

**University of Illinois Student Life, 1928 – 38:
Oral History Project
Dwight Miller – Class of 1934
Ft. Myers, Florida
March 19, 2001**

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

Ellen Swain: This is an oral history interview for the University of Illinois Archives. The interviewer is Ellen Swain. The narrator is Dwight Miller, an alumnus from the class of 1934. We are at Mr. Miller's home in Ft. Myers, Florida, and the date is March 19, 2001.

I wondered if we could start by stating your full name and birth date?

Dwight Miller: I won't give you my birth date,* but I'll give you my full name. My full name is Dwight L. Miller and I was born in Casey, Illinois. Do you know where Casey is?

*October 22, 1913

ES: Sure.

DM: Soon afterwards my family moved to the country outside of Casey, in Cumberland County. Casey is in Clark County. We moved out there and I grew up in the country and went to country schools and a country grade school. We had about 30 students and one teacher and all the classes were conducted in one room. They called it Yanaway School. Everybody knew everybody else. All walked to school. In other words, we walked cross country to school and we skated on the old, what we called, Dunn pond. There was oil in that area and most of the power plants that pumped the oil had to cool the engine so they had a pond close by and they pumped the water from this through the engine and back into the pond. That pond was also our fishing pool and our skating rink.

Then I went to Casey High School in Casey, Illinois. I don't know if you know exactly where Casey is – its about midway between Terre Haute, Indiana, and Effingham, Illinois, and it's on the old US 40. We had about, I guess, around 400 students. Our class would be about 80 to 90. We had a reunion there a few years ago of our class that graduated. Those were quite depressed times. I had an older sister and an older brother and a younger sister and we all ended up going to the same high school. There were very strict rules in the high school. It was a public school, but I recall the lady teachers could not be married. That was prohibited. They wouldn't hire them again if they got married; they would be discharged. Casey was well known and it was one of the more fortunate schools because the Ohio Oil Company collected their oil and they had a big tank farm about three or four miles east of Casey. The taxes from that oil came to Casey so we as a school were financially much better off than most of the schools at that time. Now, I'm sorry, is that was you want?

ES: Sure.

DM: One of the most interesting things was that every so often in thunder and lightning storms, lightning would hit one of the tanks of oil, and my father who was an employee of the Ohio Oil Company, if we heard the telephone ring at two o'clock or three o'clock in the night, knew that one of those big tanks was on fire. Anybody connected with the oil company had to go and help fight and build trenches to keep this fire from spreading all over the place.

Well, anyhow, there were, I think, about 80 students in my class. Most of the people lived within ten miles of Casey. We lived about five or six miles or so, over the most awful country roads that you could imagine. Sometimes we had to even leave the car half way to town and walk to it in order to have transportation. Today they're all blacktop roads.

So I went to my country school in Cumberland and I spent all my high school in Casey. Things were really financially tough on everybody. Our family was probably fortunate. First of all, my parents sure supported education. I set my goal only that I was going to go to the University of Illinois. Most of our students, I would say very few of our students, made it to any university. In fact, my roommate, named Harlan Pfister, who incidentally is still alive, lives in Pennsylvania. He and I, as far as I know, were the only two that really attended a major university from our graduating class. The girls did everything to survive. They worked as waitresses, and they would try anything. I earned my way through the University. Fortunately, I had some awfully good supporters. My grades were extremely good and the people were actually very helpful.

I thought I was going to be a waiter to earn my way. The principal of the school, decided that I deserved to go to Illinois. He got me a job working for the University. I worked the Information Office all the way through U. of I. I earned essentially all my expenses. I got a county scholarship through a county. I was very fortunate, let's put it that way. My roommate's father died soon after we started and I was able to get him a position there also. We worked by the hour and we were put in a trusting position. Miss Nuber managed the office. We also made examination papers and printed them. I ran mimeograph machines and did typing. It sure did interfere with college life. If I had a free hour, even during the day, I went to the office and worked.

ES: How many hours do you think you worked a week?

DM: Forty-some. I always worked from 35 to 45 hours a week and I worked all day Saturday. This interfered, obviously, with athletics and things like that. As the football games were going on I was delivering calendars to all the buildings. I knew every building and every bulletin board. It was a marvelous place to work and, as I said, it is what saved me.

I was not taking an easy course; I was taking Chemical Engineering. I graduated as a Chemical Engineer. We were fortunate then that we had some of the most outstanding Chemical Engineer professors in the whole United States. We had people like DB Keyes [Donald Babcock Keyes], who was head of the Chemical Engineering department and was known all over the U.S. Marvel, we called him Speed Marvel [Carl

Marvel], who was one of the outstanding Chemistry professors there ever was and Swann [Sherlock Swann, Jr. & Roger Adaus]. I could go on and on about these professors. They were really outstanding and they took a great interest in our class. For example, Illinois is famous in Chemistry and Chem Engineering. We had about 25 to 30 students in my Chem Engineering class. Things were so tough that less than 5 had any positions when they graduated. The jobs just were not around. I was fortunate in that I had three offers that same time.

