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Sally A. Evans interview, Former Director of Student Services, Wright State University

Marlene Bireley

Wright State University - Main Campus

Sally A. Evans

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WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY
Retiree Association Oral History Project

Interview Date: December 6, 2002

Interviewer: Marlene Bireley
Professor Emeritus, College of Education

Interviewee: Sally A. Evans
Director of Student Services until retirement in 1992
Wright State University

This is Marlene Bireley, Professor Emeritus, College of Education, and I am interviewing on December 6, 2002, Sally Evans, who was the Director of Student Services until her retirement in 1992. Sally, do you want to tell me a little bit of your background before you came to Wright State, some of the things that you were doing?

Um, let me think about that. I was married. When I first went to college, I met Bill when we were standing in line to register for college. He had just come back from the Air Force and I was just out of high school, and I was very interested. So we went together those first couple of years and we decided to get married, and so I- in order for us to be successful in our marriage I had to get a job, and so I quit college and worked while Bill finished out his degree, and he had a couple more years, then he taught at Youngstown. Then we moved to Michigan and he taught in Michigan, and I had my two children while we were there. Then we decided to run a business, and we ran a motion picture theater. It was in a resort town so in the winter time it was only open on the weekend, and in the summer time it was gang busters, there were lots of people and it was very busy. So at the end of our lease, the agreement that we had with the owners, Bill and I decided that he would go back to school, so we went to Miami, went to Oxford, and he went to school, then we came to Wright State. Bill started to teach there and I became very active in what they called Faculty Wives at that time. It was a little bit before the women's movement, and so everybody wanted to be a faculty wife. But then later we changed the name to University Women and tried to be a little more democratic, and we had all women, but it tended to be pretty much a faculty wives group.

But there were some professors?

Oh yes, there were a lot of faculty.

What kinds of things- let's talk about that group a little bit- what kinds of things did the group do?

At the very beginning, most people had moved to Dayton from other places and they were fairly young, had young families. We were very interested in having family activities so that the wives and children could come on to campus and become a part of

what was going on. One of the first things we had, and I don't think we had children at that, we did have a potluck dinner, and we had it in the basement of Allyn Hall. They had a music room down in Allyn Hall which had no seating, and so they could put tables up in there. We invited Stanley Allyn, who at that time was the Chairman of NCR, and he was quite elderly, I imagine he was 70 or more at that time, and I remember speaking to him. He said, "This is very interesting. I don't think I have ever been to a potluck dinner before." He probably moved in different circles. But anyway, he was very charming and talked to our group and we were all very interested in getting to know him and know others...Oelman, and people who were on the Board of Trustees and so forth. So it was a very intimate time. One of the popular things in the University Women at that time was a group that did puppet shows, and they went around and did puppet shows for hospitals and so forth, and then, of course, entertained when we had Christmas programs and had all the children come. We tried to do things that everybody could have a sense of what the campus was about. That lasted for a few years.

You said it was a women's group, so did the nature of what happened...how did it change?

As I recall, one of the faculty members, female faculty members in Liberal Arts, was very critical of the group, that we were "Faculty Wives". That was just not politically correct. She wanted us to be a little more radical in our direction. Of course, by that time, after two or three years, we had sort of a set program, but we did change our name to the University Women, and all women were invited. But we did have female faculty members. Bea Chait, who was in our college, was president of Wright State Women before I was. She was, I think, 1969 she was president. Then I was president in 1971, that school year. I'm trying to remember if there were any other faculty. There weren't too many faculty women who had the time to do that.

I remember hearing about that group. It was one of those where you never had the time. So, you came as a faculty wife. When did you start actually working at the university?

Well, as I say, I quit college so I needed to finish my degree. Bill was very interested in me taking some courses so he encouraged me to take courses. I didn't take any the first year and I took them in 1965, and I had Ed Cox was my professor and I just thought he was wonderful. He was just a great lecturer and he was just-

What subject?

History. World History. So I took a lot of history courses. I majored then in Social Studies and Education. So I had Lun Graham [ph] and Jim Uphoff, and all of those in the early days, and Bea, Bea Chait. We had a course one time that was taught jointly by Norwood Marquis, who was dean, and Bea Chait. They were co-teaching our class, but he would forget to come to class, but Bea was marvelous. She always covered just beautifully when he would not show up. I think we were getting ready for student teaching, it might have been the 422 class, the class that went along with student

teaching. But anyway, when I finished my degree, Bill had always- I probably shouldn't tell this- but he always took care of all of my advising. He would go and check out the courses and get me registered and so forth. So when this job became available, Katie Stoufer [ph], who was the first Records Analyst, which was the position I started at, she spoke to Bill and she said, "I see that Sally's graduating and would she be interested in coming to work at Wright State?" So Bill talked to me and we thought since I was very interested and involved at Wright State, that would be a good idea. So I came in and talked to Katie, then I talked to Norwood, and I had this long interview with Norwood, and probably like many people, I called Bill and he said, "Well, what happened?" and I said, "I think they offered me the job but I'm not real sure." So I called back in a couple of days and I accepted, so evidently they did.

