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Chet Sheldon

Chet Sheldon '43

Illinois Wesleyan University

Rae Rein 2011

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Oral History Interview at the home of Chet and Helen Sheldon

Rae Rein: My name is Rein. I am a senior Political Science major at Illinois Wesleyan, Class of 2011. Today is September twenty—

Chet Sheldon: Twenty-fourth.

Rein: Twenty-fourth?

Sheldon: Yes.

Rein: Of two thousand and ten, and I am here with—

Sheldon: With Chet Sheldon, Class of 1943. I'm a former member of Beta Kappa Fraternity, now Theta Chi. I arrived on campus in 1937 coming from Rock Island, Illinois by bus, all in one suitcase with a tennis racket on the outside and a pair of gym shoes on the outside, and that was all the possessions that I brought to college.

Rein: Wow.

Sheldon: Back in those days, there were no men's dorms. I arrived—the bus station at that time was way down on South Main Street, almost down to the—where the old Home Sweet Home mission was just close—just north of the bridge. And I started to walk out to campus and got tired rather quickly and decided I'd take a bus that said "Center Street" except that it didn't get to where I was destined. I finally found my room that was an upstairs apartment to be shared by three other fellas and I was the only one to be there that whole evening. It was one of the loneliest nights I've put in in my life I think—very, very homesick immediately.

Rein: Where did you come from originally?

Sheldon: I came from Rock Island, Illinois. My parents had two [daughters] and my dad was the Chief Engineer for the Public School System of Rock Island. I had started out graduating from high school in 1936 with the intention of becoming an electric motor rewind worker, had a—I already had a job as an apprenticeship in a local firm. In high school I was not interested in college. It was my intention to become a motor rewinder and follow more in the line of what my dad had been. But the United Methodist Church had annual conferences that at that time met in various local churches and our Central Illinois Conference was meeting that year in Rock Island in my home church. I had been MYF President and I'll abbreviate that segment because it's not as relevant as you—

Rein: Mhmm.

Sheldon: What you're wanting, but something happened on that late September day that turned me out from going to become a laborer to being—having a call to go into ministry and I talked to my local minister and he called Dr. Harry McPherson at Illinois Wesleyan and said, "I've got a young guy here that wants to be—become a preacher and what can I do?" He said, "Send him down." And, literally, that was about the extent of the admissions policy. I had no other interviews. I came down and found my own housing and arrived and registered for my freshman year 1937. I said that I didn't do well in high school. I remember Miss Locke, my senior English teacher, pointing her finger at me and saying, "Young man, you better get this. Some day you're going to want to go to

college,” and the smart aleck that I was, I just laughed in her face. Well she was very right, I was going to need it.

[Both laugh]

Sheldon: And my freshman year was anything but an easy run. They called me one day from the Dean’s Office and said, “We’re awfully sorry but you’re on probation because of what your high school record was.”

Rein: Oh no.

Sheldon: So, little by little, I climbed out of that deep hole. So Wesleyan has been a real wonderful experience for me. We, as I said, we had no men’s dorms. I did become a member of Beta Kappa Fraternity, invited to be—it was said that that would help me get a meal job. There was no food service for general students. The Greek houses did have a food service, but I was able then to, through some influence of other kids that were—knew their way around town better than a freshman did, and I was able to get a meal job and every quarter—or every semester that I was in school I had a meal job to keep the wolf away from the door. What more do you—what next—what direction would you like me to...

Rein: What was your major?

Sheldon: I was a major in Sociology—Dr. Ratcliffe. My wife was also a Sociology major. We hadn’t met of course at the beginning and a little bit—a little bit later on, I imagine she’ll have a story to tell about Dr. Ratcliffe.

Rein: Oh.

Sheldon: She did his papers for him, graded papers, exams, and the only time he challenged what she had graded was the day after she accepted my fraternity pin...for engagement.

Rein: What year was that?

Sheldon: Oh that probably would’ve been somewhere late 1938, no, probably in 1939.

Rein: How did you two meet?

Sheldon: Well, we met soon after I was on campus. She was a sophomore by that time of course. We both graduated from high school the same year but because of that September annual conference meeting, it was too late for me to get into school, so I actually had a year’s work before I came—for the year starting in 1937.