ES: How close were you to the faculty? Did you have contact with them outside the classroom?

DM: Essentially no contact outside the classroom, but a lot of contact in the classroom. What I mean is that we knew them quite well, and they knew us quite well and they knew our ability or lack thereof. They tried to support us and saw to it that the ones that really tried got breaks on positions. Long afterwards I worked in Michigan and for years and, for example, I had not seen Dr. Marvel, who was one of the most outstanding professors that Illinois ever had. (When he retired from Illinois, the University of Arizona hired him and he worked there until he died as a support professor.) But anyhow, I had not seen him for I bet ten years or more, and one day I happened to be in Champaign from Michigan and I thought, "Gee, I just wonder if he's available." I walked into the outer office and I said to his secretary, "Is Doctor Marvel around, I'd just like to see him?" He was in his office and suddenly he looked up, and jumped up, and said, "Why Dwight, how are you? I haven't seen you for so long." It was one of the most marvelous things to think that he still remembered me.

I had a job, a pretty good job, and they wanted me to come so I skipped the graduation program because they wanted me to start working in Peoria, Illinois. H.F. Willkie, who was a brother of Wendel Willkie, the one who ran for president, had a real close connection to Keyes. All the professors knew them really well. He built the new Hiram Walker plant in Peoria that had more Chemical Engineering operations than you can imagine. It was a beautiful plant right from scratch. I went into the research department. Mr. Willkie would talk to me, in fact he'd send me over to University of Illinois every once and a while when he wanted to know some special information from the library. I'm really rambling around but this all ties together. I met my wife, Virginia, in Peoria. She is a Bradley University graduate.

ES: After you graduated?

DM: After I graduated. We've now been married over 60 years. We have two children. I was laden with the Chemical Industry in Michigan, just south of Detroit. Our daughter is a U of I graduate with a Masters degree, a high school counselor in Evansville, Indiana, and her husband Dr. Farney graduated from Kansas University and received his Ph.D. from Illinois. He's with Bristol-Myers-Squibb, the large drug firm. Both children attended Richwoods High School in Peoria. Our son was chosen out of a class of about 500 as an exchange student to Europe. He lived with two families there. We were fortunate that he was an outstanding student that medical schools were begging for him to come, rather than us begging to get him in. He went through pre-med at Illinois and then

medical school at Illinois in six years (He was a Bronze Tablet at the University of Illinois). He wanted to graduate in six but U of I had never had it happen, so they wouldn't let him. A medical professor in Sydney, Australia heard about him and told him that if he'd come there they'd set up a program for him. So he spent his last year in Sydney, Australia medical program and then came back so he could graduate with his class. He does all types of special eye surgery. In fact, he's taken kids and restored them with perfect eye sight. We're quite proud of this and our daughter is the same way. Our son was just here last week from Mattoon, Illinois. He likes to come several times a year. He'll come down on Thursday and has to go back on Sunday; because his clinic has him scheduled for Monday. In fact, he was just talking to us last night, from Galveston, Texas, at the University of Texas. He did his residency there. They're having a big reunion of his class. He has two daughters and a son, our son does. And our daughter has two daughters. I have a feeling I'm not making this consistent.

ES: Oh it's okay. So you have a real Illinois family?

DM: That is correct. Our son's wife used to be the head of a nursing department for Methodist Hospital in Peoria. Our son-in-law is from Kansas and he got his degree from the University of Kansas before he received for his Ph.D. at Illinois.

ES: You were saying it was unusual for people to have jobs lined up when they were ready to graduate? Other people, you think, had a hard time finding employment?

DM: They had an awful time. In fact, we tried to have a newsletter the first year or so after graduation, I think I am the only one, and I'm not sure of this, I'm the only one of our graduating class who actually practiced Chemical Engineering. Some of them went into bakeries, most of them went into family things if their family had some business. But the jobs just weren't there. I am a fellow of the American Institute of Chemical Engineers.

ES: No.

DM: Well they have a Fellows program at the American Institute that is about the highest honor in the Institute (which has about 56,000 members). I do not know how many Fellows there are at this time, my guess would be less than 100. As close as I can tell I was one of the first 20 or 25 that was made Fellow. They gave me a gold pin and a diamond pin and a plaque and a whole bunch of items. I also have some patents. During World War II, which was long before your time, I designed chemical plants. I couldn't go in the war service because I had a priority next to the priority of the President and the Cabinet and high officials on clearance. I have a picture, if you want to see, of a big plant, it's still operating up in Michigan. We made the clearance for rubber manufacture, other important items, including the atomic bomb.

ES: Do you think the reason you were able to find employment was because of your professors supporting you as well as your grades?

DM: Well, let's put it this way, my scholastic record was high and also I was conscious of being a chemical engineer. Certainly the support of the professors like Dr. Marvel didn't hurt.

