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Nancy Sultan

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Oral History Interview with Nancy Sultan,
in Hansen Student Center, January 22nd
Conducted by Meg Miner, Illinois Wesleyan Archivist

Meg Miner: This is Meg Miner. I am in Hansen Student Center with Nancy Sultan on January 22nd, 2016, and we're here to talk about her recollections of Minor Myers our former president. So please go ahead and tell us who you are and how you're affiliated with Wesleyan and how you know Minor and we'll get going from there.

Nancy Sultan: So...I'm Nancy Sultan, director and professor of Greek and Roman studies. I've been here since 1993. In fact, Minor was part of the hiring process for me, which I can talk about if you want or- what was the other thing you wanted from me?

Miner: How- how- I guess your association with him-

Sultan: When I- When I interviewed for the job here in 1993, he wanted to interview me which was very unusual.

Miner: Oh, it is unusual!

Sultan: Usually the president doesn't involve himself in hires.

Miner: Sure.

Sultan: Well, I met everybody 'cause I was the first classicist they were going to have.

Miner: Okay.

Sultan: And he was very much a support for the starting of a classics program and classical studies here and one he was very excited about. I don't know if he had any role in getting my position in the first place, but this is- Janet (last name, 1:08??) was a consultant before-

Miner: Oh!

Sultan: -she was hired as our provost/dean. And she had told the university, "You know, you need certain programs here if you want to become a national institution," and one of them is classics.

Miner: Oh, okay.

Sultan: And she also said “You need anthropology too,” and some other things and so she was part of the group that, you know, got the ball rolling to- to start classics here.

Miner: Hmm.

Sultan: And maybe Minor had- he might have had something to do that also.

Miner: Hmm. Hmm.

Sultan: But yeah. I interviewed him and I- I remember the interview like it was yesterday. It was really, very nerve-racking.

Miner: Do you want to recount it for us? Get it off your chest? [laughs]

Sultan: [laughs] Well, you know, I mean, I had never met a college president before. I was fresh out of graduate school.

Miner: Oh gosh!

Sultan: Yeah, well, I had- I had a- I was coming from Stanford University. I had- I had a two-year teaching position thereafter so I wasn't actually fresh out of graduate school.

Miner: [laughs] Okay.

Sultan: But- but- so I was supposed to interview with him, and he was- I didn't know what to expect, and I went into his office and he sort of leaned over his desk. I- we sat across each other. He was behind his desk and I was sitting across from him. And he said, “So Ms. Sultan, what do you do when you're not reading Greek?” [Miner laughs] And I was- I didn't even know how to respond to that. Like, what do you do telling a guy about your hobbies-

Miner: [laughs] Yeah.

Sultan: -you know?

Miner: Who knew?

Sultan: So I was really nervous. Anyway, I remember looking around his office thinking, “What does this guy do when he's not being a president?”

Miner: Yeah.

Sultan: And he had train stuff, you know. He was a huge train- model train buff.

Miner: I didn't know he had them in his office though.

Sultan: He did. He had them in his office.

Miner: Oh.

Sultan: Yeah. And the only thing I could think of to say was, "I like trains." [laughs]

Miner: [laughs] You suck-up!

Sultan: And the only- the only reason I could say that with any degree of certainty-

Miner: Oh.

Sultan: -was because I had a five year old son who was really into trains.

Miner: Oh, ok. I retract my comment.

Sultan: So we had model trains. We had all the brio, we had all the Lego, all the movies about trains and so I had actually kind of learned about trains from my five year old son and so I was prepared when he said, "Oh, you are? Well, you know-" and then he just launched into this monologue about trains and on and on for about an hour.

Miner: Oh my gosh!

Sultan: And I- I didn't even get a word in edgewise, like he never asked me anything substantive after that.

Miner: Oh my gosh.

Sultan: It just became about him and how interested he was in trains and how he liked people that were interested in other things other than what they're trained to do and it was really strange-

Miner: That's interesting!

Sultan: -encounter with Minor. But it gave me a- a- sort of a glimpse into, you know, his personality-

Miner: Yeah.

Sultan: -and how he was so interested in everything and anything else necessarily other than, you know, the topic at hand.

Miner: Hmm.

Sultan: So I walked out of there thinking, "I think that went pretty well." [Miner laughs] He never really give me a chance to say anything that- that I could have (unsure, 4:12??) myself.

Miner: Yeah.

Sultan: So that was my first encounter with Minor.

Miner: So how long after that did you then- were you- were you here within a year of that or-

Sultan: Yeah, so they hired me during that search-

Miner: Okay-

Sultan: -so 1993 and I came and was hanging out with Minor pretty much immediately.

