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Interview with Bill Lemman (2019)

Bill Lemman
Clarence Hein

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Clarence Hein: With us this morning is Bill Lemman, who has played several interesting roles in the history of Portland State over time. I think beginning in Vanport, the very first class, back in what... ’46? 1946.

BL: Yes.

CH: I’d like you to go back there and give us a brief summary of what the atmosphere was in this school that basically was a continuation center, maybe the first two years sort of an early community college type place, in Vanport, Portland, which was a site of housing for people who working in the shipyards during World War II. What was the campus like, and the students, most of whom were fresh out of World War II?

BL: That’s what it was like! [laughing] Of course, as you suggest, the Vanport city was indeed a city. I think there were some twenty-five thousand or so people there. So there were grocery stores, and a bank, and a barber shop, and other kinds of commercial facilities that one would expect in a community of that size. So when the shipyard closed, or shipyards plural closed, and people began to leave, those businesses went out of business, so to speak, and became just empty buildings. When the college started, in the summer of ’46—I was not there at that point, but there were a few hundred people there—they just started by putting regular college desks and desk chairs in those rooms, in various places, and of course some minor remodeling was done to make them habitable and make rooms out of areas that were in previously a large grocery store, for example. One of those became our library, and so on.

So all of these kind of strange buildings [chuckling] became the campus. The number... I have no idea what proportion of students lived there, but a number of them did, as well as a lot of faculty had apartments there. There was enough activity to make it feel a little bit like a campus. There were many student dances and other kinds of art exhibits and things of that nature that made it feel somewhat like a college. I had my freshman year at Texas A & M in 1942-43, before I went into the Marine Corps, so I’d had a “genuine” campus experience...
[laughing] although that was a man’s college in those days, and a military school, so we were all in uniform at that point. Anyway, it was quite different from that. On the other hand, everyone seemed to enjoy it, and we were all adults, even if we were only 19, or 20 or 21 at that point. It had a good feeling.

CH: And the key person in the establishment of that place over the next few years was a man named Stephen Epler.

BL: Yes.

CH: I know you worked with him quite often and became very close with him; can you talk a little bit about his role in Portland State?

BL: Well, it was his idea. He was a counselor at Southern Oregon State College, I guess it was, in those days. He had been discharged from the Navy; he had his doctorate from Columbia, so he was already well into the educational stream. As with my case, I could not get back into Texas A & M because my parents had moved to Oregon during the war, and we were no longer residents. It’s the same here, you could only get into one of the public institutions if you were an Oregon resident, or had been.

CH: Before the advent of out-of-state tuition, obviously. [laughing]

BL: Correct. And so the dorms and the housing available on those campuses immediately filled because of all the returning vets, who had—some had had no college, some had, like me, had one or two or three years. Steve’s idea was to bring the college to the housing, rather than to try to build housing on the existing campuses, because there were all of those empty apartment buildings. How he discovered that, I don’t know, I don’t recall. But he persuaded the then Dean of the General Extension Division [of the Oregon State System of Higher Education], John Francis Cramer, to go ahead with that experiment, and he started hiring back in the summer of 1946 and opened it up. A large number of the faculty were also returning vets. For example, my mentor and accounting prof was Don Parker. He had graduated from Linfield and then gone on to get a master’s degree at Northwestern before he went into the Navy, so when he came out he already had his second degree. So there were a number of folks like that who were recruited as faculty members. And some older folks that were hired from other institutions.

So it was, in a sense, a community college, but without the technical and vocational kind of courses—just strictly university-level courses, all from catalogs of mostly Oregon, Oregon State, and Western [Oregon] for the education courses.
CH: So the campus was there for just about two years when the dikes on the Columbia River gave way...

BL: Actually, they weren’t dikes. They were levees.

CH: Aha.

BL: That was part of the problem, because...

CH: I see.

BL: People thought that they were dikes, but they were just a railroad levee, and not built as a dike, to withhold water from the Columbia at a flood stage.

CH: I do recall, though, that the proper authorities, whoever they were...

BL: Oh yes.

CH: ...said “Don’t worry about this... “

BL: “Don’t worry. It’ll hold.” [laughing]

CH: Apparently not!

BL: Apparently not.

CH: But you didn’t live on the campus...

BL: No.

CH: You went there after the flood? There must have been a tremendous cleanup effort that went on.

BL: We, I mean the campus community, was really 60% or more convinced that there would be a dike break, or a levee break, and so I among many others started helping haul library books and records and things like that off campus...

CH: Before the flood.

BL: Before the flood. That didn’t happen to people who lived there. They stayed. One of my favorite stories was that Philip Putnam, who was the assistant director under Steve Epler, had been working on his dissertation. And the flood came, and he got washed out, and he remembered that his dissertation was on his desk on the second floor. He found a rowboat and rowed up to the window
on the second floor, got in, got his dissertation draft and all of his papers he was working on, and rowed back out! It was that kind of a situation! [laughing] And then, of course, it was strange to see up on Interstate Avenue, tables like this stretched out for two or three blocks in the middle of the street with food and clothing... and there’s my favorite literature professor, Ella Litchfield, pawing through a bunch of old clothes, trying to find something to wear because she had been living there and it was gone! So it was really weird in that respect.

CH: So 1948 was the year that the campus got wiped out, but oddly enough that was the same year that the legislature decided to make this a permanent school—not a college, but a permanent lower-division school—

BL: Correct.

