

# **NOTICE**

**Materials in our digital Oral History collections are the products of research projects by several individuals. USF Libraries assume no responsibility for the views expressed by interviewers or interviewees. Some interviews include material that may be viewed as offensive or objectionable. Parents of minors are encouraged to supervise use of USF Libraries Oral Histories and Digital Collections. Additional oral histories may be available in Special Collections for use in the reading room. See individual collection descriptions for more information.**

**This oral history is provided for research and education within the bounds of U.S. Copyright Law (Title 17, U.S.C.). Copyright over Oral Histories hosted by the USF Libraries rests with the interviewee unless transferred to the interviewer in the course of the project. Interviewee views and information may also be protected by privacy and publicity laws. All patrons making use of it and other library content are individually accountable for their responsible and legal use of copyrighted material.**

USF 50<sup>th</sup> (2006) Anniversary Oral History Project  
Oral History Program  
Florida Studies Center  
University of South Florida, Tampa Library

Digital Object Identifier: U23-00039  
Interviewee: Linda Erickson  
Interview by: Yael V. Greenberg  
Interview date: March 5th, 2003  
Interview location: USF Tampa library  
Transcribed by: Renee Perez  
Transcription date: May 18, 2017 to May 19, 2017  
Audit Edit by: Renee Perez  
Audit Edit date: May 19, 2017  
Final Edit by: Carla Butel  
Final Edit date: March 29th, 2018 to March 30th, 2018

**Yael Greenberg (YG):** Today is Thursday, June 5th, 2003. My name is Yael Greenberg, oral history program assistant for the Florida Studies Center. Let's do that again. Today is Thursday, June 5th, 2003. My name is Yael Greenberg, oral history program assistant for the Florida Studies Center. We continue a series of interviews here in our studio in the library in the Tampa campus with USF faculty, students, and alumni, in order to commemorate 50 years of university history. Today, we will be interviewing Linda Erickson, who came to USF in 1964 as the resident instructor of Gamma Hall. In October of '96, Linda retired as the assistant vice president and university registrar. Good afternoon, Linda.

**Linda Erickson (LE):** Good afternoon.

YG: Let's begin by you taking us to the year you arrived in Tampa and what circumstances brought you to the University of South Florida.

LE: I arrived at USF to work on July 1, 1964. In the two years prior to that, I had been in the graduate program in student personnel administration at Syracuse University in New York. During the fall of my second year at Syracuse, the students in our program were notified that Raymond King, from the University of South Florida, would be coming by the campus to interview students for positions in residence halls at USF. I didn't sign up. I'm originally from the state of Washington, and I had planned to seek employment, after graduation, in California or somewhere in the Northwest, where all of my family lived and, in fact, still lives.

However, somebody pointed out to me that it might be to my advantage to, at least, go

through the interview process since I had never interviewed for a position in this field. And so, I was the last person to sign up, and I had the last interview on a Friday afternoon at 5:30. It was in February, so it was pitch dark, and it was in our major professor's suite. And I had a list of questions that I had prepared for this interview. But when I met Ray, he had several books showing the new buildings and the history of the university, and I thought all of this was so neat, and I had no idea what I said or what I asked because, suddenly, our 30 minutes were over, and I went back to my room.

I didn't hear another thing for about six weeks. One morning, at seven o'clock, my phone rang, and this voice said, "This is Ray King. We would like you to come to the University of South Florida for an interview." There was a very long silence on my end. I said, "I really appreciate the invitation, but I can't come because I couldn't spend your money. I have no intention of working in Florida or anywhere in the South or the East. I'm going back to the Pacific Northwest." Well, Ray just wouldn't take no for an answer. He said, "I want you to talk to Betty Cosby before you decide." Betty Cosby was, at that time, the director of the student personnel program at Syracuse, who later came to the University of South Florida as dean of women.

But I said yes, finally agreed to talk to her before I made my final decision. When I talked to her an hour or two later, because I didn't figure it would be polite to call her at seven in the morning, she said, "Oh, Linda, just go on down there. We've had snow here for months. It'd be great to get out of Dodge. And after it's over, just say, 'Thanks. It's a wonderful place, but the sun gives me hangnails,' or something else." So I reluctantly agreed to come. And when we drove into the campus, I had this strange feeling that I was going to accept a position here and, in fact, was totally ready to make a commitment after I'd been here a day and a half. Everything about it was just really exciting to me. My family did not want me to come. In fact, I told my mother, "Well, if I take this job, I won't stay there for more than two years." I told that story at my retirement party, 32 years later. But that's how I came to USF.

YG: Can you tell me, the first time you drove into campus in '64 for your interview, what the campus looked like? And what did some of the major surrounding areas look like, Fletcher, Fowler?

LE: I'm not sure there was a Fletcher. If there was, it was probably a dirt road. Fowler was a narrow, two-lane, blacktop road. There was virtually nothing on it. The University Restaurant was there, the Campus View Motel, and that's about all I can remember. There was no interstate that intersected at either end of Fletcher. It was simply—looked kind of like a wasteland when we got to the campus because so much land was part of the campus but undeveloped. It just looked like miles of undeveloped land to me. Of course, everything was very flat. It was the first visit I had ever made to Florida, and having grown up in the Northwest, and living in upstate New York, which are the only two

places I had ever lived, I couldn't even imagine that the world could be this flat in one area of the United States.

I was struck by how unbelievably hot it was. When I got off the airplane, I thought, I must be in the exhaust of the jet engines or something because it was so hot. I found out that was just how it was. It happened to be a really warm two days. And the campus looked like a few, small buildings in this great expanse of land. But the entrance to the institution was impressive, the original entrance. And you could see the administration building at the end of the drive. I used to call it all-university drive, with the flags flying. It really was very impressive to me. I just thought, How neat to have a brand new university.

