

Southern Voices Oral History Project
Florida Southern College

Interviewee: Shari Szabo, Class of 1983

Interviewer: Alyssa Kirby

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Kirby: *Just to begin, I need you to state your name and spell it.*

Szabo: Sure, my name is Shari Szabo [spells].

Kirby: *Thank you.*

Szabo: You're welcome.

Kirby: *And also to begin we just have some life history notes.*

Szabo: Okay.

Kirby: *So, what was your date of birth?*

Szabo: My date of birth was 4/18. Do you need to know the year also?

Kirby: Yes.

Szabo: 1962.

Kirby: *So you have a birthday coming up?*

Szabo: I do! Indeed, indeed. Last year was the mega one, this one's just the mega plus one. So, yeah.

Kirby: *Okay. I have a big birthday coming up ...*

Szabo: You'll be 21?

Kirby: *Yup.*

Szabo: Congratulations.

Kirby: *Thank you. Where were you born?*

Szabo: Lakeland, Florida. The apple did not fall far from the tree.

Kirby: [laugh] *Your highest education?*

Szabo: Graduated here from Florida Southern College. So I have a bachelor of art ... arts ... in broadcast communication.

Kirby: *And what were your parents' names?*

Szabo: My mother's name was Ellene Szabo [spells] and then my father's name was Frank Szabo.

Kirby: *And do you have any siblings?*

Szabo: I do. I have a sister. An older sister. I always like to point out she's older. And her name is Maurine Taylor. [spells]

Kirby: *Is she married?*

Szabo: She is divorced, but she kept her name.

Kirby: *Yeah, my mom kept her name. Are you married?*

Szabo: I am not.

Kirby: *Do you have any children?*

Szabo: I do. I was married at one time, but I have a son who is 20-something ... he will be 26 this summer.

Kirby: *Nice. His name is John, you said?*

Szabo: His name is Sean. [spells] Like Sean Connery. Who is the best Bond, by the way, but that's a whole 'nother story.

Kirby: [laughs] *Have you only lived in Lakeland?*

Szabo: Yes I have. I don't think Polk City counts. [laughs] I lived in Polk City for a little bit when we had a house.

Kirby: *Where's Polk City?*

Szabo: It's about 20 miles down the road.

Kirby: *North or south?*

Szabo: North.

Kirby: *What's the school down there? My friend's boyfriend went there.*

Szabo: In Polk City? I don't think there's any schools down there.

Kirby: *It's down that way, though. North side.*

Szabo: Like a high school?

Kirby: *It was a high school.*

Szabo: Oh, high schools on the north side of town would be like Lake Gibson ...

Kirby: *Yes, that's where it was!*

Szabo: Okay. Yeah this is a little more east and north of Lake Gibson. But, yeah.

Kirby: *Oh. Okay. It's actually funny. She goes to Campbell University in North Carolina ...*

Szabo: Okay ...

Kirby: *We met in Maryland. Her dad's in the Army, so she moves around. But, she met her boyfriend there and he lives here and I went to school here. So, it's just a small world.*

Szabo: Yeah. What part of North Carolina?

Kirby: *Buies Creek.*

Szabo: Where's that?

Kirby: *It's like 20 miles off 95. I'm not really sure. It's not far from Fayetteville.*

Szabo: Okay. My son lives in Cary, NC. Which is near Raleigh and Durham. So I'm starting to learn a little bit about the North Carolina area.

Kirby: *I'm not sure how far Fayetteville is from there. She lived there at one point. I visited her when I was 10 there. First time I was on a plane.*

Szabo: Ah, memorable for you ...

Kirby: *And it was my first time on a plane too, so ...*

Szabo: Ah, oh my gosh! Really memorable for you!

Kirby: *Yeah, I was really scared.*

Szabo: Yeah, I can imagine ...

Kirby: *Yeah, it was right after September eleventh, too ...*

Szabo: Yeah, so even more scared ...

Kirby: *Yeah and they have five kids so they weren't allowed to come up and get me.*

Szabo: Oh, wow ...

Kirby: *I was too old for someone to escort me, but ...*

Szabo: But too young to kind of feel comfortable.

Kirby: *Yeah. ... So, this says vocation related. I'm guessing it means like where you worked related to your bachelor's?*

Szabo: Sure, I worked at WONN and WPCV radio [spells], which is a local AM-FM radio. It's now actually four stations, but I worked for them for six years after I graduated and I was news director. So, I covered everything from national beauty pageants to witnessed executions to space shuttle launches. I fed stories to NBC radio. We were NBC news affiliates. So ...

