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Mrs. Regina Borum interview (2) conducted on May 16, 1984 about the Boonshoft School of Medicine at Wright State University

Regina Borum

James St. Peter

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**Wright State University
School of Medicine Oral History Project**

Interview date: 5/16/1984

Interviewer: James St. Peter

Interviewee: Regina Borum

James St. Peter: My name is James St. Peter and this is the second in a series of interviews with Mrs. Regina Borum, former administrative assistant to Dean John Beljan of the Wright State University School of Medicine. The date is May 16th, 1984, the time is ten o'clock A.M. and we are in room 102 of the University Television center. Mrs. Borum can you tell me a little about, you said you were the liaison person for Dr. Beljan in the outside community. How did you interact with the press in the area? Was that part of your responsibility?

Regina Borum: Not primarily, we had someone in charge of communications at that time. Dave Buzzard. However, I, my responsibility was to always make sure that the press was so to speak taken care of. That if there was going to be information from the School of Medicine to the outside community that I had to make sure that the information that was given to the press was accurate. If we were in a stage of controversy, then it was my responsibility to again make sure the information was correct and that we maintain excellent relations with the print media especially. We rarely had press conferences that were set up by me alone; we always worked through the university in order to make those things happen.

JSP: What did you mean by "taking care of the press"?

Borum: We, we all know that if the press is your friend that most of the times they will write favorably about you. What I mean by taking care of the press, if the press was coming to see John Beljan, who was historically late, that, uh, if it was going to be around the noontime that we would provide lunch for them. If it was going to be in the morning that we had the coffee, etc. That there was always someone and usually that someone was me because they knew me, was there at the door to meet them, to give them any pre-information that they might have a need for, in addition to the press releases that we always gave them. They always had a need to have just a little inside, what they called 'off the record' information. Of course we both know that nothing was ever off the record, so it was my responsibility to feed into them that kind of information.

JSP: You mentioned also something about "stage of controversy". Were there periods where the press relations were more stormy than others?

Borum: There were periods of time that in our early development that people thought we were going too fast, that they would question how we got so much money from the VA grant. They

were not stormy and not controversial, yet we needed to make sure that the information that we printed was correct so that we could maintain a good image in the external community and that nothing was said that would offend those hospitals and hospital administrators that we also had to stroke all the time.

JSP: What were some of those original problem areas that you had to smooth the waters for?

Borum: Right now Jim I can't pull any of them out of my memory, so perhaps we'll have to come back to that.

JSP: Was there ever a question of the correctness of the appropriations for the School of Medicine?

Borum: Not that I was aware of.

JSP: In your dealings with the local politicians were, was the fact that you were a black woman ever an asset to your dealings with the local politicians in the area? Did that create more of an 'in' with them for you?

Borum: No, not that I'm aware of. My blackness was something that wasn't in my opinion an asset or a liability. It was just there.

JSP: In dealing with people like CJ McClin, was he enthusiastic about the project from the very beginning?

Borum: Absolutely. Has always, was, a staunch supporter of the School of Medicine and at Wright State University and still is a supporter.

JSP: Why you think he got involved with that?

Borum: I don't know. But I think that maybe it was um, a lot of people were involved in the need for a school of medicine in this area very early on. I can recall when I was working at Good Samaritan Hospital back in the late sixties that that hospital was involved in 'was it feasible to have a school of medicine located and affiliated with Wright State University. I think CJ is politically astute and felt that it was in the best interest of the total area to have a school of medicine located here, which is the reason he became involved.

JSP: Did you have any dealings with Clara Weisenborn?

Borum: Only on a social level.

JSP: What was she like? What *is* she like, I should say.

Borum: What *is* she like...Aggressive, assertive, a supporter. Always seems to be interested in what is good for the whole, and by that I mean the whole community. I always enjoyed Clara Weisenborn, and still do, but I didn't have any one on one dealings with her.

JSP: What Tom Frees?

Borum: No, I did not.

JSP: Um, Paul Leonard?

Borum: Socially again, uh, Paul was one of those persons that rarely attended functions. When he did, um, we would interact socially but he was not one of those ones who would come into the office for a meeting, or we had to set up a time when we could go to that office for a meeting.

JSP: Who were some of those individuals?

Borum: CJ McClin, primarily. Uh, Clara Weisenborn was another one that Dr. Beljan met with quite frequently. He and the president had most of their legislative dealings together, President Kegerreis.

