

Oral History with Ben Fiester, 2017 February 9th

Participants: Ben Fiester

Jim Rodechko

Francis J. Micheline

Christopher N. Breiseth

Bob Heaman

Elizabeth Sullivan or Sandra Ludwig

Transcribed by Kara Beerley, October 2021

Begin: [00:00:50]

Francis J. Micheline (FM): So you were here before me!

Ben Fiester (BF): Yes.

BF: 1951 while I was a student.

FM: I came in 1955.

BF: Yes well, I graduated in '55; then I came back--

FM: Ohh.

BF: --to teach in 1956.

CB: The two men you're hearing are: Dr. Micheline, and Ben Fiester, who is with us today on the 29th of November, A.D. 2017. And we're high above the Susquehanna, on a gorgeous day that should not be this warm this late in the year.

FM: You mean in high elevation, we're not gonna--

CB: In high elevation. Bob Heaman and Jim Rodechko, "the faithful duo," are here as well. Ben, you started here as a student in 1951.

BF: Mhm.

CB: So, arguably, you were the person on campus with the longest view and the most extensive experience. I don't think there was anyone else on campus that---

Bob Heaman: No one.

CB: --who can do that. So your perspective---

BH: No one.

CB: In terms of the process by which Wilkes evolved is unique. So take it away.

BF: Well, I told Anne Slater when she came to our meeting that--we were talking about how long we were here--I said, "I made the man who came to dinner who looked like a case of eat and run.

[Laughter]

BF: But, when I came in 1951, I'd been out a year trying to make money to go to law school. And I was a music major for three years, and then I switched to English. And that transition was approved by Ferdinand Liva, conductor of the symphony orchestra. He said I made a wise decision.

[Laughter]

FM: I'm not sure whether we kept Ferdinand on the staff because of his wife. Who was--what was her first name?

CB: Anne.

Most men: Anne.

[inaudible, 3:08]

FM: But between the two of them, I think Dr. Farley got a two-for-one.

BF: Yeah well she was a very talented piano teacher. And Ferdinand was a talented guy. He really began with a very small group in the lobby of the old gym to put together a symphony orchestra. It was called the Wyoming Valley Philharmonic at the time, and then I think later they combined with Scranton, and now they are the Northeast Philharmonic, I hope. Anyway. So as a student one of the first people I met, of course, was Dr. Farley, and the other was George Ralston. And that was a lot to take in on one day.

[Laughter]

BF: Two very formidable guys. But Dr. Farley was always close to the students and very encouraging. And so was George, who had our back. So I had some great teachers. I had Dr. Craig, and Dr. Davies, and several others as my English teachers, but we had great music teachers as well. John Detroy and Robert Moran. There was a very small music department, and they were the backbone of the department. We had other people part time like Helen Ralston who taught voice. There was a woman named Clark who taught piano.

CB: Was she a Ralston yet?

BF: No. No she was a--let's see... I'm trying to think of her maiden name.

CB: What was Helen's maiden name?

FM: Bitler.

BF: That was her maiden name?

CB: Yes, yes.

BF: And I don't know how long she and George were married, but it was quite some time after she was teaching here. So for three years I played in the band, I played in the symphony orchestra and it was a good experience, but I really couldn't see myself continuing music, and even the music department felt the same way.

[Laughter]

BF: That's when I switched to the English Department. Encouraged by Joe Donally, who was on the faculty at the time. And so I put together enough courses so that I could graduate in English in '55. And, you know, I made a lot of good friends. And there was one thing that--I'm not sure it's appropriate to bring it up here now--but in the interview or phone interview that Harold Cox and Pat Leahy were having about his longevity here and his experience and so on, he said something I didn't think I should have taken exception to at the time, but he said he was here when the first people of color were admitted to the school. And I don't think that's true at all. I don't think there was a time when we didn't admit people of color. My very best friend, who graduated with me, was Bill Crowder. He's gone on to be a musicologist. And I think if we look at the old yearbooks, I think you'll certainly find Bill there. So given Dr. Farley's Quaker background, and his liberal attitudes, I just can't imagine that there was any time when we didn't admit people of color. I know we had people of other ethnic groups. We had students from Greece, and from China, and Hispanic people as well. So we were always a pretty cosmopolitan student body.

FM: I mentioned to Chris in an email, and it's a good point interjectory, remember the Hampton Institute Exchange Program we'd have?

BF: Yes, of course.

FM: I came in 1955 so it was already in existence, and until--

BF: As I said, I don't think there was ever a time we didn't admit students of all ethnicities.

FM: Or women!

BF: Yes. Of course.

FM: Wilkes had women as pre-med students long before it was the accepted norm. When you're at a women's medical college, you went to a women's college. So Wilkes always had that open academic---

BF: I think so, and I think that's a good point, I think that's something that should be a part of our history. We have that tradition, and I think what I said about Dr. Farley is appropo because he would have supported any kind of liberal attitude, or any kind of acceptance of students from everywhere, which we did.

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BF: I think my first salary was \$3500 a year. I had been with an insurance company as an insurance adjuster, and making more money with an expense account. I did that for a year, and I decided to quit...I was enrolled in law school, and I decided against that. And the American Bar Association may be grateful for that as well.

[Laughter]

BF: But when I left the insurance company, I left an expense account, and a much higher salary. In fact Dr. Farley sent me my first contract, and he said, “You now have the privilege of earning less in college.” Then the insurance company got nasty at the end, and they made me give the car back that they had given me. And so I was sort of in the low end again as far as finances were concerned.

CB: You pay the price for your passion.

BF: Yes. I was aware of that, and I never regretted it. It's been a great career, I think. I enjoyed every minute of it, and I still enjoy it.

CB: So you left as a student. Now you graduated in what year?

BF: '55.

CB: '55. So you graduated as Mike came?

FM: As Mike came.

BF: Yes.

CB: And then what did you do?

BF: I worked for an insurance company for a year. As I said, I had enrolled in Dickinson Law School. And the day that I was due to matriculate, particularly I just couldn't see my way clear financially. My car broke down, so I asked the Dean to put my name on hold for a year, but after working in torts for a year with the insurance company, I had enough of law and of lawyers, as a matter of fact.

[Laughter]

BF: So in any case, then I stopped in to see Dr. Farley and asked whether there were any instructorships open; he said no at the time. I had just a bachelor's degree, and he was looking for somebody with at least a master's. And then a week or so later, he wrote me and sent me a contract. So I was 24 when I started. I was the youngest faculty I think at that time; now I am the oldest--whatever distinction that is!

[Laughter]

Bob Heaman (BH): A dubious decision.

BF: Not at all! So what I did from then on, after becoming an English major and then graduating, working for the insurance company, and coming back as an instructor, I was here until 1961. And then I went to Penn State for 3 years to work on my Ph.D. In the meantime I had gotten a masters from Bucknell by going during the summer. And so I spent three years at Penn State, and then I came back, and Mike was dean, and gave me a contract at that time.

FM: That would be in '62, but I was away for a year so I came back in the same year in '63. I was in Washington---

BF: Oh okay yes. Yeah, I think I started again in the fall of '64 or something like that.

FM: Now when you left to go to Penn State, was Dr. Farley's attitude, "You get your doctorate and come back?" Or was it--

BF: Well not only that, it was almost contractual, because he gave me the money for school.

BH: Oh, wow.

BF: He gave me money and said I owed that. I originally understood that I owed it in funds, but then when I got back, he said he would forgive a certain amount every month that I stayed here.

(laughter, and inaudibles) [15:20]

CB: In the elegant form of indentured servitude.

BF: It was something like that.

BH: Is that why you have to still teach? (chuckles)

FM: We keep learning how Dr. Farley built the faculty!

BH: Yes.

BF: I said to my niece's husband, who is a gynecologist with a sense of humor, "They're making me stay at Wilkes until I get it right." And he said, "Well that'll give you lifetime employment."

[Laughter]

BF: Better than tenure.

CB: Sounds like he's picked up your kind of humor.

BF: Well--

FM: It's interesting though, the part about Dr. Farley's character, that he would see, look ahead, and see how--and say there is no reason you should not become more than you anticipated you would be.

BF: Oh yes. He had a lot of vision, and, as I said, a lot of support as well, so when I came back from Penn State, that's when Mike gave me a contract as an assistant professor. And then that was '64, and '66, that's when I became chairman of the English department. Bob, what year did you come?

BH: '69. When you hired me, and you--

BF: Yes, confirmed it.

BH: Yes, yeah...

FM: What a weave we webbed. And what a web we weave!

[Laughter]

FM: What a weave we've webbed!

[Laughter]

CB: You can say it both ways!

FM: Which came first? The chicken or the egg?

CB: Well, as an outside observer knowing something about the history of the institution before I got here, Dr. Farley had to have been singularly impressed by your qualities as a student. I have never heard of that kind of financial support to a young faculty member under Dr. Farley. To go on---

FM: And Frank Davies.