CH: Thanks largely to the efforts of a student, John Hawkinson.

BL: Yes.

CH: Can you talk about John?

BL: I knew him, not well, but I knew him a lot later as an alum. And he became president of Clackamas Community College, among other things. He was just like many of the rest of us, who thought (and knew) that this was the largest metropolitan area in the country without a public four-year college. Those of us who didn’t have the wherewithal or the G.I. Bill to help us through the financial part of it couldn’t go to a private school, or, perhaps, even move to go to one of the other institutions. So there was a large number of students and faculty and other community members, parents, who wanted to make it permanent, but John was bright enough, and thoughtful enough and skillful enough to actually draft a bill and sell it to some local legislative folks who would sponsor the legislation.

CH: And it passed?

BL: And it passed.

CH: Then the campus moved around a bit, since it had been flooded out. I think they met at Grant High School that summer...

BL: That summer, in ’48.

CH: And back to the shipyards...

BL: The Oregon shipyard.
CH: And then in 1952, jumping ahead, you had gone back to University of Oregon to get your degree?

BL: 1948-49. Just one year left.

CH: Then you came to Portland to find your fortune...

BL: [laughs]

CH: And Steve Epler contacted you again to come back, is that right?

BL: Yes.

CH: How did that come about?

BL: I’m not exactly sure, but my guess is that my friend Don Parker, who was my—I was an accounting major at that point—probably responded to Steve... they were golfing buddies. Don and Steve played a lot of golf, along with two or three other faculty members. Steve knew that he needed an assistant business manager, just to help staffing in that area, as the college grew, and my guess is that he was talking to Don about “Do you know anybody,” etc. Steve made friends with students very easily and often took the initiative to introduce himself, so it wasn’t hard to get to know him at all. Anyway, he did call and ask if I would be interested in that, and I was, and we settled on that, and that’s how I got that position.

CH: One of the things that was interesting to me was that student records and all of that sort of thing were held by the University of Oregon.

BL: Yes.

CH: So, in essence, nothing really existed at Portland State except for the...

BL: Well, that’s historical, in that the General Extension Division, which by its name meant that it was extending educational opportunities off-campus, mainly in the Portland Extension Center which was a night program actually using Lincoln High School downtown...

CH: [laughing]

BL: And also correspondence courses and things of that sort. So in order to not have to have a registrar separate from an institution, back in the 1929 or ’30 era, started using University of Oregon to house the academic records of the
Extension Division. And of course Vanport Extension Center was part of the General Extension Division of the university system. So it made sense for them to have custody of the records, because they were experienced. We on the campus designed our own registration system and method of making cards for classes and grades and so on, and then we’d send them down to the University of Oregon for recording, so that you got a transcript just like a U of O student, except it said “General Extension Division” on it and listed the courses and grades and hours and so on.

CH: Explain how you guys figured out that you could get into Lincoln High School, of which the School Board at that point had said, “This building is not adequate for a high school, but I guess it’s adequate enough for a college...”?

BL: The Portland School District was the one that made that decision, and built the new Lincoln High School up by what was then Multnomah Stadium.

CH: Right.

BL: That’s still where they are.

CH: In 1952.

BL: We were looking for a more sophisticated and permanent location, I guess, than the clapboard buildings that were used for housing shipyard offices. I was not part of that discussion at all, but it didn’t take us long to adopt that phrase: “It was not good enough for a high school, so the Board of Education bought it for a college.” [laughing]

So we had that one square block, plus the tennis court across the street, and of course, “We didn’t need a tennis court,” said the Board, “we can sell that for sixty thousand dollars.” And they did, so the AAA building’s there now. [laughing] And it would take probably three million or so to buy it, I don’t know, maybe more than that.

CH: So that’s what was on that block, were the tennis courts.

BL: Yes.

CH: When you moved into Lincoln, at least it had the feeling of a place that was dedicated. So what was the feeling amongst staff, and students too I guess, about the future of this two-year school, basically, at that time?

BL: We were actually looking for other places. Among other locations would be where the Portland Community College is, what is now... Sylvania or whatever.
CH: Oh. Yes. The Sylvania campus.

BL: Yes. That was one of the locations we looked at, but it was too expensive, or too far away, or something; I’m not sure. We were all looking for ways to expand, to have additional facilities. The Board of Higher Education, the Chancellor’s Office actually, hired a man named Will Norris, who is a professor of Physics at the University of Oregon, I think he was chair of their campus planning committee. We asked him to come up for a couple of months and design a long-term campus plan, a long-range campus plan. And he did, and it consisted of Lincoln Hall, Lincoln High School, and then two or three blocks to the south, which is now where Cramer Hall, the student center [Smith Memorial Student Union], and Neuberger Hall [now Maseeh Hall] are. His design was to have four- or five-story buildings on each of those blocks, and then have a seven-story tower over the center half—if you take a quarter off of this, a quarter off of that, and a seven-story tower over that whole… over the student center part, and resting half on Cramer and half on Neuberger Hall. There are pictures of it—I don’t know if you have them around or not, but I’m sure we can get them if you’re...

CH: That would have been something!

BL: Yes. That was his… that would going to take care of three, four, five thousand students. That was the plan at that point.

0:20:50

CH: When did the lobbying for permanent four-year status, degree-granting… that was all in the early fifties, obviously?

