

Interview with Marian Meeks

Interviewer: Laura Bounds

Transcriber: Laura Bounds

Date of Interview: October 9, 1985

Location: 820 W. Bluebonnet Drive, San Marcos, TX

Begin Tape 1, Side 1

Laura Bounds: This is Laura Bounds interviewing Marian Meeks in her home on West Bluebonnet on October 9, 1985.

Marian Meeks: Well, Laura, I'll leave out part of that— (Laughs)

[The reference is to a false start initially made by Laura Bounds]

Anyway, I think my father's life is more interesting than mine, so I'll start with him. He was born and grew up on a farm in Parker County, west of Fort Worth, in a little place called Azle. He was the oldest boy of eleven children. His father died and left him and his mother to rear these children. He stayed and—for some reason, even though she had never been to school and he possibly had been to a one-room schoolhouse some, they saw, that is, felt, that it was important that they have an education. He stayed home and worked on the farm until he had put five brothers and one sister through the University of Texas with one or two degrees. Somewhere during this time, he did take time out to go to Colonel Goodnight's College, which was called Goodnight's College and was in Clarendon, in West Texas. It was a one room, one building—great big frame building—I wish I had a picture of that—because the buffalo were out in front of it in the picture I do have of it. He told me later that it was equivalent about to what our high school is now. But Colonel Goodnight had started this college so that boys in West Texas would have an opportunity to have some education because it was so far for them to come down to Austin to school. Plus the railroads were just being put in, in the 1870–80s; I guess it was probably in the 1890s when my father went there.

But anyway, when he got the last one graduated from the University of Texas, it was his turn then, and incidentally, that one came down there when he was fifteen and graduated when he was seventeen, then they didn't award him his degree until he was eighteen because he was too young (laughs). In fact, he came down and stayed there [Austin] two weeks and then wrote home that he was going to come home—he was the baby—and he was homesick. Each of them was sent to Austin in September with \$200, which was their share of the cotton crop. And that \$200 was what they had to do on whole year. Well, fortunately, they were boys and so they could get a job and they—various ones got various jobs except the baby, and he didn't work—well, anyway, he wrote after two weeks that he was going to come home, and here Daddy had worked so hard all these years to get them through and the last one was blowing it (laughs). So he [Daddy] got

on the train in Fort Worth, came to Austin and stayed two weeks with him until he got him pacified and calmed down (laughs) and then he went home to Azle. Well, that's the one that shot through and Phi Beta Kappa and graduated by the time he was eighteen. Well, then Daddy came down, it was his turn then, there was no reason for him to stay on the farm. I don't know why he chose San Marcos, he probably didn't qualify [for UT]—I simply do not know, for the University of Texas. But he loved San Marcos. And he and his mother moved to San Marcos, and it was his turn to go to school. And he immediately, they had sold the farm up there, bought a piece of property here which he loved until the day he died. It was five acres, which is now Sessom Drive parking lot, down across from the tennis courts.

Bounds: Really?

Meeks: And it had a house on it that had four rooms and a porch. He subsequently built this on the front of it.

Bounds: It's gorgeous. (Looking at a picture of the original Nelson home with a large wooden porch in front of the house)

Meeks: And the college, it was in the master plan, or it became so, for the property to become part of the college as it grew. They acquired the property in 1972. They did let him live his life out in this house; one of the college presidents was kind enough to do that. He died in 1970, and the college immediately started negotiating about the property. And the house was torn down in 1972 so that it could be a parking lot.

Bounds: Oh. (Still looking at a picture of the Nelson house which is surrounded by beautiful large trees)

Meeks: All of these trees are gone (pointing to the photo), but Dr. Billy Mac Jones was president at the time we did the negotiations, and he suggested that we put in a clause in the contract that would restrict having the three trees over on that side [destroyed] (pointing to the picture), if you'll look the next time you're down there, you can't see them here, but they're in the parking lot. But we really wanted this pecan tree (pointing at the picture) saved, but we dared not ask because it was right in the center of the property and it would sort of negate the use of the property. At the time they were going to build an education building on it, that was the plan, but of course that changed. But Billy Mac suggested that we also put restriction clauses for the two trees over close to Sessom Drive where you turn into the parking lot. Next time you drive down there you can see. Well, my mother laughed at the time [because] those trees were not real healthy, but Dr. Rydl has taken care of the three that are on that side and the two that are on this side, and they just look real good so we're happy that that part has been retained. It's difficult to give up your home, but we were grateful that they allowed Daddy to live his life out in the house. Well, Daddy just loved going to school, and he was editor of the *Pedagog*, and the *Pedagogs* are sort of funny.

Bounds: Oh, I just love these!

