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2010

Dennis Watson

Dennis Glenn Watson '50
Illinois Wesleyan University

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Recommended Citation
Watson '50, Dennis Glenn and Miner, Meg, "Dennis Watson" (2010). *All oral histories.* Paper 10.
http://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/oral_hist/10

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Westminster Village, Bloomington

Meg Miner: Okay we are recording and my name is Meg Miner and I'm the Archivist at Illinois Wesleyan University. Today is June 10, 2010 and we are at Westminster Village and I am here today with Dennis Watson and Dennis if you could just start off by telling me your full name and how you are associated with Illinois Wesleyan.

Dennis Watson: My name is Dennis Glenn Watson and I graduated from Wesleyan in 1950 having started there in 1946 and my first recollection of actually having anything to do with Wesleyan was a friend of mine and we lived out on East Jefferson Street in Bloomington and we walked one evening to go to see a Wesleyan basketball game and we never got there because Hedding Hall was on fire.

Miner: Goodness.

Watson: And we stayed—we were there before the fire engines were even there and so we stayed and watched the fire instead of going to the basketball game.

Miner: Oh my goodness.

Watson: I'm not sure actually what year that would have been but we were probably high school-age at the time.

Miner: 1943.

Watson: '43?

Miner: Yup.

Watson: I graduated in January of '46.

Miner: Mhmm, wow.

Watson: And I was very fortunate going to Wesleyan and that I started—I graduated, as I just said, in January of '46 from Bloomington High School, so I started at Wesleyan in the spring quarter of '46 which put me ahead of most veterans because they were coming back in the fall of '46 and '47 and so I was a Business major and a Political Science minor and—but I enjoyed the business-type courses and so I had all the requirement courses for Economics also so to take that many courses, I was always one semester or so ahead of the veterans who had quite large—well not large classes but more than one professor teaching those different courses where I went through and had Professor Beadles just about everything I took in economics and business and I think I had him for close to 30 of 120 hours—

Miner: Oh my goodness.

Watson: —you needed to graduate. And then Doctor Oborn was my instructor in political science for most of the classes for the same reason—because they hired so many new

professors during the summer of ’46 that came in in the fall but I was already one semester ahead of them.

[Phone rings]

Watson: But that—I enjoyed Wesleyan. It was a wonderful school to go to. I had originally planned on going to the University of Illinois but thought, well, I was having trouble finding housing there at Illinois, and so I decided to go to Wesleyan and then maybe transfer to Illinois later but never transferred. I stayed at Wesleyan.

Miner: So did you stay at home then when you started?

Watson: Yes, I lived at home.

Miner: Okay and what do you think the difference is between you having people like Professor Beadles through several classes and then the G.I.s having several different other—how did that work out? How do you think that—

Watson: Well—

Miner: —affected—

Watson: It worked out great for me because I really enjoyed being in Dr. Beadles’ classes.

Miner: And was it—

Watson: I call him Dr. Beadles, he never got his doctorate degree but I understand he was very close to it and it burned, I think, in the Hedding fire and—

Miner: Oh, dear.

Watson: And he wasn’t going to do his dissertation over again I guess and so he never got the doctorate degree…as far as I know.

Miner: Interesting…so when you started with a faculty member was it the case that you would go through the program with that person?

Watson: No, it wasn’t—

Miner: Or just if it worked that way?

Watson: Not necessarily. It just worked out that way.

Miner: Okay.

Watson: Because he was, you know, with not as many students there in the spring of ’46. He was the main one teaching most of the business courses where in the fall of ’46 they’d

hired others to take care of the influx of the veterans so—but he was an outstanding professor and so I enjoyed having him during that time.

Miner: What was it like to have so many—I would imagine many of the veterans were older—

Watson: Oh yes.

Miner: —than the average student, so you started out school with some maybe typical demographics and then how did that change?

Watson: A lot of—especially the fraternity brothers of mine I knew and knew their ages and such and where I was just coming out of high school probably at 18 and going and starting at Wesleyan, a lot of them probably in their twenties. They were 22, 23, 24 years old having been in the service.

Miner: Do you think that affected your experience in college—

Watson: Well, I don't know if you'd say it really affected it or not.

Miner: Yeah, just curious.

Watson: It was—they did—we all seemed to get along together but there was a lot of difference in age between the high school ones and most of us high school ones did not go into service because the war was ending.

Miner: Right.

Watson: And so I went in the service after the—after college instead of before college.

Miner: Mhmm. What fraternity were you in?

Watson: Phi Gamma Delta…and we had—a lot of Blooming[ton] fellas were Phi Gammas at that time.

Miner: What do you think fraternity life did for you in your college experience?

Watson: Oh I think it was good for me and made me mature more I'd say and—where maybe if I hadn't had the association with a bunch of fellas like that I wouldn't have matured maybe as fast as I did.

Miner: Are you still in touch with anyone?

Watson: Not as—oh with a lot of the fellas, yes, but not too much with the undergraduate chapter that's there at the moment and—but when we—when I was much younger I worked with the fraternity at that time and there was one period of time where I think maybe for a couple of years I was President of the Alumni Association for the fraternity, yeah and…go ahead.

Miner: Oh I was—no go ahead.

Watson: Well, Margaret and I were very fortunate. We were gone from Bloomington from the time I graduated in'50 until almost '70, well until 1970, except for a period of a couple of years when I was back here going through a training program for State Farm, so after we came back in 1970—since then we've been quite active in Wesleyan alumni work and we were class chairs for the class of '50 for quite a number of years when they had that program going and then we were very proud to—I think it was 1993—she and I were given the Loyalty Award at homecoming that year, which was very nice…to receive—quite an accomplishment I guess.

Miner: You've worked hard. That's what it means, right?

