

Janice Booker

OK. It is June the seventeenth, 1998 and this is the interview with Janice Booker who, upon retirement, was Manager of Administrator Services here at Columbia College.

Janice, if we could start off by, tell us when you came to Columbia. How long you were here, and what were the circumstances that brought you here? I came to Columbia in 1969, if I'm not mistaken. And I came as a part-time worker in the library. I was a librarian working for Hubert Davis, but I did not have any library skills. But he would make sure that I did know; he was a great man to work for. And the library consisted of a room this size with books and magazines. And we had to shelve these books, that was my responsibility, and we also had a student worker at that time. Bert Gall was a student worker. I don't know exactly when they decided to open up a bookstore on the opposite side of the library but they did, and I was made bookstore manager. Hubert Davis ordered the books for the teachers; I ordered the other supplies. So I was there, oh goodness, I don't remember, I was promoted again. Well, at the time we only had two to three hundred students, it was small, but I was promoted to office manager/secretary. So I worked at the window, I was a receptionist, cashier, I mimeographed the schedules. When they had the schedules together for classes, I would mimeograph them, make sure all the teachers had a copy. I did all the mailing, I typed for, not the President, but the Vice President, Treasurer, and the Admissions Officer. It was a big job then, that

was great too, it was more like a family. And from there, they were getting ready to move to 600 South Michigan from 540 North Michigan, I mean Lake Shore Drive, 540 North Lake Shore Drive. I decided that it was time for me to leave Columbia, I had been there too long. And at that point I didn't see any advancement and we did not have Social Security benefits. Social Security was not being taken out at that time. And I decided that was a big plus because I had children. I had six children and if anything happened to me, you know, who would take care of my children? So I left Columbia, I stayed gone for four years, four years or five years, something like that. And I worked for Uptown Center Hull House's manager, then I went from there to Cook County Legal Assistants Foundation as legal secretary. They were getting ready to move to the suburbs and I did not want to travel to the suburbs, so I was in the process of starting to look for a job and getting my resume together when I got a call from Mr. Gall asking me if I'd like to come back to Columbia and I said yes. And I just laughed at that point. He must have read my mind; I was looking for a job. And I asked him, "Doing what?" And he said, "Admissions Counselor." And I said, "Oh, OK. That sounds cool." You know. He says, "Do you want the job?" And I said yes. So I came back to Columbia as an Admissions Counselor. I was in that position for eight months and the lady who was Manager of Administrative Services, her husband got a job in Washington, so then I was asked to take the Manager's job. So that's how it all transpired

And how long were you, what were the years that your Manager of Administrative Services went to?

From '84 to '94.

Did you know Hubert Davis? Hubert Davis.

Like how did you first hear of Columbia, the job, and what were your first impressions? Did you know anything about it before you got here?

No. I knew nothing about Columbia College. In fact, I was looking for a job and the Illinois State Employment Agency, they called me and they told me that there was an opening for a full-time position at Columbia as a librarian worker and they said, "Well, you can learn to be a librarian, that's no problem." And I said, "Fine."

Particularly in a one room library. Yeah, right. So she set up the appointment and I came and met Mr. Davis and he said, "You're



hired," right off the spot and that was it. Never heard of Columbia College.

And what were your, what were some of your memories of Bert Gall as a young man who was the student worker in the library?

Because you both kind of...

We grew up together at Columbia. Oh, he was a nice person to work for, I mean, well, to work under, well, no; he worked for me because he was a student in the library. He was a good student, I mean he did whatever you asked him to do. I think — and we spent a lot of time talking — I think it was politics, family; so we really got to know each other very well. And then as a boss, he was very good as a boss. He knew I would know what I had to do and if I had a problem I'd just come to him with it. And other than that, we never, I was never in his office a lot. You know, he hired me to do a job and if I had a fluke, well, then I would go, if I couldn't solve it myself, I would go to him. But other than that, you know, what, we'd pass each other in the hall, "Hi," and just keep on going. Because he was busy; I was busy. We didn't have time to talk.

