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Carren Moham

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Illinois Wesleyan University

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Oral History Interview with Carren Moham The Ames Library, August 15, 2014

Francine Krieger: Hi, I'm Francine Krieger. Today is August 15th, 2014 and we are on the fourth floor of Ames Library.

Carren Moham: I'm Dr. Carren Moham, and I am professor emerita of music at Illinois Wesleyan University and currently artist teacher voice at Illinois State University.

Krieger: Okay. So where were you before you came to Illinois Wesleyan?

Moham: I was at the Ohio State University where I was a doctoral candidate and also a graduate teaching associate, so, taught a full load just like any other instructor. And then right after that, my degree is in vocal health, and so I was on staff at the Washington Cancer Institute where I worked with throat cancer patients to—we would have partial laryngectomies to help them rehab their voices.

Krieger: Wow. So what was kind of the monumental moment that made you want to switch from what you were doing to come to somewhere like Illinois Wesleyan?

Moham: Well, I had always thought that I would like to teach. My undergraduate degree is in fact in education-music education, and I always knew I wanted to teach at some point. I was out singing; still have a pretty active singing career. So I was out singing and really enjoying it. But at some point I think you just want to put down some roots, and like I said, I always wanted to teach. And I guess kind of a funny story goes with that but I won't take time to tell it. [Laughs] So I actually received a call from—who, at the time, was the head of the voice area at Illinois Wesleyan, Sam Scifres, to ask about my interest in coming to Illinois Wesleyan to be a member of the voice faculty. I have to be honest, I had never heard of Illinois Wesleyan, didn't know where it was, didn't know a thing about it, so of course you know you go on, you search and you find out about it and all that kind of thing. And I at the time had also applied to some other larger universities. I applied to Florida State and I was on the short list for that job and I also applied to University of Nevada-Las Vegas and I was on the short list for that job. But when I came here, it was the students. They were just so engaged and they asked such intelligent questions, and I mean, their faces, and the interest that they had and so I—after the session that I had with the students, the question and answer session that I had with the kids, I went back to my hotel room and I called my mom and I said, 'well, if they offer me this job, this is the one I'm going to take because'—and I had a discussion with the provost and all of that, and I said, I-I love the students. And that was it. That was it. And that's why I came, and quite frankly, that's why I stayed as long as I did.

Krieger: And how long have you stayed?

Moham: 16 years.

Krieger: 16 years. How can you—how can you compare the—I guess the vibe of students from when you first started compared to now?

Moham: Well, I think—I'm in music and right now things are a little bit difficult in music. It's hard to convince parents that their little Johnny or Susan can make a living in music. And so I think now students are coming in more with the idea of I need to get a job, rather than I want to have a career where I'm doing something that I actually have a passion about, that I actually love, that I'm actually really good at. So because of that, there's just a—I just feel like there's just a little bit less passion. No less great students, because the students are still wonderfully intelligent and inquisitive and those sorts of things, but I just—I think it's just a sign of the times that they're looking more at, when I get out of here, I'm going to have to have a job, and also quite frankly, sometimes it's just hard to convince parents that it's worth paying this amount of tuition to get a music degree. And I think that that impacts the students, because they didn't listen to their parents. So they come in with these ideas of, I've got to get a job. And so I think it does impact how they approach what they're here to do. So that—that's a difference. It wasn't like that when I first came in because the economy wasn't like it is now. And so a student will come in, and we've had some very successful students that have gone out and people always tend to think in terms of performance and that's where it's hard to convince parents because they're thinking, they're not going to be able to get a career out singing somewhere but they're so much more out there and technology has just gone through the roof. And so there are students that might come in for a performance degree, but then they very quickly find out that they're really great at computers, and how do I juxtapose my interest in computers with my interest in singing or my interest in playing saxophone and those kinds of things. So there's so many more jobs out there, so I think that that's one of the things that's going to be incumbent on the university, is to show students that there are—and not just hand them a piece of paper and say, 'these are the jobs that you can get in music.' This is a show me kind of world, and so you need to be able to show them. You need to be able to help them to understand, you don't just have to be a performer. There are so many other things. And we've got a lot of kids out there that are doing wonderful things. Teaching, I mean, teaching is—is amazing, and—and I always tell parents all the time, they'll say, 'well, how's my son and daughter, they can't get a job in music?' And my answer is always, 'everyone in this building has a job in this area. Everyone in the next building has a job in theater, so that you understand that it's not just about performing. There are lighting designers and there are set designers, and people who make costumes, and people who do technology, and make sure you sound good. [Laughs] So there are actually even professional page-turners, you know, people who turn the music, and people get paid a lot of money to do that. But you got to help students get out of that box. Performing is important, I think it's great, it needs to stay around. My performances help people to stay engaged and help them to learn how to listen and to watch things, but you need to show them and not just hand them a piece of paper. So, sorry that was a little long. [Laughs]

Krieger: That's quite alright. So I actually have two questions.

Moham: Mhm.

Krieger: One is, has the genre or interest of music changed dramatically since you started compared to now?

