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Robert Brown interview

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Smith: This is another interview from the Living History Project. Our interviewee today is Dr. Robert Brown. The interview is conducted by John Utzinger, camera man, and interviewer Milo Smith. The date is February 18, 1998, and this is the third interview that we will have done in the new Archives Building at the corner of Fourteenth and “D” Street across from the University. Now, Bob, will you please start the interview by telling us something about Bob Brown’s life. Where was he born, and so forth?

Brown: OK, I’ll take a crack at that. See if I can remember it all. First of all, I was born in Edinburg, Texas. I doubt that many people would take me for a Texan at this point, but if you spoke with my parents you would quickly discover that this is true. They still have the accent. I never developed it because we moved to Arizona when I was only three years old, and virtually all of my relatives, going back a couple of generations have been in Texas. Many are still there. We moved to a town that sits on the Mexican Border in Southeastern Arizona called Douglas. Douglas, is, was a copper smelting town, and at the time I grew up there it was a fairly prosperous place. The copper mines in Southern Arizona were going strong, and Douglas was a very active city. It was a great place to be. My dad at the time I was born was actually a farmer, but when we moved to Arizona, he worked with the smelter for a while, then he was trained by the Army to be an aircraft instrument mechanic, and he ended up spending most of his working life as a watchmaker. I have one sibling, a younger brother who is nine years younger than I am, so it was a small family, and it was a, I pretty much had the run of things for quite a while. He came along late, and somewhat unexpected. I went all the way Through the public school system in Douglas. It was, as you might expect in that setting, it was a very mixed group. Probably at that time about 75% Hispanic and 25% Anglos, as we referred to ourselves. I think as a kid, I think I was a pretty good student. I did very well all the way through school, in fact I think it was too easy and I paid for that when I went to college. It was kind of an awakening when I found out I had really not accomplished any where near as much as I thought I had. Activities had a lot to do with my ultimate career, I think. Things like wandering around in the desert. We lived on the edge of town, and I could just literally wander from my house out into the desert and into the hills without any mode of transportation of any kind. There was a lot of that. My dad and I did a lot of hunting and hiking together, (?) We did a lot of fossil collecting, things like that, all of which, I’m sure had a lot to do with the fact that I ultimately decided to be a Biologist. My mother was a housewife through all of this, until I started to college, and then she went to work and became an administrative secretary to the Superintendent of Schools in Douglas. But prior to that time she had spent her entire life taking care of my brother and me. I went to the University of Arizona, I can’t recall now exactly, well yes, I do, the reason I went to the University of Arizona is that I had a band scholarship. We didn’t have a whole lot of money, and I needed some help and I had taken part in band activities throughout the school, starting about the fifth grade and I was able to get a scholarship that got me started. After that I managed to have jobs of one sort or another to work my way through the University. As I said earlier, I did very, very well in high school without much effort, and I guess the simplest way of putting the result of that was that I was on a very steep learning curve the first year or two of college trying to get with it. But managed to pull that off, and did receive my Bachelor’s Degree there. In fact I did something that I’ve always advised students not to do. I spent nine years at the University of Arizona, and received three degrees there. After, I guess I was in my junior year, yeah, my junior year of college, I met my future wife, Jane. We were married when I graduated, 1960. We were married, at that point I finished up my Bachelor’s and she was halfway through hers, and then by the time I finished my Master’s in ‘62, she finished her Bachelor’s and so on. That all went remarkably well in looking back on it, the college years, from today’s vantage point, it would seem impossible to survive with so little resources, but actually, I think, those years of graduate school turned out to be some of the best we’ve had as far as being in balance with what we had. We were able to scrape by on very little money, and to have a darn good time, those were good times, very good times. When I, I don’t have far to carry here, well, the kids, pull that in at this point. We have two kids, Jane and I do, Peggy was born while we were still in school, and she was born in 1963. And we lived in student housing on the University of Arizona campus. were stuck with this housing left over from the Second World War, quonsett huts, and one of the things I remember about that, that was kind of amusing
was that Peggy, my daughter, thought that there was something very strange about the rest of the houses in
the region. They all had angles in them, and ours was round on top. It was a nice place to be. Everyone was
in the same boat, kind of an organized slum. Our son, Michael, was born very shortly after we reached
Moscow, Idaho, which was my first job. We went there immediately after I finished my Doctoral Degree,
and Mike came along in 1965. He came along at that point. I guess we’ll come back later to the schooling,
hut that brings me up to the employment time, I guess. I actually, and this is another thing that would seem
strange to a lot of young people now, the only job that I considered was the job at Idaho. It wasn’t a matter
of chasing a job, I had an acquaintance there who let me know that there was a job open. I sent a telegram
telling him that I was interested, and I received a telegram back telling me that I was hired. So before
affirmative action, obviously. One interesting thing about that particular situation was that I, when I went
to Idaho, I was replacing Phil Dumas, who had come to Central. And a few years later, Phil recruited me to
Central, again something that would probably make Nancy Howard shudder in terms of today’s affirmative
action procedures, but that’s how I got into the higher education world, without much trouble.

