

PATRICIA FAIRFIELD-ARTMAN ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Dorothy Darnell

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[Begin CD 1]

PFA: This is an interview with Dorothy Darnell conducted on Thursday, July 27, 2004. Explain to you is, tell me the story of your life and wherever it goes and on—

DD: Well, I've been, I'm a native of Greensboro. So I have lots of places to tell you about. I was a depression child and if there had not been a college in Greensboro that my father could afford, I probably would not have gone to college. He was in a firm that went into bankruptcy and he had saved, there are six, he had six daughters—

PFA: Yes.

DD: —he had funds set aside for our education at Elon [College] and, he went to Elon, and, but with the bankruptcy of the business, all this savings went into taking care of us. And so, when I, when my high school graduation was 1940 and I had already had two older sisters that were enrolled here and there wasn't, I don't remember any discussion about where I would go—

PFA: Yes.

DD: —remarkably inexpensive place to attend and I lived at home—

PFA: Yes.

DD: —which about a mile from here, north, I mean west, beyond Elam Avenue, one street beyond Elam—

PFA: Oh yeah.

DD: —and I fully expect the university to develop all the way to that street and my home place, where I was born, on Scott Avenue, an English professor lives now in my home and he has invited me to come and examine every nook and cranny, which

I intend to do—

PFA: Yes.

DD: —and when I win the lottery, I'm going buy it back—

PFA: [laughs]

DD: —and it could be a meeting place for the university. They already use a building on Scott Avenue over towards, behind the apartments that were made for the school at the corner there?

PFA: Yes.

DD: And the university uses a building that used to be Odell Hardware Company.

PFA: Oh yeah, exactly.

DD: Anyway, so I came here and the town students were, there was a big group of us and we had a lounge and I felt the spirit of the campus but I will always regret that I didn't have the dormitory experience and my friends then, my circle tended to be Greensboro girls because many of us were in the same boat—

PFA: Yes.

DD: —in going to a local school. But that doesn't mean I didn't make some friends across campus. My college years were war years, 1940 to 1944. You did not see men on this campus except those in uniform and [on] Saturday nights. We had an Overseas Replacement Depot [Editor's note: Between March 1943 and September 1946, Greensboro was home to the country's largest military base within any American city with over 330,000 soldiers passing through the depot.] across town and they would bring a truckload, literally—

FDA: Truck of men? [laughs]

DD: —literally, they were on the bed of the truck. Servicemen in their—I don't remember a lot of camouflage like you see now, just uniforms. And dances were held for their entertainment and—

Okay, then as for my major I sort of drifted into business as a major, business education as a major and that was, a very, a popular major at that time. They were begging for secretaries in Washington and wherever. And, of course, teachers were also needed in that field. So that was where I found my major and my favorite friend professors were in that department. They meant a very great deal to me. And I don't know that I was that impressive, but something made us click and I worked for one. And when I graduated, I was certified to teach and again Greensboro just seemed to be my regular

place to settle. And I remember the interview I had with the Superintendent of the Greensboro Schools, Mr. Ben L. Smith and he was a Duke man—

PFA: Yes.

DD: —and I was told that I was the only Woman's College graduate that he had ever employed.

PFA: [laughs] Gee!

DD: [laughs] I don't know that that was true but I was offered a position at the only high school here—

PFA: Yes.

DD: —I think at that time. And taught there four years and left and worked briefly at Elon College and did some graduate study in this time. Came back to Greensboro because they again needed somebody in that high school. It's now Grimsley [Senior High School]. And that's where I met Don. He had come there to teach while I was away and I've always thought that if I had been there when he came, we may have never—

PFA: [unclear]

DD: —but it was interesting that I was the newcomer when I came back. And we were married and, oh, wait a minute, I skipped all the war years: I went to Washington and worked in the summer of '44. And it was a professor here, the head of my department, who was working in the veteran's opportunity to come back to school and he had to approve the programs that were, had to do the approval of this. And like I say, there was a big push for us to go, there was a need for us to go to Washington. And that was a wonderful experience for me. And there was a polio epidemic in the summer of that year and so school was delayed at least a month. And I stayed in Washington longer than I expected to. When I returned the following summer, they still needed people and that was the summer the war ended—

PFA: Yes.