ES: Is that what you wanted to do when you went to school? Did you have a goal when you went to school?

DM: Yeah, I did to...you're bringing up a very interesting point. When we went to University things were very rough, and we were not as selective as the students are today. They say, "I want to do that and nothing else." We were flexible in what we wanted to do. We wanted a job and we wanted a challenging and a good job. At the same time, you wouldn't say, "I will only work for that type of company or I'll only work for that company." If a good position opened up or if there was a good job, you were flexible on the choice.

ES: Do you think students were more conscientious about doing their school work because of the Depression?

DM: No question about it. Things were rough. First of all, we didn't have the money to play around any way we wanted. For example, and I don't mean this wrong, fraternities and sororities were having a difficult time then because they were more expensive. I don't mean this to sound wrong, it is just unbelievable how many fraternities tried to get me to join. My roommate was also a good student; he was taking electrical engineering...but movies, particularly movies, were perhaps one of our major entertainment. We couldn't afford expensive things, dances and balls and stuff like that. You went to some of them, but we were limited. Money was dear, let's put it that way. Also, there was and I don't know the situation now, but at the time I was in the University there was a high ratio of boys to girls. Extremely high ratio, and part of that was of course part of the overall financial situation. The families tended to put more money into getting the boys educated than they did the girls. This was a very big factor. There were about two boys to every girl. I would say that half or more of the boys never dated at all when they were at Illinois – because of the expense. The girls decided that the boys had to pay all their way and we didn't have the money. And when you're working all kinds of hours and weekends, money becomes quite dear.

ES: I wanted to ask you before we moved on to another topic: how did your friend who was from your hometown, go to Illinois too? Did he have a scholarship?

DM: He and I sat together in high school. He did not have a scholarship and financially, his family was much better off than we were out in the country. He was taking electrical engineering and we liked each other. He was a good trumpet player and he played in the University of Illinois band and also he played in dance orchestras and made some money like that. I would have loved to have the money that he had coming in. His father died suddenly and it just looked like he was going to be out of school. And I went to the people who I was working for and explained the whole situation and vouched that he was

an honest, sincere, conscientious person and they hired him. The result is, and I don't think I would ever have mentioned it to him, but I don't think he would have made it through Illinois financially if I hadn't been able to have gotten him the position.

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ES: Could you talk about Thomas Arkle Clark a little bit? What your memories about him were?

DM: When I went to the University of Illinois and I started working at the University, before school started, we were running all these registration papers and everything in University Hall. But anyhow the one thing was so well known that Clark was the Dean of Men, and he had his own set of rules, and they were extremely strict. Well, sometimes I think this actually promoted violence or what not that you would not have expected. Fortunately, I was busy and working and for example, I don't know if they still have it, but they had the freshmen initiation or freshmen something at that time over on Wright Street. And who was it, Prehn's was over there. That's a long time ago to remember, but anyhow, they had a big demonstration and it got quite out of hand, and they stripped off clothes of some of the men, and I'm not certain if they stripped some of the girls. I hesitate to say that, but some of the boys lost everything.

ES: Are you talking about cap burnings?

DM: Uh-huh. The cap burning got clear out of hand. Several students got expelled; they caught them or saw their picture. And of course, with Clark being the Dean, he would be very, very strict on that sort of thing. But anyhow, it became a joke, some of the people joked about his requirements. And it was, in my opinion, ridiculous. You know there was a period there that the kids that were quite off beat. Clark ran a very tight ship, very tight.

ES: What did students think of him?

DM: I mean they remembered him but they were scared. Personally, in my opinion, he was not a loved Dean.

ES: What were some of his rules? You talked a little bit about the cars.

DM: Well, the car was one of the big ones. Anything off beat was a violation of his rules.

ES: Could you tell me again the story about your friend who drove his car?

DM: Yeah. Both my roommate and I had a very close friend who lived in Casey. The family was financially well off, pretty well off as a matter of fact. But anyhow, this fellow had a, and I don't know what make of car it was, but it would be today what would have been one of the sportiest cars that was around. And it was his car, that he had

bought. He worked farming, down in my home area. Anyway, this car was his pride and joy. They always said, if it rained, he'd go home and polish it up and put a whole new coat of Simonize on it. The car just glowed all the time.

Anyhow, he came up to visit us. There was no rule against him staying at our place, but of course we did not ride in the car. We probably would have been expelled.

ES: For just riding in the car?

DM: Uh-huh, yeah without permission. But this man, while we were in class during the day, would go around the campus, and visit the area. He was a very nice looking, personable fellow. But anyhow, as I understand it, he was parked on Wright Street, in or around the Law Building, or some place. He came out and he got ready to go some place, wherever it was. Someone, that wasn't Clark, but some of his stooges accosted him and told him he could not drive the car. He said he could as it was his car like that. They thought, or this fellow was convinced, that this fellow was a student. The result was that they were not going to let him use the car and they were going to impound the car. Now how it ended up, I think he finally convinced them that it was his car and they'd have to beat him up or something like that. But anyhow, they tried to keep him from driving that car because they insisted, although he was not, that he was a student and he could not drive the car. But it was that strict. It really was.