Rein: If you just want to talk about what memories really stick out to you.

Sheldon: The what?

Rein: What qualities—well, you already talked about that. How close were you—what faculty members stick out in your mind? You already mentioned—

Sheldon: Oh, faculty members, mmmm. Well, there are several that were very influential in forming me and being a support to me as a young student here. I suppose the top of the list has to be Dr. Ratcliffe. He was—my major field of study. He was a very common Canadian background person. He was—they poked a lot of fun at him because he was not the most graceful gentleman, rather awkward in some of his movements, but his spirit and his heart was just very wonderful and he was extremely supportive, guiding me along. One of those early years, my experience with the general science course, basic science course that we all were required to take, was with Dr. Mortimer in the Chemistry Department, and he became a very good friend. A marvelous spirit. He became involved also and beyond the classroom—I remember so well one night he was with the youth group down at old Grace Methodist Church. Well, it was Grace Methodist Church back that far, but he came down there and was speaking with the group and talking about prayer and the room where we were had a fireplace and Dr. Mortimer said he just didn't believe that he could say a prayer that would cause that fireplace to fall and "Boom!" [claps] down went the log...[laughs].

Rein: Oh!

Sheldon: The timing was just absolutely marvelous and, of course, everybody had a roaring laugh. His idea of prayer was that he prayed as though everything was dependent upon the prayer, but then he rolled up his sleeves and went to work as though everything was dependent upon what he did about it. And his view of the cosmos was just so wonderful, got me off on a very positive direction. There was another chemistry professor that was in that same period and was—more my sophomore year—that I became very close friends with Dr. Virgil Bolen. He did not remain on campus a long period of time but he was also a United Methodist Supply Pastor and was serving the church out at Towanda as well as teaching at Wesleyan. That was a rather common thing for—within the church that people would serve these smaller churches and Virgil Bolen was—I'd bring my lunch with me and always had lunch with him in his office over in the Science Hall, now Ferguson.

Rein: Oh, wow.

Sheldon: Yeah. That was the—when we first arrived, as you know the campus today in two thousand and ten, I think there are only five or six buildings at most that were on campus, that were standing at the time we were here. That would include Buck and Presser and what is now Stevenson—the nursing school—Memorial Gym, Blackstock. I think that was it. We've seen wonderful expansion in a glorious way. They—the university has expanded. In 1980, the Methodist system of—for clergymen brought me back to Bloomington as Director of the Conference Counsel on Ministries, which occupied the building on the corner, south, between Evelyn Chapel and the President's House.

Rein: Ohh.

Sheldon: A building that has now been removed to make space for the Minor Myers Welcome Center, and as Director of the Counsel on Ministries, I was even privileged to serve as a member of the Wesleyan Board of Trustees for a period of time while I was in that capacity.

Rein: What was that experience like?

Sheldon: That would've been 1980 to '84. I retired in 1984.

Rein: What was it like being a trustee?

Sheldon: Well, I was on the Student Affairs Committee and it was not an experience that involved—I was not deeply involved except during the actual spring and fall meetings when the committees would come together. I did not have a chairmanship of that. You grow into those relationships within the structure of the trustees.

[Both begin to speak at the same time]

Rein: Oh, sorry.

Sheldon: No, go ahead.

Rein: I wanted to know if you knew anybody else on campus who wanted to become a minister.

Sheldon: Oh yes. There were a number of us that were here. We had an organization that was known as Episcopoi. It is no longer an organization that I see listed in any of the activities of present campus and I don't know whether there is some similar type group that brings together persons who are interested in going into full-time Christian service, but we had—over quite a few years, that organization had been in place, and it was essentially a fellowship experience. We would also take time when, as an organization, we would provide the program for the Wesleyan Chapel Program. You are all startled when you [learn] that chapel was mandatory in our day.

Rein: Oh.

Sheldon: Twice a week, and the seating in Presser Hall was assigned and attendance was recorded and it was a part of the way things were. At that time we accepted it without too much complaint. Helen, of course, my wife, lived on the same ground where Evelyn Chapel has been built. They would run over and get their mail just before chapel and be able to do other things during chapel, but some very good experiences and people that were brought in and, as I said, our Episcopoi group on occasions, were the ones who provided the chapel program, I remember one occasion, when I was President of Episcopoi, getting the—one of the Easter programs put together and we did quite little effort in making it as dramatic as we could with the theatrical gauze in the front and the Calvary scene in the back, bringing the lights up at the appropriate time to reveal [the cross]. Technology today is so...[laughs]...fantastic that some of these things seem almost—well, pretty prosaic.

