

**University of Illinois Student Life and Culture Archives Unit
One/Allen Hall Oral History Project
Interviewee: George Miller, former resident of Unit One
Interviewer: Spenser Bailey, Student Life and Culture Archives
Date: 25 January 2024
Method: Zoom
Length: 1: 41: 17¹**

Spenser Bailey: Okay, this is an interview for the University of Illinois Archives Unit One Oral History Project. My name is Spenser Bailey, and I am an Archives Research Assistant for Outreach and Processing at the Student Life and Culture Archives. The date today is January 25, 2024. And I'm pleased to be speaking with Mr. George Miller. We are talking via Zoom. He is at his home, and I am here in Urbana, Illinois, as the location of the Student Life and Culture Archives. Mr. Miller, first off, thank you very much for your time today. And I'll also say that if at any time, you just want to take a break, pause, start over another day or anything, just let me know. And I'd be happy to make whatever edits you'd like.

George Miller: Sounds good.

SB: All right, great. So, to begin, would you please say your full name and your birthday?

GM: My name is George Miller. I was born May 5 1952 in Blue Island, Illinois.

SB: Okay. And, would you mind talking a little bit about where you grew up, your childhood, and your family?

GM: I grew up in the near south suburbs of Chicago, first six years in Riverdale, Illinois, and then we moved to my mother's family home in Blue Island. My upbringing was quite ordinary. My parents were like Ward and June Cleaver, from *Leave It to Beaver*. And they always encouraged me to learn, get involved, be involved in things that they couldn't have. My dad was a World War Two vet, he had dropped out of high school in 1935, to go to work in a steel mill, to help support the family. He was the youngest of eight children. But my dad valued education, finished high school after he got out of the military after he returned from England. Then finished college via night school when he was 50 years old. He worked for Acme Steel Company in Riverdale, Illinois, and designed steelmaking equipment. I think he was the only one of his siblings to graduate from college. My mom's family couldn't afford college. She did go to secretarial school and worked with the Illinois Central Railroad and then Acme Steel later, and that's where my folks met.

SB: Oh, they met at work.

¹ **Transcriber's Note:** Some "filler" words – "Um," "Mm hm," and others – were not included in this transcription. Additionally, repeated words and phrases were removed when possible. I endeavored to write a transcription as faithful as possible to the conversation between interviewer and interviewee. That said, there may be some errors, so anyone considering citing any part of this interview is encouraged to listen to the relevant part of the conversation and make their own determination of what was said. Some of this transcript was created with Otter.ai software.

GM: They met at work. Yes. Yeah.

SB: Oh, that's nice. You know, and so I guess in growing up your education was important, and both to your folks and to you.

GM: Yes. Yeah. My dad became a mechanical engineer designing industrial equipment. He was good at math and good at engineering stuff. And he was curious about engineering related things. If there was something being built or being demolished, he would take us kids there to see what was going on.

SB: And you have siblings then?

GM: Brother and sister that are four years younger than me, they're twins.

SB: Ok. So, you were the older sibling then?

GM: Yeah. Which has an entirely different dynamic. [Laughs]

SB: I'm sure it does. And oh, goodness, my mind is just blanking a little bit. And so you said, you know, education was important growing up, you know, and as a student, you said you were born in 1952. How aware were you of the events and the War since he had been involved in that. If there was ever a movie that was out, he would take the whole family, to see movies about the submarines or movies about the battles, and so he took us to see that. And he always wanted us to have the advantages that he didn't. And so he encouraged sports, which I was not good at. My brother and sister got that. They encouraged being involved in the arts. I was involved in that. I was in the orchestra in grade school and high school. And they always encouraged being prepared, studying hard, ask at the kitchen table, "What did you learn today?", that kind of stuff.

SB: And that's just kind of characteristic of how you all grew up.

GM: Yeah, and there was this knowledge of the change in the world. I remember it was probably third grade when we had our first lessons about World War Two and the concentration camps in school. And looking at it from today's vantage point, parents would be upset about, "You're shocking my child," but being of German ancestry, and the majority of the students in my grade school were of German ancestry. This was just how the world was and we dealt with that.

SB: And that would have been probably 15 years or fewer since the end of the war that so it was still relatively new.

GM: It was well, let's see, that would have been about 1960. So 15 years, yeah.

SB: And you're also of the generation where probably the vast majority are, pardon me, the vast majority, or even all of your folks or your fathers, at least, had all probably been in the service. So it was close to home.

GM: And we lived in Riverdale up and down the street were World War Two vets and their children. We all have a lot in common. And one of the interesting things was, my dad's family was ethnic

German, but they had lived in Russia for 150 years. So we were German and Russian. After the Russian Revolution, after World War Two, after World War One, after the Holocaust, it was kind of a heavy thing to be aware of as a grade school kid.

SB: Yeah. I guess that was just kind of one more example of you being aware of the world and aware of what was going on. And just these things that were happening and the things that had happened.

GM: The civil rights movement was starting to. I remember asking my mom about pictures that we saw in Life Magazine of the young people getting knocked over by fire hoses, "What are they doing?" "Well, those kids want to register to vote." Which had an impact on me as well.

SB: Interesting. That's great to hear. You know, and I guess, in a way, building on what you said, your folks wanted you to have opportunities. Was it understood or expected that you and your siblings would try to or would attend college?

GM: Yeah, it wasn't articulated, you have to do this so that you can, but it was, well, this is the next step.

SB: That makes sense. And how did you, I'm sorry, go ahead.

GM: No, it's because they encouraged, that you need to take the advanced math classes, you need to do good in your English classes, etc.

SB: That makes sense. And do you remember when or if you first became aware of the University of Illinois?

GM: Well, there were, when I was in high school, there were kids talking about it, because I was in more advanced classes in a not-very-good school, but I was in the advanced classes. And so people were, the older kids were talking about, "Well, this is what I'm doing." And, and of course you start getting things in the mail when you're getting to be a junior, and so my folks would say, "Well, here, you should look at this book. And here, you should consider this school. And this is what we can afford. And this is what we can't afford."

The big thing was when I was in junior high, I was in the music program, I got a scholarship to the Illinois Summer Youth Music Program after seventh grade, and went again, eighth grade, and I was so excited about being on campus at the University of Illinois. A seventh grader, it's summer, though, but others, these big, huge buildings, and it's cool stuff. And there were some new buildings that had just opened, the Assembly Hall had just opened, and so we kids in our free time roamed all over. And it turned out that we were, for music camp, in Allen Hall. So I was familiar with Allen Hall in seventh grade and, and excited about the whole thing that this school could offer me, whatever that was to a seventh and eighth grader.

SB: So this is even a few years before when you're starting to seriously think about colleges, but you already had this, you already had been to Illinois, you had seen what the place was physically like and you were, and you enjoyed it.

GM: That was in the back of my mind that this would be a place where I could study, where I could live.

SB: So when it came time to apply, did you, I mean, obviously you applied to Illinois. Did you apply to any other schools? Or what was your decision process like?

GM: I applied to three schools, University of Illinois, Roosevelt University, because I thought it would be cool to go to school in downtown Chicago and be in the Auditorium building. And my dad said, "Too expensive. No, can't go there." And then I realized I'd have to live at home and take the train every day. And you're right. No, no. I looked at NIU and I just didn't like the campus. It didn't give me the same vibe that University of Illinois did.

SB: So, you looked at other places and you explored your options but that U of I seemed to be the natural choice for you.

GM: Yes, yes.

SB: And what do you remember about when you first arrived on campus to begin your studies as a freshman?

GM: I remember coming down with my folks. We'd come down during the summer for an orientation, couple of things, stayed in probably PAR. And then they brought me down. I had my suitcases and my boxes and my bicycle and all the things that kids need.

And I remember driving down and being kind of a smart aleck. I said to my folks, "Well, how do you feel about us growing up and moving away?" And my mom said, "We've prepared you kids for adulthood. And we think you can make this." Like, "Oh, you're not upset?" "No." "It's, we prepared you for the next stage."

But we pulled up to MRH, the Men's Residence Halls, as they were called at the time, because the men were on the Champaign side, and then the women on the Urbana side. And in this crowded environment, it was just also exciting. And then to walk over to the Quad. And it was all very exciting. And I was, "Yes, this is the right place."

SB: So, you arrived, and you had that same excitement from when you were a younger student, kind of came back in full force?