Meeks: This is him here. Here he is called “Professor,” and until the day he died he was called “Professor,” particularly by the Mexicans in town who he all knew. When he lived in Houston, I’d run across people, I was real active in the PTA, and I’d run across teachers, particularly when they’d find out that I was from San Marcos and my name had been Nelson, they would always say “Oh, I took a course from Professor Nelson.” They’d always have a funny story to tell. Well, I got to thinking, “What are all these women taking agriculture courses for?” because he taught agriculture. Finally, I asked him one time why—I asked him if he remembered this one or that one or the other and he always did—I’d ask him why all these people were taking agriculture, can you imagine anyone voluntarily taking agriculture? (Laughs) Well, it is real interesting. In 1909, Sam Rayburn was speaker of the House of Representatives in Austin, and they passed a law that all state-supported Normal schools, which is what this was then, were required to have an agriculture department and every student was required to take agriculture. This was because the entire economic system for the state of Texas was agrarian; it was based on that, oil and gas hadn’t come into it. The Normal schools were put here in various places where they are—Nacogdoches, Huntsville, Commerce and San Marcos—to supply a place for young people from small towns to go to school. It’s interesting now that Dallas, Houston, San Antonio, and Austin chiefly make up the people that go to school at SWT. But, nevertheless, that is why all these people that I’d run into who had known him had taken a class in agriculture. It was required of them if they went to school at Southwest Texas they had to take a course in agriculture, and he was the department—(laughs)

Bounds: What year did he first come up here?

Meeks: I think 1908—what is this? (Pulling an old *Pedagog* off the table)

Bounds: That’s 1910.

Meeks: This is 1910. Well, everyone wore two or three hats in those days. He was also coach for the girls’ baseball team, which was sort of a joke. (Laughs) These are pictures (looking at the 1910 *Pedagog*), this is the head of the river [San Marcos River]. This is where the springs come up, and then the hotel is right there.

Bounds: Much prettier then than it is right now.

Meeks: This was fun, fun, fun—

Bounds: What’s this? The old water wheel (referring to a photo in the 1910 *Pedagog* titled “The Old Water Wheel”).

Meeks: It’s a wheel for a grist mill that happened to be on some property that he ultimately bought. This is the courthouse; this house is up on Burluson Street; this is where Betty Jack Rains lives—Don Rains was the representative before Bob Barton. This is on Hopkins Street

(still looking at photos from the 1910 *Pedagog*). Do you know where the Tallant Clinic is on Hopkins Street?

Bounds: Sure do.

Meeks: This is on that side of the street a block down. This is Wonder Cave. This is down at Rio Vista [Park], the dam—

Bounds: Oh my goodness, look at the people in their dresses!

Meeks: This is between Peppers and where the bridge is now. (Looking at a picture of a man in a horse-drawn wagon with a barrel on its bed) They would drive their wagons in there [San Marcos River] with the barrels and get their fresh, clean water.

Bounds: Can't do that today! (Laughs)

Meeks: No—

Bounds: It was beautiful.

Meeks: I guess he graduated in 1909. But this is the type of thing—see, he was graduating, and so they were so gracious that they would write this welcome to the class coming in the next year (referring to a welcome speech printed in the back of the 1910 *Pedagog*). And no great poet was he! But that really didn't matter. These things are great to look at, they have all of them down at the Alumni House. But the people write things—somebody wrote this, you see, and it just got published in here. Of course, it's fun for me to look at.

Bounds: Those are wonderful. What was the population? What was the school enrollment then, I wonder?

Meeks: I don't know. I'd guess four or five hundred—Now, see, this is the fish hatchery.

Bounds: It's changed quite a bit.

Meeks: Yeah, sure has. I pulled this one—

Bounds: That's the 1914 *Pedagog*—

Meeks: This is he [referring to a picture of her father]. I pulled this one because—I guess, again here is sort of a classic case. You could teach school in those days, public school, with a high school certificate. You could get state certification, which is what was done. It was very, very unusual to go to college in those days. And it was unique to graduate from high school for that matter. So they figured it qualified you to teach, if you could get certification. Well, my mother had taught in Bartlett, Texas, up in Bell County, up near Temple, for several years with a high school certification. But she started coming down here to college and met my daddy. He was faculty by that time, and, this is she (pointing to photo in *Pedagog*), I think it is real interesting

that for every single student, they have some personal something to say. Can you imagine that now? [Mrs. Meeks is referring to the *Pedagog* again. At this time the editors included personal information about each faculty member and student.]

Bounds: No, they can't even get all the students to take pictures now!

Meeks: Now, well, do y'all have a *Pedagog* anymore?

Bounds: They reinstated them about two years ago, three years ago; this will be the third year. They brought it back finally.

Meeks: It's well that they did, because it gives quite a record. This is Grace Berry, who married Dr. Spurgeon Smith, who is pictured in here somewhere [referring to the 1914 *Pedagog*]; anyway, their home is the white house next to the girls' high rise [the Women's Residence Tower].

Bounds: Oh, I know which one you're talking about.

Meeks: Dr. Ralph Houston is next to him, but I think the Smith home is still there. And then this picture is interesting. All these are activities of the agriculture department, and that was a big deal, I guess, because everybody had to take agriculture. This is in front of the steps of that house I showed you, and see there's nothing growing there, a lot of rocks. Here are the cows; this is the view from the upstairs front porch; this is the fish hatchery. This is in front of the barn; this must be for animal husbandry, I can't quite make out any livestock there, but there possibly was some. This was down in front of the house; the property had about three acres. And each of the students had, I'd guess you'd call it a lab lot; it was about six feet by six feet that they would plant something in. And then there's a lot of science connected with agriculture. This is the science lab, and that's the classroom [referring to the *Pedagog*].

Bounds: I wonder what year that they stopped making agriculture required?

