

4-30-2002

Agnes Bennett interview for the Miami Valley College of Nursing and Health Oral History Project

Carol Holdcraft

Wright State University - Main Campus

Agnes Bennett

Wright State University - Main Campus

Follow this and additional works at: https://corescholar.libraries.wright.edu/nursing_oral_history



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#), and the [Nursing Commons](#)

Repository Citation

Holdcraft, C., & Bennett, A. (2002). Agnes Bennett interview for the Miami Valley College of Nursing and Health Oral History Project. .

https://corescholar.libraries.wright.edu/nursing_oral_history/1

This Oral Recording is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Nursing and Health at CORE Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Wright State University - Miami Valley College of Nursing and Health Oral History Project by an authorized administrator of CORE Scholar. For more information, please contact corescholar@www.libraries.wright.edu, library-corescholar@wright.edu.

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

AGNES BENNETT, RN, MSN

APRIL 30, 2002

CAROL HOLDCRAFT: Today is April the thirtieth, 2002 and we're doing an interview for our College of Nursing and Health, Wright State University Oral History Project with Agnes Bennett.

CH: Okay, good. And we really appreciate you coming by and some of the things that you brought with you today to share with us.

AB: I have more.

CH: Good.

AB: Lots of it.

CH: And we generally start out by asking you to tell us a little bit about your personal background; how you came to Wright State, how you came to be at Wright State in the beginning.

AB: Oh, that's a good question. We came to Dayton in 1966. In 1968, I obtained a job at St. Elizabeth's Hospital after getting my masters degree from the University of Omaha. The first year that I was here I taught anatomy and physiology. In the course of time, they made the decision that they would quit teaching the sciences and Wright State took over. Then I taught Maternity Nursing. I was there five years and ultimately in that time the School of Nursing was diminishing and ultimately was about to close. We knew that was coming. So that's when I started looking for another job. Even the director of nursing at that time said to me, "Agnes, go to Wright State." I said, "Maybe I'll go to Sinclair." She said, "You can do either." Then there were others who

suggested Wright State. When I came to Dayton I did not have my master's degree completed. So I came to Wright State to take a couple of courses to complete my master's program from Omaha.

CH: Your master's was from Omaha?

AB: Yes. University of Nebraska at Omaha. I think I was one of the first graduates of that particular program.

CH: Okay and that was a nursing program?

AB: Yes.

CH: So you did you teach nursing prior to coming to Dayton and to St. Elizabeth's?

AB: Oh yes, all the years of my life. Do you want me to start over?

CH: (Laughs)

AB: I graduated from St. Mary of the Springs, now Ohio Dominican in 1947 and started teaching chemistry at Mount Carmel, which was, where I got my nursing degree. For over a year I taught at Mount Carmel, I then was married and we moved to Minnesota where I taught anatomy and physiology for St. Mary's Hospital School of Nursing for five years. We then went to St. Cloud, Minnesota where I taught anatomy at the hospital for a year or two before we moved to Minneapolis. In Minneapolis the director of nursing said to me you can't do this anymore because the university's going to be doing all the teaching of anatomy and physiology. You're going to teach med surg; so I taught med surg. Then we adopted our daughter and I quit teaching. We moved to Dayton in 1956 and in 1958, I had my son Bob. Next we moved to Omaha, Nebraska and I went back to school at the University of Omaha and taught there in the science lab. We were out there seven years and in that period of time I almost finished my master's. Do you remember Lucy Henn either one of you?

CH: I don't know that name.

AB: Lucille Henn was the OB instructor at St. E's when I arrived and she was my mentor, advisor, teacher. She taught me OB, there's no doubt about it. Then she'd say, "Which class did you want today?" She went to all my classes and I went to all hers, that was how I started in OB and in the hospital as well. I taught the baby care and she did labor and delivery and then we switched. She went on to get her master's degree and I took labor and delivery classes. So, I've had a lot of help along the way. She was one of them.

CH: So, up through that period of places where you taught it sounds like you really started focusing on the science courses that were part of this whole program for nursing and then you moved into more the clinical nursing process.

AB: It probably had to do; well it had to do with the need at Mount Carmel when I returned. The nun there said, "Do you want anatomy or chemistry?" My sister-in-law was there and we went all through this together, I said, "Which one do you prefer Dot, because I'm not going to stay?" I knew at that point in time that I was only going to be there a short time because I was anticipating marriage. She said, "I'd rather have the anatomy." I said, "Okay, I'll take the chemistry." And that's how that one-year of chemistry almost did me in but I had good help that year too. When I went to Minnesota to St. Mary's Hospital in Rochester, Minnesota, the director of the science program, Elsie Krug, taught science, I was there for a couple of years as her assistant. Finally I went to the director and I said, "I want my own classes." I was tired of being second in command. She said, "Okay." They gave me my own group of students. Then I started with anatomy and physiology. In that period of time I also taught pharmacology and first aid which I am still doing.

CH: I'm a little bit interested in this just because it was sort of a transitional time in nursing education and the fact that nursing faculty were teaching science courses where as in

today's world those science courses are taught at the university here or Sinclair or four year universities.

AB: When I was taught anatomy and when I was in nursing school, I was taught by a nurse.

CH: Okay.

