

Oral History Interview---Helen Ralston, 2019 August 28

Participants:

Helen Ralston (interviewee)

Christopher N. Breiseth

Tim Gilmour

Jim Rodechko

Lisa Spengler

Francis J. Michelini

Suzanna Calev (Recorder)

Transcribed by Kara Beerley

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[First part is shuffling and casual conversation]

[Begin interview, 00:09:50]

Chris N. Breiseth: So we're here on the 27th of August, anno Domini 2019, with Helen Ralston, who has known this institution now, we've calculated, for close to 80 years. So, she grew up in this town. She, along the way, married George Ralston, who was "The" Dean of Wilkes for many, many years and has always lived here. Now how many of your sons have went through Wilkes?

Helen Ralston: Four.

CB: So four boys.

HR: Two granddaughters. As well as me.

CB: So this is a Wilkes family, from top to bottom. So I think, to start with, just tell us where you were born, tell us about your parents.

HR: If you don't mind, I would like to do that first. I was born in East Mauch Chunk, now Jim Thorpe. My dad was an engineer with the Central Railroad of New Jersey, and I had an older sister, Phyllis. She was born 1920, I was born in 1925. I turned 94 the beginning of this year.

Francis J. Michelini: I was a 1925 baby.

HR: Yeah but I was born in August. You're still--

FM: You're still older.

HR: By a little bit, right. And my dad decided that there was more work up in this area than there was in Mauch Chunk, so he moved us all up here. Even a big, black, upright Steinway piano. And that was all I ever wanted to do, was to be involved in music. And we settled in Ashley because the yards were in Ashley. And people didn't have 2 cars in those days, and as a result it had to be someplace close. I got out of high school when I was 16.

CB: Which high school?

HR: Ashley High School. Right up the street. Mom and daddy owned a home on Ashley Street. And then graduated in June, turned 17 in August, and started up at BUJC in September. There were a couple of others in my class that came over as well, and a lot of them went onto the campus later. But anyway, all I wanted to do was to sing and play the piano. My mother played piano, my dad was a trumpet player. I had an uncle who played a violin and a trombone. So we'd gather together in the evenings in their home down there in Mauch Chunk. But anyway. Finally, my mother allowed me to take piano lessons when I was 11. Maybe it was because they couldn't afford it, I don't know. But anyway, I started piano at age 11 and had to promise my mother I would not quit my piano lessons until I graduated from high school. And then at 13, a girl across the street from where we lived was taking singing lessons with a lady in Forty Fort. Her name was Unice Berry Dewitt. She was married to Ralph Dewitt, a photographer who had a studio in Wilkes-Barre. She was a graduate of the New England Conservatory of Music. So I went over to study with her when I was 13. At 15--now Bach Festival was in existence now, because there was a couple of years there between 33 and 42 that I wasn't on campus. And so she was an outstanding soloist. She was the soloist at First Pres. She coaxed me and my family into joining First Pres when I was 16 because she felt it would improve my musical background to be in a bigger school with--I hate saying it, you know, but little churches have--they sing hymns in spirit, and this was a chance for me to spread my wings, so to speak. So when I was 16, we joined the church. When I was 17 and just getting out of high school, a sister said to me, "Helen, there's an opening at the Kingston Methodist Church, they need an alto soloist." And I looked at her, I laughed, I said, "They would never hire a 17 year old!" Well I went over and auditioned, and I got the job. So I stayed over at that church--the Seminary church, they used to call it, until I was 19, for 2 years. And then the alto in our quartet decided to retire. Ruth Pearson was her name. And I went back to my own church, auditioned with two other people who wanted the job, but I got it. So I actually started my solo work at First Pres in September, and I was, at that point, just 20. Now, that was 1945. George came in 1946. He joined our church I don't know when, but I'm sure right away. So he must have been sitting in the audience, listening--

CB: Listening to you.

HR:--to me sing solos, or quartets, or trios--

CB: And the thought went through his mind.

HR: And I had known him from a hole in the wall, you know? And when I was on campus, if I passed him on the street, I'd say, "Hello, Mr. Ralston," and he'd take his hat off, in a pure gentlemanly, southern gentlemanly fashion and say, "Hello," in that beautiful low voice he had. So it wasn't, as far as my coursework at the BUJC was--do you know, is Dr. Mary Craig the English teacher? Did she come up from the--

CB: From Bucknell?

HR: Bucknell. She was my English teacher. I took a test and was able to--

FM: I know her name. She must've been famous. But I came in 1955 and she was already not on faculty.

HR: Yeah.

CB: Before we get to that--You come onto campus. Give us a portrait of the campus. In 1942. What buildings were part of the BUJC?

HR: Just Kirby, Chase, and Conyngham. Conyngham died--burned down here. I had nothing to do with Conyngham because that was where the sciences were. Charles B. Reif, former chair of Biology department, was up there with his biology class. I did have to take a biology class. Everything that went on for me was on the campus from Kirby to Chase. And--what did you ask me?

CB: What about the little church in the middle? Was that part of the campus yet?

HR: No. It was always there, it was a Christian Science church.

CB: Christian Science.

HR: Yeah.

CB: It was a bookstore when I got here.

HR: Okay.

CB: In 1984.

HR: And the dorm had been built back in there, that circular dorm.

CB: The new men's dorm [Pickering Hall].

HR: Yeah. George and I went over there for many a dinner at Thanksgiving, or Christmas time, whatever.

Tim Gilmour: Was Conyngham... Conyngham then was beyond the church, going down towards town?

HR: The original Conyngham was next door to the current Conynham Hall on ground now occupied by Evans Hall.

TG: Okay, that's what I thought. So there were things between Kirby and Chase.

HR: Residences, the Conyngham building...

CB: And that Evans' house, of course.

HR: And then Evans' house.

TG: Oh, of course, yeah.

CB: And then Herscovitz.

HR: Pardon?

CB: Was that the Herscovitz's house? And that Evans Hall? Which became the alumni house?

HR: Was it there first? No. They lived on Northampton, which is now one of the dorms, I can't remember which building.

CB: Roth. Roth Hall.

TG: That's quite a picture though. I mean it was just, it was really, for you, just two houses--two mansions.

HR: Yeah. Yeah, absolutely.

TG: So it was quite, uh--

CB: Very intimate.

TG: Yeah.

CB: Now Kirby had the library, right? Kirby hall?

HR: Absolutely. Kirby was a beautiful--Well, it has changed over the years because why not? But it was tapestry on the walls, not paint. It was elegant. And it was something I had never experienced in my lifetime, how could I have? I didn't come from a moneyed family.

CB: The family gave it on the day before Pearl Harbor.

HR: Oh, really?

CB: So it's on the plaque: December 6th, 1941, and the family then reconstituted it. They took all that interior and created a reconstruction of it in the Hall of Civil Rights at Lafayette.

HR: Really?

CB: So the room that you would've known--

HR: The first floor?

CB: Which was kind of the main living room. It was reconstituted as a high victorian. It is the room as it was as you probably experienced it.

HR: It was a huge room!

CB: It's in the middle of a modern building, it's like going into a mausoleum.

HR: We used to have dances in that first floor because it was all open. And these gorgeous walls with red tapestry on the side and the stairway that goes up to the second floor.

TG: Was the floor plan the same as it is now?

HR: Yes! That hasn't changed. Just--

TG: So, were the tapestries in the living room to the left? Or where were they?

HR: From the front door to the back door.

TG: Oh, in the center hall.

HR: Yeah!

TG: Yeah. Got it.

HR: All together. I had classes in there. My advisor was on the second floor of that building, Kirby. And the third floor was the music room. Pop Geis held classes on the third floor of Kirby Hall and we had a grand piano up there. We did our choral rehearsals up there. And the building was used greatly by all of us in numerous ways. Conyngham Hall I would go to periodically simply because it had a gorgeous first floor with an enormous solarium in the center. Plants growing all over the place, on the first floor of a house. Who would expect it?

PA: The Conynham pillars always had to be removed because they sat in the footprint of what was to be Founders (Evans) Hall. Perhaps the columns were damaged when the structure was razed.

CB: We preserved the columns.

JR: The one that burned down.

CB: After it burned down, and then, I think it was after I got here, and I won't say who, it just happened when they were working on building Evans Hall. They just accidentally knocked those pillars down.

TG: It was a complete accident.

CB: It was a complete accident.

TG: Yeah, yep.

CB: Uninsured.

TG: Yup.

