

Oral History Interviews, Reunion Weekend 2006

Interview with Dorothy Williams Bobilin, class of 1951

By Julia Stringfellow

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[00:00:00]

Could you please state your name?

Dorothy Maya Bobilin, that is my married name.

When did you graduate from Lawrence?

1951.

What was your degree in?

Psychology, but I took as much Anthropology as I could.

Did you think about getting a second degree in Anthropology?

No, I was really, probably very interested in Social Work. So when I later got a Master's degree in Social Work from USC.

Why did you decide to attend Lawrence?

Well, I thought I was on my own decision making, and it was my own decision, but as I look back on it, I realize there were lots of influences, like my parents. But I was quite an independent child, and so they were clever enough to leave music that they sang at Lawrence underneath the piano bench and then would play it. And I would be exposed to these things. And also my grandmother who lived in Appleton would come visit us too, so I was aware of her. So I think that is the real reason why I came.

Was the transition between high school and college a difficult one?

Well, I was the first person from Arizona to come. And it was very hot there. And even northern Arizona can be very hot. I lived in Tucson and Phoenix, and graduated from a high school where the graduating class was as big as Lawrence. So in some ways it was easier with the smaller campus, but I came by myself, and the first year I flew. After that I took the El Capitan which was like Amtrak or something. It took 39 hours and 45 minutes and then in Chicago you had to change to the 400 train. It took a long time.

What were some of the activities or organizations that you were a part of while at Lawrence?

Okay, well the first thing that happened to me was I was elected the freshman representative for the student council. And later I also was Treasurer, they tried to get me to run for President, other people, not myself so much, and we sort of missed the deadline, so that was okay with me. And I was very active in Sunset, I was in plays and I did direct plays. I took some drama classes, as many as I could. I took speech classes too. I was a Kappa Alpha Theta, and also I had won a Participation Matters medal for WRA, which was the Women's Recreation Association. I also was intramural manager and track manager of the Women's Association. I won a letter in softball for all 4 years. I also was Treasurer for, I forget the name of it, but it was a worldwide student thing of some kind. It wasn't a religious organization, it was one that was just concerned about peace. It affected my life both at Lawrence and later. I went on a work team to Germany to rebuild an orphanage. I traveled on my own, on a train, to Denmark so I could see where my grandfather was born on another side of the family. I was quite active, there were other things I was in, but I don't remember all of them right now. They're in the yearbook, so those things can always be checked out.

What was the Sunset organization?

Well that was a drama organization. And I would work both backstage and I was in a couple of plays. I don't even remember which ones they were. Probably have a scrapbook somewhere I haven't looked at since I put it together. That's what Sunset was, and I may have been part of a national organization on theatre too. I may have been, I would have to look that up. I don't want to suggest something that I wasn't a part of it. But I know I was in Sunset. And Cloak was there at the time.

[00:05:10]

I was going to ask you about working with him.

Oh yes, and he had an assistant. I had to do make-up and at one time was given instructions of Ted Cloak's associate. I had a terrible time and felt very guilty. I couldn't figure out how to do it. Anyway, I was quite active in the theatre. And I had to produce a play too where you have to block it all out and you had to help make sure everybody was going to stand in the right places and the direction, what it was going to look like and the staging. That was very creative, it was very good.

I've done some research on Ted Cloak and I read somewhere that theatrical productions would take place in the Union or on the front lawn...

Or at the Chapel.

Were there any other locations where the theatre would put on productions?

I don't remember, but he was the founder of the Attic Players in the community. That was more for the community. But he was a wonderful person, and really any accolades that were given to him were much deserved.

What were some of the traditions here at Lawrence while you were a student? I know that the ROCK was very popular.

Well the ROCK was because of my grandfather. I just discovered that, I didn't know that. In fact that's in the book that Ron Tank wrote. And he was talking to me about that this morning because I went to their little open house. And it is in that book. First when you read about the ROCK you think it was only the students, but there were other places where it was said that he was the one who suggested, it was he who arranged to have a flatbed to be carried, to get to campus, because it was impossible for them to carry it. So he arranged for that and that was apparently his idea to do that. So it was a reference to that.

