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Yael Greenberg (YG): Today is Friday, July 11th, 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 Tampa campus library, with USF faculty, students, staff, and alumni, in order to commemorate 50 years of university history. Today, we will be interviewing Margaret Fisher, who came to USF on September 1st, 1960, as the director of women's affairs. In 1975, Margaret retired as assistant to the vice president for student affairs and professor of interdisciplinary studies. Throughout the course of her tenure at USF, Margaret had over 13 titles. Good morning, Margaret.

Margaret Fisher (MF): Good morning to you.

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.

MF: Well, I think we've got most of that on another videotape. But, to encapsulate it, I was pinned to the US Office of Education for a research and evaluation job in the Bureau of Higher Education and was sort of loafing around Washington. I had just left Hampton Institute, which is now Hampton University. And I had been there for two years on the workup to becoming a full service university, from being a four-year school. So I was sort of loafing around Washington and enjoying friends in the offices of my representatives from the State of Texas: Lyndon Johnson and Homer Thornberry. One morning, I got a call from Max Wise, who was at student affairs in Gainesville and a friend of mine, longstanding.

He says, “Why don’t you come down here?” And I said, “Well, I’ve been avoiding that university.” And he said, “Oh, come on. Look at it at least. You won’t believe it.” So that’s how I came down, visiting. I met Howard Johnson, who was the dean of students then; and Sid French, who was in basic studies; and Russ Cooper, whom I had worked with in the Association for Higher Education for a long time; and other distinguished persons; Clyde Hill, over in facilities. So I went back and got unpinned and came down, and I’ve been here ever since.

YG: Why were you hesitant to come down to Florida and to see the university? What kinds of things had you heard about the university?

MF: Well, I was very excited about the plans for the university. I had heard a lot about it in the Association of Higher Education. And I knew how they were going about the planning. I was very leery about coming to Florida because I was aware of the political instability, which was characteristic of this state, and a state university in Florida was not really attractive. I had good friends in Marna Brady and Katherine—whose name now escapes me—at Florida State [University]. And Marna Brady was at [University of] Florida, and they gave the institutions and particularly the students’ good marks. And I was sort of impressed.

Max Wise was just leaving Florida and going up to Teacher’s College. And he said, “You know, it’s not as bad as it looks. On the inside, it’s not bad. It’s just the politics. It’s not well designed and coordinated.” Well, you know, being from Texas, [I thought] it may not be all that bad. And when I came and got a look at it, I was really impressed with the kind of planning and the design, particularly for interdisciplinary programs, which had been my interest ever since I was an undergraduate at the University of Texas, where I was in Plan II for the BA Degree in Honors program. I was in the first class to go through that.

So, along the way, students were in on a lot of the brainstorming, and the planning, and the forward-looking on the development of the programs. So I had gotten interested in that approach, in that particular design, at a very early age and still. And that was what really attracted me here. That, and the fact that there were people whom I had known—John Allen, Russ Cooper, Sid French—whom I had high regard for and had worked with as colleagues off and on in a professional association.

YG: Before we talk a little bit about those wonderful people that you first met here, I want to talk a little bit about, since we are approaching the 50th anniversary of the University of South Florida, the ways that universities determine their birthdays.

MF: (laughs)

YG: Can we talk a little bit about that?

MF: Well, how'd you all do it for this project?

YF: We determined—we go from 1956 to 2006.

MF: Oh, yeah. Well, I think that's a good, sound, defensible way to do it. And I'm very pleased to be a member of the class of '56. As a matter of fact, I was the first honorary alumn[a] that the alumni association picked. They honored me in that way when I retired. And that sets—this is how they chose to honor people who were in at the creation. And I think being present at the creation is—and if you know the date of the creation and don't have to argue about it, you know, you don't have a Bishop Ussher¹ who's made some preposterous choice.

This is a date, which is known, and it's writ on paper, and is in state archives, engraved, for all I know, on a cornerstone. I've never seen a cornerstone around here. But did I remember? But I think it's a good, defensible date. There are others—my alma mater, the University of Texas, picked 1883 as the date because that's when it finally opened. But it was actually chartered in 1836 in the Constitution of the Republic [of Texas]. And then, of course, you get a new constitution in 1845, and then you get another new constitution after the Civil War, and another new one in 1883, which is when they finally got the university open.

So they had about six or eight different dates to pick from if you came right down to it. In the meantime, there was another university, a private one, which had been chartered but never opened, called the University of Texas. So we had that same problem here at USF in naming it because they was a thought of—they were always looking to the South and wanted to call it Pan-American University. There was a diploma mill down in Ybor City that was operating, so that sort of went by board (??). So you have, the two most popular dates are the charter date—the date you got your charter from the state government—or the date of the first classes, or the date of the first commencement.

There are some who say that you have this gestation. And there was this thought, too, that they would first start at USF with a freshman class and work up, and there were too many people here who wanted to come in and complete a degree they'd started, so we had to open with a full program. So those are the principal ones, and you can always have a lot

¹Despite his many accomplishments, Bishop James Ussher (1581-1656) is most remembered for fixing the date of creation as midday on October 23, 4004 BCE, based upon his interpretation of the Bible.

of argument among historians about what is the true anniversary. I'm glad that's one thing we don't have to argue about at USF, some indubitable date.

