

Weckesser Hall is one of the largest former mansions in the historic neighborhood of Wilkes University. Betsy Bell Condrón grew up on South Franklin Street and her family was friendly with the Weckesser's. Since she is familiar with the mansion, it was the perfect setting to conduct her oral history.

Mrs. Condrón has led a truly, remarkable life lending her services to charity, traveling the world, raising her children, and now sharing her memories with us, Amanda Slack and Juan Carlos Jimenez. It was an honor to interview Mrs. Condrón on November 2, 2005, and we are proud to share her memories with you.

Betsy Condrón: OK...I am Betsy Bell.....

Amanda Slack: Would you mind spelling it?

Condrón: B-E-T-S-Y and B-E-L-L...and Condrón, C-O-N-D-R-O-N...As you will hear from uh, my, my oral history, um I was born Betsy Jane Straw Bell, and then married John Parkhurst. And, um, my current marriage is with Joseph Condrón, we celebrated 31 years last June, so that's pretty good.

J.C. Jimenez: Congratulations!

Condrón: Thank you. And I was born in 1928, in the Wilkes-Barre General Hospital, which was up on North Street Hill, and that's where our big major hospital is, now. In those days, there was a lovely little um, private, uh building which I remember spending several times in now and then as I had children and problems. But that building is long gone...

Um, I was born, we lived on Reynolds Street in Kingston, and uh, Reynolds Street is many of the streets, uh, in Kingston and in Wilkes-Barre, are named for our early uh, pioneer Connecticut settlers, and we will find that all up and down the valley. Um, I lived there, I guess six or seven years, um, went to the Wilkes-Barre Institute, which was a forerunner of the Wilkes-Barre day school and eventually joined with Wyoming Seminary. But I went there in first grade and then, um I mentioned I was born in '28, well most of you know that the Depression, our major, our country's major depression, came in the late 1920's. My father was a wholesale grocer, and um, that business was among many others that was failing.

So, in those years he and my mother, um and my younger brother George Bell, um moved to uh Englewood, New Jersey. And we lived there for about three years; my father was a, (chuckle), started, he was a manager of the first store to have um push carts, and uh so that was always something to look back on with a little bit of humor as we see what happens in our market today. Um, and uh I'll get back to my family in a minute.

But we moved back here then, in uh, I was in seventh grade and I don't know how old that makes me but uh made me. But um seventh grade and briefly lived in Kingston as my father was uh beginning the Blue Cross of

Pennsylvania. In those days they were no health insurances of any kind and uh so he started out with Blue Cross, it's hard when we realize what happened to our Blue Cross's now but uh he had an office in a broom closet and um he spent his days and nights going all around uh Northeastern Pennsylvania trying to get hospitals to sign up for this brand new idea of, of health insurance. And as you may or may not know that became a big time and um of course now the Blue, the Blue Cross insurance is really, really big time.

At any rate so we moved at that point back across the river or across the river here to Wilkes-Barre. And I'm gonna back track a little bit, my grandparents, my father's parents George and Margaret Bell lived on North Franklin Street, and it was that grandfather of mine who started the George T. Bell Wholesale Grocer's.

And again there were little tiny markets around but they had to be um, um (Snap, Snap) supplied by uh the wholesale grocers. And his um, um market was over of course by railroad tracks over there were our new theater is being built here in Wilkes-Barre right now. So, it was on North Hampton Street and um, um I spent a lot of time with those grandparents, as I say up on North Franklin Street.

Um, my father was the youngest of five children, I don't think we need to get into that but they we're all brought up here and went to the local schools, etc. My other grandparents, my mothers grandparents, lived on South Franklin Street, at 243 South Franklin Street, right across from where there is a Jewish Temple now, O'Hav Zebek. And we um, oh my grandparents, that would be my grandparents uh, Betsy and Samuel Wolfe. And my grandfather, Wolfe, was a doctor and um many of the houses up and down Franklin Street, uh were, were uh owned and occupied by doctors. Um, again, I won't go into that unless we wish to later on. But uh, uh we used to call it, they called it Medical Road for, for another name. Um, I spent a great deal of time with that uh set of grandparents, as well.

There was a small house, no a big house, um...on South Franklin Street, that's the one that was across from O'Hav Zebek at 243. And it was rather dilapidated and um, uh it had been the first farmhouse on the street before Franklin Street um had been cut through from South Street on down. Initially the little town of Wilkes-Barre stopped at South Street and North Street. Um, that house was a farmhouse and as I said we came back from New Jersey, obviously money was very, very tight and um we bought that house, my grandmother bought it for us for five thousand dollars. And little by little we paid back my grandfather Wolfe, grandfather Wolfe, for that house. So that's the house that I spent my years in from seventh grade on, uh really until I married. My mother and father had lived there un-until their deaths. And um, so South Franklin Street um, much of what is now the Wilkes University campus um, was my home area.

My friends lived up and down the streets; my parent's friends all lived up and down the streets; my grandparents' friends lived up and down the street. We're conducting this history in Weckesser Hall. The Weckesser's were very close friends of my grandparent Wolfe. So, I spent time as a child in here. And

in many of the other houses, which are now the Wilkes University houses. Such as the Bedford's, the Paul Bedford's house, I'm getting off the track. But it was Paul Bedford's house on the corner of South River and South Street there. Umm, uh that was another place I went. They had no children, but I remember going there for dinner.

It was the first time I had ever seen anything that I was.... we know what silverware is when you set the table, but the Bedford's had "gold ware." And their forks and knives and spoons were gold ware. I just, the memories that I have are really kind of fun. And then across, uh, was Kirb, what we call Kirby Hall. And the Kirby family were also good friends um, of, of my family. Uh there was, it was, a very close-knit community uh, in those days.

And perhaps I'll digress here to talk about the Kirby's a little bit. Umm, they had a summer home in Glen Summit Springs, as did many of these people... The Weckesser's, my own grandparents, the Wolfe's, and uh, so many of the peoples. I look out the window here, so many of the people on Franklin Street had their summer homes up there. And um, so I became very close in the summers, uh as well as the winters, with one of the Kirby daughters, Ann Kirby. And um, again we all went to that Wilkes-Barre Institute which was for young ladies. (Chuckle) Uh, until later on.

But back to uh, Franklin Street and um, the homes that were their, and my memories of living there. We, we, we went as I said; we went to the school that eventually became the Wilkes-Barre Day School. And that um, was located in a building up in Forty Fort, which is now the lower school of Wyoming Seminary. But many of my friends lived here in Wilkes-Barre, and in order to get up to school, we took the "trackless trolley." And the trackless trolley was, the mode of transportation; it was a "pseudo bus" and trolley car. And we would all gather on Public Square in the mornings and when the weather was nice, we would ride our bikes up to Forty Fort to get to school.

The Helmond Academy was a boys' school down on Terrace Street in Wilkes-Barre. And they had come on hard times as the girls Wilkes-Barre Institute had. So, at a junc, juncture up in there, I don't have the dates exactly, but they joined to become that Wilkes-Barre Day School.

It was co-ed um, through ninth grade. I stayed there and graduated in 1945 from the Wilkes-Barre Day School. The boys that came after ninth grade either went down to Wyoming Seminary or most of them away to Prep Schools, as their fathers had down too. Or to Wyoming Seminary. Um, school was wonderful, high school was wonderful.

We were, we had, we had very small classes, um, they were um, six in my graduating class and three in the class below me. And seven or eight in the classes above us. But that also gives you an idea that the school did not have, um, was having problems attracting, attracting students because they were in, there was Wyoming Seminary in town. At any rate.

So those were wonderful years. I had a fabulous education. I thank heavens for it now. And the athletics were terrific and uh we had lots of parties, lots of dancing classes, and uh everybody gave a lot of parties, we danced in each others living rooms and uh so those were fun years.

When I graduated from the Day School, I went to Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs...

