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USF Women's Club Oral History Project
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Andrew Huse (AH): Well, my name is Andy Huse, and it's my pleasure to welcome Sue Vastine to the oral history program today, and it is February 23, 2016. And we were recently inspired to have Sue in because we did a bunch of exhibits on the USF Women's Club. And of course, Sue's a longtime member of the Women's Club, a retired employee; so, we've got all kinds of stuff to talk about today. Thanks for being with us.

Susan Vastine (SV): Thank you for having me.

AH: First of all, just give us a little bit of background. Tell us about where you came from. Kind of your—a little bit about your family and what brought you to USF.

SV: To USF. Well, how many hours have you got? No, no. I was born at an early age in New York City during the war. I lived in the Second World War, this is. I lived in Ohio and Michigan; my father was sent there because he was part of war housing. And after the war was over, we moved back to New York, but this time to upstate New York, where we lived on the side of a mountain, way out in the county.

And at the age of 11, I caught polio¹. We don't know from whom because I was the only one. We lived in the country and nobody else in our whole town got it that year. But I was the first. The first of many things.

¹Polio is a contagious viral illness that can cause paralysis, difficulty breathing, and death. In the US, the last known case of naturally occurring polio occurred in 1979 but the virus continues to affect children and adults in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and some African countries.

And, so anyway, my parents realized, after a year and a half in the hospital and knowing that I would always be in a wheelchair, they realized if we stayed there I would be essentially homebound, in the wintertime, at least. So my father was working for General Electric [GE]², who were building a plant in Rome, Georgia. So he volunteered to be transferred. And we did. And let me tell you, a culture shock from country, upstate New York to small town, North Georgia is quite a change.

AH: Now, back it up just a little bit. You were 11 in what year?

SV: Nineteen forty-three.

AH: Nineteen forty-three.

SV: Nineteen forty-three.

AH: Oh no, but—

SV: I'm sorry.

AH: You were—so you were in '54?

SV: I was—fifty-four.

AH: Right, you were eleven. Okay. So, and the Salk's vaccine³—

SV: Came in the next year.

AH: Right. It didn't come in time to—right.

²General Electric (GE) is a US multinational conglomerate corporation that operates through several segments such as Appliances, Power and Water, etcetera.

³Jonas Salk is discovered and developed the first successful polio vaccine in 1953; however, widespread use of the vaccine did not come about until 1955.

SV: Right, right. In fact, after we moved to Georgia, and the vaccine came out, they were giving them at the community center. And my mother insisted that both my brother and I had to go and get the vaccine. And I said, “Mother, isn’t this like locking the barn door after the horse has been stolen?” But she was adamant, and so I did it.

AH: So, then what year did you move to Rome, then?

SV: Fifty-four.

AH: Okay. So, it’s the same year that you got the polio. Okay.

SV: Yes. Well, I’m sorry, I lied. I got it in ’53 because I was born in ’42. I got it in ’53, and then January of ’55 we moved to Georgia.

AH: Okay, all right.

SV: Where I stayed because I had a curve in my spine, the treatment in those days was to prevent—to keep the spine aligned as much as possible, so that your internal organs would not grow strangely. After you finished growing, there wasn’t so much danger, but they told me that I had to lay down for—I could sit up three hours a day, which pretty much ruined the chances of going to school.

So, I actually was homebound for school until my junior year of high school. But I had a telephone hookup in high school for my freshman and sophomore year, where a guy at the other end—that little box, the intercom, he would carry it to the different classrooms.

AH: Huh, neat.

SV: Yeah. So senior year I went. Took biology, chemistry, and physics all in the same year because those were things you had to have a lab to do. That was not easy.

AH: So were you more overwhelmed scholastically or socially? It must have been quite a big change.

SV: Good question. I was more overwhelmed socially. I ended up being the—when you're home, and you're in bed all day, what do you do? You study. So I was valedictorian of my class, even though most of them didn't even know me.

It did not go over well with the guy who thought that he was going to be the valedictorian. I found that out later. Anyway, so then it was time to think about college. And I knew that I needed to be away and on my own.

AH: Right. Well, and college isn't a given in your circumstances at that time. Now was this—I mean, were your parents very supportive of it or did you know that that's what you wanted to do or?

SV: Oh, they were very supportive, but they thought I would go to college there in Rome, which had two colleges. And I said, "No, no. The thing is, I need to be on my own." So I had gotten a scholarship from General Electric to the University of Illinois, which, at that time, was the place everybody in wheelchairs went.