[Laughter]

CB: So they didn't want those pillars around, but for a long time, those pillars survived as a memorial to the original Conyngham Hall. And of course, the later Conyngham Hall, which we still use, was from the brother--the father, Bill Conyngham. And grandfather Parkey and Will, and that house came to us after the flood, and you probably presided over that. And one of the stories about Essie Davidowitz, as a new board member is that the family, after Mrs. Conyngham died, wanted to tear the building down. They'd never really totally cleaned it up after the flood. She lived upstairs. The first floor, we didn't have mud, but it was unimproved. And Essie, among other board members, felt they should give it to the college, and the college could use it--it was a major building. And so they, reluctantly, they did that, because they didn't want to have the financial responsibility. Then she felt they needed to give money to help endow, or to provide for its improvement, which they did.

HR: You're talking about the first Conyngham Hall... [inaudible]?

CB: The second one. The one that's still there now. So there were two Conyngham Halls, we didn't get the one where student affairs was for a long time, where Jane Lampe had her office, until after the flood. Well after the flood. So in fact, we had a --Jane and I did dinners in the different buildings for board meetings. So to show the board members what this architectural richness was, and we had it in Conyngham Hall. Bill Conyngham came, we met Billy for the first time, since his--

HR: Where there was a door. An eating area. That's the one you're talking about?

CB: Yes, yes.

HR: Oh, okay. Bill Conyngham's.

CB: Yes. Bill Conyngham. He had not been in the house since his mother died.

HR: Not the original Conyngham Hall.

CB: Not the one that burned down.

HR: Yes.

CB: That was the brother of his father.

HR: Oh, okay.

CB: And that was the guy that gave his estate to become the Penn State campus. They were childless--anyway, that's the Conyngham story just to put it in context. What about student activities? What did you all do for amusement?

HR: Well, besides going to classes, which wasn't always amusement, there was theater, and there was the Pop Geis and his choral group. I joined the choir, of course, of course, and well what happened--let me go back, Mrs. Dewitt went to Pop Geis when I was 15, a junior in high school. She said, "I've got a student who's very good. She has a lovely voice, she reads music very easily. I think it would be good for her to join the choir. And Pop allowed me to sing in the Bach festival at age 15. I stood alongside Ethyl Farley onstage.

FM: Was she--?

CB: She was the daughter.

HR: In the choir, yeah. I was so grateful that I was able to have that experience and I have a picture of myself in this big portrait that I'd like to get back.

CB: Were there any men on campus in the older years?

HR: Sure, there were men. I'm sure we outnumbered them. But there were dances all the time and gatherings, and Al was at the helm, Al Groh for a while. I met Al when I was 17. But then he went off to service, and Sanjie, **Norma Sanjulianna?? [00:27:11]** arrived on the scene. Sanjie treated us girls, on the second floor of Chase Hall, we had a girls' lounge. And we could go up there and play games, or cards, or whatever--relax. And Sanjie was around at that time, and she treated us, and so she was teaching a bunch of girls in the girls' school. We, every Friday, first floor of Chase Hall, big table laid out with a samovar at the one end, a big thing that you know, poured the tea, and we had to dress up, we had to wear hats. And it was a real learning experience for us young people here in this area to learn how to be mannerly and do such things well. And I've always been happy about that experience. Sanjie didn't teach gym, she had arrhythmic classes, right. And they were held in Chase Theater, the garage behind Chase Hall, which is gone. And that's where we did our shows, as well. We had darling little uniforms, a little blue thing that fit very snugly and had a little flare skirt just up above the knees, you know. And we would learn, "*Leap, run, run. Leap, run, run,*" and we learned the 5 little ballet positions to put our feet and we never, ever got to anything more, as you think of gym now.

CB: I remember some of the men, who were students at the time, who used to watch the arrhythmics.

HR: I'm sure they got a kick when they'd go up. Between Chase and Kirby,--

CB: It was outside.

HR:--there was a big lawn.

CB: Yeah. Arrhythmics on the lawn.

HR: Absolutely. And we did archery on the lawn. And she taught us, because there was a place down Middle Road. It's got a different name. There was a riding academy, where we would go and ride horses.

TG: Now where was the riding academy, exactly? I didn't hear. The riding academy was where, in relation to campus?

HR: If you go down Main Street, and keep going.

TG: Yeah. Way, way up.

HR: The golf course. Where we're meeting next month. And so that was a tremendous amount of fun. My mama even bought me Jodhpurs so I'd look the part.

CB: So dancing, arrhythmics, horseback riding, singing.

HR: Theater.

CB: Theater.

HR: Theater was a big part.

CB: That's a pretty rich student life!

HR: We had to be initiated into the thespians. And that was in the basement of Chase Hall.

TG: And you lived at home?

HR: Oh, yes. I was old enough to drive. I got my license right after I turned 16. And daddy would walk to work, I guess, because it wasn't all that far.

CB: What kind of car did you first learn to drive?

HR: Oh I don't remember. As long as it went, that's all that was important to me. Still the same way with cars.

TG: I think, for the record, it was probably a Packard.

CB: Well, it's very famous. Her future husband had a Buick convertible,--

TG: Ohhhhhh yeah.

CB:--which was very prominent on campus. And with many of the bachelor faculty members.

HR: I had many a date in that car, but not with George. [Laughter] He'd loan it to the football players or anybody that--[clears throat] but that's a different story.

CB: You see why I wanted this interview?

TG: Yeah, boy, this is--

FM: It was a blue Buick with a white top.

HR: It was a convertible, it was red leather inside. And--

FM: I remember when I came here in 1955, there were two faculty members on campus that I absolutely was in awe of because they had--George had this blue Buick--

HR: Black Buick.

FM:--which was top of the line, and Al Groh had a gold Disotto. His father sold cars for the Disotto. And I'd go, "Man, I oughta have died and gone to heaven!" But yeah, oh, I remember that car.

TG: So you're reporting it as black?

HR: It was a black convertible. Listen, I drove it to Harrisburg, I drove it to New York state, New York to pick him up at Columbia when he finished his summer stint. To finish off his doctorate.

CB: So you learned to shift?

HR: Oh, heavens, that's what I took my test on, yeah

FM: Now what did George do during World War II? I have mixed memories.

HR: I only know what I've been told. I didn't know him then, of course. He'd finished at University of North Carolina Chapel Hill in 1940. He came up here for a job because he was a pre med student down there. He wanted to be a doctor. And he got a job teaching English or history, one or the other, at Forty Fort High School, and teaching the football team all the necessary information they needed. He was then drafted, and he came out five years later. I still didn't know him.

CB: He was in the Navy, right?

HR: No. He was a Major in the U.S. Army according to his obituary. He was in Africa.

FM: So he was in early.

HR: Yeah.

FM: 'Cause Africa was about 1942.

HR: Yeah, right. And he was on a boat on his way to Iwo Jima or someplace down there when the bomb went off in Japan, and he was turned around and sent home.

CB: So he was part of--

HR: But again, two purple hearts, and George would never talk about the war. Never would he. And I learned not to ask.

CB: Did the boys ever find out much from him about the war, your sons?

HR: No. it was just a part of his life that he didn't want to be a part of his life, I think. And he just erased it from his memory--No, from everyone else's memory. But after he came back after the war, he was a Major at that point, and got back into Forty Fort High School. And somehow or another, Dr. Farley got wind of him, and needed someone to counsel returning veterans, and he was basically one himself, but nevertheless he may have been over by a year, and that's how he got involved here in 1946. Now, it was a two-year college. I completed my freshmen year, I completed one semester of my sophomore year. I got married in '46, had David in '47, got divorced in '48, and was back on campus. It took me--to do three semesters, it took me four years because I had a child.

CB: Sure!

HR: I nourished that child. I took an 8 o'clock class and tore back home again for the rest of the day. So eventually, I persevered... and Al Groh came to me years later when he needed somebody to sing the Mother Abbess in the Sound of Music. I was then pregnant with Jamie--our fourth child. I said no, I can't do that, you don't want to put me on. But, eventually I did and that was terrific. Once George got started here, then he started taking summer classes up at Harvard and up at Columbia for the summer, and I got-- there was a lady on campus named Milly Gittins, who ran the bookstore which was located in Chase Hall in one of those back rooms. And Milly always collected the money at the senior dinner dance because it was always held in the crystal ballroom of the Hotel Sterling. And I was her friend, she was a singer, too, and she said, "Well I have to [indistinct] and so next week I'm going to pick up money, so are you going to the senior dinner dance?" "Of course not." You know, these kids are all--I'm three years older than all the rest of them. Which was eons to me.

TG: Yup.

HR: And she coaxed me and coaxed me, "I don't want to sit alone. Come and sit with me at the table." Well I ended up going and sitting with her while she got all the kids at that dinner dance. And after dinner, Herb Morris, who was a member of First Presbyterian Church, and a friend of mine, was our registrar at that time.

CB: Yes. for years and years.

