

## Betty Alverson

**Interviewer:** Dr. Courtney Tollison

**Interviewee:** Betty Alverson

**Date:** November 18, 2004

**Location:** unknown

**Subject:** Furman University

**Edited by:** Anna McDanal, August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2010

**Edited by:** Dr. Courtney Tollison, August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2010

10

### Time Code

#### Minutes 0-5

Introduction: Spartanburg Junior College (Spartanburg Methodist College); Laura Ebaugh; Dr. Gordon Blackwell; Furman University Student Center; Collegiate Educational Service Corps (CESC); Southern Seminary; North Greenville College; Ohio University; Converse College; Christ Church Episcopal; Dr. Winston Babb; Manly Hall

#### Minutes 5-10

20 Phil Elliott; Mrs. Beatrice Plyler; Dr. John Plyler; Marguerite Chiles, Dean Virginia Thomas; Dr. Olivia Phelps; Dean Robert Norman Daniel; Dr. Francis Bonner; Dr. Ernie Harrill; Dr. Gordon Blackwell

#### Minutes 10-15

The groundbreaking for the new campus; Furman Hall; the Greenville Women's College and their traditions; The Shack and social activities on campus; Julius Gladney and Frances Holmes; the Furman Student Center

#### Minutes 15-20

Dr. Laura Ebaugh; Dr. Francis Bonner; Dr. Ernie Harrill; Marguerite Childes; Dr. Gordon Blackwell; Dupree Rain; Watkins Student Center

#### 30 Minutes 20-25

Discussions on the beginnings of the Collegiate Educational Service Corps (CESC); Larry and Diane Estridge; Max Heller; Dr. Laura Ebaugh

#### Minutes 25-30

Introduction of fraternities at Furman; Kresge Foundation; Dr. Gordon Blackwell; Dr. John Plyler; Max Heller

#### Minutes 30-35

May Day; Emory University; Wake Forest University; Davidson College; L.D. Johnson

#### Minutes 35-40

40 L.D. Johnson, First Baptist Greenville; Dr. Ernie Harrill; Dr. Johnson's involvement with desegregation; University of Richmond; Jim Pitts; Robert Dean; May Day Play Day

#### Minutes 40-45

May Day Play Day and the Service Corps; Talk a Topic; L.D. Johnson

#### Minutes 45-50

Discussions on topics that dealt with racial issues on Furman's campus in the seventies; Talk a Topic; General Lewis Blaine Hershey; Dr. Gordon Blackwell; Dr. Jim Edwards

Minutes 50-55

50 Dr. John E. Johns; Film Arts; Student Center; Dr. Gordon Blackwell

Minutes 55-60

Presidential fireside chats; Susan Thompson Shi and the coffee houses; on-campus policies on dancing; Dr. Gordon Blackwell; John Duggan

Minutes 60-65

Values dinners; Dr. Elaine Knocks; Dialogue; Carol Daniels

Minutes 65-70

Art exhibits in the Student Center; Dr. Gordon Blackwell as a student at Furman in the 1930s; Southern Student Organizing Committee; South Carolina Baptist Convention

60 Minutes 70-75

Dr. Gordon Blackwell's character and upbringing; Knox College; Dr. Blackwell's campaign for national excellence; Dr. John E. Johns; Model United Nations; Dr. Donald Aiesi; Don Gordon; Dr. Ernie Harrill; John Duggan; Mark Kellogg

Minutes 75-80

Drug problems at Furman in the seventies; the Vietnam War's impact on student life; the demographics of Furman students in the 1970s

Minutes 80-85

Discussions on the changing dynamics of students between the 50s and the 90s; the split with the South Carolina Baptist Convention and how it affected the students; Dr. John E. Johns

70

Minutes 85-90

Dr. Johns' style of leadership; the South Carolina Baptist Convention; Dr. Gordon Blackwell; Susan Shi; L.D. Johnson; the boat named for Betty Alverson; swimming in Furman Lake

Minutes 90-95

Discussion on the changes in the student atmosphere over the years

Minutes 95-100

Ending discussion on the evolution of the Service Corps to the Heller Service Corps and the changes it has had over the years; Max and Trude Heller

80

**DR. TOLLISON:** Today is November 18, 2004, about 5:50 p.m. My name is Courtney Dr. Tollison, and I'm sitting here with Betty Alverson also, or more commonly known as, Miss A to us students, and we're going to have a conversation about Furman. Ms. Alverson is a 1957 Furman graduate. You attended Furman between 1955 and 1957. Prior to that you were a student at Spartanburg Junior College, which later became Spartanburg Methodist College, is that correct?

**MS. ALVERSON:** Right.

90

**DR. TOLLISON:** You were a psychology and sociology double major. One of your favorite professors, I presume, was Laura Ebaugh, [who] you worked closely with. [You were] a very close friend of Gordon Blackwell's. You became director of the Student Center in August of 1965 when the Student Center opened. [You were the] founder of CESC [Collegiate Educational Service Corps]. You attended Southern Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, received a Master's degree from the Carper School of Missions and Social Work, worked at North Greenville College, you taught there, and then also worked as a dietitian at Spartanburg Junior College. You were an RA [Resident Assistant], too, at Spartanburg and here at Furman when you were a student here, is that correct?

100

**MS. ALVERSON:** Right.

**Dr. TOLLISON:** Then later on [you] completed a Master's degree in 1966 at Ohio University, [a] Master's degree in college personnel and guidance. Okay. Why don't you start off by telling me a little about where you grew up and sort of life pre-Furman?

110

**MS. ALVERSON:** I grew up in a little community near Prospect over in Spartanburg County [South Carolina]. I went to a very small high school: [I] graduated in a class of 15. [I] played basketball, avid basketball. My dad died just as I began my senior year in high school, and then mama died just as I had finished Spartanburg Junior College, where I also played basketball and worked. [I] worked in the kitchen, learned to cook and found myself dietitian there at the ripe old age of nineteen. I saved money 'cause I knew I wanted to go on, and I had a scholarship, partial scholarship... well, I had a scholarship, full scholarship to Converse [College], but that just never worked out because I became the dietitian. The dietitian had suddenly resigned because of illness in her family. And so I worked and coached, coached basketball there. [I] came to Furman, terrifically influenced by Miss Ebaugh. [We] used to say it was "Ebaughology" because she taught all of her courses just about alike. Miss Ebaugh loved God and Christ Church and her niece just about in that order.

120

**DR. TOLLISON:** You mean Christ Church in Greenville?

**MS. ALVERSON:** Yes, great deal about that. She was an avid Episcopalian.

**DR. TOLLISON:** And that wasn't problematic on this very Baptist campus?

130

**MS. ALVERSON:** No, no, no, because Miss Ebaugh just spoke her mind. She called... we did work in the community. I worked at the YWCA [Young Women's Christian Association]. She called it our volunteer work. Well, it wasn't too volunteer because she'd flunk you if you didn't do it. So, no option. Also [I] took a lot of courses under Dr. Babb, Winston Babb in history, because he was such a fantastic teacher, and he could make... he too was the son of a Baptist minister. He was a great churchman, but he could make fun of Baptists in a way and get away with it. He was just a delightful teacher, and I learned a lot of history under him. Never had liked it before, but...

**DR. TOLLISON:** You mentioned that you were living, you lived from '55 to '57 on the men's campus in the Manly dorm.

**MS. ALVERSON:** Right.

140

**DR. TOLLISON:** And that you frequently had to, as all the students did, had to travel back and forth between the two campuses, and you wanted to stay...

**MS. ALVERSON:** You rode on a bus. Phil Elliott was the bus driver.

**DR. TOLLISON:** Who is that?

150

**MS. ALVERSON:** Phil Elliott. Later taught English here. I don't know if you've interviewed him or not. And I had to go to an afternoon P.E [Physical Education] class, and there were no busses in the late afternoon, so I frequently didn't have money to ride the bus back, and I would walk. And many, many a time Mrs. [Beatrice Dennis] Plyler has picked me up and given me a ride and how I did appreciate it on those cold days. We saw a great deal of the Plylers. They ate in the dining room. We ate over there, and Miss Chiles, Marguerite Chiles, was a tremendous influence on me because in my work I reported to her.

