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James Sayer Interview, Former Dean, Wright State University

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Repository Citation

Abrahamowicz, D., & Sayer, J. E. (2017). James Sayer Interview, Former Dean, Wright State University. .
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WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY
Retiree Association Oral History Project

Interview date: 9/29/2017

Interviewer: Dan Abrahamowicz (DA)
Former Vice President for Student Affairs,
Wright State University Retirees Association

Interviewee: Jim Sayer (JS)
Class of 1970, Professor Emeritus, Dept. of Communications

Dan Abrahamowicz: Okay, this is Dan Abrahamowicz, former Vice President for Student Affairs at Wright State University and current member of the Wright State University Retirees Association.

Jim Sayer: That's easy for you to say.

DA: Yeah right. Today is Tuesday December 12th, 2017 and I'm pleased today to be interviewing Jim Sayer, Professor Emeritus of the Department of Communications, formerly Lake Campus Dean, geez what else, former President of the Faculty, the voice of Wright State University in innumerable videos, films, reading names at graduation. For how many years did you do that.

JS: Twenty-six years.

DA: Twenty-six years, and an outstanding, I may add, pitcher for the intramural softball team as well. This is part of the retirees' association oral history project. So Jim thank you for being here, taking time with us in the holiday season. Let's start off by telling us a little bit about your background. Where you're from, where were you born, where you studied, that kind of stuff.

JS: Well I was born in upstate New York, and then my mom and dad and I moved to Arizona when I was fifteen, finished High School there. Went to a junior college.

DA: Now, how did you get, how did your family get from New York to Arizona?

JS: My Dad's, one of my Dad's brothers lived out in Southern Arizona and said 'there's opportunities out here, why don't you guys come out', and so we did.

DA: Great American west. What year was that roughly?

JS: 1962

DA: 1962.

JS: Yeah, way, way back. So I finished high school there, went to community college for my first two years of school and then transferred to Northern Arizona University.

DA: Which is now...

JS: No its still, in fact when I went there it had just changed its name from the Arizona State College to Northern Arizona. So I majored in, I double majored in History and Political Science and minored in Speech. And then I was fortunate enough to be given a scholarship, a fellowship to the University of Arizona the next year. And so I went down there and got my Masters Degree.

DA: In Speech.

JS: In Speech, and then I went back to Northern Arizona as an instructor and debate coach for three years, and then finally decided that I wanted to make this profession my career and realized you had to get a doctorate, and so by then I was married and had a couple of kids, and we packed up and moved to Ohio, and I went to Bowling Green University and got my doctorate, and right from there I came down to Wright State.

DA: So did you work while you were at Bowling Green or did you go doctorate, go to school as a full time student.

JS: I did two things, I was a teaching fellow and at night I worked for the campus police to make extra money.

DA: Dispatcher or a police officer?

JS: I was an officer.

DA: An officer, is that right? A licensed officer, didn't they carry guns in those days?

JS: Yes.

DA: Is that right...

JS: I had a gun, a nightstick, and a Motorola radio, that's all you needed.

DA: So you were licensed as a pro-op police officer. And what year was that.

JS: That was '73 to '74.

DA: That was past the demonstration period.

JS: Oh yes, yeah that was a couple of years before that.

DA: Now how did you find out about Wright State University and what did you know about it at the time.

JS: Absolutely nothing, I was nearing the end of my doctoral degree, I began looking around for job opportunities and in the summer of 1974, there weren't that many. Things were pretty tight and I got a call from Abe Bassett, who was chair of the then Speech and Theater department at Wright State, 'I would like to have you come down for an interview'.

DA: He just called you out of the blue?

JS: I had materials out, not on the net because there was no net, but there were things being circulated through different academic disciplines.

DA: Articles you'd written, things like that.

JS: Correct. And he said would you come down and I said sure and the next thing I did was run over to the Bowling Green library and figure out where was Wright State and what was it and it was very, very close and so I came down, I still remember driving up the back part into the Wright State Campus and at that time I think there were maybe 11,000 students there then, and everything was new, everything was brand new, I mean the library had just been completed and all that and I met a lot of people and I was impressed because unlike some other institutions that have sixty, eighty, a hundred years of tradition, everything is locked in. In '74 this place is only seven years old and so I thought, well, there are opportunities here.

DA: So what were the buildings here at that time, was the core?

JS: The main core was here.

DA: Plus the Library.

JS: The library had just been completed and the student center, not the Student Union, at that time was there, as was Hamilton Hall, and that was it.

DA: And who was the president then?

JS: That was Bob Kegerreis.

DA: Bob Kegerreis.

JS: Yeah, he had just become president I think two years before I came down here.

DA: So you came down here and had an interview juke with just Abe or was there others?

