

CWU LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Jim Ayers

(Transcription of Tape 1, Side 1)

MS The date is November 16, the year 2000. It happens to be a Thursday. Our interview today is with Mr. Jim Ayers, a graduate of Central – and we'll find out what else he accomplished. And the equipment operator is Dr. Alexander Hamilton Howard. [The interviewer is Milo Smith.]

All right, Jim. To break the ice, give us a little thumbnail sketch of your life, assuming you were born someplace. Go.

JA Good assumption. I was actually born in Stockton, California in 1948. Lived there during the early years, the early developmental years, till about eight years old, at which time our family moved back to my mother's father's homestead in Wenatchee, Washington.

We had a small apple orchard there. I was raised in Wenatchee. Had wonderful experiences growing up, especially compared to growing up in central California.

Graduated from Wenatchee High School in 1966, and I went to Wenatchee Valley College for two years. Sometimes the school that's the cheapest route is where you go. And that was close to home, and I had tuition paid there. So I spent two years and then transferred to Central in the fall of [19]68, and graduated in 1970.

And I've been in and out of Ellensburg several times – doing fifth-year work to complete a master's, and our family returned to Ellensburg in 1986, where I've been working with the school system here. And each return has been good, each experience has been good.

MS About your experiences at Wenatchee Valley College, you said that you had tuition paid there. That didn't come out of your pocket?

JA No, I had a tuition waiver. And attended my two years there, and then came to Central; then paid everything out of my pocket here.

MS Good. Good. May I pursue the tuition waiver?

JA Uh-huh.

MS Was this an honor that was paid you?

JA It was a Masonic scholarship, based on grades and activities and athletics. So I was very appreciative of that, and it made a big difference. Certainly helped out my folks, because we had three of us that were close in age, and I was the first one that was actually able to graduate from college.

MS Very good. Very good. I didn't mean to pry, but I felt that underneath that tuition paid at Wenatchee Valley College was something that needed to be recorded.

Remember, Jim, down through the years, you may have grandchildren and great-grandchildren who come up here and check out these materials. And that might be a source of pride for them. Or the parents can use it as a pry – “See what he did? Working with nothing?”

JA [Laughing]

MS OK, Jim. Do you have any relatives that at any time attended Central?

JA Yes, my younger sister. Because I'd gotten through Central and was out teaching, and when she decided to go to college, that was also an area of interest to her. And she came and got her bachelor's degree here at Central.

And my daughter, Angela, came to Central on a Presidential Scholarship. Had her four-year tuition waiver. She is currently finishing up her master's degree in Geology.

MS Bless her heart. Once a 'Cat, always a 'Cat, huh?

JA Yep.

MS OK, Jim. Now, what year did you start here at Central?

JA I started here in the fall of 1968. Boy, that was interesting times. [chuckles]

MS What was occurring at that time, do you recall?

JA Well, we were in the throes of a lot of political unrest, student movements against the war in Vietnam. The campus was going through a lot of growth. The city was going through some changes. It was just interesting.

I took a route through college that was not what I think you would call your typical one. I came here as a junior. I lived at the firehouse downtown, in what they called the “sleeper.” I would be on duty from 10:00pm to 7:00am.

And so it was – I think you would call that a relatively conservative group of gentlemen. And expounding on political views was an awakening. To get a real cross-section was sometimes like listening to my dad. [laughing] But it was interesting.

And they allowed us to have one night out a week. We could be out all night, if we wanted to go home Saturday night to our home town, whatever. And we could have one night out till midnight. Other than that, you were on duty at ten o'clock. And you were running on fires all night. That's what you did.

MS Did you ever get out on fire calls?

JA Oh, yes. I remember particularly the year [19]68-69, that winter was a treacherous winter as far as the cold and the amount of snow that we had. During the Christmas break that year, there was a house fire. And the temperature and the wind chills were probably down to about minus 30. It was ugly.

MS In those days, Jim, were there any kind of first-aid personnel that automatically traveled with the fire department, such as they do now?

JA That was the year they were really getting into having their first ambulance, and were just starting to look at getting people qualified as paramedics.

And so they had a huge old Cortez [sp?] aid car that they'd gotten. It was like a minibus, practically. But they were getting into that issue of moving into a new area that they hadn't traditionally done before.

There was some pretty old equipment down there. There was a lot of changeovers. Some local people – Les Sorenson was kind of a rookie at that time, he's retired now; Joel Talarico [sp?] from [inaudible] come down as a captain here, he's retired. Ed West [sp?] was a captain then and went on to be chief.

And probably a real old codger that I took a liking to was Captain Art Gregory [sp?] at that time. He has since retired and has passed on.

MS Do you recall, were there other students that were sleepers besides you?

