

## CWU LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

### Fred Cutlip

#### (Transcription of Tape 1, Side 1)

HS: [The interviewer is Helen Smith.] Today is December 12, 2000. We are interviewing Fred Cutlip, who is recently retired from the Math Department at Central Washington University, and this is yet another one in the series of interviews through the auspices of the Retirement Association of Central Washington. All right, Fred, before we really begin, here, on your life at Central, would you give us a thumbnail sketch of where you were before you came to Central?

FC: Okay. I was born in central Illinois, a town named Lincoln, in 1936 – a long time ago. I'm stammering already, Helen.

HS: That's quite all right.

FC: I had a sort of ordinary growing up, living on a small farm outside that town. Went to a one-room country school during WWII. That was not ordinary. The schools were called back into existence to save gasoline. After the War, and after my conclusion of grade eight at that school, I went to the local high school, not having a clear direction for my life, but doing sort of the next thing that came along – a strategy I had found that serves me well. I was a successful high school student, good at what I attempted, particularly drawn to Mathematics and Physics, and so began college with a Physics major in mind.

My father died when I was a college sophomore. I was younger than many of the crowd because I had taken two grades in one year at that country school, and so at age 18 – at age 18 I signed a teaching contract with two years of college behind me, teaching under a provisional certificate. Back in those days when teachers were in such short supply there was such an opportunity for people with two years of college and the ability to pass some subject matter tests. On that certificate I taught for one year at Mondale Illinois Grade School. I taught grades 5, 6, 7, and 8 in one room – easy as pie because I had attended a school with eight grades in one room. I was also the nominal Principal, which meant I raised the flag, got the mail, and signed things for that school. I was eighteen years old. One of my students was sixteen years old. I had no discipline problems. That wasn't a feature of the landscape in the mid-Fifties.

HS: How did you feel about that? Did you feel like a really important person?

FC: I felt – um – elated. I really had a good time teaching those kids. And I didn't have a sense of importance. I knew I was a small fish in a small pond, but it was a good situation in which to sort of try out teaching. At the end of that year, or near the end, I realized that I would have to go back for a four-year degree, and so I tendered my resignation to the school board. One of the gentlemen, in fact, went home and told his wife about it, and I am told he wept because we had such a fine relationship, that school and those men – they were all men – and I. It was a very good year in my life.

HS: What a wonderful beginning to a teaching career. So then, which school did you go to, then, to prepare yourself?

FC: I went to Eastern Illinois State College – became Eastern Illinois University, as most such schools did in those days. I finished there in two more years, having gone in as a Physics major, I found myself staying up late at night to do Calculus and not Physics, and discovered I was really a Math major under the skin, and so I became one. Finished at Eastern Illinois, I then taught for two years at a school near Champagne Urbana Illinois. Those were heady times because Sputnik had just gone up, and the US was trying to catch up with Russia, and so began pumping huge amounts of money into Science and Mathematics education. Teachers were afforded the opportunity to go back to university, and I did so for a

Master's degree, and that was the beginning of a great change in my life. I encountered people who came into that same program for college teaching situations. In those days a Master's in Mathematics was also an opportunity to teach at the college level. That was my next move.

HS: Aha. And you were in the right field at the right time, then, weren't you?

FC: As it happened. Right.

HS: So did you then come to Central from there, or did you do some other teaching?

FC: Oh, thank you for asking, Helen. Um, I went from there to Northern Michigan University. It was off the edge of the world to a kid from Central Illinois. I didn't know there *was* a piece of Michigan up north of Lake Michigan – the Michigan Upper Peninsula. I taught there for three years, and during that time – maybe I should retract. Was I there two, or three years? I was there three years. During that time I applied for and got another National Science Foundation Fellowship, this time to begin studies toward a Doctorate at Michigan State University. And so from 1964 to 1968 I studied at MSU, finished the degree *and* the thesis, and so was able to bring my family west to Washington in the fall of 1968. I was 32 years old that fall. I'm double that now. I've spent half my life here at Central.

HS: And what actually prompted you to come to Central? What contact did you make?

