1992

Dr. Sarah E. Harris Interview, Montgomery County Commissioner, Wright State University Board of Trustees

Alyce Earl Jenkins  
*Wright State University - Main Campus*

Sarah E. Harris  
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Profiles of African-Americans That Helped Shape Wright State University

Interview with Sarah E. Harris

Date of Interview: 1992

Interviewer: Alyce Earl Jenkins, College of Education and Human Services

Interviewee: Dr. Sarah E. Harris, Montgomery County Commissioner

Alyce Earl Jenkins: Welcome to another chronicling the contributions of African-Americans to Wright State University. Today's guest is Dr. Sarah E. Harris, one of three administrators for Montgomery County. And she's also the fourth African-American to serve on Wright State’s Board of Trustees. Welcome Dr. Harris.

Sarah E. Harris: Thank you very much.

AJ: I'm so glad you could come I know how busy you are.

SH: I'm very happy to be here. Thank you.

AJ: Since you have such a full and colorful background, I thought that I'd divide the interview up into three different parts and so we'll start out talking about your early education and professional experiences, uh, before the time you got to, became a member of the Wright State University Board of Trustees. As a young person growing up, what did you have in mind to do in the future? What did you plan to be as a profession, as a professional when you were growing up?

SH: Well I think starting, there were three things that I wanted to be. I wanted to be an airline stewardess but you couldn't be 5'9" tall so that took care of career number one. The second thing I wanted to do was be a great role model as teachers, and the third thing I wanted to be was an administrator or an executive. I had no idea of what an executive did but I went to movies, and I saw those very early movies with people like Joan Crawford and Barbara Stanwyck and they sat behind desks and made decisions. So that's basically how my earlier aspirations were shaped.

AJ: Well I can say you did all those except become an airline stewardess.

SH: Right.

AJ: That's interesting. Where did you go to school, what college?
SH: Well I went to Miami University, I’m a graduate of the Dayton Public Schools.

AJ: Okay.

SH: So the first six years of my life I went to Willard Elementary, and then I went to Dunbar in the seventh and eighth grade, and I graduated from Roosevelt High School and then went on to Miami University.

AJ: I see. So what did you major in when you were at Miami University?

SH: I went the education route and I received the Bachelor’s in Elementary Education and then later I went back for the Master’s in Supervision and Curriculum, and then finally the Ph.D. in Education Administration.

AJ: I see, very good. Now when you were in public school and when you were at Miami University did you participate in any extra-curricular activities and if so, what were they?

SH: Uh, I was one of those kids who were always doing all the extra-curricular things and that’s probably tracked me right into my adult life, um, but when I was at Miami I was a member of the Inter-Governmental Council, I was a member of the Panhellenic Group. Uh, my roommate and I shared some experiences with counseling in the area, and just about anything that came along if it looked pretty exciting, I would sign up.

AJ: I see. That sounds great. So I was thinking that maybe your interest in governmental affairs kind of peaked later in life but as I listen to you it’s been there all along.

SH: I don’t think that I thought that it was there on a very conscious basis, I just knew that I liked getting involved in student activities and really would have declared to the world that I would never have entered into the whole arena of politics. I’ve been in the public, private, and not-for-profit sectors, but certainly the political arena is the last one that I would never have thought that I’d be into.

AJ: I see. Now let’s talk a little bit about your early employment as a teacher, I understand that you were a teacher?

SH: Right.

AJ: How long did you teach and where?

SH: I taught for eight years and then I left teaching and I became a public school administrator. I was an Assistant Principal and then a Principal.

AJ: You know, that, that’s interesting, I did, I always thought that it would take longer than eight years to move from the classroom to the Principal’s office, and here you left
the classroom and became an Assistant Principal and a Principal in eight years. Is that an unusual timeframe?

SH: Uh, I think it was very slow.

AJ: Oh really?

SH: For women. Men could become Principals very quickly and generally the route to becoming a Principal was through a Coach. So then if you taught school and you were a coach, then you would naturally become a Principal. But women were not entering into administration very quickly. I became an Assistant Principal and I might have been the third or fourth woman by that time, uh, but it was just pretty much unheard of, that females would be in public school administration.