Smith: Now, for somebody using the tape who doesn’t know, Bob, in which Arizona city is the University.

Brown: Oh, The University of Arizona, as we would put it, is in Tucson. Arizona State University is the
other one. And I was there from 1956 until 1965.

Smith: Now, you came to Central, then in what year?


Smith: 1967. And you actively retired when?

Brown: At the end of this last school year, 1996-97 academic school year.

Smith: Now did you retire, or did you go on a phased program?

Brown: Full retirement.

Smith: Full retirement. Now, when you first came here, what was your academic assignment?

Brown: Well. I was, my title was Assistant Professor of Zoology, and my assignment was in the Biological
Sciences Department, and I taught a lot of different courses, but my primary field of specialization is
Vertebrate Zoology, and more specifically, Vertebrate Anatomy. So I taught courses that had to, well, for
instance, I taught human anatomy courses, and quite a few other Zoology courses.

Smith: And your wife does what, Bob?

Brown: Jane is a fifth grade teacher. Teaches at Lincoln School.

Smith: And a very good one.

Brown: I think so.

Smith: Well respected.

Brown: And this, by the way, is her final year of employment. She’s counting days.

Smith: It’s a good thing we grabbed you now because you may he hard to find in the future.
Brown: We will be gone all of next ‘ear.

Smith: Now, did you teach in any other Department than the Biology Department here at Central?

Brown: Some, I taught in the Gerontology Program, I taught the Biology of Aging Class in the Gerontology Program for many, many years. In fact, I did it until it became so self-descriptive that I decided that I didn’t want to fool with it any more. But, which wasn’t that long ago. Actually I taught that course even during the years I was Dean. I also have taught in the Douglas Honors College Program, and for a period of about four or five years, I taught Science Ed. Courses, Science Education Program (?).

Smith: I can see that you were a handy person to have around in that Department. They’d stick you every place.

Brown: I taught. probably more different courses than anyone I know, and it had to do with the fact that I had an unusually broad array of course work in graduate school. I think that’s the explanation, anyway. Anyway I taught everything under the sun.

Smith: Did you anticipate, when you were in college, that some day you may get a job where it would be valuable to you to have greater breadth than depth?

Brown: Yes, I think so. Actually I have to back up just a little bit to answer that. My Bachelor’s Degree was in Biology Education, and my initial intention was to be a Biology teacher at that level, and I think that probably, that’s where I got started with the notion that I ought to be a generalist, rather than an extreme specialist, which I carried that forward, pretty much with my choice of courses. And there was also another aspect of that, there was a general tendency at the University of Arizona at that time to deal with graduate students that way. Since that time, I think it’s changed somewhat, they’ve broken up what was then the Zoology Department into various sub-units, and I think everything is much more specialized. At that time the curriculum was structured in such a way that it was not only feasible, but we were encouraged to have considerable breadth in our training.

Smith: Now, our question list, Bob, asks what problems do you recall that you would class as significant during your tenure at Central, other than budget?

Brown: Well, I assume that under the category, problems, they mean things like the enrollment decline, and...

Smith: Certainly, that’s (?)