Moham: Yes, and for the reasons that I said. I think for-for younger people, for students, it's that they can do so many things. I would have students come into my office all the time, and say, 'oh'—and they've got this new gadget—'oh look what I can do on here.' And they're playing all sorts of cool music with just wonderful rhythms and things like that. And they're just able to just do it right there on the pad. So for me, that was very exciting but it was more exciting for me to see them be excited about it. New music is contemporary music, things that are being written right now. They may not hang around long, you may not ever hear them again, but they're very, very, very interesting and that interests our-interests students. That's changed a lot, because you didn't really see that a lot. There might be a new music festival or something like that but you very rarely just had kids come in with-with an iPad or something like that, and just, oh, look what I can do. So all of that kind of thing has changed, and it's changed because of technology. And I-I have no issues or problem with technology. But again, just like I said, I don't think it's either or. I think they both need to exist, because if we are teaching our students that they don't—that everything can be done just by flipping a switch, then we're doing them a disservice because now you're not learning how to listen, you're not learning how to watch. So I think that that right there has suffered because everything is so instant that they're losing their ability to pay attention and with-with really good music that's why those—all those old dudes have been around so long, Mozart, Beethoven, I mean, still. It's a proven scientific fact that listening to Mozart helps your cognitive abilities. So why in the world would we not want to do that?

Krieger: Right.

Moham: So I think that we need to-so that's kind of changed because students wanting to-to sit and listen and be engaged. They got to think fast. So that part has changed. And that-that's a challenge. It's a challenge, and I'm an applied teacher, I teach private lessons. It's a challenge to keep students engaged, to keep them wanting to practice, wanting to learn their music, wanting to do it right, not-so that's become a little bit more challenging since I first started all this.
[Laughs]

Krieger: That makes sense. And then just to go back to my second question was can you recall some of your favorite performances?

Moham: Of my favorite performances or performances of students?

Krieger: Either or, performances that you've done or performances that you directed or instructed or just anything.

Moham: Oh gosh.

[Krieger laughs]

Moham: I wouldn't even know where to start with that question. There are just so, so, so many. I mean, as far as myself, I really enjoy the concerts that I do with my colleague Ken Cook. He's on the piano faculty here. We've collaborated on many recitals and it's always enjoyable because first of all we're very close friends and we almost don't have to talk because we just kind of know what we need to do. So when we need to do something it's basically he does his thing, he learns his stuff, I learn my stuff, and then we get together and within really basically a couple of rehearsals we have what we need and we go out and do our recital. So it's not only the music that we do, because he's—he's such a wonderful pianist that I can throw anything at him and he can play it. [Laughs] So that's always a joy. So it's always great to work with somebody that you're that connected to, musically. And then my colleague, Erin Mulliken, we do a different kind of concert. They're not classical. We have a series that we call our groove series. And groovin' on a Sunday afternoon, 'shake your groove' thing, all the titles had the word 'groove' in it. And so we do—it's jazz and blues and a little pop thrown in there. So those are just a lot of fun. Erin is an amazing jazz musician, jazz pianist. He's a wonderful classical pianist but he really comes alive when he's playing jazz. [Laughs] So it's just a lot of fun too. I think we did five or six of those. We would do them about every two years so counting that, whatever that counts to be. So that's always been a lot of fun and I'm hoping that since I'm still in town maybe we can do another one. But as far as my students, I guess the ones that are the most—mean the most to me are when I have students that thought they couldn't do it, and I'm, yes you can. I know you can. Because sometimes you can see it and you can hear it. You know that they have it but you got to pull it out of them. They don't believe it. For whatever reason I've had students that their parents or something, they're singing all the time, their parents will tell them, shut up. So they would retreat and not want to sing. I have students that have started out with bad attitudes. And then they get going, they realize, 'Oh, I have actually something of value.' I have a couple people that come to mind right away. Karen Gregory, who came to me [with] horrible, horrible asthma. She couldn't breathe, and so I said, 'this is going to help your lungs. And you will be able to do a recital.' 'Oh, but I'm not required to do a recital.' 'You will do a recital.'

[Krieger and Moham laugh]

Moham: Jenny Allen, who now has a doctorate. I can't believe it, Dr. Allen. It just blows my mind—[Laughs]—because again, that was kind of a deal where she just needed some discipline. She just needed to be—to be shown that, okay, if you—if you are disciplined, you can do this. You have to take care of yourself and you have to take care of your voice. And I don't think they'll care if I mention their names. Sarah Price who—Sarah Nicholas Price, who—just an amazing instrument, and just kind of—just needed some guidance to show her that, okay, you can do more than what you think you can do. So Rodney Arnette, just kind of an I'm all that attitude, yeah, you may be, but there's only one queen in this room. [Laughs] One diva in here. So, I could really go on and on. I have a student actually here in town, Jennifer Wills, who has just a huge voice studio. It's amazing what she's done. And it's incorporated. I mean, it's—it's just amazing.

And like I said, I could go on and on. I still have students right now who have come just so far. And since they're still here I'm not going to name them, but they really, really have come a very long way. And you can probably tell I am extremely proud of my kids. That's—they're why I stay. And I know that they're out there, representing themselves, and representing well. And it's always when I see them get up, see, I'm-I'm-I'm just a proud-just a proud teacher. I'm proud of all of them. So I can't-I can't name a favorite. [Laughs] They all have something. They all have something. And I spend a lot of time with them. And I love spending time with them.

Krieger: Seems like it.

[Moham laughs]

Krieger: What is your favorite place to perform in on the Wesleyan campus?

Moham: Oh Wesleyan campus? The chapel.

Krieger: The chapel.

Moham: Yeah. I just like the acoustics, the ease of performing there. You can see everybody. I like looking out and seeing everybody. I always did the festival Spirituals and Songs, in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. And I did that, every year I started that on this campus, and we would have that every year. And there would be a few times when I thought, maybe I should do it in Westbrook. But it's just something about the surrounding of the chapel, and the kids just sound so good in there. And so I just-I just like it. I like being in there, performing in there, it's just always been a favorite here on campus.

