

Interviewee: Sliger, Greta
Interviewer: Robin Sellers
Date of interview: October 14, 2004
Category: FSU / President's house
Status: Open
Tape location: Box #49

Sellers: Dr. Sliger was called to be interim president in 1977? Is that correct?

Sliger: He became president in 1977.

Sellers: What were the circumstances of the year of being interim president? What was his position before that?

Sliger: He was a vice president. He came from LSU, from Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University, and he came over here as vice president when Dr. Marshall was president. He came over in 1972.

Sellers: So you had been here for several years, and he had been in an administrative capacity?

Sliger: Yes, at LSU also.

Sellers: When the Marshalls were living in the house, did you visit the house or attend functions there?

Sliger: Yes. Stan and Shirley lived in the house for a whole year when my husband was president, but they were waiting for their house to be built – which was all right with us, because we liked our house on Lakeshore. In fact, we wanted to stay on Lakeshore, but the Board of Regents said we had to move into the president's house – which was great, anyway.

Sellers: So you were not real excited about having to pack up and move to the president's house?

Sliger: Well, we had been in the president's house a few times, but we really liked our house on Lakeshore. We'd only been in there ... we moved there in 1972, so we had only been in there for four years, four or five years. But it was all right, moving in there. We had two children at home. Sten was in the fifth grade when we moved here, so he must have been in probably about the tenth grade. Then my daughter was at Florida State University.

Sellers: Did your son attend a school other than Florida High? The university school?

Sliger: He went to Maclay. He graduated from Maclay, but Greta Lee stayed at Florida High.

Sellers: That was certainly convenient for her.

Sliger: Yes, it was. I'm trying to think now exactly how long she lived here. She went to Florida State for a couple of years and then she went to Virginia and graduated at the University of Virginia. I'll have to check the dates.

Sellers: What did your children think of moving, first of all – moving out of the home that they were in and into a president's home on a campus where perhaps their behavior would be a bit more scrutinized?

Sliger: Well, our son really enjoyed it, enjoyed it more than maybe Greta Lee did. But she adjusted well. They both adjusted well; we didn't have any problems.

Sellers: Were they able to have their friends over just as they had in the Lakeshore house?

Sliger: Oh, yes, they were.

Sellers: Were there any special perks they felt they might have had because ...?

Sliger: Well, no, they didn't take advantage of that. In fact, one time when Greta Lee was attending class over there, somebody asked her if she was related President Sliger, and she said, "Yes, he's my cousin." She never admitted that he was her father. But they never took advantage of that at all.

Sellers: When you lived in the president's house, it was 1977? And Dr. Sliger had been president for a year, when the Marshalls were still in the house. In that interim period when the Marshalls were in the house, did you have any interaction with them about what you were moving into, or was there any opportunity to have them move some of their things out and you could move some of your things in?

Sliger: No, we were content just to wait until they moved out.

Sellers: How did the physical move take place? Did you sell your house?

Sliger: No, we kept our house, and we're back in it now.

Sellers: Did you pack up all your furnishings?

Sliger: Well, we left just a few things in there because we rented it. But eventually we took all the furniture out. People moved their own furniture in when they rented it.

Sellers: How did your furnishings and your particular style fit with or blend into what was in the president's house?

Sliger: Well, the president's house was more formal. We left the living room as it was with the furniture in there, although we did re-cover a lot of it. They had a big sunroom on the back. Do you remember the big sunroom on the back of the house?

Sellers: As a matter of fact, the Champions built that.

Sliger: Oh, did they build that? So we had put a lot of our furniture in there.

Sellers: What did you think of the style of the president's house? The furnishings.

Sliger: Well, it's really not my style, that real formal.

Sellers: Did it make you uncomfortable?

Sliger: No.

Sellers: Did you live mostly in the areas that had been filled with your furniture?

Sliger: No, we lived in the whole house, just like it was our home. We used the whole house.

Sellers: You mentioned when you came in [for the interview] that coming through the house, it was so different that it made you a bit sad.

Sliger: Yes, it really did.

Sellers: Describe what you remember of it when you were here.

Sliger: Well, when we came in the front door, you had the living room to the right and you had a big, beautiful piano there (which I couldn't play). Of course, you had carpeting and you had quite a few paintings on the wall. Of course, it's not filled with furniture right now, like Linda [Henning] said. And then the dining room had the big long table with all the chairs. Mary Jo Weale recovered all the seats on the chairs. And then there was a kitchen – we remodeled the kitchen, which was a very nice kitchen. Then there was the sunroom on the other end of the house, and we used that a lot. But it's so different now, it just doesn't look like Like I say, it's nice, but it's not a home any more. Because you come in, you just have what was the living room and what was the dining room, although it's smaller, and that's it.