YG: You mentioned that, pretty much as you came in and you spent the day and a half during your interview here at the University of South Florida, that you really felt an excitement. You were interested, and you were going to take the job, despite having really—prior to the interview, saying, “I’m not going to do it.” What made you so excited about coming here? Was it the people that you met? Was it the environment? What made you want to come to the University of South Florida?

LE: All of those things. The new place, I had never lived in this part of the country. All of the people I met were just fascinating to me. Resident instructors taught courses, I taught two sections of behavioral sciences. And so, I met with Dean Edwin Martin, who was dean of the College of Basic Studies. I met with Les Malpus, who was sort of like the department chair or the coordinator for the behavioral sciences basic studies course, and with virtually all of the deans. Everybody was excited about what they were doing. It was sort of a new concept, the idea of living and learning in a community, the interdisciplinary approach to learning.

Instead of choosing one of ten social science courses to meet a liberal arts requirement, students took a behavioral science course, which was already an integrated course. I was excited about the opportunity to teach because I had always been interested in doing that but did not want to teach K through 12. So the opportunity to teach was very exciting to me, and the fact that everything was new and everybody here was excited about doing it, about what they were doing, and the sense of community that I felt. I met with a student group. It was just about 16 hours the first day; I met with somebody different every hour. And each group or each individual added to that sense that I had, that this is a really good place, and I would really like to be a part of it.

YG: You came here, you accepted a position as a resident instructor in Gamma Hall. How many dorms were there in 1964?

LE: I wish I could remember exactly. Alpha, Beta, and Gamma were the three original halls on the Argos side. On the Andros side, those residence halls had just opened, and there was Delta and—I'd like to say Eta, Zeta, and Epsilon, but I'm not sure, but there weren't many. I don't think all of those Andros halls were built at the time, but there weren't many. There were way more students who wanted to live on campus than there was space for. In fact, were freshmen students required to live on campus? If you came from out of town, you were required to live on campus. And there wasn't enough space to accommodate everybody who wanted to live on campus, so they tripled Gamma Hall.

And Gamma Hall accommodated, without tripling, probably somewhere between 400 and 475 students. And they just put the overflow in Gamma Hall and tripled rooms. So I had somewhere between 550 and 600 students that first year. I was 23 years old and, trust me, wet behind the ears. So it was a major challenge, along with my first experience in a college classroom as well, where many of the students were older than I was.

YG: Tell me, what were some of your major responsibilities? What does a resident instructor do?

LE: Well, the resident instructor was responsible for the coordination of all hall activities, hall government, working with RAs, who were upper-class students on each living unit, who worked closely with the students on that living unit. And we provided academic support programs and general administrative support to the operation of the hall. In those days, there were hours; students had to be in by eleven o'clock at night. There were virtually—students had to sign in and sign out when they left the hall. It was always an issue: did they have to sign in during the day or only at night? And we used to say, Oh, bad things only happen at night. So they only had to sign out after seven o'clock. But that was a major issue, and overnights were almost nonexistent. In fact, they were discouraged, and you had to have written permission from your parents to be out overnight. Now, this was true in women's halls not in men's halls, of course. So there were a lot of responsibilities that focused on those requirements.

YG: What about having a male visitor come into the women's dorm? Did the male visitor have to sign in?

LE: Male visitors came only to the lobby, and someone would call upstairs or whatever, but they would meet the girls in the lobby. But there were no men allowed in the living units. There were no men; there was no alcohol. I mean, things were pretty clean. And there was the issue—if people were late, we had what we called the standards board. It was a type of student judiciary group that heard the infraction and meted out whatever the punishment—if you want to call it that—was going to be, for being late. If you were out of the hall overnight without permission, that was a serious infraction. Those cases went

to the dean of women.

YG: Were there any women students that were kicked out because of their midnight liaison, so to speak?

LE: Yes. They were absent. They weren't signed out. They didn't have permission to be out. We used to discover this. We were required to have fire drills every so often, and they had to be in the middle of the night. And in Gamma Hall, we also had a number of trash chute fires. As I recall, students were allowed to smoke in their rooms; garbage went down the trash chutes; and it seems like we had many trash chute fires. And there was a protocol for fire drills, where students met and they lined up by living unit. And you took role, and there were invariably missing students. And then you would have to call the hospitals, the state patrol, the jails, to make sure that these students weren't in any of those places.

And if you couldn't find them anywhere, and you couldn't get any help from a roommate who could—sometimes, if you talked to a roommate, the roommate could find them and then you could end this search. But if you couldn't locate them, then you had to call their parents. And many a night, you were up well after midnight going through this process because of a fire or a fire drill or whatever and then following up. Or sometimes a roommate would come and say, "My roommate didn't come in. I don't know where she is." And there were some very legitimate circumstances that it was a good idea, for some, that we had had that requirement because we found some people who had been in accidents or who were, in fact, in the jail, and hadn't had an opportunity to make a phone call. But those were days that I can hardly even imagine existed in the 20th century. In retrospect, it seems so antiquated to me now.

YG: Did you ever have to bail any students out of jail?

LE: I did. Many times, I went to the jail. Usually, it was an alcohol infraction, drinking underage. And very often, they would let students out on my recognizance, if I agreed that I thought they would produce themselves in court for the hearing. And then we used to go to court with them. Actually, in those days, student affairs officers acted more *in loco parentis*; certainly, they don't do that at all now, but [that's] where you sort of assume the role of a parent. It was pretty different than dorm life is today.

YG: How long were you resident instructor?

LE: Just one year.

YG: And where did you go to next?

