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WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY
Retirees Association Oral History Project
Interview with Allen Spetter

Interview Information

Interview date: January 31, 2020

Interviewer: Kathy Morris (KM), Associate VP for Student Affairs, Retired

Interviewee: Allan Spetter (AS), Professor Emeritus, Dept of History;
Exec. Secretary/ Treasurer (Former), Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations;
Board Member (Former), Dayton-Montgomery County Public Library

Interview Transcript

Kathy Morris: Well, welcome to anyone who's choosing to tune in. My name is Kathy Morris, I am the former Associate Vice-President for Student Affairs here at Wright State, and I'm also the chair for historical preservation committee for the Wright State University Retiree's Association. Today is Friday, January 31, 2020, and I'm interviewing Dr. Allan Spetter, Professor Emeritus, Department of History, College of Liberal Arts, and someone who I am so excited to interview, because, number one, you were the first faculty member- I swear- who made a kind gesture towards me when I was a new employee, and number two, we have some family histories that kind of connect, and I just was so looking forward to connecting with you today. So, let's get started. Let's start by just kind of easing into this. Let's talk a little bit about where you came from, where'd you grow up?

Allan Spetter: I was born in Brooklyn, New York, [*thumbs up motion*] alright! When I finished high school, my family moved to Newark, New Jersey, which is just a few miles from downtown Manhattan. So, basically, I lived in the New York area until I moved down to Ohio, and I had only been out to this area of the country once, in April of '66, when I went to one of the two national conventions of historians, and I was hired there to come to- or they made me an offer- to come to Wright State. And the reason that I accepted that- and in those days, history jobs and liberal arts jobs were open by the hundreds, and there were new universities like Wright State opening all over the country- so, they offered me a job that would start in January, and that perfectly fit what I was looking for, to start in the middle of the year. So, I'd only been out to Cincinnati, and you know that famous picture that New Yorkers think that there's nothing west of the Hudson River, and that was quite a lesson for me to find out that's true! [*Laughs*] I didn't even know where Dayton was, and that's the truth.

KM: So, you came here by way of Newark, but where did you go to college? Where did you do your-

AS: Rutgers.

KM: Did you do all of your studies there?

AS: I did my undergraduate at the Newark branch of Rutgers. That's the urban campus of Rutgers University, a very small school in those days. Rutgers was, as they called themselves, THE state university, like THE Ohio State University, and Rutgers had branches all over the state- in Newark, Camden, and a variety of other places. Newark was probably the biggest, but it was only maybe two-thousand students, something like that. That was my undergraduate, and graduate I did at the main campus of Rutgers, in New Brunswick, New Jersey.

KM: Alright, and so PhD from there?

AS: Correct.

KM: So, you said that there were lots of positions at the time that were open to people in your field. Were there-

AS: Very much like Wright State, there were new state universities opening all over the country.

KM: And so, you landed in Ohio. Did you even look at anyplace other than Dayton, Ohio?

AS: I can't really remember if I had other interviews. I don't know, I think early in the process I met with this group from Wright State, they seemed like a very nice bunch, they also said I could teach my specialty, and the salary was competitive. I really was pleasantly surprised, and they said I would start in January, because somebody was going on leave, and I said, "Perfect".

KM: So, Dr. Kegerreis was president then, correct? Or was Brage Golding still-

AS: No, I think Brage Golding was still president, yes.

KM: So, you end up in Dayton, Ohio, after your entire life spent on the east coast-

AS: Correct.

KM: -and what was your impression of the campus? I mean, obviously, it was much different then. But what was your impression when you first walked on campus?

AS: Much different is an exaggeration. They only opened the second building when I arrived here- first was Allyn, second was Millett- and they were just opening Millett, and that's all there was. This was like a giant cornfield out in Greene County.

KM: And what was your perception of the students who were enrolling at the university at the time?

AS: Well, a lot of students came here- that I think I'm absolutely correct on this- a lot of students came here thinking it was going to be just another version of Sinclair Community College, and they were not prepared for what might be expected of them at a university level. You know, this is a real, 4-year university. I don't think they were prepared for it. But students and faculty had to adjust.

KM: What was your department like? How many-

AS: I don't remember how many were there already, but it was probably about half the size that it would eventually be. The university opened in the fall of '64, and I think from '66 to '68, and maybe a little beyond, that's when they started to do the bulk of the hiring. A couple of hundred faculty all across. In the early years, everybody could have met up on the 4th floor of Millett and played bridge. It was a very chummy atmosphere, no matter what college you were in.

KM: And even getting to the campus must have been an interesting challenge, because we had no highway system, and there wasn't much. Like you said, it was kind of a corn field, so-

AS: We haven't rehearsed this, have we? Because the very first day I came out here, so help me, my car wouldn't start. [*Laughing*] I had to come out here by cab, that's the absolute truth. Because we came out here with a- not an old car, but a car that wasn't very reliable. Remember the Corvair?

KM: Oh, yes, my dad had one. My dad had one.

AS: Yeah. My wife had a Corvair when she was in college.

KM: Oh, that's funny.

AS: Anyway, yeah, that's the truth, and yes, I had no idea where I was going out to Greene County. "Woo", I thought it was further out in the woods.

KM: It had to be like culture shock for you.

