

**Oral History Interview with Barbara Westhofen**  
**Interviewed by Julia Stringfellow**  
**December 9, 2009**

**[Start: 00:00:00]**

**JS: Today is December 9, 2009. We are doing an oral history interview with a Milwaukee-Downer alum in her house. Could you please state your name?**

BW: I'm Barbara Lieberum Westhofen. And I was at Milwaukee-Downer in the early 1950s.

**JS: And what year did you graduate?**

BW: I was in the class of 1957, but I got married in 1955. So I didn't actually graduate from Milwaukee-Downer. I ended up graduating from the University of Utah. But when I think of my college years, it's always only Downer that I think of, because it was so special and it was such a beautiful campus.

**JS: Could you talk some about the angel chorus you were in? One of the traditions for Christmas?**

BW: Oh that was Miss Rossberg's Christmas play. It was kind of a Christmas pageant, but I was part of the angel choir and we sang all of these German Christmas carols. And I'm so glad that I know all of those carols. Miss Rossberg made us do a lot of singing. That would be a part of the assignments. But I'm so glad she did, because that has stood me a good stead ever since, really.

**JS: Were you ever involved in Lantern Night?**

BW: I actually have a lantern, but I don't remember really all that much about Lantern Night. If I was doing something else the night they went out and did that [laughs]. But that was a really nice Christmas tradition. And then there was a thing that they did, and I don't know over what time period, if it was a longstanding tradition or what. But there was a thing called Sophomore Sallies, which was a skit that the sophomores were supposed to be doing in conjunction with kind of a Christmas bazaar thing, open house bazaar thing that they would have, maybe in December, I suppose. But I got to be...in fact, in one of my letters to my parents, I mentioned that I was the chair or the co-chair of...In fact, I told my parents of the Bazaar, I thought it was just Sophomore Sallies [laughs]. At any rate, that was a lot of fun. I'm trying to find a way to convey how important it was, at least for me, what a difference it made. I had gone to a co-educational high school and going to a girl's school was, it just seemed to provide a whole lot more opportunities. I think I chose to go to Downer, because they really wanted me to come there and their admissions department was very good [laughs]. And it looked so much like my idea of what a college should look like. And it wasn't until way later on when I saw movies about Hillary Clinton or documentaries about Hillary or, there was another movie that had some famous movie actress who was a student at Wellesley, that I realized there were schools out east that looked just like that. But, you know, to me Milwaukee-Downer was just everything a college should be. And they had mixers where you could meet boys and some of us who had gone to high school in Milwaukee even knew boys [laughs] already. So that wasn't a big problem. The thing is the opportunities when I was in high school, I was always one of the youngest ones in my class. Just because of where my birthday fell and the fact

that my mother had been big for her age and kind of old for her class, so she started me in first grade at 5 instead of 6. And so I was always the youngest one and probably kind of immature and so in high school, if I got to be entrusted with the attendance slip, that was a big deal. I really...it's like the boys held all of the positions of responsibility, or so it seemed. But at Downer there weren't any boys to run everything and so I got to be like the chairman of Cabaret and chairman of Sophomore Sallies and stuff like that. It was just so amazing for me to discover that I could do that, that I could actually do that.

**[00:05:47]**

**JS: So do you think that going to an all girl's school definitely helps women, I mean, they are more active in their school and maybe they are in more leadership roles that they wouldn't be otherwise?**

BW: That was certainly the case for me. You know, maybe girls are different nowadays. And maybe there is maybe more leadership possibility in high school. Maybe things are different not, but wow, it sure made a big difference for me to think that I could be the chairman of something [laughs].

**JS: How often was Cabaret held, once a year?**

BW: Yeah, Cabaret was a competition between the classes. Each class had a Cabaret skit. But our class won in our freshmen year, we won Cabaret, which was unheard of. And then I was also on crew. That was another thing that I thought was really such a great opportunity to be able to do that. And our crew won the regatta in our freshmen year. And again that was absolutely unheard of. So we thought we were pretty special [laughs].

**JS: And were the regattas held along the Milwaukee River?**

BW: Yes.

