

Oral History Interview
Interview with Lynn Semple Hagee, class of 1958
Interviewed by Julia Stringfellow
Location: Lawrence University Archives
June 30, 2008
Transcription completed September 2008

Start [00:00:00]

1. Could you please state your name?

Lynn Semple Hagee.

2. And what year did you graduate from Lawrence?

1958.

3. And what was your major in?

My major was split between Art History and Studio Art.

4. And why did you choose to attend Lawrence?

It's an interesting story. It used to be a long time ago, I lived in the Chicago area, the *Chicago Tribune* ran a column in their section every Sunday that was on this campus. My sophomore year in high school, I fell in love in Lawrence just through the write-up on it, and then did more reading about it, and decided this was where I wanted to be. It was the only place I wanted to apply, and my mother and father said, "No, you can't do that. What if Lawrence doesn't want you?" Why wouldn't they want me? So they made me apply to two other schools, but my heart wasn't in it. If I hadn't been accepted by Lawrence, I would have been a very sad little high school girl. But it all started from that section in the Sunday *Chicago Tribune*.

5. What were your first impressions of Lawrence upon starting here?

One of the things I did was my junior year in high school, I came up by myself and was assigned to a hostess whose room I stayed in, who kept me here for Friday classes and Saturday, and I went back on Sunday. I think there were just stars in my eyes, I was just agog at everything. Everybody was just so friendly and so wonderful, and the Art department looked exciting and challenging. It was a great place.

6. And Worcester Art Center had just been built, it was a new building? Is that where the art classes were at the time?

Yes, they were, and Charles Brooks was there. An interesting segway to the present time is that I am the project manager for the new \$35 million Campus Center, but this

probably would not have happened and I wouldn't be enjoying it so much if I hadn't studied Architecture History with Charlie Brooks, only I didn't call him Mr. Brooks, he was Dr. Brooks, back in 1955, 1956 was when I took that. That was the kick-off, I ended up marrying an architect, so it was really my introduction to architecture at Lawrence that has kept me on the architectural interest list for all these years.

7. Who were some of the other professors that strongly influenced you?

Let me tell you a story about Charlie Brooks. When we did our American Architecture Survey course, we crammed all of it into a semester, but six weeks of that semester was spent on Frank Lloyd Wright, because Charlie Brooks had a thing for Frank Lloyd Wright's buildings and the way he worked and here he was in Wisconsin and so on. One of the interesting things was that Mr. Brooks went down and got a pre-cast concrete block when they were taking down the Avery Coonley Playhouse in Chicago, brought it back as a souvenir, and that was on the podium and he put his notes on the Frank Lloyd Wright pre-cast concrete block, and he lectured from there. In addition to Charles Brooks, there was Tom Dietrich who did the studio painting, and my parents gave as a gift to me when I graduated, gave me a Tom Dietrich painting.

Then there was Pete Steefel, who was Art History, and he was just so alive and so full of ideas. He was great to work with. And then as things happen, I lived in St. Louis, and he came down and was a part of Washington University in St. Louis, and had quite a following down there. He was a very dynamic teacher. I also worked at the Art Center, that was my job on campus at \$.35 an hour if you can believe that. But it helped pay for books which weren't as expensive then and sorority dues and things like that. But I always felt it was a great job because I had the opportunity to go through the slides more than once and my classmates didn't have that opportunity. No reason I shouldn't have gotten A's in all those courses, not that I did.

[00:05:20]

8. What was the sorority that you were a part of?

I was part of Delta Gamma.

9. And what were some of the activities that you did in that sorority?

Back then, sororities served a very important service that is not necessary now because there are over 100 clubs on campus. Sororities back then were your social life and they planned dances, and of course we had intramural sports, we had a folk dance festival. Our particular mission was to aid blind people, and our service was having to do with getting Braille books, reading to people. And then we also did a Christmas party for the Menominee Indians, we were bused up there and planned the party and entertained them at Christmastime. Sororities played a much more important role, and this was a group of gals that I really clicked with. I was delighted to be a part of it.