FC: I had friends back Michigan State, in fact I'd taught with these two gentlemen at Northern Michigan University, and they had prior acquaintance with the Northwest, and so spoke just glowingly of the landscape, the opportunities out here – one of them and I thought we might do some textbook writing if we got together out here, and so we applied to schools in this region. Those two fellows ended up at Western Washington University, and I came home with colleagues in the Mathematics Department – people who became my colleagues – from the Math meetings in San Francisco, to visit Central. I have to scold two of those people for luring me here and hiring me, and changing my life. One is Dale Comstock, who is helping to conduct this taping, and the other was Dr. Bernie Martin, who was Dean of our College in those times, and actually was the hiring official.

HS: And so that was 1968, and you have been here ever since?

FC: Ever since.

HS: Ever since. With no regrets.

FC: I lived happily ever after.

HS: Indeed, what a fairy tale. And when you came, what was your academic assignment, and what was your rank, when you came?

FC: I was an Assistant Professor in the Mathematics Department. Even with the bit of teaching experience I had, it wasn't enough to justify a higher appointment.

HS: Mm-hmm. And when you – when did you retire? Just recently?

FC: I retired in June of the year 2000.

HS: And what was your rank when you retired?

FC: I was Professor, at that time.

HS: Professor. And I imagine when you were teaching at that little school you had no thought in your mind that you would every be a *true* professor.

FC: I have *never* known what was coming.

HS: Now during all those wonderful years at Central, did you teach in any other departments? Did you have any assignments?

FC: No, I never did a team teaching project, for example in another department.

HS: Any problems along the way as you – okay, what a silly question! Of course there were problems. Are there some you would like to elaborate on?

FC: I – there are none that stick out so large that I – I feel like speaking about them. There's really nothing that springs to mind.

HS: Good! How about let's talk for a minute, if we can, about people in your department – administrators that you felt were important either to the school, or to your career.

FC: Of course I see things from my own niche of the University. I can't begin to mention all of the people whom I've viewed over the years as being significant, as being fine people, as being persons of integrity and strong moral fiber, but I do have to mention two or three of them, and I mean no slight by not mentioning more of them. Of course, I've gotten past blaming Dale Comstock for hiring me, and he and I have become good friends. The Department Chair when I was hired was also new to the Department – that was Dr. Robert Y. Dean. That man was so smart it scares me. There were times when we had a bit of friction, of course, but that's going to happen between *any* people with strong views. But I came to respect and honor Bob as a person of incredible vision, of an organizational ability that – a guy who gets things done – the person who really sort of shaped the Department during my first – mmm, let's see, '68 to '86 – eighteen years – eleven of those years under his Chairmanship.

As I said, Bernie Martin was Dean of my Division of the University when I was hired. Fine man. Burton Williams became Dean of that side of the University. Also served under Deans Robert Brown and Don Cummings, and I think I'm not omitting anyone. I was blessed to have people over me who understood my Department, understood our needs, and were willing to work with us to achieve our goals. As I say, Robert Dean was Chair of the Department for eleven years, and then I became Chair in 1979, and served in that capacity for eleven more years. So I came to appreciate Bob Dean much more during my tenure as Chair, having realized what hell I put him through during his tenure.

HS: Would you care to comment on either the differences that you found – which did you enjoy more, the teaching, or being Chair?

FC: Oh, being Chair is not something one *enjoys* that much, but – I've always enjoyed the teaching – the classroom, and the contact with young people, and with colleagues as we talked about teaching. Being a Chair was all right. I won't deny that. I think Bob's years as Chair were devoted to shaping programs, to getting the Department well established. The Department grew from – what was it, three persons, Dale, in '67, or four persons?

DC: Four.

FC: Very small department. It grew to 13, or 14, or 15 full-time equivalents during Dr. Dean's Chairmanship. What was I started on, there?

HS: Whether you enjoyed being in the Chair, or teaching.

FC: Well, teaching has always been the most fun, but being Chair was really okay. During my years as Chair, I – I think I held the Department on course. I think we had a harmonious department in a period when we were experiencing yet some other turnover and growth, and bringing some other personalities into it.

HS: And those years were – about when?

FC: Sixty – or rather '79 to – I think I recall 1990 my final year. I was on leave one year when I was still technically Chair but another person was acting Chair here.