BF: Yeah. Davies--sorry you didn't all know him. He was of the old school--all three degrees from Yale, and British, and he was always complaining about the sloth of undergraduates. And today, I think he would have been hysterical. Anyway, he was the chair, and...

CB: So just to get into the technicalities, do you think it was his recommendation to Farley that this be done? Or was this Dr. Farley's own vision?

BF: They conferred. I think Dr. Davies made it more of a matter of there was a spot for me to fill--he needed coverage of the composition and speech classes. When I was working in Allentown, Dr. Davies got into an automobile accident. So I went to see him--this is right before I started teaching--I went to see him in the hospital, and he finally understood who I was, and he said, "Are you the best student in the world? Do you want to put me in my place?" (chuckles) After I got here, he was pretty supportive, I think. You could confer with him, and you know, for somebody just starting out to teach composition, he was very good, I could confer with him, and he was very helpful. And he was chair until... I'm trying to think of what exactly--I was away when Jack Edgerton became chairman, he was here only a short time. He left here and went to Howard. I think. I don't know for sure. And then Dr. Davies came back as chair, and then later, I became a chair in '66.

CB: Say something then about the whole evolution of English in composition at Wilkes. Again, from my perspective, looking at where it is right now, it really is a very strong tradition, with a great commitment to writing, and from your perspective how did that all evolve?

BF: Well yes, I think the department is responsible for the writing intensive courses. You probably remember that, where we would designate a particular course. But now we have writing across the curriculum, which I'm not sure it always works, but it's certainly a good idea for all. And I tell students that every professor that you have here is going to be looking at your writing.

FM: Chuck Rife was that same mentality as Frank Davies, because he would grade a biology paper on its English.

CB: And their punctuation.

[inaudible exclamations]

BF: He was a real stickler for that sort of thing.

BH: I'd forgotten, while we're talking about what we taught insofar--we taught speech.

BF: That was the balance. Because we were teaching--we started with 15 hours. And then through the good auspices of Dr. Davies we got down to 12. But the speech, which we had no experience in, I don't know about you--

BH: [Laughing] No.

BF: --was to balance the paperload because there were so many compositions to do. We would sit down to 3 sets of composition, which was pretty much a task. The other thing, after composition was the world literature class, which was a 4 hour course, two semesters required of everyone.

BH: Great course.

BF: Yes it was. We had 3 hours of lecture. Oh, we had maybe 75 students. And then we had 1 hour for each of the breakdown sections, so we would have discussion.

BH: 6 hour course, wasn't it?

BF: It was 4 each term.

BH: Oh that was right.

BF: 8 hour requirement. And at same time we had a language requirement. So there have been a lot of changes. World Literature was always under attack by other faculty. I remember somebody from another department...

(chuckles)

BH: You are so discreet.

BF: We had people in faculty meetings saying, "Why do we need all this English?" And I remember responding that, "Our students need the training, and it's a valuable experience." So we hung onto it as long as we could, but then they cut it down to a 3 hour course. The problem--and there wasn't really a practical problem--the problem was transferring, as students that didn't have 8 hours of world literature, would come in short of a sophomore requirement. So that's one of the reasons they changed it. And they changed the language requirement. I remember Bob Capin said that we were losing students. We were compromising enrollment by being one of the few schools that required 2 years of a language. I thought it was a good thing, but it wasn't a good recruiting tool.

CB: Do any of the rest of you remember making those transitions away from a traditional curriculum?

Multiple people: Oh, yeah sure.

FM: I remember the language... Let me also tell you of Chuck Rife and Frank Davies, one which I think the rest have heard the story.

CB: Oh, go ahead.

FM: The language was a 2 year requirement. And then I guess there was enough groundswell from Chwalek, and Whitby, and Ralston that said, you know, we're losing students after we get them because they're flunking foreign language, or not paying (for a) foreign language. And then the federal government started to finance language laboratories in high schools. And so suddenly the high schools were way ahead of the colleges as far as any focus on languages. Which was very unusual in those days, Dr. Farley got a federal grant to pay for the installation of a foreign language laboratory in Kirby Hall.

First lower room on the right. And it was a technological state of the art facility. It didn't mean a damn thing as far as helping foreign languages. I don't think a student ever learned any more than they did before or after.

BF: Didn't they have earphones?

FM: But that was such a---

Everyone: Oh yeah.

FM: ---pressure point in that period. Now, who cares? You put it in your cell phone, and it will translate it for you, whatever language you want. The other story was with the requirement for English literature. Frank Gallia, Francis Gallia, kid from Old Forge, bright as hell, the only reason he got into Wilkes was because a chemistry professor called Dr. Reif, and said to Dr. Reif, "I have a very bright student here, he can't go forward to go to college, but I insist that he come down to Wilkes, and you see if you can get him in." Francis Gallia came to Wilkes from Old Forge and graduated, and he was in his senior semester with a 4.0 average. But he hadn't completed the English literature course for Frank Davies, and finally he finished the course, and he got a C the day before graduation, and he missed being a perfect 4.0 student. He later became a radiologist down in Harrisburg, I've never seen him since, but I've seen his name. But Dr. Reif, and Dr. Davies got in a real knock down drag about the requirement, "and how could you possibly give my star student less than an A?" And Dr. Davies looked him in the eyes and said, "Dr. Reif, that's what he earned."

CB: Good.

FM: Did I tell you that before?

JR: Yeah, I recall it.

FM: But you hit that character. And the character of faculty at that time, there was--Dr. Farley had respect for a faculty member and support for a faculty member politically, when Harold Thatcher would write letters to the New York Times arguing for one-world government, and everybody and all of the American Legion post past resolutions against this history professor at Wilke who was an idiot who was supporting one world. We just got through World War II, what does he expect? And Dr. Farley defended him.

BF: What I liked about Harold was that when he wrote a letter to the New York Times, he signed it, 'Harold Thatcher, Forty-Fort Pennsylvania.' He didn't put 'Wilkes' underneath. And I've always objected and faculty who were writing on political issues, social issues, but they identifying with the college. And I thought that was the wrong thing to do. But Harold never did that. He made his own case, but he didn't involve the college.

CB: Let me ask you a broad culture question. You spent 3 years at Penn State, main campus, I assume.

BF: Yes.

CB: How would you compare the cultures of then-Penn State and then-Wilkes.

BF: Well, Penn State was so much bigger. So I taught a course every term--every quarter. And there were a lot of students. Of course it's much larger now, but it was plenty big then. So there was that. But the students weren't all that bad, I thought they were great. I had one student when I first got there, and I was going around asking them how much composition they had or how much experience writing, and this one student said, "Well, I took an English course, but you gave me a D." He got a D at Wilkes, because he was an engineering student, and you couldn't transfer a D. We only had 2 years of engineering or something like that. So there I came face-to-face with that. But he stuck with the course and he came out all right.

BH: D plus.

[Laughter]

BF: Exactly.

CB: As I said before I started recording, a key moment in the development of Wilkes administratively, was the new division structure. And you were one of the division commanders. You and Dave Leach and Ralph Roselle. Why don't you put that experience into context and I'd like Mike to tell his side of that development.

BF: Well, this was Mike's concept of what should be happening. One of the problems was that the three of us were division chairs, but we were department chairs at the same time, which made for some difficulty.

CB: Oh, I didn't realize that.

BF: And the other problem wasn't so much the structure; it was the times. When we had protests on campus. I remember there were militant faculty. And one of my difficulties was with several people, even in the English department, who would proselytize in their classroom, which I thought was an absolute breach of academic freedom. So we tangled about that. So there were a lot of issues on campus at the time that weren't necessarily the fault of the structure but just the situation that existed at the time. So we essentially had, I would imagine, the role pretty much as a dean, but we were called chairs. And then, I think after the flood, that's when you appointed Don Tappa when we dissolved that structure and went back to a single Dean, an academic Dean, which we've had, of course, since then. I think it was a good idea, but it was a bit unwieldy, as far as management was concerned.

CB: How so?

BF: Mainly because of the authority that we really didn't have. Again, there were those in my own department who were going--there wasn't a chain of command--directly to Mike. and Mike was open door, which was reasonable, but I'm sure you could think of one faculty member who was very malicious and difficult, who would go around me to bring his case to you, which I'm sure you weren't happy about it.

CB: He still was doing that with me.

JR: I know exactly who it is.

CB: The one I'm thinking of has conjured his reward.

JR: I'm thinking of whatever the reward would be.

BF: What's interesting about that--this is a side note--actually, we became friends. There was a lot of animosity between him and a member of my department that started out as a personal thing in their neighborhood, just a dispute that developed into something very difficult. But then afterwards--

CB: Like ??? **Paul [33:45]** and his neighbor.

BF: Yes. Not quite that bad, but it could have come to that. So it was from '70 to '72 where we had the structure. But the flood changed everything. That's when the structure was dissolved and when we had a dean once again.

