



ATTENTION: © Copyright Western Washington University Libraries Special Collections. "Fair use" criteria of Section 107 of the Copyright Act of 1976 must be followed. The following materials can be used for educational and other noncommercial purposes without the written permission of Western Washington University Libraries Special Collections. These materials are not to be used for resale or commercial purposes without written authorization from Western Washington University Libraries Special Collections. All materials cited must be attributed to Western Washington University Libraries Special Collections.



This interview was conducted with Dr. Harold Palmer, Professor Emeritus of Business Education, Western Washington University, at his residence in Eugene, Oregon, on September 7, 2005. The interviewer is Tamara Belts.

TB: My name is Tamara Belts and I am here with Dr. Harold Palmer and we're going to be recording some of his memories of Western. You do know that you're being recorded, right?

HP: Yes.

TB: Perfect. Why don't you tell me about how you happened to decide to come to Western?

HP: My journey to Western started right here in Eugene.

TB: You came to Western after being at Eugene?

HP: Yes. Eugene had only one high school. University High the laboratory school at the University of Oregon had closed when they built the new high school, South Eugene High, in 1953. Local school and university administrators changed the program then; instead of student teaching at the University High ("Uni High" they called it) which they didn't have anymore, student teaching was centered at the new South Eugene High. I was one of the new teachers to go there. Some University High teachers didn't like the idea.

The idea was good, but it didn't work out very well. There were a number of people from University High who came with doctor's degrees doing demonstration teaching in high school and they were not very enthusiastic about it. I stayed there for three years. Then I had a chance to go to San Francisco. A friend of mine was writing a book and he wanted me to take his job for a year. So I did, and I liked college teaching so much that I didn't go back to Eugene.

Before teaching in Eugene, I was teaching at Klamath Union High School in Klamath Falls, Oregon. I believe I was president of the Oregon Business Education Association and I was well known. Unbeknownst to me, Dean Mickelwaite, the principal of Eugene High and the administrators decided they wanted me to come and teach, and I didn't even know they were looking for a teacher. The fact of the matter is, I was working on my experiment, and one day a person came to my class and sat down while I was doing an experiment in typewriting with a tachistoscope. He stayed a couple of periods, and then when I had a free moment I went up to our principal and said, "*What's that man doing in my classroom?*" He said, "*Well that's the principal of Eugene High and he wants to hire you.*" I said, "*Well he hasn't said anything to me about it!*" We went on with the day, the routine.

Do you know what a tachistoscope is?

TB: I don't. I was wondering what that was!

HP: That's my doctoral dissertation. A tachistoscope is an overhead projector with a speed adjustment. A teacher at Oregon State, Fred Winger, was doing the same kind of experiment at the college level and we agreed that I'd do it at the high school level and do it for the whole year while he did it quarters at Oregon State. We wanted to see what the differences were in the method or teaching or whatever factor was making any change. So I became quite well known. They hired me.

Uncle Ed. Have you heard of him?

TB: No.

HP: Ed Arntzen?

TB: Oh, yes!

HP: You didn't know him, you're too young.

TB: No, I didn't know him. Was he really your uncle?

HP: No.

TB: Oh, everybody called him that?

HP: Well, no. He was a big, kind of heavysset Norwegian.

TB: Right.

HP: He and his wife didn't have any children, and they were very kind people. He kind of ran the college. He was chairman of the social studies division. That doesn't mean much, but he ran everything except for sciences and math. They had home economics and a few others, but he was the important man, he and William Haggard (the college president). Arntzen and Haggard knew some people at the University of Washington and asked, "*We're going to have a new department here at Western and we want you to suggest some people.*" Well, right away they suggested me. I said to my wife, "*Where in the hell is Bellingham?*"

A couple of years before that, we'd gone to Alaska on one of those summer cruises, and we left from North Vancouver on the *Prince George*. My wife said, "*That's where we changed our money.*" I said, "*Oh yes!*" And we came up Chuckanut Drive. That's the way we entered Bellingham. They didn't have the highway in those days. So, that's how I got to Bellingham.

