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Carol Churukian

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Oral History Interview: Carol Churukian

Meg Miner: Good morning!

Carol Churukian: Good morning! How are you?

Miner: [chuckles] I am very well, thank you. Uh today is April 8th 2016, and this is Meg Miner. I am the archivist at Illinois Wesleyan, and I am working on a sabbatical project. Umm looking at Minor Myers and his influences on campus. Umm my particular interest is in his umm activities as a collector, and how some of those threads may-may connect a-across the different roles that he played umm and the people that he interacted with. Uh but also a-a lot of these conversations are including other details of uh Minor and his influences, so umm – so having good time talking ab-people from different parts of campus, and with me today is – please introduce yourself.

Churukian: My name is Carol Churukian. I am the spouse of a retired education professor. I was employed by Wesleyan to be a staff accompanist, and I stayed in that position which is part-time for twenty years.

Miner: When did that start?

Churukian: Uh 1992.

Miner: Okay... Right.

Churukian: And that was just about at the time that George was... uhh leaving the university.

Miner: So, you work here a lot longer in the area-a lot longer before that.

Churukian: Yes, when we came umm I... earned my master's degree at ISU in order to be employable... if-if... a job opportunity came up that might-that might enhance my application. But I taught piano students at home, and I had about 25 at home. That doesn't-that sounds like a lot but really isn't because there are some who have 50, and I don't know they do that.

Miner: Oh my goodness!

Churukian: I just taught... for afternoons and maybe make-makeup lessons on Friday. And my-I kept my hands open. Also, I am a church organist, and uh that takes a lot more time than people realize.

[Miner laughs]

Churukian: But I prefer the liturgical churches because it's more demanding on... the individual, and it's important to be able to know all different types of liturgy, and... many other Protestant churches don't require that.

Miner: Hmmm. So, where do you-where are you-

Churukian: Well, now I am a substitute. I have decided after many years of being available on weekends –

[laughter]

Churukian: - and [clears throat] didn't fit into our... s-s – travel schedules so easily.

Miner: Sure. Yeah. Yeah.

Churukian: So, I play wherever I am needed, and umm right now, the-the place that needs me is the Christian Science Church. But I just got a call a couple of days ago to do a substitute Sunday at First Christian Church. So, they are mostly l-local churches, although I have played in Peoria.

Miner: Huh.

Churukian: [chuckles] And uh Lincoln, and Clinton, but I prefer staying locally.

Miner: Oh, I was gonna say. Yeah.

Churukian: Yeah.

Miner: It's quite a drive.

Churukian: Yeah. Especially in the snow.

Miner: Yeah.

Churukian: The last time I was in Peoria; it was the week before there are a big tornado that went through.

[Miner gasps]

Churukian: And I would have been on that road if I had been there that Sunday.

Miner: Oh dear. Oh my goodness.

Churukian: But I have enjoyed my work, and I have enjoyed working with different people. I prefer to work with people; I don't like to do solo work.

Miner: Hmmm. Uh-huh. The students that you teach at your home; are they from anywhere in the community? Are they Wesleyan Students? Are they-

Churukian: Anywhere.

Miner: Anywhere.

Churukian: Anywhere, and they ranged from maybe seven years old through adults.

Miner: And you took your master's at ISU right before 1992 then?

Churukian: In-

Miner: Or?

Churukian: In 78.

Miner: Oh, okay.

Churukian: 78. Soon after we came.

Miner: Okay, and master's at uh music ed?

Churukian: It was in piano performance.

Miner: Oh.

Churukian: With emphasis on umm ensemble work.

Miner: Wow. Okay. So umm when you got then the part-time position at Wesleyan, what did that entail?

Churukian: At first it was supposed to include teaching the minors, which means students that have to take piano... to complete their degree, they may have been a voice major or an instrumental major, but they needed to have a couple of years of piano as well. And I was to teach some of those, and also umm there-there are students... who sign up for piano as part of their music requirement... liberal arts students, and they were the hardest working ones.

Miner: Is that right?

Churukian: [chuckles] Yes.

Miner: How interesting.

Churukian: But that was what I was supposed to do at first along with some accompany, but it flip flopped almost right away.

Miner: Huh.

Churukian: Because the person who was heading; the accompanying division... decided to pull back. And so, suddenly I was in charge of the accompanists.

Miner: Oh my, was that agreeable to you?

Churukian: It was agreeable as long as other faculty were cooperative. The students from studios... whose teachers did not want their students to spend time accompanying... they just wanted them-them to do solo work.

Miner: Oh dear!

Churukian: Yes. Those-those students were a l-difficult to work with because they didn't always prepare properly.

Miner: Because they weren't getting emphasized from-

Churukian: From their-

Miner: Mentors.

Churukian: Yes. Yes.

Miner: Or their teachers. Wow... Huh.

Churukian: So, after four years of that, I decided I was enjoying the one on one with students and with- and with the faculty, too because they did a good number of recitals with faculty.

Miner: Yeah.

Churukian: I enjoyed that... a lot more than wrestling with [laughs] somebody's opinions or faculty.

Miner: Sure. And you had a choice.

Churukian: I did.

Miner: Yeah.

Churukian: I did-

Miner: Yeah, right.

Churukian: Sure that, and unfortunately somebody came to town... whose husband was employed at in the school of music, and she's a fine pianist, and she agreed to take it on, and she's still doing it.

Miner: Who is that?

Churukian: And that is Eva Ferguson.

Miner: Okay. Alright.

Churukian: Yeah.

Miner: Umm so, when you're head of the – I am sorry, say the-the –

Churukian: I am just head-

Miner: head chief-

Churukian: of-of-

Miner: Accompany.