**DR. TOLLISON:** In your work...

160

**MS. ALVERSON:** I think they called it Assistant Residence Hall Director. I was older.

**DR. TOLLISON:** And she was the dean of... when?

**MS. ALVERSON:** No, she was at that time called Student Personnel Director.

**DR. TOLLISON:** Okay. Under Dean [Virginia] Thomas, Virginia... [Editor's Note: Dean of Greenville Women's College]

170

**MS. ALVERSON:** Well, she as a student had worked, and then as an employee, worked under Miss Thomas, but she... Dr. Phelps, Dr. Olivia Phelps, was the... And I remember once we had the so-called panty raid, which created quite a bit of pandemonium and made a lot of bad press for Furman. It didn't amount to much, really (laughs).

**DR. TOLLISON:** I still don't understand the purpose of those.

180

**MS. ALVERSON:** No, I never did either. And Dr. Phelps was a very modest lady, and of course, she had us all in interviewing us. She would never use the word panty. She never referred to it. She was a good... she was a fine person, very reserved, but a fine person. But Marguerite [Chiles] was the one who spent the time... I went camping with her several times and spent a lot of time with her.

**DR. TOLLISON:** I spoke with her several months ago. She's a great lady. You mentioned before we turned the tape on that Dr. Babb, you wanted to take some more classes on the men's campus?

190 **MS. ALVERSON:** Right. So I...they said, "Well, we don't think they'll let you in, but you can go ask him." So I go and I present my little story about time and work and, "Oh," he said, "If I gotta teach women I might as well start with you as anybody." But we became great friends, remained friends. When I came back to Furman, then he died shortly thereafter very suddenly, but he was a wonderful teacher. At that time, Dean [Robert Norman] Daniel was still teaching English, and everybody said, "Take World Literature. That's just something you have to do," not being an English major. But I signed up for Dean Daniel's World Literature class, and the second day of class he died and we got Dr. [Francis] Bonner.

**DR. TOLLISON:** Oh, goodness.

**MS. ALVERSON:** I had never worked so hard (laughs), but I survived it.

200 **DR. TOLLISON:** Tell me about Dr. Bonner, now that we're on the topic...

**MS. ALVERSON:** Well, Dr. Bonner had a lot to do with my coming back to Furman, he and Dr. Harrill, because actually I had been hired before Dr. [Gordon] Blackwell came in January as president.

**DR. TOLLISON:** So when Dr. Bonner was acting president, that's when you were hired?

210 **MS. ALVERSON:** Yeah, but he was tough, but he was fair, and I had great respect for him and still do and great love for him.

**DR. TOLLISON:** Let's talk about the condition of the campus at the time. This is a period, the land for this new campus had been purchased in 1950 and broken ground in 1953, and then you came in 1955. So what was the... was there an air of excitement on the campus about what was to be over here?

**MS. ALVERSON:** Oh, yes. We weren't sure we'd live to see it, but I came to several groundbreaking ceremonies.

220 **DR. TOLLISON:** Oh, so they had more than one? They had a groundbreaking for each building?

**MS. ALVERSON:** Yeah, mm hmm.

**DR. TOLLISON:** Oh, okay.

**MS. ALVERSON:** And we had freshmen men who lived out here and they came in and ate in the dining hall where we ate, and they were just out here with the library and one dorm. So they had many, many discipline problems, as you can imagine, and they'd just go wild (laughs). They were bussed.

230

**DR. TOLLISON:** Downtown for meals, I thought, or at least for dinner. So there was a canteen here in the center of Furman Hall, right?

**MS. ALVERSON:** Yeah.

**DR. TOLLISON:** Okay, that's interesting. I can't imagine. I heard it was very muddy.

**MS. ALVERSON:** Oh, yeah. Well, it was not far removed from still the cotton patches in those days.

240

**DR. TOLLISON:** Was there a concern among, and I know that you didn't live on the Women's College campus, but was there a concern among the women... did you ever get the sense that there was a concern that, with the integration of men and women on this new campus, that some of the traditions of GWC [Greenville Women's College] would be lost or... ?

**MS. ALVERSON:** That was more among the alumni, and students were too thrilled to be with the guys. That was no problem.

250

**DR. TOLLISON:** And probably by that point in time, by the 50s, I mean we had full coordination in '38, so maybe those students... for instance, well, I'm sure you probably did, but did most of the women identify as Furman students, or did they identify as students GWC?

**MS. ALVERSON:** No, they were still referred to as Furman students, not GWC, that's long gone from that. But the zoo was pretty prominent in their lives. Not so much in ours because we were on the other campus. Of course, most of the people who lived there had been freshmen and sophomores. See, we had just juniors and seniors women over there, and they had the affiliation and the affection for the zoo. [Editor's Note: The Zoo was a term that developed that referred to the women of the Greenville Women's College.]

260

**DR. TOLLISON:** And that was one long row of buildings, attached buildings, with The Shack behind it?

**MS. ALVERSON:** Right.

**DR. TOLLISON:** Okay, and so who...

**MS. ALVERSON:** Which was the center for social activities.

270

**DR. TOLLISON:** The Shack?

**MS. ALVERSON:** We had, on our campus we also had a bookstore and a canteen. Julius Gladney and Frances Holmes ran it and later came here, you know, to the Student Center, and if you didn't have money to buy books, Julius would let you read books, but he'd make you wash your hands, and you couldn't get them dirty, but a lot of us read books in the bookstore (laughs). I don't think they do that anymore.

280 **DR. TOLLISON:** Oh, I don't think so. I've heard a lot of great things about Mr. Gladney. He seems to...

**MS. ALVERSON:** He's a great soul.

**DR. TOLLISON:** He seems to have endeared himself to lots of generations of Furman students. So, what else was it... I've heard stories about him giving food to students who couldn't afford it and, tell me a little bit more about him.

290 **MS. ALVERSON:** Well, he loved... Furman was his life, and he gave it everything he had, and he loved us. His children sort of grew up here. I did a funeral for one of them about two or three years ago, and I was also very pleased that we could do a Habitat house for one of his children.

**DR. TOLLISON:** Oh, terrific, terrific. Who were some of the professors on the Women's College campus that you remember?

**MS. ALVERSON:** The only classes I had on the women's campus were with Miss Ebaugh.

300 **DR. TOLLISON:** Mm hmm, so she worked over there?

**MS. ALVERSON:** And she, Miss Ebaugh would never, you never got a paper back, so you never knew where you stood. We'd go to final exam, and of course, there were stories about people, just like there are stories about faculty now, that she never read papers. So this student proceeded to write the Lord's Prayer in the middle of his exam paper. But she'd sit in there while we were doing the exam and she'd go "Ha, Ha, Ha, Ha," and it'd just rattle you, you know, you'd think, *Oh, that could be my paper she's reading*. "Missed the point!" (laughs) Oh, she was a case.

310 **DR. TOLLISON:** It sounds like it, sounds like it. Did she ever catch the Lord's Prayer in the middle of the essay?

**MS. ALVERSON:** Yes, she caught it, she caught it. "Ha! Thought I didn't read it! I'll show him!"

**DR. TOLLISON:** That's funny. Let's move on... let's jump ahead to when you came

back here in 1965. Who... you mentioned Dr. Bonner asked you to come back, is that correct?

320 **MS. ALVERSON:** Well, he did the actual hiring. Dr. Harold and Miss Chiles did most of the interviewing, and I reported to Dr. Harold and he was just one of the finest human beings on God's green earth. He was a joy, and if he had a nickel for every student he's ever bailed out of jail... and the only time I ever saw him... in fact I'd been here several years, never seen him mad at all, he just didn't get angry 'til we had that famous incident of the Pepsi machine, and he was... what had happened, and I just totally, you know, forgot about the policy. We had a lot of Clemson students here, of course I'm sure the Furman students joined them, but they were smoking pot, and they'd stick it in the hymnals. You know, we'd be running up... nobody took the hymnals out of the chapel. I thought we had done remarkably well maintaining some semblance of order in that house that night, and I was just so stunned, you know, when Dr. Harold was so upset about that  
330 Pepsi machine. [I told him]: "Ernie, go home because I'm afraid you're going to have a stroke." So Ernie went home, and then later he came back to help us, and I remember holding him... he stood on the railing, the stair railing, and took a mop. We were trying to get the Pepsi syrup off of the ceiling. I called Dr. Blackwell and told him what happened. He said, "Just clean it up, Betty. Don't let DuPree ever know this ever happened." So we cleaned it up.

