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Helen McNicol Sheldon

Helen Sheldon '40

Meg Miner
Illinois Wesleyan University

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Oral History Interview at the home of Chet and Helen Sheldon

Meg Miner: My name is Meg Miner and I'm the Archivist at Illinois Wesleyan University and today is the 25th of September and I'm in the home of Chet and Helen Sheldon—may I call you Helen?

Helen Sheldon: Sure.

Miner: Great. Could you start out, Helen, by telling us your full name, your address—where we are today—and then how you're affiliated with Wesleyan?

Sheldon: what?

Miner: How you're affiliated with Wesleyan.

Sheldon: Oh.

Miner: So just tell me your whole name and where we are and we'll go from there.

Sheldon: My name is Sheldon and used to be McNicol—that was always harder to spell—and live at 408 North Colton in Bloomington across from Bloomington High School. It's been a nice, nice place to live because we can go anywhere from here and get there in about ten minutes.

Miner: Great.

Sheldon: What else did you want?

Miner: What's your affiliation with Illinois Wesleyan?

Sheldon: Oh, well I had two brothers that were eight and ten when I was born, so I was kind of a second family and my mother thought that Northwestern was too big a school for me, so we came down and visited with Dr.[McPherson, President of Illinois Wesleyan]... I thought I had his name on the tip of my tongue. Well, anyway, we came and the president ushered us into his office and—big room in Hedding Hall, which was the three-story classroom with all the things in it, you know that we didn't have very many buildings—and she and I talked to the president and now my mother—I remember my mother said she thought that she'd heard that a music school was better than a liberal arts school and he said, "Well, they can show off a lot more."

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: And it was a small size campus. We had Science Hall, Buck Library, [post-interview addition: Old North], and Presser Hall has—was quite new and we didn't get into it very often because they had several hundred more students than the Lit School did.

Miner: Wow.

Sheldon: The Music School was better known. In those days you'd listen to live music more...[laughs]...of course.

Miner: Ohhh.

Sheldon: And when our son came to Wesleyan, he was in the Apollo Quartet—with—and they'd say, introduce them, you know, and say, "This is a Horn major, this is a Speech or Music major, this is a Biology major..."

[Both laugh]

Sheldon: His Biology from Wesleyan did well for him. He just retired, you know—what, that makes me—

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: And he took care of seventy neonatal babies in Oklahoma City University. In the baby department. They had these little two-pound babies—really interesting to see.

Miner: That's amazing care...capabilities.

Sheldon: Yeah. When it came to the time they were building more isolettes to give to the school. I saw this isolette with this little tiny thing in it and stopped breathing. Its bells went off and the buzzers and nurses came from all directions. My son went over and gave the baby a little shake and it started breathing again.

Miner: Huh.

Sheldon: And best compliment I ever had was, "He must've had a good mother. He takes such good care of the babies." [laughs]

Miner: Oh, that does make you feel good, huh?

Sheldon: Yep. Well I always think that Wesleyan had such a good Science Department—and still does—a lot of pre-doctors.

Miner: Oh yeah.

Sheldon: And we've gotten acquainted with them that way too and I—now his wife went to Wesleyan and she's a doctor—x-ray— radiology? And their daughter is an MD also.

Miner: Oh my.

Sheldon: And our son just moved from Oklahoma City to Minneapolis where the daughter and the four grandsons are. So they're going to have some high-paid babysitters.

[Both laugh]

Miner: Well that's perfect.

Sheldon: Yeah, that's nice.

Miner: That's great. Well I wonder if I can ask you about that first visit that you made to campus with your mom. What year was that?

Sheldon: Oh I came to Wesleyan in 1936.

Miner: '36 so that was your first visit and then did you just decide to go to school right then and there or had you—

Sheldon: Well—

Miner: Decided before?

Sheldon: I think it was through the generations. My great-grandfather was a schoolmaster in Germany. And I never thought that I wouldn't go to college. And it was in a year—in a day when more boys went than girls.

Miner: Right.

Sheldon: In fact—I forget which year it was—I had a girlfriend and she and I would talk about how the world was coming to an end. I forget what the reason was. They had it all figured out.

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: And this girlfriend and I got on top of a car thinking we'd watch it happen, you know?

[Both laugh]

Sheldon: Oh, we've had some—

Miner: Is that why you were at school here?

Sheldon: That wasn't why I was at school here.

Miner: Oh.

Sheldon: I just was saying it went through the generations of the fact that everybody went to school. My mother was the youngest of nine and she went to college—

Miner: Oh my goodness.

Sheldon: In Dixon. The college isn't there anymore—

Miner: Oh my goodness.

Sheldon: But it was unusual to do anything beside be a secretary or a teacher.

Miner: Yeah.

Sheldon: And she was in a music school in Dixon. And when I was in high school, they were still having reunions and had gone out of business in 1910 I think it was—and so I just assumed I'd go somewhere and my mother thought that I was too shy or something to go to a big school and then Mr. Reagan and my brother, Richard, went with the same girl in high school.

Miner: That's Ronald Reagan, our former President?

Sheldon: Yes.

Miner: Okay, just checking.

Sheldon: His mother was a—did elocution readings. In those days that's what they called them. And so she was known outside of the church because of these readings and I always—I always—when he would make speeches or something, I could see her coming through.

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: And so he was an outstanding...in scholarship and they didn't have to take tests in those days—but he was a very affable fellow and he put on my roller skates one time and then he—when he decided to go to Eureka, he told my brother that he wanted to be a big fish in a little puddle.

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: And I guess he turned out that way.

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: And—but every once in a while I would correct the books or something because you don't want to believe everything in the books that were written about him...[laughs].

Miner: Is that right? There are some errors?

Sheldon: It said he was the lead in the senior high school play and I know that wasn't true because my brother was the lead—and he was the lifeguard out at the river, Rock River. He looked pretty good out there on the raft. When he...

[Both laugh]

Sheldon: Finally grew up he played football with my brother and my brother was captain his senior year and—oh, I have a picture of that football team by the way. Reagan's sitting in the front row looking like a high school boy. And he kind of finally—you know how some of the kids grow up suddenly in high school—they get bigger. And his older brother, Neil, they called Ronnie Dutch. I don't know why. His dad said he looked like a little Dutchman or something.

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: And so one day I heard an announcer and—interviewing him as President—he said he’s lifeguard. He said, “I didn’t know you lived by the ocean.”

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: Dutch said, “No we swam in the river.”

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: He swam in the river.

[Both laugh]

Sheldon: Yeah but he dragged in seventy-three people and each time he would notch a log.

Miner: Oh, is that right?

Sheldon: This big log was taken into the swimming pool when it was built in my day. I was eight years younger and his mother smiled all day because he was in the parade and that’s why they had this horse that—The big statue of... [post-interview note: in Dixon now]

Miner: Yes, yeah.

Sheldon: And so we’ve always had fun looking over things that are written about him because we knew him when he was a kid. We didn’t know he was going to be governor let alone president.

Miner: Fact or fiction, right?