JA There was one in particular, and he's still in the community. And I won't tell any stories about him. But Bob Fischer [sp?] had been in the service, in the Army, and he had come out. And he was coming back to Central, and he was a sleeper the greater part of that year that I was here. His step-dad, Darrell Ringer [sp?], was on the fire department.

MS Now, when I was in college, I oftentimes took jobs in the summer far removed. And I found that I oftentimes was heckled as "the college boy." And that the fact that I was in college set me apart from the rest of the day laborers that I was among.

Did you find that you were the butt of humor and heckling by the non – excuse the term – the non-educated element in the firehouse?

JA No, actually, they were really good. My dad was a fireman in Wenatchee, and I had a connection there; and so they knew I was coming up.

And they kind of looked after me in some ways more like one of their own kids. I was told to get my homework done. Get my clothes washed.

MS Good. Where did you live while you at Central, Jim?

JA Well, in the two years I was here –

MS Other than down at the fire hall.

JA Yes, that first year at the fire hall. And then my senior year, I was involved in *Salad Days*, a production that Central put on. I think it was one of the greatest things they'd ever done. It didn't quite work out the way they wanted, but it was a great concept.

And winter quarter, I student taught, and I was back spring quarter. And while I was in town, I lived in the Driver house. Had a bed and a room upstairs, and it cost \$10 a week. And Mrs. Driver had a gal come through every Monday that would kind of vacuum and dust and change bedding. And no guests allowed, and no cooking.

MS Good, very good. Very good. Did you have a car while you were here at Central, Jim?

JA Sometimes. [chuckles] Sometimes it worked!

MS Where did you park your car during the day?

JA Well, I was fortunate enough that I didn't have to worry about that during the wintertime, because it didn't work. So it was a matter of, where do I park the bike? That was pretty easy.

MS The reason I was asking about that was because, as you are aware, parking has really become perhaps the major problem between the University and the city at this time. And yet, we should have been able to see it coming, back when you were in school even.

What were your major and minors?

JA My major was Speech and Drama. And that was something that I'd had a long interest in, even as a kid – working in Boy Scouts and working at school, and later through other organizations, high school drama productions.

Part of my work at Wenatchee Valley College was stage manager there for two years, doing a lot of the scene construction and lighting issues. Some acting. And so that interest carried over to Central, and I completed my major in Speech and Drama.

My minor was in Special Ed, an area that I began teaching in. And that certainly – both of those areas led to some very significant people and, I think, my thought patterns, and some of my values. And I think at that age, it was really significant.

MS Who were the people who were significant in those years and in those areas that helped to move you forward?

JA Well actually, the first really significant one was Keith Sexton, who was the Drama prof over at Wenatchee Valley College. Quite a gentleman, great sense of humor.

MS A good friend of mine.

JA And he really, I think, helped develop the bug. And so when I got here, it was really interesting. There actually were two people I thought were very instrumental at the Drama Department at Central. One gentleman you might have heard of, Milo Smith.

MS Yes.

JA And another person who was really kind, as well as being very disciplined, was Hazel Dunnington. And I really enjoyed both you and Hazel, in terms of what took place.

And then Sam Rust was a new teacher at Central in Special Ed. And he certainly was interesting. I find it interesting that two of these people are Marines.

MS Yes.

JA So what significance is there? [laughing]

MS Did you ever know that Hazel served in the Red Cross in India?

JA No, I didn't know that.

MS Yes, during the war, she was overseas. While you were at Central, did you participate in any extracurricular activities, knowing that your hours, for example, down at the fire hall, would not give you a lot of free time in the evenings?

JA I was never asked to join the [inaudible] athletic club. I just couldn't get the time to work out.

But I had to be at work at ten o'clock; but I was working the stage group here at Central, and that was from 3:00pm to 5:00pm every day. And helping with scene construction for plays.

And then, where I could, I'd try to fit in some time with the acting, taking some minor parts in plays. And so that kept me fairly busy.

When we could, we'd do some intramural sports. We had a Drama group that went up and played intramural basketball, headed by Mike Nichols, in his rubber irrigation boots. [chuckles] Always was a good scene up there at the basketball court.

MS Do you remember the names of any shows you worked on in any capacity while you were here?

JA Oh, I did scene construction, basic construction, for most of them that took place. Probably the one that really jumps out, because it had such a huge set, was *Galileo*. And I had some really massive pieces to work through with that.

The Moon Is Blue. The one that I wanted to work on, but because I was involved with *Salad Days*, I didn't get much into there, was – er – *The Roar of the Crowd*, *Smell of the Greasepaint*.

What was that? I can't ever get that right. It's just the opposite. I think you directed that, didn't you?

MS Which?

JA What was that? *Roar of the Crowd*, *Smell of the Greasepaint*?

MS Oh, *Roar of the Greasepaint*, *Smell of the Crowd*.

JA And that, because I was off campus most of that time, that was one that was always a fun one that we [did] bits and pieces of. Betty Evans did some things that were always interesting. And then there were student productions for master's students, and senior project things that were being done, too that I always got to do bits and pieces.

