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Lynn Nichelson

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Written Account Derived from Lynn Nichelson's Interview with Rachel Kagan April 1, 2010 and Supplemental Recollections

This written account of the early beginnings of the financial aid program at Illinois Wesleyan University was mostly derived from Rachel Kagan's interview with Lynn Nichelson on April 1, 2010. Rachel is a senior at Illinois Wesleyan University. The interview was supplemented with other recollections which weren't covered at the time of the interview.

Lynn Nichelson served as Director of Financial Aid at Illinois Wesleyan University from 1963 until 2007. At that time, President Richard Wilson appointed him Assistant Dean of Enrollment Management and Financial Aid, a post which he retired from August 1, 2009.

Kagan: We are in the Hansen Student Center right now. You already stated this, but you began working at Illinois Wesleyan in what year and what was your first position?

Nichelson: I came to Illinois Wesleyan in 1962 as the Assistant Dean of Students. I remained in that position for a year and the President at that time, Dr. Lloyd Bertholf, asked me to begin and organize a financial aid office. It would be my responsibility to contact all of the departments who had any type of financial aid and put those programs under one umbrella. I began the initial stages of the transferring responsibilities to this new financial aid office at that point.

Kagan: Do you know why they chose you?

Nichelson: I had just completed my first year as the University's assistant dean of students and I apparently was considered to be someone who could help both the Director of Admissions, Lee Short, and Anne Meierhofer, our Dean of Students, with their respective financial aid responsibilities.

Kagan: Okay.

Nichelson: I hold a degree in Economics and this academic background was what appealed to Dr. Bertholf. The old National Defense Education Act had been passed in 1958 and it became apparent that the University needed someone to coordinate and manage Federal loans under this Act through its

new financial aid program. This process was also underway at other colleges and universities across Illinois

Kagan: Mhmm.

Nichelson: In fact, all over the country. I was very fortunate since I was at the ground level when an entirely new profession was developing and I fortunately was, with the exception of the National Defense Education Act, at the beginning of every piece of Federal legislation concerned with financial aid. I managed all of the University's financial aid programs to meet Federal regulations as programs were introduced by Congress.

Kagan: And so what qualities first drew you to apply at Wesleyan or to start working at the University?

Nichelson: Well, I was in graduate school and jobs at the time were hard to find. I was working on my Master's degree in student personnel administration at Indiana University, and this job opening came up. It was for an assistant dean of students. It was in Illinois, and was close by; I contacted the University and they invited me to come over for an interview. It was also an opportunity to begin my career in student personnel administration.

Kagan: Ohh, that's good. And so what was it like just in general starting a whole financial aid program from scratch, especially when there was just nothing to begin with?

Nichelson: Well, first you have to understand that I had a lot of guidance and support to get this off the ground. And as it turned out, Anne Meierhofer, the Dean of Students, managed all of the upperclassmen with financial aid; she basically ran that program out of the top left drawer of her desk. She had little cards to enter different aid that students had been awarded. Lee Short was the Director of Admissions at the time. He worked on all new student financial aid and it was really Lee's recommendation that President Bertholf talk with me about beginning a financial aid office.

Kagan: How did financial aid work before you started a—how did they...?

Nichelson: Well, for example, the School of Music offered its own scholarships. The same was true for the Schools of Art, Drama and Nursing;

nothing was really coordinated. They just did their thing and disbursed their own funds in the student's name directly to the Business Office. Each of these schools had its own budget and there was really no sense of professionalism about it. No one really particularly understood what they were doing or how they would go about managing these funds. That's why President Bertholf asked me to bring all of this together under the umbrella of one office and work with a need analysis methodology where we would, according to a formula developed by the College Board, determine what financial aid a student would be eligible to receive according to demonstrated need.

Kagan: And so what were the biggest difficulties right from the start?

Nichelson: Well, I guess I would go back a little bit and also say the assistant dean of students, the person whom I replaced, worked with University and Federal student loans.

Kagan: Okay.

Nichelson: And the Dean of Students, Ms. Meierhofer, worked with State, private, and University grants along with another person by the name of Glenn Dodds, who managed student employment; they awarded these funds according to Federal regulations as they understood them and it was really kind of a loose-knit organization. There were no Federal grants before I came along since they weren't authorized until the Higher Education Act of 1965. It was tough to bring all of these different sources of student aid together since those were the days when we didn't have computer programs to keep track the way we manage things now.

