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Tom Parry interview

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CWU Living History Project

Tom Parry

Interviewer: Milo Smith

Smith: This is March 13, 1996. We're on the fourth floor of Barge I-fall at Central

Washington University, and we're continuing a series of interviews for the Living History Project of the University. The gentleman you see before you has a well-known name in the Pacific Northwest at least. What is your name, sir?

Parry: Tom Parry.

Smith: Tom Parry, P-A-R-R-Y. What was your academic rank, Tom, when you came to Central'?

Parry: I was an Assistant Professor of Physical Education.

Smith: And what rank did you hold when you left your academic assignment?

Parry: I went all the way up to Assistant Professor.

Smith: Wow! The state just throws money away. What were the years of your arrival and departure?

Parry: I came in the summer of 1966 and left the end of the fall quarter in 1986.

Smith: Did you officially retire?

Parry: Yes.

Smith: You didn't get fired?

Parry: Well, that's a long story. (Laughter) No. I don't think so.

Smith: Incidentally, for those of you who are watching this tape, I want you to know that the interviewer is prejudiced. I very much admire the interviewee, partly because of the fact that I think he is a good man and a hell of a football coach and partly because he was so highly respected among the athletes that he worked with. And I think that tells you an awful lot about a man. From what school did you get your degree before coming to Central, Tom?

Parry: My Bachelor's and Master's were from Washington State.

Smith: Is that a four year school?

Parry: It was when I left.

Smith: Incidentally, did you play football with any of the Williams boys?

Parry. I played with Jerry Williams (?).

Smith: Certainly you wouldn't have played with his brother who was a Vandal.

Parry: That's right. I did play with him in the East-West Game.

Smith: Good. Good. Did you teach in any department, Tom, while you were at Central, other than in Athletics?

Parry: I was in Physical Education.

Smith: In Physical Education.

Parry: At that time all coaches were instructors.

Smith: Good. Among your academic assignments, Tom, what were some of the kinds of classes that you taught over those years?

Parry: Well, my main emphasis was in activity classes. I taught several academic classes over the years. I never...coaching football is what I did all the time. (?) I was (?)

Physical Education and Health (?)...but that was kind of off and on. (?)

Smith: How could you possibly handle teaching assignments when I know that recruiting took a lot of your time off campus?

Parry: Well, we didn't go off campus like they do in this day and age. We went off campus usually in vacation periods or weekends, or sometimes during the week. We had to get someone to take our classes. We did a lot by correspondence... Work shops.

Smith: Now, Tom, I'm going to ask you a question here, we'll divide it up a little bit.

What problems do you recall that you would class as significant in the areas of Physical

Education and Athletics during your time at Central?

Parry: Well, probably the main... Would probably be staffing. We had some excellent people who were members of the Department. And Ibr my first half of the years and, but they were busy then, too. They all coached another sport and they all had a full load of teaching, and they also.. .and so we had less access then during that time. Gary Frederick helped me in football; I helped him in baseball and I helped Art Hutton in track. Art helped me in football one year. Spike Arlt helped me several years. But that made a little bit of decline in, when the season ended, the head coach had to do most of the off-season work. That's not a complaint, just a fact.

Smith: As you think back, would you consider finances as being one of your major problems in Athletics?

Parry: I would. I think our budgets were inadequate for my whole twenty years here. I think that we needed (?). 25 to 35% more money would be (?)...Always strung out like many areas on the campus. I think the Student Union Building (?) held back student activities on the campus, not just athletics. And I understand it's (?)

Smith: In the area of finances, Tom, would you care to comment about the limitations on funding for grants of aid and financial support for athletes while going to college?

Parry: Well, this went in, we went entirely on financial aid, my first year was the second year they had done it. So we had to rely (?) on grants and loans and a student (?), totally. And if a student didn't qualify he was out of luck. And that put you in a difficult recruiting position. When it all washed out, we got an excellent group of kids. After that (?) a great experience (?) that was difficult, to not have anything to entice a kid.

Smith: Were there any league restrictions for finances that would have been any particular problem to you?

Parry: Well, the N.A.I.A. had their standards and we had them, too. And that really did(?) us in that area. That's not a total negative. But it did keep you from competing in some ways. We had to rely a great deal on Jr. Colleges, not totally, but to get the better ball players. They(?) been(?)... would(?) get an opportunity to go to a major school (?)

