



Winter 3-4-2017

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IWU Council for Women
Illinois Wesleyan University

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Recommended Citation

IWU Council for Women, "Adriane Powell and Jessica Olsen" (2017). *All oral histories*. 77.
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Council for IWU Womens Summit 2017: Adriane Powell and Jessica Olsen

ADRIANE POWELL: So, it is Friday March 3rd, 2017 and this is Adriane Powell. Um, I am the Director of Alumni Relations.

JESSICA OLSEN: And, I am Jess Olsen...class of 2008.

POWELL: Okay. So, what question do you want? [laughter]

OLSEN: Uh, let's see.

POWELL: [laughter]

OLSEN: Hmm...hmmm...hmm. I will take two of them combined, how's that?

POWELL: Okay.

OLSEN: Uh, what are you proudest of and who has been the most important woman in your life? Um, without a doubt, first and foremost my mom...followed closely by my sister and my grandma. And, they have enabled me to answer that first question of what are you proudest of. And, that is, I would say...most of all... that I am incredibly independent and can take care of myself. And, I think that is something that has been something instilled in me by my mom, and my grandma, and encouraged certainly by my sister. And, I think that is something that I hold very dear, that I can take care of myself...that I have a life...a full life of my own...that I can be proud of...but that I always have my family to come back to. So, I think that those...those three in particular...like I said...have been the most important to me and make me proud of the person that I am.

POWELL: Very cool.

OLSEN: Yeah.

POWELL: Okay.

OLSEN: What about you? What's something...?

POWELL: [long pause]. Okay, I'll go with this third question...which was...what was one example, during your high school years—or growing up years—when you started to feel like you can be *you* out-loud? And, what was one of your most challenging experiences during your high school time? And so...when I...I came from a small town...we had five-hundred students total in our high school. And, I have an older sister and she planned to graduate early...6 months...or just a semester early. She had done all of the work and was ready to leave high school. She felt that she got the most out of her high school experience...that she wanted...so she graduated a semester early and then went on to college after that...and I saw her do that and decided that was something that I wanted to do as well. And so I worked through...you know...high school and tried to...you know...take care of all of my requirements ahead of time and then when I was a junior...the school board changed the rule that students were not allowed to graduate early. And so, I talked to my mom and she talked to the office...at the school...and they said that she and I

could come to the school board meeting and appeal the decision and get special consideration to graduate early. And, so it was me and another female student, who went to the school board. I was not an out-spoken student. I was an introvert. And so...but I had to get up in front of the school board and explain to them why I wanted to graduate early...and their...the reason why they wanted me to stay was because they thought that it would...that I would be lacking of the social experiences out of that last semester of high school. And so...but I will say having to get up in front of that was very scary and it was scary for my mom as well. But we did it and they did allow me to graduate early but...as a punishment...I could not walk with the class in May at graduation. And so, instead, I went to Kenya with my father. [Laughter]

OLSEN: Oh...wow. [Laughter]

POWELL: [Laughter] And I had always laughed about that...about how I really wasn't missing out on the social experiences and...

OLSEN: Right...when you had that experience...

POWELL: Yeah.

OLSEN: [mumbles 4:44)

POWELL: And since you know...and then...because of that trip and because of other trips...travel has been a huge passion of mine...so it is funny how that all came about.

OLSEN: Works out perfectly. [Laughter]

POWELL: [Laughter].It did.

OLSEN: Well, should we pick another question?

POWELL: Yeah, yeah.

OLSEN: I just don't know if I think we should...let's see.

POWELL: Why don't I...how about you answer, "What do you hope your future holds?"

OLSEN: I hope it...I mean ultimately it is such cliché but I hope that it holds happiness...

POWELL: Mhm.

OLSEN: I hope that it has that same kind of happiness for the people that I care most about. I hope that I...again kind of cliché...can make a difference in some way. I go back and forth on whether or not that I would like to stay in the classroom.

POWELL: Yeah.

OLSEN: It has almost been ten years, and I enjoy it. But, I also think sometimes that maybe I could be doing something more...somewhere else. So, I guess that kind of...you know... career fulfillment...personal fulfillment...

POWELL: And what kinds of things sound interesting to you outside of the classroom?

OLSEN: Sometimes teaching on a different level...teaching at the college level. I think I would like to work at a college or university. I think that is more suited to the kind of person I am...

POWELL: Mhm...

OLSEN: Even though I think I do well with high school. Sometimes I think outside of that...some...some kind of helping profession...there is no doubt about that. But, I thought about social work...I thought about something that may have a more direct impact and yet I see when I am working with my students that there is an impact there...so it is hard to give that up...but I think ultimately I do not have a five-year plan or a ten-year plan...I just have a "as-life-comes," and "go-with-it" kind of plan...and I think that's okay...but I definitely want to travel certainly...spend time with my family...spend time with my friends...that's what I think is most important to me...moving forward...but professionally there is a lot that I still have to think about...

