

4-19-1999

William Shelton Oral History Interview, 1999 April 19

Laurence Smith
Eastern Michigan University

Follow this and additional works at: http://commons.emich.edu/oral_histories

Recommended Citation

Smith, Laurence, "William Shelton Oral History Interview, 1999 April 19" (1999). *Oral Histories*. 17.
http://commons.emich.edu/oral_histories/17

This oral history is brought to you for free by the Sound Recordings at DigitalCommons@EMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Oral Histories by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@EMU. For more information, please contact lib-ir@emich.edu.

EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY
HISTORY

INTERVIEW
WITH
WILLIAM SHELTON
Eighteenth President

Tape 2

LNS: This is tape two, interview with William Shelton, it's April 19, 1999. It's sort of a gray day, the clouds sort of breaking through. We're near the end of the term and I'm sitting at a little round table in his office in the corner here looking at his motorcycle.

LNS: Picture of a Harley Davidson. We'll talk about that in a minute. In talking with you last time we talked a lot about education, your philosophy about education, history of, or how you perceived the Institution. I was wondering if we could talk just a little bit about your childhood, real briefly, a little bit of background. You grew up in the South.

WS: Yeah, I was actually born in Batesville, a little community in the Delta of Mississippi. My father was the Pastor of Crowder Baptist Church. There were no paved streets in the town. I remember that. We would go to this one grocery store, it had one of those artesian wells right outside anyway, you know, you could always drink water out of it, it was always shooting water up out of the ground. I don't know why. But anyway, we'd go to the store and I could get those ice creams in a cup. Then Dad took a church, he was called to a church from there I believe to Clarksdale, Mississippi another little, a little bit larger, much larger than Crowder, much larger, still a very small place. And then about the time I was four or five years old we went to Sunrise, Mississippi which was a rural community outside of Hattiesburg near where my mother's parents lived. They lived in Petal MS. So we went there and stayed there for several years. Dad built a new church there. I started; I went to First Grade at Sunrise Elementary School. My brother and I did a journey several years ago

LNS: Now your brother's older or younger?

WS: He's 19 months older. He's a Minister in the Memphis area. But we went back to Crowder,, Clarksdale, went down to Sunrise, the old school is just an old abandoned building. We asked to go inside it, went in, climbed through windows. So then we moved to Memphis in 1951, to it was called the Louisiana Street Baptist Church but it was right by the River Bluffs in a place called Fort Pickering that was considered, which we didn't know, or maybe Dad knew, but it was considered the worst part of Memphis. It was slums. The shotgun houses on the streets and only white people could live there. And then you'd have the alleys and behind our houses, we had a fence but then back off the alleys were a whole African American neighborhood. Back off the alleys, not on the street. We lived in that community until I guess I was entering about the eighth or ninth grade. They had closed down in the fifth grade; they had closed down the School Riverside Elementary School. They shut it down and they bussed us literally. It was not about race it was just strictly about; it was a very rough neighborhood. So they shut the school down so our community had no school. And so we were bussed on city buses every day to A.B. Hill School where I became the eighth grade Arithmetic champion and also the sixth grade Spelling Bee champion. But, any way, those are interesting years in the Fort as we called it. The guys I grew

up with, well, Raymond Austin, as far I know, is still in I think its Brushy Creek or Brushy Mountain Prison in Tennessee for Armed Robbery. Raymond in the Fifth Grade in Miss Finches room and the last year before they closed Riverside, had this big playground was all pavement outside. And Miss Finch who wore a red wig, I'll never forget this short, fat, heavy set lady she said something to Raymond, got on him because Raymond was a _____. Raymond got up from his desk, and ran across the room and jumped up in this window and you know they were huge windows like this. And stood and said he was going to jump if she didn't, he didn't use the word apologize, he couldn't know that, but he was going to jump. And she literally started crying and he wouldn't come out of the window. So it was at that time, a very bad situation. Tommy (Dago) Smith he called himself Dago. Great baseball pitcher, but Tommy's dead. Women killed him. Rabbit Cook, Jerry "Rabbit" Cook. Before Dad died one day, called me, so this was before he was sick so he said that he'd got a call from the Shelby County Jail and there was a prisoner that had asked to talk to him. And of course, the police knew Dad. And it was "Rabbit". And Rabbit had been convicted for shooting a guy's head off with a shotgun on a contract killing out on the West Coast. He was in prison out there. He'd gotten to be the President of the Rotary Club, the prison Chapter so they'd let him go out to speak at these other places and he took off one time. They caught him near Memphis so they were getting ready to send him back so

LNS: Is that how he got the name Rabbit?

