

University of Illinois Student Life and Culture Archives
Voices of Illinois
Interviewee: Wendy Mathewson and Beth Watkins
Interviewer: Alicia Hopkins
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Alicia Hopkins: Today is Friday, March 19, 2018, and I'm Alicia Hopkins from the University of Illinois Archives. I'm meeting with Beth Watkins and with Wendy Mathewson, both alumni of the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, to talk about their experiences as students and their current involvement with the university. So first of all, thank you both for talking with me today. And first, we're going to talk about — how did you decide to attend UIUC?

Beth Watkins: I looked at three different schools — one teeny-tiny one sort of medium, and here. When I came to visit here, I didn't know what I wanted to major in at all, and it just seemed like whatever I would want to do, I could do here. And it seemed like kind of the right distance from home. I just knew it had a ton of options.

Wendy Mathewson: My junior year, I went on a bunch of college visits with my dad, and when we visited Princeton, I just completely fell in love. And I thought, "This is absolutely where I want to go." We had dinner with students, and we toured the campus. And I was also kind of a sucker for — their marketing was all about "conversations that matter." And I got accepted. And I got no financial aid. And at the time — I mean, it seems like peanuts now, but at the time it seemed like we couldn't really afford it. So when I got the acceptance letter, I was really elated, and then when I realized that I was getting no financial support, I was so disappointed.

I also had applied to Rice. And I didn't go visit, but I had an interview with a physicist at Fermilab, which is near where I grew up. And it was the worst conversation I've ever had in my life. I don't know what happened, but it was terrible. And so I got put on the wait list at Rice. I'm sure he was like, "She was awful" [laughter]

And I applied to U of I for the same reasons that Beth was saying. I thought — also, a lot of people in my family went to the University of Illinois. I thought that it's a huge school, since I was interested in so many different things, there would be strong programs in whatever I wanted to do. And my dad fought in the Vietnam War, so I got a children of veterans scholarship and a tuition waiver. I just thought, "We have this great state school, and I could get a veterans scholarship to come here, tuition waiver" — it just didn't make sense for me as someone who wasn't planning to conquer the world of finance or something, to ask my parents to pay for an Ivy League education that I didn't know how I was going to use. And in the end, I'm so glad that's what happened. I don't know what my life would have been like if I had chosen the other path, but I'm really grateful that it worked out the way that it did.

AH: Did either of you have any family members who are also alumni of the university?

BW: None.

WM: So many. My sister has a doctorate from here. My dad has a bachelor's and master's. My mom took some classes here, maybe a master's. My uncle... you know, some — yeah, it's a lot. I'm a—

BW: Cousin too right?

WM: Well, legacy cousins, yeah. Cousin at least, maybe cousins.

AH: Did that affect your decision to come to U of I?

WM: I certainly had positive associations and of course a lot of people from my high school came here as well. I'm sure that was true for you too.

BW: Yeah,

WM: So I think it positively affected — my family felt very positively about their experience here.

AH: What years were you students and what departments were you active in?

BW: Fall '92 to May '96. In departments, you said? I came in — I was in LAS general, like undeclared major or whatever that was called.

WM: Same.

BW: I forget if that was general curriculum or whatever it was called. And I think I became a history major for the second half of my sophomore year, somewhere in there, but not right away.

WM: Yeah, now that I'm an academic advisor in the history department, I've sort of constructed a narrative about my time as a history major. That my dad challenges — he says that I chose a major kicking and screaming. That I just wanted to do all the things. But yeah, I think I waited until late sophomore year to choose a major.

AH: Did either of you minor in anything?

MW: Nope, not formally. What were you minoring in informally?

BW: Anthro. Obviously.

AH: Do you remember the first time you visited campus?

BW: I do, yeah. So my high school...I was very, very, very active in choir in high school. Still am. And my high school, some of us came over here for a performance at Krannert Center by an English [unintelligible] group. We drove three hours over there [unintelligible]. That was my first time on this campus and I just — I'm from Macon, so I'm from a college town, but not the scale of this one. I just thought it was so great; it was so big. So we went to the Garcia's on Wright Street that doesn't exist anymore. It's Coco Mero now. Had a fireplace. It was kind of cold out, so we loved the fireplace and the pizze; it just seemed like a cool place. And then I came back a couple of other times for school related things, and then my mom brought me on a visit to check it out for college.

WM: Yeah, and I had visited — I know I had visited and come to games and things with my family, and then when I was in high school, I had older friends that were here that I visited too. So I actually don't remember the first time because I did it so much. So I was very familiar with the campus.

AH: And how did you both meet?

WM: We met in—we were both in the Campus Honors Program, and we met in a class second semester of our freshman year called The History that Music Made, which I think is a misnomer.

AH: That's a big switch.

WM: Bonded through fear in class, basically. So this was a class taught by Herbert Brun, who is a very well-known music composer, and had quite a following here in town. So it was a freshman seminar, honors seminar, and yet we were the only—

BW: The youngest people there.

WM: Were there any other freshmen in there?

BW: Maybe one or two, but mostly not.

WM: And then the rest of the students were — they seemed ancient.

BW: They were seniors, I think.

WM: There were some in their 30s or 40s.

BW: Oh yeah —

WM: In the class, just because they loved Professor Brün and wanted to hang on his every word. Also, I think they wanted to help us...

BW: See the light.

WM: See the light. Yes. And it was a — do you remember our assignments in the class?

BW: A little bit. Remember we had to bring in a piece of music that had done something to us or affected us in some way. We were both cringing at our choices.

WM: As our choices were super conventional. And shameful.

BW: We had to go to the music library and look at some art that this professor had created — had programmed a computer to make, I'm not sure which, but it was sort of computer art that was on the walls of the music library. We had to come in and think of titles for those. I remember thinking that like, well if you don't know what you want to call them then.

WM: And do you remember how he graded?

BW: No, it was weird.

WM: I feel like I remember you being pretty frustrated.

BW: I'm sure I was.

WM: It basically wasn't graded. Your assessment wasn't really based on —

BW: Was there even a syllabus for us? Maybe because they had to, but not really.

WM: So, we were deeply confused by what was going on in this class, and obviously we had more in common with each other than either of us did with what was going on in the class. Yeah, I think we just

had trouble processing the challenges. It was very — it was very anti-conventional, both socially and academically and musically. And we were very shaped by convention.

BW: We both had strong music backgrounds, but not mid-century computer music avant-garde. We're much more like, oh, here's our Mozart piano assignment.

WM: The people that were in our class and others that they were associated with did this house theater performance that they invited us to. And so we went. And so it was in a house in Urbana. And it was performance art. And it was all these different kind of sketches. But at one point, Professor Brün, who's I think in his 80s at this point, is pulled out. He's in a wagon. And they pull him through the living room and he is wearing nothing but a diaper and has a pacifier. And we were like, wow.

BW: And — you can tell, this sounds a little bit like we're making it up for a movie or a sitcom or something, but this was in fact, like — it was kind of textbook wacky college class in a way.

AH: Yes, it sounds like a very sort of quintessential experience that people can continue to tell for a long time.

