

**RG53.1 History of Wake Forest University Oral History Project
Special Collections & Archives, Z. Smith Reynolds Library**

December 5, 2014

Sandra Boyette, Senior Advisor to the President

Interviewer: Tanya Zanish-Belcher

Q: This is an interview with Sandra Boyette and Sandra, would you like to talk about your family background and where you grew up?

A: Good. I grew up right here in Winston Salem. My parents were both Virginians and my dad had come down here and started a wholesale produce company in Winston-Salem. It's still in existence and I went to the public schools here and had a great experience. I remember, my first memory of Wake Forest actually was when Fabian, and that's a name that's not familiar to a lot of people, but Fabian and Bing Crosby were supposed to make a movie here called Love in a Gold Fish Bowl and it going to be filmed at Wake Forest and I think I was in fifth or sixth grade and that was kind of an exciting thing, but they didn't. They wound up not making it because I believe there was going to be dancing in the film and so somehow it wasn't made. So, but I had a great childhood and wonderfully supportive parents. My mom had been a teacher and I have one brother who still lives here. So, I left in 1969 and went away to school and didn't come back for fifteen years and that was interesting too because Winston-Salem had changed quite a bit. We had restaurants, for example, when I came back other than a couple places that shall not be named, but they were good places then. So, it's been a great experience to be in this part of North Carolina.

Q: And you went away to school and you went to UNC Charlotte and Converse College and did you come up with a plan or was it just. How did you decide where to go to school?

A: Well, I tell everybody that was back in my hippie days. I wasn't really a hippie. But actually I started at Meredith College. I grew up Baptist and didn't want to stay in town to go to school, and so I went to Meredith first and fully intended to stay there but then I fell in love with an NC State baseball player and he was graduating and moving to Charlotte. So, that's how I decided to go to Charlotte. That was back in the days when women really did follow men places. So we married and I was teaching school because, again even though things were really starting to open up for women back then, there were still fairly limited choices so I became a school teacher and taught middle school for seven years and, back then, the only way teachers could get a raise was to get a master's degree. I was in southwest North Carolina down in Cleveland County and so Converse was close by and it was a good deal like Meredith and so I went down there for a master's degree. I wish I could tell you there was a master plan but there was not exactly. I sort of innovated as I went along.

Q: Now how did you end up back in Winston-Salem and at Wake Forest?

A: My former husband changed jobs so, by serendipity, I came back to Winston-Salem and I taught for another year after I moved back here but I was really, I had decided that teaching middle school is a very hard job and I will say now, it is the hardest job I've ever

had and I admire those teachers so much, but a friend of mine who had been in development at Gardner Webb College said I really think you would enjoy development. And I was acquainted with Bill Joyner, who was then the vice president for university relations and I went to see Bill. Wake Forest was in a campaign at that time, a sesqui-centennial campaign, so I was hired on as a staff writer and it's been a blissful experience ever since.

Q: Can you describe, I know you had that baby and Bing experience with Wake Forest, but as an adult can you describe your initial impressions when you first came on campus and first started working?

A: As an employee? I was thrilled. Because even though I had grown up here, I really didn't know Wake Forest that well. As a Baptist I knew it was affiliated with the Baptist and shortly after I got here, went through a change in relationship with the Baptist. So that was all very interesting. What I found was a very warm community and that's probably what helped me stay here all those years. Every day was, even when there were difficult days people at Wake Forest were just so very supportive. And that really is not something we just say in brochures. That's what I found. Had the opportunity, especially when I was foundations officer, to get to know a lot of faculty members very well and that was, to me, just more proof positive that what we say about our professors really is true. Very rigorous in their expectations of students and administrators, I would say, but also easy to get to know, eager to help the school. So, I don't want to sound Polly Annie-ish, but it was and is, I think, a great place.

Q: Well, you started out in development and I was wondering if, since you've been here for a long time, is there a way to describe the differences in development and advancement work today as opposed to when you started?

