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Bette Warren, Oral History Interview, 2019

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Oral History Interview with Bette Warren

Conducted by Historic Preservation Graduate Student Matt Jones (MJ) and Historic Preservation Graduate Student Rachel Burns (RB).

Transcribed by Matt Jones

Recorded 2019, March 12 at Halle Library, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, MI

MJ: It's Tuesday, March 12, 2019. This is Historic Preservation graduate student Matt Jones along with fellow Historic Preservation graduate student Rachel Burns and today we are talking with Dr. Bette Warren, a professor with the Department of Mathematics from 1984 until her retirement in 2012. Warren ventured outside of her teaching duties to become President of the Faculty Council, Chair of the Intercollegiate Athletics Advisory Committee, Chair of the Faculty Council's Budget and Resource Committee, wrote the math section of the Presidential Scholarship Examination, and served on the undergraduate symposium planning committee. She was also a bargaining council representative from the EMU chapter of the American Association of University Professors. This is small slice of the service Warren has given to EMU and the reason for her service can be summed up in a quote: "To have a sound academic program we need a well-educated and informed front line. That front line is faculty." Warren received Emeritus status in 2012. Is everything correct?

BW: Yes it sounds correct.

MJ: Can you tell us a little about your upbringing? Where you are from and who your parents were? Where and when you were born?

BW: Sure. I was born in 1949 actually in Coral Gables but that's because that was a hospital. We lived in Miami at the time. My parents were Robert and Mildred Warren. My dad was of course in WWII and they married actually in 1943. He was stationed in Tampa because he had to have a background with Western Union and so they put him in Tampa at Drew Field, where I guess they handled a lot of the radar and communication. So they married in 1943 and lived in Tampa and then came back and lived at a little house that my mother's father had built as a spec house in Miami just 59th Street near 27th Avenue. Until I was about five years old and then they moved out to what had been cow pasture but was new housing in Hialeah (SP). Basically I grew up in Hialeah which is just north of Miami airport. There's a famous racetrack there. I went to school there. Elementary school, junior high and high school.

MJ: Did you ever go to the track?

BW: Well, I wasn't allowed, but yes, I went to the track once when I was in my twenties just to go, but occasionally, and I don't know, for two or three years running, they used to have...they

schooled the horses and so I would actually go home for years and years to Florida at Christmas time because if you're going to go to Florida that is the best time to go. Probably in my twenties, several years running, we would go out, they'd serve a breakfast and you could watch the horses running around the track. There's a very flock of flamingos there, so I always relate it to flamingos.

MJ: What kind of education did your parents have?

BW: They were both high school graduates though I guess my father always like to tell the story of how they were going to have him graduate early and he didn't want to so he dropped out for a semester and went back. But he was a graduate of Miami High School, and my mother, Miami Edison. After the War, my father came back and on the GI Bill he could go back to school and he did for a while and then just decided, you know, he was just doing it for the paper, or as he said, the "sheepskin." So he stopped. My mother eventually, when she went back to work, she worked at an elementary school first in the cafeteria then as a school secretary. Thought she might want to go back and get a teaching degree but after a number of courses it's just a hard way to do it. They were both high school graduates with no college.

MJ: Were they surprised that you ultimately decided to go into teaching?

BW: I don't think so.

MJ: Were you a first generation college student?

BW: Well, my mother's brother- it depends on how far afield you go, but my mother's brother is now retired, but he was a surgeon so he had gone to college. There weren't a lot of others.

MJ: When did math make its way in for you?

BW: I think what really pushed me was that in elementary school, I was never fast and so there was always an emphasis on timed tests and so on. But I took a series of tests- they always give you a series of tests when you're going to transition and I think I ended up scoring not so high on the computational but very high on conceptual. This was just post-Sputnik. So everyone was gearing up to have more math and science, accelerated classes, and so the suggestion was that I might take this accelerated math in 7th grade. It was questionable because I wasn't computationally quick and I don't think I was ever going to be quick. But I think that saved me- I think if I would have had to do the same thing for two more years, that wouldn't have been of any interest. But I had this lovely series from Yale called "School of Mathematics Study Group." In fact, I now have a copy of the book because I found, one summer, someone was getting rid of it in the Math Department. The teachers at the time referred to it as "Some Math, Some Garbage." You know, people who teach one thing resist doing something else and I don't know what the later versions were of this series, but it was wonderful- it was conceptual.

MJ: What was different about it from traditional books?

BW: There was a lot of historical stuff- different number systems, like this is what the Babylonians used and the Egyptians and so on. You would have questions like "When they introduced inverse functions, which of these things have inverses?" So you could really understand. I remember one was jumping out of a plane- I remember thinking "Well I suppose you could jump

back in the plane but of course you could really do it.” So that was something that didn’t have an inverse.

MJ: You’re quoted later, talking about the intimidation factor with math. Did you ever have that trouble before you felt especially drawn to it? I know plenty of students who do feel it and they; stay away from it their entire lives.

BW: I don’t remember that, I remember not liking the timed tests. I remember not liking some things, not so much being afraid of math.

