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Interview with Eileen King, Class of 1953

Eileen King

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INTERVIEW WITH EILEEN KING, CLASS OF 1953

Edna Siebert 00:00

...Edna Siebert, I'm a member of the Student Alumni Council and I'm talking with Eileen King of the Class in 1953 at ISU at Homecoming activities on October 29, 1983. During this bit of oral history, we'll be reminiscing about the way it was in 1953. 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, Eileen, as you think back on your years at—in 1953, what are some of the things that are foremost in your memory of what life was like then at Illinois State University?

Eileen King 00:37

Fun.

Edna Siebert 00:39

Fun?

Eileen King 00:39

And a lot of camaraderie, there was, there were only about 1700 students on campus at the time. And you knew almost everybody and it was a small campus, found at just the square and the only thing that was across the street was the Special Ed Building.

Edna Siebert 01:02

Fairchild Hall. Okay, what do you remember about your president?

Eileen King 01:08

Oh, Dr. Fairchild, he was a nice gentleman, the old man, he was like a grandfather. He like to walk around campus and talk to the students. He was very outgoing and interested in just conversing with the student population.

Edna Siebert 01:29

Okay, what are what are some of your professors and university and administrative officials that you remember?

Eileen King 01:37

Oh, Don... Dr. Horton. Oh, a nice little man. He was in the PE department and I was a PE major. So most of these people are from that area. A Dr. Han—, or, Mr. Hancock, the Athletic Director.

Edna Siebert 01:55

They named all the stadiums after them, yeah.

Eileen King 01:57

Yes, and rightly so. Dr. Frey, Bernice Frey.

Edna Siebert 02:05

What do you remember most about these people?

Eileen King 02:09

They really, really wanted you to succeed. And they really worked hard. In fact, Dr. French, who was the head of the Women's PE Department, practically banged her head against the wall several times over some of us students, but she wanted us to be successful and truly so. Mr. Wade, who was in the Social Science Department, I worked with him on a committee to design the first Student Union which was on the drawing board when I graduated. And he was he was a nice man, I think. Most of your professors, there were some eccentric ones and some that were just, you know, the true epitome of the college professor. Lucile Tasher, who was in the Social Science Department, used to organize the Homecoming parade and I can remember her as in a frenzy just running around in this little sidecar on a motorcycle, getting the parade organized.

Edna Siebert 03:12

It sounds like today. You mentioned you were a PE major. Did you go on to teach PE or...?

Eileen King 03:18

Yes, I did. I taught a whole two years before I got married.

Edna Siebert 03:23

And then no more PE after that?

Eileen King 03:25

Well, I've been substituting off and on ever since.

Edna Siebert 03:28

Where are you from?

Eileen King 03:29

Buffalo Grove.

Edna Siebert 03:29

Buffalo Grove? And that's where you taught?

Eileen King 03:32

No, I taught in Lake Zurich.

Edna Siebert 03:33

Oh, okay. Students talk today about how difficult it is to complete their education. How would you compare it to what it was like during those years for you?

Eileen King 03:46

Most of us finished in four years, I don't think any—I can't remember anybody going past four years. Some dropped out for a while and came back, but—and I had one friend who finished in three. Today, having had a daughter that graduated in '82 from here, she had to go to a summer school in order to finish. I think the courses have, I think they've raised their standards a little bit on what you have to do. And it just seems like it's a little tougher. There's more to learn, and it's a little harder to learn it. Requirements are a little stiffer.

Edna Siebert 04:32

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

Eileen King 04:36

Oh, well, of course in the Athletic Department all of the intramurals and extramurals, football games, basketball games, and I was a cheerleader and I was involved in all that. Circus is outstanding in my memory, because I was part of that for four years. The Blackfriars was a men's organization, we didn't have fraternities and sororities then so we had clubs and organizations. We had honorary fraternities and Gamma Phi was one, which was circus, and Blackfriars was another, and that was a men's organization and they were just a lot of talented guys that would—their culmination was a spring show, talent show, and performance and it was—it was a riot. And then we had our Big Four dances, we'd have big bands come in four times a year. And our—I think the campus favorite was Dick Jurgens and they were marvelous, marvelous and they were always held in McCormick Gymnasium. Everything was always held on campus.

Edna Siebert 05:47

Did you find you had a lot of time for extracurricular activities? Or was it—

Eileen King 05:50

If you wanted to do it badly enough, you made time. And then I was also in the Drama Department and I was in several plays.

Edna Siebert 05:59

Did you get any minor or anything in the drama area?

Eileen King 06:01

Yeah, Speech and Drama was my minor.