A: There are. First of all, the whole concept of fundraising was not so much a profession back then. People got into by various pathways. Certainly the Ivy League schools and some of the larger institutions had had fundraising operations going on for a long time. But we really were and I say we, my colleagues and I were sort of in the infancy of development as a profession. Comparing development then to now at Wake Forest, I would say that there were far fewer people doing it. The staff was very small and we all did a lot of different things no matter what our child might be, which was great because we all understood the various aspects of development. Our alumni base was much smaller and not heavily concentrated in North Carolina, but much more so than it is now and so it was easier perhaps to get to know alumni better. So, there is that matter of scale now. We have lots more people in advancement. Technology has made a big difference in the field. Although, face to face, person to person, is still the best way to keep people engaged within the institution. So, some differences but I would say primarily in scale and in with who our alumni and parents are.

Q: Did you during that time period especially the early years, was there a lot of travel and events happening?

A: There were. In fact, when I talk to young people who want to be involved with development, I just say think about the lifestyle you want because you work every weekend, one way or another. If you don't have an on-campus event, then you're getting ready to go somewhere generally. If you're on the part of the development staff that calls on people. There was a lot of travel and I enjoyed that a lot. One of my best

memories and the way I learned to be a foundations officer was traveling with Ed Wilson. He would often go, because he was provost at the time, would often go along when we were making foundation calls and I simply listened to him tell the story of Wake Forest and that was my training. It was great training and you found out what kind of questions people would ask and what the real answers were. One of the things I remember, some of our early foundation calls was that the foundation director asked Ed about our foreign language requirement because as you know in the 70s a lot of schools got rid of that and she was amazed to find that we had never changed ours and I think it's pretty much stayed intact for a long time. So there were things I learned about Wake Forest and about what people wanted to know by that kind of travel and with other senior officers of the university.

Q: So you were working and then, you eventually decided to go to Wake Forest and get your MBA. Why did you decide to do that?

A: Well, fortunately, I had had the great privilege of working with President Hearn and he named me first female vice president of the institution which was great but all of my background was very humanities oriented. I was a French major in college and I had taught English and French. And everything I knew about business, I had just sort of picked up along the way certainly from my dad, but a little here and a little there and so I had been vice president since 1989 and Doctor Hearn said, I think you would, because I was working a lot in the marketing arena, he said, I think you would really enjoy and benefit from getting an MBA. So I entered the evening program. So, I was working and going to Wake Forest at night. But again that was a terrific experience. Now that it's over I can say that. Got to know the business school obviously very well and the professors there and it gave me one more interface with getting Wake Forest story correct is what we say about small classes and interested professors true and certainly in my experience I found that it was and our rigorous academic reputation is real.

Q: So, you held a variety of administrative positions and so I was just going to go through them ... I don't know that I've got them all. I was wondering if you would maybe cast your mind back on each one and talk about maybe the challenges or experiences that you've faced. So, originally you were a Director of Public Affairs.

A: Well, that was, I had been in development for awhile as Foundations Director and Assistant Director of Development and then, Russell Brantley, who had been our communications director for many years and really established one of the most respected news services around because Russell was a wonderful journalist and novelist a poet, but Russell retired and Dr. Hearn was here by that time and he wanted a public relations office that did all that but also was very focused on marketing and telling Wake Forest stories for a wider audience. So the big challenge there in the public affairs job, I think, was really establishing that office. There was probably a total of five people doing about twenty-five different jobs at the time.

So we began sort of pulling the threads together. For example, the admissions office had done all of its own marketing materials for years and did a great job with that but we tried to pull all of the external communications a little more together. It's not always possible in universities because people do speak their minds and hold onto their opinions but to try to get us speaking to our publics in a more unified way. That was a big challenge just putting that staff together, getting our magazine out much more frequently and really learning about audiences a lot more. So, I will say that in my first

week on that job, the Director of Public Relations, was when three students showed up in my office saying we want to have a presidential debate at Wake Forest. And I was overwhelmed and feeling kind of stressed at that point to put it mildly so I said great if you'll do all the leg work and research, I'll help you, thinking I might see them again at graduation, but they had already done all the research and they'd already been to see the president who sent them to see me and that was just, that was a wonderful way really. It was a big challenge, but it was wonderful way to get initiated into talking to a bigger audience about Wake Forest.