JSP: Were there any times when the dealings with the press or the politicians in the local area ever interfere with the business? Did you ever have any conflicts where you had to deal with the press simultaneously with an LCME visit or something like that?

Borum: Oh, sure, yeah. And that, that happened all the time. Uh, the LCME visit was primary. You know, we had to make sure that all of ducks were in a row, all of the time. Prior to the visit and during the time that the, uh, evaluators were here, and simultaneously we might have to, *I* might have had to deal with the press or some other School of Medicine crisis at that time and you just did it because it had to be done. But when the LCME team was in Dayton, and making their survey, they were our absolute top priority.

JSP: There were a few instances, like uh for instance the, the Sedan chair incident when the press discovered that, wrote it up in the paper that you had a Sedan chair that you paid five thousand dollars for, with your appropriations. Do you remember that one?

Borum: I remember the article.

JSP: What kind of—?

Borum: But I don't remember our reaction to it. And right now I don't even remember the chair that was involved. And I guess I don't remember because I wasn't involved directly with the purchase of it. So it's a little sketchy in my memory.

JSP: Were there ever occasions where Dr. Beljan had to be insulated from the press a little bit?

Borum: Yes. Um, I can't cite a particular incidence for you but there were times when the press would call Dr. Beljan when clearly they should've been calling the, President Kegerreis, and we had to protect Dr. Beljan from the press so that he would not be quoted, that all information was coming from the institutional head, rather than from the Dean from a particular school or college.

JSP: How did you do that?

Borum: “He’s unavailable. Is there something I may do to help you? Dr. Kegerreis is in his office, have you tried that number?”

JSP: What was the feedback that you would get from the press on those kind of occasions? Did they ever consider you the watchdog of the Dean’s office?

Borum: I’m sure that they did, but no one ever said that to me, personally, and I never had any bad dealings with the press. Uh, I’m sure that I was viewed as Dr. Beljan’s protector and a guard at the gate, which that was my function. But I had good dealings and good relations with the press and they’re still friendly.

JSP: Did you have any direct dealings with the medical societies? The county medical societies, Montgomery County, Greene County.

Borum: Montgomery county Medical Society, uh, early on we wanted to take our school of medicine faculty meetings into the community and I would deal with the executive officer of that particular, uh, Montgomery county, medical society, to set up meetings, to, uh, solicit information about the most powerful positions in town and who they might be at a particular discipline, how we may, might best work with that position and that position’s clique, so to speak.

JSP: Were there several defined physician’s cliques in Dayton? Were all the radiologists together and all the cardiologists together? And if so, how did you overcome that?

Borum: They were not all together and they would tell you privately which physician that they deemed unqualified to be practicing in a particular discipline. And would share that with you so that when renewal time came for their contract or um—I’m going to cough (does so)—for clinical appointment, that we knew who those physicians were and how they were felt, how their peers felt about them. And, um, depending on the information that we found out independently, those physicians were or were not reappointed to the voluntary clinical faculty.

JSP: Were those lack of reappointments very common?

Borum: No.

JSP: Was there a high turnover in those faculty?

Borum: No, no. I think it’s because the Dayton and area and those physicians who wanted to be affiliated with the school of medicine were qualified physicians. There were some that chose not to be affiliated with us and that was their choice. But there was a very, very low turnover as far as non-reappointment.

JSP: What about the other medical schools in the area? Did you see much interaction between those-

Borum: No.

JSP: —medical schools and yours?

Borum: No. There were phone calls between a faculty person and ours or Dr. Beljan and one of the Dean's there, but no close contact, at least not on my part. And I was not setting up any meetings so that Doctor could take part in those.

JSP: When Wright's school was being set up, there was a, um, actual consortium set up between Central State and Miami University and Wright State.

Borum: Mhmm.

JSP: That had a high peak for some time and that's kind of dropped off. Why is the reason for that?

Borum: We peaked during the early developmental years. And there was representation from the schools that you just mentioned. And the committee was called the Joint Coordinating Committee. Um, we had monthly meetings during the early developmental times. After the School of Medicine graduated its first class and a new Dean of Medicine was put in place, perhaps there was not a need for the high degree of coordination and cooperation from those institutions as it was earlier. That committee was always chaired by John Beljan and had representatives from the schools that you mentioned as well as the Veteran's administration center.

JSP: Did you ever have as in depth relationship, institutional relationship, with Wright Patterson Air Force Base as you did with the VA?

Borum: No. Not early on. Uh, as we became more mature then we saw a need for involving Wright Patterson Air Force Base and became involved at that time. And when I say not early on I'm talking about the first two or three years in the development stage of the School of Medicine.

