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UA3/4/8/6 Harriett Downing Oral History

Harriett Downing

Sue Lynn McDaniel

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Western Kentucky University
UA3/4 Dero Downing Papers
Subseries 8 Interviews / Oral History
Item 6 Harriett Downing Oral History

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Biographical/Historical Note:

The president's office was created in 1906. The search for the fourth president of WKU began with Kelly Thompson's resignation announcement May 21, 1969. Vice President for Administrative Affairs Dero Downing indicated that he would serve if asked. The Board of Regents elected him president on August 22, 1969. He served until his retirement in 1979.

Dero Downing was born September 10, 1921 at Fountain Run in Monroe County, Kentucky, and grew up at Horse Cave in Hart County. He enrolled at WKU in 1939 where he played basketball and earned both a bachelor's and master's degree. After serving in the Navy in World War II, he returned to Western as a mathematics teacher and coach at the College's Training School. He later became director of the Training School, college registrar, dean of admissions, dean of business affairs, and vice-president for administrative and business affairs. Upon his resignation as president in 1979 Downing became president of the College Heights Foundation, a position he held until his death on April 4, 2011.

Description:

Harriet Downing interviewed by Sue Lynn McDaniel regarding student life during World War II and her experiences as wife of WKU's fourth president, Dero Downing.

Date: August 23, 2000

Formats: cassette tape, wav file

Subject Analytics:

Athletics (WKU)	Cook, Paul	Downing, Kathryn
Audio recording	Cornette, James	Faculty Wives Club (WKU)
Basketball	Demonstrations	Finley, Grise
Bennett, James	Diddle, E.A.	Garrett, Paul Loos, 1893-1955
Canon, Ernest	Downing, Alex	Garrett, Virginia
Chapel	Downing, Ann	Graves, Louis
Cherry, Elizabeth	Downing, Dee	Helm-Cravens Library (WKU)
Cole, Basil	Downing, Dero Goodman, 1921-2011	Hoofnel, Aubrey
College Heights Foundation (WKU)	Downing, Elizabeth	Hornback, Ted
College High (WKU)	Downing, Harriett	Interviews
		Jaggers, Craddock Hurley

Jagers, Roberta	Richards, Frances	Theatrical productions
Keown, Charles	Schell, Merrill	Thompson, Kelly, 1909-1993
Labhart, Charles	Schneider Hall (WKU)	Thompson, Sarah
McClanahan, Susie	Searcy, AR	Training School (WKU)
McKinney, David	State Street Methodist Church	Veterans Village (WKU)
Oral history	(Bowling Green, KY)	Ward, Sumpter
Physical Education (WKU)	Stephens, Henry	West Hall (WKU)
President's Home (WKU)	Stonecipher, Sybil	Western Kentucky University
Protest movements	Streaking	Wilson, Gordon
Ragland, Clara	Students	World War II, 1939-1945
Registrar (WKU)	Taff, Nollie	
Reminiscing	Theatre & Dance (WKU)	

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Oral History Recording List UA3.4.8.6 ~ Audiocassette

10/01/2020

Media ID	Side	Start time	Subject
Tape 1	1	00:00:05	<p><i>Sue Lynn McDaniel: This is Wednesday, August the 23rd, 19, excuse me, 2000. We are still getting used to that, as far as the year. I am Sue Lynn Stone, University Archivist at Western Kentucky University. And I am sitting in the orientation room of the Kentucky Building with Harriett Yarnell Downing. Mrs. Downing, first I'd like to ask you when did you decide to come to Western?</i></p> <p><i>Harriett Downing: I was working in the law office and had met a lady who went to Murray. And she tried to convince me to go to Murray. And Mr. Lidel (?), the lawyer said, "You don't want to go to Murray. There's nothing there. But if you're going to Kentucky, you want to go to Western." His wife was from Cadiz and had gone to the old Potter School for Girls. And he said Bowling Green is a nice town and the school is a good school. So I wrote a letter and had a letter in return from President [Paul] Garrett. And he told me that he couldn't wait until I got here. And I had enough money so I got on the train and came down</i></p>
Tape 1	1	00:01:22	<p><i>SM: Could you tell us your home town? Where were you coming from?</i></p> <p><i>HD: Searcy, Arkansas. And there was a college there. It was a Church of Christ college. But it cost more to go there than it did for me to come to Western. And I've always been happy that I chose Western.</i></p>
Tape 1	1	00:01:39	<p><i>Marvelous. You had a background, I believe, in speech?</i></p> <p><i>HD: Yes. I was very interested in speech from the time I was in elementary school when we did creative dramatics. And then in high school when we did extemporaneous speaking. At that time, we had state contests. And when I was a sophomore, I won the state extemporaneous speaking contest. And planned to come to Western to be an attorney. I was going to take a pre-law course here.</i></p>
Tape 1	1	00:02:15	<p><i>SM: Marvelous, that's a fact I did not know. Tell me your first impression of Bowling Green, Kentucky.</i></p> <p><i>HD: It wasn't very good. The area from the L&N train station to the top of the hill was not the most pleasant sight in the world. And by that night, I was so home sick that I wanted to turn around and go back to Searcy but was determined that I would stick it out. And after a few days found that it was exactly where I wanted to be.</i></p>
Tape 1	1	00:02:46	<p><i>02:46 SM: Where did you live on campus?</i></p> <p><i>HD: I lived in old West Hall which is now Florence Schneider Hall. There were only two dormitories on campus and they were both women's dorms, West Hall and Potter Hall. And Miss Susie McClanahan was our dorm director. After that first semester, I worked in the office there at the dormitory. So it was a lot of fun.</i></p>
Tape 1	1	00:03:17	<p><i>SM: Can you describe for me what the rules were relevant for living on campus if you were female?</i></p> <p><i>HD: A little different than what they are now. Everyone except the seniors had to be in by nine o'clock during the week. You could stay out until 10:30 on weekends. And the seniors could stay out until 10:30 every night. But Miss Susie blinked the lights a couple of minutes before you were supposed to be in. And at the second blink of the lights, if you didn't walk in the door, she was after you. We had to sign in and sign out. You signed your name as you went out and hung it on a board. And when you came back in, you took your name off. And if you're name was still on there, you were in trouble. The lights went off at 11 o'clock at night. And we didn't know for a long time that Aubrey Hoofnel, who was the security officer, came back in during the night to turn the lights back on. But we thought that they were off and we had nothing to do except by candle light.</i></p>
Tape 1	1	00:04:24	<p><i>04:24 SLM: So your electricity went off, you're saying?</i></p> <p><i>HD: Right.</i></p> <p><i>SM: At 11 o'clock? It wasn't a matter of enforcing a rule, it was your electricity . . .</i></p> <p><i>HD: No. The electricity was turned off. The lights were turned off.</i></p>
Tape 1	1	00:04:35	<p><i>SM: I don't believe I have ever seen or heard that before. What did you do for entertainment as a student?</i></p> <p><i>HD: Well perhaps I should go back a little because I met Dero and had my first date with him</i></p>