FM: You're making me think back over the times--the economic pressures in the 70s--the economy was really going south and my brother lost a multimillion dollar business because interest rates went up to 18, 19% for a businessman trying to place inventory. But when Dr. Farley asked for his resignation and retirement, which he did voluntarily; he wanted to establish the principle of an age 70 retirement of the president. And so he felt that the college would not be able to afford that luxury unless he retired. So he formally retired. But it was in the midst of the campaign for the new science building. And so the solution, and I'm not sure how much I was even a part of it, or whether it was orchestrated by Dr. Farley or what, but he became chancellor with the responsibility to continue with the fundraising. He had Tom Kelly and Mike Worth. Where are you going to find a salary for another dean? So I think the division's structure, in my mind, was not well thought out in terms of a functional outline. And you're confirming now, one of the reasons I felt so guilty all these years, is that there was no clear definition of a job description, basically. They were 3 of the most trusted faculty who could lead their divisions. And good, here they are, Don Tappa, Ralph Roselle, Ben Fiester, David Leach. And they're naturals to take over that role. But when you point out the balance-imbalance structures, it makes a little more sense to me that it should have been more thoughtfully designed to accommodate to the lack of a position of an academic dean.

BF: Yes. I think you're right. The duties were never really defined. As you just pointed out, really we were a bargain as far as salary was concerned. We just had the same salary.

BH: That's right.

FM: But we didn't have the funds for another academic dean. Couldn't replace me there. And I couldn't do the fundraising. So it left Mike kind of--

CB: Was it your idea to try this organization, or was it Dr. Farley toward the end of his--?

FM: I don't think--I can't honestly say there are any definition points in my mind. Whatever it was, it was just kind of understood that we couldn't hire anybody else to replace him, and he was going to be chancellor, and I had been dean, so you can continue to be president and academic dean. And kind of the interim ballots would have division chairs.

CB: So in effect, the division chairs, in your eyes, were kind of helping to carry the role of dean while you were president.

BF: Yes, there was no one else--

CB: I had never understood that.

BF: Couldn't fund it. There was no one between--or shouldn't have been--anyone between us and Mike. Except for those, as I said, who went around us, which I think--

FM: And one of the things we talked about over the years in our meetings trying to understand, was that faculty members were so independent in communication with trustees. You know the Sam Rosenbergs, the Frank Davies, the Hugo Maileys of the world. The faculty had community roles. And that was kind of a different functioning apparatus in play when it came to academic finding.

CB: I'd also hazard that not on typical college precedence in those days--Dr. Farley kind of kept his hand on things. We talked about George Ralston figuring out how to insulate student affairs from him. The president was the source of authority. And if you really wanted to get something done, you go to the president. That was the system.

BH: And the deans.

CB: And the dean. But Mike, as the dean, becomes the new president. Then he's got the pressure of where people can go. Well, Dr. Farley is still on campus, which was strange of what Mike was experiencing. Not an unusual problem for colleges, by the way.

FM: Then one of the things I remember, and I found among the papers, we must have been actively engaged as a faculty in those intervening years, because there was creation of a faculty policy committee. And that bridged Dr. Farley's retirement before we even knew he was going to be chancellor, because it was obvious that the faculty needed to develop a more coherent strategy and a more coherent identity as a faculty. And the little individual empires were not functioning within the context of the college's overriding principle of operation. And so we were building a lot of bridges trying to resolve those roles of faculty policy input. And when I read the Beacon--last trip I picked up the Beacon--now students are trying to identify their roles. So we weren't unaware of the overall need for a structure. And it was the flood that brought the end to all that. When I read those papers, I thought we weren't ignoring something, we were trying to find solutions for how to get faculty input and I mean, the faculty policy committee. And that was a pretty powerful identification of a committee to be invited to... you know.

BF: I think that's one of the best things that ever happened here. I thought that we had some good people on the Faculty Policy Committee and we had some important issues. And we had some influence, I think. I was on it for a long time. Were you on that, Bob?

BH: I don't remember.

JR: I was on the first one, I remember.

BF: I thought that was one of our best moves, because the faculty had input through us, and we had some influence on what was going on. We appointed committees and did other things, other issues that came up in regard to salaries, hours, and that sort. So I thought it was a good thing, and it's still going as far as I know.

CB: We did it first after the flood?

JR: I think so. I think it happened around '73.

BF: It probably was.

FM: Faculty policy committee was already in operation when I became president. I thought '71--

JR: I don't think it was that early. I think it was around '73.

BF: I don't remember it that early. But there should be a date on that.

[Murmuring over each other]

BH: I think it was.

BF: That's a big blur.

CB: When I got here in '84, and this is a long time afterward, my sense was that the central power was still in the president and dean, and the real power in terms of faculty, were the faculty chairs. Who were, in effect, serving life sentences.

[Laughter]

FM: You're talking to the right guy!

CB: And their power was not effective in terms of what was happening at the college, but it was all-powerful in what happened in their departments. Particularly on tenure promotion. And that, if I ever get to my section of this speaking of survival, was with laziness. To me, that was the sickest part of the structure at Wilkes when I got here. And that's why I created the strategic planning committee made up of department chairs. I figured that whatever sacrifices, based on what little I knew of this earlier adventure, whatever we came up with, department chairs had to buy into it. And they came up with a new divisional structure. And the deans came out of the recommendations of department chairs, which was crucial.

BH: I may have misspoken a minute ago, when I said it was the president and the deans. It was the chairs, before we formally had deans. The chairs really had the power.

CB: The chairs had the power. I think we established the 3 year cycle, and the department could select a chair to stay longer than that. But prior to that, there was no safety belt. So they were basically barons.

JR: When you say a lifetime sentence--one of them didn't want to give up the chair.

BH: That's right.

CB: I was trying to say it nicely. I mean, you don't have to go very far from the departments represented here to know how tough that issue was.

BH: They were really three hours?

FM: Three hours.

BH: And no salary increase.

BF: That was your pay. You had 3 hours fewer courses in the classroom.

BH: A teaching benefit.

CB: So you all had established that precedent as division chairs. No additional money, just all this new power.

BF: All this new power.

[Laughter]

BF: I remember Dave one time doing something and saying, "Well there's my three hours. I put that in."

[Laughter]

CB: But you remained chairs of your department. So did you get an extra 3 hours?

BF: There was one time, I think, when you reduced us to 6 per term. But that took some doing. Mainly we had a 9 hour teaching, I think.

FM: Was Ralph a department chair? Of chemistry?

CB: He wasn't.

JR: No, that was Jim Bohning.

BF: Oh, that's right. Dave was the chair after Jim.

CB: Jim was still chair when I got here.

JR: Bohning replaced another chemist who was kind of a legend.

BF: Was it Bastress?

FM: Al Bastress was actually the dean before me, who got 3 hours of teaching load reduction to be the academic dean.

BF: He was as close to an academic dean as we had until you came.

JR: Ralph primarily did the Hahnemann program, didn't he?

BF: He was very much involved later.

JR: '76. I think it was about '76.

BF: Well actually, I thought it was earlier than that.

JR: Could it have been approved earlier than that?

CB: My sense is it came out of the study that was done in '59 on the profile of the medical doctors in Northeastern Pennsylvania.

FM: Dave Kissler.

CB: Hahnemann came out of that. It showed that the mean age was 59. The projection for what the world would be in 15 years with this large population. And that generated--I don't know how many years it took from that study--

FM: Yeah because I was academic dean when we negotiated with Hahnemann and met Joe DePalma. I was invited to an honorary degree from Hahnemann by Nicholas Samosa. Nicholas Samosa was a world renowned crook who was president of Nicaragua. But he had given substantial money to Honoman to support some things so that he could get medical care for the rest of his life. That's what Johns Hopkins does with all the Arab nations. They have a special division just to focus on the leadership of the Arab nations. But anyway, the faculty at Hahnemann got so incensed that the invitation was changed, and the awarding of the honorary degree was at the home of the chairman of the Hahnemann board, by invitation only.

CB: Very exclusive.

FM: [Laughing] And we went to that and the installation--to the awarding of the honorary degree by Nicholas Samosa.

CB: I wonder if Hahnemann tells that in its institutional history, I wonder.

BF: The idea of the Hahnemann program was to make a specialty out of a family practice.

FM: Dave Kissner was so critical.

BF: And it shortened the time--it didn't always work like that, but the idea was they would have 2 years at Wilkes and then go to medical school.

[Multiple people]: 3 years.

FM: Interestingly enough, the pre-war, pre-medical and pre-dental programs were only 2 or 3 years. It was post-World War II when there were so many applicants, every medic knew he could be a doctor when he got out of medical school, so the medical schools inserted the 4 year degree as a requirement for application for medical school, to slow down the pipeline which they couldn't accommodate.

CB: Then they limited the number that they would admit.

