



12-8-2011

Wendell Hess

Wendell Wayne Hess
Illinois Wesleyan University

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Recommended Citation

Hess, Wendell Wayne and Miner, Meg, "Wendell Hess" (2011). *All oral histories*. 46.
https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/oral_hist/46

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Oral History Interview with Wendell Hess

The Ames Library, December 8, 2011

Meg Miner: Well good morning, my name is Meg Miner, and today is December 8, 2011, and we're here in the Ames Library to do an oral history interview with Dr. Hess. Dr. Hess, if you could go ahead and start by telling us your full name, and how you're affiliated with Wesleyan, we'll go ahead and start our interview.

Wendell Hess: Okay, well good morning. My name is Wendell Wayne Hess, and I'm affiliated with the university as a retiree with the title of Provost Emeritus, which I very much appreciate.

Miner: And what positions have you held in Wesleyan? When did you start here? And...give us a little timeline here.

Hess: A little timeline? Okay. Well I came here when I was 28 years old in 1963 from the University of Kansas, when I just finished my PhD in inorganic chemistry. I came as assistant professor of chemistry, and remained in the faculty ranks for a number of years but through the years took on administrative responsibilities, and ended up moving through the academic areas. I was Department Chair of Chemistry, then I was director of the science programs, which included 4 or 5 of the science departments. And then I was Associate Academic Dean. And then I was selected to be the Dean, and I was in that position for a long time. I don't remember the exact years of associate versus the deanship itself. I retired as the Chief Academic Officer and interim President from the period of March of 1988, I believe, until July of 1989 when I retired officially from the university. I was still young, but I was tired and I'd had a great career and so that was, in a nutshell, that's what I did while I was here.

Miner: Well why did you come to Wesleyan? What drew you here?

Hess: What drew me to Wesleyan? I would say three things. Two individuals were Lloyd Bertholf, President, and Joe Collins, who was heading the Department of Chemistry at that time, when I was interviewing in the spring of 1963. I was very impressed and drawn to both of those guys. Secondly, I had graduated from a liberal arts college in Abilene, Texas by the name of McMurry College, and I had fond memories of it, and Illinois Wesleyan reminded me very, very strongly, both being historically affiliated with the Methodist church, and similar student bodies, both with a lot of potential yet to be realized. The third reason I came, I think, was probably that I saw a lot of potential. I saw a way that I could make a difference and I saw a way that I could get to know students as people, not just students. I'd just come out of the University of Kansas where it was so hard for the students to have any relationship with faculty, and I did not want any more of that. I wanted to get to know the students as people, and I wanted to help them meet their aspirations, as a colleague more than a distant faculty member. So I was always drawn to the students and I thought Wesleyan had then and still does have a tremendous student body...greatest asset. So probably those are the 3 key reasons. It wasn't geographical; I was a long way from west Texas where I was born and grew up. But my wife Loretta and I'd been in Idaho, I was in the nuclear industry for a while after I'd finished my bachelor's degree. And, so we had left Texas and been in Lawrence, Kansas then for 4 or 5 years while I got my advanced degrees. So we weren't afraid to be in Illinois.

Miner: That's a good thing.

Hess: [laughs] that's right.

Miner: Well there is certainly, as you said, a reputation that Illinois Wesleyan has for student-faculty relationships. Why do you think that is here more so than a place like Kansas or other institutions?

Hess: Well, it's hard to pinpoint exactly, I mean generalizations are a bit dangerous but these would be my impressions. Students come to Wesleyan because they desire to have a relationship with the faculty—they want to know who their mentors and faculty members are. So they make an initial decision of a small liberal arts college that has a teaching reputation. That's early on, usually it's sophomore, junior, maybe senior year in high school. On the other side of it I think faculty are at a selective liberal arts college for the same reasons. They want to get to know the students and they want to see the students achieve toward their potential and their goals and to help them and advise them should that be misguided. I think advising and rapport in the classroom and out of the classroom and through student organizations was one of the great things for me, and I still am in touch with a number of my early students that I really got to know, I mean I was only 10 years older than they were when they came in as freshmen at 18 or 19 and I was 28, and so we're not that far apart. They're beginning to retire now, all of them are beginning to retire now, but I stay in touch with a number of them. In fact, my local physician and my local dentist are both early students of mine, and I knew they were very bright early on, so they still are. [Laughs] So, those would be the reasons, I would think, that the environment is such that the rapport can occur, not that it always does occur, because personalities and such may affect that, but the opportunities—the environment is there. Whereas at large universities, there was so much pressure on the faculty members to do things other than interact with the students. Give your class, do your research, manage your post doc's, go to those meetings, it was always something other than student-focused, at the University of Kansas. And I think that's true, pretty generally. That was the age of publish or perish, the emphasis being on the professional growth within the field, or the discipline, not on your excellence as a teacher, or your rapport with the freshmen or sophomore student as they were in their formative years, trying to figure out who I want to become. So I enjoyed it very much, and I wouldn't change it in any way.

Miner: The emphasis on students, and on their world...

Hess: Yeah, yeah, sure.

Miner: Well, you mentioned Dr. Collins, was that it?

Hess: Yeah, Joe Collins.

Miner: Do you want to talk a little bit about him and how the department was that—maybe what changes went on in it while you were there?