Smith: OK, now, in the area of problems again, but not directly associated with athletics or physical education, do you recall any particular campus problems that you became aware of and you did consider as a problem?

Parry: I'd have to say this, that in my 20 years I never received anything but total cooperation from everybody we dealt with. And that is a wonderful memory for me.

Smith: That's good.

Parry: We had harmony. We had cooperation within(?)

Smith: Were eligibility rules any particular problem to you as a football coach?

Parry: They always are. The kids have to meet certain standards leading towards graduation (?) . . . But not all kids come programmed to study hard and do all the right things, and athletes are kind of active kids and (?) everything, actively finish, have a graduate record to show that athletes are better students than anybody (?). We have that problem, but everybody else has it, (?) keep an eye on it.

Smith: Well, as a faculty member, I was always aware of the athletes in my class, and I

suspect that I may have prodded them a little more than I would have those whom I

didn't watch on Saturday. I would simply say, "Hey, you fell on your face this last quiz.

I want to watch you play ball Saturday. I-lit the book a little, will ya'?" And once those fella's found out you were interested in them as human beings and as individuals, they very often responded well. I never had trouble with athletes. Except for (?)

Parry: Milo, your background leads to that, too, because you were an athlete yourself.

Yeah, I appreciate that. I think there were many instructors here (?) in their own way.

Very little negative response (?)

Smith: You certainly had some fine young men.

Parry: Yep.

Smith: Tom, you were known as a man with an excellent sense of humor. Now, would you turn back the mental machine and see if you can recall a few humorous events that took place either in or out of your area while you were active at Central?

Parry: Well, there wasn't a day goes by there wasn't something (?). I know the one thing that you can kind of, on our level of competition we traveled by bus and we had some long trips, and we'd get into the campus anywhere from 9 PM to 5 in the morning (?) and we'd just come up 14th St. by the (?) and no one was ever around, we never had any one ever greet us. We weren't expecting them to greet us. I know in 1984 when we had a very good team and we lost one game against Eastern, our opening game. We had just won our 10th game against Western on the road and we came back, pulled up on 14th St. and as I remember about 10:30, 11:00 o'clock, a car was going the opposite direction and it honked. I turned to the players in the bus and told them, our program has finally arrived, somebody honked. In fact I told that at the banquet when we played East-Central Oklahoma, which was a little school like ours. (?) East-Central Oklahoma (?)...I remember my dad said most of the good work is done (?) and it is. Now, I don't know, I think when you talk about humorous things, I think of kind of in house things mean a lot to the people around, and I don't think (?) and a special kind of memory.

Smith: OK, Tom, now that you're warmed up, turn the machine clear back to your childhood and bring us up to date as to where Tom was born and raised and moved to, and so forth.

Parry: I was born and raised in Seattle. I went to (?) High School. I was a very poor student. I say that for a reason. I am concerned that we're missing some people in education now (?) I think. I'm particularly concerned about one area that the admission's requirements (?) ...education (?) I think we screen out an awful lot of people who given time, given encouragement, would make excellent (?) I'm very concerned. I think somewhere along the line, that (?) the very high academic standards coming in to the program. If they don't make them when they get in, that's another thing. I don't think

(?) But I could name names, and you can too, of people who have come in, (?) and gone off and made a real contribution (?) ... What was your question?

Smith: Well, concerning your biography...

Parry: OK, my dad was in the advertising business, but he was an excellent student. He was elected President of the Student Body at Washington State. But he did not fulfill his term. That was in World War I. My brother was a Phi-Beta-Kappa (?) My mother went to (?). My wife was a graduate of the University of Idaho. So I've been around smart people all my life. I have to give my parents and my wife credit when (?)...went out and got me when I was a sophomore in high school, I'd played freshman football, (?)...and my mother came out and dragged me by the ear and (?). And that changed my

Smith: Good for her.

Parry: A great Mother. A great Father, and a great wife.

Smith: Oh, your wife was one of my favorite people. I went to high school with her so I knew her well, and her brother, Mr. IBM

Parry: Yeah.

Smith: Now, which administrators, Tom, and faculty come to your mind as you think back among the important leaders while you were on the staff here at Central?