Krieger: Can you describe the first one that you started?

Moham: The first MLK Chapel? Well actually the first one I did myself, because I-I really couldn't get people to do it because since it's all pieces by-either by a black composer, or it has to represent something that was important in black music history. So I would have a lot of people that would say, 'well, since the spiritual has songs by black composers, maybe I shouldn't do it.' So, and of course I'd go, 'well, you're not drumming, but you sing drumming songs.' [Laughs] So it's like, people don't really think about that. And there are tons of songs out there that are written by black composers that you may not know as a black composer, but you're singing. And so, the first one I don't really count. That's the reason why I didn't really say—like I think last year I said the 15th, even though it was the 16th. Why I said the 15th, because the first one I just didn't. There was a young man here named Ben Roseann, and Ben played piano for me, and I just-I just did the first one. But then after that, it was mostly my students and me. And then the third one, the other professor here, Robert Mangialardi, he jumped on board, and so then after that I was able to get a pianist and violinist, and so it just became a big musical tribute to Martin Luther King. I got people from the community. So I would say about the third one is when it really started to gel together, just all kinds of people. And then I had to start having cut off,

because it got to be so much that people would come up to me after the one we just did, saying, 'can we do the one next year?' So I would always start the list right then. And I would just write on the back of the program whoever had told me they wanted to do it next year, so by the time next year came I would already have the program before. And so the kids and the people in the community would start asking me, the chaplain, she would ask me, could people do readings and can we do—I've had BSU who did a short play that they had written one year, so theater people jumped in. So it's just been whoever is there, whatever they want to contribute, I don't-I don't—except for the fact that it has to be representative of black composers or something that happened in black music history or the civil rights movement, something like that, so a spiritual or a song or poetry or something that represents black music history or by a black composer or a black writer. So other than that, that's all the parameters. So we've had jazz, we've had blues, we've had classical music, we've had pop music. I mean, somebody did Stevie Wonder one year. So there's all kinds of stuff on it. And it's always packed. [Laughs] It's always packed. So I was very proud of that. So just like I said, I don't count the first one, but after that, it was always just so popular, and I was very—that's one of the things that I'm very proud of on this campus.

Krieger: You should be.

Moham: [Laughs] thank you. [Laughs]

Krieger: Would you say that it's had a better positive influence on the Wesleyan community?

Moham: Oh, I think so. I think so. People look forward to it. I always got many, many emails afterwards of people telling me that, 'oh my god, I heard music I had never heard it before.' I would get people asking me for copies of things because they wanted to be able to perform it. There were spirituals on there that people didn't realize that they had been singing in church their whole lives. They just didn't realize it was as they would call back then a Negro spiritual. They didn't realize it. They thought, oh this is something in the hymnal. They didn't realize that it actually was a part of slave history. And so usually I would get up and give a talk about where certain things came from, always ended it with a spiritual "Wade in the Water," always ended it with that. So yeah, I think it did, we always had a lot of the administration would come. President Wilson, if he was in town, he usually was there. The Provost has come several times, and many, many faculty members, and not to mention students. At first, teachers would give credit, so students could come. But then they just started coming. [Laughs] Yeah, so I think it did. Because it—that's why I wanted to—to focus on works by black composers, because you just don't get a lot of that. And I wanted people to know that there are many things out there that—if I don't tell you it's written by a black composer, you won't know. So there's nothing that says you can't sing it. There's nothing that says you can't sing a spiritual. And so-so I wanted to highlight the works of black composers. And so I think it did have a positive impact on campus. There was nothing like that. There was no musical tribute at all. And Wesleyan, known for its school of music, had no musical tribute for who I think is a very iconic figure in our history, not just black history, in our American history. And so that was another thing that I told my mom. I said, if I

come here—because they took me to what they call the Martin Luther King chapel and it basically was the chapel got up and read parts of the ‘I Have a Dream’ speech, and they sang ‘We Shall Overcome’, and another spiritual and that pretty much was it. And so I told my mom, I said, ‘if I come, I’ve got an idea.’ [Laughs] So that’s kind of how the whole thing started. [Laughs]

Krieger: Wonderful. I guess I’ll go a different route now. Did you experience any culture shock—?

[Moham laughs]

Krieger: —when you first came to Wesleyan?

Moham: [Laughs] well yes. I still do, to tell you the truth. I moved here from the D.C. metropolitan area, Washington D.C., where like I said, I was on the staff of the Washington Cancer Institute. And I actually had been in and out of D.C. for a number of years because my career—my singing career was on the east coast. But when I decided to go back to school, I went to school for—I was the first one to get the vocal health degree from Ohio State. And so it was called singers’ health then, but I was the first one to get that degree. And so when I finished with my degree, I wanted—was kind of looking for some kind of internship, and there was really nothing because I was the first one to get the degree, so it’s like, what do you do? And so I had lived in D.C. before, and so I contacted the Washington hospital and asked them, would there be any kind of opportunity? So they gave me—I think it was at the time I think it was 12 weeks—they gave me a 12 week kind of an internship, and then after that 12 weeks they—I’d worked with patients and kind of helped them with their voices and they got—people got so excited about it, they asked me if I would consider staying on as staff in the patient support services area of the Washington Cancer Institute. So I was in patient support services there. So D.C., I mean, really? [Laughs] I mean, you’re in D.C.! And so when I took the job here, I’m like, okay, my first thing that I noticed is that there are no museums. I came from a place where you could go to the Smithsonian, some part of the Smithsonian, every day of your life, and you would never, ever, ever see even a tenth of it because there’s so much and they change it all the time. Because they got stuff in Archives that you don’t ever see. So I would go to the Library of Congress because I’m a nerd, so I would go to the Library of Congress and just look stuff up. [Laughs] And I would—just on the weekends I would hang, well, I’m bored. Well, let me go to the Smithsonian. If you’re bored in D.C., it’s because you want to be. It’s as simple as that. So I came here and I was like, ‘oh my god, there are no museums.’ And then people would say, ‘well if you could just—you could whip up to Chicago.’ No, you can’t just whip up to Chicago. No, you can’t—there’s no such thing as just whipping up to Chicago. And it’s expensive. The other one was, ‘well, we have the David Davis mansion.’ Okay. I’ve been to that. In fact, I went three times. And it’s—it’s cool. It’s nice, but once you go, there’s really not a lot of reason to go again. I love cars, so I was looking forward to the car show. Love, love, love cars. So I was looking forward to that. But that was my first thing. There’s just nothing if you just want to get up and just go to a museum or to

