



8-7-2015

Interview with Martha Cranford

Martha Cranford
SC Mother of the Year Committee

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.winthrop.edu/scmotheroftheyear>



Part of the [Oral History Commons](#), [United States History Commons](#), and the [Women's History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Cranford, Martha, "Interview with Martha Cranford" (2015). *South Carolina Mother of the Year Oral History Archives*. 31.

<https://digitalcommons.winthrop.edu/scmotheroftheyear/31>

This Sound is brought to you for free and open access by the South Carolina Mothers Collection at Digital Commons @ Winthrop University. It has been accepted for inclusion in South Carolina Mother of the Year Oral History Archives by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Winthrop University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@mailbox.winthrop.edu.

Winthrop University
South Carolina Mother of the Year Award Oral History Archives
Interview Transcript
Martha Cranford

Dr. Disney: Good afternoon.

Martha Cranford: Good afternoon.

Dr. Disney: My name is Dr. Jennifer Leigh Disney and I am honored to be here interviewing Martha Cranford for the South Carolina Mother of the Year Award oral history archives at Winthrop University. Thank you, Martha, for inviting us into your beautiful home today.

Martha Cranford: Thank you for coming.

Dr. Disney: I'm going to start by asking you when and where you were born and raised.

Martha Cranford: I was born in New Albany, Mississippi, which is north Mississippi between Memphis and Tupelo.

Dr. Disney: Tell us about your family, your early childhood experience.

Martha Cranford: I had a, I guess, typical, very tradition, very happy childhood. My dad worked and my mother was a community volunteer; played golf, cooked, and did all of those things, plus raised five children – four daughters and a son. I was the second daughter. Even though we were in a very rural part of the state, and at that time poor part of the state, they believed in good food and exposing us to things. We always had books all around and we traveled. So I was real blessed to have the benefits of a small town but was also be able to see the world. In fact, my mother said maybe one of the biggest mistakes – she said with a grin – was that she taught all of her children that there was a world outside of New Albany, Mississippi because we all left and are happily established and away from that little town.

Dr. Disney: And you're one of five?

Martha Crawford: One of five.

Dr. Disney: What was it like growing up in such a large family?

Martha Cranford: Wonderful. It was wonderful. We all went to church together – sat on the same seat. We spent a lot of time in a little lake cabin. We had a lot of – meal time was a big thing for her. So we always had baked goods and large meals and lots of time talking around the table. It really was – it was pretty much an ideal childhood, I suppose.

Dr. Disney: Tell us about your education and young adult life and when you think back to that time as you talk it through with us, share with us what were your dreams, goals, and aspirations.

Martha Cranford: It was always just expected that I would do really well – all of us. So I never had a lot of rules, or didn't have a curfew, I didn't have rules about studying. The five of us – my

brother and sisters – were pretty much on our own. Somehow our parents made us all want to do well or we had that inborn. We went to a small school – there was one hundred in my graduating class. But we all did well and went on to Ole Miss. I became a CPA – graduated from Ole Miss and went to work for what was then a big aide accounting firm, Peat Marwick. Interesting, my brother and two of my other sisters were also accountants or in financial jobs.

Dr. Disney: When you were working as an accountant had you achieved your dreams, goals, and aspirations in that moment or were there other dreams and goals you had for yourself at that time in your life?

Martha Cranford: I loved being an accountant, partly because it was a big firm downtown, lots of interesting people in it. At that time, women were just making their way into that part of the world and that was a really interesting place to be then. Honestly, my dream and goal was to always be a mom and have children. I guess accounting was a good secondary thing or a good back up if that hadn't happened.

Dr. Disney: So tell us about how you met your husband.

Martha Cranford: Bill was in Jackson. My accounting firm was in Jackson; I worked downtown. Bill was in seminary at the time. He is not a minister, but he thought he might like to be. We had a big flood in Jackson and he guarded the art museum and was downtown and saw me going into work. He said, "That girl looks familiar," and as it turns out, I had taken a seminary class and he was the coffee maker and we saw each other there too. So that was double things in the city of Jackson and I figured it was meant to be – that we saw each other twice and had an immediate connection and went on from there.