JS: No I met the other three or four faculty who were there then in the Speech and Theater Department and I enjoyed it, I enjoyed meeting the people, I enjoyed meeting on this campus and

I went back to Bowling Green and said to my wife, well we'll see what happens, and it was about two days later they called and offered me the job and I was like ok.

DA: Do you remember any of the names of those you interviewed with?

JS: Gene Eakins, the late Gene Eakins he was in the Speech and Communication Department at that point, he passed away in the early 1980's there were a couple of other people who's name I cant recall and they probably passed away as well, it was a very strange group at that point and the thing that really sold me on it was the Speech and Theater Department was about to be split into a Speech and Theater Department with the notion that the Speech Department would be called communication and that they would be adding a number of faculty to really develop it. So I came in...

DA: Develop the department.

JS: Exactly, so I came in at the ground floor.

DA: So, you came here in '73, '74?

JS: I started in September of '74.

DA: And where was your first office?

JS: Up on the fourth floor of Millett, long gone now, I don't know if you could even find the place were the office was. But Bob Pruett was brought in as the department chair, the late Bob Pruett. Bill Rickert came in the same time I did, and he and I shared an office for a couple of years, there was I think five or six people that were brought in at the same time.

DA: As full-time faculty for the Communications?

JS: That's correct

DA: So they were really expanding at the time.

JS: Well they had to because when we walked in the door we had a whooping eight majors and so Bob Pruitt, god rest his soul...

DA: Eight majors in the liberal arts?

JS: Just in communication, everyone else was in the theater so we had to hustle right away and said look we've got this program.

DA: So we had journalism and...

JS: We had mass communication, which is both broadcast and print, we had basic speech communication, which is the old style, we got an organizational communication for people with a business orientation and it took off like wildfire.

DA: Now how many courses did you teach and what did you teach?

JS: I taught, when I started out I was the old style, the rhetorician I taught classical rhetoric, medieval rhetoric, persuasion, that kind of stuff. And of course I was also the debate coach too, and so I taught argumentation and debate.

DA: Wright State had a debate team.

JS: Yes we did.

DA: Do they still?

JS: No.

DA: So has debate competition gone away or ...?

JS: I was charged with the responsibility of starting the program, which I did and got it going, got it off the ground and we had very good success, especially in the Midwest and then as my responsibilities shifted a little bit Bob Pruett took over the program from me in the late 70's and then all of the sudden when the University had it's almost every twenty years financial crisis, the money that was used to support the debate program got...

DA: It dried up.

JS: And that was it.

DA: You talk about your sort of initial impression of Wright State newness and so forth what else impressed you? Were there other things that impressed you.

JS: I liked the fact that in the first week of September there was a big reception hosted by President Kegerreis for all the new incoming faculty throughout the university. There was like forty, it was a big growth and we were all young, I mean I was in my late 20's, when I had taught at Northern Arizona University back late '60s early '70s I was the youngest faculty member on the entire campus and I would go to a faculty meeting and invariably somebody would say, oh here comes the kid. Here I thought 'no, no we're all peers' and I thought that would really be good, not only in terms of my interactions with other faculty but in interacting with the student body at the same time.

DA: Sure, sure. Talk about the student body, what were they like, what were the students like at that time?

JS: About 60% were first generation students at that point, as a percentage that was much lower, but you had a lot of students who had absolutely no family background in terms of formal higher education. Mom hadn't gone, Dad hadn't gone and, so it was a whole new experience for them and they were very eager, they wanted to learn, and they realized that they were breaking ground basically for their family and they were a lot of fun. We had a number of students those first couple years or so who were transfers either from Miami or Ohio State because they felt like they had gotten lost in the mix and they could stand out a little better here at Wright State with only eleven or twelve thousand students. So they were fun students, they were way premillennial.

DA: We'll come back to the students a little later on, in campus climate, working on campus, you enjoyed it.

JS: Oh it was wonderful. Of course you got to remember it was a much smaller campus at that point, only with the four main buildings and you took your life in your hands when the weather was bad to walk to the Student Center because there were no tunnels connecting the Student Center at that point.

DA: It was a bit of a trek then.

JS: It was yes, a little bit, it was a little shaky.

DA: So there was nothing between, the four, the core four buildings and the Student Center.

JS: No, once you got out past Oelman going up to the center.

DA: So the tunnels weren't there yet?

JS: No, there were tunnels in the main core.

DA: In the main core, but not connecting the Student Center.

JS: No, that was going to come years later.

DA: So you worked for... who was head of the department?

JS: Bob Pruett.

DA: That was Pruett, and who was dean of the college at the time, do you recall?

JS: Oh boy, now I have to run my rolodex through my head. Eugene Cantalupe was the dean.

