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Mary Kenton, University Honors Program, Wright State University

Dan Abrahamowicz

Mary Kenton

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WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY
Retiree Association Oral History Project

Interview date: 7/2/2018

Interviewer: Dan Abrahamowicz (DA)
Vice President for Student Affairs, Retired

Interviewee: Mary Kenton (MK), University Honors Program, Retired

DA: Ready?

MK: Ready!

DA: Okay, This is Dan Abrahamowicz once again, Former Vice President for Student Affairs here at Wright State University and current member of the Wright State Retirees Association. Today is Monday, July 2nd, 2018 and I'm pleased to be interviewing Mary Kenton, WSU Alumni and Former Senior Associate Director for the university's honor program. This is part of the Retiree Associations Oral History Project! Mary, thank you very much for being here today!

MK: My pleasure!

DA: It's great to see you and one of the things I was struck by is, Mary wrote a piece for the WSURA Retiree Association called "Reflections" and you mentioned that you were on campus the first day Wright State University held classes.

MK: That's right!

DA: Okay, we're going to hold that aside for a minute because we're gonna go further back than that. I want to come back to that and see how that happened. Start off telling us a little bit about yourself, your background, where you're from, and so on.

MK: Oh goodness! Well, I was born in Eastern Tennessee in a town called Lafollette.

DA: What did your parents do?

MK: Well my father had been a coal miner and then he was drafted into the Second World War where he had a pretty successful career. He was in Patton's 3rd Army.

DA: Oh is that right?

MK: He was a mortar sergeant and was quite decorated.

DA: So he saw actual action.

MK: Oh my god, yeah. They landed on Normandy Beach, not in the first wave but in the second wave about ten days later. They relieved the Lost Battalion; they fought in St. Lo and in the Battle of the Bulge. They got across the river and outside Berlin but they were asked to hold up, which they were resentful about, still many, many years later. But he had the full war experience you could say, then he came back to Eastern Tennessee. My mother during the war had worked at Oak Ridge, both she and her sister, Mary, who worked in the office. My mother worked in the factory. Their parents lived there with them because they each had a war baby. Everybody got married and left a baby behind and the women worked. So after the war they reconnected, went back to the little town that we lived in, and had me. There just was no future there.

DA: Did you have brothers and sisters?

MK: I have an older sister who was the baby born during the war and I was the post-war baby so we're about four and a half years apart but that's it. They started looking to get out of Tennessee and the place to go was Ohio, where my father's older brother had settled, my mother's older brother, and then another brother. So, Dayton seemed like the place to go.

DA: So you had family here, roughly what year was that?

MK: That was 1954. We moved and settled in Beaver creek. I started second grade at Beaver creek and graduated from there, and so it went. My dad eventually started his own small business.

DA: Here in Beaver creek?

MK: Yeah, here in Beaver creek. He was an electrical contractor, so if you live in Old Tara he probably wired your house.

DA: Well, I'll be darned, I live in New Tara!

MK: Well, he didn't do those but he worked for a couple of builders like RH Bowers, and another guy, Marty Coates, and stayed busy and had a nice career here.

DA: So you went to high school in Beaver creek? Beaver creek High?

MK: Right! And then after I graduated I got a job with DP&L

DA: So you didn't think about college right away?

MK: No, not right away, I got married young and so I got this job and it was a good job. It was in the customer accounting department. They give you an academic test for those jobs. So pretty much everyone in that office was fairly sharp. The job was very

complicated and it was just as computers were coming out so you worked with big computer books that were huge. If you worked in the districts those books were carbon, so you had to be careful what you wore or you would get carbon all over you. But it was boring, so I started taking classes at night.

DA: At Wright State?

MK: At Wright State!

DA: So let's go back, you were here on the first day of Wright State's classes, which would have been '67 or something like that, right? Now, what were you doing here, were you taking night classes or what?

MK: No, no I just came out with a friend who was a student here.

DA: Okay, so you were still in high school at that time?

MK: Yeah, I was still in high school. Well, '66 I graduated. So, then I took a year of night classes and decided I liked it and I was getting more and more into it, so I just gave notice, and I had saved money-

DA: Saved enough money that you could-

MK: Well, I saved it to buy a house but what the heck, so it was enough to get me through Wright State because it was only \$240 a quarter, and it didn't change over time. I thought that was pretty expensive because my sister had gone back to college and she was going to Middle Tennessee State, where it was \$125 a semester at that time. So she paid \$250 a year.

DA: Isn't that amazing.

MK: It is amazing. It tells you how much things have changed.

DA: Well, I will say this about my era, I knew you could go work in the summer and pay for college.

MK: Well yeah! When I'm with a bunch of old people I'll often ask them, how many of you graduated from college with debt, and nobody puts their hands up. Because you figured out, you know, well my husband worked a year between high school and college and then he worked summer jobs and pick up jobs.

DA: So you graduated in '66 and you took this job at DP&L and then you started night classes about the same time or?

MK: No it was a year or so in, about 1969 and they paid for your classes as long as you got a C or better.

DA: So you took night classes in '69?

MK: Yeah I think it was '69 and they would reimburse you so I took Introduction to the Study of Literature and then I took-

DA: Did you have an idea of what you wanted to major in at the time or were you just exploring?

MK: Well, I always thought maybe about teaching high school and I always liked to read, that's my thing. So I just took classes that let you read books and you could pretend you were working, that sort of thing, you know, "I have to do this, you can't get upset with me about it". So I did that for a year and then I just gave notice one day after having a conversation about it at home- and I gave notice.

DA: And you decided to go full time?

MK: I decided to go full-time so I came out here and registered and took the regular freshman courses. I took freshman English and Psychology.

DA: So you picked Wright State because it was convenient?

MK: Well, yeah, because it was here!

DA: So you never thought about going to UD or-

MK: Oh no, that's never been under consideration. UD back then was not into recruiting local students the way that they are now.

DA: It's more of a full time, traditional aged population, and you were part time.