Sometimes it would be a last-minute "Come in and help run the lights for this," or "Hey, we need a last-minute piece here" or, "Somebody's sick." You never knew what was going to happen, so that was part of the excitement, always being able to kind of jump in at the last minute and help out.

MS Good. Good. Were you, as a participant in *Salad Days*, aware of the fact that that show was surrounded with illegalities, and cost this institution a few thousand dollars before it was over?

JA Rumor has it. [chuckles] That was interesting. You talk about some good plans gone awry. And some of those things – To answer the question, no, not till afterwards. [laughing]

But it was interesting going through it – that concept of taking a show on the road to high schools, involving high school kids, doing production at the high schools, splitting the proceeds.

MS Good.

JA We went through about six or seven high schools during that quarter, and then we kind of picked an all-star cast to bring back to Central, and then put the show on here. It was a great concept.

And part of the planning was that we were going to stay with cast members of the high schools, stay with families. And it got off to a rocky start right away, because there was a meningitis [inaudible] outbreak, and we couldn't do that. And then they had to be put up, in some cases, in hotels. One week we spent in Edmonds, I remember, on somebody's small boat down at the yacht club for housing.

But the cost did escalate – partially due to that part, and then the others would be speculation on my part. But it was certainly a great experience.

MS Yes, it was an absolutely excellent idea. Perhaps what you didn't know going into it was [that] part of the idea was to help to pay the tuition and fees and books and housing for the young man who conceived this good idea.

JA He just had his ideas further developed than the rest of us.

MS Yes, and that, I suppose, is another story. But it truly is an interesting part of the history of Central, that this was a student idea that was totally excellent. Once he had described it to those of us on the faculty, we were behind him all the way.

Because there was an extra performance that year, there was nothing in the budget for it. So we had to skimp and save and cheat ourselves by helping him a little bit. And then he found ways to get the rest of the stuff he needed.

But it would have been a fine, fine idea, except that underneath it all was a devious mind that found a way to come up with a good idea that the University would get behind. And probably the error that we made, Jim, was there was money passing through his hands that should never have passed through his hands. State money just isn't handled that way.

JA But it was a wonderful experience for us and the cast. While we not only did the rehearsals at the schools, each of us had responsibility to do workshops within the different areas of the theater. And so it was a great educational experience.

We got to *do* – you know, practice a lot of teaching, a lot of on-the-spot last-minute changes of lesson plans. Yes, it was a great experience for us. I'm glad that we weren't involved in the management part of it. [laughing]

MS Well, we'll mention no names whatsoever, but the young man who conceived this came back and finished a degree. Did you know that?

JA I think it was after a certain time limit; something about statute of limitations.

MS Well, he finished his degree, but his degree is still over here in the University safe until he pays that sum of money that has been traced directly to him. When he pays that sum of money, he'll get his degree.

OK. Did you have any particular trouble with changing schedules? That is, did the major change, once you had started pursuing it, were you thrown curves by the department because they kept changing the major as you were pursuing it? Do you recall that at all?

JA I actually, when I first got here, I remember going to see the Department Chair, Dr. Erickson. And looking at the credits that I brought with me and what I would need to finish, we had a great sit-down and planning session where he analyzed my transcript.

And he was a great gentleman to work with. He saw that I had some excess hours in other areas, and he would substitute some issues and whatnot. So actually, that was a pretty smooth transition that we had early on.

MS Good. Good.

JA I think he was very generous about what was happening.

He said, "Now, these things, here are some classes you're just going to have to take, even though you've had similar ones." And in some other cases, he gave me some credits and substituted.

And it wasn't an issue as far as the department went. The department was wonderful to work with. The issue came with the Registrar's Office later, when they did some kind of credit check.

They called me and said, "You're short a credit here."

And that seemed to be a pretty standard procedure for a lot of kids here at Central. So I'd heard many stories, and it didn't half-surprise me when I was called in.

And I did have to do some alterations at the last minute. And ended up actually taking one extra quarter, and graduated in August instead of June.

MS You may know, Jim, that later, I was Chairman of the department for four different periods. And I think I was the one that initiated written agreements; that if I made an allowance for some credit that was being transferred in, I had to have it in writing. And the student accepted it by writing. At the bottom of the page, there was a place where he accepted the decision that I had made above.

And a copy of that stayed in his master file. And it was immediately available, so that the Registrar's Office, if they ever questioned anything, that "Yes, we did know about it and we had okayed it as of this date" – the date that the letter was dated.

And it's because of the problems that you had that later students didn't have the same problems.

JA Well, that's always an exciting time, when you think you're going to graduate.

MS Did you date while you were here on campus?