POWELL: Mhm...

OLSEN: And I think...hopefully it will work it out...work itself out as it should but I just kind of have to see how that goes.

POWELL: Yeah, I think that...there's definitely opportunities now that didn't seem...not that they didn't exist but they weren't as common...and that is people changing careers...

OLSEN: Sure.

POWELL: And, uh...so it seems like...you know...in the past us people figured out what we wanted to do...and pretty much stuck with that through their entire career.

OLSEN: Right.

POWELL: Now we live longer, and there's opportunities to do...

OLSEN: Right...and the world changes so much...

POWELL: Mhm...

OLSEN: You know...I think they say that...you know top ten jobs ten years from now do not even exist in today's world.

POWELL: Right.

OLSEN: You know...they say something like that...so...

POWELL: Right.

OLSEN: I have told my students that that world is changing so much...

POWELL: Yeah.

OLSEN: ...you have to be ready to adapt and go with that...

POWELL: Yeah.

OLSEN: So, what about you? Future...what does it look like?

POWELL: Uh...oh gosh. Um...well I am fifty-three years old and so hopefully I will be able to retire...you know...at some point. Um...and I feel like I've...uh...it's been interesting because I've had lots of different careers and kind of life changes and life experiences. I was a stay-at-home mom. I was a travel agent. I was a non-traditional student. I have travelled a lot. I worked mostly in education...in the last ten years...but in different roles...and I really...really enjoy working on a college campus...there's something about that...that really appeals to me...and I think it is kind of in-bred because my father was a professor and so...

OLSEN: [Laughter].

POWELL: It feels familiar to me...but...um...you know...I've been trying to plan ahead financially...so that ten years from now...if I want to retire...I won't have a house payment and those kinds of things. So...um...you know...just kind of trying to set myself up and...you know...for the future...but also try to...kind of...appreciate...you know...the path that I'm on right now.

OLSEN: Mhm...

POWELL: So there is a definite balance for that...so...

OLSEN: Sure. [Laughter].

POWELL: [Laughter]. Alright. What uh...what traditions have been passed down to you?

OLSEN: [Laughter]. There are a lot in my family...small things...and when I share it with people...I get a lot of "oh that's so cute..."

POWELL: Mm...

OLSEN: ...that's so great that your family does that...so...things like that I think will continue. Simple things like spending holidays together...things like that...and within those...there are traditions that I really value. Every year at Christmas, for example, before we open presents...uh...everyone sings the "Twelve Days of Christmas" corresponding to their birthday month. So...you know... the January person has to sing the partridge in a pear tree...

POWELL: Oh, okay! Gotcha.

OLSEN: You know...all the way up through...you know one and then you go back.

POWELL: Yeah.

OLSEN: You know...throughout the whole song.

POWELL: Wow.

OLSEN: And so...as we have added new people...you know...people have gotten married and the kids in the family and whatever...that adds to it and that's something that I think is really special. And every year...on birthdays...because we still get together for birthdays...you sing

happy birthday and how old are you...and the person sings back...and then you clap out their age. [Clapping].

POWELL: Oh...

OLSEN: ...and a pinch to grow an inch at the end...

POWELL: Oh, okay.

OLSEN: And that's always...even all the way up to my grandpa's 90th birthday.

POWELL: Oh my gosh...

OLSEN: Clapping out ninety times to the littlest one who just turned one last month...so that's a neat tradition. And so...my grandparents call everyone in the family on their birthday and leave a voicemail or live...my grandpa sings happy birthday and my grandma plays it on the piano.

POWELL: Oh...wow.

OLSEN: So, those are voicemails I have saved on my phone.

POLWELL: I have those voicemails too! [Laughter].

OLSEN: You will never be able to get rid of...

POWELL: Never. Never. Yeah, we have that same tradition...um...and it wasn't always the tradition. I don't even quite know when it started...you know...I think I was an adult when it started...but I have all of those if you look at...all of those...the voicemails that I have saved...pretty much all of them are on July 17th...you know...because they are my family singing to me happy birthday. Um...we on Christmas...um...we take turns opening our presents because we do uh...we do uh draw for gifts and so each person uh basically gets one gift and so uh...we start uh...we start with the youngest and go to the oldest. And so that's a good one...um...we always get together on the evening of Christmas day. And I that that's...that's pretty much all I can think of as far as it comes to family traditions.

OLSEN: Mhm...

POWELL: Yeah, just all of the birthdays and Christmases...

OSLEN. Yeah-yeah. And that is what makes holidays so special...