AS: Absolutely, People don't understand what it's like growing up in a place like Brooklyn. I mean, the ultimate city, really. The ultimate city, and then moving out here to this area of the country, and Dayton is a small city. You adjust, and they always say 'it's a great place to bring up kids', so that's the compensation for it. But I've never completely abandoned New York. You know, they say 'you can take me out of New York, but you can't take New York out of me'.

KM: Well, I think when I first met you, I could tell right away that you were an east coaster.

AS: The kids used to ask me- the students used to ask me, "Where are you from?" I knew what they were getting at, and I'd say, "Atlanta". [*Laughing*] You have to know my sense of humor.

KM: Oh, that's great. So, did you see in that first decade of your time at the university... what kind of things do you remember most about the institution's evolution in those early years?

AS: Well, remember when it started, it was an offshoot of Ohio State and Miami. I wouldn't have taken the position unless they told me that we were going to become an independent university, so that was a really big step. And as I know you're familiar with my career, I got into a big controversy within a couple of years, because the then president of the university was trying to unload two people in the English Department who had been- one had been criticizing him, and they basically put the other one together so that it wouldn't look like they were trying to get rid of the guy who criticized the administration. So, that was a battle I think I won. First of many here at Wright State. The first president basically established an atmosphere here of antagonism towards the faculty, and I believe that has always existed here. Some have been better than others. That first president, Brage Golding, once called the faculty "immature". My response to that is, well, we were all only 25-30 years old at the time, so maybe we were, we were mostly hired out of graduate school. So, we had that antagonism between the administration and the faculty from the very beginning, and that lasted for many years.

KM: How would you characterize the relationship between the faculty and the staff?

AS: It's hard to say. I don't think I ever had any real problems with the staff in the History Department that I'm aware of, it varied a lot. You're talking more than the secretaries?

KM: More like just the general sense of how the entities that function within a university interact. Because at this point in time, there are very clear distinctions between classified and unclassified staff, and the faculty, and heaven knows in the last year-

AS: Yeah.

KM: -some of that's been particularly evidenced. But any observations about just the staff in general and how they worked with faculty, what those relationships were like?

AS: I don't recall having any serious problems of my own, so I couldn't speak beyond that much, and mostly my interactions would have been within the History Department. I thought we always had support when we needed it, so I didn't have any serious problems with staff.

KM: You know, your college has always been the largest as long as I've been affiliated with the university, and it's so unique in that there are so many different pieces and parts. How would you characterize the evolution of the college, and the growth of programs and units?

AS: Again, I can only talk about History, and then if I start talking about that I'm going to get into administration, because I personally had difficult relations with a person who was the dean at the college for a very long time, and, for instance, since you're familiar with the archival and museum program, the graduate program- which I might add is one of the most successful programs in the university, and we never got any support to speak of from the dean, and I mean that. We got a few assistantships, that was it, but nothing else really was done in a generous or meaningful way. But that was part of the evolution, creating that program. People... I don't think anybody at Wright State knows how successful that program has been. We have staffed people all over the world- some of them in Europe, all over the United States, the Smithsonian- you name a museum, our graduates have been there. Nobody even knows about it to speak of.

KM: You know, I guess as a person who... you know, we all live in our silos when you're at an institution, and you try your best to expand your awareness of what else is happening across campus, but my observation was that- at least certainly in my last five years at the university- was more and more awareness of the archives of the university, because of the university reaching milestones of existence, and also because of the relationship to the Wright Brothers and the family, and Dawne Dewey, of course, and the work that she did. But I think that in the next few years, there's going to be a rather large spotlight shining on it, once they move all of these pieces and have them all in their own special place.

AS: So, you're going to be in a separate building across the road?

KM: My understanding is it is to move across the street. Chris can probably give you more of the details of that.

AS: That's what I- I thought that had happened already, because I'm so out of touch.

KM: Well, I think a lot of... if I'm correct, some fundraising initiatives kind of went sideways in recent years, after some very, very successful years of fundraising. But, anyway, I digress, I got you off-track here.

AS: That's okay. No, I thought we had a lot in common that we could talk about.

KM: Well, it's interesting. Let's talk a little bit more about the administration, and the role of the administration during your tenure. You mentioned some frustrations, concerns, with the dean in your college and some leadership.

AS: Yes.

KM: What do you recall other people saying about the administration as the university was growing and changing?

AS: Well, I tend to generalize, but many faculty, particularly... let me digress. I said when we I came out of graduate school, we could almost pick our job, that's how many there were. I had like six possible universities, all like Wright State, all new state universities. Then, within 3, 4, 5 years, there were almost no jobs to be had. They produced too many PhD's. That's a long story I could get into. In any case, a lot of people- depending on their discipline, particularly- are so happy to have a job, and to perhaps obtain tenure where they have security, that they will never speak out against the administration. That's the kind of frustration I felt. They just go along with whatever they were told to do, and I was never like that, that's my problem. So, a few people- there's a couple of very outspoken people in my department now, but generally speaking, only a few of us did the heavy lifting, if you will, and most people just went along with whatever existed at the time. I can't remember any single individual in the liberal arts- I'd have to think about it, I might not be correct- I can't remember any single individual really speaking out against any kind of administrative abuse, if I want to call it that. There was one guy in the English Department, who was chairman when I was chairman of the History Department. He did speak out on occasion, but generally he would withdraw and not follow through, so I often found myself alone challenging the dean, and that can cost you, and it did.

