

## PATRICIA FAIRFIELD-ARTMAN ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Rosemary McGee

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[Begin CD 1]

PFA: —July 15, 2004 interviewing Dr. Rosemary McGee. Dr. McGee, the only question I have is: Tell me the story of your life.

RM: Well, where do you want me to begin? [laughs]

PFA: Wherever. Wherever it goes is fine.

RM: Well, I'm a Texas gal and went to college in San Marcos, Texas, Southwest Texas [State Teachers College]. And Pop always said, "If there hadn't been a college there, I couldn't have gone to school because we were a [Great] Depression family and I knew from the very beginning that I wanted to be in physical education. And so from there, I got my degree and went down to Galveston to teach in a junior high school and I love that age group. They are not sophisticated and wanted to play and, you know, in the spring.

PFA: Yes, I know.

RM: —but after one year, I got an offer to go to Illinois State to do my master's and I hadn't planned to do it that quickly. But Pop encouraged me so I went up there on an assistantship and I've always been interested in numbers and statistics and so I went up there and studied with Esther French and Grant Smith who—French and Smith had written a book on measurements. And so I got my master's there and taught for a year but because of that connection, I went on to [State University of] Iowa, which was the place to go at the time, I imagine and studied with Gladys Scott and Elizabeth Halsey. And when I finished, I was twenty-six.

PFA: Yes.

RM: —and I had two job offers: One was to come here and one was to [unclear] Colorado and Pop always said, "[unclear] go on" and he helped me, of course, paid about \$100 a month to pay it off. And he always said, "You got to, if I help you, you got to come back to Texas to teach." [laughs] Which I never did.

PFA: [laughs]

RM: So I took this one. And you often wonder: What if I'd taken the other one? And so I came here in '54, Ethel Martus was head of the department. Everybody was, it was already a well-known department. Gail Hennis, whose name I'm sure you've run across—she just died last year—was doing her doctorate at Iowa and that's how I had the contact. And so she talked to Miss Martus and offered me the job over the phone; I didn't come for an interview—

PFA: Oh!

RM: —and so I took the job. The department was already well-known. And they were starting a master's program, a graduate program and needed some help with dissertations and thesis. I ended up teaching graduate classes. It's interesting when I tell people I'm a physical [education] educator, they think I taught tennis and swimming all my life [laughs] and you know what, that's okay. I don't try to explain—

PFA: Yes.

RM: —but, you know, when I looked at my vitae and directed sixty-one some master's and thirty-some dissertations and been on many, many committees, there's no way I can have them understand that I just don't teach games—

PFA: Yes.

RM: —you know, which is fun. As I say, I'm not Dr. McGee, I'm just Rosemary, [clears throat] so we started the graduate program and [clears throat] and the thing that I appreciated at the time was the strength, the power of those women. And Miss Martus was very good about encouraging us to get into associations, going to conventions, and publishing and speaking, and [clears throat] to be on committees. She wanted us to be involved on campus [clears throat] and she wanted us to be recognized as legitimate faculty, not just game people over there at the gym. You know, that we had some sense about us and could make a contribution, you know. So elections came up and we were always nominated for everything. And so she got us exposed and I thought had great vision because of that. And [clears throat] and that way we got to know people on campus. Surely, you've run into them, Lyda Gordon Shivers and Jo Hege, they're all deceased now but were strong, strong women: [unclear], Harriet Elliott. I didn't know her, but [clears throat] the program kept going. The thing that I realized and that I really appreciated, not only was the faculty women, were the faculty women strong, but the students were strong—

PFA: Yes.

RM: —and when we went from Woman's College [of the University of North Carolina, now UNC Greensboro] to co-ed, I think the thing that we lost was leadership roles for women—

PFA: Yes.

RM: —you know, president of Student Government, vice-president of Student Government. I served on the Honor Board and on, you know— [coughs] And what was the other one called, Social Board? And fantastic women! You know, here they were, hearing cases on their peers and could make the right decision. Tough, tough decisions [unclear].

PFA: I'm not very good at this.