Slack: Can you please spell that? Do you know..

Condron: SKIDMORE. S-k-i-d-m-o-r-e. It was in Saratoga Springs New York.

Slack: Ok.

Condron: And my mother had gone to Barnard. My aunt..Barnard, B-a-r-n-a-r-d. My aunt had gone to Vassar, V-a-s-s-a-r. And they each wanted me to go to those schools. But the headmaster of our school felt that the art um, department at Skidmore was the best place for me. And we did what our headmasters told us.

We didn't do what, what is done now and kind of cased different colleges. And um so I went, had four wonderful years there.

Again, um, it was after the war by then so the soldiers and sailors and all were coming back and uh um I was, this was a girls school, a girls college then because most of my friends all went to girls colleges. And um....

Jimenez: Do you mind, do you mind me asking you what you went there for; you went there for the arts?

Condron: Well yes. That's what the headmaster felt that I should take. Um, I think he was probably wrong (laughing) looking back on it; I ended up majoring in the history of art because it was the history that I probably wanted.

During World War II, something new had come, um, up, in, in praising young men for the jobs they might have in the army or after the army and those were called achievement tests. And so our headmaster, who'd been serving in the service, came back to our little Wilkes-Barre Day School, the high school. And he thought these achievement tests were the nuts. They were really good. So we all took them. And mine for some unknown reason came out art...

(Group Laughter)

Condron: I guess I did, I've always loved design. And I have done various things with it. But at any rate, that is why I went up to, to Skidmore. But again, as I say, it was a liberal arts college so we took lots of different courses in history. Those were the things that I particularly loved. I look back on that now and wish that I had had more of that.

However...but those were the days when we were still having debutante parties and mostly my friends would have, uh, when we were sophomores in college. We had coming out parties, and I had a fun coming out parties, and uh, here in Wilkes-Barre, and I don't know if this is even of interest anymore, but the coming out year, "your year" was exciting because everybody had parties for you and uh, we had special dances and cotillions and those kinds of things.

Condrón: Well, the flood was June 23rd/24th, something like that, and we were to leave July 6th or 7th, or something. But, nobody, people lost their passports. Kids were coming from home, they lost their clothing, the things they were going to take. I'll tell you, Dan Flood, who was our congressman who saved a lot of this valley in many many ways, but he was able to get some of the kids who didn't have their passports, got passports, but I didn't really know until I got down to La Guardia, New York...did we leave from La Guardia? Yes the airport, whether everybody would be there because they had all been evacuated to different places and of those kids that were there, I had, that year I didn't have as many, 16. Fortunately, my oldest daughter was one of the ones that was coming. I did this because I wanted to get my kids to Europe, and if I was the counselor, that way I can get a kid that year, and another kid the next year for practically nothing. But anyway, they were all there, and Sally, we got to London, and I was so exhausted and there was Queen's Rose Garden, was close to the...we stayed in universities most all around Europe, and I was near there. Sally took the kids, took them over quite a bit, and I would just stretch out in the Queen's Rose Garden, and sleep, and gather my energies for the rest of the trip. Um, okay, so then we get back to the flood, and as I said, we had 44 inches, and we kept working all through the summer. We were living on food stamps, I mean, we weren't living on them but we had food stamps; everybody had them. The trick was to try to find the places where they had the food close to where you were living. The family where I was staying, the Innes family, had a swimming pool, and Don Innes ran the Nickleson manufacturing company down in south Wilkes-Barre, so he was coming in. So his role was very nerve wrecking to try and get that up and running. So he would come home exhausted, and I would come back exhausted and my daughters with me, and there was that lovely swimming pool, of course we're filthy, so we had a nice swim. As I said, we were living in their pool house on a couple of cots, and...anyway, we were very very fortunate, but lots of people were not. Wyoming Seminary, I had a job there, and they...we had spent...they had gotten all the books up from the library and it had taken everybody that day, the night before and the morning before the flood, to get all the books up on the second level of Sprage Hall, in Wyoming Seminary. And, um, the flood came and it came up and over the second floor, so, their book...they lost much of their library. But then, I was down there, working and trying to get things ready because we had a class to get started and we also needed to help clear out the buildings at Seminary. But I told you there was a side bar to my, to the flood. You may or may not have learned that when that flood water broke through the levies, and the dykes, up in Forty Fort it came through the Forty Fort cemetery and unearthed caskets and there were skeletons, there were tremendously difficult and ghastly experiences. I'm very much involved with the Forty Fort meeting house, which you probably don't know about J.C., but possibly, I don't know if know where it is in Forty Fort.

Slack: Hmm, I'm not sure.

Condron: Well, if you have opportunities, in your time here, to get up north of Kingston into Forty Fort, there is a marvelous old old cemetery there, and there is an old old meeting house, which was built in 1807, it's the oldest religious building still...and it hasn't had to have been redone in any way; it still has the old pews, it still has everything. The flood broke through the cemetery, a huge tree came down and blocked off a corner of this meetinghouse, which is probably the reason why the meetinghouse is still standing today. I mean, you think...we're in the midst of a huge campaign to try to get moneys to... because it needs a lot of things now. But because of the way the rivers came through, and under the dyke and boiled up through as well as over the dyke...too bad they can't see me because, (*Group Laughter*) I'm doing things with my hands...Anyway, people don't understand that that was part of the destruction of this terrible hurricane. Hurricane Agnus, the flood, it came both ways, up and under. Um, So I'm very involved with the Forty Fort meeting house, I guess that was all I was going to say now. But all the schools, when you think of all the things that were going...I wasn't part of Wilkes in those days. So they, of course had their serious problems here as well. When I left Wyoming Seminary after the ten years, because I didn't want to work full-time, I had just been married...well, not just, but a couple of years before that, and I worked there from '69 through '79, through the school years...into the fall of '79...is that right? Yes. And then, began to look for another job, did I talk about that before?

Slack: No, not yet.

Condron: So, I was looking at Luzerne Community College, and also Keystone Junior College, near where my husband was working up in Scranton...but, and Wilkes. And in the end I came to Wilkes to start a program which was called "Planned Giving Program", which is a way for donors, philanthropists, people who wanted to help, in this case Wilkes College, to increase its endowment, which in those days was very small, and start programs that would enrich the college.

Jimenez: What was the name of the plan again?

Condron: "Planned Giving", and it's a term used by financial people, organizations. Many many educational institutions have a Planned Giving programs. Even others now, a charitable institutions, have Planned Giving programs. Well I initially thought I could possibly come because money's, that was not anything I understood easily or well. Anything that had to do with mathematics, or whatever. But I got here, Bob Capin was the president; wonderful man who really really knew and understood the needs of keeping an institution in the black. He did some wonderful things that way, and he knew that we needed this kind of program. But, we didn't have much in it...it falls under development. Now, it's Vice President Development, meaning developing friends, developing money, developing university. But in those days, it was nothing. And I got here and I realized we didn't have much development. We didn't have many friends

in terms of people who could give money. So what I ended up doing, for the first four or five years, was trying to make friends, and give events, and start the types of things that Wilkes was in need of, which was a wonderful job. I loved every bit of it. And then stayed for, whatever it was, I don't know when I retired...a couple of years ago, although I am still here (*chuckle*), as a volunteer. So, then Bob Capin retired, and a new president was hired and Chris Brieseth was here for all of my tenure, and then some. He is a historian, so each leader brings something different to a post. I've learned that in my own leadership posts on boards. Each person brings something different and Chris was a historian, he was a tremendously anxious to keep the history of Wilkes-Barre and of Wilkes College intact. So, he inaugurated some programs that were to assure that. He also started oral histories, and he and I would work on oral histories. The kind of thing we're doing today probably. Interviewing many of the men and women who had been an intricate part of Wilkes, when it was Bucknell University Junior College, and then when it was Wilkes College, and then when it became Wilkes University. So, we have those oral histories. Unfortunately, only about half of them have been...trans...what do you say?