AB: I can't remember her name. You know when I went back to Mount Caramel with my bachelor's degree I was the minority.

CH: Having a bachelor's degree put you--.

AB: "Why would you do that?" people would say to me. "What makes you think you're so smart?"

CH: What was your response to that?

AB: I was also clinical instructor in the emergency room that first year back at the hospital. What was my what?

CH: What was your response to them? Why at that point did you get your bachelor's degree?

AB: My father was the stimulus.

CH: How did he --?

AB: He encouraged me to go on. He wanted me to get a degree. My brother and sister were both ahead of me and they both had college degrees and he wanted that for me. So I did. My sister-in-law Dorothy Berkimer-Bennett was also there. She would say, "Go with me." We went through college like this. They used to call us "shoes." We worked in the infirmary. We cared for the old nuns, went to school and that's how we paid for a good part of our expenses at that time. And then another lucky situation that just worked out.

CH: Because that then allowed you these other career opportunities, having the bachelor's degree.

AB: Oh yes. I'm saying this was early on because at that time, I'm talking about '47, '48, nurses didn't have degrees. When I came back to Dayton you remember some of the furor on this account when Wright State began and people, "Why? Why do nurses need a bachelor's degree?" We went through all that. You did too, I'm sure, at local hospitals until they finally closed their nursing programs.

CH: Were you part of the decision at all to close St. Elizabeth's Hospital School of Nursing or were you pretty ignorant of that?

AB: No, we knew it was coming.

CH: You knew it was happening, but it wasn't, you weren't part of the decision making process at all.

AB: No, no, no I was just an end product.

CH: Okay, so you were there until just before it closed and then --.

AB: I came to Wright State in '73.

CH: Okay, so you left in '73 to take a job here at Wright State. Tell us a little bit about that period, that 1973 beginning.

AB: Oh gosh, that's a fun one, '73. I don't suppose you guys remember; you remember Joann Cross was here. Una Walker? Una was at St. E's and she's also one of the people who said to me go to Wright State. I'm trying to think who else was here at that time. We had, our offices were in the P.E. building. Did you know that?

CH: Yes, we heard that.

AB: Up there on the hill and the dean was down here in Fawcett, I think.

CH: One of the buildings in the quad.

AB: In the quad.

CH: That would have been Dean Randall.

AB: Yes.

CH: So she was the one who hired you?

AB: Yes. That you probably heard from Joann. Have you interviewed Joann?

CH: Yes, we have.

AB: She probably had better numbers on that. I don't know. We were up there one year. Marge Kenney, you mentioned the other day, was there and Donna Dean, there were also two young, faculty members that she hired. The dean hired me. She was only here a year. Donna Dean and Andy Kuntzman took over the next year. You probably already know that.

CH: We know the facts about it but what were your recollections about their tenure as. .? .?

AB: They were good. They were great. I wished that they had stayed on but then in the mean time they were looking for a new dean. Wasn't that when Gert came?

CH: I think so. Were you part of the process that brought Gert here?

AB: No. I was in the background for all of this because when Gert came one of the faculty... I'm trying to think of her name, she was nursing arts instructor and she said to me, "I won't be here very long because Gert doesn't approve of nursing arts." She left shortly there after. She was a neat lady. Her husband was a dentist and I think they're still in town. I thought maybe she went to Sinclair. Anyhow, that's what happened. When Gert came, there were a number of changes. Secretaries left; we moved, from the P.E. building. The dean was down here in Fawcett. Then we moved over into Millet, I think.

CH: Fawcett's the one:

AB: Oleman maybe.

CH: Oleman, okay.

AB: Anyhow we moved around until after Gert came. When Gert came we were in Oleman, I think. She took over.

CH: I know, but for the history purposes we really want to have your recollections of what really happened at that point.

AB: When Gert came or when she left? When she came?

CH: Well, when she came we could start.

AB: I don't even know what to say. I liked Gert. I liked her method of teaching. I liked her method of administration. She incorporated everybody in decision-making. I could tell you stories. One time I was at home; I can't remember why. I forgot to come to class. I was having a little lab group in a conference room about this size and I forgot that I had class. When I walked in, I think I must have called and said, "I'm going to be late." When I got to class, Gert had taken over my class and she was teaching them what I was supposed to be doing. And she's just that kind of person; never said a word to me.

CH: So she stepped in.

AB: Never said a word. "No where were you or why weren't you here or what were you doing?" When I got there she left. She was a terrific dean as far as I'm concerned and as an administrator in terms of getting things done. She helped me get tenure. She got me moving and you always felt like she was for you. You know not just me but for everyone in the crowd. She assisted me to get my tenure. If she needed something done you know she'd tell you, "Do it."

When we started the theories book she said to me, "You will teach Weidenbach. Marge will help you." Marge never did.

CH: She pointed the finger at you and picked you.

AB: Oh yes. (Laughs) I didn't have a choice. That was it. Peggy Foster ultimately helped me but Marge was supposed to. Peggy is the one who helped.

CH: Do you recall how the decision came about to write the Theories book? Do you remember that?

AB: That was Gert's idea.

CH: Okay, it was Gert's idea.

AB: Right from the very beginning she sat around that conference table and she said, "We're going to write a book on nursing theory." We are. We need a director or coordinator or whatever, Julie said, "I'll do it," she's been doing it ever since. You know that story. I don't have to tell you the rest of that. Yeah, that came right out of Gert's mouth. I can almost remember her doing it.

