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Ben Rhodes

Ben Rhodes '69

Francine Krieger 2015

Illinois Wesleyan University

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Oral History Interview with Ben Rhodes
(Part I of II, second part is also included in this file)
November 8, 2013

Krieger: Today's November 8th, 2014, and we are on the fourth floor of the Ames library. I'm here with Ben.

Rhodes: My name is Benjamin Rhodes, and I graduated from Illinois Wesleyan in 1969. I was an education major. I went out and I taught school, and then in 1979 I taught elementary school. In 1979, there was a job opening at Illinois Wesleyan in the development office, and I became the director of the education fund, and through the 35 years of working at Illinois Wesleyan, I was campaign director for the fundraising effort, I was the director of development, I was director of planned giving and ended up as associate director—excuse me, associate vice president of advancement. Lot of titles.

Krieger: [Chuckles] my name is Franny, short for Francine Krieger. I am a junior currently at Illinois Wesleyan. I'm in the class of 2015. I'm majoring in history and minoring in English. Okay. So before we started speaking, you mentioned how you have a family history with Illinois Wesleyan. And I was curious to know what your experience was like, starting from before you actually went to Wesleyan, so whether just visiting campus, because you are from Bloomington.

Rhodes: I'm a local, yeah. My ancestors, they were the third family here in Bloomington. Bloomington was started by John Hendrix and John Dawson and my great-grandfather was Ebenezer Rhodes, who was the first minister of McLean County. And so I just kind of grew up here and we have a family cemetery south of town, where all my ancestors are buried.

Krieger: Where is that?

Rhodes: It's from Brandtville, which is the intersection of 150 and Veteran's Parkway, it would be one mile directly south as the crow flies from that. That's where Bloomington the original settlement was. So I grew up in Bloomington-Normal. My uncle Ben, who went to Illinois Wesleyan, he was in the law school here. He eventually became mayor, I was named after him. They built Lake Bloomington during his term. He had two brothers, my father, Henry Rhodes, his older brother, three years older, and then the oldest brother was Frank, who was vice president of what would now be United Parcel, now UPS. And then there were two sisters of my father. But I also had a sister who went here, Gerry, Geraldine Crabtree, Geraldine Rhodes Crabtree, who married Nate Crabtree. Nate was very influential in the United States. In fact that he developed radio for Europe, and he was a Board of Trustee member. My sister was always involved. So I saw Illinois Wesleyan from a child. When I was five years old I was the bat boy for the Notre Dame baseball team, and that was—they played Illinois Wesleyan, and I went to the—I think that's the first memory I have of going to a baseball game at Illinois Wesleyan, and being there with my mother and father at that time.

Krieger: I know that five years old is very young but is there anything that you remember about the vibe or the environment of Illinois Wesleyan when you first visited?

Rhodes: I do. The gymnasium was where all the kids in the neighborhood used to sneak in and play basketball and everything else. And it was a very small campus. They had the gymnasium which is now the Hansen Student Center. They had the football field—baseball area that was combined and everything else. Trinity High School, used to play there on Friday nights, so a bunch of us kids and a lot of my friends, we used to run underneath the football stadium and play and it was just a very safe environment. We had a lot of fun, just running all over the place and watching the football games. So it was basically athletic oriented. As far as the academics I don't remember anything other than the fact that later, when I was probably in eighth grade, seventh grade, something like that, I took some tutoring lessons from a professor who was a math professor and I do not remember his name, but he gave me a great foundation for algebra. And arithmetic was kind of a struggle for me, but algebra, trigonometry, geometry, it was a breeze. I think it was because of the professor who really gave me, gee, a first understanding I really had of mathematics. Illinois Wesleyan was—had great homecoming parades. They had—the town was really—it was the local university, and Bloomington-Normal was very small. 40,000, 30,000 people I think, and Illinois Wesleyan was always held very well in high esteem by the local people.

Krieger: So it was kind of like a community place where everybody kind of came together?

Rhodes: It was. And used to come—the athletic team—of course, you know, we didn't have television. Nothing the programming had—it was just a different era. There was more community involvement with the colleges and the colleges were more involved with the community, I think, too.

Krieger: Can you say like around what time period this would be?

Rhodes: The time period would—I'm talking in the 1950's.

Krieger: The 1950's.

Rhodes: Yeah.

Krieger: Okay, interesting. So actually, something that I wanted to ask you later on, I took a class with Professor Paul Bushnell—

Rhodes: Yes.

Krieger: —about slavery and civil rights and all that. And I know that Martin Luther King visited Illinois Wesleyan in 1968.

Rhodes: Mhm.

Krieger: Did you go to—

Rhodes: I did go, yes.

Krieger: Okay.

Rhodes: I was a student then. We went because he'd made a presentation—Lloyd Bertholf was the president at that time. And Dr. Martin Luther King was here. Civil rights—very involved, active time. A lot of people in the United States. So he came and I remember going, he was a phenomenal speaker. Details of his speech, I can't remember. I think they were basically the same, equality and—

Krieger: Yeah.

Rhodes: —freedom.

Krieger: Do you—were there black students at Illinois Wesleyan at this time?

Rhodes: There were. Drama major was Frankie Faison. He was—my pledge father was Richard Jenkins, who was nominated a few years ago for an Oscar, and, I think a year younger was Frankie Faison who starred in *Raisin in the Sun*. John Ficca was the director of the School of Theatre Arts at that time, called it Drama. So they did a lot of plays. They were racially oriented as well. Not a lot, but they did a few plays. And we had actors—there were also younger people—the Black Student Union was formed during that time, BSU, supported by the Student Senate, and so it was just more of a total awareness of different elements of society.

Krieger: So would you say that Wesleyan—well obviously they had Martin Luther King here, but I'd consider ourselves somewhat of an intellectual bubble.

Rhodes: Mhm.

Krieger: I'd think—I'd imagine that we would be a little bit more supportive. Would you say that black students felt very safe and supported during the civil rights movement at Illinois Wesleyan while you were here?

Rhodes: Interesting question. I have two perspectives on that. I felt yes. While I was a student, this was a very supportive environment. As I worked here in the alumni office and in the development office, I would see—or I would talk with a lot of the black alumni. And they felt that it was not as supportive. And so we started—during my tenure, we started the Minority Alumni Network, because there was an alienation. They felt alienated from Illinois Wesleyan. And so by having the Minority Alumni Network they really felt that they were part of the alumni body. And that grew and it's been a very dynamic force when it was created in—what was that, 1991, '90?—is when we started the alumni minority network. And that's been very unifying. And that had multiracial representation.

Krieger: I know that we have the—well I remember from my freshman year that before I showed up there were people who were at school already who were part of somewhat of a minority awareness. I don't even know what the program was about, but essentially people who considered themselves minorities or I guess the university identified them as minority in comparison to the rest of the population, were invited to come to the campus first to kind of get assimilated and get acquainted and meet each other.

Rhodes: Yeah that was the admission office that did that, and the alumni office with the Minority Alumni Network. I think we brought a lot of those issues to the forefront. Here's what we need to do, we need to be unified, and be supportive. And then also at the same time, we're starting internationalization. I mean we always had international students here, but nothing on such a structured program. I had a lot of friends who were from Korea, and there was a big effort for some reason, and I don't know Korean—maybe it's because we were Methodist, and the Methodist church is strong in Korea, but a lot of the students, that I know, a lot, as I should say, they came from Korea. And one was a—her father was the mayor of Seoul, Korea, and he was a graduate of Illinois Wesleyan back in the 1930's. So there's a long, pretty strong history here of international students coming.

Krieger: That's awesome.

Rhodes: Yeah. And it was—she's still a good friend. She lives in California. Wonmi Kwon is her name, and she started a scholarship fund in honor of her father and mother. But Illinois Wesleyan kind of rediscovered some of our history and the fact that we were the first institution in the United States of higher education to award a PhD to an African American, at that time called a Negro. And he took a correspondence [course], and earned his PhD, and I believe that was in biology.

Krieger: I didn't know that.

Rhodes: Yeah, A.O. Coffin. And we developed several brochures on that to tell everybody that hey, look, we've always been somewhat proactive as an institution in racial matters. And Illinois Wesleyan was one of the forefront institutions to admit women to higher education as well. So we have a strong, rich history which is pretty well documented in the Sesquicentennial book as well.

Krieger: Very nice. On a different note, you mentioned that you were part of Greek life. How is that experience?

Rhodes: It—again, I've got two different perspectives, one as a student, one as an administrator employee. When I was in Greek life it was very strong, and the focus was to develop leadership. And so if people became members of various social organizations that—fraternity Greek system—they had responsibilities, they had to develop their leadership skills, and the fact they'd be put in charge of a particular program or something, and the rest of the house is waiting and depending upon them to provide the leadership and stuff. And so it was very positive and very good, and you had a sense of a lot of friendships, deep friendships. And you wouldn't want to let down anybody, so you kind of grew as a person. Then after I graduated—I graduated in 1969—the movie Animal House came out and Animal House really, from my perspective, it really destroyed what the Greek system really stood for, in developing leadership and bonding and just being all part of the whole university. And it more or less became Animal House as just a drinking, carousing—it kind of destroyed a lot of the values of the Greek system. Now the Greek system probably was weak and didn't defend itself, and liked that notoriety, I don't know. So nationally, the Greek system, I think, has become weaker. Because out on the east coast, a lot of the colleges they used to have, fraternities and sororities, no longer have those. And it's kind of

migrating west. So, are the sororities and fraternities going to be around for a long time? I don't know. They originally started because there weren't any dormitories, and people who were students, they had to live somewhere, and so they bonded together and they formed a Greek house and it was kind of a rooming house. And so if you're rooming, it's kind of a micro society.

