



## Voices of Lycoming Oral Histories

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*Oral History of*

### **Dr. Otto L. Sonder**

Alumnus, Class of 1946

Date: October 11, 2002

Interview conducted by: Julie Dougherty

Transcribed by: Julie Dougherty

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**Dr. Otto Sonder**

October 11, 2002

Interviewer: Julie Dougherty

Transcriber: Julie Dougherty

**Julie:** The date is October 11, 2002 I'm speaking with Dr. Otto Sonders who will be awarded the Angela Vaira Kyte award for the outstanding alum 2002 at homecoming tomorrow on October 12<sup>th</sup>. I am Julie Dougherty from the archives at Lycoming College.

Please tell me about your early life, where you were born, do you have any siblings?

**Otto:** Well I was born in Williamsport at the Williamsport hospital, as a matter of fact, in 1925. My folks took me home to the house they had built in South Williamsport when they were married. I lived in that house all the time till I was 18 and finished high school, which was not too far away at that time; I was just a few blocks away on Central Avenue. My house was my home was on the corner of George and Central, and it was kind of handy and unlike a lot of kids I was able to walk home for lunch and so forth, it was a lovely neighborhood to grow up in.

I understand that Gene Landon is getting the achievement award tomorrow, and Gene grew up at the opposite end of the block that I lived on. His folks had a little grocery store, it started out as a house and then expanded by former owner who name was Bruno. As they got older they sold it, and so Gene and his family ran the store for much of the time that I was in high school at least or before that maybe, an interesting coincidence.

Anyhow, I don't have any siblings I was an only child, which had it advantages sometimes and disadvantages other times. We had a big yard and it was nice to play in when I was little, but when I got bigger my father was pretty busy and ultimately became ill, and so it was a lot to take care of. But I knew all the neighbors, I can drive up and down over there, or I drive all around Williamsport and remember who lived in lots and lots of houses. In that part of South Williamsport I can identify every house and who used to live there, I'm sure not any more.

My mother's uncle was George Lupert who started down here along the river on Front Street. He came from Germany from the Black Forest and was a skilled cabinet maker. So he started a little cabinet making shop there in the early 1800s, and also undertaking because the cabinet maker made the coffins. He managed to succeed pretty well with the furniture business. Apparently he was innately a good business man. So he built a large factory in South Williamsport up and the upper end on River Side Drive, about two blocks from the Maynard St. Bridge. The building is still there, I think it is now a printing plant. They built on the bank just opposite it, a rather large brick house that perhaps,

you remember, Dr. Tobias had his office and he lived there. That house is still there, and there is a brick house next to it.

Anyway my mother was born here on Hughes Street, just a block or so from the campus and grew up there. Tragically this was during the very early part of the century when tuberculosis epidemic occurred through much of the country including Williamsport. She was orphaned when she was about nine years old I think. In those days the family connections would..... Her family was split she had a sister and a brother. Her father died first, and her mother must have gotten by with practically nothing until she died of tuberculosis and orphaned the three children. The young boy, my uncle, again I never knew but have seen pictures of him and we have a surprising resemblance from the picture anyway. He and my mother's sister, Aunt Florence, was taken to be raised by an uncle close by there- who was apparently kind of a skinflint person who I met later in my life- briefly. My mother had an aunt who lived in that area too, her mother's sister. He had one arm he lost an arm climbing through a train. I presume it ran along campus because it was still here when I went to Williamsport Dickinson. She grew up with the Lupert family. Unfortunately she didn't have any money but she did have some advantages of being live in.

My father's family had come from Germany, Uncle George Lupert; I guess was from the Black Forest. I tried to trace the family but I never have too much luck with it. Apparently the people of this little Black Forest village were all pretty good with cabinet making, and so he gradually saved and helped them come over here. Obviously when my grandfather Sonder had a number of children, seven or eight as I recall. When my father was old enough, they kind of pushed the two of them together I guess, that's how I arrived. So that's a long way around the barn here to give you a bit of a story.

**Julie:** Where did you receive your early education?

**Otto:** Well I started at Mountain Avenue School which is now gone, in South Williamsport that was on the corner of Mountain Avenue and Market Street. I went there for six years, and at that time South Side had a new building which was a combination junior and senior high school building, which is still there. I think it is now just junior high school or middle school, something like that. I went there from seventh grade on and graduated there. I put six years in at Mountain Avenue and six years at South Side high school. That's about that. I started working while I was in high school and I've never been without a job since. I worked in the clothing store that used to be in Market Square, every night after school. I was eager to save the money. It wasn't too bad to walk except in the winter; the old Market Street Bridge used to get pretty chilly. When you looked down and saw the ice and so forth. It was an interesting kind of life.

**Julie:** What was the name of the store?

**Otto:** It was Concord Clothes. It was a factory to you sort of outlet. It was at the corner of the square on the southwest side of the square. With racks and rack it ran almost a block deep, and there were all these racks that pulled out turned around and there were more racks on the back of them. Among my tasks was whisking off the shoulders of all those suits to keep the dust from forming. Ultimately I was able to do a bit of selling, when everyone else was busy. I think I got something like seven dollars a week for going over there five days a week after for school for a couple hours, and all day Saturday from eight in the morning until nine, ten o'clock at night. It was all men's suits, not shirts; it was when they had their own factory somewhere where they made them. There were two or three standard prices, and you got a commission on ones that you sold. So obviously I would stand around outside the store, you were not allowed to lean on anything, and you had to stand practically at attention all day. When everyone was busy I got to try my hand at selling. It was a really fun experience doing that. My commissions were one percent, and they had two prices of suits as I remember \$22.95 and \$27.95. So you had to sell a few suits to make a quarter or whatever.