Brown: Well, I think that the first major problem that I was really fully aware of and understood very well, I think I was probably like most faculty members, it took me two or three years to get my feet on the ground in the classroom, and I probably wasn’t aware of some of the kinds of things that were going on in ’68, ’69 while I was there. But I think the thing that hit me, the first major thing that hit me as a problem, was that as I came into Central, the projections were that Central was going to grow very rapidly into fifteen or sixteen thousand or so. And I went into a Department in which preparation was being made for that. The hiring plan, the basic structure that was being put together was based on that assumption, faulty projections, but those assumptions. And we were, the hiring in that Department was specifically designed to work that way. One of the consequences of the fact that the projections didn’t come true, is that the staffing pattern was never completed, and that had some something to do with shaping and limiting the Department, to some extent. It’s a good Department, but it would be like any unit that was being designed for one situation and then the situation turns out to be something totally different. But that was, I think that was a big problem, and that has had major impacts. There were things that were started, for instance, we were developing a very substantial graduate program. We got up to the point we had twenty-five or thirty graduate students on campus. We had at one time ten teaching assistants and ten research assistants, for
instance, and it’s really what it takes to have a viable science graduate program you need financial support. And then, essentially what happened was the rug was pulled on that because of the fact that the numbers didn’t materialize. And then, of course, this all became even, it not only didn’t get as big as it was supposed to, with the enrollment crashes after the end of the Viet Nam War, getting worse, but then we, of course, had to shift into some survival modes that, like teaching off campus and doing all kinds of special things, not to be able to achieve what we at first thought we were going to, but just to stay alive and maintain faculties that we had then. So I think those, probably, were the most serious problems I’ve seen at Central, probably related to those matters. And a spin-off from that is, they’re still with us, there are still things that I think that characterize Central that resulted from that situation.

Smith: Now, Bob, do you have any knowledge of what happened to some of those graduate students in Biology that you were involved with?

Brown: Yes, we do have quite a bit of information about them, and it makes me feel even worse about the fact that we weren’t able to carry forward on this, because they, the ones who made it through the program before it tended to falter, many of them hold very respectable positions at major institutions. They’ve done extremely well. Within the past few years we’ve had some of them applying for high level administrative jobs on this campus, for instance, just to show you where they’ve gone. It’s coming, I think those programs are beginning to come back a little bit, but it’s extremely difficult now; for different reasons it’s hard to build them again. So it was extremely important for several reasons, obviously for what happened to the students, but the other thing that was lost when this came apart is that the faculty lost what is probably the best outlet for their scholarly work in an institution of this nature (?). It’s difficult to maintain a program of scholarly work in science in particular, I think. We have a lot of lab work or field work or something to do without graduate students. That’s very often where it focuses, and in major Universities that’s where the real focus is. The loss of that solid graduate program, I think, was quite a blow in that respect, too. Because not only did we no longer have opportunity to contribute our efforts to training those scientists, it removed what I think was the most important aspect, the scholarly work the faculty did.

Smith: Do you know, Bob, that any of your graduates have used the Biology Program as a means by which to get into such allied areas as medicine?

Brown: Oh, yes. Yeah, and actually that has continued quite well over the years. That really didn’t fall off so much. We did have several graduate students who ended up in medicine, but the usual route for the pre-medical students is just a strong undergraduate degree and then they go to medical school. And the Department has done very well with them. Actually that’s a little too narrow, the Biology and Chemistry Departments have because they’re both very much involved with them.

Smith: Did you also serve, especially young women who were headed into nursing programs?

Brown: Yes, that was, we never had a nursing program here per se. but we always had pre-nursing programs, and up until fairly recently that’s been an important thing. That has fallen off in recent years because of the change of demand for nurses. The world has changed a bit, nursing schools dropped off a hit, but that was a very significant factor.

Smith: Would you care to make a comment concerning the facilities in which you had to work while at Central?