Hess: Well I can tell you a little bit about—the university—well, Illinois Wesleyan as a college at that time had struggled greatly after World War II. Getting students, vets returning in G.I. bills and things, but financially and otherwise, the university had not done well. Joe Collins was a very bright graduate in chemistry—organic chemistry; actually medicinal chemistry was his specialty, been at the Sterling Winthrop Drug Company, and he had put forward a proposal that the company had not sponsored, and it irritated Dr. Collins and so he wanted to try some

teaching anyhow, so he just came to Illinois Wesleyan, and he was a tremendous teacher, good researcher, rapport unbelievable, good Christian man, students loved him, and he was well respected in the faculty, all across the disciplines. I could see, when I was interviewing, the religion faculty, the philosophers, the English faculty, all knew who Joe Collins was, and he had only been here a year or two at that time. Well, he influenced me in a very positive way. He said, 'Wendell—I'm not going to be here that long, I will be returning to industry, and you're the kind of guy I would like to have in our department.' So okay, that was very influential, and in two years, he was gone. He went back to Sterling. They saw the light of his wisdom, they recruited him right back, and he became vice president for research for Sterling-Winthrop. Very talented mind and good teacher. I'm still in touch with Joe.

He and his wife were just here last summer, visiting. Yeah, so, he's retired now, but great faculty member. The department consisted of Joe, and a lady by the name of Dorothy Banfill, who is deceased, and there may have been another member of the department, but I don't recall that there was. I think I was number three in the Chemistry department. And then it grew from there, but I think that's basically the history. And there were a few majors, not many, they were good students, they were dedicated, most of them had had a very weak high school preparation, and we had a lot of work to do with them to give them the tools they needed to really learn to be good chemists. But we were patient, we worked with them. I remember teaching algebra and logarithms and all kinds of tools that weren't chemistry, but they were necessary to do chemistry, so we did whatever we needed to do, work together, and had a good relationship with those early students. There were like, oh, three or four per class, that would graduate, something like that, three or four majors, and of course we were servicing a lot of the science students through the division structure. I think that's about all I remember about the history of the chemistry department when I came.

Miner: Did you want to talk a little bit about Dr. Bertholf?

Hess: Well I certainly could, he was a great guy. Good biologist, highly regarded biologist. Expert in bees, good Christian man, a leader, and a lay person in the Methodist church. Highly regarded within all of the Illinois area as a leading Methodist lay person, and Lloyd was very concerned about Wesleyan's future. He knew a lot about its history, and was dedicated. I could see from the very time I shook his hand, you know, he was really serious about his job and what the challenges were. He had been here a little while. I think Lloyd came—Dr. Bertholf came in about '58, left in about '68. I came in '63 so he had been here four or five years when I got here. So he knew the situation pretty well, and he was very interested in the chemistry department gaining some strength. The biology department under the leadership of Dr. Wayne Wantland had been dominant, no question: they had the most students, most graduates, highly qualified majors, more faculty, well-trained faculty. Dr. Bertholf, being a biologist, wanted the chemistry department to gain more in stature. And he saw that possibility and I guess convinced me that maybe I was the guy that could help him do that. So it was more of an invitation, more 'why don't you consider joining us in our challenges?' And that's how I got the same story from Dr. Bertholf and Dr. Collins. Well by the time I left here I was feeling that this was already beginning to feel like home, you know, I could belong, but I was on an interview tour and I was going to interview three or four other colleges that I'd already arranged to see, so I went right ahead and did it. But when it all came down to being a chemist at that time, the supply did not equal the demand, so I had some choices. It wasn't that I was hungry looking for a job, I was just fortunate that I got an offer from Illinois Wesleyan among others. And so I went back to Kansas and talked to my wife. She was about to have our first child. She was due in July, this was like March. I said, 'How would you like to move to Bloomington, Illinois?' and she said, 'Well

where is that?' [Laughs] but she was very willing to do whatever, and sure enough it all happened, so I got my PhD, on the tenth of July of '63, and he was born on the seventeenth, so we had that planned just about right! [Laughs] It was mostly an accident I'm sure but we had decided not to have children real early in our marriage so then our second child was born here in what was then known as old Mennonite Hospital in '66, so the two children grew up here around the campus involved and such.

Miner: Well, you said Dr. Bertholf wanted you to strengthen the program, right?

Hess: Yeah.

Miner: So how did that all come about? Was it—you said—you talked about working with students on developing their skills and other areas that are helpful to chemistry... so were those curricular changes, or extracurricular changes, was it a recruiting thing?

Hess: Well it was recruitment, retention, good instruction, good relationships with the students and other faculty members. Bridging—he was very much into bridging. You know, they're important, you're important. Together we're stronger than we are separate.

Miner: In the department.

Hess: Yeah, all—

Miner: The division...