WM: So we bonded — I remember, so it must have been early in the class. It was winter. We were like out in the Quad talking about where we were going to live next semester, right? And decided to live together at Busey-Evans. Both our roommates were going other places

BW: And you had that great room.

WM: Yeah, a corner room in Evans Hall, in the women's residence hall. And so, yeah, the rest is history.

AH: Did you both live there for the other three years, or did you eventually move off of campus?

WM: We were there sophomore year, and then Wendy went abroad junior year, but then when she was back senior year, we shared an apartment. So two of our four years, we were roommates.

AH: And what did a normal day look like for you both on campus?

WM: I think it kind of depends on which year, but somewhere in there, probably sophomore year, I guess, I started volunteering at the now-closed Museum of Natural History and really liked that. So I was doing a lot of volunteering and then paid student work over there, kind of among my classes. But yeah, lots of evenings spent in this building, for sure, in the library. We were talking the other day about a class we took together our sophomore year — a history class, I think it was a medieval England course — and we were talking about our different morning routines. And as a little bit of — who were those roommates from the sitcom in the 70s?

BW: Oh, the Odd Couple?

WM: Yeah, a little bit like the Odd Couple,

BW: Oscar and Felix.

WM: Yes! So Beth would wake up two hours before class started, then go to the gym in her little matching sweatsuit and ride the bike, and then read the paper and have a sensible breakfast and a cup of coffee, come back upstairs, take a shower — at which point I'd be like, "Whoa!" — and I would roll out

of bed five minutes before we needed to leave for class. And then she reminded me that she would just take off. She needed to do her, and like, I was not ready to go. And we would just —

BW: Wendy was late a lot, in my opinion. I mean, not actually, but to me it was like, "aaah."

WM: I think it's that my definition of late is different than hers. Might be one way to say it.

BW: Probably. I think you're too kind to me.

WM: Yeah, so we both studied a lot. And — I was looking through some letters. I think there were some places on campus we liked to go, and liked to go together. We spent a lot of time at Espresso Royale; we both started drinking coffee in college. I think Raspberry Mochas was our big favorite gateway drink. We went to Delights, which was an ice cream shop next to where Manolo's is now. And you could pick anything you wanted to put in your ice cream. I had trouble editing. It was a favorite spot. We went to a lot of shows at Krannert. Yeah, so a typical day would be going to class and doing our volunteer organization, studying.

AH: Were either of you involved in any registered student organizations or groups that weren't necessarily registered that still existed on campus at the time?

WM: I forgot the flyer. I have some items for the archive. Perhaps they tied to our oral history. Actually, Beth had hung on to this, but there's a flyer in sort of [unintelligible] font with some illustration that says, you know, "Help us revive the Undergraduate History Association. Call Wendy or Beth." And then it's just one phone number because we shared a landline. And we were going to have a meeting in 307 Gregory Hall. Yeah, so we were involved somewhat in the history stuff.

BW: I was in Women's Glee Club for all four years. That was a big part of my, you know, extracurricular — like, I don't feel like I was in any RSOs, at least not very involved. I don't remember.

WM: I was in InterVarsity Christian Fellowship and spent a lot of time on that, at least the first two years. Yeah, then I wasn't as involved after I studied abroad.

AH: And you studied abroad your junior year?

WM: That's right. I spent my entire junior year in Glasgow, Scotland at the University of Glasgow.

AH: And how was that experience?

WM: Amazing. It was great. I had such a good time. I've had a pretty good life and I'd say that was like the best year of my life. It was so much fun. I loved being here at the University of Illinois, but I also really wanted to kind of stretch my wings and experience different ways of doing things in different cultures, and being in a place that all my family hadn't been to and that no one from my high school was there. It was certainly a chance to do that. Also, the people that I met there were so hospitable and welcoming, and I went around and visited a whole bunch of my friends in their homes around Britain and got to travel after that year around Europe and it was just a really great adventure.

AH: Are there any particular professors who were influential while you were here on campus that you had or didn't have?

BW: One of ours is the same. Caroline Hibbard in the history department — taught with medieval and early modern Britain, which we were both quite interested in.

WM: And I ended up doing a senior thesis — she was my thesis advisor. I did a thesis on the Scottish Reformation. And yeah, so I would spend a lot of time revising that with her up in her office on the fourth floor of Gregory Hall. But yeah — tell her about the time we had her over for dinner.

BW: We, in our senior year, were here in our apartment, we invited her over for dinner and she did come, and her mother was visiting, so she brought her mother with her — and I don't know, do you think her mom was probably 80? Something like that, maybe?

WM: At least.

BW: Yeah, we lived on the third floor, there was no elevator, and this happened to be the same night that a tornado touched down in southeast Urbana, so we had to leave the apartment, and because there was no basement in our, you know, prefab kind of cardboard building — We went — we lived right by Lincoln and Green and we scurried over the Boneyard into Hendrick House dorm. And they let us come and take shelter in their basement, which is very nice of them. Yeah, of all the nights to have your professor over.

WM: Well, and getting her mother down those rickety stairs and across the creek.

BW: I'm sure it was raining, right?

WM: Oh, yeah. It was and the wind

BW: Spraying and it was all quite cold. Yeah.

WM: And our fettuccine Alfredo got lumpy.

BW: Yeah sure did.

WM: Oh, it was a good time, though.

BW: Yeah. There was also a grad student in anthropology who was pretty key to my undergrad experience here. She was reinvigorating a hands-on kind of discovery center at the Museum of Natural History — as I think she was doing it for a sort of practicum or something like that. That was part of her graduate work, and that I worked a lot over there on, and that has ended up shaping my entire career. I think she finished her master's degree here, I'm not sure, but that was another, you know, educator figure. My choir director, Joe Grant, was also a favorite all the years that I was in that group. And he is still in town, retired, and every now and then I see him and he's like, "How about that?"

AH: Was the Natural History Museum part of the World Heritage Museum?

BW: Separate. This was on the third and fourth floor of the Natural History Building, which now that it's been renovated, I think pretty much all traces are gone back over there. But the collections from that got dispersed in the early 2000s to the State Museum and the State Natural History Survey. So they stayed in the state but are no longer on campus.

AH: Are there any campus landmarks or buildings that stand out in your memories of the university?

BW: I just spent a lot of time in Gregory Hall and the library.

WM: Yeah, I loved being in the stacks in the library. I spent a lot of time in there, especially my senior year working on my thesis. Oh, it just felt so... Like a treasure cave, you know, full of —

BW: Cave being [unintelligible]. Yeah, you just never knew what you were going to find in there. It was great. We had stacks passes, so it felt special to get to go in there. Campus Honors gave you a stacks pass.

WM: So not everybody can go in?

BW: Not when we were in — I don't know.

AH: Now everybody can go in, you just have to have an I-card or you can get like a community borrower card and you can go in that way too.

BW: That's really good.

WM: Yeah, it was a special privilege.

BW: Yeah, it was a privilege. And it's always either freezing or boiling back there.

AH: That, I think, is still true.