LE: Then I was appointed assistant dean of women.

YG: What were some of your major responsibilities as the dean of women? Because, I believe, today—I don't think we have a dean of women?

LE: That's correct. At that time, the student affairs structure was dean of students, dean of women, and dean of men. It was a gender-specific structure. And there was no assistant dean of men, so I sort of got to function as both. So that was fun. But I was charged with responsibility for women's discipline, so I did a lot of the disciplinary hearings in those days. And mostly residence-hall related, alcohol and staying out all night were the common ones. I was the advisor to students with disabilities. In those days, they were called handicapped students. And basically, handicapped at that time were some physical disability that caused you to be confined to a wheelchair or a severe visual handicap.

YG: Were there a lot of handicapped students attending the university in '65 through '71?

LE: Well, a lot is sort of relative, but USF had more than almost any college or university in the country, and the reason for that is that the terrain was relatively flat, so a wheelchair didn't have to climb any hills and because the campus was new, elevators had been put in virtually all of the buildings, and ramps had been built for the delivery of goods, equipment, and the movement of furniture. The ramps and the elevators weren't to provide for students in wheel chairs; that just happened to be sort of a by-product that made it so that students could function.

There isn't any snow and ice in Florida, so that helped. So students from all over the country were referred to USF for admission. And actually, every one of those students had to be interviewed personally by me. And one of the things I had to determine was that they would be self-sufficient with the support services that were available, that they would not require an attendant, that they would be able to somehow get class notes if they used a tape recorder or whatever, but that they would be able to function independently in the university community. There were certain majors that were considered inappropriate.

For example, students who were physically disabled in a wheelchair or blind were not admissible to the College of Education because handicapped persons were not certified to

teach in the state of Florida. And I can remember the dean telling me there was no point in putting them through an education program if they couldn't get a job when they finished. And you think of how different that is today and how the world has changed. It just is kind of fascinating to look back on the time when we were exclusive, in terms of persons who had any kind of disability. And on the other hand, learning disabilities weren't even recognized. I never even heard of a learning disability until considerably down the road.

YG: Was this policy of the College of Education of not allowing disabled students, was this something that was state-mandated?

LE: No. This was simply a decision that was made by the dean in what, from his perspective, was in the student's best interest. Because, if they couldn't be certified to teach and get a job, it didn't seem right to take them into the program. And then, when they graduated, they wouldn't be eligible for employment.

YG: You mentioned the permissive environment of USF: the flat terrains, the new elevators. What other kinds of support services did the university offer to disabled students, in those early days? Were there services?

LE: No, there weren't very many. I'm trying to think. I don't think there were any specific services. As an advisor to handicapped students, I tried to help them. For example, blind students have to find readers. And since I had worked in a dorm, I knew students and taught classes. So I could sometimes help them, connect them with somebody who would be a reader for them or who could help them find readers. I helped them find classes that they could get to because it wasn't so easy in some buildings. In some buildings, the elevators operated only by keys, and there was some difficulty in whether or not the students could have keys to those elevators. And it seems to me that there may have been one building on campus that did not have an elevator, so we tried to build—I helped them build class schedules that would allow them access to where their classes were and to provide enough time for them to get from class to class because sometimes they couldn't take classes consecutively from one hour to the next.

YG: Were disabled students living in dormitories?

LE: Yes. As long as they were self-sufficient.

YG: While you were assistant dean of women, you also helped with something called the Mortar Board.

LE: Right. During the very early years, prior to my arrival, sometime between 1960 and 1964, the institution established a local women's honorary called Athenaeum. And Athenaeum was a prototype of a national organization called Mortar Board, which is a women's academic and service organization.<sup>1</sup> It's sort of a sorority or honorary sorority, fraternity-type group. And rather than just being simply an honorary, the group did university service projects and other things and had meetings as well, so it was an active student organization. And one of my responsibilities was to be advisor to Athenaeum. And after the university had been in existence for five year, and we had been eligible for accreditation during those five years, except for the fact that we weren't five years old, which was one of the requirements, there was interest in petitioning Mortar Board for affiliation, so that Athenaeum would become a Mortar Board chapter.

And one of my primary responsibilities was to shepherd them through that process. There was an application process where you filled out all kinds of things about the university, volumes in the library, and similar to the things that you would fill out, information required for Phi Beta Kappa affiliation. And then you'd have a visit from one or more officers of Mortar Board, who review your chapter and your institution. And then, if you meet all of the requirements, you're in. That virtually never happens, although we only had to go through that process once. They wrote us, and they said these were the deficiencies that they saw. We remedied those and reapplied the next year and then were accepted. And so, Athenaeum became the Athenaeum chapter of Mortar Board in 1972.

YG: And this was a gender-specific group?

LE: Yes. At the time, it was all women. Now it includes men.

YG: In preparing for this interview, something that you said jogged my memory that we talked about on the phone, which was the idea of fraternities and sororities at the University of South Florida. Can you tell me a little bit about the history of fraternities and sororities at USF?

LE: While I was not directly involved with those groups, I can tell you what I remember. In order for national fraternities and sororities to be on a campus, the institution must be accredited by its regional accrediting association. At that time, the requirement was that you had to be in existence five years before you could be regionally accredited. So during the first five years of its existence, local groups organized as prototypes for national

---

<sup>1</sup>The Athenaeum Chapter of the Mortar Board is the University of South Florida's scholastic honorary society for seniors. Although Athenaeum, one of USF's earliest student organizations, was originally only available to women, it is now open to women and men of senior class standing.

fraternity and sorority chapters. And there were both men's groups and women's groups. And once the university hit that magic, five-year mark, then the groups started looking at national fraternities and sororities with the intent to chose one to affiliate with.