10. Was it the Delta Gammas that did the South Sea Island party?

Yes, we did a South Sea Island party for rush. The pin for Delta Gamma is an anchor, so any sort of nautical South Sea Island party, that sort of thing, fit right in with the pin that we were wearing.

11. What were some other organizations that you were a part of while you were at Lawrence?

I was a part of student government, and I remember I did social events. I came back to Lawrence in 2001 and started helping plan social events. I've never gotten very far away. But I was Social Chairman for the entire school, and we did the big dances and brought in big bands and that was a lot of fun. So I was a part of that. I also handled all the coffee hours, which were held in the Union, which then was a pretty new building, we thought it was great. Now it looks rather small and dwarflike, but at that time we thought it was great. And also the theater was in there because we did not have Cloak and Stansbury and all of those buildings. So the theater was a part of what is now the coffeehouse. Then as far as other organizations, I was a part of the Art Association, and played intramural sports and that sort of thing.

12. The Union, was it a popular place for students to go and gather at the Grill?

Yes, bridge was the big thing in the Grill. People played bridge for hours and hours and hours. I never clicked with bridge, and if I played bridge I had to bring a plastic tablecloth that I had that had how to count the points written on it so I wouldn't embarrass my partner too much. Yes, it was a big place for that. And there was sledding on the hill.

Two of the things that took place back then, not necessarily associated with organizations, but there were serenades back then, and they were fabulous. That was when somebody, a girl in the dorm, of course we were all separated then, was pinned to a boy, that meant back then engaged to be engaged. The whole fraternity would come and sing at the girl's dormitory, and all the women would flock to the windows or outside to hear this. It was really a very nice thing. The fraternities had dances, we had a Valentine dance, there were all sorts of activities that were school wide.

I had heard that with Union Hill, the goal of sledding down it was not to go into the river.

We didn't have all the bushes we have down there now. There were people that got a little wet down there, yes.

[00:10:05]

13. What were the dorms that you lived in while you were a student here?

I started out in Ormsby, I remember there were so many rules at that point. And Mary Morton was the Dean of Women, and she ruled with an iron hand. The word was she'd been in the military prior to accepting this position. We certainly all believed that from her gait which was very long stride as well as her admonitions. She didn't want there to be babies under any bushes at Lawrence, so when you had a gentleman caller in a place like Ormsby, there had to be three feet on the floor at all times, that was one of the rules. Anyway, you had to be in at nine o'clock. I felt like a little kid, it wasn't even dark out, you had to be in at nine. And some of us wanted a pizza, there was pizza at Frank's Pizza way back then which still exists. And I ordered a pizza for some of us on the floor, and it was after nine o'clock, doors locked, everything like that. I went to one of the windows at Ormsby and opened it up so I could get the pizza and pay the man. I was campused for a week, which meant I couldn't leave the dorm after six o'clock at night. It was just for a pizza, I was campused for one week. I think about today, no way would anything like that happen.

My sophomore year I lived in Russell Sage and I had a fabulous room for the serenades. It was the middle room right over the doorway, it still is there. I remember for a joke one time I came back to my room, opened the door, and my friends had filled the room with crushed newspaper. I could not even walk into the room, it was so full of newspaper. My roommate and I spent hours, and of course we had that printers ink all over us from cleaning it out, oh dear. So that was sophomore year. I was a counselor my Junior year, so I went back to Ormsby again, and that's when I roomed with Sue Fortney Walby, whose three children have gone to school here, and whose oldest child Katherine is now at the Academy of Music in the Conservatory and is my piano teacher.

And then my senior year, big thrill, Colman was brand new, and I got to move into Colman. And at this point, Lawrence chose rooms according to your grade point, they would start with the top 3 point and then move down. And I just happened in my senior year pick the person, the woman who had the highest grade point in our class, so we got our choice of a room that was with a view of the river and so on. It was very nice, and it was brand new.