BW: Yeah, so you'd go in with your backpack and get laden down with books and faint because it's hot.

AH: And you can't take backpacks anymore. They'll give you a cart, but you can't take a backpack or a bag.

BW: Cart. That's nice.

WM: Yeah. With the wheel with you?

AH: Mm-hmm.

WM: That makes sense.

BW: Let's go [laughter].

WM: We've got to go, sorry.

AH: I also spent a lot of time in the stacks for my thesis. And one of my favorites was — I needed a book that was in a room that was like a cage and they had to unlock it. It was very like Hogwarts-esque.

BW: I really loved the — so not Temple Buell Hall, which didn't open while we were in undergrad, but the Architecture Building. I took classes in architecture history.

WM: They had the best bathrooms!

BW: Yeah! And that library, the Ricker Library there is really lovely. I like to study over there even though it wasn't — even if I didn't have a class that day or whatever, I'd love to be spending time in

there. And Grainger opened while we were in college, and since that was sort of close to our apartment, we studied there a lot, but it just felt so deluxe — like it had those huge tables that no one had scratched up, and it had, you know, big chairs, lovely lamps, it was pink on one side, green on the other. It just felt so — it was kind of the opposite of the stacks, but in a fun way.

WM: We spent time at the Union too. I remember hanging out in the lounges in the Union.

AH: What are some other landmarks? What would be a landmark?

BW: I don't know.

AH: It's very open-ended. On the archives website, some of the landmarks that they talk about — what the about oral history questions are — like the eternal flame is one that's brought up.

WM: I heard a tour guide talking about it this morning. "If you kiss by the eternal flame, your love will last forever."

AH: I'm trying to think what else.

BW: The computer lab in the English building basement. That's a key fixture of my undergrad experience. Remember that one?

WM: I don't remember that one as well as the computer lab in Busey-Evans and the computer lab in the honors house — is another place that we spent a lot of time. There was a computer lab in the attic of the honors house where—

BW: We clambered up there.

WM: Clacked away yeah.

BW: Is that what [unintelligible]?

WM: Oh, I think that might have been the Oregon Street Computing Lab, which I haven't been in there lately. It still stands. I don't know what's in there. It's across the street from where I work, and I still have no idea what's in there.

AH: I think there's still a computer lab. I'm trying to — I feel like I was there all the time in undergrad. But I don't remember what for and why.

WM: Yeah, but something happened — the floppy disk that my thesis was on got damaged. I had a nervous breakdown, basically. And then I had to go to somebody's tiny desk in the basement of the supercomputing building. And they retrieved it.

BW: That was a tense night.

WM: It was very tense.

AH: That sounds terrible.

WM: I was really freaked out.

BW: There was no cloud storage, there was no — you couldn't email things, but we didn't know how to email things to ourselves. Maybe other people did, but no, it's disk for most.

AH: And there are still undergraduates who almost lose their thesis every year. I'm still, even with the cloud and DMs and all those things. Did any of you work while you were on campus, changing there's a little bit?

WM: Yeah, I worked at — I worked in the cataloging department of this library, like downstairs, one summer doing — assigning Cutter numbers to books. Um, I don't know if you were here in the summer.

BW: Yeah, I went home and worked in the summers.

WM: I worked there for a summer and then maybe a little bit in the school year, I don't remember. But then I was working at the Natural History Museum for pay for, I think, my last two years? — like my last two years, something like that.

BW: Yeah, I don't think I had a job on campus. Um, later on I worked, like, full-time. When I wasn't a student, I worked at the Center for African Studies. I didn't work on campus.

AH: Were there any notable events that had happened while you were on campus within the university history or larger than that?

BW: Before we met, but Hillary Clinton came to on behalf of a bill in 1992 talking about her health care reform. Richard Lewis, the comedian, kind of opened for her. And then he did this one — that's his gesturing on the Quad floor. He did all these jokes at the Quad. But yeah, I remember being on the Quad and being all excited. And my mom told me in 2016 during the election that I had gotten to shake her hand, and I had like called my parents that evening, I was so excited. I don't remember that. So I'm not entirely sure that's true, but it's also something I would have been excited about.

WM: I remember that I wore rope-soled shoes. And the Quad was all wet — it must've rained. And I was just standing there in my shoes, like — just soaked up all of the Quad moisture while I was listening to her talk. I also remember freshman year Bill Clinton came to Assembly Hall.

BW: Really?

WM: Pretty sure. And I, you know, I had been brainwashed by my grandfather.

BW: You sure had.

WM: That's another thing — I thought that we might talk about, if there was time, about the transformation that can happen while you're getting a liberal arts education. I knew one Democrat growing up, and it was my sociology teacher in high school. Anyway, so I was not a Bill Clinton supporter that year, but I remember him coming into Assembly Hall and everyone's reaction, and I remember just thinking that there was something about the office and something about, you know, the structure of our democracy that I found myself responding to, despite the brainwashing I had received.

AH: What else happened?

BW: We got here a couple months after the big protest by the Latinx community about La Casa, when all those arrests were made. And I don't remember anything about that. I've only recently learned about that, for example.

WM: So didn't Jay Rosenstein make In Whose Honor? while we were students?

AH: I think so.

WM: And so that would have been one of the kinds of transformations that occurred. I mean, I watched that and I was like, "Oh, wow, OK. Yeah, we shouldn't be doing that." Yeah, so that was a big controversy on campus, certainly while we were students.

BW: The Oklahoma City bombing happened while we were undergrads. I don't remember if that was when you were in Scotland. I remember talking about it with colleagues at the Natural History Museum and just feeling like... And now, I mean, I can barely remember anything about it now because so many other horrible things have happened since, but it's kind of a major news thing that I remember.

WM: The government shutdown — I think they're... well, now we've had more. [laughter]

AH: Did either of you go to Quad Day?

BW: Yep. I feel like I maybe worked at it at least one year. But yeah, I remember going, I think freshman year right away, and just feeling like — there's more people on the Quad right now than there were in my hometown. Not exactly what it felt — it felt kind of like that. But it certainly was one of those experiences that reinforced me feeling like, yes, I made the right decision to come here, because I wanted to get to explore things and look at all this stuff. Things I'd never heard of, things I would never in a million years have dreamed up. And, it's got to be said — lots of people who aren't white. It was not my experience in my hometown. It felt sort of — whatever the academic and collegiate version of cosmopolitan is, it felt like that to me. I liked that.

WM: Yeah, I think it exactly confirmed the reasons that we came here. There's all of this stuff going on, all these people, all these interesting activities.

AH: Were either of you involved in any sororities on campus?

BW: No, there was one of eight of them across the street from our dorms, so you could hear the singing and chanting and stuff. It was the beginning of the school year, though.

AH: What are some of your most memorable experiences on campus?

BW: I remember — you came, this must have been senior year — you came to find me at the museum because a letter from one of the graduate programs I had applied to had come. And you brought it to me, and it was a rejection letter. And so you were with me when I opened it. And I'm sure I was crying. I cried pretty easily. We may have been with Professor Hibbard also; we walked with the letter... I might be conflating experiences, but you were with me when I got that piece of bad news. And it all worked out for the best. I'm very happy with where I went to graduate school, but yeah.