**JS: How did the boats go from the campus to the river?**

BW: There was a boat house right...and that's why in some of the songs...in some of the Downer songs that people would sing, there would be a little tag at the end like, "Behind the boathouse." Depending on what kind of activity we were describing [laughs]. But that was supposed to be kind of a suggestive thing. But yeah, the boat house was right there. Part of the whole thing was getting those boats from where they were mounted and getting them into the water. I mean, you know, that took a lot of time and a lot of skill. Miss Heimbach was the crew person when I was there. I just thought it was just a huge privilege to be in the crew.

**JS: Did crew usually start in April of the school year?**

BW: It happened in the fall as well, but then it happened in the spring. At least as far as I remember, I think that's right.

**JS: Well I was going to ask about professors that you had that really made a big impact on you and that you remember?**

BW: Well, Miss Rossberg did. Well, the other thing was, a lot of the other classes were pretty small, and there was no way you could go to Miss Rossberg's class without having done your assignment. I mean, there was no place to hide! And she had big expectations. She also in the dining room, there were always eight at a table and most tables had a faculty person. Because in those days, there were quite a few resident faculty people. There would be a faculty person at the head of the table. And then at the foot of the table was the "vis," as in "vis à vis," facing toward the person who was the head of the table. But that person was in charge of like pouring the coffee, but also keeping the conversation going and making sure that people were involved in the conversation. But at Miss Rossberg's table, Miss Rossberg ate in the European fashion with her fork in her left hand and the knife in the right. And when you eat that way and when you're good at it, you could eat extremely quickly and she was such a fast eater that if you engaged in very much conversation, you wouldn't get your food eaten and Miss Rossberg was done already [laughs]. And that probably wasn't good either, if you were holding things back [laughs]. But in a way it was kind of nice, because some of those concepts a person might not have learned about at home. And some of that again, I guess, later when I was out in the world, I never had any questions in my mind which fork I should be using or something like that, because that was pretty much drilled into us there. That was a good thing.

[00:11:07]

**JS: So Miss Rossberg was one teacher. Were there any other teachers that...?**

BW: Well, Miss Hadley also lived in our dorm. And she lived on the same floor as I did. Miss Rossberg lived on the very first floor, or the ground floor, right by the door. So if a person had been thinking about sneaking about in or out, you would have to sneak past Miss Rossberg's door. Miss Hadley was an English teacher and she also...I took a creative writing course from her, which was a very good class. People really respected Miss Hadley, too. I remember one night she invited a few of us to her room. This didn't happen a lot, I mean, to be in the room or the apartment of a faculty person, but I remember that really clearly. That was pretty nice.

Miss Calbick was our class advisor and I had a pretty good friend who really didn't like Miss Calbick very much. But she wasn't in our class. But she had been in Miss Calbick's class. So I don't know what Miss Calbick was like as a teacher, but as the teacher who was...in fact, I think we had chosen her to be our faculty advisor. But she had been the advisor to other purple classes, so she was definitely kind of partial to purple classes. And we always thought she really did like our class the best. I always felt like she really liked me a lot. And that's a really nice feeling to have a teacher who really likes you a lot. Mrs. Sheldon was another English teacher that I liked and really learned. Well, I guess I hadn't really known very many professional women. My mother had worked at the gas company until she got married, but then she had to quit her job, because to have kept her job would have been taking a job away from some man who really had needed the job. I mean, that's how companies thought during those days. So I really didn't know any professional women. Like grandma, I later learned, had taught piano and gone out on her horse to give piano lessons to families in the Hartford area, but I never...well, I had had my tonsils out and I had been in a hospital, so I knew that there were women who were nurses, but of course they

probably wouldn't be doctors. So I guess to see these women who had careers and who were so smart and who knew all of this German and all of these other different things.

**[00:14:56]**

**JS: And did all of the professors live in the dorms?**

BW: Not all, because there were male professors there as well. And there were not any men who lived on campus.

**JS: You had been talking about the curfews, especially for the freshmen. What time did students have to be in their dorms at night?**

BW: Oh, I don't remember exactly, but it was ridiculously early. It was just so early. And that changed after the first few months. There was a little more leeway, but I remember reading, you know, just to get an assignment done, reading under the covers with a flashlight, because lights out came so early in our freshmen year. Later on, I don't remember it being such a big deal, if a person was quietly studying with her lights on. I don't think that would have caused any problem, but for the freshmen they could get into lots of trouble. So it was very lucky to have a flashlight [laughs].