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			<p>about five days after I came to Western. And there wasn't a whole lot to do because we didn't have any money. We walked up and down the hill a lot. On Friday nights, you could go to the old Diamond Theater where they went up and down the aisles selling hot popcorn. And you could go for a dime. The summer that I was here, we had a battery operated radio. And we spent a lot of time sitting around on campus on benches listening to the radio and talking. And we spent time in the lunch room with other students. You went to a movie, if you had the money, you went a bought a hamburger and an ice cream cone. But we went to ball games and in basketball season, which he was a basketball player so I didn't miss those. And all students went to football games in the fall. It was more of a community oriented [unintelligible]. There were not fraternities or sororities except for those that were not recognized. And so you just found your entertainment. And we were easily pleased because we had not been used to having a lot of money and doing a lot of outside things.</p>
Tape 1	1	00:06:24	<p>SM: Would you describe for me meeting Dero Downing?</p> <p>HD: I think I was introduced to him on Sunday after lunch and had heard his name the night before. Some of the girls were talking about him. And the name had stayed with me because it was unusual. But on Monday afternoon, one of the office girls in the dorm came back to my room and said there is someone out in front that wants to talk with you. And I thought it was another boy. And I thought she meant out in front of the dorm. So I went to the lobby and Dero was seated there and I just said "Hello" and walked on through. And he said come here a minute. And I went over and he asked me for a date. And for the next two years then. Oh, we had a few ups and downs. A time or two when he'd get upset or I'd get upset - well this was the end - but it wouldn't have worked out that way.</p>
Tape 1	1	00:07:34	<p>SM: I noticed that you were one of the campus beauties your freshman year.</p> <p>HD: I don't think they really called us that, campus beauties, did they?</p> <p>SM: I believe you were a beauty that year.</p> <p>HD: I thought they called them favorites.</p> <p>SM: Favorites I think is the term used the next year.</p> <p>HD: Maybe so.</p> <p>SM: But I believe you're a beauty.</p> <p>HD: Well I was not a beauty, really. It was a matter of - I had been in some plays and I was a class officer. And the school was small. So if you knew a lot of people, then it was a student vote. So it really wasn't a beauty. I never been known as a beauty.</p> <p>SM: Well you've always been modest.</p> <p>HD: No. I just know I'm not beautiful. There were some beautiful girls in that group.</p>
Tape 1	1	00:08:24	<p>SM: Tell me about the plays.</p> <p>HD: The first one I was in was The Flying Gerardos. And I've been taking a lot of, do I want to say flack, about that ever since. Because we were - it was about a circus that had come into this town. And I was the circus performer who fell in love with one of the town boys as I remember. He decided to join the circus. But we were dressed in costumes that looked like long underwear. And so my children have laughed about it. My family has laughed about it, because when they look at that picture, it is right comical looking. But it was a great experience, I made some good friends there. And usually Dero could come over, I had late permission, you know. And he could come over and wait for me when we had a little extra time when I was doing play practice.</p>
Tape 1	1	00:09:30	<p>SM: So if you're involved in a campus activity and you're going to be late getting back to your residence hall, you had to have a special permission first in order to wait?</p> <p>HD: Right. And if there was someone else in your dorm that was in that same play and they got in before you did, beware. Then later in the year, that was in the fall. Then later I was in another production called Escape. And it was not quite as good a play as the first one was. But by the time the next year came around, I didn't want to spend that much time on play practice. We were in war time by then. We knew that our time together was short and I didn't want to spend a lot of hours in play practice so I cut that out.</p>
Tape 1	1	00:10:26	<p>SM: I can well understand that. What was it like to be a student at Western when news of the war broke out?</p> <p>HD: The day that Pearl Harbor was bombed, it was like it was dead silence everywhere you went. It was almost unbelievable. I mean, there was this sorrow because we knew that all the young men were going to be gone. And we didn't really know what the future was going to hold. I think it caused a bonding of students just as it did a bonding of families and faculty. I can see Miss Sybil Stonecipher now sitting on the stage at Van Meter when we had chapel,</p>