BL: Oh, yes. Continuous.

CH: And that was going on at the same time?

BL: Exactly.

CH: Who were the standard-bearers in that? Was that Epler again, or Cramer?

BL: Mr. Cramer was the Dean of the Extension Division, and his instructions from the Chancellor’s office were not to push expansion. The Board was very reluctant, because I think they thought it would take resources and students away from, that would have otherwise gone to, the existing campuses, and that building a new campus would be expensive, etc. So that was never a foresight of anyone in that hierarchy. It was mostly Steve Epler and other administrators and
faculty, and students and parents. That just continued year by year until it happened.

CH: 1955, I guess the legislation actually said it shall be a city college with… it specifically prohibited housing. Is that… ?

BL: My memory is that the words are… that it was to be a… I don’t recall; I don’t think it said “urban.” I think it said “a downtown city college,” and “not of the campus type.” Those were code words for no residence halls and no dormitories.

CH: [laughing]

BL: That was expressly put in by the Chancellor’s Office to…

CH: No doubt, at the behest of [University of] Oregon and Oregon State, I assume.

BL: I can’t answer that.

[laughter from all]

CH: That’s all right.

BL: I have opinions about it, but I don’t know.

0:23:03

CH: Well, that was just after Cramer made his famous “accordion” speech? Could you tell us about the accordion speech?

BL: Well, the notion was that when he approved, when Dean Cramer approved the establishment of Vanport Extension Center, that was going to be temporary, and bringing overflow students to this housing project, and that when the overflow diminished, so would the campus. So he described it as being an accordion that expanded when the students were there, and then when the students started to disappear then the campus would close. That was his mental perception, and his strategic plan for the institution.

CH: And then it must have come as somewhat of a surprise when the four-year institution was authorized, that the first President was the “accordionist” himself, rather than Steve Epler! Even to this day, there are still people who resent that.

BL: Oh yes. I think that most everyone, if you put it that way, expected that. Steve had a doctorate degree in Education just like Jack Cramer did, and there
were no reasons... the expectation was that he would become the President, because he was the founder and he was the person who had guided the whole development of the institution. But Mr. Cramer decided that it wasn’t so bad after all, I guess, and that maybe this was a better future for a person with his background and experience. Of course, having been the person who directly reporting to the Board of Education and the Chancellor, he had the inside track. This was before Affirmative Action... [laughing] I don’t know anything about the actual decision-making process at that time, but that’s what happened. I think the inferences are pretty clear.

0:26:03

CH: So you were in the Business Office at Portland State for most of that time, right?

BL: Yes, ’50 to ’56, 1950 to ’56.

CH: And where did you go in ’56?

BL: I’d been asked by people in the Chancellor’s office if I would be interested in going to Oregon State. They had a vacancy in the Fiscal Office for the Ag Experiment station and the College of Agriculture. At that time, those two budgets were larger than Portland State’s! [laughing]

CH: Well, we didn’t have any farms.

BL: That’s correct. It had branch stations and all the other things. But anyway, it became an attractive thing for us and a step up for me, and we decided to take it. So I did that, and was there for three and a half years, until President Millar came down one day and talked to me about returning.

CH: How do you suppose that came about? Some friends of yours who were here... President Millar was looking for help, and they said, “Well, talk to Bill Lemman!”

BL: Again, I can’t get into their specific minds, but the business manager, Leslie Newhouse, he was the one who was business manager when I was hired in 1950 or shortly thereafter, maybe within six months. So he had been there all this time, and he had wanted to become a... he had wanted an opportunity to go to an embassy in the Caribbean for a year, as a business officer of some sort. He’d had that as a dream for a long while, and he had an opportunity presented to him for that in late ’55 or early ’56. So he asked President Millar for a leave of absence. Well, Bran Millar had just been there a few months, and he said, “I can’t come here and have my chief business officer leave for a year when I’m trying to learn all of what’s going on.” So Mr. Newhouse said, “OK, I quit.” So he did! [laughing] And he went to... I’ve forgotten where it was, one of the
Caribbean nations. So Bran [Millar] and Jack Swarthout, who was the Dean of Faculty, who also knew me because I’d been there before, came down to Oregon State and talked to me about taking that position. That was a no-brainer for me. [laughing]

CH: Out of the farms, and back to the city?

BL: There you go.

CH: So you came back in 1959, really at the beginning of Branford Millar’s presidency. And the next six or eight years were basically pivotal, really pivotal in the development of this institution. I’d like to go back and talk about Dr. Millar’s influence and some of the major changes that came about on campus during the early sixties; in fact, the whole decade of the sixties. It must have been exciting to come here...

BL: Oh, yeah, in those days, because we were growing ten, twelve, fifteen percent a year, and just struggling to find space, buying a house here and there or something, getting a quarter of a block building here and a quarter of a block building there, because again, the Board of Higher Education was not used to giving high priority to this institution. Bran agreed to hire Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill’s Portland office to do a long-range plan for the Portland State College... we weren’t thinking “University” at that point, we’d just become a college! And we did. That office had done the Air Force Academy out of their Chicago office, and we were able to get one of those people onto the Portland staff, and designed a campus plan which incorporated going west of the Park Blocks and having a series of walkways and so on through the Park Blocks. We created a model, a physical model for it, and that was photographed—I don’t know if you have that in your archives, but if not I think I have one somewhere—it was on the front page of the Oregon Journal, I think, at that time. Branford and I were standing looking at the model with an architect, and it said, “PSU plans for 20,000 students” at the top! And everybody was thinking, “Ha, ha, ha.” [laughter in the room]

CH: Well, for people who weren’t here during those years, and who have experienced trying to find rooms in Cramer Hall, the reason those floors all seem strange is that that building was built in at least four different pieces. So the third floor isn’t always the third floor, and the first floor isn’t always the basement, or vice versa! That’s the way this campus, the main campus, was developed.

