
INTERVIEW WITH BARBARA BLUNK, CLASS OF 1957 AND 1971

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KATE O'TOOLE: Today is May 14th, 2007. I'm interviewing Barbara Blunk in her home. My name is Kate O'Toole. I'm a graduate assistant for the Illinois State University Oral History Project, for which this interview is being conducted. What year were you born?

BARBARA BLUNK: I was born in 1935.

O'TOOLE: Where were you raised?

BARBARA BLUNK: Until I was in second grade, I lived in Muscatine, Iowa. That's where I was born. And then when I went to third grade, I went to a little town called Sweet Springs, Missouri, about halfway between Kansas City and St. Louis, and I lived there for two years. My dad was a school administrator. And then from there we came to Normal, so we came to Normal in 1944, the summer of '44, and my dad was principal of Thomas Metcalf [School] here at Illinois State Normal University.

O'TOOLE: So how far did either of your parents go with their educations?

BARBARA BLUNK: My father, of course, had the doctorate. My mother had a bachelor's plus—I don't think she ever got the master's. She taught school until my older brother was born, but then after she started having children, she stayed at home, never taught after that. Interestingly enough, though, my dad didn't graduate from high school. My dad started teaching at age 16 because he was older than the other kids around him. See, my dad was born in 1900, and so he started teaching in—well, the school. I can't say it was high school, but in the school he started teaching math, and then he did what they would call probably like a proficiency exam, when he went to the University of Missouri for his undergrad, but then he had the doctorate then.

O'TOOLE: Okay, so both your parents were teachers.

BARBARA BLUNK: Yes, both my parents were teachers.

O'TOOLE: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

BARBARA BLUNK: I have an older brother and a younger sister.

O'TOOLE: And what were their educational backgrounds and occupations?

BARBARA BLUNK: My brother finished college and did a number of small jobs. He eventually went back, and he was ISU's I think oldest graduate in the CPA program. He got his CPS then, at a quite advanced

age; I don't remember what exactly. He had to be 65-plus. I'm not sure exactly. Well, I should say 60-plus, maybe. But then he was an accountant for the last few years of his life. He's passed away.

And then my sister has a master's degree. She was a teacher of English, and she is retired from a community college in Michigan.

O'TOOLE: Where did you go to graduate school, high school and college?

BARBARA BLUNK: I started at Thomas Metcalf in fifth grade. I graduated from Thomas Metcalf in eighth grade. I went to University High School, and I graduated from University High School. I went to Illinois State Normal University. I graduated with my bachelor's in 1957, and then I started teaching. I taught two years, and then I stopped and had two daughters, and then I was out of teaching about six years, went back in 1964. At that time, ISNU was just booming, and everything was breaking loose as far as enrollments and so on, and so I was really approached and asked to come back to teaching, because I didn't think I'd go back until my girls were older.

As it was, I started teaching back in the business department. This is before colleges were really established. When I did that, they highly recommended, almost insisted that I start my master's work, so I started my master's work then in 1964, and I did it one course at a semester, occasionally a couple, because I was doing the mother things too along with it, Brownies and dance classes and Sunday school and all those things. So I took seven years to get my master's, so I have the master's and then I have a couple of courses beyond that.

O'TOOLE: Okay. What made you decide to go to ISNU?

BARBARA BLUNK: I don't think there was ever any question. One of the reasons my dad came to this town was because he knew this wonderful university, and he knew it would be a place where his children could be educated. A schoolteacher didn't make very much. You know, they're not a high-paying job today, but he knew that the school would be there for us to go to, so I never even questioned. I was going to be a teacher from, the time I was very little, and I never even questioned it. I didn't even look at colleges like kids do today. I just was glad to be able to go to Illinois State Normal.

O'TOOLE: I hear you.

BARBARA BLUNK: Yes.

O'TOOLE: So you've always wanted to be a teacher.

BARBARA BLUNK: I've always wanted to be a teacher. When my dad was teaching community college in the nighttime in the high schools in Iowa, I can remember in second grade—he became an administrator, superintendent when I was in third grade, but I can remember him giving my sister and I red pencils and setting us down at his desk in his office while he'd go in and do some teaching or be with the kids, and we would, quote, "grade papers." I mean, you know, from very little, my sister and I thought red pencils were the—and, of course, then it was not pens, it was pencils—were just the

greatest thing around. And then if you could checkmark on things, that was even better because that's what teachers did, see?

O'TOOLE: Okay. Can you tell me about some of your favorite professors?

BARBARA BLUNK: Oh, yes. My most favorite teacher from my whole schooling would have to be [Alta?] Day. Miss Day was a shorthand teacher, a rather gruff teacher, had a manner that—she didn't smile much. I don't know whether she had a stroke or something, but her mouth wouldn't smile real well. So when you looked at her, you kind of thought, Mmm, this must be a grouchy teacher. But in essence, she had a heart of gold and a sense of humor like—well, I thought it was wonderful. And, of course, I loved shorthand. And so that was probably my favorite teacher.

Other teachers that stand out or that I really remember would be—one of them' would be Dr. Luke. He taught education, psychology and so on. Ed [Paine?] taught psychology, was also a favorite professor. I'm trying to think of other college teachers. I really—you know, I was taught when I was young that the teacher knew best in the classroom. My parents instilled that in me very early, because they were teachers, I suppose, and so I never really, quote, "disliked" or really hated a teacher. There were some classes I didn't like, but I never really disliked a teacher. But my favorites I guess might be those three people, I guess.

O'TOOLE: Did you student teach while you were at ISU?

BARBARA BLUNK: I did. I did nine weeks of student teaching. I went to Decatur, I went to old Stephen Decatur. Now, Decatur has had two Stephen Decatur. I think maybe both of them are gone at this point. I think that might have been the name of a soldier from the wars, early wars or something.¹ But it was downtown, so it was kind of an inner-city school. A lot of kind of tough problems. I didn't realize they were tough at the time, but Dr. [Cecilia] Lauby, my supervisor of student teaching, told me later that, you know, it was kind of a hard school to be in. But I chose it because I had a friend in elementary ed, and we wanted to student teach together, room together, you know, and so we could both get placed down there, and so that's what we did. We got an apartment, and she walked one way to her elementary school and I walked downtown to my high school. It was close to town, and I was kind of involved here with a boyfriend, so it was easy to get back and forth to Decatur, too, so that was a good place to teach.

O'TOOLE: Did you feel that classroom [studies] had prepared you for teaching?

BARBARA BLUNK: Oh, yes, I think I was prepared, yes. Yes, for sure.

O'TOOLE: What was the student body like when you were at ISNU?

BARBARA BLUNK: It was a lot different than it is today. I remember my ID number. We used to go by ID numbers, not Social Security numbers. And my ID number was 3536. That means that I was only the

¹ The town was named after War of 1812 naval hero Stephen Decatur Jr.

three thousandth five hundred-some student that had come through, you see, at the time that I went in there. I don't know when this numbering system started.

The thing that was kind of interesting when I was in college was that the high school students and the college students intermingled. That is, the high school students, when I was in U High—we went from one building to the other, just like the college kids did, so as you walked through the campus—and, of course, our campus was pretty much limited to the quad area, but when you'd walk through the campus, you'd see college kids as well as high school kids, so it was kind of nice. You'd call it maybe multigenerational, but it was a small student body.

I liked it because I knew most of the people. I was pretty interested in sports as an observer, so I knew most all the athletes. Again, that was because my dad was on the athletic board and had kind of instilled that in me. I hated playing sports. I was never in intramurals or women's recreational—and this was long before Title IX, so girls only had those intramural type things, but I never played any of that. I only took just the amount of PE I had to. Four semesters of PE was required for teaching, for all of us, because we were all teaching candidates.

But it was small. I liked that. I think I would find it a lot different going to school today with the twenty-some thousand compared to—I really don't know how many were in my class. I thought about counting and seeing how many were in my class, but it was small, yes, and I liked that.

O'TOOLE: Were there any foreign students?