Kagan: Yeah.

Nichelson: I can remember starting out with a twelve-column accounting pad while I talked to both the Admissions Office and the Dean of Students about how they did things. I also contacted other people across the campus who were responsible for managing different types of financial aid, as well as department heads who had control of any other source of private or University student assistance. Once I got all that together, I had to figure out how I was going to mold this into an efficient program that would disburse financial aid from a single place into the Business Office records of student award recipients.

Kagan: And so what kind of changes did you see in the office in your, you know, forty plus years at Wesleyan, at the Financial Aid Office?

Nichelson: Well, over the years financial aid programs have been gradually implemented by the Federal government since the first Higher Education Act was passed in 1965. And because of all those changes, many financial aid officers both nationally and statewide have had to sit down and figure out what it was that needed to be done professionally to better- manage this growing influence of Federal financial aid programs. I have done a lot of traveling and attended several meetings: I sat, I listened, I heard people who had written papers about how we were going to develop this process, and then it just grew piece by piece over time.

Kagan: Okay.

Nichelson: And finally, after working alone for 2 years, I was allowed to hire an office assistant in 1965; a receptionist was added in 1969 to work mostly with students and parents who came into the office looking for help..

Kagan: Were any of them students or were they both -

Nichelson: What?

Kagan: Both professionals, or were any students -

Nichelson: Well, they were professional staff who had secretarial skills.

Kagan: Oh, okay.

Nichelson: I trained them as the need arose, but basically the three of us were it except that I think I had about five students working for me and they would do a lot of the clerical work, filing, different things like that. And then I promoted one of my staff to office manager. Her major responsibility was to keep track of all awarded aid, which involved analysis by hand. She'd give me periodic reports to advise me that we spent this much in grants and that much on loans; in those days there was nothing computerized about those reports. However, I must add as an important supplement to this interview that it was Jeanne Johnson, hired in 1967 to manage the advent of our current information technology systems, who played a major role in

bringing us to the point where, at last, we had a methodology which allowed us to make the decisions we needed to keep us away from problems with our auditors. I am deeply grateful for having the opportunity to work with her for over 40 years! The financial aid office wouldn't be where it is today without her support and guidance.

Kagan: Interesting. I also remember you told me a story once about how, when students were working in the office, there usually was no desk for them, and they were forced to sit on the floor to get their paperwork done.

Nichelson: They did, and the standing rule was women must wear jeans since a dress wouldn't be conducive to the poor working conditions of an office which was too small to accommodate the staff needed to get the job done.

Kagan: Yeah.

Nichelson: Because it's hard to work on the floor.

Kagan: And you said the office was tiny compared to what it is now?

Nichelson: Well, consider the spot where you now work in the financial aid office -

Kaegan: Mhmm.

Nichelson: The desk where you are now located was the receptionist's area and the entrance to the financial aid office was now where our copiers, etc. are stationed. The office safe, which also is now in the operations area, was originally located in the hallway next to the door which led to the receptionist's desk.

Kagan: Okay.

Nichelson: The public would walk into the office at that point and go back to where you now work to meet our receptionist. That space added to the area over to the south wall was about 25% of the current space in the basement where our staff now works.

Kagan: Oh, it's just -

Nichelson: I mean it's not much more than twenty or thirty feet, if that.

Kagan: And how many people had to fit into that space?

Nichelson: About four permanent staff along with their desk and chair. The desks were practically touching!

Kagan: Okay.

Nichelson: And to dramatize our space problem, I occasionally would ask our then president, Minor Meyers, to meet with me in my office. I'd also schedule an early afternoon appointment with him when we had the most student help working on the floor because desk space wasn't available.

Kagan: Yeah.

Nichelson: In addition to that I always had my financial aid applications to be reviewed stacked on the floor in my office, since there was no other place for them, to further show how difficult it was to get the work done within that limited space.

Kagan: To make the appointment when it was at the busiest time of the afternoon.

Nichelson: Yes. I would ask Minor to be careful since he would need to step around my student help to get to my office.

Kagan: And how long until he gave you more office space after that?

Nichelson: Ohh, it probably took me one or two years to get that point across, as well as to convince him that we truly needed the entire basement office area to fully accommodate my staff.