TB: They interviewed you on the phone?

HP: No, they paid for me to come up here. I met with all the people. Murray and Monahan and Mayer and those professors all became close friends. Most of them are dead.

TB: Dr. Mayer just died.

HP: Yes, I got a call. And Ada Walter just died.

TB: Oh, Dr. Walter's wife?

HP: Yes. She died in the same week as Mayer. The last few years she's been very sick. She lived in Olympia. She had a lot to do with the Foundation. She was a wealthy woman and she would write to me and tell me all about the Foundation. Do you know where she lived?

TB: No.

HP: Do you know where Herb Taylor lived?

TB: I don't know where he lived with his first wife.

HP: On Garden Street. They lived next door. She knew all about the Taylors, and the Taylors knew all about her. She would write to me, a single-spaced typed letter, a couple pages for Christmas, and give all the little details. She was one of our first regular shorthand teachers, and taught shorthand methods.

TB: Did you live on Garden Street yourself?

HP: No.

TB: But you came up to start the commercial education department, or business education at Western?

HP: Yes.

TB: Then you hired Ada Walter to work for you?

HP: Yes, and Hubert Thoreson, "Hub". He stayed there until he retired. He came from North Dakota. And funny thing, I thought we were hiring his brother, who was teaching in one of the North Dakota schools. Just by accident we hired Hub (1971). Hubert was his name, but everybody called him „Hub.“ He was quite a golfer. He lived out on the lake. He was religious. I can't tell any personal things about him, although I worked with him for a long time. We weren't that close.

TB: OK, tell me what it was like working for Dr. Haggard.

HP: Haggard was a prince of a man. He always called me his friend. He and I and a couple other men were Masons and we went to lunch together. There is a different relationship than just working for somebody or knowing them. There's a closeness that develops, first name and all that stuff.

TB: Why don't you tell me a little bit more about Ed Arntzen?

HP: He's one of the nicest men I've ever met. I thought he was slow in his deliberations: "*Well now, we'll take that under consideration.*" "*Holy smoke Ed, tell us what you want!*" However, he was a smart man. He invested money in stocks successfully. I used to ride back and forth to Seattle when he'd see his broker and I wished that the time would come when I could do that. Everybody liked him. Well, not everybody likes everybody, but he was a good man. He did everything he could for the college. When I went there it was Western Washington College of Education, then the name was changed to Western Washington State College, and changed again to Western Washington University.

TB: So when you came, you kind of really developed the business education department. Did you know May Bettman?

HP: Yes, what about her?

TB: Tell me about her?

HP: Yes, she taught some of the skill classes like shorthand and typewriting. But she didn't know why she was teaching them. What we wanted and what we did was turn out teachers who knew how to teach typewriting and shorthand and accounting and so on.

TB: Where was your office when you first came to Western?

HP: Behind the balcony of the old auditorium. They changed the old auditorium into the third floor or fourth floor, which would it be? We didn't have any elevator then. I think it was the third. Anyway, we opened the back door and looked straight down on the parking lot.

TB: So what happened when Dr. Jarrett came?

HP: This was when Jarrett was there (referring to some papers). What's that say?

TB: This is obviously the conflict, "*Convo/Convocare/Conflictus.*" It starts with President Jarrett. It says, "*President James L. Jarrett's convocation address to the freshman class last week seemed a bit out of place for Western Washington State College. Perhaps Dr. Jarrett's mention that he woke up that morning at Harvard University had left a few ivy-covered cobwebs still hanging in his memory.*"

HP: It's written by the school editor. Do you want to take that along?

TB: I'd like to get a copy of it! There were obviously some concerns about it when he first came, where he was.

HP: He was a real concern of everybody. Are you familiar with the campus? He thought he was going to make it a "St. John's of the West."

END TAPE 1, SIDE 1

The faculty was encouraged to attend some of Jarrett's lectures and we did, and we'd go out saying, "*If I taught my class like that, they would never learn a thing.*" There may be a bit of envy or jealousy, which there is in all those situations.