Meeks: Oh, well, it had stopped by the time I got to school [1938]. I pulled, this was my brother's, this is 1938 [*Pedagog*] but I just wanted to show you the faculty. Nowadays you have to have a PhD degree, and you have to publish and all that. Dr. Nolle was the first PhD that came here, and he was just about the only one for years and years. Dr. Evans was president and had been president of the college since 1922, and he was Dr. Evans, but it was just an honorary degree, not a earned degree. And she, Miss Brogdon, was dean of women, Mr. Speck was dean of men, you see these were all—Dr. Wiley was chairman of the education department, and his daughter and I were real good friends, and he got his PhD long after he had been here. But just look, most of these are just master's degrees [referring to the faculty of the 1938 *Pedagog*]. I shouldn't say just master's degrees, because it was really something to have a bachelor's degree much less to have progressed to a master's degree. But there are precious few PhDs on the

faculty at that time. Now, I understand, the faculty is at about five hundred in number; that is the total in 1938—

Bounds: It's three pages—

Meeks: Two, four, six, eight, ten, even, say twelve on three pages in '36.

Bounds: It's so strange to see the faces that go with the names on the buildings. Like you showed Miss Brogdon, and then there's Brogdon Hall—

Meeks: And then there's Jackson—

Bounds: Jackson, Jackson Hall.

Meeks: And you know, I really wonder why some of these people don't have buildings named for them. Dr. Derrick just died a couple of years ago, and he has a building. Buckner does, Arnold does, Butler—she was my second grade teacher and then started teaching art. She died last year (phone ringing) but these are pictures—these are the Shakespeares, who became ADPi [Alpha Delta Pi], but just look at what these—they're doing the same thing you all do. (Phone ringing) Do you belong to a sorority?

Bounds: No, but I wish I did. But I have a lot of good friends who are ADPi's.

Meeks: Those are the ADPi's; these are the Chi O's [Chi Omega]. This is up on the quadrangle. [Still looking at photos in the 1938 *Pedagog*]

Bounds: When you came to school, there was Old Main and the Music Building, which is the History Building now right? Was the Taylor-Murphy—?

Meeks: There was one girls' dormitory, which is just south of—well, it's been torn down because that's where the LBJ Building is now. There was one girls' dormitory, and there were buildings on either side of the quadrangle, Old Main and either side of the quad—and I have somewhere a picture—Evans Auditorium was there, which is the one they keep building on (laughs). That's my brother; he was in the band. That's the girls' dormitory.

Bounds: And they tore it down?

Meeks: And this is that old boys' dormitory across over from the Math Building.

Bounds: Harris Hall.

Meeks: Yeah—

Bounds: It's coming down soon.

Meeks: Is it?

Bounds: Yes, that's where the new library is going to go.

Meeks: Somewhere in here was a whole series of them going down the hill. There was the Science Building, and then what, I guess, they still call the Education Building, but they chose to fix it up and leave it. That's where I went to kindergarten and through to junior high school. They operated what they called a demonstration school; San Marcos had the public school, but most of the faculty children went to the demonstration school. This is the college gym that burned down twice where the swimming pool is now.

Bounds: Oh, the aquatic building? Down there?

Meeks: Yeah. But they had to have some kids to practice on (laughs) and hadn't yet worked out, at that time, a contract with the public school for the practice teachers to—there's Momma and Daddy's house [referring to the 1938 *Pedagog*].

Bounds: What's that in the backyard? Basketball—did y'all have a winning basketball or football team?

Meeks: They had a better basketball—but the interesting thing is that everybody in town went to every function, every recital, to every football game, to every basketball game—now, that bathing suit isn't too different.

Bounds: Very similar. Well, I've been told that we're the copycat generation. We just keep looking back and finding something we like, and we'll wear it. She was awful pretty. [Looking at a beauty queen's picture]

Meeks: They were, real pretty girls. And the interesting thing, the bright young men and women from this age—forty years ago, here is the college quartet. Every one of them is a PhD [referring to the college quartet]. For some reason, I found these in my mother's things to show how, in 1912, for instance—(pulls out the 1912 *Pedagog*) This is looking up towards Old Main, and I understand that they have completed the redesign reconstruction of that.

Bounds: Um—(nodding)

Meeks: And they—

Bounds: So that's just like it is today, only a little bit different.

Meeks: Yeah, this again is another picture where they drive their horse into the river with the barrel to get fresh water. This is Mother and her roommate (looking at Mrs. Meeks's album, which had belonged to her mother). Incidentally, her roommate became the first woman county school superintendent in the state of Texas. But they fixed up their room [and] then crawled under the table and had their picture made.

Bounds: And there's the single light bulb that you were telling me about. [Referring to the picture of two girls peering out at the camera from under a table; above the table is a single, exposed light bulb.]

Meeks: Well, it was something for many of them [students] to even have electricity because San Marcos got it earlier [than country folks], you see, and many of them [students] came from such a rural background that they didn't even have electricity at home. This is down in the fish hatchery; this is the boarding house. There were a number of big two-story framed boarding houses on what is now LBJ [Street], and I don't know what they used the building for that's the college bookstore. It used to be the Student Union Building, but it's the college bookstore. And down either side of that block, that's what this house was, they lived in boarding houses.