Churukian: Accompany, yeah.

Miner: So, then it's you are head of the students for doing the accompany-

Churukian: That's right.

Miner: When you first said that I thought you were in charge of like other part-time staff –

Churukian: N-No.

Miner: Oh.

Churukian: No. Just-Just the students because they have a requirement too that they have to fulfill. I believe it's still the same that those who are majoring in piano have to do four semesters of accompanying others. That was started. And before 1988... Bedford Watkins who-

Miner: Oh.

Churukian: -was head of the piano division at the time, and he saw the need for staff to get involved, and some staff were very busy and so they try to get their students involved, and. Now in-in other schools, whether it's a certification-I'm not sure, but other schools do the same thing where their pianists must accompany other students.

Miner: Seems like it would be a-a good kind of...

Churukian: Ex-Excellent.

Miner: Tactic!

Churukian: Excellent!

Miner: [laughs] I mean you don't have to work with others.

Churukian: When-when they leave here-

Miner: Yeah. Yeah.

Churukian: They are not going on the Carnegie Hall stage.

Miner: Right. Yeah.

Churukian: [laughs] So, they had the experience of playing with different instruments... uh instrumentalists I should say, and with um vocalists, and their... knowledge of literature expands tremendously.

Miner: Huh.

Churukian: So, maybe it's because I am always being interested; I would think that other people should be interested too.

Miner: Sometimes yeah, we have to win them over to our way of thinking.

Churukian: Ah-huh. Ah-huh.

Miner: Well, thanks for clarifying that because I confess that um the curriculum in the school of music is rather dizzying-

[laughter]

Miner: -when I have done advising, I am constantly in the, you know, the books, checking things out-

Churukian: Yes.

Miner: Making sure I am doing it right, so.

Churukian: Yeah. There are a lot of little things that have to...

Miner: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

Churukian: Be taken into consideration for certification. And the music education students have a lot to do.

Miner: Yeah. Yeah.

Churukian: People don't realize some of that estate driven...

Miner: Aha. Aha.

Churukian: And university driven, and they may not match necessarily. So, they maybe overlap or there maybe additional things that students have to take to qualify.

Miner: They are hardworking people.

Churukian: They are.

Miner: That's actually sure-

Churukian: They are.

Miner: These students are. Well, before we started uh recording, you were talking a little bit about umm the growth of women in-

Churukian: Ah-huh.

Miner: -they represented on campus, and-and I don't know if that's something you wanna explore further or-and how it changed when you came to this community or ... or how it affected your work or... was it-

Churukian: Well, it-I realized right away that we seem to be more provincial here than in some areas-

Miner: In what way?

Churukian: In-In other-In other geographical areas.

Miner: Ah-huh.

Churukian: Umm [clears throat] when we lived in Syracuse, there was – didn't seem to be any umm restriction on... women being involved. We mov- [laughs] we lived in Virginia Beach, Virginia for five long years [laughs].

Miner: Uh oh [laughs].

Churukian: That was quite different there.

Miner: Yeah.

Churukian: So, this-

Miner: Different from Syracuse?

Churukian: Very different from Syracuse.

Miner: For women or just generally?

Churukian: For women—

Miner: Okay.

Churukian: For general – yes. Umm... it was many years since desegregation, but still there's the underlying current that we have to be careful-fully employ to find out what their philosophy is, and what their behavior is.

Miner: So, not just gender, but political-

Churukian: Political, yes.

Miner: -and racial, and-

Churukian: And racial. And-

Miner: Probably religious.

Churukian: I was asked one time to fill in for somebody for methodical uh service which was to be broadcast. And I was asked all sorts of questions, and I couldn't figure out why I was having somebody's questions. After I got off the phone, they were-they asked me what I looked like. They asked me the color of my hair.

Miner: My goodness!

Churukian: And I realized that they did not want a black.

Miner: Oh my goodness. What school was that?

Churukian: That-well, this was in Virginia Beach. It was not connected with a school.

Miner: Oh, okay.

Churukian: Although-Although George was the head of education at Virginia Wesleyan Un-

Miner: Oh.

Churukian: College, it was called then. Ah-huh.

Miner: Ah. Yeah.

Churukian: It was a very new school; run by ministers mostly.

Miner: Huh.

Churukian: Who would ask, "Where else in Virginia do we do this?" When George wanted to make a change in the curriculum.

Miner: How dare.

Churukian: Where else in Virginia?

Miner: How dare.

Churukian: Being Virginian was very important to the Virginians.

Miner: No, no, no. Way back when and now [laughs].

Churukian: Ah-huh. Yep.

Miner: Wow. So, when you got-so that was a culture shock from Syracuse.

Churukian: Yes.

Miner: So, did it rebound a little bit in the other direction when you came here or was it just as umm-

Churukian: It was almost liberating at first, but then I realized that there were restrictions.

Miner: Like what?

Churukian: Umm like hiring women to do certain things... some-

Miner: And-And it wasn't stated?

Churukian: No, it wasn't stated, and I applied for umm organist position, and I was visited at my home shortly after I played umm by a committee from the church who said that I was more qualified, but the other person was the breadwinner of the family.

Miner: Ah.

Churukian: And since I had a husband-

Miner: Oh dear.

Churukian: They chose him.

Miner: And that was in 1970s-

Churukian: That was in the seventy-late seventies.

Miner: Late seventies.

Churukian: Aha.

Miner: Wow.

Churukian: Yep. But that has changed now I think.

Miner: Yeah, yeah.

Churukian: Yeah.