WS: Rabbit Cook, so anyway Dad, they said we don't recommend you come, but he's asking. I'll come see him. He played with my sonandell. He came a little bit to church. So Dad went there, and he said they had a very special area, they and they searched Dad and he said they had these two guards, Dad there, cubicle eight by... he said you'd never known that I was talking to a convicted killer. So how's Billy, how's Sonny? You know and they went on. But Rabbit, there was two groceries only two groceries existed in our community. One was Malkins, a Jewish Grocery. _____. I don't know whatever; Mr. & Mrs. Malkin a Jewish family had this little grocery store. And then there was a grocery store owned by a Chinese. And the Chinese store kept missing stuff. So the China man stayed in there one night with a shotgun cause they couldn't find any doors or glass broken and all this stuff. And so he was in there after close in the dark and all. And there was a sky light there was a flat roof, and he's sitting in there sky light opens and here comes this body hanging through well he shot the gun, the shotgun with the Buck Shot in it before the person got through and it hit the person. So anyway, they called the police and this person then climbed out, and took off. Well, it was Rabbit. They'd followed the trail of blood right back to Rabbit's house. And so now Rabbit at that time, I mean gosh, we're like twelve or thirteen years old, he went to Juvenile Court for a while. So it's those kinds of people. Skippy Osburn who claims he was a cousin to Elvis but we never could find that out for a fact. He always said he was Elvis' cousin and Elvis did come over into our neighborhood a time or two. But I don't think it was Skippy's. Red

Austin was born with a birth defect in one leg. But he played ball. We played sandlot ball. One time the ball went out in the street and went in a sewer pipe about this big went all the way under the street and Red just starts going and he gets half way under the street and he gets stuck. They had the Fire Department; I forget how they ever got him out of there. But it was those kinds of people and most of them and I went back to that reunion as I said in that article, first time I'd seen people in the Fort. And most of the people Greg Lou were there. Sandy Wambaugh was there. Skippy was supposed to be there. He didn't come. Beverly Eaves was there, but she's been married twice three times, I can't remember. Judy Wambaugh, who's actually Judy somebody else now, etc. It's first time in gosh, forty years, thirty-five years and, yet it's still as much as my home, it's the only place I identify as home. Well Urban Renewal, they just wiped out the whole neighborhood. Just came in to Dad's well we had built a new church Louisiana Street was right over where you could literally see the bridge the old bridge, the old Memphis - Arkansas Bridge and we moved over on Pennsylvania Street cause we lived, our shotgun house was on Pennsylvania Street next to the Summers' and the Osburns' on this side. So we built the DeSoto Heights Baptist Church her tore that old building down that was a rickety old wood building. Mother cried, she literally did. When she saw where it was. So, anyway, then they came in the City, because it was so bad. Murder, the most frightening time I think I ever had as a child it was every Saturday night we had Bologna and Pork & Beans. And that was the supper every Saturday night growing up was Bologna sandwich and Pork & Beans that's all we could afford. And it's coming a helluva storm of course we all had bars on our windows cause there was no air conditioning. And I don't know if you're familiar with shotgun houses, you never had to live in one, I'm sure. But shotgun houses its just one room right behind the other. Then a little hallway that kind of goes like this. So you had the Front room, and then, where Sonny and I slept. And then Mother and Daddy's room and then kind of a little dining room and here's a little kitchenette and the kitchen and the bathroom in the back porch. The bathroom was actually on the back porch. Anyway, it's storming and thundering and lightening and going like crazy. The doorbell rings and anyway, it was the black guy that would deliver groceries you know the bike that had the little front wheel, from Malkin's Grocery store. I forget his name but he knew us, you know and he was coming to get Daddy. And Frankie's sister, I can't remember her first name who lived right across the street right behind Malkin's store. Had been murdered, I think had been stabbed fifty-seven times. To make a long story short, they came to get Daddy for anything in the neighborhood, people jumping off the bridge, they'd come and get Daddy. And I remember that night, it was storming and I was so scared and there was this murder. Well now the guy that killed her actually lived right behind our fence if you could've climbed right over the fence of our backyard which was a wood fence about eight foot tall and all those black houses, he was mentally retarded. And he got out seven years later cause he had stabbed; he was waiting in her house when she came home from work. He had stabbed her actually a screwdriver. They condemned the neighborhood, Dad relocated or we moved the church over to Peabody.

LNS: Still in Memphis?

