

Reviewed and Edited for Errors of Fact and Wording
By BRIAN BACH on September 23, 2016

Brian Bach

Mr. Tolin: Welcome to CWU's Living History Project, jointly sponsored by CWU and the CWU's Retiree's Association. The date is January 13th, 2016. Our interviewee is Brian Bach who is retired as a Library Specialist at Central. Brian, first can I ask you for a brief personal history before coming to central.

Brian Bach: Yeah, pre-Central for me, so to speak, was early childhood in Madison, Wisconsin where my dad taught for a while, but he also taught here in the Art Department. So I grew up here. I grew up with Central, and that's my orientation here, so it was a natural thing that I feel at home here.

Mr. Tolin: Okay. My next question was going to be what brought you to Central.

Brian Bach: Yeah, yeah. Well, Dad was in the Art Department from 1951 to '54, and then from '56 to '79, when he retired. And I attended College Elementary School here on campus when they had the lab school here, later known as Hebel. Then I attended Central itself, and then I went to the Evergreen State College and UW, too, but I graduated from Central.

Mr. Tolin: What was your first rank, your first job title here?

Brian Bach: Well, it was... it was working in the Circulation Department, the Library, so my work history at Central is in the Library.

Mr. Tolin: When did you come?

Brian Bach: To the Library?

Mr. Tolin: To the Library.

Brian Bach: 1989.

Mr. Tolin: Any job changes during your career?

Brian Bach: I started out in Circulation and then I went to Periodicals and then most of the time I was in charge of the Map Collection in the Government Documents Department.

Mr. Tolin: During your time here, I imagine there have been some rather influential or at least unforgettable people during your time here.

Brian Bach: Oh, yeah, well, if I can just rattle off some names here?

Mr. Tolin: Sure.

Brian Bach: My dad, Frank Bach. Amanda Hebel, who founded the College Elementary School here, she was like a grandmother to me. Reino Randall was a good friend of ours and a colleague of my dad's; the Art Department building was named after him. Ramona Solberg. Irene McPherson was my first grade teacher at Hebel and she was a wonderful person, handpicked by Amanda, who pretty much handpicked all of the teachers. Jack Sheridan was another one, for 5th grade.

Joel Andress was a good personal friend of mine. He was in Geography for many years, a great guy and we both had an interest of India in common. Herbert Bird, who was in the Music Department and recently passed on at the age of 99.9.

Milo Smith in the Drama Department was a great guy and a great director and a good friend. Betty Evans was a pillar in the Drama Department and an unforgettable personality. Clifford Wolfsehr was a librarian here in the early '60s, back when the Library was in Bouillon and is still around, as is Jim Brooks, the one and only Jim Brooks. Hazel Dunnington was a great lady in the Drama Department - Speech and Drama.

And a bit more contemporary here, Moose Mack, Mike Launius, Josh Nelson, Virginia Mack, Jim Cook, Ray Heimbeck, Morris

Uebelacker. And from the past, Bert Christianson, Lester McKim, who was our French teacher in elementary school, Roy Wilson, Sarah Spurgeon of the Gallery fame, and my wife, Sandra Bach, who worked in Continuing Ed. And many student teachers. There was a bit here (in the interview) about first impressions of the campus, and the town, too.

Mr. Tolin: Uh-huh.

Brian Bach: And I just... you know, to me Ellensburg was always a classic of small town Americana. You know, it was like an 'Andy of Mayberry'. To me, 1961 stands out as a representative year - kind of before the big changes, you know, big expansion on campus and things like that.

The campus expansion in the '60s and '70s, introduced a more big-time feel to the town and the college, which became a university - the massive expansion here. I remember Jim Brooks telling me that when he walked this area, he went through about five different type of geographic features, so this all... I remember, this was all field out here, most of it with scattered houses. So the airiness of the layout was always an attractive thing, not only the wind, but just the big sky quality of all of this. And for years the one inarguable fact (before the changes on campus) was the Milwaukee Road railway - the trains coming through and interrupting classes.

Barge Hall was like a huge Victorian mansion to me. And the buildings designed by John Maloney, such as the classic McConnell Hall, Lind Hall, Hebel, and a few others, always struck me as world class, high quality architecture. So that's...

Mr. Tolin: Skip on for just a minute.

Brian Bach: Yeah.

Mr. Tolin: Talking about: did you get a sense of a 'town/gown' problem?

Brian Bach: Well, while I was attending elementary school at Hebel here, those days, but later on, we 'Hebel kids' - when we were in the main school system here - we kind of had a reputation for being sort of 'alternative', which was sometimes a

bit of a burden.

But I found in school, public school, there was a gown and a town - and a country - which were the ranchers and farmers. And when I was growing up here, there was much more of a mix. Now, everybody seems to be much more compartmentalized, but with more apathy than competition, I would think.

Central has been more diverse now than it's ever been, but campus was always 'exposed'... Campus was my first exposure to other peoples and other cultures. At Hebelier we had student teachers from Kenya and Spain and France.

In town one could see mainstream Hollywood films at the Liberty Theater, but on campus, films such as 'Ugetsu' or 'Satyricon' or 'Camille Claudel', to name only three, were accessible because they knew about that stuff here, and they accessed it.

Mr. Tolin: How about changes on your campus during your tenure, thinking about changes in the...

Brian Bach: Well, as a kid, the big expansion years in the '60s, and '70s seemed bold, exciting and optimistic. Personally, I thought the dissolution of Hebelier Elementary School to be appalling, and the conversion of that remarkable custom-built facility into a computer housing to be shameful in the extreme. It was only because I was intimately associated with the school and what they were doing there, and plus, it was lot of fun.

