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USF Florida Studies Center
Oral History Program
USF 50th History Anniversary Project

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Date of Interview: May 22, 2003
Editor: Danielle E. Riley

Location of Interview: Tampa
Campus Library
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TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

Year of arrival

Ms. Marshall came to USF in 1969 as program director of the University Center.

Circumstances that brought Phyllis Marshall to USF

Before coming to USF, Ms. Marshall was at a small private school in Virginia. The president of the school was very supportive of her, and moved her up the ladder to dean of women. He told her he was going to find her another school because she needed to proceed. She agreed because she was going through a divorce and thought it was a good idea for a fresh start. The president found out that USF was looking for someone to help with students. USF was a brand new school. Margaret Fisher of USF called Ms. Marshall and hired her over the telephone.

Ms. Marshall arrives at USF

Ms. Marshall came down a week before USF officially opened. Ms. Marshall was told that she would be living with students on the fourth floor of the University Center. Ms. Marshall had her own room. She moved in to the center and got to know the people in the center, as well as the students.

The opening of the University Center

Shortly after she arrived, Ms. Marshall went to the opening of the center. The governor of Florida came to the ceremony. President Allen's wife arranged for a reception in the lobby of the center.

What did the campus look like in 1960?

Ms. Marshall says there were three buildings, and nothing but sand. The first thing President Allen told Ms. Marshall was, "If you get sand in your shoes, you can never leave Florida." Ms. Marshall says that comment was very funny since sand was everywhere.

What was located in the University Center?

Ms. Marshall says the student center had everything in it. The ballroom was the library. The College of Arts and Sciences was downstairs in the center. Business was also located at the center. Ms. Marshall says that when students wanted to have activities they had to go outside.

What was President Allen like?

“Both he and his wife were very bright people. He wanted to see this as a special school like up north. He did not want athletics. He wanted to be sure that we had a good music department. He got the music program started. Many of his ideas are still here. I give him the credit for us being here and having all of the colleges that we have now. He brought in marvelous people to be the professors that had wonderful experience. We were very fortunate to have that accomplishment in our first year. Then when new faculty comes that our thinking in other ways, things become more difficult,” says Ms. Marshall.

Number of students at USF in 1960

There were 1,947 students at USF in 1960.

Dress code in the early years

She says there was one in the very beginning, but it did not last long.

Johns Committee and its affects on USF

Ms. Marshall says the legislature controlled what was happening on the campus. She thinks it was all men that they went after. “I felt sorry for Dr. Allen because whatever he did was wrong. He couldn’t keep them from coming here because we are a state institution. But, the faculty was up in arms. Students wanted to march, but they were too young to know what was going on. That was probably the lowest event to happen in that era. It was national news. It was on the news every night. It affected the people that wanted to come here in the beginning and then chose not to. It was the saddest time of my life here,” states Ms. Marshall.

Women students living on campus

Ms. Marshall says forty-seven women lived on campus on the top floor of the University Center. These students wanted to live on campus. She says the students wanted to get the atmosphere of living on campus. There were local and out of state women. She says the girls got along well. Where the girls were living was originally designed to be a hotel. The rooms were separate. But, one side of the floor had common showers. The other side had separate bathrooms. Alpha Hall was built, and the student moved in there.

Women students engage in mischief

Ms. Marshall says at the end of the first year the women got in real trouble. The women toilet-papered the building. Dr. Allen’s office called Ms. Marshall to see what was happening. Ms. Marshall told the girls that none of them could go to class until the mess was cleaned up.

What did Ms. Marshall do when she arrived at USF?

Ms. Marshall got acquainted with the students and tried to help them organize into groups. The first dean of students announced that there would be no fraternities or sororities on campus. Ms. Marshall had to let them organize in a different way.

She told the students that the groups would just be social groups and to give their groups names unrelated to Greek life. Twelve groups were formed. Ms. Marshall says the groups gave students something to do. Then Ms. Marshall and students organized student government. The students wanted to have dances. Since Ms. Marshall was in charge of student events, she went to every event.

Student programs and activities in the early years

Ms. Marshall says there were two really good programs the first year. Every Friday afternoon there was a jazz program in the ballroom. The other program was called Meet the Author, where writers came to speak. Many writers came from Sarasota to speak. Both faculty and students loved the program. Also, Ms. Marshall says that in the early years the center would be decorated for Halloween. The center put on Halloween parties for children since USF had a lot of families with children that attended the university. Ms. Marshall says dances were always occurring at the center. Also, students would plan their own programs. Once Greek organizations were allowed on campus, sorority and fraternity groups gathered together to plan activities and programs. Students were involved with athletics. They had their own teams and would play each other. Students developed chess at USF. Student government gave scholarships for chess players. Ms. Marshall says some of the players would be featured in the *New York Times*. Ms. Marshall says USF eventually stopped the chess program. Students were upset because it was their own money that was used for the program. “That was one of the saddest things, and I couldn’t do anything about it,” she says.