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			<i>knitting during chapel. Some of those faculty members were involved in wrapping, folding bandages and knitting socks. And I'm rambling.</i>
Tape 1	1	00:11:36	<p>SM: No, this is very important.</p> <p>HD: I learned later, after Dero and I were married and went back to Western, that the faculty wives were very, very involved with Red Cross, with knitting, with sending bundles overseas, with all the war efforts. The wives of faculty members that were at Western very vigorously involved.</p>
Tape 1	1	00:12:00	<p>SM: Let me digress for a moment and ask you about your family. Are you from a large family, a small family? Tell me about Arkansas.</p> <p>HD: Well, no. I had one brother. We lived on a farm. But my father also worked at the post office. So we had the best of both worlds. I grew up in a small town, maybe five or six thousand people. So everyone knew everyone else. My father had been born there. My mother had moved there when she was about 9 years old. So we were old families that knew all the old families. And since Daddy was post office, he met all the new ones. My mother was of a generation, when newcomers came to town, you went calling. You dressed in your best. And you took your calling cards. And from the time I was a little girl, I went with my mother to call on new comers to town. And if they were not there, you left your card. And if they were there, then they returned your visit. And it was a good life growing up. I've never wanted to go back since the town has grown. I have good friends still there. But I never wanted to leave Bowling Green.</p>
Tape 1	1	00:13:30	<p>SM: Can you describe chapel for me at Western?</p> <p>HD: We had chapel once a week and we had designated seats and roll was kept. And there were special chapel programs. The faculty was small enough that they were all seated on the stage in Van Meter auditorium. But chapel was a good experience. We had inspirational speakers. We had educational speakers. Football games, basketball games, we had pep rallies. And it was, there again, it was something I think was a binding with students and faculty because you got to know the faculty. And then the school was so small that you knew the faculty whether you had them in class or not. And you knew them on a personal level.</p>
Tape 1	1	00:14:25	<p>SM: Can you describe for me a few of your favorite teachers?</p> <p>HD: [Unintelligible and laughter] Dr. Ward Sumpter, I had a chemistry class with him the first semester. He always called me Miss Yarnell, of course. We were never known by our first names. But he had taught in a small college, College of the Ozarks, in Arkansas for about three years. So he talked to me about Arkansas and that made me feel at home. And I didn't know a Bunsen burner from a hole in the ground. I had no chemistry in Searcy, Arkansas. Had it not been for his being helpful and for a lab supervisor that played on the tennis team with Dero, I probably would not have passed chemistry. Miss Sybil Stonecipher, she was my Latin professor was a very good friend for years. Miss Frances Richards, though I never had her as a teacher, was always a good friend. Dr. Gordon Wilson, I had two classes with him. Mrs. T. C. [Elizabeth] Cherry [unintelligible] in a Tennyson and Browning class. Oh, how I did like poetry. Oh, I could just go on and on. Dr. James Cornette. Dr. Cornette left here during the war. He became president of West Texas State. But I had both my freshman history classes with him and he was a wonderful teacher. Dr. B. C. [Basil] Cole, though I never had a class with him was one of the favorites of everyone on campus. Dr. Stephens, Henry Stephens. The list could go on forever because there were so many. Dean [Finley] Grise and I became very good friends.</p>
Tape 1	1	00:16:35	<p>SM: Are there any funny stories you remember about any of them that really would help our students to feel as if they knew them? Or possibly serious stories?</p> <p>HD: Oh, I don't know. I remember, and I don't know whether this was . . . We had a psychology teacher, Dr. [Marion] Billings. And I won't say he's one of my favorite teachers, because, I was scared to death of him. He was a small man and I still don't know why I was so afraid. But he didn't look through and say Miss Yarnell such and such. He had these cards and he'd ask a question and then he'd flip through those cards and he'd point his finger at you and say, "Miss Yarnell." And by that time, if I knew the answer, he'd scared it out of me. And I remember one day going in and had not studied and here were these test papers. And I looked at that and I got sick and I just left. I thought I'm going to flunk it anyway, I might as well flunk it not being here. I remember Dr. [Nollie] Taff and Dr. [David] McKinney both taught in economics. And Dr. Taff was another Arkansas professor. And my mother had sent Arkansas strawberries to me. She sent a whole crate. And I thought, well, I'll take some of these to Dr. Taff. So I took a quart of strawberries in to him and there was Dr. McKinney. And I thought, oh dear, I'd better go back and get some for him. Well as I got back to the door, Dr. McKinney was saying to Dr. Taff, "I'd don't know if we can call this apple polishing. Do we call it strawberry polishing?" But those are just - I don't know - teachers that just meant so much to you. And because the school was so small that you felt there was a personal friendship.</p>
Tape 1	1	00:18:38	<p>SM: One of the stories I'm often told is that you didn't have to have a student ID because Dr. [Ernest] Canon knew everyone. [Ernest Canon was the Registrar, 1925-1959]</p>

