

**University of Illinois Student Life, 1928 – 38:
Oral History Project
Wanda Spencer Larson '38
Paxton, IL
January 9th, 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 Wanda Larson, a U of I alumna from the class of 1938. We are at Mrs. Larson's home in Paxton, Illinois and the date is January 9, 2001.

Wanda Larson: Well I was born in a small town, Bridgeport, Illinois, which is south about 140 miles south and somewhat east of Champaign. And, there were four boys and I was the only girl in the family. My father had numerous businesses, as is often the case in a small community, and one of which was an undertaker. That's when all of the embalming and stuff was done in the back of a store. He also had a furniture store and a hardware store, and so that part of it was never taken care of at our house. Also, at that time, bodies remained in the home of the people where they had exited and then usually somebody sat with them, all hours of the day and night. Well with so many of us in the family, my parents decided it would be wise to move to Champaign so that we could live at home and go to the University of Illinois, which is what we did. And we moved there in 1927 and then in 19--, in the September it would have been of 1927. And then my father was killed in 1928 in a train accident, and so he never was in business at all in Champaign.

I had all my elementary schooling at Avenue School which was on the site that Champaign Central is on now, University Avenue, and it was just about 4 blocks from where we lived. The selection of the home site was made because of being close to things, my mother was never terribly fond of the house. It was a big house and it had a lot of room, it was close to both the high school and the elementary school and junior high and church, and so, well, not really the church to start with. We had been in a Christian Church in Bridgeport, Illinois, and, but the only church of really the same denomination was University Place Christian Church, you know which of course was a long way away, and my mother didn't drive. We always had a car because all the rest of us drove, depending on, you know, when we reached the age that we could. And, so there was always a car available, but as I say, mother never drove. We were close to Westside Park, just a couple blocks down from there too. So it was very close to the downtown area as well.

And then in the process we started going to the Methodist Church which was just across the park. And so which we had an excellent minister, Dr. Clifford Northcot was his name. He was there for a very long period of time because he was extremely well liked and he wasn't told that he had to move some place. Until he became a Bishop, he was appointed a Bishop in Wisconsin, he just stayed in Champaign because apparently he liked it too and it was a very great association. And he was wonderful in trying to broaden the interests and things of what we youngsters....going to Chicago was a big

thing at that stage of life, and he'd take us up and take us on Maxell Street and into different areas. A temple, now I can't even remember what the name of the temple would have been, it was on Michigan Avenue. He took us many places and then we went to the institute at Old Salem, which was close to Petersburg, Illinois, if I'm not mistaken. And we always sent a sizable group because we raised money to pay our way by doing things. We always gave like a three act play, we had a gym in that church, up on the, I think on the forth floor, third or forth.

ES: Is this First Methodist of Champaign?

WL: Yes. It had a stage too, so when we had dinners also, which our parents figured heavily in, but we got the money from it, so we always raised enough money so that we'd take, oh maybe 35 or 40 of high school age. The girls lived in a cottage down there and the boys lived in tent city. And they had a big dining hall down there, I think there would be 800 there at a time because when we would go for early morning chapel, which was in a really big building and then they had a cafeteria there for food, I mean we didn't do our own cooking. Some groups did because there was a kitchen, but our group never did. I guess none of us knew how to cook which was probably the whole thing you know. But it was very pleasurable.

As I said, we moved to Champaign in order to go to the University of Illinois, so there was never any question of looking around to other schools you know, that just wasn't done then. In fact, the University was only 12,000 at the time, and there were 3,000 girls and 9,000 young men. There was lots of social activity of course, not always did it cost because nickel coke dates were very much in vogue and enjoyed and then we had three great places on campus for dancing too. There again, one was on Wright Street, I don't know what is under it now, it used to be a book store, it was upstairs it was called Bradley. And then one was on the corner of 6th and Green and that was Prehn's at that time. And then there was one down on the corner for 4th and Green, it would have been I think. All of these were upstairs. Then of course Robeson's Roof in nice weather and summer time was a great favorite place to go.

ES: How often did those occur?

WL: Oh, all the time. If you couldn't go to a dance on Friday and Saturday night both, it was kind of a lost weekend you know. As I say, dating was very prevalent. Drinking was not a problem at all. There may have been some place on campus that served it, I don't know, but as I say it was really not a problem at all. But, people really dressed up too, this was true even for classes. We'd wear heels to classes, I mean, never slacks. Skirts and dresses and suits and heels. Where the Union Building is now was called Uni Hall and it was five stories high. There was a road that went through campus, it entered from Green Street and was on the left hand side, it would have been, and went down past the Quad, to the side of the Quad, and past the Auditorium and then sort of made a little curve. Then there was a rock garden and lily pond and the rock garden was where the initiation for Mortar Board was always held at sunrise because it was strictly all girls, and I know that too has changed. They'd come around during the night and tap you that you

that you had been chosen to be a Mortar Board, and as I say, they took you out to the Rock Garden.