HS: Well during that time you must have been in a very good position to notice any conflict or significant differences between students and faculty, students and administration – would you care to comment on those?

FC: Not so much differences *between*, but differences within those categories. In particular, the changes in students. During my early years here the Viet Nam War was ramping up, and then in full swing, and our enrollment was much inflated by young people seeing, frankly, college as a way to not be drafted. There were a lot of people here who didn't necessarily have higher education as a top priority, but it beat going to Viet Nam. I remember in those years we built the new library building. It was intended that it serve a university of size up to about 15,000 students, and the talk in those days was to control our growth – to keep it down to no more than 15,000 by what – 1972, I think. We controlled that growth very well, and I think the University never exceeded 7,000 during my time here. When the War ended, so did the pressure – the enrollment pressure – and numbers actually dropped off for a few years.

HS: During that time, did you find that those students that were here were good students in the classroom?

FC: They were earnest about not wanting to go to war. I think they worked harder for grades out of that motivation than they might have had they been here on their own. I've noticed in more recent times, however, students coming to the University who are perhaps not better prepared than their forebears, but they are earnest about being here. They see the University education as the key to, if not a better life – but I think it is – at least to the life they want to lead. To entry into their chosen professions.

HS: Compare, then, those students that you're talking about right now with the ones that you first encountered when you came to Central.

FC: It's hard to do that, because I was so young then! I was not a lot older than my students, and so I saw them as not quite peers, but not so far below my age level. And now I see students much more in a fatherly fashion. I see them as the young persons that they are who are trying to discover themselves, even as I was trying to discover myself in those years, and still am.

HS: What about the preparation for those two different sets of students. Did you feel that – when you first came, did you feel that the students you encountered were prepared in the subject matter?

FC: Better prepared, I think, than now.

HS: Ah!

FC: The reason I believe that is, in those years the high schools were still getting the push – the benefit – from the National Science Foundation and other sources, to really press for excellence in Math and Science education. I think there's been some trailing off of that in the intervening years, and now we see students coming to Central who, for example, need remedial programs in Mathematics, in English, probably could use remedial Science, but we don't offer that sort of thing. I think the students are improving during these

times because there's pressure all up and down the spectrum of education for better schools, for example, in nationwide, and even worldwide tests in math and science.

HS: So that the joy of teaching hasn't diminished at all – you're finding that it's still challenging, right up to the end.

FC: I like it so well that I'm going to come back and do it next quarter.

HS: All right! So a phased retirement, excellent, excellent. Well all these years at Central, and raising a family and all, I'm sure you have some comment on the salary schedule.

FC: Well I can't laugh forcibly enough to express my feeling about the salary schedule, but over the years it has been almost laughable. I say that because we were pressed to go to such lengths to advance by those tiny increments – those minuscule dollar amounts built into the so-called salary schedule. It's not really a salary schedule in the sense of, for example the public schools, where time and rank moves you across and education moves you up, if I haven't got it wrong, and so one, in the course of a career, advances on the salary scale. At Central there have been multitudes of different salary scales in effect. The rules for advancement have changed over the years. They've, for example, emphasized research or not emphasized research, always intent to emphasize teaching but sometimes not quite so much, perhaps. I have seen colleagues become absolutely cynical about advancing on the salary schedule – to become dispirited. I've seen other colleagues compete so strongly with each other that enmities arose. It's – it's been really quite a tragic story, I think. I hope that things are improving. I have a sense that perhaps they are. But I'm far enough from that concern now that I don't pay a lot of attention to the details.

HS: Hmm. You mentioned the faculty that worked so hard. What about the publish or perish climate at Central?

FC: That's been interesting to observe. When I arrived at Central Dean Martin explained to me that one advances in this University life by three components: one is teaching, and that's always been the number one named component. The other is research or scholarly activity, as it has come to be interpreted, and the third is service to the University, to the community, to the State, to the Nation. Service beyond one's immediate job-related concerns. In recent years I think the publish component has received increased stress. There is more interest in having people producing papers, books, expository speeches, performances that somehow carry the reputation of Central to a wider audience, and also encourage the faculty to become, and remain very active in their own research fields.

HS: Do you think that has hurt the teaching element of it?