Because this guy would come back from World War II, realized that a lot of veterans that were in wheelchairs were going to need education, etcetera, etcetera. So, he became the head of this. He really built this program. But they had very stringent rules. And one of the rules was, you had to be independent, which was fine.

But if you wanted to take a class that was in a classroom building that was more than one story high and had no elevator, you could not take that class. And I, at that time, thought I wanted to be a French major. So, guess where the modern language classes were?

So, I wasn't real thrilled about the idea of going to Illinois. And then I heard about a new school that was going to be built in St. Petersburg called Florida Presbyterian College [FPC], which is now Eckerd College. And it appealed to me. And my mother and I came down and looked at it, and it appealed even more.

And we said, But, it's expensive. And GE wouldn't give me the scholarship because it wasn't accredited because it had just started. So, they said, Don't worry, we'll work it out. And they did, and I went there, and it was very exciting.

It's interesting, I'll jump ahead for just one second, and say Jim, my husband, was in the charter class here at USF. So it was interesting for us to compare our experiences between a very small, 99-percent residential, Christian college, very innovative for its time.

They—FPC invented the winter term. We were the first to do that. Where you just take one class. So, it was interesting to compare. Some things were the same, and some were very different.

AH: Now, I can only imagine St. Petersburg in the 1950s, too. I mean, it must have made an impression.

SV: Well, the first two years we were in the maritime base, which is now USF St. Pete. Yes, only it was the maritime base.

AH: Yeah. These were not luxurious days, by the way.

SV: No, no, they were not.

AH: So you were surrounded by a beautiful environment, I'm sure, but that maritime base was not fancy. It was for sailors.

SV: Not at all. Not at all. You talk about buildings more than one story high. The women's dorm and the cafeteria were both on the second floor of the main building, and the only elevator was the kitchen elevator. So many times, we had to take garbage cans off the elevator, so there'd be room for me to go up and down. But we made it work. So, that was it. I graduated.

AH: Yeah, when did you graduate?

SV: I graduated in '64. I had realized pretty early on there was no way that I was going to make a living as a French major, unless I could go and live in France for a while, you know. I had great visions of being a translator, you know, sitting in my garrote (sic) and translating, or being at the UN [United Nations] with my earphones on, saving the world.

But, so, my advisor's wife was a librarian, and he encouraged me to do that, to look into that. I had always loved to read, and people always say, You love to read? You must be—Wow, they think that's all librarians do is sit down and read all the time. They don't know.

But I decided I wanted to be a librarian. Well, I got turned down by three library schools, the ones in [University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill] and FSU [Florida State University] because, they said, We don't think this is the career for you. You're in a wheelchair, how would you get the books down off the shelves?

Emory in Atlanta also turned me down because the dean said that she thought it would be too difficult for me on their campus. So, I made bold to say, "Well, I'm from Rome, Georgia, and I'm going to be at home. Would you mind if I just come down and look around and decide for myself whether it would be too hard for me?" And she said, "No, that would be all right."

So, I did. The library was very old, but it did have elevators. (AH laughs) And I managed to convince her. Now, the library school was in the library. So all my classes were in the same building. It was really easier than when I had gone to college. So, I managed to convince the dean she could accept me.

And I went to Emory. But after one year in Emory, in the cold, in the hills of Decatur, I said, I need to go somewhere where it's—I told you that before—where it's warm and flat. And USF was looking—I also decided I would be a cataloger. That was my interest.

AH: Yeah, and you decided this while you were still training and getting your education or was this after?

SV: Yes. No, no, no. Before. So I took all the cataloging classes I could. And, in fact, I even knew before I went that I wanted to be a cataloger because, of course, remember, at the time, this was the early '60s.

AH: It's very in demand.

SV: We were in the race to the moon with the Russians. And there was all this talk—if you're a cataloger that can read Russian, you've got it made. And I said, "Maybe I had better take Russian." So, I did take three years of Russian in college.

AH: Did you get good enough to be able to catalog Russian materials?

SV: Yes.

AH: Okay.

SV: It's easy to read it; the hard part is speaking it. So, you know, if you can read it. And interestingly enough, a lot of Russian words are really French words because the Russian nobility sent all their sons to France to be educated. So, having been a French major, that was a welcome surprise. It wasn't really that hard once you got past the alphabet barrier. So I graduated, looking for a job where it would be warm and flat.

