Southern Voices Oral History Project
Florida Southern College

Interviewee: Ruth E. Bandy Howard, Class of 1950

Interviewer: LuAnn Mims, College Archivist

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Mims: *Hi, today is June 26, 2012, I am LuAnn Mims for Florida Southern College Archives and today we will be talking with Mrs. Ruth Bandy Howard. Hi! Can you give me a little bit about your background? I know you graduated in 1950 but what brought you to Florida Southern College?*

Howard: My father Dr. O. S. Bandy was a Spanish teacher at the college. There were twenty-one faculty children. I lived at home on Lexington Street and walked to my college classes. My major was music and I was in the choir, and the orchestra, also a member of the Methodist church choir.

Mims: *What brought your father here? Was it the job?*

Howard: My father had been a high school teacher in Atlanta and they consolidated the school system. So he was a member of the Spanish Club in Atlanta and Mary Harbor, a Methodist minister's wife, told him about an opening at Florida Southern. And he was very anxious to be a part of the foreign student [Guatemala] student program. So he actually did that the first summer we moved to Florida.

I lived a block away from the College so I could walk to all the classes.

Mims: *How old were you when you made the move?*

Howard: I was fifteen years old, the oldest of five siblings.

Mims: *Okay, so at age fifteen you should be going to high school, right?*

Howard: Right, but I entered by examination.

Mims: *Okay, so what was that like? Did your dad have to ask Dr. Spivey or Dr. Thrift? Or how did you go about doing this, do you remember?*

Howard: My father worked through the admissions procedures; I don't remember much of it.

Mims: *Do you remember any of the exams?*

Howard: A lot of the exams brought out my music background. I remember identifying musical themes in the exams.

Mims: *Okay, so you are fifteen years old and starting as a college freshman.*

Howard: Yes, a college freshman, right, with a major in piano. I had private music lessons and had also played violin so I played in the school orchestra. And took all of the major classes that I needed; English, social studies, and religion. We had chapel services.

Mims: *So you entered in? What year?*

Howard: 1947.

Mims: *Okay 1947, we were two years post-war, what was the campus like?*

Howard: We had the GI Bill students coming in so the campus swelled to about 2,000 students. It was a very large population of former servicemen. And I was inducted in Alpha Chi Omega sorority.

Mims: *How did you fit in over all, you were young?*

Howard: No, I looked older for my age so no one really knew that I was that young until I graduated. That's when I became Miss Lakeland, they identified my age at that point. Until then nobody had known. I even helped some of the freshmen feel at home, because I was at home.

Mims: *Did you accelerate your program?*

Howard: Yes, yes I accelerated the programs so I could graduate in three years because there were so many siblings in my family that needed to be educated.

Mims: *So as a young girl what do you remember feeling like, were you excited or too much work?*

Howard: It was work but it was challenging. It was interesting and I became very well-rounded. I felt like I was where I was supposed to be. I really enjoyed my college experience.

Mims*: I can only imagine a fifteen year old now facing that type of challenge how they would fare. It's a lot to be here; taking classes, going to chapel, extra-curricular, sorority, and the music department … can you give a little idea of what it was like to be a music major then?*

Howard: We didn't have an auditorium then and the studies were done mostly in Quonset huts, temporary-type buildings. So there was just a lot of work connected to it. Most of the practice was done at home. But we had scholarship singers and I became accompanist for the scholarship singers. Dr. Spivey's son [Bill] was accompanist for the choir. But it was a wonderful experience.

Mims*: I was just thinking about what the students have to do now; x-number of practice hours; do you remember any of those details?*

Howard: I think I had a well-rounded life. A lot of things were done at home. And of course there were a lot of social events; I participated in a lot of those too.

Mims: *During your time here what were some of your more memorable classes?*

Howard: Of course music was foremost and the choir oratorio that was presented with special singers, special soloists, was a highlight of that particular time, the preparation for it and the presentation of it was a highlight.

Mims: *Which faculty?*

Howard: Let's see, Professor Gayler was my organ teacher and then Helen Wood Barnum prepared me for my senior recital where I did a Rachmaninoff concerto in the Pfeiffer Chapel. We toured the state with ensemble and instrumental, and chorale groups. One program was up in Suwannee, the Florida Music Festival there. A lot of that was very interesting.

