Southern Voices Oral History Project
Florida Southern College

Interviewee: Julia Cousins Lanning, Class of 1942

Interviewers: LuAnn Mims and Heather Pharris

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Transcription: LuAnn Mims, December 2013

Mims: *November 21, 2013, this is LuAnn Mims with Southern Voices interviewing Julia Cousins Lanning. Thank you so much for talking with me today. Can you give me a little history about yourself, where you were born and raised?*

Lanning: Well, I was born in Norton, Virginia in 1921. Our family moved from there to Venice in 1927.

Mims: *What prompted your family to move?*

Lanning: A new town was being built here in Venice by the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, the BLE. My father was a building contractor, so that meant work, so we moved. Briefly, first to [?] where he built some houses and then when we heard about what was happening in Venice … well the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers had bought all this property, what Venice is built on, from Mrs. Potter Palmer.

Well, that's not exactly right. Mrs. Palmer first sold the property to Dr. Albee, Dr. Fred Albee, who was a very, newly famous, surgeon, bone surgeon, from New York City. He had come down here with some revenues and seen the area, particularly Nokomis, looking to buy some property. So he bought some property in Nokomis and during the negations they said why don't you throw Venice in. It was not called Venice then.

But at any rate he ended up buying all this property with the idea he was going to build this new city. There was a waterway there that had to be dredged out but it was ideal for a boat basin. So he was going to do all of that until he found out how much that was going to cost. [Laughter] And then he decided he better not get involved with that because he still had his surgery business in New York.

So he put it up for sale and the most likely person who was interested in it was the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, which is the largest trade union in the country. So they figured they had the money to do it. So he started with the wharf, then added some more acreage east of here. Then they carried the ball. They had recently lost some money from their retirement fund which they were trying to make up. So everything was just booming here in this whole area, at that time.

Mims: *So you arrived here, you were six years old? Did you go to public school here, was there public school here?*

Lanning: We aren't that far yet? I am five years old.

Mims: *Oh, okay. Did you attend public school or private school?*

Lanning: Public school such as it was, it wasn't that much, and nothing was organized. This was just bare frontier, there was nothing here. We bought a farm out on Jackson Road which was about six miles out of town. Mother was going to run the farm and daddy was going to build houses and they were going to make a lot of money. That went fine for about three years; we grew strawberries and raised chickens. The farm was going nicely and then the bottom dropped out of everything. We lost the farm.

The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers just walked- off and left their brand new city. All these people who that had bought houses and had planned to move because it was a booming city. There were stores downtown and everything was just going great. So when the bust came, the BLE lost millions, just got up and left. Everybody who had bought property was mortgaged to the hilt and ruined financially there was no way they could have recouped their losses so they just got up and left.

They left all these empty houses, all these empty store fronts. There were a hand full of people who had no way to leave and no way to get there. So that was the situation from, I guess ,about '29 until the first relief we had was from the Kentucky Military Institute decided to utilize these brand new hotels for their barracks.

They had come from a situation on the east coast, Eau Gallie, where their campus had burned down. So they were looking for a new place. They found that by moving their school down to Florida for three months, in the winter, that it improved their enrollment.

Mims: *But your family stayed in Venice?*

Lanning: Our family stayed. Well we were away for about one year in Bradenton but that doesn't even count for any practical purposes. We came back because at least we knew the area. We knew that there were fish in the bays and the gulf and you could raise chickens in your backyard and a vegetable garden. At least you could survive! Which was more than we could do on a pigeon farm in Bradenton.

So we came back. And then at that that time you see, there was absolutely no tax base, because there was nobody to pay any taxes. So we could have bought any property in town and probably even further out what is now Casey Key [Road], we could buy anything without taxes.

Daddy found a house that was not quite finished, that he could buy for back taxes. The back taxes were a thousand dollars; we did not have a thousand dollars. So we arranged with the city, that he would keep their buildings in repair, for a very minimum wage, and I still have the papers on this, until he worked out that thousand dollars, which he did. That was our home from then on.

Mims: *What I would like to do now is to get you to college … had you ever considered going to college?*

Lanning: No, I had not considered anything … let me go back a little more.

