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Oral History of Retired American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD) Leaders: Presidents and/or National Award Recipients Interview with Dr. Catherine Louise Allen

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ORAL HISTORY OF RETIRED AMERICAN ALLIANCE
FOR HEALTH, PHYSICAL EDUCATION, RECREATION AND DANCE
(AAHPERD) LEADERS: PRESIDENTS AND/OR NATIONAL AWARD
RECIPIENTS

INTERVIEW WITH DR. CATHERINE LOUISE ALLEN

AUGUST 25, 1989

BY ALLYS SWANSON AND SHARON L. VAN OTEGHEN

TRANSCRIBERS - ALLYS SWANSON AND DIANE LE BLANC

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MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY

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PLACE Brookline MA

DATE 8/25/89

(to be completed at the time and place of the interview)

Catherine L. Allen

INTERVIEWER

8/25/89

DATE

(For the AAHPERD Archives, the Mississippi Valley Archives of the John Willard Brister Library of Memphis State University and the Physical Education Department of St. Catherine's College)
Dr. Catherine Allen served as president of the American Association for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation (AAHPER) from 1964 to 1965. The Association is now the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD). Dr. Allen received an Alliance Honor Award in 1957 and in 1970 was awarded the Luther Halsey Gulick Medal. She was recipient of the R. Tait McKenzie Award in 1980.
ALLYS SWANSON: Good morning Catherine. We’re happy to be with you today in Boston. We’d like to begin the interview by asking you to tell us where you were born and what you recall from your family and early childhood experiences.

DR. ALLEN: I was born in Columbus, Georgia to a very interesting family. A great many of us lived together, including my grandfather, my mother, my father and my mother’s sister, Aunt Edna. My mother had six children of whom I’m the oldest. After awhile, we had a huge household. We lived right next door to a big field. Grandfather had built the house there so that we would have a place to play in the city. When my sister Sarah married, she, her husband and their two children came to live with us for awhile. Margery, another married sister, lived there with one or two of her children. I think Edna escaped, and the two boys went away. It was a marvelous way to grow up.
My grandfather, a Quaker, was born and lived in York, Pennsylvania, near Lancaster. He came south after the War Between the States, married a Georgia woman and remained there. One day, as my grandfather sat rocking on the porch, a boy named David Rosenthal from up the street came up to him and said, "Mr. Jessop, I understand you’re a Yankee." My grandfather said, "If you mean I was born north of the Mason-Dixon Line, then yes I’m a Yankee." David said, "That’s awful Mr. Jessop." Grandfather asked, "What’s so bad about it?" David replied, "Well, you’re not like us." Grandfather said, "No, but I’m trying to be, All I want to be is a Southern gentleman who is very polite." The little boy didn’t say anything else.

My mother was the mothering type: a lovely and pretty lady. She saw to the food, the clothes and all the things that go with loving one’s children. Aunt Edna, who later was blind, was an intellectual. There was no question about that. She saw to our mental processes. In addition to going to school, we were tutored. Aunt Edna always heard our lessons. It was a very fascinating way to grow up.

ALLYS SWANSON: What was your father like?

DR. ALLEN: My father was a Virginian. His family moved to Tennessee and later to Alabama and Georgia. His parents lived in Columbus, Georgia, across the Chattahoochee River about 10 minutes from Alabama. They lived there for a long time. My father was a typical Southerner from an interesting line of Virginians. According to my sister, who is a genealogist, Thomas Jefferson was part of that lineage. My father was a great gentleman, and my mother was quite a lady. I lost my father when I was 17. There were five children younger than I was, the youngest still in diapers, so it was a great loss early in our lives.
ALLYS SWANSON: Among the many values that your parents have given you, what stands out in your mind?

DR. ALLEN: One of my most immediate recollections is their advice on including loving in our lives. We learned the importance of smiles rather than tears, if at all possible, and of looking at life happily. We were told to be grateful for what we had and to work hard to accomplish anything that we wanted to accomplish. We were taught honesty, good manners and gracious living, all part of the Southern tradition. They were very honest, God-fearing people. Both sang and had lovely voices. My mother was a fine soprano and my father was an Irish tenor. We all grew up around the piano with a love for music. Everyone, including grandfather, sang. I wouldn’t change my parents at all.

ALLYS SWANSON: You mentioned your early experiences with music. What were they, and how did you happen to learn to play the accordion?

DR. ALLEN: Thinking that I had talent, my parents tried to give me piano lessons. My piano teacher was a friend of my mother. She didn’t care about teaching me music. Instead, she would go to the second floor of our house where she and mama would talk over a cup of tea and a few cookies. I was supposed to be practicing downstairs. I was practicing, but I was playing by ear what I had heard her play. That talent sort of runs in the family. I always got her to play first and then I’d play behind her. It was pure laziness and I regret every minute of it now that I don’t know my notes. I can pick them out mathematically, but I would have learned if mama’s friend Mabel had realized what I was doing.
I didn’t learn to play the accordion until I went to the University of Tennessee during the World War II years. I taught dance in the gym until the armed services took it for housing. Mr. Hobt, head of the department, told me that I would have to stop teaching folk, tap and modern dance. I was not going to do that so I bought an accordion for $90. I put $10 down and paid the rest monthly. That was a lot of money then. At Christmas I went to see my adopted sister. She and I would sing together until we’d get the tunes so I could teach folk dance. Then I could practice on the accordion. Luckily I was able to play by ear. Aunt Edna also played beautifully by ear. She would play classical pieces, which I can’t. I knew just enough to be an amateur. It was great.

ALLYS SWANSON: You mentioned earlier that your grandfather built your family’s house near a big field so that the children could have a place to play in the city. What were some of your early experiences with sports and active play on that field?

DR. ALLEN: The empty field was two houses down from ours. There was a family of seven next to us and a family of eight across the street. Poor Miss Hawkins didn’t have but one; I felt sorry for her. We had three full baseball teams, with subs, on our block between 15th Street and 16th Street on 4th Avenue. We let Helen Hawkins sit on the sidelines. We played in the field and on the grass. We ran many races and did a lot of roller skating. I remember entering a roller skating derby when I was 10 or 11. By golly I won it! I don’t know how I didn’t break every bone in my body. It was wonderful. We played baseball, volleyball, and we did a lot of what we would call track and field. We vaulted over fences and climbed over walls as a lot of youngsters do. I had a very active childhood.
ALLYS SWANSON: Do you recall any personal leadership experiences from this open recreation environment?

DR. ALLEN: Being the oldest of six, I was the leader of the family pack. I was given responsibilities to care for the younger ones. Then my mother would start feeling free of babies and have another one. We had a lot of fun though. I learned how to rock them, to change their diapers and to do all those fine things. I never used those skills in my own life. Nevertheless, because I was the head of my mother’s household and the most active on the block, I automatically became the head of the neighborhood crowd.

I did some foolish things. I remember a time when we got tired of living on 4th Avenue. All of us children wanted to go up on the railroad tracks to Rose Hill. On the day I decided to take everyone up there, the train was on the tracks. Everybody climbed under the train to see Rose Hill. We explored the area to see what things were like. We liked it well enough to have the roller skating derby up there. It scares the life out of me when I think about it now. That venture could have killed everybody in the neighborhood. My leadership wasn’t always well thought out.

ALLYS SWANSON: What sort of influence did your father have on your childhood?

DR. ALLEN: My father was very interesting. He had more personality than was good for a man. He was a salesman, and he sold all sorts of products. At that time, the general stores in Georgia and Alabama sold clothes, food and farm implements. No matter what it was, my father could sell it. When I was about five, he would take me with him. My mother would dress me up before we went. We drove the unpaved roads in his T-Model Ford. I would sit on his lap and steer. Although he had his hands on the
wheel, I'm quite sure I was guiding the car. He would take me to the country stores and put me on the counter and say, "Ladies and gentlemen, this is my Catherine." They would give me candy and ask me questions and all sorts of wonderful things.

My father greatly influenced me in two ways. One, he was a born musician, not a trained one. He was a natural singer. I got half of my love of music, singing and playing from him and half from my mother. I also learned from him how to sell anything I wished to sell. He chose to sell things to people who needed things. I chose to sell ideas in my profession. That influence has had a lot to do with my approach to the profession and the good it can do.

ALLYS SWANSON: What experiences do you recall from elementary school? Were there teachers, values or leadership qualities that you thought were important?

DR. ALLEN: I just loved elementary school. In kindergarten I had a beau, which very few of the other children had. His name was Howard Bickerstaff. The closest we ever got to being intimate was that he would save a chair for me next to him in the circle. That is about all I can remember except that I went to one part of the first grade then was moved to the second. That was too bad because I loved the first grade teacher.

