

**Rudolph G. Wilson, Assistant Provost and Vice-Chancellor of SIUE**  
**Transcript of Interview for the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of SIUE Oral History Project**  
**Interviewed by Ellen Nore**  
**March 7, 2006**

Ellen Nore [EN]: You wrote, you wrote me something about how you happened to come to SIUE in 1970. I just wanted to ask...

Rudolph Wilson [RW]: '69.

EN: '69... um.

RW: I was interviewed in 1968.

EN: Yes, I'll put that, this will be on the, when I transcribe it, this exact conversation will [RW coughs] be on there.

RW: Okay.

EN: Then I wondered if you remember how you felt during those years as a young academic, and a teacher and a citizen, during those, just, times of tremendous change and coming from California, which I always...?

RW: Right, What I, in my letter to you, I discuss what happened to me in California because it's very important in terms of what happened to me in California, in terms of why I'm here today. One is because of W. Dean Wiley, who is now, who was my first Principal in Claremont, California.

EN: Okay.

RW: And he left after two years and went on to NYU [New York University] and then came here as the first Dean of Education. Now that's very important to know, uh. Because he took a risk on me, and I'll tell you the risk is very important because I was the first person of color ever hired for this school district. And it was right in 1964-65. And you know what the racial sentiments were.

EN: Yes.

RW: There were proactive people for Civil Rights, and there there were a lot of people who were against it. I describe that incident to you in the paper to you.

EN: Okay, good.

RW: I describe what happened to me. What parents carried picket signs and things like that.

EN: Good grief.

RW: And some teachers, did some very nasty things, but, you know, I prevailed. One, the reason I prevailed is the why I'm still here today. Because I felt that whatever, whatever, this job that I received, I could, I could have taught at Beverly Hills, California because I was hired. I was offered a job there, and I could have been taught at some of the the most prestigious school districts in California because of my record. But, there was something about Claremont that got me there. Because they were the first, it was one of the first uh, flexible-scheduling schools in the United States. It was taking, taking high school students, and treating them like they were a college students, Monday, Wednesday, Friday, Tuesday class, Wednesday. Tuesday, Thursday

classes, lecture classes, etc. So, it was pretty interesting to go there. But also, because Medgar Evers had been assassinated.

EN: Yes.

RW: And they were bringing his children to Claremont, which is one of the the things they did do. They helped them settle in Claremont.

EN: I didn't know that.

RW: Uh-huh. And so, uh, by their coming, it was interesting, when I met Mrs. Evers, then, the widow, the kids thought ah, they had hired me just for them. Which was very interesting for them, coming from Mississippi, that they had a black teacher. So and they were younger. I was teaching high school, and they were elementary kids, you know. But I did some things with them. Anyway.

But ah, just to make that understand that, that was a terrible time for me, in terms of my own life. Claremont. As it, and it parallels what happened to me five years later here in Edwardsville. I couldn't find a place to live.

EN: That's what I was going to ask you about.

RW: Now, I couldn't, I could buy a house, but how many people graduating from college [sound of banging for emphasis]...I could not buy a house. I went to 120 apartments in Clare, In Claremont. I wrote this down in the letter.

EN: Okay.

RW: Where people turned me down, hide behind curtains, and you know, and I finally ended up going to Pomona. I had a car, a truck. You know, I had been teaching in Japan!

EN: Yes.

RW: I mean, I've taught in Guatemala, I taught in Japan. You know, even, you know, so, I wrote this down in that thing...

EN: Yeah, good.

RW: ...so you can look at that. So anyway, uh, I found a place. I went over to Pomona, California, which I had never heard of before. And I saw this uh [Phone ringing in background], African American male, uh-uh sweeping or something. I said, "I need a place to live, but I don't want to live where there's corruption and things like that." Well, he said, "You're going to live in with those dykes." I said, "What dykes?" He said, "There's a dyke apartment building that has openings." Talking about gay women.

EN: [EN Laughs] I know!

RW: So, I went over there, and I loved it!

EN: Sure, nice neighbors.

RW: There was a swimming pool that was clean.

EN: Sure. Sure.

RW: They were really great neighbors, you know!

EN: Right.

RW: Private! And I, I stayed in Pomona until I was able to rent a house in Claremont. After they knew that I was a good teacher, all of a sudden, the community changed. Because kids, kids knew that I was named the Great Teacher of...

EN: That's right.

RW: Of, of, of uh California, and I was hiring people. And some of those teachers who walked out on me, or said they didn't want to work with me, became my, I became their boss in two years [EN Laughs]. So, anyway, I left there in 19...

EN: '64.

RW: So, All of a sudden, Wiley, came here to SIUE. Wiley and Rendleman were very good friends. And where, Wiley was very much concerned of the quality of teaching methodology, especially teaching English, of the Professors in the School of Education. They were all retired Superintendents. Because, that's where this first got started. They kinda set the tone for us. They were, you know, they came from Superintendancies and um, and, and they hired, they not really specialists in anything, but they were journalists. You know what I mean?

EN: Yes.

RW: And that's okay. They got us started.

EN: Yes.

RW: And Wiley said that we needed some quality educators here, who could teach these kids and model for them. Rendleman came to California to visit me.

EN: Oh, that's great.

RW: Isn't that something?

EN: Yes, it is.

RW: And he watched *me* teach.

EN: Oh.

RW: I have to tell you. He said, "God damn it! You are good!" I don't think that's what he said, but that was wonderful. So, they, they put a team of people in there to look at me, and so Rendleman told me, "You're going to sign this contract. We, we, You've gotta - to come here." Well, in that time period, it's in there, I was the Department Chairman of English. I had the largest Department of English, you know. And right in the middle of all of this, in ah 19...

EN: '67?