Who were some of the other people when you first came here that you remember and had contact with?

Well, management: Mike Alexandroff. I'm trying to think, John and Betty I met at Columbia. Brian Katz, Al Parker, Thaine Lyman, Bill Russo, Kowalski, he was our Treasurer, our Finance Officer. And I'm trying to think of the other lady's name who was Director of Admissions. It's been a long time. But there was a lot of people. And the Bursar was Peggy O'Grady, who just retired. She was the Bursar then and the Payroll

Clerk. So she was doing two jobs. I also learned that job too.

In your spare time.

In my spare time. Yeah, so, and I knew quite a number of the students, and we kept in contact even after they graduated

Can you describe those years in the early '70s, what the College was like for, maybe, someone who's listening to this tape that's only familiar with more traditional institutions and that are more similar than different in a lot of ways, how was Columbia different?

It was fun.

It was fun.

It was more of a family college. I guess that's what you would say because everyone, staff faculty, and students, they were all close. I mean, everyone knew each other. And you would go out and have a beer with them after work or after school. And it was just a close thing. And then in the '70s, well, that was really hectic, especially with the demonstration and all. And that spilled over to Columbia.

And how did that, are you talking about the anti-war demonstrations?

Well, we closed off Lake Shore Drive, you know.

Columbia did?

Yes, the students did.

You're the first person to mention that.

Oh, I am? See, I guess they don't remember that. Well, no, I was standing out the door watching them, "Hi." No, but the students had flags and stuff, it was just... To me it was a great demonstration and it was of students' energy because there was a lot of energy put into it and all. And I just think

it was a rough year for everyone but it was a good year.

And this is '74? And was there anything else about the year? You said it was a rough year. Was it just with the politics and how that influenced the school itself?

Yes, yes, yes. Because at one time I think the media said other individuals started the school as a radical school, you know, because of the demonstration, because of the protest and all. And then they finally decided that Columbia College was somebody.

And did you find that, you said you were egging them on or supported them, were most of the administration, staff and faculty, supportive of that?

Yes, uh-huh.

And so there wasn't tension between the administration?

No, no, uh-uh. Not at all, not at all.

And that must have been unusual. When you see what's happening across the country where there was a real tension.

No, there was no tension, no tension.

And how do you, what do you attribute that to?

Maybe the openness of the faculty. In fact, Lou Silverstein, I shouldn't say this, but when he came to Columbia he had a cape, he wore a cape. So we all said that he was a radical, so he fit right in. But he had a black flowing cape, you know, and he wore it all the time, just flowing into school. So he was right there with Mike Alexandroff, who had a long beard so he looked like Santa Claus and, you know, a mustache. It was just great. Students used to sit in the hallways

and the musicians with their guitars would sit there and play their music, you know, this is during class time or whatever, sit there and talk and eat. So it was just great, it was just so informal. But informal as it was, there was strict learning. Oh, Harry Bouras was there also, I forgot about Harry Bouras.

And why do you remember him?
Well, when I said the guitar, because they used to sit outside of his classroom and play guitar. Harry was a strange little man. He was an artist and I just remember him very good. He always gave me a collage for my birthday. He'd say, "Keep it because one of these days it will be worth money." You know, and I said, "OK." So I still have them, waiting for that day they're worth money.

I'll come back to other— you said '74 as a year that you remember, and if I'm correct I think that's when they got accredited. So it's interesting.

And that was, yeah, yeah, that was very hard. I mean we really, and to think of it, we had just the 540 building, 540 North Lake Shore Drive. And I'm trying to think; we had two rooms for the library. And just to get accredited with what we had, you know, accreditation with what we had, it was really remarkable. But they saw that we were struggling, the teachers, the students, everything. But going back to when I started, the dark-room was the closet, the maintenance closet that's across from the receptionist area. So that was the darkroom, the broom closet was no bigger. Only one person could get in there. It was just great, fun times.