KM: What do you think it cost you?

AS: It took me a hell of a long time to get promoted to full professor-

KM: How long did it take you? I'm always interested in hearing about that.

AS: Yeah, I know that. Well, first of all, you have to publish, and I published a couple of articles, and not that much more, and I finally published- I co-authored a book, a pretty well-respected book in a well-respected series. And of course, that's... I called the promotion process that used to be- I'm not sure what it's like now- arbitrary and capricious, based on what the dean wants to do, whether he wants you to be promoted or not. It actually took me, I believe, about twenty years to go from associate to full professor. And many of my colleagues never made it, and not in liberal arts necessarily, but in the sciences even more difficult. They have to have a grant, as I understand it, to get to full professor. So, I knew several people who never made it beyond associate professor. That bothered me, because I was never willing to accept that, and they... 'That's it, that's life. As long as I have a job and I have tenure, and I'm making a decent salary, I'm not going to speak out and do anything to disturb the situation'. Yes, I'm not necessarily saying that I deserved promotion earlier, but I had an excellent public service record, outstanding teaching credentials, and some reasonable amount of publication. And I had to fight my way tooth and nail to get a promotion, even after the book came out. That's a long story, and I don't know if you want me to go into it.

KM: Sure. Yeah.

AS: Oh, okay. Well, here it is.

KM: I'm really interested in this in part because I think so many people who might be tuning in to these stories, if they are staff members, don't necessarily know or understand what promotion and tenure is like. And I'm sure it varies by college, as you've described.

AS: Here's mine. And I only get my information second-hand. The last time around, after my book came out, my understanding was- I mean, I know it for a fact- the department supported me unanimously, the college supported me unanimously. The university committee used to require a two-thirds vote, and after all those years, and all I went through, they were going to turn me down by one vote short of two-thirds. I said, "This is unbelievable, I can't believe it", and the dean at the time sort of apologized- "Sorry, I didn't pay enough attention to it". I said, "I'm not willing to accept this", and the committee was overruled by the university president. Which a lot of faculty don't like that to take place, and that it should be a faculty decision. But in this case, they knew they'd done something wrong.

KM: So, this university committee is comprised of faculty across all the colleges.

AS: Yeah. I think they are elected to the college P & T committee, I'm not even sure. And I couldn't figure it out, you know, how could that be? It's not possible. Now I think it's a simple majority, I think the union got that changed. But it was two-thirds then, and it was one. They would turn me down by one vote. I used to say, "How could you do that to a person?" I've never heard of anything like that.

KM: So, who was president at that time who overruled?

AS: Mulhollan.

KM: Now, I think of him as the president that grew the physical plant of the campus.

AS: He wanted the Nutter Center. But whatever might have been thought about it, Rudy Fichtenbaum and others predicted this was going to cost us a fortune, and I think we still lose about a million dollars a year on the Nutter Center. I'm not sure, I don't know if that's true.

KM: I'm probably not the right person to talk about that one. Because I'm of the opinion- we're getting off the conversation here- but I'm of the opinion that the Nutter Center helped establish Wright State's place in Dayton, Ohio, and I think it's done so many good things for the university, so I'm less annoyed by that. But what annoys me- if we're going to talk about that- is I remember when the Nutter Center was being built, that we were told that it was going to be... first of all, they assessed students a hefty amount for that, and that was for the capital project, it was to build the project. And our understanding was, at least my understanding was, that once that was done, there would be discussion about how those dollars- which of course they're not

going to stop assessing students- how those dollars would be used. That never happened. The university decided to use it in other ways, so there were programs and services that got the short shrift, and I thought that was incredibly unfair, but-

AS: The faculty had a major showdown with Mulhollan, at a big faculty meeting, and I can always remember him saying, "This isn't just going to be for basketball. We're going to have tractor pulls..."

KM: Woo hoo!

AS: "We're going to have monster cars"- whatever they're called, monster trucks- and the faculty was going, 'What, is this guy serious?' Now, he came from Arizona State, which had a major athletic program, and so we understood some of it. I don't know the latest figures, but I think we consistently lose about a million dollars each year on the Nutter Center. Now, let me just add, as I often say, I don't think they ever draw 5,000 people for a basketball game-

KM: They do. They just had 6,900 the other night.

AS: Really?

KM: Yeah, the men's game. Wright State's men's team is-

AS: Who were they playing? Yeah, this year's different, their best team ever.

KM: They're doing really, really well. But they've done really well under Scott Nagy. But, you know- and I'm going to do my little spiel here, as it relates to Athletics, which for many years it was under Student Affairs- but those 300 or so students that are part of Wright State's Athletic Department are, for the most part, exceptional students. They have consistently for the last... I think it's, like, for the last nearly forty semesters or terms, had their students with well over a 3.0 GPA, collectively.

AS: Good.

KM: And they graduate them at a much higher rate than we graduate the rest of the student body. And on top of all of that-

AS: That's quite a commentary.

KM: And on top of that, the vast majority of them have next to no scholarship funding. They are walk-ons, or they get a tiny little stipend, but the only athletic programs that receive full rides are men's and women's basketball, women's volleyball... and I think partial scholarships go to

men's and women's soccer. But the rest of them all are just eking by. So, I think they're a good value for the university.

