

Interview with Allene Sugg Highsmith

Interviewed by Dorothy Joynes

Jan. 26, 1993.

DJ: It was over six months ago that Bill Buchanan said, "Oh, be sure to interview Allene." I said, "I certainly will." But what I wanted to do was to find out more about you and not just talk about the University because that's been a large part of your thirty years here, but you have done a lot of other things, too. So when I came across the clipping, which I think is really very well done and a little amusing, September the 30th 1962, you were interviewed and, in a way, the First Lady of the Asheville Biltmore College was being asked about her role and her place as a woman and this was even before Betty Fredan had talked about the "feminine disease". But they wondered whether you were gonna waste your time with children at home or whether you were gonna get back into teaching and you had some very nice comments about values, which I enjoyed. You and your husband felt that raising children in an educated family was very important, but it was the beginning of all of these changes that you and I have gone through, and you'd seen so many changes, not only in the educational field, but in Asheville. So, tell me first about yourself and what it felt like to come here where you were going to have a real project as you had had before; you're husband had put another college together, a junior college into a four year college. And you knew it was gonna be a lot of work.

AH: Well, the previous one had been a private institution and we spent quite a lot of time raising money in order to do it and we thought this one would be nice, it would be a state institution. We didn't know that my husband was gonna have to spend all his time in Raleigh raising money for a good portion of the time. But it was a delightful change. The

boys were five and eight and it was a relatively easy time to move them. You can move small children easier than you can move high-school children. But two buildings that were not really made for college buildings were quite daunting when one looked at them for the first time. For instance, the science building which was one of the two, the administration building was the other, and the administration building held everything from the offices to the classrooms to the library. The science building I do believe had been designed and built by people who had never seen anything more sophisticated than a high school laboratory. The comments that we got from incoming people in chemistry, physics and biology you can well imagine, when they were faced with something that looked like you were in high school.

DJ: They had a Bunsen burner.

AH: Ha, ha, Bunsen burner! That's about all! They had a very small cabinet affair, and that was to put *the chemicals* in, it looked like maybe you could put a couple of large spice racks in it. My husband was a little irritated at the building. It was a long rectangle, and he called it "the sock factory", and that's exactly what it looked like. Finally we did get the first of the two towers up in front, and instead of putting the second tower, by the time that Dr. Brown got here, the money was there and came for the Robinson Hall portion of Rhodes Hall. So, you can't tell now that it was a sock factory! But it was rather crowded in the administration building. And this institution had been going on a shoe string since 1927, with borrowed money, begged books, free teaching in some areas and, for instance, full professors had made for some years a sum total of 1800 dollars a year with out any raises for years and years. They were a little better in the sixties but not tremendously. I will never forget the librarian's face the first time he saw his library. This

was a charming man named Aimsely Whitman who was an extremely good librarian, but as I told you, most of the books had been given.

DJ: AAUW had a drive ...

AH: Yes, they did, a rather large drive and they had gotten some relatively good books. But they also got some that were quite interesting for a college library. For instance, I think that Asheville Biltmore had the distinction of having had several copies of every novel that Merritt Roberts Rhinehart ever wrote. And we used to tease Aimsely about having burned the books, he was a very shy person and he got all in a dither because of course no librarian would ever burn a book but no librarian worth his salt would have the sort of books that was in that library. So, it's puzzling as to what Aimsely did with those books. But, as you mentioned from the article in 1962, that Gertrude Ramsey, a charming lady who was on the board and worked for the newspaper, did ask what I was going to do and I mentioned children and I did not realize that I was going to get involved with everybody else's children too. When I came, right away I became one of the den mothers, for my eight year, as soon as he turned nine for cub scouts, with a lady named Lina Privet. And we had nine little monster angels. I had never had anything to do with cub scouts before, neither had Lina, we learned a lot. And then, through June Elmore, I got involved with the Asheville Day Nursery. And of all the boards that I have been a part of, and that is several over the years, I think that Asheville Day Nursery really captured my heart more than anything, because it was the place where working mother's left their children for a sliding scale amount of money. There were people who would come on the bus in the rain to leave their children at 6:30 in the morning, go to Vanderbilt Shirt Shop work all day, take the bus and come back. And there were nurses'

children, various children, it was a mix. But mainly a lower socio-economic class. And I worry now that great numbers of those children are not being served, because more and more, well not *all* that many mothers worked thirty years ago, and practically all mothers work now. No matter the economic class. But I have a horror that a great many of those little fellows are being short changed and they will pay for it and *we* will pay for it, forever, if we don't get those children educated from the word go. I fear they have is an inept babysitter just to keep them alive that's not gonna help them much. One of the things that I am proudest of, that my husband did, he happened to have been chosen as the first chairman of the Opportunity Corporation in the Johnson years. A journalist from the Louisville Courier Journal stopped his job there and took a position being head of permanent secretary of The Opportunity Corporation. At that time we were all involved with doing things with Asheville Day Nursery and that was on my mind and the three of us were sitting at my kitchen table one night. They had the promise of a pretty good size sum of money, and they were shooting at each other the various ideas of where they could best serve with the money. Because that was really all that was on my mind at that time, we had just had to move into a new place, I insisted that the best thing they could do with it was to put nurseries over at housing units. Amazingly enough, they finally agreed with me and that's why there are nursery units over at Hillside and at Pisgah View. They were beautifully done, beautifully staffed, only trouble is that they are so small and they don't take care of nearly all the children that need that service there. And it's a tremendous puzzle as to what you do with those children, because if you're ever going to break the cycle of poverty you have to break it before they are big enough to fall into the habit of their parents and the welfare generations.

DJ: They had a program of kindergarten training. I'm trying to think of the name of it, it was nationally done. Something like, oh yeah, "Headstart". What happened with that?

AH: Now, "Headstart" is going beautifully. It just doesn't take care of enough children either. All over the country maybe less than half the children are served that qualify for "Headstart". They just run out of money.

DJ: Where are they held?

AH: To tell you the truth, I don't really know.

DJ: This has nothing to do with what you were doing?

AH: No, nothing, this was nursery care from infants through, at that time North Carolina did not even have kindergarten for five. So it was for little tiny people up to the time when they went to school. In fact our day nursery, though I was no longer on the board, when about ten years ago the state introduced, it was when Governor Hunt was governor for the first time. They introduced kindergarten into the public schools and it took awhile to get them all around the state. But that took the five year olds from the Asheville Day Nursery, and gave them the opportunity to take smaller children, because it eliminated a whole class unit.