How would you describe the mission of the College, personally as you see it, and maybe as what you feel the institution feels itself? And maybe then if you think it's changed over the years, you can speak to that as well. But what do you feel is the mission of the institution or was the mission while you were here?
I don't think it has changed that much from when I was here. They still have the open door policy, which I think is very good, especially for students that are not in the upper-half but in the middle-half of their class, graduating class, even in the lower half, and want to try college. And I think this would be a perfect place to start. You know, even if it's just one semester, you know, they get an idea of what a college is. But then I'm contradicting myself because when I was in admissions and students were coming from high school to Columbia I would tell them, "College is a hundred percent different from high school." And if they don't think they're prepared to come to Columbia, because Columbia is different, the criteria is different, that they should go to a community college for a year and then come to Columbia. Because it's entirely different. And I would always tell them to take, don't go in and take Television I, try and take your electives first. You know, take your art, take your science, and get those out of the way and then go and take whatever you want, whatever branch your going into. Because it's hard; radio is hard, television is hard, art is hard, photography is hard. None of the classes are easy. You know, everything is geared for you to use your brain and if you don't use your brain that's it. But I really don't think it's changed that much. I don't know now if they still have

the open door policy. I know they did when I left. I also understand now that they have some kind of assessment test that freshmen have to take before they come in, which is great. That will help that student get along much better in a college atmosphere, environment rather.

What, while you were here did— maybe as you started formulating, did your view of education change or did you formulate your own, because then you end up in the admissions office...
Well, nothing changed. My view of education didn't change.

Why don't you talk a bit to that, what your philosophy was.
OK. For one thing, I had six, I have six, children: three girls, three boys. And at home I told them that they had to finish high school. They definitely had to finish high school. I didn't care what they did but they had to finish high school. And I said, "After you finish high school you have two months to decide whether you want to go to college. If you don't, then you go get a job." So education was, it was there, it was already there before that. In fact, my son, while I was working here, he was under Hubert Davis. He learned about data processing from Hubert Davis while he was in high school. That's his field now, he's a programmer now. So education has been really, is really a good tool. And I'm glad I was here at the College where my children could get a bird's-eye view of what college life was about. And they stayed here practically, you know, not here but 540. During the summer I think I had them with me practically every day. So they got to meet instructors, they got to interact with people. In fact, my daughter, she baby-sat for Bill

Russo and his family, their children, you know, while I was dancing. Memories just popping up.

Now where were you dancing, here at the College?
But education... for Bill Russo's Free Street Theater.

Really?

He got me into dancing. "I understand you were a dancer." And I said, "Oh yeah, years ago, ballet." And he said, "Well, you've got to come and dance." I was, "Oh," you know. Next thing I knew I was in David and...

And what was that like? Maybe talk a little bit about that. That's a new perspective.

Oh, that was great, yeah. I mean, that was, in a bowling alley on the second floor. We had our theater, on Lincoln Avenue. The performances were great, people were just... sometimes it was standing room only and we had to dance over the people, you know, to get back to the stage. It was great. And Bill Russo is just a great person to work with. He yelled a lot and all through the performance; he would change things, and you'd have to remember what he changed. But it was fine.

And what were the names of the productions?
David and...

Well, if you remember, was that common for the staff to be included in the productions?

No, that's just how we were. You know, he just talked me into going in. He said, "Do it once and if you like it you can continue it." And I did, I liked the people I was with.

And did your children, did any of them attend Columbia?
David attended Columbia, then he went into the Air Force. Gary

attended Theater/Music, I think, for a year, and he's still in the music business. Let's see, the others didn't. Brian went to Eastern. Roenna just graduated, my baby daughter just graduated. And she was going part-time for the last six and a half years with her four daughters. So she just graduated

From here?
From Columbia.