MK: Right, and Wright State just seemed like the right place for me. I was a little out of the-

DA: What was Wright State's reputation back then? Just as a place of convenience?

MK: I think that's what attracted almost everybody then, cost and convenience, and it was such an addition to the community. I think people were very excited to have it. It made people who were place-bound, who had jobs or families or whatever, I cannot tell you how many people I went to school with that that was exactly their thing. It's not until much later, when I'm working here, that I started to hear different reasons like the reputation of this department or the good scholarship offers. In the beginning it was just cost and convenience.

DA: Cost and convenience, but in your reflections piece you reflect on excellent academic qualities and placing. You're a smart person so we have to take seriously the

fact that you were challenged and thought some of these faculty members were great. Right?

MK: Oh absolutely, I went through six years here of education and I never had... well, the freshman English teachers and the freshman composition teachers were full time Wright State employees, because of some complicated situations in that department-

DA: So English was sort of your major?

MK: Right, I majored in English and History; I got certified to teach both high school English and history. So the English teachers were not tenure-track faculty, but they were full time instructors within the department, and every person I had for a class was a tenure-track faculty member. Every single one as an undergraduate and they were young, they were dynamic.

DA: I think I heard you say the student population was old but the faculty was young.

MK: Right, we were older than average, I was 21 or so when I started full time and I was still young. I thought, man, I'm going to be the old lady out there but I was still young compared to a lot of students. There were a lot of students in their early to mid-twenties and on into their thirties. There were people who worked full time, who worked night jobs, got off at 7 or 7:30 in the morning and came to class and then went home to bed-kind of thing. It was just a very diverse student population back then.

DA: I think there in your piece you write about a Biology professor, who was that? Did they stand out more or?

MK: Ira Fritz, he was a Biochemist and his wife Evelyn, you know he died a couple of years ago, and his wife Evelyn samples things at Dorothy Lane Market, so I still see her there and greet her. He also served for many years on the Honors Committee later, but he was just the best of the three, and back in those days-

DA: Of the three, what do you mean?

MK: Biology professors, you had to take the same science.

DA: Oh, you had to take three, yeah, right.

MK: And it wasn't dumbed down science. Pardon me. But it was the same science. If you were pre-med, you took the same science class. So I had Marvin Seiger for fall quarter and Prem Batra was in the winter quarter and then I had Ira Fritz in the spring.

DA: So an English/History major is struck most by a biology professor?

MK: Well, not most, but he was a dear guy and I'd say the other two faculty members as undergraduates that were most influential are people I remained friends with, Jake Dorn and Jim Hughes.

DA: You took classes with Jim Sayer too, I think?

MK: No, I never had a class with Jim Sayer. No, I had speech with Abe Bassett!

DA: Abe Bassett! Okay, so a high academic qualities and a great academic experience you would say?

MK: Oh, I think in many ways it was exactly the right thing for me. It maybe didn't suit other people so well but it worked really well for me.

DA: Why do you say that maybe it didn't suit others well?

MK: Well, if you wanted a much more traditional experience. There was just Hamilton Hall.

DA: And the Quad, right?

MK: There was the Quad, but it was a different time. I was a lot more rambunctious, shall we say.

DA: You reflect also on student life, but you talk about speakers that had an impact on you and stood out in your mind.

MK: There was just a lot of stuff going on and it was more to scale.

DA: What do you mean "to scale"?

MK: Well, when Gloria Steinem was here she spoke in Oelman Auditorium, and you'd been there for classes and, you know, you weren't in some huge audience with a thousand people or something like that. Most of the people at these events were students. It didn't attract a lot of community members. I'm sure there must have been some, but the things were scheduled for students. And, you know, Jake invited Herbert Aptheker, the prominent communist historian, and general mayhem broke loose on the fourth floor of Millett where all the liberal arts faculty used to be housed back then. And you had Ken Daily, the Russian historian, a Cold War kind of a guy- he was just kind of beside himself. So, you had those kinds of events.

DA: There's an intimacy to the place though, right?

MK: Dick Gregory was here, I can remember him talking about kids and how the kids were going to save us all, the young people. Just person after person, I had tickets for Oprah. Now that's later on, when I was working. I had tickets for the Oprah thing and I

was walking up there, she was going to be in the old field house, and I was walking up there, and it was just a beautiful day and you know what I did?

DA: What?

MK: I went for a run.

DA: You passed on Oprah?

MK: I passed on Oprah. I've kind of regretted that.

DA: I thought maybe you ran into her and she gave you a car.

MK: No, that was the thing. Lillian Johnson was head of the Bolinga Center back then and she was in charge of getting Oprah here from the airport. Well, she learned really late in the process that Oprah only rode in a limo.

DA: Oh, she couldn't get in a plain old car?

MK: So, she couldn't just go pick her up in her car like everybody we did for the Honors Institute. So she panicked- you should hear her tell the story. You should interview her sometime, she's got some stories to tell. She called CJ McLin and borrowed a limo, and that's the limo they went to get her with.

DA: Well good, that's good thinking. Very good thinking. So when did you finish your undergraduate degree?

MK: '74, and I finished right before the Xenia tornado.

DA: Oh is that right?

MK: Yep, because I remember that going over and I had a terrible sinus infection. I remember I was home alone and went to look out the window or door and I just went back to bed. It went on down US 35.

DA: Where were you?

MK: I was in Riverside, so you could see it and you'd wake up and hear about the devastation. It was just horrifying. That was in March and I just didn't find a job teaching right away.

DA: So were you actively looking for a job?

MK: Yeah, I was going to get a teaching job, even though student teaching was...

DA: You didn't like student teaching?

MK: It was tough. I was placed on a ninth-grade team at Spinning Hills Junior High.

DA: Where is Spinning Hills, is that in Dayton?

MK: Well, it's in Riverside and it's on Spinning Road. You know, if you go down Airway and turn left and go up that hill, it's right up there and it's a middle school or something like that now. I was placed on this team and they always had a student teacher, they had three professional people and a student teacher, and it was just really challenging, but they were wonderful.

