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Anne Weston McGowan

Anne McGowan '76
Illinois Wesleyan University

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Oral History Interview with Anne McGowan
May 3, 2013

Abby Szunyogh: My name is Abby Szunyogh and I am a student at Illinois Wesleyan, helping with the oral history program, and today is May 5th, 2013—oooh it is May 3rd, 2013! [Laughs] Yeah, and I am here with Anne. Would you mind stating your name for me and the year you graduated and what your major was?

Anne McGowan: My name is Anne Weston McGowan, and my major changed. I came in as a Drama major and wound up as an English major and then came back for teaching courses. The English degree was granted in '76 and the teaching accreditation came in '87 or '88, I don't remember which. So I did a lot of things in between there. I had started my undergraduate work at Middlebury College in 1955, and that's where I met my husband James McGowan, and we had babies before I graduated. So I finished up my degree here with a dance career in between and raising three children.

Szunyogh: Oh, wow.

McGowan: Yeah. [Chuckles] So after the drama initiation which I loved dearly, I wanted to learn more stage craft to go with my dance. I had wanted to start a dance troupe here, but I found the audience for dance here had not been as developed as it had been in New Jersey where we lived before. And so I taught dance instead, Modern Dance, downtown at a studio that I rented with another dance teacher, and also at Miller Park Pavilion which was great fun because the lions were roaring in the background when the windows would be open and the geese were flying by, and it was just a delightful place to dance and to teach. Then, after that I went into teaching daycare.

Szunyogh: Okay. Where did you teach daycare?

McGowan: It was in First Christian Church. There was a daycare called Children's Corner.

Szunyogh: Okay.

McGowan: And I was working down there with two-year-olds. And they were delightful. And I had had my own children by that time so I knew how to deal with kids pretty well, and they were just so sweet to be with. And there were ten of them under my care, and we did all kinds of fun things, field trips and stuff like that.

Szunyogh: Perfect!

McGowan: Yeah. So I realized that with drama, a career wasn't good for family life at all, because you're working at night, and weekends, and all that kind of thing, and my children were in school at this point, and Jim and I were presidents of the PTA, and it just wasn't going to work out for drama or dance for me. So I switched to an English major and had a wonderful education. There was a course that you guys didn't get a crack at which was absolutely wonderful. It was the Humanities course. And every Junior took it. There was huge lectures in McPherson Theater, taught by people from every discipline in the arts.

Szunyogh: Oh.

McGowan: Music, art, philosophy, religion, all of these teachers gave lectures. And then at different times through the week you were in a small breakout group for several classes and you discussed these things and had quite a bit of reading to do. And the discussions were fascinating and tests were hard.

Szunyogh: Oh!

McGowan: [Chuckles] It was a course that every single Wesleyan student had to take, and I have had more feedback about that from alums than from almost anything that was—it was a unifying experience for the Wesleyan campus. I've been in the dentist's chair then and had the dentist say, 'that was the best course I ever had to take! It just taught me so much about culture and the world I live in outside of my profession.' So yeah, it was a great course.

Szunyogh: So, sorry but when did you transfer to Illinois Wesleyan again?

McGowan: It was 1969 when—

Szunyogh: 1969?

McGowan: Mhm. And boy, were we scared. We'd never been out of the East Coast area, we're ocean people. And we got out here and we had heard about tornados and read about them in the paper, and at that time this community wasn't really set up to accept people from away. So there weren't helpful brochures from the sheriff's department telling you what to do in case of a tornado coming or what the conditions were likely to be. And so we didn't realize you had to have some kind of stormy weather going on. We had—from reading I mean we saw Wizard of Oz and that tornado came out of nowhere.

[McGowan and Szunyogh chuckle]

McGowan: So we spent a lot of time in the basement first year until we found out what the rules were. It amazed us on talking with people to find that people who have lived here all their lives have never seen one. And then we started to relax.

Szunyogh: That's good.

McGowan: Yeah. [Chuckles] Another thing that frightened us was the freight cars banging together. Because they make these big booming sounds in the night and we had been living in New Jersey before that. And at the time we came out here it was the time of the civil rights movement. And there were race riots in both Newark and Trenton. So we were sort of in between them. Not—we had nothing to do with them in the small town we were in, but we knew that such things could happen and we didn't know about the kind people in the Midwest. [Chuckles] So it was a little frightening the first year until we got oriented. We thought we'd only be here for a year but we're still here now and like it very much.