FC: I think it can. For example, I know of a new faculty member who is very strongly pressing his own advancement because his research seems to be pretty good, and I don't think he grasps it – so perhaps there's a general difference in communication to faculty – that teaching remains the strongest component of service to this University. I think it should be the strongest. We are a teaching University. I believe in that. It's not just a way of ducking doing other things, but teaching young people is our mission.

HS: And do you think Central has lived up to that mission?

FC: By and large.

HS: Good. In your own case, did you feel ever pulled away from teaching to do some research and scholarly endeavor?

FC: I've really pondered that. When I came here I intended to maintain a strong research effort, and frankly I did not do it. So I must not have felt much pressure to do it. But in my early years here the

emphasis really *was* on teaching, and on excellence inside and outside the classroom in relationship to students, and so for my own part, I advanced reasonably well based upon, I think, contributions within the University. Couldn't have been based upon my research, because there wasn't that much of it. A colleague and I did publish a textbook which I think, during its production and its later use, did enhance my own case for advancement. Other than that I didn't do any stellar research.

HS: What – what's the name of your textbook, and is it still being used?

FC: It's still being used at Central and a few other places. It was never a nationwide best seller, so I'm not retiring a rich man. It's called Finite Mathematics for Decision Making. The co-author, I should say, is Dr. Bill Owen, who is also my good long-time friend.

HS: And while you were here, in this long career, you obviously made many contributions to the department, to the University. Please comment on what you feel some of those most significant ones were.

FC: I feel okay – I feel very good about my years as Department Chair. I think holding the Department steady and maintaining and improving our contacts with other departments in the University were good things to have done. There was a period when an inter-departmental committee composed of people from Mathematics and Science and Education worked very hard for several years to produce a plan for educating elementary level classroom teachers. That plan was finally adopted and saw it's – found it's own place in the University catalog. It was an ambitious program for a young person to attend. It frankly drew not very many takers, because it was only an option for educating elementary level teachers. It never became *the* way it's done. I would have preferred that it be a little bit more strongly advanced, because I continue to feel that people teaching in the elementary classroom need to be better grounded in Mathematics and Science than they are to this day.

HS: Do you feel that – what proportion of the students that came through your classes – do you have any idea of how many of them did go into teaching in the Mathematics field?

FC: I would say proportionally – I'll speak first of majors in the Mathematics Department – the great preponderance of our majors were secondary education teachers. We've always had a trickle of Bachelor of Science or Bachelor of Arts majors. At one time we had a Master of Science program in Mathematics. For a complex of reasons that program has dwindled and gone dormant. I don't believe it's dead, but it's not active at the moment. Now the great number of students who come through our department are taking Math courses as service to their own majors, and we serve a lot of students in the Business School with our Finite Mathematics course, our Pre-Calculus courses, some Elementary Statistics courses – we serve students across the University who take what was called Basic and Breadth Requirements, and one of the Breadth Requirements was in Mathematics. Many of them took Finite Mathematics because it met a requirement, and also served the Business School.

HS: Speak, if you can for a minute, about the apparent huge amount of Math anxiety in American students.

FC: All that Math anxiety makes me nervous. It's – I think – that was a real catch phrase. It was part of the currency of maybe ten years ago. I don't hear that phrase so much any more. I don't think being anxious about Math has gone away, but being anxious about doing anything difficult is sort of natural. Mathematics isn't all that deep, but it does have this sort of aura of mystery to people who haven't gotten very far into it, and I think exposure – gentle exposure, if necessary – is the best way to overcome that anxiety.

HS: Then that would explain why you were so insistent about this program for the elementary teacher, I would assume – that you could forego – waylay some of that anxiety early on.

FC: Absolutely. I think you're less likely to be afraid of something if you know about it, and the elementary teacher comes in – the candidate comes in generally with some tension about Mathematics, and never gets past it, in many cases, and so goes out into the classroom and either soft pedals Mathematics in his or her own classroom, or does a less than optimal job of communicating Mathematics to the students – may even communicate that distaste, that anxiety, that reluctance to meet Mathematics head on. And so I'm concerned about that.

HS: Were there other courses that you developed, or curriculum that you helped design that you're pleased about, looking back?

