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Donald Black interview

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CWU LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Dr. Don Black

(Transcription of Tape 1, Side 1)

BJ: Today we're interviewing Don Black from the Education Department. Tony [inaudible – could be "Quigley"] is going to be running the camera, and Bob Jones is going to be interviewing. Don, could you tell us something about your background? How it all began, when it began, and where it ended, maybe, before we're through?

DB: Well, I was born in the state of Nebraska, and about when I was two years old we moved to Iowa, and so I grew up on an Iowa farm. And uh – during that time, of course, I graduated from high school, and there was no way I was going to school. I knew all the answers – I think we all do, when we're in high school. And I moved to Denver, and – I'm sorry, I'll back up. I first went to the service, because my Dad and I got into a discussion one day, and it was opposite, and so I went to the service, and it was during – while I was in Korea that my Dad passed away.

BJ: What branch of the service?

DB: I was in the Army. And I was in Korea, I was in the 121 and Vac hospital, which was the main hospital during Desert Storm. My Dad passed away, I came back home, and then farmed for two years with my Mom. During that time my Mom, then, went back to school to become a teacher – renew her certificate – and my brother was going to school to be a teacher, and so then I returned and went to community college, and then to the University of Northern Iowa and got my BA in Vocational Education. So we went from a family of farmers to teachers, because my sister, brother, mom and I all got our teaching certificates from University of Northern Iowa.

It was at that time that I got my first job at the Commission for the Blind in Des Moines, and I worked four and a half years there, teaching the blind in Des Moines. And it was about that time that I met my wife in Colorado at a Church Convention. And it was – we'd been married about eight months, living in Des Moines, and her parents were killed in a plane crash. And he was a cattle feeder [breeder?] in Greeley, Colorado, so we – that summer, then, of 1980 – moved to Greeley, Colorado. I had been accepted, and my wife had been accepted – at the time, she was going to Drake, in Des Moines – but I had been accepted at University of Northern Iowa to work on my Master's Degree. With this change in family plans, then, being in Greeley, I then applied to work on my Master's there at Greeley while Anne finished up her BA at Greeley.

The next year, after I got my Master's, Anne had a teaching job there – first grade in Greeley – and so with the challenge of it, I decided I would continue on, then, for my EdD. And I did my dissertation and course work all at the same time, and maybe that

was why, then, I got real ill at the end of that year. But I made it, and I went to – uh – a conference in Chicago, and it was at ATE, and at that time it was the Association for Student Teaching – and AACTE – they were combined. And while I was there, I looked on the board that there were some jobs available out on the west coast.

At that time, I was looking for a vocational job, but I – during my Doctorate I had worked with supervision of student teachers and enjoyed that, and that was part of my school administration supporting area. So I met with the people from Central, and it was Con Potter and Al Bergstrom, Bob Carlson – and as a result I had an interview, then, with them. And it was after that conference, in February, then, - about – later, I was offered a job here at Central. So that I came to Central, then, in 1971 in the fall, and I came as an Assistant Professor, and I was the supervisor of student teachers in the Kent/Tacoma area in the Seattle area.

BJ: Did you attend college on the GI bill?

DB: I did – I did. I had college on the GI bill. I also had – some of the loans were forgiven by going into teaching. But I think it was several years paying off some of the others, yet.

BJ: And you did eventually have the degree from what is now UNC – University of Northern Colorado.

DB: I did. I got my Master's and Doctorate from University of Northern Colorado, and my BA from University of Northern Iowa.

BJ: So could you say you were – came here in 1971, and you retired when?

DB: This past spring quarter, 1998.

BJ: And are you on phased retirement, or not?

DB: I am not.

BJ: You're officially retired.

DB: I am officially retired.

BJ: Once and forever.

DB: Once and forever. And I under – I couldn't go on paid. I'm 60 – just turned 60 this April, and that's one thing that I believe would be helpful for the University. I understand that at sister university WSU you *can* do phased at 60. Their Faculty Senate has approved that. But here, so far, at Central you have to be 62.