Edna Siebert 06:04

What plays were you in?

Eileen King 06:05

I was in *The Curious Savage* and *Liliom* which is the original play that *Carousel* was taken from.

Edna Siebert 06:18

What were the prices for, like, hamburgers, and movies, and gasoline, and tuition?

Eileen King 06:22

Oh, you wouldn't believe. Hamburgers were about 15 cents and gasoline if I remember right was about 20 cents a gallon. It cost us a quarter to get into Capen to see the movie and I think it was about 50 cents at the downtown theaters. Tuition was \$40 a semester.

Edna Siebert 06:47

Oh my god. I wish it were still that much.

Eileen King 06:54

But about 60% of the students on campus had some kind of a scholarship. I don't know where the money came from to run the school. The state pumped it in, I guess.

Edna Siebert 07:03

You mentioned the price of gas. Did you have a car down here, or did many people?

Eileen King 07:05

No, really freshmen weren't allowed to have cars. And cars were—if you were a junior, senior, you might have a car. I did get a car when I was a junior only because my father decided he was tired of driving back and forth to pick me up and I needed it for student teaching.

Edna Siebert 07:30

What was downtown Normal like? I'm just curious.

Eileen King 07:33

Oh, it was noth—there was not, there was no downtown Normal.

Edna Siebert 07:35

No downtown?

Eileen King 07:35

There was the theater, the show, and a couple of shops and that's it. If you wanted to do shopping you hopped the bus and in went into Bloomington around the square.

Edna Siebert 07:47

The square?

Eileen King 07:48

The square.

Edna Siebert 07:48

Oh, okay.

Eileen King 07:51

Where the courthouse is. And it was—that was Bloomington at the time. That was the shopping. That was the only place to shop.

Edna Siebert 08:00

I see. Okay, what was the dress like, what kind of outfits did you wear like for class or were they different for dates or for church or whatever?

Eileen King 08:08

Oh yes, definitely. For running around campus it was blue jeans, bulky sweaters, and jackets.

Edna Siebert 08:16

Were the blue jeans rolled up like we, you know, do it?

Eileen King 08:18

Yes, like you see with the saddle shoes and the white bobby socks. And you wore skirts and sweaters with the bobby socks and the saddle shoes.

Edna Siebert 08:27

And this is to class.

Eileen King 08:28

Yes.

Edna Siebert 08:29

What about if you—like for a date or something?

Eileen King 08:30

Oh, for a date you got a little more dressed up. You wore—you might have put knee socks on with your saddle shoes, or you might put your ballerina slippers on with some stockings to go on a date.

Edna Siebert 08:44

What about church or something?

Eileen King 08:46

Church was dressed up, yes. And if it was a good date, a big date, then you put your heels on and a good dress. Like Big Four dances were always dressy affairs.

Edna Siebert 08:58

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

Eileen King 09:03

I can remember when I was a freshman William Lewis decided that coal miners would go on strike and they did in February, or were they—I guess they went on strike in January, but we had to close school down for three weeks, because our coal ran out.

Edna Siebert 09:20

Oh, oh, okay.

Eileen King 09:23

And what coal supply was here for the generators and a power plant that—a lot of it was taken to some other institutions like the prisons and the hospitals and to run—keep those people are warm and comfortable. So we were sent home for three weeks and then when we came back we had to readjust our class schedules because we had to make up the time.

Edna Siebert 09:47

The three weeks?

Eileen King 09:48

And I remember having Art Appreciation at 7 o'clock in the morning.

Edna Siebert 09:53

Oh, you guys didn't go extra then, you just squeezed it all into what the time—

Eileen King 09:56

No, we squeezed it all into it—into a week rather than into a semester. We made up time by minutes rather than days.

Edna Siebert 10:04

Oh man. I mean, that would be nice now—

Eileen King 10:07

And then of course the Korean War was in full swing.

Edna Siebert 10:12

What's that—were there are a lot of university students being sent over there?

Eileen King 10:16

No, they didn't get here until after they have served their time. Most of the students that were here were either—would finish college and go for officers training or they were already finished with their service time and were in here on the GI Bill.

Edna Siebert 10:36

I see. Okay, what were the most popular forms of entertainment on campus?

Eileen King 10:42

The Big Four dances.

Edna Siebert 10:43

The dances, yeah.

Eileen King 10:44

And the movies at Capen and the coffee shops.

Edna Siebert 10:49

Coffee shops?

Eileen King 10:50

The Pilgrim and The Cage in the last few years. The Cage was an addition that they added to Fell Hall, the back of Fell Hall, and that was The Cage at that time.