BARBARA BLUNK: Very few, very few. In fact, as I looked at my books last night, there were very few black students. I can remember only in my mind, only two really that kind of stood out in my class. Of course, one of the people in my class was Don McHenry, who became a United Nations spokesperson. It was interesting because he was named greatest debater or something like that on the collegiate level in a debate thing that happened while he was in college, and I thought, Well, that sort of sounds like—because he went ahead, then, and went on into political work. But he was some sort of an ambassador for the U.N.

O'TOOLE: Could you spell his name for me?

BARBARA BLUNK: Yes, it's M-c-H-e-n-r-y, Donald McHenry.

O'TOOLE: All right. What was the balance like between men and women when you were there?

BARBARA BLUNK: I would say it's probably about half and half. I don't remember there being an overabundance—probably there were more girls. Probably there were more girls. But, you know, if it was two-thirds to one-third or something like that, I mean, because—no, wait a minute, I don't mean that. There were almost as many boys and girls. I don't know the percentage, but it wouldn't be a lot different. Maybe two-thirds, one-third. I don't know. But there were a lot more girls going into teaching, probably, than men. But as I look at my pictures, there for the senior class, there were an awful lot of men, so—

The other thing that was kind of interesting when I was in school was returning veterans. There were a lot—because the G.I. Bill was very prevalent, and so there were a lot of older guys. They weren't the same age I was. In fact, there were a lot of guys with families. There used to be, over on Main Street, over where the field house sets, or a little closer to Main Street, what they called Vet Village, and then it turned into Cardinal Court, and then they moved Cardinal Court over on Gregory Street, but it was prefab houses, and it was returning vets. For the most part—I think maybe you had to be married to live there, so it was married student housing, you know. But they all had, then, small children. They had a little kindergarten over there. In fact, my dad was instrumental in getting that kindergarten set up over there. So a lot of these returning vets, even, lived over there.

O'TOOLE: What can you tell me about the social life while you were at ISU? What did people do for fun?

BARBARA BLUNK: Yes, what did people do for fun? Well, now, you got to remember that the social life there when I was in school—Normal was a dry town, and as teenagers—you know, college students always think they have to smoke and drink, you know? One of the things I think kids did.—I didn't do this. Number one, I lived at home [chuckles], and so it was a little harder for me to do things that would not pass my parents' muster.

They kept a rather strict corral on the kids, though, too. If you went over to Bloomington to, quote, "visit the bars"—and I don't mean be a rowdy person but just if you wanted to drink, okay?—and if the dean of men happened to make his little trip over to Bloomington and find any ISNU students, Monday morning you'd be in the office of the dean of women or dean of men's office. That's right. You'd be called in. Today the kids can't even believe this kind of thing could have happened. So as a result of that— and I don't want to give you the understanding that I was a goody two-shoes, but as a result of that, I never participated in any of those trips.

O'TOOLE: [Laughs.]

BARBARA BLUNK: The worst thing I ever felt was to shame my parents. I would never have thought of hurting my parents, and if I had been called in, my father would have been the first one to have known all that, you know. So that kind of social life was going on, I know.

We had a great amount of social life on campus. We had what they called Big Four dances, where they brought in big-name bands, and there were a lot of formal dances, I can remember. When I say "a lot," maybe four a year. Now, those Big Fours were just dressy dances. You just wore nice clothes. But there was a sophomore cotillion put on by the sophomores but for the whole school. Of course, there was a junior-senior prom, and that was for juniors and seniors.

Of course, homecoming every year was always a very dressy affair. Homecomings were very big when I was in school. All the rooming houses decorated their houses. We had a humongous parade. I mean, it was a long parade.

Weekend social things—there were a lot of plays at school, so you had that to see. There used to be movies. I think maybe there are still are movies shown on campus, like at Capen [Auditorium] or

something like that, recent movies. And, of course, the Normal Theater was operating when I was there. There were four movie theaters in Bloomington that you could go to. This was all downtown Bloomington. Nothing was spread out. See, this was long before anything like Eastland or anything outside of downtown Bloomington.

So I'm thinking, on weekends what did we do? Athletic events, of course. Always a big program of athletics, and it was all in McCormick Gym. See, this was before the field house was built. The field house was built in 1963, and so we were all in McCormick Gym, but the gym was packed, so we followed the teams, and my friends— we went to that.

We went to movies. I don't know. I wasn't big on the social scene because already had a boyfriend from high school, and he was in the Navy, and so I never really got into—I dated some, you know—I mean, because he had asked me not to wear his class ring, so I could date and that sort of thing, but we were pretty well emotionally committed at that point. So I did go to some Big Fours. One, I remember, he was home, so I went with him. He was at Great Lakes [Naval Recruit Training Command], so it was almost like he was away at school. So the first two years of college, he was at Great Lakes, so it was just as though he was at school because he did his training up there. He would come home on weekends.

But I didn't do lots of things where couples would go, for that reason. But I had a lot of girlfriends. We did an awful lot of things. As I look back on it, it had to be athletics, it had to be movies. School had a lot of plays. There was a lot of drama going on, and we went to those. My circle of friends was not of the mind that would make the trips to Bloomington, but that did happen a lot. I don't condone that by any means, it's just that I know that was happening. That was where kids went for nightlife, you know, I guess.

O'TOOLE: What do you remember about the Rites of Spring Festival?

BARBARA BLUNK: I don't remember much about it. In fact, these four years here—I can't find out much about Rites of Spring. I remember hearing about that, and when I was little— now, see, my time at ISU goes back to my fifth grade because I was pretty deeply involved. And when I said multi generational a minute ago, as a grade school person, see, I was even on main campus, where all those college people were, because my dad was a teacher. And the boys, the sports boys were constantly back and forth to my dad's house, visiting with him, so as a child, as a grade school child and as a high school student, I knew college kids, too, because I knew they were in ISU. But it was like we were three different groups of kids, all on that same one campus. You can hardly imagine today that happening. It doesn't happen very many places where three levels of kids, ages of kids all live together.

And I remember that Rites of Spring thing, and I remember in the sixties there, after I got out, it got out of hand. I remember that, because I was just a newly married, and I can remember that being a real— oh, they had a real hard time corralling it. But I can hardly remember it. I can't even bring it back to myself from these four years. Maybe that's because I lived off campus, but I can't remember ever participating in it.

O'TOOLE: When you were a student, you didn't live on campus.

BARBARA BLUNK: No, I didn't. I lived in Decatur.

O'TOOLE: When did you graduate from ISU?

BARBARA BLUNK: I graduated in June of 1957.

O'TOOLE: Did you return for graduate study after taking your bachelor's degree?

BARBARA BLUNK: Sure. I came back in 1964 for my master's.

O'TOOLE: And you are married.

BARBARA BLUNK: I'm married.

O'TOOLE: What's his name?

BARBARA BLUNK: His name is Bob.

O'TOOLE: So how did you meet your husband, and when did you get married?

BARBARA BLUNK: Well, we met at church. He went to Normal Community, and I went to U High, so we were kind of adversaries when we were in high school. He was three years ahead of me, so we really didn't know each other very well except just through Young People's [Ministries? Union?] at church. I think we might have gone to a movie. My parents didn't let me date real early. Being in a car with a boy [chuckles] was, you know, a little risqué at that time, my parents thought. I mean, you know, you got to remember we're talking now 1948, '9 or something like that, and my parents were anxious. I think it was the danger of the thing more than anything else. My parents were a little concerned about that. And so I wasn't encouraged to date.

But we saw each other a lot at church, Young People's. Then the year he graduated from high school I was a freshman, and we dated some there, and then we all—he went, I guess—let's see, through high school, my freshman, sophomore Junior year we dated all the time. He went right into a training program at the *Daily Pantagraph*. He was a printer. And so he was one of these—where you learn on the job and you do class work by the side—you know, seven years' apprenticeship.

And so he was into his apprenticeship for about three years, and then the Korean

War was breathing down his neck, and he decided rather than be drafted, because that was coming up, he would volunteer for the Navy, and so he volunteered when I was a junior in college. He went away, then—I'm sorry, a junior in high school. He went away, then, to Great Lakes.