Slack: Transcribed.

Condron: Transcribed. So, at some point, they're all sitting back there in my pseudo-office in Wecksser Hall...we have to do something about them. Have I answered your questions about the flood?

Slack and Jimenez: Yes, definitely.

Condron: I want to get back, if I may then, to my grandparents

Slack: Okay.

Condron: Because they, all four of them, were part of the beginnings of Wilkes-Barre. The two that I mentioned that live on Franklin Street, he, George T. Bell, who started the wholesale grocery business, and then had wholesale groceries around northeastern into central Pennsylvania. And then, my grandfather and grandmother Wolfe; she came from Drums, which is the Hazleton area, and her name was Straw...you don't need that for any particular reason, and he was from the Mulhensburg area. Just as an example of what young people did then, in order to advance their lives, he was a farm boy, and he was determined to become a doctor. But he live out on a farm, and he had to walk many miles to get, each day, to get some kind of conveyance, that would bring him up here to school, to Wilkes-Barre.

Jimenez: Now, is this your mother's side?

Condron: My mothers? Yes, my mother's side, it would've been my mother's father. He completed highschool here, or in Nanticoke perhaps, I'm not even sure.

Possibly Nanticoke. But then he had to get himself into a medical school, and he did. He went to Jefferson College in Philadelphia. But, when I think of him as a young boy, walking all those miles every day, to get, some way to get up to, it must've been Nanticoke, and then he went off. Anyways, he became a tremendously successful surgeon here and became part of this, living on Franklin Street, with all the doctors. I think...its interesting, my grandparents, Wolfe, he Doctor Wolfe, my grandmother Betsy Straw, had three children. The oldest was my mother who was Sarah and then came Rachael. Sarah Wolfe married George Bell and Rachael married William Gutman, and then came Samuel Wolfe. Rachael Gutman...I only bring this up because they lived here on the Wilkes campus Rachael Gutman's hosue was always known as the Gutman property...and now, you know the Martz Center, and you know there's a parking lot to the south of it, as you face the front of it, there's a parking lot to on the right, that was the Gutman home. That's where my aunt Rachael lived and my mother lived, I've told you, in a house across from, that was an old farmhouse and then added onto and added onto, across from O'Hav Zebek, in the center of that block. That old house, after Franklin Street was cut through, then buildings began to be built on the block, and people came along and made it then Victorian and it became a wonderful house. Then we had to give it up. Wilkes College tried hard to help us move the house. The Historical Society wanted to keep the house, but they couldn't move it because it was too fragile. It was wood; they couldn't move it through the electric wires across the streets. They'd have to get it up on a conveyance and it couldn't get under, it was too tall and too thin. So anyway, in the end, Wilkes had it for a while but couldn't use it in the way they did, and we had to destroy it. So that's where there is now a greensway. I think they have other plans for it some time soon. Then my uncle Sam Wolfe, lived also on the block, and this is just kind of a funny story, so he lived on Franklin Street, right there on the corners, my aunt Rachael lived there, my mother lived there, and my grandmother at 218 South Franklin. All within that same block. Sam Wolfe decided he would join the ARMY, at the age, when World War II was going on, at the age of almost 40, and he was stationed out in the state of Washington and all of his mail came from, and was addressed to, and then his wife lived on South Franklin Street, he was married by then. Everything went to South Franklin Street in Wilkes-Barre, and he tells his story, and this isn't a particular interest on this tape but it all is kind of funny. So, some of his ARMY friends came to visit and they assumed that South Franklin Street just this one little street town because (*Group Laughter*) all the mail came, you know to his...all these addresses on South Franklin Street. But World War II, I remember when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, I was sitting on the front steps of my house here at 243 South Franklin Street, and I remember, as you remember when Kennedy was shot, or where you were, we all remember those kinds of things; but, I remember a lot of things from the war years. And I don't...I have no idea, how long have we been talking?

Jimenez: Oh, it's...

Condron: It's time.

Jimenez: Oh, no, if you feel like it.

Slack: Oh no, keep going, we're not trying to cut you off at all.

Condron: I'm just thinking of World War II years, and the kinds of things we did. We saved the gum wrappers, which you probably heard, they were all, gum was wrapped in tin foil. Tin foil was important, so we'd always save, and we had competitions, how large could your tin foil ball be, because then they were sent to somewhere where the tin foil was used for making metal stuff. They needed all the metal. We saved...we knit, everybody knit, constantly, for the soldiers. Of course we had...nobody had ever heard of Olio Margarine. Because, what you had to do was we all had butter, and butter was yellow. So we'd buy this stuff, that was Olio Margarine, but it was white, and so to make it consumable, we had yellow dye, so we would dye the white stuff yellow...of course, what we all have today is Olio Margarine. We all had food stamps, we all could get certain things...my father, we all, he was a...we had to black all our windows because, you know, they were going to come and bomb us! My daddy was a, what do you call them...well, he was what they were; he wore his special hat, and his special uniform, and he'd go up and down the streets one night Franklin Street, and all the streets and made sure that everybody had their black curtains drawn, so that no light was coming through. Air, air...he was an air raid warden. Of course, we had no big airport, we had our little airport up in Forty Fort, so that was the place where all the planes were in and out of. We had...I'm trying to think of other World War II things that would happen. Of course gas was just...you just couldn't get gas. With summers, I said, in Glens Summit, but John Parkerst, who was a heavy bough in those days, would only be allowed to have gas to come up once a week to see me. So they were out...they had the summer homes near Harvey's Lake, but gas rationing was very important.

Jimenez: Is it similar to something that we're dealing with right now?

Condron: It may be, but of course it was just that they needed it for the war effort, we're needing it for primarily...we can say it's not the war effort, but in many ways it is. We're needing it because of the terrible hurricane problems and the tragedies there.

Jimenez: Now, what...I'm sorry, I'm curious...

Condron: Yes, go ahead, ask...

Jimenez: Like, I know you experienced the flood and it was a devastating thing, what are your thoughts on the flood down in New Orleans?

Condron: Oh, Okay.

Jimenez: Do you believe that they are going to try and do the same thing that Wilkes-Barre is doing, or do you think it's going to be a little bit more fast paced than the revitalization of...?

Condron: We open...through the flood, talked about the situation in Mississippi, and Louisiana, a lot, comparing our situation with their situation and its almost not comparable in that we had a small area, we had help that came in immediately, because of our congressman primarily and because of Frank Carlucci who was a head of a lot things in Washington who came from Bear Creek, and went to Wyoming Seminary. Frank Carlucci...C-A-R-L-U-C-C-I, and congressman Flood. So, we had...it was dreadful, devastating, we did not loose lives, one or two or three maybe, um, the moneys came in, the trailers came in, many of my friends lived in trailers in their driveways in Kingston and Wilkes-Barre. For months and months and months, many, as I say, you couldn't get the heat, you didn't have gas, we didn't have electricity, and we didn't have telephones for such a long time, but their situation there is horrendous, much broader much more devastating, much more dreadful. Then one, and then another, and then another smaller one, that could've been worse than that last one. So, in terms of getting back, sure, I think they will come back, but I don't see...I've been to New Orleans many many times, I cannot imagine, and I've been to Biloxi, and I've been to, up and down Mississippi, and I cannot imagine, um them, them ever coming back to the way it was. I can't, I think of the educational institutions primarily, because that is a major interest here, and the tragedies with the students, the athletics, the professors, the people and the kids who were going to be...I have a friend who's daughter was going to start in Tulane, oh just so exciting. You know, what happens to all those lives that have been so dreadfully affected? That didn't happen to us in that scope. I have a very good friend here, who's mother lives in Natchez, and Natchez wasn't destroyed in anyway, it's up the Mississippi, but she was here visiting last...a couple of weeks ago. First of all, she was talking about the cotton, and the cotton was in full bloom, just when this was striking the cotton fields, and she said it was one of the best years they'd ever had, I hadn't seen anything about the cotton, but she was saying that was very tragic for the farmers. Well, that's one little tiny, little spot of the problems there, of their suffering. But she also was talking about the evacuees, and sadly, so many of them who take their evacuations as a given, as something that the government and people owe them. There is, and unfortunately in our culture, a much larger...