FM: So going back to saying that basically, 3 years of basic science was perfectly enough for a dentist, for a doctor. And Wilkes--with Bernie Cohen I believe--or one of the students who went through the program for dental school came back to me, I was academic dean, and he said, "Dr. Mike, I want to get my degree from Wilkes!" And I said, "Well, you only went to Wilkes for 3 years." And that required a whole faculty academic standing study: could we do that? And we put in the policy, it said if you successfully complete 2 years of a post-graduate curriculum, Wilkes will be magnanimous enough to

award you your Wilkes degree. There were a lot of happy alumni who would not have got a Wilkes degree. But that took a policy change.

BF: My son-in-law was in that program, and he went to podiatry school.

JR: Any professional school.

FM: That's right.

BF: And when he finished and got the DPM, he came back and got his diploma.

CB: So we did this with Hahnemann, we did it with podiatry, we did it in optometry. Did we do it in any dental school?

JR: I think we did.

FM: Dental school, did you say?

CB: Yeah.

FM: Oh yes, that was part of the package. John Hosage was one of my first students.

CB: Which dental school?

FM: Usually they start out with Philadelphia Temple. Temple was a big destination for dental school.

JR: And in your day, we did it with the osteopathic. Philadelphia osteopathic.

CB: After the Hahnemann thing collapsed, we came back and got some slots at Hershey. And I think we got some at Jefferson. You know, this brings up something we have not talked about in any of our sessions. In talking about the faculty's relative lack of power, which was an issue on virtually every campus in the 70s. My impression is that the academic standards committee and the curriculum committee were pretty powerful committees in shaping issues of the real academic curricular issues. Am I wrong on that?

BF: No, that's right, I'm sure.

CB: Because that would have been a major safety belt.

FM: I remember when Dr. Farley came back from his conference in New York and said, "We're going to take the 2 year physics program and make it 4 years and we're gonna take our 4 year chemistry program and make it Master's degrees." Why? Because the RCA board demanded that.

CB: It was because of the RCA.

FM: And that burden went right through the academic standing committee for the curricular things. So you're right, it was the implementation that was the faculty responsibility.

CB: Going back to division chairs and your frustrations, what is it that you kind of felt you needed to do and the people resisted? Your fellow faculty members resisted you?

BF: I don't think they really thought of us as deans or had respect for us. There were, if you remember, even at the first faculty meeting when this started, there was a lot of resistance. And I think that mostly was the problem. There were a lot of faculty members who were resistant to this structure, and so I think that's where it undermined us.

BH: And I think it was because the chairs were so powerful, that the faculty wouldn't identify with a chair. Beyond that, I don't know.

JR: I remember, I was pretty close to Dave, and he got a lot of trouble from particularly the business...I think it was the business department. Well they just didn't trust. It was also the department chair in history. And he was telling them that he was trying to deal with the guy who was teaching statistics. I won't say his name. And they raised a cane about that. And a large part of their argument was the chair of the history department telling the business people what to do.

CB: So your chairdom in the department represented a kind of noose around your neck when you presumed to give direction to chairs in other departments.

BF: Yeah, there was some difficulty. I remember, particularly in foreign language, having some problems. The chair at that time was Angel Balick. There was an incident where I, as the division chairman, I had to support him in a decision as to awarding a course. We had a Fulbright here, and I wanted to give him a particular course. We had a woman on the faculty who was a Guggenheim recipient, and she may have come directly to you. In fact I may have called you about it. That was... Hilda! Hilda Marban. She was one tough lady.

CB: Hilda Marban!

BF: We had really harsh words when I was in that bind between giving her the course that she wanted, an advanced course, and supporting Angel, who had made the decision to give this Fulbright. This particular course. And she even wept in my office because she wanted that course so badly. And I think I might have called you and said that she was on her way.

BH: [Laughing] Had you forgotten?

BF: In any case, just put it out of your mind.

FM: I don't mean to be making excuses or anything, but my own personal history--I was never a department chair. I was oblivious to much of the implementation of power. So I probably missed a lot of signals that I should have said, "Mike, back up and take a second look." I just did not have the kind of experience of moving through those positions.

CB: I would still impose my hypothesis that Dr. Farley was such a dominant and strong shaping, founding president,

That there was going to be, inevitably, a very rough transition as his power was shared, even with another president. But also as a more developed institution and to learn how to share it with the faculty. And department chairs emerged as George Ralston emerged in student affairs. And John Whitby in admissions. And they were not about to share their power. And if you didn't even lose your old title, so that you still could be seen as the chair of the English department when you came up to deal with the

business people, I mean it's structurally--in the wake of the Farley 30 years, whatever it was--that was not going to work. But who knew that? You had to take some steps to learn in the process. And then you had the flood. One of the assumptions that I made early on in this oral history discussion was that one of the things I heard was that Wilkes was saved by the flood. Because it forced, organizationally, to come to grips with certain problems. And obviously, their organizational ones. And you made decisions for the institution, for example, on the faculty who were going to be fired because of the budget following the flood that created the AUP center, which was what was on my plate when I got here. All those were transitions from a very dominant, very focused, very gifted leader. And a flood which could have ended the institution. So my sense is that everyone was very heroic in the roles that they played. But it took some time. And my unique opportunity, having come out of 3 different institutions where I worked in governance, was to start giving us some shape. And that was my instinct in strategic planning for the department chairs. Because they were the ones whose power would be clipped by coming up with some strong deans. And the early deans, as Jim can tell you, they had some of the same trouble that you guys had. But we were more evolved as an institution by then, and we had the advantage of a new president who was authorized by the trustees to deal with things, and I got the trustees to yield on the thing that faculty most cared about, which was tenure two. I said to members in the faculty meeting I said, "Look, you've got to support 5 year review of tenure faculty for me to get the trustees to yield on tenure two." I told the trustees, "You got to yield on tenure two and get 5 year review," which met the criticism that tenure faculty are no longer evaluated. And that, probably politically, was the most important thing I did in my first year. And at the end of it we had a new structure. And parts of it worked and parts of it didn't, but basically it stayed. Different names of schools, different members of schools, different configurations of programs, and with each new program, you had to figure out if it was a school itself. But all that was evolved. What I can't help but think about is that I was the direct descendant of the three of you guys. And I see you as the people that demonstrated to the faculty that ultimately, the faculty had to share in the administration side, not just the governance side, but the administration side. And there had to be authority by other people who were your peers. And that was hard, because of Farley's dominance, that was a very hard message to work through to those who had gotten real power as department chair.

FM: I'm thinking back over how to fill the framework and I'm thinking the flood actually built on what I'll say was the chaos of interdepartmental warfare that was evolving at that time. Because we would not have survived the flood if everybody had not worked together. I mean you think back to that period: department chairs, they were responsible--the chemistry department had to get back in operation. The library had to get back in operation. The English department. I don't care how they did it or when they did it, but they had to get back in operation, with the uncertainty of even having a class show up in September of '72. The other colleges were offering to take our students for the first semester. So I think that was a very traumatic impact on faculty that I never really thought about, but it did lay the framework for saying, "maybe you didn't listen or we didn't listen, but if we want to keep our jobs and keep an institution going, we better get our act together." So in a way, there could have been a motivational impetus that the divisions created without us even knowing or intending it. But that could have brought in to focus the need that structure was important, and so that post-flood activity was basically dealing with structure.

BF: We had all kinds of cooperation. In fact, We shoveled mud for days out of Bedford. But we were up and running that summer on the second floor. And in the fall, we were back in business. The \$9 million from Richard Nixon didn't hurt...

FM: That helped.

CB: Was that the number?

FM: Gave us a line of credit with Sordoni.

BF: But then he came and delivered--

FM: But we started our recovery before we even knew there was going to be federal money.

BF: And we didn't know, you're right. The day of the flood, of course--Right, you had no idea that we were going to get that fund. We would never get that again today, but Nixon came and brought the check.

CB: Was \$9 million the check?

BF: 4.

FM: The check was for 4, the total was 12 I think.

BF: Oh, okay. I don't remember.

CB: Okay, I thought it was 12 or 13.

FM: I heard 9 to 12. Numbers were very ambiguous.

[unknown]: I know I heard different numbers.

FM: This was the first time government had ever made that kind of support to private institutions. So there were totals for the whole bill, which included King's, and Nesbitt hospital, and Mercy Hospital, and all the ships at sea were packaged into that recovery thing. But Wilkes, the first check from Nixon was a \$4 million down payment, which in his remarks that are on a cassette tape, he made the first installment to a small college. And I was the small college product. So it was the first installment of what would be-- because we didn't know what the totals were going to be. Because it was to the Department of Education. It wasn't to Wilkes, it was to the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

JR: After that money came in, the place got better. Things got fixed that weren't damaged before.

[Laughter]

CB: Puerto Rico was in exactly the same issue.

BF: Well our library, I don't know if you remember, that benefitted, because when I wrote to Harry Meserole, who was the bibliography for the MLA, he had duplicates. And he shipped them all. We had books we never had before.

BH: That's right.

BF: He wrote back and he said he had tons of duplicates because we had lost everything in the basement. So we came out a little bit better from that.