AS: Well, if they drew 6,900 for a game, that's quite an improvement. Because I used to say I've never seen them draw 5,000, except when they had a playoff game, I think, on occasion. So maybe the fact that they have one of the best records in the country-

KM: They do.

AS: - that I can't say that I'd deny that might put us on the map, maybe.

KM: I... you know, there's obviously a couple of ways of looking at every little thing-

AS: Of course.

KM: -but I do remember the hoopla over the Nutter Center project- you know, the construction- and I also remember how as a person on the staffing side, being really ticked off about how we couldn't get anyone in the administration to give us a straight line about how those dollars- since the building's been paid off- how those dollars can be reallocated for other things the university needed.

AS: That would be Mulhollan's second-in-command. What was his name?

KM: Ed Spanier?

AS: No. What was he, vice-president or provost?

KM: Um... it was Ed Spanier, until...

AS: Spanier I thought ran financial [*best guess- hard to understand*]

KM: You mean Perry Moore?

AS: No.

KM: We didn't have a... oh...

AS: What the heck was his name. I can't think of it. [*Charles Hathaway, VP for Academic Affairs*]

KM: Well, I know Ed Spanier was the business guy.

AS: This guy, whatever his name was, he never told anything that was the truth in the entire time that he was here, and various individuals found it out the hard way. When I complained to him about the promotion and tenure process, he said, "We're going to do something about it". Never. They did nothing.

KM: Hmm.

AS: That's one of the reasons we have a union. A lot of people were fed up with the promotions process.

KM: Let's talk about the union.

AS: Yes.

KM: Because I know that the union was created during your time here, and I want to hear more about your role in that.

AS: Well, the godfather of the union is really Mel Goldfinger, and actually Adrian Corbett was about as important as Mel in getting the union off the ground. One of the things I know that she did was to compare our health benefits with I think every state university in Ohio to see how far off we were. And once I heard what they were doing, I eagerly got on board, and I took charge of what I could do in Liberal Arts. I knew that I could convince enough people in Liberal Arts. I just had to speak to them, face-to-face. So, Mel used to go around this campus, office by office by office, and distribute literature. He carried like a postman's bag around his shoulders. He was a riot. A really talented man, a brilliant guy. I just went door to door in Millett, and most people said, 'of course I'll join', and I don't even know if anybody in Liberal Arts ever turned me down. The problem is the people in other colleges who thought they were too good for a union. So, that was difficult in convincing many of them. But we won the vote. That was a dramatic moment when we had the vote for whether we want a union or not. I can remember- I won't mention any names, but two people I met an hour before the polls were closed, I said, "Did you vote?", and they said, "Oh, no, we haven't", and I said, "Get over there and vote", and they promised me they would. So, we won by a very narrow margin, but-

KM: Are there any universities, public universities in Ohio, that do not have a union?

AS: I don't know if Miami has ever had a union, I'm not sure.

KM: I know- I grew up in the Cleveland area, and everything up there is unionized.

AS: Sure, yeah. It's AAUP, a professional union. But it's made a big difference for faculty. Some people may not even appreciate it. Obviously, when they put in the first minimum salary ever in the history of Wright State, who benefits except Liberal Arts? We're always the lowest paid people. So, somebody benefits from that, and a lot of other things that were accomplished. I mean, I'm sorry there had to be a strike, but I think it took a lot of guts for them to do it, and they did it. And I wasn't out here, but I heard that quite a few people ignored the picket lines and continued to teach, which was sad for me, but-

KM: I wasn't up here, I had already retired when that happened, and I think so many of us were kind of grieving what we were observing, you know, sitting on the outside, and that was just kind of like one more thing to cast Wright State in a less than positive light.

AS: Of course. Well, as I said earlier, from the beginning, the administration, no matter who it's been- there have been some exceptions- have been hostile towards the faculty, for whatever reason. For instance, I'm known for telling it like it is. The Academic Council was loaded from the beginning. It had administrators, it had students, and then it had faculty. So, we're one of three groups, and unfortunately, the students always tended to side with the administrators, for whatever reason. So, we were always outvoted, and never got anything that would go our way. I could tell what I really think about the Academic Council and its history, but I don't think it's appropriate [*laughs*]. It's a little off-color.

KM: What do you think the relationships among faculty, staff, and administration are like right now? What have your colleagues and friends been saying to you about what they are seeing?

AS: Well, it's my understanding that they got rid of about every single person they could possibly get rid of, so I can't imagine what the morale is like now. Now, the first to go are always the unclassified staff, because they have no protection. Although, I guess depending on how long you've been here, you get a certain time?

KM: Um, yeah, they do get a certain period of time, but unfortunately for the people who I think were in those roles, you kind of get like shoved into a closet somewhere, and really if you have any brains in your head you're trying your best just to get out of there and move on, because it's not pleasant.

AS: And they give you nothing to do.

KM: It wouldn't be a pleasant situation. You can't call it a severance, because the expectation is that you are here, but... yeah, it was very painful to see that.

AS: And I understand, like, there's almost no secretaries left in Liberal Arts? They've doubled-up people, and tripled-up people.

KM: And student employment has been cut quite a bit, too, because budgetarily, everybody's had to reduce, reduce, reduce. So, whereas the university, for a long time Career Services reported to me, and student employment was a part of that, the payroll for student employment was a more significant challenge for the university than the payroll for faculty and staff. Because students are coming into the system all the time, and every two weeks they were getting paid, and then you have to re-enroll them, then terminate them at certain points along the year, and it's an enormous, cumbersome task. And then you've got situations where you've got students who are only permitted to work in work-study environments. So, say you're in the History Department, and your budget only allows for work-study. Well, there aren't any work-study students, so you don't have any student employees.