AJ: So what were some of your challenges then?

SH: Well first of all the challenge was just getting through the Master’s degree because, in fact as I think back over my experience in most of those administration classes, I was the only woman. So obviously one, you have to convince people that you have the ability to uh, to do a job. And two, for a workforce that typically was not very familiar with women you have to sort of get over that hurdle so that they are very comfortable, but once that’s done and you can convince people that you have the ability to get the job done, it really doesn’t matter much one way or the other.

AJ: That’s true. Now when you became an administrator, were you, did you have your Master’s degree then?

SH: Oh yes.

AJ: You had completed all of your training then?

SH: Yes. I had the Master’s degree at that time, and also for people who were getting that Master’s in Supervision and Curriculum, there was a great need, because again, typically Principals had all of the training in how you run a building, but they kept crying out for people who had some good sense of curriculum, because by then they were trying to develop curriculums in their schools. So for those of us who were fortunate enough to have majored in the supervisor curriculum, um, the field was pretty open.

AJ: It made it easier.

SH: Yes.

SH: Well, during that era, we were very concerned with what was happening with education for particularly black students. I was a Principal of a predominately black school. We of course had white youngsters but it was a predominately black school at Weaver Elementary School, and again we had some concerns over what appeared to be happening with black youngsters. Whether or not they were developing the self-concept, whether or not they were aware of their own background and history, and the whole African-American culture.


SH: It’s déjà vu, and it also gets pretty frustrating at times because you think that you have gone over those hurdles and you look around and they are still popping up.

AJ: Yes.

SH: But at any rate, the whole Model Cities concept, was a way for neighborhoods and people in communities to take charge of their resources, and one of the things that we kept stressing to parents was that they should never give up the education of their children to anyone, uh, so there was the whole element of trying to have parental involvement. And because we didn’t have a lot of African-American teachers, uh, a part of the Model Cities experience was also to give teachers the sense of accomplishment and the fact that they could aspire and very definitely that they had a responsibility to teach black youngsters to the best of their ability. So it was a very exciting time.

AJ: Very good. Now when you left there is that the very time that you started working with the Council for…

SH: No. After I left Model Cities, we got very exciting, very excited for a new teacher training program and that was called the Careers Opportunity Program.

AJ: Okay.

SH: So I ended up going to work for Central State University as a University Coordinator but it was back with the public schools. By then we were pretty much aware that if you were going to give teachers the kind of sensitive experience that they needed, it had to begin early on, that was one. And two we were also going through the time when we were trying to make sure that quote, quote, people at risk that never would have a chance at getting a college education could do that. And so for people in the Dayton community and in particularly returning Vietnam Vets, this was a tailor made program whereby many people, parents for instance, older women, older men who just had never had a chance to go to college, was an opportunity to get them into teacher training, and the premise was, if you started in the classroom in your Freshman year, you had classroom experiences at the same time that you were getting what we would
call the ivory tower experiences. You were coming out with a much balanced education and so that was the genesis of that program.

AJ: And you were a perfect person for that because

SH: It, it was exciting.

AJ: being from the classroom, from the classroom to the Principal’s office, and then Model Cities…

SH: Yes, yes.

AJ: all of that helped you to do that job real well.

SH: It flowed together very nicely because at the same time, uh, again, these were people who had lots of barriers but we simply would not accept excuses, and at the same time [tape jumped] doctorate, so when they complained about how tough it was to raise a family, and to have to go cook, and to study, I could say to them I understand exactly how you feel because I’m going through the very same things at the same time.

AJ: That’s right, you were an example. So, then you worked with the Ohio Council of Schools…

SH: Well, after that, believe it or not, I left the Careers Opportunity Program and went to the private sector.

AJ: Okay.