Q: What was your biggest challenge in regards to logistics?

A: Everything. You know, I think probably toward the end of the time that we were planning and the time very close to the debate itself, the logistics challenge was people living on the quad, feeding people. The cafeteria was our media center, that was the biggest place, the Pit, the biggest place we had to put the news media. Back then believe it or not, everyone who came to cover the debate would fit in our cafeteria. Not so now. But, we had to shut down the cafeteria for three or four days. We had to move some people away from the quad. Not many, but the great thing was that our student life staff just responded beautifully and in the days the cafeteria was closed they hosted picnics. One Saturday morning we all went knocking on doors and handing out sausage biscuits in resident halls, that kind of thing. So, there were some challenges and I guess the biggest challenge was we had turned over our campus to a group of people that we really didn't know very well. Certainly they were well respected, the Commission on the Presidential Debate and they still are but they were, what they said was the law. So, if we had to close the parking lot, we had to close the parking lot. We were their guinea pigs and they were their guinea pigs because we were both involved. This was the very first presidential debate that they had ever run September 25, 1988, and so they were learning and we were learning. But, I have to say, working day and night, it was a wonderful experience for the students certainly because we had six of seven hundred students that got to work directly in some capacity and we had one young man who was Tom Brokaw's assistant for the whole time he was here. Things like that that really you can't replicate in any other way.

Q: So, after being Vice President of Public Affairs you went on to be Interim and Vice President for Advancement.

A: That's right.

Q: And what were the challenges of that?

A: Well, my predecessor Bill Joyner, who had hired me retired and while they were deciding on what kind of Vice President they wanted I laughingly told President Hearn that he would get two VPs for the price of one. About half of the universities in the country put their public relations and fundraising together and about half have them separate. So, again, we were still small enough and knew each other well enough that we decided we could, it would be feasible to put us together and it remains that way today.

Q: Are there any memories that stick out in your head about people or events that you were involved in?

A: Well, you know, being involved with graduation every year is kind of a thrill. I have sat up on the stage for probably twenty-five graduations but also our staff have big responsibilities for that and that is always, it would always bring a tear to your eye just to think about all these wonderful young people. So that was an annual ritual that I really enjoyed being involved in. Getting to know how our board of trustees operates was a wonderful education for me. Getting to know them and again, in the same way that you get to know faculty members and other administrators here. It was easy to get to know the trustees. Most of them were devoted alumni who wanted to know what we were doing and we saw them on a frequent basis and learning how a governing board works was a wonderful experience for me. Now I'm jumping back in time. So, this is good for the editing. One of my most interesting experiences happened the year I came on board at Wake Forest. Because Graylyn Conference Center, Graylyn Estate, the house had just burned. I came to work in June and I think it had, maybe it was the previous fall/late Summer that it had burned. But, the very first project I worked on was proposal writing to try to fund the conference center and that was absolutely fascinating. Tom Gray, who was a member of that family had done his dissertation, I guess, at University of Delaware on Graylyn. So we had a road map. We had wonderfully explicit language and history about that old house and certainly the people who were doing the construction had a lot of guidance in how to put the house back together. So, that was a huge learning experience.

Q: Your current position is Senior Advisor to the President and would you like to describe what that is?

A: Yes, when I decided that I wanted to ease into retirement, I talked to Doctor Hatch and just said, you know, I don't want to do this full time anymore but if there is a real part-time job, I would like to stay at Wake Forest. And he and Mark Peterson who is now the Vice President for University Advancement came to me and said we would like you to stay on and the best way I can describe my position now is, as institutional memory. There are people on campus who have long institutional memory and affiliation like Tom Mullen and Ed Wilson. But, I do still a lot of writing, still a lot of editing. Knowing who our alumni are, knowing a lot of the donors, our trustees, past and current is helpful in the whole communications arena and in fundraising. So, I do a lot of different projects based on what the need is, vis-à-vis fundraising and the President's time.

Q: Can you describe a couple of projects?