**JS: Well, going off campus and doing various types of activities, what were some things that Downer students like to do in Milwaukee, off campus?**

BW: I think there's a real contrast between how things are today. I mean, community involvement is really a big deal at Lawrence right now. It has been for awhile. And I think there was a time later on after the time when I was there, maybe when people did get more involved, you know with the Civil Rights movement and things like that. But at the time when I was there, that was really our world, and there were a couple of stores, like a drug store and I can't remember what else. But within just a couple of blocks, and that was called Lesser, because it was the lesser distance. Whereas there was another place more blocks away where you could get more things, but it was more a matter of going to the store and it wasn't like going out and doing something out in the community or anything. There was just this whole very busy, amazingly, wonderful world right there and everything that was going on on campus, I mean that was it. That was our life.

**JS: Well, during summer breaks and other breaks from school, did you travel anywhere?**

BW: The school didn't...I knew people who had been to Europe, but I wasn't aware that there was any particular program that you could take to go to a particular place or anything like that. Basically I just went home and worked in my Dad's store.

**JS: I was going to ask you about Chapman Library and the Teakwood Room that was there? What different types of events were held in the Teakwood Room?**

BW: Well, it was adjacent to another room. I remember pouring at a tea, being one of the people asked to pour tea. I'm thinking maybe it was an art opening. And I supposed the art gallery where, that must

have been kind of close to the Teakwood Room. There was so much marble in the Chapman Library. It actually seemed like kind of a cold place. The only really warm place was the Teakwood Room, but it wasn't a place where we could go and study or something like that. It would be open on some sort of special occasion or something like that. I really do wonder about how that's going to work with the Teakwood Room in Downer now.

**[00:20:14]**

**JS: Yes, we all wonder. Hopefully they will continue to preserve it.**

BW: I sure hope so.

Oh, and we had to dress for dinner on Thursdays, Thursday evenings. And Sunday dinner we had to dress up, which means we had like high heels and everything.

**JS: Was that something that you wanted to share or?**

BW: About dressing for dinner you mean or just what else?

**JS: What you were looking at.**

BW: Oh, other things I learned at Downer were how to smoke, how to knit, and how to play bridge. But that's sounds kind of, as if that's all that people sat around doing and that isn't true at all. I mean there were all kinds of activities and people were fairly serious about their academic work. Very serious.

Oh, and Miss Rossberg wore a cape. Well, in winter especially. But that walk from McLaren and over to Holton, you really should be wearing something warm. The cape was very impressive.

I was just trying to notice if there was anything else that...

**JS: Well, what do you remember about the Hat Hunt that you were a part of? In addition to the mud?**

BW: Well, it just seemed to be very, very important to be a participant, because if you went through Hat Hunt, then you'd get to be a last hunter. And if you were last hunter, then you could wear this sort of hat-shaped thing on your jacket lapel and also you'd get a little necklace that had a little silver hat and it just seemed to me to be pretty much unthinkable to not go through Hat Hunt, because you wouldn't quite belong or something.

**JS: Weren't all the freshmen required to go through the Hat Hunt?**

BW: No, I think there were a lot of faculty people who thought it was a pretty bad idea [laughs] and who wished there wouldn't be a Hat Hunt, because it took a lot of time and energy from the students. So it was hard for the students to do their job of being a student and getting their school work done. And if someone was sort of a marginal student to begin with, that could be a really big problem. So no, it wasn't required. It was just the feeling about it as I said that you wouldn't want to not have done it. And looking back, well, we had to get up really early. I'm trying to think, maybe we did...there was a time when actual real people did use rags for curlers where you take a strand of hair and then kind of wind it

up on the rag and tie it. And I think maybe we would do that at night before we went to bed so that the next morning when we had to get up for Hat Hunt we would be ready, because that was required and if you wanted to be in the Hat Hunt, you would have to be there. They would take roll call, the sophomores were really mean and you had to have the hair and those curlers in the morning, those rag curlers. And then before you went out for the late afternoon Hat Hunt, you had to have all those braids and the number had something to do with your...like if we were the class of '57, I think we probably had to have seventeen braids or seventeen curls. And every once and a while they would check that, too.