BJ: Is that because of Social Security?

DB: Well, I have – what I had heard is that the Attorney General – that they have – their counsel for [inaudible] says you can't, and I understand the administration says "Yes, we can," and so far, it's sticking. I don't know the reasons why you couldn't do it at 60 rather than 62. I believe it would help the faculty a lot, and the University a lot if you could do phased at 60.

BJ: Well, give us a little more information about your progression in the department. You first came as a –

DB: I first came as a Supervisor of Student Teachers in the Kent area, and I was there from '71 through '76. And in 1976 there was a change on campus. Bob Carleton, who had been the Director of Student Teaching became the Chair of the Department of Ed, and that position was open. I applied for it, and was selected as the new Director, so we then moved to campus then, in 1976.

BJ: As the new Director.

DB: As the new Director of Student Teaching.

BJ: Okay. And –

DB: I was the Director, then, for four years. And at the end of four years, I applied for a retraining leave, and that was to deal with sign language. And so for one year I spent time at Lewis and Clark College in Portland, and in – uh – spring quarter I went to NTID, which is at Rochester, New York – the National Technical Institute for the Deaf – and then the summer of 1981 I was on the Gallaudet Campus in Washington DC with my family. The first time that a totally hearing family had lived on campus, and had gone to school there. While my family was busy going up and down the Mall seeing all the different historical places in Washington DC for six weeks, I went to school on their campus.

Upon the return to Central, then, that fall, I was part of the Special Ed faculty and taught the intro to Special Ed and started the sign language program. Up to that point we had only had sign language taught during the summertime, and felt that it was a very good supportive area for Special Ed – really, all teacher trainees. So that fall when we started the sign language program – and I did that for four years – at the end of those four years there was a change in the Directorship of Student Teaching, so I went back to the Director of Student Teaching again. I was in that office for four years, and then I elected to go out in the field and supervise in the Kittitas Valley, which I did, and I – I think I was out there about three or four years, and then I came back to the Director of Student Teaching one more time. I was there three different times of four years each, and then one more year, so I had thirteen years as the Director of Student Teaching. The last four years I have been full-time in the Kittitas Valley supervising student teachers – Easton, Cle Elum, Thorpe, and Ellensburg. The other half of the Kittitas Valley is being supervised by Cheryl Babcock, who also has Royal City and Mattewa. So that's sort of what I've done here at Central. I've bounced back and forth to different jobs.

BJ: And what's become of the sign language classes that you –

DB: Presently – after I went back to the student teaching office, then Carol Brothers took over the sign language classes and taught those for several years. And then when she stopped to raise a family, those courses then were not offered due to not having someone able to teach them on regular schedule. But she has taught them ever since through continuing Ed in the evenings. In the school district, and on campus.

BJ: During the regular school year?

DB: During the regular school year. Summertime she has had some classes also, which are continuing Ed for [inaudible – sounds like “the time.”]

BJ: Is sign language a part of any of the Special Ed requirements?

DB: It is – uh – not, though it's strongly encouraged, and a lot of the students do take sign because it really does help with language-delayed or – students with a lot of different language difficulties. Sign seems to fill in that gap for them. It really should be a requirement. It should be something that every teacher takes, because it does have a place in the learning process in the classroom.

BJ: Going on here – do you recall any humorous events?