Mims: *Other than music what courses do you remember?*

Howard: I enjoyed religion, history, English and social studies; just very eager to learn. And I graduated *magnum cum laude*.

Mims: *Do you remember any faculty in the Religion Department?*

Howard: Yes, Grace Snyder and it just gave you a whole new view on the Bible. And a lot of this was related to the Methodist church where I belonged. I had been a Baptist but I converted to the Methodist church.

Mims: *I think at this time students were required to take religion?*

Howard: Yes, right and we also had to attend chapel, weekly chapel. The college was being constructed with the Frank Lloyd Wright buildings at the time with the Esplanade and there was a lot of interest in that.

Mims: *Which buildings were going up, do you remember?*

Howard: Well the Esplanades, all the Esplanades, Pfeiffer was completed. The library was the old one.

Mims: *The Water Dome would have been pretty new*.

Howard: And we marched around that for graduation. And it was incomplete.

Mims: *Polk Science was one of the last to go up.*

Howard: Yes, that wasn't here then when I was.

Mims: *Not here … the little Danforth Chapel?*

Howard: That was here. And the Hindu Gardens was quite a famous place.

Mims: *Did you have an opportunity to see Frank Lloyd Wright on any of his trips here?*

Howard: The colony of people that worked with him, they lived in Lake Morton, and I got to meet them. I didn't see him.

Mims: *One of those might have been Nils Schweizer. He oversaw the majority of the construction and went on to design some of FSC buildings, like the new Roux Library.*

Howard: I am glad this is going to be a historic place now. It's really important in American architecture.

Mims: *Over in the history department, do you remember any of the faculty there?*

Howard: It's been too long. And later on I became a school librarian. I finished and then twenty years later I got a degree in school library from Rutgers and I became a public school librarian in Dunellen, New Jersey. So I retired from Dunellen.

Mims: *So you got your music degree here and then how soon afterward you graduated did you get married?*

Howard: It was about … I went up to the University of Florida, worked up there for a little bit. I played on one of their radio programs. I met my husband there. So in 1953 I was married. And I had three children. My husband's name is Winifred Howard, he used the name Bill.

Mims: *Okay, Bill Howard, and then he taught at Florida Southern …*

Howard: In 1955 and 1956 he taught at Florida Southern. And then later he went into business and industry.

Mims: *So when he taught here he taught business?*

Howard: Yes business administration and economics.

Mims: *So you were the daughter of faculty, you were a student and then you became wife of faculty.*

Howard: And an alum, with a lot of ties to the college. And I am currently the accompanist for the Ocala West United Methodist Church. I have been employed with them for ten years. So I am still active with music.

Mims: *So I would say you made good use of your degree. What are some things you remember about your time here? You didn't live in the dorm and didn't take any of your meals here?*

Howard: No, I had the participation with class work, the sorority, and with music groups.

Mims: *Let's talk about the Alpha Chi Omegas. Can you describe that process of going into that group?*

Howard: I think it was a wonderful social event and you felt honored to be a part of the pledge activities, to be selected and to go through the secret initiations, to wear the pin and participate in all their college activities. You identified with them. And a lot of faculty members' children were in that, that particular group.

Mims: *The group is ongoing today. So your young age didn't hinder that at all?*

Howard: No.

Mims: *We have been looking through some of your scrapbooks and you were all over the place with your participation. But it shows you get into the circuit of the pageants, the different queens … how did you get into that?*

Howard: And there was some modeling too. I think they were just opportunities that opened up for me.

Mims: *Who would have told you about these, your mom or someone on campus?*

Howard: Somebody on campus. I did a lot of modeling of clothes and student activities and they used the pictures in the yearbook taken at various places on the campus.

Mims: *So that extra-curricular … was it fun, or just more work?*

Howard: It was fun. It was exciting to be a part of that.

Mims: *What was your most memorable pageant?*

Howard: Oh, Miss Florida, Miss Lakeland 1950 and it was held at the Yacht Club. I performed piano selections for it.

Mims: *And you were crowned?*

Howard: At that one, Miss Lakeland. I didn't win anything with Miss Florida but it was a good experience to go to that in Miami, stay in a hotel, participate in the opportunity.