Miner: Maybe not in pay but-

[laughter]

Churukian: Yeah, maybe not.

Miner: Yeah.

Churukian: Expectations m-m-have changed somewhat, but...

Miner: So, umm did you find that um-were you able to observe this on campus? I mean obviously it was a long time between when you got to this community and when you start working at campus-

Churukian: Aha.

Miner: But certainly through George's perspective and, you know, going to events on campus, I would assume or- I mean do you think that Illinois Wesleyan was open for women?

Churukian: I think they became open at first when we were here in the seventies-late seventies. Umm I don't think it was that open.

Miner: Ah-huh.

Churukian: But I think it... evolved slowly. I don't know precisely what it is now, but there seem to be the number of women uh who are in-in top positions such as curators and archivists. [laughs]

Miner: Oh well. [laughs] How top I am. Just kinda sandwiched.

Churukian: Yeah. Well...

Miner & Churukian: Yeah.

Churukian: Well.

Miner: That's good I guess that the trend is up. So-

Churukian: I think the trend is up.

Miner: It's difficult.

Churukian: And I think it helps make a university uhh more diverse and-and mmm greater than it already is.

Miner: Yeah.

Churukian: And speaking [knocks on table] of greater than it already is, uh we noticed right away when Miner came, that he was going to make this university great, and it sounds like one of our political aspirants right now; he's going to make America great.

[Miner laughs]

Churukian: [laughs] And we kept saying... it's not that we want to rest on our laurels, but we've known about this university for a long time.

Miner: Mmmm.

Churukian: And it has a good reputation. What is he talking about.

Miner: Ahhh, okay.

Churukian: But I think it was his way of trying to encourage people to do more.

Miner: Do you think people were receptive to that?

Churukian: Some-Some I think were.

Miner: Okay.

Churukian: Some I think were. Yeah.

Miner: What do you think umm might have been an objection to going in a different direction or... I mean I am trying to-

Churukian: Well, maybe doing things that were not in the realm of a particular professor. I can speak f-for George in this case when Miner thought that since George was on sabbatical, he should when visiting Washington D.C. or uh visit I think the national science foundation, and it's an information for them-from them, and apply it [knocks on table] somehow to... Wesleyan to make Wesleyan greater.

Miner: From the national science-

Churukian: From the n-yeah.

Miner: Hmmm.

Churukian: And so, he had to visit them, and he had some questions, and he said-it just seemed like they were saying, without saying, "Why are you here?"

[laughter]

Miner: So, was the directive to get ideas or to get money from the national science-

Churukian: Probably both. Probably both. I am not sure because that seems to be a long time ago now, but-

Miner: Yeah, sure.

Churukian: But it was during sabbatical eve. And-

Miner: Seems odd.

Churukian: Ah-huh. Ah-huh.

Miner: Huh.

Churukian: Kind of to take advantage of somebody's time off that-working on another project, that he should do this for Minor.

Miner: Do you think that there would have been repercussions if he hadn't?

Churukian: Yes.

Miner: Huh? Okay.

Churukian: Yes, I do. Because he visited George once after... George was... named uh Fulbright scholar I think soon after Minor came to campus, so-don't remember exactly what year Minor came, but this was in 19-

Miner: 89.

Churukian: Yeah. This 19-this is right after desert storm...

Miner: So, it will be 90.

Churukian: So, it will be 90, yeah. And umm... he was not... pleased that George was given this honor umm... he visited his office, and one time – I think was just before George left for Kuwait, and he said that he was striving to make this campus free of education courses because that was not part of his idea of what an ideal university was.

Miner: Oh, interesting.

Churukian: He had to retract soon after I think because if there were no education courses on campus, we would not have a music education department, which is half of the school of music.

Miner: Huh.

Churukian: You would not be... working with students and working in the community.

Miner: Ah-huh.

Churukian: Which I think is the strength of this university that we are not just in an ivory tower. We send the students out, and I think that is a strength. So, that would have stopped. Also, one of- [laughs] umm...

made some students consider not coming to Wesleyan who are interested in this particular study. Many of these were... children of ministers.

Miner: Hmmm.

Churukian: And there were support from many churches in the community-the greater community. From Methodist churches to Wesleyan [knocks on table], and that would have stopped.

Miner: Hmmm.

Churukian: Or would have slowed down.

Miner: Financial support.

Churukian: Finan-Financial support. And then these students would coming-going somewhere else...

Miner: Hmmm.

Churukian: So, there would be fewer students.

Miner: Hmmm. So, the objection to George being a Fulbright scholar in Kuwait wasn't necessarily about him being gone form campus so much as not seeing the benefit of him... being, you know, exposing Illinois Wesleyan in that part of the world or...

Churukian: I just don't think he didn't think-

Miner: [interrupting] Program?

Churukian: He just didn't think it was an e-exciting, important thing to do.

Miner: Hmm.

Churukian: And when he came back –

Miner: Any another ideas?

[laughter]

Churukian: I don't know! When he returned, Bob Erin who was. fairly new. was beginning to change the alumni - I'll call it a newspaper that was sent out quarterly-

Miner: Ah-huh.

Churukian: To a monthly magazine, and the first article was to feature George.

Miner: Mmmm.

Churukian: Minor nixed it.

Miner: Oh my goodness!

Churukian: Ah-huh. And that was the first, I think, encounter that Bob had with Minor.

Miner: Wow.

Churukian: He wanted to have this umm a joint... article with someone who was involved... a-a campus professor involved – I am trying to think if it was with German... automobile production- something like that.

Miner: Huh.

Churukian: And so, he wanted-he wanted Bob to combine... George's experience with this other person's experiences.