And so in 1966 and '67, many of these groups, then, were being installed as chapters of national fraternities and sororities. I can remember, on one Saturday night, there were so many installation banquets, that in the student affairs area, we had to divide up. The dean of students went to one, the dean of women went to one, the dean of men went to one, and I went to one. And I can remember I went to Tri Delta, to their installation banquet and I had the opportunity to go to some others. Kappa Alpha Theta, when they were installed, I went to their installation banquet and gave the university response. And it was a very exciting time. But it was just happening so quickly. By the accreditation—the formal accreditation was one of those milestones that triggered more opportunities.

YG: And this was the accreditation of the university itself?

LE: Correct. By the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

YG: So prior to that, within those five years of being established, USF was not an accredited institution.

LE: That is correct, but we were in a unique category that said we met all accreditation standards except for age. So people were accepting our degrees, our graduates were still going to Harvard, being admitted to Harvard graduate school, and there didn't seem to be, certainly, in that day and age, any significant disadvantage to it. Things were less—I don't want to say less formal, but there was a little more latitude than there is today. If an institution is not regionally accredited today, it's a major disadvantage, and the students' degrees do not meet requirements, really, for admission to graduate school—you know just as any bachelor's degree would.

YG: Let's talk a little bit about natural disasters affecting the university. I've heard a lot of funny stories about flooding in particular buildings and the tornado that happened in—I think it was '66.

LE: I think so.

YG: Could you tell me a little bit about how the tornado affected the university?

LE: Well, I need to give you just a tiny bit of history. About a year before the tornado, construction was in process on campus. That was a fact of life at USF. More buildings would open every fall than you could almost visit. But construction workers cut a main cable to the campus. And every time it rained or we'd have bad weather, we'd have a power outage. And on this campus, as it existed then, virtually there were no classrooms that had windows. And when there was a power outage, classes had to be cancelled. And there was a big thing made of the fact, however, that no one could cancel classes except the president of the university. Of course, now, nobody can cancel classes unless it's authorized by the chancellor and the, then, board of regents.

So you didn't even have local authority to make that decision in the years following the inception of the institution. But back in those days, the president chose to have the authority to do that. And nobody else below him made that decision. Well, the tornado occurred, I believe, in the spring. And the dean of women and the dean of students were away at professional meetings in Washington, DC. The board of regents was meeting at the airport, so President Allen was at the airport. The dean of men, Charles Wildy, was en route to the airport to sit in on the board of regents meeting. I was getting ready to leave my apartment, which was on 15th Street, very near to the campus.

It was raining and blowing so hard that, when I walked out the front door, the wind blew me around against the door, and I was smack up against the side of the house, and I could hardly get the door closed to get back in. And then, of course, I was soaking wet, so I had to go and change clothes and start over. The pebbles were flying off the roof. Lights that were on poles out near driveways had been torn loose and were flying around, garbage cans, lawn chairs. I saw a door fly overhead. It was totally intact but just went flying overhead. I mean, coming from the state of Washington, I had no idea what was happening. Absolutely none.

Finally, I got a frantic call from the university, and it was the university operator saying, "The power is out on campus, and everybody is calling to see if we should cancel classes. Should we?" And I said, "Well, I can't make that decision. Only the president can do that." "Well, the president isn't here." I said, "Well, then you need to start down the line." Well, they tried everybody, and they got down to my level. And she said, "Somebody's got to make this decision," and I said, "Well, does the president always cancel classes when the power goes out?" And she said, "Yeah, as far as I know." I said, "Well, cancel classes, but don't ever tell anybody I told you to do it."

Eventually, I was able to get out of my driveway and come to the campus. There were fire trucks, police cars coming up Fowler Avenue toward the university. It was maybe a mile and a quarter on Fowler for me to drive. There were cars upside down and in ditches, and I thought, If these people couldn't see, I wonder why they didn't pull off the road. I had

no idea this was a tornado. I came into the campus, and when I walked into the office, everybody breathed a major sigh of relief because I was the only staff person, virtually, in the administration building because everybody else was caught en route or something had happened.

The wind had blown the roof off of one of the women's halls, so we needed to get students out of that hall and relocated somewhere else. All of the phones on campus where multiple lines came in were dependent on electricity to ring, so when the power went out, the phone didn't ring. And the only way you could tell whether or not you had an incoming call was to push the button down and pick it up and say, "Hello?" and see if anybody was there. So we knew we would have a lot of parents calling and wondering if their sons and daughters were okay. So one of the things I did immediately was to help get these people relocated. And then we set up some phone stations where every student was going to have an opportunity to call their families, first the relocated students and then the others, so that they could call home.

But it was just unbelievable. In the parking lots, trees had come down, cars had been blown so that there would be—I called it a tree sandwich—there would be a car with a tree in the middle, and another car had been blown on the top of that. So it was car, tree, and car. But not major damage to other buildings. There was a lot of rain, so there was some minor flooding, but the worst damage—except for fairly superficial damage to other places—was to that one residence hall. Faculty homes in the Carrollwood area, some of them were just totally destroyed to the ground. And the duplexes on 50th Street, what they used to call the Ward Duplexes, when you drove by, you could hardly tell anybody had ever lived there. They were just piles of kindling wood with little things that were totally untouched. There was a piece of wallboard that had a roll of paper towels—paper towel holder fastened to it, with the paper towel roll still sitting there, in the middle of rubble that was totally unidentifiable as a place to live. It was really unbelievable.

YG: How long did it take the university to recover from this?

LE: Well, it really wasn't long. They did some quick patchwork on the roof, so the students could move back into their dorm rooms fairly quickly. It was a little disrupted for a few days, and people talked about it for a long time, but it didn't raise nearly as much havoc as it might have. And I think the fact that the buildings were new, maybe they were stronger and withheld the winds better than if they had been old buildings.