BH: Well the library rivaled almost anything I had ever seen!

FM: Do you remember we threw out more boxes of Reader's Digest condensed books than I ever knew was printed?!

BF: Good riddance!

FM: Yeah, exactly! But it got to the point where we were just unloading the trucks and loading them back up to go to the landfill.

BH: That's right.

FM: It was ridiculous. So a place like that, they knew what they were giving.

BF: Yeah, exactly.

CB: Jim, give your sense of this organizational evolution, because you became part of that next structure of needs.

JR: I think there was a real similarity when I became dean. I didn't know what a dean did. And my mentor at the time, I don't think he knew either. That was Jerry. And George Walden, he had a concept.

FM: That whole transition to the provost end of things, I never paid much attention to that. I was just busy. But didn't we go through a couple of provosts?

CB: That's what I'm trying--

BF: Well Jerry, he was made vice president.

CB: I made him vice president based on that organizational recommendation, which was comprehensive because we also made vice president Paul Hopkins on that.

FM: Was Bob made provost?

CB: No. He had Jerry Hardigan--

FM: Dean?

CB: He was dean of the faculty.

BF: Yes.

CB: So it was dean of the faculty and department chairs when I got here, that was it. I was at Williams from '63 to '71, and during that period, they made a provost, which is now a powerful decision at Williams. And I remember **Joe Kershal [70:01]** was the provost, and he was giving a talk as an economist at night, and it was a big crowd who came out to hear him, he was quite a distinguished guy. And in the front row, a bunch of students held up a big sign that said, "WHAT THE HELL IS A PROVOST?"

[Laughter]

CB: I cannot hear the term without going back to that. Gee, that was hilarious. That gave him his innings to run things.

JR: You know, it's funny, because when I first went to Bowling Green Ohio, they had a provost there, and I remember sitting there, "What's a provost?" Now I don't feel so bad asking questions. I never quite understood where they fit in the structure of Wilkes.

BH: What is a provost?

Moderator: It's the senior vice president.

JR: Second in command, I guess.

FM: And there's a difference between a dean of faculty and the dean of academic affairs that technically-

CB: Well there can be, but they can be the same thing.

BF: I always thought they were the same.

CB: Yeah.

JR: I think here they were.

CB: I interrupted you on your...

JR: No, that's all.

BF: There was something you inherited, Chris, and I don't know how relevant this is; it was the de facto tenure problem. And that's why the AAUP gave us its sanction-- and you got us out from under that eventually. But that was when we were under sanction when you came.

CB: And that was the sanction, and then we added to it by the trustees' policy and interruptible tenure.

BF: Right. It was complicated.

CB: So both of them were--I felt we needed to deal with both of them, which took a lot of internal political maneuvering as we fixed them.

JR: What was interruptible tenure?

CB: Tenure two. Basically, the institution needed to be in a position to say "We don't need you anymore," or "you're not doing well." And that was a sort of downcase?

BH: And that's when you had to have a PhD in order to get tenure.

JR: I thought that was primarily to limit the number of tenure people in a department, no?

CB: It certainly had that, that was one part of it. But there was tenure one and tenure two.

JR: Yeah, I remember tenure one.

CB: And I couldn't... I'd have to go back. Because part of this was before I got here. Well actually, all of it was before I got here. And then **Miss Benice?? [72:51]** suggested the people that were here during the flood, and they happen to be in languages, several of them were, who had been here more than the seven years, should have, under AUP 1940, automatically been given tenure or be dismissed.

CB: So that was the application. The institution had to dismiss them, after they had had their seven years.

BF: That was the problem.

CB: That was an automatic AUP censure. So we worked with those people. If you remember, you and I. And they were all old colleagues of yours. All new to me. Gone. So part of it was working-- and there was one person who was not ready to make amends. Not make amends, but yield or take an offer. It was a woman. A talented woman. Angry as hell.

FM: I think one of other things that influences a president is the board and what their perceptions of academic rank and academic protection and all kinds of things, they think that the president should control the faculty. And if you want to teach 15 hours, you should tell him, and that should be it. And if you want to grant tenure, and if you don't, you should do it. And what's tenure in the first place? If I have to fire the vice president of my bank, I fire him! Their perception of management is sometimes quite different, and presents a president with quite a different set of issues to deal with. And I think it continues to this day. That academic protection of all of the things that create a faculty with independence, the boards don't understand why you can't get rid of the black professor that denies the holocaust ever happened, as the president Ivory Nelson did at the black college in Philadelphia. He's a faculty member who denies the whole holocaust and everything else. The community is up and arms, the state board gets involved, the state board gets involved, and they don't understand how to make any distinctions between what a professor is protected in and what a professor--

CB: The academic freedom dimension of it. And as I understand it, back in Dr. Farley's day, he might have just been walking along S. Franklin St, he'd say to you, "You got tenure."

BH: Right.

CB: There was no committee in the early days.

[Commotion of agreement]

CB: It was the president's decision.

BF: In fact, I didn't know I was even being considered for a full professorship until I saw a contract. But you were telling about the board of trustees, I was on 2 presidential search committees, and I think things changed when you were on the one where we got Chris to come here. But they sort of thought of us as second-class citizens. And I remember the second time, the one trustee was saying, "We're gonna meet in an executive session," which meant that Chuck Reif and Welton Ferrar and I weren't invited. So they were pretty high-handed as far as their authority was concerned. And I don't know how that's changed. But I think you told me, when you were on that committee, they were giving you equal status. But we never thought that we quite had that as the other two.

CB: Was that a fair assessment? Did you think you were a first-class citizen with Patty Davies and the crew?

BH: Oh!

CB: Was the faculty represented?

BH: Absolutely. Especially with Patty Davies. She identified more with faculty members on that committee than with her colleagues. She knew what we needed, more than the other members of the faculty that were of the committee. She was committed.

CB: Times have changed on governance issues or boards. I think the advantage of bringing in a newcomer who had some institutional experience in other kinds of colleges, it was just the right fit at the right time. And I think that board recognized it and the people on that committee, who with their age very close to the president, they're starting to die now. But that was a very collegial group. And you were close to almost all of those people too. Arnie Rifkin and Mary Rose.

BH: They were nice people.

JR: They are very nice people.

CB: Frank Henry. I mean it was a terrific board.

BF: You had a very different board to deal with than I think we did.

BH: Oh yeah, it was a great board, it really was. Well, you did too.

CB: This was going back to being some of the early board members, right? Came out in the 40s.

BF: You know, they might have. They certainly-- well, Max Rosenn was one. He had been there for a while.

CB: He continues.

BF: The guy who was CEO at the bank, what was his name?

CB: Tom Kiley

FM: No, it was... Rick Ross.

[REDACTED]

CB: Well this is probably a dangerous set of thoughts to try out in the open like this, but as I think about your career, your department chair role becoming division chair, becoming a member of presidential search committees, your general patience and equanimity allotted you both to carry some heavy

responsibilities, but not be discouraged when they were discouraging, in terms of your love affair with Wilkes.

BF: Absolutely true. I never--

CB: I felt that wall of coming out of those two departments, much to the mention that the toughest between English and chemistry. Those were my two star-making experiences doing this. The politics of English and chemistry. But you and your good friend Stan Gutin?? kept smiling. Always there, a positive role. From the two of you, I never remember a negative conversation on anything to do with Wilkes. And that was my great exception in my experience with other people in that department.

BF: I appreciate you saying that. But Stan was a very positive professor.

CB: Very positive.

BF: Always. And there were times when there were things that were difficult to be positive about, but he was a real stoic.

CB: It's important to have collegueship like the two of you had. Welton and Bob Young had it. And I think in life circumstances, when you can have a colleague that you can really share things with and a common setting where you can interpret the madness that's going on, then you have what Jack Meyers.

JR: And Berlatski.

CB: And Berlatski. That's what makes academia at its best. And in big institutions, it's very rare. You don't let your guard down to be that close to people.

BH: What mostly we've been talking about is the administrative relationship with the university. Faculty relationship was with its students. We were much more identified, absolutely, with students than with administration. I would say 90% of our psyche was with our students.

CB: Which is crucial.

[Talking over each other]

BH: I mean, that's where our heads were.

JR: When I was at Bowling Green, I was in a department of history with 27 people. I was there 2 years. By the time I left, I didn't know a single faculty member outside that department. And I don't think the rest of them did, either. It was an insulated group.

CB: When I came here, I came from Bradley University, Illinois, in which we structured things to force faculty across departments to deal with each other. And students would have committees with faculty members who would not only represent their own department but other departments with their final exams. Just deliberately. And part of it was, even my coming out of a small place like Williams, where the history department was like a separate fiefdom. Until the day I left, I was a junior member. And that feeling was dominant. And Williams was very good to me. They really were very good to me. Turned me down for tenure twice, but they were very good to me. So I was determined we'd get to the same state. Since we had to structure things anew, that we would do it on a cross-disciplinary basis.

