

Oral History with Owen Faut
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Participants:

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Transcribed by Kara Beerley, November 2021

Chris Breiseth (CB): This is February 12, Lincoln's birthday, in the year 2020. We're in Weckesser Hall and we have Tim Gilmour and Robert Heaman and Jim Rodechko and Suzanna Calev, and we're interviewing chemistry professor Owen Faut, who I think out of the people in the room, goes back further in Wilkes's history than any of us. So Owen, to begin with, how did you find out about Wilkes and how did you get here? And when?

Owen Faut (OF): I came here in 1967 and I had previously been employed by a college in Indiana called Hanover College, and I had gone there when I had finished my PhD. The thing that attracted me to Hanover was the fact that they were starting a brand new curriculum the year I was going to be there, including a brand new calendar. They had two 14-week terms and a 5-week term, and during the 14 week term, students were only allowed to take 3 courses, and during the 5-week term, they were only allowed to take one course. And we had to arrange the entire chemistry department program to fit into that curriculum. And I thought it was gonna be a great way to learn how college operates. It's a small liberal arts college in southern Indiana, affiliated with the Presbyterian church. And we did well. Our students did well. I was promoted my third year from assistant to associate professor and given tenure. But in my 5th year I decided it was time to leave. If you ask me why, I still can't tell you. But I applied for positions around various places in the United States, and Wilkes had a position open. I applied here, I came for an interview, and I was impressed by several things. I was impressed by the chemistry faculty and what they wanted to do for their students. I was certainly impressed by Eugene Farley, who was president at the time. And I looked at the physics department and my gosh, they had an outstanding physics department at that time. And since physics needed to be used to support chemistry majors, that was a great positive feature. And I liked several things that went on. As I said, the department was pushing its students to be the best they could be, which I thought was vital. In addition to that, when I talked to Farley, he said that if I wanted to get tenure here, I was gonna have to get involved in the community. And I liked that because it meant that you have a college that's in the middle of a community like this one is, the college was committing itself to the community. I didn't have to be involved in Wilkes-Barre, I just had to be involved in the community in which I lived, and we never did that in Wilkes-Barre when we were here. And still don't. But that's some of the things that brought me here.

CB: Tell us about Dr. Farley.

OF: [Laughs] Oh. A very interesting gentleman. A couple of things. My first year here, I was impressed with the way the faculty minutes were taken. Dr. Farley appointed the faculty secretary, and that person, usually from the English department, would take the minutes and read them at the next faculty meeting. And one of the first things I did in one of the first faculty meetings I attended was to request that the minutes be distributed to the entire faculty so that the faculty could have a written form of what went on in the faculty meeting and be able to advise students more carefully about what was happening in the curriculum. And he had no problem, he said, "sure, we can do that." and he had not done that before, but I had made that suggestion, and he said yeah, we can do it. If you talked to him, he was not the kind of arrogant, stand-offish fellow that I had heard about. And I'll never forget the time that we invited him to dinner in our home, and that's while he was still president. I'll never forget him walking into the house, and all four of our children came down from their rooms upstairs, looked him right in the eye, stuck out their hands to shake hands with him, and it rocked him right back on his heels. [Laughing]

CB: Beautiful.

OF: Including people: our daughters were in preschool at that time!

CB: We know where they learned that.

OF: Yes! But it was a lovely time. He wound up sitting at the table with us for dinner, and he wound up serving the meal because my wife had put it all in front of him! And he had no problem with this whatsoever. So I always thought of him as a different kind of person than what I had heard about. And later on, after he retired and he was still here as I think chancellor, I was working with him one time on writing some kind of paper and he said, "We want to keep this short and to the point." I said, "Okay, no problem." Anyway, we get to a difficult topic, and he keeps adding and adding and adding and adding and adding. And I said, "I thought you wanted to keep this short and to the point!" And he looked at me and he said, "You're throwing it back at me, aren't ya?" I said, "Yessir!" I just found him a delightful man to work with. I didn't have a big problem with him at all.

CB: As you look at the faculty governance issue, which you've spent a long time on, what do you see as his approach to that and how do you see our evolution through subsequent presidencies?

OF: I saw Dr. Farley as a person who wanted to make sure that issues were resolved. If the faculty were now going to get involved, he would resolve it. And I think that got him a reputation as being sort of a dictator. But I didn't see him that way. If you worked with him, and talked with him, and argued with him, you could make your point known. He might not agree with you, and he might decide that in the long one, yours was not the right idea, but you could talk to this man. And what I've seen since is that we've made a lot of effort to get the faculty much more involved in the governance for the institution or to have the faculty much more articulate and I think we've moved in a huge direction in that way for a while. As a matter of fact, in times when you were president here, there was a conflict between the administration and the faculty, and I need to talk about my friend Harold Cox. And I know there was a time he came to see you and he said, "Look, do we want to destroy this place or do we want to work together and get it done?" And the two of you decided we'll work together. And you did. And things happened. And that's the way it's supposed to be. I don't see that happening any longer, because I don't see the faculty organized or involved. But again, I've been retired for 20 years, I am not intimately incorporated with all of this. But

what I see does not seem to fit with the kind of governance that the university needs in order to really succeed.

CB: Let's come back to that. I want to stick with Farley for longer. Did you know him?

BH: Yeah.

CB: So the three of you knew him, so you all add to this. My sense is that he not only was he, in effect, the founding president. Eisenhower was here before him, but he really presided over the evolution of the institution, and he came out of a period when college presidents were kind of the king of the castle. And he lived long enough in the job that he came into a period where the pressures for him increased. Faculty participation, I mean, we were going through the turmoil of the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War. So he was forced to make changes in style. When you look at the transition from Farley and Michilini, what are your recollections of what the college at that point was going through and how it handled it before the flood? And then after.

OF: Oh, before the flood, okay. Because Michilini, I think the most important thing that happened to him was that '72 flood with Hurricane Agnus. And the thing is, Michilini had been the dean of academic affairs under Farley for a number of years. He had seen how Farley operated, but Michilini was not the same personality that Farley was, so he couldn't operate it in exactly the same way. And as far as I'm concerned, that's not the huge problem. You're not going to get two people who have the same personality, they're going to be different, and you're going to have to learn to work with each other in a different way. But my recollection is that Michilini was not the decision maker that Farley was, and I'm not exactly sure I can explain that in any detail, it just was the way he operated and he was different in his personality. That doesn't mean he was a poor president, I'm not saying that.

CB: Well plug in the divisional structure that was instituted before the flood. With Dave Leach, Ben Fiester, and Ralph Roselle. I'm counting division chairs, and the style of presidential leadership that Mike was providing. What are your memories of that?

OF: I didn't think that that was particularly the most important thing going, simply because I was much more involved in working out my coursework in the chemistry department. And well, I was involved with committees on the campus and involved in faculty affairs that way. That was one thing. But I must admit, I did not have that broad perspective at that time. Because I was--

CB: This is all before my time, but we talked about this with lots of individuals. That seemed to be a real crisis before the flood, over how that divisional organization was perceived.

OF: It was?

CB: And those three guys all have tales of a lot of punishment for having stepped out as leaders of their peers in academic organization. Is that your memory?