I didn't like Jarrett; I didn't make any bones about it. When the time came for the first time for people who were eligible for full professorships, some were turned down. Ray Schwalm in industrial arts and I, Herb Taylor in anthropology and Charles Harwood in psychology (he later became dean of Fairhaven, he died in a boat accident); we four were nominated and two of us didn't make it. It raised a rumpus. It went clear to the legislature. I've got some papers in here of Jarrett apologizing and all that kind of stuff. There were four trustees and one was a Republican who lived in Seattle somewhere. Anyway, he didn't change his mind; he just had his mind made up in the beginning that he wasn't going to vote for me or Schwalm. They got it and we didn't. It was a big rumpus; the biggest stink to ever hit the college. It went clear to the state legislature. Then the day before graduation, we got a letter from the board of trustees saying they had changed their mind and that all four people were made full professors.

TB: Good.

HP: That didn't set good with Angie. You know who I mean?

TB: Angelo Anastasio.

HP: Yes, well you see we all used to be the same – it was the social studies department and Arntzen was running the whole thing. When the college grew, it didn't work. This was when they established Fairhaven. It became a good college. How is it now?

TB: Very different. Now it's more of a department and the housing is really just housing and it's more like a program than a real college. They take a lot of classes at Western as well as Fairhaven. It's still around, but it's very different. They don't all live in the same place and have all their classes in the same place. They can still kind of do self-designed majors.

HP: It doesn't have the prestige it used to have?

TB: Probably not.

HP: Well, a lot of us didn't like the idea of picking out certain students. They just didn't have anything to do with the rest of the school. The students, as it turned out, I never had anything to do with them, but lots of people didn't think they deserved the prestige.

TB: You did get your full professorship, though?

HP: Yes.

TB: What about Bunke? Do you remember anything about Bunke when he came?

HP: He was an economist. We got along just fine because Mitchell and Mayer and the accountants and all the others were Bunke people.

TB: You liked Bunke then, too? That worked out good?

HP: Yes. He was a nice person.

TB: Wow. So what are some of your favorite memories of Western? Do you have any favorite memories?

HP: Yes, the way we instilled a loyalty to Western students that even today they meet [and get together]. I get Christmas cards and letters from people that I've almost forgotten. I think that's good for the whole school. I liked it, I enjoyed it. I liked it so well that 40 years of teaching college I would do for nothing, but don't tell the boss!

TB: What did you think about the student protests then in the Sixties? Do you have any memories of that?

HP: Yes. That's when a number of college teachers went down to the San Francisco area and recruited black students up to Western. I didn't think that it was a good idea. That was right at the top of the protest. I had taught at San Francisco State before I came to Western. Sam Hayakawa was a popular English teacher at San Francisco State and served as acting president. I dealt with him and he was the nicest of all. I was having a little trouble moving and I said, "*I was told that my moving expenses would be taken care of*" and it didn't happen then, so I went to him. "*Oh sure, don't think anything about it, I'll take care of it.*" I believe the regular president was in one of the colleges in Iraq, somewhere down there, American University.

TB: So that was when you left here, Eugene, the first time and went down to San Francisco for a year?

HP: Yes. They offered me a job in San Francisco, and my wife went out to lunch with somebody and I went with someone else. We met afterwards and shook our heads and I said, "*I couldn't teach down here.*" She said, "*I wouldn't want to live down here.*" So we made no effort to adjust. We just wanted to get back to the Northwest.

TB: So all the time that you worked at Western, was your office in Old Main?

HP: No, we had offices in Arntzen Hall. I've forgotten where it was. It was up on the, I believe third floor, right down the hall from the economics department. Peter Harder became chairman of the economics department. Howard Mitchell and Byron Haglund were in that department also.

Short Break

HP: Before moving here, I lived in the Eugene Hotel for a number of years. That was one of the nicest experience I ever had. They had good food and every Tuesday we'd take a trip. We'd go to one of these big movies... what do they call them nowadays?