The second grade teacher's name was Miss Mary. Heaven knows what her last name was. She was an Episcopalian just as I was and still am. I can remember going to church one day and kneeling as my mother told me to do. The people started to go up for Holy Communion. Miss Mary passed by me on the aisle. I couldn't bear it. I reached out, touched Miss Mary and asked, "Where are you going Miss Mary?" She was going to take Communion, and on she went.
My fourth grade teacher was Miss Jody. I loved her. She was stern but fair. The fifth grade teacher, whose last name I’ve forgotten, was Sarah Francis. We called her Miss Sally Fanny. She was a rare one. She was hard, too. Then during the sixth grade, President Warren Harding came through our town on the train. The class and my teacher, Miss Johanna Lange, chose me to go down to the train station and shake his hand. The whole school went down to the station and gawked as I went up and shook hands with the president of the United States. I didn’t wash that hand for days and days. That was a great experience.

I had another experience in grade school with the president of the United States. Herbert Hoover was president and my grandfather voted Republican. Hoover’s state, California, voted him down. Grandfather turned to me and said, "Isn’t that horrible?" I said, "Yes grandfather, I’m going to write to him." So I wrote to Herbert Hoover, told him how sorry I was that he didn’t get elected, and I got an answer.

At that time, we didn’t have junior and senior high school. In the seventh grade, I was taught for the first time by a male teacher. Mr. Drane sat up on a platform. We were wild hyenas. To keep order, he rolled a cannonball down the aisle. If our feet were in the aisle, someone would lose a foot or two. If he didn’t like what someone did, he sent that student to the cloakroom. That was marvelous because from the cloakroom we could get to the cafeteria and pick up a little extra food, or we could go to the johnny.

We had a wonderful playground with a pomegranate tree. We played a lot of soccer. We spent most of our time trying to raise money to pay Mrs. Freeman, who lived in the house next to the school ground, for the windows we broke with our ball. Mrs. Freeman could have gotten an award for having more broken windows than anyone else in the city. It was a wonderful active experience.
ALLYS SWANSON: What were your favorite classes and subjects? Did you have any hobbies? What leadership experiences do you recall from junior high and high school?

DR. ALLEN: As I remember, I was really too young for high school. I don’t think that we mature socially and emotionally as quickly as we do physically. After half of the seventh grade, I went on to high school. I went to Columbus High School and developed an intense interest in language. I had as much Latin as I could get in high school. Aunt Edna was a Latin scholar. She would work with me at night, then require that I teach all the girls and boys in the morning before class. When we got to Miss Rogers’ class and Miss Zacharias’ class, we knew more Latin than is believable. I also studied Spanish and French. I loved English and I still do. I wanted to do something in the area of English and creative writing. It has been a guide for me. In fact, my bachelor’s degree is in English and writing, not physical education. That was a hobby that later became a profession.

Throughout high school I was quite studious and paid attention to my classes. The teachers were exceptionally good to me. The principal, Mr. Kendrick, had taught my mother. He thought it was great to have a grandchild in there. He led me to realize that physical education is a very important part of a school’s curriculum. He was a personal guide. I later went back to teach for him.

ALLYS SWANSON: How did you choose the college that you attended?

DR. ALLEN: My father could not send me to college. The years had gotten lean and he had six children to care for. My mother’s sister, Edith, lived in New York City. She sent a letter home to say that she would send me to a normal school for two years. I was amazed. She gave me my choice of two schools: the University of Georgia in Athens, and Georgia State
College for Women (GSCW), which is now Georgia College, in Milledgeville. I chose GSCW and became what was known then as a "Jessy." After Aunt Edith's death, when I went up to take care of her affairs in New York, I found records of my school expenses. Two years in that college, plus a little extra to finish my English degree, cost her $500. That sum also included the $5 a month that I received for spending money. With that I had to buy stockings, and we were in uniform. It had to pay for my contribution to the Saturday night feast: salmon in a can, bread and other such items.

That's how I chose GSCW. It was closer to home than Athens. Perhaps distance wasn't the reason; I knew many people who had gone there.

ALLYS SWANSON: Relate more about your college experiences and how your career evolved.

DR. ALLEN: When I went to GSCW, it was a two-year normal school and predominantly a teachers college. I went to school at 16 and earned my normal diploma by the time I was 18. I had worked, studied and played very hard. I do everything hard. I began teaching in the Columbus public school system at 18, which is pretty young. It was a magnificent experience.

The summer after I finished my normal diploma, I had an opportunity to drive two teachers to New York. They were both from Columbus, Georgia and had taught in the high school I attended. I had never driven anywhere but on a country road, and they had a rather nice car. Nevertheless, I decided that I would go. The only thing I forgot to do was to notify my family. I remember quite well that I arrived in New York with $5.83. I stayed for five weeks. I didn't live on the streets, I didn't pan handle, I didn't become a prostitute or do any of those things. I could ride the subway uptown for a nickel. I learned a great deal and realized
that education was broader than what I had learned in normal school. A person can learn a lot by travelling, and this has become a lifetime pattern for me.

When I returned home, Dad was gone and I was head of the house. Aunt Edith had been the executive secretary to Dr. Daniels, superintendent of the schools. Dr. Daniels commented that they would have to find a place for me because we had lived in the town for such a long time and now my father was gone. He found a place for me at the Industrial High School, where I taught shorthand, typing, business law, business penmanship and business mathematics. I didn’t know any of the material so I would take the books home at night and teach the next day.

I was 18 then, and some of the students who would stay to play basketball were 22 or 23. It was rough, but again this was a marvelous example of what our field can do. I asked if I could start a noontime recreation program. I was permitted and given limited equipment. They turned all of the boys and girls out onto that playground at noon and I organized everything: soccer, softball, baseball, basketball and other sports.

I also coached girls basketball. My best forward was Zadie Anglin. She was a great big, tall, lanky redhead. She must have been 6 feet 10 inches tall; she towered over me. She was marvelous on the playing field. Zadie’s father ran a vegetable and fruit truck. He drove around neighborhoods, and people would come out and shop. When we had a ball game, the whole team and I would go over, unload the truck, and put the produce where Mr. Anglin wanted us to put it. Then we would all climb in and go to the little town where we were going to play. We never accepted games to which we couldn’t afford to go. Mr. Anglin didn’t give us the gas. We had to put in our nickels and dimes. It was my first job and a great experience.
ALLYS SWANSON: Do you recall what your salary was?

DR. ALLEN: My salary was $1,000 a year. As I remember, that was $83.33 a month. My mother, the six children, Aunt Edna and my grandfather all lived on that salary. We had a communal household. Grandfather and I were working and we pooled our money. We had a glorious life. We always had a home, good food, plenty of clothes and wonderful times. I have no regrets.

ALLYS SWANSON: How long were you at that position?

DR. ALLEN: I stayed for just one year. I wasn’t fired; it was an 11-month school. After that year I asked to be transferred to an elementary school so that I could teach nine months a year and go to summer school to get my bachelor’s degree. I got into East Highlands Elementary School and taught third grade as a classroom teacher. Again, I asked if I could organize physical education for the school. At recess I taught the children physical education.

In addition, I got a job after school as director of the playground at East Highlands School. Some of the children there had practically no food and no clothes; some were barefoot. This was during the Depression when food was hard to come by. The teachers made sandwiches for the needy children. We were mainstreaming without knowing it. There was a crippled boy who I had to put in my arms and take downstairs every time there was a fire drill because we were on the second floor. Another boy named Louie was sixteen, retarded and a marvelous artist, but he couldn’t comprehend other things. It was a great learning experience. I taught miscellaneous groups mostly at the recess periods before and after school.
ALLYS SWANSON: How did your career evolve into the profession of physical education?

DR. ALLEN: I taught at East Highlands Elementary School for 10 or 12 years. I didn't want to move. I loved the children. There was so much talent to be developed. They were avid learners. It was a marvelous place to try and influence youngsters to do better. I have vivid memories of a little boy named Joe Crouch. Joe was the best tap dancer I have yet to see on stage or otherwise. He came from a big family. His mother and one or two of his teen-aged sisters were prostitutes. His mother would take this child across the river to Alabama. Since there were no rules against it at that time, she would take him to the bars and have him tap dance for money. The next day he would come to school and sleep for two or three hours. After I learned what was happening, I let the child sleep. I taught there as long as I did for this type of child.

