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## UA68/8/2 Larry Kirkland Oral History

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This is an interview with Larry Kirkland in Kansas City, Missouri, October 17, 1980.

#7915

Jim Bennett: Larry, you graduated from Western in what year?

Larry Kirkland: 1969.

JB: '69. And you majored in what, Business Administration?

LK: Business Administration.

JB: And then you told me a while ago you went right into job with International Harvester and you've been with them ever since?

LK: Yes, you know I worked as a ..... shortly before going to work for the company. I worked as an electrician and then I left Bowling Green, went to Atlanta, Georgia in October of 69.

JB: How did you decide to come to Western?

LK: Well, that is a long story, because I started to school originally or initially in Eastern Kentucky University, and I had a friend who was at the University of Kentucky. A football player there. Somehow he had some problems at the University of Kentucky. And another by the name of Reese Morgan, which I think you may be familiar with. Wes Simpson was the individual's name. So they both decided they were going to Western Kentucky. And we got together at a midpoint between Lexington and Richmond and we all three decided that we were probably going to go to Western because we had heard a lot of good comments about the school. And really this is kind of how we arrived there.

JB: Now you are originally from Lebanon, in Barren County.

LK: Right.

JB: That was the home of Kelly Thompson.

LK: That's true.

JB: I guess even before you thought of going to Western you heard a lot about Western because of Kelly's association.

LK: Well, I think, really, when I think about it, I probably became aware of Kelly Thompson more so through what was known then and probably today as Kelly's Hill. Because back in those days there was this, especially in the winter time, the favored sledding area was Kelly's Hill. And this was on the, I assume, the Thompson farm, which is just probably a couple of miles from the downtown area of Lebanon. So I would say that probably

that's how I become more familiar with Kelly Thompson is just through that. And then obviously after thinking about going to school at Western, the name Kelly Thompson, the Hurrigan, Mr. Hurrigan, I forget his...

JB: Bill Hurrigan.

LK: Bill Hurrigan was there, and he was also from Lebanon. And it was through, I guess just through that association that I became aware of Kelly Thompson being the president of Western Kentucky University.

JB: Had you met him before you came to Western?

LK: No I hadn't. I think he had been probably away from the city for a number of years.

JB: What was his family still, did he still have family in Lebanon when you were growing up or not.

LK: I'm sure he did. I'm sure he did. I don't recall exactly, you know, what associat... or relatives he had there, whether his parents or.... But I'm sure he had inlaws or people or cousins or something along those lines. Because there are a number of Thompsons families in that county. And I'm sure that, yes he did have relatives still in the area.

JB: Well when you got to Western, did you meet Kelly pretty soon after you got on campus or not?

LK: Yes. We were, I say we because a number of us from Lebanon went to school at Western at that time. I think he was most, I think we all were encouraged to either introduce or reintroduce ourselves to Mr. Thompson and Mr. Hurrigan. People that you can, that you know, that you can feel that it's nice to know, that will, from my home town, and I'd at least have some feeling of part of the old home town, the home away from home.

JB: Did you go by his office? I know he sort of had an open door policy.

LK: Yes I did. I can't think of the secretary.

JB: Georgia Bates.

LK: Could have been, but obviously once they know who you are, where you're coming from, or where you're from or whatever, you could the red carpet treatment. I definitely recall that.

JB: What was your first impression of Western when you got on the campus? You'd been to Eastern. Of course I'm sure you've been to UK.

LK: I think number one just, you know, the way the campus was laid out back in those days and this was like 1965. I think really what, just that I thought it was really a beautiful place. Of course in those days it was a smaller campus. I knew a number of people going in, so it wasn't like, you know, just going into a place and I didn't have any friends, or that I was totally unfamiliar with, because so many people from our community were going to school there at the time. And you know descriptions about the campus, about the campus life, about this .... I think it made it, I don't think I was totally in awe of the campus when I first came here. I think I was just, as I said earlier, I liked the way it was laid out. I thought it was a very beautiful campus.

JB: Now mostly the campus was around the top of the hill. They were just beginning the buildings down, the new dorms, along the bottom of the hill.

LK: Yea, everything was centered around, I guess Cherry Hall was pretty much the focal point of the campus at that time. I think Central Hall was probably the most modern dorm on campus if I recall that correctly.

JB: Yea, that was the new dorm, the big one. First tall building on the campus.