AH: Do you remember graduation?

BW: A little bit.

WM: I mean, so now I plan the convocation ceremony for the history department. And so it's troubling to me how little I remember.

BW: You work so hard to plan it!

WM: And I — what I remember — I remember someone throwing up.

BW: Yep.

WM: In the row in front of me. We were in Foellinger.

BW: Yeah, it was like LAS honors, [unintelligible] or something. Poor young woman.

AH: Oh no.

BW: Horrible. But everybody kept their cool, and like, someone just put some papers down and we all kind of stepped gingerly and, you know.

WM: But I don't remember, you know, who spoke or —

BW: Nope — any of that.

WM: Dean Delia.

BW: Probably.

WM: Yeah, Dean Delia. He was everywhere.

BW: Everywhere you want to be. Yeah. I don't remember. Yeah, it really does blur together for me a lot into composites of many good times spent at Espresso Royale, many happy rehearsals in the basement of Krannert — but I don't... specifics are... and I wonder if I would remember more specifics had I not spent so much time on campus subsequently, because I've, you know, I came back for grad school and have never left. So I'm wondering if that's kind of made it blur.

WM: Yeah, nothing else is springing to mind

AH: So you talked about going to the libraries to study — was there anywhere else that you studied, or any sort of notable study experiences and education experiences that you have?

BW: It's ironic to me in retrospect that I came here because I didn't know what I wanted to do, and I loved the options, and I ended up being a history major for European history, which you can do literally at any university or college in the United States, probably. I did love — like, I ended up taking some architecture history classes because a friend from high school who also came here had taken one. I think he ended up being in architecture; he was more focused on that kind of thing, but he was telling me how great it was. And so I took it. And that totally changed my life. I wrote my thesis in my master's degree program on that. And it's been an interest of mine ever since. So that absolutely changed the way I see the world. Sorry, I wasn't [unintelligible] about it. You can tell the advisor if you want to.

WM: I was also thinking about how the general education requirements pushed me outside of my comfort zone and really led to some serious transformation in how I viewed the world. And, you know, reading third world literature in English — the post-colonial period — in that class, I was really challenged on some of my assumptions, and frankly some of my racist — the racism I had absorbed in our culture — and it made a huge difference in my life. And, so I, you know — and this is part of why I do what I do now — is I really believe that this kind of university experience can help transform young

people, like it did for me, into people who need to function in a democracy and be able to empathize with other people and examine evidence, you know, re-evaluate their own assumptions about things, and listen to the stories of people from different backgrounds.

BW: And just that — it wasn't pretty buried back in our day, but to open the course catalog, and it was huge, and there were just so many things in it, you know — and that really — Yeah, yeah, I mean, it really was like Christmas for nerdy kids. And it was all these courses that — there were so many of them that were interesting, and narrowing down to just five or six a semester just five or six was so hard.

WM: Which is still the case for history majors. That's just a big challenge. There's so many things they're interested in.

BW: And I remember by my senior year, I had basically finished up what I needed to do for the major, but then I was like, "What else can I do?" — everything and anything. And it was so — it was so fun. And, you know, even now when I talk to undergrads and they talk about the classes they're taking, I'm like, "Oh, I need to go back to school!" It's just such a rich experience. It's great.

AH: What was the class registration like?

BW: I think we remember slightly different things, but what I remember is that you filled out a scantron form, so like the little, filling in pencil, and you took that somewhere and dropped it off. But because we were in the honors program, we got to put — ours got processed first for like our year. So we got an advanced crack at classes, which was great. But then this was still in the days of the infamous stand in line at the Armory at huge tables. What I remember is that that was — if you needed to add or drop or change or whatever, like actually once the semester had begun. I don't remember doing that to actually sign up in the first place. And then computerized stuff — like actually logging on yourself and doing things — came in while we were here. So I remember doing that again in the attic of the honor's house in the little computer lab up there.

WM: Beth has a much better memory than I do. I mean, I have a memory of standing in line in the Armory in the hot, hot, sweltering — it's so hot. And you know, there's some staff person at the front of the table, and each discipline, I think, had a table. It must have been the worst job. So I had assumed until we just talked about it this week that that was registering for classes. I believe, Beth, that it was something else. But I do remember standing in the Armory in the hot.

BW: And I still dislike the Armory, and I think that's why. So whenever I have to go over there, I'm like, "Ugh."

WM: It's a space aversion.

BW: Yeah. Yeah. It's not the fault of the Armory at all. It's not its fault that it was 97 degrees every time you got to register for a class.

AH: It's not exactly the most intuitive floor plan either.

BW: It isn't.

AH: Could you tell me about what you remember from your favorite classes?

BW: Actually, I feel like that's blurred together too. I remember professors pretty well, I think — like we mentioned Professor Hibbard, and then I had — he's not here anymore either — a professor named Robert Ousterhout in architecture, who I thought was fantastic and fascinating.

WM: I took him too, right?

BW: I don't remember.

WM: Is that art history or architecture?

BW: Architecture History. Pretty.

WM: I remember an honors class I took on Shakespeare that I really enjoyed. I got to do the Beatrice and Benedick scene from *Much Ado About Nothing* where she [unintelligible]. Also, you know, they would — maybe that honors program still does this, but the professor had us over to his house for dinner.

BW: That was fun. I had a — you were mentioning Professor Winton U. Solberg earlier — I had him for a class in the honors program. It was about the history of the university in the United States, which was really interesting. But there were four of us in that class, and that was definitely the smallest class I had. So, when people complain about class sizes at large state universities, I'm like, "uh-uh." But it was terrifying to be in that kind of setting with him because he knows everything. The readings were like, here are five books — pick 100 pages to read every week, or whatever. So you could not rely on someone else having read the same thing you had read to help get discussion going. So he'd ask you what you read, and you would tell him. And he'd say, "What do you think of that argument laid out by so-and-so?" Which, of course, he knew that person and edited the book or whatever. It was extremely scary. And he had us go to the archives to do research for that class, which was also a really great experience to dig in. As a sophomore, to be encouraged to go to the archives and be like, this is a resource you can use. This is not just for faculty. This is for you. It was really fun. I got to do research on — actually, I don't remember what I did. But I do remember is that because I had that experience, the next year, my choir was having its 100th birthday. And so they wanted to do a little like display of photos of the history and I was like, "I'll do it! Because I had been to the archives and I knew where to look for things," and it was really fun. But yeah, there were some — I, you know, I had nothing but good things to say about my professors here too. Yeah, people who complain about professors who don't want to teach and whatever — I'm sure that does happen, but that was not my experience at all. And given that I took eight full semesters plus some summer classes, I feel like the odds are high that other people also have pretty good. And I had great grad students too. The times that I had discussion sections or labs or even someone running a course — they were great.