JA There's something about living at the firehouse that kind of squashes that idea. You know, it's not like you're going to have a party or you're going to have friends over. And it's not like you could go out and have a great time. You have to be in, sober, not under the influence of anything, at ten o'clock every night.

Dating wasn't much of an issue. My present wife, we had dated all through high school. And were kind of off-again, on-again, through college. So there were times when she and I were still dating and times when we weren't. But nobody could ever match up to her anyway, so it didn't make any difference.

MS Good enough. The reason I asked is because sometimes we find that students find that looking back that dating was the most pleasant experience that occurred on campus – on or off campus – during their years here. I'm glad that wasn't the case with you.

Did you ever get in trouble on campus?

JA No, I didn't. I really missed out on some things, I guess, but that doesn't mean I didn't have a good time.

MS Well, that's fine. I didn't anticipate that you had gotten into any trouble. But once in a while, we find that students were accused of something that they did not do. And sometimes they sit here, and it's been 40 years since they've had an opportunity to talk about it, and they want to unload and they do. They were falsely accused.

JA No, I really had I think probably – mostly all – really good experiences and memories of my undergraduate days at Central.

MS When you didn't live at the fire hall, where did you live?

JA In the Driver house at the corner of –

MS The Driver house?

JA Uh-huh.

MS The same one that the Rodeo Board is now anticipating buying?

JA Yeah. It was a wonderful place and good location. And ice cream right across the street. [laughter] Hard-packed ice cream there where Winager's is now.

And they'd just put in the law offices and the liquor store on the other side, that was a new building going up. It was like Oh, decisions, decisions. Albertson's was just down the street? So everything was there. Little coffee shop [inaudible] down the block. You could go down and eat a good little breakfast or lunch.

MS Now, Dr. Howard, do you realize how interesting this is that he described the neighborhood, and left out the liquor store right across the street? [laughing] Obviously, this student was serious about getting an education, not about drinking one of everything in the store.

Do you recall any issues on campus that made it into the *Crier* that were either students against faculty, or faculty against faculty? Every once in a while, the *Crier* is filled with a series of stories that for a moment or two is the big discussion. Did that ever occur while you were here?

JA Well, probably the biggest in [19]68-69 really stemmed around, again, the issue of Vietnam. And there was a lot of student unrest nationwide. There were active movements here to organize students to protest the war, to get signatures and send them off.

To the point where when violence was breaking out in other areas of the country, city officials – the firehouse is still right next to the police department – and they were concerned about the things that they were hearing, the things that they were reading in the newspapers, and wondering if that was going to take place in Ellensburg, Washington.

And because myself and another fellow were students on campus, we were always getting pumped with, you know, “Are there any plans going on? Are they going to burn down the ROTC buildings, or what is happening?”

And so there was a heightened awareness that was of some concern, but by and large at Central it [inaudible]. There was one time when the students marched down into town.

MS Yes.

JA But, you know, it was never an issue of being out of control or ever being violent. It was always focused on what the purpose was.

MS Were you aware of any of the sit-ins that took place here on campus at that time, including sitting in at the President’s office?

JA I heard about it, but I was in a position where I was too busy to be involved with that at the time. I was trying to get my own life through as a student, and I couldn’t afford to get caught up in some of that stuff.

And so I didn’t. But I certainly was aware of it. I had other friends who were on the fringes, and some of them were involved. And it’s interesting in retrospect to look back and think that even as a college student in the middle of all that, how unaware of some things, and how naïve you can still be, while you’re sitting there looking at it.

MS It just happens that at that particular time, I was teaching an off-campus class down in the Tri-Cities, and drove down with Bruce Robinson of the Psychology Department.

And one evening as we were driving home after our classes, we tuned into the local radio station as soon as we could get it, and they told us that there had been a sit-in in the President’s Office, but it was not anti-Vietnam.

It was the first black student rebellion that I’m aware of that occurred on campus. Black students wanted to be heard, and they had a list of grievances.

And we heard by KXLE Radio that they had sat in at the President’s Office, until they were finally invited to be there; then given an opportunity to voice their complaints to the President and other administrators.

It could have been a problem, but it never amounted to one, once the students found out that there was no need to sit in, there were open ears ready to listen. But we had visions of the Administration Building being burned down by the time we got back to the campus, and that didn’t happen.

We do know – were you aware – that there were night watch patrols in the ROTC Building at that particular time?

JA Oh, yes.

MS Good. I just wondered if some of these that happened, that most students were totally unaware of. That was just one interesting response to the rumor that the ROTC Building would be burned down. And there were paid and volunteer people who slept in the building at night. I don't think they were armed with perhaps other than a fire hose.

OK, Jim. Now, do you happen to recall any of the student leaders at that time? Who was the Student Body President, for example?

JA Oh gosh, that was really fun. Because one of the issues with working with the stage crew was the fact that the nominating conventions and whatnot took place in the McConnell. And we got to help coordinate the issue of trying to throw boxes of confetti out of the ceiling – and having to clean up, too.

