Elizabeth (Libby) Street Interview

>>CORWIN KING: Welcome, everyone, to CWU's Living History Project, jointly sponsored by CWU and the CWU Retirees' Association. I am Corwin King, president of the Retirees Association 2014-15. The date is July 25th, 2014 and our interviewee today is Dr. Elizabeth Libby Street, who recently retired from the psychology department and was also very active in university administration.

So let's start things off, Libby, by just asking you for a brief personal history about how you got to Central, what you did before you came here?

>>DR. STREET: Well, to start at the very beginning, I was born in West Virginia and was a coal miner's daughter. I went to Morgantown High School and I attended, West Virginia University for two degrees and I was going to stop then, but my husband was drafted and I was pregnant and so I went on to get my doctoral degree and then after I finished that.

Actually, after I finished the coursework for that, I went to the University of Illinois as a research assistant for a year; then I took a job as director of Heed School. It was the first private school day treatment program for emotionally disturbed children in the State of Illinois. Then I went to Adolph Meyer Mental Health Center, and then to the University of Wisconsin at La Crosse before coming here.

>>CORWIN KING: How did you happen to come to Central?

>>DR. STREET: Well, my husband at the time got a job here and I followed him and that was it. When I first arrived, I didn't get a job at the University. I worked for six months at Comprehensive Mental Health in Yakima directing the children and family unit there.

>>CORWIN KING: Coming all the way from West Virginia, what were your impressions of the campus and the town when you arrived?

>>DR. STREET: Well, I first came to Ellensburg in November and we drove from Spokane and it was pretty disappointing, actually. It's not a good time to see the valley, not from that side anyhow, and my first impression of the town was it was very desert like. I was used to lots of trees and mountains. It was pretty disappointing.

About four months later I was able to drive to Easton for the first time. I thought
"this is more like it," and then of course, going to Seattle it was so beautiful, and the campus, though, I thought was gorgeous. I always thought it was a pretty campus, and I guess that's pretty much it.

>>CORWIN KING: Tell us about your first rank and assignments on the faculty. When did you begin teaching here and what were you doing when you started?

>>DR. STREET: I started in 1979. I was an assistant professor in special education. I guess it was actually the Ed Department, but I was assigned to special education and I taught 12 credits a quarter. I drove to Seattle once a week to supervise students in practicum. That was quite the job because at the end of the day I would go to Bremerton or someplace else on the west side and teach a class and then drive back. That was grueling, truly grueling.

I also for a while was responsible for the . they had a small library in Black Hall that was for special education students so for a short while I also was responsible for some of that.

>>CORWIN KING: The University, of course, was a lot smaller then. Who were some of the influential or maybe unforgettable people that you met while you were at Central?

>>DR. STREET: Well, you know I always thought the classified staff (members) were really important and sometimes overlooked here. There were a number of them who . They provide the continuity for the University and there were a number who did that for me. First was Sandy Balmer who was in the Department of Education. Anytime I had a question, she knew the answer. It was amazing. Also Judy Miller who was a secretary in psychology for a while, Carol Mellergaard is another person who has been . who has provided that kind of continuity.

There are administrative exempt people. I think Anne Denman, I think she was the first woman dean on campus. I thought that was a very good move to show that women had the capability to do that kind of thing. Also John Drinkwater is a person I think of who is very influential because of his role with students and in his later years with building a new student union and recreation center.

Faculty, I was trying to think of who the really influential faculty were. I think in my own department, Terry DeVietti was very influential because he was a true researcher. He understood the role of research for a university and he did it. I also . I also think of Meghan Miller who came here, revolutionized some of the hard science departments by coming in like a whirlwind and bringing some grants with her and that kind of thing. I am sure there were others, many, many others.
>>CORWIN KING: You were a university administrator for a period of time. Could you maybe comment in that role about some of the political problems or issues that you may have encountered?

>>DR. STREET: You know, the biggest political problem that I encountered was actually when I was a faculty member and it was between psychology and education. It was never a really happy relationship between those two departments and I remember that the year that I moved to psychology, which is after I had been here for four years, the Ed Department had some task and I can't even remember what it was now, some task they asked each department that had education majors or played a role in the program to do, and I remember that Owen Pratts did the one for psychology. I didn't even know him at the time, but he did the one and it was so good and so perfect, in fact, that I was kind of accused of having helped them do it and I hadn't, and I thought what's this all about? Well, then the more I was in the department, the more -- in psychology that is -- the more I saw that there was just a bad relationship there, something we never totally fixed. It's kind of sad.

>>CORWIN KING: This almost always comes when you talk about a university in a smallish town. In your experience, Libby, did you ever sense a noticeable town-gown problem when you were at Central?