RW: '68...'66...'68 - uh, 1968, the Vietnam War was still going. And I was, I was told by the Board of Education that ah, I had to fire these teachers who were proselytizing in the classroom ah, because they were not giving an equal, a "balanced." And these were some of my friends that I grew up, I mean I grew up teaching with. And it really hurt me to tell them that, I have to, you know. And I felt that I couldn't do that. I just felt that it was not right for me to to tell them. I told them, "You have to do what you have to do. But, if you believe what you believe, then you need to understand that the School Board is saying, 'No.' You can talk outside the classroom, but you cannot use that classroom to talk about the Vietnam War." Which, I agree. You know. Because we did it here too. And so, uh, I lost some friends. And I felt really...I mean, I was still Department Chairman, but I was so glad that, that Rendleman at that time said, "I wanna, I want

to look at you." And so they did. So, I came here on June 17, 1935 [1968]. I could not find a place to live. Uh, there were, I have this in this article. The welcome wagon lady told me, you can't have uh, she came to my... I finally found a place at the Huntleigh Apartments. First, I went to Black Jack. You remember Black Jack?

EN: Yes.

RW: I had to file a discrimination suit against them. Nothing happened out of it, but they would not find, well they, they told me there were no places for me to live in Black Jack. And then, I went to the Ma...what is it the Mansion House?

EN: Yes, downtown.

RW: You know, now that was okay. Huh?

EN: The Mansion House downtown.

RW: Right, I cant. I had never driven in the snow, and uh, I was afraid to come across that bridge. This is really silly. So, I said, "I'm going to find me someplace here." So I lived in the Huntleigh Apartments, you know, right there at the uh...matter of fact...

EN: Yes.

RW: Now, you have to understand. That when I came here [RW Sniffs], ah Winston Brown was, was President of the NAACP. Emil Jason was a recruiter, for, he was Associate Provost here at the university, so I got to meet them. And when I came here, this town was in turmoil. [Bob] Engbretson, I don't know if you remember Bob Engbretson?

EN: No.

RW: Huh, he was in Psychology. His son, white, had taken a black girl to the prom.

EN: Huh.

RW: And there was racial division. And there was all kinds of stuff going on. So, they asked me, Emil Jason, and, and, and um, Winston, to kinda meet with parents and talk about this.

EN: Yes.

RW: You know, so that's in the letter, that's in the thing I sent you. So, my windows got broken in my place.

EN: They did!

RW: Yes, oh, oh yeah. It was really bad. And then, and then the, they had this woman tell me there were no black barbers in town and, if I had children, no one could babysit my children. And know, I'm listening to all of this, and I'm thinking, "This is deja vu." I put that in there too. This is like...What, I I don't know. This place. My girlfriend, whom I was engaged to, not Laverne [EN Laughs], ah, was in California, and she said, "Why are you coming to this segregationist city?"

EN: Yeah.

RW: And I found out that Southern Illinois area, including Missouri, was, is a very segregated place.

EN: Very, yeah.

RW: [Repeated banging noise] The blacks live on one side of the street, and the whites live on the other. I, I have never lived like that in my entire life. So, I came here thinking, "God! This is the North, but it's not the North. It has very Southern principles." And so, I became very active in the community while I was teaching here. Ah, There was a group out of ah, I wrote that. There was a group out of ah Alton who were concerned about Sears Roebuck, which was in Alton at that time. They were, they were fighting to hire black people in leadership positions in the Sears Roebuck, like being a salesperson instead of being custodians and other things. Well, I participated in an investigation because of that group out of Alton. In fact, ah, some of those people are still around - the guy that runs ah... he's still around, you need to talk to him, too.

EN: Yeah, I would like to have...

RW: Ah, his wife, his ex-wife works up here in, in ah, in HR [Human Resources], I'll get that name for you.

EN: Okay, yeah.

RW: You need to interview him because he knows the climate, he grew up in this community.

EN: Yes, I would, that's what I'm looking for.

RW: Yeah, he grew up in...I'll give you his name in a minute.

EN: I have a wonderful letter from ah, from the early days of the university, one I found in the archives, from a black woman who lived on Salu Street in Alton - which is up in the Historic Black District.

RW: What was her name?

EN: Oh. I can't, I haven't looked at it for several months...um, I don't...

RW: They were very upset about SIU being here, because, they thought..[RW Coughing]

EN: Well, she wanted to be...this was very early, she wanted to be on the committee, and they kept not sending her the mailings. And, and, and, so, she wrote to the, she had written to oh, the President, I guess it was Stevens then, er, or someone, to the President's office about it. And, and she, and she had just a very eloquent letter, you know, just explaining why, why she, *she* is interested in the university, and she should be on this committee. And that, that her address was not lost, you know.

RW: I bet I know who you're talking about, if you can think of her name.

EN: Yeah, oh no, I'll get her name, I can just look at it. I just, I have, I took all my notes by hand.

RW: This is the woman from Alton who [unintelligible] to be here too. And she was very active [RW Coughs] I'm gonna get her name for you in a minute.

EN: Yes, she was very active.

RW: But uh anyway, she also...So, anyway, I came here, and she told Rendleman that we need to have some black faculty. And Rendleman responded to her! You know, because she loved him, in fact, she got a job here working in the Student Affairs for a while. So anyway, ah, so finally I went to, to Alton to work with this group. And the manager, the President of that company, or the Chief Executive Officer said to me, "Well, you know if the person applying for that job had your complexion, we would hire them. But, if they were darker than you, they would scare our

customers away." I put that in a quote for you. He told me that. I said, "Really? So, a dark-skinned person is scary?" You know, he said, you would have-ta... You know how they talked in those days. They still talk about the light color.

EN: Right.

RW: It's color-struck, you know. So, anyway, I got, I worked with that. People began knowing that I would go out and be...

EN: On the line.

RW: I will, I would be on the line. I did. I got so I brought all that stuff back to campus, and you know, so I took all my students, for the most part, I had never... I can count on my fingertips how many SIU students that I have taught who were not...black...who were black. I didn't have that many because not many of them go into Secondary Education. Most of the Education people, most of the black educators went into Elementary or Special Education. Because they had to have a degree in History or degree in English to be in Secondary Education. So that, you know, but I do know em' all. But I know all my students. I mean I know all, I can tell you their names just like that, it's something. I'll have to hold onto that. Ah, but anyway.

EN: Who are they? And I might like to interview them. Did you write, did you write their names down?

RW: Oh, I have some I can write down. There's one that's on the board...

EN: Some, the guy that's on the board right now?