Miner: Okay.

Sultan: He was so interested in anything I wanted to get going in classics.

Miner: Great.

Sultan: He was constantly coming in my office with ideas of things I could do and- and events I could hold and, you know, he was just- wanted to talk to me about books. He wanted to talk to me about coins. He- he had a collection of Classica and I get him confused with...William Calder at UIUC-

Miner: Hmm.

Sultan: -who also collected Classica. And one of them- one of the two guys collected seventeenth and eighteenth century books on classics and one collected nineteenth and twentieth century and I can't remember which one he was.

Miner: Minor said in published interviews that he was into the eighteenth century so-

Sultan: Okay.

Miner: -it was probably seventeenth and eighteenth.

Sultan: Okay. So he had all of these books that were published in, you know, during those-

Miner: Hmm.

Sultan: -during that time that were about classics.

Miner: Hmm.

Sultan: Greek and Roman studies.

Miner: Hmm.

Sultan: And he was very proud of that collection and on more than one occasion he invited me and his students over to see these books and he called- he would pull some out. He would show us these books-

Miner: From his home?

Sultan: -from his home and also from his coin collections.

Miner: Hmm.

Sultan: He would bring coins out and he would give us little- little coins to take home that weren't very valuable. Just like a little token of affection.

Miner: Aww. I'd love to hear about that.

Sultan: Yeah. So everybody really loved that and it was wonderful for the program, and yeah. He was very much involved in- in- in- and he would loan me books and we would talk about what he should buy-

Miner: Hmm.

Sultan: -because he was on E-bay twenty-four seven buying books. He was- he had an auction going all the time.

Miner: Did he- so he asked for your recommendations on-

Sultan: Yeah, so we would talk about recommendations and- and, you know, that wasn't my (unsure, 6:18??). Like that period of- of collecting books on classics from that period but I- I did know the scholars so we would talk about Bill (Movitts? Unsure about spelling, 6:26??) and we would talk about A.E. Houseman. So these were eighteenth and nineteenth century classicists-

Miner: Hmm. Hmm.

Sultan: -you know, and so we just had lovely, delightful conversations and at one point I told him I was designing a course on sex and gender in the ancient world and I wanted to have some coins because I- there were several different interesting things. One was to go into a brothel, you got a little token and the tokens would have a picture of what you wanted from the-

Miner: Oh my!

Sultan: -from the prostitute. So, you know, just a blow job, or what do you want? There was a picture of it on the token and so instead of actually paying money you would buy these tokens.

Miner: Oh!

Sultan: So I said, you know, "If you could get your hands on one of those, that would be awesome." or "If you could get your hands on a coin that had some kind of erotic scene on it," because there were lots of those and I got him all interested in that and I don't know what happened because he never got his hands on one before he died.

Miner: Oh my goodness.

Sultan: But he was looking for them and he was pricing them and stuff and he got very interested in that.

Miner: Interesting.

Sultan: And I found a book published by Heinrich Schliemann which was his 19th century publication of his excavations at Troy that's full of lithographs. And it's- it's not a first edition, but it's- it is of the year the books came out.

Miner: Oh wonderful!

Sultan: And I asked him to price it for me 'cause I got it for nothing at a Harvard bookstore, you know, book sale and- and he got very interested in finding out how much it was worth. He did all the research. He came back and he told me this book is worth three hundred and fifty dollars.

Miner: Wow.

Sultan: And it's on my shelf right now...[Miner laughs]...and I do bring it out every now and then and show it to the students. So, you know, we had a lot of interactions with books and-

Miner: Do you share those stories with your students today even or is it a kind of-

Sultan: I share the Schliemann story.

Miner: Okay.

Sultan: But...he would loan me books and one book in particular, not too long before he passed away- it might have been before he was diagnosed but he loaned me a book that was full of lithographs or watercolors actually. They were watercolors of- of some very weird looking... sculptures. And it was a book in Italian. I think it dated from 1700s or 1800s, didn't have a cover on it. He bought it cheap. He didn't know what it was about.

Miner: Hmm.

Sultan: And he wanted me to tell him what it was about and he loaned it to me. And then I went to a conference and I had so many phone calls from him, wanting this book back and panicking about what happened to it and, you know, "Where is it? Are you keeping it safe?" He was very nervous about this book. And I was wondering why because he- he didn't pay much money for it-

Miner: Yeah.

Sultan: -and it really wasn't worth anything.

Miner: Yeah.

Sultan: But he was very- he had these moments of anxiety when he loaned books to people-

Miner: Huh.

