
INTERVIEW WITH LEE STABENOW, CLASS OF 1937

[Side A of tape]

Diane Amend 00:00

Thank you. This is Diane Amend and I'm talking with Lee Stabenow of the Class of 1937 at ISU at Homecoming activities on October 9, 1982. During this bit of oral history, we'll—we will be reminiscing about the way it was in 1937. We hope that those of you who are listening to this tape will enjoy hearing from the people who have volunteered to record this bit of it history and will find it interesting and informative. First, Mr. Stabenow...

Lee Stabenow 00:30

Yes.

Diane Amend 00:31

As you think back 45 years, what are some of the things that are foremost in your memory of what life was like back then at Illinois State University?

Lee Stabenow 00:40

Well, first of all, we were in the midst of a deep depression, and money was nearly non-existent, and many of the students did their own cooking; in fact, I did the first year, and my total expenditure—I happened to have a scholarship so I didn't have to pay tuition. And my total expenditure, eating hominy and various things, was about \$120 for two semesters, no, it was three terms at that time, which was very, very reasonable. And, we seemed to have a good time. And, in our house there were, oh I think about fifteen fellows, and all of us did cooking.

Diane Amend 01:27

Was it a fraternity?

Lee Stabenow 01:28

No. Just a house. It was down here on Mulberry Street. The house has disappeared and other things are there now, but that was the big thing. And I can remember that if we wanted to go uptown—that is, to Bloomington, we would walk rather than ride the bus. Because I think it cost only a dime or fifteen cents but that was a scarce commodity.

Diane Amend 01:56

What do you remember about President Fairchild?

Lee Stabenow 01:59

I remember him as a big man. Physically. Have you ever seen him? He must have been six four or five or six. He was just... I kind of liked him. I though he was a very fine man. And I used to live with Pop Horton who was well, I think, one of the buildings was named after—

Diane Amend 02:25

Horton Field House.

Lee Stabenow 02:26

Yes, Horton Field House. And with Pop and his wife Garnet so I lived across the street from President Fairchild and occasionally when Dr. Fairchild was driving home and I was walking he'd invite me to ride along. So I got to know him quite well. But I thought he was very good and I thought he was interested in improving ISNU at that time.

Diane Amend 02:55

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

Lee Stabenow 03:01

Well, I remember Kenyon Fletcher. He was the director of the band and the head of the print shop. And I played in the band and marching band and the concert orchestra and the concert band and the like and I knew him extremely well. In addition he and his wife and family lived next door to where I lived with Pop Horton so I—

Diane Amend 03:29

Everyone lived on the same street?

Lee Stabenow 03:30

Oh yeah, there was many, many faculty people up there. In fact, in talking today with Dr. Francis Brown, he lives across the street now from where I used to live as a student. 601 Normal Avenue and we lived at 606 so he was just close. I also jotted another name down here I thought a lot of Blaine Boicourt. She was in the music department and she was director of the glee club. And I sang in the glee club for three years. Another person that I enjoyed very much was F. Lincoln D. Holmes. He was one of the people in the speech and I used to debate for him. I was on the debating team. So I was very active in college.

Diane Amend 03:34

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

Lee Stabenow 04:42

Well, of course, I have a little more money now than I had then so it doesn't seem as difficult. And I think that you can earn money a little easier. I don't know about here on the campus. There were very few jobs at that time and possibly that's true today. I don't know your employment situation. But I would think that you could get government loans. I understand they are available.

Diane Amend 05:08

They're cutting back.

Lee Stabenow 05:09

Yes, well, some of the students didn't pay. And so that was a problem. But I would think it's no more difficult today. I'm sure that everyone feels their time that they're in college is the most difficult. Their study the hardest and all of these things which we thought. But actually I think that you have so many more things available. When we were here we never had a nice building like we're sitting in here this what do you call it the Dr. Bone Student Center?

Diane Amend 05:40

Bone Student Center.