OF: Well. I have a very personal memory of one thing that Ralph Roselle did for me my first year here. I don't know if you are aware, our first child, our son, had a case of juvenile rheumatoid arthritis. And he was in first grade at that time and my first year here. And he could not walk home from school or walk to school. My wife didn't drive at that time, so I had to take him there. And I had to get away in the

afternoon to pick him up from school and take him home. Unfortunately, that was also the time of the start of laboratory sessions, and I had 2 or 3 laboratory sessions during that week. How was I going to take care of the laboratories, get that started, and also go home and get my son? I raised the problem with Ralph Roselle, he said, "Don't worry about it. Go get your son. We'll take care of starting up your laboratories." and he did. The entire department, whoever was free at the time, would come in and start my laboratories, I would get back as soon as I could, and they helped me out. They committed themselves to helping me out in that way. I never forgot that. There's a simple reason that they were saying, "Hey. We'll help you." And I don't care what Ralph's title was at that time, he just told me, "Don't worry about it, we'll take care of it. So I have a rather nice feeling about Ralph Roselle.

JR: When you came, who were some of the chemistry faculty?

OF: The chemistry faculty here at that time. Bill Stein, he had been here for a couple of years, he was teaching organic. Frank Sally of course had been here for quite a while. Howard Swain had been here for a bit. The first year I was here, he was off on sabbatical leave. And my job when I was at Hanover was to teach physical chemistry, and I was asked to help teach the physical chemistry course at that time. Ralph Roselle wanted to do the lectures, asked me to do the laboratory, and I did that. Jim Bohning was here. And Jim Bohning, I must say, was one of the most creative guys with whom I've ever worked. That first year I was here, he was taking all of the sections of general chemistry and putting them into one lecture section. Essentially to save the college money. And he discovered he was saving the college about \$50,000 a year doing that. And he had a lecture of about 100 to 150 students, but he made sure that he got to know the people in the lecture and they could get to see him. He had time available to make sure that there was a good interaction between himself as a faculty member and every student in that class. And he set an example for that.

JR: Was Bastrice here? Or John--

OF: No, Bastrice had retired a couple of years. I knew Al Bastrice and his wife because they still lived in the area, but he had been retired for a year or two.

JR: How about John Labose? [15:47]

OF: John Labose came later. He was not here at that time.

JR: He must have come in '68, then.

OF: He came in '68 or '69, something like that. He worked in organic chemistry for a while.

JR: It must have been '68.

CB: One of the great things about Jim Bohning, who I just have a tremendous admiration for, he was very helpful in dealing with some of the challenges that I had with your department. He went on to do some great work in the history of science.

OF: Yes.

CB: I mean, just some really creative stuff.

JR: He passed away.

OF: Yes, he passed away. He took a sabbatical leave one year and went down, to I think it was the University of Pennsylvania, which was sponsored by the American Chemical Society, and did research on the early history of the American Chemical Society. And when he retired from here, he had a position at Lehigh University as their chemistry historian. Lehigh had been involved with the American Chemical Society almost from the beginning.

CB: Yeah. We stayed very close, unfortunately, up until when he died.

OF: Oh, good!

CB: Christmas letters back and forth. And he would send me the stuff he was working on.

JR: What do you know about Ralph today?

OF: Very little. I'm not even sure if he's still living, I assume he is.

JR: I think he is.

OF: But I understand his--

JR: We've gotten conflicting--someone said he has Alzheimer's, someone said he's fine.

OF: I don't know about Alzheimer's, I heard that he's invalid, that he doesn't get around very easily. But I don't know, it's been a number of years since I've seen him. Actually, it was 10 years ago, it was after I retired though, he called me in my office, as a matter of fact, and we chatted for a while.

CB: Since we brought him up, why don't you give us your perspective on the development of the Wilkes Hahnemann program.

OF: Oh. That was interesting. Ralph was in charge of that, as a matter of fact, he was director of the Wilkes Hahnemann program here. And it was, if you remember that, I think students were here for three years, and then they transferred down to Hahnemann, and when they finished their medical degree at Hahnemann, they were granted their Bachelor's degree the same year from here. One of the things that at least I went through in terms of my thinking about that process was that our students had to be well prepared and learn how to think analytically and intelligently about the subjects they were going to be learning at Hahnemann. So we had only three years to really get them to do that, not the usual four. That meant that we had to condense the work we had much more seriously. And that was when I started reorganizing the second semester general chemistry into what was the chemical equilibrium approach that I used. I don't know if you're familiar with that. I essentially just made that whole second semester on that one topic because it was a very broad topic and I took a sabbatical leave for a semester and wrote the textbook for it because there was no textbook out there that had any of this information within it. And we would sell the students the textbook just for the cost of reproducing the pages. When it was first incorporated into the curriculum for a couple of years, the students in the Hahnemann program decided they didn't like that at all and they would transfer from here to the community college for the second semester to see if they would get better grades. Until the story came back from Hahnemann about a gentleman who had taken my course. He had attended a lecture at Hahnemann about the carbon dioxide

equilibrium in the human body and his comment was he knew more about it than the instructor did. That staged the game. Nobody left my class.

[Laughter]

CB: That's a good story. What do you remember about the faculty dynamics in putting that all together? That was an unusual commitment on a small college faculty.

OF: It was. I remember the biology department going through the whole variety of situations in terms of how they would incorporate this into it. I remember we talked a lot about what we were going to do with organic chemistry, since that was a vital ingredient for people going to medical school. And what Bill Stein was going to be doing was organic chemistry and he was going to incorporate that in it. And the job got done. And the best example I can give about that is not the people who went to Hahnemann, but a young lady who was a biology major and a pre-medical student who went to Harvard medical school. And at the end of her first year there, he sent a message back to Bill Stein that said, "I know at least as much organic chemistry as anybody else here. Continue to keep us sharp." So he incorporated it into it and the students were doing very well. And we had no problem with our students going to Hahnemann. I don't care who was biology, physics, chemistry, mathematics, whatever. Down there, they did the job.

CB: This really was a Wilkes story, you know. When I came, it was having trouble because Hahnemann was having trouble. They had a new dean who was increasingly resistant to controlling a part of his admission class coming out of Wilkes. But when it closed and got it going again, we had the statistics on it, I don't know if you've ever seen that. But they were committed to doing community medicine and not be a specialist. It worked for all of them, but something like 75 or 80% had ended up as physicians in northern Pennsylvania, Southern-tier New York. Which is exactly what the objective in 1959 was, when they did the census, the population of physicians in this area was something like 57 or 58 years old. The impression was, where will we be in 10 years? And that became like the imperative for engineering with RCA, and this little institution literally was taking on huge commitments for major industries. I think that is the prototypic Wilkes story because it defined who we were in terms of the public interest. And I asked about the faculty process of buying into this--I had never heard this story. But my sense is, as with pharmacy, which was the big commitment of my 17 years here, there was very little resistance, there were some complaints that people didn't feel the planning process had been as open as it ought to have been. But people just absorbed it and got with the program. And it meant changing the course design. And I think it's to mention to Wilkes that we really haven't talked about, and when you're talking about faculty governance and presidential leadership, ultimately, one of the ways to test is how are you going to develop curricula in a way that is totally atypical for a liberal arts institution. And I think it gets to your concept of really, we're like a land-grant college. Although independent in our ownership and structure.