DJ: Was this before segregation?

AH: Now, um, I've forgotten. Yes, I was president of the board when we molded Tiny Tots in with The Asheville Day Nursery. Those were United Way agencies, and Tiny Tots was the black institution and The United Way was getting more and more things they needed to cover and the integration business with the Brown vs. Board of Education had passed in 1954 and it was really silly to keep two separate day care centers which we really couldn't afford. So, we offered to just bring them all into one and that was

perfectly satisfactory with everybody. There was no fuss, no bother whatsoever. The Day Nursery had had to move itself from Montford from a two story wooden house, which was a fire hazard, when finally the city noticed that we were operating in a fire hazard they made us move. So we bought the building across the street from Asheville High School and that was the time when it was convenient to take in the little Tiny Tots Nursery, they had far fewer students than we did because they were in a much smaller place. So it was very convenient just to roll everything together. There was never any difficulty from any body.

DJ: You were working with the YWCA at this time also?

AH: A little later I worked with the Y. I did not take them both on at once. June got me into it; she was always getting me into things, I guess she did get me into that before I was out of the Day Nursery.

DJ: Did you have the same segregation and integration situation?

AH: Well now, by the time I was on the Asheville Y, there was still, there had been a black advisory board, but I think that was in the past at the time I came onto it. Because the board was very very well integrated, it would have looked a little silly with the head of the Y being black if it had not been integrated. Some marvelous people were on that board.

DJ: Was this when Thelma Caldwell was ...

AH: Yes, Thelma had been there for some time when I was there. I was there at the time that they decided to close the Grove Street area and to move it all into, well, to build the Y on South French Broad .

DJ: Were you there for the building?

AH: I was there for part of it. And then I got involved with something.

DJ: When you were doing the building, you got to know Tony Lord who was your architect.

AH: Tony designed the library which to my way of thinking is still the most beautiful and best-built building on the campus. Although the new classroom graduate studies, the Karpen Building, is a lovely lovely building. But one reason it is a beautiful building with out even knowing Tony but you see Tony all over this. The lights up in the top on the outside, Tony insisted on. They are rather hard to change when the lights burn. They have to get a three-story or four-story ladder send it up on the outside all the way around. I remember my husband told Tony that if those lights start burning out you're gonna hang by your toes and change them all! 'Cause he could see the tremendous bill of having to push that thing all around the library building, you'd have to rent it from the fire department in order to do it.

DJ: Tell me more about him.

AH: Tony Lord, is really a renaissance man. He is a marvelous individual. He has a wonderful hobby of making and collecting old locks, have you ever seen the pictures of his old locks?

DJ: I've seen what he's made, but they weren't locks, I've seen the hardware that he's made in the Cathedral in Washington D.C.

AH: There are various types of hardwares but what I remember basically is the locks because some of them were so intricate. He spent forever on the library.

DJ: Forever and ever, I'm gonna go back and interview him again. I have one interview with him and he quotes himself as being a nuisance because he stays on until he

gets things the way he wants them and he is considered the renaissance man. I am delighted that you had your experiences with him. You say that the library looks like Tony. Now, how do you mean that?

AH: Well not like Tony at all, but you, because I know that Tony did it. It's structurally very sound and everything makes sense in it. Nothing is there for no purpose. It's a business-like building but it's very, it's beautiful. It's light, it's airy, it feels spacious or rather it did until we were so wall-to-wall books and the children had to sit on the floor to study. Unfortunately, it's closed at the moment and everything is wadded into the annex.

DJ: He asked me whether the doors were still red or whether they had gotten pink in the sun, the front doors.

AH: They had been re-painted, and don't tell Tony, they are now more purple than red. Dr. Brown, for some reason did not like it being painted white with red doors and painted it a tan and painted the doors a sort of lavenderish purple, which to Tony and me looks very strange; to everybody else it looks fine because they are accustomed to it that way. But Tony made it stark white with bright red doors, and when Bill came home the day they unpacked the door and laid them out on the quadrangle he was a little, he was swallowing rather hard because he had never seen them and he said "I don't know if they're gonna look good or if they're gonna look like the doors to a Chinese whorehouse."

DJ: Beautiful!

AH: Fortunately they were beautiful when he put them up, as everything that Tony ever did was perfect.

DJ: And he also did the Y. The new Y, he was, there was a picture of him...

AH: No, Tony didn't do the Y.

DJ: Well, he got credit with Thelma Caldwell in the newspaper photograph that he was the...

AH: He might have helped with the architecture but the Dutchman, Jan Wigman, actually did the Y.

DJ: Well, he didn't get credit in the newspaper for it. I was reading about it.

AH: Jan did it, 'cause I was there.

DJ: Oh, so you know, so we will correct history. It isn't often that I get a chance to really get the real story and correct newspapers.

AH: Well, Jan Wigman is a very nice person but he is no Tony Lord. In fact there is no Tony Lord other than Tony, and that's not being ugly to Yan, it's just that nobody else is Tony. I wish that he had been a generation younger or that we could recycle him because the world needs a Tony Lord and he's getting to be quite elderly, but he's just as charming as he was the first day I ever met him.

DJ: Can you tell me about that?

AH: Heavens, I've known him so long, and he's been so wonderful and always involved in so many things, he enjoys good music, painting, good food, good conversation. And, of course with his architecture he's a genius of the first order. And he's been everywhere. He's seen all the buildings in the world or rather all the European buildings that would matter to a person in his field. He's just one delightful person. Now he does not drive anymore and either Mary Parker or Josephine Schafer, her sister, will

take him hither and yon and I don't think he can see well enough to tell who you are but he still recognizes practically everyone's voices.

DJ: And he's still the complete gentleman.

AH: He is that, he's the perfect gentleman, isn't he?

DJ: You knew Hiden Ramsey, can you tell me about him? All I know is his name and that these tapes will be going into the place that's named after him.