CH: And what do you think her goal was in writing the book?

AB: I think it was to teach nursing theory because it was from that point on that we used nursing theory as a basis for the curriculum and I taught some of that.

CH: And there wasn't a textbook available at that time?

AB: No. There wasn't because then the nursing process came after that. You guys, I think, were involved in that. But no, there was no nursing theory book. There were individuals who had a book. Orem had a book and I can't say who else. Different nurses had written bits and pieces that were collaborated and then put into the theories book. We used them in writing the book. I think that was probably her general idea probably was for a textbook.

CH: To come up with a textbook?

AB: Yes.

CH: Part of my recollection was that it was really to get faculty published for the tenuring process. What we needed at that point was a publication.

AB: That might have been underneath it and her role, as the dean and she knew that we needed that. I wasn't aware of it. (Laughs) I was told to write Weidinbach.

AB: I thought, "Who is Weidinbach?"

CH: So you found out who Weidinbach is.

AB: I found out, yes, right away. I've been doing it ever since. So that's been, you know, an ongoing process. That's how Peggy and I became such good friends and now we are doing Orem.

CH: So you took over Orem in '84 from Nancy.

AB: Jansen. Have you talked to her?

CH: Not yet. We plan to.

AB: She was in that first class. I could tell you stories about that. (Laughs)

CH: Tell us about the first class.

AB: I was looking, I thought I had a picture of that class, just a little table group like this is. Just very small, I think six, seven, eleven maybe.

CH: Eleven had advanced standing. I'm not sure if all eleven graduated in the first class.

AB: I want to say names but I don't want to say names on that tape.

CH: Okay.

AB: But I remember stories. It was a small group. I don't think there were eleven in it.

CH: Okay, you're recollections are of a smaller group.

AB: Yes. Joann could tell you.

CH: Yes. So are there any stories that you want to share for the history about that first group of students and the teaching of them?

AB: All of those students were RN's. They came in as an RN group and they came to get their degrees. So they were unique in that regard. There are some of them still here in town that you could interview. Maybe you have them on your list already. They have been active in the Wright State Alumni Association. The stories that I could tell.

CH: Okay.

AB: I mean for personal reasons. I was teaching clinical nursing and I was at a hospital with this first class. There was a student in the lab who ultimately did not make it, Una Walker. We were called before the Board of Trustees because we failed her in clinical. We were asked why we failed her.

CH: The Board of Trustees?

AB: Yes. The gentlemen who sat around that table and interviewed us as to why we would do that and how we did it et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. We sat there and told them what she did and what she didn't do et cetera. The gentleman sitting next to me [I'll always remember him], "You do all that?" And I said, "Yes." They went on about their business, she apparently had appealed our decision and ultimately graduated from the university. Why? I don't know. Or how? I don't know.

CH: From the School of Nursing?

AB: No.

CH: From?

AB: From the university.

CH: From the university.

AB: In some other area. That was the excitement of that situation. I think that was the first year I was here. I'm sure it was. There was a time, when we were in the P.E. building when I went out to my car one night. The secretary, I wish I could say her name, was worried about me because she was afraid that the failed student would follow me and do something to me because she was angry with me. There's no doubt about that; she had failed. She just wanted me to give her the grade.

CH: So, even at the very beginning there were issues about whether someone was meeting standards and would the faculty be upheld in their decision to set a standard and fail a student from the very beginning. Sounds like you faculty stuck to your guns and it sounds like perhaps you faculty had your documentation of what happened and it was supported by the University with turmoil along the way.

AB: One gentlemen of the Board of Trustees had lawyer qualifications. The faculty warned me ahead of time. They said, "He will talk like a lawyer." And he did. Did you know Una? Did either one of you know Una?

CH: I heard of her but I didn't know her.

AB: She was just different, she was a nice lady and I liked her very much but- especially in that scene. So I tried to keep her calm and apprised of what was going on. I think she's retired. She went from here to Minnesota. She worked for the same school I did when I was out there. But I haven't seen her since.

CH: What were some of the challenges that you faced in your role at Wright State?

AB: Challenges?

CH: Challenges.

AB: Well first of all, one of the big ones was coming into a four year program in a town that was geared to three-year programs. St. E's, Miami Valley and Good Sam were all dyed-in the wool three-year programs. So, the first major job was probably selling the four-year program. We all had to do that individually and collectively. We were still doing it in 1980 when I left. You just told me out there in the hall about the value of the four-year program. I could have taught it then in '80 but people weren't listening. I can remember a particular doctor at St. E's saying, "Well, why do nurses need their degree?" I won't tell you who that was because you'd know him. Anyhow, that was just one. There was a nurse at St. E's who was a supervisor saying the same thing to me: "Why, what makes you think a nurse needs a baccalaureate degree?"

CH: And what kind of a response would you give somebody that would say something like that?

AB: I'd say oh, I can't remember.

CH: You'd have to be politically correct?