MJ: Did you expect from an early age to go to college?

BW: I think my parent expected I would.

MJ: Did you have any idea what kind of career you would find after college?

BW: You know, if anything, probably teaching, but not necessarily at the college level. Aside from being a kid and thinking that it would be pretty neat to collect the garbage or drive a police car or whatever those kinds of things were.

MJ: Why didn’t you think you’d be teaching college?

BW: Because that wasn’t in my frame of reference.

MJ: Well how did you decide to go to Washington University?

BW: The mother of a friend of mine was a professor at Miami Edison, which was at that time an inner city school and Washington University sent recruiters. She suggested it to my friend Beth and I or to my friend Beth and me. That this might be a good place; it had as high percentage of PhDs on the faculty and all kinds of good things. It turns out we had a somewhat removed relative who was a master’s student there so I had family not far from St. Louis and they said it was very good. So it was one of the places I applied.

MJ: Where else did you apply?

BW: MIT and I didn’t get in because, basically, they didn’t have enough dorms for women so they didn’t accept as many women. The salutatorian got in, but whatever. See, it blurs now between undergraduate and graduate. But it was about six schools, Florida State is the state school which would have been fine.

MJ: How was that change- going from Miami to St. Louis?

BW: First time I saw snow.

MJ: Snow?

BW: Absolutely. We had been on a trip to New York was about ten years old so I saw the flakes falling. This was South Florida so we’re talking subtropical. But yeah it was the day before Thanksgiving and it was snowing. My roommate was also from Hialeah and she had never seen snow. She got very excited and went out, and then hated it after that but I kind of liked it. I had spent the entire year, well, my when my parents came they bought us coats because I was from

South Florida I didn't have a coat. They were kind of dress coats though and that wasn't good enough so we actually went and bought more informal, easier to wear coats with hoods. But I spent the winter looking around for boots. I just didn't like the boots until April when there was a ten inch snow and I was in loafers and I decided that it doesn't have to be the perfect pair. I could just get boots.

MJ: So you never had a coat growing up.

BW: I had coats, but nothing as heavy as it would take for winter.

MJ: So when did you get to Indiana University?

BW: That was in 1971. I had decided at that point that I did want to go to graduate school in math. That was one of the places I applied and got an assistantship- a teaching assistantship. I think I looked at the course catalogue and was most interested in what was there.

RB: Was the course work more conceptual mathematics as opposed to computational?

BW: At that level, it almost always is, even the applied is pretty conceptual. I'm not so much interested in applied. I was really interested in pure math.

MJ: Can you tell me what the difference is?

BW: At some point it starts not being this simple, but, the idea in applied math is it's pretty much inspired by physical problems. They may not be physical but other kinds of computational problems. Physics does a lot because physics is so mathematized and chemistry. I was less interested in that than I was in the abstractions once you got beyond that.

MJ: I know that you started to develop math courses with a writing component. Was that going on here before, not to jump too far ahead?

BW: It was certainly going on in the mathematics community and I think it was going on because in part I did it through...there was a lot of faculty development here that I took advantage of. I think there was a writing across the curriculum workshop or something that was a summer thing. It was an extensive thing- not one afternoon, to help people develop these kinds of courses. Some of it was a result of doing that, and then trying to find the right way to do it in a math course.

MJ: How did students react in math class to a writing component?

BW: Well, not all of them liked it but, you know, not all of them liked doing the math either. I remember one was in Calculus II; basically had them do summaries. And then I would collect the summaries and have them peer review them and so on. The difficulty of course was peer reviewing- no one wanted to be critical. Learning to do those things, but you know, trying to help students synthesize what was going on. It was also true that in some of these things, especially if they were conducted say, by English faculty. They seemed to have a mindset that this always helps students. I never really liked writing. Doing something for a specific purpose is one thing- it's not that I couldn't do it, but it wasn't my favorite thing to do. Finding a way that really...the whole point is it ought to help you integrate and do the math better. From my perspective it has to do that. So it couldn't be an onerous extra thing. But I did it throughout the levels of math and I think at some point basically I developed almost worksheets where it could

be still complete sentences but more succinct and more direct and more thinking-through and answering a question about the math, as opposed to just summarizing. But I worked on it and refined it a lot over time.

MJ: Were there any levels of math that it was harder to use the writing component? Or any that were easier?

BW: I don't think it's the level of math- it's how you ask the students to do it. Students come in with different interests but for example, I developed the elementary statistics course here. I think it's still probably Math 170. You got some really pretty good students in there who were good at whatever their discipline was. I found that that meant they were actually pretty good in here if you could help them to, kind of connect it to something they were interested in. They were fine in writing things. They just have to connect it. I don't want them to write at the exclusion of adding too much work.

MJ: Your comment about student finding it hard to be critical- that goes across all subjects I think. Is there a way to encourage them to be critical of their peers?

BW: What you want them to be is helpful to their peers. But that's all the personality of the person. Yes, what I tried to do was review what they said and comment on it and how they might have been more helpful. It's more reviewing what they did and making suggestions.