Bounds: You hear all these stories of how they segregated all the girls and guys. They didn't want the—

Meeks: One of the neatest stories, I just could not believe this, I was a teenager when I heard it. The district judge here was a man named Wilhelm. Judge Wilhelm, and he was very German and very proper and very austere and, God rest his bones, the dullest man I ever saw in my life, as was his wife, but he asked my mother's roommate, Mrs. Rugel, the one that became the first woman county school superintendent, to walk with him to the post office. The post office was located just across the street from where it is now. So, if they lived where the college bookstore is approximately and were going to walk, what three blocks? They were not allowed to do that. And so Mrs. Rugel went to Miss Brogdon, who was the dean of women, and said that Judge Wilhelm at that time (laughs) and said that he had invited her to walk to the post office with him and could she go. Miss Brogdon said that if Miss Phillips, that was my mother, walked with them, this was 3:00 or 4:00 in the afternoon, they could walk to the post office (laughs). So Mother went with the date. And I said, "Did you feel like the extra thumb?" And she said no, that's just the way it was. (Laughs) That's some of the girls. [Again looking at the family album] This fish pond is still down there, you know, it's the one to the left of the administration building.

Bounds: Uh-hm—

Meeks: These are wonderful—this is my mother, look at those hats; and this is on the steps in front of the Main Building—these are Shakespeares.

Bounds: Was your mother a Shakespeare?

Meeks: Uh-hm—I was a Shakespeare.

Bounds: Oh, those are ADPi's right?

Meeks: Well, I'm an ADPi alum now, I'm not very active, but when I came back here they had become ADPi's and my Shakespeare friends were now ADPi's. This is my mother, and this is on

the south side of Old Main. I wish I knew who these were, but these were the kind of clothes I sort of think he must have been the president, wouldn't you think?

Bounds: He looks like it! (Laughs)

Meeks: Long, flowing [robes]. This is my mother, too, with the hat on. This is on the stairs, on the ____ (??). They had their kimonos on, they, you know, Japanese kimonos, but they were just girls away from home having fun.

Bounds: Somebody had a camera. I had the impression that cameras were very rare, but—

Meeks: Well, somebody had one. (Laughs) Okay, now we get up to my time. This is the only one I have of this [picture]. This was the fifth grade of the laboratory school, and this was Miss Ruby Henderson, who was the fifth grade teacher. And our teachers were on the staff at the college, even though this was elementary school, and practically all of these are faculty children.

Bounds: There's what? Two, four, six, eight, ten, twelve, thirteen students.

Meeks: And this was big class. They usually ran eight to ten, and even the junior high school was in that building. We didn't go to public school until we moved over into high school, and actually we didn't—

Bounds: So y'all kind of mixed in with the college students.

Meeks: Yeah—

Bounds: I bet that was fun.

Meeks: Well, in a sense, it, I don't know, it's not nearly as much town and gown now as it was then because transportation is much easier now for one thing. But the college was self-contained, and we just grew up, all the faculty members were our parents. I learned to pour tea at a tea table at [women's] faculty meetings. Let me have one of these books. I want to show you what the president's house looked like before it was torn down.

Bounds: Okay.

Meeks: It would be a treasure to have now. You know where that flat top one, up from the Aquatic Building is, it used to be the president's house; well, it's right back—okay?

Bounds: Yes.

Meeks: This house I'm trying to show you was torn down to put that house there. But that was where the faculty daughters learned about teas and coffees, and you sat with your ankles crossed, and—

Bounds: That's beautiful. I can't believe they tore it down.

Meeks: Well, this was torn down before all that “Save Our Heritage” started.

Bounds: Yeah. This is 1910 [*Pedagog*]. So, and they put up that modern thing instead. It was beautiful.

Meeks: And Mr. Harris, who was the first president of the college, supplied his own home, which is that house over on Comanche Street that just became a fraternity house, that’s across the alley from the funeral home.

Bounds: Um-hm, that’s the Sig Ep [Sigma Epsilon Fraternity] house now.

Meeks: That was Mr. Harris’s house. Okay.

Bounds: Is this you playing piano?

Meeks: This is the organ. I wanted to show you this because this is in 1938 and these are all the faculty children. This was a recital of Bach organ music. This particular organ happens to be in the home of Mrs. Burkholder, our teacher, and it was rare indeed for anyone to have an organ in their home. I was practicing there, but this recital was at the First Presbyterian Church, which happens to be our church. All of us went there. I was the organist at the church until I finished college. But everybody in town—the organ that’s there now is the same organ that this was, it’s the original organ in the church, it’s a fine, small organ—everybody in town would come to the organ recital. Can you imagine? I go to recitals up here in the Music Building now in the recital hall. And there will be two music faculty and probably the parents of the person performing, and five music majors.

Bounds: Yeah, there’s a lot of apathy now.

Meeks: We would fill up for piano recitals; let me see if I can find one now [photo]. This was on the auditorium of the stage at Old Main, and there would not be an empty seat. We would fill up that auditorium for a piano recital, and you know, piano recitals can be pretty painful! (Laughs) Of course, the older ones were college students. [Referring to the older persons in the photo]

Bounds: Are you in here?

Meeks: Yeah, here.

Bounds: Oh—

Meeks: And this is what was done in 1936 for the, what was that, the Texas—this is the sesquicentennial, what would 1936 be? Well that would just be the centennial celebration. But we all had big, ploppy dresses and—I think there’s another [picture] —oh, here’s one—Ron Jager is doing the planning and what-have-you for the sesquicentennial, and he said, “Tell me what happened at it.” And I said, “I can’t remember anything except hooped skirts.” (Laughs)

Bounds: That's a beautiful picture—hooped skirts? Yep— (Laughs)

Meeks: Yeah, and we must have had a play. This is in the high school auditorium, and we must have had a play. I was playing the piano over there (pointing to the picture), I don't remember.