**DR. TOLLISON:** Did he ever, did Mr. [DuPree] Rhame ever find out?

340 **MS. ALVERSON:** No.

**DR. TOLLISON:** Never found out?

**MS. ALVERSON:** Never to my knowledge did he ever know it because they would have killed us. Dr. Blackwell might have been forced to fire me.

**DR. TOLLISON:** Well, that worked out... evidently. Oh, that's a good story. I'll have to cross-reference that in this interview. So you came here in 1955 when the Watkins Student Center was brand new, just now opening, and what was your job description?

350 **MS. ALVERSON:** You didn't have job descriptions in those days. I was just to build a program. You remember that's the time when there were probably maybe two automobiles on campus and we were still pretty isolated, and having been downtown and known Furman as that, it was still a pretty... it was just pretty isolated for students and I knew one thing I had in mind before I came here was that we would build a service program. I had done work, as I said Miss Ebaugh called it volunteer. I didn't think it was very volunteer because she'd flunk you if you didn't do it, but I had grown up with that and certainly at the seminary I had a, you know, I was educated to believe that ministry was service and my very, very firmly believed that at liberal arts college people should be taught to serve and I knew that I wanted to build programs that I thought complemented,  
360 not competed with the academic, and I tried to do that during my entire thirty-five years here, and I had the freedom to do it.

**DR. TOLLISON:** CESC developed the...

370 **MS. ALVERSON:** We started working on it. We worked, well we started as soon as I came. I started meeting with students. Larry Estridge was student body president at the time, and Diane [Estridge], whom he later married, was the chairman of the social board. They were the first two students that I met. We had six students... he wanted six students to help me work on this... on service corps, and we met with, oh, we had luncheon after luncheon, meeting after meeting, with community people and with students and with faculty before we ever started. Those first six students named Service Corps...

**DR. TOLLISON:** How did they come up with the title of the organization?

380 **MS. ALVERSON:** I don't remember exactly what brought it about, it just... and we... but it worked and we kept it. We never changed it, and while I'm devoted to Max Heller, it almost cost us our friendship when they changed the name of it. I thought it was a great discredit to the students because we made some innovations in it, you see where people could put their own... we had slogans, you know, it would, every year there was some slogan, and the different... but we tried to stay true, and those first six students wrote a poem called *Hands*. They wrote it; six people wrote that poem. It was always in the front of the Service Corps brochure, and that was our emblem... a hand of a Furman student, you see the Furman ring with the "F" on it and a hand because the concept was for it not to be a handout but a hand.

**DR. TOLLISON:** So then like lending a hand?

390 **MS. ALVERSON:** ... and I was, I also proposed giving academic credit or required service of people. I am absolute purist when it comes to service and volunteerism. And it worked; it worked very well. We [had our meetings] down in the conference room. I'll tell you something else about the conference room later. And we had 75 volunteers; we had 18 agencies. I've seen a lot of misquotes about that recently, but it was six students and 18 agencies. We stayed at... they started in May of that, that would have been '66, May of '66, and we right off the bat started taking them to camp... went one year to Camp Mondamin, and after that always to Camp Highrocks, that some of the Williams', who was a Furman faculty member, owned.

**DR. TOLLISON:** What was the purpose of going to camp?

400 **MS. ALVERSON:** The purpose of that was to do the leadership training for the leadership for the New Year, and I saw my role as director of the Student Center to develop student leadership, and that's what I did, and I guess that's why I knew so many, you know, good students. Service Corps, we never have elections. You rose to a position of responsibility in that because you worked hard, and the former leadership would choose the next years' leadership. First, we just had one. We went along a couple of years and we had gotten a grant, and we bought two station wagons and that was very

important to have a way to get off campus [and] was a pretty good drawing card. After the first couple of years then fraternities came in, and that was a big growth. Also, in just another couple of years we got another rather large grant. I had asked Dr. Blackwell if we could ask the Kresge Foundation for money and he said, “Yeah. I don’t think they’ll give it to you, but you can ask them. They’ve never given Furman anything.” And we asked them for \$18,000, and they gave us \$20,000, and we bought six station wagons. Well, you bought eight vehicles and a lot of people began to know this was not a little fly-by-night, Sunday school, do- good program; that it was serious business.

**DR. TOLLISON:** What was that foundation? Kresge?

**MS. ALVERSON:** Kresge. K-R-E-S-G-E. It’s a K-Mart... it was then.

420 **DR. TOLLISON:** Okay. I have a photo of Dr. [John] Plyler receiving a check, and it says on the back that it’s from the K-Mart Foundation, but Dr. Plyler would not have been here. [Editor’s Note: John Plyler should be referred to as President Plyler, not Dr. Plyler, since he holds a juris doctorate and not a Ph.D.]

**MS. ALVERSON:** No, he wouldn’t have been here then.

**DR. TOLLISON:** Okay, maybe someone...

**MS. ALVERSON:** Maybe we just didn’t know they had given money.

430

**DR. TOLLISON:** Well perhaps someone was confusing that check with another grant... Okay, I’ll have to think about that.

**MS. ALVERSON:** And so it really took off.

**DR. TOLLISON:** From the six students that were... that initially provided the leadership... was there a structure in place immediately, like, I’d like to know, for instance, maybe you have a project coordinator, basically, for each program, and then the students...

440

**MS. ALVERSON:** We immediately set it up, we had what was called a coordinator for each program, each agency and they had a relationship with a person... you had an agency person also and they worked, you know, directly with us and we... the city, Wayne Resenberg, who was a city councilman, and Gordon Blackwell, I mean, pardon me, Max Heller, had been very supportive of Service Corps, very interested, and they had certain plots of land in different parts of the city. We called them mini-parks, and the fraternities put... the city bought the equipment, the fraternities largely installed the equipment, playground equipment, on them, and at that point we really, you know, probably tripled the participation.

450

**DR. TOLLISON:** Why bring in fraternities?

460 **MS. ALVERSON:** Well, by their having many parks, you see, and they were so... and every program was going strong by then, and we had, also we had started... April Smith was the chairman: we just had one in the beginning and we didn't have co-chairs. That was in our third year and we found it was tough... people, kids didn't understand why we just left in May. Graduation meant nothing to them; they just knew their Furman student was gone... so we came up with the idea of having a play day. We named it May Day because we wanted to show something... the turmoil in the world over May Day in revolt and riots, and we wanted to show a different side of it in America.

**DR. TOLLISON:** So this May Day originated more out of the worker's rights and that kind of thing as opposed to the May Day, the May Queen, that kind of stuff...

**MS. ALVERSON:** Oh, yeah, that caused some... some people didn't like doing away with that. May queens and they still wanted that May court and whatnot, but...

470 **DR. TOLLISON:** So there's no, because I've read some reports that say that May Day Play Day here...

**MS. ALVERSON:** It did replace it.

**DR. TOLLISON:** So it did replace that event.

480 **ALVERSON:** Yeah, and the purpose of it wasn't to compete with that. The purpose of it was to have something and a way of saying goodbye and ending that year's relationship. That was the purpose of it, and a lot of people came in to Service Corps because they worked at May Day and they had a good experience so in the fall they would come back and they would volunteer. So shortly after that then it got to be too much for one person so we had co-chairs.

**DR. TOLLISON:** [What year was the first] May Day Play Day?

490 **MS. ALVERSON:** I cannot give you years, I just know more about... and we had also, we wanted to be able to camp. That was a big dream of ours; we wanted to buy camper and some equipment. So we found out about the National Volunteer Awards, and there was a \$5,000 cash award, which we didn't get because we weren't the top program, but we were among the top four volunteer programs in the country.

**DR. TOLLISON:** And this includes collegiate and non-collegiate volunteer organizations.

**MS. ALVERSON:** Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

**DR. TOLLISON:** Very impressive.

500 **MS. ALVERSON:** Well, Service Corps is impressive because of the student leadership and that is what people need to remember, and a lot of people learned leadership skills, not too traditional, popularity or votes or officiousness, because it was work, nothing but work. It was, I thought, an honor, but it was a lot of work, and these people gave hours and hours and hours.