Krieger: That's really interesting. That's what my mom said.

Rhodes: Oh really?

Krieger: Yeah, when my mom first—I joined Alpha Gamma Delta.

Rhodes: Oh yeah, that's what my wife is.

Krieger: Yeah?

Rhodes: Yeah.

Krieger: And I like it a lot. And as a freshman I had a different perspective of it than what I do now.

Rhodes: Yeah.

Krieger: But when my mom first visited she was just like, you know, I understand that this is something that you want to be a part of, but I'm not so sure if you're going to enjoy living like this. Because I don't know if when your wife went here if they still had the living—you eat here, and you hang out here, and you all sleep in this room.

Rhodes: Right.

Krieger: Did she live in the house?

Rhodes: She did not go to Illinois Wesleyan.

Krieger: Oh.

Rhodes: Her grandmother, grandfather, everybody in her family, but she went to the University of Illinois. She did not like it. She eventually graduated from Pitt, summa cum laude, and just really way up there, in women's studies, which is fascinating—it's another subject, but she was in Alpha Gam, at the University of Illinois. And her experience with the sorority was good. But it was not as strong as my experience because she was not allowed to move into the house because they had over capacity. But she learned how to play bridge incredibly out there and stuff, but she lived across campus, long story, and she got a tack one time because she wasn't going to go back through the houses but from my perspective I think the sororities are much stronger than fraternities, because the sororities had their alumni boards—their corporate boards—you had to have capacity in the house. You had to live there—if you had twenty beds in the house, you had to have twenty members there. Financially they're stronger than the fraternities were. The fraternities were a little more—maybe too lax in that type of administrative structure. But the fraternity—all the fraternity houses on this campus now are owned by the university, so they're

dormitories, where the sororities are all still independent, and they have their own endowments and they meet their capacities, and they're very, very strong, just looking at the numbers of beds that are there, membership and everything else. So I think they really have—they know what it's all about, where the fraternities might be a little more relaxed.

Krieger: Yeah. I would say so. Okay. Was there anything that occurred in your college experience, and I'm saying before you graduated in 1969. Was there anything that occurred either in campus life in your Greek affiliated life or in your academic life that really helped, that associated Illinois Wesleyan, that really helped shape where you were going, and why?

Rhodes: Very interesting question, I could go in a lot of different directions on that one. When I was an undergraduate—and academically, this is probably the strongest thing that I remember about Illinois Wesleyan, and didn't appreciate it at the time but later did—to graduate, you had to take a test in your final year of your major. And you had to pass that comprehensive test. You also had to take oral exams with your faculty members of that department. And you would go in and take those exams, and you had to pass both of those in order to graduate. That was for a bachelor's degree, and that is much like what they did for your graduate degree and masters and especially PhD. I appreciated—I didn't appreciate at the time but then the academic portion—there was a course called humanities which was four hours each semester—you had to take two semesters—excuse me—you had to take two semesters of that. It was the hardest course, and it was mandatory, and you had lectures and you had discussion groups and everything else. But I learned that was the culminating course of anything I took about society, man, religion, art—the total of what education is really about. Truly, it educated the person.

Krieger: So it was just a class about—?

Rhodes: About everything.

Krieger: Everything?

Rhodes: It was about art, it was about philosophy, theology, literature, Dante, you read everything. And you went to classes and you had a—there was a faculty member there who was director of the School of Art, Rupert Kilgore, and we talked—we had the Greek, the Roman, the Renaissance, we had all the examples of art lectures and everything else, and if you take a look at that building right there, which was the old courthouse, he—I never will forget it—he put a slide up, and it's an absolutely gorgeous building, you know, architectural style—and he put the slide up and said, does anybody recognize that? And they were all saying, it's St. Paul's in London, it's the St. Peter's in Rome and everything else and he said, no, that's the McLean County Courthouse. And he said it's a perfect example of the architecture except that the dome is one third in scale too small from the size of the building. And I never—so that gave me a critical eye to look at that. And now I'm going on, but anytime I go to a city, I always start looking at the architecture, and you can tell so much about a community, just from the way it evolved, and I go right to the downtown of every new city I'm in and I drive all over them, so I get a real feel for—franchise kind of ruined a lot of that style, because this place and that place, they all look the same, but the true community, the fiber, came through the type of architecture that people liked and enjoyed and the cultural aspects.

Krieger: Very nice.

Rhodes: So it's been very rewarding for me.

Krieger: So academically, you were very impressed by this humanities class.

Rhodes: Very.

Krieger: Were there any campus-wide purchases such as—I know it's kind of small—not small scale, but I know it's not necessarily as impressionable as the big art sculpture that we now have but the Dugout, our food quarters, have just changed drastically, and it's elevated the mood of the entire building. There are students in and out of there, there are more people who I see on a daily basis when I go there. I find myself buying more coffee.

Rhodes: Yeah.

Krieger: Were there any campus changes that kind of made an impression upon your college career?

Rhodes: Well we had a place called the Dugout and that's where you had coffee and nobody knew about Starbucks or anything like that. Coffee was coffee and you just got it there and you sat around and you would kind of be in your social organization—fraternity, sorority, and you'd sit at the table. Or if you were independent, you'd just see people and you'd talk to them. And the Dugout was the big thing. We had a pool table, we had a pool hall that was down there, and a lot of people would go down and play pool. The cafeteria was the cafeteria. That was before it was called the Bertholf Commons. And I think Saga was here, which is Soviet attempt to gag America. Everybody made fun of it, but, you know, it was basic food and people just ate. And you had the grill, the Dugout, and that's where you would go. There were a lot of community, people just kind of intermingled and just saw people all over the Memorial Student Center.

Krieger: So would you say that people were kind of affiliated with their Greek organizations?

Rhodes: Greek or dorms. Magill Hall has a great alumni former residence there and they all kind of bond together and they get together at Homecoming or something like that. That's Magill Hall, and then Dolan Hall. So I think it's by the living units more than it is by the class. Just where you—18, 19, 20-years old, you just kind of grew up together and bonded and had somewhat of the same experiences. Much more so than seniors. You know seniors are one group, and freshmen in another group.

Krieger: That's interesting. Okay how about personal/Greek experiences? Was there any—?

Rhodes: Personal what?

Krieger: Personal or Greek experiences. Was there anybody who you met who kind of changed—not that they changed you, but they left a lasting impression upon you at Illinois Wesleyan?

Rhodes: Faculty members definitely made a very strong impression on me. I'm going blank on some other names, but Jerry Stone was just outstanding. He was a lawyer, he was a minister, he was a—he had so many things. He taught religion. They had religion classes. Dr. Whitehurst was a magician as well as a religion faculty member. The art—Fred Brian was very strong, and Tony Vestuto was a lot of the art—that was the era of a lot of art going on, and drama was very strong. So I think it was more of that performing type of experiences and of course music. It was—School of Music was always good and strong. This was still a very small campus and the buildings were—Shaw Hall was kind of the modern building [chuckles], because it was built in '55 or something like that. This was only ten years later. So we didn't know what to expect that was different. I think—and then the United States was undergoing a lot of radical changes with the Vietnam War starting, and all the fears of uncertainty, and the evolving racial situation, and proactive—I think the student body was proactive. I remember one time that there was a theme—I don't know if anybody else recalled this—there was a theme, Illinois Wesleyan, and I think it eventually ended up to be the micro university. But I remember one person, I can't remember his name, but he said Illinois Wesleyan, a hot bed of apathy. I just thought that was kind of very humorous to me.

Krieger: What did he mean by that?

Rhodes: He thought that a lot of people were just apathetic at the university and didn't care too much about it. So that's why it was 'hot bed of apathy', just—nothing was going to happen, nothing was going to change.

Krieger: Okay. Let me see. Oh okay. So since leaving Illinois Wesleyan and either in the twenty years when—or ten or twenty years when you were teaching or when you came back—actually, let me start that question over.

Rhodes: Okay.

Krieger: When you first returned to Illinois Wesleyan as a faculty member—

Rhodes: I wasn't, I was an administrator always.

Krieger: —as an administrator—I'm sorry. What impressed you the most?