And so then he was up there all my senior year in high school and my freshman year at college, and maybe even into my sophomore year of college. We were still writing letters every day. Of course, by this time—girls used to get class rings from their boyfriends, and that really mean you were going steady, and so we were well on the way to doing that kind of thing. I mean, I had his class ring and so on.

Then he asked me not to wear it when I went to ISU because he knew that if I did, I wouldn't be able to go to any dances or anything of that sort, so—he was a pretty smart guy, but I didn't think so at the time. I thought he was [laughs]—I thought he was not as fond of me as I was of him. But there is a poem that says, you know, if you love something and you set it free, if it's yours it'll come back to you; if it wasn't yours, it won't ever be—you know, I can't quote it exactly, but it's that gist. So he knew what he was doing when he did it. As I say, he was probably smarter than I was.

Then he spent—I think he came back from the Navy when I was a junior in college, so I was convinced at that time—that was nine years now from the time I first met him, you see, and we'd been going together all the time, even though I went to a few dances and so on. Actually he sent me a date a couple of times from Great Lakes, too, some friends of his [laughs]. He thought that he'd help me. So I dated a couple of sailors that I didn't even know.

But anyway, when I was a junior in college, then, I decided that I would just drop out of school because when he was going to come home, it was high time for us to get married. And I could work. I could be a secretary because I loved shorthand and typing, and I'd been working in a law firm each summer of my college years. And so Richard Dunn, who Dunn Hall is named for, was who I was working for, and he sat down and talked to me and told me that he really wanted me to keep the job that I had there, but he wasn't going to offer it to me. He says, "You need to finish school."

He was the lawyer for the Teachers College Board. So he was the one I think probably—of course with my parents, too, but—that kept me in school. He said, "You've only got one year to finish, and you'll regret it if you don't do it." And, of course, we talked it over and said it's the best insurance policy you could buy, to get the degree, because then if anything happened, I would be able to, quote, "take care of myself" or any family, you know.

And so then I went back to school that year. I went to Decatur and did student teaching. My supervisor told me there was a position open here in town for the next year, and she wanted me to sign the papers and get my application in. And I did, and when I turned my application in, I asked for a week off in September [chuckles] after school had started for a honeymoon. I mean, today I don't think you could do that either, probably, but we had already set a wedding date, and so I started teaching with my maiden name, and I taught two weeks that way and got married, went away for a week for a honeymoon, and—actually, just went north in Illinois; we didn't take a big trip—and then came back as the married name. [Laughs.]

O'TOOLE: How many children do you have?

BARBARA BLUNK: I have two—we have two daughters.

O'TOOLE: And what are their occupations?

BARBARA BLUNK: Cindy, our oldest, is a CPA, and she's a mother of two sons. She works only part time. She has a good job. She can choose her hours, and she's easily marketable. They live in Florida. She does mother things and is a CPA on the side.

And then Cathy, our second one, lives here in town. Cathy is in the I guess you'd call it medical profession. She's a home respirator care. She works in the business of— when people need oxygen in their homes and so on, and so she's been a manager of an office; now she's a salesperson for the office, so she enjoys that. She's a good people person. She has two children.

O'TOOLE: Tell me a little bit more about your first job after graduation.

BARBARA BLUNK: My first job after graduation was interesting because when I finished Decatur, there were only nine weeks left in school, and my supervisor of student teaching called me, and she said—I was through at ISU. I had my classes all done. And she said, “Would you like to teach from now till June?” This was in March. And I said, “Well, yeah, but where would I get a teaching job now?” “Oh, I've got you a teaching job.” So my first teaching job was two and a half months or so [chuckles], up at Roanoke-Benson High School.

Oh, I thought this was just wonderful, to go right from student teaching right into a job, and it was a wonderful community. They were apostolic Christian people, so good, good family values. I mean, I loved the kids. They were just wonderful. But I found out after I got up there that the kids had run the teacher off before them. The teacher had a nervous breakdown, and I was walking into you'd call it a hornet's nest type of thing, only I didn't realize that's what I was walking into. But the other business teacher told me about it, and I could never believe that it was this kind of thing because, well, they were a step up from what I'd had in student teaching as far as kids, wonderful kids.

And I loved it. I thought it was super great. I would have stayed there for the next year, but we were getting married in the fall. We'd set our date for September, and the roads, the highways between here and Roanoke were, like, terrible blacktops, and it meant one of us was going to have to commute. Bob had a job here in Bloomington, and if I was out there, wherever we lived, one of us was going to have to commute, so I kind of unwillingly gave up that job and moved then to Bloomington.

I taught at Irving Junior High School. Bloomington used to have three junior high schools before they consolidated into one building. They had one out on the far west side, one on the east side and one kind of in the middle of town. And I was out on the far west side. It was a tough student population. It was real working-class people, lots of single-parents families, a lot of minority children, and a pretty hard school to teach in. Things I learned there that I never knew growing up. I mean, I was 22 years old and [sighs], you know, from a pretty sheltered family. I really learned a lot of things in my first two years at Irving.

O'TOOLE: What subject did you teach?

BARBARA BLUNK: I taught business subjects. I started with general business and typing and seventh grade math, and then in the high school at Roanoke I was teaching accounting, I was teaching shorthand and typing and general business, I think.

O'TOOLE: What year did you start working at U High?

BARBARA BLUNK: 1964.

O'TOOLE: And how long did you work there?

BARBARA BLUNK: 28 years, I think it was.

O'TOOLE: So what year did you leave?

BARBARA BLUNK: Well, let's see, I've been out now four years full-time out. I really retired 10 years ago. After I retired, took retirement, they asked me to stay and teach just one class, the accounting class, and I said, "Well, if it could be at 8 o'clock in the morning," because I didn't want to have to have a 1 o'clock class every day or something like that. And [they said], "Oh, yeah, that'll be fine." So they moved the accounting class to 8 o'clock, and so I did that for six years. And then it was one of those things that after six years—and I loved it. I always enjoyed the students and everything, but we got to the place where—and it was nice in those six years, too, because I could get away from the politics of things, too. I could teach my class, and I didn't have to stay highly involved in all the committees and everything that teachers normally do. I could really concentrate on kids.

But then we kind of made the decision we wanted to spend more time moving around. He was retired at that point, and so I kind of gave it up at that point. It was good, because some health problems came up at that point, too. So I've been retired actually 10 years, so it would have been '97 or '98 I guess that I quit or that I retired.

O'TOOLE: How much did the job change while you were there?

BARBARA BLUNK: I think that probably U High was the best place to teach of any place I taught, simply because U High is highly student governed. The kids take care of themselves. There are no bells in that school, and the students have to be responsible for their actions. We don't have a high lot of sassing back the teacher. There's not a lot of fights and that sort of thing. I have often told my husband I'm not sure I could have lasted as long as I did in teaching in the public schools, because I did a lot of subbing in those six years I was off having my two daughters, and boy, those public schools—I don't know how teachers do it sometimes with the fights that occur, actually lunchroom fights and that sort of thing. I saw a lot of that in subbing when I was in the public school. As I said, the school on the west side was a pretty tough place to teach.

As far as how did it change, I didn't see an awful lot of that change. As the years went by at U High, kids really took care of themselves so well as far as behavior and deportment was concerned. Of course, a lot of changes with clothes and music and the things kids did, that sort of thing. I saw an awful lot of change there from '57 or '8 up to '97.

O'TOOLE: Who was the principal when you started teaching?

BARBARA BLUNK: Dr. Lovelace, and he was the principal when I was in high school also.

O'TOOLE: What other principals did you work for?

BARBARA BLUNK: Oh, boy! I lived through a lot of principals. Well, let's see. How many, I really haven't counted. Barry Farnham, Dennis Kelly, Mike Surma, Rich Schuler, Mary Anne Lynn, Dianne Ashby—that's six.

BOB BLUNK: [Whispers] Steve Charton.

BARBARA BLUNK: Steve Charton. That's seven. I don't know. There are at least seven that I could name.

O'TOOLE: Could you spell their names for me?

BARBARA BLUNK: Sure.