Mims: *Sure.*

Lanning: During this, when Venice was a deserted village, there was literally nobody here, three hundred people, and that includes part of Nokomis and outer lying areas. The only school system was, elementary school, there was an elementary school in Nokomis. We had a building there that was very minimal, but the few of us in Venice went to a makeshift school in an old building, and one of the store fronts in the old San Marco Hotel, which later became part of KMI, a KMI building.

I spent about two grades; I guess it was 4th and 5th grade in that school. When I reached the 6th grade I went to the Nokomis School. It was while I was there Florida Southern sent out … I don't remember …

Mims: *Somebody associated with Dr. Spivey?*

Lanning: Oh, yes …

Mims: *Or was it Dr. Thrift?*

Lanning: This was before him …

Mims: *Corning Tolle?*

Lanning: Corning Tolle! He sent Corning Tolle down and of course, mother had said she was hoping I would get to college, but there was no way she could send me. In order to close that gap between the time when everybody left and the time we came back from Bradenton, that short time. She had gone to the bank and borrowed $50 to open a little tea room. She was a good cook, loved to cook and she knew there was nothing like that in town. So she opened this little tea room called the Venetian Tea Room.

It was really a restaurant, it wasn't a tea room, it was a restaurant. The military brought their entire school, cadets, kitchen help, the whole kitchen; everybody came by train to Venice for three months between Christmas holiday and Easter holiday. Those three months they were here for the next thirty seven years. When they first came, the owners and some of the faculty came ahead to open up the buildings and everything and ate with us.

That was a quite a large salvation because we had a few people to eat with us. Just this pasted weekend, the Kentucky Military Institute, which no longer operates, but they still have their reunion every four years, or maybe it's two, I have forgotten. They have this big program, which is going to be shown on National Public Television, I don't know when, but the opening one was Sunday night and it was shown at our little theater here.

But anyway that was the salvation of the town really at the time plus the fact that Dr. Albee, who had originally owned the property, he bought a lot of the old hotels and turned it into a hospital. That is what became the Florida Medical Center and that ran very nicely until here comes the Second World War, by that time one of the local people had property out south of here and they wrote the government and offered them the property for an air base or whatever they wanted to use it for and were taken up on it.

So about 1942, when I finished college, my first job was in the office of that great construction company that built the air base [Venice Army Air Base]. I worked there for less than a month, I think, until I was off to New York City.

Mims: *So Corning Tolle came to Venice?*

Lanning: He came to Venice; he must have worked out something with her. Because by that time, let's see … I'm not sure what year that was. See my father didn't have any job for quite awhile but then finally Colonel Richmond from KMI hired him to oversee and take care of the buildings while they were in Kentucky, while the rest of the school was in Kentucky. So he had a shop in one the buildings in which he used to do all the up keeping.

I don't know how many dining room chairs he repaired in that shop. [Laughter] He kept the buildings up, so that gave him a little income. I don't think it gave much because they weren't very flush either. So between the two things we survived that whole period. And she somehow managed to scrape up money together to get me into college.

Mims: *Awesome! So other than Corning Tolle coming here had you ever been to the [FSC] campus?*

Lanning: No, I don't think I ever saw the campus until they took me up there.

Mims: *How did you get there, your family drive or took a train?*

Lanning: No, they drove me.

Mims: *Okay, so you are new at the college, arriving to live there …*

Lanning: The first time I had been away from home.

Mims: *So you stayed in a dorm, residence hall?*

Lanning: I stayed in the dorm Joseph-Reynolds Hall.

Mims: *JR, okay!*

Lanning: That's where they had the freshmen.

Mims: *Sure. Did you have a roommate?*

Lanning: Yes. The girls that I first met there I had nothing in common with and I wasn't very happy there. Finally they changed residence, switched us around and then I had a nice roommate that I got along with fine. So we roomed together, I guess, that whole freshman year, the rest of it.

Mims: *When you first got to campus, did you do an orientation program?*

Lanning: I just don't remember an awful lot about that. I am sure they did. They showed us all around. The rooms were arranged as so they were sort of suites; two or three people shared the bathroom and so forth.

Mims: *Did they have any special designation that you were freshmen, versus upper class?*

Lanning: Well, just the fact that we lived in Joseph-Reynolds that was it.