A: Let me see what would be the most interesting one that you would want to know about. Well this is not a project exactly, but we have a fair number of young employees in the development office and a lot of times they just show up in my office and to say they tell me about this person or tell me about this time at Wake Forest. Is there anything I need to be aware of when I go to see this particular individual? So, that's fun because I get to do exactly what I'm doing right now. Think about the history of Wake Forest, but the writing projects, you know, sometimes they're campaign pieces, sometimes they're letters. Mostly that others have written but sometimes I can add things that I believe would be meaningful to the readers.

Q: One of the things that I wanted to ask about is probably over the last twenty to thirty years, Wake Forest has really moved from being a regional University to being much more on the national map. Why do you think that is?

A: Well, I happen to think that and my marketing colleagues would probably boo and hiss me about this, but I happen to think that the scholarly strength of any institution is where the reputation begins and ends and at the time that I became an employee, the US News rankings had just begun and for five or six or seven years, Wake Forest wound up at the top of the regional institution list and I really think there's a reason for that and back to something I said earlier, our requirements were still very tough we expected a lot of our students and we had an increasing number of students who got admitted to the best graduate and professional schools in the country, so that said, I think marketing is important. I think that it's awfully important to diversify your enrollment. Wake Forest was primarily a North Carolina school, it was primarily white. It was, I won't say it was primarily Protestant because we had a lot of Catholics from the Northeast who were enrolled here at the time I first came, but if you look at the campus enrollment now, we've had a very deliberate emphasis on diversity and so, I think marketing helps a lot with that and if you can say, we really do have support mechanisms in place for first generation students. And if that's true, that word of mouth as important as anything. But, you cannot convince people that they've had a good experience, if they haven't. So we listen to our alumni a lot and our parents too because they hear what their kids are saying.

Q: Do you think an increasing size has brought more challenges?

A: I do. And I worked through some of that, and I will say that our trustees have always put a lot of emphasis on trying to keep the undergraduate population small because we historically for various reasons and a smaller endowment than a lot of the private schools with which we compete we've had to add students for a particular reason and that's revenue. But I think we've been very deliberate in also trying to match that with making certain that those classes and those standards have remained the same. But the challenge is walking across campus and not knowing a lot of the people you meet and especially from an administrative standpoint. I think the real risk is getting into a bureaucracy where somebody says you can't do this, but you don't know why. I've not seen that happen at Wake Forest but of course as organizations grow, that's what happens.

Q: Would you like to talk a little bit about being the first woman Vice President in the Wake Forest administration and were there special challenges associated with that?

A: Well, I have to say, again, I was so busy doing what I was doing, I didn't think about it so much at the time. But, walking into the President staff meeting with eight or ten men and being expected to hold your own and know what everyone's talking about and being able to make your own case heard, was daunting at times. Bill Joyner was a wonderful mentor and I would go to him and Ed Wilson frequently to say help me interpret this, what should I do?, what can I do? But there were also a lot of women around campus who were cheering and so, I got a lot of confidence and information from them. Peggy Smith in the art department, Susan Warwick in the music department, Nancy Cotton, Emily Wilson, Katie Herriger, a lot of faculty women and also Lou Leake, who was probably the first female assistant Vice President. All of them were helpful and nearby and accessible and so that helped me through some rough spots but there were rough spots and you know, you want people to know that your idea is your idea and that's one thing you really have to, I think in any organization when there are few women and a lot

of men, you got to make sure that people know that you did this job and to Tom Hearn's great credit, he was a wonderful supporter of women's rights and of me and I did feel like that when I ran into any kinds of problems that might be because I was a woman I could go to him. I'll tell you a funny story and he would laugh at this too, I think, if he were here. When I was first traveling in New York, the men at the institution could stay at the university club. Women were not allowed to stay at the university club and so I would stay down the street at the Warwick Hotel, 54th and 5th and 6th. So on the very first trip when I was in New York with President Hearn, Bob Baker, my colleague who is still at Wake Forest, and I had arranged a brutal three days of appointments because we wanted to make sure that the President knew that we were good at our jobs. So, Bob and Doctor Hearn were staying at the University Club. It was down the street from the Warwick and at the end of the first day we needed to debrief. And so the taxi let us out at University Club and Doctor Hearn said well come on in and we'll talk in here so I went in. Women could enter the place but that's about it.