Lee Stabenow 05:40

Uh-huh. And, incidentally this is the first I've been back to the campus in 45 years.

Diane Amend 05:46

You're kidding!

Lee Stabenow 05:47

No.

Diane Amend 05:48

My gosh, it has to be a total shock to you.

Lee Stabenow 05:50

Yes, it is. Old Main no longer exists and I haven't had an opportunity to go to all the buildings but I can see it has changed tremendously since we were here. And I would assume for the better. You have so many more facilities. I even notice you got a video center down here. And when we were in school, drinking was prohibited; smoking was what shall I say tolerated. And you could get kicked out of school for taking a drink of beer. So, today I understand it's available.

Diane Amend 06:32

Yeah. It's pretty strict on this campus compared to other campuses.

Lee Stabenow 06:36

Oh, yeah.

Diane Amend 06:39

I mean it doesn't stop anything cause it just doesn't but as far as there are no college bars where if you're under 21 you can get into whereas most of the other college towns have, you know, just small town bars where the kids go to. They don't have that here at ISU.

Lee Stabenow 06:57

Now, where do you go?

Diane Amend 06:59

Well, the people would go to fraternity parties and things like that.

Lee Stabenow 07:05

Well, that brings up a point. We had no fraternities at that time. I did belong to Blackfriars which was a... and I saw the Blackfriar organization in the parade today and I assume it's the same one which was for people who were interested in the theater and music. And we would put on original plays written by the fellas and directed by the fellas and the men played ladies' or women's parts as well as the men's parts. We went down to Charleston and put the show on and we went to one of the other state campuses of the teachers'. So, it was a lot of fun. I was going to also say that actually from the standpoint of entertainment, on Saturday nights in the old Capen Auditorium they had a free movie for all students.

Diane Amend 08:06

They're not free anymore.

Lee Stabenow 08:08

Aren't they?

Diane Amend 08:09

\$1.25.

Lee Stabenow 08:10

Really? I noticed the parking was \$1.25.

Diane Amend 08:13

Yeah.

Lee Stabenow 08:14

So we used to go—that was the big Saturday night thing. It was free. And then you would go over to—I believe it was [Melton's?]? You heard them talk this noon. Yeah. Well, it was about as big... I don't think there were over about 10 stools and hamburgers a nickel, coffee a nickel, milk a nickel. And a couple of those hamburgers, why would make up your lunch. So, things have changed from that standpoint.

Diane Amend 08:51

Well, you told us that you were involved in the musical department. Was there anything else extracurricular activities that were important to you and to other students at that time?

Lee Stabenow 09:01

Oh, yes, I think that I was in the Science Club. Of course I mentioned debating. I should have my copy of the '37 Index. I had about that many things listed under my name. So I was in a lot of things and I'll tell you this: I did I would say, above average, there would be a difference of opinion if the professors were still here. No, I did all right in grades. But out in the actual world of living my extracurricular experiences—and I enjoyed every one of them—helped me meet people better than the class work. Or as well. Now I got the information there, but you know how to meet people which is very, very important. I would recommend that kids have to get into at least one or two extracurricular activities.

Diane Amend 10:08

I agree. I was very active in high school. So far in college I'm in, you know, I'm in, a couple activities and clubs or organizations. But there's just so much studying it just doesn't seem like there's time. But you really need to make time for those extra activities.

Lee Stabenow 10:25

Oh, no question. I had a meeting every night, five nights a week, the only time that was played is on Sunday. And then are saying the Glee Club and we used to go to and sing to the various churches on Sunday. So that was one of the things that we did. But I am a believer in extracurricular activities. And I think the students, the kids themselves have to make it a point to go out and try for them, and not feel discouraged. If you don't make one the first time or the second time. We used to have—I don't know where they got those [plaques?]-of the active students. I've forgotten what they call it I might even see it in the Index a picture of it. and they had I think we had about 2,000 students, 1800, so you can see it was very small, possibly even knew people better. Depends how active you were and they would take about eight or ten out of the students body and put them on there as honor participants in extracurricular activities and I will tell you I made that all four years—each year. And I've been that busy outside, too.