RW: There's a woman on the board right now that's from East St. Louis; she has a loud lisp. She's very good. You need to call her.

EN: Yeah. I should. I will. She's on the Board of Trustees?

RW: No. She's on the the Alumni Board.

EN: Oh, the Alumni Board, okay.

RW: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

EN: Okay, I can find out.

RW: Yeah. So, anyway, I began teaching here. Well, I just couldn't take all this prejudice. I just didn't think...this was not right. I mean the statements and things, stuff like that. And I was ready to leave after the summer. I taught the summer classes very successful [RW Coughs], and Wiley was trying to keep me here. So he said, "I'm gonna have to..." My feet were breaking out! I could not understand some of these statements people were saying, you know, about Black people. They were stereotyping people! Anyway, he said I didn't have a friend. So he taught, he taught my friend. Do you remember Don Keefe?

EN: Yes.

RW: Okay. That's my best friend. We taught together. He brought him in. He said, you know, in order for some of our people...he gotta...said, whose your friend. I wasn't married then, see. So he brought Don Keefe in that Fall. You know, that was my best friend, he knew that Don would keep me here. So Don was coming, you know!

EN: Yes.

RW: This is interesting. So, we started teaching. I mean I started teaching the Methods of Teaching classes, and the Urban Education classes. Then, I won't say the name of the school district, because that's not important. But, I was told that I could not come into that school district, because of the color of my skin, to supervise student teachers.

EN: Is that in District 7?

RW: No, I won't. I won't tell you.

EN: Oh. Okay.

RW: I think it's Wood River or Granite City. Both those okay, [RW Sniffs] both of those places.

EN: Yes, I have a student whose father worked in the steel mill in Granite City, and he, they lived in East St. Louis, but they had to be careful when they went there to get his paycheck.

RW: That's right. That's right. And so I used to go to Granite City. I was, one of the people, that one of my people, that one of my first teachers is a professor here now, Gloria, you should talk to her, Gloria Skubish. Her name, I mean, She's Skubish, but she has a new name now. You need to call...She was one of my first students I ever had here.

EN: Uh-huh. Good.

RW: She loved me!

EN: Yeah.

RW: That was my friend. She's in education.

EN: Oh, yes, I need to talk to more people in education. That's why I'm glad about this.

RW: Yeah, yeah, I'm gonna give you her name. I can give you some names.

EN: Yeah.

RW: Okay, and so, anyway, ah, anyway, these people told me I couldn't come, and one of my student teachers in Dupo, now I'm telling you all this, but don't use their names, because that's not important.

EN: No!

RW: They told him, "When the [n-word] comes, let us know!" Can you believe they told my student teacher that? And they told my student teacher, "We are, we are, now we going to kick you out of here!" These are all white student teachers because I didn't have any Black student teachers hardly at all, that, that uh, "You need to go back there and be with those [n-words] then, if you are going to have a [n-word] supervisor." He told me this. He still is a teacher in East St. Louis. He's retired now, I think. But ah, that was Dupo and Granite City.

Rendleman wrote a letter to the School Board of one of those districts that said, "If you cannot take... one of the, I saw the letter...one of the finest teachers we have here, we will never send a student to your school for student teaching ever again." Can you believe that? I mean, I was so. I mean, to me, that says something about the commitment he had, you know.

EN: Yes, it does.

RW: And he was a wonderful person that way. He wrote that letter, and you know, to this day...you know, it took 20 years before we'd started another contract with that school district.

But, during that whole time, I'm going to Granite City with Gloria, because Gloria's one of my students, who I, and she invites me to come to these seminars in her church to talk about black-white relations, you know. So, I'm in, I'm in Granite City, but I cannot... I mean, I even went there to supervise student teachers, and nothing happens to me.

EN: Nothing happens to you, well, that's....?

RW: To me! Because everyone, they know me.

EN: Oh, okay.

RW: See, I made sure I knew the community before they, they knew me in the schools. So I knew Gloria and her husband at that time were very active politicians. It's like what I did on my sabbatical on the Reservation. Only one, I did not go into the school Reservation at first. I talked to some people who knew me, and then they sent my name up. So, I had a kind of safe banner. And so, that's what happens when I go places. I, people know *of me* before they know me as a teacher. Which is nice.

EN: Yes.

RW: And that's my credibility in terms of I treat everyone the same way. So, anyway, I, I took my students to Jessie's Cafe, and Jessie cooked Soul Food for them.

EN: Yes, I interviewed her. For that other book.

RW: Um-hmn, yeah, Soul Food for them, which was wonderful. They still remember that. What I did for them, the white students, you know that had been here. Every every student in my classes have, when I taught Methods, would come to my house for breakfast. They'd come to cook breakfast, and we'd just sit around and talk. I think that's very important that these students need to see how Black people live, but at the same time, they need to understand that they're, my house is not off off-limits to them, so neither should their house be off-limits to me. You know.

EN: Yes.

RW: And so, that began my, my career. And so, all of a sudden, um me and I uh [banging sound]...Oh, her husband taught the Suzuki [phonetic] program here, he's dead now...Ah, they live over there in the...ah, what's her name? We lived in these uh...

EN: Kendall?

RW: Kendall! Kay Kendall and I.

EN: Kay Kendall is dead, but John is still around.

RW: She's dead. Right. Kay Kendall and I ah, got together and decided to build the Senior Citizens Center here in Edwardsville.

EN: Oh, right.

RW: So we negotiated that center. Huh? Kay Kendall and I and a committee, we did that! We got the money from, they gave it to us for a dollar a year from that church, you know...

EN: Yes.

RW: ...and we began. You see, that facility now is one of the nicest facilities here.

EN: Yes, it is.



RW: And I was on the Board. I was on that board, okay? I was on that board, and I, Kay and I, and the other people really worked hard for the Senior Citizens, which, by the way, were all white. Right?

EN: Yeah [EN laughs].

