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Jeanene McNair oral history interview by Milly St. Julien, July 18, 1985

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JEANENE McNAIR

St. Julien: Today I am interviewing Jeanene McNair, who is the Librarian and Department Head for Collection Development, for the USF Silver Anniversary Oral History Project. What was your first contact with USF and what made you decide to come here?

McNair: My first contact was really as an undergraduate student. At the time I was living in Miami attending Southwest Miami High School. I was a charter member of Southwest Miami High School. Miami was a growing metropolitan area and so I was the first graduate of that high school, setting all the school traditions. Frank Spain came down and said that they were thinking about building this university up in Tampa, and he asked me if I would like to come up and be a charter student. He said that they had wonderful things coming. That sounded very interesting because I certainly wanted to continue my education. From that point I applied to USF and was accepted and decided to be a charter student, not only for my secondary education, but then again for my college education. I can remember after being accepted my parents were very excited. As snowbirds we drove back to Indiana for the summer and drove through Tampa. Now this is the summer before the University was to open. My mother was quite distraught because there was nothing but sand. There were buildings partially under construction. The University Center at the time, the second floor where the railing is, had no railing and mother almost walked off the edge at which point she was sure I was going to be destroyed during my freshman year at college. The school year started late because of Hurricane Donna.
St. Julien: That is what I wanted to ask you about. What year was that?

McNair: That was in 1960. The school year started in October. They had to postpone it because Fowler Avenue, which was a two lane road at the time, was under water. I couldn't get out to the University.

St. Julien: Did you come as a resident student?

McNair: Yes I did. There were around forty-five girls who were housed on campus and they were housed on the top floor of the University Center, what is now the medical clinics. It was originally designed to be a hotel. So when we went into the rooms it was like a normal hotel room. It had two beds in it and a very small closet for staying overnight; they assigned two girls to stay there with this very small closet. It also had an adjacent bath. In a way they were nice accommodations except for the closet area. At that time we had dorm mothers. The RA's came much later. Phyllis Marshall was our dorm mother and we referred to her as Mama Marshall.

St. Julien: Could you describe the University when you first saw it?

McNair: When I came back they had finished and put the railings up. There were only three buildings that were opened when we first arrived. That was the University Center, the Administration building, which was about half to three-fourths classrooms at the time, and what we called the Science Center which is now called the Chemistry building. There was only one science building at the time. The sidewalks originally ran from the University Center to the Administration, from the Administration to the Science building. Naturally, all your classes were from the University Center to the Science building. Well, how did you go? Well, today you
look out and you just walk across the lawn. Wrong! You walked across the sand dunes. There was no grass. They had not yet planted the grass. That came much later. So the first years it was really trudging across. People who had contact lenses suffered something terrible because you would walk with your hands over your eyes because the sand would get beneath the contact lens.

St. Julien: Did everybody have . . .

McNair: Everybody had open toed shoes because otherwise you would have to dump your shoes of sand. You could take the sidewalks, but that was twice as long.

St. Julien: Was that good for tanning?

McNair: This was a different era. This was the era of the Peace Corp and believing in John F. Kennedy and we were going to save the world. The dress code was still early 1960.

St. Julien: Do you remember the graffiti wall?

McNair: No, that I don't remember.

St. Julien: It was mentioned in the (Cooper and Fisher) book and so far I haven't come across anybody that really remembers it.

McNair: The first semester that we opened the library, it was in the ballroom of the University Center. That is because the library building, which is now Student Services building, when they began construction on it they found a very sizeable sink hole under the foundation of the building. So what the engineers did was they brought in the weight and they filled it with
concrete to provide the types of foundation we are now familiar with when you begin buildings. They hadn't anticipated that which delayed the construction of the library building. So when the University opened in October the building was not yet ready for occupation and it wasn't until the second semester. At that time they started out under the semester system. The library physically moved into first one building, then another. So the first year it was actually in the ballroom.

St. Julien: What size was the library?

McNair: I'm not sure what the volume count was at that time, but only part of the collection was unpacked and put into the ballroom for use.