SH: I believe that the administrative experience that I had was comparable to managerial experience, and I also sort of just wanted to see what the other side of the street looked like. So I ended up going to work for the General Electric Company as a manager, and did very well, and of course you make a lot more money in private industry. And so I was beginning to be paid I thought, commensurate with what my training and background was, but I was also commuting every day and after two or three years commuting from Dayton to Cincinnati gets very old. And uh, by that time, there was another new program on the horizon called the [Esa] Program. I get involved in these community-based programs. Again, trying to help community people get empowered to take responsibility one for their neighborhoods, and their children and for the education. Um, and so this was a program designed to take youngsters in the public schools who were two or more years behind in reading and math, and to set up labs to bring them up to par and also maybe to help them move further ahead, uh, so I managed that particular program. And it was right after that then that I went to work for Citizens Council for Ohio Schools. I became and education policy fellow and did work out of George Washington University and did my internship at Citizens Council.
AJ: I see.

SH: Ended up staying and working for them for that time period.

AJ: Now when you were with the Citizens Council….

SH: Citizens Council for Ohio Schools.

AJ: for Ohio Schools…

SH: Yes.

AJ: did you shape any policies that were adopted?

SH: At that time we were looking particularly at parent involvement. I managed the Southwest Ohio office for Citizens Council and so I commuted again to Cleveland, a little bit farther, but I only had to do it once a week

AJ: I see.

SH: so it was a lot more convenient. By and large we were trying to look at, how do you really get parents involved in schools because teachers were telling us that they simply could not get parents involved. Again, I’m a believer that parents genuinely care about their children, but that sometimes we’ve got to give them the supportive experiences that help them make a link, and so we, what we did was we set up a training programs for parents on how they tutor their children, just to give them support and also how the negotiate the school system for their children because by and large what we found was that low, poor and low income parents, and particularly minority parents, um, were not always welcome, one, and two they never felt as comfortable and as confident going eyeball to eyeball with a teacher on behalf of their children. And so we taught them how to do that and uh, then we began to look at policy. And one of the policies again that came about and a part of my dissertation had to do with what we called field-based experiences. Again, we found that if you could give teachers in training an experience much sooner than student-teaching, it made them a lot more sensitive and a lot more confident in how they responded to children.

AJ: Yes we have that here at Wright State called Phase I and Phase II

SH: Yes.

AJ: where they have the early experiences.

SH: Exactly. I’m glad that’s still going on because I think it’s very critical.

AJ: It is, and the students really, it’s good for the students because it helps them make the decision whether or not they’re really cut out to be in the classroom or whether
SH: Long before they get that four-year degree.

AJ: That’s right, before they get so many hours toward that degree. When you were talking about teaching parents to tutor their children and all, I was thinking déjà vu again because now they are trying to initiate those programs and get teenage mothers involved with reading and tutoring hoping that you will not only teach the child but motivate the parent and encourage them to go back to school so it seems like we, we’re going back because we really didn’t, either we didn’t do well the first time or people ignored us one, I not sure what happened there.

SH: I, I think that by and large what happens is, the, the good programs that work typically get thrown out with programs that don’t work. And if we would just take the models of programs that are successful and fund them and support them, I really think that we could see some tremendous changes.

AJ: And I think too if we would look at what we’ve done and how we’ve failed before we initiate new programs, that that would be helpful too.

SH: Absolutely true.

AJ: So then you finally got to the Urban League.

SH: Well yes, and at the time I was working with Citizens Council for Ohio Schools, I happened to be on the Board of the Urban League.

AJ: Oh, okay.

SH: And at that time we ended up in a process of where there had been a search committee put together to search then for a new director for the Urban League. And I was not on the search committee but people had come to me and approached me about putting my name in and I absolutely said that I wasn’t interested. I knew a little bit about the organization and I also knew that there were some things that we had to do to get that organization turned around and in a much more positive light. And I was still sort of going down the education track by that time. Uh, but what happened was, there were some people in fact sort of slid my resume in and I ended up getting called and interviewed, and ended up getting the job for the Urban League.

AJ: And you were there eight, how long were you there?

SH: Uh, I was there from 1980 to 1984.

AJ: Okay, very good. But it seems to me that your whole philosophy about empowering people, about your belief in community-based programs, all fit right in with the Urban League
SH: Yes.

AJ: And it seems like it was a natural place for you to be at that time.

SH: Yes.

AJ: What kinds of challenges did you have there?

SH: Well the first challenge had to do with the budget and it seems like wherever you go you run into all kinds of budget problems.

AJ: Yes.