Kirby: *That's pretty interesting.*

Szabo: Yeah, so it was an interesting career. And then I had my son and kind of wanted something a little normal. So, for some reason I thought Florida Southern would be normal. So, I ended up working at Florida Southern and working at a variety of areas on campus.

Kirby: *Oh. That's cool! Do you have any military affiliations?*

Szabo: I have not served in the military, no.

Kirby: [laugh] *Any special memberships?*

Szabo: No. I mean, at a time, when I was doing public relations for the college, I was certainly in professional organizations that had to do with public relations. But, I'm not currently associated with any professional organizations.

Kirby: *Okay. Do you have any skills or hobbies?*

Szabo: Well that's always questionable! What do you call a skill and what do you call a hobby!? Wow, hmm, I guess my hobbies would be ... I enjoy recreational reading, I enjoy exercising, I enjoy cooking, I enjoy ... sounds like I should say, "Long walks on the beach!" [laugh]

Kirby: [laugh] *It's okay, I love the beach!*

Szabo: I know, I know! Goodness gracious, I should have a hobby by this point in my life! I like decorating, that kind of stuff. I enjoy ...

Kirby: *Scrapbooking?*

Szabo: Oh god, no! No, no, no. Like home decorating kind of stuff. I enjoy announcing. I enjoy athletics, so I do a lot of announcing for our Florida Southern teams. Do the public announcings for three of our women's sports. And occasionally we'll sit in for [inaudible]. For about six years, I was the public announcer for the Lakeland Flying Tigers, which is a farm team for the Detroit Tigers. So I stopped doing that so I could have a life ...

Kirby: *Oh okay; which women's teams?*

Szabo: Here, the women's teams are softball, basketball, and volleyball.

Kirby: *Okay. I used to be on the swim team.*

Szabo: Oh did you? Okay. Oh good. Well you're a better woman than I. I usually drown if I end up in a pool. I like to just be able to know I can touch the side of the pool.

Kirby: *Yeah, it was just too much for me ...*

Szabo: Yeah, yeah. It's a demanding ... I think all of our athletic programs are very demanding. I have a huge respect for students who are able to combine the two and truly be a student-athlete. It's very hard.

Kirby: *I think back and I don't know how I did it in high school. I really don't.*

Szabo: Well, it's different dynamics than college. So, even though it certainly is demanding, I think once you get to the collegiate level and when you look at D2, it's demanding. And then you look at students who are D1 and it's like you really don't know how they do it.

Kirby: *Well, my friend goes to Towson University and she swims there and when we began swimming at college, we were talking about the programs, and she's D1, and she was like we don't even do that ...*

Szabo: Wow ...

Kirby: *She's awesome.*

Szabo: Wow. What was your specialty?

Kirby: *Yeah, breaststroke!*

Szabo: Breaststroke, so that's one of those. [motions]

Kirby: Yes. [laughs]

Szabo: Great form as [knocks over microphone] I knock over your mic. Write that down in your notes, that she's like throwing things in your interview.

Kirby: [laughs] *It's okay. ... So how many years did you attend Florida Southern?*

Szabo: Well, I attended Florida Southern ... I graduated in three years

Kirby: *Oh wow ...*

Szabo: I CLEPped a year and graduated in three. I think I took a couple summer sessions along the way, but ...

Kirby: *That's a good idea ... I did that! What brought you to FSC?*

Szabo: Well, I was born here, [laughs] literally ... My father was employed here. My dad actually worked here for 38 years before he retired. And our house was on campus, so I grew up in the campus environment and literally as a college employee, one of the wonderful benefits is that you can attend here. We also are part of a conglomerate, for lack of a better name, that you could do tuition exchange, and so the only way I could go to college was to come here at Florida Southern College, so I attended Florida Southern, which was a wonderful education experience and a free education experience for me and then my parents though it was very important for me to live in the residence halls. So, even though our house literally was on campus, and I would pass our house on the way to the cafeteria, I lived in the residence halls ...

Kirby: *Oh wow ... where did you live?*

Szabo: I lived in Allan Spivey, first floor, mega room, and actually my roommate, her father was a professor on campus in the citrus department so we had known each other in high school. And then, I joined Zeta Tau Alpha, and before I joined Zeta, I think I lived in Panhellenic, which at the time we had a long line of residence halls, we called them dorms back then, in front of Lake Hollingsworth. And then, I was in there for probably a semester and then I joined Zeta and moved into the Zeta house which was over in the area that is currently known as Greek Village, even though those buildings weren't in existence, but we had dorms all in that area.