YG: Margaret, can you tell me, the first time you saw the university campus, what did it look like? And what did the immediate, surrounding areas of the campus look like? Fowler Avenue, for example.

MF: Well, I'm sure you have this same impression from everybody who came here from anywhere else. It was just scrub land, sandy land. And I thought about that old song, you know, (singing) Raise good taters in sandy land. / Oh ladies, fare thee well.

And I was ready to fare thee well, you know? (laughs). It's an old square dance song, and I thought about that, looking at the campus. I thought maybe that ought to be the university anthem.

YG: In this scrub, desert-like land, could you get a sense of the excitement of building a new university? Was there this vision from the beginning that this was just going to be the beginning, and this wasn't just going to be the be-end of all?

MF: Well, you know, for sons and daughters of pioneers and the grandsons and granddaughters and great-grandchildren, why this is a real inspiration. Yes sirree. That's what we're here for, is to make this desert bloom and to put a fine university—the very first, finest type, the first water. The first water had just been flooded out when I got here. I just missed a great inundation. So I took that into account, too, when I went to buy a house. I wanted one where the driveway went up, and I lived in that house for 40 years.

I never regretted picking that place because there was high water. I had cousins in Sarasota who used to refugee up to my house. Then they moved up here to St. Pete. They're down by the bayou over there, Spring Bayou. And they would refugee over here because I was high water. I'd come home dripping wet, you know, and having got the university all shut down and making sure everything was copacetic, and here would be two adults, three children, and two large dogs in my two-bedroom house. Well, the Fishers are the kind of family where you accommodate. We are used to having drop-ins, and we take people in and enjoy the confusion and the coping and all of those things. So I think, you know, Westerners particularly expect things to come out all right. You know you're going to have a miserable time, but that doesn't matter.

YG: In September of 1960, wasn't there a hurricane?

MF: Yeah. Wasn't much of one. Well, really, it was. It was a pretty strong one, but oddly enough, we had very little damage. I think the worst thing was, there was a door in the University Center that was broken. The sand had scoured the glass clean, so you couldn't see it, and Sid French was talking to somebody and just ambling along, going to lunch, and walked into it and cut his nose and cracked the glass.

YG: You mentioned the idea of the university going through—prior to becoming USF—ideas for names. Who came up with the idea of the University of South Florida?

MF: Well, as I've said, Allen. Dr. Allen had to make most of the decisions. Oh, about the hurricane, I was going to tell you, there was some more damage. And I think I put this in the book. I don't remember. Anyway, unbeknownst to us, it opened up a sinkhole at the corner of what's now the Marshall Center, then the University Center. I asked Clyde Hill, the facilities director and the campus engineer, about the cracks in the terrazzo, as I had noted one over by the water fountain.

And he looked at it, and as he looked, it went, "ka-zook!" And he got up and decamped quickly. They had a dragline² out there. In just an unbelievably short time that they brought in from where the golf course is now. They were digging some peat out. Got that all here in jig time and saved the building. It was about to slide in, that whole corner of it, anyway. Well, he got called to book by the Office of Administration of the State of Florida because he didn't bid the job out. It was on that dragline. That was more than \$5,000, so he should have bid it out. He had no right to do it himself, with our own equipment.

YG: This is Mr. Hill?

MF: This is Mr. Hill. And I think he was still answering that charge when he retired.

YG: Let's talk a little bit about your first meeting with John Allen, the first time you met him, first impressions of John Allen.

MF: You know, I don't remember very much about that first meeting. I met with the administrative staff. It was a group meeting. I liked him. And I knew him. I already had my impression and was not at all surprised, I guess. So it doesn't really stand out in my mind. It was just fun to be in there and work with him.

²A dragline is a kind of excavator used in surface mining and civil engineering.

YG: From those early days and working with Dr. Allen, could you get a sense of his vision of the University of South Florida? What was his vision in those early days?

MF: Oh, it was quite clear that this was to be a university of the first class, which is not to be mistaken with first class university. He wasn't thinking about the rating scale but about the program, that it should be a full-service university, that it should be closely tied to the community, that it would be rooted in the community, and also have strong ties throughout the university world, not only in this country but worldwide. That is, he was like most us in the charter class, we thought very much in terms of belonging to a community of scholars, the community of persuasion that we used as our context for life and work.

And that gives us a sounding board; it gives us a context where we can check our interests and our ideas with one another and keep reasonably on course and make reasonably good sense. You know, you say this is nebulous. Well, it's not because it has real, concrete form. When I go to supper with Grace Allen and Miriam Hill and June Miller and other people over at John Knox Village, we are [a] visible community of scholars, you know. And there are other colleagues and other people from the profession, whom we just instantly belong together. Whether we like each other or not, we belong to the same totem, and they are people whom I regard as helpful when it comes to making sure I'm not way out in left field somewhere and about to do something that would do harm, or be foolish, or all of the above.

YG: In terms of challenges in those early, formative years, what were some of the major challenges that you think that Dr. Allen had to go through in order to facilitate his vision?