And I heard that USF was looking for a cataloger, so I applied and came down. And Mr. Hardaway, who was the first library director, was showing me around the catalog department before my interview with Mary Lou Harkness, who was, then, Mary Lou Barker, the head of the department, and introduced me to—what he said, “Here's someone I believe you already know.”

And it was Bill Harrison, who had been a librarian at FPC and was now at USF. And he, of course, had encouraged me to become a librarian, so I'm sure he put in a good word. And Mary Lou asked me the most important question. She said, “I'm going to ask you two questions. You must answer, ‘Yes,’ to one of them.”

And I'm thinking, Oh my God, think, think; what kind of question would she be asking you? I thought it would be something about cataloging. The first question was, Do you play bridge? The second one, Are you willing to learn? I said, “Yes.” “No,” and “Yes.”

AH: That sounds like Mary Lou—

SV: I got it. I got the job.

AH: She loved bridge, didn't she?

SV: She did. She taught me every day at lunch.

AH: Well, that was going to be an important survival skill in the USF Women's Club.

SV: Oh yes. It still is.

AH: Right. So, well, tell us just a little bit about your first impressions of the campus. I mean, coming here, it wasn't much at the time, right?

SV: Big. It was big. That was my first impression; it was big. They had just moved into the new library right before I came.

AH: Right, okay. The student services building.

SV: So, a lot of—yes. Now it's the student services building. So, it looked like there was plenty of room for expansion, which there wasn't. I mean, we outgrew it pretty fast.

AH: Yeah, tell me about that. That's one thing that—USF was growing at such a fast rate, especially in the late '60s. We blew way past the projections for 10,000 students by 1970; I think two years before, we had already passed that point. Was it like coming to a different university every year because it was getting so much bigger? What did you notice about it?

SV: Well, to tell you the truth, I didn't think too much about the rest of the campus. I had a parking space, and I got from my parking space to work, and then when I got out, I got home.

Although, I really did not realize that it was so far away, so far out of town, so to speak. We had an artist lecture concert series at USF to bring some culture to the area, you know. I mean, the interstate wasn't done; going downtown was a major undertaking.

AH: Well, you know, people don't realize there was no arts in Tampa at the time. And there was no performing arts center, there's no Straz [Center for the Performing Arts]. I mean, anything that happened, either UT [University of Tampa] brought here or we brought.

SV: And UT had the Falk Theatre, which was not very big.

AH: Well, they tended to be a lot more conservative in the kinds of choices they made, whereas USF, especially as the '60s went on, was much more pushing the envelope with avant-garde and the kinds of things that people in downtown Tampa might not

understand. So, tell us about how you got involved in the Women's Club, and then we'll kind of go forward with your USF experience.

SV: Well, I need to start by saying that Mr. Hardaway was—I don't know if you've heard this before—he was very much interested in getting faculty and librarians together. That's why he built the wonderful snack bar at the top floor of the library.

AH: Right, there was a lounge.

SV: Yes. A beautiful lounge. And to that end, of course, remember that in those days, the Women's Club consisted mostly of non-working spouses of faculty, some administrators, some people like Mary Lou and Margaret Fischer, who were working full-time on campus but were interested.

But I think Mr. Hardaway thought, well, most of his librarians, all of his librarians, as far as he was concerned, all of his librarians who were female should join the Women's Club because at least we would get to know the wives of faculty. And as it turned out, just a little aside, there's an interest group.

It's now called the Supper Club, but it's been in existence, under one name or another, for the whole history of the place. And the Supper Club gets together once a month with spouses or guests. And I've had faculty—and Jim said the same thing—through the Women's Club, they got to know faculty from all over the campus that they never would've met otherwise and in a friendly relationship.

AH: Informal setting.

SV: Yeah, right. Thank you. But then, when the faculty have a problem, who do they go —? You know, they say, Oh, I know someone in the library. So, Jim got a lot more than I did because he was in public service. But Mr. Hardaway—

AH: He had a big plan. Right.

SV: He had a plan. He said, "You want to go to a meeting? You got the time." You didn't have to make up the time. They had neighborhood coffees, so the women could get to know the other women in their neighborhoods. We got time off to go to that. He really encouraged it.

AH: Okay. So, then tell us about some of your first impressions upon joining the Women's Club. Who are some of the people that you met first? Were there any incidents that told you like, Oh, this will be okay, or—and what was your initial attitude? I mean, were you enthusiastic about joining, or were you kind of like—?