WS: Still in Memphis. Yeah, became Peabody Baptist Church; Peabody Street is the first street that had streetlights in the City of Memphis. They it was the street that E. H. Crump, Moss Crump from Tennessee fame and one of the most powerful bosses back during the time of bosses. His house was like only two blocks down from where we bought this corner lot. And it was a real nice house. It was partially there. There were two, three little wooden houses. They tore those down and built DeSoto Heights so that's where the church from where Dad stayed until he retired.

LNS: What years are you talking about? You were how old at this point?

WS: Well when we moved over there I started the tenth grade at Memphis Tech. Technical High School, Auto Mechanics. Took auto mechanics a half a day and Academic parallels the other half of the day.

LNS: Can you fix a car?

WS: I could then, I can't now. I don't even know what the hell is underneath there.

LNS: How about a lawn mower?

WS: Some of those I'm pretty good at. But my brother went one year to South Side, which was the rough high school. It was south side. I went to Memphis Tech Auto Mechanics and did that all the way through high school took auto mechanics half a day and academic parallel, did it in three years. I was a great person in terms of telling you how a carburetor could work or a brake system that was just a for a high school kid I had an amazing ability to explain exactly what was going on. I wasn't real good, I never had that knack with those guys that had the greasy things on and they could get under that car. I did it; I had to do it. But I could do it here where they had no idea to explain exactly what those jets were doing and all those kinds of things. So by that time I had decided probably, I wouldn't be. General Motors contacted me through Mr. Crumb who was a teacher at the Auto Mechanics Shop. Actually the possibility of going through a training Program and then I also got this Memphis State Academic Scholarship. So obviously, that was good.

LNS: Pressures to go to college from your family?

WS: No. From me. Sonny didn't go right out of high school. Sonny joined the Marines right out of high school and didn't get his degree until much later after he came back from the Marines; he worked for a printing company and as a sales person in Memphis.

LNS: So what year did you start college?

WS: I started college; I graduated from High School in '62 and started that fall of '62 at Memphis State. And so that was

LNS: So you were in Memphis when Martin Luther King was...

WS: Oh yes. I was on campus that night. I was in came out of class and went to get in my car cause I committed, and I was driving along and I thought, my god, there's nobody out tonight. And I didn't realize the curfew, they had imposed a curfew and while I didn't get stopped there was a broadcast that he'd been shot. There was a curfew all over town. Yeah the garbage strikes. It was again eerie time in the city.

LNS: When you said you look back to the old days; it's probably safe to say that you're one of the few who became a college president probably.

WS: I would say, the only person out of Fort Pickering that's ever been a college president. Maybe the only person with a Doctorate, I don't know.

LNS: Do you see that a successful thing or a failure?

WS: Well, it was kind of interesting when I went back this time. And again, part of it is because of respect for dad and mom. The whole reunion was...Billy's coming Billy's coming and you know how many of those people and that my mom is seventy-seven and how many of those people at that age, oh Billy this and Billy that. Yeah, I think I was probably of the Fort kids, although, how do you measure success? You see a lot of those are still right there and they've still got friendships retained. Yeah, they don't make near as much money. They don't have, but I don't view it like that because...but, in a lot of ways, they have things that I don't I gave up a lot to pursue a career. They kept probably things that were really more important in their lives.

LNS: When you look back at your childhood, do you see things that helped you or determined the course of your life like you were going to take?

WS: I hate to say it, but I really, when I lived in the Fort I really made up my mind that I was going to have worldly goods. I was especially motivated too. But I think that it was just because poverty was so much a part of our life. I remember, I was going to own stocks. I was going to own stocks. And I don't know where I came up with this and I was going to own a very expensive watch, I don't know if it was the name Rolex or not and I was going to have a very fancy car which was a Mercedes and Rolex were the last two, I think. And I bought twenty-five shares of some Out-West utility. I don't remember exactly when I was able to first buy some shares of stock. But I just said I'm going to be successful and I didn't know at that time what I didn't have. I wouldn't have known anything. Everybody

thought that I'd be a preacher. Cause I was a pretty good speaker and so I think. Well, I think that there's just this assumption that Billy's just going to be a speaker. Well, Sonny turned out to be the speaker. Sonny was actually at first he was the kind of the renegade of the family and then I became the renegade of the family. But I think there was just the assumption that I'd be a preacher. Although I did Youth Work, a lot of Youth Work, as a Pastor while I was actually filled in at a lot of churches and when I was a High School teacher. I actually Pastored a little church I don't know when it was...I was Principal at Oakland, Tennessee. This was a little church there.