St. Julien: So it was basically pretty small?

McNair: Yes. Again, it was supporting the freshman courses because they opened with only one class so that everyone was at the same level. There wasn't a sophomore, junior, or senior class. There was only a freshman class.

St. Julien: Did they have a junior class the next year?

McNair: The timetable... because I can remember thinking how expensive it was... It was $90 for 18 hours, for a whole semester including tuition and fees. During the course of my studies for my bachelor's degree they switched to the trimester system. The state was bent on utilizing these buildings during the summer. They mandated that you attend a summer. So we switched to a trimester system. When I returned as an employee they switched to the quarter system and now we are back to the semester system. It wasn't very long.
St. Julien: What do you recall about the relationship between the students, faculty, staff, and administration?

McNair: The first president, John Allen, really had a spark of innovation. We wanted to be innovative and different. We were going to be the institution that values education. The motto "Accent On Learning" was evidence of that. They developed what was known as the "All University Approach." I think Margaret Fisher's and Dean Cooper's book emphasized that. Again, the philosophy was consistent with the times, the egalitarian idea that everyone was equal. If you were a janitor or a full professor or a freshman student, you were making a contribution and you were part of the University community. Everyone had a value. In fact at first they weren't going to have professorial ranks. You were simply going to be here. That quickly disappeared. I think we adopted the much more traditional approaches. There was an "All University Book" at the time. There was a committee to select it. Everyone, including the janitors, were expected to read the "All University Book" of the semester. So that regardless of the specific courses you took you had a common point to have intellectual conversations about because you all shared this common experience of reading the "All University Book."

St. Julien: What was this "All University Book?"

McNair: They were different things. One of the them was Eric Hoffer's True Believer. They were books more of that character. I can't remember any of the other books that they used at the time. That lasted for about two and a half years. It died a slow, painful death when it became evident that the bookstore was ordering a thousand copies of the "All University Book" and selling twenty. Then they tried testing you on each of the courses that
you were taking in your knowledge of basic studies. You would have three

St. Julien: Tell us a little bit about that since you were student.

McNair: test questions from the "All University Book," and that kind of destroyed
the philosophy or the attitude that people were going to on their own
initiative read this so our "Accent On Learning" would have a common
denominator. It was just kind of put away. But that again I think was
typical of the whole concept of that College of Basic Studies.

Coming in as a freshman I had no expectations. Now, looking back upon it,
I realize what they were doing. In some ways today we are reinventing the
bill and rediscovering this unique concept. It was basically that anyone
who was going to be a graduate of the University should graduate as a
humanist. You should have certain basic knowledge, certain experiences
that you could relate to. You should graduate as a thinking person. To
be a thinking well-rounded person you had to have courses in several
disciplines, sciences as well as social sciences, a feel for the litera-
ture and the arts. So indeed for your first two years your curriculum was
in the College of Basic Studies before you could declare any kind of a
major and you had to take these general courses. I can remember the first
year thinking that it was strange having a course in social sciences, a
course in math, and a course in literature. And all of a sudden in the
same week we were talking about logic. Obviously what had happened, the
faculty who joined had gotten together and did lesson plans and decided
week 17 was the week to discuss logic. So you got logic from the social
science perspective, logic from the mathematical perspective, logic from a
philosophical perspective, and it was very interesting because there was
that effort to coordinate curriculum and tie it together. That was
possible when you had less than two thousand students and had a single class. I think as we grew much larger that it began to be much more difficult to coordinate. The pressures too of the student body wanting to have a greater specialization and spend more time on a business specialization, that the College of Basic Studies died the painful death of the "All University Book" and the "All University Approach." There was a common joke during the first couple of years. We did develop a health center after the 45 of us moved out of the University Center into Alpha Hall. The "All University Approach" was so prevalent throughout all of the campus life that there was even an "All University Pill" for the "All University Disease of the Week." There was probably some truth to that in reality, but it got to the point where everything had an "All University" label attached to it and that was very evident during those early years.

St. Julien: What about the lack of sports on campus? As a student, how did this go over with the student body?

