Donald Murphy interview

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Smith: Our interview today is Don Murphy formerly of the ed department now retired. Don would you please start with a brief personal history of your life before coming to Central?

Murphy: I was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I grew up on a farm in Waukesha, Wisconsin which today is known as Brookfield and graduated from Waukesha High School. Attended White Water State Teacher’s College, which was like the old normal school here at Central. My college years were interrupted with the service. I signed up for the enlisted men’s reserve as a sophomore and I was called up in my junior year.

Smith: How did you become a teacher?

Murphy: I went in for the interview into Chicago at one of the hotels and was interviewed by Bob McConnell and McConnell, of course, wanted to put his best foot forward and he brought some brochures of Ellensburg and housing with him for us. And of course the houses - he had pictures of the hay - Haybrook farmhouse out here on the north side of town. It is worth probably a quarter of a million bucks and he showed us these pictures and then he’s offering me a salary of - it came in that September - we didn’t get paid in September. They paid only at the end of October. We were breaking the piggy banks and I think my first take home pay at Central was 367 bucks take home. My god, he’s showing us this Haybrook house. I couldn’t believe it but eventually everything worked out over the years. My academic assignment was the ed department. I was green and I was assigned one course - a three credit course and 15 student teachers. That’s a load of 18 and mid quarter our chair quit and went to work for Boeing and they had to distribute the loads around.

Smith: Do you recall, Don, an assortment of the courses that you taught for the record?

Murphy: Oh, there would be 20 different courses.

Smith: That’s fine. Name some.

Murphy: Oh I taught - well at the end here I was teaching Ed 311 which is the methods course, 311. I taught 490 which is law and school problems, the introduction to teaching. I taught individualized instruction and social studies 420. I taught reading at the secondary level.

Smith: That’s good.

Murphy: That’s enough you know.
Smith: What year did you retire officially?

Murphy: I retired in April 1st of ’88 and I was writing a book and I had the first draft just about finished but it wasn’t. So I didn’t teach any classes that spring quarter, I didn’t get any pay here, I just came to work. I finished the book and eventually it was published and the royalties were given to Central but they will never get a cent because the company just doesn’t have the marketing technology to move it.

Smith: Would you indicate for the record, Don, what kind of book was this?

Murphy: Well, I had taught a workshop in agriculture and Frank Carison and I were the directors of it and I thought that the stuff was so fragmented, you know, just utterly fragmented. So I said we’ll put it together and we offered to do a curriculum guide for the Women in Agriculture for the schools to do an elementary curriculum guide. The Women of Agriculture wrote back and said they’d love to have us do it but I’d have to do it with somebody from WSU and I said, “You can take WSU. I’ve got two kids going to WSU right now and I love WSU but you can take WSU as far as helping me write that ag book and tell them to stuff it because I’m not going to have anything to do with them.” So in doing that I lost any monetary support they might have given me, you know, but I was a stubborn old coot and by god they weren’t going to tell me what to do. So I got it published. See, in publishing, there is such a thing as subscription publishers and a subscription publisher will say to you, “Milo, well you write this book and you want it published, we’ll publish it for you but you have to pay us to publish it,” So when they told me that, that’s after I was affiliated with them, I told them to stuff it because I’m not putting up any money. I’ve already got $1,500 bucks in the damn thing. Why should I pay you to do it? They finally decided that they were going to do it, you know, so they said - I had the college lab do the work for me - the photography and stuff like that and the bill was $900 and they paid it but they haven’t sold any books. They are nuts, crazy. That’s a weird publisher.

Smith: What was your beginning rank at Central, Don?

Murphy: Bottom. Low, low, low. I was…

Smith: Instructor?

Murphy: No, middle of assistant.

Smith: Oh, middle of the assistant.

Murphy: That was pretty low.

Smith: And what rank were you when you retired?

Murphy: Full.

Smith: Full professor.

Murphy: It took six years to get out of the assistant’s rank and another six years to get out of the associate’s rank and the rest of the way I was full but then they had this flaky thing that the professors couldn’t advance in their steps, you know, because unless you did something like discover the moon or something you couldn’t break that

- they wouldn’t give you a step and that was bad business in my mind. If you were an administrator and you already were up there they let you keep it but if you were a teacher you couldn’t advance beyond a certain step, you know, then they’re full. I always thought that was dirty pool in my book.
Smith: Did you ever get an assignment to teach in any other department besides education?

