

Elevator Diaries Tell UT's Stories Through Film

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If walls could talk, Plant Hall would have plenty to say. Instead, its elevator is spilling the beans.

The first elevator in Florida recently served as a sort of confessional for the Elevator Diaries, which captured on film the stories of alumni, faculty and staff of The University of Tampa. Interview subjects recounted their favorite memories in front of a video camera during the closing party for the University's 75th anniversary.

Barbara Pennington and Susan Crawley, consultants for the University's Office of Development and University Relations, came up with the concept when brainstorming ideas for celebrating UT's 75th. The women asked Dana Plays, associate professor of communication, to put together an oral history project.

They needed a quiet space to work, and someone suggested the elevator.

"Everyone felt safe and contained in there," Plays said. "I was pleasantly surprised by how freely the stories flowed."

The interview subjects talked for 10 minutes each about how UT has changed through the years. The football team came up often, as did the transition to a two-college model.

Dana Professor of Economics, Dr. Michael Truscott, recalled working in the Division of Economics and Business in the '70s, before it became the Sykes College of Business. Then there were only 12 faculty members, he said, three of whom had a Ph.D. Each professor taught five classes at a time.

"The class sizes were very large, and teaching loads were heavy, but we had a good esprit de corps," Truscott said. "It was a collegial atmosphere."

Over the years, the quality of the faculty upgraded dramatically, he said, and today there are more than 50 faculty members in COB, most with Ph.D.s.

Truscott also remembered how the minarets were painted gold to celebrate the 50th anniversary.

"It wasn't a very good paint job, and it started peeling six months into it," he said. "It started looking pretty dastardly. Finally, they took the gold paint off and repainted them silver."

Joan Jones '59 has fond memories of living in Plant Hall as a student. Now, she

volunteers in the H.B. Plant Museum and is a member of the Chiselers, the Friends of Plant Park and the Minaret Society. She said she can still find her old room by counting doors on the third floor.

Now a professor's office, her room had a fireplace, walk-in closets, a lavatory and a sink, plus antique wicker furniture original to the hotel.

"I have really good memories, and it's so nice to see that the building is so well kept," she said. "I dearly love the whole building and the people there and the people in the museum."

While talking in front of a video camera can be intimidating to some, Plays said it also catches things that cannot be communicated through the written word or portraiture.

"Video is such a perfect medium for capturing these stories," said Plays, whose previous work includes historical biographies, including a film *Love Stories My Grandmother Tells*, and a work in progress, *The Story of Otilie Moore*. "You can hear and see the person and find out some of the things you couldn't otherwise."

Plays said she hopes to expand the project into a more traditional documentary. Her students, Justin Poirier and Lamar Edwards, helped with the editing of the film. It will be distributed to participants after editing, and placed on reserve in the Macdonald-Kelce Library on campus.

Featured in the film are President Ronald L. Vaughn, former President Dick Cheshire and his wife Bobbie, football star and former NFL player Freddie Solomon, Gov. Bob Martinez '57 and Ernest Segundo '56.

"It's not like it has to have an ending place," Plays said. "We could make volumes. We could play it at the 100th anniversary."