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Milo and Helen Smith interview

Milo Smith

Helen Smith

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(Transcription of Tape 1)

KB: Today is Tuesday, March 15, 2006, and I’m Karen Blair at the home of Milo Smith and Helen Smith, retired professors from Central Washington University. [Tape is turned off, and begins again in mid-sentence.] Well why don’t you tell me about the parties, then?

MS: The students will have just been through a full performance. They are warm - they’re too warm, and they get out here, and the first thing they want is a glass of water. “Oh, please, a glass of water.” So I pour them a glass of water, and always the same response: “Dr. Smith, what’s wrong with your water?” And I’d say, “Not a single thing. Why?”

“Well, it doesn’t have any taste.

And I said, “Did you not, when you were a child in grade school, learn that pure water has no color, no taste, no smell? That’s pure water. You’re used to water being fortified by chemicals in a City system, and this is coming straight out of the ground. This is pure water.”

KB: So you’re in the country here.

HS: We are indeed. And speaking of drinking at cast parties, we never, ever allowed any alcohol at cast parties because so many of those students were under age. But other profs did, and I was always pleased that they would still come to cast parties. Now we realized that after they left here, they had their own cast parties with whatever they wanted to drink, but maybe because the food was so good, or the communication in these little rooms was so good, that they would still come to cast parties and have a very, very good time.

KB: Did – as Central grew bigger and bigger over the thirty years of your career, did the quality of interaction with students change, or were these cast parties and other interactions pretty similar?

MS: Quite similar. Quite similar. I would always inherit students who – at the most, they had been in one high school play. Possibly a few of them would be in two high school plays, and that would be pretty much the limit of experience that they had. Always eager. I just simply cannot complain about the students’ responses to me. They worked hard, they were loyal, and I love them all. I just couldn’t compare my experience with that that I hear from some of my colleagues in other schools, that they couldn’t get along with the kids. Well, I got along with them fine. I enjoyed them. I knew that without them I didn’t have a job, and – Dr. McConnell hired me, so I go way back, and it was so interesting that he offered me a salary, and I said, “I’m sorry sir, I’m making more than that teaching high school down in Oregon. I couldn’t very well come here for that salary.” And so he turned to Wes Crum, who was Dean of Faculty, and said, “Wes, take these people to lunch, and in the mean time, see if you can find out some way that we can legitimately offer this man more money.” Well, as Wes Crum drove us around town so we could get an idea of what kind of town we were getting into, and it just – it was interesting that there were several homes like the one that is next door to us here, and as we drove around he’d say, “There’s a prof from Econ that’s building this house, and this family here is building it in Business, or in History – ” He drove us around to show us just what the faculty was building. Gave us a little bit of an idea as to what we might someday be able to afford. And then Crum said, “Milo, do I remember someplace in your papers that you did some teaching in the Marine Corps?” I said, “In that I was a Platoon commander, I did some teaching of the men in my Platoon, yes. That was one of my responsibilities.” He said, “Well how much did you do?” And I told him, and we tried to compare it to a typical class situation. Anyway, he allowed me some more teaching experience on the basis of what I did in the Marine Corps., and that was two wars – I was
called back in for the Korean War also. And so he gave me some credit for additional teaching there so they could sweeten the salary a bit. It wasn’t a very sweet salary, but it was college teaching. I had been working toward that time, and I’d finished my PhD so that I could make myself eligible for college teaching.

KB: Do you remember what the salary was?

MS: Oh, yeah. I’ve got it here someplace.

HS: We’ll get it.

KB: We can look it up later.

HS: We can look it up.

KB: Tell me about McConnell. What was he like, and did he support the department?

MS: Oh, white-haired, rather majestic man. He – I don’t know of a single faculty member that felt close to Bob McConnell. He was slightly austere. He – there was no question about who was the President. There was no doubt about that. He ruled with an iron hand.

KB: What do you mean?

MS: He didn’t allow any doubts to form anyplace. He – well, for example – at the same time I was hired, the Superintendent of the Physical Plant was hired – a fellow named Paul Bechtel. He lives in town now, but he became the Superintendent of the Physical Plant. And after a couple of years I was having coffee over across the street where all the faculty went between classes, and Paul came over to me and said, “Well Milo, we came together, but we’re not leaving together. I’m quitting.” And I said, “Paul, I thought you liked the job!” He said, “I like most of it.” And I said, “What didn’t you like?” He said, “Can you believe it? I’ve never been allowed to hire personnel without being cleared by Dr. McConnell?” Now that is typical of Bob McConnell. He was afraid to trust a faculty committee to choose an additional faculty member for their department. He would choose them.

HS: Tell her about the very specific things that he wanted his hand in, like paper clips, and things like that.

MS: Oh yes! A lady in the Art Department told what a [unclear – sounds like doll, but could be dolt or dulled – none of which seems likely in this context.] She had ordered some paper clips, and she wanted some boxes of paper clips, and typical of Dr. McConnell, requisitions like that passed over his desk. Paper clips, yet! The President of the University is going to clear on paper clips! He refused to allow here to have X number of boxes. He sent some to her in an envelope, sealed the envelope and put it in the campus mail.

HS: And wasn’t that the same thing with your tools for the stage, that you –

MS: Oh yes. And she took that envelope over to Dr. McConnell, and she says, “When the secretary told me it was my turn to come in and talk with him, I stood before his desk and I put that envelope of paper clips on his desk, and I said, ‘Dr. McConnell, I teach Art, and I have to display student work, and I choose not to have their names painted on. I want to be able to paper clip their names so I can easily take their name off, if we put it into a competition, for example.’” And she said, “I needed paper clips!” He opened the drawer of his desk, and said, “How many do you want?” She said, “Dr. McConnell, I need boxes of paper clips!” Well they went back and forth, and finally she got two or three boxes of paper clips. But that
was quite typical of him. His wife was a very, very lovely lady, refined, friendly, warm, enjoyed being included among the faculty. But Bob was austere – this tall, grey-haired man –

KB: So it sounds like he didn’t have a Vice President like Ed Harrington aided Brooks.

MS: No. There was no Vice President. The next one in command was Wes Crum, who was Dean of Faculty.

KB: And did they work together well? What was he like?

MS: Well, as long as – as long as Wes did what Dr. McConnell wanted him to do, it was – it was – now when it came time to change personnel I happened to be on the screening committee for the new President. After we had been receiving applications, and we’d been meeting for maybe a month or so, and we would meet 7:30 in the morning – no fun – after several meetings we suddenly started receiving some mail from current faculty members – that is, two, three or four letters, all of the same ilk – “How come we haven’t heard Wes Crum’s name mentioned for possible President?” And we talked it over in our committee meeting, and said, “Nobody has – nobody has evidently told Wes that he had to make application. We need it in writing that he was interested in the position, and the rest of the faculty needs to know that he has never applied.”

And so I was selected, because I was a friend of Wes’s – I was selected to be the member on the screening committee to stop by Wes’s office and tell him, “A goodly number of faculty members are upset that they’ve never heard your name mentioned for a candidate for the Presidency. Would you please make application? A simple little letter saying that you are interested.” And he said, “No, I’m right here. You know where I am. You all know my background. You all know me.” And I said, “I’m sorry, Wes. Unless you make application, you are not meeting one of the requirements that the committee has been working under.” Well of course, that upset a goodly number of the faculty because they didn’t find Wes’s name suddenly added to the list, and those of us on the committee passed the word: “You tell Wes to make application. A simple little letter that says, ‘I would be interested in applying for the Presidency.’ That’s all he needs do.”

