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David Berry

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Illinois Wesleyan University

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Oral History Interview with David Berry
January 24, 2014

Abby Szunyogh: My name is Abby Szunyogh, today is January 24th, 2014, and we are at Jacob's Well Community Church in Bloomington, IL, and I am here with...

David Berry: David Berry.

Szunyogh: And could you please state your name and—well, you already said your name.

Berry: David S. Berry—I came to Wesleyan in the fall of 1970 and graduated in May of 1974. And actually, we're in Normal.

Szunyogh: So what qualities drew you to Illinois Wesleyan?

Berry: Well I had an unusual...precedent to coming to Wesleyan. I'd never considered it as a possibility. I had gone to Bradley. I had done one year at Bradley, I played baseball and basketball, and had enjoyed that a lot. In February of that year, which was the year of '69-'70, in February of that year I was in a terrible car accident, very serious. The other two fellows were killed, and that changed everything for me. The father of one of the guys in the other car was in the mob in Peoria, and he had threatened me, and so—even though I was only 18 at the time—I was unsettled about all that.

But I didn't have enough gumption to really do anything about it. During that spring, my buddy and I—Cal Atwell was his name, he's now a doctor, in Geneseo, IL—came over to Wesleyan, we visited with the basketball coach, spent a night at the old Sig house, and just paid this rather informal visit, and that was nice. And I had received a letter from the coach, a recruiting letter, but I didn't give it too much thought to be honest with you. I was pretty settled, and I was absolutely just living one day at a time and not looking too far ahead.

When—okay so that summer I spent a good deal of that summer in California playing basketball with Athletes in Action. When I got back here, I was all ready to go to Bradley. I was at Bradley, I was registering for the semester, and I got a letter at Bradley from Cal, who—I look back on this and it's all providential I'm certain, but had I not gotten that letter I'd never go to Wesleyan. And he had started here, and just said he thought that I would flourish here, and he knew I wanted out of Peoria, and I should see if I can get in it at Wesleyan.

Well it so happened that my sister was home. Her husband was in Vietnam for his second tour of duty and she was living with my parents. And she's a guidance counselor. She was working at a local school. And so I went home that weekend, and school was supposed to start Monday. And so this was probably Friday I went home. And I mentioned that I'd gotten this letter from Cal, and she said, well, you should try to go. And I said, they've been going for a week. You just can't do that. She said, but, here's what you need to understand. There are always kids who quit school the first week. And there may be an empty bed. So I called the basketball coach, Dennie Bridges, and said, hey, could you get me in school? He said, probably not, we've been going a week. He called me back the next day and said, I can get you in. So I just made the decision right then, okay I'm going to go to Wesleyan.

Now I wasn't eligible to play, you had to sit out a while. And quite frankly I was so tired of playing basketball that it was going to take a lot of...kind of a rebirth of emotion for it, for me to ever really want to play again. But I did love playing baseball. So I enrolled, and they had fall baseball, and I did that, and went to one or two basketball things, but since I wasn't eligible, and I'll tell you I was so overwhelmed by

the things that had happened that relate to the accident. I'd just then gotten sued—by the two families. One family sued me for \$2,003,000—

Szunyogh: My goodness.

Berry: —and another family sued me for \$503,000.

Szunyogh: Wow.

Berry: I had just turned 19, in August, and I had been sued personally for \$2,506,000 dollars. And that wasn't something that a lot of people knew about, and I was also—had been threatened by this family, and I just wanted to get away from it, although I wasn't that far away. But it was enough. So I just kind of started up here. I was a political science major when I got here and soon discovered that it was more science than politics for my taste. And that changed when I took a class with Dr. Harvey Beutner who became my favorite professor, I changed to an English major and that was a good decision.

Szunyogh: With Dr...?

Berry: Harvey Beutner.

Szunyogh: Beutner. Okay. And you switched to English.

Berry: Yeah.

Szunyogh: Let's see. Are there any other faculty members that stand out in your memory?

Berry: Yeah. Dr. Beutner was my best friend in the faculty for certain, and I'll tell you why. He confided things in me, he sought me out, he was kind, generous, and I think more than anything, he understood me. Whereas I felt like that was a rare thing those days. Because I wasn't sure I understood myself but he did. But another professor that I had a great deal of respect for was a woman in the English department named Sammie Greer.

Szunyogh: Oh, interesting.

