

## CWU LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Bob Wieking

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

This is March 16, 2005. Project, of course, is Central Washington University Living History. The Interviewer, today, is Ross Herd, and our subject is the esteemed Robert Wieking.

R.H.: Welcome, Bob. Uh, let's start with a – just a brief personal history, prior to coming to Central. What's your background?

B.W.: Well, I was born and raised in the San Francisco Bay area, actually born and raised in Oakland, which few people are willing to commit to. Uh, I went to high school in the Bay area and got a little scholarship from the Bay Area Association for the Advancement of Industrial Education and that got me off, full of ideas about being in the world of industrial arts education. And, uh, graduated from San Jose State with that scholarship and, uh, actually, at that point, I decided the last thing in the world I wanted to do was teach, and I worked for Lockheed Missiles and Space Company, in what's called Electronic Component Reliability, working for missiles, building missiles – uh, Polaris and Poseidon programs. And, uh, after about a year and a half of that – that was during the Viet Nam War era and, uh, when I realized that my occupational deferment did not exist, even though I was doing the same job as other people at Lockheed were doing, I took all the exams for the Air Force Electronic Maintenance Officer Candidate Program, and was just about ready to go in. I was standing in line in the Oakland Induction Center which is a pretty notorious place in the Oakland Bay area, and, uh, they said, "Well, do you have – is there any reason why you should NOT be entering the military?" And I said, "Well, the only thing is, is I have had two viral infections in my heart. We don't know the origin of it, but it was very serious." And he says, "Oh, boy. We better have you checked out." So with that in mind, went up to Letterman Hospital. This is a longer story than you want, but it's just comes back in a series of bad dreams. Uh, I went up to Letterman and they said, "No, they don't want any part of me." So, at that point, I, uh, left Lockheed Missiles and Space Company with some good experience under my belt and sold my MGB sports car with the leather seats and the ragtop; and with that money, I went to the Greyhound Bus from Oakland, California, to Montreal, Canada, and then a little freighter ship, uh, the smallest freighter ship in the harbor in Montreal. If you ever take freighter ships, they will always tell you to take the largest freighter ship because they're not as delicate in the tough seas. But I had the littlest one, called The Sun Amelia, and it landed in England; and for the next year, I traveled by motorcycle and thumb and met all my German relatives, went down to Greece, over to Prague and, literally, while sitting on a desert island, eating little deep fried red fish that you could buy in little Greek restaurants, I got thinking, "I have very little more money. I have a return ticket. Done all the traveling I really want to do for awhile and one thing I never did do was teach." And I came back with a real vengeance and taught at Miramaudi High School – uh, woodworking, electronics and auto mechanics and got very full of myself, thinking I should be involved in teacher education and, uh, came north to WSU for their Vocational Technical Education Program, six years in Minnesota in the, uh, Industrial Technology Department there at Moorehead State University, and then back out here

to Central, where I spent the rest of my teaching career. A long story, but a good story.

R.H.: Fast life, Robert. Fast life. Uh, how did you happen to come to Central?

B.W.: Well, when we were in graduate school over in Pullman, my wife, one child and I would drive by Ellensburg, on the freeway to Seattle to some meeting or whatever, and, uh, you know as husbands are trying to do – they're always trying to promise their wife the better life that lays ahead after graduate school; and I would illustrate by saying, "Well, what I would really like to do is have the position – well, just like here in this valley here, with this environment, this size school, with the programs that are going on here – that would be my ideal, Nancy. Now I know we're not going to get that but that's . . ." And sure enough, when the position opened up – that was the year that Mount St. Helens blew and then, uh, my good friend and Department Chairman, Beau Bede, withdrew the position for that year, and I thought we were just dead in the water, but it was reopened a year later and I went all – all guns loaded, trying to get this position out here. So we literally, are, and were in the favorite first place position that I had ever wanted to be in.

R.H.: Great. So, any additional first impressions of the campus or the town?