DB: Well one time, during those four years when I was a Special Ed faculty, I not only taught classes on campus, but then every Thursday we always went out in the field and supervised students who were doing the Special Ed practicum. And I had some students in Kent and Shoreline, and the first quarter that I did that, not really knowing the process of the supervision of the Special Ed practicums – and I had not met them like I had my student teachers – so I went out this Thursday to observe some of the students doing their practical work, and this one day in particular I was in Kent, and I walked into this [inaudible] classroom, and there was this person up front who I assumed was the Special Ed person. So I sat back in the back of the room, wrote a page and a half critique of what they were doing, and after they were done I went up and handed the sheet to this person, and I said, “You really did well. There's no sense of talking about it now. We'll meet later today in our seminar up in Shoreline, and we'll talk about it then.” And she says, “What seminar?” And I says, “Well, every Thursday we have a seminar.” And she says, “Well, who are you, and why are you telling me this?” And I told her who I was, and she says, “I think you have the wrong person. I'm the classroom teacher. The practicum student's back there in the corner with two students.” So I went back and talked with the practice student for a while, and later then saw her at the seminar. A week later I got a letter from the Superintendent – though it was a fake letter – because I'd been in that district before, they knew me, and the letter said, “We really want to congratulate you for spending extra time to observe our own teachers and give us critiques. So we'd like to set up a schedule when you can go around the whole district doing this.” [Laughter in background]

BJ: So how did you respond?

DB: I said I wasn't available. [Laughs]

BJ: Do you recall any administrators or faculty that you felt were important – in the institution, important leaders?

DB: When I first came in 1971 it was really the heyday. We had 1400 student teachers. And it was during that time – I guess there was more money available – that Con Potter was the Director, or was the Chair, and I felt under his leadership we really did do a lot of innovative things. Somebody started the Option C program, and we had even some other options where people just sort of personalized their program, called Option D. In addition to that, Bob Crossman comes to mind. He was an excellent Chair and Director of Student Teachers. There were some faculty that come to my mind – Dan Unruh, for sure, was really a good, solid person in the department. Cam Howard, Bill Floyd, Darryl Baysler – all those come to my mind of the people that were here and well established when I came in '71.

And the administrator that I worked with was Phil Backland, and Jerry worked with Phil when he was in the Speech Communications department. We did two different national conferences together – uh – [inaudible – sounds like “that he”] had been in the Dean's office. Again, I had several contacts with him, and it's been a very good relationship.

BJ: Do you have any memories of problems that existed between the teaching faculty and the administrators or the Board of Trustees?

DB: I guess – sometimes I felt there was a lack of support of administration – faculty as a whole wanted to do certain things, and maybe it's because we're so used to doing it for so many years we think it's the last way to go. I think the union would be very helpful in negotiations, and would be helpful to the institution and the faculty. It [inaudible] like that was the conflict – it's just the lack of support by administration including the board – saying that maybe we need to have a – union sometimes is a bad word, but I think we need to have some negotiating power as a faculty.

BJ: Do you recall any significant differences which arose between students and faculty, or students and administration?

DB: No, I really don't. I think – the only conflict that I – recent came to mind is maybe the conflict between – maybe some students, but the faculty and the selection of our present basketball coach. I think it was unfair the way that Greg Brown was able to become our basketball coach. I think that was just an unfortunate situation. He's a good man, and he shouldn't have had to go through the hassle that he did just to get where he is.

BJ: Running through this laundry list of subjects here – would you care to comment on the salary schedule? The faculty salary schedule.

DB: Well – you talk about humorous, and it wasn't humorous at the time, but when I first came to Central in 1971 my salary was so low that when I was supervising in Kent one day I learned, talking to some people there, that I lacked the ability to get food stamps by only \$40 a month – that's how low my salary was. And I think as we look at salary increases since, we still are too low compared to our sister institutions in the state. But yeah, I think our salary schedule is too low for what we do and represent as higher education.

BJ: Uh, how about the Faculty Senate? Were you involved at all with the Faculty Senate?

DB: I was involved – I was Faculty Senate for six years. I also was involved in Curriculum Committee for the Faculty Senate. Those were good years for me. I think we had a lot of good dialogue, and we – probably didn't change the world any. I think the Faculty Senate could, and should have more power than they do. But – I don't know what else to say.

BJ: How about the town and gown relationship?

