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Eugenia Hamilton Memoir

H180. Hamilton, Eugenia
Interview and memoir
1 tape, 90 mins., 25 pp.

Hamilton discusses her employment in education as well as jobs she has held in traditionally male-dominated fields. She recalls the circumstances which enabled her to work outside the home, and employment during WWII in the area of military intelligence. Other topics include Hamilton's family background, her husband's family background as Russian immigrants, and her work in education, particularly the "More Academically Able" Program. References are made to the Palmer Sanatorium and the treatment of tuberculosis.

Interview by Melinda Kwedar, 1976
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Preface

This manuscript is the product of a tape recorded interview conducted by Melinda Kwedar for the Oral History Office in August 1976. Laura Duescher transcribed the tapes and Vince Whitman edited the transcript.

Eugenia Hamilton has been employed outside her home for most of her life. She has been eager to compete with men and has therefore had jobs in male dominated fields such as engineering and military intelligence. She says she really feels more comfortable with men than with homebound women. She is now an administrator in the Springfield School District 186 as Director of In-Service.

After many different jobs, Eugenia settle in the Springfield area and taught in several schools. In 1960 the "More Academically Able" Program was put into effect and she taught one of these classes for three years. She was then principal of Lindsay School before receiving her administrative position.

Readers of the oral history memoir should bear in mind that it is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, narrator and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. Sangamon State University is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for views expressed therein; these are for the reader to judge.

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Eugenia Hamilton, August 3, 1976, Springfield, Illinois.

Melinda Kwedar, Interviewer.

Q: Eugenia, I'd like to start with your childhood. When and where were you born?

A: I was born in Champaign, Illinois, with a mother and father living in that area. Father was in insurance. My mother had graduated from the University of Illinois in something like 1912. She had an English major over there. Had not really worked at all, and they were very happily married for five years, when my father was enlisted in the army, at the end of World War I. He returned after being based in Texas, had been home a very short time, contracted flu which was very prevalent at the time after World War I, and died. At that time I was three months old. And my mother was really a wreck over this, moved back with her father and mother to Greenview, Illinois, and in her grief rode horseback for the better part of twelve months. And I was more or less cared for during that time by cousins and a devoted grandmother and . . . was certainly not devoid of love. When I was four years old, my mother met a veteran of the First World War, and she said, "Oh, Carl. You really don't want to marry a widow with a youngster." And his reply was, "How do you know I'm not marrying you for your daughter?" And as long as he lived this was their relationship. I did not know he was not my father until I was in the sixth grade.

Q: Oh, my gosh.

A: I never questioned having the name Armor and having my mother wtih the name of Negis.

Q: Until you were twelve years old. Then did you question at that time?

A: Yes. I adored it, and I think maybe subconsciously, I was avoiding the question.

Q: Yes, you didn't want to talk about it.

A: Because I thought he was perfect. At that time we were living in Davenport, Iowa, he and his brothers owned a chain of men's clothing stores, and I went to a private Episcopal girls' school. I was very chunky and my mother thought that she definitely was stuck with a dud. (laughter) So I spent days going to St. Katherine's and getting off of school at 2:30 in the afternoon, and swimming until five o'clock, and swimming is probably the most vivid thing of my childhood.

Q: Now, did your mother work at all during the time between the time your father died and she remarried?

A: Yes. She taught English in the high school in Greenview, Illinois. And my grandfather was a landowner and a banker on the board of education, so it wasn't very difficult for her to get a job. She taught for a couple of years, then remarried, and worked no more until after she was sixty-five.

Q: After!

A: And at that time she was living in Petersburg, and I have deep roots there.

Q: Petersburg, Illinois?

A: Yes. And at that time in the bookstore at New Salem they needed someone who was familiar with literature . . . familiar with all the Lincoln lore of the community, so she was asked to come and work in the bookshop.

Q: And that was when she was sixty-five.

A: That's right, and she worked there until, let me see, she's eighty-three now, and I guess she stopped when she was eighty.

Q: Well, that must have been a very nice job for her at that time. So your stepfather worked in Iowa, and then you moved.

A: And we finally decided that because my father was ill that it would be a good idea to move back to Illinois. He had a very serious case of tuberculosis. We moved back to Illinois with my grandparents, moving in with my grandparents, and my stepfather was placed first of all in Palmer Sanatarium here in Springfield, and the eventually into government hospitals. This was right in the middle of the Depression. So, needless to say, the money ran out, and he finally ended up in Hines Hospital and a number of government sites. During this period of time, he more or less recovered, and because we had another store in Sioux City, Iowa, we moved out there. And it took less than a year for the tuberculosis to become active again, so we then moved back to Petersburg, Illinois.

Q: Now how old were you during this time?

