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Barbara Kohler Interview

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CWU Living History Project

Barbara Kohler

Putnam: ? 10, 1995 and we are in Barbara Kohler’s home at 306 North Sampson Ellensburg. Present today in the group interviewing Barbara are Ham Howard at the camera and Milo and Helen Smith are both going to assist in recording and questioning and Jean Putnam so we will begin Barbara by having you give us a little background of how you came to be in Ellensburg and a little about your family.

Kohler: My father was born and raised in Switzerland in the town of Zurich and he was trained as a cheese maker but he had the wanderlust and wanted to get away from cows and cheese so he decided he would come to America and he came-I think he was 17-and he didn’t know any English but he taught himself to read and to write in English. And he had relatives in upstate New York until he earned enough money that he could come across the United States. And on his way through he always stopped at places where there were Swiss people and he brought greetings from people in Switzerland to the American immigrants who had come over and on his way he stopped in Nebraska and that is where he met my mother but he had the wanderlust in him I guess you’d say and so that was a nice stop but kept coming West and he came to the state of Oregon and that was where he worked to earn some money by being a shepherd and while he was there instead of paying him cash he was given a certain number of sheep and when he had enough of a flock that he could drive them (and when I say drive I mean walk them) from Oregon to Washington and he came into the valley and he kept looking for a place that had range but he also wanted to have access to water and that’s where he went over to the Columbia and started his Whiskey Dick sheep ranch which was about, I think, 12,000 acres and there was an upper place and a lower place and in the upper place they did sheep grazing and in the lower place they raised hay, grain, and things like that and a big garden and vegetables. He was kind of a horticulturalist. He raised peanuts out on the Columbia river at Whiskey Dick and his sheep ranch was, I think, about 12,000 acres and so they did the lambing at the low place and then he drove them and when I say drove I mean they walked their way up through the Kittitas Valley and up into the Swauk where they grazed in the summer.

Putnam: Can, when you came to Ellensburg now did you go to schools here in Ellensburg?

Kohler: I was born in Ellensburg and my two older brothers and my younger sister. We all were born in that old house that was the dormitory for women.

Putnam: Where was that?

Kohler: Chestnut and Second.

Putnam: Chestnut and Second. Was that the first dormitory or was that?

Kohler: Yes. First dormitory for women. And we used to try to decipher the things that-they had an etched window in the front door and the girls who had engagements would take their diamond rings and scratch out their initials and the date they were going to get married.

Putnam: That’s not still there of course?

Kohler: No. And the dormitory was four floors and the basement consisted of a furnace room and in one room my dad had two barrels of vinegar because they always had vinegar that they used when they made pickles and things like that out at the ranch. And they-also the men who were the herders-would like to have vinegar. The interesting thing about the herders was that they didn’t have many utensils for working with but they had a regulation flour sack and they opened it and turned it down all around and then they made a little indentation and they put the soda and the salt and the liquid in the top until it took enough moisture to make the dough. Then they lifted it out and closed the flour sack until the next time. Then, they
baked their bread in an oven that they improvised I guess it would be a gasoline can that was about this high and this wide and they cut one end off and then that was their oven. They put it over an open fire. And they made very good biscuits.

Putnam: Well let’s talk about your years at Central as a student.

Kohler: Okay.

Putnam: What do you remember about coming and going up to the University first, what did it look like and what did you do?

Kohler: Something just went out, on purpose?

Putnam: A light did.

Kohler: Do you need another bulb? I can get one.

Putnam. I think, I think that will be okay. I think it just switched. It just didn’t. It’s a loose bulb. Okay. Well let’s just get on then while she’s fixing it. Why don’t we talk about student days.

Kohler: I graduated from Ellensburg High School and decided that I wanted to be a teacher. So I had two brothers that were older than myself and they had gone to Washington State but I had known Helen Smith who was the kindergarten teacher up at the college and she used to teach Sunday school at the Presbyterian church and I went to the Presbyterian Sunday school. Now Helen was a very good friend of Clara Meisner and Clara Meisner was one of the head people for kindergarten teachers and first I knew Helen Smith because she was my Sunday school teacher and then I got to know Clara Meisner and she was one of the people who influenced me to become a primary teacher and I wasn’t sure what I wanted to be but I knew I wanted to work with children. So I went to Central and took the necessary classes.

Putnam: What year was that, do you remember?

Kohler: No. I would have to look it up. I graduated from high school in ’25. So it would be...

Putnam: Probably in 20’s. Was it right after that?