ES: So they would just come to your house in the middle of the night?

WL: Yes. Well, of course then, in a lot of cases it would be in the sororities or the resident halls, but in my case, since I lived at home, yes they came to my house. But as I say, when I look at the dress on every place now it just had changed so much. It's more comfortable, without a doubt, and warmer. I can remember having one class on fifth floor of Uni Hall and my next class was out in the Commerce Building, I'm not sure what's called now, it has a name too. That was quite a hike really, you had to get down those five floors, of course you weren't the only one trying to come down either.

ES: What was the building like?

WL: Very old. It was very old, the stairs were just...from many many feet trampling on them of course.

ES: Was that the center of student activity?

WL: No, no, not at all, just for classes. The center of student activities was at the Y which was there on Wright, and then the Woman's Building, and then the Illini Union which was also on Wright, and the offices for the *Daily Illini* were, they were partially in the Union Building too, and the *Illio*, and the publications had offices there. But no, it was strictly a classroom. I mean the Union, you know, now spreads this way and its lovely, but it was a real tall, very old building. Now I don't know, it had to have been there for years before 1934 and that's when I got there of course.

Really one of the main purposes of this Woman's League was to build traditions that, they wanted carried on through the campus. They had excellent speakers usually, we learned songs, all of the school songs and then you were tested. You had to have a 3 point average, that must have just been a C average at that time, because we were on the 5 point system at that time. At the end of these meetings that you went to weekly, you know you were tested, and they had a play that was given by some of the older members concerning that you should be giving back to the community or the school, something also, and that was the way of doing it, to work through these organizations. It was first Orange and Blue Feathers was the first organization that you went into. As I told you before, it was mandatory. There weren't night classes, classes were all over by 5 o'clock every place. That doesn't mean you'd be in school until five I mean depending on your classes. Now, of course, you had classes that go through the dinner hour and the exams are done in these huge halls where there are all kinds of sections together to take the exam. Really, there has been something lost in that process, I think. Because houses, this was true in independent houses too, that they had songs and they'd sing, you know, after dinner too. Everybody would be served. You'd have a house mother or somebody with authority that was also trying to produce good manners and proper behavior for young ladies. Then as I say, they used to have serenades just on the spur of the moment. If a fraternity decided that they wanted to serenade a certain

house after they came in from dates, why they just went. Now you can't do it, I know that it's changed, you have to petition the head, I think, in order to. Well that would take so much away, but then, it's a whole different ball game now.

ES: I wanted to ask you, you said that your father died in 1928. How did your mother make a living for you, how was your family able to continue?

WL: She was excellent at managing things. My father apparently, you know Bud [husband] especially has marveled at this, how anybody could leave enough money to have a family. She never worked outside the home. She always had a big garden, and she canned, of course it was before the freezing thing. She did lots of canning and loved flowers and worked outside, clear up until she was 90 years old, working and planting flowers and such, but she never worked outside the home.

ES: Was your family affected by the Depression?

WL: I'd say we were affected less than most because I cannot remember that we ever had hardships. With food, I suppose that's where you'd notice it first. Mother made all my clothes, she was very handy, and even formals when I got to college. But, as I say, Bud always marveled at this how anyone could ever... In 1940, we were all gone by then, but I was teaching in Champaign but living at home. I wasn't paying anything to live at home either, I just lived there. She built a house out on the corner of Prospect and Williams, a smaller house. As I say, I think we were affected less than most families, I really do. I suppose that she had investments that she made in government bonds, that was the kind that you used to clip coupons, I don't know if they even have it anymore. You'd clip coupons and she always banked at the Champaign National Bank, and there were officers there who I think gave her real good... because she had never done a thing before with money because that was all taken care of by my father.

ES: Did you and your brothers all attend the University?

WL: Yes, except one. And he, English was his bugaboo, he went to a radio school in Valporaso Indiana, it was a two-year school. So he did not go to the University of Illinois. My oldest brother graduated in chemistry and then my next brother graduated in history. Then I'm in the middle, I mean, those are the two oldest boys. Then the next boy, who is the only one still alive now, was graduated from business and commerce, business administration. He went right in the Navy, immediately, and was a pilot. He came out and was Pan-American until he was, I forget what the retirement was, 62 maybe, that you had to retire. Then he did use his business because he got very interested in stocks so he would have used it there. Then my youngest brother was the one who went to the radio school.

ES: Was education important to your parents? Did you always feel like you were going to go to college?

WL: Oh very much so, definitely, there was never any question. As I said, there was never any question. My father, before he had gotten in to all these other businesses, he had been a school superintendent. He was seven years older than my mother, and that's where he met her. She was a student.

ES: Were they connected to the U of I at all? You don't know why there was an appeal for them for you to go here?