Kirby: *Oh, okay. I live in the AOP house.*

Szabo: Oh do you? Oh good!

Kirby: *I'm not in AOP, but I have a single there.*

Szabo: Oh okay, well that's great space ... It's a nice living environment.

Kirby: *I'm going to live in the Lake Hollingsworth apartments next year ...*

Szabo: Are you? Oh.

Kirby: *Did they have any apartments back then?*

Szabo: Oh goodness, no. But Lake Hollingsworth is a wonderful set-up. When I graduated from Florida Southern I could not afford to live in Lake Hollingsworth Villa, apartments, I guess they were at the time. That was probably one of the highest apartments in town. And, so I couldn't afford to live there. They were very nice.

Kirby: *Yeah, it's right on the lake ...*

Szabo: Yeah, yeah. And huge apartments. Very large spaces

Kirby: *Yeah! We each get our own bathroom.*

Szabo: That's great! You can't go wrong with that! My goodness!

Kirby: *Yeah, I was like, "That's awesome!"*

Szabo: That's nice, it'll be a nice change for you.

Kirby: *So this says how did you physically arrive here, but you already lived here, so ... [laughs]*

Szabo: I was birthed! [laughs] Exactly!

Kirby: *Who were some of your professors?*

Szabo: Who were some of my professors? ... Dr. Steve Winzenburg, was one of my broadcast professors, who was awesome. And I remember we had to DJ, that was the time of albums, not CDs, we're talking albums ... Take it on back. [laugh] 'Cause we had a little studio in the comm building and we had to DJ something. And, obviously, I was always a news person, so DJing was something different. I think I chose Jump Jet and something else that was totally, I guess everyone thought I was kind of prim and proper, so then I played some wilder music for the time, for my thing and he just thought that was hysterical. He was a great professor.

And then Tom Willnow was another one of my professors and he was a radio broadcaster. He was actually an adjunct for us and I remember him telling us some of his words of advice when he got into radio, that in your normal, everyday language you should not swear because if you use that kind of language normally, then when you are on the air, it's going to slip out. And that was something, back in the day, you never even heard. You hear many more of those words now than you ever heard before ...

And then I had Dr. Plowman for a class and I think I actually took him for some summer classes. I had Dr. Weaver in a psych class that I think I dropped. Actually, that was the only class I dropped and I think it was child development which I could've used after I had a kid. But, I dropped it because I wanted to tan. Which, we had a little outside area next to the Zeta house, and I decided my last semester of senior year I wanted a tan. We called it Zeta beach, so I would lay out in the sun every afternoon and of course fair skin that I am, two years ago I came down with melanoma. So, not a real good plan as you think back [laughs] of all that time in the sun, but it seemed really wise at the time! You know that kind of thing Let's see, I think I had Dr. Willis for one of my religion classes, because we had to take religion back then, there weren't any other options. Goodness, I think I had Dr. Robinson, I had Dr. White, they aren't here now. ... Never had Dr. Burnette for a class. We knew them as family. Certainly our families were friends. Those were some of the professors that really stood out for me.

Kirby: *What did you think about Dr. Plowman?*

Szabo: He was a hoot! He cracked me up ... I'm trying to think if he actually jumped up on the table. The folklore goes that he would jump up on the table occasionally and lecture from there ...

Kirby: *He never did that ...*

Szabo: He never did that? Okay. I remember we took, it was the summer that Princess Diana and Charles got married, I think one of the classes I was taking was marriage and family. So, there was a lot of conversation about that. I remember getting up early to watch that. Then we went to this restaurant called Live Oak, that used to be down from ... kind of on the street where Kaus is but on the other side of Ingraham ... or up from where Kaus would be now, but at the time was a place called Greco's, but I digress. But Live Oak Restaurant was kind of where blue-collared workers would go. So, one of our class trips was we went there for breakfast and our job was to study the blue-collar workers around us and have breakfast. [laughs] But, yeah.

Kirby: *With Dr. Plowman? He didn't take you on a tour of downtown Lakeland?*

Szabo: Yeah. He did not ... he did not, no. But I was a sociology minor so I had CLEP'd a lot of hours in sociology. And, so, there were a few classes I had to take to get through my minor. I took with Dr. Plowman.

Kirby: *I'm a sociology and psychology major ...*

Szabo: Oh cool, very cool! Neat.