Oh, OK. So three of them did it. And being a mother and looking at your children's educational experiences, did you see differences in Columbia and other mainstream institutions?

Well, my son Gary, he went, after he attended here for a year in music, he went to SIU and he came back. He didn't like it, it was so big and impersonal. So I think he decided he could just not take a big college, you know, because of the atmosphere that they had here. Darlynn went to Eastern because that was a small college, you know, and her major was biology, so that's where she went. And they all just like the small college atmosphere because you get to really know your instructor and he gets to know you. You know, you're not in a room, a mass of people and the instructor's way up there and you're trying to listen to what he's saying. So I think Columbia did rub off on them. But they're still looking for that family contact at this school and it was not there.

Yeah, I'm not sure if it's anywhere else. People that have been here a long time speak to that frequently.

It was a family thing; it was just, the whole thing. When we had graduation everyone attended, it was a formal affair. Everyone dressed, I mean women had, the

staff and faculty had on long dresses and the men were dressed up in suits, like an elegant affair. And sometimes we were just going to the President's house for the dinner, you know? Whatever the celebration, wherever it was, and that's how we dressed for graduation because it was a family affair. It was something for the students to remember and it was something for the faculty to remember. So, you know, it was entirely different, entirely different.

Can you point to when it started to change and why?

I think when I came back to Columbia, to 600 South Michigan, that's when I noticed the change. There was a lot of faculty members that were here from 540 North Lake Shore Drive but you never got to see them because they were in different parts of the building or whatever. And so that closeness that you had before, it wasn't there. You probably saw them at a gathering, faculty or staff, if they were having a luncheon, but that was only briefly because they were busy in between classes, you know. So it wasn't the comradeship that we had before, you know. But we knew we were here, each other were here, but that's about it.

So it's interesting because you're saying that, in part at least, that the literal physical structure that changed, it wasn't just the group was growing and there were more people but the actual physical structure changed the atmosphere.

Yes, spreading out and no more contact, just contacts...

What were some of the other challenges? You said that '74 was a particularly tumultuous year for a couple things. Looking back, can you think of other things where the school was

particularly challenged or high points or low points in your memory?

None that I can think of, no, after '84. Business as usual.

So '84 you started as Manager of Administrative Services. When you left, when you retired in '94, what were your, what did you see in your crystal ball for the College? Did you have concerns about it?

Let me think about that. For the College? Nothing, I had some negative thoughts, but the only thing I really miss are some people that are still here; that's about it.

But as far as, you talked about the different atmosphere in the early '70s and then when you came back and it changed, did you worry about Columbia staying Columbia?

I think about that once in a while, especially since I just heard that they purchased more buildings, whatever. And then I get very wary that we may get...

We.
Maybe still.

You were here long enough to say that.

...stretching ourselves sort of thin. And with the economy and tuition going up are we going to afford progress? And then I just keep thinking well, if they keep growing at this rate, then they keep building, so whatever. It's nice to belong to an institution that I was with when it was growing. And I don't think, I don't dwell on it. Just once in a while I pick up the paper or somebody calls and we talk about Columbia.

So you see a lot of this too as institutional growing pains, that you don't necessarily, you don't think Columbia should be frozen

in time in that little place where...

Oh no, no. They have to grow, I understand that, I understand that. It's just that, my children tell me I always fear what's going to happen in the future and the future isn't even here. You just sit back and say, "Oh," you know. So that's what I think about Columbia. I just think that at times we're spreading out and I think with the economy, if the economy goes down then they have this land and buildings nobody's ever heard of. Which they can always sell off but, you know what I'm saying, start from scratch. But that's the only thing, I have a fear. But then I don't think about it that much, you know.

Yeah... Can you talk about how, personally, Mike Alexandroff influenced the College or what you see is his influence on the institution, particularly in maybe when you first came here?