DA: Because of the students or because of the teachers?

MK: Well, it was just that way of doing things that was a little more challenging, I think. And the students, they were all bigger than me and various things happened there. The ambulance would come. I made a mistake once of using the regular restroom instead of the teacher's restroom and I ended up with glue in various body parts.

DA: Oh Geez!

MK: So, you know, it was not a good time and so people thought- we'd sit over in Allyn Hall and talk, and people would say "You try and teach in Dayton and you'll be eaten alive" and yada yada yada, "You're not tough enough for this", and so your confidence is being undermined, and then they dangled out this grad assistantship.

DA: Who did?

MK: Jake Dorn did, he said "Well, have you thought about doing that?" and I said "Well you know I wasn't even a real history major, that wasn't my area of study". He said "Nah, it doesn't matter"

DA: So you stayed in contact with him?

MK: I think he had written me a reference or something like that, I probably had four or five courses with Jim Hughes and I probably had four or five courses with Jake. They both had written me letters for this teaching thing. So, I applied for an assistantship in History and was really surprised when I got one.

DA: Was it a teaching assistant?

MK: No, although I did do some lectures, but no, it wasn't a GTA, it was just a grad assistant. So I got assigned to Jake, of course, and then Tsing Yuan was my other professor.

DA: So then you had a Master's in History?

MK: I got a MA in History, yeah, and I wrote a thesis that was later published as part of a book that Jake edited on Socialism and Christianity in early 20th century America.

DA: Was that a two-year program?

MK: Yes.

DA: And then did you start your career at Wright State right after that?

MK: Well as it turned out, this graduate program was just wonderful, a wonderful experience for me. There were six of us back then. I mean, this was back in the 70's. They had a budget to have that many graduate assistants and they had this thriving archives program. Gosh, I can remember the guy that was the first archivist, years ago, but they worked hard- people like Carl Becker- they worked hard to get this public history project going and all this stuff. We bonded, all the students, there was a group of about 6 or 7 of us.

DA: Who had assistantships?

MK: Most of them, not everybody. There were a couple of outsiders in that group, Jean Baker, and we had an Air Force lieutenant, Alex Goodell, that we would hang out with sometimes, too. But mostly they were grad assistants. We still, you know, this time last summer there were several of us who would get together with Jake and we would all have lunch and talk and stuff like that. But we took a lot of classes together- we took a lot of mostly social history, intellectual history, and left-wing history, that kind of thing.

DA: Had you ever seen any change at that point? Can you reflect on or notice any significant difference from '74 or so to '69 or '67 when you first wandered onto campus?

MK: Well, obviously, buildings. The library, when I first experienced Wright State, the library was on the first floor and in the basement of Millett Hall I think. When I started as a student, there were just the four buildings around the Quad, and then the library was built. Then there was the student union was up there, too, and then the library was built and there was all kinds of controversy about the library and the architect.

DA: What was the controversy? The design of it?

MK: Oh I don't know. I've always thought it was the most beautiful building on campus. But I think that there was trouble at first with leaking through the roof, and the stairs were a little dangerous. There were no rails, there was no carpeting, there wasn't anything, but it was just a gorgeous building. So, always there was something being built and always there was something being added. So, the Honors Program came into being somewhere, I don't know, probably around '74 or '75. It was just a new program, I don't remember what the actual year was. Then Jake was appointed by Andy Spiegel-

DA: Who was provost-

MK: Who was provost- to be the founding director of the Honors Program. He was one of those kids who went off to college at 16.

DA: Spiegel did?

MK: No, Jake did. So he finished his graduate work pretty early, and got his PhD done before he was 25. He became a full professor at a young age.

DA: Was he the one in your reflections speech you mentioned something about the strange and wonderful workings of higher education.

MK: Well, just that whole experience with the graduate program, because I got elected to be the graduate student's representative on the graduate committee and some other committee and it was just like, "Really?"

DA: Do you remember some of the stuff or some of those things?

MK: Oh, just the kinds of arguments that went on. It just seemed so-

DA: For an institution of higher education.

MK: Yes. It just didn't seem quite worthy of the ideal picture I had of what it was and these people and all of that. That was interesting. Now, Jake and Spiegel- Andy- were life-long friends.

DA: Is that right? So the president at the time would have been

MK: Kegerreis.

DA: Kegerreis.

MK: He's the first one I can remember, and every time that I would see him, he would come to an honors event or something.

DA: Kegerreis, or Spiegel?

MK: Kegerreis, and then everytime I would see him he would stick his hand out and say, "Hello, I'm Bob Kegerreis" and I'd probably met him, you know, ten times. But that was just him. But he did show up.

DA: So he came?

MK: He would come to things and lend his presence.

DA: So how did you get the job, because you were his grad assistant?

MK: Well, I-

DA: That was a good entrée, right?

MK: That was a very good entrée, because as that was winding up and then the question was did I want to go to UC and get a PhD in History? I had been in school non-stop for six years and it gets more intense the further along you go.

DA: Sure, sure.

MK: So, I decided I did not want to do that. So, Janice Wilson, who was Jake's associate there, was one of the instructors in the English Department and as you may or not know, they were term limited, because if you kept people on too long at that time, you know, you got into tenure issues, so they could only stay-

DA: As instructors?

MK: As instructors, right. We had a lawsuit, that's back when I think Jim Gleason was department chair. Janice had decided she was going to go do her PhD in English at UC, so she was resigning. So I got a temporary contract to help her wind up and do some of these basic kinds of things.

DA: She was associate director?

MK: No, I think it started off being like Assistant to the Director, was the title at the time.

DA: But she was also an instructor, so her time was running out.

MK: Right, and I don't know that she was term limited in that same way that other people had been, because they eventually had worked it out and now we have permanent people at the instructor level. But she was going and so I filled in there for a while, and then we had this big elaborate search, and there were two deans, I mean, it was ridiculous.

DA: Search for what?

