

Interview with Gladys Reese
September 27, 2001
Interviewer: Jane Stearns

Jane: I am interviewing Gladys Reese. Did you just say you are 90?

Gladys: 90

Jane: Have you been a member of UU for a long time?

Gladys: Yes, I was a member before the church was built. We lived in Sherwood Forest and we were friends of Herb Ball, and we came up from Florida and we went to the different churches in Brevard, and my husband was an Episcopalian and I was kind of an independent. He had a bad hip and he said, I can't do that up and downing any more, so he didn't want to go to the Episcopal Church, and the others I didn't care for. Herb and Gladys said, come over to Asheville with us to the Unitarian Church. You might like that. We did, we came over from Sherwood Forest – it's about 50 miles – and I liked it right away. It was in that little white house before the church was built.

Jane: What white house?

Gladys: That's where we met the first year before the church was built. It was over in West Asheville someplace. We liked it and we liked the people so we joined. We've been member since the church was built.

Jane: At that time about how many members were there?

Gladys: I think there were about 50.

Jane: And that was your first membership in a Unitarian Church?

Gladys: That's right.

Jane: What about your husband?

Gladys: He's Episcopalian.

Jane: Did he attend with you?

Gladys: I guess he did.

Jane: You had children?

Gladys: I had one son. He is 52 years old now, and he lives in New Hampshire. I have a wonderful daughter-in-law. She was a classmate of his at school. They went to Bates College in Maine. He was a year ahead of her, so he went to Germany to do his army work, and then the day she graduated he came back from Germany and they were married the day after she graduated. Then she went back to Germany with him. They were there for another year or so, and then they came back and they lived with us in Bucks County. We had a little farm there, a nice little place.

Jane: What county?

Gladys: Bucks County in Pennsylvania. That was north of Philadelphia, not too far. Don had to go in town, there was a railroad that went in. He had to into Shallpond, which is a little town about three miles from us. We had our son before we moved out, he was just a baby. Of course I stayed home until he was ready to go to school, I stayed home and took care of him. Then once he went to school I got a job as a registered dietician, and I got a job part time with a little community hospital.

Jane: This was still in Bucks County.

Gladys: Bucks County, yes.

Jane: Historically important place.

Gladys: We had some wonderful neighbors and some interesting people we were lucky enough to have met. In fact we knew James Michener, and I knew his first wife and I knew his second wife, and I never did meet his third wife.

Jane: At some point you moved down to Florida, right?

Gladys: We moved to Florida when we were living in Bucks County, and the county was going to take over our . . . we had twenty acres and a big, big house . . . and the county was going to take it over because they needed the water to supplement the Philadelphia water supply, so we knew we had to get out. We had gone to Florida with my mother and we liked it very much and we had bought a lot at that time, and then when we were going to move we had them build us a little

house on the bayou side next to Sanibel. We were there about ten years. We had a wonderful time.

Jane: How did you happen to move up here to North Carolina?

Gladys: We knew people who had lived up here. We loved it on Captiva, it's a beautiful island. We loved to shell, we loved all those things. It's just a little barrier island and having heard there was going to be a hurricane, my husband said, this really isn't the place for us. He said lots of people here have two or three houses and if they lose one house it wouldn't make any difference, but, he said, for us it would be disastrous. So we knew people who lived up in North Carolina, and we came up here and lived down in Sherwood Forest. We were there about ten years and we loved it. We had a nice house on a lake and a canoe and a sailboat and a power boat. We had a wonderful time and we loved it. I still have friends down there that I keep in touch with. But then, as I said, we came up here and lived in Sherwood Forest and built a house there, and we liked it very much. It's a beautiful place. It's south of Brevard. That was where we met the Balls. They lived up the hill from us, and that's how we happened to go to the church with them. What was it you asked me before, how did I ever get . . .

Jane: Well, you just kept driving back and forth from Sherwood Forest up to this little church in West Asheville.

Gladys: It was only there for a little while before they built the church. We liked it so well that that's where we joined right away. We had joined in that little church and we just went over to the big church.

Jane: Who was the minister?

Gladys: Pullman, Tracy Pullman.

Jane: Oh, that goes way back.

Gladys: Well, of course. I'm 90, so I go way back.

Jane: Can you remember what the church was like, what the service was like?

Gladys: That sort of thing is hard for me to remember. It was a Unitarian service, and I liked Dr. Pullman very much and I liked the people, and we used to go. Then we would always go to dinner afterwards after we'd been to church, and we

went to the Red Lobster. We had favorite places in town. We did that for a long time.

Jane: Was there a children's program at that time?

Gladys: I think it was started very soon.

Jane: From there the church moved into its present quarters?

Gladys: That's right, less than a year after we got up there.