But at that time, there was a great race between Randy Fiorito [sp?] and Tim Wynn [sp?] for President. And that year, too, Ron Sims was running for Vice President. And then the following year, Ron Sims became President and he had, I think it was, Tom Dudley [sp?] and Drinkwater were Vice Presidents.

And those were always fun times. It was fun as far as the convention atmosphere that was going on. There was a tremendous amount of interest, I think, from students, more so than we're seeing right now.

Campus life was still a bit different then, you know. There was still a lot of social life involved in the dorm settings. And so it came out at the convention time, too, when we had student government going.

That just reminds me of some the other things. Homecomings were so great because each of the dorms. They had the parade, you know, and they had float entries, and they had the decorations.

And so that was before we had the mixed dorms, and we still had some of the elderly ladies that were dorm presidents. You would be announced when you came to visit, and you would sit and wait for whoever is was to come down.

MS I remember. I remember they were called the "blue-haired ladies."

JA Among other things, yes. [laughter]

MS Those political conventions that took place in McConnell Auditorium, I will always remember being responsible for the building, and trying to match the color of the plaster on the wall to cover up those spots where somebody had ripped off Scotch tape off the wall and took the plaster with it.

While you were at Central, Jim, as far as the University was concerned, were you ever greeted or awarded any kind of particular honors for any particular reason? Other than Honor Roll, and we'll assume that that's a natural.

JA I was there at times. There were also a few small scholarships that helped me through. And then, of course, getting the diploma in the mail was a highlight. But nothing other than those types of things. I was just too busy.

MS That is also a period, Jim, when the Blood Bank first started coming up to campus and drawing blood once or twice a year. Did you ever participate in blood drawings?

JA No.

MS We became awfully, awfully, war-conscious, of course, with that unpopular war in Vietnam. But suddenly, students wanted to assist in any way they could.

And once it was announced that if you were 18 years old, you could give blood, there wasn't much problem. The college students lined up, and we were very proud of the fact that students wanted to participate in the blood bank.

JA And they're still that way.

MS Yes.

JA Not only for that, but other civic things. It was about that time that Don Wise was starting to organize the river clean-up.

MS Right.

JA And there were a lot of students involved with that at the beginning.

MS Right. Oh, there's no question about it. It's too often that the good things don't get remembered.

Organizational changes – did you run into any kind of academic reorganizations that caused you pains in the neck, such as suddenly, the major has been changed, and you find now that while you thought you were within 10 credits of completing your major, suddenly there are 15 new requirements?

JA I found that true in my minor area of studies [inaudible] that I had to do some regrouping. But because I had spent time with Dr. Erickson, we had my two years pretty well laid out as far as my major went, so that one didn't have to surprise me.

Probably any changes I saw at Central at that time were more confusing with all the building that was going on.

MS Oh, yes.

JA Tremendous growth to the north at that time. When I first got here, we were still using Bouillon as the main library. And the residence halls were all down here, and the dining hall was down here.

And so for those two years, you began to see the new dorms going into the north. You saw the new library starting to go up; the other classrooms that were going on. Everything was just starting to move north as an expanding campus. From that little street right behind old Samuelson – the blocks that used to be the center of campus – all of a sudden was moving.

When we did *Salad Days*, we did a lot of our practicing in the new Samuelson while it was still under construction. We'd be in this room for two weeks, and then we'd get moved to another room because they had to finish that one off. And so there were a lot of changes going on then.

We used to have – I miss Edison. As ugly as it was, as cold and drafty as it was, Edison Hall – where we had a lot of our classes for Speech and Drama – was gone.

And the treks up to the third-floor of Barge, [to] the little theater [that] was up on top. If it was a warm spring day, you probably were in a sweat by the time you got to the stop of the stairs, and then you were greeted by the heat up there.

MS Jim, I'm glad you mentioned that that little theater was on the top of Barge Hall, because it's never been recorded, and I want to record it here now that you mentioned it.

That theater floor in that little theater actually had a rake, that is, the floor slanted slightly downward where the footlights would normally be. That was a holdover from the way that theaters were built in America for, oh, maybe a hundred years.

The floor was slanted because the audience floor was level. And so that the audience could see the actors from their shoes to the top of their head, the floor was slanted.

And there are any number of amusing stories that are told [about] old actors losing their equilibrium on the slanted floor, especially those that had had a little nip between exits and entrances. And by the third act, they were losing their equilibrium.

Also, I can recall Helen Hayes remembering that in one of her early years, she dropped an earring. It fell off of her ear onto the floor, and she tried to pursue it. And it ended up down in the footlight trough, and she burned herself regaining her earring. A little piece of theater history.

You've just about named the significant student leaders at that particular time. I think it's interesting that you mentioned Sims, who has since gone on to be considerably politically active in Seattle. And is the head of King County as this particular time, having served several other capacities.