Assassination of JFK

Students had programs planned when JFK was assassinated. The students came to Ms. Marshall and asked her what they should do. Ms. Marshall told the students not to cancel the events. She told them to make a statement or say a prayer at the beginning of the program and then continue. “It was very difficult for them,” she says.

Blacks and the University Center

Ms. Marshall says that in the early years blacks would not come into the center. She worried about the black students because they would sit out on the patio as opposed to coming into the building. Ms. Marshall says the center was a student building. It was meant for all students. Ms. Marshall and a minister on campus decided to get about six or eight black students to come to the center and talk to them. “We said that this building is yours also and we never see you come in and use it,” says Ms. Marshall. “We were successful. We worked very diligently to get the black students in here. It took a long time, but it finally succeeded. I’m proud of that because when I was in college I did not see very many blacks,” she states.

Greek organizations are allowed at USF

USF got a new vice president of student affairs. The new vice president said USF will have Greek organizations on campus. Ms. Marshall says by this time, USF had more buildings on campus.

Ms. Marshall hears from past students

She hears from many students of the early years who continue to keep in touch with her. “I have no children of my own, but I had thousands of students,” she says.

USF closes for Christmas (what does Ms. Marshall do during the break)

Ms. Marshall says students left at Christmas time, and the university closed for two weeks. Ms. Marshall was left alone on campus. She decided to use her spare time to learn how to drive. She bought a car. She practiced driving around campus since she was the only person there. USF did not think anyone was on campus so the university turned off the heat. Ms. Marshall did not have her driver’s license yet so she could not drive anywhere. She did not have much food, just canned soup. People thought Ms. Marshall was going some place for the Christmas break. Ms. Marshall decided that she had enough of being alone. She decided to take her driving test and drive to Virginia. She passed her test, and drove 700 miles to Virginia. She stayed a week there and then came home.

Ms. Marshall comments on being a part of USF

“The best thing that ever happened to me was having the opportunity to be here. The people have just been unbelievable to me in helping me to move forward and so forth,” she says.

The number of student rooms increases

“Each year we got stronger and got more rooms that we could use for students,” she says.

Students involved with landscaping around the center

Ms. Marshall says that people brought trucks of trees to the university. Ms. Marshall says students planted all of the trees that are up and down in front of the center.

Ms. Marshall comments on the student’s role within the university

“It is important for students to work with the university. I wanted to make sure students were taken care of and that they felt comfortable to speak up,” she says. Ms. Marshall says that she wanted to make sure the students’ rights were heard.

Vietnam War protests

Ms. Marshall says, “Students should express their feelings whether or not we think they are right or wrong.” Ms. Marshall says that once a week students would march in protest against the war and she would have to march with them in order for the protests to be allowed. She would get a policeman to escort them. She says the marches went on week after week. The governor of Florida at the time came and answered students’ questions.

The best time in her history at USF was having a building named after her

Ms. Marshall says she has had so many wonderful times at USF. Students would surprise her on her birthday. Her best memory is when students wanted to name the university center after her. Students went to the president of USF at the time, Jack Brown, and asked him if they could name the building for her. President Brown said he would love to because he loved Phyllis Marshall, but it was against the law to name a building after a

living person. Ms. Marshall says the center did not give up. They took a legislator out to dinner and told her that they wanted to name the building for Ms. Marshall. The legislator said she would go to the Senate and get it attached to a bill. The legislator succeeded. Ms. Marshall is part of women's league in Tampa called Athena, which focuses on women's rights. Ms. Marshall says women from Athena and students went and lobbied for the right to name the building after Ms. Marshall. Students brought the bill back to show Ms. Marshall what they had done. Ms. Marshall says, "I could not believe it." She went to the student government meetings every night when she was living and working at USF. To me they [students] were first. They would ask me for this and that," she says. Ms. Marshall's family could not come to the building dedication ceremony. Both her parents are deceased. She remembers telling students, "My dad would have been so proud to know that I've climbed that high. I'm a little kid from nowhere and I worked my way all through school."

Women's rights demonstrations on campus

Ms. Marshall says faculty demonstrated for women's rights.

Final thought to leave behind about Ms. Marshall's thirty plus years at USF

"I would say to the faculty to treat the students as people always because you will get so much more when you treat them as someone special. I'll always remember USF in the early days and the kindness of the presidents and vice presidents.

End of Interview