

Southern Voices Oral History Project
Florida Southern College

Interviewee: Shari Szabo, Class of 1983

Interviewer: Alyssa Kirby

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Kirby: *Just to begin, I need you to state your name and spell it.*

Szabo: Sure, my name is Shari Szabo [spells].

Kirby: *Thank you.*

Szabo: You're welcome.

Kirby: *And also to begin we just have some life history notes.*

Szabo: Okay.

Kirby: *So, what was your date of birth?*

Szabo: My date of birth was 4/18. Do you need to know the year also?

Kirby: Yes.

Szabo: 1962.

Kirby: *So you have a birthday coming up?*

Szabo: I do! Indeed, indeed. Last year was the mega one, this one's just the mega plus one. So, yeah.

Kirby: *Okay. I have a big birthday coming up ...*

Szabo: You'll be 21?

Kirby: *Yup.*

Szabo: Congratulations.

Kirby: *Thank you. Where were you born?*

Szabo: Lakeland, Florida. The apple did not fall far from the tree.

Kirby: [laugh] *Your highest education?*

Szabo: Graduated here from Florida Southern College. So I have a bachelor of art ... arts ... in broadcast communication.

Kirby: *And what were your parents' names?*

Szabo: My mother's name was Ellene Szabo [spells] and then my father's name was Frank Szabo.

Kirby: *And do you have any siblings?*

Szabo: I do. I have a sister. An older sister. I always like to point out she's older. And her name is Maurine Taylor. [spells]

Kirby: *Is she married?*

Szabo: She is divorced, but she kept her name.

Kirby: *Yeah, my mom kept her name. Are you married?*

Szabo: I am not.

Kirby: *Do you have any children?*

Szabo: I do. I was married at one time, but I have a son who is 20-something ... he will be 26 this summer.

Kirby: *Nice. His name is John, you said?*

Szabo: His name is Sean. [spells] Like Sean Connery. Who is the best Bond, by the way, but that's a whole 'nother story.

Kirby: [laughs] *Have you only lived in Lakeland?*

Szabo: Yes I have. I don't think Polk City counts. [laughs] I lived in Polk City for a little bit when we had a house.

Kirby: *Where's P I-*

Szabo: North.

Kirby: *What's the school down there? My friend's boyfriend went there.*

Szabo: In Polk City? I don't think there's any schools down there.

Kirby: *It's down that way, though. North side.*

Szabo: Like a high school?

Kirby: *It was a high school.*

Szabo: Oh, high schools on the north side of town would be like Lake Gibson ...

Kirby: *Yes, that's where it was!*

Szabo: Okay. Yeah this is a little more east and north of Lake Gibson. But, yeah.

Kirby: *Oh. Okay. It's actually funny. She goes to Campbell University in North Carolina ...*

Szabo: Okay ...

Kirby: *We met in Maryland. Her dad's in the Army, so she moves around. But, she met her boyfriend there and he lives here and I went to school here. So, it's just a small world.*

Szabo: Yeah. What part of North Carolina?

Kirby: *Buies Creek.*

Szabo: Where's that?

Kirby: *It's like 20 miles off 95. I'm not really sure. It's not far from Fayetteville.*

Szabo: Okay. My son lives in Cary, NC. Which is near Raleigh and Durham. So I'm starting to learn a little bit about the North Carolina area.

Kirby: *I'm not sure how far Fayetteville is from there. She lived there at one point. I visited her when I was 10 there. First time I was on a plane.*

Szabo: Ah, memorable for you ...

Kirby: *And it was my first time on a plane too, so ...*

Szabo: *!Td (d) 1.207 5.9896 (t) 5 (n) 5 (e) 3 (o) 14 f) 2 (r) (t) 18960, so*

Kirby: *Yeah, it was right after September eleventh, too ...*

Szabo: Yeah, so even more scared ...

Kirby: *Yeah and they have five kids so they weren't allowed to come up and get me.*

Szabo: Oh, wow ...

Kirby: *I was too old for someone to escort me, but ...*

Szabo: But too young to kind of feel comfortable.

Kirby: *Yeah. ... So, this says vocation related. I'm guessing it means like where you worked related to your bachelor's?*

Szabo: Sure, I worked at WONN and WPCV radio [spells], which is a local AM-FM radio. It's now actually four stations, but I worked for them for six years after I graduated and I was news director. So, I covered everything from national beauty pageants to witnessed executions to space shuttle launches. I fed stories to NBC radio. We were NBC news affiliates. So ...

