

Oral History Transcription

Matt McGowan: (19:15) Um yeah um, we were wondering what um highlights do you remember from your first week of classes at Drake?

Jack Watson: Say that again.

Matt McGowan: Um, what highlight do you remember from your first week of classes?

Jack Watson: Highlights? From classes? I had the most wonderful history teacher, Ethel May Jones, ahh I ahh, she was a good teacher and ahh one of the best experiences I had. I just tried to think of George's last name, George Huff was the ahh biology teacher, Lee Johnson was his right hand person and Faye Shawhan was with him, those three were a terrific group. A young lab assistant who now is at Wesley Acres where I live, she's in the health center there, ahh was a lab instructor she was three or four years older than we were and ahh ahhh having a contact with her now is a real plus because ahh she's a Des Moines person too. I didn't know her until I met her in the lab thing. Funny thing about lab, I'll never forget part of that lab, we cut apart earthworms and other things, and I had a cat that we were cutting apart just before lunch (muffled laughter) and if they do it the same way you get a lot of formaldehyde on your fingers, when your working with cutting up a cat and that doesn't make lunch particularly appetizing. Funny what you think of after that long a time. But biology class was wonderful the (indistinguishable), we had a wonderful person on campus, Paul Helmick, he was a physics prof. ahh he ahh because I was interested in journalism and I wanted to learn more about cameras and stuff. He had a photography course that I took from him, which I was one of the highlights. We had a ahh retired prof. that did some seminars. His last name was...J. Werthington Smith...I think it was, Werthington was his middle name, who taught that class that was one of the highlights. Um this was such a friendly campus, I think it still is a friendly campus. Uhh when I'd been there Furyk was the drama teacher, and when you're in journalism and doing work in a newspaper you get around and meet an awful lot of people that an average student doesn't doesn't meet. I was editor of *The (Times) Delphic* when I ahh...in my senior year and I can say this that *The Delphic* now is ten times as good as when we were in school and I did do a great job with *The Delphic*. Are you working on *The Delphic* or you will be you will be as...your probably taking classes but your not on *The Delphic* yet?

Matt McGowan: Uhh uhh. Not yet.

Jack Watson: What's your major?

Safwan: Um actuarial science.

Jack Watson: What?

Safwan: Actuarial science.

Jack Watson: Ok well good for you. Hey your something you came to the right town you know that. I mean this is the heart of actuarial science.

Safwan: Yeah.

Jack Watson: All these companies, I worked at Principal bank and they had more actuaries...The nice thing about an actuary is that you learn all phases of the building...of the business. I don't know where you are in yours now but you must be pretty good in math. Are your going to be an actuary?

Safwan: Yeah, I hope so.

Jack Watson: Yeah math and statistics are kind of important. Well that's good; well you better put your application in at Principle because it's a wonderful place to work and a great company. We got some bad publicity last week, I don't know if you saw that. They had a \$21 million assessment from the federal government because they were supposedly not not completely revealing all of the stuff they bought. They got clipped for \$21 million, and Wells Fargo for about twice that much, not very good publicity for a company that really has one of its core values of integrity but I think there is supposed to be some extenuating circumstances. I don't have many contacts at the company anymore because I've been gone, well since 1985, my best one is the CEO and that's a pretty good one to have, Larry Zinkl...Zippleman, is an actuary and he worked for us on compensation stuff when I was involved there, but I know him and he knows me by name which is a plus. When I went to Banker's Life (?) there were 500 people working there, when I left there were 7,000 (muffled *wow*) so a lot of growth. They've kicked off some lately, because I don't know where they stand now, Nationally, I think they've got somewhere between 12 and 16,000 people, but ah they ah cut off a couple of their business...got out of the health insurance business, the mortgage business so some of the people got laid off some of them didn't. The objective is to get that person back into a position and they've done a pretty good job of that. Ok, where do we go from here?

Matt McGowan: Um you talked about um how you were involved with *The Times Delphic*. Um what other activities were you um involved in on campus?