SH: Uh, it appears there’s never enough money to do the kinds of jobs that need to be done, uh, so we were having some real budget problems and so we had to try to streamline and to try to focus and determine how do you best spend your dollars. The League at that time was running a number of programs but we were not getting enough dollars to do any of the programs well so we had to really focus on our mission and ended up focusing on both education and employment. And thought that those were probably two of the greatest issues facing particularly African-Americans and low-income residents at that particular time. And fortunately I’m happy to say that those years have sort of passed and gone and now the Urban League is doing much more broad-based programming but those were some very difficult years. We were working through some negative problems and so we were trying to make sure that we had set up a good organization and probably the greatest skills that were helpful during that era would have been management skills because it was just a matter of then managing an organization, and again trying to set up the right budget and focusing on programs and setting up the mission.

AJ: And you there ’80 to ’84…

SH: Yes.

AJ: and that was like the forerunner of the ’84 recession

SH: Yes.

AJ: And we tend to always feel it more

SH: Always.

AJ: and sooner in our communities,

SH: Very true.
AJ: so I can understand what you were talking about as far as the budget was concerned.

SH: That’s true and we had also done some studies and realized at that time that blacks in Montgomery and other counties were worse off in every aspect of American life.

AJ: Yes, yes. We’re three or four years ahead of everybody when it comes to negative influences upon our lives. Um, so you worked there until ’84 and then you made a dramatic change. Um, and I, as I recall reading the papers and everything, you then, uh, campaigned for

SH: Yes.

AJ: you made your formal entry into politics. How did that come about?

SH: Yes. Very strangely, believe me. Uh, I think it was the year before so it would have been maybe ’83, that Chuck Curran who was then in as State Senator decided he wanted to come back and be a County Commissioner, which left the State Senate seat open. Well obviously once you become an Urban League Exec, uh, and you do a lot of broad-based community kinds programs, you become fairly visible. And I think as a result of some of that, I had people who came to me to say, you really ought to consider politics.

AJ: [break in tape]

SH: I can remember I was not very much into the politics, but I can remember saying, [break in tape] happened to be in a meeting and I thought it was terrible that at that time the Democratic party just did not seem to be elevating any blacks into any political office, we certainly had [break in tape] Glenn but there just were not, and we had Mayor McGee, but beyond that there just [break in tape] were not blacks in and finally we did have Mayor Dixon, who came in. And I just, I was fussing pretty much at him and he sort of looked at me and said you ought to consider it yourself.

AJ: [laughter]

SH: which really shut me up for just a moment but I didn’t think very seriously about it and I had enough people who finally came and said you really ought to at least talk to the [break in tape] and see. And I sort of went unwillingly saying, well just to get them off my back a little. Well what happened is there was a real outpouring from the community and I got the endorsement from both newspapers, of course the long and short of it is I didn’t get the appointment, but it did indicate that certainly there were people in the community that thought that I could probably serve in some office capacity. And then it
was the next year then that Commissioner Horn wanted to become a Senator. It was like musical chairs on elective office positions, and I was encouraged to go [break in tape] and I got the endorsement to run for Montgomery County Commission in 1984. Uh, because the Urban League is a non-partisan organization, I had to then resign as Exec and spent the year then running. That was my first time running for political office and I lost by 2 percentage points. I was very close but I can tell you a win’s much better than coming in number 2 but it was a, it did show

AJ: Remarkable showing

SH: Absolutely, and to start out running at at Montgomery County level

AJ: That’s right.

SH: is very, very difficult

AJ: And especially at that time.

SH: Exactly. Blacks and other minorities only make up about [break in tape] percent of the whole [break in tape]. Obviously I was very grateful to the people of Montgomery County for giving me the opportunity to do that.

AJ: Then you were a natural person to become appointed Treasurer.

SH: Yeah.

AJ: [break in tape] campaign.

SH: Yes, I did work for the Dayton Power and Light Company

AJ: Okay.