His running for office on campus as a young black student really, really opened the door for other minority students; that he was brave enough to try it, and he succeeded. And because he did, others have since. His was not a totally happy lot, being the first. But I admired him very much.

Accidents, injuries, to you or any of your friends while you were going to school here? Did you end up in the campus sick bay?

JA Never had to visit that. I tell you, I wouldn't recommend – uh – because, again, that [19]68-69 was such a cold winter. It was a tough one because I had an eight o'clock swim class, and [was coming] from the firehouse up to Nicholson. [I had] to be there at eight o'clock.

And then what was worse was coming out all wet in that freezing cold. And there happened to be a Chemistry class that I didn't make quite as often I probably should have, because all I could think about was getting down to the SUB and getting a cup of hot chocolate or something, to get warmed up after that walk. [laughter]

But no, I came out pretty injury-free, so that wasn't a problem.

MS Good. Good. I can also remember those years, that half of the injuries that occurred on campus in any year were students falling on icy sidewalks.

JA Oh my. That construction they had going when they decided to close Walnut Street and they put sidewalks across, it was a joke that particular year. You could see all this work delay and all this concrete down there at 8th and Walnut; and then two weeks later, you'd see them and there were jackhammers tearing it all up, because something didn't get done.

So they laid more concrete, and a few weeks later, they'd be jackhammering it up again. It was like, How many times are they going to pour this stuff before it's finally down?

MS That certainly has been the history of alterations on the piping system. And then, of course, something that was quite new to me was when they started to underground all of the electrical service. And the television cables all underground all over the campus that caused a considerable amount of torn-up blacktop and sidewalks.

Had television classes begun by the time you were here?

JA No, at least not that I remember.

MS Were there radio classes then?

JA Radio, it seemed, was on its way out, and television really hadn't come in as far as classes go.

It's interesting that I think, over the years, that I inherited a few of the old records – those *huge* platters that they used to use at the radio station from the late [19]40s and [19]50s. I'm not even sure how they ended up in my hands. But I've got a few of them. They're just [chuckles] you can't play them. I don't think anybody has a turntable that big, unless you have a commercial station. [laughter]

That was just kind of the in-between. We were phasing it out of the radio. It was still operating, but it was not a big deal. There was a teacher at Ellensburg High School, Frank Marvin, who used to be one of the voices on the station here at Central. He's since retired, but he still has a great voice.

And I wasn't into television as much, because of Speech and Drama. And then, going into Education, that wasn't the focus.

MS How did you get interested in school administration, Jim?

JA Oh-oh. When I graduated in August of [19]70, there weren't a great deal of teaching jobs available. And I started pounding the streets of Wenatchee looking for a job.

And long about October, Sam Rust called me and said, "Jim, you still want to teach?"

I said, "Yeah, why?"

He said, "I've got a job for you."

And he found a Special Ed job down at the Granger School District. They had a teacher that wasn't working out and was being relieved.

And so I was finishing up doing community theater in Wenatchee – Harbee [sp?]. And finished that up the last week of October, and started teaching the first of November down in Granger.

And while I was at Granger, those were very interesting years. Probably the greatest year I ever had at teaching in a classroom.

I had an intermediate, self-contained Special Ed room. Grades, 4, 5 and 6. Thirteen kids. What a hodgepodge. And it was wonderful. And at the end of that year, I got caught up in –

MS I'm assuming that "wonderful" means it was very rewarding.

JA It was. It was very rewarding. I had grown up in Wenatchee, which at that time had no minorities. I seldom can even remember kids even in our school that had surnames that weren't pretty much Anglo-Saxon.

So going to Granger, which was about 40 percent Hispanic, 30 percent Indian – Native American – and about 30 percent white was a real shakeup here as far as values and assumptions.

While I was there, I got caught up in the great lottery. They did away with the draft and they picked lottery numbers, and mine was a low number. So at the end of that first year of teaching, I went into the service.

When I came back from Vietnam, the program that I had been teaching in, because it was a cooperative program between districts, had been disbanded. It wasn't there, so I went into regular Ed.

And did start teaching English, because everybody knew if you were in Speech and Drama, it had to be English. And I learned a lot about English that year.

But in the course of working there, in five years, I'd been under five principals and three superintendents. And I thought, I can do that. [chuckles]

And so I made it known that I was kind of interested in getting into administration. And one of the teachers who was at Granger took a principal's job on the coast, and called me up and said, "Hey, want to be my vice principal and athletic director?"

And, true to doing everything backwards, OK, so now I've got the job. And now I have to start thinking about, Gee, don't I have to go back and get a degree or something? So I worked two years as a vice principal, and finished – no, I didn't finish, I started my master's.

And then another one of the principals I had worked for at Granger was in another district, and he called me up and said, "Hey, do you want to apply for the principal's job?"