GM: It came back. And I met some people that became long term friends, including one the same day. I was there just a few hours. And the RAs came around, "We're doing these activities for new freshmen. Do you want to join us?" "Do I have a choice?" "No, you don't, you have to do this." And so I met some people and some I kept in touch with for all four years, and some you'd see on campus." Oh, I remember you from freshman year," when they show up in class. It broke down this huge institution. As I remember somebody telling me, "Pay attention to who's on the on the quad when you're walking around. Could you see the same people every day? So smile at them and say hello." And it helps to get to know people that way.

SB: Yeah, people don't often believe me when I say you know, "We're actually we're up to almost 50,000 students now."

GM: About 43,000 when I was there.

SB: People don't really believe me, when I'll say that, "Yes, I'm at the Big U, there's people everywhere, but like, if I'm out and about, I'll generally see somebody that I know, or at least recognize." Interesting to hear that it was kind of that way back when you were here as well.

GM: It was, it was. And some people didn't get it, how this was supposed to work. I remember freshman year, there was a kid that sat down at the cafeteria table fairly early on, and he was complaining about the university. And I said, "Well, what's the matter?" "Well, I'm from New York..." – I think he was from Brooklyn. He said, "I wanted to go to school in a small environment. And I thought University of Illinois was going to be a country school. And it would be very small." You didn't do your homework, did you? You didn't open the book. [laughs].

SB: That's probably the first time I've ever heard of somebody showing up here and thinking that they were going to be at a small school.

GM: Yeah, he was, I suppose, anxious to get away from mom and dad and get as far away as possible. But there are other people that couldn't handle the lecture classes with 500 to 1000 people in them and stuff like that.

SB: And when would you say what year was it that you started here as a freshman?

GM: I started Fall of 1970.

SB: Fall of 1970. And when you, you lived in the Men's Residence Halls, which building were you in? Do you remember?

GM: I was in overflow housing in Hopkins first semester, and then moved to Garner and I had some of my Hopkins friends that ended up in Forbes.

SB: Okay.

GM: I think three of those buildings are down now, or two of the three buildings are down.

SB: Yeah, Hopkins is still there. And Garner and Forbes, Garner and Forbes were torn down. I missed seeing Forbes by about a year. So that one made it to 2015.

GM: Those were kind of like warehouses for teenagers and lots of people and big common bathrooms. And it's just an older way of living that students don't appreciate today either.

SB: There's still four of the six, six pack dorms are still up. So there's a bit of it still. I'm assuming you must have had a roommate. How did you, did you know him before you got there? Or was it someone that you were assigned to?

GM: I did not, I didn't know anybody. Actually, I did. I knew people coming to U of I. And I didn't want to live with them because this is all new. I don't want to continue high school. And not that high school, high school was bad in some ways, but that's for a different interview.

But I was assigned a roommate, Pete Hanson from western Illinois. We were both business majors and he and I got along but we didn't stay rooming together when we got broken up. I moved to another when I went to Garner, moved in with an Ag student from Ford County who was interesting, his family had hogs and corn, near Roberts, Illinois. That was an entirely different world too.

SB: Most certainly. That's just a little bit north of here, isn't it? Or something like that?

GM: It's in Ford County. So I don't know. Maybe 40 minutes straight north.

SB: Depending on who's driving, of course, with 57 you never know.

GM: Well, when I came down in junior high, 57 wasn't done yet. So it was narrow little roads coming down from all of the, all of the small towns from Chicago to...

SB: So you came down on U.S. 45, then?

GM: 45? Yes, I didn't remember the number but that was it. Yes, 45.

SB: Interesting. Oh, that's really something, and did you, just out of curiosity, when you came down, then, did you take a bus with other students?

GM: No, my folks drove me down to music camp, drove me down. And then two weeks later came and picked me up and then took me back.

SB: Oh, nice.

GM: Yeah, that was interesting. And I'm glad we can go faster now. But it was, having to do it once or twice, that was good.

SB: I actually, out of curiosity, I do that. In the last couple of summers, I grew up in the south suburbs in Lemont and I'd split, I'd spend some time here working during the week and then go home for the weekend. And sometimes I will take 45 in the summer, because it's just a little quieter. And now that 57 exists, there's absolutely no traffic on it ever, which is very nice.

GM: Yes.

SB: And you said you were a business major. What made you want to major in business or what led you to that decision?

GM: My first real job, in high school, I started working when I was a sophomore, was in a small local department store in Blue Island. And my boss was good to me, took me to trade shows and shared stuff about what was, how they bought and sold. I could do this; I would like that. So I applied for College of Commerce, as it was called at that point, was a marketing major.

I don't know whether they declare majors in business now. Then we didn't declare a major, but you'd have an emphasis, if you got 20 hours in something that was what your emphasis was. So practically speaking, I was a marketing major. Took the retailing class, all the marketing classes, advertising

classes, I was very interested in that. Though, after college, jobs were tight, and the job I got I didn't like very much and then went into education.

SB: But that was your motivation behind picking Marketing?

GM: Yeah, I had some experience, retail experience at work. And, and went in that direction.

SB: That's really interesting and good to hear that as well. Your first impressions of campus, you know, what was it? What was it like, you had been down here, and seen the place and enjoyed it when you were a student in grade school, what was it like coming back? And what was it like being a student that first year?

GM: I just, I took the recommended classes. I had an accounting class, which was very tough for me, because I didn't have accounting in high school. My high school advisor told me not to take it. So that was a struggle, so was economics. We had to take two semesters of speech at that time, that was very good. So, each thing was a little different.

I also needed one more credit. So I added a one semester one credit hour course in the psychology of drug use. I was not a drug user, I'm not a heavy drug user ever. And that was very interesting. That was in the Auditorium. And sometimes that place was filled, and it holds 1900 people. So that was an interesting thing. I always would go to the balcony early and sit in the front row with my feet up.

SB: It was a good vantage point then and it's a good vantage point now, I can tell you that.

GM: Yes, it was!

SB: Before, before we started the recording, you mentioned that you were a user of the library when you were a student. Did you start using that as a freshman?

GM: I did. I did. Of course, there were the, there was the huge acreage of card catalogs at that time, drawers, and I enjoyed going through the cards, "Oh, this is interesting. I'll write that down. I'll go and learn about that." So that was one of the ways I used it. I was also curious, so I would try, and if I was checking out a book, "Oh, there's a copy of it in the Commerce Library, there's a copy in the Ag Library. I'll go to the Ag Library and see what that one looks like." And so, I used many of them. It's like, "I'm doing this term paper. So what do they have in the Archives for that, or the Newspaper Library?"

I did a report on Orson Welles' *War of the Worlds* broadcast in the in the 30s, and went to the newspaper library and read the current accounts of that, which was so interesting. I tried to use the library as much as I could.

SB: Were undergraduates able to actually go into the book stacks at that time, or did you have to make requests?

GM: We were not. If you were, what was the name of it, there was a higher...?

SB: James Scholar?

GM: Yes, yes. And I was not. So I could not do them, but you'd fill out a little paper card, and you'd go up and give it to the person. And they'd send it up to a picker who would send the book down in a dumbwaiter for you.

SB: What was the, just out of curiosity, what was the turnaround time on that? Was it just a few minutes? Or would you have to come back the next day or something?

GM: They had rows of chairs in front of the circulation desk to wait, and it could be 10 minutes? It could be a half an hour?

SB: Oh, wow. But it was right away. Interesting.

GM: If it was something was off site, it might be a week till you got it.

SB: That makes sense. Yeah, the students, all students can access the stacks now. But you can still make requests, but they have fewer staff, of course, because you can go in there yourself. So it takes a little longer. Did you have a favorite building?

GM: My favorite building was Altgeld Hall. I had a couple of math classes there. But I thought the circulation area in that building was just sublimely beautiful, even in its state of disrepair in the 70s. And I've been following the project to reinstall the leaded glass ceiling and restore the paintings, etc. That'll be the next time I come down, is to see the grand opening of that.

SB: It's going to really be something and if I remember to do this, when I send you an email after this as a follow up, I will attach a picture that I took of Altgeld when they started cleaning the outside of it. It's really, the color change is striking. And the inside really is. . .

GM: Yeah, I guess all that coal smoke, in the first three quarters of its life.

SB: That's exactly right.

GM: That pale pink brick or stone.

SB: And when you said it was somewhat dilapidated, when you were a student, my father was a student in the 80s. And he studied math, so he was in there. And I had a class in there just a couple years ago. And I spoke to him about it and mentioned that, like, I tripped over something that was broken. He goes, "Oh, that was broken when I was there." [Both laugh] It's overdue. So I'm with you on that one. I'll be very excited to see what it looks like, see what it looks like when it's done. And then to get a little bit more on topic here, I suppose. But I've enjoyed hearing, hearing some background and you know, when and how did you first hear about Allen Hall and Unit, and what became Unit One. Because you lived in the Champaign side of campus, so you may not have known that.