SH: and did sort of said to myself, uh, I don’t think the office position is where I wanted to go and ended up working for them and enjoyed it so much I thought I would retire from there. [break in tape] I’d get the call because Chairman Joe Shump, at the time, [break in the tape] from the Treasurer position about that [break in tape] appointed and I ran for the office the next year and won very well, and so I was Treasurer from 1987 until last January, and because I had already run for the Commission seat, I had never lost the interest. It is a policy making position and I thought I’d still like very much to be a Commissioner. And Commissioner McElwayne then decided to retire [break in tape] and I was appointed [break in tape] her expired term and now I’m on the campaign trail again so that I can keep the Commission seat.

AJ: You cannot say you can look at Joe Shump and say that [break in tape], that the departed did not groom someone, prepare someone, black female to move on in politics
because from the time you made that statement to him, he has made certain that you [break in tape]....'laughter'.....

SH: Maybe I should have kept my mouth closed, I don't know.

AJ: Well I don't know.

SH: But seriously, and that important and we have, of course since my election, we have elected first time African-American female to the City Commission and of course we do have a State Representative, Rhine McLin, who has taken [break in tape], do still have Tom Roberts.

AJ: Do you, are you grooming or mentoring the other people other than the ones that are elected [break in tape]

SH: I am really trying to encourage young people to consider the political arena even though for those of us who are in it we wonder on many given days why anyone in their right mind would [break in tape] do what we do, but it’s still, it makes a difference. And so yeah, trying to encourage as many people as possible, I’m trying to [break in tape] just so they can see from a grassroots all of this is [inaudible].

AJ: Okay now that we have a better picture of those traits, those characteristics that led to you becoming a Board of Trustees member [break in tape] way to catch the eye of the people out here, let’s talk about your years with Wright State University [tape jumped]. Now before you became a member of the Trustees had you worked, been on any other committees here at Wright State?

SH: Not really. At the time I became a Trustee member, I was on the UD Board of Trustees.

AJ: Okay.

SH: And uh, I knew Dr. Keggeris very well. And of course I knew he was very interested in making sure he had a very balanced, multi-ethnic kind of Board, and he had talked with me a little bit about it but of course those are appointments as you know from the Governor and, certainly Mr. McLin also had, who has been very instrumental in uh, lobbying for uh seats awards and I think we're certainly through Mr. McLin's efforts and uh Bob Keggeris' efforts, that I did end up, because at that time Sy Lauter was a Trustee and left and I ended up filling his unexpired, uh slot, and then was later appointed a nine year term.

AJ: So at the completion of your nine year term, you would have served eleven years.

SH: That's right.
AJ: And that would be the second longest term served by an African-American [break in tape] served thirteen years.

SH: That’s right. Yes.

AJ: I think I have an understanding of what the Board of Trustees does, that you’re supposed to set policy

SH: Right.

AJ: and make sure that the policy is implemented by the appointed administrators.

SH: Right.

AJ: Is there anything else that you do?

SH: Well we do a lot. We, we ask the why questions and try not to actually do the how to kinds of functions. By and large, I think were we spend our time and hopefully make some impact is in the Board Committee structure. And uh, I’ve been very fortunate I’ve served on the Student Affairs Committee and have chaired that, I’ve served on the Academic Affairs Committee and I’ve chaired that, and I’ve served on the Buildings and Grounds Committee. And so those are the three major committees that I’ve served on.

AJ: So what are the charges for the Student Services Committee, each of those committees?

SH: Well I think Student Affairs is probably every Trustees favorite committee because by and large the reason we serve on the Board is to support students, I mean the university would not exist if it was not for [break in tape] to support and educate people, and that is the one, these young people are very intimately involved in the committee and it also works through the Student Government, um, organization. There’s a way for us to hear from students, what’s on [break in tape], what they think are important, and also a way to work back through so that they know what’s going on and they can sort of carry [break in tape] back out to students and to get input. And they’re pretty honest I think and they simply tell you pretty much what’s on their minds and that’s very refreshing. Uh, so that is one. We’re always concerned with the whole issue of teaching and research and how a teacher or a professor gets evaluated. And of course students kept telling us early on, that [break in tape] comfortable with the evaluation process and that they wanted to have an opportunity as well to evaluate staff. And so [break in tape] sort of gone around that particular one the Board has been very sensitive to making sure that no matter what we are doing in the whole evaluation area that there is some input [break in tape] back to the administration about how they see instructors and professors.
AJ: I see. Now Buildings and Grounds Committee, you make the decisions about which buildings we'll build, which

SH: Yes, the buildings that are built, the Nutter Center, I think that I was on the Buildings and Grounds Committee for a short time during the whole Nutter Center, uh, uh, process. And uh Engineering buildings, and uh the contracts [break] for let, for the buildings and for the other service kinds of projects, those all come through the Buildings and Grounds Committee. Concerns about environmental issues and whether or not for instance there's something leaking that would be environmentally unsafe, so that particular committee deals with that type of thing as well.