**DR. TOLLISON:** A lot of responsibility.

**MS. ALVERSON:** Yes, yes.

**DR. TOLLISON:** And a lot of responsibility for each coordinator as well.

510 **MS. ALVERSON:** And so we also, we were named a second time, and Furman has had quite a history. I believe it's eight other colleges and universities that came here and have copied our program. Emory [University] is the nearest to us, it's a little bit different. Wake Forest [University] is a lot like ours.

**DR. TOLLISON:** What are the other schools that have... ?

520 **MS. ALVERSON:** Davidson [College], there's a couple of Virginia schools, and I cannot tell you the names right now, but what I would always suggest. They'd call me and [say], "Well how do you do it?" and I would say, "Get some interested students, come and sit down with our students and let them tell you how it works. We always had a lot of emphasis on transfer dates, that was when we officially recognized the next year's leadership, that and [Camp] Highrocks where we did our training. By then Dr. [L.D.] Johnson had come as chaplain and he was very, very supportive of Service Corps.

**DR. TOLLISON:** Tell me a little about him, about Dr. Johnson.

530 **MS. ALVERSON:** Well, he was a scholar; [he] had the biggest heart that you can imagine. [He] had known tragedy and sorrow, but that didn't stop him, didn't let it get him down. He loved teaching; he loved students.

**DR. TOLLISON:** Didn't he teach here as well?

**MS. ALVERSON:** Oh, yeah.

**DR. TOLLISON:** And there were weekly chapel services at that point in time, right?

**MS. ALVERSON:** Right.

540 **DR. TOLLISON:** So where were they held?

**MS. ALVERSON:** They were held in McAlister, and they had feedback sessions in the Student Center.

**DR. TOLLISON:** I've heard that he came here from First Baptist Church in Greenville because he was rather outspoken about racial situations, racial changes that were going on.

**MS. ALVERSON:** Right. He and Dr. Harrill were on the, I guess it was a seven-or eight-man committee that...

550

**DR. TOLLISON:** The desegregation in the public school system?

**MS. ALVERSON:** Right.

**DR. TOLLISON:** And so he felt, perhaps, that he would have a more, he would be more comfortable here on this campus.

**MRS. ALVERSON:** Right, and he had been chaplain at the University of Richmond and had taught there and he really, you know, still had such poignant memories of that.

560

**DR. TOLLISON:** So he enjoyed working with students... ?

**MS. ALVERSON:** Oh yeah, he enjoyed working with students, and he was good with students.

**DR. TOLLISON:** What about Jim Pitts?

**MS. ALVERSON:** Jim came. They were, at first, in the basement... see, the thing about the Student Center was there, it was Furman's newest building and their pride and joy. It's the most nonfunctional thing you've ever seen. Because the architect, they let [Robert] Dean, who later I became good friends with, but he wanted to kill me when he first, you know, met me. Everything was open. We had pool and ping pong up on the third floor and you were trying to have something out in, well, it was just a big lounge, it wasn't what... we later had them put a screen in it and put those bleacher things in, which students came up with the idea of doing; [we] did away with that lounge.

570

**DR. TOLLISON:** There were no meeting rooms per se.

**MS. ALVERSON:** Well, we had the conference room and the Thomas Room. The Thomas Room would hold about 25 chairs and the conference room, I think, you could pack 200 in if you really jammed them in. But we did a lot of things with it, we... it did have a... my first experience with that conference room. One day when I first came to work, I think I maybe did have a desk, I'm not sure because the furniture hadn't come, and I was standing in that conference room and the door closed, and I got locked in. There was no way to unlock it. And I spent the whole day in there because nobody came by. I had no way of getting out, but I did figure out that the ceiling, something was wrong, it was covering about three feet of the screen, the movie screen... you can't show movies in here. So we had to takeout part of the ceiling before we ever started, so I guess

580

it was [good] I could locked in it.

590

**DR. TOLLISON:** The May Day Play Day... I'm jumping around here but, the May Day Play Day, now I have a vision of what it is like today. Did it start out as such a big venture or did it eventually...

600

**MS. ALVERSON:** Oh, it was so wild. It grew so. One year we had nearly 3,000. We had no control. It was pandemonium and it wasn't, I mean it was, you know, everybody came. So that was when we knew we had to take a stance and get control. We got permission blanks and you had a permission blank and you, that made it, you knew who was coming made it. We had quite an incident one year. I always worked the front gate to try to back up whoever was doing it and to identify and sort of problem-shoot, and this car came up of people. They were black, and they wanted to come in, and I asked them where they were from and they said somewhere... they said Happy Hearts, and at that time we were not working at Happy Hearts, and I knew it, and I said, "Well, I'm sorry." I tried to explain, you know, what it was about. They were very angry. They were also very drunk. They left and after a while they came back and they had a big chain, like a log chain on the side of the car. I felt pretty vulnerable sitting out there, and they said they were from Travelers Rest Park. I said, "I'm just as sorry as I can be." They said, "Is this Bob Jones [University]?" I said, "No, this is Furman University", because they were incubating. I thought if you could look in there it is 80% black. Well, this...understand now the context I'm saying this in, this very, very big black lady got out, put her hands on her hips, she said, "You're just a big fat n\*\*\*\*\*." I could feel my face getting red, my neck, because I had used that word, and I'm thinking, *Honey, that's not...*, and they had a gun, but Public Safety got them out finally. So people would get very... but you have to have... you had to have control.

610

**DR. TOLLISON:** Well, it's quite an organization, something that Furman is very proud of.

620

**MS. ALVERSON:** Well, give students the credit. There are a lot of people who would like to say that Service Corps was a reaction to the '70s and all. Now we were very different because we were, our students were busy serving, but that was not the reason we developed Service Corps. We developed Service Corps because we felt that a liberally educated person ought to be a person who knows something about service, and that was always our... always a hand and not a handout. Thousands and thousands of students have gone through Service Corps, and I cannot say enough about the leadership.

**DR. TOLLISON:** Let's talk about some of the other Student Center programs that you started... Talk a Topic, tell me about that.

630

**MS. ALVERSON:** Well, Talk a Topic, here again, I'm not big on debates but there were a lot of things that needed to be discussed. So we came up with the concept of a panel, and there would be a moderator, and there would be two people who would speak to one side and two to the other side. That's where we had the famous confrontation with the Ku Klux Klan. We had... L.D. [Johnson] was moderating, and it was the one time that I could have, and had I been able to reach him and snatch him off of the stage I would

640 have, because I thought he chose to be funny, which was probably a good thing and played to the crowd. What he didn't know was, that as that panel got on stage this man walks up, flips his coat open, and said, "I'm with the FBI. Who's in charge?" and I said, "I am." "Well, who are you?" and I told him. Well, it was one, they were supposed to last just an hour, and I tell you, Courtney, that was the longest hour of my life, because there were 12 Klansmen there with guns. He said, he told us, and the Grand Dragon was one of the speakers, Grand Dragon of the Klan.

**DR. TOLLISON:** Was the topic race relations, and who was on what side?

**MS. ALVERSON:** I disremember... I don't know. I can tell you the two people who spoke for blacks, two people that I knew and respected and maybe [I can] bring back their names in a minute.

650 **DR. TOLLISON:** Were they African-American?

**MS. ALVERSON:** Mm hmm, in '73, one of them and has since died, a young man.

**DR. TOLLISON:** They were not students here?

**MS. ALVERSON:** Oh, no, but we had probably 12 or 13 black students, and they were there with bottles, so it was just a very volatile situation and somebody could have been hurt very badly.

660 **DR. TOLLISON:** Bottles insinuating that there might be...

**MS. ALVERSON:** And there were, you know, it was bad for both sides. One was just as bad as the other. So that ended Talk a Topic. I never did, that was it, because it was really scary, and the wrong word somewhere, and a bottle could have gone and a pistol been fired, and we could have had something just as bad as Orangeburg had, when they had three students killed by the National Guard. No topic in the world is worth that in my opinion.

