For that reason, Richmond was a town that was integrated – not residentially, especially, but through the schools – right after the war. [This was true] particularly at the middle school and junior high school level. While there were some elementary schools that were neighborhood schools that remained reflective [of the] neighborhood composition, whatever that might have been, we had to do bussing to the middle schools because there were not enough middle schools around. We had double sessions in order to just get all of the children into school.

By the time I was in the fifth grade I was skipped ahead a year because a number of us who [it] was felt could handle the work were double promoted just because of the crowded conditions in the schools. They began building schools about the time I was in middle school, so I went to two or three different middle schools. I think I was in a different one almost every year. Then the whole town went to Richmond High School, and I think it was the biggest high school (or one of the biggest ones) in the nation. We had well over 1,000 students in our senior class alone.

S: And the majority of them were [from] working-class [families]?

L: Richmond was primarily a working-class town. It had a kind of classic division because that area has flatlands that are right next to the bay and then there are hills. The people who were more affluent lived up on the hill, and the people who were middle class [and] lower middle class tended to live down where the real

estate was less expensive, so they lived down on the flat part of the town. So there was a division that way. But we all went to the same high school. Everybody went to one high school.

S: In elevations terms, where did your family live?

L: Well, there was a town called El Sobrante, which is a rural town outside of Richmond. After the war, my dad went into the real estate business.

S: So he stopped being an engineer?

L: No, that was my mother's father. My father was the Irish Catholic.

S: Oh, OK.

L: My dad had been in the Aleutian Islands during the war and for part of the war effort. After the war he went into the real estate business and built homes in the El Sobrante area. He put up whole subdivisions that he sold to GIs; he put in the foundations and just the superstructure and then sold them to the GIs (so that they could afford them), and they would then fill in and do the [rest of the] work themselves. Dad must have sold hundreds of those things.

So we lived out there in the house where his office [was located], and my mother worked with him in the front. Later we moved on farther out into the country and had a small – [as] we called it – ranch. It was about twenty-five acres, and we had horses. We lived there until I was in high school almost ready to graduate. My sister had started high school, so we moved then to the "hill" at that point. But we were somewhat atypical in the sense that we were a rural family but not rural in our orientation. We just lived out in the country in order to have horses. We did a lot of showing of horses and that kind of thing when I was a kid.

S: Do you recall whether or not your mother worked during the war?

L: Oh, yes! She was a welder at the shipyards. Not only did she work, [but] she was only sixteen when she was married. She had a child at seventeen and another one at nineteen and another one at twenty. Her family had essentially disowned her. When my sister was born, my father was having a terrible time. You know, that was the end of the Depression at the beginning of the war. My dad was nineteen [when he married], and supporting three children was just almost impossible. So he left and did contract work. He was trained somewhat as an electrician. His father had been an electrician. He went to Los Angeles, and my mother moved in temporarily with her family on the condition that she file divorce papers [against] my father. So we were there until my mother could get enough money to move out, which she did as quickly as she could.

S: Did she file the papers?

L: She filed the papers but never finished the divorce. I mean, she did what she had to do. Then she got a small apartment and was working in grocery stores and [doing] whatever she could do until my father finished his contract work and was able to get work at Standard Oil. He worked at Standard Oil and was also a policeman part of the time. He did just whatever it was he could do. Then when he went to the Aleutian Islands, the money he made as a civilian employee of the military – he was 4-F – gave him a nest egg. When he came back he was able to invest that money in the real estate business. He bought into a business, and then, of course, everything after that was uphill.

S: [The classification] 4-F is a physical [disability]?

L: Yes, a physical disability. He was nearsighted.

S: You mentioned two sisters.

L: No. [I had] one brother and one sister.

S: Can you tell me their names and when they were born?

L: My brother was born in December of 1938, I guess. His name was Don McMullen. He is an aeronautical engineer just about ready to lose his job, I am sure, out in California since they all are [about to lose their jobs] out there. My sister is Bonnie McMullen. Byram her name is now. She has been a middle school computer and math teacher for years. [She was born in March of 1941.]

S: To get back to where we were before I pulled us back into the Second World War, you were in an integrated high school.

L: Totally integrated. And [I attended] integrated middle schools.

S: In the mid to late 1950s?

L: The 1940s. You have the wrong decade there.

S: You were born in 1940.

L: You see, I graduated from high school in 1956.

S: OK. You graduated at sixteen.

L: Yes.

S: And you entered this high school in the ninth grade or eighth grade?

L: Tenth grade.

S: Were there a lot of Hispanics?

L: No. A lot of black students [attended]. North Richmond is an area where few years ago there was a big scandal with police brutality. It made national news, and there were programs done about it. That whole area is where that federal housing used to be, so basically that was a legacy of the federal government. After the war they walked out and left those people who were uneducated and who had no jobs anymore. The composition of the area [also included] a lot of immigrants. We even had a member of my high school class who defected and went to the Soviet Union, oh, maybe ten years ago from an immigrant family that moved, unfortunately, to Dallas, Texas. He was a biochemist. He graduated from Berkeley [and was] not political at all. [He] hit the cultural shock in Dallas, Texas, and became [disillusioned]. The reaction was, at first, disbelief. Then it became a kind of paranoia with him, and he took his family and left the country. It was kind of a shock for us all, because we knew him well. In addition, there were a number of Asians because that area has a lot of Asians. There are Hispanics, but at that time the Hispanics were very well assimilated. We did not think in terms of a first-generation Hispanic culture that far north in California. They were more in the Los Angeles area.

S: So they were "white," in other words?

L: They tended to be, yes.

S: Once you graduated high school, I take it you went to college.

L: Yes.

S: And that was [where]?

L: At Berkeley.

S: Tell me about that experience. What did you study? What did you do? You said something about being a sorority member.

L: Yes. [laughter] The first year I lived at home. Then the second year I pledged a sorority. That I did, primarily, because that was the only way my parents would let me live on campus. So I lived there. That gives you a notion of the difference, culturally, of what it was like and then what it was like, say, five or ten years later. We, the girls, were pretty sheltered. We had [curfew] hours: we

could not be out past 12:00 [midnight] during the week, and during the weekends we could not be out past 2:00. We had to sign in and out and all of that kind of thing, and there were penalties assessed if you stayed out late.

I majored in political science. I was active in publications things on campus.

S: [The] campus newspaper?

L: No, like [the] campus journal and yearbook and those kinds of things. I worked in the summertime in the bay area and graduated early so that I went through the graduation ceremony, I think, a week after my twentieth birthday. I went through in three and one-half years there.

S: What was Berkeley like, in terms of student culture and atmosphere, in the late 1950s?

L: Well, it was the transition time. I think the fellow's name was Mario Savio who was the leader of the free-speech movement at Berkeley. I remember [it was] in the late 1950s when that group was just getting started. They came around to the dormitories and sororities and fraternities drumming up support. They all wore shirts and ties and jackets, which if you think of what happened a few years later, you cannot believe. But it was true. It was done. They were all part of the establishment, albeit certainly advocating a change, but not in a way that they [later] did. The alienation at that point had not really set in.

Berkeley is an intense place. It was an intense place then, but the political intensity, of course, came during the Vietnam experience. It was after I graduated and went back to Berkeley for graduate school [that I] became involved in all of that.

S: In what way would you say it was intense while you were an undergraduate there? Competitive?

L: Well, it was competitive, and the culture was not viewed as [that of] a party school. It was viewed as a school where intellectually you were supposed to be involved in not only your academic work but [in] your community and [with] world issues and all of these sorts of things. That does not mean that everyone was, but that was [the intention]. It was viewed as a school where if you were serious about "getting ahead" or whatever, you went to Berkeley. If you wanted to surf, you went to UCLA or USC. Now, that [image has] changed a lot over the years. UCLA has a very strong reputation [now]. But Berkeley, at that time, had a stronger academic reputation than Stanford did. Stanford was viewed as [being] the party school for rich kids. Even though it was private and selective, [Stanford] did not have the same academic reputation. In California, if you had

serious academic interests or pretensions, you went to Berkeley if you could.