O'TOOLE: Mary Anne Lynn is L-y-n-n. Diane Ashby is Dr. Ashby on campus. Steve Charton is C-h-a-r-t-o-n. Dennis Kelly, K-e-l-l-y—he was also the director of the lab schools. Who else did I say? Mike Surma, S-u-r-m-a. Surma was a principal at U High and then—some of these were interims; you know, they were just in there for a little bit. Barry Farnham was F-a-r-n-h-a-m. Rich Schuler was S-c-h-u-l-e-r. I think that's it.

BOB BLUNK: [Whispers] Johnson.

BARBARA BLUNK: Oh, yes, yes, Dennis Johnson. That was another one. My husband's helping me here. Johnson, J-o-h-n-s-o-n, Dennis Johnson. That's another. There were a number of them because some of those guys only lasted, like, two years. Surma might have been only two. Ashby was one. Dr. Lynn maybe was only two. Oh, another one was Jerry Norris, N-o-r-r-i-s. Yes.

O'TOOLE: What was the ratio of men to women at the U High faculty when you started there?

BARBARA BLUNK: Oh, boy. Ooh, boy. Oh, when I started there. It was probably, you know, almost 50-50, 40-60 maybe, a few more women, but it was pretty even. There were an awful lot of men, yes.

O'TOOLE: Did that ratio change over time?

BARBARA BLUNK: I'm trying to think here at the last. Maybe there were more women as time went on, but I'll bet it's still—it might be, you know, like 30-70 now. I'm not sure. I didn't see a big change, right.

O'TOOLE: Okay. What can you tell me about the curriculum and teaching approaches during the years you worked at U High?

BARBARA BLUNK: The curriculum probably leaned, as I was there the longer [the longer I was there], leaned a lot more advanced placement. We had no advanced placement courses when I went in. So this was good. This was a challenge. And I always liked that because our older daughter was able to take some of those classes, and I have always appreciated that fact that there were some classes for kids who were just a little above the norm. And now in AP classes they can get some college credit.

The other thing that was nice at U High—and I think this was from the very beginning—they could take an ISU class when they were seniors and get the idea of how a college class worked, and that was always really a neat thing to have at U High.

The thing, of course, that's hurt me the most is that I—and I saw this as hard as I . fought for it—vocational education as such—and business education, industrial ed and home ec would be the three areas—declined tremendously at U High as advanced placement courses took over or came more in. Something's got to give, you know, and some of the giving happened to be the technical courses. I always felt bad about that, because, of course, my concern in curriculum is the student who's going to have to get a job. Not every kid is going to go to college and become a professional person, and I like to be able to train a student for living. And even if he goes to a four-year college, he may not get his 'druthers at the moment; he may have to take a typing job. I've had so many kids come back and tell me, "If I didn't know how to type, I wouldn't have gotten my foot in the door at XYZ Company" or something like that.

So I saw that shift, and now, then, there's practically no industrial tech, I think maybe a couple of classes. Of course, it's all computer-assisted drawing, drafting and that sort of thing. The business courses are practically nonexistent. I think maybe they're teaching—of course, they have to teach consumer ed because that's a state mandate, but I'm not sure whether they're even teaching accounting this year.

The keyboarding is practically gone out the window. They seem to think that anybody can operate a keyboard. Of course, now, then, children start so young using a computer, in second and third, maybe first grade even, that they're pecking rather than touch typing or touch keying. So that, of course, hurts me. I guess I'm glad [chuckles] that I'm gone because the vocational part of it is dropping.

Now, that's not true of the public school. Normal Community and Normal West—their business departments are just flourishing, so there's still a need for those kinds of training because kids are taking jobs at State Farm and all these other places. You know, they're training for that. But I've seen that in the curriculum at U High has changed. In one way that's good, but they're becoming more college prep is what I guess I'm saying.

O'TOOLE: During your years at U High, did you work with student teachers?

BARBARA BLUNK: Yes, I did. Oh, yes. Actually, one of my student teachers became my colleague. We hired her, and she worked with me, then, for many years. Oh, yes. It got to the place—I think I only had maybe three student teachers because it got to the place that they started using U High for the pre—each student teacher had to have 100 hours of participation in a classroom before they could student teach, and when that mandate all came about, then U High became the ground for putting all those 100 hours in. And so, because the business department was small—there were, well, only three of us at the most, and it got down to two teachers—we couldn't tie one of us with a student teacher because we had to do that preparation with those 100-hour kids coming through all the time. So my biggest involvement would have been in the pre-student teaching hours.

O'TOOLE: What did you think of the preparation they received before coming into the classroom?

BARBARA BLUNK: I was pretty pleased. I mean, you know, for the most part I can say that they were well prepared. They knew their business subjects. Obviously, as they come through, there was always—

there'd be—I don't say always, but there would be a kid or so who'd come through, and he would just be—or she—would just be absolutely unprepared. And we often wondered: How did they get to this point? And we'd go back and speak with the college professors about them, and there were some of them that recycled through us two or three times before—

And I can remember my colleague and I turning one person down, saying, “We're not even going to pass this person. We just don't even feel like we can say we're going to put our stamp on it.” So there were just some candidates that—and the college teachers would say, “You can't just tell them they can't be a teacher,” but, you know, it's like—finally, after so long a time, they're probably going to drop out of the teaching program.

But for the most part, I would say they were well prepared in their business backgrounds, but it was their approach with kids more than their knowledge of the business subjects, I think.

O'TOOLE: Did you ever work with Cecilia Lauby?

BARBARA BLUNK: She was my supervisor in student teaching, yes, mm-hm. She came to Decatur each time—and it was interesting because after I retired, I supervised student teachers for, what, three semesters, I guess, in the business department and traveled around and met them and all. It was interesting for me to then get in the position that Dr. Lauby was in with me. But, yes, she was my supervisor in student teaching, yes.

O'TOOLE: How do you think teaching standards have changed over the years?

BARBARA BLUNK: One of the things I think that's really great, and I just got out as this was starting: I think this master teacher program is just fantastic. Like I say, they were just starting to count those hours when I was doing that part-time teaching I was telling you about, so I never even got involved with it, because I knew my career was coming to an end and why would I start counting hours?

But I was highly involved in, my professional organization. I was president of the state organization in business ed and spent many years working in that as treasurer and committee chairs and so on before I became president. But I'm thrilled to see that because I really feel like they—and a lot of teachers here in town are going for that program—I think that it's—well, what do I want to say? It keeps teachers on their toes. I guess that's it. You don't just get the BS and then you say, “Okay, now I'm a teacher, and I don't have to do anything anymore.” It makes them go to professional organizations, it makes them keep up on methods in their fields, so I'm real glad to see that, yes.

O'TOOLE: Have you had any influence in helping to change those standards?

BARBARA BLUNK: Well, I can't think I really had. Probably—I know that we worked at U High on some standards prior to that thing coming out, but as far as those standards that are now in effect, I don't really think I probably had any effect on that, no.

O'TOOLE: So how involved with the community have you been over the years?

BARBARA BLUNK: When I was raising kids, I was not really involved with the community, but now, then, I do a good deal of volunteer work. I work at the History Museum now. I volunteer there 10 hours a month.

I volunteer at U High. I feel like when you retire, volunteering and giving back to the community in some way is something you ought to do, and so as an alum of U High, it's a good way for me to keep involved. So I do a great deal of work there. I'm on their board and stay involved with that.

I have been previously working with a shop called Crossroads in Bloomington. It's a retail shop where all the salespeople are women from churches here in town. They sell goods from third-world countries. I haven't gotten back to that because I've had some health problems and I just haven't gotten back to doing that yet again.

But those are probably the three ways I've been working mostly. As I went through, though, I guess I did give back to the community through the church. I work in the Sunday school and Girl Scouts. When my kids were little, I was a Girl Scout leader and a Brownie leader, so I helped with kids doing that because I was involved with my kids. I don't know how else. Probably that's it.

O'TOOLE: What can you tell me about the budget problems the school had in the 1980s?