WL: No, no, no. That was the closest university. Well, Charleston would have been closer I guess, but no. Well, the oldest boy who was in chemistry, it was a very well thought of school at the time, and still is. Some schools are better in certain in places. It was always very good in chemistry, he went with DuPont after graduation and was there. He passed away early, he was only 52 when he died of a heart attack. The question never arose in our family, we just all were expected to go to school which we did.

ES: Your brothers lived at home when then went to school?

WL: Uh-huh.

ES: You lived at home?

WL: Uh-huh.

ES: You were a member of Chi Omega sorority? Tell me how you got to be a part of that.

WL: They do spring rush with town girls often, maybe still do, I don't know. They'd have you over, I guess you wouldn't call it rush exactly. All these kinds of sororities would ask you over for dinner at a certain time and visit with you, no pledging was done then, it was just getting to know the girls and them getting to know you. Then formal rush was in the fall and you just went around to where you had been invited.

ES: How did you get invited?

WL: Well, I guess because they asked you in the spring, I don't know. I went, as was the case with many of my friends, girls didn't go to college as much then. There weren't too many in our graduating class, it was 200 I think in Champaign and there weren't too many of us who went to school. And the ones of us who did, I think all went to the University of Illinois. I know of no one who went off to an eastern school or another school in Illinois. If you went to college, why you just went to the University of Illinois. And I assume, you know, from having you as a guest in the spring, if they thought you had possibilities, then they'd invite you for fall rush. You'd get to know them better and they got to know you better, and decide where you thought you might fit in. They had a system, at that time. I worked at the Administration Building on Wright Street, that building that's kind of in the middle on the far side, in the Recorder's Office during summer time. I just applied for a job and I received it. Then they had a system if you felt

you couldn't go to school without some financial aid, they would pay you and you would work a certain number of hours. Well I wanted to join a sorority, of course, and you couldn't keep a job and if you had the job you had to commit that you wouldn't go unless you had that money to go with, which wasn't the case, so I, of course, didn't go ahead. I worked during the summer some more.

ES: So you didn't have a job during the school year?

WL: No. I forget what the program was called. They gave a lesser hourly wage, I don't even remember what I made in the summer time, anyway they gave a lesser wage, which was helpful to many. But as I said, it didn't fit in with my plans, so I didn't continue during the school year.

ES: You lived at home and yet you were still part of the sorority? How did that work?

WL: Uh-huh. Fine. See the sororities weren't so huge then either. You'd usually pledge about 18 girls. Pledges could live right in the house. Now, they make you pledge like about 60 or something like that, I mean huge numbers now, then of course there's not room. Our house, when I joined Chi Omega it was on the corner of 3rd and Green St., the house is no longer there. The house we're in now was built, it was new my senior year. We had to move out because they tore down, we had a house there all along but it was torn down and started over again, so in that interim we lived over, I think it was over on 3rd and Green, it was a real nice home really, but it wasn't large enough, you see. I think we had as many as 60 living in the house, I believe, but I stayed there many many weekends because cab fare was quite an added expense and well, I was always invited to stay. As I say, usually weekends I'd stay there in the house. Go home in the morning, I mean stay at night, I should say, because I seldom missed church.

ES: You went to church in Champaign? You didn't go to Wesley?

WL: We went to Wesley for winter institutes, but we went through Champaign. No, I'd go home and go with mother to church. I did stay usually ever Friday and Saturday night. It worked fine, we had our chapter meetings. . . there again, see the system where classes don't go at every hour of the night, you really build up more of a spirit of friendship and closeness. See we sang songs and so forth after dinner, maybe as long as half hour and 45 minutes, you know, because you'd learn all the songs of the school as well and then of other houses and they, in turn, would be doing the same thing.

ES: Did the houses intermingle a lot? How was the social, how did that all work?

WL: Yes. When you're a freshman every sorority would select two freshmen that, I guess, they thought were really going to get involved in activities.

START OF TAPE 1 SIDE B

So two were selected from each sorority for Shi Ai, it was called, so then every week you would go to a different house for dinner on a given night, I forget, I think usually Wednesday night if I'm not mistaken. You'd go to the Pi Phi house one time, you know, and you'd go to the Theta house and to the Kappa house and the Alpha Chi Omega, all of the houses you'd go to and be their guest, so you got to know people. Bobby, our younger son came along much younger, so he went to school, he graduated much later, 82 maybe, he was a Sigma Chi. He was a Sigma Chi, their meals, you know, they'd have a class at six o'clock or someone else would, why they'd just grab something or eat in a hurry, here it wasn't that way. It was all a nice, lovely, leisurely dinner and it was accepted. Something's lost the way they do it now, I really do think, but there is no way of changing that, as many students as there are, the added things in the curriculum. But then you lose that spirit of friendship, I think, a great deal. I can't say that about the Sigma Chi's, they were a great group, stayed very cohesive even after they were out of college. That's my most recent exposure to college life. The fellows had the same thing, it was called Skull and Crescent, there again they went around and had dinners at different houses, it was your opportunity. And so that was Woman's League too. You'd meet once from independents too when you went to these meetings, and then you were expected to go to Wednesday teas in the Woman's Building up on the second floor. Then I don't know who made the selection for Torch, that was something that you made and we wore orange scarves every Wednesday all day to school and then down at the bottom it had a navy U of I, big. Then you'd go to these teas, and there again you were expected to go.