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			<p>HD: That's right.</p> <p>SM: And so therefore you easily identifiable. When you went to ball games, were you required to purchase a ticket for the ballgame or do you recall?</p> <p>HD: I don't think so. I don't remember.</p> <p>SM: Because you didn't have a student ID.</p> <p>HD: [Unintelligible] And it was so inexpensive. I spent a summer here on \$50. Now I worked and I got my meals. But my tuition, my books, I didn't have but \$50 all summer long. [Unintelligible] Of course, a dollar bought a lot more than it does now.</p>
Tape 1	1	00:19:24	<p>SM: You were dating a basketball player and I frequently hear about Coach [Ed] Diddle and his opinion about women dating his basketball players.</p> <p>HD: Yes.</p> <p>SM: Could you comment on that.</p> <p>HD: Yes. I have a story to tell about that. I was so afraid of Coach Diddle that if I came out of West Hall and he was sitting over at the old gym, which is now the library. He sat out in the sun a lot in a chair. But if he was seated there, I would walk up the hill instead of going across the track which was easier. But I didn't even want to see him. He didn't, there was only one time that he really got after Dero about dating me, or dating anyone. Dero had a place on his leg that had not healed so on Friday afternoon, Coach Diddle had taken him to the doctor. They went in and scraped the bone so he was bandaged from his ankle up to his knee. And we thought well there is no way that he is going to play ball tomorrow night. So that night, we went to the movie [unintelligible] went to a movie, went to Western Lunch Room and were seated there about 10:15 finishing a sandwich, and Coach Diddle and Mr. [Ted] Hornback walked in. Coach Diddle saw us [unintelligible] and he just said everything to Dero, not to me, but to Dero about being out late and also about eating. Dero was saying, "Yes, sir, yes, sir, yes, sir" and putting my coat on me all the time. And we went out that door, and we didn't walk, we ran. He wouldn't even go to the door with me at the dorm. He rushed away to the Village where he lived. Coach Diddle got there by the time he did to make sure he went in. And the next night, Coach Diddle put him in. And he made more points that night than he'd made all year in a game.</p> <p>SM: He was motivated.</p> <p>HD: I guess so. Then the next day, after lunch, Dero and Charles Labhart who was a basketball player said "Coach Diddle's looking for you." And I said, "Well, I'm not looking for him. I don't want to see Coach Diddle." And the next day in a P.E. class, Coach Diddle came to the door of his office there in the gym. And as soon as the class was over, he called me into his office. And he was so sweet and so nice. And he said, "You know that Dero is one of the best boys I ever had." And he said, "It looks like though if he ever does anything wrong though, I always catch him. But I wanted to apologize to you for the things I said to him." And from then on, we were good friends. Now I was still leery, but we didn't do anything we shouldn't do after that.</p>
Tape 1	1	00:22:45	<p>SM: What were, the boys obviously had a curfew if they were on the team. What would have been his usual curfew?</p> <p>HD: Well, the night before the game, you were not supposed to have a date. And if you tended to have a weight problem, you definitely weren't supposed to be eating cheese sandwiches. But he never was supposed to have a date the night before a ballgame. If he had thought he was going to play he wouldn't have had a date. He was sort of a stickler for the rules.</p>
Tape 1	1	00:23:17	<p>SM: You said that you spent a summer here. Was that the summer between your freshmen and sophomore years?</p> <p>HD: Yes. Partly because of Dero and partly because I wanted to pick up some extra hours and not knowing what was going to happen. I didn't want to take a chance with anybody else catching him though.</p>
Tape 1	1	00:23:41	<p>SM: Oh no! So you attended your sophomore year.</p> <p>HD: Yes. And then Dero entered the V-7 naval program in the spring of 1942, I guess. No maybe '40 - no it was '42 when he signed up for that. I'm sorry. That allowed him to finish school without being drafted. Because he graduated in 1943. By that time, we knew we were going to get married as soon as he finished midshipman school. When you entered, when you signed up for the V-7 naval program, you had to sign a paper that you would not marry until you finished midshipmen's school. But our plans were already made then. So when he graduated, we went to Horse Cave to his sister's and stayed a few days. And then he went on to West Virginia to his parents and I went to Arkansas. And then he spent four months in</p>