LK: That's right.

JB: And I guess most of your, where were you? Was Grice Hall there then?

LK: Oh...

JB: I guess that's where Business Administration would be now.

LK: Grice Hall. You know I don't, I don't recall that. I don't recall Grice Hall.

JB: It was after that. In what buildings did you have most of your classes?

LK: Most of the classes I had, as far as business administration, and, keeping in mind that I was someone that had lived over there for a period for about two and a half years. I didn't decide to major in business until just about my third year in college. So by that time most of the business administration courses were conducted, as I recall I would leave Central Hall and go I guess East and there were a couple of girls' dorms on the left and there was a large business administration building, but I can't think of...

JB: That was Grice Hall. You would come out of Central Hall and

cross the street and there would be girls' dorms there. And then you'd go on up toward the old football field. That's Grice Hall.

LK: O.K.

JB: Stuck right in there. Sort of bottom side of the old football field. That was Grice Hall.

LK: O.K. That's where most of my courses were. And then I had a number also, a number of courses in Cherry Hall.

JB: There were still quite a number of departments in Cherry Hall then.

LK: Oh yes.

JB: You know when I first went there just about all except agriculture and home economics, I think. Because it was English, History, and foreign languages, and, chemistry...

LK: About the only thing that you, that I recall taking, courses outside of those two facilities, was like the lab which was on down, I guess south of Cherry Hall, down the hill.

JB: Let's see, Snell Hall, and there was another old building in there. It's gone now, there's a new science building. I can't think of the name of that. Yea, that was about the campus. Who are some of the, the teachers that you recall that you had. Sort of stand out in your memory.

LK: I think I took a speech course there and the individual has since passed away, probably in the English Department.

JB: Russell Miller.

LK: Russell Miller. I recall him real well. He was, as we were talking a little earlier, I think he was a strong disciplinarian, and so I can remember him rather vividly. Some of the, I should probably know more than business administration people than I do. I remember a professor there by the name of Dr. John Hering, I believe was his name. There was a lady there in the business administration department, that was real popular with most of the students. And a good teacher. And I can't ... You know I've often thought of her, and as a matter of fact someone and not long ago or I was talking with someone, her name was mentioned. But for the life of me I can't think of her name.

JB: I know the woman, and she died a few years ago.

LK: Is that right?

JB: If it's the one I'm thinking of.

LK: I remember also an English teacher, I can't think of his first name, but his Acou was his last name. He may no longer be with the University.

JB: No. I remember him, he left, I don't remember.... Now you wouldn't have had any foreign languages?

LK: Yes I did. And I can visualize the individual that taught, I had him for two semesters. A tall fellow, big, and taught German. And he was just a, he did a real good job. It was the way that he taught the class, I felt was, you know I was always reluctant to take a foreign language, and it was surprising, German came very easy to me. You know I'm not German, I have no association with Germans or I haven't really heard the language or was around the language that much, but I could read it, interpret it, and just came to it naturally. I think it was probably the way that the individual taught the class. It was very smooth, kind of made everybody want to participate. I can't think of the guy's name to save my life.

JB: I'm sorry I can't recall it, but I'll check it and put it in the interview. Well, and then of course you would have known Charlie Keown, the Dean of Students.

LK: Yes, I would.

JB: Now we may come back to Beverly. It's hard to dredge up all these names.

LK: Well, you know I knew some of these, like the athletic department that taught some of the phys ed courses, we were talking earlier Joe Bufull.

JB: Mr. Elrod.

LK: Turner Elrod, God rest his soul was Nick Dennis.

JB: Coach Griffin.

LK: Yea, I never knew him well, though.

JB: Is that right?

LK: No. I never really got to know that individual as well. I knew him just in the distant. But for the most part I will have to say this, they were, back in those days, and I'm sure it's probably changed, you know, commercialization has a way of taking away that, making everyone feel you know, you're part of the same, you just get so big, I think, it's impossible to do that. But I know this, that most of those people, those teachers, those professors, and such, they were pretty congenial people back in those days.

JB: It was a really nice situation. As we were talking a while ago, you felt like you know just about everybody. You knew what was going on, you were a part of the whole thing. You lose some of that when you get larger.

LK: Well, I think there is, that's certainly true. I know that I have and I still do, obviously, Lee and I talked about this at one time before, I have so many fond memories of Western. And I think they did a good job of, you know, we used to talk about pride and all the Big Red ..... and they did an extremely good job of creating that.