AJ: Uh, in 1990 the Americans Disability Act was passed and Wright State has a reputation of being very accessible to persons with disabilities, but I understand that the Buildings and Grounds people are really, uh, amazed at, what they, what the university really has to do

SH: Yes still.

AJ: to come into compliance

SH: That's true, that's true

AJ: so does that come under Buildings and Grounds [break in tape]

SH: Under Buildings and Grounds. I don't serve on that committee now but I'm sure they have to wrestle with that one as most organizations throughout this community wrestle with that.

AJ: I heard um, I think if I can try to remember the repeat the secret that I heard but that it's going to cost lots and lots of money to bring a, this institution which is already in compliance we thought into greater, into more compliance with ADA

SH: That's correct, that's correct.

AJ: so it's going to be interesting.

SH: Uh, it's interesting how all of these cross, in my political life we see very much [break in tape] what we complain about is that we get mandates from the federal government to the state level to the local level. We get the mandates but we don't get the money.

AJ: That's true.

SH: And sometimes the mandates are very, very costly, and the Americans Disability Act is a good example, as that while it's important to do, nobody is sending money to do
this and for those of us and at the Trustees level, of course you have trouble with budgets, and we know that the resources are dwindling, and we listen to [break in tape] the hundreds of millions of dollar deficit and of course the first axe is going to higher ed, so we’re already braced for the fact that we are going to have fewer resources and yet we have greater demands [break in tape] with the Americans Disability Act, we’re not sure what that would cost. So then you’ve got to figure out if you do this, what’s going to go lacking someplace else.

AJ: Working with the national group that gave birth to the Disability Act and we’re already looking at how to add some more things.

SH: Oh boy. The challenges continue.

AJ: And how to make, how to make sure that people do comply with that bill, it will be very interesting. You’ve been on the Board since 1984, uh, but you mentioned, uh you did not mention but I want to talk about Reverend Lucas because I know that Reverend Lucas served on the Wright State Campus Advisory Board before it became an institution. And I also understand that he was on the Board that organized, founded the League too um before he became involved with Wright State and then later became a Board of Trustee. Do you have any contact with him when he was on the Wright State Advisory Council or a Trustee?

SH: Not really through the Advisory Council or as a Trustee, I did my work at Wright State at the time when it was just a figment of, of everybody’s imagination and started working on my Master’s there. I [break in tape] Mr. Lucas much more from a position of awe because he was, he was such a strong, dynamic community leader and of course I think we’ve gone through the era where your community leaders all tended to be your religious leaders. Um, and I think that’s why early Trustees when you think of Reverend Lucas and you think of Reverend Younger, typically came through the sterile kind of segment of the community, and the same thing was true of the Dayton School Board as I recall Reverend [Broadess]. But these were all people who were just very active and so the Wright State piece from where I sat was just a very small piece of all things I thought that Reverend Lucas meant to the community.

AJ: It’s interesting you mention the school system because he also served on the um, school board

SH: That’s right.

AJ: in addition to the Urban League and some others.

SH: Yes.

AJ: I’m going to interview his wife
SH: Oh Mrs. Lucas, yes.

AJ: and we’re going to reminisce about his days at Wright State University. [break in tape] Reverend Younger.

SH: Yes.

AJ: I have a picture here of Reverend Younger, as you said, replaced Reverend Lucas in 1978 and not only were both of them ministers but they were both Baptist ministers

SH: That’s right.

AJ: I thought that was kind of interesting too.

SH: Yes.

AJ: Now here’s a picture of Reverend Lucas and his wife and uh, they made a very

SH: Oh this is when they were younger

AJ: [break in tape] and I thought they were a very handsome couple.

