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Mrs. Regina Borum interview (1) conducted on April 12, 1984 about the Boonshoft School of Medicine at Wright State University

Regina Borum

James St. Peter

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**Wright State University
School of Medicine Oral History Project**

Interview date: 4/12/1984

Interviewer: James St. Peter

Interviewee: Regina Borum

James St. Peter: My name is James St. Peter and this is an interview with Mrs. Regina Borum, former administrative assistant to Dean John Beljan of the Wright State University School of Medicine and currently Director of University Community Events and Acting Director, Bolinga Black Cultural Resources Center. The date is April 12th, 1984, the time is 3:00 P.M. and we are in Mrs. Borum's office at Wright State University.

JSP: Mrs. Borum, would you, uh, describe your background prior to coming to Wright State and the School of Medicine?

Regina Borum: My most recent experience prior to, um being employed by the School of Medicine was Executive Assistant to the President of Good Samaritan Hospital, which gave me the kind of background that I needed to assist Dr. Beljan...(is this loud enough?)...to assist Dr. Beljan in the early developmental days of the School of Medicine. Ah, at Good Samaritan Hospital I was involved with um, the President in the day to day operation of the hospital, which in turn allowed me to be involved with the physicians that practiced there. I also had the opportunity to be involved with other physicians from around the city that had privileges at hospitals other than Good Samaritan.

JSP: So you had some medical background before coming to Wright State?

Borum: Right, right. And knew the medical community quite well.

JSP: When were you hired for the position of administrative assistant? Or is it executive assistant? Which is the correct title?

Borum: No, it was administrative assistant, no, I'm sorry, it was—it started out as administrative assistant to the Dean, okay. At a later time it was changed to just assistant to the Dean. Um, I was hired on March the 19th, 1975. Before I interviewed with Dr. Beljan for that position, I was assisting a friend of mine in writing some Affirmative Action programs, just a freelance kind of thing, for Monarch Marking, And a friend of mine said to me 'there's a position at Wright State

University for the School of Medicine, are you interested?’ and I said ‘no’. And this friend of mine, who is very close to me still, took it upon herself to send in my resume. Ah, then she told me that she sent it in. And I got a phone call, asking me to come for an interview. And I said ‘okay, I will come’. Well, that day we had one of those famous March ice storms. So when I got down for my interview with Dr. Beljan all the doors were locked. Everything was closed up. And so I consequently couldn’t get into the Kettering Center. But because it was located right across from Sears—and it was either a Monday or a Thursday because Sears was open late—I went over and called and he picked up the phone, then came down and opened the door for me. And after chatting with him he asked me did I think I would be interested and I said ‘well, I don’t know, let me think about it.’ Dr. Beljan was the kind of man that could make you interested and make you want to be in on the ground level of a School of Medicine in its development years. He got me excited about the prospect of working for him but I still had a commitment to do what I said I was going to do with my friend. So we sort of just left it that ‘yeah, I was sort of interested, yeah he was sort of interested in me’ and I went home and didn’t think any more about it. Received a phone call the next day to ask me to come in for a second interview and I, I can remember thinking at that time ‘I’m getting in a little deeper than I really want to in this thing’. But again I went in and I talked to Dr. Beljan, who always reared back in his seat and picked at his left thumb when he was quite serious about something, I later found out, something that he wanted to do. And asked me if I wanted to just take the job part-time because somebody by the name of Sharon Holly was going to be leaving and he really did need someone. Again, because he made it sound *so* exciting, I consented to do it part-time, which meant that when I first started I was working two jobs. Part-time there and doing my freelance with Monarch Marking, writing Affirmative Action programs. Well the part time job with the School of Medicine and John Beljan lasted from Monday until Wednesday and then I found that I was full time at the School of Medicine and part-time with Monarch Marking, you know, I was doing Monarch Marking work at nighttime after I got home from the School of Medicine (laughs). Um, and so that’s how I started.

JSP: What were your impressions of the School of Medicine when you first came on the job?