Diane Amend 12:01

What services were available on campus then to students, such as health services, counseling, placement service, and so forth?

Lee Stabenow 12:08

Well, there was health service of a kind. Of course, at that age, you don't need too much health service normally. And there was placement for positions which were rather difficult although I did go out and taught in Kewanee High School. So there was no problem. That could be your tape.

Diane Amend 12:34

I think it is.

Lee Stabenow 12:35

It's in...

Diane Amend 12:39

Okay. Well, you mentioned earlier about the place where you went for hamburgers?

Lee Stabenow 12:48

Oh, [Melton's?].

Diane Amend 12:49

[Melton's?]. Well, you said that hamburgers were five cents? How about the movies, gasoline, and tuition?

Lee Stabenow 12:56

Well, gasoline would run anywhere from fifteen to sixteen cents a gallon. Sometimes with a gas war, twelve cents. And I think then that eighteen cents would be terribly high. Comparable to a dollar today.

And, the movies, I'm sure were a quarter. If you went in the afternoon, fifteen cents. Meals, you could get a dinner for fifty cents, sixty cents.

Diane Amend 13:28

Oh my gosh.

Lee Stabenow 13:30

Nearly impossible to believe. Of course, your income per hour was much less, too.

Diane Amend 13:38

What was the typical type of dress back in 1937?

Lee Stabenow 13:43

Well, I really feel that it was better than I see today on occasion. Of course, not at ISU here but other campuses I've seen that. And, mainly we wore suit, tie, shirt or if you didn't wear a coat you wore a sweater but you'd have a tie—

Diane Amend 14:08

To class?

Lee Stabenow 14:08

Oh, certainly. I've never seen anyone—I think they might not have been accepted if they wore jeans at that time. So you—

Diane Amend 14:18

99% of the people wear jeans here.

Lee Stabenow 14:20

I know, I've seen a lot of it. But I kind of think that's no good. It sets a certain—what should I say—decorum for the students and I think they may be a little more serious. Not that we don't have serious students today. But the—and the same was true with church. Many went, and I think more people went than didn't go. Cause there wasn't a lot to do and really that was kind of a form a social activity, too. I'm not casting aspersions on going to church. But I went a lot because of the Glee Club and we—I discovered for the first time, as we would sit behind the minister, so many of the ministers read their sermons and I never realized that.

Diane Amend 14:20

You're kidding.

Lee Stabenow 15:17

No! Or they follow right along, and since then when I go I can see them, I know what to look for. That isn't true of all ministers or all priests or all rabbis and I've gone to all three.

Diane Amend 15:38

What was the most important national event that happened in 1937?

Lee Stabenow 15:42

Well, I suppose the steps to improve the economic standards and the one thing that stood out at that time, it was thought that Landon would defeat President Roosevelt and I think he only won two states and McLean County. That was the joke at the time. He was overwhelmingly defeated and President Roosevelt was reelected. And also the students were kind of active on both sides of the aisle and they would have little political meetings and have meetings at Capen Auditorium and various things. In fact, I was surprised today in the parade to see the candidates and that didn't happen. Incidentally, I marched in every parade 37 years ago. So we—I'll tell you an interesting thing, it was interesting to me. I was the business manager and a young man by the name of Cunningham was the president of the band. Lloyd Cunningham, in Danville, Illinois, over here. I'm from Freeport, which is the northern part of the state. And for the first year, I think this is my sophomore year, we marched last in the parade, and at that time, they had more horses than they have now.

Diane Amend 17:15

Oh, no!

Lee Stabenow 17:16

And we wrote a letter of protest that we didn't feel that we should have to flock to the street and clean up after all those horses and we felt the ISU Redbird Band should be —should lead the parade. And by gosh, I noticed that they did today.

Diane Amend 17:34

They did today!

Lee Stabenow 17:34

Did they last year?