Sellers: What about upstairs? What was the layout?

Sliger: There were three bedrooms upstairs and two bathrooms.

Sellers: Was there any provision made for guests who might visit the university and stay overnight?

Sliger: Not really, but we did have one bedroom downstairs with a bathroom that if we had guests, we put them down there. It was kind of private down there.

Sellers: What was the color scheme?

Sliger: Garnet and gold.

Sellers: Of course! Was it difficult to live in garnet and gold?

Sliger: No, not really. When we moved in, everything was kind of grey-green, and it wasn't too lively. But I think the carpeting ... we put new carpeting down – that was gold. Then the drapes were gold, too. Mary Jo Weale helped us out on that. She was really a big help.

Sellers: Who is Mary Jo Weale?

Sliger: Professor Mary Jo Weale. She was married to Bruce Weale. He was a professor. Don't you remember those names?

Sellers: No, I don't.

Sliger: Mary Jo is a good artist. We have quite a few paintings of hers. [conversation about Mary Jo Weale not transcribed]

Sellers: You said you remodeled the kitchen – did you do your own cooking or did you have help?

Sliger: No, the only time we had a cook was if we had dinner guests. But I did all my own cooking – breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Then Esther would come over if we had a lot of guests for dinner.

Sellers: What about housekeeping?

Sliger: Well, we had Pearl Yant (she's deceased now). She kept care of the house. She kept care of the house, too, for the Marshalls. She was really a sweet woman.

Sellers: She was on the university payroll, not your personal ...?

Sliger: Yes.

Sellers: Were most of your housing expenses assumed by the university?

Sliger: We paid rent for about eight years, living in this house.

Sellers: I wasn't aware of that.

Sliger: Yes, for about eight years, I think it was. It wasn't all that much, but we did pay rent. And then, of course, the money that we paid for rent did not go back to the university, it went to the state rather than to the university.

Sellers: But the house belonged to the university?

Sliger: Yes.

Sellers: What kind of events did you entertain for there?

Sliger: One was the ice cream social. Bernie started that. He started that maybe about 1980, and that was always a big event.

Sellers: What made him start that? Did you have any input in it?

Sliger: No, he just decided it would be a good idea. We used to have, oh gosh, loads of students. Then sometimes part of the Circus would come over and perform. Then Esther made all the cookies. But I think the students really enjoyed it, and they could really eat the ice cream.

Sellers: Did you ever have any events ... Mary Champion mentioned that towards the end of John's tenure that there had been some uncomfortable times with students. But you were a number of years removed from that. Were there any uncomfortable events that you recall?

Sliger: No, nothing at all.

Sellers: Obviously you entertained dignitaries who would come for various things. When we were going with the ACC or particular sports events, did you entertain for that? I'm trying to get a feel for how the university ...

Sliger: No, we didn't entertain for sports events.

Sellers: So you weren't really an entertaining facility, you were actually a home. Did you feel like it was a home?

Sliger: Yes, I felt like it was a home. But we entertained different guests. One time we had Sir Harold Wilson here, the Prime Minister. And what was so interesting about that ... in fact, he was coming for breakfast in the morning, but we didn't know it until about ten o'clock

that night. So my daughter and I went grocery shopping at Albertson's about twelve o'clock. But I don't think I cooked; I think Esther came over and cooked.

Sellers: What did you serve the Prime Minister?

Sliger: Must have been scrambled eggs and bacon [laughs]. But the interesting part about that was my daughter had met this British sailor who was stationed in Jacksonville, so she had invited him over for the weekend, not knowing that the Prime Minister was going to be here. So there was this British sailor and the Prime Minister. I said the sailor must have been impressed. Think of what he must have told his shipmates when he went back to his ship. But it was nice, and he was very, very nice. He sat there and he smoked a pipe and talked to us. It was really nice.

Then we had Lillian Carter here one time.

Sellers: What was the occasion for that?

Sliger: I'm trying to think why she was here – if she got a degree or honorary doctorate Then Patty Andrews, you know, one of the Andrews Sisters. And then Bob Urich, and Raul Julia – he's an actor – he died. And Burt Reynolds.

Sellers: So you were social but not propaganda social. What was it like when you weren't entertaining, when Dr. Sliger wasn't "the president," when he was just "Bernie that you married?"