DD: —and I was there and was on Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House when Mr. [Harry] Truman came out and spoke to us—

PFA: Wow!

DD: —and it was an exciting time.

PFA: Oh, yeah.

DD: Washington was a wonderful city to roam around in—concerts, plays, whatever. I was there six years, I lived there.

PFA: Oh yeah.

DD: I remember walking comfortably to the Watergate Concerts—

PFA: Yeah.

DD: —and that kind of thing. Anyway, in 1951, Don and I were married and I taught one year after we were married and had babies and lost one child and I now have a son and a daughter and one little granddaughter. Don's field is architectural drawing and I didn't realize until we had enough time to talk about former students and this kind of thing that there are monuments all over North Carolina [laughs] that Don could claim because they were designs that, the steeple at Wake Forest and the, you know—

PFA: My goodness.

DD: —different things.

PFA: Yeah.

DD: —because he had a number of students that that did become architects and he follows them still with great interest. And he's the artist, I'm not. [laughs]

PFA: [laughs] Of a different sort, you are.

DD: Yeah. We've had a good good run. He's a few years older, not many. And then after when I had a child, I had my daughter and the head of the business department here called me and asked if I would agree to teach just one or two classes and she was just a very small child and yes, I did it because there was enough flexibility in the college schedule that I felt like I could do it.

PFA: Do you remember what year that was?

DD: That would be 1957—

PFA: Yes.

DD: —she was born in '56. And I began taking one graduate course at a time, you know, kind of blending it with family and the baby. And then the head of that department was asked to be acting dean of the Graduate School, Vance Littlejohn. And I cannot believe what I did one of those years: Dr. Littlejohn asked me to more or less take care of his office in the department, which meant all kinds of managing it—

PFA: Yes.

DD: —I didn't make decisions that required him, but anyway, he asked me to do. That I was doing. I was helping with self-study for the Southern Association—

PFA: Oh gosh!

DD: —and taking graduate, no, teaching, I was teaching. In fact, if I was taking a graduate course, I don't know what it would have been. Previously, previous to all of this going on for me at the Woman's College, I did some graduate study at Chapel Hill. But anyway, Vance Littlejohn asked me to manage the department, teach and I did. [laughs]

PFA: Yes.

DD: I'll never forget, I decided to have a desk that was on the ground floor—

PFA: [laughs]

DD: —down in the basement of what used to be Forney [Building], well,

PFA: Forney is still here.

DD: Yeah—and I left his desk because he occasionally needed to come to it. So I saw this desk on that ground floor and I had it moved up there for me. [laughs] And it cost \$3.50 for them to move it and he hit the ceiling—

PFA: [laughs]

DD: —you know, how dare they. Well, I think it was critical for my having it moved in the first place but then that little charge on his budget—

PFA: Oh yeah.

DD: —that really offended me that he would make such a big deal of it.

PFA: It's still the case now.

DD: You never know. Yes, anyway, okay, then I was given an appointment to teach in that department and he came back as the head of—I taught I don't know how long and the position was eliminated. I wasn't on a tenure track anyway. And that's a hard time—

PFA: Yes:

DD: —I couldn't quite—I remember when he told me and I, you take these things without tears but later you think what was he saying? Was I fired? You know, am I a terrible teacher or whatever? But I realize now that constraints on the departments to retain or not keep faculty is a big issue at any university, at any college—

PFA: Yes.

DD: —so, by this time, I guess people knew me rather generally although I was mainly in that one department but Tommy Lou Smith—let me back up a minute, in your, in your time here, did you have what was called a class chairman?

PFA: No.

DD: Okay. There was a system of, no, I realize you couldn't have been a system of that, we had a permanent faculty—freshman advisor —

PFA: Yes.

DD: —chairman and then, then a faculty member was appointed to that class when it became a sophomore class and stayed with that class until graduation. That person, I'm sure, I didn't work there at that time, but I'm sure they were, had release time to do it. And, and, it, that person was a focal point. They did not advise every student about their program but they were there for the big issues—

PFA: Oh!