Sultan: -that somehow he wasn't going to get it back. Like he was very attached to his books.

Miner: That's interesting because he- and this is, you know, one of the things that I'm curious about, is how did he use these? So you read them?

Sultan: He tried-

Miner: You read them?

Sultan: He tried to look through- I mean, many of the ones he had were not in English.

Miner: Okay.

Sultan: You know, so he had books in German. He had books in Italian and they looked good and they were interesting. He wasn't sure what they were but he would buy them anyway, especially if they weren't expensive.

Miner: So he wasn't reading in other languages?

Sultan: I don't think so.

Miner: Okay.

Sultan: And this book was full of illustrations and so he liked that idea.

Miner: Yeah.

Sultan: And so he asked me, "What do these pictures of? What is this book about?", you know. He was very curious to know what it was-

Miner: Interesting.

Sultan: And I guess he wanted to know if it was valuable or if it-

Miner: Hmm.

Sultan: -was something really interesting.

Miner: Well, that's one thing that's been curious for me about this. I mean, he had so many books at the end of his life and as he was collecting them, was he- was he using them? Was he considering them or- I've heard stories that he purchased books at auction.

Sultan: Mm-hmm.

Miner: And so he would get one book with a bunch of others just so they ended up being sold and so did he keep the ones that were in those lots? Did he then, you know, become interested in them or did they just sit there because he had gotten them and might get to them someday? Those of some of the things I'm interested in.

Sultan: He's a very, very distracted person.

Miner: Okay.

Sultan: He was a very distracted person so he would have purchased things and maybe never had even looked at them.

Miner: Okay. But never thought about getting rid of them?

Sultan: No, no.

Miner: Okay.

Sultan: No. And as I said, when he loaned books to people, I mean, he'd get anxious about them and he wanted to know they were safe and when I was going to bring it back. I mean, I- I literally had like, you know, ten voice messages from him, wanting to know what happened to this book like-

Miner: Wow!

Sultan: -"Did you get, you know, are you taking care of it?" And so when I got back from my conference, I was like, you know, "Here, you know, I've had it safe all this time." I didn't realize it was such a- and then he was like, "Oh, no, no, no."

Miner: Yeah.

Sultan: "I just- I didn't know what happened. I wanted to make sure."

Miner: Make sure you don't forget you have it.

Sultan: Exactly. So he was very attached to these- these objects even if he didn't necessarily really read them, but he collected these. In fact, I tried to put them together with William Calder. His home was basically a library.

Miner: Oh. Hmm.

Sultan: And he's retired. I can't- he might have passed away. But he was a classics emeritus at UIUC.

Miner: Hmm.

Sultan: He was (unsure, 11:51??) . He had a house that he called "The Villa Movitts(unsure of spelling, 11:54??)"-

Miner: Hmm. Hmm.

Sultan: -named after the great German classics scholar Bill Movitts (spelling??). And he collected, as I said, whatever century, so he was either seventeenth and eighteenth or eighteenth and nineteenth. But anyway, he had floor to ceiling- I mean, every room of his house was-

Miner: Hmm.

Sultan: -was packed. And he would give tours, you know, of his library to people.

Miner: That's interesting that he did that.

Sultan: He made- he made his own catalogues of all his whole collection. So he had, you know, a card catalogue-

Miner: Oh.

Sultan: -an official one that was published-

Miner: Hmm.

Sultan: -for all of his books. And I thought, “God, the two of them would have a hayday talking to each other,” you know, because they both collected this Classica tradition-

Miner: Yeah.

Sultan: -of books about classics, you know, by various scholars over the years. I don’t know if they ever got together or not. I tried to get them together and I tried to get a tour organized with Minor into Calder’s library. And even though he told me over and over again, that “Yes, yes. You can come,” we never got it to happen.

Miner: Hmm. When you- you just sparked another thought. When you were in his home- in Minor’s home with your students, did you get a sense that his home collection was organized?

Sultan: You know, he always- he pulled the books he wanted us to see and he brought them upstairs.

Miner: Oh, so you never went to the basement?

Sultan: I did go to the basement. I did go to the basement to see his trains.

Miner: Oh, okay.

Sultan: But we never went on a tour of his library collection.

Miner: Okay.

Sultan: He pulled the books and he had them all on a table all set out for us to talk about. He took time to pick- pick which volumes he wanted us to look at and, you know, volumes that he knew the most about or he thought were very important-

Miner: Sure.

Sultan: -or you know. So I never actually- I mean, I knew he had books all over the place. I mean, he had books in his garage and his garage door would be wide open and the elements wouldn’t be there and he just wouldn’t-

Miner: Yeah.