Szunyogh: That's good! What brought you to Wesleyan?

McGowan: A job!

Szunyogh: Okay.

McGowan: [Chuckles] My husband had been looking for college jobs on the East Coast for about a year and they were just closing all over the place. There just weren't any offers. So I came home from dance

rehearsal one day and found a note on the kitchen table. 'I have been flown to Bloomington, Illinois.' Never heard of Bloomington, Illinois in my life. And I went to get our kids from the neighbor who was babysitting them and I said, my husband's gone! And I said he's flown away for a job interview! And she said where? And I said Bloomington, Illinois and she said, my husband just came back from there—

Szunyogh: Oh!

McGowan: He's a truck driver, and he had been delivering shelves for the library, old library, Sheean.

Szunyogh: Oh!

McGowan: Uh huh! And—

[Szunyogh chuckles]

McGowan: —so we figured this had to happen, and it did. It did.

Szunyogh: That's great.

McGowan: Yeah.

Szunyogh: So...so you were a drama major at Middlebury?

McGowan: No, no. I was an English major.

Szunyogh: You were an English major, okay.

McGowan: With tendencies toward biology. I really didn't know what I was doing.

[McGowan and Szunyogh laugh]

Szunyogh: That's just fine, I didn't know when I first came here either.

McGowan: You shouldn't know yet!

Szunyogh: Yeah. Still working it out and I'm a junior. So you started—but you started as a drama major, right? And then you switched to English?

McGowan: Well, I started here as a drama major. Oh!

McGowan: Because I had the dance career—

Szunyogh: Okay.

McGowan: —in the meantime.

Szunyogh: Okay. So you were English at Middlebury and then—

McGowan: Yeah. Before then.

Szunyogh: —yeah. Okay, okay.

McGowan: And then I had all these other things happen. And I wanted to learn stagecraft. I learned quite a bit!

Szunyogh: That's great.

McGowan: Took singing lessons and dancing lessons.

Szunyogh: Yeah.

McGowan: Drama, acting, loved it.

Szunyogh: That's good.

McGowan: Stagecraft, I loved the scene shop.

Szunyogh: Have you been to very many productions?

McGowan: Oh sure.

Szunyogh: Yeah?

McGowan: Not as many recently as we used to. We used to go all the time.

Szunyogh: Yeah. Are there any that stood out to you?

McGowan: Oh my goodness, *Lysistrata* was fantastic. *Midsummer Night's Dream* under—oh, can't remember. The scene director was absolutely fabulous. Can't—it'll come to me later. [Note from Anne McGowan January 17, 2014: Tony Pisoni] He was a really great artist, did fabulous things, went on to Hollywood—

Szunyogh: Oh wow.

McGowan: —from here, and did several big movies. His name will come later. [Note from Anne McGowan January 17, 2014: Ed Pisoni]

Szunyogh: Okay. So what were some of your favorite things about Illinois Wesleyan while you were there?

McGowan: I think the openness of the community around it.

Szunyogh: Okay.

McGowan: We weren't just on campus of course. We lived on campus. The first apartment we had we rented from the university, and it was at the foot of Park Street where it hits Beecher. [See enclosed photo]

Szunyogh: Okay.

McGowan: And there's nothing there now except a parking lot, but there used to be a really strange building there that had been a little two-room house and it had been added on to make a store on one

side and an apartment over it. We were in the apartment over it. The security police office was in the old office underneath my children's bedroom.

Szunyogh: Oh!

McGowan: And the rest of the apartment was over the campus coffee house, which, in the late sixties was a very, very popular place. So we had loud music and all that kind of fun stuff underneath us. And it- it was fine. The weirdest part was that the way the staircase was configured, there was no front door.

Szunyogh: Really.

McGowan: So we'd have people wandering into our apartment in the middle of the night looking for either the security police or the coffee house if they were stoned.

Szunyogh: Oh my goodness!

McGowan: [Chuckles] it was strange, it was strange. I learned then privacy really isn't that important.

[McGowan and Szunyogh laugh]

Szunyogh: Well that's good.

McGowan: Yeah.