Rhodes: That was a great question too. When I graduated from Illinois Wesleyan, I became a teacher and I taught sixth grade, and I was the only male in this elementary type of thing for a few years, and I just had tremendous success, really enjoyed it, and had great kids and everything else. And then the unions, teacher unions, they became strong and I got on the negotiating thing and I kind of burned out from all of that stuff. And I always said that if I felt that I was burned out, I was going to leave because I wasn't going to be doing that. And I ended up getting into the landscaping business while I was getting my master's degree and just loved that, was winning all kinds of awards for design on landscaping, and it was just a very fulfilling job. And I was going to start my own business, because I was working for a guy, and he promised me so much of the business and it just didn't transpire so I was thinking to either start my own business or... what. I didn't know what. And I saw in the Illinois Wesleyan alumni newspaper—that time they called it

the Titan Times—that there was an advertisement for development officer. So I called up and I said I was interested in that, and I'd like to interview for that, and then, it was very informal. And they said oh, would you like to come in for an appointment and do it in two days or something. I said yes, I'd like to do that. And I went in. I was supposed to go in for half an hour, had a two hour interview. I came home after that, I went home, and I told my wife, I said, gee, I don't care if they hire me or not, but they just treated me so nice. It was great. And I got a call that afternoon, could I come back? And yes, the next day. So I went back, had another two hour interview, and just felt wonderful. The people were so kind and everything else, and it was just—it was really a very positive environment. And so then, I got a—after the next afternoon I got a call, could I come back and meet with President Eckley, Robert Eckley, for a final interview? And I said yes I'd like to do that, I came in, and I met with President Eckley. We went through, and he—his background was the chief economist at Caterpillar Tractor and he came over here to become president in 1968. And I graduated in 1969. Let's see, because he came in the fall of '68-'69. And I graduated and he was my president when I did that. So anyway I had this interview in his office, and he asked me the question, he said, why do I want to be in the development office and have this job? And I just said to him, well I want to do something with my life, something like you've done. And I think I hit right between the eyes, because he nodded, with the very knowing expression that there was something in me and also in him, and to a higher calling, I guess, or something. And he just nodded. And so then I was offered the job. And it was just like everything in my life, all my experiences hit at one time, and it's just been perfect ever since. Living my dream, is what I say.

Krieger: I like that a lot.

Rhodes: Yeah. It's just been perfect. I've had just the best life, because of that break, to get a job here, and people treat you so nice.

Krieger: I would definitely say that that's a common feeling amongst Illinois Wesleyan's campus. Some of my favorite professors, what I admired about them the most—actually Professor Bushnell is probably—

Rhodes: Oh yeah.

Krieger: —one of the most impressionable people I've ever met. And it's because he's done so much with his life.

Rhodes: Yeah. He's a terrific guy. He really is. There are so many terrific faculty members. It's incredible.

Krieger: I like the way you worded that. So it's about 3 o'clock.

Rhodes: Okay. 3:06.

Krieger: 3:06. Was there anything else in particular that when you imagined talking about the history of Illinois Wesleyan that struck you as something worth mentioning?

Rhodes: You have wonderful questions and they're so open ended that I could just go almost any direction. I think the visionary aspect of Illinois Wesleyan—in the 1950's, the 1960's, higher education became very strong as a national agenda item. Sputnik. See my father was born before automobiles were invented. He died the year that Sputnik went up, the Russian satellite, just a itty bitty thing went up in the air. So I think of his life, gee, just the changing and transformation there, but my life, the 50's and the 60's, science, progress, World War II was over, and now we were making—John Kennedy came to office, a young person, who became president of the United States, wasn't a 70 year old, or a 60—here he was in his 40's. It was a very dynamic time. There was a lot of energy, synergy that was going on. It was just magical, really exciting and great to be youthful. And the world was the oyster, as they say. Lots of opportunity there, and it was all opportunity. And I think Illinois Wesleyan, when you look back at the presidents of Illinois Wesleyan, each president has provided a great richness for their era. Lloyd Bertholf, they built the dormitories, because they had the baby boomers coming to colleges. So they needed more dormitories. And he was kind of a building president. And then Bob Eckley came, and he saw the financial weakness of the university, and it was always kind of a poor little school at that time. He started the endowment, or the emphasis on the endowment. It grew, because when he came the endowment was \$6,000,000, and when he left it was \$86,000,000. Huge, tremendous. And then following Bob Eckley, Minor Myers was here. And Minor just took the light off the bushel basket off the candle and said, look at us! And I think there was a great sense of pride among the alumni, to say, whoa, we really are something. This really is a good school. And we got national recognition and everything else. And then the tragedy of Minor's death with cancer was kind of a shocking experience, and then Dick Wilson came in as president, and the United States, the financial circumstances—the great recession, and here he was, a mathematician background, and he could manage the finances of the university. We took some hard knocks and we did it willingly, and the morale stayed high, because he was able to put the vision out, that here's what we have to do to continue to be viable. So I guess it's the leadership, and that's not from presidential standpoint, but not to discount at all the trustees because they really were a brilliant group of individuals. Not all, but most. [Chuckles] I say that tongue-in-cheek. But they were really—the dedication to making this a strong institution, to fulfill its mission, of providing an education. That's where I—I think that humanities course really provided a lot for me. It impacted my whole life because I can—the liberal arts training, education—I can see all these different aspects of life, and how they all come together for the betterment of the individual, and the betterment of society, betterment of the institution. It's good. I truly feel like I've got a great education. So, anything else? Your time? What do you got?

Krieger: I actually have a lot of time. You want to keep on talking? It's up to you.

Rhodes: It's up to you. I don't want to bore anybody.

Krieger: No, absolutely not. What—I'm just curious—what fraternity were you a member of?

Rhodes: I was a member of Phi Gamma Delta fraternity, which is called FIJI. And my uncle Ben was a member of the Phi Gamma Delta. My brother-in-law, Nate Crabtree—and that's why I really came to Illinois Wesleyan, even though I had family history. Nate Crabtree was of Sigma Chi and he was a Trustee, and he used to come to Bloomington—he lived in Minneapolis. He

would come to Bloomington for Trustee meetings and he asked me when I was a senior, he said, ‘Ben, what school are you going to? What are you interested in?’ And I said, well I’m really going to go to Rockhurst College in Kansas City, which was a Jesuit school, and it was all male, and he said, well if you would consider going to Illinois Wesleyan, that would be a great personal honor for me. And I knew that my uncle Ben had been here, my sister had gone here, and I thought, oh okay. And so in August of 1965, I made application to come to Illinois Wesleyan, and it was just incredible. Nobody—it was so late because school started in September, and I thought well—Nate had died suddenly of a heart attack, and he was a young man. I think he was 59 or something when he died. He was the Vice President of General Mills. And he added up their charitable division but he was in charge of all the public relations and everything else for General Mills. And Radio Free Europe, he did that. He was involved in a lot of things on a national, international basis. So I was thinking about Nate, and so I decided Illinois Wesleyan’s a good school. I’ll come here, well, I eventually got enrolled at the university, and the rest is history. But it was really because of Nate saying that to me. And I was honoring his wishes, and it was a great choice for me. I just fell into it. It was a great choice. [Chuckles]

Krieger: That actually sounds about right.

Rhodes: Couldn’t do that today. It’s a different time.

Krieger: Yeah there—I think there’ll probably be a lot of different factors that go into applying to school unfortunately.

Rhodes: Well we never had college—nobody from colleges ever came to high schools and visited back then or anything.

Krieger: Yeah. I only—I visited Wesleyan once.

Rhodes: Well—

Krieger: It was actually the last school that I visited.

Rhodes: Really?

Krieger: Yeah, and I just—I didn’t even have to stay for the lunch or anything. I was exhausted by that point. I had visited Indiana—University of Indiana as well. My mom and I broke the clock on the car—

Rhodes: Oh.

Krieger: —because we went from Chicago to Indiana and then back so fast.

Rhodes: Oh, right. [Chuckles]

Krieger: But I just stepped on campus and I looked around and I think one person had spoken who was a football player but he was also president of his student class and he was maybe an economics major but he also took a lot of Spanish classes because he liked to.

Rhodes: Yeah.

Krieger: And I was just like, yeah, that sounds about right.

Rhodes: Yeah. That's the nice thing about Wesleyan, especially the liberal arts. You can experiment and take all kinds of different things. It is very rewarding, all of it.

Krieger: Definitely.

Rhodes: Yeah.

Krieger: Are there any specific memories, either from your collegiate experience, or from being on the Board of Directors that just strike you as memorable?

Rhodes: When I was an undergraduate with the fraternity I was in charge of building the floats for Homecoming. And we won two or three years in a row. We got best float, and it was just a fun time, and a lot of work, but academically, as I said, the humanities course. As an employee of the university, I have met so many wonderful people, and alums and everything else. And they have—their attitude has changed about Illinois Wesleyan. We started—we never used to have alumni club or anything like that, and with a Trustee, her name was Flo Armstrong. We started—Bob Eckley was retiring, and she lived in Phoenix, Arizona, and we started what we call the connections. And it was kind of a way to say goodbye to Bob and Nell Eckley. But Flo had a dinner out in Phoenix and got all the alums out there and there were probably 20-25 alums out there at that point. And it was so successful. Everybody enjoyed getting together and everything else. From that, we started all the different alumni gatherings, and for alumni and friends. And now we have kind of a national network. And that was fun to be involved with. It's not about fundraising and money and everything else. It's all these different connections, friendships that people were really enjoying, and it's a very strong network now. And I know it's going to evolve even stronger as young alums go to an area, they can go to one of those meetings, and they can meet all kinds of people that they never knew were even there. So it's good. And I think the recognition by good or bad—U.S. News & World Report started their recognition, the best liberal arts college, and da-da-da. And we were—Illinois Wesleyan—was the best in the Midwest on a regional basis for five consecutive years. And then we got bumped up into the national liberal arts institutions. And I think our alums are kind of catching up to that, the fact that we are truly a national liberal arts college. And recruitment, most of the population is from Illinois, and there are surrounding states that are not as populated with students as Illinois is. But here, you're from New York—you know? And we're getting people from California and New York, all over the nation. And that's what's good. And because it provides so much enrichment for us Midwesterners, I think it's a two-way street.