Mims: *Some people have talked about having to wear a hat, that signified they were freshmen …*

Lanning: [laughter] … was that a beanie? I don't remember particularly having to wear a beanie, but a lot of people did.

Mims: *Where did you go to eat?*

Lanning: In Edge Hall. That was the dining room for the whole campus.

Mims: *Eleanor Searle? Or the campus dining room?*

Lanning: I am talking about Edge Hall …

Mims: *Okay, offices, then classroom, dining hall, I think the library was located there for awhile.*

Lanning: Yes, I think it was. My memories about that aren't too clear but I know that's where we ate. Line-up and wait in line to get into the hall.

Mims: *Where were your classes held?*

Lanning: Let's see … I think most of them were in Spivey … I just don't even remember what I took.

Pharris: *Were you an English major?*

Lanning: Yes! I was an English major and a science minor. My interest was in art. The only art teacher they had was a rather ancient lady; her name was … what was her name?

Mims: *I can look these kinds of things up … [Possibly Edythe Bainter FSC Interlachen 1942]. Did you have to take physical education?*

Lanning: Yeah and I don't remember who taught it …

Mims: *I have heard stories about having to take swimming?*

Lanning: No swimming.

Mims: *Okay, no swimming. How about music, did you take any music?*

Lanning: I think I might have been in the glee club at one time. It wasn't my freshman year, but a couple of years later I was in the chorale readers with Miss Wills.

Mims: *Yes, she started the Vagabonds, I think.*

Lanning: Yes, I was a Vagabond. I took courses with her all the time I was there. Wills was her name.

Mims: *Marguerite Wills.*

Lanning: One of the years I was there she got married.

Mims: *[looking through the 1941* Interlachen*] … um Oween Summers was the librarian … art department.*

Lanning: She was there for years after I left, I would see her at Homecoming, a lovely lady.

Mims: *Was Donna Stoddard was there?*

Lanning: Oh yes, Donna Stoddard was there, I didn't take any classes under her.

Mims: *You didn't?*

Lanning: No, she was more of a commercial art type.

Mims: *Says the head of the Art Department was Howard Barnum.*

Lanning: Oh boy! Howard Barnum was a music teacher. He had a son, Howard Barnum, junior, that also went there. I found out later, didn't even know it at the time, that Barnum, allegedly or early on was connected with Ringling School of Art.

Mims: *That would make sense the school overlapped for a time. Dr. Spivey was also president of Ringling for awhile. A lot of FSC faculty came from there. And art … the Allan Spivey urn was done by an artist at Ringling College.*

Lanning: Well, I knew Howard and Howard, junior, saw them up in New York when I was there.

Mims: *Okay, you said you were English, that was headed by Gibson Weihe …*

Lanning: Dr. Weihe [pronounced WHY], not Wee … he was a wonderful teacher.

Mims: *Henry Barnett was still there?*

Lanning: Yes, Henry was there but I didn't have him as a teacher.

Mims: *I have his collection in the archives! A lot of it is travel writing, very interesting. Let's see Education … you said you were science, oh did you take any religion classes during that time?*

Lanning: The only religion class I remember was under Thrift …

Mims: *Yes, Dr. Thrift was teaching and there was a gentleman named Shirley Jackson Case.*

Lanning: I remember him but I did not take a class under him. I took a class under Thrift. He had all this history about our local church. I wonder what he did with those things?

Mims: *They are in the archives!*

Pharris: *He was the president after Dr. Spivey?*

Mims: *Yes, he was vice president under Dr. Spivey. Okay, here's science, who do you remember in science? The head of the department was Dr. Bly.*

Lanning: Oh yes, I remember him but did not have a class with him. My science teacher was Dr. Mulvania. And he was a wonderful teacher.

Mims: *This was right before the Cancer Research labs developed on campus in the post war years. Were you part of any social clubs or organizations?*

Lanning: Rush party, I didn't know what a rush party was, I had never heard of a sorority before. When they first started talking about it I didn't know what they were talking about. Dr. Spivey formed this [Tri Zetas]. He knew there were a bunch of girls there that should have a place like this; otherwise we were just called Independent Women.

Mims: *Independent Women became Tri Zeta?*

Lanning: No, not the whole group, I don't think just the ones that were offered it.