Rein: I don't know, there was probably a magic about it. That made it feel very theatrical and real.

Sheldon: Yeah. The funny part about growing out of one of the relationships as Episcopoi was the group always had a Sweetheart Banquet and I'll have to jump ahead of myself

here with incident but we'll go back and pick up the other later. I was a Student Pastor from the time I was a junior here on campus serving the Methodist Church at Cooksville—I was the pastor of that local church and I was married. We were married [in 1941]. A year after Helen graduated.

Rein: You better not get that wrong...[laughs].

Sheldon: Yeah, that date is right—

[Rein laughs]

Sheldon: Because in 1942 we had our first son.

Rein: Ohh.

Sheldon: And Roger arrived on a September day at Brokaw, old Brokaw Hospital, same general area where the present—

Rein: BroMenn?

Sheldon: BroMenn is located, and I was there during the late and early morning hours for Roger's arrival...[clears throat]...excuse me, and I made it to my morning class with Dean Wallis and announced the arrival of my son. And another unique thing about September 21st, 1941—there was snow on the ground.

Rein: Oh wow.

Sheldon: I got my feet wet—

[Rein laughs]

Sheldon: Getting from the hospital to class that morning. The—well I've lost my train of thought now.

Rein: You were talking about the Sweetheart Banquet.

Sheldon: The what?

Rein: The Sweetheart Banquet.

Sheldon: Oh yes, thank you. Yes, the Episcopoi Sweetheart Banquet the following fall—I guess it would've been in mid-winter. My good friend Frank Nestler was MC for the banquet that night. In the course of the evening, they recog—Roger came to the banquet and Frank's comment was that—the prophecy was that Roger was going to make "Who's Who" and Chet would make "Believe It or Not".

[Rein laughs]

Sheldon: So...at least part of it's right.

[Rein laughs]

Sheldon: That little boy was born in 1942, has now retired after thirty years of medical practice as Professor of Neonatal Medicine at the University of Oklahoma. So he made out pretty well. He did. He could qualify for making “Who’s Who”. He was nominated for the Regions Award at the University of Oklahoma this year, didn’t get the award but he was nominated. Excuse me...[pause]...I don’t know whether that will help my voice or not.

[Rein laughs]

Sheldon: I usually don’t have a gravelly voice.

Rein: Well, you talk for—

Sheldon: Yeah.

Rein: You know, I’m not used to talking hardly...as long as you have already, so—

Sheldon: Yeah...[laughs].

Rein: Now did your son—I think Meg told me that your son attended Illinois Wesleyan as well.

Sheldon: I have two sons that attended Illinois Wesleyan. Roger graduated in 1960. He was valedictorian of his high school class and he qualified for a full-tuition scholarship at Northwestern University Medical School, so he has had his training in—his med school training at Northwestern. He did his pediatric training at Children’s Hospital in Boston at Harvard and has been the neonatal side of things ever since. Fantastic program that they’ve had at Oklahoma that as he concludes now is—they’ve had a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit with seventy units—

Rein: Wow.

Sheldon: They could care for seventy children from anywhere all over the state of Oklahoma and he was the one that put the program together for helicopter pickup of any infant needing that kind of care from anywhere in the state and bring them into the central Children’s Hospital in Oklahoma City, so Roger was the older son. He later married Carol Thompson who was the Class of ’60—no, ’65. My numbers are wrong. Roger graduated from high school in ’60, Wesleyan in ’64, Carol in ’65 and she has been—was a Radiologist MD in Oklahoma City and they are both now retired. Our younger son—we have three boys but the middle boy, Gordon, went to Southern Illinois University. Mark is the younger one who also graduated from Illinois Wesleyan in a Class of 1964 [correction: 1970]. That doesn’t sound right, they’re celebrating their fortieth anniversary of graduation this homecoming year and Mark has been kind of chairing the promotion of getting the group together to come for homecoming and they’ve got a huge group of kids coming back from the Class of nineteen [seventy]—

Rein: Five?