Sheldon: Yeah.

Miner: Well when you did come to Wesleyan, you decided to be in the Liberal Arts College?

Sheldon: Kemp Hall was the only dormitory—

Miner: Uh-huh.

Sheldon: It was for girls and then they had a house down Main Street that some freshman girls lived in because it was not enough room at Kemp. Kemp was only three floors and it was a lovely old house and I think I—biggest room I’d ever had because we had the master bedroom on the front side, on the left side of the front.

Miner: In Kemp or in the other one?

Sheldon: In Kemp.

Miner: Okay.

Sheldon: It had a big walk-in closet—which was unusual and nobody wanted that room because the house mother's room was connected by the bathroom. It never bothered us because she was always up on third floor finding out what was going on there...[laughs].

Miner: She left you alone.

Sheldon: And we had hours and house mothers everywhere—ten o'clock. If you were two minutes late, you had to make up five minutes for every minute that you were late the next date night.

Miner: You mean you had to be back that much earlier the—

Sheldon: Yeah.

Miner: Ohh dear. That's an incentive.

Sheldon: And we had chapel twice a week...they took attendance and it was—after the freshman year you had to find your own housing because there weren't any more dormitories—but some of them, the ones that went into a sorority or fraternity, had their housing there, so we lived in a house that—is where the chapel is now. There were three houses—taken down. And we lived with the Pearson family. They had three bedrooms, I think, upstairs. There were four girls. We had two of the bedrooms, two to each room. And we slept together in the double bed. And I was happy because it was more room than I'd had at home and this was Depression time, you know? We never got our money ahead of time. They'd send on the two week—two dollars a week for the room.

Miner: Your parents?

Sheldon: My mother and dad would send the money ahead—not very far ahead of time. My dad was an osteopath and he gave a good long treatment. I think probably two dollars. And then we had some people that we traded [with]...I got a permanent—these old things. Then she would—she would take free treatments and I'd pay for my permanent.

Miner: Oh, that's great.

Sheldon: Some people brought produce to the school.

Miner: Brought what?

Helen Shedon: Produce.

Miner: Oh, right, mmmm.

Sheldon: Vegetables.

Miner: Mmmm.

Sheldon: Instead of money. Because we had so little money. It just amazes me that these little two and three-year-olds are going to basketball games, they're running around with several dollars in their hand to get a hotdog, you know? We never had any running around money because everybody had meal jobs after their freshman year and—

Miner: Can you tell me what a meal job is so we can understand?

Sheldon: Yeah, we just worked for an hour and a half for each meal and tips, and there weren't hardly any tips, a dime now and then.

Miner: And where would you work?

Sheldon: And I worked at the Village Inn—

Miner: Okay.

Sheldon: If you can still remember that place fondly, it was down under the sidewalk, and my mother thought it looked like a dive but it was a very nice little tearoom that two college kids started apparently. And we had the proprietor—I asked her to write my annual after I'd worked there a couple years and she wrote in it, "Be on time and eat first."

Miner: [laughs] Well that's nice.

Sheldon: We got the number two meal, which was just beyond a soup and sandwich one, and I lusted after the chocolate cake that they made but I never—it never occurred to me to buy some. I didn't have any money.

Miner: Or work an extra hour?

Sheldon: No salary—I was telling that to the girls in the office here at Wesleyan. They were complaining about \$8.50 an hour and I was making—when I got out of college I got \$15 a week at Brokaw. But I got noon meal—that was a big deal in Depression time.

Miner: That is a big deal.

Sheldon: So...[laughs]...but it wasn't—it was a good meal but not anything fancy.

Miner: So tell us what your major was. What was your major in school?

Sheldon: Sociology...[laughs].

Miner: Okay...[laugh].

Sheldon: I worked for Dr. Ratcliffe—Sociology major.

Miner: And that—Dr. Ratcliffe was a professor—

Sheldon: Yeah.

Miner: Here? Okay.

Sheldon: A big, tall, gangly sort of fellow that tripped over his own feet—

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: But he was very good to be working for.

Miner: What did you do? What was your work?

Sheldon: Well, I—he had me grading papers.

Miner: Ohh.

Sheldon: And he even let me grade them by myself, you know? And they're all essay-type questions, which I thought was really kind of amazing that when I look back on it I think he must've been pretty...[laughs]...he needed—needed somebody bad. The only time he ever changed anything, the grade, was a girl that usually made good grades and he thought she didn't do as well as usual—the way I graded it—and that was the weekend that I got Chet's fraternity pin and I think he thought my head wasn't on straight yet.

[Miner laughs]

Miner: So that was why you were in school. And did—did Dr. Ratcliffe have a lot of students? This was a lot of—

Sheldon: Oh yeah.

Miner: Big class?

Sheldon: He had written a book about Neanderthal people called *Man's Long Trail*—and that was about a six-week introduction to sociology and it was very interesting. I learned a lot including Neanderthals.

[Both laugh]

Sheldon: But he was good to work for.

Miner: So you had a lot of extra jobs then. You're working for food and you're working for money—

Sheldon: We were busy. We didn't have time to be off campus at all.

Miner: My goodness.

Sheldon: Except when we went downtown—see I went down about fourteen blocks and we—everybody walked, nobody had cars except people like Chet that had church on the weekend and they must've been desperate because we had quite a few student pastors...[laughs] and we got acquainted with them because once in a while we got a ride

down to our meal job with—one of them, you know? And—meal job was—it saved the day for Wesleyan I think—

Miner: I bet.

Sheldon: Because I don't think—I didn't hardly know anybody that didn't have a meal job of some sort. Then after that year, I got a job waiting tables at Kemp Hall. They served about sixty girls every day, three meals, so we worked and got our meal. That was it. And if you broke something, you—I'm afraid you had to pay for it.

Miner: Yeah.

Sheldon: I once dropped a tray full of glasses and broke every one of them. I think it was about fifteen glasses.

Miner: Oh dear.

Sheldon: And Chet worked at the Jefferson Cafeteria downtown. He was a hot busboy we called him.

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: He had to take the food from the basement, hot food, and go upstairs, put it in the steam tables. Those people came, waiting for him to get their food.

Miner: Yeah.

Sheldon: One night he dropped them right over the steam table and it was liver and onions and it was mostly on the floor I guess—

Miner: Oh.

Sheldon: That's his big story. Don't tell him.

Miner: [laughs] That's a mess.

Sheldon: And—you always think of the bad things that happened. We had so many nice things that happened too.

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: Dr. Ferguson, the German teacher, and I say this is a good example of Wesleyan's adaptability because I wanted to take German because of my grandparents—should've learned it when my grandmother lived with us but I wasn't that smart. She—I knew some names she called me in German.

[Both laugh]

Sheldon: But I had to take care of her while she was—probably what we call—old people's disease or something—

Miner: Alzheimer's or—

Sheldon: Yeah but we didn't—Grandma was just old, you know? And she would—she thought she was on the home place, which was a farm, yeah, in Bureau County, near Tampico where Mr. Reagan was born. And—of course we didn't know that at the time—but we took our—my folks made the dining room into a bedroom for Grandma. And she lived with us until she died. And I—my mother was long suffering taking care of her—And when she would run away she could run about as fast as I could. She was—

Miner: Oh dear.

