
INTERVIEW WITH RONALD BEER, CLASS OF 1958

Barbara Pedersen 00:00

Welcome to Illinois State University. This is Barbara Pedersen and I'm a member of the Student Alumni Council and I'm talking with Mr. Ronald Beer of the Class of '58 at ISU at Homecoming activities on October 29, 1983. During this bit of oral history we will be reminiscing about the way it was in 1958. We hope that those who listen to this tape will enjoy hearing from the persons who have volunteered to record this bit of ISU history and will find it interesting and informative. First, Mr. Beer, as you think back 25 years, what are some things that are foremost in your memory of what life was like then at Illinois State University?

Ronald Beer 00:41

Well, Barb, let me first express appreciation for your taking time to participate in this moment of history. I have just returned for the first time in a number of years. I come from Oklahoma now and I'm finding the experience to be very delightful. I think there's a flood of memories that goes through my mind, as you might imagine, when one comes back after being gone that long. Illinois State Normal University as it was known when I first started here, and it was during my four years that the word Normal was dropped from that and that was rather traumatic, because they were changing the name of our institution. So there are a lot of different thoughts that go through my mind but I guess those things that are of most importance to students at the time, I very distinctly remember women's curfews. I'm sure that that's very foreign to those of you who are here at the moment, but ladies had to be in the halls by, I think, it might have been 10 or 10:30 at night and you would see a mad rush for the door and all the kissing and hugging that occurred before everybody had to go in. And for the women, during those years one had to have permission to leave the campus to go home on the weekend. Parents had a permission slip with the residence hall director and I understand now that that would be very foreign to those on the campus. Old Main, which was the original building on the campus was still standing, its steps very worn from a hundred years of use, but it had, it had a lot of character, old, wooden, musty, dark, dingy halls with tall 15-, 20-foot ceilings. At that time, they had a little old bookstore in the basement and every semester one would go downstairs and tell them what classes you were in, they gave you a book. And course you had to return it at the end of the semester. Freddie Marberry, who was just an outstanding person as well as an incredible basketball player, quickly comes back to my mind. What was then known as The Cage, which was kind of the social hangout, was in a little screened-in porch behind Fell Hall. And during my sophomore year they built for the first time a Student Union and they have subsequently abandoned that now for this magnificent facility in which we find ourselves seated today. But The Cage brings back a lot of fond memories. The ISU/ Wesleyan football games, where students would attempt to sneak down into the stadium the night before and burn a big W in the middle of our field and we took it upon ourselves to guard that such that that wouldn't happen, and they did the same on the alternate years of course. The Blackfriars, which apparently is no longer in existence, but it was an organization of men who put on shows and creative talent kind of thing. It

was the forerunner of fraternities, I guess one could say. So those are very quickly some of the types of memories. We were small. I think when I came there were about 3000 students on the campus and it was kind of like a family. You just knew pretty much everybody.

Barbara Pedersen 04:20

What do you remember about President Bone?

Ronald Beer 04:23

A marvelous, marvelous man. Very distinguished-looking gentleman. Very kind, I think, very sensitive to the concerns and interest of students. A very scholarly man, I think has made enormous contributions during his reign of the presidency. He saw the institution begin its fantastic growth period. I think probably, well, it was about 3000 when I came in and President Bone was appointed president toward the end of my sophomore year. And of course the following year, the junior year, 1957, was the hundredth anniversary celebration, the centennial of ISU. And it was within a very short period of time that the institution doubled, 6000, within just a few years, and obviously it's gone much beyond that. But I think it would be inappropriate to refer to President Bone and not his wife, Karin, who is a marvelous First Lady. And those two people hold a lot of fondness in our memories for the people there and I would submit to you that most students probably knew them. He was a very outgoing man, very open. Just an extraordinary person.

Barbara Pedersen 05:55

Who are some of the professors and university administrative officials that you remember for special reasons?

Ronald Beer 06:02

Well, I guess there are two, three people that come to my mind in addition to Dr. Bone. Well, perhaps more than that now that I reflect on it. Very quickly, Dr. Emma Knudson, director of the Department of Music in which I was a major, a lady who retired my senior year. One of the most marvelous women I've ever known. She was a taskmaster, demanded a great deal of the students, but again, a very warm, caring person, which really, I think, reflected Illinois State and I trust does today. I'm not sure because I've not been here in some time. But certainly Emma Knudson, Doc Peithman, Harlan Peithman, who is the director of the Men's Glee Club, taught theory of music and down in the basement of Cook Hall, many, many hours sitting down there pounding a piano. But I think the fondest memories for him come to me from the Men's Glee Club, and we toured the state on a number of occasions as a Glee Club. A real taskmaster, but I think he brought the best out in most people. Richard Hulet, Dr. Richard Hulet, who is the—originally dean of students and then became Vice President for Student Services, perhaps, because he really put me into the business I'm in today, had a tremendous impact and influence on my life. Very fondly remember a man affectionately known as "Pinky" Linkins who was the dean of men who preceded Hulet and a fairly small man in physical stature with a bit of a shuffle. But "Pinky" Linkins was known for his voice and I—he just was a marvelous, marvelous gentleman. Anna Keaton who is the dean of women. Isabelle Terrill, who is the director of Fell Hall and her assistant comes to mind. Didn't always understand the regulations they required of us, couldn't understand why they got so upset when the boys tried to have panty raids and all those good

kinds of thing. But, you know, in retrospect, we can now look back and understand, but I think those are the individuals that were most influential to me.