ES: Was Clark pretty visible to students? Did you see him out on campus?

DM: No. Not that I recall. You knew his name and everything like that, but he was not, I wouldn't say, real visible or running around in a uniform or something like that. But this was a period, in fact, I think probably if you looked at the literature back then – I can't think of his first name, what was his first name?

ES: Thomas Arkle Clark?

DM: Thomas, that's right – Clark. I'm sure you'd see some write up in some of those things – in the *Illio* or some paper. But he ran a tight ship. If I'm not mistaken, and I could be wrong in this, I don't think without your getting permission ahead of time that you could've even driven your family car at home during the summer. You could get permission.

ES: What was he worried about?

DM: I don't know. If you got permission, you could drive. Innocent me, if I was going to drive a car at home or anything like that, I always went over to the Dean's office and got permission. It was no problem; I'd get permission and was cleared. We had a student down at Casey, I'm trying to think of his name – this goes back a few years, you know – anyhow, he came home on a vacation to Casey and I don't know he drove anyplace in his folks car except up to the center of town, anyhow I understand he was expelled. Somebody reported him and they verified it.

ES: And that was driving the car in Casey?

DM: Well Casey or the surrounding areas.

ES: But not in Champaign-Urbana?

DM: No. That was down at home. Clark ran a tight ship. I must confess though it prevented, if there would have been, malicious behavior or crime in general. You knew that if you were caught, you couldn't talk yourself out of it. And so the result was that there wasn't much crime.

ES: What was the moral code on campus?

DM: What do you mean?

ES: How strict was morality regulated?

DM: Oh, there were an awful lot of things that went on. I think there was as much boy and girl playing around there as there is now. You saw evidence of this after a big dance or after affairs.

ES: Was drinking a problem?

DM: No. During the time while I was there, I think I was a junior or something, the liquor law was revised and I tell you, boy, the first night that beer could be served, it was a pretty wild night. It was because this was the first time that legally beer was available. Not hard liquor, but beer. Hard liquor laws were passed or repealed soon thereafter, but that beer night, that first night, the campus went wild.

ES: Could students find access to beer prior to that if they wanted to? Was there any underground system?

DM: Yeah, there was a modest amount, not as much beer as hard liquor. It was not uncommon at the rooming house, where my roommate and I lived, several fellows stayed there. It was not uncommon for a man to come in on Saturday night pretty soused. But they didn't make it as obvious as they did later because it was illegal.

ES: I've got a question about the Presidents. Did you know who the President of the University was when you were a student or have much contact with him?

DM: I did not have contact with him.

ES: Well, Chase came in—

DM: Who?

ES: Chase, and then Willard. President Willard was after that.

DM: I'm just not sure. There was a man that came in soon after I left that absolutely got into some trouble. That Willard name is awfully familiar.

ES: But you did not have much contact as a student with the Presidents of the University?

DM: I did not. I was in the – do you know where the Information Office is? It's probably changed now. It was on Wright Street and the Union Building was here, and the Law Building was over there, and then this next building was the Information Office which was on the first floor of that building. Then, it seems like the Women's Building was the next one.

ES: It was on the Quad – or the Broadwalk.

DM: Yeah. That's a long time to go back and remember all of that. See, when I went there the old Union Building was there – and it was a wreck.

ES: Are you talking about University Hall?

DM: And it was a wreck and it was the Union building too, wasn't it? I mean, that building would even shake at times from people running up and down stairs.

ES: That primarily was for classrooms?

DM: They had classrooms, upstairs. Then later on, they tore down the building and built the present Union building, which I've stayed in several time. Overall, I feel I had a lot of awfully good professors, very conscientious professors, and they were really trying to do their job. I spent an lot of time in the Chemistry Building. Then they built the Chemical Engineering Building, then they built the Analytical Chemical Building just south of that. I don't know what it's called now. Then later on they built the Chemical Engineering Building over across the street. Our professors were very conscientious and they were trying to do a good job. The fact that they were interested helped. In view of some of the experiments that I ran, I'm surprised that the Chemistry Building is there today. We set up an oil refinery in the basement of that building and we used wide open flames for cracking units. I've thought, many times, all that wooden flooring up above us and all, I'm surprised that we didn't burn it down.

ES: Were there fires?

DM: Not that I remember. As a matter of fact, as I remember, it was pretty safe. The one that I do remember, and this is beside the point, this Dr. Marvel, they called him Speed Marvel, and there's been a lot of arguments where he got the name Speed. Most people say, and I believe, he lectured so fast that they called him Speed and he was a

terrific lecturer. But anyhow, one day he was giving a lecture and I don't know whether the lecture room is still there, it probably seated 150 people, somebody, and I think on purpose, they released a very odiferous compound. I mean odiferous. It just stunk. He had to dismiss the lecture and so forth and it penetrated all of our clothes and we went to classes all over the campus and that odor followed us around – it was quite the talk for a long time. I think that in general the enrollment then was about half of what it is now. I think they said in October 2000, 36,000. Well, we had about half of that many students. The predominance was boys. You didn't have the eating places that you have now; you'd eat at local restaurants or homes.