Well, we finally found Jim Brooks, who had been a student at Central years before, was at this particular time down at Portland University, and I don’t recall now what his position was down there, but there were a number of people who knew him as a student here at Central. Pete Barto was one, and he was on our screening committee, and I will always remember one morning when we were discussing Jim Brooks as a candidate and Pete said, “Well, I’ve got to tell you people that it’s only fair that I keep my mouth shut. Because you see, Jim used to have a room in the basement of our home when he was a student here. He ate meals at our table. And Mrs. Barto and I look on that young man as if he were our son, so I can hardly be other than impartial.” And oh, it was a marvelous experience. Eventually, though, Jim Brooks did get the job, and he was a good President. Still lives in town.

KB: He was so young, though, and he didn’t have a lot of years of administrative experience.

MS: No.

KB: How come he headed the list?

MS: Because he was young. He wasn’t set in his ways. And we had just gone through a President who was not only set in his ways – that was in concrete. If you can imagine the Superintendent of the Physical Plant, and when he was telling me why he was leaving he said, “Milo, every time I have a vacancy and the word gets out, and we’ve advertised the vacancy, and we identify what kind. Maybe we want a furnace man, and we want somebody that has experience with furnaces. Well, I would find an occasional man that would come by for an interview, and his background was such that he would be valuable to us, but I
couldn’t hire him. I had to send him over to Dr. McConnell. McConnell hired him, if he cleared McConnell’s want list.

KB: Was there some kind of specific event that caused McConnell to be invited to depart?

MS: No. It was merely a better job. The – Uncle Sam wanted him to serve down in the Bay Area, and they wanted him to be in a capacity to help hire academic personnel who would work with – under governmental rulings. And he had had some experience up here, of course, with hiring personnel to fulfill like ROTC jobs on campus, and he had lots of experience there, and anyway, he had the kind of experience that would have made him eligible for this position down in San Francisco, and it was a bigger job than Central President.

KB: So you think he was tired of Central?

MS: Pardon?

KB: You think he was tired of Central. Not that Central was tired of him.

MS: I think because Central was tired of him, he became tired of Central. It was – I think it was very mutual. He had been hiring – for the previous two, three years before I came he had been hiring a lot of young blood that didn’t want to play the kind of game he wanted to play – that he was God Almighty, and all dictates will come from this desk. He was having trouble adjusting his ways to the faculty people he was hiring, and I think that, plus the fact that there was this Federal job offered to him down in California, and it was a nice recognition for him, that he simply decided to leave. And I’m sure that by that time he had – he had found enough complaints from faculty that he realized that the writing was on the wall. He had to make a change. He had to ease up. He couldn’t just be a dictator.

KB: Brooks told me he was the only President who hadn’t been fired, so he seems to have assumed that the Trustees – Victor Bouillon – invited McConnell to look around for other work.

MS: Possible. Possible.

KB: It seems like McConnell had to deal with the University in a Great Depression, a War, a huge return of veterans that – the campus in the Fifties was exploding without resources –

MS: Oh, yes.

KB: And the minute he left, Brooks got these big checks from Olympia to start spending.

MS: Yeah, yeah.

KB: Hardly fair. Did McConnell go to theater performances?

MS: Not regularly. He chose that which he thought they might enjoy, and stayed away when it was something he might not enjoy.

KB: Did he go to music events, or athletic events? Was he seen around campus participating in lectures, and –

MS: No. Compared to Presidents since McConnell, he was quite scarce. He would once in a while go to a basketball game, but no degree of regularity. He would go – he would walk up and see a baseball game. He might go to a football game. I think now – if he were President now – he might like it at a
football game, because there is a box for the President, and she’s in a room where there is a heater, and on cold days they can turn on that electric heater, and she’s got a big glass window there, she can see the ball game, and in the next room are refreshments.

KB: The Nylanders told me that McConnell wanted to know what church they belonged to before he would hire Jim Nylander, and Donna said he told her that that faculty wives were not allowed to wear blue jeans in town.

HS: That’s right.

KB: Did you hear that same rule, too?

HS: Yes, right.

KB: Did he tell you?

HS: Not personally, no. I just heard it.

KB: Were there other expectations for faculty families?

HS: Well, I think at the time the faculty wives could not teach in the University – I think for a time that was a rule, that if you were married to a prof, you couldn’t teach there.

KB: That was a State rule. Margaret Coffin Holmes had to quit. Her husband Hal was teaching in the Thirties.

HS: Oh my. Silly rule.

KB: It was, I think, designed because of the scarcity of jobs in the Great Depression.

HS: Sure, sure. Yeah. Did McConnell come to see “Ten Nights in a Bar Room” – the play that got him so excited? Do you remember that brou-ha-ha?

MS: Oh yes.

KB: What was that? I know it’s a play about the community falling apart when a tavern –

HS: Temperance.

MS: He was very conscious of titles. The title of the play, he assumed, described what the play was about, and he saw “Ten Nights in a Bar Room,” he didn’t know it as an old, historical play that America had been raised on. He didn’t know it at all. He was only upset because the title was too suggestive.

KB: If you had to name the three – of dramatic productions you were proudest of, what would they be?

MS: Well, the first one would be Carousel – musical. I had – while working on my PhD, I had worked on Carousel down at the University of Oregon. I liked the music, I liked the musical, and when I interviewed with Dr. McConnell I said, “Do you have any history of doing musicals?” And he said, “No.” And I said, “Would you have any objection to my selecting a musical?” And he said, “I would expect you to consult with the head of the Music Department.” I said yes, I would have to do that because we would need orchestral support, we would need some vocal support, and I definitely would work through Dr. Hertz. And so he said, “If you can get Hertz interested, that’s all right with me.” So our first
production was Carousel because I was so familiar with it, having just come from Oregon. I didn’t have to start over with an unknown element. I had a familiarity that I knew what I needed in the way of casting. I knew the voices that I needed. And when I said I would like to do musicals, he said – Dr. McConnell said, “You – I will warn you ahead of time that when we hired Dr. Hertz as Chairman of the Musical Department – Music Department – he made us promise that he wouldn’t have to do musicals because back in Illinois, where he had been teaching, he worked on musicals with other faculty members and he had bad experiences that sooner or later the other people kind of wandered away, and he got stuck with it. And it was night and day he was rehearsing, and he said – he made us promise when he came that he wouldn’t have to do musicals.” So –

KB: So it turned out pretty well, did it?

MS: Very well. Someplace over here I have [tape is turned off.]

KB: Hand written?

MS: Oh no, this is history.

HS: In the making. So what have you gotten there, Milo? What is it?

MS: Well let me find what I’m looking for. It’s written out someplace. I remember what was there. When I mentioned to Dr. McConnell that I would be interested in introducing musicals to Central he said, “You may have a little bit of trouble there with the man in the Music Department because he had bad experiences back in Illinois. He would – evidently they would start rehearsal schedule and in a few days he discovered that he was left all alone, and everybody else had backed out, and he was stuck with the whole thing. And so when we hired him he made us promise that he would never have to do a musical.” Well, I said, “May I have your permission to see if I can change his mind?” And he said, “Go to it. I don’t think you can, but you can try it.” So I – I wrote Dr. Hertz a note asking if we could – I knew that he walked down to the Highway Grill, which was down a couple blocks from campus then – I knew that he walked down there for coffee. We could not – at that particular time we were not allowed to have coffee pots on campus. Now that came after Dr. McConnell’s. And I knew that Hertz went down to the Highway Grill for coffee, so I said, “May I volunteer to buy you coffee? Because I need to have a chat with you.” He said, “Fine. I like to have other people buy me coffee.” So we walked down, and we talked – [end of side one].