YG: You mentioned President Allen. I assume you had some contact with President Allen. Can you tell me a little bit about him? What his personality was like? Who was John Allen?

LE: John Allen was a man with a vision. When I came here, John Allen knew every staff member on campus by name and most students. I probably hadn't been here two weeks, and if I passed him on campus, he'd say, "Hello, Linda, how are you?" He had the strong sense—it was his vision that built the university on the interdisciplinary study idea, the community idea. In those days, there was not a faculty senate and student government and A&P Council<sup>2</sup> and all of that. Whether there was community governance that included faculty, staff, and students in one body, he felt that students, did not benefit educationally from spectator sports, but rather benefitted from sports in which they participated.

So he said, "We will not spend our precious dollars on intercollegiate athletics as they are known on most campuses, and instead we'll emphasize intramural activities and facilities for student participation." Tennis courts, lighted tennis courts, Olympic-sized swimming pools, the golf course, eventually, the idea [was] that these were sports that students could participate in. He was tall and soft spoken, thoughtful. When he spoke, he had something to say, and was a wonderful person. I feel privileged to have been here when he was president. In fact, Dr. Genshaft is the first president that I haven't worked under.

YG: The idea of not having intercollegiate college sports, I'm sure, was an issue that a lot of people didn't understand, maybe, why John Allen did it. Was [sic] there opposing opinions to this philosophy?

LE: In the early years, I think not because I think the original faculty and staff bought into his concepts and supported those, as did the students. And the institution really wasn't big enough or established enough to support football as it was known then, say, at the University of Tampa or the University of Florida. But, periodically, there would be discussions, particularly about football. People wanted football. And as we got closer to the time President Allen retired, there was more—the interest in intercollegiate sports cropped up more frequently. He retired in 1970, I believe, and it had come up a number of times. He was also a very strong proponent of the fine arts, and he saw that kind of as a replacement for intercollegiate athletics. He felt we should nurture the arts, that this should be a place that showcased the arts. The fine arts building was one of the original buildings, you know, with the recital hall. And he was very supportive of the theater and the fine arts in general.

YG: In those early days, how did the larger community, the non-university community, feel about having the University of South Florida?

---

<sup>2</sup>The A&P Council has been reorganized since the time of this interview and is now known as Administrative Advisory Council, or AAC.

LE: Well, I don't think we were real popular with the community. Just prior to my coming, the Johns Committee<sup>3</sup> had been here to investigate. I don't know, really, what all they were investigating. I think they were looking for evidence of communism or homosexuality. The board of regents was very concerned, for example, after Fontana Hall<sup>4</sup> was built. The current judge, [Elizabeth A.] Kovachevich, federal judge, was on the board of regents at the time and I can remember her making a sort of off-hand comment about USF residence halls that went down in history. She probably didn't intend that. But she called them the taxpayers' warehouses. And we weren't exactly popular, I think, in the community in the early days because of those things. In fact, I think we suffered from not having really good community relations until Betty Castor came here. I think that's one of the things she did for USF. She mended the community fences, and now we get much more community support.

YG: After John Allen retired, we had Cecil Mackey. Can you tell me a little bit about Cecil Mackey? In particular, how different he was from John Allen.

LE: He, too, was a tall guy, kind of lanky looking but extraordinarily intense and high-energy. Going like a 12-cylinder job, 24/7. And what he did was—I think his mark on the university was to bring it back more like a traditional university. He disbanded the College of Basic Studies and established three colleges, the College of Arts and Letters, the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, and the College of Natural Science. And so, we got divided into colleges, basic studies requirements went away and got replaced by core requirements, but he was forward-thinking in many ways. He brought new people in: Joe Howell, Herb Wunderlich, who had been the dean of students. [He] also retired, I believe, in 1970.

And Joe Howell came as vice president for student affairs, a reorganization of the old dean of students, dean of men, dean of women structure. And it became non-gender specific and became student affairs, and you had a vice president for student affairs, an assistant vice president and assistants to the vice president for student affairs. And the vision in that time brought a lot of changes too and the people who came in at that time. I think Bert Hartley came [in] not long after Cecil Mackey did. I think Cecil Mackey had known him at Florida State [University] or somewhere. He was one of the people who came during that period of time. Dr. Riggs was here during that period of time.

---

<sup>3</sup>The Florida Legislative Investigation Committee (also known as the Johns Committee) was established in 1956. Similar to the investigative committees during the McCarthy period, the Johns Committee conducted wide-ranging investigations; they focused on academics, Civil Rights Movement groups, suspected communist organizations and homosexuals with an aim to expose what they believed to be subversive activities.

<sup>4</sup>Built in 1967, Fontana Hall was the first off-campus housing built for students. It was coed and had a liberal visitation policy at a time when USF dormitories did not allow coed visitation and did not offer coed dormitories.

So they all left their mark. From my perspective, one of the major developments that occurred early in Cecil Mackey's tenure was an idea that Joe Howell had; he wanted USF to have a summer orientation program. Now you can hardly imagine a college or university that doesn't have one because they all do. But at that time, we did orientation for new students—all new students—in the day or two before the term started. And they came, and they sat through hour after hour of speeches, and then they saw an advisor and registered for their classes, and that's the way it went.

Joe Howell was very eager to have students come in during the summer before classes started. To have a program for parents, so parents would have some understanding of the college experience and be familiar with the campus and have some idea of what their sons and daughters would go through, and to give the students an opportunity to be here and get acquainted so that when they came back in the fall, it felt familiar and comfortable, rather than this strange new place where they had to learn to find their way and do everything in two days among thousands of other students.