**Julie:** Did you work there after high school as well?

**Otto:** No I worked there during high school, and then well I kept working there as a matter of fact. I'm trying to think; later I worked at another clothing store. Actually when I started to teach here I worked at another clothing store it was on Pine Street, no it was on Fourth Street near where Otto's book store used to be further up on the Sun Gazette. It was called David's Men's Shop. David Lockspeiser owned it. I stayed with that for the two years that I was at Williamsport Dickinson, but just weekends. And then I was out of town teaching and going to school and so forth finishing up school, and when I came back the salaries were not that opulent around here.

So the Ciccarelli boys, who I had vaguely known, the younger one was quite a basketball star at Williamsport high school and was roughly around my age. I got to know them they were opening a clothing store down in the Masonic Temple, there is a store on the Market Street side, and then later moved up to what is called the Varsity Shop. They moved up to Pine Street where they still are. One died a few years ago, and it was only a short while ago, because I kept in touch with Clem and his wife Marion through all the years I've been away. I hear from them every Christmas and stop in the store see them and so forth. Clem died within the last six months if I remember reading about it. I think their son has it now, and another son has the Clothier over on Fourth Street. So they were a clothing family.

My dad wanted me to work, and take over his plumbing business when he was unable to do it. But I worked instead in the summer when I was here at school, at Eagles Mere in a summer hotel, the Forrest Inn. Which a buddy of mine that I met here came from Jersey Shore, and we went up as bellhops. It was supposed to be a great job and we were supposed to get lots of money doing it and so forth, and there were all these lovely girls as waitress, college girls. It was going to be a great summer but we got there

and the night switchboard operator quit and the woman that worked there insisted that we also take turns keeping it open all night. It really had our social life cut to nothing.

**Julie:** Did you stay there right at the inn?

**Otto:** Yeah right at the hotel. In quite cramped little rooms. I can't remember what we made, but it was terribly small and we made nothing in tips because it was an old style summer hotel. It brought lots of folks from Philadelphia to come up and spend a week or a month. So they would come and run your legs off delivering stuff to the room and then they leave and hand you fifty cents or a dollar after a week or a month's stay. So it was kind of fun.

An interesting little side note on that, they had quartet, no a trio, of musicians who would entertain in the evening and that's when I first got to know Mary Russell a bit. From her being on the campus while I was teaching, not when I was teaching but as a student but when I came to school here. Mary came here in '36 and I came here as student in '44-46 at the old Junior College. Mary was there and Hazel Dorie who used to teach piano and music in the music department here, was the second member of the trio. Then there was this very little short man who played the cello. The cello was taller than he was. He was kind of a funny little man. I think he had kind of a crush on Hazel Dorie; we used to kid her about it.

**Julie:** Was this before Mary was widowed or before she was married?

**Otto:** Mary was widowed very soon after she was married, I think her husband was in the Air Force. She had a West Point wedding; I remember that it was the talk around Williamsport when it happened. No, she wasn't a widow then. I think it was when she began teaching here in 1936 as a matter of fact.

**Julie:** Were you inducted in the armed services?

**Otto:** Yep

**Julie:** What year was that?

**Otto:** Well that would have been right when I graduated high school in 1943.

**Julie:** It had to be the army

**Otto:** It was the army. In fact I referred to it a bit in the talk that I gave for the Fall Convocation. Which was a great honor, I really enjoyed that. I was very royally treated.

**Julie:** We were very honored to have you.

**Otto:** Well I enjoyed doing it. I started talking at it, it poured down rain, and Dean Piper was so kind. Somebody appeared with umbrellas quickly so he held the umbrella over me. Fortunately I had that speech, usually I have an outline, but I had the plastic pages so I could turn them. They kept getting wet, and I had to sort of pick them apart the water kind of glued the plastic together. I felt so sorry for the freshmen sitting in the front there because fortunately the trees were dense enough and most people were clustered around the trees. It was a great day.

**Julie:** What did you do after graduation?

**Otto:** Then I went in the army.

**Julie:** Did you stay in the states?

**Otto:** I stayed in the states, I was kind of unlucky. It was a nasty year because everyone knew we were going to get drafted the minute we got out of school. I had taken the army specialized training test ASTP program, and the army decided I would make a wonderful engineer. They must have had some bargain rate, for a specialist to look over the test because I was never cut I out to be an engineer. I never had any interest in it. I was always interested in social sciences, humanities that kind of thing. After basic training at Fort Benning, Georgia, the infantry school, it was kind of rough basic training; I then got shipped off to Kenyon College, at Gambier, Ohio, a wonderful old English type school. They had a regular curriculum for us, and regularly emphasizing math and physics and so forth. Also we took some English and that kind of thing, and I wound up as I think I said in the talk, helping my army buddies with their English and history, and they helped me with the math and science which I wasn't so eager to do. We were only there a short period of time. It was a lovely campus. I had wanted to go to college, and I thought I had arrived when I got to that beautiful small men's school. It was an interesting place, and still is. When I was there even with their regular students they required pre-Latin for graduation. They were the first college that I know of in the country to provide pilot training. They had their own little airport, and so forth. Of course it did us no good, because our curriculum was very fixed. Wonderful buildings, one of them burned 7 years ago, the one where I was housed, as a matter of fact, with the army program. Things got tough in the war, and the army went down to that program. So I then went down to Fort Campbell Kentucky; they sent me there it wasn't like I decided to travel down to join the army infantry, which wasn't so pleasant. I wound up with a medical condition, and wound up getting out early and that's how I ended up here so quickly after I finished up high school. I came here in the fall of 1944. I was delighted to be here.

**Julie:** That was when Dr. Long was here.

**Otto:** Yes indeed and boy do I have rememberances of that time particularly. They used to have freshmen customs. You had to dress in foolish costumes and so forth.