“Wayne, I understand that you came with the provision that you would never have to do musicals. I’m hoping that I can change your mind, and I’m going to approach it this way. When your students graduate from Central and go out into the public school system, they are going to come into public school systems that are used to having musicals performed at that school, and if your candidates do not have any experience doing musicals, they’re not going to get the good jobs.”

“I’d never thought about that.”

He only thought of himself. Now back in Illinois, the reason he became soured was that he said, “We would get started on the rehearsal schedule, and one thing and another would come up, and this guy drops out, and that guy drops out, and that guy drops out, and pretty soon I’ve got the whole thing to myself. I not only have to conduct the orchestra, I have to teach the soloists their solos, and I have to teach the actors their entrances and exits.” And he said, “I simply said, never again will I be where I get stuck with the whole thing.” And I said, “Well I can guarantee you that if you will join with me, I will not back out. You may back out, but I will not back out because I know what musicals will do for a program. And when your students are graduating from your department and going out to teach in the public schools of the State of Washington, most of them now have some history of doing musicals, and your students, who are applying for jobs in Wenatchee High School, for example – they do musicals every other year or so, and if your students aren’t ready to do musicals, they’re not going to be hired for those good jobs.” And he’d never
looked at it from the viewpoint of his students. Only from his own viewpoint that he was afraid he’d get stuck alone. Well finally he said, “Well, send me some material.” And I said, “I just, down in Oregon, helped to stage Carousel. I know it by heart, forward and backward, and I know from what I’ve heard on campus already we’ve got the voices.” He said, “Well, you go ahead and send me some material and let me look at it.” So I sent him vocal music, and I sent him the orchestral scores, and waited a few days, and I said, “Have you had a chance to look at them?”

“Yes. Let’s have a chat. We’ll go have coffee again.”

And he finally decided that we’d do it, and he was never, ever sorry. That was the first of several that we did then, and he never got left alone on the job. I did my job, he did his job, the community loved the musicals, and they loved the fact that there was some variety in the offering in McConnell Auditorium, and the students liked them, and of course, those who sang the primary roles – the lead roles – just loved those musicals because it gave them a legitimate way to show off on campus. But –

KB: Sounds like Wayne Hertz was a pretty big personality?

MS: Oh yeah. Yes.

HS: I’ve always wondered if that might have been part of his problem in Illinois – that people dropped off, possibly.

MS: Yes.

HS: But you had a good relationship for all those musicals. It worked very, very well.

MS: He was my friend, and I was his friend, and we had no trouble whatsoever. However, everybody on campus couldn’t say that. Wayne was a little bit like Dr. McConnell in that Wayne wanted to rule with no division of ruling. I’m the boss. And he was a good man. He built a fine reputation for the music at Central. And every spring his chorus took a statewide tour, and they were always invited back, and I read countless, countless, countless letters that he would receive from principals, and PTA Presidents – how happy they were that he had brought his chorus to our town to perform.

KB: Was he a good friend of McConnell’s?

MS: Yes. Yes he was. And there was a little bit of McConnell in Wayne Hertz. But Wayne was not unreasonable, and I think the thing that made him change his mind was when I said, “Wayne, the kids that are graduating from your department of Music are not going to be ready at Wenatchee High School, or Colfax High School, or even Yakima. They’re doing musicals in the high schools now, and your students are going to know how to do musicals.”

KB: Do you feel your students were well-prepared, from the Theater Department, to –

MS: Absolutely. Absolutely. And it – that proved to be true. Still today Richard Davis is head of the department down at – what do they call that school in –

HS: Monmouth, Oregon. Used to be Southern Oregon College of Education.

KB: Sure, it’s a school like ours.

MS: I’m sure I’ve got a lot of students who are out there that I don’t even know about. Some I know, and some I don’t. But –
KB: How would you say the department evolved from the beginning to the end of your career? What are the changes? What should the Theater Department be proud of?

MS: Well, I brought musicals to Central. They’ve done very little in the way of musicals in recent years up there. This – these people don’t have that kind of orientation, evidently.

HS: You brought Shakespeare and children’s plays to Central.

MS: Yes, Children’s Theater, and Shakespeare, and musicals. Now Dr. McConnell ended up liking the musicals we did because it drew people into that building that eventually became McConnell auditorium. He was pleased to invite the – what was that community? We had a whole sequence of Community Concerts – Community Concerts, as every town did have. He invited the Community Concerts to use that auditorium up there, and he was very proud because it drew full houses, when sometimes the – sometimes the talent was known, and sometimes it was unknown. Sometimes they had recordings, and the recordings would be sold out in the lobby, and sometimes they didn’t have recordings. But he was pleased that it pulled more community people into that auditorium – not just the college faculty, but town’s people. He liked that.

KB: How was the town/gown relationship? Was there tension, or cooperation?

MS: I don’t know of any tension at all. They weren’t used to – the town wasn’t used to musicals. They had never seen a Shakespeare play in McConnell Auditorium. I brought in a lot of things that rounded out my life as a teacher, that was totally new to Ellensburg. And it was my thrill to have an opportunity to present something new to the community. And Dr. McConnell loved it when he either would see that it was a house full of people, or he would get the report that for three nights now there’s been capacity audiences, and he just loved that.

KB: How was the town/gown relationship? Was there tension, or cooperation?

HS: It’s huge.

KB: Yeah.

MS: And I’m sure that he never, ever assumed that some day it would be named for him. I don’t know that he thought that.

HS: I thought it was before he left. But I’m –

MS: No, no – it came after he did.

KB: How many people were teaching in the Theater Department when you were hired? You were the whole show?

MS: I was it.

KB: Oh.

HS: For about 10 years he was the one-man Theater Department.

MS: About 10 years I was the one-man Theater Department, and the people who are up there now can’t imagine that I did the whole job by myself. Well, I didn’t see a lot of my family when they were growing up. I was always up there because I had to be up there. Once you get something started, you’ve got to
keep it going, and – well, that book over there is full of plays. All of those fifty-some plays that I did up there – that’s a lot of rehearsals.

HS: Well not only rehearsals, but mixing paint, building sets, showing students how to build sets –

MS: Oh yes. Every weekend there.

KB: Did you sew costumes, too?

MS: I did some, yes. I had taken a costuming class at Stanford while working on my Doctorate, and had a very wonderful teacher, and I will never, ever forget the first time I sat down to the tailoring machine, and I touched that lever with my knee, and [makes a whooshing noise] the fabric shot out across the room. I never will forget.

HS: But you actually had – you really liked the seamstresses that you had here.

MS: Oh yes.

HS: I don’t know if they were Home Economic majors, but they were so clever.

MS: In almost all cases they were girls who had come from homes in which if they wanted something modern and new, they had to make it. And that suited me fine.

KB: So you hired students.

MS: Oh yes. Student – I had – I had a student stage crew, and the seamstress was part of the stage crew. And I tried to encourage majors – Theater majors, Speech and Drama majors – I tried to encourage them to apply for the jobs on the stage because you’ll learn to run a stage, and you’ll need that when you get out on the job. And all those kids were very dear to me. Without them, I couldn’t have functioned. They got very little – I can’t remember what the salary was, but it was very little, and I tried to balance out the work hours so that everybody got a chance to have about the same number of hours as anybody else on the crew.