S: What were your politics and your feelings about social issues [and] especially race while you were an undergraduate? Do you remember?

L: Sure. With the race issue, I was streetwise. In other words, there were only a few black students who were in my high school who were in the college track (and we were tracked). There were very definite courses that you took if you wanted to get into Berkeley because Berkeley was prescribing what you had to take in order to be admitted there. If you did not take those things, you did not go there. And you had to get a certain grade point average and those kinds of things. So there were only a few black students in my class who were college bound. There was one fellow in particular [that] I remember who went to Berkeley with me and asked me out [on a date] at Berkeley. I did not go out with him. I did not go out with him for two reasons – one was because he was black, and the other was I did not have anything in common with him. I do not know why he asked me out except that he was probably lonesome. We used to meet and talk and sit together and all of this kind of thing, but I always drew the line at dating. It just was not in my vocabulary, I guess, at the time.

I viewed myself as someone who had a variety of friends of all kinds. I also viewed myself who had sense enough at the time to [know] where to go in town and where not to go in town. But then in the 1950s you had a lot of rules. There were social rules about what you did and did not do and who you did them with, and you became labeled if you did certain kinds of things. I was very aware of all of that and very deliberate about what I chose to do and what I chose not to do because of those social rules that now people would scoff at but were very real at the time.

S: Was your sorority all white?

L: Yes. In fact, my sorority on the Berkeley campus no longer has a chapter because when I graduated – that would have been in January 1960 – the pledge class the following fall wanted to pledge an Asian girl. She was a real sharp girl. The alumni association refused to allow them to pledge her, and the girls refused to rush. They shut the chapter down because of that.

S: Well, good for them!

L: Yes. At the time, I was traveling for the sorority as a field organizer.

S: They shut the chapter down because they could not admit this Asian student?

L: They got into a fight with the alumni. The girls just said, "That's it!" Of course, if

you lose a whole pledge class, you cannot make your building payment and the rest of it. So they had them over the barrel. But at the time, I remember that I was instructed that Greek girls were not to be pledged in the Midwest. It was interesting, the rationale, on Asians and blacks at Berkeley. The alumni told us that this particular sorority, which I would rather not name, had its strength in the South (that is where it was founded) and that it was a top sorority at some of the major campuses in the South. They would pull out if we pledged anyone that they did not approve of. I suppose that may have been true. I do not know whether they would have known or cared, but the alumni were certainly worried about it.

S: What did you do upon graduation?

L: I became a field counselor. In fact, one of the reasons that I decided to graduate early was that I was asked if I would be what was called an academic counselor for the sorority. I went around, first of all, starting new chapters. I went all over the country to college campuses. I started out in Oregon, went to Kansas, and Tennessee. I have a charm bracelet with, I suppose, twenty different campuses where I was. I would get those [chapters] started.

Then I went up to Quebec to the national convention, and they signed me on for another year. That year I went around helping them with academic scholarship programs. They sent me to [different] chapters. I remember I went to Duke [University], and the girls at Duke did not have a high-enough chapter grade point average. They wanted me to go in there and set up a program for them to raise their grade point average and see what the trouble was. So I did that for a year.

When I finished that, I went back home and went back to school at Berkeley. I enrolled in the graduate program and became certified as a teacher.

S: So you were taking graduate courses in [what]?

L: Political science and in education. The way it works there for education [majors] is you take your education methods courses in the summers, and you take regular academic courses the rest of the time. So I had to take six weeks of reading methods and all of that sort of stuff. In the fall I was taking some political science courses, and then I had student teaching. That is where I met my husband; [he] was in a political science course there.

S: And when were you married?

L: The following June. That would have been June 1962.

S: Did you eventually take another degree from Berkeley?

L: No, because [my husband] Keith was in school as a graduate student, and his graduate student stipend was about \$5,000 a year, as I remember. So I got a teaching job, and I made \$5,200 a year. He went to school, and I taught for two years. We socked my whole salary away so that he could have some money to do his field research. He wanted to go to Greece to do his field research. We saved \$5,000 in those two years, and we went off to Greece. Actually, [we] stopped in Minnesota, which is where my family is from, and they drove us to New York. As we reached Minnesota, we found out that he had gotten a foreign-area fellowship for \$5,000. So we used that and went off and spent the year in Greece, and [then we] went back to Berkeley while he worked on his dissertation. I went back to teaching that year. Then we moved here in 1966.

S: So you were in Berkeley when Sabio and the free-speech movement started going and when the hippie counterculture got started.

L: Oh, absolutely! But, you see, by that time I was no longer an undergraduate.

S: You did not have any contact with any of this, did you?

L: Oh, sure. But not involvement. I mean, you were very aware of it. After we had been here – it was 1970 – we went back to Berkeley for a year when my son was a year old. In 1970-1971 Keith had a visiting professorship there, and we lived in Berkeley while Keith was teaching there. That was right in the middle of the [antiwar movement]. Things were really intense.

[Robert] Scalapino, who was their Far Eastern area specialist in political science, was the target of an awful lot of the diatribes about Vietnam. He was somewhat concerned about his life. The story that Keith tells is that one day he went up to the political science department. (They had an office up on the seventh floor, I think it was.) Scalapino had come to work, and he looked down the hallway and saw a bag in front of his door. [He] immediately went into the departmental office and called the bomb squad. They came, and it was his lunch. His wife had left his lunch he had forgotten in front of the door. [laughter] But that gives you a notion.

Another professor committed suicide, a nervous breakdown sort of thing. We had problems where we lived, which was right on the north side of campus. There was a little coffee shop that we liked to go to and have coffee in the evening. It became somewhat problematic. When you read the newspaper, people were getting shot on the street [in] just drive-by shootings. The woman next to us, who was [the wife of] a famous statistician (Neumann, I think his name was), lived there. She was, I do not know, seventy or seventy-five years

old or maybe older. She was robbed in the middle of the night by hippies.

Just everything was so out of control. There were policemen in the grocery stores, which seemed incongruous to have to deal with policemen in grocery stores. [There were] young kids – thirteen – and fourteen-year-old runaways – sleeping on the street. [People walking on the street] were being panhandled mercilessly.

Berkeley at the time I was in school was a kind of upper-middle-class community in many ways. It was beautiful; it was a very desirable place to live. It still is beautiful. But during that time the city council was taken over by the counterculture, essentially. What happened was that a lot of the more affluent people just moved to the Valley [and] just left Berkeley. Of course, that took a lot of the talent out of the town as well, and the businesses began folding up. When you walked down Telegraph Avenue, you found streets with store windows all boarded up. The banks bricked up all of their windows because that way you could not pitch things through the windows. The whole place became a kind of enormous junk shop. [There were] real cheap import kinds of things that may have been drug-laundering stores and that kind of thing, which did terrible things for the tax base of the community.

S: When you got to Gainesville in 1966, you said that you had traveled around working for the sorority.

L: Yes.

S: Had you experienced the Deep South and its social arrangements before you got to Gainesville?

L: Not really. They did not send me any farther south than North Carolina, which is not very southern. I mean, it is southern in many ways, but it is not like South Carolina would be. Tennessee is also border state. So I do not think that you can say that I did. No.

S: So what did you think of Gainesville when you got here?

L: When I came to Gainesville, there was the Sears store and not much else, so I knew right away that I was not in Berkeley anymore. [laughter] I mean, there just was not anything here. I felt a little like I was on an outpost. I remember when we looked at Gainesville on the map and drew these lines to Atlanta (we were trying to find big cities), Jacksonville, Miami, and Orlando ([which] did not amount to much then). I said: "Well, it is not much of a drive, a couple of hours or so, to Jacksonville and three or four to Atlanta. We can go up on the weekends."