Well, we definitely have to go back to when I first came to Columbia because when I met Mr. Alexandroff, Mike we called him, and he found out I had six children — my husband had just died a year ago, a year prior to that — he and his family, his wife and his children sort of took us under his wing, under their wing. And we lived on — I had to go back this far, sorry.

No, that's fine.

We lived on the South Side on Fifty-eighth between South Park, I think it was Calumet at that time. And when King was assassinated, you know, the whole town of Chicago just went crazy. In the neighborhood I lived in they vandalized everything and I called the College to let them know I couldn't come to work because I

couldn't leave my children here and they couldn't go to school. So I had to be with them because they were shooting up and down the street. So Mr. Alexandroff got on the phone and he said, well, I told him I couldn't even go to the store and get my kids some food. I could not venture out of the house. So he said, "Jane and I will bring you some food." And I said, "Oh, no, do not come over to this wreck! Do not come south, stay north, please!" At that time, if I'm not mistaken, they lived in Highland Park, you know. And I said, "Do not come here because I couldn't vouch for your safety." So he said, "OK. Well, call me tomorrow and let me know what's going on." And I said, "OK." So he called the next day and he said, "I have an apartment for you over here on the North Side." And I forgot the lady's name, one of the art teachers, went to go and check the apartment out. He said, "You've got to come over here and see it, you and your children. If you like it, take it. I'll pay your security deposit and your first month's rent." And I said, "What?" because no one had ever done anything like that for me. So the children and I, he gave them the address, we got in the cab because I didn't know anything about the North Side. And the driver brought us to the apartment building, 833 West Buena, a fourth floor apartment, 409; it was a three-bedroom apartment, living room, kitchen, and two baths. And we said we'd take it. So we moved to the North Side. And when we went to work the following Monday he told me that he could not have me over there and my children in need and afraid to come out. He was just like a big father, a grandfather, to me and my family. He had me under his wing, I'll put it like this, I was under his wing. I was very thankful to him and for a lot of things him

and his wife did for me and my family. You know, Christmas time, because a single parent raising six kids, so I couldn't always afford Christmas gifts or whatever. And they made sure my children had Christmas gifts. They made sure my freezer was full. They always called and said, "You know, we're defrosting the refrigerator and we've got all this food here and we're going to get Jake, Jake Caref, to bring it over to your house. Is that OK?" I said, "Fine." And you know, you know within your heart that that is not it, they just went and bought some. But you accept it, you know. It was just great. Any time that I had a problem, when my mother passed and her insurance didn't cover the burial and I didn't have the money, my sister didn't have it, and we needed eight hundred dollars more, I called him and asked him if I could borrow eight hundred dollars from him until my income tax check came in. Which was, my mother died in February. He said, "What do you need?" And I said, "Eight hundred dollars, because they won't have the funeral unless I pay the last eight hundred dollars." And he said, "Fine. Who are you going to send to get it, David or Gary?" I said, "David." He said, "OK. Come to my office." So he gave me, gave him the check and I paid the funeral director. And when my income tax check came in I gave him his eight hundred dollars, you know. He didn't want it but I put it in his pocket anyway. I mean, that's the type of person he was, well, he still is. If I called him today and told him I needed or my kids needed he would be right there. So he was more of a, instead of a boss, my patron saint. So that's part of Columbia, that's the way they were at that time. Whatever

you needed, if you needed anything, even John and Betty, the whole, it's just... everybody knew everybody's problems. It's just... we'd come to your aid, no standoffishness or anything like that.

I might be wrong but it doesn't sound like anyone had a whole lot either.

No, no one did.

He wasn't sitting on a pile of money.