SV: Oh, I was, I was. I had a bridge group. See, I had to hone my skills here. So I joined the—they had several bridge groups. But they had one that met in the evenings for women. It was just women in that league.

AH: And it probably helped that so many of your coworkers were part of the club, too.

SV: Actually, Mr. Hardaway was not as successful as he hoped to be.

AH: Oh, wow. Okay. So you—

SV: There were a few of us, but not everybody, by any means. And so, people, like—I did not go to most of the daytime meetings. Except we had three lunches a year. And they were always on campus. I did go to those and got to know people. And there was a book discussion group, but I wasn't in it. But the bridge group was good.

AH: Yeah, so what were the—they had so many different groups and activity groups and stuff. What were some that you joined?

SV: I don't think I joined any except the bridge group.

AH: Oh, just the bridge group.

SV: But they had, at one point—I mean, this was before I came—but I think they had something like 400 members and 30 interest groups, all the different sports and crafts and culture and cooking and eating and bird watching. You name it; they had a group for that.

Well, our goal, our motto—motto's not the right term but—we were to better our social relations with other campus members, support the university. And in the very early days, of course, Emily Post said, "Invitations must be hand addressed."

So, two of the main things that the Women's Club did in the early years was sit in a room over in the Ad building, hand addressing invitations. They also poured at events where it was coffee or punch was served. And Women's Club members were always called upon to do that, to bake cookies or whatever. We also raised money.

AH: This is the—you're referring to the mission, right?

SV: That's the—right, the mission. Thank you. The mission to raise money. When I came, they were raising money for television sets for the infirmary. So, there really wasn't any—somebody would put forth a need. And if they thought they could raise enough money to do it, they would do it.

AH: This is in the age when each resident hall had one television in the lobby. So, for people who are watching now, there wasn't TVs and flat screens everywhere.

SV: No, no, not at all. But some members volunteered, being like Pink Ladies in the infirmary. But I remember raising money for televisions. And then, somewhere pretty early on, we thought, Well, books are very expensive. Maybe it was the few librarians that were here, saying, We could give book scholarships.

We knew we couldn't raise enough money to give a tuition scholarship, but we could give a 50-dollar book scholarship to help students buy books. So, we did that for a few years, and we got better at organizing fundraisers, and what works and what doesn't work, and what's profitable and what isn't.

We did a bridge luncheon/silent auction for many years. But one of the first ones we did for the silent auction part was really more like a flea market. We decided to bring clothes. So, a lot of people brought clothes. And then when we got there we realized, Well, you really want to see your dress when you—?

I mean, there was a gorgeous formal there that Pat Riggs brought. Her husband was the vice president, and we said, Well, we can't go to the Christmas formal in Pat's dress. (AH laughs) When are we going to wear it? So, clothing did not last, but other things did.

AH: There were quite a few fashion shows, I remember.

SV: We did have a fashion show every year. Right, that was the spring luncheon. The fall luncheon was always the president telling us about what was happening at USF.

AH: I see, because it was always surprising. I saw Phyllis Marshall in pearls and wearing all this stuff. And normally, she's wearing sneakers and everything, so it was neat to see her all decked out.

SV: Well, if you look at some of the first scrapbooks, you will see that the ladies all wore hats and gloves to the meetings. So it was much more formal than it is, but everything was more formal in those days.

AH: Right, kind of the residue of the 1950s hadn't completely—

SV: Yes, yes. My mother wore her hat when she went downtown. She wore her hat and her gloves. So, anyway, after a few years of giving book scholarships, then we thought, Well, you give a book scholarship that lets one person buy books, but if you give to the library, then many people can use the books.

So we did that. Both the Grace Allen library endowment and the Grace Allen scholarship were started in the years when the state said, If you will earn 100,000 dollars, we will match it, and it doesn't matter how long it takes you to do it.

So that became our two goals. In the first year, we gave one scholarship. I think last year, we gave eight. And that's just from the interest of the endowment.

AH: Right, right. That's great.

SV: And the books, now, mostly go to the electronic resources, which the whole budget does, from what you said.

AH: Okay, right. Well, then and also the—what is it? Oh, it just ran away from me. So you were always involved in these kinds of fundraising.

SV: I was always involved with the Women's Club, from 1965 when I joined. But, as I said, it was mostly the bridge group, and then going to the luncheons and participating in the fundraisers.