So he headed upstairs toward the bar and he said just come on up and we'll meet up here and I knew better I said I can't go up there. He said, what do you mean you can't go up there. I said they don't let women in up there and he said well they're going to and I said well I promise you they won't because I've been through this drill before and sure enough we got up there and they said gentleman you're welcome but the lady will have to go to the lady's lounge. So, the three of us went to the lady's lounge and had a drink. Men could come in the lady's lounge, but women couldn't. Blessedly, that has changed now. Women are very welcome at the University Club, but that was, that was startling to me. Just because, I guess, coming through an era where things were just starting to open up to women it just shocked me that there could still be an institution like that. So, the back of the bus syndrome was alive and well for women back then that's for sure.

Q: Now you brought this up. So, I have to ask about it. Describe one of your rough spots for me?

A: I'll tell you the very roughest spot. The roughest spot happened in 1999. I was supervising WFDD and the question arose with the Wake Forest Baptist Church as to whether they could have a gay marriage ceremony and of course that's 1999. It's a long time ago. Everyone in the administration's first impulse was to say this is a church matter and the church should handle it. But there were a lot of constituencies to worry about. So, the trustees, through Doctor Hearn, ultimately responded that, we believe this is a church matter and the church needs to decide, but we would prefer that you not. I had to be the person to deliver that message to the news media and so I did. I took the news release to the Winston-Salem Journal and various other media outlets and I can't say that I was entirely comfortable with that decision. I think that it was a church matter. Well, and I can't speak for Tom Hearn, but that's the decision they made and the day that was happening, the day I took all those news releases around. I was leaving the next morning for New York. I had Wake Forest business there. I had said to the manager of WFDD, I know that WFDD doesn't do editorials, but just remind your news staff that they're funded by the university and they also broadcast the Wake Forest Baptist Church. So then you'll be perfectly objective. She delivered that message and a couple of the employees got very upset and believed that I was somehow trying to stifle their right to talk, which I was not, but I was gone. That was back in the days that cell phones didn't work so great and so it blew way out of proportion and ultimately, I said to Tom Hearn, you know, let somebody else supervise WFDD. He was very supportive of me. He knew that I hadn't tried to stifle the truth, and also, fortunately for me, a lot of

really wonderful faculty members, whom I knew, said Sandra doesn't operate this way. So, it was messy for awhile and I lost some weight and I lost some sleep but, I gained it back quickly, but that was a tough time because I so believe in, first of all, I'm a Democrat and I'm way left of center that was not me that they were talking about, but when you're in that spokesperson position, you can't say that and there was some manipulation going on that I was very unhappy with. Not on the part of anyone who supervised me, but on the part of a couple of employees and it was, it was an unhappy time. But, it resolved itself and then about the time that was over we got our second presidential debate. So it was a wild time, but I think that truly that's the only deeply negative experience I've had. You know everybody has day-to-day things that happen, but that was the roughest.

Q: What do you think when you look back over your long administrative career, what do you think are the most important qualities that you think you can bring to being a good administrator?

A: Well, being a good employee of any kind, to me, involves the ability to listen well. And especially on a university campus. I think being an administrator at a university of course you have to have skills and you have to be able to defend your positions probably better than you would out there in the corporate world and the one thing that I think is difficult for people who make the transition from corporate world administration to non-profit and or university world is the process. That decision processes are much slower, much longer. Many people have to have so much input and, you know, sometimes you kind of lose sight of what the original question was. So, patience is one and certainly in the administrative positions I've had you got to enjoy working with people. There are positions, I suppose, where you can hide behind a computer or, you know. I don't mean that. That sounded condescending where you can spend your entire career without having to interact with a lot of people but you have to an openness to that and get energy from it.

Q: You briefly talked about Thomas Hearn and Bill Joyner serving as mentors for you and what qualities do you think they taught you and are there other people who had an impact on you and your career?

