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UA68/8/2 Gertrude Bale Oral History

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CAROL CROWE: It is September 7, 1977. We are at Miss Gertrude Bale's apartment, 1225 College Street, Bowling Green, Kentucky, and my name is Carol Crowe, and I represent the Oral History Project. Miss Bale, could you tell me about when you first came to Western, what year and why you came here?

GERTRUDE BALE: Well, I came in 1949, and I came for the simple reason that a job opened up down here, and I had just got my master's degree from Northwestern University, and this was exactly the kind of job that I wanted. Dr. Gunderson was head of the music department then, and he had seen me at the University of Iowa way back in 1939. So, he got my application, then he called me and offered me the job and I came.

CC: Had you ever heard of Western Kentucky University before?

GB: No, I never had. I had never been in Kentucky before; this was my first time.

CC: Is Iowa home?

GB: Iowa's my home state.

CC: And Morningside is...

GB: Morningside College is the college that I - Morningside in Sioux City - is where I got my bachelor of music degree.

CC: I read a little bit about you, and it said B. S. Music, Morningside College, and I didn't know where it was - Sioux City. When you came to Western, who was the head of the department?

GB: You mean of the music department?

CC: Yes.

GB: Dr. Hugh Gunderson.

CC: Were people like - I have a list of names - like John Vinson already gone then?

GB: He was gone.

CC: And Roy Harris?

GB: Well, Mr. and Mrs. Roy Harris were a team, were here the first year that I was at Western. They were here and taught. She taught piano. That was the year that - I don't know whether you've heard anything about the Dagwood situation or not - Mr. Dagwood was head of the piano department, and he was implicated in a murder that had happened in Bowling Green the spring before I came. Had you heard about that?

CC: No, I don't know anything about that.

GB: You hadn't heard about that? Well, there was a lot of talk and Dagwood, of course, had to quit teaching, and Mrs. Harris came and taught piano for us. They were in Nashville at that time, and so they came up maybe two days a week or something like that.

CC: Oh, I see. Did Mr. Harris teach as well?

GB: Yes, he taught some courses to those who wanted to take advanced composition. He worked with those who wanted to do composition.

CC: Did he become a rather famous composer or is he considered famous?

GB: I think he's considered fairly famous. I haven't heard too much about him lately, but I believe his works are played by some of the bigger orchestras.

CC: What about Weldon Hart?

GB: He was gone before I came.

CC: And Hugh Johnson?

GB: Well, Hugh Johnson was here; I did meet him. And he played - 'course he was in the math department - and he played violin in the orchestra for a time, and he was a very interesting person.

CC: Do you - I guess Professor Strahm was long dead by 1949.

GB: Yes, he was. Now, I heard a lot of stories about Professor Strahm. I don't know when he died, but he was long gone by 1949.

CC: Nancy Behr was telling me in the Kentucky Library that, according to her in-laws, Henry and Nell Behr, the music department here had quite a good reputation in the '40's and '50's. Would you go along with that idea that there were some awfully good people teaching here or leaving from here or associating...?

GB: We had some very good students at that time and there were some good teachers. Let's see, the violin teacher was - I can't think of his name. He went to Cincinnati from here. And we had a cello teacher, too. That's when I came. And they had a string quartet at one time. Well, the music department was fairly close when I first came. We had lots of parties and visited back and forth and so on. The Gunderson's entertained quite a lot.

CC: Did Dr. Carpenter replace Dr. Gunderson or was there somebody else between them?

GB: Oh, there was somebody between them: Dr. Stone. That was before you....

CC: Yeah, I don't remember him at all. Mr. Garrett was president then when you came?

GB: When I came, he was president.

CC: When you came for your first interview, did he interview you as well as Gunderson?

GB: That's one thing I didn't have to do; I didn't have to come down here.

CC: You weren't interviewed at all?

GB: I wasn't interviewed at all. The first time I came down here and met anybody was when I came down here to take the job. I was hired...

CC: Sight unseen.

GB: Sight unseen.

CC: By your credentials.

GB: Yeah, by my credentials, I guess.

CC: That's pretty good.

GB: From Northwestern. Well, as I said, Hugh Gunderson was in summer school at the University of Iowa and I went to the University of Iowa in the summer of 1939. And I didn't know him, and I was surprised that he knew of me, but he must have. He said he'd seen me, and maybe he saw something about my grades or something. I don't know, but anyway.

CC: You're a pretty good student, then, huh?

GB: Well, I wasn't the worst student there was. I did all right; I'll just put it that way.

CC: Dr. Bennett told me to be sure and ask you if you remember any characters in the music department or in the school, both professors and students. Who would you have considered a character?