Sheldon: Ninety. Now I'm ninety and I'm hobbling around. Anyway, I had to go chase her when—I'd find her at a neighbor's house or—a block away or so. She was going across—going across the field to her son's house and she could've done that had she been on the home place because it was contiguous to—

Miner: It would've been there?

Sheldon: To her eighty-acre farm, which I thought was *a* farm—

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: And I came down here and people say—well, I don't know, half a section or so. And I just couldn't imagine people having that much land because I thought eighty acres was a lot of land and—

Miner: People here had more?

Sheldon: People here had lots more—

Miner: Mmm.

Sheldon: Better land probably. Anyway, when she—when I'd get to her, she'd—she'd say oh she was just going over to Theodore's and I'd say, "Grandma, you can't go that far. It's thirty-six miles." "Ach!" It wasn't "sechsunddreissig" miles, you know.

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: And—

Miner: Was Theodore her brother?

Sheldon: Her brother— [post-interview edit: her son]

Miner: Theodore her brother?

Sheldon: Was still living on the farm.

Miner: Yeah, okay. Well you said you took German from Dr. Ferguson—

Sheldon: Yeah, that's another of the nice teachers that they had.

Miner: Yeah?

Sheldon: He was a dear little fellow that would take his glasses off and put them under his chin like this [resting hand under chin] and come in close and talk to you. One morning I came in and we had seating, so we'd try to figure out what we had to translate by counting the seats from the beginning of the lesson to see how many—

Miner: Oh, he would take—

Sheldon: Lines—

Miner: Give you a line or something?

Sheldon: I had to translate something and I looked about where I had to do it because he always went right down the row. One morning he said—he came over and sat down beside me. He said, “Ms. McNicol, are you happy?” “Yeah,” I said, “Oh, I hadn't thought about it.” I guessed I was and he said, “Well, I like my students to be happy.”

[Miner laughs]

Miner: Huh.

Sheldon: But he was such a dear little man.

Miner: That's nice.

Sheldon: He had his name on the front of the old gym, which is Hansen now. That's where I graduated. It was a little bitty place.

Miner: They had ceremony in the gym?

Sheldon: Yeah. And there was a pool in the bottom, you know.

Miner: There sure was.

Sheldon: We had to pass a swimming test to graduate.

Miner: Did you really?

Sheldon: It wasn't a very hard swimming test because I never did learn much and I was kind of afraid of it, but my mother was afraid of the river and she wouldn't let us get near it if she could help it, especially when my brother had ice skates. She wasn't happy with that.

Miner: Oh dear.

Sheldon: But it was a nice little bitty pool and we had to—we just had to tread water or—swim a little bit sideways or something and—Then we got our little ticket so we could graduate...[laughs]...you know?

Miner: So they would give it to you right there and then you would have to give it to who—the Registrar or something?

Sheldon: Well I don't remember the logistics of it very much but—

Miner: Well—well, that's really interesting. So it was thought that part of a liberal education would include being able to swim. What other kind of requirements did you have?

Sheldon: Well, this Humanities class was required in our sophomore year and I wanted to take German that hour—and they said they'd see if they could work it out and I could take other classes in lieu of the Humanities. I think I'm probably the only person that didn't take humanities. And—but I thought it was great that they could change it around that way. And I had to take an art class and a religion class and I don't know whether I had to take—art and language—the language was German, which other people didn't—weren't taking. And so I—I really had a more liberal education...

[Both laugh]

Sheldon: Because these were separate classes, you know?

Miner: Mhmm. How many—how many German classes did you have to take?

Sheldon: Oh, I had to take it—I took it two years. And it barely left a time element for him. He was eighty when he was teaching.

Miner: Oh my.

Sheldon: And I thought that was really ancient and it was in those days because people just didn't function well. They just had to have more—didn't have as many hospitals in that day. Of course Brokaw is changing now again.

Miner: Mhmm.

Sheldon: And I'm waiting for the time they'll just drop the "BroMenn" and be just "Advocate." Because Carle is sprouting all the crucifixes now.

Miner: Yeah, yeah.

Sheldon: And it's not a—it's a Catholic hospital but they never had all that up before—because it included so many other people and so Brokaw was where I worked after college.

Miner: And what did you do there?

Sheldon: Oh, I was in the record room—

Miner: Okay.

Sheldon: Taking dictation from all the doctors and I never had done that before but I had taken short-hand at Wesleyan—

Miner: Huh.

Sheldon: In a night course. And, I don't know, they must've been desperate but \$15 a week is a—I had such a nice time with all the doctors as my father was in the medical, you know—Well, osteopaths were in a lot of hospitals in those days. But I got some of the medical background I guess and my picture of my brother that was in medical school is up over there. He died at twenty-six because they didn't have any sulfur or anything. He got an infection in the bloodstream.

Miner: Oh dear.

Sheldon: In the Cleveland City Hospital. A fifteen hundred bed hospital, nobody knew what to do.

Miner: Oh my goodness—

Sheldon: He wrote home and said, "Well, you'd better blow your nose not too hard because I think I have an ear infection." Next thing they called and said he was in the hospital and it got in the bloodstream and—endocarditis. My mother and my dad didn't go over during the year he was there because it—we didn't have the money. And—but, of course, we got right in the car when he got—he was sick and we got over there and we couldn't stay because we couldn't pay the hotel bills—So my mother stayed and the interns fixed a bed up for her to be there and my dad and I went back home. And that was one of the biggest tragedies in our family because he was valedictorian and such a good student. He would've been a—terrific [doctor].

Miner: That's so sad.

Sheldon: When he was in medical school, I—well, I wrote to him, wrote letters to him, wrote—imagine a kid sending his sister letters, little brat sister.

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: And I wrote him that I just didn't know what to do because everybody was taking dancing lessons and I didn't have the money to take them and I was afraid I'd never have any dates.

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: And I was about sixteen. He was ten years older. He wrote back and said, "Don't jump off any tall buildings. I'll write you some charm letters and you can get—do as well as everybody else," and I think back now, he said maybe he'd write a series and he did.

Miner: Hm.

Sheldon: In medical school he was training to be observant, so he wrote me one on making the best of—most of your best points and he described the girls he knew. I have a poem in the—my poetry book about it. It was wonderful—letters and he had to send them all by short—not short-hand but, you know, snail mail now...[laughs].

Miner: Mhmm, right...[laughs].

Sheldon: And anyway, he wrote one on dancing and how you shouldn't use boy's arm as a hammock and—

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: Have your hair smell nice because sometimes it gets eaten and—

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: Things like that, just great letters, and I look back and think how he took time to do that and when he would connect me with some student—somebody in the hospital that was my age and we wrote back and forth so—and our older son is a—takes care of preemies. And so I always think that went on through, you know? And then his daughter was going to be in computer work. She got awful tired of telling people how to do the computer after college and so she decided she'd go to medical school...[laughs].