Sheldon: Well it would be Class of 1970, of course.

Rein: '70, yeah, yeah.

Sheldon: What's the matter with me?

[Both laugh]

Sheldon: My math isn't clicking very quickly.

[Rein laughs]

Rein: That's okay.

Sheldon: Yeah. Mark was—both of the boys, both Roger and Mark, were President of the Student Senate while they were on campus. That may be a unique feature for the Sheldon family. I don't think any other family have had two kids that both were Student Senate President. We don't know if that's the case. And Mark then was President of the Alumni Association for a period of time, one term a few years back now, and has always been a highly promotional person on behalf of Illinois Wesleyan and has been—spent thirty years in Hong Kong and in Asia. He will be the—one of the lecturers for “Back-to-College” at this year's Homecoming—

Rein: Okay.

Sheldon: “China Rising” ...one of the Friday programs. You want to get there.

Rein: Yeah, I remember seeing it in the—

Sheldon: Yeah. Well that's—that's our little boy.

Rein: You must be very proud.

Sheldon: Indeed.

Rein: You must've been pretty promotional yourself if two of your sons ended up at Illinois Wesleyan. Was that your doing?

Sheldon: Well, it—economics always plays a part in deciding about where you're going to college, and I was a Methodist Pastor and at the time I arrived on campus, 1937, my tuition was ninety dollars a semester, and because I was pre-The [meaning, Theology], it was half of that. When kids of preacher's families from the conference came to Wesleyan, their tuition was half—they usually had a half-tuition grant, so that was part of the reason. Over the years, Wesleyan had a number of programs when the youth kids of the churches of the conference would all come in for Methodist Youth Day on campus and our kids were exposed that way. We'd bring a number of carloads of teenagers down here every Fall and—for Methodist Youth Day—and always a football included in that but it was exposing them to the university and, of course, Admissions today are so much more complex than it was even in the sixties when our kids were beginning their college, but they were—it just seemed like it was a foregone conclusion in our household that

they would follow us to Illinois Wesleyan and they never gave us any static on that. They always seemed to be quite happy with the idea and are still quite happy with the idea of having been here. They're both—both pretty good promoters of—Mark has especially been instrumental in bringing in the delegations from China.

Rein: So I kind of wanted to backtrack a little bit. You were on campus when World War II started.

Sheldon: Yes, mmmm.

Rein: How is that—how did that affect campus?

Sheldon: Okay, I'll spill—spin out a little bit on that. We're on. Yes, my relationship—I was married in '41. We had a very dear friend, Abe Akaka, from Hawaii that was a fraternity brother, was supposed to sing at our wedding in August of 1941. He had been working at Estes Park in Colorado that summer and met his new sweetheart and he didn't make our wedding but he did promise to come down and see us. He was then enrolled as a theological student at Chicago University School of Theology, so he came down to see us and it was one of those times that became historic. We were all together in our automobile Sunday afternoon riding on the newly-opened Veterans—what is now Veterans Parkway in—around I-55 City—on the afternoon of December 7th, 1941 when the radio broke in with the announcement of Pearl Harbor. Abe Akaka was seated in the middle of our front seat as we rode down that street. Abe has been a very marvelous Wesleyan alum who became the first Native American—native Hawaiian to become pastor of Kawaiaha'o Church in Honolulu, the mother church of Protestantism in the Islands. He was the first native person to serve as—in that function. Well that was 1941. I was already married. I was serving local churches and I was received—because of that I was granted a 4-F Classification and was never called up for military service. I've always been one who's been in the field of peace with justice, close to being a full pacifist but yet realizing that there are some things that create a circumstance that restraints have to sometimes be employed, ugly and unfortunate as those things are, but I've been committed through my whole ministry for working in that era—in that area of creating reconciliation, peace, bringing people together in dialogue rather than in hostility. So that's my relationship with the period of World War II.

Rein: Mmmm. Did the campus—I'm sure that the campus changed from when—during the time of peace to war. Was—what was the general feeling of the students?