JSP: When the School of Medicine was first becoming organized as an institution, why did you have such a hard time keeping a development director?

Borum: Beats me. I can't even remember who we had—we only had one. And his name was George Vangelo [sp?]. There was someone that we tried to hire from Pepperdine, and I cannot remember his name now—Harris somehow comes to mind. And he chose after I think four or six months of promising us that he was coming right after the first of the year he chose not to come. So it wasn't that we couldn't keep one, we just didn't have any (laughs).

JSP: What about uh, Mrs. Young? Mrs. Joyce Young. Were you on board when she came on?

Borum: Mhmm. Yes I was.

JSP: Who was she? What was her responsibilities?

Borum: She was to help raise money for the School of Medicine.

JSP: Why did you need a separate person for that? Why did the school need a separate person for fundraising? Weren't they operating through the University's fundraising apparatus?

Borum: Yes they were, but because of the uniqueness of the School of Medicine, and some of our needs that were not met by, or could not be met by the general University fund, Dr. Kegerreis and Dr. Beljan decided that a person, it would be advantageous for a person to devote much of their efforts to the School of Medicine and in the future other medical components. Joyce left, as I recall, to take another position with the metropolitan insurance company.

JSP: Who took over after she left?

Borum: Someone by the name of Gavin Pitt. Gavin is still with the university and his primary function is the School of Medicine and Professional Psychology.

JSP: So, that position is still intact?

Borum: Yes, yes.

JSP: What I'd like to do for the remainder of the interview is to ask you to, uh, respond to a series of names.

Borum: Okay.

JSP: Just give me your impressions of the individuals and what you thought of their role in the development process. We'll start with an easy one: Dr. Suriano.

Borum: Bob Suriano, um, came to Wright State from Toledo and was very instrumental in screening students for that first class. Worked very, very hard and still does with the admissions committee and the admissions process and that whole conglomerate having to do with student affairs. Bob Suriano was low key, in awe of John Beljan, chose to stay out of his way as much as possible. But did one heck of a good job and is still with the School of Medicine.

JSP: Dr. Anthony Zapalla.

Borum: (Laughs) The most volatile and emotional faculty person that I've ever come in contact with. And he was emotional about every issue. Came to the School of Medicine, ah, with John Beljan from California. And for a very short amount of time he was an Associate Dean for Curricular Affairs. That was even, that even preceded my coming to the School of Medicine. I remember Dr. Beljan needed someone to head up the Anatomy Department and so Tony Zapalla was the Chairman of Anatomy. Tony didn't get on well with many faculty persons just because

of his emotional make up, but did a good job the time that he was here. And was very knowledgeable in his area and gave the necessary respect to the Department of Anatomy. One thing I recall about Tony was he gave me a tour through the Anatomy department and I thought “Oh, I’m going to dread this, I’m not going to like going down there with the cadavers and I don’t want to see anything dissected” because I’d never done it before. He took me down, he showed me the morgue and he made me have an appreciation for the body and indicated that the way he teaches anatomy is the way a person or an architect builds a house. And he will tell a student that you start with the foundation, the feet, and he moves all the way up to the head and shoulder. And he did that with me, as a lay person. And I really had a better appreciation and understanding of what he was doing. He was a different person when he was in the morgue and in the laboratory than he was when he was doing administrative things.

JSP: How was he like during those administrative things?

Borum: Emotional, volatile. Um, very high-strung. Um—

JSP: So in other words he was more calm and collected when he was in the lab?

Borum: Right. Very calm, very collected, very, very in control. Which is where he probably felt the most comfortable.

JSP: Dr. Samuel Kolmen.

Borum: What can I say about Sam. Sam was another one of those persons I’ll call a pioneer. Sam could go into John Beljan’s office and tell him exactly what he thought, be it right or wrong. He was not afraid of John Beljan, as some of the other faculty persons were. Did an excellent job for the Department of Physiology. Uh, was the person who spearheaded the writing of the, uh, constitution and by-laws. Was policy-oriented, knew how to have policies and procedures written, and when John Beljan needed a person to do those kinds of detailed things, he would always call on Sam Coleman.

JSP: Dr. Manny Cowder.

Borum: I didn’t know Manny very well because Manny was at Children’s Medical Centers, so he was good, but I can’t speak to a lot of in depth things about Manny.

JSP: Dr. Robert Jewett.