Brown: Well, the first, my first year at Central, we were housed in Lind Hall, and Dean Hall was just being completed that year, 1967. Lind Hall, of course, was terribly crowded and totally inadequate in almost all respects. So we moved into Dean Hall in 1968, and that was an exciting time. It was just great to move into a new building and to have the, not only the physical facility, but all of the equipment that comes with it. One of the, the major way, I should say, of getting equipment is capital projects, you very rarely get any significant amount of equipment in this state any other way. So we were really excited moving in there, and over all, over the long haul, it’s been a good place to work. The building was, I hate to say this, but it is a
fact, was very carefully designed for the task, as, well, it’s not terribly unusual, I guess, it’s kind of a generalization we make about a lot of things, but that one was not good. It wasn’t very long until we realized it’s inadequacies. One of the things I did over the years was to serve on at least ten different committees within the Department planning additions or remodeling projects, none of which ever occurred. But over all it would be wrong of me to suggest that we weren’t adequately provided for there. We got the job done in that building. It’s a shame it wasn’t better because it basically had the same life span on this campus that I had, roughly, about thirty years, and that’s not long enough. A major state facility should be better than that.

Smith: Now, Bob, will it give you any satisfaction, having spent hours on those committees to know that some of the work you did, and some of the planning that you did, may bear fruit in the new science building that is currently under construction?

Brown: Absolutely. Yeah, there’s a lot of thought went into what was needed in terms of remodeling, and so forth, and a lot of that was translated into the new science building.

Smith: Good.

Brown: One of the things that, jump ahead slightly, I suppose, One of the things that I was quite happy about was in my second reincarnation as a Dean. I was a member of the committee dealing with the new building, and that’s a very exciting project.

Smith: Sure. Now, you recall that in the list is this ridiculous little question, what humorous events do you recall from your years as serving in the Biology Department as a faculty member?

Brown: Well. I thought a lot about that one, and one of the things, as I pondered this, I came up with a lot of stories, but almost all of them are at somebody else’s expense, and I’m hesitant to use those, but I’ve thought of a couple that I think will give you some notion of what kinds of things happened. One of them actually had to do with the problems that I was alluding to earlier with the enrollment crash and so forth, and the financial troubles that we had, and during that time, of course, one of the things that occurred was that the Deans and other administrators had to pass bad news down on a regular basis. And somewhere along about 1976, I would say, at the time I was Chair of the Biology Department, and I was just finished working through the summer schedule for summer school for the Department, and it had been very difficult because the budget had been cut already and people were not getting what they were used to. One of the things they were used to was teaching, many of them were teaching full time every summer, which was very important to them. So I had this all done and turned it in to Bernie Martin, who was in the next office, by the way, they had moved into Dean 1-lall, so I was sitting Chair of the Department, right next door was the Dean. He came in to see me one day, just before the noon hour, and that was the time, throughout most of my career I went to the gym and in those days I was running quite a hit, came in and told me that the budget had been cut in half again. And what, you know, started wheeling through my mind was the thing that anybody’s Chair would dread, would have to go back to all those people and say, “Look, I know you were angry about what we were doing to begin with, but here’s what we’re going to have to do now.” And I didn’t do anything immediately, I just jumped up and I went to the gym, and I suited out and I started running up Airport Road and got to the corner of Sanders and looked at my watch and noticed that the time was seven minutes. I had never done that before in my life, and I wheeled to the right and, to make a long story short. I ran the four mile loop around there, which I did all the time, I did it in twenty-eight minutes, which was almost ten minutes better than what I usually did. I think, to me at least, there’s some humor in there, but it’s the kind of humor that carries a lot with it. In telling that story, I’m not expressing any anger toward, anything of the sort towards Bernie, but it really wasn’t that, it was just being extremely angry about the circumstances. The other thing that hit me when I was trying to think of something that was somewhat humorous anyway was during the days when students were doing all sorts of wild things on campus. This was also during the time when I was Chair. Walking down the mall towards the student union, I came to the curb that we go past in what used to be the bookstore, (?). And here came at a very high rate of speed, came this young lady, totally undaunted. The curb was such that I actually had to jump
out of the way to keep from being, from having a collision. And the thing that struck me at the time, and it’s hit me a number of times since then, was that my field of interest is anatomy, especially the anatomy having to do with motion, locomotion, and so forth, and I think that I learned more in that split second about human, motions of the human body in its totality, than in anything I’ve ever worked with. There were a lot of other things. but, like I said, almost all of them involved losing something.