Sheldon: Of the students? Well, here at—when I was on campus, a number of people were being called up just because of their draft numbers and the entire college marching band during that period enrolled as a unit. The Wesleyan band marched from campus to the railroad station out on West Washington Street at that time as a unit and were taken into service as a unit and were kept as a unit throughout their time in military service as I understand it. I know they were at the beginning, I don't know whether they, before it was all over, whether they were broken up, but they stayed together as a unit. Campus became considerably smaller because of the fact of enlistment and, I think, as I remember it, we got down to just a little over four hundred students during the peak of World War II. And then as the others came back they—the G.I. Bill brought a number of them back in. There were some old, Quonset hut type of dormitories that were built on the west end of Presser Hall in the area where—before McPherson became a reality and there were

three or four of those that were used for housing as some of the guys came—and families came back from military service. There were several faculty homes in that area, which is now—that's McLean isn't it that comes on up to campus there and would've gone on through Presser Hall and—no, not through Presser, through McPherson. The street would've come up right through Ames Library, that's Prairie, isn't it?

Rein: I'm not sure.

Sheldon: Well whatever street it is.

Rein: Yeah.

Sheldon: Anyway, Dr. Browns lived in a house there across the street with Dr. Hazzard—he had a home there. There was a dorm for girls Swisher Hall located there. I was a houseboy there for one term taking care of the furnace in the wintertime, keeping the girls warm and the Hazzards—let me talk about [Dr. Lowell] Hazzard for a little bit.

Rein: Mhmm.

Sheldon: Dr. Corn had been the Professor of Religion when we first came and he became the Methodist Pastor of the church in—First Church in Normal—left the teaching and went and became pastor of the church, and Dr. Lowell Hazzard came in as his successor. He was just the most gracious and most congenial, outgoing—well, he was just the warmest spirit I've run into for many, many people that I've known, and the Hazzards—his wife, Stella, would—always had the cookies and punch and whatever ready anytime students wanted to drop into their house. They just had kind of a student center going there, or hospitality center, for the kids and people would come in and they would have conversations and Dr. Hazzard was one that was always—he wasn't a Minor Myers but yet he was one who had such warm, deep interest in people becoming what they could become and he was one of those who helped me over a few hurdles and helped me get my feet on the ground as far as getting into the ministry, preparing for the ministry, before I went on up to seminary. Lowell Hazzard became New Testament Professor in Westminster University Seminary when he left here. He went on up into higher levels of academic teaching.

Rein: The hurdles you faced, those were what you were going through when you were on campus?

Sheldon: I'm sorry—

Rein: Oh.

Sheldon: A little louder.

Rein: The hurdles that you faced on campus, were they more what you were going to do with your life?

Sheldon: Well, the ones that—the biggest hurdle I had was overcoming the fact that I wasn't a good student in high school. I've always had a great struggle to get all of the work done that was needed to be done and that has just been one of the things that made

it a basic part of me and I've had to struggle with it through my whole career. It hasn't ended...[laughs]...it's still a struggle to keep up with all of the vast materials that can—can't begin to cover the things that are available in the cyber world that we have today. But even back in the other days when everything was in print, that was a challenge always to try to be able to keep up with the academic requirements and I was never at the top of the class, but I would pay close attention. I've been able to absorb a lot more through my ears than through my eyes and that's just the way this kid happened to be put together.

Rein: What was your favorite subject?

Sheldon: Well, subject, favorite subject, there's so many of them. The whole world is out there and as far as school and seminary is concerned, yes, I think my favorite studies in seminary were in the field of New Testament. There were others in church history that excited me. I could've gone on to further studies in either of those fields but I was destined to be a pastor and the fact that I already was a family person with—by the time I was out of seminary, my third son had arrived.

Rein: Wow.

Sheldon: I could spin out the worst week in my life connected with that but that's not relevant to Wesleyan. I'll tell it to you later...[laughs].

Rein: Okay.

[Both laugh]

Rein: What were some traditions at Wesleyan that you remember?

Sheldon: Traditions... Well, I don't know.

Rein: Do you think they've changed—well, obviously they've changed, but—

Sheldon: Oh yes. The fact that I was a Student Pastor kept me out of some of the life activity of the campus. I would—was always the first one in the library when I lived in Cooksville. We moved to Cooksville and we lived in a parsonage there my last year. A mailman from Colfax met me on the corner at the gas station in Cooksville and I was in Bloomington at the library about 7:00 a.m. every morning, so I got an early start but then I also was back on the charge at night and the life of the fraternity type of thing and other activities just was not my privilege. Traditions—I always enjoyed the homecoming connections, the things that—some of those I guess the—what's the—I thought I had that name in mind, the track meet and the tug o' wars and the things that—

Rein: Oh, yeah.