RW: So, people kept telling me, "You sure, you're such a nice person." Because I would go there on Sunday and play bridge, play cards ah with the ladies, you know. [EN laughs] You know, I used to go by there and have soup with them. But, they all knew me, and so they said, I said, "I'm running for School Board, and I need to get some votes." Because the Black Community did not accept me as much because I'm not from this community. Not that...They have their own ethnic groups too. Also, my wife and I do not go to bars. I mean, I would go and play cards, but my wife would never go into a bar, you know as a woman, you know, she goes with her husband. And, they had all this stuff going about, you know. And we lived, we moved to the white side of town. You know that was... they didn't like that.

That we moved to ah, past Leclair, you know to Gerber Subdivision. No whites, no Blacks had ever been there before, and some of the Blacks were afraid to even cross ah, Montclair to get to that other side of town. You know, the Blacks lived on this side. Well, I didn't think about any of that because ah, ah, one of the real estate people was a professor here, and he, he, he ah, owned homes. He was a real estate person, too. He's now deceased. So, I bought this house from Kenneth Cleat [?], who was a, uh teacher at the high school, who bought this house, and uh. Paul Gaston has a way of describing. He said I was one of the first professors that had a house of 3,000 square feet. You know, people didn't have houses.

EN: No.

RW: Shaw had not stopped building houses then, remember?

EN: Yeah.

RW: So, our house. You know, you've seen my house! He used to say, "God, you got..." We didn't pay a lot of money for it 'cause it was a lot of work. But it was the impact of us living in a house with four bedrooms, a dining room, and a study, and all that stuff. Paul was so wonderful. Because Paul was my friend before I met Laverne. Paul Gaston. And so, anyway, what happened out of that is that they told us that the Ku Klux Klan was going get us. When we moved out there, one of the neighbors came over and said, "We just heard that the Ku Klux Klan was going to burn a cross on your lawn." I said, "No, they're not." He said, "Yes, they are." My next-door neighbor had told them, uh, had told the neighbors, he'll, "[I'll] never talk to him." "I don't want his kids to talk to us." "I don't want any of us to talk to us." Now, this is Edwardsville! He's a Catholic, and I would buy tickets from his children to go to that dinner, you know those dinners at St. Boniface Church, and they'd have to serve me, which I thought was really funny! [RW and EN laugh].

The other thing was, I'd joined St. Andrews Episcopal Church, you know. And uh, some of the old-timers in this community, Mudge and all those people, you know, I would take communion, and some of them, if I would take the communion cup before they did, they would go up, they would not take communion [EN Laughs]. So, I always made sure I'll be the first one in line to take communion.

EN: Uh-huh.

RW: I looked at them and said, "If you don't want to drink after me, then I'm sorry because we're all sharing this cup together, right?" But, one of the best people to help me was a librarian here, ah, Abbott. Abbott was my advocate. You know Mr. Abbott?

EN: Yes.

RW: Abbott was, was wonderful to me. Abbott belonged to St. Andrews, and he was always a Civil Rights person, and he he was my supporter throughout this. Well, it changed, you know. People get tired of seeing this, you know.

And uh, then so, I went to these women in the Senior Citizens Club, and I said, "Now, I know I don't know that many people. You know, I'm not here for a Black vote. I'm here for a vote because I think I can do something. And uh, I've been asked to run for School Board. Would you tell your children to vote for me?" I lost the first election by 19 votes, a newcomer to this community, by 19 votes.

EN: That's pretty good.

RW: That's pretty good, wasn't it?

EN: Yes, that's very good.

RW: And all these people and everyone said, "You'll never get elected here." You know, because I was the, you know. The second year, the next year I ran again, and I won! And the headlines in the paper said, "First Negro..." I have the headlines at home, "First Negro Elected to A Political Position in Madison County." Did you know that? I have the headlines from *The Intelligencer*. "The First Negro!" That's what it said! Ain't that something? Well, that was a start. I stayed on that School Board for 18 years, you know that.

EN: Yes.

RW: Eighteen years. And uh, I had the longest tenure. They had some of these top people trying to run against me, some of these lawyers in town, running against me. They never could beat me! [EN Laughs] You know, cause I was a fair, I, I did a, I think I did...The only reason I left is that my kids finally got old enough to, to graduate from high school and move someplace else. I thought people with kids should do that.

And so, I felt that this community embraced me in many ways because I was always a kind person. And I didn't go around using any kind of negative words about anybody, any group. If you don't want me to be there, I can walk away. I put a, I put a thing in for you to look at about when they invited me to a party, an all-white party and I was the only black, and they said, "Everyone bring a picture...of yourself as a baby." And so I'm thinking..."It'll be fun, right?" I'm thinking, "As soon as I go there with a picture of myself as a baby, everyone will say, 'There's Rudy!'" So, I borrowed my friend's picture, a white friend's picture, and put it on the wall. They said, "Where are you Rudy?" I said, "I'm up there." But I wanted them to see that they were gonna have a good time identifying themselves, but everyone could identify me. I said, "That was very, you know, do you understand what you've done to me in terms of how I feel?" That's why I did it that way.

EN: Uh-huh.

RW: And so I put that in notes to you, that was the thing in the book about how I dealt with Justice issues.

EN: Yes.

RW: When [RW coughs] I began to get involved. I was on the Piasa Healthcare Board, that's the Board for drug and, drug and alcohol prevention. I was the President of that Board. I have, I did a lot of work with, called Operation Snowball and Snowflake, teenage prevention for alcohol and drugs, and I became one of the key people to do all the workshops on drug and alcohol abuse on this campus, to the students here and everything. I used to run the program with Connie Rockingham. Every student who got admitted here had to go through my drug and alcohol program, which I think they should be doing again...

EN: Today, yes!

RW:...but they're not doing it that way. It's just different. Even Earl Lazerson participated. I developed a program Earl Lazerson participated in my exercise on dysfunctional families. I think that was wonderful to see him standing on the chair, he thought I was... He loved me! Earl Lazerson. Everyone talks about how bad he was. I never...I loved Earl Lazerson. He was straight; he was from Detroit too. I'm from Detroit.

EN: Yeah, right.

RW: Okay, he went to Cass Tech, I went to Cass Tech [Cass Technical High School based out of Detroit, MI], so I always tease him on that. But, anyway, so my career as a teacher was already in place. I got promoted.