Kohler: Well. No, because my brothers were at WSU and they thought I should go to WSU so I went and while I was there I had an appendix and mastoid operation so they put me in the hospital in Spokane and the president of the college came up to see me. (guess it was because I had two older brothers who were in school there, anyway he had his housekeeper bring me a box of little jars of jelly she had made. So I thought that was a very nice gesture of a president of a college.

Putnam: So you came home then and here and you probably came.

Kohler: Yes. I had to have a mastoid operation on my left ear and then I stayed out of school that year to recoup and then the next year I went to Central and I did my practice teaching under her name was Jones, Pearl Jones. And then a number of years later she retired and lives in Montana and still lives there. And then from when I graduated there was not many jobs available. And I decided I would take anything that was available in Wapato and Toppenish and all of those areas. I didn’t try Yakima because I knew I was too inexperienced to get into a big establishment like that. So Ernie Muzzall was the city superintendent in Toppenish at the time and Ernie and his wife were very good friends of all of we-immature, inexperienced people. And I learned quite early in my life in Toppenish that I had children of many different races and the Indian children were not very dependable as far as school was concerned because when their family went fishing they all went fishing and when they went berry picking they all
went berry picking and that meant they were not very constant in being in school. And we had quite a few Japanese children there. And then we had other children who didn’t know who their fathers were because they were living in kind of communal huts. And that’s were I got my first experience with working with children that had head lice and impetigo and I had never seen or heard anything about lice or all of these things I was exposed to and I have to tell you a funny little story that happened. I had Japanese twins and one little boy was very studious and very alert and the other one didn’t care if school took or not, so you know how their hair grows when their head is tipped forward; all this straight hair is hanging down. You can’t see their eyes to know if they are reading from left to right or not reading at all. So I asked my principal if I could take the children down to the little health room and put them on a stool and cut their hair. So she said she didn’t see why not so I got them down there and cut their hair and you know it is very wiry and when I got through it looked like saw teeth all the way across their forehead. And I was mortified and I didn’t know what to do so I went down to the kitchen and asked if I could have a bowl so I took the howl back and put it on his head. He wasn’t too pleased with the idea but the bowl didn’t hold the hair close enough. So when I got through I thought I better go home with those boys and explain what happened. But they didn’t want me to go home with them. So the next day those poor little boys came to school with their heads shaved. So that really was the ticket. So I decided I better go home and explain it to the parents. The father was out in the field with a machete and he was cutting watermelon so I didn’t know if he was going to use it on me or what would happen. But I knew I had to go see him so I explained to him and we became very good friends after that and he would take that machete and go down and pop open a great big watermelon and just take the insides out and give it to you.

Putnam: Oh how wonderful. Great. Now can we go back. A couple things I would like to know. When you were back here. Let’s go back as a student. Where did you live when you went to school?

Kohler: I lived at my home.

Putnam: Okay so you lived at your home.

Kohler: On Second Street. The old dormitory.

Putnam: What buildings were there when you were there? What did the campus look like?

Kohler: The training school is the thing I remember most because that’s where we had some of our classes and that’s where they had assemblies and they had this very interesting metal fire escape on the outside of the Edison school and they had to have it closed at the bottom except when they had a fire drill and then they opened it.

Putnam. So Edison was the training school at that time.

Kohler: Yes.

Putnam: And not Hebeler. Hebeler didn’t exist at that time. So was Edison, and Barge Hall was there and were there any other buildings that you recall?

Kohler: It was Edison was the training school. Tenny Johanson I think taught in fourth grade and Mabel Anderson in third grade and I can’t recall right now Jones I think was first, yes first grade teacher. And then Clara Meisner was the supervisor of student teachers.

Putnam: Now do you remember anything about how much things cost at that time or how you got through school? Did you have any problems getting through school like tuition, were there any scholarships or anything like that?

Kohler: My parents paid for my schooling. I didn’t have to work for it
Putnam: But you don’t remember how much it would have cost?

Kohler: No I don’t.

Putnam: Which of the college professors do you feel were the most important to you?

Kohler: Clara Meisner was my staff of life.

Putnam: Was she and why?

Kohler: She was the one that was trained in Germany. She was determined if we were going to he kindergarten or first grade teachers we should he the best. She was the one who encouraged me to go on to college when I went to Columbia University. Helen Smith also was very influential.

Putnam: And now was this a four-year degree or a three-year degree and was this the, weren’t you in the class with the first four-year degree students?