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			<i>midshipmen's school. The day after, two days after midshipmen's school [unintelligible] we got married in Searcy.</i>
Tape 1	1	00:24:58	<p>SM: <i>One of the most frustrating things for me about a Dero Downing interview that was done by Jim Bennett, was that he was in the process of telling about that period of your lives and he literally says something to the effect that he finished midshipmen's school. He went to Arkansas to marry Harriett who had been, dot, dot, dot and the tape runs out. And when Jim picks up the tape on the other side, they don't continue on about what Harriett had been doing. So you had gone back to Arkansas?</i></p> <p>HD: <i>I had gone back to Arkansas and went back to work that summer in the law office where I had worked before I came here.</i></p>
Tape 1	1	00:25:39	<p>SM: <i>While he was in midshipmen's?</i></p> <p>HD: <i>While he was in midshipmen's school. By correspondence, you didn't pick up the phone and call then, but by correspondence, we worked out all the plans. And we didn't know how much time he would have from the day he graduated until we could get married. So we had to make plans for Arkansas, for New York, and for all places in between where we could get. His orders said "You must report to a ship immediately." There was a Collier's magazine, good of Collier's, and it had that summer listed all the states in the union and what it took to get married in each state. Some of them had a waiting period. Some of them you had to get a blood test. You know those kinds of things. Well in Arkansas, all you had to have was 50 cents, a girl and a boy and a preacher. Fortunately, he was able to get two-weeks leave. So he caught a train the afternoon after he graduated. He rode all night. Got into Arkansas about 10 o'clock in the morning and we got married at six that night. Immediately, we went to Memphis and spent two or three nights. Came back through Bowling Green and saw his family in Kentucky. And then went on to West Virginia. His family could not travel to Arkansas to be there for the wedding. Which would have been foolish anyway, we wouldn't have been able to spend time. So we spent that two weeks with them. Then he reported to Solomons, Maryland where he had some training. [Naval Amphibious Training Base] I joined him there. And he went to Seneca, Illinois to pick up his ship. I joined him there. And he went down the river to New Orleans. I caught a train to New Orleans and we were there for a week. I went back to Arkansas. He went on maneuvers and he came back to New Orleans. And I joined him for another week. And then he left and I went back to Arkansas. By then, I thought perhaps we were expecting Kathryn. We didn't know for sure even when he called me before the night his ship left. And I said, "I think so." And then I did not see him then until, let's see, that was in April 1944. [unintelligible]</i></p>
Tape 1	1	00:28:36	<p>SM: <i>You know I think it's so difficult for those of us who were not living during that time to understand how that must have been. I mean, I've read lots of World War II letters written by Western students back to Miss [Frances] Richards and to others on the hill. But when you start describing things like Collier's magazine and how precious time was. And how basically women completely cleared their schedules and did what they had to do in order to get spend time with their husbands because they had no idea when they would see them again.</i></p> <p>HD: <i>Or if.</i></p> <p>SM: <i>And I think probably your response about knowing that you were quite possibly expecting keeps me from having to ask, did you consider going back to school while he was away on ship. And obviously it would have been difficult to have been carrying a child at that time and trying to get your education here at Western.</i></p> <p>HD: <i>Oh, and I stayed with my parents until, I went up and spent part of the time with his parents that summer. Because they had three boys overseas. Any my parents, my brother was overseas. Families needed families. I thought his parents wanted me to be there. And they acted as if they wanted me to be there. But the doctor had said when you're seven months pregnant, you should be where you're going to have that baby. And so in August, I took the train and went back to Arkansas and stayed until Kathryn was six months old. And then I went back to West Virginia and stayed there until Dero came back from overseas.</i></p>
Tape 1	1	00:30:20	<p>SM: <i>That must have been a wonderful day.</i></p> <p>HD: <i>Oh, it was. It was. It's almost unbelievable. But you know, everyone was going through the same thing. So you couldn't feel sorry for yourself because everyone else was at war. And I think that is how we survived.</i></p>
Tape 1	1	00:30:44	<p>SM: <i>At that time, did you have any idea that you'd end up back in Bowling Green?</i></p> <p>HD: <i>Possibly, because we used to walk up and down College Street, State Street. And there was a particular house on State Street. It was the Grave's house, Dr. Louis Graves. It was a beautiful home, still is. And we'd look at that house and how beautiful it was. But then we'd say, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if someday we could come back and work at Western."</i></p>
Tape 1	1	00:32:17	<p>SM: <i>We were describing the war years and what it was like to be a student and to be someone who knew well the individuals who had fought. Would you like to tell me more about</i></p>

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that?

HD: Yes. But could we go back just a moment and pick where we were on the other tape? The summer that I, after Dero was in midshipmen school and then while he was overseas, I had correspondence with President Garrett. He said in a letter that Dr. [C.H.] Jagggers wanted Dero to be employed at the Training School when he got out of service. And he quoted a salary to me of \$1,800.00 for this particular position. So when Dero got out of school, I mean got out of the service and came back, he went to see Dr. Jagggers. And then Dr. Jagggers said "I want you for this position [unintelligible] coach and team teacher. Go over and talk to President Garrett." And President Garrett said, "Now let's see. That position pays \$1,600.00" He said, "Dr. Garrett, you wrote me a letter and said you thought \$1,800.00." He said, "Did I? Well, that's all right then. Make it \$1,800.00." So that was the beginning salary.

Okay now. You asked about the people in service and so many of the young men left even before Dero did because they were drafted. And we look back through our annuals now to see the faces of those that were lost and remember the personal friendships that we had with them. Sometimes correspondence with their families. And those friendships from those years, both athletes and students, have remained with us. And this particular annual, let's see, '42 annual. That's sort of been our Western bible because children and grandchildren, and now the great grandchildren of these people have continued to come to Western. And often times, he will get a phone call and he will come home and say, "Do you remember so and so? Well they called. Their child, their grandchildren or someone else is coming to Western." So if we can't remember their face, we get out the annual and look at it.