Borum: Oh, I don’t know. When I first came on the job there were so few of us. There was myself, Ed Spaniard, ah, Dr. Beljan, ah, Dr. Zappala and Sam Kolmen. So it was so small. But Dr. Beljan, you know, explained to me what his concepts were and how he wanted to involve the medical community in the development of this. And I thought ‘God, that’s an awful big chunk to bite off in, and to chew’. Um, but he was the kind of man that made you believe that anything he said he was going to do that he indeed was going to do that. Because he wanted to involve so many people, in the process, it was difficult not to admire what he wanted to do and how he chose to achieve his goal. I didn’t have—I had a good impression of what the School of Medicine could be, but I almost had no impression of what Wright State was, because we weren’t on campus. So it was difficult for me, at least initially, to connect the two. And that was something I had to overcome, that it was the Wright State University School of Medicine, it was

not the School of Medicine in Wright State University (laughs). Shall I open that ventilation for you?

JSP: This is fine. As long as you're not having any problems yourself.

Borum: I'm fine.

JSP: What were your first, initial responsibilities? What does an administrative assistant do?

Borum: I asked him that too (laughs). I said 'what do you want me to do?' and his response was: 'I want you to help me. And I want you to do whatever it takes to help me build this school of medicine.' So I did. Uh, there was an office staff that I was responsible for, and for all of the correspondence that flowed from the Dean's office, from Ed Spaniard's office, from the other physicians that were initially hired, from the librarian, all of that funneled through me for disbursement to the qualified staff person. Initially I was acutely involved in recruiting because we didn't have a chairman of anything. We had departments that we knew a school of medicine was supposed to have, a department of medicine, and surgery, and anesthesiology and all of those other things in order to give the student a well-rounded education. But we didn't have anybody, we didn't have a chairman of anything except anatomy, and that was Dr. Zappala. So initially we were recruiting and we did it intensely. We would send out, uh, we would advertise, and after the advertisement we would get a flood of applications in that had to be screened very carefully. And all their credentials had to be checked and re-checked, and that was my responsibility to make sure that if any position said that he went to X, Y, Z University and graduated in 1945 that he indeed did that. And he had graduated, and he was in good standing, that if he said he was a fellow, that he was indeed a fellow. And we had big volumes of books that had all of this information and it was, uh, very small print. So you had to look up all these names and check all these credentials and again that was my responsibility. I also had to make sure that when for instance a surgeon came to town to be interviewed as a possible chair of surgery, that he was interviewed by all the prominent surgeons in Dayton, that he was interviewed by the Chiefs of Staff at all of the area hospitals, that he was interviewed by the administrators, and by the doctors who were in charge of medical education. In addition to making sure that they saw all these people, you, at least I, had to make sure that their social needs were met (laughs). So there were cocktail parties. Most of these were held at Dr. Beljan's home, number one it was easier for him to have guests there and it...it was more of a good hospitality kind of thing to have it at a doctor's home, so that's where we had it. If the wife came, I entertained the wife and you know showed her the Dayton Art Institute or whatever her interest might be, and made sure they were hooked up with a competent real estate person. I was also responsible for what we called 'steering committees'. And these steering committees would review the credentials of their peers to assess whether these physicians would good enough to be on the voluntary clinical faculty of the School of Medicine. And Dr. Beljan and I would have meetings Monday through Friday beginning at 5:30 and we would meet with 30 to 40 of the physicians that were called steering committee persons and we would go the credentials. And

then if a doctor had not performed his particular duties according to the ethics that were, uh, established, then the committee would share that information and we would, I, would have to check and double check that, uh, it was okay. We had steering committee meetings from the beginning until it seemed liked eternity.

JSP: How many steering committees were there?

Borum: For each department.

JSP: Every department?

Borum: Right. Um, what else were my responsibilities...? I did whatever it took to get the job done. If that meant hosting an applicant, to checking documentation, to working on Saturdays and Sundays to make sure that information got to our accrediting board, whatever it took to get the job done. I did a lot of things with the legislators who were acutely involved.

JSP: What were some of the things you did with them?

Borum: Um, most of those were meetings and keeping them informed as to what we were doing. I was the primary liaison person between Dr. Beljan, the University community, the medical community, the external medical community, the faculty and staff within our own little nucleus there and anyone else. I was the person, I was that contact person between whoever was here and Dr. Beljan. Because you must keep in mind that during those early days there was, we maintained, three offices. There was one here on campus, there was one at the Kettering Center, and there was one at the Veteran's Administration Center. So there were three offices that had to be maintained at all times and Doctor could be in any one of those offices but I was the one that was responsible for coordinating his activities and making sure that all of those offices were covered all of the time.