Mims: *Do you remember doing any activities with the sorority?*

Lanning: Just meetings, ordinary meetings and we had to make up our own … initiation … we had to make those things up.

Mims: *The rituals?*

Lanning: Yes we did. I remember making up a … I guess I invented this a coat of arms and that turned up oddly just a few years ago on something else from the college and I wondered "where did they get that?" What happened to that little plaque I made with that on it. I never did find out. But they had used that with it on it.

Mims: *By the time you got there the school had been there about fifteen years or so, there were still a lot of oranges and orange groves?*

Lanning: Oh yes! Fruit fights!

Mims: *Oh, yes I have heard about those, did you partake in that?*

Lanning: Oh the boys did that.

Mims: *I was asking about your affiliation with the Tri Zeta there is usually some charity work and some social activities, a dance or …*

Lanning: There was a banquet every year, but I don't remember a lot of other stuff, but there must have been some parties. But the Choral Readers is the main other activity I remember being in. We used to travel around the state to various churches to do our programs.

Mims: *Here is the picture of Marguerite Wills Callahan … she was instrumental in the drama program too. Here is the Vagabond page and here she is right there. You were part of that? Do you remember any particular play or productions you were in?*

Lanning: Oh yes. I was involved in practically all of them in one way or the other, anything from painting scenery to acting or whatever needs to be done.

Mims: *And where did you say the productions were held since the campus didn't have an auditorium?*

Lanning: Someplace downtown …

Mims: *… The City Auditorium?*

Lanning: Yeah! And we put on some good productions. I remember being involved with "You Can't Take it With You" [names another here?] … and what's another of the Gilbert and Sullivan's? Oh, one called "Family Portrait." That's one I was in; nobody could hear me passed the front. I didn't have much of a career as an actress. [Mockingly] No one can hear you!

Mims: *So tell me what did you do for fun when you didn't have classes or doing your social activities with your groups, what would you do for fun around campus or in Lakeland?*

Lanning: Well, if we had a date we had to go to church if it was on Wednesdays or Sundays. I cut down on activities considerably. I didn't have that many dates.

Mims: *Now there were a lot of restrictions placed on your comings and goings, like you had to sign in and out, right?*

Lanning: Yes, we had to sign in and out and occasionally we got company … Mrs. Duggar was our house mother, we kept track of where people were signing out for like the library. For a long time the [Jim and Ima] Kings were good friend of our up in Carolina.

Pharris: *When was the first time you met President Spivey? Do you recall?*

Lanning: I don't remember the first time I met him but of course, he was very much a person on the campus. He had the family over there for Sunday dinner, all the whole family ate there for Sunday dinner, including the little Louise and her white cat. He was very much a part of the campus.

Mims: *You were telling us earlier of a time you heard him speak, can you tell us that again? You had said he talked to the students in an outdoor setting?*

Lanning: Yes, that's where it was; I guess we called it the Chapel because we didn't have any inside chapel. This was in the outdoor theatre, stage rather; it had a chicken wire covering with Spanish moss on top of it. I can think of one concert that was given there … Dr. Spivey would gather people. He would contact people and befriend them and bring them to the campus. I know one time he brought a, I think,

he was a Chilean poet. And he brought him to the campus and he was going to teach poetry, I guess. But I don't think anything developed out of that!

Lanning: Another time he, after it became apparent that I was … they were going to have this man come who was a miniature portrait painter. I didn't want to paint miniature portraits [laughter]. So that never developed. And then they brought in this man from Englewood, he and I just didn't get along at all. When I would be working on something under him, he would say I was just not big enough in feeling, whatever that is [laughter].

Mims: *I understand that Dr. Spivey would have students over at his house?*

Lanning: Oh he did, he did, he would have a tea. I remember going to those. He would see the freshmen when they came in, and I remember my dress that mama made. So those were nice affairs.

Mims: *How about convocation … do you remember having to go to chapel once a week or once a month?*

Lanning: Well, I don't know … I remember one convocation particularly. That's when Paul McNutt, who was a congressman, I guess, when he was there, and of course everybody was robed and they couldn't find a hat big enough for him [laughter].