Miner: My goodness.

Sheldon: So I wrote one poem about the fact that I'm the only one in the family with just one degree.

[Both laugh]

Sheldon: But you—educated woman, you'd have a lot streaking off along the way.

Miner: Indeed, indeed.

Sheldon: Yeah.

Miner: Well who are some of your other favorite faculty or friends from school?

Sheldon: Well, Dr. Mortimer was one of the best as science teacher.

Miner: Mortimer? What kind of science?

Sheldon: Well, I don't know—physical science.

Miner: Okay.

Sheldon: He—there would—Grace Church was down on—was closer to the campus than Methodist Church and a bunch of us went there and I remember we, four of us, washed

dishes for one of—three hundred dinner something and we each got three dollars and we thought that was just out of this world, you know?

Miner: Hm.

Sheldon: You get paid for one evening. Of course the kids get tips now...[laughs]...that are more than that I suppose.

Miner: Hm.

Sheldon: But Reverend Marston was there and he—he was a good part of our upbringing I guess. We had a college group and we had a lot of friends in that group and...what else about that?

Miner: Well, did—

Sheldon: Well, Dr. Mortimer came to speak to us about science and religion for—I remember him saying that just because you say something and pray about it, doesn't mean it's going to happen, you know, and that's kind of...of this world at that time because there many more fundamentalists than there are now, and he was talking and he said—he was in this room that had a fireplace. It was going, the fire was going, he said, "If I said that the log should drop into the fireplace, it wouldn't happen," and then it dropped just a—

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: I remember Dr. Mortimer. He was a good teacher.

Miner: Did he take that in stride? Was he good-natured about that?

[Both laugh]

Sheldon: His son was in my class and—had a few dates with Jack...[laughs]. He was too mathematical and scientific to pursue me at the time I guess. But he's one of these real—we call them nerds now I guess...[laughs].

Miner: That's great.

Sheldon: But they're the ones that are making money after they get out of school...[laughs]...you know?

Miner: Well, making the world go 'round right?

Sheldon: Making—millionaires with computers some of them.

Miner: Hm. Well what did you do—you were doing an awful lot of work and an awful lot of schoolwork, did you have time for fun with your classmates?

Sheldon: Well, the first dance was called "The Grind", you know that probably.

Miner: I have heard that.

Sheldon: And we all had to wear our beanies. The freshman wore the beanies 'til Thanksgiving. But that was the first time we got home, and nobody—went home every weekend. We just—so we had time on the weekends and—

Miner: Okay.

Sheldon: This group at church—we had a lot of that, and later on my husband and I were counselors at East Bay with the high school kids.

Miner: Mhmm.

Sheldon: And I remember we...[laughs]...we thought we knew everything at that point, you know? And he sprained his ankle a little bit. When he came home, one of the ladies in the church says, "He—he's not as young as he thinks he is."

[Both laugh]

Sheldon: But we, one year when he was director, we had a course entitled "Getting Ready to Fall in Love" and you had a big bunch—took that course.

Miner: Aww.

Sheldon: We thought we knew everything about getting ready. Now I think back, it must've been funny.

[Both laugh]

Sheldon: Then when we were in the churches we'd have classes like that and when we were in Monticello, it was a big old house that was given to the college for meetings and his name was Hott, H-o-t-t.

Miner: Yes, I know the Hott House.

Sheldon: So we had—yeah, well, we had this class at the Hott House. We thought it was great, you know, this sex class in the Hott House.

[Both laugh]

Sheldon: Kids thought that was a funny joke.

Miner: That is funny.

Sheldon: And—

Miner: And that was—that was after school when you were—when your husband—

Sheldon: Yeah.

Miner: Had a ministry in Monticello—

Sheldon: Yeah.

Miner: Then? Okay.

Sheldon: We got married a year after school.

Miner: After his school or your school?

Sheldon: Wesleyan.

Miner: Okay.

Sheldon: We were married before he was out of school—

Miner: Okay.

Sheldon: He was out a year and came back, so his—'39 actually he would've been in my class if he hadn't—some people just dropped out to work to get money to come back.

Miner: Oh, I see.

Sheldon: And some people flunked out.

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: Which was part of each, I think, for him and I—I didn't realize it was as serious as it was at the time. Makes you very—you know, it wasn't one of these things about—like Reagan, he wasn't a bookworm, but he made up for it in other ways, you know? I'm still—was surprised that he got to be governor let alone—

[Both laugh]

Sheldon: But his mother was a very smart woman and she had to do a lot of work because his dad was an alcoholic. And his dad sold shoes when he was sober and...[laughs]...then when they built the new high school in—a couple years before I was in high school in Dixon, they voted on where to put it because—well, there was the north side and the south side of the river and the—all the north siders voted on this place by the river and the south siders voted on several places and lost it. And I—you get a little too close to the river because I could watch it going over the tennis courts when I was in study hall. But it's—the tennis courts have been moved...[laughs]...since.

Miner: Did a little rearranging.

Sheldon: Yeah.

Miner: Well, when did Chet and you—when did you get engaged?

Sheldon: Well—

Miner: Or was that—

Sheldon: A fraternity pin was—

Miner: The pinning?

Sheldon: Supposed to be a—

Miner: Okay.

Sheldon: Engagement to start with and the Beta Kappas, which now are Theta Chi—Theta Chi—and I—when you get pinned, it was a big deal and—like an engagement and that was when I was a senior, 1940, and he had a car, so—and there was a—this house we lived in there over where the jog is on Park Street.

Miner: Mhmm, yep.

Sheldon: And they put a—they had an alley there by the jog. Then they made it—took it out later on so they—

Miner: To put the chapel—

Sheldon: That's where we used to park, you see, because it was right beside the house I lived in. And I could go home and get my mail before chapel and then I'd go and sit in chapel and would read my...

[Both laugh]

Sheldon: And it was handy. And got the pin and then we were out a year making money and paying some debts. We didn't come out of college with debt, so— And I think back now, it never occurred to us to get money that we didn't earn.

Miner: Hm. To take a loan you mean?

Sheldon: Yeah.

Miner: Yeah.

Sheldon: And I didn't—went to Brokaw for \$15 a week, but you could buy a lot more groceries with that—

Miner: Sure.

Sheldon: Than you could now. It's relative, but we have a—got a—went to Scotland with—my older son took us to Scotland on a trip and I got a record and there's a line in it that says, "We were never so happy as when we were poor." And so that's why my theme is—nobody had any money, so we had to make our own fun.

Miner: Yeah.

Sheldon: Walking home from the library was almost a date and the fraternity pins, they already had them, you know. You didn't have to get a ring. And then so I had this job of—Brokaw at \$15 a week and Chet was still in school. I think we're probably one of the few couples that were in school when we were in—

Miner: Mhmm.