Sultan: So he, you know, didn't always take care of the books. And as I said, this book that he bought that had no value he was very worried about. It had no cover. It was a mess. But that was the book I bought at the auction.

Miner: Oh. Was it the one you wanted to remember him by?

Sultan: Well, I told him when we were talking about the book, I explained him the pictures were of various votive objects for religious purposes from Etruria, which is a section of Italy in the (unsure, 14:16??). And I said I would just like to cut these out and frame them-

Miner: Hmm.

Sultan: -'cause they were just really pretty. They're really pretty pictures-

Miner: Hmm.

Sultan: -you know, little watercolors. And so, you know, we talked about how it, you know, that they- that these were frameable and they were very cool and very weird. Some of them-

Miner: Did he think that would be a good idea?

Sultan: He didn't say, you know- I mean, he wouldn't have done it.

Miner: But he didn't- he didn't shrink back or-

Sultan: He didn't- he didn't know I was ever going to have my hands on it.

Miner: Oh. So you didn't discuss that. Okay.

Sultan: I just said, "Oh, I- if it were me, I would, you know, these are frameable."

Miner: Yeah.

Sultan: So when he passed away, we had the auction I bought the book and indeed cut out some of those and put them in frames.

Miner: Oh, okay.

Sultan: Because they were so cute.

Miner: You said there was one in particular and I interrupted you. You were going to talk about one of the pictures in particular.

Sultan: Did- was I? Some of them were really strange. They were these weird votive objects so they were sort of sexualized, like fertility objects. Some of them were lamps, but some of them were like little statues and- and sort of demonic looking.

Miner: Oh, how interesting!

Sultan: Yeah, so-

Miner: But you never figured out what the book was?

Sultan: Well, no. I did. It was a collection of these Etrurian fertility-

Miner: Oh, that's what it was.

Sultan: -like votive objects.

Miner: Very interesting.

Sultan: Yeah.

Miner: So when you were with-with the students at his house and he brought these books out, and he- you- you made the observation that there were ones- did you create the assessment that they were interesting and useful for your students to know about and was it an enjoyable-

Sultan: Yeah. In some cases-

Miner: -experience?

Sultan: -yes, in other cases no. Sometimes he learned to look more value on something that it was owed.

Miner: In what way?

Sultan: Well, I mean, there were certain authors that he didn't know anything about but he thought they looked good.

Miner: Okay.

Sultan: And he didn't always do his research into everything he bought. But some- what he knew about, he knew about. You know, he would do his research on certain items, you know, for things he knew were important.

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Sultan: And he got a lot of his information from Ebay, I mean, from the sellers.

Miner: From the book sellers.

Sultan: From the sellers.

Miner: Interesting.

Sultan: Yeah, they would tell him what they thought, and then he might, you know double check it and what not. But he had lists of books that he wanted. I mean, he had a wish list.

Miner: That was my other thing. I've not come across any of those yet and I haven't talked to any book sellers who had, you know, want lists, created- created want lists for him.

Sultan: Oh, that's too bad 'cause I know he did. Well, I gave him things to look for too.

Miner: Did you?

Sultan: Yeah.

Miner: Did he ever find anything for you?

Sultan: He was in the process, I said, of looking for this erotica stuff.

Miner: Yeah. But that's about it?

Sultan: I'm trying to think if I- if I sent him on a task to find something. I don't know if I did or not to be honest as far as actual specific books. But we talked about- for me, the thing I loved were, you know, first edition publications of excavations with all the drawings.

Miner: Hmm.

Sultan: And he liked that too and they all had maps, you know-

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Sultan: So that was all the, you know, extra stuff that were in the books that for me really made them special.

Miner: Hmm. So you guys bonded over that?

Sultan: Yeah. We bonded over that.

Miner: That's great.

Sultan: Yeah.

Miner: So what do you think a- a person like that who had- I mean, we've just been talking about books but I think you mentioned earlier too that, you know, of course there were other things he was interested in. What do you think the effect of somebody like that on a campus or on people such as yourself was?

Sultan: Oh, I think it's huge. I mean, his intellectual engagement, his excitement about, and curiosity about learning and the centrality of books to his process was very infectious and it was very important for the students to see that we have a very intellectual president who is into ideas and you know, values books and valued coins and valued, you know, research and he just loved the library. I mean, the fact that we have the statue of him and striding into the library, I mean that really does sum up his enthusiasm for a love of learning.

Miner: Hmm.

Sultan: He really was a polymath.

Miner: Hmm. Mm-hmm.