MK: For the permanent replacement for Janice.

DA: Oh is that right? You mean a nationwide search?

MK: They advertised it. I don't think it was nationwide, but there were like a couple hundred applicants.

DA: Wow. And this was '74, or '76?

MK: This is '76, I started in the fall of '76. Gene Cantelupe was on the search committee and Brian Huchings, the dean of Science and Math, and Elenore Koch, you know her, and Janice and Jake. It just seemed ridiculous, you know? But we did it. We went through all these interview processes and all these things, and then I got hired.

DA: And the rest is history.

MK: And the rest is history. It was handled perfectly professionally, and just the way it should have been. We had an appropriate search.

DA: So the difference between being a full time employee and a student, did you notice any big difference right away?

MK: Oh well sure! You were in a whole different position. You've changed teams, so to speak and I had so much to learn from that end! That's a whole different learning curve.

DA: And where were your offices?

MK: The offices were on the first floor of Millett. I don't remember exactly when you came, but you remember what Millett used to be like before they did all this reconfiguration.

DA: I was here before they did it, but I don't remember what it looked like.

MK: Yeah, it's hard for me sometimes to get it back, too, but there was a classroom right across the hall. And so oftentimes, because there were no lounge chairs-

DA: Where's the Honors offices now?

MK: They're on the second floor of Millett.

DA: Okay, they're still in Millett.

MK: Right, because when Perry Moore was dean, and they did the big remodel, they wanted the Honors Offices, which Chuck Hathaway had moved down to where the old Bolinga Center offices were, and the library.

DA: Bolinga Center offices? In the library?

MK: The Dunbar Library was in Millett!

DA: Oh I see, before this was built.

MK: No, this was built, and the Dunbar library I think was still there and it stayed there for a while.

DA: Was it just a Dunbar collection?

MK: It had the Dunbar collection, it wasn't the whole thing, it was just that particular collection, and there was a librarian who was responsible for that. Then there was the Bolinga Center, where there were various directors over time. So, we had that whole end of Millett.

DA: I think the first time... gosh, I remember the Bolinga Center in the Union when I first got up here. I don't even remember anymore.

MK: Yeah, they moved up there for a while, but we had the diaspora when they remodeled it the last time, and then honors went over to the basement of University Hall. We lived down there with the nurses.

DA: Oh, okay. So talk about your initial impressions as an employee of the university, what was going on, was Kegerreis still the president at that time?

MK: Kegerreis was the president, Andy Spiegel was the provost, Elenore Koch was the student affairs person-

DA: Who was the business person at that time?

MK: Whenever we wanted money we always went to Spiegel, but I know there was another guy. Spanier was the first business guy I really remember.

DA: I remember that name

MK: Ed Spanier. All three of his sons I think went to college here and went through the Honors Program. A lot of faculty kids came through over time. I think, thinking back as an employee, I always had a lot of flexibility and I was always involved in things, outside of Honors. I got involved when Ferarri came.

DA: He was provost, also?

MK: He was provost. When he came he wanted to start up the staff council, so we started up a professional staff advisory council.

DA: And you were on the ground floor there?

MK: Yeah, I got involved in that early on.

DA: Well, just the creation of an Honors Program was sort of new for Wright State, in the sense that your early experiences, because of convenience and cost, and suddenly now there's honor students.

MK: Yeah, and you know Eleanor Koch had so much to do with how this place turned out, and I don't know that she gets anywhere near the credit she deserves.

DA: Is that right?

MK: Yeah, I think.

DA: So what made you think what you just said?

MK: Well, thinking about the scholarship program. At that time, when she was putting together this scholarship program, it was all merit based, and that was because one of the things they wanted to do with this Honors Program was to attract more academically gifted students, and we felt like we needed money to do it, and that we would reward their diligence.

DA: When did that happen? Why did the university at that point in its history do you think, decide to attract more academically gifted students? Because it was maturing as an institution and that's what mature institutions do?

MK: I think that's it, I think they were as ambitious as all get out from the get go, and they never saw this place as some backwater, they were going to...

DA: An advanced community college. There was always the ambition to be-

MK: Oh absolutely, to do better and better.

DA: Where did that vision come from? From the faculty? From the president, or everyone on the board?

MK: I think it was just in the water. That was clearly what people wanted to do. I mean the faculty were young, they were hard chargers, they were go-getters.

DA: And they were outstanding faculty. You mentioned Dorn, I mean, they're high quality faculty.

MK: A lot of really good people and they just didn't want to be at some junior college. They wanted to be at a university, and so I think it was just always marching forward. Always something new was happening, and we did so many just terrific things that have fallen by the wayside, things like-

DA: Like what?

MK: Like we used to have a full-time post office. When that went I really missed that. We had a frame shop, so you could use that for your personal stuff. We had a juried art show two or three times.

DA: Wasn't there a horse riding club?

MK: There was a horse riding club.

DA: But on campus, right?

MK: Yeah, they had stables, but that went quick.

DA: I think it was over by where the pond is now for the Nutter Center.

MK: Yeah, I think that was gone fairly quickly early on. Well, and then the place now where the Meijer parking lot is, there was a crazy farm where they had all kinds of exotic farm animals. And the only place to eat was at the Airway Inn, and when the Airway Inn burned down, that was that.

DA: They burnt down?

MK: Yeah, it was a dramatic event for a lot of people. Because if you taught a night class-

DA: That was the only place to eat. Except the cafeteria. The Allyn Hall cafeteria, that you mentioned, too, that was a hopping place. Was that called the Hangar? Not the Hangar, what was that-

MK: The Hanger was later, that was in the basement of Millett when they moved it down there for a while. At the beginning I guess there was something up in the student union but I don't really remember if there was food. If I ate on campus it was in Allyn hall cafeteria.

DA: So you started with Jake Dorn as the director, how long was he the director of the honors program?

MK: He was there for, gosh, over 10 years.

DA: Let me get the timeline again, so you started in-

MK: '76.

DA: As a student director?