Sheldon: At college, and so we had this apartment, which was East Street on the other side of the tennis courts and we had an apartment that had an outdoor stairway—no, an indoor stairway and we got two rooms and—a bedroom and a kitchenette and when we moved in there at seven dollars a week I think it was, he carried me up those stairs—

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: Over the threshold—couldn't do it now, I'll tell you that.

[Both laugh]

Sheldon: But it was near the campus and in between Brokaw and the campus.

Miner: Perfect.

Sheldon: Gave us perfect—but then when Roger was on the way the next year, '42—I graduated '40 and I worked that year. And at \$15 a week and Chet wasn't making any money. We had to go somewhere else and he was serving in the church at Cooksville.

Miner: Hm.

Sheldon: And so we had to have—half of \$15, we couldn't make it and so we had to move out to Cooksville to an old parsonage that hadn't been used for a long time and they'd papered over and papered over, so it was kind of funny. We didn't have any furniture, so—we had a little more money but not much—he would ride into school to—he was still in school—and there was a curve there at Cooksville and he'd stand out there on the curb and wait for the fellow from Colfax that had a job at the post office, so he was in early.

Miner: Hm.

Sheldon: So he came into Wesleyan that year. When we got out there we found that they decided since the parsonage hadn't been used for so long—it was five rooms and a path I called it—

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: And an outhouse. Neither one of us had grown up that way and so—

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: It was kind of a big deal.

Miner: Culture shock.

Sheldon: We thought it was funny...[laughs]...And he'd go half a block for our drinking water.

Miner: Oh my.

Sheldon: But we had a nice cookstove and I had never used a cookstove, and Roge could play in the cobs where...[laughs]...in the—

Miner: The corn cobs for the stove, is that how it was fueled?

Sheldon: For the stove, yeah.

Miner: Yeah? Okay.

Sheldon: To start the stove.

Miner: Uh-huh.

Sheldon: And well we learned a few things. I never had a stove. I didn't—couldn't regulate it. I had—my mother, she would stick her hand in and know if it was hot enough. But I had never experienced that, and I didn't have an electric iron in those days. I think that was one of the first things we got. But anyway, we—it was just kind of a lark. We—they painted the outside of the house and they had painted the church at the same time but they hadn't painted the steeple.

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: So my husband and one of the tenant farmers...decided they'd go up and paint the steeple, so they put an extension ladder on the back of a truck—

Miner: Oh dear.

Sheldon: And climbed up there. I didn't have sense enough to worry about it—

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: I guess. I was busy with Roger, and they got that painted. And then we invited some people out from Wesleyan and just before they were to get to the luncheon, the dining room ceiling paper was too heavy for itself and it came down and hung there—

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: Over the table. Those were the days when it was funny to be poor.

Miner: Yeah...[laughs].

Sheldon: But we were there a year and then moved to Verona. Nobody knows where Verona is, do you know where—

Miner: I do not know where Verona is.

Sheldon: It's up in—what county is it? Anyway, it was in the middle of a section, so nobody ever came there unless they knew where they were going...[laughs].

Miner: A middle of a section of what?

Sheldon: Of land.

Miner: Okay.

Sheldon: I mean the town was—

Miner: So it wasn't—okay, mhmm.

Sheldon: Two hundred people.

Miner: Oh dear.

Sheldon: Lady across the street back of me came over and helped me pit cherries with a cherry tree and I canned thirty quarts of cherries.

Miner: Oh my word.

Sheldon: And that's a lot of pittin'.

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: And we put chickens into the locker down—not—the next town that had a locker, and this other minister who was about forty in the town, he and his wife were childless and they kinda took us over and grew us up, you know. And [Laura and Marian Rowlen]—a poem book that he wrote that's just gorgeous and he said to me, "You guys are just so young and dumb. You don't know you're not having a good time."

[Both laugh]

Sheldon: Because we—and neither one had grown up without running water and—

Miner: Yeah.

Sheldon: Heating stoves, you know?

Miner: Mhmm.

Sheldon: The front room stove...We were just there a year luckily.

Miner: Everything seems like an adventure at that age.

Sheldon: Yeah. Well, I think we went there at—what was it—they were gunna pay us \$800 for the year.

Miner: Hm.

Sheldon: And they put—by the end of the year they made it \$1,000—big deal.

Miner: Bonus.

Sheldon: Because I was working then, you see.

Miner: Mhmm.

Sheldon: And Roger got to learn about cobs and stoves—

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: The minister who had been there that had kind of—was the reason that Chet wanted to go into the ministry. He said, “That’s a very good stove. I bought it when I was there and it has two reservoirs to keep food warm.”

Miner: Oh.

Sheldon: It went up the top and he said, “You gotta reservoir water so you got hot water inside,” and it really was a nice cookstove—

Miner: My goodness.

Sheldon: If you like to cook.

Miner: Yeah.

Sheldon: Then when we went to Verona—you know where Morris is?

Miner: I do.

Sheldon: Well Verona is five miles west.

Miner: Oh okay.

Sheldon: So that is where I had the adventure with the rat and they don’t teach you in college how to deal with a rat, you know? It woke Chet up. It was—bit his arm.

Miner: Oh dear.

Sheldon: He’ll show you his teeth marks, and I must—I thought it must’ve jumped over Chet because we were sleeping together and in the—and the crib was in the corner and I always heard the baby but he never did.

Miner: Mm.

Sheldon: But that time he heard him.

Miner: Oh my goodness.

Sheldon: And saw what it was and he went scootin', so we had to go five miles to Morris to the doctor and...for some reason Chet was smart enough to put the broom at the front door with—when we left and when we came back, that rat was up on the top of the reservoir.

Miner: What did he put at the front door?

Sheldon: The—just a broom.

Miner: A broom—a broom?

Sheldon: To make it—to hit it.

Miner: To hit it, okay, thank you.

Sheldon: And I was surprised that he did that because I didn't think he was going to hit it anyway. It was up on top of the stove and when he heard us coming, he jumped from the top of the stove to the mid-part of the stove, and when he went from that to the floor, Chet hit him.

Miner: Uh-huh.

Sheldon: He killed that rat. He moved so fast, I never saw him move so fast in my life...[laughs].

Miner: Oh my goodness. I can't believe the rat was still hanging around.

Sheldon: Well, it wasn't. It was en route to the door—

Miner: Uh-huh.

Sheldon: And it got hit in midair I guess. I don't know. Anyway, it killed it.

Miner: Wow.

Sheldon: And when we went to see the doctor then after he had done that, he said, "Oh well it was a good fur—a clean [prairie] rat," you know?

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: So we didn't think about—anything about shots or anything.

Miner: Right...[laughs].

Sheldon: You know, you're so dumb but so sensible in a way.

Miner: Yeah.

Sheldon: So that was the big—big episode at that town.

Miner: That's an—that's an amazing story.

Sheldon: Yeah we got a lot of stories for each town. Once you remember it—all these kind of crazy things you remember, you know.

Miner: I was going to say, probably all that traveling you would've collected quite a few—

Sheldon: Our oldest son who went to Wesleyan was here for the fiftieth anniversary of his high school class—

Miner: Uh-huh.