(Recording Stops)

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BUCKNELL UNIVERSITY
LEWISBURG, PA.
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

May 22, 1933.

President Homer P. Rainey,
Bucknell University,
Lewisburg, Pennsylvania.

Dear President Rainey:

In accordance with your request to report on the possibility of the success of a junior college to be established by Bucknell University in the vicinity of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, I have the honor to present the following:

I. Definition of the Junior College: The American Association of Junior Colleges gives the following definition:

"The junior college is an institution offering two years of instruction of strictly collegiate grade. This curriculum may include those courses usually offered in the first two years of the four-year college; in which case those courses must be identical, in scope and thoroughness, with corresponding courses of the standard four-year college. The junior college may develop and is likely to develop a different type of curriculum suited to the larger and ever-changing civic, social, religious, and vocational needs of the entire community in which the college is located." (Report of the Association, December 1928, page 101.)

II. Function of the Junior College: The junior college performs several functions among which are: The preparation of students for entrance to the junior year of colleges and universities; and the furnishing of terminal education of two years either of a vocational nature or for general culture. The last mentioned purpose would imply that cultural courses for adults should be an important part of the offering.

III. History and Growth: The junior college movement began about 1900. The following table will indicate the growth of this movement from 1921 to 1931.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Number of Junior Colleges</u>		<u>Enrolment</u>
1921-1922	(private)	137	7,682
	(public)	70	8,439
1930-1931	(private)	258	29,067
	(public)	178	45,021

Betsy Condron

Oral History

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Slack: Now what age was that?

Condron: Um, sophomore in college. How old would I have been? Probably about seventeen or... eighteen! By then.

Slack: Eighteen?

Condron: Yeah, seventeen, eighteen. I graduated a little young. Eighteen or nineteen, maybe. And um... at any rate, uh so... there were, those were, we were lucky we were after the war.

So our "beaus", the, the young men we went out with were those that had either not been in the war or had survived the war. Um....

Jimenez: Is that; is that your first marriage?

Condron: Yes, it is my first marriage and I'll explain that.

Jimenez: Sure.

Condron: The um, (giggle), the man that I did marry was John Parkhurst. P-a-r-k-h-u-r-s-t. And the Parkhurst family were a very old family here in Wilkes-Barre. Um, Johnny's grandparents also lived up on North Franklin Street and uh his father and my father were close friends always. And our families were friends. And he had a, a younger sister, who is still a good friend, and an older brother and an older sister.

Older sister married William Conyngham. And we have Conyngham Hall here on the university campus. And the Conyngham's family as well as all of these.... Again it was a rather intermingled group of community leaders. And... So I married John Parkhurst, and Oh, well after I graduated from Skidmore first, I went to um, (taps fingers on table) the Northampton School for girls in Northampton Massachusetts. And I taught there. I taught a little bit of Art History, a little bit of Art, a little bit of French, coached hockey, field hockey. It was whatever was pretty much needed in those days. It was a very good girls, private, boarding school.

And John Parkhurst, who had left the Day School and gone away to school to the Taft School in Watertown Connecticut, along with many of his colleagues. At any rate, um, came back here eventually, and we had been um, well sweethearts really and yet um.... I...I guess I liked...I had a lot of...I had a good time with a lot of different guys.

(Group Laughter)

Jimenez: That's understandable.

Condron: And uh stuff, (still laughing). But um. But we married and I'll get back to that in a minute. I forgot cause one of the highlights of my, of my um years at college. After I graduated from college. And again I was on a scholarship, slight

scholarship. Um... so... um. I was very, the word is penurious. I was very careful with the moneys that I had and I worked off and on through college and saved my money so that I could go away on weekends and visit the guys at all the different colleges and do those things.

But also after we graduated, a group of us went to Europe. And in those days you didn't go to Europe by airplanes, of course. Because there weren't any. The airplanes weren't there.

Jimenez: Now was this before Northampton? Before you taught there?

Condron: Oh, sorry. Yes, it was. It was between. It was that summer. Good for you to pick that up! Ok. I graduated in probably June....

Jimenez: Ok.

Condron: Of, um, nineteen forty ...nine. And then this group of women uh took uh.... It was a tour, but the only way to get there was a converted troop ship. And um so you don't need to hear all that but it was fabulous.

(Group Laughter)

Condron: It took us twelve days to get over to Europe. We had to leave from Quebec and got over to Rotterdam eventually. But that summer we got to.... We got to nine or ten different countries.

Jimenez: Wow!

Condron: And we were so welcomed. You know, the war was over. The Americans were the saviors and we were representing in a way our country. And we just did the most terrific things. The whole thing cost \$840. And so that was one of those nifty, nifty things. We got back....

Jimenez: Did you um, I'm sorry I didn't mean to interrupt.

Condron: No, please. It doesn't matter.

Jimenez: Did, did you happen to visit Germany by any chance on, on the way...like...over to Europe.

Condron: No. No. No, Germany still was not, um, a place we would have been visiting in forty-nine. But that's a good question. Later on I had the luck to go across the ocean 50 times. (Giggles)

Jimenez: Oh, Wow!

Condron: So I've been to Europe a lot. I took students on trips, but we can get back

to that, if I could remember to tell you eventually. Anyway, um, so we didn't go to Germany. We went to Holland and Belgium and **Lukesingberg** and, of course, Britain and Scotland. And then we went to France, we went to.... We didn't go to Spain on that trip. We went to Italy. And we went on into what was, what was Austria. I don't know where I am. Switzerland, uh, whatever. So it was great.

Jimenez: Did you by any chance find like a big difference, besides you know the culture shocks of like regular culture shocks....

Condron: Yes!

Jimenez: What was the biggest difference that you found over there?

Condron: (sigh) We didn't have meat.

(Group Laughter)

Jimenez: Really?

Condron: Let me go back a minute. So we got, first we got to Holland and then we crossed the channel on a, on a channel boat. Um, an overnight ferry and got to London. And we were in London for maybe, um, I guess maybe about a week at that point. And they were, we were, you know the bomb, the bombing, there was nothing much fixed up in those days. So you know everywhere we walked there was craters from the bombs. And uh, the Britain's were still uh pulling themselves together after the dreadful experience that they had had. Oh, I could go on about the children that came over here and stayed with some of our families. Some of the British children that, that were sent away from um, the bombing.

But anyway, um...Ok, back to England. So, of course, there wasn't really anything, of...of meat. I was kidding when I said that.

(Group Laughter)

Condron: But we.... Some of us, a few of us got on the overnight train and got up to Scotland. And we stayed, in, in Edinburgh. And that morning we came down. And we all, we still when we get together talk about it now and then. And she had, they had sausages for us...

(Group Laughter)

Condron: It was so exciting! At any rate.... So then we came back and we got over to Europe. Proper. To the mainland, um, it wasn't as, um, as gustily as the scenes we saw in England. Um, but of course, there were still the sights of the war.... Italy. Wow! And, and of France. And Normandy, where our troops

came in and up. And Belgium and Holland, um, it was trea... you know it was very sad. We had our eyes opened.

Jimenez: Now you shock your head towards Italy, like what was uh, like what was the most memorable thing you found in Italy?

Condron: In Italy proper? In those years?

Jimenez: In those years.

