

CWU LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

DON CUMMINGS

Smith: Our interview today for the Living History Program is with Dr. Don Cummings. The camera is being operated by Dr. Jean Putnam, and your interviewer is Milo Smith. Don, as you've been forewarned would you please give us a thumbnail sketch of the life of Don Cummings starting with birth?

Cummings: I was born in 1935, Swedish Hospital in Seattle, and was raised until I was about eight in and around Seattle, mostly out in the country around Issaquah. My mother and I spent the Second World War years tearing up and down the East Coast pursuing my step-father who was in the Navy. And then when we came back we moved out into the woods between Duvali and Woodinville, and that was where I spent most of my older childhood. Went to high school at Bothel High School. And then went to the University of Washington where I took all three of my degrees, and it was while I was at the University of Washington that Carol and I got married and had our first child, about nine months and three days after. I was at the University working on my Ph.D. as I had finished the BA and they had advised me to just skip the MA and go directly to the Ph.D., so I was, I think I had two classes left, and a German Exam and seemingly endless string of oral, written exams, and the dissertation to write. But it was the summer of '60, sometime in July, and I was taking a course with David Burt, who was just finishing his first year, or had just finished his first year teaching here at Central, and David and I really hit it off well, for some reason or other in this class. And one day he came and said, "Do you want a job teaching at Central?" And I said, "Well, all I have is a Bachelor's Degree." And he said, "They're desperate, they're really desperate. Why don't you see what you can do?" Carol and I had driven through Ellensburg a number of times. This, of course, was back in the days when the State Highway ran right in front of this building, and we were rather attracted by the town and the campus and the location because it was close to all of our family. So I thought, "Well, they won't want me, but I'll write them a letter, at least I'll get my name on their, in their files for later on." So I sent them a letter and it couldn't have been two days, and I got a phone call from Katherine Bullard, who was the head of the Language and Literature Division, asked if I could come over the next day for an interview. And the next day I came over for an interview, and she and Wes Crumm, who was then Dean of Faculty, I think was his title, they interviewed me over at what used to be Webster's Barbecue across Eighth, which is now, I think, Domino's Pizza. The interview lasted about ten minutes, and it was pretty clear by the time I left that I had a job, and I had also found out that part of the reason they were in such a rush was that Katherine had reservations to get on the plane to start a three weeks vacation in Europe, and she wasn't about to mess that up hiring some young instructor. So I, we came and I inherited an Associate Professor's load because the guy who resigned unexpectedly was an Associate Prof. She didn't want to mess around with the schedule at that late date so she just gave me his. So my first year I taught an upper division course in Eighteenth Century Literature even though I'd never studied Eighteenth Century Literature. But it was a wonderful experience. Actually it worked out rather well because of the kind of assignments that I got. I got to teach just about everything that was on the reading list I subsequently had to take exams over. That was how we came here in the Fall of 1960. I was then fired in the Spring of 1961, and after kind of, I don't know how exactly to describe it; it wasn't exactly an uprising, it was just a kind of murmuring complaint from some colleagues in the Division. They decided to rehire me, or un-fire me, one or the other. And I can remember, one of the things that I can remember most about that episode, other than the fact that I was informed that I was fired while I was in the process, literally I was on my hands and knees planting asparagus seed, in any case, the other thing that I can remember most about that episode was that after the smoke had cleared and I had my job back Elwyn O'Dell from the Political Science Department came up to me and said, "I understand they hired you back." And I said, "Yeah." And he said, "Well, hell, next thing you know you'll be getting tenure." And he kind of appeared disgusted by it all. But that was it, and we've stayed in Ellensburg; raised three children here, and I've enjoyed an interesting career as instructor, Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, Professor, Program Director, Department Chairman, and Dean. I had my eye on the Provost Office, but thought the hell with it.

Smith: All right, Don, where was Carol from?

Cummings: Carol was from the same area. She was, matter of fact, she and I grew up just a couple of miles from one another, and met by accident at a dance one night, and I don't know about her, I was immediately smitten, and that was it for me. But, I think it took her awhile, of course, she was only fifteen at the time.

Smith: How many children? What sexes are they? Did they do to Central?