Kohler: That I can’t remember but they could probably look it up someplace but when we worked Ernie Muzzall was the superintendent down there and he was a wonderful person and then he let and came up to teach in the college in Ellensburg and at that time I decided I should move on so I applied in Ellensburg and I got a job teaching in the old Washington school.

Putnam: To what class?

Kohler: Pardon.

Putnam: What grade?

Kohler: First grade.

Putnam: First grade. Wonderful. Now do you remember who was president at the time you were going to school? Dr. Black.

Kohler: Dr. Black.

Putnam: Do you remember anything about him?

Kohler: Yes and his youngest daughter was Janet Black and she was going to school in the same class that I was in and she married Bob Gault who was related to - he was a cousin of Naomi Edwards who helped me.

Ham: Randall.

Kohler: Randall. Yes.

Putnam: Do you remember anything about President Black? What his personality or how he administered or maybe you didn’t know too much about him.

Kohler: Well I remember a few things that I probably shouldn’t mention.

Putnam: Well I think we want everything.
Kohler: Okay. He had a couple of girl friends in the college. One was in the P.E. department, and I can’t remember what the other one was in. At that time in the dormitory they had Philippine boys that were waiters and they all wore white jackets and dark trousers. And I was invited to a few things up there and that is how I got in on it otherwise I did all my eating at home because I was a towns person not a dorms person.

Putnam: Where was that dining hall?

Kohler: What was the first one up there?

Putnam: Was that Sue Lombard? Do you mean in the basement of that area?

Kohler: No I mean of the dorms there.

Putnam: Kamola?

Kohler: Kamola, yeah.

Putnam: Okay so it was there, Speaking of President Black, now do you remember about his personality or anything else about him that might have been significant for our history?

Kohler: Well, I don’t think you should tell about his two girlfriends.

Putnam: Oh, well, but no, but do you remember was he vigorous or personable or was he very stern?

Kohler: No, he was not the most friendly or outgoing kind of person. I knew him because of his daughter Janet, but see he had two older daughters, one was maybe Elizabeth and I can’t recall the name of the other one. But there is probably a record of them someplace. But they were beautiful girls and Mrs. Black was very quiet and retiring and George was the more outgoing, aggressive kind of person.

Putnam: Did the President live on the campus or did he live in town?

Kohler: Well I don’t think the houses are there anymore. I could take you by and show you where the first president’s house was and the second president’s house was. But...

Putnam: Do you know what street that was on? On that D Street which the new president’s is on.

Kohler: No it was on what street is Sue on besides 8th? 7th and what?

Ham: Walnut.


Kohler: There was a home there and, then I remember when the Black’s lived there. It must have been Sixth or Seventh and Walnut in a big white house because we used to go there and play.

Putnam: Let’s get back to the student government. Do you remember anything? Did the students elect a?

Kohler: No. I being a town’s person didn’t get in on many of those things because my parents were rather strict and if I wasn’t due up there to a class or something like that I was home or at the library.
Putnam: So you don’t remember any extra-curricular activities that you might have gone to? Were there any athletics? Or were there dances or concerts?

Kohler: Well I do remember some beautiful things that were done by the P.E. people. And my sister was a Phys. Ed. major from Central but she did graduate from Pullman. But they used to have lovely hedges and beautiful evergreens in front of the two women’s dorms. And the P.E. women gave some beautiful programs of they wore sheer flowing chiffon robes and did, I guess designs with huge balloons and they would come in and Out around the evergreens and so on. It was very beautiful. They also did things with silk scarves. And usually had good crowds for that. Much applause.

Putnam: Did you remember the names of the instructors or anything?

Kohler: Pardon.

Putnam: Did you remember the names of the instructors -the dance instructors or anybody that was associated?

Kohler: No but I might be able to look some up in some of my sisters things.

Putnam: Oh, we do have the annuals so maybe that will help.

Kohler: I would recognize them if I saw them in the annuals.

Putnam: Any other extra-curricular activities? Like drama or the music or anything like athletics do you remember?

Kohler: Gene, Gene somebody used to direct drama and I don’t know how she did it but she got me into a play and I was scared to death all the while I was in it. But it apparently went over very big.

Putnam: What was the name of it?

Kohler: I can’t even remember the name of it. I may somewhere in my past have a program or something. And then I don’t know if any of you knew Dr. Fish? Pam you did didn’t you? He was the one that put on the Rodeo pageant that they had for a number of years and I was in that. I was the girl that the Indians captured and took me off into the unknown. I got a program of that.