A: This is . . . when we moved to Sioux City, I was going into junior high and . . . actually, I guess, my freshman year. I remember it very well because I had started my freshman year in Petersburg in Latin, and had transferred to Sioux City the second semester of my freshman year. I had learned nouns in Latin my first semester and I went to Iowa and learned nouns in Latin the second semester. They had reversed semesters. So by the time I became a sophomore I had to get very busy on Latin verbs. But my, my stepfather died when . . . I really hate to say stepfather because he, he was a father.

Q: Right.

A: He died when I was a junior in high school, and at that time we were living in Petersburg.

Q: Right, so you were back with your mother's parents at that time.

A: Right.

Q: Can you tell me anything about that Palmer Sanitarium? I've heard that referred to before and know very little details.

A: Palmer Sanitarium was where the Presbytarian Home is now, on Lawrence and Chatham Road. Looked then very much the way it does now, except that one side of the building was lined with open-air, screened-in porches. Because at that time of course, the treatment for tubercular patients was open air, and it really is very strange for me to see the architecture having changed so little.

Q: I've always wondered what that was initially.

A: That's exactly it. It was a little more secluded then because there were large trees around, and because of my age through those years every precaution was taken against my mother's contracting T.B., and mine, too. We had regular check-ups and regular X-rays. When we were living in Sioux City our dishes were separate, they were sterilized . . . This is a matter of really living apart in many respects. Washing was separate from my father. Because . . .

Q: Was there ever a cause assessment? Did this have to do with the war in any way?

A: Yes, yes. My father had been gassed during World War I, and all this was attributed to that.

Q: Now were other kinds of patients treated in this sanitarium or was it just for T.B.?

A: No. As far as I recall it was strictly, strictly for tubercular patients.

Q: Okay, so then you moved back when you were in high school, and you finished high school in Petersburg, Illinois?

A: Yes, I had spent six years in an Episcopal girls' school in Iowa, came back to Illinois and had my first experience with public schools, finished in Petersburg, and then went to MacMurray College in Jacksonville, Illinois.

Q: Now did you work in the house with your grandparents, or did you . . .

A: Yes. Strangely enough, through those years anyone who became somewhat destitute moved in too. I first of all had an aunt and an

uncle and a cousin who moved in and were living with us. This was a large frame, slate roof, columned Victorian home, let's say . . . no, post-Victorian. And there were four bedrooms up, a bedroom down, a huge entry hall, living room, dining room, kitchen, pantry, and four rooms in the basement. And so an aunt and an uncle and a cousin came. About the time I was graduating from high school, an aunt and her two children came. And I grew up with these two youngsters as sister and brother.

Q: So it was like you had some siblings, right?

A: Yes, definitely. It's very hard for me to say I have no sisters and no brothers when our relationship is so entirely different, in that they are mine . . . my own.

Q: But then again you didn't live with them until you were in high school, right? Or had you . . .

A: Yes, but you have to remember the . . . the cousin, the girl cousin, was going into the . . . fourth grade.

Q: Oh.

A: And the boy was three years old.

Q: Oh, I see.

A: He is now a professor of history at Eastern Michigan and she's a teacher in California.

Q: So you were like a second mother then, to them.

A: Right.

Q: That's a nice situation. So you went to MacMurray College, then?

A: That's right.

Q: And you graduated?

A: I went there four years, graduated with a degree in Art and English.

Q: What about education? Was that just assumed a part of it or was, did you take separate courses?

A: I . . . I did carry enough education to qualify for a teaching certificate. However, my practice teaching was at the college level.

Q: Oh.

A: And I taught freshmen, and loved it. And then back to the Depression, I . . . we had a struggle getting through college. I went through on scholarships, and the generosity of the president of MacMurray, who is

a very close friend of mine, Dr. McClelland. And by working. I had charge of perspective students. So, when I finished MacMurray I felt I needed a very, very secure position. So I applied at St. Catherine's, where I had gone to grade school, and I was hired by the Episcopal nuns for the whole sum of $35 a month. I lived on a flat faculty floor.

Q: So your housing was paid for?

A: And my laundry and my food. The works. So I . . . what I really was having was a $35 allowance.

Q: Right.

A: Every month. Bought fantastic things with it, did everything I wanted to do. And I really loved it, and it was strange because people who were living there with me. . . . we had a masters degree gal from Vassar. This should show you how lean money was and . . .

Q: Jobs for it to come by.

A: That's right.

Q: Right. Now this was in Iowa, right?

A: After I finished college in 1941, I went back to Iowa. Now, in December of 1941, I had the job of driving a station wagon over to a nearby orphanage where we picked up youngsters with a . . . to celebrate a sort of pre-Christmas. It was between Thanksgiving and Christmas, and we had spent weeks getting gifts together for the orphans. It was my fortune or my misfortune to pick up a little girl who was a polio victim, braces on both legs, very handicapped. And I got down out of the bus and said, "Let me help you," and put out my arms to lift her down to the ground, and she said, "I'll do it myself." And at this point, a large gorup of my students came over and said, "This is Sunday, Pearl Harbor has been bombed." And I never forget the association with this youngster that I was feeling so strongly for and this, this ghastly news.