TB: IMAX?

HP: Yes. We'd go to Portland every time they had one. Then I fell on my caboose and moved over here. I had to, I couldn't navigate by myself. My wife and I lived for twenty-seven years in Arizona. Before she retired, she worked for the Department of Social Welfare. She was in charge of three northwest counties, which included Island.

TB: So Whatcom, Skagit, and Island.

HP: Yes. She was in charge of those areas, and she was the only woman supervisor. In 1973, long about fall, I said, "*Well, I've been thinking. I can retire, why don't you do it?*" She said, "*OK.*" She worked until the first of January and I finished the year out.

TB: Who did you think were some of the most influential campus leaders among the faculty? Well, you said Mr. Arntzen.

HP: And a man in the English department.

TB: Hicks?

HP: Yes, Arthur Hicks. Is he mentioned by others?

TB: He is definitely mentioned, yes. He probably agreed with you about Jarrett, didn't he?

HP: Yes.

TB: What were the kinds of changes that you saw in your department over the time that you were there?

HP: It went from nothing to one of the best in the state because lots of school superintendents came in person to interview people – business teachers. We had the best program. Of course, I wouldn't say we didn't have, because we did! We included lots of economics and accounting because many of our students got jobs in small schools and needed to teach these subjects. Then they went from there to bigger schools. Like, a couple students became state directors. One became director of business education. He's now retired from Green River.

TB: Did you feel that you were treated well as a faculty member?

HP: Me? Yes.

TB: Excellent.

TB: Do you have any kind of soapbox statement or lecture that your students would always remember you by, any quotes that you always shared with your students?

HP: Probably my work with the tachistoscope, because I went back to New York and demonstrated that. I spent a summer in Connecticut and several other places. I didn't like living out in the country... my wife and daughters said, "*We're not going anywhere else! We're going back home!*" I had exchanged houses with a professor from University of Connecticut. He lived on a big lake – a reservoir about seven or eight miles south of the university. I had never met his family. We were visiting my friend's parents in the middle of South Dakota. The family from Connecticut was coming across the country. We agreed to meet

at the post office on such and such a day and exchange keys. When I saw his boys, I said to my wife, "*Oh boy.*" We had just built a brand new house on Highland Drive.

We lived at 312 Highland Drive. When Arntzen was first showing me around Bellingham he showed me where some college people lived. "*They live in an area up on the hill there by the water tower,*" he had said. I replied, "*Anybody must be crazy to build a house up there.*"

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2

HP: What did I do? I built a house right where I said I must be crazy to do it!

TB: Yes, that area really developed while you were there, right?

HP: Yes, it sure did. A lot of college people came up there; Brown and Mayer and a couple other people in science.

TB: Dr. Lawyer, Robert Lawyer was on Highland Drive.

HP: Lawyer? Yes. He was in the library, wasn't he?

TB: Yes.

TB: Is there anything else I haven't asked you that you think you'd like to have on the record?

HP: No.

TB: So you retired from Western and you went to Arizona?

HP: Yes.

TB: And you lived down there year-round for twenty-seven years?

HP: For a while, we were what they call "snowbirds." We even came back and lived in our own house! We went to...where was the last winter Olympics? I thought it was right out of Salt Lake City. We spent two summers there. There was a listing of people who want to live there in the winter and rent during the summer. It was very nice, about 25 miles from Salt Lake City. Many people lived at Salt Lake and would drive back and forth. We also lived a summer in Fort Collins, Colorado. Those were interesting places because they were school sponsored and had lots of school activities.

TB: What you've been doing since you retired?

HP: See those two books up on the top there?

TB: Oh, yes. Oh, you wrote those!

HP: Yes.

TB: Wow. I remember that one, I used that one.

HP: Finally I found somebody of the many thousands who bought that book! I thank you for it!

TB: Yes, I remember that. I'm going to try to get a copy of that.

HP: It's out of print. What do you want it for?

TB: Well, we have a Western Collection.