Hess: Yeah, across the entire campus. He was very inter-disciplinary in his beliefs. He thought liberal arts—the main one—inter-disciplinary. And he really practiced what he preached, and I too felt the same conviction. So he added to the faculty, he added to our budgets, what little he could, he encouraged us to go out and get grant money, which we did. He encouraged us to do what we could in the way of research and get some publicity, get some more recognition to the university, which we did, and Joe, to this day, has a reagent known as the Collins Reagent, which we worked on together, but he did it primarily while he was right here at Illinois Wesleyan working on the paper, published in Organic Chemistry, it will show Illinois Wesleyan. So, through those sorts of activities we began to slowly say, we can be more than what we currently are, all of us, students, faculty, college, environment, and so, I think we were challenged to do it. This was the early 60s, before it got so politically disturbing as the late 60s rolled in, and the students and faculty began to really be distressed. As we all know, Kent State, all those events, Vietnam, and such, very unsettled, unhappy times, but that wasn't true in '63, '4, '5. It was more peaceful and people were trying to really recover and keep things moving along, as a country too. 'Course tragedies were occurring, John Kennedy was assassinated just a few months or so after I came. So it wasn't that we were without strife out in the larger arena of our country, but the students were not as involved politically, and such as they later became, with the bad scenes of Vietnam, and such. So they were in a learning mode. We had good students. They came—a lot still are—from central Illinois, and a lot of them had already had really strong high school backgrounds, but boy they came with a work ethic, they came with motivation, they came with God-given talents, and brains, they just needed more opportunity to grow, you know, and most of them came from tremendous families, I mean, maybe the mom and dad hadn't received a formal education or degrees, necessarily, but that didn't mean they didn't value it for their children, higher education. So, the students were a pleasure to work with, because if you set

reasonable goals, they would bust their tails to try to reach those goals, and that was rewarding, that was good. So it made you work hard. And I did, and all the faculty did. We didn't have any laggards that I knew of. And I got to know the faculty members across the campus, and was interested in visiting with them and talking to them about their disciplines and their students. A lot of times we would visit about a student just to see how they were doing, across disciplines. 'How's Pete doing in your Religion 101?' 'Well, he's doing alright.' 'Well, how about Chemistry?' 'Fine.'

Miner: So were those kinds of conversations through—

Hess: Lunch. [Laughs]

Miner: Lunch?

Hess: Lunch, or coffee klatch, or waiting for a committee meeting to start or break up or whatever, or walking across the quad, yeah, they were spontaneous. They weren't planned. We didn't have student seminars for the purpose of discussing students. [Laughs]

Miner: You talked about Dr. Bertholf's interest in getting people communicating—

Hess: Right.

Miner: So I was just wondering if that was sort of an outcome of that? Or if it just—

Hess: It probably was encouraged by—yeah, I hadn't thought of it that way but I would say he certainly set an environment that would have encouraged that kind of thing, yeah, very definitely, and he knew every faculty member. But so did Dr. Eckley. We've been so fortunate in that way, or we were, in those years, and I can't speak after July of '89, but up to that time, we had—Lloyd—Dr. Bertholf and Dr. Eckley, excuse me if I refer to them on first name basis, because they were my friends—

Miner: Oh, please.

Hess: I knew them, I knew them well, and I called them that. We weren't that formal with each other. The students addressed me as doctor all the time. That was part of protocol, but once they were graduated and gone, you know, 'Hey, I'm Wendell. You're Pete.' But the presidents were—I wouldn't say they were—alright, let me say they were campus-oriented, program-oriented presidents, both Lloyd and Bob, those were the two I worked with, just very shortly with Wayne Anderson, just a year. But they were very much campus-oriented presidents, and they knew the faculty, they knew the programs, they knew the facilities, they knew what was going on, they were visible, the student body knew who they were, and what they were doing. It was, you know, it was more of a family-type environment. In fact I remember Dr. Bertholf saying, 'we're just one big family, let's just be one big family!' and though Dr. Eckley was more formal, in his personality and his approach, he felt the same way, and Nell, bless her heart, she— if anybody can, create a sense of family and harmony and such, boy, Nell Eckley could do it. She was the social chief. [Hess and Miner laugh] And did it well. I can remember her talking to prospective students and parents when they would come for orientation, or, even before that maybe they were coming for what we call Faculty Open Houses for visitation when they were shopping for colleges. Nell would give little speeches about her sons and daughters attending

colleges and what it was like to be a college parent, and what to expect about phone calls, and money requests, and all that. And she would have those parents in stitches. They would just be rolling in the aisles with laughter. Nell was very good at that, and she made them feel comfortable and at ease, and created this bake sale for cakes, you know, ‘we’ll bake your son or daughter a cake on a special birthday or a holiday and we’ll only charge you \$5, and we’ll deliver the cake’, and all that, and boy the parents ate it up. I’ll tell you, they went for that. So, that kind of comfort level was established real early on with prospective parents and students, and it was carried out at the highest level. I mean, the president’s office has set those standards, and the rest of us—well, we appreciated that I think, and we pretty much all participated. Some personalities are more gregarious, outgoing, of course, than others, but the faculty were a lot closer then than they are now, and that they even later became, uh—I guess times were just different, but, you know, the women, and, well it wasn’t just women, it was, I guess they were the movers or shakers but that league that they got going there, they brought couples together, staff and faculty and administrators and such, you know, for social events, parties, and get-togethers, fundraisers. We had a lot of social interaction among the faculty and the staff, and we didn’t feel so segregated. I don’t know what to attribute that to, but it had to do with the environment, and the faculty came and often to stay for long periods of time, and they needed outlets, and social outlets, and camaraderie. So I appreciated all those sorts of events and I’m talking about them because they contributed to all and made us feel more comfortable.

Miner: And that was the IWU League?