Sheldon: Precedes homecoming.

Rein: Mhmm. I forget the name of it.

Sheldon: Yeah, but that dates way back there. One of the things that we don't do anymore is homecoming parades and floats that were always a part of the homecoming—worked on a few of those in spite of all of the other things. The—I've always been warmly connected with the Music School and the choirs that are there, same with the Wesleyan—the big choir—never was in any of the refined groups—

[Both laugh]

Sheldon: On campus but one year, under the direction of Dr. Westbrook, for whom the auditorium has been named, he was conductor for the Messiah that we've sung together. A couple years I was in that chorus. I'm not sure if I'm picking up on any other things that qualify as tradition, mmmm.

Rein: So if you were pretty academically-minded, how did you interact with the fraternity you said you were in?

Sheldon: Well, it didn't create a conflict for me. It was just that I had other things that I had to do and the fraternity recognized what I was about and there was never any challenge from them that made my life hard. I was able to do what I could do and the—would try to get to the fraternity, some of the social things that—the dances that they would have occasionally, although I'm not much of a dancer.

[Rein laughs]

Sheldon: My older son is fantastic. He and his wife have taken ballroom dancing lessons and I don't see how a kid of mine can be that graceful.

[Rein laughs]

Sheldon: He was married—when his daughter was married, he danced with his daughter, the bride, and it was beautiful!

[Rein laughs]

Sheldon: I've been at privilege to marry three of my grandchildren.

Rein: Ohh.

Sheldon: Before.

Rein: That's nice.

Sheldon: The older grandson was my first wedding in Ohio, second one was the granddaughter Rebecca in an outdoor wedding in—two hundred miles north of Minneapolis in June, lakeside open-air wedding. I thought “Surely it's going to be awful cold.”

[Both laugh]

Sheldon: It was a gorgeous day. We had a fantastic experience.

Rein: That's great.

Sheldon: And at the reception Roge and Rebecca danced and it was worth—wish I had the footage on film.

Rein: Mhmm.

Sheldon: Yeah, but that's not Daddy.

[Rein laughs]

Rein: It's nice though.

Sheldon: Yes. Well, let's see, what else can we share?

Rein: Um...I was interested—you said—you mentioned two professors, like science professors, who were also ministers. I guess, I don't know many professors now who do—

Sheldon: Both.

Rein: Yeah.

Sheldon: Yeah. I don't know of anybody on—here at the moment that is serving a local church, but there were, at least during the time I was at school, the Professor of Religion was an ordained clergyman as well as an academic—met the academic qualification of PhD in his field. Some of the others—I mentioned the Chemistry Professor Virgil Bolen who was also serving a church at Towanda. The—often that people—Dr. Whitehurst was a Professor of Religion here—he's been retired now probably I'm going to guess twenty years maybe—but Jim did not have an appointment that I know of but he was often available to going, doing Sunday services or special events, and as a clergyman he was ordained as well as PhD level as an academic. There are, I guess—Bill White is also a clergyman who has ordination as well as his academic qualifications. He's now retired from—more recently from the Religion Department. Jerry Stone was ordained as well. So there've been a number of those that over the years have been both professor and also clergy pastor, doing both.

Rein: Do you think that adds something to their teaching?

Sheldon: Adds something to their teaching? Well, I would hope so.

[Both laugh]

Sheldon: And maybe it worked the other way too, that their teaching added a dimension to their preaching. I think that to be authentic in your academic approach to things and be able to document things academically gives an integrity to your expressions of the Gospel and your application of the Gospel. There are a lot of issues in our world today that talk about religion, talk about justice, talk about peace, talk about social issues, and the important thing is whether you have a blend of both the spiritual and the reality that is

there and how they merge with love and justice becoming the main supports for what is a peaceful circumstance where people can become individuals that fulfill—with fulfillment. There's not going to be any peace if there isn't going to be justice and until that is—becomes a reality, we're going to be continuing to have major problems in our world. And I'm afraid that there are those in—sometimes in the religious world that become a little bit askew in the way they face up to some of these things.