Those of us who were commuting, for example, one day all the guys had to wear red nail polish. So of course when you came on campus the Sophomore Tribunal would check your nails if you were a male. So obviously you couldn't come on campus and do them. I was getting on the bus coming home from South Side walking down on Fourth Street crossing the railroad tracks and coming in that entrance. In the fall it was very warm and I remember wearing winter gloves, as I got off the bus I could hardly handle the bus tokens, because of these winter gloves. I wore these so nobody would see the red fingernails!

The next year I wound up being a member of the Tribunal so every year you added on to the misery that you put the freshmen through. Which today is against the law, it is hazing. Well it was kind of war time, and so all the classes were in Old Main. Every day they would have different instructions. I remember the one day the girls had to wear their hair in 13 pigtailed. These poor little ladies were ironing their hair to get it straight, so they could fit it into 13 pigtailed, which stuck out like spikes if your hair wasn't long enough. They had to wear plaid skirts and one long black stocking and one long cotton white stocking, and then they had to tie them at the knees with purple and black ribbon. The idea was to make it as horrible a color combination as you could make it.

Well we had other things that we had to do, like carry our books around in a pillow case. And when someone would holler, "Black out!" (war time you know), always waiting for the classes to be passing on the stairways, you had to dump your books out immediately, crouch down on your knees and put on the pillow case on your head. Other days there were "Air Raid," days where you had to carry an umbrella, rain or shine and of course that's when I was on the Tribunal, so anyway, when any member of the Tribunal member would holler, "Air Raid!" everybody had to crouch down and put up the umbrellas. Well the halls in Old Main were very narrow and the stairways were not terribly wide, so you would have all these poor souls with the umbrellas up and them crouched down under them until you called, "All Clear!"

The next year instead of the plaid skirts we made the girls wear shorts, with the one long black stocking and the one long white stocking and the ribbons tied around and all that stuff, and here I was in class and Dr. Long sent somebody over for me (I was head of the Tribunal). I went to his office and he was sitting behind his big desk. I had only seen him from afar before that and he looked me up and down and said, "Get those girls out of those shorts right away." Well I was a young kid and I thought it would be fun to take him literally, but I did get his message. We kind of modified that day a bit. It was kind of a fun period.

I was so appreciative to be here, and really there were so few men students, because I had gotten out of the army earlier than most people. There were so many women and I remember we had no athletics or anything, and we had the quad space outside of the administration building. Between Rich Hall and the administration building we used that for football. In fact, the old seminary years before had used that same space for

football. I remember we had the nursing program here during the war, and some of those nursing ladies were pretty hefty women. So they challenged the guys, the few of us that were around, to a football game, and we said we will do it if you play men's rules, and you know some of those ladies were pretty hefty and when they blocked you, you were really being blocked! I think I could go on forever about that kind of thing.

**Julie:** I spoke to Margie Farrell.

**Otto:** Yes. She was from Hughesville. She was either in my class or in the class where she was a freshman when I was a sophomore. I can't remember, but I think she was in my class. We used to all keep close track of each other. I was particularly close to Carol Lansdale from Millville. In fact Carol and I transferred together when we graduated from here to America University. We were kind of recruited by Staff Cassel who had some connection to Williamsport Dickinson but I can't recall; he might have been a graduate. He went to American as a basketball coach and also recruiter for admissions and he insisted that we come down and look over the place. And for me it was love for Washington at first sight. I just loved being there and transferred there, and did my baccalaureate, finis there. With majors in political science and sociology, and you had to have a variety of minors. So I wound up taking minors in economics and a minor in history that went with the political science and a minor in psychology that went with sociology. So I ended up a well rounded social scientist and I forgot all about that old engineering stuff that I had been exposed to before.

**Julie:** Who were your favorite faculty members when you were here?

**Otto:** When I was here as a student, oh without question Helen Weidman. In fact when she died a couple of years ago, and I know Molly was upset because it was so long, I wrote a tribute to Helen. In fact it is in one of the old Lycoming magazines.

**Julie:** Do you remember off hand what year it was?

**Otto:** Oh boy I don't know off hand exactly, within the last 5 years or more. Let see Helen was here, and I just worshipped that woman. She really inspired me to do the kinds of things I did. Later, Fred Stevens was in the music department, but taught my first course in sociology. I can still remember he wasn't much of a sociologist. Although he liked it and later transferred down to the faculty at Susquehanna, and as I recall left music and taught sociology full time down there. I can still remember the first day of class we got our text books and Fred said, "Alright memorize the glossary in the back of the book," which was all these terms and definitions and so forth, "Then we will start talking about sociology after we have an exam on the glossary." As I have taught and been connected to colleges, standards have receded through the years. Back at that time we were also so doggone glad to be in school and most people I know, my parents included, never went to college. In fact, my mother and father both never finished high school, not too many people at that time did. I think kids coming to

college had a different attitude then many do now. I knew one thing; I didn't want to work in plumbing with my dad. He never forgave me for not taking over his business. I certainly didn't want to make a life's career of selling men's clothing, not to mention whisking off the shoulders of the suits every week.

**Julie:** As a veteran your outlook didn't change when you came back. Was it different?

**Otto:** No not a great deal. I just managed to pick up my life a little quicker than some people did. I lost a number of friends in the war, in fact before I got out of high school, I think I referred to this in the talk too, one of my good friends in high school dropped out of high school to avoid being drafted and enlisted in the navy. I can still remember Dunbar talking to us before he left about the fact that we were going to be in fox holes while he was going to have a nice bunk on a ship. It was kind of tragic because the ship he was on got torpedoed and he was lost before we even graduated from high school. It was kind of a sad graduation, because we all knew where we were going. We already lost one of us, and my class was around 70, something like that; my graduating class from high school, so we all knew each other fairly well.