Barbara Pedersen 08:33

Students today talk about how difficult it is to complete their education. How do you compare how it was during your years here to the way it seems to be today?

Ronald Beer 08:45

Well, I think perhaps about the same, and I've done a lot of reflection. I, I've always been in higher education. I left here and went to Michigan State for a master's and most of my Ph.D. work and from there I went to Kent State where I completed my degree. I've been in administrative—university administration since then at three major institutions. And, oh, some things have changed. But I think the need to work, the monetary concerns, how we were going to find money to pay for tuition the next semester, we didn't have federal aid. There weren't such things as Pell Grants and guaranteed student loans and all of those kinds of things. There were some scholarships. But I think that the difficulty about what you ask was perhaps similar. You're—because of technology today I think you folks are confronted with a lot more information. You're a lot more mobile than we were. You didn't find nearly the numbers of vehicles on the campus that you do today. But we worked, we took jobs. I think that the standards were probably similar. Maybe we did a little bit more writing, it seems like we always had term papers that were due and I'm not sure that that's so applicable, maybe it is depending on your field of study. But I suspect it's probably pretty same at a different level. You know, things tend to be rather cyclical in nature. But I would guess it's about the same.

Barbara Pedersen 10:19

What kind of extracurricular activities were important to you and other students?

Ronald Beer 10:24

Well, I suspect they vary. Do we—we just completed our luncheon for the 25th year class and a lot of people talked about the Big Four and we sponsored four big dances and I don't know whether these names will even be meaning to you, but Louis Armstrong and Count Basie and Ralph Marterie. Names like that were really big, nationally known bands and they were huge in number, maybe 50 members and those kinds of things. So we had a lot of dances, the Cotillion and the Sweetheart Ball, and it seems to me that we were always going to a resonant unit or the old McCormick Gym. We'd decorate that and have these huge dances and when the Union was built they had a ballroom, we just thought we were at the top of the world. We spent some time going out to Lake Bloomington at night for some parties, you know, and I suspect that that still happens. Operettas and musicals at the theater, athletic events were always big things. Homecoming was always a highlight because we participated in making floats like you do today and house decorations. Although I haven't seen many house decorations. Do fraternities and sororities...?

Barbara Pedersen 11:41

I think some of them do that, but not a lot of them.

Ronald Beer 11:44

But all the halls well, there weren't very many, Dunn-Barton and Fell and some of these, we all had these big wire mesh crepe paper deals. And that was a big, that was a big thing. And then the Glee Club, the Men's Glee Club and the choir were big. What I would call extracurricular kind of thing, maybe co-curricular kinds of things. The other one that I would I want—not want—to fail to mention was the singing of the Messiah. Handel's Messiah, big event, maybe three, four hundred people, students predominantly. It was sung each Easter and that was always a magnificent experience.

Barbara Pedersen 12:27

What were prices then for hamburgers, movies, gasoline, and tuition?

Ronald Beer 12:32

Oh goodness, you really challenged my memory bank on that one, but I, you know, I, gasoline was probably 35 cents a gallon and movies maybe a quarter, fifty cents. Hamburgers were certainly not more than 15, 20, 25 cents. But you must remember even though that sounds like a very small amount the wages that one would draw—now you've got \$3.35 minimum per hour and we probably worked maybe for 65 cents an hour. So it was a different, a different system at that time. But yeah, it seems, seems a lot different now.

Barbara Pedersen 13:20

What was the typical mode of dress in the 1950s for class, church, dates?

Ronald Beer 13:25

Well, they, girl—the ladies would wear long skirts down probably to the middle of the calf or ankle and the white bobby socks and the saddle shoes were big things. Jeans were not nearly so popular. Some of the kids from the farming community would wear blue jeans, but you wouldn't see very many as I recollect in those days. Slacks, kind of dress shirts, was the expected wear. Any dance was a white shirt, tie, coat, many times tux. Considerably different, considerably, suits were worn on a number of occasions for special events, teas and receptions and that kind of stuff, not nearly what you would see on today's campus.

Barbara Pedersen 14:18

What was the most important national event that happened in those years?

