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Naomi Edward Randall interview

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We are interviewing today Naomi Randall, who attended Central from 1932 to 1934. We’re glad you’re here, Naomi. You, I understand, were a local Ellensburg kid.

NR: Yes.

Q: So give us first of all your name at that time, and a little tiny bit of your family background. Okay? Get started on Central.

NR: Okay. Well, when I entered Central, or – it was the Ellensburg Normal School at that time – my name was Naomi Edwards. I was born in Ellensburg. My mother was born in Ellensburg in 1881 on a homestead where the Tennis Club is now, and our two children were born in Ellensburg, so I’m really an Ellensburg product.

Q: You’re a native from the word go. And as an Ellensburg kid, you were aware of the college here at the time. Did you ever, before you became a student, take advantage of it in any way?

NR: Well at one time I went to kindergarten here, and also junior high school. The first junior high school was over in the Edison School, and I went to that before I went to the Ellensburg High School. And I graduated from Ellensburg High School in 1932 on a Saturday night, and the following Monday I came up to Central and registered. And at that time you could get a three-year teaching certificate, and that was what I registered for, and it turned out that I went two years and three summers, and got my teaching certificate in 1934.

Q: So in 1934 you became a certified teacher?

NR: Yes. And it was interesting, because at that time there really weren’t any professional jobs open for women except teaching, and to be a nurse, or a secretary. Those were your three choices. And of course it seems to me at that time about half of our class came and registered at Central. It was during the Depression, there weren’t any jobs, and it was cheaper to go to school, I guess, than to sit home. So a lot of our class did attend Central.

Q: Speaking of it being cheaper, do you happen to remember any prices at all of what it cost to go to school, or –

NR: Yes, I remember. I was trying to think today, but I think it cost about $35 a quarter. Now I was a town girl, so of course I didn’t have the room and board that the campus people had, but I worked in the library during the time that I went to Central, and I got 25 cents an hour. And that was the top – absolute top pay for that time. Most of the jobs were 10 cents an hour. And – but when you figure it was $35 for the quarter, I almost in three months made my [tuition].

Q: So you were working here on campus to help pay for your tuition.

NR: Yes.
Q: Tell us a little bit about the physical campus at that time. How big was it?

NR: Well it wasn’t very big. Of course, it seemed quite large at the time, but there was the old Ad building, which is the building where Janovich is [?] – now Barge. And there was the library, which at that time was just the front part of what is now Shaw-Smyser. Then in back of that was the old Business school, which was the training school, and then, over here in back of this building was a little building – a little square building that we called the Science building.

Q: Now gone.

NR: Now gone. And then there was two dorms: Kamola and Sue Lombard for the women, and Munson Hall for the men. And that was just about it.

Q: So it didn’t take long to get from class to class.

NR: No.

Q: And you never did live in a dorm.

NR: No, I never did.

Q: You lived at home.

NR: It was interesting. We were going to this building which is so marvelous now to see it restored, but we were in one of the little dormers over here – one of the offices – in fact, it was more or less like this, and I remembered that that was the off-campus room, and that they had that room set up for us. It had a old, rickety couch, I remember, and it had a card table with four chairs, and the off-campus girls – there were about six of us that came out at the same time, and we would eat our lunch there. There was no place to eat lunch, or go out to lunch, so we'd bring our sandwiches and eat lunch there, and play bridge.

Q: Aha. [Laughter] But they did indeed make a special provision for you.

NR: Yes, they did.

Q: Not very classy.

NR: Well, it was as classy as anything, I guess, that was around here.

Q: What about profs? Can you remember particular professors that you established a really good relationship with, or a rapport – some that you remember well?