>>DR. STREET: You know I didn't and I think it was because Ruth Harrington had already taken care of it. I was asked by the newspaper some time ago to say some words about Ruth and I called her a bulldog, then I had to apologize to her for using that term. I really do think she's so good at getting people to participate. If she asks you to do something, you might as well say yes the first time because she will keep asking and you will finally say yes. And so I felt that she had bridged a lot of the gap that was maybe there. There are still a few areas where I think people in the town don't really trust the university and vice versa, but they are so small compared to many towns. I think it's a great relationship, actually.

>>CORWIN KING: What about changes on campus during your tenure? And you can answer that any way you would like. I guess we could think about changes in the organization of the University or maybe changes in the curriculum programs, certainly changes in the physical plant.

>>DR. STREET: Well, organizationally I have been here through six presidents, two of them were interim. There was Don Garrity who was followed by Jim Pappas as an interim who was followed by Ivory Nelson who was followed by Dolph Norton as the interim and Jeri McIntyre and James Gaudino and those organizational changes certainly brought some...some change to the campus. I think each of those people brought some strength to the University.
I have always felt kind of bad that Ivory Nelson was treated the way he was on campus. I felt like he did a good job of bringing the University kicking and screaming into the technological age. There were some glitches in what he did, but he was determined and he got it done. I thought that Jeri McIntyre was a tremendous president for the University at exactly the right time.

Also departmental or program-wise, CLAS, the College of Letters, Arts, & Sciences was the college that psychology was part of when I started there. It was later divided into CEPS. no, into COTS, COTS, I think and. and no. It was COTS and CAH. That's it; College of the Sciences and College of Humanities, No! College of Arts and Humanities.

I think that there have been a couple of departments that were established since I have been here. I think exercise science and primate studies are two that I think of, there may be more. I don't think so. I do know that the Department of Teacher Education was divided into five departments.

I also am aware there were lots of buildings [added], not as many as in the previous couple of decades, but during my time here, they added two residence halls and demolished two. They remodeled the two beautiful residence halls on University Way. By the way, that was a change, to University Way, 8th Avenue became University Way. They built the CHCI, Farrell, music, science, P.E. and the Natatorium, and they demolished Edison and they remodeled Black Hall, which when I was there was kind of the cell block. It was a pretty bad building and it's a lovely facility now. Those are the changes I think of; there may be others.

>>CORWIN KING: That sort of leads into another question: As you look back, could you name some of the particularly proud or good moments in your experience? What are the things that you think were really good about the University when you were there?

>>DR. STREET: I think the major change has been the increasing diversity of the University and that has been wonderful. I used to say I would feel this University had really made it when I could walk around the corner anywhere on campus and not be able to predict the ethnicity of the person I saw first and that's just about happened now. I think that's been purposeful in some ways and some ways it just reflects changes in this state, but when I came here, it was a pretty white campus and the diversity has added such a richness and I love that.

I also like the fact, as I said earlier, that the University decided to allow women to play a role in administration. That was done first by hiring some (woman) deans. I think Liahna Armstrong, Anne Denman were the first two, I believe. And then of course when Jeri McIntyre was hired as president, I thought that was wonderful.
Also I loved . and this is a personal thing because I worked on it . I worked on the book 'By Teaching We Learn.' (It was) a history of the University, (a) continuation of what Sam Mohler had done earlier, but it was a wonderful thing. These are the proudest moments and there was a time when Mallory (and another young lady on our softball team) picked up the young lady (From the opposing team) and carried her around the bases on the softball field. That was wonderful.

>>CORWIN KING: What was your perception of the students when you first came and did that perception change in any way by the time you retired?

>>DR. STREET: You know, when I first came here I sometimes felt like I was teaching (some of) the best and brightest students we had in this state and there were others who were struggling, and I thought the exact same thing when I left. I felt like there were students who could go anywhere in the world and be successful. There were also some who . who probably didn't have the basic skills they needed to do well in universities.

But did it change? I don't really think it did. I think the percentages were about the same when I finished my tenure here as when I began it. I do think that there's a particular struggle for a lot of students of color who come here, and then again, some of them have been the best and brightest in the state and some have struggled because of history or whatever reasons. No, I don't think it's changed much. Some people will say it's gotten worse or students aren't as good as they used to be. I just didn't experience it that way.

>>CORWIN KING: The University, of course, is much larger now than it was back in the '70s. We have taught 10,000 students on campus. Do you think that the expansion of the University has changed the kinds of students who it's attracting? Do you think we still offer the same kind of services to students that we offered when we had say 6,000 students?