KB: I saw in the records that you were on a University committee as McConnell was leaving and Perry Mitchell was the interim President – a committee to select names for the buildings on campus. Do you have any memories of –

MS: No. I was included in several different committees for naming, and certainly with McConnell Auditorium, and – McConnell saw that building as the single building in the community that would offer long-haired entertainment – quality musicals, quality – well the – what they – community concert. We got – a few named people from the opera world would come through and sing here one night. He liked that, because here is somebody who has a prominent name musically in New York, and they’re coming here, and they’re going to entertain our little cow town audience, and they are coming up here to our facility, to see this oddity in this town of big-name entertainment. He was very proud of that.

KB: Were you involved in the Faculty Council or faculty governance, in any way?

MS: Well I was on the screening committee. I think there were eight of us on that committee, all faculty. The one person I will always remember – a man in the History Department, Pete Barto – we were discussing this name that had come up from the University of Portland, Jim Brooks. None of us knew him. It came around the table to Pete Barto, and he started to, [imitates Barto’s speech] “Well, I can’t give you a non-partial recommendation for that young man. You see, he slept in our basement a couple years while he was going to school here, and he ate at our table. And you know, Mrs. Barto and I never had
any children. Jim Brooks has been our son, so I’ll just have to shut my mouth when it comes to him. I’m in favor of him. That’s all I’ll say now."

KB: Speaking of the History Department, did you know Sam Mohler at all?

MS: Oh yes, yes.

KB: Could you tell me about him?

MS: Sam was – Sam was 50% minister, and 50% History teacher.

KB: What do you mean?

MS: He was – he had to have his hands slapped occasionally, I understand, from people preceding me. Sam was quite a religious fellow, and sometimes, I understand, he allowed his religiosity to become a force within his classroom, and he had to have his hand slapped on a few occasions. But Sam was a gentle man, quite a religious man. I enjoyed him. I had no trouble with Sam at all.

KB: Now what about the Brooks years? We’ve talked a lot about the Fifties. Brooks came in ’61, and it looks like the University suddenly – College – began to grow – lots of building, lots of hiring – how did your life change in the 1960s with the new President?

MS: Umm, we – I went from a one-man Theater Department to a multiple faculty Department. That was the biggest change. I had to share the load – I shouldn’t say that. Yes. I had to share the load with faculty people, because people who have training in the areas that I had trained in want to direct plays. They’re not interested in just building sets, just painting sets, but they want, occasionally an opportunity to do some artistic decision-making. And so we started – when we started adding faculty we started looking for Jack-of-all-Trades – someone who could not only teach in the classroom, but somebody who could direct a show. Somebody who could supervise construction of a set – the design of a set. People who could make decisions, and help design and sew costumes. That, of course, always dictated what we hired in the way of additions to the faculty. How many different ways will they fit into the load that has to be carried within our Department. It worked out very well.

KB: Did people in those days feel that they – that this was a strenuous job? That they were expected to teach a lot of classes? A lot of students? Or was it seen as a good arrangement?

MS: No – uh – I think the thing that counterbalanced that load was the fact that they were appreciated, and we made it known that they were appreciated. They had an opportunity to do some of the things they wanted to do, not just that we wanted them to do. And as Chairman of the Department I would sometimes sit down with one of our new faculty – I said, “All right, now you’ve had a chance to get acquainted with us, and you see what we do, and how we do it. Do you have any recommendations that would fit our Department that we haven’t thought of? I want you to start making recommendations now that you are familiar.” And we were very fortunate in getting people that were a compliment to ourselves, in that we did not want to duplicate talent and skills all the way down the line. We wanted – some of the women, for example, wanted to do women’s plays. We just had never done women’s plays.

KB: Do you mean plays about women, or plays written by Alice Furstenberg, or –

MS: Plays about women. I don’t think I ever did a woman-centered play, did I?

HS: By golly, I don’t think so.

MS: I did a lot of women-centered plays.
KB: How about Lysistrata?

HS: Well, that was done here, but – you didn’t do it.

MS: No.

KB: Well let’s see. I guess – I wonder if you could talk a little bit about Brooks’s style of leadership? How was he different, or the same, from McConnell?

MS: The biggest difference – and this was overnight – McConnell didn’t want to share responsibility with anybody, and Jim, when he came in, wanted everybody to get in and take part of the responsibility – that we’re going to grow together, and if we do grow it’s going to be because we worked together. He was just old-fashioned enough that he believed in working together. And he was young, he wasn’t afraid to put in the time, he was likable, and [long pause] – there was a reception in the ballroom for Mr. and Mrs. Brooks the first week on campus – “Come meet the President.” We had a few refreshments – a long line of people coming by to shake the Brooks’s hand, meet them, identify yourself. The Brooks’s had been on campus two or three days, and they had been to something every night, and in the day time all day, and they were fatigued, and you could tell it. And my darling wife – as we went through the line and shook hands with the Brooks’s, she took Jim’s hand, cupped it in her hands, and said, “I bet you’d like to go to bed.” [Laughter]

HS: How to get your husband fired the first day.

MS: Well they had just been go, go, go – the new people – ever since. And you know, it’s funny that nobody ever considered them when everybody was thinking of another doings of some kind that they could be introduced to more people.

HS: I’m sure they expected it. That’s just part of the – it goes with the territory, as they say. You become exhausted.

MS: Yeah. Helen was looking out for her husband.

KB: Was it possible in those days to be friends with faculty all over campus, or were you pretty busy in your own department?

MS: That would be totally determined by the nature of each individual. I wanted to get to know people across campus. I went to baseball games, and football games. I went to basketball games. I went to wrestling matches. I got to know the coaches, and enjoyed them. I had some history of Athletics in my own background, of course, and especially the old-timers like Sam Mohler – I wanted to get to know them because often times they would have answers to questions that I had about how did you used to do, or did you ever do – um – it was a matter of what the individual felt that he needed. We had a Dean of Women, for example, that came – a dear, dear, dear lady but very prissy, and I can still remember her – we used to have assemblies – not every week, but I think Wednesday at 11:00 was available in case there was some need for an all-campus assembly – and I remember Annette Hitchcock was the Dean of Women, and she stood up in front of that student body, and she said, “I want you to know, those of you who don’t know – this street out here – you may think of it as Eighth, but that’s a cross-state highway.” It wasn’t. If you wanted to go to Vantage, if you wanted to ride out past Knudson’s Lumber, or ride out and – she said, “You students – I don’t mind you sitting on the lawn out in front of the building. You just won’t stay seated. You’ve got to lie down. And I’m very sensitive to what you look like when people drive across our State, and they pass our campus, and there’s students lying down all around campus.” And she said, “That’s got to stop.”

KB: What other kinds of rules did they have for the women – men, too?
MS: Well, of course the hours were very strict for girls. If you lived in Kamola –

[End of Tape One]

MS: If you lived in Kamola you had to be in by 10:00 on weekends, and 9:00 during the week. I’m very sensitive to that because I had to clear with house mothers if I had to keep girls late in rehearsal. I would have to make plans ahead of time, call that house mother and give her the names of the girls that were in the cast or the crew, and that we will be – as we come down closer to opening night we’re getting a little longer and a little longer, and I think you need to know that these three girls will not be leaving McConnell Auditorium until sometimes maybe 10:30-ish on weekends, because we can then get in a good, long rehearsal. I never saw this, but the girls told me about it. The hall that used to be known primarily as Munson Hall, across the street from Sue Lombard – that was a girls’ dorm, and it had been a men’s dorm, and there were urinals in upstairs rest rooms. The girls made planters out of them.

HS: Enterprising.