Kagan: Oh, that's not too bad.

Nichelson: Minor was always very good to me in terms of recognizing what my needs were, but he also had to consider the politics of other senior staff wanting more office space in that same area to meet their own needs. Minor eventually prevailed and I finally got the space I needed..

Kagan: Yeah, which is understandable. Did you have a lot of students and parents coming in to discuss financial aid?

Nichelson: That's right.

Kagan: Also - Were there more faculty-student interactions, would you say - or staff-student interactions?

Nichelson: I would say there was more then than now among both faculty and staff.

Kagan: Was a lot of the financial aid based on just speaking with people?

Nichelson: No - There's been a very thorough need analysis and standardized application process going on for several years according to Federal and University standards. It's on this basis that decisions about who gets how much aid are based on a thorough review of a family's finances and/or academic merit. Our Financial Aid and Admissions staff, though, also go around to high schools to speak at financial aid nights to explain how Wesleyan could be an affordable option, even though it has a high price tag. We explain about the availability of grants, loans, and jobs to meet demonstrated need and how our appeal process works in the event something financial or personal happened at home.

Kagan: Mhmm.

Nichelson: Parents and students would also come to our office and we'd meet privately to go over their application for assistance.

Kagan: Do you think this type of student and family interaction has changed over the years or has it stayed fairly constant?

Nichelson: It's really changed due to our modern culture. You can look at all the work that students do today on the internet and by email to understand my point.

Kagan: Mhmm.

Nichelson: And I realize I sound like ancient history, but you must remember that sort of thing didn't happen until 1990.

Kagan: Mhmm.

Nichelson: It's only been within the last twenty years that there's been this culture of interaction by e-mail, voice mail, cell phone etc. All of those things weren't around in 1990, so there was a lot more personal contact involved with students and parents. I would say, particularly, that during the last ten years I worked at Wesleyan, there wasn't as much contact by phone. I worked with students and parents more by e-mail and also tried to catch up with them by voicemail or on their cell phone. The whole culture is quite a bit different.

Kagan: Of course, yeah.

Nichelson: That was the way it used to be. And it wasn't until the late '80's that the University got into using information technology as a tool for management..

Kagan: Yeah.

Nichelson: And data management technology in general wasn't as sophisticated before then.

Nichelson: I have a thought about data management before the use of PC's. First, getting back to student employees in my office, I was always strong on trying to identify students who were the sharpest, were serious about their work, and wanted to help me the most because I never had enough staff; the lack of adequate computer technology in those days made it all the more important that we identify good student help.

Kagan: Yeah.

Nichelson: So, I always trained them to take their campus job seriously in a professional way. I was very proud of our student workers and trusted them completely; it was very unusual for us to hire a student, only to discover that he didn't belong there in the first place. I'd say 99% of our students never had that first problem. They welcomed the responsibility and did very well.

Kagan: You were happy with all of them?

Nichelson: I always had a good relationship with our student employees. I hope you're included in that.

[Both laugh]

Kagan: Thank you. Of course.

Nichelson: But there were two students whom I remembered more than anyone else. A student worked for me in the mid '70's; her married name is Carolyn Lindley. Her future husband also attended Wesleyan and was an excellent baseball player. He's coached baseball for years at Hinsdale High School. Carolyn was hired at Northwestern, working in the financial aid office. She was steadily promoted there and has been Director of Financial Aid for several years.

Kagan: Oh, wow.

Nichelson: Carolyn and I also worked with the College Board in various capacities and often served on the same national committees; it's ironic she was a student employee in my office. I've always been proud of Carolyn, but another student, - her married name is Carole Liske - was also incredibly conscientious, did really great work, graduated as a nursing major and proved to be someone who truly appreciated being here at the University. She's now married to a pulmonologist in the Chicago area and serves on the nursing faculty at Aurora University; she's also her husband's nursing assistant. Carole never forgot how Wesleyan made it possible for her to remain here with financial assistance and recently has become a major supporter of our effort to raise money for financial aid. I'd lost all contact with her until about three years ago when she showed up in my office unexpectedly for a short visit.

Kagan: Oh, wow.

Nichelson: She was just the kind of person who didn't want to forget her roots and how we gave her the opportunity to get to where she is today.

Kagan: And do you see a lot of that—the impact financial aid has on people?