MK: Assistant to the director

DA: Assistant to the director, in '76. Okay.

MK: Right and then Jake left, and then there was David Barr. Then David left because that's what had to happen in order for things to go in another direction. Then Anna Bellasari came in.

DA: So, David came in what year would you say?

MK: After Jake. Well, I'm trying to think. I should have asked him. I thought, "Do I need to do research for this?" So '76, '86... probably like '87 or '88, somewhere right along in there. Then Anna came in the early '90's.

DA: Was the honors program changing at that point?

MK: Oh, dramatically.

DA: How so?

MK: Well, when I started, we had three scholarships that we awarded, at \$1000 each.

DA: Those are things Eleanor helped create?

MK: Eleanor created those.

DA: Through the financial aid program.

MK: Right. Emelda Dahms was the first scholarship coordinator.

DA: A thousand dollars?

MK: A thousand dollars.

DA: That was a year's tuition, probably?

MK: That was a year's tuition and books. Because we were still in the \$240-\$250 range, so \$1000 basically covered tuition and books. Then by the time we get to the late '80's, the Oma Sells money, I think honors got a lot of that.

DA: The what money?

MK: Oma Sells, I think- I might be-

DA: A donor?

MK: Yes, a donor and I think one of the scholarship people- well, that money got sent over to honors. At one time there was a scholarship council, that's how we got the 5th year scholarship in athletics. Somebody tried to go get a 5th year scholarship and they said "No, no, no", so I said "Well let me try this", so we did it. Honors made the proposal

and we wanted to get a 5th year for engineering students, because it was so hard to finish an engineering degree in 4 years.

DA: So, these honors students were given \$1000 scholarships and were extended one more year for certain programs.

MK: Well, no. I mean, the athletics got the 5th year scholarship, but we never did.

DA: I see.

MK: But I think there are ways that they do that now if you're within a certain point of graduation, I think they would let you keep some of your awards. But the scholarship program just grew dramatically, and we went from having three a year to having 20 a year to having more than that.

DA: Well, I remember when I first got here, the valedictorian/ salutatorian scholarships, we were the top attractions for valedictorians in the state of Ohio. A lot of people, we gave them full ride plus tuition. Room and board plus tuition, I think.

MK: We went a little crazy on that one, I think. I remember the director of financial aid, whose name I won't say, decided to give a kid from-

DA: Dave Darr?

MK: From I don't know where it was. Abu Dhabi? I don't know where it was. Some far remote place. We did not have a real transcript that anybody could read or anything like that, but by god he got a scholarship. So we were giving scholarships in classes of just a few students, and then the high schools started playing us, I think, and that's when they started having, like, one year I don't know how many valedictorians Fairmont had, like 15 or so. Adjustments had to be made. There was never a fixed scholarship budget in those days. It just grew. It was what it was.

DA: Well, talk also then- you mentioned Ferrari when he became provost, started this staff council.

MK: Right.

DA: Talk about that and what was going on with the staff then and your recollection of that.

MK: Well, I'm trying to think. There had been some unionization of some of the staff.

DA: Some of the staff?

MK: Right, that we still have.

DA: The classified staff.

MK: Right, that are still in place. Then the Communication Workers of America-

DA: The CWOA

MK: -tried to organize the rest of the classified staff, and that didn't work and that failed as an effort. I think Ferrari had done established these councils at Bowling Green, and he started the staff council while he was there.

DA: So his motivation was maybe to deflect thought of unionization?

MK: Well, I don't know if that was his motivation. I think he just believed in inclusive governance and getting everyone active and acquainted.

DA: That's nice. Yeah.

MK: I mean, he was extremely popular when he was here.

DA: He wasn't hired by Kegerreis, was he?

MK: Well, we thought he was going to be the president. That's what everybody thought.

DA: After Kegerreis left?

MK: Right. The whole thought that was why they brought him in-

DA: So, Kegerreis brought him in, Kegerreis retires, and people thought Ferrari was gonna be it.

MK: Right, everybody thought Ferrari was going to be president, and then the board was not happy, I think, with his staff friendliness. I don't know, that's just gossip and speculation.

DA: And that lead to Mulhollan being president.

MK: Yeah, and then Paige came in as president. We still had Academic Council in those days, and I think it was a mistake to get rid of Academic Council. I think the Faculty Senate ended up doing that.

DA: Do you recall issues around staff council at that time, or in the early stages of it?

MK: I think a lot of it was just getting up and organized.

DA: And this was probably early 80's by then?

MK: Oh, yeah. I can't remember exactly when it was, time is marching on. But then when Mulhollan, when Paige came, things heated up a little bit.

DA: With the staff?

MK: Yeah. We had a lay-off! Everybody around here was laying people off.

DA: I recall legends of a consulting company coming in and then a terrible sort of period where people were laid off after that.

MK: It was ugly. I mean, it was ugly.

DA: And that was under Paige?

MK: That was under Paige. And the Human Relations guy, now I can't think of his name, but we got into it at a public meeting about what was going on. They'd have you fill out these elaborate forms that I thought were just a distraction. After the discussion, Patty Walker said she thought he had threatened me.

DA: Who had threatened you?

MK: This HR guy.

DA: The who?

MK: The Human Resources guy.

DA: Oh. Patty Walker, that's Jim Walker's wife?

MK: Right, who was associate librarian here. And so she told Jim, and Jim...

DA: What was the situation? Why would the HR person threaten you?

MK: Well, he didn't like what I was saying.

DA: In the staff council meeting?

MK: Well, and in this big public meeting discussing the layoff. I can't even remember now what the issue was that we even got into over.

DA: You were being militant about it, were you?

MK: Well, I was just stating my point of view.

DA: Did you feel that he threatened you?

MK: Well, no, I did not think that he did, but it got a bit heated.

DA: So, what did Jim do?

MK: Nothing. [*Laughs*] But he wanted to offer support if necessary.

DA: He railed about it.

MK: We had another encounter, when we had the Deep Throat movie debate. That was another fun event.