And Joe Howell talked to Cecil Mackey about that, and he said, "I support it." So, Dr. Howell talked to me about something like that. And in fact, in the summer of 1971, we did two parent dinners for parents of freshmen who lived in the Tampa Bay area. I said, "I think we can do that on a short—without much lead time." We sent out invitations to all the parents of accepted freshmen and invited them to come to one of two or three dinners that we had. And Joe Howell gave what has become known as his famous freshman experience speech.

He gave a speech that just sort of went down in history and, when he left, was modified and continued by Dan Walbolt, and I don't really know what they're doing now. But it really was one of those things that was a USF tradition, the freshman experience speech at the freshman parent dinner. But the following year, that fall, he sent me to Stillwater, Oklahoma, to meet with a small, not really formally organized, but a small group of colleges that had summer orientation programs, and that included the University of Michigan—let's see, Wichita State [University] and the University of Maryland I remember specifically. There weren't many.

There may have been eight or nine colleges represented, and most of them brought students who were involved in their program, so it made a mess of maybe 40 or 50 people total. And it was my first experience and introduction and opportunity to talk with people who had summer programs. Then, when I came back, he said, "Okay, develop a proposal for one at USF." So I did that, and after he agreed that it met the goals he had for it, he gathered together the college deans, Dr. Riggs, Mr. Hartley, every one, and he said, "Now, we want to do something different, and there's always resistance to change. So what I want to do is I want to talk to you to find out if you can support this because we're going to need your support, because we're not going to do it the way it's always been

done.”

So they all bought into that, and he said, “Go for it.” It was a major undertaking. But that following summer, the summer of 1952<sup>5</sup>, was the first program. Freshmen and their parents came for three-day, two-night sessions; they had the opportunity to stay in the residence halls. Parents could come to the full session, or they could come to the dinner only if they lived in the area, and they couldn’t stay for the full time. And then, we did five sessions for transfer students. You asked me earlier about our community relations. That was one of the programs that did good things for our community relations. At that time, Tampa had an evening paper called the *Tampa Times*.

And the night we opened, the first freshmen parent program, we had the lead editorial in the *Tampa Times*, and it was entitled, “Someone is doing something right at USF.” And I can remember Joe Howell was just absolutely walking on air. I was so busy, I didn’t have time to enjoy or appreciate it as much as I have in retrospect. But that was a big deal. And we were the first school in Florida to do a summer orientation. We were invited by the board of regents to do a presentation about the program. We had a freshman student, a parent, and some others who came and talked about their experience. And the board of regents thought this was the greatest thing since sliced bread and said all state universities in Florida shall develop a summer orientation program.

And since USF was new and kind of the step-child, Cinderella, of the state university system, that was a major coup for us and one of the things that Cecil Mackey supported. The program continues today. It was 30 years old, had its thirtieth anniversary last summer. While some changes have been made—they no longer call it FOCUS, they call it new student orientation—it survived, essentially, as we started it that first year. There are student leaders, students in small groups, all of the same things that we did, virtually, the first year. It was very exciting. I can remember Joe Howell told me, he said, “This may be one of the most significant things you ever do in your career.”

And when you’re doing it, you can’t see that. You think, Well, if this is the best I can do —. Because if you can do it, it doesn’t seem like that big a deal. But in retrospect, it was a contribution to the tradition, to the ongoing fabric of the institution, if you would, and something I’m really proud of today that I started. It was a ton of work. I can remember sitting up at night, trying to write the information packet. And one night, they said we might have a hurricane. And I tried to stay up to protect my papers because there were no copies. And I was so tired, I fell asleep, but I put the copies in four Ziploc plastic bags and put rocks on it and put it in my stairwell, hoping that would be a safe place, that it would survive if any storms came through.

---

<sup>5</sup>Erickson is more than likely meaning 1972 as USF was founded in 1956.

YG: This creation of the FOCUS program was while you were assistant to the vice president for student affairs?

LE: Correct.

YG: And you were assistant to the vice president between '71 and '73?

LE: Correct.

YG: Where did you go after that?

LE: Well, Joe Howell had another vision. Student recruitment was becoming an issue. USF had sort of always been in the situation [of] if we build it, they will come. And, in fact, they did. They poured in here in far greater numbers than had been projected when the institution was originally started. They thought we'd have 10,000 students by 1970. I think we had 10,000 students by 1966, very quickly. But by the early '70s, when there began to be some discussion about serving more students, more state universities were being built, there was a sense of more competition, funding was beginning, there was discussion of tying funding to enrollment, and equal opportunity was an issue.

So recruitment became something that the administrators were interested in and concerned about, and USF had never done this. And Joe Howell thought we ought to have a focus for new students, an office or department that would be responsible for recruitment and could take students from the point of contact, all the way through the new student orientation process, to where they were USF students. So this was another project that he sold. And, in fact at that time, [he] persuaded the administration that the admissions office should be moved from academic affairs and report to student affairs because it was really a very student-oriented thing.

And that we should establish a new unit called new student relations that would be responsible for recruitment and would address recruitment and needs of adult students, minority students, military veterans, honors students, as well as new freshmen. At this time, transfer students were addressed by the office of community college relations; that was already in existence. So, in fact, that office was established, and he asked me if I would be the director and told me, of course, I would take new student orientation with me as one of the responsibilities of the new office.

YG: I need to change the tape very quickly.

*Track 1 ends; track 2 begins*

YG: Okay. You were talking about new student relations. And what I wanted to ask you was in terms of why USF really felt the need, at this point in the early '70s, to start looking at recruitment issues as well as getting freshman students who were more qualified to come to the university. Was that even an issue?