Nichelson: I've had a number of students after they've been away from the University for ten or fifteen years tell me about their career, where they hope to be in the future, and how life has treated them. All of them have said if it hadn't been for the University's aid, they couldn't have remained with us to earn their degree.

Kagan: Do you think Wesleyan stands out in that respect or that -

Nichelson: Yes I do.

Kagan: Okay.

Nichelson: For example, Illinois Wesleyan has a special program, called the Parents' Association Fund, which was begun about forty-five years ago. The University raises money to help a student with special financial needs. It's described in our catalog that if a student, through death or total and permanent disability, loses a parent who is the major wage earner of the family, our tuition may be waived up to demonstrated financial need

Kagan: Mhmm.

Nichelson: A student, for example, may come from a family without demonstrated financial need. The father is killed in a car accident, and there's not much life insurance. Her mother may lose the family home due to the tragic death of her husband, and suddenly they have gone from a comfortable life to one which is difficult, at best. Our tuition under this program will be waived up to demonstrated need, and the University will fund any remaining tuition after other need-based State, Federal and private gift assistance has been taken into account. The Parents' Association Grant will be renewed so long as the student is enrolled full time at the University and financial need continues to be in evidence.

Kagan: Yeah.

Nichelson: Down through the years this fund has kept many students in school. One student never forgot what the Parents' Association Grant did for him. He was about to begin his freshman year and had come to the campus early for football practice.

Kagan: Uh-huh

Nichelson: He came into my office shortly before fall classes began and said, “Coach sent me over here because I need to leave school and classes haven’t even started. My parents are divorced; I have no idea where my dad is living, my mom was just killed in an automobile accident, my brother and sister are living with my aunt, and I need to drop out of school.” I explained about the Parents’ Association Grant and asked him to file an appeal to apply for the program. Every year he was enrolled at Wesleyan he continued to demonstrate a high need and his tuition was paid by a combination of Federal, State, University, and private grants . He borrowed the remainder of his unmet need and worked a campus job for his spending money. He was bright, conscientious, and a neat guy; he turned out to be a starter on the football team. He and Norm Eash played together in the late 70’s. Norm, as you know, is now our football coach. He graduated and went on to found a major marketing company in the Chicago area. His biggest clients were American Airlines, United, and McDonald’s; he was just an incredible success. He invited me to an alumni gathering at his home a few years ago and I spent some time talking with him about his life and what he had done with it after leaving Wesleyan. He wanted to thank the University for the assistance he received and felt the time was right to return what was awarded him when he had nothing.

Kagan: Oh, wow.

Nichelson: It’s one story after another like that; financial aid has been awarded to so many deserving students and most of them come back to thank us for the opportunity the University gave them.

Kagan: Do you try to keep track of where people have gone?

Nichelson: They keep in touch with me on an occasional basis. One student who worked for me about eight years ago sends a card every Christmas. She has a brother who worked in our office his freshman year before moving on to another campus job. She, though, worked for me all four years, really bright. I think this summer she’s finishing up her PhD in accounting and has an offer to join the faculty at Illinois State University. Her father was a minister and passed away about five years ago. The family struggled after his death and her brother went through Wesleyan on the Parents’ Association Grant Program. So ... that’s what the University is about. And

we've met our obligation for each of those students who was qualified to receive aid from this fund.

Kagan: Are there any other faculty or staff that stick out in your memory?

Nichelson: Well, I get back to Lee Short. When I first came here, we became friends, I worked with him, and he knew a lot about financial aid, but didn't have time to deal with it; he really got me started. The Dean of Students Office, where another part of the financial aid program was managed, gave me a lot of support, and you just don't forget people like that. All of us were very close with the faculty. Throughout the 1960's we were a school of about 1,200 students and those of us who worked for the University were trying to keep its enrollment where it should be without sacrificing the quality of the students it admitted. It seemed in those days that everyone we worked with had time to sit down and have coffee almost every morning. That has changed now due to our increased workload and enrollment, but I think that the internet, email and voicemail have also contributed to the lack of personal interaction. Technology and increased job expectations have also played a role in the University's change from where it found itself several years ago.

Kagan: Yeah.

Nichelson: The Feds now have also kept the proverbial fire at our feet through increased regulation and audit requirements. It isn't enough having to study to keep up with expanded financial aid programs; increased responsibilities to our students and families have also grown as our comprehensive fee continues to rise.