something like that, there's nothing here. It's very family-oriented. I'm not very-I have no children. And I never felt that until I moved here. I never felt like I don't quite fit. And I never felt that till I moved here. And I still feel it. Sometimes people don't invite me to things because I'm not a couple. [Laughs] But like I said my whole reason for being here, and still is, was work. I work all the time pretty much. So that's the culture shock. I can't say that I worked all the time but I lived in D.C., yes. Sometimes I just go, okay, that's enough of that. Let me get up and go do whatever. And you can just go and walk around the mall which of course is where the Washington Monument, the Lincoln Memorial, now the Martin Luther King Memorial, all of that. And you can just go walk around. You could-again, you could do that every day and see something different. So yeah, that's a lot of culture shock. [Laughs]

Krieger: Yeah.

Moham: And the diversity, that's the other thing. I'm used to-I was used to just seeing people of color everywhere, all different races, nationalities, creeds, everything. And that was another thing to come onto campus and really at that point it was one of two black faculty, me, and Pam Brea. So that was-that was also a bit of a shock. [Laughs] But I'm just kind of like—I at that point did travel a lot. I still travel a bit. So I would go and come, come and go. But yeah, it was tough when you're from D.C. [Laughs]

Krieger: Sure. Have there been any ways as time has gone on that this culture shock has eased in any way, or that you found ways to assimilate by using the Wesleyan society or Wesleyan culture?

Moham: Well yeah I mean obviously I have close friends and colleagues that my closest friends—I mentioned my colleague Ken Cook. We sort of just formed a quick bond very fast. He's from Texas, I'm from Oklahoma. So we're both from similar parts of the country. But we still go to dinner every Thursday night. We started doing that 14 years ago-15 now. And we still go to dinner every Thursday night just so we can just kind of get caught up with each other, talk, and just know that we have that to look forward to if nothing else. My-my closest friends are over in theatre. I have a theatre minor from the University of Oklahoma. I love theatre, so they're all kind of a little left of center, so am I. [Laughs] so yeah, so I made some really good-really good friends. And then I was-I chaired a huge committee, co-chaired with someone else, a multicultural study group, to try to bring more diversity to campus. Not just racial diversity, but ethnic diversity, diversity of the curriculum, all those kinds of things. And for a while, it-the initiative was very successful. We had a number of black faculty on campus. But then systematically, they all left, including me, because I just—for me it was just time to go. I think for them it was just more of a culture shock than they could deal with. And I worked tirelessly for that when I was here because I-and it wasn't for me. It's because our kids need to get out there. It's a global society, and it's way more global than when I was coming along because now you can literally jump on a plane and be anywhere in the world in hours. And-and people are being-working all over the world and being hired from other places and brought to the United

States and so you really need-our students need to have that. I had a young man that told me one time—he was in my Gateway, and he told me, he said, ‘if I had not had you, I would’ve gone through my entire career’-his entire education career, without ever having a faculty of color. And it was hard for him, because he had never had anyone of color tell him what to do. And it was tough for him. And he—people have heard me tell this story before—he wound up in D.C., where he was the minority. And so he-we had a conversation, and he-he’s very grateful, very thankful to me because he was going to switch out of my Gateway, and I said, ‘stay in here. Stay in here, and if I can’t get you engaged then I’m not doing my job. So you stay in here, and after a couple weeks, if you feel like this is just not going to work for you, I’ll go to somebody and find you another Gateway.’ Because my Gateway was on Motown and he didn’t think he needed to know anything about Motown. He didn’t—how is that relevant to our society and blah blah blah blah. [Laughs] But needless to say, he stayed. And we’re actually good friends now. Whenever he comes into town, I’m probably the second person he calls after his mom. [Laughs] So we always go to lunch, we always go to dinner or he comes over and just hangs out in my condo. But-but he credits being in my Gateway with helping him be successful in going to D.C. to a company where he was the minority and his boss was actually a black woman. [Laughs]

Krieger: Funny how that stuff happens.

Moham: Yup, yup. So I think that—I’m a performer, I’m around all kinds of different people doing all kinds of different things and I think it’s really helped me to be able to find a place for myself in Bloomington-Normal. And I’ve always done that. And when I feel like it’s time for me to move on, I do. And I’m not the type that sits and worries about money or-or gets afraid about things. I had someone tell me one time I only have sense enough to be afraid. [Laughs] And if that’s true, maybe that’s good. Because I will move on, when I feel like I’m not doing what’s best for me or what’s best for the people that I am responsible for. But I am no longer at Wesleyan but I am still in the community. And for whatever reason the university wanted me to stay here so here I am. It’s kind of the way I look at it. [Laughs]

Krieger: Okay. I was going to say speculatively, but I suppose if you’re still here, maybe incorporatively, what are your plans moving forward for your students or for your teaching career or whatever you have in mind?