ES: That was for independents and sorority? That was for everyone on campus?

WL: That's right. In your sophomore year, if you were promoted so to speak, it was Gold Feathers. They continued that same thing of trying to get people more indoctrinated with what the University of Illinois stood for. Then as a sophomore you had to serve so many times too, I don't remember what that was, on the day of the teas that was every Wednesday they had a tea up there. I don't know who provided the food, all you did was go and serve or eat and visit. I don't know who, I suppose it was the University of Illinois, I don't know. It wasn't elaborate, but then it was very nice.

As a Junior you made Torch, I don't know how that selection was made. I know you had to have a pretty high grade point average and then you had to be working actively in some activity. Publications were always a very strong activity too, I never was in that. Star Course was another one that was very active. It was like things that come to Krannert, they arranged what would come. Although they didn't have musical comedies, they'd have opera types or classical music, always quite well known people. It isn't exactly like what is done at the Assembly Hall either because it was student run, well you had faculty sponsors that worked with you, that was true in Woman's League, that's where we had Ms. Leonard and Ms. Pierson was her assistant. Ms. Leonard did not come to as many of our board meetings as Ms. Pierson. There was a faculty person there, not for, see the Woman's League would take the forefront, and we'd plan for Homecoming and we'd plan for Father's Day and Mother's Day, or Dad's Day they called it, not Father's Day. The young men were very helpful after you suggested what they should be doing. At Homecoming, badge sales would always be big, we'd sell like

10,000 badges. They were just things with ribbons on, you know. Then we'd always have a Homecoming Stunt Show too, that Woman's League was in charge of that.

Severina Nelson, have you had anybody talk about her in your interviews? She was the most remarkable women, and she taught speech. She was very outspoken, she was a single woman, lived with her mother. And, but she was extremely interested in speech correction and children who were born with cleft palates and getting surgery for those children, so that that they could speak normally then. She just went all over the state presenting her message to Rotary Clubs to any kind of an organizations in cities, she'd go all over the state. I don't remember her going south in the state as much, but north and west, she just was out all the time. Yet she taught a full round of classes, as I say she was a truly remarkable person. Because then she had to get these other organizations interested enough to give money was the whole idea. Then when you'd take classes with her, you'd work right with these children who were having the difficulties. We'd have class right in Lincoln Hall, their offices were always along the side of Lincoln Hall, all the speech courses were also taught along that hall. The faculty offices would be on the other side of the hall. She was very active with the Woman's League, she was one of our faculty sponsors as well. And, she directed the Homecoming Stunt Show. See you had to have try outs for that, this was group try outs, you'd make up skit, sort of group thing with singing and costumes and the whole thing. Our house was in it every year. One year we had to do it in the Ice Skating Rink because the Auditorium, which is where it was usually held, was judged unfit, they were afraid the balcony was going to fall down. And so we did it in the skating rink, they set up a stage in the skating rink, that was my senior year. But Seve was always in charge of that, and she also did a musical comedy, usually in February or March, in the early spring. It was a formal event, the first night. You went in formals and the fellows went in tuxs and there again it was a money raising thing. It was done in Lincoln Hall. It was always packed, you know, just the first night was formal, the next night was not formal. Usually dinner was held too, in the sororities and the fraternities prior to going. It was very nice.

ES: How important were athletics?

WL: Oh very much so. You could get an A ticket, well to some. The student participation was better then than it is now. You could get an Athletic, AA ticket, for \$10, and that entitled you to get into every sport. Fall, winter, baseball, swimming, there was a swim team at that time, a Men's Swim team.

ES: Did students do that even though it was during the Depression and money was tight?

WL: Oh yeah. Well \$10 though, for a whole year.

ES: Wasn't very bad?

WL: Wasn't very much. For \$10 you could go to all the football games, all the basketball games, baseball, water polo, track. It wasn't 100 per cent at all, but as I say

percentage wise attendance was better then than it is now. Of course they keep working, the basketball attendance has really gone up a lot because they've put that whole section of seats down where there weren't any seats, well that's part of it. Of course, I love sports in Huff Hall because you're so close. In Assembly Hall you're just so far away unless you're in A section.

ES: Were woman's sports--?

WL: Oh no, there wasn't any.

ES: They were all intramural?

WL: Oh yeah, there wasn't any.

ES: Did you have a PE requirement?

WL: Oh yeah, four semesters you had to take. There is a pool, I assume in the Woman's Building, I don't know if it's used or not, there was a swimming pool.

ES: There was.