MF: I think you really ought to ask—I wish you could ask Allen about that, or ask Grace. You know, I tell you, when I look at history, I don't think so much about challenge and confrontation and conflict. I think more about growth, and (inaudible). That just doesn't fit into the universe of metaphor and analogy that I think easily in. And I don't think in terms of courts of law. I'm more interested in communication networks and things of this sort. I think the things that really disturbed and disrupted the community here are well known and have been gone over and over and over, until they're almost stale, like the Johns Committee³.

In general, I think what was happening and the difficulties that keep coming up, and they repeat—they come again and again—have to do with the development of the university itself. There are two ways that we think about organization that are incompatible. And, of

³The 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.

course, you can use several other approaches, but the ones which seem to create confusion and turmoil are a notion of a bureaucratic structure and a hierarchy of power, and the other [is] more developmental, growth-oriented approach. Allen, of course, was growth-oriented.

This was a growing, organic institution, and he was very clear about that. And he encouraged us to take that approach. As a matter of fact, what worked here worked when we stopped this notion that it takes time and that you have freedom to change. And you have to be thinking ahead, and adapting, and take a planning posture, and a growth posture because the projections were quite clear that this university was going to have to be—there was going to have to be another university in Florida, which was a full-dressed, national research university. We had a national mission. This was quite clear. Whether people in Florida all supported this concept or not, I don't know.

But we were very conscious, at that point, of the national needs because this university was planned and developed in an over-all plan for expansion of the system of higher education. The entire system of education in the United States, which cranked up with the National Planning Act of '45 in the Roosevelt-Truman administration. So this was definitely a work of a developmental nature and a growth and the outlook for growth and planning and all the things that go with it: experimentation, evaluation, feedback, trial and error. And this is not tweaking your regulations. This is not a bureaucratic notion of, you know, you've got a square peg, you put it in a round hole, you tweak it a little, and it'll fit. You don't have, really, a construction and certainly not a trial or challenge orientation. I think this is an example, the way that Allen treated the Johns Committee⁴. He was reluctant to pay any attention to them at all.

YG: Why?

MF: Oh, because they were doing their thing, and they were not investigating the university; they were after—goodness knows what. Just a snipe hunt, I think it would've been a snipe hunt if the university had gotten into it or let them go into it. But what the American Association of University Professors chapter recommended, and Allen agreed to it, and the deans also were of one mind, that the only place we'd be comfortable with this type of operation was to have it out in the sunshine and invite them to campus. And this is consistent with his approach. These are people whom you welcome into your institution as interested parties, as a guest, and if they have a lawful mission, you facilitate it to the extent that you're required to by law at least. And you do not go beyond

⁴The Florida Legislative Investigation Committee, often called the Johns Committee, was established by the Florida legislature in 1956. The Johns Committee conducted investigations of potentially subversive academic activities, Civil Rights Movement groups, and attempted to eliminate members of the LGBT community from public education.

the limits. I think that that outlook of growth and the organic view of the university is what made the place work. And that was quite clearly Allen's view and the dean and the entire cadre that planned the university.

YG: Let's talk a little bit about the book that you and, I believe, Russell Cooper wrote together, or co-wrote.

MF: Yeah, I wish we had been able to write together.

YG: How did the idea of writing the vision of a contemporary university come about?

MF: Well, when Cecil Mackey came in, there was a discussion about having a 20th anniversary from '56 and ending in '71. Somehow or other we got the notion that in '76, we ought to have the 20th anniversary party. I wish I had brought the cartoon that I have on my wall. It was used in the *Oracle*, which was for its annual literary supplement and news summary, and it shows a 20th birthday cake with President Mackey standing on it and Carl Riggs as the vice president—the academic vice president—and I'm standing on it. And I'm the only one that's eating cake; everybody else is trying to keep the icing from melting and running down. And there are symbolic students, and the *Oracle* editor is calling for a forklift, crane, cherry picker. It's a funny cartoon.

But when the university organized and Dr. Cooper stepped down as dean of the liberal arts college, Mackey asked him to assume responsibility for writing the university history through the first 20 years. And unfortunately, Dr. Cooper died before he completed it. And long, about '78 or '79, I was asked to see about finishing it up and to look at it. The plan was very neat and easy to follow, and I said I'd do it. It didn't quite work out the way I'd hoped, but it was pretty good. If I were doing it over, I would take much more time on the business side and the construction that was sort of scanted. I don't think Dr. Cooper had particularly planned to drill on that, and he didn't do that.

It was a history of the colleges, but I think it would've been a helpful addition. And also, the operation and the people and the achievements in the career service and administrative area deserved a lot more treatment than they got. I found what he'd been getting into and what I had to work with in the time [that] I had to work. It had to be pretty much vision-centered and to give examples of the beginnings of realizing, of giving it shape. I'm looking forward to the 50th anniversary work. It's going to be much more interesting, and of course multi-media, that's great stuff.

YG: Let's talk a little bit about Russell Cooper. Can you tell me a little bit about Russell Cooper? What was his vision? Was it similar to John Allen's vision?

