

Interviewee: Beatrice D. Plyler
Interviewer: Courtney L. Tollison, Ph.D.
Date: August 25, 2004

Courtney: Today is August 25, 2004, and I am sitting here at the home of, I guess it's former home of you and your husband, your home, near Furman, actually, down the street from White Oaks(?), what's the address here?

Bea: 1303 Roe Ford Road.

Courtney: 1303 Roe Ford Road, and it's about 10:45 a.m., and I'm sitting here with Mrs. Bea Plyler, Beatrice D. Plyler, Dennis was your maiden name, and we're just going to have a little conversation about Furman today. Why don't we start off, why don't you just tell me about yourself, tell me where you were born, where you grew up, things like that.

Bea: Well, I was born in, actually a little town that is now under water.
[Macbeth]

Courtney: Wow! That's interesting.

Bea: It's under Lake Moultrie. Then later I lived in Pinopolis, which is just a short distance away, it's a peninsula that's jutting out into Lake Moultrie, and it's a wonderful little village, has lots of pine trees.

Courtney: And this is in South Carolina?

Bea: Yes, it's thirty miles from Charleston.

Courtney: Okay, so the lower part of South Carolina. And what year was that that you were born?

Bea: 1911.

Courtney: 1911. Okay. And tell me about growing up there.

Bea: Well, in retrospect, and otherwise, it was really delightful, because, the fun things to do were to ride horseback and to go on arrow chases, there was no pavement anywhere, there were no sidewalks, so it was easy to go on arrow chases. Do you know what they are?

Courtney: Are you looking for Indian arrowheads, is that what you're talking about?

Bea: No, one person starts out ahead and then you're supposed to confuse those who are to follow, but you can see how long you can hide from them and you give arrows here and there.

Courtney: Okay.

Bea: It's like hide and seek.

Courtney: With arrows, well that's fun.

Bea: We played games, hopscotch, things you could draw on the ground, and simple things, we played baseball, and the girls, I remember, I was so afraid that I would be the last one to be chosen because I was not such a good player.

Courtney: I think that's every child's fear.

Bea: But simple things, and we had a little school that, I can remember, it's strange, I probably won't remember somebody that I met yesterday and their name, but I can remember my first grade teacher and my second teacher, and the students, the names of many of the students, and it was a delightful little place to grow up in.

Courtney: Who were your parents?

Bea: My parents were Edward James Dennis and my mother was Ella Mae Coney. My father first practiced law in St. George. And then he came to, his father, my father's father, was the first senator from Berkeley County. That area used to be divided into upper and lower St. John. But when they divided it they made Berkeley County and Charleston County. And the County Seat was in Mt. Pleasant. I don't know when, but sometime later the County Seat was moved to Moncks Corner.

Courtney: Okay.

Bea: And that's where my father practiced law. And his father was the first senator and my father was the second senator of Berkeley County. And then later my brother, Rembert, was the senator, but there was somebody else in between.

Courtney: Not directly after your father.

Bea: Yes.

Courtney: That's interesting. So you grew up there. How long did you live there?

Bea: Well actually I was living there when I was married. There were seven children, and my oldest brother E. J. [Edward James] studied law under John [Plyler] at Furman.

Courtney: Oh, how convenient.

Bea: I didn't know John except he was, I don't know that I ever saw him until sometime, but I knew that my brother was very fond of him because he invited him to come for a deer hunt. Hunting was very important for the men in my family. They loved their dogs and I think they really loved the woods more than the killing, but it was part of the.

Courtney: Part of the experience.

Bea: Just part of it. The way that E. J. thought he could honor John was to invite him to a hunt. But John's reaction was, those beautiful little deer, I couldn't kill a beautiful little creature. My brothers had grown up with a father who also loved to hunt. I think Berkeley County actually was considered a playground for those who enjoyed the outdoors and hunting and fishing, and things like that.

Courtney: So, Dr. Plyler never came down to hunt.

Bea: He didn't come to hunt, no.

Courtney: So you met him in the mountains in North Carolina, is that correct?

Bea: Well, my mother had inherited a home in Hendersonville, and we spent summers there, and so we were fortunate to be able to get away because the insects and the mosquitos and so forth were bad in Berkeley.

Courtney: So you went up there for the summer, every summer?

Bea: Yes.

Courtney: And is that where you met your husband?

Bea: Well I met him, I guess, I think I came when my brother was in summer school one summer. He was able to do his undergraduate work and his graduate work by going to summer school one summer, in four years. So while we were in Hendersonville once we came over to Greenville to see him, and I think that's when I first met him, I don't remember a lot about it but that's when I think I first met John.

Courtney: And your brother was at Furman? Was he in school at Furman?

Bea: He graduated under John in the Furman Law School.

Courtney: So the undergraduate was going to Furman and then the graduate school was attending law school [Law School at the time was an L.L.B. degree, it was not post grad at Furman] and one of his professors was your husband, your future husband, is that correct?

Bea: John was dean of the law school and this was my brother, not the one E. J. This was the brother who tragically died, just before his 24th birthday he died of pneumonia. And my father had died the year before.

Courtney: Oh, goodness.

Bea: So we had one tragedy after another, and then the home burned, so there were many tragic things that happened in those years.

Courtney: And would you say this was the early 1930s or late 1920s or so.

Bea: Yes, the late 20s. I think I graduated from high school in 27. And my brother, this oldest brother, who was named for my father, he was Edward James, the same as my father and my grandfather, he had practiced with my father one year and then my father died. And then the next year he died.

Courtney: And is your brother Rembert, is he an attorney as well?

Bea: This was Edward James who died. And then Rembert came to Furman. I think Rembert was about 16 when I was married, so he came to Furman. John was not president of Furman then.

Courtney: Right. Was he still dean of the law school?

Bea: He was dean of the law school. But Rembert just did his undergraduate work at Furman and then he went to Carolina.

Courtney: To South Carolina or North Carolina?

Bea: South. I think he worked for a congressman and attended law school in Washington one year, and then he graduated from the law school at South Carolina.

Courtney: So did Dr. Plyler come to Hendersonville, is that when...