AH: Hiden Ramsey was a newspaper man. I knew his wife, Mary, better than I knew Hiden. She and I used to go up to the place at Blackberry and gather wildflowers out of the wood because she always knew what everything was when it was tiny and she was the only person I have ever known that could find the silver bell trees in bloom on Pisgah Mountain. Mr. Hiden was a very, very intelligent person who was the first chairman of the Board of Higher Education for the college system through the state. I think he was made so by Governor Van Moore who was from Canton and who knew Hiden Ramsey quite well and who knew he could trust him with such a job. He really did not have much to do with the University except that he, in his own way, was something of a renaissance man himself and a good number of the Board of Trustees when we came were devoted to Hiden Ramsey and he had been quite an influence on all of them, particularly a marvelous lady named Virginia Dameron. I think that really that is the reason that the library is named for him because he was such a substantial citizen and had had such a good influence on so many people's lives in this whole mountain area.

DJ: He's mentioned so often in your husband's book.

AH: He's a wonderful person. Some of his grandchildren have been to college over at UNCA. I don't think all of them were but I think maybe a couple of them.

DJ: And can you tell me about Louis Lipinski, did you know him?

AH: That was another of God's own gentleman. His daughter, Jo-Ann Edwin, still lives here and his adopted older son, Louis Jr., has come back to live here from Charlotte. His other son Edward is a chemist somewhere in the mid-west, wonderful young man. Mr. Louis at the time we came was head of his store named Bon Marche, which I still miss desperately. It was a wonderful store. And Mr. Lipinski was a wonderful individual. He was quite calm and just knew what should be done in any given situation. He was a very highly respected civic leader and he was one of the movers and shakers on that original Board of Trustees.

DJ: And getting the campus...

AH: Indeed, he was. Mr. Lipinski and John Reynolds and Manley Wright, I think, were the three spearheads who really took care of the whole thing. Virginia Dameron was a big help with the P.R. and Gertrude Ramsey was a help with the newspaper and Ralph Miller was helpful. In fact, they were all very, very good people. I'm a little partial to that board; I've always liked all the members of the boards of trustees but because that was our original board and because they were so very nice to us when we came, I have to admit I'm a little partial to that original board.

DJ: And when you became a university in the system with NC, your board had to be changed so that you took in a different group, so it didn't feel like home for awhile.

AH: Well, by that time, we had known a great many people in town. You see, when we first came the first people we met were those people and they became our first friends. But, by the time in '69 when the status changed to a college of the university, I think we knew, except for a few people who were from out-of-town who were appointed, we knew

all the people and they were wonderful people, too. But, it was different, and it was very peculiar that those people had worked themselves completely out of a job and they had loved the university but they were glad to do it, to see it move on, but none of them quit. They were all very instrumental in helping the college go along.

DJ: It was a tremendous shift for a small... well, how many changes has the school gone through; five changes and four names or something like that? To start out as a very small, almost a high school, and to get to this stage in twenty years. And there were some scary moments.

AH: Well, I think the scariest of the moments was when almost we didn't make it to senior college status. There was, the year we came, the Carlisle Commission put together by Governor Sanford. When the Commission spoke, it cut off the incoming of the junior colleges into senior college status at 700 FTE. We had 700 warm bodies but did not have 700 full-title equivalents. At that, my husband got it from Raleigh and was panicked and our head of the Board of Trustees was in the hospital at the moment; Robin Phillips for whom the Administration Building is named. So, we called the Vice-Chairman, Manley Wright, and Manley and John Reynolds and my husband made an appointment with the governor and went down early one morning and I don't know what they said but by the time they left the governor's office they had the agreement somehow.

DJ: Yeah, but you're gonna get it, you're gonna get it.

AH: That line in the sand of 700 STE faded, which was really right because we were much older than either Charlotte or Wilmington. They had both grown up after WW II and poor Asheville had been staggering along as best it could since 1927, which is a long long time. And all the students who graduated from here and went elsewhere did

beautifully. Nobody ever had trouble when they went to Duke or Carolina or wherever they went. So, it was a worthy thing but it was touch and go there for a while and if we had not gotten it, I think that would have been our last year here because I don't think my husband would have been very happy to stay at a junior college for ever and ever and to beg borrow and steal the money. This was having to be done, to run the place. So it was quite a help to be able to...

DJ: Well, he was picked for this, wasn't he?

AH: Yes.

DJ: This was your mission, you knew when you came that this was the gold.

AH: Yes, yes. Having put together one junior to make senior college and get it accredited in five years, that's the sort of thing we were looking for. There were not at the time an over abundance of such people, so ...

DJ: You knew what you were getting into.

AH: He knew what we were getting into. I didn't realize and I don't know if he did, quite how much he was going to have to go back and forth from here to Raleigh with his hat in his hand. He used to make it by starting out at three o'clock in the morning, getting there for a eight or nine o'clock meeting, work all day and come home and get home at two or three in the morning and still be at his desk at eight o'clock. And he did that for years, not only did he do that but also a wonderful person named Dr. Oliver Carmichael retired here to town, wonderful educator, and Bill had known him cause we had been at the University of Alabama for a brief time and that was his last post. Not only did Bill have those kind of hours, Dr. Carmichael was made head of the Board of Higher Education and they went down and back together, and Dr. Carmichael didn't have sense

enough to stop and spend the night, even when there was rain, snow, sleet or whatever. They would come right over Old Fort with icicles all over them and frighten everybody to death, but nothing ever happened to them so I guess they were right. And they got what they went for.

DJ: You mentioned several other people, could you describe them? You said Reynolds and...

AH: John Reynolds was the nephew of the founder of the college, A.C. Reynolds. John and his wife, Nancy, are both very interesting people, very bright and they are most interested, have always been, in education at all levels. They had three children of their own. For sixteen years, John was on the Board of Education which is the state asserted for the management of secondary education, K through 12. He had been on, I think Mr. Lipinski had asked him, if he would be on this board. As you say, they've changed so many times, for instance the building, they were in six buildings, this is their sixth location on the campus down on Merrimon now. For awhile they were county, for awhile they were run by the City School Board, for awhile by the Board itself with nobody else looking around. They just did the best they could to hold a college together and pay whatever teachers they could, some of them taught for free, some of their wives taught for free. In fact, Manley Wright's wife Betty was the librarian who I don't think was ever paid. If she was paid, she wasn't paid much, but she was there for years. For a time her total library budget including index cards and all was \$600 a year. Can't you imagine how far you could get with a library and Betty scrounged books from everywhere she could find them. She was a very good librarian and a marvelous person with students. She had no children of her own but she was very good with students and she helped them

organize various literary sororities and what have you. Manley, her husband, was Vice Chairman of the Board and then Chairman for a good number of years. In addition to being a brilliant person himself, understood what sort of college they wanted and what sort of college they needed in this end of the state. We had two teachers colleges nearby but we needed something other than a teachers college and that's what they set out to build.