Szunyogh: Yeah, as long as you're okay with it. [Chuckles]

McGowan: Well, we learned to be okay with it. [Chuckles] It was a little strange idea at first, though. But the community was a wonderful place. I mean in the first year we were here, we were elected PTA presidents. 1970 and '71 were years where it was an exciting time. And it is an exciting time again! New things are happening. In 1970, a group of us parents who thought that the public schools were too restrictive, opened a school called the New School at that time, and it's morphed into the Mulberry School, which is still going.

Szunyogh: Okay.

McGowan: And it was a private school but it was based on the open classroom principle, almost like a one-room schoolhouse where the older kids are helping teach the younger kids. And two of our children went there and it really made a big difference in their lives because the public schools here were kind of lockstep and old-fashioned and rigid and our kids weren't used to that. New Jersey schools were very different.

Szunyogh: Okay. So is the Mulberry School still the same now?

McGowan: N—well it has expanded. It's moved up to Normal One.

Szunyogh: Okay.

McGowan: And it's-it's not a big school yet. Private, co-operative, and they have fancy fundraisers. We used to have bake sales, that kind of thing. Parents helped teach.

Szunyogh: Oh! That's interesting.

McGowan: Yeah. It is. And then in 1971, an ISU campus group joined by our Wesleyan environmental groups started something called Operation Recycle. And that had recycle drives in both Bloomington and Normal—

Szunyogh: Sorry.

McGowan: —all voluntary—what's going on here?

Szunyogh: My phone's buzzing.

McGowan: Oh. [Laughs] That happens though. And after a while the city took over Recycling but it took eighteen years for the city to take it over.

Szunyogh: Wow.

McGowan: —I was a volunteer in the first recycle drive and on the Board many years, then I wound up being their environmental educator. That was the time when the organization decided to open its own education center, the Ecology Action Center—

Szunyogh: Oh!

McGowan: —and I was Director of that for quite a few years, and co-director for a while, then I phased out as Membership Director and retired. But that was great.

Szunyogh: So when did you become involved in the environmental education center?

McGowan: It opened in 1994.

Szunyogh: 1994?

McGowan: Mhm. We had programs that went out to schools and organizations before that, but that was when the Center opened in Normal. It's next to the Normal Public Library. Have you been there?

Szunyogh: I have not, but I've heard of the Ecology Action Center.

McGowan: Go-go and visit! It's a wonderful place to visit.

Szunyogh: Alright, I will.

McGowan: Very colorful.

Szunyogh: Great! So how did you get involved in that?

McGowan: As a volunteer.

Szunyogh: Okay.

McGowan: I strongly believed in recycling, grew up recycling when I was just a child in World War II. We used to take bottles and cans to a certain place, and newspapers. Kids with little red wagons would pull

stuff and put it in there for the war effort. When we chewed gum we'd take the paper and peel the foil off the paper and recycle the paper with the paper and the foil with the tin cans.

Szunyogh: Oh wow!

McGowan: And all this was supposedly going toward ammunition and things to help our uncles who were fighting the war. It was a very involved time during World War II. Everybody was doing something.

Szunyogh: Yeah.

McGowan: Had to. We were feeding Europe! Because their food and supplies had been ruined completely so we were shipping just about everything we could to Europe so everybody here had to grow their own food. And meat was rationed and it was a very different time. Gas was rationed. If you bought a tire you had to bring your old tire in because they need the rubber. And you could only get one pair of shoes a year.

Szunyogh: Oh wow.

McGowan: And I mean, no cuffs on pants, that was wasted material.

Szunyogh: Oh wow. That's really interesting. I didn't know all that stuff. I just took a class that kind of covered World War II. So—

McGowan: But not from that perspective.

Szunyogh: No!

[McGowan laughs]

Szunyogh: So how did—I know you said that coming to Bloomington from New Jersey, right?

McGowan: Mhm!

Szunyogh: You said that the community was very welcoming. And that you weren't used to the freight trains, and there had been race riots in New Jersey that you didn't have here. What are some other ways that you found life here in Bloomington at Illinois Wesleyan different from being in New Jersey and at Middlebury?

McGowan: People have different senses of humor here.

Szunyogh: Huh.