HR: Herb came over from his table from across the floor, the dance floor, "How about a dance, Helen?" I said, "Sure, I'd love to!" So, we got up and danced and Instead of taking me back to Milly's table, he walked me across the dance floor to where he was standing with a guy on the other side who happened to be George Ralston. And that was supposed to be our formal invitation. "Have you two ever met?" George asked me to dance, and we danced together all evening. This was 1952. Then he walked me back down because there was a garage behind Kirby Hall--where Pop used to have his rehearsals--but I would park my car in that driveway, and it was--okay. So he walked me back to my car, I took off to Ashley after a nice little kiss. And then he went up to Butler Hall. I waited two weeks for him to call me back, and I was having a fit because I wanted to have him call me back. And he did, and he took me out, and that was the beginning of the end for George.

[Laughter]

CB: It was the beginning of the beginning!

[Laughter]

HR: This is the age that I needed, he was 8 years older than I was. And the other guys on campus that I dated--sorry, were interested in only one thing. I'd been married, divorced, had a child, blah blah blah. And one date, and that finished all of that off. And a lot of them were football players.

CB: So George was their coach?

HR: That's right.

CB: Aw, this is interesting.

HR: And that's why if they wanted a date with me and they needed a car, they'd just take the convertible! Which was fine with me, I enjoyed riding in it.

CB: So which was more important in your ultimate marriage agreement: the car, or George?

HR: I'm quite definitely--you know the answer to that one.

CB: Let me go back to uh--

HR: Yes, we're going up and down, so to speak.

CB: --a big topic. No, It's wonderful.

FM: While you're taking a sip of your water: you kept up a connection with the college for many years, so you must have--I don't know when you graduated--

TG: '48.

FM:--but you were in every music production I ever saw, and I came in 1955, but you were singing solo parts and shows and theater shows in Irem Temple.

HR: That's right. Well that's--

FM:--And that was the biggest--

HR:--where we did the Sound of Music, and we did a couple of other shows. Al just used me and I wanted to sing, and that was it.

FM: They always made you a part.

HR: Well.

CB: If you got a talent, you pick the show, and show us that talent.

FM: That was the first--when we first came here, I remember the show at Irem Temple was really a big deal in the community. It was really the first organized volunteer--and it wasn't all students, it included--

HR: We did it in conjunction with Kiwanis.

CB: Kiwanis.

HR: I think they wanted to help us, financially, in putting it together. They always had that.

CB: Why don't you say something about Al and the emergence of theater at the BUJC and then at Wilkes?

HR: I never did anything under Al in those early years, when I was 17, 18, 19. But when Sanjie came, and I joined the thespian group, I was in a lot of shows. And I have some pictures that go way back to that time. Sanjie had a saying, that this was her baby and she'd run it her way, and if she gave you a part, you took it. If you didn't take it, you'd never see a part again. And that taught us something, too. I had a lead in a Noel Coward play called Hay Fever one year. And the next year, I was a cockney maid to three Bronte sisters. And I took it because I wanted to be in the next one, whatever it happened to be.

TG: Great system.

[Laughter]

CB: When we talk about surviving,--

HR: Yeah.

CB:--your evolutionary concept--

The stage was where we kept props and on the second floor, if we went up something that was almost a vertical ladder, to the second floor, we had our costume department up there. It was very--as George might have said--what does he say about football? "We didn't even have a jock strap," he'd say. It was basically that way for us, too--we were creating as we did things. And that was terrific. Sanjie and I became very close friends.

CB: We haven't talked about **Norma Sanjulianna Tabersky [00:44:09]**. She--the reference. And what was her relationship to the Planter Peanut fortune?

HR: Obici! Her uncle. She had a home up in Mountaintop where we'd go every summer for a big to-do. In fact, we'd ride a bus up 309, and he'd drop us off, and we'd have to walk the rest of the way into Sanjie's house. And next door to Sanjie--But there was something there that was--they weren't great friends, or something to that effect.

CB: A sister.

HR: Well, there must have been a falling out, of some sort.

CB: She had a sister she wouldn't talk to that was living in the area.

HR: Yeah. So, long side of Sanjie's place was this home for the Obicis, and that was a big name in the company, I presume.

CB: They were one of the founding--?

HR: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

CB: And Connie Mayock, who was on the board, maybe after your time, but her husband was one of the first doctors produced by the BUJC. Dr. Mayock.

HR: Oh, yeah.

CB: Very distinguished physician in Philadelphia at Penn. And Connie Mayock was a niece of the Obicis or in that connection. So she and Sanjie were kind of connected. Sanjie, we got her involved later with the alumni association.

HR: Didn't you give her an honorary doctorate degree?

CB: We did, yup.

CB: She was a real character, and as Helen suggests, very strong. Mr. **Taberski??** [00:46:07] kind of went along with whatever Norma wanted to be doing. But the arrhythmics was the first kind of vision I had of her in action at the BUJC, leading the girls. And she had some falling out with one of the key people, maybe Dr. Farley?

HR: I don't know all of that, I only know of it.

CB: Yeah. Well, what do you know of it?

HR: Just that--nothing, whatever, just that it was. She never opened her mouth to me about it personally. Not at her place at the lake, or.

CB: I think she did to me. But she was, at that point, beginning to lose it. She maybe felt freed up to say things that she would not have before. She became Alzheimers, big time.

HR: I didn't realize that. I went to her funeral, of course, stood with Taya, her daughter, and I made some comment, and said my last name. Because we didn't have first names, us thespians, we were **Bitner**[00:47:14], we were Graham, we were whatever. And I made some kind of a statement, and she looked at me, she said, "Are you **Bitner**! I've heard so much about you!" which was unbelievable to me, because I was just one of the girls, as far as I was concerned. And we had a lunch--

CB: I think that was a great period of her life. We got to know each other at the point that she was in her 70s, probably her 80s, and she was very reminiscing about her days up at the BUJC. They clearly were among the best in her life.

HR: Isn't that interesting. Well she sure taught us kids a heck of a lot of the finer things in life.

CB: [whispering] The finer things.

HR: We just learned how to be ladies.

CB: Speaking of finer things,--

HR: And I've held on to that I think--I hope--all my life.

CB: Give us a portrait, first of Dr. Farley, and then of Mrs. Farley.

HR: Dr. Faley was the great white father. We all bowed and screamed if he came anywhere close byIf he came up to the second floor of the girls' lounge, of Chase Hall, and came to the

doorway, we all snapped to our feet as though a bullet had gone through us, or whatever. He just demanded...

FM: Respect.

HR: ...that feeling of great respect for him. I think he might have been a hard man to live with. But I know nothing else, yknow, it's just a sense that I have. Mrs. Farley was a concert pianist. What her background was as far as studying or playing, she was an outstandingly wonderful musician. She was a very kind, gentle person. Very friendly. There was a point in my life, and it was terrific, I loved it. Laila and Martin Friedmann came to our college. Martin was hired as a violin teacher. Laila was an oboist of great--no, she had a wonderful reputation. We became friends. Laila and Martin had a book of Bach Arias, and we all met at Mrs. Farley's. How it all came about, I don't know. They would meet up at Mrs. Farley's house, in the alumni house, and I was there and they handed me this book and said, "It would be wonderful if we could do some of these with you because the book had violin obligatos and oboe obligatos to alto or mezzo soprano Bach Arias from all of his cantatas." So they gave it to me and said, "Let's meet next week," and I did, and I just devoured that anthology of Bach Arias and learned a number of them very well. Went back the next week, and they were amazed that I had done that, gone that far. And we became a foursome, so to speak. In fact, Mrs. Farley, out at the farm, there was a huge barn. She concocted a program, invited friends, and she had a piano put in the barn and we did Bach Arias with me as the soloist, and then playing the obligatos to a number of these.

CB: Bach and **Bitner** at the Barn.

HR: Well that was it. Chuck Reif used to call me "The Littler Miss Fiddler."

[Laughter]

TG: Thanks, Chuck.

HR: So anyway, that was Chuck for you. But that was a terrific night, and then she had some food afterward. But it was something I think that she probably pulled in, pulled up--what was the famous artist that lived on that same road that Fair-Lea is located on? And I don't mean the lady now named Jan.

[multiple voices murmuring]: Nick Cortiglia?

HR: That's it! Niccolo Cortiglia. Yeah, who was I trying to tell that to? And you think I could come up with that name? Thank you, I think I've got it now.

CB: And was their house the one that Chuck Reif?

FM: Yes.

HR: Oh, Chuck was that--

FM: Chuck was very--

CB: Cause he was out near **Farley**.

HR: Yeah. Carolyn was quite an artist. In fact, there was one specific view of the farm line--

FM: Who might have--?