Of course, when we got here I had a baby. I was pregnant when we came, and salaries were pretty low. We did not have a lot of money to be going off to Atlanta or any of these kinds of things anyway. So I guess you could say I thought it was small.

The other thing was it was pouring down rain. That was a very, very wet, wet year. If you come from California [where] the summers are dry and the hills are all brown ("Golden California": that is because the hills are all brown) and you come here in the summer, the contrast is just incredible. With a wet year, I had nightmares, I remember, thinking I was out in my front yard and the shrubbery was growing over the house. That was kind of a recurring nightmare that I had about Gainesville.

S: What part of town did you live in?

L: We moved into this house. When I first got here I was nine months pregnant. My daughter decided not to be born in nine months; she liked ten better. So I arrived, and we moved into a furnished apartment. We went ahead and bought this house, but there were people living in it, so we could not move in. Then our furniture all arrived, so we had to put our furniture in this furnished apartment. We were living in the kitchen of this little place on a sofa bed that rolled right out to the kitchen table. There was no air-conditioning, and it was August. I came on Saturday. Tuesday I was to check in with the doctor, and they put me in the hospital immediately. I was in and out of the hospital for the next three weeks because I was not adapting to the climate and my blood pressure went up and that sort of thing. That was my introduction to Gainesville.

Then the people moved out of the house, and I was able to move in here and could get my body under control. Everything worked out fine. I know for about three years we debated constantly about leaving. [We] talked about it and even thought about applying for jobs [in] various [other] places.

S: Why? What did you really not like about Gainesville that would prompt you to really want to leave?

L: Oh, it was a variety of things. I think a lot of people went through that. In fact, it got to be kind of a joke, because as we stayed here over the years we have known people who have come in and gone through the same thing. It is the culture shock. It is the notion that you are in the middle of nowhere. We used to call the University an oasis, because when we came the University brought in a lot of people that year and the next year. There was an influx of [state] money, and there were a lot of new positions created. So there was a group of us who were from really good schools – bright people with all kinds of energy – and we felt very much like we were in an oasis surrounded by people who did not

appreciate having us there [and] who had no interest in who we were. We did not fit in with them. [We were made uncomfortable by] the town-[versus]-gown business as well as the rural setting around the town. We were viewed by many people – [or at least] we felt, rightly or wrongly – as foreigners. So I think that had something to do with it.

[We were] wondering if the promise of the Collins era [would come to fruition]. It was Governor [LeRoy] Collins that got us here, and that was how you rationalized your whole existence and reason for coming here. Florida was the "New South." This was where things were happening. That whole focus that he [created] was a national thing. When we [were] sitting in Berkeley, we said: "We will never go south of the Mason-Dixon Line. There is no way!" That is how we rationalized it. This was a choice between here and Johns Hopkins [University], and we did not want to live in Baltimore. Those were the jobs that were open. There was one at FSU. My husband was at FSU, and his advisor called him and told him: "You are at the wrong school. Get out of that town. Go to Gainesville." [laughter] So we came here. When it came down to it, Keith liked this situation better than working at Johns Hopkins for a variety of reasons.

S: When you got here, of course, you were pregnant. This was your first child to deal with?

L: Yes, my daughter.

S: Aside from raising her and dealing with her, did you join any organizations?

L: Oh, not much. I think I was in that newcomers thing that they had in town.

S: The newcomers group?

L: Yes. The Gainesville Women for Equal Rights [GWER] thing, I think, was because of Pat. Pat Farris had come here from Alabama, and her husband had been forced out at [the University of] Alabama because he participated in the faculty demonstrations over the integrations of the University of Alabama. Charles was an incredibly bright, interesting fellow. [He was] well read [and] a real intellectual. Pat and Charles had very strong social consciences. Pat had gotten involved in Gainesville Women for Equal Rights, and she recruited me.

S: So you met her through the political science department?

L: Yes. Right. Now, I was in the League of Women Voters in kind of a peripheral way. Other than that, I really was not involved in organizations in town at all.

S: What do you remember of early Gainesville and its equal rights movement?

What is the earliest activity that you were involved in with that?

L: Well, the things that come into my mind were like the Eighteen Points. That I was very involved in. Kindergarten Alert I was very involved in. So those were the earlier things. I think later I became involved in the welfare reform thing with Jean Chalmers. Jean and Shirley Conroy were really the founders of that whole thing, but Jean and I really kind of carried that the year that I was president, 1969.

S: Tell me what you did in regard to Kindergarten Alert. From what you said, that was the earliest chronologically.

L: Well, Kindergarten Alert was [a GWER program for] helping families get their kids registered for school. We would go out in our cars and pick up mothers and their children. Sometimes it was just getting birth certificates. There was no compulsory kindergarten, and we wanted to get these kids into school. There were all these problems associated with getting low-income kids into school, like they had to get their shots and they had to have their birth certificates. [There were] just these mechanical things that were rather large things for families to deal with, especially when the [head of the] family was a single mother. We just viewed it as sort of a voter registration drive except that we were registering kids for school. We did whatever it took.

S: How did you locate these children?

L: Well, part of it was through Rosa Williams and various community organizations that were in schools and whatever all else. I mean, we just compiled lists. That is basically what we did. Then we would sit down and divvy up the list of who was going to go where and just get the job done.

S: How did these mothers react? I assume all of them were low income and most of them were black. How did they react to middle-class and, of course, black women coming in and saying, "Let's get your kid in kindergarten"?

L: Well, you know, I think probably your perceptions of what things were changes. You get more sophisticated, I think – more sensitive might be a better word for that. At the time, it was a job. It was a job for me to do because this was something that I had said that I would do, and these people wanted this done. So we were not interacting very much in a very personal way. We were doing very personal things, but it was a more professional kind of reaction as far as I was concerned. My daughter and her husband have been tutoring seven little children who live in her neighborhood. She lives in the Capital Hill section of Washington, DC. That is a black area. When she first started tutoring those children, she was met with enormous distrust, which they overcame. But even

the teacher the second year – they had the same children for two years – resented them terribly. [She was] a black, very bright, young woman teacher. [She resented them] because of the kind of notion that it is paternalistic and that blacks ought to help themselves and that whites have no role.

I do not think the lines had been drawn as openly [then] as they would be now in the sense that people behaved differently toward each other then.

S: There was so much distance between races.

L: Whatever. I mean, you did not show your feelings as much. In other words, I would not be surprised that we were resented. But I think that at the time perhaps – I am guessing now – many of these ladies simply did not show the resentment if they felt it. I never felt particularly unwelcome, whereas I think I would now.

S: I know that GWER set up actual physical examinations for children.

L: That is right.

S: Did you participate?

L: I took kids to those exams. Sure.

S: What about this, the "Eighteen Points" to the city commission? I was able to find that once you mentioned it to me.

L: Yes. Well, we had the city commission meeting in this room right here to review these eighteen points. I do not know what I think about these now. I mean, I read some of these things, and I wonder. But we were very concerned at the time about what is obviously right now a very topical issue, and that is police/community relations. We very much wanted to try to make some communication between the black community and the police force and the white community. We viewed ourselves as intermediaries and facilitators.

S: I also understand that because of the continued integration plans for the schools [and] because the way the civil rights movement was going that racial tension in Gainesville had been rising steadily throughout late 1967.

L: Oh, it was intense.

S: This was in part a response to increasing instances of violence and things like that?

L: Oh, absolutely. The police advisory board came out of that. The feeling, I think, of real frustration that we had [stemmed from the fact] that [William S. "Tiny"] Talbot, the superintendent, was going to take care of his constituency, which was not the black community, at the expense of the black community. In order to do that, plans were made to close the schools that were easy to integrate, like A. Quinn Jones and Sidney Lanier and those kinds of schools.

S: The black [schools].

