

PARTIAL TRANSCRIPT: Interview with Dr. Frankie Hall  
Conducted February 17, 2007.

Transcript begins at 1 hour, 31 minutes and 35 seconds into the interview:

Code: FH = Interviewee Frankie Hall; JW= interviewer Jenny Womack

Jenny Womack: Well, I, you know, it strikes me too, that--after you sold camp and moved to Leicester, North Carolina--

Frankie Hall: That's "Lester"--spelled Leicester [laughing]

JW: Right [laughing], you have continued a lot of community involvement that's also--I don't know if you would characterize it as much about developing leadership or would you?--you've continued a lot of...

FH: Involvement.

JW: Involvement, uh huh.

FH: Yes, uh huh.

JW: And what has that been about -- what--?

FH: I don't know, I just think--

JW:--what drives you to do that?

FH: I don't know. I had the energy, I had the time, I had the interest. I think that, again, you know, we always--my two sisters and I say my mother was the meanest woman in the world!

[Both laughing]

FH: We told her that to her face sometimes. No! [laughing] But we, we do, and yet we say - to this day we say yes, but it was *because* of her, and you know she didn't use any of this democratic-- she was *very* authoritarian!

JW: Umm, uh huh.

FH:--and she was very demanding and, you know that's why I wonder about how they raise kids now: they let them "find themselves". Honey, you didn't have time to find yourself with my mother! She found you *for* you!

JW: Yeah, yeah well I'm struck she appears throughout--that she helped you go to college--

FH: Yes. Oh yes.

JW: And she also was sort of the person over your shoulder when you wouldn't break your contract anywhere--

FH: That's right, that's right.

JW:-- and took responsibility and now you're saying she kind of raised you to give back and to--

FH: That's right.

JW: Uh huh.

FH: But she was that kind of a person herself. Do you know her story about that?

JW: I don't.

FH: Well, you know there were five of us, and my brother went off to help my daddy work in Miami to help send money home during the Depression.

JW: Uh huh

FH: And, so my mother was working in a doctor's office and Judge Criswell in Jacksonville, Florida--back then you didn't put children in foster homes, you had wards of the court.

JW: Ah.

FH: He was a juvenile judge. These children would be brought before him that should be taken away from their families or they had-- [aside] are you running out of time?

JW: [checking recorder] No, I think we're good.

FH: -or they were whatever. And Judge Criswell would call and "Mrs. Hall, I've got this young, this little three year old girl here and her mother cannot get sober and I'm wondering if you would mind keeping this little girl for a little while until we can get her mother straightened out." And Mother would say "Yeah" and so there was always a ward of the court living with us.

JW: Oh, so you always had other children, living with you.

FH: Oh yeah! Oh yeah!

JW: I never had heard that before.

FH: Some names I don't remember. No, the one I remember was that three year old named Ginger. She called my mother Big Mama and her mama Little Mama and we all boo-hooed when she left! We wished her mother would stay drunk for the rest of her life so we could keep Ginger. [laughing]

JW: And how long did she live with you?

FH: Oh probably a year.

JW: Oh, OK.

FH: And to this day I can hear her saying--we had this screen door that, you know, that came up on our porch, on our screen porch and she couldn't quite reach it and she'd stand out there and yell [in a child-like voice with emphasized Southern drawl]: "Somebody! Come open the do-or!"

[Both laughing]

FH: And so we--Sis and Joyce and I say that to each other to this day: "Somebody!"-- and, we had a guy that was a fire-eater. The circus left him. He came to town with the circus and the circus left him.

JW: Oh, you're serious a fire eater?

FH: Serious--a fire eater! He showed us how to do it and my mother said "Don't you do that!" We always had people, extra people around the table.

[Both laughing]

JW: She was afraid you might end up in the circus!

FH: Yeah, I know it!--run off with the circus! But see, this was part of her , and the doctor she worked with. I bet you they did more what they now call pro bono work than anybody in Duvall County.

JW: And this was in the 1930s?

FH: 30s and 40s, uh huh

JW: So late 30s and early 40s--so just after the Depression and just before World War II?

FH: World War II ended the Depression, 'cause see once World War II started everybody could find a job--'cause all the men were gone.

JW: Uh huh.

FH: So, everybody could find a job.

JW: Yeah. Do you ever think that growing up with that and sort of your--that was your early teenage years--right? At World War II?

FH: No, I was graduated from high school. The four years I was in college was the four years of World War II.

JW: Of World War II, okay. I just wondered how formative that was around, you know--

FH: Didn't even know the war was going on! [laughing]

JW: Really? So it wasn't part of your day to day awareness?