MS: Well, sure. And one of the restrooms – I think it was up on the top floor – it was a pretty good-sized restroom – the girls used it for a place to store their formals. Some of them had two, and three, and four formals, and their closets weren’t big enough –

HS: Do you think there are formals on campus now?

MS: I don’t know.

HS: It’s such a difference in dress that –

MS: There may not be formals now. But in – all the girls that lived in Munson Hall kept their formals on racks up on the top floor in the same room in which there was ivy growing out of the urinals.

KB: I understand there was a dress code in the old days for girls.

MS: Yes, depending pretty much on the Dean of Women. Annette Hitchcock was – any way you think about her, she was old-fashioned, and that situation of the students out there lying down on the lawn along a cross-state highway – you can understand that Annette Hitchcock was very upset by that conduct – that, “What are those people going to think of us when they drive by and we’re out there smooching, and you’re lying down on the lawn,” and that was against the law. That was against regulations.

KB: Were Professors required to go to those assemblies?

MS: No. No. We had – we had one hour per week that was available for all campus assemblies. For example, there was a time when Dr. McConnell was hung in effigy on a corner that happens to be the corner of Munson Hall, from a telephone pole. And I don’t remember now what he had done that some of the fellows got upset about, and they made a figure, and put a grey wig on him, and put a sign on him, and there was no question about who was represented – it was Dr. McConnell. And we ended up with an all-campus assembly, and Dr. Mc Connell usurped the entire period of the hour scolding, and not gaining one inch. The man simply never, ever allowed himself to grow with his student body. He couldn’t accommodate the new ilk. He couldn’t accommodate the new customs and conditions, and consequently he had the student body working against him. He wasn’t wise enough to know that occasionally if you give a little, you might be able to take a little.

KB: Well in the Fifties there must have been a lot of veterans who had been through the War, and who were older, and married –
MS: Oh, yes. Yes.

KB: And probably weren’t as willing as some were –

MS: Yes, going to school on the GI bill, yes. And I suppose that 90% of all the male faculty members had been in the service in some capacity. McConnell never been in the service. I don’t think he would have ever volunteered, because they wouldn’t have let him run it. But that story of Paul Vechtel [who] was not allowed to hire his own personnel, and he said, “I was hiring men based on what they had been doing. I needed a furnace man! And I need a man who knows how to operate those furnaces. I can’t hire the man I want, because McConnell decides that they don’t belong to the right church. I don’t care what church they belong to. I’m hiring a furnace man, not a church man!”

KB: Did they have no minorities on campus in the Sixties?

HS: No.

MS: Very, very, very few. We usually got more – more Black students in the summer time than we ever did during the regular year.

HS: Well I understood that Dr. McConnell didn’t really like minorities.

MS: Oh, he didn’t care for minorities at all. They didn’t get any breaks from him. They didn’t find any rules that he made any accommodation to them at all. I never, ever heard him publicly say that he assumed that they were inferior, but sometimes in faculty meetings when he was able to control the attendance he would make some snide comments.

KB: Were there any minority faculty members?

MS: No. Not at all. The closest we came to a minority faculty member would be Indians. Men who were at least part Indian I can remember. I can remember when we started hiring Black faculty members, and the reason I remember is because I can still remember choosing a text book for a particular Dramatic Literature class one summer. I knew I would have Black students and so I chose some plays in a collection – some plays that looked at life through the eyes of Black people. And we had, at that time, a young Black man who was serving the campus as – he had some official capacity. I can’t remember now what it was. But I had had coffee several times in the same small group that he was in, and I had developed a little bit of a relationship with him – enough to know that he might be interested in this class that I’m teaching this summer that has some Black plays. He might be interested in that. And when I found out that he was, I also found out that he would be willing to come talk to us about being a Black man in a White man’s world, which is the basic problem in all of these plays that we were reading. Is this a terrible exaggeration, or could you identify this situation as having much truth?

Dr. McConnell simply would not have fit in in any capacity in those years when we started having – a small percentage of the student body were always Black – male and female. He would have been very uncomfortable with that.

KB: So this was later in the Brooks years, or the Sixties?

MS: Yes. Yes.

KB: Were you required to teach summer school, or was that voluntary?

MS: In most cases it was voluntary and desirable because we needed the money. We all had families, and just because summer comes doesn’t mean that the bills don’t still come. So we wanted to teach
summer school if possible. And some departments – they had to take turns. You could expect maybe every other year, or one out of every three you get a chance to teach. Sometimes it was a case of dividing the summer load up among the faculty so you each get a class, and at least you’ll have some salary coming in.

KB: Tell me a little bit about the faculty meetings with McConnell. And did Brooks also hold faculty meetings?

MS: Yes.

KB: I’d love to hear about the differences.

MS: You know, I can’t remember a faculty meeting with McConnell. I can remember meetings with McConnell, but they weren’t faculty meetings. When he was hanged in effigy there was a – an assembly, and all students were expected to attend. That was on the posters on campus.

HS: But no faculty meetings – regular faculty meetings.

MS: No.

KB: He called you when he wanted you.

MS: Pardon?

KB: He called you when he wanted you.

MS: Yes. Yes.

KB: But there was a Faculty Council.

MS: Oh yes. Yeah, and they could make decisions up to a point, and then they got to go to Dr. McConnell, “Sir, may we?”

KB: Were you required to go to graduations?

MS: You were expected to – I can’t remember now whether it was one out of every three, or every other one, but yes. We did have requirements that we had to attend graduation, and you had to wear a cap and gown, which meant for most faculty that you had to rent it, and there’s still – the same lady is still working in the bookstore – what’s the last name? That lady is – if you didn’t have a cap and gown of your own, go see her in the bookstore, and she will line you up. She’s got the books that says what you need if you graduated from Vassar, or you graduated from North Carolina Tech – she’s got the books that tell you what you need. And we had to rent our cap and gown.

HS: Graduation used to be outside in the parking lot behind –

MS: Behind Barge Hall. And I can still remember because I was a one-man Theater Department, I was also responsible for everything that went on in McConnell. And when it came to graduation we either had to use the parking lot, which is now full of plantings behind Barge Hall, or we used the lawn of the College Elementary School which is right behind Mitchell Hall. Mitchell Hall wasn’t there. That was lawn, and if it was a nice day we’d have chairs out on that lawn. If it had been raining and it’s soggy we’ll have it in the parking lot, but also Milo, you’ve got to prepare to have graduation on the stage of McConnell in case of rain. And I always had to have the sufficient number of chairs in the right place, speaker stand, and so
I had to have that accommodation ready at the moment’s notice that it’s starting to rain – we’re going to move indoors.

KB: I know that Central was created to produce teachers, and that it wasn’t really until the Brooks years of the Sixties that there was more emphasis on the Liberal Arts and a Master’s in various disciplines. What if you talk a little bit about that changing relationship with the School of Education? Were they resentful when a Theater Department came along and took resources away, or – what are your thoughts about the relationship between Education and the Liberal Arts?

MS: The first thing I have to say is that those students who decided that they wanted to be teachers automatically had to give their soul to the Ed Department. They’re going to be dictated to by the – by the professional Education Department. They determined what classes you will take, and how many hours you will accumulate. However, they’re also going to be the people who will help you find a job. Sometimes your major pros in Theater or whatever your major was – sometimes they helped you find jobs, but very often times it’s people in the Ed Department who know where the positions are, and they have connections with the Superintendent at such and such a school, and so on. I suppose I have to be very honest and say that generally Ed courses were not considered desirable. Students prepared to take Ed courses. They got their fill of Ed courses. By the time they had one or two, that was enough. And I suppose it was legitimate that most student interests went to their major areas. And the Ed people had sufficiently strong requirements that you had to not only accumulate credits in courses, but you also had to have made an appearance at certain assemblies when there would be – a State Superintendent of Public Instruction is coming and is going to speak at McConnell, and you will be expected to be there. [Pause] The Ed Department was not popular, and the courses were not popular.

