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Ruth Ghilain Luhring

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Westminster Village, Bloomington

[Note: a recording problem prevented the first few minutes of the interview from being heard; when the problem was discovered, the interviewer started again and recorded the following. The interview date was June 10, 2010.]

Ann Harding: Oh there we go, now it's working. Alright, let's—let me prompt you, we'll do it quick.

Ruth Luhring: Okay.

Harding: Because I remember a lot of stuff that you said.

Luhring: Okay.

Harding: If you could say your name and what year you graduated and your major.

Luhring: I'm Ruth Ghilain Luhring. I came to Wesleyan in 1939 and graduated in 1943. I married Harold Luhring who also graduated—well, he didn't graduate that year because he went into service and came back later and got his degree later but he was in the same classes with me.

Harding: Music major also?

Luhring: Yeah. My favorite class or the one that helped me the most I think—was the Public School music classes that helped me in my teaching later on. I didn't realize it at the time but that was the thing that I fell back upon because I learned how to teach every grade level at a different era—

Harding: And your instructor that was your biggest influence?

Luhring: Carrie Spier was my instructor and she was just delightful and had been a music teacher in the schools here in Bloomington and that was one thing all of the music majors—music majors that were going to teach did their practice teaching in the Bloomington schools and they had an excellent music program because they were all professional musicians that were teaching it and the music program—that's why you have so many musicians in Bloomington too.

Harding: Mhmm.

Luhring: And—

Harding: After you and your husband graduated, and that was during the war—

Luhring: Yes, then after the war we came back to Wesleyan and I worked in the Music School office with Alice Ward and then we were gone for a while and then in 1964 we came back to Bloomington and I worked with Lynn Nichelson to set up the Financial Aid office. Lee Short had looked for someone to set up an office and he knew that I had done office work while my husband was in service and so he thought I was the person to do it

and I did it until—from September until the middle of January when the Dean of the Music School called and said that they needed a music teacher out at Danvers and would I please go. He had already made an arrangement for my appointment to meet the people out there to take the job rather than sit in an office, and from then on I taught—after Danvers I taught in Stanford and then I taught in LeRoy. In Stanford I had organized a marching band and whenever I marched I got pneumonia.

Harding: What?

Luhring: And the gal from the county office had come in, always brought students out to visit my classes, and she was aware of the fact that every time I marched I wasn't in school because I was sick, so it was the end of that year when she called and said, "Leroy is switching its—dividing their music program. They're separating it and they're hiring two people and I've already recommended you for the grade school, so you'll—grade school, you'll have no marching band," so that's where I went and finished my last thirteen years there and then developed a program sort of exemplary of the PSM program that I'd had earlier at Wesleyan but I developed it in such a way that the children learned to read music as well as read words and my delight was that two of my students came back as husband and wife playing in a handbell choir from their church as adults and came up afterwards and said that they had got—everything they learned about music they had learned from me in—from kindergarten through fifth grade.

Harding: [laughs]...Now you met your husband—

Luhring: At a roller-skating party. I had known who he was in classes but we started skating together at a roller-skating party with the Phi Mus and the DOs and from then on we dated and—

Harding: And you got your student-teaching together?

Luhring: Student-teaching together out at Irving School and we had to walk out there so we walked together every day or two or three days a week, whatever we did, I can't remember and I had always kept my certificate registered wherever my husband was teaching and so then I've taught in a variety of places. My husband was the Band Director in Lincoln, Illinois and I was—did the Beason schools and the Elkhart schools to the Broadwell schools.

Harding: Now when you were a first-year student, you lived at—

Luhring: At Kemp Hall and when I came as a freshman I was the first mallet person to come and I was soloist with the orchestra because the conductor of the orchestra had written a composition for xylophone and orchestra and it was very jazzy. Then the next year he was moved on.

[Harding laughs]

Luhring: I never did know if it was because of me or what.

Harding: [laughs]...Was Kemp Hall all women?

Luhring: Oh yes. Is it now?

Harding: No.

Luhring: Oh!

Harding: Yeah, mostly international students now.

Luhring: Oh, we were always separated, women and men.

Harding: And you had—

Luhring: I don't know where the men lived.

[Both laugh]

Harding: You never got to see.

[Both laugh]

Harding: And now—but you were very involved with DO as a student?

Luhring: Oh yes, yes. I was very involved with DO and I was Secretary there. We did a lot of programs around town and in the university, always performing.

Harding: And then as a—when you became an employee, you were the Advisor of DO?

Luhring: Yes, that was back in the 60s when I came back in the—after the war. My husband came back to finish his degree to—and get his master's and so then I worked with Alice Ward in the Music School office and then later on I worked with Lynn Nichelson—

Harding: Mhmm.

Luhring: In '64.

Harding: Now you also said to me that there were no laundry facilities.

Luhring: Oh that's right. Our laundry went home every week or so, whenever we had the laundry box ready.

Harding: You shipped it home and it came back and everything was all clean and pressed and folded, ready to—

Luhring: Yep, ready to wear.

[Harding laughs]

Luhring: Ready to wear.

Harding: And your most influential person there while you were a student?

Luhring: At the sorority?

Harding: No, I can't—when you were a student.

Luhring: Oh, I don't know who was influential except for the—my senior year I got to study with Stefan Bardas who was a concert pianist. He was back—the first year he was back, I don't know how many years he was there. He had followed Ralph Dobbs who was my mother's cousin.

Harding: Oh.

Luhring: And Ralph had moved on somewhere else and then Stefan Bardas came in and is now in Texas but—

Harding: Can you—now let's see, you were a graduate of nineteen—

Luhring: '43.

Harding: '43. How would you advise a student from the class of 2011?

Luhring: It would be difficult because our lives are so different. We lived in a different time completely. Our dress-up clothes were used all the time. We weren't in jeans, we weren't in slacks. We were always dressed up. We were ready for anything that came.

Harding: And that's how you would advise them—be ready for anything that comes?

Luhring: Yes, yes. Take advantage of every class you have. You never know what you're going to use.

Harding: [laughs]...Okay, thank you.