Berry: Greer, Dr. Sammie Greer. She was very, very smart, and an excellent presenter of the major English writers, or whatever it was we were studying and I just respected her a lot and she was kind. So those would be my two favorites.

Szunyogh: Okay. Do you think that in general student-faculty interactions were close at IWU when you were there, or was it just those two professors?

Berry: Well in general I think that most students had probably a better relationship with faculty than I did because I was such a lousy student and that being a lousy student was my unwillingness to be disciplined and to compete. I didn't compete in college. If I liked the class, I got an A. If I didn't like it, I could get anything else. And the sad thing was I didn't really care. I just wanted to graduate someday. And so I didn't compete for grades. I had a couple of classes later in my senior year. I had a senior colloquium class which was all English majors and it was very competitive. And I kind of took the bit then and thought, okay I'm going to work hard in this class, and I did, and it was taught by a team of teachers. And I worked hard in that class. But for the most part, I just skated, made friends, did other stuff. And

was not someone that a lot of faculty was going to say, I want to befriend that guy. But this is where Dr. Beutner was different. He appreciated my background, he appreciated what I believed, and what I was going through, and he could not have been kinder. And without him I don't graduate.

Szunyogh: That's really great that you found someone like that. So what kinds of extracurricular activities did you do?

Berry: Well I played baseball my first year. And after that, I think my extracurricular things were solely related to trying to become part of—now this would've been in the spring of my junior year, and a whole group of us who didn't know each other coalesced, and a Christian community was formed. And I'd say it was a dozen people. But we didn't know each other before. We just kind of found each other. And so when that happened, my whole world changed. And I now had an accountability, a relationship with some people that encouraged me, and I got very, very dedicated to seeking God. Just finding out the truth about the Christian faith, because if it wasn't true I didn't want anything to do with it. If it was true, then it demanded everything I had.

So I set out to study that, and to work at that. And so I would say, from that point on, my extracurricular time was spent doing small group things, prayer meetings, Bible studies, but we were never official. We were never part of any campus directive of any kind. It was just ad hoc, we were all very serious about this. And that's what I gave my time to. And as I think about, I didn't play my horn; I didn't do anything like that. Oh I did intramurals. I did all the intramurals. But I wasn't a part of the campus political scene. That was a time when in the Vietnam War, it became very uncool to be a part of the establishment. And the campus political scene was seen as establishment. And so if you did that that was uncool.

Now if you wanted to be cool, you became part of the dropout scene, and you became a drug user and all those kinds of things. I didn't want to do that either. So I was just in my own little realm. I mean, I had the best friends and so much fun and I loved being in school and all of that. But as a group we just didn't get real involved in campus things.

Szunyogh: Do you remember any particular traditions that were going on at IWU?

Berry: Yeah. I mean Homecoming was a big deal. Sue, who was my girlfriend and has been my wife now for 37 years was on the Homecoming Court and we did that together. Yeah, they had the Titan Games. But that was more of a Greek thing.

Szunyogh: Mm-hm. Yeah, they still are.

Berry: Yeah, that was more of a Greek thing. Again, it was a fluid time. And if they tried to sponsor something at the school it was not readily taken to, but there were weird things that developed. Like I was in school when the whole streaking thing—

Szunyogh: Oh!

Berry: —was so—and our yearbook that year, you open the page and there's a bunch of Sigma Chi's there without any clothes on!

Szunyogh: Ha!

Berry: And so that was a deal. And oh, I don't know that there were other—I just don't recall other things that would've grabbed me, I don't think. Not that that didn't grab me but it was just kind of fascinating, that old business.

Szunyogh: Yeah. An interesting fad.

Berry: Yeah. People just went nuts for about two weeks.

Szunyogh: Really.

Berry: And that was it. Never again. [Laughs]

Szunyogh: That's funny. Do you still sometimes go to Homecoming or did you go after graduation very much?

Berry: We've gone some. I think we've maybe gone two or three times to the official deal. When there was a reunion. But more than that, we just connect with old friends.

Szunyogh: Okay. That's nice.

Berry: I still go to a lot of football and basketball games. Sue goes to some, but not a part of any official alumni deal.

Szunyogh: Have you noticed any changes in the way that Homecoming was and how it is now?