Cummings: Three children. Two boys, Dan and Lon, a girl, Jody. They came pretty much in that order. Dan and Lon and Jody, and Dan did not attend school, as a matter of fact, there was a huge family celebration when he finished high school. Dan was not one of the world's great scholars. He was very bright, but he just didn't like school, and he now lives in Duvall; is married, has one son; owns, is half owner of a large cabinet making shop, employees, I don't know, fifteen, twenty employees. So he's done pretty well, in spite of the fact that he didn't go to Central. Lon was an interesting case. He took one year of Central immediately after graduating from high school. He wasn't really into it. He'd got it in his head he wanted to be a deep-sea welder, and so he went over to Seattle, we sent him to welding school, and I think, diving school. That was right around, and he was doing very well in both of those, and it was right in there somewhere that he talked with someone who said, "Did you ever notice that there aren't any old deep-sea welders?" They make about a thousand dollars an hour, or something like that, and Lon got to poking around and discovered that it's incredibly dangerous work, and decided maybe that wasn't really what he wanted to do. And we had this deal, still have it actually with the kids, if they ever want to go back and go to school, we'll put them through, they didn't have to go through on their own after they got out of high school. So one night the phone rang and Lon said, "I've decided I want to go back to school." He was twenty-nine years old. So he came back, moved into our house, and he was going to take just enough courses to get ready to go to Chiropractic School, some place in Oregon. So while he was here he ran into Don Dietrich and some of those other guys over in Dean Hall, and got really interested in Chemistry and Biology, primarily Chemistry. He did extraordinarily well, and this was a kid who celebrated when he got a "C-" in high school, and he got, like straight "A's". I think he graduated from here, got his BA in Chemistry with something like a 3.98 average, or something. I have never seen anybody study as hard as he did. And he is now a Chemist for the Food and Drug Administration over in Seattle. Jody is an interpreter for deaf students in the Wenatchee School District. She and her husband and two girls live in Wenatchee. She took just, I don't know, I think, I'm not even sure she completed a whole quarter of school, but she's gone through some special, she's had some specialized schooling. Interpretation and what-not. She's on us for post-graduate work or something, whatever it is.

Smith: Good. Now, let's go back to you having been fired from Central once. Were the grounds because you didn't have more than a Bachelor's Degree?

Cummings: Oh, no. No, it's hard to tell; it's hard to imagine, I guess, just sort of looking at me now. But back in those days I was really a smart-aleck. And I had come to Central with all of the prejudices that, I mean, that sort of pre-adolescent prejudices, that one is expected to get in English Graduate School. You know, and sort of disdain for anything that was different from the very tight focus of my study. And I said some, you know, some really pretty insulting things to Katherine Bullard, and she was the English Education Specialist at the time. And I thought that was pretty Mickey Mouse kind of stuff, and she took umbrage at that, and she decided the school could do better, and get rid of me. It's really one of the grand ironies that later on I became most interested in English Education, so that the last two decades or more of my teaching I was primarily concerned with the preparation of English teachers, and that's how I got involved with spelling.

Smith: Did you ever have a chance or the desire to mend the fence that you had built between the two of you?

Cummings: No, because when, this is a complicated story, This was all happening right at the time when we were in between Presidents, and shortly after I was rehired, Jim Brooks became President, and, of course, Jim had been one of Katherine's undergraduate students. You remember Katherine, Milo?

Smith: Oh, yes.

Cummings: She was a very, what's the word? Leonine. She was something. An imposing woman. She was an imposing human being, any gender. And, as I said there was a kind of a fuss about my being terminated, and I guess one of the early interviews Jim and Katherine had Nvasn't there, but what I heard was he said to her, "Well, Katherine, I understand you've had some problems with your staff over this Cummings guy." Katherine got quite upset when he said that. She said, "You don't have any right to say that to me." And he said, "I think I do." And she got mad and quit. I have to believe there were other things going on that I don't know about. But in any case, she did quit; she left. I never saw her except for one very brief instance which I'll tell you about some time, if you're interested, when the camera's not running. But, Keith Rinehart, and others had seen her and she was very angry, not with me so much, but with the school...

(?)

Smith: Because this is being recorded, I'll throw into the pot a little fact that you may not be aware of, but because of Katherine Bullard we were able to buy the home we're now living in. She loaned us fifteen hundred dollars. We had come to town, spent all of our savings on a brand new car, a brand new station wagon, and suddenly the home we wanted was available and we didn't have a down payment. So dear old Katherine Bullard came through.

Cummings: Yeah, she was a woman of many, many virtues.

Smith: You know what her hobby was? Did you know that she entered contests and that her home was full of knickknacks and prizes that she had won. That was her hobby.

Cummings: I never heard that.

Smith: She said, "That is the least intellectual thing I could find to do."

Cummings: I think that story of my being hired is most interesting because of what it says about the differences between now and then.

Smith: Oh, certainly.