Putnam: Where was the Central library at that time? Do you remember?

Kohler: Well I think it was in the Shaw?

Putnam: Shaw-Smyser building?

Kohler: Yes. On the first floor.

Putnam: Do you remember anything about that? Was it very big? Did you use it?

Kohler: I remember it was crowded and it wasn’t always easy to get the books you needed.

Putnam: Now the other places like the registrar’s office and the business offices, was that all in Barge?

Kohler: All in Barge.
Putnam: The health center. Did they have a health center?

Kohler: Not to my knowledge.

Putnam: Okay. Now do you remember did you have to get any-were there any awards or honors that you remember that you or anyone else got that was a student?

Kohler: No. I don’t. I felt that sometimes it was more difficult being a local person then not being on campus.

Putnam: Correct.

Kohler: That was kind of hard to get up there. I didn’t have a bicycle for a long time.

Putnam: Did most of the students walk? Or did they have cars or bicycles?

Kohler: They had bicycles or walked.

Putnam: Did anyone else have any questions they would like to pursue at least focusing on Barbara as a student? Anything.

Milo: Well, Barbara do you recall a day I have read about, memoirs of early students that remember cattle grazing around the campus.

Kohler: That I don’t remember.

Milo: You don’t remember the campus being so small that the pastures came right up to the fence of the campus’?

Kohler: No. I don’t recall that. And there were very few automobiles but there were some bicycles but most people were on their shank’s mares.

Milo: Were there any kind of athletic events organized or unorganized?

Kohler: I do remember that both men and women played some tennis. And if there were other types of things we weren’t allowed to go up there.

Putnam: So you don’t remember football or basketball or anything like that at that time?

Kohler: No.

Milo: How about dances on campus? Do you remember if there were dances?

Kohler: Yes. Uh huh, and they were usually in the basement of the dorms. Not the first floor.

Milo: When I first came to Central down on the ground floor the basement floor of Barge there was a large room known then as the old women’s gym.

Kohler: (she laughs)

Milo: Do you recall having gym classes?
Kohler: Yes. Yes.

Milo: In that location?

Kohler: And I also recall in the auditorium which was above there that’s where there (phone rings). Excuse me. (she answers the phone).

That’s where we had to take our eighth grade state exams in the auditorium there. And so all the kids from the county came there and took our exams. And they used to have on the wall these great big round silhouettes I guess you could say of the heads of Caesar and all of those people. Do you remember seeing those? Do you know where they ended up?

Milo: No. I know that many of the statues ended up in the present art department. The bust of Caesar for example is up in the art department.

Kohler: Well all of these plaster of Paris things were about this big around and they were white.

Milo: And they were bas relief’s.

Kohler: Uh huh. And one day a friend came in on the bus and I went to meet her and she wanted some food so we stopped on the Main Street at Adeline’s and there on the walls were all of these great big things that used to be in the Ad building. And I kind of asked around through the waitress and they were picked up by the man who has that steam roller that goes from Thorp.

Milo: Fischer.

Kohler: What?

Milo: Fischer.

Kohler: Yeah. So he had absconded with all of those. And I haven’t been in Adeline’s since. I don’t know if they are still there or not.

Putnam: I think we should check that out. Well now Barbara before we regroup here and talk about you as a faculty member is there anything else that you can remember as a student or about the campus that might be of interest to us?

Kohler: Well in one of the P.E. classes we had tennis so I remember that and was at a hospital guild meeting at Joanne Prater’s and Joanne was one of the class members.

Putnam: Oh wonderful.

Kohler: That was Gene Prater’s wife.


Kohler: So we reminisced for a minute yesterday.

Putnam: Good. Anybody else have any questions for her as a student? Okay why don’t we turn it off for just a minute? And let’s check to see.
Break

Putnam: Okay Barbara we have heard about your time as a student now we would like to focus on you as the teacher and you spoke very briefly about your time down at Toppenish and now we would like to have you focus on from Toppenish coming up to Ellensburg and teaching here in the training school.

Kohler: In the old Washington school.

Putnam: And oh so you came to the Washington school.

Kohler: Um hm.

Putnam: Okay and was there anything there that you can remember that would be related to the university? Did you have student teachers?