MF: Well, I think, yes. This was true pretty consistently in the first deans. They took an organic view of the university, and this was pretty well—I think this was pretty much of a consensus in those days in the American system of higher education. I know in the Association of Higher Education and in the National Association of Women Deans and the Personnel and Guidance Association, this was pretty common understanding, that we were not just—it was not just a matter of constructing and spreading out geographically and going upward, but this was a matter of organic growth and development, change, and a multiplication of types of institutions, for instance.

And they were very much aware of, Cooper was, of community, of different communities and of the interaction between communities of persuasion and local, residential communities. That is, where you live in Tampa, you couldn't fail to be aware of communities of persuasion of all kinds—particularly the manifold of persuasions and interests and subject matter and fields of study and so on, that are represented in the university because you don't have to leave home to go get in touch with people who are engaged in another geographic area[s] but working on a similar problem where there's got to be some geographic connection and time connection. So I think Cooper was particularly concerned about conflict resolution. He was very much one to get things in the open.

When we had the to-do about the Vietnamese [Vietnam War] protests, and we had a festival of life move in on a peace march, which had been scheduled over on the soccer field, Cooper took charge of the training, mustering and training the marshals to keep order on the field and that kind of thing. He was in international studies. He and I had both studied with James Shotwell, who was a very fine professor of international law at Columbia University. So we often spoke of Shotwell and of the kind of issues which were coming up: the reorganization of the United Nations, the changes in the progressive development since the League of Nations and on. Of course, Shotwell's studies were seminal there and traced, really, the very constructive course of international organizations and development of international law. A lot of people seem to have forgotten that this is not, you know, just a power play and a bureaucratic construction.

This is something—these are institutions which have grown. He was very much into institutional development. And this sounds strange because he was, what has science, and what has English, and what has foreign language got to do with this kind of—but these are ways of getting into the principal notion of advancing the knowledge and the useful applications there, which was his main concern and his dedication. He was a good man to work with. Some of his colleagues used to say that he tried to run this place like a YMCA camp. But if it comes to this sense of place, and of freedom, and of play, and the aesthetic

side, and the enjoyment of working together, and of studying, and of exploring new ideas, and working with new people, and watching people and institutions grow; that was his approach to his work, and a very good one too.

YG: When you came here in 1960, you came in as the director of women's affairs—

MF: (laughs)

YG: —which ultimately became the dean of women.

MF: There were two schools of thought about titles at this time. And, with the expansion and lots of new patterns of organization, the old titles just didn't seem to go. Of course, you had a choice of titles. I suggested that we might go the Vassar route where you had wardens, and I had an unpleasant run-in with a warden, myself, as a guest who had taken a couple of students out for dinner. We were delayed by a hurricane, which didn't sit well with the warden at Vassar. But that's another story.

I suggested that we might adopt that title, you know, and we could all be wardens in student affairs since nobody thought we were scholarly people and had no business being in a university in the first place. There was a very strong anti-counseling, anti-student personnel movement at that time. It was often motivated by budgetary considerations, so we had a lot of trouble with titles. But you get new types of jobs, and you get a—gosh, we could have used Mary Anne Moore to think of poetic names for them, could've probably used her eight hours a day, nine days a week.

YG: What does a director of women's—?

MF: I was the second rank behind Johnsoy, and he had a very large, generous, active sense of humor and a very sharp wit. So we tried—I said, let's use Latin. So he had a copy of the *Pseudepigrapha Academica*, and I've never found another copy. I would love to have one, but it went with him. We went into that trying to find suitable, and they all turned out to be remarkable epithets with strange and esoteric references, so we gave up on Latin. But the main schools of thought, then, about titles was that they should be functional, so that you say what you do. Well, this is fine, if you've got some sort of a contraption to run or if you have a location that you're in, fixed location.

So you have an address, but what Johnsoy and I came up with, and we convinced Allen, was that there was no really—dividing by sex was kind of silly because everybody should

be concerned about the advancement of women and the advancement of men equally. So that this was not a matter for sexual division of labor. But we went with it because that was what everybody else was doing. My opposite number, the men's affairs, didn't arrive; he died probably in a flash flood on the way here. So we went with director of student affairs. There was a dean and a director, and this didn't fit—I don't think I can recite all 13 titles that we tried on for size. But eventually when—Johnsoy left after the Johns Committee was here. He was not at all comfortable with the kind of interference with students' lives that he saw here.

And when Herb Wunderlich came in, who was then vice president, they boosted everybody a rank. This was just one of those things about being a new university. You know, you weren't like all the others. You didn't have any vice presidents; you had deans, and then you had directors, and then they boosted us all in '62 when everybody admitted we were going to be accredited. It was obvious that we were going to be accredited and that we were going to grow outside of anybody's expectations. So that's when, for want of a better approach, we went back to the old division of labor. And, as Johnsoy pointed out, this does at least give people an address. You know, you don't know who to go to and where and you're thinking who.

It's easy to think either you want somebody who is like you and you'll feel comfortable, or you want somebody who is not like you so that you may be able to put something over on them. So either you want somebody who you think has an understanding or somebody who doesn't. You have a choice. The important thing was to have a choice, and the jobs, of course, were assigned functionally. And I used to say they stripped jobs off of my job description like skin off a banana because we opened and expanded other offices. So what happened that first year was that Johnsoy and I split financial aid. He took most of those, which were pretty straightforward. I took the tough ones and the minority ones. The people would call it integration then; now we call it diversity.