Cummings: It would be inconceivable that you would hire somebody today the way I was hired, and I tell that story now to these poor youngsters who send out a hundred and fifty resumes and all of that. I mean that was the only time I was ever interviewed for a job. That's quite amazing to me, that it was just blind, dumb luck.

Smith: Don, just in case at some time in the future, some under-grad gets a-hold of this and listens to your interview, would you recommend to undergraduates now that they go straight ahead for a Ph.D. instead of taking some time between?

Cummings: Well, I don't really know, Milo, because the, I don't know much about what life is like out there in graduate school and the meat markets anymore. The idea of passing up the MA was you could get done faster. But I'm not so sure that that's an advantage today because at least in areas where there's, there seem to be plenty of applicants for all the jobs. You're probably better if you've got a pretty rich resume, even while you're still in graduate school. I've got some publications and research projects, things like that, and the best way to do that is to stay in graduate school and continue working on that stuff. It would seem to me that it would make sense to not hurry up graduate school. Back in the early Sixties, late Fifties and early Sixties, it made sense because it was a seller's market then. There were not a whole lot of candidates for the various positions. Schools were in desperation over this. If a similar situation arose today in

Ellensburg, they could fill it from qualified people who were living here in Ellensburg, for heaven's sake. They wouldn't even have to go outside.

Smith: Now, Don, did you find that your first few years of teaching were an eye opener to you, that you learned more about your discipline from teaching?

Cummings: It was nothing but that. Fortunately I always enjoyed teaching, and I seemed to be a fairly quick study, at least I'm able to make a good presentation, even if I'm not always too deeply sure of everything. But...

Smith: That's called "Faking your way through!"

Cummings: Yeah, sort of faking your way through. Though it wasn't really faking, it was just sort of gliding gracefully on the surfaces, you know. One of the things Keith Rinehart did when he became Head of the Division was to, and later Chair of the English Department, he deliberately mixed up my schedule. So by the time I had been here three or four years, I had taught literally everything on the schedule because he said that way I would have good preparations for my reading exams for my Ph.D. Or also he thought, Keith was a person with very strong feelings about what he thought was quality, and I think that he thought that my training in literature was weak, which it was. I came to it late and I over-specialized in American, Nineteenth Century American literature, so I didn't have much breadth. And so Keith, he told me one day, he said, "Look, I'm just increasing your general education. There's a lot of stuff you haven't read at all, and you're going to." And then I can also remember one day he sat down with a copy of my Ph.D. reading list and looked at it and said, "OK, well, here you teach this class, and then you can teach this stuff." So, again that was just blind luck to have fallen into a situation where I could have that kind of experience, that kind of boss, and that kind of a possibility, so that I was learning a lot of stuff really fast. Changing my mind almost daily.

Smith: You retired when, Don?

Cummings: September of 1996.

Smith: Now in those years, did you ever take a sabbatical leave?

Cummings: Took two. Took one in 1980, and we went to, Carol was, Milo and Jean. Carol teaches Polynesian dancing at our home, and she wanted to go to Hawaii, and Rorotonga, and New Zealand, and Tahiti, and take lessons. So we decided I would try for a sabbatical and it was then that I started working on this big monograph on English spelling because I could write that anywhere. I didn't have to be in any particular location. And Rorotonga and Tahiti aren't bad places to write. And so that year we visited, we spent seven months in the South Pacific in those four areas, and in those seven months I got a complete first draft written. Several hundred pages. It was a very, very productive year. And then later, 1987 maybe, '87 or '88, we took, I took another sabbatical we went back to, a large part of that, well, not a large part, only a month or so. We went back to Hawaii and there I was doing some reading on Chronology of Literacy, and I was beginning to get interested in the Theory of Biological Evolution because I thought that it had some interesting implications for the language change. The way writing systems and things like that changed across time. So that was basically a reading and note-taking time.

Smith: This might be a logical place, Don, to sneak in some discussion on your part explaining to us and to future interested people, the nature of the third publication, the English spelling book.

Cummings: Well, it's a rather large book that takes very seriously the proposition that the English spelling system, in spite of the bad press it has got in the past four or five hundred years, is a system, that it's systematic. And beyond that that it is a self-regulating and a self-reorganizing system. It, the idea that I had, working on that book was something, it wasn't much more complicated than the notion of a thermostat,

which is also self-regulating, and so on. But, basically what it tries to do is to develop a theoretical context for looking at the spelling system and analyzing written words into their component elements, and then looking systematically at the processes that are involved when those elements combine to form written words. Most of the work has been done in Twentieth Century Linguistics, it's done with the spoken language not with the written language, and there are some significant differences there. I'm not a specialist trying to explore that book, so the first part of the book simply presents the theoretical context, and the middle of the book talks about the basic rules that control how we can sequence letters and sounds and various processes, like deleting the silent final "e", and twinning final consonants. And the last, second half of the book really, the largest single part of the book is a very detailed accounting of the sound to spelling correspondences, like how is the sound "IJHM" spelled in all it's various ways? And how far can we go towards writing selection rules that'll tell us when to pick this spelling and when to pick another?