Kohler: Well I did keep in contact with my teachers at Central and they often sent somebody down to watch me teach But my recollection is that-well I’ll have to bypass that for a minute and tell you that do you remember Moonway down at the New York Cafe? Well the China men go to China and they say make a baby. And then when the baby is old enough to leave the mother they ship them back and then the boys learn how to wash dishes and scrape the things at the New York cafe and so on. So Eddie and Moonway had children that came back and while I was teaching at the Washington School there were five little boys that did not speak English. So the Chinese asked if I would teach them English and I said “well I didn’t have much time and I had no training in that but I would do the best I could.” So those little boys stayed after school two days a week and I worked with them and I had to start from scratch and I wrote to Washington D.C. to see if they could give me any help And they did send me a couple of publications that were of help but when I was through and the boys were able to name and pick out things that they hadn’t understood before. The Chinese at the New York wanted to pay me and I said “I wasn’t really trained for that. It was okay” And I can’t remember if I was borrowing a typewriter from the office or something because my writing was big for small children but not for adults. Anyway, they gave me money for a typewriter and it’s there by Ham and its in pretty bad shape but its traveled all over the United States and every place I’ve gone the typewriter has gone. And the sad thing I’ve never learned to type except hunt-and-peck.

Putnam: So that was in the late thirty’s or sometime during that time. Now how did you get to Central and what was your assignment?

Kohler: Oh that was quite a trip! I did teach in Bellingham two summers and at Cheney one summer and it was the summers that I had off here. And then I even drove up to Edmonton, Alberta and taught at the University of Alberta for one summer. So the people of Canada would usually come down to Bellingham which is just over the border and the two summers that I taught there then by word of mouth they had me teach at the University of Alberta. Summer session, which was in with Victoria so I had combined vacation and pleasure. And it was while I was teaching in Victoria that some professors were down from the University of Alberta in Edmonton and so they invited me to come up there. But I have to tell you a funny thing about that. They are much more prim and proper and more like English people than Vancouver and Victoria but anyway. They, I guess it would be the dean of women said that they always had a formal dinner and they also had a tea party on the campus and I said, “Well, I didn’t bring any kind of clothes like that.” Cause she said you had to have a big picture hat. Well I said I don’t have a hat. And so a couple of the teachers that I had met there that were more prone to understand Americans than some of them. So they said we’ll fix you up. So they found a dress for me and a hat and a petticoat with ruffles underneath because the dress was so full and had to stick out so I went to the tea party in borrowed finery but I got by. (Group laughs)

Putnam: That’s wonderful! Now how did you get to Central to teach?
Kohler: They’ used to send students down to the Washington school and the professors that I knew would send their students down and I said well if I am going to do this I better go some place and learn how, because I really didn’t know. So that’s when I decided I would go back to Columbia University. And my roommate was also a Centralite and she was from Ephrata and her name was Eva Olsen. And she was a good friend of the Randall’s. And when we were at Columbia University I was invited to go teach in a college in up state in New York at Oneonta and she was invited to go to a lab school in New Haven, Connecticut. And it was while we were there that the Clymer’s invited me to their home for Thanksgiving because I couldn’t go home. And so if Eva could come too, and of course they were very generous so we had several nice experiences with the Clymer’s and their home in Connecticut.

Ham: Good.

Putnam: Now did you teach in the training school here at the University? Did you do any teaching here at the University?

Kohler: Did I teach here?

Putnam: Yes.

Kohler: Yes. After I came back. But between those times during the war I was hired by Oklahoma City to establish the land of nursery’s there because that was when the mothers were working and the fathers were in the service. So I worked with the Home-Ec. dietician and we worked that out and I was there for a couple of years. I hated Oklahoma City because of the segregation of Negroes and whites and it was still very evident. And I had an office on the second floor of the Board of Education. And I was invited to join the Chamber of Commerce in Oklahoma City and they gave me a great big thing with all kinds of shields and stuff on it. I have it some place in a trunk. But anyway I did have difficulty there because the only way I could work with the separate teacher which was the Negroes, was to meet in a Episcopalian Negro church because I innocently invited her to come up to my office and the telephone switchboard rang my telephone number and said get that god damn Nigger out of this building!

Ham: Is that right!

Putnam: And this was in the forties right? During the war?

Kohler: Yeah and I was flabbergasted. And so I decided this was no place for me. I can’t adjust to something like that. So I finished out the year and then I went to Bremerton and established the kindergartens in the public schools in Bremerton and then I also taught an extension class at the University of Washington on child development. And then from there I was invited to come to the campus in 1947. And that’s where I made my nest.

Putnam: And what was your official capacity? Did you have a certain title or level?