WL: At any rate, that's where we had our swimming. They didn't have that, well, the part that was over there the Freer Building, is that what it's called. I tried out for Orchesis, it was a dance. You had to have a few semesters of an A in PE and then you could try out for this if you wanted to. I'm trying to think what kind of dancing would you call it? Interpretive dancing you might call it where you took a thought or a few words, or something, and you'd create a feeling. I'm not explaining it very well. Well, that was Orchesis, it was great, but it took too much time. As I got farther along, I just didn't have the time, that I could—It was for about three hours at night. It wasn't for credit at all, it was for enjoyment. You actually felt like you were creating a certain aura, you know. But, at any rate [laughter], I had to give the Y up too, I worked in the YWCA the first year my first semester.

ES: What kinds of things did you do?

WL: There again, many of those things that we did were, as a freshman, those meetings where they were trying to instill mainly being productive and helpful to others, as they would say. We'd have smaller group discussions. By the time you go to be a junior, you had to make a choice, because you really couldn't do both from the time elements, you know, because too many things were happening at the same time and you couldn't be in both places, and so that's when I chose to go for Woman's League. And I had the one job that was a two year job, you were a Junior Representative and then you were a Senior Representative in Woman's League and all the other offices changed every year. As I say, and then that's where you, we did much more with Ms. Pierson than we did with Ms. Leonard.

ES: Do you have any impressions of her? What did you think of her?

WL: Oh yes. She was lovely. Of course you heard weird tales about her, you know.

ES: What?

WL: Well, people didn't have cars then on campus. I could drive back and forth because I lived in town. Bud had a car a senior year because he was working for the *Courier*. He didn't get his senior job, he got his junior job but not his senior job. His car was in front of a sorority on like a weekday night and it was taken away from him. He was covering at the time, the Phi Gam house is unfortunately no longer, it's just a shame because they have a wonderful group of men. I think the Delts have taken it over now, it's on the corner of 4th and John or is it...

ES: Yeah, I can't keep it straight but—

WL: But he continued to work in it even when he was out of school because they had alums that worked in the house too. In the early years when Bud was out...

ES: That was his fraternity?

WL: Uh-huh, Phi Gamma Delta.

ES: But he had his car parked in front of a sorority?

WL: Yeah, but it was on a week day. When if it had been there on a weekend maybe it would have been alright. But no, it was taken away from him. He was covering Maroon sports which was football in Champaign. Do you know where Southside school is in Champaign? Well, that's where they practiced and played. You know, from there to the Phi Gam house is, you have to go over the icy railroad tracks, well, I don't know how far it would be, but anyway, in the time frame that he had, I think that he ended up running the whole way. I didn't go with Bud in school, I ended up going with him later. I taught four years in Champaign before I became involved with Bud. As I say, it was a definite handicap to him with his job and the *Courier* is on over in Urbana.

ES: But that was just a rule that there were no cars on campus for students?

WL: Oh yeah, uh-huh, that's right.

ES: How visible were the Deans, Dean Turner and Dean Leonard, among the students?

WL: Well, I don't know. To what I worked in they were visible, of course. They always said that Ms. Leonard thought that girls shouldn't drink out of a fountain because then their lips would be tempting to young men, have that shiny look I guess. Also, they'd say that she didn't, that's how I got into this, there weren't cars. If one person had a car there

would often be a large group in that car. She didn't think that girls should sit on young men laps either.

ES: How did you know this? Did she tell that in front of groups?

WL: No, no no no. That was just hearsay.

ES: I see.

WL: Whether she ever said these things, I don't know. They'd say, "Have you heard what Dean Maria said now?" I only saw her as a very lovely, dignified, very interested in helping everyone, that's my view of her. And, I don't know how involved she ever had to be in correcting individuals, I have no idea about that.

ES: Did rules differ for men and for women on campus?

WL: As far as hours at night, yes. For women, during the week they had to be in by 10 o'clock or whatever it had been, I'm trying to think. Weekends it was one. There weren't any rules for men, I don't think. In the first place, very few of the houses had house mothers, some did.

ES: Oh is that right?

WL: For the fraternities, all the sororities of course would have.

ES: What was the house mother's role for the sororities?

WL: Well, it was ten on the weekdays...

ES: I mean, what was her job?

WL: To make us nice, respectable, polite young women. We had a really good one. She was very tough, really. They had their own separate living quarters, like a little apartment really, always on the ground floor. Well, I shouldn't say always, I know in the Theta house, but I just know that up and down Wright Street they were on the main floor. She was eminent, when it came towards one o'clock, you knew that she was there. She didn't stay hidden in her apartment, which was nice.

ES: Were boys in the house? You could invite people over?

WL: Oh sure, but not upstairs. They'd be bringing girls home and they could stay until one o'clock. She tried to monitor people being too affectionate also. She had, Annie Laurie was her name, she had no qualms about breaking things up if she thought they weren't as she liked it. She had children of her own, grown children.