I thought of a couple other things that happened here during college. In terms of faculty members that made great impressions I can still remember Al Dickison, spelled differently from Dickinson, he was a young guy. Also Jean Yocum, a beautiful young lady, the relatively few men on campus would drool when she walked across the campus. They both taught, well we had a secretarial program at Dickinson at that time. She taught short hand and typing and I think Al taught bookkeeping and so forth, but his first love was theatre. I had been interested in that, I had been in high school plays and that kind of thing. One of our most memorable things, we worked all year on it; he started a variety show sort of thing. It became a tradition for awhile called Campus Thunder, which consisted of a lot of different acts and that kind of thing.

Then he did a Christmas pageant every year, which was really impressive. We had it in the chapel, the altar was beautiful and so you had the stage available for it. I wrote one when I first came back here for the Christmas pageant, which was a tear jerker, I also got to direct it. It was a tear jerker about this fellow who was away in the South Pacific, homesick for his family and so forth. It ended with the organ music- I built, with cheese cloth, a big rosette window and we left it on the altar where it belonged and then we mounted this over it. It looked like stain glass, but it was painted on cheese cloth. We built a platform behind the altar and behind this the rosette window. At the end when the soldier was walking up the aisle to meet his mother, who was coming down the aisle, the choir was arranged in benches, singing Silent Night. Over the altar, the lighting changes, and it looks like this stain glass window is melting like wax; we had a manger scene behind it. It was very touching.

We had no athletics and drama became a real plan. When I first came back here for teaching there was still something here of that tradition, but there was no department

of drama. When I came back here to teach, I had taught at Penn State for 2 years and then DePaul University out in Indiana for 6 six years, so it was 8 years after I finished college and my master's degree. The campus was still kind of small; it had turned into Lycoming College. In fact it did that the year after I graduated from here, otherwise I would have stayed here as a four year student. But I'm not sorry I went to Washington, as I had said I loved that city. I got a terrific education there and took advantage of everything you could do.

The whole drama thing: Bradley Hall was standing when I was here as a student, and the basement was unused. It had a wooden floor; it was kind of an English basement that was up above the ground about five feet. The drama club people cleaned it up and painted this huge dragon on the wall, it was about 25 feet long. In fact, I think it probably still exists in some of the old year book pictures. We called it the "Dragon Room" and we used to have our drama meetings down there. We kept a lot of old furniture that we used for sets and so forth.

**Julie:** Was it just used for drama? It was never a classroom or anything?

**Otto:** Well I think maybe before that it had been. When I was here, you see, that was part of the girls' dormitory. The library was on the first floor, this was in Bradley. The library was on the first floor and the floors above it, I think there were 3 floors up there. These floors may have been classrooms at one point, but I'm sure they had girls housed there. Girls were in one side of Old Main, there was a block of the building in the center which was built later. The oldest part of Old Main was a two story building, at about where the entrance to Lamade Gym is, and that stood there itself. I've seen old drawings even before the photography period.

**Julie:** Was that the section with the front porch on it?

**Otto:** No, the front porch was on the other end, facing down by the railroad tracks on Fourth Street. This was originally a two story building, and then as the place prospered a little bit more they added the top two floors. They also put on the one with the front porch which kind of matched it. As I recall from my own history; I am very interested in the history and always have been of the school, I think they had these two little war story towers and then later built the center section which was considerably larger. I think that must have been five or six floors. The chapel was located on the second level of that, and occupied two stories. It had big stained glass windows and a platform where the altar had been. It was more or less empty space when I was here; we went through it to get to the stairways. The men's dormitory space was on the floors above the chapel, before Clark Chapel was built.

**Julie:** Clark Chapel was the chapel when you were here, is that correct?

**Otto:** Yes I think that was built around 1938 or 39.

**Julie:** What other buildings were here, when you were a student?

**Otto:** Okay, we had the Angel Factory as it was called. It had the central heating plan in it. We had Old Main of course, and we had Bradley Hall. We had the old gym which is now the Fine Arts building and we had Rich Hall.

**Julie:** The old Fine Arts.

**Otto:** That was the gym.

**Julie:** What about up on Washington Boulevard?

**Otto:** No, that did not belong to the college. I think when I was here as a student, Dr. Long lived in the first floor of the East wing of Old Main. Other faculty from when I was a student here, Florence Dewy who taught music and was also Dean of Women, a very strict kind of life it was. I think I recall Dr. Long moved in later when they acquired that room on the boulevard- to the one on the corner of One College Place and the boulevard.

**Julie:** Which is now the admissions office.

**Otto:** Yes, but it hasn't changed a great deal from when they lived there, although I don't think I was ever in it when they lived there. I was in it when I came back and became faculty, and went there a number of times when Fred Wertz and Betty lived there. Anyhow, the brewery was still functioning, when I was here as a student.

**Julie:** Did you ever sneak over there?

**Otto:** No, it was interesting though the Methodists were very, very strict about not drinking. The smell of the hops, on days like today, outside its kind of overcast and damp, would waft over and just lay on the campus. That was still going on when I first came here to teach. By that time they had added a building, immediately beside- kind of running between, Bradley Hall and Clark Chapel. The building was called Memorial Hall, and it had started life as an army barracks over at the Allenwood Military Institution. It looked like a normal typically good barracks, but they knocked it down, brought it over in sections and built a very tall basement. They built one floor and came up with the level of the ground there just outside the chapel, and built kind of a little bridge across to the doorway of the building. They did a nice job of putting the bricks on three sides of it. From the brewery side, of course, it looked like the old beat up barracks zone, all the wood rotted and the paint wasn't too good either. That was where my office was when I first came back to teach. I kind of lucked out when I first got back because Helen Weidman and I were office mates. We continued our friendship all that time

**Julie:** Okay, you returned to Lycoming College as a faculty member in 1956, after earning your BA.

**Otto:** Yes, well I got my BA at America in '48 and my master's from Bucknell in '49. I got my first job, which I was terribly lucky about it, teaching for Penn State. Actually I'm constantly reminding people that Joe Paterno and I joined the Penn State faculty the same year. I didn't know him very well, he was an assistant coach he was not the head honcho at that point.