DA: And you said Kegerreis was the president.

JS: He was the president.

DA: And did you get to know the president?

JS: Oh yeah, in '79 I was elected to my first term as faculty president.

DA: That was what, just five years after you got there?

JS: Right, and so I got to work with President Kegerreis very extensively and I enjoyed working with him he was a delightful man. I said to him and I said to others at the time that he really had no business being a University President, that he should be a TV game show host

DA: Is that right.

JS: Because he was, well one night he asked me to go with him down to downtown Dayton for a meeting of the University of Dayton Alumni, University of Dayton Alumni, and he gave a speech and got money from them, they contributed money to Wright State he was that impressive. He was very good I enjoyed him immensely.

DA: So you got elected to the Faculty President in '79, Kegerreis was still president at the time, what were the issues for the faculty?

JS: Well, this was before the union and all of that and so every year was what I call the annual dance of the death and that was how much can we ask for a raise for the faculty and staff knowing that sports and the administration would say this will be the end of Western Civilization, so we always had to deal with that.

DA: Somebody I recall was called the President of the Faculty Senate, was there a combined government?

JS: The senate wasn't there then, there was what was called the Academic Council.

DA: Academic Council, you were president back then of the council?

JS: Correct. Well, officially, president of the faculty, but I was chairing the council. And so I had faculty, staff, students, and administrators, I had five deans on there. And that's why after a number of years of that, myself and a couple of others were then able to convince then President Flack that it was time to get rid of the council and have a real faculty senate.

DA: So your role as chair of the Academic Council you were just sort of representing all interests to the people who made budgetary decisions.

JS: That's correct. I was supposedly the representative of the overall university so that I wasn't just representing a group or an area, that I had to have the university perspective.

DA: And so was the university perspective fairly homogenous at that time?

JS: It was as long as there wasn't a financial crisis.

DA: And there wasn't at that time.

JS: Well, '81-'82 it went south.

DA: Was Kegerreis still president then?

JS: Yes he was. Like I said, every twenty years we go through something like this and in '81-'82 there was an economic downturn in the country which of course then affected Ohio even more so. And so three times during that academic year the State of Ohio cut the university's subsidy, because they just didn't have the money and of course the hard part is once you are into the year you've got money encumbered in all that and when they start slicing their subsidy that makes it tough. On Christmas morning that year-

DA: '81 or '82?

JS: '81. President Kegerreis called me and said we've got another cut coming, he was calling an emergency meeting of the budget people, which included me. And so Christmas afternoon we met in the old wing and made some decisions about, you know, what can we cut now. That was when you began to see stresses and strains between departments.

DA: The academic council.

JS: Oh yeah. I mean, when you're cutting Dean A's budget but you're not cutting Dean B's budget, there was some animosity there. It got to be kind of dicey at times, but happily that didn't last a long time and good times came back and things were a little bit better.

DA: So, how long was- so you were Academic Council Chair and Faculty President, first in '79?

JS: That's correct.

DA: And when else did you have that sort of role?

JS: Seven different times I had the pleasure of being a Faculty President under President Kegerreis, President Mulhollan, President Flack, President Goldenberg, and then finally President Hopkins, and I had the joy or advantage or interest or whatever of working with all those different presidents, seeing that they were different personalities and different styles, that there's not "a" thing that says this is a university president. Because all five of those guys were very, very different, and some were more effective than others no doubt about it.

DA: You mentioned you enjoyed working with Kegerreis, what about the others?

JS: I mean yeah, I'll tell the truth, I don't care. Mulhollan was a task. Mulhollan was a history professor.

DA: And he was the president the longest, right?

JS: No, Kegerreis was longest.

DA: Oh, Kegerreis was?

JS: Yes he was like '72 to '86, something like that. Mulhollan was a very hard negotiator, he took no prisoners, but he was logical and you could convince him that he was wrong. Which I respected very, very much. President Flack was very difficult to deal, with and of course it was unfortunate that he passed away early on when he had pancreatic cancer, but he felt, I think- and this is my nickel's worth of psychology- at a disadvantage because he was African-American on a campus that was overwhelmingly Caucasian, and he unfortunately also surrounded himself in his cabinet with some people who just weren't really viable or good.

DA: This with me being the exception.

JS: Yeah, well, you know, you work here, you can tell stories better than I can. But he had a couple that were really shaky.

DA: Oh yeah, he sure did.

JS: Oh boy, and he was not a lot of fun to work with because he changed his mind on something almost daily.

DA: Yes, yes he did.