FC: Not that I personally was involved in, but something very fine that's happened in our department, and it happened – really started under Bob Dean's care, and continued under mine – that's the Actuarial Science Program, which is not unique to the Northwest, but the best in the Northwest, and I say that without hesitation or apology. A couple of other schools have, or are instituting Actuarial Science programs, but the program presently run by Bill Owen and C.T. Lind is up and flourishing, and turning out students in significant numbers – by that I mean 12 and 15 a year – and these students go into excellent, excellent jobs with insurance companies, pension companies – any company where risk assessment and costs and benefits are analyzed. Some of these people are destined to be high-ranking officials in their companies – perhaps even CEOs.

HS: That should be very gratifying.

FC: It is.

HS: Anything else about the department, or creating majors/minors before we go on to something else?

FC: If the something else includes personal things about the department that – I – otherwise I'll mention those here.

HS: Okay, good.

FC: Um – it's really been a kick to come into this department back in '68 with a whole bunch of other young people, and to have most of those people stay right on during all these years and become my best friends in the world, my colleagues, of course, professionally, and the people with whom I shared more of my life than I shared with my wife, for a lot of years. So I must mention that I found the best friends of my life in the Mathematics Department. I would name names, but I would omit somebody, and that would be sad.

HS: Do you want to include humorous incidents here, or save that for another time?

FC: It's hard for me to remember single things that stick out as humorous, but there was always good humor around our department. There were shared jokes – sometimes jokes on each other – good times. I do remember a couple of things. When Dave Anderson turned 50 years old, we wanted to honor that in some way. Dave was, and is a sort of reserved type. Dave does not make a fool of himself in public. During his 11:00 class, I believe, in a room near the Math Department office, we interrupted about five minutes before the end of the class – I don't know if this should go on tape or not, but I'm going to say it – we had arranged for a belly dancer to come in. I don't know if you could get away with that now. It was a young woman, and it was all very tastefully done, but *it was a belly dancer in Dave Anderson's classroom!* And so this accompanying drum beat started up just outside the door, and Dave snapped to attention and looked through that glass door, and here came this young woman into the room with her veils and finger cymbals, doing this elaborate dance, and then I brought in – having dressed as a waiter for the occasion – brought in a silver tray with a silver coffee service on it, and set it down in front of Dave with

his morning roll and coffee, and a fresh – I think it was the Seattle PI, and that's our celebration of Dave's birthday. We never did anything that crazy again in the Department.

HS: So it is not true that Mathematics people are staid, conservative stick in the muds.

FC: Why of course it is, Helen!

HS: Well with all this going on – all of this course development and serious stuff – did you have time to serve on any campus committees?

FC: Lots of them. I was on the General Ed Committee for a time. I think that was the – probably the most satisfying committee I served upon.

HS: In what way? Why?

FC: Well it was involved with shaping curriculum, and that's always important. It's important to keep paying attention to it over the years. It can't remain static, and it doesn't.

HS: So that was the most important one. There's a question here about which campus committees do you think were the most significant to the progress of University, so are you going to stick with your favorite one there?

FC: I – I think I will, but then I don't have wide experience on some of the other policy making committees. I'll stick with General Ed.

HS: All right. Now tell us a little bit – unless – is there anything about Central that I have missed that you want to comment on before we go to more personal things – the faculty code, academic freedom, town/gown – anything along there that you want to –

FC: I think I would just be tackling other people.

HS: Tell us, then, about your family. I know that you have a family.

FC: I do indeed, and we did talk earlier about family members who attended Central. The first in my family to attend and take a degree at Central was my wife Jean. She did a degree in – in those days I think it was called Speech Pathology under Bill Wensley – there were some other people in that Department who guided her. She took a statistics course from Bill Owen. It nearly killed her! But she did finish her Master's degree at Central in, I think, 1972 or '73. My son Chris attended Central – finished his degree in Business – not Business Education – and is now a manager for the family that owns many of the businesses in Vantage, Washington. He's making a life there. He has a wife and three children. My daughter Kim did not attend Central, but another University on the West side, and is now a Pharmacist with her own family. And my son Phillip attended University of Puget Sound, then Eastman School of Music, and is now a professional singer – opera, oratorios, recitals – that kind of thing, as is his wife.

HS: And does that take you and Jean to many different places to hear these performances?