Jack Watson: Not much, ah when you're working a lot...and the Delphic, the Delphic was a pretty full time job. Ah you're responsible for getting out a newspaper, when I was on the Delphic I was a...circulation manager as a freshman and doing other kinds of things until I was managing... editor my senior year...my junior year and then editor my senior year. Let me tell you some incidents about the Delphic you might be interested in. Ah where was I on Pearl Harbor Day? I was working in the Delphic office on that Sunday. I got a phone call and it said, "Did you hear the news?" No we didn't have any radio there or anything like that. They said Pearl Harbor got bombed and I said...I didn't know the person...I said are you sure about that? Yeah, he said we sure we lost a lot of battleships so that's when we got the wake up call that changed our future. Another interesting thing, Does Steve Alan mean anything to you? That name? Steve Alan was a comedian and had a lot of publicity. He did he did...He was in the theatre, he was very creative, he wrote many songs, he was...he did lots of things, but he was a young freshman and one morning under the door in the Delphic office I had a note from this freshman. That... here's a column that I'd like to have you use if you can and if you want to talk about it call me. Of course, I didn't know who Steve Alan was...Drake is very proud of knowing Steve Alan now because he was very good to Drake in many ways and he became a nationally known figure...I think he's dead now I'm not sure but that's why I bumped into him and a very creative guy. We ran his column because he did it week after week. He was critical of me at one point because he says, "You know because you put the little bold faced lines in between the sub-heads." And I said yeah. And he said, "Well your stealing my thunder." I said, what do you mean I'm stealing your thunder? He said, "You're giving away my story." I said that for the readership so they'll read your darn stuff. One of those moments... wonderful piano player he would sit down in Bulldog here Bulldog room down in...it was new a brand new residential hall...I don't remember the name of it, but he'd sit down there and play piano for the guys and that it was an interesting episode. You ever heard of the Gallup poll? Gallup poll was one of the early polls that George Gallup was probably one of the best poll persons in getting people's opinions and that stuff out and in Asia the Gallup poll is still going under a new name. And he headed up the journalism department here...I think he went from here to Iowa City, but he started the poll the whole poll idea was generated right here at Drake University and I thought that was a plug for Drake. Another person that I hadn't thought about this for a long time, it was a philosophy prof...not a philosophy prof...a psychology prof. and he invented an eye camera that the advertising people got interested in. He he developed a process where they could

take pictures of a person to see which part of the paper the eye fell on first. He came up with a lot of different philosophies to help these make-up people...to read the column from head to left...but little stuff to help the advertisers that should be important for editorial people to because where you put the stories makes a heck of a difference. The advertising people liked it because they could get some input where they should put their ads. There were some other people...cant remember his name. One of the great persons a campus was killed, a prof...Stalnaker...there's a Stalnaker Hall I think and he was a guy in philosophy class that ah he would take on side of the argument and kill you. He would take the same one that he killed you and kill you on the other side of the argument, one of the greats. John Torgeson...I don't know if you'd know him, he's just retired. He's a good guy too. I don't know if he can match Stalnaker because I have strong feelings about him. Ahh...other things about Drake...I mentioned Paul Helmick's name in the...and his son did the commons out here. There's the Helmick name tied in with something here...probably his son. His wife also taught here. I had an economics prof. who were a husband and wife... Ian Hoffman taught economics...Drake used to be known for its fine arts and not to long ago, time goes so fast. I would say a dozen years maybe ten years, they no longer have a fine arts deal. They tied that in with a liberal arts function, which I don think has diluted the program at all. It was a it was a catastrophe many people thought because they liked a distinctive fine arts aspect. They developed a lot of good pianists, good singers and Sheryl...Sheryl Mills was a metropolitan harper (?) started right here. Um um a friend of mine...not at that time but later became known was the dean of fine arts an organist, Frank Jordan. His wife, Alice...Alice Jordan a Des Moines person, has music all over the world where she's made arrangements for hymns and sacred music. They were very proud of that activity. When I was on school, President Morehouse was still here. He was one of the early Presidents of Drake and he was an astronomer, and he found the Morehouse Comet, which was very important at that particular time and it's interesting that I reach back that far. Ahh I don't know where to go from here, I've told you bout everything especially off the top of my head.

Matt McGowan: Um have you stayed in touch with um friends that you made while you were at Drake?

Jack Watson: Have I done what?

Matt McGowan: Have you stayed in touch with friends that you made while you were at Drake?