Kirby: *Double major ...*

Szabo: Excellent! What do you hope to do?

Kirby: [inaudible] *It's still ...*

Szabo: Decisions, decisions. Huh?

Kirby: *Yeah. Originally a child life specialist.*

Szabo: Wow, okay ...

Kirby: *So are you aware of what that is?*

Szabo: Well, it sounds important and it sounds like it could be life changing ...

Kirby: [laughs] *It's just where you go in to the hospital and work with cancer patients and their families, mentor them.*

Szabo: Wow, that's some heavy stuff ...

Kirby: *Yeah ...*

Szabo: What drives you to do that?

Kirby: *I don't know ... I've never had cancer, but I've been sick a lot. So, it is hard. It gets weary. Especially when you are trying to do well in school and sports. I was very passionate about swimming. That was my life and I'm not sure. One of the boys on the swim team, his sister, she's the head at Johns Hopkins for the department. So, he was talking about it and she actually went to school down here in Florida. I'm not sure where she went, but he was just talking about it and I was like, "Oh, that sounds like something I would want to do." Originally, I wanted to do pre-vet and I took AP biology, but that didn't really work out.*

Szabo: Sciences don't work out too well for me, either. [chuckle]

Kirby: *So, I decided sociology and then I decided psychology a year ago. Last spring, my sophomore year.*

Szabo: Neat!

Kirby: Yes ...

Szabo: Fascinating topics ... I think they'll serve you well whether you go on to do that or you have a way to do something else ...

Kirby: *There's lots of options.*

Szabo: Yeah, I bet. I think having that knowledge ... knowing how people think, what makes them tick, societal and also individual I think you can use in a lot of different ways.

Kirby: *Yeah, that's what people always say. Especially when you meet someone for the first time, around my age, they always say, "Oh, you're evaluating me now." And I'm like, "No, not really"*

Szabo: No. That's right, that's right. [laugh] "Only behind your back, I'm evaluating you"

Kirby: [laugh] *Yeah. Okay, so what was your typical day like here on campus?*

Szabo: Typical day here on campus ... well, goodness. You would go to class, there was the expectation, there was none of the; I don't know if absences were allowed from that stand point. You had to dress up for class. If you wore jeans, you'd have to get permission from your professor. You certainly didn't wear shorts. You; we had convocation. Did we have convocation? I think we had it, I think it had changed by the time I got here that it was only once a month, but it was only once a month. It used to be that it was every week. But, I think by the time I had gotten here, it had changed to once a month. You eat in the caf ... we called it the caf then ... there was no Wynee's Bistro, it was the caf. [chuckle] The CT was the college terrace, the snack bar underneath, we had that. Our library was still the library. You know, there really wasn't any other study options. You know, days before computers, you took notes, that thing. The bookstore was still here ... Wow, the lakefront, there wasn't really anything like that. We didn't have a wellness center. Yeah ... you ...

Kirby: *So, there was like nothing here.* [chuckle]

Szabo: [chuckle] Well ... you know intramurals was big so whether you were Greek or not, intramurals was really big so you'd have a lot of that ... We used to have every Friday they would do movies in

Branscomb Auditorium. Because that was before DVDs and you know streaming and I think there was only like three channels on TV or something wicked like that, so ... I think maybe, were VHS tapes just coming out at that point? I don't know, you're talking like early '80s cause I graduated in '83.

Kirby: *My sister was born in '83, so maybe ...*

Szabo: Well, good this is making me feel so good now. I was just having flashbacks. I'm trying to think. I mean we, you just hung out with your friends. You know, you had, campus life was still very vibrant. Greek life was very active and important. Not everybody had a car. There wasn't a lot to do in Lakeland. So, you just kind of hung out. The big thing, you had your telephone in your room. Not cell phones, you know, but hard lines in your room. But then you also had a phone in the lobby. So, the big thing was you'd get a call and you had the intercom system and so you'd get paged in the hall and you'd hear you had a call and you know how exciting would that be. No visitation. We had open houses, I think you could have one open house once a month. No, once a semester and so it was open door. So you know, the boys could come in so you'd have to have your door open. Fun stuff. You know different day, different time.

Kirby: *Wow. That's really interesting ...*

Szabo: [laugh] You're going, "Oh my God, how boring."

Kirby: *No ... it depends sometimes they really enforce the rules. Ya know, because we can't have boys from one AM to 10 AM I think it is. Sometimes I would forget 10 AM because we'd have an early class, and then if you have a group project or something like that. Sometimes, especially as freshman. But, now they are doing boy-girl freshman.*

Szabo: I know! How about that?