NR: Well you know, at that time the college – the Normal – the enrollment was only 250, I think, so you knew everyone. And you knew all the teachers, too, because the classes weren’t that large, and there weren’t that many, and I particularly – I liked all of them, and I thought we had a wonderful staff, and now these buildings are named for the people that we who were – they were my professors. And they were all very well trained. They came from Eastern colleges – Harvard, Yale, Columbia, several of them. But the one that I remember the most was Margaret Holmes. Now she at that time was Margaret Coffin, and Margaret came here as the Dean of Women. And it happened that I was the President of the Girl’s Club. I guess that’s what it was called then. And Margaret and I had a nice relationship. She – we all thought Margaret was wonderful. She was a very stately looking woman, but very warm, and generous, and – we thought – very cultured, because she had – at that time she was about the only person any of us knew who
had made the Grand Tour of Europe, and done all the things that people with means had done. She did come from a wealthy sheep ranching family and the Coffin family in Yakima.

But Margaret was wonderful. She lived in a little apartment that was in Kamola someplace. It was no more than just one big room and a hot plate, but Margaret would have the girls there in groups. She would serve us with her silver tea service, her beautiful cups, and I think that was the first that we were introduced to gracious living, you know – that it could be, even in a small place. And then, of course, we watched the romance between Margaret and Hal Holmes, when that was all – that involved one whole year for all of us, and when Margaret finally got her ring we could all heave a big sigh of relief. But she invited all the girls up to see her place, and I thought that was really nice. I have a very warm feeling for Margaret.

Q: She was a real inspiration for you.

NR: Yes, she was. She was.

Q: You mentioned that you were the President of the Girl’s Club, so you indeed were active in campus affairs. Either tell us about that club – what they did, or other extra-curricular activities that you were involved in.

NR: Well I was trying to think about the club and what we did do, and I think our big main project was getting the Snow Ball in December, which was the big, formal dance. I think we planned for that for a long time, and decorated, and everything. We did other things. I think the off-campus few of us, one of the things that we got – we did try to see that all the girls who wanted jobs and needed jobs, had jobs. And surprisingly, at that time, I think most of the help up here at the Normal was student help. I think that the grounds were all done by students at 10 cents an hour, and I know that Reino was a janitor for 10 cents an hour, I think, and the – we worked on that. That was part of our project, to see that people had jobs.

Q: When you did the Snow Ball, tell us about the music. Did you have live?

NR: Oh my yes, I should say so. And we decorated the gym, and the gym at that time was – Samuelson is now incorporated as Samuelson Union, but that was the gym where all the basketball games were played, and all the activities – PE activities. But we did extensive decorations. I can’t remember exactly what they were now, but that was the big thing – we decorated that gym. And generally with boughs that came all through the ceiling in the center, and it was a great deal of fun, and of course, it was the main formal even, and the men rented Tuxes, at least, and the girls, of course, were all in their formals, and that was the time that you did get a corsage, generally, and it was a real social event of the whole school year.

Q: And the orchestra was student musicians?

NR: No. At that time there were several little bands or orchestras that played around at different places. Now actually, dancing was a good part of our social activity. They had – every Wednesday evening there were dances in Sue Lombard after dinner, and Ralph Bantz – a boy who played the piano very well – played the piano for that. Then on the weekends there was always a dance in the old Women’s gym, which was just down below us, and there were Saturday night dances, and there was a live little band for that, and then the Elk’s Club downtown had dances that they sponsored for the college kids and the high school kids. They were well chaperoned – our mothers would let us go – and in fact that’s where I first met Ray, was at one of those dances at the Elks. And there – of course there was no TV or no radio. We danced. We played bridge – played a lot of cards, and games, and in the winter we skied, and went on picnics, and it was fun that we made for ourselves.

Q: Sure, because there wasn’t a lot outside.

NR: No. We had radio, but not a lot.
Q: Were there any campus-wide picnics or outings?

NR: Yes. We always had a ski trip that was out in the Manastash, and that was a big picnic. We had a picnic up in the Swauk, I think it was, in the spring, and well – I don’t know. We were busy, it seemed like, but I can’t think exactly. We did a lot of dancing.

Q: Well we all know that campus life was much, much different now from 1932. What about things that you recall there being any student attitudes at that time about – women’s rights, and sexual discrimination, and things like that. Did you have to deal with that?

NR: We didn’t even know what those things were. It never occurred to us. Well I don’t know. To me, at that time, it seemed to me we didn’t realize we didn’t have any rights. It seemed like things were pretty equal, and I don’t think – we were very innocent, and if there was any sort of a sexual information it was very little then.