Sultan: And he was insatiable.

Miner: Hmm.

Sultan: I mean, there were certain things he was really passionate about, you know, like Japanese like prints and art. He was interested in this you know, Classical tradition.

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Sultan: He had a certain little areas which he was really passionate about. Just generally, he was interested to anything that anyone wanted to talk to him about.

Miner: Hmm.

Sultan: And that was just hugely important. It was important for faculty. It was important for staff, and students, and he was always really engaged intellectually.

Miner: Hmm.

Sultan: And for him that was why you got up in the morning. "What am I going to learn today?"

Miner: Hmm.

Sultan: "What book am I going to find today?"

Miner: Interesting.

Sultan: Right? "What-what ideas is he going to come across me today, you know? Who's going to stimulate me?"

Miner: Hmm.

Sultan: "And who can I stimulate?"

Miner: () Go ahead.

Sultan: Go ahead.

Miner: You're the first person who's mentioned staff. You know what kind of interactions he had with staff? Along similar- along similar ways? You know the- the

Sultan: Well, he would talk to anybody. He would talk to anybody. It didn't- it wasn't like he was a staff snob, not at all.

Miner: Well, staff I think are a pretty underrepresented group on campus so it was interesting to hear you say that.

Sultan: Yeah. No, I mean, our office coordinators at the time, you know, interacted with him and I know that all the people at Holmes Hall all who were, you know, working for him and around him-

Miner: Sure.

Sultan: -benefited from his sort of manic lust for...[Miner laughs]...moving on from one thing to another. For example-well, she's faculty, you know, but I mean, Sue Anderson will, you know, talk your ear off about all of her experiences from Minor but you know, all the library staff. I mean he was so much a part of Ames library becoming Ames Library, from zero to when it happened.

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Sultan: Never left- I mean, she used to say, you know, "I got to get him out of here because he's driving me crazy." You know...[Miner laughs]...I mean, he just- he was there for every- every day.

Miner: Hmm.

Sultan: He would- he would see this building going up from his house and it-

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Sultan: -this was- consumed him.

Miner: Hmm.

Sultan: You know, he had this vision of this world- class, beautiful library on this campus-

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Sultan: -and it's really what gave him the biggest kick.

Miner: Hmm.

Sultan: You know, even though he was, you know, responsible for all these other buildings going up, you know, the library was the single most consuming love of his life.

Miner: That's interesting.

Sultan: And so every staff member who had anything to do with this library would say something about his impact on them during this whole process. And sometimes it was pretty stressing, you know.

Miner: Yeah.

Sultan: Like, if something happened- like we had lots of problems-

Miner: Yeah.

Sultan: -you know, the water sprinklers went off, all this stuff. I can't remember when you were here.

Miner: I was here after that. After that. [laughs]

Sultan: Yeah. Well, Anke Voss may be able to give you insight into that-

Miner: Yeah.

Sultan: -'cause she was here during that time but I'm-a see her on Saturday.

Miner: Are you? Yeah, I'm going to talk to her too.

Sultan: But- so some of it was him getting freaked out when things happened was not so great but- but he was- I would say that you know, if you were to ask Minor, you know, "What is your one legacy on this campus that you want to be remembered for?" it would be the library.

Miner: Hmm.

Sultan: Oh yeah.

Miner: Were you involved in the planning too in all of that? 'Cause I know that so many people on campus were involved with focus groups and other things.

Sultan: Yeah. I mean, I might have been but I just can't remember. I'm trying to think. I don't know what my role was in that whole process to be honest with you.

Miner: Well, one of the things that you- that you raised- and I think is true, the...this idea of influencing the library is still felt today, right? So he had a very particular view of his own

collecting which I think you're bearing down in some of what you say about, you know, he would never think of getting rid of something-

Sultan: Mm-hmm.

Miner: -and he was very interested in making sure everything was around and available and that was not perceived well, I think, along all of the library staff and faculty.

Sultan: Yeah.

Miner: I mean, there are real issues there within-

Sultan: Right.

Miner: -an academic library, and I- I certainly understand them because I'm, you know, drawn of the same cloth but I'm also a person of the book. Right? And I love the artifacts and I'm very much into that, but- so I was wondering if you have any, you know, thoughts or perceptions on his philosophy about- you know, what I see- this is totally my bias, as his "can't get rid of anything, got to collect everything" in an academic library-

Sultan: Hmm.

Miner: -in a place like Illinois Wesleyan-

Sultan: Yeah.

Miner: -as opposed to some of the other big collecting libraries, right?

Sultan: Right. Right. Yeah, I see-

Miner: And how that plays out.