>>DR. STREET: I do think we offer the same kinds of services. I worry a little bit about the online programs. My last year here I taught two fully online classes, it was quite the experience. The first quarter was pretty bad. I think I did not do a particularly good job, but I worry that students may not be getting the same good experience that those who come and sit in the classroom get and yet students seem to love it and so I may just be being old-fashioned about that. But otherwise, no, I think we do a great job; yeah.

>>CORWIN KING: Dealing with online students is a fairly common problem in universities today. Do you think there's a way to improve that experience or is it just
destined to be what it is?

>>DR. STREET: Well, you know the first online class that I had any experience with at all was very peripheral. I was doing an accreditation visit to University of Southeast Alaska, I think it was. no maybe it was Alaska Pacific. I can't remember. Anyhow, it was one of the Alaska schools and they had a program up in Barrow, Alaska that was a distance. It was way before they had good internet connectivity or anything. One of the things they would do is bring all of the students on campus a week before the program began and then a week at the end.

So the first week they would get to know each other and then when they would go back and they would be in a discussion group or something like that, they would have to throw the discussion to another person and once it had been thrown to person number two, then that person couldn't throw it back to the people that had already been...had already participated. I thought that was a really neat idea and I wish we could do...I think we should do something similar now.

>>CORWIN KING: Let's shift around a bit. Do you feel that Central provides ample cultural enrichment for students?

>>DR. STREET: Oh, my goodness, yes. This university, between the music department and dance and theater and so forth, provides nearly one...an average of about one cultural activity a day for the whole year. We have (about) 365. (cultural activities each year). Several of them come on the same day sometimes, but it's a really rich environment. We have an excellent, excellent music department and the theater department is also very good. So yes, I think students...whether they get what they want -- maybe they want rap artists, I don't know—but Student Affairs tries to deal with some of those needs and I think the students have tremendous opportunity here.

>>CORWIN KING: A complaint I often heard when I was at the University was the University through Student Affairs and other offices, really makes an effort to provide cultural enrichment for students, bring in speakers and programs, but it's difficult to get students to take advantage of them. Do you have any thoughts on that?

>>DR. STREET: Well, I have rarely attended anything that I thought students were not interested in. I mean, students were there, so I guess...I guess each student has to find [his or her] own way in that regard.

>>CORWIN KING: Tell us about any job changes you had during your career. You started off as a faculty member, became an administrator, perhaps you could talk a little bit about that transition.
>>DR. STREET: Well, it was all very serendipitous. I had...I had gone to...I had taken a sabbatical in '94-95 and Warren and I went to Washington D.C. I had the opportunity to have a congressional science fellowship in the office...in the education office of Edward Kennedy and that was a life-changing experience in itself. When I come back, other people thought it had been life-changing, too so they started tapping me for a lot of pseudo administrative roles.

The first one, I think was in '97, was when our accreditation was...our regional accreditation report was...due and so I was asked to oversee that and I did. When I finished that...the year I finished was the year that Ivory Nelson left the University and Dolph Norton came—so he was here when the accreditation team actually came to Central. Afterwards he asked if I would stay on and be his special assistant, and I said I would. It sounded like a year's worth of work, and then Jeri McIntyre came. She asked me if I would continue as executive assistant to the president and I said sure and then I became the chief planning officer for her, and then I guess that was the role I had when she left.

And then [a year after] President Gaudino came, [he asked me to serve] as the interim vice president for university relations and that was quite an eye-opener. I had never really thought much about how the administration at the University works, and so having that experience was quite amazing. It made me aware though, that administrators really ought to also be in the classroom when they can because I was coming back to teach every quarter, which I did the whole time I was in administration; that kept me grounded about what the University is all about. I thought that was very important.

>>CORWIN KING: Let me follow that up for a minute, if I can, Libby. What would you say was the biggest adjustment you had to make moving from faculty member to an administrator?

>>DR. STREET: Clothes. You know, you wear different clothes; that's pretty much it. No, seriously, the biggest adjustment was you had to learn to not say exactly what you were thinking all of the time because people took everything you said literally and to heart and they would bring it up later if you said it.

The other adjustments were that you were on call 24 hours a day and as a teacher I was not. I was...I was a very busy teacher and I certainly worked 40 and 50 and sometimes 60 hours a week, but there was a time when I felt like I was done.