OF: Well one of the things that happened I think as a direct result of the Hahnemann program was, first of all, we still today have an outstanding biology department. The chemistry department developed to the point where our students were doing extremely well. And the best--I got a whole bunch of stories here about that, but let me tell you this one. The Philadelphia section of the American Chemical Society used to have what they call "Graduate School Night" where they would invite students from the colleges in the area to come and meet representatives of graduate schools from all over the United States. Our students went down there for a number of times, and they all came back with the same story. They would walk up to a representative of a graduate school, they'd say, "Hi, my name is Joe, I'm from Wilkes College." And

the guy would say, "You're from Wilkes? Come here, I want to talk to you." Because we had established a national reputation at that time. And we had done it for a variety of reasons. Not only the success of our students going out there, but also the awards that they got from national scholarships, fellowships, research fellowships, for a semester, for a summer. And again, I've got tons of stories here about that. And I think what we need to do, and it's something that we're not doing today, is that we need to get stories like that from the faculty about the success of our students. And we need to use that to recruit students, to recruit faculty, and to raise money for the institution. And you were president at a time where that had a dramatic effect. Where the Rockefeller Foundation representative came. And you remember the story that I told you about?

CB: Mhm. But go ahead.

OF: This is the story about how a woman, I think Lauren **Mulener**??? [26:15] was her name. She was in my freshman chemistry class, was one of the outstanding students in the class. She was a chemistry major, so she was in my sophomore inorganic class, and she was having a tough time in that class. She barely squeezed a 2 out of the class. In her junior year, she was a TA with me and seemed to be more up to par with her freshman year. In her senior year, she was awarded the Science and Research Semester Fellowship to the Lawrence radiation laboratory in Berkeley California. She did so well there, she was offered a permanent job. She turned it down because she wanted to go to medical school. While she was out in California, she had to take a course in philosophy to meet her graduation requirements here. She took it at this unknown place called the University of California at Berkeley, and she claimed it was the easiest class she's had in 4 years and she was tutoring the other students in the class there at Berkeley to help them pass this philosophy course. She then went to Hershey Medical Center, and in her third year there, she was awarded the Howard Hughes Fellowship to do medical research, one of the most prestigious medical research fellowships in the world. So what happened to her her sophomore year? I found out a few years later, she had cancer.

CB: Oh my.

OF: She didn't tell anybody about it, and she was going to chemo and radiation therapy and that of course affects the brain and how it functions.

CB: Sure.

OF: And she beat the cancer and then came back. Now. A few years later, I was one of several faculty members, we were invited over to meet a representative from the Rockefeller Foundation, and as I understood it, you had applied for a \$50,000 grant with them. I told them that story. The graduates looked at me and didn't say a word. I understand that we didn't get the \$50,000. We got \$100,000. Why? Because of what the students have done for us. And we need those stories, and I'm sure every department here has stories like that. And if we can put those together, we can go out, we can recruit students, and we can tell them, "you're gonna have to work like crazy while you're here, but look what's gonna happen to you when you leave!" I think we're going to be able to get our students into the top professional schools and graduate schools. They can get jobs. You're bound to have stories like that here. And we should be able to raise money to support this place because we're doing the jobs for our students.

BH: Jim and I had the same experience with our students.

OF: Yeah. I'm sure the history department has the same thing, coming to talk to Harold Cox about it.

CB: Four individuals that stand out--to demonstrate your point--in my experience, all of them, we worked with--in terms of what you're talking about as defining the institution in strikes and recruiting. Paul Wender, Cathy DeAngelis, Dan Kopen, and **Les Sweeney**. In different generations. But they all told the story of how solid their education was here. They left here not assuming they were competitive, and they got into first class graduate schools and discovered that they were better prepared than students from--and that is the Wilkes story. Particularly in the sciences. And it just has been very hard to get that story out there because the humility in this Valley and in this institution is such that people just don't assume they really are great. Something I worked on probably more than any other single PR thing during the time that I was here, was particularly with alumni groups. I urged them to acknowledge their Wilkes education and what they got from it. Because it wasn't 'Class A' to talk about being from Wilkes around Harvard and Yale and Princeton people.

OF: Well, did I tell you the story about Paul Wender?

CB: Yes.

OF: He left here and went to Yale University for his PhD. He is a synthetic organic chemist, that is, he makes compounds. And it took him 3 years to get his PhD, which is not unusual for synthetic organic chemists. At the end of that year, he was appointed to a post-doctoral position for a year at Columbia University, working with the most distinguished synthetic organic chemists in the world, including a man named Gilbert Stork. Paul was only there for 6 months. Because he solved the problem in half the time. At the end of that time, he was given a 5 year appointment to the faculty at Harvard. Harvard has these 5 year appointments, where they will take young faculty members, they will appoint them for 5 years, then they have 5 years to establish their reputation and then they have to move on. I went to graduate school with a man who had a 5 year appointment at Harvard. He had to move on, he went to the University of Wisconsin, he eventually came back to MIT, and wound up going to Harvard and becoming chair of the chemistry department at Harvard. At the end of five years, Paul Wender was offered tenure at Harvard, which has never been done before! He turned it down because he had such a good offer from Stanford University, he couldn't turn that down! He's been there ever since. He's a distinguished faculty member. And we've had people coming in here who are synthetic organic chemists who were giving seminars in our department and they heard, "Oh, Wender's from here? Oh my God. He does in half the time what it takes me to do some research that I'm doing." He's frequently mentioned as a potential Nobel award winner. Because he is one of the most creative synthetic organic chemists in the world. And it is as simple as that.

CB: And I mentioned, I think yesterday, there was a period when the public information, people assumed he was gonna get the Nobel and we were getting phone calls as to whether it had been awarded yet. That had nothing to do--Wilkes did nothing to generate that, it was that the word was out that he was on the short list, and they wanted to talk to his alma mater. And he's one that has kept identifying Wilkes.

OF: Yes, he has.

CB: Unlike people like **Joe Panola** who I literally had to try to kick in the pants to acknowledge that he didn't just go to Bucknell. I said, "Joe, we need you more than Bucknell does, and you never went on the

Bucknell campus. You did all your work at the UJC and got your degree from Wilkes.” Maybe he took the Bucknell degree, I don’t know. But Paul was one who was very proud. As was Cathy DeAnglis. Just take those two careers that are absolutely at the top of their profession.

OF: Yes. Paul wasn’t the only one. There was--God, the name just went out of my head now. A woman who went down to Villanova for her Master’s degree and her PhD, when Villanova still had a PhD program, and then took it in analytical chemistry and was hired by Dupont. Became head of the analytical chemistry division at the Central Research Division at Dupont. Several years later, we had a student named Peter Shtur who went to the University of Connecticut and earned his PhD in analytical chemistry there and was hired by Dupont after his PhD was complete. And after the second year he was at Dupont, he was told he was allowed to take over the head of the analytical division when the woman retired. She never retired. She passed away before it was time for her to retire. He did not get the job. He had already been promoted so far that he would have been her boss. He was sent all over the world to give talks to various places on behalf of Dupont. And he did it so well that he was invited back and people used to really applaud him at the end of his talks because he would do them that well.

CB: Do you have--and I have no knowledge of how to answer this--do you have any indication, any of you, that our special relationship with Dupont because of the carpenters, ever led to any kind of relationship with Dupont at the science level or corporate level? Because of that special Valley relationship?