Kirby: *Yeah, I don't understand that ...*

Szabo: Well, they won't be across the hall. They'll be one hall, or one floor will be men and one will be women. So it won't be like you'll have men across the wing ... yeah, yeah, yeah.

Kirby: *Well, aren't they making Spivey all guys now?*

Szabo: Spivey will be all guys and J-R will be all women and then Wesley and Nicholas will be the broken up hall, broken up floor kind of thing. Yeah, that's a huge culture shift and change.

Kirby: *Yeah. Well, I mean probably not for them, but for us ... The way we were, we were totally separated as freshman.*

Szabo: Mhm. Exactly. My son, when he went to college, I remember moving him in and all of a sudden this girl in a towel walks past his room and I just went, "Excuse me! What's going on here?"

Kirby: *Where did he go?*

Szabo: He is a pastry chef, and he works in a five-star restaurant and he graduated, he actually did his four-year degree at the Culinary Institute of America up in High Park, New York. So he is, not only is he a great chef, he knows how to run a business. So ...

Kirby: *That's awesome!*

Szabo: Yeah, it's cool.

Kirby: *That's good he knows how to cook ...*

Szabo: He does, he does.

Kirby: *Okay, so you talked about intramurals. Did you play any sports?*

Szabo: Well, again it would be what is one's definition of playing sports. I would get out there and you know, make attempts. I think I remember playing softball and you know probably attempting basketball or volleyball. I would always be on a team; I don't know necessarily I would get played a lot, but yeah.

Kirby: *Right. Did you have a favorite? Or ...*

Szabo: You know, it's fun to be out there and be active so I don't know if I necessarily had a favorite or that I excelled in a sport or anything like that.

Kirby: *Well, that's true. You did lots of different things.*

Szabo: Yeah!

Kirby: *So, you belonged to Zeta. Did you belong to any other clubs?*

Szabo: Broadcasting Club, I think I was in the French Club, I was in ODK. I was not active in student government. I was not active in what would have been called, what was it called, not ACE. It was SUB; Student Union Board. I was not active in that. That was what used to be what ACE is today. Let's see ... what else ... I think that's all. And I was a little sister. At the time, fraternities could have little sisters and sororities could have big brothers. I was a little sister for Sig Ep. Which is Sigma Epsilon ... Sigma Phi Epsilon, which we don't have currently.

Kirby: *Hmm. What happened to them?*

Szabo: Oh, they got kicked off. You know, probably some shenanigans they were doing. Whether it was, uh, I don't know if they were the ones at the time that the dean saw them very early in the morning. This is how stupid sometimes boys can be. But, they were doing a bit of hazing, it would fall in the category of hazing, but I think they were having a beer keg that they had to roll around Lake Hollingsworth and they didn't really think that perhaps the dean of students at the time was really into running at the time, and so he would get up early in the morning and run. And, in fact, he was out there running and came across them doing that little shenanigan that they just, yeah, yeah ... Oh the tales, the tales ...

Kirby: *That's really funny. I'm sure it was a dry campus back then?*

Szabo: It was, well and my dad's role for those 38 years, he was assistant dean of men so he was actually in charge of the discipline so he would have to go bust parties and all that kind of fun stuff. And so that was ... And my role here later on in life as alumni director, I got to have a lot of interactions with students through the years that had had a lot of interactions with him, and he was seen to be very fair and would really sometimes, could be hard on you and toe the line and made sure the rules were enforced. But, he was very fair about the way he went about it. So, it was [inaudible] ... He had a lot of students through those 38 years who had a lot of affection for him.

Kirby: *Well that's good. That must make you feel really good!*

Szabo: It does! It does, it does!

Kirby: *Any extracurricular activities?*

Szabo: Oh ... I was not in band, I was not in orchestra, no nothing like that, no.

Kirby: *This says freshman rats ... do you know anything about that?*

Szabo: That was way before me. That would probably be people in the '40s and '50s. That was I think when, if I recall from the times I was alumni director, where you know they would put freshmen in a garbage can or something like that. I don't know, or they wore goofy hats or something like that, yeah, but that was way before me. We didn't do anything like that. No, no, no.