ES: Tell me where you lived and what you did for board.

DM: We were besieged, both of us, by fraternities wanting us to join in – and financially they needed us, because I mean, the richer, the more affluent people were the ones that were hit so hard financially and this hurt the fraternities. Well anyhow, we found that we could have lived, and I think it was Matthew, which was about two blocks east of the Chemistry building. There were some sororities there also, there probably are now, but they also had these rooming houses. At that time, the operators were mostly widows and were financially having an awful time. So we would rent rooms there by the month. Not only did we rent by the month but they served meals. So we just got board and room together and they would serve every meal except Sunday evening. We would get, frankly, a beautiful home cooked meal. At most of those, we'd have about 20 people, and we paid room and board. The boarders did not all necessarily come from the house where it was served. In other words, there might be someone who had roomers, five, six or so roomers live there, and they would all eat over at this other place. Frankly, it was ridiculous - \$25 a month for room and board. And these were big meals, and people at that age, we could eat pretty heavily.

ES: Did you share rooms then? Was it a dormitory?

DM: This fellow I'm telling you about from my hometown, we shared a room every year through Illinois – every year. One semester or so, we stayed at a place called the Granada in Champaign.

ES: I've heard of it.

DM: We lived there, one semester or so. But frankly, we found that these other rooming arrangements were much better than the Granada. Although, the Granada had prestige and so forth. We went right back to the other—

ES: So you lived in different rooming houses?

DM: We lived in about, I'd say, three or four. The Granada I know. We decided we didn't want that. And we looked fraternities over very carefully and we decided that it just wasn't worth our time and hard earned money to be there.

ES: How did the fraternities and the independent students get along on campus?

DM: At the time we were there, the fraternities and the rooming places had little trouble. The fraternities tried to promote that they had the prestige and all of that, but they really didn't get by with that. However, our daughter is a member of Chi Omega, as is my wife, and my son is a Sigma Chi. I don't know now, but back then he broke their scholastic record. But knowing our son, and I'm prejudiced, is a pretty good looking kid and was pretty popular, and he dated, but frankly he didn't stay at the fraternity for study. He went to the library.

ES: Is that what you did? You did your study in the rooming house?

DM: No, I also used the library. But in the rooming house, like I'm talking about, there would just be two of us to the room and we didn't have a big recreation area. So our study we tended to do more also at the rooming house.

ES: Is that when you meet most of your friends – where you lived?

DM: No, I would say that I met most of my friends through the University.

ES: Through the Chemistry?

DM: Through the University and also over in the office where I worked.

ES: Were there a lot of students in that office?

DM: No, there were about four or five of us. But I had all four years there. In fact, the lady that ran it was a marvelous woman but very strict. The interesting thing is that my roommate and I both worked in that office, and we ran reproduced final exams and all kinds of things like that, and I say with all honesty, that he at times on rare occasion might have run ones that I might have and I might run one that he might have. I say with all honesty that I do not know that either of us ever cheated and told the other anything. We always prided ourselves in everything that we were honest. Some people would offer you money to give them exams.

ES: You had people do that?

DM: Oh sure. I'm not aware that I ever cheated, and I'm not aware that he ever cheated. We set our moral goals like that. We were very careful. The lady who ran this was Miss Ann Neuber. I remember her well. She warned us, but she told us ahead of time, that we must have this type of moral standard. I wouldn't have let down. The principal of my high school was one of them that verified to her that he thought I would be honest. I would never have let him down.

ES: You talked about this a little bit, but could you say again what kinds of things you did for fun when you had time.

DM: Well, yes. First of all, we dated some. We liked movies too. We'd go downtown Champaign for the movies and – or Urbana, but usually in Champaign. We both liked, and particularly my roommate liked more than me, dance orchestras. If they had a real hot find down in the colored section of Champaign and they'd let us in to the bleachers, we'd listen to them all evening. They would often let us into the campus dances to listen to the famous big orchestras that came there. I would say this type of thing didn't cost us anything. We liked to go to Prehn's, and what was the one over on Wright Street?

ES: Bradley's? Cameron's?

DM: Well, they're probably gone now.

ES: Handley's?

DM: Handley's – yes. Well, when we could, we'd go to the sports. The football and the basketball when we could we'd go there.