GM: During my first year there. I saw an article about the proposal for what became Unit One in the *Daily Illini*, which I read every day, I subscribed all four years. And because in the old days, you had to pay and it was delivered to you. And so, I saw the article, "New Program for Living and Learning," and, "Oh, this sounds cool." You get to take classes in the dorm and you're focused with the same people. It

was, I guess, a way to break down the size of the Big U. And in the article it said, that they're looking for upperclassmen to help out the newest, the freshman students to acclimate to the campus. "I could do that." So on a lark I called or wrote or whatever one did at that time and I was contacted and they said, "Here, fill out this form," and sent me a letter, "You been accepted and this is what's going to happen." And so the next fall, my folks drove me to Allen Hall and dumped me off in front and the rest is history.

SB: And you had said earlier when we were speaking, that you had actually stayed in Allen when you were a young man in the summer?

GM: Yeah, in seventh, seventh and eighth grade, both. I know at least one of those years I was on the third floor in the south end. I can't remember the second year where I stayed, but basic college dorm situation.

SB: Interesting, I feel like that's somewhat rare for an incoming student to have actually stayed in his dorm before being a college student?

GM: Yes, yes, yes. Yeah. And it was interesting because the feeling on campus among dorm residents changed from my freshman year to my sophomore year, going from the segregated dorm segregated by gender. "Well, we need to go over to Urbana, where all the girls are." The panty raids and all that that kind of malarkey from the 40s and 30s." I remember participating in a panty raid at Allen my freshman year. And my sophomore year, no panty raids, people learn to talk to men and women as though they were adults. It was a very positive thing I thought.

SB: Interesting. And that was kind of a shift that was like, just from one year to the next.

GM: Yes, yeah, parents could still have their students sequestered in places where you couldn't have people of the opposite gender on the floors; LAR had a couple of floors like that, had no visitation for residents, but Allen had Unit One, with men on one section women on the other, but you could go back and forth, there was no security in the dorms at that time. And then there were the other floors, where it was split. South End was women, I believe in North End was men, with a lounge in-between.

SB: And that was, when you first got to Allen in that first year, was it just the ground floor of Allen? Or was it a couple of floors?

GM: Ground and first, I believe, and I think the next year, the second floor opened.

SB: That makes sense, that it would grow in size.

Just out of, you know, as someone who studied and handles the history of the campus, in a lot of different ways, it's really interesting to hear about that. That change, I took a class on U of I history, actually through the history department as an undergrad, which was very cool. And we talked a little bit about that time in the history of this place where it there was this shift from you know, the 40s 50s and 60s and *en loco parentis* era where it was, the university was like your third parent, to where you were a little bit more treated as young adults, you know, and be able to move around, it's really interesting to hear that, for you and noticing that that there was this noticeable shift from your first year to your second.

GM: There was, yes. So it was especially focused for me being part of Unit One, because I had a different world here last year. And now, here's what we're experiencing. So in a sense, I was starting over again, with this big group of freshmen. The age difference didn't bother me, it didn't bother them either.

SB: What were your first impressions of Unit One, after you got moved in and started kind of seeing what was going on?

GM: There's a lot of fun people, a lot of crazy people, all the artsy people, which I really enjoyed. And there was one other business student and one other sophomore, but people from all over campus. And yeah, it was enjoyable. And one of the interesting things is because we were this special program where you had classes, and you had things you had to do to create your own class. There were meetings and we would get together and and get to know each other more than one would just in a regular dorm situation.

SB: There were more opportunities to socialize. And more people took advantage of that.

GM: Yes, yes, yes.

SB: And what was, since it was the very first year, there must have been people kind of not quite knowing what was what was going on, what were, what was some of the earliest programming that you can remember?

GM: Well, from the beginning, there were photography classes, and I took one of those, I think, sophomore year, yeah, I think it was that sophomore year, in the dark room there.

And so you'd have classroom sessions, and then you'd be in the lab by yourself, and you check the key out and do what your assignment was. The next year, I took a history class, but the big discussion was with how we're going to do this, LAS 105, I think it was, I think was the number. And you need to find a project. There were a number of teachers, a number of professors that had submitted proposals, "Yeah, I'd work with a kid to do this." And there were several of us that met with a music professor, Dr. Neely Bruce, who's from Alabama, and very interested in American music, had a doctorate on a specific early American composer, Anton Philip Heinrich. And he was looking at starting a publishing company. So there were five or six of us that met with Neely and we'd have him, he'd come and have lunch with us in the dorm every other week or every week and we would look at our projects and talk about what we were doing.

And so that was unusual for me to be that close with a professor. I remember when I went over to his office, he was in one of the houses that used to be on Nevada Street. And it was hot, it wasn't air conditioned. So I knocked on his door and he let me in. He was wearing shorts, "Professors wear shorts?" And then he was giving our group a tour in the building, and he took us to the electronic music lab that they had there at the time. And we get to the top of the stairs, and he didn't have his key. And that was the first time I heard a professor use the F word when he was frustrated that he couldn't get into this place because he didn't have the right key. So that situation where we got to get to know our professors on a more intimate level.

And since I got involved with the performing group that he had, we'd see him every week in that as well as our special class. And then once or twice a year he'd have a party at his house, he and his wife would host us and those were pretty good parties that he had at his house. I remember one time that was late in the evening, and a couple of us were sitting under the grand piano in his living room while he was playing ragtime and we're drinking Buffalo Grass vodka. And it was a, an unusual college professor experience, kind of experience.

SB: It certainly seems like it. And that was something that you ended up with, in your experience, directly because of Unit One.

GM: Yeah, yeah, I would not have had that. And we did our project. But I worked with Neely for three years and was in the American Music Group, we took two tours of the East, including one time where we got to perform at the Smithsonian American History Museum, went to a number of universities and colleges. And there was a third tour that took place in between and that was to the southwest. I remember the group went to Texas. I didn't go because my mom died that week, and I couldn't go.

SB: Oh, I'm sorry.

GM: So yeah, that was a rough time, being a student too, because you're away. And then all of this is happening. But yeah, that was the experience, in my college experience, that carried me through the whole college experience. High school, I was in the music program. So despite all the changes that happened yearly, I was in the same orchestra all four years. And that was the guiding thing.

SB: What did you, what instrument did you play?

GM: I played the violin, not well. But that's not what education is about. It's to teach you what things are about, not that you have to be the best. Academically, I was not the best student in college. I did graduate. So that's the important thing. And one interesting thing that I don't tell many people is that some years later, I was going through of some stuff from college, throw, throw, throw, and I came across my permit to enter. They, at the time, they sent us a big page listing all of our high school classes, all of our test scores. And I hadn't paid any attention to it at the time because my class rank wasn't that great. My GPA wasn't that good. But it had down on the form, they thought that I had a perfect ACT score!

And so that was probably what got me in when I really was not, should not have been accepted. And so, the angels were watching me or something. And I guess if I wasn't a strong enough student to get in, but I graduated, that was good. But as I mentioned in the thing that I sent you there, I also feel like I majored in life because I wanted to experience the culture of the university, the student life, the films, the alternate classes, and wrapped that around my major and I luckily did that successfully.

SB: So you really took advantage of a lot of what the Big U has to offer.

GM: I did. I felt that was very important because at the time film was big on campus, many student organizations raised funds that way. At the Auditorium there were several films a weekend, Lincoln Hall Theater, Com West and DKH auditoriums. And so, for 50 or 75 cents, you could see not the newest films but we saw lots and lots of stuff.

SB: So that was something that, you know, it seems like almost every night or every other night there would be some sort of a film being shown somewhere

GM: Somewhere, yes, yes, at least one somewhere on campus on the weekends, many. And I kind of traveled with a group of people.” Hey, what's everybody doing this week? Well, I want to see this over here at the Auditorium.” And the dorms didn't have dinner on Sunday. So, let's go out for pizza. Which place should we go for pizza? And so that was how it worked. And people that came in and out of those groups as we kind of moved around campus.

SB: I'll tell you, it's still very much like that. At least it was for me.

GM: Good, yeah.

SB: But going for pizza and seeing films, what were some of the popular hangout spots on campus at the time.