Parry: I'd start at the top with Jim Brooks. Jim was one of those (?) who would teach (?) and when he got all done became teachers(?) . . .I'm sure he had a lot of pressures on him(?) I always felt that (?)...Abe

Poffenroth was the only one school administrator that I ever (?)...Department Chairman who made the statement that (?) . . .you got good people(?) ...never had to jump up when he came in the room (?) you were comfortable with him. (?) and never said anything about it. I think (?) was (?) ...there were many other administrators who went through here and unfortunately I didn't get to know them. I knew them, but I wouldn't be able to comment. My relations with them, I think, were fine, but (?). Gary Frederick, I worked for him. Ron (?)... I'd have to put (?) in a special class (?) He was (?). Guys I worked with coaching were outstanding people, Art Hutton, track coach, Gary Frederick, baseball coach, I always felt (?), track and baseball, Eric Beardsley coaching wrestling, Of course, Dean Nicholson, one of my best friends. (?) It's all true isn't it? I don't want to leave anybody out. I could go on and on...

Smith: Oh, that's fine.

Parry: Those are kind of key people. I'd say we had one common thread among us that I think is important, and that is all had coached in the public schools before we came here. None of us came off a major campus or (?) system. We all had to (?). We all had to teach school.. .beholden to the education system. I think that's one of the reasons (?)some excellent people. I think that maybe you're going to ask me about this, Milo, (?) We had just total harmony. It was a great place to work.

Smith: Good. Now, going back to the biography, Tom, let's graduate you from college with a Bachelor's degree. Let's pursue Tom from that point.

Parry: OK. I started school in 1941. and then working (?) and went into the Navy and came back out and things like that. I actually graduated in 1949 from Langley High School on Whidbey Island. I was a coach, football and baseball coach, (?) I was only there one year and then I went to (?) High School. (?) Then I (?went) to (?)Jr. College for two years, and (9) for two years, (?) ...five years, (?and was about to quit coaching when this opportunity came up. (?)

Smith: Just incidentally, Tom, did you ever cross paths with Lauri Niemi?

Parry: (?)

Smith: Good. He was one of my favorite nemesis, as I played football for Lower(?)

Parry: Yes.

Smith: And I looked across the line and saw that behemoth named Niemi.

Parry: An outstanding lineman.

Smith: A fine fellow. We finally found his weakness. You could trap him because he was such a power house straight ahead.

Parry: (?) at Washington State.

Smith: Now, Tom, do you recall any particular problems that existed between the student body and the faculty that were of any particular concerns to you during those years?

Parry: Well, we all know that the Vietnamese War years were difficult for anybody. I would think we start that the people with the most difficulty were the students. (?) At least they didn't murder any people (?) .. I always...

Smith: Good.

Parry: (?)

Smith: Do you have any knowledge of problems that might have come up during your tenure here between the faculty and the administration?

Parry: Well, like all faculty members I used to care about things, (?) thank you (?) I think we're so close to the students that our concerns were more with students and (?)... I think probably if I had to do everything all over again I would be a little more active maybe with the problems (?) And I think a little more involved maybe, in rights for faculty. (?) perhaps in salary (?) I'm not complaining (?) I think there's room for a little more representation(?)

Smith: Good. Now, Tom, all of us have read, and continue to hear that athletes are professional while they are in college, and they're being paid and we should come out of the closet and admit it. What's your feeling about this?

Parry: (?) I think there's some merit to that, considering 1996. answering the question, I think the student athletes at Central are the antithesis of(?), of NOT being paid. He and his parents, however they structure their finances and government assistance was a great boon. They're struggling to make it (?) and there are many other students (?) classified activities, that's just hogwash as far as I'm concerned. In the major schools, [think (?) people (?) Can't be (?) can't be (?) ...I don't think you have to worry about small college professionalism.

Smith: Certainly not. Now, Tom, I'm going to toss you a series of short subjects that if you have something to comment on who, if not we'll move on. React if you can. the first one is: The salary schedule at Central during your tenure.

Parry: I think there is a lack of recognition for non-academic pursuits, (?) non-academics meaning coaches, (?) in that we didn't have time. I don't think in all seriousness we were recognized for publish or perish, pushed upon, but it is also (?) They did not get (?) recognition (?) I'm not (?) myself. We have time to (?) ... I think there's a gap there. I think there's a gap in the system that should be repaired.