START OF TAPE 2 SIDE A

DM: But, as I was saying, not only did we live in the same town, we got along well enough. And I assure you that there were not gay rights involved in anyway. We'd double date during the summer. Usually my father or his father would let us have a car and we'd double date. The Treanon Ballroom over at Terre Haute had a beautiful dance palace. But we knew practically everything that was going on everywhere for miles around. As a matter of fact, after we got out of University of Illinois, both of us loved to travel and both of us traveled a great deal around the USA. In 1936, and I think I'm right, Harlan Pfeister and I took a trip down through here. The Tamiami Trail had not been opened very long and was considered dangerous to go across. We loved to fish, I could dig it out, a big chart, that says that I belong to the Sailfish club of Miami Beach. They're for the big sailfish that both of us caught; I mean we caught two. I'm trying to think, what else we loved. Of course at school, you didn't have a car. If we wanted to go someplace we'd just walk. We'd walk down to Champaign at night and walk back. I don't know whether I'm answering your question or not.

ES: Were you involved in any student organizations?

DM: In connection with the profession – like the American Chemical Society, the American Institute of Chemical Engineers, and that. We did not belong, or I did not, to a fraternity. We wrote a lot of reports and many of those are published. My roommate played in the University of Illinois band, I did not. I played the trombone but in no way could I make the U of I band.

ES: Were fraternities prominent on campus? Did that lend you higher prestige to belong to one?

DM: The fraternity people thought it did, but it didn't to the rest of us. We did not apologize for not being in a fraternity. The funds that would have had to have gone to the fraternity we could do a lot of other things that we preferred to do. Listening or the attending and listening as a non-dancing member of many of the bands, we did that a lot. We liked that and we hit some of the ones that became top bands later on.

ES: Was it obvious that the Depression was affecting student activities?

DM: No question about that. There were fewer dances and a lot fewer other outside activities. Illinois had, maybe they're worse now, but they had some of the lousiest teams, particularly football teams. You'd go to the stadium and the stadium wouldn't be half full. This was after the "Red Grange" era.

ES: Is that right?

DM: It was just deserted. People just didn't have the money for that kind of thing and teams were poor.

ES: Did students talk about their problems to each other?

DM: Sure. Well, you would be interested in this. For our high school, all of us that were still alive, which is roughly less than half of the class now, we had this booklet recently put together. You read that and you get depressed. Half of them, particularly the girls, just had nothing to do. The boys couldn't afford to take them out – I don't know that that lowered their moral standards. They might babysit or what have you, for some it would be about all they could do. You can see what little money they get for that because the people that were having them babysit didn't have any money either. It really is very depressing to read about these things. Then, I don't have it now, it might be in the files someplace, you read about my fellow students in Chem Engineering. As far as I know, I'm one of the one or two out of our whole class that actually became member of the American Institute, who practiced Chemical Engineering when they graduated – there just were not any jobs. This fellow, H.F. Willkie that I mentioned was probably one of the best things that ever came along at that time for the University of Illinois Chem Engineers. What I mean is, he was in charge of building this fantastic plant in Peoria right from bare ground, and this was an expensive plant. He was a Chem Engineer and he decided that he was going to help Chem Engineers with that plant in Peoria. He helped them then, because they didn't have any jobs. He put them on as operators and laborers. I was fortunate enough that I didn't get involved in that part. They ran the stills, they ran the cookers, they ran the piping, the pumping and all like that. On top of that, he could have hired all of these people for any amount of money that he wanted to give, but he said that they deserved better, so he paid these people, including myself, I'd say, 50 to 100 dollars per month more than he had to. And he said that they deserved it. It really was a life saver. A lot of these men never did anything but this sort of thing in

their whole career. But he really was a savior, they had no jobs before. He went from there to Seagram's down in Louisville after several years. He became a head of a big meat packing outfit in Indianapolis later and I forget what all. He could write his own ticket anyplace because he was dynamic. We had a big cafeteria, for example, at Hiram Walker and he went down and got in line with the rest of us to eat. The Russians got permission to come over and observe the big fancy plant. And it just shocked the Russians, the Communists. They couldn't believe that an American in that position would do that. And we all adored him.

ES: He employed a lot of the Illinois graduates?

DM: He was probably the biggest employer of U of I Chemical Engineer graduates at that one time. I don't know the situation now. I don't like to get into racials or so forth, but the University of Illinois, I don't know if they still do, at that time, had a racial problem. Maybe you're familiar or maybe you know what I'm talking about.

ES: Yeah. Could you talk a little bit about it?

DM: I came from an area in which we had no racial problems. I don't mean colored. This was particularly between the Jewish and the others, and there was a problem going on at the University of Illinois. Raised in the country and so forth, everybody was your friend. I did not know, but some said that you'll learn very shortly, and I did. It reached a point where the Aryans and the Jews would bump each other on the sidewalk. In other words, you'd go down the walk, and say I was alone, and here would come two or three of the Jewish, and I probably would have been bumped off the sidewalk as we met. Which shocked me a great deal. I suspect it was about as bad about the time I was there as any time.

ES: Why do you think that was?

DM: That's a good question, I don't know. Possibly the economic situation.

ES: Was it among the students primarily?

DM: Among students.