No, because at that time, sometimes they couldn't make faculty payroll, so the chairman of each department would not get paid, just the staff would get paid. And we knew it, we knew it. That's how it was. We didn't have that much money floating around. So the chairs wouldn't take anything for that pay period. You now, I'd take a partial payment or something like that. No one had anything. But it was, it was, like I said, it was a family. It was a family-type thing, you know? And I remember helping quite a few students, that they came to me and wanted to talk to me. I was their surrogate mother and in fact one young lady called me at twelve o'clock at night and she was hysterical. She was thinking about committing suicide. And I just went to her house and I stayed up with her all night talking. And it was just a family thing with her mother and father and she just couldn't take any more. And I said, "What do you want to do? Graduate or sit up here and drink yourself to death and jump out the window? You have the whole future ahead of you." So she decided to finish school and that's what she did. So I, I really, I talked them because I had children, you know. And I don't know if they saw I was open to anything they had to say to me, I didn't say, you know, that you shouldn't be doing this or you

should be doing, whatever you were doing. You know within yourself it was wrong, right or wrong, so I just sit and listened and talked to them; that's all.

You talked about the fact that you remember many students and a lot of them you've stayed in touch with, and you just gave one example of the contact or the relationship. Could you speak to that a little more as your relationship to students or certain things you remember particularly that stand out?

Well, since we went to all the graduations, and the students I was close with, I went to their parties afterwards, their graduation parties that they had at their homes. And that their mothers and father, it was another great big family reunion. I went on picnics with a young lady and her boyfriend, both of them attended Columbia, with them. And it was just, I don't know, it was great times, you know? And sit at the lakefront and watch the sun come up at five o'clock in the morning with them. And it was, I guess because we were there, I don't know. Just it, I was just a part of the College and I just felt like I was part of the students too. And everybody was just growing. So it was a growing experience for me because of my background. And I think in a way I grew up at Columbia and I started using my brain, you know. Because I hadn't for the last ten years prior to coming to Columbia, I had not used my brain at all. I had an abusive husband so, you know, we just, I don't want to go into that. But it was to the point where I could not think. I was considered dumb or whatever and just beaten down.

If you're told that enough you start to believe that.

Yeah, you believe that you're nothing, you know. So when I came out into the workforce after he died, it was like a fifteen-year-old, sixteen-year-old's first job, you know, being around people. So I was experiencing companionship on the job, you know, which was great. I mean, I grew.

Was it exciting or scary or a combination of both?

It was a combination of both, you know. Because I was wondering, what was I feeling from people, you know, and why am I in there, am I that smart that they want to promote me or is it just my mouth?

Actually the next thing I was going to ask you was some of the more biographical, but I'm sorry, no. You were talking about making that transition from being an abused wife to an independent but single mother and coming, having Columbia being your first...

My first job, yeah. It was hard. And I found out that you could be loved just by being who you are, respect, respected. And it was just a door opening for me.

How old were your children at that stage when you came out?

My baby was five; I have to get that right. And my oldest daughter was eleven or twelve.

I'm just curious, did you see, I mean obviously you're talking about the tremendous change within yourself. How about your relationship with your kids or what you could give to them?

Oh, that changed, that changed. Before I was a very serious mother, very serious. I don't think we had

any laughter in the house unless they brought it in, told jokes. It wasn't a warm house. And I think that was due to my fear so it just was not there. And then when I came to Columbia I found out I could laugh, you know, that laughter was fun.

You've laughed a lot during this interview, so you learned that lesson well.

Yes, and I took that home with me. And I opened the door for them also, my children also to be happy, happy children. Since they didn't know what was going on, in fact I didn't tell them until they were I think about five, 1992 or 1993, that I finally sat down and told them what was going on, you know.

You mean with your relationship with your husband prior to his passing?

With their father, yeah, uh-huh. Because that was still their father, so there was no negative remarks ever spoke of in front of them at all. Because he was their father, you know, respect that. But I found out that you could be happy and look forward to the next day. And I did, I looked forward to going to work, I just loved going to work so I could be with these happy people. And I started reading a lot. I used to read all the time and I started reading again. I read anything, anything you would lay down and say, "Oh, this is a good book Janice. Read it!" And I would read it. Then I started taking classes at Columbia so I really, I just really opened up, you know.

What kind of classes did you take?