Watson: A lot of hours.

[Both laugh]

Watson: I wouldn't say hard but hours.

Miner: Yeah.

Watson: A lot of hours.

Miner: Well you had mentioned that you thought initially you would transfer out of Wesleyan.

Watson: Mhmm.

Miner: What made you decide to stay?

Watson: Well I'd say the—just the school itself and the people that I had met and I was enjoying it, didn't see any reason to move and I met Margaret at Wesleyan. She and I were—she came in in the fall of '46 and we didn't actually meet until we were sophomores and now we've been married, as of later this month, 59 years.

Miner: Wow, congratulations.

Watson: Thank you.
Miner: That's great. Well what do you think a liberal arts education did for you that might have been different at the U of I—if you'd gone to the U of I?

Watson: I'm not sure there would have been a great difference because I was not going to—I was not planning on specializing in like law or medicine or engineering or anything like that so my degree down there would have probably been very similar to what I ended up getting at Wesleyan.

Miner: Do you think you took any classes at Wesleyan that you might not have otherwise taken?

Watson: At Illinois—

Miner: Mhmm.

Watson: Did you say? Well I don't know because I spent so much time just on those business courses, the economics courses, and the political science courses and then we had, naturally, we had some courses that were required courses and so you add all that together and it didn't give me much time for any other courses.

Miner: I bet.

Watson: So it was pretty much specialized just in those areas.

Miner: Mhmm. Do you have a favorite memory of some social event or a campus activity that you were a part of?

Watson: Well meeting Margaret was a great thing...[laughs].

Miner: How did you meet?

Watson: Well it was Thanksgiving of her sophomore year, she was—her home was in Salem, Illinois and she was coming back in a car with other people who lived down that way and they had a bad auto accident down just north of Clinton, Illinois in between Clinton and Bloomington and it was on a Sunday, the Sunday after Thanksgiving and they called—some of the kids had to go to the hospital but then some of the rest of them needed a way to get up to Bloomington so they called the fraternity house. Her brother was a Phi Gamma also and they called the Phi Gamma house and I happened to be there this Sunday and I had a car and so I drove down and picked the kids up that had been in the accident and…Margaret and I met. That was where we actually met.

Miner: Hmm, was it a bus that was coming back?

Watson: No, a car, but there were six kids in it.

Miner: Oh it was a car, okay.

Watson: Yeah, six in the car, yeah and it was a terrible accident but that was where we met and then, oh, within a couple weeks after that I think, she invited me to go to a Sigma Kappa dance and we've been together ever since I should say.

[Miner laughs]

Watson: Long time.

Miner: It is.

Watson: And that would have been 19—probably 1947 I guess, Thanksgiving of '47.

Miner: Hmm, talk about loyalty.

[Both laugh]

Watson: Yeah.

Miner: Well what ways has the campus changed that you've noticed over the years? What are some of the things that stand out for you or maybe some of the traditions you had that you wish we still did?

Watson: Homecoming is much different. I enjoy—we go every year to homecoming—I enjoy it but, you know, when we were in school we had floats and the house decorations and the bands playing in the parade and all that and none of that seems to have carried forward, whether that's good or bad I don't know, but that's so different than it used to be.

Miner: Sure.

Watson: And they've done a magnificent job in building the buildings out there in the past few years, especially—the athletic complex is probably as nice as you'd find any place.

Miner: It's beautiful.

Watson: And it's very nice. And we were there when they built the Memorial Center and I hate to admit it but I never did care for the entranceway on the side and the new Joslin entranceway they put in is, I think, is a great, great improvement of that building.

Miner: It's a nice face, yeah, yeah.

Watson: Yeah, they did a nice job.

Miner: Well where did you have classes on campus?

Watson: Well some—there was a science building but I was not taking those courses so I wasn't there. There was Old North Hall and so many of my classes were in the barracks that were along the east side of campus.

Miner: So in the area that—

Watson: You know where that—

Miner: CLA is? The liberal arts or—

Watson: Well those buildings—

Miner: Near the Hansen Student Center and the Memorial Gym?

Watson: You know where the President of the university is now?

Miner: Mhmm.

Watson: Those buildings right in there.

Miner: Oh.

Watson: That's where the barracks were.

Miner: Okay.

Watson: And then they had some barracks just for the married veterans too but we had a lot of classrooms in those other barracks and then they started building after—well Minor did so much of the building.

Miner: He did.

Watson: Minor Myers, he did a lot. It was a great loss when we lost him.

Miner: Do you have any favorite memories of him you—

Watson: No—

Miner: —want to share?

Watson: He was just a wonderful person and we enjoyed knowing him.

Miner: Well is there anything else you'd like to add that we should know about?

Watson: Well I don't know, I can't think of anything. It was a good place for an education and it still is and probably is a lot more difficult to get into now than it was when I went there.

[Both laugh]

Watson: I'm sure it is and—but it's been a nice outlet for Margaret and I to be able to help the school over the years by volunteering for different things like homecoming-type work and that.

Miner: Mhhm, it's great to have great friends—

Watson: Oh yeah.

Miner: Of the university too.

Watson: Yeah, there are a lot of—there's so many that stay in Bloomington and so you have an awful lot of friends that you made in college that are still here in town, but we're getting up in years because this homecoming this year will be our 60th.

Miner: That's amazing.

Watson: Graduated in ’50.

Miner: Mhmm.

Watson: Sixty years ago.

Miner: It’s hard to believe that time has passed.

[Both laugh]

Watson: That’s right, yeah.

Miner: Well I hope you have a wonderful experience again and I thank you so much for your time today.

Watson: Well thank you—

Miner: It’s a pleasure talking with you

Watson: Okay.

Miner: Okay.