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Joseph C. Blumel, *et al.*
“Memorial Gathering for Branford P. Millar”
January 23, 1975
Portland State University

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[Recording opens with performance of Samuel Barber’s “Mutations on Bach” by the Portland State University Wind Ensemble, conducted by Tomas Svoboda. Speakers begin at 0:27:30]

JOSEPH BLUMEL: We are meeting here today to commemorate and to celebrate the life of our friend and colleague Bran Millar. It is in keeping with his philosophy and the wishes of his family that we emphasize the celebration of his life. And in that, as all who knew him will attest, there is much to celebrate.

We have asked a few friends and associates with whom he worked in his career in Portland to offer some personal observations about the kind of man he was as they saw him in their various encounters with him. Dr. R. E. Lieuallen, Chancellor of the Oregon State System of Higher Education, who for a period was a fellow president in the state system and subsequently worked with Bran in his role as Chancellor. Mr. Allan Hart, a former member of the Oregon State Board of Higher Education and personal friend. Dr. Frank Roberts, professor of speech and member of the Oregon State Senate. Dr. E. Dean Anderson, Vice President for University Relations, who was among the very closest associates of Bran during his presidency, and Dr. Frederick O. Waller, Head of the Department of English, the department to which Bran returned as distinguished service professor. Fred Waller also served in various capacities including Dean of Undergraduate Studies in the Millar administration.

My own association with Bran spans a period of sixteen years, and I should like to begin with a few personal observations, as one who has in a sense succeeded him in that curious and unpredictable line of succession to the presidency of this university, an institution which was one of the dominant and consuming interests in his life. I knew him first as a member of the faculty, I being a rather young, uncredentialed, untenured, naive, and somewhat abrasive instructor at the time he assumed the presidency. I recall his accessibility, his regular presence in the faculty dining room, his patient discussions with me and others like me on questions ranging from curricular and program development to faculty governance. I remember how completely, yet how gently and with what good humor, he exposed my ignorance. But he always left me feeling that I had helped him. Though I had been utterly defeated in debate, he left me with my self-respect, and I still don't know quite how he did that.

During my years as an administrator, which were after he left the presidency, he was careful not to intrude, yet he retained that quality of accessibility. He spoke with his well-known eloquence and wit in the meetings of the faculty on issues which concerned him, and while he never volunteered advice, he was generous of his time when it was sought, as it so often was. He was, in this advisory capacity as in so many others, a great resource on which we all drew repeatedly—perhaps excessively. His great quality was that intangible, almost indefinable one of wisdom. While we will no longer be able to ask him what should be done, we will still ask what he would have done.

We all know that when Bran became president, we were essentially a general studies institution. His commitment to scholarship and the disciplines suited him admirably to lead the institution in the development of major programs. His own accomplishments, his manifest interest in scholarship, provided an example and set a tone for this phase of our development. I guess the best way to put it is to say that his presence set a standard of quality for us all. He was the right man at the right time, and we are, all of us, the richer that it was at this place.

ROY LIEUALLEN: Bran Millar and his family moved to Oregon in 1959 and in quite short order they became devoted and loyal Oregonians. More than any other man, in the words of Wednesday evening's *Register-Guard*, Bran "put his personal stamp on Portland State University." And in a resolution adopted by the Board of Higher Education last Tuesday, the board declared that under the guidance and leadership of Bran Millar, Oregon's newest four-year institution of higher education experienced great growth in enrollment, programs, and physical plant, and fulfilled its mission of a unique urban college. The resolution paid honor to President Millar's accomplishments and expressed gratitude on the behalf of all Oregonians for the imprint which he left on Portland State University and upon higher education more generally.

Now, a remarkable quality of Bran, as far as I was concerned, was his capacity, somehow, to adjust readily and quickly to any kind of a circumstance in which he found himself. He was at home in a Harvard classroom or in a Michigan State dean's session, in a Portland State University faculty meeting, in the council of the presidents, or—as Mrs. Sam Johnson put it in her preface to the board's resolution—in his boots and dungarees as he stalked through the Metolius meadows. Bran, more than anyone I've known at least, should be characterized as a man for all seasons. And this capacity for ready adaptation seemed to flow out of his enthusiasm for whatever he might be doing, from his eagerness to do well whatever he was about, from his sheer enjoyment of the associations with his friends and his colleagues.

And even after the fatal flaw in his physical makeup made it evident to Bran that he should resign the presidency of Portland State University, his presidential colleagues and I continued to value and to seek and to profit from his wisdom and his judgement. In fact, during the hour immediately preceding his sudden illness last Thursday, Bran talked at length with a colleague in the board's office. We shall miss the opportunities to muse with Bran Millar over the professional problems and issues which continue to vex us, and we shall miss his not infrequent pungent and cogent quips, which seemed somehow to put our problems and issues into manageable proportions. More than anything else, we shall miss his friendship.