JS: Goldenberg, President Goldenberg, I had known him before he became president. He was Dean of the Medical School and so I've worked with him in different kinds of venues and I always got a kick out of his sense of humor, because he had a great sense of humor, always self-deprecating sense of humor, but to be honest with you I found him to be lazy, and so when he stepped down mid-year and Dave Hopkins became president, I thought, 'well this is going to be very different' because Hopkins is a go-getter, is a cheerleader. He's very, very active.

DA: Extrovert.

JS: Oh, very much so

DA: As opposed to the introvert that was Goldenberg.

JS: Very much so, I mean, Mrs. Goldenberg was more of an extrovert than he was, and President Flack was in fact an introvert. In my time at Wright State we've had two really extroverted presidents, and that's Kegerreis and Hopkins, and I don't know the current president so I don't know if she's in or out yet.

DA: So did you enjoy your time as President of Faculty? I mean obviously you did it seven times, and now- first off, you must have been very good at it.

JS: You know, I had some success, I did enjoy it because I tried my best, especially when we made it a Faculty Senate to try to represent to the Administrations and to the Board of Trustees the faculty viewpoint of significant issues facing us in that time and yeah, I wouldn't have kept running and winning if I didn't enjoy the silly thing because you don't get anything for it. But yeah, I enjoyed it. I just won my eighth term and I just started when I had to resign to go and become Dean of the Lake Campus.

DA: And what year was that, just to give us a time frame.

JS: 2007.

DA: 2007. So did you find that the university was receptive to the issues that were affecting faculty in the times that you were president? So I guess what I'm trying to get at, was this a university that was sensitive to faculty issues? Did you find- being eight times elected, actually- you would have a good sense of that?

JS: In general, yes, the only real bad time was when President Flack was here and I think one of the reasons for that was not him so much, but one of his minions in the cabinet was outspokenly anti-faculty and-

DA: Was that Janet?

JS: Yeah, yeah.

DA: Janet Achterman was the Vice President for business.

JS: Correct, and really was the power behind the throne, in some respects.

DA: Even though there's a Provost, John Fleischauer, who was I would imagine was pretty sensitive to the faculty.

JS: Very, John was.

DA: He was a classical faculty guy.

JS: Oh yeah, he was and his. I know him and his wife both, and yeah, unfortunately, Janet Achterman was the real power. She was very strongly anti-faculty and I've always said that it was Flack and Achterman that were responsible for eventually bringing us the faculty union. Because up until President Flack, this call for a faculty union had been going on since I first came here and it got no traction whatsoever.

DA: Why was there a call for a faculty union to begin with?

JS: Well, there was about six or seven faculty, primarily over in the sciences, who thought that the faculty were not receiving appropriate compensation or appropriate benefits and that the only way to get those things would be to unionize. It went nowhere. And then because of things going on

under the Flack administration, man that picked up steam, and although President Flack was then deceased when the union vote took place, and President Goldenberg was in office.

DA: It happened just after Goldenberg got into office, right?

JS: Yeah...

DA: The same month, practically.

JS: The die was cast at that point, I've said for years after that the faculty should name their union the Harley Flack Memorial Faculty Union because it was his administration that gave you the impetus to it.

DA: I'll be darned. Okay, so that was a significant change in really your first twenty years or so...

JS: Yes

DA: The emergence of the Faculty Union, do you feel you gave faculty a stronger voice in the final analysis? Of course, it's still under process...

JS: Well, it gives the faculty a stronger voice in a limited area, primarily with things like working conditions, salary, and benefits, but it has nothing to do with organizational structure with curricular matters and so forth, and so to really have a good strong effective faculty voice, you got to have a strong faculty union and strong faculty governments working together. That's the only way you can really work that way. Now I do believe that the unionization was a good thing in that it made things like promotion and tenure very transparent so that you knew exactly what had gone on, who had voted which way and so you could see if you'd gotten a raw deal. Before the union, a person would go up for a promotion and tenure and it was sort of like being in a star chamber, you found out yes you did or no you didn't, and you had no idea why. Now it's very clear and that is, to me, the greatest benefit.

DA: And in those years from the seventies to the eighties into the nineties, through four different presidents, did the university grow apart as it grew larger.

JS: Yeah, yeah it did. Because not only in terms of the actual physical development of the campus as we begin to add buildings like Rike Hall and all of that, you began to see the old medieval notion of faculty psychology where you had silos. You know, here are people doing this, and here are people doing that, here are people doing this, and the one thing that I saw happening that I didn't like was back when I first became the Faculty President, I had faculty working on different committees for me literally from all over the university, all the different disciplines, and it was great. As time went on and as the silos developed more and more, faculty from different areas never got involved in governance at all, and so it became almost like a closed system where the same-

DA: Same people

JS: -people got involved in different committees and teams and all of that and I... I struggled to try to get other people from different disciplines to take part in governance and the response basically was 'well, I don't see anything in it for me, I've got to do my research, I'd rather do this, I've got to do that'.