DJ: And you had AB-Tech.

AH: Oh yes, fortunately, very fortunately.

DJ: So you didn't need that.

AH: You see because there's AB-Tech, UNCA does not have to bother with a lot of things that otherwise it would be a necessity to teach. So AB-Tech is invaluable to the whole area and it's probably done as much to raise the standard of living in this area and all over the state as most universities systems have, with the exception of NC State which I think has done tremendous amounts of work with the rural area, with what it's done with agriculture and engineering. We lose too many of our people from Chapel Hill to other states and, unfortunately, we lose a lot of people from UNCA to other states. I hope that eventually this area will catch on to what it's losing. One thing they do not lose is the teachers who graduate. UNCA has an entirely different arrangement for graduating teaching graduates than the other schools do. In order to become certified to teach from UNCA, one must get a degree in a academic subject and a minor in an academic subject and take the credentials for the education department to satisfy the state requirements in addition to their regular college training. So that when they get out, they know what they're teaching, plus they know the new methods and techniques of teaching. It takes

longer, it takes 4 ½ or 5 years, but none of our teaching graduates are ever left without a job. They are normally hired at wherever they do their practice teaching, because they are so good that nobody is gonna let them go, if possible. If they already have somewhere else in mind to go, then they have a very sick principal where they did their practice teaching cause they're good, they're that good.

DJ: It's quite a tribute isn't it?

AH: Yes, it is.

DJ: Well, you've described a lot of people but the most important person I'd like to have you describe, of course, is your husband. I've read that he was a gentle person, and I've seen... Can you tell me about your husband?

AH: What does one say about the love of one's life? He was the perfect gentleman, he was the perfect man, he was the perfect anything. He was the brightest man I've ever met. He was the only person I could have ever lived with. I've never been so honored in my life, to have lived with him, he was wonderful.

DJ: Tell me about how you met.

AH: Well, the year before I met Bill, I had been pulled rather unceremoniously to go to Bird High School to coach debate. They'd run out of a debate coach in Shreveport at this high school and my roommate was from Shreveport and mentioned to some member of the board that her roommate coached debate. He called me up so I interrupted my work on my PHD and went up to coach debate and teach public speaking for one year. We used to drive through a town; I took them all over the southwest. Debate is big on the other side of the river, and we'd drive through a town that had, we thought, a very comical name and at the end edge of town was the neon picture of an Indian slumped

over his horse at the end of the trail and the name of the town was Broken Bow, Oklahoma. The next year, I was back working madly away on my degree and in the freshman history office, one of the men tapped me on the shoulder where I was working at my desk and said "*Allene, I want you to meet my friend Bill Highsmith from Broken Bow, Oklahoma. And Broken Bow, Oklahoma was the place where we always threatened the kids we were gonna through them off at the end of the trail if they lost he debate*". And I looked up at the man and just laughed! I don't know why he ever spoke to me again. I tried to explain it and, of course, that made it infinitely worse. But I thought the man would never speak to me again. He had been in Panama teaching. He was head of Panama's Caribbean Program, Panama and Puerto Rico at the time and I was rather shocked out-of-my-mind when he called me. Oh, I guess it was that same weekend and asked me to go to dinner. And I had a dinner engagement, not a date but one of the senior graduate students who was married had invited a group of us over to Blackman's across the river to dinner that night. For some reason, I was not prone to tell tall tales. I didn't tell him I was supposed to go to Raleigh and Ellen's for dinner or he could have gone, too. He'd been Raleigh's friend forever, but I told him I had an English history test on Monday, which I did, but it hadn't worried me till then and it wasn't worrying me then. I don't know why I just didn't want to tell him where I was going but really I felt peculiar about dating a man at whose face I'd laughed. So, he insisted that we would go down to the village and eat and I would get right back. So, we went down to the village and had stuffed flounder which was their specialty and for some reason we wound up dancing in New Orleans which was 2 ½ hours away from Baton Rouge, until five o'clock in the morning and came back by the French market and had coffee and then drove back

through the fog to get me back to class by 7:30, when they were gonna check roll and then I went and took my English history test. And from then on, I didn't date anybody else, cause this guy was wonderful and we got along beautifully. He had come up to get his dissertation passed and finished and my mother and nor his mother and father ever knew that we'd only known one another for about a month when we decided to get married. We never told that part, but it lasted for 34 years, so I guess it was alright.

DJ: Through all sorts of turmoil and decisions and anxiety. You had a great deal to do with the hostessing and the entertaining; the being there for new people coming in and introducing. You had along with the civic activities that you had, you were in a responsible position, not even to think about being a mother and a good cub scout and all the rest.

AH: One thing I was so grateful for was when the department got big enough to show their own incoming faculty around, because it was my it was my job to do until the departments got large enough to do it themselves. And I don't know left from right. I only know two directions; that's up and down. You know the way Asheville is set out there are only two blocks in the whole of the city you can circle and they don't go anywhere. And you've got to memorize, street by street by street. They sent me out to show these people where to live and how to get from point A to point B. It's a wonder we ever got home from anywhere with my sense of direction! Then the institution was so poverty stricken that there was no such thing as having a caterer, the food services were minimal and were by no means equipped to do parties, dinner parties at the house. And I had one party catered and the lady who was the caterer is beautiful now, she's wonderful, she cannot be surpassed, but I think this must have been her second party that she did for

me and as soon as the door closed on the last guest I was in tears and the next morning I was on the phone early to Eugenia at Food Services at Jacksonville University, "*Eugenia, send me copies of recipes that will feed fifty people, of everything I need.*" She said "*But honey you don't cook.*" I said "*I do now.*" So I learned to cook for fifty people, then as it grew, I learned to cook for a hundred people and then a hundred and fifty and then two hundred and then two-fifty and now I could cook for two-fifty better than I could make a dinner for six. But I had a marvelous lady who helped me all the time, her name was Nona Woodson, who had never done big parties but we learned together to do big parties and she was absolutely marvelous. She and a great lady who worked over at the campus on the maintenance office named Cindy. Cindy helped occasionally and we would pull two or three other people.