DA: I do recall some history of that, too. Who brought the Deep Throat movie in?

MK: It was a student group. It was going to be shown on campus and we had a student, Marty Evers, and he was just dead set against it, as were many other people.

DA: This was going to be shown at the union?

MK: Yes, it was going to be shown at the union on campus. So, then there was so much complaint about it that they got together a group and were going to have a public hearing. So, Jim Walker was sort of like a moderator of this thing and people could come in and talk. So I got bulldozed into going in and talking, and what I agreed to do- because the Supreme court had ruled that what was pornographic or whatever, was not a fixed thing. It had to do with community values.

DA: Community standards.

MK: Community standards. So I said I would speak to that. So, I wrote a piece and spoke to that, and then Jim wanted to push me to render a judgement about this movie.

DA: A personal judgement?

MK: Yeah.

DA: You weren't the judge, he just wanted your opinion.

MK: Right, and I resisted, so we went around and around about it. I said "I'm not saying that this movie shouldn't be shown anywhere, but I think if people want to see this it should be shown down on 5th Street, where such movies are usually shown, not here on campus" That I just didn't think campus was the appropriate place to show such a film. Those were my community values. That I would feel better about my campus if they didn't do that. And Lorna Dawes was there, and she never said a word, but I could feel her saying "Yes!" But anyway, Jim and I remained friends.

DA: But they didn't show the movie, did they?

MK: I'm trying to remember.

DA: I don't believe they did

MK: I don't think we did, but I wouldn't bet my last dollar on that, either. But we had those kinds of events, there was always something like that going on. Then when they decided the faculty was going to censure- Jake Dorn, back then it was vice president of the faculty because the president of the university was president- so he was vice president of the faculty and there was this big brouhaha because we always were fighting over parking. Always. Once they started making people pay. When I first came it was all free and I had this beat up Volkswagen and I would just squeeze it in.

DA: A little bug?

MK: Yeah, a little bug, and I would push the seat way back so I could get out. It was just muddy and rocky, but it was free. So once they started charging us, we always fought about parking. It came out that the deans were getting free "A" parking places. Spiegel was giving them these, and there was outrage! People would get outraged about all kinds of things back then. So there was this vote to censure Andy Spiegel.

DA: And his job, he was what?

MK: He was Provost.

DA: Now he was provost before Ferrari?

MK: Yes. So, the news came out, you know, and we're sitting there in the honors office, and my space worked better for the camera so I had to vacate, so they're interviewing Jake in there about-

DA: You mean, the news? Like, Channel 7 or Channel 2 or whatever?

MK: Yeah! This was the first censure vote, no confidence vote.

DA: Over parking?

MK: Over parking. And their friendship survived that. I thought that was a strong testament to friendship.

DA: So ultimately, you worked here for 34 years, is that right?

MK: Yeah, and I was able to buy my graduate assistant time, a year and a half.

DA: So 36?

MK: Well, I ended up with 35. It was a year and a half, it translated to that.

DA: So you went through Kegerreis and Mulhollan, and so Mulhollan era sounded a bit tumultuous right from the get go, with the layoffs and everything.

MK: Well, he came in- well, we conned him into a raise early on and the Academic Council... Academic Council was-

DA: So, you sat at Academic Council, you had a position because-

MK: I was representing the professional staff.

DA: So you were representing professional staff members.

MK: That's what we called it back then.

DA: Professional Staff Council.

MK: Yes, Professional Staff Advisory Council. PSAC. It was PSAC and CSAC, back in those days.

DA: PSAC and CSAC. Okay. Not USAC and CSAC.

MK: Yeah. So, we had this benefits committee that Don Pabst in the Accountancy program, he was just brilliant, he did all this stuff, that's how we got vision coverage and all kinds of things. Then, of course, then came the time when they wanted to build the Nutter Center, and that of course was a huge thing.

DA: Mulhollan wanted to do that, right?

MK: He did, and they got that gift from Nutter which, as you've probably heard, I mean there's just been constant debate, you know, did he get more than he paid for and all.

DA: He sure did.

MK: All that kind of stuff, and what the Nutter Center was going to cost and what it was going to entail. I remember that. I would go sit in the back row at faculty meetings just for fun sometimes because I wanted to hear the debate.

DA: I must say, one of the things coming here, and I came in '96, and maybe it's because of my position or whatever, but there was so much contentiousness here, between faculty and- and this was in '96- between faculty and administration, and maybe you can talk about the change between Mulhollan and Harley Flack. I think Harley succeeded Mulhollan, right?

MK: Right

DA: But I don't remember that, coming from Toledo, I don't remember all that antagonism and anxiety and stuff, but when I got here it was just palpable.

MK: Flack was here?

DA: Yeah, Flack was here.

MK: Bad times. Well, Paige was... I just came to really like Paige as a human being and I loved Mary Bess.

DA: That was his wife?

MK: Mm hmm. They were more engaged. They had gotten involved in this freshman honorary society, on a plane trip somehow, so they sort of adopted this Alpha Lambda Delta, the freshman honor society. They would have us down there for all kinds of events. They were just very open with their time and their home. No pretensions, you know, I remember going in the hall bathroom, the guest bathroom once, and there was a pair of pantyhose in the sink, [*laughing*], and they had dogs, and they were just very regular people in so many ways. But Paige did a lot of really unpopular things, and Chuck Hathaway.

DA: Besides the Nutter Center, I don't remember, what else did he do?

MK: Well, then there were all the battles about General Education and revamping the curriculum. We've been through all of those wars, and people ended up, you know, in departments, not talking to each other for decades. Yeah, a lot of battles were fought.

DA: And so you went through a number of any of the directors of the honors program, and the last one you mentioned was Anna Bellasari.

MK: I still see Anna on a regular basis!

DA: Well, she was at the luncheon, the Retirees Luncheon!

MK: Yeah. Yeah.

DA: I think she told me to sit down or something.

MK: [*Laughs*] Behave.