POWELL: Yeah.

OLSEN: To have those...you know...it's obviously not about the presents or anything.

POWELL: Exactly.

OLSEN ...it's those little things that you look forward to...

POWELL: Exactly. Yeah-yeah.

OLSEN: ...and kind of creating your own...you know...things that I do...

POWELL: Mhm...

OLSEN: ...with friends now...

POWELL: Mhm...

OLSEN: ...that are like family. That adds another type of component to the tradition...

POWELL: Exactly.

OLSEN: Those are fun.

POWELL: Yeah.

OLSEN: That makes...I don't know...makes life more fun to have those.

POWELL: Yeah.

OLSEN: So...what else?

POWELL: Well, let's talk about Illinois Wesleyan. What for you...this is not on this list...um...but what are...some of your like...your...I don't know...maybe your favorite memory here at Illinois Wesleyan...or...uh...a particular challenge.

OLSEN: Sure. I-It's hard to think back on those four years and I have so many things that I can say...

POWELL: Mhm...

OLSEN: I will tie it into today...um...here with two friends...that we drove down together and we are thirteen years removed from meeting in our freshman year dorm.

POWELL: Wow.

OLSEN: So, we all lived on the same floor in Dolan...third floor in Dolan...2004...moved in...in August. Abbie lived next door to me and Kelly lived a couple doors down and we get together once a month for book club and we carpoled down here and talk regularly and that to me is something that is really special. And then I can add other people...outside of Women's Council...freshman year...

POWELL: Yeah.

OLSEN: ...my roommate for the last three years of college...met her freshman year in my dorms...still one of my best friends...another friend down the hall...and you know...those are the things that I really cherish about my time here. I would say...academically...I love that I got to do a little bit of everything. I came in knowing that I wanted to teach English in Secondary Ed—and I tested out of German and I thought...okay I'm done with that and then I thought well no I should minor in that...and that led me to do my Fulbright in Germany for a year to teach English and then that has obviously led into my teaching career...and so I felt that I just had so many opportunities...and I stayed busy because that's what I like to do...but I got to volunteer...I got to be in different schools in the community...um...I got to do anything that I

would have wanted to do and that's such an empowering feeling and has also helped me become...as I said earlier...the independent person that I am now. So, I-I don't ever know if I could pick one favorite memory or one favorite class...

POWELL: Right.

OLSEN: ...or anything like that...but it's just a fondness that I have for this place and not everyone has that. Plenty of friends who oh-yeah, "I got my undergrad over with," or you know the, "I will never go back there." And, here I am...eager to go back once or twice a year. A lot of it has to do with the people but it is also just the feeling of the place...

POWELL: Yeah...

OLSEN: And what it means. Yeah so...what about you? Favorite Wesleyan...

POWELL: Oh gosh...um...I mean there's a lot. Um, actually one of the ones that I think kind of for me...as someone who works here...kind of exemplifies my experience here...and why I...you know...I don't see myself leaving. Um...is...um...guess...uh...just short of my first year here...uh...I have gotten to know the Director of Wellness...because I took the exercise classes at noon...and um...that's back when um...flash mobs were a big thing...

OLSEN: Okay...

POWELL: And so she told me that they were going to put together a flash mob at the Christmas party...and would I want to be a part of it...and I said absolutely...and I didn't know very many people on campus just yet...but I thought well this is a way for me to know more people and so for about six weeks before the Christmas party...a group of us got together...you know...top-secret and practiced this dance...so that we would be ready for this flash mob Christmas party. And...just you know...that experience of practicing and getting to know these people and you know it was a mixture of faculty and staff and you know...from all different factions...and um even the President Wilson and his wife Pat Wilson got involved...

OLSEN: [Laughter].

POWELL: ...which was so much fun...and so we had it all planned out and ready to go...and at the Christmas party...as he always did...President Wilson got up to give a toast and um you know started to say his usual spiel about how thankful he was for all of us and then the music started...and you know he faked the you know surprise look...like he didn't know what was happening and-and people started to you know coming out of the wood work and started...and went up to the front of the room and started dancing, and you know there were just layers upon layers of people and everywhere you looked there was a person that you would be surprised was involved like Mike Welsh from Sodexo...

OLSEN: [Laughter].

POWELL: ...and Steve Seibring from advancement and Frank Boyd...the Assistant Provost...and uh...you know...all sorts of different people that you never would have expected. And then about half-way through, Dick and Pat jumped in...

OLSEN: [Laughter].

POWELL: ...and that...then everyone went crazy...

OLSEN: [Laughter].

POWELL: [Laughter].

OLSEN: I can imagine that...I can. I can.