Dr. Disney: That's wonderful. How did you know he was the one?

Martha Cranford: I just did. I really did. I had not dated a whole lot and I had not met a guy who I thought I would marry. When I met him – well, I was a pretty practical person. All of our view of – our spiritual life, what we wanted in life, our family background so much lined up. But I also thought he was real cute and was crazy about him.

Dr. Disney: Tell us about the early years of your marriage and the birth of your children.

Martha Cranford: We married in 1981, moved to Charleston, South Carolina, and he was starting his third year of dental school. So we married, went to the mountains on our honeymoon, and then went straight to Charleston, and I got a job with the regional accounting firm. We lived in a wonderful old house in Charleston and just had a great time. I got to meet his friends; it was a real relaxed and laidback time. We married in August and Laura Ann/Lauren was born February, a year later – I mean October a year later; we found out in February that we would be having her. I worked there overtime really hard right after she was born. Two years passed and we moved to Greenville where he worked with the dentist; and six months later we moved to Rock Hill, where he and I, together, opened up his dental practice.

Dr. Disney: How many children have you had altogether?

Martha Cranford: I have four.

Dr. Disney: Why don't you take a minute and tell us about your children?

Martha Cranford: First I had three girls and I loved raising them. I really did. It was a great experience. Every part of raising children, I loved. Probably now is my favorite time – they're adults and I'm an empty nester so that's pretty good, too. Laura Ann/Lauren lives in Florence. She's a teacher and she has my only grandson, John, who is one year old. Elizabeth is a dentist. She went to Vanderbilt and into Charleston and did a residency in Florida and now practices with her dad. She got married this summer; she is thirty. Margaret is in medical equipment sales and she married David Kuhn this summer, in August, and they are happily settled in Charlotte. And my son is in the middle of his first year of dental school. So he's in Charleston, also loves living there and is having a great time – hopefully studying

Dr. Disney: So you've had a busy summer, the summer of 2015 – two weddings, son off to dental school. What does motherhood mean to you?

Martha Cranford: Oh that's a big question. Well I really do think mother is – I've said many times that mother is, to me, the most beautiful word in the English language. It's one of the one's most filled with emotion. It's just the greatest opportunity in the world – to raise children and to know the love you have for a child and to be loved like your children, at times, love you. It's probably been my greatest – one of my greatest joys is being a mother.

Dr. Disney: You've shared with us some of the activities you've been involved in – you've worked outside the home, you've worked really hard as an accountant, you helped your husband open up his dental firm here in Rock Hill, and yet you also shared that your number one goal or aspiration was to be a mother. Talk to us a little bit about all the activities you were involved in while you were a mother and how you were able to balance that number one goal and priority in life of being a mother with all the other activities – working outside the home, community volunteerism, and etcetera.

Martha Cranford: When we moved to Rock Hill, I actually hung a shingle and wanted to grow my own accounting practice. As time went on, I got more involved in the dental office and with my children and community work and decided that having one business growing was enough. So I pretty much dedicated myself to the dental office. I went from doing all the books and the 401k and the insurance and then got involved in social media and the marketing. It's been really challenging to keep growing and learning. I've really enjoyed that. I did anything my children did when they were little. I did the PTO; we went to sports events; I served as treasurer of a good many organizations. It was really good because we got to know people in town. Now we just know so many people and we love knowing our kids' friends and the parents of their friends, which makes Rock Hill such a great place to live. It's small enough that you can really get out into the community and do that. It was a lot to balance. I was blessed to have help with my children that came into my home. But it was very, very busy and a lot to balance, but a lot of fun – wouldn't do it any differently.

Dr. Disney: Well, I just want to say, as someone who as a professor at Winthrop University, Martha reached out to me to first get involved in the project. So it's clear to me that you've always been someone whose commitment to your community and to Winthrop University, within your community of Rock Hill, South Carolina, has always been important to you. And

you have found a way to do that work so well and also maintain that number one commitment and priority to your children.