Krieger: Yeah.

Rhodes: As you were saying, you get a little—there's more to the world than New York.

Krieger: I agree. I actually probably made one of the best decisions I've ever made in my whole life, was taking a step away from New York—only because New York's always going to be there. We're always going to have our loud people, our quiet people, our artsy people. It's

always going to be there, and it's always going to change. But I kind of felt like I needed—if I'm at this point in my life where I can experience and kind of discover who I am and what I like and what not I should probably give other things a try.

Rhodes: That's perfect. That's exactly what Illinois Wesleyan is and should be. That opportunity. That's why it's rewarding for me to work for the university, or have worked for the university, because of exactly what you just said. You see all of that, and that's been the real benefit of my job. I get to see the students from when they enter to when they graduate, then five years, ten years, something like that. It's really how they evolve and change. It's very exciting. It's fun to be a part of.

Krieger: Yeah. I agree.

[Krieger and Rhodes chuckles]

Krieger: Okay. Well I think we'll stop here today.

Rhodes: Alright, great.

Krieger: And thank you very much.

Rhodes: Oh thank you.

[These recordings were made over two days and the combined for ease of use. The audio files are also joined, with an audible description separating them. The duration of the first recording is 44:45; the total length is 01:45:36]

Oral History Interview with Ben Rhodes (Part II)
November 15, 2013

Francine Krieger: Hello. Today is November 15th, 2013, and I'm here with Ben Rhodes, who is in the class of 1969. Do you want to say a few things about yourself?

Ben Rhodes: I was born in Bloomington, Illinois, and grew up around this area as a kid, watched it, used to play when we'd have football games down here, I'd just play one of the neighborhood kids. And my family has been associated with the university for over 100 years. And it's just kind of second nature to me.

Krieger: Nice. My name is Francine Krieger. I'm in the class of 2015. And I'm a History major and an English minor, and this is a continuation of an interview that we had on November 8, 2013. And today, we are going to talk about donors.

Rhodes: The people in the development office are long-winded, so that's why we're trying to keep it concise.

Krieger: Oh. So, Chuck and Jay Ames.

Rhodes: Yes. We have a list in front of us of just some names of donors to the university, and some are major donors, and some are just significant, and by that I mean they made gifts that were more than monetary. They were just a different type of gift. But anyway, the first name is Chuck and Jay Ames. And we are sitting in the Ames library. And back in the 1990's, we were having a big major fundraising campaign, we'd never raised anything like \$50,000,000 before and that was our big goal. The most that we ever tried to raise was I think \$15,000,000, so this was a big stretch. Well we were very, very, very successful. I mean it just kicked off right away, and before you knew it, we were at \$85,000,000, and things were going because we had a president and a Board of Trustees that really provided the vision, and people bought into it. Minor Myers went out to New York City, and he met with the call people, Olin Foundation. The Olin Foundation was famous for building only two types of buildings. One was a library and one was a science center. But we had already built our science center, and he was just having a meeting with the then director, and the director saw our numbers and talked to him and he said, if we would come to them for a proposal to build a library, they would fund it. Minor came back, met with the Board of Trustees at a Board meeting, he told them about the situation, the Board said, oh yes, we would definitely want to do that. They approved the—they gave him the authority to go back, Minor went back, and the Olin Foundation in the meantime, which was only a few months, they changed their complete focus. They decided they were going to build an engineering school next to MIT, which they have done. They closed their foundation which was into the multimillions. So there we were, we had a project with no funding and no sources for funding, and it was also during the .com era when everybody was looking up and researching everything right on the computer. So it was the beginning stages of that. Big struggle, everybody I would visit, they would say, oh you don't need a library anymore, it's all on a computer. That's how the new future is going to be that way. So it was just kind of a waste of money, well it was very, very frustrating. So I went to Chuck Ames in New York City and went—I was at the hotel room, and the night before, I was thinking about, what am I going to do? Here we had a—it was a \$25,000,000 project, somewhere in the range of \$20-25,000,000. And so I prayed, and I said, it's just going to happen. It's either going to be yes or no, and it's going to be for—I was doing this for God. And so I went and I saw Chuck, and right in his office and his meeting, and he was at that time working as a principal with Clayton Dubilier & Rice, which is a leverage buyout company. Chuck and I visited and I talked about Illinois Wesleyan, how successful we've been, and I explained that we had an athletic center, we had the science center, but now the third element was that we needed a library, and that would put us in the top liberal arts colleges in the nation. And I asked him—excuse me, it was...yes, it was a \$15,000,000 project projected at that time—so I asked Chuck if he would consider providing a gift of \$15,000,000. He paused, and he looked at me, and he said, well I'm not comfortable with giving more than \$7,000,000 without talking to my wife. At which point, inside of me, I just jumped for joy because we had a library at that point. And so I told him I understood, I thanked him very much, I said we would get back together, and I would get on my way. So I went to the airport, I called my boss, I said, we have a library. He will give \$7,000,000, but he's considering \$15,000,000, but no matter what, he has \$7,000,000 committed. And so I wanted somebody else to know besides myself in case the plane came down or whatever. And it came back and of course everybody's happy, and about a week

later Chuck called me and said, I don't think I can do that. I can't do anything like that. And I said well let me come out and talk to you. And he said, well I'm going to Santa Fe—he had another home in Santa Fe—I said, well I'll fly out, I'll meet you there. The next day I was on an airplane, I flew out to Santa Fe, I met him in the kitchen at his house, with Jay, his wife, and we sat down and we talked, and we went through the whole thing again, and they recommitted to not only the \$7,000,000 but they committed to the \$15,000,000—

Krieger: Wow.

Rhodes: —to build the library. Then, a little bit after that, about two weeks after that, again they were having some questions and stuff and they invited my wife and myself to come out to their house in Chagrin Falls, Ohio, which is a suburb of Cleveland, and meet with the family. And Susan and I went out and we met with them, and Jay and Chuck were there, and they had their children with, and the children of course are adults, and there were spouses and everything else, and we were going to have a dinner. And Chuck, just out of the blue, said, Ben, I want you to sit down over there in the corner with my children and explain to me why it's more important for Jay and I to give our money to Illinois Wesleyan than it is to give it to them.

Krieger: Wow.

Rhodes: Just straight off of the top of the head. [Chuckles]

Krieger: No pressure!

Rhodes: Oh it was fun. So I went through and I talked about the library and everything else and what their parents were doing, and the philanthropy, and they just totally agreed. It was wonderful. And so the whole family was committed. And we had a library and that's what we're sitting here now today, and—

Krieger: Yeah.

Rhodes: Just lots of stories after stories on that. But it was just kind of a funny thing. It was kind of a three-phase ask—

Krieger: Yeah.

Rhodes: —about for the library. And of course, then the library, they're so proud of it. But the library's been judged as one of the top ten college libraries in the nation with Stanford, MIT, University of Chicago, here—

Krieger: I definitely did not know that.

Rhodes: Yeah, it's not known very well. I mean we publicized it when we first got the recognition but we haven't done much with that since.

Krieger: That's kind of a big deal.

Rhodes: It is.

Krieger: So, was Buck Library our library before Ames?

Rhodes: No, Buck Library was actually the first self-supporting library. We only had one classroom at the beginning which was Old North and they had a little room which was the library, and then they built Buck, which a trustee had provided money for, a farm, and they built Buck Library and that was from 19—look it up, somewhere in the 20s to 1969 and '68. Then the university built, where State Farm Hall is, a building, which was the library, and it was built for \$127,000 or something like that, \$172,000.

Krieger: From \$172 to \$15,000,000.

Rhodes: Yeah. And that building served—it was later named Sheean Library. And then from Sheean Library we built The Ames Library here, which is magnificent.

Krieger: Wow. And maybe I just wasn't listening hard enough, but what did you say that Chuck and Jay Ames, what their occupation was?

Rhodes: Well he was a businessman, and Clayton, Dubilier & Rice is a leverage buyout company. And so what they would do is, well, case in point, they bought Kinko's, and then they also—the company did—and then the company also bought Federal Express. Then, as Chuck said, they changed the management, or they changed the management, meaning they changed the philosophy of the management to gear it up into a more businesslike manner. And if the management doesn't agree with it then they bring their own people in. But they always work with the management. So Chuck—excuse me, Clayton, Dubilier & Rice, they merged Kinko and Federal Express into one large company. And then they sold that, and Clayton, Dubilier & Rice, from the sale, after buying the two different companies, and then they sold it, their net profit was \$1,000,000,000.

Krieger: Wow.

Rhodes: So this is a very large leverage buyout company. But they're not a hostile leverage buyout. They don't go in unless the manager wants to sell it. And so they're astute business people, very sharp on the numbers and management and personnel, so they've done a lot of that. That's just one example of the type of business they've done. They own Hertz, they bought that from Ford Motor Company. They own just lots of different companies.

Krieger: No big deal.