Kohler: I taught kindergarten.

Putnam: In the training school. Did they have…

Kohler: I had two groups. A morning group and an afternoon group.

Putnam: Was this in Edison?

Kohler: Pardon.
Putnam: Where was this you taught? What building?

Kohler: In Edison.

Putnam: Okay. Did they give you any rank like a professor would get rank or were you...

Kohler: I always felt that I was underpaid and under everything because I didn’t have time to advertise.

Putnam: Do you remember what your salary might have been then?

Kohler: No, but they probably have a record of it up at the campus. But the younger the children the less important you are as a teacher. And I always felt that was wrong.

Putnam: Do you remember any of the children that you have names that we would remember?

Kohler: Ham’s children.

Ham: Three of them.

Putnam: Three. What were their names?

Ham: Nancy, Andy, and John.

Putnam: Huh! Were they good students?

Kohler: Um hm. They had to be! They had a mother and father who were teachers!

Putnam: Great

Kohler: I have a beautiful letter from his son and it was mailed to him and I was embarrassed because at heart I am a shy person. But Ham and Dorothy delivered it in person and I think they thought I was a cold fish. (Group laughs) But anyway it was a beautiful letter. I have several beautiful letters from boys that I had in kindergarten and his son wanted to hope his son would

Side A finished

Putnam: Were there any problems that you might have had or the university had or the college had at that time while you were teaching?

Kohler: Well I always felt in the last school we were on the south side and it had a lot of windows and it got very hot. And then they had the wide cement side walk outside and a number of times I asked if we could have a couple of fans or air conditioning or something like that and it was just like water running off of a duck’s back. Nobody paid any attention and so on. And the first thing they did when they added the-it was like a knife in my heart but they had what’s the name of the department that’s in the lab school now?

Ham: Computers?

Kohler: Computers. First thing they did was put this huge air conditioning thing in for machinery but not for humans. And I just felt that well I don’t think that... What was our last president?

Putnam: President Garrity?
Kohler: Garrity. He was not at all interested in kindergarten and he wanted to clear it out so that they could put the machines in. So he was low man on the totem pole as far as I was concerned and yet he has grandchildren-that I think Virginia would have approved of it but he was not.

Putnam: Now who was the president when you first came as a teacher? You said that President Black was there when you were a student. Who? Do you remember who was the student or who was the president when you were teaching there or may have been several.

Kohler: Several.

Putnam: Was it McConnell? Was he one? Do you remember anything about McConnell?

Kohler: I remember his sons telling me or telling the children that their dad was the boss.

Putnam: Was that right? Were the sons in your class?

Kohler: Um hm. Both of them at different times and I had the Brooks children, boys and girls.

Putnam: So did President Brooks come just after McConnell or not?

Kohler: Um hm.

Milo: Perry Mitchell was an interim president for one year and then Brooks came in 1962.

Putnam: Do you remember anything about president McConnell? Anything other than you had his kids?

Kohler: You see I was so busy in my little hut that I didn’t get around very much, and I had a little problem with some of the children whose fathers taught in different buildings so they thought they could go to those buildings and ride the elevator and things like that. And when I heard about it I went over and put a stop to it. But some of the fathers thought I was being a little officious because I was complaining about it. But with small children-I think that is probably my mail coming through the slot.

Putnam: Do you remember anything about president Brooks? Was he there? You had his sons but do you remember anything about him?

Kohler: It’s very interesting to me all of the presidents that had children that were in kindergarten they all alerted me in the fact that their dad was top man.

Putnam: Very interesting!

Kohler: Yes!

Putnam: Well do you, were there any faculty or administrators other than the presidents that you might remember that you had any relationship with or problems with or ran into?

Kohler: I wouldn’t say I had problems with them but Mabel Anderson was an inspiration to work with. Mary Simpson sometimes would cross wires on a few things but I had an idea and she had an idea that we couldn’t always get together on.
Putnam: Now about Mabel Anderson you said she was an inspiration. What do you remember about her that would he significant?

Kohler: Well she was I can’t remember now what grade she taught but she was a student supervisor plus teaching in the lab school in the old training school. And she was quite a reasonable kind of person. And Mabel had definite ideas and you couldn’t change her with a stick of dynamite. So sometimes we had to go separate ways.

Putnam: Do you remember anything about say the board of trustees or anybody there you might have remembered?