Diane Amend 17:35

Yeah, they did last year.

Lee Stabenow 17:36

Yeah? Well, we were kind of sore about that and I think it was—It wasn't planned that way, it just happened. I'm amazed at the size of the parade.

Diane Amend 17:48

That's what I was just going to say. You were in the band itself. How many people were in it?

Lee Stabenow 17:52

Oh, I would guess 40, 50 and we had some very good musicians and I was never a music major, I just played because I enjoyed it. And I played since, like in Shriners Band or something, just silly [inaudible] to have a good time. But we had some very talented music majors. And they played—I couldn't tell the difference between their band playing and a dance band—in an auditorium assembly. Free. And they sounded as good to me as [Jan Driver?] or Ted Weems or any of them.

Diane Amend 18:39

What is the most popular form of entertainment on campus in 1937?

Lee Stabenow 18:44

Well, I suppose just playing grid in the Student Lounge, that was in the basement of Old Main and—or any kind of card that you wish and another thing that we would do is go out and play golf or play tennis and—or go on dates, any time that we could go up to... [inaudible], just go—I mean, you know dates. And most of that would be a school activity cause you couldn't afford anything else. Very few of the kids had cars. And today just in driving around here I noticed there are a lot of parking lots so many must have. I think it's better to not have a car and just devote your time to the extracurricular activities and just...

Diane Amend 19:39

[Inaudible]

Lee Stabenow 19:40

Right! Well, that brings up another point. A lot of kids would come on Mondays, go home Fridays and they really missed out. I think a big part of the college life is the social life.

Diane Amend 19:57

[Inaudible]

Lee Stabenow 19:58

Oh, sure! And I always felt they missed out, they would go out just to wander or whatever. Proximity would determine where they would go. Mine being Freeport. I normally would come back Christmas and I would go on the Glee Club tour between quarters or semesters, and I wouldn't get home then 'til August because I was in summer school and I would go home Thanksgiving, those were the only two times of the year, but I think we get a lot out of that and I feel the kids can, you know, really participate.

Diane Amend 20:38

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

Lee Stabenow 20:41

Well, I'll tell you, Normal was probably one of the smallest towns I'd ever seen. And—but it was a nice, friendly little town. And in two minutes, you could nearly walk the length of Normal. I'm exaggerating a little but there wasn't much to it. Not many stores. Bloomington of course was much bigger and has the county seat. We'd go up there, you know, if you needed a pair of shoes. I remember buying Brown & Tan, they still make them, I believe. I think they were \$2.95. I bought a Palm Beach white suit, double-breasted coat with white trousers, and it was usually that that cost \$12.95. And this is at one of the better stores out in Bloomington. There was a shark thing that you could get two for four, I would go into Chicago. And—forgetting the name of the—Carol's, I believe, I don't know whether they have, are they still there? And you could buy a suit like for ten...

Diane Amend 21:49

That sounds like a lot of money, it seems to me.

Lee Stabenow 21:51

Oh certainly, certainly. I suppose more difficult than the hundred today, likely. That—I kind of liked Bloomington when I was up there, I thought it was a very nice town, it was big because I had been.... well, I guess, well, my town was smaller... and so this seemed like, you know, [inaudible] town, I used to lived in Chicago so I had seen bigger towns.

Diane Amend 22:20

What did you like most about attending university?

Lee Stabenow 22:24

Well, I thought it was very democratic. It didn't make any difference whether you were, what should I say, whether you had any money or didn't. And actually your ability on grades and to participate determined more than whether you'd grown up on a farm or in the city or what you could do. I hope that's still true, I assume it is, but sometimes, you know, with the fraternities and sororities, at least at other schools, where I am familiar—my—I have two children, by the way, and they were—I have a son and a daughter—and they were preparing the in-sorority people. So I know some of the problems that exist, and selecting, et cetera. But I thought it was very, very democratic and you could get as good a grade as you were able to write a test and talk. I never thought there was any favoritism whether you played well. You saw Don Adams and Glenn Jacobs who were our star basketball players, two of them. They had to work as much as I, we played in the band or [inaudible] in the fall. And [Harry?] for the—he played his father in the [inaudible] in the fall. It was just what you did and I think that's the way it should be. I'll tell you this one, when I played for the orchestra—I always thought this was interesting—you played behind the screen, and you had a number and that's how they determined whether you, what chair you played and the like. They didn't know who it was unless they could recognize your...