McNair: I think from the very beginning there has always been an element of wanting to have a football team and that was certainly there the first year. I can remember when we chose a name for a mascot. We didn't have a team, but we wanted a mascot. Most of the suggestions during the early years were "the desert rats" and "camels." The administration at the time very wisely in retrospect said that nobody would understand why we did this years from now. They said that they knew it was sand but there would be grass eventually. So the Brahman Bulls were selected. But that was a contest that students would enter and there was a winner that got some sort of a prize.
St. Julien: Did you have any sports? What kind of activities were there?

McNair: In the College of Basic Studies you had to take physical education. It was mandatory. I think John Allen was against this because at the University of Florida the football team drained the resources of the University. He felt that in establishing a new university that had such limited resources to begin to drain them into a football effort would not have been a wise investment. He kept talking about the "Accent On Learning." We all bought it. We were going to read the "All University Book." We weren't going to beat Gainesville's football team.

St. Julien: What do you recall about the interaction or competition between Florida State or the University of Florida and this new university that comes up? How did students feel about being new students in a new university?

McNair: We were all pioneers at the time. The faculty that was here at the time--and many of them are still here--was very young. Most of them had their doctorates and for many of them it was their first position. They had to be somewhat of a pioneer to attach their reputation to an institution that had no reputation. I think they were attracted here somewhat for John S. Allen's innovative ideas, and they felt like, "I am not going to be hampered by the traditions of the University because I am the traditions of the University, even if they are only one-day old." They weren't entering into an area where they would be the low man on the totem pole or where the faculty politics dictated that they would be a slave for the first ten years because they were the junior faculty. So it attracted a particular type of faculty member who had that pioneer spirit and was willing to gamble on an institution. The students were also gambling at
the same time. So I think there was the cohesiveness of working together.

St. Julien: Do you remember anything about any competition between other students from Florida State or the University of Florida?

McNair: Not so much. I think that would have been a lot more evident had we had intramural sports. One of the early happenings during the second year was when the Johns Committee came to the campus. The students were somewhat immune to it. At the time the USF newspaper, which was really the St. Petersburg Times, gave us their front page and our student newspaper would be printed on the front page of the St. Pete Times and the St. Pete Times would come over and distribute it. Later on we had a contest and we named it the Oracle. I can remember when one of my good friends submitted that as the name for the student newspaper. Then eventually we hired our own printer and had a separate printing. When the Johns Committee came to campus it was a very tough time. The students were somewhat immune to it other than the faculty relaying it in the classroom setting. I can remember the faculty members talking to the students about intellectual freedom and the search for knowledge. One of the books that was used for the "All University Book" in the social sciences was the Monkey Trial. That was the whole issue of evolution. They didn't call it creationism, but indeed it was that same philosophy. This was the era when we had to have communism courses taught in the secondary schools to make sure that everyone knew that communism was bad. Charlie Johns came out of the back woods of Florida to express a lot of those ideas and challenged a lot of the faculty. We had lost some faculty members because of this at that time. They felt like if this was the kind of atmosphere that Florida was going
to cultivate, they didn't want to be a part of it. That was hurtful because I can remember some of the faculty who indeed did leave at that time. It was like you had this young pioneering institution that was out to conquer the world. We were going to take over everything and Charlie Johns came in and pricked our balloon.

St. Julien: Do you think it was worse here at this University because it was an urban university as compared to a more rural type of university like Florida State and the University of Florida?

McNair: I think it was because indeed when you have a residential university it is one thing for the student to go home during semester breaks and take the Monkey Trial. It's another thing for the student to be living at home and saying, "Guess what we talked about today in class." I think that one of the parents who complained was of a fundamentalist faith and talked it over with the pastor whether her daughter should be exposed to this kind of education. It made it very uncomfortable in that situation. Then there was the other issue where we had one faculty member who was before his time. He admitted that he was a homosexual. In 1962 you don't go around saying you were a homosexual. But he was very comfortable with that and felt that this didn't affect his teaching abilities which it did not. In fact there were students that wanted to take his classes unaware of whether he was a homosexual or not. That was immaterial. He was a very good scholar, but it was not the political climate to admit his sexuality.