HR:--out there that she had done that George and I were so in love with that eventually they ended up giving it to us. And I have it on my first floor.

FM: Did Nick do the original presidential painting of Dr. Farley?

CB: Yes.

HR: What's that? The first original what?

CB: Painting of Dr. Farley. The portrait.

FM: It's hanging in Wickesser.

HR: Oh! I don't know that. I would imagine she would've done it.

FM: I think it might be 1955, but by that time the Cortiglias were very respected, both he and she. But I have a recollection that they did the first portrait.

CB: We have some Cortiglias given to us by Chuck Reif, given to our girls.

TG: Was there another portrait?

CB: I'm sorry?

TG: You said the "first portrait."

CB: It's not this one out here.

TG: Okay.

CB: It's a bigger portrait, and it hung in the library, I think.

FM: I don't know if I would have been able to make a distinction. I look at this one and I think Nick Cortiglia, but your--

CB: Maybe. I think the one that I'm thinking of, it was bigger, and he was younger. It was a younger Dr. Farley.

TG: He looks fairly young in that one, the one that I've seen.

CB: Yeah, but he continued to look, from my impression, he continued to look young, even though he had heart trouble. He looked young.

HR: Dr. Farley?

CB: Yup. Young and vigorous.

HR: Well he was out of Philadelphia and his background was--Quaker?

TG: Quaker.

HR: I think that had a lot to do with his personality, and his persona. And but George always got a kick out of it because he said he had heard a story that two kids were walking up River Street, hand-in-hand, and Dr. Farley was walking behind them and went up and separated them, "Don't walk hand-in-hand. Not on my watch, no."

JR: Were there standards of dress applied to the women students?

CB: Standards of dress applied to women students?

HR: Well, we didn't wear pants, that's for darn sure. The way we live in them now.

JR: How about smoking?

HR: That was a part of the scene. In fact, after I had David and went back to finish my degree, and got back and involved in the theater, everybody smoked. And I said to Margo, who was a

dear friend of mine, in a lot of the plays, directed a lot of them, I said, "I've never smoked. What's it like?" I said, "Give me a cigarette." "No, don't start it, Helen, if you do, it'll be impossible to quit." And I did, and I smoked for a couple of years back then. And I suddenly decided that singing was more important, and smoking was bad for my vocal chords, and so I just quit, like that, that's it. Finished. I wasn't addicted, thank God. But everybody smoked! Look at old movies! Constantly!

CB: Home movies, in our case.

FM: Kelly Ripa, on the Good Morning, on current television, every once in a while she uses that gesture that was the woman smoking her cigarette. And I keep thinking, 'Kelly? You're going to make that a thing for women, too!' Helen, m trains of thought changed. George was the Dean of anybody that had a problem. When I came in 1955, Gertrude Doane--

HR: Yeah. Lovely lady.

FM: --was Dean of Women. I only knew. And she was part-time, her husband was Dr. Doane, who was a medical physician

CB: But she ended up Dean of Women.

HR: She ended up being Dean of Women.

CB: So was George then Dean of Men?

FM: Yes. I always called him that.

HR: In the very beginning. Dr. Farley called him in and said, "George, you've got to make up your mind." This was after they had started sports activities, and also counseling kids and the like. He said, "Make up your mind, you've got to be one or the other. Do you want to be director of athletics or be a counselor for students." And thank God he chose the latter, because he was good at that. Kids would get-- I have a letter that I gave to Pat, that I have it back, that came from Gene Roth, who wrote to me after George died, a nice long letter, about how he, as an 18 year old student out of GAR high school, had come to Chase Hall to see if he could get into Wilkes. Wilkes? Yeah. College, and he had to meet the Dean, and he was on the first floor of Chase Hall, and somehow or another George had been informed that Gene was there and Gene said in this letter, "I was trembling in my boots. But he came down the steps to me, I didn't go up the steps to him." He just had a way with kids that endeared them to him. I'd say, "How do you do that, George?" I really did because it was amazing to me, the number of letters and all the rest over the years from students who had been... George McMann wanted to be a doctor, and he couldn't pay his bill, it was \$600 and George gave him the money out of his pocket, I don't know what

pocket, but anyway that sort of thing worried me. But he always got paid back if he loaned money. He did the same thing with **Stelios [1:00:02]**.

CB: Jay S??? [1:00:10]

HR: Yeah. He had spent all his money having a good time. He came over from Italy--no, India.

CB: Jay ???[1:00:20] India. Yeah. But Stelios--

HR: Stelios!

CB: --came from Greece, didn't he?

HR: George, he had a contact in Washington, an ambassador who would relay unto him, good students from Egypt and Greece.

CB: Egypt, okay.

HR: Because we were trying to get foreign students to come to the college. And this way, George was assured that they were good students because he relied on this man who knew. So Stelios came, the story goes, with \$1000 in his pocket, and he blew 9/10ths of it and was called on the carpet to George because he hadn't paid a portion of his bill to the college, whatever, and George did it for him he said, "That's alright, I'll take care of it." How it was taken care of, I don't know, maybe he paid it himself, maybe he just asked forgiveness for it. But whatever he said was law here on this campus. Dr. Farley may have been the Big Cheese, but George was the working man behind it. In fact, Stelios calls me his surrogate mother because he was so appreciative of what George had done for him when he was a kid, and that just is across the board for George.

CB: Say more about the relationship between George and Gene Farley.

HR: George--

CB:--and Gene Farley. How they worked together.

HR: I don't know. That's the first time I've said that, isn't it? I really don't--I don't know. George would never negatively talk about anybody. If he was called on the carpet about something, it was his fault, not, you know. It was never a thing that we talked about at home.

CB: Well, just how did you perceive the way they interacted?

HR: Oh, well certainly they got along well. In fact, we had a Christmas dinner every year on the second floor of that circular dormitory.

CB: New men's dorm.

HR: Oh, Okay. And they always wanted to sing carols and then Dr. Farley would say, "Alright, now it's time for Helen and George to sing Silent Night," and he'd insist--and George loved to sing. He said that he makes a joyful noise. But he really loved to sing, but never studied in any way, shape, or form. So I would sing the alto line, while George would handle the melodic line. And Dr. Farley would come over and ask me for a dance, and I would dance with him. And he made some comment one year after maybe 3 Christmases that I wore the same red dress to the dinner. And he made some comment about having seen the dress before, or something like that, and I felt like saying to him, "Well, if you paid my husband a living salary then maybe I could buy a second dress," because really, I mean things were tight, with four kids.

TG: Yeah.

HR: But you know, you live through it all.

CB: Yup, you live through it all.

FM: Well.

HR: Pardon?

FM: We've done a lot of talking about that post-war, World War II and the student return, and how it changed Wilkes. And when we talk about the early days of the administration, we really are a very lean and mean operation. Dr. Farley, he didn't have a lot of extra bodies around him. In my kind of attempt to understand Dr. Farley's mode of operation, was that he had administrators that came back out of World War II. He didn't give George Ralston--

HR: Administrators? What do you mean?

FM: After World War II. The veterans that came back after World War II.

HR: Yeah...?

CB: That would be Al Groh, George Ralston, John Chwalek.

FM: John Whitby. [1:05:18] That cohort was used to getting a mission assignment. “George, go take that hill. Get rid of that artillery that’s shooting at our flag.” The one of the kind of intangibles that helped to build Wilkes, you just told that guy what you needed to have done, and it wasn’t an order, it was an attempt to identify a problem, and you could solve it for him.

HR: The one thing that George told me about Dr. Farley that I remembered--I’m sure there may have been other things, but I don’t remember everything about that. Dr. Farley is a micromanager. He has to know everything that’s going on. He has to decide what color the draperies are to go in such and such a room. And instead of giving the job to someone else and taking it, he had to have his finger in the pie. And the place was small enough, I guess, that he could do that. That is one thing that I remember about Dr. Farley, he just insisted that he know everything about everything.

FM: And he got the best out of everybody who worked for him.

HR: Yeah.

CB: I’ve got an additional angle on that, which I’ve said during one of these interview sessions, because George was still Dean when I came, so I was dealing with student affairs through him.

HR: You mean Dean of Men.

CB: Well, he was Dean of Students when I came.

HR: Oh, really?

CB: And... Jane and... this is my forgetting names--the guy that succeeded George. Who died--

HR: Oh, Art Hoover.

CB: So Jane and Art were assistant Deans, George was the Dean. And I had a terrible time ever finding out what was going on with student affairs. And there’d be a problem, and my--because I had done a lot with student affairs in my other jobs--my nose would be twitching. And I’d say, “What is happening in this case?” It was like getting something out of the CIA to get Jane and George and Art--and my take on that was that he learned by Dr. Farley to deal with student affairs on his own.