Kirby: *That's pretty interesting.*

Szabo: Y2K - FBI and CIA 26976 and (e) 348 (S) (C) (T) (F) (W) (E) (Y) (I) (Z) (X) (M) (B) (P) (O) (S) (A) (C) (T) (M) (U) (G) (C) (A) (Z) (E) (L) (P) (S) (M)

Kirby: *Scrapbooking?*

Szabo: Oh god, no! No, no, no. Like home decorating kind of stuff. I enjoy announcing. I enjoy athletics, so I do a lot of announcing for our Florida Southern teams. Do the public announcings for three of our women's sports. And occasionally we'll sit in for [inaudible]. For about six years, I was the public announcer for the Lakeland Flying Tigers, which is a farm team for the Detroit Tigers. So I stopped doing that so I could have a life ...

Kirby: *Oh okay; which women's teams?*

Szabo: Here, the women's teams are softball, basketball, and volleyball.

Kirby: *Okay. I used to be on the swim team.*

Szabo: Oh did you? Okay. Oh good. Well you're a better woman than I. I usually drown if I end up in a pool. I like to just be able to know I can touch the side of the pool.

Kirby: *Yeah, it was just too much for me ...*

Szabo: Yeah, yeah. It's a demanding ... I think all of our athletic programs are very demanding. I have a huge respect for students who are able to combine the two and truly be a student-athlete. It's very hard.

Kirby: *I think back and I don't know how I did it in high school. I really don't.*

Szabo: Well, it's different dynamics than college. So, even though it certainly is demanding, I think once you get to the collegiate level and when you look at D2, it's demanding. And then you look at students who are D1 and it's like you really don't know how they do it.

Kirby: *Well, my friend goes to Towson University and she swims there and when we began swimming at college, we were talking about the programs, and she's D1, and she was like we don't even do that ...*

Szabo: Wow ...

Kirby: *She's awesome.*

Szabo: Wow. What was your specialty?

Kirby: *Yeah, breaststroke!*

Szabo: Breaststroke, so that's one of those. [motions]

Kirby: Yes. [laughs]

Szabo: Great form as [knocks over microphone] I knock over your mic. Write that down in your notes, that she's like throwing things in your interview.

Kirby: [laughs] *It's okay. ... So how many years did you attend Florida Southern?*

Kirby: *Yeah, it's right on the lake*

Szabo: He was a hoot! He cracked me up ... I'm trying to think if he actually jumped up on the table. The folklore goes that he would jump up on the table occasionally and lecture from there ...

Kirby: *He never did that ...*

Szabo: He never did that? Okay. I remember we took, it was the summer that Princess Diana and Charles got married, I think one of the classes I was taking was marriage and family. So, there was a lot of conversation about that. I remember getting up early to watch that. Then we went to this restaurant called Live Oak, that use-

Branscomb Auditorium. Because that was before DVDs and you know streaming and I think there was only like three channels on TV or something wicked like that, so ... I think maybe, were VHS tapes just coming out at that point? I don't know, you're talking like early '80s cause I graduated in '83.

Kirby: *My sister was born in '83, so maybe ...*

Szabo: He is a pastry chef, and he works in a five-star restaurant and he graduated, he actually did his four-year degree at the Culinary Institute of America up in High Park, New York. So he is, not only is he a great chef, he knows how to run a business. So ...

Kirby: *That's awesome!*

Szabo: Yeah, it's cool.

Kirby: *That's good he knows how to cook ...*

Szabo: He does, he does.

Kirby: *Okay, so you talked about intramurals. Did you play any sports?*

Szabo: It was, well and my dad's role for those 38 years, he was assistant dean of men so he was actually in charge of the discipline so he would have to go bust parties and all that kind of fun stuff. And so that was ... And my role here later on in life as alumni director, I got to have a lot of interactions with students through the years that had had a lot of interactions with him, and he was seen to be very fair and would really sometimes, could be hard on you and toe the line and made sure the rules were enforced. But, he was very fair about the way he went about it. So, it was [inaudible] ... He had a lot of students through those 38 years who had a lot of affection for him.

Kirby: *Well that's good. That must make you feel really good!*

Szabo: It does! It does, it does!

Kirby: *Any extracurricular activities?*

Szabo: Oh ... I was not in band, I was not in orchestra, no nothing like that, no.

Kirby: *This says freshman rats ... do you know anything about that?*

Szabo: That was way before me. That would probably be people in the '40s and '50s. That was I think when, if I recall from the times I was alumni director, where you know they would put freshmen in a garbage can or something like that. I don't know, or they wore goofy hats or something like that, yeah, but that was way before me. We didn't do anything like that. No, no, no.

Kirby: [chuckle] *So, your, did your dad attend here at all?*

Szabo: My dad did attend here. My dad graduated from here in 1952. And he actually had a degree I

basketball and there really weren't a lot of women's sports back then. Then, they both loved the men's baseball team so they followed the men's team extensively and would travel out of state to see the games and all that kind of stuff, so ...