OF: There’s another story that we can tell about Dupont. And I think that if you wanted to go down there and see if we could make money from them, there would be plenty of opportunities we would have to do that. But the other story I have is Ron Pryor’s daughter. Ron Pryor was a member of the math department here. His daughter Laura was a chemistry major here. And the summer between her junior and senior year, she was awarded the Solid State Research fellowship. Now two things happen when you have a Solid State Research fellowship for the summer. First of all, you go to classes for a week at a major University some place in the United States. Only about a dozen of these are offered during any one year, and all people who had been awarded this go to the classes. Her classes were at the University of Southern California, San Diego. After the first couple of days, other students were coming up to her and saying, “you’re not taking notes. Do you know this stuff?” She said, “Yes, yes I do.” And they’d say, “Where do you go to school?” And she’d tell them. “What kind of curriculum do you have?” She’d tell them. And they would say, “Boy, I’m glad we don’t go there.” And her answer was, “Who’s not taking notes?” At the end of the week, she was, at her request, assigned to do her research at the Central Research Division at Dupont. The day she gets there, she is assigned a task. Her boss says, “The company is sending me on a trip for a week or two, when I get back I want a report from every one of you on what you’ve done while I was away.” He comes back, she goes in to report, it turns out while he was away, she solved a problem they had been working on for 5 years. I think we have a good reputation.

CB: You know, following on from Wagiha, since we talked about this at length, and listening to you and examples, reflect on the role of women students at Wilkes.

OF: My opinion is this. Women students at Wilkes and men students at Wilkes were treated equally. We made no distinction between the basis of gender. Any distinction that was made was based on their interest, their ability, and their attitude. And the best example I have other than that last one is a woman who was in my general chemistry class, one of the last classes I taught before I retired. She was a

pharmacy student. Never got an A in the class. Got a 3. In both semesters. But didn't get a 4. And in the second semester, she was working in our stockroom. And I walked in and there was this pile of debris all the way up to the ceiling, against one wall. And she was looking at it. And I said, "April, you're going to need an army to take care of that." And she just looked at me, she said, "It'll look better when I'm done." All I did was walk away with my jaw on the floor. On September the 11th, when we were hearing about what was going on, she came into my office, we started talking about that. And her major concern that she expressed to me was how she was going to raise a family in a safe environment. She wasn't married, she wasn't pregnant, she had no children, I'm not even sure she had a steady boyfriend at that time. She was thinking 5 to 10 years down the road. A year or two later, I encountered Bernard Graham, dean of pharmacy. I said, "How's my last freshman class doing?" He said, "Oh, you mean April's class?" I said, "What do you mean, April's class, she didn't get the best grades in that class." And his answer was, "No, but she has an outstanding attitude." And she did. And it was noticed not just in terms of what I've seen of her, but the whole pharmacy program noticed it as well. Now, I don't care if it was male or female. That attitude was the most important thing to learn. Then I can tell you stories about women, men.

CB: Do you feel like the rest of the faculty had that same attitude consistently?

OF: The faculty members that I knew best did. You go to the physics department. In their junior year, they had a course in quantum mechanics. And we would encourage some of our students to take that course if they were going to go to graduate school, then they would find any quantum course quite easy. The students were well prepared and whoever taught that course just handled it. Same was true with mathematics. With people who went into mathematics. We would have students who would take courses in the English department so they'd learn how to write a little bit better. Made no difference if it was a man or a woman. So my impression was that the faculty here had an outstanding attitude toward the students regardless of gender.

CB: See, I think that is another underemphasized characteristic coming in. My wife went to Cornell, which had been coed from the beginning. The treatment of women of her generation, who was four years younger than I am, so she graduated in '62. They continued to be discriminated against in the sense that the expectations were not as high. I was at Williams when they decided to go coed. The women--it wasn't as bad as Dartmouth and Princeton, but the women initially had real challenges being treated as equals. Just as we had women on the board in 1937 here. I just think we embraced so many of what immediately, the egalitarian objectives of our society. We embrace those unitive values. And in a value that was hierarchical in structure, that was, at its leadership, was white male dominated, the coal companies, the railroad companies, the bankers. But this little place, and I don't know what Bucknell was like in the 30s, when we started getting the cream of their faculty to come over and teach, and many of them stayed on to become Wilkes faculty people. But I think this mix of commitment to students, regardless of their background, and partly because there was no legacy program, which was powerful in the institution's head. And therefore the class structure was never to mention here. And the decision of fraternities, we never segregated students by some internal preference system. And our woman who went on to be dean of the Woman's Medical College in Philadelphia, Doris Bartuska. She was one of our key people, but there was another woman who was in charge of the accreditation of medical schools. Edith or Ethyl... I forget her name, but they were products of the 40s here. And I remember talking to Doris, and her daughter was a graduate of Wilkes and went on to be a doctor. Without even regarding this as a particularly special thing, she just talked about that. It was the way she was treated here. It was her mind and her attitude, like

you talked about, that was supported and responded to favorably. And even when you had the kind of sexism like that of Chuck Reif, which would be a problem these days, some of his great students were women students, which he pushed hard to be successful. So I think it's a dimension that we never really articulated, that I know of, as part of our culture. And thinking that our letter that we're talking about, this may be worth--because I think it's still true. And I think faculty who come in here pick up on the fact that that's the way it was supposed to be. Now we had to deal with the issue of how women faculty members were treated. That was a dimension that I particularly spent a lot of time on. But for the students, I think the students really looked at it exactly the way in which you just defined. What do the rest of you think?

BH: Absolutely.

JR: Let me ask you another question. It's one that Wagihah brought up. Did you find Wilkes offered you opportunities to do things you wouldn't have had opportunities to do at other institutions?

OF: Yes. I was teaching summer school here, I had four children, and I needed money to help raise the family. One summer I got a notification in the mail, I don't know why, with an opportunity to apply to NASA for a summer fellowship. And I wrote it in, and I got it. And for the next number of years, I spent 8 summers and 3 full years doing research with NASA. and I had no problem with that, getting the sabbatical leaves and the time off I needed to do this. In addition to that, just in terms of commitments to the institution, again, we were talking about Umid Najib earlier. He called me into his office one time and said that the police department here needed someone to do an alcohol analysis with people who had taken drunk driving tests, and could we do that? Yep. We did that. And the thing I remember most vividly about that is one time, one of the people who had taken that test complained about that, and they went to court about the whole situation, and I was called on as a witness. And during the procedure, the defense attorney asked me who actually did the titration on this, the actual clinical experiment. I said it was a student, he said, "Who was the student?" I said, "I'm not going to tell you." And he threatened me with contempt of court, I said, "I don't care. I am not going to tell you who the student was. I oversaw it, I am responsible for it. I can tell you everything that went on. If you want to know something about it, I will tell you. But I will not tell you the name of the student." It was as simple as that. But we were working as a community. In another situation, Umid again called me into his office. There was a gentleman there and he said they wanted somebody to see if someone could figure out how to make soap from olive oil. And I wasn't sure what was really going on there. I said, "You guys are really serious about this?" He said, "Yeah. Why do you think we're not serious?" I said, "Well, my wife makes soap from leftover fat from meat and we haven't bought soap in our house in 30 years." Which was true! But the gentleman was a banker from New York. he had access to some very inexpensive olive oil, and he wanted to make soap out of it. So he hired us to work up the process for making that soap. And it got interesting because there was a young lady, chemistry major--biochemistry, actually--that got hired to work with me on that, and I'll never forget her coming into my office one day and saying, "Well, I've made the soap!" And I said, "Does it work?" She said, "What do you mean?" "Would you wash your hands with it?" She said, "Good heavens, no!" I said, "Wash your hands with it and see if it works." And she did. And I washed my hands with it, and we compared ours to see if we had the same kind of reaction. She eventually wound up taking it home for her family to do it, calling in friends of hers that were students who had passed, "Come on, I want you to wash your hands!" But we had a procedure for the man, and he took it. Whether he's actually ever done it commercially, I don't know. The point is that we had opportunity to do things like that, and making soap is the--

CB: I think you should tell your perspective on the Curley murder.

