
INTERVIEW WITH THOMAS KRONES, JOHN LOWEY, ROGER WELLER, AND THOMAS WILSON, CLASS OF 1959

Joyce Wittmuss Tartar 00:01

...University. This is Joyce Wittmuss Tartar of the Class of 1959 representing Illinois State Normal University and I am talking with Roger Weller, John Lowey, and Tom Wilson and Tom Krones of the Class of 1959. The time is Homecoming 1979. In this bit of oral history, we hope to recapture some of the moments, thoughts, and events that were important to us in the late 50s. We hope that those of you who will listen to this conversation will find the content interesting and informative. To start, Illinois State University had a record enrollment of 19,576 students this fall. John, what do you remember about the size of the student body in 1955?

John Lowey 01:01

The thing I remember in '55, we were the—our class was the first group that brought the enrollment over 3000 here at the Illinois State Normal and we ended up with a record graduating group when we graduated, over 1000 people, and I think the enrollment in '59 was a little over 4000.

Joyce Wittmuss Tartar 01:31

Today, there are also some 2500 faculty and support staff personnel working on campus. Can you relate to or even imagine this? Tom Krones, who was the president and some of the university's top administrators when you were a student and what things do you remember about them?

Tom Krones 01:55

Dr. Larsen was the acting president for two of the years that we were here and then Dr. Bone come in and followed for a long term. Dr. Larsen I remember handling many different positions in his time at Illinois State Normal University and Dr. Bone, one of the things I recall is his the ability to recall first names of people throughout the campus. I don't know how often he had meet you to do this, but I recall him using my name one time, which surprised me. "Pinky" Linkins was the dean of men when we first come in and many of the escapades and things I think can be recalled for the... [might go into detail?] and Dr. Hulet is taking over from "Pinky" Linkins in '57 and the fact that we'd go to him with problems. Dr. Anna Keaton, the dean of women, and here I'll have to refer this back to you, Joyce as far as anything about Dr. Keaton.

Joyce Wittmuss Tartar 03:12

Well, I didn't spend much time there so I can't really relate much to that. However, Roger, I know that you were involved in athletics, dramatics, or some of the other outer school activities. Can you relate some of those experiences for us?

Roger Weller 03:28

Joyce, I participated on the track and basketball teams here from 1955 to '59 and I have some very fond memories of those days. In track I can recall some very fine fellowship with a lot of fine athletes both from ISU, or Illinois State Normal University, and from other universities too. I suspect that probably the finest athlete in track that we had an opportunity to run against was Hayes Jones from Eastern Michigan University who was in our conference at that time. And he went on to represent our conference and the United States and the Olympic Games in 1960 and '64. And of course in basketball there were people like Fred Marberry and Dave Schertz and Ed Koch and Rex Parker among others that I was able to play with, watch them most of the time, sitting right beside Coach Collie, but at least we had some good times. John, you were involved pretty extensively in campus activities and also some sporting events. Can you add to this?

John Lowey 04:46

I think I would—my fondest memories probably would be in '59 when we were fortunate enough to go to the national tournament in Kansas City. I remember a group of us driving to Kansas City and then rushing back to get to the classes the next day. We also had—in '59, we were—during our time here, the four years, we had the Big Four dances which brought in outside entertainment. The Crew Cuts is an era gone by but it's the group that I remember in '59 that stood out. There's just a number of things, swimming team, I happened to represent that with Archie Harris, who is still around as a coach, and then Dr. Gillette and his Gamma Phi Circus, which is still a group that's very important on campus and I enjoy their activities. I happen—I was fortunate enough to be in that for four years. Tom, why don't you go ahead and bring some more in?

Tom Wilson 06:00

Okay, I guess I remember best the Social Science Club and mostly the people involved in the Social Science Club. But I do recall at the time the club sponsor, the Homecoming parade, and so we get out in the morning of the parade and get the streets painted and so forth for the floats to line up. Dr. Warren Harden, who's still at ISU, was the sponsor of the club at that time. I believe, as I recall, the Social Science Club also sponsored the first Birdie Balloon Blast in maybe about 1957 or so with my good friend Roger Tipps largely taking the initiative on that event. Tom, did you have some other things that...?

Tom Krones 06:49

I recall helping with managing track team and some of the things that Roger Weller has referenced to. I had the pleasure of being, sitting up in the stands and keeping times for this particular event that we had. Elmer Busch and I, we were in charge of keeping records and times and those records of time being verified, helping with the B-squad and football and losing three or four quarterbacks in two games and ended up with somebody else playing for quarterback. Interesting, particular time during those times. Joyce, I'll turn this back to you.

Joyce Wittmuss Tartar 07:33

From the academic side, I remember Aunt Jo Ross, our clothing instructor, who was very meticulous and exacting, as well as living in the Rambo Home Management House with Miss Conkey, which is

now the headquarters for the Alumni Office operation. I also recall sweating through Con Civ with Dr. Sands. Tom Wilson, what do you recall?