LE: Yes, it was. In what used to be the *Tampa Times*, they did a *Tampa Times* scholar program. The *Tampa Tribune* does it now, where two or three outstanding students from every high school are selected, and out of those, a number of them get major scholarships, and they publish their photos in the newspaper, and they are high achieving students, and they all say where they're going to go to college. And USF wasn't getting very many of those freshmen. They were going out of state, to the University of Florida or Florida State [University], and we weren't getting many.

And Joe Howell wanted us to start making some inroads in getting our share of those students. And we were beginning to look at, instead of making everybody adapt to the university, trying to become a more user-friendly organization and place. And, for adults who had never gone to college or who had been out of school for 10 or 15 years and wanted to come back, what we offered for traditional freshmen or traditional aged transfer students really didn't meet the needs of those people. And we live in an area that has a large military base, and many of those military personnel have retired in the bay area.

And so, we wanted to work with them as well because veterans, some who want to use GI benefits or whatever, again, they have different needs and concerns than traditional age students who simply go from high school to college. And there was much more interest in minority student enrollment and in increasing minority student enrollment, so that was another one of the factors that went into that. So when I started that unit, I actually hired four people. I hired a mature student admissions officer; that was Lee Levingood, who now is in continuing education. I think she's still there. And one who was a veteran student admissions officer, Russell Burr, who was a veteran. A minority student admissions officer, who was George Robinson, and a freshman recruitment coordinator and director of orientation, who was Vicky Ahrens.

And so, that was basically the staff; she did both general freshmen recruitment and new student orientation. And it's interesting, I don't know if you're aware of the fact that senior citizens, now by state law, may come to universities as soon as registration is over. And if there's space in class, they can register to sit in on those classes. They don't get credit and a grade, but if there's space available, they can get into those classes tuition-

free, and that was one of the things that the office of new student relations spearheaded. Lee Levingood took the active, the key point, in getting that legislation passed. So that was one of the things we did in those days.

YG: In 1981, you became the first woman director of admissions.

LE: Yes.

YG: What were some of your major initiatives, as director of admissions? And what is the focus of a director of admissions?

LE: Well, this was a point in time when there was sort of another reorganization. It was very hard to do new student orientation and new student relations recruitment when we didn't have access to admissions records and admissions information because, if students called us, then we didn't know. And this was prior to the days of computerized records, so you would have to go to the admissions office, and ask them if they would look up a record for you and see where it was in the process, see if the test scores were there. You had to go through a file drawer and see if they were there. So there were just many things that it seemed like we could be more affective if we combined the recruitment, admissions, new student orientation process.

So that was an initiative of Dan Walbolt's, and indeed, that was supported. And in 1981, the former director of admissions retired, and I was appointed director of admissions. And I arrived in admissions with a brand new computerized admission system. The first they'd ever had, and of course, it didn't work. It admitted people who didn't meet the requirements and did all kinds of bizarre things. And in those days, really, people had so little experience with computer systems, they didn't know what to do when you put up a new system. And so they got it and then it didn't work. They hadn't done anything to modify how they did business so that the system was integrated into the workflow. Everybody tried to do what they used to do.

So trying to get that straightened out was a major focus when I first came here. The other major goal was to improve the student service. Admissions had kind of developed a reputation for being non-student friendly, and when I got there, I could see that there were some very concrete reasons for this. The person on the front desk and the person who answered the phone, for example, both had responsibilities for other things that had deadlines. So they had to make a deposit at the cashier's office, or they had to have a request for computer services filled out and in the computer center at a certain time. Well, as time is passing quickly, you're more interested in trying to finish the work to meet your deadline than you are in serving the student at the counter or on the phone. So we

did an entire analysis of the office and did some major, major internal reorganizing. We got the computer system, so it finally worked, and it was really an exciting time. I sort of thrive on cleaning up a mess and it was a giant mess, but it was a lot of fun, too.

YG: I'm sure when you started and you came here, obviously, USF didn't have computers, and now here you are, entering in the late '80s, and, all of a sudden, you're utilizing computers for admissions. What an amazing change you had seen.

LE: And there was so much resistance to that. I had no experience with them, nobody in the office had any experience with them, we were operating, in those days, on a mainframe. The mainframe took up an entire floor of the old library, which is now the student services building. I think the fourth floor was the computer floor, and it had about as much power, and maybe not quite as much, as the desktop I have at home. So we have seen amazing things, and we've learned so much in, golly, 40 years.

YG: How did it feel to be the first woman director of admissions? Was that something that people highlighted?

LE: Not so much at USF. I never felt discriminated against at USF because I was a woman. I heard that from colleagues at other universities but mostly at established universities. I was the first woman director of admissions in the state university system, and when I went to the state meetings, I was the only woman in the room. And it was a little intimidating at first. First of all, I had no experience in admissions; you have to understand, I came right out of a soft area, if you will, into this admissions requirements and making sure they met the requirements, admitting them, sending formal admissions letters and all of that.

And I didn't know a thing about it. And the staff in there knew I didn't, so I had to work really hard to win their respect and support and cooperation. We had a theme that was called, "work smarter not harder," because they all felt that they were overworked and underpaid, which is probably a situation everywhere, all the time, no matter what year it is. But it was really bad then, and they were doing things that allowed them to shoot themselves in the foot, if you will. And they just turned out, once we got all that turned around, to be an absolutely superb, student-oriented office that certainly carried through my tenure at the university. Just great with students, just a really good office.

YG: Your final position at the university was as the assistant vice president and university registrar from 1986 to 1996. What were some of your major initiatives? And I'm particularly interested in the university registrar side of it as well.