Rhodes: Yeah, really. They own tire companies, paint companies, furniture companies, steel companies, they own a lot of different companies.

Krieger: Mhm. It's kind of interesting to know where the money comes from.

Rhodes: Yes.

Krieger: I like in the story that you sent me about what you read to the Board of Trustees—

Rhodes: Mhm. Roberta Lyons?

Krieger: —about Roberta Lyons—

Rhodes: Yeah.

Krieger: —that she was a descendant of Queen Elizabeth. That's incredible. Can we talk about Roberta a little bit?

Rhodes: Sure. Roberta Lyons. She was a widow, and her husband, they lived in Lacon, Illinois, and they had modest means of financial support, but they care deeply. They had no children, they had no other relatives that were living, all their relatives pre-deceased them. And I used to go over and visit Roberta at the retirement home, and we'd have lunch, and she would always say, let's talk business, meaning that she wanted to talk when her years were over what I was supposed to do. I was the, not the executor of the estate, but I was going to fulfill everything she wanted to get done. And so we became great friends, very good friends over many years. And then one day I got the call that she passed away, which was a terrible call, but I knew what to do. I got down to business and I arranged for the funeral and we had the funeral and a grave and I knew what dress she wanted to wear, and I knew the casket, and she wanted to be buried next to her husband which was south of Decatur, Illinois, and so I arranged for the minister to be there and I was the only other person there, the minister, myself, and we buried Roberta. So it was terrible, and I just was really sad about it. I lost my friend, and I thought, gee, this job is just—this is the worst job in the world anybody could have because you make all these friends. But I got down to business, and I fulfilled her wishes, and cleared out her apartment, sold her stocks, her bonds, and jewelry, etc. etc. and was kind of feeling depressed myself. But I did everything and fulfilled the function of the job. And then the first assembly of the year, the new school year, her estate was settled, and the first recipient of her scholarship, which is what she wanted all of her money to go to, was announced, and the student walked across the stage, and shook hands with the president, and at that moment—I'll get emotional here—at that moment, I saw Roberta's dream had been fulfilled. And I was a part of that. And I thought, gee, this is a great job. Because the student would never know Roberta, but I knew her, and I knew what she wanted, and this student was going to get an education, and I've kept track of who that person is, and that student has really done quite well on her life. It's been 30 years ago, now. But it's just really—every one of these students can get a scholarship and I know that other people are dreaming the same thing. So it's very just an extremely rewarding job because I get to be a part of that. A little bit.

Krieger: And it's amazing because Roberta has not only left behind a legacy of what she did with her life not only just brought her success, but she gets to not leave it behind and then impact somebody else's life.

Rhodes: Yeah.

Krieger: Set somebody up for their future. That's—

Rhodes: Yes. That's exactly what she wanted to do.

Krieger: That's awesome.

Rhodes: She knew that she's not going to be immortal but she wanted to share whatever she had in this world with the next person. And it's been wonderful. That's the good part about the job.

Krieger: Yeah. What—?

Rhodes: And all these donors on that list, they feel that way. That's really their true feeling, they want to help somebody else.

Krieger: Before we move on, what was she like, Roberta?

Rhodes: Oh, she was a fireball of a little lady. She just had a bunch of energy, and she was very practical, and she was deeply in love with her husband, her husband had died. And this is kind of a funny story, but she said my husband was so good to me, he used to get up in the morning earlier than I would, and he would go into the bathroom and he would warm the bathroom seat for me, and instead of being a male and standing up and doing his thing, he'd sit down and warm the seat so when she got up, she said it was always comfortable for me.

Krieger: [Laughs] Aw.

Rhodes: People share such intimate things with—

Krieger: Yeah.

Rhodes: They have with me.

Krieger: I don't think it gets any more personal than that. [Laughs]

Rhodes: It doesn't get more personal. You couldn't write that down and you can't tell anybody else, but that's—Roberta was just in love and her husband, they had a very strong relationship. But she was always thinking of somebody else at the retirement home. She would stop, and she always introduced me. We always had a little table of other people. It always seemed to be different people because she wanted everybody else to get to know me, or I got to know them, but there were always two or three others at our table for lunch. She was interested in what's going on at Illinois Wesleyan, and how are the students, who are the new faculty members, how's that new president? What about his spouse? It was all male presidents at that time. It was just—she always wanted to know about other people.

Krieger: Beyond her donation, what was her—did she have any sort of affiliation with Illinois Wesleyan?

Rhodes: She did not. She did not go to school here or anything else. She was a United Methodist member. Illinois Wesleyan was affiliated with the United Methodist church. She wanted higher education and she did not go to college herself, nor did her husband, but they just thought Illinois Wesleyan school, higher education, it was important.

Krieger: That's awesome.

Rhodes: And that happens to a lot of the people who go here, that they had somewhat of that similar circumstance.

Krieger: Who would you like to talk about next?

Rhodes: Oh let's see, who's on the list? I could talk about...look at that quickly...well there's a guy here, Lee Short. Somebody may have interviewed him. Lee Short was—he was an alum of Illinois Wesleyan, music major, worked at the university in the administrations, served in a lot of different capacity, was Director and Dean of Admission, Director of Development, but he was a really creative guy, and his daughters went here too, as well as his wife. His daughters went here, and when he retired, I came in and if he hadn't retired, I wouldn't have gotten the job. So I kind of look at Lee.

Krieger: Oh okay.

Rhodes: But he was just always so kind to me, very creative guy, and I have a lot of programs here talking about Room at the Top program, which was really kind of a revolutionary idea. And he got General Electric, had a big plant here, a general telephone, which was now Verizon, and country companies, and he put those three companies together and he asked them to support interns, and they would be restricted for women, and there was only Illinois Wesleyan women. We would select the students, the companies would interview them, the women would go out, they would work during the school year during the week, maybe five hours, maybe ten hours a week depending on their schedule, and then the companies would provide scholarship aid. Well, it was a great program, Room at the Top, because the women were somewhat—at that time, they had a ceiling, a glass ceiling. You couldn't go any further. And so this was a way to get women into management. And if you take a look at the woman that participated in that program, which I took over when I was here, I would meet with those different companies, those women, the alumni, of that group organization, Room at the Top, they are very, very successful. One is an executive vice president at State Farm, the other one is a top executive at a hospital, and it just—it was really a phenomenal program that worked well.

Krieger: That's pretty interesting. So this Room at the Top program, it just consisted of—almost a work study job?

Rhodes: It was almost. But the women were selected and they—it depended upon—they had a mentor at each program. So they would report to somebody, and then they would be put in with a project, and our women did such a phenomenal job that the companies loved it, and they were—there was always a project at a company that nobody had time to do. So our—the women would go from Illinois Wesleyan, would go in, and they would take over that project, and they would get it done. And everybody just raved about, gee, this is the greatest program, and everything else. And eventually, the only reason it stopped is because the glass ceiling was kind of taken away, and we really didn't have a need for that kind of program anymore, which is good.

Krieger: Yeah.

Rhodes: So that was good. The Minority Alumni Network, which is—I'm very proud of—there was a woman that worked in the development office, her name was Yvonne Jones. And I—she was not a rich—she originally worked at Illinois Wesleyan as kind of the counselor and admissions advocate for recruiting of minority students. It was a very demanding job, and then she was going to leave that job and go somewhere, and I was talking to her, and I asked her to consider joining the development office, and heading up our Chicago office at that time, which we didn't have a Chicago office but I wanted to get a representative up there. We have a lot of—25% of our alumni base is in the Chicago area. And Yvonne agreed. And so we established an office up in Chicago, regional office, and we have another one in Phoenix.

Krieger: Phoenix, Arizona?

Rhodes: Phoenix, Arizona, because we have a vast network—another 25% of our alums are out in California or Arizona, and southwest region.

Krieger: That's interesting.

Rhodes: Yeah.

Krieger: Why do you think that is?

Rhodes: Well it's a very popular place to live, and there's a lot of growth and industry there. So California, Arizona—Arizona was our fastest growing alumni group for many years, for many decades.

Krieger: That actually makes sense because I was actually a little bit surprised by the amount of students from Arizona that go here now.

Rhodes: Well that started because of weighing the regional offices we established, and our alums got connected, and admission office got involved, and they started sending representatives out there. So it's just been a building block ever since. But Yvonne, in Chicago, we found that we weren't getting a lot of minority representation at our alumni events. Why? We didn't know. So we started talking, and we found out that the minority alums felt somewhat disconnected, that it was during the 60s they came here, and oh they got an education but they didn't really feel welcomed.

Krieger: You were saying that—

Rhodes: That was the perception.

Krieger: Yeah, you were saying that in our last interview when I asked about how the black community felt on campus. They had a good college experience, but they didn't necessarily feel in their element.

Rhodes: Right. They didn't feel as connected with the university, that the university wasn't tolerant of all the cultural aspects that they wanted to fulfill while they were here. So they felt that there was some separation. Well, I don't like that. And Yvonne and I talked, and we got a group—through her, we got a group of alums to come together, and we kind of just had a talk

about what are we going to do, and how much money it's going to take to do this, and I said don't worry about the money, we're just going to get this done. And so we started the Minority Alumni Network which was composed of Hispanic, Asians, African American, anybody who was non-Caucasian, you might say. And so we had a board, it was very successful, we had a recruiting thing, we had a social committee, we did this, and we had separate events for many things and then they felt very comfortable, very welcome. And they started joining in with the other alumni, and friend connections, that's what we call them, and it's just been a building block. And that's been going on for almost 25 years.