DJ: Where did you hold these...

AH: The Sixty-Two Macon was built in '65 or '66.

DJ: I'm gonna turn the tape over and I want to hear more about that... Side Two. On the first side we were ending with a talk about your house on Macon Street.

AH: The house on Macon was built when we had been here, I believe three years and at the time I was looking for a house to buy. I was not too comfortable in a rented house and my father was practically hysterical. He did not believe daughters should live in rented houses. And I tried to explain that that was a portion of the salary that was needed here but in the days of my father, one did not live in a rented house if one was going to remain in a city. So, I was looking for a place to live, to buy, and a lovely lady, Elizabeth her last name escapes me, anyway wonderful person, had a house on the market. I went to see it and it was just exactly what I wanted. She'd had a very fortunate fire. It had done

no structural damage but it had given her the wherewithal to re-decorate, beautifully. It was a turn-key gauge, so far as I could tell, and I was trying to get her down a little on the price and at that time the Board of Trustees asked me whether I would prefer the house on campus or out in town. And having seen children grow up on campus as pets, I was not going to have that happen to my sons and I told them you can build a house on campus and I will entertain over there gladly but I am not going to grow two boys up on a college campus, and I'm looking at a house right now that we are going to buy. John Reynolds asked which house it was and I told him and he went over and bought it for a thousand dollars cheaper for the campus and I got to live in the house and didn't have to buy it. And it was a very good thing because all that I had looked at was the surface things. How did I know that the power lines had to be re-run, the water lines had to be re-run, a few other things like that which ran into some money, but it was wonderful it was like a great big rocking chair to the children. Then it just had infinite expansion room downstairs in warm weather. There was a sun porch that opened out from the living room and there was a huge front porch that could be used. Later the Browns did a beautiful job with the backyard so that they could have beautiful parties in the backyard. It had been a playground for children as long as I was there and when our children were gone automatically another generation of children took up residence because it was the only full yard. Ann Pearlman had lived there and she had gotten tired of fishing Skip and Lowell out of the creek and had the creek covered over so it was one big expanse and you could play anything, soccer, football, throw the discuss, numerous things in addition to all my playing with flowers back there. But the parties that we had there were, the ones around Christmas, got pretty tight because we couldn't use the outdoor spaces. And when

Owen Conference Center was built with that beautiful area on the third floor, I had intended to move the parties up there, but the faculty were accustomed to close communion by that time and they insisted, "*No you don't move it up there*". And I did one over there and it was really so much trouble, to carry everything back and forth because I was not equipped like a caterer is to carry tremendous amounts of food over and keep it hot and whatever, so I never tried it again. And, for some reason, I guess it's because everybody was accustomed to my doing it, nobody ever brought up the idea of a caterer as long as I was there. And they knew they were never going to get anybody else to do anything that dumb to do that sort of thing again! By that time the campus was so large and the faculty was so large that it would have been ludicrous to ask anybody to do that, but it was really like the old story of the boy who could lift the two thousand pound bull; he'd done it everyday since the animal was a small calf so he could still do it. We had some rather interesting affairs, the faculty got settled on one menu for the Christmas celebration and I didn't realize that I'd served the same thing two or three times until we varied it tremendously one year. We had been serving a liver pate and we fried about sixty pounds of chicken livers in bacon one year and they consumed the bacon and chicken livers and came in the kitchen and asked Nona "*Where's the pate?*" So, we decided that we could very well dispense with all that frying grease stuff after that and we made the same recipes every time and it went over beautifully. We couldn't do that for anything else, but we could always do it for the faculty at the Christmas party, which I thought was a might peculiar but, oh, it was so much less work cause you could just repeat yourself.

DJ: Tell me about the Highsmith Center, that must have been a very warming experience.

AH: It's a lovely place on the inside, unfortunately it was too small by the time it was built. Everything was too small by the time it was built. But it was such an improvement over the Lipinski building which was very quickly outgrown. The cafeteria was there and it had been enlarged as much as it would enlarge and it still would not take care of even the lunch-time people at school. It was not very well laid out for a student center. There were large areas that were almost wasted space and then there were areas that were very much over used: the offices for the radio, for the annual for student government, and things there just wasn't a proper amount of room properly situated. And it was overrun, and the poor building was so overused, with the cafeteria and the major auditorium which included music and drama and everything there was that went into the auditorium.

Something had to be done and Burt King was the architect for the student center and for the money he had, he did a beautiful job getting it proportioned correctly for the amount of students we had when he started, but the student population kept growing and growing and growing so that by the time that it got built it was too small and now I'd stand there and knock out the walls and make it tremendously larger. I do wish that the roof was not level with the street, it would look considerably better if you could see something other than the roof, I think they've tried to see how they could put a second story on and decided they couldn't, I wish they could. It's a most interesting building and is used twenty-four hours a day practically and kids get a big kick out of it it's well-proportioned for them, unfortunately the only things wrong with it is it's just too little.

DJ: In reading your husband's book, I was struck by how you were immediately pressed for funds. Pressed for space, it was always always this pressure. There is no way of anticipating, is there?

AH: No, he kept trying to make a point down state, that we're growing and we're going to grow more and this is going to be passé by the time we get it. Somehow, he could never quite make them believe that! So, invariably, it was too little too late and some of the things were ludicrous by the time we got them. For instance, the science tower which was the first addition to Rhodes Science, by the time we got it was so small that it did very little good. I think they put in it and a part of chemistry. But you see, we are one of the smaller of the institutions and not only we but Wilmington and Pembroke also have the same trouble because they're not Chapel Hill. The smaller you are and the farther away from the center you are, the more trouble you have making your case, 'cause nobody's gonna come look. And they figure we could cut here, we could cut there. And you really cannot cut very much at the places where the graduate and professional schools are, this is quite understandable, you can't take a meat axe to Chapel Hill or NC State or Greensboro 'cause those are our PHD degree granting institutions and they have to have a tremendous amount of money between them they have the Law School, the Dental School, the Medical School, Architecture, all of those are terribly expensive and we understand that. We just wish we could funnel a little more down to the smaller of the institutions, but that's the way it has been and unfortunately it still works to that degree, the smaller you are the longer you wait.