Diane Amend 24:20

Shadow?

Lee Stabenow 24:21

Yeah, well, no, your finesse.

Diane Amend 24:26

What were the campus boundaries then?

Lee Stabenow 24:28

Well, I'll tell you Main Street and whatever the one was that went over here by the bookstore at that time, I've forgotten the name of the street but it's wherever, it's just over here at the [inaudible]. Yeah, and that was it and then down by—to the railroad track. And this is about this here, there is nothing over where the Fieldhouse and the football field—that was the University Farm at that time and the Ag students, I assume they still have an Ag Department?

Diane Amend 25:03

Oh, definitely. [Inaudible] What were the buildings—well, what buildings were here and for what were the purposes were they used?

Lee Stabenow 25:11

Well, Old Main was a general purpose...

Diane Amend 25:16

Yeah, like in [inaudible]?

Lee Stabenow 25:17

No, no, no. You had classes there. That was the first building with the tower on the campus design, I understand. I can't verify that, I don't remember quite back to '57... and we had a Science Building, we had the library, and then there was this Cooks—Cook Hall, is that still here?

Diane Amend 25:43

Yes.

Lee Stabenow 25:43

Okay, and there was Fell Hall, the girls' dormitory, and then there was a—I forget the name of the Home Ec building—and the gym there and the [inaudible] fieldhouse and the football field used to be down there, now maybe that's Phys Ed now, I don't know.

Diane Amend 26:03

Well, all the Physical Education's [inaudible]...

Lee Stabenow 26:05

Oh, out there? So you have to walk over there.

Diane Amend 26:08

Yeah, there's also dorms out there too.

Lee Stabenow 26:11

Oh, are there? For the athletes or for everyone?

Diane Amend 26:14

For—a lot of athletes are there for the convenience [purposes probably?].

Lee Stabenow 26:18

Well, Fell Hall and Smith Hall, the last two years that I was here—I don't know if the [Smith Hall's still standing?], and that was the boys' dormitory whereas Fell Hall was for the girls, the women.

Diane Amend 26:34

Now Fell Hall is for guys.

Lee Stabenow 26:36

Oh, is that right? Now, do you—I noticed some of these high rises, I assume those are dormitories? Now did the boys and girls live in the same dormitories?

Diane Amend 26:48

There's, well, Watterson Tower is the largest dorm on campus, those have co-ed floors and, you know, housing, and also so does Manchester, it has a co-ed floor. But most of them are either, you know, strictly women's buildings or men's, yeah.

Lee Stabenow 27:14

Incidentally, is Dr. Watterson still on the campus, do you know?

Diane Amend 27:18

I'm not sure... you know, I was talking to someone today who said something about an [inaudible]...

Lee Stabenow 27:25

[Inaudible] Well, it could be. He and I were in the same class, '37.

Lee Stabenow 27:31

Yes. We took a lot of classes and courses, in fact an interesting anecdote, we were going to go through Europe together in the summer of 1938 and we had another young man and the three of us saved our money teaching, what there was to save, and when Dr. Watterson had his physical they discovered he had a heart condition so we cancelled it, along came the war and we never did go. But we were very, very close, study for tests together once in a while, he was a good student in a way and very popular, so I can see why it was named after him.

Diane Amend 27:32

Really?

Diane Amend 28:21

What was the most humorous event that happened while you were here?