LE: Well, I got named to that position for the same reason, I think, I went to admissions. I arrived with a brand new computer system. The computer system had now migrated from admissions to student records. It had just come up and, of course, like every new system that we were bringing up, it was a disaster; it didn't work. And everybody was pretty frantic about the fact that transcripts weren't coming out accurately, et cetera. So was I, but they thought my experience in cleaning up the messes in admissions would help me in the registrar's office, and I was in the same situation. I had no experience in a registrar's office; I didn't know the business.

I didn't know their system because I hadn't been in on the planning and development of it, so I sort of had to learn all that from the ground up. And I had this wild idea that, if I just hired somebody to be responsible for it, I would never have to know. Well, that didn't work. So getting the computer system to work was a major focus there. At that time, we had learned that there was a very close alliance between admissions and the registrar's office. Some functions overlapped; many functions required close cooperation. And while new student relations and admissions—and then the admissions office, once new student relations merged with it—had reported to student affairs, the registrar's office had continued to report to academic affairs.

So they both reported to different vice presidents, and there was a great deal of—well, let me say, there was not a lot of cooperation and good will between the two staffs. So the decision was made to have the two offices have a coordinator, someone who coordinated both offices that both offices would report to, and both offices reported to the same vice president. So at that time, we then reported to academic affairs, and Greg O'Brien was the provost, and I was the university registrar and assistant vice president, and I reported to him. The university had grown rapidly and had outgrown the registration system that we were using.

We were registering students in a distributive processing environment on a machine called an 8100 that was not designed to handle 20,000 registrations and a million drop/adds. And the thing that had always bothered me most at USF were registration lines. I always said they were over the curvature of the earth, that whenever we were registering, the lines were so long, you couldn't see the end. And I felt we really did students a disservice by not providing better registration services. And at that point in time, telephone registration was just beginning to come into its own in a few places, just like orientation was starting back when I was assistant to the vice president for student affairs in '71.

This is, you know, 15 years later, and we're just getting to the point where telephone [registration] is coming in. I had been a strong proponent of that, but there were never funds available. So when they asked me to be the university registrar, I thought about it

long and hard because, you know, the higher you go, the harder you fall. And I thought we really needed telephone if we were going to start solving any of our problems. We had to make some forward progress, so I thought, I just don't think I can do that unless I have a commitment for telephone registration. So I told the people in student affairs and Provost O'Brien that I didn't think I could accept the position unless they could guarantee that they would provide for telephone registration. So they said they would.

And, in fact, we brought up telephone registration in 1989, not as quickly as I would have liked to, but the computer system demanded our early attention to get that operating first, and then to design a system that would work. And because I'd already had two experiences with disasters when we tried to bring up new systems, I was determined that I was going to use that experience and that that would not happen with telephone registration. We tested it from one end to the other in-house, and then we live tested it because you can never simulate all of those kinds of situations that happen in a registration process. And we brought students on in groups.

We brought graduate students first because they had fewer problems. The course permit problem wasn't such an issue with graduate students, and they didn't have linked courses, and there were just other things that made it easier for them. Plus, they all knew about registration; they were less uptight than undergraduates. So we sent a letter and invited them to participate in a live test of telephone registration, and we sent them the instructions. We sent them a schedule of classes and sent them an evaluation form and said, We want your honest feedback because this is not written in stone. We want to know if you encountered any problems. We want to know what was bizarre, what we need to modify, and I was amazed at how many people returned the evaluations.

And that did allow us to make some modifications. They said, for example, once you enter your social security number, the machine never comes back and confirms that it has your record, so they wanted us to do that. Some other little things like that. So we brought students on gradually, and it never failed. It never crashed. So that was really the start of what I think are much better registration services. Then my eyes were bigger than my stomach, and I wanted to have online registration, but that was really far-out because people hardly knew what the Internet was in those days, and people didn't own their own computers, everybody. And so, that was sort of a big leap. But everything comes full circle, and now that's available as well.

But telephone registration was another contribution, I think, I provided leadership for that I'm proud of and I'm glad I did. And by the time I had been there five or six years, the computer system worked. We were able to put in place enhancements that supported college needs and pretty much met everybody's requirements. We had a new facility, a new lobby for both offices to share at that time, to receive our student guests and prospective student guests in. And things were humming along. About 1995, with the

year 2000 coming up, it became clear that we either had to modify or have a new student record system because the old computer systems could not recognize the year 2000.

And the university decision, at that time, was made to have a new student record system, to create a new one if you will, and to buy a system and make minor modifications so it would work at USF. I was here through the process of the university selecting Banner<sup>6</sup>, and I worked on the preliminary planning and “spec’ing” of that system. When I thought about going through it all one more time, I said, “I think I’ve paid my dues.” And so, in October of ’96, I decided that I would retire. I was on a retirement plan that allowed you, once you had worked 30 years, you could retire with full benefits, regardless of your age. So I took advantage of that, and I’ve had a wonderful life since, as well.

YG: My final question to you: if you could leave a statement to either future faculty and students or previous faculty and students that you’ve worked with throughout the years, what would you want to say about the University of South Florida and your role in the University of South Florida? If you could leave a final thought, if you will.

LE: I hope the university can continue to reinvent some small sense of the community that USF had in its early days, where people discussed but respected different opinions, where they were willing to help one another, people were friendly, even if you passed someone you didn’t know, you would speak. I think that that quality that the university had then would be worthwhile to carry into the future. It’s a wonderful place, and I feel privileged to have been a part of it and, hopefully, I’ve made some contribution to its future.

YG: Linda, thank you very much.

LE: You’re welcome.

***End of Interview***

---

<sup>6</sup>Banner by Ellucian is an administrative software application developed by Systems & Computer Technology specifically for colleges and universities.