And so, I took most of the residue and served on the academic standards committee, and we split the financial aid jobs. I was doing a program planning for counseling, particularly in vocational development and placement, which was sort of farmed out to personnel services and co-op and things like that. We just sort of did all the stuff, functional stuff and kind of divided it where, actually I took most of the day-to-day operation, and he was then doing the ongoing design and policy development. Of course, this meant we were back and forth and around and around all the time. But functional titles were a little hard to think up, particularly in top administration. And then, there was always, of course, you don't want the student personnel administration. It's froth. It's icing on the cake; you don't really need it.

YG: When Cecil Mackey came in as president of the University of South Florida, certainly his style was different, his way that he went about doing things was different, and his vision was different. How did that shake up the university?

MF: Well, I don't know that his vision was different. It was stated in a different form. But his approach was more bureaucratic and hierarchical, or at least that was our impression. And he really was structural. He wanted to get the table of organization straight when, of course, with people with dual appointments, we were sort of all over the map and wouldn't stay put. And you'd put a box in, but then, here you have this person in all these boxes over here. It didn't bother us as long as it didn't overflow the hours in the day and the days in the week. As far as getting the boxes all in the right place, and who supervised who, and who answered who, when actually you kind of have to answer to everybody all over the lot. And the art of making carbon copies is essential to develop.

We were just not in good shape, so we were dragged into good shape. Also, there was the bit about, he was—well, of course, this was the time when people were getting rid of student publications because they were often critical of the administration and because they also took on issues such as war and peace, and economic fairness, and poverty and riches, and all of the dilemmas. If you find a contradiction in terms, you'd find a pair of opposites. You create a dilemma and then you go at it with a hammer and tongs. This was very stylish back in the late '60s and the '70s. This is one of the contradictions in the design of universities because we assume you have a bureaucratic structure with grades and a hierarchy of authority, when you actually are working with a network or an organic something or other with an extensive nervous system connected all over the lot.

And so you start putting a structure where you're thinking nervous system, or acting like an organic entity with a highly sophisticated central nervous system, and then you get this structural ladder thing imposed on you. It's kind of hard to combine them. And this was, I think, what sort of got people at odds with Mackey. First of all, [he] was trying to eliminate things, and this was beginning, too, of the privatize stuff movement. He appeared to be right in tune with the business of getting the university out of things which we regarded as valuable and helpful for survival.

And we were accustomed to doing them ourselves, and having colleagues who were doing them for us, who we knew. It just didn't set well; it didn't ring true to the kind of work we'd been accustomed to do. But the power plays were very much to the fore; this, of course, was a salient question in the split-up of the liberal arts college because if you had four colleges, you'd have more power. You'd have more people on the dean's council, so you could weigh heavier against all these other people who are not the core of the university. And, of course, the liberal arts college is always a problem to administer because it's going to be the largest college in the university because this is where the growth comes and where students are growing up and coming up to speed, if you will.

If you look at this as a journey, they're the ones who can fall in and keep up the pace, which is one of the great visions that you have in higher education. The view of life as a journey and the active life, particularly as you're going someplace and getting somewhere. You think of milestones; this is planning mode. You think of goals and milestones and a whole crew's journey. And that was hard for some people around here to get used to, and a lot of the faculty, of course—this was common sense; this is how you organize things. You have a structure, and you can put it on a chart. On the other hand, here we were, very busily in administration learning how to do flowcharts and how to help students learn how to plan a course of study with alternatives and how to connect them with the university mission or don't. And there was a lot of clash and clangor around.

YG: I'm going to change the tape real quick, Margaret, and let you take a break.

Track 1 ends; track 2 begins

YG: Okay, we're back. We just changed our tape, and Margaret, you had mentioned something in the break about the storm.

MF: Oh, yes. The tornado of 1966, I think. I had a student call the other day to find out whether it was '65 or '66, and we were under tornado watch at the time when she called. (laughs) I thought she was talking about the impending storm, not the one that was back when she and her husband were approaching graduation. But, speaking of the difference between the bureaucratic structure, and who is supposed to talk to who, and who is answerable to who, and who is responsible for action and where it goes, the original organization of the university, it's still there. The responsibility went to the scene of the action, and then you referred up because referring up also meant, if you had to refer out, that's the way it would spread. What this meant, in the early days, was that the switchboard operators—do you remember switchboard operators?

YG: No, ma'am.

MF: You've never seen a switchboard?

YG: Oh, I've certainly seen a switchboard.

MF: You've seen a switchboard, and you know what fun it is to operate. Well, the switchboard operators really fulfilled the obligation of referral from one office to another. And you could very often count on them. Say, if you were out in the community somewhere and needed to get a message in and nobody was in, they would keep trying for you while you went on about your business. They'd pass it along. And, of course, in emergencies they were the first ones fielding calls from the community. This was the case one morning when I was in Washington [for an] Association of Higher Education meeting and had gone with Lucille Faus, the head of Epsilon Hall, the resident instructor over there.