OF: Oh, the Curley case. Yes. the Curley case happened, we were renovating the laboratories in the 1990s. Early 1990s.

CB: That was to prepare for pharmacy.

OF: Yeah.

CB: '93.

OF: And Robert Curley was one of the electricians working in that job. And he was taken ill and taken to the hospital. And eventually they took him down to Hershey Medical Center, and he died there. And they did an autopsy on him and found out he died of thallium poisoning. Thallium is a metal on the periodic table, and it is a very poisonous material. Now, we had a number of thallium compounds in the stock room. And Curley's wife was going to instigate a criminal negligence lawsuit against us, because she had claimed that we were responsible for the death of her husband.

CB: And you remember her attorney?

OF: Yeah, what was his name?

CB: Ciavarella?

OF: Ciavarella, that's right, yes.

CB: He was in prison.

OF: Yes. But they eventually exhumed his body, and did an analysis of his hair, and they could tell from the analysis of his hair, approximately when he was given this thallium, or had taken this thallium. And it could not have been done while he was working in the chemistry department. But on top of that, it was impossible for that to happen accidentally. And the reason it wasn't possible is because Frank Sally had arranged all of our chemicals in the stockroom by anion. When you talk about something like sodium chloride, which is common table salt, sodium is a cation, chloride is the anion. So sodium chloride would be stored under 'C' for chloride, not 'S' for sodium. Just as for thallium compounds, thallium forms cations, so if you had thallium chloride, it would be stored under 'C' for chloride, thallium sulfate would be under 'S' for sulfate, thallium nitrate under 'N' for nitrate. It wasn't just there as a collection of thallium compounds, in order for Curley to have accidentally taken this accidentally, it would have had to be almost deliberate. And I remember going over to you and saying this to you and saying, "No matter what she does with that lawsuit, don't agree to anything." And we had state, local, federal police officers coming in, and I was chairman of the chemistry department at that time and I would tour them through our stockroom. And when we finished, they'd say to me, "You guys had nothing to do with this." and they were eventually able to show that his wife had put the thallium poisoning in his tea.

CB: Iced tea.

OF: Iced tea. And she got that because she had some rat poison that had been common in the 1940s and 50s that was thallium compounds that they used to kill rats that came into houses that lived along the river here. I think she's still in jail.

Many: No.

CB: She got out.

JR: Yeah, she did her 20 years.

CB: But he's still in jail.

JR: Yeah.

CB: On my side, as the generalist CEO, is that we were under tremendous pressure because Ciavarella made the allegation that it was from the thallium in the stockroom. And that it was our liability. And annotated that parents should be concerned about sending their students to Wilkes, that they were in jeopardy. So we called a press conference and it was very well attended. And I called on Owen--

JR: I remember that.

CB: --to talk about our action to it. And I think you brought the beaker, or whatever it was in, of thallium and showed the records. A periodical view of what was in the stockroom. And showed that the level was exactly the same as where it had been for several previous inspections. And you spoke eloquently to that point, and I showed a considerable amount of anger at the charges that were made. This was an outrageous, gratuitous... but she was known, even by that time, as the black widow. Because her first husband had died as well.

OF: Yes. Hit by a truck.

CB: Hit by a semi truck. And this was just as we're getting... Our enrollments were down. Badly down. We make our commitment to pharmacy and to building the classroom office building and to building the student union. And we've got this incubus on top of it. It was probably the lowest point in my presidency.

JR: One other point, too, that I remember. Are you sure it was '93 and not '92? Because I think I was still dean. And I was dean in '92. We were having a meeting the day that this happened, that he died. Bob came in and said, "She killed him." You said that right from the start! He said, "She killed him." Now, that went by the books for the months after that because you had to deal with that "We killed him."

OF: Well, the other thing that happened--

CB: Well, O'Hopp was the kind of convener of our forces to deal with this, including the lawyers and Rosenwald & Jenkins. And we were having one meeting up at his office when the call came from--I think it was Hershey, not Geisinger, Danbury.

JR: It was Hershey.

CB: We got a call from them that they knew it was thallium before they did an autopsy. I don't know how they knew it.

OF: Oh, a blood analysis. They did a blood analysis. A blood test.

CB: And they said the amount is increasing. He was getting sicker and sicker, and the blood test showed that the thallium content was increasing. So we knew, at that point, it was murder. And because of the guy who was head of electricians--his name I forget obstinately--who did all our work, they suspected his wife all along. They were the ones who were probably black widow based on the first husband from whom she collected a great deal of insurance. So the inside assumption was that somehow she was murdering him. We knew that it was thallium by that point. But that wasn't our position to express publicly. That had to all be worked through the process, which Ciavarella was an absolute piece of dash dash dash dash. And he showed it at cash for kids. He was the--

OF: Well, I should tell you this aspect, too. When Ciavarella came out with that accusation and that idea, I went around to every chemistry class that we were offering, because as I said, I was head of the department at that time, and I told them about the organization of the stockroom, and the fact that we had nothing to do with this. And they shouldn't worry about anything. And every student--I'll never forget--looked at me and said, "What's your point? You guys have been pushing safety on us ever since we've been here. We know better than that." And they did. And it was the students I loved.

CB: But what else should we get?

JR: I was gonna ask, how would you assess over the years your facilities? I know you're still in the land over there, how do you feel about what the place is now as opposed to when you came?

OF: I have a problem right now with our facilities because I believe they're too small. First of all, when we did the renovations back in the 90s, we just about doubled the size of our stockroom. And we had plenty of room to store material. There were people who would come in and look at our stockroom, and when they left, they would say to me, and I kid you not, "This is one of the best facilities that I've seen on the east coast." Because we had set things up so that we could take volatile materials and store them, and then they could be exhausted not into the room, but outside. But right now, the stockroom that we have is very small, it's crowded like crazy, we have one hood in there for people to work with, and it's just not that good of a facility. And I'm concerned that something is going to happen. I'm not sure we have enough hood space in the laboratories because I think we should have a hood for every student in that laboratory. So if you've got a classroom with 20 students in it, then you need hood space for 20 students. Because if we're going to be doing the job right, where we're going to be teaching them how to work with dangerous and volatile materials, they've got to do it in the hood. And I'll give you an example. We had a student who was a shy young lady, she was working our stockroom. And one time, she was working in there and we heard this explosion. And so we rushed over to see what was going on, and she goes out there, I said, "Woah there, what happened?" And she said, "It exploded." She was taking materials that were leftover. Now we don't throw things out like that. We either converted it into materials that we could use again, or we recrystallized them or recycled them, or we destroyed them so that they would be easily and conveniently thrown away. She was destroying something, but it exploded. Now it turned out, she did it in the hood. She knew exactly how to handle it, she had set it up so that nothing else was in the hood, and the hood door was down. She was not injured. Nothing else was damaged. And she was able to go right back in there and finish it up. But I think we need additional hood space. And I don't know if you remember, when we were doing the--

CB: I remember the whole hood adventure.