Condron: It's hard to remember because I've been back so many times (Laughing). Isn't it lucky to get to say something like that? Wow. Um...I think, I think too, I was very young. Um, I wasn't aware of their needs or their problems the way I was later or wou..Or would be, certainly now. Um, so that I was into the art. And so many of the galleries were not yet open. The Uffitzi in Florence. Things weren't opened then, yet. And their, many of their things that they had tries to save were still in storage in '49. Um, so I remember thinking, "Oh, Am I ever going to see Michelangelo's "Pieta" or the "David" or those things." And I...And many of them we did not in those years. So I was aware of that, um, as a loss, never thinking that I'd get back.... to see the things later on.

Um, there was still, of course, boarded up places, but there weren't tour guides that were able to tell us then the young people, who like now, young people become tour guides in a European countries. But then the young people were striving to get their lives back in order...And, um, I do remember Switzerland, because of course, Switzerland, um, having stayed neutral, was another spot that was not affected deeply to the eyes of a young person, um, in anyway at all. The beauty, Oh my glory, the beauty.

Um, you asked me some other thing that I might remember. This isn't particularly culture. But we were, we were in uh...Now this is 1949. We were brought up in very conservative manners. We dressed, uh, the girls in those days we had to pack, um, the new look had come in. Our dresses were these HUGE, skirted, voluminous things that we had to pack and take all over Europe with us, of course. And so we had to take our funny little irons. And then we had to wash these and then iron them to look nice. And, um, so we had conservative clothing.

We got to Switzerland and we got to a town called Lugano, which is near the Italian border. And, um.....Was that in Lugano? Yes, it was in Lugano.

Jimenez: I'm sorry. Could you spell that?

Condron: Um, Lugano. L-u-g-a-n-o.

Jimenez: Ok.

Condron: Let me think a minute. Lugano? Or was that Venice. It must of been Lugano. And there was a beach. On, on the lake. On Lake Lugano. And so one day we,

the gals, went, got our things together. We were all excited; we were going to get to the beach. And we got there and there were these men. And they were on the beach. And all they wore for bathing suits, frankly, were jock straps.

(Group Laughter)

Condron: And that's what, of course, they wear everywhere today and now. But we just couldn't...We were absolutely overwhelmed. Those were some of the memories. Actually, I met with a friend, you don't have to put this down, well of course it's on the tape...

(Group Laughter)

Condron: I met with friends and we got our diaries out. This was just this summer on Cape Cod. She had been on the trip with us and we started to remember some of the, these neat, fun things. Ok...So....

Jimenez: (Laughing) Jock straps.

Condron: Um, Europe. Europe. Well, we went. I don't know if you want to hear of that trip. But we did go, you know we were, we were. We went down and we went to Monte Car...we went to Menton. M-e-n-t-o-n. Which was a town on the French Riviera. And, um, so we went over to Monte Carlo one night. And I again, being the soul I was could never have gambled a penny. And I still can't, it's just nothing I could do with my money.

But, um, we went there and we walked in and you guys don't know but somebody, whoever looks at this tape, might know of Orson Welles and Rita Hayworth. And they were there gambling and Orson Welles stepped on my foot.

So you asked me the memories, that was something that was terribly exciting. That this very, very important movie star...(laughing)...had been a part of my summer. The, the summer tales can go on, I don't wanna.... But, um, so I say, we left on the forth of July or the fifth and we never got back until the middle of September. And I, as you gathered, was teaching at the Northampton School for girls.

Jimenez: Um, hum.

Condron: But they let me come a little bit late because of this trip.

Jimenez: Right.

Condron: And I loved my year there. I really, I just loved it. And again, I was fortuna... you know I had a couple of "beaus" at Amerce and over in Boston. So, that was fun, but in the mean time um.... the man I married, John Parkhurst....

Jimenez: Uh, hum.

Condron:...had come back here to Wilkes-Barre. And, um, he...we...we decided to announce our engagement that Christmas. And we did. And that was a lot of fun. And we were married, um, September 9, 1950. Is that it? Yes, September 9, 1950. And we married and we lived...Oh, Gee, we lived. Our first apartment was up on the Kings campus practically. It's on Jackson Street in Wilkes-Barre. And, um, Johnny's family had the oldest insurance company here in this, in this area was Thompson. It was F.E. Parkhurst Insurance Company. And it's offices were the whole twelfth floor of the Meiner's Bank, which is now the Citizen's Bank. So he could just walk to work from Jackson Street. But I then had begun to teach up at the Wilkes-Barre Day School. So....um, I had to come up and take the bus. Trackless trolleys then?...I'm not sure anyway, to get up to... We had one car, of course, that was it. And um, we had our little apartment and I would get up to Forty Fort to do my year of teaching. I taught ninth through twelfth um, art and odds and ends fitting in here and there. A little French, a little uh, these things.

Um, we had, um..Theres something in there I wanted to say, our apartment. Um, Oh well I've lost it. Perhaps it'll come back.

Jimenez: Are, are you fluent in French?

Condron: No! No longer. (Laughing)

Jimenez: OK

Condron: I noticed that each year. Jo..my husband and I had just come back from a (not) trip. Which maybe I'll get to, maybe I won't. And I realized every time I go to France how unfluent, how badly...It's all (Group Laughter)...it's all gone away. You don't use it.

Um, so John Parkhurst and I. So we were married and um, and I became pregnant and so we were looking for a house. And we moved over to Kingston. And um, and bought a house in Kingston on Lathrop Street. And my first, our first daughter was born there in well, in a whole year or so along 1951 in September. And um, she is named Sara Bell Parkhurst. And her married name now is Van Why. V-a-n-w-h-y.

Slack: I'm sorry. Let me interrupt you for one second. What was the name of the street you moved on to?

Condron: We moved on to Lathrop Street.

Slack: Lathroop Street.

Condron: L-a-t-h-r-o-p..... And we lived there for five years. It was very handy. It was around the corner from John's mother and father, who lived on Fort Avenue. And um...They were wonderful babysitters. And my mother and father

were still over here in Wilkes-Barre on South Franklin Street and they loved being grandparents. So, we were lucky. We had lots of a, we had lots of gran...grandparent sitters.

And then another daughter came along, um, a couple years later, Betsy Bell Parkhurst. And her married name is now Shendell. S-h-e-n-d-e-l-l. And I guess I can tell you more about them later. Neither of them live here in Wilkes-Barre and they each have families, etc.

And then, Ok, so then we had the children and then we needed a bigger house. So we moved in Kingston back to the same street where I was born, which was Reynolds Street. And bought a house at number 36 Reynolds Street. And I say that because that's the house I am living in today. So we bought that in 1956. And John and I raised our family there; we had lots of good times. Um.... and my mother and father, over here in Wilkes-Barre, were both very, very involved in the community. Deeply involved. Um, my father was a leader in everything there was a leader to be in. My mother was for women in those days. Headed up, um so many things. League one voters in the junior league and, and all kinds of health, welfare things and became um, she went on to state boards and national boards, etc. So community service was very much a part of my bringing up. So right along as I could, I too began to become involved in the community in a lot of different ways. And....um...in fact a grandchild asked me, not long ago, um, how...how...a...about, about how many boards? We counted up the boards I've served on. Forty-five boards, and in most of them, many of them leadership positions. And I say that only to say that community service has been such a major part of my life and a, and a wonderful part of my life.

I hope everybody can have the opportunity, many people don't. But the opportunity to, to be of service. My life has always been in health and education and welfare. Again, lucky for me on a state and a, and a, and a national, as well as a local.

Back to...So John and I were on Reynolds Street. We were married for...we, we were married for about twenty years and had a variety for personal problems. Um, so we separated for several years. Our families, of course, were so close and all of our friends were close. It was a difficult time for both of us. Um...um...money had become very tight and so I was looking to go back to work. And um...(laughs)...I, uh, the the uh, the headmaster, the head of Wyoming Sem. in those days was **Dr. Wallus Stetler**. And he, he remained the head of Wyoming Seminary for many, many years. And I had done some substitute teaching in the Valley West school system. Soo..He knew that. But he also knew that I was very involved uh on the board of Skidmore College in, in New York. And so he asked me if I would be interested in coming down to Wyoming Seminary and starting a college placement department, which is what I did. And it was one of those fortuitous lucky things in life. It just was a wonderful thing.