HR: Well he ran the show for so many years on his own.

CB: And yes, Dr. Farley would try to get into it, but George was very good at keeping that unit doing the work. And I mean, look at Paul Adams as acting president, who was a product of George's student affairs clan. And I mean that's a continuity within an institution of one group of people. I bet you won't find that anywhere else in the country.

HR: I commend Paul. Paul really loved George, very deeply. George was helpful to Paul. We were at a dinner dance--or we were at a dance someplace up at the Woodlands, Jean and Paul, and George and I. We were sitting waiting for it to start or whatever, and Paul said to George--he at that point was running... Paul was head of housing. Housing, that's it. He said, "You know George, I really don't see myself going anyplace here at this college. Where do I go from this job?" You know, that would be an advancement. And George--whatever George said--and I don't know, Jean and I were probably talking about something, and this is just swirling around--and George must have convinced Paul that he should stick it out, hang in there, take his chances, get his doctorate degree, whatever. And he did. And it paid off.

CB: Hugely. For Wilkes and for Paul and Jean.

HR: And for Paul and Gene I hear they're down in McCole house. John McCole.

CB: Really?

HR: They moved from their home in Kingston.

CB: That's presidential house, or is this his private house?

HR: I'm sure they're not selling their house because Paul knows this is an interim job. But I think he wanted to get closer to campus. And when I talked to Gene at the funeral of Art Piccone, she said, "We're moving into John McCole's house," on River Street.

TG: No, it's on River

CB: On South River Street.

TG: South River.

HR: It's a nice house. In fact, Sandra Carol and her husband lived there for a number of months, I think, until they bought a house in the back mountain, because we went to a Christmas party, George and I, in that house. And I think he just wants, she said, "We wouldn't dream of going into the president's home," because I think out of respect for the fact that he won't be the president.

CB: Interesting.

HR: So obviously that place was available and they just decided to move over to being closer on campus.

CB: When John McCole, John's brother, when we negotiated that house and there were what, five others? That were owned by John McCole and our, what's the name of the nursing school on the corner? Richard Pearsall.

HR: Passan?

TG: Pearsall.

CB: Adrian Pearsall and John McCole owned several houses on South River Street. And we secured those at the same time, turned them into housing.

HR: They belong to us? Wilkes, I mean?

CB: Wilkes got them. And before John died, it was a big deal. It created tensions with our mayor and part of why I was ready to leave. John and Connie hoped that we would move into that house. And Jane spent a lot of time using it for entertaining. For students, the community. It's a beautiful house, and it's right in the middle of the action. And unfortunately, the person who lived next door was Steve **Corbin**, which is what gave me my heartburn. I said, "I don't need to be doing this for the rest of my life."

HR: What was the last name?

CB: Corbett. Steve Corbett. Wrote a column in the Times Leader. A viscous column.

TG: And I think he was responsible for that other thing that was in there, what was it called? They would print anything.

CB: No, that was Allison Walzer.

TG: Was it?

CB: Yeah, what was it called? You could spill the dirt on your colleague and not spoil your name. So it was honest.

TG: Did I ever tell you the story, by the way, so I lived down near McCole when I first came because they were renovating 30 West River, and so I was down there one Saturday morning and I happened to come out of the driveway and there he was, and he said, "Did you hear the noise last night, I bet it kept you awake all night." And I said, "No, I didn't hear a thing." It was true! I didn't hear a thing. So I didn't care for his complaints. Either he was a very light sleeper or--

CB: We lived in the house next to him, which we owned. I mean he bought tools.

TG: Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to...

HR: Oh, it's alright, why not? You're entitled.

CB: We put the most outstanding students in that house just because we knew it was gonna be... but he still found ways to provoke them and they couldn't resist provoking him.

TG: He was...

CB: He was sick.

TG: Yeah.

Jim Rodechko: Well he got involved in the Betty Wolsieffer killing, if you remember that. She was killed by her husband, the dentist. And he interfered with the court proceedings. There was a [indistinct, 1:15:24] and he won. They were, at that time, would've thrown him in jail. Too bad they didn't.

TG: Well anyway, we digressed there.

CB: We digress. But your thoughts on Paul are really wonderful. And I'll just re-comment that what George created in the student affairs world at Wilkes, is one of its real jewels. And it continues. And as I said, I would guess there's not a college in the country who has had the continuity of staff--

HR: Yeah.

CB: --from one person. 1946 through the present, which now is close to 60 years. You've got interlocking people that were there, very, very unusual.

TG: That's a point that needs to be underlined. Because when I was president--part of it was Paul, but I think it was staff as well-- I never worried about student affairs. Most presidents have to worry about that all the time.

CB: Same here.

TG: And I think that's the tradition that George built up.

HR: I've got something. Dr. Farley called George one night--we were married--in the middle of the night, and said, "George," --One of his granddaughters, starts with an "L"?

CB: Lindsay.

HR: Lindsay! I had Leslie going in my head.

CB: She was the last gal.

HR: "Lindsay hasn't come home," in the middle of the night to George. Not the father. George. "Go find her." George got dressed and found her out in Bear Creek with her boyfriend. They are stuck in the mud or something, whatever. But George got them back home again. But that's what Dr. Farley would do to George, and he knew it would work!

CB: Lindsay and I talked about that the other night, that same story.

HR: Oh, really!

TG: No kidding.

HR: Well what was her take on why--did they get stuck in the mud?

CB: What were they gonna do?

HR: Yeah, there was no cellphone in those days.

CB: So she was rescued by the Dean, I mean that's the perfect, straightforward story.

TG: Rescued! Now that suggests, though, that George knew all the places to look.

CB: George knew everything. He coulda been CIA.

HR: I even dated Bob a couple of times.

CB: You did.

HR: Yeah.

CB: Bob Farley.

HR: He's dead. Is Gene dead?

CB: Yes. Gene has died too.

HR: Well, he was a doctor.

CB: Right, at Wisconsin.

HR: Yeah.

FM: I thought he was at Rochester.

CB: He was for a while, but I think he ended up at Madison. And a very active role, civically, in that wonderful city. But Ethyl was the one who bore the burdens of being in that high-powered family. She had a very rough life.

HR: She married and then divorced,--

CB: And married again.

HR: --because he was homosexual. And she had a child with him. And he was the same age as David, my oldest son, who's now 72, and I'd go out to Fair Lea (Or Farley Farm) with David, and she was--Doug?

CB: Douglas was the name of her second marriage.

HR: What was the name of her first son? But anyway our kids would play, and we'd sit or walk around in the fields or whatever. And we were good friends for a number of years.

CB: Well we employed her daughter one summer here, working on Wilkes things. And she had a son Eugene Farley Douglas, who's brilliant, and since we're taping this I won't go further, but

I've had a lot to do with him. Not recently, but I catch up on him whenever I see Sarah or Lindsay. It's a long saga.

HR: Well what's her second husband's name?

CB: Her second husband's name was Douglas. Now there were two kids, Gene--Eugene and I'm forgetting what the girl's name is, and she had the son by this first marriage.

HR: George and I went out to the Fair-Lea (Farley Farm) because that's where they had the service.

CB: Say something about--you two, about Fair-Lea as part of the Wilkes family campus, their home. Now we know that **Bitner?** and Bach were in the barn, but what else can you say about the Fair-Lea as an extension of the Wilkes campus?

FM: There was a fall welcoming event down at the barn where freshmen wore their dinks. Remember those years? The little kind of funny cap that was an ivy league tradition. And Dr. Farley, I think the first year I came in 1955 was the last year that they actually wore dinks for the freshmen class.

HR: That they had what?

CB: Dinks.

HR: Oh!

FM: little cap things.

HR: Oh, yeah. I only remember mostly the picnics we had prior to graduation time, and George was always the guy making the hamburgers, and they had a baseball game going, and it was just a time to relax and enjoy people's company

CB: Lisa has something to add.

Lisa Spengler: I remember it so well. So well. The baseball games, and cooking the hamburgers, the farm, we could run around. It was... I still have really good memories of the farm.

FM: That's my middle daughter, Helen.

LS: Yes.

HR: I forgot you were down there!

LS: I know. But I remember that so well and I don't even remember how old I was, but I was young. I remember always going up there.

HR: Yeah, we always took our kids out

FM: This story has no relevance to our history, but I remember playing the ball games out at the senior class picnic or whatever, and I was not very athletically inclined, and of course, George. He was an athlete. He may have only been five foot seven or something.

HR: Yeah.

FM: Was he an all-American at North Carolina or something?