SH: Absolutely. She accompanied him to many meetings, committee meetings and board meetings, and I think we probably thought of her as another Trustee in a sense. A, a very gracious woman.

AJ: Really.

SH: And, uh, so it was my good fortune to have at least served some time with Reverend Younger, I did not have the good fortune to serve with Reverend Lucas on the Board.

AJ: Um, I understand that Mrs. Lucas also accompanied Reverend Lucas to a lot of activities and she has a wealth of information

SH: Oh, I

AJ: because she, she was there when things, when decisions were being made

SH: Right. I know Mrs. Lucas in another life.

AJ: Okay.

SH: And again, uh, she is just an outstanding woman and looks to me very much the way she did, and I can remember when I went up to Bethel Church, which is Reverend Lucas’ church, for Bible school, even though that was not my church, I am a Baptist by
the way. But I always went not only to my, my Bible school but I went to Bethel and that's how I first got to know Mrs. Lucas.

AJ: I see.

SH: And, probably knew her better than I knew um

AJ: Reverend Lucas.

SH: Reverend Lucas. Yes.

AJ: I see. Now um, Reverend Younger and Reverend Lucas both served on similar committees the Student Services Committee and the Academic Services Committee

SH: Yes.

AJ: of the Board of Trustees [break in tape] Um, Younger had an interest in the Bolinga Center

SH: Yes.

AJ: and reading the minutes of the Board of Trustees over in the Archival Library, I saw that he was a chairman of a professional committee on the Bolinga Center, do you

SH: That’s true.

AJ: recall?

SH: Yes I do in fact I served for a very short time on that committee with Younger.

AJ: And what was the purpose of that committee

SH: Well basically, uh, I [break in tape] find a good sense how the Bolinga to function with this University. And we got the sense that it was more of an appendage university rather than an intrical part of the university, so we were struggling with mission. Uh, what is the real mission of the Bolinga Center, do you look at just [break in tape] isolating African-American students, or should the goal really be to help them negotiate the total university in order to be successful. So we were going through a lot [break in tape] kinds of thoughts and we were also very concerned about the kind of funding that the organization got and how it was viewed in the rest of the university. [break in tape] getting a strong sense that by and large that um, if [break in tape] dealt with an African-American student everybody just wanted to say, here give it to the Bolinga Center and let’s have them solve it, when by and large, we did not see the Bolinga Center functioning that way.

AJ: I see.
SH: So I can remember a lot of very heated discussions that we had about that issue.

AJ: Now Reverend Lucas left the Board in 1987 I believe.

SH: Reverend Younger.

AJ: Younger, Reverend Younger

SH: Yes.

AJ: let in 1987, but what happened to the Bolinga committee, is it still...

SH: It is not. It is not functioning as a committee and it was really kind of short-term committee to try to get together and to [break in tape] the organization. Uh, [break in tape] now Hardy, uh, the student under, uh, Dr. Dixon.…

AJ: Yes, he reports to both

SH: both Nixon and Dr.

AJ: Dr. Hathaway,

SH: and Dr. Hathaway, yes.

AJ: uh-huh

SH: and so [break in tape] that committee is no longer there

AJ: I see. I also have a picture here of you speaking at one of the Bolinga banquets, and the person here in the picture with you is Green.

SH: Yes. Attorney James Green.

AJ: Attorney James Green who’s very active in the

SH: In the Dayton community absolutely.

AJ: the Dayton community. He was active here as a student and he is still out there doing things.

SH: Now it’s very interesting I’m looking at the picture and I see James sitting there, uh to my left, and um, uh it’s always been my thought that I really didn’t meet James Green until much later, which lets you know that you, you run into people but they’re not always just a part of your kind of formal visual structure at the time and yet now he’s certainly one of my favorite people [break in tape] we’ve worked together on many, many occasions.
AJ: And he’s, it looks like he’s listening and hanging on
SH: Yes.
AJ: to every word you’re saying.
SH: I hope
AJ: so you probably
SH: I hope I said something important
AJ: influenced him. Okay so you served on the Board with Reverend Younger
SH: Yes.
AJ: and he lives now in Columbus
SH: Yes.
AJ: after he retired. Then another African-American that went to the Board in 19 when was Reverend [break in tape] Bennett
SH: Uh, I think he’s been on now for
AJ: appointed, I think it was Bennett
SH: a couple of years now or so
AJ: okay
SH: if Younger left in ’87
AJ: he came in ’8?
SH: probably would have been right, or probably ’87 maybe.
AJ: Okay, he was appointed in ’88
SH: ’88
AJ: Mr. Bennett
SH: Okay.
AJ: So then you have [break in tape] Mr. Bennett.
SH: That’s correct.
AJ: Now Mr. Bennett is completely different, he doesn’t fit the mold