AB: Oh well, my role I guess some of my thoughts might have been: "They're smart, they're better educated." They come to us, a baccalaureate program, with prior qualifications. Some students come in from two or three-year programs. That's all there is to it. That doesn't mean you don't have the capabilities because you know that a good number of us, three year graduates, come through here and the same is true of those who graduated today from Sinclair. I don't know what percentage you get but I taught a number of them at Miami. They're good people; I was in trouble at Miami with that because I gave them good grades. The students that came to Miami were mostly from the Dayton area. I had them in clinicals, clinicals in Dayton mostly. The Dean reprimanded me because I gave them A's and B's in clinicals. They were

graduates of a Sinclair or Kettering program. The only reason they were there was because they were smart and motivated. They knew the value of obtaining a baccalaureate degree. They were easy, easy students but they challenged me. (Laughs) You know some of them now.

CH: So really this span of time was a transition in Dayton between the diploma graduates to associate degrees and baccalaureate and the combination of them.

AB: Well I could throw that question back at you. Do you see that today?

CH: What's that?

AB: They, well you know, "We've got an old saying how that nurses tend to eat their young. Are they still doing that?"

CH: I think it's changing partly because of the nursing shortage.

AB: Okay.

CH: So with the nursing shortage it's forcing nurses who are practicing to say, "Well where will my helpers come from, and they are being a little nicer to these people that are coming on board."

AB: (Laughs) Good. Well, you know and I know, it didn't make any difference where my graduates came from, whether they came from St. E's or Wright State. There was always somebody out there that would say to them, "Don't you know that? Didn't they teach you that?" I saw Barbara Goodman on television the other day. That's a neat commercial. There are other good nursing commercials, coming through about time, I guess.

CH: So what do you think you were trying to accomplish when you were at Wright State? What were your goals?

AB: Oh dear. Someplace I have those written. I had them at Miami. We had to write them there. Probably my main goal was to increase my knowledge and to increase my ability to

teach and hopefully to transcend some of that to the students and to get them to think like I do of course, think logically and to assume some of the roles that I think are important in nursing. Also for my own personal interest. I enjoyed nursing. I've enjoyed teaching. I'm still at it, as you know, so I enjoyed my years here and I didn't want to leave right then. I thoroughly enjoyed it. I enjoyed working for Gert. I enjoyed my years here and when I was looking at that, I was trying to figure when Gert left and Jacobson came. Where you here then? Were you guys here?

CH: I wasn't at that time but tell us about that though.

AB: I don't remember too much about that. I don't think I was here with her for too long, but I must have been for awhile, because according to my reading when I went back through those years, that must have happened when I was here. I was here just a short time after she came and I can't remember too much about her. (Pause) However, I have a current statement, I make and it doesn't have anything to do with Jacobson. I said I had all kinds of deans and the best one I have had is now at Sinclair which is why I am probably still there. She's probably the best boss I've ever had.

CH: Your dean is Gloria.

AB: She's not the dean. She's the director of our program, Karen Winston. She has been to me an outstanding leader in our program. She's been wonderful to me.

CH: Tell us about...

AB: When I was leaving here Gert called the director at Miami and said to her, "Hire Agnes". She called me and she did hire me.

CH: So, tell us about 1980 and your recollection of what happened.

AB: Do you want me to start with '78?

CH: Start with '78. Do you want to go through it? Would that help you go through your recollection as well?

AB: I think, I don't know if you want any of this or not. I just want to think about the hours I spent on the telephone with this crap. There was always somebody calling and saying, "What do you think? What are you feeling?" Kathy Leonard was one of them and so was Sue Fitzsimmons. Here I thought, this lady is still here. I saw her name on the wall. (GOING THROUGH PAPERS) Nick Thompson, he died a few years ago. It's baloney that we only follow orders. The things you remember. One of the doctors was out here one day and said, "We are the captains of the ship." He's still doctoring in Dayton. Anyhow, Wright State Nursing...

CH: Is this a picture of Wright State Nursing Students in nursing uniforms back then?

AB: Yes. The caps had a band on it. It doesn't show up there very well.

CH: Or was it on the side?

AB: The band was green and gold and on the corner. You probably have a better picture than that someplace.

CH: This is the first time I've seen this style.

AB: One of the students designed that while I was here. I can't tell you her name of course.

CH: And so we talk about, we talk about...

AB: I want to show you this. My, this was in '78. See the words?

CH: In '78 you put the degree on delay.

AB: We thought we won the battle and my husband said to me at the time, "You haven't won a thing." And he was right.

CH: And that was in '78.

AB: That was in '78.

CH: And that was a delay for what?

AB: To keep the School of Nursing out from under the medical profession, the Medical School. You don't know that?

CH: So, your recollection...

AB: That was our reason for doing what we did: for leaving.

CH: So, beginning in '78 there was a movement to...

AB: Well that's when Beljan came.

CH: Okay, Beljan came in '78.

AB: I'm not sure of the year but it was in that vicinity. He wanted the School of Nursing under his baliwiak.

CH: And he was at that point...

AB: The Dean of the School of Medicine and that was new. See, we were here before the School of Medicine. Yes, I came in '73 and in '78 Beljan wanted the School of Nursing under his command, Gert said, "No, we're not going to do that". And that's when the whole thing started. But Gert didn't come until '74.

CH: She came in '75.