Miner: And that would happen.

Churukian: No.

Miner: Hm.

Churukian: George was never given that recognition.

Miner: Huh.

Churukian: So, we didn't start off on a good foot.

Miner: Really?

[Churukian laughs]

Miner: But do you think then that you said initially Minor didn't think education was a good thing on this campus. Do you think he came around?

Churukian: I think he had to. I think he had to.

Miner: So, but he wasn't trying to - or was he trying to influence the curriculum?

Churukian: I think he was trying to influence the curriculum. I think he wanted people to recognize him, himself... umm... as head of the school that... perhaps gave more emphasis to the sciences and to the liberal arts than to areas such as education...

Miner: And in what ways-

Churukian: -courses.

Miner: -did you see that? I mean where there affects that you saw that made you think that or was it umm more about, you know, conversations or?

Churukian: I felt that in... the way even Minor talked to me. Uh he was very cold to George. He froze George's salary when he came back from Kuwait... which let George to think why was he doing this, and so he took early retirement.

Miner: Wow. Because that uh-that's an era when-or maybe it was later, when faculty were saying they were receiving large increases in salary.

Churukian: Right.

Miner: Was that afterwards that?

Churukian: It was around that time.

Miner: And so-

Churukian: And G-George- other were promoted shall we say financially but George's salary was frozen.

Miner: How bizarre.

Churukian: Aha. Yep. So-

Miner: No, you said he was cold to you, so did you have a lot of interactions with him through the school or through-through the school of music or through other ways?

Churukian: Well, this give one... funny incident. This happened several times. I would appear on campus about the same time that Minor was going from his... home to his office.

Miner: Aha.

Churukian: So our paths would cross, and Minor would cross the street so he wouldn't have to talk to me.

Miner: Oh dear!

Churukian: Ah-huh. [laughs]

Miner: How bizarre.

Churukian: Yeah. Umm... One time, I was to play the harpsichord on a recital for someone, and you had to have a key to the room that the harps-where the harpsichord was kept. And this was about quarter to nine in the morning, and I heard someone playing. And rather than use my key to open the door, I knocked on the door. The person did not stop.

Miner: Okay.

Churukian: So I had to open the door because I was assigned... to practice with the student by 9, and I wanted to warm up. [clears throat] Usually nobody wanted that particular room. There was no need for it necessarily, but it was a locked room, and It was Minor practicing before going to work, shall we say. And he said not word. Not a word. He got up and he left, which was fine. I wished him a good day and that was that.

Miner: Well, that is-I saw-I'll say it again, this bizarre because you two had something in common.

Churukian: Ah-huh.

Miner: I mean he was a lover of the harpsichord-

Churukian: Ah-huh.

Miner: -and you have your own.

Churukian: I didn't. It was sold recently! [laughs]

Miner: Okay. Yeah, right. And umm the one that you were using in the school of music, was that the one that Minor acquired, or was it umm one of the other ones? Because I understood there were some that were there.

Churukian: Yes, they were. This was the more recent acquisition that we're going to use on stage. However, it was-it is not a good instrument for the school. Uh number one it needs to be in a climate-controlled area, and it was not. It needed a lot of help. It had to be sent away for a while to be redone. Minor, I know, was anxious for Igor Kipnis to come and play here.

Miner: Ah-huh.

Churukian: He at the time was a well-known harpsichordist. It-when-when the instrument arrived, it was... late December-early January, and we had snow on the ground-

Miner: Oh dear.

Churukian: -and it was quite cold, and Mr. Kipnis wanted to play over in the student center. So, they had to take the harpsichord from the school of music and take it over there in the cold.

Miner: Okay.

Churukian: Soon after that, and I am not saying that-that caused the problem with the harpsichord-soon after the harpsichord had to be sent back to the manufacturer to be redone. Apparently, it was put together in such a hurry... that the wood was not properly cured yet.

Miner: Oh dear.

Churukian: And so, it was warping.

Miner: Oh my goodness.

Churukian: Yeah. So, it was-it was Minor's enthusiasm shall we say? Or insistence that we had to have this instrument- we had to have this type of instrument... because Igor Kipnis he couldn't invite then which he did, and Mr. Kipnis accepted and was here for about five days, I think.

Miner: Did he do things with the students that you were teaching or?

Churukian: No.

Miner: No.

Churukian: No. I don't think he did much with students. I think his object was to play, and he did-did give a recital on uh Pressor Hall stage, umm but the big thing was playing in the memorial center which was wonderful... for students to have that exposure.

Miner: Was it? Okay.

Churukian: To-

Miner: Didn't seem odd! [laughs]

Churukian: Yeah! Yeah. But uh-

Miner: I guess you go where the audience is.

Churukian: Yeah. And the other reason it's not a good reason for this particular school is not only no-not climate-controlled... room for it, but it had to be removed and taken a level up to the stage, and that meant it had to always have maintenance people do this, and they got to the point where the maintenance people wouldn't do it anymore, and they had to call Kenny's every time to pay for it-

Miner: Oh my goodness.

Churukian: -to have it moved up and down-

Miner: Oh my goodness.

Churukian: -where a very simple solution would have been to create a space off of the stage, use part of the courtyard that has never used, and create a spot not only for that instrument, but also for maybe classroom.

Miner: Yeah. Wow.

Churukian: You know, it has not-

Miner: So, was that-was that kind of idea raised and just not heard or paid attention to or was it just never [deep breath] something that anybody consider, I mean who would be the-what channels would that kind of a concern be-

Churukian: Apparently, I don't know what the channels were because I did raise the question and it went nowhere.