Tape 1	1	00:34:58	<p>SM: It certainly does help. But I wish we had an annual for every year. These recent years without annuals just breaks my heart as an archivist.</p> <p>HD: Right. Because they are not like the old annuals. The old annuals are so very personal.</p>
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Tape 1	1	00:35:12	<p>SM: When you accepted the position, and I'm going to tend to talk about it like a team. Because I think in your case very much as your marriage has always been a team relationship.</p> <p>HD: That's right.</p> <p>SM: You were taking care of the home and taking care of the children. But as I understand Bowling Green in those years, being the wife of someone who was teaching on the hill and coaching on the hill, you had a very public role whether you wanted one or not. Is that the case?</p> <p>HD: You were involved. And of course with Dero being basketball coach and the baseball coach and swimming coach at College High, you became very close to families. Some of whom have been his most loyal, or I say our most loyal, supporters through the years. I can name names because then, someone who was a teacher, particularly in a high school, could say to a student, "Well now if you want me to call your parents, then I will." And then if he had to call parents, both parents came to school. Or if the child was not doing well in school, "Well let's get your parents and talk about it." So it was not anti-, it was a cooperative spirit. And in doing this, I met these people. And I met them because they were interested in their children. If they lived on farms sometimes they brought a sausage or beef or vegetables because they understood a teacher didn't make much money. You had a lot of friendships there. But then you were also active in church. I taught a Sunday school class.</p>
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Tape 1	1	00:37:11	<p>SM: Name the church please.</p> <p>HD: State Street Methodist Church. And we are still members there. I had worked there as a student worker when I was at Western for \$10.00 a month. And we made contact between the church and schools on the hill. When Dero joined that church when we came back to Bowling Green, and we became very active members. Our children went to College High. So we had a PTA then which all parents participated in. You then became a member of faculty wives even though you were at the high school. I was amazed when Mrs. Cherry (?) sent me a letter saying that I was invited to the Faculty Wives Club. And I thought, oh, you mean, I get to be a member too? Because College High Training School was a department within Western. And Mrs. [Roberta] Jagggers was the wife of the director of the Training School and she was my mentor. She would come and get me and take me to the meetings. It was probably the best social event that I ever attended. Because we had programs that were educational. We had very intelligent wives. Mrs. [Virginia] Garrett always had it in her home, in the President's Home. And we always had refreshments. And it was something that you looked forward to from one month to the next. But it was not just a social organization. It was, you had duties to do with students. You took care of the sick within the faculty. You had a student wives group which mainly was veteran's wives. There was a babysitting group that would go and take care of children in the nursery down in the [veteran's] village so the wives could get out once and a while. And all these things. Faculty wives was a service organization for Western. It's no longer here.</p>
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Tape 1	1	00:39:43	<p>SM: At that time, the majority of the faculty member's wives did not work outside the home. Is that correct?</p>
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			<p>HD: <i>That's true. That's true.</i></p> <p>SM: <i>I'm always very careful not to say they did not work because I always recognize the amount of work that goes on to rear children and care for a home. But they were normally not employed outside the home.</i></p> <p>HD: <i>Most of them were homemakers. We dressed in our hats and our gloves to go to faculty wives group.</i></p>
Tape 1	1	00:40:11	<p>SM: <i>I'm glad you mentioned gloves. Do you remember when gloves quit being the thing to do for receptions and parties on campus?</i></p> <p>HD: <i>No. I really don't but I know that they were, you know there were formal occasions. There were formal dances and receptions where ladies did dress and dressed in formals. Men dressed in tux and then that went out for a long, long time. It's come back to some extent. But it's not [unintelligible]. But I don't remember when we stopped wearing gloves. Because I remember that my brother-in-law went to Rome and he brought me back several pairs of gloves in all lengths and all colors because we were still wearing them. So I would say that would have been late '50's, maybe. We were still wearing them then.</i></p>
Tape 1	1	00:41:14	<p>SM: <i>What about the wearing of slacks or pants for ladies?</i></p> <p>HD: <i>Oh. I still find that difficult to get into. You know? I do remember though that our youngest son was not very happy with me. This is after Dero had stepped down as President. And one night it was very cold and we went to basketball game. And I had some little slacks and I put them on. And Dero put on a long sleeved wool sport shirt. And our son said, "You all have just ruined your image."</i></p>
Tape 1	1	00:41:56	<p>SM: <i>Oh my. As First Lady at Western, were you very conscious of the fact that you were known anywhere that you were in Bowling Green and really throughout the state?</i></p> <p>HD: <i>You know I hope, in most ways, that I was the same then as I had been. Because we had been through so many positions at Western, and had been in Bowling Green for so long, we already had our contacts made in the community. So it was different for us than it had been for anyone since then. And I have always felt sorry for these other people because I could concentrate on Western more than the community. And we always enjoyed having people come to our home regardless of whether it was a two bedroom home or our first apartment or whether it was the President's Home. Because you make it formal enough that people would know that you realized it was the home of the President of the University, but still kept it as friendly. A place where we hoped they would come back again.</i></p>
Tape 1	1	00:43:29	<p>SM: <i>And you want it to be a special event. Something people would look forward to.</i></p> <p>HD: <i>And we tried to have, we did have, open house every spring. And sometimes we would spread it out over four or five Sunday afternoons where we would invite all faculty, all staff. And we would start about 1:00 or 1:30 and go through until about 5:00 in 45-minute periods. It was just, it was a wonderful experience. I won't say there weren't some bad times. I didn't like anyone to criticize Dero.</i></p>
Tape 1	1	00:44:07	<p>SM: <i>And that's part of being a team player I would say. Tell us where your home was when President Downing was our president. Because for our student's now, the president's home is on Chestnut Street. Were you all in that home?</i></p> <p>HD: <i>No. We were at 1536 State Street. Which had been where the Thompsons had lived for the last three or four years that Dr. [Kelly] Thompson was president. They moved into that home, thinking that they were going to build a new president's home. When the bids came in, it was so far over budget that the Thompsons decided that they would not, they would just live in this home. Which had originally been built by Dr. [Merrill] Schell who was in the Mathematics department where he and his family lived. The Thompsons did some renovation to it, or Western did for them. That is where we lived. And it was a wonderful home for our family because we still had, we had a four-year-old when we moved there. And there was a basement area which came in off of the carport where the little children could play and we could shut off the rest of the house. So all their toys could stay out and so forth and we didn't have to worry about that. The home was large enough that we could have dinners and we could have open house. And then we did very large dinners a lot of times on campus. Dero always liked for me to be part of the deserts. Part of the special things that he liked, the dishes, which I would take to the cafeteria.</i></p>
Tape 1	1	00:45:58	<p>SM: <i>Tell us a bit more about that. When you were the hostess for an event, you were still in a sense assisting in part of the food preparation?</i></p> <p>HD: <i>Oh, that was the only thing I knew I could do. Yes. I did most of the preparation. Now, I had a friend Dr. [unintelligible], faculty members. We had always worked together on things. But she was a home science major. And so she would help me do certain things for when we would have an open house or dinner. She would do them at her home. She would do the things she liked to do and I would do the things I liked to do. And we would work several</i></p>