L: Well, or the white schools that were on the border line of the black areas. They would be easy to integrate because both whites and blacks could go to school there, so they were just going to be closed and made into special-use schools. They were going to be vocational schools and all of this kind of stuff.

Well, that is what they were going to have done to Lincoln [High School] as well. [While a school] like Lincoln [might] not as well equipped as, say, GHS [Gainesville High School], [it] was a decent physical plant. They were going to make that into a vocational school, and we were very concerned about the injustice of that. [And that is] not to speak of just the economic disaster that that represented for the community, too. But at that time that was not our primary concern. The notion [was] that if schools had to integrate [it was] the blacks who had to be the ones to do it. That was wrong as far as we were concerned. As far as I personally was concerned, it was impractical. It would have very dire consequences for the town in the long run.

So that was part of why we were so concerned about building bridges and trying to make it possible for people to communicate. There were black teachers in this town who were bright, articulate, well-educated people who had no access. We knew that, so we tried to be a buffer in that sense.

S: How did the commission react? How did they deal with the Gainesville Women for Equal Rights handing them these eighteen recommendations?

L: My impression at the time was that they were pretty desperate. They knew they were in trouble. They knew the town was in trouble. That was one time that I felt we were given more at least surface-level encouragement than we had been up until then. There was real concern by responsible people, regardless of their racial attitudes, that the town was going to come apart. For that reason, I think they were looking for any idea that they could use that could possibly be acceptable to both sides. So I think they welcomed this. They actually did fund some of it.

S: Some of it, but –

L: Well, I mean, it was token stuff. But at the time the fact that they would do anything was something amazing.

S: So you felt that this was, for the most part, a success?

L: Well, it depends on what you mean by success. A long-term success? No. At the time, as a way to make people in the black [community] feel that somebody was listening [and] that there was some voice, I think it was useful. I think we had an impact that could have helped defuse some of that violence, because it was so intense at that time that we really felt that it could have erupted so that it would have been years to heal.

S: There were a lot of black women who were members of GWER and very active. Do you recall any that were especially active in this period in time?

L: Well, like Vivian Filer and Rosa Williams.

S: Rosa Williams was there?

L: Yes.

S: OK.

L: Of course, Cora Roberson. You know, she ran for city commissioner. I think that was the first black that ever ran for city commission. Oh, there is a whole list of them on here who were very active.

S: Ann McGhee?

L: Oh, yes. Ann McGhee was the one who tried to pull me off the street when I was arrested.

S: Tell me about that. That was April 7, 1968.

L: Oh, yes. Of course, [it all happened] in the context of [Robert] Kennedy's being shot and [Martin Luther] King's being shot, when [people were] doing everything that they knew how to do to make what they thought was a positive contribution. I mean, we were trying very hard to not let our town come apart, and I think there were a lot of people who felt the need to respond who might not have otherwise at that time. Then when King was shot, the feeling [was] that, in my view, almost like the odds were stacked against reasonable behavior. If you are involved in organizations, from my point of view, and if they are going to work, it is going to take the right personalities at the right time. King was one of those people. Regardless of what everybody thought about his personal life or

anything else about him, he was the right person for the right time. The impact of his death seconding, really, Kennedy's death was kind of, you know, this whole notion of the end of hope. When that happened, we had the demonstration downtown. It was a march, and it was in honor of King. There was nothing about that march that was intended in any way to be destructive to anything.

S: It was purely memorial.

L: That is right. Except in Bev[erly] Jones's mind and a few other people. I knew nothing about that ahead of time.

S: Beverly or Marshall Jones?

L: Well, take your pick [laughter]. Bev was the one who involved me, and Marshall was the one behind it.

S: The newspapers point all the fingers at him.

L: Well, you know, women did not have things pointed at them so much as they do now. At any rate, Bev approached Pat Farris and asked her to participate in what was to be a symbolic sit-down downtown in the intersection. Civil disobedience was what this was to be.

S: [This was] the intersection of University [Avenue] and –

L: Wherever it was. [It was] right down there by the civic center.

S: Main or 1st Street?

L: Yes, right down there. I do not remember the street. I suppressed it. But it was a symbolic sit-down. Well, Pat did not want to do it by herself. I remember exactly what I said to her when she asked me to do it with her. I said: "All right, Pat, I will do this, but I will do it on the condition that we have a long discussion afterwards about what the point is, because we are not going to accomplish anything by this. It is simply a symbolic thing." She said: "Well, Bev has told me that nobody is going to get arrested. It is just going to be a protest, and it will be broken up immediately, and that will be the end of it."

Well, that is not what happened at all. Evidently, Bev and Marshall had distributed fliers all around ahead of time. I knew nothing about it. The police were all in their police cars right around this area waiting for this thing to happen. I had no notion of it.

So I agreed to participate in this thing with Pat. We got out into the street, and we were not out there more than two minutes when the police cars came. They literally dragged us into the cars. I mean, we were treated in a way that you would not believe. I was not beaten, but these policemen were loaded for bear. I mean, they were primed. We went squealing off to the police station so fast it was lucky we did not get into an accident. And we did not have anyplace to go. I mean, this was a little town. It was not very far, and there was no hurry. But this guy was in a hurry. That was the intensity and the emotion about it all.

S: Who all were arrested? Were they all white adults?

L: Yes, pretty much. Ann McGhee, who was the gal you had mentioned, said, "Sue, don't do this," and she was trying to drag me off the street. I said: "Ann, I have told Pat I will do it. It is a symbolic thing. Do not worry about it." Of course, right at that moment the police came.

S: Were there students involved?

L: Yes, there were some students, and there was a professor in the College of Education. Frankly, I did not know who else was going to do it besides Pat when I did it.

S: What happened to Beverly Jones in all of this? Marshall was arrested.

L: Well, she did not get arrested because they had small children, so somebody had to take care of the kids.

S: [She was] sort of off on the side. Virginia Albury told me that she and her husband had an agreement to take turns getting arrested so that one would be able to babysit.

L: Yes, that was very practical.

S: So they took you to the police station. Did you go to trial, or did you pay your fine?

L: I got to pay the fine.

S: OK. You paid your fine and then left. How did the community or the people you had to deal with react when they found out that you had been arrested in such a protest?

L: Well, there was an article in the paper about it, and it was written in a kind of derogatory way, as if we were all a bunch of hippies out there in the street. That

was the furthest thing from the truth. I was pretty upset about the way the thing was perceived because I thought it was symbolic sort of thing that I thought was going to be perceived as such.

That is why I wrote that article that was in the paper. I called Pat and read it to her, and she agreed to it. So we sent that thing in as a statement of why we did that. [In] the neighborhood, I had one neighbor who was supportive, but the rest of them would not speak to me. My husband would not speak to me much, either, as I remember [laughter].

The thing, though, that really hurt was Ruth McQuown saying, "Well, I was no longer politically viable and could not be useful in the political campaigns in town any longer." Of course, Ruth was someone who espoused all of the causes, and that made me angry. I am still angry over that.

S: Had you, before that point, been very active in people's campaigns?

L: Yes.

S: Were you a member of the county Democratic committee?

L: No.

S: What form, then, did your activism take?

L: Oh, GWER had a group of us. Shirley Conroy, Joan Henry, Pat Farris, Jean Chalmers, and I were the core group that actually organized people's campaigns: Cora's and Neil Butler's and Ed Turlington's. We did leafleting and got volunteers and raised money and wrote letters and did all of those things.

S: You had mentioned losing a babysitter over all of this.

L: That was a neighbor – a very, very southern family – and her parents would no longer let her babysit for us after that.

S: And you still had only one child at this point?

L: Yes.

S: Did you [ever] have any other kids?

L: Well, my son was born in 1969.