WM: Yeah. I also, when I studied abroad — your stories about Professor Solberg reminded me of those classes. I just took three classes the whole year long. European History — actually, Europe I, Europe II, and Scottish History. And it was a lecture-tutorial model. So you have the lecture and then you'd be in like a 10-person tutorial. And the way they did assignments too was like, here's 30 books. You know, and so for the tutorial, it would just be a question — you know, was the Reformation a crisis of belief or authority? And then you'd go through the readings to try to come up with some sources around that question.

WM: Yeah, I loved that. I actually really loved that way of teaching it.

AH: Do any topics that you studied stand out? Like — not necessarily class titles, but there are, you know, there's a theme between class titles and topic areas.

BW: A lot of them — I remember I got [to take] an honors program class on — I'm not sure this is what we would title this today, but ethnic minority immigrant literature in American literature. It's all these stories of people coming to the United States at different times. I loved that class, it was a fantastic class. A lot of my history classes stand out, like a history of medicine and science — a lot of these things that Professor Hibbard taught. The terrifying Habsburg class, which was not a good experience, but I remember it. I had some great anthropology classes, like a linguistics class, an ethnography class. There was a museum studies class, which for me has been key. The architecture history definitely stands out. Things like, you know, the classics — class that was on Greek tragedies. That was great fun because that was Professor Scanlon who was famous at the time, lived on campus. Yeah, all sorts of great stuff.

WM: I remember loving a class on Greek tragedies. I think it was a philosophy class. But the professor was — he just seemed like the stereotype of a — he had the patches, the patches. Yeah, and that course was — yeah, we were looking — we were reading, I think we were reading Greek Tragedies and Nietzsche or something.

BW: As one does.

WM: Yeah, I loved that class. I also took — I took a lot of art history, but was the architecture history, was that under the art history department?

BW: It was under architecture.

WM: So I think I must have taken some of both. And I took — I took some English classes. I thought I was going to be an English major because I love to read fiction. And in fact, that's kind of what I read for pleasure now, mostly. But somehow, the way English — sort of the theory of it and the way you write papers in English classes — wasn't as intuitive to me as the history papers were. But I took Renaissance literature and culture and loved that. And then, you know, got to go to Europe and try to see all that stuff in person, which actually then turned out to be kind of a tyranny.

BW: We were making a lot of jokes about the medieval spirituality blues. I don't remember what that meant, but I just remember the phrase.

WM: That was in my grade as well, and I'm also not quite sure what it meant, but I think there must have been some things about that class that were challenging.

BW: Yeah. Very medieval art and spirituality blues. Like that.

AH: So how did you both — after graduation, how did you both come back to campus?

BW: I went and did a graduate degree in Toronto and then moved back to — moved to the Chicagoland area. And sometimes on weekends would come down here to visit a friend I had met through you — through Wendy — because you can tell that to Suzanne — but, you know, when Wendy was working here, I occasionally came back to visit.

WM: I thought you were in Canada,

BW: Getting my years mixed up, but —

WM: Because you were in Canada two years, right?

BW: Yeah.

WM: So yeah, when I was in African Studies, you were in Canada.

BW: I was in Canada. Anyway, some friend that I had met through you, I would come down and visit because I hated the suburbs. I hated living out there and being here was such a great thing to do for me. And then I decided I was going to go do a library degree and I got into the iSchool here. I came back and have been here ever since.

WM: Yeah, so I went away. I got a BUNAC visa. I don't think this exists anymore — the British Universities North America Club. So if you've been a student within the last six months you could get an exchange visa in Britain, and someone, a student there would come here, and in six months you could work. So after I graduated I was in love with somebody I met in Scotland and so I went back and got a job there and I lived and worked there for — I think I also — I stayed there a little longer. I didn't work the whole time. And then I came back here and it didn't work out. So I just — I knew I wanted to go to grad school and I had like a year before that started. So I got a job at the Center for African Studies as a Secretary III, they called it that — which was also an amazing experience. I loved the professors and staff and grad students in African Studies. It was such a fun year. I was just remembering — like back then they used to do this big African music festival. Remember that?

BW: No.

WM: It was amazing. They put on — it was like a big like street festival of African musicians. But yeah, great. It was a great time. And then I went to seminary. I went to a Presbyterian seminary and became a Presbyterian minister and worked in the Chicago area for most of my adult life. And then I was ready for a career change and my partner — I met him here as well. He's an alum. I should have mentioned that. Oh yeah. And he really — he's from this area and he really like — he didn't, he didn't like living in Chicago very much. There's a lot about driving in the city and living in the city that he did not enjoy. So we were both kind of ready for a change and we decided to move back here because we really liked it here. I wanted to be with Beth and some of our other friends — a lot of friends here, and family. Both of our families are from Central Illinois. So we made our way back here, and when we came back, he was working for a startup remotely, so we could have gone anywhere and we chose to be here. We thought about some other great options. I was imagining myself living in the Pacific Northwest and kayaking in the ocean every day, going to the temperate rainforest. But anyway, we decided — friends and family. Friends and family.

And when we moved here, we both thought — there was a job in his department. He was in electrical engineering. We thought if that job ever came open, I think I would apply for that. And I thought — you know, I was remembering my advisor, our advisor, Sharon Michalove. And I thought, well, if that job ever came open, I would apply for that. And now we're both in those jobs in the department we graduated from.

AH: That's awesome. How did you — so backing up a little bit — how did you meet your partner here?

WM: We met through a mutual friend. I believe it was outside the Jerusalem Cafe when we first laid eyes on each other. And he's younger than I am, just a little bit. And so we became friends and we were kind of in some of the same circles and we were really good friends for years and years. And it wasn't until, I don't know, five or six years after we met that we started dating. While I was in seminary, I spent a year as an international volunteer in the Middle East. And then the Second Intifada started, and I was evacuated. That's another story. And so while I was finishing up that year, we started dating.

AH: And could you both talk a little bit about your current roles on campus? I know that Wendy, you're the advisor, and you are at —

BW: I'm at the Spurlock, yeah. I came in 2000 as a grad student in the Library and Information Sciences program and had a fellowship at the museum. The director there at the time had been my boss when I worked at the Natural History Museum in undergrad. And there were only like four or five years in between those two things, but it seems like longer. So I came on there as a grad student and then I've been able to stay on. But I work in education and publications and exhibit development and marketing and a bunch of stuff that's both fun behind the scenes, but also with the public.

WM: So I'm the academic advisor in the history department. So I work with all the history majors and minors and help them meet their academic goals and also pre-professional goals — helping them identify coursework that they might want to do or experiences they might want to pursue, or other resources on campus that would help them in their student development.

BW: And we have put our connections to use on the students a couple times.

WM: Absolutely.

BW: So she'd say, like, "Does [the] Museum have any volunteer positions open?" Or I would say, "Are there any history majors who might want to do blah, blah, blah, blah?" History and Spurlock have actually not worked together a whole lot, which is kind of strange, really, but we decided, "OK, we can do something about that. It seems like a mutually beneficial fit for the people we serve and the kind of roles we play on campus."

WM: Yeah, so now lots of my students are over there all the time.