ES: She was live in, but she had a family?

WL: Uh-huh, but they were grown.

ES: Were the housemothers mainly widowed or single women?

WL: Well, it changed later on, they were younger too but mainly they were, I'd say they were widowed. They could have been divorced, but divorce wasn't very prevalent. I think primarily they were widowed. She was there a long, long time. She had definite rules at meals on, well, just manners was just what is usually was. Waiters, usually see fraternities would get jobs as waiters in sororities or in their own house too, you know, it was a job. And in our house, we had a woman that took care of the cleaning too, so the girls were expected to do their own rooms, but as far as the down stairs, the halls, and the living quarters were all taken care of, the girls didn't do any of that. I don't think that was true in fraternities. I remember Bud saying, tales they'd tell, as freshmen they had to do a lot of work in the kitchen, working and scrubbing out grease traps and things like that that the girls, at least in our house, were never expected to do. Judy, our older daughter was a Theta when she went to school and I know at that Theta house they didn't either. Their own room they were expected to keep.

ES: Was the cook live in too?

WL: No. We had a wonderful cook too. She could make the best rolls. No, really good. Again, the sorority mother was over that. I don't think she made the menu, yes she did. Our mother made the menus too, but that, I don't think, had to be done that way. The Dean of Women worked with housemothers too, she had meetings, I think they met once a month. There again, it would be all houses and so they'd get to know each other in the jobs that they were doing. She really tried to keep her fingers in having a campus, being respectable and well run.

ES: Talking about sororities, how did the Greeks and the Independents get along as far as intermingling?

WL: Fine, fine. Well, that was done through things you work on together.

ES: Did you have an elevated status if you belonged to a Greek organization?

WL: No, I don't think so. Some of them, it's a funny thing, some of them by the time they got to be a junior or even a senior would pledge. Once it had been like the President of the whole Organization of Independent Women, you know, towards the end would pledge a sorority. So I suppose they wanted that for after they were out of school because sometimes communities have very active alum groups and felt they would have a better opportunity of being in a group. After independents left school, I don't think they stayed organized in any fashion, where as of course, sororities did.

ES: I wanted to ask you one more question about sororities and fraternities. Was there a hierarchy among the different fraternities and sororities?

WL: Oh we thought so. We thought some were lots better than others.

ES: It wasn't anything that was written down?

WL: Oh no. It depends on the campus too, some groups would be stronger in another sections of the country maybe. Like in the south, some of the ones that maybe we didn't think were as strong at Illinois, would be very strong on different campuses.

START OF TAPE 2 SIDE A

WL: They had no program through business school that dealt with teaching. I mean that came on later. You were just trained to go into business. I took a lot of economic courses and accounting, not so many in accounting, mainly in economics. And this Dr. Karrenbrock [W. E. Karrenbrock] I just thought was, just really, I know he wrote a book, but this would have been way, way back. He just made you feel that you had let him down if for any reason you didn't turn up with an assignment. You felt, you weren't worried that you were going to get an E or anything, that wasn't the thing, you were worried that you were letting that man down. I just thought he was superior. Severina Nelson in another one of course, I had various classes with her in speech. She was another excellent teacher I thought.

ES: What made you want to go into that field? What did you think you were going to do with that degree? What did you want to be?

WL: Well I felt I wanted to teach, and English was not my favorite subject, even though it should have been, it's a natural thing with speech, there's no question about that. It didn't seem like there were too many opportunities for girls when you got through with college. Not too many opportunities for jobs, it just seems that they all went to men. Maybe that's just the feeling that I got, of course, that's not true in the teaching field, you certainly had just as good of a chance as a man to get a job there. I thought, although I certainly know they welcomed men in the teaching field way down in the grades because they feel that they can be a role model for so many boys particularly, who don't have fathers, who have a single parent, so I know they're much sought after. I can remember Bobby's first male teacher was in fifth grade. Of course then divorce was, well, you really just didn't hear about it. All those youngsters in the room had fathers, good, decent fathers, who were very interested in them. But even so I can remember we were real happy when the first male teacher came along at West Lawn School. And for some, where fathers had been abusive or had just not shown any interest in the youngster, it was particularly important. Of course, that wasn't true with Bud, he was intensely interested in anything our children did. And the first that we had, that would have been the case too. They were interested and working in Scouts and the church and the community as well as with their families.

ES: Is that what you thought you would do when you graduated? Become a teacher?

WL: Uh-huh, yeah.

ES: Is that was you wanted to do?

WL: Uh-huh. I say, it probably would have been in a different field, it probably would have been in a business field had that been..., but they had no practice teaching or any kind in the Commerce School at that time. I don't know what they have now. Of course, it would all be done through the College of Education anyway, but I did enjoy the courses I took there very much. I taught in Champaign for four years.

ES: After you graduated?

WL: Uh-huh.

ES: Did you have a hard time finding a job?