One day Dr. Monroe, superintendent of schools, came to my room and said, "Catherine I'm transferring you." I asked what I had done wrong, and he said, "Not a thing. I'm just transferring you." I asked where I was going. He said that I was going to Columbus High School, of which I was a graduate. They were having discipline problems, students were drinking and racing cars. I asked what I was going to have to do. He said I was going to teach physical education. He said, "It has gotten so bad that they just tossed the last teacher out the window." I asked, "Is that the way you are going to entice me into going? Those things didn't happen when I went there." Then he asked me if I would go. I said "That's better. Since you asked me, I will go." I hated to leave because I loved East Highlands.

I went to Columbus High School as head of the physical education department for the junior and senior high schools. I was supposedly in charge of
the girls department, but the boys didn't have any program at all. If they were highly skilled, they were in basketball, track or football. The boys would stick their faces into the door of the girls gym because they were right across the hall. One day I invited them in. I didn't have any equipment except for one basketball. I told them that I had rented a jukebox and that I was going to teach the girls social dance. I said that if they would come in I would be glad to help them. Believe it or not, the boys came and loved it.

After that, we had a dance in the gym with the jukebox every Friday night. Admission was 20 cents for those who came with a partner and 25 cents for those who came single. We made enough money to buy archery and fencing equipment, to put a balcony on the gym and to put table tennis up there. (That was the area set aside for girls once a month. At that time we didn't have ultimate knowledge!) We outfitted that place and did very well in teaching folk, modern, social and tap dance. We put on shows in the auditorium to keep the students interested and to help them realize that physical education was more than just throwing and catching.

In the spring, we had big, gorgeous May festivals with horses, queens and folk dancers. We held track and field events on the spot where an old pond had been drained. We had a review in the newspaper complete with pictures and thought we were "big stuff." Physical education was in my blood.

ALLYS SWANSON: Did you start the May Day Festival?
DR. ALLEN: Yes, I did. It was wonderful. We loved it, the parents and faculty loved it, and the newspaper loved it. So did the Roman Catholics. There weren't many in town at the time. One day, a Roman Catholic youngster in one of my classes came to me and said, "Would you go down and see the Mother Superior at the convent?" I said "Yes, but why?"
She said, "She wants to talk to you." I went down to talk with the Mother Superior, who became a great friend of mine and who later tried to teach me to play the piano. She asked if I would be willing to teach the Catholic children, who came from Alabama and Georgia, in that convent school. I was delighted but said that it would have to be after I finished at the high school; I was coaching basketball and volleyball. I agreed to come on Saturdays.

The convent school put on tremendous fairs. They sold cakes and candy, and made money for the children’s programs. I did that for two years. It was a memorable experience. On one occasion, the sisters got a special dispensation. They had trouble stringing the May pole and called me after hours. I had to borrow my sister’s car to go to the convent. There they sat in a great big room with a huge May pole and a lot of streamers. All the nuns and I put the May pole together. It was an experience you could get no place but in Columbus, Georgia.

ALLYS SWANSON: You certainly were busy with all your activities: teaching, coaching and helping the Catholic school. Basketball has changed dramatically over the years. What was your coaching experience like?
DR. ALLEN: I learned to coach from Miss Jessie Cary. She was my first physical education teacher, when I was a senior in high school, and a graduate of Sargent, a private physical education college. I taught like Miss Cary did. There were four divisions: forwards and guards at each end, jump center and side center in the center. I had been a jump center in high school and later a forward. I played whatever position was needed. Although I taught the same as Miss Cary, basketball had changed. The speed of girls basketball now is almost impossible for me to believe. I thought my girls were good, but they could go only from under the basket to the center line. It was a slower game, but we became very skilled at it.
ALLYS SWANSON: At that time it was unusual for schools to have a conference. Was this unique to Columbus?

DR. ALLEN: We didn’t have an after-school conference. I’m not sure where our competition came from. We played each other, so had all sorts of teams in that way. I’m sure we must have played other high schools. There was Industrial High School in the city. There were also two high schools across the river in Gerard and Phoenix City. We did not have interscholastic sports. We had predominantly intramural games, but they were highly competitive.

ALLYS SWANSON: What happened next as your career evolved?

DR. ALLEN: I had an agreement with my grandfather when he was well into his nineties that I would never go more than five hours away during his lifetime because we were very close. He felt secure with me and I with him. I decided that I would go to Peabody College in Nashville, which is now part of Vanderbilt. I went there to see what they were teaching. Among other things, I took tennis, archery, and track and field. I loved it but it was no different from what I had done in the past. That bothered me. I went there for the summers after my first and second years teaching at Columbus High School.

After my grandfather died, the time had come for me to see what I was missing in the field. I had a Ford, so I drove north alone to investigate Teachers College, Columbia. Aunt Edith had given me my first two years and I worked my way through the remaining time. The College accepted my undergraduate degree. However, they did not accept the work I had done at Peabody because I had taken only activities. Teachers College respected them but gave no credit for them.
After that visit, I drove up and down the coast of Maine. I don’t know where I got the money. I came back through the states I had not seen but had always had the desire to see.

That September, with grandfather gone, I went to Teachers College, Columbia. I stayed there for one year and a summer to finish my master of arts degree. At that time, some of the great physical educators were there. Josephine Rathbone taught Anatomy and Physiology, and Clifford Brownell taught Administration and Measurement and Evaluation. Mary O’Donnell taught dance. What a joy! That was my first experience in modern dance with a really fine dancer. I studied tap dance and music with Nancy Duggan, folk dance with Norma Schwendener, and hockey and soccer with Marjorie Hillas. She burst into laughter every time I came onto the field; she thought that my appearance was the funniest thing she had ever seen. I wore the red shorts that had been accepted at home.

I did everything to earn money during college. I threw the New York Times. I also taught slimnastics at the YWCA in the Bronx. In all my life I had never seen women as big as the ones in that class. They would meet me at the subway at night and walk me through the streets to the YWCA. As soon as it was over they would say, "Now let’s go eat." I worked them all that time then we’d go have pie and everything known to man. They also drank a lot of beer, which I don’t like. They put on as much weight as possible. They would walk me back to the subway, I would ride home, then walk through Harlem to get back to the dorms on 122nd Street. It was a marvelous experience and I will never forget those people as long as I live.

After I got my master’s degree, Watt Hobt, chairman of the department of physical education at the University of Tennessee, offered me a position. He was
quite a celebrity in physical education in Tennessee. I called my superintendent in Columbus, where I had been given a leave of absence to get my master’s degree. He encouraged me to take the position. I notified my family of my plans and went home for my clothes.

ALLYS SWANSON: Catherine, you were at the University of Tennessee from 1941 to 1955. From 1944 to 1946, you were involved with the American Red Cross in the Pacific area. How did the war influence your life and how did you make the decision to work for the American Red Cross?

DR. ALLEN: I was at the University of Tennessee when the United States entered the war. I was in charge of swimming, stunts and tumbling, and folk, tap and modern dance. I also did some fascinating work with a variety of people in the community. We became part of the war effort at the University of Tennessee. Our gymnasium was taken for housing and we were forced to move our activities outside. Teaching became increasingly problematic. I used to take the accordion out onto the paved road behind the gymnasium. There we would do various types of simple folk dances such as the Virginia Reel. We would look up and see the whole neighborhood watching us, so we would invite them to join us. We began community activities.

In the meantime, the war got increasingly worse. My two brothers had gone. Aubrey, the older of the two, had been in the Coast Guard and the Navy took him. Alfred had gone to the University of Tennessee for one year. As soon as he turned 18 they took him. Aubrey went to the South Pacific, and Alfred went with the foot soldiers into north Africa, into Italy, then on to France and Germany.

With my brothers away, I thought that I should go. I was trained and knew I could work with people. They offered to make me an officer in one of the women’s groups, but as an officer I would have had to work with officer
personnel; I wanted to work with enlisted men. One of my brothers was a non-
commissioned officer and the other was an enlisted private leader who later
achieved higher rank. I volunteered for the Red Cross and was sent to the
Central Pacific in Micronesia, which are the small islands close to the Philippines.
My base was the island of Guam. I have often wondered about my mother. She
had six children and three of us were in active battle areas of the war at the same
time.

Before shipping out, I went to American University in Washington, D.C.
where recreational personnel were trained for six weeks before going overseas.
As part of our training, we actively had to answer the question, "What would you
do with a small group of approximately 10,000 men?" We learned how to do
everything from carnivals to sing-alongs to dances. The tests were rough. I
remember taking a swimming test and going off the high board in full regalia,
wearing fatigues, heavy shoes, a helmet and a backpack. We jumped from the
high board as if we were on a ship. We would jump into the water, get rid of that
junk and get ourselves back to the surface. It was a fierce test. Although I’m glad
I had the training, I’m glad I didn’t have to use it.