BARBARA BLUNK: Oh, my. Hmm. Well, you know, I guess I wasn't intimately involved with that at school, so I don't really know—I don't have much knowledge about that. I mean, I know there were some cutbacks on what the school would fund. We used to be able to go to our professional organizations and they would always pay your sub; there was never a question. And then they might reimburse you for travel and even give you a car.

Many times in the '60s and '70s there, when I would go to professional organizations, I would be driving a school car. I know that I did a lot of evaluations, school evaluations. I worked for the state Board of Education during the '60s and '70s, and there the state cars were always available. I remember state cars weren't as available. We drove our own car some. So maybe there was some cutback there on money. I don't remember seeing that so much.

I do remember we didn't really get reimbursed for some of our expenses at conventions and things like that. In the '80s, I probably wasn't doing as much work—I'm trying to think about that. I don't remember seeing departmental budgets change that much; that is, where we were told we couldn't get this or that, and that was always a nice thing at U High, was that we really were able to upgrade textbooks whenever we wanted, because the parents, of course, always buy the textbooks. We were able to upgrade equipment pretty well. So I didn't really see a lot of that budget problem, I guess.

O'TOOLE: Were the schools close to being eliminated at some point?

BARBARA BLUNK: Hah! Twice in my tenure there. Yes, I can remember in the '70s—that would have been '77 or '76, right in there, and I remember the kids coming forth and rallying, and the alumni rallying and so on. The state simply said they were going to draw back some of their funding. The second time might have been in the '80s. I'm trying to think when it was. Later '80s.

What happened was the state would look at their budget, and they would say, “It’s too expensive to maintain lab schools. We can’t put a dollar amount on training a teacher. I mean, how can you measure how much time it takes and so on? And we’re going to cut this.” Well, if the state cut their funding, then the lab schools couldn’t go because they just didn’t have the funding base. Well, then it was in the—it had to be around—in the late ’70s—let’s see, I’m trying to think when my girls graduated. It had to be in the late ’70s, latter part of the ’70s that they brought in the thing where they finally declared U High a public school district.

Ben Hubbard was responsible—I’m sure you’ve heard some of this. And at that time, then, the funding base became more secure, so that had to be the second time it happened. It must have happened before. I don’t remember the two times. I can remember the ’70s that it happened, the imminent closing of the lab schools, and I don’t remember when the other time would have been, because it must have . been soon after that that they created that district. I don’t know the date of that exactly.

O’TOOLE: Were there any politics behind wanting to close these schools?

BARBARA BLUNK: I know that Normal Community—there were politics against trying to keep them open. Normal Community was extremely concerned that if the school closed, they would be inundated with these kids because the majority of the students lived in Normal, and so they were extremely concerned. You know, if they closed those doors, that means all those kids are going to be on our backs, you know. So I think the Normal Unit 5 rallied, trying to help keep the schools open.

It was the Bloomington district, then, I remember, scared because they were concerned if they declared U High a district in itself that we would—I think the word is “proselytize”—that we would take kids from their district, and Bloomington’s district was diminishing. Unit 5 was surrounding Bloomington. And I don’t know if you’ve seen this or not, but it’s sort of like a doughnut, and Bloomington sits in the middle of it, and Unit 5 surrounds this thing.

And so all these subdivisions were going up, though the kids live in Bloomington, they’re Unit 5 school district, you see, and so Bloomington says, “Well, our district is shrinking here, and Unit 5 is going—well, what will happen if U High starts pulling out our kids?” So when they set that as a public school, when they made that law, at that day they said that no more than X number, whatever it was, of the kids that lived in Bloomington, District 87, that was the top number we could ever take for U High and Metcalf, the two schools together from District 87, so that they would not expand, in other words, District 87 kids. If there were, you know, 225, that’s all they could ever take from there. And so they would try to protect Bloomington schools in that regard. So I think Bloomington was concerned about that, and then Normal, of course, tried to keep it open, so they wouldn’t get run over with kids particularly.

O’TOOLE: Was there anybody specific who was for or against closing the schools?

BARBARA BLUNK: I guess Normal Unit 5 was trying to keep it open, sure. And I think the alumni in town were extremely concerned. They tried to rally. Of course, the emotions got above the dollar sign. [Chuckles.] The dollar sign was the important part, was—I can remember Ben Hubbard saying, “Well, you know, we all want ’ it, but where is the dollars gonna come from then?”—see?

I remember our daughters were in school in the 70s. The older one graduated in '77, then the other would have been '79. I remember when they first went in, we had to fill out cards. Each of the girls had to fill out cards, and then their cards, their names and address and everything were sent to Normal Community or to Unit 5's office. And at the time, then, the state was sending money to Unit 5 for our girls—now, just our kids as an example—and then Unit 5 would, let's say it be five cents, you know, for that particular time. Then Unit 5 would keep, like, two pennies and U High would get three pennies of it. I mean, this is how the funding came, so it came from the state to Unit 5 to U High.

And so the bookkeeping was absolutely horrendous, because they had to keep track of the days in the school. I mean, how many times is a kid absent during the year? How many times was he here? Right, it was attendance records they were keeping, for any Normal kid, was kept through Unit 5. Any Bloomington kid was kept through District 87. And then the monies would go to each of those two and then back to U High. So you can imagine the horrendous nightmare before Ben Hubbard and Alan Hickrod got hold of this thing?

And then they finally decided—they took the U High in Normal, the one in Chicago—there was a Uni High, a little bit of a high school for University of Illinois up there—the one in Urbana, from the University High School—I think it's just the three. They're not contiguous, but they called them a district. I don't even know the number because we never used the number. But they said, "Okay, here's a district, lab schools in Illinois," in other words.

This one's the only comprehensive lab school; the other were just partial, parts, you know? Now, then, we can fund this district, and it doesn't have to go through Unit 5 or District 87. So then our kids, like my girl, the Normal kids, then money came right straight, see, to U High because they were U High students. And so that helped secure the base for the funding thing.

But as far as people for it, I remember Unit 5 saying, "Yeah, we want to keep them open," and Bloomington was scared to death when they started to create this because they were afraid, well, we would grow and take their people away. The alumni rose up en masse, and but of course that was just emotion. That wasn't dollars. And they tried to—so—and I remember the student council was really interesting because—the student senate. It must have been later, because the seventies—it must have been '79. [Sound of train.]

Those two times must have been in the early 70s and then mid-70s. It must have been that close, because I'm trying to think—the other kid that was really highly involved was Eric Ruud, who is a state's attorney in Bloomington now. He's older than my girls by about four or five years, so it must have been, like, '69 or '70 and then again in '75 or '6, those two times were. And then that law must have been passed soon after that. I don't know the date of the law.

O'TOOLE: So how were the schools preserved in the end? Like, what was the compromise that they came up with?

BARBARA BLUNK: Ben Hubbard and Alan Hickrod wrote this law, and as I say, I'm not sure of that. I know they created a district for the lab schools of Illinois, and the funding then does come from the

state. A partial amount of the funding does come from the state, just like Unit Five gets some money from the state, and so that was the compromise.

Then, of course, there was also—and about that time, I guess, maybe a little later—but there’s been a high push by Dr. [Robert] Dean, who’s the director of the lab schools, recently to cultivate the alumni base of U High, and so the fund-raising for the lab schools has gone into I should say high gear in the last, oh, maybe 10 years maybe?

Yes, I’ll say 10 years. To try to get gifts and things from—to help fund things at school. And so that was never—when I started U High they never cultivated the alumni as trying to get them to give, to give back to the school. I don’t think there’s anything wrong with that. I think that’s good. And since U High is sort of a private school in one respect, I think alumni should support it, help support it.

O’TOOLE: Do you think the cost of the lab schools to the University is worth the quality of education?

BARBARA BLUNK: There’s no question in my mind, no question in my mind.

O’TOOLE: Do some people have negative opinions of the school?

BARBARA BLUNK: The negative opinions I hear mostly are [from] those who get turned down, and then they get real upset about—they wanted their kids to go there, and then when they’re not able to—you know, I think the ratio now still is about three to one; they take three applications to every one they can take, because the school can only keep 600 or a little over that. That’s got to be the top for U High. I think the two schools together are right at 1,100 or so. I believe that’s right.