LNS: Well what was, you look back and see what is your reaction to your father being a preacher and living the kind of life you had?

WS: Well, I said, you know I said something that I know had to hurt him you can always think back. I was in college in Memphis State. There was a revival going on at Dad's church so Dad said why don't you have lunch with whoever the visiting Evangelist was I don't remember who it was, and him that day meet them somewhere, they were out doing you know. So I did. And I'll never forget this I said certain things that you never, I said one thing to Brad that to this day I still regret you know just that one thing. Anyways, so we're just like at Piccadilly Cafeteria or a Marston's. It was a cafeteria I know that. And so the three of us were sitting there, and so this, and Dad was very proud of me. Why I don't know at that time I wasn't exactly achieving great things in my college career, but I was in college and I guess you know. So this guy said, talking about being a PK, a preacher's kid. And he said something, if you could change or if there could be one thing different or something you know. What and I said, well I wish Dad would've spent more time with me. Now I didn't mean it probably the way although I realize later that it probably hurt Dad very much. I mean this man; if you believe you're called to do something my father believed he was called to serve the Lord as a Pastor. And he his happiest moments were the seven days a week, the twenty-four hours a day when he was doing that. Now he loved his family, but he'd drive the church bus, he'd go over there and help the janitor clean, he'd visit the hospitals and the homes, I mean this was, this was the guy that made me believe that there was something to organized religion. Unfortunately, I could name you a whole group more that made me believe there's nothing to organized religion. But he really, he saw me play ball very few times; I was a good baseball player, decent basketball. He saw me play very few times other than with my grandparent, my Granddad a few times, we never went fishing together. He didn't play golf, he had nothing, and I mean again, Dad's life focused on carrying people to the doctor, visiting and all that stuff. And just really you know he really made me believe that there is such a thing as being called to something. And even though as I don't know if I'm sinning, I'm not an Agnostic, I don't mean that at all. But so much of what I saw from others. But he was the guy that really believed. He lived it every day and unfortunately, Mother wanted him to retire. He retired and in two years he died.

LNS: How long ago did he pass away?

WS: 1986.

LNS: How old was he?

WS: 67.

LNS: My father died at 67. Young age, isn't it?

WS: Yeah. Yeah.

LNS: Your mother still alive?

WS: Yeah. She's in Memphis. She's seventy-seven, seventy-eight. Decent health, high cholesterol, no exercise, eats a lot of potato chips, lives by herself, still drives, God forbid. Has had a hip replacement and she has the brittle bones and sometimes she'll break a bone. They can't fix it, it just kind of mends back together. Sonny's a Pastor of a church there. He became a minister later in life and got his Degree, his education later in life and see he's never left Memphis. He went for a short time to Chattanooga, couldn't stand it that's something like a hundred miles away, he came back. So as I say it's really how you define what's significant what has hit me, I think as I learned later on.

LNS: When you look in the mirror do you ever see your father in you?

WS: Oh yeah, a lot. I'm very much like. You would...

LNS: What traits?

WS: My speaking, my mannerisms. He liked to laugh. He was driven. He was driven by his call; I was driven by mine. Pug nose, curly hair, he went gray very early. He was shorter and then Sonny's like mother. Mother's half-Indian. Sonny had the high cheekbones, pointed nose and straight hair. And yeah, so I was a lot like him.

LNS: What made you go into Higher Education field?

WS: Well I was gonna be that lawyer. Trial lawyer. I can't remember the name of that TV show.

LNS: Probably Perry Mason.

WS: No. It wasn't Perry. I watched all of the Perry's and read all of his books. I read all of those books. But there was another guy that was a little more flamboyant.

LNS: Matlock?

WS: No. Matlock wasn't on. But he did wear a white suit. If I told you his name, it wasn't one of those major shows. But I started with a Degree in History because at that time history, Poli-Sci that was my minor. That's the way you go to Law School, of course. And then of course, you could go into a direction come from Business. But, at that time was the traditional route. So I finally got my Bachelor of Science, believe it or not in History not a Bachelor of Arts, a Bachelor of Science. I don't know what the extension was but I got a BS in History.

LNS: Were you a teacher?

WS: No. Not one course in education. This is where the irony comes in.

LNS: So this would be about '66?

WS: Well '62 when I started school. And so I finished up in '67 actually. I had a little four and -a half-year run actually.

LNSL You were starting the trend.