And I wasn't the only one. The people who were drawn to that place were really alienated by that structure, which by the late 60s was breaking down. So we were brand new in all the turbulence that you'd been talking about that was affecting this kind of campus and other campuses. And some of the things we tried didn't work.

BH: And students became much more powerful.

CB: Much more powerful.

JR: One of the things that broke down the departmental barriers here would be a group that today would be unquestionably ruled out. Faculty Wives' Gourmet Group.

CB: That's right.

JR: Worked together in every department and--

Well we talked about the evolution of the physical plant and the way Dr. Farley and presidents after him tried to blend--Sordoni Art Gallery was deliberately placed where there was going to be engineering instruction and medical instruction and a chemistry department. We always had a more blended campus and blended faculty except where there was a building like Kirby Hall that was the English department. No, the English department is across the street.

CB: Bedford.

FM: Bedford Hall. Were they inhibiting in any way? I never really thought about it. History department had its own building, English department had its own building.

JR: Philosophy was in its own.

BH: Oh, that's right.

FM: But there was enough other stuff going on that you were involved with that you never felt isolated.

JR: We had also multidisciplinary courses. We had the one titled 'Black Studies, which I think you were involved in setting up.

BF: I may have. And yes, you did some interdepartmental--

CB: I taught every year I was here. 17 years. Minus one. One year I didn't do it. I was bringing stuff right out of my experience at Illinois. And the 5 year review was what we had erected in Illinois to avoid tenure. Faculty wanted a five year review, no tenure. And finally, the Board of Regions, which was responsible for 2 other campuses, said, "You got to take the standard tenure." So that transition year was brutal. As the first group of chartered faculty, in that first group, 6 were denied tenure by a peer committee. And it took us years to recover from that blood-letting. I was there 13 years, so I had been through a lot of that. So I brought that experience here and recognized certain problems as endemic to colleges, and others that--we had done some things at Illinois that we were trying to breakthrough to the next era, and frankly, Wilkes--as I look back on it--Wilkes was very open to that kind of leadership. Partly because I really was an outsider and I wasn't identified with any of the long-term... I mean, you

kept going for leadership internally, which made all kinds of sense, but at some point, you had to break it. Of course, it made an enemy, for me, of the man who thought he should have been selected president.

FM: Ben, you taught for a long, long time. How would you rank students and student learning with the totally changed environment that they're in now. Have you adapted a lot or do you find that, on the contrary, there are some fundamentals that are timeless. What's your--?

BF: I've been resistive to the internet and to--one of the things I find is a kind of cultural illiteracy. When I tell students that an author would assume certain things, just as students would assume that you know about the Dred Scott case.

BH: [Laughing] Like the Civil War.

BF: Well you know, I didn't live then either. But one of the problems is having a reference. And the other thing is not being able to refer to things that they've read before they got here. So it's a problem, I think.

BH: Culturally.

BF: Culturally, yes, that we try to resist. And of course, to keep students off the internet as a substitute for a book. It's difficult as well. I had a prohibition in my class that all the essays are primary source essays.

JR: Exposition.

BH: And exhortation of no internet, no secondary sources. But every once in a while, there are things that you recognize come from the internet, where there is a lot of misinformation.

CB: My daughter is the founder and director of a charter school in southwest Baltimore. And I ask her the question, "What do you do with the cell phones?" iPhones, whatever. And they have to check them in the front hall, they get them at the end of the day. And these are 98% African American. Low-income African American kids. They're cut their phones. If they turn up in the class with them and using them, they get I think two times, and the third time it's taken away. So they just had to be draconian about it. Because the kids cannot stay off of it. If it's there, they've got to use it. My adult friends seem to have the same problem. Go out to dinner with people and they pull out their phones.

BF: Oh, all over the place. I have a page in my syllabus about my texting policy. One time is 5 points off or something like that, the second time would be 10 points, and then I have a skull and crossbones. "Third time: bad news."

CB: And it works.

BF: So far. Sometimes I have to tell them during the exam, "disconnect."

FM: I've walked this campus enough to be introduced to a lot of young faculty members. How would you characterize the new doctoral, postdoc faculty members in terms of their understanding? I don't see them as having a common cultural background like I feel I had in a faculty relationship. I see a far different world, much more fragmented. How do young faculty seem to communicate with each other and discuss problems like how you reach through to students? Or so on.

BF: Well people in my department seem very good at that. I don't go to all the department meetings because I don't have that much to contribute, but we have a really compatible group and I think we have almost all tenured positions. Larry just got promoted to full professor. So I think they're doing their job. They're committed; they're publishing. And students like them, so I'm very positive about my colleagues at this point.

CB: You know we reflected on your teaching era, where a lot of your fellow teachers had been in World War II. And so you had people on the faculty who were refugees from Europe's problems. So you had a-- it was a huge shared cultural context within which this institution grew and grew. You've gone through the whole cycle, because your fellow students, some of them would have been World War II veterans, certainly your teachers.

BF: Well it was the last of the G.I. Bill people when I started.

CB: Right, so you come all the way through. What other changes in student culture, in Wilkes culture, can you note along the way? Or as you see them evolving.

BF: It seems to be that it's a pretty cosmopolitan population. We have students all over the world, now. And of course, now with some of the new arrangements that had been made with other schools: Panama, for one. I think we have really a melting pot of people from different cultures, and they make a contribution. There was some problems with Saudi Arabians. We had quite a few, and they didn't have the language skills. It wasn't their fault, but I think that some of that has been corrected. And occasionally, I have had students from other countries who have had difficulty with English. One of my students criticized me last year; she said, "You don't do ESL." I said, "No, I don't. I wouldn't know where to start!" But she needed that kind of support. So there were some problems. There were other students, but for the most part, they seemed to be hard working, committed, and I enjoyed them.

FM: Yeah, I tried to make the point last meeting we had, and I did it in very crude terms, but just sitting at the Starbucks and watching students go by, the diversity on this campus is just absolutely mind-boggling. When you said ESL, I said, "Oh! That's English as a second language." But I had to consciously say, "What's ESL?" It is a different student body. We used to think we were a very--if we had Nanticoke students and Forty Fort students and Harvey's Lake students, that was pretty geographically spread in those days!

CB: The other division that was still in people's minds when I was here was between people who commuted from home versus people who lived on campus. Is that still a division? Because the kids who commuted had to make a bigger effort to be part of the things happening on campus. Do you have a sense?

BF: I have no sense of that, actually. One time we had what, 50?

CB: We had about 50-50 when I came here.

BF: So it really was something I hadn't noticed. Maybe the student deans might be more knowledgeable.

JR: It's more now residence people that commute.

CB: Is that right? With all the apartments around, not all of it is Wilkes housing. But that was a real distinction. I think he was wiser because I told last time when I fought for the rights of smokers in Stark lounge, to put in a smoking lounge with a powerful evacuation air handler. It was really for the commuter students, so they would have a place they could feel at home on campus.

BH: It appears to me with all this, as you talk about how diversified the student body is now, in a sense it was, when I came here, there were--it was not so much by nationality as by where their parents came from. All over. And a lot of them may have been the mines. A lot of those students had parents or grandparents who had been in the mines, and who had themselves identified with the old country. And that got passed on. That got passed on to the students. And a lot of them knew some of that language that they learned from their parents or grandparents. So there's a kind of cosmopolitan dimension to the student body as well.

JR: In fact, when we got the action grant in '75, that's the basis that I don't know, that this was a highly ethnic community, one of the most diverse in the country, which was an interesting--

BF: Bill Scranton made that comment at a commencement when he was the speaker, and he said in all of his travels all over the world, this was the most ethnically cosmopolitan, 42 I think, different identifiable national identities.

BH: So that tradition has carried on, hasn't it?

BF: Yes I'm wondering now what the percentage of first generation college students there are. At one time, correct me, I think 100% of them.

BH: Yeah, yeah.

CB: Still over 50%.

BF: Is it really that?

JR: 57%, I think.

CB: Happily use that in every speech you give us.

FM: But I think they're much more of the first descendants of an immigrant population from different parts of the world. Our immigrant populations came in the late 18- early 1900s, and they came from Ireland, Europe, the European countries that were in turmoil after World War I and World War II. But now, the influx is from India, over there. Very bright, good gene pool intellectually, but a huge country with huge problems of their own. But there are an awful lot of first generation people who had immigrated from the far east especially. And more than our heritage was from Europe. I'm only second generation.

BH: A lot of our students, it's funny, why they missed class. And they say, "Well I was at my grandmother's funeral. I couldn't make class." For a long time I couldn't figure it out, why would they be at their grandmother's whatever it was, until you found out that they were raised by their grandparents, or identified in strong ways with their grandparents.

CB: Sunday dinner.

BH: Mmhm.