Martha Cranford: I love this community. I might always say that I'm not from here, but I feel like I am. I have loved raising my children here and I feel like so many people here have been good to us – people in our church, in the neighborhoods we've lived in, Bill's patients, my friends – and I really would aim to a point where I'd like to give back even more. I have enjoyed giving back. We have great schools, great parks. It's great having Winthrop there, with all it offers and those beautiful old buildings and a beautiful campus. It just really is a great place to be.

Dr. Disney: So speaking of one of the many activities you've been involved in in your life, how did you become a member of the South Carolina Mother of the Year selection committee?

Martha Cranford: Well, Shirley Fishburne is a longtime friend – she's one of those people that we met through our girls. We raised two daughters, they were the same age, and we used to – well her husband was also a dentist in town and they really reached out to us and were very supportive when we moved to town. We have just a long relationship with them. She called me one day and said she needed a treasurer and I really couldn't turn Shirley down. So that's how I got involved with the South Carolina Mother of the Year organization.

Dr. Disney: You began as their treasurer; did you fulfil any other office positions in your time?

Martha Cranford: No, I really came on and said I would just be treasurer. That's all I really committed to do.

Dr. Disney: How many years were you involved?

Martha Cranford: Probably eight to ten. I'm one of the newer members.

Dr. Disney: I know you as such a strong leader of the organization. I met you and Shirley through really the leadership of the culminating experience of the Mother of the Year Association, producing the book, which is next to you, that is – I think it was really your brainchild. Tell us how this book came about.

Martha Cranford: Well, the Mother of the Year organization started in 1942 and every year we picked – the selection committee picked – a woman who was honored as Mother of the Year, which, at the time, was sort of a big thing. She had the front page, the whole front page, of the state newspaper plus follow up articles. I really think it was a way to recognize women when they weren't being recognized in other places. As time went on, there were changes in the national organization and changes in what women did and how we honored women. We had an investment account and made the decision that we would like to do something lasting and significant with our funds. The whole nomination process changed, which made our committee not as necessary, so we decided to use the funds and research all of these women and put it together into a book telling about the organization and a short bit about each woman. It was very interesting and very rewarding. We are very happy we did that and have a lasting document of who these women were.

Dr. Disney: It's an amazing book and it was an amazing experience to work with you on that book and it's such a great way to recognize, as you said, the seventy years of remarkable women who served as Mothers of the Year of South Carolina, and people like you who served on the selection committee.

Martha Cranford: Right. It really told a good story. My daughter – when the book first came out – she was getting established as a dentist and already thinking ahead to what was involved with that and if she had children and got married one day, which she did. She read the book and looked at me and said, “Oh, if all of these women did they did, I can certainly do what I do.” There's a big misconception about women in the forties and fifties, particularly in small towns, and what they did. They really did have amazing jobs and kept a lot going and balanced a lot.

Dr. Disney: That's such an important part of this project because we want women to have this intergenerational conversation – to look back to our grandmothers, our mothers, granddaughters – and talk about how women are able to balance all of the things we do.

Martha Cranford: I was really surprised as I got to know these women. I had total misconceptions about them.

Dr. Disney: Give us some examples of some of the things that most surprised you when you were doing the archival research. I know I was with you in the microfilm room. Tell us about some of the things that really surprised you when you were going through this process.

Martha Cranford: Well, it surprised me that there was a misconception that women used to bake bread and put food on the table and you know. But these women – many of them were left with farms to take care of; many of them pushed their children into amazing places. We had doctors and lawyers and Supreme Court people. Just all walks of life – hardworking women, who quietly and sometimes without recognition, worked just as hard as or harder than young women today. They were the pioneers of learning to balance it all.

Dr. Disney: Do you think women's work and women's roles as mothers are adequately recognized by society – and you can say then and now. Do you think women's roles and women's work as mothers were adequately recognized then and how about today?