St. Julien: You think of this area now as urban. I'm not so sure that people would have thought of Tampa or even the Bay area as really an urban area.
McNair: No it wasn't. Even then when you drove down between what is now the interstate and the University, the only thing that was there was the University Restaurant. It was there from day one. I can remember when one of the black students went to the University Restaurant and the group was thrown out. The students picketed the University Restaurant. So they decided that maybe they could serve a black person and let them eat within the facility in the same room as other people.

St. Julien: So it was a very rural southern type of community?

McNair: We were emerging and beginning from the equal opportunity movements at that time.

St. Julien: Did this start out as an integrated school? Did they have black students from the very beginning?

McNair: Very few.

St. Julien: But they did have some black students. Do you recall any kind of instance that happened involving minority students or integration in anyway in this area? Was there any opposition from the community, students, or faculty?

McNair: I think you might want to ask some of the black individuals. Later during my career here at the University I served on the Equal Opportunity Committee and I chaired that committee for some time. I became alot more sensitive to many of those issues. The University has made great strides in recruiting black students from our community, but I think still we have
a long way to go in those areas and that was evident in the very beginning.

St. Julien: What about women and their role from the beginning? You mentioned Phyllis Marshall and Margaret Fisher so it's obvious that women were involved as faculty and administrators. Were there courses that separated female students from the male students like home economics? Were women encouraged to go into education or the standard female occupations?

McNair: We had no home economics and we had no nursing program. We did have the College of Education at the time. Margaret Fisher was indeed an administrator here at the very beginning. She was the Dean of Women. We also had Dean Johnshoy who was the Dean of Men. The Dean of Students came much later. At the outset there were two deans, one for men and one for women. I don't think there was a male and female curriculum, although I was a political science major and to be very frank, I was the only girl in most of my classes. I wasn't discouraged from majoring in political science.

St. Julien: So there wasn't an obvious effort to . . .

McNair: I think the College of Education was predominantly female.

St. Julien: How did they react to the . . .

McNair: The curriculum did not integrate any of the women's perspectives that we hope to find in our curriculum today. We may some time in the future get around to it.

St. Julien: You said that you had a dorm mother. Were there strict rules for female residents over the male residents?
Yes. There were curfews and all of that. That was all there from the very beginning. In fact, the first year when there was only 45 of us on campus, there were no classes on weekends as there are very few classes on weekends now. The road in essence is the outer rim of what I call the doughnut. Telling people how to get from one side of this campus to the other, if you tell them they are on a doughnut they can go around the outside edge. I can remember when the campus police would climb up on the roof of the University Center and sit there with their binoculars watching people drive through the main entrance, at which point they would radio their buddy who would tail them all the way through the campus. At that time the police coverage was complete. You came out here on the weekend and you would have a police tail. They would turn the sprinklers on between the buildings to water the grass so that the police didn't have to worry about anybody roaming those areas and all they had to do was watch of couple of roads. We had good police protection. I can remember when we moved into Alpha Hall which was completed for the second year that I was here. It was half male and half female. They put a steel door between the two halves because they split the dormitories down the middle. They didn't split certain floors. It was split down the middle. A steel door worth four hundred dollars was installed between. Of course everyone realized that because of the sound proofing on the ceiling you simply pushed up the panels and crawled over to the other side. But there was a steel door with a big lock on it between the two ends. That was always very interesting. At that time the concept of RA's was introduced and full-time students came on. Phyllis Marshall could take over organizing
the University Center and its activities much the same way as she does today. So she moved out of the role of Mama Marshall.

St. Julien: What do you remember about the community relations with the University? As a student I don't know how much you actually got out into the community, but you must have been aware of newspapers and some of the comments that were made about . . .