DA: In the university as a whole, was there a sense of university community and ebb and flow?

JS: There was that back in seventies and early eighties...

DA: I mean you had the physical proximity...

JS: Yeah, the proximity. I mean back then, when I was in the Comm Department up on the fourth floor, the Communication Department was up there, History was up there, English was up there, Social Work was up there, Sociology was up there, right below me was the entire College of Education. I mean I could walk down the hall and talk to people in Poli-Sci or History or whoever it was, and then as the campus expanded and these little silos got created, you know, we lost something in that. The notion of community.

DA: And you personally, what kept you here through all that? Through the changes and everything else?

JS: Well, I just enjoyed being here, I enjoyed the faculty with whom I worked, not just in my department but other departments, and I enjoyed the students that I was dealing with, and by and large I enjoyed my interactions with the central administrations, whoever they happened to be at the given time. I just had fun, and I thought this area was perfect for my family. You know I ended up with four kids and this is just a wonderful area for them and...

DA: Where did you live?

JS: First year when we just came down here I didn't know what in the world to do, so we rented a house in Huber Heights, and then after that year we bought a house in Beaver creek where we have lived ever since then.

DA: Where in Beaver creek?

JS: I live in, I think the development used to be called Shaker Heights or Shaker Estates. It's off Shakertown Road.

DA: And then your wife worked here.

JS: Yes.

DA: When did she start?

JS: She started in... lets see, she got her master's degree, she got her bachelor's degree here in both English and Communication, then she got her Master's in English and then she began teaching

in the late nineties in the English Department, and then Lillie Howard talked to her about this new thing she was creating about service learning and civic engagement, and she became the director of that till she retired.

DA: So, did your children go to school here as well?

JS: Three out of four went here in some manner or another. My oldest, Bob, got his bachelor's degree here and then went on and got his master's degree at George Mason University. My older daughter, Laura, got her bachelor's degree in vocal performance and then decided there was not a real great career opportunity for that, and went across the campus with her 4.0 GPA got an MBA, and now is a federal employee in Tampa with civil service rating of what is it, a 16. Its equivalent to a one-star General.

DA: Oh, is that right.

JS: Which isn't bad for someone that got her degree in Vocal Performance. My number three child, Annie, she went to Wheaton College in Illinois, but she was here a couple of summers taking language classes, and then the youngest, our baby who's 35, Steven, went to school here for a year, decided at that point college is not for him and went out to Los Angeles, where he lives now and he is a professional dancer, and dance instructor, both he and his wife both.

DA: I'll be darned. Quite a successful brood you have there.

JS: Very different, very different, yes.

DA: Just reflecting on some of the things you talked about, I think when I got here I think it was kind of a tumultuous time in the late nineties, and I came from the University of Toledo, as you know, I was amazed at the tension I felt on campus. You know, I'd go to the cabinet meetings that were going on for three, four hours and there'd be things said and people doing things that I was just astonished at, and I felt the tension between especially faculty and administration which I never... I was at a lower level at Toledo, but I didn't feel that at Toledo in the same way, and I think Harley's personality and some of the people he trusted most I think contributed a lot to that.

JS: Yes, I think that...

DA: That was in '96, '97.

JS: He took some bad advice, President Flack took some bad advice and then when he became ill and you saw this firsthand everything just stopped, because the people like Provost Fleishauer they were nervous about making decisions because they didn't know what President Flack would do when he came back, if he came back.

DA: Plus there was this thing between Fleishauer and Achterman, they were at loggerheads, and she thought she was running the place, and he had the title that he was running the place, and so...

JS: Yeah, he got emasculated in that foolishness, and I think a lot of that was responsible for the tension that you perceived, which is quite accurate, it was very, very accurate.

DA: Were you, personally... did you personally experience that unhappiness as a faculty member, feeling that you, and you representing the faculty, weren't given your due or appreciated?

JS: I was besides being the faculty president, I was also a department chair at the same time, and so when the whole notion about a union vote came about, you know, I would never be in the union because I was a department chair, and although I tried to keep myself impartial on it, to some of my friends I said 'look, if I were able to vote, I'd vote yes, because right now the administration does not take the faculty seriously, and maybe the union can make them do that'. And as I said before, it should be named after President Flack, the union.

DA: You know, I have when I came here my first year, at the end of my first year, I said to my wife, 'I don't know where this is going, but I'm not having any fun'. But one of the things early on I remember, I remember you- and you don't remember this- but we were at some weird, some event, and I think there were students there and some of you were there, and I think a student said something to you about are you an administrator, and you said something like, 'I'm not an administrator, I'm a real person', something like that.

