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Homecoming 2010, recorded at The Ames Library

Meg Miner: Good Morning. My name is Miner and I'm the Archivist here at Illinois Wesleyan University and today is Saturday October 9th on Homecoming and we're in the Ames Library today with one of our alums. Please introduce yourself and tell us your full name and your class year and your major.

Clonda Ellis: Hi, my name is Clonda Bohn Ellis and I was class year of 1947 and my major was Music, Piano major. I also had a minor in Band, I played in the band, tenor saxophone—

Miner: Excellent.

Ellis: And enjoyed that. And then we were...[laughs]...asked to play in the Philharmonic Symphony after we had some background in strings and I was appointed to play the string bass.

Miner: Oh my.

Ellis: And I enjoyed that very much. We had that all year—every year that we were here.

Miner: Well I hope you don't mind me observing this for the people who can't have the privilege of meeting you, but that string bass must've been as tall as you are.

Ellis: It was.

[Both laugh]

Ellis: And I sat on a stool to play it.

Miner: Oh that's wonderful. That's a great story.

Ellis: Yes.

Miner: Is that something that happened to a lot of students—

Ellis: Yes.

Miner: That you would major—

Ellis: Yes.

Miner: And then do a different—instruments?

Ellis: Because there was shortage of people—

Miner: Uh-huh.

Ellis: During the war.

Miner: Sure.

Ellis: And they just corralled us and we played what we could.

Miner: Wonderful, that's a great story. Well, what kind of things did you do for fun on campus? What extracurricular activities were there in your—

Ellis: Well, of course, after I pledged a sorority, we were busy with that and that was Sigma Alpha Iota.

Miner: Okay.

Ellis: And I enjoyed that and living in the house the second year was very fun but I enjoyed the dorm the first year too. I lived in Blackstock Hall.

Miner: Oh, great.

Ellis: That's still there, and many of the friends that I had, of course, pledged other sororities during that first year and we sort of spread out but we have stayed in touch most of the four years we were here.

Miner: That's great. And what did your—what were your interactions like with the rest of the campus then as a sorority member? Did you have some—I've heard some of the dances that used to go on on campus.

Ellis: Oh, we had dances and we had sings, contests between the DOs, Phi Mu Alphas, and SAIs, and those were all fun.

Miner: Yeah?

Ellis: And we had the dances and parties and things for Mother's Day get-togethers and just many things. We were kept busy.

Miner: [laughs]...I bet. And, of course, then there was school too I'm sure...[laughs].

Ellis: Oh sure. We had to be at the school to practice and everything.

[Both laugh]

Ellis: And we had no transportation. We walked every place we went, I think.

Miner: Ah, off campus too?

Ellis: Mhmm.

Miner: Go downtown?

Ellis: Mhmm.

Miner: Did you go to Bloomington a lot?

Ellis: For the hotels for our gatherings we did, for the parties.

Miner: Ohh.

Ellis: And I guess we took public transportation because I only remember walking.

Miner: Hm, well it's not that far.

Ellis: No, it isn't.

Miner: Well what were your classes like? What are some memorable classes that you took here?

Ellis: Well, of course, we always had the theory and harmony classes with the music and then we had other—English composition, a Spanish class that I took and that wasn't very memorable a lot of the time.

[Both laugh]

Miner: Everybody has a talent for something.

Ellis: Yes. And then there were some religion classes too.

Miner: Where were those classes at? Obviously your music classes were in [Miner and Ellis in unison] Presser—

Miner: But where were your other classes?

Ellis: We had Hedding Hall.

Miner: Uh-huh.

Ellis: And—I'm trying to think what other building—I guess Hedding was it because I don't think there were any other buildings around—and Presser.

Miner: In Hedding or in Duration?

Ellis: What?

Miner: Duration Hall.

Ellis: Might have been.

Miner: Okay—oh no, you know what? I've just noticed they've got the wrong year on your nametag. I looked at your nametag and it says '47.

Ellis: I graduated in '47.

Miner: But you were a student here—

Ellis: A freshman in '43.

Miner: Okay.

Ellis: I started in '43.

Miner: So you had—okay.

Ellis: And so—

Miner: Because the fire happened at Hedding in '43.

Ellis: Yes, before I came.

Miner: Okay.

Ellis: And it was just at the lower level when we were here.

Miner: Yeah, so that was called—they called it Duration Hall then.

Ellis: Mhmm, I guess that's right.

Miner: Yeah, yeah.

Ellis: I've forgotten that.

Miner: I was suddenly taken aback, I thought, "Wait a minute."

[Both laugh]

Miner: Maybe my dates are mixed up, so—

Ellis: No, no.

Miner: So you were here after the fire.

Ellis: Right.