Bounds: Where was the high school then?

Meeks: It was across the street from Pennington Funeral Home, and it was—a friend was cleaning her things out last year and sent me a picture of me in front of the building in my—this is what the drill team wore in high school. My kids were far more interested with the building—we had baccalaureate clothes. This is a picture of me in my baccalaureate dress. Here is that centennial [picture]—

Bounds: This is your house?

Meeks: Yes, and we had dates with cars, and—I hope I haven't thrown that away—(Looking at Mrs. Meeks's family album). This is when we were fourth graders in the laboratory school. And the strangest thing is that I ended up being the biggest one of all of these. I was just slow in maturing.

Bounds: Yes, you're a head shorter than all of them. Looks like Huckleberry Finn, doesn't he? (Laughs) (Pointing to a small boy in overalls, no shirt, no shoes and holding something in his hand.)

Meeks: We were dressed for something, a play or something. That's a high school—this is the car that was given to me when I graduated from college. I was a vocational home economics major. It's hard for home economists to get a job because usually, well, there were just one or two in a school. It's not like English teachers or history teachers or math. And if you were in vocational home economics—in fact, I don't think they have that anymore—you had to have a car, because you had to do home visits, and you worked ten months a year, and so my parents—I don't see that picture—

Bounds: Did your mother work at all after she graduated?

Meeks: Heavens, no! (Laughs) Mothers did not do that. (Laughs) Well, this is out in front of my house with some college-aged friends. We had had a bridal shower for that one there (pointing to a young woman in the photo), and you can see the Main Building up there. I've forgotten who had the convertible.

Bounds: Oh, wouldn't you just die to have one of those today?

Meeks: Well, I probably wouldn't care. (Laughs) I'm sorry, I can't find—

Bounds: Okay. [Mrs. Meeks is referring to not finding a picture of the high school]

Meeks: But it was—the high school was a three-story, brick building.

Bounds: What was high school? I know in some states it's tenth–twelfth [grades]. And in some states it's ninth–twelfth [grades]—

Meeks: Oh, I graduated from high school when I was fifteen. I graduated from college when I was eighteen. So I had just had my nineteenth birthday when I went off to teach school. But I skipped a grade, and I found out—in fact, one of the tests, I think is still used in Texas is the Votaw-something test, and we in the laboratory school were the guinea pigs for all these testing programs. And I remember every year, when we went through that, I swore that when I came out of the auditorium, I was going to learn how to spell “hippopotamus” (laughs) because that was always on that test. And I could not spell “hippopotamus.” I didn't think, but anyway, I skipped the sixth grade so that put me a year ahead, and I found out that—I mean, I don't know why I skipped the sixth grade. I went to the sixth grade room the next year in September, and Miss Knispel said, “No, you belong in the seventh grade,” so I went there (laughs). So I never questioned it. I've found out since that several people skipped the sixth grade. For some reason, probably due to something on that test, we were just moved from the fifth grade to the seventh grade. Plus, in those days, there were just eleven years of school, so there you pick up another year. And then, when you lived in San Marcos, you just went to school all the time.

And when I, the place where I got a job, which turned out to be an absolutely marvelous experience and was terribly, terribly traumatic the first month because I'd never been away from home—I'd lived at home my whole life—was Moulton [Referring to the town where she held her first job], a little Bohemian town down here close to Schulenburg. I lived, rented, a room from the superintendent, my daddy saw to that. They were aware that I was very young to be going out on my own. And I came home after two weeks and said to my mother and daddy, “Did you know that there are perfectly good people who drink beer and haven't been to college?” (Laughs) See, this was a dry town. We did not drink beer; some of the football players, and this was very hush, hush, would go to the county line and get beer sometimes, but that was only a rumor, you know, (laughs) unless you dated a football player. And they, my—there was no money to buy beer. And then everyone in San Marcos went on to college, no big deal finishing high school, you just moved over to another building, and you just went on to college. So, I didn't know that Germans drank beer, and it was a privilege to go to college. I really did not know that. And I remember when I made that (laughs) earthshaking remark, my mother looked at my daddy and said, “How have we failed?” (Laughs) But we had grown up in this little protected environment in San Marcos and—we didn't know. Talk about naïve!

Bounds: What did you do?—you taught home economics?

Meeks: Yes, and just had a wonderful situation! I had a wonderful time, fell in love, and then I got a scholarship that spring, which I didn't even apply for, I think that the home economics powers that be here did it. I got a scholarship to go to the University of Texas to graduate school

the next year. So I just taught one year. And the war, World War II, was on, and I got interested, I had several friends who had joined the WACS or the WAVES or something like that, and I didn't feel like I could or wanted to do that, and I had this master's degree in nutrition, and so I decided to do this dietetic internship. I was in the post office one day and saw that the government was advertising exams for dietetic internships. And having nothing else to do, this was in Austin, I looked at the date when they had it and went and took it and ended up in Chicago doing a dietetic internship.