DB: Um – being the Director of Student Teaching I really have – I think had the ear mainly of the school districts, because I have met with the Superintendent group monthly all these years. I have missed several, of course, but every month when all the Superintendents of the area meet, I always met with them just to know what was happening in the area. And I feel that that was a very helpful thing as far as having good relationships with the local schools. And it's really important because our local schools are impacted a big deal because of all the practical experience we ask all of our students to do in Teacher Ed. The community, I think, is very supportive. We are the biggest employer, but there are times when we may do things they think that it creates a little discomfort, and so over the 27 years I see that the relationship has sort of gone up and down. But mostly it's gone on a good level.

BJ: Do you care to comment on the publish or perish?

DB: I think the publish or perish dilemma that we have on campus is probably similar to that on many campuses. But there are so many faculty – and I will speak particularly about the Supervisor of Student Teachers – their situation and setting is so much different than the on-campus academics that it's – they are at a good setting for research, but their days – and I can say this wholeheartedly because I've been there – you leave the house at 7:30 and you get home at 5:00 or 6:00 because, especially on the coast where they're busy driving all day long in the traffic from school to school. You don't have time for a separate day to go and do research to write, and that's where all of our promotions seem to come from, and our merit comes from – because you need to publish something. I think some of the things that we have being published were only that – they were published to get promoted, but it probably didn't change the world. And I think that publish or perish syndrome can work against us.

BJ: Do you feel it worked against you?

DB: Yes. When I was on that one-year's leave – retraining leave, I was able to put together a book on [inaudible – sounds like “locational”]. Since that time, I've presented it at conferences, but I have not published.

BJ: I don't recall if you mentioned your rank at the time you retired. You were a full professor?

DB: Yes, I retired a full professor. And there's another thing that I believe that the record people would look at – very few – uh, I can only think of two, of all the years that I have been here – two field faculty were ever promoted to full professor. Rarely do you get promoted if you're off campus. It's the visibility on campus. It was after I moved from Kent to campus that I was able to be promoted. I don't believe I did anything different, but – you're visible. And if you're out in the field and no one sees you except for once a quarter, no matter how good a job you're doing – how good your student evaluations are – you don't get promoted.

BJ: Do you feel that your promotion came more or less on schedule?

DB: I do. I did not – it happened before my seven years of tenure, and that kind of requirement. There are some that I know who have been here – one man just retired after thirty years, and still associate. Most all of them retired associate. A couple were assistants still.

BJ: Would you care to comment on hiring policies and practices?

DB: I believe that we sometimes lose the sense of how much quality is important, and we look at quota. I think there are times when we feel that we are obligated because of affirmative action rules – that we have to have faculty that meet all of the different ethnic cultural guidelines, and to the point of where some faculty are not hired because they weren't the right – come from the right group. I know a couple of instances where maybe a search was even closed because the right number of people were not on the final selection group, and I think that's unfortunate, because the people that were – made those top three were good candidates, but they were denied an opportunity to work because they were not of the right ethnic group, and that's wrong. I believe we need to look at the quality of people, not where they come from.

BJ: Did you feel that Central is different in that respect, as compared to other campuses?

DB: No. Talk of my colleagues in – probably one of the – as I said in my retirement letter – the one, strong support that I have for Central is that they did support me in my professional activities, and I was very active professionally through ATE – the Association of Teacher Educators – I held several offices for that national group. But going to those conferences and talking to those people – we are no different than they are.

And I think a humorous thing, maybe – one summer when I first came here, we were housed in North Hall. And it was during those years when we had 1400 student teachers. We hired 80-some extra people during the summertime for our summer faculty. One man from Illinois, who not only did I get acquainted with when he got to campus, but in our association – one day a group of the supervisors were sitting around a table, and I suppose kibitzing complaining as we normally do sometimes in our circle. And later I made a comment to him. I said, “I’m sorry you had to listen to that.” And he says, “No, no problem. All I had to do was close my eyes, and I was at home.” And so I think it’s not unique just to Central. It’s around the nation.