Bea: He came to Hendersonville because we had visiting us a friend of my sister's from Coker College. And married Charles Jackson. Her daughter's husband [Ravenel Curry] incidentally was once a trustee at Furman. She was a Jackson then, but

she married a Rivers. But we called him Reedy Rivers [also a Trustee]. I've forgotten what his son-in-law's name was but he was a trustee [Ravenel Curry] at Furman. Let's see, what was I talking about?

Courtney: We were talking about being in Hendersonville, and Dr. Plyler coming there.

Bea: Yes, and he came with W. W. Wilkins, who is the father of Judge Wilkins and Ambassador Wilkins.

Courtney: Yes ma'am.

Bea: Well he and John were very good friends and his sweetheart was visiting us in Hendersonville. She was my sister's roommate at Coker. They came to Hendersonville, which took a little longer than it takes now, so while they were there they had an afternoon date, and then for an evening date Mary Charles Jackson chose Maxine, who was her good friend at Coker, to have whomever "Bum" brought with him, this is W. W. "Bum" Wilkins, I don't know how he got that name, he was anything but a bum. So he brought John along to double date. So my sister had a date with him, but she was involved for the evening so I filled in. So I was a fill-in his first date.

Courtney: What do you remember about that first date?

Bea: Well, he was a very distinguished lawyer and teacher, and I was still in college, so I don't know exactly how it was, but I thought he was very special.

Courtney: Where were you in college?

Bea: Let's see, what year was that, I think that was, I was probably a junior.

Courtney: And where were you in college?

Bea: Oh where, I was at Asbury College.

Courtney: Okay.

Bea: In Willmore, Kentucky.

Courtney: And you were out of college in the summer.

Bea: My first year, that was of course the year before. My brother had not died, and I may be confusing the time somewhat, but my first year in school I was in Greensboro living with my mother's sister and I attended the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Courtney: It was the women's college at the time, right?

Bea: Yes, it was called the Women's College. And then my next three years I went to Asbury College in Kentucky.

Courtney: So you met him when you were still in college. And did you all keep in touch after your first date?

Bea: No, I didn't see him again for a couple of years.

Courtney: And when did you see him again next? When was the next time that you saw him?

Bea: Well, my father had died and my mother was going to teach school, since that was one of the things she could do, and so she was attending summer school at Furman, and we had a relative, she exchanged her home in Greenville for mother's home in Hendersonville, and so the family came up to keep house for her while she went to summer school at Furman, and then I met John again. This same friend, who was a Jackson and married a Rivers, I think I've been calling her Mary Charles Jackson, but she was a Rivers then. Mary Charles Rivers and "Bum" Wilkins were still dating, so he called John and said you remember the Dennis girl that you dated once in Hendersonville, so that's when I saw him the next time.

Courtney: And what happened after that?

Bea: Well eventually he said will you marry me?

Courtney: And were you still in college when he asked you, or had you graduated?

Bea: The year after I graduated, I think.

Courtney: And you were married in 1932, is that correct?

Bea: Yes. I finished school in 1931 and married in 1932.

Courtney: Where did you get married?

Bea: In a little Methodist church in Pinopolis. My father was a member of the Methodist church across the street from our house and my mother was a member of St. John's, which was about a mile away, so we went to both churches.

Courtney: St. John's, what denomination was that?

Bea: It was Baptist. So we were well churched. We had Sunday school at the Methodist church in the mornings and the Baptist church was one that didn't have morning services but they had afternoon services, so we went to the St. John's church, and I don't know that we did that every Sunday, but...

Courtney: So you married in the Methodist church. Now your husband was...

Bea: My father was Methodist, one sister was an Episcopalian and another one was Methodist, we were all mixed up.

Courtney: Did your husband grow up in the Baptist church?

Bea: Yes, he did.

Courtney: He grew up in Greenville? Tell me a little bit about his life, about his growing up?

Bea: Well, when he graduated from Furman I was about 6 years old.

Courtney: So this was all stuff that he told you later.

Bea: Well, I know that he was, I guess this is the only thing I can tell, I think he adored, I know he adored his mother. I guess most boys should adore their mother.

Courtney: And he was born in that house not too far from here, wasn't he?

Bea: In Travelers Rest. His father was a combination of minister and teacher. And John could tell you things that I probably don't know, but I know that it was a very loving family and supportive, but I think there was very little money. There were three boys and two girls.

Courtney: He was a stand-out child.

Bea: But they all were stand out. His brother Earle was a very outstanding physicist. And his brother Bill was a wonderful man, he was a Sunday school teacher who was more like a minister. He was just a great fellow. I think his mother wrote a lot. She finished at what was then the Greenville Female Academy.

Courtney: And she and her husband were married by Dr. James C. Furman, isn't that correct?

Bea: I think so.

Courtney: That's pretty impressive. That goes way back.

Bea: Yes, it does.

Courtney: My goodness, that must have been the late 1800s, well I know Dr. Furman died in 1891, so I guess the late 1880s or so. Anyway, so your husband grew up here in Greenville and went to Greenville High School?

Bea: Central High School. He and Alester were good friends and together at Furman.

Courtney: This Alester Furman...

Bea: Junior.

Courtney: Junior.

Bea: Yes, and his father admired John so much, and I remember that he said once that his father said to him, "You haven't taken me lately out to see what John's doing at Furman."

Courtney: This was Alester Furman senior.

Bea: Yes. And Alester said, "Well father I just took you out yesterday." He said, "I don't think so," but he was vitally interested in what was going on.

Courtney: He must have been a standout even in college, he must have been very intelligent, to have someone like that looking after him.

Bea: What do you mean?

Courtney: You said Mr. Furman, senior, was interested in your husband?

Bea: Yes, but this was later, after college.

Courtney: So there must have been something very special about him when he was in college that would have made Mr. Furman be so interest in him.

Bea: Oh yes, right. Mr. Furman, senior, and Mr. H. J. Haynsworth were good friends and I think Mr. Haynsworth was one of the trustees then, wasn't he? Following service in WWI, John entered Harvard Law School, which he partially paid for with a loan from Mr. Haynsworth. In any event, Mr. Furman suggested John for a position in the Haynsworth Law Firm which he accepted after having taught school for a couple of years after college.

Courtney: Wow, what a generous offer!

Bea: And so of course John paid it back, but that was how he had the opportunity to go to Harvard Law School.