Smith: It just struck me that I do know a humorous story that involves your building. Shortly after you had moved in I happened to be having coffee with my old friend, Phil Dumas. And he was on a tirade because there were no toilet tissue dispensers in the stalls in a brand new multi-million dollar building, and for very many mornings, that was his common complaint. “We still don’t have toilet tissue dispensers in those stalls.”

Brown: Well, unfortunately that wasn’t the only thing wrong with the building, but again, it has served well.

Smith: Well, when he looked into it, he said he found out that nobody had ever thought about toilet tissues.

Brown: All dealing with a lot more sophisticated things

Smith: Oh, certainly. Now, Bob, let’s switch over to your first assignment as Dean. Dean of what?

Brown: Well, that’s another one of, another story that’s had some strange twists. I’ll tell you how I got into that. I had left the chair position in ’89, I guess it was, ’90, coming into ’90, and I went back to teaching, and I was thoroughly enjoying what I was doing, and had no interest at all in administration, had never even given it a thought. And I got a call from Burt Williams one day, he wanted me to come talk with him, and, of course, I hadn’t the foggiest idea why and was trying to think, “What in the devil have I done that the Dean wants to talk with me?”

Smith: And what was his office?

Brown: The Dean, Burton, at that time, was the Dean of College of Letters, Arts, and Sciences, which only recently been formed. It had only been existence for a year or two. One of the things that goes on at Central, as it does elsewhere is to continually split and join, split and join, hoping to find something that is going to work a little better. Anyway, what he wanted, what Burt wanted was to know if I would be interested in replacing David Lygre for a year, as his Assistant Dean, while David went on sabbatical. And I told him I’d think about it, and I did for a few days, and then I thought, “Well, kind of interesting to see what goes on in there.” So I said, “OK.” To make a long story short, just before I took that job on as the Assistant Dean, Burt resigned as Dean of the College of Letters, Arts, and Sciences, effective at the end of Fall quarter. So I was, at least technically, the Assistant Dean for that period of time. Actually, he started sending me to various meetings even before, so I never really got much of a notion of exactly what it would be like to be an Assistant Dean. During that time, Ed Harrington asked me if I would be willing to replace Burt for the remainder of that year while they carried out a search for a Dean. I had already, by the time the question came up, I had already been doing some of the things that went with it (?), making some investment in there so I might as well play it out this year. They did a search and it turned out to be one of a series of failed searches for that particular position, and I ended up being, well, during those second two quarters that year I was called the acting Dean of the College of Letters, Arts, and Sciences. The following year I was named the interim Dean of the College of Letters, Arts, and Sciences. Another search was done that year, but that was an internal search, and I did apply, and then I was in the office for another, what two or three years, I think it was a total of six years in that office under at least three different titles, it might have been four. The work didn’t change with the title changes. It was basically the same job in every case. So it was something, it was a thing that had never been on my agenda, but it happened. And I did that until ’89, I guess.

Smith: So bracket, what yearly brackets would indicate your beginning and ending of that particular job?
Brown: It started, I went in there in the Fall of ’84, as Assistant Dean, and then it was a continuous string up to 1990.

Smith: Now, were you fired from that position?

Brown: No. No, no. No, that’s one of the few things I can be clearly proud of. I’ve never been fired from anything. No, I decided that I didn’t want to do it any more. It was a very difficult job. I thought, and I think others have concluded the same thing. Complicated, lots of serious financial problems without any apparent solutions coming down the road, and, at the time I left it, I didn’t regret having done it. I was quite pleased and quite proud of the way it worked out, but I didn’t intend to do it any more.

Smith: Because this is an historical. Bob, could you indicate the breadth of coverage of your Deanship, the disciplines that you were responsible for?

Brown: Well, at that time what was involved was all of the Arts and Sciences disciplines, plus a number of programs that went with it. Particularly in the Social Sciences there tend to be inter-disciplinary programs that have, in some cases, almost departmental status, in other cases they are smaller than that. So basically what that meant at that time was that when I had a Chairs’ meeting, there would be twenty-five, thirty people there. A very large unit to deal with. So the coverage was quite large.