I was working most of the time with the Bat stand at Penn State. They had opened the year before that which was called the Behrend Center up in Erie. It is now the Behrend College in the Penn State system. When it was opened it was a one year center. They started off with a very small faculty. I had a fabulous career in teaching because the faculty was like a family. We didn't have a great many students. We had this wonderful mansion. Mrs. Behrend's husband was one of the founders of the Hammermill Paper Company. They had the estate on the unfashionable side of Erie because Mr. Behrend didn't like the sun in his eyes when he went to work in the morning while he was being driven by his chauffeur. So they lived on the unfashionable side where the sun was always behind him. They had this beautiful mansion there; we had two barns. The ring barn, the Behrend children went there to visit the horses and train them and so forth, and then there was the working barn. Penn State had the good sense to leave it looking like a barn.

It was a big campus; they had as much acreage as on the main campus. It was a beautiful stop, it had a little cemetery, and one of the Behrends' sons had been killed in an automobile accident. They built a slightly miniaturized version of Bruton Parish church in Williamsburg Virginia; lighted it with candles no road went to it, just a little path that went back through the woods. It was just a wonderful kind of thing.

I joined that faculty the second year they were in operation. We were all just great buddies; we did all these crazy things with the students. The Behrends had a heated swimming pool outside the mansion; they had a ski lift up the mountain. They had a yacht that carried them from their place in Connecticut to a place they owned on the Riviera. This was big time wealth! Mr. Behrend was gone at that point, but she gave that estate the big country house they thought of; it started out as a little four room stone farm house. She brought stone masons from Italy to match the stone work of the old house, and added on to it to make it huge. When I first moved there, before I had found a place to live, I was living in the servants' corners of the house. For example, in the library, she had wonderful carpenters who were able to build bookshelves that looked like they were sagging, but they were perfectly true. It was just an unbelievable place. There were servant's cottages surrounding the place, the old chauffeurs quarters were occupied by the fellow who taught chemistry and his family, and where the six limousines had been parked that became the chemistry labs. It was just a wonderful place to start to teach.

I worked two years there, teaching both sociology and political science. Then I got a job at Depaul University, a wonderful man who had been kind of on the edge of the American Founders of Sociology, hired me to come out and teach sociology in the department there in the Midwestern Ivy League School. I'm very grateful, and I go to see people out there. In fact, there and Lycoming are my two favorite colleges. Oh also the 29 years I put up at Hartwick College in Oneonta. I think I pretty much hit all the buildings that were on campus and I ramble on here. What is now the administration building was the new library that replaced the library that had been in Bradley Hall.

**Julie:** Okay, you came back in 1956; Dr. Wertz was the president at that point. How was he different then Dr. Long?

**Otto:** Well in many ways. He had rather a vigorous temper on occasion. Dr. Long did also, but Dr. Long had been here so long he was kind of like a father figure really. I remember Dr. Long had a sense of humor because we had these formal receptions for freshmen every year, and when I was a sophomore I was one of people who was supposed to escort through ladies on my arm, and walk them through. I sort of remember these palm trees, these palm plants that they moved stuff out of the lounge in the library, and had it in there as sort of a social center, and I took one of Dr. Long's daughters through the receiving line and introduced her to her father. He carried it off very well, as if he had never seen the child before. He had a big family, but I'm sure that he had seen her before.

There were always all these stories circulating, because he was very straight-laced, he had this huge family. The Methodist ministers used to meet every summer, for a conference on campus. There were all these stories spread by the maintenance guys of the beer bottles they took out of the dorm rooms after the ministers had occupied them. There were always so many stories going about but I'm not sure how true many of them are.

Let me get back to Miss Dewy for a minute, the violin teacher, a sweet beautiful lady, but very strict. She started as dean of women. When you would go out on a date with your girl, you had to have her back early as early as nine o'clock during the week, and ten o'clock on weekends. She would always get ready for bed early on the evenings, and I can still remember vividly this faded blue kimono she had; she used to put her hair up in rags. So here she would come to the door; you couldn't go into the lounge or dormitory at all, she would come to the door and hold out her hand and shake hands with the girl that you were bringing back. She would pull her up close and say, "Did you 'sniff sniff,' have a good time Deary?" She was just delightful really. Helen Felix took over for her later I think. I knew Helen very well too.

**Julie:** Who were your fellow faculty members when you came back and started teaching?

**Otto:** Well I mentioned Helen Weidman, Bob Ewing had an office right down the hall from where Helen and I had an office. He had an office by himself. Phil Gillette was here when I was a student, he was on the faculty, and I think Phil was here when I came back to teach. He retired went to Florida and then later died. I kept in correspondence with Mrs. Gillette until she died.

**Julie:** Who was the dean then?

**Otto:** I know Marshall was here, I'm trying to think if he was dean, and I do not recall. James Skeath was here both when I was student and when I came back; we became quite good friends. Interestingly Francis who I was so glad to see, in fact today when I came by there I was wishing I had time, but with the traffic situation I didn't, I'll try again before I go back. She was Miss Knights when I went to South Side High School. She was a geometry teacher. She joined the faculty here, shortly after I came here, and we were good friends. She was one high school faculty person I had, and then my second grade teacher who was Elise Roads who later became Elise Roads Schaffer; she joined the faculty here teaching education, while I was here on the faculty. It was kind of an interesting connection. It isn't often that you have your old second grade teacher as a colleague when you're on a college faculty. I'm trying to remember the man that taught French. I know that Phil taught Spanish and German; they lived down on Fourth Street in a double brick house that is now part of the parking lot. Why can't I remember the name of the man who was a really wonderful teacher who taught English? I was so lucky to have really great teachers that inspired me. I think my own teaching life I have tried to live up to the great people that they were. I'm trying to think of others that were on the faculty. Arnold Courier came when I was here; Walter McIver of course was here. When I was doing my musicals on the faculty person, I remember Maryann Ciraulo was one of my students, and had a comic lead in what I wrote, produced and directed for kids to do who couldn't afford royalties. Three musicals I think, and they used a lot of students; forty or fifty, you could never put them on anywhere because you could never afford to hire that many actors and actresses.