WS: Yeah. So I got my Bachelor of Science. All history and Poli-Sci, minored in Poli-Sci. And I took the Law School Admission Test. There was an analogy test that was used at that time and passed them. But I couldn't afford the books, financial aid I'd never, I'd worked in grocery stores, worked in putting roofs on buildings and tiles on floors. So I'm sure there was Federal Financial Aid and all but I didn't know anything about it. So I didn't have the money. Sharon and I got married in my Senior Year.

LNS: How'd you meet her?

WS: She was working where Sonny was working at the printing store. She was working there and I went in to see Sonny one day. So we got married about two years later.

LNS: You were still in college?

WS: Yeah, I was finishing my Junior Year when I actually got married. And she was working. So I said ok, I was recruited that year, when I realized I wasn't going to be able to go to Law School because of the money. I don't know how but somebody wanted me to take this test from this insurance company. Cause I had really thought about getting a part time job going to picking up bodies. You know, work the night shift, you work all night, you go pick up the bodies at night. But anyways I took this test, and I was the best candidate in the world to be a life insurance salesman. Well, Alexander Hamilton Life somehow or another talked to me and then they said, it's an office building and it was a carpeted office. Now

I shared it with another person this was how I got as education I had to take, study this book. _____ but draw of \$700 a month, which I didn't want. It was a draw against earnings, but I said, that's too much money. I can't. No we want you to have good clothes, also seven hundred dollars a month plus a parking pass in this thing, plus there was a restaurant on top of this and it was one of those first restaurants that would go around in a circle and I got access to that. So man, here's a poor kid, seven hundred dollars a month; he's got a carpeted office, etc., etc. And so when I graduated a year later, I went to work for them. I mean, for all of seven hundred dollars a month. Of course, they encourage you to sell. I never sold a policy to a relative. I said no.

LNS: May distinguish you among.

WS: They want you to do it. And I said no if it's a good product, you know. Well the good news is that I was able to sell enough to match my draw for June, July and August. So I was good at just kind of cold calling kind of doing. But I really didn't believe that, I know life insurance is important, it's good, but I didn't believe in it. You had to go through this thing you had to go through three no's and you try to get down to the heartstrings thing at the end, you mean you're gonna tell me that those little children you don't care enough. So, I wouldn't do that. This is not, even though I could make money. So the guy in my office there was an older fellow who was the Principal during the regular part of the year, he just sold insurance in the Summer. He was a Principal at the Olive Branch Elementary School and. _____. Hutch, they called him Hutch. He said well Bill they really need you in _____ in Mississippi. Well to make a long story short, he takes me down to see B.J. Redchain who'd been the Principal of Legend. So I mean he had one more year to retire. But at Olive Branch High School. Now I had a History Degree in Poli Sci, so I was just no education courses. Yep, they gave me a contract for nine months for twenty-seven hundred dollars total. But then they moved it up actually to thirty-six hundred dollars.

LNS: Wasn't quite as good as insurance though.

WS: No. No, not at all. Considering I got an eighty-four hundred dollar draw. But I take the thirty-six and I teach, I'm supposed to teach one Civics Class, and I had one Business Math class, some kind of science thing. Then they only had me a couple of days; I had that one class down at a Civics Political Science at Olive Branch High School. And Mr. Chain calls me in and he says, Mr. Shelton. He said, _____. I need you to change your Civics Class and give that to Miss Gr_____, I'll never forget her name. And you take a Senior English Class and we had that homogeneous group and this was the bus driver with the cigarettes in the T-shirt at that particular time. And I said, well, Mr. Chain I will but I do have degrees, in this area and other than winning a High School English Award. He said, Oh yeah, you've got all you need