OF: Yes, the hood adventure. Because I walk into the organic laboratory one day, and they were putting the ductwork in for the hood. And it was galvanized iron. And I objected, because galvanized iron was going to be very reactive. ‘Galvanized’ means it’s coated with zinc. Zinc is a reactive metal. And if we take acids or bases and run them up the hood, it was going to take that zinc off, and then we were going to have iron exposed, which was gonna corrode, then we were going to have holes in that hood space all throughout. And I objected. And they wouldn’t do it. And when I talked to the people about it, including you, they said, “Well, that’s what the specifications were.” I said I don’t care. I will not allow it. And they wanted nothing to do with it. I said, “Okay. What I will do is I will go out to a lawyer and I will get a statement that we have no responsibility for what is going to happen as a result of that galvanized ductwork.”

CB: And that quickly was changed.

OF: [Laughing] And we had zero trouble.

CB: Owen did know about how to get things done.

[Laughter]

JR: By threats!

OF: But I don’t know what the ductwork is in the new building. And if it’s galvanized iron, we’re in trouble. And I think we need to look at that. Besides, again I look at that, there are safety showers in some of the laboratories. But not in all of them! Some of the safety showers are out in the hallway! That means if you run into an accident and you need to have a shower to clean yourself off, you gotta go out the door, into the hallway. And the hallways are polished concrete. So if you use the shower, it’s gonna get wet, and that’s very slippery, and it’s dangerous.

JR: You’re talking about the chem labs specifically.

OF: I’m talking about the chem and biology laboratories and the environmental laboratories that are over there. They are frequently similar. Not all of them.

JR: And they have all been renovated?

OF: No, they have not been renovated.

JR: Oh, okay. Is there a plan to renovate?

OF: Not that I know about.

CB: Let me ask--I asked Wagiha and her response was minimal. Give us a portrait of Umid Najib as a colleague. As an innovator.

OF: The first word that comes to mind when I think about Umid, is he was trustworthy. He was a man you could trust. And I didn’t know him that well at all when he first got into that job, but boy, it didn’t

take long to find out. And the opportunities he provided, as I said, about doing the alcohol analysis, by doing that olive oil soap preparation, he would have people coming in there and he would make sure that those things stayed at the university and he would get faculty members to do them. He did the first and last job. And if you talked to him, he was calm, he was just a nice guy to talk to. And you didn't understand it until you started working with him. But no, I very much liked working with him. Just a delightful man to work with. And as I said, trustworthy is a word that comes to mind. And I don't often say anything about deans.

[Laughter]

CB: Do you have a response?

OF: No.

TG: By virtue of the title that you aren't.

CB: Tim, what are your comments or questions as we wrap this up?

TG: Oh, I don't think I have really any questions, but it's really been enjoyable and fascinating hearing all these stories. Do you have any other stories that you were thinking we would ask you about?

OF: Well, let's see, I only have about 4 or 5 pages here of them.

[Laughter]

CB: He's thorough.

OF: I've written these so that I won't forget them. And if the people start coming around and asking about them, then I would have these. Because I forget students' names sometimes. There's a gentleman, he was a chem major in the 70s or 80s, went and was assigned to an engineering research semester to the Argonne National Laboratories in Chicago. He applied to five graduate schools, and was admitted to every one. He chose to attend MIT. In the first year that he was there, a couple things happened. He decided he wanted to get married. He met a woman here and they wanted to get married. But he also decided he was only going to take a Master's degree there. But at MIT, a Master's degree is a boobie prize. You get that if you don't qualify for your PhD.

TG: Right.

OF: But anyway, the reason he was going to get a Master's degree was because he didn't want to go into academia, and there was a company that was just starting up in Cambridge that wanted to hire him to help them start the company. So he took his Master's degree and he went to work for them. Last I heard, he was vice president of that company who is hiring PhDs. Not bad.

TG: Did he get married?

OF: Yes, they did. I told you about Dan Colton, I told you about Paul Wender. Ed Hilinski was a graduate at about the same time that Paul Wender graduated. He attended Yale for his PhD. He was employed by Bell Laboratories when it was known as Bell Laboratories for about five years. And then he went down

and took a faculty position at Florida State University. He was awarded tenure a year early so they wouldn't lose him. He does what is called femtosecond chemistry. That's 10 to the minus 15 seconds.

TG: Wow.

OF: That's very very rapid. And he's looking at the way molecules rearrange themselves as they undergo a reaction so that he can get details about the chemical reaction and how you can predict what's going to go on. So his story is like that. I told you about Laura Prior. Oh. This is one I like. In the 1980s, we had a young man, Richard Pancheck. He was a very shy, not very confident student. He was recruited to work in our stockroom. And in his junior year, he was awarded a research fellowship for the summer at Purdue University. He did so well at Purdue, they went after him to attend graduate school at Purdue. He really didn't want to go to Purdue. He went to Vanderbilt. He got a PhD there. That said, our students have reputations that they get placed anywhere they wanted to. Oh! I love this one. In the 1980s, we had two women. Melissa Summa and Lisa Zimmerman. Who won science and engineering research semester fellowships to the Los Alamos National Laboratories in New Mexico. Lisa Zimmerman did research on fluidized bed reactors. Went to graduate school at Vanderbilt, where she got her PhD in bioinorganic chemistry. And when she graduated, she was offered a job at the Vanderbilt medical school to do research for them in bioinorganic chemistry. Melissa wanted to teach science in high school. So she was put into the Los Alamos program for local and hispanic students that were being taught there. And so when she gave her first examination, she noticed one of the young men, and he was not doing an exam. And she walked over and said, "Why aren't you doing the exam?" And he said, "I can't read it." He only read Spanish, he could not read English. Melissa had taken five years of Spanish, she sat down to translate the exam for him on the spot, and he did the exam. As far as I'm concerned, she saved his life. As a matter of fact, I'm very proud to say that I think we were the last department at this institution that required our majors to have a foreign language.

CB: I remember that.

OF: And I think we still should be doing that.

TG: I agree.

OF: Anything else in here? Oh yes.

BH: I've got a question.

OF: Yeah.

BH: How do you remember all these students that do so well? How do you keep track of them, or where do you get that information?

OF: When you've worked with these students on a daily basis, it's hard to forget them.

BH: Wonderful.

OF: It really is.

TG: You also keep in touch.

OF: No. Not that often. There are some of them I do, yes. For example, one young lady, Stephanie Smith was her name when she was here, she was a pharmacy student. She was in my general chemistry class. And we got to know each other, I think she was in a laboratory session too. And when she graduated, she bought a pharmacy from her father in western Pennsylvania and ran that for a while. Now, my wife and I had been going back and forth every summer for about 30 years to the Ohio Light Opera. And we had been in touch with Stephanie and her husband. And her husband was a medical doctor who was a biology major here. And he was an emergency physician in the Pittsburgh area. And at the end of the first year that she was running that pharmacy, she was brought back here to give a lecture on how to run an independent pharmacy by the pharmacy department. And I attended it. The very first thing she said to the group of people that were there, to the students, she said, "If you're here just for the money, you're in for the wrong reason. Get out." I could have kissed her. [Laughs] She was dead right.

TG: I'm sure she was.