Miner: You raised it with the director?

Churukian: Aha.

Miner: Yeah.

Churukian: Well, he-I know he took it f-further, but it didn't-it just was not accepted. And it is a money issue of course.

Miner: Well, everything is.

Churukian: But-

Miner: Is it Mario at that time or was it somebody else?

Churukian: No, it was uh Bob Kvam who worked very hard for the students I believe. Yeah.

Miner: Didn't know the name of the person who was before Mario, sorry!

Churukian: Bob Kvam. Yeah.

Miner: Okay.

Churukian: Yeah.

Miner: Hmm. Umm... well, so that's a-that's an interesting insight, and I thank you for that because umm Minor's passion for music is certainly something that he's remembered for-

Churukian: Ah-huh.

Miner: -umm but-so, it sounds like he wasn't collaborative though in his passion. He had-

Churukian: Ah-huh.

Miner: -umm... one way of thinking about things and then...

Churukian: Ah-huh. Ah-huh.

Miner: Didn't really seek other opinions or accept them.

Churukian: Well, he was a collector.

Miner: Okay.

Churukian: He was a collector normally of books but of musical instruments, so he had some very old instruments that he had mounted in his... home. Umm he did not have a piano, and so the school of music had to provide one for him.

Miner: Was that the piano forte?

Churukian: No, it was an actual styling-yeah.

Miner: - regular piano? Okay, because I heard he had a... piano-

Churukian: Piano forte.

Miner: -forte also.

Churukian: Yeah he did, and it was in terrible shape.
[laughter]

Miner: So-So you went to his home-

Churukian: Aha.

Miner: -occasionally, so did you ever have – I mean doesn't like he was really gonna ever be chatting with you, but did you ever have conversations about the instruments over there with him or-

Churukian: I am-

Miner: -hear from-

Churukian: Very little because he would be chatting with other people. And this would be... semi-large groups.

Miner: Huh.

Churukian: So the opportunity really wasn't there.

Miner: Hmm.

Churukian: But perhaps I should have done what he did when he came to our house once.

Miner: Oh tell me!

Churukian: I invited [laughing] to – I invited Ellen and Minor to our home for dinner because I've had find a way I thought that he would get to know George off campus. And since both George and I are Armenian, and because I do a lot of Armenian cooking, I thought this would be something that would be interesting to Minor.

Miner: Hmmm.

Churukian: But I had to have some other draw, and the draw was Pearl Funk.

Miner: Okay.

Churukian: Now, Pearl and I... collaborated several times. Pearl was a violinist who was very quiet. Uh people didn't realize how much influence she had in the... community.

Miner: With which-which parts of the-

Churukian: With-

Miner: -community?

Churukian: With the upper parts.

Miner: Okay.

[laughter]

Churukian: She had many friends, but there were people that she uh associated with. One with Melba Kirkpatrick.

Miner: Ah-huh.

Churukian: And they did things together although Pearl often did not agree with Melba, but Melba was a very strong individual herself. So-

Miner: And Pearl was as well?

Churukian: Pearl was-

Miner: As strong?

Churukian: Pearl was pre-individual but people didn't realize because she was soft spoken.

Miner: Huh.

Churukian: That she could wield a lot of influence. So, the two of us did... short programs for an organization at the time was about one hundred years old, the armature musical club.

Miner: Aha.

Churukian: And uh the armature musical club was only for women, which was very common in the late eighteen hundreds-

Miner: Huh.

Churukian: Because there were several clubs that formed in this area. Armature musical club was one of them, and they did a lot of wonderful things in the community uh such as: they made a good bit of money during the first world war because they prepared bandages for the red cross.

Miner: Mmm.

Churukian: So, there was a large amount of money in the bank-

Miner: Oh wow.

Churukian: -from that. They also sponsored community concerts. Uh at the time, there was no Braden auditorium at ISU. And so, the evening entertainment umm... in cultural things other than what the universities were doing, would be inviting people from other places to come and play.

Miner: Huh.

Churukian: And it was held at Wesleyan, and Wesleyan did not charge for these professional concerts.

Miner: Wow.

Churukian: So they just open their doors, and one of the-one of the wonderful things I think about this university to be available to the community.

Miner: Hmm.

Churukian: And so, there-I don't know what the contract was that happened before we came. But amateur musical club had quite bit of money that they earned from those endeavors.

Miner: Huh.

Churukian: [clears throat] But they would not consider... inviting men. So, women became anxious to join the war force, and so they were not anxious to be part of this group that would-

Miner: Hmmm.

Churukian: -be monthly or semi-monthly and sometimes give concerts and things. And we were, not necessarily profession, but kind of in between.... [coughs] So... this money was in... the treasury, and we'd limped to our hundredth anniversary...

Miner: [laughs] With members. [laughs]

Churukian: Gave a concert-

[laughter]

Churukian: -with members [chuckles] that were uh existing, breathing.

Miner: Hmmm.

Churukian: [chuckles] And we had twenty-seven thousand dollars for Wesleyan to put into a scholarship, which Bob Kvam very kindly worked hard for the development department to accept in that way because Minor it to be a general thing, and Bob and I both insisted no it had to be for a student who is in a degreed music program. Not for just somebody who is taking lessons. We finally after three trials, got through. And I know that Minor had his finger on that.

Miner: Huh.

Churukian: But, he may have been part of Bob Kvam's downfall. I don't know.

Miner: Umm that's an-that's another sort of claim then, right?

Churukian: Ah-huh.

Miner: Because why wouldn't-why wouldn't he want [deep breath] scholarship for music students.