McGowan: And it took us quite a while to realize that the sarcasm that we had grown up using in New Jersey was not-not understood, not liked, kind of hurtful to people, and so that was-that was a learning curve for us. We had to dull our wits a little bit because we would realize we were hurting people's feelings.

Szunyogh: Oh.

McGowan: And we didn't want to do that. We wanted to be productive, not destructive members of the community.

Szunyogh: Yeah.

McGowan: So it took us a while to adjust, because sarcasm in New Jersey is a way of life. And it's fun. It's really fun. But you don't want to hurt people. We're kind of tough [laughs] on the East Coast.

Szunyogh: That's kind of the impression that I got.

McGowan: Oh another problem! We didn't know whether it was low tide or high tide! It just feels so different in a place where it doesn't matter whether the tide is high or low. And if you're used to that being important, it's sort of like a missing element in your life.

Szunyogh: Hm! I never would have thought of that. I don't really think about the tides, I guess.

McGowan: Well—

Szunyogh: —being from the Midwest. [Chuckles]

McGowan: —if you're ever on the ocean it's really important! Life depends on it if you're out on boats. And we were on boats every chance we could get because we loved being on the water. My husband wrote a wonderful poem about coming to Illinois and—

Szunyogh: Really!

McGowan: —and adjusting to it, yeah. Yes. And it's one of his better ones and one of the first published here in Illinois. Some of his other stuff had been published before.

Szunyogh: So you had said you hadn't heard about Bloomington before coming here right? What kind of—was there any sort of reputation that you encountered about Illinois Wesleyan before you came here—?

McGowan: No!

Szunyogh: —and how did that change—

McGowan: Noone we knew had ever heard of here either. [Chuckles]

Szunyogh: Never heard of it? [Chuckles]

McGowan: So as soon as my husband got back, I was all ears. What is it like? What happened? And he was delighted to get the job. He liked everybody he met out here. And he said it felt good. People seemed like very intelligent people. He was asked about...a lot of things that he was comfortable with having to answer. And people who helped interviewing. The faculty helped interview candidates and he felt comfortable with them and enjoyed their company, so he thought it'd make a good company for us.

Szunyogh: Okay. How have you noticed that Illinois Wesleyan has changed over time?

McGowan: Oh lordy.

[McGowan and Szunyogh chuckles]

McGowan: Well of course we lived on campus. And our kids played on campus. And we knew a number of students intimately. I mean they'd come to our house, babysit our kids. And those who lived in the dorm had quite a few more restrictions than there are now. I'm not sure what the situation is right now, but dorms were not co-ed at that time. And I think girls had to be in by a certain time, I'm not sure what it was.

Szunyogh: Oh okay.

McGowan: I don't know that boys did.

Szunyogh: Okay.

McGowan: Just the women, because this school still felt itself *in loco parentis* at that time. The school was acting as the parents of these students.

Szunyogh: Okay.

McGowan: In place of these parents. Let me think. There was some drug use then. Probably—maybe even more than there is now, because it was the end of the sixties. And so you'd have a little bit of that kind of thing going on, which actually was interesting because my husband taught a course on William Blake. And William Blake is very appealing to people who do LSD because it was almost as if he was naturally drugged, that way his perceptions of spiritual things were—

Szunyogh: Huh.

McGowan: —very similar to what people experience with LSD, I guess. We are innocent of all drug use because my father-in-law was a judge and we never wanted to embarrass him and get in trouble of any kind because it would've just mortified him to have somebody in his family misbehave.

[McGowan and Szunyogh chuckle]

Szunyogh: It happens.

McGowan: Oh, oh another thing! Alcohol was never allowed on campus—

Szunyogh: Oh! Okay.

McGowan: —at that time. And I think the first time it was ever served at a function supported—run by the university, it was at my husband's retirement.

Szunyogh: Huh!

McGowan: And that was in 2000.

Szunyogh: Oh wow.

McGowan: Now that doesn't mean that people didn't drink. But it was just that on campus, at a campus-run event, there would never ever be wine. Or beer. Let me think what else...I don't know, the classes

are still nice and small. That's good stuff. Library is different of course, quite different. And there wasn't all this electronic distraction.

Szunyogh: Mhm...So when you were—

McGowan: Excuse me, one more thing.

Szunyogh: Okay.