Kirby: [chuckle] *So, your, did your dad attend here at all?*

Szabo: My dad did attend here. My dad graduated from here in 1952. And he actually had a degree I think in like industrial arts. Which is shop, at the time we offered that. And he was here on the GI Bill, he had served in the war. Came here on the GI Bill, and Dr. Spivey hired him to be a faculty member. He taught shop in the Ordway Building. That's where shop was housed. And about a year after he graduated, Dr. Spivey's daughter was married and the gentleman who she was married to who also graduated from Florida Southern, was the assistant dean of men. And Louise, Dr. Spivey's daughter, and her husband, Roger, Dr. Spivey bought them a hardware store out of state to go and manage and run and so Roger, I think, said to Dr. Spivey, "Well I think Frank Szabo would be a great person to replace me." And so, that's how my dad became dean of men, so he moved from faculty to administrator. And so his career began in 1952 but he started as dean of men in 1953 and until he retired.

Kirby: *How about your mom? Did she ...*

Szabo: My mom had her master's in P.E. which is very unusual for women back then. My mom was also older when she had me, she was 42. And that was not heard of back then, too. Even now it's nothing for people to have babies in their forties, but she married late in life and had me. And she, I think for a while, a short while, maybe did some academic advising here on campus. And then just chose to stay at home with my sister and I. She was very active though in college life and loved intramurals and would always go out and support the teams and she baked cookies for students and she kind of adopted a hall and we'd bring cupcakes and we'd have pizza parties for students. And she was a huge fan of, particularly, she loved volleyball, so she would follow women's volleyball and then both my mom and dad loved all the sports. My dad worked the clock and did the announcing at men's soccer and men's

basketball and there really weren't a lot of women's sports back then. Then, they both loved the men's baseball team so they followed the men's team extensively and would travel out of state to see the games and all that kind of stuff, so ...

Kirby: *That's pretty cool ... I know the baseball team played the Orioles last year. I wanted to go see them so bad.*

Szabo: Yeah, yeah. Oh, did they? Oh, that's neat.

Kirby: *But, well usually they play the Detroit Tigers. I think they played the Detroit Tigers and the Orioles at spring training ...*

Szabo: Oh neat, last year. Cool. That's a great experience for those young men to be able to do that.

Kirby: *Yeah, it is cool. It's cool how the Orioles last season went so far. So now everybody's like, "Oh, the Orioles!" It's opening day up there today ...*

Szabo: Oh today ... okay ...

Kirby: *My dad's obsessed with baseball. He's going to the game tomorrow.*

Szabo: Oh, nice, nice. It's nice to be able to do that ...

Kirby: *Can you describe Lakeland at the time you were here?*

Szabo: Oh, Lakeland at the time ... a lot of orange groves, Sears Town was big. Which Sears Town now on Memorial Boulevard is not. There was the mall that finally opened. It was the Lakeland Mall, which is now where First Baptist Mall at the Church is. There certainly was no Lakeside Village. There was Grove Park, that was probably the happening shopping center. The Publix was always here, but there was a movie theatre up at Grove Park and so you could go to the movies there and there was the original J Burns' Pizza. There's a J Burns' Pizza now that's the same recipe for the pizza. It's like a real thin, square pizza, it's delish. On Cleveland Heights and Edgewood now, but it used to be up there next to the movie theatre that was in Grove Park.

You know, downtown, there was a downtown, but there wasn't a lot happening in it. It was just, Lakeland was, it was kind of a core. Still, Tampa was the bigger city and Orlando and of course Disney had opened by then and when I was a little girl I remember going to Disney the first year it opened. Yeah, not, I mean Lakeland was a lot about citrus. Polk County, which we're in, was a lot of phosphate, so phosphate was big money, big operations, but citrus was really huge.

Kirby: *Do you think it's changed a lot?*

Szabo: Oh, heck yeah, yeah. I mean, you know citrus has moved so far south. Phosphate has changed so much. The population of Lakeland has changed so much. It's just become so much bigger, obviously and has become more of a metropolitan area if you can imagine that. I mean you still, I think Lakeland now provides anything that you would want. If you would truly want a bigger city experience, you still would have to go to Tampa or Orlando, but you know. Never would I have thought there would be a Starbuck's in Lakeland. But, you know, we have one on almost every corner.

Kirby: *I remember when I came for my recruit trip, my senior year, it was probably; it was October. It was around Halloween. And where the Starbucks is, we stopped to get gas.*

Szabo: Yeah, it was a gas station. Sure enough!

Kirby: *And then I came back to come to school here and I was like, "Wasn't that a gas station?"*

Szabo: How did that happen? I know!