Krieger: So Yvonne Jones was more of an idea donor than she was—

Rhodes: Well she was a staff person, and, yes, she does have a wonderful personality, people relate to her, and she's a very capable executive-type person. She's now the executive director of the Jesse White Tumblers, which is a rather—it's a national tumbling group, headed out of Chicago. Jesse White our Secretary of State started it 40 years ago, something like that. And it's inner-school, inner-city and it's a very successful program, and she heads up that program, because they have a tutoring element, and they send students off to college after they get through and everything. So that's—

Krieger: That's a really cool thing.

Rhodes: Just to jump a little bit, I've got a list on here of some faculty members, and there's one that—Craig and Jag Malstead, which I think is a rather interesting group. They both went to Illinois Wesleyan. They were alums of the Theatre Arts, which was then called School of Drama. And we had a professor who was head of it at that time, his name was John Ficca. One day, Craig, who's my agent—called up and said that he wanted to—he and Jan had been talking and they'd been successful and everything else, but they wanted to start a scholarship fund. And they would like to start it in honor of John Ficca, which is a faculty member, and I said, that's great! And he said, but I don't think John Ficca wants it known that this scholarship fund is for him. So we just—I said, well we'll just keep it anonymous until he retires. And that kind of set a pattern for many other people. And so Craig and Jan started to fund that on an annual basis. Every year they would give several thousands of dollars. And the more it went the more they gave, so they started that, and we just had the Drama Scholarship fund. And John was the only one who knew that it was—he was it. And none of the other faculty members knew when we announced it that this was the—it was a prestigious kind of award.

Krieger: That's kind of nice.

Rhodes: It was really nice. And then when he retired we did announce it. Also, Craig and Jan started a scholarship fund for Larry Shue, who was a playwright, who wrote *The Nerd* and the *Foreigner* and some other Broadway plays, who was tragically killed in an airplane crash when he was way too young, but had gone to school with Jan and Craig too.

Krieger: Mhm.

Rhodes: And so the **Malsteads (27:37??)** do not have a scholarship in their own name. They have—and this is why I want to talk about them because they're the type of people that represent a lot of alums, who do not have scholarships in their name. But they have it in honor of somebody, a friend, a faculty member, parents, a brother or sister, something like that. But they didn't want to list their name, which I always thought was rather a nice way to do it. But at the same time we like people to have those names in their own because it helps others to know that hey, Joe did that, I can do that too.

Krieger: I appreciate how a lot of these donors are humble in their own way.

Rhodes: They really are. You picked up on that very well. That's good. That's great. And that's, I think, why I've enjoyed my job. Because they're humble, they really—you would think, gee they got a lot of money, they got a lot of ego. And they don't. They may have a lot of money, or they may not have a lot of money. But they have a lot of care for the students here at the university.

Krieger: Yeah. Well you have to. If you became that successful you clearly have a good head on your shoulders. I like to think that people with a good head on their shoulders will do the right thing with all of their success. So that's good people.

Rhodes: That's really the real essence of the philanthropy portion of my job, is they're really trying just to help other people. And then you get down to the, oh some of the crassness, well how much can we get this, and how much this, and how—and that's unnecessary evil. But you got to keep your positive focus on, you're really trying to do something nice for someone else.

Krieger: Yeah. So this is a little bit off track—

Rhodes: Yeah.

Krieger: —but what is with the head on—

Rhodes: Oh, on the Theatre Arts?

Krieger: —the theater? Because even when I toured, when I got my tour of—

Rhodes: Yeah.

Krieger: —Illinois Wesleyan, obviously, they have to approach the big head, they're not just going to ignore that as you're walking out of Ames.

Rhodes: Right.

Krieger: But they didn't really know.

Rhodes: Well, that building is kind of a nondescript building. You don't really know it's the School of Theatre Arts. Now, the Art building was the same way. And the Art building—Jay Ames said, well nobody knows it's an art building, it just looks like an old brick building over there. And we said, yes, you're right. So we have an artist, and we did kind of a national

competition, and we've selected an artist, and we built that little lobby on the side of the quad. So now you know that soon as you walk on, you know that's the Art building.

Krieger: Yeah.

Rhodes: Well the School of Theatre Arts, they did a play, and that head was one of the props in the play.

Krieger: That huge stone head.

Rhodes: The huge stone head, right. And—I'm going blank.

Krieger: By the way for anyone who's listening, we have a giant stone head on top of our theater building that is just plopped sideways and just is—I'd say it's like 10 x 10, bigger than that.

Rhodes: Yeah, it's probably 12, 15 feet.

Krieger: It's pretty large.

Rhodes: It's probably 15 feet x 15 feet. It's a big head.

Krieger: It's a very big head, considering.

Rhodes: And it's sitting on top of the portico, kind of the bridge or the main entrance to the School of Theatre Arts.

Krieger: Yeah.

Rhodes: And that was a prop. And I think that they said well, they put it out there because they wanted to emphasize the fact that they had this play, and I'm going blank on its name right now. I just thought of it a minute ago and now I can't think of it. But anyway, that was one of the things. And so they were going to take it down after the play. But everybody raved about it and so they've kind of just kept it up there, saying this is the School of Theatre Arts.

Krieger: Yeah. It definitely makes that statement.

Rhodes: Yeah, everybody knows it, so that's kind of a fun thing. It's been painted into a realistic look. And now, I think it's all white now. Yeah, so they—

Krieger: They just recently got a new one. Some hooligans pushed it off last year.

Rhodes: Oh really, I didn't know that.

Krieger: Yeah.

Rhodes: Oh, gee.

Krieger: In the middle of the night, it was all over Twitter. There were pictures all over Twitter.

Rhodes: Pranksters, huh?

Krieger: Yeah. I don't know if they got a new one or if they just repaired it and put it back.

Rhodes: Well that happened at the university's president's house. You're mentioning some pranks. When Bob and Nell Eckley came to Illinois Wesleyan, the president's house was not anything like you would expect. And so they built the current president's house in 1968, and they had an old German woodcarver who built the house as a colonial-looking house. And over most colonial doorways they have a pineapple. And the pineapple means welcome, come to our house. And that's an old colonial statement. And so it's steeped in history. Well this German woodcarver carved this pineapple that they had placed over the doorway and everything else, and I think it was members of the class of 1970, would go over there in the middle of the night, they'd take the pineapple off of the door, and then it would be gone for several months. Well, where's the pineapple, blah blah blah. And it would mysteriously appear just as it mysteriously had disappeared. And this kept going on and on. And of course the class of 1970 graduated, but it continued on for many years after that. And then one time it just disappeared and never came back.

Krieger: I'm very interested as to where it is.

Rhodes: Yeah, nobody knows which is kind of sad, because the German gentleman who had hand carved that, his handiwork is gone forever, because nobody knows, and that's been well, since the 70s, so, 50 years ago.

Krieger: I almost want to get another pineapple.

Rhodes: [Laughs] well the class, there was a--one of the sons of one of the members of the class of 1970, Chris, and he was a trumpet major, he heard about this pineapple disappearing and everything else. So when their class graduated three, four years ago, they presented at commencement time, the university, with a pineapple.

Krieger: Nice.

Rhodes: And it's a concrete pineapple but it's—and so they have it present at Commencement every time to represent that old story.

Krieger: Good.

Rhodes: And it's somewhat of a tradition.

Krieger: Yeah. That's very interesting.

Rhodes: Well there's a lot of people on this list, and I could go on and on and on about different things. But one other program that I want to mention is the Wade McCree program, just talking about the tradition or the history of Illinois Wesleyan and how we stand. We talked about recruiting in the Southwest and everything else. Part of the Minority Alumni Network, we did not have a lot of minority representation on campus. And I was in Detroit; we have an alum who's in Detroit, his name's Bob Burg. And he was the press secretary for the then mayor Paul Young, who was a somewhat controversial—not somewhat—he was a controversial mayor, but

he was for Detroit, completely for Detroit. Well Bob Burg was telling me about this Wade McCree program that the Detroit public schools have. Wade McCree was a Secretary of Labor—excuse me, maybe Secretary of Education in the Jimmy Carter administration. He was from Detroit. And what the program was, that you had a lot of students go from kindergarten through 8th grade, and then during somewhere in high school they drop out. And that's what—and when they established this program that students could apply to get into the Wade McCree program, and if they were accepted, they guaranteed that one, they would have a B average, they would take tutoring, they would have a B average, they would not be delinquent, they would go to all the required days of school, they would not have drugs that are any of the things that might be a problem, and they would graduate in four years. If they did that, then the sponsoring colleges would grant them a tuition-free college education.

Krieger: Wow.

Rhodes: So it was really—the colleges were mentoring the students for four years, and then when they graduated from high school, they could get a college degree if they were successful at the college, and you had to meet the normal requirements. Well, as soon as I heard that, I said to Bob, holy cow, that's exactly what Illinois Wesleyan would love to do. And I came back and I explained that to Minor Myers, and he said yes, we want to get involved with that. And so we met with him, and Illinois Wesleyan joined the sponsoring colleges. And it ended up that we were the only college outside of the state of Michigan. But we were the only private college. All the other sponsoring colleges were the University of Michigan, Michigan State, Grand Valley State, all the public institutions of Michigan—

Krieger: I'm sorry do we still—

Rhodes: We still participate in that program.