Berry: Yeah. In those days, being the queen was a big, big deal. And so it had to do with beauty and popularity and things like that. I think that's all changed. There was a parade. I always felt like it was—excuse me—it's called Homecoming with the understanding of it's when alumni came back to school, but always felt like it was more for the students that were there, and I'm not sure that that's changed. I think it's a time when they do stuff, and it's okay.

Szunyogh: Mm-hm. Yeah. So what are some of your favorite personal stories or memories that you have from IWU?

Berry: Oh my gosh. I have a zillion of them. Probably my favorite story that has anything to do with academics relates to a 300 level English class I took called Satire. And Dr. Beutner taught the class, and my best friend and roommate at the time, Kirk Bode, took the class with me. And he has always been Mr. Read-the-Syllabus, Start-Writing-the-Papers. He is just so disciplined and such a great student. He got one B his whole time at Wesleyan—

Szunyogh: Wow.

Berry: —and he could've argued out of that. So he was a spectacular student. And I was so slovenly and just...but I was so just not worried. I was just enjoying life. So there were I think 32 people in this class, 32 or 35. And a third of our grade was creating our own satire that we would present to the rest of the class at the end of the semester. And Kirk had known what he was going to do from the beginning of the semester. He had this all planned out, he had worked on it, and just refined it and shared it with his girlfriend, and just worked so much on it. And mine is due the next morning, and I still don't know what I'm doing.

Szunyogh: Oh no!

Berry: I still don't know what I'm doing. In fact I still have the beginning of one approach, some writing that I was doing, I still have that at home, because I found it every now and then. And I just scrapped that because it was going nowhere. And he's going nuts. He always called me Harry, Harry's my dad's name. So he called me Harry.

Szunyogh: Okay.

Berry: He goes, Harry, you're first tomorrow morning.

[Szunyogh laughs]

Berry: You have to have this thing down. It's a third of our grade. And I had an A going in the class. And I just said, I got nothing! I got nothing. So I'm just going to bed. And I'll come up with something in the morning. And he argued with me, cajoled, did anything to try to get me to get this out of the way so that I could go the next day and have something. And I just thought, I just need a good night's sleep. And then I'll think of something in the morning and we'll just whip something up in no time. I—and here's what's funny about it. I went to bed, I went to sleep, and I had not had the thought that ended up being my idea. I had never entertained the thought. But I woke up, and the idea was right in front of me. And I thought, that's a great idea. And I set about working this out. And the idea was this. I was writing letters home from Wesleyan to different people. To my old girlfriend, to my parents, to my grandmother, to an old teacher, and to a friend. And I think I wrote a total of 13 letters. Put them in an envelope, quickly addressed them, sealed the envelope, and then what I did is I got up in front of the whole class, and in order, read these letters. And it was a time where I can say that the muse had visited me because they were really good. And I hadn't thought about it. It was just there. It just came. And in the grading of this, half of your grade came from Dr. Beutner, the other half came from the class. Because they graded everybody.

Szunyogh: Oh wow.

Berry: I had the universally—that means everyone—chose mine as the best.

Szunyogh: That's awesome!

Berry: Out of 32 people.

Szunyogh: That's really awesome.

Berry: It was—it was crazy.

[Szunyogh laughs]

Berry: It was my only victory really. But here's what it was. They identified with it. Because I was really honest about a lot of stuff. As I would write to my buddy in that letter, I would write things that made them laugh, and I would write things that made them cry. But what I went through in the letters was an existential crisis in which I'd lost my faith. And gave up hope. And I'm telling you, everybody in the class understood that. That their experience had not been one where their faith had been built up, but one where it had been torn down. And so, they identified with that. Dr. Beutner wrote me the nicest letter

that I got when I was home on break, explaining that I'd got the universal top grade, and he was so proud of it and thought it was so good. He never did know that it happened the two hours before class that morning.

Szunyogh: [Laughs] yeah.

Berry: So that's my favorite classroom thing. Had so much fun with these guys, and I was always up for ping pong or foosball or something and was great at—when I made friends who were of like academic—because that was dangerous because we were going to play ping pong. [laughs] So did a lot of that, went on some crazy trips, yeah, just had fun. I think of one thing that's just kind of crazy now that I think about it, but nobody thought anything of it! I had guns in my room!

Szunyogh: Oh my gosh.

Berry: Because I went hunting. So I had a shotgun and a rifle in my room, I carried them right in the dorm, I carried them right outside the dorm, people in the dorm knew I had them. Nobody cared.

Szunyogh: That would be very different now.