JS: I work for a living.

DA: Yeah, something like that, and I said to my wife, 'I never heard that ever at Toledo, and look what we're experiencing'.

JS: Yeah, yeah. It was a very, very, very strange time and everything, as you know, since you were part of the cabinet at that point, everything just came to a halt for a while.

DA: The whole year was shot.

JS: Yeah, it was it was totally shot.

DA: And the board didn't know what to do. The board created this "Office of the President", where four vice-presidents were ostensibly in charge, but we had a perfectly good provost, ostensibly second in command, you know?

JS: Yeah, they didn't know what to do. I met with the executive committee of the board one day.

DA: That was Dan Duval...

JS: Duval, and I don't remember the other two now.

DA: Probably Soin was one.

JS: No, before him. Diggs was there, and I said ‘look’- I said this is off the record, but I will tell you, this is important- ‘you have to essentially put President Flack on leave and come in with an interim president, because we’re just wallowing’, and they wouldn’t do it.

DA: Let’s go back to students. In your years here, have you noticed changes in them, changes in the students? And in what way?

JS: Well, first of all, we don’t have a majority of the students anymore being first generation, so that’s different, though there is greater familiarity with the notion, familywise, of going to higher education, which wasn’t true back in the early ‘70s. Of course in terms of the things available to students now, back when I first started teaching here I gave them assignments and the students had to go to the library. Now I imagine a lot of our students have never seen the inside of the library because you can go online and get all the research and stuff that you need, that you couldn’t have forty years ago. I still find students here to be very hard-working, they are either upper lower class or lower or middle-middle class, you don’t have the super wealthy students that you... When I was getting my masters degree at the University of Arizona back a million years ago, I was always embarrassed to park my 1956 Ford by the student parking lot because there would be BMWs and all kinds of stuff, because U of A is a very wealthy student population. We’ve never had that. I still think they work very hard, they are very respectful and I mean just to give you a plug for our Lake Campus. I was Dean there for three years, as you know, and I was always amazed when I would walk down the hall and say hello to students, their respectfulness was overwhelming. It was all ‘Good morning, Dean Sayer’, ‘hello, Dean Sayer’, and when I would meet with their parents in different venues I would always tell them how impressed I was with the fact that their students were just overwhelmingly polite. Not that the ones here on the Dayton campus weren’t, but the ones at the lake were super polite.

DA: So you were a faculty member from ’74 to 2006, when did you go to Lake Campus?

JS: 2007, I still retain...

DA: You’re still faculty, talk about what you observed as a change in being faculty member versus administrator, because that was a new role for you.

JS: It was. Because I had literally overnight.

DA: You were the head of the campus, essentially president of the Lake Campus.

JS: That’s what Bob Kegerreis called me. Yes, when I took the position up there, he said ‘you are now the president of a campus’, and it happened literally overnight. One day I was department chair and faculty president, and the next day I was now Dean of the Lake Campus.

DA: Goldenberg gave you that.

JS: No, that was Hopkins.

DA: Was that Hopkins?

JS: 2007.

DA: Oh, 2007, right just as he took over there.

JS: And Dr. Angle was the Provost at that point, and yeah all of the sudden I am now a hated administrator, and so when I first met with the faculty the next week at the Lake Campus, I had a meeting with all 30 some of them, and I said, 'look, just so you know, I am the Dean, but I'm always going to be a faculty member. I didn't serve all those terms as Faculty President and then in the faculty all these years to forget that. I happen to be the Dean, but I see myself as a faculty member who happens to have administrative responsibilities'. That was it, that's how I carried it out.

DA: And so, how was it?

JS: I enjoyed it. Oh yeah, it was fun. Like any administrative position, as you certainly know, Dan, there are frustrations with it, you're always having to keep an eye on the bottom line in your budget, this, that and the other, and you're dealing with different folks and different personalities. I had 30 some faculty, 70 some staff, and they all were different people and had different interests and desires and all that, and so you feel like a ringmaster or something, but I enjoyed it immensely. I especially enjoyed being at the Lake Campus because the people there were very diligent and committed to the campus. They worked hard, the students were great, and the communities that we serve were super supportive of the campus, and so again, I enjoyed those three years immensely.

DA: So, 2010, you step down.

JS: I retired at the end of June 2010.

DA: And as you look back, anything, any memorable experience stand out? A couple of them, two or three stand out, particularly for you?