HR: He was on a varsity for four years. I mean, his degree--he had an athletic scholarship to get in because he needed it, obviously

FM: So I didn't know any of that, you know? And George is pitching. And I'm catching, because that's all I do, I sit there and catch the ball that got past the batter. So there was a pop fly, and it came down, now George is out there, he's pitching and I'm back there and I'm catching. The batter's here, kind of the end of his swing, and George is on a direct line to get the ball. I'm on a direct line to the ball. He hit me, and I must've gone five feet in the air!

HR: George?

FM: George!

HR: I'm so sorry!

FM: His instinct, he just glocked himself right into me and caught the ball and I was flying out in left field.

HR: He didn't even see you he was so

CB: He didn't see you, he was a focuser! George was focused.

FM: And that was the first I realized how, and I'm a biologist now, first I realized how human tissue can really feel different in different people. And athletes-- you know, I was the average

kid. But George was really a gifted physical specimen, and he was always stretching. He'd sit on a chair, like this, at a meeting, when he got bored, I can't do it, but he'd do sit ups, with his arms up! Yeah! And Dr. Farley got tired of saying, "George, is anything the matter?" he'd

HR: Right.

FM: He was a very strong man.

CB: Part of George's strength that I experienced is grabbing my hand and pushing me on the shoulder.

HR: Yeah!

CB: Just like he was testing me.

HR: He was making a point, you know, because I know you've told me about this, I know he'd hold you like--he did that to everybody! But I think it was the middle for me!

FM: Everybody kind of has that little grim!

HR: Nobody could stop him. I didn't even try. And that handshake--brother! Sometimes he'd grab a hold of me, and I'd say, "Oh, George, not so hard!"

FM: Great memories.

HR: He just seemed to be a very physical individual and yet he had the mentality of an angel.

CB: If you put your thumb, where you're shaking, put the thumb there. They can't squeeze it. It protects you. I learned this in terms of giving out diplomas, everyone shaking hands and going across. If you get the thumb right there with the wrestlers you come across, they're gonna crunch your knuckles. That keeps them from doing it. I did that with George, too.

HR: Valid.

CB: This may be a more personal thing to ask, did George ever consider another position, away from Wilkes?

HR: Yeah. After he finished all of the exams up at Columbia, he took the four comprehensive oral... I can't name them. There were four exams he had to get through in order to get his

doctorate, that is, if he would write the thesis, of course, which was a terrible topic for him, and that's why he never did it!

CB: What was the topic?

HR: It was a statistical analysis of four classes, college classes, in relationship with four others at some other time, and the comparison or whatever. It was too statistical for George. He wasn't built that way. Why did they insist on it?

They extended it, and extended it, and extended it, until finally they gave up. And that was the end of his formal education.

CB: What impact did that have on him?

HR: Oh, and he had offers out as far as California. I said, "Well George, honey you've got to make up your mind about these things. I'll go anywhere with you. I don't care where it is" And he was so in love with this little college that he couldn't pull himself away from it. And I was at the church. I was for 70 years the alto soloist at the Presbyterian church. Why? Because we never left town! We just stayed and lived our life here. And Wilkes-Barre gets bad-mouthed so much by so many people. And sometimes I'll even hear it come out of one of our boys, and I'll say, "Look. It took decades for us to get to this mess, now it's going to take decades to get our city back where it should be. Don't do this, because it just upsets me. I'm just a part of the college, and that's it."

FM: Wilkes barre. And what was the other one we wanted to ask Helen about? [indistinct, 1:29:27] and structure.

CB: Ask about the Barre Hall first, and I'll--

FM: Do you remember having any conversations or have any insight into what George's involvement or contribution to naming Wilkes was?

CB: Wilkes College.

HR: Wilkes? No, I haven't the foggiest idea.

FM: Because it was... Were you here when it was the junior college?

HR: Yeah! The BUJC. 1933-47 I was at the BUJC.

FM: So you were here when the main--

CB: You were here when it was named Wilkes College. But we don't remember why they chose that.

FM: We've been trying to find out why did they pick Wilkes? My theory was well, they sure didn't want to call it Bucknell in Wilkes-Barre, or Bucknell campus in Wilkes-Barre, and Wilkes-Barre already it was a city, and Barre doesn't have a-- But Wilkes College would identify it, it's out of Bucknell's hands, and that may be, but that's too simple.

HR: I wouldn't have the foggiest idea.

FM: We have a statue of John Wilkes on the bloomin campus, and nobody knows why!

CB: Well I did that. I did that.

TG: Chris can tell you about that.

FM: So it was an arbitrary historian.

HR: Well, because of Wilkes!

CB: There was a Sordoni Gallery exhibition, which you probably remember, and I think Petrillo did it, the the brother-in-law?

JR: That sounds right.

CB: And it focused on Wilkes and Barre. And it was 18th century paintings and cartoons. I think in that catalog, there was a reference to the process by which they decided to not name it John Wilkes College, because John Wilkes was in none of the ??? [1:31:37] that this was taking on more than his reputation or what he wanted to do. But they also really got associated with him. And if you read the plaque on the statue, which I spent a fair amount of time on, it identifies three major things that Wilkes did in the process of the 1760s and 70s, which were ultimately in support of the colonists and that were very worthy of being identified. One was the prohibition of lawful search and seizures of your private property. One was the requirement that the proceedings of the parliament be published and available to the public. And the third one, I can't remember, but it was essential to our Bill of Rights. And his support group was called the Bill of Rights Society. So we actually got the actual concept for our first 10 amendments to the Bill of Rights from the Bill of Rights Society supporting John Wilkes. I think there was talk of Wilkes-Barre College located in this town. Whether the fact that King's College had been established in that precise period, they didn't want it solely identified as the town, so they chose to relate to

John Wilkes, but don't put the name John. That's my--and that, I think, is explored in the catalog of the Sordoni Gallery. We should be able to get that. And I think it was one of Charlie Petrillo (Class of 1966) historical--he did a lot of publications of things historical for Wilkes-Barre.

TG: So one of our alums bought the statue, though right? We didn't find it?

CB: No, I raised money for it. I got the most money from the Sordoni and from Rosenn and Jenkins and Greenwald. Because we dedicated the statue to Max Rosenn. So I raised 50 or \$60,000 for it. I went over and saw the original in London.

TG: Oh, I see, so this is a replica.

CB: I didn't go over to do that, we were there for other reasons, but I-- Lee Namey, who was the mayor--

HR: Where is it, in England?

CB: It's right in the old city of London. It's right near St. Paul's. It's out in an area in the middle of the road, a little island around it. But Lee Namey, the mayor at the time, and so the dedication party over in London invited him, and I think the mayor of Wilkesboro North Carolina, other towns that were named--I mean John Wilkes was a great hero to the colonists, because he kind of thumbed his nose at the King, who, by the way, ended up being a very good friend of his. He was Lord Mayor of London. And this doctor in the new old city felt that John Wilkes should be remembered as Lord Mayor. So he commissioned the statue from Mr. Butler, who did the statue, and what he's holding is a document that deals with the rights of the colonists. Even in London that's how he's represented. So Lee Namey said, "I can't go when you go." And I said, "I can't go, but when I next go to London, I'll try to look him up. so I went and met the doctor and I said, "I would really like to see if we couldn't do a copy of it and have it at Wilkes." and he said, "Well, let me call James Butler," who was up in Worcestershire. And he could come to see me the next day. I was only going to be there one more day. And we met and we hit it off terrifically. And we worked out the price, the cost. And I came back to raise the money. I had no guarantee, but I said, "I can raise the money." And it was Steve Sordoni, he was the one who gave the most money.

TG: Is that right?

HR: Steve?

CB: Steve Sordoni, the youngest.

HR: Yeah.

CB: And then Rosenn Jenkins and Greenwald gave a chunk in honor of Max, and Joe Savitz was part of the effort. And it was a great day when it was dedicated, and the Butlers came over. And his wife, who was from South Africa, a fantastic, interesting woman, wrote about bicycling internationally. They had five girls, and I subsequently went and visited him at their home in England, and he had all these statues of little ballerinas, modeled by his daughters. We have one in our living room that he gave us. He did the great statue of Kenyatta in Nairobi, the great seated statue. He did a major one in Zimbabwe of one of the freedom fighters. And he also did a lot in England. And he won the right to do the statue to Queen Elizabeth on her 50th anniversary in Parliament Square. But that was when the financial problems of the royal family were out there and she said, "I don't want any money spent on this." But it was going to be a unicorn. It was beautiful! And it was a highly competitive process. So James Butler was a major sculptor. And so we were lucky to get him to... he loved having it here. And it came in pieces, of course, which we stored in the garage of the building on the corner which is in the art department and ROTC, and the **man of Demesotta?? [1:38:35]** who was a Princeton graduate. Right next to the **Gimbey?? [1:38:47]** Center
What's the name of that building?