BL: ... that’s correct. They were built in pieces. I think probably Neuberger Hall was the first building that was built in toto, but even the Smith Center was built in two stories, and then we added another two stories a couple of years later.
Those were built with the idea of those expansions at the time, so it wasn’t as if they were unplanned. On the other hand, it’s a lot more costly to do it that way.

0:33:32

CH: An exciting thing happened in the late sixties, probably beginning in the mid-sixties, and you played a key role in this—the Urban Renewal legislation, the federal Urban Renewal legislation which basically provided for the major expansion of this campus beyond these four blocks downtown.

BL: Yes. [opening a bottle of water]

CH: Once you have slaked your thirst, I’d like you to tell that story, because it’s very interesting, the way a small group here in Portland took advantage of that particular legislation in Portland State’s favor.

BL: I was engaged here with the Western and then National Association of College and University Business Offices, a professional organization, and I had gone to a seminar at Wayne State University in Detroit about urban renewal for colleges and universities. The background is that urban renewal up to that time was to be used to clear dilapidated (that was one of their terms) housing or areas and convert them to commercial or housing, but not for other purposes. A man named Julian Levy was an attorney for the University of Chicago; his brother later became president of the University of Chicago. Anyway, he was on the staff there, and the University of Chicago was trying to expand. They were landlocked, they were blocked in by tenement apartments and some other things that were not very good. And they didn’t have the power of eminent domain; they are a private institution. So they couldn’t just force people to sell. He and some others lobbied the Congress to amend the Urban Renewal Act to permit properties acquired in that manner to be sold to colleges, universities, and hospitals. That’s where I learned of that.

I have a fond memory of that, because it was in a new, small auditorium there at Wayne State that had been done by Minoru Yamasaki, he was the architect. It was just a little jewel. That was one of my first trips back East, for business anyway. So I came back and talked to Bran about this. We were buying these old houses as we could, around campus, particularly right on Broadway where Smith Center is. So we employed a young man named Dick Soderbergh whom we found in Southern Oregon—he was affiliated with I think it was Medford’s urban renewal—and he came up and did what he called a windshield survey, just walking and riding around the area to see what was there and the status of it in terms of its long-term use, houses or commercial buildings. He decided that he thought it would qualify, so we designed a little project and took it down to the urban renewal agency, the Portland Development Commission. John Kenward was the director at that time. I remember talking to him about it, and he thought, “It has possibilities, but we’re really busy with the South Auditorium
project,” and he didn’t really want to get involved at this point. We kept working on him, and finally I was given the opportunity to make a presentation to the Development Commission. It was chaired by Ira Keller in those days. So I did, and they decided that maybe it was OK. So we made the application to HUD for a project...

CH: That’s Housing and Urban Development?

BL: Housing and Urban Development. I guess they were still HUD in those days, I can’t remember!

CH: I think so.

BL: It was going to be approved, and it would provide five or seven million dollars, I think, for acquisition, but we had to match it with five million, which...

[laughing] Where’s that?! Bran and I went down to the legislative subcommittee hearing and really couldn’t get a formal hearing on it, so we talked to... I think his name was Dean Lewis, does that ring a bell at all? A legislator in Ways and Means. We did our little chalkboard presentation about how this could work, and they really were thrilled with it. Lo and behold, five million came up in Ways and Means! [laughing] So that was in 1965, maybe. Along in there. So the board did permit us, in 1964... [looking at his notes] I pulled that out, because I couldn’t remember. They did approve the project as a concept, and it would require almost thirty acres along... where the boundaries are. The other project was approved in... it was formally approved in March of 1965. When that was signed by the urban renewal commission, the Portland Development Commission, they started acquiring property and demolishing it. That was part of it. Everything had to be demolished to bare land. That was part of the budget. So off we went.

0:41:37

CH: And as I recall at that time, there were a lot of private homes, or houses in this area, and also apartment houses. That requirement, of demolition, spurred the push for student housing in a really interesting fashion, to me. Which is another movement that was pushed by students here. Can you talk about how you managed to save several apartment houses that still are student housing today?

BL: Well, there are two parts to that story.

CH: Good.

BL: One is that a student named Stan Amy, who is now well-known in the community because he started Natural Foods, or...
BL: Nature’s. He came to my office, in this old house on the Park Blocks, where the Business Office was in those days, and wanted to talk because he was having problems with his housing just a few blocks from here. We talked quite a while; he thought that he could organize a group to get some private housing going, and he did. Names are going to start failing me now... one of the persons key to that was the president, or one of the chief administrators of... Blitz Weinhard Brewery.