Mims: *At this pageant it was discovered you were just 18?*

Howard: That's right. The newspaper article is about being such a young age to receive the degrees and to be in college that young.

Mims: *How old were you when you actually graduated?*

Howard: Eighteen years old with two degrees in 1950.

Mims: *That is quite an accomplishment! Looking back on it does it seem like a lot?*

Howard: I think about the fact that I was a college graduate opened the door for any job that I applied for. They thought that if I had the degrees I was capable of learning anything that I wanted to do. There

were a lot of different openings. I had a variety of jobs after I graduated. I decided that music teaching wasn't exciting enough; I wanted to do a lot of other things.

Mims: *Your path crossed with a number of people, anyone in particular stand out?*

Howard: Neva Jane Langley later became Miss America, through Wesleyan College; she came through as Miss Georgia. A lot of the people went on to do well but we all moved in different directions, I try to keep up with a lot of them.

Mims: *One of your pictures shows you on a bridge at Cypress Gardens, what are your memories there?*

Howard: We did some of the modeling there. There was a lot of opportunities because the surroundings were so beautiful. Esther Williams was making a lot of movies there and it was just a gorgeous place to be.

Mims: *Right we see the background there for the southern belle, the pageants; citrus … took place over there, it was the best place to be.*

Howard: In the citrus industry they needed the young girls to represent and promote the citrus industry in Florida because the college was n the middle of an orange grove.

Mims: *What else can you tell us about … Dr. Spivey was president, did you meet him?*

Howard: Yes, and his daughter [Louise] was in my sorority. And his son William played piano, accompanied the choir. So I got to know the family very well. I came back for the fiftieth reunion and we had it at Dr. Spivey's home. They were interested in hearing what life was like, we discussed the things that we did.

Mims: *What was Dr. Spivey like?*

Howard: Very interesting. He loved the South American connection. He made opportunities for the Guatemalan students to come over here and be students. He promoted the International Club. It was a very interesting time.

Mims: *Definitely! He seems interesting on paper; just wondering if that came through when you met him. Seems like he never met anyone that he didn't "know"—like he instantly connected with them.*

Howard: Yes, yes, exactly. He really did a lot for the College; made it well known, got people to come here.

Mims: *Did you know any of the other deans or administration*?

Howard: Let's see … Dean Peel and Gayler and I knew a lot of their families too.

Mims: *Yes, as a faculty child I would think you would be involved with them too. I wonder if they present a different side with their families than when they are with students.*

Howard: Right, I think everyone had opportunities for counseling, for if you needed extra-curricular help with your student work. Everybody was always very helpful with anything that you needed to do, very compatible group of people, both the faculty and the students.

Mims: *In looking through some of the* Southern *newspapers and some of the activities here on campus were unusual, there was a circus performance/course/event …*

Howard: Big bands … Glen Gray.

Mims: *Right the big bands*.

Howard: Dressing up for the big dances when the big bands was quite an occasion. Glen Gray, of course they toured, the big bands toured then and were available for the college. Like they have the choir concerts today, we had the big bands.

Mims: *Where would the concerts be held?*

Howard: Well, let's see … seems like it was the city auditorium.

Mims: *Mayhall? So it wasn't on campus*.

Howard: No, we didn't have anything big enough then.

Mims: *How about the dances, where were they held?*

Howard: Mayhall, off campus too.

Mims: *Do you remember any dances over at Ordway?*

Howard: No, I don't remember that.

Mims: *It has that big lounge area that I have seen pictures of dances there. Where was your graduation held?*

Howard: The Annie Pfeiffer Chapel, and then of course around the Water Dome, we had the procession around the Water Dome. I don't remember who the speaker was. Dr. Spivey presented the degrees.

Mims: *What color was your gown?*

Howard: I don't remember that!

Mims: *Some years it was red.*

Howard: It looks like in the picture that it was dark, might have been black. And then my father wore an academic hood.

Mims: *Now in looking through some of your sorority pictures there is one about the "Gay '90's" Day …*

Howard: It was one of the programs that we had, like Mother's Day programs and various social things that we did, representing the sorority.

Mims: *There is also the program "Campus Capers" which looks like an introduction to the Greek life here.*

Howard: That's right.