Smith: Now, in the course of writing this book, did you discover that you were proving your pre-conception?

Cummings: Actually, I was just, I think the only real pre-conception that I had was that I believed that it must be more systematic than people let on. Because, well, it was kind of a simple deduction. A spelling system is part of the language. Language has to be systematic. It's a coding system, and if it's not systematic, people don't know what-one-another are talking about, and it doesn't work. And it seems to me that if you apply that notion to the spelling system, then the only conclusion you can reach is that, well, the spelling must be systematic, it's just that we don't understand it. It's incredibly complicated, in some respects, but that doesn't, being complicated is not the same thing as being un-systematic. Actually what I discovered was that there was a whole lot more of a systematic nature going on in there than I had anticipated, and I can still remember working, I started out with a huge pile of three-by-five filing cards, and a dictionary, and Jespersen's Modern English Grammar, and I started just working on sound to spelling correspondences, just collecting great huge piles of words in which a certain sound is spelled a certain way. And then going back in and trying to figure out why it was spelled that way in that word. What I began discovering was that there was much more pattern, and system in there than I had expected to find. And that continues 'til today, you know, even the kind of work I'm doing now, I'm still surprised when I find something that looks on the surface to be really quite whimsical and arbitrary, makes sense. Once you understand

Smith: Good. Good. Now, Don, through the years that you were a faculty member, did you ever serve on the Faculty Senate, or the Faculty Council?

Cummings: No. I was never a Senator. I think in the thirty-six years that I was at

Central I maybe went to three faculty meetings, three Faculty Senate meetings. And I

think that was always, that was during my years as Dean. I wasn't particularly fond of

Faculty Senate meetings.

Smith: Would you voice an opinion as to what you thought it's value may have been to this institution?

Cummings: Do you mean in an ideal situation, or historical fact?

Smith: Through the years the Faculty Senate did do things.

Cummings: Oh, yeah.

Smith: Some of the things were complimentary to the school some were not. Did you feel that generally it was a worthwhile organization?

Cummings: Well, to the extent that any academic committee, which is really what it is, a very high powered committee. To the extent that any academic committee is worth the incredible amount of energy that is put into it, yeah, it's (?) the voice of the faculty. As we know, having been here back in the pre-senate days, the history of this place is a history, up until the coming of Jim Brooks, is a history of the faculty not having much voice at all in any way, in anything, except in their classroom. To the extent that the Senate has worked against that tradition and has provided a kind of input for faculty to affect administrative decisions, and so on, it's a good thing, and curriculum, It seems to me the faculty had to have control of the curriculum, and I think, yeah, in that sense it's a good thing.

Smith: I happened to be serving on the Senate at the time when the word that was kicked around at every meeting for a considerable number of months, and caused a considerable amount of consternation was the word "collegiality". When there was an attempt to try to discover who was in charge of what, and what we found was that since the Board of Trustees had the right to not accept the Faculty Code that the Board of Trustees was indeed in charge of the school.

Cummings: Oh, yeah. No question about that. The State Administrative Code...

Smith: You'll recall, however, that there was a strong feeling that the faculty should have complete control of a certain number of elements. The administration, including the Board, can rightfully be in charge of everything else, but we wanted to be in charge of a few more things than just curriculum, and we got our hands slapped on several occasions. Now would you make a comment, Don, on your observation concerning "academic freedom" in all those years that you served at various levels.