So then I started to work, and the very first day I worked at Wright State was in September. I started right after Labor Day. Registration used to be... I don't know if disaster is too strong a word, but it was always a mess. So I got off the elevator on the 4th floor of Millett Hall and there was a line that was starting right at the elevator going all the way down the hall, and actually it was going to my office. I went into my office and I had never done much advising, or even taken care of my own advising or registration. So, anyway, I started off with a fire.

What year was this?

1969? 1968? 1968.

Well, one of my first questions is what are one of your most memorable personal experiences, which you may have just given me.

That was memorable. It was wonderful to work with Katie Stoufer. She was just that marvelous kind of colleague to work with. She was just very generous with her time, and of course she was very interested in elementary students and she gave me the secondary. We had a good relationship and it was lots of fun to work with her. We were always busy. Bea Chait was there, and she was the Director of Student Teaching, and the faculty were all right up there, so we had a good time, but lots of students all the time. I mean you would leave your office to go to the restroom and they would follow you into the restroom for more advice.

I don't know if that has changed or not, but it was that way for a long time. You have done probably a lot of this already, but is there any other way you would describe the role of the staff in the early years?

It was interesting because, of course, right across the hall were business faculty. I think at that time, we had Business, Liberal Arts, and Education on the 4th floor. So you got to know everybody and if you needed something you just walked down the hall and you were right there. So it was a very nice place to work and it was different than it was later on.

How would you describe the character of Wright State during the early years?

I think it was learning together. I know as far as I'm concerned, you would say to somebody, "Well, let me check that out." You were on the phone a lot, talking to a lot of people and asking a lot of questions, finding out what was going on, trying to do your best for the students. They didn't have a lot of expectations because many of them had just gone to school part-time, so they weren't real sophisticated students. But it was interesting to work with them. I guess when I was working, at that time you had a lot of freedom to do your own thing. We didn't have a lot of supervision because we didn't need it. The Dean always said, "I can go away and I know everything will work just perfect when I'm not here." The thing about Dr. Marquis was that he had done a lot of advising at Miami, and so he had a lot of respect for advisors. Later, we had Deans who had other priorities, but that was the way that worked out at that time. He was great to work for.

I think that's the way he treated faculty as well. He let us do our own thing. Okay, for the university as a whole, what did you see as the major problems or issues or obstacles in those early years? What kinds of things were you aware of that might have been an obstacle?

That's a good question. I'm trying to think. I was always very much pro Wright State. I always thought Wright State was doing everything right and it was a great place to be and a great place to work. So I didn't think of it much as obstacles. I think everything was overcrowded. Classes were overcrowded and there probably were not enough advisors, enough faculty, you know, as there probably should have been. So I think probably we just were overbooked.

You talked a little about the role of the Dean, at least the first Dean. Did you have any feel, in your position, about the role of the Administration?

Well, of course we were all very involved. When I wasn't working the first couple of years, from 1964-1968, but I was a student there, we were very much aware of the choosing of the president and the choosing of people. But they seemed to quickly become somewhat walled off. On the day President Golding left, when he was leaving, he came around and shook everybody's hand, and I think it was the first time I ever saw him in Millett Hall, on his final day. I think they had a photographer and you could have your picture taken with him. Bill has a picture, I think. No, Bill has a picture of Fred White. But anyway, that was sort of a strategy. Your final day, you were out and around. But we were there when they built the house for the president. There always seemed to me to be a wall, I guess you would say, around the Administration, with the president and his staff, but not so much with the Dean and so forth.

Because of your job, you had very intimate relationships with a lot of students. You probably knew all the students in your college. Do you want to elaborate on that at all, in terms of the interaction with the students?

One of the things that I did, and again with Bea Chait, we established the Kappa Delta Pi, the honor society, and we did that very early on. Bea and Mary Harbage were the counselors to start with and I was the president of the chapter, and we had the national president come from Kappa Delta Pi and established our chapter at Wright State. So Bea and I were active in doing that. In fact, we always laughed because we had it on the fourth floor. There was a lounge on the fourth floor of Millett Hall, it was the faculty lounge. She and I went in the night that we were going to have the program and we took paper towels and cleaned that floor up so it looked presentable for when our president came. Then we went and picked up the president at the airport, and he was about 85 years old, so we wouldn't have had to clean the floor. But anyway, we did establish the chapter.