Q: And closely guarded.

NR: Heavily guarded, that’s right.

Q: What about limitations on you – hours you had to be in, and things like – well of course, you didn’t live on campus.

NR: Yeah, but they did have hours, and of course we had hours at home that really corresponded with that, too, but as I recall, I think 10:30 was the latest you could be out on a weeknight, and 1:00 if there was a dance, and I don’t know for special occasions. But there was definitely – there were hours that had to be observed.

Q: It sounds as if it was a very peaceful, happy time, so you probably don’t recall any boycotts, or marches, or student demonstrations?

NR: No, no. No, I don’t. And I think Ellensburg was lucky in that it was a college town, it was an agricultural town, and if this, or course, was during the Depression, and I don’t think that – we didn’t really realize there was a Depression. There was no great wealth here. There were some wealthy families, but there was no great wealth, and no great poverty that I knew about, anyway, and I don’t believe there was. I think it was a nice place to be during the Depression. And I talked with other people that were here at the time, and they say the same thing – that no one had any money, so it wasn’t as though any one of us was being discriminated against.

Q: Well if it was such a generally good time, do you have any memories for us about humorous things that happened? Funny things? Funny people?

NR: Well yes. Some of them I’m not sure I can tell. [Laughing] Let’s see. Well I do remember in regard to Margaret Holmes – Margaret had a big sheep dog that lived with her, and his name was Munch, and when Munch was standing still you couldn’t tell which was the front or which was the back. He had that long, shaggy hair that was dragging around. And anyway, Margaret’s office was up in the library, and Margaret would come in, and Munch would come along with her, and Margaret would go on upstairs and Munch would take his drink out of the drinking fountain every day. And then Munch would look around in the library, and greet his favorite people, and then he’d go on upstairs. And then they come down later at noon, and Munch would also, again, have his drink out of the library, and visit people in the library, and so Munch was just a wonderful present for all of us, and we loved him dearly. But one day, one – a friend of mine, too – blew the whistle on Munch, and went to Margaret and said – this is Miss Codlin at West End [?] – “Miss Codlin, do you know what Munch is doing?” And we all clearly knew what Munch was doing, but she – Margaret said no, she didn’t – this was at one of our council meetings. “Munch is drinking out of
the drinking fountain, and I will never drink in the drinking fountain again.” Well Munch got a chain put on him after that. Not so funny, but Munch was a little institution at that time.

Q: Almost a mascot.

NR: Yes, yes. Everybody loved him. It was funny – let’s see, funny ha-ha. Well I do know that the “men” in the – in – what was the name of the men’s dorm?

MS: Munson Hall?

NR: Munson Hall, thanks. In Munson Hall were making beer in the attic, and were caught making beer, and then there was also a – they have – in some place on the campus they were distilling spirits, and they were all caught and rounded up for that, but [tape is turned off.]

Q: [Tape turned on mid-sentence] then, while you were both students here, is that correct?

NR: Yes.

Q: You were both attending here.

NR: Yes.

Q: And then you graduated in ’34, and tell us – did you immediately start a career at that time, or had he convinced you to marry him, or how did that go?

NR: No, we really got together at the swimming pool. Reino was the lifeguard at the swimming pool, and all the town girls, of course, used to go up there. Reino always thought he had taught me how to swim, but really I knew how to swim before I went up there. But anyway, then Reino started going together when – I guess I was a freshman. But he had been here a year, I think, or two, at that time, and then I finished and got my – we went together all during that time, and then I finished and got my three-year teaching certificate, and Dr. Samuelson, who was a wonderful, wonderful man as far as all of we who were looking for jobs – he came here during the time when there were no jobs, actually, in the State of Washington – teaching jobs – and if you could get a one-room country school house you were lucky. But Sam, at the time that I graduated – and Reino got his degree at that time – Sam placed, I think it was eighteen people out of our class, and those who were trained, in various jobs. And so Sam got a job for me in Wapato, Washington – first grade, and he got a job for Reino in the Junior High School in Wapato in the first grade. But if you think about getting married, no, because women could not teach if they were married at that time. Now there was a discrimination. But women could not teach. So we both went down to Wapato and taught there two years, and then Reino decided that he wanted to go back and get his Master’s, and I went back to the University and got my BA. So – and then we both taught a year after that, and Reino taught in Watterville, New York, and I taught in Puyallup, and then we were married – 1938.