So when a kid makes an application to U High and he gets turned down, then I’ve heard parents—“Oh, those are just the rich kids.” Well, it’s definitely not rich kids. I’ve sat on that committee, and—yes, applications committee. They try to maintain the socioeconomic blending of McLean County. They go down to the place where—as they admit a freshman class now, they look at: “Okay, we’ve got room for a minority girl” or “a white boy in this economic range.” I mean, you know, they’re that close on the type of thing. They try to keep the applications blind so they don’t really know who the kids are except for, of course—I mean, keep their names off of them, but they know their gender, they know their nationality, they know their socioeconomic ranking.

I think there have been parents—they won’t take U High students who are—if there’s ever a comment that “this child needs constant supervision” or “this child works best in a controlled environment” or anything like that from a junior high counselor. If that comes through, I think that child would not be accepted. Number one, it’s not because I don’t think they want them; it’s because they can’t handle that. As I just told you, it’s a highly student oriented population, no bells. They don’t have study halls. It’s an open campus. So a child like that wouldn’t be good in that kind of an environment, so why put him in something that he’s going to be a known failure? You know, we don’t want to do that. So they can’t take somebody that they feel they can’t do good for.

The only parent I’ve ever heard—and I’ve heard a few complaints—was [someone who mentioned] “rich kids,” and it’s not just rich kids, but you can’t tell them that because there’s a doctor’s kid they know

that goes there, and they would say, “Well”—because of that. But they may have gotten their kid turned down, too, and then they’re unhappy. So I think those are the things I hear that they’re unhappy about.

O’TOOLE: Has the focus of the education changed over the years in the school, kindergarten through twelve?

BARBARA BLUNK: Well, of course, kindergarten—when I first came here, they had the two kindergartens, four-year and five-year. Now I think they have a three-year-old kindergarten, so I know the focus of early childhood [education]—that’s changed very much since I started in fifth grade. It’s even changed since our daughter started in kindergarten. It was still just a four- or five- program at that time. Now, then, you practically have to get your child into three-year-old kindergarten over there, you know? I mean, that part has changed.

And then I mentioned to you about the changing of the focus I think at U High. I think parents who feel they want their children to be in a lot of AP courses—but, you know, any more Normal Community and Normal West have a lot of AP courses, too, so that’s not—you know, not to say that we’re the only ones in town that have that, too.

The one thing that’s true of U High that the other two schools probably don’t have is controlled class sizes, because I remember even when I was subbing back in the sixties, I could go to an English class, let’s say, at Normal Community that might have thirty-six kids. Well, at U High there’d be no way it would possibly be more than twenty-eight, maybe more like twenty-five or -six. And so there’s a great deal of difference when you take out nine or ten kids out of a class, and the class is smaller, and so U High keeps that small. Because they’re a smaller school, they can do that.

O’TOOLE: What about the racial and ethnic makeup? Has that changed?

BARBARA BLUNK: Oh, yes, tremendously, tremendously. In fact, I was just speaking with the principal the other day at U High. There used to be a program called AFS, American Field Services, and this is when I was teaching there at U High. And we would bring in a foreign student. There would be a club called AFS, and what you would do—it was an international organization, and you would apply to the national office. Like, “We want a child for this year.” And then you’d find a host family to keep that child for the year, and then he’d come from his home country and be our student.

And then during the year, he was sort of committed to, oh, have an assembly— you know, kind of let the kids know about where he came from. So we had a Danish kid or we’d have a kid from Ethiopia or, you know, whatever. And it was really great because here’s, you know, John from Norway, and he’s going to tell us all about that. Well, it got to the place where more and more money had to be raised because the school here had to raise money, and then the kid had to raise money to get him here. The host family was never a problem. They always seemed to be able to find the host family.

But the club got smaller and smaller to raise the money, and they wanted more money, and then it seemed like our AFS kid—well, here’s one foreign child, and then we’ve got, you know, twenty-five others who’ve come. Daddy has come to town as an Indian doctor, so now we’ve got an Indian child.

Somebody else's dad is working at State Farm, an accountant. He's being brought in, some computer guy. And they're from, let's say, in Asia or someplace, so then they bring in their child and put him in U High.

So the AFS kid got lost, so over the years, the one AFS kid in the student body— and I can remember there in the sixties he was about the only foreign kid we had—now, then, they did a project at school, and if you go in that building you'll see they painted on the walls. They did a project one year, and they had the kids pinpoint the country of their birth, and I don't even remember. I'll bet you the number's in the forties, probably, of the countries of the world where these kids were born. And then they painted these different flags. One of the clubs at school painted these different flags on the walls over there, so that ethnic group representation is as wide as McLean County is now.

And so they just dropped that AFS program, then, because, you know, it was just too expensive to maintain when you figure all these other families are coming into our community, and their children are coming to the school, so—and there's a high population now at U High of Black Americans, too, yes.

O'TOOLE: Can you tell me about the school administrators?

BARBARA BLUNK: About them? Well, about them. They passed through real fast, a lot of them. Most of them had their doctorates. Used to be sort of said that it was kind of a steppingstone, that they would come and be there for a little bit and move on, which was often true. A lot of them were interims. Several of them, two or three that I can think of, didn't have their doctorates but had gotten their administrative certificates. For the most part, I think they were all well equipped to sit in the chairs. I mean, I never really had tremendous problems with any of them. Some of them, I liked better than others.

Had some good women, like Dr. Ashby was fantastic. Of course, she came in as an appointee from the director of the lab schools because I think they'd done a search and couldn't find a principal, and they put her in there for a year. I wish she would have stayed longer. [Chuckles.] But, you know, I don't know what else about them. They moved in and out, as I gave you all those names, in my twenty-some years. That's quite a lot of change when you figure Dr. Lovelace had been there for, oh, maybe fifteen or sixteen years; then all of a sudden we'd get these others in there, two years, one years, one year, four years, six—you know, that sort of thing.

O'TOOLE: Can you remember any specific names?

BARBARA BLUNK: Yes, I told you those guys. That's the list of—you're talking about the principals, right?

O'TOOLE: No, like school administrators, like superintendents or—

BARBARA BLUNK: Well, see, always there's been—at U High and Metcalf they've had principals, and then they've had what they call the director of the lab school, and he sat in the College of Education. Then just a year or two ago, they changed that director's title to a superintendent because—to more closely align it to the public schools. And so now, then, the superintendent [chuckles] of the lab schools is one who used to be principal of Metcalf. So several of the principals of the U High or Metcalf—I think

he might be the only one from Metcalf, but several of those guys have gone on to be the director. Dennis Kelly did, I think Rich Schuler did. Let's see, I'm trying to think who else. But they moved up from principal to director.

Several of the—oh, another guy I forgot, the latest one. I forgot all about him. He's teaching now in the College of Education. You don't show this to anybody, this tape?

O'TOOLE: Uh—

[Tape cuts off]

BARBARA BLUNK: —O'Malley. That's O-apostrophe-M-a-l-l-e-y. And then several of them, Gary included, went over to teach in the College of Education. And then the assistant principals, of course, have passed through real fast, just about as fast as the principals did. A few of those have moved up and become principals.

O'TOOLE: What kind of leaders were they?

BARBARA BLUNK: I think for the most part they were pretty strong leaders. Always the principal sat in that position of being under the director or the superintendent, as he's called now, but I think they almost always made their own decisions and so on, yes.

O'TOOLE: Were you employed at ISU during the name change?

BARBARA BLUNK: Oh, yeah. Well, actually, I came in at the name change. That's when I came in, because that name change happened in '64, and that's when I came in, was the fall of '64. The Department of Business was just busting out, and so the head of the business department called me and asked if I would be interested in teaching some in the Department of Business. Now, these were before the colleges were organized, so it was before the name change. That was in September. They needed some extra teachers. I only had my bachelor's. He'd been to Dr. Lauby, though, my supervisor, and she'd given me high marks and said yes, she could do this.