Before we shipped out, I went to New York to see Aunt Edith, who had paid
for my first two years of college. Then I came back and got on the train in
Washington, D.C. We went through the northern part of the United States. On
December 1, which is my birthday, we went to Chicago. They let us off the train,
but it was so cold and windy that we couldn’t stand up. We didn’t stay out long.
We crossed the country to Bremerton, Washington. In the meantime, we had
collected both light and heavy clothing, coat liners and lightweight summer
dresses. It was a disguise because we were not informed of our destination. I was
sure that if they knew I was a Southerner, they would send me to the Arctic Circle
where there is an eternal wind. Nevertheless, I volunteered to do whatever they wanted me to do.

We boarded a troop ship in a great hurry because the war was escalating. We had taken practically all of our shots at once. There were shots for everything; I don’t know how we stood it. The women who were going across for recreation were on one level and the men were on the lower deck. I used to go to the edge on my deck and play the accordion. The boys on the lower level would sing and we would have the most wonderful time.

There were marvelous priests, ministers and rabbis on board. Among others was Helen Merrill of Merrill, Lynch, Fenner, Bean and Smith. She had plenty of money. She, Margaret Vanderbilt Emerson, who we knew as Maggie, and Stanton Griffis, who was rumored to own Paramount Studios and Brentano Book Stores, all went for a dollar a year.

One night, I was with eight people in the stateroom, where I had my bunk. Everyone got seasick except me. It was an awful experience. While we were in there, we heard a knock on the door. It was Maggie, who said, "Cat, can you help me." I said, "Of course." I was so relieved to get out of that room. She said, "Come in and close the door." Inside her room she said, "Cat, I have to learn how to polish my shoes. They make us polish our shoes every day and I have never polished shoes." We sat on the floor and polished our shoes. She had the shiniest shoes in the Pacific. She was a delightful lady.

ALLYS SWANSON: What were recreation leaders paid? Certainly more than a dollar a year.

DR. ALLEN: We earned a very small salary and we didn’t have any privileges. We went to Honolulu, on Oahu. Maggie had a house there, so we had the use of her home and swimming pool. She was very
gracious. By this time we had made many friends so we found places to stay. Christmas was warm, and we went swimming, wore summer outfits, and sang "Jingle Bells." Everybody was having a great time and we decorated a tree or two. By that time we had realized that they weren't going to send us to the Arctic Circle.

From Honolulu, they flew Kay Brennan and me to Guam. I had been permitted to pick my companion, and I chose Kay because she had multiple talents. She could run a crafts shop, play the violin, and she was a grand photographer. She had a good club sense, which was important because we were going to set up clubs for the men. My job was to train personnel to work in those clubs. Then I went on to my special assignment as director of special activities ocean areas. Most of my work was on all sizes of ships and in isolated locations. My experience provided me with a marvelous background for social recreation in the States, although we didn't have a specialized field called recreation as we do now.

At one time I staged performances with Madge Caperton from Texas, Kay Brennan and Lorene Wharton from Alabama. The executive officers and crew would come to these affairs. I would go out and introduce them. We chose different names for different events. We were Mariana's Mamas for a while. We decided that the talent of more than a thousand men was being wasted. So, we would go out on the stage and sing first. An accordion is a natural invitation to sing. We would sing and sing, then we would ask, "Boys, is anybody here from Texas?" The hands would go up, and they would hoot and call out "San Antonio," "Dallas," "Fort Worth." At that I would bring out Madge Caperton, who came from San Antonio, and say, "We brought a group to put on a show." You never heard such a slow, Southern voice in your life. Madge would come out and banter
back and forth with the boys. She was handsome, and she must have been 5 feet 10 inches tall.

While all of this was going on, I talked the executive officer and captain into letting me have a hat, a jacket with scrambled eggs on it and a pair of boots. I also talked them into being part of the shows. They were good Joes; they never turned me down. They would come out and we would play jokes on them, ridicule them and ask them for a date. The boys would fall off their chairs as if we were the funniest thing they had ever heard. We were so corny.

Next, I would ask, "Is anyone here from Brooklyn?" They would carry on and say where they were from until I brought out Kay Brennan, who came from Brooklyn. She would say her piece with that accent of hers and the boys would love it. Lorene would sing in her untrained but sweet voice. "Laura" was a popular song at that time. There were two or three love songs that would embrace everyone, and the boys would cry. We would call talent out of the audience. Someone usually said something like, "Joe here can play a harmonica." Before we were done with all of the audience's talent, we would have a show to end all shows. Afterwards we had refreshments. We took time to sit with the boys and be just home folks.

Our shows began to draw a big crowd. The secretaries and administrative assistants would join us. They were great talking with the boys. There was never a pass made by either the men or the women. One night, when they expected an attack, we had a blackout. We weren't sure whether it was an air or submarine threat. I got the girls down below and told them to hold hands and to lie low in the event that something serious happened. I went upstairs for the morale factor. When I got up there, everything was blacked out and I stepped right in the middle
of a huge frosted cake. There I stood when it was all over. It was perfect because in the laughter everyone forgot their fear and, believe me, they were afraid.

We had many fascinating experiences. One night Lorene, Madge and I went into a battery in a rain forest. A group of guns was watching the shore for anything approaching. I don’t know why the boys didn’t lose their minds. All they heard was drip, drip, drip. We staged a picnic that night for just a few of us. We told tales and talked about home. We kept rather quiet because we were on a very vulnerable spot. On another night I went alone to a battery. All of a sudden, a young kid came up behind me, hit me and knocked me flat on the floor. At that moment a shot rang out. A Japanese soldier was shooting at the base of my spine, an injury which would have paralyzed me. This young man saw him so he knocked me down and saved my life. I don’t want to live that experience again, but I wouldn’t have missed a minute of it.

ALLYS SWANSON: How old were you when you were working as a Red Cross volunteer?

DR. ALLEN: I was in my early thirties. I had opened a club on one of the beaches and the boys would come in and rest after they had been at Iwojima or in the islands of the South Pacific. There were famous baseball players there who taught these young men a lot. I remember I made the hardest doughnuts. The men acted as though they were perfectly good, but I haven’t eaten a doughnut since. The servicemen would talk to me as if I were a mother, a grandmother, a girl friend or a wife.

DR. VAN OTEGHEN: You can honestly say then, as we read in the physical education history books, that the recreation that the recreation programs did indeed improve the morale of those in the service?
DR. ALLEN: There is no question about it. Recreation was a godsend. Once, a young man who had been badly wounded came to me and said, "Georgia, you know except for you and a bulldozer we would have lost this damn war." He was not talking about Catherine Allen; he was talking about recreation. Sometimes we would run a carnival for two thousand or more men and we would place women in psychological spots. One would read hands. Of course she was told what to say because we didn’t know how to read palms. She had some fine stories. For example, she would say, "You’re going to go home and have five children." I am convinced that even in very disastrous circumstances, recreation had a lot to do with high morale.

ALLYS SWANSON: How did this experience influence your leadership style?

DR. ALLEN: I’m a group person. I don’t like to be front and center. I believe that a person makes a much better contribution as part of a group than by herself. A group has better ideas and more creative thinking than an individual. We had to function in groups, sometimes in very large ones, with all types of people. They were educated and uneducated, cultured and uncultured.

ALLYS SWANSON: You often worked with assigned groups and felt the needs of the whole group. Has that experience helped you to focus on the groups in your professional associations?

DR. ALLEN: I don’t think there is any question that experience plays a very large role in one’s profession. The methods that we used for recreation in the Pacific were taken back to Tennessee. I returned in 1946 with fungus in my lungs. Doctors kept me on the West Coast until I was well enough to return to Tennessee. I was still on a leave of absence from the University. When I returned, I asked to spend six months on campus teaching the
courses for which I was responsible. In particular, I wanted to work with the physical education and recreation majors and graduate students.

The other six months I spent traveling first through Tennessee and then through the South. Ultimately leaders were trained nationally and internationally. We taught the methods that we had used during the war to pull talent from a group. To the small groups, we taught folk dancing, simple quiet games, and active games. There were programs for all ages because we taught in predominantly rural areas. Families arrived at workshops in the same car or wagon. In Tennessee we taught in strange places as we had done in the Pacific. We used what we had, everything from the tobacco barns to Mr. Jones’ field for kickball.

ALLYS SWANSON: Earlier you mentioned your wanderlust and how much you loved to travel. Did your experience in the Pacific Ocean enhance that and instill in you more of a desire to travel?