Murphy: No, but I spent seven years in grants and contracts. I received a grant -

Smith: That was through the business office, was it?

Murphy: Yeah, well I ran the thing. It was through the –

Smith: Oh, you ran it?

Murphy: Oh yeah, you bet I ran it. It was 750,000 bucks, three quarters of a million and I got it through politics and Jackson and Magnuson, we put the screws on them just as tight as we could and we got it and then two years - three years later we were just starting the third year. I was running us through Okanogan County and then I ran it through Grant County and then they closed Moses Lake Air Force Base and they were scrambling for every cent they could get because their community was going down the tubes according to them and they said, “Well, what about that quarter of million over there at Central that Murphy’s running. We want it.” And they put the screws on Magnuson and Jackson and they buckled.

Smith: Oh wow.

Murphy: And then we - educationally speaking it was a disaster because - then I got off the hook on the evaluation of the thing and the next year but I was really ticked about the whole affair but three fourths of a million is a lot of bread and you know what Milo, I didn’t even get a raise when I got the three quarter of a million bucks. Somebody was sleeping. Your department chair was no
t going to take care of you because you’re out of the department now. In fact, you’re a pain in the neck to him because he’s got to cover your classes and so it wasn’t a very good situation to be in. Then I did another grant down in - I did it for the department, I guess, down in Toppenish for Indian Education Career Awareness. I worked nine months down in Toppenish. I commuted every day and I bailed it out. It was really a bail out job. We were going down the tube to the tune of 120,000 bucks and that’s it
Someone had to go pick up the pieces.

Smith: Now with the major grant under Magnuson and Jackson, what was the nature of that study?

Murphy: We developed - we got a staff together and - I had a staff and we developed materials for 155 classrooms in Washington state and we picked out the fifth grade, intermediate materials, because I didn’t want to mess around with primary because you’ve got that reading and vocabulary business to worry about. We developed the materials and we put them in the schools and we sent in supervisors to help them but I’m of the conviction that you’re never going to change the teachers until you change their attitudes. We were helping with the materials. Hopefully the attitudes would come along ? but no. They want to - I gave an in-service talk down at Toppenish or Wapato - Wapato I guess it was. The school gave the teachers off early release time you know - an hour and a half or something like that and the teachers were supposed to give the same amount of time - hour and a half, you know. So when I got to about the mid point I asked them, you know, if they wanted me to talk about any specific thing or I would select something. They said want to go home. And I said, “You want to go home and cook supper but the school has given you this time and you don’t have the right to say I want to go home and cook supper. The heck with you. You will stay your time. The school gave your time, now they want you to give your time. The school has given theirs already.” And it’s an attitudinal thing on the part of teachers. They are not going to change unless we bring a whole new crop up from Central now and I don’t see a lot of that here. You’ve got to bring a whole new group of people through. You’ve got to change their attitudes and that’s the hardest thing in the world to do. I think if I had some years left in it and had some grants I’d work on a grant for changing teacher’s attitudes.

Smith: Now Don, let’s turn to question number five, what problems do you recall that you would class as significant during your tenure at Central?
Murphy: Well, I think the salary schedule was one of the main problems because we were always running behind trying to catch up. We never caught up. We had one good year under Dan Evans. Other than that, we just didn’t have good years. Now, basically I don’t know what’s going on now. I haven’t seen a schedule recently but I would imagine that in eight years it’s up substantially but the teachers in Oregon, I read the paper yesterday. Teachers in Oregon average $41 ,000 a year. That’s primary and secondary. Well jeepers, 41 grand a year, I bet a lot of our people are working for a lot less than that.

Smith: Very possibly.

Murphy: So I think the reason the salary schedule has always been a problem and with that, of course, you could say the union, the AFT, the NEA. Why would faculty members that are struggling give them a 100 or 50 or 200 dollars a year to belong to the organization if the organization doesn’t bargain for you? They just keep your 200 and walk away and say the heck with you. So it’s all tied in a ball of wax and all the while I was here and it’s still going on today. When we - Marie reminded me today when we were coming down here. “You tell them about the first day we were here.” I said, “What do we do?” and she said “oh, we were invited to this group meeting,” and Sam Mohler he was dead against McConnell and dead against the administration. He got up and let us know what the score was in Sam’s mind, of course, and he never missed a word.