Churukian: I don't know. I am being...

Miner: Huh.

Churukian: Involved, interested... participating somewhat in music here in the area. He just did not want that. He wanted it his way.

Miner: Huh.

Churukian: And it didn't work out that way.

Miner: So, umm then, Pearl was little muscle [laughs]-

Churukian: Yeah, Pearl was-

Miner: -at this to help making this happen or?

Churukian: Pearl was a member-

Miner: Because this would have been before that-that finally that-

Churukian: Right. Right.

Miner: This would have been before that finally went through? Okay.

Churukian: Pearl was reactive in amateur musical club.

Miner: Okay.

Churukian: Umm I don't think she had any particular finger in making this a special scholarship for students, but-

Miner: Oh, okay.

Churukian: Because she was a member of the organization. I think that meant something a little different to Minor because his association with Minor-his association with Pearl was that she had a lovely book collection, and he was interested in it, and he would call her from places like San Francisco bookstore to tell her that he found this wonderful book and would she like it for her collection.

Miner: Huh.

Churukian: She was thrilled to have the association with Minor and would talk about him frequently.

Miner: Huh.

Churukian: Anyway, back t-fifteen minutes ago, I invited Minor and Ellen to our house so that hear could hear Pearl and me play.

Miner: Uh oh.

Churukian: That was the ploy.

Miner: Uh oh.

Churukian: So we gathered, and so Pearl and I while-while dinner was warming up... Pearl and I played, and I don't remember exactly what we played at the time, specifically, but we played. Umm and then we went to dinner, from the-from the music room through the... living room to the dining room, and we had a meal, and he excused himself immediately after he finished his coffee. Did not ask. He simply got up. I said he excused himself; I don't even remember him saying excuse me please. He simply got up, and he went back to the music room to play the piano. Not the harpsichord but the piano.

Miner: Huh.

Churukian: And we didn't really see much of him for the rest of the evening. So, George and I entertained Ellen.

Miner: Huh.

Churukian: And then he decided it was time to go, and he left.

Miner: So he finished playing, came back-

Churukian: Came into the-

Miner: That's why-

Churukian: Yep, and they left.

Miner: So they-Did they.

Churukian: Ah-huh.

Miner: [deep breath] That's pretty rude too.

Churukian: Yes, it was. So, his behavior toward me, and to George I think, was not what you would hope a college official would do.

Miner: Did Pearl notice these clunks?

Churukian: She never mentioned.

Miner: She just said it was a good evening and...

Churukian: Ah-huh.

Miner: How wonderful that you got to play and he got to play-

Churukian: And he got to hear them, yes.

Miner: Huh.

[Churukian chuckles]

Miner: Uhh –

Churukian: And as a result, I believe Pearl gave her collection, book collection, to Wesleyan. Is that correct?

Miner: She gave the limited editions club collection-

Churukian: Okay.

Miner: -to Wesleyan. I don't know what else she might have had. That's all I have ever seen her name associated with, it was pretty extensive.

Churukian: Yeah. Yeah. So, from the very beginning when Minor was here, he sought the money to people in Bloomington, I think. And he made good friends with them and established a foundation, and many of them I believe umm felt he was a fine individual and were um... uh willing... to donate large amounts of money to the university. So I think that was perhaps part of his... his legacy that he was able to extract [chuckles] I don't want-

Miner: Ah-huh.

Churukian: -to say moneys from people!

Miner: Ah-huh.

Churukian: But people would expect to-our president to go out and meet the community and to get money for the community, so he was fulfilling that.

Miner: Huh.

Churukian: Not perhaps enough for the university to survive, but-

Miner: Mmmm.

Churukian: [chuckles] But umm... he sought after these actively.

Miner: Hmm. Did Pearl umm... the book that he called her about; did she tell you was it umm something that she ended up paying him for or was it a gift?

Churukian: I think it was a gift.

Miner: Okay.

Churukian: She was excited. I don't know what the book was.

Miner: Huh. Something like-

Churukian: But she was excited not only because he had found this particular book, but he had called her from San Francisco.

Miner: Hmm. Umm not too many people talk about gifts, so-

Churukian: Hmm.

Miner: -when you mentioned the story May I think last year when we were talking about this, I really wanted you to uh to relate it for this project-

Churukian: Yeah.

Miner: So, I appreciate you doing that.

Churukian: That's about all I know about his as-association...

Miner: With Pearl.

Churukian: With Pearl.

Miner: And cultivating her deliberately as a donor.

Churukian: Yes. And-yes.

Miner: Which I think is another valuable –

Churukian: Yeah.

Miner: -insight to have, right?

Churukian: It is. It is.

Miner: Umm... I'll have to see if there are any donor records... from her. I don't recall there being anything like an- you know, correspondents-

Churukian: Yes.

Miner: -yeah with him. That kind of like. Umm-

Churukian: I am sure there must have been. I don't know.

Miner: Yeah.

Churukian: If you save...

Miner: We have other things that I have note a list of notes here-

Churukian: [laughs] But-

Miner: - did we talk about-

Churukian: Well-

Miner: - most of them –

Churukian: -it doesn't have anything to do-

Miner: -or there are other things to add or?

Churukian: It doesn't have anything to do necessarily with umm... books and collections, but... Unfortunately, my first impression of him was not a positive one.

Miner: Right.

Churukian: And it was at the Fall Faculty Get Together, which umm was umm a gathering Friday night before school opened for the fall. A very festive time that had going on that way. I don't know if Bob Eckley had started that when he was president or if something that had... he continued. Umm this was still going on. Miner helped him to continue. But, he had new faculty introduce themselves. He wanted them to do something unique, so we would remember them. And he put the faculty-new faculty on the spot.