OF: You have to be there because you have to really want to do that job. And we'd been pushing that, I'd been pushing that, other people had been pushing that, the pharmacy program had been pushing that. And bingo. There it was. So yeah. A number of years ago, her husband was offered a job he could not refuse at Geisinger down in Danville. And they moved from Western Pennsylvania to Danville and they bought a 15 acre estate where they had built the house of their dreams. She's still running a pharmacy in western Pennsylvania though. But now it's by long distance. Another one! Jennifer Bartels, graduated in the 1990s. Between her junior and senior year, she was awarded a research fellowship to work with a woman on the faculty at Penn State. I love to tell the story this way. At the end of her junior year, when she left us for that summer internship, she was a good student. At the end of the summer, when she came back, she wasn't a good student anymore. She was a superb student. She did zero work her senior year. All she did was have fun. And having fun, by definition for her, was finishing her laboratory, rushing over to go to dinner, and going back to her room to study because it was fun. She was admitted to graduate school at the University of Pittsburgh.

Suzanna Calev (SC): I had a question for you.

OF: Yeah.

SC: Because this had been stuff that Wagiha mentioned about current students and how they sort of require a lot more attention, they're just kind of more demanding. And I was talking to an international relations student recently, about the differences between the humanities and the STEM professors and how she noticed that a lot of the humanities professors are like inviting their students out to dinner, they're maybe more engaged, and I was wondering if there's really a difference between the STEM students that are coming here and if maybe the STEM professors are less engaged because a lot of them are just coming in, trying to get a degree and getting out. And just the sort of nature of the students versus the faculty, if you've seen differences over the years?

OF: I can only guess because I do not keep track of what is happening on the faculty these days. But when I was an active faculty member, we had students at our house for dinner a number of times.

SC: Okay.

OF: And I know some other people. Jim Bohning did, Howard Swain did, and Bill Stein didn't do it that often because he was married only for short periods of time and didn't have a place where he could easily do that. I don't know if Frank Sally did it. But I know Jim did it, and I did it.

CB: We did it.

OF: Yeah. I know you guys did it too, sure. As a matter of fact, famous stories about what you guys used to do because you used to have them over there, and teach them how to handle themselves at a formal dinner.

TG: That's great.

CB: The etiquette dinners.

OF: Yes.

CB: The name for the--what's the bowl of water?

SC: Your finger?

JR: The finger bowl.

CB: It was called the finger bowl dinners. Very popular. Well we can't end this without talking to us about your music.

OF: Well, okay. If you walk to the end of my office, there's always a radio on. And it's tuned to WVIA FM. The hit classical music. And when students would come in when I was teaching, it's amazing how many students would be sitting there, would be going over some things and they would turn to me and they would say, "gee it's so peaceful in here." And it was because of the music. At the same time, as I had mentioned earlier, my wife and I had been going to the Ohio Light Opera to college in Wooster. In Wooster, Ohio the last 30 years. And I'd been trying to encourage people here to establish an operatic program on the Wilkes campus for the summer, because I think it would do an enormous amount for us. I happen to know that the Ohio Light Opera is on for 8 weeks in the summertime, on the quiet campus of a college in Wooster. And during that time, the town of Wooster sees an income of over \$2 million dollars a year. Just from the people coming in for that. Now, we could have a serious impact on Wilkes-Barre. We can have a serious impact on the reputation of this institution going on. The impact on the reputation for the music and arts program I think would be enormous. And we could develop those things like crazy. And we would have an easy access to people who would come here, think of people who come here for vacations in the Poconos, who might want to come down for a day or two and just see an Operetta. If we start doing things like what they did at the Ohio Light Opera. Gilbert Sullivan. They do a whole variety of other things. I can't quite think of his name right now, but a 20th century Hungarian composer and they did about 5 or 6 of his operas. Never heard of them before, I know them now, I love them! They're great! But it seems to me that we would have an impact here and we could have students from this college itself getting involved, doing all kinds of things.

JR: That's not a bad idea. You know, DeSales has that summer Shakespeare. They do pretty well with that.

OF: Not only that, look what it would do for King's and Misericordia if they wanted to do summer programs, theater programs of some kind. And doesn't Bloomberg do Shakespeare? I think during the summer sometimes.

JR: Bloomberg has that little theater. I didn't know it was Shakespeare.

OF: Yeah. I know they have something going on. I've only been down there a couple of times. I know my own alma mater, Muhlenberg College in Allentown, has expanded its theater program like crazy. And we go down there now, in many cases, to look for things in the summer. And the thing I really love hearing about are the people who are involved in the theater program who are also biology majors or chemistry majors and they're getting involved now. But if you're a chemistry major and you're involved with the theater, and you're looking for a job in the industry, you're going to get hired because you learned how to think differently. And you learned how to merge those two things. And I think we can do the same thing here.

CB: I have a somewhat inconsiderate question to ask you.

OF: Uh oh.

CB: Did you ever consider going into college administration?

OF: No.

CB: Why?

OF: The reason I didn't? I think it goes back to my junior year in college. I was taking a course in atomic and nuclear physics. And the gentleman teaching the course was having so much fun. And after a month, I just looked at him and I said, "I have to do that." And that's all I wanted to do because being in the classroom is just too much fun.

JR: Were you ever tempted to leave Wilkes?

OF: Leave Wilkes? No, as a matter of fact, I wasn't. And I often thought about that because as I said, when I left Hanover College, I did it for reasons I still don't understand.

JR: You had very good credentials too. You could have.

OF: I know. But at the same time, here I was given the opportunity to do a whole variety of things, including doing that work with NASA, where I retrained what is called a tribologist, doing friction lubrication and wear, while my PhD is in inorganic chemistry. So I had an opportunity to expand. And we liked the area in which we lived. It's a nice community, we live out in Dallas. I was involved in some of the things that's going on in the Dallas community and I've done it for years and it's fun.

CB: And you put on support dinner parties.

[Laughing]

CB: Other comments? From you, or from anybody else?

TG: Would you be willing to share your stories for our records? If we make a copy.

OF: You can have it. I have it on my computer, I can always print it out.

[Paper shuffling, laughing]

OF: I think you have a copy already.

SC: I have a copy.

JR: "Give it back!"

[Laughing]

SC: I made sure to get one immediately when you started talking about them.

CB: I do think we have the authority to take it again.

SC: But it's good that we have this recording as well.

OF: The other thing I would like to say is, and I'm talking about the young lady who's now teaching inorganic chemistry in the chemistry department, a woman by the name of Megan Youmans, and this past fall, she had a baby. And she was given 12 months maternity leave, but she was only paid for 12 weeks during that 12 months. So she was only paid for 6 of those weeks because that's all that's required by federal law. And it seems to me that we want people like this to have children and we need to make a commitment that the institution has to these people here. And I think they need to pay them for that maternity leave. And I say that because the first year I was here, in 1967, there was a gentleman in the psychology department, I think his name was Sutton, who had a brain tumor. He was out his whole year, his first year. And yet Dr. Farley kept him on salary for that whole year. He made the commitment to Sutton and Sutton made the commitment to Wilkes because in later years, he became a playwright. And he had some of his plays produced in New York, and he always made sure that the Wilkes University and the Wilkes College name was associated with it.

JR: Over the years, I think that's what was generally done, though.

CB: Did he produce his plays here?

JR: Yeah, I think he did.

OF: Yeah, probably.

CB: As I got to know him--

JR: I think what Owen is talking about; what happened with Sutton, that was done with other people too. I don't know why it wasn't done with the woman.

OF: I don't know why it wasn't done either. Because she was doing a good job, as far as I can tell, in the chemistry department. And the thing that I like about her is the first semester she was here, she had a reputation of being a real SOB in the classroom. And yet she had two or three students approaching her

and wanting to do research with her. So that tells me something. She might have an outstanding reputation of being an SOB in the classroom, but she also has a reputation for being somebody you want to work with.