AH: Now, we have to talk about bridge because so much time has been—I know that Mary Lou—I have pictures of her playing bridge.

SV: We played at lunch everyday.

AH: Right, and some very emotive looks on her face. So, first of all, you had never played bridge before.

SV: Never. I had an uncle, when I was getting ready to go to college, who said, "You will never be a success in college unless you learn to play bridge." And I said, "Like heck I will," so I did not learn to play bridge.

And I could see that it was very popular and a nice way to get to know people, but it did take a lot of time. And some of them should have been studying instead of playing bridge. But then, I was working, and I had to promise that I would learn.

AH: So you did.

SV: So I did.

AH: And so, what were some of the other preoccupations of the Women's Club? Obviously, there's a lot of dinners and random parties.

SV: Well, I saw that, even though the Supper Club, in those—I should back up a second and say, in the early days, the Women's Club membership was restricted. You could only be a member if you worked at USF, if you were faculty or staff, or you were the spouse of a faculty or staff, and you had to be a woman. It was the Women's Club.

There was a couple's bridge group, and then there was this Supper Club that met. And it was mostly couples. So, I realized, as a single person, I felt out of place. Besides, you had to cook, (AH laughs) and I was not a great cook. I was not even a half great cook.

But as soon as I got married, when we got back from the honeymoon, I said, “Now we can join the Supper Club.” And Jim says, “Say what?” I said, “You’re going to join the Supper Club.”

AH: He said, “What have I gotten myself into?”

SV: Yeah, he wasn’t too excited about that because he didn’t know anybody, but then he loved it just as much as I did and has said, “Thanks to that, I’ve met people from all over.”

AH: Well, as long as we’re talking about meeting people, tell us about meeting Jim, if you don’t mind.

SV: You want that story?

AH: We’ve got some time. We don’t have all afternoon but—

SV: Well, Jim had been a charter student here. He finished in August of ’64, went to Tallahassee, got his MLS [Master of Library Sciences], got drafted. They were just waiting for him to get out to draft him. So then he went in the Navy and was in the Navy for five years. And every time he came back for a visit, they’d ask him if he was looking for work.

So, of course, when he got out of the Navy he came back. Mary Lou was on vacation, but she hired him over the phone because things were different in those days; no search committees. I had been on vacation, and when I got, back I was told, Guess what? We have a new librarian in the catalog department.

Hadn’t come yet, but we were getting a new one. And we had someone who had been a paraprofessional for a bunch of years, Arlene King, who had gone to Tallahassee to get her degree because USF didn’t have a library school in those days. And they had kind of promised her she’d have the next opening in cataloging.

So I said, “I didn’t know Arlene was finished.” They said, No, it’s not her. It’s some guy. And the worst of it is, he doesn’t even want to be a cataloger. He wants to be reference,

but they don't have an opening in reference, so he's coming to catalog. And here is the kicker: he is taking your desk.

I have to explain that cataloging is something you don't learn in library school, really; you learn it on the job. And you have a mentor. And Bob Bradley, who was my mentor, I had to confer with him a lot. So our desks were right next to each other. But I'd been there for five years at this point. I didn't really need a mentor anymore. But this one did.

So he was taking my desk, so I was prepared not to like him at all. But he came, and I looked him over, and I thought, Gee, not so bad. He's kind of nice looking. And of course, then I got to know him, and the more I knew him the more I liked him. And I'm a fast worker.

AH: So he arrived closer to like 1970 then?

SV: Yes.

AH: Right around then?

SV: Yes, yes, 1970.

AH: All right, so you were here for a good five years—

SV: He came in September. I came in September of '65; he came in September of '70. And librarians do a lot of partying, as you know.

AH: Especially back then.

SV: Yeah, more than they do now, I think. But we even had a library group that went out for dinner as a group somewhere. The farther away, the better, you know. We went to Lakeland. We went to Kapok Tree in Clearwater. We just had a wonderful time.

So, he was just, sort of, made to come into the social life of the other single librarians and some that were married whose spouses would come. But of course, we were together

every day, all day. So, we got to know each other pretty quick, and we got engaged in December.

AH: Oh wow, that year?

SV: Yes. And we had both been invited to a New Year's Eve party being given by another librarian, separately—we had been invited separately. So we went together. And it's customary, at midnight, to kiss everybody. Well, then after that, some people knew that there's more here than we know about, so that was sort of how we announced our engagement, so to speak.