TG: Ohhh!

CB: It begins with "P". My god, this is infectious. Mike, we've infected this whole group with our short-term memory!

FM: We have.

TG: Yeah, it really has.

CB: It's not Parish. Or is it Parish?

TG: No.

FM: Parish was up near...

CB: Anyway, that sculpture to me was one of the most important moments of my presidency. As a historian, we had opened up the quadrangle. Because much of the time I was here, there were those carriage houses and the Fenners were very determined to keep their land themselves and keep the noise level down for Hilda. And it was only going to Torch Club with Chuck Reif and George Fenner, one a month, I had taken the risk of being driven home by George, who would

drop Chuck off first, and then I would have to negotiate driving with him from North Franklin Street to get back. But when we'd park behind the president's house, George Fenner would start talking about the things that he was really concerned about at Wilkes. We gradually worked it around, and then he left, basically, even after Hilda died, they left major bonds to us. When George died, he actually left the house to us, while he was still alive, when he turned it into a faculty--

HR: They gave us the air conditioning of our First Presbyterian Church auditorium.

FM: [indistinct] pictures that you've sent us on emails?

Suzanna Calev: Oh, through this scrapbook?

CB: The three great--

SC: Oh, the three--no, we've been trying to figure out who--

CB: I think the first one is Christopher Columbus.

SC: Okay. The one that's on the right, yeah.

CB: Almost positive.

SC: I think there have been a few guesses, one of them was Galileo and Copernicus, and then Christopher Columbus, and almost sort of like looking toward the future, and two of them looking to the past. We were trying to figure it out.

CB: I linked it with the sculpture of Dantes, which was not in this room, but was in the other--

SC: Right

CB: It was paper mache, and it looked like bronze. Was that still on the mantle?

TG: I don't recall if it was.

CB: It was a bust. It looked the same artist.

SC: Interesting. Do we know where that went? Probably not. No. And it was in here?

CB: And it was, on the back of it, split. The first part was "D-A-N" then there's the bust, and then "T-E-S".

SC: Interesting.

CB: I said, “Who is this ‘Dan Tez’?”

[Laughter]

TG: Yeah, well. [Laugh]

CB: Then we finally figured it out and, we said, “Looked just like the guy I knew!” It was Dantes. Helen, what other issues or topics would you like to hear us talk about, or that you would like to share with us as we reminisce about Wilkes?

HR: No, I turn that over to you, absolutely. My conception of meeting with you all was to just explore some of the things that I remembered from that early era of my life.

CB: What do you remember about the faculty? You mentioned Pop Geis, what other faculty did you have at the BUJC? And Sanjie.

HR: In that period? Who I’d pick primarily? I mean, there’s so--you know, faculty has gone on and--

CB: I’m saying were there any that stand out?

HR: I’ll always remember Mary Craig, Dr. Mary Craig.

CB: Tell us what you remember about her. Because people, students from your generation and later, regard her as one of the great characters of their experience.

HR: You see, I was going into World Lit as a freshmen because I skipped 101 English. I wish I hadn’t, because we had to write papers, papers, papers, which I would have learned to do better, had I taken 101. She was a huge woman, and she had an absolutely unbelievable facade in the front like this. You didn’t know where it started or ended, but it went from the shoulders to the waist! And she had a very severe haircut, and every time she’d start to talk, [HR taking a slow, deep inhale and exhale] she had this tremendous exhale or inhale of air, she probably had a physical problem.

CB: Probably. COPD.

HR: But just highly respected. I do remember sitting alongside her in the cafeteria, which was in Chase Hall, on the first floor. And Mrs. Rerron was the lady who was in charge of it. And I was sitting on a stool and she was alongside of me, and I made the mistake of saying to her, “Dr. Craig, you wouldn’t like to buy a ticket to the Bach festival concert, would you?” And she, [HR groans loudly] “That is what you never say! That’s a negative approach, Helen!” Mind, she had this voice that would go up and down. And I thought, “Yeah, the darn lady is right about it,” I should have said, “I’m selling tickets for,” and you know, and didn’t postulate that, “You wouldn’t like to.” And I was a little bit of an introvert. I think that’s why I got into music, because that was the only way I could express myself, and explode out from what held me back in the first place. I had very little to do with her on a one-on-one basis. And Dr. Nicholson was my English professor and I didn’t like him at all, but it doesn’t matter. Not English, history professor. But where he came from, that’s what I said, did he come from the university or not?

CB: Were you aware of which faculty were actually Bucknell faculty that came from Lewisburg?

HR: No.

CB: No distinction.

HR: I was just a little 17 year old kid, you know?

CB: I’m just wondering what the faculty, how they are perceived by the students.

TG: And even how they presented themselves. Did some Bucknell faculty commute here, but they were on the main campus?

CB: Right, and then some of those decided to stay when it became Wilkes.

HR: Well, that’s what I said, Pop Geis used to come up two days of the week, as I understand it.

TG: And did he teach at Bucknell as well?

HR: Yeah. He was coming out of, where the heck is?

CB: Lewisburg.

HR: Lewisburg.

JR: That’s a good drive.

CB: 60 miles.

TG: And in those days, it was...

HR: And he had a little hole in the wall spot in Weckesser Hall's third floor that he called home when he was here.

CB: Now is that the Weckesser Hall...

HR: I don't mean Weckesser, I mean Chase Hall. Weckesser wasn't--this building wasn't a part of the college at all. In fact, I understand they taught classes on Northampton Street prior.

CB: In the very beginning.

HR: And see I know that came between **Humphrey?? [1:47:54]** and when I came in '42.

CB: Across from the YMCA.

FM: Across from the he YMCA second floor I believe, before that--

CB: Do you remember what the name of that building was?

FM: No.

CB: It was a commercial building...the old Wilkes-Barre Business College building 29-31 West Northampton Street.

HR: Yeah. But it's gone now.

TG: It's gone now?

CB: I think that was where the BUJC started.

HR: Yeah.

CB: I mean that was the beginning. I mean, we didn't get Kirby Hall until December 6, '41.

HR: Or Chase.

CB: It was already 8 years old--it was a college by then.

HR: Yeah.

SC: I had a question about if the BUJC, if when they were making the change to Wilkes College, if the students were apprehensive, or were they excited for the change? Was there any sort of perception of that?

HR: I haven't the foggiest idea. I can remember the program was held between Chase and Kirby in '47 and there was a lot of hoopla and some music and whatnot and I was... '47. I was not at the school at that time because that's the year David was born. But I still came to that program from my parents'.

CB: Is this the one on the mural in the Stark-Cohen center? That mural is of the dedication, innit? Of Wilkes College?

FM: Yeah!

HR: Oh, really? I don't think so.

FM: Oh no, because Stark Hall wasn't built in 1947.

CB: No no, when Stark Hall was built, you had a mural painted on the wall outside the big--

FM: It had all the faculty up to...

CB: Well I think it showed the picture when the Wilkes College was established. It's got Dr. Farley, it's got trustees.

HR: Right, right.

TG: Everybody's wearing a wig.

[Laughter]

HR: The one person in that mural that I think his face was caught perfectly was Al Groh.

CB: Was that a Cathel O'Toole?

HR: Cathel? Yeah, it was here.

CB: Okay. I never put that together.

SC: It's actually being moved to the library actually, so eventually it's going to be--

JR: The mural?

SC: Yeah.

JR: It still exists?

SC: Yeah.

HR: I showed Suzanna some pictures that were framed that had Cathel's name down it.

SC: Oh yeah, they're wonderful.

HR: So listen, Paul, my sister, lived on Yeager Avenue up in Forty Fort, and they had a beautiful, big Cathel O'toole over their fireplace and it got demolished in the flood. Because it was a watercolor! I guess it didn't have glass on it. But he [O'toole] was very much a part of the university family.

CB: I have a Cathel O'toole Christmas card reproduction of the president's house on 30 West River that went out one year and we framed it and it's our picture of--

FM: You know you go through life and there are certain odds and ends that stick in your mind almost forever. And the one thing that always stuck in my mind early on from George Ralston was when he would be welcoming the freshmen class and encouraging them to sing, and George would stand up there and say, "And if you don't know how to sing,--

FM and HR: "Make a joyful noise!"

FM: Somehow that has stuck in my brain for 60 years!

HR: He used to say that at Rotary too, cause he directed all the music every Tuesday at lunchtime up at the Genetti's.

CB: He also ran the cheer. W-I-L-K-E-S running up and down the sidelines. Remember that?

HR: Oh, sure. I have a picture of him up in the den. I have numerous pictures that are going to end up back here if they're wanted.