DJ: Is this something that causes frustration?

AH: Oh, terrific amount of frustration and you know why and you know it cannot be helped but also you know that it's terribly important for the students you are trying to educate, and these mountain students are as bright as they are anywhere in the world, you give them an opportunity and they go right to the top. It's just maddening that you can't get the money to do what has to be done for them, and thereby we lose a lot of the students because we cannot offer enough of a range of things that they want to satisfy them here at home. And it costs a kid a tremendous amount of money to go all the way down state to get something that if we just had a few extra dollars, he could have it here.

DJ: Do your professors feel a sense of stress with extra hours that they want to put in because they see the needs of the students and yet there isn't another professor to come in and help them?

AH: Now, when we were there, except for very peculiar periods when there was a state freeze or something, we did not have tremendous trouble with a lack of professors and the professors have always been an outstanding group of people. I cannot speak highly enough of the people who come here to teach at UNCA. They know it is a small, liberal arts school. In 1963, when it went four year, from that time on, a liberal arts school, we ran into a snag when we went under the state system in '71 with the Board of Governors and it took forever to get it back to that marvelous article. But it has forever and it was when it began; it did teach a few other things, but basically it was liberal arts.

DJ: Your philosophy has been challenged but it's still there.

AH: It's still there. But the professors who come understand that this is not one of those "publish or perish" places, this is a teaching institution. And the most important thing they can do is teach students. We like them to write and we want them to be

involved in their own area of expertise with their association and they are. But as much emphasis is put on their association with students and what they can teach the students, that's their main job and this they understand. This is why they come, this is why they stay. Practically all the professors I know have had ample opportunity to move wherever they want to, but they like it here, they like it because they like to teach. They do not necessarily like to sit in a library and pick out the seeds of a cucumber from some esoteric something that nobody's going to read except a few people who have to plow through certain journals. These people are working teachers and it shows, shows with the students. And when they get those students through they can go anywhere they want to. They're good and they come in from these county high schools with the majority of them a very parochial view because in the mountains we're pretty far away from a lot of things and relatively few of our students have had the opportunity to travel very far and we don't have a vast number of out-of-state or out-of-country students but we have enough to make a nice leavening of the mixture of students. And it broadens these mountain children to no end. And it teaches some of our students who come in from New York, New Jersey, whatever some things they didn't know. It's a marvelous student body. The mix has been very good for a number of years. I do hope they do not have to raise the tuition so that it's almost prohibitive for out-of-state students to come because it will really be a bad thing for the broadening of our own students. Now that we very seldom are able to do such things, as take them to Oxford in the summer. The first time we started the Oxford program, they could go for six weeks for the sum total of \$600! That has been a while and a good number of them took advantage of that and we sent some professors over there with them; used English teachers among the labor lords. That

sounds like a peculiar situation, doesn't it? I've actually met some, but eventually we had to almost give that up. A few students go every year but NC State runs it now because with their much vaster numbers of students, they can find enough that can actually afford the going rate now for six weeks in Oxford. I was terribly sorry that it went out of our financial range because it was a marvelous thing for our student and they took beautiful advantage of it; kids who never thought they'd get past Raleigh.

DJ: Did you ever go with a group?

AH: Yes, we went one year. Well, not with them, we went over to see about them. I guess they'd been over about four or five years and it was magnificent to watch them and one of the nicest things was that they had classes from Monday to Thursday and then they could travel anywhere their little pocket books would take them. And it didn't take much to go over to the continent at that time. It was rather cheap with youth hostels and somebody could always play a guitar or sing or something; half the time they sang for their supper or entertained. They would sleep in people's pastures and nothing ever happened to any of them. They had a wonderful time. And they saw sights they would never have the opportunity to see again. Well, in fact we went over to see them twice. We went again later when there were fewer of our students; about half at that time. The Oxford program got big enough that we had to rent a second college; we were renting a Baptists college first and then after a while started renting a Catholic college also that was near. The colleges, both of them are relatively small. You could put about 50 or 60 students in the dormitories at each place. I don't know how it's coming along now. I'd like to know and I'd like to know how many of our people can still go. Some of them do but I think it's seldom that one of our professors goes any longer. But it used to be a

marvelous situation for some of our professors to go except for that fact that invariably the students would run out of money before the last weekend and all the faculty would wind up with students sleeping and eating with them for the last few days. But they lived through it and it was tales to tell. They could dine out on it when they came home.

DJ: Wonderful, just wonderful. You indicated the change because of the financial situation that we are all aware of. There were also changes on campus and from what I've read you were almost unscathed during the Vietnam uprising boycotts and the student rebellion period.

AH: Very fortunately. Now we had teach-ins but they were all very civilized teach-ins.

DJ: Would you explain the teach-ins?

AH: Teach-in: some people would come, sometimes from Chapel Hill sometimes from various and sundry places, who were very much opposed to the war. They would come and the school would make arrangements for the hours, so they wouldn't have to skip classes, for the teach-ins to take place. I think one thing that made the students understand that they didn't have to raise holy hell was the faculty was about as opposed to the war as they were and some of the teach-ins took place among our own faculty members. There were people who saw all sorts of rational reasons for fighting in Vietnam and then there were people who were adamantly against it. They would arrange debates for such a thing. The students were, I think, rather awed at first to find out that these grown up people with graying temples felt the way they felt about it. So they didn't get all upset at the faculty. They didn't blame the war on the faculty as they did for some reason, which made no sense, at other places. But the faculty at most institutions felt like our faculty did. We had a strike one day. It was a marvelous strike. There were about

fifteen people who came and struck, in addition to, well, I do think the war had something to do with it. Some people were not re-hired after their contracts were up and this was during the Vietnam kick-out and this was the only upset we had. They sat down under a tree, but everybody was very careful to get to his classes, and he would leave to go to his classes and come back and strike some more. They were also striking the cafeteria food but when everybody would get hungry they would take up money and somebody would go down to the cafeteria and get food for all of them! And the next morning there were only four people under the tree, so our president of Student Government who was heading the strike declared it a success and they went gaily on about their business! It was a wonderful strike!

DJ: Everybody was happy about it.

AH: Yes, indeed! And they never missed a class, not any of them.

DJ: Wonderful! How did you manage the transfer of the necessary credentials from a four year college to a university level?