Cummings: The Sixties and through, a lesser extent, the Seventies, it seems to me, were a period of freedom in a sense that there was a great deal of, there really isn't a good word for this, I think of it as, the word that I use to myself when I'm thinking about this is tolerance, but it's not tolerance in the class, social class sense. It's tolerance in the mechanical sense, you know, the parts don't have to fit together too well for the engine to run if your tolerances aren't too tight. It seems to me, that in the Sixties and the Seventies, the tolerances were considerably looser than they are now, so there was more room to sort of move back and forth. And one of the results of that was an increasing sense of academic freedom. I think one of the most ironic episodes in the early years was back when there was this big fuss about Gus Hall coming to talk representing the American Communist Party, and the faculty were sort of split on the issue, and as I recall, passed a kind of wishy-washy sort of notion just amongst ourselves about it. Though I think predominantly saying, "Yes, he should come because there should be open discourse at a college, and so on." But It was the Board of Trustees, specifically Mrs. Weyerhaeuser Davis, in spite of that name Weyerhaeuser, you'd expect some huge conservative thing here, she, I think, pretty much ram-rodged through that Board of Trustees the resolution that, "Hell, yes, he can come. Anybody can come and talk to the school. That's what schools are about." I've always thought that was really kind of funny. It might be the last time in history that the Board of Trustees took a position more liberal than the faculty and the rest of the school did. But I don't recall ever feeling any pinch of academic freedom, but then I'm not a highly political person. Politics does not infuse itself much into the kind of work that I was doing in my classroom. I worry more, this isn't really the question you asked, but it was one that I've been thinking about the last couple of days, I worry more about the fact that today, starting, I don't know like ten years ago, something like that, it seems to me that more and more academic decisions are being made by auditors, accountants, and lawyers. And that basically the mentality of upper level administration is that of auditors, accountants, and lawyers. And if you put that up against, you know, add to that this political correctness thing, so many topics become taboo for domestic reasons, and then you add to that the fact that the faculty is becoming increasingly politicizing and interested in a union, pretty soon I can visualize a situation where you have a school where the administrators are all basically accountants, auditors, and lawyers, and the faculty are all union zealots, and they're all working in this context of covering their ass and political correctness. I think, my God, what does a term like academic freedom mean in a situation like that? That, it seems to me, and one of the questions that was on that sheet was, "What kind of problems did it seem really serious to you at the time?" That seems to me, to be the most serious problem that this or, I suspect, all schools are facing that, but I think that a very serious problem. I don't see where in the next life that you have a tolerance for people who believe in nice blurry abstractions like academic visions, and things like that. I mean if you go into a

room where everybody thinks like an accountant, or an auditor, or a lawyer, or a union representative, what good does it do to talk about the virtues of a liberal education? We can't measure the virtues of a liberal education, you know, the fact of the matter is the guys that ran those crematoriums for Adolph Hitler were very liberally educated. They were just also crazy. But, I mean, we can't document that the bottom line that liberal education is worth the money, but I know it is, and you know it is, and you know it is. But, no, it doesn't feed the bulldog now days, and that, that really worries me, I mean to the extent that I'm capable of worrying about what happens in higher education, now that I'm on social security. That's the real threat to academic freedom. That lack of tolerance.

Smith: Now, maybe we have warmed up to the point that you'll commit yourself. The question says, "What administrators and faculty come to mind as important leaders while you were teaching here?"

Cummings: Well, I think it's really easy to way under estimate the importance of Jim Brooks because Jim was such a quiet, modest man, still is. My God, look, the man was President then he goes back to being not only a Geography Professor, but a really good Geography Professor, who really worked his fanny off That says something about the soul of the man, it seems to me, and the modesty of the man, But his leadership during the Sixties was extraordinarily important in a quiet sort of way. Closer to home, it seems to me, someone like Keith Rinehart was extremely important. Keith led the English Program even when he wasn't Chair. I can't remember what his particular role might have been. He was still the spiritual leader, as well as the political leader. Those two names are the ones that come most immediately to my mind. I have a huge amount of respect for Don Garrity, even though, I know in those last few years, perhaps because of health reasons, Don was having quite a problem. But he, it seems to me, was a very tolerant man, in the sense in which I'm using the word tolerant. He was willing to give you the room to move around, and that, it seems to me, was very important to us as we were evolving from being an ex-Normal School, into a College of Education, to being a Regional University. So I would throw Don in that (?).

Smith: I am so pleased that you picked Jim Brooks because in a left-handed way I take that as a partial compliment to my decision making. I'm the last survivor of the screening committee that selected Jim Brooks. Now, have you any memories of problems that existed between the teaching faculty and the administration?

Cummings: Back in the early days?

Smith: Any time.