S: You had also told me when we talked earlier that you appeared on TV and

- spoke. What was that?
- L: That was "Report Five." There were a series of television programs done [by the] public TV station in town, in Gainesville. We were asked to do one on school integration.
- S: "We" being GWER?
- L: Yes. I was the representative, and there was a whole panel of people. There was an article in the newspaper, in *Focus*, and you can look up who all the other people were. I read a statement on the air that the executive committee of GWER and I had written, and that statement had to do with the feasibility of a 70/30 racial balance integration of the schools. What we were concerned about was if you had only a relatively few whites integrating into the black areas of town and a few black students integrated into the whites, you were going to disrupt housing. You were going to have a lot of "white flight" from those areas that were going to be integrated on the east side of town, and the whole town was going to end up going north, which is exactly what happened. My argument at the time was [that] this was a small town. I mean, we are not talking [about a huge geographic area]. I grew up in the country and rode a bus every day of my life to school. Bussing was no big deal in a town like Gainesville. It was a small place, and it was relatively easy to integrate the schools. I did not buy the argument that you would not be safe at Williams [Elementary] or one of these other schools. If you set up a school and have the parents and the community involvement, kids would be just as safe in one school as in another. So I thought it was better for race relations to go ahead and balance things out as well as we could.
- S: To try to get closer to 50/50 in the schools?
- L: Well, no. There were not that many black students in town. There was about a 25 to 30 percent black [population] ratio. Just, you know, integrate everybody and keep things from getting overloaded in one way or another.
- S: Do you have a date on that by chance?
- L: February 1, 1970.
- S: What about the 1969 lobbying trip to Tallahassee?
- L: Well, that was Jean's show. I just kind of went along for moral support. I was a member of the committee and helped her do some of the work in preparation for that. But, really, Shirley and Jean had started that, and Jean, really, had done an enormous amount of work on that. I was really the third person, so, you know, really you need to talk to them about that in terms of the inspiration for it

and all those things.

S: [It was] yourself, Jean Chalmers, Shirley Conroy, Savannah Williams, and a woman named Dorothy Lewis, it says here in the *Focus*, [who] all went [to Tallahassee].

L: Yes. Savannah, by the way, was a real key person.

S: I am going to try to get in touch with her real soon. I understand that one of the reasons she went was because she was a welfare recipient.

L: And a very articulate, energetic, bright lady. She was a go-getter.

S: What can you tell me about Dorothy Lewis?

L: Not very much. I did not know her well. I knew Savannah, but I did not know Dorothy well. Again, it may be that Jean knew her better than I.

S: Was she white or black?

L: As I remember she was black, but to tell you the truth Dorothy Lewis is not someone who was in my [close circle].

S: What about Carol Thomas? What can you tell me about Carol Thomas?

L: Not a lot first hand. Carol Thomas was someone who was involved, I guess, in a more extreme way in issues that I was not as involved in, so I really did not have a lot to do with her. The types of things that we were involved in [were not extreme]. The court observer program, [for example]. We were involved in that.

S: What can you tell me about the court observer?

L: Well, did you talk to Bobbie? She had a fair amount to do with the court observer program, I think. The interesting thing about that was we were viewed in a very hostile way quite quickly. We were pointing out disparities in what we thought were sentences handed out to whites and blacks. As a kind of sidebar to that – and I think Carol Thomas was involved; I am trying to remember who it was – I got involved in a peripheral way helping develop a jury selection methodology for Alachua County. There was a group of people who were working on what is now a pretty commonly accepted methodology. If you want to staff a jury, you know exactly how to do it. Well, that was just in its infancy then, and I had agreed to help do some surveying and telephone work and all of that kind of thing. So I was involved in that, and I kind of thought it was kind of a social science thing. It was fascinating.

S: Did you ever go and sit in the courtroom with the form the ACLU made up?

L: No, I did not do that. There was another committee, and then, of course, I went to California at about that time. See, that was the year that we went off to Berkeley.

S: Did you have anything to do [or] any contact with the antiwar movement in Gainesville?

L: No. Absolutely none.

S: How did you feel about that?

L: The antiwar movement?

S: The Vietnam War in 1965, 1966, 1967, and 1968.

L: You mean was I pro or agin? I was against it. I mean, I thought it was absolutely national suicide. But as far as getting involved in it, [I did not]. I will tell you what I was really thinking of. A phrase just jumped into my mind. When I begin to feel at that time that what happens or could easily happen to me – partially because when I was president of GWER I was the focus of a lot of resentment just because I was president and not because I was Sue Legg – [was] the process of alienation can set in there. So what happens, in my view, is you can start buying into the counterculture, buying into antiestablishment sort of thinking, and then you never can come back in. I used to say there is a line you cross, and once you do you do not come back. I kept pushing against that line. I said to my self, "I cannot cross that line, because if I do, not only will I have problems with my husband and my family and all of that obligation that I had (and commitment, [because] it was not just obligation), [but] it will mean that you no longer were willing to "work within the system" – you were going to work against the system. It did not make any difference what the issue was.

A lot of those people went from one issue to the next. So for me, when I came here, I thought the school integration thing did not have to be the way it was because I knew from my own experience that while it was not easy and it was not fun and there were a lot of problems in the hallways and all of that kind of thing while I was growing up – I mean, I knew all of the bad stuff – I also knew that it was not that bad and that you could get along and could make race not such an issue. Here was something I cared very much about and thought I could do something constructive about. If you let the paranoia set in, which is very easy because you have a lot of people very hostile and angry with you, then what you end up doing is saying: "Well, alright. I am going to go from this to the Vietnam war business. I am going to go from that and get into, oh, the labor union movement."

Whatever it is, there is always a movement, and there is always something to protest if what you are is basically alienated from your political system. Well, I did not want to be alienated from my political system, so I quit that.

S: One thing that I should [have] asked you a ways back has to do with religion. What sort of church were you in when you grew up?

L: Well, you remember the business about the mother and the father. My mother came from a Methodist family (kind of upper middle class), and my father was Irish Catholic. Now, he was not a practicing Catholic, but his mother after his father died kept house for a priest. So she was a pretty Catholic lady. The husband, my grandfather, was Scotch Irish, so he was Protestant. He married an Irish Catholic. So what you have is a war between two religions in the sense of the families, and my father and my mother [were] basically nonreligious because of it. There was no home in either place for them, so we never went to church.

I went to church in an experimental way; when I was in grade school [I went] to the Methodist church so I could sing in the choir because I thought that was kind of nice. That lasted for a year or so. Then I went to the Catholic church when I was in middle school because my grandmother thought that was nifty. I was never confirmed. I just went. I remember that stopped because my father, being a very nice person, agreed to go to church with me one Sunday morning. Of course, he had not been to church since he was about ten. So we went off to the Catholic church, and he got a speeding ticket on the way. That was the end of my religious training.

S: [laughter] OK. That question was meant to lead up to [this one]: Were you involved in any congregation while you were in Gainesville?

L: No. OK.

S: The only thing I have been involved with, which was nothing religious, was in coordinating the A-four-Cs (the Alachua County Coordinated Child Care).

S: Please tell me about that. That was after you got back from Berkeley.

L: Yes. Then I became GWER's representative to the board. I just stayed on that board. I liked Molly Springfield, I liked what they were doing, I had small children, [and] I have always been kind of oriented toward [children]. I mean, I just like kids, and I like trying to do what I can. So I stayed involved in that.

S: Tell me a little about Molly Springfield.

L: She was the director of A-four-Cs.

S: Were you involved in the organizational process?

L: I was a board member.

S: What was its main function? What did it do?

L: It ran child day-care centers in town.

S: Did it create day-care centers?

L: Oh, yes. There were a number of them in town, and some of them were integrated. Of course, there was some state and federal money to support low-income people so that they could send their children there. We even ran Baby Gator [Nursery] for a while. I do not know if we still do or not, but there were a number of them.

S: And the A-four-Cs still exists? It is still around?

L: Oh, yes, as far as I know. I mean, I have not been involved now in several years. But it was a good program. Bell Nursery was one. It was just a superb day-care center, and it had black and white [children] in it.