Courtney: So Mr. Haynsworth must have written a recommendation for him or made some phone calls or something?

Bea: Oh, I'm sure. The loan was probably on a handshake.

Courtney: Gentleman's agreement.

Bea: Right.

Courtney: So he went to Harvard and went to law school there. And did he come back to Greenville immediately after he graduated?

Bea: Yes.

Courtney: And began working as an attorney here?

Bea: Right.

Courtney: And then he became a judge?

Bea: Yes.

Courtney: And then he was dean of the law school, is that right?

Bea: Not exactly. He was an assistant professor, professor and dean of the Law School while he practiced law and until the Law School closed. The Furman president then asked him to teach a course in commercial law, which he continued to do through the first semester of his presidency.

Courtney: Okay. So when the law school folded he stayed on at Furman as a professor?

Bea: No.

Courtney: Did he start practicing law again?

Bea: Yes.

Courtney: But he remained involved at Furman, he was a trustee at one point?

Bea: He was a trustee, I don't know exactly how long. And I am really naive about that because John will know if you need to know anything.

Courtney: Tell me about the first few years that you all were married.

Bea: The first few years, well John had bought some property in an area of Greenville, Hillcrest Drive, what direction is that, and he decided to start building in the area. He built a little brick house and that's where we lived when we were first married. We lived there and then when John decided that we could have a larger house, John sold our house and we roomed in a home on Mills Avenue while our home on Pine Forest Drive was being built. John went about everything methodically. He knew what he could and what he couldn't do. And the couldn't was much greater, but he was a man of such great integrity I think he could have started a business on a handshake because I think people trusted him.

Courtney: Tell me about that story that impressed upon you how disciplined he was when you all were reading together, that you mentioned earlier.

Bea: It was after the evening meal.

Courtney: When you were first married?

Bea: Yes.

Courtney: And you were reading together?

Bea: And he looked over and noticed that I was nodding and he thought that was strange that anybody could go to sleep without permission from themselves.

Courtney: You fell asleep and he said, I don't go to sleep until I give myself permission to go to sleep, is that what he said?

Bea: Yes. He said I can't understand how you can go to sleep, I can't go to sleep without giving myself permission to go to sleep.

Courtney: That says a lot about him. Tell me some other things about him as a person. What kind of things were important to him in life?

Bea: I think he was, I don't think I know, that he was a man who was a godly man in the sense that, well he was educated there, he had a Sunday school class...

Courtney: At First Baptist Church?

Bea: Yes. [He first taught a class at Earle Street Baptist Church at the request of his law partner, Mr. A. C. Mann.]

Courtney: Did he teach adults or children?

Bea: The old ladies. I better not say that, but I remember he took me to that class. I was 21 and they were mostly in their 70s.

Courtney: Well, then they won't be hearing this.

Bea: He was also superintendent of the Sunday school at one time and he was just a great man. I thought of things I wanted to tell you about him but I can't right now, maybe..

Courtney: You can tell me later.

Bea: Maybe I should stop talking about how wonderful he was.

Courtney: Oh, no, no.

Bea: But he was wonderful to put up with me because I wasn't easy.

Courtney: Why weren't you easy? I can't imagine you not being easy.

Bea: I don't know. But he was great. I think he was the kind of person who could love unconditionally. He didn't love you because of this or that, he loved just loved you totally.

Courtney: You were very young at that point in time.

Bea: Yes. As I think about it now, very young, and foolish in some ways, but when it came to doing things when he had an opportunity to decide things that would be done at Furman, in fact he let me select the furnishings for the girls' parlor and I made some suggestions all along how I hoped, when the campus was built after the trustees decided that there would be a building. I think John's wisdom in getting a real estate agent to study the sites that would be available large enough and available for a school. When I'm thinking about it in retrospect I wish I could say it like I think of it, but I'm not saying it very well, but he arranged it so that the trustees in coming out to look at the sites could make the decision about where it would be. He had them go to several other places that had been selected and then he had them come to this site and had the bus come in at the top of the hill, it was a magnificent site with the mountains in the background.

Courtney: Near where Cherrydale is now?

Bea: Right. There was a little road that came in to a cotton field there.

Courtney: Were there cows on the property as well?

Bea: No, I didn't see any cows. I don't think there were any cows, but there was a nursery, I don't remember the man's name now, but there was a nursery there and just I think one or two little houses.

Courtney: So you think acquiring a real estate agent the trustees were more ready to look...

Bea: No, I think John had them go to these other places that he thought were okay but he knew that this one impressed him so he was hoping that this would be one that the trustees would choose.

Courtney: Did the real estate agent help everyone make a more informed decision, is that..

Bea: Well the reason I mentioned the real estate agent is that John wanted to acquire all the property that he could in the surrounding area, so that's why it has such a large area, because not only for the campus but to protect the campus, and the area down here by me, our property adjoined the Furman property. This property was never owned by Furman. John decided that he didn't want to build a president's home on the campus, so he decided that since he would be retiring he would rather build a small home of his own. So that's why we have our home. Because I don't think would be of interest to anybody. As you know salaries were not very big then, and John had borrowed \$7,000 on his insurance when he left Furman.

Courtney: To build this house?

Bea: Partially.

Courtney: Or to live?

Bea: Yeah. I don't think it was to build the house because I think in lieu of a salary Furman, I don't know how that worked out.

Courtney: Did Furman help build the house?

Bea: I think that when John died, I think Furman finished the payments. John was paying for it.

Courtney: Has Furman been good to you?

Bea: Furman has been wonderful to me.

Courtney: Does Furman help provide for you now?

Bea: Yes they do. They are very generous with me.

Courtney: In what ways?

Bea: In every way. They have somebody come over and cut the grass when it gets too tall. The trustees have always been most supportive of me.

Courtney: Do they have someone come help you clean, that kind of thing?

Bea: Oh no, I wouldn't dare ask for that.

Courtney: Do you have a lot of friends at Furman still.

Bea: I hope so. I feel that way about them.

Courtney: I think you do. I think you have a lot.

Bea: I'll say they couldn't have been better to me.

Courtney: Well who were your friends when you husband was president at Furman.