BL: Downtown. Anyway, the upshot of it was that they organized Portland Student Services and incorporated it, and in those days HUD would give a $3 million low-interest loan to any institution for student housing. Of course, we had the prohibition [against housing] in statute at that point, so I inquired if that could be assigned, and learned that it could. So we assigned that $3 million federal loan to Portland Student Services, and they built the Goose Hollow Inn out of that, the Goose Hollow lodging or whatever they call it, the residence hall. So that’s one part of how that part got started. The other, as you suggest, there were some apartment houses that were frame, they were just two or three stories; but we had several brick ones that were three or four stories like the Blackstone and some others that are right here, I think seven or eight of them. So, having persuaded the federal government that this place was so dilapidated that it all had to be demolished, John Kenward of the Portland Development Commission, executive director, and his attorney Ollie North, Oliver North, and I went down to the San Francisco regional office and persuaded HUD to let us keep those seven or eight buildings. Contractually, we had to sign that we would bear the cost of demolition, rather than it being absorbed by the urban renewal project. So that got taken care of, and we found ourselves with seven or eight apartments.

BL: And Portland... excuse me, go ahead.

CH: Portland Student Services ran those, then, or... ?

BL: I can’t recall.

CH: Because the college could not do it, right?

BL: Well, it couldn’t build a residence hall.
CH: Aha.

BL: But we had the buildings, and they looked the other way.

0:45:55 CH: So we had the development, basically, of what you would call the Broadway campus. Then when did we vacate the Park Blocks and...

BL: The streets?

CH: Yeah.

BL: I really don’t recall. It was in that era, but I really don’t recall the exact dates. There are a number of things that went into that. First, we needed to put those bridges between Lincoln Hall and Cramer, and Cramer and...

CH: The skybridges.

BL: Skybridges. And the city: “Oh no.” Liability. “Somebody might fall onto our street! And sue us.” Well, we could solve that and vacate the street! [laughing]

CH: So it’s OK if they fall on your property, right?

BL: So that’s how that started.

CH: [laughing] Well...

BL: And then we had a big fuss about making curb cuts for the sidewalks to go into the street, because we had students all around—famously, Art Honeyman, who used to trike around on his little... it was not a wheelchair in the traditional sense, it was a chair with four wheels! Like that, on it, and he would just scoot all over the place, having to get from here to there over curbs. So we had to fight with the city to get curb cuts. Of course, now they’re all over the place! We had a few little beginnings of that.

0:47:42 CH: The other student housing development that happened at that time was Dan Davis’ building, what is now the Ondine, which then was the Viking. That was a private development?

BL: Yes.

CH: How did that come about?

BL: He was a developer; he had a number of apartment houses around the city. I don’t recall how many, but he was a reasonably wealthy person. He came to
visit one day and talked about that, and it encouraged him, because again we had no statutory authority for that. He bought that block and built it, and that was in the days when I think we were just beginning or just into a very good growth of the Middle East Studies Center. We had a lot of students who were from Saudi Arabia and Lebanon and... mainly those two, I think, coming here. They had the wherewithal to house themselves in a nice dormitory across the street, so that helped get that off the ground financially I think. Anyway, I think it grew to the point that it was commercially successful.

CH: And after you had been back on campus for quite a while, you had the opportunity to go back south to the Chancellor’s Office. What position did you hold back down there?

0:49:44 BL: I was Vice-Chancellor for Personnel Administration. It was another one of those things that were starting... again, through my affiliated organization, the Western Association of College and University Business Offices, there was a weeklong seminar in Denver about faculty collective bargaining that had just started getting underway on the East Coast, mostly in Florida and in some of the East Coast states. I went to that, as did Dave Frohnmeyer, who was then on the law school faculty at U of O and legal assistant to the President. So we were both there, by happenstance, it wasn’t planned that way. Anyway, the Oregon legislature, back in 1969 or ’71, along in there someplace, adopted legislation to make it possible for public employees to bargain collectively. And the faculty at Southern Oregon State College decided they would like to form a faculty union. So they made a petition to the... whatever the Board was in those days, that handled that at the state level, and the Board’s attorney, John Osborne, who was an assistant attorney general but who was officed in Eugene with the Chancellor’s Office, knew that I had been to that seminar. He called me up about a couple of things, and I said, “Oh, I’ll have to look in my notes.” [laughing] “Are our department heads in the bargaining unit, or out of the bargaining unit? I don’t remember, I have to look at my notes.” That kind of thing.

So when that hearing on the establishment of the union at Southern Oregon came about, the Chancellor and John Osborne invited me to go with them down there, and so I did. On the way back, we were talking about what is bargainable. Lieu really didn’t... Lieuallen, Chancellor [Roy] Lieuallen didn’t really know much about the extent of matters that could be bargained. So we talked quite a while, and Lieu said, “We don’t have anybody to do that.” Then he asked whether the state had a personnel division employee who was their specialist in union organization, and conducting the elections, and so on, who was an attorney, and Lieu asked him what kind of a person you need for that. And he said, “Well, someone who is familiar with higher education, higher education finance, and some experience in negotiating.” And Lieu said, “That sounds like you [Bill].” [laughing] And I said, “No... no.” But some months went by, and they voted to be
represented, so then Lieu had to face it. So he asked the President if I could take a couple of months to come down and organize an office for that purpose. And I did, but it developed... I was asked to take the job, and I did.