FH: Really! No, no it was not. I mean we would read the paper and the Germans are bombing London and [wiping forehead dramatically] "whew, whew...the Germans are bombing London...and what were we supposed to have for homework tomorrow?" You know? And I'm serious!

JW: So in Tallahassee, Florida it didn't impact your daily routine?

FH: On the FSCW campus we were insulated from that.

JW: Uh huh

FH: The thing that affected--where it affected us the most was in the dining room.

JW: Why was that?

FH: Because of the food, the food shortage.

JW: Oh, the rations. Oh, OK.

FH: Uh huh, and we had people literally--friends of mine paid their tuition with oranges because their families had orange groves.

JW: Oh really?

FH: Yes! And like somebody said once--Somebody's-- what was it we had so dadgone much? Oh, prune whip! Have you ever had prune whip?

JW: What is prune whip?

FH: It is terrible! It is awful! Somebody said: "Who paid their tuition in prune whip? We'll get them!"

JW: Is it literally prunes that are whipped?

FH: Yeah and it's a dessert-- and they usually got back more than they sent out to the dining room! You know, it was just awful! And we still kid about prune whip a lot. But --and everybody had food stamps and we had to bring our food stamps to college with us and turn them into the dining room.

JW: Oh! And that paid for your food--

FH: And that helped the dining room buy the food-- 'cause you had to have food stamps to do that.

JW: Wow.

FH: So that's where it affected us the most. I was--on a day to day basis World War II didn't affect me. Believe it or not, I think it affected me more *after* the war was over and I learned about things like the Holocaust that we didn't know about at the time, and I learned about the things, the horrible things that we were insulated from. I think it affected me more then, literally, than when it was going on.

JW: Wow. [pause]. What other--as you look back on 82 years --what other were the major events that you think impacted you--either that were going on societally or just within your own corner of the world--what were sort of the major impacts?

FH: Well, I think that probably the--the thing I took a great deal of pride on was being hired at Florida State at the age of 24.

JW: Uh huh

FH: --you know. Cause that didn't--that wasn't happening to a whole lot of people. 'Cause see, the men were coming back by then. And so, so that is a source of pride with me. I think when I-- I think camp--I used to tell people that I was--even the year that we durn--we about lost our shirts--

JW: Financially?

FH: Financially.

JW: Uh huh.

FH: And, I said I was not about to preside over the demise of Camp Illahee. You know, I was going to do *whatever* it took to *save* Camp Illahee. It wasn't gonna go under on my watch! And so it didn't--and so I'm kind of proud of that!

JW: Um hmm and what--? Was that because of the recession? The economic recession at the time?

FH: Yes, it was economics. You know, it was real funny. When the economy was good you could get the campers but you couldn't get the counselors because they could get better jobs.

JW: Right.

FH: When the economy was bad you couldn't get the campers but you could get the counselors because they couldn't find any other jobs.

JW: Oh huh. So you always had a mismatch

FH: It was always a mismatch! That's right.

JW: Hmmm.

FH: I'm proud of a lot of the students and counselors, and campers--and what they have become. A couple of bummers in there, too, you know--there were some dipsticks along the way! But I think I'm mostly proud of those people that I--I--I don't know how to put this because I wasn't *over* them, but I taught, or supervised, or, you know--

JW: Uh huh, uh huh. You know, I--it's, I guess, really appealing to me that you look back and you don't say, you know "I had to fight and claw"--"I was--"

FH: No, no--

JW:--or "I had to compete with a man for this --I had to compete with whatever--"

FH: No, no--

JW:--but I do remember a story you told me early on when I first knew you--

FH: Uh oh!

JW: No, I'm just curious -sort of -about putting a woman's life when you came along into a bigger context--because you told me something about applying for your first gas credit card.

FH: OH YES! [laughing]

JW: You remember that story?

FH: It was their problem.

JW: OK, so it was their problem, but tell--say what happened again.

FH: Two things, two things. I applied for a Standard Oil credit card and they would not give me one because I did not have a husband to sign for it.

JW: Ahh.

FH: And I have never to this day bought another drop of any Standard Oil.

JW: And you were working professionally already?

FH: I was working professionally. I had my own income, my own salary, my own everything. So--and then another thing happened. And, like I said, that was their problem. See, they--I bought a lot of gas and oil in 82 years!

JW: Right! But not from them.

FH: And they didn't get a penny of it! And then I bought a Ford station wagon one time, and it was getting about 8 miles to the gallon and I took it back and I said "We've got to do something about this." And he said [stern voice] "Lady! You don't know how to figure mileage! Get your husband to do it for you!"

JW: Oh!

FH: I have never owned a Ford and never will! I bought Camp Illahee and the next day there was a Ford truck sitting in Camp Illahee and it came with camp-- the day after I bought Camp Illahee I sold that Ford truck!