Then I became, then they decided to combine these... they had Elementary Education, Secondary Education, Early Childhood Education, and Reading. And they decided to combine it and get rid of all of those chairpersons and only name one. I was elected the Chairman of that, all of the 41 faculty members. I think I had the largest faculty in the university.

EN: Good grief!

RW: Huh, I also was President of the Faculty Senate, and you were here when I was on Faculty Senate.

EN: Yes.

RW: I also was Chairman of the Welfare Council. You know, and then, I started getting all of these awards. In 1971, the Great Excellence Award, in 1973, the Teaching Excellence Award. I just got one today, from the, look at that one, the guy just sent me from the Probation Department, from the Federal Probation Department sent me that from Dr....you see it. That first one there, it's really neat.

EN: This one here? Oh yeah.

RW: I got the Liberty Bell Award, I got the... what is that club that meets at Rusty's, one of those social clubs? You know, those, those organizations...

EN: I don't even know any that meet at...

RW: I'll put in a, I put in a page for you to see. Wait here, I'm a Paul Harris Fellow from the Rotary.

ENL The Rotary, oh okay!

RW: I got selected a Paul Harris Fellow, you know?

EN: Yes.

RW: You know that.

EN: The Rotary... I think I'd written that down in my notes

RW: Then, on Law Day, the lawyers picked me; this is the one I like the most, the Liberty Bell Award for Law Day, U.S.A. I was the recipient of that [EN Laughs]. Which is kind of nice, you know? And this is, did you ever see this? This is what Dick Norris, he wrote this.

EN: Oh yes, Dick Norris, oh he's dead now. But I loved him a lot.

RW: When I took that position, he wrote that. That's a nice thing from Dick Norris. So anyway, the question you asked me about how I got in, in diversity. I've been doing it all my life. I cannot stop doing it because I gotta make sure people can hear the... and I said that to you in a philosophy statement...

EN: Yes.

RW: I believe that people can interact with me, and we can let some of the skeletons out of our own closet, and we find out that we're all human beings. I just hate... I mean was so glad that Crash won that award last night.

EN: I was too! I was hoping for Crash!

RW: Yeah, I thought that was well done

EN: Yeah, the way it all came together.

RW: Yeah, it was wonderful. But it serves the black and white side in every one of us, the evil and good side in every one of us, which I thought was wonderfully done. But I just keep leaving, and I wrote a statement to you in a paper, in that, in one of those papers. That we've got... I'm from the era, I'm 71.

EN: [whispers] you are?

RW: Yeah.

EN: Okay. [Laughs].

RW: I come from an era, when I saw, when I went to the movies and heard the radio growing up, it was all white people. I didn't hear Black people endorsing a product. I mean, and so, I'm looking at the movies that were made in those days, the blonde woman was always the heroine...

EN: Right.

RW: ...the dark-haired one, you know... I saw a lot of stereotyping in the movies and we still do that today.

EN: Yeah, radio, I remember Amos and Andy, I remember growing up in Nebraska and seeing that.

RW: Yes, Amos, and Andy. I remember all of that. I remember I came home one day and said to my father... My father was a Communist. You knew that, didn't you?

EN: No, I didn't know that, but that's great. That's something to be very proud of.

RW: You know, I wonder if you know Steve Brown?

EN: Yes!

RW: Steve Brown's mother, Norma, she is deceased now. Norma was a wonderful lady. She was one of my students. She was 50 years old in my class. She was getting a teacher certification. You know, so, she and my father hooked up. Did you know she was a Communist too?

EN: No.

RW: I didn't realize that either. But, in those days, they were called Socialists, I guess, right? But, my father was in the Party movement, and my father raised me entirely different. He made us all go to a church. Because that's what, my mother died when I was five. You know, but all of us elected the church of our choice, not a church of his choice, because he did not go to any church. You know [EN laughs]. But, he said, "You've got to have this experience because somebody is going to ask you about your church. So, make sure you've got something you can say about your church. But, you don't have to go if you don't want to go."

EN: That's great.

RW: You know. So, growing up in that kind of environment has given me the ability to say. You know, this world we live in, my father was President of a union. My father ran his own business. My father was an entrepreneur. He was a hustler.

EN: Yes.

RW: My father! He worked with Walter Reuther. He helped organize the unions in Detroit. I can see my father coming out on the job, but I see all these white men, white people, excuse me, I'm about to cough... My father would say...You know, how many times would a black child see a black man telling white people, "You better quit messing with me!" You know. That gave me an incentive to say that, "It's not the color of your skin. It's what you can do with life." You know?

EN: Yes!

RW: It was my Dad, you know, and I loved my Dad for that. I loved him, you know. When I went to Africa, I wish he had been alive because he always wanted to go to Africa. He taught me, all of us, he taught us African traditions. My father was born in 1909. And he taught me about Africa. He had never been there in his life, but he told me that Africa is about brushing teeth, and diet, and religion.

EN: Yeah.

RW: He did all that. So, that helped. I look at all of this and say, coming out of a family, not raised by a woman, cause my mother died when I was 5...

EN: Yes.

RW: It really does make a difference. I mean, just the way I look at life, I'm talking about men who had mothers. You know, and I don't even have a picture of my mother because my brother was so angry. He burned every picture of my mother so we have no, no pictures. But, at the same time, my imagination still was alive, so I could still feel her presence in, in my imagination, you know.

EN: Yes. Someone should write a book on your, you and your father. Someone, that sounds like a book to me.

RW: Let me tell you about my brother and my father. Because he hates him. My brother, he's 80. He, oh, he hates him.

EN: He hates your father?

RW: Mm! Because he thinks my father killed my mother, because she kept having babies.

EN: Oh

RW: And you know. Yeah, he makes me cry, so I don't want to talk about that.

EN: Okay.

RW: That's a little bit about...

EN: Yeah, that's really interesting, though.

RW: I'm trying to find that person for you so you can talk to her, she's wonderful.

EN: Yeah.

RW: Next question!

EN: Oh, okay. [RW laughs]. Well, you've kinda already gone over it...

RW: I've got a whole bunch of...

EN: The Education board...

RW: Yeah, it was wonderful. I also put you a list of all the people that were caliber men. I can tell you where every person is, too, that left here and they didn't leave because they were black. They left here because... Walker was a good example.