JB: Now you didn't play football at Western did you?

LK: Yes I did.

JB: I couldn't remember if you... Now you didn't your last...

LK: I didn't. You say I came here in 65, and I played football down there through 60... two seasons. Actually played football two seasons. I came there in the Fall, it was 65 and, of course, not being eligible to play, so I practiced ... let's see, 65, 66, 67 and 1967 is when Bev and I got married. And I decided, or we decided, what I needed to do more so than anything was kind of buckle down and do the things I hadn't been doing in school. And I think back in those days there is a tendency to have quite a bit of fun at Western. And I think I'm sure I had my share of fun. So, and also I was having problems with the draft, which a lot of people today didn't experience. You know there were a number of people who were drafted, who were taken out of Western. As a matter of fact I was called about twice myself. On two occasions, I think, I kind of flunked the physical and even when I graduated I received a draft notification prior to graduation. So I think tying it all together, what after two and a half years or whatever it was of playing football I felt my main concern had to be to get through school.

JB: When you were playing football, did you live in the Rock House?

LK: No, I lived in Central Hall.

JB: Did they still have the Rock House then for the football players or not?

LK: You know at the time I think they had the basketball players living there, if I recall that correctly.

JB: I knew there had been a time earlier when the football team had been housed there. That's right, they moved down to Central Hall when that was over. That's a girls' dorm now.

LK: I remember one time Coach Dennis made a statement in one of the summer football camps that he was, or maybe it was toward the end of the season or something like that, and he was, you know, real proud, so proud of this group. And he had a way of expressing himself. And he used to talk about the fact that years ago that primarily most of the recruits for the football team were former 101st airborne division paratroopers. And his big chore on Sunday morning was to go down and bail them out of jail. So, and that's back when they lived, I think at one time they used to live across from Cherry Hall at the old Rock House, or whatever it was called. And so that's, you know, my knowledge of the football team at one time living over there.

JB: Yea, they were living there when I went to Western. 60 and I guess along about 63 or 64 they completed Central Hall and they moved in there.

LK: And you know they could have moved the basketball team, and I think they did. Because we lived on the second floor, the football team lived on the second floor. If I'm not mistaken, I think some of the basketball players lived down there.

JB: Yea, for a while they were, with the enrollment sort of mushrooming, they moved people around quite a bit. Because when I came I lived in the girls' dorm right across from, well then it was across from the tennis courts, it's where the new student center is. And we had an apartment there for about three years. But the Rock House, there are a lot of stories I've heard about that when Ken Waller and some of that bunch were living there.

LK: Well, I remember, you know I meant to ask you earlier about the orange bar.

JB: It's still there. Now Emory's calmed down a bit. You know there used to be a shooting or stabbing every weekend in there, but don't hear anything out of them any more.

LK: I remember back in 65, maybe it was 66, second year I was there, Waller and myself, Wes Simpson, Alan Hogan, maybe a couple more guys, went to the Orange Bar and we really didn't know what was going on after a while. Of course we were just as guilty as anyone. But Waller decided that you know he wanted to have the bar to himself and his associates. So he started going around to each table and just telling people to leave. And most people, you know, who knew Waller would leave if you asked them to. And they did. So he locked the door with me inside and the bartender he decided he was going to call the police. So Waller tore the telephone off the wall. And so we stayed there probably for about an hour and when we left it was about the end of it. But we were notified that we were never to go back to the Orange Bar anymore.



JB: Waller was a real rounder, wasn't he?

LK: Yes he was.

JB: I saw him a couple of years ago. Of course he's in California now, and has one all those physique titles. Has calmed down quite a bit.

LK: That would be interesting to see him in that, in that style, I guess, because I've always known him just the other way.

JB: Yea. I was really surprised. He was very calm. Not like the Waller that I knew, either. A lot of stories about him when he was there. Was there any, the time you were there, I guess it was about the time well we started growing in enrollment. It was the beginning of some dissatisfaction of students that were wanting more changes. We began to have a little unrest. I don't whether that occurred while you were there or not.

LK: No, I don't think so. I think it must have happened shortly thereafter. Maybe the early 70s. It seems like around 72, 73 or something like that.

JB: It was a really traumatic period.