WS: He said, your big, that's what you've got. He said: Number one, for that hour you keep em' from killing each other and you keep tearing up the building. If you do that, that's all I'm asking you to do. _____ write a book about that year, the class and the people now all the Bus Drivers. So I did that and then I thought, gosh, if I can do this, I'm not qualified to do this. Somehow or another I found that there was a school in Tennessee, a rural school in Tennessee that needed a Principal, Grades 1 - 8. And somehow I forget who the connection was. I was able to get a one-year of temporary certificate to teach high school in Mississippi. I got a two-year certificate to be a Principal in Tennessee of an Elementary School. Now I got not one class in education. I started at night actually though at Olive Branch well I thought, I'll still take History courses at night so that will be keeping me to study so when I go to Law School I'll be ready. Well to make a long story short, I went there for two years, fifty-two hundred dollars, first year. And I was Principal of Elementary School there and we had three Federal Court Orders and I'm telling you what boy, it was the worst. When I went there I was the youngest Principal in the State of Tennessee, believe it or not. And obviously no background and then the first Federal Court Order was Freedom of Choice where there was across the highway we were right on the highway ___ about 600 yards was black school, Mr. Persons was the Principal down there. We fixed their meals, they didn't have a kitchen. So my kitchen fixed their meals and he'd come and get it in his car and all that kind of stuff. So we had that Freedom of Choice, well we had a few African-American children come to our school and that created, cause this community, the cotton gin. The church and the schools less than three schools. That created some unrest. The PTA dissolved. I had a PTA when I moved here and they just dissolved and I knew I could do better than those people. Then the second one; they integrated or desegregated, got the best African-American teachers and sent the worst ones away. Well as that turned out, that really, I mean, the Mayor of town _____ gotten a son if sixth grade had a little desk like this "I want you to understand my son will never have an "N" for a teacher", you know. I was wearing glasses. I took the glasses off and I jumped and came back over that desk and I want you to understand I'm running this school and your son, if he goes here will have one and of course he pulled his kid out. But, no he didn't. His kid stayed. I'd departmentalized from Grades four on where no one had an all black, no one had a black teacher or a white teacher so. Then the third one where it really broke loose is when they drew the lines. You live on that side of the road, you're kid goes there and you know. I did that two years. Then I went to a junior, by that time I said I'm going be in education but I'm gonna be a college president. Three years I'm gonna be a college president, that's when I decided it, I don't know I said you know. And that's when the progression started I went to a Junior College in Mississippi, Director of Student Activities.

LNS: That was?

WS: That was in 19...that was '67 through '69, '70 that period.

LNS: What school was that?

WS: Alex Northwest Mississippi Junior College and went there as Director of Student Activities became Dean of Students as an Assistant to the President. I left there in '75 and went to Henderson State University as Dean of Student Development and then Vice President for University Services, strange title. And stayed there until '83 went to Kent in '83 as Vice President _____ and came here in '89. So everything was going to a better school. A little different responsibility building of things. When it came out, other than Finance, I pretty much had experience in every area as far as running an institution.

LNS: As being a Southerner, how do you think that has affected you?

WS: I think I certainly realize the way I talk, some people under-estimate me and that's OK. I think that there's that I was instilled with a value system; I don't mean some kind of moralistic value system. Oh there is some moral to it. I just think something about respecting people, something like that. I think certain kind of things.

LNS: Gentility of the South?

WS: Yeah, before I came here I never went to a college football game without wearing a tie. Well I mean, but I had never seen that. When you went to a ball you dressed up. Now you may not have rich clothes but you when you went to a college football game you wore a tie, you wore a coat. You know. And some of those kinds of things and I think that.

LNS: Still maintain that attitude do you think?

WS: Yeah.

LNS: It's the period we grew up in, don't you think? Sometimes when I go to the movies I think I should be getting dressed up.

WS: Well you as you know.

LNS: Do you dress for church?

WS: Oh yeah.

LNS: See we dress too for religious service and now people almost come in in sweatshirts. I mean it's sort of...

WS: Only within the last two years have I even worn Bermuda Shorts in public. And that's very limited where I'll do that here. I just didn't think that that's appropriate to wear. I wouldn't wear them in public, I'd wear them at home.

LNS: That's interesting. You've announced your retirement about fourteen months from now.

WS: It seems like it's a long ways away.

LNS: Time's clicking fast, isn't it?

WS: Well certainly over the last ten years it is. I mean I can remember so in that sense, I know that those fourteen I, and it's not because it's got the word motorcycle in it, Although I bough it to read.

LNS: Motorcycle.

WS: He talks about how, as you look back and it yesterday I was interviewing candidates here for the MAC commission and we have their resume and we'd start off I said well tell us about you, where you've been. As a beautiful pattern to the past, a perfect pattern as you look back just like I've shared the pattern here. But of course, we all can see clearly the past but there's no pattern to the future. We have to go through the future and then look back and that's kind of where I am right now. I can as I show you the logical steps from, almost from Fort Pickering to where I am and you put it, the way it sounds, as boy, Bill that was you had that laid out perfectly. But now in this last fourteen months and whatever the rest of the years of my life, see we don't know. We don't know. We can do some planning but you can't control that. That pattern only comes when you look back.

LNS: Is it exciting or awesome or both?

WS: Oh I think it's a little bit of both. I'm excited for the first time in my life I don't have a game plan after June 30th.

LNS: Not this June 30. June 30, 2000.