Bea: Margaret and Dean Rainey. Margaret, I guess I used to say was my best friend. I had lots of good friends. Among them were for instance Ruby Ebert who took me on these fabulous trips with her because her husband didn't like to travel and she loved to travel, so I was fortunate to be chosen as a traveling guest, and so that was mostly after John died. But one of them was before he died. But he was good to let me go because he couldn't afford to take me. John, I tell you, he was a peacemaker. And as there is recorded there was a difference in the feeling of some of the ministers in the Baptist convention and the subject academic freedom, but John knew how to, he loved people and he could see both sides, and he made sure that those who, the Baptist owned Furman actually, and that was where their greatest support, Furman's greatest support, came from. And if somebody would have an idea that he liked to promote with a loud voice and it had lots of value, you just can't do that, you have to make peace with both sides. And I know Dr. Crain who was a wonderful friend of John's. He and John used to have many telephone conversations, as he and Alester did. But Dr. Crain, after John had been there I think maybe three or four years, maybe five years, and he had gotten Furman out of debt, because that was his assignment, I think, get Furman out of debt.

Courtney: When he took over in 1939, what some would consider the depression.

Bea: In 1949, after WWII, I remember Dr. Crain who was a trustee then, he said I think John should go on a trip, he should certainly be rewarded. So that's when we had a wonderful trip to Europe. And he said I think Bea should go with him.

Courtney: Where did you all go.

Bea: Well, we had a wonderful itinerary.

Courtney: Did you go all over?

Bea: Yes, we went to Italy and France. I have been on so many wonderful trips with friends. I went with Edna Hartness once on a trip.

Courtney: Where did you all go?

Bea: We went to Italy and France, and I don't know, right now I can't even think.

Courtney: You and your husband also went to England, didn't you?

Bea: Well, yes, we went to England. I forgot to mention that. And we went on that trip, no actually John and I went on that trip to Norway, I think. We had two trips and I've forgotten which came first.

Courtney: I've read that it was when you were in England and France that's when you came up and admired the gardens and the fountains.

Bea: Yes, and I remember particularly, I think it was at Versailles, and we were walking outside, we had been through the palace, and seeing a lake and I said wouldn't it be wonderful if we could have a lake and fountains on our campus.

Courtney: Sure. So you knew at that point in time, or you were hoping, that there would be a new campus, and you were trying to get some ideas?

Bea: Right.

Courtney: And what about the gardens in England?

Bea: Oh, John thought the gardens were so beautiful, so he found out that, he talked with Dr. Webel, who was the landscape director, and Dr. Webel was in touch with Mr. Hebblethwaite who came to help with Dr. Webel's plans, to carry them out. And I think John's admiration of the English garden, he really loved beauty, beauty of hills...

Courtney: Well the campus certainly is beautiful, it's certainly a tribute to him and to you as well. Tell me about decorating the parlors.

Bea: That was so exciting because we hadn't had a lot of money to go out and buy things but I could go and select things and not even say how much is that.

Courtney: You weren't picking up the tab.

Bea: But I did want Furman to be beautiful.

Courtney: So where did you go to buy furniture?

Bea: We went with Frank Mayfield, who had a furniture store here and had access to places in High Point or wherever that was, somewhere in North Carolina.

Courtney: Where they made furniture.

Bea: So John let me help with that, and that was a real treat.

Courtney: So you went to North Carolina and selected some furniture?

Bea: Right. He let me select colors at times, and then, he was very good. And he also let me go with him, well I was invited to go, to visit in Boston when he went up on business. We stayed with the Deans.

Courtney: The architects?

Bea: Yes, and while I was there Mr. Perry, who was one of the architects, came over and picked me up and I spent the night at his house and we went horse-back riding.

Courtney: Oh, fun. How nice!

Bea: That was wonderful. He was a delightful person. It was he, I think, who had the main, I think he was the main one who helped redo Williamsburg.

Courtney: So were they both very involved here at Furman?

Bea: Oh yes, Mr. Dean was the primary architect, and Mr. Perry was, well they were in the same firm. Perry, Shaw, Hepburn, Kehoe, & Dean were the main architects at that time.

Courtney: And did you tell me that you used to ride horses on the land that Furman...

Bea: Yes. I had never had a horse, so John decided that there was no place on the old campus for a barn or a horse, so I used to rent horses and ride sometimes. But John let me have a horse and had a little stable built where the, what is the kindergarten area or the preschool area on the campus... [on old Roe Ford Rd. across from site of proposed retirement community]

Courtney: You know I don't know where that is. I've heard about it.

Bea: It was a little brick house. Well in that vicinity John had a little stable built and I kept my horse there, and I would come out in the afternoons and ride.

Courtney: And this was after you moved out to the new campus?

Bea: No, this was before, because we lived on the old campus for a while during new campus construction, 1955-1958 (3 years), and then they needed our house for student housing, so we moved and spent I don't know how many months [one semester] while our house was being built here in the men's dormitory in an apartment there.

Courtney: How was that?

Bea: That was fun.

Courtney: Was it? You had your children and everything.

Bea: Well I didn't get to furnish that and I didn't like the furnishings. No, I'm just teasing about that. But to go back to why it was so important to me to have Furman beautiful is that our facilities on the old campus were difficult, and we had not accumulated a lot of furniture or we didn't have a lot of money to spend, so I was often embarrassed at our facility. And I have a picture, sometime maybe you can see it, of Mickey and Charlie Daniel and Francis Norwood Funderburk and I were at a table and having lunch before a football game and I just didn't have any _____ and I would compare with people from the southern conference, I would hear them discussing how they entertained, and I was so afraid it would be my time to tell how I entertained. Sometimes I had some frightful moments. I remember looking at Mrs. Gaines, Frank Gaines was connected with Furman at one time and then he was president of Washington and Lee.

Courtney: How was he connected to Furman?

Bea: I don't know whether he attended or whether he was at one time he taught, and then his son, Pendleton Gaines, you know, later became president of Wofford. But they were a very interesting family and she was adorable, but when these people were discussing how they entertained, the wife of the President of Rice was describing the way she entertained, Mrs. Gaines and I, I looked over at her and I was so scared that it would be my turn next to tell how I entertained and she looked at me and winked and that gave me a feeling of comfort.

Courtney: Sure.