| 0:53:42 | CH: And you were there during another interesting time on campus, when a President from Southern Oregon took over at Portland State, a man named Natale Sicuro.  
BL: Yes.  
CH: And you could say he was not unanimously popular among the faculty here, and ran into a lot of problems, and who was later basically asked to seek other avenues of employment. At that point, I believe you were Acting Chancellor, or...?  
BL: No, I was Chancellor for a year. But I specifically...  
CH: Is that like king for a day?  
BL: Yes, exactly! Bud Davis had left to go to LSU as president, and I just had my little bachelor’s degree, so I knew I wouldn’t get to be the guy. But I was asked to serve as Chancellor while the search went on for one more properly qualified. I said to the Board, “Don’t tag me with that ‘Acting’ adjective. People will just say, ‘Well, we don’t have to pay attention to him, he’s just Acting.’” So they agreed, and I said, “OK. I’m the Chancellor.” It doesn’t make any difference, whether you’re “Acting.” It was just psychological, to me, and so that’s how I had that position for a year.  
CH: I don’t want to...  
BL: In 1987-88, I think it was.  
CH: Yes. We don’t need to get into the confidentiality of the negotiations of contracts and so on, but when Mr. Sicuro was asked, eventually, to leave, through a series of hearings that I assume you had to organize here on campus, and you needed to select a President for Portland State, an interim, or an acting...  
BL: Yes.  
| 0:56:15 | CH: You selected a man, Roger Edgington, who was a business guy on campus. Can you...  
BL: He was my successor.
CH: Can you tell me about your thinking, why he was the choice rather than an “academic,” quote-unquote?

BL: Yes, I think my memory is that the person in the Academic Affairs office, the chief academic officer at that time I didn’t believe was suitable for that position [the presidency]. I didn’t want to start raising any precedents of a person moving in from that position and then having the inside track to become the President on a more continuing basis. I thought Roger had already demonstrated his ability to care for the institution. He was steady, he was not going to get that excited about things. I thought that he was well-suited in terms of his personality and in terms of his experience here and commitment to the institution; he deserved that for... like me and my one-year position, he didn’t expect to be the President on a continuing basis, so I thought that was the best solution for that at that particular point in time.

CH: Well, I think many of us who were on campus at that time were surprised, but later came to realize that he was, as you say, he was a steady hand at the wheel when there had been a lot of animosity on campus which gradually, I think, gradually dissipated over the time he served as President. Because there weren’t a lot of factions.

BL: Yes. That’s what you have to avoid.

CH: Every time I come down to the campus now, I still am amazed at the difference between now and when I first came on campus as a student in ’61, I think it was. What do you think about when you—other than not being able to find a parking place—[laughing] what do you think about when you see this place with 28,000 students reaching clear down to the auditorium now?

BL: The same thing you do—it’s astonishing. I don’t have to compare it to 1961, I can compare it to three years ago, or five years ago! Every time you come here there’s a crane over here and a crane over there, and it’s really kind of developing the way that we generally thought in the Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill long-term plan. Not precisely, by any means, but just in a general way. It’s heartwarming to see that, of course, for me.

CH: Sure.

BL: Even when I was away for fifteen years, this was still in here [in the heart].

CH: Yes. And all those years of saying that a city like Portland really needed an institution... the word seems finally to have reached the campuses of the south, now, which... U of O and OSU both have facilities in the city now.
BL: Yes.

CH: Should we be worried about that?

BL: I don’t think so. The Board of Higher Education, of course, in its initial formulation in 1929, was to elim… I shouldn’t say “eliminate,” but to limit duplication of courses on other campuses. Not courses, but majors, fields of study, degree programs. I’ll get it right in a minute! So University of Oregon has wanted to have architecture, for example, as one of their programs in Portland, because this is where the architectural profession of the state is! And yet, they’re down 120 miles south or whatever. So it was fighting that, or resisting it, as one might say, that the Board’s position on duplication made it hard for us to have an architecture program, for example, and other things of that sort. On the other hand, I think… I’m really not familiar with the extent to which they have made their physical presence […] for athletics and for other kinds of meetings, just having a presence here where they’re in the population center.

1:02:40 CH: What do you think, based on your experience, of the relatively new organization in which each of the schools, the major universities, have their own boards now? The traditional role of the State Board isn’t there anymore.

BL: I think the earlier organization served its purpose, particularly during a period of fast growth back in the sixties, seventies, and eighties. Since then, the state system really couldn’t do its work as effectively because each of the institutions, including PSU, have had legislative relations staff, and in a sense those go around the Board. Everybody agrees, and they still do, even without the Board of Higher Education, to cooperate in their legislative requests and programs, to support each other, which is necessary—it’s not a good thing, it’s a necessary thing—[laughing]. I don’t have any objection to that. I think it gives the institution more latitude and permits it to have a sense of purpose and an identification that’s not as easy under that other operating format. But the fear is, of course, early on, that Oregon and Oregon State had these well-established alums who had the ability to be major contributors, where Portland State had many thousands but who were out there still working as working people. They’re good, strong, middle-class people, but we didn’t have a string of millionaires or even near-millionaires like many of the professionals who came out of many of those other institutions. Having reached a larger plateau, now—I forgot what the President said, 100,000 alums right in the city of Portland, I think he said?

CH: Correct.
BL: I don’t know the total number now, 150, 170? Somewhere in that range. Makes that [fundraising] an easier situation for PSU to work with. One of the things that I wish we could have done was get the Northwest School of Law when we had that opportunity. But the Board washed that real quickly. That’s one of the strengths of the U of O...