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			<p>weeks to get it ready, get it in the freezer for the things that could be frozen. Then I had a college-age daughter. She would bring her friends sometimes and they would help us. They always helped us serve in the days that we had dinner parties. But I did like to cook.</p> <p>SM: You sound like a very busy lady.</p> <p>HD: Well, you go with the flow, Sue Lynn.</p>
Tape 1	1	00:47:16	<p>SM: You're rearing your children though during this period of time.</p> <p>HD: Right. We had three children. Well, Ann was in college.</p> <p>SM: Tell me about your children.</p> <p>HD: I'd hate to listen to this tape, that's for sure. We had five children. Kathryn will be 56 in October. Our youngest, Alex, was 34 in January. Dee is 53. Ann is 49. Elizabeth is, will be 42 in November. And then Alex. I lost my brain for a minute. Elizabeth and Alex were still at home. Ann was in college but she moved home after the first semester because she was coming by and eating lunch everyday anyway and she that house was closer to her classes than McCormack Hall was so she just moved home. We did not have help but two days a week when we first went into the President's Home. And then after about four years, we did have help five days a week. (?) I have to give credit to Clara Ragland. She was an employee at Western for 20 years. She was the wonderful help and most wonderful friend that we could ask for. She deserves a place in history at Western.</p>
Tape 1	1	00:48:56	<p>SM: Marvelous. I'm glad that you mentioned her. When Dr. Downing had speaking engagements, was the expectation that you would attend as well?</p> <p>HD: Sometimes. There were times when he would appear on another college campus when I would always try to go with him. Then sometimes at high schools depending on whether he had to go by himself, how well I knew the people that were involved. I went with him when I could. And fortunately having a college-age daughter, she could help out with babysitting. And then, Dero's mother and my mother were both widows. Dero's mother was not well. And later on my mother wasn't either. But at that time, my mother spent the winters with us. So she was there sometimes when we were going to be out late and Ann couldn't be there. So there was a lot of help. Dero's mother was with us a lot of times too. But I didn't count on her for babysitting at that stage of her life.</p>
Tape 1	1	00:50:13	<p>SM: You have always been to me the epitome of a gracious first lady. Let me say that. Now, is there a first lady school that one attends in order to know what the expectation is? Did you look at other first ladies and see what was done and what wasn't done?</p> <p>HD: I always thought I would just do the best I can. Of course, I had done some things with Mrs. [Sarah] Thompson which I'm certain helped me. Because I was chairman, and at that time we didn't say chairperson, of the courtesy committee for faculty wives. So there were occasions when there would be people on campus where Mrs. Thompson would ask a certain lady to be a host to a certain couple. So often times, I was one of the designated keeper to take over a person. If it was going to be a program, there would be a dinner beforehand, then you would sort of make sure that the wife of the speaker or the platform guest would be taken care of during the time and would be where she was supposed to be. And I'm certain along that line, I did get a lot of information that would be helpful later on. And then we had the presidents of the other state colleges, or state universities, Morehead, Eastern, Murray. Those wives and husbands were so supportive of Dero and of me. And they were so helpful. They were, Dero was the new kid on the block. But they never failed to give him respect. And the wives were the same way with me. I am certain that I picked up some pointers from them that helped me along the way. But, I decided very early that if this was what we were going to do, they'd just have to take me as I was. And I did the best I could.</p> <p>SM: You mentioned earlier that the one thing you would say was you don't like criticism of Dero.</p> <p>HD: I don't mind if they criticize me. But I don't want them to criticize him.</p>
Tape 1	1	00:52:47	<p>SM: There were some tense times during President Downing's administration. Now I'm a bit young to remember student unrest as it is frequently referred to but I know there are newspaper clippings about things that were going on elsewhere. There is, we have a photograph of when Dr. Downing had to speak to students who were sitting in. Can you describe that period of time? What it was like? And what it was like to be at home knowing that he was dealing with those things.</p> <p>HD: That wasn't a good time. You can look back at them now perhaps and laugh about some things. There were some times of unrest. And we were very fortunate that it never reached the state here that it did in some of the coastal areas. There was one particular time when he and a group of men, he never worked alone, there were a group of probably 20 men that worked together. Some people referred to them as the goon squad. They were people that were immediately on call if there was trouble and they came. And if you saw any of those faces, then you felt like things were under control. This particular time, they were burning a lot</p>