Kohler: Well I remember the Smyser’s because of their daughter Martha was a little bit older than I. But we were Ellensburg people so we knew each other. And I remember as children when we used to go up on Craig’s hill that was before all of those houses were built up there and the Reed Park and things like that we used to dig Indian potatoes up there on the hill and if it was real hot and we came back down the hill we’d go by Smyser’s and Mrs. Symser would invite us to come in and have some raspberry-shrub. Which was a drink she made out of raspberries. And it was so cool and refreshing when we come off the hill that was wonderful.

Putnam: Now what did Mrs. Smyser do?

Kohler: She was just a homemaker.

Putnam: Oh well wasn’t. Was the husband. What did he do?

Kohler: He was a teacher.

Putnam: What?

Kohler: That I don’t remember.

Putnam: You don’t remember what his official capacity was. Does anyone else remember?

Ham: He was before mc. He was an interim president between Black and McConnell. And he taught in social sciences. I had him as an instructor one time.

Milo: Barbara do you recall some of the principals of the lab schools under whom you worked and any particular educational philosophies that they might have introduced.

Kohler: Well Amanda I Biebler was the one who was longest but, there are several that were not there very long.

Ham: Do you remember a man named Reed?

Kohler: Edwin Reed and he was from Utah. He was a Mormon and when I was coming back from one of my trips up to Canada I stopped in and I was a guest in their home for several days and I had two of their children in kindergarten. And let’s see who else?

Putnam: What kind of principal was he? Was his philosophy strict?

Kohler: He was pretty set in his ways and it had to be his way or else, so lie was not too well liked by most of the teachers. I can’t remember all the others, there were plenty.
Milo: Well, Barbara we recently did an interview with one of your cohorts, a young man who was at the Lab school for a very short time. Roy Wilson. Do you remember Roy?

Kohler: Yes. Roy and Thelma came to see me when they came West and they had two of their daughters with them and their youngest daughter was one of the most beautiful girls I’ve ever seen. She had a peaches and cream complexion and jet black hair and she was a stunner.

Milo: Well, I remember Roy as a teacher so well because he was doing a lot of drama work with the students. They would take stories from their reading class and dramatize them. And I would take my college students over to visit his classroom where he put on the plays in the auditorium over there. I remember “The Billy Goats Gruff” especially, my college kids were excited about what he was getting those young children to do in performing.

Putnam: One other thing that comes to mind. Now you lived in Ellensburg and of course your family did and you taught up there. Do you have any perception of the people in town and their perception of the University. Was it a good relationship or did we have problems?

Kohler: Well, a number of people wanted their children to go to the lab school but they were not in the district and so occasionally somebody would pull a shenanigan of some kind and they would let their child in, but they tried to keep all the children. I don’t remember now if it was the Eighth Street but, that was the dividing line.

Putnam: Do you think the people who lived in Ellensburg, did they accept the college as a positive contribution to the community or did they have problems with it being there as a competition?

Kohler: Well I think there was a little feeling of competition because some people that were very good friends of Amanda Hebeler wanted their children to go to the Lab school and they were not teachers of the college and sometimes it was arranged. I remember that the Catlin children were allowed because Amanda belonged to the Friday Club and different organizations that townspeople belonged to and there were exceptions made for them.

Putnam: Does anyone else have any questions they think would be pertinent to ask Barbara regarding her term as a faculty member?

Milo: Barbara, I recall seeing you and your children in that little makeshift that was just to the outside of your window. There is no sign anymore, but it once was a busy playground with lots of little children out there. I am surprised you talk about heat from that side because that building supposedly was built with teachers and teaching in mind and the advisors in the design of that building should have been cognizant of the’ heat.

Kohler: I think part of the problem was there was such wide sidewalk of cement and then the heat reflecting on that.

Helen: What about philosophy of teaching? Was that handed down to you from a principal or were you pretty much free?

Kohler: I think we pretty much did our own.

Helen: Even though you were observed frequently no one asked you to change your methods? So you felt you really had autonomy as a classroom?

Kohler: I think I had Joe’s, who is he married to one of your daughters, I had him in kindergarten. His mother was, I think was, the head telephone operator at the time.
Putnam: Well that spurred a question for me. What is your philosophy of teaching? What was your goal with the kids.

Kohler: One goal was to get to know the children and another was to take them as far as I could while they were with me. I tried to make teaching a happy, fun experience. I remember I had a little boy, I don’t know if you folks knew the man who worked in the P.E. department, let’s see he was not a teacher or professor but he was a great big man He was probably in charge of equipment or something like that.

Milo: Mr. Powell?