AH: That was not an easy matter. Fortunately, because our academic standards were very high, they had no qualms about accepting our students, but there seemed to be all sorts of problems about technicalities that had to go through the registrar's office and that took some working out, mainly with Chapel Hill registrar's office. One other complication was that we were on the trimester system which my husband had set up in Jacksonville, FL in order to get students through more rapidly because being a private school it was much more expensive than the average state school and they preferred to go through as rapidly as possible.

DJ: Can you tell me some more about the requirement difference between a university and a college?

AH: Well, there was a complication with the registrar's offices in other places and the fact that we were on a trimester system. But we did not keep the trimester system terribly long because it just did not dovetail with the semester system that the university was on. Yes, we did have to have a somewhat different faculty. We had begun to have a different faculty when it came up from a junior college to a senior college. Of all that original junior college faculty, I believe only two of the forty people were kept. There was constant upgrading of the faculty all during those years and we got some absolutely wonderful people who go all the way back to the early seventies who've been over there ever since. Of course, we lose a good many who go on to other places but we have a very good record of getting very good, very bright professors straight out of graduate school, their first jobs after PhDs. And they get here and find that Asheville is a wonderful place to raise children and the schools are not what you call magnificent but the public schools are better than they are in a lot of areas in the country, amazingly enough with us being way back in the mountains. In fact we have people here who have come from; one of our best professors was tenured at University of California at Riverside but he had three little girls and he preferred to grow them up somewhere other than in the mass confusion of southern California so he brought them here and they have lived happily ever after and we wouldn't take anything for Teddy Ulrich. In fact, he is the individual who has been pulled from history at the moment in order to set up our first graduate program in liberal arts and we need him there but they also need him back with his expertise in Chinese and

Russian history and Middle East so the only thing I can think of to do is just clone Teddy Ulrich!

DJ: I guess he knows that?

AH: There are other people over there who are just as valuable, who have been with us for a good length of time. The head of the Art Department and the person who, for most of the years he has been here, has been Head of Drama, Ar Wingrow, have been here since the seventies. They're just irreplaceable as far as we're concerned. A great many people have been here since that time and are now beginning to retire because they are beginning to age out. Approximately, oh I can't remember the exact proportion, but a great number of the faculty has been here for less than five years. Most of them intend to stay, very bright people. They work into this area amazingly well. They join the churches they get involved in civic activities. None of them just teach their classes and go home. They have come to put down roots and stay and the very few who don't put down roots, you know, are not going to stay very long because they are not interested in staying. Some of them do a good job on campus while they are here but then they are gone and somebody else replaces them who does wish to stay. I'd like you to know that faculty they are marvelous people. I don't know one that isn't a real jewel.

DJ: That's a good feeling. You have such a glowing attitude towards all that you've done and very much still hands on. You are still very much a part of all of this and it must feel good when you go up there and ...

AH: Well, if you babysit something for twenty-two years you feel that it's yours and I still have the very bad habit of saying "we" when it comes to UNCA. You feel that it's part of your life that is there forever.

DJ: It is your baby.

AH: I'm very very proud of it.

DJ: That's wonderful and we've talked a great deal about the university and there is so much more that I would like to ask you but I'm interested in you as a person. Mrs. Highsmith on the Election Board in '76 -- '77. Now let's see: are you a Democrat or a Republican? I'm trying to remember.

AH: You know I never saw a Republican 'til I was about twenty one and for years I had a tendency to look for the horns, and I'm sure they are up there some where! Governor Hunt put me on the Board of Elections which was a total surprise but a wonderful thing. I wouldn't take anything for having served. My husband was sure that when I disappeared in my car to head south or head east for some strange Board meeting in a place called Fort Oakes that he would never see me again because he knew what sense of direction I had. But normally I got to Raleigh and one of the assistant Attorney Generals would go with me in my car but he would drive. So I got everywhere and never got lost and it was fascinating. What was so funny were the wine and beer elections. You very seldom had difficulty out of the others. If you had difficulty, everybody who lost was insistent that he should have won, of course, but almost invariably the people, no matter which side it came out, the other side wanted to contest on wine and beer election. It was almost comical because they would read almost the same litany that had happened or could have happened before the Board and we very seldom went but occasionally there was one where you needed to go and see about it, they would list 12 or 14 things and without exception the last item on the lawyers brief, trying to make the plea that you should go and straighten this out before anything worse happened in that county, was the

election workers had worked so long, such long hours and they were so exhausted they just couldn't count correctly!

DJ: And where has the wine and beer come in?

AH: One has to vote in a county; it's a local option in this state, as are ABC stores. So both those things are involved with the Board of Elections in that they have to be voted on by the counties. And then the big elections are fun because you've got to go down and make certain that all the votes are correct and that they are tallied correctly and sometimes they are so very close that ...

DJ: You'd have to do a recount.

AH: Yes, a recount is necessary. And, if so, then you stand around and hold your breath no matter which side because if it has been miscounted and it goes to somebody else even if it's primary and it's one's own party it is very nerve wracking because if a mistake has been made it casts a shadow over the elective process. Fortunately, no mistake was made during the time I was on that Board. But, it gives you a scary feeling that one might be if it has to be recounted.

DJ: Who gave you the donkey?

AH: A lovely, old fellow who was for a long time in the state senate. He was a lawyer named Icy Crawford and he did not give it to me. He gave it to Mrs. Democrat of Buncombe County: her name is Nona McDonald. She quite often was then the lady who ran the headquarters for the Democratic Party during elections and bond issues of all sorts and it was a part of a store decoration from Ivy's when there was Ivy's downtown and it was wonderful, I wish you'd been here at that time.

DJ: Well I'm very sorry that we're not gonna have your picture up-to-date in the file but we will have your donkey.

AH: Please, don't put the donkey in there!

DJ: In the file? Well, you wouldn't pose for a picture for me, so, of course, I will.

AH: Not with the donkey!

DJ: You don't want the donkey to go in your file? You're known for that. I knew about the donkey before I met you.

AH: How did you know about the donkey?

DJ: Ah, lets see. I think it was Catherine Sheppard that told me about that and she said incidentally that your mother, just before she died, was called on by you.

AH: Her mother, yes.

DJ: You were the last one to go to...

AH: Mrs. Binum was a wonderful person.