Martha Cranford: Then, I really don't think so, which is one reason I'm glad we did the project. I myself had misconceptions and that might be where this award came from initially – as a way to recognize women. Of course we'll always have administrative assistants and secretaries and nurses, but often they were on the leading edge of what was happening and were multitaskers and did great things. The women of the forties and fifties – many of them could have been CEOs and a lot of those doors weren't open and I don't think they were recognized. Today I will say that I am very happy that all of the women are doing so well and are being recognized in nearly every field. Is it perfect? No, but it's not perfect for some men either. So I really do see it changing and that women are, not only recognized, but people understand how detailed and smart women are. Often times, we want women as our doctors and dentists and lawyers because we know they'll care and do a good job.

Dr. Disney: That is definitely something that I think has changed – the doors that are open for women, the opportunities, the desire; the opportunity and desire to see a woman and have a

woman in a professional position of power that you just discussed. You've raised three daughters, right? Talk a little bit about being a mother of daughters, how that's helped impact your sense of opportunities for boys and girls, for women and men, and what those opportunities should look like.

Martha Cranford: I like to be realistic about the career you choose and how it does impact your life. Maybe not enough is said to women about judging exactly what's involved in a certain career and do you really plan to work as hard as it would take to be successful at that career? It's not just getting the degree it's – my daughter who's a dentist and my daughter who's a teacher and I'm sure the same will be true for my younger daughter – but it's continuing to improve yourself and excel and be really good at what you do. I feel like if you don't do that, it's better to pick another profession. These high power jobs come at a price.

Dr. Disney: That is so true. As you said, I think we don't often state that. Either as mothers to our daughters or recognize that within society.

Martha Cranford: Right. We also don't look at enough of how much money does it take to live – I guess being an accountant, I really did be realistic about that they might be supporting themselves or that they might be supporting themselves and a husband and a family. To look at all of that, is how you pick a career, too. Just the reality and the black and white of work and pay and time commitment and all of that and making it all balance out.

Dr. Disney: When you look back and think about all you had to balance – from becoming an accountant; starting your own business with your husband; hanging out your shingle but then not pursuing that shingle push because of the pull of your family – how do you think that compares to what young women have to balance today in terms of work and family? Talk a little about that. Have things gotten harder? Have they gotten easier? Is it comparable?

Martha Cranford: It's so hard to compare situations and I was so blessed because Bill was always so supportive. I feel like he really was a team mate and I'm seeing that more and more now with these younger women their husbands. They really are a team; they're a partnership. It's so exciting to see what men are doing that my father didn't know that he could do nor would he do. I think that's made it easier. There are more options for childcare, but still there's that emotional tug and we're always mothers first.

Dr. Disney: Talk a little about how your membership on the South Carolina Mother's Association committee has impacted you and your family and your community. What kind of impact has that experience had – the amazing women that you've interacted with through this process?

Martha Cranford: It has had a big impact. First of all, it's been real important for my children to see that I am interested in other things, that I have a life beyond them. It's good for them to see me interacting with other interesting women. It's good for them to meet other and hear about other interesting women. All of those have been great for them. The impact on me is just an amazing group of women – some are not with us anymore that are in the book – but also the women on the committee and the current mothers of the year. It's just been a privilege to get to know them and I really wouldn't give anything for it.

Dr. Disney: I just want to say that it's been a privilege for me to get to know you and I want to thank you for involving me in this project and thank you for choosing to house it in the Louise Pettus Archives at Winthrop University.

Martha Cranford: We've really enjoyed the partnership with Winthrop and I think – hopefully – it will be a model for other community slash statewide slash Winthrop projects that could be done in the future. That's one of the great things about being in a college community. The world's the limit to what we can do if we put all of us together and work towards different goals.

Dr. Disney: I absolutely agree with you. I want to switch gears a little bit and ask you just some broader questions and that's a good segue since you talked about the broader connections we can make outside of our community. What do you think are the most important issues facing women today?