Ronald Beer 14:24

Well, that's, that would have been 1954-'58. Frankly, on a national scene probably pretty uneventful. Had completed the, what, Korean War, had not gotten into Vietnam. Eisenhower was probably president, fairly stable, had just completed—there still certainly strong memories of the war. But I don't recollect any national calamity or any event that really comes to mind.

Barbara Pedersen 15:04

What were the most popular forms of entertainment on campus?

Ronald Beer 15:09

I think I alluded to that earlier. The big dances, just a lot of dances with the big band sound. And we had several bands formed by students, Sammy Licocci had his own band and a guy by the name of Al Pizzamiglio who started the swing band and was very, very popular, had a very beautiful, attractive singer that he later married, who was a student, but I would guess the entertainment was basically dances, some movies, and athletic events.

Barbara Pedersen 15:52

What do you remember about the towns of Bloomington and Normal?

Ronald Beer 15:57

Normal was a very small sleepy dry town. And I say that because it was—you couldn't buy, you could not buy liquor or beer in the city of Normal. Of course it's always been contiguous or adjacent to Bloomington. I think those of us like myself who came from really small farm communities, 800 to, or, yeah, 800 to a thousand people, perhaps it appeared to be larger when you thought about Bloomington, and that was kind of the big city. If you wanted a really nice dinner on a special occasion you might take a date down to the Green Mill, which was a nice eating place. If you wanted to go dancing to a nightclub, you usually went to Bloomington. There was some little nightspots out along Old Route 66 where we would go. But fond memories of Normal in it—in those days, and it was just a small sleep town comprised mostly of faculty and employees at the university, some city folks. But dramatically changed, obviously, since that time to what it is today.

Barbara Pedersen 17:17

What about the use of tobacco and alcoholic beverages?

Ronald Beer 17:22

Didn't see many people use tobacco. Alcohol, perhaps more in terms of beer, at parties on weekends, but I think not with the frequency that one sees it today. I—and I say that because my own experience in university community, I think I've retained fairly close contact and I'm able to observe—and it seems to me that in the last 15 years, maybe, that the popularity of beer drinking has increased rather dramatically. Never heard of use of drugs, just never. Marijuana and any of the rest were foreign to us and not many users of tobacco as I recall.

Barbara Pedersen 18:15

What do you like most about ISU?

Ronald Beer 18:19

I think the—it was the attit—the atmosphere of a big family. Warm, friendly people, faculty and staff, students who participated in a lot of things together. It was—and I tried to separate out to, the, not to put this in terms of nostalgia, but I really worked hard at that, reflecting back there, and I think it was, it was really truly one of the most fun period times in my life. We just had a lot of good times. And so I think that the big family, knew-most-everyone kind of environment was really very attractive to me. The least, at that time, I think was probably much like today the resistance to or the negative feelings about restrictions. Thinking that, you know, "I'm a 17, 18-year-old now and I'm an adult and I'm going away to college or university," and we really knew all the answers. You know, like one attempts to do. It's a very

natural process, one begins to separate the umbilical cord, if you will, from mother and father. You begin to want to create some independence and show that I can make some decisions and I don't find that unlike today. They're different circumstances, but we complained about girls having to be in early and what you could and couldn't do. In the residence hall, we sat down around a family table and were served our meals and, you know, subsequently that changed to a cafeteria line, and I'm not sure what it is now, you probably eat when you want to or where you want to. I don't know. But I, you know, I think it was a reaction, a resistance to some of the things that you thought ought not to have to be.

Barbara Pedersen 20:33

What were the campus boundaries then?

Ronald Beer 20:37

They were small. I don't think I can remember the streets so much, but Dunn-Barton Hall were—along with Fairchild Hall, whatever that road is that's to the west...

Barbara Pedersen 20:51

I'm not sure about that either.

Ronald Beer 20:52

Yeah, that was the most western part of the campus except for the farms and we always thought the farm was you know, really, some distance. All of maybe half a dozen blocks. And then the street that ran to the north side of Old Main and now the Union in which we're seated is on the north side of that. And goodness knows how many buildings are along this, all those big high rises to the east. That was all a part of Normal, the Normal residential community. So it was really a fairly small campus, compact, pleasant, but certainly nothing like it is today.

Barbara Pedersen 21:34

In summary, are there any other special memories that you have, which we have not already covered?

Ronald Beer 21:42

Well, I don't know without going into, you know, a lot of particular personal kinds of things. Enormous friendships that continue to exist today, and have through the years, I think is perhaps as meaningful as anything, with memories of faculty and staff, and contact with men and women that one met for the first time during their attendance at the university. And I guess I'm very grateful for what the institution did to me, or for me, and the opportunities that it provided. I'd probably still be a farmhand or posthole digger or whatever had it not been for all of those good things. So I remember a lot of neat people and a lot of neat experiences about the institution, but perhaps we've covered those fairly well.

Barbara Pedersen 22:47

Well, thank you very much.

Ronald Beer 22:49

Thank you.