Hess: Yeah, I guess that is what they called it! I’d forgotten the official name, but oh they raised a lot of money through their bake sale and through other things, and they put a lot of benches out on the quad and I think they did some landscaping. They did a lot of good things; I know that, I don’t remember the details. I was really engaged in my own activities; all the years I was here I guess I almost was a workaholic. I’d grown up with a work ethic that my parents had instilled in me that you know, you don’t have an infinite amount of time so don’t be sitting around wasting it. Stay busy. And that was a bit of a down side, probably still is, because I still feel like I need to be productive. [Laughs] Not that I do, but I feel that way.

Miner: It’s the impulse that counts.

Hess: Yeah.

Miner: Well, aside from your teaching, then, and your involvement with your students—

Hess: Mhm.

Miner: What were the other things that you have been involved in? Or is that what took up so much of your time?

Hess: Well I was in—the only other outside activity that I was involved in early on was Wesley United Methodist Church. Now, at Illinois Wesleyan, I was politically involved in a lot of ways. And early on, I don’t know quite why, I guess I was interested in that and spent some time doing it, but I remember when Dr. Bertholf announced his retirement. [Pause] The Board of Trustees selected three or four faculty members to serve with some trustees to select a new president and I was one of the faculty that was selected, either elected by the faculty or selected by the Board, I don’t remember exactly how it happened, I think there were four of us on there and I remember

meeting Bob and Nell Eckley, and the very first time that they came to visit Wesleyan. Well that was a very important event—

Miner: Wasn't that just 5 years after you arrived?

Hess: Yeah! I was a young terk. So I got involved and in the 60's... I remember being blown away, what was it like, May of 1967, I was named Teacher of the Year, and I couldn't believe it. I looked at those, there were five or six ahead of me I guess that had already been named, Dr. Bertholf had put that in when he had come, and here I was I was like 32 or '3 years old, I'd been here a few years, four years maybe, and Dr. Beadles and Dr. Wantland and Dr. Andrew and you know, old timers, they were the century club honorees or whatever the title was at that time, it's evolved through the years, but it is still, well at that time and I think still is, regarded as probably the highest single faculty achievement you can achieve from your peers. Well I was just stunned. And I remember since I was sitting over there, we were in the Memorial Center up there in that Young Lounge and I remember Dr. Bertholf announced that I was—that I had been selected as Teacher of the Year, and that the following May I would be giving a speech. Well Dr. Eckley and Nell were sitting there in the audience and I thought, 'Ah, oh man, what kind of a baptism by fire am I getting?' and uh, oh that was a nerve-racking experience. But sure enough came May of '68, there I was giving a Century Club address, which was a challenge, a real challenge, and there I was, a young whippersnapper, what wisdom does this man have to share with us, well, you know, not much. [Hess and Miner laugh]

Nevertheless, it was one of those challenges, but it brought great reward. So I was very involved early on, and stayed really involved with this community, through my retirement actually. So, I guess that's partly why, and of course I was proud of the faculty and by and large I respected the faculty. Not all of them, like all the students, had had opportunities to maximize their potential, but they were good people, they were full of the right motives to work with the students and help the students achieve what they wanted. So yeah I respected Illinois Wesleyan from the get go. And never did lose my respect for the institution. I think it's still a tremendous institution. So I then later of course contributed, through my academic leadership and through many years, sometimes joy and sometimes tribulations with the big A on my back, you know, it's hard to go from being a member of the Faculty to being a member of the Administration and maintain equity in both camps, you know?

And it was a delicate balance, but I never forgot that I—where I had grown up, that I grew up as faculty. But Dr. Eckley would from time to time need to remind me that I was also—[laughs]—helping him achieve his two major goals. I remember he told us early on, 'We've got to do two major things at Illinois Wesleyan, one is we must increase the endowment and have some money coming off of the endowment to raise this institution up, and we've got to improve the academic quality of this institution, we must keep doing what Dr. Bertholf has been doing. We need to get more and better qualified faculty.' So that was the biggest single challenge that I [faced], as his chief academic officer, because it was an interesting situation. Here I'm told, 'get the best faculty you can, reward those faculty, get the best scholarship and teaching you can, but also, be as frugal as you can, because we've got to keep this money coming in order to get the cash flow to pay this faculty that you're trying to get,' and so forth. Boy now there's a fine line you have to walk. Those were my administrative goals, and my academic goals, of course, were also to keep it organized, keep it civil, [laughs] keep the faculty as happy as you can.

Miner: That's a challenge alone.

Hess: Provide the leadership that you can. Yeah, faculty are an interesting, challenging group of people, but they're a joy. They're alright.

Miner: So that was—you moved into the administrative levels as the Dean of the University then, as your first administrative position, and that was with Dr. Eckley?

Hess: Yeah, although I had been named Director of the Science Programs, which required one course release from my teaching, so I say my first administrative position that had much demand on me was Director of the Science Programs because I had five departments, and—

Miner: Would it be appropriate to call that the Division Chair?

Hess: Yeah.

Miner: Okay.

Hess: That's exactly what it later, or previously was, yeah. 'Course, the divisions, as such, have come and gone through different academic leadership. It's a little bit hard to trace some of the history there but yes, it was the grouping of the natural science faculty.