Smith: I think that gap becomes so very exposed especially at a time when schools become concerned with such things as "publish or perish" and every school sooner or later has to come up with some kind of a decision as to what is the equivalent to publishing an article in a journal.

Parry: No, I didn't do that.

Smith: That brings me to the point that did you ever feel pressured to win? Was your job ever on the line from season to season? Depending on your won-loss record

Parry: That's something I'm not aware of. (?) I think there was more pressure in the later years probably because we had some down years(9) The primary one being that the school didn't have much money for staff

Smith: Do you have any comments concerning academic freedom?

Parry: I believe in it. It's absolutely necessary.

Smith: Did you ever have outside pressures on you as to such things as, anybody telling you that you had better start playing "Chuck a little more because his parents are major contributors to the Alumni Fund. Things like that, or were you free to make your choices?

Parry: Minimum pressure. I had, I only getting one (?layer) at one time. No.

Smith: Good.

Parry: I (?) There may have been, but (?)...That's pretty unusual.

Smith: Now, Tom, do you have any memory of having been interested in and involved with the faculty code and/or the Faculty Senate?

Parry: I was certainly interested to a degree, but I just couldn't spend much time with that. The Faculty Senate is (?) I think it's a valuable part of the whole picture. (?)

Smith: Recently, Tom, I've been noticing that articles in the paper indicate that, for instance, our current crisis is very concerned about the "Town and Gown" relationships improving, when I think that the town and gown was very close for years and years and years and only since I retired in '91 that they've started drifting apart, if they have. Did you feel supported by the town? Did you feel that there was a terrible significant difference between town and gown?

Parry: No.

Smith: Good. I didn't either.

Parry: I only think the only thing I would say that in football because we didn't have lights, many of the people who worked in stores and businesses could not come to games, and I think that is one thing (?) in playing day games. I think that's college football. (?) I would never change it. I do feel we missed those people, great supporters of basketball. I kind of regret that because they never got to see us play and yet were interested. So that's just a minor thing, and I wouldn't change it. College football is a day game. You get that campus atmosphere and great fans that support us all year, I mean, a first class operation. (?)

Smith: Now, Tom, In this same short answer list, can you recall any campus emergencies in your years here? Did you have a bomb threat in your building?

Parry: No, I don't think so. To come back to the Vietnamese War, we had some stress, as you remember. Up in Nicholson Pavilion, we had some (?) up there. And there was some stress and (?) because we had to get people there, and some of those people (?) some pretty challenging things. I don't blame them.

Smith: Do you have any strong feelings about your memories concerning the hiring policy and practices at Central?

Parry: Oh, I think everybody can (?)a thing about that.

Smith: Did you feel that you had an opportunity to participate in decision making, the hiring of people in your Department, for example?

Parry: Yes, yes.

Smith: Good.

Parry: Yes, we elected our people. You can't ask for more than that.

Smith: Now, would you care to comment on the students that you inherited each fall, at least late summer. The quality of people that came to Central as opposed to going to the U. or to Washington State?

Parry: Well, my experience, and I dealt with a lot of kids because I taught a lot of activity classes as P.E requirements, they were a cross section of the Student Body, Nothing but great (?) I've never seen (?) Scholarships (?)...I read a statement (?) some of these people get no (?) they already have a (?) You know, you have the chance to (?)

Smith: Tom. I was so sensitive when I first came here ten years before you in '56, that we really did have some reputation in the state of taking the flunk outs from Seattle and Pullman. And that did exist for a little while and then I noticed that students would be coming back to campus in the summer and very often times they would say, "My God, what have you people been doing? I used to be able to get "A's" without having to study. And now, I'm up all times of night to get a "B". Well, you know what happened. The faculty got sick and tired of that reputation and we decided to try doing something about

it. Were you getting a lower quality athlete because you couldn't compete for scholarship money at the U. or at Washington State, or one of the other state schools?

Parry: Well, in the case of an athlete you go, less talented athlete, size, speed, (?) I've said this my whole career. We've got good students. Just as smart of player, but we don't have the bigger size. (?) I can't get negative about that. And you can't either.

Smith: Do you recall significant young men whom you worked with, who probably could have made it at the U. Probably could have made it in Pullman, but chose to come to Central and played ball with you? There were some weren't there?