AB: All right. So then we had a year with, "what's her name," the first one you mentioned and then we had a year with Donna and Andy and then Gert came. So that was '75 and so that's when, so it must have been '78. We must have been here from '75 to '78 before Beljan came the scene. I don't know that for a fact, but that's my recollection as to when he came. He thought that the School of Nursing should be a part of the School of Medicine, under the School of Medicine, with the School of Medicine. I don't know the proper way to say that.

That was our knowledge base and Gert said, "No, we're not going to do that". We'd been here at that time for five years. We had been independent of the School of Medicine and they were just getting started.

CH: And what do you recall was their motives or their motivations for wanting to bring the School of Nursing over there?

AB: Oh, I just think he thought philosophically that it belonged there because the nurses were the "handmaidens of the doctors." Aren't they?

CH: So, that was the message you got.

AB: Aren't they? You answer my question. Yes, that's the message we got. Then, you can have this. If you want to look at it, go through, it take it. (Pause) Lots of memories. One of Kegerreis. He facilitated it. He and Beljan got together and decided that that's what was going to happen, but ultimately he saw our point. He came around, I think, but he left. They both left not too long after I did. So, anyhow.

CH: And so what's this a picture of? That's Kathy Leonard.

AB: Uh-huh. That was the night in '78 that Jack said to me, "You didn't win a thing. You just think you did."

CH: So this is a faculty meeting?

AB: That was two years before the final decision.

DMC: I came in '79 and I didn't know any of that.

AB: Didn't you?

DMC: No.

AB: Was Trish with you?

DMC: We both came in '79. We finished at St. Louis University.

CH: The trustees approved a revised re-organization plan. Nurse Louise Walther noted that the schools' autonomy from the school of medicines was unique in the State of Ohio.

AB: Did you know Louise?

CH: Seems like Louise Walter needs to be added to our list of people to be interviewed?

AB: She's gone you know.

DMC: Oh really?

CH: I didn't know that.

AB: Oh yes, several years ago. She was quite an advocate of Wright State School of Nursing.

DMC: She was in District 10. That is where I knew her from.

AB: That would make sense. She was. You take these and glance through them. "So and so" did such and "such in such" and such a year. You know, here is Jean Valentine; didn't I just read her name down the hall?

CH: Yeah, she was here at Wright State. Her office was down the hall.

AB: She stood with us. She argued with us, for us.

CH: So how much of this has to do with male/female roles do you think?

AB: Oh, I'm sure that was there. John Murphy isn't around, is he or Jake Thorn?

CH: Jake Thorn is down the hall.

AB: (Laughs) Um, here's another one I'd like to know, Ed Pollick. He isn't here is he? He went to our church when he was here. Kathy Leonard made the statement one time that Dalton reminded her of that little guy who is on... I can't think of it. It doesn't matter. Mary Lou Jacobson joins the School of Nursing, it says right here.

CH: And that was in?

AB: '80, June of '80.

CH: June of '80 and so when did you resign?

AB: About June of '80.

CH: About June of '80?

AB: Yes.

CH: And so what was your knowledge of the people who stayed and didn't resign? What was your recollection of that experience? You made the decision to resign and you said Gert facilitated you getting another job.

AB: I'm uncertain as to how to answer that but I want to say, "Maybe we didn't take to kindly to the people who stayed."

CH: So there was animosity.

AB: Maybe not verbal or identified but in here someplace. It was never particularly discussed as I recall or to the individuals. Barb Bogan was one of them, I never, I don't think I've ever seen her, since I left and she was here at the time. She stayed in her capacity. I've nothing against Barb for doing that. My animosity was directed at other people, not Barb. I knew Barb at St. E's. We worked together at St. E's.

CH: But there was a real feeling, there was a real feeling that...

AB: You know that.

CH: Yeah, there was a real feeling on your part and on the part of the people who left that you were taking a risk. You were taking a step that affected you personally.

AB: Yes. I couldn't help coming in today thinking, "Why, why did I leave?" You can't help but think that in terms of the years of teaching that I put in here versus my years at Miami and ultimately my years at Kettering, that wasn't too pleasant.

CH: It was a decision that changed your career path.

AB: Oh yes, dramatically.

CH: Because you had tenure here at Wright State.

AB: I got it at Miami as well. I left there for a different reason. Well, the reason was somewhat physical; driving distance, driving back and forth down there.

CH: So at the time that you left and shortly there after, did you ever have second thoughts that you should have stayed?

AB: I was told I should stay by a friend I had in town. She said, "Now Agnes, don't do that. Don't do that. You stay." But I felt strongly enough for the principle of the reason that I was leaving that I did not. I think we won the battle. I think we did and I feel like I need to be patted on the back for that. Not just me, but those of us who did leave made a major difference and I think we made the university stop and think, "Hey, what's wrong here?" It never got under the School of Medicine. The battle we won when we left wasn't won in '78. It was won in '80 and I don't even know, you probably know how many left in '80. Do you?

CH: I haven't counted up the number yet.

DMC: Twenty or so.

AB: I was going to say seventeen. So I was thinking that was it. How many stayed? I don't even know that number. Okay, you were here, but you were in and out, so you knew enough. So, did I answer your question?

CH: Well, yeah you gave some good answers to the question and I guess I still, I still want to understand. That's really; it really was a major turning point for the college.

AB: Oh yes. Oh yes.