DJ: She must have been. They wanted to name the Claxton School after her. She was the first woman on the School Board in Asheville.

AH: I wish they had. She was a very interesting person...

DJ: I think they've got her picture in there but they didn't. She didn't want to have her name...

AH: Catherine's mother and her father were very interesting people and they helped the university a lot. The Binum Collection in the library is marvelous.

DJ: I know. I knew the letter that had come in. I haven't seen the books because with the renovation they are not available right now. But I went back and I told Catherine that everything was alright and the books are being well take care of. Another thing I came

across and it reminds me of our conversation earlier. 1971 Mrs. Highsmith at St. James on Woman's Day: Women in Times like These were you're subjects. And I'm thinking about times like these in '71 and times like these in '92 and '93 and I wondered if you would talk about that. What were the times like then as you compare them with today.

AH: St. James... To tell the truth, there was a time so many years back, and it is gone. Unfortunately, when other races were invited to speak at black churches on something called Woman's Day: this was a delightful celebration. You know how important women are in all the churches really. Women really sort of run the churches everywhere I've been. Men come along and take up collection but the women are the moves and shakers.

DJ: And they also talk a lot.

AH: Yes. But quite often, I was invited to do the Woman's Day speech at; I think it was in May, each year. I do not recall ever having said anything profound but I always had a charming time and they were very nice to me. But that went by the boards and it became passé for white women to speak in black churches and it hasn't been done for quite a long time. I have acquired a lot of Afro-American friends in the city over the past thirty years and I go to a lot of weddings and a lot of funerals but I don't get asked to speak anymore; maybe after they've already heard me.

DJ: I think that they are feeling better about talking themselves.

AH: I think quite obviously so.

DJ: I've asked you many questions and there is so much more that we could cover but I don't want this tape to go off without you talking about your wonderful sons. What they are doing and the experiences they had with the university background and the life here. They are both doctors... Tell me about them.

AH: Oh, how much time do we have? Both sons do have their doctorates. Edward is in clinical chemistry except he's post-doctored himself into a specialty in genetics, in molecular genetics, whatever that is. Now, he has just left medical school at Chapel Hill to go with a company that makes biochemical and genetic products for hospitals and laboratories in Philadelphia. He seems very happy. He is at the moment setting up his own research team which is the first time he has had a team of his own. He has been a part of a marvelous team in Chapel Hill for several years, working on cystic fibrosis and his private research will remain in cystic fibrosis. The second son, John, is just over in Haywood County and he has wanted to be a dentist since he was about 11 years old. Doctor Kenneth Ray was his hero. I think he would have been just as interested in eyes if Dr. Edispy has ever answered his questions. But Ed was too busy so he said just sit down and let me fix your glasses. But Ken was flattered that somebody would ask what he was doing. He had three sons but they weren't interested and John asked a million questions of anybody who would be still and Ken answered him so they became quite good friends. My son taught him to do enameling on copper and silver and Ken taught him to caste gold and silver.

DJ: I see the enameling here. Is this his work?

AH: Some of his early work, yes.

DJ: Oh, that's lovely.

AH: Then, he began to sell the expensive type. But he graduated from Chapel Hill dental school in 3 ½ years so he could go for the church to Belize for a semester. He said that he would probably be retired before he could do any missionary work again. He had a wonderful time going all over Belize, right on the Guatemalan border and the time he

was accompanied by a British young man, whom he called a spy, he was supposed to have had been a member of what is the British equivalent of our peace corps. John said he was really British intelligence. He went all over up the sides of the mountains and climbing with his instruments on his back and Mama's presto-cooker to sterilize his instruments in. He had an absolutely wonderful time except he says he'll never eat another corn tortilla as long as he lives. And he went over to Haywood County to be polite to a dental supply salesman, never having heard of Glide, NC before and fell in love. He married a wonderful young lady from Gastonia, Sandra Hayes, who is at the University, incidentally in graphics and publications. They are charmed to live in Glide which is sort of bedroom community for both Asheville and Waynesville. They act in the HART, which is the Haywood County Arts Theater, and they do musicals plus plays and they are involved in various things over there and there are a lot of young professionals over there and neither of them has ever lived in a town that small before and they love it. They don't have any children but I have two grand-dogs.

DJ: Tell me the names of the wives and your grand-dogs and your grandchildren so I'll have that on tape.

AH: I don't have any grand children. But my husband did adopt some grandchildren. Dr. Yabakeeney's children are our grandchildren and Joe and Dottie Sulock's children are our grandchildren, so we have five delightful grandchildren. Never mind they aren't blood kin, they are lovely people.

DJ: And are they in town?

AH: Oh, yes. Now Diana has gotten grown up and big and she is going to school, I am afraid, in NY this fall, to college. That is the Yabakeeney daughter. The rest of them are

here and little Rebecca has turned from just a little girl to a perfect beauty in the last two years it is amazing to watch little girls grow up. We never had a little girl.

DJ: They bloom don't they?

AH: We've been delighted to watch Diana Yabakeeney and Rebecca Sulock grow into just beautiful flowers. And, of course, little boys are always wonderful. We've always known that.

DJ: What is most interesting to you right now in your life? What are you doing? The telephone, aside from the dentist, you have other telephone calls asking you to do fun things.

AH: Well, right now my major outside activity is involved with the Boys and Girls Club over at the Salvation Army. We take little fellows, it is an after school program, and this one is in West Asheville. The majority of our clientele over there can't pay for very sophisticated after school care but their parents work until dark, both of them, and you can't have those children going home to an empty house. It's dangerous. So, we gather as many of them as we can at the Salvation Army over in West Asheville on Haywood Road we run an after-school program from 2:00 to 6:30. There also is a dire need for somewhere just to keep teenagers out of trouble so that they don't get into horrible things, sometimes through no fault of their own, and sometimes very much through the fault of their own. So, from 6 to 8 or a little later, there is a gymnasium over there and it's amazing how much kids like to play basketball. So, we turn the gym over to the teenagers and they are well-supervised. We also have a weight room over there which is very, very well supervised because you could kill somebody with those weights if you're not careful. But thirty years later I am still where I started, I'm with children.

DJ: And I am so glad to have been able to catch up with you and I'm gonna say thank you now and give you one of these tapes. It's been a real privilege and thank you very much.