Berry: Nobody cared. And yeah, it's just different now.

Szunyogh: Definitely is. I can't imagine someone trying to do that now.

Berry: Oh! They'd be arrested!

Szunyogh: Yeah. What else was dorm life like?

Berry: Dorm life was good. I lived in Dolan first. Lived there for two years, then I lived in East Hall, which is now Dodds. Dolan was plain, and there was nothing at all about Dolan that sold itself. It was just fun. And my RA became my best friend. He was a senior, and we shared a lot of silliness...And I was always looking for a card game or something. So the whole floor became kind of a community, and had a lot of fun that way. And then the next year, I had a roommate on the same floor. And then I got my girlfriend, and that changed my life more than anything, was having a girlfriend, because the first year I didn't have one. And so then in early in November of my junior year, when I got a girlfriend, and so then we just did so much stuff with other couples and other friends, and she became a part of my friend group, probably more than I became part of hers, because she was in a sorority and I wasn't a part of that business. But we just did—we played so much cards, and we did so much stuff that was free. Because we didn't have a meal on Sunday night, that was when we went out to eat. But the rest of the—I thought Saga was awesome. I thought Saga was really, really good, and I was always happy with the food, and it was only Sunday night so we had to go out to eat. And so we did. We'd go out for pizza. We went to Tobin's, which was then in downtown Bloomington. That was our favorite place to go, and just had so much fun. Just goofing around.

Szunyogh: That's good.

Berry: Yeah. One of the biggest changes of the campus is the campus.

Szunyogh: Yeah.

Berry: It has—the buildings are just so different. I remember the old library, which was a new library when I went there. And thinking, this building is really modern and unusual, and open, and it was a place of great community, the library—we all went to the library and studied, but that's where we connected with people.

Szunyogh: Yeah.

Berry: And now I look at Ames and it just seems like this enormous, fabulous place, but I loved our old library.

Szunyogh: Yeah, yeah. I never got to see the inside of Sheean.

Berry: Oh, you didn't? Oh, I-I loved it. I thought it was fabulous.

Szunyogh: I've seen pictures. Are there other major changes you've noticed?

Berry: Well buildings—some of the roads have changed. I never liked the fact that they closed the roads that they closed—because it made access to things harder to drive to—but I understand. I think they've done a fabulous job. And the whole Shirk Center. The whole athletic complex is just so different. I mean our baseball diamond was carved out of the football field when we were there. And Fred Young Fieldhouse was the Fieldhouse, and—it was no award-winning place but it was in keeping with the times.

Szunyogh: Mm-hm.

Berry: And they've just done a fabulous job I think of upgrading all those things that are part of student life, and some of the dorms now and the classrooms and the labs and all that, if they're just—they are just superior now to what was there, but what there was when I was there was good for the time.

Szunyogh: Yeah.

Berry: I think my favorite place was when I was there was the old Buck Library. You know where at?

Szunyogh: Mm-hm! Yup. We still use it.

Berry: Yeah I had journalism class there, and I had French class there, and it was old, and it smelled, and it just—but you felt like, I'm in a college. It just had that kind of Ivy League feel to it.

Szunyogh: You kind of mentioned a bit about the Vietnam War, and how that affected the campus. What are some other ways that current events outside the Wesleyan bubble affected life there?

Berry: Well, there was a sense then, that the youth culture was becoming its own organism, which was so different I think than the generation ahead of us. And so, all the old taboos and mores were cast aside, and people just started living a much more liberal lifestyle. And that came from the music. Music became such a determinant of who you hung around with, and what you did. And I was very, very much into rock music.

Szunyogh: Rock music?

Berry: Rock music. So my buddies were all guys who listened to rock music, and we did that every day. Listen to records. That's what we did. There were no TV's, there were no computers. I mean talk about change. There were no computers!

Szunyogh: Yeah.

Berry: And so our influences were music...every now and then, a speaker would come through. There were some campus groups that had some political leanings both right and left, and they would bring speakers in. But really I think it was kids coming from their homes with some of these new ideas that related to the war. Watergate was a part of things starting to fall apart. And that was I think in '73. So yeah, those things had an effect of tearing down some old structures in the community. And it was kind of a hard time in that regard. We all let our hair grow long, we dressed like slobs. I wore the same thing every day for weeks.