CH: So I think it's really important at this point as you said while there was rhetoric that went on at the time, things that got into the newspaper, and things that were happening, when the ultimate decision was made to go or stay. Some people never shared their personal decisions...

AB: I can remember walking into that building over there from the parking lot which was down there and thinking as I was coming up the sidewalk, "I have to go. I can't stay in this situation." Morally I felt that I had to leave.

CH: For?

AB: It didn't have to do with the dean or the people but it had to do with Beljan.

CH: It had to do with Beljan?

AB: My anger all these years has been with John Beljan.

CH: Uh-huh.

AB: Not Kegerreis, I think Kegerreis was hoodwinked by Beljan and I disapproved of what he did; but I didn't dislike him. You know what I'm saying?

CH: Uh-huh.

AB: I think he got... Beljan sold him a bill of goods and I think that's where that went. I think that if you talk to Bob Kegerreis today you might get a whole different story. That'd be fun.

DMC: Do you remember a time they invited us all to go over to the administration room.

AB: He was there and I was there.

DMC: Can you describe what you remember, since we all remember it a little differently?

AB: Well, what I remember was he was extremely nice to us and listened to us. He listened to our side of the story. That's why I have more fond memories of him. I never sat in a

conference room with John Beljan. Never. We sat with Kegerreis and he listened to us. That's my memory.

CH: And what was it you were telling him at that point?

AB: Why we didn't want to be under the School of Medicine. Why we wanted to be an independent school of our own, not under the bailiwick of the School of Medicine. Why all of our feelings were directed at John Beljan. It didn't have anything to do with the other medical faculty, you know, it was all at him because he was the dean. That's all.

CH: And so there was a sense that the Dean of the School of Medicine was the one who had orchestrated the whole thing and that other physicians in the Medical School or around town...

AB: Well, they may have supported him but you see we weren't terribly aware of that. There were some nasty things said about Gert and Marge during those years. You may know some of that, I don't know. I heard some of that backlash in terms of that... I don't even want to say what. I was so involved with the School of Nursing that I didn't even, I wasn't even aware of what was going on in their life. It wasn't any of my business. It didn't have anything to do with me. I'm telling, they were good for me, to me, with me. So.

CH: There are people who have said that the whole issue of bringing the School of Nursing under the School of Medicine was the manufactured issue that would get rid of and cause the resignation of the Dean and the Associate Dean at that time.

AB: Of nursing?

CH: Of nursing.

AB: Manufactured by?

CH: By the university desire to...

AB: Get rid of them?

CH: Get rid of them.

AB: I have difficulty believing that. Maybe that's my naivety. I don't know, but I was here all that while. I think I would have been aware of some of it because I was on other university committees. I know that there was disgruntlement about the dean. You know that. The faculty in other parts of the university didn't like them because of her, I have to say her sexuality because at the time I wasn't even aware of it. You know it, didn't make any difference to me what she did at home. It was never mentioned in the School of Nursing. Never. I didn't know any of that until after I left and then people told me what was happening. I'm serious. That was completely out of our conversations. Our conversations had to do with nursing education. "How are we going to do this? And how are we going to help you?" Things like that.

CH: Uh-huh.

AB: Gert called me in the office one time and she said, "Agnes, do you know you're the most disliked person on this faculty?"

CH: (Laughs) Did that upset you?

AB: Oh, terribly. You might have been there by that time because I could say names, but I'm not going to. I think I got passed it. I think they got over it. There was a time when we were all on teams. On a team, what years were you here?

CH: I stayed from '75 to '77.

AB: Well you know that then.

CH: And then I came back in '80.

AB: But we had a team of four or five people. On that team somebody had to be the leader. There was a certain amount of friction among team members and the leader depending upon who was the leader and who was on that team and we were assigned different teams. I can tell you some of my good ones and some of my bad ones and part of that had to do with whether they liked me or disliked me. It didn't have anything to do with my leaving because by that time I think I was pretty much liked. It never occurred to me that somebody would dislike me. I was vocal because after you guys came, I think, I don't want to use names or anything. I can remember specific instances of friction. Sometimes if somebody was appointed a leader of a team and that didn't sit too well.

CH: You said before that people would elect their team leader or coordinator?

AB: Most of the time they were elected but occasionally somebody would take over.

(Laughs) Do I have to say names?

CH: No, you don't. You're in charge of how much you say.

AB: You know who I'm talking about. I think you both know. Okay.

CH: You said a little bit about your interactions with the colleagues in the college. How about interactions with your colleagues outside the college, across campus, the other faculty members?

AB: Very little. I was on a couple of committees. I was on the library committee. That was nice. I enjoyed that and that was because the first dean, Jacobson, insisted that when we came, that we belong or we get involved in some university committee. That was her philosophy and it was good. So I was, there again, pointed or encouraged I think maybe appointed, I think she sent us to be on a committee with other faculty. And I liked that because you got to know other kinds of people and then they got to know the School of Nursing.

CH: And so there were some specific people, it sounds like, who were supportive of the nursing faculty during that time.

AB: Oh yes. Oh yes. I've even probably got some notes from other faculty.

CH: Uh-huh.

AB: That said things like this, "Stick to your guns." "Do what you are doing" or something to that effect. I don't suppose I kept those.

CH: But there was a sense that they understood the principles that you were fighting for.