Smith: Because I was involved with teaching in that School, at that time, I can not quite imagine how you were able to compartmentalize your brain when you were talking to all those various Chairmen about their disciplines.

Brown: Well, I think that if there is an advantage of any kind in being a Biologist, somebody from the area of Science that involves pigeon holing, and lots of such categorization of things, that might be where it lies. A lot of people have remarked that Ed Harrington has a remarkable ability in that same area, to be able to keep track of details of a lot of separate things in their proper categories, and, of course, he comes from a similar background. I think there’s something of that kind involved in that aspect of it. It doesn’t necessarily, however, give you any magic approach to solving problems which there isn’t a soluble or evident solution.

Smith: Now I’m sure that you as well as I, would have trouble remembering when there was ever a sufficient budget to do all the work that we thought we would like to do, and perhaps even, should be doing, but also I know that there has often times been some kind of problem of trying to get funds that should he available but they couldn’t he released I am thinking, for example, of your having superiors who preferred to keep track of the purse strings themselves, rather than giving you the freedom to, “Here is a budget, go do your work.” But they’re always holding back a little bit.

Brown: Yeah, well, I think that there was a period of time and that’s some time when I was Dean the first time, I think it was maybe the worst part of it in some ways, when there simply wasn’t enough money to get everything done. But part of that I found most troublesome was the, related to the fact that we had moved into something new at Central, and we hadn’t been doing in a very large way, and that is using part-time faculty. In fact one of the major changes that had taken place on curriculum at the time I became Dean was that there was a Division of the General Education Program that involved increasing the number of English courses required, Speech courses added, some foreign language changes, and some math, so forth, all on one big blow. And there was no special provision made, it was impossible to make a special provision to staff all of those things with regular faculty members, I mean tenure-track faculty members (?). And as a consequence of that, we
moved from a situation where within that College there were, maybe a half a dozen part-time faculty. Within a few years we had twenty, thirty. It was becoming large, and there was no budget that went with that. That was always a matter of found money. In other words, it had to come out of the woodwork, here and there, as time went on, through salary savings, and where ever else it can be scrounged. And that’s actually the thing that, I think, wore me down more than anything else in that first, first experience as a Dean, was chasing money, constantly chasing money to do things that we obviously had to do. There wasn’t a question about doing it. It was a matter of how you budget So that’s I think that’s my response to what you’re saying, that’s the part of your question. That’s the part of that phenomenon that was most trying to me.

Smith: During those years of inadequate funding, can you recall having lost any faculty because of inadequate funding?

Brown: No, not during those years. We did not. There had been a few faculty lost in earlier years, the seventies. There were a few faculty lost. But in the Eighties when I was involved in this we didn’t lose faculty in the sense of having to dismiss people because we couldn’t pay them, or something of that sort. What did happen, though, is there were people who were not replaced. Some retirements weren’t replaced, and I felt very fortunate at the time that the age structure of the faculty was such that there weren’t a lot of retirements because I think we would have taken a lot hits on that, if there had been a lot of retirements. There would have been a lot of transferring from...

Smith: Can you recall any time, Bob, when there was inadequate salary to entice new corners to come join the faculty?

Brown: Yes, I think, as a matter of fact, I think that was true to a considerable extent up until fairly recently. I think that within the last five or six years we finally have come to the point where we’ve been as an institution, been willing to do all of the, or most of the right things, anyway, in recruiting. Offering pretty good starting salaries, they’re pretty good now. Most of the time that I was involved with that previously, as a Chair, in my first go-around as a Dean, what we were doing was trying to recruit faculty with the lowest possible salary we could get by with, and we were not able to be as thorough and as elaborate in our recruitment techniques as we have been more recently. We’ve done some very good recruiting in the last five years. And we’ve done quite well in giving people decent salaries coming in, unfortunately, that’s as far as it goes.

Smith: Bob, I can remember.

Brown: (?) is our biggest problem.