GM: I didn't go to the bars where the frat guys hung out. I didn't go to KAMS, I think I was there once. Red Lion farther west on Green Street, I was there once. Used to be a place on Lincoln Avenue called Treno's, across, it's across from Krannert, just south of Krannert. They had pizza and beer, and you could get served most of the time. There was another pizzeria called Manzellas, on Goodwin, very tiny little hole in the wall. Up on Green Street, there was a, I've been trying to, been racking my brain to remember what it was called, it was about Second and Green. It was a strange little place built on the front lawn of a big old house and you could get wine and sandwiches, wine and burgers. And yeah, it was something Pub, I think. But that's as far as my brain remembers. Spent a lot of time there. [White Horse Inn.]

SB: And you mentioned, just to get this, get this down. Did you ever consider rushing a fraternity?

GM: Oh, for about 10 minutes, and then I got over it.

SB: One of those things, where you're coming here and you feel like you might [unintelligible] need would be wise to consider everything but you considered it and then thought...

GM: Yeah. And I thought, well, you know, your life is so structured. This is when our game is, and even if you're not playing, you have to be there. And I didn't want people telling me what to do. And a girl I knew from high school said "I'll never talk to you again if you join a frat." And that made me think a few minutes. But then. [laughs]

SB: Well, that sounds like a perfectly fine motivation to me. [Both laugh] Let me the page here a little bit. And when you, Unit One was Unit One? And do you happen to know exactly why it was called Unit One?

GM: Because there were going to be more.

SB: Oh, interesting.

GM: So if this is successful, there'll be a Unit Two with another take. There'll be a Unit Three with another take. So that was one of the things that came out of that initial discussion with that.

SB: Interesting. I'll tell you, I never, I went to things that at Unit One, which is it's still called that and I've never until you said this just now realized why it's called Unit One.

GM: The others never happened and whether that's good or bad, I don't know.

SB: I'll tell you, I wonder, I don't know why they dispensed with the unit naming convention. But there are now there are other living learning communities all over campus, actually.

GM: There were the language ones when I was down there. There was Japan House that dealt with arts, music and culture and language of Japan. Shozo Sato was one of the big movers and shakers. And what kind of things are there in other directions?

SB: Now they have, there's a Women in Engineering community, there's a Business Living Learning Community, Unit One obviously is still Unit One. I lived in, actually my first year is somewhat similar to yours. They were starting an Honors Living Learning Community aimed at the kids who were in the James Scholar and Chancellor's Scholars Program. So I lived there my first two years. And that was interesting kind of seeing them stand up that group. There's a Sustainability Living Learning Community. And I think there's, they've come and gone. Of course, the one constant is Unit One, that was the first.

GM: You know, that would make sense that as topics and needs change and the culture changes as you change direction. That's just how it works.

SB: Yeah, that that makes a lot of sense. I guess it makes perfect sense to me now that I think about it that Unit One is Unit One because it was the first one of them, but I'd never, literally I've never...

GM: They could have called any of them Unit Two, and this one focuses on commerce students or business students and this one focuses on academic progress, etc.

SB: Well, that's really good to know, you know. And of course, though, since it was being set up at the time, I'm sure there was some uncertainty or debate about whether it was going to continue or in what form. Do you remember anything about how, what was happening with that?

GM: There was. And that was, there was discussion from the beginning. "This needs to be successful, so it will continue." And we felt that things were successful, but then the University started having money difficulties, professors threatening to strike and it was decided that, well, we're just going to end this, I think was after this after the first year and then the second. Both years was like, "Well, we've done this." And the students got together, had meetings and talked to people. Alan Purves was the director at the time. And we somehow convinced the right people that we should come back next year.

SB: And it worked?

GM: Mm hm.

SB: What was, mentioning, you know, that you got together and the like, you know, and you'd said that you have had these groups of people that you would go and do things with, you know, what was the social scene like in Unit One, was it nice to meet people in there?

GM: It was easy to meet people. Of course, there were the cool kids and it's hard to break into the "A Group." But I, being a sophomore, had people that I knew from the previous year. I then knew through other people, people that were upstairs that were not in the unit. And so, going out to the movies or for pizza on the weekend, there could be a couple of unit people, a couple of non-unit people, a couple of upperclassmen, that type of thing. And of course, there were things that happened in the dorm, you'd hear people singing, with their guitar and people would join and people playing the piano in the lounge, and so things happened. There's a big movie on TV, we would gather in the main lounge, I remember when *Love Story* was on TV for the first time there were 40 or 50 people in chairs that we'd all pulled up and watched that film and cried a little bit at the end. [Laughs]

SB: Were there televisions in the lounges then?

GM: There were, that was one that rolled in. I don't know exactly where it came from. I think there was one TV in the main lounge. There are a few students that had TVs, my dad wouldn't let me take a TV because, "You're supposed to be studying," okay, I get that. The Union, they had TV rooms on one of the upper floors. Like NBC, ABC, CBS, etc. You could pick which room you want to watch TV on.

SB: That's handy.

GM: Yeah, I never used it. But I went once and, "Oh, okay. I've been here."

SB: Another one of those things that you tried, but it wasn't something that you did a lot.

GM: Yeah. Yeah.

SB: And you mentioned that there was a photo lab in Allen/Unit One, what was, were there other spaces like that? How much did you guys make use of those?

GM: Well, that changed over the time that I was there. There were the photo students, some more serious than others. You could have two or three kids working in the lab at a time but then they had other areas where you could do dry mounting and matting and framing and things like that. So going down the hall past the photo lab, there were other places where you could work.

The first year that I was there I was on Ground North which they don't have people living in now. And those rooms became study rooms or small rooms for work. I remember needing to get a paper typed when we had typewriters. And I waited too long, so I had to type overnight and so didn't want to wake the roommate up. So I just rolled into one of those small meeting rooms with my typewriter and my stack of paper and knocked out that paper for the professor, that was due at eight o'clock the next morning.

SB: It's better late than never.

GM: Occasionally I was late. But never not finished.

SB: Well, that's certainly good. And the, I actually did another interview just yesterday with a guy named Charlie Myerson.

GM: I know of him. He's a little bit younger than me, a couple years later.

SB: He was, I think he might have, I don't know if you would have been at Allen, I feel like he might have started at Allen in the fall of 74. It was another early perspective from Unit One.

GM: [Unintelligible] he was either 73 or 74. I've read a number of things that he's written on the Ghosts of Allen Hall Facebook page.

SB: Yeah.

GM: A number of the people that I knew were on there and then other younger people that I didn't know. I know he contributed a big collection of his writings and tapes from radio programs.

SB: He did. I processed and accessioned the archives and writings part of that one.

GM: Okay.

SB: So it was great, yesterday was the first time I'd actually spoken with him, although we've sent countless emails back and forth. The reason why I wanted to A.) see if you knew him, just because that'd be interesting. But also, just to mention that, is that he said that he lived on Ground South when he was first there and even by that point, which was just a year or so after you probably would have left, Ground North had already been turned into those spaces.

GM: Yes, that was the case. And Ground South where I was, I was in Room 4, and that was the year that the, or was it, yeah, that was the year it was determined to be "Desolation Row" because it was such a such a desolate place to live. And yeah, interesting times. I had a couple of good roommates there. And that was when I was on, when I was on Ground North, sophomore year, I had the drug dealer as a roommate. That was trippy because I may have partaken occasionally, but I was not a regular user, but he was a regular seller and had set up shop in Room 59, I think it was, I thought, "You're gonna get us arrested." He was having dope mailed to the room through the Post Office! "Mike, you're gonna get us all arrested here."

SB: So this was your roommate in the dorm. So he's in the same actual room as you and he's dealing?

GM: Yes, yes, yes. Yeah, yeah. There was one time he was gone, and I was studying late and it was a Saturday, I should have been out enjoying it, but I was home. Knock at the door. I open the door. "Is this where I get the stuff?" I didn't know anything about no stuff. "Oh, but I asked, I asked somebody out on the patio in front of the building where I could get good stuff. And they said Room 59." I got away from that, I'm gonna get robbed. I'm gonna get shot.

And [unintelligible] happened a couple of years after that, that somebody got shot in the drug thing in Allen Hall. But...

SB: Oh, good lord!

GM: That was about 75. After I graduated. In fact, they closed that floor, that wing after the person got shot.

SB: Did they survive?

GM: That I don't know. I wasn't on campus. [Unintelligible] one of those things that that I heard about from other people and read in the paper.

SB: I'll have to check the DI for that. That's, that's a curious one.

GM: It would be about 75, I think.

[TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE: The text immediately preceding this note, which is indicated by the asterisks and is italicized, refers to George Miller's recollection of a shooting at Allen Hall. After the interview, he looked into the story, and discovered that the incident did not happen as he had thought. We have retained the text in this transcription, as it corresponds to the recording, but have included this note to clarify that whatever transpired was not as Mr. Miller initially recalled it.]