ES: Did Jewish students intermingle with other students?

DM: We did in Chem Engineering. That's never been a problem of mine, thank goodness, but it reached a pretty bad spot there for a time. For example, if I had been Jewish, most of the fraternity offers I would have never have received. I don't know whether it's carried on or if it's disappeared; I don't know.

ES: Was it pretty universal or was it a certain group of students?

DM: No, it was pretty universal. There were lots of fraternities, for example, in inviting me to join would emphasize the fact that they didn't let certain races in.

ES: How large a population were the Jewish students? Do you have a sense of that?

DM: Oh, I haven't any idea, I wouldn't be surprised if up to 25 percent of them were, but of course I'm just guessing. It may have been lower.

ES: What about black students on campus?

DM: The black students, first of all, the number of black students then was relatively low. I think that was primarily because of finances. It was not a very dominant factor, and as far as I know, there was no real fight or opposition or hatred in that regard. I'm sorry, that's really not a subject that came to the front. It's not like the present time where the basketball game that is going on this weekend has almost 100 percent black players. Which creates a lot of hard feelings. I noticed today that the two black tennis girls were booed the whole time that they were playing yesterday. Which surprised me, they're terrific payers. It was out by Los Angeles. Now I don't know what brought that on exactly, they're terrific players and they're so big and strong. But I can get the paper and show you that it said that they were booed the whole time they played. The one girl, she even tried to throw it back at them. I'm not aware of a black versus a white problem while I was in school.

ES: An incident or some kind of event or something? Did you get a feeling of how accepting the town was of black students?

DM: Well, we had a large black sections there in Champaign. As a matter of fact, the bands like Duke Ellington came in there and played dances for the blacks. Now, as far as I am aware, my roommate and I could have gone to those dances. We probably might not have been welcomed, but I don't know, we never tried it. He and I would go there and in the black section at night and sit there and listen to these orchestras and all like that.

ES: And you never felt any problems?

DM: Well, some always tried to sell you some liquor and sex a little bit, but you were not forced to do that. We did not feel that we were going to be beaten up or robbed or anything like that. We had the impression that we were welcome to observe.

ES: Do you remember black students in your classes?

DM: Not really. I'm trying to think. I don't believe we had a single black Chem Engineer in our class. There were in Chemistry. Do they still call it the Noyes building?

ES: Uh-huh.

DM: There were some blacks in Chemistry but I didn't know that they ever had any trouble. As far as I know they were welcome. We were fighting to get a degree and live. I suppose my children might think that I'm race conscience now compared to what they are. I'm just rambling, I'm not sure I'm telling you what you want to hear about.

For example, after I left the Chemical industry up in Michigan where we lived for 15 years, where I designed a series of chemical plants, we went back to Peoria. We liked Peoria and our children were relatively young and about the right time for school. Anyhow, I went back as Assistant Director of the large agricultural center in Peoria. Are you familiar with it? Its one of the biggest research centers that the Department of Agriculture has. And one time we had about 600 scientists, of which over 100 had Ph.D's. You can't go through a day now without using something that was developed at this center. Penicillin, streptomycin, the things based on soybeans and corn. At this big research center, it sits next to Bradley Park on Interstate 74. In this research center we had several black people. We also, as a Department of Agriculture place, had a lot of very fine, black chemists, like John Hodges and a bunch of other scientists. Frankly, they were just terrific. Most of them are retired now.

Several years ago, we had bowling leagues and we never thought of them as black. I know this John Hodge's wife, she was just a dear, I could just forget her color anytime. We went back and forth to and from Florida for several years as we had a ranch home out in Northmoore Hills. Finally we decided that we just couldn't go back and forth because we were going to be here in the winter time and we like it in the summer. Half or more of the people leave, they'll be leaving next month or so. When we went back and forth, I would go out to the golf course in Peoria. They had three or four fine public golf courses, and I went out to the one I know (Newman Golf Course) one day when I was there. I took my clubs and I thought maybe I could get with someone to play. I went down to the starting tee, it was over crowded, and they were waiting in line. While I was there, a black fellow – from our industry (there were three blacks) were just about ready to go off. One of them or all of them looked at me and said, "Dwight, are you going to play golf?" I said, "Well, I hope I can get in soon." "Would you like to play with us?" I say, "If you don't mind." So, I got right on. You know, believe it or not, I was near the end of the first or second hole before I realized that I was playing with three black men. But they were the nicest group, and I really felt honored when they asked if I would play with them. Certainly, no racial problem, I had a marvelous time. I had no reason to think I wasn't anything but as welcome as can be. Now we have about 40 employees here at Seven Lakes, including a full time manager. I would say a third or half of these are colored, particularly the ones that run the machinery. I wave to them and they speak and wave. I don't know how we got into this racial thing, but it really points out that it doesn't have to be. I see some of the blacks on TV that say that everything that the whites do is crooked and the election is wrong and everything else. You can't believe this last election if you don't live down here, but anyhow I object to it. I don't like to hear African-American. If someone asked me, would I say European English-American? I don't think we should say that. I think we should. "I'm an American." Have I messed you up completely?