CB: Good. That'd be very good.

HR: At some point in time. You saw that wall full of them.

CB: Any other observations on the relation or the friendship between Al Groh and Elenor Farley, which seemed to be a beautiful friendship. An unusual one.

HR: I haven't any idea. But I don't know if they talked art, music, ..

CB: Yes, yes. Al talked to me a lot about it.

HR: He was knowledgeable, and she probably found him someone good to communicate with.

HR: I was only a kid. I couldn't sit with Mrs. Farley and discuss anything like that. She needed someone closer to her own age.

CB: I think they both wrote poetry. But Al talked a lot about her with me. And my sense was that she unburdened herself a lot with what it was like to be the president's wife.

HR: Mhm. Maybe that's how I got that feeling that...

CB: And it's a grim observation that maybe we've made once before, but all the presidents' wives to Pat, died before they did. Which, given the fact that in this country, women live longer than men, we have survived our wives.

HR: That's weird.

CB: All of us.

TG: I survived my *second* wife.

CB: You took that chance.

TG: Yeah. [Laughing] Made the leap.

CB: Because I know Dr. Farley's loss of Elanor was a huge, huge loss.

HR: Loss of?

CB: Of Elanor, when she died.

HR: Oh, I bet.

CB: Well I think this has been a lovely, animated session. We didn't get you to sing an Aria. I have heard you sing, mostly at the Presbyterian church, many times as a soloist. And a gorgeous contralto voice.

HR: I did a lot of singing all around the area. The singers guild in Scranton, the Hazleton Oratorio. It was basic band at Wyoming Valley Oratorio with the ??? [1:54:53]. That's what I wanted out of life. All I wanted to do was enjoy music and share it with people. And fortunately, I had the ability to do that. So I taught lower school, I had all 4 Sordoni boys. In fact, every time I see Andy, he says, "Oh, my favorite music teacher!" Which is kind of cute.

CB: It's nice.

HR: And I was only there for 2 or 3 years.

CB: His company means more than others.

HR: Yeah! And Stevie was a second grader, and George--no, Andy was the oldest of those guys.

CB: Andy was the oldest. George, Bill.

HR: He was in 8th grade going onto Sem.

CB: I think Bill was 2 and George was 3 and Steve was 4.

TG: Yep. Right.

HR: Oh, okay.

CB: Steve was the baby.

HR: Yeah. So that was a wonderful experience.

CB: Would you be willing to say a little bit about each of your sons, and what they've done in life?

HR: Jamie, my youngest, is an electrical engineer. Got the degree at Wilkes, the four of them got their degrees. He works at Martin Rogers here in Wilkes-Barre and does a lot of design work for them, laying out new layouts. What he does, I don't know. But he knows what he's doing and he's highly respected by Martin and Rogers. Seven years later, than--Jamie is my youngest, and Tom is seven years...

TG: Older.

HR: Older, right. I'm going backwards, I don't know why I do that, they usually start with David and work down. But Tom had a music degree from Wilkes in trombone. Went on to BU to do a master's in it, and then decided, he said to me one day, "I don't want to be a poor musician the rest of my life. I'm going to do something else." So he put his trombone aside, and ended up with New England Financial and MetLife and he didn't like MetLife's way of doing business. So he had a friend who had been downsized. Thomas never downsized, because he had the art of speaking easily and well with people and--outgoing. So he ended up, because his friend had gone to Bentley University in Waltham, in development. He said, "Tom, there's an opening over here, are you interested?" So he went to Bentley and ended up working in development of that university the rest of his life.

CB: And now with the alumni association at Wilkes.

HR: And now he's on the board. Yeah, he's on the board. John is 18 months older than Tom. The two boys came quickly. And John graduated with honors here from Wilkes, but developed an ailment when he was a senior called Reiter's syndrome, which is an arthritic ailment that attacks the young adult. He crossed to get his diploma with hard-soled flat shoes on because his feet were so swollen, he couldn't get his feet into shoes. He couldn't get his thumb to hit his baby finger because his hands were swollen. We had him doctored here locally for a couple of weeks, and nothing was helping. We ended up sending him down to Geisinger, or Danville in Geisinger and after two weeks down there and bloodwork and all that kind of thing, they diagnosed it as this arthritic ailment for which they had no cure, but you could go into remission. So that's what happened to John. John wanted to go on to get a master's degree when he left Wilkes, but he was physically incapable. Gene Domzalski was the guy working here that would place kids into jobs temporarily or whatever, and so he did a myriad of jobs locally as best he could at that period of his time. And ended up in a Ponderosa and sort of fell into doing that kind of work. Ended up at a big hotel in Harrisburg and then one out in Houston, Texas. And has just been able to use that as his livelihood. He's succeeded at that. He's in Canton--it's called Orchard Cove in Campton, Massachusetts. It's a Hebrew senior life, it's called. It's a very large senior citizen's residence. And he runs the whole--he's head of culinary there, and there are five whole restaurants that he has to make sure of on a daily basis, so it's--

CB: And David?

HR: And David, of course, finished here. He had a job at IBM before he even got out of college. Went straight up to Poughkeepsie NY and worked there for a year and decided he didn't like that kind of work at all. He had a business degree. And so he went to Florida Atlantic in Boca Raton in Florida and got a Master's degree. And then IBM took him back again because that was their policy in those days. So he worked another year for IBM and still decided he didn't like it. So he went to FSU and did a doctoral study in organizational management and that sort of thing. David has achieved--David had a chair position for about 15 years at the University of Oklahoma, which he got after 18 years at UCON in Connecticut. University of Connecticut. Then he went to Oklahoma. And does mostly writing. In fact, he still publishes in the periodicals, and has even done some of the work in the periodicals accepting or rejecting papers and that sort of thing. He most recently was taken into the Academy of International Business Fellows. And he had to go over to India to get that. And he's just done very well, but he's totally retired now and just does a lot of writing, and basically that's David's life now, at 72. It's time for him to slow down.

CB: To be a healthy mother--

HR: Yes!

CB: --of a 72 year old son, is itself an accomplishment.

HR: Oh yeah, he keeps himself trim. He was my son that I had before marriage.

CB: I know that, I know that.

HR: And so that covers the boys.

TG: Well, the story is, that they're out of the house.

CB: They're out of the house. Produced some grandchildren.

TG: They're out of the house, and they have their own benefits.

HR: Oh yeah, they're all very--

CB: Self-sustained.

HR: Very self-sustaining!

CB: Which is important.

TG: That's an accomplishment.

HR: Yeah.

CB: Helen, this has been delightful. Thank you, thank you so much. This is all on tape!

HR: I--that's a shame.

[Laughter]

TG: No, it's not, it's wonderful.

JR: Helen, can I ask you a question?

HR: I know I've missed some things I would have liked to have said--but!

JR: In the course of your singing career, did you ever meet the woman from Wilkes-Barre who was supposed to be the worst opera singing act? Florence Gibson, was it?

CB: Jenkins.

JR: Florence Jenkins!

HR: No, I never met her. Mrs. Dewitt knew her from--

[indistinct side conversations]

HR:--the West side, and the movie with--

CB: Meryl Streep.

HR: --Meryl Streep is--

TG: Is that about her?

HR: Yeah. And my friend, who's now departed, from Kingston, has a recording that is a recording of her singing, and he always had a lot of fun letting us all hear it.

CB: There was a woman, a housewife in Southern California, I think in the 1960s, named Mrs. Miller.

JR: Oh, yeah. [Laughter]

CB: And I have a record and on the back of it, it refers to Florence Foster Jenkins. And Mrs. Miller sounds amazingly like her, although she's singing songs like "These Shoes were Made for Walking," as opposed to arias. But the timbre of the voice and the reach for the note is hilarious.

HR: And not quite making it!

CB: Or over making it!

HR: Or, yes.

CB: So I didn't know, until I was talking about Mrs. Miller the other day, with Joe Mateo, and he said, "Wouldn't you know, Florence Jenkins is from Wilkes-Barre." And she's buried here, and people come to visit the grave. Typically since the movie.

HR: Yes.

JR: The movie was very good.

CB: Anyway, thank you for sharing so much. And we don't know what's going to happen to this project, but now you are recorded for history.

HR: Oh, dear heavens.

CB: We wish it had been video, but we have not gotten to that level of sophistication yet.

It's been a delight for me, but a fright as well, ever since you approached it to me months and months ago. I've been *dreading* this day.

JR: Really?

HR: Because I just had that feeling that I wasn't going to be able to produce sufficiently for you all to make it--

CB: Butterflies in the stomach--

HR: Yeah.

CB: --before the performance. You did very well.

HR: You can turn it off now, Susan.

SC: Oh okay, yeah.