[Laughter]

JW: So, sweet revenge!

FH: Well, you know, I bought a lot of cars in my life--

JW: Uh huh--but you speak economically for when you've not been treated well.

FH: Yes, that's right.

JW: Well, I hadn't ever heard the Ford truck story. That was a good addition.

FH: [laughing] I know it!

[pause]

JW : I'm wondering, if you, when you look ahead--what are your accomplishments that are still ahead of you?

FH: [said playfully, touching the side of her face] To get well--

JW: Oh dear. To get well--

FH: Oh I don't know, that's a good-- interesting question, because see I haven't--I haven't--the only thing I think about right now is 'Lord, let me get over *this*.'

JW: So you're referring to--I'm just gonna say for the record you're referring to the post-herpetic neuralgia you had after shingles.

FH: Yes, after shingles.

JW: This last year--

FH: Because it was--it really--I lost an entire year and I don't think I'm through yet. But you know yesterday was the one year since I'd had it. Um, I think I still want to volunteer as long as I can, --you know, and if I can help anybody with anything or--you know-- I'll be--uh--[pause] I don't know if I'm gonna tell you this--no, I'm not gonna tell you this.

JW: OK, all right.

FH: No, because along the way--I am gonna tell you this but not mention any names or anything. The people who do my income taxes say that "you don't have a lot of deductions for your church and for this and for that" and I say I help private individuals. Period.

JW: Well, and as the recipient of that help I would just ask you in return: what prompts you to do that?

FH: I don't know. I've got it.

JW: But you see something in the individuals that you feel okay about investing in?

FH: Yes. And also I give it to some that I don't feel like if I think that they need it. And I have.

JW: Uh huh. You just feel like it's a cause that needs your--

FH: No, you know, they need it and if they need it and I've got it I'll share it. [laughing] My mother's watching!

JW: [laughing] Your mother's watching; you can't say too much! Your mother's watching--

FH: No, I'm teasing about that. I'm half teasing about that, let me put it--, and you know it always gets a good laugh.

JW: Right. Are there specific goals around--you know, I just keep coming back to the--ok, you're laughing so you can say if you want to say first--

FH: No, go ahead--

JW: No, I just am struck with, you know, the reason that I'm sitting here today is because you have let me, you know--develop some leadership skills, and--

FH: I hope so--

JW: --and people that I know as my contemporaries--

FH: See, you had the potential there to begin with. That's another thing I think you should take-- is that I seem to be drawn to people that already have the potential, I think.

JW: But you draw it out of them.

FH: I try to draw it out of them, yeah. But there are some people I try to draw it out of and it just wasn't there. But I think, I think I can see in people, potential. I really do! And, but of course I'm not in a position to do that now like I was at camp and like I was at Florida State. You know, when you're retired, you just don't have those opportunities-- which is all right. You know, somebody's doing it. Somebody's out there doing it! I hope you're doing it. If you aren't, you will be, because your time will come when you'll think it's time to give back. But you already do.

JW: You had made a comment earlier about-- you know, when I asked you if you ever felt at a disadvantage in a meeting and you said no, because you always went in thinking "my brain's the same as your brain--"

FH: Yeah! And it's as good as yours!

JW:--and that's what I think you've imparted to young women that I've seen you interact with.

FH: Oh good! [laughing] I'm glad you noticed that!

JW: Well, and I'm thinking about even other things that you have taught me and other people that I know about-- woodworking, about building, about-- you know, various things about keeping a home, and things like that, and, you know, those are your hobbies, but they're also--when you see them in other people, you--keep them going.

FH: Uh huh. I had an email the other day from a former counselor whose name I will not mention because you will know--and she said in there--and I don't know why all of a sudden we were, we were--starting to practice flattery with each other--but she said "you were the first example of a woman I ever saw that made me feel like, that a woman could *do* something." And she said, "when I saw you operate" she thought: "I can operate like that!", and she's operating like that right now.

JW: Uh, huh. Uh huh.

FH: And she said "it never occurred to me that--" She always thought that a woman was just supposed to be subservient or whatever the word is I want. And she said the same thing.



JW: That's quite a legacy.

FH: I guess. [laughing]

You know, wherever you take it, the ball's in your court now!

JW: That's right. So Frankie, is there anything else you would like to say? Anything we haven't talked about that you would like to add?

FH: No, you know I feel like-- I'm not sure what you were after, but I feel like that I have not put this in the broader context. I feel like it's always, it's been limited to Florida State and Camp Illahee and, you know, it's so narrow. But I guess oral history *is* narrow, but it-- but I feel like I should have put it in a broader context--Except, I don't think I operated in a broader context.