Jim decided we should be married in May. This was January, essentially. May. And I said, "Why do we have to wait so long?" He said, "Because that's when the rhododendrons are in bloom on the Blue Ridge." I said, "Why do we care about that?" He said, "Because that's where we will be camping for our honeymoon."

And that's what we did. Only we missed the rhododendrons by one week. Should've been a week earlier. They were past their prime. That's all right.

AH: It's still a good story.

SV: And of course, we went to the Library of Congress on our honeymoon.

AH: Okay. So, what else? What haven't we covered about the Women's Club? Certainly there's—

SV: Well, many, many funny stories.

AH: Tell us about some of the personalities you met because, I mean, there were so many strong, legendary personalities.

SV: Well, okay. I will tell you a couple. I'll tell you two, if that doesn't take too long, then I could go on. But the best one was, when Jim and I first joined, the Supper Club was meeting monthly, the whole group. We were still small enough that we could all meet if the house was not too tiny.

We used to alternate between small dinners, like a dinner for eight or ten or twelve, where everybody cooked one of the courses. That was later on. But at this particular time, it was like potluck every month.

Someone would call you up and say, “You’re bringing the salad and it’s Asian.” And we’d say, What the heck is an Asian salad? And I remember Jim said, “Just throw water chestnuts in it. That’ll make it Asian.”

So, we were meeting at the home of the astronomer, Eichhorn von Worm (sic) and his wife, Edie, who lived up in Lutz. And Edie decided—Edie was a large woman, and German and large—and she decided circulation was not right in her house for as many people as were coming.

And she had a big, like a Florida room⁴ or porch. It was more like a porch, I guess. And a big living room but there was only one little door between the two. She said, “Not enough room.” So she took a sledgehammer and made a hole in the wall, so there would be two doors, and you could circulate. And we said, Okay.

And another time, we got the call. This was when it was more formal, and you actually got a menu with a recipe in it. So, we got our menu, and it was Italian, and we had to bring the antipasto⁵ platter. And it had all these ingredients that I didn’t know. The meats, capicola⁶ and, of course, other things.

And I went to the butcher at the U-Save, and he said, “You’ve got to go to Cacciatore Brothers⁷ for that. Oh, you’ve got to go to Cacciatore Brothers for that.” Oh, and olive oil, one specific kind of olive oil. “Oh yeah, you really got to go to Cacciatore’s for that.”

So, I send Jim out with his list, Saturday morning, to Cacciatore Brothers, which, of course we had never been to. I send him by himself. He walked in; he tells the story, he walked into this room; it was an old fashioned butcher shop where you had to go up to the counter.

⁴A Florida room is more commonly referred to as a sunroom.

⁵Antipasto is an Italian word meaning “before the meal” and is the traditional first course, or appetizer, of a formal Italian meal.

⁶Capicola, also known as gabagool, is a traditional Italian cold cut made from dry-cured pork muscle.

⁷Cacciatore Brothers is a long time Italian specialty store in Tampa, Florida, that supplies fruits, vegetables, meats, cheeses, and other items.

You took a number, and then you had to go up to the counter and tell what you wanted. And it was filled with little old ladies all dressed in black. And he said they were either buying provisions for six months, or they were going to be cooking for very large families, because it took forever. They had gigantic amounts of food that they had to take away, meats, meats. So, he's clutching his—

AH: It hasn't changed much.

SV: Oh, really?

AH: No. I go there every weekend.

SV: Well, he's clutching his little ticket. Do you still have to take a ticket?

AH: You do.

SV: That's good. He's clutching his ticket. Okay, and I have to back off a minute. Do you know Gene Anderson (sic)? Whose husband is Mel Anderson? She's a very active member of the Women's Club.

AH: I may have met her. I just don't know her by name.

SV: Well, she was also very active in the Supper Club. So, he's in there with all these little old ladies, clutching his number, and in comes Gene Anderson. And he said to her, "I bet I know why you're here." And she said, "Yeah, I have to buy all this stuff, and my grocery store man said I had to go to Cacciatore Brothers."

So, they started discussing the menu—I mean, the thing. And all these little old ladies are listening, and they realize that they are talking about antipasto platter. And Jim says, "And they all started telling us their recipe," and each one was a little different from the other. And they were all insisting that it wasn't a real one if it didn't have whatever. And they just—

Well, we have to follow what's in here. We're going to get in trouble. Except, when Jim finally got his turn to go up, and he asked about the olive oil, the guy says, "Well, there.