Moham: Well right just like I said, I am-I took a position at ISU, Artist Teacher Voice. And I look at it as the opportunity to just kind of slow down just a little bit and think of which direction I do want to go. I have always been interested in higher education administration and I thought there might be some opportunities for me here at Wesleyan but there wasn’t. So that was one of the reasons why I decided to go ahead and move on because I-I don’t want to spend a lot of time spinning on wheels. I want to see if I can move forward with some of my dreams. And that is something that I have been interested in. I’m hopeful that I can even talk to some people at ISU while I’m there and maybe get some advice. How do you go from being a member of the faculty to the director of a school to the dean of a college to the Provost? [Laughs] Because there are

people that have similar backgrounds to mine who have moved into these types of positions. And so that was one of the dreams when I came here. I talked to the Provost and President at the time. And they were supportive of that and supported me the entire time they were here. But then once they left it just-it just seemed like I couldn't-I couldn't get it done. I couldn't move any further. So that was one of the reasons that I decided to go. But that's-that's my dream. However, my degree is in vocal health. And so I actually have already quite a large business where I help people rehab their voices. I've got people who have had surgery for whatever reason, either because of throat cancer or vertebrae in their neck, or I've got a couple of women who are singers who are going through menopause and just kind of need some help keeping their cords in good shape. So I've got students who have nodes or whatever. And I enjoy it. I love it, so, no mas going into my feet. [Laughs] If one doesn't work out, if one door closes, something else is always there.

Krieger: 'Course, absolutely.

[Moham laughs]

Krieger: I'm not sure what I want to ask you next. Do you have a favorite story or memory or multiple stories or memories about any aspect of campus?

Moham: Well, there's a lot of those too. [Laughs] Well I guess for myself, point of pride, several people have told me that I was actually the first black person to achieve the rank of full professor at Illinois Wesleyan. I don't know about that, I'd have to ask Meg, although I'm fairly sure I am the first black woman. So that's something that I didn't know until I was promoted to full professor, and then all these people started coming out of woodwork telling me this. So it wasn't something that I just said, I'm going to be the first black professor to get full professor. I had no idea. But then once it happened my first thing was, 'Oh, wow, that's exciting!' And then it was like, 'oh, how can that be?' because what, the university is 180 years old. So on one hand, it's wahoo, but on the other hand, it's like, seriously? [Laughs] And so I kind of had those-those moments. But it was something that I was kind of proud of to be the first one, whether it was the first black professor or the first black woman professor, either way. Gosh, the student stories, Lauren, I could just go on. You don't even want me to get started with that. [Laughs] Because I'm so proud of all of them that I don't even know. They are just so very exciting. The most recent thing I think—and I'll start there with some kids that are still here—the most recent thing was there-there's a group of students who started a student-led group that they call Illinois Opera Works, I think is what they call it. And they just came to me one day and I guess they wanted to just have their own group where they could do scenes from opera, scenes from music theatre, those kinds of things. And one senior, mostly they were-they were sophomores and juniors, and they just decided this was something they wanted to do, and in my mind, I'm thinking, that's going to take you guys a while to get that up and running. It didn't. [Laughs] I mean, seriously within a semester, they were bringing in guest artists and everything. They—well first of all they had opera singers, they had a statement of purpose, they had just all kinds of

stuff. And of course I'll read things over and go, oh, okay. Wow. Ask me next. [Laughs] And the next thing you knew they were bringing in guest artists and people to do master classes on different odd subjects and then they decided they were going to put on a show in the spring, which they did this past spring. They held auditions. Really the only thing I kind of did was just around to give advice and showed up if they needed for me to. And then they did a performance in April over in the Young Main Lounge, which was just amazing. And I was just like, wow, these kids are just—when they put their minds to something, there's just no stopping them. And there were students from different studios. Couple of them were from my studio. I knew of at least one from the Best Major Art studio. So they just kind of all came together from these different studios and held auditions and they got people from all over campus. I mean, people who aren't even performers came and auditioned, and they cast them and they did their own sets, they did their own costumes, they did their own rehearsals, they set their own person schedules, did their own—chose their own scenes that they wanted to do. And again, just like I said, I sort of went, 'oh okay, well that looks like that'll work.' And if there was a problem, they would come. But there was hardly anything. There was really nothing. And it was just—it was just really, really amazing what they were able to accomplish really within that year. And so I was really proud, the Illinois Opera Works, I mean Illinois Wesleyan, I think that's what they called it—IWU Opera Works I think is what they call it. But see there's lots of stories like that where they would just kind of decide, you know what? This is what's missing. Touch of Class, they just came to me and said, we want to start a female a cappella group. Because you rarely see—Suspended was kind of up and going, but they wanted to start a female a cappella group. Now I had a huge hand in that, because there was no—we-they didn't know where to start. They didn't know what to do. So we actually even went watched on—we came over here to the library and watched film some female a cappella groups so we just kind of have some idea because I didn't really know anything about it either. So you guys need some officers, music director, you need this and this and this. And now, again, that is another group that I am extremely proud of, because I had a huge hand in getting Touch of Class up and running, again Karen Gregory, Patty—I can't remember Patty's last name right now—two of the people that were the original members or people that got it started, and of course they're still going. And they get called a lot. They call me all the time. Can Touch of Class come do this? Can Touch of Class come do that? So that's a great group. But just all of that just to say there are many, many, many stories about things like that. For me, it's just about the students and what they're able to do. And sometimes it takes convincing them that they're able to do it. But wow, once they get it to their heads, then it's like okay, you're doing too much. [Laughs] You need to back off, you're doing too much. But that's kind of a nice problem to have, to be able to have to do that. Yeah those are some of my best moments on campus. My students and I and my studio will go to dinner every Tuesday night. I will take them to dinner. And wherever they wanted to go, within reason—[laughs]—just so we can talk. Students—you guys tend to talk more off campus than you do when you're on. It's almost like there're no ears. So we just talk and laugh. And they tell me stuff that they probably didn't know they were telling me. [Laughs] So that was always just a fun time. Those