Bea: She knew what the situation was at Furman and she must have known how I felt.

Courtney: And the situation was that the buildings were very old and ..

Bea: Well, it was just that the house was, other presidents had lived there, Dr. McGlothlin and Dr. Geer, but anyway...

Courtney: Was your house on Pine Forest much nicer and much more amenable to entertaining than your house at Furman?

Bea: Oh, much, right. I was not accustomed to bounty before I was married and elegance, but it was simple elegance to me. It was wonderful. I thought it would be wonderful to have a place and it was wonderful that the Daniels decided that their home would be left for the president.

Courtney: Do you think that they built the home with that in mind?

Bea: I'm wondering, because you never know about things like that. I think that

Charlie was, of course his company built the first buildings and if he had lived longer, I don't know, I think he would have, and then I think, Mickey was a delightful person, a very private person.

Courtney: Oh, certainly, certainly.

Bea: But she was genuinely fine and she had a maid or housekeeper (Margie) who was, after Charlie died, she was, well I don't know how Mickey would have gotten along without her, because they just understood each other so well. The property that the Daniels built on was property that the Bonners had selected to build their home. John decided that they should have enough land so that professors could choose places to build. The Bonners had chosen, not the whole section, but a lot there and John asked them if they would relinquish that so that the Daniels could have the whole area.

Courtney: Is that area called Stratford Forest, or is this Green Valley.

Bea: Green Valley was not even conceived at that time. John got a map of England and he gave it, I think it was to Dr. Crabtree, to look at the names, a map of London, and I think he chose them. Sometime if you're talking with Dr. Crabtree you might ask him, but that's my understanding, that he selected the names for the streets.

Courtney: And the neighborhood probably, too, Stratford Forest.

Bea: And the names all, if you notice, are of English origin.

Courtney: We're on Kingston right now.

Bea: Kensington.

Courtney: Kensington, well that's certainly very English. Now that we're talking about people in England, I believe your son mentioned to me that you met Dr. Lord in England?

Bea: The Baptist World Alliance met in Sao Paulo, Brazil, and John and I went to that, and that's when he met Dr. Lord, who was president of the Alliance.

Courtney: And they developed a friendship?

Bea: Yes. And actually John had a little house on the old campus, women's campus, he let me decorate that for the Lords. So it was interesting how one did things then. I was able to select the materials and, at that time, you could have a sewing person come to your house, so that little house was really a little

dream house.

Courtney: Where was that on campus?

Bea: The, let's see, what was his name, he was a music professor, they lived in. This was a music professor, a pianist. He and his wife both were pianists [Mr. and Mrs. Wendell Keeney]. You've seen pictures of the girls' campus.

Courtney: Yes, ma'am.

Bea: Well it was on the left of the fine arts building.

Courtney: Ramsey?

Bea: Right. And the Lords lived there and when they came back again they just came to teach one semester each year. They had an apartment in the married students' apartments [Montague Village]. I took him to the doctor the afternoon that he died. When we were getting out of the car when we came back I held his arm and when we stepped in the door he immediately went over to a chair and died, just sat in the chair and died almost instantly. I was actually holding him in the chair.

Courtney: So they lived here in Greenville.

Bea: They went back to England, but they came, I don't know whether this was his second or third visit, but he would come back and stay a semester.

Courtney: And teach?

Bea: And teach.

Courtney: At Furman or at the women's college, or both, I guess at that point in time, and this was on one of his visits here that he passed away.

Bea: And Mrs. Lord, she was so precious. After Dr. Lord's death, she stayed with me until somebody came from England, some of her relatives, and she had lots of good friends. The Waddy Thompsons were very good friends of hers, and everybody who knew them had great respect and admiration for them.

Courtney: Let's talk a little bit more about your husband. What do you think were some of his priorities when he was president?

Bea: One thing that I didn't know until long after he had died, his first secretary was Cora Girardeau, and she told me once that, she said, you know, Dr. Plyler was praying so hard I could hear him in my room. I think things were really at times very stressful. He knew the source of strength.

Courtney: Certainly. Your son told me that the children used to go visit your husband in his office in the afternoons and walk home with him.

Bea: They were so partial to John sometimes I think I was overly jealous. I remember once that I had picked them up, it was rainy, and I had picked them up at Donaldson School, and John was coming home for lunch, I guess about that time, so they must have been very young, and John said, it was pouring down rain, and John said, mother hurry up, daddy's parked out in front and he'll get wet. And I had been paddling around in the rain picking them up but that was okay, but daddy shouldn't get wet.

Courtney: Right. Did he come home for lunch pretty often?

Bea: He did, you see it was just a step or two away.

Courtney: From where his office was. And they went over in the afternoon. Did you go over to his office quite a bit?

Bea: No, not much.

Courtney: You had things to do at home, and you had three children, three boys.

Bea: Right.

Courtney: John's your oldest.

Bea: John and Jim were born when John was chosen to be president. They were already here. But then after he had been president, I don't remember how long, Keith came. [18 months after JLP became president]

Courtney: I think your son told me that he thinks that you all were the first, or perhaps the only, presidential couple to have a child while in office.

Bea: I don't know. I think John was one of the youngest college presidents at that time.

Courtney: Right, right.

Bea: I think that David Shi was a little younger, maybe a year younger, when he became president. At that time I think John was one of the youngest.

Courtney: What were some of the things that were important to him when he was president?

Bea: Important to John?

Courtney: Yes. What were some of the big issues that he to face?

Bea: Well I think it was as a peacemaker between the people who owned Furman and those, well, I don't know, the people who had money.

Courtney: Benefactors.

Bea: I don't think benefactors are interested in a little school that's in debt, a poor little school. But I think it was wonderful that John was able to get it out of debt and I think he had lots of wonderful friends who knew people who were wealthy, and of course Dr. Geer meeting with Mr. Duke came along about that time.

Courtney: Was your husband close to anyone related to the Duke Endowment?

Bea: Yes! Especially Tom Perkins, Chair in the late 50s-50s era. He had lots of good friends who admired what he had done at Furman and admired him, but other than the Duke Foundation he had, the Gambrells, especially Charles and William, were good friends and they had connections in New York. He knew people who had been to Furman or were Carolinians and knew about Furman, and were eager for Furman to develop. Of course, John's scholarship was utterly important but scholarship, because John himself was scholarly, a disciplined man who had natural ability and used it well.