CH: The law school.

| 1:06:14 | CH: And Lewis and Clark [College] got that law school...
BL: And they’ve done well.
CH: It’s done very well. They have basically their own campus up there.
Carolee: When was that opportunity? You’re saying Portland State had the opportunity to absorb the Northwest School of Law?
BL: Yes.
CJH: At what time?
BL: I can’t recall. It would have been probably in the 1960s.
Cris Paschild: It was under Millar.
BL: Yes. It was in Millar’s era. The Northwest College of Law was... I shouldn’t say failing, but it was struggling financially, and...
CH: Its history basically was early Portland State’s history. It was located downtown in rented space, and basically served a large proportion of returning World War II veterans who wanted to become lawyers.
BL: But now there are Lewis and Clark graduates on all the courts, municipal and appellate courts, and other places. They’re strong.
CH: Just one more in a string of missed opportunities...
BL: [laughing] Darn!

| 1:07:36 | CH: Any other things you need to get off your chest at this point?
BL: No, I’m satisfied; I want to get at whatever you have in mind.
CP: Can I ask—I always like to ask, you said it is satisfying to see our ongoing growth, because Portland State’s always in your heart. I know you started at
Vanport, but you were gone for a while, you were at another Oregon institution, and then you were in the Chancellor’s office. So what is it about Portland State that holds your heart over basically... your whole career as an adult, your professional career? What is it about us that lets us hold onto you even when you weren’t here?

BL: I guess because I was part of the beginning of it, and it’s like family, it’s part of me. As you say, it’s my adulthood, really. What was it, 1950, I would have been 25 years old. I’m 93 now. It just continues to be a part, seeing it grow as we had hoped, when we started as students and early staff and faculty members. That’s the main thing, I guess. We’ve built friends, most of our lifelong friends have come out of this institution. I’ve outlasted most of them for some reason, I don’t know. [laughing]

CH: Clean living, probably.

BL: Good clean living. You got it! I’m sure that’s it.

CH: Dean Acheson, who was Secretary of State under Truman and some other... He wrote a book called Present at the Creation, in which he was talking about the creation of the so-called “new world order” after World War II. I think we could say the same about you and this institution. You were present at the creation. And that’s probably why...

BL: Virtually so, yes.

CP: It’s unclear if we would be where we are if you hadn’t been here, especially in that period, in the sixties and seventies.

BL: I believe that my main contribution was the urban renewal project, and that activity opened things up. Everything that grew from that, piece by piece and time over time. It could have done it, but I happened to be the one who was here. I was lucky. Someone said recently that luck is the intersection of preparation, or preparedness and opportunity. Fortunately, I have been in that situation a number of times, where I had prepared—not specifically for something, but happened to have the preparedness, and when the opportunity came I connected. I got lucky.

CH: Somebody once said it’s better to be lucky than good, but I think you were both!

BL: Thank you very much. It’s been a pleasure.
CH: Even though it meant Papa John’s delicatessen had to go! [laughter in the room]

BL: I know. There were several places like that that we used to go to.

CH: And that older woman who had a little coffee shop...

BL: Oh yes.

CJH: Bianca’s!

CH: Bianca’s! That’s it!

BL: Thank you.

CJH: Yeah, I read about that.

BL: Over in East Hall.

CJH: Yep, she was over in East Hall.

CH: Well, that’s it. [laughing]

CH: If you ordered soup, she used to have these little cans of Campbell’s soup that she would heat up in a coffee maker. [laughter] It was amazing, a piece of work.

BL: There were some delightful folks around here, over time.

CH: That’s right.

CJH: Did you have students who worked with you when you were working with the PDC? When you were planning with the PDC, or with the architects for those Portland State plans—you were talking about the buildings, the campus plans, you didn’t have students contributing their...

BL: No, I don’t think so. I don’t know why.

CJH: The only reason I ask is that I think that today that would be... I think students like Stan Amy are probably part of the legacy for that.

BL: You bet.
CJH: Even today, when they do renovations at Smith Center, they take polls of students and faculty and staff, campus community polls.

BL: I don’t have any specific recollections of that. But some of that was held in confidence—it sounds a little over-reaching, but it wasn’t publicized very much when we were doing some of those things, because they were sub rosa in a sense. We were actually making plans that were not congruent with what the position of the Board of Higher Education was, or the Chancellor’s office.

CJH: Right.

BL: The whole effort to make this an institution was, in a sense, that way, although it was not in those early days when people were swarming over [...] but a lot of folks going to the legislature, parents and students; that was obviously public. But some of the other plans had to be done, formulated at least, in the infant stages, without participation of many others.

CJH: I’m really interested in the urban renewal period, and I’ve done some studies on downtown revitalization and how urban renewal played a role, not just in Portland, but in other cities, in “clearing blight” and the impact—of course, there have been a lot of people doing historical studies on how urban renewal programs in various parts of the city have impacted displacement of communities. Particularly in Albina—that same law, that was amended, that you mentioned, for universities, colleges, and hospitals, created that project for Emanuel Hospital over there that displaced a lot of the community in Albina. So I thought it was interesting that you brought that up. That’s definitely something that people are still looking at here. Anyway, I’ve been interested in seeing how, within student media, how student media recorded the change from on-campus community as housing was affected. Students [were] living in these boarding houses, apartment buildings, and partaking of the mom & pop businesses that were still around the area in the early sixties, and then witnessing the demolition of that in order to create the campus. So there’s this paradox between losing the community and creating the campus.