McGowan: I think teaching has gotten harder.

Szunyogh: How so?

McGowan: When we invite people over for dinner during the semester they're always too busy. Even on the weekends-because they're returning e-mails. And that was something that-that was not an element. If you wanted to see a professor you had to go to the office during office hours. There was no way to communicate with them outside of that time. Or I mean you could call them at home but people didn't do that very often unless they were on friendly terms. And so the communication between students and faculty has greatly increased. And that's what's keeping the faculty so much busier than we were as teachers.

Szunyogh: Would you say that's a good thing or a bad thing?

McGowan: I think it makes people tenser. I think people are less relaxed, and they have not as much down time for ideas to percolate. One of the nicest things that happened during the course of my career was the Humanities course I told you about. [Note from Anne McGowan January 17, 2014: I only took the one course that year.] The assigned readings were parts of books.

Szunyogh: Mhm.

McGowan: Because there just wasn't time in a year to get all this great literature in. But I was working a part time job that was totally menial. I was a cleaning woman, and I had time to think while I was cleaning about what I had been reading.

Szunyogh: Hm!

McGowan: And I also had enough time to read the whole book.

Szunyogh: Oh wow.

McGowan: Which was just wonderful. And you need time to digest the information you're taking in, in order to really make it work for you. And I feel like electronics are really getting in the way of that. When you used to be walking across campus you had nothing to distract you from your thoughts or the squirrels or the birds or the sky. [Chuckles]

Szunyogh: Mhm. You mentioned that you felt that communication with students was increased. Do you think that even though students can communicate with their professors through email, do you think that the quality of the communication has decreased?

McGowan: I have no idea about that.

Szunyogh: Okay.

McGowan: I really just don't. I know that the frequency has. And that's what's keeping my friends so busy and they can't come for dinner. [Chuckles]

Szunyogh: Yeah.

McGowan: We used to be able to go to dinner on weekends. Or have people over something like that. They just don't seem to have any social life outside of work and that-that saddens me.

Szunyogh: Can you tell me a bit about what social life was for professors when you were there?

McGowan: Mhm, yeah! When we first came there were a whole bunch of folks that came at this same time, that were hired at the same time. And we were all young families with young children. So we would help each other out. Babysitter-babysitting, and we would—we had parties—I mean all the time, almost every other weekend. There was some kind of party. And at the end of the semester, everybody would move. [Chuckles]

Szunyogh: Oh no!

McGowan: So we had what I called the Faculty Moving and Sports Club. And if you were moving somebody, everybody was packing in stuff, moving their stuff from the truck and taking it over to the restrooms and unpacking at the other end. And everybody would bring food, or the person who was moving would send out for sandwiches or something like that. And then if nobody was moving that week, we'd sit around and play bridge or baseball or something like that, so, we were together a lot. Very-very warm, close group of people. Saw each other a lot, raised each other's kids. It was good.

Szunyogh: What was the professor-student interaction like?

McGowan: It was good. It's always been good. We'd have students over at our house. I mean, they'd come. They'd come to visit with Jim or me. We'd be up playing the piano and singing and stuff like that. We got to know them, some of them quite well; others stayed away from faculty, as I'm sure still happens. I think that the years that Jim was starting were very challenging years for students. And the teachers were tough. I don't know how it is now, but they really did get people thinking and working your brains well.

Szunyogh: What made it so challenging for the students?

McGowan: Well they really had to think!

Szunyogh: Okay.

McGowan: And challenge what they always meant—this is true of college education everywhere, if it's done right. But the teachers were really—Larry Colter, I remember the students were either scared to death of him, or amazed by him. My husband had a following of course, the people who majored in Jim. And some of them have done very well and we're in touch with a quite a few of them still.

Szunyogh: That's great.

McGowan: Yeah.

Szunyogh: What course did Larry Colter teach or what department was he in?

McGowan: Philosophy.

Szunyogh: Philosophy?

McGowan: Mhm.

Szunyogh: Okay.

McGowan: Yeah he died recently and we had a memorial service for him at Homecoming.

Szunyogh: Oh!

McGowan: Last fall.

Szunyogh: Okay.

McGowan: His daughter was supposed to come and she died.

Szunyogh: Oh no!

McGowan: That was just so sad.

Szunyogh: Devastating. Devastating.