And we had moved Miss Dickey, Earline Dickey, from Gamma Hall over to Epsilon to cover for her while we were—we were gone about two weeks. There was a whole series of meetings. So the last thing we said to Miss Dickey was, "Just keep the roof on. That's all we ask." Well, comes this tornado that tore up Carrollwood, and I think Grace Allen may have told you about that because they lived out there. The switchboard operators, of course, were aware of an approaching storm because they, very early, started getting calls, "Is the university going to be open?" So they tried the president and couldn't get through. There were lines that couldn't even get the phone to ring.

Any of the deans and administrators mostly lived out in Carrollwood and [the operators] couldn't raise anybody, couldn't get hold of Mr. Hill in Temple Terrace. The one person they could get hold of was the assistant dean of women, Linda Erickson, who retired recently as registrar and vice president for whatever the rest of that title was—the functional part. So they asked her, "What should we say? You're the only one we can get a hold of." And she said, "Well I think, if Dr. Allen were here, he'd close the university for the day. So why don't you go ahead and tell people it's closed? And I'll get up there and see what can be done at campus." She started out the door, and the wind flung her back up against the side of the house. She was soaked.

She had to go in and change everything from the ground up and started out again with full foul weather gear. So she was in charge of the university for a while, until things sort of got straightened out and some people began to straggle in. But this was how the university worked, the kind of way that you couldn't put it on organizational charts. You wanted the first person you could find. You went down the chain of command, but the first person you could get hold of did their best. You were accustomed to role shifts regardless of rank, and this business of career ladders was coming to the fore in those days because of the fair employment practices act and the equal opportunity act and so on, so that we were very busy reclassifying jobs and making sure that we had a career ladder and all these kinds of things.

But I'm getting this mixed up with the way the university worked. The way people work together is a perennial problem and always has been and because of this there is a place

where these two things clash, and you get inharmonious operations in the university. Things that you now call “issues,” and you don’t resolve them that way; you resolve them by people looking at the situation and saying, Well, let’s get together and do the best we can. And I think Mackey really depended on this infrastructure, which was really very solid in accomplishing this reorganization, so that the university looked like the others and had some uniformity.

YG: In terms of presidents that stick out in your mind at the university, who were some of the presidents that really stick out in your mind in the history of the university?

MF: You know, I have enjoyed the presidents, all of them. Harris Dean, who was acting president before Mackey got here. [He] was always a joy to work with. He was a bit of an entertainer too; he could always be counted on to think of a suitable song and maybe sing it, if we ran into some difficult situation that was hard to describe or cope with. And, of course, Carl Riggs was a delight. I enjoyed Cecil Mackey. I really liked him a lot. He was good to work with, fun to work with. Although, I was not at all in sympathy with the way he was reorganizing. But John Lott Brown had his own style, and he had very good logic. And he was another one who was very comfortable with and very firmly grounded in an organic view. Borkowski took a musical view.

He liked things in tune, in time, together, and also, he had the idea that life was supposed to be—well, the *joie de vivre* that he brought to this university was just much, much needed. Because we kind of got to where we were feeling like we’d been dragged at the tail of a cart and hung up wet. We’d just been through the mill; we were just tired of this slogging along and having to cut budgets and make bricks without straw and all these awful things that you have to cope with, this nutty state that we got dropped into, you know. So Borkowski was really a great breath of fresh air. I think all of them, in turn, kept the momentum; the university kept its momentum, and they didn’t do anything to impede it. I think every one of them gave us a good shove and contributed a lot to, of course, the growth. But I’ve enjoyed every one of them.

Betty Castor, I told her I wished she wouldn’t take the presidency because I felt we needed her in the State Department of Education to stabilize the whole thing and to get the university system ringing consonant with the rest of the enterprise. But she did a good job for us, and I enjoyed working with her. And she did such a good job with community relations in all of its geographic dimensions and governmental directions, particularly. And, of course, it’s been fun watching Judy Genshaft. She enjoys that job. And I think this is what counts. I think every one of them has enjoyed the university and has enjoyed their work. If you’re going to work in higher education, you kind of have to enjoy getting up and going to see what’s going to happen next. I don’t know of anything to match it, for giving you infinite variety from day to day. You never know what’s going to come up.

YG: What are you most proud of in your tenure at the University of South Florida?

MF: I don't really feel that I have very much ground for pride. I think I used to say, when asked, I was proud of the trees that we planted in the quad. But they kind of got overshadowed by those paths we've got out there now. But that was, really, one of the first things where you got an all-university enterprise. And I was always getting socked with these responsibilities. I don't know why. I think it was because it was the closest place to park them that wasn't interrupting instruction on the part of the faculty. But I got, of all things—I loathe fairs, and I don't like to go to large, crowded places. And Busch Gardens leaves me cold. (laughs) But the president asked if I would be so kind as to set up the exhibit at the state fair in 1961, the spring of '61. And so, I did it.

But it was an all-university enterprise because, the first thing that happened, they told us we were going to have a booth there where we could show the books and the exhibit catalogues and recruit. And then all of a sudden, we get about six booths, which is the equivalent of a classroom, practically. So we had an all-university enterprise. We changed exhibits every day, every department, every field of study had an exhibit. And some of them were so popular that we kept them throughout the 10 days of the fair, two weeks. One was the Gestalt apparatus, where you look at a mirror and draw a star, but you can't see directly.