FC: We have seen more of the country following Phillip around than we ever did on our own. That may change, but it's still a factor. We hope to see Phillip and Mary and Max, their baby – their son – in Florida, in March, where Phil and Mary will both be appearing.

HS: And appearing in an opera concert?

FC: It's an opera. It happens to be Humperdink's Hansel and Gretel. Not Engelbert Humperdink, but the real Engelbert Humperdink.

HS: You posed a question that you think that perhaps would be an interesting one to add, and I'm going to spring it on you right now. If you had not gone into the field of Mathematics, and come to Central, and had this long, illustrious career, what do you think you might have done?

FC: Well for me, that was easy. I've always liked music. I've been a minor performer. I played trombone in high school and in college, where I was in the marching and concert bands. I've played in summer bands over the years in various towns. I've not played in years and years, but I've always thought if I had it to do over, and let's say, *couldn't* do Mathematics – because I don't want to be disloyal to Math – but I would be really interested in a career in Music. I think a life in Music – if you can make a living in Music – has to be the most fun a person can have. If you can't make a living in Music, it's really, really hard, because you've got to find a day job – another job – to support yourself.

HS: And the fact that music and math are so closely allied, that's a very natural other wish, I would think.

FC: It is, and there's even good, sound physiological, biological brain anatomy research to support that notion. The two talents really do go together. It's not an accident.

HS: I – teaching all this time is gratifying in many ways, and I'm sure that you got rewards every day, and every week. Were there ever any official awards and rewards that came your way?

FC: There were the usual things – there were tiny promotions. The year 1979 a friend of mine, Dave LeGree, heard about two things that happened that year, and said "What is this? The year of the Cutlip, or something?" The things that happened that year were three in number – one was promotion to Professor after eleven years at Central, the second was being named Department Chair, and I really considered that an honor. It was awarded to me by my colleagues, and I can't tell you what a pleasure that was. And the third was one of the recently instituted, then – what was it called? – Distinguished Professor of the University awards. There were awards in three categories – the three you might expect: teaching, research or scholarly activity, and service. And I, that year, had the Distinguished Professor in Teaching award. I have the plaque on my office wall. I keep it shined up.

HS: I would hope so! That had to be an absolute euphoric feeling.

FC: It was. It was – and I have to thank colleagues for that, too. It was Bernie Martin, Dean in those days, who, I think, really picked up and advanced that cause. One must be nominated and supported for that award. It involves the gathering of materials from colleagues, from students, and the candidate often doesn't even know about it, and certainly isn't involved in the gathering. So I have to thank Bernie Martin, and perhaps others I don't know about, for significant help in obtaining that award. Thanks, Bernie.

HS: And so besides having a polished plaque on your wall, you are also, then, displayed in the library, is that not correct?

FC: Well, I'm not displayed, Helen, but my photograph is.

HS: But your photograph is. Let us use the English language succinctly, here.

FC: I do believe there might still be a photo – it's actually on an honor wall in Barge Hall now – again, newly instituted with the help of the CWURA – the Central Washington University Retirement

Association. And so I'm up there with a lot of people whom I've known over the years, and respected, and loved.

HS: Not a rogue's gallery, but a gallery of –

FC: Well, it's that, too.

HS: Let's close with kind of a summation on your part. How would you characterize your years at Central?

FC: I've never lived my life according to a plan. As I said earlier, I started out in school, found that I was good at certain things, and that doors opened, opportunities came, and never knowing what other path I might have taken, and to what that path might have led. I made choices almost by accident. I found myself here as a young person. Here I am an old geezer, and retired, and I can hardly believe it, by the way. I still feel like the kid who came here. I look into the mirror, and I wonder who I'm looking at, because inside I'm still Fred Cutlip – still the happy recipient of bounties that came to me through no particular choices of my own. I'm grateful for my years at Central. I at one time early on felt that I had to do the usual thing, which was look around for advancement by moving to another school and moving another step up. I didn't do that, and I'm happy now that I did not. I found a life here at Central. It's been more than a living and livelihood, it's been a life.

HS: I cannot thank you enough for taking the time out of your life to come and share all of these thoughts with us. Thank you, Fred Cutlip, very, very much.

FC: My pleasure.