
INTERVIEW WITH HALF CENTURY CLUB INDUCTEES, CLASS OF 1930

Interviewer

...for the possible future use by staff members or faculty members of Illinois State University or other interested people associated with the university. Today is Saturday, May the 10th, 1980. Today is the celebration day for those people of the Class of 1930 of Illinois State Normal University who are being inducted into the Half Century Club. The people I have here to speak with me today are all now living out of the state of Illinois. They are:

Thomas Barton

Thomas Frank Barton, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana. The thing I remember most as I contemplate fifty years ago is President Felmley, and the superior faculty he had assembled here. After all he was President for 30 years, from 1900 to 1930, and practically all of the professors that influenced our lives had been hired by President Felmley. He was a wonderful judge of men and women, he hired superior people, he sometimes made a mistake or two, but he'd go around the ask students about a certain professor and he would disappear from the campus. It was not a ruthless method, it was just a method of maintaining a superior faculty. Practically all the graduate students I have talked to in the last 24 hours have mentioned Professor Adams, or Professor Croth, or this professor or that professor and I would estimate—I haven't done research on this—that 90% of the professors that influenced us, and that were on the faculty at that time had been hired by President Tompkins. And this is a wonderful compliment, to a great president.

Interviewer

Did President Felmley serve the entire time you were a student here Mr. Barton?

Thomas Barton

Oh yes, yes sir, very much, oh he died the last year, as I mentioned earlier. He got cancer and didn't serve out the year, but they do give him credit, there wasn't another president appointed. Somebody would take care of the duties, but he was, he was over on the [unintelligible], outside the president's office, well there's a picture of President Felmley, president from 1900 to 1930.

Interviewer

Was the Science Building, which is now called Felmley, originated during the time that you were a student or was that built afterwards...

Thomas Barton

Well it was built, and I was hired and one of the jobs I did on the maintenance crew, was to install the bulletin boards outside the offices and to paint the museum cases in the museum that was on the top floor of Felmley Hall at that time.

Interviewer

Thank you, Dr. Barton. Mr. Classon?

Robert Classon

Yes, I am Bob Classon, and I have been teaching the last 31 years, not the last 31 years, but the last 31 years of my professional and active life was in Southwest High School in Minneapolis, Minnesota where I was the principle at Southwest High School for the last 20 years, and I too would like to add my favorable impressions of President Felmley during the time that I was in school. He to me stands just about the top of the list of anyone I've known in relation to education and educational policies and standards and all that implies. One of my most favorite—or, one of the professors that I thought most of I think is here today, Dr. Browne. I was in several of his classes. He, coached, debated, he won Illinois a couple of years before I went to Minneapolis, and he was out and served as a judge to debates out there, seemed to have time to talk to people and to do favors for them and a very able and interesting professor in class. I also remember and have fond memories for Mr. Beyer and with whom I'd had many classes. I felt that extracurricular activities at that time were good, and played an important part in the education of all of us. I feel that the opportunities I had to take part in dramatic work and debates and student activities of various kinds played a tremendous part in my total education and it's interesting here and first was raised as to the typical mode of dress in 1929. That was rather different than it is today. No jeans.

Interviewer

That's an abrupt change, you're right. Many things have, many things have come and gone in between as well. Mr. Means, if you'd like to introduce yourself and go on from there.

George Means

Well I am George Means of Greenwood, Indiana. I have many happy memories of this place, but the most important ones relate to faculty: Dean Manchester, Herman Henry Schroeder, William Andrew Lawrence Beyer, Fred Sorrenson, Robert Guy Buzzard; there's an endless list of eminent men and women that were of great influence, but I think preeminent of all is David Felmley. He was not only a very humanistic fellow, but a very strict disciplinarian. We had general assembly every day, I think about 10 o'clock, and it lasted for about a half an hour. I say every day, every day except one, because one day each week, during the general assembly period the entire student body met in what was called "Rhetoricals," and that was a very highbrow name for elementary speech, really, and President Felmley taught the class in Rhetoricals, and we would indicate our choice of the class to which we were to go. My recollection is we were to indicate three choices, and I indicated always David Felmley, David Felmley, David Felmley, and I got him, and he was a strict fellow. He assigned things to be memorized, he criticized not only our mastery of the text—whether or not we had full memorization—but our interpretation of it, and the meaning that we gave when we spoke it, and in later years I have had great reason to be thankful time and time again for my association with David Felmley, an association that I think today a student can't have with a president. But I could say the same thing for Orson Manchester, who used to come to class and close the door and sit behind the desk and look over the group and he would say, "Mr. Means," and when that

statement was made, as a student you were to stand, and you were to say everything you knew on the subject, and if you would speak for the entire hour, that would be all right with him. But when you sat down, then he would say, "Mr. Barton," and Mr. Barton was to arise, and he could not repeat anything that I said, but he was to elaborate on it. And if you didn't come to Orson Manchester's class well prepared, you were in great danger, I can tell you that. Well, I could reminisce a long time, but this must go on to someone else.