Jack Watson: Oh yeah sure, some of them are dead, I ahh...my mother lived to be 104 so I've got some good genes for me but many of them have died. I'm still in touch with the wife of the managing editor when I was there, Jim Crawford, I'm still in touch with her she lives in Santa...in in California. Ahh I still have other contacts, Paul Morrison was in school and that's a name I know you know. I got a phone call from him and cards from him when my wife died and we've been friends for a long long time. Paul will live forever I think, he's never driven a car, can't believe that these days can you. When he retired they gave him a new car, parked in his...his wife was dead then and yea I think she was anyway. He got the car never drove it, he bums a ride with someone or takes public transportation or a taxi cab. When I came to campus, we went to chapel and his Dad, he lived in Cedar Rapids, his dad was on the stage at a pep rally, and but now it's the auditorium, it was the chapel area then, and he was leading a pep rally at that particular time so Paul Morrison's family has been around here for a long long time. Paul is a legend you know that, he's been around...they call him the historian, but he retired...he didn't retire I don't think they're still paying him but he's still got a place on campus and he goes to every football game and he pays his own way and goes to basketball games. He and Don Adams, does that name ring a bell with you? Don Adams, he's retired, yea he did retire...he would have been in class this morning. He was vice' president and had a lot to do with student relations. He would've retired about two years ago. Ok do I have anything left in that area or have we covered...

Matt McGowan: Um could you explain for us some memories you have from your graduation ceremony?

Jack Watson: ...Not too many, we lined up with our caps and gowns and went from Old Main to the Christian church. The church was on 25<sup>th</sup> near University (Ave.) and I remember that probably because of pictures that I've seen. ...I guess I and many others especially weren't thinking too much about graduation. We were thinking about what's next, where are we going to be six months, a year from now, but I've been an active alum...we've... we had our 50<sup>th</sup>, 60<sup>th</sup>, reunion. I went up for the 60<sup>th</sup>. I don't think they've had one since. They can't find anybody that will take that job on. Have you ever been in the alumni office? No, I suppose there's no real reason for you to be in there. They've got their own location of course but um a very friendly group, I've got a lot of really good friends that I've known in that for a long long time. One of the gals who edited *The Quax*, we were good friends still are good friends, she lives in Chism, MN that's in the Iron Range area, that's Northern Minnesota. Her name was Vita Ponikwar(?), and I've got her phone number. I've got to call her again because she's been having some health problems but your close to so many of those people...you

establish...there's a lot of Des Moines people. I went to high school with some of these people, Roosevelt High School in Des Moines has some kind of a kinship, these people have some kind of a kinship with each other you find them all over and they get together for various events. I don't know if that's really true of other towns or true for very many other high schools in Des Moines but the Roosevelt people really...I was an ATO with Drake though I didn't get into a Fraternity, until...I was too busy with other things until maybe my junior year, but I was (indistinguishable) but um better get another topic for us.

Matt McGowan: Um what words of advice would you have for this year's graduating class?

Jack Watson: This year's graduating class? Ah keep going to school, keep getting educated you never get too old. Learning is a life long thing. I'm ninety-one, I'll be ninety-one next week and I have a burning desire to learn, that Ray Society fulfilled that. I was taking care of my wife for about eight and a half years when she had the Alzheimer's thing so that slowed be down a little bit. Ah give yourself away ah you get back rewards far more far greater if you give yourself away, help other people. Look for the people in need. Ah give ah...help some people that need a hand and teach them to pass it along. Ahh if someone has a need and you can stretch a little and give them some money or give them some help with books or whatever it may be. Pass along the word that I'm doing this for you because I expect you to pass it along. That's an important philosophy. This world is in a bad place in many ways because people don't have that fraternization or interest in each other that they should have. I foresee they day when that will come...I won't live that long but I think if the world doesn't learn how to get together...the various nations don't learn how to get together we're not going to have very much of a life for anybody. Ah we have a great opportunity ah...I just helped a girl...well I had help but I did the thing for Louise completely for three years and I kind of wrecked my arm because your holding and lifting. I could handle them here but then when I she would clump those on the kitchen here and the leverage was bad and I've got tennis elbow in both arms and I couldn't do it so we got gals in to help. And ah ah ah...I helped one of the girls get some additional education and this is a gal that's smart, lots of ah street smarts but also other kinds of smarts. Ah she didn't finish high school but she had gotten her GED before I met her and you know what that is. You get...complete your education. She had a better high school education out of high school and she was satisfied with the status quo. If things were okay and she was in a rut and I let her know that and she was so good I helped her go to school. And ah she thanks me now because she's a different person and ah I had nothing to do with that except maybe make it...make her really understand that if she wanted