BL: It was hard for us, particularly along Broadway there. There were these two-or three-story houses, some with apartments, but all the lower, street level were little businesses. A cleaners, a sewing shop, hair salon, or, you know, little things like that that were obviously the livelihood of those folks that we had to doom. So... eminent domain is a double-edged sword, and...

CH: Well, there’s no resisting it.

BL: I know! Well, the ranchers along the Rio Grande river are resisting it! [laughter in the room] That’ll be fun to see.
CJH: In terms of the city, it’s kind of the quintessential “You can’t fight City Hall” sort of dilemma with eminent domain... ?

BL: That’s part of what we had to do, though, was to fight City Hall, on things like the bridges and the curb cuts, for example. When they start to get on board and see the longer term, and the facts of how they can participate for the good of the community, then it changes the whole attitude and makes things a little easier, I hope.

CJH: It did seem to give downtown another... eventually, the University District, right, is what came out of Portland State.

BL: Yes.

CJH: Which has contributed to the success of downtown.

BL: Noted formally as the University District, I guess. I don’t know what the boundaries are.

CP: No one knows what the boundaries are! [laughter in the room]

CJH: Not anymore.

BL: It seems to hop and skip, doesn’t it.

CP: Since we have shared spaces now, right, with OHSU, if you think of down on the waterfront and things like that. There’s a lot of collaborative spaces that are PSU spaces but other people’s spaces too.

CH: Actually, that is one thing that is kind of missing here. If you go to the University of Washington, at least when I was a student there in the late sixties, there really was a “University District.”

BL: Yes.

CH: You knew you were in the “U District,” because there were two major business streets that were several blocks long, and it was all University-related stuff. Bookstores and...

BL: Clothing stores, and barber shops and all that.

CH: Yeah.
CJH: Business that students would use.

CH: Yeah. But that’s not...

CJH: That’s only just recently sort of been recovered here, I think.

BL: Portland has these tiny little blocks, 200-square-foot blocks; that makes it... chops it up a lot more.

CJH: Yeah.

BL: In this downtown area.

CJH: Since you had experience on a couple of different campuses, did you observe that having student housing on campus made a difference in terms of community on campus? Did you witness that, as far as having... I don’t know how to describe this, it’s sort of indescribable, but... to have it feel more like students come to school and it’s this academic environment sort of set apart from the city? Did you feel that happened at Portland State as housing either left here or was returned here?

BL: I can’t really say that it did. I think that in the first place it was so limited in the beginning that it was three percent or five percent of those students, it wasn’t enough to change the whole ambiance or atmosphere. And again, the fact that everything here is so chopped-up, other than the Park Blocks, there’s little continuity in businesses and activities that are unrelated to the campus, that are not physically a part of it. So I don’t know.

CH: That’s a good point, I hadn’t really thought about that. The way the public streets, except for two park streets, they’re still viable streets. That just cuts the campus up much more than most campuses.

BL: Oh, yeah.

CH: I remember we fought like heck to get a crossing signal on Broadway. In fact, the students drew their own crosswalks on Broadway because it was so difficult to get across. Now there are traffic lights all over Broadway.

CP: It’s an interesting idea, the impact of housing or lack of housing, right? Because somewhere like OSU now can require its entire incoming class to live in student housing. So you can force sort of a massive change of the culture, but that’s obviously never been, even with new student housing that’s not an option for us, and also not... it’s kind of counter to our appeal, in the middle of the city. That’s not necessarily what our students want.
BL: It’s always been a commuter college.

CP: Right.

BL: And always will be, in one sense, because so many of the students... look at the average age, and look at the number of students who have children at Portland State.

CP: Right.

BL: I don’t know of any downtown-type campus that has adequate accommodation for students with kids. Whether they’re married or single, it doesn’t make much difference. I think it’s always going to be different in that respect.

CP: And it should be.

BL: But I’m always amazed; one of the things that always strikes me when I come down here is the disparate age and the culture, the ethnic differences that one sees. It’s palpable.

CH: Well, I think the average age has come down, but not very much. It’s still—the average age of the student body here is still in the higher 20s, as I recall.

CP: I think it came down from 28 to 26. So it’s a slight decrease. And we are the most [culturally] diverse campus in Oregon.

BL: I can’t question that at all.

CP: Well, Bill, this is the third time you’ve been willing to sit down and talk to us on camera, so we really appreciate your stamina and willingness! [laughter]

BL: I hope it was helpful. That was the easy part... getting this thing to work [pointing to his forehead] is the hard part.

CP: Well, in two more years, we’ll probably come up with more questions we have to ask you!

BL: If I’m here, I’ll be pleased to answer. If my brain works!

CP: Thank you.

[concludes 1:24:39]
CH: From my point of view, this was the perfect place for me to do undergraduate stuff in ’61 through ’65. Because like all the rest of the students I knew, I worked at least half-time all the time. It was easy to get down here and do stuff, and it was a flexible place, and there were a lot of students who were in the same situation.

BL: Sure.

CH: So it was perfect for me. And it didn’t matter what my high school grades were. It probably does, now, huh?

CP: [laughing] A little bit, a little bit.

[1:25:38]