are some of my best memories. I love Halloween, and my studio always had a huge Halloween party. We'd rent out Eastland suites. We'd rent out a room in Eastland suites, music, dancing, we catered. And each one of them would pay a certain amount, I can't remember how much it was, and then I would put in the other half. And everybody comes in costumes. They can invite people, so each person can invite two other people. So it became people trying to make friends with people in the studio so they could come to the Halloween party. [Laughs] So we would just kind of get together and have a great time. I would invite some other of our co-faculty. [Laughs] And everyone has to come in costume. Sometimes we had themes. One year, it was everyone had—it was all Michael Jackson. I think it was the year that Michael Jackson passed away. So it was all Michael Jackson, and the entire night was all Michael Jackson and Jackson 5 music. So that just let you know how much-how much Michael Jackson there was. We were all amazed. We were like, oh my god; we just went five hours with nothing but Michael Jackson never repeated a song. So it was mind blowing. [Laughs] Yeah, yeah, so those are kind of—it's really all about my students. I love my students. [Laughs] I'm going to cry, because that was hard to leave my chicas. But it's okay. [Laughs]

Krieger: Was there any sort of gender stratification at Illinois Wesleyan while you were here? How about racial or other divisions? What significance do you think they hold either to you personally or on Wesleyan's purpose?

Moham: Woah. [Laughs]

Krieger: Yeah, it's a loaded question.

Moham: People have heard me say this before so I'm not saying anything that I haven't said out loud. When I first came to Wesleyan, I really felt like it was a great time to be a woman on this campus. I really did. It-it just-you just felt like the sky was the limit. And just like I said, I-I felt supported in my-my talks that I had with upper administration about one day moving into administration and I just remember one of the administrators at the time, and I'll just say who it is, Mona Gardner, because she has just been still to this day, is someone that I call when I need to talk through something or I need advice about something. But I would-I'd talk to her, and she's very supportive. This-'I think you'd be a great administrator, and these are some things you might want to look into doing.' And I have done a lot of most of the things that she told me I should do, I've done them. The different workshops, conferences, all of that, which she suggested, I thought, okay, if I'm going to get myself ready I need to go do it. And they were just very supportive. And so when I needed help with things I could go to any of the other women on faculty, and they would-they would jump right in and help me. Also Curtis Trout over here in the School of Theatre Arts, he really has been someone who I could go to when I needed advice whether it was helping me write my tenure document. He would literally stay up and go through it with a fine-tooth comb. [Laughs] I really felt like it was just a great time. Even in the staff, there were wonderful people that I really just felt like it was a great time. And I have to say, I-I didn't feel that as the-as the years went on. I don't feel it now. And that was one of the reasons

why I thought it's just time to go, because if you have dreams and aspirations and you feel like there's no way that—that they're being supported or you feel like you can't move forward, and in your hopes and ideals and dreams, it's your fault if you stay. It's your fault if you stay in the situation. I was raised to believe that there is no amount of money that's worth that. And so I know that there are other women on campus, a lot of women, not just other, a lot, that feel the same way. They can't—they can't just up and walk away because they have family. They have—they have children. And so it's a little bit different situation because I only have to be worried about taking care of me. I don't have small children. I don't have kids going to college. I don't have that sort of thing. I don't—I don't like to see people become bitter. And so even though I'm not here anymore, almost every week I had lunch with somebody just so they can be a sounding board—just so I can be a sounding board for them to talk through whatever it is that they're having to deal with, because I went through it. Because I had the same problems. I had the same issues. I—and for whatever reason people would come to me because they felt like they had nowhere else to go. So they would come and talk to me. And they still do it. I'm—I'm retired. I don't work here anymore. But they do still—I don't think a week has gone by since—since April that someone—I've not had lunch with somebody. And so I think that that—that's something that needs to be paid attention to. I'm not sure by whom, but someone needs to pay attention to it. There needs to be someplace where women and people of color especially, of this campus feel like they can go get some answers, be supported, have somewhere where they feel that safe, where they can get the help that they need. And that's a huge deal. That's a huge deal. So I do have to say that that's—that's a big change and I do know that there's a lot, a lot of women especially on campus that feel that there aren't sadly—there's only one black faculty member left, Darryl over in business and accounting, and you never see him. And I think that also speaks for others. I was very visible. I wasn't going to let anybody keep me down. [Laughs] But I also think that's part of my persona as a performer, as someone who—I enjoy people, I care who they are, what walk of life you come from. I just like people. But at the same time I still felt like I had to do what was best for me. But again, people found out I was still in the area. I just had somebody yesterday that just asked me to go and have lunch and I said, well, let me get my schedule together—[Laughs]—at ISU and see what it looks like before we can—I'll give you an email and we can find the time to have lunch. So I think that that speaks volumes that I am not—I mean, I still consider myself a part of the Wesleyan community because I retired from here, nobody fired me, I'm still in good standing. Like I said, I'm professor emerita, so I'm still in good standing. But I do think that that speaks volumes that people still call me. That shouldn't have to happen. You should be able to go somewhere on this campus and find the help that you need. And it's always a woman, or it's someone of color. That's—that's who it is.