GB: I'll tell you one character; _____, that fella that sang in that - for Western, the Hilltoppers Quartet - Jimmy Socca. I had Jimmy Socca in class, in sight-singing class, and I don't remember whether I had him in any other class or not.

But he didn't care whether he came to class or not; he was kind of a character, I thought. And I had David Livingston in class, too. Dr. David Livingston was in one of my classes that first year when I was here, and he also took piano lessons from me and that was so funny. He always says, "Well, here's my piano teacher." Let's see, I don't remember any particular characters. I remember the first year that I was here everybody was so nice, and there were so many - Sybil Stonecipher and Frances Richards and Gabey Robertson and Ercell Egbert and Emma Stith - all those older teachers, they were just lovely to me, and they all made me feel so right at home and they entertained me. I've never been anywhere that I liked so much as I did being here. It was just wonderful.

CC: Well, where did you live when you first came here?

GB: Oh, I lived - I just had a room on 12th Street, 655 12th Street. I roomed with a Mrs. _____

CC: I see. And then you moved here after you retired to Carriage Hill. Or were you here when you - No, you were...

GB: No, I moved to Carriage Hill before I retired. I lived on 12th Street. Mrs. Lowry lived across the street, and I moved across with her two years; I just had a room, and then my father became ill and my father passed away. My mother was left, and that's when I got an apartment down here at 1211 College and my mother came to live with me. And I lived with her till 1960.

CC: When you came here and in the years you've been here, have you tended to make friends with the people in town as well as at the university? Or did you feel a separation of town and gown, as they talk about sometimes? Or do you have friends in town as well?

GB: Well, I suppose most of my friends are connected with college, but then I have some who aren't, because I'm connected with the Methodist Church, so I have church firends. And then, at one time, I belonged to the Altrusa Club. When they started the Altrusa

Club here, I was one of the charter members, and so I got acquainted with some business people that way, but I just didn't have time to keep that up.

CC: How much of a class load did you have when you came here? How many hours a day did they have in the classroom?

GB: In the first year? Oh, I don't know; it was about the usual amount. I can't remember how many hours.

CC: Was the school on semesters or quarters?

GB: It was on semesters; it was on semesters. And you were supposed to teach in the summertime also.

CC: Oh, really.

GB: Yeah, I didn't teach here the first summer that I was here. I was hired for nine months the first year; I was hired for nine months because Mrs. Travelstead was going to come back. Then, I can't remember which, but anyhow, a position opened up in the training school. They needed somebody to teach elementary music in the training school, and so they wanted me to take that job, so that kept me here. So, I went over in the training school then and taught elementary music.

CC: And then in 1950, then, would that be about right?

GB: Yes. In 1950 I started teaching in the training school. And then I taught Saturday classes; I taught a Saturday class _____ . It was teaching music, and it was the elementary education majors - people who were out teaching who came back. Because when I first came here, a lot of teachers were just teaching that kind of certificate that just lets you teach because they have to have somebody - a temporary certificate. And so, then, a lot of them were coming back to get their degrees.

CC: Well, can I be so crude as to ask you what they paid you when you came here in 1949?

GB: In 1949? I don't mind telling you. That year I got \$3,000 and that was for the nine months.

CC: Nine months, yeah. And then after 1950 you went over to the training school, but you continued to keep your relationship with the music department. Did you do that on until you retired? Did you continue to teach maybe one class in the music department, or did you eventually move completely into the training school?

GB: Well, no, nearly always I taught a Saturday class, and it used to be that, because I was considered part of the music department, I was kind of irked sometimes because I taught Saturday class and they just considered that part of my load, and I didn't get extra pay for teaching a Saturday class, while if somebody who was teaching the first grade or second grade or something in the training school and they taught a Saturday class, they got extra pay and that used to irk me.

CC: Well, of course, you know you aren't married and didn't have family, so you didn't need the money. Did you get any of that?

GB: That's right. I used to fuss about that and finally, I don't remember what they finally did, but - Well, after Mrs. Travelstead retired, then I always taught some in the college. But they worked it out so that I taught two college classes every semester and then did the elementary music which worked out just fine.

CC: Well, now, on my piece of paper they say you retired as an assistant professor of music in 1968. That's wrong, isn't it, because you've worked since then.

GB: I didn't retire in '68; I retired in '75.

CC: That's what I was gonna - I told that graduate student who did that, I said, "That's wrong."

GB: Maybe that's when they put me in as assistant professor; I don't know when they started that business. They didn't used to have - you didn't have a title or something; you were just a teacher. So, I don't know when the assistant professor came; maybe that's when that came. I don't know.