Smith: I can recall years ago I took a class in higher education administration, and the instructor was the Vice-president of the University, and he said, “My philosophy is, in handling of Deans, hire the very best Dean you can, give them a charge, provide them with sufficient money to activate that charge, and then get the hell out of their way, but keep track of what they’re doing.” Did you feel that you were trusted to spend what budget you had any way your good judgment suggested?

Brown: I think I’m going to hedge a little bit, I guess. But I think that within the limits of what was possible during those times, I was given that, yes. I think the big problem was that for almost all of that, well, certainly for all of that time, I was in the Dean’s office for the first time, there simply was not enough money to get everything done, and think if the powers that be had not held tight, and had not managed the way they did, I think we would have, we would have had to do some drastic cutting, or something of the sort. Something would have to
happen in order to free up money, to have the kind of thing you’re talking about. And the second go-around, it actually was more like what you’re talking about. It was a...there was a reasonable amount of money to work with and we had more discussion.

Smith: What are your feelings about the salary schedules at Central from the time you joined the faculty until you retired?

Brown: Well, that’s a subject that I could probably say more about than anything else because I’ve been personally involved in it from the stand point early in my career of being extremely unhappy with the situation. Of being in a situation where simply, was not making enough money, saw no hope of making enough money, and became very frustrated here. I can recall, for instance, one time going into talk with Phil Dumas, this might be considered a fun story in a way, going in, in retrospect, going and talking to Phil Dumas and saying, ‘Look, I’m getting nowhere fast with this, and I’m not sure what I’m going to do; I may have to leave; my family’s hurting, and so on.” And he said, “Well,” he was very sympathetic and very supportive. What he said to me was, “That one of these days you’ll reach a point on this campus where this will change, as far as you’re concerned.” He was right. But that’s where I was, I was to the point of that. When the AFT formed here, way back when, I was a charter member. I didn’t stay in it very long because, there’s irony in this, too, because the people who were in charge of it, and who were pretty much becoming what was going on, were interested in nothing but retirement issues. And I was in a cohort, all of us bailed out because we were a young faculty, we weren’t getting sufficient raises, and so forth. My opinion of the salary situation (?), it formed early, and it’s continued, I think, I’ve seen it from every side. The problem with it is not salary scale, because I don’t think there’s ever been a serious problem with the salary scale. The problem is, is the erratic funding that drives the thing, and it turns out, when you put it all together, when you take the fact that the funding isn’t forthcoming at a regular basis, and you have a merit system which, in those days, depended on forming lists of people who should get raises. It’s a, it becomes a... It’s sinister, really in the way it operates because it’s, it becomes a matter of luck. If you happen to be on that list in a year when there is some money, good, then you win. But more often than not, and increasingly, this is getting worse now than it ever was, the last five or six years there’s been virtually nothing. It’s just awful what this does to faculty members. Bringing away from this institution, above everything else is the damage, some ideas about the damage that’s been done to people throughout the campus on a random basis as a result of this system. Where does the fault lie? I think you have to trace it all the way back to the political climate, really. The Legislature does not feel compelled to come through with salaries, increases, on a regular basis, and they also, when they do come through, more often than not, stipulate that it be used on, for merit. The result of that is that everyone, is that virtually no one on this campus, regardless of where they started, where they end up, isn’t angry about this. And some people have, in my opinion, some people’s careers have been essentially ruined by this process. Because they became, they were snookered so many times, and they became so distraught and so upset about it, that they essentially lost it.

Smith: Now, Bob, after your period of Deanship, when you went back to teaching, how long did that teaching assignment last?

Brown: Four years. I went back into the classroom. I taught four years, anyway I went back four years.

Smith: And then what?

Brown: Well, and then there was another failed search, and I did what I had told people that I would do under no circumstances, I said, “Yeah, I’ll do it again.” And I don’t regret that either, actually.

Smith: Now during either of your Deanship terms, was there any discussion concerning breaking up that huge school?