B.W.: Well, I was real concerned about being in as small a town situation as it was. Growing up, as I like to tell people – growing up in the San Francisco Bay area, I literally had no concept of the edge of a town or a city. There's no edges. You just continue. And looking out the third floor of Cleveland Hall, one day, many years ago, I remember looking at the edge of Pullman, and I thought, "What a radical concept! You can actually see the edge and then you can go beyond the edge into, like, where no one is." So I . . .

R.H.: (*inaudible*) wheat fields.

B.W.: It turned out. (*chuckle*) As my father said one day when he visited us many years ago – he pulled me aside with just me – my child and wife were off talking with my mother – he says, "Bob, do you realize you're right out in the middle of a wheat field?"

R.H.: (*chuckle*)

B.W.: I said, "Yeah. Isn't it great?"

R.H.: Well, tell us about your first rank and assignments.

B.W.: Well, I came here as an Assistant Professor and I have always wanted to have that combination of being involved in engineering and technology, but also being involved in teaching and, ideally, preparing of teachers. So, I had the official responsibility of starting a power technology program, a series of twelve courses, a power technology laboratory with equipment facilities, learning assignments and I also was responsible for the – what was called originally, the Industrial Arts Teacher Education Program and Industrial Education Program. And so that's the way we started out here and those – the combination of those has always served me very well.

R.H.: Now is Owen Shadle still here, or has he passed away?

B.W.: You know, uh, I hope this is a good time to remember Owen because his passing, uh, several years before I came here, literally opened up the position that allowed me to come here.

R.H.: Who were some of the influential or unforgettable people during your tenure here at Central?

B.W.: Well, I've got to mention, uh – I will mention Ross Berg. Uh, he was – we knew, deep in our hearts, that we both came from the WSU program there and we were fellows under the, uh – we were fellow students, fellow graduates; and he not only – not only did we continue to invite each other to our classes to speak for at least twenty, twenty-two years. But, uh, Ross, over and over again, helped me, supported me and made that special relationship. Another memorable person for sure is my then Department Chairman, Beau Bede, who, uh, as he said to me real clearly, "You know, you gotta make that lab go, Bob. If you don't look good, I don't look good. So, that's, you know, gotta happen." And lastly, you know, I'll say Don Garrity. Don Garrity got me involved, uh, with a little bit of work with the faculty legislative representative, working with Dick Thompson and Gil Backlund, working over in Olympia for just about a full year, so I got to know the President, Garrity, in a way that, perhaps, I never would have otherwise; and certainly was an influence in my career here.

R.H.: Please comment on the political problems that you've encountered during your tenure.

B.W.: Well, you know, frankly, I was told growing up that shouldn't talk about sex, religion or politics very much. Normally, I've ignored that, but I am learning in my old age that that's not at all a bad concept. Uh, for the most part, I must say that I have enjoyed the politics at Central. I did get involved working legislatively. I testified several times down at Olympia. I prepared (*inaudible*) writing for various positions that we were working on. I met face-to-face with a lot of legislators, and then had to work in a way back on campus in that same manner. So I would say, overall, I kind of have enjoyed politics, for better or worse; and, uh, it's been a positive experience for me.

R.H.: Good. Good. Uh, have you ever sensed a noticeable town-gown problem?

B.W.: Well, having said what I just said, I will also say that I've been sensitive to a line – a line drawn in the sand between some community members and faculty. And even after retiring, I was getting together with a bunch of, uh, mostly fellows in a group that I'm a member of and they got talking about how all those liberal faculty members on campus are exactly illustrating what they like so little about higher education. Most of these fellows had just moved into town from the west side and just thought they'd set up shop over here in the valley and just carry on; and all of a sudden, one of 'em kinda looked toward me and they kinda said, "Oh, watch out. There's one of 'em right now." And they weren't joking. It was not a – it was not a fun chiding kind of a thing. And so I guess I am periodically reminded, uh, that there are some strange divisions and I haven't liked it. I've always felt probably overly sensitive toward it, and sometimes I've probably not been involved in

downtown organizations because of knowing that I'll probably run into that, uh, harmless, but maybe not so harmless feelings.

R.H.: Yeah. What about changes on campus during your tenure, Bob - organizational, departmental, programs, buildings?