CC: Yeah. I didn't think that was right at all.

GB: No. And due to Dr. Carpenter, I retired as an associate professor. I was an associate professor the last year,

CC: Oh, good.

GB: Yes, I thought that was very nice. I really appreciated that, because it made a nice little raise.

CC: Well, since I'm teaching a women's history course this time, I want to ask you if you've found any discrimination towards you as a woman in the university setting. Were you "discriminated against," quote, unquote, whatever that means, as part of the music department or did they treat you all as one of the boys?

GB: Well, I think in a way they discriminated against the women. The women were never put on the committees, you know, except maybe...

CC: The refreshment committee.

GB: That's what I was going to say. Take charge of the refreshments. And when we had something in the music department and were entertaining some people, then the women teachers would get the refreshments, and then they would stand there and pour punch.

CC: Doesn't change a lot, does it?

GB: No, no. Actually, I guess they sort of discriminated against us, but I really didn't care too much. Well, I really did sometimes think I was discriminated against because my load was so heavy sometimes. Sometimes I taught, when they had the University High - I don't know whether you were here when they still had University

High - well, when I first worked at the training school, I just taught elementary music. That was my favorite; I liked teaching elementary children. And that was my specialty, and then I taught some of the college classes, you know. Well, then, they needed somebody to do the high school music. So, Dr. Jagers was head of the training school at that time, and I was crazy about Dr. Jagers. He was very nice to work with, I thought, and would do most anything for you. Well, he wanted me to take the high school chorus. I said, "Dr. Jagers, I had high school chorus when I was teaching in Iowa," and I said, "Never again." And he said, "Well, I know you were good." And I said, "Well, yes. I did do a good job." I always tried to do a good job when I was teaching. And I said, "I don't want to have high school chorus." Well, will it be all right if I just took the girls. And I said, "Well, if you say I have to, I guess I will." So, then they gave me the girls' chorus. So, I had the girls' chorus for a number of years. And they were good if I do say so myself.

CC: Did you have any outstanding voices that went on?

GB: Well, Sally Lambert. I don't know if you've ever heard of Sally Lambert or not, but Sally Lambert sang one of the lead parts when they gave Bye, Bye Birdie in the college. Of course, she was taking voice from _____. Yeah, I had some very good _____. I didn't do much with the solo ones _____. Patty Griffus, she went on, she did _____ folk singing. And I think she still does some somewhere _____.

CC: Well, I guess you could say you had the Hilltoppers, too, the Sacco voice?

GB: Yeah. _____, but I don't take any credit for them.

CC: It's not your kind of music, huh?

GB: No. The girls' high school chorus was considered very good. I mean, they always got superior ratings in the music contests,

and then I had triple trio, trio, girls' quartet, things like that, but it took an awful lot of time. So, I had that besides teaching some college classes. So, I just had - Well, my load added up to about 20 hours a semester.

CC: And there wasn't any provisions made for overload either.

GB: No, there wasn't any. Now, if it had been one of the men, they would have made a great big fuss. I felt I was discriminated against once in awhile.

CC: Do you think it had something to do with the fact that you were single, as well, and it didn't take as much money and you had more time or something?

GB: Well, I suppose that may have had something to do with it. It must have been because I was fairly good natured. I guess it was because I liked the job and I didn't fuss too much.

CC: Do you remember any innovations that you might have made in teaching that were different from the things your colleagues were doing? Did you teach all the music classes, say, at the lab school?

GB: Mm-hmm.

CC: Nancy Behr told me that you did something that she had never seen before and she really enjoyed it, that at their recitals - her children's recitals, I guess - you sometimes played the piano and you had two students who played a zither or something. What is that?

GB: Oh, the autoharp.

CC: The autoharp.

GB: Well, one I did at Christmas time I used all the children in the school, and I did have some of them accompany me on the autoharp, and they usually memorized it, too. We had some pretty good programs.

CC: Did you have a Christmas program and a spring program or ...

GB: Well, usually if I had a program in the spring, it was by grades. Each grade would have its own program, and it was usually a program I just made up. We'd work out a little story to go with it. I didn't like grade school _____.
I felt most of them were written for grade school; the story was very trite and so on and so on _____.
And then, of course, down at the lab school the facilities for putting on a program down there were not of the best. You've been down there, haven't you? You know, you had to do it in that circular room and it wasn't much room. And so, there were just little programs that were a culmination of the daily classroom work.

CC: But all the kids took part in it.

GB: Yes.

CC: Well, that's...

GB: Every child took part.