Krieger: So would you say that for a matter of lack of opportunity that people feel as if they're—people of color and women mostly feel disenfranchised or are there other-other factors that make them feel that way?

Moham: Yeah, I think that they're that, what you just said, but also, just sometimes it's the way you're treated. You just wanted to be treated like a viable member of the faculty. You want to be treated like an equal. You want the fact that you went to school just as long, you did just as much as the guys did. You are just as qualified, sometimes even more so because especially if you're a woman, you had to do so many things that-that-that men don't have to think about. And sometimes you have to be—I've always felt that whatever it was, I had to be that much better at it, see, whatever it was, because I'm not only a woman, I'm a woman of color. And I'm slightly overweight. So see that—a lot overweight. That adds to it too. You walk into a room, people automatically think oh, lazy, because she needs to lose 50 pounds. I think anybody knows me—that has known me five minutes knows that that's not true. But when I walk into a room, I have to walk in knowing that I'm going to have to prove myself, because I am a woman, and I am a woman of color. I never-I never feel like I can stop doing that. And even then, it's-it's usually not enough. But I-I do feel like it's—yes it's that, but it's also that you just-you just want to feel like I am someone who is vital. I'm-I'm someone who you feel like can handle this, can get the job done. I am a leader. And see that's another thing. I'm a leader. I know it. I have to have opportunities to lead. And I don't get those. I'm an achiever, and if I don't get those then I have to go someplace where I can. And so—and there are other people. There are other women that feel that way. There are other women that want those opportunities in the place where they work. And they want to be given those chances. They want to have those opportunities. They want to be thought of as someone who can move ahead, who can move forward and not always take the safe choice. Sometimes the safe choice is not the best choice. And like I said, I'm not the only one who feels that way. It's just that I'm in a position fortunately for me where I can make the choice to say, okay, it's time for me to-to move on somewhere where I can-I can see it. It may not work out. I don't know. But I can see-I can at least see. I can at least try. Because I don't want to be 60 years old and just go, ugh, I wish I had. I've never done it, so no need to start now. [Laughs] I've always kind of thought, okay, if this is what you really have on your heart to do, take the step. Take the step. The universe will catch you. And it always has. [Laughs] But not everybody can do that. So you kind of-you hope that you'll be given those opportunities where you are. And sometimes the opportunity is there but the people that you have to rely on to give you that chance, they're the ones that are afraid to do it. And so there you go. What do you do? It's an issue. It's an issue, because people shouldn't have to come and talk to me. I don't know. I'm not going to say anything more about that. [Laughs]

Krieger: That's fair enough.

Moham: Well you asked about race too, and I don't know if I said, but-but I do think—I don't think—in some ways that's better, but in some ways not. I hope that one day I can be in a place where I don't feel like I have to conform, that I can be in a place where I feel like I can totally be myself if it's okay, and I've not felt that either. I've always felt like I had to not quite be me. I've grown up a lot. I've learned so much. And I know that you have to tell me things, you can't always say what you think. But some people are just afraid of what they see when they see a

person of color, they just get afraid. They expect me to be the angry black woman. I hear that a lot. I'm just like, I'm not angry nor black—I mean I'm black but I'm not angry. And I've said this in public too. In fact I said it in a big thing over there in the Memorial Union. I can promise you that no one at Illinois Wesleyan has ever seen me angry. I can promise you that. [Laughs] Because you would not forget it. I have not been angry since I was 21 years old. And I remember the moment where I just said—I threw my book at the wall, my very expensive Aria book, and it fell apart. And I just looked at that book and I went, 'Have you lost your mind?'

[Krieger and Moham laugh]

Moham: That book cost blah blah blah, and I think back then, it was, I don't know, \$18, which if you're a college student, that's a lot of money. And with tax, it was over 20 bucks. So I'm just like, have you lost your mind? Okay that's over. That's over. That just—that just wastes a lot of energy. You don't feel good, your head hurts. That was my internal dialogue. And I said, you're never going to do that again. Walk away. And that's what I do. Before I get angry, before I get bitter, I walk away. And so that term, angry black woman, I have to laugh at it because wow, you don't even know. [Laughs] And it's such a stereotype, and I work very hard to make sure that no one ever sees me angry. As well as Ken Cook knows me, and he knows me about as probably—and Kelly, over in Theatre Arts—those are the two people who probably know me best, and both of them can tell you they've never seen me angry. So that-so whenever I hear that term, no, I'm not angry, and actually I'm more Native-American actually than I even am black. [Laughs] Because my mom's Native American. But when you walk into a room, people see a black woman. So it's good, it's cool. [Laughs]

Krieger: How was your relationship with Professor Paul Bushnell?

Moham: Oh god I love Paul! Oh my gosh yeah, he's one of my favorite people. He's one of the first people I met when I came here, so yeah we're—I love Paul, love his wife too. Yeah.

[Laughs]

Krieger: Would you say that—I think you-you stayed a year longer than he did, or two years longer than he did?

Moham: Oh he's been here—well he's retired now but Paul—

Krieger: Right, past his retirement.