MJ: It's a problem I see in every class- working with groups, everyone's like, "That was great!"

BW: But you don't want to be the one person who's just a curmudgeon. That isn't helpful either.

MJ: True. Do you remember your first real research project or your thesis? What were you studying?

BW: Finite Group Theory. I certainly remember the first real research project. My thesis. It was kind of a hot topic at the time. It's, again, not that there are applications, but the applications were what were of interest to me. A lot of mathematics is developed out of solving problems that have some kind of real grounding, but that wasn't what was of interest. At the time, groups of these simple things that it's a collection of things- perhaps numbers. An example is the integers. It has an operation like addition or like multiplication, but it's one operation so there's a structure there that that you're looking at that may have more structure but you are only interested in what you can decide from this particular one. If I choose integers with addition, then I'm only interested in the properties I can develop from that. The fact that you can multiply numbers too is not my focus right now unless I take the integers with multiplication. The non-zero integers and multiplication. The whole point of all of this is it's very abstract but once you study this, this kind of a group, and you prove things you can with just these few things, like just this operation, then it applies to a whole bunch of things because of a whole bunch of things may have that kind of structure. Like if you take matrixes and add them or matrix multiplication when you don't count the zero. Then once you prove something from that, you prove a whole lot of things. A whole lot of different circumstances. All someone has to do is show, yes, this thing I'm looking at is a group with this operation. And then you have all those theorems that tell you, "It's going to have to behave, this thing."

MJ: I see. Kind of I see. I wish I could've taken math from you because you just explained it really well.

BW: You know, there is syntax, and there is semantics. The syntax is very heavy in math but the meanings kind of help you to interpret and understand.

MJ: I think that's what I always wanted more of in math class

BW: I always wanted more of it in physics and astronomy.

MJ: How did you choose EMU? How did you hear about the position?

BW: I didn't hear about the position. When I got out of graduate school, I was married and had a four-year-old. A lot of people at the time in fact, took positions separately but I didn't want to do that with a 4-year-old. So we kind of applied to different places and then if there was interest for one, then we started looking more extensively in the area. So my husband at the time had an interview at Michigan and so I just wrote to place around here so Eastern and Concordia and so on. It turns out although I hadn't picked it out specifically, there was an opening, I was a little elate in asking about it and applying, but there was an opening in the Math Department. I think they were just starting to hire. There had been several years of not hiring. The year before they hired two people, the year I came, it was six or eight of us. It was still math and computer science. What made me stand out was that I had taken actuarial exams because I spent eight years of being in New York. It was then SUNY Binghamton and now Binghamton University. Essentially teaching year by year because my husband had the job, the tenure track job. The job market was just beginning to improve in 1984 and so it seemed like the time to go out looking. I had, while at Binghamton, started training people who wanted to take actuarial exams. I had taken some myself and had gone as far as what they call the "Associate Society of Actuaries," without an interest in being an actuary but with an interest in what exams were like to train students. Here is this department, Professor Nellie Allman (SP) had started an actuary in training program so when my application came in she was really excited because I had also written an article about actuarial training and students in the American Mathematical Monthly. She was excited about that, I remember trying to figure out what was going on with the application and I kept trying to email Jim Worthy who had been the Department Head but he wasn't then. It turned out to be someone else but somehow, after all of that, I managed to connect and get an interview and be hired.

MJ: What kind of campus did you find upon arrival?

BW: I thought it was pretty neat. What I really liked and what I was struck by, of course you have the colleagues and all of that- you expect to find all of that. What struck me was the diversity. Not that there was no diversity in other places I had been but it seemed like a far more diverse place, just walking around seeing people in offices. I liked that.

MJ: A diversity in cultural backgrounds, ethnic backgrounds?

BW: Yes and also race. That's what you notice.

MJ: And you're talking about faculty, staff, and students?

BW: Yes;

MJ: What was it like working with Don Lick? He was the Department Head forever wasn't her?

BW: He was Department Head for a long time but I think there were others that were longer here, but they are just lore to me. I loved Don. Don was great. In fact, the first year I came, Harlan Hought (SP???) was Interim Department Head, but shortly after I came, a year or two later, the computer science split off from math. So Harlan went with computer science and they hired Don. Don was great. He was always very supportive of faculty, interested in developing programs. One of the things I was part of at first was getting statistics going as a program. Both on the graduate and undergraduate level. Don was supportive. I mean I've always believed that the Department Head's two big jobs are being supportive of faculty and being supportive of the students. That means not just giving someone what they want- it means far broader than that. It means developing programs that are going to be useful and help someone if they encounter a bump in the road to get them around it. Don was great at that.

MJ: Do you think that Department Heads sometimes feel they have other responsibilities besides those two that you named?