DMC: Did you remember Jim Sayer? The president?

AB: Yes.

CH: He's President again.

AB: Is he?

CH: The fourth time.

AB: God, he's been around a long time too. He was on television quite a bit there at one time, wasn't he? On some kind of local program, I think. Yes, I remember him. Well you know Al Leonard was on the faculty elsewhere in the university.

CH: Uh-huh, this was Kathy Leonard's husband.

AB: Yes. I'm going to say he gave us an "in" because again they were both very likeable people, both Al and Kathy, that he was on faculty?

DMC: I think so. I shared an office with her but I can't remember; isn't that funny?

AB: Well, I'm having trouble too because he's not doing that anymore. He left teaching after they left West Virginia. He's in real estate now in Florida and has been and she's there. She's the director of nursing at New Smyrna Beach, Florida.

CH: In a hospital?

AB: Yes.

CH: She was a pediatric faculty. Is this a Children's hospital or just a general hospital?

AB: General hospital. She never got her PhD. She was all but dissertation when they left and she was going to go finish it at Ohio but didn't. They went to West Virginia from here and she worked down there for a year or two. They both did and lived with that little lady, Liz. Anyhow, they were neat. They are neat people. I shouldn't say they were. They are neat people. I hear from her every now and then.

CH: And so, those of your colleagues that you were close to, have you maintained relationships with over the years, have you remained in contact with people who were part of the group that left?

AB: Yes, Fitzsimmons. Fitzsimmons and I went to Miami together and so did (Pause) oh, you know who I mean. Her picture was in the paper the other day. I mentioned it to you when I talked to you.

CH: Oh, Phyllis Andrews.

AB: Phyllis and Fitzsimmons and I all went down there together. I'm trying to think if there was anybody else.

CH: And was Miami a new nursing program at that point?

AB: No. Miami is a two-year program and this was the baccalaureate extension of the two-year program. And we were, first year we were there, we were on campus in Oxford and then they moved us to Hamilton. Sue was only with us one year and then she got the job at Miami Valley Hospital. I will never forget that. And Phyllis and I went to Hamilton and we were down there then all the rest of the years. But Fitzsimmons and Falco, have you thought about her?

CH: Yeah, we haven't talked to her yet.

AB: Call her. I'd like to see her. Tell her I'd like to see her. Come down here, she can come to my house. I used to get a, well that's probably just partly me because I haven't sent too many Christmas cards lately, but I used to get a Christmas card from her every year. She took a sabbatical and I think she's back at the university last I heard. Falco was a terrific teacher. She was good for me. When she was the leader of the team, I enjoyed working with her, really enjoyed it. I'd walk in and say, "Sue, what do you think about this or that?" She is a smart lady. Geri brought her in here for some reason and somehow they must have known each other someplace.

CH: She recruited her.

AB: I really did enjoy her. Anyhow, she was the one, she and Fitzsimmons, Fitzsimmons stayed and I saw Lois Fish's name in there someplace the other day. Is she around? Do you ever see or hear of her?

DMC: She's up there in Troy.

CH: Tipp City Area.

AB: Still working?

CH: Yes.

AB: Then there was someone that went to Sinclair, I can't say her name, a psych nurse that went to Sinclair.

CH: Elaine Battaglia went there, actually in the early years.

AB: Yeah but there's another one. I ran into her not too long ago. I went to a gerontology meeting last year and she was there and I can't think of her name. Oh well. That's why this helps when you see names and they come back to you.

CH: So, tell us a little bit about your relationship to the community institutions during the time you were here at Wright State with the hospitals, community, community organizations...

END OF SIDE A

START OF SIDE B

CH: What are your recollections about that?

AB: Like Catholic Social Services?

CH: Yeah.

AB: I was on the Board of Directors there for several years because of Kathy Leonard. When Kathy left she called me and asked me if I would do this and I said yes. So I was on that board for a number of years and that hooked me up with Kathy Eckerly and her husband Ron. I've seen Kathy more recently. Have you talked to her?

DMC: I was on a committee with her at the Valley.

AB: Oh okay. We see each other and we say, "Let's have lunch," and that begins an instant conversation. I've seen her at the grocery store.

CH: You took students to the hospital.

AB: That was never a problem, really and I'll tell you one. Right off the bat when I went to the Valley the first year that I took students to Miami Valley in OB who was the clinical instructor there but Pat Martin? She was wonderful to me. I've never gotten over that, never because when I went to Good Sam I got that "eating young part." They couldn't understand. I came primary from St. E's. Because St. E's was more revolutionary in their maternity care than

either the Valley or Good Sam and that's the way I was brought up in OB and so I just assumed everybody was doing it. Well, no, they weren't. I had a few confrontations at Good Sam. That was back when we had the husbands out there in the hall someplace.

CH: Okay.

AB: You just had a baby. Thank God that's all changed.

CH: There was a similar transition in OB care really during the time from when you came to the OB and you said...

AB: Oh yeah. Do you know why? Because the people who were using OB, the clients changed it, not nursing, the clients changed it. Because they demanded husbands being in the room. They demanded less medication. I lived through Jim Burt at St. E's. That's history isn't it? Yeah, he believed in medication, strong medication. And dad's were not a necessary item at all. I remember seeing the first farther going into the intensive care nursery at St. E's. That was a day of recollection. You know you think you are not allowed here

CH: With all of their germs?