It's over there," and it was in gallon jugs. And he wasn't going to buy. And, I mean, you can imagine what a gallon jug of olive oil would cost.

So he said Gene and he decided they would—if anybody else was bringing antipasto, they could buy the olive oil, so they did not buy it. And when they got to the house, that night, Saturday night, for the dinner, the hostess said, "I never put olive oil on my antipasto." So they were sure glad they didn't buy it.

AH: Right. Wow. That sounds like it's a demanding group sometimes.

SV: It was. As I say, it went through its phases, but it got harder and harder to get people willing to spend all day Saturday cooking some exotic thing.

AH: And then go to a party after they're done, after you're all tired.

SV: Yes. And we realized there were really two kinds of people in the group. Those who were really—it was called the gourmet group—who really were interested in trying different kinds of things, and then there were those that just went for the social part, who didn't want to.

So, we actually had to cease for a year because the two sides could not get together. So we stopped. And then we said, Well, we'll just keep doing things informally. Because the rule in the Women's Club is, you have to be a member of the Women's Club to be in an interest group, and that is still true.

And so, there are people who are in it only for the interest groups. There are bridge players. There are bridge players at [St. Joseph's] John Knox who are members of the Women's Club because they play bridge, but they don't come to anything except that.

AH: Right. Well, I guess that's one of the other interesting issues as we go forward, is how does the makeup of the university, the demographics—so much has changed. So what's the present and the future of the Women's Club?

SV: That's a very good question. Of course, no president wants the club to die on her watch. So, we all struggle. We've just not had success in—as I say, in the beginning it was women who didn't work, and they wanted to have meetings at ten o'clock in the morning or two o'clock in the afternoon, when their kids were in school.

We 'laxed our rules. First, we let men in because there were a few men who were the main ones that were interested in Supper Club, and after their wives either died or left them, they still wanted to belong. So they petitioned to belong. And they were such good cooks, of course we let them. Then we said, Well, you can be a friend of USF. So, we were desperate, you know, anybody we could get.

Because a lot of people had friends who had no connection, but they thought they would really enjoy the Women's Club. But we still—our membership has dwindled. We get new people, but so many women now are working. And especially women faculty are, you know, they're researching or they're publishing or trying to publish, and I don't know. I don't know. We're dying off.

AH: Well, it's interesting, too, because when you had the early parts of the club, you had a lot of people living in the same neighborhoods because they were moving to the—everything has changed. Now everyone's spread all over the place. You can't have a party in Carrollwood and expect to have the club show up.

So it's very difficult. So, I mean, it's more than just demographics and gender roles. It's the university development, where people are living; all that has changed so much. So it'd be a huge challenge for any group, I think, to keep ahead of this curve.

SV: Are you familiar with USFAR (sic)?

AH: I am.

SV: At one point, we seriously talked about trying to merge with them because, in many ways, the way they do things is not as expensive as the way we do things. But then, we do more things than they do. But a lot—it's still the university, and as more and more members are now retired in our—actually, I'm in both. I can see. But, somehow, it didn't fly. They're pretty—they like things the way they are.

AH: Right. And USFAR (sic), they don't really have a mission like the USF Women's Club to raise money and that kind of thing, right? I mean, it's more like just an interest group.

SV: Right. But they do have some—

AH: Oh, yeah. I know, it's some really neat, intellectually engaging stuff, too. Interesting. It didn't pan out, though.

SV: I don't know. We may have to. We know that there are other Women's Clubs at other universities. And we've looked at some of their, you know, what they do and how they do it. But I don't know. We have several young ones right now, but I mean, free—we've tried.

AH: Right, it's a huge challenge.

SV: People would say, Well, I work; I can't come to an evening meeting. I mean, I could only come to an evening meeting. So we said, Okay. We'll have an evening meeting. And we had some evening meetings, and they didn't come anyway, because if you've worked all day, especially if you have kids at home, you don't want to come to an evening meeting.

I have the USF Women's Club evening book group, which started meeting at my house, oh, more than 10 years ago. And when I moved to John Knox, they said, We'll keep coming to you. It was much easier for me if they come to me.

But we have four members—we only have 12 because that's all that will fit in my apartment. Plus, there's 12 months in a year, so each person picks a book, and then they lead the discussion on the book. But we have four members, that evening book group's all they do. They don't do anything else with the Women's Club. They're like some of the bridge players.