Bounds: Weren't you scared to death in moving to Chicago? I mean, if moving down to Schulenberg is terrifying then—

Meeks: Well, but then I had [been] down in Austin. Austin was not unfamiliar to me because one of these brothers that Daddy had sent to school was faculty at the University of Texas, and I had spent nearly every summer over at their house with them. And—I guess it was if I'd thought about it, but I just sort of—when you're that young, you just sort of fall into things. And they put me on a train, which was the only way to travel—when was that? That was the year before the war was over—there wasn't any gasoline or anything, I mean nobody—well, there was a little gasoline; you could drive from here to Austin, but you couldn't drive from here to Chicago. I had a marvelous time up there and really liked hospital work. Our base was Hines VA hospital and Vaughn hospital—Vaughn Army General hospital, which was next to each other. And then we did an affiliation with Michael Reese, which is one of the finest hospitals in the United States. [It] was downtown Chicago for our women's and children's part [of the internship]. When I got through, I was going to be assigned to McCloskey VA hospital in Temple, but it hadn't quite changed over from the Army to a VA. And so I spent six months at Jefferson Barracks in St. Louis and came to Temple. And my future husband was the second person I met at—July 3, 1946, when I walked into that hospital.

Bounds: What does your husband do?

Meeks: Well, he got his degree from Southwestern University after we got married. Then we went to Houston and he worked at Foley's until sixteen years ago when we moved up here. We were having to come up here increasingly because of problems with my parents. And then he got to the stage where he said he'd learned how to make money for Foley's, and now he'd like the opportunity to have a business of his own. That opportunity came about, and so we came here, and he's done real well.

Bounds: It's [San Marcos] a beautiful part of the state.

Meeks: Where are you from?

Bounds: I grew up all over. I was—

Meeks: Military?

Bounds: My dad worked for the military. Well, he wasn't in the military, but he worked for them. I spent seven years in Virginia and on and off—

Meeks: Beautiful.

Bounds: It is. And then on and off in the Fort Worth area. Now they're in Louisiana, and I'm here. I've been here for five years.

Meeks: Where in Louisiana?

Bounds: Lafayette.

Meeks: Really?

Bounds: Uh-huh, and they love it except that it rains all the time.

Meeks: And what does he do there?

Bounds: He works for Bell Helicopter, and they're in charge of the petroleum helicopters.

Meeks: Oh—they fly out to the rigs?

Bounds: Exactly. And that's why this is so interesting. I love to hear stories about how things were. That way I can compare it to what my dad said to see if he's telling me a lie, but—just—how much was it to go to school because he didn't even finish high school. The thing was to get out of high school so you could go to work on the farm.

Meeks: Well, another interesting thing just in passing; you know, the world is real small. But I told you that everybody on the faculty wore two or three hats; you just did a lot of different things—and it seems to me now, Ron Brown and Ron Jager and all the other faculty members that hear this (laughs) —it seems to me that they have a tremendous amount of time off, and they talk all the time about what a tremendous amount of pressure—well okay, I'll buy that, but this group of faculty back in those days, there weren't pressures I don't think like we have today because life didn't move that fast. But they worked all the time. They had two weeks off from the end of the second six weeks of summer school until school started again the day after Labor Day. And Dr. Pat Norwood down here is a retired faculty member, about eighty years old now. You ought to hear him get started on the subject of long hours. And they would teach all day. And Pat happened to be one of the ones who did it, and Marty Juel did too, who is retired now. And then they would drive to Victoria or San Antonio to teach, maybe once or twice a week, to teach a night course to teachers down there too—it was part of their extension service and [then] drive back after their class at 10:00 p.m. and then at 8:00 a.m. be in front of another class here. But one of the things that Daddy did was that he was in charge of the student loan fund. And he was pretty business-minded, oriented and among the many people who had to borrow money to go to school, and when I say the tuition was \$15 a semester that might be wrong, it might be \$25 a semester, but it was something [like that], plus the State provided the books. But one of the

students was named Lyndon Johnson. And he borrowed money to go through school, all—every year he went down here. You talk about hard scrabble, he came from it too. And he never paid that money back until he ran for the United States Senate.

Bounds: Really?

Meeks: Well, you hear, my daddy used to—he died in 1970 [Mr. Nelson, that is]—and he was long since through with it because he retired in 1945, but when we started giving a lot of publicity to these students' debts that were financed—and how much money was owed to the government, particularly from doctors and lawyers, you know, professional people who could have long since paid the money back but just never did. And when he started [Johnson] to run for Senator, and I'm not bad-mouthing him—but my initial point was that practically everybody had to borrow this \$25, and then he worked for his room and board.

Bounds: He used to work for Dean Brogdon, didn't he? I heard he was sort of a handy-man. I heard stories like that—

Meeks: Yes because the students wouldn't have any particular skill. And one thing I was going to say in connection with—back in those days, when my parents were students here, and in the early days when my daddy was teaching here, it would sound as if they stuck out like sore thumbs because my mother was like twenty-seven when she started coming down here, but so was everyone else. They'd teach a year or two and then come for a semester or a year and then go back and teach a year or two or three, and then come back—and so the medium age of the student was greater, higher than eighteen to twenty-two like it is now.

Bounds: A lot more serious, too—about education.

Meeks: Well, yes—

Bounds: This is a vacation for a lot of students today.