EN: Yes.

RW: Dr. Walker. I was just at his funeral last week. You know, he and I were very, very good friends.

EN: Yes. I thought he was a wonderful...

RW: He was a wonderful person.

EN: Whenever he came to speak, I always went to hear him.

RW: Wasn't he wonderful? Oh God!

EN: Yes, when he first... after, after Ted Sanders that awful person.

RW: Oh, he was horrible

EN: ...he came to campus and had all these meetings with people.

RW: Reading. Her name is Gloria Reading. She's an Assistant Professor. Her number is [Phone number] She had me, one of my first students. That'll be good to hear.

EN: Okay, okay. Good.

RW: Gloria Reading. She will give you some other people. I'm trying to think of another person, I don't know what I did with that [paper rustling]

EN: You know, a lot of the people that I've interviewed, I'll ask them, you know, "What do you think is part of the success of SIUE?" and they mention the Diversity programs, did you know that?

RW: Uh-uh...

EN: Yes. People, it's really

RW: They know me? [RW and EN Laughing].

EN: Yes! They remember going to Pathways of Harmony...

RW: Sure!

EN: ...and programs like that. They say, "That's what makes it different here."

RW: That's right.

EN: Because we've addressed the issues. Well, I wondered about John Rendleman. You know I...

RW: He was a roue, too, you know.

EN: He was what?

RW: A roue. He chased women.

EN: Oh yes, oh yes. That's what I had thought of just writing separate article somewhere trying to rescue him from the sleaze [ EN Laughs].

RW: Cause he was a wonderful person.

EN: Yeah, I...

EN: You could see John Rendleman. If he knew, if he looked at your picture, he would come in. He used to come and sit like you're doing now, come and sit in the office. He'd walk around, you know. I loved him!

EN: He sounds like a great guy to me.

RW: I remember...

EN: I've never been bothered by peoples sexual activities. No

RW: He was a great guy. I don't care about that. No. Everybody has something.

EN: Yeah, that's right [EN Laughing]

RW: I remember 19... I put that in there, I was asked... Rendleman was concerned about the grad assistants, and that he thought that they didn't have enough pedagogical skills. And Faculty were using them, so he said, "I want Rudy Wilson to take these - and Shirley Portwood was one of the students, and take them through a summer institute on pedagogy.

EN: Uh-huh.

RW: And these are all the grad assistants that the faculty had hired. It was so successful that some of the Deans got concerned that, that, that I was pushing them to join a, ah grad assistants' union. Because they spoke up. You know, it was kinda neat!

EN: I know Shirley. Shirley always speaks up!

RW: Right. And so [RW coughs] Rendleman could not pay me for doing this. And he wanted...He, he allowed me to go to Jamaica, you know. And uh, he said, "We can't pay you for this, but we could give you a trip. Go down and look at that institution," which I thought was neat. At the same time, I thought it was... everyone, all the people tell me, even today, "You know that program with the grad assistants, we should have, we should have kept it going."

EN: Yeah.

RW: you know, it really was getting these grad assistants to understand the concept of diversity and understand how you present a lecture, you know, not just do the old way, not to copy your faculty. But come up with some skills yourself, you know. Sort of nice. So, that's why I love Rendleman. Rendleman's statement to everyone... And that's why I like Poshard. Poshard is a Rendleman that uh.

EN: Oh yes, that's good to know.

RW: Poshard was one of my students in our program here. Did you know that?

EN: No.

RW: He was in the Next Step program with, remember Merrill Harmon?

EN: Yes!

RW: He was in the Next Step program with Merrill Harmon and all those people. Poshard is one...At the funeral...I've got to share this with you. At the funeral for Walker, he loved Walker. He did a poem written by Paul Laurence Dunbar. He did it dramatic. He did a dramatic reading but he had memorized the whole poem!

EN: Good.

RW: This is Poshard, our President, at this funeral.

EN: That's great.

RW: It was the most beautiful! No one could compete with that, his thing to honor Walker. He was just crying while he was doing it too. He loved Walker. And uh...

EN: Yeah.

RW: And so I just thought, "God, this man!" And he's pushing. He said, you know, he met some Nigerians at the lunch [Martin Luther King lunch]. He said, "We've got to get more."

EN: Yes. Uh-huh.

RW: I think he is committed to diversity. He came from a little, small white town and he says "I understand that." He, you know, he talks about that, you know?

EN: Yeah.

RW: We keep raising the bar so high that we can't get these kids, who are so marginalized, into our university. We're in trouble!

EN: Yeah, that's what I was going to ask you, too, about that.

RW: That bothers me!

EN: Some of the people I've interviewed of, in the community are really worried about that.



RW: They are! And you know what? Those hundred kids they brought here, with 30 ACTs or more... you saw that right?

EN: Yes.

RW: They gave them all a little bit of something, which bothered me.

EN: And special classes.

RW: Cause I have a program too. There were no whites... no Blacks... did you know there were no blacks in that whole pool?

EN: No blacks in the whole group?

RW: There were no Black Americans! But, you know what? [Loud banging] I have 38 Black students, [EN laughs], who are Dean's College Students last semester. I have every one of my 160 students in my scholarship program has a 3.0 or better!

EN: That's great!

RW: Now, you can tell... these are kids. I, they may come here and not get anything the first semester, but I tell them, "Give me a 3.0, and I've got you!"

EN: Yeah [EN Laughs], and they do it!

RW: Yeah. You know I'll get you some...

EN: And they do it?

RW: You know that! I've raised the bar. We started with a 2.5 when we started here. 2.5 was sluggish. You don't have the resiliency or you don't have the persistence. I believe in persistence. Persistence is not how you do on a test score.

EN: No.

RW: Persistence is that you want to be somebody different.

EN: That's right.

RW: And so, I work with persistence, and my persistence rate is very good, very good. They stay here, you know? They stay here, and that's good.

EN: Yes!

RW: And they, I've raised the bar from 2.5 to 3.0, and these kids are not balking. They said, "Okay!" When I kick them out after one semester, I just send them home to their parents. "Your child just screwed up, and there's no money available for you. And then you need to deal with your child." But, I have some great students. That Jennetta Heel... Jennetta...