AS: Right.

KM: It... it was complicated, and the reduction in student employment had a huge impact on campus, because we relied on not only student undergrads, but grad assistants. Those positions were cut all over the place, too.

AS: I can't imagine what it's like in History now. As I would like to say, again, we never got any real and equal support from the dean, and we never got the positions we asked for, and we never got the money we asked for, so I can't imagine what it's like now.

KM: Challenging. Challenging.

AS: You're closer to it than I am since you're only retired a few years, but would you say that morale is a problem here now? I don't mean to shift this.

KM: oh, I would say that that's true. It's not as bad as it was this time a year ago. Because I think this time a year ago, we were just wrapping up the strike and people were feeling pretty wounded, and it was raw. Emotions were really running pretty high. But I still think it's hard. You know, people are trying to figure out how to identify the needs they have in their departments, whether it's an academic unit or an administrative unit, and then figure out how they can justify the hiring of any new positions.

AS: Well, without putting you on the spot, do you happen to know why Schrader really resigned? Is there a reason that is known?

KM: Oh, I don't know that there's ever been any reason that would ever be publicly given to any of us. I'm sure we've all heard versions of why. But, you know, one thing that I think was pretty obvious around this time last year is that the strike was creating a very... it was very contentious, and staff- my colleagues, unclassified staff- were feeling very uncomfortable. People were being asked to teach classes. Staff were being asked to teach classes. Awkward. Students were kind of being recruited from different factions to do different things, and it was

really, really uncomfortable, and it was... god, I was reading between the lines of the stories in the Dayton Daily News, and you could get a sense that administration and the board were not... it didn't seem like things were all that copacetic. That was just, you know, you read between the lines.

AS: But typically for Wright State, in its history, they usually pass the job on from one, to another, to another, to another. They brought this woman in as provost, almost certainly knowing that she was going to be the next president of the university. They didn't do a national search. I don't think they've done one in quite a while. So, that's what goes on. I used to say that in Liberal Arts, as far as I know- and I'm out of touch now- but in Liberal Arts, in the entire history of the university, I believe there was only one legitimate search for the dean. And mostly it was just one picked the next, picked the next, picked the next.

KM: If I recall correctly, I can think of one person who was external in the College of Liberal Arts for a dean's position.

AS: I can't tell you if that's correct.

KM: Okay, this is what happens when you're gone even for just three years...um... she left for a provost position, a female. [*Kristin Sobolik*]

AS: Oh, Mazey?

KM: No, not Mary Ellen. Oh, this is terrible. I'm having a moment. She was the person in the position before the current dean, Linda Caron.

AS: Yeah. I can't remember who it was before then.

KM: I see her face, but it's just not coming to me.

AS: I may have completely missed that.

KM: But that's the only one that I can think of. Everyone else was, as you said, someone who'd been part of the college. Yeah, it's been interesting times here, and I know there are just a couple of new board positions that have just been filled. It's almost like a whole new landscape to me, even in three years, you know, in what has changed.

AS: Of course.

KM: So, I'm not really in any position to even comment. I never met the president, the president who left.

AS: Schrader?

KM: I never met her, and I never met the person who was interim. The man who was brought in to just kind of begin the process of dismantling things and doing the budget cuts. Yeah, it's tough times.

AS: Well, I think Schrader would be described as a term I use frequently in such situations. She was like the ax woman. They brought her in to just cut to the bone, get rid of everything you can. She was willing to do that, I guess, and that's what happened. And once she did her job, she's dispensable, you know, you can get rid of her.

KM: Well, I think one thing we all kind of became aware of is that no one is irreplaceable. You can hope that during the time that you're doing your work that you're putting a mark on it, and that you're doing things that contribute to student success, and you're helping people get to the finish line and go after their dreams, you know?

AS: Right, yeah.

KM: That's what you're hoping for, but I remember telling myself- and I'm interested in how you were feeling the day that you left- for me it was I had to kind of let go of the title I had, the jobs I've done, and my role here. Because it's all going to change, and that's the way it is. Life goes on, and you just have to let go. So, how was it for you? Because for me, when I left, there was a voluntary retirement, and 150 of us walked out the door, at the end of September in 2016.

AS: I see.

KM: It was a very large exodus, and three of the five senior staff in Student Affairs left that day. So, it was a big deal. When you left, how were you feeling?

AS: You know, I loved teaching at a university. That's the career I had decided on very early on while in grad- I wouldn't have been in graduate school if that's not what I wanted to do. So, it was hard for me to give it up. I really enjoyed it, although there were trying parts to it, too.

KM: What did you like the most about it? The teaching?

AS: What I liked most about it is that on occasion, we had an outstanding student who we helped groom, who went on to- we had, in History, we had people who went on to law school, medical school, PhD's- I'm very proud of that accomplishment, and we tried to steer them to the right university for what they wanted.

KM: Were you teaching both graduate and undergraduate courses?