And so I said, well, I'd consider it. We had [a] preschooler; she was ready for kindergarten, and a three-year-old. So he took it up to the dean of the University, and the dean of the University said, "Absolutely not." You had to be a master teacher before you could be hired to teach college kids, which I thought sounded right in the beginning, you know? I mean, I was surprised they even came to me.

And so the business department head was very apologetic, and he said he was sorry about that, and I said—I mean, I told you I had thought I wouldn't go to teaching until the kids got into fifth or sixth grade, and so he says, "But if you'd start on your master's work now," he says, "I think I can guarantee you a teaching job from now on, part-time teaching, because we're growing so fast."

So we talked it over, and we decided, mmm, okay, well, I could start back to work, back to school. So I picked a course that was on his night off, because he was working nights and he could keep the babies, and so I took a course, started taking a course. I signed up in August. And in October—and, of course,

this was hard. I hadn't been to school for six years, and I had two toddlers. In October they called me, and they said the lady they had hired in my place—in the place they were trying to get me to take, those classes—they had made it a full position. They'd given some other teacher release time and given her a full position, four classes, teaching in the University.

She'd had a nervous breakdown. I think I told you this story before, only it's different. [Laughs.]

O'TOOLE: Okay.

BARBARA BLUNK: And would I teach? Now they didn't care that I only had a bachelor's. They had classrooms of kids. This is October. And they have to have a teacher, so they didn't care that I didn't have a master's yet. And we talked it over: Could I handle a class— they wanted me to teach two classes. Could I handle teaching a class at the University, take a class at night, still keep on with babies—you know, toddlers?

So we talked it over, and I said, well, I'd give it a try. So I took a typing class. That would be the easiest to teach, I thought. You know, it would be the least amount of preparation. So I took a typing class, and he says, "Couldn't you take this math class, too?" So I took what's called—I forgot—I think I called it Business Math or something like that. So I took two classes of University kids, and the class I was taking, you know, as a student, and I started teaching then.

And so from then on—you know, I made it. I mean, I don't know how we made it, but we did. And so from then on, except for one semester, I taught some in the University or some at U High. At that time, U High teachers came from the University departments. And then as they organized and they became the colleges, then it became the College of Business and the lab schools were thrown in with the College of Education.

So I guess I was kind of there when it did change, because I had started in part time there in '64, and then name I think officially got changed in the fall or spring of '64. And that's when the colleges began evolving, and that's when—though I was hired in the Department of Business Education, then U High went in with the College of Education, so I sort of lost my tie to the College of Business, and I became part of the College of Education there. So I kind of was there during that time, part time.

O'TOOLE: Why do you think people resisted changing the name?

BARBARA BLUNK: Well, I know why they did, was because—it had been a good school for a hundred years. Why did you have to change? You see. There were all these people out there that thought that if you got a degree from a normal school, it wouldn't be as good a degree. I mean, I didn't have much to say about it, but emotionally—I mean, I didn't say much about it. I could have said more, I suppose.

I couldn't understand why they changed it. I know that a normal school is a teachers' school, so if a person wants to be an accountant, his degree should come from a school that's not a normal school, you see. Or if he wants to be a drama—an actor on Broadway or whatever, then he should come from schools—so I see that if I was, you know, not in the teaching field, maybe I would think that the name

“Normal” should be dropped out of it. That was I think the whole deal, was that we want to train teachers, but we want to train more than teachers; we want to become broader.

And so I, of course, because I was a teacher, I couldn’t see why—I mean, it’s a good school, Illinois State Normal, and we were very unique, you know. But I think there was resistance. And the education people, said, “Why drop the name? It’s been good. For a hundred years it’s been good.” My father would travel all over the world, not just the United States, and if he said he was from Illinois State Normal, they knew exactly where he was from, because it had a good name for teacher education—well, it still does, you know. We found that didn’t change, because it still is one of the highest-ranking universities as far as teacher preparation, but that’s the smallest college, of course. So it was good for the school that they did change.

O’TOOLE: So in general, what did people think of the name change? Were there some people that were just totally against it? Was it, like, divided?

BARBARA BLUNK: Yes.

O’TOOLE: Or was it—

BARBARA BLUNK: I think there were a lot of people—and I think the resistance was the people in education saying [they] couldn’t see the need for it; yet those that could stand and take a broader look at it—and I believe I was one of those, because I was in business, business ed, but I also knew that there were people in business—they were going to become accountants, and accounting was, the way I could see it, closest—if I became an accountant, wouldn’t it be better if I was from not a normal school?

And so maybe I saw both sides of it in that regard. I think there were a lot of people that did emotionally hate to see the name go, and that was probably because we came from Illinois State Normal University. As I’ve lived through it, though, there’s nothing wrong, and it’s become nothing but better as it’s gone on, so, you know—

O’TOOLE: So what do you think makes a good teacher?

BARBARA BLUNK: “What do you think makes a good teacher?” I think caring for kids first. I think a teacher’s got to be a person who looks beyond his subject and says, “I want to see this boy or girl become a happy, well-adjusted man or woman, and hopefully parent,” you know. So I think that first concern is the concern for the kid, wanting to see him grow up and be a good, productive member of society.

And then I think you’ve got to love your subject. You’ve got to believe in it. I mean, I still today strongly believe in vocational education. I do not believe every child needs a four-year college degree. If they did, we wouldn’t have people who do our hair and people who service at McDonald’s and all these other service industries that we all want more and more every day, the mechanic who fixes our car and, you know, all these other jobs. It’s wonderful to be in all these other high-paying positions, and you want your kid to do that, but then the reality of the thing says we want all these service people to do things for us, too.

So I guess to be a good teacher, first you've got to love kids, and I always said when I became a teacher that I wouldn't stay in teaching any longer than I could believe in kids, laugh with them, joke with them, understand them, that sort of thing. I think a teacher is a person who stays young because he does swing with the kids.

My father was 68 when he quit teaching, and he should have taught more years because he still had a very young mind, and his body was still good, but the law said he had to quit. And yet there were other 68-year-olds that should have retired before that. So, you know, there had to be an age to cut off; I realize that.

But what makes a good teacher I think is love of the kids and then belief in your subject, probably, and, you know, understand it.

O'TOOLE: Can you tell me more about your father's role in the Metcalf School?

BARBARA BLUNK: Dad was here for—he was principal of Metcalf for four years. That was when they were in the old Metcalf building. He was hired as principal of Metcalf and teacher of the eighth grade. And so while I was in fifth, sixth and seventh grades, he assumed that role. Then when I got to be ready for eighth grade, he went to President [Raymond] Fairchild at the time and said to him, "I would be glad to stay as principal of the school, but," he says, "I've got a daughter who's going to be in eighth grade next year. Do you suppose we could hire an eighth-grade teacher, and then I could teach another class at ISNU or something like that?" And [he said], "Oh, yes," he said, "we'll arrange something. You don't want to do that. It's not good to have your own kid in school."

So he stayed principal one more year, and then they hired an eighth-grade teacher, and then he went over—and they used to teach a course called American Public Education. Every freshman had to take it, because we were all going to be teachers. And so then he started teaching that class. Then the year I went into U High, he then left Metcalf. They hired a new principal. And he started teaching American Public Education full time. And very soon after that, then—I don't remember just how long, how many years—he would have gotten into graduate courses in ed. Now, this was Department of Education and Psychology at the time. And he did a great deal of master's counseling of graduate students.

He was active in athletics, I told you. Actually, when he was an undergrad he played sports, but knew that sports weren't going to be his life, and so when he came here, he got involved with sports. He was a timer—[to her husband] wasn't my dad a timer or a scorer? What did he do?

BOB BLUNK: Timer.

BARBARA BLUNK: Timer at all the basketball games, and observer at all of the things. Then when they were planning Horton Field House, he was on the athletic board, and so then he was chairman of the athletic board when Horton Field House and Hancock Field there were built. And then he maintained, of course—as the school went into the colleges, then he was in the College of Education, and he worked with—I'm trying to think—pretty much graduate students then. He was out—of course, as we became

multipurpose, that American Public Ed course went down the tubes. Everybody didn't take that, you see, at that time. And so he was now teaching most all graduate courses. I think that's about—

O'TOOLE: What role did he have in developing the community colleges?