14. And was Lucinda's open at the time that the dorm was open?

Yes, it was, and of course it was all women. We would line up before the dining room opened in that long hallway which still exists. We all stood in line knitting. You couldn't take your knitting needles into the dining room, so all these various knitting projects were piled up along the windowsill when you went in to eat. The other thing, it was an interesting attendance requirement, was Convocation. Convocation was every single Thursday, and it was required. You were assigned a seat, and there were seniors up in the balcony looking down and saying, "Row M, Seat 4 isn't there," and so on. You were allowed just so many absences from Convocation. I know that if you were on the Dean's list, then you could skip Convocation, but those were the people who tended to be more studious and more interested in what was happening, so they would go to Convocation anyway. It was a full house for Convocation. It was not just lectures, it was music, it was explanations about art, no video of course in there.

And Convocations, I saved some of my programs and they were marvelous. It was Leontyne Price, one of the things I remember about Leontyne Price, who as you know was a wonderful opera singer, a contralto, she came to town, she was black, and there wasn't a hotel that would put her up. And we had to scramble and find accommodations for her here on campus. Thank heaven, that sort of thing doesn't happen anymore, but that was back in 1955, 1956. It was also the time Joe McCarthy died in there somewhere.

In 1957.

Yes, and I remember going down to the train station, not that I thought Joe McCarthy was anybody I wanted to see, but I thought it was history in the making. I wanted to see the train coming through for the funeral service, they brought his body back for the funeral service. Long time ago!

[00:16:09]

15. What were some of the traditions that were popular at Lawrence during that time, like the ROCK was a really big thing, putting stuff up in the cupola, that sort of thing.

All of the names in the cupola, it was a thing to get your name carved on the wall. I just happened to have been up there before I came here to see you, the names do go way, way back. In fact I saw John Reeve's name in there, he was one of our leaders, not in my class, he preceded me, but certainly a board member and a trustee and so on. His name is up there, so my goodness. Certainly as far as traditions are concerned, certainly the serenades which I spoke of. Then we had a May Day with a May Pole and the whole thing, and that was down on the Union grass.

I'm trying to think of other traditions, oh, the ROCK was one. That was really more the guys than it was the gals, where it would be hidden and so on. You heard the story, this was after I left here, it being put way up, it was on top of Colman, somebody had put the ROCK up there. But it turned out, how did they get that up there, how did that happen, it was a paper mache rock. I don't know where it is today, they think there are two possible sightings, one being over at Appleton East.

16. I've heard that before. With the May Day festivities, did the whole campus attend, was there food there and entertainment?

Yes, there was a whole thing, there was a reception afterward. There was the May Queen, and then she had a court, and they were all in formals and on a stand. And there was singing, and the winners of the folk dance festival performer for that, music of course down there. It was a very nice occasion down at the foot of Union Hill.

17. During the winter, I've heard that there was a Winter Carnival when people went up to go skiing north of Green Bay. What were some of the activities that were popular during the winter?

Well certainly the skiing, and that was what I started out on my freshman year. And then I went back my sophomore year, only we went up to north of Sturgeon Bay, and it was just the whole raft of us that went up there. It was the first time I had ever skied, and I remember an incident from my freshman year and an incident from my sophomore year. My freshman year, I was just learning how to ski, it was terribly cold, you came down and then you would go up in the rope tow. I remember I fell and hit the back of my head, and it didn't mean anything, I went down and got in line again. And the person running the ski lift said, "You can't go up there, there's blood coming out of the back of your head!" Sure enough there was, I guess I was numb or too cold. Anyway, it was a big enough cut that they felt that they needed to take me into Sturgeon Bay to the hospital. But the neat thing about it was the senior on the ski patrol from Lawrence was the one who had to drive me in, and I remember coming back with stitches in my head and my friends saying, "Oh, you got to ride with the hot guy! What is he like?" and so on. That was the thrill of the ski trip.

Then my sophomore year I had Vern Roelofs for American history, and he was one of the chaperones, this was the same place at Sturgeon Bay. I came down the hill out of control and I ran over the back of his skis, he was waiting on sort of a plateau there and knocked one of the skis off of his foot, and it went down to the bottom of the hill. There he was up there, and I never felt he understood my understanding of American history. But those are two of the ski trips that were great.