[Szunyogh laughs]

Berry: And everybody did. [Chuckles] We washed it, [but] we just wore jeans and work shirts. That's what we wore. Bell bottom jeans and work shirts.

Szunyogh: How was your transition from—well, I guess you went to Bradley first, but, your transition from high school to college, how did that go?

Berry: Well, that's an interesting question because Wesleyan was more like my high school than Bradley was.

Szunyogh: Really.

Berry: Bradley was 5,000 students, many of whom were from the East coast.

Szunyogh: Oh, okay.

Berry: And so going to Bradley was such a shock to my system. It was good that I was in the sports I was in because that gave me a community—even though some of them were not guys I would choose to hang around with—but it was who I was with...and kept you safe. Yeah, see, that spring I was there was the Kent State uprising—

Szunyogh: Oh yeah.

Berry: And there were bombings. And there were just bad things. There were bad things here too. I know the whole graduation here was thrown off, and—

Szunyogh: Really.

Berry: Yeah. There were marches, so all that was very, very untidy.

Szunyogh: Mm-hm.

Berry: I just wonder what the administration was thinking, what are we going to do? So...but Wesleyan was more middle western than was Bradley.

Szunyogh: Okay.

Berry: And so when I got there, I felt I think more at ease. I liked the feel of it.

Szunyogh: Mm-hm.

Berry: Now this is an interesting thing. And I've always had this kind of an opinion, having lived in Peoria for a year, then I come here, I discovered that Bloomington-Normal is condescending towards Peoria.

Szunyogh: Really.

Berry: And the being in business in Peoria for 22 years, they don't think about Bloomington-Normal over there.

Szunyogh: Really.

Berry: Yeah. So it's kind of funny. It's like, we're better than they are. And they're more like, who are they? It's just a different kind of a thing. And so coming here from Peoria, I felt a little bit of that. But I was such a small town guy, and there were kids here that I knew in high school, and there was only — there were only two at Bradley—no, three—at Bradley that I knew in high school. Two basketball players and my roommate. There were more kids that I knew here, and that was fun, and that was good. And that helped me feel better. Yeah. Now here's an interesting thing. In my day, there was a Parents Weekend.

Szunyogh: Mm-hm.

Berry: My parents came to that but that was it. There was not much conversation with parents from the school at all. There was Parents Weekend. And so my parents did not view this as a place where they should come and hang out with their kid at all. Not that they wanted to, I don't think. But there wasn't that sense of, this is a family commitment. I think they've done better at that. I think I see more—I go to games now, and I see more parents. Seriously, when I was going to games, when I was in college it was all students and faculty.

Szunyogh: Really.

Berry: Yeah it wasn't parents.

Szunyogh: Yeah. That's interesting.

Berry: Yeah. I think it is.

Szunyogh: Hm. Did your lifestyle and work ethic change at all from when you came in your first year and when you graduated?

Berry: Hm. Yeah. It got better [chuckles] in an interesting way. The summer jobs I had made me want to come back to college.

Szunyogh: Really.

Berry: No I should say this. There was a point, what we call my first senior year where I started that year, and I had no idea what I was doing. What was I going to do or anything, and I just quit. I quit school. Went home, and I worked on the farm. I froze my buns off, I worked hard, I was out there every morning

before the sun came up and I worked until after the sun went down. And that cured me. That made me want to come back to school. And I can remember I drove a tractor that fall that didn't have a cab. And it was this kind of cold. It was sometimes below zero. And I can remember sitting out freezing, and thinking, my roommates are in their beds right now. And then they're going to go have a warm breakfast. And it's just better. It's better than this. And my folks understood that. Because if I came home and quit, I didn't call them and say, hey, I'm thinking about this. I just showed up and said, I quit. I'm a senior and I quit. And they were kind about it. My dad said, well you're going to go out to Linda's tomorrow—she's my sister, and they were farmers, and they needed help and you're going to work. And you're not going to lay around here. You're going to work. And so I did, and after that, I got straight A's.

Szunyogh: Really. So that—yes, I grew up. I definitely grew up, in that regard. Sue also, was a great student. And when I was going with her, I did a little better because of her. And so that was good too. Yeah. Now interesting, Abby, after...30 years later, I go to graduate school when I'm 52, and I'm an entirely different person. And I worked my buns off. I did the extra stuff, I got straight A's, and had finally become a student, and I'm 52. So it's different, different things for different people.

Szunyogh: Yeah. Yeah, that's quite true.