BARBARA BLUNK: Okay, yes, I should have said that, too. When it looked like community college—Father's master's thesis was on community colleges, and his doctoral dissertation was on that. At the time he was studying that, community colleges were in high school at night. There were no stand-alone buildings. And so he had studied it from day one.

Dr. Fairchild came to Father, and I can't give you the year, but he said, "It looks like this community college thing is going to go." That's what he said. "And I think Illinois State Normal needs to get on the ball. I want you to develop a curriculum." So he really developed a curriculum for the teaching in the junior college in the Department of Ed. Now, this was before multipurpose time. So I think they would probably credit him with having developed the curriculum for junior college.

And then he developed the master plan for the state of Illinois. He was on the committee that developed that. And so he was pretty well nationally known, and he traveled all over the country, studying junior colleges. When I took the course called The Junior College, which is a course still taught in the department, we learned about the early pioneers of junior college education, and most interesting was the fact that these were names that my parents talked about at the dinner table, and my father said to me, "And you remember—no, you don't remember—but So-and-so—he held you when you were, like, two and three years old," because they were visitors of my father. They were friends of my father. And these were guys that were known nationally in the junior college movement. So before it became community college, it was called a junior college, and Father was very active in that.

O'TOOLE: Did you set up a scholarship called EAF, and what does that stand for?

BARBARA BLUNK: The scholarship is called the Elden A. Lichty Scholarship in the Department of Educational Administration and Foundations. It's in the EAF department.

O'TOOLE: Could you spell that?

BARBARA BLUNK: My dad's name is L-i-c-h-t-y, Lichty. Elden, E-l-d-e-n. And my brother and my sister and I set that up after Father passed away, and it's given to a graduate student who is interested in—we had said originally in administration work in community colleges, but then we've kind of broadened that to any student who is interested in teaching or administration at the junior college or community college level, and so that's given each year in the college.

O'TOOLE: And what can you tell me about establishment of the alumni of the U High high school?

BARBARA BLUNK: Well—

BOB BLUNK: She started—she really, by herself, right here at this table [knocks on table], she got all these yearbooks, started copying—well, you tell her about it. She started the whole thing. I don't know

if it'll be going—it probably will be going on now, because they see so many funds are coming in. She started the whole thing on the telephone. Go on, tell them how you got started.

BARBARA BLUNK: My class decided to have a ten-year reunion. I graduated in 1953. And so we tried to have a ten-year reunion one year in '50 to '59. And we couldn't find lists of people. I mean, you know, it was hard to find, and we had a good turnout, but people would say, "Well, I didn't know ' anything about it." "Well, we didn't know about you," you know. So I got the yearbooks for those ten years, and I brought them home, just like he said. I just copied down the names of all the seniors in the yearbooks, and I started making class lists. And I got the class lists done from '50 to '59. And I went to the principal, and I told him what I was doing.

Now, there had been a stab at making a newsletter for alumni from one of the principals, but he wanted one of the alumni—there are several alumni teachers over at U High—he wanted one of the teachers to do it [with] no release time, no help. Well, it was a terrible undertaking because you couldn't do that in addition to your teaching job. So I was showing him what I was doing. This was while I was still teaching, of course.

I said, "I've got these 10 years done." I said, "I want to get these put onto some sort of a"—now, this was in early data processing—"I want to get them put on some sort of a disc here so we can keep these." And then I said, "Don't you think it would be a good idea if we started keeping track of some of this, and maybe then see what I could get and gather?" And he said, "Oh, I think that's a good idea." This principal was very much in favor of it.

And I was doing this on my volunteer time, with my job, of course. And it was an interesting project because I would go through, and I would find things—people—then I went back into the forties. I started doing the same thing with the 10-years of the forties, and especially those 10 years, I would find ladies that I never knew went to U High, and I'd find their pictures in the yearbook. And I had tea and lunch with several ladies who would draw out their Christmas card lists, you know, and they'd say, "Oh, I can help you out." And then they would give me the addresses of these people.

So [I was] not just getting their names, but I was trying to get addresses put with these whenever I could. And so these were just typewritten lists, and I was filling them in, and then I was retyping them, you know. Nothing yet was going on disc, because the principal had said, "You get some of it together, and we'll see about getting it keyed in." I ended up keying it in, too, after that. So then I said, after I got the forties done, I said to him, "How far back should we go?" And he says, "Well, let's not go much farther back than '37, because by that time—you know. So I said, "Okay."

And, now, you and I had a Distinguished Alumni Program going at the time. That was the only award they were giving. And that was an award that was just sort of like—I don't know who started it, but somebody finally said, "You know, that guy"—an attorney in town, let's say—"he went to U High. I think we should call him a Distinguished Alum." They'd say, "Okay, let's do that." And we'd get his picture and put it on the wall. And there were no criteria. There was no committee to pick this out or anything like that. So we had that award going.

So anyway, the assistant principal heard I was doing this, and he was an alum, and he said, “Barbara, I think we need to get some alums together at Homecoming.” So I said, “Well, yeah, it would be great if we could do that.” And he says, “Well, I’ll find some money.” He says, “Let’s have some cider and doughnuts or something like that.”

So he and I started working on a gathering at Homecoming time, just cider and doughnuts. Now, there was no money involved. Nobody was being asked for money, nothing like that. But we’d just get people together. And then that little movement just sort of kept going. One year, then, we decided, well, let’s have some door prizes, so we solicited a few door prizes. And, okay—because this kid had said to me, this young man had said to me, “You know, you don’t get a cornfield without planting com.” He says, “You know, you get people and you start in first, and you get people, and you let them know that you love ’em, and then maybe they’ll do something for them down the road.” This is the list that’s involved.

BOB BLUNK: Every one of these, she put in here. She put the address, the names and addresses of every—then they got them in alphabetical order and stuff like that.

BARBARA BLUNK: And that only goes through ’02, I think it is. Isn’t that—what’s that date is, ’02?

BOB BLUNK: So this is—

BARBARA BLUNK: And so—yes. So now, see—that’s not updated. They haven’t printed that off for me since ’02. So that’s what we did. And we just started in. And then Bob Dean finally came along and said, “You know, I’ll put some money behind this.” And so then we said, “Well, let’s get an organization started.” “Barbara, I think we should get something going here.”

So then I went to ISU, and I asked them for their bylaws, ISU’s bylaws, and I told them what I was doing. Could we use that as a jumping-off point? I said, “We want to start an alumni association.” So I took that, got a couple of people together with me, and we scratched it all out and changed it and made it a U High thing. And then we decided—so then Bob asked me—Bob Dean asked would I be president of this, and I said, “I don’t think I want to be president of this.”

So we got another alum. I don’t know if you know [Casey’s] Garden Shop down in Bloomington? He’s an alum of U High, so he became our first president, and I was treasurer. And then we established a board, and we got the board started, and so it’s grown now until we have now at Homecoming a gathering—we have maybe 400, 500 people. Now, this is families, now, coming, that come before the game. From four to seven we have a thing where we get everybody together, and so it’s a really nice gathering.

And as a result of this, then, the development office, of course, then, has piggybacked on all this, and they’re raking in a few funds from alums, which is, like I told you, the way we ought to be doing it. But it did just start ’ from that one reunion that we had. [Chuckles.]

Then after I did the forties, I went up and did the sixties and seventies and eighties and then nineties.

BOB BLUNK: You went back in the 20s, didn’t you?

BARBARA BLUNK: No, I haven't gone back—

BOB BLUNK: You haven't [unintelligible]?

BARBARA BLUNK: No, we didn't go back past—

BOB BLUNK: '37?

BARBARA BLUNK: '37. Well, then, the ones- before '37—the only ones before '37 are ones I've picked up here and there, and there were a few put in before '37, but I didn't go to yearbooks before '37. Yes.

O'TOOLE: Anything you want to add that I didn't ask about?

BARBARA BLUNK: No, I think you've been very complete. You've been very complete on it.

O'TOOLE: Thanks.

BARBARA BLUNK: Yes, sure.