ALLAN HART: It's my privilege to know Dr. Branford Millar during the early years of his presidency of this institution in my capacity as a member of the Board of Higher Education, and throughout his residence in Portland, I have also known him as a friend and as his occasional legal advisor. In representing the college before the Board of Higher Education, Bran was always eloquent, firm, and fair. He was a strong partisan for the college without losing his perspective and his understanding that Portland State had to function cooperatively with other institutions in the system. I recall that Bran's leadership gave new directions to the planning and design of Portland State's campus, which the board welcomed. And it gave new impetus to the development of the college's graduate studies. It was a pleasure to work with Bran on these and other problems.

In recent years, my relationship with Bran has been more personal, and it has continued to be enriched by his qualities of fairness, kindness, and good humor. I like to remember Bran Millar particularly for the meticulous orderliness of his way of thinking and speaking, for his keen perceptions and his quiet wisdom in dealing with his friends and his associates, and most of all, for the strength and warmth of his friendship. I am glad to have had the privilege of knowing Branford Millar.

FRANK ROBERTS: I am here today as a friend of Bran Millar, and as a colleague. And there are many things that I recall in those roles through a long association with him. But I'm also a representative of the Oregon Legislature, which is now in session, and the president of the Senate, Jason Boe, and the speaker of the House, Phil Lang, have asked me to represent them, and to read a resolution which was introduced into the Senate today: whereas Dr. Branford Price Millar, president of Portland State College from 1959 to 1968, died January 17, 1975 in Portland; and whereas Dr. Millar presided over the college during the difficult years of its growth into a university; and whereas Dr. Millar has a distinguished academic career reflected in his demand that the quality of education never be sacrificed for growth; and whereas Dr. Millar's dedication to Portland State University caused him to continue in its service even after leaving its presidency; now, therefore, be it resolved by the Legislative Assembly of the State of Oregon that we, members of the 58th Legislative Assembly, honor the memory of Dr. Branford Price Millar, educator and citizen, whose contribution endures in the memories of the faculty and the students of the institution he served so well. And be it further resolved that we recommend to the State Board of Higher Education the naming of a chair in English or American literature in his honor and memory. And be it further resolved that copies of this resolution be sent to Dr. Millar's widow, Teresa, and his son Andrew, and his daughter Constance, as a gesture of our respect for Dr. Millar, and our sympathy in their time of loss.

Now the words of this resolution are simple, direct, and sincere. They're a proper tribute to Bran Millar. And I should add that I first met him when he was being interviewed as a candidate for the presidency of Portland State College, and I recall one of the questions that was asked of him at that time by the committee, and they asked what he thought the first priority should be for an urban college. And he replied simply: to become a quality university. It was that dedication to academic integrity and quality that marked his life as an educator and as a human being. I know that he significantly contributed to my life, and to the life of the university and to Oregon.

E. DEAN ANDERSON: Bran Millar will be remembered for many things, remembered fondly and admiringly. As I think back on the 16 years, many facets of his warm personality and of his quick, quiet, firm, intelligent leadership stand out. It was characteristic of him that he gave to every problem complete analysis and appraisal. He was satisfied only when he became convinced that the contemplative act, along with all of its effects, had been thoroughly considered.

Having been offered the presidency here, for instance, he retreated from the importuning of faculty, chancellor, and board to weigh for one full month the pros and cons of making the move. Having said yes at the end of that period, he then set out to learn everything possible

about the business of a college presidency. I think this gives a clue to one of his most significant traits. He had confidence in his dedication to education, and in his ability to master administration, but he also had modesty. He never assumed that because he had been chosen to lead, he was of an order higher than that of other human beings. I think that what helped Bran remain so human was primarily his sense of humor. He kept things in proper proportion.

After he had been here for a while, he said one day in a tone of regret that he guessed he'd have to yield courtesy in favor of efficiency. Whenever he started through a doorway, someone, everyone, would rush to open the door for the president. He didn't assume the necessity of this tribute, and he tried to do his share of door-holding. But after many Alphonse and Gaston acts, he gave in, but inside he still thought such sincere politeness was really a bit funny. And he smiled and he bore it. Each of us has wondered why, now and then, someone misspells a name. Bran found that his full name lent itself to an unusual amount of variation, and he would greet each new version on an incoming envelope with real glee. The writer was not insulting the president by his carelessness; he was providing the president a good laugh. The laughs came well over 100 times in 9 years. I hope that someone still has that list, and I think Bran would like it if we were to publish the list of misnomers in the *Perspective* one of these days.

We used to tease Bran about his academic plumage. Portland State had earlier been impressed with Frank Eaton's Germanic ruffle, but a genuine Harvard crimson glory! I wish we had a videotape of the scene when Bran had his witty way with a young faculty member who showed up rather rashly at commencement in *his* newly won and rival Harvard gown.