And so then I went to Pomeroy, a wheat town down in the southeast corner of the state in Garfield County. And I was the high school principal there for seven years. And I coached basketball, varsity basketball, two years, and had to drive bus, and sweep the floors at halftime and do everything. [End of Side 1]

(Transcription of Tape 1, Side 2)

JA And then from there, I came to Ellensburg as the high school principal in the fall of 1986. I was the principal through the graduating class of [19]91-92.

And then, all three of my kids were all in high school. And I did not want to be their principal. I knew too much about all the kids, and knew things that I didn't want to know.

And so I took a job transfer to my current position, which is the Director of Special Services. And my Vice Principal, Dave Paul – another Ellensburg graduate, who was beginning a master's – is the high school principal. He was just finishing his last year, and will retire this year.

MS So that you can educate this old man, and anybody who may ever listen and watch this interview, what are Special Services that you're responsible for in this school district?

JA I think it's everything nobody else wants to do. [chuckles] But it does encompass the school nurses and the Health Program; it encompasses the Gifted/Highly Capable Program; and the majority of the job is really centered around Special Education.

And because of the background I that I did have in the district at the time, the fact that I had taught Special Education, we'd made some transfers, and that was a natural transfer for me. And it was coming full circle in a way, so it was interesting, it has been interesting.

MS Somebody made a very logical decision in an area where people are not usually known for making logical decisions. But you seem to be the right man for the job at the right time.

JA We can always hope.

MS Did your wife go to college?

JA Yes, my wife went to – started at Pacific Lutheran, and she came down with spinal meningitis. And so, near death, in a coma, during Christmas break, she had a long recovery from that.

And while she was recovering, she had taken a part-time job at one of the hospitals in Wenatchee, and was working in the lab preparing media and cleaning things.

So as she started taking some classes out at Wenatchee Valley College, while I was there, too, and they were just starting up a new program there in Medical Lab Technology. And she got into that program.

They had thirty-some kids start, only seven finished. And it was about a three-year program with an internship. And she's been working in the med tech field since 1970.

MS Good for her. I would assume that with the parental background your children have that they assumed all their lives that they were going to be expected to go to college. Is that true?

JA No, not expected. We still, I think, would ascribe to the fact that college isn't for everybody.

And we have three children: Angela, who is just finishing her master's; Matthew, the second child, went to the Air Force Academy and is now stationed at Warner-Robbins Air Base in Georgia; and our youngest child, Anthony, who looked at Matt and looked at Tony and said, "I'm not going to compete." [chuckles]

And it was never his goal to go to college at that time. Right now, he's stationed at Jacksonville, Florida in the U.S. Navy. He's an E-5, which he feels really good with, because he's made his promotions at a good rate. He's looking at saving money for a college fund if he wants to when he gets out. He's looking ahead to get all the training he can. And he's just as happy as the others are, so it makes us happy.

MS Good. During World War II, I went to radio school in Jacksonville, Florida. Has he ever mentioned the river that is the color of root beer?

JA Uh-huh. And part of his training has been in that river.

MS Yeah. I can remember we used to take a sternwheeler from the base down to Jacksonville and back. That was our “liberty bus.” And we’d stand in the back and watch that stern wheel grinding up the surf. And it looked just like the froth on a root beer, and the water was brown.

JA Jaundiced river?

MS Are your children, are any of them married?

JA Angela’s married about a year and a half now. Her husband is also a master’s student at Central in Art.

MS Well, good. Good. Looking back, have you ever felt sorry that you didn’t choose to go to a prestigious school like Notre Dame or Oxford?

JA No, I never have. And actually, it’s my kids that who have put that in perspective.

Angela wanted to go to the University of Washington, she wanted to go to Pacific Lutheran, UPS [University of Puget Sound]. But the financial package wasn’t there.

And she got a scholarship here, and she went. And within the first six weeks, she goes “I’m really glad I’m here.”

MS *Ahhh*. Was her ambition to go to school out away from Ellensburg? Was that behind it all?

JA I think like many, yes. [Inaudible] was good. Being away from home was good. But she got hooked into the Geology Department and loved every minute of it. Was here for four years and [is going on here] with her master’s work.

MS Good for her.

JA I look at that, and at my son, who is at the Academy. And he had a lot of friends at U of W. And they’d get home at vacation times, and Matt would come back and comment about “These guys don’t have a clue about what it really means to be committed to something.”

And so he, too – even though he didn’t have free time, he didn’t have time to party and other things – he said he definitely made the right decision being where he was.

MS Now, thinking back over your college years, Jim, considering the living in the fire hall, the restrictive hours that you had free to socialize, the extremely cold winter – all of the things that are part and parcel of your experience at Central – looking back, would you come to Central again?

JA Oh, absolutely. Absolutely.

MS Good.