WS: Yeah. So in a sense it's kind of exciting and yet it represents such a departure because I have always had a plan of what was going to happen next and what was I going to do and while I couldn't guarantee it. Like looking back and seeing the pattern there. I always had a plan and although it's frightening in a sense it, July 1st for the first time since you were in your early '20s or maybe even younger, you don't really know what is supposed to be going on in your life.

LNS: Sort of liberating?

WS: Yeah it is.

LNS: Recreate yourself. Having, going through the same thing being able to think clearly not being encumbered by lots of other kinds of things at this point in your life.

LNS: When you look back at the presidency someone comes to you today and they really dead set on being the president and they said well what kinds of skill attributes, characteristics, what would define an ideal president or someone who might become an ideal president. What would you think about that?

WS: Well I first of all just seeing so many of us in this role there is no one way to describe the university president they are so across the board. I think that the single biggest key for the successful president in the public sector at least is the ability to persevere. I know that sounds very small when you come right down to it. I'm not a great thinker. But the point is that it's a marathon kind of experience whether it is three years or ten years or, you know. And the ability then to accept it very, very seldom is anything as good or as bad as the first few years. And if you can hold that, and I would say you learn something from everybody you work with. I saw the presidency in a sense, destroy two very competent people. Because they took it very personally. And one of the reasons is I got to this is I began to sense cause I had always said I won't take it personally, whoever's in that office whether the decisions is the same as our map. Are going to be, I mean a President, if you do anything you're going to be criticized. And the issue, can you not take it personally? For nine years, I was pretty good at not taking it personally. But, I began to sense, I actually began to sense, actually began to sense the first thing that told me to wake up to remind me was in the last Faculty Initiatives. I took it personally for a little while there. I said, wait now that's not what you're supposed to do. That was three years ago. So, I would say the ability to not take it personally is awfully important.

LNS: Are there other things that you could think of? Thin skinned is that the same as?

WS: I think it really is. And again, I have a variety of I've read every book on the Presidency you could read and I have a whole series of them I used them all the Presidency is a temporary position. You know you gotta always understand that. It may be a temporary position of one year or ten years or twenty years. It's a temporary; don't view this as something that it's not. It's a temporary. If you need applause try show business. You're not going to get it, you know the University Presidency is not a popularity contest the majority of the decisions you're going to make your going to upset somebody. So I had a whole series of those kinds of things that I would remind myself of day after day and don't ever confuse the regency of the office I mean by virtue of being there. I'll understand when June 30th comes and my pencil is broken and maybe even a little beforehand, I won't be treated the same way as I am as President of this University. I won't be invited to the same kinds of things, I mean there'll be a group of things. But the point is that presidency, by virtue of being president I've played some of the finest golf courses that I'd never play if I weren't President of a University and you know, I

understand that and too many of my colleagues don't understand, they let it go to their ego that by god, I'm something, yeah, your somebody but you're not the regency of the presidency you're sitting in that chair. So those are the kinds of things that you know, but I don't really know that there's any magic I think that Maryanna one day here saw of course he'd been on the A.P. Executive Committee still may be and she said I think of all the things I've learned about you is just how literally, how you persevere. That you just don't let them beat you down regardless of the things you just keep on going. And I think that's true; I just refuse to just let it get me down. And I think that that's one of the differences but if you look on this job as something for the rest of your life see then it becomes, see it's hard to do that.

LNS: You define your life in those terms.

WS: And then it takes on a whole view and as I said in my speech, I think what happened this is not for the book. And you say Bill what's the failure of your life. My marriage. And I think it was one of those things. You know, I'm not going to be beaten down and unfortunately the attention that was needed at home I couldn't give. Or didn't give. I was going to make this work. So that's really the only failure and that came and I really do believe this job really takes that kind of toll on you now if your spouse has his or her own career that helps a lot if you don't live on campus I think that would help a lot. There are a variety of things that I think that can ease that problem. But this is almost like my Dad's situation where day after day night after night dad was out. His family could've been sick home and he loved them don't misunderstand me but he was out there at the hospital with the church members and he was out there not because he didn't care about us but because that was his calling. And I just declared that I mean that no one would probably thought other than myself that I'd ever be a college President. You could've thought if you'd known me back then that I'd be a lot of things and I would be successful but you'd never thought I'd be a college president.

LNS: So you said you think perspective is important too?