Tom Wilson 07:57

Well, I remember many of the faculty members, it'd be fun to go on at great length here. I suppose, in the social sciences, John Kinneman is somebody that almost everybody knew whether they ever had him for class or not. I also remember, of course, Ted Sands for history and people like Dr. Cavanaugh and Dr. Kohn, Dr. Ebel. I also remember with great fondness some of the professors I had in English, particularly people like Dr. Dale Vetter, and Dr. Henline, whose readings of Walt Whitman still bring back very good memories for me. I remember too even struggling through a French class under the good guidance of Dr. Jennie Whitten, and at the end of the course Dr. Whitten had us all over to her house for a very nice French dinner. So there are good many faculty that I remember with a great fondness.

Tom Krones 09:06

Tom Krones, relating some of the same things that Tom Wilson—I remember Dr. Cavanaugh and U.S. History and learning to get the readings in, summarizing, so Friday come, he was able to summarize and get rid of all the things that needed to be weeded out. Dr. Gillette, Physical Education, gave me a lot of help in preparation for going on in my teaching, had him as a student teacher advisor. I also remember Dr. Gimmestad and English Grammar. And hopefully I haven't made any mistakes here. That would foul this up for Dr. Gimmestad.

Joyce Wittmuss Tartar 09:53

What were the major national or world news events that occurred during our college days, Tom?

Tom Wilson 10:01

Joyce, I think this period was one—well, it's often been said that the 50s were not a terribly exciting era, especially the late 50s. I do remember the election of 1956 was somewhat interesting, locally, of course, because of Stevenson's candidacy against Eisenhower, although, of course, the election itself wasn't close. I think one event that was terribly significant as we look back on it was the development of the space exploration during the period we were in school, and of course the Russians getting a head start on that. And then the growing interest in the United States and science and math, which certainly did have an effect on many of us then in the late 50s and then on into the 1960s.

Joyce Wittmuss Tartar 10:56

I remember as a freshman in 1955 moving into a new built dorm, Walker Hall, which held 486 girls and believe it or not, no drapes. I also recall that girls were not permitted to wear slacks or jeans to class or to dinner in the dorms. What are some of the things that you remember about campus life, Roger?

Roger Weller 11:21

Well, I think a couple of things that I can recall was the dress code choices you mentioned. I didn't see any Levi's when we first came here on any of the guys or the girls, and it was usually dress pants, shirts, dresses for the gals or skirts and sweaters or whatever. We were a pretty good looking, pretty well-dressed group of people at that time. And another significant thing I remember is the fact that there was no drinking or smoking on campus. There was some smoking areas outside of buildings as I recall,

but it was frowned upon by the administration and the teachers here and we represented a pretty conservative group at that time. John, add a few things to this.

John Lowey 12:12

Probably as conservative as we were, one of the things that flashed back in my mind is the so-called "panty raid" that happened, I'm not sure whether it was our sophomore or junior year. The fact that they brought the state troopers in and the National Guard from Pontiac and the fact that a number of students were called in and kept up late that night, phone calls from parents, I remember the—working with the, over in the dean's office where they—we were trying to track students down because parents thought that they had been arrested and taken off to jail. My recollection is that it—really, none of the people got arrested, but it was there were a few who did end up not being in school for a while. What else do you remember, Tom?

Tom Wilson 13:12

Well, I do remember the basketball team was a very good team, as I recall, especially our last year and that was under Jim Collie's direction and the school was small enough that even though I wasn't terribly active in things, it was small enough that you'd still know a few of the players reasonably well. I do remember too in terms of residence halls, when you see the huge complexes here now. At that time, there was only I believe Smith Hall and then Dunn and Barton and I believe maybe Walker Hall somewhat later. But I remember living at Dunn Hall and the whole operation being small enough that we would sit down for evening dinners at a table and have a host and so forth. At least for the evening dinner, we didn't go through the cafeteria arrangement. Tom, let you take over here.

Tom Krones 14:08

All right. I remember Cardinal Court because I live there, the old wooden barracks that are not in existence. And I don't know whether there's any pictures around but it would be interesting, and many of the men that lived there, grew up there, Fred Marberry was one I can recall, Fred Moore, interesting, that takes us back to—Dean Linkins had to visit Cardinal Court, not because of me, but some of the other fellows that were living there. One of the other things I recall are assemblies that we had to attend on Wednesdays, you had a choice of two different periods and you had to be there and name—roll call was taken, and missing assemblies could get you removed from the university at that time, and trying to remember what the assemblies were about. Vague and trying to remember, but I think it had to do with telling us where we were located and why we were here and that—expectations of us while we were here. Joyce, I'm turning this back to you for your thoughts.

Joyce Wittmuss Tartar 15:17

Tom, I too remember the barracks as they were to—housing English classes and there were several of them set up there to the south side of Fell Hall and Fell Hall, of course, accommodated our Cage, which many of us spent a lot of time with. I think this then, is, in closing, myself, Joyce Tarter, Tom Wilson, John Lowey, and Roger Weller and Tom Krones of the Illinois State University Class of 1959 as a part of the Homecoming experience for 1979.