McGowan: It really is.

Szunyogh: I'm sorry to hear that. Are there any other professors or students that stand out in your mind?

McGowan: Oh yes, many. [Chuckles]

Szunyogh: Yeah. Can you tell me about a few of them?

McGowan: One of them was Harold Hungerford.

Szunyogh: Harold Hungerford.

McGowan: He was an English teacher who was almost deaf.

Szunyogh: Huh!

McGowan: But he was a magnificent teacher. He could read lips very well so you did not have to do anything unusual to communicate with him. And he had studied at a school for the deaf that taught him that skill. It was Gallaudet University, and they taught him not only to be able to read lips and understand spoken speech. But he knew accents.

Szunyogh: Huh!

McGowan: He could tell what part of the country you came from, almost whether you were from north Jersey or south Jersey.

Szunyogh: Wow.

McGowan: Whether you used an “h” in your “why.” He knew—he could pick that out and—brilliant, brilliant man. Absolutely brilliant.

Szunyogh: That’s really cool.

McGowan: Robert Bray.

Szunyogh: Robert Bray.

McGowan: He was another.

Szunyogh: What did he— ?

McGowan: He’s still here.

Szunyogh: He is?

McGowan: Yup, uh-huh, he’s teaching English.

Szunyogh: Oh!

McGowan: Yup.

Szunyogh: I unfortunately haven’t taken any English classes.

McGowan: You missed something.

Szunyogh: I know.

McGowan: There are wonderful people in the English department.

Szunyogh: Yeah. I’ve heard great things. I wish that I could fit it into my schedule now.

McGowan: I was talking with somebody yesterday.

Szunyogh: Really.

McGowan: She’s my age.

Szunyogh: Oh okay.

McGowan: She had been a Home Ec. major at U of I.

Szunyogh: Okay.

McGowan: And in her senior year she suddenly discovered short stories and plays, Shakespeare, and she said her whole senior year was doing English because she loved it so much, wondering about her major, but I said hey, those are life skills you can keep the rest of your life and enjoy it, so.

Szunyogh: Yeah. That's very true.

McGowan: Yup.

Szunyogh: Yeah. Are there any other faculty members that are still at Wesleyan that were there when you were—

McGowan: That I studied under?

Szunyogh: Yeah, sure.

McGowan: Let me think. Oh, there are—they're all gone now.

Szunyogh: Okay.

McGowan: John Ficca was good. He's still around, he's retired now. He was head of the Drama school—

Szunyogh: Huh.

McGowan: —for many, many years. He was a fine teacher. And one who is no longer here, because she went on to the presidency of the University of Maine. Sue Huseman. H-u-s-e-m-a-n. She taught French brilliantly.

Szunyogh: Hm.

McGowan: And French people could not tell that she was American.

Szunyogh: Wow!

McGowan: She taught one of the first Short Term courses. Short Term used to be in January. She taught one of the first Short Term courses. The Cultural Differences between France and America, and it was all in French. And we sat there cudgeling our brains, working those gray matters so hard, and laughing the whole time.

[Szunyogh chuckles]

McGowan: Now that's brilliance in teaching.

Szunyogh: Yeah.

McGowan: She-she was magnificent. But she went over to the dark side and became an administrator and—

Szunyogh: Oh.

McGowan: And then we lost her to University of Maine. And now she's retired and in Florida in the winter and then in Maine in the summer; that's a pretty good way to go.

Szunyogh: I would agree. Yeah, Maine's nice.

McGowan: Oh yeah. So's Florida!

Szunyogh: Yeah!

[McGowan chuckles]

Szunyogh: Yeah.

McGowan: She married a naturalist.

Szunyogh: Okay.

McGowan: And they spend a lot of time in kayaks—

Szunyogh: Nice.

McGowan: —and out in the woods.

Szunyogh: Nice. I thought of something. Oh! So while you were a student at Wesleyan, your husband was a Professor, right?

McGowan: Mhm, mhm!

Szunyogh: What was that like? Fine?

McGowan: It was fine. It was absolutely fine, taking classes from my friends.

Szunyogh: Okay.

McGowan: Which was fine. And then when we started the New School, of course the parents were in the classroom teaching their own children along with other children. And for some kids that was a hard adjustment having their parents in the classroom-but it-it worked out fine.