A: Certainly with Bill and Ed I got deep history of Wake Forest and how, what this culture was like was radically important. I would say, Tom Hearn was a wonderful scholar. He was a philosopher but he was very pragmatic about administration. He knew how universities worked but he probably put us a little bit more in the business mode of running the institution and what I learned from him was how to make decisions because he was very logical in laying out all of the possibilities, all the pros and cons and talking things over but not forever. And so I think I learned a lot about decision making from him. And now I'm throwing in more antidotes. Thanks for editing. You asked earlier about one of my most memorable events. On 9/11 we were gathered in the president's conference room, in the Autumn room, which is where the president's staff met on Tuesdays and a couple of people were absent because they were in a meeting. Leon Corbett and Reid Morgan from the legal council's office and we were I guess three quarters of the way through our meeting when the two of them came in and Leon said there's news. Well, that was just an odd thing for him to say and we didn't know if the campus was on fire or whatever and he said a plane has crashed into the Twin Towers and they think it might be terrorism and so forth. So, this is a good Tom Hearn story. He looked around at all of us and he said does anyone think we need to

continue this meeting? And we all said no and so up and out we went. But it's just one of those moments that you won't forget and that's the kind of administrator he was. If things were changing in a meeting then he would turn them around and go the other way.

Q: When you look back over your time at Wake Forest, what do you think your most important contribution has been?

A: That's a question that I have wrestled with. I hope it is imparting a sense that even though Wake Forest is not a huge institution, it has huge power and huge potential because to think that, we could land not one but two presidential debates, is pretty remarkable. But then when you look back to know that Martin Luther King spoke here and so many people. Jimmy Carter was here early in his career. I think Wake Forest has a certain kind of understatement to it which is wonderful and admirable but I hope that we know a little bit more now about what our potential really is as an institution. I think it can go too far in one direction. I mean, I think you have to know what your culture is, you have to know what your niche is and really work to keep that but know that there are things you can do in the academic world that are great for students and faculty.

Q: What do you think the biggest challenge facing Wake Forest is today?

A: Maintaining its niche. I think that we are more diverse. We are bigger. We used to talk about the fact that Wake Forest was born and did part of its growing up in a small southern town. There are bad things about small southern towns but there are a lot of good things and that sense of community is one and I think, you know, if you get bigger then bureaucracy can happen. Students don't know each other as well. Students and professors don't interact maybe as often as they could and the other thing that I think about a lot is economic diversity. I think we have less economic diversity then when we had when I first came here and that, to me, that is just a great asset to have economic diversity within the student body. I spent my whole fundraising career it seems, we did other things, but finding scholarship endowment for students who were either, now it's middle class. If, you know, you're a solid middle class family income wise it's hard to afford Wake Forest. So, finding money for those people and for first generation. That's a little bit easier. People get it about first generation students. Access, you know, if your mom's a teacher and your dad's a bank manager you're pretty much in the solid middle class and we want those students and we want the first generation students. So I think it's a dollar problem in making certain we have access for those people. Who are Wake Forest historical constituents.

Q: Are there any experiences, further experiences, that you would like to share that you don't think we've covered?

A: Well, I might think of them in the middle of the night three nights from now. I don't think so. I mean I think . . . Well I will say that one of the things I most appreciate about Wake Forest and Winston-Salem now is what a wonderful relationship this is. I have heard people who've moved here from the old campus say that they felt that Winston-Salem was, you know, the powers that be, were a little stand offish for this little Baptist school that had moved but when you look at today what's happening today, with our downtown and our medical school's gonna be keeping downtown Winston-Salem alive for a long time, that's just wildly exciting to me. So, I think it's been a good move. I used to say that I thought Wake Forest being in Division I sports is a great thing and I still do

but I'm not extremely comfortable with the direction of intercollegiate athletics in general at this point. I think there's too much professionalism. I'm glad that we're in the ACC. That helped get our story out there in a certain way and to some people and I hope that we can still have that as part of our culture but I think that's a story to be written by collegiate athletics and in general.

Q: Okay, well thank you very much. This has been really good.

A: Thank you. This has been great fun to talk about this.