B.W.: Well, we, uh - of course, I'm going to be first one on television maybe to mention that it's about time that Hogue Technology Building was remodeled, enlarged, and that the IET Department get even more support for all the good work that they do around the region.

R.H.: Now was that twenty years ago, you mean?

B.W.: Well, yeah, we first start - we had our first Hogue Enlargement Committee meeting twenty-four years ago, now; and I spent a goodly amount of work writing on a document that is nowhere. But having said that, uh, I think that we don't get as much building capital funds as maybe we ought to, compared with some of the bigger institutions. It's been real - it's been very nice to see the Music Building coming on, the Science Building, uh, and the thing that would just round it out perfectly would be the enlargement to the Hogue Building. But it's been good to see all the music activities that we have, for instance, available at our doorstep.

R.H.: Okay. Any other organizational changes or - that you've observed that have impacted you or that, you know -

B.W.: Well, you know that is - that's a good question. I spent two years, minimum, on what was called a Campus Climate Committee, with our President, uh, the previous President of the University.

R.H.: Hal Nelson?

B.W.: Yes. And it was our task to look into the negative kinds of karma, I would say, and environment on campus; and in a way, I might have learned even more than I had wanted to in terms of the kind of - the rowdiness among students that I hadn't ever witnessed or known much about. We worked very hard at - at least starting to be aware of the negative pressures that many people do feel on this campus for one reason or another. And I'd like to say that that first humble attempt at talking about corporate health on campus was good thing and I - it's continuing, which is good.

R.H.: Okay. Uh, what about your - any particularly proud moments for the university?

B.W.: Well, there - in a way, there's just too - really too much to talk about. I'm just going to limit it to, uh - I might start out with our own Department - the IET Department. You know, we have - we have accomplished things and done things continuously that are really surprising. You know, we're off, in a way for better - mostly better - we're not connected with a major industrial center. Some of our colleagues at other institutions, I know, use - that's the first thing out of their mouth - they say, "Well, Central might be good, but they're not connected to a major urban center and they can't get all the donations." Well, it so happens that

some of my colleagues in the department have gotten amazing amounts of financial donations, equipment money, equipment donations. We have walked into territory and had students placed in positions that speak very well for this university. And those are, I think, some of my proudest moments, seeing what we or they have been able to pull off. And we had no right to be able to do that except by really hard work, very hard work, a lot of leadership and that's it.

R.H.: Okay. What was your perception of students' capabilities when you first came to Central and when you retired? Any noticeable changes or significant kinds of things?

B.W.: You know, I thought about that quite a bit my last couple of years. I think one of the things that changed for me is that previously, I had taught twelve different courses each year, of all things – which is an amazing number of book orders to put in every year, for instance. But I normally taught students within our own department; and our students, typically, are – they come in with lots of work experience, they're very motivated, they've spent their years, often times, knocking around and perhaps not doing well somewhere; but they come in to us and they're ready to go to work. And it was only after I was pleased, being asked to teach a Technology 101 class, an introduction to technology, where I was exposed to all kinds of other students on campus, that I became a little bit, uh – oh a little bit displeased sometimes. And there was – there's some kids come in with some pretty – not many, but a few that come in with some pretty rough edges; and they aren't really sure if they should be here or perhaps somewhere else yet. But having said that, uh, I would say the capability is just fine. I've written philosophy statements that I've turned in one place or another where I've said that I believe – I would prefer to be in an institution where we are helping, perhaps medium – mediumly intelligent people becoming exceptionally fine people; and that's far better than just carrying on and promoting abnormally intelligent kids with, perhaps overly high-priced family incomes, just carrying on the status quo. So. . .

R.H.: Do you feel that Central provides ample cultural enrichment for students?

B.W.: I believe so. There are a lot of good things offered to students here. Uh, I'm not sure that students have that first in mind when Friday afternoon comes – that they want to find really enriching, uh, experience – intellectual experience. But I'm very pleased with the number of musical events that, you know, you can almost walk into by accident, into either the old or the new music buildings, and just be carried away with wonderful, wonderful entertainment. Yeah, I think we're doing – and doing better – the Student Union Building coming out of that shop or all kinds of other good activities and entertainments. That would be my belief.