Szunyogh: That's good.

McGowan: I don't think I got any preferential treatment in my Wesleyan classes because of our friends being my teachers. It was very nice.

Szunyogh: That's good. Do you remember when the Humanities course stopped being taught?

McGowan: I can't really remember when that was; but it's a shame.

Szunyogh: Yeah it sounds really interesting.

McGowan: It was wonderful. At Middlebury there was a course, too, that everybody had to take. And that was in Freshman year, so that was another binder for everybody because we had a common experience and it was a tough course. It was on Contemporary Civilization. You know when you're taking history in high school you get past the Civil War and then you run out of time and then you don't ever finish the book? Okay, this was to finish the book. And it had to do with 20th century. Of course we were

in 1955 when we took that course and it had to do with the events of World War I and World War II; and as part of our class we had to read the newspaper every day.

Szunyogh: Hm.

McGowan: And we had discussion groups twice a week as well as lectures.

Szunyogh: Oh wow.

McGowan: So it was a tough course but again, everybody had that same experience and it did a lot for uniting the campus. And getting to know people, too.

Szunyogh: Yeah. So, was everybody taking the same course at the same time?

McGowan: Same lecture course. At the same time.

Szunyogh: Oh okay.

McGowan: The whole freshman class was in there.

Szunyogh: Oh okay.

McGowan: And then breakout sessions rooms were about seven, eight people.

Szunyogh: Okay. Oh.

McGowan: Yeah, it was good.

Szunyogh: That's good. Yeah I know now we have the first-year gateway course. Which everyone—all of the freshmen take a gateway class but a different—

McGowan: Mm-mm. So it's not the same in-design thing.

Szunyogh: Yeah, yeah. But I know that I became close with some of the in my gateway class. So, that's interesting.

McGowan: Mhm, that is.

Szunyogh: Is there anything that you remember other than the Humanities course from your time here that you would like to see brought back to Illinois Wesleyan?

McGowan: I don't know, it's evolving in its own nice way. No, I think the university's doing really well. I-I like the people that are working here now and I like the way that things are going pretty much.

Szunyogh: That's good.

McGowan: Yeah. Things are generally—I shouldn't speak of my time here in the past. I'm on campus every day.

Szunyogh: You are?

McGowan: We're at the Shirk center.

Szunyogh: Oh yeah!

McGowan: Working out every morning.

Szunyogh: Yeah, mhm.

McGowan: We're often in the Library. There are such good events. You'll see us in Beckman at 4 many times for the classical lectures that—we don't miss a whole lot.

Szunyogh: That's good. So did you decide to stay in Bloomington because you loved it so much?

McGowan: Mhm. Yeah, the welcoming community is still here. We are respected elders in this community. And you cannot move away from that and expect to find that kind of respect—people still ask us for help with their projects. And we want to help, we want to give back to this good community, we want to continue to make it a better place, because I'm still working as a fracktivist now. I'm an environmental activist.

Szunyogh: Okay.

McGowan: You'll see me holding signs on the street corner and lobbying in Springfield and writing letters to the editor. I was at a meeting last night with a group called Vision 2020.

Szunyogh: Okay, I've heard of that.

McGowan: Mhm. We're leaning toward a sustainable community where when the power goes off we can manage without having a crisis. We would be free of this huge, insane grid of transporting everything everywhere and we would be a local, viable community producing our own power, taking care of our own waste, producing our own food, and we won't need to be constantly in touch with the rest of the world.

Szunyogh: Mhm. So are you still involved in Ecology—? Alright.

McGowan: I volunteer at the Ecology Action Center sometimes. Michael Brown is the current director. He's always got something—some big project going on.

Szunyogh: That's great.

McGowan: Yeah, he recently removed his lawn, and Vision 2020 will remove lawns, and two of us stopped at his house and said why didn't you ask us to help you remove your lawn?

Szunyogh: How did that work?

McGowan: Well, you cover over the leaves in the grass with wet newspapers, and then you puncture holes in the newspapers, and you plant native plants that don't need mowing.

Szunyogh: Huh!

McGowan: And that way, you get rid of your lawn mower and don't have to be polluting the air with gas fumes.

Szunyogh: Hm. That's interesting.