BW: So this morning, there was a student working in my office, and she is one of Wendy's majors.

WM: Yeah, it's been great. And also, Beth and her colleagues have been willing to do some sort of career guidance with my students that are interested in museums as a profession.

BW: That's really important to be able to connect students with people who do something that they're interested in learning more about. I had a little bit of that as an undergrad, but not a ton, and I think it would have been valuable. So it's nice to be able to do that for people. And they always ask questions that make you reflect in a different way about what you do and why you do it and why it matters to you and why you feel it matters in general. It's heartwarming, but it's also a nice piece of professional reflection, I think. We have good students.

WM: We have great students.

AH: And — let's see, what I was on...

BW: We also — we should just add, we share a student worker. Informally, I always hire graphic design students to do publications and exhibit design at the museum. And Wendy was saying this — she's like, "Oh, you really need some graphic design help." And I was like, well —

WM: And she's amazing.

BW: She is. She graduates in May. We're both — we're both

WM: Having separation anxiety.

BW: She's at a career festival today in Chicago, hopefully getting nabbed up by some good design firm.

WM: Yes. It's very exciting.

AH: How has campus changed since you were a student?

BW: I'll say two things. One is just the buildings. And — so Spurlock hosts a lot of the admissions information sessions for prospective students and admitted students. And so sometimes when I'm just kind of in the museum lobby or whatever, I chat with parents — some of whom are alums, of course, and they're like, "I can't believe this has changed." And sometimes I don't notice it because I'm, you know — we're here all the time. But it really is quite breathtaking to me to think about all the things that have popped up — not because they're all architectural masterpieces or anything, but just because it is — I think it's great that the university is still able to invest in infrastructure about important things — about research, about serving students, about serving the quest for knowledge of humankind, you know, even in terrible budget years and horrible political situations and things like that.

I was thinking while Wendy was talking earlier just about who my professors were, and I feel like I see a much more diverse faculty body here. I'm sure it has something to do with the classes I took, right? If I had been in engineering, I would have had a lot more professors from a lot more different countries, I think. And I had some. But most of my professors were White, and I think most of them — a slight majority of them were men, probably. I'd have to sit down and make a list.

But I feel like I look around campus or I go to a department website because I want to know if there's someone who can maybe help advise the museum about something or other. And — I know the world is here. And that is so inspiring to me. And I think I hope that students see that too and feel connected to it and feel that they recognize diversity in who they think is an expert and who they think is a researcher and who they think does work that matters. I think that that's much better now than it — I don't think it was awful when we were in undergrad necessarily. I probably didn't think about it very much, but I'm very impressed by that. And at the administrative level to some extent too here, that's pretty great.

WM: I completely agree. I've been thinking a lot about — this isn't necessarily a change at the university — well, it's a broader change that was reflected in my experience at the university, which is just how we communicate with each other. And I think, you know, in the same way that we were here when course registration came online and email — kind of email and the web were born while we were here too, right?

BW: I mean, we got email addresses when we became students here, but we —

WM: We didn't have email addresses before that.

BW: Not as high school students, no. But we got them as college [students].

WM: So I don't know when you guys started giving email addresses to students.

BW: It was fairly early.

AH: Yeah, my assumption would be sometime in the early '90s. But I don't know exactly when.

WM: I think we went back in the first few years.

BW: First few years of that.

WM: And so at the same time, we were still writing letters, and we were still handwriting notes to each other. And that was how a lot of communication happened. And it's such a huge shift now — a huge cultural shift, and a huge shift for historical sources. But that's no longer how people communicate. Yeah, so I think that's a big shift. I also have noticed a huge difference in downtown Urbana and downtown Champaign. A lot more diversity there as well.

I mean, Café Kopi was there when we were in undergrad. We went over there sometimes, but there were not that many students in downtown Champaign — we'd go over there and feel all cool and special — because we knew where it was. Downtown Urbana, I only remember the [unintelligible] really from college,

WM: There was that bar called The Office.

BW: Oh yeah, yeah.

WM: But yeah, I know — you're right, town has — it's a lot more micro-urban than it was in the '90s.

BW: I think some of that — I don't [know] — you came from a much bigger place overall to here, and I came from a much smaller place. So Champaign-Urbana has always seemed big and interesting to me because it was —

WM: I mean, I came from a very provincial place, but we went into the city a lot.

BW: Right. Yeah.

AH: I would say even — so I graduated in 2015 as undergrad. And even since then, I feel like there have been a lot of changes that make it feel more — to use your word — like micro-urban, with apartment complexes and things that are going up in town that just weren't there when I was here. And so next question — if you were giving advice to an incoming freshman at UIUC, what would it be?

BW: You do that every day.

WM: I do that every day. One of the things I say is — the reason you're here is because it's a great university with so many opportunities, right? That's why we both come here. So, it's a huge community, and you need to find a handful of smaller communities within this larger community where you belong and where people know you and you feel some sense of, you know, being a person known by name and that kind of thing. And I reassure them that the history department will be one of those smaller communities, and Phi Alpha Theta, the history undergrad honor society, will be one of those places. But they need to think about a couple other ways that they're going to take initiative — and you kind of have to do that here because it's so huge — that you need to think about where are you going to take some initiative and try to create these other smaller communities within the large community.

BW: I don't get the opportunity to talk to incoming students very much, but I talk with the undergrads who work in the museum quite a bit. There's like 50 of them. I try to encourage them to just try things, because there's so much to try. Like, does that sound interesting? Go to a meeting, or however things are organized, or how students do things. Or let's say you finished your homework and you want to do

something in the evening. There's so much to do, and most of it's free. It is just staggering. I mean, I say that to people in town too when I meet people who are new to town, whether or not they work on campus. There's so much to do here, and most of it's pretty convenient and pretty affordable. And it's kind of — you know, like Saturday I was thinking, like, there's a political resistance art and food fair with performances, there's a kind of lecture-performance on Azerbaijani music, and the Mark Morris Dance Troupe from New York City is here, and there's a Russian Choral Festival, and like — those are just sort of like cultural artsy things that I happen to know about. And that's just —

WM: There's Engineering Open House.

BW: And Engineering Open House. Where you can go see cutting-edge something that I don't remotely understand, and teeny-weeny, and giant, and I'll just, you know — there's so much to do here. It's great. Do you feel you meet a lot of students who need to be reminded that they should look for some smaller communities? Can you find some? Do people come into you kind of going, "I'm overwhelmed by how big this is?"

WM: Yeah, I think sometimes — and I think especially transfer students. There's not as many ways that that automatically happens for transfer students. I guess I'm also, when I tell them that, I'm also trying to reassure them.

BW: Yeah. You know, it's possible to find these things.

WM: Yeah, exactly.

BW: I mean, we had fairly different freshman year experiences, I think, certainly before we met one another. But my freshman year, I was in a different dorm. I liked my roommate a lot, and I made a couple good friends on the dorm floor, one of whom I'm still good friends with. But overall, I did not feel like I had met my people. I was like, "College is supposed to be kind of better than this." And academically, it was fine. But socially, I was like, "Meh." And then one day — I made friends in my choir, and my choir went on a road trip over Christmas break, and that was really fun. So I bonded with like those 50 other women who were singers and stuff like that. But the first semester I just remember feeling like it didn't feel like it was too big, but I certainly felt like I had not identified my parts of what this campus was about.