EN: Jennetta Heely Scholars.

RW: Yeah. My, I call it the Scholar's Academy. I keep asking this question: why can't they put those kids with those, those Chancellors' Scholars and Deans' Scholars? At least some time in their life...

EN: Yeah, why not mix them up more? Yes, I totally agree with that.

RW: Mix them up more! Put them in a, have a second-year class, cause then you will have all the students who've been in all the scholarship programs. Make a special class that will go towards

graduation that they all must take. You see what I mean? They've got to learn how to live and work with each other.

EN: Yes.

RW: You know?

EN: I agree with that.

RW: When I had the President when the Chancellor was here, I said, "Chancellor, look at these kids. Everyone thinks these kids are marginalized. These kids are getting 3.0. Well, tell him what you're doing kids." They told him, "President, we have a 3.0 or better."

EN: Right.

RW: Cause I have, I have reasons. They love our faculty. The faculty doesn't believe this, but I interview every one of these kids, every year. "What is it about what's keeping you here?"

EN: Exactly.

RW: They talk about the faculty who care about them. You know, and they don't talk about Black faculty and white faculty. They talk about there are faculty members who really believe in them, and they'll talk about the ones who don't believe in them. And, they won't take their classes, if they can avoid it, you know? So, it's nice to see that diversity. I have my, my Hispanic people. I have three Indians now in my program.

EN: That's good.

RW: Isn't that nice? In fact, I'm meeting with a Reservation Chief, ah from Pine Ridge where I did my sabbatical, and he wants me to set up a program to bring more of his kids here because I've been on that Reservation. I've taught them.

EN: That's great! That would be wonderful.

RW: But, I'm trying to retire. [EN laughs]. See, I'm like you, they got you!

EN: No, but...

RW: Like Vaughn said, no one can replace me. Dave, Dave Werner said, "You're the only person in the whole world of this University who can bring a student or faculty member into your office and cuss them out and then hug them as they're walking out the door."

EN: Yeah, yeah.

RW: You know, that's fun! But, that's good life! That's good living! I think that I have been blessed in my way. I remember when I started teaching in that small island in Japan, I never wanted to be a teacher. Then, someone said to me, "You need to go to this island, and teach these kids how to read and write." And I just got so turned on. It was so wonderful. If I had not gone there, these kids would have been prostitutes and shoe-shine boys at the bases. And now they could work in the PX [BX] or work in the Bookstore or work the sales floor and make, you know. I gave them from poor to middle-class, the opportunity. You know, and that was 1950... You want to know what year that was? 1958!

EN: 1958? Hm.

RW: I gotta tell you one more story, you'll love. I'm sitting in class in 1954, at UCLA. I'm sitting with my friend who, her name is Honeybear. We both have the "W"s in our name. It's like May

15 or 16 or something, or something like that. I said, "I am so excited." We're in Music Appreciation at UCLA. She said, "What are you excited about?" I said, "The Supreme Court is getting ready to make a decision on the ah, Brown v. the Board of Education," [RW coughs] and I said, "I've been following [RW coughs], I've been following the lawyer," who, you know, who... She said, "Why didn't you say something to me, about *my* father?" [EN laughs]. I said, "Who is your father?" She said, "Don't you know who my father is?" I said, "Honey, I don't know who your father is, I know you as Honeybear." Guess who her father was, is...was. Chief Justice Warren!

EN: Oh, no [EN Laughs]!

RW: Isn't that wonderful?

EN: Yes, it is! That's actually wonderful!

RW: And, we're celebrating this decision. I mean, I thought, where else could I have had that? And I'm...She's sitting next to me, and we're laughing about her father is the Chief Justice Warren, and Thurgood Marshall is my friend and got to the Supreme Court. And she said, "Isn't that a great...isn't that wonderful?"

EN: It is.

RW: I remember that. See, Johnny Corcoran and I went to school together too, you know. He went to USC. But it was funny [RW coughs]. So I guess we've been fighting this battle for a long time. And I. Do you remember John Ellsworth?

EN: Yes.

RW: Okay. John Ellsworth and I and a group of people, you know, we set up the first... I didn't put that down for you, but I want you to... the first is called... what did he call, uh, what did we call it? Ah, Southern Illinois Adoptive Families Association. You know, when that priest came out of Chicago and talked about Black people not adopting ah kids, and white people cannot adopt, could not adopt bi-racial, black kids.

EN: Yes.

RW: Well, I bought into that. I bought into that so much that I adopted three kids because of that. You know?

EN: Yes.

RW: Those kids there now... Amy is in medical school now, she's getting reading to start her third year in medical School.

EN: Wow!

RW: Dana getting her Master's Degree in May [EN laughs] at uh, Santa Clara College, in Special, Special Education. My son is the Vice President of his own company. Another one is uh, you know...God has been good for us. Look at that! John Ellsworth and I would go on the radio to try to talk about getting people to adopt children. You know John and Linda, at that time, they adopted a Vietnamese child, you know. So we would go around, I would go around giving speeches to all the agencies, helping people, how to deal with adoption, what does adoption mean, especially whites. I said whites don't want to adopt a black child, but they will adopt a Filipino or a Korean child, which is interesting.

EN: Yes, it is interesting.

RW: You know, yet, social workers in Illinois would not allow whites...

EN: ...to adopt Black children...

RW: Bi-racial children especially. Like my two bi-racial kids, you know. Why couldn't they? Why can't they? If you're going to adopt a Korean, why can't you adopt a...

EN: That's right. That's crazy.

RW: You know what I mean. It's crazy! So, I would go around making speeches to all of these people. And we had one of the largest groups of families. The only reason we're not together now is because our kids, at a point when they turned about 11 or 12 years old, said, "Don't have your group. Don't call us that anymore because you are Mom and Dad." But, when we were trying to organize ourselves, we'd all get together and share our complaints and all those... Ruth Cook. You remember her, Ruth Cook?

EN: Yes.

RW: Okay. Dana lives with Ruth Cook right now in Santa Clara, California!

EN: Oh, really?