Interviewer

Mr. Means, I have one question for you. It's obvious that personalities that you knew during your years were probably a highlight. What—if you had to pinpoint, one thing you least liked about your college years would you respond?

George Means

That would be very difficult for me to do. I suppose study.

Interviewer

Thank you. Mr. Moore.

Roy Moore

I'm Roy Moore, from Mankato, Minnesota, retired from Mankato State University. I had 21 years in the public schools to prepare myself for teaching preparation in Mankato State University, in physical education. I guess maybe I am in a different phase of teachers and so on than some of the rest of you, however, all the men you have mentioned had my high respect, and I had courses from many of them. I think I want to talk about Joe Cogdal who was our coach, and also Pop Horkin—Horton, as he's called—later, who was my advisor in physical education. Joe Cogdal had to coach everything: Football, basketball, track. One bang, bang, bang, bang, and I learned a lot from him because I had to do the same thing when I went out to coach and then teach, I had to take every—something—every quarter, every term of the season. I'm sure that our next speaker would want to speak of something, I want to, want to mention the difficulty, and the, I guess you say, the social relationships and which is was in the country as a whole, particularly would cause some problems in travelling when we had Black athletes. You could not room or eat at a place because they would not allow Black athletes to eat, or room with you in the same hotel, and Joe Cagdal had to adjust, make all kinds of efforts to find a place for his excellent—like Harry Caldwell for example, and other people who played on his teams, and we respected these fellow athletes and very good friends as a team and we thought that was just very unfair, and this is a different thing now as I'm sure that our next speaker would speak about too. I particularly liked—you said, "What do we like,"—I though the extracurricular activities I began to get into when I was a sophomore, I thought I was probably not good enough before then, and into football and track. I did not play basketball, but I—intramurals and softball, and intramurals, and so on. But also dramatics and Bob Classon and I was in one play together, "Outward Bound," and I got a lot out of that. And as some of you know, I enjoyed writing poetry, or what we called verse, maybe I should say, and had it published in the Vidette at that time, and so I had many phases of that. What I liked least about it, there was nothing about ISNU that I disliked. I was thrilled to death all the time, and, from the studying to every class I went, I

went with enthusiasm, even though sometimes I did some things maybe the instructor thought I should do better. It was a real experience.

Interviewer

Thank you Mr. Moore. You, you have a difficulty in being as positive when you address, Miss Dawson, the issues that he's talked about?

Carrie Dawson

Oh, it's not difficult at all, and I think it's because of the vantage point of 50 years in retrospect. We have to say it was a bittersweet experience, but the fact that the three of us who were more closely associated than any other student that I would have had an alliance with, the two of them here with me today are from East Saint Louis, which was then my home. I'm in Atlanta, Georgia now after a long period, of course, of many experiences, but as soon as that letter came from [Tom Moore?], from [Tom? unintelligible], as soon as that letter came, our—I called East St. Louis to one of the former students and I would say the next day the other student called me, and our quick response was, "We're going, let's go, I'll meet you there," and that's how important the, then Normal was to us. Certainly, we experienced what you mention. We could not stay in Fell Hall. That was not a part of our experience. We were in an approved home, unaccepted in the dormitory.

Interviewer

Can I just... Fell Hall was university housing, and you were not allowed...?

Carrie Dawson

It was university housing and we were not allowed to stay. In fact, while we were there—and this is an aside, because, and it must not be put in top of place as the important thing that happened to us—because out of the Normal experience, I think, and you'll find us all over the United States who came through that experience during that time and during the Depression, who have been so highly motivated by these tremendous people we met, as professors and instructors, and leaders, that we, I meet them everywhere, and we've gone to the top rungs because of the inspiration we received here. We learned, and I think, and we say all the time, that we came through the golden age of the profession. Because we came through and were excellent teachers because at ISU we learned how to teach, and we learned the commitment and the dedication to the profession, and we were further motivated to tend the young, and I've gone on to the doctorate from the University of Illinois and got three degrees from there. I've been an art supervisor, K through Twelve, then a general elementary supervisor. I've been a principal. I've taught at the University of [Maine?], at Southern University, Indiana campus, you know, located in Gary, and the director of all of their federally funded programs in Gary, and ended my career there as assistant superintendent of the Gary Schools, the community and the school established a \$10,000 dollar scholarship in my name for teachers who want to go further in their pursuit of learning about early childhood and then I was invited to Atlanta University as postdoctoral law fellow fellow, and I've been working with those who are at the point of writing their dissertations. But we come back to ISU and find, today, an International House, where they, I think they told us, thirty people of different ethnic origins are there and we sit in a

cafeteria, our finest restaurant, and we see the white, the Black, just as companions, and we know better than the young that times are better, because we, when we were here, how dare we be here all of us during the Depression, but as the—there was no place like ISU, and I mention all of the people that you mentioned, and [Spicer?] and [Grammar?] and [Mounbrake?] and all of these giants, I think, in education, and as a result of the experience I think that we've gone on an inspiration to touch the lives of other people.