Smith Yeah, that’s Reverend Mohler. He had been a minister.

Murphy: Oh yes. I’ve attended funerals in which he presided.

Smith: Now Don, something that might be a little more fun to recall. What humorous events occurred on campus that have lodged in your memory or embarrassing moments for someone else, perhaps, that became humorous?

Murphy: I don’t.

Smith: Do you have any memory?

Murphy: I don’t have any memories on it. I couldn’t remember a joke if you told me today and I wouldn’t remember it tomorrow so - but I would have liked - McConnell used to hang on to the keys. We had four or five cars and he got a motor pool of a hundred but we only had four or five cars and Roy Ruebel and I were supervising in Wenatchee and we’d go up there and supervise four students a piece. That’s probably a days work and then we’d teach a workshop at night and the next day we would teach four more and then come home. That’s - in two days we did a whole weeks work. That would have been one person. Well, I was driving this Chevrolet and we were coming home over Saddle Mountain. We had a blow out and fortunately it was on a rear tire and fortunately I wasn’t going that fast and I was able to control the vehicle and I took it home - brought it home and we looked at it and it was right down through the core and I told Marie, “I think I’ll take that tire wrapper right around Bob McConnell’s neck.” She talked me out of it. Oh, I told him, I just told him I said, “Get rid of the keys. Do you want to get up every morning at six o’clock and check those tires? You don’t want to do that. I won’t let you do it. Just give the keys to the –

Smith: Physical plant.

Murphy: “…physical plant and let them take care of it.”

Smith: Make them responsible.

Murphy: He could have killed us both. If that were a front tire we would have really had it.
Smith: Someplace in one of our tapes somebody shared with us that one of the art teachers, an old friend of all of ours, had gone to Dr. McConnell and said, “Sir, I had ordered some paper clips and I understand that you have scratched it off from my request list and off my requisition,” and he said, “Yes, I did that.” She said, “How come?” and he said, “Well, you had ordered some last year,” and he said, “I have paper clips, how many do you want?” He pulled a box out and he was going to count them out in her hand. That poor man. One thing you can say about Dr. McConnell though, he knew everything about everything that was happening on the campus. Which administrators and faculty come to mind, Don, as important leaders in your opinion while you were teaching here?

Murphy: Well, I think McConnell was a pretty good man. I think Brooks was a good man or he wouldn’t have held on to the job as long as he did. The thing is, when I came almost everybody in my department was old. I was the youngest one and they let me know it too. But, you know, within a few years - well it was like Mary Simpson and Mable and Milo T. Anderson - Mable Anderson, Lillian Bloomer and one thing about Lillian - Don Thompson and all those people. They were good people but they were getting up there to where they couldn’t hack it anymore and so one thing about Lillian. We should have assigned someone to her to keep her oriented because she - I always thought it was pretty sad that she would go into classrooms and she would bring the wrong lecture notes and then teach it to the wrong class. You know, I thought that was horrible. And then you know what, it happened to me once so you’ve got to understand that people can do that but she did it all the time. She was a nice old lady. They used her money to set up the Douglas Honors College which I don’t think she would have done if she were living. I mean that was a decision the college made.

Smith: Now Don, do you have any memories of problems that existed between the teaching faculty and the administration or the faculty and the board of trustees?

Murphy: I never paid much attention to that, you know.

Smith: Okay.

Murphy: We did have problems at Central during the Vietnamese War. Well, you were here then by that time and the kids would want to argue in class about - you can’t do that. I’d try to hold them down and then they’d march downtown and faculty was right up in front leading them, you know.

Smith: Threatened to burn the ROTC Building.

Murphy: Yes, that was a pretty risky time for Central and we had a lot of problems. About half the people were against the war and half were for it trying to help support. It’s just like the abortion issue. Half the people in America are in favor of some kind of abortion, person’s choice. Half the people in America are definitely opposed. When you’ve got a 50/50 split like that I say let’s forget it. Quit talking about it. You’re not going to change anybody’s mind.

Smith: Yes.

Murphy: Gosh. It was that same way with that war. You weren’t going to change anybody’s mind.

Smith: Are there any other opinions or ideas that you would like to express concerning the salary schedule?