DR. ALLEN: Yes, it certainly did. That was a very different part of the world to me. In 1969, I went back to Guam to see what it is was like. Many times since, I have gone back to Oahu. I’ve always felt some wanderlust or else I wouldn’t have traveled the coast of Maine alone in my Ford with no money. Traveling has been a great part of my life. I will always love Africa, which I studied in grammar school. I haven’t been everywhere, not by a long shot. But I’ve made an effort to travel because I think that people’s cultures are very important. My philosophy, about which you asked me before the interview, is based on the one world concept. I believe in trying to understand the different cultures, not in complete agreement, so that there is an opportunity for us to be global.
ALLYS SWANSON: After leaving the University of Tennessee, you went to New York University and chaired the women’s department of physical education. What was your major focus at that time?

DR. ALLEN: While at Tennessee, I went to New York University (NYU) to get my doctorate. I chose NYU because Jay B. Nash was there; he retired almost immediately after I got there. At that time, he was considered one of the greatest philosophers of recreation. After I finished my doctorate, NYU asked me to chair the women’s physical education department. That was a difficult decision to make because I was still traveling six months of the year in rural Tennessee. I was getting invitations to national events. Recreation leadership programming was catching on because we taught the skilled as well as the unskilled.

Because they wanted me to rebuild the women’s department and to speak all over the country about women’s physical education, I decided to take the position at New York University. I traveled and was chair at NYU for two years. It was a wonderful experience: working with people of all nationalities. We didn’t have the best facilities, so we went to a YMCA for swimming and somewhere else to play field hockey. We had dance and sports, theory and practice. My focus was good physical education, and my philosophy remains the same.

DR. VAN OTEGHEN: It was quite unique for you to be asked to chair a department upon finishing a doctorate. How did that come about?

DR. ALLEN: That’s hard to tell. While studying for my degree, I had done a great many things that graduate students don’t always have an opportunity to do. Among other things, I programmed Camp Sebago, where graduate students, masters and doctors would spend a summer
quarter. It was in a lovely spot in New York. I helped teach, plan programs and organize trips. I was not afraid to get up and speak. Perhaps I was chosen for the job because they wanted someone who would "sell" physical education to the country.

Early in that work, Jay B. Nash and I worked together as a team so I had a chance to talk with him a great deal. I got to know many others, too, but Jay meant the most to me.

ALLYS SWANSON: What was Jay B. Nash like?

DR. ALLEN: Jay B. Nash was my first introduction to the hospitality of New York. When I got there, he called me and said, "I hear you are here from the South." When I said that I was, he invited me to breakfast. I went to his apartment, where I met him, his wife Emma and their son, who was just a little fellow at the time. I wore a red suit, which he loved. They had a rocking chair for me, and Jay had planned the breakfast. We had grits, scrambled eggs and fish eggs. Where he had gotten the idea for fish eggs, I don't know.

He was a precious man. He should have been solely an orator because he was an eloquent speaker with a spiritual quality. He used to prop his foot up on a boulder on Sunday nights and deliver what would have been a magnificent homily in any cathedral. He spoke of values, love of our fellow men and women, fair play and the ultimate importance of physical education, recreation and youth work. He had a great influence on me and was very good to me, which may have been a factor when the vote came. He couldn't vote because he had retired by then. However, his wife, Emma Frazier, was a graduate of Bouvé-Boston School, where I was later dean. We met quite often. He was a great influence on me.
philosophically, as were Elwood Craig Davis and Minnie L. Lynn. I guess my base is philosophy.

ALLYS SWANSON: What is your philosophy?

DR. ALLEN: My philosophy developed from a group people and the many experiences throughout the years. I am a generalist and think that the different areas of the field, physical education, recreation and dance for example, are integrating into the profession as a whole. I explain it as the five fingers of the hand tied together at the palm; the strength comes from that palm. There is health, physical education, recreation, dance, and the fifth is what an individual wishes to do with his or her own talents. It's different for each of us. When we tie together at the hand we become strong. I believe implicitly in that. I feel that this profession must have a focus on toddlers, youth, adults, the ables and the special needs group. We have a vital role to play in all of those areas. That is basic to my philosophy.

Another spoke of the philosophical wheel is my belief that this is one world. We must live in it and understand one another, not necessarily to follow the same pattern, but to understand each other and work together. Above all things, our world needs food, clothing, education, health and fitness. We hold the key to communication through our language of music and movement. We can cross the boundaries of countries when an ambassador is not welcome. Through our language we have changed and can continue to change the world. When I was wandering around Africa, I saw Peace Corps volunteers working beautifully in all sorts of villages where no ambassador will ever go. There is no question that our profession should be at the core. I don't want to minimize math and science, but we can't forget total health. Our profession is basic to healthful living.
ALLYS SWANSON: What type of specialized study did you do at UCLA and at American University in Washington, D.C.? DR. ALLEN: I studied recreation at American University, plus I received cultural training for the types of people I would meet during the war. For example, I met the natives and islanders known as Chamorran on Guam. We learned about their culture, their recreation, and the safety procedures that would see us through war service. At the request of the commandant, I stayed long after the war was over to run a club while we cleared the men out of the Pacific. They were transported through Guam to be processed. Then they would return to the United States on ships, planes, or whatever transportation was available. I stayed and kept open the Sixth Marine Club while the boys waited to go home. They were very impatient because they had been there a long time.

When I came back to the United States in August, I was advised to stay in California until it was time to go back to the University of Tennessee in September. I went to UCLA and audited what would be philosophy in our profession. Martha Dean was a great teacher. I also took dance, theater and speech. They let me audit all of those courses. I was not going for credit; I was going to learn.

ALLYS SWANSON: From 1957 to 1960 you were at the University of Pittsburgh on a dual appointment. Later you went to Boston-Bouvé to another dual appointment. Dual appointments seem to be quite unique. What was this part of your career like?

DR. ALLEN: After two years at New York University, I was offered a position at the University of Pittsburgh with a dual appointment, which means I was working in two entirely separate areas. They
offered me about twice the salary I was receiving. I had already borrowed on my
insurance while I was at NYU because living in New York was very expensive.
Friends and family came to visit. By the time I took them on trips and fed them,
I'd spent a lot of money. The University of Pittsburgh's offer was too good to turn
down, and I had completed what New York University had wanted me to do. I
rebuilt the women's department, worked on morale, and spoke around the
country. With all of this accomplished, I decided to go to Pittsburgh.

In Pittsburgh, Minnie Lynn and I decided to work together. Minnie had been
on the University of Pittsburgh faculty for 19 years. She had a big influence on my
decision to go and on getting my salary to a good level. She chaired the combined
graduate and undergraduate departments. My job was to teach modern dance, to
initiate recreation, and to work in the usual physical education fields. The dual
appointment, offered by the University of Pittsburgh itself, was to act as
coordinator of special activities, to work with student groups across the board, not
just those in health, physical education, recreation and dance. I worked with
engineers, nurses, business students and others. The University had a converted
hotel across the street from the Cathedral of Learning. There we held all sorts of
student activities. That was for the University of Pittsburgh. My physical
education, dance and recreation were for the physical education department.
That was in 1957.

In 1960, the executive committee of Bouvé-Boston School invited Minnie to
be director of the school, which is in Medford, north of Boston. She was president
of AAHPER at that time. They talked and talked to her but she and I were very
happy in Pittsburgh. It has a magnificent ethnic mix. We had wonderful variety in
our folk dance, music and crafts programs. One day, Mr. Felix Pereira, chairman
of the executive committee, said to her, "We really are desperate. We have got to
have a leader who can guide us into the 21st century and work on development and new programs. At the present time the committee has voted that if we can’t get a national figure then we will close.” As soon as he said that, Minnie made a decision based on her sense of history. Bouvé-Boston School stemmed from the former Boston School of Physical Education in 1913. That night Minnie said to me, "Cat, will you go as my assistant and start a recreation program at the school and in the community? I said, "Sure, young people are young people. It doesn’t matter where I am."

On May 6, 1960, Minnie and I went to Tufts University, where Bouvé-Boston School was affiliated. We arrived early, at the end of the third trimester, to assess the situation. Neither Minnie nor I were on salary until September. While we were there, the provost from Tufts asked Minnie if she would release me part time as coordinator of special activities to work with student groups and to develop unity among groups. You asked about the effects of the three-fold appointment in Tennessee. That program was sponsored by the department of physical education and recreation, the state department of education, and the college of agriculture. It was a beautifully unified thing.

ALLYS SWANSON: Take us through the evolution of Boston-Bouvé College to its present status with Northeastern University.

DR. ALLEN: In 1960, Boston-Bouvé School was a women’s school with majors in physical education and physical therapy. During that year, Minnie and I worked feverishly to develop community contacts, to initiate a recreation curriculum, and to solve problems.