Berry: Yeah.

Szunyogh: So how did you meet Sue?

Berry: I was playing Frisbee on the quad, and so, I'm a junior, and all of us nerdy guys are thinking, there's a fresh crop of freshmen coming in, we just need to scope this out. And so we had been doing that for a couple of days, and making our assessments of the girls, and this girl comes walking towards me, from the library, towards the Main Lounge there, and I'm in the quad. And she had on red hip hugger bell bottoms. And I intentionally threw the Frisbee over to where she was walking. So I could get a closer look.

[Szunyogh chuckles]

Berry: And so that was when I first saw her. And I ask her out four times before she said yes.

Szunyogh: Really.

Berry: Yeah. She always had an excuse. And I told my friends after the third time, because they were by me with the phone, because I had been told to ask her out because she doesn't have anything going on. And the time in between I got that news at Saga and got back to my room, someone had asked her out.

Szunyogh: Oh!

Berry: So she said no. And I hung up the phone and I turned to my three or four buddies that are in the room—and they were too nerdy to ever ask anybody out—

[Szunyogh chuckles]

Berry: —I turned to them, I said I'm never talking to that girl again.

[Szunyogh laughs]

Berry: And so then probably a month later, on a Friday night, I was just having dinner and I was going to go to Champaign to, chances are, to hear a band play that was made up of friends of mine. And there was a whole bunch of us guys just going to go, hear the band. And this gal, Peggy, from my area, came over, she said, ask Sue to go out tonight. Now I think about this and how providential this was. And I said, I've said I'm done with her. And she said, no, she's not doing anything tonight. Ask her. She says, you guys would be great together. So I went over and I sat down, and it was Peggy and Sue and Mary McIntyre. And we started this thing, and Sue is on my right, and I just said, hey, what are you doing tonight? It took courage to do that for me. And she says, oh, nothing. I said, do you want to go to Champaign? She said, sure.

[Szunyogh laughs]

Berry: So that was our first date. And then I went immediately over to the other side of Saga, I went to the west side, and the guys were going, I said, you're not going, because she's going. I need one person to get a date and go with.

[Szunyogh laughs]

Berry: So Greg Hornaday said, I'll get a date. So he asked Kris Ellsworth and she went, and the four of us went, and that's the only time they ever went out, but Sue and I have been married for 37 years.

[Chuckles] So yeah.

Szunyogh: Yeah. That's cute.

Berry: Yeah, it was fun.

Szunyogh: What did Sue major in?

Berry: Nursing. She's a nurse. See that's where we're so different. And even as a mom, she always wanted the kids to have a plan, and I never cared if they had a plan because I never had a plan. But she always had a plan. And so in that way, we're just different. But it worked fine. And now the kids are out. [Laughs] but they're doing well.

Szunyogh: That's what matters. They're doing okay.

Berry: Yeah she knew she wanted to be a nurse from the time she was a little girl because her aunt was a nurse and her uncle was a doctor, and she wanted to do that, see? Well, I wanted to play major league baseball. That wasn't going to happen.

Szunyogh: Yeah. That's like my mom. My mom knew that she wanted to be a doctor since elementary school. And I have—I still don't—

Berry: You still don't know, yeah.

Szunyogh: —know what I want to do, and I'm graduating!

Berry: Yeah, right. Good for you.

Szunyogh: Yeah. It's fine.

[Berry and Szunyogh laugh]

Szunyogh: Let's see. What else. There was something else I wanted to ask. Hm.

Berry: One thing that I can bring into this that really served me well was working off campus. And in a strange kind of psychological way, I had different jobs around the community that, I would just hear about something, and I'd go get the job. I worked at the Pantagraph, I worked at Funks Grove making maple syrup.

Szunyogh: That's fun.

Berry: I did some construction. I helped a carpenter. So I did all these kinds of jobs that kept me busy, that gave me a little spending money, but can I tell you what they did? Is when I came home from work, that Wesleyan was really home because I'd go out to these worlds, and work, and then I come home from work and that dorm room was my home. I really sensed that then in a little bit richer way.

Szunyogh: That's good. That's nice. Did anyone else in your family go to college?

Berry: Yes. I was the youngest of five, and four of us have at least Masters Degrees.

Szunyogh: Okay.