JS: Well as Faculty President, I was pleased that at the end of my first term as Faculty President I was able to convince both President Kegerreis and his cabinet to make a change in the STRS contribution for faculty. It was called "the pickup on the pickup", and what this did was it basically gave all the faculty members like a \$5,000 raise immediately, so I was very pleased. I think later on the administration hated the fact they did it, but it worked out well for the faculty. I was pleased we were able to change from the Academic Council to the Faculty Senate, which I think gave a much stronger faculty voice in dealing with the central administration, and when I was up at the Lake Campus, I was pleased that when I went up there we had a headcount of 730, and myself and a couple of other people got up and hustled, and went to every college fair, every high school.

DA: You personally? As Dean?

JS: Oh yeah. Yep, I went out there and talked to all kinds of principals and counselors and went to the college fairs and talked to moms and dads. When I retired, we had taken the 730 headcount

and gotten just over 1500. Showing that if you get out and hustle you can do it, which is a lesson I think this campus needs to consider from time to time.

DA: One of things, even though when I first got here I felt that there was this tension, I think that it has kind of ebbed and flowed over the years, but I think there's always a... Wright State as a community, people felt they were part of something.

JS: Yes.

DA: Do you think that pertains still, do you think that still applies?

JS: No I don't think so, and I can only say that because since I retired I've just been teaching an honor seminar each fall semester, so it's not like I'm down here 24/7 like I used to be, but I do run into some of my former friends, both faculty and staff. At the moment I would say morale is non-existent and I know from what students have told me in my different honors sections they feel separated from the university. They don't feel part of a community, which is very unfortunate. It is very, very different than 34 years ago.

DA: Yeah, these are tough times right there, I felt that even towards the last two or three years of my tenure at Wright State, I've had twenty years, that it has lost its sense of connection.

JS: And that's really unfortunate.

DA: I think that's one of the things that stood out about Wright State. I think a sense of creativity, a sense of being dynamic. It is still a young university, and a sense of connection, boy that just fell off a cliff somewhere.

JS: Well, when I started here in '74, we made an awful lot of agreements between people, between departments, with a handshake. Now you've got to have an act of God just about to get certain things done. I know, and I guess that's normal with any growing bureaucracy, but we reached a lot of deals, the deal we struck with President Kegerreis about the pickup on the pickup for the STRS contributions. He shook hands with me and that was it. Game was over.

DA: You couldn't do that now. Got to get lawyers involved and go to the State Legislature.

JS: Yeah, like I said, you almost need to get the Pope to come over and deal with something, but I guess that's a natural bureaucratic...

DA: Yeah, yeah, absolutely, I guess that goes along with the territory, it's kind of sad. Any major disappointments? Things that...

JS: Well, obviously I was very, very disappointed with the situation surrounding President Flack's administration. I thought that we just went right in the pit.

DA: You think he shouldn't have been president? I mean there was some controversies as I recall. Goldenberg was like runner up or something, right?

JS: Yeah, he was a... President Goldenberg is one of the three finalists, and I'll tell you the story on this. The Board of Trustees wanted to do something different with the university presidency, and so when President Flack threw his name in the hopper there was initially some question about the viability of his resume. That might be what you were referencing, and so all of a sudden that resume was pulled, and a different one showed up, and he got the job. And Goldenberg was one of the two other finalists who didn't get it. Then when President Flack became ill and then passed away, I was Faculty President- everything always happens when I'm Faculty President.

DA: That's because you were Faculty President.

JS: Yeah, that's right, they blamed me for it. I got a call from Mr. Diggs, who was one of the three honchos on the Board of Trustees, could I come over and meet with the executive committee of the board in the small conference room in the administrative wing, as it then existed. I said sure, so I came over and they said 'President Flack has passed away, we don't know what to do'. I said 'well, Kim Goldenberg is here, he was a finalist, he's in a good job as the Dean of the Med School, why don't you just name him President'. Diggs jumped up out of his chair around the table, pulled me to my feet and gave me a hug, he said we needed to have someone to have the courage to say it.

DA: They were thinking of it, they just wouldn't speak it out loud.

JS: That's it, and they said if you're good with it, it's done, and the next day they named President Goldenberg president.

DA: Who stayed president for seven years.

JS: Yeah.

DA: Yeah, it was a period of fairly significant growth in enrollment, programs. It was kind of a boom time.

JS: You had a great boom time during President Kegerreis' administration. Not so much, it was okay with Mulhollan. It was a disaster with Flack. And then it went very well with President Goldenberg, yes.

DA: Do you think it's because of their leadership or something else? I think Harley made his own bed.

JS: Yeah, he did, he created his own disaster. But I think initially President Goldenberg, with then Provost Moore, got things moving in a positive direction, after he'd been treading water for a while.

DA: He also galvanized everybody...

JS: We also had great growth in the American economy at the same time.

DA: And growth in enrollment did the same thing.