Cummings: I remember nothing, but' There had been times when I refused to let the people I was working with use the word "faculty morale" around me because I felt that no matter what the situation was, even if you set up the best of all possible worlds, literally, there would still be a faculty morale problem, you know what I mean. Well, this can't last, or you know, there would be something. It even caused me to brood a lot about the fact that maybe there's something about the nature of the academic life that tends to attract essentially insecure people. and I think, you know, there might be something to that, that because of tenure, because of an extremely fine retirement program, and because of the fact that you get to work inside where it's warm and clean and there's no heavy lifting, and things like that, probably the really entrepreneurial types are not too interested in it. They're out of here. But it's the people who don't have a strong entrepreneurial spirit, such as myself, and that very well translates into something like, a certain lack of self-confidence, a certain insecurity. At least a propensity towards it. So, my theory is that there is a principle of selection at work here, which does not mean that all faculty members are insecure, it just means that on any given faculty you have a higher percentage of insecure, of more highly insecure people than you do in comparable off the campus groups. That's the assumption, and that would explain an awful lot of the faculty morale problem. I think there is, and I'm not a social scientist, thank God I think there is something to that. Anyhow, when I first came here the big issue was just getting faculty representation in the governance of the school. And that was a festering sore. I got here just as it was, apparently, getting resolved because it was the .year after I came that Jim Brooks came. And he began setting in motion the things that began to address that problem. But I still think that the problem that I mentioned earlier, the

increasing lack of tolerance which makes it impossible to maintain anything like a healthy, and imaginative academic vision. I think that's really important. It's kind of ironic to me that this school started out as a Normal School with all of the limitations that that name implies, and then it was, I guess it was, closer, even a little before your time I think, Milo, but my impression is that, immediately after the Second World War that a lot of guys were coming back in, mostly guys, coming back into the faculty in areas like English, and History, and so on. They tended to start pushing for more Arts and Sciences emphasis in curriculum on campus, in sort of a pulling away from underneath the skirts of mother education, and that pretty much got worked out in the Sixties, and Seventies, and Eighties. And now, it seems to me, we're back the other way because of pressures that are, to a certain extent, out of our control. You know, to really push the Arts and Sciences in a place like this, you have to really push Liberal Education which is part of a Liberal Education, an important part of Liberal Education's General Education. One of the things that we are facing now is the fact that Community Colleges, more and more of our students transfer here from Community Colleges, and the thing that they get at Community College, all of their General Education. So they come here to get what? To get the technical and professional training, so, you see, we're becoming increasingly a professional and technical school, sort of like a Normal School, only with but a School of Business, and Tech, and what-not thrown in. What in the hell has happened to a Liberal Education in all that, you see, other than the fact that we mouth a lot of platitudes about it. But I'm struck by the irony that the community Colleges have flip-flopped. I mean, they were set-up to be vocational-technical schools essentially. Now they're doing the General Education and we're becoming the vocational-technical school. And that doesn't seem right to me, and I think that's a serious problem. I think that with the increasing pressures that the school gets for accountability, and other forms of accountability, I mean, one form of accountability is how successful your graduates are at getting jobs and things like that. I mean, I could just hear all kinds of pressures against this nice and soft and blurry liberal Education thing. Here's another example, in a way it seems like kind of a counter-example, I guess, but when I became Dean, I was startled to find out that there was... I was startled to find out the extent to which General Education courses were being taught by non-tenure track people, by part-timers, non-tenure track full-timers. I knew there was a certain amount of this going on and I think that a certain amount of it is good because, I think any school should have a place for non-tenure track people, and for part-time, but this was just growing like sourdough. And not only that, we didn't have any budget for these people. Quarter-by-quarter to pay their salary, we had to scramble for money by cashing in on salary savings from faculty, tenure faculty who were on leave, things like that, and it was a mad house. Here was this thing that was supposed to be at the soul of the University, the Liberal Education Program, and the Dean literally had to go around with a tin cup to support the damn thing, so it could be taught by an increasingly large number of part-time, non-tenure track people which, that says there is something askew in the commitment of the school towards Liberal Education. I don't think you can lay that off on the administration. A great deal of blame for that has to be laid on the faculty. They didn't want to mess around, I mean, most English teachers given a choice between teaching a graduate seminar in Shakespeare or teaching an English 101 Class, are going to choose Shakespeare. It's even worse around the Department. To suggest that maybe some of these people should teach some General Education courses and they get outraged.

Smith: Don, you never served as a Dean, did you, under Harrington as Vice-president?

Cummings: No, Bob Edington was Vice-president.

Smith: The reason I ask is because I know that had you served under him, you would have had fewer monitory concerns because he made the decisions.

Cummings: Yes, that's right.

Smith: Many times, as a Chairman, I would call-up my Dean and I would need some information, possibly some money, and he says, every time I got the same response, "I'll have to get back to you because I have to talk to Ed." Even for small sums of money.