Mims: *Now you are on campus in 1938 and Dr. Spivey connects with a gentleman by the name of Frank Lloyd Wright, what do you recall about any of that time?*

Lanning: I recall a lot about it. He was on campus several times. He was a very small man with a tam-hat, and I think, a cane, I have forgotten a lot of the details, but he was very visible when he was a round. He is the one that started the chapel. He used students to make the bricks and everything. I don't know if they made them all …

First they had it where the tower crashed into the chapel … but I was never very impressed with his buildings. The administration building, he didn't put any bathrooms into that.

Pharris: *They still do not have any bathrooms [laughter]. That's where my office is, and there is one tiny bathroom.*

Lanning: In the chapel they had just one little tiny bathroom with two or three stalls …

Mims: *And down the stairs …*

Lanning: So I don't know why they even need a bathroom there [laughter].

Mims: *Did you ever have an opportunity to meet him? Or hear him speak?*

Lanning: No, no he didn't do that sort of thing, he was above that. He was THE big man. But he would drag around the campus whenever he was here. I saw him several times on the campus, just wandering around. But not talking with him …

That brings to my mind another chapel program, which we would have occasionally. They had this big deal going with … Dr. Spivey had Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt, I don't know what her last name was at that time, come and she was a singer, and he had her come and built this program around her. They were doing "Elijah" the oratorio "Elijah."

At that time they were still out in the moss covered chapel. I have forgotten who the director was, but they had imported him from somewhere. I don't think they did any auditions but they were using the entire student body as the chorus. They would practice in the chapel. They had all of the student body in the chapel on this one occasion. The opening chorus in that oratorio starts out with "Hear us Lord!" with everybody singing and we hadn't had any rain for ages and the place was dry. And the whole chorus was flat.

So the director, I have forgotten his name, couldn't get people to sing loud enough to make them feel like, they really needed that break. So it was "sing louder!" and everything. He had a certain way of picking people out and at this point he picked on Corning Tolle. Corning was sitting beside Dr. Spivey's secretary and beside the faculty chairman. He picked him out to say he wasn't singing loud enough or something. So Corning said, "Yes, Lord!" and broke the place up [laughter]. It was just silly things like that.

And then something wonderful came out of … I guess this was at a reunion, I mean a convocation, reunion combination. And I did not know this before that at the time but Dr. Mulvania had come to our campus from Carolina, or Georgia, wherever they had the "Monkey trial."

Mims: *That was Tennessee.*

Lanning: Tennessee … okay. He had been a part of that in some capacity; I don't remember what it was, whether he was called upon to testify or what it was. But I did not know about that because I never talked to anyone, but I think some of the students had and told me about it. But he was a sweet man, such a nice man.

Mims: *When it became time for graduation, where was that held?*

Lanning: In the chapel after it was built.

Mims: *After it was built … I want to say one of the first ones held was in 1941 or 1942?*

Lanning: I have a picture of me in front of the chapel, beside the chapel, in my cap and gown. So it had to have been by 1942. They had that disaster of the tower falling in. He had designed the seats for that, I don't know if you have ever seen any of them? Have you ever sat in them?

Mims: *Yes, but no … I can only imagine after seeing pictures. I have one of the library chairs in the archives, so I can only imagine how uncomfortable that is.*

Lanning: Well, anyway the cushions just sat in this bottom, the cushions didn't stay locked or anything. So that didn't last very long, then they put in ordinary theatre seats. They didn't go with the décor. So the chapel didn't look much like Frank Lloyd Wright to me.

[End of tape one]

[Beginning of tape two]

Mims: *And we are back. So you graduated from Florida Southern College in 1942 with a degree in English and a minor in science. What did you do after graduation?*

Lanning: Well, I came back to Venice and within the next couple of weeks, maybe as long as a month, I don't really remember, I had received letters from friends urging me to go to New York. I mean good friends, and two of them were already there.

Mims: *Was the drive to do that part of you interested in art?*

Lanning: They knew the whole reason for my wanting to go someplace else was my love of music. We had nothing here. Venice was a cultural desert. There was nothing here. I just longed for it with all my being. I just longed for that. When I was in college we did have a chance occasionally to go to one of the nearby communities … they used to have these community concerts deals.

There was an impresario by the name of Sol Hulok who during the Depression signed up all of these young artists who just were ready to concertize, do solo work. He would present them to the public, to communities that would engage them for a concert. This was sort of country wide, I guess. Of course where we were which is Lakeland the only access to a large city was Tampa or Orlando.