BW: I mean, I was a Department Head so I know they do. I think those are the important things but you have to do the whole job. I mean, you're the person in the middle. Here, Department Heads are not chairs- they are heads and they are administrators. But they are the first level administrators. They're responsible above and below but administration above, if they're smart, want the department heads to be supportive of their faculty. Sure, there is all kinds of things. I found in teaching- if I spend 90% of my time doing things that weren't my favorite part, like grading, but they have to be done and they have to be done well, I may be doing them to fulfill another purpose but a lot of your day to day job isn't like you're feeling some great rush of enthusiasm; it just has to be done to get where you want to go. I think department heads are under a lot of pressure because, you know, faculty wants something, students want something. You've always got to be careful- the whole point isn't to please people; the point is to try to get a good resolution if there's a conflict, or to advance someone's interests, someone's best interest whether it's what they asked for or not. So sometimes you don't end up being able to give someone what they want but you may be able to help them. I found that especially true when I was in the Provost's office as an Associate Vice President in charge of academic programming. I was the one who got all the complaints of an academic nature that went beyond a college, and that would mean someone didn't like what they got at the department and went to their legislature, who knocked it down to the president, who knocked it down to the Provost, and they gave it to me. So they were difficult. You would have students who had problems and they got to the point of thinking they were going to graduate and they were missing something and I couldn't just waive requirements- that's not reasonable to anyone else. On the other hand you want to find a way to help to students get to the point where they can graduate. So, a lot of problem solving like that. A lot of conflict, which isn't my favorite part. It may be some people's.

MJ: How often was it difficult to keep a good department operating cohesively?

BW: I think it might be different at different departments. I think each department has a personality and in part, it's discipline-driven but not entirely. I'm sure you could find math departments

someplace else that had all kinds of conflict. It's not that there wasn't conflict in the Math Department, but mostly I think had what you think of as the same attitude toward students- they want to help students. That means they wanted to get them the education they need and deserve, they want to help them grow. I think on the whole it was a very good department that way, but we did have people who yelled at each other at committee meetings and things like that. You have to be able to work around and get where you need to go.

MJ: Where was the department? Was it in Pray-Harrod?

BW: Yes. The whole time, I thought we started on the 6th floor and moved down to the 5th floor. I had broken my leg, and so I remember that was before I knew it was broken- trying to move stuff down, pushing a chair and finally when I was casted, people had to move my stuff down for me.

MJ: How did you break your leg?

BW: Going out of my garage to go get the newspaper and slipping. Spiral fracture, so it wasn't like I could tell it was broken. But I had a car with a clutch at the time so I had to get rides or take cabs for several months.

MJ: Where were you living at the time when you first came here?

BW: Ann Arbor. Basically on Ashe Court, which is not far from Packard so it was a straight shot in on Packard.

MJ: IN addition to teaching, you were seemingly on every committee on campus. For example, the Calculus Committee, Statistics Area Committee- seven different ad hoc committees, faculty committees, budget committees. What drove you to be part of so many things, so many committees?

BW: It's like everything else- it's one step at a time. In the department, you're on committees depending on what you're teaching. But also, if people have an idea and want to do something, for example, statistics committees- I was teaching stats- I develop that elementary statistics course. It was basically the faculty who were teaching statistics who got together when we thought we might want to develop a statistics major or minor. So that's part of how it works- you get on committees and if you're here long enough you'll be on lots of committees. The Faculty Council actually- when I was there most of the time, had representatives from each department, but before that when I first was elected, it was college-based. So you had a certain number from each college. It was smaller. Sally and I ran at the same time and got on. Actually the AAUP encouraged me to run because I had worked with them on something else, I can't even remember what. But shortly after that it went to the department representation and then I was elected from the department.

MJ: You had three terms as president, two as vice president. What were your contributions to the Faculty Council, do you think?

BW: One was securing a place for the Faculty Council president as a non-voting member of the Foundation Board. When the Foundation first came in, in 1990, there was a lot of suspicion of it. There was all kind of push and pull, and there really was an attempt to get it out of the hands of the faculty, and a lot of suspicion. The Board did have a student rep- a non-voting student rep. I

wanted to push for representation of the faculty. To be there at the meetings and to interact with the Board. We had lots of focus sessions and developed a rationale and a proposal and presented it to Faculty Affairs Committee of the Board. There was resistance but it ended up, and I was still president and the first one to serve on the Foundation Board. Those kinds of structural things were my contribution. Also, the Provost at the time, Ron Collins, I found very helpful but you have to ask for things. Let me back up. That's one of the things I learned: you have to ask for things even if you aren't going to get it right now. You can't be frustrated and angry when you don't get it but p-put it on the table so you may eventually get it. I had discussions, I met with the Provost and at first had been warned- always take someone else in when you meet with an administrator. Sometimes that's wise and sometimes it's unnecessary. I usually had people. But Ron was willing to help if we could find ways, not to necessarily meet demands. You don't necessarily know what to ask for- you have to have people who are willing to help you get to what you need. He ended up agreeing to have a group from the Faculty Council sit and talk to him about things we saw as problems. That was important. We got things. For example, at the time in the early 90s, whenever I became president, there were administrators who basically, not necessarily academic ones, but say, people in charge of the budget who viewed that computers were necessary for computer science but not for anyone else. That there was a campus network. But understand- the campus network had grown up around the campus with people in departments like, say, Continuing Education having to pay to be connected through their own budgets. It was important because there really ought to be jacks in every office and the faculty ought to be on the network. That was a hard sell. Going beyond that, that was the first step and going beyond that, that faculty, all faculty, ought to have computers. It's not that this was in a vacuum. There were administrators, for example, the Dean Health and Human Services, or whatever the college was, the name of the college at the time, had gotten some money and they had bought computers for all of the faculty. Then you got people complaining, "Well they sit there and nothing happens." But they didn't sit there and nothing happened for a long time- it took a little while but they were being used. It was not necessarily an easy thing to convince people that faculty needed them. We were told when we wanted to make proposals that we should always phrase it in terms of the students. Of course you do, but my feeling was when you support the faculty in doing their jobs. You are supporting the students. You can BS around all you want but it should be able to say "faculty need this to do their jobs because ..." and increasingly that was true. You needed computers.