In 1962, Tufts asked Minnie to develop a plan for Bouvé Boston School’s future. The president, some professors and personnel from Tufts asked Minnie to attend a crisis meeting but then they ignored her report. They said that they were
not going to keep any professional schools. Instead, Boston-Bouvé could merge with Jackson College, the women’s college at Tufts. Minnie was absolutely opposed to that idea because she felt that it was not morally right. The proposed merger would force us to give up all of our traditions. Our faculty would have to go, and we would have to close our buildings and shut down our programs. Our career-oriented people would have no place to go.

We decided that Tufts was not the place for us, so Minnie and Mr. Pereira began to hunt for another campus. They went to Brandeis. Abram Sakow was president and wanted to help us. However, he told Minnie frankly that he couldn’t give us facilities for five years because they had a developmental plan. Minnie and Mr. Pereira went to Boston University and Northeastern University. Northeastern wanted us and we wanted Northeastern because it had a cooperative plan. Students went to school for one quarter and then worked at a job related to their field for the next quarter. They earned money for tuition. They went back to the schoolroom and then out on a co-op program alternately. Although it was a five-year program instead of a four-year program, the students were beautifully educated.

Northeastern agreed to hire any Bouvé-Boston School faculty and staff who wished to make the transfer. Some retired and others came over in 1964. In 1962 and 1963 Minnie and I commuted from one campus to the other. All of Minnie’s requests were answered. We were given a building of our own with a dance studio, recreation room, gymnasium, swimming pool and outdoor center. Asa Knowles, a superior character and administrator, was president at the time. He requested that we become coeducational. Combining the two departments was difficult because there was a men’s physical education department at Northeastern and a women’s physical education department at Bouvé-Boston
School. However, the change was made congenially and effectively. It has been a very happy experience.

Minnie and I were considered faculty from the time we arrived at Northeastern in 1960. Many changes followed. Minnie went from director to dean. The school became a college and legally reversed its name to Boston-Bouvé College. It became a five-year cooperative school. Until 1967, I was a professor developing recreation curriculum, and I became chair of the new recreation department. We had 15 students when we opened in 1965. After that we felt the necessity for a department of health education. I was acting chair and became dean in 1967.

I was dean from 1967 to 1977, at which point I became special assistant to Dr. Kenneth G. Ryder, president of the University. I was in the administrative building doing straight administrative work. I met a new group of people who cordially took me in. I stayed in that position until I retired in 1981. I am now what they call a 25-year associate because I have given more than 25 years of my life to Northeastern.

ALLYS SWANSON: Minnie L. Lynn made many wonderful contributions to our profession. What can you tell us about her?

DR. ALLEN: Minnie Lynn was a very personable, petite, attractive person. She was a brilliant scholar. She was a graduate of Oberlin College and, when I last checked, she was the only woman to have received the Distinguished Alumni Award. Although Minnie was probably most well-known as a health educator, she played professional basketball long before she became a teacher. She was so tiny that she would run around under the other players’ arms. I am 5 feet 4 inches tall, and Minnie was smaller than me with
delicate bones. She had a marvelous feeling of fairness for students and faculty. She worked well with men and women.

Besides being attractive, scholarly, and a magnificent health educator, Minnie had a backbone of steel. There were things she had to do that a brave man with a sword wouldn’t have tackled. In spite of the possibility of real conflict over maintaining a four-year curriculum, Minnie was able to introduce the women’s program into the complex situation at Northeastern. She did this beautifully and quietly. I have the greatest respect for Minnie Lynn.

There is no question that Minnie certainly influenced me. I remember an incident that occurred shortly after I returned from Mexico. I had gone there on a Pan-American Scholarship to get a feel for the Mexican people and their dance. Minnie invited me to speak at McKinley High School in Canton, Ohio. The speech was about Mexico and was full of dancing, laughing and clapping. It seemed like a great speech because everyone was laughing and shaking my hand. Minnie came up to me and said, "Cat, I never want to hear that speech again." I asked Minnie if she had seen the reaction of those people. She said "Yes, but I have heard it five times." I said, "Well, I didn't invite you, you just came." She said, "You know, I think it is time for you to broaden your base. Use examples if you like but learn to speak about...." She gave me a list of all the things I was to explore. Minnie was my second tutor; Aunt Edna was my first.

ALLYS SWANSON: What were some of the unique challenges you faced as dean? Also, I want to note that women deans at coeducational institutions were not that common.

DR. ALLEN: To begin with, I was a dean in the 1960s, a time of student turmoil over the Vietnam War and other issues. It was tremendous and fierce on university campuses. Boston is a city of colleges
and universities. There probably isn’t any place in the country that has more. You can call them troublemakers if you wish, but a lot of the people who didn’t agree with things that were happening were students and graduates of schools like Harvard, MIT and a few others. They would come over to Northeastern because we had a lot of dormitories right in Boston. While I was dean, some of our own people picketed, and threw bricks and bottles at the police. I lived in my office for a while because students threatened to bomb the ROTC building which was right behind our building. No one could do much alone, but the broom closet, with the brooms and buckets, was right next to my office. If a fire started, at least I could pour water on it.

Those were interesting years during which many of us realized that it was important to cooperate rather than to compete. Faculty and students needed to understand each other. I told them to work together. We met every single day in the recreation room to calm our tempers and to talk about problems, what might happen in Vietnam, and what direction we should take. During that time we cemented our relationships. One important aspect of being a dean was to understand the faculty, staff and students. I let them know that I cared for them and that if I had to discipline them it was because I cared.

It was always simple to work with the administration because they were interested in having a harmonious campus where there was collegiality. In the 1970s, the faculty began to revolt. They would picket and block doors, and they began to sue for this, that and the other thing. We had a particularly fine group. Part of our strength was that we all knew each other well and worked together well. The student advisory board, that we had started at Bouvé, would bring problems to us to be solved before they exploded. We were problem solvers.
ALLYS SWANSON: You have mentioned several significant contributions from people you admire. Are there any others you would like to mention?

DR. ALLEN: I admired Dr. Ruth Abernathy. Originally a Southerner from Oklahoma, she taught in Texas, California and the state of Washington. We were most closely associated at all of the conventions. She was very interested in recreation, didn’t know anything about it, and wouldn’t think about leading it. However, she had great administrative and organizational skills. She helped me a great deal. We used to sit and talk at all of the conventions. We knew each other formally, but also we were great personal friends. We had our picture taken not long before she died, when I visited her at her home on Whidbey Island, in Washington. One of the greatest influences on my life was watching a very skilled administrator and organizer. I learned by letting her skills seep through me. She certainly helped me. She was a marvelous friend.

ALLYS SWANSON: What can you tell us about Dorothy Ainsworth? We always teach about her contributions to international professional development and her work at Smith College.

DR. ALLEN: Dorothy was one of my finest friends. I first became closely associated with her in 1960 when the World Congress of the International Association of Physical Education and Sports for Girls and Women (IAPESGW) met in Washington, D.C. She invited me to lead recreation and singing, and to work with international groups. Both she and I were very interested in international groups. She founded IAPESGW and the International Council of Health, Physical Education and Recreation (ICHPER), which was for men and women. When Dorothy retired, she invited me to come
and talk with the president about following her as chair of the physical education
department at Smith College. I was honored, but I believed implicitly in a mixed
population. I liked a big city and a big university.

Dorothy and I traveled together at times. We weren't anywhere near the
same age, but we were great companions. In fact, I carried her pocketbook
practically everywhere we went. She had one the size of a man's suitcase, and she
had a horrible habit of setting it down and leaving it. She carried a mint of money
because she always bought gifts when we traveled; she was very generous. We
were in a gift shop in Atlantic City once, and she left her pocketbook on the
counter. We got back to the hotel and she said, "Cat, where is my pocketbook?" I
said, "You didn't give it to me. You must have left it in that last gift shop." I'm
glad I had track and field, but still I nearly broke my neck getting down there to
pick up that pocketbook. They remembered me and everything she had bought. I
did the same thing for her in Africa. Her pocketbook was the heaviest load I have
ever carried. It was worse than an accordion and that's heavy.

ALLYS SWANSON: You were a speaker at many international meetings. I
would like to mention some of the meetings and ask you
to relate what you think was significant. The first World Seminar on Health,
Physical Education, Recreation and Youth Work, held at the 1952 Olympics in
Helsinki, Finland.