Borum: Bob Jewett came to us from Emory. Bob Jewett is the one that Dr. Beljan had take minutes at the executive committee meeting. Bob Jewett was a paper pusher, had the respect of the faculty, but I’m not quite sure that he ever gained the administrative respect of John Beljan.

JSP: Why was that?

Borum: He was a paper pusher. He was not able to make hard decisions. He couldn’t make a tough decision and stick with it. He would sit on the fence and do a lot of talking, talk an issue to

death. Became very stressed during, when they're were issues of controversy. And it may not be anything big but he was, uh, that was his makeup.

JSP: Donald Hagerty.

Borum: Don Hagerty was I think MPR—

JSP: For University Director of Communications?

Borum: Right. Nothing, no.

JSP: Ray Palmer.

Borum: Ray Palmer was an old nanny (laughs). Librarian, source of information. Loved to gossip. Set up one of the finest health sciences libraries that anyone ever could because he had to work out of the library downtown, he had to work out of an unfinished laboratory, and finally when his library was ready he made it one of the finest ones that I've ever been in. Very, very qualified.

JSP: Dr. Sam Sabba. [sp?]

Borum: Who?

JSP: Sam Sabba.

Borum: I don't know him.

JSP: Ok. Frederick A. White.

Borum: The granddaddy of the university supportive of the School of Medicine. Um, he was retiring when I came to the university (clears throat). So I don't know his interactions with John Beljan but he was always supportive of anything that had to with Wright State University.

Peter: George Vangelo. [sp?]

JSP: I can't tell you anything positive about George Vangelo. Um, George was brought on as a development director who in my opinion was totally unqualified for that position and was not able to function, at all, and left.

JSP: Gavin Pitt.

Borum: I have not worked closely enough with Gavin Pitt to offer an opinion.

JSP: Dr. Andrew Spiegel.

Borum: I only knew Andy Spiegel from afar, who reminded me of a little Hitler. He was tough. John Beljan respected him because he was tough. Uh, but I didn't have a lot of interaction with Andy.

JSP: How would you describe Dr. Beljan's interactions with Dr. Spiegel?

Borum: As far as I know, they were ok. Again, I think John Beljan respected Spiegel because he was tough, or at least gave the appearance of being so.

JSP: Dr. Robert Stuhlman.

Borum: Bob Stuhlman was just always in his lab. You know, he was always doing something with his dogs. Set up a good laboratory for the animals, and that's about it.

JSP: Dr. David Buzzard.

Borum: Dave Buzzard was and is a wordsmith. Dave came to the School of Medicine after doing a freelance job and he was able to put together brochures and pamphlets and information that made the School of Medicine look on paper as good as it really was. John Beljan had a great deal of respect for the written word, and the way that Dave was able to capture his thoughts and put them down on paper. Dave was a hard worker, and interacted well with the School of Medicine faculty and chairmen.

JSP: Dr. Rodin?

Borum: He was just there and he sorta...As I recall, when he started he was in charge of, I can't pull the department out now. Jennings is in charge of it now. Pathology. But chose to move from the department of Pathology to Continuing Education, and seemed qualified in both areas and we would have liked for him to stay in the Department of Pathology. But he was there and did a good job and is doing a good job.

JSP: Dr. Lindower?

Borum: Dr. Lindower came from Columbus and put a curriculum package together like no one else could. And was able to satisfy a lot of chairmen, and a lot of faculty members, because everyone wanted more time than there is to teach in a particular semester. But he put a curriculum package together and he did it with the kind of finesse that kept everyone satisfied. Uh, Dr. Lindower is a very religious man, and carries that into controversial kinds of things when people want a larger piece of the pie than they are, than they really should have.

JSP: What do you mean by that?

Borum: Every department chairman felt they needed more student hour contact than they could get in a particular semester and he was able to tell them "This is all the time that you can be allotted; perhaps you will have to structure your teaching materials in such a way that you can cover the necessary information. You have this much time and these are the parameters in which

you will have to work.” And again he did it in such a way that they were able to accept it. Not right off the bat of course, but he didn’t make anybody angry. And that was a plus.

JSP: A diplomat in other words?

Borum: Absolutely.

JSP: Dr. Edward Spanier.

Borum: The backbone of the School of Medicine. Ed Spaniard is the most ethical man that I’ve ever known. He has financial wizardry that is uncommon. He was able to deal with John Beljan, and let him know there are certain things you can and cannot do as far as finances are concerned. Uh, most of the faculty went to Ed Spaniard before they went to John Beljan, because Ed Spaniard can get you from A to Z in a logical fashion and point out thing that perhaps you haven’t even thought of before. He has, and had at time an open door policy so he was constantly interrupted, people just walked in and out. But Ed Spaniard probably solved more problems for John Beljan than John Beljan will ever recognize that he did.