AS: I think we all did. Like, we taught maybe one seminar- graduate seminar- a year. Mostly, we all are busy with teaching Western Civ or U.S. History, the basic courses. And remember, at one time, we had 400 people in a class. That was a nightmare. But in the smaller groups where I could interact with the students, I really felt good about it. And when a student really showed some promise, that makes you feel really good, if you can have some kind of effect on that kid on furthering their career. But when you get all the others who are struggling, who as I said, they didn't really know what it was going to be like coming to a university. I remember in the early years at Liberal Arts, we had a group of graduate students, actually, teaching freshman English, and they were brutal on the kids. Many of them were brutal. They didn't know what they were getting into when they came here to teach freshman English, to kids who some of them couldn't really write a paragraph, okay? They didn't really know about that, and that's not what they went to graduate school to do, to teach that kind of student. So, you know, we can't all end up at Harvard, and we do our best under the circumstances, and I think most of our faculty have done an outstanding job. Maybe not everybody.

KM: Are you... you mentioned getting together with a group of retirees from your area. Is that still something you're doing?

AS: They were mostly in the sciences, because it was started by Rubin Battino. Sadly- I had to mention this somewhere along the way- at least three of the guys who were in the group have passed away. One very recently- Lenny Cargan, from Sociology- within the past week. But one guy I really admired, he was my mentor, Noel Nussbaum, who was in Biology, and Ira Fritz, who was a good friend, who I think was also in Biology. So, the group's getting older, Rubin Battino still tries to keep it together, but it's not easy. We used to meet every Wednesday, then he went to every other Wednesday, now it's once a month on Wednesday, and so on and so forth. It was an interesting group, and I don't know if they'll continue for much longer. Rubin tries. I've sort of advised him, "I don't think we can meet every week, Rubin", but it was hard for him to accept that. But he did. We always meet at Panera now, we used to go around to different locations, but he likes Panera, so we meet at Panera.

KM: And since he's in charge of the group, he gets to go where he wants [*laughs*].

AS: Right.

KM: So, when you retired, what kinds of things did you choose to put your energies into?

AS: Um... you know, I often tell this and it's true. I worked very hard from the time I was- beginning when I was still in high school. At one time, I had three different jobs. I was a graduate student with an assistantship, which required me to do research. I was actually a substitute teacher for a year. When I started- this is going to sound like the Middle Ages- it was in a small suburb I lived in outside of Newark. I did that exclusively. Believe it or not- because most of my students couldn't relate to anything like this- the pay for substitute teachers in this district was sixteen dollars a day. Then they raised it to eighteen, which was more than a ten

percent increase, and I was overjoyed. So, I subbed, I was a graduate assistant, and I also worked for the Newark Star Ledger, one of the two biggest papers in New Jersey.

KM: What were you doing?

AS: I started out as a job that probably no longer exists, as the guy who did the... you know, I would go out for the coffee. Copyboy. I'd go out for the coffee and donuts, and do other little jobs, but eventually I got a place on the paper. For awhile I was on the sports department, and then I was a reporter, and for my last assignment before I left Newark was to cover the civil rights movement and the anti-poverty movement under Johnson. It was a long time ago. I got to meet some fascinating people, it was very enjoyable and exciting.

KM: Do you think those experiences cemented your points of view, your-

AS: Certainly. You know, I proudly say I'm rather liberal, which is no longer a popular thing to admit in America- who would ever think that we would come to that point. But I've always been in favor of civil rights, you can't help it when you grow up in Brooklyn and you live in Newark. My daughter went to the Dayton Public Schools. So, I try to bring up my kids the right way, open-minded, and I did my best in those areas. I wasn't a militant, I wasn't out on the front line, but I supported a lot of activities. When I was in college, some of my colleagues went on something similar to the Freedom Rides. Not to the Deep South, but to a place like Maryland, which was also completely segregated, and I'll never forget, something that was pretty much a shock to me- because living in the north my whole life and New York, I never really experienced this kind of thing- but they came back with a menu from a pizza place, you know, it had pizza and whatever else they had, and the menu said, "\$100 cover, \$100 minimum". I mean, you had to spend two hundred dollars just to go in the place, and obviously, that was if you were black, that's how they get you out. So, these were all eye-opening things to me, and I got more and more involved.

KM: What were your observations of the city of Dayton, when you got here?

AS: Well, to tell you the truth, since I never really experienced it, I didn't know that Dayton for all intents and purposes was a completely segregated school system. I mean, I tell people openly, and nobody else could really compare to it, that I had a black teacher when I was in the sixth grade in New York. You wouldn't see that in too many other places in the country. Not that my school system was all that integrated, but it was beginning to change, and my parents, along with everyone else, participated in what is called "white flight"; they kept moving further and further away from the city. We went out to a suburb of Newark, and that's where I lived before I came to Dayton. But we lived in Brooklyn and in Newark in heavily integrated communities.

KM: What are your thoughts about Wright State today? Like, if you were to come back and teach a class-

AS: -yes

KM: -what would you say to a group of fresh-faced students? Let's say you had a... let's choose an upper-class set of students, not a group of freshmen who were kind of clueless about what they were doing. What would you say to them?

AS: I would probably prefer the freshmen, because as I've told friends of mine whose kids are college aged- that's probably no longer true- but I would tell them, and I mean this- at one point, anyway- the education at Wright State is equal to any of the other state universities in Ohio, except maybe Ohio State, which has unlimited resources and personnel to do whatever they wish. But as far as any of the other state universities, I think we provide the same quality of education. Now, we might have slipped in that regard in the last couple of years, but I still think we provide an outstanding education. If the kids are serious.