The tilt of Central from liberal arts college to a more corporate entity is entirely distasteful to me, even though I understand all the reasons why. Much of the organization and reorganization in the post-Brooks era, has been, I think, ridiculous and indicative of the entire society's drift towards commercialism. Most of the restoration of the seminal buildings on campus has been welcome. The current Library building, which surrounds us right now, is a major disappointment to me, only because I vividly remember the Library when it was in Bouillon, with its open plan and ease of use. It could have easily been expanded to the east.

When the Art Department was located in Barge Hall, the ambiance was much more Bohemian, stimulating and fun.

When the department got its own building in 1970, the facility was expanded, but the magic was gone.

Mr. Tolin: What about particularly proud moments for the university, strengths of the university?

Brian Bach: Well, growing up with Central, there always seemed to be a reliability here. A confidence of continuity and beneficence that promises security and civilized behavior through knowledge, which any educational institution aspires to. But just being on campus here, this atmosphere was naturally-occurring I think, and still is.

In today's organizational climate though, I think there isn't the same sense of purpose in play. Dedication to service is certainly present, but as with the society in general, self-interest is more apparent than caring for the institution as a whole.

I am just one of the generation which is now actually running Central, so I suppose my thoughts in this respect reflect the findings I expressed in my assessment of my fellow Baby Boomers in my recent e-book: 'Busted Boom: The Bummer Of Being A Boomer', which is by turns trenchant, critical, understanding, satirical, and humorous.

Mr. Tolin: What was your perception of students' capabilities when you first came and has that changed?

Brian Bach: Well, for me it's kind of easy to be a social critic when observing student performance and trending, as I attempted in my 'Busted Boom' book. While it's an essay considering my own generation and their choices, I naturally make comparisons to those who are younger, and I find them more dependent on external effects rather than the reliance on critical thinking, for one. I know that's a platitude, but just to summarize, one of the more obvious changes that I noticed being in the Library was that the student use of the Library - as a library - basically has taken a nosedive, or at least as I witnessed it.

One of the reasons I found is that younger faculty themselves have not been as library-oriented. So, they are not requiring it of their students as much. However, all through my years at

Central, I have always encountered many, many fine students of great ability and promise.

Mr. Tolin: Do you feel that Central provides adequate social and cultural enrichment for students?

Brian Bach: I do, and it has a long history of that. One of my first memories was when Vincent Price came to campus for a visit in 1957. He was going to narrate one of my dad's art films. And then the symposia they got going in the '60s and '70s. Every year there would be a pretty impressive line-up, with some world class figures such as Margaret Mead, Timothy Leary, Stokely Carmichael - and even Bop Hope - were all memorable. Three Dog Night and Iron Butterfly were big-time concerts over at Nicholson Pavilion, little mini-Woodstocks, actually.

And more recently César Chavez, Eleanor Clift, Cornel West, Robert Kennedy, Jr., Ralph Nader, Glenn Greenwald - and Salman Rushdie, to whom I presented a copy of my book: 'The Grand Trunk Road From The Front Seat' - have kept the tradition going.

Drama - the Drama Department has put on a stellar selection of plays here, a field of which I was involved in. And the Music Department has been consistent in their high-quality concerts and recitals. The most recent, just the other night, was Maria Newman. It was an excellent concert. There have been fallow periods, but the progression has been steady, I think.

Mr. Tolin: How about personal contributions to your department at the university, what brings you the most pride?

Brian Bach: Well, I always enjoyed working with the students directly. I mean, that one-on-one rapport, I think... Because, particularly in the Library, when students come in, they... you know, it's a lot to digest, and if we can get them in the right direction, and then once that's in play, that's when you kind of start exchanging ideas, and so forth. So, I found that to be very rewarding. Much more than... than I thought it would be, because I usually learned as much from them as I was hoping to impart, really.

Also the preservation of materials in the Library has been, I think,

not only a legacy accomplishment, which many have done here, but, you know, down the road, who knows who is going to find what? But it's here and that's what's really cool about a comprehensive collection that has been wisely preserved. I emphasize 'wisely' because sometimes collections aren't, but this is a good collection here. It's an outstanding collection, and the more known it is, the more it will be used.

Also, personally, in my efforts in the Map Collection, I became kind of regarded as a go-to person, especially in Geology and Geography. That was gratifying to me. And I hope I left things better than I found them.

Mr. Tolin: Finally, give us a statement that wraps up your feelings about your time at Central?

Brian Bach: Well, I would add that during my years at the Library, I have had three books published, two by HarperCollins and one by Rupa & Co. The first one was: 'The Grand Trunk Road From The Front Seat'. It's my travels in India and Pakistan, two editions, in 1993 and 2000. And then the other is a major study: 'Calcutta's Edifice: The Buildings Of A Great City'. It's an appreciative, thorough, and exhaustive examination of the city's architecture and society, and that was in 2006. Both were produced independently - not under CWU's auspices - and they are all in the Library here.

Well, but virtually growing up on this campus, so to speak, I have always been imbued with a special sense of world awareness, I think. Not only because the campus is so appealing in its physicality and its facilities, but because of the universality of its premise. Being a university, it's going to be invitational and dispersive at the same time, I think. And the launching-pad nature of this university, plus the openness of the campus itself, in the center of Kittitas Valley, has always been... always had an invitational effect that has been with me on world travels and daily life.

Mr. Tolin: Thanks, Brian for adding to the living history of our campus and community. We appreciate your thoughts and memories, and this concludes our interview.

Brian Bach: I would just add that, I think that many... There are

many great stories, and lots of lore on this campus. From many people of the past and the present, that... That is what I think this... This sort of expression of it is really helpful, because there's a lot of stuff that's happened here, and I think it's good to know.

Mr. Tolin: Thank you again.

Brian Bach: Thank you.

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