Courtney: Your son told me about how at the end of every day he would clean his office and sometimes would only have a piece of paper or just his paperweight on his desk and was so organized.

Bea: He was the neatest person. That's another way I'm sure I drove him crazy. When he took off a garment he hung it. And when he put his shoes in the closet they were right together. He just was a tidy person. And John is like that, my son. When I visit them and see how tidy his bedroom is, his clothes the way they are hung, John was always, well he didn't have a house jacket but when he came home and took off his coat he would put on a coat that had frayed cuffs. He was very neat, and he was unbelievably good to me, and he never left the house without or came back without warmly greeting me and reminding me that he loved me. And he would say to the children often, he would exaggerate terribly, you know you have the most beautiful mother in the world.

Courtney: That's very sweet. What kinds of things did you all do when the children were small, when he was president, did you go to football games or baseball games?

Bea: Yes, we did both of those. John was a baseball player.

Courtney: I heard about that. Very good baseball player.

Bea: Left-handed pitcher. I don't know how seriously he thought of playing pro ball but I think his mother discouraged him immediately. Just from little things I've heard, I never had the pleasure of knowing his mother. He had a sister who actually prepared fruitcakes and things like that for a living. She made wonderful fruitcakes and what she called coffee cakes, which were yeast bread with brown sugar and butter and all those good things. She had customers for that.

Courtney: Your son John told me that your husband was once offered a professional contract to play baseball.

Bea: He probably was. John knows a lot because he absolutely adored his father.

Courtney: They were very close?

Bea: Yes, they were.

Courtney: Well he must have been a very great baseball player at one point in time.

Bea: Well I don't think John ever saw him play but he heard about it from others.

Courtney: Did he like to throw the ball in the backyard and things like that growing up?

Bea: Yes. He was left-handed.

Courtney: And I heard that you all, would you all eat lunch every Sunday afternoon after church in the Furman Dining Hall?

Bea: Yes. Sarge, the director, he made the bread. We lived near a bakery but he made this wonderful bread. I don't know how much Sarge charged, probably about 10 cents a loaf, I'm not sure. After Sunday dinner we would buy a loaf of bread for Sunday supper.

Courtney: Tell me about how involved Furman was with people at Greenville at that point in time. Did you all make an effort to get to know people, I guess you already did know people in the Greenville community, but...

Bea: Well I, as the wife of the president, no, I didn't do anything. Somebody suggested once that I should be more active in the missionary society.

Courtney: The Baptist missionary, is that it?

Bea: Well the Missionary Society is an organization in the Baptist church, or in every church, don't they all have them, anyway then they did.

Courtney: Is this a women's missionary union, or..

Bea: You just meet once a month and discuss what you have done and what you are going to do for the community. And she told me, John didn't tell me, she said, I think it would be nice if Bea were more active in the missionary society. And he said, well she has her hands full with three little boys so he defended me.

Courtney: Did you get the sense that it was important to him that Furman be close with people that were in the Greenville community?

Bea: I don't think he did in a sense that he was trying to make friends. I think he was more interested in Furman developing into the kind of school that she already was have the opportunity to serve more people. No, I don't think, I had a feeling and I know he did too, that you don't play up to people for what you can get out of them. I wasn't very diplomatic I'd say.

Courtney: Well, it was probably much more fluid in the sense that Furman was located downtown Greenville, so the relationship didn't have to be worked on.

Bea: Yes. I think there were a lot of people who were sad about moving the campus. There was one old building that John tried to desperately to keep when they trustees decided that it was not possible to purchase enough land or whatever at that place.

Courtney: And which building was that?

Bea: It was Old Main, it was the Italian renaissance building. You've probably seen pictures of it lots of times.

Courtney: The old bell tower?

Bea: Yes.

Courtney: And he tried to salvage it?

Bea: Well he wanted it to remain and that would have made a beautiful park, that area, with the trees. The other buildings, really, I don't think any of them were, maybe the library, but most of them were just, they weren't, I think, worthy of spending a lot of money on. But it could have been such a beautiful park, the building would have made a wonderful museum. I remember when they were tearing some of the boards off. I still don't like the way I'm telling you, it was so much better than I'm making it, I wanted it to sound good.

Courtney: Oh, no, you sound great, and believe me, from the perspective of someone who wasn't there, it's so interesting to hear about the old campus and the

experiences and things like that. It probably seems to you that you are not articulating it well, but you really are, so it's fine.

Bea: I think I can speak better, but at the moment I can't.

Courtney: Well, you know what, I can come back another day if you'd like and we could talk a little bit more about some other things if you'd care to do that, or if you want to keep on going now, it doesn't matter to me.

Bea: I'm fine, I just want you to be happy.

Courtney: Oh, I'm very happy. Don't worry, I'm just thrilled to be here talking with you. What about Dr. Bradshaw, he lived across the street?

Bea: Yes, he did. He had the neatest little house and several professors lived in it later. The things I remember about it, he was a very tall man and I think a very, he lived frugally but he had money. I think he inherited money, but all of that's unimportant. He definitely loved Furman. I think he never married. The bathtub was about nine feet long, it was really unique.

Courtney: Wow, he must have been very tall!

Bea: He was tall, I don't know that he was nine feet, but that was something about the little house that was unique. Dean and Mrs. Daniel lived there at one time, and John's secretary, Cora Girardeau, lived there, and other faculty members through the years.

Courtney: What about Nancy Baker, do you remember her?

Bea: I do. She was a darling, and she reminded me of a year or so, and Margaret Kendrick, have you interviewed Margaret Kendrick?

Courtney: No, but your son suggested I should do that.

Bea: She was secretary a long time. But what I was going to tell you about Nancy Baker, she told me, not too many years ago, she said she was remembering and that she remembered that Keith, who is now in his 60s, used to come in and want to borrow nickel. He was probably a little pre-schooler at time. I hope he was pre-school. I hope he didn't try to borrow a nickel when he was in school. But their daddy's office was very available, and I'm sure the secretaries probably had some problems but they didn't complain.

Courtney: A very open environment.

Bea: Yes.