Miner: Oh I don't know if that's shoehorning into it, I have just heard conversations today about the way the university is shaped, administratively and there were references made to divisions, so I wanted to see if that was in this time frame—

Hess: Oh yeah. In fact I was a big proponent of the divisional organization. However, when I was the Chief Academic Officer, I said to the faculty, I want to meet with every department chair, frequently, and I want to meet with their leaders, the division chairs, frequently. But I need to know what's going on and you need to know that you can talk to me about things that are appropriate. And so, if you'll set up the appointments, we will sit down and will visit for a half hour or so, whatever it takes, on a periodic basis. Well that really sounded great, and I think it was, but it really over-scheduled me very much. It took my entire time, but I learned a lot, I knew what was going on, I knew what were in people's heads, hearts, minds, desires, budget requests, where they felt their strengths and weaknesses were. And that gave a good sense of faculty camaraderie. And later, my successors, decided that was too darn much work, and they were probably right, and so they destroyed some of the organizational things, changed things around. And for their style of leadership it may be just right. I'm not criticizing it, I'm just saying, you need to kind of have things so your own efforts can be effective.

But yeah, I was very much, and I still see, a need for groupings, so that the leadership can carry out all the prerogatives that they really need to be paying attention to. And there are a lot of them. And particularly when Wesleyan kept moving up, up, up in the 'esteem ladders', I called it, you know, when we would say we aspire to be a Carleton or an Oberlin, or an Earlham or whatever, Grinnell, oh I could go on and on, I had the list down, I mean I had it memorized, I said I knew a lot about every one of those colleges [laughs] and I said you know, we can strive that way, we can set some goals, we won't get there tomorrow, the next day, or next week, but if we don't have those aspirations, we're not going to get there. So Dr. Eckley and I both were very—and Dr. Bertholf, to some degree, but I knew less about his aspirations that way than I did Dr. Eckley, but boy, he and I, we were together on that. In fact, some of the faculty, you know, they'd say, well they're too close together, but we had to support each other, or we couldn't achieve the goals that we had agreed to try to achieve, and though there was a little

disgruntlement from time to time, here and there, overall, I wouldn't change very much of it. You can't please all people all the time, and I learned that fairly early, but I tried to keep the displeasure minimized. But you can't be a yes boy all the time to your boss or the people you're trying to lead, so, always a challenge.

Miner: Well I'm guessing that the endowment was not your responsibility. So what did you do, then, to attract faculty? You said you wanted to—you had the goal [of] strengthening the faculty— and the president was also, you know, interested in strengthening the endowment and that you had to juggle those things so, how were some of the ways that you addressed some of those challenges?

Hess: Oh, multiple ways, I guess, Meg. One thing was to try to always equal or exceed the credentials of the person leaving with the person coming. Upgrade, every time you get a chance. In other words, you're looking at curriculum vita, you're looking at experience, you're looking at degrees, you're looking at the marketplace, you've got all of those things to consider when you're trying to select and recruit the best faculty you can to, at that time, not a very well known, Midwest, small liberal arts college.

Miner: So it was a very hands-on recruitment—

Hess: Oh absolutely.

Miner: Now we do national notices, search committees—

Hess: Still do.

Miner: Or bring in vitae. But you're saying— it sounds like you're saying that it was more of an outreach of the Dean's.

Hess: Well, it was both parties. Many of the department chairs had not done much of this, in fact in some cases, none. And so you worked together. Others of them had experience doing that, so you would set up a process that wouldn't always be the same, depending on your discipline and all that kind of stuff. But the Dean always had a very heavy hand in who the faculty was going to be. Now Dr. Bertholf and Dr. Eckley, as I suggested earlier, were very much campus-bound presidents and they both wanted to interview, or see, or be introduced to, every faculty candidate that looked promising. They didn't want to go through all the papers and such, but when the Dean and the department, or division, whoever was making a recommendation, then usually, in fact it may have been almost without exception, they would be introduced to, and meet the President in his office. It might just be 15 minutes. But both Presidents, that I worked under, were very insistent on that, and they knew the faculty, and that's how they knew the faculty, and that impressed the faculty.

It worked the same for me when Dr. Collins took me over to introduce me to Dr. Bertholf, you know, 'Hey, you get to meet the President,' and you're just a green, young aspirant to a faculty position, very different. So, yes, I played a very heavy role in faculty recruitment. I did some visitation for gifts. I had enough alums by that time and different physicians, and doctors, and others from around, and I wasn't bashful, I'd say you need to help your old Alma Mater, and a lot of them have and did, and they still do! I remember making some trips with the Development officers. I was very active with Jim Ruoti in recruiting students too, as the Dean, and even as a faculty member, when he would go out to the high schools and go to the counselor

meetings, and he was a tremendous salesperson. He represented Wesleyan so well that he would often invite a faculty member and/or a staff member to go with him, and we would make a presentation that we'd call a dog and pony show and we would tell them about Illinois Wesleyan. Now why should you recommend to your students that that'd be a good school for them? And so we would pass out literature, talk to them, and socialize with them some, but it was hands-on.