Brown: Before I went back in there?
Brown: No. No, I don’t think there had been any. The first time it came up, the issue was coming up, well, they were looking for solutions to it, looking for some ways to solve it, but one of them was not the splitting. In fact it had been stated unequivocally that it would not be split. And I guess I would have to admit that one reason I was interested in going back in there was to see if I couldn’t do something to help it be split. And I look upon that, as far as my career is concerned, as a fairly significant achievement. I didn’t do that single handedly, but I had a lot to do with it.

Smith: Now, when and under whom, did the split take place?

Brown: Tom Moore was the Provost, and it took place in 1996 (?) It was actually effective.

Smith: Split into what now?

Brown: Split into two Colleges, rather than three, as had been done before. Arts and Humanities, and the Sciences. The reason, in my opinion, the reason that the other system won’t work on this campus is that we have, what, I don’t mean this in a derogatory sense, but we have a week Chair system. The Chair is elected, serves, if you will, the people in the Department, by and large. Chairs are not expected, nor should they be expected to handle very difficult situations that arise, and there are plenty of those. Consequently all of those things tend to gravitate back to the Dean’s office. On a larger campus, University of Washington, for example, you have a huge Liberal Arts College, but everyone of those Chairs, but they’re not Chairs, they’re Heads, has status similar to what a Dean has here. You know, it’s a different situation.

Smith: Now, having worked under that system as a faculty member and as a Chairman of one of your Departments, now I’m free to tell you that one of the difficulties working under that system at that time was the fact that I would occasionally find great necessity to contact you by telephone and ask you for a decision from your office, only to be told that you weren’t free to make all the decisions, that you’d have to get back because you had to consult the Vice-president.

Brown: Well, there are, there were many cases in which that was true. And there were different styles of management, and during those years, I would say that was characteristic. There were a lot of thing, especially that involved money. And a significant amount of money, that would have been necessary. More recently, let’s put it simply, when I was, the second go-round the style was somewhat different. There was more leeway. There was also more money available.

Smith: Do you know if the current break, under the current break, have the Deans’ jobs become any easier?

Brown: As opposed to when I was in there?

Smith: Yes. When you had it all.

Brown: Oh, when I had the whole thing.

Smith: As we look dramatically to a future, do you think things will he better?

Brown: Yes. They definitely I don’t think there’s any question about that. Yeah. It makes it possible to concentrate more on a smaller number of units and to interact a lot more with each one of those Chairs. I mean from the Dean’s stand point, that’s what’s happening. Chairs and faculty as well, and we have now,
really quite a few very, very active Departments. I mean they’re really’ going for it, and that, I think, that’s one of the reasons, one of the very important reasons that this needed to be done.

Smith: Now, I’m going to spend the rest of the tape on questions concerning the Dean’s background compared to the duties he’s going to be expected to perform. You know that faculty people always look to see what’s the Dean’s background, and they ask, “Will he be able to understand our needs? Will he be able to understand our problems?” Did you find that educational, difficult, what?

Brown: I’m not sure I understand exactly. Did I find the interaction...?

Smith: Did you find that working with people totally outside of a Science discipline was difficult for you to comprehend sometimes?

Brown: Oh, Well, honestly, no.

Smith: Good.

Brown: I didn’t, and obviously I can’t, couldn’t and still can’t, talk with various people in all these various Departments in their technical jargon of their fields, that’s out of the question, nobody’s going to be able to do that, but, no, I don’t think I was ever, ever felt that I couldn’t understand what they were getting at.

Smith: Good. You know that there is always the distrust, to begin with.

Brown: Well, one of the things that I found very interesting about all of this, is that of the people who have openly expressed to me, why they accepted me, in a sense, the thing that has come out almost invariably, is the feeling they had that I didn’t really want to be a Dean. And there’s something about that, that I think, sheds light on the fact that I have been able to get by with this, since. And on the other, it makes you wonder what it would take to be able to convince a faculty that administrators are a necessary evil. You have to have them, and that it isn’t necessarily had that somebody wants to do that

Smith: I have to get this on the tail end here. You were judged to be as fair as an administrator could ever be fair by those of us who worked under you, and I think that’s one of the reasons why you got along so well. You were just.

Smith: Thank you, thank you.

Smith: As we come to the end, and we thank you for the interview.