to have a life, she needed more education. She finished at Kaplan (College) and I went to her graduation proud of her and she had her first job interview last... yesterday or the day before and she thinks she got the job so she's really walking tall...and she knows that because I helped her she has an obligation to help somebody else. I've got a young fellow that ah that bought our house when we moved from from West Des Moines to Wes Wesley Acres where we have a retirement community on Grand (Ave.). Ah ah he ah came over to our house for dinner one night and as I say he bought our house so we have a little bit of connection. He said I need some advice and the bottom line was he couldn't read. He finished high school one of the best high schools in Des Moines and he couldn't read and how a person can finish high school and not read. I said what do you mean you can't read? He said I can't read a job application. Can you imagine that, someone who has gone to high school and can't read a job application? Four years and how did he ever get that far without reading. I was surprised he he worked at True Value Hardware on 63<sup>rd</sup> and Grand. I said how do you operate there. He said I memorize everything if he's smart enough to memorize, he's smart enough to do other stuff. I said what price are you willing to pay? He said well if I learned to read I think I'd be a new person so he was old enough. He said I think I would be a little embarrassed going to school with little kids...I could see that too. So I had a friend who was in charge of adult education in Des Moines school system and I talked to her and she said well Chuck's mother in law... and that's her son's mother in law...has done that and she's just retired so I got in touch with her. In six months, he was reading perfect. In nine months, he was reading at a college level, just a matter of being applied. Ah he thanks me all the time for what I gave to him but he also did another think. I had my ninetieth birthday and he gave me ninety dollars. He said I want you to be living so I can give you one hundred next year. I said well what do you want me to do with this I'm not going to take it from you. He said well you got a better feeling of what to do with that kind of money than I have, give it to somebody that really wants a need. Ah when my wife died, he came over with his daughter and gave me a hundred dollars...he can't afford to pay a hundred dollars. I said come on, no back. He says no, invest this for me and I said what would you like to do. And he said I'd like to honor Louise... that's my wife...by either getting a tree or planting flowers. We have wonderful flowers, a nice courtyard we put stuff in, get flowers for Louise or do something else so that place will be more beautiful. So it's a catching kind of thing those are really key things. They're more important than the money you make, they're more important than the publicity you get. They headline I put on my wife's deal, four little lines, Ah "They'll remember her because of her smile and what she did to help other people." (Pause) that that was Louise to put it in a few words that was Louise and people who knew her knew how true that

was. Ah we think too much of ourselves, too much self-gratification. I want today don't worry about that and those kinds of things...I'm scared for the kids in college today. They get a debt...I'd be scared if I had that kind of a debt burden. Ah are you working?

Matt McGowan: Not yet, only in the summers.

Jack Watson: Only in the summertime.

Matt McGowan: Uh huh.

Jack Watson: Are you working?

Safwan: No.

Jack Watson: Yeah, are you here on scholarship?

Safwan: Yeah.

Jack Watson: Yeah, ah we helped start that thing for for for college students to get them a free ride if they continue to do a good job that's a big deal, a free ride. That was everything I don't know if they're still doing that or not. I was on that committee for a while. Ah, what else...take advantage of the opportunities you've got while you're in school. If you don't, your going to regret what you didn't do. I got, I told you I could have been a better student. I don't know if I could have been really, I just didn't have that much time. I didn't think I had that much time. I could have done a better job. I could've done a better job in my job. I thought I did a good job; I was the Senior Vice President down there. I could have done a better job in that job. When you sit back and think of what you could have done. I think that's true of all of us so try to take care of your potential, build on your potential you've got, take advantage of what you've naturally got. You know the smartest guys aren't the guys that get farthest ahead. It's the guy that uses his noodle and works hard and has a people person...that's the other thing. I think one of the most...best talents a person can have is to have a good personal relationship with other people, that's human nature. Some people get along with other people. Some people are lousy at that, the best engineer in the town won't go as far as a pretty good engineer whose got a good people people connection. I see that over and over and over again. I hired a lot of people. I had probably a thousand people working for me at one time. I hired a lot of people but ah the outstanding one's are the one's that can get along with people and know how to handle people. Anything else?

Matt McGowan: That covers it.



Jack Watson: Does it?

Matt McGowan: Yeah, thanks for coming in today.

Jack Watson: Sure was nice to speak with you.

Matt McGowan and Safwan: Yeah, thank you.

Safwan: Thank you very much.

Jack Watson: Good luck to you in your own careers. I think it's terrific that you're here. (42:22)