I took Television for Actors, I'm an actor too, Television I, I didn't take any radio classes. I took the dancing classes, I took theater classes,

Bill Russo's music class, anything that was active; art, I love art. In fact right now, if I'm not mistaken, I'm about sixty hours away from my degree and practically all of my credits are from Columbia. I just did not finish. I don't like classrooms. If I get my degree by paper it would be great. But everything just opened up for me.

And you took advantage.

I took advantage of it, yeah. Because it only comes once in a lifetime.

And were you able, I mean Columbia, it seems to me, and maybe you can speak to this, that it would also be a good place, you must have been able to identify with a lot of the students and their stories because of your personal experience. And the people that sometimes end up here at Columbia, they don't fit in other places or...

Yes, yes. I did, I really did. I connected with a lot of students. And I don't know if it was written on my face or what, you know, their need was written on their face, but it just seemed like we would just always get to talking and it would come out and, "Can I have lunch with you, please?" Yeah, we'd meet across the street at Ohio and I think it was, where we used to eat at. And I would go over there and we'd have lunch. But I don't know what, how we recognized each other, that we needed someone to talk to or that I could help in any way, you know. But it was there, it was there. I guess it still is. But, it was, that relationship with the young lady, she's married now and she has three kids. And then there was a relationship with a young lady and her boyfriend and that was nationality conflict between her family and not

his. He was Scotch and she was Jewish and her family wanted her to quit seeing him and they sabotaged his car, they did everything possible, call the police on him. The police finally told them that their daughter was of age, she could pick whoever she wanted for a date. So that, I mean that broke up a family, you know. And I think they've been married now for twenty some years and they just recognized the marriage. When it turned fifteen years they recognized the marriage, their family did. Because she was kicked out of her family.

And that is gone, they don't ever get that back.

No, they don't get that back. And that was a traumatic experience for her but her love was greater. So I went to that wedding as her family, you know? She didn't have any family. It was just things like that, things just happened and it always seemed like I was in the middle of them, you know, someone needing my help and I would give my help.

And did that feeling last through '94 until your retirement? I guess I'm asking you, is it possible for that kind of rapport and closeness in such a bigger institution? I still had it from '84 to '94. I still had it and I was still talking to but it wasn't students. It wasn't primarily students, it was faculty, I mean staff, staff people that were coming to me. So I had them in my office, we'd talk, have dinner with them, and we'd just deal with things and talk to them. So that was something. That I miss, but that was a lot of energy that I gave away, being needed like that, I don't know.

You have your big family.
Yes, all the grandchildren now.

How many grandchildren do you have?
I have fourteen grandchildren and one great grandson.

(To a child present) You have lots of cousins then, don't you?
That's who she's up here meeting now, her cousins.

Well, I would finish by just asking if there's anything when you look back, favorite memories or things now, that you mentioned again, closing down Lake Shore Drive, but a particular graduation or talk someone gave, or a teacher when you were in class that was particularly influential, you know. What really stands out in my mind, I guess I'll always carry that with me, the Alexandroffs gave a party for the faculty and staff, that was once a year. And this particular party, well, my oldest son, he was a bartender. And this was given at their home and it was formal again, they just loved formal. And I remember buying this dress. It was a wine colored dress with accordion sleeves and it was full, the skirt was full. It was beautiful. And a V-neck, you know. And going to the party and Jane and... Jane and dinners, she cooked everything. Everything was delicious; she always cooked good food. And at that time Norman, I think Norman was about...

That's his son, right?
...was about seven or eight years of age. And if you ask him about it he'll tell you, I went to his room and I got a top hat and cane and I danced. I danced for Norman. I mean it was just things like that that we would just, just great, we would just, that I'll always remember. It was faculty there, I can't

remember if Lou Silverstein was there or not.

With his cape.
Yeah, ask him about that.