Kagan: And that has changed a lot - you've noticed that change?

Nichelson: Yes I have. If you have time, I'd like to share a story with you to illustrate my point:

[Kagan laughs]

Nichelson: In 1965 I met a gentleman by the name of Peter Mousolite; he was in charge of the Office of Education's Region V office in Chicago. The Higher Education Act had just been passed by Congress and with that came the creation of the first federally-sponsored grant and student employment

programs. The Office of Education was also responsible for managing the original National Defense Student Loan Program, which was created about seven years before the passage of the Higher Education Act. The Feds knew as much about this new legislation as we did and were counting on financial aid professionals to let them know what needed to be done. I went to several meetings in Chicago for a couple of years and had a lot of conferences with the Feds. I remember one day Peter told me, "We're not interested in telling the financial aid profession what to do. All we want is to give you a block grant, an amount of money to spend to help students who can demonstrate a need to enroll at your institution. We'll give you a budget for the Education Opportunity Grant Program, the National Defense Student Loan Program, and money to supplement what you're trying to do with student employment. All you have to do is fill out a fiscal operations report in the fall and tell us how you spent the money as well as how many students with need received awards. Just send it in to us; if we have any questions, we'll call you. We count on you as the financial aid professionals to get these funds into the hands of needy students so they don't have to drop out of school."

Kagan: Wow, that's changed a lot.

Nichelson: It's a regulation and fiscal nightmare now -

Kagan: Yes.

Nichelson: I don't make any secret of it. And the regulations now tell you what financial aid officers can and can't do. That really came home to me when, in 1998, I was asked to serve on a negotiated rulemaking committee in Washington; I served on the committee that wrote the regulations for Federal loan programs. I was in Washington several times over six months that year and spent three to four days during each conference period working from early morning to late at night, trying to negotiate those regulations. The forty committee members sat around a table in a government building and read through the regulations. We'd cross out the old regulations and substitute what the law now required. An interpretation of the intent of Congress would be negotiated among us as we wrote the new regulations.

Kagan: Yeah.

Nichelson: I just use that as an illustration.

Kagan: Yeah, it's changed a lot. Do you think it is negatively impacting the financial aid that we are allowed to award?

Nichelson: Very definitely. The financial aid community is now regarded by Congress as an instrument to disburse Federal aid according to its regulations, subject to audit. And I could tell you stories about the stress an audit can create.

Kagan: Yeah, I believe everybody has complained about them at some point in the office.

Nichelson: I get upset with the Feds. They make unreasonable demands on our auditors; those who have never experienced a financial aid audit can become easily exasperated. Occasionally, I'll be forced to ask an auditor to provide me with the federal regulation which requires me to follow a particular rule, or perhaps the instructions for completing a federal report may be perfectly clear, but the auditor may not be willing to accept those instructions because he can't locate the regulation which supports those instructions.

Kagan: Yeah.

Nichelson: But on the other hand, it's gotten to the point where we couldn't get along without the support of our auditors, which is deeply appreciated.

Kagan: Yeah.

Nichelson: Many of the Feds are professional about the way they handle their relationships with financial aid administrators, but there are also other things which affect our daily lives at the office – we're becoming an over-regulated business which has had a serious impact on the finances of the University and what we must charge for tuition.

Kagan: Yes, unfortunately. Are there any improvements you'd like to see for Wesleyan in the future, starting with financial aid and maybe -

Nichelson: Well -

Kagan: Getting more general with the University?

Nichelson: I've given that some thought and I want to raise a few issues: First, I'm very pleased that the University, through its capital campaign, is trying to raise major support for the advancement of Wesleyan's financial aid program. Dr. Wilson in his role as President of the University has been tremendously supportive and we must do more in the way of helping need-based students with larger grant support, rather than awarding heavier loans. We simply can't go on asking students to borrow the increased financing needed to help meet their cost of education when we're in an economy that now has an unemployment rate approaching twelve percent.

Kagan: I've started to notice that loans have been going up higher and higher.

Nichelson: That's right. Loans have become the only way to meet the remainder of most student need; nobody has additional grant money to award, at least at the State and Federal level. There's concern about whether or not our Illinois students will have an Illinois State Monetary Award next year; that's \$4,968 which could be lost in grant assistance. This has become a significant problem and I'm glad that President Wilson views this as a major issue. We are trying to raise grant funds to further support our aid budget; students need that additional help to meet our cost without sinking deeper into debt.