>>CORWIN KING: Well, since this is a historical record, Libby, could you tell us about a particular problem or issue that you faced as an administrator and you kind of pick out as the most important one during your tenure?
DR. STREET: I think. I am editing here what I want to say. It seems to me that being an administrator at Central was particularly challenging was in...in the relationship between the faculty and the administration. This was particularly during the last part of Ivory's tenure and that's when I first had stepped into the accreditation work. It was as if everybody wanted there to be lines drawn, and then I saw that continue with the beginning of the union. And I always felt like there was a perception that the administration didn't want the union. That was never true to my knowledge, certainly not by Jeri McIntyre, and there were some people on campus who seemed to want to fight and that was troublesome to me.

I would see things from the faculty's point of view when I was talking to the administration, and when I was talking to the faculty, I would see things from the administration's point of view. I do believe there were times when money would have been better spent on faculty raises than on adding additional administrators, but it wasn't my call and I just...maybe there were more issues than I understood at the time.

CORWIN KING: Well, let's shift to sort of a parallel question. How about some of your personal contributions to your department or to the University as a whole? What are some of the things you think of that you are most proud of?

DR. STREET: Well, in 1992, the University had had been put on projection by NCATE -- National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education -- and I and Patsy Callahan were called in to help from COTS and CAH to help with the effort to change that outcome and we, I think, between us, did a very good job. It sounds like I am bragging and I am, I guess, but I was very proud of the work we did and a little surprised that it hadn't been done in the first place.

Now, it's true that in that particular year, 33% of schools did not pass their NCATE accreditation and people thought it was because of the addition of the conceptual framework piece where the faculty had to say what they believed and what the underpinnings of their program were, and that's the part that Patsy and I worked on and I think we did a darn good job. I am very proud of that.

I am also proud of the first northwest accreditation, the regional accreditation report, which became a model for the northwest regional programs. Those are two of the things I am really proud of.

CORWIN KING: Well, I have one final question and it's a...kind of a ballpark one, so please feel free to take it whichever way you would prefer. Could you give us a sort of a closing statement that wraps up your feelings about your time at CWU? As you look back on it what's your overall impression of this school?
Dr. Street: It was a very good run. As I said earlier, I got to teach and learn from some of the best and brightest students in the state. I had an opportunity to help students who were struggling find their potential, and that's what teaching is really all about, I think. I also had the wonderful opportunity to work with the person I thought was the best college president that this state has ever seen, that being Jeri McIntyre, and it would be hard to ask for better colleagues than I had, particularly in the Department of Psychology, some wonderful colleagues there, not the least of who is my husband. And it was a great...it was a very good run.

Corwin King: So if you had it to do over, would you do it again?

Dr. Street: I would indeed. I would probably do it exactly the same way. Yeah. It's really interesting that it seems like my career has been very serendipitous from deciding to get a doctoral degree, which I never intended to do. I was a math ed teacher. That's what my first degree was math education. I was going to teach high school math and my husband at that time and I had gone to . he had been accepted to Ann Arbor Michigan for his doctoral degree and we had gone there and I had [signed a contract for a] job in inner city Detroit to teach math and we had rented an apartment, drove back to Morgantown, West Virginia to a draft notice for him and then shortly after I learned I was pregnant. That was why I went into the doctoral program. I never had any intention to do that kind of thing. So serendipity played a huge role there.

And then when we came here to Ellensburg, the same thing was true. Every time there was an opportunity and I said yes, I will do that, it turned out to be just a perfect change for me at the time. And even going to Washington D.C, Warren, my husband, had been wanting to do his . his work at the APA in D.C. at the American Psych Association. I said "okay, but I don't know what I will do there." One day he brought in this ad for the congressional science fellowship and threw it on my desk and I said, "yeah, right." And he said 'you can't win the lottery if you don't buy a ticket" And so I applied and I was very surprised when I was selected, but again it was serendipity.

Everything happened as if somebody else was kind of playing the god in the...what do you call them? Shoot. I can't think of it, in the theater when you are above the theater?

Corwin King: Puppet show?

Dr. Street: No, but the—shoot!

Corwin King: Puppet master.
>>DR. STREET: No. It's the catwalks, the God in the catwalks, that's it. Yeah, and so then getting the administrator position at the University, I never sought it; it just came to me. And that's been a wonderful thing about this life, it's all just kind of happened and I was in the right place at the right time. I was able to take advantage of some wonderful opportunities and to work (with) some of the best people in the country in their fields so it's been a really wonderful run.

>>CORWIN KING: Well, Libby, thank you so much. It's been a pleasure talking to you and getting your information and this concludes the questions I have. I know it's a little sinister, but do you have any last words you would like to.

>>DR. STREET: No, it's just been a very good run and I love this university and it's been a good place...it's been a good area to raise my children and everything, so it's wonderful.

>>CORWIN KING: Thank you so much and this concludes .

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