McNair: The student who didn't have a car . . . And there wasn't anything within ten miles of the campus. There was no bus service to speak of. I was really not aware of a lot of relationships between the two. I think the most visible one was the day the University opened and they had all these chairs in front of the Administration building spread across the driveways and Sam Gibbons got up and accepted the seal of the University in appreciation for his contributions and making it possible to put the University here. You go back and read some of the old issues of the newspaper prior to that and the controversy as to whether the campus was going to be here or the site of what is now Eckerd College. At that time it was Florida Presbyterian College. The politics of why Tampa was selected over St. Pete. I don't think St. Pete has ever forgiven us for that. We have a branch over there. Maybe some day the University of South Florida at St. Petersburg will be a separate university. I would say there was, from my perspective, very minimal interaction. As a northerner, my early years were spent in the midwest, I know one of the most frequently heard comments out here at the University was about the food the Morrison's Cafeteria served. They cooked southern style.

St. Julien: Was that good or bad?
McNair: They burned the vegetables. They served this green stuff that someone said was collards. I can remember some of those comments from the early days. Any student that lives on campus has to complain about the food. There was also a cultural shock.

St. Julien: What are some of the other events or issues that you think USF may have had a relation to such as the Vietnam War? It was in its very early stages. That was something that had just happened.

McNair: I can remember the day President Kennedy was shot. It was a class day here. Classes were all in session. The minute that word came the classes stopped. At the time Andros Center had a television in the lounge as well as the University Center had a television lounge down in the first floor. The students were just glued to the television for about four days after that. It was a real blow because we were disciples of Kennedy. Everyone was going to join the Peace Corps and we were going to save the rest of the world. There was a lot of spirit at that time. It was very devastating.

St. Julien: What about civil rights or women's liberation?

McNair: Those movements came later. We were going to save the rest of the world, not ourselves.

St. Julien: Do you remember any discussion about Vietnam at that time? I realize that was very early.

McNair: No. We were the Cuban Missile Crisis. That is when Kennedy tried to invade down there. They kept talking about Key West being 90 miles from
Cuba. They plotted the missile trajectory which could conveniently hit Tampa. Needless to say, at that time all parents and faculty . . . I can remember some of the students went back up north. Their parents called them and told them to come home because they were in missile range. That is when they designated the Student Services Building as a civil defense center. We didn't have any practice raids or anything. But they gathered the food up and they put the water down in the basement of that building and it sat there and rotted for about two and a half years.

St. Julien: Did you have drills?

McNair: No. I think everyone was certainly aware of it. It was a very real thing to live with. It's not as devastating as the people in Beirut are dealing with today with the actual bombing of their city. The potential was there. You could see the photographs of the missiles in Key West aimed at Cuba. We were certainly aware of that. That was something that was very critical. At that time there was a lot of debate on campus. Charlie Arnade and some other professor had a debate about whether Castro was for the good or the bad. We hadn't made up our minds whether he was a friend or an enemy. So we were certainly into those issues. I think this may have been part of the Charlie Johns feeling of whether Castro was good even though he was a communist. Some of those issues were ones that we were really concerned with. The Vietnam era was after I came back here as an employee.

St. Julien: So you graduated from this school. Then you got your master's in Indiana and then you came back here to work. Was that in the library?
I had been a student assistant in the library during my undergraduate years. I worked in the reference department for the library. That was an interesting experience. At the time the University budget could not afford to have full-time library staff or professional librarians on the weekends. So they hired students to man the library. I had the key to the library. I was responsible for opening the library on Saturday afternoon and manning it. I can remember at the time... Mr. Hardaway was the first library director at the time. The student at the front desk at the entry to the building would phone up to the second floor where I was and tell me when Hardaway was in the building and to pass the word. You can imagine this library director who might make impromptu visits out to your facility on the weekend that was being totally manned by these undergraduate students. So we had his number and we would indeed call around and warn everyone when he came in the building. Mr. Hardaway knew me as a student assistant and the reference librarians encouraged me to consider librarianship as my profession and I followed their advice. I attended Indiana University. When I completed my degree my fiancee was still here in Tampa finishing his degree. He was a residential student at the time. So I wrote back telling them that I was getting married and Don had one more year to finish his degree, and remember me the student assistant who used to open the building on Saturday, would you like to hire me as a professional? I said that I would be there at least a year. I was very concerned with letting them know that because in all of our classes we had been told that a professional has to state that he had four years on his first job or they are going to look at your resume and know that there is something wrong with you. So I understand that there was a great deal of debate about that. They finally agreed that they would take...
a chance on me for one year. That was twenty years ago. Don did finish his degree in history here.