Interviewer

Thank you. It's more easy to comment on progress when you've experienced it rather than read about it, that should be obvious.

Carrie Dawson

And when you've felt it.

[Male voice]

The wonderful thing is that Fell Hall which you couldn't room in is the International House.

Interviewer

It certainly is a coincidence, I agree.

Carrie Dawson

Oh, that is, that's good.

Interviewer

I'm going to ask our next speaker—our net two speakers—two other female graduates from ISNU to comment on what a broader scope of life was like in terms of prices, for instance, of gasoline, or of hamburgers, important national events during that era. Miss Splitek?

Sula Splitek

I'm Sula Wallen Splitek.

Interviewer

Mrs. Splitek, I'm sorry.

Sula Splitek

Yes, and I am now from Elsinor, or Lake Elsinor, California. Before I mention about the prices of things, I would rather go back and comment on one person, that all of you know. Whenever I enrolled in college, the, about two days later, three or four of us girls were standing talking, and a dear little old grey haired man, very chivalric and I thought rather nosy at the time came over and he said, "Well, young ladies," and he spoke to the first one, "What are you doing—going to do here?" "I'm going to learn to teach home economics," and he spoke to the next one, "I'm going to teach French," and he spoke to three or four of the others and by that time I thought he's quite nosy, so he got to me and he said "And what are you going to do?" I said, "I'm going to teach children." He looked at me for a minute, he said "You will be a teacher." I think that

impressed me more than anything because it gave me a little bit of a build up, and I didn't have much of a build up, I had a little bit of an inferiority complex, but I'm grateful for the school for the moral standards that they had at that time, it helped to influence me, and I think it helped to influence most of these students. I'm proud of the class of today, because I've looked them over, they've made something out of themselves, they—and I feel that's partly through the influence of the college. We could have prayer in school. There were so many things that I'm grateful that, I wasn't born 40 years too soon, I was born at the right time, and I came to the right college. So I have so many precious memories, and grateful that I could come back.

[Male voice]

And who was the nosy gentleman?

Sula Splitek

Oh, didn't I tell? That, that was Dr. Felmley!

Sula Splitek

I, I left out my punchline. And about the price of hamburgers and things, I don't know, because I didn't have enough money to buy hamburgers. I worked my way through college, and glad that I did, I appreciated my education nine times, ten times more than the youngsters today that have their way paid, and the spending money, and the cars to run around in.

Interviewer

Was working one's way through college more typical than non-typical?

Sula Splitek

Yes! It was more typical at that time. So I really enjoyed college and appreciate dear old ISNU.

Interviewer

Would you like to go on, Mrs. Whiteside?

Margaret Whiteside

Well, one of the questions you asked – I'm Margaret Hiatt Whiteside, formerly from Pekin, Illinois, now from Wilmington, Delaware—you asked some of the things we didn't like. One of the things that seems to me a negative thing now, which wasn't negative then, we didn't have any money, but nobody else had any and we didn't really mind. In my group of friends at Fell Hall, very often not a one of us had enough money to buy a stamp to write home for money, and so unless somebody was inspired to send some, nobody had any. But it didn't seem to be a disadvantage because nobody else had any either.

[Female voice]

You can't conceive that now, can you?

Interviewer

I do have a little difficulty with that one.

Margaret Whiteside

But we really didn't.

[Female voice]

We didn't.

Margaret Whiteside

One of the, you ask about, well, one of the things that we didn't, that I didn't like, besides the fact I didn't have any money, all that didn't matter too much. This did matter. There weren't any dates. There were thirteen girls to every man. And if you had a date it was an occasion, believe me. Everybody else from the dorm came around, asked, "Who is he and what's he like," and so forth. You ask about the, you ask about the use of alcohol and tobacco. I'm not sure I knew anybody that used alcohol, but—and I came from the university not smoking, but the rule against smoking was so strict, of course I had to try. And, we used to, a few times we tried it out in the bushes outside the, some of the buildings because we knew we'd be expelled if we were caught and this was thrilling.

Interviewer

You were a daredevil!

Margaret Whiteside

This was really exciting. Likewise as for some of our moral turpitude, I was an honor resident at Fell Hall my sophomore year, and we were supposed to patrol the freshmen, so we would go around and get them all in bed, I think it was 11:00 they had to be in, and then they would gather in my room, a group of them – my mother would send cookies from home—and we would take my—lights out at 11:00 was a strict rule, and obviously we were not only to enforce it but we were to set an example from the freshmen, so we would take a little table lamp and we plugged in with a long cord and stuck it in the coat closet and put a black bathrobe over it so no light showed, and we sat around in this closet crowded in eating cookies and drinking cokes 'till midnight, and we thought we were so wicked, because, if we'd have been caught, we'd have, Miss Whitten would really have called us on the carpet, even yet I don't want to go and speak with Miss Whitten today because I, I've still got a guilty conscience.

Interviewer

Thank you all for contributing today to the memories of the Class of 1930, which I'm sure will be of interest to those later.