AB: Kowasaki, do you know that disease?

DMC: Oh, Kowasaki?

AB: Kowasaki, my great niece has it. I've learned all about it this year. She's a cutie. Three years old. Sad. She is doing okay now, she's over it I think. Scary.

DMC: Was Nancy Goodmen still at St. E's when you were there for clinicals?

AB: Yes.

DMC: Nurse Manager

AB: Doctors didn't like her, but I did. She was not the nurse manager. She was an instructor when I first went there. No, she wasn't the supervisor anything like that. She taught me a lot too. Nancy came out here then after that and then she went to Texas I think. She was one of those outspoken nurses that was resented by the medical staff because of her knowledge. Period. She was a smart lady. Another smart lady but she talked too much. She wasn't politic with her knowledge. I liked her a lot. But, I would say "shh, don't talk so loud". I really did that to her.

CH: So, how did your experience at Wright State affect your career since then. We have talked about that a little bit, but...?

AB: Well it sent me to Miami literally and I went to Miami and I liked it at Miami. I had a lot of good years at the school. But I had difficulty with my grades. The dean at that point in time was a numbers man. He sat at his computer and calculated all your numbers and you were supposed to give grades on a Bell curve and I didn't. I still don't but I do occasionally at Sinclair. I used to say to Jack look at this, this is the perfect Bell curve.

CH: Surprised yourself.

AB: Well, you've got a different clientele. I told you I was at Miami I had all RN's. They were all RN's and they were all motivated

CH: And more educated

AB: And they worked. So that was a different group all together. So anyhow, I and the Dean didn't get along. He didn't like my records. He thought I should teach and have grades on a Bell curve. He counted all my student evaluations. You did this and this and this. Back to publishing, "well you did that last year." "What'd you do this year?" All that. I got

tired of it. I was there five years. Then I came back to Kettering. I liked my first year at Kettering and then we got a new dean. Oh well that's another story.

CH: So it sounds like having a dean you can respect is important to you.

AB: I like a dean that identifies the fact that I know how to teach and values my teaching and that's a major factor. Gert did, Karen does, and the first one at Kettering did, the second one didn't. I have to say the second one was just out of the master's program herself. She'd just gotten her degree and she was telling me how to teach. I'm telling you I had good teachers. When I started out in Minnesota, Elsie Krug was probably the best teacher I ever had, in terms of how to, you know.

CH: And was your master's in education or was your master's...?

AB: In nursing.

CH: It was in Nursing? Did it have course work about how to teach nursing? Was that a piece of it?

AB: I suppose. There were clinical components in that. It was nursing, RN...

CH: It was in clinical nursing?

AB: Yes.

CH: Okay.

AB: And at the same time I was teaching anatomy in the lab. It was a good background. I'm telling you it still helps me. (Laughs) As a matter of fact the other day I gave the final in class the other day and the kids were scared to death. They were studying the flow of blood through the heart, the difference between arteries and veins. So that's my focus I guess and I'm still using it. I think it's important in first aid you've got to know how the blood flows.

CH: Right.

AB: If you don't know the difference between an artery and a vein how are you going to stop one or the other? I preach a lot. I still do. My son, you know I told you he was an Arson inspector and I talked to him the other day about candles. And he told me I can't give the numbers, but he told me how many deaths they've had in the past six months or year due to candles. That's one of my sermons in first aid. I taught about candles. I hate them. On the television, that's all you see.

CH: Is there anything that I didn't ask you that we didn't talk about today that you'd like to share?

AB: I can't think. I'd like to discuss individuals but I don't think that's appropriate. You know that. I won't do that. I had good years here. I'm glad I came. I think I'm glad I left. As I was walking up the campus today, I was thinking it's a long walk. I've got it good at Sinclair. I park right there and walk in the door.

CH: It's pretty close to your house, not too far to drive.

AB: I took my grandson down the other day. He said, "This is a long way from your house." But to him it is because he lives close to school and then we got in there and he said, "Where are all the kids?" (Laughs) There weren't any kids there. That was kind of funny. Anyhow, I went to one of his classes a couple months ago and taught. I didn't teach I helped reading with the little ones. This is kindergarten and the teacher had them each tell about their name, "This is Mary Smith and I'm supposed to read this page." I listened to them read and first of all he didn't want me to go. Then, his mother said you're going because I told the teacher you would be there and she's depending on you to be there. I thought I don't want to go if he doesn't want me. So all the other kids came through but him, he didn't come. Everyone in class, all, I don't know how many there are but twenty or so and read for me, and I passed them on, but

finally he came with his book but I wouldn't let him read because I was done by this time. Later he said to me, not that day the next day maybe, he says "Are you a teacher?" I said yes. He is trying to put all that together and I said yes, I told Jean the other day, and she says, "Do you want to go again?" and I said, "Sure, I'd love that". She said it will be different this time, he will be different, because he has already identified that you are a teacher. Then he went to my school. See, I took him down to Sinclair.

CH: He's learning about you different than just being Grandma.

DMC: Well, I think we're all done.

END OF INTERVIEW

June 7, 1980: Agnes Bennett received an award for Teaching Excellence from the Wright State Alumni Association.