Edna Siebert 11:02

Those are, like, the most popular places? I mean, the in spots?

Eileen King 11:06

Yeah, those were the gathering places, and The Pilgrim was just in back of the Administration Building across the street on the corner.

Edna Siebert 11:14

Were these, like, was The Pilgrim like a hamburger joint or something?

Eileen King 11:17

Yeah.

Edna Siebert 11:17

I guess I watched too much TV or something. I picture the little spinning stools and...

Eileen King 11:21

Yeah, they had stools and they had booths and they had tables.

Edna Siebert 11:23

Do they have, like, outside where you beep the car and they bring the food out?

Eileen King 11:27

No, no, well, they had those. And oh, the Steak 'n Shake was here too.

Edna Siebert 11:30

Oh, one of my favorite places.

Eileen King 11:32

It always was mine too.

Edna Siebert 11:34

You still go there, huh? For reminiscing purposes?

Eileen King 11:38

Yeah, yeah.

Edna Siebert 11:40

Okay, what do you remember about the towns of Bloomington and Normal?

Eileen King 11:45

Normal was dry and Bloomington was wet. And Normal was a very quiet—you really didn't see many Normal people, "Normalites" I should say, "Normalites." The town was basically overrun by students. And then Bloomington was like going into a separate world, it was—it had Wesleyan down there but we didn't pay attention to them unless we had to play them in football or basketball.

Edna Siebert 12:18

School rivalry?

Eileen King 12:19

Oh, that was the rivalry. Yes.

Edna Siebert 12:21

They were the biggest?

Eileen King 12:22

They were the biggest.

Edna Siebert 12:23

What was, like—

Eileen King 12:24

It wasn't it wasn't that they were the biggest school or it was the most important game in a conference or to round out your season. It was just that they were down the street and it was just the closeness that created this rivalry. And it was—at one time you could see their campus from Old Main.

Edna Siebert 12:49

Oh.

Eileen King 12:51

And it was just the closeness and "funness". I guess "funness" is a good word.

Edna Siebert 12:57

It's a nice word. What was, like, our biggest sport back then or something? What were we doing the best at? Or were we pretty good all-around?

Eileen King 13:06

When I was a freshman we did really well in football because we went to a Thanksgiving tournament at that time, and it was an invitation-type thing. Basketball we were pretty good at. Wrestling we were good at. Baseball was good. We had a real good athletic program.

Edna Siebert 13:31

What was the school spirit like?

Eileen King 13:32

Fantastic.

Edna Siebert 13:33

Really, a lot of people would go?

Eileen King 13:34

The stands were always filled. The band was fantastic, as it is today. The loyalty of the students was unbelievable.

Edna Siebert 13:47

Did you have a mascot or something back then too, a Reggie the Redbird or something?

Eileen King 13:50

Not in costume, no.

Edna Siebert 13:51

No? Was it—it was called the Redbird?

Edna Siebert 13:54

So still all through Illinois State history. Okay, let me know—you said alcohol was not in...

Eileen King 13:54

Oh, yeah.

Eileen King 14:01

You couldn't buy it in Normal, but you could get it in Bloomington. It's the same as today. If you want it, you can get it.

Edna Siebert 14:08

So Bloomington clear—I mean, Normal cleared out on a Friday and Saturday night?

Eileen King 14:11

You weren't allowed to have it in your housing. I said you weren't allowed to have it in your housing.

Edna Siebert 14:17

But it was still there?

Eileen King 14:20

We had—once you were out of Fell Hall, which was just a residence for females.

Edna Siebert 14:28

Oh, really?

Eileen King 14:28

Freshmen. You had—or Fell Hall—you had to find your own housing, which was in private homes.

Edna Siebert 14:36

Oh, could you tell me a little about that, I mean...?

Eileen King 14:39

There was an—in the dean's office, in Dean Keaton's office, there was a listing and then these people who opened their homes to students had to follow certain guidelines and rules, you had to have a desk and a lamp and certain furniture in your room. And you have, had to have, either you had to furnish the eating facilities, or your—the rent was such that that you, it allowed you to buy meal ticket at the cafeteria. So most of the homes did furnish some kind of kitchen facilities.

Edna Siebert 15:11

For you was it just like it, was like a free environment? Like you're part of the family or something?

Eileen King 15:15

No, you had hours.

Edna Siebert 15:17

Oh really?

Eileen King 15:17

Oh yes. It was very strict. We had to be, on weeknights It was 10:30. And on weekends I think it was 1 o'clock.