WL: No, no. I was 20 when I graduated from college because I skipped a grade, I don't know if I skipped third or if I skipped fourth grade. Anyway, I skipped one of those two grades. Anyway, I graduated young. Anyway, I applied in Champaign and I knew many of the Board Members from church or dating their sons [laughter] so no, I was real fortunate.

ES: What was the relationship between the students and faculty? Did you get to the know the faculty?

WL: No, not too much. We did know Severina Nelson. There was a speech honorary too, Zeta Phi Eta was the name of it, and she was the one who got that started at the University of Illinois. I don't know if it's still going now or not. She would entertain us at her home and we had installations of new members we would do at her home also. But no, that was the faculty home I was ever in. Maybe that isn't true of others, I can't speak for other, but I don't think that was very prevalent.

ES: What do you think the strengths and weaknesses of your education were?

WL: We had practice teaching, methods of teaching was what it was called, at Uni High. We went to a Miss McCary, I think her name was. She was excellent and I felt when I started teaching that I was not as prepared as those who came out of Illinois State, which used to be Illinois Normal, wasn't it called? I felt they were better prepared than I because they had more actual practice in the classroom than I ever had. I did my practice teaching under Marian Stuart, who was an excellent teacher at Champaign High School. But they had more of it than I had, actual experience. Of course, all the preparation in the world isn't like the actual thing [laughter] when you're there. I had many black students, of course, although it's much blacker in Champaign now than it was then. I think a tenth of our students at the Junior High were black as I remember. At first they just all looked alike to me, of course that didn't last long. I had one class the last period of the day that

was primarily black. I can remember that feeling that I had, “I’m never going to be able to distinguish one from another.” But of course, that wasn’t true, I was just too young and too inexperienced.

ES: Were there black students when you went to school at the U of I?

WL: No, no.

ES: You don’t remember?

WL: A few good athletes, but very few, very, very few. I don’t remember any black girls, but there had to be.

ES: You didn’t have much contact with other racial groups? What about Jewish students?

WL: Uh-huh, Lots. They were very active in the Woman’s League. In fact, my predecessor in the job I had was a terrific woman, stunning, a Jewish girl from Chicago. There were a lot of Jewish girls from the south that came up to school during the period that I was in school. Usually beautiful girls too, beautiful figures, smart. The one who was just ahead of me, I thoroughly enjoyed working with, she was just lovely, and helpful.

ES: So they intermingled?

WL: Oh yes.

ES: Were they in the sorority system too?

WL: Uh-huh. There were three sororities, Jewish sororities, when I was in the sorority system in school. I don’t know how many there are now. Sigma Delta Tau was the one that we always thought was the best of the three. I can’t remember the names of the others.

ES: Did they interact socially with the other sororities?

WL: Oh yes. They’d be in the Shi Ai that I spoke about where we went around and had dinners, they’d be in that. Yes, they were very active in that type of thing.

I just, I was trying to think who some black athletes were at that time. I can’t think of it off hand now, but it was primarily white, it really was.

ES: You don’t remember any kinds of discrimination?

WL: Oh no.

ES: Was there a problem in town? Did you feel that growing up in Champaign?

WL: No. We all went to the same eighth grade which was a building just on the other side of the old post office which was kitty-corner from Old Robeson's store. There were many separate elementary schools, but everybody went there for eighth grade. That was really when we were first introduced to black students. Even then they were very much a minority group. Then by the time I got to college, high school and then college, it had changed in Champaign. There were so many more blacks than there had been. Of course it has continued to be that. No. I was never in classes with them. When we had eighth grade we were separated by, oh, abilities I guess you'd say. So there weren't mixed classes, you were just in a class with higher achievers and then they graduated. In high school I can remember one black, it was a girl who was a very good student. I remember her in high school, but I don't think she went on to college. I was never in a class with a black at the U of I. Nope. There weren't many there.

ES: How aware of national events were you? Were there political movements on campus?

WL: No.

ES: There wasn't much of that going on.

WL: No.

ES: Were students involved in presidential campaigns?

WL: They had their own student elections for officers, but they didn't really...there was nothing really. It was a very peaceful group I'd say, none of this demonstrating. You know this lesbian and...I don't think I had even heard of it when I was in school. I don't think I would have had much contact with it because I probably wasn't even aware of what it was. I was pretty young and naive I'll tell you that. Pretty young and naïve.

ES: We've talked a lot about your activities, but what did you do for fun? Where did you go, what did you friends do?

WL: Lots of dances. Lots of dances, uh-huh. And movies. That was it. Picnics, we used to go over to Pollywogs over in Danville, you know, and have picnics, or picnics at Crystal Lake. We weren't very grown up, I mean, we truly weren't. There were many people from smaller communities. We had a few from the Chicago area in our sorority.

ES: How did Chicago kids interact with more local or down state kids?

WL: Fine, just fine. They always were a step ahead of us. The level of interaction was fine.