**[00:25:06]**

**JS: They would go around and count the number of braids?**

BW: You would have to...one part of it was we would have to entertain. It was like "Entertain, freshmen!" And they would kind of yell at you. I don't think, I don't remember what my thing was, if it was a song. It must have been some song that I sang. I think I have a pretty good memory, but I don't remember that. But then we would have to do like the duck walk. And have to walk like that. Or sometimes you would have to do jumping jacks or whatever. And the four hat girls of the sophomore class were the ones that kind of ran Hat Hunt. But any sophomore could be verbally abusive to you. And that's that part, the scolding and being verbally abusive, I'm not sure the Hat Hunt was always like that. I think maybe someone that came in after the war, because they think that maybe they picked that up from guys of how things were at boot camp or something like that. Because occasionally during the school year, there were times when sophomores would be nice, the individual ones would be nice. But there were some who were never nice [laughs].

**JS: Now what types of activities have you done as a Downer alum, like working with other alums or going to Milwaukee-Downer events held for alumnae or?**

BW: Yeah, well, I've been their class secretary for quite awhile. There were other people who took turns at it over years. I was the class agent for awhile. But I was the one who...maybe I just happened to be class secretary at the time of the merger, because I remember writing a really long class newsletter about that. And more recently I've been on Alumni Board. I've often been to the reunions. Jan Quinlan was just the most wonderful, I mean we think of her as being a Downer girl, because she was always so interested in Downer and interested in the traditions and seemed to have a lot of liking and a lot of respect for Downer and the traditions and the Downer women and everything. But it was fun being on the Lawrence Alumni Board and I'm just off of that. I still attended the spring meeting but then that was the end of my term. So now a new term has started for somebody else. We always have a couple of Downer women on the Alumni Board. But that was fun, because it just kept me really in touch with all of the new stuff that's going on at Lawrence and there's lots and lots of things. Well and when I met you it was at, I think a year ago in the fall, you did a dinner presentation for the Downer women. And at the time you had said something about doing interviews and we were listening to some of these little clips on the computer. At the time I thought, oh I could do that, but I don't want to sign up right now, because all of these other people can do it and she can talk to me any time [laughs]. But then when you gave the presentation over at Warch...

**JS: Oh, last month, yes.**

BW: I thought, oh, that's right, I was going to do that! Maybe I should.

**[00:30:05]**

**JS: Yeah, I'm always seeking Downer alums to interview.**

BW: Well and the thing is, and I'm so aware of this now, with you know even some of the family things, like my parents are dead now and both of my father's siblings are dead, and of the immediate family and there might be some distant relatives in some other place. But of the cousins and family that I'm aware of, it's like I'm the oldest one. There isn't anybody who remembers me when I was young. I've got one cousin who's younger than I, but he remembers me a little bit when I was young, but otherwise, you know, I don't have anybody to ask and every once in a while, I think, oh, what about this or what about that? And it's like for a minute, I think, oh, who could I ask and then I remember there's nobody left that I can ask anymore. Except once in a while you can see things, well, back in the days when people corresponded with each other on paper and sometimes would even make carbon copies so they would remember what had already been said, that's just a treasure trove of information about things.

**JS: Yeah, letters contain so much information on history and I don't know if that's transitioned over to all the e-mails that have taken the letters' place.**

BW: Well and you know with the e-mails, things get lost. This is my third computer, but there's e-mail stuff that never made the transition, partly because of the way AOL works I think, too.

**JS: Well, is there anything else that you can think of that we haven't talked about regarding Downer?**

BW: Well, there must be a whole bunch, but I can't think of it [laughs].

**JS: Okay.**

BW: But it was really hard for me to leave Downer. As I said, I really think of that as my school. You know other schools I've been to were just like, I don't know, when you study up to get your driver's license or something. I mean, you have to do a certain amount of studying to get this pass or this certificate or something, but you know, the actually college experience was the experience at Downer. Well and that whole liberal arts idea, too, I think is so important.

**JS: Okay, well I'm going to turn off the recorder.**

**[End: 00:33:39]**