Sliger: Well, we had a vegetable garden for a few years, out where ... the swimming pool is not here any more, is it? No. But we had a vegetable garden, and he really liked working that. The gardener that was here at the time really enjoyed it, too. Then we had the rose garden, which is not here any more, and Bernie used to pick roses in the morning. He'd walk to work, and on the way he'd be handing them out to the students. If he had any left, he'd take them to the office. He enjoyed that.

Sellers: This was past the years when the university had its own flower garden?

Sliger: Yes, we never had any flowers from the flower garden.

Sellers: What kind of maintenance problems did you have? From talking to Patsy Palmer, there were a lot of leaks and roof problems and things like that. Tell me about coping with some of those.

Sliger: I think Patsy may have had more problems than we did. I don't think we ever had any leaks. I mean, we always had maintenance people over here, building services over here, doing something. But we really didn't I think one time when there was a hurricane, it blew in the bottom part of the house. I remember the rats coming in. They would be down in the

basement, and I was scared to death to go down in the basement.

Sellers: So there was a basement?

Sliger: Yes, basement. And there was a garage, too, and we converted that to a family room. But they've taken the whole basement out, I think. I don't think there's anything down there any more. There had been a basement on one side and then the garage that we converted to a family room; we had a big TV down there and some couches and chairs.

Sellers: The air conditioning worked when it needed to?

Sliger: Air conditioning worked pretty well, yes.

Sellers: The heat worked?

Sliger: Yes, the heat worked, too. And the fire alarm really worked! It would go off in the middle of the night.

Sellers: For any particular reason?

Sliger: No, no particular reason. It would just go off, and I would have to run all the way from upstairs down to the basement and try to turn it off, and by that time the firemen would be there and it would be up the stairs and up in the attic checking ... they'd have to go up there first, and Bernie would sleep through it all. That loud fire alarm. They finally got that figured out. But we never had any problems with the heat or the air conditioning. We were pretty comfortable in that house.

Sellers: What about security? Was there a special security detail for the house?

Sliger: No special security, but I think that campus police would drive through every night.

Sellers: How about transportation for you? Did you drive your own car?

Sliger: Yes, I just drove myself. And Bernie used to walk almost all the time to his office at Westcott.

Sellers: How did you feel about the house being passed on and the new idea that the president gets a stipend but he lives ...

Sliger: We wish we could have had that. It would have worked for us.

Sellers: So the sentimentality of the president not living in "his house" any more didn't

bother you?

Sliger: No, that didn't bother me.

Sellers: What kind of provisions were made for the changeover when the Marshalls left and you came in? Did it happen in a day or did the university move you or ...?

Sliger: The university moved us, yes. And I told them where to put the furniture.

Sellers: How about when you moved back?

Sliger: The university moved us back, except I packed up a lot of my own things, like my china and paintings and all that and moved it.

Sellers: What proportion of the things that you were living with were yours and what belonged to the university? Can you guess?

Sliger: Apparently we must have had quite a bit here, because when we moved back we filled our house up again.

Sellers: So this was provided but there was nothing that said you had to live in a museum.

Sliger: No. We just figured that like our house on Lakeshore, it was our house. Our children were living there. And we had two cats. Cats came here. At one time, it was funny, the Music Guild was having their program here in the living room. They had chairs set up all over the living room. Must have been about seventy people here. This lady was singing an aria from something, and Pretty, the cat, came down the stairs meowing the whole time, and came right into the living room. I guess she liked the music or something; singing along. We liked our cats. We have a cat now at home, too.

Sellers: What about your children – how long did they live here?

Sliger: Well, Sten lived here even when he went to Florida State. And then I told you Greta Lee graduated from Virginia, and she came back here and went to graduate school here. So she lived with us here.

Sellers: Were there ever any problems that they made you aware of, of them being teased or anything about living in the president's house?

Sliger: No. I think our son kind of enjoyed it, really.

Sellers: What did they think about it. You said they enjoyed it, but did they feel any constraints, were you or your husband or were they expected to behave a little bit above the

normal, or could they be normal kids?

Sliger: Well, no, I think they could be normal kids. But of course, we had to tell them a few things, too. But they were normal.

Sellers: It didn't bother them that they were being held to a particular standard because they lived in the president's house and were the president's family?

Sliger: No. They had their friends over. It was just like we would be living on Lakeshore. We didn't change our style of living at all.

Sellers: You were in here for about fifteen years ... how do you think things changed ...

Sliger: Fifteen years – I think the longest that any president had been in here.

Sellers: Did anything change in the house? You said you remodeled the kitchen ...

Sliger: Yes, remodeled the kitchen. There was another wing that was a sunroom, on the other side of the house. There were two rooms – it was a study and a small room, and we took out the partition and made one big room. We used to sit in there and watch television a lot.