I have stayed very close to Wyoming Seminary. My daughters went to Wyoming Seminary. And um, I started.... at, at any rate. So, so those were great years and I stayed for about ten years. In the mean time John Parkhurst and I were, um, divorced as amicably as those things can be.

And, um, I was then, as I say teaching at Seminary. I did a little teaching, a little bit of writing, um...And those kinds of things. A little bit of English. Creative writing. Um...But mostly it was the college counseling.

And so I got to know all these young people, which has always been fun as you stay in the same community all through the years, you know, I see them growing up and not remembering their names when they come up to on the street.

(Group Laughter)

Condrón: Feeling embarrassed. Of course, they were all half married. The girls have different names. At any rate. So I stayed there for ten years and because the college placement department had become so, such a, a major part of a draw. Of a, a star in the crown in some ways for Seminary. They needed it to be had full-time. I was only working a part-time. Mmm, became twenty to thirty hours a week in those days. So I began looking for another job. Probably college admissions is what I was interested in. I also, uhh, began to..see, th-there were, in that kind of a job, it's nice you have still some kind of a social life.

But at any rate there was um, a man in Scranton, Joe Condrón, and he had been married to.. my first cousin. And I knew him and I knew his kids and our kids knew each other a little bit. Although, we weren't, we, we didn't, we, our families weren't close, Scranton and Wilkes-Barre growing up, but we all knew each other. And Margie, his wife, had died of, um... cancers, other um.... sad illnesses. So, um, so how or another, we got together. You don't need to hear about our wonderful courtship,... (Laughter).....but we did. And we were then married in nineteen...(clucks her tongue)...wow, if we just celebrated our 31st anniversary it must of been about 197-5? Yeah, how does that sound? Probably about right.

Jimenez: *(Laughs)*

Condrón: And we chose, we lived in Scranton in his house in Scranton for a little bit. We lived in both that house and mine in Kingston. But because I was still working at Seminary, I had a lot of night meetings. And um, he felt that it would be better for him to do the um, the back and forth thing more then for me. So in the end, we sold the house in Scranton, he moved down here and he, he, he was in the construction business in Scranton. And so, he did a lot of the back and forth thing over the years

But he had five children. And um, so... our family got bigger. And um, one, his youngest child, who was a severely, the word is know a days **autistic**. But we called it, he was retarded. And Jimmy, his name was Jimmying, and he lived until he was a...19, I think. 18 or 19. And so we still know have all these children. We have four, six children. They're all married. We have 14 grandchildren...And our life is busy with those kinds of things, as well as sisters and brothers and in-laws and nieces and nephews and birthdays and valentines and Christmas and Easter. And it's...

(Group Laughter)

Jimenez: All the holidays, it tends to get more busy.

Condron: All those wonderful things. That's right. So, lets see. Where am I back to? Ok. So...(sighs)...I, I wanted to talk a little more about Wilkes-Barre and the early days....

Jimenez: If you don't mind me asking.

Condron: No, please. Ask.

Jimenez: About, the uh, we were gonna ask you....about the hotel Sterling.

Slack: Yeah, we were gonna ask you a few questions. Maybe if you had any memories on the Hotel Sterling? Have you ever stayed there?

Condron: Ok, ask me these questions. Oh, sure. I'm so glad you did. I was telling you about debutante parties.

Slack: Yes, yes, yes.

Condron: And weddings. Ok, um, yes. That's, that was the spot where all of the major in-town weddings and parties were held. And, uh, dances. There was, uh, the, the Crystal Ball Room, up on the second floor, which was absolutely glorious. And then there was a dining room up on the first floor, off of the lobby. And that lobby of course was spectacular. I hope, I keep hoping. I'm up beating that someday we'll get, get some of that back.

But, the...th...it was such a treat to be able to go to the dining room for Sunday dinner, which John Parkhurst's family would take us often to the dining room for Sunday dinner. And that was big. And then we would take the children, of course, to special events there as well.

Later on, we did have friends, who had an apartments, on the second floor. Some of the apartments were very, very handsome. Of course, the Sordoni family had their own apartments up in the, um, penthouse, of the Sterling Hotel. And they were magnificent. The Sordoni's ha...had owned, built the Sterling. They hadn't built it. Actually it was built by Daniel, well we don't have to go into that either.

(Group Laughter)

Condron: But next store to the Sterling Hotel is what we call the Sterling Annex. And that's still standing. If you think of, if you, if you, know that building on North Franklin Street. And that's where we always had our dancing classes. So that was, that was kind of fun too. I have a lot of great memories fr..from th..that

building.

Yes, the building...The building itself is so handsome and so grandious.
That there are good memories of that.

Jimenez: Did you.... Were you close with the Sordoni's?

Condron: Pardon me?

Jimenez: Were you close with the Sordoni's?

Condron: Well, yes. Know, the um...the Senator and his wife, would have been.... older than my family. His son, Jack Sordoni, who has since died, married, um, Margaret Barner from Philadelphia. And Jack and the Barner, the Jack Sordoni was good friends of mine.... of John...of John Parkhurst and mine. Yes, we were together. We were... Because they were involved in the community, we were often together on all these boards. And these kinds of things. The United Ways, the...the...the hospital boards. Those kinds of things. So yes, in that way we were.

Jack and Barney Sordoni's, um, sons. Um, Andy Sordoni, who has been very much a part of...of our community, as you probably know, perhaps. Here, Sordoni Art Gallery at Wilkes University. And other things. Yes, were still close with them.

Jimenez: Only reason I ask is because I taught...um.... to...Spanish to Patty Sordoni.

Condron: Oh! Did You!

Jimenez: This past...

Condron: Oh, Did you?

Jimenez: I think it was last semester. Yeah....

Condron: Ok!

Jimenez: ...for the spring semester. I, uh, spent some time with here.

Condron: Oh, that's wonderful. I was with her yesterday.

Jimenez: Really?

Condron: She's, well. We've both been on the board at the Children's Service Center. She's been a president of the board of the Children's Service Center, down here on South Franklin Street.

Jimenez: Very lovely person.

Condron: Isn't she?

Jimenez: Very, very lovely person.

Condron: You talk about community service. The Sordoni family are all. And George Sordoni. Well, anyway. They're all very involved in community service. The youngest is done in Philadelphia, so we don't see as much of him. But I'm so glad you asked because then when I see her, I'll tell her that you mentioned this.

Jimenez: I'm gonna be embarrassed now. (Laughing)

Condron: (Laughing) No. Um, you asked. Ok, so that's some of my memories of the Sterling. What else did you want to ask?

Slack: Ho... How do you feel about them rebuilding the Sterling now, too? It... it was sold to City Vest. I wasn't sure if you were aware.

Condron: Oh, yes. I'm very much aware of it. No, I'm praying. I'm 77. I want a wonderful place to come and live. (Laughing).. I want those apartments to get ready for me. (*Group Laughter*) Because Wilkes-Barre is such a part of my own life. And, uh... Yes, I... And preservation of historic buildings is again, become a... intracle part of my interests and my life. I do downtown historic tours. And uh, did, did one just the other night. And we do them during the days because I'm on the, um, Luzerne County Historical Society Board. And, um, so anything that can be preserved...um...properly, if we could get the money for it, I am all for.

Slack: According to what I read though, they said that they weren't exactly gonna turn it back into a hotel. They said they were gonna use it for commercial space.

Condron: Yes.

Slack: And then use part of it for the hotel. So, do you feel like that's kind of taking away from its preservation?