Jane: So you remember seeing that church built.

Gladys: Oh, yes. And we just thought it was the most beautiful church, and it was. It's a beautiful church.

Jane: It still is.

Gladys: Yes, I love the church.

Jane: How long was Dr. Pullman there after you moved?

Gladys: He was only there two or three years, and then . . .

Jane: Was it Bill Hammond, do you remember.

Gladys: Hammond came after Pullman. Hammond was there. Let me see, who was after Hammond, there was somebody.

Jane: Jim . . .

Gladys: Yes, Jim Brewer, and he was there. We liked all of them. Hammond, I liked him the least. He was very scholarly. He was a real educated man, but he was really an educator, he wasn't a person person. He would talk to you and he would look over your shoulder and look at somebody behind you. That was just the way he was. He had a wonderful wife, she was a lovely woman. She did so much for the church. She worked like a dog. They built a little house out from the church, out in the country, and she did most of the work. We were out there for dinner a couple times, and she would work like everything. He'd just sit in the dining room and be waited on, and that was Hammond. I shouldn't be so personal about it, but it's the truth.

Jane: He was the minister for quite some time.

Gladys: He was the minister for quite some time. As I said, she was wonderful. We got along fine with her, but finally he ditched her for another woman. He really did. It was somebody who had a lot of money that he had known for awhile, and I guess he thought that she would really take care of him, so he ditched his wonderful wife that we loved dearly.

Jane: What happened to his wife?

Gladys: I think she was really a librarian. She got a job in the library in Asheville.

Jane: During the period of Bill Hammond's tenure there, do you remember in addition to the Sunday morning services, what other kinds of activities were held?

Gladys: I can't tell you, I just don't remember.

Jane: You were not involved with them?

Gladys: No, we lived in the country. We weren't in town, you know, and we weren't really able – we did some things. We did the coffee hour and that sort of thing. We did the, what was it, you had eight people for lunch or for dinner.

Jane: They had that way back then, those dinners for eight?

Gladys: Yes, we did.

Jane: Did that mean that the church was growing?

Gladys: Oh, yes, it grew by leaps and bounds. It was beautiful, and we were so surprised – after all Asheville's in the bible belt, and we didn't think there would be that many liberal people, and it just grew and grew because . . . well from the colleges around, and they liked it, and they send their children to the school.

Jane: Did you notice when the church was growing whether there were people who were coming into it who had moved here who had retired from other parts of the country, mostly the east, I guess.

Gladys: Yes.

Jane: During that time, they had an organ there in the new church. Was that used?

Gladys: We knew the person that gave them that organ. The man's wife died and in her memory he gave the church a wonderful organ. He wasn't a rich man, but he gave it. I can't think of his name.

Jane: Was the organ used in the church?

Gladys: It was used, yes. Then after awhile somebody who lived over here gave them the piano, gave them a baby grand. He said it isn't a baby grand, it's a grand piano, and he gave that to the church.

Jane: Are you talking about Harold.

Gladys: Yes.

Jane: So you were there at the time these things were happening. In addition to the organ, were there other kinds of music programs?

Gladys: I know people came in and danced once in awhile. There was a man who – I can't think of his name again – but somebody did something else there.

Jane: Did they have a choir at that time?

Gladys: They started a choir when I was still going. Who was it, he does the bridge now?

Jane: Are you talking about Dave Bates?

Gladys: Dave Bates.

Jane: He goes that far back?

Gladys: He goes back to when I was going over there. He goes back a long ways. We used to go in with the Leisersons and play bridge on Friday evening, I think it was. Kay and I used to go in with the Leisersons, and that was fun.

Jane: So Dave Bates started the choir?

Gladys: He's been there for a long time. As far as I know. I could be wrong about that.

Jane: I am interested in what you remember about the music program. So David Bates really started the choir.

Gladys: I shouldn't say that because I'm vague about some of those things.

Jane: But there was a choir, and there was dancing.

Gladys: Some people came in from the outside to dance, I remember.

Jane: Was your main interest then in the sermon itself?

Gladys: Partly, I liked what they said and I liked their ideas of what they wanted to do with themselves and what our purpose in life should be, and I agreed with all those things. My husband was ten years older than I am and he died when we were living in Black Mountain at Highland Farms. He had a bad hip. He had a buggy like mine, not the same one, and he used to garden. He would go up and garden. I don't know how he did it, but he did it. He had a wonderful garden.

Jane: That was here at Highland Farms. When did you and your husband move from Sherwood Forest?

Gladys: I've been here twenty years so we can figure it out from that.

Jane: You moved from Sherwood Forest directly to Highland Farms.