CB: My experience, because I came here a generation after you did, all of you, was that the coal mine relatives were the grandparents. Or if they were the parents, they were the faculty whose parents had been in the mines. I can't remember a student at Wilkes whose parents had been in the mine. Whose father or uncles. That was one generation back. So I think I encountered a different connectivity to that culture, except through the faculty. And I told the story last time, when Andy Shaw came in for his interview after I was selected, and he indicated that all four grandparents and parents--the men--had been in the mines. And so many had died. And that meant that he understood this valley in ways that I would never understand. That was his first armed force.

FM: What was your family? Were you first generation, sixth generation? What gave you motivation to go beyond high school?

BF: Oh, well it was because I had some illusions I guess about being a musician.

FM: But were your parents conscious of education?

BF: Oh yeah, they encouraged us, both my brother and me. We were first generation. My grandfather was a miner. But we were always encouraged, both of us, to go to school. I didn't think about doing anything else, especially, as I mentioned before, after working a year for an insurance company.

[Laughter]

BF: I figured I'd better get on with it, do something else. It was a good experience then, as I said I worked for a year before I came to college, putting money together. I worked in an office. So coming to college was like heaven, I really enjoyed it.

CB: We've kind of broken this oral history up by presidencies, and you talked about Dr. Farley and we talked about Dr. Mike. Can you say something about your experience and your understanding of what the evolutionary process was through Bob Capin's presidency?

BF: I think Capin had a businessman's mind, I think. He was an accountant, and he was very much on the fiscal part of things, and very responsible, I thought, and also very supportive. And I think he had moved the college along. Those weren't easy times for him, either. And I had a very positive relationship with him, and I think the faculty did in general. He had his own difficulties with one dean who had left abruptly. Bob took over as dean until he made another appointment. But I thought he did well.

CB: And like you, he started as a student here.

BF: Yes he did.

BH: That's right.

CB: In fact he said when he first came, I think he was from Harrisburg. He said when he got to Plymouth and he saw all of the bars and everything, he thought maybe he'd better rethink. Yeah that road through Plymouth is very discouraging.

FM: Every corner and in between!

JR: It's still that way!

BF: When you get to other streets, it's a very nice town. But he said he was on a Greyhound coming here for an interview, and he was starting to think about other options. We had a very good relationship. After he retired, he joined our play reading group, which Stan Gutin had put together. So we saw quite a good bit of him even after he retired.

CB: Now this is a very personal question, but among your disappointments, does that include not becoming college president?

BF: Not at all. Not for a minute! Sorry. Once the chairman things were over, that cured me.

CB: That was my understanding when I came. Ben will do anything you ask, but don't ask him to be an administrator.

BF: No, I had quite a bit of that.

CB: Other thoughts or comments before we sign off? This has been lovely.

BF: I'd have to say, it is. I find it very interesting what you're doing, I applaud your work. You've been at this for some time now?

Moderator: A year and a half.

BF: A year and a half?

CB: I think this is the seventh thing. Mike has really structured it, in terms of the documents he's brought in as we dealt with different major topics. I think we had two on the flood. It came up in everything, but one--

JR: There was one we had in the library. I don't think you were there.

CB: I missed one.

JR: It was Bob, Bobby and Mike and Elizabeth who were looking at pictures this past semester.

BH: Oh yeah, that's right.

FM: Ben, one of the things we have come to pretty much common insights was that from Dr. Farley on, there were people in particular places that tended to be the right people for that time. And you're mentioning Bob Capin. My transition to Bob Capin was absolutely with confidence that as an accountant, he was what the college needed to deal with the undercurrents of the broad abuse and everything else financially in the flood recovery. My tenure, I served--I think I was a transitioned president in many ways, and I think the flood was a happenstance where my ignorance was a help because it made others see that if the college were to survive, they damn well better get to work. So Bob did, in his era, a kind of a fundamental cleanup in a structural financial way. You were the first president that came in with a totally blank slate and a fresh look at Wilkes because every other president--My first job was at Wilkes was as a

professor in biology. Bob Capin had been here as a student and administrator. So we were very insular, which probably protected us a lot because there was such a clear focus on the mission, on the community, on the overall integration of people that was needed at those times. So in a way, you say that there's some higher being hopefully, that kind of puts the right people at the right time. I think yours unquestionably will be the longest tenured president, and it was the most important transition point, that 17 year that you spent here brought us from a very insular kind of problem-solving strategy to a quite different strategy of looking at it in an institutional way. None of us were capable of doing because we hadn't known anything else.

CB: And the times were right for that.

FM: And I think it'll be another 10 years before Tim Gilmour's 10 years, in all honesty, gets properly assessed. But those 10 years were tremendous periods of stress and change and expansion for reasons beyond anybody's individual control, but which tended to give the college a whole new face. And [Pat] Leahy is the latest iteration of fitting into circumstances that are far broader conceptually. But I think Wilkes has been blessed over the years with a central core, like you, that have been here and have just taken for granted the experience of Wilkes and have contributed in their unique ways as best they could. But I often wonder how... Why did my life go the way it did? You find so many branching points where things happen that people say, "what are you going to be? What are you going to do?" I don't know! "I'm gonna be a doctor, I'm gonna be a lawyer." No you're not!

CB: I had written the beginnings of a memoir. I have 18 chapters. And my first chapter on Wilkes, I record that coming from the house--our house on W River Street with my young daughter who's 4 years old on my shoulders, walking over to Weckesser Hall. And on that walk over she asks, "Why do people die?" So I just finished answering that question, and I won't give you the answer, but I said this is what I'm gonna do when I grow up; be president of Wilkes. And that was very much a sense that this is now my adulthood right here. And I record that as a kind of moment of truth of my own odyssey, but I couldn't have picked a better place for me.

FM: To express your talents.

CB: And the fact that you on the search committee thought I was black from my resume, I was thrilled.

BH: I think that is Wilkes. Somehow when you get here, you get identified with the place. I know when I came here, I was gonna be here for a year, then I was going on to Harvard or Yale, I forget which one.

[Laughter]

BH: But I had that what attracted me probably the most, which didn't attract Bob, was the bars. I said, "Oh, I know this place! I understand this culture! I know my students!" And their grandparents!

CB: On that point Ben, reflect a little bit on some of the other faculty colleagues over the years. Both as your teachers and then as your colleagues that you think are ones we should highlight. Obviously you've talked a little bit about Stan and Dr. Davies, but who are some of the folks that you would like to have remembered?

BF: Well Dr. Craig for one, she was an institution.

FM: Ma Craig.

BF: Mary Craig, right. And we kept in touch after she left and she retired and went back to Oberland. But she was very demanding and she had that kind of very strong Scottish background, and very inspiring, I thought. She was one of my all-time favorites. Joe Donelly was another one as a professor. He left here, I don't know to where. I think he went to a public school or someplace after that. Those were certainly two that I remember. What about your colleagues?

BH: Patricia Boyle.

[Laughter, "Oh!" exclamations]

BH: Yeah, that was sort of one of my attractions to Wilkes.

BF: I understand that.

FM: You know who comes unsung to mind? You don't often think of. Cromwell Thomas, I think was one of the most eclectic engineering instructors. And we forget--George Elliot and Welton Ferrar, my God, they were the backbone. You think of Sam Rosenberg and all that Sam did, but he didn't do anything that George Elliot and Ferrar didn't cover for him when it came to student attention and student instruction. I mean, they really impacted the students of this college. You can almost go through every department and say, yeah, that guy was an unsung hero. He was a great faculty member.

BF: The two that you mentioned were very solid.

FM: Oh yeah, George--And because they didn't have Ph.Ds, they were always kind of on the fringes. But they had tenure because they were damn good!

BF: We had a number of--Frank Salley was another one. They were all very solid guys. And I don't know if they were marginalized, but they didn't have PhDs. They would have been to their advantage if they had I think. But they did well. And they did well by their students.

CB: You mentioned Dr. Craig. There were a significant number of top women instructors here, starting in the late 30s and the 40s, which again contributed to the kind of uniqueness of Wilkes. Geographically, ethnically, and so forth. There were Temple lectures.

FM: Oh yeah, I was surprised walking through the science building and see Grace Kimbells' scholarship. I wish I could leave an estate like that.

CB: Catherine Bone. These were high-powered intellectuals.

JR: I think the first person we had here who taught computers was a woman named Betty Jahr. And she taught computers in the 70s, which was not a time--

FM: I remember Grace Kimbell and she replaced Edith **Namisniack** whose husband was a high school teacher in Nanticoke, and Edith was a biologist, bacteriologist. But she was replaced by Grace Kimbell, and I remember Grane opening a pack of cigarettes. And she turned the pack of cigarettes upside down and opened it from the bottom. I said "what are you doing?" And she said, "that's the most logical thing because you're picking the end that you're going to light to smoke and you're putting in your mouth the

tip end of the cigarette, so doesn't it make sense to light the bottom of the cigarette when you pull it out of the pack?"

CB: The Camels were upside down.

FM: Somebody's mind is working in a different way!