Sultan: Yeah. Well, I mean, you know, he- he was kind of a hoarder, you know. He didn't like getting rid of things and you can't run a library like that at a college this size.

Miner: Right.

Sultan: You- you have to be able to pull things off the shelf when they're not being used ever-

Miner: Right.

Sultan: -or they're completely out of date, especially some of those science texts or whatever. Right?

Miner: Yeah.

Sutan. They're just so not useful anymore and are out of date. I'm like him, though. I don't get rid of books.

Miner: Yeah.

Sultan: I will find a place for them but I'm not running a university library.

Miner: Right.

Sultan: Right? But I mean, I still have every book I ever had from my whole life pretty much.

Miner: Hmm.

Sultan: I just can't- you know, my mother still lives in the house we all grew up in-

Miner: Hmm.

Sultan: -which was a five bedroom, three and a half bathroom-

Miner: Hmm.

Sultan: -mansion basically. And all our books are still on the shelves from our whole lives.

Miner: Wow.

Sultan: And I'm sure that when the time comes, I will not keep all of those. I mean, lots of paperbacks and stuff, you know. But- but we- my mother was a librarian.

Miner: Really? I didn't know that.

Sultan: Yes.

Miner: Oh fun!

Sultan: So we were told, “Don’t ever write in the book.” When we were growing up, you know, books were treasures, you know.

Miner: Yeah.

Sultan: You didn’t write in a book. You didn’t write on a spine. You didn’t bend a page. You didn’t dog-ear-

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Sultan: -you know, we always had beautiful, beautiful bookmarks, you know, and book plates and things.

Miner: Hmm.

Sultan: It was just books- books were very, very treasured then and valued. But as soon as I got to college, I started writing in my books and realized that (unsure, 25:00??) to me was so essential.

Miner: Yeah.

Sultan: And I really started to value other people’s comments that were scribbled in books.

Miner: Yeah.

Sultan: And so mom hated that. She hated it, hated it. [Miner laughs] But I think Minor was that way too, so I think we kind of bonded over that too. [Miner laughs] But yes, he did, I’m sure, cause problems with his lack of the wherewithal to cull-

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Sultan: -and I can see where that can be very anxiety-provoking, especially if you disagree on what books should be culled, you know, like which goes in the go box and which goes in the stay box and why, the argumentation about that. Why- this book may not seem important now, but it could- it was certainly important in the 1790s.

Miner: Right.

Sultan: And it could be important again, you know, as some sort of historical relic.

Miner: Well, that's one of the things that-

Sultan: Well, I'm sure the staff, you know...were not happy about that. And I'm glad I didn't have to- I remember when all the books were, you know, piled up and everything. I was the same way. I mean, Paul Bushnell and he never read his books either and they were sitting around in the Shaw classroom all piled up.

Miner: Yeah.

Sultan: And I thought, "Hmm. I wonder how many of these I could take."

Miner: [laughs] You get the bug.

Sultan: Instead of "Oh, these need to go."

Miner: Yeah, well-

Sultan: You know.

Miner: That's great.

Sultan: But- well, do I really need the textbook that I used in ninth grade to study Mesopotamia?

Miner: Well, maybe that one.

Sultan: Yeah.

Miner: Yeah, maybe that one. [laughs]

Sultan: Yeah. It's got a nice picture on the cover.

Miner: Professional- professional interests.

Sultan: It's got my- it's got my handwriting in it from when I was in ninth grade. I mean, stuff like that. I'm a classicist, right? So, you know, if I wrote something in or or a student wrote something in it or anything-

Miner: Yeah.

Sultan: -to me, that's historic and worth keeping.

Miner: Hmm. So are you an active book collector now?

Sultan: Well-

Miner: Or are you a collector of other things?

Sultan: I buy books. I mean, I collect books in my field.

Miner: Yeah.

Sultan: And I'm running out of room, as you can see. [Miner laughs] But duplicates I'll get rid of.

Miner: Oh well. Got to have some criteria.

Sultan: Duplicates, yeah. [Miner laughs] And I have been known to give away books that I know really aren't ever going to be correct and don't need to be-

Miner: Yeah.

Sultan: I do keep some hardcovers.

Miner: It's hard. It's difficult.

Sultan: But I am a bibliophile.

Miner: Well, and we thank you for your support. [both laugh] So back to one of the comments you made earlier about bringing ideas to you when you first got here, how did you like that? Did you- you were excited about being here-

Sultan: Yeah!

Miner: -you had programmatic ideas. Was it fun to have a collaborator or did you think otherwise?