WS: Yeah I do. Because this institution, you think with all of the things that have happened over the last ten years, boy, you look at all these buildings, you say, I didn't hammer one nail. And I understand what you are saying. But again, if John Doe had been the President during that same period or one of the other candidates for instance, this institution would be more like it was then than different than it was then ten years ago. Regardless of who is in this office, yeah, you may have the little twists, maybe I built a Convocation center with somebody else when would have built or a new performing arts center or maybe we did this when we did that. But the nature, the character of the institution because and again this is a little bit of that Zen thing, the character of this institution would still be, Eighteen Presidents can't change the but character of this institution and the nineteenth is not going to change the character of this institution,. They can do things to contribute, but that's the beauty of a true university. It has a life of unto its own

that you can't significantly change you can move it two degrees or three degrees maybe but you're not going to turn this big ship around in another direction because the university yes, ok, because the university is it's not a set of buildings as you know it's not a student body, it's not even one faculty it's an entity that in a sense, exists outside of everything.

LNS: You said, last time we talked that all you want to have been said is that you did the best you could. Do you still feel that way?

WS: Yeah. I have I'm glad we had two hundred and something million dollars worth of buildings I'm glad we've done this, I'm glad we've done that. And all of that. But that is not something that I view as how you, because I've also made some great mistakes. If you want to really talk about, you know, when I say great mistakes, don't know if they've been great mistakes but there've been mistakes. I have made as many mistakes probably as I have made good judgements in my life. Maybe they're not at the same level. So, I don't view it, whether be it a Toledo or a Wayne State or whether it be a Central Michigan or where ever it is. The president has a role but the president does not define or redefine that the real the true university.

LNS: So vision is important as the letter to mission as people say but it's not going to change the mission?

WS: Yeah, I mean our College of Education is now what third out of five. But this institution is still viewed as an institution that primarily prepares teachers. We know that that's not what we internally, statistically that doesn't appear to be what it is at all. Yeah, you give vision and you try to provide leadership the main key is your leadership better follow the way the university wants to go otherwise it's gonna follow you. When you look over here if those people are following you then ok you're leading them in the right direction. And if we're said, we're gonna turn this into a totally different kind of institution we couldn't have it's not a matter of would we, we've not've been able because this university has a body of knowledge all those indefinable you can tear down a building, and build a new building you know and you can probably change much of the faculty and staff over a period of time and certainly the student body changes over a hundred and fifty years but it's like I said to those two alumni, in fact I just said this last week, in 1849 provided good common school education and as hard as we may try to do something different the reality is that's still what we do. We may do it a little more, with a little more sophistication.

LNS: When all is said and done do you feel that you've done the best you could?

WS: Yep. When I say yes in terms of the overall. Are there individual things I could've done better? Sure there's a whole group of things I could've done better. But in terms of the total effort of the ten-year period, I believe that I provided

basically the best leadership I could. And was it good enough? Again, the university's still open, financially still sound, etc., etc. From that standpoint, yeah

LNS: Your successor will find a pretty good place to start from?

WS: Yeah I think so. I think it's going to be awfully hard. I think the university presidency, I talked to two of my colleagues yesterday one of them president of Miami, their board did come back and drop three sports. And he's bruised and battered even though it was the right thing to do. And the university, the public university presidency on paper is the only reason why they had to do that. Financially, gender equity, every reason in the world to do that. He did it. He got his Board to do it. And he's taking a helluva beating. And that's the problem with the public university presidency and that's why we're seeing a turnover like we do today. That there's a loss of respect and where at one time when people disagreed with the President there was a level of civility with which that disagreement went on. There's no level of civility it's a very personalized attack and whether it be AJ Kovaskis when the faculty union during negotiation he lived off campus at Central Michigan and they would come down his street in a nice neighborhood in Mt. Pleasant at One, Two, Three o'clock thirty cars blowing horns to wake up the whole neighborhood to do those kind of personalized things that just constantly create a difficult time for him. No civility. And that's the difference. If you said, what do I think is the main difference between the University Presidency while there may be that kind of respect the civility that at least when they disagree with the Presidency there's no more it's become a very personalized attack. If they can hurt you as Bill Shelton. It's not, for some of them, like the logo, a good healthy debate about a university's position in terms of inconsistency of mission with certain things such as logos and stuff. That's wonderful and there can be great disagreement and I talked to someone recently, graduate of this institution and said you know, Mr. President, I'll never agree with your logo decision. But I really appreciate the leadership you provide to that institution. That's the one level. As opposed to the personalized level where they talk about your family, they you know, the phone calls in the middle of the night. The kind of staff that The Jim Martins and the Dean Rockwells and all those kinds of things. The way, and as I say I'm just one, I mean Frank Taylor at Toledo there was some people that just personalize they try to this is a person rather than say this is an issue that I disagree with they try to destroy you as a person.