Sheldon: Dwight.

Miner: Uh-huh.

Sheldon: And we went up with him because—and Mark was here, so he went up to see if he—what the junior high girls look like now.

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: And he and the middle son who is in Florida had both dated girls in eighth grade—in high school there. And, “Oh, Mom, they look so matronly...”

[Both laugh]

Sheldon: After all, it's been fifty years—

[Both laugh]

Sheldon: Two or three kids, and so that was kinda interesting.

Miner: So was that when you were—

Sheldon: But then I started to say what old people remember about you. He said to my older son, “Sheldon—Oh yeah, Sheldon. I remember you. You beat me in checkers in eighth grade.” [laughs] The things you remember.

Miner: That's something. They never forgave him for that all those years.

Sheldon: Probably not.

Miner: So you moved from the little town outside of Morris then to Dwight or were they just going to school in Dwight?

Sheldon: Oh, I'm trying to remember the sequence. I have it somewhere.

Miner: Well.

Sheldon: Yeah. Roger, when he was three years old, could say the whole *Night before Christmas*—did one of the Christmas programs.

Miner: Mhmm.

Sheldon: And I always say I didn't know he was so precocious. It's probably a good thing, but we read a lot. And he could give you the—he used to say, “I—” when he was about three he said, “I have a good memory like an elephant,” and he used to—did and he liked the Puffin and the Pirate. “Don Durk of Dowdee”—that was one of our favorite poems.

Miner: Yeah?

Sheldon: It's wicked as could be but perfectly wonderful to see.

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: He had “a dagger and a dirk and a squizzamaroo” and it was—wonderful words.

Miner: Oh great.

Sheldon: Then the next time that we had three years between the boys—I don't know, I never knew why—and as it was part of my education, I'd never gotten a...[laughs]...Usually it was a year or two years—

Miner: Uh-huh.

Sheldon: Before you had the next one, you know?

Miner: Yeah.

Sheldon: And they are three years apart, so they were just enough apart so that one could build something and the other could knock it down, you know?

[Both laugh]

Sheldon: And so when Gordy was born, well we went up to Dixon because they had the hospital there and my mother could take care of Roger. So we were up there at that time. That's in the history there, the Ronald Reagans, but a picture in the hospital, so we have something connected to each one of the history on that. Thing that's in the sidewalk—fun.

Miner: Is that commemorative sidewalk in Dixon?

Sheldon: Yeah, it's—

Miner: Okay.

Sheldon: By the statue of—

Miner: Okay.

Sheldon: Reagan on the horse. Looking down the street he used to go to high school on.

Miner: Sure.

Sheldon: Well, when they found out he was going to be president, the mailman found it out first and he bought that house—actually the house that they commemorated, not one he lived in as much as he lived on the north side.

Miner: Is that right?

Sheldon: So that's another little business, you know, you don't talk about.

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: And Grandma took care of Roger and loved it.

Miner: What year was it when you went to Dixon then?

Sheldon: Well, we didn't live at Dixon except for going to see the grandparents.

Miner: Oh, okay. Sorry.

Sheldon: And our house was by a spur of the railroad, so we had a big yard we could play baseball in. A tree on each side for the bases and then we put a plate out here and we had a field. And by the—one of my playmate's father was a engineer on one of the switch engines. So they'd come in there and switch engines, I guess. Anyway, we needn't pay any attention to all the logistics of the—it was fun to wait for her dad to go by and wave at him—

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: And yell, "Take us with you!" and nobody ever told us that he ever would.

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: We lived—we lived in hope for the—

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: We'd get a ride and he did let us up in the yard one time, I guess, but the—my poetry book that's there on the couch. And you could take that along and use it for reference because it's mostly things that happened—

Miner: Oh, I'd love to see it.

Sheldon: And in our lives, you know? Like when I broke my elbow or when it tells about the letters that my brother wrote. And I still well up when I think about it.

Miner: Oh, I'm sure.

Sheldon: Well, Wellington came next. You ever heard of Wellington? It's by—about five miles between Hoopeston and—

Miner: I know where Hoopeston is.

Sheldon: Watseka or somewhere. Anyway, it's another one of the little towns. These little towns are fun because they do such funny things and they know each other and they can make a story up and wink at somebody and know what they're talking about...and like we had a central—you had to call on the phone at that time and the phone would ring and you could hear what the other people were saying on your line—

Miner: Mhmm.

Sheldon: And I had a ring one time in Wellington and the lady who I was, you know, she said, "The fire." I said, "Where's the fire?" They needed to tell everybody where the fire was—a little town, you could walk to it usually. And it was just—she said, "Well, if you'd look out the window, you'd see it. It's right across the street."

Miner: Oh goodness.

[Both laugh]

Sheldon: That was...and then from Verona we went to Watseka to have the middle son and that week was the—was the biggest week of Chet's life because he was to graduate from seminary and I needed to go in Evanston and so the grandmas went and then he was to get ordained in a church here in Bloomington, old Grace Church. And then he had to—he went back to Wellington from the—went to conference from there to—got ordained and back to Wellington and the two grandmas were off to Evanston from Garrett. And the week is not over yet. He had to take the—the grandmas back and finish pack from—simply to go to Sibley, so they packed up in Wellington, moved everything to Sibley and put me in bed there and brought me home from the hospital. Best move I ever made, I didn't move anything.

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: And the Sibley house was so little, the bedroom—you couldn't move the bed around.

Miner: Hm.

Sheldon: You put it one place and it stayed there.

Miner: So the reason you didn't get to go to the graduation was because you were—

Sheldon: I always tell him I don't know whether he graduated or was ordained or anything—

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: I don't know.

Miner: But you were in the hospital with your son, Gordon?

Sheldon: I—well, yeah.

Miner: Is that right? Okay.

Sheldon: Yeah, and then they came from the hospital—

Miner: And got you, yeah.

Sheldon: And Chet's mother and my mother were both there to help.

Miner: That's nice.

Sheldon: And she went downtown, the only place to get ice cream. Gordy wanted an ice cream cone. The only place to get ice cream was the village pub in—one street, no—so Grandma, the WCTU-er, went into the saloon that you wouldn't—she—

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: Wouldn't have gone in otherwise to get the ice cream cone for a grandchild. So the next day, Gordy was missing. It was only a block or two from the house—the pub and here he was down at the—coming home from downtown with an ice cream cone. He'd just gone down there—he was about three—and—two blocks—and asked for an ice cream cone and they gave it to him.

Miner: They gave it to him...[laughs]. Isn't that cute?

Sheldon: He came back licking an ice cream cone and when they found him he was about halfway back...[laughs].

Miner: Did that set the trend for his life? Was he always independent? [laughs]

Sheldon: Well, we—the second children are always independent—

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: Nobody paid any attention to him. Yeah, he's the one—first one to have ice cream like that. He was first to have a motorcycle and so the second son—the third was kind of a mixture. Mark—yeah, traveled all over everything.