Mims: *Physical space here … of course the library was the Frank Lloyd Wright …*

Howard: The Frank Lloyd Wright, the Annie Pfeiffer Chapel, the Religion Building, the campus halls … Reynolds and Spivey, the halls there were the oldest buildings. Then there was some of the new sorority and fraternity and student housing, they were building that.

Mims: *The Panhellenic, over by the lake?*

Howard: No, these are the older ones closer to McDonald Street, the first buildings.

Mims: *The gym?*

Howard: No, it was an old one. There was the bandshell where the band met. The Smith family, Lenore and Betty, their family home was in the middle of that campus over there, there was a big red, brick house over by fraternity row. They were both in Alpha Chi.

Mims: *Where were your music classes?*

Howard: A Quonset hut! We didn't have a formal music building. We practiced in the chapel when the recital was in the chapel. None of those buildings exist anymore, they were just temporary buildings.

Mims: *On the campus aerials there is a round building you can see over near the bandshell, I think it was the art building …*

Howard: Probably, that was Donna Stoddard.

Mims: *It looked fairly large and I thought maybe the music was in there?*

Howard: Most of the lessons were possibly in some of the homes, brick homes that were still used; we didn't have a formal music building.

Mims: *Do you remember where your science classes were?*

Howard: Probably a lot of them were in the old college buildings, like Edge, the ground floor of that. There was a separate religion building …

Mims: *Jackson, right?*

Howard: Right.

Mims: *Not used for religion classes now but it is still used for the chaplain and his work. I know you didn't take meals here but where did the students eat?*

Howard: I am not sure because I didn't participate in any of that. I lived at home.

Mims: *How about athletic events, did you go to any of those?*

Howard: I didn't have time; it was ALL music, right.

Mims: *All music. Did you do any half-time shows?*

Howard: No.

Mims: *Orchestras usually doesn't do that sort of thing, no marching*.

Howard: Orchestra doesn't march, no. We did the oratorios, the recitals and various programs.

Mims: *How about downtown Lakeland? Would you do any social activities there?*

Howard: There is a big tall building and there was a restaurant on the first floor, I played background music for them. There was a small theater in town, so there was a little local activity there, not a lot.

Mims: *Did you go see any movies?*

Howard: Went to movies at the Polk Theatre, but not a lot because I had so much to do with finishing the degree in three years and doing all the music, it kept me pretty busy.

Mims: *I can't imagine! Now when you said you played for the restaurant downtown, was that for pay?*

Howard: Yes, and I worked at the Yacht Club for awhile for pay but not a lot. There were various religious groups that would come through that needed somebody to play piano, I did some of that. I never did the bells, the carillon bells; they had that for class times. There was a group of people that did that; played for changing of class. The carillon bells, which I don't think they have any more.

Mims: *No, they don't. Did you see the last alumni magazine? There was an article about the carillon … chimes.*

Howard: Yes, I saw that, yes. That was in the early forties when that they did that.

Mims: *I heard the neighbors complained.*

Howard: I am sure; you could hear that to go to class.

Mims: *So you did have some social activities. Usually I ask alums about life in the dorms, the house mothers and curfew, but living at home you bypassed those experiences.*

Howard: Exactly, but all the band and the social activities were guided by whatever the college rules were, right.

Mims: *Right. But what was your home life like? Was your mother … ?*

Howard: I was all wrapped up … there were younger children so I was all wrapped up with college activities. I didn't stay home very much. I spent most of my time at the college.

Mims: *Did you drive yourself to most of the places you needed to go?*

Howard: No, I walked. We didn't have a car; there was one car for the family so I walked everywhere. We were just a block away.

Mims: *Did you ever have anytime where you thought, "This is nuts, why am I pushing myself?"*

Howard: No, I loved it, every minute of it, LOVED every minute of it. And I look back over the years and it was the happiest time in my life.

Mims: *Did your brother follow you, and came here too?*

Howard: Yes, he was three years younger. So he graduated … I can't remember the year … but he graduated.

Mims: *Did he come early too?*

Howard: No, nobody else came early. But he went into education and worked as a teacher in Whiteville, Maryland for years, retired from the Maryland school system. And my dad went on to become a dean in a college. After he finished working for Pasco County. So we were in education, I had an aunt who was in education and later on I went into education, too, as a school librarian.