**Julie:** This is when you were faculty?

**Otto:** Yes faculty.

**Julie:** You must have spent your whole life over there.

**Otto:** Oh I did, well at least a lot of it. It was great fun. In fact the shows became so popular that we actually had youngsters from town waiting for the caste people to come out, to collect their autographs. *Let's go Abroad*, *Spirit May Come*, *Summer in Greasepaint*, those were the names of the three musicals. Going back to Mary Ciraulo, she was a student that had a wonderful voice; Walter was in the music department and really giving Maryann lessons. When he heard that she had a part in my musical, he was

very unhappy he was afraid that I might ruin her voice. Fortunately I didn't she became an opera star.

**Julie:** She came back?

**Otto:** Guy Rothfuss was in one, let see he was in summer in *Greasepaint*. The plot of that involved a bunch of college kids who went out to start a summer theatre. I had been in summer theatre myself by that time. These kids went out to open an old barn and start a summer theater, the barn of course had been occupied by a bunch of old crooks that had hidden the loot in the barn. They returned of course, and the only way they could find and search for the loot was because the guy who had hidden it was shot. We worked that out as a prologue for the musical. For the musical I didn't have a whole orchestra, I had a guy playing the organ and students wrote the music, I did the lyrics, and the book. So anyway Guy Rothfuss was one of the crooks and I noticed that he had been back on campus with his wife to appear on campus. They were the two who had lost their leader in the gang, and they had known he had hidden the loot in this barn, so this gave us a lot of chances for comedy. They thought the only way they could hang around the kids and look for the loot was to join the drama company. Well of course they both had three left feet when they tried to dance. It was really quite humorous.

**Julie:** Now I wanted to ask you something about Dr. Wertz the college President.

**Otto:** Nelly Gorgas was his secretary and she was a wonderful woman and we were friends until she died. She went up and taught at Jersey Shore High School. Emily Biechle, who is still in town, was here the whole time I was in town. In fact, she had been in the secretarial program when I was a student in the business program. We are still in touch, I hear from her occasionally I call her every once in a while on the phone.

**Julie:** She is a delightful young lady, but she will not come in for me to interview her!

**Otto:** You need to knock on the door, and you say, "Here I am! You can't get rid of me." She has so many stories that could be so useful. Okay, so back to Dr. Wertz.

**Julie:** Did he relate well to the faculty?

**Otto:** This is not to be critical of him, because this is what most college presidents were like at that time. For example, one year he went on this kick that the grades were too high. So the faculty responded, vigorously. I didn't respond vigorously because I was always a very tough grader. Well then the next set of grades came out; he kind of softened it down a bit. He started to get worried about loss of students and so forth. Then he saw faculty walking across the quad which didn't have a sidewalk at that time, because it was used for the football before we had the stadium. He made quite a scene about how people could walk around this instead of cutting across it.

**Julie:** Well faculty is usually in a hurry and don't have a lot of time.

**Otto:** Well see in those days you had the president hiring everybody. For example, I dealt with him when I came here. There was nobody else, no committee; it was all introduced into academia after that.

**Julie:** What were the circumstances that brought you back to the college?

**Otto:** The circumstance that brought me back from Depaul was the continued illness of my father. Back here in Pennsylvania he was taken ill while I was at American University. He had a number of strokes and had to leave his business long before he had planned to retire. For about 25 years he was quite severely disabled, handicapped. So it was getting too much of a problem for my mother to handle him.

I could tell Lycoming wanted someone, but it was kind of a challenge because, they had had a number of folks here that taught sociology, as one person departments, and had not been very successful at it. Well, one left and I had heard about it and called Dr. Wertz and asked him if he would be interested in me, and he was. I started with a one person sociology department. I had about six or seven majors at that point. There were no prerequisites for the course. The first year I had to set up the classes so even the advanced students had an intro part first. Then I moved into whatever the specialty was going in the advanced course. I was here 12 years teaching. I went from just myself to two people. I had 3 fulltime and a part time, I think I persuaded P.D. Mitchell who is a great friend of mine to come down and teach a course. Even though he didn't have sociology training, the man was remarkable he could do anything really. In fact I had one of his children as one of my students in a class while I was here.

**Julie:** Did they have big shoes to fill in?

**Otto:** Oh they sure did, and they did fill them. The same way with the Fishers who I started a program with at the Bethune-Douglas Center; I took the students up there two afternoons a week, late afternoons. They worked with the youngsters when they came home from school. That was a real wonderful experience. I actually got some of the boys who were on the wrestling team to go up, because these children would really take to wrestlers. Students would go up there and became it was a real education in social work for my students. I somehow scrounged up some wrestling mats for that program. Those poor little children were not very clean, would come and we were afraid the mats were going to become useless. These kids cooked up the idea that in wrestling you had to take a shower before you wrestled and after you wrestled. I remember one parent came to me furious, because it was winter time, and everyone knew that is was bad for children to take baths in the winter time because they would catch colds. It was really interesting.

**Julie:** It's too bad you don't live here now the center really needs help.

**Otto:** I was the second light invited to join their board. Of course it was through P.D. we had become good friends and also Oscar Fisher was on the board at that time. How small the world is. I advised a fraternity at Hartwick, and directly across the street from the fraternity house that I advised lived one of Oscar Fisher's sons who was a good friend of P.D.'s kids. There were so many connections.