HS: And the Ed Department felt that they had been shoved aside, and said so in many angry words.

MS: Oh yeah, yeah – we had some very, very dear friends who were part of the Ed Department, and they were very sensitive to the fact that most of the campus, faculty and student, considered the Department of Education was a necessary evil. That students had to accumulate credits – this, that, and the other – and they were not popular courses, and consequently – like Ham Howard – dear, dear friend of ours – Ham taught only in the Ed Department, and he was very sensitive to the fact that he was teaching students who really didn’t like the material he was teaching. They didn’t like it before they got there, and they didn’t give him a chance because they walked in with a chip on their shoulder. And I can remember Ham being down in the dumps several times because two or three students had asked him permission to meet with him in his office, and they’d say, “Dr. Howard, does that class have to be that boring?” And Ed classes were generally accepted as boring classes, or, “We’ve known that ever since we went to school. Why do we have to learn it all over again?” Ed courses have never been popular, and that’s a shame because the Ed faculty is so aware of that.

KB: I wonder if you have any recollection of a fuss on campus in ’61 when Gus Hall was invited to speak about the Communist Party and Brooks changed his mind and cancelled the engagement?

MS: Well, his – his invitation was not popular with the town. It was not popular with most of the faculty. It was not popular with a lot of the student body because – not because they themselves were prejudiced. Mama and Papa were prejudiced. “We don’t want him talking to our kids, because you know what he’s going to do. He’s going to try to win them over! And our kids are young and flexible now, and we don’t want him there.” We seldom had any organized resistance to a speaker at all, and – [apparently to HS] can you think of any? Organized resistance seldom – Gus Hall would have been as close to organized resistance as any, and an awful lot of students were in favor of Gus Hall because faculty weren’t. That was the only reason. Or there were a lot of faculty that were – that wanted Gus Hall because the administration didn’t want him.

HS: Well it is, after all, a University, and it should be open to all kinds of discussion. I was surprised the offer was rescinded. I was really surprised.
MS: Yeah.

KB: Now did you have any business with Charles McCann, the Provost for Brooks, or after he left, Ed Harrington?

MS: Ed, certainly. And in case you don’t know this story – [aside, to HS] What’s Mrs. Harrington’s name?

HS: Ruth.

MS: Ruth. Ed had an inner office, and an outer office. Most of your business could be taken care of in the outer office. You might have to see Ed, and as you approached his glass door, there was a sign on his door: “Ruth’s Husband.”

KB: Because of her scholarship luncheons?

MS: Partly, yes.

KB: Were you coerced to belong to those, or was that voluntary.

MS: That was the ladies.

HS: Oh, not totally.

MS: You made the decisions, though.

HS: It was indeed voluntary, but she was a good, good money raiser, and could make you feel rather useless if you didn’t belong to one. You should do it for the good of the order, and it raises much good scholarship money.

KB: But I guess I’m asking you if your husband’s career would be slowed if you hadn’t gotten in line to participate.

HS: I certainly – no, I don’t think so. Not at all.

MS: I think the reason that Ruth was able to be as dictatorial as she was was because she could show the results of her work. The lady knew how to make money, and if you need money for a cause, get Ruth helping you.

HS: She should have been here back in the very beginning, in the Fifties, when there was an organization called Central Women. And it wasn’t really Central Women, it was just – oh, no, at first it was just faculty wives, which in fact it was – only. Wives of faculty members met once a month on campus, had dessert, played a little bridge or whatever. And then it became obvious that Faculty Wives was not the best name in the world, and we should include faculty women as well, if it was to be a women’s group on campus. But it never quite – I think that idea came about just when we were enlarging, and then it became a matter of it being so large that it was perhaps unwieldy. And I’m not at all sure what the situation is now, but it was – for a long time it was just simply – it was a closed group because it was faculty wives, and then when we tried to expand it became too large to handle.

MS: I was so interested that faculty wives became sufficiently active that they bought their own tables and chairs.
HS: Well it was – you have to eat, because you have to have dessert, for heaven’s sake.

MS: To make sure that those tables and chairs were available for a luncheon or a meeting, they bought their own, and I thought that was interesting.

KB: I think that organization is moribund now.

HS: I believe it is. I think so, and in a way I think that it’s really too bad, because it would have been wonderful to have had that interaction between faculty women and the women who were educated and interested, but who happened to be wives.

KB: Well maybe you could tell me a little bit about your experiences. Who hired you to teach in the English Department, and what did you teach?

HS: I – it was in the mid-70’s, and first of all, I had gone – I’d started taking classes. After our children were raised up and pretty much on their own I started taking classes in the English department, and one quarter Don Cummings said to me, “When are you going to quit fooling around and get a degree?” That had never occurred to me. I just thought, “Oh, I’m going to take courses because it’s very interesting.” So I did get a degree, and then was hired – I don’t – well not by Cummings, he wasn’t Chair of the Department at that time – to be a TA – one of those lowly hired hands that doesn’t have any benefits or anything, but just loves what they were doing. And for a long time taught sections of English 101 and 301 – happily so. And then after a while taught in the Academic Skills Center, which was then run by Don Cummings. And that was kind of a point of awakening for me, because I was one of these people that at first really didn’t feel there was any place in a University for a Skills Center. If people didn’t come with enough skills, they shouldn’t come to the University. But I changed my mind about that because it was obvious – extremely obvious to me that the students that came there were eager to repair themselves. They had been abandoned somewhere along the line in the education process, and they were so eternally grateful for any help that you could give them to improve their writing, their understanding.

So that was a real turn-around for me, that yes, given the situation of education in the country, academic skills centers should be here, and we should work hard with those students. It was very – you know, you work with a student that really, really shouldn’t be in University with his skills, and bring him up to the point where he can compete – was pretty heady stuff. That was – that made you feel very, very good about yourself indeed. So those were good, good experiences – about 13 years, half – no, mostly teaching classes, and then part of that time in the Skills Center. And then did some research in the Skills Center on composition, which was really fun, and using the 100 students there – you know, what the students called “bone-head English” all the time. And so I started a program of sentence combining with them, and it was a really exciting time to see them flourish under some very guided situations. And the Skills Center – I don’t know who is running it now, but Don Cummings – I just have nothing but praise for him. He had the students’ interests at heart, and –

KB: Did he launch it?

HS: I believe he must have, because he was there right from the beginning.

KB: And when would that have been?

HS: That would have been in the late Seventies, probably. I don’t know exactly when it started, but – he, of course, has done great work with spelling, and has published books on that. That’s his real interest. But Don Cummings as a teacher is – he’s the only teacher I’ve had who doesn’t teach by deductive reasoning. You know, most of us – it’s so easy, we just do deduction. But he just used the other way. Suddenly he had you answering questions that you didn’t know you had in the first place. It was – it’s a very quiet, quiet skill, as he is a very quiet, quiet teacher. But those were – those were good years, so
I was very glad that he said one time, “When are you going to quit fooling around and get a degree?” Because that was a real turning point.

KB: What was your title in the Department?

HS: I was simply – I think they still called them Teacher’s Aides. No, not Teacher’s Aides – what was I called – a TA. Yeah, I was called a TA. And of course right about that same time there was all this brouhaha in all the educational and University magazines about this whole group of people that we are dragging along with us that don’t have any benefits, and they work hard, and is that right, and should we form a coalition to strike for better wages – I have no idea what the situation is now, but I’m sure there are still TAs.