Meeks: Our daughter lives in Chicago, and she loves this river. When we pick her up in Austin and drive across the bridge down here [referring to the bridge that crosses the San Marcos River on Aquarena Springs Drive], you know when Sewell Park is in operation, she looks over there and says, "You fools, you just don't know what you've got!" And she still, she's thirty-two now, she'll put on her bathing suit and go down there and lie on her stomach just to listen to the conversation going on. And she'll say, "I can't believe it, I just can't believe what I'll hear them saying." And she went through school at Cheatham Street Warehouse. (Laughs)

Bounds: Was the river a big drawing place for y'all, too, when you were in school?

Meeks: Oh, yes, from the time I was four years old, we would spend the afternoon down there. And nobody worried about us drowning; we swam from the time we were two. They saw to it that we learned to swim. We were supposed to stay out of the current, you know, where it could

carry you on down to the sea. But there was a bathhouse on stilts so that when it flooded it wouldn't wash away. And there was never a question about evil men lurking around in the bathhouse or on the way home or—you know where the Aquatic Building is now?

Bounds: Yes.

Meeks: That was more fun—they have landscaped that so beautifully so that creek can continue to sort of run underneath it. And there was a creek running there exactly in that position then. And that was more fun because the turtles would all congregate (laughs) up there, and we would dig turtle eggs. And—

Bounds: What did you do with them?

Meeks: Well, did you know, turtles put their eggs down in the sand? And it's really something to dig around in a bunch of sand and come up with turtle eggs (laughs). But since Daddy taught agriculture, he had incubators, and we would try to hatch turtles. We would slip those turtle eggs into the chicken incubator and all that type of thing— (laughs) but one of the fashion things in the thirties was—what—oh, we called them beach pajamas. They were big-legged pants, only they were of a weight like dress fabric. And my brother and his friends were four years older than I, and one of their things—they had a, just a wooden boat out on the lake between Peppers and what we always called—it's the head of the river, which is Aquarena Lake now, but I joined them in that boat in beach pajamas one time in the summer. And they didn't want me there, of course, but didn't make much of an issue about it; and they rowed out in the middle—have you ever been on one of those glass bottom boats?

Bounds: Yes.

Meeks: With all that grass down on the bottom of the lake like that—and they threw me out in the middle of the lake in these beach pajamas, with those big legs, with that mess around you when it gets wet, and all that grass like that (laughs) —well, I was furious and screamed and yelled and swam to shore. And then went huffing and puffing home. I remember Mother was in the kitchen making cornbread, and I just spewed forth my fury, and—you know, they were going to drown little sister and all that stuff—that they had thrown me out in the middle of the lake—and she just kept on stirring the cornbread and said, “You had no business getting in the boat with them in the first place!” They didn't worry about us, you know? And we were expected to take care of ourselves and to behave ourselves—

Bounds: You had the etiquette, the upbringing, of a lady—I mean the music—I mean there was a different social norm. Like you were talking about serving tea—I'd probably spill it over everybody!

Meeks: Well, now when we were like this age—I have a little five-year-old granddaughter who lives here, and when I was her age—and when I get the opportunity I will expose her to this,

except they don't do this anymore, the Faculty Club was the *big* thing for women. And they would have a basket and make up cute little theme things to pin on people after they had been served or at the time they were served so that the hostesses wouldn't go and ask a person for the second or third time, "Won't you come be served." So when we were four or five years old, we would be given a basket and it was our business to see that whatever—the little flower or little boat or whatever the theme of the party was—that this little thing was pinned on them. And we were trained to say, "May I pin your favor on you?" And all, most of the ladies had a child that had been through that training period, and they would bend down where we could get to them, and it would be our business to carefully pin it on without sticking them and put it on the appropriate one—That's another plus too, that everybody else, and I guess the place was small enough then, though five thousand is not real small, that there wasn't much you could do that you wouldn't be seen.

Bounds: But it's twenty; well, nineteen thousand now. And you—

Meeks: Well, I mean the population of San Marcos was five thousand.

Bounds: Is that all?

Meeks: And see, there wasn't anything to do but go to Bach organ recitals. There were, was a barber shop quartet, and of course people were real active in their churches, and you'd better be—well, they were in churches, and they—well let me say, to varying degrees of activity, and that was back in the days when they still had church in the morning and the evening on Sunday and Wednesday night they had prayer meetings. And there was always a real good youth group, and I do not say that with tongue in cheek, it was really a good, fun youth group. And blessed be the people who sponsored those kids because they had a job on their hands.

Bounds: When do you think everything started to change? Was it after the war?

Meeks: Yes.

Bounds: It seems like—attitudes—

Meeks: I think this is good. I really—I think my children are much better able to cope with life than I was or my brother was. I don't see how my uncles, those "boys" that my father sent down to the University of Texas, coped at all. And they were all successful to say the least. One was president of a college—

Bounds: Which one?

Meeks: Two were millionaires, Nelson Field in Austin, which is the high school athletic fields, is named for one of them. He's the father of the junior high school system of education, which is currently on the way out; you know. middle school has become the thing. But they're the ones I think are really—and then the youngest one—the one that was going to come home after two

weeks—he set up the civil service system for the City of San Francisco and the City of Los Angeles plus the teacher retirement system for the State of California in the early thirties. That was the depths of the Depression, and they had no money to pay him—he was an actuary—and so they gave him stocks and bonds in the city, and he never cashed them, so you can imagine—

Bounds: Oh, Lord! (Laughs)

Meeks: You can just imagine—he left the University of Texas \$5.5 million in gratitude for what it had done for his family because they never could have made it if it had not been for that education.