Sultan: Well, I mean, he could be a little annoying because he would come buzzing into my office and say "I've got the great idea for an event that I want you to organize!" Right?

Miner: Okay.

Sultan: So it was always, “I’m thinking of the idea. You carry it out,” and, you know, piling work onto my schedule, so sometimes, you know, I just kind of would give him a punch in the arm and say, you know, “What a great idea!” and “Thanks a lot for that! I’ll put it in my database!” you know and then I would file it away because he was always doing that.

Miner: Then never came back and said-

Sultan: So very rarely when he would like get me, you know, pull rank on me or something. He never forced me to do anything, you know-

Miner: Okay.

Sultan: -ever. But he just wanted me to more-

Miner: Sure.

Sultan: -and I would do- I mean, he loved everything which was interesting because a lot of the times it was the faculty that was stopping me from things. So when I wanted to start an ancient Greek language program here-

Miner: Yeah. Yeah.

Sultan: -it was more the faculty. They fought my tooth and nail. Latin? Fought me tooth and nail. Because when they hired me, they had no classics before. They had no tradition of it so they weren’t sure that- that they wanted to add languages to the curriculum-

Miner: Hmm.

Sultan: -because they were not very supportive of a second language learning. There’s still a huge pushback from the faculty- from faculty to, you know, make language requirements and encouraging students to study a second language. I mean, they don’t see the value in it. But he did. He was very supportive and that support and enthusiasm kind of saw me through and- and encouraged me to keep fighting the good fight. And even Janet after a while saw the writing on the wall for some of things I wanted to do and she kind of said, “Well, the faculty are probably going to vote that down. The faculty are probably going to vote this down,” and- but I had enough support from faculty to where actually any time I brought it to a vote, it passed.

Miner: Hmm.

Sultan: I was never denied anything I had ever asked for in the end.

Miner: Oh, good for you.

Sultan: But I had a lot of naysayers and grumbling, you know.

Miner: Well, it's part of the process.

Sultan: But he was always so happy and supportive any time anything had passed and wanted to know. He wanted to be in the loop, you know, and he would come to things and I would have speakers and events, and he was there, and he would come and so it was important to have that enthusiasm. [Miner laughs] And every now and then he would come up with a good idea that was actually doable and that I could follow through.

Miner: [laughs] Yeah.

Sultan: Some of the things were kind of hare-brained.

Miner: The wisdom to know the difference.

Sultan: Right. But he didn't do this to me. I want to make that very clear. It wasn't just classics that he was interested in. I mean, he would pop into a lot of people's offices-

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Sultan: -with ideas of things that we can do.

Miner: Hmm.

Sultan: And, you know, sometimes that was seen as, you know, "get your nose out of my affairs" kind of a feeling.

Miner: Hmm.

Sultan: So- "You're adding to my workload."

Miner: Sure.

Sultan: Some faculty didn't understand that when he came bursting in with an idea that they could just humor it, like some faculty felt like he was telling them, "You have to do this." But he never was really doing that.

Miner: Hmm.

Sultan: He never did.

Miner: They never got the clue that-

Sultan: But I think they were worried that the president comes in your office and says, "Hey, let's do this," then he really means it, and then you kind of all have to drop what you're doing at that moment and do it, and then they thought it was kind of annoying-

Miner: Hmm.

Sultan: -in that way.

Miner: Hmm.

Sultan: But when I- I never did. I just liked the fact that he liked what I was doing.

Miner: Suddenly I got a- a image of a pollinator-

Sultan: Really? Yeah.

Miner: [laughs] -when you were talking about going into different offices.

Sultan: He kind of was, 'cause he was constantly thinking of things, you know. Something would strike him, or he would read something or he would see something and he had to share or he had to wonder about it and he wanted to know. I mean, every now and then I'd get an email from him wanting the definition of a term-

Miner: Hmm.

Sultan: -Latin, or Greek, you know.

Miner: Hmm.

Sultan: So I found that very stimulating and wonderful.

Miner: Great.

Sultan: And, you know, Dick Wilson has been a good president in so many ways but he is not like that.

Miner: Sure.

Sultan: He's not intellectually engaged and excited about things and he- he would get lip service and would come to stuff every now and then.

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Sultan: And he would be showering us with praise. Like he came to a couple of performances that I had of Greek tragedy-

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Sultan: -and plays that we would put on and scenes studies and things, and I'd invite him and he'd come. And he would be bemused because he just didn't get it.

Miner: Yeah.

Sultan: But he was supportive.

Miner: He was there.

Sultan: Yeah, he was there. But- but Miner got it-

Miner: Yeah.