S: Well, while we are still sort of on the topic of children and things like that, what can you tell me about the Best Day of the Week program?

L: Not much. That really happened while I was gone [to Berkeley].

S: You were president of the Gainesville Women for Equal Rights. Very soon after your tenure as president ended you left for California for a year, correct?

L: That is right.

S: When you came back, did you immediately establish all of your old contacts, or did you find things different?

L: I reestablished some of my contacts, but there were some very difficult things going on when I came back. There was a program that went on after the Best Day of the Week.

S: Home and School (HANDS).

L: Yes, HANDS. That is the one that I was involved with.

S: You said there were difficult things going on.

L: Yes, they were personal things. Not with me [but] in the sense that everybody we knew was getting divorced. That was pretty grim. I mean, not everybody, but a lot of people. There were people leaving Gainesville – bailing out, so to speak – so it was a time that I would call social disintegration. Bobbi Zeman and [Joseph] Jay Zeman [assistant professor of philosophy] were the only people left in philosophy who were stable, and that only lasted another year or so. Then they split up. The Chalmers stayed together, but other friends we had did not. So that was a very difficult time.

S: Did you ever join a feminist consciousness-raising group?

L: No.

S: Did you ever join the National Organization of Women?

L: No, but I reamed out a car salesman Friday. You know, my son and I went to buy a car on Friday. I went down to look at this automobile, and there was this 6'6" ex-football player about thirty-five years old who was the salesman. I said, "OK, I need a price." He said, "Well, this is the negotiable price." So I said: "All right. You better tell me what the *real* price is, because I am also dealing with another car dealer, and I am going to have to be running back a forth saying, 'You told me this much, and he told me this.' Now, what is your price?" He said, "When is your husband coming?" I said, "He will come back this afternoon after I make my choice because he will want to ride to make sure he likes the trunk and the seat." He said, "Well, there is no point in talking money with you until he is here." I said: "You are about to lose this sale. You are either going to talk money with me right now or you are going to find me walking out of here." So he went off to his manager and came back and gave me a dollar figure. I thanked him and walked out and did not buy his car. So it is not that I am insensitive to the issue [of women's rights], but I am a pretty independent person who has a way of getting accomplished what I need to get accomplished.

I also, when I came back [from California] in 1974, went to work. Again, that was Pat Farris. She was working in a mental health study at Shands.

S: Did you drive around in the country and interview people?

L: That is right. She hired me to be an interviewer.

S: And you worked with Joan Henry.

L: Oh, yes, the whole group. We were all there.

S: And Judith Brown worked on that, I think.

L: Well, Judith was not [present] after when I was there. I was there, I do not know, a few months when the supervisor of that group left, and I was asked to take that over. So I then became the supervisor of the interviewers.

S: Shirley Conroy worked on that, too, did she not?

L: Oh, yes, and Sandy Peterson. We had a bunch of them.

S: [Let me ask] a quick question. You said that when you got back from Berkeley, a lot of marriages were in trouble or had split apart. The early 1970s is also a time when feminist consciousness is rising and women are getting together in consciousness-raising groups [with others] who are having problems in relationships with men and things like that. So my question is, Was your marriage in good shape throughout this period?

L: The only time I think that my marriage was ever in bad shape was [during] the three days after I got arrested and we were communicating by writing notes. But I think Keith and I have had a friendship that goes beyond what most people would expect. Because of that I would say no. In fact, what happened in those years when we came back [was that] Keith was promoted pretty fast because he got a couple of books out and one thing and another. When that mental health grant ran out – that was a part-time job – I had to do something else. I got a job [working] just a couple of days a week on another grant at the health center called Humanizing the Doctors. It was teaching the medical students how to deal with death and dying. I met a woman there who was the director of the office where I work now. She offered me a permanent job as a statistician.

It was just kind of a curious thing, but when I was doing those other grant jobs, the people who had the interesting jobs were the people who had statistics training. They were doing the research evaluation; they were doing the analysis. They could work part time, and they had all of this flexibility. Well, I had been taking statistics courses over in the stat. department on the side, so when Jeaninne Webb met me, she needed somebody to run a three-year longitudinal study of the CLEP [College Level Examination Placement]. I had these statistics courses, so she hired me on a USPS job. [She] told me that testing in the state of Florida was what was going to happen in the next ten years. I mean, this was going to be huge business here.

The University's Office of Instructional Resources wanted to be in the position to contribute. [I was told that] if I would go ahead and get my degree, she would support that, so I was working full time and getting a doctorate. My husband,

who had just been promoted to full professor, agreed to take over responsibility for the children after school, so he came home when the kids got home, and he was here until I got home. Then we cooked dinner and got the kids to bed and did those kinds of things, and I would go back to campus and do my computer stuff. My personal feelings were (and I do not know if I ought to say this on tape or not) that if [in the case of] Bobbi and Jay, if Jay had been willing to give Bobbi some of that kind of support, that marriage might have lasted.

So that is what I mean by the strength of our relationship. He gave up time in his career because he said it was my turn. So I did not have to be in the feminist movement from a personal standpoint. I had the kind of relationship with my husband where we [shared responsibilities]. I mean, he does all of the cooking. Even now he does all of the cooking [laughter].

S: I am just trying to figure out why women got involved in the feminist movement, or why they did not, in your case. So that was the reason for those questions.

You mentioned a woman named Jeaninne.

L: Yes, Jeaninne Webb. She is the director of my office.

S: OK. You got your Ph.D. in what year and in what subject?

L: It was in 1978, I guess, and it was in educational research statistics and measurement.

S: Before I forget, we were talking just a little bit about the HANDS program, and then I got us off track. So can you tell me about your involvement in HANDS?

L: Well, it was just a few months, because that was at the close of that project. I was down at A. Quinn Jones School. I was kind of the office coordinator was all I was doing. So there is not a whole lot to tell about my role. That was a project that Bobbi Zeman really put together while I was gone. When I happened to get back, they needed somebody in the office – the person they had quit – so I said, "Well, since it is just a few months, I will take it." And I did that, [and] that was part time.

S: So in the mid 1970s you are back in school, and the Gainesville Women for Equal Rights seems to be very rapidly running out of energy and sort of falling apart.

L: We were all going to school.

S: All [of you were] going to school?

- L: A lot of us were. Jean went back to college, and I did [also]. Others went to work. You know, of course, I did both. I went back to work and to school. The thing that bound us together – the school integration – was down to [small problems]. All the issues then were things like the schools were integrated but in some of the rural schools they painted a stripe down the middle of the hallways. [They had] a black side of the hall and a white side. I mean, there was asinine stuff like that that was going on. But it was not the kind of thing for an organization to deal with. I mean, you were into one-by-one situations in individual schools where you had relatively little control, because the parents primarily controlled what went on in the schools. That kind of thing [was hard to control]. You could break up the overt things like the lines down the hallways, but the more informal kinds of problems that existed we had no way to get a handle on.
- S: What about the fact that Beverly Jones had left? A couple of people have suggested that she and Joan Henry were the two powerful personalities in the Gainesville Women for Equal Rights.
- L: Well, see, Beverly was more involved in Gainesville Women for Equal Rights before I was than while I was. Joan was very much involved, and Joan was a powerful personality by not being a powerful personality. Joan was, generally, very bright, very energetic, very personable. She was the kind of person who was very thorough in everything that she did and [was also] very giving of herself. But Beverly was the activist in that sense. I mean, a totally different personality. Beverly would not have drawn me into the organization. Joan would. Beverly had enormous commitment and had a very profound role on GWER, but the years that I was heavily involved it was Joan and Shirley and Pat. So I do not view Beverly's leaving as the key thing. I think what began to happen was that the core group turned to other things. Joan died [later]. (You know, she had that heart problem.) But nevertheless, there were just other things happening with her. Shirley, you know, went to work. Bobbi was president, and Bobbi had a different orientation. Bobbi was not part of the core group. She came and became more involved. She was president after I was.
- S: How well did black women and white women get along?
- L: I never saw it as an issue except to other people, and that was part of my sensitization to what the racial problems were in this town. Barbara Higgins was very articulate. She is a sharp gal. I liked being around her. I like being around bright women. I like women who can do things [and] who think through things well [and] who do their homework [and] who you are proud to hear speak, and Barbara was one of those. Ann McGhee was another. Cora was another gal. There were a number of [them]. Rosa Williams was someone who had very

hard personal circumstances but knew exactly what she was about. And these were the black women in GWER.