Miner: Oh my gosh!

Churukian: Uh one of the new faculty was Barrington Coleman.

Miner: I didn't know that name.

Churukian: Barrington was a graduate from the school of music, and had gone to Julliard. Fine tenor, black tenor. And... we needed a tenor as an instructor, and Barrington was hired. And so, Barrington put together at the last minute some kind of a wrap that would indicate who he was, brought the house down.

Miner: Oh my gosh!

Churukian: Yeah. But I found that not only-it seemed that... since we had known Barrington when he was a student somewhat and he was coming back, we felt that we could talk with him easily, and how does it feel now not to be a student but to be a member of faculty and that sort of thing.

Miner: Ah-huh.

Churukian: And umm I accompanied Barrington a few times, too, so I got to know him pretty well. I just felt that whole situation then opened the door for Miner to let us know about himself which was perfectly fine, but he went on and on and on. And I turn-

Miner: At the faculty's-

Churukian: At the faculty-

Miner: Okay.

Churukian: At this faculty dinner. And I thought we'll never get out of here! [laughs] This man talks too much!

Miner: Oh my gosh.

Churukian: [laughs] This man is talking about himself, and he is talking about himself; we are gonna have this forever!

Miner: Mmmm. Ah-huh.

Churukian: And it seemed that he did enjoy talking.

Miner: Yeah.

[Churukian laughs]

Miner: You said at the beginning that he came here with an intention to change the university, and some people thought that it was okay and some people didn't-

Churukian: Ah-huh.

Miner: -like the direction. Do you think that he um achieved that all?... Of changing university-

Churukian: Well, I think I-

Miner: -and which direction was it going in?

Churukian: I don't know if I can answer that precisely, but the climate on campus changed.

Miner: In what way?

Churukian: Umm there was also a provost on campus who seemed to be hell bent on firing people.

Miner: Hmm.

Churukian: And after she left here, she went to a college in Pennsylvania that I happened to know about, and um she did the same thing there before she was ousted.

Miner: Oh my. That would have been Ellen Hurwitz or what?

Churukian: It was.

Miner: And she started here right before Minor.

Churukian: That's right, and he-he claim on people were complaining about her. He inherited her. And-uh actually Pearl said that, that he had told her that he had inherited her. And I said to Pearl, "But he is the head of this institution. He can also fire her."

Miner: Mmm.

Churukian: But um just too many-too many things were going on-

Miner: Hmmm.

Churukian: -about that. And so, the climate was becoming a little bit uhh - I shouldn't say a little bit, quite negative. When she left, I understand in the school of music they were dancing in the halls.

Miner: Hmmm.

[Churukian laughs]

Miner: Because she was firing people there?

Churukian: Oh yeah. Oh yeah, and people were afraid of talking to each other because they were afraid if it was going to get reported back to her.

Miner: Huh.

Churukian: And this did happen in the education department.

Miner: Huh.

Churukian: Because there wa-and the education department was a small department. I think there were four faculty members in that plus adjuncts. And one of them seemed to be always... asking George particular questions and seemed that she was reporting back to Ellen.

Miner: Oh dear.

Churukian: Which is not good. But anyway, I-

Miner: I've heard of the firings, and I-I'm-I am sure I am just incredibly naïve, but I don't know how you fire a tenured faculty member.

Churukian: Umm by saying they are not going in the direction you are thinking. They don't have the same vision for the university. That's not grounds for firing, but these people were very uncomfortable, and so they found positions elsewhere and left.

Miner: Okay, so-

Churukian: So, I should say firing, but they-

Miner: Pressuring.

Churukian: Pressuring them, and many of them like Bob Kvam went to head the Fine Arts Division at Ball State.

Miner: Oh my.

Churukian: And he oversaw the creation of a performing arts center and... I am not sure I-perhaps by this time he has retired, but-

Miner: Huh.

Churukian: I lost contact with him.

Miner: Hmm.

Churukian: You know. So-

Miner: But you thought that maybe Minor and Ellen were- I mean he was a-at least tacitly approving of-

Churukian: Yes.

Miner: -what she was doing-

Churukian: Yes.

Miner: -because he didn't fire her.

Churukian: Yeah.

Miner: Okay.

Churukian: Apparently not.

Miner: Yeah. Hmm.

Churukian: No, so. But other people did seek the other positions, and I think Clay Highum who was the head of the library, took early retirement, too. Umm another person who was pressured; I don't know what for a reason, was Jim Barber who was in the cabinet and he left-

Miner: Registrar, right?

Churukian: Registrar!

Miner: Yeah.

Churukian: Thank you. I forgot. Yeah. And he also left. So, they were leaving about the same time.

Miner: Hmm.

Churukian: And George came home one day; he said, "My health is more important than having to stand up to this sort of things", so he decided... that he would retire. He was 62.

Miner: Right?

Churukian: Yeah. I think he was about 62.

Miner: Huh.

Churukian: Yep.

Miner: Well, -

Churukian: And his idea was that he would slowly... umm work with somebody who would take over his position when he became 65, and he would retire at 65 or 66. That never happened.

Miner: Yeah.

Churukian: Because the education department was dissolved.

Miner: Mmm. But we still have-

Churukian: It's called education studies.

Miner: Uh okay.

Churukian: And they don't have – they don't report like George reported to umm Wendell Hess.

Miner: The provost.

Churukian: The provost... that time. So, they are part of a larger division.

Miner: Hmm.

Churukian: They almost fell apart. [laughs]

Miner: Sorry?