McGowan: And the plants that are planted are fine in this climate and soil because they are native to here—without watering. So you're cutting pollution by quite a bit. So remove a lawn, you're removing pollution and saving water.

Szunyogh: That's interesting.

McGowan: Vision 2020 members installed geothermal systems in their houses, and try to get all-natural gas, because new natural gas is being fracked [Note from Anne McGowan January 17, 2014: a pollution-ridden process that wastes millions of gallons of water]. It's cold here and with insulation you can cut the use of all your fuels. And adding solar. If you add solar, you're just about off the electric grid.

Szunyogh: That's very interesting.

McGowan: Yeah!

Szunyogh: I know that they're installing geothermal into the State Farm Hall.

McGowan: Yes.

Szunyogh: Yeah.

McGowan: And eventually the plan is to connect all the buildings around the quad to the geo-thermal system.

Szunyogh: Really! Oh I didn't know that.

McGowan: Yup, yeah. Well it'll save the university thousands of dollars a year; millions over time. Yup.

Szunyogh: So do you—were you involved at all with the Peace Garden that was here?

McGowan: No I wasn't, but I was just charmed and delighted and thrilled and proud of Wesleyan. I think it's a great idea.

Szunyogh: I bought some vegetables from there before.

McGowan: You can buy vegetables? Who do you buy them from?

Szunyogh: They set up a little table on the quad and they'll have vegetables—

McGowan: When?

Szunyogh: —out for you to buy. I'm not sure how often they sell them. I know that they—

McGowan: You just bump into it.

Szunyogh: Yeah, they posted posters in some of the buildings. And I remember seeing that. I don't know if—

McGowan: Oh, I'll have to watch out for that. [Note from Anne McGowan January 17, 2014: I've since bought some at the uptown Famers Market.]

Szunyogh: Yeah!

McGowan: I take Tai Chi on the quad every Saturday.

Szunyogh: Oh really!

McGowan: Yeah, mhm.

Szunyogh: Nice!

McGowan: Yeah it is nice.

Szunyogh: Yeah, that sounds really nice.

McGowan: Speaking of Saturday, the Downtown Farmers' Market opens Saturday.

Szunyogh: Yeah!

McGowan: Bloomington.

Szunyogh: Yeah. I love Farmers' Market.

McGowan: I do too.

Szunyogh: It's really wonderful.

McGowan: It's what I've been told.

Szunyogh: Do you know when that started?

McGowan: Oh golly it's been bouncing around for years. It settled at the Courthouse three or four years ago, five maybe; it used to be at different places. But it seems to work out pretty well at the Courthouse.

Szunyogh: Yeah! It's nice. It's within walking distance to campus, so I like it a lot.

McGowan: Yeah there are a lot of good initiatives going on right now. There's a group called Radical Homemakers teaching each other skills like sewing and knitting and farming, something called hugelkultur.

Szunyogh: Hugelkultur, what's that?

McGowan: It's a form of gardening, that you dig a trench and you put wood in it and you put it in the lowest part of your yard so that it will attract runoff rainwater. And you fill it with wood and it can be old junky wood or it can be logs or whatever you've got, whatever tree came down, you'd chop it up, put it in. And then you fill it over and plant trees on it. And then the wood in the mound, as it decomposes, nourishes the young trees, and it attracts water and holds it so the trees always have plenty of water.

Szunyogh: That's really interesting.

McGowan: Yeah, uh huh. Don't ask me to spell it for you.

[McGowan and Szunyogh laugh]

Szunyogh: That's just fine, I guess.

McGowan: It's just one of the gardening techniques that uses less water, no power tools. I mean for digging the trench you might want a power tool, but it could be done with a shovel. It used to be. But it's trying to cut down the carbon footprint right here.

Szunyogh: Mhm. I guess are there any final things you'd like to tell me about?

McGowan: Hm. I'll think of them after you go.

[McGowan and Szunyogh laugh]

Szunyogh: Alright, well, if you ever think of anything else you could share.

McGowan: Something we missed.

Szunyogh: Mhm.

McGowan: Okay. It's been a pleasure meeting you.

Szunyogh: Yeah. It was very nice to meet you too.

McGowan: Uh huh!

Szunyogh: I enjoyed this.

McGowan: Me too, very much.