Then student government would go off on retreats, and we would go to the Green Lake conference center. They pulled all of us out of classes, and we talked about where we were going to go with student government. That was another fun thing that was sort of a tradition, student government did that.

[00:21:29]

18. What were your impressions of Freshman Studies? Was it overwhelming?

It was a bittersweet sort of thing, it was a combination. I always in high school read what I had been assigned, but it was usually associated with English class, it wasn't elsewhere. And some of the literature we read here I had done in high school and we did it again, which was fine because I certainly had a different take on it after I'd done it with an English professor here at Lawrence.

The book that absolutely threw me, well, two of them threw me, one was Alfred North Whitehead's Science in the Modern World and it was, could I ever even get through this. I remember the print was tiny, and you just waded through this thing. It was not my cup of tea, I did not read Science, I took Geology just to get my requirement out of the way. Then the other one that I had trouble with strangely enough was Ernest Hemingway, and

I remember I had Merton Sealts for that particular part of Freshman Studies, and we worked and worked on a paper, and he was very helpful and kind to me. And finally, I think he got tired out in the end, and he said, "You and Ernest just aren't going to bond on this. Why don't we let this go?"

Where I really appreciate Freshman Studies is in retrospect, because it just introduced all sorts of things to me, such as how to write better, how to read more analytically, how to question things. It is a terrific course. It had recently been started here at Lawrence, because Pusey was the one who started it and he left the year before I arrived. So it was fairly new, but it also, you were in the Arts, you were with somebody in the French department, you were with somebody in the Science world. It was a real cornerstone I feel to a liberal arts education, and I understand that the senior capstone experience which they're working on now is going to be the other part of it, the other bookend. And I think that is just an excellent plan.

19. What was the relationship like between the Lawrence community and the Appleton community? Were the students very active going off and doing things in Appleton?

I am totally unaware of our interacting with Appleton. When we had our Homecoming parade and built floats, that was our parade, it didn't feed into a greater parade. Of course we needed Conkey's and Mr. Feelen and the bars of course were a magnet for some of the students. But I certainly was unaware of a lot of interaction with the city. And now of course that's one of the projects I'm working on, so it's interesting, but I was unaware of anything when I was here in school.

[00:25:01]

20. What was the relationship like between the students and faculty and administration?

I don't know exactly how to explain this, but it was different than it is today. I think students are closer to their teachers today, I see more one on one. Yet back then, you would meet your professor at the Union or their office, I think some of that goes on today. I also remember the professors opening their houses and having you over for dinner and that sort of thing which doesn't exist anymore today as best as I can tell. But the whole idea of individual attention I think still exists today but in a different form.

21. How did it affect your life in terms of going on after and choosing to go into the careers you went into? How did Lawrence affect that?

I am a true believer in the liberal arts education instead of sticking in one confined area, because I did not leave here and practice art. I did not want to be an art teacher, sure I did things at home, but I did not choose that as a career for many reasons. I taught school after I was here, but I have had a very eclectic career in my life and I think much of that

is attributable to the liberal arts type of thinking, "I can do that, I can learn how to do that." And I think certainly it affects me even today.

22. Looking at Lawrence from the perspective of an alum, how is it still the same as it was when you were a student here and how has it changed?

It's really changed a lot and now working with students I am really aware of that. I think the student body demographics have changed certainly. We had very few international students. And I guess it was my sophomore year that a person of color was a part of the campus. It was different in terms of demographics. I think Lawrence still has, at least I perceive it, that pushing, challenging, liberal arts sort of thing, but it manifests itself in many different ways. I know our parents weren't hovering over us like they are today. Communication, we had one telephone on the whole floor of the dormitory and we had to take turns using it. There were no cars on campus, except for the second half of your senior year, you could have a car. That doesn't mean that there weren't cars hidden in garages around town, but there were no cars on campus. Just those two things alone, the phone and the car, really made our community very insular in a way. Perhaps that is a reason we were not involved with the community.

23. Is there anything else you can think of? Any other stories to share?

If I do, I'll just scamper over here and take over your microphone!

End [00:29:16]