Berry: And then I have a—the only one who didn't go to a four-year school, Linda, went to business school, and then she got married, so yeah. We're all—but my parents didn't. But they were so smart, they just couldn't afford it. My mom went to business school. She set records for typing there, and—

Szunyogh: Nice!

Berry: She's fabulous. And she would've been an awesome college student, as my dad would've been, but they just could not afford it. They had to work. Even graduating from high school was something, that was quite something. My dad was one of ten boys. I think he had one older brother who graduated from high school, then he and his three younger brothers all graduated from high school. So half the boys went to high school. The other boys went to 8th grade.

Szunyogh: Yeah. Let's see. What kind of reputation have you seen Illinois Wesleyan have and how has it changed since you were there?

Berry: One thing I noticed when I got here that was good was within this community Wesleyan had a good reputation, a reputation of excellence. There was never any sense of, it's easy and anybody can go there. It was always highly regarded. I think that's increased. I think they're probably more discerning in who comes now than who used to. One thing that I haven't said yet that I should say that was a part of my thinking when I came here, when Cal wrote me that letter, I thought, Illinois Wesleyan. They're Methodist. They must be Christian. I didn't know anything, but I just thought there would be sympathy for the Christian message there and that will feel good. I will like that. I will thrive in that. And then there really wasn't. But that was part of—the Methodist church was much more a part of things when I was here than they are now. I don't know that that was good, either, so yeah.

Szunyogh: I guess, what is the biggest impact that your time at IWU has had on your life?

Berry: Well I can look back and say, because of the way things happened, that I believe that they were all providential. That God was in all these things, and that he wanted me here, okay? We wouldn't have the church, I wouldn't have had my business. We wouldn't have all these things had I not gone to Wesleyan. I wouldn't have met Sue, so it has shaped my life remarkably. And I'll tell you this, that looking for a job, which I had to do, getting jobs; it was always a point of honor that I got my degree from Illinois Wesleyan. That was always a good thing. I think the biggest effect—and this is where I'm going to be different from 999 out of 1000 people. The biggest effect Wesleyan had on me is kind of a reverse excellence. So I come here, and I am a wandering, fledgling, immature Christian who doesn't—who isn't quite sure what he believes but who through the horror of that car accident, who had to deal with death. And who had to deal with upset and didn't want it. I hated it, but I had to deal with it. So I had to—I had to grow up, in those ways like that, okay? So I come here, thinking that this would be a refuge of faith, and then it wasn't. And then I had to—so what do I do with that? What I had to do is truly begin the quest, and not have a borrowed faith.

Szunyogh: Mm-hm.

Berry: I had to look for God. It was such legitimacy, that what I believed I could trust, I had come to that. And that happened, and it was happening with my friends too, because we were from different backgrounds. But there were about a dozen of us who just threw our lots in together and said we believe this, and we're going to live like we believe it, and we're going to share our faith with others, and we're going to grow, and—and we did. And had there been a DRL, or an InterVarsity or something, we would've eaten that up like you can't believe! There wasn't anything like that. And we didn't have weekly anything. We just had Bible studies and prayer meetings, and we talked to people about the Lord, and we went to some things at ISU, some campus ministry things. But I think more than anything, having to find my faith, when Harvey Beutner was the only professor I had who said, I agree with you on this but don't tell anybody that I'm a Christian. He pulled me in his office and said that.

Szunyogh: Really.

Berry: Yeah, because it wasn't popular. But I came to understand and believe, and I believe it fully now that I didn't have to check my intellect at the door. Rather, I made it come alive, and I became quite a voracious reader and student of these things, and I feel good about it now. So yeah, I have been so thrilled to meet Christians at Wesleyan, and to see the campus community have a Christian identity, a group that this is our identity. You don't know what that means to somebody who is there when there were a dozen maybe? It means the world! Yeah. So I love that.

Szunyogh: That's good.

Berry: Yeah. So thanks.

Szunyogh: No problem.

[Berry and Szunyogh laugh]

Berry: We literally—I remember my group of friends standing in the quad praying for revival to come to Wesleyan. And when I met Brandon Grant and he was doing DRL and I was helping, I thought, it's come, it's come, it's come. And it was a thrill, and I believed that. So yeah. Yeah.

Szunyogh: Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Berry: Let's see. I love the food, had a lot of fun.