Gladys: Not the same apartment. We wanted to be over in Brookside and they first put us in a roadside place, but then they had a two bedroom, two bath place on Brookside, and we were over there, and that's where we were most of the time. Don had a big garden, and he fed half the people here with his garden. As I said he was 93. It was wonderful. He planted corn on Monday, got pneumonia, went to the hospital and died on Friday. He was 93. He didn't have to go to health care. It was wonderful. It was hard, but it was wonderful.

Jane: We all hope for a good death, don't we.

Gladys: He did what he wanted, and he did what I wanted him to.

Jane: Did you know Jim Brewer very well?

Gladys: I knew him. I wouldn't say very well. I just knew him. I wasn't intimate with him at all.

Jane: Did you go regularly to church every Sunday?

Gladys: Yes, we went regularly. Very seldom missed unless the weather was just too terrible.

Jane: Do you get there at all anymore?

Gladys: I can't go anymore because I can't walk.

Jane: How long has it been since you've gone?

Gladys: I'm just trying to think how long it has been. I used to go with Randall Thompson. They used to take me after Don died. I went with Randall and Lois. But then I could still walk. I didn't have this trouble with my leg. We used to go to the same Chinese place after church, week after week after week.

Jane: Was the place on Charlotte near the church?

Gladys: No, it was on the way out here. I forget. It was a real nice place. And they could both use chopsticks. The people in the restaurant knew them well, and as soon as they came they always brought them chopsticks right away. I did that for quite awhile really.

Jane: Your activity at the church, besides attending, had to do with the coffee hour.

Gladys: But that was a long time ago. I haven't been able to for a long time because I can't walk.

Jane: Have you been able to go since Maureen?

Gladys: Oh, yes. I liked her very much. I thought she was wonderful. I liked her husband. I liked Peter very much too.

Jane: Did you get any sense that as these ministers came and went that there were any changes in the church, any difference in approach or anything like that.

Gladys: I don't know. Maureen is so good that I think she's brought life to the place really. It's much, shall I say, livelier since Maureen has been there. I like

what she does. I'm very fond of her. Did you remember that ministerial intern, Kendra Ford?

Jane: Oh, yes.

Gladys: Well, Kendra and I were good friends, and Kendra used to come out here to see me once a month and we'd go out to lunch together. I could walk with a cane if she helped me into the car. So we used to go out to lunch together for years. I talked to Kendra the other day. She had moved up to Exeter in New Hampshire to a church there. I know Exeter very well because it's only about twenty miles from where my son and daughter-in-law live, and she goes to the Unitarian Church in Andover, and I thought that she and Kendra would like each other, so I told Kendra – and she and my son have a beautiful house over in Hampstead. They're retired now. They had their own factory. Delight is a wonderful girl. She can do anything. She's a terrific worker. When I talked to her last week she said she has a wonderful flower garden, prettiest one in town, and she had a big bowl of flowers to take over to her church. Anyhow I told Kendra about her and I'm going to tell Delight about her, and I hope they get together because I think they'd like each other. I'm very fond of Kendra. I think she's going to be a good minister. I told her that.

Jane: She has a special . . .

Gladys: She looks at you when she talks to you. She doesn't look over your shoulder.

Jane: Do you sense that with the passage of time and new ministers, there has been any shift like a shift to a more spiritual or philosophical . . .

Gladys: Not more spiritual, I don't think that. I think it has gotten maybe a little bit more pragmatic.

Jane: You mean with the world?

Gladys: With the world, yes. It's a beautiful church and I like what they do.

Jane: Are there any things you can think of that you would like to see changed or anything you'd like to have added?

Gladys: Not really. I'm sorry that they're having to build another church because the place is overcrowded. I never thought that there would be that many liberal

people in this area. But I know they had to add because they were having two services and it was still crowded. If I could ever go back, which I can't unfortunately, I wouldn't want to go here, I would still want to go back to that other church because I loved that.

Jane: The one in Asheville?

Gladys: The one in Asheville, yes.

Jane: I want to remember this correctly. When you joined this church in that little white building in West Asheville that was the first time that you were a member of a Unitarian Church.

Gladys: Yes, I didn't know anything about the Unitarian Church. I'm a Minnesota Lutheran, you know, a Scandinavian, and brought up in the Lutheran Church. My parents were really very liberal for that time. They had five kids and we all had to get educated, but we always had to go to the Lutheran Church to be confirmed, which was 3 miles out in the country. I used to walk out there with a friend of mine, and sometimes the minister would come along and pick us up, and we'd go out with him then. But we went to catechism there, and there were about ten of us in the class, and the first year that we went I was young, but I used to be curious about things and I asked questions. One time I asked him something, a perfectly innocent question, I just wanted to know, he said, Gladys Ursted, you'll be sorry someday if you think like that. I never went to another Lutheran Church as soon as I was confirmed.

Jane: Thank you.