KM: Did you say both your children graduated from Wright State? Did they go here.

AS: No, no. My oldest daughter graduated from Indiana, and my other daughter and my son graduated from Ohio State.

KM: I was one of those people who told- well, because you know this story- I told my three, I remember saying to them, "You will go to Wright State, at least for your first year".

AS: Yeah. Right.

KM: Because they didn't know what the heck they wanted to do. So, "You're going to go here for your first year, and if something becomes very evident to you that it's just not fitting for you, then we'll talk about it". But once they were here, they found their niche and they loved it here.

AS: It's... yeah. It's been tarnished in the last few years, but it was an outstanding and very decent and solid education here.

KM: I would agree with you, and I don't know that I would say that the academic programs have suffered, in terms of quality. I would say that the students that I've talked to still talk with pride about being in programs here. So, I think for a lot of students, what's happening is like [*waves hand over head*], it kind of is over their head. They're focused on doing what they need to do.

AS: For instance, do you know if they still teach German here at all?

KM: That I couldn't tell you.

AS: Yeah, they were slashing the Modern Language Department, and getting rid of a few languages, and I think they may have done something like that. I think they basically merged the Classics, Religion, and Philosophy Departments, and I'm not sure about all of the others. The Art, Theatre, and Music Departments are still okay, I don't know if they've shrunk at all-

KM: You are aware of what they're going to be doing with the sciences?

AS: No. Bombshell.

KM: Well, at our retiree's board meeting- the last one, or the one before- the woman who is an associate provost who came out of the School of Professional Psychology, a really interesting background in forensic science, that's her field- but she said that it's expected that Nursing, the School of Professional Psychology, and several health related specialties, some of which are housed in Education and some of which are in Liberal Arts, will be conjoined, and that the College of Education is the college that is probably going to see the greatest reduction, if not-

AS: Really?

KM: Because they're moving out all the programs that are- Counseling, or Rehab, or any of that- is going out. And the focus would be, I imagine, on primary and secondary education programs.

AS: I'm not surprised. I mean, I know the size of the student body has shrunk. I wonder what the size of the faculty is now, versus what it once was before this crisis.

KM: I'm sure that data is right out there, on the Institutional Research page that has all the information of, you know, what all the numbers are. Yeah, it's a massive change, and I think for both of us in our times at Wright State, we worked and lived through a couple of major shifts in the university's plans and directions, and you saw people coming and going. So, I suppose some kind of big change had to happen. But I don't think it's going to be just what happens at Wright State. I think the whole landscape of higher education is shifting.

AS: We're not alone. I just read that Miami is having financial problems. In the daily news. I never know if anything in there is ever accurate, but it said they are having financial problems. I would say- and I don't have evidence to support this- but we probably have too many state universities in Ohio.

KM: Well, and on top of all of that, we have- "We", I still talk like I'm working here- there's now a very, very popular group of two-year institutions that are doing good work on behalf of students who are not prepared to enter a place like Wright State right out of high school, and who offer some pretty remarkable programs. And I know many of those people, and I marvel at what they do. But they're everywhere. You could throw a rock and hit a university or a two-year institution.

AS: Well, while we were driving here, I said to my wife, "How about all of the online schools that have opened up around us"- that... I'm sorry, I can't handle that. I don't want to get too nasty. I have a lot of friends who support things like the University of Phoenix, and I say, "What is it?" I mean, talk about "the cloud", it exists in the air somewhere-

KM: There's something about in the classroom, the interaction with the students, the walking on the campus, the-

AS: -the faculty, meet a real faculty member.

KM: Yeah, you know, this is where my youngest son has, I think, suffered, because-

AS: Did he go to college?

KM: He has an associate's degree. But he did not apply himself in school, and I remember the day he said something to me, "Yeah, I'm going to go to Wright State", and I said, "No, you're not". He just looked at me, and I said, "I don't think I've seen you crack a book. You have no clue what you would be in for". Anyway, I think for a lot of people, certainly those that are working and need to change careers, or they've had life events that have pushed them in a different direction, the online opportunities are what they need, because they wouldn't be able to do it otherwise and still support their families. But, it's... I think in our lifetime we're going to see changes that we never had to experience when we were working.

AS: Like they're now predicting newspapers will disappear, including the Dayton Daily News. So, the university as we know it may disappear, and people will do everything from home on a computer. It's kind of scary.

KM: Although I did see some weird article this morning about toddlers, and the amount of time that toddlers are spending with technology, and how it is creating a lot of problems for these kids, and I'm thinking, yeah, I get that. It's not like anything we've experienced. You know, we thought it was cool- I thought it was cool when I was a grad student was an electric typewriter, okay? That was- I was lucky, you know?

AS: [*Laughs*] I still have a manual typewriter. I haven't used it in years, but I have it in the closet.

KM: But still. Tom Hanks would love your typewriter. You know, he collects those, and now that we've got the Tom Hanks Motion Picture facility-

AS: Oh, yeah? Boy, see, people don't know exactly what you have here. This is really an impressive collection.

KM: Have you seen some of the- have you gone through some of the newer buildings?

AS: No. Oh, buildings?

KM: Yeah.

AS: It's not easy for me to walk around so much.