KB: Well did you feel exploited?

HS: Not at first, because I was so happy to be there. And then after about 10 years I did start to feel exploited, yes. Not enough to really take charge and lead a revolt – no revolt. No march.

KB: Did there come to be more and more of you?

HS: There were – yes, there were. I wish I could give you a specific number. I don’t know. But there were quite a few of us.

KB: In all departments, or just in English.

HS: Oh, I think in – I think more in English, because they needed more help with those – well, I guess all departments need help with the basic courses, but that’s what we taught, was the basic courses. Mostly – most TAs taught 101. I taught many 301s, which I liked a great deal – argumentation.

KB: Who were some of your peers?

HS: Beginning, Joe Powell, Judith Kleck, Gloria – I’ll think of her name. A good group of people. We were good teachers. I think we were.

KB: Was there any talk of unionization?

HS: There was not, and we would read the articles in the national publications about this and share them, but we didn’t do anything about them. And on reflection, I find that troubling now. But we were comfortable. I in my situation, of course, was more comfortable than most. He was a professor, I didn’t have to worry that much about money. And maybe if I had been a single person trying to support myself on that salary I might indeed have been moved to lead a revolt. Because it was using people to get more out of them than you should have expected with no benefits and all that. So I have no idea what the situation is now.

KB: Well the part-timers – the adjuncts – are part of the new union that’s been approved.

HS: Okay, so that then was taken care of, and they’re called adjuncts. So.

KB: Did Feminism come to our campus in the Seventies?

HS: Uh, not – not with any great flash. I think it took much longer. And again, I was in a – if I had been a regular student, you know, an ordinary student, I might have been much more aware of that. Now
we started to have the Women’s courses of study, and things like that, but as far as overt feminism, certainly not in the Seventies, no.

KB: Were there women in the Education – in the English Department who were role models? Professors?

HS: Later, yes. At first it was largely a male department, but then Patsy Callahan came, and she is the role model of all role models as far as I’m concerned. She’s the one that I can think of, mostly.

KB: I think she came in the mid-Eighties, around the time that I did.

HS: Mm-hmm. Yes.

KB: Now did your children have any involvement with the Hebeler Elementary School?

HS: No. Our children did not. They all went to public schools. I don’t think – oh yes, the Hebeler School was still going when we had children, but no.

KB: Was that a self-conscious decision?

HS: I think it was just proximity. Absolutely. Just proximity.

MS: Yeah, we lived a block from Lincoln School.

HS: Right.

KB: How did the English Department evolve over the time that you were there? What should they be proud of? What were their challenges?

HS: It evolved from – they had the reputation of being a group of egotists who did not care about the group, and it evolved – it really evolved – into a much more caring, concerned group of people that were concerned about the students. I’m not saying that the individual faculty weren’t concerned about students before, but it was very much a thing of, “These majors are my people, and the rest of you people sitting here, don’t bother us too much.” Concerned about their individual specialty. And I think that it evolved right about from the early 80s on into a much more cohesive group. And they should be very proud of that – that they – because I think more Composition people came in. Before it was more sections of Literature, and specialists in Literature, and we’ll let the TAs teach composition because anybody can do that, and it isn’t that important. Well obviously it is of paramount importance, and that’s what I see happening with Patsy Callahan, and Terry Martin that have really spearheaded that. And it seems to me it’s a much more accommodating, loving department as far as the student is concerned, and more concerned with the student rather than just that individual student that is really a whiz in 15th Century poetry.

KB: Is there a gulf between the professors who love literature versus those who want to teach writing?

HS: There was. I do not think that there is now, from what I hear. Of course I’m not there. But there certainly was in the beginning. Yes. Absolutely. And I think that’s what Patsy Callahan, when she came, has had a major impact in dissolving that. And I don’t know what magic she used, but form observation and hearing things, it seems to be the case.

KB: And could you speculate about what was responsible for that change of attitude? Did she make it happen, or was it time for it to happen?
HS: I think a combination. Well I think she, certainly, and then she gathered more people around her that had that same inclination, yes.

KB: Did Cummings’ Academic Skill Center have a part in . . .?

HS: Sure, sure. Because of course he’s very much for improving writing, and was doing it not only at the Skill Center, but then they worked together, too. The TAs would go back and forth. I think it - I think they should be very, very proud of how that department has evolved into something that is much more for the student than it had been before.

KB: Do you have names of leaders – faculty or administrative – who you were particularly impressed with, or disappointed in?

HS: Not – I don’t have anybody I was disappointed in in the English Department. It just seemed to be a general aura about – not “Hooray for me,” but “I am this specialist, and I am going to do this as well as I can.” Cummings certainly above all, and Callahan, and the rest of them I didn’t know that well, either. Ned Toomey was certainly – I think he has since retired. I don’t think he is there anymore. Those would be the –

MS: How about the man whose house was full of books? Like a library.

HS: Well –

KB: Ray Smith?

HS: No, John Diffien. I could admire John Diffien individually for his brain and his breadth of knowledge, but not for his work with students. No. He was not as accessible to them because he was – he just simply wasn’t accessible to them.

KB: What about the move from teaching to publishing, which seems to me got momentum in the Eighties and Nineties? Did you see that play out in the English Department at all?

HS: No, that happened after I was there.

KB: So people put most of their energy into their teaching.

HS: Mm-hmm. Yes. And there was a great deal of talk about the need to publish, but nobody seemed to get up enough gumption to do it. Even I published a little something. It was a very, very good experience for me, and I think I’m happy that they have become what seems to me to be a very, very good, caring, helpful department.

KB: Any last thoughts, observations or complaints you care to share about the institution in general?

HS: Oh, the institution in general – I wish it – Milo and I don’t want to let it grow away from us. It seems to be getting bigger, and bigger, and bigger. But we try to stay in touch. And I think that’s really important for us as human beings. One of the nicest experiences we had was several years ago when we were asked to do the Grandma and Grandpa roles in The Grapes of Wrath, and we had been away from the campus long enough that we really didn’t know any students at all, and this was so special for us, because we had to go to rehearsal every night, and in rehearsal you get to know people extremely well, and it was then for three or four years after that there were still students on campus that we could recognize, and it was very fulfilling for us. It made us feel good. And now it’s gone again, so we’ll have to be in another play.
KB: Was that your premiere, or had you done lots of theater?

HS: Well, we had been in a play together when Milo did a series of one-acts [end of side one.] Herbert and Muriel are two people so aged that they cannot remember what this husband’s name is, or how long this wife has been around. And it’s about a half-hour long play, and it is hilariously funny, but it is difficult to learn because there are no cues – because their brains are theirs, so they say things completely out of context, which makes a hilarious laugh, but friends have said, “Well you don’t really have to memorize that, do you? Can’t you just kind of bumble along?” Well no, there won’t be any jokes if you bumble along. So that was very special. That’s pretty much the extent. We have not done – you have not done – well you were in one of your musicals, you played a role. But we tried to stay out of the theater if we can.

KB: Did you do much acting while you were a professor in the department?

MS: Only that one time, wasn’t it?

HS: Mm-hmm, yeah. You did not.

MS: Wayne Hertz – Music Department – Wayne – dear, dear, dear friend, now gone – Wayne was the one who wanted nothing to do with musicals, and he discovered that there was a whole area of music that he didn’t know anything about, and he’d never allowed his –

HS: And what did he play in A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum?

MS: He ran around what? The Coliseum?