Bounds: But the thought that they went to college and took—the importance of higher education in those days.

Meeks: That’s what I’ve never quite understood. I had a cousin who is a historian. He started writing a history of the family, and the family is not—the family is, I know—is not unique; it’s not unusual. There were many other families that did the same thing, but how my grandmother, who had never been to school in her life, knew it was important to go to school. And this historian cousin that I have said, “Well, they learned to read early and wrote all over their books.” And they did! I think reading was the key to it.

Bounds: I think TV has replaced it, really—I think to a large extent.

Meeks: Well, we’re going to have to learn that TVs are not going to go away. And we’re going to have to learn to cope with it. There’s a lot of problems we have now that we’re going to have to learn to cope with. Back to how they managed to cope—that generation, I think—people in those days were more aware that they were responsible for their own destiny than young people are today. Where the responsibility for the direction you go is lost in the young people, I don’t know. But until I, we feel like, my husband and I, we really worked on our kids that in the final analysis, they were responsible for their own lives. Until young people learn that again and assume that responsibility, it’s just going to be downhill for our society.

Bounds: I agree. Well, what do you think about all this that is happening to San Marcos and to the school?

Meeks: Well, I think it is wonderful. I would love to—I took a course five years ago—I had had a beginning weaving course in home economics when I was sixteen, and all these years I had wanted to learn how to work a four-harness loom. And so I drove around the campus four times one rainy January when they were registering, and finally, the fifth time, I aimed the car in the right direction (laughs) and went and enrolled in a weaving course and just loved it, just loved it.

Bounds: Was it so different from what you remembered from the first time?

Meeks: I didn't remember anything except you had to warp and woof and went like that (laughs) — I enjoyed that—there were seventeen in it; art majors, interior decorators have to take that course—I'm not sure art majors have to take, but there were seventeen kids in there, and I thoroughly—they were so nice to me, and I thoroughly enjoyed them. And I was tremendously impressed by them. I nearly had a nervous breakdown because there were three major projects which had to be done in the semester. And it didn't make any difference to me, you know, whether I did it or not, I was just in there to get what I wanted out of it. But I chose to do those three things. And I did not know, though I had been around musicians and played most of my life—you can't put deadlines on creative activities. _____ (?) See, I learned that at the age of fifty-seven, that deadlines for creative activities is just murder, it's just murder! And those kids were doing it for a grade, whereas—and all three of those activities, I mean those things that had to be done, were creative; were to be original. They were really under pressure.

Bounds: Were the faculty—

End Side 1, begin Side 2

Meeks: —I can't say in the case of weaving because there really wasn't any instructions with it. We just had a book and we just launched—and she was there some of the time, and some of the time she wasn't since it was a creative type of thing. I feel sure that the classes are more structured now. Friends that we have—I ask them what kinds of tests—say for instance, it is final time or something—and they say that they have tests to grade and what-have-you—I say, “What kind of tests?” And, of course, the big complaint about kids nowadays is that they can't write, and I'll say, “Is it true or false?” You know multiple choice or something like that. Well, many of them are—especially in freshman and sophomore classes, where there are so many papers to be graded, and they have a grader, but even so—I imagine that the input that the teacher gives the student is probably far more comprehensive than that we got. I'm not saying that for sure. I have an idea that we got better tests, hardest tests for the simple reason they had time to do it.

Bounds: To grade them?

Meeks: Yes. And we had to be able to write and spell and punctuate and paragraph and—so most of our tests were that type of test we had—it was rare indeed—if we had true/false or multiple choice. That was considered a cop-out.

Bounds: It must have been strange though, going home from laboratory class then to high school then come back to SWT then, all of the sudden, these men and women you'd known all your life were your professors. Was it kind of—?

Meeks: No. There was nothing strange. Sometimes they'd have their own children in the class.

Bounds: It was just normal?

Meeks: Yes. We saw nothing unusual about that at all.

Bounds: How big were the classes?

Meeks: Well, they certainly weren't auditorium size! (Laughs) One of the things we had to do, and back in my mother's day they had to do it too, was every Thursday at 2:00 [p.m.] there was—we had an auditorium, and we had—Miss Brogdon would lecture the girls. And I can think that would be called sex education. I don't think she was qualified to teach it (laughs) to tell you the truth of the matter! But we all showed up—all the girls showed up every Thursday at 2:00 [p.m.], and I guess, I don't remember, but I guess the guys had to be off somewhere (laughs) doing that too. Now, it wouldn't just be sex education; the rules, like the dorm rules, like they had to be in at 9:00 or 10:00 [p.m.] or if someone had stepped out of line at a football game or something, that would be talked about. But etiquette was talked about, I guess Dear Abbey and Miss Manners and all type of thing, they weren't exactly talked about—we were lectured because there was no input from us at all. We just say there. But we showed up every Thursday at 2:00 for assembly. And Mother—let's see, one time I was seething about that. Miss Brogdon had told us a very unlikely thing. I came home and told my mother, she told us that, and I said, "How could she stand up there and tell us that?" And Mother said, "Well, she told us that!" (Laughs)

Bounds: She was here forever, wasn't she? Miss Brogdon— (phone ringing)

Meeks: Yes. And the thing is that we just accepted these things. And this is where I think your generation at questioning is better—

End of interview