And another was a volcano, and then we brought the theater in about the fourth or fifth day, and they stayed through the rest of it. And then we had the closed-circuit TV on from day one, and we planned to keep that, and we were glad we did. But everybody did something, and I was reprimanded severely because we were trumpeting our concern for the natural needs of the students by using paperback texts. All of our texts were going to be paperback texts, as far as they were available. And almost all of them were particularly in the liberal arts college, and we had a set of textbooks in bookcases there. And about half of the ones for the coming term had been removed from the shelves. I was sorely criticized for that, "Hmph, cost of—write it off as advertising!" But this was viewed dimly.

But then, the next thing I got was so successful. You see, come March, I get in charge of planting the trees because, of course, we don't have the budget to hire people to come in and plant trees. We had some physical plant people, and we had the trees over where the golf course is now. They'd been heeled out: little elms and oaks. I was told I was so good at this. So it was an all-university enterprise. We had volunteers, students and faculty, and, by this time, we had a fledgling student government. They recruited students. Everybody got out there. I remember Nancy McGillavry and I were in the same hole, and I had to do some time teaching her to fling the sand to leeward. She simply couldn't get the idea of throwing it downwind. Good Lord!

So I had an eye full of sand every once in a while. Windy day, blowing cold, you wouldn't believe [it]. And, of course, we had eats later on, over in the cafeteria. People came around with donuts and coffee. But we planted the whole lot in that whole strip between where the new library was rising. Where the old library is—the student services center—that whole length, clear down to the fine arts building. We put in all of those trees on both sides of the sidewalk, both sides mall in one day. We had a little forklift that ran around, brought the trees. When we got the hole deep enough—my knees have always been unsatisfactory. I have trouble climbing. Somebody would come around and help me climb out of the hole, then we'd get the tree in there and go back in. Oh, it was scientifically done.

I have no idea how many people we had working, but it was plenty, and we didn't have anybody running around loose, making mischief, or asking if I need help, or anything. It was a wonderful day. I enjoyed that a lot. I find it easier to talk about things that I enjoyed. I enjoyed elephant drill over at Epsilon Hall because, after the tornado came, it walked right up to Epsilon Hall and took the roof off and turned around and went away. At least that's what I was told. Then, after they put the roof back on, there were complaints about elephants on the roof at night. Well, I had a delegation come from Epsilon Hall to say something has got to be done about this, and physical plant has not acted. Well, goodness knows they had plenty to do in physical plant after the storm damage. So I said to the students, "Organize [an] elephant drill. Get your athletes with all of their bats, and hockey sticks, and tennis rackets in the presses, golf clubs." Do you need to take a break?

YG: No, I'm fine. Go ahead.

MF: Well, "You put them on the stairwells, and we'll send someone out there. The beaters with the drums and bugles, we'll send them up the other stairway, and then we'll drive them down past these. And you must herd them along, you know, by beating them with this athletic equipment. And at the bottom, we'll have two tame elephants for Busch Gardens that we'll greet and welcome them, and trumpet them and be chained to them, led away. And we'll solve the problem." Of course, they added on to my version.

They had this big story about this elephant drill, and everybody promptly went away and forgot it because I had got on the phone and talked to either Clyde Hill or George Chavez and said, "Perhaps it would be helpful to get up there and get whatever is in the air conditioning ducts out." So they went up and found that there was an opossum with babies that had gotten into the ducts, and she was very thankful to be got out. Thereafter, the elephants went away. So some of these sassy people who were in Epsilon Hall decided that the elephants had followed the opossums and were trying to get them out.

That story went on for a while, for a couple of weeks. It took our minds off other things, which, doubtless, were too fierce to mention.

YG: Two more quick questions. Being that you were at, really, the beginning point of the university, the creation point of the university, and now looking almost 50 years later, where do you see the University of South Florida moving? What's the next direction of the university? Where are we going?

MF: Well, I think it's going in the same direction it was going in the first place. I don't think there's any change of direction. I think it's done a very good job on what it was intended to do. It expanded, of course, more rapidly than anyone believed, which is one reason we were always out of money. And the other one being that the state has always used regressive budget formulae. You can't base next year's growth, which you're going to have, if you're dealing with a growing population. You can't base your next year's budget on last year's budget.

There are other little things, like, you'd save money; you'd have savings, but you couldn't hold that as a reserve against next year, which is just dumb. You know, even Pharaoh understood it when Joseph interpreted that dream about the seven fat kind and the seven lean ones.⁵ You know, it's just been a constant drain and a constant strain, and there's been a lot of burnout on the faculty, and staff, and students, too. It's part of the price we pay for the stress we've been under. But, in terms of changing direction, I think it's been quite clear where we were going.

We were going to be a big, community-based, strongly community-oriented, full-service university with strong international ties, particularly to the Caribbean and the Americas. But it turns out that we also have developed some others elsewhere, which we've managed to—you can't just—the notion of a regional mission is fine, as long as you're aware that it's also going to give you a global outreach, and we got that and are handling it, I think, as well as we can with the resources we've got. I think it still would be an exciting place to come to for people who like teaching and administration.