**DR. TOLLISON:** Some of the other topics that had previously been...

670 **MS. ALVERSON:** Well, we had the draft, and General [Lewis Blaine] Hershey was here for the draft. We had one on homosexuality, it's a wonder the Baptist didn't kill me for that.

**DR. TOLLISON:** What was,... was there a reaction?

**MS. ALVERSON:** Well, yes, Dr. Blackwell got some letters about it but he was pretty... he was so open-minded that he handled it.

680 **DR. TOLLISON:** Well this is very progressive, 1960s Furman.

**MS. ALVERSON:** We had Film Arts. We had some problems. Film Arts was a program where we'd choose, we had a student and a faculty committee, and they would choose films and there was always a discussion afterwards. So usually there was some point, you know, for choosing this film. We had one, it was *One Potato, Two Potato*. I remember it very well. It was one of my favorite films. The main character in it was reversed because the black man had married a white woman, and his parents were very opposed to it, that was the whole gist of the thing, but boy, Dr. Blackwell really got a lot of criticism about that. I saw a man not long ago at the grocery store, it's been several years now, and talked to him, and I know he wrote a very nasty letter to Dr. Blackwell about me, about that. Well, later on I'm talking to his brother-in-law and he said, "My brother-in-law said he thought you were the prettiest thing he'd ever seen", and I thought, *HAHA, I wish he'd just thought I was pretty*, and stayed off of the topic of... and the ultimate end of Film Arts was [that] we had a film, and here again it would be important for me to think of the name and Jim Edwards could tell you, and a trustee opposed it. In the end, a principal character committed suicide, and it was a controversial... oh, why can't I think of the name, because I always thought if it'd been named Sunday School Picnic nobody would have said a word. *Carnal Knowledge* was the film, and so Dr. [John] Johns made me cancel it though I tried to, I wanted to get the committee together and let them do it and he just said, "No, you do it," so I did it, but that was also the end of Film Arts because if I couldn't have a committee and [have] them choose, then I wouldn't do it.

**DR. TOLLISON:** And again, that was...

**MS. ALVERSON:** And... here again I thought it was very wrong to do the committee that way, and I felt it was my responsibility... I never, I met with the committee, but I never voted or had any say so in the films and I certainly supported that choice.

**DR. TOLLISON:** So you felt it was important to promote discussion of lots of various social issues?

**MS. ALVERSON:** Yes, I did.

**DR. TOLLISON:** And what kind of impact did that have on students? Were these topics things that people were discussing in everyday lunch conversations?

**MS. ALVERSON:** ... no, but they needed to.

**DR. TOLLISON:** And that's why you felt that...

**MS. ALVERSON:** Sure. You know, I always thought the Student Center shouldn't be just a place, that it should be a program and a way of life. [I thought] that it should go up hand-in-hand with a liberal arts education.

**DR. TOLLISON:** Now did Dr. Johns as...

**MS. ALVERSON:** He was as supportive of me as... that's the only time we ever had a controversy over anything. Of course, he was the president. The trustee was very powerful and a good friend of mine but he was wrong about that, I thought.

730

**DR. TOLLISON:** What about, you mentioned a story in Dr. Blackwell's eulogy that you had invited a speaker to campus that he wasn't thrilled about.

**MS. ALVERSON:** That was in Talk a Topic. Thomas J. Altizer, who had written the book, *God Is Dead*, and that was a big discussion everywhere. So, big me, I called him up and he said...and we were asking Landon Brown Gilkey on the other side, who taught at the University of Chicago, a very fine theologian, and we would've had two Furman people, one on one side and one on the other to offset it, but [I] said, "It'd cost us five million dollars." And I'm thinking... I started working at Furman for 6,000 a year and I'm thinking, "How many years will it take me to pay that back?" [Editor's Note: *God is Dead* was not a name of a novel, but rather a radical Christian movement in the United States in the 1960s.]

740

**DR. TOLLISON:** But the program went through, it wasn't canceled, right?

**MS. ALVERSON:** No, see he didn't come. [Landon Brown] Gilkey couldn't, come so it fell apart. Oh, we were, I was delivered, providentially... I was never so glad... I really worried about that. I wouldn't have wanted to do anything to embarrass Dr. Blackwell or Furman in any way.

750

**DR. TOLLISON:** That's interesting.

**MS. ALVERSON:** I spent my first five years, maybe it wasn't quite five, but I guess it was almost five, going to trustee meetings and pleading with them to let us dance. I think about, when I thought about this year's election and the issues and the...I'm a liberal and I'm proud of it. I'm an ordained minister, and I think the most liberal thing I know is for Jesus to look after you and say your sins are forgiven, and I didn't know how, as a denomination, we've gotten into this very negative stuff...

760

**DR. TOLLISON:** You're a Baptist?

**MS. ALVERSON:** Yes, I'm a Baptist. And it grieves me greatly... and I did everything I could to influence students to think liberally if that's what people want to say is liberal.

**DR. TOLLISON:** What about these presidential fireside chats that developed...

**MS. ALVERSON:** Well that was, you know, the students were chomping at the bit about dancing and about South Carolina Baptists, and that's a tough road to walk when you've got to try to make, have some peace between the two groups, some respect. I could remember as a child hearing Franklin Roosevelt in the radio fireside chats, so I go to Dr. Blackwell and he thought it was a good idea and he was good at it. We'd have... by then we had sort of changed that Student Center, we had glassed in the upstairs and

770

put in the bleachers, though some people didn't like giving up the lounge but it just wasn't functional. We didn't need a lounge, we needed a place to have... you couldn't see movies in the conference room and the chairs were hard. You're practically paralyzed... by then we were using it pretty much... and incidentally the student who helped me start that was Susan Shi, Susan Thompson coffee houses, and the first ones were pretty psychedelic and we had all these black lights and hangings and we used that conference room for that, so we did the best we could with what we had.

780

**DR. TOLLISON:** Was that the early '70s or late '60s or so?

**MS. ALVERSON:** I don't know what year Susan [Thompson, now Shi] graduated. As I say, I remember not by years, I should, but I remember about these people, I can tell you what happened in this person's, you know.

**DR. TOLLISON:** I think it was '70 or '73. I'll have to double check that. I'll go back and double check that. So she started the coffee houses, and I have a photo of David Shi playing in one of those coffee houses. They were very popular when they first started?

790

[Editor's Note: Susan Thompson Shi graduated from Furman University in 1971.]

**MS. ALVERSON:** Oh yes, and here again the idea was to develop campus talent, and we never had outside groups. We tried that. We spent a lot of money and nobody would show up, but people would come to hear their friends.

**DR. TOLLISON:** Now tell me how this on-campus dancing resolved itself. I understand...

800

**MS. ALVERSON:** Well, we finally persuaded the trustees to let us have a square dance, and so we had a square dance on campus. Of course you know everybody came. It was quite an event.

**DR. TOLLISON:** I heard Dr. Blackwell say that had been an event.

**MS. ALVERSON:** Well, he took Mrs. [Elizabeth Lyles] Blackwell out on the dance floor and they were the first... he said, "I want to be a part of it. I don't want you to take the heat. I'll be with you. I'm behind you on this."

810

**DR. TOLLISON:** I've heard that there is a story that John Duggan said that he was going to have a dance and this was something that he was determined to do, and what ended up happening was that Dr. Blackwell very cleverly planned the square dance the night before so that the actual, the first one...

**MS. ALVERSON:** Well I never heard that. There was nothing to prove...

**DR. TOLLISON:** ....and Dr. Blackwell planned the square dance.

**MS. ALVERSON:** But it wasn't a reaction to anybody. Students couldn't find places. You had to pay a lot to have off-campus...

820

**DR. TOLLISON:** So this was in the dining hall?

**MS. ALVERSON:** Mm hmm. But we had values dinners. Do you know about those?

**DR. TOLLISON:** Tell me about when you started, when values dinners began.

**MS. ALVERSON:** Well, here again it was just to try to make people think and to give people the chance to express their opinion, and to hear faculty express their opinion. So we always tried to have faculty that were popular, because that was your drawing crowd. That's what brought people in.