It just was not an issue with me what color they were, except that they were the people who could give us information as an organization and validity as an organization [and] without whom we had no particular reason to exist. I think that is why Ann felt in some ways despairing when I participated in the Martin Luther King thing. What she was [afraid of] was that she was going to lose an ally. Ann was a very respectable, talented, educated woman. She knew that if you got arrested, you were going to have a problem. So she felt in agony. I mean, she literally tried to pull me out of the street. So from the standpoint of that core group of people, we worked extraordinarily well together. I do not think I missed undercurrents there.

S: Do you remember any class tension between black women who were school teachers and black women who were not?

L: There may have been some tacit class tension, but to tell you the truth, Keith was making \$9,200 a year and I was not making anything, so we lived on a different side of town. But none of us was in a situation where we were going to be too obvious about, say, economic advantages at that time. I am sure there was some of that, but it was not what was on our minds. This was a task-oriented group. I think Jean, more than anyone else, was involved in very personal ways with families and people and their homes, and that continued long after – helping people on a one-to-one basis. She probably would have a better feel for that than I did because my involvement was through the organization. Our social interaction was through the organization.

S: How would you judge what GWER accomplished, looking back on it now?

L: I think that it is wrong to think that somehow the organization failed because it did not survive. I think that it was created because of the need of the time, [and] it served that need extraordinarily well. I do not know what would have happened if there had not been a GWER, but I like to think that we kept some communication open and helped defuse at least some tension. I think once that acute need was filled in the sense that integration was accomplished [then there was less need for the organization]. It may not have been what it should have been, but it was a whale of a lot better than it might have been somewhere else. It was a single-focus organization. We would have had to become something else to survive. I do not know what else that would have been. I mean, there are all kinds of other social causes you can get into, but that is not what we were about.

S: Well, how do you feel about what has or has not happened with the civil rights

movement since the late 1960s?

L: We had a meeting at Jean Chalmers's house a year or so ago. The idea was should we reform GWER.

S: Was this the reunion?

L: Yes, the reunion. The question was raised, and there obviously was not going to be any consensus. But Shirley was adamant that it still should be a social activist group [and] that we should take on agencies within the community that were discriminating or were not being supportive of low-income people. The notion that there were other ways and other things that needed to be done to support people [was not among her suggestions]. Now, there are a lot of black city officials now who are very well educated people. Years ago the University had to integrate, so they hired a lot of people who were black because it was convenient. They were local and they were handy and they were not necessarily effective. That, to me, is a terrible form of racism.

S: We are talking about faculty members?

L: Well, staff and professionals. I am not talking about career service secretaries. I am talking about professional kinds of positions in order to "integrate" the University. My feeling is that you need to recruit the best faculty and staff that you can get, but at the time that was not what was done. They kind of looked around and found a few people locally, and the feeling was they found people they thought they could control. I do not think that spoke very well at the time.

So when you look at what has happened since then, we are just getting now to the point where we are really looking for high-quality people. Of course, there is a problem that people have to pay such a premium in terms that you create internal dissension if you, say, bring in a black professor from somewhere else. He can command or she can command \$10,000 more than a comparable white professor. You create all kinds of problems. So the issues are very complex, and it is not the kind of thing that an "organization" can deal with.

S: What about the quality of life for blacks in Gainesville?

L: Well, I cannot really speak to that. Again, I am not as involved, and I do not have the first-hand knowledge. I know my feeling is that the drug problem in Gainesville, which is because we have such an incredible market for it with the student body, has decimated black neighborhoods. So there is a combination of that plus the economic hardships and then the adverse effects of integration, which we all recognize now. That is, if you bus black students all out of their neighborhoods, you break down the community support for these kids in the other schools. The kids feel alienated in the schools, and the parents do not feel

welcome, even if they can get there. So there is a whole different kind of problem where, I would suspect, there is some defeatism that may not have been as obvious years ago, when I would have thought it would have been worse. [That is] simply because they had their own communities for support, and they do not have that anymore. Many of the middle-class black families have left the black communities and moved into white areas, so there is a kind of a dearth of leadership.

S: I am going to hazard another guess, but this is an integrated neighborhood [in which you live].

L: Yes.

S: Can you remember when the first black family [moved in to become your] first black neighbors?

L: It was not so long ago that the lady bought the house two houses down [from] here. She never really lived here. I do not know why she has the house. She lives in New Jersey. People live in that house from time to time. That has been a number of years ago. It may be ten; I do not know. Time goes so fast now, [so] it is hard to say. There is a black family living in the next block, and they have been here several years.

S: Do you recall any of your white neighbors getting riled?

L: Yes, but it was couched. In fact, there is a family that used to live two houses down from here, and he was a fund raiser for the University. They lived across the street from the woman who bought this house. She hired Sears to come and put this fake facing on the house so that it looks like stone, and they put the stone all over. Then they sprinkled the stuff with glue or something, and then they actually literally threw glitter on it. I will never have Sears do my house. So we had this house that really would be kind of an attractive house all of a sudden turn into fake-stone facing with glitter on it. Well, the people across the street tried to organize the neighborhood in protest. Theoretically, they were protesting the stone facing on the house. In reality, they were protesting the woman who bought the house. She had just bought it and was redoing the house.

S: [They were protesting] because she was black.

L: Yes. Sure. My husband defused that one.

S: [break in tape] – but that is the only conflict in residential integration that you know of?

L: There has not been anything more. See, this neighborhood is kind of an interesting one. There are a lot of churches around this neighborhood. The other thing that you find in this neighborhood are some very fundamentalist Baptists, and then [there are] people like us. So I have to admit there is a mixture of families in this particular location. I do not know just why the fundamentalists are all here, but it had to do, I think, with the development that they were going to put on 8th Avenue. You know that church that was doing all the proselytizing. What is that church? It is down closer to the University. At one time it was Crossroads. It is a very fundamentalist, proselytizing church, and they had people all over the place. Anyway, there was a time in Gainesville when that got to be a problem.

Well, they had bought some property right on the other side of 8th Avenue from here, and they were going to put in a whole development of people. Well, the whole neighborhood [in] this area and all around organized to prevent that, and in one way or another it was prevented. Well, then there was a notion sometime that that church was going to infiltrate this neighborhood. I do not know whether it really was true or not, but that was the rumor.

S: In the middle of this block?

L: Yes. It was just a stitch. As a consequence or not I am not sure, [but] there are a lot of families who moved in in this area in the last few years who are incredibly fundamentalist. I am not just talking about Baptist families. I am talking about real fundamentalist types. The point of all this is I do not have a lot in common with those people, so I do not know what they say and do not say about the black neighbors. I can guess what they might say, but that may be unfair. I frankly do not know. I do not discuss it with them.

S: One thing that has popped into my mind a couple of times is: How much social contact were you having with non-University people in Gainesville?

L: Next to zero.

S: Next to zero.

L: Other than the political campaigning.

S: So your separate community is the University.

L: That is right.

S: One of the things that I strongly suspect is the character of the civil rights movement hinges on the fact that GWER members were mainly from the

University.

L: Oh, there is not any question. We were faculty wives and black school teachers. That is who we were. We also had some knowledge of some other places and how things might be. Frankly, I think time [was an essential factor]. If you give a bunch of active women who are not working some [time] and feed them into a small community, they are going to do something. That issue was right there. We were all going to have small children that had to go into these schools, and we wanted these schools to be a lot better than they were. We certainly did not want them full of a lot of racial tension and everything else. This was home; this was where we were going to raise our families, so if you do not like the community, you try to change it.