Rein: Do you think studying religion—I know that wasn't your major but—do you think studying religion helps or hurts that?

Sheldon: Oh, one has to be grounded in what has been before you can really dream of what should be. When we're disconnected with our roots, it becomes a real tragedy. There are a lot of new things out there and fine, let's explore them, let's integrate them when they're useful, but there still has to be that basic connection with what is the reality of your existence and I choose to say that the most important thing in our relationships is still love and there's no better example of what that is—how that is described and lived out than in the life of Jesus Christ and to wash that aside and say, "Oh, we don't need religion," well religion is one thing but the spirituality that is connected with Jesus and the way he exemplified that love in his relationship to individuals and causes the champion, the issues of justice and all, those things are the realities that we still need to grapple with, find new ways of applying them, but we can't ignore them.

Rein: Do you think that they are ignored more today than they were?

Sheldon: Well, there's a certain secularism that just doesn't acknowledge them. There's—of course there's a large number of people who claim atheism, which would be a denial of all of that. They don't believe any relationship of any supercreator that had anything to do with the origins of man and creation. I understand how the mind works and some of these folks come to those kind of conclusions, but I don't believe they have grappled with the realities, what the life of Jesus actually showed and how he actually lived, not so much concerned with either his birth or necessarily the way he died but the way he lived and what he was, how he related to the real gutsy stuff of life, and love was always in there.

Rein: Did you feel that way even when you were younger, even when you were still in college?

Sheldon: Oh I'm sure I couldn't express it even too well not now let alone way back then.

Rein: Did it help you though like with the war and being married and—

Sheldon: Yeah.

Rein: Dealing with things? Did your being a minister—

Sheldon: Yeah, yeah. When just asked to do the best you can, not to create further conflict, but to try to relate to the circumstances that you're facing in that kind of a positive, creative, constructive way and my whole motivation was that the world would be—I might be able to do a little—be a little bit something better because of the life in the ministry I shared and had some successes along the way at that point. Thirty years in

pastoral ministry, another ten in administration of—as a District Superintendent and as a Director of the Counsel on Ministries with opportunities in programmatic things all the way along the line, and an example of life with my wife for sixty-nine years now has been positive, some sons that have been contributors to quality life of those with whom they've come in touch.

Rein: We've gotten way off...

[Both laugh]

Rein: But it's—I think it's really interesting.

Sheldon: Well, all of that connects with Illinois Wesleyan and the people that were here, the nurturing that was received as a student, and it's like planting a seed. It eventually sprouts and it grows and once in a while it blooms and it's beautiful and that's what I hope has been the long-term result of Wesleyan's influence on Sheldon.

Rein: That's nice.

Sheldon: We have several presidents of the university that were clergymen. When we were students here, there were four different persons who served as president of the university during that time and I mentioned Dr. McPherson. When Dr. Shaw came along, he was President when Roger arrived and we have a note from him, congratulations to our young son when he arrived, and we've always had a very close relationship with the faculty and the administrative people of Illinois Wesleyan over the years. I've been on a first name basis with most of them for a long, long time, but, yeah. It's been a joy, mhmm.

Rein: Um...that's pretty—did—ah man—is there anything else? Any other stories?

Sheldon: Well I don't know whether—we pretty well—

Rein: Yeah.

Sheldon: Covered the works I think. I summarized the fact that I'm in debt to Wesleyan. I have appreciated what they've done for me and my family and I hope we can continue to enjoy that kind of a creative relationship as on down the line.

Rein: Yeah. Are you going to Homecoming?

Sheldon: Oh yes, we'll have to be to Homecoming.

Rein: Yeah, your son, of course.

Sheldon: Yeah, well last year, you know, they gave us the Loyalty Award for the Alumni Association, so we were there in “sporting” detail of it last year.

[Rein laughs]

Sheldon: Had a great time.

Rein: That's great.

Sheldon: Yeah. Even got to make a little speech.

[Both laugh]

Sheldon: All recorded.

Rein: Of course.

Sheldon: Yeah.

Rein: Okay—

[The recording stops and then is started again to pick up the thread of a story begun after the formal interview ended.]