Martha Cranford: I think the issues facing women are the same issues that are facing men: a world that we live in where there's fear. There's a fear of letting our children play in the yard, which I never experienced. Whether or not the fear is real, I don't know. There's the deficit. Our government, we're in deep debt. I don't see any way out of that for us and certainly not for our children. World peace. All of these things, we share equally, men and women. It's hard for me to really pull out anything just for women. On a personal level, it's learning to try to get involved and do something about all of that – community and world problems – while still raising a healthy family and being good mom. A lot to balance.

Dr. Disney: That is a lot to balance, as you said, for women and men and their families. When you hear the word feminism, what does feminism mean to you?

Martha Cranford: Feminism – what it means to me and what it has meant to me in the past – has really changed over the past years. I really do see feminism as opening doors for women to do and empowering them to do whatever they can do to better themselves personally, their families, and for the world. In the past, I will admit that I've tied it to maybe militant type women or overly aggressive women or maybe offensive women, which really isn't fair because some of that type of women had to be strong to pave the way for some of the things I take for granted. It's maybe gone from having a negative connotation to a very positive one. I think we're all feminists to some degree or the other. We really do want to have our rights and our ability to do what we want to do in this world.

Dr. Disney: Has this project impacted your thoughts in any way? Traveling around the great state of South Carolina, interviewing all of these great women – has that had an impact on you?

Martha Cranford: It has. Just thinking of the many ways that we can impact the world and not every woman is meant to be a cutting edge lawyer or politician. I'm so thankful for the many women who are community volunteers or who just possibly raise a handicapped child or volunteer or have foster children – all the many ways that we can impact our corner of the world. I've seen that in nearly every example of different types of women and how they've given back and they're all great. It's just given me a big view into the diverse ways that we can be feminists and do what's right for us and our community.

Dr. Disney: I want to give you a chance in case there's anything else you want to share, in terms of activities that you've been involved in. You've done so much in terms of family, community, education, and employment before and after you were married. Have we touched upon – or in other words, you've talked about women and how we do so much. We multitask; we contribute to our communities in so many ways. There are probably many ways that you have contributed that we haven't gotten to speak about yet in our time together today. Is there anything else when you think back, any other things you'd like to share to future generations of women, of activities and ways that you've gotten active, again within family, education, employment, community, and church that has helped fulfil you and your roles as a mother and as a citizen?

Martha Cranford: I like to read and think a lot about what is impacted. I'm involved in some different groups with young women – college-age and the age of my daughters which is twenties and young thirties. I really have done a lot of thinking about the culture and where they are. I understand that families aren't having meals together. The line between right and wrong has been smeared and young people seem to be, even more than when mine were coming along, involved in all sorts of things. We blame technology, but I don't know if it's that or the folding up of family values or pulling away from the church and any spiritual beliefs. I really would like to somehow figure out how to teach, especially young girls, just to do the right thing over and over and over. Just do the right thing; don't get involved with the wrong guy, don't get overly involved with alcohol or drugs and just go down the right road. But it's seems to be getting harder for young mother's to instill that in their kids.

Dr. Disney: You basically predicted my next question which was going to ask what advice you have for young women, young mothers, and future generations. You just kind of said that beautifully.

Martha Cranford: I would say commit to do the right thing and figure out what the right thing is, whether through your parents, your spiritual advisors, your church, your relationship with God. There are a lot of good things in life that get smeared by doing the wrong thing – getting involved in substances, pornography, and all sorts of things. Just keep doing the right thing and move on towards that goal and don't get distracted from it.

Dr. Disney: You've helped reinforce for me, as well, to set your priorities and keep your priorities. It's easy to get pulled into work and responsibilities, but remember your priority to family and your loved ones. You've helped me through this project.

Martha Cranford: There really usually are consequences to our behaviors. Not always, but usually, bad behavior equals bad consequences. I've seen so many young people go down that road and it's just so hard to pull yourself out.

Dr. Disney: I want to ask you one more question about the book and you can correct me if I'm wrong. Did Ann Edwards – there's kind of a joke when we interviewed Ann Edwards that she's the one you have to blame for the book.