Cummings: Well, one of the, this is the thing that makes this business about financing General Ed. kind of a counter-example to my Jeremiah that I've been presenting here, but one of the first things that Ivory Nelson did, and one of the truly good things that Ivory Nelson did, was that he established the budget for General Education. And at the first budget hearing that I attended as Dean and Ivory as President, when I went in and told him that we were \$50,000 out of skew, well, it wasn't \$50,000, a huge amount of money, but that I wasn't worried about it because I was sure salary savings would cover it. Ivory just threw a fit! He'd never heard of such things, and he, I think, there on the spot, he just turned and he said we're going to set up a budget and we're going to put "X" numbers of dollars into it, and that, I believe, was the first time there really was a General Education budget. And it still exists, and it's gotten bigger because one of the things that we did was we dumped some carry-over money, you know if you've got somebody on the payroll at \$50,000 and you replace them, and he retires, and you replace him with someone at \$25,000, that \$25,000 difference carries on, the differential carries on, and if you're smart you stick it into something like a General Educational budget, and then it just carries on year after year. That's how that budget's gotten up now to pretty good size.

Smith: Now that you have brought up the subject of the General Education Program, I remember as a faculty member, as teacher, as a Chairman that from quarter to quarter, year to year, we never really knew what the hell the General Education was! It was always a football to be kicked around.

Cummings: It didn't change much in all those years, by the way. I was on a committee that I think was 19, it must have been 19, early 1970's that drew up the basic General Ed. Program that was just replaced a year or so ago. It had some fine tuning that was done on it; it didn't change much. The political football image is quite accurate. And that's part of the reason it's so difficult to get a coherent General Education Program, is that, there's nobody, basically, in charge, and what you have is a confederation of Departments. And they do what they can and are willing to do, but you can't ask the faculty to do much of anything that's going to pull them too far away from their main professional interests. And not only that, it's very difficult to have any kind of a coherent program when the students are essentially transient, coming in with bits and pieces that they need to fill in, you know, they need ten more General Education credits, and that kind, how can you give somebody a coherent program under a situation like that? I sometimes think if I were emperor, if I were higher education emperor, I would say, "No more transferring! You started at school, by God, you're finishing at that school!" And at least give the schools a chance, I mean there'd be obviously all kinds of problems with that, but it would at least give the schools a chance to develop some coherent programs, rather than feeling that General Education, or even major programs are sort of like poker chips. You've got two gold ones, well, you need one more red one and one more blue one, and then you'll have your degree. And you get your gold one at that school and that blue one at that school, and, oh, God, it doesn't make any sense to me.

Smith: Let me bounce something off of you, a pet peeve of many of us through the years was the fact that the money went for what the enrollment was. The more students you can enroll, the more assured we were of being able to keep that class, and consequently, everybody to my knowledge, every Department wanted more and more and more General Education courses because those were required, and they also had big enrollments, and if you could get enough students enrolled in your Department, your budget would go up. And it weakened General Education because the criteria for selection, I thought was wrong.

Cummings: Well, I think that we have all passed that, but that condition hasn't existed, to my knowledge, at the school, for... it didn't exist during the time that I was Dean, I don't think it existed at the time I was Department Chair. There was some point in there in which we quit counting student credit hours. And that just changed that. Now, in more recent years there's been a concern about class size which was sort of the same problem gotten at from a different perspective. But that, you know, that's a different issue, and it looks to me like not a great deal is happening there, other than a lot of people got scared and angry, and what not, because classes aren't any bigger than they used to be.

Smith: OK, Don, now, you'll recall that there was a list of short, a very short list, of subjects at the bottom of the page. We have kicked around some of them. I'd like to have your comments, for the record, on the

town and gown relationship, as you have seen it change from the time you came to the time you left, or even to the present.

Cummings: When we came here in 1960 my impression was that the town and gown relationship was very bad. As you might remember, Milo, you and I were two of the first faculty members to have beards.

Smith: Yes, oh, yes.

Cummings: And I know that there were times when I went into stores downtown, back in the very early Sixties, and people refused to wait on me. I would just sort of stand around and they would walk by and wait on people who came in after me, and what not. And I think, that was just a very superficial symptom of what I think was a very deep underlying chasm there. And that was one of the things that I think that Jim Brooks and Don Garrity addressed very effectively, but I think the town and gown relationship got a whole lot better. There are certain indications that they are slipping again. One hundred and twenty foot light poles and things like that are sort of symptomatic, I think, of a general slippage there. It's surely better than it was back in the early Sixties.