RM: I don't go to many social things on campus because I get too emotional about it.

PFA: You do, that's great.

RM: But so over the years then, Miss Martus promoted us and got us involved with associations, elected to offices and all that kind of mess. And Lord, we went—yeah, we went to conventions and we worked hard but we played hard. You know, we'd go to the beach and we'd go to—Have you ever been ruby mining up at Franklin, [North Carolina]?

PFA: No.

RM: You ought to go sometimes. We'd go up there and have fun. But anyway, worked hard but played hard too. And we were very active. The thing I always remember about teaching while it was Woman's College, there were thousands of people [unclear].

PFA: [laughs]

RM: And then between classes, we'd go back in the lounge and have coffee and—

[recording error]

—smoked, of course, at that time. But I didn't and half of the staff had dogs and I didn't have a dog. And but you, you learn to cope. Now you read about all this stuff about secondary smoke and [laughs] not being good for you and I had lived with it all those years— [laughs]

PFA: [laughs]

RM: —so anyway, we went ahead and fought for a long time, once we got the master's program established, to get the doctoral program established and [University of North Carolina at] Chapel Hill fought us on it—

PFA: Oh Wow!

RM: —and we had a much stronger, more recognized department than Chapel Hill had at the time. Or has ever had! And, but Dr. Cornwall was head over there and a powerful man.

And Miss Martus would get us all together, all the PhD's by that time and we'd go talk to President [William] Friday [unclear] about getting a degree approved. And he kept delaying it, delaying it, throwing things in our face but finally gave approval. And then, of course, we started attracting more doctoral faculty because we had to have them.

PFA: What year was that, do you know?

RM: I don't know. [laughter] I'm not very good about dates. Now, so, you know, I was teaching tests and measurements and statistics and—and wrote some textbook on measurements and then— It's now in its fifth edition—

PFA: Oh!

RM: —and so with Harold Barrow who was head of the department at Wake Forest and he has retired but I think he is about ninety-five now. He—He and his wife are living in Winston. I stay in touch with him.

Somewhere along the way, this may have been after we became co-ed, you may not be interested in this, we needed a dean of women. And Dr. [Otis] Singletary was chancellor at the time and he asked me if I would be acting dean of women. This was following Sadye Dunn who was a really, really strong undergraduate president of Student Government and everything. And so I took that on with the proviso that I could teach, that I could keep teaching my measurements class and I kept up with my doctoral students. I don't know but anyway I did that for two years. And I realized that I was not keeping up professionally with research and what I needed to be doing and so I went back to teaching and gave up the administrative job.

I never shall forget Celeste Ulrich [unclear]. She was one of the people we brought in to help with the doctoral program and had been an undergraduate here and taught here for what, twenty years or something and left to go to Oregon to be a teacher. But when I went over to be the dean of women, she said, "You're just interested in power." And I thought: How wrong can you be? How wrong can you be? And some people, I think, like some of these people want to be superintendents. They're interested in power but I was not interested in power, you know?

PFA: Yes.

RM: But anyway, I went back to doing my professional work, which was a good decision. I enjoyed being the dean of women but I did not enjoy doing things because I was a dean of women, not because I was [unclear].

PFA: Yes.

RM: There's a big difference. Doing things by title instead of [unclear]. But that was back in the days where you got your hair done every week and you got a manicure every other week and you went to all the teas and did all the functions that you should do. And I just wasn't interested in that for the rest of my life so I went back to teaching. And we kept growing the doctoral program and somewhere along there, we got promoted from a

department to a school. Miss Martus then became from the head of the department to the dean. And then, after she left and some other deans came in and out, we needed a dean and so Dr. [Stanley] Jones asked me if I would fill in for a year as interim dean, you know. And I think, I think it's real interesting that I have done all of these administrative things that I did not seek and did not want but they thought I was capable of doing. [

[laughter]

RM: That leadership that we have been—

PFA: Yeah.