Kohler: Huh, no, no.

Milo: He was at one time.

Kohler: Andy Cooper.

Milo: Cooper.

Kohler: Andy was the oldest in the family and I don’t know whether I should tell this or not.

Putnam: Yes.

Kohler: Okay. Andy was the oldest of several children and his mother worked up on the hill in the nursing home. His dad was something in charge of equipment or something like that in the P.E. department and Andy had a lot of responsibilities being the oldest. He was a gentle, kind person. One day he came to school and I some how put my hand on his back and he cringed and I said “what’s the matter?” He said his back was sore. And I said “Did you fall down? ”No.” I finally found Out his father used a strap on him, so I asked him if he would come into my office and I pulled up his shirt and saw those welts on his hack and it infuriated me. So I called Judge Cole and said that I had a little boy that I wanted him to look at and I told him why. So we went down. He was shocked and so was I but I did have a conference with the father and he was very abrupt and brusque and I knew something had to be done and so after that he never came to school with welts on his back. I know he was not too happy and secure in the home and his father was a big brute of a person. A shock to me.

Milo: Barbara, you were probably very, very involved in reading and writing most of the time in the kindergarten. Did you go through lots of different philosophies when fads would come in and fads would go out in teaching?

Kohler: Not too much. Is there a little red light flickering going on”

Putnam: Yeah, we’re just wanting to know how much tape we have left. Why don’t you finish the question and well turn the tape off

Milo: I have a memory when children were not taught the alphabet but rather they were being taught the letter “I” was a man sitting down The letter “P” was a man with a pack on his back. Were you ever exposed to that?

Kohler: No.

Putnam: Let’s find out when she retired. Let’s turn it of for just a minute. Because I want to end it but I want to find out how much tape we have. Because I don’t know if we’ve run out. Does your screen tell you how much time?
Putnam: Barbara, we would like to ask you about your memories of Amanda Hebeler because she did have a building named after her and we would like to get any information you can remember about her personalities, ideas, philosophies.

Kohler: Maybe I should give that a little more thought. She was devoted to the school. And she had definite ideas. For instance, when I was teaching first grade there I was hired to teach kindergarten until Alice Marie retired so I taught first grade. Across, above the blackboard I had the alphabet letters. One row was small case letters and the other capital letters and I had children that had help at home and wanted to write and if any wanted to could go to the blackboard and practice or they could write at their tables. And she came in one day and said “Barbara, I want to see you after school.” So I thought what in the world have I done. And that was all that was said. So after school I went in to see her and she said “You’ll have to take those letters off the blackboard. And I said, “Why?” She said, “Because you are not teaching writing.” And that struck me as kind of peculiar. I never could find out why I was not to have them. In the other grades they did have them and I saw no reason if I had a child who was ready, why they couldn’t have the correct symbol for that. I never could get that through my head.

Putnam: What kind of person was she? What did she do?

Kohler: She could be very pleasant and she could be very domineering. It had to be her way or else. And I don’t know how else to describe it. She was devoted as a principal, but she had to be the head of it. Nobody could have ideas.

Putnam: I think if we have any tape left. Maybe you could tell us briefly about your sister’s scholarship to an outstanding woman in physical education

Kohler: All right, the one thing I didn’t approve of was they gave the scholarship to one girl for two years. I’d rather have it be somebody who needs it for one year to get them started and then let them go on their own. I was not consulted. I have not heard anything from the P.E. department since and I feel I should have a little finger in the pie.

Putnam: You sister’s name?

Kohler: Elizabeth Kohler Bardwell. Her twin granddaughters went to Central. One is teaching in Southwest Yakima and the other one is teaching in the upper part of the state.

Putnam: And this was to be given to a...What were the characteristics of the person she felt should have that?

Kohler: It should be a person who was a dedicated person as far as physical education was concerned. Somebody who needed help because they didn’t have enough money the first year. But I would prefer to have it be a different person every year instead of one person two years

Putnam: Is there anything else you would like to say regarding your relationship to Central if we have any tape left?

Kohler: I love Central and I had many lovely experiences at Central. Sometimes if I had an idea and wanted to try it I was sometimes discouraged from doing it but if I didn’t have the opportunity of doing it here I would do it in Bellingham or Cheney or where ever else. And I did teach in all Lab schools.

Ham: Okay, we’re out of time.
Putnam: Thank you very much Barbara for your time. It’s just wonderful. Suppose if we had the right questions to ask her we could come up with another whole day.