Frugality in the budget, and equipment was a part of my contribution towards growing the endowment. What you don't spend, you save. Bob Eckley was a master at that. He realized early on that we had to get related to the business and professional world more than we had been. Dr. Bertholf had been a real strong instrument with the church, and the church was very important, and Dr. Eckley did not denigrate it at all. He wanted to increase it by saying we got to get the business community and we got to get the professional community involved in here, and he did, by Board of Trustees selection, primarily, and by requests for funding, and State Farm became, under his friendship, a tremendous player with Illinois Wesleyan, and still is. So, all of those places were important to me, and I spent time working with all those different things, and it was a real privilege. For instance, as Chairman of the Academic Affairs Committee of the Board of Trustees, I got a chance to work with Ed Rust, Sr., and that was a once in a lifetime opportunity, to have him being your most immediate boss. So, I liked that eclectic part of the job.

Miner: I was going to say, that's quite a range.

Hess: It was, yes. There was no set job description, one, two, three, four, five...Dr. Eckley and I understood each other from the get-go. I mean from the very earliest days, we had a lot of the same values, the same goals for the University, and so, there was never any difficulty that way. My second big surprise was that I was able to be selected as the Dean of the University by a national search, and I was the in-house candidate, and that was the first time that had ever happened, and I don't think it's happened since. Usually, it's very hard to be a part of a group and then become the leader of that group by election from that group. [Laughs] That was a real honor, and I was really pleased that I became the Dean in that way, instead of by hands being placed on...or something like that, you know.

Miner: So when did that official—when was the official entry into the Dean...?

Hess: When was the official one? Well, I guess around '75, '76. John Clark had been the dean, and he had had difficulty—health problems, heart problems and such, and he had asked me to be the Associate Dean in '73 or '4, and then I was—I worked with him and I had delegated responsibilities as Associate Dean, and then John had a more severe heart attack and later passed away, and I was named interim Dean, and then the search committee was created and went after a national search for the Chief Academic Officer, and I was asked to put my hat in the ring, and I did, and I was selected. It must have been about 1976 but I'd been in the Dean's Office and involved in parts of it from about '74 maybe. We'd have to look up those dates; I just don't remember that, Meg.

Miner: I was just curious because then you had—that means you had done about a decade before, and a decade after. So you've—

Hess: That's interesting!

Miner: Split about—almost about even, in those roles.

Hess: Yes, I guess that's about right.

Miner: Now what do you think some of the biggest changes are that you've seen to the University in whatever capacity you'd like to address that question on since your time here in '63?

Hess: You mean since I've left the University?

Miner: Well over that time, yeah.

Hess: Oh, from '63 until 2011? [Laughs] That's a good span.

Miner: It's something.

Hess: You know, I've been retired now 21 or 22 years.

Miner: That's kind of amazing.

Hess: It is kind of amazing, you're retiring in '89. What're the biggest changes? Well, Dr. Eckley achieved to a large degree his two goals: the endowment probably went up six to ten times. Well, I remember talking to him about it. We had like \$5 or 6 million dollars in the endowment when he came on board and when he left it was probably \$80 or 90 million. So that's a lot of doubling.

Faculty was better. More numerous student body—gone from 1100 to 1200 up to 1600-1650, I believe we were about that time. Physical facilities had greatly—have greatly improved—under all four of the Presidents that I am familiar with: Bertholf, Eckley, Myers, and Wilson. Every one of them has contributed in different ways, but all have made positive contributions to the growth, development, maturity, recognition, esteem of Illinois Wesleyan. In different ways, but in some ways very similar.

The similarities would be in physical facilities. They were all builders. Bob Eckley less in brick and mortar than the others have turned out to be, but he was building the endowment. He was putting the foundation together that Minor Myers could come into and have money to do things with: increasing the faculty, increasing financial aid, increasing the student body, increasing scholarships—all of those things that cost money and are not so obvious. Unless you're in the administrative offices and understand what's happening there, that's—those funds are not so obvious unless you dig. They're available, but they're not bannered. So they all contributed in those ways.

The reputation is obviously just much better. I mean we're probably, if not at, we are very near the top, within the top 50 institutions of our type in the country. We're certainly not the top 10, or 15, or 20. Those that I named earlier are still right up there, and we ran—we run fast but we don't catch them because they're running fast too! [Laughs] And that's okay. We have moved way up.

Miner: It's probably good for everyone to have healthy competition.

Hess: Sure, sure, student body's better trained than they were when I came. They come better prepared; they come from better high schools, bigger high schools. Obviously the revolution that the Carnegie Foundation predicted—information technology revolution—has come. 1984 came and went, and Big Brother is a lot more obvious than he was when I came. But you know, I was

28 when I came and I'm 76 now so, that's a big span of time. But those are my general impressions, just off the top.

Miner: Well, you talked about four presidents, during your time here, but you notably skipped over your year as president—

Hess: Yeah.

Miner: Did you want to—

Hess: That was a—

Miner: Talk about—

Hess: Well, yes and no. [Laughs]

Miner: Just wanted to point it out there, we don't have to go there.

Hess: No, it's not. It's not a place not to go.

Miner: Okay.

Hess: It was the most stressful and most challenging time that I was at Illinois Wesleyan. No question. I'll tell you the story. After Bob [Eckley] resigned, the Board of Trustees went out and looked for a president, national search, and Wayne Anderson was their president. He came in the fall of '86. When it came time to renew his contract for the second year appointment, I got this call from the president of the Board of Trustees, and he said I'd like to meet with you, could you meet with me privately and so forth and so on. I said well sure, I mean you don't tell the president of the Board no. So we talked, and he laid out the details to me, and then he made a request, he said I want you to become the acting president, and we're going to do a search, and we've got to keep this done the right way, and he said you need to stay as the Provost, but I want you to add on this acting president, and I said, well there's just one of me—and he said I know, but you can do it, and I know you will do it. And, you know, how could you say no?