JSP: You were mentioning the fact that you were a central receiving point for information about the Dean and about his activities. Does that mean you screened the people that came in to see him?

Borum: I made his appointments, yes.

JSP: Was that, uh, a difficult task, with his busy schedule running in and out of the office?

Borum: Yes it was, and no it wasn't, because in those early days it was important that he saw as many of the medical community as he could. And although it was difficult for me to schedule, it was more difficult for him to try to see all of these people. But we managed. Dr. Beljan is a workaholic. And so he sort of got his second wind about 5:30, you know (laughs). And he would go on from there. Um, fascinating man. Learned a lot from that gentleman. Learned a lot from

him.

JSP: When you were talking about the steering committees, how long were the steering committees in action? Did they continue right up to the point where he moved into the facilities here at Wright State?

Borum: They were not as active at that time and exactly how long they were...They were only in effect as long as it took to appoint voluntary clinical faculty for every department. And when we had clinical faculty appointed, and the letters of appointment had been sent, then there was no need for the steering committee any longer. So they would be disbanded as departments and their needs were filled.

JSP: Besides taking his appointments, was there a regular time you met with Dr. Beljan—

Borum: No—

JSP: For a briefing?

Borum: We, Dr. Beljan and I did not have any scheduled appointments, like every Monday or every Friday, to sort of brief each other on what was happening. I was comfortable enough with Dr. Beljan, after a while, that I could anticipate what he needed. And I read every piece of paper that came across my desk. Ed Spaniard and I worked almost hourly together in order to make sure that the Dean had all of the information that he needed for anything that might come up. So to answer your question, no, I did not meet with him on a regular basis but I had freedom to be in and out of his office as much as I needed and I knew where he was at all times so I could get him, if I needed to.

JSP: Were you the supervisor for the clerical people in the office?

Borum: Mhmm.

JSP: How many staff did you have at that point, when you first came on and how many, did you develop more staff as you went along?

Borum: In the Dean's office, there were only three persons. But there were other hires that I made for pharmacology, and pathology, and for all of the people that, all of the chairmen that came early on. I hired their staff persons for them.

JSP: So you were in effect Director of Personnel at the same time?

Borum: I'd never thought about it that way, but I guess so. Hm!

JSP: With Dr. Beljan doing a lot of personal, ah, public relations type of work in the community, was he, uh, did he always keep up the same amount of enthusiasm and energy?

Borum: Dr. Beljan could turn on his charm and be charismatic almost on call. If he needed and wanted something, he could turn on the charm, and make it work. And then walk out of the room and click it off. I had seen him go from a meeting, or a gathering, where he needed to be charismatic with this group, and leave that group and walk across the hall and bawl somebody out with the same intensity with which he stroked the people that he was trying to stroke in the social gathering. He had the ability to do that and I think that's something that a lot of us don't have.

JSP: Do you think that enhanced his abilities as a leader of the medical school cadre?

Borum: At the time that Dr. Beljan was the Dean at the School of Medicine, I am convinced there isn't anyone else that could've brought the School of Medicine along as quickly and as effectively as he did. His style of leadership was questioned, many times, but at that point that is exactly what was needed to get a school of medicine off of ground zero.

JSP: When did you move out of the Veterans Administration center?

Borum: We moved into this building here in I think it was 1978? 77, 78.

JSP: And you'd moved to the Veterans Administration from Kettering Center?

Borum: I, when I was hired in I was hired in at the Kettering Center and I stayed at the Kettering Center from March until July. And moved to the Veterans administration center in July.

JSP: That was 1975?