HS: Seven times, and he kept appearing on the stage. It was just a funny little sight gag. And then one night he had to be gone to conduct a chorus someplace –

MS: And so I had to take Wayne’s place. Yeah, he had to go to Spokane to conduct a Chorus of the West or whatever.

HS: Oh, and then one time I had to step in for a role you had done. He did the play Twelve Angry Men, and Milo has always contended that women in a situation on a jury would be meaner than men, so he cast it on alternate nights Twelve Angry Men, and Twelve Angry Women, and one of your women had to drop out, and I stepped in and did that – you know – with my cheat sheets right here, because it was very, very fast that we had to do that. But generally no, we have not. We’re not [inaudible].

MS: And I think I proved myself right. If you saw both performances, the men were more caring, less vindictive, and the ladies wanted to nail them to the wall.

HS: And it was interesting that you used exactly the same script, exactly the same words, but you said that the tones of voice and everything were very, very different.

KB: So your audiences had to show up twice.

HS: Yes, if they wanted to see them both, they did. And a few people did.

MS: And of course a great many of our friends did come to see it twice, and agreed that, “Boy, those women! I don’t want any jury of women if I have to go to court.”

KB: Well now Milo, Helen talked about some of her colleagues in the English Department. Would you like to say a little bit about your colleagues in Theater before we wind down?
Richard Lineoweaver [phonetic], now down in Eugene working with a community theater but not academic. He married a woman who was a Librarian, and she got a good job in Eugene, and he’s semi-retired and he works now with a community theater down there. I don’t know what he’s doing.

He wore a lot of hats. Didn’t he start the Laughing Horse Theater in the summers?

Yeah, he was one of the group. Yeah. Richard Lineoweaver. And Betty Evans. Betty – New Zealander and sounded like it – Betty was – Betty was a little hard for students to work with because she was a very funny person. I don’t think she intended to be funny, but spoke with such a very British accent, and she did have a good sense of humor, but – and she was blunt. Betty would tell you not that the woman was pregnant, but she got knocked up. That was Betty. And she spoke like that in front of her classes, and the kids thought she was hilarious. She was not afraid to say what was on her mind. My first – my first cohort was Norman Howell, who was primarily a Speech teacher who had been directing some plays occasionally before I came, and I think he directed Laura, which was the first play we saw up here after we came. And when I came in I took over the load, and he spent most of his time with Public Speaking classes and didn’t direct any more.

What was your relationship with the Speech Department?

Well I started out kind of half Speech and half Drama, and little, by little, by little other people picked up the Speech classes as I went more and more to Drama because the load was there.

It was actually the same department, wasn’t it?

Same department, Speech and Drama, yes.

And what kinds of students would want to take Speech? Was that a skill that future educators would want?

And was it required?

It was a required course.

I think it was indeed required.

Speech almost always has been required in Teacher Education courses.

Just to have an articulate instructor.

Right. And Norm Howell was the only teacher in Speech when I came, and then I picked up half a load of Speech and a half a load of Drama, and little, by little, by little I got rid of the Speech and went full-time Drama, as the load was obviously there.

Maybe we could go back to the Laughing Horse. Can you instruct me about any origins of development of the theater?

Peggy Evans was the one who named it Laughing Horse. She – there was a contest of sorts and she recommended Laughing Horse because of the Western community, and the committee that was set to select names chose Laughing Horse because it sounded like fun, and it had a relationship to the Rodeo.
KB: Was it a University enterprise, or was it only incidentally connected?

MS: No, it was – it could not have existed at all if it had not been for the University because Laughing Horse depended on our theaters, our equipment, our materials, and [pause] – Benny directed a little bit, Richard directed a little bit.

KB: You were not involved in it?

MS: No. Not at all.

KB: When I came in the Eighties there was a community board that raised money and sold tickets, I think. It was – although it took place on the campus, it seemed to have some community input.

HS: Oh, a lot of – a lot of local community people were involved with it, yes. It was all a volunteer organization. And I don’t know how they split the – they had to buy the equipment and everything, but they still used the campus theaters, and lights, and all that without charge. But I don’t know exactly. But it finally failed, I think, because the volunteers just got so overworked.

MS: Yeah.

HS: That’s what everybody told me. There were not enough volunteers to keep it going.

KB: Well, do you have any last thoughts or observations to share? We’ve got a long morning here, but we’ve covered a lot of ground. Is there anything we’ve left out?

HS: Oh, we must have left out lots of things, but I think we hit the high notes.

KB: Well maybe you’ll let me come back or telephone, and you might have other things.

HS: Oh, you may come back anytime, yes.

MS: You might want to, before you leave, just thumb through that monstrous notebook over there.

KB: I’d love to. Thank you.

MS: I need variety in my life. Consequently, I was able to build variety into my work. I was the head cheese. I was chairman of the department most of the time – not all the time, but most of the time – and I was the only long-term play director. There were others who came in who began to pick up some load – and it is a load – and I wanted to – I need variety, and I wanted to offer variety, and as you thumb through that notebook over there you will notice everything from the ridiculous to the sublime. And there is Shakespeare, and there is not Shakespeare. There is American, and there is foreign. There is funny, and there is sad.

KB: May I ask if you are a theater goer when you leave town for vacations, or –

MS: Oh yes.

HS: Yes we do.

MS: We go to New York every Spring. We’ll be going the first week of May this time. We used to go in April. [Whispers] Last time we were there it snowed on us. [Resumes regular speech] And Helen had shoes without toes.
HS: Yes. Sometimes we see as many as nine or ten plays while we’re there. So we just – we take this week and a half and cram everything into that little, short time, and it is such fun. It really is.

MS: Yes. I don’t – other people might find it boring.

HS: Oh, nobody would find that boring!

MS: We certainly don’t find it boring. We are particular about what we go to. There is a little Irish theater in New York that we have gone to almost every trip, we work something in, and they do plays by Irish playwrights – plays about Irish that are American. They do Irish musicals as well as straight plays, and serious, and comic. And we almost always know exactly what we’re going to see before we leave this house, because we take New York magazine, and we take The New Yorker, and both of them have all the schedules in them of what’s opening, what’s closing, and thumbnail sketch of what the show is about. Well we will read about, and think about, and talk about, and then finally, when we get down to the point of actually making up our trip, Helen will either do it on the computer, or by telephone, and we will – we’ll always work in one symphony at the Carnegie, because we both need an occasional symphony orchestra. I think they’re grand. But other than that, all of them are in the Theater district. And some are musicals, some are straight plays –

HS: Some are on Broadway, some are off Broadway –

MS: We need – both need variety.

HS: But did somebody tell me – and if this is correct, I extend to you sympathy – you were a friend of Wendy Wasserstein?

KB: Yes, she and I went to Mt. Holyoke together. We took History classes together.

HS: Oh, and we’ve lost her now. I am so sorry.

KB: Very sad.

HS: Yes. Oh my. Well, that was a privilege all these years for you.

KB: Yes indeed.

MS: We saw one of her shows very early on.

HS: So you were in school together?

KB: That’s right. Her first play, Uncommon Women and Others, very much describes our college experience.

HS: Okay.

KB: Some of the characters are clearly real people – real characters.

HS: Sure. Well I had heard that, and when I read in the paper that she had died I almost sent you a card, and then I thought, “I don’t even know if that’s really true. I can’t do that.”

KB: Yeah, it was pretty sobering. I think the reason I’m going to India tomorrow is because her death reminded me that there’s no time like the present.
HS: Indeed yes, and tell us about this. You’re going to India tomorrow . . .

[End of Tape]