DA: She was on the search committee when I was hired. Well, one of my search committees, when I was hired.

MK: She's a delightful human being. Then after Anna was Susan Carafiello, whose has served longer than anybody else in that position.

DA: Yeah. So Susan succeeded Anna, and what year was that?

MK: That was in the fateful year of 2001.

DA: Why do you say that was a fateful year?

MK: Well, because we were down there in the basement, you know, in our exile, while they were remodeling Millett and all, and my sister calls me on 9/11-

DA: Oh, I see.

MK: And she says, "Do you know what is happening?" And I said, "What?" I didn't know, I thought she was drunk. She doesn't even drink, but she just sounded so insane what she was trying to tell me. So I yelled out at Beverly Rowe, who was our long-time secretary, administrative assistant, and she couldn't find out anything on the computer because everything was jammed, and Susan was there, so we sent her to try and find out what was going on, and it took a while, I mean, it just took a while for everyone to learn what was happening. I didn't feel unsafe to be here or anything like that, that wasn't my reaction, but I guess a lot of people did. So that was a big bunch of tension.

DA: Sure.

MK: About whether or not people got to go home, and I think Lillie did not let the University College advisors go home, even people who had kids and stuff like that, so that ended up being problematic. But that was, like, Susan had just come on board when all of that blew.

DA: Barbara Gamstetter was my secretary at the time, and she went home without asking. She was so stressed, and she just left.

MK: Well, I have never seen the twin towers come down.

DA: No?

MK: I made a decision before I left Wright State that I didn't want to see it. I didn't want that in my head, so I didn't watch it.

DA: So, somehow, somewhere along the line you got interested in athletics and gender equity. Talk about that.

MK: Ah. I forget how I... I got appointed to Athletic Council through PSAC, and-

DA: Cusack was a director at the time?

MK: Cusack was the director at the time and then Paige was still president, and Title IX came down. He had had trouble with athletics back at his-

DA: Paige did?

MK: Yeah, at his last gig, so he wanted to do everything by the book. So, he appointed a committee to look at what the situation was.

DA: A committee apart from Athletics Council?

MK: Right, reporting to him.

DA: On Title IX?

MK: On Title IX, and so Elizabeth Harden was chair, and Peg Wynkoop- I don't know if you remember Peg- and I and a couple other people on there, and we did this thorough study, you know, we made our recommendations. Paige funded everything that we said.

DA: And what did you say? Scholarships and all the stuff to bring the university in line with appropriate Title IX standards? Scholarships and participation, uniforms, all that stuff, right?

MK: Right, so here's what we need to do now. So he funded that, and then we established a permanent gender equity committee on the Athletics Council.

DA: Is that when you became a part of Athletics Council?

MK: Well, that's when I just stayed on.

DA: You had been on it?

MK: Right, and that's why I got appointed to that committee, because I'd been there.

DA: Did you want to be in Athletics Council?

MK: Yeah, it was interesting!

DA: You were an athlete?

MK: Oh, no I was an active person but never in an organized sort of way. But I'm a huge tennis fan and I love college basketball. I'm a sports fan and I'm interested in those issues and I have always been interested in those issues and so I just stayed on, and I got trained, I got sent to some NCAA things, and I think you paid for me to go a couple of times.

DA: Probably.

MK: We went to the Title IX meetings and we learned more and more, and so I got to be the resident campus expert, particularly after Peg left. Then we went through two or three senior women administrators.

DA: And did you find that role fulfilling or frustrating or both?

MK: Oh, very frustrating, yeah. And every time I wanted to quit, Juanita Wehrle-Einhorn, who was the affirmative action officer would sit me down and say “No, we have to do this” and I’d say “Well, we’re not getting anywhere” and she’d say “No, we’re establishing a record, we have to establish the record every year.”

DA: Did you feel like the athletics department was not on board with appropriate levels on interest in equity? Or was it other things?

MK: I don’t want to overstate one way or the other but when I started doing reviews for the NCAA, back when they were doing certification reviews, one of the things I learned always about going to conferences, whether it was professional, or for honors, or discipline based, or doing these things for the NCAA, you learn how very like each other these like institutions are. So when I would go, because I always did the gender piece of that when I would go, I would see the same problems. The same softball/ baseball dichotomies. The same track is always treated like the poor orphan kid-

DA: And it still is. [*Laughs*]

MK: -and that’s just the way that it was. Men’s basketball was always elevated at these schools, because, you know, they never sent us- and you did the same stuff.

DA: Sure.

MK: You don’t go to a football school, so men’s basketball was the king of the heap. You’re always fighting against what is not just a norm here but is a norm everywhere.

DA: But it’s amazing how it has stayed so hidden still, isn’t it? I mean, you’re absolutely right, track was a good example. How few schools have tracks and how many schools use track as a way to enhance the appearance of-

MK: Proportionality.

DA: Proportionality, but it’s really a shell game, right? It’s moving things around, that’s all it is.

MK: When we recommended, we had a participation imbalance, but women’s golf would have fixed it. But Mike Cusack wanted track.

DA: He wanted the track team?

MK: He wanted the track team.

DA: Well, you had the indoor and outdoor piece, that's why.

MK: Yeah, the indoor/ outdoor piece, and then cross country.

DA: That's two teams for the price of one!

MK: Well, you get three!

DA: Three teams, cross country and indoor and outdoor track.

MK: Yeah, and sometimes I just do the numbers on track and I get mad all over again, because they work hard and they're just short-shrifted.

DA: But for some years weren't we like third in the country in some of those standards?

MK: Oh, yeah. And it was in track! It was because of that track team. I said, "It's immoral!" That you make all this hay off of this, and we just treat these athletes so poorly. I went on one audit and I can't remember- I couldn't say what school it was anyway- but the track team we met with, you know, you meet with student athletes, and we had a bunch of track kids in there, and the stuff they were telling us, we told them this isn't just a gender equity issue, this is a student athlete welfare issue, and our president really laid into their president.

DA: Oh, is that right?