Borum: 1975, yes, 1975. Very hot, no air conditioning, on the second floor. Lots of windows, no ventilation. But we had a job to do, and so we did it in the heat. That first summer Wright State decided that they would go on the four hour week, which meant that at four o'clock in the afternoon the sun was directly overhead and we still had two hours to work. So it was most uncomfortable there, and in addition to the Dean's office being there, um, Ed Spaniard was there and what was called the back room there was Allen Pope that was in charge of...I've forgotten what Allen's title was early on, but it was minority recruitment, that kind of thing. The health sciences library (and Ray Palmer was in that same area. The veterinarian Bob Stuhlman was in the back room. Then we added Bob Jowett and he was out there. The Vice President for Health Affairs, Jim Sheevey [sp?] he was hired and he was out there. We were a very close family. We had our executive committee meetings there. We were a functioning school of medicine. The administration, the administrative part of the School of Medicine was at the VA center. I mean, after all, it was their grant that gave us the money (laughs), so we had to have some visibility

there.

JSP: How would you describe relations with the dean? Were they always cordial?

Borum: They were always cordial, but the Veterans Administration has their own system of operating, and there was a lot of red tape to go through. And many times our requests were not honored as quickly as we would've liked for them to have been. Which caused for tense-ness because we needed our needs met immediately. We didn't have time to mess around, we were too busy. And that caused tense-ness.

JSP: What about the area hospitals?

Borum: The area hospitals? Good relationships there. Jim Sheevey was, uh, Vice President for Health Affairs and he was the person who was in charge of negotiating and developing what we called our affiliation agreements. Some of them went very smoothly. Others, like, uh, Children's, it took forever to get all of the details worked out. But that was Jim Sheevey's responsibility, to meet with the powers of the area hospitals and get those details worked out. Dr. Beljan maintained good relationships with the CEOs of the area hospitals, he was very good at that. And because we didn't have a teaching hospital, it was critical that we had good relationships with these hospitals.

JSP: What were some of the other administrative staff besides the doctors who were in the early point in the VA? Was there a development team on hand? I know there was, uh, Dr. Buzzard was there with the—

Borum: With the Communication Department, Communications and Public Relations. At the VA center, the people that I mentioned, that was it. And then we moved out here on campus.

JSP: When was that?

Borum: I'm trying to remember the exact year. It perhaps was 1977. Whenever it was 21 below zero and we had eighteen inches of snow and the university was closed for the observance of Martin Luther King day, but our site team was coming. And we had to come to work and I parked out there somewhere in a snow drift and literally walked in snow up to my knees to get into the building. Um, but the site team was coming and we had to be in our building and we were.

JSP: How did you handle the LCME visits?

Borum: Oh, with tender loving care (laughs). Dr. Beljan at one time before we moved out on campus, there was what was called a "self-study." The LCME sent information to us so that we could gather information about ourselves. And each department had to put together a self-study

package. They in turn sent that self-study package to me for copying, collating, putting in books. If you can imagine a room about the size of a two car garage with, I think we had to make fifteen copies, and put together fifteen books that could be sent, imagine that and having all these copies and someone manually collating them so that Dr. Beljan could get on the plane with these documents in his hand and carry them to Washington D.C. And we did that, because he wanted to make sure that they got there and we wanted to make sure that they got there. So the day that, the day before he left, and I'm sorry Jim I can't remember the day, we came to work at 4:30 in the morning. And there was one department, the department of Medicine, I'm sorry the department of Family Practice, that didn't have their information in yet. And there was a secretary that I called at home at five o'clock and said I have to have it, you must get it to me, I don't care what it takes, 'I'm in the bed?' tough, get up, get it to me (laughs). I need it. And she did. And she brought it out about twenty minutes to six and we plugged that piece in. And those are the kinds of things I'm talking about, whatever it takes to get the job done, I'm not going to send this with Dr. Beljan unless it's complete. And if your piece isn't here, you've got to get it to me, period.

JSP: When the LCME actually got here for their site visits did they, did the level of activity pick up at the medical school?

Borum: During the time that they were here—

JSP: Yes—

Borum: We were so nervous. We wanted to make the best possible impression, so everybody was like 'oh, company's coming so we all have to be on our best behavior'. And it was an exciting time, I mean, everybody was up, the adrenaline was flowing. And uh, however, we had carefully orchestrated how we wanted things to flow. We knew they wanted a certain amount of information so we made sure that we provided that for them. But we made sure that we did the niceties, that we had made hotel accommodations that were to their liking. That we had provided them with whatever they needed, regardless to what that was.

JSP: What were some of the examples of—?