ES: No, I just have a couple of more questions. You've answered so many, it's been great. The last thing I wanted to talk to you about was national events and how aware students were aware of the outside world.

DM: When I was there, I think the students were pretty aware because of the economic situation. Social security came in and the economic situation worsened. President Roosevelt closed the banks. When they closed the bank, we were all aware of it. I think that the students were aware of the outside condition because they were involved.

ES: How did you get that information?

DM: We had student newspapers and we had radio. We didn't have TV, but we had radio so there was no problem. Of course, every bulletin board had posters of some kind all over the thing.

ES: Were student politics pretty strong?

DM: Yes.

ES: People were involved in campus politics?

DM: Student politics were pretty strong, particularly among fraternities, sororities, and that group. I had no desire, for example, to be president of the class or anything like that. Our work kept us away from really becoming involved. Since then, I've been a Councilman of Trenton, Michigan, a city of 25,000, I've been chapter president of a Kiwanis Club and a whole bunch of things like that.

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ES: Was the campus more Democrat or Republican?

DM: I couldn't answer that. I suspect, in view of the economic situations and the drastic wage to do something, it was probably more Democrat. I feel sure that Roosevelt was more popular than Hoover. Later things have shown maybe this wasn't all good, but what I'm getting at is people were desperate. In my opinion, Roosevelt could have become a dictator then if he had wanted too. I'm quite sure he could have. You know he served an extra term and people...alright, I'll just throw this in. I lived in the country and we'd help each other as much as we could. I even mowed a cemetery for a summer and that was my job. I think I received a whole \$75 for it. In the country, we had neighbors. Our nearest neighbor lived a half mile away. We'd help each other any way possible. We used to hunt a lot and I used to hunt for rabbit and squirrels. If we got one, we didn't do it just for hunting; it went on the pot; we used it for food. It was not uncommon to have kids at the neighbors invite you to stay for lunch if you were over there playing. What would always floor me was they might have one pot of food – that's all they had to eat. It might be a soup or it might be a broth, or it might be something else like beans – but that's all they had. You didn't have an assortment. In our family with one chicken,

with my mother and father and four of us, we knew exactly what piece was ours before it was cooked up. If someone had tried to take that leg away from you or something, you were liable to have a fight. I always think of my poor father and mother, and they were marvelous people, ate too many chicken backs... But what I'm getting at, from a political standpoint, anything would be better than what you were. You didn't know where the next meal was coming from. Even where the next gallon of gas was coming from. It may have only been 10 cents a gallon. So, that I would have to say that at least through Roosevelt's term, (Truman followed), it was probably more Democratic.

ES: Were there radical groups? Radical student groups?

DM: To some extent, but not as evident, I don't think, as what you see now. For example, I'll never forget one of these fellows that ate at one of the rooming places. His father was connected or was a policeman in Chicago. He didn't have much money, but he got along as well or better than most of us. He admitted, very openly, that his father took bribes for bootlegging. Anyhow, they paid off the policeman to look the other way. He said, "I don't know what we'd do if we didn't have that." He knew that his father was taking bribes and he didn't know what he'd do if he didn't take them.

ES: I think you've answered most of my questions.

DM: Well, you're welcome. Virginia! Virginia!

[Interruption]

DM: They put a bank moratorium, they closed all the banks. I don't know how long a time it was closed. But anyhow, you couldn't get any money in or out and people hadn't prepared for anything like that. I know that my roommate and I had maybe \$10 a piece and we were practically royalty for a while. But that didn't last for too long. Then they put that \$100,000 guarantee (Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation – FDIC).

Mrs. Miller: Was that when Roosevelt was in office?

DM: Excuse me. I've been talking so much I'm losing my voice.

Mrs. Miller: Do you want a glass of water Dwight?

DM: Yeah, or something. Get Ellen a little bit of that...

Mrs. Miller: The grape juice? White grape juice.

DM: You'd like some of that. Ice cold.

ES: Ok.

Mrs. Miller: I'll put an ice cube in it.

DM: But what I'm getting at is, Roosevelt took some very drastic actions. Now you look back, it probably has been bad for our country because some have carried on. Social Security was never intended to be what it is today; there was no medical in it or anything like that. You weren't supposed to be able to live on it, you couldn't do that. So the people were conscientious on that standpoint. You just came to - something must be better than this. Roosevelt, in my opinion, could have become a dictator. We could have lost our democracy right then. I think he could have become one overwhelmingly – the people would have voted him in. Where did you go to school?

ES: I went to Earlham, in Richmond, Indiana.

DM: In where?

ES: Richmond, Indiana, Earlham College.

Mrs. Miller: I know where Richmond is. I've been to Richmond.

DM: I've been to Richmond. I'm not familiar with your college.

ES: Okay.

[End of interview.]