Kagan: Mhmm.

Nichelson: I also want to discuss the University's desire to enroll a more diversified student body. It's equally important that we continue to graduate students according to gender, race, and ethnic origin. We must work toward becoming more of a national and international community to keep pace with technology and a world economy. We need to make it possible for international as well as Hispanic and African American students to graduate from Illinois Wesleyan with degrees from a broad spectrum of majors. If we don't, we're going to meet the fate of other countries whose higher education programs and enrollments have failed to keep pace with technology. Goods and services which we've come to take for granted in the past may be lost if we fail to maintain our leadership at home and abroad through Higher Education. The University has been very sensitive to that prospect. We have worked very hard at trying to provide that diversity; we

must continue to learn from each other on-campus through our various cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

Kagan: Have you noticed differences in how the University treats people of different cultures or how they try to embrace all cultures?

Nichelson: We have tried to embrace all cultures and that's from my perspective, but we have really gone out of our way to be supportive of the special needs of these students. Many of our students of diversity come from families where neither parent has ever gone to college, and if we can get into that base and have a lot of first-generation college graduates, then the country is going to be fine and it will grow and flourish; we've got to be protecting our history in providing for the future.

Kagan: And do you think Wesleyan is – are there any more changes which need to be made in the future or are they going along the right path?

Nichelson: If we had the money, I would like to see us funding our need-based diversity program more with grants than self-help, although loan and job support is very important to help create an understanding that a college degree isn't free.

Kagan: Yeah.

Nichelson: For many of these students - I'll use cultural attitudes as an example - it's hard to bring them to the University because it's likely there will be a need to borrow and the family's expectation would be that, "We don't borrow money for college, and what happens to us if you fail?" The student's family also wouldn't look at it as an investment; it would be seen as a burden. There's a need for reeducation on this issue, although I do think we are making progress. If we had more grant money, it would be ideal to keep our students of diversity at a level of borrowing which would be at least close to the university average. I'm not saying that borrowing any less would be acceptable, but we should review those who come from families of significant need with the goal of at least borrowing an average amount with more grant support. And many of those students who enroll here make excellent grades because they know where they've come from, where they want to go with this opportunity, and are motivated to earn good grades. Of course, our selective admissions policy has also played a major part in their ability to graduate.

Kagan: Mhmm and also, do you believe that this type of - well, the question is - was there any sort of gender stratification at IWU while you were here or throughout the years or racial, any other divisions, things that you've seen change?

Nichelson: Well, we always struggle with keeping the ratio of men to women in balance. There has always been more women than men. We've also made great strides in our diversity initiatives and this has given our balance of enrollment a more accurate view of the real world

Kagan: I know that last year there was definitely a lot more women than men.

Nichelson: That's right, and for some reason that balance is affected since men are generally attracted to the larger universities which offer a broader selection of majors in the physical sciences. However, we do maintain a strong School of Business as well as an excellent pre-med program; that's where we've tried to compensate for that imbalance. A majority of women, on the other hand, tend to enroll in the fine arts and nursing.

Kagan: Who wonders if that will ever change?

Nichelson: Depends on the culture.

Kaegan: Yep, and how have the facilities on this campus changed in the years you were here - I know there's been drastic change.

Nichelson: Our facilities now are incredible.

Kagan: What was it like when you first started?

Nichelson: Sheean Library was built in '66 after I'd been here four years. When I first came to Wesleyan, there was a parking lot where Sheean Library now stands. The arch at the main entrance to Hedding Hall stood in front of the old parking lot; it was renamed Duration Hall after it burned to the ground in January of 1943. The Administration was housed in the basement until 1959 when the University was finally able to raise enough money to build Holmes Hall. The School of Nursing was also founded in

1960 and moved into the old science building shortly after Country Companies built a new science building for us in the early '60's.

McPherson Theatre was also completed in the fall of 1962 during my first year at Wesleyan.

Kagan: Okay.