830

**DR. TOLLISON:** So a faculty member was invited to come speak at dinner?

**MS. ALVERSON:** There'd be two, two faculty and two students [that] spoke at each dinner.

**DR. TOLLISON:** And the topic was always what are your values, what's important to you?

840

**MS. ALVERSON:** That's the core of it.

**DR. TOLLISON:** And how often would these occur?

**MS. ALVERSON:** We had one a term.

**DR. TOLLISON:** And Elaine Nocks was in charge of this then.

**MS. ALVERSON:** She told me she was going to try to revive it.

850

**DR. TOLLISON:** What about Dialogue? Did that program start...

**MS. ALVERSON:** Oh, yeah, Dialogue. We started [that] along about my second or third year here. Here again, it was to put students with faculty, particularly people who were not their advisors or not their majors. Here again, you chose to be in it. You did not have to be in it. You signed up for it.

860

**DR. TOLLISON:** And just for people trying to understand, unfortunately, Dialogue is no longer going on. I participated in it when I was here and Elaine Nocks and I were actually put together. But just so that we get this on tape it was a senior student that was paired with a faculty member and freshmen could sign up before they arrived on campus, in the summer, and many of them replied and they were organized into groups of about 10 or 12, and then during...

**MS. ALVERSON:** The first evening, the first Sunday night, of orientation, they went to dinner...

870 **DR. TOLLISON:** And some faculty members homes also. Okay, gotcha. I remember organizing that dinner. I think we had lasagna and salad... and many of these Dialogue groups, some met just for that one time and no longer continued meeting, but some continued meeting throughout the entire first year.

**MS. ALVERSON:** We started off with six times, and that got too long, couldn't hold onto that, so we reduced it to four. Some would go and some wouldn't.

**DR. TOLLISON:** Right, it just depends on the dynamics of the group and the people the students...

880 **MS. ALVERSON:** I mean, I know a class that came back for their 25<sup>th</sup> reunion this year and seven of their Dialogue people met with their Dialogue leaders, and I remember the year they graduated, they were a little bit vain, but they gave the couple a portrait of themselves, the Dialogue group, so it was their gift to their leaders.

**DR. TOLLISON:** That was to the faculty member and the senior when they graduated? That's interesting. What about the radio station?

**MS. ALVERSON:** The radio station has always been Carol Daniels' baby. They just were housed in the Student Center.

890 **DR. TOLLISON:** And when did Carol Daniels come to Furman?

**MS. ALVERSON:** I cannot tell you, Courtney.

**DR. TOLLISON:** Was it '81, maybe? [Editor's Note: Carol Daniels became Director of Student Life in 1983.]

**MS. ALVERSON:** I'm not sure what year Carol Daniels came.

**DR. TOLLISON:** Okay, I'll have to double check on that.

900 **MS. ALVERSON:** I don't know if you knew that we did art exhibits. We did... there was no art gallery at the time, and we did, and were very successful with it, had a lot of nice things. I guess it was on up until the '80s and theft got to be a real problem, and we just couldn't, our insurance couldn't handle that, so we quit doing that.

**DR. TOLLISON:** And this would be art that was displayed in the Student Center?

**MS. ALVERSON:** Mm hmm. And we used to have pool tournaments a lot. Then I had the social board, then it became FUSAB [Furman University Student Activities Board]. I had that for a number of years, and of course during this time I adopted a little boy and he

910 grew up on this campus. This is home to Bill, and it was a good place to raise a child.

**DR. TOLLISON:** Now, are you speaking figuratively or literally, did you live on campus?

**MS. ALVERSON:** No, but we were here so much that it...

920 **DR. TOLLISON:** Became a home to him certainly. Let's talk a little bit about Gordon Blackwell as an individual, personal side of Gordon Blackwell. He mentioned in an interview to me that he was frequently called to the president's office when he was a student here in the '30s for publishing socialist propaganda in the student newspaper at the time. Could you talk a little bit about any personal conflicts he may have had with, perhaps, his private or inner support of student groups like the Southern Student Organizing Committee, or students that were actively opposed to the speaker ban or compulsory chapel, fearing an empathy for these students and their causes, but at the same time of course having a responsibility to the board of trustees and to the South Carolina Baptists Convention.

**MS. ALVERSON:** That was the faculty. You also sometimes would have a position from faculty about things like that.

930

**DR. TOLLISON:** Regarding the students...

**MS. ALVERSON:** Activism.

**DR. TOLLISON:** But there were still faculty members that were very supportive of the students as well, is that correct?

**MS. ALVERSON:** Right.

940 **DR. TOLLISON:** Did you ever get the sense that this was, that he felt an inner battle, so to speak, regarding how he may have privately felt regarding the students activism?

950 **MS. ALVERSON:** Well, he was such a gentleman that you would never have known it. He also had students in his home all the time. Student government met there once a month so he knew what students were thinking, and he respected students greatly. I'll tell you; you'd better not get in conflict with a student because you were going to get a note from him asking for the details. He was extremely fair about it, and a lot of faculty didn't like that because they didn't like to be questioned about something. I always told him, lovingly but truthfully, that if there was a slight edge he was always going to give it to the student. I can assure you that.

**DR. TOLLISON:** He undoubtedly empathized with the students' concerns, but...

**MS. ALVERSON:** His father was a Baptist minister, I had known them in Spartanburg, known of them in Spartanburg, and his father was the minister at Saxon Baptist Church.

960 His father was a graduate of Andover-Newton [Theological School]. Well, Andover-Newton would have been, in the south, very suspect at the least, you know, it would have been considered extremely liberal, and Saxon was a mill village, and so his father, you know, often preached on topics about labor unions and supported labor, and that certainly was not [popular with some]. So he had grown up in a liberal background and of course then he had been at Florida State and he studied at Harvard [University], and so he had an open mind. He was the fairest person and loving. I always thought he saw the best in us, and he forgave us of our worst very quickly.

**DR. TOLLISON:** Very diplomatic person?

970 **MS. ALVERSON:** Very diplomatic, very diplomatic, and came to Furman at the right time and didn't mind the integration fight. That wasn't popular with South Carolina Baptists either.

**DR. TOLLISON:** But of course he was very supportive of desegregation.

**MS. ALVERSON:** Oh, heavens, yes.

**DR. TOLLISON:** And what, did he continue to make that a priority once he got here...

**MS. ALVERSON:** Oh, heavens, yes.

980 **DR. TOLLISON:** How did he do that?

**MS. ALVERSON:** Well for one thing, Dr. Blackwell participated in everything that I ever tried to do, and not just my programs, but others. He was there, he was interested, he wasn't there... he was just there because he cared, and he cared about... if I went to one more meeting on greatness according to national standards I would surely die. Knox College was the... which, you know, now is defunct.

**DR. TOLLISON:** Knox College? Where is that?

990 **MS. ALVERSON:** In Illinois, but that was his model. We'd have this guy from Knox College, and we'd all be drug to hear him... but it was a good thing, it was something we needed to hear.

**DR. TOLLISON:** Why Knox College?

**MS. ALVERSON:** It was a small liberal arts school, and he just thought it was such a good school, and such a model.

**DR. TOLLISON:** A model [by] national standards.

1000 **MS. ALVERSON:** National standards. That was his theme song.

**DR. TOLLISON:** It's curious to me. It's a brilliant maneuver on his part to actually put a title on this campaign almost, if we could it that. When I first started studying about this I wasn't quite sure if that is a phrase that developed after the fact and people were applying it retroactively to his time period but then I started seeing literature. This was a very deliberate act. It was very deliberate campaign on his part and [it was] highly effective.

1010

**MS. ALVERSON:** But he was a marvelous person.

**DR. TOLLISON:** Let's talk about Dr. Johns.

**MS. ALVERSON:** Yeah, before we go there, then I want to talk about Dr. Johns, but one other thing we did that you may not know about, we had a model United Nations [UN]. Have you ever heard about that?

**DR. TOLLISON:** Mm hmm, in the Student Center?

1020

**MS. ALVERSON:** Well it actually met in McAlister, but we had, oh, I don't know, maybe 18 or 20 colleges and about 30 high schools that sat in delegations, and back then Don Aiesi was new, Don Gordon was new. Of course Dr. Harrill was very supportive of it, but the UN [United Nations] wasn't very popular either, you know, at that time.