Sultan: -and- and really was excited-

Miner: Hmm.

Sultan: -you know, and wanted to know what was going on. "What are you doing this week? What are you doing? What are your plans?"

Miner: [laughs] Always have to have something in the hopper.

Sultan: Mm-hmm.

Miner: Well, you want to talk a little bit about the auction?

Sultan: Sure.

Miner: One of the things I'm curious about from people who knew him was how you think he might have felt about having his collection purchased at an auction.

Sultan: You know, I mean, I never heard him talk about that, you know, or express an interest in wanting to get rid of anything in his collection-

Miner: Mm-hmm.

Sultan: - in any way. So, I mean, my gut feeling is that, you know, he would have been really unhappy that his books were being auctioned, even though he himself went to many auctions.

Miner: Well, see, that's what's- what's interesting to me is I've now had a decade of experience working with donors, you know, and some of them enjoy the thrill of the chase so much-

Sultan: Mm-hmm.

Miner: -and- and express, you know, such excitement at being able to get rid of a collection and acquire a collection, and you know, that whole game kind of thing. But having one static view of Miner as a collector, which is a lot of things that he never expressed publicly-

Sultan: Hmm.

Miner- an interest in collecting and were in his collection, so my bias, my- not my bias, but my assumption is that he was not that kind of collector who enjoyed the- the getting and the giving. It was all about the getting, right?

Sultan: Mm-hmm.

Miner: And finding a good deal or some other- whatever criteria it was, so-

Sultan: Yeah.

Miner: -and- and I've always kind of wondered how he would think about...his collection not going into the library that he built.

Sultan: Right. Yeah, I think it would be hurtful for him actually. I mean, I don't know him well enough in his private affairs to know if he ever did auction off-

Miner: Okay.

Sultan: -or sell any of his own collection.

Miner: Okay, 'cause that's one of the things I'm looking-

Sultan: I know, and I don't know if he did or not. He never talked to me about selling anything.

Miner: Okay.

Sultan: It was always about acquiring things.

Miner: Okay. This is another piece of the puzzle.

Sultan: Yeah.

Miner: What did you think of the auction? Were you-

Sultan: I was sad.

Miner: Yeah.

Sultan: It was very- you know, I had mixed feelings about it. And I went to the auction knowing I was going to purchase this book-

Miner: Okay:

Sultan: -'cause I saw it in the line-up and it was like, "Okay. This is it." Depending on how much it is, I'm going to- I'm going to-

Miner: Right.

Sultan: -buy it because I wanted to have that memory because that was such a fond of sitting with him and going through those lithographs or those watercolors or whatever that-

Miner: Right.

Sultan: -they were watercolors.

Miner: Right.

Sultan: But just going through that little book and talking with him about it and- and how anxious he was about it...[Miner laughs]...you know, all his voicemails and-

Miner: Yeah. That's funny.

Sultan: But sitting there, you know, it was sad. It's like pieces of Minor were being sent away, you know? And there weren't a whole lot of people I knew at the auction, which I also found sort of sad. There was only a handful that I- of faculty, for example, who wanted to buy a book of Minor's.

Miner: Yeah.

Sultan: That was also kind of sad.

Miner: Yeah.

Sultan: But I was very happy that I was able to acquire this at the auction.

Miner: I'm happy for you too.

Sultan: Yeah, I wish I could find it now.

Miner: [laughs] I'm sure you will.

Sultan: I've sort of pilfered it.

Miner: Are there other things we should know about Minor from you? Do you think there are other things you can think about or-

Sultan: You know, he just- he had this (unsure, 36:44??), just a real love of life, love of being alive, and being able to have a thought, you know, think about things, talk about things. He was just one of the most engaged people that I had met.

Miner: Hmm.

Sultan: And he was so good for this place in that way. In other ways, like money-

Miner: Yeah.

Sultan: -he wasn't so great. [Miner laughs] But as far as contributing to the- he wanted Illinois Wesleyan to be big, you know? And he tried to make that happen and he did. You know, he wanted us to rise up and be in that group of these elite institutions that he valued. But he valued an institution because of its intellectual (unsure, 37:38??).

Miner: Hmm.

Sultan: So...I always had so much fun talking with him.

Miner: It sounds like he tried to, you know, pollinate here and, you know, engage people.

Sultan: I do too. But you know-

Miner: Well, thank you so much for doing this. I hope you find the book. I hope to see it someday.

Sultan: Yeah.

Miner: Or at least what you've framed, or what you thought you should frame. [laughs] Well, thanks Nancy.

Sultan: Well, thank you for doing this.