Miner: And so they'd already normalized that building—

Ellis: Right.

Miner: And were using it for—

Ellis: Right, classes.

Miner: Okay.

Ellis: And Presser and that was it.

Miner: Did you go into Old North at all?

Ellis: We could have, for some, but I don't remember what.

Miner: Just curious, okay. Well what was it like coming to school here? Where were you from?

Ellis: Well, I was from a little town in the—between Lincoln and Springfield called Cornland, Illinois and it was just a spot in the road and coming to Wesleyan was...[laughs]...quite a good surprise.

Miner: It was good?

Ellis: Yes—

Miner: Okay.

Ellis: Very nice.

Miner: It must've been a big transition, huh?

Ellis: It was, it was, and I was the oldest of two children. My brother was six years younger than I and so I didn't have that much connection with other girls—small town, small class that I graduated in, and I went to school in Mt. Pulaski, Illinois where I graduated from high school, so I was pleased to get the letter that I had been accepted to the School of Music from Dean Green.

Miner: And thank you for giving us that letter today too.

Ellis: You're very welcome.

Miner: You brought it with you that was very nice.

Ellis: You're very welcome.

Miner: Was it hard for your family to have you away from—

Ellis: I think for a little while it must've been hard but they realized that I was home every so often and visited and it wasn't that bad.

Miner: And you made the transition to being around a lot of people—

Ellis: Right.

Miner: Pretty well?

Ellis: Right.

Miner: Good.

Ellis: I enjoyed it.

Miner: Well, are there other memories that you have that you'd like to share with us?

Ellis: I don't—can't think of anything offhand. I remember marching in the band and that was different for me. I had never done that and—

Miner: In parades or during football games?

Ellis: We didn't have that many parades, just at homecoming time, but—and all the decorating for homecoming and so forth if they did and I'm sure they still do that. Do they still do that at homecoming?

Miner: Not so much.

Ellis: I hadn't noticed that.

Miner: Not too much, yeah.

Ellis: So—I don't know.

Miner: That was different.

Ellis: Mhmm.

Miner: Well, it was also a big transition, I would think, with the war years—

Ellis: Right.

Miner: From the war years to when the soldiers came back.

Ellis: Right.

Miner: Do you—is that—does any of that stick out for you?

Ellis: There weren't many that came back right away before—see, it ended in '45—

Miner: Mhmm.

Ellis: And so I left in '47 but I actually finished a semester ahead in '47 and I came back just once a week for piano lessons until the graduation time.

Miner: Hm.

Ellis: So I was at home from February until May, living at home and coming back and forth for that lesson.

Miner: That's interesting, so there wasn't a big immediate influx—

Ellis: No, not that I noticed.

Miner: Of students on campus.

Ellis: And there were only eighty-five people in our graduating class.

Miner: Wow.

Ellis: So that was interesting too.

Miner: What'd you do after graduation?

Ellis: Well, I went to work—well, I was married two weeks before I graduated.

Miner: And he was someone you met here or did you know him from before?

Ellis: No, I met him through a couple of students in school here that introduced us—

Miner: Okay.

Ellis: In St. Louis and after that, he was working in Springfield and I was too. Then he decided to go back in service and so we moved to South Carolina.

Miner: Ah, big move.

Ellis: And eventually we—he was sent to England and we had a tour of duty in England for about a year and a half.

Miner: How did you like that?

Ellis: Oh, it was nice.

Miner: Where were you?

Ellis: In Margate, which is just off the coast—they still had the water damage from the coast and over—

Miner: Mmm, I bet.

Ellis: And so forth. It was very interesting.

Miner: Hm.

Ellis: But we came back when our oldest son was ready for kindergarten as he had started talking like the English, so we decided it was time to come back.

[Both laugh]

Miner: That's funny.

Ellis: So we came back and ended up in St. Louis.

Miner: Okay, and have lived there since?

Ellis: Yes—

Miner: Okay.

Ellis: Ever since.

Miner: And how often do you come back to campus?

Ellis: Well, this is the first time I've been back since 1997.

Miner: That's a good long time.

Ellis: Mhmm that was for the fiftieth anniversary. Of course, it's been sixty-three years now.

Miner: That's amazing. Does it seem that long?

Ellis: Yes it does.

Miner: Oh.

[Both laugh]

Ellis: But time flies.

Miner: It sure does.

Ellis: I've been a widow for twelve years, so that keeps you busy, trying to do everything yourself.

Miner: I'm sure it does.

Ellis: So—

Miner: Well I thank you for spending some time on a beautiful day inside talking to us.

Ellis: You're very welcome.

Miner: And I really appreciate you doing this.

Ellis: Glad I could help.

Miner: Have a great rest of your weekend.

Ellis: Thank you.