WM: So the other thing I often say is that that's totally normal. And that so many students come in with the expectation that immediately it's going to be like some sort of movie where —

BW: Yeah, because that's how it is on TV. It's not what you get.

WM: For the vast majority of students, there is an awkward period that feels too long where you are trying to find your people.

BW: And like my best friend from home had clicked with her kind of dorm quad right away and stuff like that. Not everybody I knew from high school had gone to a college where they got an email address, and if you didn't have a long distance plan in your dorm room, it was hard to stay in touch. You had to write letters and call. My parents were great at calling, and they did have email since they worked at the university, but I felt fairly removed, and I enjoyed seeing my friends from high school who had come to school here as well. Yeah, it took a while. And I kind of wonder if I had come in with a major, would I have felt that same way? I don't know. I don't know. That would not have fixed — like, I don't love everyone on my dorm floor. It might have narrowed some of the circles a little bit faster, but I'll never

know. It's funny to think about that. I don't think about that semester very much at all anymore, but it was not great.

WM: There's a student — a history student who — the LAS has made this video now for admitted students, and they have students giving advice about like, what do you recommend? And so one of the history students — and just when I watched it this morning, I sort of got teary when she was talking about, "You have to remember that you're doing this for you. And even if your parents are telling you one thing, and your friends are telling you something else, you have to stay true to what you are here to do, and what you want to study." And I was like, "Oh!" That's a really hard come-by deep knowledge for a lot of students who are facing these kinds of pressures — from their parents who are super anxious about their financial success, and from their friends who are like, "What are you going to do with that?" And so I think especially for humanities majors, they have to come up with some kind of internal resilience to deal with that pressure. And then to watch them do it, it's like — yes, it's so great. And that will serve them well in so many other situations that they'll have to deal with in their lives.

AH: I think even for myself, that's a huge part of the transformation that you're talking about that happens in college for most people — that getting that resilience.

WM: Absolutely. Do you want to talk about this?

BW: Sure. Yeah.

WM: Yeah. So one of the other interesting things about our — the RSO — we didn't call it that then. But the organization I was in was InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, which is an evangelical Christian fellowship. And so I was very religious at that time. And I think I developed, you know, spiritually in college, and when I studied abroad, I think it kind of allowed me to really wrestle with — I guess, the meaning of life, which I have always wrestled with every day — but really challenging what I think had become kind of a rigid way of thinking about that. I had tried to embrace some ways of viewing myself and the world and the divine that really ended up not being a good fit for me. And studying abroad, I think kind of broke that open and I was able to explore some other ways of doing things while I was there.

But I also think that Beth, and then now my partner, who do not share my religious identity or views, and yet I've had just the most life-giving relationships with them — has also been a really important part of my own development as a person. And I think the skills that — I don't know if skills is the right word, but like having relationships with people who — even with whom — obviously, we share so many values and interests, and I mean, I think we've kind of realized in that class that we're kind of kindred spirits.

BW: Yeah, absolutely.

WM: And yet there's kind of some of these core beliefs that we don't share. But being able to maintain relationships with people who have really serious differences of conviction is such a gift and so important. And I think a great skill to have. And I also think it keeps me kind of honest/humble, right? Because if you're only surrounding yourself with people who share your assumptions, it's easy to get, I don't know what — [unintelligible] about your assumptions. I don't know, is there anything else?

BW: I think literally the day that we met, you were wearing a pink InterVarsity Christian Fellowship sweatshirt, and I had come to — I had been actually raised in the same denomination, Wendy, but had a very different experience, and I think our conversations were fairly different, I gather. But I was an atheist by the time I came to college and was very happy not to feel — my parents didn't really pressure

me to go to church, but it was clear I was probably going to have to kick up a stink, and I'm not a stinky kicker-up. So I was thrilled not to be going to church anymore because it wasn't for me.

And then when I met Wendy, clearly I was going to have to adjust my concept of what a Christian with firmly, deeply held beliefs was like. But it was so clear to me right away that you thought about everything so much. And the sort of — what — like significantly Christian people that I knew — like people who kind of were more than just like, "Oh, we go on Sundays or whatever" — were not like that — that I was aware of, granted, I was a kid — but, you know, you stretched vastly my understanding of what a person of conviction, a religious conviction, can be.

WM: Well, likewise — I think one of the things that was not a good fit for me was, I think, a lot of Christians view people who aren't Christians in a way that didn't seem appropriate for someone. And that seemed like totally wrong to me.

BW: I never felt judged by you, and I remember someone from my hometown asking me about that. I was like, no, I don't think she — I mean, if she judges me, it doesn't get in the way of our friendship. We all judge one another, right?

WM: There was a deep respect underlying everything.

BW: And when you — I would completely concur about — when you came back from Scotland, you were not a different person, but you had clearly let go of some stuff that also had clearly been troubling you. Like, I remember you wrestling with things like, "It doesn't seem right to me to treat people this way, but yet that's what I've been told," or whatever it may happen to be. But you came back quite a — quite a — like, it [had] cracked open.

WM: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, and so I also tell freshmen to think about studying abroad. Some need it more than others, probably.

BW: Like, you know, Wendy is a person who was photographed by the Chicago Tribune standing up for voter rights in the city with her clerical collar on, being like, "You're not going to mess with the civil rights of people in my area." You stand up for social justice and have done so in your professional career. And I'm not sure that's the person I met.

WM: Yeah.

BW: As a freshman but clearly the person I met...

WM: Well, and this is the question, right? As we were trying to tell this story, like — we were texting last night, I was showing her some letters I found that were ridiculous. And I texted back, "Who even were we?" And this question of identity, you know, is a — I don't know what that is — that's a, I don't know, philosophical question. You know, who were we? What is the essence of our identity? You know, when I was a, you know, whatever — kind of politically conservative student from the suburbs coming here — what about my core? And now, you know, my worldview is almost —

BW: Totally different.

WM: Totally different. Although I think I was a proto-feminist even. But there were a few other consciousness-raising I needed and still need, I'm sure. Yeah, what is it? Who were we?

BW: Who even were we? But then sometimes I see the photos, and I'm like, "I recognize those women."

WM: Well, and I was showing my daughter the pictures, and she's like — my daughter calls her Frauntie Beth which is a friend-auntie. She's like, "Oh yeah, she can see that it's us." But if she was asking me — I have a box called Nostalgia. So I was going through that last night, and my daughter was like, "What is nostalgia?" And I was trying to explain it to her, and she said, "Well, can I have nostalgia?" I was like, "No, you're too young." But then she started to think, well, what were the things she was going to put in her box, right? That would be, you know, that would typify who she was — who she is right now, you know? But I think, yeah, there are certainly underlying personality traits and the kind of energy that we have and the things we're interested in that have been with us this whole time.