Sellers: You were comfortable here.

Sliger: Yes, we were comfortable here.

Sellers: Were you glad to leave, or were you sorry to leave?

Sliger: Well, it was time to leave. I mean, we were glad to get back to our own house. In fact, when our daughter was married, we were still living in the house, so we had the reception out in the yard. So that was real nice.

Sellers: Can you think of any particular things that happened ... you've got a list. Tell me what's on it.

Sliger: I probably told you about everything that was on it. What we enjoyed most about living here were the grounds. Bernie loved the trees. In fact, I was telling the girl at the reception desk, Bernie had planted a water birch tree in front of the house. You know, up north you have the white birch. So he and Jim Melton planted this water birch, and I see they've taken that out. So he won't be very happy about that. It was a beautiful tree and it had grown so big. I don't know why they took it out, really. As you would come in the front door of the house, it was right on the side. I see where there's a little dip there ... that must be where they pulled it out. It may have been too close with remodeling. But it's really different now.

[some general conversation not transcribed]

Sellers: Your children were old enough that they had their own cars while they were living here, and they kind of grew into, through, and out of living here.

Sliger: Right. And our little grandson used to stay with us once in a while. He was just three, but he loved the gardener. He loved Jim. He'd follow Jim all over and he'd eat lunch with him. He went to Florida High, too, and he always wanted to be old enough so he could walk back here. But we moved out before he was old enough to walk back. He's twenty-two now.

Sellers: You left in ...?

Sliger: We left in '91. Then Bernie came back as interim president, but we were living in our old house then.

Sellers: So you had the most years of anybody.

Sliger: We were really used to the house. I never worried about the kids. Of course, like you say, they were older.

Sellers: Did you have a sense of obligation to the house, like you were a caretaker?

Sliger: Well, yes, in a way. We always kept it pretty nice. I guess so.

Sellers: Did you have any complaints about it that you didn't voice?

Sliger: I may have, but I probably didn't voice them.

Sellers: Would you like to voice them now?

Sliger: No. They took pretty good care of us. Maintenance would come over any time you needed them, if you were having any problems. They were always good.

Sellers: I know that Kellum Hall is right across Tennessee, and when I was here in college in the '60s, my future husband lived in Kellum Hall on the tenth floor. One of their favorite afternoon pastimes was bouncing golf balls onto Tennessee Street to see how far into the lawn of the president's house they could come. Did you ever have anything like that happen?

Sliger: No, we never had anything like that. We had, you know, a few homeless people sleeping in the yard now and then. But they never bothered us. They'd sleep down at the end of the driveway. But I don't think we ever had anything Oh, one time we had a phone call – must have been a student playing a prank – said that there was a bomb set to go off in about fifteen minutes. But I just ignored it. But I went and sat in the hall just in case I had to run out! But ordinarily the students ... well, they liked Bernie, and Bernie liked the students. But we never really had any problems. Of course, Bernie was here when that Bundy incident happened,

which was very bad.

Sellers: Did that spill over into the life in the house?

Sliger: Well, of course we always made sure the doors were locked anyway, and we did have a burglar alarm. But I remember that night, Greta Lee was sleeping in the downstairs bedroom. Of course, after that, when they called Bernie ... it must have been about midnight ... of course, I went right downstairs to look to see if she was okay. So it was kind of scary for a while before they caught him. But I always kept the doors locked in the daytime, too.

[casual conversation not transcribed]

Sellers: Anything else you want to put on the tape right now?

Sliger: I guess not, unless you've got anything else to ask me.

[tape turned off and back on]

Sellers: ... graduation receptions ...

Sliger: And we'd have refreshments for them. Of course, Bernie and I would have to stand and shake hands, and Bernie's hand would be so sore. But it was nice to have the reception there at the house, and I think the parents liked that, to see the house.

Sellers: You'd have several thousand people.

Sliger: Oh, yes, we would.

Sellers: Did they come through the house?

Sliger: They came through the house; they'd come in the front door, yes. I think they enjoyed coming over here. They wanted to see the house.

Sellers: The ice cream social and the graduation receptions ... were there any other outreach occasions to parents or alumni that were held on a regular basis.

Sliger: Let me think. I supposed parents weekend they would probably be over here. And we'd have some athletic events. I can remember a couple events when all the football players would be over here.

Sellers: I think you were very brave.

Sliger: We enjoyed it while we were here, and now we're glad We're very down to earth, Bernie and I are. We can go along with what we have to do.

End interview