I will never forget one particular time we went it was a ballet. It was in Orlando. We put a bunch of people in a car in order to get over there to see it. And that performance was one of the most wonderful experiences in my life. The name of the ballet was "Serenade" and the music was Tchaikovsky's "Serenade for Strings." Which begins with three long notes …

When that started, instantaneously, the light went down and the curtains opened and the dancers were dancing. All of this happened instantaneously. I didn't know what was going on with this experience. I have never seen or heard it since … until now we have a wonderful ballet group in Sarasota. I guess it was a year, or two years ago from now I saw that was listed on the program.

I thought I would like to see that again, so I got the tickets. The lights went down, the music started, those three notes and nothing happened on the stage. But I immediately understood why. There has to be somebody there giving the signal for all those things to happen simultaneously. There is no way to do that with canned music. And I was just simply crushed.

I called … I had a contact up there since I am a donor to it, I knew that they had a fund started to engaged live music. So I called her up … been talking to her and explained my situation. So now, this coming weekend I am going to see it with live music [excited laughter]. Anyway when I called and told her all about this I said I have got to meet your director. And so she has arranged for that. She also recommended for me to go to a rehearsal. But I don't want to see a rehearsal, I want to see the whole thing! So I am going next Saturday. She's going to take me up there. She lives in Osprey so it won't be too hard a thing for her.

But that is why I went to New York!

Mims: *When you were n New York did you see plays, shows, ballets?*

Lanning: Oh yeah, oh yes. I went to plays, I went to the orchestra, opera and now we have all those things here! It's hard to get to them now, of course, that I am handicapped. I don't have access to all. It's just wonderful what we do have available here now. If you have any interest at all in opera, and want to see good productions, see the ones at Sarasota Opera House.

Mims: *What did you do for work in New York?*

Lanning: Well, of course I started out with absolutely no experience and nobody would hire me for anything, because I had no experience. And I was thinking how do I get experience without work? [laughter] But it was during war times. I took a job as a shipping clerk for Cunard Lines, which is down in the Battery in New York. They were shipping lend-lease material to England and to Vladivostok. So it was just a matter of keeping records and that kind of thing which I wasn't very good at anyway. That didn't last too long.

I had applied to McGraw-Hill, so finally I got a letter from the head man at the illustration department there saying I hope this is the news you have been waiting for and that he had an opening. Of course many men had been taken up with the war, so they had a need. I mean this is a bull pit. They had to start hiring women. The head of the department, I guess, was Hungarian, or whatever, he had a strong accent. So he hired me. I worked there for two or three years, I guess.

I had a big spat with the guy who handed out the items that had to be done. I went into the manager's office and this guy was saying – why is she still here, I can never train her to use a t-square and a triangle! And Mr. Rodgers said, well her work is acceptable isn't it? And he had to admit that it was. Mr. Rodgers said after that, don't worry James, or Joe, or whatever his name was, you come to me for your next assignment.

So after that for the next assignment was an illuminated manuscript for the London office of McGraw-Hill, which is Mr. McGraw, I guess. But anyway I designed … executed an illuminated manuscript using parchment paper and I sketched it out.

Mims: *How long did you stay at McGraw?*

Lanning: I would say maybe two or three years. And then I had a chance … I also need to go into this, it's a mish-mash … anyway I spent one year in Cambridge teaching school, a private school. That was a disaster. Then I went to another job at McGraw, at Reader's Digest. I was in their art department for the next twenty years; spent a lot of time there.

But I did not stay long enough to get completely … I was vested, but I was not … I didn't complete the length of time to get full retirement, I was vested in retirement but it was minimal, but I got something. After twenty years I deserved something.

This was a male dominated place and it was only several months after I retired that the women there rebelled, got lawyers and got themselves put on an equal basis with the men. I just missed it by weeks or so.

Mims: *Would this have been around 1968, 1970? ERA? [Equal Rights Amendment]*

Lanning: This was 1970. As I say that was the best move I ever made in my life because I came back down here. I got involved with a little theater group, I met some of the best friends of my life. These ladies, most of whom are younger than I am, are still out there. We still get together one Monday a month.