RW: Yes! [RW and EN laugh] [RW coughs]

EN: I used to teach at San Jose State.

RW: Did you?

EN: Yes, and I used to take the bus every day!

RW: She graduated from San Jose State!

EN: And it goes through, it goes by Santa Clara.

RW: Right.

EN: The bus to San Jose State.

RW: That's right.

EN: Yeah, that's a nice, private university. That's a deluxe place there.

RW: Mhm. [EN laughs]. Dana graduated from San Jose State for undergraduate.

EN: Oh really?

RW: Yes. She, I sent her to apply to schools, she only got a 12 on her ACT. She couldn't get admitted here. So I sent her down, down south to a private school, episcopal school, and they kicked her out because she refused to go to prayer.

EN: Uh-huh. Oh.

RW: So she came here, and I put her in Alverita's Beauty College.

EN: Yes.

RW: And she passed, for a year, cost me \$10,000, but she became a licensed beauty person, you know. She, if you go around here now, people, women remember...

EN: Yes

RW: They see her, they say, "she used to cut my hair. Dana was great!" She hated being a stylist. She hated it!

EN: [EN laughs] Oh!

RW: But she fell in love with my grad assistant. [EN laughs]. He was from California. And so, when she found out he had finished his Master's degree and was leaving for California, she followed him out there [EN laughs]. And the father did not like her.

EN: Oh.

RW: And so Ruth took her... and she's getting a Master's degree now, and I'm proud of her!

EN: Oh, that's great!

RW: And she's going to graduate Magna Cum Laude! She's getting A's, and the professors love her at that little college! Ain't that something?

EN: Yeah.

RW: And she writes about her experience with being an adopted child, and once she was able to get that all out... she thinks I walk on water, though. She thinks I'm the greatest father in the whole world. Doesn't know why she hated me before, you know? [EN laughs]. Isn't that neat? [RW laughs].

EN: Yes, it is. It is really wonderful.

RW: I told you Gloria Reading, right? Okay?

EN: Yeah.

RW: Mhm. She was one of my first students.

EN: I'll get to her immediately.

RW: So, anything else you need?

EN: Well, I just...

RW: You can call me. Let me know.

EN: Okay. I'll be returning this, this.

RW: Okay.

EN: I'll type it all out, you know, this interview.

RW: I didn't finish it all because I...

EN: You have too many stories!

RW: Yes, I have too many stories to tell! I can, I can, I've been in here since 9 o'clock this morning writing this thing for you.

EN: Oh, good. Oh, thank you!

RW: But I want you to see it in writing too because this is a great...the journey is a good journey. You know, it's like you could bring it to them. It's a good journey. I mean, I've been the Office of Education, I've been working for the Department of Education. I was one of the best trainers

they ever had. I put the administrators' academy. All the administrators in this area know me because I was one of the trainers for all administrators because they were concerned about the Principals not having the skills to be sympathetic and empathetic, and also, they all just want to be controlling, rather than they wanna be, rather than being a good listener, you know.

EN: Yes.

RW: So, we talked about stereo...that principals come from stereotypic families too. And I still hear that. I was on ah, with the Pharmacy... not the Pharmacy, with the Accounting Department, and they want to do a program for Black kids. They used the words "minority," "disadvantaged." I blew up in the meeting. And this is a Black woman who wrote this. I said, "Why are, why do you put 'minority' and 'disadvantaged' on a proposal?" "There were no Black people there, except myself and you." She's from Jamaica. "Why did you put... Disadvantaged!? All of us are disadvantaged!" She said, "I went to college, and, you know, minorities don't send their kids to college." I was like what in the hell? I'm talking to myself saying, "What in the hell?" But you see, we're still carrying the slave mentality right, in this area! I mean, that's all it is! The people, you know, I said, You've have never asked me... I would never say to a white person, "What's it like being a white?"

EN: No!

RW: You see me? We never do that.

EN: No, no.

RW: You know, I, I said I went to a workshop in Vermont, and I was with this woman who did The Bluest Eye, you know.

EN: You brought that here. I saw her, when you brought her to campus.

RW: Right.

EN: You and John Farley or someone.

RW: And she said, Princeton, to a whole-white audience, "How many of you would be willing to just be Black for 24 hours? That's all I'm asking you." This was, I was there, because I was hidden behind the camera, because I work here. She said, "I'll ask you again. How many would be willing to be Black for 24 hours? That's all I'm asking." No one raised their hand among 5,000 people in the audience. She said, "See. You don't, you know what it's like to be Black for 24 hours, but there are people who are Black for a lifetime. Get a life!" you know what I mean....

EN: Get a life [EN laughs]!

RW: Isn't that wonderful? She's wonderful. [EN laughs] I love her. So anything else, let me know.

EN: No. Okay. Okay.

RW: I've got to go give blood now.

EN: Okay.

RW: I've got a kid with lupus.

EN: Oh, you do?

RW: Not my child, ah for the Red Cross. His blood and my blood match.

EN: Oh, that's good.

RW: But I went to Nigeria last, in March.

EN: You really are trim, you know. You flossed and everything. Not bad.

RW: But anyway, I went to Nigeria, and because I was in Nigeria, they said I was around AIDS people. I was not, I was at the University. So, they made me wait a whole year to give this boy blood. And now, they're calling me now, saying he's desperate, he needs blood right now. So I'm going up to Fairview Heights and take some blood for them.

EN: What kind of, do you have some kind of B+ or...

RW: O.

EN: O. Oh, you're O. Okay. Yeah.

RW: Uh-huh. So, I'm going to give the little boy some of my blood.

EN: Yeah.

RW: That's okay.

EN: Yeah. I could give him some too because I'm O.

RW: Are you?

EN: Yeah.

RW: But you're not matched perfectly, I'm matched perfectly, O.

EN: Yeah, you must have some factors or something.

RW: Right, I have a factor in there. You're O, too? Good! When is your birthday?

EN: January 15<sup>th</sup>, of '42 [EN Laughs]

RW: Oh, you were born in '42, you're young! [EN laughs]. I was born in '35! [EN laughs] Let me see if she has that other thing for you too, while you disconnect that recorder.

EN: I know, I um...[Recording ends]