POWELL: And, I have to say...that was probably the most fun thing that I have ever done. You know...just the element of surprise and the lightheartedness of it. It was just a really neat way to get to know people on campus.

OLSEN: Yeah.

POWELL: ...and have some fun...

OLSEN: It speaks to the community.

POWELL: It does...

OLSEN: ...which exists here...

POWELL: It does. Yeah, and I have to say that...coming from a larger university...um...you know...-It warms my heart every year...you know...the Christmas party or other different events that we have...that I can look around the room and say that I just about know everybody at some level or another...and so that is what makes me think I understand that this is an important place for alumni and students too.

OLSEN: Definitely.

POWELL: It does feel very much like a family...

OLSEN: Mhm...and it becomes a second home...

POWELL: Yes.

OLSEN: you know...which is how it... hopefully would feel...not like you're away from home...just at a new home...

POWELL: Yeah. And I uh...just live two blocks away from campus...and you know...every day I will walk to the office and run into the grounds people...

OLSEN: Mhm...

POWELL: And, you know I'll stop and talk with them and you know you run into so many on campus and just have a quick conversation...

OLSEN: Yeah.

POWELL: ...It's in the environment...

OLSEN: Definitely.

POWELL: Yeah.

OLSEN: Well...

POWELL: Want to do one more?

OLSEN: One more? Sure. I'm trying to think [Laughter]. Let's see. I feel like we have talked about some of these...

POWELL: Mhm...

OLSEN: ...indirectly already...

POWELL: Yes...

OLSEN: ...but...

POWELL: I know.

OLSEN: Think of...maybe...I mean think about the people that have been kindest to you in your life. Um...first person I think of is my grandpa. Like I said, he just turned ninety last year...

POWELL: Yeah...

OLSEN: And he is the kindest, gentlest, most patient person I have ever known...and um... he does little things that just...I don't know...always [laughter] make me tear up...

POWELL: Aw...

OLSEN: Oh, yeah. [Laughter]. Um...just little things...like uh...he's a Bears fan and I'm a Packers fan...and after the Packers played in the play-offs earlier this year...he called me...

POWELL: Aw...

OLSEN: ...and just my grandpa getting on the phone and dialing...

POWELL: Yeah...

OLSEN: ...my cellphone number...and calling me...um...and he just said, "oh, kiddo what a game."

POWELL: Aw...

OLSEN: And he would just follow me up on that...or he was the first person that I wanted to talk to when the Cubs were playing this year.

POWELL: Mhm...

OLSEN: And um...I went to a World Series game...which was incredible that I got to go...

POWELL: Yes...

OLSEN: Wanted to be able to take him, but it just wasn't possible...and I called him you know as I said in our seats and said, "We are at the game." And, just...

POWELL: Aw...

OLSEN: ...the excitement that he had...and he is just always...he is just...I don't know...he just loves people...

POWELL: Yeah.

OLSEN: ...so much...

POWELL: Aw...

OLSEN: [Laughter]. Sorry!

POWELL: No... [Laughter].

OLSEN: Oh, so...

POWELL: Yeah...that's amazing that you have somebody like that in your life.

OLSEN: [Laughter].

POWELL: Yeah.

OLSEN: Oh my goodness...so...yeah that is the first person that I think of with that question.

POWELL: Yeah.

OLSEN: So, what about you? Who comes to mind as...?

POWELL: The kindest person...um...actually as far as the kindest...the one that I am in contact a lot is...um...is our office coordinator. Brenda Milcik...and she is...you know... the one you know...when people come into her office...she's the first person that they'll see and um...she's just...the way she cares about every person...

OLSEN: Yeah.

POWELL: ...and you know goes...you know the extra step to listen...a lot...sometimes alumni will come in the office...you know...for...with a question...or you know if they want to drop off some yearbooks...because they want to look somebody up that they haven't seen in a while...And she's very patient with everyone that comes in and is very willing to take the time to listen to their story and understands the importance of telling that story.

OLSEN: Yeah...

POWELL: ...and then...you know...tries to look for ways to um connect that to the present things that are happening on campus and she's just...you know...pure kindness...you know...that's like the first...

OLSEN: The first thing...

POWELL: ...the first thing that you can think of.

OLSEN: Yeah.

POWELL: Yeah-yeah.

POWELL: She's the one that I get to see every day...you know...

OLSEN: Mhm...

POWELL: So, it's neat to be able to work with her.

OLSEN: Yeah, it's nice to be around someone like that.

POWELL: Yeah!

OLSEN: [Laughter].

POWELL: Absolutely. Absolutely. Okay.

OLSEN: Well, shall we?

POWELL: Alright...so...we are at the Council for Women's Summit...raise your voice...this is Jess Olsen and Adriane Powell. We're out.

OLSEN: [Laughter].