So I had a lot of enjoyment and you get to meeting students much more intimately when you work with them in groups like that. So from the early days on, I was always, I would always spend...when Bea retired I became counselor and then Mary Lou White came in and we worked together, and we initiated lots of people and I went to lots of conferences, and it was really lovely, I enjoyed that a lot. We worked with a lot of students and we had them to the house. We used to have wine tasting parties and Christmas parties, so we entertained them at our house a lot, and they always wrote me notes and how nice it was to come to my home and get to know the family. We had a lot of faculty and things that participated in that. In fact, after I retired, Mary Lou and I were invited out to the campus, and they established a scholarship in our names and they were going to continue to give money to students. We had always given scholarships to students. We had \$500 and \$1,000 scholarships.

For Kappa Delta Pi?

For Kappa Delta Pi.

Is that chapter still active?

As far as I know it is.

If you were asked to describe Wright State in one word, what would be the word you would use to describe it?

One word. I think that it was great. I think it came together for the needs of the community and the needs of the wider community for students who didn't have a place to go to school and they got a good start, and felt good about their experience. We can do a lot of nitpicking about how we did it, but I think we did a great job.

I know you haven't been to campus that much recently, but from your perspective, if you were asked to describe Wright State with one word now, what would that word be?

Hmm, I don't know if I can say that.

[Laughs] You can say anything you want.

Anything I want? It's a little more....of course, it's big and it offers a lot of things. But I have that warm spot when I see Allyn Hall, in that first building that we had so many great activities in, and then Millett Hall. And now, of course, there are buildings that I haven't even been in, like the engineering building. I guess I have been in the medical school, and they have remodeled Allyn Hall and Millett Hall completely, I understand, so I probably wouldn't recognize anything. So it's changed, it really has changed. It must be the 21st century here. [Laughs]

Well, it looks like that, on the outside. If you had the opportunity to do something over, of the things that you did at Wright State, is there anything you'd like to say, "Gee, I wish it would have worked this way or that way?"

Well, when I think about my time at Wright State, I was always very anxious for everything to work as a team and to work well. And I think as I am looking back from this perspective, I should have been a little more aggressive in protecting my turf and the things that I wanted. I was always, probably wouldn't want to rock the boat, and I think maybe I would rock it a little bit more if I had that chance. Who knows I might not have.

Again, I don't know since you haven't been there for awhile, how do you think or what do you think the difference in student attitude toward education might be today than in the 60's and 70's?

I think of course in the 60's and the early 70's, we had the Vietnam War, which was really interesting because we had a lot of male students in Education that probably were only there to protect their draft status. So that made for an interesting student body. They were interesting students. I think, hopefully, some of them stayed in education and so forth, but they probably didn't and probably went other places. But I think we had a lot more freedom to run our program and prepare students. I don't think the state was as restrictive as it has become in later times. So we could sit down and think about programs. I remember I worked with Ruth King when we took this group of students to the Huffman School and had them in the classroom, and you didn't have to have a lot of prior approval except with the college sponsor and the budget and so forth. The state didn't really direct things as much as they do today, and I think from what I hear, some of the things they are doing, you just wonder what committee dreamed up some of the things they are interested in. But I do think we had more freedom to do some things. Whether that was good or not, it was good from our standpoint, the working and being creative, developing things. Maybe this other new structure, tighter structure, I don't know if it is any better or not.

One of the things I'm supposed to ask you is about the challenges in higher education. I think, in a way, you just answered that for education. I would very much agree with what you said. Can you think of any other challenges in higher education that you are aware of that might be affecting Wright State today?

I suppose, of course with the economy the way it is right now, I would think at some point that will have an impact on what kind of money is available. In fact, I was reading in the paper where a lot of private colleges who had endowments and lots of money, and now of course that money is not coming in and they have had to lay off a lot of professors and downsize. So I suppose that will, at some point, and is probably affecting the campus even now. Those are always hard things. We always had lot of good facilities at Wright State. I think the state provided us with great labs and media, and we had everything we ever needed. I think that's good, colleges should. It's too bad that high schools and elementary schools don't have that as well, but it was good for us and it was good for higher education. But whether that.... the economy will be a problem.

We're coming to the end of my questions and I will ask an open-ended one. That is, what else would you like to tell us that will be put down for perpetuity?

I think I mentioned everything I had on my list, which was minimal. I don't think that I have anything more to add or not. I guess I can fold at that point.

Thank you very much, Sally.