Miner: He sure does.

Sheldon: Anyway, remember the WCTU went down to make a purchase and went down—she went back later to pay for it.

Miner: She made what?

Sheldon: Made noises in the town that the preacher's kid has been in the pub twice already...[laughs].

Miner: The WCTU is the Women's Christian Temperance Union? Okay.

Sheldon: Yeah. And he had gone to the tavern twice in the week—

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: The first week we were there.

Miner: Made an impression for you.

Sheldon: And he just asked for it and ask and it shall be given to you, see—

[Both laugh]

Sheldon: First convert. And now in Cooksville we had a retired schoolteacher that took care of us. Well, Ida Smith was quite the gal. She believed implicitly in David C. Cook. David C. Cook was a publishing house that was a little bit off from the Methodist.

Miner: Ahhh.

Sheldon: Because it was a little more strict and she took care of...going by David C. Cook. And I used to put the kids on my lap like this because I had long legs and then I could go like this, put them to sleep.

Miner: Rock them a little bit.

Sheldon: I was rocking the baby at church and she came over and told me I better quit that because I would addle his brains, and so he's the doctor that I addled up pretty good.

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: And I have done—I think it's true of Wesleyan, talking about the different teachers—

Miner: Mhmm.

Sheldon: It all depends on good teachers.

Miner: I think so.

Sheldon: And I had that nice little moment with Dr. Ferguson. I worked for Dr. Ratcliffe. I had Ms. White—what was her first name? We didn't call them by their first names ever. But we knew what it was, you know? [laughs]...And Dr. Chase taught Greek. I can see him walking resolutely across the campus with his arm full of books.

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: I didn't have any classes with him but it's so typical of scholars of the day. That you just sort of fit in to the Old North where he—school place with the bell, you know, the—one of the first buildings. It was—it was here.

Miner: And that was his office—was in Old North?

Sheldon: Uh-huh.

Miner: The Greek?

Sheldon: Yeah.

Miner: You told me before we started a little story about Mrs. Kirkpatrick and teaching you. Do you want to repeat that for us? We didn't have the tape rolling yet.

Sheldon: Oh, I don't think she'd mind. We talked to her last year when we were given the Loyalty Award, you know.

Miner: Uh-huh.

Sheldon: And I said, "Oh," we call her E. Melba—even in those days we called her E. Melba—

Miner: Hm.

Sheldon: E. Melba Johnson and she—that's the way she went by. She had a presence. All five feet of her or whatever it is. She is very short. She always wears heels about like that. And I told her, I said, "Oh, E. Melba you..." I was intimidated. I had never given a speech and I gave a speech about the 1933 World's Fair because my older brother who I liked so well was a guide at the fair and so we made up some money to go whether we had it or not, and they fired a bunch of people and we were not happy about that. Then they hired back all the ones that could play instruments and he could play the trombone. So they made up a guide band that all had to wear—they wore their uniforms, and—for being a guide—

Miner: Mhmm.

Sheldon: Any V.I.P.s that came were ushered in by the guide band.

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: So he—from Twelfth Street down to the middle of the fair.

Miner: Oh my.

Sheldon: And we were there—had to go and see everything like that and—

Miner: And where was that at?

Sheldon: That was in Chicago.

Miner: Okay.

Sheldon: One hundred miles from home. And I loved to go to Evanston because I could get a waffle. I didn't have a waffle iron until the boys got her one finally.

[Miner laughs]

Miner: But Mrs. Kirkpatrick didn't like the way you gave your—

Sheldon: No, she—

Miner: Speech?

Sheldon: No, she said, "Oh, Helen, how could I intimidate you?" She has to look up to me about like this, you know?

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: And I said, "Well, you know—" She says, "You're such a timid little thing." And I thought I was pretty assertive at the time, I guess.

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: So this was a picture that was taken at the corner of Hedding and—Hedding Hall.

Miner: Yes, I've seen that photo. I think that's up with one of the news stories that they did about you and Chet on campus. It's a wonderful photo. You're standing by some flowering bushes?

Sheldon: It was spirea. Right at the corner, old Hedding Hall.

Miner: Old Hedding. Oh, that's wonderful.

Sheldon: And...Chet has—has it blown up on the computer.

Miner: Uh-huh. Yeah, it's a great photo. Well, I think we've talked about quite a range of—of topics here. Do you have other things that we should know about you? It's just—your time with Wesleyan?

Sheldon: Well, I write poetry, but I didn't do it 'til quite a while after I was married. I—

Miner: Uh-huh.

Sheldon: Do have some from college in that book.

Miner: Uh-huh.

Sheldon: It—it says so. And there's some in there about East Bay, which is the camp at Lake Bloomington where we worked with the young people so many years.

Miner: You did that?

Sheldon: Oh, I was a counselor and Chet was a director for quite a few years—high school camp.

Miner: Oh, great.

Sheldon: There's a camp over near...eastern part of the state, used to be called Dipler Springs and it became—became to a different name then. I have trouble remembering.

Miner: Oh, I'm not familiar with any of that.

Sheldon: I'll tell you anyway, he was director of a junior high camp and we got over there—it had rained so hard that the creek was onto the bank. You had to cross the creek on a bridge to get to the main part of the camp. We got over there and all these kids were over here. They couldn't get across the creek, so Chet and some of the other counselors took them piggyback over to the— [cabins].

Miner: Oh...[laughs].

Sheldon: Camp part. I think I wouldn't have left my kid there for the world now—

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: To think about carrying them across the creek and the parents left.

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: I think it was nutty.

Miner: Oh my goodness.

Sheldon: Anyway—

Miner: Well, that's a wonderful story.

Sheldon: Creek went down and we had a nice camp and nobody got hurt or anything, so...[laughs]. Oh, I wanted to tell you that the Bob Montgomery Award that they give every year.

Miner: Uh-huh, yes.

Sheldon: It wasn't—he was in high school in Monticello when we lived in Monticello there—was a preacher.

Miner: Oh.

Sheldon: So I think about him every time they give that award.

Miner: And so you knew him too? How interesting.

Sheldon: And the—the thing that's amazing—when we were at Cooksville, Chet had his first wedding and we go to a church out in Normal here, retirement, and Cecil Petty was a—at Wesleyan—sister, minister's wife, her husband is deceased now but [Ellen Hendrix]—her name used to be Petty—she went to Wesleyan too. And she came bearing a snapshot of the first wedding. She was a bridesmaid in it out in Cooksville.

Miner: What a coincidence.

Sheldon: And she was in it because—she was a schoolteacher. She played the piano in the church. And then a little later she came and said, with the picture, "You know who this is, Margaret Parrot," who was a teacher at ISU was the maid of honor, so there were two in that Cooksville wedding that we saw fifty years later, you know.

Miner: Oh my goodness. That's great connections.

Sheldon: That's the Methodist Church, which I'm afraid they'll just call it the—they say they're going to put the "Y" and not have YMCA because that was Christian Union. I'm waiting for the new hospital built out here to drop the name of BroMenn because nobody knows what it comes from, but it was a consortium of all kinds of Protestant churches that paid for BroMed first.