BW: I remember you — what year was it that you got ordained? When was that?

WM: 2003-ish?

BW: I don't remember what that event is called, but I was there. And that meant so much to me to be a part of this thing in her life that it does not resonate with me as an individual, but it does because it's so important to my best friend. And I would not have missed that for the world, even though I don't understand it.

WM: So in my tradition, I became a Presbyterian minister. You have to invite an ecumenical representative to be on the commission, your ordination commission. So like an Episcopalian or a Lutheran — but I remember thinking about you in that way. And the reason — I acquired that, is the idea is they want you to have relationships outside of your own, you know, birds-of-a-feather type of situation. So that meant — that meant a lot to me, too. Yeah. And, yeah, I — Who even are we?

BW: Who? I don't know.

WM: But, but I think — clearly, being in this place at that time was a hugely important and transformative context for the values that we share around education, around public access to education. I mean, we've now committed our professional lives to that mission.

BW: And thinking how to take care of the records of humanity and how can we learn from those and make the world a better place based on what the world has already tried.

WM: And how do we invite people to engage with historical sources in a way that lead them to think critically about the world that they're in and can affect right now.

BW: Is Professor Hibbard still alive?

WM: Yes, she's living in Maine. We should write her a letter.

BW: If this goes online, we can be like, "Hey, you should listen to this."

WM: And actually, I would love to know what her narrative of that tornado dinner would be — what she remembers about it. Yeah. Also, our apartment was —

BW: Bland.

WM: Bland, except for all of the Renaissance painting postcards we had stuck to every surface. Yeah. Oh, another thing I found in my nostalgia box was a notebook, and I had all of these — it was an interesting document. It had lists of like places I visited in Europe, and like all the things, money I spent

there. But in the back it had — it must have been lists for our apartment — like things I wanted to bring to the apartment. Answering machine, poster putty, like all of these. But like, I remember we needed lots of poster putty for our postcards up around the apartment.

BW: It's a sad little apartment. The pigeons.

WM: Oh, the pigeons were terrible. What a biohazard. Lots of waste. We had a hibachi grill out there that we should not [have] used. Did we use it?

BW: Yes.

WM: We shouldn't have used it.

BW: We did. Where are you going to grill in the apartment if not on your little sad deck?

WM: One of the things you said in your letter was, "I was having coffee out on the veranda," and then in parentheses it was like, "I know it's just a stack of rotting wood, but I like to think of it as a veranda." You're going to have to edit this.

AH: It's okay.

WM: Is there anything else you wanted to talk about? So I was also going to ask you, how do you think you changed in college?

BW: Oh, um — when I think about myself changing, I think of actually the next two years after college when I went to Canada to study. So again, the study abroad experience I think was helpful. So I suspect I became less shy throughout college. I feel like I was much more shy sort of in high school than I am now. But like if you told high school me that part of my job would be giving presentations to a room full of sixth graders, I would have never believed you, but I do it now all the time and I'm like, "Oh, that's fun." I'm not sure that I did change very much in college, but I think right after.

WM: So you don't feel like your worldview changed very much? I mean, I guess you grew up with professors. I mean, is that the difference?

BW: I think that might be some of the difference. One thing that certainly changed for me coming here — this would have happened some other places, but not, you know, like if I had gone to St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota, I don't think this would have changed for me. I really began to understand much better that there are people who are not White, and there are — that they are diverse within themselves, not only just not white. And I have this — this is a ridiculous memory, but a ridiculous thought to have had — but I remember getting on a bus, like the 22 or whatever, to go to class, and there were several African-American students on the bus, and then another African-American student got on the bus and didn't sit with them, and like did not appear to know them. And I was like, "Oh, not all the black people here know each other." Because in my hometown, they did, because we all knew each other, but also because I think there were certain communities that were very tight in the small, mostly white town.

But that was, you know, that was one of those moments of like, "Oh, I've come from a small, sheltered, in many ways sheltered place." You know, so there were things about who exists in the world — I became a lot — I got a better sense of that here. And that is one of those things college is supposed to be about. And that's one of the things both of our units that we work for are trying to do. That was definitely part of college for me.

WM: Me too.

AH: So then a question that I have that I didn't actually put on here that I just thought of — is what — what sort of life advice would you give someone who's about to graduate from undergrad?

BW: That is something I get to talk with students about fairly often. And I always — if they want advice from me, what I tell them is, "Don't feel like you have to have it figured out anytime soon or possibly ever." And everyone's asking you what you're going to do next and whatever. It was hard not to have an answer to that, but you don't need to have an answer to that. You'll probably be happier if you don't try to push yourself into a path. Continue to try, and continue to resist thinking that once you set off on a path that that's where you have to stay.

WM: Yeah, I feel like so often when we're at those kind of big transition points, it feels like the stakes are super high with the decision we're making. If I choose this college or this college, if I choose this grad program or not, you know. And there's a sense in which that's true. But I also think that it may shape your life even more — the choices that you make every day, every moment, about how you're living and the things you're doing with your time and energy. And I guess I want to sort of say, you know, to take a little bit of anxiety and energy away from those — what feel like those huge high-stakes decisions — and say, it's also just really important how you're living every day.

BW: Yeah, the emails you choose to send to your friends will shape your life more than — probably more than whatever first job you decide.

WM: And also that — especially in our fields, you know, people will likely have — well, I guess you have had the same job for a long time, but a lot of people end up having lots of different paths. Which I guess my message there too is also to kind of, you know — it's not — things are — things, most things are not permanent. And I think sometimes we start to believe a lie that the situation we're in is permanent. And that's also what makes the stakes feel so high. Like, if I choose this thing, that's the thing forever. And that's, you know, for most of us, most of the time, that's not that true. I guess — you have to figure out what your values are. Everyone has to figure that out. And so I, in the last few years, through a really intentional process with my partner, we sat down and we made lists of what's important to us. What do we want in our lives? And this is kind of how we came here. We wanted to be with friends and family. We wanted to be in a culturally and intellectually interesting community. And we had some other values that we considered, like dramatic natural views.

BW: What do you call it — that — not subtle natural views.

WM: Yeah. Then here we have subtle natural views. There are also places with unsubtle natural views.

BW: Dramatic. Large bodies of water.

BW: That we do not have.

AH: All right, is there anything else that I did not ask you about that you want to cover?

BW: It's been interesting to try to isolate to college, because we've been friends for so long and unbreakingly in that. It's not like, "Oh, we lost touch for five, ten years" or whatever. And we've been constant friends since we met. So it's very hard to — it's like, "Oh, yeah, we did go to that place a lot." That did happen at that time, because it's a bit of a blur.

WM: It is. Absolutely. Absolutely. And I guess I hope that's true for [other] people — for students, you know — that you can find a couple people that will accompany you in your life and will know you through all sorts of strange transitions and experiences and highs and lows. And that can help you make sense of it.

AH: All right, well, thank you both very much for being willing to be interviewed.

WM: Thank you for asking us. It's been really fun to reflect.

BW: Of course. I've told people that we're doing this, and they're like, "Of course you are."