I think people have been treated as fairly as you could expect with the kinds of restraints that we've had and the kinds of inharmonious arrangements we've had to work with, with partisan politics. The notion of conducting warfare, you know, of having to go and conduct warfare in order to gain support for a public university is dumb and counterproductive. But we apparently have had to do that, or at least it's been interpreted

⁵Fisher is alluding to Genesis 41, a chapter in the Bible where Joseph interprets Pharaoh's perplexing dreams as a foretelling of seven abundant years immediately followed by seven years of severe famine. Joseph suggests that Pharaoh hold back a portion of harvest from every abundant year to help during the years of famine. Pharaoh follows this advice and Egypt is not only saved but increases in wealth as people pay handsomely for grain in order to survive.

that way. I think this not a fair interpretation of the way the university works. It works as a network. It works by getting the—it has worked very effectively in a planning posture because, one way or another, we've usually been ahead of developments, of the nasty surprises.

We've went out far enough ahead of them that we've been able to go through it and ride it out, and we've had some wonderful miracles, some delightful surprises along the way. And a lot of those had to do with the achievements of students and their chosen careers and with the—I don't quite know how to put it—the morale, which seems to be quite sturdy and stands up because of the diversity that we have. I think there's a kind of counterpoint that we've managed, between the bureaucratic and the organic organization. And there's a kind of counterpoint within this diverse student body.

We've used the differences constructively and, I think, pretty boldly on the whole, considering I think we've done what seemed to come naturally and met challenges if we had to, which you don't often have to. There's a certain academic agility and imagination, which enables you to ride out threats, particularly if you can anticipate them. It's like President Allen said to me when I called him and I asked—when I was working on the Cooper and Fisher book—I said, “Dr. Allen, I know when you were planning the university, we were coming up on racial integration. We were headed for affirmative action and equality of opportunity and all of those good things, and we were going to have open admissions.”

And I said, “How did you decide this matter? Who decided whether we should build two kinds of restrooms, instead of four?” He said, “Nobody. We just designed it that way, and I signed off on the plan.” I said, “Did you know that somebody was going to say, Oh, you're violating the laws?” “Hah, that law,” he said, “Hah. Would you have gone to all the expense?” I said, “Well, no, I just wondered how it went.” He said, “Oh, I just decided we'd do it right.”

And there was a lot of that attitude. I think that what saved us a lot of grief and a lot of work was that very strong tendency to say, Okay, we're going to do something. And then he'd say, “Okay, let's get it right, as near as we can this time. Let's not have too many bugs in it. Let's work it over real good before we go with it.” And I think that helped. That's just the good ol' common sense attitude. First, make sure you're not going to do too much harm.

YG: My final question, and this is something that I've asked all of my interviewees, if you could leave a statement about the University of South Florida, either to future faculty and students and staff, or to your previous faculty, students, and staff, what would you want to tell them about the University of South Florida?

MF: Well, you want a short answer, and I don't have time for that. And besides, why should I tell them something when I don't even know they're going to ask the question? I suppose, well, I've talked to students who were considering the university, and I said, "Well, if you like it, and you decide to go with it, I think you can trust your judgment. Because it does look good, and, yet it doesn't look too idealized and too gussied up. What's there—what you see is what you get." And I think there's an air of elegance about it. You know, in the mathematical sense, it hasn't been overdone. A lot of people say, Oh, the buildings are so ugly! You don't have this and that!

I think the approach, this one of economy in this sense of elegance was not—this was not going to be an *el cheapo* university, but we were not going to extravagant lengths to impress people. And we made due. We had dual appointments. President Allen even taught astronomy and physics. I loved to teach, and I would not have taken—this was one of the things that attracted me here, was the dual appointment, because I would not take an administrative job, unless I was also in the classroom. We assumed that the classroom is the social center of the university and that, for other types of gathering, you need a Marshall Center, you need recreational facilities, you need places for people to dance, and eat and play, and run around, and get sweaty.

But the social center is the classroom, and I think this is one thing that the university has held to pretty well. I know any student will give you a bad example, students being negatively suggestible, anyway. But, on the whole, I think this has held true, and it certainly stands up—that has stood up to the test of time thus far. You might mess around a lot outside, but you don't mess around much in class. Sure, you have a few people who come in—I've had students come in stoned, and you don't have to put up with them. You can toss them. But, on the whole, I think this is one of the common sense basics that we came up with. And it stands up.

Residing on campus, I don't know. There are fads; sometimes it's fashionable, and sometimes it's not. And it does not always follow economic cycles. It was kind of funny, the way we started out, of course, sort of being a year late and three years behind, but that has developed, I think, quite reasonably. And there's always a business, well shall we put state money in it or let private enterprise do it? Well, there have been times when private enterprise just doesn't, and I watched the development of the foundation. And that has given us great strength. So, no, I think as far as changing direction, I don't think it has. You adjust your course, you know, and get a little bit different heading in terms of the general direction and of the focus on the advancement of knowledge and the useful applications thereof. And I would add the enjoyment of learning. I think the university has stayed right on course. You know, you yaw and wobble.

YG: Margaret, I want to thank you very much.

MF: Well, it has been fun, Yael. Thank you for having me.

End of Interview