Sheldon: For the building—

Rein: Mhmm.

Sheldon: A number of my friends were still here on campus and came and there were John Wesley Powell things up in what—known as Amie Chapel up in Hedding Hall and they got a lot of those things out but there were a lot of things that they couldn't get out. The faculty had offices in old Hedding and the poor people, they just lost their libraries, they lost their notes, their lecture notes and all of that couldn't be salvaged or couldn't be gotten out and yet on Monday morning after that fire, every class met somewhere. They were able to find—because there were a lot of classes that did meet in Hedding Hall. There were lots of classrooms in the—that were in the upper floors of that building and—

Rein: That's incredible.

Sheldon: It was incredible, very remarkable and, of course, then the old building was—collapsed in itself and for years the front entrance masonry of old Hedding stood as a monument to the old building and they put a new roof over the basement area and it was called Duration Hall. And for quite a number of years that was used. Our Methodist office building had not been built and our office—our church center was in part of old Hedding Duration Hall and the—I know my good friend Gordon Reubenking, now known as Gordon King, was on campus at that time and was a one of the fellows that came and helped to evacuate as much as they possibly could from the building before it was inaccessible. It was a big—it was such a tall building and the floors—the ceilings were probably fifteen, eighteen feet, big high rooms, so that meant the whole thing went up.

Rein: Yeah.

Sheldon: There were four floors to it altogether. And the—Amie Chapel had a lot of display cases around it of memorabilia from the John Wesley Powell era and some of that was saved and some of it was not. It was a turning point in a sense with the loss of that

building. It made it awfully difficult to find adequate space to equal what was lost there. I don't know when that first building came up after the fire, after '43. That's interesting to do a little research on to find out when the replacement for that came into exist—came into being.

Rein: It musta—had to have been pretty soon after. Because they had to put—

Sheldon: Yeah.

Rein: All those... Thank you, this was really—yeah. [talking about the picture of Chet and Helen, outside Hedding Hall] Have you been saving it all these years then?

Sheldon: This?

Rein: Mhmm, yeah.

Sheldon: Well I had these laminated. They preserved a lot easier this way—

Rein: Sure.

Sheldon: But it was really quite an attractive building. I remember one year Helen was on the Homecoming Committee and they got a big neon sign, letters that were probably a foot high that said, "Welcome Alums," and they got it up—it was up almost at the third floor level of the old Hedding Hall.

Rein: That's wonderful.

Sheldon: That's what survived—

Rein: Oh.

Sheldon: That—

Rein: The arch.

Sheldon: The arch, yeah. That stood for a long time before they removed all of old Duration and made way for Sheean Library.

Rein: Oh yeah.

Sheldon: That's the time that Old North came down to make way for Sheean Library.

Rein: And now they're taking that down too, eventually.

Sheldon: Well yes, that's to come out. I know what the master plan is, that—I'm surprised that hasn't already come out. I understand—I know why it hasn't—because of the economics of the present—

Rein: Yeah.

Sheldon: Slump in the general economy and the loss of income that has resulted and that's an expensive thing just to get rid of that. And that's the kind of a building that was all cement, poured cement walls and those don't break up very easily.

Rein: No.

[Both laugh]

Rein: No.

Sheldon: Yeah....

Rein: So this picture of you and your wife—well, you weren't married at the time—

Sheldon: No, we weren't married at that time. That was '38. We weren't married until '41. It could've been—no, I think that has to be '38, yeah.

Rein: Do you know when or why this was—was it just taken for fun or was it an occasion?

Sheldon: Well, it was spring. I don't know what the occasion was. It was just a wonderful time of the year and. Old Hedding had spirea all the way around the front of it and when it was in bloom you can see how lovely it became.

Rein: Oh, so this is Hedding behind you?

Sheldon: Yeah, that's old Hedding back in there, yeah...yeah.

Rein: That's wonderful.

Sheldon: Yes.

Rein: Such a great picture.

Sheldon: Helen's got another print of that out. She was showing Meg but you folks can put that on file.

Rein: Oh.

Sheldon: That's already in the picture bank over at [University Communications] at the Wesleyan magazine. They've had that in Wesleyan magazine at some other occasion, I know I got it to [Tim] Obermiller.

Rein: Hmm. [Recording ends with no further comments.]