LK: Because I know that after you know I had gotten out of Western and, of course, nothing is ever the same when you go back. If you've been away for a while. And talking to people. You know I would relate my thoughts about Western and, as I say, I have very fond memories of campus life and how, you know I went to school there. And when you talk to people you relate those. And they don't relate. Because it's different. It's changed. You know it's larger. It seems like...you know I think the biggest complaint I ever heard from the people I talked to and whether they were majorly biased or what I don't know, but they just seemed they didn't think, there were so many blacks coming to Western and they were just taking over the campus. Now whether that was it or not, I didn't know. You know the drug problem, you know the worst thing we ever had as far as any drugs were concerned, was we had beer, drank beer, but I don't know of any drugs, people that took drugs, when I was there. But shortly thereafter...

JB: Yea, in the seventies, I guess that's when the drug culture began to evolve. But I couldn't recall that during that period there was any kind of student unrest.

LK: No, we didn't have any problems to my knowledge. And I may have been somewhat oblivious to them, but I don't think so.

JB: I wouldn't think so. You were pretty much in the middle of activities. You know most of the people there. You would have

known, I think, if there would have been anything like that.

LK: That's right.

JB: Looking back now, with all the experience you've had, how do you think Western was administered under President Thompson, Koeun, Cravens was dean then.

LK: Well, as far as administration goes, I would say that compared to what I know about administration today and you know that's just through experience with a large corporation, and I think this is what we're talking about, I think I would have to say that it was well, you know it was under control. There was lots of control, it seemed like. You know when I asked, would read stories or hear about the problems of schools, and whether it be high schools in New York or wherever it might be, and campus unrest, it's hard for me to relate to that, because, you know, we had a certain amount of respect that you had to show. And I think in order to show respect you somewhat have to, you have to have a good standard. There was a good standard there they kind of went by. I'd say from the standpoint of administrative competency, it was definitely there then. In my way of appreciating good administration.

JB: What were some of the social activities that you recall?

LK: Well, I wasn't...when I was at Western, belonging to a fraternity was not a...we were really encouraged not to belong to fraternities.

JB: Had they established any of the national fraternities then?

LK: Yes they did. But, nonetheless, we still had our friends and we associated, we attended the fraternity parties as guests, and you had your own groups. You know the Beech Bend Park, and those areas. You kind of just made your own fun. And that was pretty much the extent of social life.

JB: Was most of the social life off campus? I mean as opposed say to dances they would have on the campus?

LK: Oh, I think so. I think so. As I recall that would be the case.

JB: Any particular thing that stands out as you think about it now? Any particular events or things you were involved in as a student?

LK: Well, I think so. There's a couple of things. You know the thing that comes to mind immediately is, you know we had, we all had quite a tragedy there, I think it was Dwight Smith, is that correct? And this had quite, shocked the entire campus. And it

was like, you know you can, I think you can go through life and take a lot of things for granted and never think twice about a lot of things you do, and then I think about that. You know here was an individual, ..... everyone on campus was concerned, and this is one thing that stood out. I think, again, I think it comes back to people caring for others, and that seemed the association you get with a lot of people. But other things that stand out.... Of course there was always people taking it to one extreme, I guess it goes back to the social right. There was always such a gathering every spring, spring break, and people would band together and take off for Florida or wherever it might be. But that always was a thing you looked forward to, a fun time.

JB: Do you usually make the trip to Florida?

LK: Oh, yes. That was...

JB: You almost had to do that.

LK: Yea, I think I made it every year.

JB: You know I think they're not doing that now. I don't know what they do at Spring Break now. You don't hear much talk about it anyway.

LK: Well, again, you know it was, Christ, you could go to Florida and you would see about half of campus down there. And it was just like, you know, a ten year reunion, and you'd probably only been apart for about two days. Oh, what else. Of course you know, I think, the strong association with the football team. I have lots of good memories of those activities. As far as any real striking matters that stand out, I don't, not too many come to mind.

JB: Well, that's a difficult question. Takes a lot of thinking. Let me ask you one other, here. Do you think now that you've got a pretty basic education at Western?