Condron: I think it's probably.... I think it's a necessity. I...I have...My feelings are this: Anything that we can do in downtown Wilkes-Barre, to... make the city more livable, more attractive to people coming in is a must. I think in that little area if they can have some types of commercial..um.....attractions in the lower level of the Sterling, perhaps just off of the lobby. I don't know if you've seen the.... the architectural drawings...of the Sterling. Well, they're very exciting. And, um...I can't explain them without making my hands go (laughing), which in the tape can't pick it up. (*Group Laughter*) But there will be an entrance that is not off of Market, nor is it off of North River. It will have a.... an entrance that will be an enclosed entrance. So some of the small stores and commercial

things can be there and, perhaps, some restaurants, etc. And in a way there were some commercial things there.

I think they need to do the apartment living so that they have the people to, um, buy things from the commercial thingies. I think the hotel aspect alone.... um.... I don't see it...yet...as a hotel. I don't know how they can incorporate that yet. Perhaps, it will happen. I don't know enough about it that.

Jimenez: Are you gonna be in the, uh, sorta revitalizing aspect of the Hotel Sterling at all?

(Voice overlaps)

Condron: Am I personally?

Jimenez: Yes.

Condron: No, just through community interest, um, and being involved with the people who are part of Citivest, and the Chamber of Commerce, and the Historical Society. We are, eh, we are, and I would be one of them, if the Luzerne County Historical Society ends up being the prime occupant of the Sterling Hotel Annex, that I mentioned to you before where the dancing classes were, then I personally would be partially involved.

Jimenez: Okay.

Condron: But I see all sorts of wonderful things that can happen in downtown Wilkes-Barre, but we have to have the patience, and we have to have the money. And, um, we need a lot of grants, and we need some good politicians...um, we need good mayors. We need lots of good things, and I think they're coming.

Jimenez: Do you believe that Wilkes-Barre is going to "live" again, sort of speak?

Condron: Yes. Yes.

Jimenez: Um, how...how long, do you think, it's going to take for the city to get back on its feet?

Condron: Longer than I hope! *(Group Laughter)* You know, I would hope within a half a dozen years, we would begin...within a half a dozen years we would then begin to see a, a major upswing. The theater is one thing, but there has to be a heck of a lot of other things that um need to be part of downtown Wilkes-Barre. I do think what's happening on the streets of Wilkes-Barre is very exciting. I'm not talking about prostitutes or crime...*(Group Laughter)* Those things are sad. But I think that that's what happens in many of our downtowns.

Jimenez: Right, right.

Condron: Um, I spent spending a lot of time in Harrisburg, these last couple of years, and Harrisburg, our state capital, was a mess! It was full of just the kinds of things that we're seeing here in Wilkes-Barre. And they've done it. They've done it in the city of Harrisburg, its tremendously exciting, and they have in other places. They have in um...in Dickins...we've been around several of the towns. I think Wilkes-Barre will come, but I think what has to be...there has to be many people that are buying these houses here on South Franklin Street and fixing them up the way you've seen. It's exciting...and on down where the children service center is. And up on North Franklin Street, the two colleges: King's College and Wilkes University are tremendous assets and...

Jimenez: Do you believe they're doing a good job in the um, like, remodeling...

Condron: Fabulous.

Jimenez: In doing, doing the houses again for university purposes?

Condron: I think...let me first take King's College, I just spent a lot of time down there. Their situation is quite different than Wilkes University's because it's much more compact. And they have been able to do some tremendously exciting things. They've...my husband's grandparents lived on the North Franklin Street hill, that house has become the president's house for King's. But all those other buildings have become King's buildings. They're doing a wonderful job. You take Wilkes University that has a much more of a challenge. I think what this university has done to preserve its downtown and its history is unbelievably exciting. It's very costly; it's something that a lot of colleges and universities would not have had, um, as a core responsibility. I think...I think the school and its administrators um, and I'm not one of them anymore, as such, and I can, so I could say almost anything...I think what they've done is a commitment to historic preservation of what they have is laudable. I think it's very exciting. When I take various people from out of the area, or within the area...tour groups, on tours up and down this Wilkes University campus people cannot believe what we have. And um, they are talking about other things that are being done. Right next door there was the Red Cross building and these five women, who have together, put it together, bought it and are rejuvenating a building that was a Stegmeier family home...um, it's a thrill, and it's right here in the middle of the campus. It will have some slight commercial tone to it, because it's going to be a venue for the arts. Artists, craftsmen, will be able to bring their work there for sale. But they also will have...but that too is exciting. And that's the kind of thing that should be on a campus and done well. There are a couple of bed and breakfast that are on South, that are going to be bed and breakfasts, down on the corner of Ross Street and South Franklin. That was another Stegmeier home. That great big gray stone building, where we used to always have our new year's eve parties when the Stegmeier's lived there. But

it's being made into, by a man, Joe Mateo, who being, who's taking it on his own to try to bring it back. And um, what he's done inside that building is breath-taking. Um, so, there are only pockets of these things, you go, I mean I know I'm always an optimistic person, and I have friends who aren't and say, "But how can you think that? When you go down into Wilkes-Barre and you see problems." But, I don't see it that way. So I, I think its very exciting. I think, as I say, the beginning can be in a half a dozen years, of being, seeing the exact upswing. You gotta be patient, because people are working so hard. I, well, I can get...(chuckles) get me going on these things and get on and on and on. What other questions might you have?

Slack: Um, just that maybe, if you can reflect on the flood, and maybe how you were affected? Was your home affected, or...?

Condron: Okay, Okay...(pause) Yes...

Slack: Yes.

(Group Laughter)

Jimenez: Did you have to move? Did you have to relocate, for a certain period of time?

Condron: Oh, my, yes...Let me just say this. So 1972, um, I was living in my house at 36 Reynolds Street, which is just off of, four houses in off of Wyoming Avenue. And my ex-husband and I were separated then, and still as I say friends, I have the two daughters. (pause) We were told to evacuate, and I had the call about four o'clock in the morning, and I'm again being an optimistic I said, "Oh, this is ridiculous, but we better get out of here, we don't want to cause anybody any trouble." So, both girls...in the mean time both of the girls are bringing things up from the basement. We have a huge house and, um, 67 windows in our house, I used to have to wash them all now I don't, now they're all dirty, because I don't wash them anymore. *(Group Laughter)* But at any rate, down in the basement we have five rooms, so they were bringing things up like sewing machine, we had a sewing room down there. And, um, we had a wonderful game room down there that my husband had built, he was great with his hands. And, um, there were five rooms down there, and they were busy bringing things up. I said, "Look, stop this now. Come on, we gotta have breakfast, we gotta do things. And, we're...(pause) So finally, the whistles were blowing, and that would be around seven when we had to get out, to evacuate. We fortunately took our car, and drove out to friends...the Kiley family. He was the president of the First Eastern Bank.

Jimenez: I'm sorry, what was the name of that...

Conron: Thomas Kiley, actually he was the chairman of a board here at Wilkes. He

was a chair man of all kinds of things in this community. K-I-L-E-Y.

Jimenez: ...L-E-Y

Condron: K-I-L-E-Y, Thomas Kiley. And just a couple of months before that, he and his wife had moved out to Suttonoad in Shavertown. And so, they called me and said, "C'mon, get out and come stay with us." So, that was fine. I called the girls to stop packing and let's get going. So we didn't to anything much like taking things up. Fortunately, somebody got the movies and the pictures, and some of those things out, but a lot did not got saved. Anyway, so we went out...

Jimenez: How old were the girls if you don't mind me asking?

Condron: Oh, yes, okay, let me see...72...Sally...this was summer, just starting summer, Sally would've been in at Hood College in Frederick, Maryland, but she was home because it was summer vacation. Binky, was probably still at Seminary...(pause) was she? Jeez, I can't remember, we could figure it out...72...yes, because she hadn't started college yet. Anyway...I think I'm right.

Jimenez: Wait, you said you're first daughter was born in 51, you said, and...