So I didn't say no, but it was difficult, because Wayne Anderson was very disappointed, very saddened by the Trustees' action, and he needed to save face and he needed to keep dignity and the university needed to do all the same thing. So he remained with the title of the president until August of '88. But I was the president, in everything but name, in fact, that's where it was really difficult to walk. We may need to edit some of these remarks but I'm going to lay them out to you and then we can edit it. So, here I was, managing the Cabinet. All the people in the university knew that I was in charge, had the responsibility. [Laughs] I wasn't so much in charge, I just had all the responsibilities, and they all really rallied. They really were great. The Cabinet just supported me a hundred percent and so did the Trustees, because everybody knew—realized it was delicate. And nobody needed egg on their face.

And so, those months were difficult. But I was able to manage to get through it, I was working day and night, sixteen hours a day it took to do that. And then in '88, the fall of '88 through '89, I was able to convince the Trustees that we needed to get them into this computer business a whole lot heavier than we had been, and that we needed to get that old Buck Library renovated and make it a beautiful facility on the inside and it could be the computer area, in the

center and we could preserve that beautiful building, and it was doable. And by golly they bought it, and they did it.

And so that was my crowning achievement in my years as acting president was to really up the stakes for the computing, and the technology on the campus, because we were drifting, way behind, I mean, I was visiting other campuses and talking to other leaders and we were about to get skunked. If we were going to stay up there and stay in that race we had to do it, and they did. I was so pleased that they did and Roger Schnaitter and others were very helpful in helping me achieve some of those goals that we set out. So I would say, you know, I couldn't do that by myself, but we did it with just good team effort, and we had the building laid out for the science building, before that happened. We already knew the footprint pretty much of what the science building would be.

The year was stressful in another way. The search committee of the Board of Trustees asked me to be a candidate for the presidency, and I was very reticent, and I thought about that quite a long time, and one of them kind of said to me, you know, what if this thing doesn't work. What if we don't find the right president? See they were burning from the fact of Dr. Anderson's, and so he persuaded me to say okay. So I became their in-house candidate, and later, basically, it became clear, I became their ace in the hole! If the presidential search failed, Wendell would be the president.

Well that kind of stung, that kind of hurt, you know. But looking back, time now has gone on; they probably did the right thing. [Chuckles] It was just a little tough going at the time. So I retired, on August 1st of '89 and they were nice enough to say okay you really stepped up to the plate so take a year to think through what you want to do. And I did. So in the year I decided to leave Wesleyan and resigned my faculty position.

But it was a great career and my retirement has been equally good and I've got no complaints about any of that. But, you know, I was fortunate to be in the right place at the right time, to meet my own personal goals and needs and, to help the university meet some of their goals and needs, so you can't ask for a better fit than that. That's just as good a career as you could hope for. So that's the way I feel about it.

Miner: And you had colleagues who were in industry, and it never crossed your mind to be in industry?

Hess: Well I've been there.

Miner: Okay.

Hess: I've been there. When I first graduated from McMurry College [Texas], I became an adhesive chemist helping out in the war effort of putting solid fuel rockets on planes to get them off the short runways in Korea. The Korean conflict was going on at that time in very great turmoil and I was 1A draft and they said since you're a chemist and you need to contribute to the war effort if you'll do this we'll put you on a special deferment. So I served my military role as a member of the National Guard but also as a Special Services guy. So I went to work as an adhesive chemist for Phillips Petroleum Company in Waco, Texas. And then, North American Aviation came in and merged the operations and I got a chance to do two things, I could either leave the company or I could look around for other positions. And I said, 'Let me look around and see what you've got.' Well, they had a nuclear reactor engineering position available in Idaho Falls, Idaho on the Arco Desert that they were running for the government. High secrecy, Q clearance required. And so I said, 'you know, I've never been out of Texas, why not?' So Loretta and I gathered our baggage and we went to Idaho Falls, Idaho, and I worked as a nuclear

reactor engineer at the Engineering Test Reactor where wartime materials were being tested with tremendous gamma radiation. And so I had a bunch of union folks working with me as the operators and I was in management and I was a shift worker, and I pulled the rods on the reactor. And so I did that for a year and a half or so and was taking a graduate course in chemistry at the University of Idaho, by correspondence at the same time. And I decided you know this is not the life I really want to live. And I'd always known I really was probably going to need to be a professor or a doctor or a minister. And so by that time I was twenty—I don't know, four or five. I decided a professor's probably where I belong. And that's the reason I went to graduate school, just to get the necessary credentials to do it. So when I went to the University of Kansas, I again was fortunate, I was able to select an adviser whom I'd met as an undergraduate student [clears throat] several years earlier. I asked if I could come and talk with him about working under his guidance for my PhD and he said yes. I went down, we talked and I ended up being one of his graduate students. And I told him I said I want to teach a liberal arts college and therefore I need to take lots of different parts of chemistry, because I'm not going to be an organic chemist or whatever. And he helped me and all of my five years at the University of Kansas I was preparing to be in a place like Illinois Wesleyan. So when I hit the deck I could teach three of the four disciplines of chemistry at that time.