St. Julien: How long were you away from this school?

McNair: A year and three months.

St. Julien: So it wasn't that long?

McNair: No it wasn't.

St. Julien: When you came back did you notice a great deal of difference in the University or hadn't it changed that much?

McNair: No. At that time it really hadn't changed all that much. In looking back over the twenty years at the same institution, I haven't been ... I've really worked at about four or five different universities because when I was first here the University was a small undergraduate university. It was really a college at that time. As we began to add master's programs and, indeed, I think a reflection of this is that our university collection grew so large that we moved into this new building. And as we changed administrations from Allen to Mackey to Brown, you could see that the character of the University was changing. I can remember when Mackey was here we abandoned all the innovative ideas of John Allen. I've often wondered if that was a function of size. Could those indeed have survived in a very large institution which we were becoming, or is that something that could only survive in a very small student body. Could it survive an advanced degree program like the master's program?

St. Julien: We were talking about the differences among the USF presidents and the impact they have had.
McNair: I think part of what Mackey came in and did was indeed the phenomena of growing bigger, moving into graduate programs and into doctoral programs requires a different administrative pattern. We became much more like a traditional university. The traditional university politics that are so embedded certainly bud here at USF. They are fully cultivated today I would say.

St. Julien: Did it become more of an administrator's college rather than a combination? From what I understand that when it first started teachers served as administrators and vice versa. It was sort of a combination.

McNair: Well, you still have that role where even Greg O'Brian steps into the classroom. Originally, it was John Allen's idea that anyone that was going to teach here had to be willing to teach a freshman level course. I don't think we have that philosophy anymore. When you get into faculty members who are valued for their research expertise and their contributions in those areas, then indeed I think you create a different atmosphere. Mackey was not a much loved administrator, but I think there was a lot of changes that the University went through during his administration. All those changes were very intentional to bring us from an undergraduate teaching institution and to begin to develop into a major research, graduate level university.

St. Julien: Do you see a difference between Brown's administration and the Mackey administration?

McNair: Oh definitely. Mackey was during the transitional change and the change is never easy to accommodate. John Brown has been able to build upon the
end results of that. I think everyone has a major contribution they can make. There was a time for Charles de Gaulle in France. There was a time for Churchill in England. Their contributions were major and they were the right people for the time. If you stay too long you outlive your value. Mackey could have outlived his value but instead he moved on. His genius is in being able to hatchet through changes. He had the ability to move ahead.

St. Julien: So you see Brown as being a combination of Mackey and Allen?

McNair: My personal impression of Jack Brown is that he is much more of a scholar and an academician, that that is foremost in his mind. He certainly has some strong administrative skills in those areas. He was beginning to build the academic excellence into the graduate programs. It is one thing to say that you have a doctorate program and it's another thing to say that you have a doctorate program with academic excellence. I see that more the mission of John Lott Brown. It's an evolutionary one.

St. Julien: Since that time when you first came back, if you were to sum up your experience as a student and as a staff person, what would you say were some of the best trends or some of the worst trends that the University has undergone?

McNair: I would say that some of the worst trends is when they abandoned the College of Basic Studies. I have full confidence that we are going to rediscover it under a different molding in the same manner that we rediscovered the semester system having tried the trimester and the quarter system was perhaps the preferred method. I can remember in some of those undergraduate courses talking about the cycles of history. Now I am
beginning to see the cycles of history and we are indeed reinventing some of the early spirit, but we are inventing it on a different level.

St. Julien: What would you say were some of the best trends?

McNair: I think the maturing of the University. Making that commitment to retain the academic excellence and yet move into the graduate programs and the research programs. I think that is one that we can all really be proud of. We are not there yet, but we are on our way.

St. Julien: Thank you very much for talking to us today.