**DR. TOLLISON:** Now was this an existing program that Furman decided to bring to this campus or...

1030

**MS. ALVERSON:** No, we just dreamed it up. We thought of it. [Editor's Note: The National Model United Nations traces its beginnings to 1923 college simulations of the League of Nations. Harvard University boasts the first truly college Model United Nations in the late 1940s.]

**DR. TOLLISON:** Because it's a very widespread, popular program. So it started here, on this campus?

**MS. ALVERSON:** There may have been others somewhere. We didn't model after anyone, but we did it, did it two or three years. [We] did it very well; [we] had wonderful students. John Duncan participated in that.

1040

**DR. TOLLISON:** And what were some of the schools that participated?

**MS. ALVERSON:** Wofford [College], Converse [College], University of South Carolina, Erskine [College]. They were all South Carolina schools, but they came and we had someone from... Mark Kellogg was very, was a student who was very instrumental in it and he still thinks that having that ambassador that we had to come and speak was such a wonderful thing. I don't remember a word the man said.

**DR. TOLLISON:** Who was it? Do you remember his name?

1050 **MS. ALVERSON:** No. I probably have a program somewhere but I don't know where. But it was pretty impressive, all those UN [United Nations] flags flying out in front of McAlister.

**DR. TOLLISON:** Certainly. Let's talk a little about drug problems here on this campus in the early '70s, I understand that it... it's surprising to me but I understand that it actually did get to be quite a problem.

**MS. ALVERSON:** Well it was everywhere, it wasn't just at Furman, it was everywhere with the culture.

1060 **DR. TOLLISON:** So this is the student culture of the '70s. When did it appear on the administration or your radar screen that this was a problem on campus?

1070 **MS. ALVERSON:** Well you always hear the grapevine, you know, and what's going on, but there were a lot of conflicts in society at the time and the country was just about as divided as it is right now, and it was tough for students. It was very hard for them. I remember, then we came to Vietnam [War] and that was when I first remember writing the first letter I ever wrote for anybody as a conscientious objector, and I really struggled with that... I thought that was... I wasn't sure that was American to do, but I also knew we were in an unjust war... or I thought we... were in an unjust war, and then if I could help a student who really believed he shouldn't go, that I would do so.

**DR. TOLLISON:** And were there quite a number of students that felt that way?

**MS. ALVERSON:** No, there was more a minority.

**DR. TOLLISON:** So the majority did support the Vietnam War?

1080 **MS. ALVERSON:** I wouldn't say majority. Maybe it would be 50/50. At that time the campus, because we used to have big parties, election parties, and the student body was probably 95% democratic at that time.

**DR. TOLLISON:** So what's happened?

**MS. ALVERSON:** Wealthier students.

**DR. TOLLISON:** Wealthier students were an influence factor?

**MS. ALVERSON:** Mm hmm, I think.

1090 **DR. TOLLISON:** Because the tuition costs at Furman have increased... We were, we had just touched the topic of the increasing conservatism of students, this trend that has

developed, goodness, since I don't know when. I think a lot of people think, tend to think of Furman, because it was previously very... identified more on the Baptist side than it is now, that we've now become, the student body and the administration and the faculty, having become increasingly more liberal, but from what I understand that wasn't always the case. You're saying now that the student body is actually now more conservative than it was at least in the 1970s.

**MS. ALVERSON:** I think it so.

1100

**DR. TOLLISON:** What about when you got here in the '60s and what about in the '80s?

**MS. ALVERSON:** You had some who... I guess one of my great regrets was that it seemed like we could never change enough students thinking, and they went on and became Baptist preachers and never changed very much.

**DR. TOLLISON:** There was always a conservative element.

1110

**MS. ALVERSON:** There was anywhere, but as a whole and what I consider important liberalism, Furman has always been there.

**DR. TOLLISON:** And Furman students today? The student body doesn't body doesn't reflect that?

**MS. ALVERSON:** I think that, and I may have got to be businesslike. Furman lost a lot, we've lost a lot, and that it is not community anymore. Even by the time I left I was seeing that. It was considered, and the strong point was Furman family, and it was what made us great. It was the glue that will endure and it was what made Furman, Furman.

1120

**DR. TOLLISON:** And so you feel that now that sense of community has been lost, is that correct?

**MS. ALVERSON:** I surely do.

**DR. TOLLISON:** How did that occur, in your opinion?

**MS. ALVERSON:** I think it maybe changed priorities.

1130

**DR. TOLLISON:** What were the priorities, and what do you feel are the priorities now?

**MS. ALVERSON:** I don't know what they are now, I just know that [then], you know, everybody was important and there was such a strong feeling that if you accepted a student, you needed to do everything you could to help that student graduate, to help them be successful. I always thought [that] a big part of my job was to make students look good, and fortunately I had good students so it wasn't a very hard job.

1140 **DR. TOLLISON:** Let's... I'm interested in this, that in this changing dynamic, thinking about the 1970s, with the liberal student body so to speak, especially with the student body. Was this an anomaly? Do you think students in the '50s were far more conservative, and in the sixties and seventies, this was a time of great student participation? In the United States it was a student culture that happened to be very liberal during this part, during these decades. Can you compare it with the '50s, and then with the '80s and '90s increasing conservatism?

**MS. ALVERSON:** Well, I think values have changed and I think that money so much controls everything and everybody, and look at the number of extremely wealthy people. I mean, how many millionaires do we have now?

1150 **DR. TOLLISON:** In the country?

**MS. ALVERSON:** In the country, and you could name them on one hand at one time. So... and then one of my great grieves is that Baptists who had the tradition for being liberal has become so negative and so damned mean with it. That's what I don't like, is meanness.

**DR. TOLLISON:** Tell me about your personal, how you [dealt with] a personal struggle here with you when Furman split from the Baptist Convention.

1160 **MS. ALVERSON:** Well, it was sad, but it had to be, and I didn't know anybody who could have done it better than Dr. Johns did, either. We started to talk about him, and all I certainly want to say about him... we had the most freedom under him. If people didn't do their job it was their fault, but if people were lazy, they'd just gripe.

**DR. TOLLISON:** What kinds of freedom? I don't understand what you mean.

1170 **MS. ALVERSON:** Well, I mean they were just, there were just no restraints, you could just do. You could do your work. I mean once in a while... like I got my hand smacked good about that *Carnal Knowledge* thing, and I still think he was wrong to do it the way he did, and he knows I think it, but he was the president.

**DR. TOLLISON:** He was very hands-off type of leadership: you do your job, I'll do mine.

**MS. ALVERSON:** Well, he did support you and he would tell you if you weren't good, too. But he didn't even say no.

1180 **DR. TOLLISON:** ... direction or guidance or... and it's not in a negative sense but it was very, "This is your domain, this is mine, if any problems exist I'll come over and..."

**MS. ALVERSON:** And he got, I mean, he got along well with South Carolina Baptists.

They always thought Gordon Blackwell was too liberal, and they greatly suspected that he was still Episcopalian at heart, and that ticked a lot of them off.

**DR. TOLLISON:** Just because of his personal beliefs or...

**MS. ALVERSON:** Well, Mrs. Blackwell was Episcopalian, and he was Episcopalian, only he did join the Episcopal Church, and he went back in it when he came here as president.

1190

**DR. TOLLISON:** He went back into the Baptist church?

**MS. ALVERSON:** Yes. He was just a man of great faith, as is Dr. Johns, and tremendous personal integrity

**DR. TOLLISON:** You've got a boat named after you on the lake.

1200

**MS. ALVERSON:** [That is thanks] to Miss Susan Shi. We had a little committee and we had a name. We going to name that thing Looney Tunes, and we were going to christen it with a bottle of Pepsi- Cola, because we weren't allowed to... that's another thing that irks me. I served Coke here when I wanted to. L.D. [Johnson] was there, and a whole group of students and they had gone behind my back and named it, and it was horribly, in a way, embarrassing, but then there was so much yaya that I wouldn't have given up that name for anybody.

**DR. TOLLISON:** How did the boat, the decision to purchase the boat come about? [They] just thought it would be a fun idea to have a boat...