DD: —the change of major or if you were on academic probation or if you had flunked out or whatever. And the day I was asked to come into that Office of Academic Advising, Laura Anderton had been the, she was called the associate dean. You see, when you're a college—Mereb Mossman was the dean of the faculty, I think.

PFA: Yes.

DD: So then what do you call people who report to her? They were called associate deans. Tommy Lou Smith was named after Laura Anderton.

PFA: Okay.

DD: And I guess it was Tommy Lou who—I don't know if it was Laura or Tommy Lou who invited me to come into that office. But I did and so it would be that period when the university, the Woman's College had become co-ed first—

PFA: Yes.

DD: —and university status came in what year? I'm going say 1968 but that's close. [Editor's note: The name changed from Woman's College to The University of North Carolina at Greensboro in 1963.]

PFA: Yes.

DD: And I was an assistant in that office and much later, many, several years later, I was made assistant dean and retired in—officially in 1987. But then I was invited to help with the adult student program. ACES [Adult Continuing and Evening Students Program]—

PFA: Yes.

DD: —and Brooks Graham and I did that on a part-time basis until a year or two ago. Two or three years ago.

PFA: Yes.

DD: Once my responsibilities in, as an assistant, I guess you would say I was the first designated person [coughs] to work with students with physical disabilities. [coughs] At that time, primarily we had a few visually impaired and a few hearing inspired. I do not recall the big swell in learning disabilities—

PFA: Yes

DD: —but I became very much involved with visually impaired and the hearing impaired—

PFA: Is this after it became co-ed, changed?

DD: Yes. Yes.

PFA: Yes.

DD: Because one of my favorite students was Joe Illman who had drug-induced diabetes, which did not mean illegal drugs but something, you know caused it—caused the diabetes and the blindness and he was one of my favorites. As a matter of fact, his father has just died within the last two or three days. His father was ninety and I remember we went to the circus one night and his father told him, told Joe everything that was happening—made an impression on me. Anyway, when I retired, I didn't want any gifts but they provided a stipend of scholarship contribution to the Illman Scholarship Fund, which had been established by his parents by the time the student had died. And in my honor, they, the faculty gave a stipend and another part of my retirement gift was to go to the Warren Ashby Dialogues—

PFA: Yes.

DD: —so I left on that note—

PFA: Oh!

DD: —and I'll mention a town's person that you may want to add to your list because he, if I'm not mistaken, he was the first male undergraduate student that I knew, Tom Martin. Now, you know him through the City of Greensboro because he's the Tom Martin that,

what is his title? He may be City Manager? [Editor's note: Tom Martin was Director of Planning.]

PFA: I was going to say I think—

DD: I think so. And he recently served as president of the Alumni Association—

PFA: Okay. I think I remember seeing something—

DD: —and Tom basketball player, he's as tall as that door [chuckles] and he was one of the very first male and had that experience then coming back on campus for athletics and for the Alumni Association so I think he's his observations might be very interesting.

PFA: Yes.

DD: As far as transition to males. [laughs] We had, at one time, we had a dean of man and I do believe it was Tom Martin—and that was funny [laughs] but then we began to get a few more.

You know. I would say, I don't know if it was just a rumor. [coughs]) I don't know how to, to tell you for sure, but we were told that we were the largest women's college in the world. Now whether that means a public a state-funded or literally the largest women's college in the world. I think there were about 2,500 students when I was here and I have no idea what the enrollment at Wellesley [College] might have been or Smith [College]—have no idea. Maybe we were the largest in the world. And I think there were some who hated to lose that identification—

PFA: Yes.

DD: —more time, faculty would come back on campus. There was a Dean of Women Katherine Taylor [Class of 1928, professor, dean], who was in the WAVES [United States Naval Reserve known as Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service] with Laura Anderton, I think.

PFA: Oh!

DD: As a matter of fact, I've heard that it was Miss Taylor who persuaded Laura to come to the South but they were WAVES and their uniforms were so handsome and the hats—

PFA: Yes.

DD: —anyway, they would come recruiting and I loved the WAVES hat.

PFA: Yeah.