[Berry and Szunyogh chuckle]

Berry: I did silly things. Just did crazy silly things. I just had so many friends. It was a friendly place where I could walk around on campus and recognize everyone and feel like I had no enemies, but I did feel a division between the Greek and the independents. I was independent because, here's what was funny about it. I was on the baseball team, and when I was with the team those guys were friendly to me, but if I saw them on campus, it was like I didn't exist. And so—but, that was just as much my fault. I didn't break down those walls either, but I had so many wonderful friends. Oh my gosh. I think I was a good friend, and hope that I was. And that's important to me, yeah. So, yeah. That was good. And it's funny. I still have dreams that I haven't graduated, or I missed a final, or something like that. And then I wake up and think, wait a minute, did I really graduate? Yeah. That was a big time.

Szunyogh: Yeah. You did.

Berry: Yeah. I really did.

Szunyogh: That's good. I hope that I'm graduating as well.

Berry: [laughs] Yes, I hope you are.

Szunyogh: Yeah. Thanks.

[Berry laughs]

Szunyogh: So, you mentioned the Greeks a couple times. Did they have a fairly large influence?

Berry: On campus they did. Yeah I mean they had their own thing going on campus, and if you weren't a part of it you simply weren't a part of it. You just weren't a part of things, but I had chosen to not be a part of it. It was somewhat of a tension with Sue and me, because her house would do something with a fraternity house. They'd have a party or whatever and I wasn't to be a part of it. But we overcame that.

Szunyogh: That's good. It worked out.

Berry: Yeah.

Szunyogh: What sorority was Sue in?

Berry: She was in AOPi, which doesn't exist anymore.

Szunyogh: Oh okay.

Berry: That old house on Fell. Have you ever seen that big old, kind of—

Szunyogh: Is it stone?

Berry: Stone, yeah.

Szunyogh: And really—it's really cool looking? I don't know, I think it's really cool. Is it like a gray stone?

Berry: Yeah, yeah.

Szunyogh: Large gray stone?

Berry: Yeah.

Szunyogh: And now it doesn't look like anyone really lives there.

Berry: Nobody lives there.

Szunyogh: That's interesting.

Berry: Yeah. It was vibrant when she was there, 50 girls in there.

Szunyogh: I've always wanted to go in there.

Berry: Well, yeah. It all happened. I don't know what happened. I never asked but it's no more. Probably has something to do with money, but I don't know.

Szunyogh: I don't know either.

Berry: Yeah. Ha-ha!

Szunyogh: We talked about a lot. We talked about—

Berry: I just want you to imagine going to college and there are no computers. Nobody has their own phone. That just didn't happen. You communicated with people by writing letters. That's how you communicated. Imagine that.

Szunyogh: It would be very different. I can't imagine trying to do research and write papers without a computer.

Berry: Well yeah, but you did. You just—you went to the library and you went to the periodic-periodical area and looked in those books and would look for articles and then you'd go find the magazine. I mean it was quite a-quite a job, and someone else had already checked out the magazine, and then what do I do?—you know? And so, getting your mail everyday then was a big thing then, bigger than it is now, I'm sure. Everyday you checked your mail!

Szunyogh: Yeah. I still—it was always—I mean when I was a freshman, and pretty much the whole time I lived in the dorms I checked my mail all the time because it was so exciting to get mail, because it was so rare.

Berry: Oh well, I had friends and girlfriends and family that we were writing each other all the time. So that was—that was cool to me, but the immediacy of cell phones, and smartphones, and just PCs and all

that, that never entered our minds. Never entered our minds, so we just had to do everything in a different way but it was a good way. It's a demanding way.

Szunyogh: It worked.

Berry: Yeah. It worked.

Szunyogh: Did it.

Berry: We did it! Ah!

Szunyogh: Let's see if I have any other questions. I think we've covered just about every question that I had.

Berry: I got my money's worth in the cafeteria—

[Szunyogh laughs]

Berry: —and not in the classroom.

[Berry and Szunyogh laugh]

Szunyogh: That's okay; you got your money's worth somewhere.

[Berry laughs]

Szunyogh: That's what's important. But yeah.

Berry: Alright.

Szunyogh: Well—

Berry: Good. That's the truth, what you heard is the truth.

Szunyogh: I think we've covered all the—

Berry: I'm supposed to meet someone 12 minutes ago.

Szunyogh: Oh, okay. Well, guess that's it for now. Thank you David Berry.

Berry: Well thank you, Abby, and Illinois Wesleyan.

Szunyogh: You're welcome.