MJ: IO read that you, during your time as President and Vice President of Faculty Council, that the viability of the organization was raised- it was made more diverse. Can you speak to that?

BW: The Faculty Council itself?

MJ: Yes

BW: The things that comes to mind is changing from a college-based to department-based. In terms of viability, I wouldn't even say "viability." It may be in reference to this: some of it was in presentations at board committee meetings; making the point that you really need to listen to a variety of voices and faculty on the university campus are extremely important. They are your line workers but they are very highly educated line workers. That doesn't mean that everything comes to a vote- it's not even about democracy. It's about how central faculty are and there

knowledge is, to the essential mission. So there was a lot of trying to make that point. Again, it was kind of a hard sell but Ron Collins actually helped get us involved in putting forward above-board budget requests, which are the requests for funding for things like the computers. I think it's more that you ought to be listening to these voices because it's not just a matter of being democratic; it's a matter of the faculty having a unique role and a unique perspective and you get a better campus by involving them and if you haven't seen it you ought to see the AAUP red book. There is a statement in there- a joint statement on governance. I think as it turns out, it was something developed by the American Association of governing Boards, the AAUP and some other things. I don't know that the Governing Boards never actually adopted it, but it's a very nice statement about running a university and how you listen to all the voices, and the amount of attention you pay depends on the roles. So for example, faculty have a very important role in curriculum development that you don't just want to be adding course and programs without the faculty involvement. Therefore, you have what you call the input system, which is a collection of committees that you have proposals for programs and they go through review in the college level and at the university level depending on how far reaching it is. But that level of review is very important.

So, the conflict will often come in things where you may not be obviously who has the biggest voice. Athletics was always a big thing. Let's go back to that athletic committee. That was another thing that I think was very important. There had been advisory committees all along, but the athletic director had not necessarily paid attention or had overridden and had used them for various- they used them for whatever purposes. WE wanted to have a committee organized that could give genuine faculty input to the administration on athletics. There were all kinds of considerations. The president was Bill Shelton at the time. He in fact had been involved at the national level at NCAA with the President's Council or whatever it was called. We made the point that you really want this. It's a hard sell to tell people you need to have a structure that allows you to hear things you don't want to hear. On the other hand, they were kind of receptive to it but you had to have the structure that allowed it. The formation of the intercollegiate advisory committee (I'm not sure if that's still the name) basically was a three-way negotiation. It was the Athletic Department, the President's office, and the Faculty Council. We all had our interests. We wanted to be sure on the faculty side that, first of all, it's the Faculty Council that gives input- it's not its committees. We never ceded control over the input so if there was a recommendation to made, if you wanted input you had to go to the full council. On the other hand, you wanted to be able to have the interactions with the Athletic Department. So, we developed bylaws that made the point of, "well no, you cant just go to this committee and get what you call input, you have to go here," but the President's office wasn't interested in having the committee vote and do things out of its control. So we had to figure out where everyone was in order to get the structure that made sense. That was an important one.

MJ: Just to backtrack a little but, back to the Foundation, maybe I'm just naïve, but why wouldn't the Foundation want a faculty representative?

BW: Well, because the person who was probably most-involved in getting the Foundation, well, the Foundation was for the purposes of supporting the University but it was outside the University. It has come in more now than it was. I wouldn't even say it's a love/hate relationship with the faculty. There was a lot of criticism of things. When he was appointed there was a lot of faculty

positions, it was kind of a political appointment. There were issues like building the College of Business, the Owen Building downtown that had a lot of opposition among the faculty and he resented that. There were all kinds of resentments and the feeling that faculty are just...I can't even speak from his perspective but he was not interested in the faculty telling him what to do.

MJ: You were AAUP Department Steward from 87 to 90, and a bargaining council rep in 87, 90, 93 and 95. What kinds of things were you doing as a rep?

BW: You go to the bargaining council and develop proposals. What you specifically develop are- it's narrow because you were on a specific committee. I was usually on the input end of it. And also some on the retirement proposals. So it's just kind of grunge-work.

MJ: I was reading about your experience with the AAUP and I was stuck by the amount of times that faculty and administration just seemed to be just not at all on the same page. I was wondering if that was accurate because I only looked at a few cases. I looked at some faculty complaints about money being taken away from teaching for things like the Radisson Hotel...