DD: I still do. Okay. Ask me a question!

PFA: How do you think the faculty reacted to the change to the co-ed business?

DD: I would have to just, if I had any intuition about it, I think I could have identified a few—

PFA: Yes.

DD: —who wished we would remain Woman's College and these were English—these were the older faculty members. I remember an English professor that I sort of got this feeling—

PFA: Yes.

DD: —and I don't, in a department like physical education, I don't know how they adjusted to it because they had a harder time, I would think with facilities and uniforms, you know, the whole bit.

PFA: Oh yeah. That's a good point.

DD: But whether they resented the idea, I wouldn't have any way of knowing that.

PFA: Right.

DD: More than an adjustment.

PFA: Yes.

DD: The faculty, so many of the faculty lived on McIver Street and families and single faculty members and it was quite a "Faculty Row" and, of course, some of those little houses some are still there—

PFA: Yes.

DD: —behind the new Science Building but most of them are gone—

PFA: Yes.

DD: —in those days, it was unheard of to cancel classes because of weather. [laughs] Unheard of! And you were ridiculed if you even considered such a thing—

PFA: [laughs]

DD: —and that it was not on until Dr. [Patricia] Sullivan followed who? [William] Moran?

PFA: Yes. Yes.

DD: It was not really until late in his tenure and then in her tenure that they started

cancelling classes because our commuting student body is far greater than those on campus, I think.

PFA: Yes. Oh, yeah.

DD: There were some who commuted from as far away as Sanford or Southern Pines or—and—

PFA: So when it was Woman's College when you were here as a student, were most of the students [on] campus—lived on campus?

DD: I think the majority, maybe, I don't know, I don't know. Have you seen any of the old yearbooks now?

PFA: [unclear]

DD: There is a group picture of town students in mine, the '44 book and it's a sizable group—

PFA: Yes.

DD: —but I can't, I don't have a good feel for whether—I'm sure the dormitory students outnumbered the town students.

PFA: Yeah. Oh, that's your yearbook.

DD: Transition—What do you call the decade of the transition?

PFA: Well, the early '60s, you know, going late '50s to early '60s going into the middle '60s.

DD: Okay.

PFA: There was a chancellor change in that time too? Wasn't there also?

DD: Probably the one that I knew very little about which—There was such a division in philosophy and happiness. [chuckles] And I ran into a faculty member at the grocery store yesterday and we always have to catch up on university news. I told him I was coming over here today and he said, "Well, ask her if she has read the [Allen] Trelease book" and I said, "Well, she's already told me she has not."

PFA: Yes.

DD: And I said, "You know, I don't." Now this guy that I was talking with was an assistant, was a vice chancellor—

PFA: Yes.

DD: —and I said, "You know, I know very little about that period that was so trying for so many people." And he said, "Well, Trelease treats it very well in his book." So I don't know. So I said, "Well, I believe the person who's going to, who's doing the doctoral study maybe waiting to use that book [chuckles] and I don't blame them, I don't blame her."

PFA: Yes, yes.

DD: I think she's deliberately waiting.

PFA: That's exactly right.

DD: But I can't comment on it because I was just not privy to any of it except that it was going on and there were faculty members that didn't speak to each other and that kind of thing.

PFA: Yes.

DD: As far as becoming co-ed, [chuckles] getting past the day of dean of man. I think it went very smoothly. Yeah, from everything I hear, it seems that way.

PFA: Were you here during the Civil Rights [Movement], which was like the late '60s?

DD: Yes.

PFA: How—was there—here on campus? Several people have commented on that and I know it's after transition?

DD: I'm trying to remember the, I remember some demonstrations in our building because we were in the Foust Building.

PFA: Yes.

DD: I remember demonstrations. I don't know what their, what their issues were because I don't remember that they were denied any, any privileges or I don't remember that, I may have the demonstrations confused with Cambodia. That was a very big issue—

PFA: Yes.

DD: —and I'd have to review the history of what it was. Well, it was the Ohio—

PFA: Oh, yeah.

DD: —massacre [Editor's note: On May 4, 1970, the Ohio National Guard shot unarmed Kent State University students during a protest against the bombing of Cambodia by United

States military forces.] and we did not have exams that Spring and students were allowed to drop courses, no questions asked, yes.