Kirby: *That's pretty cool ... I know the baseball team played the Orioles last year. I wanted to go see them so bad.*

Szabo: Yeah, yeah. Oh, did they? Oh,

Kirby: *I remember when I came for my recruit trip, my senior year, it was probably; it was October. It was around Halloween. And where the Starbucks is, we stopped to get gas.*

Szabo: Yeah, it was a gas station. Sure enough!

Kirby: *And then I came back to come to school here and I was like, "Wasn't that a gas station?"*

Szabo: How did that happen? I know!

Kirby: *Yeah, I was like wait!*

Szabo: Well, you know, the demographics change and it's smarter for businesses to come in. There's actually the business to support a more affluent habit, if you will, that Starbucks's would be every time you turn around it's \$3.00, \$4.00 for a drink. But, yeah, so I really have seen it grow. A lot of chain restaurants. You know, we used to have a lot of independent restaurants and you don't see that anymore, which is too bad. Still a good quality. A lot of great parks. I think Lakeland has always a great park system and nice playground areas and all that kind of stuff. That's continued to really grow.

Kirby: *The park over by, I think it's Lake Mirror ...*

Szabo: Yeah, yeah ...

Kirby: *That's awesome.*

Szabo: That's wonderful, isn't it?

Kirby: *I wish I had a park like that ... when I was little.*

Szabo: Yeah, I know. I wish. When my son was little there were nice parks to go to, but nothing like that. I mean yo

Kirby: *That's awesome. So, what did you do for entertainment around here?*

Szabo: What did I do for entertainment around here? Well we'd go to movies or again we'd find things to do on campus. You watched TV.

Kirby: *Did you have TVs in your room? Probably not? ...*

Szabo: Well, we had to provide them. So, we provided a TV. Well, you're talking massive. Even the small TVs were massive. They were just built so differently than the thin ones now. But, yes we had a TV in our room. We had cable. Yeah, so, just that kind of stuff. Nothing earth-shattering. We didn't, I wasn't really into a lot of volunteer work. I'm trying to think. Well at the time Zeta's philanthropy, now it's breast cancer, but at the time it was called; this tells you how far things have changed. It was the national
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much slower the second time. And that was a few years later. That was a woo-ha moment for me. That was something very empowering to do, and one year as a staff member, I got to go to an ROTC training thing in Fort Knox, which involved jumping off of high-dives blindfolded with a gun in your hand, in boots, and then being up 35 feet off the ground in a safety harness, and then repelling off of a tower and all that kind of stuff. So those were some cool moments in my old younger years.

Kirby: [chuckle] *I used to swim at the Naval Academy for swim meets and we would see them doing that sometimes. You're so young and you're like, "How can they do that?"*

Szabo: Yeah, it's amazing. It's amazing. You know, it was self-empowering but it was also a real exercise for me because the young men and women that were telling us what to do, were truly young men and women. They were college age. So, you're talking about students, they were probably more 19, 20, maybe 21, telling you ... you developed a trust factor. Here's this young whippersnapper and here I am in my, I think at the time I was doing it maybe late thirties, maybe early forties. Probably more late thirties, but still a real trust element, you know, here's this young person you're basically putting your life in their hands as they talk you through these things and so it was a real learning experience for me.

Kirby: *Yeah, that's awesome. Can you reflect on your time here at FSC? Anything else you would like to add?*

Szabo: Wow ... It was, I think, for me it was particularly interesting because I have, I came into it with a different perspective having grown up on campus and I mean, I was a little girl, I would ride my bike around campus. You know, I remember, I think one of our, became a lifelong friend, a student needed a study for her education class and I fit the age bracket and she kind of used me as a study person or you know to kind of observe me and that kind of thing. You know, made friends with college students and you admired different college students or you have crushes on those boys were way, way too old for you. And really just saw Florida Southern grow and I knew that the college meant an awful lot to my

Szabo: Oh yeah, yeah. I think so. Because, you're just around a different type of environment and you know you're not in a neighborhood with a lot of kids your age so you're exposed to just a kind of different tempo on campus and different interactions with students. And yeah, I think you just; yeah, I would say, it gave me a different perspective than I think other people had and I think probably, you know, for the majority of my son growing up, I had worked at Florida Southern and we had not lived on campus, but we lived near, so he certainly has been involved in that aspect. I was an advisor for the Zetas for about seven years so he had a lot of interaction with the sorority girls while he was a little tyke. He would go with me as I would do announcing at some of the athletic events so he had some similar experiences, but not as much as an immersion as I certainly did.

Kirby: *Right. Did you say how much older your sister was than you?*

Szabo: She is five years older. Yes, yes. So she is 56.

Kirby: [laugh] *I didn't need to know that ...*

Szabo: Oh, yes you did ... yell it from the roof tops! She's 56! [laugh]

Kirby: [laugh] *Yeah, I like to rub it in my mom's face. She tries to be all young and hip and I'm just like no* udb8 0 Td1y8 C