BW: Whether it was even the Radisson or the Marriot, now- the golf course was the problem.

MJ: The corporate education center and the golf club. So it's just one thing after another.

BW: Which is also the resentment on the part of the person who didn't want faculty input.

MJ: What's behind that? Just that disconnect? It seems like...

BW: I don't know whether it's worse here than other place because I don't have that perspective. Some of it is maybe not understanding fully what all of the constraints are and how much money would really have gone to teaching, I don't know. In part, EMU has this culture scarcity. It's a place that is, and I'm going to veer off here but maybe come back. It's a place that's fairly supportive if you have an idea but they might not let you go do it. You aren't necessarily going to get a lot of support for it though. If you think you need something that's going to take some money, that's going to be a problem. I've seen many many things where there were resolutions at the board for some wonderful program that someone was doing and it was a grant funded program. As soon as the money ran out, of course, it went away, and a lot of granting agencies want you to prove that this works and then expect the institution to take over. EMU never had the kind of money to take over these things. So, when you saw that your building was in miserable shape or you thought it was in miserable shape because it was fifty degrees in your office in the winter and someone else got the money for something, it was a problem. There just wasn't enough money to do all the good things you wanted to do. I think you'll probably find most places, there are probably these kinds of things, these kinds of resentments and it's kind of sad. I think part of it is that you have people who really care and I don't know for example, if there was always also a push and pull with the local area. Ypsilanti is very important to EMU and EMU is very important to Ypsilanti but how much EMU supports Ypsilanti is always an issue. How much vice versa that the area supports Ypsilanti- there are all these issues with that. Do you hire locally, do you hire nationally? There are always things probably at other places too that those things cause conflict.

Part of it is the personalities involved. You get some people that just have something that gnaws at them and if they're aggressive enough, they push it. Complaining is easy. Getting anything accomplished is harder. I'm not saying that the complaints are not right, but I don't know that it is unique here. I just don't have the perspective. I do know that I always thought Ypsi politics was a snake pit.

MJ: That's an understatement. I'm not sure how anybody can wade into it.

BW: Nor would they want to. The people who want to are different. That's not fair because there are some people who really do it because they want to make it better and do make it better.

MJ: You live in Ypsi now?

BW: Ypsi Township.

MJ: Were you involved in the strike in 1989? I read about 200 faculty protesting around Welch.

BW: Yes, in fact, I was on the front page of the Ann Arbor News carrying a picket sign.

MJ: I saw some pictures from the newspaper- it was in the wintertime right? I think it was cold. People had hats and scarves. I was trying to figure out if one of them was you.

BW: I think there was a picture taken outside of Pray-Harrold, but there were numerous small strikes and work stoppages outside Welch. One of them was outside of Welch.

MJ: What was the basis of that?

BW: Oh lord. You know, I don't remember that one specifically. It almost certainly had to do with where the resources were going. I know at the time there was a facilities plan that was produced that had athletic training facility near the top and there was nothing for the library and that became a cause. Oh and the stadium they then built. So it seemed like this emphasis on athletics and not on academics. Whether that was the point of that strike, it was certainly something that fueled it.

MJ: I read that Shelton came out and addressed the crowd of faculty, said basically he heard them, and asked them to wait and see what he did with their suggestions. Did he?

BW: I had a very good relationship with him because he was the president when I was President of the Faculty Council. So I met with him monthly. He was the one that got faculty offices wired, but the interesting thing is that I told you, I thought it was important to have proposals on the table. So we put forth a proposal to wire faculty offices- to put them on the campus network. It wasn't funded. On the other hand, I hadn't been president at the time, but I had written that proposal. The next president was chatting with him once and he had sent out an all-campus notice. The president at the time of the Faculty Council, John Novak, told him, "You know, the faculty can't read that- they're not on the network." That got the offices wired. But if you hadn't had that proposal on his mind and you hadn't used it, it wouldn't have happened. What Shelton did was generated this whole "Learning University" and all kinds of councils. The concern was there on the Faculty Council and the AAUP was trying to circumvent the structure. The structure of representation was, you know, long established and fought for. As I said, I think it's important for people to listen to the voices that should be listened to like faculty especially where

academics are concerned, and where issues of resources are a concern because the academics are so central. I think it's important for people to listen even when they're not hearing what they want to hear. Administrators can make decisions later that aren't exactly what the faculty might be recommending. It is important to listen at least, and be part of that conversation, and to have a special place. The feeling was that he was trying to circumvent all that and get all these committees that are together from disparate sources. Frankly, when you read the reports coming out of some of them, you could say "Ah yeah that was so and so- I know who was on that committee," because they had been pushing those things all along. It was a very great concern not to have those be the voices that are listened to the exclusion of others. That was a big part of the conflict over the Learning University.