DR. ALLEN: The conference itself was magnificent, the first of its
kind. I had just completed a year's work at New York
University, and Jay Nash asked me to go. People attended from all over the
world. The discussion was on health, physical education, recreation and youth
work, and on working with clubs. It was a magnificent opportunity to talk with
people with the same problems.
The main event I recall is that we were shipwrecked in the North Sea on the way back. We boarded the Anna Saleen, which was a converted baby flattop leased to Finland. There were just 17 Americans on that ship. I was co-director of the tour and in charge of all of the recreation. We went to Copenhagen, Denmark, and then on to Norway, Sweden and Finland.

On our way back, our ship was diverted to pick up about 300 displaced persons in Europe. We went through the Kiel Canal at night and didn’t really know where we were. Instead of going through the English Channel, we went through the North Sea. We were rammed at midnight by a Norwegian mother whaler loaded with oil and blubber. I remember the exact time because I was running recreation and I stopped the activities every night at midnight. It’s impossible to know how we stayed afloat because there was water coming in at the bottom and there were flames at the top. We worked hard to keep people from jumping overboard because they would have lasted only five minutes in the icy North Sea. It’s strange what people do when they expect to die, and we expected to die. One lady put on her brand new outfit from Paris. Some people got on their knees and prayed. Other people sang. The American boys played table tennis. They were smoking and flicking their cigarette butts over the side of the ship and onto the oil. Somehow we made it through the night. At daybreak, the captain gave the "all clear" signal. As we went down for breakfast, we were towed slowly around the north end of Scotland.

ALLYS SWANSON: In 1969 you were in Tokyo, Japan heading up the delegation for IAPESGW. What do you recall from that conference?

DR. ALLEN: It was one of the best conferences we ever had. We used Tokyo’s marvelous Olympic facilities for our
demonstrations. Among other things, as head of the delegation, I had the opportunity to talk with other leaders, through interpreters of course, about their programs. There is a very strong dance focus among the women in Japan. They emphasize fitness and physical education. We were wined and dined. Everything was very well-organized.

One night they asked four of us to present a dance which was typical of our countries. I went down onto the huge floor with a cordless microphone. People were seated to the ceiling yet everyone could hear me. I felt like a midget because we were in that huge Olympic facility. I spoke of the Pattycake Polka, a dance typical to the United States. It is a very simple but catchy dance. There is a lot of clapping in it, and I heeled and toed. I gathered a group out on the floor for a demonstration. I knew that they wouldn’t understand me in English, but an interpreter would have delayed us. In the meantime, a Japanese man had caught the tune from me and was playing it on the piano. I had the accordion and began to sing and dance. Then people began to sing and dance. Thousands of people began to pour out onto the floor. There were so many that I had to form four concentric circles and arrange people so that their partners were next to them showing them how to do it. It was an uplifting experience in human understanding. People danced, sang, and heeled and toed for the rest of the congress. Everyone had great admiration for the Japanese women because this was the first event they were permitted to organize on their own.

ALLYS SWANSON: In 1965, you traveled to Ethiopia, Africa.

DR. ALLEN: Yes, I shall never forget that trip. That was the International Congress of Health, Physical Education and Recreation (ICHPER) in conjunction with the World Confederation of Organizations of the Teaching Profession (WCOTP). There were representatives
from all over the world. Our plane landed first, so I went alone. I later met Dorothy Ainsworth, Elsa Schneider, Gwendolyn Drew and Helen Manley. That was when Haile Selassie was emperor, and travel in Ethiopia was still allowed. He tried to bring his country into the 20th century. You can’t help but respect what he had done. He erected a huge hall with a tremendous mural. It was to be the center for African Unity where representatives from all the countries of Africa would meet. It was built according to the same plan as the United Nations. We sat in a semi-circular pattern with our names and countries on a placard in front of us. A little machine in front of each of us would translate. If someone was speaking Swahili, I could punch the English button and hear a translation.

It was my privilege to represent and to vote for the United States. Elsa Schneider was there working in health. Dorothy Ainsworth was working in general physical education and fitness. She also was part of the organizing team. I stayed over, hired a driver and traveled through some of the back country of Ethiopia. Today when I look at the faces of so many starving youngsters, I think of many of those places.

The Ethiopian conference was the epitome of the influence of music and movement. The president at that time was an English lord. I was asked to lead the singing and did so with pleasure. I got out the accordion and first taught them "Kumbaya." We don’t really know if it was brought from Africa, but it means "come this way my Lord." I had it translated into French, Swahili and English. We sang all the different languages together and everyone caught the fact that it was deeply spiritual.

Dorothy Ainsworth and I were invited into the home of one of the delegates. We walked through mud to the door and sat on the floor inside. It was wiped clean and spotless. Then they poured a type of batter on the table to make
something similar to a johnnycake with a chicken mixture on it. We rolled it up and ate it with our hands. I am grateful I got to Ethiopia when travel there was still possible.

ALLYS SWANSON: Tell us about your experiences at Buenos Aires, Argentina in 1981.

DR. ALLEN: I went early to South America and visited Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. There was a meeting there at which everyone in the audience was Portuguese except me and a few of my friends. I learned enough Portuguese to introduce myself to the group and exchange greetings. Then I communicated through a translator. That particular talk was about what we were doing in the United States, and what they might do there if they wished. We also visited some of their institutions of higher learning to see what was actually happening.

After leaving Brazil, I went to Buenos Aires. We were beautifully entertained and taken around in mini-buses and cars. We met once in the Olympic building and saw all of their athletes’ pictures on the wall. They had a party for us. Since their greatest joy was opera, they took us to the opera house.

Their main street is glorious with cathedrals, statues and fine buildings but, as in many countries, behind the scenes was not quite so fine. There was a weird feeling in Buenos Aires. We didn’t realize at first what the problem was, but there were times when I felt as though I were in a Humphrey Bogart-Marlene Dietrich film. People wearing trench coats stood underneath lamp posts. There was a feeling of great secrecy. Almost immediately after we returned home, the Falkland Islands War started. Americans were not terribly popular. All in all, I have had a lifetime of people and cultures.

ALLYS SWANSON: Share with us some other international experiences.
DR. ALLEN: When Czechoslovakia was behind the Iron Curtain, I received word that its physical educators were very much interested in the fact that the United States had gone into fitness through jogging. They wondered if I could be of any influence in getting one of their outstanding physical educators out of Czechoslovakia to observe and study fitness in our country. I still don’t know how it happened, but we got her here. I got some books on fitness and jogging for her. She was just wide-eyed over the types of freedom and the great diversity of programs we had. Her visit was part of the international relations that I find very important.

I also had many opportunities to go to the Maritime Provinces in eastern Canada, through Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and that area. I’ve also traveled and studied in Mexico. I got to know people living on our own continent. They live different types of lives. I am still traveling when I get a chance.

ALLYS SWANSON: You were the presenter of the first Dorothy Sears Ainsworth Award for the IAPESGW in Buenos Aires, Argentina in 1981. At the IAPESGW 1989 conference in Bali, Indonesia, you were the recipient of the Dorothy Sears Ainsworth Award. Tell us what that means to you.

DR. ALLEN: Receiving that award was a very humbling experience. The fact that it is international means that there is a lot of understanding among us whether or not we speak the same language, whether or not we worship in the same way. We all worship the same God, a creator greater than we are, but we have chosen different avenues. To me, it was a great tribute to Dorothy Ainsworth’s philosophy and what she saw in founding IAPESGW. She wanted to give more opportunities to women, particularly in developing countries. She felt that in this way, delegates from these countries
could take back ideas on health, physical education, recreation, and the implementation of dance into schools. It certainly is one of the greatest honors ever bestowed on me.

DR. VAN OTEGHEN: Since the Tennessee Alliance of Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance claims you as one its own, will you give a brief synopsis of the Tennessee State wide Recreation Leadership Training Program that you developed?

DR. ALLEN: Tennessee is very good to me; I feel as though I am one of them. The program was started during the six months that followed World War II. Trainees spent six months working throughout the state of Tennessee and six months at the University of Tennessee. They were trained in methods of organization for teaching folk dance, group singing, quiet and active games. We taught them how to get farmer Jones to let his field be used for outdoor sports, how to dam up a creek to get enough depth to teach a little swimming, and how to make volleyball nets out of potato sacks, sew them together and run them between two trees. Our program used what we had, taking leadership where it could be found and giving what training we could. During the interim, trainees had obligations to go back to their churches or groups, such as the Future Farmers or Homemakers of America.

DR. VAN OTEGHEN: You were president of the Alliance, then of the Association for Health, Physical Education and Recreation from 1964 to 1965. What were the main concerns of the profession and on what did your leadership focus?