RM: —talking about. And so I did the dean, acting dean for a year and I told the staff at my first meeting with them, I said, "The first thing you need to know is that I am not a candidate to be the dean. So this is not a political appointment. I'm in here to fight for you, to do whatever I can do to help you get on with your research, your teaching, whatever a dean needs to do." And one thing I did do that year is that I equalized salaries, I think that was important at the time.

PFA: Oh!

RM: It was [unclear] particularly—The women faculty had not been treated right salary-wise so Dr. Jones helped me do that. And I did that for a year and went back to teaching. And then I retired in '88, having taught for thirty-four years here. And done all this doctoral work and been on all these committees, been chairman of the University Curriculum Committee, you know, and asked to run for president of the Faculty Senate, which I did not do.

And [clears throat] Martha Ramsay in the library [is] another lady to talk to, she tried to talk me into running for that and I said, "Not on my life." [coughs] But anyway, we started getting a bunch of men faculty in and then some women, new women faculty. And all of a sudden, they—I got the feeling that they didn't think I was qualified—

PFA: Yes.

RM: Because when I came up, my—measurements was my field, but I was directing thesis in philosophy, you know, and physiology and stuff like that. By the time you got kids, the students' committee together, you know, Laura Anderton and all these people. We had the academic backgrounds for a strong—so I felt, so I felt, for a strong committee. So I felt reluctance about chairing these committees and the students had some say about who's going to chair their committee—

PFA: Yes.

RM: —and but I got to the feeling as all these new people started coming in and they were

specialists, you know, they were much more zeroed in on just this one field and just their own research and the hell with the rest of the students and the rest of the program! And I also had the feeling that I had lost their respect. So I retired early—

PFA: Yes.

RM: —retired at age sixty-two instead of sixty-five. And as it worked out fine. I had one year and then my folks got sick and I went to Texas for seven years to take care—first my Dad—

PFA: So you did come home?

RM: Yeah, I did go home finally. Right.

PFA: [laughs]

RM: [laughs] Not to teach, but I did go home. He was sick a long time and then Mother—and I have a sister and brother-in-law in a similar retirement facility that is in San Antonio and—

PFA: Yes.

RM: —but finally Mother, they have a nursing home near where my sister is and Mother said, "Well, you need to get on with your life and go back to Greensboro." Everybody kept saying, "You going to move back to Texas? You going to move back to Texas?" And [laughs] I said, "No way am I going back to Texas!"

[laughter]

RM: —And so this friend Marian Solleder that you had there on your list. [coughs] We would go over to her house and take care of the mail, the—the mail and water the flowers and so, you know, I had a yard man so I kept the house. And about two weeks, every three months, my sister would go to San Marcos to be with the folks and I could come home for two weeks. And I did that for seven years. And I traveled a little bit, not a whole lot. Marian has been all over the world like Gail [Hennis] but I wanted to stay home.

But, I guess, as I reflect on it, what I think about is the strength of the women faculty and their respect that they had and the opportunities for the women students to develop into leadership and not be cowed because, you know, the men would think they were smart or something and they wouldn't really—And I think we lost that and at the time, you know, all women's colleges were going co-ed, like Florida and Virginia and South Carolina, Florida State, you know, went, and they immediately, Florida State was great timing. They immediately got in on all the GIs with their athletic programs. And we had, by the way, we had a lot of different, divisiveness about the road to go co-ed and

many of our women faculty, as you are probably aware, many, many, many of our women were opposed to it. And some of them have not gotten over it yet but anyway.

The other big divisive vote, I think was when Chancellor [William] Moran decided to go to big-time athletics. And the thing that I remember about that is that you are probably aware that Chancellor [Patricia] Sullivan has been able to get some equitable monies into our budget because we were not treated right in the past, budget-wise, because we were the little sister, you know?

PFA: Yes.

RM: And so she's gotten some money for that. If we had stayed a women's college and well, if they had not had the men and then big-time Division One athletics, we would never have gotten our facilities—

PFA: Yes.

RM: —we would not have gotten the new building, athletic fields, the soccer fields, the stadium and stuff like that. Well, we might have gotten a tennis court then, you know, but the great push, you know, we've got to have the facilities and you couldn't host a national soccer tournament if you didn't have adequate facilities to do it—

PFA: Right.