On the other hand, I remember being President of the Faculty Council at the time and responding to all these task force reports, and making a really concerted effort to send material out to all the departments and have the faculty look at it and give feedback. Negotiating at the time with the University over the timelines, telling them we need this much time when it comes to us- we need a couple of months to bring it through but we need to set that timeline. We found that the University was willing to do it when we phrased it that way. I remember two- one of those semesters was the semester that our half time secretary- they had allowed her to go on leave to do PhD work in theater at Cornell or someplace in New York. I was doing all the duplicating and all of that. But I thought it was very important that the faculty get to look at this and that we give feedback. That was part of the conflict. Bill Shelton had all kinds of important, good ideas. OIN the other hand, he needed to be told "You need to do it within the structure we have." I remember one conversation with him where he was talking about how, philosophically, faculty shouldn't be unionized. That it was not part of what faculty should be doing. I just told him that that was what we had chosen. He kind of accepted that.

MJ: He kind of did?

BW: I'm sure it wasn't an epiphany, but it was ok then. I could talk to him and I'm sure I didn't change everything, but I think he understood that. It was at least a losing battle for him to talk about how you shouldn't be unionized when you've already chosen to do it.

MJ: We've interviewed a lot of people who were here when Harold Sponberg was president, and it's interesting to hear the difference in how certain issues are handled from one administration to the next. Sponberg was reluctant to come out and address a crowd in front of Welch even if he disagreed with them.

BW: Especially if he disagreed with them.

MJ: Yes. What were your impressions of John Porter?

BW: He was here only in my first years. I was a young faculty member- an assistant professor. Maybe I was an associate by the time he left. My main concern with him was that I was on the Scholarship Committee in the Math Department and we had these scholarships we were supposed to give to people. It was kind of, to me it seemed like an ideological thing but there were certain levels of scholarship. You used words for it that jarred, like "opportunity" and whatever. We would be given names of people- high school students with no indication of

record, no indication of recommendations of teachers or anything, and asked to pick people to give these scholarships to. That didn't sit right with me. Part of it is that I hadn't been here in the early 80s when school was in danger of not surviving, and he had really built it up and grown the student body. That was part of it, I'm sure, but it just jarred me to be asked to do things without information.

MJ: You served on the Undergrad Symposium Planning Committee for a long time.

BW: It was close to the beginning.

MJ: So when did it start?

BW: If I was on the committee in 85, it was probably 83 or something.

MJ: Where was it held before the Student Center?

BW: It was McKenny.

MJ: When it started, did it have as many participants? What was it like?

BW: No. I don't know when it began, but when I was there at first, I don't think we had any math participants and so one of my big things was trying to drum up support in the department. We started getting some math students. We always had, before we even had to think about limiting their role, you'd always have a lot of English students because they would write papers in classes and the professor would say "You should present that paper." Well, a math student- it's not that the math students turning something in and the professor says you should present that. It's that you have to get the student to do a project that would work from the beginning. That was harder. But I think it did grow and at some point we actually had to limit it. One of my jobs was in proposing and rationing positions and you tell departments they could have so many oral presentations. I don't think we did posters at first. Not that you couldn't have more but you had to be, whenever everyone had gotten what they were allocated, if there were more spots, you could have another one. Or, if you could find another way to expand. That was the ideal- finding ways to fit more people in. The Student Center helped.

MJ: Was the Student Center one of those projects that raised conflict?

BW: Oh yes.

MJ: One of our interviews was with Glenna Frank Miller and I know she had a lot to do with the Student CENTER.

BW: Well, with anything it's always about how you're going to pay for it. With academic buildings, there was always some faculty part, unhappiness with spending it on something else. I guess you basically have to tax the students for it. You have to tax the students no matter what- the state, at some point, well, I guess the Student Center wasn't an academic building so it wasn't in the same pot. But even academic buildings now- you have to raise a quarter. EMU has students pay for it. That's what it boils down to. I think people- faculty- weren't thrilled with having that 4expensers put on the students and not building academic buildings. It was that simple. Although it's a wonderful facility. And the lake house; that was also a "why would you build that when you need academic buildings?" kind of thing.

MJ: I think maybe people are still wondering that.

BW: Although it was off in different pots of money.

MJ: WE haven't had a chance to get into any of the administrators of presidents after Shelton because of issues of time and also because there are so many presidents after 2000. It must get hard- after a while, does faculty just disengage with what's happening higher up?

BW: It depends on where you are and what your perspective is. I would have a different perspective when I started engaging than when I didn't. That doesn't mean other people weren't engaged. I don't know- I think I have always heard the whole time, "Oh morale is lower than it's ever been..." If that happens all the time, it's not really true. I think there's, well, first of all, faculty are supposed to be specialized. That's part of what they do. That's part of what the administration is- making sure they are supported to be able to do what they uniquely can do because somebody else in another department can't do that thing that they are good at. When you're very focused on the specifically what you're trying to do, it's hard not to have the resources to do everything you'd like. It's actually hard when you have the resources to make it real too. That part is difficult and some people are better at it than others. I don't know that people are any more disengaged at one time than another. I'm sure there is an ebb and flow. But some presidents have been better than others.

MJ: We're getting close to the end here. I wanted to ask you why you retired.