SB: Well, it's good that you missed out on that. And you just had a disappointed stoner instead of somebody with a gun.

*GM: Exactly. Exactly. Unit One became quite notorious. When I was still on campus, maybe in junior or senior year, there was a conservative group of mothers that bought a full page ad in the *DI* criticizing the sex, drugs, etc. that were going on at the university, corrupting the youth of the nation. And they specifically called out Unit One for...*

SB: Did they really?

GM: ... the perversity that was going on. Yes.

SB: What was the reaction of seeing that? Did you guys use the article as a dart board or anything?

GM: Pretty much, yes. It was the Mamas From Mattoon, and so we decided we didn't have any interest in anything dealing with Mattoon, Illinois.

SB: Well, you know, I suppose parents have been crusading against such things on colleges ever since colleges existed and they still have yet to succeed.

GM: Exactly, exactly.

SB: What do you, you mentioned a Mr. Purves, the director of Unit One at the time, how well or did you interact with the administrative staff or with the director much? Or was that kind of something that you didn't do as much?

GM: They were around, and he was an English professor, I believe. And you had to interact with the administrative or the academic staff. With your project, you had to turn in things that would be evaluated, and if they had questions. I wouldn't say we had, at least I wouldn't say that I had a lot of interaction, but there was. There definitely was more than you would with a traditional academic situation.

SB: That makes sense. And did they at that time, just in the first couple years of Unit One, did they have the artists-in-residence yet?

GM: There were, yes, I didn't see many. I was going through my poster collection of things that I purloined from campus. And one of them was from one of the Unit One artists-in-residence, Doyle Moore, who was a graphic design professor, did a poetry reading. When we're done with the program, I'll ask you, if you want any of the things that I have, I could send them to you.

SB: My inclination would be yes. But that's a question for my supervisor to be sure.

GM: I can take pictures and say this is what I have from the first year. And if you want it, you can have it

SB: That would do very nicely. You said you moved out of Allen, your senior year. What was your motivation behind that? Did you just want to live in an apartment or how did that work?

GM: It was a difficult situation because I really liked the Unit One experience, the Allen Hall experience. But I thought, "I'm a senior, that's uncool to live in a dorm." And so, I had to balance my feelings of what I would like to do and how will all these freshmen and sophomores feel about hanging out with a senior? And so, a group of friends, four of us, got an apartment up at Stoughton and Goodwin above the north of the engineering campus.

SB: And were they people you knew from Allen?

GM: Uh, yeah. Although people came and went, one person graduated early, and we got somebody else in, somebody dropped out. And somebody came in, one of the guys that came in, he had been the president of his frat, and he got thrown out for having bad grade point average. And so he lived in our apartment.

SB: He needed a place to...

GM: A place to crash.

SB: A place to crash, yes. Whatever works. I'm trying to make sure that I get a lot of this down, because this is just so great, learning, especially about the first couple of years. Was it exciting to be there for the first iteration of this place and this program?

GM: It was. I thought it was because when you're dealing with an institution at that point was a little over 100 years old, and here's this, this groundbreaking thing. And in many ways, the campus had its feet in the 50s and 60s and 40s. I remember having a professor say, "Oh, things were better in the 40s. And when I was teaching here..." And he had been here that long at that point. But then there's all this new stuff happening and with the things going on on campus. The increase in awareness of women's issues, racial issues. We didn't have all the alphabet soup, but gay issues at that point. And then there was the war. Couple of riots, that I was through, and it was a very interesting time.

SB: And I would be completely remiss in not asking you about this. You got there in 1970. So that was, Vietnam was still going on, although there was a drawdown, but Kent State had not happened yet. So what if anything, do you remember about the, either the anti-war protests or just the events that were going on as part of all that?

GM: Kent State happened my senior year in high school, it was in May 70.

SB: Oh, it was in May of 70, that's right.

GM: 70. And I remember one of the songs that was popular on the jukebox in the Snack Bar at MRH was Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young's *Ohio*, Four Dead in Ohio. And you can sit there in your evening in which we did play cards and stuff. You might hear that song a half a dozen times in the course of that evening. It was a lot of awareness that that could have been here and could have been us.

There were a number of protests war related, anti-Dow Chemical related, anti-University Board of Trustees related, you got to get rid of the Dow stock and stuff like that. There were two riots that I recall. One, I had been with a friend at the Co-Ed Theater, which I'm sure is long gone, on Green Street. We saw *Woodstock* and came out and there's glass breaking and police chasing and students running and, "Oh, let's see how do we get back home? Let's go the roundabout way to get home." Another time there was, and I don't remember what that unrest was over. But the, would have been sophomore year because I was on that side of the building. The RA came around and said, "There's something happening on Green Street. We're on lockdown. You're supposed to stay here." And so as soon as he was gone, we snuck out the back door to see what was going on.

SB: Of course! What else could you possibly do?

GM: [Laughs] Yes, yes. So yeah, there was always that. There were, in the one entrance to the Union, there was what was called this free speech area. I don't know whether that's still a thing, would have been the south entrance closest to Altgeld. That was where you could petition, you could pass out flyers. And I always gathered whatever people were talking about. And sometimes there'd be the Communists selling cookies. And it was just always interesting.

SB: Now that you say that, I don't, it's not quite called the free speech area. But there's that vestibule into the Union, you said that was the south side closest to Altgeld?

GM: Yes, yes.

SB: Yeah, that one, that vestibule still has a trio of tables, where students will gather for those sorts of things.

GM: A whole row of tables and your group could register to. Yeah, there was a compromise a few years before, because the university didn't allow any political discussion on campus, I think it was John Kennedy that broke that in 60? In 60.

SB: In 60.

GM: Because he came to campus. And then after that, people were demanding, we need a place to express our ideas. And they say, "You can have this lobby at the corner of the Union." And that's what happened.

SB: And that I'm sure that lasted for about a week, and then they had all the demonstrations on the quad and stuff.

GM: Yeah, yeah.

SB: Did they ever, was the National Guard ever called out when you were there? Or had that been like the previous year?

GM: That must have been the previous year because there was the big unrest in spring of 70, around, Kent, Kent State time. I had a friend from high school that was down there, a young woman who lived in Evans Hall at that time.

SB: And was, what's the best way to phrase this? Did you ever participate in any of those protests or anything? Or did you just kind of see it, but not directly be there?

GM: See it but not be involved. I was more involved in protests later in life, as I became more radicalized.

SB: So, for you, that came later?

GM: That came later? Yes, yes.

SB: But I suppose there must have been some influence of having these memories, of these things at Illinois that may have persisted a little bit, perhaps, as you were becoming more of an activist later in life.

GM: Yeah, it did. But the funny thing was, by the time I was a senior, it was very obvious that the campus was becoming more and more conservative.

SB: Really?

GM: And there were conservative folks running for student government, wanting to throw out the Democrats and Liberals and there was a guy that lived in Allen that ran for UGSA, as it was called at the time, and did not win. I voted against him because he was too, too conservative. But yeah, things ebb and flow. It's interesting how things change over, and of course, your attitudes change over a four-year period, too.

SB: Of course. Yeah. And it's that time in your life when you're figuring out who you are as a person. So it's almost like hyper, hypersensitive to such things.

GM: Yeah, yeah. And that was one of the things that was going on with me. I was looking at, "Well, who am I?" And looking at my sexuality, "Am I gay? Am I straight?" And there's Unit One, there were a lot of gay people. But I didn't think I was ready for that and ended up taking a detour because as I mentioned in what I wrote, I married my college sweetheart, that I knew from Allen Hall, and took that detour and it didn't end well.

SB: But for at least for a little while, you did actually marry somebody that you had met at Allen.

GM: Yes, yes, yes. It was 10 days after graduation, we got married back here in Chicagoland. And yeah, it was, it's part of the journey.

SB: Yeah, that's exactly. So that was somebody that you had, you must have started seeing her when you were there?

GM: Yeah, we were friends in the group that moved like this around. And then I had mentioned that my mom had passed away. And she had been coming back alone from the library one day, at night, and somebody jumped her on Greg Drive by the Women's Gym.

SB: Oh, wow.

GM: There used to be tennis courts there. I think they're gone now. And so, she came in to the dorm and came to me, because I was the one she could trust. And so, then we were both dealing with issues. And that brought us together. And so that led to that relationship.

SB: Interesting. Yeah, that's, that's something. And that's somebody that you wouldn't have, that's a part of your life, you wouldn't have had had you not been to Allen.

GM: Yeah, yeah.