Miner: A very intentional approach?

Hess: Very intentional, yeah. But that's what came with a little more maturity, meaning being out in the industry. And I could say to students, 'hey, you're going to have to prepare for this, this, this, and this.' Been there, done that, and I wouldn't trade it. In fact, I encouraged a number of them, I said, 'if you're going to go in the professoriate, medicine, or whatever, try, see what the real world kind of looks like.' I had that experience, and it was good.

Miner: That's great. Well, do you want to talk a little bit about what you've done since your retirement? Are you very active in the community or...are there other interests that you have? Anything else you want to...?

Hess: Well my retirement was a continuation of Illinois Wesleyan to some degree. One of the alums, R. E. Davis, Bob Davis, had graduated just before I came and he'd gone into the industry himself in Oakbrook, Illinois and I'd known him through Science Advisory Committee and other ways and he said to me soon after I retired, he said, 'can you come up and work with me?' And I did, for a year as a contractor. And he and I enjoyed each other's company, we took on some crazy challenges and such but it was an enjoyable year and I was really a chemist again. I was really doing lab work and at the bench and doing glass chemistry, primarily.

And then after that, I'd been on the Baby Fold Board of Trustees since the '70s. Now I've been Chairman of their Board for a while, and Mr. Thomas became terminally ill. He was the CEO, and they asked me, 'you know the Baby Fold; you love the Baby Fold, how about you be the CEO of the Baby Fold until we can get a new CEO—a new director?' Well, there again, how could you say no to an institution that loves you, invited you, wanted you to help? So I did that. And then we got a new CEO, and that was my job: you recruit, and you recommend to us the next boss of the Baby Fold, and I did, and that worked out fine, very well, as a matter of fact.

Then I decided I had some educational and chemical experiences and so I volunteered for the—what'd they call that?—International Executive Service Corp, IESC. And I filled out an application and then they asked me to go to Egypt and help a guy work on some gelatin. He was importing camel bones and exporting wheat from the Nile River Valley and he wanted to get in the gelatin production and be on World Food Standards and he needed somebody to help him do

that, so I went over there and worked in Alexandria, Egypt. Loretta went with me. That was a great experience, learning and teaching experience, for them. Then I went to Mexico and worked at Monterrey for a while on a toothpaste problem that they had had, couldn't get their product quite up to World Food Standards. Then I got involved in some farming and ranching that my grandparents had homesteaded and so I went down to west Texas and got back into where I'd started on a farm, developed an irrigated farm/ranch area there for a while, which I sold in 2008, not that long ago, actually, and stayed active at the church and at the Baby Fold and oh, Habitat for Humanity. Things that—I've always tried to say, 'help those less fortunate than you, than you yourself.' So that's been the way I've tried to volunteer, is to Third World countries, to Baby Fold, Habitat, people who need a little hand. It doesn't diminish your life to help them a little bit.

And then the most recent thing of course was getting into house remodeling, helping six houses over here near the hospital, stay as a part of the neighborhood. So I spent last year basically partly intellectual and a whole lot with hammer and nails doing a house, which I now own and have rented, and now I'm a landlord living across the street! [Laughs] You never know what's next. But that may be my last big hoo-rah, I don't know. But of course, I try to visit sick and older people from time to time. You know, I'm sad about Dr. Eckley's illness, about Jerry Stone's illness, Forrest Frank's illness, all of whom were close to me at Illinois Wesleyan. So yeah, they're all not doing very well. So there's a lot to do. More to do than there's time to do it in.

Miner: That's kind of a good problem to have when you're a go-getter who's—

Hess: Oh it is.

Miner: —gone, doing a lot.

Hess: I'm blessed. I'm blessed. I just count my blessings every day. It doesn't take even a minute to realize how fortunate I've been, through no effort of my own, except you know, try to stay in physically good shape and stay active. When I retired, I'd made three goals. I said I'm going to divide my time three ways. I'm going to do something intellectually to keep my brain going, I'm going to do something for somebody else to help keep them going, and I'm going to do something physically to keep myself going. And I have pretty well kept to those divisions of time and effort, so by the week, I will look back and say, 'okay did you do those three things?' So I just kind of use those as guides. Don't forget this, this, and that, so that was a good thing. I don't where I decided to do it that way, but it worked out fine, and I still do.

Miner: Well are there any other things that you would like to tell us about? Something you'd like to add?

Hess: You've picked very good, you've quizzed me hard.

[Miner laughs]

Hess: And well, and that's good!

Miner: Well okay.

Hess: I appreciate this chance to tell you my impressions, my memories, because that's all they are. I hope I haven't given any false impressions or false statements. I don't do it intentionally

but sometimes with that many years' span, you can get a little forgetful. But you've been great; I've enjoyed very much talking to you.

Miner: And I have as well, I can't thank you enough, and it's a goal of these interviews that I personally have, to help us expand what we know of our history more than just by documents. And of course we never solely rely on our documents to understand our history and we also never rely solely on people's recollections but I think the two together can really help us fill out an understanding of where we've been and what our goals have been and guide us into the future. I really thank you for your time—

Hess: Well thank you.

Miner: It's been really nice.

Hess: Well thank you! I've enjoyed our time and recollections are good.

Miner: Thanks so much.