MK: That's right, and they weren't going to certify them if they didn't make some changes in what they were doing for track.

DA: What school was that? [*Laughs*]

MK: So you learn that. You learn that no matter how... that Wright State is not unique. The one thing that struck me in the six or seven visits I went on, that where we were unique was in our facilities. I never saw any other like institution with anything like the Nutter Center or the rest of our facilities; I never was in a presidential dining room that had anything like the Wright Brothers Room. And all of our facilities were just so superior to what I would see in other places, so that was an interesting piece and that may be why we have some of the problems that we do.

DA: So you put in 34 years and you retired relatively young.

MK: I was 61.

DA: Yeah, that's not very old. Why step down?

MK: Well, there was a buyout.

DA: And that was 2010?

MK: Right, and I had my 35 years because I bought the graduate assistant time a few years earlier, I don't know, it just felt like it was the right time.

DA: It was the right time.

MK: Yeah

DA: And so as you look back on it, in your reflections as you talk about things that were impactful for you, anything else? What was the biggest change you've seen at Wright State in those 35 years? Obviously the facilities, the buildings have grown and the campus has expanded, but did you notice a change in students, for example?

MK: Oh, yeah. Gosh. Dramatic changes in students. When I first worked here, I never met anyone's parents. They would come in and have their initial interview in honors, their scholarship interview, they managed their own lives. They graduated and we had a reception for them, no parents. And as time went on, the parents have become more and more present. Then there were times when I would see the parent more than the student! *[Laughs]* I had this one parent and he kept coming in and he had a great kid. We had given him a pile of money, and he was just gangbusters and he would have like a 3.9 GPA in Computer Engineering, and he was just a good kid, and his dad always thought he should do more, more, more! He said "He's just not fulfilling his potential" and I said, "Do you want to trade? I will trade you right now". One girl for this boy in a heartbeat. He was a great kid, and he got a Microsoft internship one summer, and they offered him a full-time job when he graduated. And do you know what his dad did? He moved out there with him.

DA: Well, there you go.

MK: There you go. So, that's the change. That there are kids that I still stay in touch with that go back to those early seventies and I've never met their parents.

DA: Then there's parents you met, and you don't remember the kids.

MK: Yep. That changed dramatically, of having to figure out ways to deal with these parents.

DA: And the evolution of the university, the ups and downs, and now down. What are your thoughts on that?

MK: The thing I regret the most about what's happened is, I would say, what has happened to the faculty. That I look back at, you know, when I was here in 1976, 1974, 1975, the history department had six graduate assistants, and they had more faculty

positions than they probably do now. The religion department, they're not sure they're even going to survive. I mean, there are departments- it's not that anyone has said that you're on the hit list or anything, but that's what people worry about now. So that instead of this almost joyous experience that you had in the classroom, I think a lot of that kind of energy and verve and excitement, and the sense of being... the faculty were a smaller group, because we didn't have it expanded into all areas that we have it now, but people knew each other across disciplines and across colleges and that was one of the single best things about honors. I thought about this the other day and I wanted to make this point, that I knew everybody on campus.

DA: Well, you straddled the academics, and the-

MK: The student services. Eleanor would call me up, you know, "Mary, I want you to do this", so I knew that there was no place on campus, except maybe the med school, that we didn't have interaction with a lot. And then with my work on the Athletics Council, I knew all of those people.

DA: What was the most fun you had, in your time here?

MK: I don't know, a lot of it was fun.

DA: What about the other end. What was the roughest part of your time here?

MK: I think towards the end, I just didn't have the enthusiasm for it that I'd always had, and it became more impersonal. The kids had always been just a huge part of it for me, I loved working with that population, and you got a chance to really get to know some of these kids over time, and to see them come in as freshman and to see them grow up and mature, and then to write them their medical school references and stuff like that. And there was less of that sort of thing, and toward the end I worked with mostly a population of people that were applying for special graduate fellowships, like Jim Dahlman, and kids like that. But I didn't know all the honor students. For the first 20 years, I knew pretty much everybody.

DA: Is that right? What else? Anything you want to talk about, any last things you want to talk about?

MK: The opportunities, I just got to do so many different things. I got to write, we had the first newsletter on campus in honors. It was the first newsletter and we won a national award that year, we got the National Collegiate Honors Council Award.

DA: Well, that's the thing, you were pioneers, right? You paved the way for everything that followed.

MK: Right, and in honors that was one of our functions, I think. We were to try things out. Like we were the first- I think I taught the first service learning class on campus, called Service First, because Lillie really wanted to get into that, and Hathaway had

wanted us to get into that, because he wanted us to get a Rhodes Scholar, which wasn't going to happen. But we took kids to the ballet, and the opera, and up to Columbus to see a play, and we would take them to dinner, and we had a special fund- I haven't talked about the Bingo Club.

DA: The Bingo Club?

MK: We got a bunch of money from the Bingo Club, and we had this fund called the director's fund, and it was money that wasn't set aside for scholarships but you could spend it at the director's discretion, so we used it for things like that. Because Hathaway said, "Our students don't know how to eat in a nice restaurant. They don't have culture, we need to..." you know, and that was true. Many of them came from small farming communities, and so we showed them some stuff. I did the service class. We did service projects and they each had an individual one, and we'd do these group ones, where we'd go down to Habitat and, you know, bang nails and stuff like that. So, it was just fun to do so many different things. I had certain features of my job that were repetitive, but there was always something new and something different.

DA: To keep you interested and maintain a level of excitement.

MK: Right, and the wonderful students you got to work with, and we worked pretty intensely with a lot of faculty, teaching the classes. You know, it was very social and a very engaged experience.

DA: Well, good for you. And you are one of the pioneers, and it was a great honor talking to you and Jim Sayer and Jim Brown and Davenport, and others that sort of made this place the great place it is. I think still is, right?

MK: Yeah, I still think we have a future. I keep saying, "Don't let this go down the tubes!"

DA: Well, thanks Mary!

MK: Thank you!