BJ: How do you feel about the pre-college preparation and the quality of the students who entered Central during your career here?

DB: It seems like we are – in one sense we’re very humanitarian. We accept students with a lot of difficult handicaps, and that’s good for them. But I guess I’m appalled at – looking at the student teaching requirements where people have to write letters in their application process and they still can’t spell, they still cannot put a good sentence together – somewhere, someone has not done their job.

BJ: Has this changed from the time you came until the time you retired?

DB: Yes. I think it’s gotten worse. I think we had better grammarians, if you will, when I first came than now. An interesting story – when I was in Kent, one day a student teacher [inaudible] his students at high school level evaluate him. And of course, working with high school / middle school students you have to have a good sense of humor, or you’ll never get along. They all decided to write the answers to his little survey on toilet paper and paper towels – that was his first shock. When he showed his teacher, he said, “Look at this!” But secondly, as he read all the evaluations, he said, “I can’t believe they can’t spell. I can’t believe they can’t write a good sentence.” So he took all those papers to the head of the English Department of the high school and said, “Look at this. Why can’t they write any better than they do?” And the person said, “Well, that’s just the way we get them from the middle school, and by the time they get here, we can’t do thing with them.” Well the student didn’t quit there. He then went down to the middle school, down below the hill, and again went to the department head and said, “This is what my students have shown me, and they said it really should have started here. How do you feel about this?” And he looked at it, and shook his head – “I’m sorry. By the time we get them from the elementary school, it’s too late.” So I don’t know who’s to blame, but I believe – I’ve always told my student teachers, “We all, no matter what our [sounds like “analytic”] areas – we all need to be an English teacher. We all need to help everyone write better.” Just this week I got a letter from my former student teacher asking that I write a recommendation for a district they applied for, and the last sentence was, “I hope to here from you.” H – E – R – E. [Laughter in background.]

BJ: Have you had any experience with the faculty organizations? Unions, or?

DB: I ran – when I first came, I was involved with the Association for Higher Education with Frank Carlson – another man that I should have mentioned earlier. And I've been a member of – this last year, of the union efforts on campus, but that's mainly been my involvement. I really think that we need to have, as I said earlier, more representation on campus with the administration.

BJ: Going on here, were you the recipient of any awards or honors?

DB: I have not from Central, but I have from – um – some of the national organizations that I've been. I've received several different awards from ATE for my involvement there, and I've been – um – I started – I started the special Ed thing, which is a special interest group for ATE several years ago.

BJ: Now ATE is?

DB: Pardon?

BJ: What is ATE?

DB: ATE is the Association for Teacher Educators. It's the former Association for Student Teaching, but it's a very large professional group now that has a board member on INCAPE [?], so it's well represented in the nation for education. I was co-chair for our national conference with them, and I'm presently second four-year term as exec secretary for the regional association. And I – there's a whole list of things I could mention that I obviously won't, but I've done that all outside of university. I have not really received anything from Central.

BJ: Uh – what specific contribution do you feel that you made to the progress at the Department of School?

DB: Well I was in the student teaching office. Earlier I mentioned we had the Option C program. We then – that was changed to Option A, which we presently have. I need to clear my throat. You want to stop the –

Some of the options that we've had in our teacher prep program that we looked at the history – we had the SELA option – I was involved in starting that. Then we went to the MERVED program. I was involved in big – with two of the faculty, the Caples, where we were working with first the Spanish-speaking students, and then we moved to the Seattle area and worked with several different Asian groups where they had come to this country with a teaching degree, but because they did not have a certificate in the State. We then offered courses over there, and they did practice teaching, and another – a graduate student and I went over and observed them, video taped them, and then we had a committee on campus where we viewed those tapes and decided whether they would have to student teach or not, and granted them a certificate.

I also, when I was here as Director for the teaching, we started a State group for State student teachers. And so we met periodically as just the Directors to talk about the problems of the area –

(Transcription of Tape 1, Side 2)

[Side two appears to be blank.]