I don't think we in Oregon would ever have kept Bran if he hadn't found the Metolius. I remember many forays around the state with him, but two stops that stand out in my memory include the day we had lunch near Camp Sherman, and Bran took the whole family back there the following weekend. And the coffee break at Wagon Tire. The shop owner at Wagon Tire was a genuine Western card. It was about a standoff between him and the college president, passing himself off under the guise of the barefoot boy from New England. And earlier on that trip, Bran had seen "Hole in the Ground." I doubt if he ever thereafter regretted missing some of the world's wonders. While I, again, regret not carrying a recorder, or having the foresight of the poet who watched closely when Cortéz first stared at the Pacific.

It comforts me that Bran seemed especially happy in his work this year. What he was doing is very important to the future of this university. He was particularly well-suited to the task. His greatest wars for Portland State had been fought earlier, but he died in the service of our school, and we can go further and farther and much better because of his years here.

FREDERICK WALLER: As president, Bran Millar used to comment that no one outranks a full professor. He was, therefore, at the top of his profession when he died, and I wish to remember him now as a professor of English by reading a poem of which he was very fond. But first, for just a moment or two, I'd like to recall some of the qualities that made Bran beloved as a colleague.

When he was president, most of us knew him through his utterances, though he was always accessible to the faculty. And the best words I can use to describe the speeches he made to us through those 9 years as president are elegance and respect for the English language. He spoke to the faculty as one among equals, and he understood the relation between "urban," that which belongs to the city, and "urbane," in the sense of courtesy and civility. At a formative period in our institution's history, he developed and has now passed on to us a tradition of style, a standard of excellence, and more, a view of reality that gave vision as well as bound to our sense of goal, and a heritage of toughness and decision in dealing with our problems. He also left us another heritage that is probably unique. It is still called "Millar's Law," and it says that every academic department grows faster in enrollment than the institution as a whole. [laughter] It may present some problem to the science of physics, but I daresay it'll never be violated.

A part of the style to which I referred was Bran's sense of self-perspective and a pretension-bursting humor. Most of us remember his invitation, after his fourth or fifth commencement exercise, to repeat with him in unison, for goodness knows we'd heard it often enough, his charge to the graduates. I take that speech as at once reflecting the economy of effort and wit even at his own expense. Or, at a personal level, I recall Bran's asking me to take an oath of office the first time I sat with the executive committee, the president's executive committee. That I had to place my hand on a large plaster egg bearing the legend "Think" was a little unnerving, but I went ahead with the oath, assuming that the ceremony was customary, until I discovered that I was reading the "Optimist's Creed." [laughter]

Bran was a respected and beloved friend in the department of English, and we were fortunate beyond measure that he chose to join us when he left the presidency. It is only a small mark of the trust and affection in which he was held by his colleagues that he was twice elected to the departmental advisory committee. And outside the department, he was elected to the Faculty Senate and the State System's inter-institutional faculty senate.

As a former president, as an established scholar, and as a senior professor, Bran might well have claimed his prerogatives. But he was a good and generous faculty member, and he willingly taught what was necessary for the department to offer, not the least of which was

English composition. He never said, "I want this," but asked instead, "What do you want me to do?" and he never shirked. He was considerate to younger faculty and he was unstinting of his time spent with students. He was a debonair companion; the brown-bag lunch group in the departmental lounge has already missed him. Yet he remained, as Dean Anderson just commented, a private person of no affectation and a strong sense of who he was. So I'd like to close by reading Robert Frost's "Mending Wall," a poem which Bran liked.

*Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun;
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.
The work of hunters is another thing:
I have come after them and made repair
Where they have left not one stone on a stone,
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,
To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,
No one has seen them made or heard them made,
But at spring mending-time we find them there.
I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;
And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us once again.
We keep the wall between us as we go.
To each the boulders that have fallen to each.
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls
We have to use a spell to make them balance:
"Stay where you are until our backs are turned!"
We wear our fingers rough with handling them.
Oh, just another kind of out-door game,
One on a side. It comes to little more:
There where it is we do not need the wall:
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.
My apple trees will never get across
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.
He only says, "Good fences make good neighbors."
Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder
If I could put a notion in his head:
"Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it
Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.*

*Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offense.
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That wants it down." I could say "Elves" to him,
But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather
He said it for himself. I see him there
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.
He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
He will not go behind his father's saying,
And he likes having thought of it so well
He says again, "Good fences make good neighbors."*

BLUMEL: This concludes our celebration, but before we leave, Teresa Millar has asked that I acknowledge to you all her gratitude and that of Andy and Connie, and Melville Millar, Bran's brother, for the many kindnesses, thoughtful messages, and expressions of sympathy received during these last few days. Thank you.

[PSU Wind Ensemble plays to end of program]