PFA: Oh?

DD: I wish I could be a better historian on it but that was—The students were TRULY upset and it was for years we had to refer to the "Cambodia Semester" because academic records were completely askew.

PFA: Amazing!

DD: Yes.

PFA: That's after that Ohio State?

DD: Yes, and that Ohio State thing—what was going on and what?

PFA: Vietnam?

DD: Yeah.

PFA: Wow!

DD: Forgetting my wars. [chuckles] There's too many these days.

PFA: Oh God, yeah.

DD: Ask me another question.

PFA: Well, you've answered —

DD: [chuckles]

PFA: —you haven't done a beautiful job. This has been fascinating.

DD: I don't think it sounds particularly interesting.

PFA: Oh, I do. It's amazing! One of the things that Sally [Robinson] has mentioned about being a student on campus and the involvement of the faculty with students—

DD: Right.

PFA: Yes.

DD: We had a faculty advisor, my first one was a professor in the history department but then you, by the junior year you moved to your major department and had an advisor there and

yes, we felt very close to that, to those people. I liked, well, this is before the time you're really looking at but Harriet Elliott—

PFA: Yes.

DD: — was back and forth from Washington at the time I was here because [President Franklin D.] Roosevelt had appointed her as an advisor of some kind. This building is named for her—

PFA: Yeah?

DD: —and she had a good friend, Louise Alexander, a political science professor who was also a lawyer and that was one of my favorite professors, Louise Alexander. And all students related to their faculty—and admired her very much. My biology professor scared the hell out of me!

PFA: [laughs]

DD: [laughs] And when we studied blood and he got around to my finger, he said, "My goodness, the ends of your fingers sure are tough." And I said, "Piano and keyboard did it!" [laughs] But he was a big ole bear that scared everybody but you grew to like him but he was fierce. I saw him throw an eraser one day in the class, [chuckles] chalkboard eraser.

Involvement with students: We were called, "Miss So-and-So." Never any first name basis with the faculty. And when student teachers, when I was in academic advising, would tell me that they were being taught to have their students call them by their first names—[chuckles] I think I disagreed with that and still do.

PFA: Oh, I do. There's that, there's that separation.

DD: Oh, yeah. Students, I would say, were very politically active because of the war and the—and the—I think Harriet Elliott had a big influence on us in that regard because she truly was a mentor of people, not systems are important and encouraged the women students to go into the professions like law, politics [unclear].

[recording paused]

DD: We were talking about the students with disabilities and it amazes me now the numbers that are encouraged to come—

PFA: Yes.

DD: —and they a very a very fine program for them, I understand.

PFA: Yes.

[recording error]

DD: He was a young English professor and he's a South Carolinian and has this beautiful Southern way of speech and I guess he made a motion that teaching be considered a part of the tenure criterion and to this day, it's called Tisdall Amendment because it was passed.

PFA: Yes.

DD: And he still believes it. And I do too.

PFA: Yes, yes.

DD: I left him out in my summary of deans. Charles [Tisdall] came in as dean, acting dean of academic advising while I was there and he's, he's a write. He wrote poetry and novels and once he landed in Greensboro from Princeton, he never entertained to my knowledge, going any other place. He liked this city. He's a good guy.

PFA: Yes.

DD: But I wouldn't know, I think UNCG/Woman's College had a reputation for being very conservative about promotions. I don't know if I just saw it that way or whether that was true but the number of people who were made full professors or granted tenure looked disproportionately small to the North Carolina State [University], of course, they were much bigger.

[recording error]

DD: Form of strictness that I recall as Phi Beta Kappa. And some branches of the university, I think it's almost automatic—

PFA: Yes.

DD: —but not here—

PFA: Yes.

DD: —and the women faculty, the old Woman's College faculty held strong to those Standards.

PFA: And the Golden Chain?

DD: Yes. Me too. I'm an honorary. It wasn't in existence when I was a student. [chuckles]

PFA: Nancy [White] wears hers—also her—

DD: Yeah.

[End of Interview]