Murphy: The salary schedule. I think we are always going to be behind and this goes back to the voters and the legislature and unless you have some kind of an organization working for you I think you can just forget it because you are just an individual and an individual isn’t going to hack it in this world on trying to get better salaries.
Smith: Would you predict, Don, at this point since you know so much about the history of this school that eventually and maybe not too far into the distant future there will be some kind of unionization of college faculty?

Murphy: I would say yes, there will be and it’s not too far off.

Smith: I think you’re right. I hate to see it but I think you’re right. How about town and gown relationships?

Murphy: Well –

Smith: Things that improved. Things that hurt.

Murphy: You know, we always did our share for the UGN drive, you know, and stuff like that and worked together with the community but overall, I think the town is pretty cliquish. I mean, you’ve got the cowboys and you’ve got the medical profession and you’ve got lawyers and people just don’t mix like they should.

Smith: They think we are cliquish up here.

Murphy: And we’re the same way. We’re cliquish and we even are cliquish not as a faculty but in departments and stuff like that and sometimes I don’t think the departments go far enough to make people feel comfortable and involved.

Smith: Now, about publish or perish, what is your opinion there or memories?

Murphy: Well, to be brutally frank, you have to produce. You could teach course after course, teach ‘til the cows come home and it’s not going to get you promoted or get you a step or something like that. In my mind, only the things you do above your regular teaching and we have to just accept the fact that yeah some of them are good and some of them are bad but, you know, everyone is trying to do their job. You’ve got to produce over and above. You’ve got to produce films, produce media, write books, write monographs, give speeches at major conventions, and it has to be pretty substantial before you get promotion and a lot of people don’t understand that. In fact, I’ve seen some people get it without and I shake my head. You’ve got to produce in this world and I’m talking big, you know. I had started a series of children’s stories when I retired, you know, and lately - the last three or four years with operations and medical problems and stuff like that I kind of put it aside and now I’m to the point where I’ve got three finished. I’m on number four. Five is outlined and I have whale of a wonderful illustrator. She’s got Central ties. Stan Dudley’s daughter-in-law and she was a muralist for the Hilton Hotel chain. She is my gal. I’ve let her down but I would only allow her to do three paintings as samples because there is no use getting her too far involved and then not have a contract. I think we can get a contract but if you write like we talked about - all this writing you can do no one’s going to accept your work unless they see it. A publisher or a magazine or - they’ve got to see the work and that’s - we’ve got one gal in education right now, I don’t know her name but Bill called me about her - Bill Schmidt and he wanted me to help her and I said, “I can’t help her.” He said, “What about those children’s books you were writing?” I said, “I can’t. I’ve got an agreement with another lady. I can’t help the lady but I’d have coffee with her and talk.” Some of these people get a mental block and they just can’t come up with the ideas. They don’t have the creativity to push themselves into a project or a writing thing so it’s still the same. It’s still the same here. You write, you’re going to get promoted. Preferably books but other things count too.

Smith: Would you comment on hiring policies and practices during your years that you were here?

Murphy: Read that again to me.
Smith: Hiring policies and practices?

Murphy: Practices. I thought you said prostitutes. I though what the hell?

Smith: No, practices.

Murphy: I have nothing to say about that.

Smith: Did you think that faculty representation was sufficient in the selection of additional faculty?

Murphy: I believe so. I believe they got the department involved. If you were hiring for education, then the ed people were involved and if you were hiring for art, then the art people were involved. So I think, you know, they advertised nationwide in The Chronicle, you know.

Smith: Now, would you comment on the quality of students that you found sitting in front of you all those years here at Central?

Murphy: Well, I think the bulk of those youngsters going through our program were pretty good. You’re always going to have some that aren’t and it’s up to the faculty to flunk them. I mean if they aren’t cutting the mustard - during the Vietnamese War I flunked a kid. He was black, by the way, but he wasn’t cutting it. He came back at me that I put him in the army and I said no way, if my one course did that to you then a lot of other people were involved too so don’t tell me that.

Smith: You bet.

Murphy: I don’t know what his name was but –

Smith: Now Don, in those 35 years were you the recipient of any awards or honors that you can recall?

Murphy: I had one appointment that was not due to Central but Iowa - University of Iowa. One of my advisors there got me appointed to US/Canada International Committee on Education. That was a prestigious type of thing but it fell apart shortly after I got the appointment. I never attended so. That was a real nice award, What else? I don’t think I got any awards.