Nichelson: The old parking lot wasn't concrete or blacktop; it was gravel. The University didn't have the money to blacktop it. The change to our campus began when Country Companies decided to move its offices from Chicago to Bloomington in 1961. While they were building those offices on Towanda Avenue, they came to the University and offered to build a field house and a science building, which has since become our Center for the Liberal Arts. The Fred Young Field House and the new science building were to be used by Country Companies for its home offices until it could move into its new facilities. This was an incredible opportunity and later served as the corner stone for the beginning of our own construction program over the next forty years.

Kagan: Yeah.

Nichelson: And our enrollment was only about 1,200 when Country Companies came to our campus.

Kagan: Okay, I was going to ask that.

Nichelson: During that same time frame our swimming meets and basketball games took place in the Memorial Gym, later renamed the Hansen Center in 2001. That building was built in 1921 as a memorial to former Wesleyan students who lost their lives during World War I. The building was the hub of most university activities and performances. A large stage stood at the north end of the building where the Bookstore is now located and folding chairs were placed on the gym floor for the audience to watch special campus-wide performances. The horseshoe balcony above the floor was used for spectators when basketball games were played, and bleachers were also placed on the main floor. The entire building during the '60's and '70's still looked as if 1920's America was alive and well. It was an interesting piece of architecture and I'm glad that piece of our history was preserved when the remodeling for the Hansen Center took place in 2001.

Kagan: There were bleachers here?

Nichelson: Right.

Kagan: Wow.

Nichelson: I've seen a lot of changes - the Center for Natural Science was built on a parking lot with the tennis courts next to it in the early 90's, and Sigma Chi was on East Street across from the tennis courts.

Kagan: Okay.

Nichelson: The Shirk Center also opened in '94, shortly after the Natural Science Center was completed.

Kagan: Have you been to the new Minor Myers building?

Nichelson: Oh, sure.

Kagan: What do you think - how do you compare the facilities?

Nichelson: There's just no comparison -

Kagan: Yeah.

Nichelson: I have a sense of history about Illinois Wesleyan. When I came here, it was going to be a short stay and I planned to move on -

Kagan: Mhmm.

Nichelson: Although the following wasn't included as a part of my interview with Rachel, I do want to add that both Dr. Bertholf and Dr. Eckley, who became our president in 1968, had the vision to lay a solid fiscal foundation for the University. Dr. Eckley was an economist who continued Dr. Bertholf's good work of financial responsibility and shortly after he arrived it was apparent he was a man of vision. He understood the importance of providing gift assistance and other financial aid to those who needed it to complete their work toward a degree. I always found him to be as supportive as Dr. Bertholf and the financial aid office grew in stature throughout his

years as president. I owe Dr. Eckley a great deal for his encouragement and confidence in my ability as a financial aid administrator. I also want to add that our endowment has grown to its present level due to his extraordinary understanding of what a university must do to become financially strong. He changed Illinois Wesleyan for the better during his 20 years as president and we have now become one of the better-endowed private universities in the state.

Kaegan: Do you think that was different from other universities?

Nichelson: Yes.

Kagan: Or was it - okay.

Nichelson: We went through a very difficult time, but everyone who worked here was absolutely incredible. We were like a family. I didn't want to leave, as I once had planned. For example, shortly after we moved to Bloomington, my wife and I were occasionally invited to get-togethers at staff homes for small parties. This was how I came to know and appreciate the faculty and staff at Wesleyan

Kagan: Yeah.

Nichelson: Let me give you another example of the campus atmosphere. At the time in the early '60's Glenn Dodds was in charge of our student employment program.

Kagan: Okay.

Nichelson: He and his wife had just moved here from White Plains, New York, where they were high school teachers. Both he and his wife were from McLean County, having been raised in the area. Glenn and his wife owned a beautiful two-story 1920's style home on North East St. They also owned the entire side of the block from Beecher St. to Emerson St.

Kaegan: Emerson?

Nichelson: Yes. There were four houses on that block and Glenn and Millie lived on one end; his mother lived two houses away at the other end. They also owned two pieces of rental property in the middle. When I came to

Wesleyan for my job interview, Glenn was the first person I met; I had stopped to ask for directions to Holmes Hall. "Oh," he said, "are you a candidate for the Assistant Dean of Students job?" When I told him I was there to talk about the job, he said, "Come on in, I want you to meet my wife. Let's have a cup of coffee. It's only eight o'clock. When do you meet with President Bertholf?" I said, at 9:00." "Oh," he said, "We have an hour." "I'll tell you what's good about Wesleyan." So we talked for an hour and he told me things about the University which I possibly couldn't have learned from any campus literature. I had a great conversation with Glenn and Millie for an hour; I still say that's how I got the job. Glenn and Millie became very close friends of my family. My children became their grandchildren since they had none of their own. They just adopted us and it was just an incredibly good relationship.