AH: Well, the other—I'm sorry, go ahead.

SV: Well, just, I can foresee—I mean we used to meet every month. The Women's Club, the whole group met every month. But then people wouldn't come to them. You would get maybe five or six, or maybe ten at a regular monthly meeting.

And you didn't want to ask somebody to come and speak, and only six people show up. So they reduced the number of meetings. I could foresee that we might just become a loose confederation of interest groups.

AH: Well, there are so many ways to support the university now. And, you know, in 1965, that wasn't the case. Now, there's so many websites, there's so many things that busy people can give or have money taken out of their checks or whatever to support the university.

I guess the sad part is that there's not a group there to help steer that and to choose what areas are getting helped and everything. But that's the other thing, is it's sort of a victim of USF's success in having all these other outlets now if you want to get involved or if you want to support the university.

SV: And of course, since both the Grace Allen Library Endowment and the scholarship are established, we can still get—as I say, we can only use the interests. Even if we don't add anything more, we can still give scholarships or books or electronics or whatever. So we'll have to see. It'll be interesting. But we have one charter member left. One. I don't know what we'll do if she dies.

AH: Right. Well, is there anything that we haven't—

SV: But—

AH: —I'm sorry. Go ahead.

SV: No, I just—

AH: Is there anything that we haven't covered here? I feel like we've—we haven't fully gotten into your whole track through the library or anything.

SV: Well, that's true, and that's okay. But as far as the Women's Club, I think that they did a great deal for the university.

AH: Absolutely. I don't think that could be challenged, yeah.

SV: And, of course, when we had men who were presidents of the university, and the wife, the president's wife, was automatically the honorary president of the Women's

Club. And we've had some president's wives who really weren't into that sort of thing, which is fine. We had two, notably, Kay Borkowski⁸ and, oh dear—

AH: Who, Grace Allen?

SV: Katy. Katy. Well, Grace Allen⁹ but she's—

AH: Brown?

SV: —she founded it. Katy Brown¹⁰. Yes. Who were very active, very active in the Women's Club. And then of course, as you were saying, in those days, it was more limited. But they don't need us to handwrite envelopes and they don't need us to pour out anymore, that sort of thing.

And we're getting old. A lot of us are old, and we physically can't do the labor-intensive fundraisers that we used to do. So, now, we go for the no-stress fundraisers. You know what our fundraiser is for this year?

AH: What's that?

SV: We are going to Chili's in March. We have a flyer that we will take with us, and we're encouraged to make copies of the flyer and give them out to everybody we know. I should have brought some to give you. And anybody that goes on this particular night, Chili's will give ten percent of our check to the Women's Club. So, that's really no stress for us. Except, I mean, we're going to go and have a good time.

AH: Right. Order a dessert and a nice appetizer.

SV: Run up that bill there.

⁸Kay Borkowski was the wife of Francis T. Borkowski, who took office as University of South Florida's fourth president in 1988.

⁹Grace Allen was the wife of John S. Alan, who became the University of South Florida's first president in 1957.

¹⁰Katy Brown was the wife of John Lott Brown, who was tapped in 1978 to serve as the University of South Florida's third president.

AH: That sounds nice.

SV: But we can't do what we used to do.

AH: Well, I mean there's no denying what the Women's Club has done. And it's a part of our history here, and it's a part of USF's heritage. And I certainly wish nothing but the best for the future.

SV: Well, as I say, nobody wants it to end on their watch.

AH: Well, and because it's not open to students, there's no hope in getting any revitalization there, but that would be a revolving door anyway.

SV: It would. We did take on a project to get the names of all of the scholarship winners, because over the years there've been about 400, and find out who still lives in the area and wrote them letters saying, "Now that you're not a student anymore, wouldn't you like to join the Women's Club and help us help other students?"

I don't think they got much response, probably because they're all working, and they haven't got the time. But I know in the case of Mary Lou, she was a member for many years but didn't really participate much except for the bridge group until after she retired. And that's been the same with others, too. Once they're retired or their husband is retired, then they have the time to do some of these things.

AH: Well, we also hear, in general, that people have less free time than they did a generation ago. Even though we have all these supposed labor-saving devices, we still seem to be shorter on time than ever. So that's one of the luxuries that's really the oxygen for a club like this, is having some time.

SV: But I'm sure the Supper Club will go on.

End of Interview