JR: We had other people who got sick over the years, and they were not penalized salary-wise.

OF: I think we have to do the same thing with women on our faculty because we want people like that to have children. They're going to provide the outstanding people in the future. So we need to support them, we need to make a commitment. And I'm also convinced that the more the institution makes a commitment to the faculty, and the more the faculty makes a commitment to the institution, the more the students are going to see that and understand the commitment they have to make to the faculty and to the institution. And we're going to profit from that all the way down the line.

BH: So how are your children doing?

OF: Oh! [Laughing] When my children graduated from high school, I told them they could go anywhere they wanted to go to college, except where I was teaching, because I didn't want them around where I was. Well, my older son went to Beloit College, graduated as an English major. And today, he is a manager for the KPMG Corporation in Washington D.C. and he's auditing malicious computers. There's a neat story about that. When he graduated, he was looking for a job as an editor, and the economy wasn't doing too well at that time, so he couldn't get a job. So he took some courses here because he could do it for free because I was a faculty member. And he was taking a course in education because he thought he might teach English in high school. And Gene Hammer was teaching the course. And my son found the course dull. And my wife had taught him how to knit, so he would be sitting in class and he would be knitting and Gene Handler got really annoyed at that. And one day, they were talking about grammar, and he said, "Can anybody give me an example of two pronouns? Nathan?" The name of my son. And without missing a stitch, he said, "Who? Me?"

[Laughing]

OF: Our younger son had some learning disabilities going through school, but he was the brightest out of all the children in many respects. I'll never forget a time we were sitting at the dining room table and we were talking about the commutation of numbers. And I said, "Alright, can anybody give me a sentence in English that commutes?" Just like that, Robin says, "Fish eat fish." That means it commutes. You can turn that around and it still says the same thing, right? You get the same answer. And we just looked at him, "whaaat??" I said, "Okay, can you give me a sentence in English that doesn't commute?" Just like that, he said, "Big fish eat little fish."

[Laughter]

OF: Today he is in charge of all of the medical records in the city of Kansas City Missouri, for all the hospitals in that area. And he did his own undergraduate degree in computer science and his Master's degree online when he was working out there. Our older daughter works for the computer programs and other things at the University of Massachusetts. She's a graduate of Mount Holyoke College. Our younger daughter was supposed to be the brightest in school. School was the easiest for her. And when she graduated--she skipped first grade when she went in--when she graduated from high school a year young, admitted to Smith College, one of the top women's colleges in the United States. And in her freshman

year she was taking junior level math and sophomore level English classes. At the end of the second year, they asked her to leave because she wasn't doing the job. It's not that she couldn't. She wasn't. Some years later, there was a lot of stuff going on in between, but at any rate, she was married, living in Colorado and had two children at that time, and she was working as an EMT. And she stepped out of an ambulance in Denver and broke her ankle. And when her ankle healed, it didn't heal sufficiently well that she could pass the physical examination for EMT work any longer. So her husband, who was a municipal policeman there--not in Denver, but in the town where they lived--suggested that she go back to college and then go to medical school. She did. In 2010, she did two things on the same day. She graduated from medical school and she celebrated her 43rd birthday. Today she is a practicing internist in the evenings--or at nights, I should say--at the University of Michigan.

CB: What about the son that was having all the rheumatoid arthritis problems?

OF: He had that rheumatoid arthritis from the time he was about 3 years old until he started through puberty. When he went through puberty, it burned out.

CB: Really?

OF: Yes. But when he was 6 years old and he was in 1st grade, the rheumatoid arthritis got to the lining around his heart. So it started swelling up, and it would have killed him if they hadn't been able to get the swelling down, because it would have been blocking off the blood vessels flowing in and out of the heart. But we took him down to Geisinger in Danville, and they gave him medication to pull the swelling down. He was there for a month, they pulled it down. They didn't have to do any surgery on him, but they had an open heart surgery team on standby alert for 48 hours when he first got down there. Today, he's walking around on two artificial hips, and if he walked in here, you'd never know it.

CB: So which of the jobs you described is him?

OF: He's the manager of the KBMG Corporation down in Washington D.C. Yes.

CB: Wow.

OF: So he's doing very well.

TG: That's great.

CB: One last thing, because I see you've brought the--Harold Cox's.

OF: Yes!

CB: You and Harold were extremely close friends.

OF: Yes.

CB: I've asked you about Umid. Harold was one of the other really unusual people at Wilkes. Give us a portrait of Harold.

OF: Harold had been here a year or two before I got here. And it turned out, that neither of us were particularly shy at the faculty meetings

JR: Oh yeah?

OF: Yeah. I knew you'd never suspect that. But at any rate, at the end of the first year, we both had the same opinion of each other. "What an arrogant SOB he is." It was the basis of a lifelong friendship! In 1972, Harold and his wife lived with us for 5 weeks while he was having his house repaired. Because he lived in Forty Fort and it flooded. And he and I had been friends ever since. And, as you know, today Harold has a very serious case of Alzheimer's disease. He is now permanently in the Wesley Village home, the nursing home, and is being taken care of there today. We go visit him every now and then. Last time, it was just last week, and he was having lunch. And [he was] much more up to date with what was going on, but even so, if you talked to him, and he's talked about something, five minutes later, he will have forgotten you talked to him about it.

JR: Was he in total care or an assisted?

OF: Yeah, it's assisted care.

BH: But he knows who you are?

OF: He knows who I am, but he doesn't recognize a lot of other people. And if I mention your names, he might not know who you are. I think I said, it's a terrible situation. Because I think Harold had a serious impact on this institution, a very positive impact. And if you want to talk to some of the people who have been students of his, they would tell you how important his classes were to them. And I'm sure you know some of these people.

SC: I wish I had been able to pick his brain on a lot of topics that--

OF: He was an archivist before you, he was the first archivist here. He arranged all of the material down in the basement of this building, it was scattered all over the place and had no organization, and he went through the whole thing and arranged it, and we have been able to use that. He made a serious contribution here. He also didn't have any children. He was involved in real estate and they were able to make a considerable amount of money and I think he's made some significant donations to the institution.

CB: And even in the entertainment industry in New York City. Well, one of the things--well, I would say closing, but anyone else, make your remarks--one of the most important things of this interview is the strong commitment to students and appreciation for what they've accomplished in this environment. Obviously, which was having you as a teacher.

OF: Well, it wasn't just me. I am hoping I made a contribution, but it was all the faculty. I could talk about two guys who graduated in the late 60s, early 70s, Jim Weber and Bob Davis. Took a course in history with James Berg. and James Berg had a reputation to be dull, dull, dull. They didn't find him that way. They listened to him, they understood what he was talking about. They wound up taking his ancient history course because he was teaching it. And they got the only 2 As in the course. And they weren't history majors. But the point is, these are people who loved to have fun. And I will never forget, I hired both of those guys to do research with me one summer. We were talking about a variety of things and we were talking about ancient Greece, and I couldn't remember the name of Zeus's parents. So the next day, I went out to the bookstore to see if I could buy a copy of a book that would tell me who his parents were. There was a woman working up there who was a chemistry major, she was working there for the summer.

And she told me, “Oh! Jim and Bob were up here just the other day, they went and bought the same book.”

[Laughter]

OF: When you’ve got students with attitudes like that, how can it not be fun?

CB: Yeah, it’s good.

[end interview, 1:37:15]