BW: Well because Sally is seven years older and we had to find the time for us. We wanted to travel and had to do it while we can.

MJ: Do you miss being more involved here on campus? For someone who was so involved?

BW: I don't miss getting up at six in the morning. That's what I really don't miss. We try to stay somewhat involved but not involved in terms politics. Some people are drawn to conflict because they like it. I don't. I'm happy to be out of the conflict. It doesn't mean you don't care or have opinions, but that part I don't care about. Interestingly, in part it's just the nature of the departments. I mean, I'm still involved with math in the sense that I'm going to go to a lecture they have on Pi Day, and I'll go to award ceremonies and so on, but I'm not nearly there as much as I am in CMTA. That's just because we go to theater and it's just a more of a department that has outreach. We're involved in that, we're involved both on the College of Arts and Science Advisory and Advancement Committee. Trying to do good things but not trying to get into politics. I am not unhappy at being out of the politics.

MJ: That's surprising to hear you say. I don't think of somebody who doesn't like that political conflict to be a bargaining council representative. Do you have to be drawn to it to accept the role?

BW: You had to have something to get you into it; a particular reason you wanted to be there. You just kind of do it the next time too. Again, for example, the Steward of the Department didn't mean you wanted to create a ruckus- you just wanted to help do things.

MJ: I saw another of your quotes. You were saying that you do what you do just because you like to see positive results.

BW: And you have to go through the negative to get there.

MJ: Two really broad questions here. What do you think is the greatest strength of EMU? And you can tie that in with what kept you here since 1984.

BW: I will say I think the greatest feature of EMU is its place of opportunity. Some of our best math students were people who started someplace else and for various reasons weren't really ready to do it. Ended up coming back here and just excelling. But they had to go through it, whatever they were going through before they were really ready to commit. I have a son who's like that. He went back and he's going to graduate from Dearborn- University of Michigan, Dearborn, in April. He didn't really even go back to college until he was thirty. He started and has fourteen hours' worth at Eastern but wasn't going to class and wasn't ready and there are just people who aren't ready when they start. EMU is place where it's not that you're given a degree- you can come and get an education. When you're ready to do it. I think that's a really important thing. The other thing is I think the very best thing about EMU is the people. I always believed in faculty and it's not that I like all faculty equally. Some are more favorites than others. But I think they're committed. I think they care about students. I think the staff care about students. It takes a village. It takes more than faculty, more than administrators, it take more than staff, and they all have to work together for a common purpose. It isn't because anybody is getting rich, because they can get jobs that pay more. I really think they are committed to the students and I think that's the best part of EMU.

MJ: I always screw up the order of these questions because I like to ask what the strength was last and the weakness second to last. But in this case- what do you think is the greatest weakness of EMU?

BW: By "need to work on," my least favorite part is the conflict. I don't know that it's any worse here than anywhere else. The thing I disliked the most was, as opposed to trying to focus on the problem, having a lot of blame. A blaming culture sometimes. The main thing is you have to know who to blame. Mistrust. When I first became Faculty Council President I was up in a rarified atmosphere. Beyond anything I'd dealt with before. I was warned not to trust the administrators. What I figured is, and I think with Bill Shelton this worked, I'm going to assume that what people tell me, they mean. That doesn't mean I'm naïve and I think that will always be true. What it does mean is that I know if there are walls out there that I won't see. I'll know it's there when I run into it. I'll have to experience it. That doesn't mean I'm going to be reactive and defensive and assume it's going to be there. I think you get a lot farther by doing that than by assuming I couldn't talk to people and work through something even though it wasn't exactly what I proposed. I found that that was the case and it didn't mean it was the case with everyone. But I didn't know who it was going to be. I can't say it's the same every place else.

MJ: IOs there anything else you'd like to say on the record?

BW: Gosh.

MJ: We can always do another interview too.

BW: I don't know. I'm grateful we survived a couple of presidents that we did. I think my greatest concern for EMU and other regionals is the economics of higher ed. I know that when I was in

the Provost's office, it wasn't my job- I looked at a whole bunch of data (because I like data) and in EMU, a lot of the lower division is what supports the upper division. In the Math Department I knew that of course because it's, as most places, primarily a service department. That doesn't mean that it doesn't have good programs about the bulk of the credit hour production is gen. Ed. Or somebody else's major is taking this. To the extent that the regionals lose the lower division, you're not going to be able to sustain the upper division. The other thing is student debt. I forget exactly what it was, probably around 2010, there was some very high percentage of EMU students who were Pell-eligible. That's kind of an economic at-risk group. So much student debt that that's a real problem. I know when I was going to school, I didn't go to a state school but people who did certainly had more support from the state. Now, the percentage of what is supported by the state is really low. So, I think that's a real danger to people and to continue the opportunity, we have to lower the debt level on students.

MJ: Alright. Do you think there's anybody else we should talk to?

BW: Barry Fish. Alida Westman was one of the first teaching award winners. Linda Yohn.

MJ: Ok! I'm going to stop the tape now. Thank you so much for joining us.