Lee Stabenow 28:25

I'll tell you, I was thinking about that and someone set our clock again when I was going to summer school and I started like 6:30 or 7 o'clock to beat the heat. It gets warmer here than it used to for school here in the summer now. I doubt it. But anyway, they set it one hour ahead and so I set my alarm—they set my alarm again and I get up, go down Normal Avenue, I don't see a lot of people but I think, well, maybe I'm the only one that has got a class in this area and I get down and I happen to glance up at the Old Main had a clock in the tower, maybe the tower is still preserved, I don't know. But anyway, I see that it's then only about 5 o'clock. I'd gotten up, I'd set it early because I wanted to come down... So I just enjoyed the beautiful morning and heard the birds chirping and...

Diane Amend 28:25

What was the least humorous?

Lee Stabenow 29:41

Well, I suppose after you get your degree and you say goodbye to your friends of four years or many of your friends you don't have time to say goodbye and you know that most likely you won't see them too often, if again...

Diane Amend 29:58

Or 45 years later!

Lee Stabenow 29:59

Yeah! And I saw these people for the first time, with an exception or two, in 45 years today. I was surprised. And I'll tell you another thing that's interested me today. Dr. Richard Browne, not Francis. He looked the best, he looks just like he looked 45 years ago except that he has a few little age marks.

Diane Amend 30:33

Smile lines, we call them.

Lee Stabenow 30:35

Yes, and he was a tremendous [inaudible]. I just thought the he was the greatest in the choir. But I think that's the saddest thing. I haven't seen my roommate in 45 years and I was hoping he'd be here. In fact, I was hoping some of the others would be here but since I was one of the class officers I thought, Well, I better get back, and I drove for eight hours or a little more yesterday in coming over [inaudible].

Diane Amend 31:11

Great. Well, in summary, is there anything else that we might have missed? Any special memories that we have not already covered?

Lee Stabenow 31:19

Well, I can't think of any in particular... I'm interested in hearing you say that they still have gym classes. I never felt that at that age I needed gym classes. Now, I could take a little physical education now but... So I'll tell you what I did and I thought this was kind of interesting. I took all of my...

[Side B of tape]

Lee Stabenow 31:46

...thing as far as I'm concerned here was when I got all my gym courses finished in one summer term. I took, I took tennis, I took golf, and I took another course, I don't know what it was, I believe it was tumbling.

Diane Amend 32:04

All in one summer?

Diane Amend 32:10

Yes, and that's all it took. To me it was—see, our gym was clear down there, and you'd only have five minutes to get up to this end, in the wintertime you had to shower and they rarely let you out too early for it and I assume [inaudible] that same problem.

Diane Amend 32:26

Yeah, [inaudible] so far [inaudible].

Lee Stabenow 32:30

So then we would come rushing in to class and I decided that I just...

Diane Amend 32:37

Play it smart and get it over with in one summer.

Lee Stabenow 32:40

But I'd recommend that anyone come to Illinois State, I thought it—I got a good education. I think you get what you want to get out of it.

Diane Amend 32:50

Exactly.

Lee Stabenow 32:55

Neither one of my children, you know, they—I was transferred a lot during my career and my son went to join Georgia Tech. He went to the University of Georgia, got a degree there, and incidentally was Phi Beta Kappa—he takes after my wife—and then he went to Washington University Medical School. And our daughter went there, to Georgia, and she went to Georgia State in the summer to pick up some extra courses. She was a professional student, got her master's, I encouraged her to before she went to work because it's hard to come back. Rarely do you [learn?]. And she got within two semesters of a doctorate, a Ph.D. And so she's happily married and now she's working with three grandchildren, getting them fired... So I've just been well-pleased. I never regretted coming down here. I met fine people, I was very successful financially, and I think that was because of my extracurricular activities, the nice people I met, and you saw we had had a nice group there today. They're inspired to do well, so if you came back, you know, to an alumni meeting you wouldn't want to be the low man on the totem pole. So I enjoyed it very much and I'm just impressed with you and the other students that I've met. I'm sure you are doing better than we and I look forward to seeing great things.

Diane Amend 33:50

Well, thank you very much and good luck.