Krieger: Okay. That makes sense, because I work with someone from Detroit.

Rhodes: Do you?

Krieger: Yes.

Rhodes: They are getting a college degree and a college tuition. And they have to pay for room and board and all that other stuff, but this is—the university is doing this to help fulfill the dream of getting an education—

Krieger: Which everyone deserves, yeah.

Rhodes: —for that student. Now yes, we have sponsoring corporations that are paying for the tuition for that student. But they don't know that. And I don't think very many people know the names of companies that are doing that, because they also believe in this. So it's been a good program.

Krieger: I would say that Illinois Wesleyan is excellent with financial aid. And I think it's very interesting that with our—I accepted a scholarship and an alumni grant. And I thought it was

very, very cool that with my acceptance of the grant that they sent me information about where it came from.

Rhodes: That's great. I'm glad to hear that, because we've tried to get that. That has a history also. There's a woman, her name is Sally Firestone, and she lives in Kansas City, and back in 1986, '4, something like that, there was a thing called the Hyatt tea dance, and what it was, was it was a terrible disaster. 216 people were killed, and hundreds and hundreds of people were injured and so forth. Well Sally was—what had happened is in the lobby of this Hyatt hotel, they had a band, and they would perform, and people would gather in there. It was just a big gathering place for a lot of young people, and they had these walkways that crisscrossed across the lobby and everything else. Well people would stand on these lobbies or on those bridges and they'd hear the music and like anybody, they'd kind of be bouncing. Well, they fell, and they crashed, and they fell down on all these people. Sally was the worst injured survivor. All—

Krieger: Mhm. The bridges themselves collapsed?

Rhodes: Yeah, they collapsed.

Krieger: Oh my god.

Rhodes: And they fell on all these people and Sally was the worst injured survivor, and she's quadriplegic today because of that. So ever since then, she's been that way. But she established a foundation, and—because there was a settlement and everything else—but that's the type of event you could turn in and say, poor me, hey look at me, I'm terrible and everything else, I'm going to be this condition the rest of my life. But she turned outward, and so she started to establish, just like I was talking about Craig and Jan Malstead. Sally, who was a graduate of 1969, she established scholarship in honor of the church secretary—her father was a minister, Sally's father was a minister—and she established a scholarship for Mildred Miller in honor of Mildred. And I happen to—I was fortunate enough to be the one who worked with Sally on this. And so I went up and I saw Mildred in Oak Park, IL where she lived. And I knew that she'd never been to Illinois Wesleyan's campus. And the scholarship was set, and she was just thrilled that what an honor, Sally did this for me and da da da. And I realized, nobody who receives that scholarship is going to know who Mildred Miller was. And Mildred Miller's probably not going to know the students. So there was a problem. And we started at that point what we call scholarship profiles. So now, just as you were talking about, you got your award, and then you got a letter later about who this person was. So we started the scholarship profiles, which is an 8½ x 11 piece of paper. It has the picture of the name of the person that the scholarship is, has the name of the scholarship on it, and then there's some biographical information there. And we worked individually with all these different endowed scholarships that we have. And so you know that, I don't know, Mary Smith who—scholarship, there's a picture of Mary Smith, she was class of 1999, she grew up in Lincoln, IL, and she went to Illinois Wesleyan and she became a great composer, blah blah blah. Something about her. So there you have that connector. And now we have over 400 of those scholarship profiles, all developed, and we just published our first book on that called Volume 1, which will list all the endowed scholarships. That way the students will know it's just a connector.

Krieger: I think—

Rhodes: I'm a little longwinded on this but I'm really excited about that, because it's forever and ever—

[Krieger laughs]

Rhodes: —you're going to have that connection between—there's the Mildred Miller's of the world, and the students will know who she was.

Krieger: Yeah. And honestly, knowing these stories, knowing where the foundation of your education and your opportunity comes from, I'm sure that after I graduate if I become a very prosperous person that I'll want to turn around and do the same thing.

Rhodes: Well even if you don't become prosperous, if you send in five dollars. You're going to help in some way. And hopefully the person at the office, whoever is doing those gifts, will send you a personal thank you. And you'll get to know a little bit.

Krieger: That's very cool.

Rhodes: So you know you're helping.

Krieger: That's one thing that Wesleyan just has, is just this huge sense of community and support and care about not only the people you go to school with, but the faculty and the people who are going to be here after us, everybody—the students run the admissions office. It's just very, very interesting. It's cool.

Rhodes: You're speaking right to me.

[Krieger laughs]

Rhodes: I'm so happy to hear you say that. That's wonderful. That's kind of why I want to work here too. Because I think it's a personal education. People are involved and they care for each other.

Krieger: Yeah. I'm not supposed to talk too much about myself but I just have to share.

Rhodes: Yeah.

Krieger: I called my mom one day, and I told her that college is really hard, that my classes are getting very, very difficult, and—

Rhodes: That's good, that's good.

Krieger: [Laughs] and she said that college isn't necessarily about learning what you're learning. It's not necessarily about political science or biology or anything like that, but it's learning how to learn. Learning how to live your life.

Rhodes: You have a very smart mother.

Krieger: I have a very smart mom, yes I do.

Rhodes: Yeah. She's very—she got it. She understands it.

[Krieger laughs]

Rhodes: And the reason I say that is because I think a lot of people now going to college, they don't understand it. They think it's to get a job. And it's not. It's just as your mother said. It's how you learn, and you're going to be a learner the rest of your life then. Because you're approaching it the right way.

Krieger: I think so. I'll thank her for it. But we'll stop talking about me.

Rhodes: That's great.

Krieger: How about Harriett Rust? I'm assuming—

Rhodes: Oh Harriett Rust—

Krieger: —that's for Harriett Hall.

Rhodes: —Harriett Rust House. She was the wife of Edward B. Rust, and they were high school sweethearts, grew up in Bloomington, and he went to Stanford, and she wanted to go out to USC, but her father who was a doctor, Dr. Fuller, would not let her. He said, you have to go to University of Illinois. So she went to the University of Illinois for one year and she came home and said, well Dad, I've done that, I want to go to University of Southern California. And so her father said okay, you can do that. Now think about it, that was back in the 1930s, and you had two people from Bloomington, IL, one went to Stanford, California, pretty far away, and the other one, the girl, Harriett, went to southern California, and that was days and days of traveling to get out there. So that was pretty adventurous, but Harriett and Mr. Rust, Ed Rust, they continued boyfriend, girlfriend, and they eventually got married at Bloomington Country Club in the Rafters Room, and then they had three children. And Edward B. Rust Jr. is now the president of State Farm Insurance Company.

Krieger: Oh wow.

Rhodes: Yeah. And that's Ed Rust, was the president. His father, Adlai Rust, was a law graduate from Illinois Wesleyan University. So that'd be current Ed's grandfather, was a graduate of Illinois Wesleyan. He started the—Adlai Rust started the Wesleyan Associates, which is another thing I have on here, which is all the businessmen and community leaders of Bloomington-Normal, kind of got around the local college and started to support it, but that's another story. So Harriett Rust has always been involved, and when Bob and Nell Eckley, their administration, when they came here to the university, Bob Eckley and Ed Rust became good friends, and Harriett and Nell became very good friends, and even though they were not graduates of Illinois Wesleyan, they were very—the Rusts—they were very involved with Illinois Wesleyan. They knew Jack Horenberger, who was Horenberger Field, and a great, great—

Krieger: I was going to say, that sounds familiar.

Rhodes: Yeah, Horenberger baseball field. Jack Horenberger, you could write a whole book just about him and all the wonderful things he did. But, Harriett was always involved. So, Mr. Rust got ill, and he passed away. And they had gone to many—they went to Scripps and everything else but it was kind of an illness that it was just not curable. And he died, and Harriett—which I had known, I grew up a half a block away from them—asked her if she would consider being the Chairman of the President’s Club, which was \$1,000 and more type of thing. At that time we had 120-125 members, which was quite a few. And that would be 1986. And she said, well, yeah she would do it. So we had a board of volunteers and everything else. Well we grew, through Harriett’s effort, over 900 members in the President’s Club, which was over \$1,000,000 a year for scholarships and everything else. But she was just a natural. She just cared about people, she used to hire students to come out and work on her property because they had farmland, and she would have lunches with the students. She supported students with personal scholarships, and we would have lunches, and she’d just talk about the students and everything else. You would never know that she was the wife of the eleventh largest company in the United States.

Krieger: Yeah, she just carried herself so well?