Edna Siebert 15:27

Okay, what about tobacco—oh, sorry.

Eileen King 15:28

And your house mother was sitting there waiting to lock the door.

Edna Siebert 15:32

This this wasn't like—you just moved in with the family, or did I understand wrong, or it was it a big building full of—?

Eileen King 15:36

No, it was a home. It was a home. And then usually the upstairs—these big old homes that you see around here were converted into housing for students with three and four bedrooms upstairs, maybe one or two and, on the main level.

Edna Siebert 15:51

Okay, so it was all—

Eileen King 15:52

It would be for like widows who turn their homes over to students. And then in some cases, the kitchen was up there with the bedrooms. They had converted something into a kitchen. In one house I lived in the kitchen was in the basement.

Edna Siebert

Oh, and how many years did you do that?

Eileen King 16:08

Three.

Edna Siebert 16:09

The last three years?

Eileen King 16:10

The last three years. There was no housing on campus for upperclasswomen. Smith Hall was available to the men, but it was just, it was just a house, it was—and I think there were only about 20 men in there.

Eileen King 16:11

Okay, what about tobacco use on campus?

Eileen King 16:17

Oh, it was prevalent. It was interesting. I have to tell you this because at that time the big push was on for smoking. And their—all companies would come around with their little free packages of four cigarettes and then, since I can remember, a company got—came out with a brand called Cavalier, which I think was a predecessor of Winston, I'm not sure, but they would pass out all of these free samples and anybody and everybody took them. If you didn't smoke you gave them to a friend. And then it wasn't too much later that the commercials on television would say, "So-and-so 80% of the college students on campus smoke Cavalier cigarettes." Well, sure they did, they were free! Which was, you know, a nice advertising campaign.

Edna Siebert 17:23

What did you like most about ISU?

Eileen King 17:25

Oh, it was small. And we graduated two hundred and—a little over 270—students in my senior year and there were about 1700 on campus at the time. It was small. You knew almost everybody. You could talk to them as you walk from class to class. Everybody enjoyed themselves here. If you didn't, you didn't last long.

Edna Siebert 17:55

You were into education, was education a big thing for this school then?

Eileen King 17:59

That was it. It was a teaching—teacher training college at the time. You didn't—a lot, there were some students that didn't go into teaching. They went into other fields, was several from ours went into the military and stayed there. I know one that became a doctor. Several became lawyers. They decided after they graduated to go on to other things. But it was a good—it was the teaching institution.

Edna Siebert 18:25

What did you like least about this place?

Eileen King 18:31

Really there, there really isn't much at the time to not like. It was—for me it was a busy and a happy time and there were a lot of students I think that weren't involved in the school life that find—found—it dull and an unhappy place but that was their problem.

Edna Siebert 19:06

We already talked about what the boundaries of campus were.

Eileen King 19:08

Yeah, it was just the square.

Edna Siebert 19:11

Any other memories that you'd just like to share while we got the tape rolling here?

Eileen King 19:15

One. When I was a freshman and first came down here, the top, the dome part of Old Main and the top floor, had been removed from Old Main, and the dome was sitting down by the tennis courts, which was next to Milner Library. And it was just sitting there and no sign, no nothing on it. And I didn't know, it was months before I found out what it was. I thought it was some kind of a concession stand. I can still see that it looked like a German helmet with this peak, a round down with the spike on the top. And I thought—I walked I don't know how many times around that thing trying to find the doorway, and there wasn't one there. Now that's a freshmen for you.

Edna Siebert 20:01

I don't know, I wanted to... oh, if you had any advice? I mean, as you're looking back on these years, is there anything that you would do differently? If you could do it all over again?

Eileen King 20:12

Oh, I'd get into more things.

Edna Siebert 20:14

More things?

Eileen King 20:14

More things. I had one professor didn't like that but—

Edna Siebert 20:18

Thought studying was the only thing?

Eileen King 20:20

Yes, he thought studying was the only thing you were there for.

Edna Siebert 20:23

One—I got another question. What about if you had, like, not a philosophy but something to tell students that are here now. Something to tell them, you know, since you've been through college, and if they were listening to this tape, a bit of advice or anything like that you'd like to give?

Eileen King 20:39

Enjoy.

Edna Siebert 20:41

I'm sure you wanted to tell too many—

Eileen King 20:43

Enjoy and try not to put everything off to the last minute, but it happens.

Edna Siebert 20:52

Well, thanks a lot for talking to us. We really appreciate this and people are going to enjoy listening to you and hearing about what it was like in 1953.

Edna Siebert 20:59

Oh, I loved it.