**Julie:** The students loved you definitely, and Sue McCormick said you were her favorite.

**Otto:** Sue was one of my students; her husband was one of my students also. I have them all over the place really.

**Julie:** You do keep in contact with many of your students.

**Otto:** Oh a great many of them. The mailman hates me at Christmas time! It is absolutely magnificent. I have boxes of pictures of my students' youngsters, and now my students' grandchildren and so forth. It is just the most exciting thing. I always try to stay home Christmas Eve, and put a fire in the fireplace and just sit there and go through everything the cards, letters, and pictures. It is absolutely a wonderful, rewarding kind of thing.

**Julie:** You left Lycoming in 1968 then you went to Hartwick.

**Otto:** No I didn't; I did leave, here, in '68 and we had changed Presidents at that point. Dr. Wertz had ended up fulfilling his dream as a bishop. He had really wanted that, and it was so obvious that he had wanted to be bishop of Washington. That didn't happen and he wound up bishop in West Virginia. There was that period in between, and then Detwiler came. He was the CEO for the cable company in Jersey Shore. He came down and said he could run the college a couple hours a day. So anyway I just wasn't terribly happy with the situation at that point. Dr. Carl, who had been second in command at the Williamsport Technical Institute to Dr. Parks, who was the founder, had offered me a position as Dean of Liberal Arts a good year before that time, at the now named Williamsport Community College. Dr. Carl really shepherded it through to make it a community college. To me it seemed to be an opportune time to go because, I still had illness problems with the family and I could definitely stay in Williamsport. In any event, I put in 6 years as Dean of the Arts and Sciences of Williamsport Community College. There was a period of considerable growth, most of the time I was there I taught at least one introductory course in sociology because I loved doing it.

**Julie:** In 1968 wasn't that when the mess was with Dr. Marshall leaving?

**Otto:** Marshall was here when I was here.

**Julie:** Do you know what that was all about?

**Otto:** Well its interesting Dave Busey, who I forgot to mention, was coach at that point and Helen Hasskarl was his secretary. She was also the wife of my minister at Saint Marks. She left here in hope of a little better position because pay was not always outstanding at Lycoming and so forth. She went up to the community college at just about the time that I had gotten there. So she wound up as my secretary, and kind of administrative assistant. We have been lifelong friends. I still hope to get down and see her because her husband is not well. I was president of the congregation at Saint Marks when I left town to go to New York State.

So then I went to New York in 74, and I've been there ever since. I'm actually retired, since I got back from my last trip from Ireland. This was a program for Hartwick that I ran in Ireland for 20 years. People in that country officially made me an honorary citizen. I have an Irish godchild and it's wonderful. If you ever decide to go to Ireland let me know, and I will put you in touch with all different wonderful people. When I came back from the trip this past January, that's when I formally retired from Hartwick.

I am currently doing some part time teaching for the state university. I'm helping them develop a capstone course for their mass communications program. Mass Communications was one area; I taught so many different areas. You kind of get used to going to where ever you are needed. Even if it wasn't your specialty you put everything into it. I taught mass communication for years and years, actually before it was ever called that. I started teaching a course here called public opinion. Many of those courses also involved sociology. Now mass communications is a department, there are whole schools of it; there are twenty five people in the department that I teach with communication arts. I'm helping develop a cap stone course, kind of a senior thesis type course, for the graduating majors in the mass communication wing in the department. This includes theatre and speech which are also in the department.

**Julie:** Have you done any theatre work since you have left here?

**Otto:** Not at Hartwick. I'm involved with theatre a bit. We have a very active theatre company in Oneonta which is semi professional; it gives about 3 or 4 musicals every year. I'm currently on a volunteer basis trying to help them get connected so busloads of people will come in. I definitely support that kind of thing. They're about to build a new multimillion dollar headquarters. This will include a large theatre, small theatre, practice rooms that kind of thing in it, in Oneonta, which is quite a small town. I'm wondering how they are going to find the multimillions in order to do this. Well they have great confidence, so I hope it all comes through.

**Julie:** How would you like most to be remembered?

**Otto:** As a good teacher, more than anything else.

**Julie:** What advice would you give to current academic students that would be most valuable to their academic career, and how have students changed?

**Otto:** How students have changed, oh my I have seen so many changes in all sorts of ways. I have seen so many student fads that I go far enough back to bstar where there was some formula that every so many words you had to insert B's into it. Like I B'going down town. I have also seen more clothing customs that you could shake a stick at. All of them were shocking at the time. I can remember when the most shocking thing men could do on campus was shave off their hair. Shortly after that we kind of got into the hippy period, and the same people who were saying, "How they could do that?" were saying, "Why don't they cut their hair?"

In terms of motivation this is a sore subject, not many academic people would want to talk about it, but student apathy has become so noteworthy, that there are even sociologist attempting to do studies to explain why it is there. They are very hard to motivate. One of my colleagues at the same university was saying that the other day, when we were talking about the stuff that they like on TV like MTV and so forth. We were chatting about the fact that when they are all by themselves you don't have seven writers, a full orchestra, set builders, etcetera. And yet they have grown up all their memory time with the television and the spectacular stuff that you see on it.

**Julie:** They never had to entertain themselves.

**Otto:** No that's the thing, it's so amusing to me, and I have lots of kids who don't go right to work after they graduated. They have to go travel in Europe or something to kind of get their bearings because it has been such a terribly difficult experience for them these past four intense years. They think that life is intense at the moment, but they have no clue at all. Rarely do I have, well we have student employment on our campus, and the kids are not paid terribly well, of course it is dished out on a need basis. Some of the jobs are simply amazing, a kid that sits in the gym and hands out towels to people who come in. So much has been given to them, and I think sociologists now say one possibility to explain this is that most of them came from families who weren't terribly affluent. They did have a chance to go to college like me, partly through the GI Bill, and did have to work pretty hard.