JA I have never been a big-town boy. It just makes me nervous being around all those people, all those cars, everything else. I felt very comfortable here.

I got to do, I think, just about everything that I wanted to do at the time. And probably some things that I shouldn’t have, but we all go through that.

I still think back, in terms of that cold winter. And [that] for one of the acting classes, Bob Keane – who was the best man at my wedding, and we shared a room at Central at the Driver house – we’d be up at Tomlinson Field in the middle of that winter in all that snow, practicing.

And one of us would be out in the middle of the football field, one would be up at the top of the stands. And we’d be shouting out our lines so that we would *enunciate* and *be heard*. And our gestures were big and bold.

And, you know, people driving by thinking, What are those guys doing? [laughter]

But you wouldn’t do that in a lot of places. And it was wonderful to do here. It was wonderful, I think, when I talked about people earlier – yourself, Hazel Dunnington, Sam Rust – who took personal interest in kids that they may never see again.

Hazel knew I was struggling at times trying to make ends meet and whatnot. And it might have been something that she didn’t need done, but she would ask me to come up and stain her fence in the back. And pay me a good wage at the time.

And I would feel guilty and say, “It’s too old to stain. This isn’t going to work.” [chuckles]

MS Oh, I wish I had known that.

JA And she’d find something else for me to do.

MS Several winters, I used to volunteer and go over and snow shovel Hazel out so she could get out of her house, and I never charged her. Now I know I should have! [laughter]

JA Sam Rust, when I was teaching down at Granger – and, of course, it was great that he found a job – called me up. I didn’t have a car then, and I would hitchhike from Granger to Wenatchee, or I’d hitchhike from Granger to here to take classes or go see my folks in Wenatchee.

And I was coming back through about Thanksgiving time. Snow was on the ground. Caught a ride to Ellensburg and stopped to see Sam.

And I said, “Well, I’ve got to get going.”

“What’s the rush?”

“Well, I’ve got to get out there so I can get a ride home tonight.”

He said, “What do you mean?” And I explained to him I didn’t have a car and he said, “Hey, I’ve got a car I’m not using. Let me throw the starter back in it and you can have it.”

I said, “No, I can’t do that.”

He said, “OK, I’ll sell it to you.” So I went out there and I had a car to drive home that night. [laughing]

MS I’ll be darned.

JA So those have been the types of experiences at Central that I'd say, yeah, it was the right decision. It was the right place for me. I would do it again.

MS I don't mean to belittle your efforts, but it sounds like you have also been a very fortunate fellow in being at the right place at the right time and meeting the right people. If you hadn't been a decent sort of a person, no one would want to have helped you. But you were a very decent young fellow.

But you also – you earned what you got, but you were at the right place at the right time often.

JA I was. And I think that, you know, some of that I always believed that Father above was looking over me, and He guides us in ways we don't know. I believe that He's hooked me up with the right people. And He's given me a conscience at times that's made me do things that some other kids wouldn't do, and He's made me not do some things that other kids would.

And all in all, that's been a common theme in my life with Sue, the family, here. And I hope that it continues that way.

MS Now, it can't be full of only pluses. Did you get in trouble at Central for anything at all?

JA Hey, when you've got 20 fathers down at the firehouse [chuckles] what you don't need is more trouble.

MS Only trouble that you could get into on this campus, of course, would be to sneak girls in and out of halls after hours.

I can remember I would have students who would come to me and say, "Dr. Smith, I have to drop out of the play because I have to give up all activities. And I'm confined to my room at night."

JA No, I didn't have that problem. [chuckles] I had more problems saying, "I need to go to play practice. And it might go till 10:00pm. I might be a few minutes late."

MS Yeah. I see that you've never really learned the Milo Smith lesson: Don't refer to play "practice." We don't practice, we "rehearse." [chuckles] Practice is when you put it on for money.

JA I had to speak in terms other people understood.

MS Right. Is there anything that you'd like to volunteer that you want to make sure that people in the future will know this much about Jim Ayers?

JA Oh my. I think Jim has always been the type of person who has been very committed. I think loyalty is one of those things that we don't see, a commodity not in excess anymore. That Jim still fights to try and prove that it's still the right thing.

You can go back and look at the districts where I've served, they're always wanting employees to be loyal to the district. And my role – when we talked about school administration earlier, I think there's a commitment from administration, I hope, in the districts, to be loyal to the employees, and support them.

And as I learned in the service, you will do – as well as you take care of your troops, they'll take care of you. And that's been one of those life lessons that I try to carry out, that I try to, as an administrator, support the teachers and kids as best I can.

And sometimes that puts me at odds with the School Board or the Superintendent. It's not always easy.

One of the sayings that we use in Leadership class: Doing what's right isn't always popular. Doing what's popular isn't always right.

MS When you moved to your present position, Jim, did you find that you missed your student contact, or does it supply sufficient –

JA My present position, I [recording ends]