CC: Do all children have musical ability, do you think?

GB: Well, no, but one thing I never did. I never told a child that he couldn't sing. I had too many people that used to be in music classes, the college classes, _____ that'd say, "Oh, Miss Bale, I can't sing." And I'd say, "Well, you could have. Somebody told you at one time you couldn't sing."

CC: I guess somebody did me that disservice. I say I'm tone deaf. I guess I could have learned to be tone deaf.

GB: Well, there are people who can't sing, but the child can always do something and sometimes a child who enjoys singing enjoys the fun, and if he isn't singing just exactly right, well, just tell him to sing a little softer, that you don't want to hear him above everybody else. Use a little psychology on him. But I like it when the children enjoy it, and I think most of them did. There were a few who didn't, but most of them did.

CC: Did you give concerts at the college, too? I mean, did they have a program with Gertrude Bale at the piano or something or...?

GB: No, I never did anything, really. When we were at the training school, the old training school, we gave a Christmas program we always gave at Van Meter, and that was all the children, but it was just a chorus. I directed and somebody did the playing on the piano. Or, if I had a good student teacher, then I let the student teacher do some of the directing and I played the accompanying part on the piano.

CC: Did you all sing or play at chapel as a regularity, or did you all attend chapel with the...?

GB: No, we didn't attend chapel. My girls' chorus used to give a program once in awhile when I had girls' chorus - they'd sing...

CC: I think, if my math's right, you taught here about 26 years. Is that right? Did you see any difference in students in this 26-year period of time? Are there any changes in the student that comes to Western during this period of time?

GB: Well, I don't know.

CC: Do you think they were more eager to learn in the '50's than they were in the '70's?

GB: Well, I think there were some who were and some who weren't; I don't know. I always enjoyed my college classes so much. I enjoyed the ones who weren't music majors. I enjoyed the education majors that I had, because they'd come into my class and they were usually a little bit afraid maybe that they couldn't do it. Sometimes you get in college classes, they were taking the course because they had to, and they were more interested in band than they were in elementary education. And so sometimes I had some who didn't want to, but on the whole, I don't know, there wasn't too much difference. You know, when the blacks first started coming here, I had a few qualms about having them in class, mainly because of some of the songs we used like Stephan Foster songs and so forth. But I never had any trouble.

CC: Did you find them all to have rhythm?

GB: Well, I think most of them have rhythm, and some of them were good students, too. I didn't ever have more than about two or three in a class at a time. But some of them were _____

CC: When did the blacks first come here? Do you remember?

GB: _____ I don't remember when it was.

CC: I think - I was at the University of Georgia in 1961, and I think they integrated, they integrated the year before.

GB: I can't remember, but I know that they had a departmental meeting, called everybody in, and Dr. Gunderson was president then, made the statement and said it was going to be in the news and he wanted to tell us before it got out that we were going to integrate. But I don't remember when it was.

CC: In your years of teaching, were you appalled by the sloppiness of the early '70's?

GB: Yes. That's the difference. You know, they used to have a code in dress, and I remember one time when that...

END OF SIDE 1

GB: ...the kids would take turns teaching, getting a little experience teaching, down at the lab school. So, the committee that was doing fifth grade that day, and here came James Simpson with a hat on. And something was wrong with those rooms where you go in, so I said, "Jim, take off your hat. You're going to have to sit in the room, so I don't think it would be very good for you to wear your hat. And he said, "Miss Gama, I haven't combed my hair." And I said, "Well, you can comb yourself. I'll just leave it up to you to judge it." So, he came in just a little bit later, and he'd combed off his hat and he'd combed his hair some way or other.

CC: He looked all right, huh? He'd pass.

GB: Yeah, he passed all right. But when he taught, he was on the committee to teach sixth grade, boy I tell you, he was dressed fit to kill. He really looked sharp.

CC: Since you've retired, have you kept your association with the music department? Do you still go to their parties or their meetings?

GB: Well, I don't go to any meetings. I think they only have about one party every year and that's the Christmas party and I didn't go to it last year because I had a previous engagement. But sometimes I go to some of the parties and so on.

CC: There's no program kind of that you could become a patron of the music department or anything?

GB: No. Well, I did last year when David Gibson gave his opera that he had written, and so I gave him money beforehand and was a patroness or whatever you want to call it.

CC: Do you think the new lady who's come into the music department, Mrs. or Miss Sylvia...

GB: Karsenbaum.

CC: Karsenbaum. Since I'm not too music oriented, she has a very good reputation, doesn't she?

GB: M-hmm. (Telephone rings.) Excuse me.

END OF INTERVIEW