Kirby: *Yeah, I was like wait!*

Szabo: Well, you know, the demographics change and it's smarter for businesses to come in. There's actually the business to support a more affluent habit, if you will, that Starbucks's would be every time you turn around it's \$3.00, \$4.00 for a drink. But, yeah, so I really have seen it grow. A lot of chain restaurants. You know, we used to have a lot of independent restaurants and you don't see that anymore, which is too bad. Still a good quality. A lot of great parks. I think Lakeland has always a great park system and nice playground areas and all that kind of stuff. That's continued to really grow.

Kirby: *The park over by, I think it's Lake Mirror ...*

Szabo: Yeah, yeah ...

Kirby: *That's awesome.*

Szabo: That's wonderful, isn't it?

Kirby: *I wish I had a park like that ... when I was little.*

Szabo: Yeah, I know. I wish. When my son was little there were nice parks to go to, but nothing like that. I mean you had nice, safe playground areas, but not like today. It really is, it's, I think Lakeland has always been a family-friendly town, but it's now evolved to be able to support young professionals that want to stay. Where before, you had a lot of flight. You wouldn't have a lot of graduates that would stay because they didn't really feel like there was much to offer young professionals and now there are.

Kirby: *Yeah. I definitely see some of my older friends who have stayed here. So, that's, that is good to see. Makes me want to stay.*

Szabo: Good! You know, you got to figure out where career-wise, where you can go.

Kirby: *Yeah, what's going to benefit me the most. I don't really want to go back up north.*

Szabo: No, you've had a touch of the sunshine, huh?

Kirby: *Yeah. I have! Have you ever seen snow?*

Szabo: Yes I have! I've seen snow. Yes, when I visited my son in New York I would see it and my sister lives out in Colorado, so I've seen it.

Kirby: *That's awesome. So, what did you do for entertainment around here?*

Szabo: What did I do for entertainment around here? Well we'd go to movies or again we'd find things to do on campus. You watched TV.

Kirby: *Did you have TVs in your room? Probably not? ...*

Szabo: Well, we had to provide them. So, we provided a TV. Well, you're talking massive. Even the small TVs were massive. They were just built so differently than the thin ones now. But, yes we had a TV in our room. We had cable. Yeah, so, just that kind of stuff. Nothing earth-shattering. We didn't, I wasn't really into a lot of volunteer work. I'm trying to think. Well at the time Zeta's philanthropy, now it's breast cancer, but at the time it was called; this tells you how far things have changed. It was the national association I think of what they called retarded citizens and now, you know, you don't use that terminology. And, but that was our philanthropy at the time. If we did volunteer work it was associated with the sorority.

Kirby: *What kind of volunteer work did you do?*

Szabo: Oh, we'd do fundraisers for them, that kind of stuff. I'm trying to think, I don't think there was any place locally really that we went and ...

Kirby: *Kind of like Best Buddies?*

Szabo: Kind of, but way before Best Buddies. I mean I think Best Buddies serves that kind of purpose, but again I think society has just changed so much that there wasn't; I mean we may have done some outreach through Peace River, because I think Peace River would have still been here, but I think it was more like we would raise money as opposed to actually go and do service. We'd do car washes, that type of thing.

Kirby: *Right. Why did they change it?*

Szabo: I don't know. It was Zeta national that did it and so I think probably as you really started to look, kind of thought process, you're talking sorority and so something that's truly impactful for women. Certainly while men can encounter and have breast cancer, it's a woman's thing so I think as a sorority they decided to embrace that and really bring it to light. Now they have their own breast cancer foundation, but I think originally when they changed to that it was associated through Susan G. Komen.

Kirby: *Have you ever done the 5Ks for them?*

Szabo: I have not, but I have done two half-marathons in my life. So, I like to count it as one. I think if you did 13.1 or .2 miles and another 13.1 or .2, I should be able to say that I've done a marathon, but I've actually done two half-marathons.

Kirby: *My brother-in-law did a half-marathon in October, so yes. That was a milestone for him.*

Szabo: Wow! Fun! That's neat. I would say it is one of the most empowering things I've ever done and chose to do it twice, don't ask me why. And didn't really, my time, it was average. I wasn't really that

much slower the second time. And that was a few years later. That was a woo-ha moment for me. That was something very empowering to do, and one year as a staff member, I got to go to an ROTC training thing in Fort Knox, which involved jumping off of high-dives blindfolded with a gun in your hand, in boots, and then being up 35 feet off the ground in a safety harness, and then repelling off of a tower and all that kind of stuff. So those were some cool moments in my old younger years.