Borum: Oh, a good bottle of scotch (laughs). Um, and I took it upon myself to call each team member's primary staff person to find out what their quirks were. If they don't like coffee in the morning, then we're not going to have coffee in the morning. You know, if one guy likes Tanqueray gin, to sort of mellow out after an all day thing, then we're going to have Tanqueray gin. Those kind of little quirks. So we made sure that in addition to making certain that we had all of the self-study information together, we made sure we took those extra little steps.

JSP: Were there any of those small, seemingly small but all of a sudden immense crisis that usually come up during an inspection date?

Borum: Mhmm.

JSP: What were some of those?

Borum: One was, one gentleman on that first site team felt that he didn't have enough information in the department of Medicine, which meant that what was submitted had to be redone. And so what we did was everybody pulled out all the stops, from everything they were doing, that just went on hold. And you just picked up and everybody went to the department of Medicine to clear up this project, and let's get this finalized right now. But it was always a team effort. I don't think in all the time that I was with the School of Medicine that I ever made a request of someone that they didn't say, 'okay' and they didn't ask 'is there anything else I can do to help.' And with that sort of family feeling that was really good.

JSP: Occasionally, when I was talking to Dr. Beljan he mentioned the fact that the LCME would give a favorable report and then the main body would not accept it.

Borum: Mhmm.

JSP: Was there any, uh, reflection of that back here? What was your reactions to that?

Borum: Most of the time, before they left, they would give us a sense of what their report would be. We never got a bad report. There were some areas that they would suggest that we might want to tighten, and I don't mean to, to always cite the Department of Medicine, but during one of those site visits we did not have a chairman. And they spoke to that. But these were things we were aware of anyway. And most of the time when the final report came, it was almost to the letter, as it had suggested it would be. And you could always tell when, uh, it came because it directly into Dr. Beljan's office. And he would come out, and he would—he's a pilot, as you may well know—and he would always give the thumbs up. I mean, he never would say anything super big but thumbs up meant 'hey guys you made it and we're ok' (laughs).

JSP: What were some of the other priorities that went into his desk during the course of the development process? What were the things he attached special importance to?

Borum: Dr. Beljan attached special importance to everything. There wasn't anything that, of any significance, that he didn't see. He signed every purchase order, he reviewed every personnel request, and most of the time made a determination whether or not you can add an FTE or not. He chaired every major meeting. The School of Medicine was John Beljan.

JSP: Do you feel that style of leadership was important to the development of the School of Medicine?

Borum: Early on—early, early on, I felt that yes because we didn't have anyone and he had to make the decisions. As we became larger and as we began to hire more and more competent people, then because the faculty shared with me I began to recognize that that style of leadership perhaps was not the best one after a certain period of time. That more of the responsibility should've been delegated to chairmen, or whoever.

JSP: Did you have anything to do with the executive committee meetings that took place?

Borum: No. the executive committee meetings were only attended by department chairmen. Dave Buzzard was involved to get information, um, what was his title...? Because Bob Jowett he took minutes. He was like the second in command. So, that sort of gives you a sense of how Dr. Beljan wanted things to happen. Dr. Beljan is the only person that I have ever known personally that kept a lot of things, most everything, very close to his breast. And he was the only one that knew everything.

JSP: Why was that?

Borum: I don't know. He wore suspenders and a belt, you know (laughs). He just, double protection, I don't know. I think he had a need to be super protected. Suspenders and a belt.

JSP: Were there, in the recruiting process, were all the efforts to recruit people successful?

Borum: No.

JSP: What were some of the efforts that weren't successful?

Borum: Microbiology. I remember that one specifically because we thought we had that one all packaged up and that was critical to us in the early years. The gentlemen's name was Wheat. And he told he would come and we had a big sigh of relief. And we were publishing his name and getting ready for a lot of different things and then he called Dr. Beljan and said that he didn't want to make the move. And that was a great disappointment for Doctor because a lot of time and effort that been put into that. And he was, would have been, a chairman of one of the basic sciences. And we needed that person to tie the package up. And when he decided not to come then we were back at ground zero. It took us a long time, an awfully long time to get a chair of medicine. We had a lot of applicants, many of them very qualified, but we just couldn't quite get the right person. That took a long time to get someone from surgery that was a good person for surgery. And keep in mind, not only did Dr. Beljan wanted, want someone who had demonstrated administrative style, and ability, and success, someone who was, had the ability to teach their particular discipline. Someone who was an accomplished specialist in their field. But you needed someone that was going to be a good marriage between the community positions, the Wright State people, and the School of Medicine in general. So we were always looking for

someone who could walk on water (laughs).