JSP: Why do you think that?

Borum: Why was he able to solve the problems, or why did faculty go to him—?

JSP: Why was he able to solve the problems?

Borum: Because of his logical thinking pattern and because he had his finger on the pulse of every department and every internal issue within the School of Medicine. He was like a sponge; he could absorb information and people gave it to him. So if a person came into his office with a problem, because five other persons that fed information into him he was able to give this person insight, a way, a different way of thinking about a solution. So that many times when this person left the office they had reached the solution, they didn’t have to bother John Beljan, and John Beljan, again, I don’t think he will ever recognize how many problems Ed solved for him.

JSP: Dr. Robert Kegerreis.

Borum: Dr. Kegerreis and Dr. Beljan, in the early years, worked very closely and very harmoniously together. They had a common goal and that was to see the best school of medicine developed in the shortest amount of time. Bob Kegerreis was very supportive of John Beljan and the School of Medicine, and counseled Dr. Beljan a lot. Dr. Beljan had a weekly meeting with Dr. Kegerreis which would last from an hour to two hours and the agenda items may go from only three or four to a list of twenty things that need to be talked about. Um they kept these appointments almost religiously early on because there was such information that they needed to share. Um, Bob Kegerreis is a very smooth leader. And because of his leadership and his political savvy, I think the School of Medicine in addition to John’s, John Beljan’s forcefulness, and his manner in which he led the School of Medicine, those two gentlemen should get an award for bringing the school along in such a short amount of time.

JSP: Why do you differentiate between the early years and later years in the relationship between Dr. Beljan and Dr. Kegerreis?

Borum: Later years would mean after John Beljan left the School of Medicine and I can't speak to their relationship after that time.

JSP: Dr. John Beljan.

Borum: John Beljan was one of the most dynamic and one of the most brilliant men that I've ever come in contact with. He had a mind like a steel trap. He could remember minute details. He was able to lead in such a way that you would follow him off the edge of the cliff because you trusted his leadership. He made everyone have one goal, and that goal was to develop the best school of medicine that one could, and had everybody on his team. Everybody didn't always agree with his manner, didn't always agree with his style, but we all agreed we wanted a good school of medicine and we would do whatever it took to make that happen. John Beljan is politically astute, charismatic. He would lead many times by crisis management. By that I mean he would have this department chairman feel—have a crisis, and this one have a crisis, and that one have a crisis. And that's what I mean when I say John Beljan led by crisis management. But because every department or every person was having their own separate crisis, it did not mean that they lost sight of the goal, which was to develop the School of Medicine.

JSP: In other words, he tried to impose a feeling upon the chairs that they had to do, had to go all out, all the time.

Borum: Absolutely.

JSP: Why was that important to his style?

Borum: Because he went out, all out, all the time. He didn't demand anymore of anyone else than he demanded of himself. But he demanded just unreal things of himself.

JSP: Did you ever get the feeling that he was going up, just, too far ahead of the program? Did he ever have to be reined in by his associates?

Borum: No. No, I never got the feeling he was going too far, too fast. And perhaps that's because I was running alongside of him, so (laughs).

JSP: If you were asked to describe the role of Regina Borum to the School of Medicine's development, how would you do that?

Borum: I, I think that I was an integral part of the development. A small part, but an integral part, because I worked closely with John Beljan, and being, again, the guard at the gate, after persons began to trust me, and that didn't take a lot of time, they began to share information with me that I was able, much like Ed, to give them insight into other things that I knew that would help them in their department or in their dealing with Dr. Beljan. The part that I played, I think is important, if you have a man like John Beljan who is doing a thousand different things at one

time. You need a person like me to add that continuity to the office, who's going to be there to make sure that you can pick all of the pieces from all the different areas he's working it, mold it together in some shape, and keep things afloat for him.

JSP: Kind of the anchor.

Borum: Yeah, yeah that's right. You know I, you're right, I was the stability. I was just, always there (laughs).

JSP: Well thank you very much, I appreciate your candor in answering some tough questions.

Borum: Sure.

JSP: Ah, it's been a delightful series of interviews.

Borum: I appreciate your time.

JSP: It's an excellent perspective, and I appreciate you taking time out of your extremely busy schedule to talk to me.

Borum: (laughs) Glad to do it.

JSP: Thank you.