DR. ALLEN: The concerns were very much as they are now. Some of them focused on organizational methods and morale, such as strength through unity and strength through diversity. Much of my focus
was creativity, not just on knowing how to paint, to sculpt or to play an instrument, but on creativity in our programs. There has been research in at least four areas of intelligence: intelligence measurable by I.Q., kinesthetic intelligence, creative intelligence, psychosocial intelligence. These four types of intelligence are included in our programs. Creative-innovative intelligence was a vital fact in the 1964-65 year. I made up the term creative-innovative to refer to new ideas, new ways of doing things, and new ways of doing old things. There is no question that we haven’t explored creativity to its depth and how to develop it. According to the latest research that I have read, the key to creativity is the freedom to think and to act.

DR. VAN OTEGHEN: Anita Aldrich mentioned that she so much appreciated the fact that you maintained an emphasis on elementary physical education when oftentimes new Alliance presidents select something entirely different. Do you recall having done that?

DR. ALLEN: Yes, I had taught children for a long time and dearly loved it. Again it was a fortunate experience. Lyndon B. Johnson was president, and he was working on the Elementary and Secondary Act. Official personnel invited me to address a Senate committee in Washington, D.C. on the issue of including physical education in President Johnson’s program. We wanted assurance that physical education facilities were included in all the new schools that were built, making gymnasiums and swimming pools available to the children of this nation. It was Anita’s and my great interest.

DR. VAN OTEGHEN: We may have touched on this enough already, but what do you consider to be the greatest challenges and/or accomplishments of your career?
DR. ALLEN: I enjoyed the thrill of working at every level, with the very youngest to the very oldest. When segregation still existed in the South, I taught illiterate blacks and whites at night on an integrated basis at a black school in Georgia. It was a real challenge to learn how to teach illiterates and an even greater thrill to see a person write his or her name, instead of an X, for the first time. These accomplishments might signal the end of a career, but I am not through yet; I am still working at home. I have known and still know some of the most outstanding people in the history of health, physical education, recreation and dance. One of my greatest achievements is having been a friend and a colleague of those people, having learned from them, and having shared the challenges of increasing physical education, integration and study for people abroad.

DR. VAN OTEGHEN: Have there been any disappointments?

DR. ALLEN: No, not really. Every single position or job has a great fulfillment.

DR. VAN OTEGHEN: Catherine, what do you believe you have given students and colleagues over the years? In other words, how would you like to be remembered?

DR. ALLEN: I would like to be remembered as a person who loves people and who tries to help them learn in whatever ways they can.

DR. VAN OTEGHEN: Among the numerous awards you received were an Alliance Honor Award in 1957, the Gulick Medal in 1970, the R. Tait McKenzie Award in 1980, the Hetherington Award of the American Academy of Physical Education in 1984, and the First Women's Shell at Northeastern University was named "Catherine Allen." You must have cherished
these times in your life. Of what significance were these or any other awards to you?

DR. ALLEN: Again I would turn to people. The awards mean a lot for two reasons. First, I am honored by the people who make the awards possible through home, school, church and professional influences. Secondly, I cherish the experiences and personal relationships made possible through the presentation.

DR. VAN OTEGHEN: I know that you were very deserving of the several significant awards in the profession that you received. You talked earlier about some of the activities that you did as a child. What type of physical activities did you participate in throughout the decades of teaching and into retirement?

DR. ALLEN: I stayed active in all types of dance except ballet. I also stayed active in tennis and swimming. While at the University of Tennessee, I learned the trampoline and played volleyball and basketball just as I had done in high school and college. My leisure time pursuits are much less active since hip surgery and a transplant with complications that have followed. Activities such as walking are limited. My leisure pursuits are reading, writing, music, friends, colleagues and family. I regret not being completely active, but a person must accept what comes.

DR. VAN OTEGHEN: Were you the creator of the AALR-AAHPER song sessions?

DR. ALLEN: Yes, I have been leading group singing for a very long time. AALR was not our first collaboration because we had been singing all over the country for years. The Southern District has great singers, including Jane Hooker. The Eastern District sings as well. Around the
country we have little groups of singers. Officially, AALR initiated the national sessions in 1973, and they have served a great purpose. I asked to be retired when we were in Las Vegas several years ago. The memories are warm and happy. Others are carrying on the tradition, which is what should happen.

DR. VAN OTEGHEN: You are a member of the American Academy of Physical Education. Of what significance is that to you?

DR. ALLEN: My association with the Academy is invaluable. I have been a member for many years. It is a group of scholars, both men and women, who naturally are very thoughtful. The meetings are attended by the carefully selected Academy members. The Academy is very provocative. I have learned a great deal, particularly when so many of the members have been focusing on exercise science as an integral part of the profession. A great many of my closest friends are in the Academy.

DR. VAN OTEGHEN: What is your philosophy on remaining active in professional associations versus not remaining active upon retirement?

DR. ALLEN: I am definitely staying active in various associations and otherwise. I am doing research and writing. I am very much interested in history and archives in the Academy, AAHPERD and Boston-Bouvé College of Northeastern University. I presently have a publication ready to go. It is on the history of Boston-Bouvé College and includes a memorial lecture to Marjorie Bouvé, the first director of the College. Since 1988, I have been working on a proposal called the Presidents' Scholarship/Special Projects Fund. It has now been established and will honor all of the AAHPERD presidents since 1885. That project has been behind the scenes.
I am working actively with the Massachusetts AAHPERD group; they are live wires. I attend all of the conventions and conferences that I can. I don’t believe that a person should stop just because she reaches a certain age. A person has a right to stop, but as long as she is alert, has experiences to share and young people to guide, she should stay active.

DR. VAN OTEGHEN: Do you do anything special in the way of diet or stress management?

DR. ALLEN: I don’t have any problem with diet or stress management. My mind governs my body, and I can keep myself completely calm. I balance active times with quiet times, a public life with a private life. Music is essential. I never go through a day without listening to classical music. I have a radio by my bed, and I am up by five and listening by six. I don’t play the accordion or other instruments as much as I should. I am playing at a big reunion in October. The accordion is a heavy instrument. I have an organ but it is at my other home in Rhode Island. My work and leisure pursuits are reading, writing, thinking, developing programs and plans, and knitting. I also do a lot of counseling and advising with organizations and young people, both within and outside of the profession.

DR. VAN OTEGHEN: Did you make any special preparations for retirement? If so, what would you recommend to those who see retirement down the line?

DR. ALLEN: I viewed retirement with pure anticipation of using time to make choices. It is a time to dream, to write, to think, to listen to music, to garden, to visit and to travel. I also saw it as a time to continue professional commitment.
DR. VAN OTEGHEN: What advice would you give to a young person today who would like to major in the field of health, physical education, recreation and/or dance?

DR. ALLEN: I would say get in there as quickly as you can. It is the most rewarding profession there is. When we realize that we are at the core of total health and well-being, I can think of no greater missionary work than ours. It is very rewarding. In our field, teachers and students have a closer affinity than in any other discipline. A career in health, physical education, recreation or dance can give back much more than a person can give to it.

DR. VAN OTEGHEN: What are your plans for the future?

DR. ALLEN: I want to take another long trip. Right now my car is being traded in Wakefield, Rhode Island. When that’s taken care of, I am going to take a long trip to Montreal and to Eastern Canada. Canada is a love of mine. I once took the train from Montreal to Vancouver. I dearly love the train.

DR. VAN OTEGHEN: It sounds as if you are going to have an exciting future. Are there any additional aspects of your personal or professional life that you would like to share with us today?

DR. ALLEN: My family and some teachers, in English for example, never understood why in the world anyone would need to go to college to learn how to play. Perhaps they had forgotten that our profession is based in the sciences: biology, physiology, kinesiology, motor learning. Perhaps they had forgotten that the human body is the greatest instrument that has ever been created. It has a soul. If a person’s greatest capability is to play, that is magnificent. What could be greater? It has been a pleasure to prove to my
family that people live longer, are healthier, can overcome broken hips and have a rich, full life because of this profession that we cherish.

ALLYS SWANSON: Catherine Allen, you have given us so much pleasure: the songs, the dances, the leadership to help groups and individuals have fun and work together to accomplish common goals. Your commitment to bridging worldwide gaps of culture and conflict with recreation, song, dance and physical education has made the world a better place. The lives you’ve touched have been enriched by that special Catherine Allen love and understanding. A smile, a song, a twinkle in your eye and a note of encouragement is the Catherine Allen hallmark to all with whom you’ve worked: elementary children, men in the service, college students, administrators and faculty, high ranking government officials, and your many friends and colleagues. We all cherish that special moment when our lives have been touched in some way by Cat Allen. Thank you very much.

DR. ALLEN: Thank you. If those things have been important and have enriched lives, what greater happiness could I find?