JR: She must have driven Chuck Reif crazy. Because I never saw her when having a cigarette. She walked through Stark always. And he was on a war.

BF: Absolutely.

CB: Well I had to defend the smoking lounge against Chuck because we were both from Minneapolis, from the same neighborhood in Minneapolis. He kind of owned me from the beginning. We used to go fishing together at Lake Talbot. So I got all of his protests and things he was irritated about. So I knew when I was taking a stand in defense of smokers, that I was really--It's one thing to have a third child, and that was offensive enough.

BF: Yeah he was a no-child person.

CB: But he turned out to be like a grandfather to my youngest daughter. Bought her her first computer. I remember, she was probably 5 or 6, and he asked if he could--he made a determination of my wife and me that we were never going to teach our kids science. And this was a hopeless cause, so he wanted to--take it, we knew each other at the Presbyterian church, so he asked if he could come to tea some day and just give her some science education. So we thought, "Well, okay." So I left them alone in the living room and I come home and I said, "Sweetie, how did it go?" and she said, "I think I disappointed him." I said, "Why?" "I don't think I learned as fast as he thought I should." "You're along with thousands of Wilkes graduates. They remain very close. He wrote her letters. And of course, he's the one that got Cathy DeAngeles to move in her own mind from being a nurse to being a doctor.

BF: A very successful woman.

CB: A hugely successful woman. So while he was known for some offensive language on the issue of gender, he was very supportive of certain women students and as a colleague. I think that women--I don't think anyone has ever focused on women faculty, including Patricia. But particularly the generation before that. Which Dr. Farley had confidence in, as equals.

FM: He hired one of three PhDs in nursing education at Wilkes. Jesse. She was--there were only three. I think she had her doctorate from Columbia University, and that planted the seed of dealing with the academic side of education of nurses. And I won't go through all of them, but a presentation to the academic standing committee instead of diploma programs. And I told you that story.

CB: I had mentioned before, but I think it was so singular. In 1937, when we get our first--I think it's called the academic advisory board--within the Bucknell structure. I think there were 3 or 4 women on that board. There were 2 Jews. There was a Polish-Catholic doctor.

JR: Dr. Coshen?

CB: Dr. Coshen. In 1937, that year, Tyler Denneth became President at Williams. And he decreed that there would be no more negro students, and they would limit the number of Jews that could come. So that was in the air.

JR: In the culture.

CB: It was terribly antisemitic at that point. And African Americans couldn't get close to the door. So I just think there are all these separate elements that Dr. Farley represented and embraced the diversity that has come so naturally to the college over time. Different kinds of diversity, different folks.

BH: One thing I have to say about women while I was here. One of the reasons that I wanted so desperately for you to become president is because there were so few women here with tenure. So few. I think you were good to have with us.

CB: But if you go back to the 1950s and 60s--

BH: Well yeah, but wouldn't you say? Across campus.

CB: No. It ebbed and flowed.

BH: They were largely exploited.

CB: No no, that was a clear issue on my--

BH: In a lot of places.

CB: I wouldn't know where to begin.

JR: That's why you have that faculty wives gourmet group. It was faculty wives. There were no real faculty.

CB: As a student of Francis Perkins, one of her difficult situations was whether she really should be invited to Eleanor's teas for cavalry wives because she was a cavalry member. She and I talked about it, that was a conflict. But she wins. She was very close to Eleanor, but they had slotted that way. She had been struggling enough to be in the men's club. But to be consigned to the women's club for this was a real source of tension for her.

FM: Well in the sciences biology was the only one who had women. Chemistry did have Catherine Bone. Physics had no women.

CB: How about languages? Foreign languages?

BH: There were very few.

FM: Mathematics had no women.

CB: Art.

BF: Gildemor ?? in Spanish.

FM: Music probably had more.

BF: Prior to that, though--oh, I'm sorry.

CB: I was going to say, in terms of Bob's point, probably if you tracked it over time, there was a falling off after the flood. You had some of the teachers that got fired cause tenure and cause the AAUP censure for women.

BH: And they didn't have their degrees. And because a lot of them came out of having taught in high schools with other degrees and a lot of them were teaching writing, and necessarily so. So it looked as if we weren't supportive in the English department, but in a lot of ways we were, and in a lot of ways, they made major contributions. But across campus, there were very few women.

CB: Other final thoughts?

FM: Well the external cultural changes impacted what the-- I think the college may have been on the cutting edge as the society was changing. It was young enough and flexible enough to take advantage of that. And we had women students when usually the elite institutions had a private men's college and a private women's college. Post-World War II, the University of Pennsylvania and MIT were male-only. Or Yale or Harvard and Villanova, male-only. We were young enough and naive enough and desperate enough to say, "Hey, we're going to take everybody. We don't care if they're black, white, women, male or female in their sex or whatever." And you can't say any of that was anybody's decision. We were young enough to be inventive and explorative I think and that's where Dr. Farley's precipice set in.

CB: Was Bucknell coed in '33?

FM: I don't know. I think it might have been co-ed

BF: I get the alumni magazine all the time and there are pictures going back; there were women in them.

CB: Did it start as a coeducational institution?

BF: That I don't know. I have a book that somebody gave me that had the history about it. I'll have to look it up. I don't know if they started co-ed or not.

CB: Because I think the decision of Bucknell, whether Bucknell started co-ed, I would doubt it.

FM: Some of the religious ones, they started out ecumenical from the beginning.

BF: And that was a religious...

CB: It was Baptist.

BF: A Baptist institution.

CB: I think the decision for both men and women to be--to have no fraternities, and to be open to anyone in the 1930s, was the singular gift that Dr. Farley and Arnold Martz and others really gave to this Valley. Even when you all hired me, part of the interpretation was that this was The institution of free thought and for its surrounding community, which had allowed it to play major roles in the life of the community.

FM: Take it what it wished for!

CB: Well there were some negative things to say in that that I don't want to put on tape, but the relationship between Wilkes and the wider Wilkes-barre and Wyoming Valley community, I would compare to any town relationship in terms of its positive value both ways. And you mentioned Dr. Kissler in the Hahnemann program. You got that in virtually every part of the curriculum. Key people in the community, some of which became part of the board of trustees, I was not. And just watching Andy Sordoni at the opening of the new Sordoni gallery, there's a family connection that's really very profound. Buildings were built by them, and his grandfather was a key part of the early days of Wilkes. Senator Sordoni. Speaking of trustees, beyond the ones that you have mentioned, were there other strong trustee figures that stand out in your mind?

BF: Well I think I already mentioned one, which was Max Rosenn. He was one of the strongest... Rick Ross as well. When we had the faculty trustee committee, he was usually on that. Ben Badman was another. And there was one other, a younger fellow. He was president of one of the banks. His name just doesn't come to me.

CB: Harold Rose?

BF: No, I can't think of his name now. Anyway, he was one of the trustees. I remember we used to have hearings. Those were the ones I remember.

FM: How about Essie Davidowitz, was she here generally?

BF: She was, yes. But I was never on a committee with her. But certainly I remember her.

CB: I just discovered Dennis this morning has a collage underneath the clasp where you pay your very large numbered dollars, of me and Essie. A beautiful picture of us cheek to cheek.

BF: Really?

CB: Yeah. She was a very important part of my life here. Gotta call her on mother's day, she's got Parkinson's.

BF: Mm, very sad.

CB: She was critical to the writing of the book, *Essays of an Educator*. She wasn't a student at Wilkes, but she was so close to Dr. Farley that the tattoo on her wrist is more Wilkes than her own alma mater. But Jim, what questions have we not asked to this distinguished professor?

JR: The one I was really interested in was his role as a student, how he reacted to Dr. Farley and the role of students on campus.

FM: Ben, when did Dr. Davies, did he retire? You kind of implied he went somewhere else?

BF: He retired and he had family in Bryn Mawr. He retired and then Edgerton took over, and Edgerton was here only a year. He wrote me a letter while I was at State College and said he was going to Howard. And then Dr. Davies came back as interim chair.

FM: Adjunct?

BF: As chair. As interim chair.

CB: Well, as chair.

FM: Oh oh, okay.

BF: He was just called back into service. He had wanted to retire. I think he was 65 at the time he wanted to step down. He liked his privacy, he liked to read. When he retired, we bought a TV set. And that was so far into his culture and his interests, but he enjoyed it.

CB: He accommodated it, the technology.

BF: He did, yeah.

CB: We have students coming in at 3 o'clock, we have 5 minutes.

Moderator: Oh, yes.

CB: So we have finished. Thank you again, Fiester.

BF: It's my pleasure. I certainly appreciate what you're doing here. You're going to continue, I assume?

CB: We hope so, we have to host Elizabeth Sullivan. A resurrection.

BF: So you're leaving?

Elizabeth Sullivan: Yeah, December 22 is my last day at Wilkes.

BF: I see. And you're going to Oberlin?

ES: Yes, Oberlin College.

[Ends, 2:14:20]