And what was his name?

My grandfather's name was Dexter Putman Nicholson. And his memorial window is on the right hand side of the chapel toward the back with Sir Galahad pictured and there's a brass plate that says "Dexter Putman Nicholson." He died at 48 years of age, and I won't go into the reasons and how he died. It was essentially an accident.

Did it occur here on campus?

No, it wasn't on campus, but it was in Appleton. So he lived in Appleton and therefore, my grandmother was widowed early. And so she became, and this is off the subject...she had gone to Europe at the turn of the century. When she was in Europe, and particularly in Germany, although I have reason to think she may have gone to Russia, but I have letters I have not had a chance to get into that are wrapped in ribbon, and I don't think even my mother knew that. There were steamships that she was on where her maiden name was listed, Harriet Elizabeth Hammond. And the first one said Harriet Elizabeth. And I have the dates, and I have the originals of that. But she was called Hattie, which she didn't really like the name Hattie. It would be of great interest if I could ask her today why that was Hattie. And she taught French and German here, and that's in the book of alumni, the one that is out of print now. Alumni Record, and it stops in 1922. My own father is listed in there. But my mother is not, because she graduated in 1923, class of 1923. My grandmother is also a trustee and in that old book, all the trustees are listed, so is the first person in our family who went here, Joseph Wesley Hammond. My mother and father were married in the house that's on East John Street that a lot of faculty had. And when I was a student, I used to leave things there in the summertime, because I didn't want to drag everything home and I would leave things in one of their attics. In fact, I think I forgot some stuff one time.

[00:11:02]

Where were teachers here at Lawrence that really influenced your life?

I think Freshman Studies generally. And the guy that had taught education that was mentioned this morning, he also was a coach and he was kind of a big guy, very strong, his hands, I remember how strong he looked. But he was really good. I can't remember his name right now. He was the football coach, but he also did Freshman Studies.

While you were here after Lawrence, it was right after the Second World War. How did what was going on around the country and the world affect what was going on at Lawrence?

I remember the guys that had come back had housing, because they were married. It was not detrimental in any way and it was an interesting thing.

They had stopped having the green beanie. I remember seeing the green beanie. That may have influenced me coming to Lawrence, because it looked so cute. But there were a lot of people who didn't like the idea of beanies. So when I was a freshman and on the Freshman Council, I remember giving a speech about it and protesting that, because it was not a way of humiliating freshmen, but to give them recognition. And that they were who they were, as freshmen. Anyway, I think it was resumed, but I remember speaking up about it.

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How was the relationship between the students and faculty and the administration here at Lawrence?

I think it was very positive. Pusey was the President when I was there. And he was really wonderful, I thought. We were all very proud of him when he was selected to go to Harvard, that was very exciting.

It's hard to remember the relationship, because students were more just student-oriented. And they had no power, no real power, although they would like to think they had real power sometimes. Nevertheless, when I took my children with me to visit here, I deliberately took them to a classroom upstairs in Main Hall. First I wanted to show them Main Hall, but I also wanted them to see the smallness that we had and thus, the individualization which we had. And even though there were some classes that were larger. English History was very difficult. We had to read a tremendous amount. You certainly couldn't hide when there were quiz sections and that was difficult. Later I wish I had paid more attention, when I went to Europe, when I went to England. I think that if there were more individual work, that would have been a little better.

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On the other hand, I had one class which was a psychology tutorial. It wasn't strong enough and you could get away with a lot. I had a lot of motivation to do well in that, but it was somewhat redundant to what I had in High School. There was some things I thought that wasn't strong enough or good enough or not rigorous enough. I think that if there would have been two people, there would have been a different interaction, there may have been a little competition, that wouldn't have been bad either. Not in competition with the professor, especially in the '50s. So I think that should be given some consideration, if they are looking for some suggestions on that.

I think that I have taken all of your time, probably.

Yes, we are actually out of time for the interview. Thank you very much.

[End: 00:23:08]