SH: Certainly isn’t a Baptist minister.

AJ: Not a Baptist minister, he’s not a community activist, he’s a Fortune 500 manager or administrator

SH: Yes.

AJ: or whatever a Fortune 500 company person. Seems he would bring a completely different perspective, uh, to the Board from the African-American community.

SH: Yes.

AJ: Tell me about your working with Mr. Bennett, and, and some of the strengths that he’s brought to the committee.

SH: He’s a real joy to work with. I think him to be probably one of the most analytical people I’ve ever met, but yet very sensitive, very down to earth. Um, when you first see him you think of him as being maybe sort of quiet and a little bit laid back. And what I found that he does is that he assesses everything. Um, probably of all of us, [break in tape] he, he does his homework. Maybe [break in tape] really spends the time, uh, so he’s look at all directions and he’s certainly has looked at all of the figures. He participates in the discussion but he sort of watches everybody. And then when you think that there’s no solution to the [answer], he sort of leans up and well, um, let me tell you what I’ve figured out, I’ve several alternatives for you, would you like to hear it. And by now he has built up such great [break in tape] from all of the Trustees, that right away all of the Trustees say yes Walt, tell us what you think the alternatives are and by and large just about everything he recommends is much accepted. So he’s a different kind of Trustee, certainly he has a business background, uh, [break in tape] financial ability, um, and he’s just he’s a great thinker, he makes you think and yet he still keeps you right on your toes and he’ll say things like but have we really dealt with the issue, or is this really where we wanting to go. So he is really just very outstanding.

AJ: I think of him as being, um, the Bill Grey, you know Bill Grey from

SH: Yes.

AJ: Congressman Grey who [break in tape] budget committee [break in tape] and I thought my goodness can you look [break in tape] an African-American over all this money?

SH: Yes.
AJ: And I look at the records I see that Mr. Bennett has chaired the Finance and Audit Committee, and I think now that's, that's a switch.

SH: That's true.

AJ: That's impressive.

SH: That's true.

AJ: That's a different [break in tape] do it

SH: He does an outstanding job for Wright State.

AJ: Yes, and he's a former [military] person and I think that that too adds to his uh, characteristic of checking things out

SH: That's right.

AJ: making sure that everything's just as it should be

SH: Very thorough.

AJ: and knowing where you're going

SH: That's right.

AJ: and how you're going to get there. Another perspective he brings too is if not all three, at least two of his daughters attended Wright State University

SH: That's right.

AJ: so when his daughters were here he wasn't even thinking about being a Trustee

SH: That’s right.

AJ: and so I'm sure he remembers some of the experiences

SH: Yes.

AJ: that his daughters have had.

SH: It’s interesting, I did not know Walt before he was appointed and yet I can remember having a conversation with Mr. McLin about him [break in tape]. He had already been impressed uh by Mr. Bennett and obviously again he attracted the attention of the [break in tape] Wright State, and certainly the Governor evidently was very convinced that he be appointed.

AJ: Well I think that you know, I think our concerns are in good hands
SH: Thank you.

AJ: with you and Mr. Bennett and the other Trustees but I really think that we have people there representing us, representing of all of Wright State’s constituencies but especially the African-American constituency and we’re kind of out of the traditional mode and they recognize that we have people who are doing things and who think beyond [break in tape] and the church and the Bible. That for those [break in tape] its [break in tape] but we can deal with the dollars like you have your $500 million dollar budget that you three have to work with. Well listen, thank you so much for coming and talking with me. It has really been informative and delightful.

SH: Well it’s been a privilege and I thank you very much for the invitation to be here.