ES: They didn't have a difficult transition coming down to Champaign?

WL: No. But we did have, I'm not to sure about the Phi Gam house, but there were a lot from Peoria, which, you know, was considered a pretty big community then, and still is. We were, all the girls were just a small community. () had usually about two town girls a year, I'd say, two. But no, it was a harmonious group.

ES: So you graduated in 1938?

WL: Uh-huh.

ES: And you got a job teaching at the Champaign Junior High?

WL: Junior High. Which was on University Avenue, see they tore old Lavener [sp?] down and built a junior high. See they've traded now, but I went to what's Edison Junior High as high school, that was the high school, on Green Street. Then the Junior High was the brand new one University Avenue, the new one. It was, I think it had only been built one year before I had started teaching there. Then when they changed schools they added on and they made that school much bigger. They always used the gym at the Junior High, I mean the High School did too for games, because it was a nice gym and it was a terrible gym on, terrible, terrible gym on Green Street. I've been down there, was it Peter or Bobby played a game down there, but I couldn't believe how awful it was; it just didn't seat anybody, you know, it was so little. It had a balcony, no place much for people to sit. Oh, crazy. You know, it was built a long time ago too, it was probably all they thought they needed at the time. But the others, Harry Combs Gym, he was teaching at the same time I was, and of course he was very famous at the University of Illinois, too, as a player and as a coach.

ES: You were there four years and then what did you do after that? Was that 38 to 42?

WL: Then I started teaching, 38 to 42.

ES: Then you got married in 42. How did you meet your husband?

WL: Well, at a Sachem Sing. Sachem is another organization over there. I was dating the coach at our school at the time. And so we, he, in turn, not only coached basketball at our school but tennis at the Senior High. We went to Sachem Sing, I always liked that, you know, it was down outside in front of the Auditorium. And, so Bud came back to talk to Don Adams, the one I was with, to see how his tennis team had done because he was covering sports. So, we met and so then he called me after we got home. Then he was gone the next year. He worked in Washington D.C for *Pathfinder Magazine*. Then they called him from the *Gazette* to come back and he knew he was going to be drafted, or he was going to be enlisting, so then he came back to Champaign. So in March of, would have been 40. He graduated in 40 and he left and was gone all that next year, well he came back from Christmas when he was working in Washington. Then he came back that following March and we started seeing a great deal of each other. When he went into the service he was a cadet. He had to, at that time, you had to have completed college

and you had to, you couldn't be married and then, of course, you had to pass some tests too, so he became cadet and went to Birmingham, Alabama first and then to South Carolina and we were married in Camden, South Carolina. My mother, and his mother and dad and I all went down together and we were married in a Presbyterian church down there by Dr. Migarn, and that was 1942.

ES: And then you moved back to Paxton after the War?

WL: No. When he went overseas, when Bud went overseas, I moved back. We already had Pete. First he was in the ferrying command, where they ferried planes to various places, in Wilmington, Delaware was where he was stationed then. Then when he was sent overseas I came back. As I said Pete was born when we lived there. I was pregnant with Judy, the one that went to the University of Illinois, so I lived with his parents and Dad Larson took me to the hospital for Judy when she was born. They were just 15 ½ months apart, the first two. They took care of me while Bud was gone. Then we lived just down the street in that brick bungalow on the other side, just one the next corner, for a little over a year. Then Brownny Blendall, who owned the house, wanted to sell it. We knew, or we hoped that we were going to have more children and it wasn't large enough. So then we moved over on Center Street and we lived there for 35 years. And then, this is where Bud grew up, was in this house. Then when his mother was no longer able to stay here, we moved here.

ES: And you had the clothing store in town?

WL: Uh-huh, yes. But he was with the newspaper here first. See he graduated in Journalism. When he was overseas, why Hub who owned the paper, he and his brother Harold, who owned the paper together, weren't getting long real well. So they owned farmland and they owned the paper together and he wanted Bud to come back and be business manager, is what he wanted him to do. He said if Bud would come back and run the paper then Harold could have the farm land and they could go their own way. So that's...Bud stayed there until he was 40 years old and then he...the Larson's Store, his dad had been very active in the management but he hadn't done work there. There wasn't anyone to take over so Bud then did that. Then when there was nobody to take over Bud had to sell, so there is no Larson's there anymore. Robin Neal has a printing shop there now. But she changed it around a lot.

ES: I'll ask you one more question. How has your education at U of I influenced your later life do you think, positively or negatively? How has it impacted your life?

WL: Very positively. I hope it has made me a better person. I thought school was a wonderful experience and I was happy in the sense to come back where nobody knew that I could take any particular interest in an organization, it was kind of a nice change for a while to not get involved, but then you get involved all over again. I think it was a very worthwhile experience all the way. Not only just from the academics, but from the opportunities presented in working in different organizations down there and meeting people and getting some different ideas which have broadened me I think.

ES: Thank you.

END OF THE INTERVIEW