JS: Yeah, I mean all of the sudden we started going, going, going and it carried through much of the early part of the 21st century in terms of enrollment, growth, revenue and all that. Which I think is one of the reason we are found in our current situation. We assumed it would go on forever. But yeah, things really got going in a better manner once Kim Goldenberg became president, and then carried on during the initial years of President Hopkins.

DA: Well, that was my observation. But I had the same thing- something you said earlier about President Goldenberg, he was kind of disconnected from the university. He was hands-off.

JS: Correct, yeah.

DA: You know, in my area there are stories- now maybe their apocryphal- but he wondered where our football team played.

JS: Yeah.

DA: He didn't know we didn't have a football team.

JS: Well, he almost killed Perry Moore because he dumped so much stuff on Perry as Provost, that it about did him in. And there are different leadership styles, and his was a hands-off leadership style.

DA: Well, let's see, it says here "if you were asked to describe WSU then, in one word..."

JS: Collegial.

DA: If you were asked to describe WSU now, in one word?

JS: Bifurcated.

DA: Would you recommend Wright State, to a kid, to come to Wright State now?

JS: No, not yet. Maybe in a few years if they get things straightened out.

DA: What else do you want to say about your time here? Well, you know, you might just want to talk about your plans to move west. Is that a daunting thing for you?

JS: It is. My wife and I built the house we're in 34 years ago, and so the idea of all the stuff we've collected to get rid of, and to go through the routine of selling the house and moving. But I think I'm still young enough for one more challenge.

DA: And it's not as though you don't have some experience in the west, right? Spent some time out there.

JS: Yeah, that's correct, some time in Arizona. I mean, I still see myself as an Arizonian. The 36 years of full time work that I had here plus the seven years after that, I've enjoyed Wright State. You know, I had many good times as a faculty member, faculty president, dean, department chair, and all that. I can't complain about how my career has been at Wright State University. If in '74 when I came here, if you would have said, "Jim, you're gonna be here over 40 years", I would have said you're nuts, because that's very unusual in higher education, and I can't complain about a thing. I've been treated very, very well, I've enjoyed most of the experience that I've had at Wright State, it's unfortunate that you and I find ourselves in the university situation that is right now, but I'm hopeful that things can be turned around so that that sense of community can be redeveloped that existed back in the '70s and '80s.

DA: One last thing, so when you were reading all those names at graduation and you came to some complicated name like mine, Abrahamowitz, did you actually think you got it right, or were you just saying things?

JS: I was just saying things. Bill Rickert and I did that together for 26 years, and our attitude was relatively simple: okay, when you get a name that has 27 consonants and whatever-

DA: Students from Thailand...

JS: Oh, a lot of different countries- we decided that at the most, with all the thousands of people in there at the arena, no more than 20 people would actually know how that person's name was pronounced, and so we would just give it a sound and realize if we didn't irritate more than 20 people, we were successful. So we gave it... we had funny things, one day I got as I'm looking at this name, it's just got a whole series of...

DA: Consonants...

JS: Oh my god, and I'm looking, and the student leaned over to my ear and said 'do the best you can'.

DA: Perfect, perfect. And that's all you could do.

JS: Yeah, just give it a name, and hope for the best.

DA: Well, you guys, hats off to you in doing that, hats off to you in your career at Wright State, as a true pioneer of this university, and making it a great institution, that's gonna see better days than it's seeing right now.

JS: We certainly hope.

DA: So thanks very much, Jim. Thank you. Best wishes out to you and your family, Kathy and everybody else out west.

JS: You got it.

DA: Now I think we've got find Chris to turn it off, while the memory is still hot.

JS: Always, always, always work on the notion, that that sucker is still going.

DA: Oh, it's awfully funny hearing people when they think they're off camera, and it's not.

JS: Oh lord, yeah, that's a mistake you don't want to make.

DA: Did you every look at other jobs while you were here?

JS: I had a couple of people- I had a fella come, I was at a conference and he talked to me about going to the University of Minnesota, and so he was talking to me, and he came to his big selling point that if you come up here, and you get to be the department chairman, you would get your own plugin. Well, I didn't know what that was. So he told me about this thing and you would put it under the car so that your engine block doesn't freeze and crack, and I thought, wait a minute, that's good for my car, but then I've got to walk from my car. And then I had a guy for a couple of years that tried to get me to go to Harvard, and he told me the salary, and I looked at him, and I said 'are you kidding?' and he said 'but you are at Harvard', and I said 'when I go to the store and I'm going to buy some stuff, I'm not gonna say 'look, you can't charge me, because I'm teaching at Harvard'. So I said no, to hell with that.

DA: I had a friend that was at Bemidji University, which is now Minnesota State or something like that, but the thing that amazed me about that was they had a lake on campus, which in the winter time was a parking lot. And I can tell you why. (*Voices trail off*)