SB: And you mentioned, you mentioned President Kennedy, or Senator Kennedy at the time, coming in 1960. I'll just detour myself for a moment. There's a very interesting set of photos that I came across, in one of our new accessions from a couple of years ago, it's a set of 13 photos, 8 by 10s, of Kennedy that day, on campus, and that's going to be... I have yet to exactly get it formatted the right way. But that's, that's going to be a blog post at some point.

GM: Cool.

SB: From our unit, so I'll be sure to send you the link to that.

GM: I've seen some of those photographs at the time I was down there, because that was still a big deal. That Kennedy [was] there.

SB: Even though, but that's right, because you all would have remembered his assassination.

GM: Yep. I was in sixth grade, November 22, in Mrs. Pidrak's sixth grade class, Whittier School in Blue Island, Illinois, the room was yellow, and the teacher was crying.

SB: Wow. Did she make an announcement? How did you find out?

GM: Well, we had been, I don't know what we were doing. But the principal came in, walked up to her, and whispered something to her. And that was when she started to cry. And we knew something serious was up. And I don't remember whether the principal told us or whether she pulled herself together enough to tell us. But it was a rough time. The whole country shut down for a month, while that was going on.

SB: Kennedy had been there, you know, years before, a little bit before you got there. But did any political figures ever visit when you were there that you remember?

GM: Gosh. Oh, I saw somebody at the Assembly Hall freshman year, civil rights speaker, and I don't remember who it was. [Dick Gregory]

SB: But there were people, there were visits of that sort?

GM: Yeah. And that was, if you're having somebody in the Assembly Hall that's a big deal.

SB: Most definitely. I want to ask you about one thing, on my response of questions that you wrote out, you refer to something as the George Wall-Less Memorial Lounge. [GM laughs]. What on earth, can you tell me a little bit about whatever that is?

GM: On Ground North, and you notice how I spelled it.

SB: I did, yeah, yeah.

GM: And Ground North, because in Allen, each side of the floor had a small lounge, and in the old days would have had a couple of sofas and chairs and tables. Well for the first year of Unit One, they knocked the walls on Ground North's lounge down, the cinderblocks and doors were just taken away, the columns are still here to hold the building.

SB: Oh, yeah.

GM: So then the students started calling it the Wall-Less Lounge because it had no walls. And then somebody made a sign for the 'George C. Wall-Less Memorial Lounge.' And it got a lot of chuckles. [Laughs]

SB: I'm sure, I'm sure.

GM: Governor Wallace was still in the news at that point, people had that awareness.

SB: Didn't someone try to assassinate him around that time?

GM: Yeah. I don't remember exactly the chronology because I was not on that radar, but yes.

SB: Coming up with that name was, that was somebody that everyone present would have known.

GM: Yes.

SB: It might be like somebody calling it the Mitch McConnell or Donald Trump lounge today...

GM: Yes, yes.

SB: ... you know who that is.

GM: Of course, it was this fun play on words...

SB: Yeah.

GM: ... because the walls were gone. It was wall-less. [Laughs]

SB: Oh, so the lounges in their previous iteration had been like a closed room with a door?

GM: Yeah, they were at a corner in the hallway, closed room with two doors, and just that one, they took the walls down.

SB: Huh. Interesting.

GM: Small groups could gather and discuss their projects, et cetera.

SB: During your time on campus, we've talked for a long time now, over an hour, which is great. You were there for this time period when things were changing in more ways than one. You said that your first year you had seen the shift away from the more supervision to a little bit more lax.

GM: Yes. En loco parentis was discussed quite a bit in that period.

SB: And then this shift, perhaps, to conservatism a little bit towards the end...

GM: Not all the way back, but yes, there was...

SB: ... a little bit. Overall, what was it like to be here for those two shifts but also just the amount of what was going on in the world at the time?

GM: I thought it was refreshing and liberating. Even for things that I was not interested or able to become involved with, I certainly wasn't going to throw any rocks, though a lot of rocks got thrown around campus in that period. I remember reading about the gay group on campus, and even though I wasn't ready to deal with that, I felt that was comforting to me to know that that was there. It was the Gay Liberation Front, it was called in that period, they'd have dances in the Union. It fell apart about the time I was a senior, but knowing that that safety net was there for others when I didn't need it at that moment.

SB: It was becoming more welcoming, there were more opportunities and more things that were growing and arriving?

GM: The Greek system was declining, every fall I'd read in the *DI*, "Well, two more frats have closed and this sorority is having trouble," so that was waning. Of course, when you have this monolithic institution, things kind of roll forward.

SB: And you talked a little bit about your courses that you took, a photography course in Allen, and that you had this LAS 105 course in music with that one Professor, Bruce.

GM: Neely Bruce, and we put, I worked with him all, those four semesters, sophomore, junior year. We were originally intending to publish sheet music for school choruses, 19th century American stuff. He did his dissertation, like I said, about, last name was Heinrich, I'm drawing a blank on the first couple of names. [Anton Philip Heinrich]

There was a lot of stuff going on in the Music Department in those years leading up to the bicentennial. Neely had the choral group, we were discussing publishing, he wanted to record so we did four recordings on the stage at Krannert.

SB: Really!

GM: And then I was in charge of, I was part of the publishing company, we incorporated and the records were delivered to my dorm room, and I had boxes under my bed and strapping tape and would mail them out. And senior year, when I was in the apartment, I had the boxes and records under my bed and would mail them out when the orders came in. That was all interesting, a lot of fun, so there were several different things. We had the class that we did, we had work for that, and part of it was the performing thing. We did two operas on campus, we did a show at the Depot Theater, which I hope is still there, over near Lincoln Square. There's an abandoned railroad line that goes through there, and there was a train station that was a theater on and off for years. We did a show about, Neely had done research on the prohibition movement, and he went up to the WCTU headquarters in Evanston and got music and a play. And so we did this play with music that was very successful, it was a lot of fun. Did performances in other campus events, that was on a number of different levels, that we did that.

The first year you did the 100-level LAS class, I think was 105, and for your second year you did a different kind of project through the LAS 210, I think was the number. Why I'm remembering these numbers, I have no clue.

SB: And so you met Professor Bruce through Unit One?

GM: Yeah, yeah. Because it was, "Here's the list of professor proposals, so I went over and knocked on Neely's office door in whatever that house address was, and yeah." Lets work together, and I've got some other people, let's meet, we'll talk and it worked out fine. I'm Facebook friend with him now, we're not that big in touch but he retired from Connecticut Wesleyan a few years ago. He was in the big influx out of the University c. 74, because money was tight and professors weren't getting raises and so anybody who could get out was getting out in that period.

SB: Oh, interesting. So that was another consequence of those budget cuts was that faculty were leaving for opportunities where they could get better compensation.

GM: Yes, yes. Mm Hm.

SB: And were you, that would have been about your last year. Was that noticeable in the classes or around campus?

GM: You would hear professors talk, and there was stuff in the *DI* about what was going to happen to the University, and “Oh my god, this program’s closing, the world’s going to end.”

SB: And with the meetings that you attended, talking about the benefits of Unit One, what were the vibes there, or were these things that were held at Unit One, or would the University be holding them elsewhere?

GM: I know we met in the South Lounge at Allen, and in the basement by the cafeteria.” We’ve got to do something about this.” And people came up with proposals, “Well, there’s this facility over here, there’s this facility over here, but regardless it has to keep going.” I don’t ultimately know how that was resolved, where they found the money, but there was a lot of student input, that this is something worth doing.

I only talked about my project, but people did all kinds of different things. I remember students going down to Appalachia and working over break to help people build houses and renovate houses and other projects. Many, many different things.

SB: This LAS 105, now it’s 101 and 110, so at some point they made the change.

GM: I may be wrong on the numbers.

SB: Well, Charlie Meyerson gave us all of his course notes, so I can go in there and check. [GM laughs]

GM: Yes, yeah, from his time, my time to his time, it would be very similar.

SB: This was, these courses were something that every freshman had to do, or was it just students in Allen?

GM: Just the students in Unit One at Allen. So it was understood that you would either choose something from this list, or you would make a proposal for something that you wanted to do, and they could either accept that or reject that.” That’s not the direction we’re looking at going.” I never had a problem with that, with the...

SB: Mm hm. And in your notes you sent over, you said you took a history course at Allen as well. What was that like?

GM: That was U.S. History, and it was a lecture-discussion class, and the discussion class was held in the South Lounge. 12, 15 students in that discussion section, and whatever night of the week it was we'd go over, the professor would come, and we'd talk about whatever the lesson du jour was.

SB: Do you remember his name?

GM: I do not. Stocky guy, dark hair. That's all I know.