R.H.: Good. Tell us about any job, or major primary duty changes you had during your career.

B.W.: Well, in a way I continually was either asked to, or decided to develop new courses, and if you're in the IET Department, it's not just another course in a three-ring – in a three page syllabus, it's equipment and tools and materials and things that are going to be donated and video and other media that should perhaps be brought into the system – in other words, the physical plant that has to be organized or reorganized. So, I would say, for the better, that I was always in a state of change in modification, new courses, new facilities, re-mod – modified programs.

R.H.: Okay. Um, how about some of your personal contributions to your department or the university, as a whole – in addition to what you've already commented on, Bob?

B.W.: Well, some of the – one of the things that I was most pleased with, and worked very hard at was representing our department, representing my profession of engineering and technology. I felt – I was probably really full of myself, thinking that I had a role to play in representing that out to the public to – and particularly to school kids. I'm very proud of saying that we have ramrodded, uh, science and technology programs in our department. We've gone out to schools around the state – elementary through high school. We've gone to Martin Luther King Elementary School. We were invited down there, after we put on a big show for two days at the Valley Mall in Yakima. So, to me, that was just heaven on earth, realizing we – one day, we were at a mall, and then a teacher of the gifted and talented asked us to come over to the Martin Luther King Elementary School, where we set up machinery all day long and talked with kids in small groups. Uh, the years we had hundreds of kids over a ten-year period, coming up from White Swan, the school districts down there, where we had hands-on learning centers, uh, in the department, in the power technology lab. So, to me, that was a real – that's one of the things I'd like to hang my hat on.

R.H.: In terms of the outreach, if you will, but the whole focus was on helping students develop basic knowledge of technology?

B.W.: Mm-hmm.

R.H.: Or what about career orientation? Were you also trying to encourage career development, if you will?

B.W.: Oh, absolutely. We would – I went out – we got one grant, working with Jan Bowers. We received a grant for non-traditional career development; and my piece of the pie was – we went around, just to the school districts in our Valley, here; and we had alternative career events where girls, boys got all kinds of hands-on experience and learning about careers. What was really good about putting on these shows in hands-on experiences, was that every one of my teacher education majors – and if I could get my hands on any other teacher education majors – they would all be encouraged to get involved on the delivery end of these things. And I'm fond of saying that you really don't know anything until you've had to get out front and really explain and show it off to someone else.

R.H.: Okay.

B.W.: So, we are outreaching and we are also providing absolute experience for our own Central students.

R.H.: Yeah. Sounds good. And, will you give us a statement that wraps up your feelings about your time at Central?

B.W.: Well, it was – my time at Central was just a – it was a lovely time. As my arthritis kicked in, I slowed down more than I ever wanted to, but, gee whiz, on my – I had wonderful times. I could not have expanded and been more of an individual

anywhere else. I was allowed to exert myself any amount that I wished. And I got enough support where I felt like I was being encouraged and I had a great stay here.

R.H.: Okay. Now, as you've thought about this interview today, are there some other comments you'd like to make? The doors wide open.

B.W.: Oh, I do have a hot pink list of things that – I don't go anywhere without a hot pink list of things. It's called a "hot pink list" – HPLOT – "hot pink list of things." I'm very pleased. We worked with Betel Labs, uh, getting a three hundred twenty-five thousand dollar NSF grant, uh, for developing a new material science technology curriculum. Beau Bede and I then provided training, we developed curriculum, we developed (*inaudible*) laboratory learning activities and trained, probably, over five hundred junior and senior high school science and technology teachers. That was another very nice thing I'm please with. And other things.

R.H.: Any other comments?

B.W.: No. That's it.

R.H.: Great. Well, thank you, Bob Wieking. You're a good person, Robert.

B.W.: That's all I know. Didn't use my notes. That would have gotten in the way.

R.H.: (chuckle) Good. Thank you.

**End of Transcription**