Smith: Well, I think that the nature of Dr. McConnell in his natural austerity, he built a fence between the community and the school. The building that is named after him, McConnell Auditorium, was named that because it was the first building on campus that was constructed after he became President. And he foresaw the possibility that it could become, in fact one of the ways he got the money to build the building was to call to the attention, the fact that nothing in Ellensburg could house a large group of people, and he got a lot of town support for the construction of McConnell by saying, "I'm looking at this as a community auditorium." And then the minute we got it built we started finding all the reasons why the community shouldn't be using it. How about long range planning, Don? You'll recall that back when we had Divisions and we had Departments, we were very concerned then with long range planning, and we spent a lot of needless meetings, and that seems to always be the case, What's your feeling about long range planning at Central?

Cummings: I was on a number of long range planning committees over the years, and I have never seen any indication that they ever made any difference. I know that the first two or three that I served on, didn't make any difference. But whether or not the strategic planning that has been going on for the last six or seven years, whether or not that is making a difference, I don't know. Some people that I talk to say that it has made a great deal of difference in the sense that it does affect decision making, administrative decision making. Other people say somewhat more cynically, now they still do what they want to do, and they don't care.(?much less)..

Smith: I recall, very specifically, Don, serving on a long range planning committee under Dr. Brooks whom I admire greatly, however; he was very encouraging in that he wanted everybody to do everything they could to improve the quality of their instruction, to improve the quality of every element of the University. And when I served on that committee we had a charge to work for improvement of everything, as long as it doesn't cost any money.

Cummings: Yeah, right.

Smith: And that was the catch on most of the long range planning. It can't cost money. Now, we're getting down close, Don, reviewing your years as Dean, and I think that you are going to be able to make marvelous contribution here, having been a Chairman and having been a teaching faculty for years, you looked from the Dean's office considerably different from many people whom we hired in as Deans, and, in fact, while you were Dean there was a re-organization of your school, and I think you made a considerable contribution to that re-organization.

Cummings: That's not quite right. While I was Dean there was a great deal of discussion of re-organizing the school, because what had happened was that the Letters, Arts, and Sciences had gotten really

unmanageable. Due to the fact that Ivory had made some re-organizations that had put more responsibilities into the office, and the State and the Feds. were demanding more accountability which was creating problems in the office. And it was just getting uncontrollable. When I was Dean I had twenty-one Department Chairs, and I think, five program directors reporting to me, and trying to keep track of all that was just, you know, just impossible. Well, the question then becomes, well, what do you do? Do you divide it up, and thus have more Deans, or what do you do? My working assumption was, "The world doesn't need more Deans." What we needed were stronger Department Chairs, but you can't have twenty-one strong Department Chairs when some of the Departments, well, one of the Departments only had a half of an FTE faculty in it, and he was the damn Chair.

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.as close to the action as you can, and that to me means that you want Department Chairs to be as strong and have as much decision making power as they can have. You know, given the hierarchical nature of the beast. And so the logical thing to do would be to combine some Departments, to combine faculties into a Department. Getting back to something like the Divisions structure before only still were talking about elected faculty as Chairs, and so on. The alternative to that, of course, is to hire more Deans which, it seems to me, the inevitable result of doing that is that you end up increasingly weakening the Chairs, and strengthening the Deans and the Provost. I had a remarkable lack of success in conveying that message to Department Chairs. And I literally had Department Chairs in my office crying, one of them cried, when we were talking about the fact that his Department had to be linked to another Department. Even though he agreed that it was a logical link, and even though he agreed that in other schools, such linkages are not unknown. There was all this history out there. Well, I finally just gave up on the re-organization. I gave up on the notion of combining Departments, and I never did support the idea of hiring more Deans, and it wasn't until I left the office and Bob became Dean, and then they split it. I still think it was a mistake.

Smith: Good.

Cummings: Is that thing still running?

Smith: Are we about at the end, Jean?

Putnam: We've got about a minute left.

Smith: Don, would you comment on the mistrust of having a Dean who is not conversant with anything in your area of discipline?

Cummings: Well, I guess that depends on the Dean.

Smith: I discovered a general mistrust across campus. They wanted one of their own to be the Dean.

Cummings: Well, yeah, that's true, you want one of your own to be Department Chair, but it depends upon the Dean. Obviously, there are some Deans who are extremely good, and who are able to address the needs of Departments quite different, and disciplines quite different from the ones in which they're serving. But I think about the things that I'm proudest of, through my thirty-six years here. One of them is the new Science Building. I played a very small role the early planning for that building. That gives me immense pleasure, and the fact that I'm not a scientist, the contribution I made was not of a scientific nature. (?) rhetorical, but, yeah, the mistrust was there, but that gets me back to Cumming's theory of essentially insecure faculty members.

Smith: Well, Don, we thank you very much for giving us your time and your wisdom.