LK: I really do. And whether it be, of course, you know, this is, I guess what I'm getting to is a value system, I guess, that I feel was developed there more so than even the intellectual aptitude. And it's not to say it's not there. I probably feel that it's more my fault than what ever could be at Western, because they certainly provided many, many opportunities for a person like myself as well as others to be as smart and to study and to do all the things that we should do. But like a lot of people, we kind of choose our own way, and don't apply ourselves at the right time, and then later on in life, you've got to figure out, well, I wish I would have applied myself a little stronger. But that aside, I think the, probably the best aspect of the education I got at Western, was just as I say to really

build on a value system, because I think that's really important. It's probably, and I think I'm probably overlooking.... It's hard for me to really associate what that education is contributed to me as far as the business end of what I'm involved in. Even though it's got to be there. You know it's got to be there. Its, subconsciously I'm sure it's there. I just, I think it's not specializing in anything, being pretty much, business administration, or getting a good background in business, I think it, obviously provided that for me. It gave me some insights. I don't think you can get too many answers until you get out into what you're involved in. But I think for the most part, you know we all, when you go to work some days you compete just as you compete in class, compete in athletics and so forth. Somewhere along the way I think something was instilled that you've got to be competitive if you're going to amount to anything. You've got to get in there and apply yourself just a little. So, again, I don't know, I kind of get hung up on that. But it takes a little principle and it takes a little discipline, to take those values in the right perspective. I don't know, and you tie it all together. You know I think the first thing if I went back, or if I went, to say, went to a school and could not feel a part of it, as though I did experience, I don't know what that would have done for me. I don't know whether it would have bolstered my ego or not. And not being too egotistical, but by the same token, I felt pretty good about coming out of Western. I always felt very proud of talking to someone about the school and regardless of what their opinion was, I probably never even gave it a thought. And I think that's important too.

JB: I think that's all the questions I can come up with. Is there anything else that you'd want to say?

LK: Well, of course I, I think it's you know like a person like yourself, this took a lot of time and interest in students, I know that, including myself. This is just something that I think is kind of plus, I guess, to what I experienced at Western. It's good to be able to relate, to have someone like yourself, to tie in what the University, especially if you feel a closeness to it and want to try to feel that maybe you can keep some ties with the school. But as I said earlier, I think it's pretty good to, or I feel good. As a matter of fact, I'll just relate something else to you. Tom Burbus, as we talked earlier, Tom's a successful business person today, and Tom was very much in the thick of things as well as any of us at Western at the time. But after, he was away from school, he was away from Western, oh I guess four years. And I was talking to him after some time there, and he had bought a farm up in Lewisburg, Ohio, to go along with these restaurants that he had put together. And I remember we would call him T-burg at school. And I don't know how we ever got that tied in, because what he did he drove a Mustang convertible. But anyhow, he kind of said "Believe it or not, you know I've still got that old T-bird." I said, "You're

kidding." "No," he said, "as a matter of fact, it's out in the barn. You'd be surprised. Every now and then I'll get to thinking about the old days down at Western, and you know I get out there and sit in that car and those things just come back to me like you would not believe." I was really surprised at that. But I can appreciate that. Because Tom was just.... And you know he used to go back for games, for Homecoming, games like..... I don't know whether he does now or not, but he was just loyal as all get out. Well, again, I think it was, I would hope that the people, and I don't know whether they're having that fondness of the school, that closeness, that appreciation of the school that we had. If they aren't, they're missing something I think.

JB: I wonder about that, too. There are a few, of course, that you get to know, but we're dealing with such numbers now that....

LK: And you've got to have the numbers.

JB: Yea, the way it's set up now you've got to have the numbers. But I miss something. I don't have the chance to know not nearly as large a percentage as I once did. And that's a minus, I think. A lot of your reward in teaching is just recalling the people you've gotten to know.

LK: Association.

JB: So it's changed a lot, but I think we've got a good future ahead of us. We've got I think a fine president.

LK: Well, from the looks of the group, of the campus, from what I hear it should be. It should be.

JB: What you need to do is get back up there for Homecoming this year.

LK: I've thought about it. I may try to work that in. That would be a good treat.

JB: Yea, you both deserve it now.

LK: Yea, we'll think about it. You know those two children can....

JB: Bring them along, they have entertainment for the children this year, I think.

LK: They keep us pretty much chained to the homefront, that's for sure.

JB: Well, Larry, I surely thank you not only for the interview but for all the hospitality. I've really enjoyed it.

LK: It's been a pleasure.

JB: I wish I didn't have to leave tomorrow.

LK: You took the opportunity to call and we could get together.