JSP: What about the non-teaching, non-medical aspects of the School of Medicine? Were there any of the, uh, say uh, besides communications development, did you have problems filling?

Borum: Like foundation and development?

JSP: Yeah.

Borum: Yes we did. Again, this was one of those non-successes. Um, I've forgotten his name, but he was from Pepperdine, and again he pulled 'yes I will come' and we recruited him and we went after him because we felt that he was gonna be that person that we needed for the School of Medicine and he promised us that he would come. I can remember specifically him writing the letter to us indicating that he had changed his mind, he was returning uh, I guess some travel checks that we had sent. He left them uncashed because he decided not to come to Wright State. This was around Christmas time. There wasn't any way in the world that I was going to send or share that information with Dr. Beljan at Christmas. I just could not do that, I knew how important it was for him to have that slot filled. So I kept that in my desk drawer.

JSP: For how long?

Borum: Until after the first of the year. And then I gave it to him and I said "it came in, but I just couldn't give it to you." Oh, he was angry! Not at me for keeping the letter, he understood my motivation for that. But he was so angry that the person didn't come and had led him to believe that he would be here I think it was January the fifteenth or so. So that was another one of our disappointments.

JSP: What was Dr. Beljan like when he was angry?

Borum: What was he like when he was angry...Dr. Beljan has the ability to intimidate. I never saw him yell, scream, that kind of thing, but you knew when he was angry. His mannerism you know was such, his body language, um...he's someone that could do battle well. I did see him go for a couple jugglers, but he did it in such a diplomatic way. You knew that he was angry and you knew you that you had done something to displease him. And the way he went after you was not with a lot of yelling or screaming or desk pounding, but you knew when you left outta there you'd been in a real [hurt?] There wasn't anyone but one man that I knew that could do battle with Dr. Beljan and hold his own.

JSP: Who was that?

Borum: Leon Cudkowicz.

JSP: Who was Leon Cudkowicz?

Borum: Leon Cudkowicz was a chairman of the Department of Medicine, who began to have a lot of problems with his department. Interpersonal kinds of problems, making decisions that were not in the best interests of what Dr. Beljan felt the School of Medicine, the department, or anyone. And faculty began to come to Dr. Beljan with those complaints. And when they did Dr. Beljan made an assessment and at that time decided that in the best interests of everyone that perhaps Dr. Cudkowicz should be relieved of his duties. And Leon fought it, and fought him and was prepared to fight him legally. And there was a lot of confidential documentation. That is the only time I've ever seen Dr. Beljan do battle that I had some doubt that he might win. And I think he had doubts that he might win. He was an excellent opponent.

JSP: I've been told by other people that I've interviewed that you could sense his moods and herald the paperwork accordingly. Where there times when you held people back from his office and told them to come back later, he might be in a better mood then?

Borum: Yes, yes. [*Brief pause, while door opens*] Yes, I could sense his moods and not only did I direct paperwork accordingly, but I would direct people accordingly. Because of the input that I had from a lot of different areas, if it was not the right time to ask Dr. Beljan this question or to approach him on this issue, faculty would, began to ask 'is this the right time?' And after I knew more faculty they would share with me what they wanted to tell Dr. Beljan and I would say: 'it would be better if you waited until Dr. Beljan has these two meetings before you ask this question.' Or 'it's not a good day to address that issue.' And the issue might've been on budget but I would be aware that Doctor had just left a Dean's meeting where they had talked about budget, where he has been under scrutiny because the School of Medicine had money. Or that he had met with the President and I knew from the agenda that I had prepared for him that he ought not talk about that today. And I felt a responsibility to tell the faculty that you really should wait and approach that next week. Uh, and I think they appreciated that information. Timing is everything sometimes.

JSP: Well, thank you very much for talking with me for now. I'll get some more questions and I'll set up another time to see you then.

Borum: Fine, thanks.