Kirby: [chuckle] *I used to swim at the Naval Academy for swim meets and we would see them doing that sometimes. You're so young and you're like, "How can they do that?"*

Szabo: Yeah, it's amazing. It's amazing. You know, it was self-empowering but it was also a real exercise for me because the young men and women that were telling us what to do, were truly young men and women. They were college age. So, you're talking about students, they were probably more 19, 20, maybe 21, telling you ... you developed a trust factor. Here's this young whippersnapper and here I am in my, I think at the time I was doing it maybe late thirties, maybe early forties. Probably more late thirties, but still a real trust element, you know, here's this young person you're basically putting your life in their hands as they talk you through these things and so it was a real learning experience for me.

Kirby: *Yeah, that's awesome. Can you reflect on your time here at FSC? Anything else you would like to add?*

Szabo: Wow ... It was, I think, for me it was particularly interesting because I have, I came into it with a different perspective having grown up on campus and I mean, I was a little girl, I would ride my bike around campus. You know, I remember, I think one of our, became a lifelong friend, a student needed a study for her education class and I fit the age bracket and she kind of used me as a study person or you know to kind of observe me and that kind of thing. You know, made friends with college students and you admired different college students or you have crushes on those boys were way, way too old for you. And really just saw Florida Southern grow and I knew that the college meant an awful lot to my father and that he gave an awful lot of himself, where, because of his role he was on call 24/7 and he dealt with all sorts of things and dealt with having to call a family when a student was a water skier actually and got hit by lightning on the lake and died and he had to call the parents and tell them. You know, he just lived and breathed the institution. And so, I respected that a lot when I was a student and then certainly have respected that as a staff member now for 22 years I think I've worked here now. So, yeah it's a great place and I think it all comes back to the students that I kind of understand now why he stayed here as long as he did.

It's not just buildings, it's about the relationships that we do get to develop with students and that you do get to see the things that they do and who they grow in to. I know my dad used to get such a twinkle in his eye when alums would come back and you know they were just hellions when they were here and you know on campus and getting in all sorts of mischief and trouble, and back then it was not mischief and trouble that could hurt you or hurt somebody else. I think it was a different kind of mischief and trouble, but he would see who they became and what they went out and did. And, so, it sounds like a cliché when our mission statement is about going out and making a consequential difference. That really is what we've always done and I think that's what he always got so much enjoyment and pride in. And so, I think it helped me not only being a student here, but then also a staff member to see that really played out and it's really true.

Kirby: *Do you think it made you mature faster, grow up faster, by living here?*

Szabo: Oh yeah, yeah. I think so. Because, you're just around a different type of environment and you know you're not in a neighborhood with a lot of kids your age so you're exposed to just a kind of different tempo on campus and different interactions with students. And yeah, I think you just; yeah, I would say, it gave me a different perspective than I think other people had and I think probably, you know, for the majority of my son growing up, I had worked at Florida Southern and we had not lived on campus, but we lived near, so he certainly has been involved in that aspect. I was an advisor for the Zetas for about seven years so he had a lot of interaction with the sorority girls while he was a little tyke. He would go with me as I would do announcing at some of the athletic events so he had some similar experiences, but not as much as an immersion as I certainly did.

Kirby: *Right. Did you say how much older your sister was than you?*

Szabo: She is five years older. Yes, yes. So she is 56.

Kirby: [laugh] *I didn't need to know that ...*

Szabo: Oh, yes you did ... yell it from the roof tops! She's 56! [laugh]

Kirby: [laugh] *Yeah, I like to rub it in my mom's face. She tries to be all young and hip and I'm just like no ...*

Szabo: Your mom is probably in her forties, I would say ...

Kirby: *She's 53. She was born in '59.*

Szabo: So she's just a couple years older than I am.

Kirby: *Mhm.*

Szabo: That's not old by the way, put that in writing. Fifties is not old, it's the new forties! [laugh]

Kirby: *It's not, but I just like to tease her. She wears American Eagle and Hollister and I'm just like, "Really, mom?"*

Szabo: [laugh] That's funny. You too someday will have those same conversations with your children.

Kirby: *Hopefully, I hope I look as good as her when I am that old.*

Szabo: [laugh] That's nice!

Kirby: *Okay. Well ... that is all I have!*

Szabo: That's it!? Well, hopefully you will be able to pull five minutes out of all of that foolishness ... to be able to do all your presentation. Now what do you have to do with all this?

[END]