I have felt for awhile that I don't want my kids, well I want my kids to have a much easier, better time than I. So the kids have gotten used to that all the way through. That's another trend, one that is more recent. Another thing is when I was a kid there were really more things that kids could do that were visible and useful to keep the household going. We didn't have an automatic washing machine. We were lucky to have one with an agitator in it. We took the clothes out, rang the ringer, then we took them out and hung them up, we didn't have a dryer. Well as my mother got older and so forth I actually did all that stuff. We didn't have a dishwasher so I helped with the dishes. All those things I did were useful. Even though they didn't add anything

economically to the household they were still useful. But now you see there is no need for that. I have friends, who have children that really worry about what kind of little chores they can cook up for them to do. There just aren't that many things for them to do.

We've got the notion that, well we have had great inflation, and I complain that they don't work hard enough, but they haven't been pushed to work hard enough. Great inflation goes back to the Vietnam period in part, when the draft existed and if kids didn't do well enough in college they might be drafted. Well younger faculty members thought gee, I'm not in favor of the Vietnam War, it's only a B, the kid probably deserves a C but at least that will keep him out of Vietnam. This challenge of grades, if you gave less than a B in a course, well I have figures on it. The average grades given out on a campus were in the Bs. This was not true before. We usually had somewhat of a curve for at least for the first two years of college. Where every time there was a D down here there was a B. For every F there was an A. Now the As Bs and Cs were the preponderant grade. We in today's world on most campuses that I keep track of, if you give a kid a C; this is like they have flunked the course. Well you see you have younger and younger faculty coming in who went through this very kind of thing themselves, because the Vietnam period was quite awhile ago. All of these factors come together, most of the kids I went to school with I don't believe their parents went to college. My father's brothers and sisters, for example, only one in his large family of seven or eight went to college. My uncle went and became a petroleum engineer. He was the only one, but when I look at my cousins a larger number have gone, and their kids practically all of them have gone to college. It is not something that they have to earn, it becomes something that you kind of own. You don't ask people, "Are you going to college?" when they graduate high school, you ask, "Which college are you going to?"

**Julie:** Not every child is meant to go to college.

**Otto:** I don't think so either. Then there are other things here. Parental attention, this is a sticky one. Occasionally I will pull a little thing to illustrate a point like this in one of my own classes, "In how many of your families are both parents together?" if they are together, that's a qualifier too because very often they are not together. You learn how to use language differently. Parents' weekend you don't say, "Hi, Mr. and Mrs. Jones," because Mary brought them over, you say, "Oh, Mary are these your folks?" because you have no idea who is there.

Then the company, and the advertising sold is at a need for so many things, you have to pay for the car every so often and so forth. So you have to learn your family particularly when the kids go to college. Even before that, golly if you have both parents coming home tired from a job, how much time do you have to spend with the children? I started to say something but then I got side tracked, but I'll ask a question like, "How many of you, when you were in elementary school or even junior high had a parent always home when you came home from school?" You almost never get a hand up.

Then they look at me like I'm some kind of freak when I say I can only remember two times from grade one to at least grade nine or ten, only two times that I came home from school and my mother wasn't there. Therefore she knew what I was getting into when I came home from school.

**Julie:** Is there anything else you would like to add? Is there anything that we didn't cover?

**Otto:** Well advice to current students I gave quite a bit of it in the talk. I realize that it is not the wisest thing to give advice. The older you get, they are less interested in it and they don't see it as applicable and so forth. The thing that I wish I could do more is to engender is a love for learning. We have become so practical that almost anything at the college level and back at high school that you learn to raise the question, "How is this going to help me earn a living?"

I think I mentioned this in the talk too, every year when I go to graduation I see students walk across and get that diploma and in cases that I know, many of them are going out into jobs that didn't even exist when they started college. Therefore if you are going to ask what each thing does, you want specialization. At the state university all of them think they are going to be TV anchors and with this swelling up of stations, fewer jobs for TV anchors and so forth, where are they going to get jobs like that?

Well if you have a broad education, to get that broad education you have to love learning. It's very hard to inoculate people with; you can't take a pill for it. You have got to love to learn it then you will see a purpose in it. I'm gung ho for liberal arts education over the specialized type. You will never know what little thing you would have gotten interested in. I just had a student who graduated from here, when I taught here, we are still in touch. He was not one my majors, we just got to be kind of good friends, and I think he came to my house a few times to help with some of my chores. I used to have students come over every once in a while and put the air conditioner into the window because I couldn't do it by myself. But anyway, he comes to me his senior year and said, "You know what? I'm scared; I don't have any idea what kind of job I can get." I knew he was from Chicago, and I said, "Look Jerry, you have borrowed my books on architecture which is one of my hobbies, also books on interior design, that kind of thing. Obviously if you are borrowing them you must have some interest in them. Let's sit down and think, what you could do that might let you use some of that?" He was an economy major. So I wound up suggesting to him that he write to real estate management offices in Chicago, there were quite a few of them, and apply for a job. He wrote three letters, two of the three called him in for interviews, and one hired him. They said it was the first time anyone had ever written to them to apply for a job. They were just not the kind of place people looked. Later he went to the west coast and got a job with a bank, wound up managing all their properties from Hawaii to the Mississippi. He was an average student, not outstanding, a C student, which today's students would be ashamed to be. Then you were quite handy because you were like everyone else.

This kind of experience is tougher to have, because the whole culture pushes us toward the practical. What is practical becomes obsolete. I have a dickens of a time with computers. I type, but I taught myself to type. I would occasionally hit the wrong one but I would go at my own speed. When I had moved out of my office, I had bought from departmental funds actually, one of the grand kind of things, an IBM selector typewriter. I loved it, but nobody has a typewriter anymore.

**Julie:** I have a computer, but I also have a typewriter which needs fixed right now.

**Otto:** I bet you will have trouble getting it fixed.

**Julie:** There is a man that still does it here, right by the college.

**Otto:** These trends are what are producing the different type of student. It's not their fault.

**Julie:** I want to say thank you very, very much for coming.

**Otto:** Thank you I have enjoyed it.