Churukian: They almost fell apart!

Miner: Yeah. Well, does seem to be a big draw for students on-

Churukian: Yeah.

Miner: -our campus.

Churukian: Yeah. Yeah.

Miner: Well, at least you are fascinating details. What else do we need to know?

Churukian: Oh, I don't know. I've s-said before we started all this; most of my comments would be negative.

Miner: Yeah. No, and I-and I –

[Churukian laughs]

Miner: - appreciate you being frank. I'm not looking for sunshine and roses, you know?

[Churukian laughs]

Miner: I think I -I think [deep breath] you've contributed to Minor standing on Minor's collector.

Churukian: Aha.

Miner: And you've um provided insights that other people who are interested in how he was as a manager.

Churukian: Aha.

Miner: I-I think will find... revealing and useful and - I mean certainly umm as time goes by, uh a lot of these kinds of details are lost.

Churukian: Aha.

Miner: Umm and-and they are all influenced by, you know, everything else is going on in-in our particular part of the world, so I think – but I think patterns will emerge and-and it will all be useful.

Churukian: Yeah.

Miner: So, were you aware of the – oh what were you saying?

Churukian: Oh no, go ahead.

Miner: Were you aware of the umm option on-and the-the nature of his dep-

Churukian: No.

Miner: Family's department-

Churukian: No.

Miner: -or anything?

Churukian: I knew-I knew that there would be an option, but I was not interested-

Miner: Yeah.

Churukian: -in anyway.

Miner: Okay. Well, we will talk about that.

Churukian: And I didn't know-I didn't know that he had a particular interest in 18th century.

Miner: Oh, okay.

Churukian: Because I knew he was collecting from whatever.

Miner: From everywhere.

Churukian: Yeah.

Miner: Yeah. So, you got wasn't even your assumption about him-

Churukian: No.

Miner: -that he was-okay.

Churukian: No, I had no idea.

Miner: Yeah.

Churukian: So, thank you for-

Miner: No-

Churukian: -revealing that! [laughs]

Miner: Sure.

Churukian: Umm he seemed to jump from one thing to another. Educators have a label for that... which is umm – well, I don't like to use labels, but he... simply didn't have attention on a particular subject long enough... before he would change it to something else. So, it was difficult to pin him down...

Miner: Hmmm.

Churukian: -at some things. Speed seemed to be important to him.

Miner: Huh.

Churukian: Umm I was asked to play for a memorial service for someone who was prominent apparently, maybe a-the wife of a former trustee. I am not sure who it was, but perhaps you do. Umm the-I believe it was... this person owned the farm ware. Those pillars came from that are-

Miner: Aha.

Churukian: That are erected.

Miner: The heading.

Churukian: The hea-y-y-yeah.

Miner: Heading pillars.

Churukian: Yeah. Well... a... woman died and they couldn't find – and she didn't like organ, and it-but this was to be-this was to be done in Evelyn Chapel.

Miner: Huh.

Churukian: But they wanted a pianist, and there were no faculty pianists that were either available or willing to give up [laughs] some time to play.

Miner: Mmm.

Churukian: So, I got a call from the development department, and I went, and I played. And he came up to me afterwards, and he said – this was an example of his knowing a lot about many s-uh knowing about a lot of subjects but not very much about each subject.

Miner: Okay.

Churukian: Which is how I felt. He came up, and he said, “I don't think I have ever heard that prelude played so fast.” And he walked away. [chuckles]

Miner: Was that supposed to be a good comment or a bad comment?

Churukian: I don't know.

[Miner laughs]

Churukian: That was the very end umm it was supposed to be an uplifting service, and so, this was a-a minute and a quarter... of music that was written by Bach, a prelude that I played-

Miner: Hmm.

Churukian: -as people were exiting.

Miner: Hmm.

Churukian: And that's what his comment was. So that was a complement I think he thought he was giving me, and I didn't know what to take it-how to make it.

Miner: Hmm. But you didn't have a chance to respond, so apparently-

Churukian: No, he just walked away.

Miner: Huh. Aww.

Churukian: Because I never had an in-depth...

Miner: Conversation.

Churukian: Conversation with him because he either evaded me-

Miner: Yeah.

Churukian: -or uh... would speak in-in just a very short manner like that.

Miner: Huh. Well-

Churukian: And every time I play that now-

[laughter]

Miner: Uh oh.

Churukian: I think-

Miner: Uh oh. That's-

Churukian: "Am I playing this too fast?" [laughs]

Miner: Uh oh. Wow.

Churukian: Uh so, I don't know. Certainly, quite an influence. I have to admit that when I go the library, I do not look at that statue.

Miner: Walk to the other side.

Churukian: I-I – Let it be. To my left and I walk... [pounds the table] quickly up the steps and into the building. [laughs]

Miner: Huh.

Churukian: So.

Miner: Well, umm... thank you... for... providing this information and also for years of not so highly visible or –

[Churukian laughs]

Miner: Or perhaps-

Churukian: Right.

Miner: -recognized service-

Churukian: Right.

Miner: -to our students in our institution and.

Churukian: Yeah. And of course, I wasn't looking for recognition but a little politeness would have-

Miner: Yeah. Yeah.

Churukian: -gone a long way.

Miner: Human-Human decency -

Churukian: Yes. Yeah

Miner: Especially when paying and status are not part of the-

Churukian: Ah-huh.

Miner: -equations-

Churukian: Ah-huh.

Miner: -going on, so.

Churukian: Yeah. Well, thank you for letting me ex-go on and on. [laughs]

Miner: Oh. It's all good. Thank you so much girl.

Churukian: You are welcome.