1210

**MS. ALVERSON:** Yeah, we just had that lake out there and... I also had the lake when we... see, we used to swim in it, and that was under my bailiwick, and I had begged and begged and begged for a fence to control who went in and out, and one Sunday afternoon we had a man, a janitor, who went in, and within two minutes he had disappeared. We didn't know whether he had gotten out, because he was playing with his children, and disappeared. But he drowned, and we got the fence, but I also gave up the lake after that. That was a nightmare, too.

**DR. TOLLISON:** So where was the fence?

1220

**MS. ALVERSON:** It's down, there's no beach area over there anymore I don't think, and no swimming area. It's too polluted.

**DR. TOLLISON:** So that was the end of swimming in the lake?

**MS. ALVERSON:** No, somebody else did it, but I didn't do it.

**DR. TOLLISON:** Right, okay, supervised it; and now students, when did that become...?

1230 **MS. ALVERSON:** Well the funny thing, one time we used to put a Christmas tree out on the lake on a pontoon, and it was very pretty. It just floated out there. So, one Sunday night at home I get a call from Public Safety. There's a naked student out there. He'd gone out to drape toilet paper all over the tree. They said, "What do you want us to do?" I said, "I'll call you back when I decide," so a couple of hours later when I thought he'd be getting cold, I called them back and said. "Go get him." So they didn't go out and do the toilet paper anymore.

**DR. TOLLISON:** Certainly. You know, I've heard all these stories about the draping... So swimming basically became an activity the students really didn't participate in anymore but because of the polluted lake...

1240 **MS. ALVERSON:** Right, it wasn't safe to do it.

**DR. TOLLISON:** And the beach, there's really not a beach there...

**MS. ALVERSON:** Not anymore. Well, we'd haul sand in there and...

**DR. TOLLISON:** It looks like so much fun, though. I see old pictures of students on the boat and even seen students in...

1250 **MS. ALVERSON:** [One of the problems know is] that students aren't going to know one another. You don't have Dialogue. You don't have Service Corps. If you weren't in a sorority or fraternity... too many good kids go through the cracks and I think [that's because of] loneliness. I think there's a real sense of loneliness, sometimes among a lot of students. And I would think being a minority student would be awfully hard now.

**DR. TOLLISON:** So what's the answer to fixing this? Is it more emphasis on...

1260 **MS. ALVERSON:** Well, I'm glad I don't have to decide all that.

**DR. TOLLISON:** Do you think it's more of an emphasis on student participation, or that depends on the individual, or...?

**MS. ALVERSON:** Yeah, I do. I just think you've got to design a lot of opportunities for them.

**DR. TOLLISON:** And hope that they... find their niche?

1270 **MS. ALVERSON:** Yeah, right. Of course... and I saw through the years more and more pressure for students to get good grades. A lot of it [was due to the] well-meaning parents, but the more the tuition goes up the greater the pressure on the student.

**DR. TOLLISON:** In your opinion... I want to ask you two questions, and we've already touched on part of it, so if we've already answered it then we'll just move on to the next. What, in your opinion, has changed about this place since you came here in 1955, what has remained the same?

**MS. ALVERSON:** Well, there's still an awful lot of good people here, thank goodness... like you.

1280

**DR. TOLLISON:** Thank you.

**MS. ALVERSON:** Well, I mean it.

**DR. TOLLISON:** Thank you.

**MS. ALVERSON:** See, I knew you from my days here, and I had, in Service Corps my last year, my best leadership, and Robert and Leslie.

1290 **DR. TOLLISON:** And that was in 2000?

**MS. ALVERSON:** Oh, I don't know dates. I go by people.

**DR. TOLLISON:** I know you were here when I was here, and I graduated in 1999. So, 2000-2001?

**MS. ALVERSON:** Yeah.

**DR. TOLLISON:** So you've been gone for two or three years?

1300

**MS. ALVERSON:** Yeah.

**DR. TOLLISON:** So, right after the turn of the century?

**MS. ALVERSON:** I've been gone four years now.

**DR. TOLLISON:** So about 2000. So there are good people here, that's remained the same?

1310 **MS. ALVERSON:** Right.

**DR. TOLLISON:** Anything else?

**MS. ALVERSON:** That's what makes a good school.

**DR. TOLLISON:** And what's changed? We've already addressed a lot of the issues...

**MS. ALVERSON:** Well, I think the emphasis is more on money, and there'll be... need to stay... There needs to be a touch of humility along with all the successes.

1320

**DR. TOLLISON:** Do you think this is...is it coincidental or do you perhaps the loss of the relationship to the Baptist Convention has had a hand in this? Or is it, does the religiosity bring an element of this, the human touch?

**MS. ALVERSON:** Not necessarily, because it could, see, it got mean. [Changing tapes so there is a brief pause.] It's almost like a little learning can be dangerous, and if you are not well-versed in grace and humility, you're just like a lot of other... see, we got along quite well with Service Corps. Students brought a lot of recognition to Furman, and other schools respected it because we had something very special. I'm not sure that it's that way now.

1330

**DR. TOLLISON:** How do you think, do you think it's the naming of the organization, the Max and Trudy Heller Organization, do you think that changed it?

**MS. ALVERSON:** No, I think... Max was a good man, and we got over that, but it was a difficult time, because I would not... I worked with students and I had opinions, strong opinions, but I also respected their opinions. We did it together, and I think this was solely to get money.

1340

**DR. TOLLISON:** What is the official title of the organization now?

**MS. ALVEIISON:** I don't know. I don't keep up.

**DR. TOLLISON:** I'm wondering if it's The Max and Trudy Heller CESC or it might be the Max and Trudy Heller Service Corps. [In 2010, the name of the organization is the Heller Service Corps.]

**MS. ALVERSON:** I don't know what it is.

1350

**DR. TOLLISON:** But you feel that...

**MS. ALVERSON:** I would never have changed it, never.

**DR. TOLLISON:** Do you feel that the essence of the organization has been affected?

**MS. ALVERSON:** Well, from what I hear it has changed rather drastically. I don't think... we always chose leadership from people who had done, who had been a coordinator or a volunteer, and who had done well. I understand, from what I hear it isn't that way now. They have directors, and Lord knows I would never choose a title like that, because you're trying to work with an agency to get something done, to help people, and that was always the heart of our thing: people helping people. That was all we ever wanted to be, and that was enough. That was enough.

1360

**DR. TOLLISON:** And there's a deliberate difference between the meaning of director and coordinator?

1370 **MS. ALVERSON:** In my opinion, and I understand that you can apply to be a director whether you've ever worked in Service Corp or not. Well, I surely wouldn't do that. We never had officers, you see, presidents and vice presidents, and I hope we weren't officious. I hope.

**DR. TOLLISON:** I think you're very... well, the organization's beautiful, has a beautiful purpose in it.

1380 **MS. ALVERSON:** ... and maybe someday it'll go back. I mean, I have no problem with service learning, and I thought there was room for both, that has its place and you can... but, in a liberal arts school bent on tradition... I don't think you give academic credit for it. I just think it's important to be a good, contributing human being and that you should, if you haven't learned it, you should learn it in a liberal arts college.

**DR. TOLLISON:** As part of educating the whole person?

**MS. ALVERSON:** Right. That is, to me, an educated person. It is not that you're the most brilliant. Because if that is not tempered with compassion and concern, God help us.

**DR. TOLLISON:** I'm going to ask you to brag on yourself for a second.

1390 **MS. ALVERSON:** No, no, no.

**DR. TOLLISON:** Or perhaps, we won't look at it in that way. We'll look at it as you telling me... more of a reflection of your priorities. What do you feel is your greatest contribution to Furman? I could name several things, but in your opinion, what is your greatest contribution to this place?

**MS. ALVERSON:** I thought it was in developing service-minded people.

**DR. TOLLISON:** Instilling that value in...

1400 **MS. ALVERSON:** And in developing student leadership, and I'd have that kind of leadership in the whole country if I were running it.

**DR. TOLLISON:** Well, thank you very much for meeting with me. Do you have anything else that you'd like to add that you think would be historically significant?

**MS. ALVERSON:** No, I'm just very grateful to all the people I ever worked with, and particularly to students. They... I have learned more from students than any of my degrees reflect anything.

1410 **DR. TOLLISON:** Well thank you very much. That's a good note to end on.