S: OK. Is there anything else you would like to add?

L: No.

S: Real quickly, you got your Ph.D. and got the job that you were promised in 1974 in the Office of Instructional Resources.

L: Well, see, what happened there was just that I had the career service position. Then when I finished the Ph.D. I was promoted to a faculty position. Then two years or so after that we began getting involved in all of this statewide testing and things, so I then took over that role and became an associate director for testing and evaluation. We kind of split the job; there was another person who took test administration kinds of things – the GRE [Graduate Record Exam] and those sorts of things. He did that kind of thing, and I did the statewide contracts. He is retired now, so I do all of that.

S: So what is your title?

L: Associate director, Office of Instructional Resources.

S: OK. Do you like what you do?

L: Oh, very much. It is an interesting extension of GWER in a sense, because the state of Florida went through the basic skills movement, basic skills testing, and that was a direct result of integration. It is a nice circle because [of] the whole business of Governor [LeRoy] Collins and the New South, Florida being in the New South. Well, if you are going to be the New South, you have to attract industry to Florida, and to attract the industry you have to have a well-educated work force. The notion was, once you have all of these schools integrated, you had to do something to bring up the bottom in terms of achievement level. So they put all that money into compensatory education and had basic skills testing in grades three, five, eight, and eleven. That had a dramatic impact on the

achievement level of black students through the early 1980s. You can see the charts – it climbs right up.

S: So it is a success.

L: Well, yes and no. Then what happened was that the top group, if you take SAT scores, for example, did not increase. There was enormous energy to bring the bottom up but a depression of achievement in the higher level. By 1986, 1987, 1988, there was a plateauing of the impact of basic skills, and then by the late 1980s it began to go down. You find really what has happened with the educational system: if you do not put your energies into the kind of creative thinking, problem solving, [and] analytical thinking that you need to and are making everything rote, [you are being short-sighted in terms of long-term, quality education]. You teach people to read. You teach them to do sheets of multiplication tables. While they might learn to do multiplication tables, they cannot do problem solving. The whole thing fell apart, and now all that basic skills testing has been thrown out.

It follows right along with the civil rights movement and the necessary integration of the schools and the impact that that had. Now we have to move on. We have to move on not only in terms of getting rid of this kind of think-and-do mentality in our schools, [but] we have to teach lower-achieving students how to think. They did not think. They did worksheets in the compensatory education classes; they had worksheet classes. It was rote learning, memorization. Nationwide that is going on. We particularly see it in Florida because this state wanted more at one time than many other southern states in terms of its possibilities. It had more hope and put a lot of energy into doing what it thought was the right thing. That is over now. That "right thing" is no longer the right thing. We have to get on to the next thing, and we are having a crisis of will, because I am not sure the state wants to go on because of the cost.

S: It is difficult to raise property taxes in this state to fund education, as I understand it, especially in the southern part.

L: Yes. And we are not going to get an income tax [to] fund it. Of course, it is too easy to look at California right now. California is bankrupt. They are giving out warrants instead of salaries for state workers, but the banks are no longer going to accept them. They cannot agree on a budget. They have all these taxes. Because they have this enormous unemployment and their budget has been based on projection of income that they do not have, the state is bankrupt. So how do you tell the state of Florida, which has no tax base, essentially, that more tax is going to solve it? When you look up at California, they are in the same boat. They have all the same cuts in the university system that we have had. They have had the same public education cuts. It is just that they are cutting

from a higher base. So it is pretty hard to convince people that taxes are the answer.

Even though we do not pay any, we have to do something. If you do see the difference in quality, if you want to close the difference in quality, then you must have money. I think we are kind of parochial in this state.

I think that is part of the problem with the University of Florida, the whole notion of its being a flagship university. There are a lot of people who would rather kill the king than let the University of Florida become what it could be because it means concentration of resources. We cannot become the Berkeley of Florida because the population of the state and the political power is down in Miami, in the southern end of the state. They are not going to let us become the Berkeley.

S: OK. Well, I would like to thank you for all the information, formal and informal. We will get you a copy of it soon.

[I have] one thing to add. Why do you think GWER was so effective?

L: We were effective because we were so extraordinarily thorough in what we did. We were thorough in our homework. I remember specifically when Jean [Chalmers] and the rest of us went to Tallahassee for the welfare reform lobbying effort. We were invited to go up there and do a presentation. Jean did that. You could sense the room when she came in and we all came in. She sat down at the table with the others, and the men there clearly were uncomfortable and almost at the point of contempt. [They had] expressions on their faces that could make you a little unhappy. By the time she finished, there was genuine respect in their voices. That happened to us in a number of situations, even the situation with the Gainesville Eighteen Points, when they came here to my house.

They came because they knew that we did our homework, that we were not just sitting around a coffee table spinning up ideas of things to do to make people uncomfortable. Every single issue that we took on we did all the research that we could do. Of course, there were a number of people with advanced degrees who knew how to do that kind of research. The rest of us pitched in, and I think we gained respect because we were very good at what we did.

S: So no moves were made until everything was studied, researched, [and] carefully planned?

L: I cannot remember a time when we were caught off guard by someone being able to tell us that we were misinformed. Now, maybe there were times, but I cannot remember them. We made people very uncomfortable because when issues would come up and there would be question-and-answer sessions [it

became quickly evident that we were prepared to respond to even the toughest questions]. We used to have these panel discussions. When you get a couple hundred people coming to them [there are a lot of questions, and] we had the answers, and people would make statements that we could refute. It was obvious. People, I think, just were not used to that-informed a community group. The League of Women Voters had some very informed people in it, but at that time we were the organization in town that was the most active.

S: Is this mode of operation the way the League of Women Voters does things?

L: Yes, except that they are not an activist group. They were deliberately not an activist group at the time.

S: So they do not take the final steps.

L: They have position papers. We put pressure on.

S: I am wondering if it is possible that the League of Women Voters was a model for some of these things when the group was organized in the early 1960s.

L: I frankly do not know. I just know that I wanted to be in the League of Women Voters education committee and was not welcome because I was in GWER. [laughter]

S: You were too radical?

L: Yes.

S: What were meetings like? It sounds like things were thoroughly discussed and carefully worked out before anything was done, and it also sounds like there were a lot of strong personalities possessed by very intelligent women. So what were the meetings like, usually?

L: Intense. We did not have sense to go home at night. I can remember being incensed at my husband's calling me at 11:00 or 11:30 at night saying, "Are you ever coming home?" [It was] sort of like my father saying, "It is time to come home." But the strategy sessions that we had – and a lot of them were strategy sessions – were very intense. Lots of different opinions [were expressed] about what was the most effective way to do something and who we were going to get to help.

S: Were there factions, cliques, that you can remember?

L: I would not view it that way. I really view it as a strong central committee, and

that strong central committee really was not factionalized.

S: A central committee made up of the president, vice-president, and the committee chairs?

L: Yes.

S: And you all would have meetings and decide things, and then it would break down into committees?

L: Yes, and a lot of the work went on in those committees. You could have the court program going in one direction, and I was on that police advisory commission going in another direction, [and] the kindergarten alert thing going in another direction. [It] was totally separate membership groups, so it was like a lot of little organizations. The effectiveness of the committee had to do with who was the committee chair. Of course, if you picked good people for that, then you can get a lot done. So it was not just the president. The president called the meetings and set directions, but in reality it was a different political model, if you will, [from the League of Women Voters]. It [GWER] was truly a group of five or six women who gave the leadership to the organization.

We listened very hard to our membership, particularly to the black membership, but also to the white membership because we did not want to lose our base. But I would not say that we were factionalized. At least in those early years.

S: OK. I just thought I would try to add that.

[End of the interview]