Q: And then when did you come back to Central with him?

NR: Well we were married in 1938, and the day that we were ready to go back to Watterville, New York, where Reino was teaching, we had a phone call from Dr. McConnell, and Dr. McConnell said there had been a resignation in the Art Department, and would Reino like to come up and talk with him about it. Well it so happened that it was Pauline Johnson, who was the art department at that time, who had resigned and was going someplace else, and so Dr. McConnell offered Reino the job. And so we had the car all packed and were ready to go, and we sat out on the back porch in my mother’s home, and tried to figure out what we should do, because we realized it was a turning point for us, and so he decided to take the job, and that’s how he happened to get it.
Q: I think it would be interesting for our listeners to hear a little bit about, then, your job as a faculty wife, and entertaining responsibilities, and such things as that, in all those years that he was with the Art Department. Was that a burdensome job to handle, or was it enjoyable, or was it very big?

NR: Well I do think there was a very active social life here. It was a small school. There wasn’t a lot of things to do, you know, and I think that – about the time – or at exactly the time we came Wayne and Tekla Hertz came in the Music Department, George Sogge came in the Industrial Arts, and Ernie Muzzall came in the Education Department, and Reino and I in the Art Department, and the Nurse – those were the new faculty members. And we joined all these old people – not old people, [laughter], I didn’t say that! But all of these former professors of ours, and now we were colleagues, which was a little difficult, but when you were used to calling them Mr. Holmes, or Dr. So and So, and then you were supposed to call them by their first names – it was a little hard. But we did have a very active social life. I sort of enjoyed it. When the kids came it got to be a little difficult at times, but no, I think the faculty wives were very supportive of the – and we did form a group called the Faculty Wives which I was part of.

Louise Partridge, and Georgina Rogel, and I gave a party one night for all the faculty, and when we realized – I mean faculty wives – and when we realized that it was all faculty wives that we were inviting, we said, “Why don’t we just throw it out – would you like to have a faculty wife’s group?” But first we consulted Alva McConnell, because she was the President’s wife and we thought we’d better not do anything without her permission. But she was just delighted. In fact, I think she had wanted to do it herself, but didn’t want to be the one. So anyway, that’s when we started the Faculty Wives, and we started it with the idea that it was to be purely social. We weren’t going to have any committees, we weren’t going to have any officers, no business – it was going to be just a good party, and that’s the way it was for a long time.

NR: Probably about – yes, early 1940s.

Q: And that was started right about what? Nineteen thirty-nine, forty?

NR: And that lasted for a long time.

Q: Oh yes. Oh yes. And it gradually became study groups and things like that, but to begin with it was purely social.

NR: Oh yes. Oh yes. And it gradually became study groups and things like that, but to begin with it was purely social.

NR: Well it did, and particularly for people – you see, that was quite a period of growth in the 1940s and 50s, and for new people – for new wives, you know, and we did try to help new people – new families – get located and become a part of the community.

Q: But that obviously met a very important need – a social need.

NR: Is there anything else that we haven’t covered that you would like to have future generations know about your time at Central? I think I’ll just open it up to you, and let you reminisce, unless perhaps we have covered everything.

NR: Well, I do want to say that I am so proud of having been associated with Central, and particularly now that – in the last ten years Reino and I have lived in California to be near our girls, and I realize more and more, after seeing what goes on down there, that what we have here was something very special. The campus is beautiful. It reflects, I think, a lot of thought and work on the part of many people who have helped to design it, and the care of it. I think our classes and our schools – our professors – are first-class, and I’m just very proud to have been a part of it.

Q: As far as an ending statement, I think that will really go down as a perfect one. Thank you so much, Naomi, for your time.
NR: Thank you.