Miner: Uh-huh.

Sheldon: And the preachers have a pension plan that we have been very grateful about all these years and they pay for medical—have a medical plan.

Miner: Oh, that's wonderful.

Sheldon: These old boys were pretty smart. They didn't have any money but they looked ahead and they fixed it so their—rakes in millions over the years for their—

Miner: From their investments?

Sheldon: Uh-huh.

Miner: It's one thing to be poor at the beginning of your life and another...[laughs]...

Sheldon: Well, we—we didn't—

Miner: After you're retired.

Sheldon: Know enough to be thankful at the time, I guess, but we get a check and just lately they've—the wives would get half as much—and now they've fixed it so that if the man dies, that she gets the same as he got. They won't get their own but they'll get his, which is more, so that's a Methodist thing, and I—I hate to think of the circuit riders losing a trail back to schools like Wesleyan because the first circuit riders that were in Illinois appointment was Illinois, not one—just town.

Miner: They had to go to all of them.

Sheldon: They kept going on—

Miner: Hm.

Sheldon: Didn't see their wives very much.

Miner: My goodness.

Sheldon: They had to fight Steven Douglass. They had debates with Steven A. Douglass and they have a debate over here at the old house once in a while.

Miner: At the David Davis Mansion? Uh-huh.

Sheldon: And that house is fantastic. It had the first indoor toilet of any place around—a lot of things about that Davis Mansion that are very interesting.

Miner: It's an amazing place.

Sheldon: Uh-huh.

Miner: Well, Helen, if you could give advice to a Wesleyan student today about their school years or anything else, what would you say to a Wesleyan student today?

Sheldon: Well, Minor Myers wanted it to be called the Harvard of the West and I think people don't realize the diversity. It's becoming better because of Mark as far as Chinese students—and we never thought they'd have a Chinese—or a course or...I think that these big mega-churches and these big universities are not going to last as long as the smaller ones for how they can be adjustable. And you meet people from all over as well as eastern schools do. Now you know Chao and he said that he—but he didn't get accepted at an eastern school. He was sort of disappointed and he came here and he said it was the best thing that happened because we got a lot of different venues that he wouldn't have and that's one thing that I'd want you to say that we do, that we get acquainted with kids from other countries. We've been doing that all our life.

Miner: And that's Chao Ren. He's a senior this year but he's originally from China and he is—would you say you're sort of his sponsoring family here?

Sheldon: Well, he—Mark had met him before he came.

Miner: Uh-huh.

Sheldon: And he said he's quite a remarkable fella, so we looked him up of course. He wanted to learn to make an apple pie.

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: I said, "Well, I think I can handle that."

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: Because I'm famous for my pie, and so during the first Christmastime when he was in extended hours, he was over here for—overnight for two to three nights—

Miner: Uh-huh.

Sheldon: And we both made apple pie.

Miner: How fun.

Sheldon: And Crisco's kinda did me in. They took so much fat out of the Crisco that it doesn't roll out quite as well, so I've had to change the recipe, but I didn't think it was as good but it looked good. And then he took his little camera out and took a picture of it and then he called his mother.

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: And I told them that was my apple pie diplomacy. There's a poem in the book about—why don't you take that book along with you.

Miner: I definitely will.

Sheldon: Yeah.

Miner: Yeah.

Sheldon: And it's called—I called it "Easy as Pie".

[Miner laughs]

Miner: How fun.

Sheldon: Anyway, you can remember things like that if you set them a little jingle, these—I sent one to a couple of the preachers when they knew that I had it and he's since deceased but he wrote—they both wrote wonderful letters to me after they got them because they didn't have high expectations I don't think.

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: He said—usually preachers write little quatrains—and he said he was so amazed that he'd known me all this time and he didn't know all these things and, well you know, it hits the middle-class, I guess. They understand what I'm saying.

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: And I went to this poetry group and one fellow wrote at the bottom, “I know what you’re talking about,” and some of them actually couldn’t understand, they were so—

Miner: Yeah.

Sheldon: Esoteric is the word, I guess. It’s just kind of out of it. They knew what they were talking about but it—it had some pretty words but it didn’t say anything to me.

Miner: Mhmm.

Sheldon: And that one’s called “Easy as Pie” and the—if you have some relationship with Chao, I—he’ll remember that.

Miner: Oh sure. I do see him on campus still, yeah.

Sheldon: Yeah. I asked him to write down his course titles and I’ve done that with our friend’s son who is equally ahead of me and one of Garth, Mark’s son, wrote when he was in junior high and the last word I couldn’t find in the dictionary.

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: And that was a Tagalog word. It was about a butterfly coming out on Christmas and being so happy to have a house...and it was such a nice poem but I couldn’t understand the last word. It—well, it’s a Tagalog word for butterfly.

[Miner laughs]

Miner: Well, doesn’t everybody know that? [laughs]

Sheldon: But things keep jumping over the generations and thing—

Miner: Yeah.

Sheldon: And so—let’s see if I left out any of the teachers that I liked. Ms. White was kind of—she was kind of spacey—was—you weren’t quite sure what she was saying in—

[Miner laughs]

Sheldon: Poetry and she had us writing some poetry. I think there’s one in there that I wrote in—about a jail cell. And one of the people that I know from here said, “It’s such a different mood,” and she wondered what had happened—this kind of black feeling, you know? I said, “Oh that was one I wrote in college.”

[Both laugh]

Sheldon: And it didn't have anything to do with being depressed or anything but...[laughs]...but it's so funny what people take when you write something and you know what you're talking about and they have something in their lives that clicks with the same type of thing like—

Miner: That's true.

Sheldon: The one about...jacks and...hopscotch and jacks and it's people that—another generation.

Miner: Hm. Yeah, we all view things through our own experiences, right?

Sheldon: Today in the mail I got this letter from a gal that [word obscured by background noise] a writer from our class.

Miner: I've met her, mhmm.

Sheldon: This is up-to-date.

Miner: Mhmm. She got—

Sheldon: Anyway, we—I had my ninetieth birthday at Ames.

Miner: Mhmm.

Sheldon: And I—

Miner: I remember.

Sheldon: Oh, were you—were you there?

Miner: I missed it that day. No, I was not there.

Sheldon: I got the class notes. It's quite extensive. It's in here. I was separating it from this...but I tore this out in a page from the Camp—Camp Point—*Camp Point Journal Hometown Weekly* to send to you. It is evidently submitted by a subscriber from Minden, a small town northwest of Camp Point in Adams County, author unknown. It's a little wordier than your sentiments but you're on the same wavelength. A newsletter, letter of poetry—what did I do with it? Anyway, you oughta look on page fifty-eight I think it was.

Miner: Oh, well, we'll look that up for sure.

Sheldon: Look it up, yeah, and—

Miner: Well I think we'll go ahead and—and—and end our conversation here but know that we can pick it up another time and I just thank you so much for sharing these interesting perspectives with us.