Mims: *Earlier you had said you still keep up with friends that you made while at Florida Southern?*

Lanning: Yes, mainly through Irma [King] because she has a house there in Lakeland. If you haven't been there you should try to arrange it …

Mims: *Her husband was a captain, a Navy or ship captain?*

Lanning: Yes, he was a captain in the Navy. He has a good background too, very interesting background. They built a house, I even helped a little bit, but on one spot. I put stained glass in all the windows. It's worth arranging to go over there to see it if you can.

Mims: *Stained glass?*

Lanning: Her daughter lives with her. Her daughter, unfortunately had to give up her job to do this but she stays with Irma. And then she has a daughter who's living there with them. So the house is not as nice as when we first finished it because they had to bring in wood that has changed the character of the interior of the house. But it's still a beautiful house and it's right on Lake Scott, which is one of the sink holes.

Mims: *Okay, I kind of want to get to a point to reflect on Florida Southern College, what it has meant to your life, or how it got you to where you are now?*

Lanning: Okay, to me college, the main advantage to college to almost anyone, that young person, because it gives them a chance to grow up. It gives them a chance to try their wings, to see what the outside world is like. In my case, I entered at sixteen, which is equivalent to twelve, I was sixteen going on twelve [laughter]. I was a babe in the woods in every sense of the word. I just learned what it was like to be an adult.

So by the time I left for New York I had no qualms about going up there by myself. I made it! It has been a wonderful experience. I had my huge dose of culture which I craved from young childhood. I was there at a time when so much was going on, like the ballets and the development of the ballet. During this heyday of some of the best ballet masters of the century and staying in a good state now.

Then when I came back here … you see my mother after she had opened the tea room, and later this building called the Triangle Inn became available. Whoever had built it opened it as an Inn had been burned in a kitchen accident and had to give it up. And then that building became available, and mother had an opportunity to rent our house, which brought us to Venice at that time, to a Canadian couple, for the winter and we could live in the Triangle Inn and serve meals there. That's how you made ends meet in those days so that's what we did.

I lived in the Triangle Inn for about three years, I guess, with my family. And then when I came back the Triangle Inn had been turned into a museum and archives. I went there to volunteer which was very fortuitous. Of course in the meantime I had met my husband and married him.

He was introduced to me by a mutual friend who I went to college with, was also at Florida Southern college, I think she graduated when her sister did, name was Shepherd, Marie and Margaret Shepherd. Their mother also went there as a teacher and taught evening classes before them.

Anyway the Shepherd family. Marie Shepherd had worked for a big international law firm in New York City. After she retired her boss retired down here, and he retired to Venice. So she said well you should meet the Lanning's! Eventually she came over to visit me. I called and made an appointment with the Lanning's, I'm not comfortable with going over and banging on the door saying, "Oh, I'm Marie's friend."

My neighbor and I went over there and met him. His wife was ill, she was in the bedroom, I never saw her. I heard later that she had died. We had had a very nice visit with him and the other girl that was with us, knew people that he knew, so we had good conversation. I believe when his wife died I called him, gave him a condolence call. He was very charming.

He said he would like to go out to Arkansas, is that where that western sun coast center is? Sun something is.

Mims: *I'm not sure, let's just say Arkansas, like Sun City?*

Lanning: Yes, Sun City West. So we went over to meet him, but he was alone, anyway he said he didn't know what to do with his cat. He didn't want to leave the cat with neighborhood boys who didn't know what they were doing. So of course I said I'd be glad to look after your cat [laughter]. The cat and I got along fine. After he came back I didn't hear from him for, I don't know, several weeks, I guess but eventually he got to miss the cat.

This was right after I had moved my house. This house that my father finished and we lived in all of our lives, I moved it from Venice to Nokomis. I was trying to move it to Nokomis but I couldn't find a place to put it, so I moved it to Venice. So our house is still here in Venice. Some lovely people own it now.

I began volunteering at the Triangle Inn, met the new director when he came it. He is the one I got involved with in expanding the space. I offered him the money, the seed money, to that building …

Mims: *You were able to give back to the community.*

Lanning: It's been an interesting one.

Pharris: *That is wonderful, Mrs. Lanning!*

Mims: *I just want to thank you so much for talking to us. I am going to turn the recorder off now.*

[END]