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of midnight oil. And a young man, and I won't call him by name, who was student government president was an idealist. And he thought he was doing the right thing but he really was under the wrong perception. But he came over, they called me and told me he was coming over to the house to pick up a particular paper to take back to Dero. So when he came after it, I told him, I said I did not let the children go on campus. And he got to the gate which was in front of the home and he turned around and he came back and he said, "Oh Mrs. Downing, there's no danger. No one would hurt your children." And I said, "But [unintelligible]." And he turned and walked away without saying anything. But I wondered what went through his mind as he went back. He had not thought about that part of it. And he really thought "We're doing something good." And I don't think he realized the dangers of what can happen when even a small crowd if there are one or two that really want to cause trouble.

Tape 1	1	00:55:22	<p>SM: And situations escalate.</p> <p>HD: Right.</p> <p>SM: And that whole mob concept of emotions building can cause people to do things they would not do in normal circumstances.</p> <p>HD: That's right. And I don't think he realized that. Then we went through the streaking period. I know particularly now people go around with not too much on anyway. But it was a serious thing. And they had set a rule that if someone was caught, then they would be prosecuted. So that particular night, someone was caught and all of a sudden, about two o'clock in the morning, all of a sudden Dero said, "Now Harriet, don't move, but I'm going down to the door. You stay right here." All these lights were flashing. And they had thrown flares into the trees in the yard of the President's Home. And there were about 300 students there. And I look out the window and I see Paul Cook and [unintelligible] and Charlie Keown and [unintelligible] and they're here on top of it. And I couldn't stay upstairs in the bedroom. Dero very calmly put a robe on and went out on the front porch. And some of them started, they wanted him to go down and get the streaker out of jail. He said, "I refuse to talk with you tonight. If you want to come to my office in the morning, then I will talk with you one on one. But I will not talk with you like this tonight." And he turned around and came back in the house. [Unintelligible] He didn't go and get the boy out of jail but I don't know exactly what happened to him. But those kinds of things, and we did have a telephone line put into the house that went directly to the security office. Or that we could call the security office and alert them that we had turned our normal telephone line off and that this one was an unlisted number. So there were times when the phone would ring all night you know. And sometimes during snow, you know. Somebody wanting to call, "You going to have class in the morning?" Because they wanted to stay out all night if there was no class. And where we had turned that phone off and then alert the security office that the other one would be used during the night. And we would get a call occasionally. Somebody was upset over something. I always referred them to somebody else on campus. "This is not my prerogative to make decisions about this. You'll have to talk to someone else." But even with those times, and you know someone told me, and I've thought about this a lot of times, if you don't ever get criticism, it means you're not doing anything. And I think that's probably true. Dero has always been the kind of person to make a decision, and even if you make a wrong one sometimes, you still make one. And then you try to live with it the best he could. [Unintelligible]</p>
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Tape 1	1	00:59:05	<p>SM: That's just marvelous. In your years while he has been with the College Heights Foundation, you've continued to be very visible on campus, to attend many of the events. As university archivist, I'm always pleased when I see you at Golden Anniversary event night because I know there are so many that want to see you. And I know that there is a tremendous responsibility there. I was reading one account of the President going back to work too soon after having had a leg stripped of varicose veins and that causing further complications and problems. Were there times that as a wife you were very concerned for his health because he was so involved at Western, that he was probably trying to perform about what his body was capable of doing at that particular time?</p> <p>HD: Oh, there's no question in my mind that had he continued in the office of the president that he would not be here. Because the last two years that he was there, because of stress and then perhaps because he didn't take care of himself as well as he should have, his health declined. [Unintelligible] And I don't think there is a question that he would not be here [unintelligible].</p>
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Tape 1	1	01:00:27	<p>SM: What was the thing you liked least about being First Lady at Western?</p> <p>HD: Probably people would say things about him I didn't like.</p> <p>SM: Okay.</p> <p>HD: It's true.</p> <p>SM: What was the thing you liked best?</p> <p>HD: Oh, that's hard to answer. Because I liked everything that we've ever done. And I think it's the association with people and the friendships. You know the College High groups are having the 30, 40, 50 year reunions. And to go back to some of those and get a big hug from one of those children, and I still classify them as children even though Dero tells me</p>
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			<i>they're all drawing social security now. That was a wonderful time. And every position that he has been in, as now with College High Foundation, because there are friendships that we have had for years and years and years, of people who contribute to the College Heights Foundation. Who have stayed in our home and have continued to come back to Western to support Western. So I don't know. The tradition of the wife of the President was just another good experience.</i>
Tape 1	1	01:01:50	<p><i>SM: Marvelous. Is there anything I have failed to ask you that you'd like to mention?</i></p> <p><i>HD: I think that I've told you more than you wanted to know probably.</i></p>
Tape 1	1	01:01:58	<p><i>SM: Not at all. I thank you so much for the time that you've given us this morning. For allowing us to put this tape in the university archives as a part of the university's history. I consider first lady to be a very important part and one that we haven't documented as well and I appreciate you giving your time this morning.</i></p> <p><i>HD: Thank you.</i></p>