SB: You described like half of the history department. [Both laugh]. That was my major as an undergraduate.

GM: Ok.

SB: So that was a class where there was a big lecture in one of the halls, but the discussion section was...

GM: Lincoln Hall Theater was where we had that.

SB: But your discussion section was taught by the professor, not like a TA?

GM: I don't think, he was not a TA, but he wasn't the lead professor either.

SB: But he was somebody that was, it was a little bit different than having a section with a TA, which is probably what everybody else did.

GM: I have had those, yes. I don't remember his name or what his credentials were, I just remember we talked about stuff.

SB: And it was right in your dorm, then?

GM: Yeah, yeah. It was after dinner, so walk out of the cafeteria, make a left into the South Lounge, a row of chairs in the center, talk about whatever it was that we were supposed to talk about.

SB: That probably has to be about the shortest walk you could possibly have from your room to class.

GM: Yes, yes.

SB: Especially in the winter with the weather like what we've had recently.

GM: I knew all the ways to cut through, go through this, go through the Armory and go through here and then through the Library and, yeah.

SB: And, well, the Armory is big enough that that'll knock two blocks right off.

GM: Yes, it does.

SB: Unless, of course, you get lost in there forever, which is also a completely valid possibility considering how labyrinthine the place is.

GM: Mm hm.

SB: You said that you liked exploring the libraries and finding different ones and seeing what there was, did you ever arrive upon a favorite?

GM: The one I used the most was the Undergrad Library, the study carrels and it was a quite place to study. Of course, Allen and Unit One was not necessarily a quiet place. So, yeah, I did that often. A funny story about that: my usual habit was to take my stuff, study, and I wanted to get a snack. I'd take my shoes off, and I had a brand-new pair of shoes that I bought from one of the student stores on Green Street, Sixth and Green, it was a men's store, it was very popular among the frat boys. And I really liked these shoes, they were cool. So I go and get my candy bar and my pop, I'm walking back to the study carrel: my books were there, but my shoes were gone." Damn!" [Laughs] So I had to call my roommate, Gary, "Get a pair of shoes out of my closet and bring them up to the Library." Because it was weather like this, it was winter. [Laughs]

SB: Oh, no! [Laughs]

GM: They were very expensive, Bass saddle shoes, they were \$40.00, which was a lot of money then. And my dad didn't know about that event ever, because he would have been angry that I had gotten my shoes stolen.

SB: Well, it's probably for the best you never told him about that one.

GM: On a "need to know" basis, yes.

SB: Absolutely. I guess I'll also ask, whatever you'd like to share about your life post-graduation, just to have that, but also, how did the experiences from the University specifically but from Unit One in general, the other way around, Unit One specifically...

GM: Generally and specific, yes.

SB: How did that inform how you went about your life after, post-graduation?

GM: I ultimately ended up a high-school teacher. I worked in business for a year and a half, didn't like where I was working, went back to grad school, got a degree in education, ended up teaching business subjects for 33 years. I tried to individualize things, I tried to make things realistic for students rather than just take things out of the textbook. That helped, I thought that helped the students a lot. I was also involved in student activities, being a business teacher, I was a sponsor of the Future Business Leaders for a number of years. I also, later in my career, sponsored the Gay-Straight Alliance at the high school in Hinsdale, which is a very conservative community. It was groundbreaking there. But we feel that we changed the attitude in the school community about diversity. So, I'm proud of that accomplishment.

SB: And you're in your retirement now?

GM: Yeah, I retired in 2010, so this is my 14th school year out. My partner, husband, and I have been together 40 years now, and have a house in Naperville. Mike just retired from the Federal Aviation Administration earlier this year, and now we're trying to figure out what we want to do when we grow up.

SB: You've got plenty of time now, on your hands!

GM: I do, yes! [Laughs]

SB: That's really something. Mr. Miller, I can't thank you enough for taking some time and sharing all this with me. I don't want to take too much of your time this afternoon, but I would like to ask before I forget, is there any memories or stories from your time here at the University, whether they involve Unit One or not, that we haven't talked about that you'd like to share?

GM: Any that I'd like to share. I've shared the best ones, because I like to look at life as a journey, and an experience, and interesting wacky things. I can't come up with anything. One of the things I thought about with this, do you have any regrets about your time there. And I don't really. The biggest two regrets... one, that I never had a fish sandwich at Deluxe Lunch on Green Street, which were known worldwide for really great deep-fried fish sandwiches, and that my circle, the other one, my circle never got interested in the Red Herring Coffee Shop and Channing-Murray Foundation just off campus.

Because in certain circles that was really big. Big names in folk music era were involved there, but I would listen to things from their live performances on WPGU, because I was a big fan of WPGU. Dan Fogelberg sang all the time down there, and went on to have a world-class career.

Any other things I'd like to say or mention? Can't think of any funny stories or things that I would like to say, but I tried to use the University for the best possible reasons and get out of it what I wanted. I'm very happy with what I gained from my time there.

SB: That's wonderful! And if I may ask one more question. You mentioned that you actually used the University Archives when you were here. And that's not something that many undergrads do, even today. And also, you may know this or you may not, when you were a student, the Archives was actually less than ten years old. We got started in '63.

GM: Really? Wow.

SB: I don't think I've ever met someone or spoke with someone who was a user of the space that far back. What was that experience like? What did you go there to look at?

GM: I don't specifically remember what I was doing. I know I went there several times, it was more of a personal curiosity, perhaps. I remember you went down this narrow hallway, there'd be gray or green metal file cabinets and a desk at the end, and a person would be there. "I'm looking for this information...", and they would go get it and bring it to me. I remember being there one time and the person was so excited, they just showed me, as this nobody that walked in, someone had just donated a uniform from the high school academy that the Illinois Industrial University had, in the very beginning in the 1860s, I guess that would be.

So there was this gray wool military uniform with braid on it, that was, at that point, over 100 years old, but it had just been donated and so they were very proud of that. Part of that was my nerdy interest in history and information, and how can I maximize my exposure to that. What could I do that could incorporate this into my assignment? One of the reasons I may have been there, for some class I did a report on Altgeld Hall, and I used the dissertation that Muriel Feinman, I think her name was, that she did in the '60s about the building of Altgeld Hall. I may have gone in there to get additional information.

SB: That's really something, and I'll tell you also, that those file cabinets are all still down there.

GM: I'm sure they are.

SB: We don't, I mean, we're the Archives, we're not supposed to throw anything away.

GM: And that's a good thing! Don't throw anything away! I understand that the Archives is moving to the Undergrad Library?

SB: Yeah, there's a proposal in the works, the Undergrad Library has closed, but they're, and they're working.... I mean, I'm the low man on the totem pole at the Archives. We've been hearing that the proposals are in, they're sorting out the bids and contractors and those sorts, all the administrative minutia that takes far too long. In the opinion of someone who is just watching it, but from the other side, of course, they're moving as quickly as they can.

But yeah, eventually, the idea will be that the Archives and the Rare Book Library will move down there, and have a nice, centralized location.

GM: That will be a good thing. On the one hand, you hate to put the Archives and Rare Books 30 feet underground, but I'm assuming they have good pumps to pump the water out?

SB: I certainly hope so!

GM: The way people use libraries is so different today, the way people access information is so different. Because we have on these little devices in our pocket access to much more than students could when I was there.

SB: Yeah, it's really something. And that'll be, I don't know if I'll still be working here whenever the move is made, but it'll be really something to see that. And then, the idea, you may know, you may not, is that after the move is made, the Main Library will then get a significant renovation because there's a few parts of that that could use the help.

GM: Oh, yeah, that would make sense, yes. The staffing needs in all those behind-the-scenes things is very different too than it was 50 years ago that I was there! It's a wild thing!

SB: And you mentioned they used to have dumbwaiters in the Main Stacks.

GM: Mm hm.

SB: I'm trying to think, I don't know if those are still in-use everywhere, but I know that some of the specialized stacks that Rare Books use actually still have one of those. That's really something.

GM: I remember using the Rare Book Room a couple of times. "You don't have any pens on you, do you?" [Laughs]. "Here are some gloves for that book, yes." The way it should be!

SB: Pretty much the same way. Then the last thing I'll ask you, before I'll leave you be, and just say thank-you so much, again, is, this is a very specific question, with the Main Quad, what kind of trees were there? Because the Dutch Elms were gone by that point, I think.

GM: The Dutch Elm Disease got them, it was, the American Elm that was planted whenever they laid that out. There was one tree that was not an elm that survived, at the East corner of the Auditorium. They planted honey locusts to replace the elms because they were fast growing and similarly shaped, and then there were some decorative things up towards the Union, sweetgum trees.