Kagan: That's interesting.

Nichelson: He had a lot of talent.

Kaegan: Yeah.

Nichelson: He was a writer, a magician; he played the organ and piano. Glenn's wife passed away in 1973 and he married Anne Meierhofer the next year. They decided to move to Sarasota after their marriage. When my wife and I met him at a faculty dinner that fall, he said, "I want to come over and say goodbye to the boys." So we drove to our house and got them out of bed to say good bye to Glenn. He played the piano, showed them magic tricks, and joked around with them. Now my sons, of course, are older and to this day they still remember that night.

Kagan: What year was that?

Nichelson: 1974.

Kagan: 1974?.

Nichelson: A long time ago.

Kagan: That's interesting.

Nichelson: I had a reason for sharing this memory with you. Glenn and Millie had a true love for Wesleyan; it was for this reason that they willed their properties on East St. to the University. Dodds Hall is named for them and I felt, for the record, that you should know more about this couple and why this residence hall was named in their honor.

Nichelson: I have many good memories about Wesleyan. The financial aid program was my professional life. The University allowed me to put in place whatever I felt was necessary for the advancement of the goals and objectives of the office. I always made sure we succeeded and that's the advice I would give anyone: If you're going to promise something, work hard to make that something becomes a reality.

Kagan: Especially if it comes to need-based financial aid.

Kagan: And so how do you spend your time now, post-retirement?

Nichelson: I continue to keep in touch with financial aid professionally and I hold a membership in our national association. I've been keeping up with the latest changes in financial aid legislation and I'm working on several projects around the house. I'm organizing papers and old conference notes in my study. I'm keeping myself busy.

Kagan: And how do you think Wesleyan has, I guess, overall impacted your life, your family's life?

Nichelson: The University changed my life. It strengthened my values; it helped me to appreciate what students and their parents go through to earn a college degree. I've enjoyed getting to know students like you over the four years they've been with us and learning what they've endured to stay in school, how hard they've studied, and watching them succeed. Each student I've worked with has been special to me; if I had a chance to sit down and visit, it was a special time. I've also asked a few to keep in touch, to let me know how their life has changed since graduating from Wesleyan. And believe it or not, I do receive Christmas cards from a few. I've also worked with students who have had special problems; we found the aid they needed and most went on to graduate.

Kagan: And do you think that's a reason we have so many donations to the alumni fund and high alumni participation? Do you think we stand out at all?

Nichelson: I would hope so, although, if you look at *U.S. News & World Report*, our alumni participation is not as high as what you might find at other schools; I would like for it to be much higher, but, on the other hand, we are graduating close to 90% of our students and it does take time to become established in a career before gifts to the University become an affordable option.

Kagan: It takes a long time to get established.

Nichelson: It does take a very long time, but our students have been more successful than most in terms of a career. I think you've read about some of the successes that our graduates have had.

Kagan: Yeah.

Nichelson: Many of our students in medicine and industry have had great success with their careers. For example, I spoke to Ed Pacchetti, who is now working with the U.S. Office of Education as a special assistant.

Kagan: Okay.

Nichelson: He seems very much involved with legislative issues. I had a good conversation with him at Homecoming last fall; we laughed about the debates we had shortly before he graduated in the early '90's about what Congress was thinking and how financial aid regulations were changing.

Kagan: Yeah.

Nichelson: We had interesting discussions. He was president of the Student Senate at the time. I see other graduates doing good things now. That's why the University is special; we don't take these things for granted.

Nichelson: Not many people know about this, but Old North was our oldest academic building before it was demolished about 45 years ago. It was at the back of Holmes Hall and was located at the East side of Sheean Library.

Kagan: Mhmm.

Glenn Dodds wrote a poem about Old North as it was being torn down, and I believe an old issue of the Alumni Bulletin published it in 1966. Glenn was sentimental about those things & he enjoyed writing poetry as it moved him.

Kagan: Oh.

Nichelson: Thanks for giving me the chance to talk about my career. I have taken longer than I expected.