Courtney: What about your husband's relationship with Frank Bonner?

Bea: Well I think John had great admiration for Frank, and Frank was the kind of person, he had a hard job, because had to be done that were not popular with the students, but if John thought they were important Frank would do them without, he was very cooperative.

Courtney: So they were a good team.

Bea: They worked well together. I think, of course I know, he was a very scholarly and I think Dean Daniel, who was dean when John became president, but he and John had great respect for each other. John told me once that Dr. Daniel was a wonderful English teacher when John was a student at Furman. Dr. Geer was his English professor and he was a great professor. I never knew Dr. Geer well.

Courtney: Did he stay in Greenville after he resigned?

Bea: Yes he did. They had a lovely old home, it was the house that now has law offices in it, it's over in the area where the Bi-Lo Center is, one of those streets that comes in to the Poinsett Club. I've forgotten what street it is but it's one of the fine old homes, there were lots of names over there that indicate Furman.

Courtney: Who were some of the more popular professors when your husband was president?

Bea: Well, I guess the Gilpatricks were very popular. I don't know, I think they were all beloved. We had some wonderful professors.

Courtney: Were you all close to the faculty?

Bea: I think so. I didn't do a lot of entertaining but I did annual things.

Courtney: Tell me about having the students, did the students come over to your house quite a bit?

Bea: Not a lot. But once we had two boys stay at our house. They did some little service, I think coaching with the boys, Keith, I think. And I don't know, I loved them all, I thought they were great, they were wonderful. They were kind and helpful and when I was scout mother, den mother for boy scouts, I had a relationship with one of them who would come sometimes and help.

Courtney: And your son told me that the students would come over and listen to the radio and listen to Furman football games when the team was away at you

and your husband's home. They'd have popcorn, and we saw the photo earlier.

Bea: We had mostly fruit.

Courtney: Tangerines and oranges or apples, things like that. Did a lot of people come over, it looks like they did.

Bea: Yes. I think they did.

Courtney: In the photo it looks like you had probably a hundred students or so, it was quite a bit.

Bea: It was an interesting old house, as I told you earlier, there were so many windows and they came all the way down to the floor, and the president's home was not furnished.

Courtney: So the Geers took everything of theirs out when you all moved in?

Bea: Yes, it all belonged to the Geers.

Courtney: It was their personal...

Bea: It was not a furnished house [constructed in 1892]. The McGlothlins had lived there before and I don't know who lived there before the McGlothlins. I don't know if that was the president's home before the McGlothlins or not.

Courtney: When was the home demolished?

Bea: I guess when the campus was demolished. That was one thing that I said please, please when this property is sold don't cut down the trees.

Courtney: Did they?

Bea: Every one of them.

Courtney: You all did a great job planting new trees. Tell me about the campus, I've seen photographs of it when the trees were teeny-tiney. Was that very important?

Bea: Well, when the buildings started, when they started building, of course, there was a lot of red mud and a lot of red brick, so I remember saying please plant the trees because there were numerous people who thought, how ridiculous, Furman, a poor, poor school, using Williamsburg brick, fine Williamsburg brick.

Courtney: Hand made in Virginia, wasn't it?

Bea: Yes. And John wanted it to be beautiful. Of course beauty was not his main objective, but at the time the trustees had made all the decisions, and I was so anxious for it not to be, it seemed to me the architects at that time were building such strange looking structures.

Courtney: In the 1950s and early 1960s.

Bea: And I remember saying, why can't something that has proven that it's beautiful and thought beautiful for years, why can't it be made functional. And I don't think any architects, wherever they are, they like to create their own type of building and don't care to copy anybody. But I think John, I know he thought that too. Of course, I don't know whether that had anything to do with the structure being Williamsburg or not. But I do not that, I think that, somehow that sort of started with John, the type of architecture that he wanted. I don't know that it's what the architects would have chosen.

Courtney: Your husband selected, your husband selected the architecture?

Bea: Well I think that he wanted the best architects, but I don't know that he knew who they were, he probably found out from, maybe, I don't know whether it was Alester. Alester was very knowledgeable about a lot of things. He and John worked well together. Actually, that's one of those things you just don't really know. I would not want to be quoted on anything like that.

Courtney: Tell me about the old entrances to the campus before the front gate was created. I heard that your husband drew the sketch for the gate, for how he wanted the gate. How did he come up with that idea, do you think?

Bea: Well I think was sort of the type thing that went well with the, I don't know.

Courtney: He communicated that to the architects and they came up with that?

Bea: I don't know that either. But I just remember hearing him say that he had drawn a sketch of how the gate should look.

Courtney: I heard that he also went to Columbia and basically talked with the legislators there about building Poinsett Highway.

Bea: Well, he had to go and talk with whatever the department is, highway, the headquarters for the highway department. I do know that he made several trips to Columbia relative to changing the highway so that Furman would be on the highway. Because the people who owned the land between the land that was purchased and the old highway, they wouldn't sell that.

Courtney: They created a junkyard, didn't they?

Bea: I don't know about that. All I know is that it looked junky. So I think that's when they planted the trees to conceal it. Sometimes people just don't want to sell their property, even for a good cause.

Courtney: I'm not quite sure I understand, Furman bought the property that the actual campus sits on now, and did the university purchase some of the property in this surrounding area as well?

Bea: No, you know I don't know the details about things like that, because John never discussed things that he didn't need my knowledge relative to that, but I do know this, that the trustees said when John indicated that he would rather that they would not build the president's home, that there was so much else to do that was important, that he said he'd rather just build a home of his own. So the trustees said you may select property, so John selected this property for us.

Courtney: Tell me about, I've been told that your husband declined a formal inauguration when he became president. Tell me about how he became president, how he was asked to become president.

Bea: He never told me in detail anything about that.

Courtney: Did he just come to you and say I've been asked to become the next president of Furman University, or how did that happen?

Bea: You want me to be perfectly honest? I have no idea. But he was a trustee so I guess he knew what was going on. It didn't require an explanation, I guess, I don't actually know how to explain that.

Courtney: And he declined a formal inauguration.

Bea: Yes.

Courtney: Was there any ceremony?

Bea: There was not a formal ceremony. That wasn't that important to him. He just wanted, I think it was just a challenge. He just felt inspired to do it and I know he felt that he could. He was a modest man but he was also sure of his ability.