JW: Well, you know the other thing I think about oral histories is that they are--they create a broader context by the collection of meaning of them. And that your piece of it is *your* history that you can bring to the collective. I don't know if that's--

FH: Because, you know I don't--I kept thinking "well now, how have I helped women advance?" And then as we've talked here, I guess, on an individual basis I've helped some women advance and then you put it collectively, you know, then it puts it in a little bit broader context, but I'm like A.J. Bassett said, she said "I was given a responsibility and I just got up every day and went to work and did what was expected of me and tried to give a little bit more and then went home and tried to get rested before the next day."

JW: To give a little bit more.

FH: To give it again, to give one more time. And she's one of those that gives and gives and gives.

JW: I have never heard you talk about, or call yourself a feminist or talk about the women's liberation movement, and how did that differ from the fact that you, you know, really promoted women's leadership development and growth?

FH: My feeling was that if you do a good job, if you are honest and if you are fair, if you have all of those, you know, Ten Commandment qualities. If you *do* all of those things, that you will, you know: "a rising tide lifts all boats"!

JW: Hmm.

FH: And that if you do those things, then you don't have to burn your bra, you don't have to walk with a sign. You can do it by taking this group of women and making *them* better.

JW: Uh huh, uh huh

FH: I never have been-- like I said, you know, I was the only one that went to work when the teachers struck.

JW: Uh huh

FH: Because it was a commitment!

JW: Uh huh.

FH: You know--you've got to show up.

JW: Because each one of those women will pass it on.

FH: Oh yeah, and they have. This one was a good-- this one picture that I showed you--good example--and there--there are a lot of them. I've got 250 people on my mailing list, and a bunch of them are former students and campers and counselors and, you know, colleagues and stuff like that--who worked--and mostly I worked with women because I was in that kind of environment. Now, in the graduate program at Florida State, I worked with some of the greatest guys in the world. These were men graduate students who have done extremely well, a bunch of them. And I loved them and I tried to, you know, I tried to lift them up too, because they were great guys. Great guys. But mostly through my career because of the profession I've been in, I worked with mostly women because that was my job-- and anyhow, they're more fun [laughing]. They're less demanding.

JW: So, anything else you would like to say? Before--

FH: Well, let's see here--

JW: This is, we've lasted an hour and 52 minutes.

FH: Oh, I cannot believe that! How long does that go?

JW: Well, it's still going, that's all I know.

FH: Oh, OK.

JW: I anticipated an hour and a half and we're past that.

FH: Let me ask you this. Have you interviewed others?

JW: No, not yet. Other than in the project I was doing for Folklore. I haven't interviewed other people for this project.

FH: Because I was wondering what kind of a, a response that you got, whether or not you got a--see, I feel that my response has been like this [puts her thumb and index fingers about an inch apart] instead of like this [spreads her arms wide]-- but you take what you can get!

JW: Well, you know and I have to say personally that I'm glad to have that response about you because I'm just glad we sat down to do this.

FH: Yeah, you probably didn't know a whole lot of that.

JW: Yeah, some of it I didn't know.

FH: And when you asked me awhile ago something I was proud-- I am proud of being a part of Camp Illahee, that has the history that it has, that has lasted as long as it has with a simple basic philosophy that it has had, you know, and it has endured--it has--

JW: It's what? Eighty-five years?

FH: Well, it started in 1921. You do the math. I don't do math.

JW: Yeah, eighty-six this year, I guess.

FH: Yeah, that's right 'cause we had the 85<sup>th</sup> thing last year-- isn't that what we went to? And I'm proud to be a part of that history, although interestingly enough right after my tenure I didn't feel too good about it because I thought, well, I blew that one, because I was so ignored but then, that was not my problem, that was their problem.

JW: Right, you gave that problem back.

FH: That was not my fault; that was their fault.

JW: Right, right. That might have been the intimidation about your leadership.

FH: That's, that-- you know I can rationalize it any way I want to but there was a big letdown after I sold camp. I frankly was very relieved to be free of the burden. I didn't feel that way when I left Florida State because I didn't feel like it was a burden. It was just plain old fun to go to work every day. I don't know. You know, it's interesting, and sometimes you look back and say "Well, what would you or could you have done differently?" But you know, and you're gonna get this every time: I wouldn't have done anything differently, really. I don't think I would have, because, you know, I really did-- have lived a cream puff life when you stop and think about it. I've had good friends all my life-- you know, I can't complain about anything-- except [touches her face]

JW: Except that health problem.

FH: Well, see my health was GREAT, literally great, and I'm serious. Heather [her doctor] said she thought she was gonna get me to at least ninety, and-- well, can you turn that thing off?

END OF INTERVIEW