HP: I'll give you one. These are out of print nowadays because they don't teach typing, they teach keyboarding.

TB: Will you sign it?

HP: Yes.

TB: Excellent. Yes, I had that when I had that class from Thoreson! That was the textbook he used!

HP: Oh, the heck it was!

TB: Yes! So you're sure it's OK if I have this?

HP: Sure.

TB: We'll send you a letter. We'll put it in our Western Collection, because we do collect publications by faculty, staff, students and alumni.

HP: Does it mention Western?

TB: Yes, it does. It says you are a professor of business education emeritus and then Western Washington State University. Did you ever talk very much with Bearnice Skeen? She taught typing to really young children.

HP: Yes.

TB: What did you think of that?

HP: I don't think much of it; because there comes a time when they want to learn to really type. Steve Sauers...

TB: I knew him! That's the guy at Green River!

HP: Yes.

TB: Yes. I had him as a tennis coach.

HP: Yes, that's right. Whenever he would come down to Arizona coaching, he would come out and stay with me. Steve was quite an enthusiastic person.

TB: He was a nice man.

HP: Yes.

TB: Yes. He was the men's tennis coach, but he taught tennis in the summer, too, so I had taken a class from him in tennis. This is great! It's really a small world.

HP: It is, isn't it!

TB: Were you originally from Eugene? Did you grow up in this area? Where were you born?

HP: I was born in Emporia, Kansas in 1907. I got married in 1932 and we moved to Kensington, Kansas where I taught for four years. Because of the depression and dust storms, we decided to move to the west coast. I wrote to the dean of education at Eugene, the dean at Washington, and the dean at California, wanting to know about my credits and did they have out-of-state fees, and would my credits be accepted. Oregon answered right away. Washington answered but they didn't have any hopes of finding a job or anything. And I see the damn Californians haven't answered the letter yet! And I've been a member of their system, teaching at San Francisco State! When I was down there, they knew I was from out of state, and I had all kinds of teaching offers.

My first view of Bellingham was from a train, meeting Ed Arntzen down at the Depot.

TB: So really he's responsible for your coming to Bellingham.

HP: Yes, he and President Haggard. When I got there and went out to his house for dinner and before we had dinner, he said, "*Well now, we have a little refreshment here.*" I didn't know what to expect! He said, "*I make an Arntzen special. You'll sample it.*" It was a big jolt of vodka, some lime juice and 7 Up. I smacked my lips and said, "*My, this is good!*" He said, "*Good, you'll have another one!*" I said, "*Well, one more!*" He would always fill you up! He and Haggard were real close friends.

TB: But now Haggard didn't believe in drinking, did he?

HP: No, but he did.

TB: He did? Oh, OK. I've not heard that before! I heard he was a real teetotaler. But you knew him as a Mason.

HP: Yes, when he lived over there on the corner in that old house, we used to have parties there. He'd call some of us out into the kitchen and he'd mix a little drink.

TB: Well I know they went to the Presbyterian Church.

HP: Yes, so did I.

TB: St. James?

HP: Yes, and before that, First Presbyterian.

TB: So that's why you know the Monahans so well, from church.

HP: Yes. I was born and raised Presbyterian. I graduated from a Presbyterian college, got married in a Presbyterian church. Well, just everything's been Presbyterian. When I first started teaching out in western Kansas, they didn't have a Presbyterian church. I went to a Methodist church. That was all there was, but it was good.

What ever happened to Mary ..., she was redheaded, she worked for the education department.

TB: Oh, Mary Watrous? I don't know I'll have to find out, I think she's still around.

HP: We used to get together in a bridge group.

TB: I do not know her, but her name has come up before in oral histories. People have mentioned her. Well, can you think of anything else we should be talking about?

HP: This is my wife...it's our wedding picture.

TB: This is your wedding picture? Yes, you are a very handsome couple.

HP: We were married for sixty seven years.

TB: That's a good accomplishment. You've got a very nice looking family. Well this has sure been great. I think we've covered all the bases here. Thank you very much this has been great.

HP: OK.