Smith: Well, let’s move on to number 12. What specific contributions do you feel that you made to the progress of your department or school such as new courses or revisions of courses, revisions of majors, minors? Did your department make it possible for you to make that kind of contribution?

Murphy: Yes, we put the teacher education program together and I think it was ‘59, ’60, ’61 and just before I retired I remember a faculty meeting we talked about this. I said if we were hiring a new chair we should go outside. No, I said we should stay inside. Everybody else wanted to go outside and the reason I gave to go inside, we had big problems. Here we are running this program that we put together in 1960 and we have NCATE coming up in two or three years and we’re going to lose our accreditation. That is exactly what happened. I wasn’t here anymore. I - the last year I was here they asked me one time would I write the report and I said, “I suppose.” They gave it to Doris and she wrote the report but she wished she had never taken it but it wasn’t Doris. It was the fact that here we are getting kudos for a program that is 30 some years old and nobody - I fought, oh god, I fought like a tiger. We worked - appointed a committee and I was the chair of that committee and by gosh we put together a program called - what is it? For place bound students and we were in this building here right downstairs, Jimmy’s old office and I took them on. I called them. I swore I would call 30 names, you know, you’re going to lose your accreditation. You know it’s going to happen. Is Garitty going to get fired? No. Is the provost going to get fired? No. Who’s going to get fired? I said Jim’s going to get fired and maybe Brown and maybe the chair in education and maybe Silva. Silva was the one that was dragging his feet. John had a - was the kind of administrator where he had to
have his finger on everything, everything and so he had his girl down there and she was attending meetings
but when push came to shove he wouldn’t back her. He wouldn’t do what she recommended. I don’t know. He had a heart attack right after that too.

Smith: Now Don, what campus committees did you think were the most significant to progress? Any that you served on for example that were especially significant?

Murphy: Just teacher education.

Smith: Teacher education committee.

Murphy: And that was Frank Bach and Reino Randall and Otto Jakubek. So one representative from each outfit that was adding courses in our program. It was simple matter of horse trading. As long as everybody got something, by god, everybody was happy. So we put those six majors in there and everybody was tickled pink. I wanted to vote against a course one time. It was a tie vote and as chair I had a vote. I voted positive and then ten minutes later I said, “I want to go back on that. I want to change my vote.” So I went back and changed it. This was a course taught by Helen McCabe. Helen has passed away now but she had a brain tumor. I would no sooner cross that lady than I would jump in a lake. That was a major committee. That thing ran for years.

Smith: Good. I remember I had a chairman one time who served on that committee and he was very concerned with the morals of every student who wanted in to the teacher education program. He was insistent that we learn about the moral standards of those students before we accept them into a program where they’re going to end up teaching in somebody’s public school and I kept telling him, “Mr., you’re going to end up in court. You better keep your mouth shut because you don’t know what you’re talking about when you go before the committee and say, ‘This girl is indecent,’ and ‘This girl is indecent,’ ‘This one is selling herself down in the Tri Cities.’” I said, “You don’t know these things to be a fact. You only know that they are rumored and if you mouth that around the y have a right to take you to court and they probably should.”

Murphy: They would.

Smith: When we have turned off the tape I’ll tell you who that was. He has passed on now. Did you ever serve as an administrator, Don, outside of facilitating your grants?

Murphy: No, not at Central.

Smith: Okay. Are there any programs or activities on the campus that you feel are not justified on a university campus?

Murphy: No, if they weren’t justified they wouldn’t be here.

Smith: Well, for example, we had one interview of an academic who felt that there was really no place on a university campus for technical courses. They belong in a technical school but not on a university campus. He was very pure. Have you had any relatives who have attended Central?

Murphy: Oh, you better believe it. My wife got her MEd under Pete Barto here. My oldest son - well, all the kids went to Hebeler. My oldest son got his B.A. in math here - math and computers. He’s been working for Batelle but he’s taking the year off. He’s skiing. He was a ski bum last year.

Smith: Now, we come down to the end Don. Will you please close with a statement of your feeling about you career here at Central? Was it pleasant? Was it collegial? Was it challenging?
Murphy: For the most part it was pleasant, you know. Collegial? Yes. Challenging? Yes. It went pretty fast. That’s one thing that you can look at. In fact it went very fast. Thirty-five years - when you’re talking 35 in the future it’s a long time but looking backwards, hardly a ripple.

Smith: This is Milo Smith, the interviewer. This is February 12, 1997.