Condron: And Binky was then born in 55.

Jimenez: 55? Okay.

Condron: Yea...(to herself) 52, 54 55, 65, 75... (out loud) So she would've still been here 72...Well, you figure it out...

(Group Laughter)

Slack: We'll forget it...

Condron: My head's too full... So, alright, but they were both home, because as I said it was June. And, um. (pause) Oh!, I didn't tell you, so I have to back up, because of the flood. So I was working at Wyoming Seminary, and I was taking groups of students to Europe, on student study tours. They were six-week study trip tours, and I was doing that as I took groups. And the first group had been when Binky was sophomore, which would have been the year before, so she was still at Seminary...and I had 16 kids, and we had all these countries. Maybe of interest, maybe not of interest; it was very, very exciting. But of course in those days the planes had begun, so we went across in the airplane...different than the planes of today. But, um, I had of the 16 kids, I was so naïve, and took them all over Europe. Of the 16, 14 of them were sick at one point or another. In and out of hospitals all over Europe, but never all at once. (Chuckles) So we managed to do it. It was tremendously exciting. So then, then next year, I'm still

at Seminary, and the flood came; we've evacuated to the Kiley's home. And, *(pause)* we had lots and lots of friends then, who lived in the Back Mountain, who had moved out to Dallas, some up to the Mountain Top area, but mostly to Dallas, the Back Mountain area. Close friends, our social friends, and many of our family. But, our neighbors next door, Bob Freedman's, did not have a lot of friends in the Back Mountain in those days, but they had known the Kiley's, who used to live right across on Reynold's Street. So, we got out there, and we got settled in the Kiley's thinking we would get back in very shortly. And It wasn't happening...The dyke, the levies broke, and the flood waters came in and...the Freedman's had no where to go. So they had called the Kiley's, well the Kiley's said of course, come there. Well, we had all kinds of friends up and down Sutton Road up in Dallas, and I said to them, "Look we'll move out to the Innes'." They had a pool house which is where we lived, for four months. *(Voices over lap)* Four months, we never got back...

Slack: I'm sorry, what was the name of that...?

Condron: Pardon me?

Slack: What was the name of the place you just said? The Innes'...?

Condron: Oh, our friends were the Don Innes', where we stayed there for four months...

Slack: Is that with an E?

Jimenez: Is that his last name?

Condron: I-N-N-E-S.

Slack and Jimenez: Okay.

Condron: He was an architect. His father did half of these buildings on the campus. Anyway, I get going you know, and I have so much to say. *(Group Laughter)* So, we moved down there, and as you know, the flood devastated Wyoming Valley. And, here's a side bar to too, to that flood...*(pause)* No, I'll get back to that side bar later. *(Group Laughter)* So, it was days before we could come back in to Kingston. *(pause)*

Slack: Well, how many days would you say?

Condron: Well, I'll tell you, okay...so we're out there *(to herself)* Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday *(out loud)* I think it probably, when the National Guard finally began to let people come in to check the houses, the water had receded, I would say it was five to six days later. *(pause, noise in the background)* So I had my daughters with me and *(noise gets louder)* we got to 36 Reynolds Street. Now,

we couldn't bring our cars in, we had to park on the Pringle Street hill and walk. *(noise fades)* We borrowed boots, and we knew enough to bring...I don't even remember...but we walked for probably a mile to get to Reynolds Street. Got to our house, but we couldn't open the doors because of the mud that was inside the houses. My two daughters and I went around to the back door, and just with as much strength as we could summon finally got the back kitchen door open. *(noise fades in, pause)* Very hard to talk about this and to really think back to it, because it's very emotional. And um...

Jimenez: Understandable.

Condron: We had, um, as I told you, we had the five rooms in the basement and our first floor had a large living room and a large den, and a big center hallway, and a big dinning room, powder room, huge kitchen, breakfast room, etcetera. We got into the kitchen, we got ourselves through into the front, and in the den, if you could picture it, which is one side of this big hallway, we had two huge chairs; one was leather, I don't remember what the other one was, but those chairs, from the swirling water inside our house, had been moved over into the front room of the living room. Which was a lot of room, through, into the front glass windows. So, if you're standing there, you have an idea of the destruction, then devastation, inside the homes. We had, as I say, 44 inches high of water; my mother and father's house down here on 243 South Franklin Street, 42-43 inches of water. So however, we considered ourselves very lucky, we had a second floor, from which we could work day after day after day. I was a member of the Junior League at that time, and many other communities, many other organizations did the same thing. They would, and many of them lived in the Back Mountain, when cars were then be good, oh maybe a week and a half, or two weeks, to be able to come in to Kingston, they would bring in food, sandwiches because we were...there was no place to make your lunch or dinner or whatever, so they would bring in food. And my daughter was engaged, at that point, my oldest daughter was engaged to a young man who lived in Bushkill. *(noise fades in)* And that first...second...oh, that first and second day as I say, it's a tremendously emotional experience to see your home, your belongings...my grandparents, some of the beautiful tables, some of the lovely things, gone, pretty much. And again, we were still struggling, in terms of finances; you know to a bit, I was of course working and stuff. So I looked out the front window, and no cars were allowed on the street, and there comes this truck. And in the truck, was an open back truck, and this man gets out with a hard hat because of course we all had to wear hard hats. It was my daughter's fiancé, and I really hadn't been sure that really I wanted her to marry him at that point in life, you know, I wasn't sure about this. But this guy came with a pump, and because he had National Guard friends, he'd been allowed to come in, and he started pumping out from the basement. I've always said, from that point on, I love my Norman VanWy; *(Group Laughter)* he's still my son in law. They live out in Bedford, Pennsylvania, where my daughter is a schoolteacher.

Jimenez: What was his name again? I'm sorry...

Condron: Yes, VanWy, Norman VanWy. *(pause)* So he came, and then others began to come in. People who lived in the Back Mountain, we had friends we had family, and people helped us, we worked...One of the major problems was trying to get rid of, as I say it was a large house, the rugs had been sitting in the water for six days, seven days, eight days, nine days, because we didn't get to those first but soon we had to. There were young boys on the street who were friends of my daughters, who were friends of ours, I mean my kids at Seminary. So they came, and eventually got the rugs out and onto the street, we have pictures of the piles of our belongings, of course piled up on the street. In the mean time, I didn't know where my mother and father were, because they'd been evacuated too. My brother, who lived in Kingston, and his wife and family, had a summer home in Nuangola. His name is George Belle. I thought in my mind that probably my mother and father had been able to be evacuated because there was no phone service, there was no way to find out where anybody was. So, somehow or another...oh, Tom Kiley, who was president of the bank, the First Eastern National Bank had, of course on Mountain Top, near Nuangola, a Mountain Top branch, and he, of course being our close friend, discovered, I guess daddy went in, somebody went in and said that's where my mother and father were because Tom Kiley was able to come up and tell us, in Shavertown, where mother and daddy were. But you couldn't get there because you couldn't get across the river. Anyways, my father's birthday (came) along, and I was determined to see my father on his birthday, and somehow I went down to Berwick, or somewhere, in the car and I found a cupcake and anyways, got over to see my father where they were evacuated. They were up there all summer, and longer because their house, here on Franklin Street, we couldn't get furnaces. There was no way to get furnaces in, to heat the homes and get them dried out, because how do you get them in? Everybody wanted and needed furnaces. They never got in their home until late October I guess it was here...

Slack: Oh wow.

Condron: So anyways, where were we? Flood...so then we worked, and we worked all summer. Oh, but, I was committed at Wyoming Seminary to take a whole group of students to Europe; the second year. I mean, I took them a year, with my daughter, I call her "Binky". And then Sally, my oldest daughter, she was going on that trip then. Well, I had to do that and here's my house. It's been flooded, and we were to leave July...well, in July.

Jimenez: Right after the flood?

Slack: You had to go right after?

(Sound slightly distorted)