I will.
But it was staff and faculty and the more the merrier. I mean, and we never would leave one of their parties until four or five o'clock in the morning. I mean they'd just go on and on and on. They'd just sit there; you'd talk about everything. Jane would get up and fix breakfast.

I found it interesting that you a couple times said it was a formal affair and you like formal. When you say "formal," which I find is an unusual juxtaposition against Columbia, you know, with it's stereotype of being a hippie school. Do you mean more like dress-up, were people...
Oh, it was dress-up. This was long dresses.

But people loved to...
Loved to put them on.

But why do you think it was...
It was different from what we had to wear everyday and we were trying to bring back some of the '30s or whatever back to the school or whatever. And the men, I think even the men liked it, dressing up with bow ties. So it was a fun time to see each one come in with his dress, you know, long dresses and everyone looking beautiful. I don't know why we never took pictures or anything like that, we just never did. I guess we just figured it would linger on in our memories or whatever. None of the dinners did we ever take pictures. I can't remember even if the graduations we had pictures taken.

And you said that these dinners were for faculty and staff. Did you feel like together? You know, at some institutions there is a real separation.

Separation between staff and faculty. No, it was togetherness, it was togetherness. You would come in and sit wherever you wanted to sit. You'd be sitting on the floor because you were in somebody else's conversation but they never cared, you know. Very informal, even with the gowns on it was still informal, sit on the floor, it didn't matter, you know?

Did that come from Mike Alexandroff, you think? Or did he hire people that liked that kind of attitude?

No. I think Jane had more to do with it than he did because she was that type of person, loved just beautiful things, you know. And she just, I think she had some more to do with that. Then after talking to the staff and faculty about it, "Oh yeah. That would be great." So I mean it just started, you know. Great times.

And did those continue up through the middle of the '90s or did that have to change?

Oh that changed, you know. I can't remember the last time at Alexandroff's house. I think it was in the '90s, might be in the '90s before he retired. And I think Mr. Duff and his wife gave a dinner party to get to know the staff but that was only staff, it wasn't faculty. That was very formal. So nothing, to me nothing came out of it.

Formal as in stiff?

Stiff, there was no fun there. And even though you knew the majority of the staff there it was just no—so you'd just find your little clique to

go and sit with and that was it, you know. It was not the same feeling. That's why I say the family left or is leaving gradually out of the school. I think there's only about three or four from 540 that are still here.

Oh really?

Bert, naturally, I'm trying to think if Steve Russell Thomas is over there again, Brian Katz, Al Parker. And the Schultzes, John Schultz and Betty. Jim Newberry, but he didn't come over here. Shirley Mordine but she's way over there now, and Bill Russo. Just a few still left from 540. All us old folks.

You're just moving on.
Yes.

Well, thank you very much. I very much appreciated talking to you.

OK. Well, I enjoyed that too, bringing back memories. And if I really thought about it I would have sat and wrote out stuff that I remembered

Well, it's nice to hear when you sit down and the things come to you.

I have some very good memories at Columbia. And my retirement, it was just great.

Who threw that for you?

The College.

The College.

Was Mike Alexandroff there?

No, he wasn't there, and Bert wasn't there, but it still came off right. Very, very good. That I have pictures of.

Did you dance?

Oh yes. I love to dance, I just love to dance. I still do it now every once in a while. I still love to dance. In fact, in '92 I was taking a course, what was it, Abnormal

Psych with Marlene Zucarro, she was teaching. And I found out that I was abnormal, everybody's abnormal, no one's normal, you know. We had to give a paper, an oral presentation on death, religion, love, marriage and something else. And it could be how you wanted to give it and so my presentation, I did it with the song by Frank Sinatra, My Way, that started it off, you know. And I danced around a lots of people, I started talking, ran off all this and I ended it up with Six O'clock Blues, you know. After the whole thing Marlene said, "Well, this is very good. Have you ever been on the stage?" I said, "Oh yeah." She said, "I have someone who is getting ready to do a play and you would be great for it." And I said, "Right," you know.