Parry: Absolutely.

Smith: And we used to enjoy them on Saturday.

Parry: Yes. That's right.

Smith: Now, how about any comments that you might have concerning faculty organizations and most specifically, did you ever feel a need to unionize in all your years here on the faculty?

Parry: Well, my answer would be that when I came here I felt that my role (?) the whole organization (?) I felt that way (?) I think, certainly (?) force the faculty, I believe (?)...rather not have it(?) . . .but I think other occasions.

Smith: Well, I can recall discussions on campus that I was part of or at least a listener to, very often concerned with, what do we have to give up in order to get the union working for better salaries? Do we have to give up some of our freedom? And I know at the time that some of us looked into it, we were so jealous of the freedoms that we enjoyed on this campus, that we didn't want to jeopardize that by doing anything. OK, now, Tom, during all those years, were you the recipient of any awards or honors?

Parry: Oh, yes.

Smith: For the sake of history. People twenty-five years from now that are viewing this tape, could you tell us about one or two?

Parry: Well, I'm in the Central Washington University Hall of Fame. (?)football (?)coaches. (?)... I don't know. That's about it.

Smith: OK. Now, this is a difficult question and please don't be modest. What specific contributions do you feel that you made to the progress of your Department or school during the years you were active?

Parry: Well, like all of us (?)

Smith: Obviously.

Parry: Obvious errors, obvious omissions. (?) I tried my best. (?)teaching football (?)

Smith: Did you introduce any new policies and practices in athletics that were of any particular significance while you were here?

Parry: No.

Smith: How about training rules?

Parry: Well, we went the gamut in training rules, that everybody has. Very difficult, very very difficult,...

Smith: More so all the time.

Parry: More so. Well, we had a structure in our program that was pretty (?). a kid (?) I think we all do that. (?) cannot have a lot of individual behaviors (?) and as soon as they understand that, we're off and running. I tried to make that (?) I think we'd all agree that when you get a student, an athlete, or new employee for a company, the biggest thing that has to happen is to close the gap, of how they perceive overall and how you perceive. In your role as a leader and their role as a participant. Once you close that gap, you (7) spend time(?) and you have to (7)

Smith: Now, Tom, during all of those years, did you ever have an opportunity to participate in the planning or the design and construction of a building or an athletic facility of any kind?

Parry: We were involved in some (?) And after a great degree of student push (?) because any major thing that was done in a building, and that wasn't really involved in the building.

Smith: How about the grid iron itself?

Parry: Well, the grid iron itself was excellent when I got here and excellent when I left.

(?) I have to compliment the physical plant people. They were just outstanding. IatT)7 was the best field for many, many years. (?)

Smith: How about the practice fields east of the playing field. Was that sufficient for your practices?

Parry: Oh. yeah.

Smith: Good.

Parry: It was great facilities. We wore it out every year, but it came back.

Smith: How about equipment that you were, that you issued every year? Did you feel that you had modern up to date equipment and sufficient of it?

Parry: That was our priority. We had limited funds in our budget and our priority was not to have new uniforms every year. But to have safe equipment (7) strict on that. We took pride in, I think that's one contribution I think we made here. We probably had less severe football injuries than any school around. (?)

Smith: Now, Tom, I personally know that you do have children. Where did they go to school?

Parry: I had one daughter graduate (?) I have a son(?)

Smith: Did they think that Washington State was as good as the school?

Parry: (?)

Smith: Do you have any relatives, Tom, who attended Central outside of your immediate family.

Parry: No.

Smith: Now, this last question is have you served in the military. You mentioned Navy.

I assume that was the United States Navy. You were on our side, Tom, were you? OK.

What rank did you hold and what did you do in the Navy?

Parry: Well, I was a physical instructor in the Navy. (?) from running a power boat (?)...Not by choice.

Smith: When you came back from Service, did you have an opportunity to use the G.I. Bill?

Parry: I certainly did.

Smith: Good. Now we have come to the end of the sample questions, any comment you would like to make just off the top of your head in addition to everything you have been asked this afternoon?

Parry: No, I just like to leave it as the college wants.

Smith: Good.

Parry: (?)

Smith: Well, we were all very comfortable with you. Thank you, Tom.