Mims: *That is very interesting! Now the year that you were Miss Lakeland, what kind of activities did that put on your plate?*

Howard: Well, it was only … I didn't have to do any preparation except with my music teacher to work on the pieces that I would play; there wasn't anything extras except a small rehearsal.

Mims: *So you didn't have any obligations connected with the title? Ribbon cuttings, appearances?*

Howard: No, no, I didn't have any of that. It was in name only and to go to the Miss Florida contest once that was over. And I didn't place as Miss Florida so I didn't have any of those duties to perform.

Mims: *Huh, really because now you represent the organization at festivals and others … do you still have the crown?*

Howard: Yes, and the bathing suit and the ribbon, yes and the pictures.

Mims: *So nothing else on your plate except to go to college …*

Howard: College and Miss Lakeland, that was all.

Mims: *And that was fairly soon after you graduated?*

Howard: Yes, yes it was and it was part of the Miss America pageant so there was a time table to get it done, September in Atlantic City.

Mims: *I am trying to think of anything else to talk about; can you think of something I have not covered?*

Howard: Well, I think it was a wonderful atmosphere for learning and for people to get ahead and appreciate that a college education could be a jumping-off point in various professions and careers. And a lot of my classmates went on to do wonderful things. We all appreciated being at a fine institute like Florida Southern.

Mims: *Do you think it substituted your high school years?*

Howard: I think that because music was my interest, my passion in life, that the college opened the opportunity for the most work in that area. And that is what my passion has always been. I was grateful for the foundation that they gave me and I was able to move forward.

When I went to Rutgers I sang in the Rutgers choir. I received a fellowship to study with for a summer program there. I always had opportunities to go into music wherever I went. And this gave me a background for it, and an appreciation and understanding of it. It is a specialized field.

Mims: *What would you say to a student in music today?*

Howard: I don't think you have as many opportunities and my passion was for classical so we are very dated and the opportunities are mainly in big cities for classical music. But it's wonderful in all you activities, whatever you do for the next generation. Keep music in your lives.

Mims: *Now you never did music education?*

Howard: About a year, I did it for about three years but I didn't like it as well as performing. I also played for my high school chorus, accompanist there. I played for children's programs, I did community theatre. So a lot of opportunity to continue with my piano.

Mims: *Do you teach now?*

Howard: No, I never did teach, but I have always been an accompanist.

Mims: *Okay, well this has been wonderful, thanks so much for talking to me.*

Howard: You are welcome, I am happy to be here.

[Break in tape]

Mims: *As we were talking off-tape, wanted to share when Mrs. Howard was a faculty wife.*

Howard: My husband had learned through my father and family about the college. And it just felt like a wonderful opportunity for him. So when we first came down here I got my yearbook out and showed

him all the faculty members and he memorized everybody's name. And he always dressed like a banker and was over six feet tall and very erect. The students would stand in line to get in his classes. He was so well-received. He made sure that everything was prompt. He would lock the door and they would climb around trying to get into the classes, after awhile nobody was late because they wanted to be there. He arranged very interesting field trips and related things to real life. So he was very popular.

But when I was expecting a child and we needed to earn twice our income he had to leave teaching, which he loved very much, to go into industry.

Mims: *Well during the time he was here there were probably faculty activities, was there a wives club?*

Howard: That's right. Well, the International Club … a lot of the student activities, actually he worked hard, and with the GI bill he went through reserves in Ohio and had never done any social activities. Always worked and went to school, so the fraternity inducted him as Pi Kappa Phi so that we could be chaperones for the activities because he was such a popular teacher that they wanted us to be chaperones. So we had a wonderful year here 1955-1956.

And I was a music teacher in Mulberry during that time.

Mims: *And you had your baby here?*

Howard: No, in Cleveland, my first child was born in Cleveland; he went to work for White Sewing Machine in Cleveland.

Mims: *So how was it being a former student and then find yourself aligning with faculty?*

Howard: I felt comfortable because I had always loved the college and then I was a music teacher so I spent a lot of time away from the college. We rented my parents' home, where I had lived when I had gone to college. So my husband had faculty counseling sessions at the house too, we lived so close to the college again.

Mims: *Dr. Spivey would have still been president? Dr. Thrift becomes president in '57.*

Howard: Yes, he was president then, that's right.

Mims: *Very good.*

[END]