Moham: Oh past his retirement. Yeah, maybe a year.

Krieger: Would you say that it's gotten any better or worse since he retired?

Moham: Well, I mean, you see changes all the time. And-and there've definitely been some changes. I don't think you know that quickly what kind of impact they've had, because he's

only-he's been gone a very short time. So I don't-I think it's going to take a little bit more time before we'll see if there's been—

Krieger: Major impact.

Moham: Yeah, uh huh.

Krieger: Okay. I was curious about that. We discussed a lot about your students, but besides your students, how did your time at Illinois Wesleyan impact your life?

Moham: Oh I liked Illinois Wesleyan, I really do. I don't want anyone to think that I don't like this school. I really—I love Wesleyan, I love the campus, I think it's a beautiful campus. I have many colleagues that I really love and enjoy being around, still socialize with them and expect to always. And just like I said, Wesleyan's taught me a lot. President Wilson has—I've learned so much from just watching President Wilson. I've always liked the fact that he was—he was transparent about things. And I've told him this to his face. There are a lot of people that when they have to deliver good news, they're right there in the front, boom. I've got good news, here I am. I'm going to tell you all about it. But when things aren't going so well, they're in the back. And they could take a lesson from Nelson Mandela. He says when there's good stuff happening, see a great leader stands at the back and pushes his people or her people to the forefront. If there's something bad going on, a great leader is right there in the front. And President Wilson brought us through some really, really, really rough times. And I don't care how bad the news was, he stood right there in front of the faculty. And I'm sure that there are people that like it or don't like it, whatever it is. Everybody has an opinion. But as far as him, and how he handled things, whether it was good news or bad news, he was standing right there, and he was taking the hard questions and answering the hard questions. And if he didn't know the answer, my grandmother used to say the three most intelligent words in the English language are 'I don't know.' And President Wilson was never afraid to say, 'I don't know, but I will find out.' [Laughs] So I learned a lot by-just by watching him deal with when he had to deliver the bad news, when he had to stand up in front of the faculty and say, 'you're not going to get a raise.' It's like, ah! And you're the kind of person that gets hated on, when in a lot of ways, you didn't have a whole lot to do with it. It's the economy's bad, and this is happening, and that's happening, but he will stand there. He will take the brunt of all of it. So I learned a lot just from watching him and how he does things and that kind of thing, and just like I told you the people that I got to perform with and work with, Ken, Erin, all of that. I'm the person that kind of gets out on campus, gets to know people. So just like I said earlier, most of the people that I really hang around a lot are in theatre, but I love April Schulz over in history and Rebecca Gearhart over in Anthropology. [Laughs] So I got to know most of the administrative staff on campus because everybody knows they're really the ones that run things. So you should never be disrespectful of the administrative staff because they can put things under real fast. [Laughs] So I got out and just got to know everybody. This is a place where you can do that. I came from Ohio State. Good luck—[laughs]—trying—you're lucky if you know all the people in the school of

music or in the college of the arts. But this is the place where you can get out, you can get around, and you know people, and you can talk to just about anybody in any area. And you see your students out, you know people by name because it's small enough to where you can—you can really know everybody. And I enjoy my time here. But just like I said, things just got a little rough, and you have to know when it's time to go. You have to know when it's time to go. But I don't want anybody to think that—I think President Wilson made the statement to me one time that he hated that I was leaving Wesleyan disappointed. And I said, oh no. No, no, no, because my kids gave me a huge farewell over in Westbrook. I had no idea about it, it was a surprise. I didn't know they were doing it, because I was just going to walk away quietly. But they were not having that. And so I said to him, I said there's no way I could look up on that stage and walk away disappointed. There's no way, because there were people who sang, there were people who spoke, people sent in videos. If they couldn't be here, they sent in a video. So no, absolutely not, I am not disappointed. But is there areas where Wesleyan needs a whole lot of work? Yeah, yeah, we just talked about that. But I'm not going away thinking I'm dying at Illinois Wesleyan. No, that's so far from the truth, so far. I was allowed to grow here in ways that I probably couldn't have at a larger school. And I take the support that I got early on. It didn't go anywhere. So I still have that and I do still believe that I was supported by the university, maybe not in the same way, but in other ways, because it's just as important to learn what not to do as it is to learn what to do. And so I learned that too. [Laughs] So does that answer?

Krieger: Yes, yes, it does, absolutely does. Is there anything you'd like to add?

Moham: I guess the only thing that I would like to say is that I know the university right now is going through some rough times. They're making some changes to try to deal with all of that, and I just want the place that I spent so many years to continue to be successful. It goes beyond your own personal self. It's a lot bigger than any of us, and you want to see the place where you worked, the place where you went to school, all of those things, you want other people to look at it and go, 'ooh.' [Laughs] So when I say that I'm professor emerita at Illinois Wesleyan University, I want people to go, 'ooh.' [Laughs]

Krieger: Right.

Moham: So I want to see everyone be successful. I want to see the school of music be successful because that's where I spent all those years. I still have friends and colleagues in the school of music. I want to see them be successful. I want to see it grow, I want to see it get back up on its feet, and I want to see it be a crowing jewel in this university. And so that's—that's my hope, that—that's my wish. And even though President Wilson went to school in Michigan, he didn't know any better, I want to see him continue to bring the university forward and up on its feet, and Provost Green as well. I wish that for the university. Because selfishly, I do want people to go, 'ooh.' [Laughs] So I guess that's it.

Krieger: Well thank you so much.

Moham: Oh you're welcome, you're welcome. [Laughs]