RM: —and if we had not, if we'd stayed Division Three athletics and if we had not gone co-ed, we would not have gotten the facilities. And so I feel that those two decisions got us the facilities that we needed and because we had the facilities AND because we had great, great doctoral program, we were able to attract the faculty.

PFA: Yes.

RM: We had a little bit of debate. I don't know whether that's in [Allen] Trelease's book [*Making North Carolina Literate: The University of North Carolina at Greensboro from Normal School to Metropolitan University*] or not, but—but the EDD and the PhD. We wanted the PhD and an EDD and I forget now the transition that we got one of them and then we had two of them and then they decided one of them we didn't need. Anyway, they reinstated the PhD now and that's why we have both programs. But, that's, that's another thing of this business of looking down on something. They were looking down on the EDD, which is a very respectable degree, and at the time, I got a PhD from Iowa because that's what Iowa offered, you know, but we had a lot of students come through here with EDD's who went on to be great curriculum specialists all over the country, you know.

PFA: Yes.

RM: So I don't know, I guess the vote on co-ed, the vote on athletics and the vote on, not the vote but the processing of the two degrees, second-class citizens, were probably the three

things [unclear]. And, and, I bought my house in '63 and I sold it in '03, had paid off my mortgage and had no intention of moving this soon. But it was a good move and I'm here!

PFA: Great! Do you think—?

RM: [laughs]

PFA: One question I do have which, Sally [Robinson] brought up is the Civil Rights Movements, during that whole interaction, yeah, that whole change-over.

RM: Yeah. Because I was the dean of women when the black students came and Shaw [Residence] Hall, you know Shaw Hall?

PFA: Yes.

RM: We divided, we wanted the whole wing of the bottom floor of Shaw Hall for the black students and we didn't have but three or four [black students]. I don't know why, but we did everything we could to make them comfortable but I'm not sure, to hear their side of it that we did it right even then. But that was a very traumatic time. I thought we were more receptive to them than they probably thought. Have you been into the new Elliott [University] Center?

PFA: Yes.

RM: To the bookstore?

PFA: Yes.

RM: Because the big thing on the wall about the blacks that's up there?

PFA: Yes.

RM: So, yeah, I think that'll be very definite. And that, that came right after co-ed, didn't it?

PFA: Yes, in the '60s mid '60's?

RM: We went co-ed in '63, yes. Well, I was dean of women I think it about '66, '68, somewhere like that. We are all co-ed and the women were still powerful in Student Government, and Clarence Shipton was the dean of men and, you know, [unclear].

PFA: [laughs]

RM: But anyway, gradually, of course, the men have gotten even more. I don't know, is the break-down 50/50 yet? I doubt it, still more women on campus.

PFA: Yeah, no question.



RM: And—but I think the men are—being head of Student Government and running the newspaper and doing all those things that the women did. They had a great Junior Show and those kinds of things have phased out. But yeah, the civil rights thing, I'm sure it did, and the girls marched, you know, they supported the [North Carolina] A&T [State University]—

PFA: That's right, yeah.

RM: Yeah, yeah, it was, it was exciting. Yeah.

[laughter]

PFA: [unclear]

RM: So what else do you need to know?

PFA: That's it! That's really good. But, of course, if you think of anything else, we can always continue on.

RM: Yeah. I always felt that my role was in the graduate program and even though I taught activity, you know, I taught swimming [and] some golf. There's a beautiful pool here and everybody says, "Well, you know, you can go swimming." And I said, "No, I don't want to go swimming, you get wet." So you know. I have no desire to go to it but a lot of people use it for therapy, which is wonderful—

PFA: Sure.

RM: —you know, someday I might do that. Nancy, I'm trying to get Nancy, Nancy White to go. She has rheumatoid arthritis, you know. But anyway, it's been, it was the right place for me, it was Southern, it was strong women and when I have to be, I am a strong woman but I'm not obviously a strong woman.

PFA: Yes.

[Interview Ends]