Courtney: So he was confident but very humble.

Bea: He was, and he didn't care about credit. It didn't matter who got the credit, he just had a dream about what could be, and I think that in a sense he realized the beginning of it. Because actually it was on the way up when he decided perhaps

it was time for him to let somebody else, and I think it was he who suggested Gordon Blackwell. Gordon had experience in several colleges and he was certainly a scholarly man and also a Furman graduate. John admired him very much.

Courtney: I've heard a lot of people emphasize how humble your husband was...

Bea: I don't know what humility is, really, he knew that he could do anything that he set his mind to do. I'm not saying....

Courtney: He didn't seek credit for that?

Bea: No he did not seek credit. I have a picture of him, you probably have seen it, of when they were digging the first holes. If you'll come out on the porch I'll show you.

Courtney: Sure, we could do that. Do you want to go right now or do you want to finish talking and then...

Bea: Whatever you want to do.

Courtney: Okay, well why don't we just go ahead and then we can come back.

Bea: John didn't tell me this but knowing him, he planned this and you see he had Mr. Alester, Sr. to do the first digging, and then Dean Crain to do next, because they were important, and Alester, but you can see he looks like a father proud of the boys.

Courtney: Yes ma'am.

Bea: So that they will reflect that they are the ones and not, he's just the proud father. But of course he's the proud father who made it happen. These are some of the pictures I was telling you about entertaining in the dining hall, about the Daniels, Frances Funderburk and me.

Courtney: That's you on the right,

Bea: That's Charlie Daniel and Mickey Daniel.

Courtney: And who is that?

Bea: That's Frances Funderburk.

Courtney: Oh, is that Sapp Funderburk's wife?

Bea: Yes.

Courtney: And were you all dining?

Bea: This was before a football game.

Courtney: In the Dining Hall?

Bea: Yes, we had lunch. And this is at our front door at University Ridge, the president's home there. These are students and John and I are receiving them at the door.

Courtney: The gentleman on the left, to your right, is he a student as well?

Bea: Yes. I don't remember his name. You see how John had all these trees planted out here. This was the way our house looked.

Courtney: Oh this was your house.

Bea: That's the back of it I think. Yes. It was screened in at that time.

Courtney: You've got some great photographs.

Bea: This is before we left, it's the living room of the house on University Ridge.

Courtney: Now tell me who's who. I know who you and your husband are.

Bea: This is John, and that's his father, this is Keith and that's Jim, my middle son.

Courtney: Where are you all going there, do you remember?

Bea: John just had a photographer come and take the picture I guess.

Courtney: Do you remember being at the groundbreaking?

Bea: No.

Courtney: It looks like there were a lot of people there.

Bea: I'm sure that I was there, but to be perfectly honest I don't remember. I had a darling servant who was with us on University Ridge and she would say, you know I disremember, so I disremember more than I remember. But this is a good place to sit anyway, isn't it? I'm going to get you a glass of orange juice.

Courtney: Well actually, I probably, is there anything...

Bea: Are you ready to go because I don't have anything special...

Courtney: Well why don't I do this, when I get the transcript I can bring it to you and then we can, unless, do you have anything more, I hate to take up too much of your morning, so, whatever.

Bea: No, my dear, I don't have anything engagements at the moment.

Courtney: Well I know there would be lots of people over on the campus that would love to see you.

Bea: No, I really do very little. I might tell you about some of the stuff out here, like that table, that was a meat chopping table in the women's college kitchen, and you know they'd just throw a whole big cow upon there and, if you walk over to it and touch it you can see how, and the things that were in the college that they could use were taken out, then the professors and staff were allowed to come and select what they might like to have. So Marguerite Childs and I were the only two that put our names on that table, and you can see why, it wouldn't fit into many places.

Courtney: That's very interesting. So this is what they chopped meat on?

Bea: Yes. And this is the bottom of an old stove. And that's what the man, a farmer who lived in a little house right out in front, he had a box down in that and that was his mule's dining table, that little piece of wood on top is from an old building that was tom down on a hill just above the picnic stand. There's an incline there, and that's the place that I chose for the president's home.

Courtney: Okay, and is that where Cherrydale is now? Tell me where that is again.

Bea: On the other side of the campus. Do you know where the picnic house is on the end of the lake?

Courtney: The picnic tables, yes.

Bea: That area, and then it's where the little bridge that John designed.

Courtney: Oh, he designed that little bridge, that little stone bridge that crosses the creek.

Bea: From a bridge that he saw in Scotland. It's at the top of the hill there, you know that..

Courtney: Sure, oh yeah, I've walked up that hill.

Bea: Well there was a little house there, and when that was tom down, this is a piece of lumber off of that little house, and the bottom of it is an old stove.

Courtney: And that's where you wanted the president's home to be?

Bea: Yes.

Courtney: That's a beautiful area. It probably would have been similar to your other one in that it was so wooded around that area. Well thank you so much for showing me all of this, it's wonderful.

Bea: Well, of course it's nothing, but I love nothing.

Courtney: Those things are special

Bea: They have meaning, and that piece of wood that the decoy is on was from the library that was torn down.

Courtney: This piece of wood right here. That's from the old, the Carnegie library?

Bea: Yes.

Courtney: Oh, what a beautiful back yard you have. That's wonderful.

Bea: My son lives down at the foot of the hill.

Courtney: Oh, does he, how nice.

Bea: They are in the process of building roads and destroying all of this beautiful wooded area. Not where my house is, but over to the left. We had wild turkeys under our grapevine last year, now there'll probably be no more wild turkeys because they are going to put a whole bit development in there.

Courtney: What's the brick structure right there?

Bea: I thought it was a well cover, but it was where that little house was in front, and I had it moved back here because I thought it was so interesting.

Courtney: It is.

Bea: But Keith says he thinks it was an outdoor refrigerator.

Courtney: Wow, they used to cool things in it. That's so interesting. Well, it's nice a thing to have a vine growing out of.

Bea: Right, a friend of mine had somebody with equipment come and move it here.

Courtney: Thank you so much for meeting with me today. I really do appreciate it.

Bea: I enjoyed the pleasure to be with you.