Martha Cranford: Ann is. She is. Ann is a very, well she really has been a force in our state. I admire Ann a lot. She is involved in – and has been for years – all sorts of things, plus maintains relationships all across the state with women of all ages. I got to know Ann – well I had known

her through friends and the connection with the dental school, which is named after her husband Jim Edwards – but Ann decided that I was to be the next chair of the committee and made multiple phone calls to my house and basically wouldn't take no for an answer. So I ate my words because of her determination and took the job as chair. She really way – I kidded her a lot – but she was very encouraging and shared the vision to do something lasting with the money and was a lot of the positive energy behind getting the book done.

Dr. Disney: So we have Ann Edwards to thank, not just for your chair ship on the committee, but for being a strong impetus behind this wonderful book.

Martha Cranford: Ann and her – there was a group that had been on the committee for years and years and they're all amazing women from different parts of the state. They all immediately saw the vision for the book and bringing some of the ladies back to life that weren't recognized for what they did in the forties and fifties. It was a group – definitely a group – effort and we have a lot of ladies to thank for the project and the book and where we are today, including you and Winthrop University.

Dr. Disney: Thank you very much. Do you have any questions for us or anything else that you would like to share that you haven't had a chance to give voice to?

Martha Cranford: Well I would love to know, have your impressions of women – you're the director of women's studies and we've laughed a little about having different viewpoints, which is good – but I have wondered have your views of women, particularly in the South, changed?

Dr. Disney: I have learned a lot, first of all, through this project and I couldn't be more grateful to you. This book has taught me a lot about women historically. As you've said, I came in with kind of preconceived notions of what the class and what the racial identity of the women that we would be interviewing would be, and that is not necessarily true. There are a lot of diverse women in terms of class and race that have been involved in this project. Also, I think we've pinpointed something unique called "Southern feminism." I mean, there's been a conceptual contribution of this project – the number of women that, first of all, positively identify with feminism is great to me, but there was also a wanting to distinguish between feminism and, as you've talked about initially, something more militant, something more negative, and associate it with something just as strong and powerful, but maybe more civil or maybe softer.

Martha Cranford: That was a common thread and that wasn't prompted. It was amazing – the women that were maybe equally proud to be from the south as they were to be women and more proud to be women from the south. I never really thought that much about it, even though I'm from the Deep South, you know. In Mississippi, South Carolina is barely the South. I remember the remark that was made about you. I can't remember exactly, but some degree of pity that you grew up in Baltimore and how much we laughed about that. I really don't know – it's hard to make a statement about a whole part of the country, but I think in the South, perhaps, women did go about achieving their rights in a quieter way and possibly even now, are not outspoken about what they think they should have. But I believe we are all pretty much on common ground across the nation.

Dr. Disney: I agree. I was so impressed with the common ground of equal opportunity that everyone wanted for their sons and daughters, for women and men, but also something unique about – you said it beautifully, a kind of Southern pride or pride of being from the South equally with a commitment to women’s equality. I’m going to go back and read all the transcripts of all these interviews. I’m going to pull out all the definitions of feminism and who knows – we may be publishing an article that has something to do with Southern feminism and contributing something new.

Martha Cranford: You really should. My goal – my hope would be that some of the things that have come up through this book that you and Michaela and some of your students could really take this and who knows where it would go. I wish you well with that.

Dr. Disney: Thank you. This is such a wonderful contribution, a teaching tool for the classroom or a research tool in terms of scholarship and publication. I could not be more pleased that you’re my colleague and my friend. I just want to say thank you so much, Martha Cranford, for bringing me into this project and for bringing this project to Winthrop University and for sharing with us your wisdom as treasurer and chair of the South Carolina Mother’s Association, someone who really spearheaded this project, this book, and this oral history archives.

Martha Cranford: Thank you. We could not have done it without you and without the contacts and resources you have at Winthrop University. It’s been a great partnership.