KM: No, but you could have somebody to get you a chair and get a tour. I would strongly encourage you to do it. Because I think people marvel when they come on this campus, and say, "Whoa! I had no idea".

AS: What's the blue building?

KM: That's the Hanks motion picture studio.

AS: Oh, it's a studio?

KM: Well, it's the Hanks Motion Picture and Film... I'm going to get it wrong and I'll be slammed for doing that.

AS: That's like Edison started with a black box, that's all he had. So, that's why it's colored that way.

KM: I think people kind of remarked that- yeah, it stands out.

AS: My first reaction was that it blocks the windows of the library on that side.

KM: It was pretty cool when they celebrated the opening of that, and he was here. That was a remarkable day.

AS: How did he develop that link with Wright State?

KM: I think it had to do with our Theatre chair, and Tom Hanks had his start in theatre at the Great Lakes Shakespeare Festival up in Cleveland, he met people up there, and then he met Stuart McDowell, they've had connections, and then so many of our students have gone on to successful careers, met Tom Hanks, and gotten-

AS: That's another thing, you don't get enough publicity. Some of our people are on Broadway. That should be front page news, you know, really.

KM: The Motion Picture Program has certainly gotten a lot, with Julia Reichert and Bogнар-

AS: Well, if they win the Oscar? Oh my god. They've done very well.

KM: I think it's their year, I do.

AS: You know, I'm almost reluctant to see the movie, but I think I should.

KM: It's wonderful.

AS: Really?

KM: It's wonderful, I couldn't stop.

AS: Is it critical of the people who took over? That's what I'd like to-

KM: Everybody. It's everybody that deserves a black eye, got a black eye in that.

AS: Oh, okay. Then I have to try to see it.

KM: You have to see it. They had amazing, unfettered access to these people, and I just... it was remarkable.

AS: She's a genius, I mean she's really... of course, she broke off with the first partner, Klein? Jim Klein?

KM: I don't remember that.

AS: I remember one day asking something like, "How's your husband?", and she said, "Oh, we're not married", so they just had a professional relationship, I guess, and then [Steve] Bognar sort of moved in and replaced him. And you know his father just passed away, too. He was one of our Wednesday lunch guys, Bela Bognar, a colorful character.

KM: There are a lot of really amazing characters in this university-

AS: Oh, yeah.

KM: -and it's great that Lew Shupe and Gary Barlow got these interviews going, because it's important to have our history recorded.

AS: Oh, they started this?

KM: Yeah, in fact, after Lew Shupe passed away, his family provided a gift to the university that supports a lot of the work that they're doing on this.

AS: Did Hanks give a big gift?

KM: You know, there was not any huge mention of some monster gift from Tom Hanks. But certainly his name recognition has done good things.

AS: Of course. The Theatre Department has been incredibly successful, one of the gems of this university. I've seen only a couple of plays over the years, but when I saw Sweeney Todd, I said to myself, "They couldn't do this better on Broadway. They can't". And I remember talking to a guy from Sinclair, who was the head of their program, he said to me, "We can't compete with Wright State. Do you know how much money they spend on their productions? We can't do that at Sinclair", so-

KM: There are many, many good things, and in fact you could go to each college, and probably name at least one program in each college that stands out, and consistently gets good attention. Which is why, you know, I can say I'm really proud to have worked here and served here for almost thirty-four years, and I know you must feel that way, or you would not have agreed to come up here and talk to me.

AS: No, I enjoyed it. I really enjoyed it and had some good colleagues that helped me enjoy it. But there was a lot of grief, too. But that's life. You know, it's going to be both sides of everything. But I made it through somehow, it wasn't easy, but I made it through.

KM: Is there anything else you would add to your story? For the record?

AS: [*Laughs*] That would take another hour. Um, no... the History Department at Wright State has been a very strong department. We don't get much publicity, either, but we're probably the department that has produced the most publications of any department in the college. I might be wrong, but I don't think so. I mean legitimate, scholarly manuscripts by people in our department. Again, it doesn't get much publicity. And we have catered to- at one point, you know, we taught Western Civ to the entire university in chunks of four hundred students. It's a disgrace. Who were all graded by computer. Okay, I'll finish that. I should finish on that note.

KM: Thank you so much, for making the time.

AS: Thank you, thank you. It's my pleasure. Yes, I'll always have a spot in my heart for Wright State.

KM: A spot on mine, too. Good memory. Thanks so much.

AS: There were some good memories, yes. And if anybody ever told me I'd end up in Dayton, Ohio... [laughs]

KM: I would say the same thing. You know, when Lee and I came here in '83, it was January of '83, we both thought, 'oh, we'll be here a couple years'. Two years turned into five years, then ten years, and by then the kids are all entrenched, and careers are moving, and I never would have thought I'd be here thirty-seven years.

AS: I'll tell you what it was like when I came here, I was invited here on a one-year offer, and when I came to the airport, they guy who recruited me- the late Ed Cox, a wonderful guy, and I think his son is still teaching here in the Music Department, I may be out of touch. Franklin Cox?

KM: I don't know.

AS: Anyway, at the airport he said to me, "You know, this is now a tenure track job", and the way it used to be, I said like Jack Benny, "Can I think it over? I'm not sure if I want it". [Laughs] And, yes, I took the job, and I was happy to do so.

KM: I'm glad you did.

AS: This has been a great experience, thank you very much.

KM: You're welcome.