SB: Oh, interesting!

GM: With the little spiky ball seed pods. Then, the honey locusts started dying, as you probably know, because they don't like their roots walked-on. So I imagine they have an assortment of different kinds of more indigenous to Illinois trees.

SB: They do, now. There actually, there are a couple of honey locusts left in front of the English Building, of all places.

GM: Okay.

SB: That's just another interesting perspective I wanted to get, because that's one thing that's changed. They're always taking them out and planting new ones and stuff.

GM: Well, you know, because trees have a life cycle and there's a lot of foot traffic that goes over that. You mentioned the English Building, that was another favorite building of mine. When I was there, it had not been changed in any way since it was the Women's Building, and there was still the swimming pool at the west, on the west side.

SB: Was it actually full of water as a pool?

GM: Yeah, yeah. It was, until some point in the late '70s, because in the old days you couldn't have men and women swimming in the same place. The gym was on the lower level of the west side, with a gymnasium above. Everything for women – the cooking, the swimming, the reading, the writing – all happened what's now the English Building.

SB: That's very interesting. And, again, I just keep thinking of new things that I'd like to ask. If you have to go, please let me know!

GM: No, I'm fine! I'm enjoying this thoroughly.

SB: Great, great. Another thing I wanted to ask was the, I don't think the, had the Intermural Physical Education Building been built when you were there yet?

GM: That was new! Probably the year I started or the year before that, that was a big deal and we, every semester, on our tuition we paid a fee to cover the loans on the property, I guess. But yeah, I remember going there to swim, and not that I'm athletic, but I remember going with a group of people, we went and swam. Yeah.

SB: That was, I was curious about that, because I know that that had been built at some point around...

GM: Yeah, built in 69, 68, 69. 70, that that would have been finished. When I was over at Allen, we would go to the pool in Freer Gym, which was the Women's Gym in the past. So that was a good pool to swim in.

SB: And that's essentially right next to Allen? So that must have been very convenient.

GM: Yes, yeah.

SB: And before you moved into Allen, when you spent your first year in the, I guess it's now the Ikenberry Commons, but the Six Pack is still used commonly to describe it. Especially by those of us who had parents that went here. [GM laughs] Did you, did you know about Allen Hall as another dorm? Obviously, you had lived there briefly in the summertime, but did you ever know people over there before it became Unit One?

GM: Not in the first year, no. I didn't know anybody over there. I knew one person from college, or, I mean from high school, that lived in Evans, and then I met somebody from the American Music Group that was in Busey, but I didn't really know anyone over there. Knew people from ISR, and had classmates from Pennsylvania Avenue, and Florida.

SB: And did you ever, I know a lot of the dorms, well, they still do, in that case, in that day I know they did as well, have their own dining halls. Did you have to eat at your own dorm, or could you eat elsewhere?

GM: You had to eat in your own dorm.

SB: Oh, really?

GM: And you could not go elsewhere, because it was, I don't know why. And one of the funny things was when we moved into Allen, it had been a women's dorm the year before.

SB: Oh, an all-women dorm?

GM: All women, yeah. I don't know, 600 people, however many people are in that dorm. And the guys immediately knew that the portions were too small in the cafeteria, and we started a protest. Hey, because you couldn't get seconds on food in that period either.

SB: Really? Uh huh.

GM: “You’re going to need to give us seconds or increase...” So then they compromised, and “This entrée you can get a second of.” But you couldn’t get it the first time, you’d have to go back through and get, on the one with the sign.

SB: Interesting. So that’s just another part of having this new space, you have to figure these things out. That’s probably not something that the administrators had even thought of, “We’re bringing co-ed students into a dorm that used to be all women, we’ve got to have more food.”

GM: Yeah, yeah. Ground North had been set up for female rehab students, because the bathrooms in Ground North all had special showers with seating and...

SB: Oh, wow!

GM: ... that the rest of the building didn’t have.

SB: Uh huh. Interesting.

GM: Before MRH opened, which had serious rehab facilities.

SB: Yeah! Because the University has been a pioneer in disability education for a long time. Actually, I lived my first two years in Nugent Hall, which is about where Garner used to be.

GM: Ok.

SM: And that’s named for Tim Nugent, who was the professor in charge of a lot of that.

GM: Okay.

SB: Another thing I’ll ask, have you ever returned here as an alum, to either come back or visit or for a reunion or anything?

GM: I did, yes! About 1991-ish, there was a 20th anniversary reunion of the first group. I remember getting the letter in the mail – when people still sent letters – announcing this reunion. I had just had a horrible day at work, I opened this envelope, “Oh! This is so exciting!” In the summer, June, July, we went down to U of I, it was a Friday, Saturday, Sunday event. They had us stay in Evans, because that had just been remodeled, that’s where they did summer programs, but they had Allen Hall open, all the dorm rooms open that we would have been in. So you got to see our room, “Oh, God, this is tiny... and this is...”. And they had food from the cafeteria, they provided beer for us in South Lounge, so we ate, we drank, people brought artifacts to show, posters and this and things from projects. Then a group of us ended up in the courtyard that we weren’t allowed to use when we lived there, getting high in the courtyard instead of in the room was, that was a wild experience. That was Friday night, and Saturday we had a picnic at Illini Grove, which is just south of there. Some of the professors came in, Alan Purves was there, a few others that I didn’t know very well.

And yeah, that was good. They had changed the layout in the cafeteria to make it more attractive. I've also been back a few times, my partner's parents both graduated from U of I in the early '50s.

SB: Oh, wow!

GM: And they, for a number of years, had football tickets, and so a couple times we used their tickets and went to football games. Of course, I was more interested in wandering around the campus than I was in seeing the football game.

SB: Well, knowing the quality of the football team at times, I don't blame you.

GM: Well, people referred to them as the Silly Illini at various times, yes. [Laughs]

SB: As much as I'd like to vehemently refute that, I can't, because you're not wrong. [Both laugh]. I have a poster that I bought around town that's a team schedule of the '72 Fighting Illini. It was a steal, I was so happy, and then my roommate and I looked it up, and I was like, "I wonder why this is so cheap?" They lost the first eight games. [Both laugh].

GM: Yeah, yeah.

SB: And did you attend sporting events a lot when you were down here?

GM: Freshman year, a group of friends was getting tickets for the basketball season and so, with them, I bought the season basketball, which was interesting. Of course, the halftime show was always more interesting than the game, to me. And then a few football games, I went to. Interestingly, my partner's, my partner went to school down here, a few years later than me, and he nominated his dad to be King Dad at Homecoming, and he was selected.

SB: Oh wow!

GM: They all got to go down on the field and meet Chief Illiniwek and the whole business.

SB: That's really something. So not only are you an alumnus, but your partner and his folks are all very much in there.

GM: Mike, his parents, and his sister all went down there.

SB: And did any of your siblings end up coming down here as well?

GM: My sister was down there, she was a German major. And she graduated four years after me in '74.

SB: Oh, wow. So you were the first of your family to attend here but you were not the last?

GM: Yes, but not the last, yes.

SB: Very nice. As a final question which I'll ask, and I'm sure I'll think of follow-ups the moment we end the call...

GM: Feel free to email me if there's anything you want clarified!

SB: Of course, I will, most definitely. Looking back, it certainly seems like you would go through and live in Allen and Unit One again, and if somebody was going to speak to you and say, "Mr. Miller, I'm going to U of I, do you have tips or recommendations?", would you recommend it to future students?

GM: I would! And I did. Because it would come up when I was teaching high school that...

SB: Oh, yeah!

GM: ... here's where you want to start thinking about this. And I said if you go to the University of Illinois, I would suggest that you look at this and see if it would fit with your interests and needs. I don't specifically know that anybody actually did, because I didn't always find out where the students were going. I know that the daughter of a colleague, his daughter went to Unit One.

SB: So there's certainly, there's some continuity there.

GM: Yeah, yeah.

SB: Alright! Well, Mr. Miller, I can't say enough, thank-you very much for taking some time and sharing your story with me.

GM: Oh, this was a pleasure, I enjoyed every minute! And I took the thing that you sent as a homework assignment. [Laughs]

SB: No, that's perfect, and that helped me know what to ask, so that's really good.

GM: If there any other questions, keep in touch!

SB: Of course, will do. And I'll be in touch, yeah, and I'll be sure and get you a copy as well.

GM: Thank you, and I'll send some pictures of some of the artifacts that I have if you folks would be interested.

SB: Ok, great! Alright, you have a great day, take care!

GM: Take care, bye, thank you!

SB: Bye.

END ‘