Rhodes: She was a natural. Oh, just wonderful. And all the students loved her. And the faculty, they appreciated her so much, and of course she became an honorary trustee, and she was always thinking, what can we do for Illinois Wesleyan? Then Minor, we were building a new residence hall, which was for us a brand new—It was kind of a—I call it an Embassy Suites type of thing? Because it has the bedrooms and a common living room and everything else. We were going to name that and Harriett was—she got sick herself, ill. And it was a terminal type of illness. So she was at a board meeting, and we’d just had the— building was just opening up, and Minor was able to announce the university was naming it the Harriett Fuller Rust House. It’s the very first time I have ever seen Harriett Rust speechless. She was just shocked. And she never got to actually see the building. She died just before it was finished. But they did get the name inscribed on it in the outside on the portico in the stone, Harriett Fuller Rust House. And I went over to her house, and I went in and I showed her the picture of it, and she was just thrilled. She was just—tears of happiness. And it was great. She was an original. She was just the kind of person if you met her, you certainly remembered Harriett Rust. Great gal. And so the whole Rust family’s been very good with Illinois Wesleyan.

Krieger: I was going to say, beyond Harriett Hall then , now we have State Farm Hall which makes sense because—

Rhodes: Yeah.

Krieger: Wow. That’s—

Rhodes: Yeah. State Farm Hall, State Farm had provided the major funding to start that whole project, and they have had such a strong impact upon the success of Illinois Wesleyan for scholarships, for professorships, for operational funds and everything else, and the trustees wanted to name it, but we talked to State Farm. We asked them, would you allow us to name it? Because they keep a very low profile.

Krieger: State Farm?

Rhodes: State Farm. They've done a lot of things but a lot of people don't know what they've done. Because they are not, oh, look at us, we're wonderful. They're doing things just because they're right. And so they had a long time to think about it, and they did agree that, okay, we could. And so then, now we have State Farm Hall, which is great.

Krieger: You know, that's very interesting because last year, when State Farm Hall opened—or was that this year?

Rhodes: It just opened this August.

Krieger: Oh my goodness, that feels like so long ago.

[Rhodes laughs]

Krieger: There was a lot of commotion about naming it State Farm Hall. Everybody who had a political opinion on Facebook, there were the really, really intelligent people who like to have their voice heard that's—

Rhodes: Right.

Krieger: —really opinionated.

[Rhodes chuckles]

Krieger: Sorry.

Rhodes: Yeah.

Krieger: But, a lot of people were kind of upset that it was named State Farm Hall, seeing as a lot of our other buildings have—

Rhodes: Individual names.

Krieger: Yeah.

Rhodes: Mhm.

Krieger: And I like that.

Rhodes: Well, it was absolutely—you have Presser Hall, which was named for Presser Foundation, that's the School of Music. You have a lot—but most of the other buildings have traditionally been individual donors, such as the Ames Library—

Krieger: Uh huh.

Rhodes: —named after the Ames family. And I think that got polarized, because it was a corporate name, going on.

Krieger: Yeah.

Rhodes: Well it's not going to—because there's not going to be any undue influence there or anything else like that. It's really in appreciation for everything that Illinois Wesleyan has done. And the trustees and the administration were adamant about it. This is the name to be. And it's worked out wonderful. I think all of that original was Twitter, back and forth, was just a good way to express themselves. That's good.

[Krieger chuckles]

Rhodes: But the real truth is, without State Farm, we probably wouldn't be here, quite honestly.

Krieger: Yeah.

Rhodes: We had some very tough times. I'm talking about all the good times.

Krieger: Yeah.

Rhodes: But economically—

Krieger: Illinois Wesleyan had some poor economic times?

Rhodes: Oh geez, just yeah. We didn't have sidewalks! This campus didn't have any sidewalks, couldn't afford them.

Krieger: When was that?

Rhodes: Oh back in the 30s, the 40s, the 50s, it was a poor little school.

Krieger: Really!

Rhodes: Really. [Chuckles]

Krieger: That's interesting.

Rhodes: What you see now is—

Krieger: Revolutionized.

Rhodes: It is.

Krieger: Completely different.

Rhodes: We had buildings that there was a fire in. We couldn't build a new building because they didn't have enough money. So we used the old building that had the fire in it. It was—

Krieger: Was Illinois Wesleyan equally as prestigious as it's considered now, despite being economically deficient?

Rhodes: No, it was not. It was a good school. It was not as prestigious as it is today. Of course we didn't have rankings back then or anything else. But it was known that it had some good schools. It was a United Methodist Church school, the way a lot of people looked at it. And now it's just emerged over the years, strong financially, it's a beautiful campus, and that was Bob and

Nell Eckley, they started a beautification program, because we had the [Dutch] Elm disease come and knocked out 200-some trees on campus.

Krieger: The elm disease?

Rhodes: Yeah, back in the 50s. So this was a very stark looking kind of place.

Krieger: Yeah. Isn't there something particularly interesting about our trees on campus?

Rhodes: Well, we have so many different varieties of trees now.

Krieger: That's what it is, yeah.

Rhodes: We're kind of like an arboretum. Such great—and it really is, and that was—Bob and Nell Eckley had an alum, Nelva Sammataro came, and she redesigned the campus, so we had different varieties of trees and everything else, and developed the pattern of sidewalks with the big circles in there. That was back in the 70s. And so we had a beautification program, so that started from the ground up, so to say.

Krieger: Was she an artistic type of person?

Rhodes: Very much so. She was a landscape architect out in the East coast. And she would come here every summer, she would look at the way people walked, and where they were walking, and looked at our campus, and we had the big quad, which is now called the Eckley quad, instead of just having sidewalks that crisscrossed everything else, we had this green space with a strolling walkway.

Krieger: Yeah. And I will say it adds to our little sense of community as well because people aren't just walking—that's surprisingly interesting. People aren't just walking the same way every single day, they're taking different paths, they're seeing different people.

Rhodes: That's true.

Krieger: That's pretty cool.

Rhodes: Yeah.

Krieger: She thought that out. She did a good job with that.

Rhodes: It's very well laid out, and I know that Bob Eckley wanted to make sure we didn't have too much concrete.

Krieger: Mhm.

Rhodes: So there would be a lot of areas that people would walk across and maybe make it their pathway. Well, instead of putting concrete there, there might be a tree that would be an obstruction. And so instead of walking around the tree, people walked on the sidewalk because it was a lot easier. So that's one of the beautification marks too.

Krieger: Yeah. That's very cool.

Rhodes: Yeah, it worked out well.

Krieger: One thing I was going to mention, I never realized how, you mentioned in our last interview how kids would come to Hansen now or the athletic facility.

Rhodes: Mhm, little kids.

Krieger: Yeah. Wesleyan is so community-oriented, and I never realized—

Rhodes: Yes it is.

Krieger: —Harriett was your neighbor from Bloomington. You're from Bloomington.

Rhodes: Yeah. It was just—you grew up with these national figures. They really were.

Krieger: That's wild.

Rhodes: And Bloomington was good that way. It was a small town, but it was 30-40,000 people. I've got a lot of names on here, Professors Harrington, Beadles, Horenberger, and so forth. And the professors really cared, and they were part of the community too. Not just teaching a class and that was it, and having office hours. They'd be involved in everything, and they would be here during the summertime we had summer school back then, and we had plays in the summertime. So the community, culturally, really was advanced because of Illinois Wesleyan. With all the summer plays—we had three plays during the summertime, bing, bing, bing, one right after the other. We had concerts, we had music camps, we had so much activity going on. And that's because the professors wanted to be part of the community, this is where they live. A lot of them grew up or had attended the—they were alums, and so forth.

Krieger: That's very interesting.

Rhodes: Yeah.

Krieger: Actually, something completely not related to donors, I wanted to ask you if there were any major musical or recreational events at Wesleyan that just blew your mind when you were in college.

Rhodes: Well we had—that's a good question. And you always—you got good questions. We had a fine arts festival. And Dennis Brown, who's a writer, and teaches down at—he was in California and now he's in St. Louis, which is where his home was, he moved back there, and he teaches at Webster College and Washington U, he teaches film class and everything else. But he's a writer, and he's a critic. But when he was here, as an undergraduate, did the fine arts festival, which would run all week, had plays and music concerts and everything during the spring. It was just the liberal arts education. We had a course called humanities, which was—you took it for first semester and second semester for four hours or eight hours. And you had to pass it to graduate. It was the best course, because it brought in all the arts, it brought in the literature, it brought in religion, it brought in English composition. It really culminated and showed you what a liberal arts education really is. And so the fine arts festival was part of that as well. It just

kind of jumped off, and it was wonderful. And then we had special concerts. There was—you're going to laugh, but...Johnny Mathis was here, down in the old gymnasium.

Krieger: Really.

Rhodes: At that time they had the ball with the mirrors on it. That was all brand new to us.

Krieger: Really.

Rhodes: It was really, ooh, wow, this is something.

[Krieger chuckles]

Rhodes: You think back, gee. But they had, as we mentioned, Martin Luther King was here. We had national figures that came to this campus back in the 60s, 70s.

Krieger: That's incredible to think, because 40 years later we didn't have sidewalks and then Martin Luther King is coming to Wesleyan.

Rhodes: Yeah. It's—

Krieger: That is incredible.

Rhodes: —quite a bit. This is truly a fine college for the education. And people happen to get jobs after they're educated.

Krieger: Right. [Laughs]

Rhodes: But, they're truly educated here.

Krieger: Okay well—

Rhodes: Very good.

Krieger: I think this is where we're going to stop.

Rhodes: Great.

Krieger: —for today.

Rhodes: Good, good.

Krieger: But thank you so much.

Rhodes: Thank you again. It was great.