Q: Oh, it figures that about everybody remembers where they were when they heard about Pearl Harbor.

A: True.

Q: How old was this child?

A: About six. Darling!

Q: And of course that was during the time that polio was such a scourge, as I remember my own childhood, that it was . . .

A: And I think that the worry that I had is, here I am so willing to love her, you know, I wish she were mine, and thinking how many people would be willing to adopt her . . . as handicapped as she was.

Q: Right.

A: But that, let me see, that finished that year out. In June, I got a job through the summer with probably the most tedious thing I have ever done in my life: editing and proofreading for a publishing company in Davenport. One of those background jobs with, you know, a light bulb hanging from the ceiling, and I almost lost my mind. That lasted about a month, and I went home and said, "You can have it." I'd been offered a salary back at St. Catherine's, but in the meantime with the war, I decided I was going to win it. Single-handedly.

Q: The war.

A: Absolutely. So at that point it was possible to crowd further education in a very short period of time. And I heard that I could go to the Illinois Institute of Technology, which at that time was Louis Institute, out in the boondocks of Chicago--really just past skid row--and that I culd take a brush-up course and I could end up as an engineering draftsman. So I took the intensive course with math, that I hadn't had since high school, and came out with an offer of illustrating technical manuals for the University of Chicago. Well, that was not going to win the war. So, a friend of mine called. His father was one of the executives of Kressge's in Michigan, in Detroit. [She] said, "My father has just been out to New York, and has run into Colonel Barlow who's one of the, is involved with military intelligence in Washington. Would you like to go to Washington? My father says that if you will say yes, I can go." By the way, this is someone who came originally, whose family came originally from this part of the country. Her name was Pickering. Her father was John Pickering, and her . . . let me see . . . uncle was Senator Yates, her grandfather was Governor Yates.

Q: Oh, my gosh.

A: And quite a gal. So, I announced to my family that I was not going to illustrate for the University of Chicago, that I was going to Washington to win the war, which I proceeded to do. I worked for military intelligence, and at first I was a . . . I was drawing manuals for G.I.'s that would indentify guns, equipment that the Germans were using. After some time at that I was asked if I'd had any library experience. And I said, "Yes, some." So I ended up working for military intelligence in, as a photogrammetrist in the library that was maintained by military intelligence, with all of the aerial coverage from all the air forces thoughout the world. This was Schnals, Tampf and all over. Never at any time had the aerial coverage been on file nor had it been analyzed in one location. Now the Air Force maintained the library, but we maintained this file of the aerial coverage, the reports that were either filed after bomb damage or were filed as results of assignments for aerial coverage. Of course, this was a library that was used extensively by the Office of Naval Intelligence, the Office of Strategic Services, by any intelligence outfit. So I was naturally dealing with privileged information and knowing where the next strike was going to be.

Q: Yes, wow.

A: And I lived in a house in Chevy Chase.

Q: Did you live with this other girl at the time? Other woman?

A: Yes. First of all we shared a house in Georgetown, a quaint sort of row house typical of Georgetown, and there were five of us in the house, all of us with different assignments and all of us with dealing with classified material. So the house really wasn't large enough. It couldn't accommodate all of us, and so we moved to a place we called Hodgepodge Lodge in Chevy Chase, thinking that we were very clever at the time . . . was way at the end of Rock Creek Park. There were three WAVES and two civilians by that time. We shared a three bedroom house, and I worked in the Pentagon . . . two of us worked in the Pentagon. Three of them in, were WAVES in the Naval Department.

Q: So you got to do your part to win the war.

A: Right, I did.

Q: Okay, so this continued with the duration of the war?

A: I was in Washington three years. I . . . was married very briefly to a Russian--not very briefly, for three years--to one of the servicemen that I met, who was in the navy. So the next thing that I did after marrying Igor--who's background was Russian, his father had really grown up in England--I moved down to Miami, where Igor trained Russian naval personnel how to man seagoing tugs that they were going to get on land-lease, because he spoke fluent Russian. He was an engineer. And then his next assignment was on the staff of the Naval Academy in Annapolis. So we lived there.

Q: Now this is Miami, Florida, where you moved. You quit your job at that point.

A: That's right. Moved to Miami, then moved to Annapolis, Maryland, and then moved to Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island. At that time he was getting his doctorate in applied mathematics at Brown, translating scientific journals of the Russians. And I worked as a stylist in a large department store, and did some lecturing at the Rhode Island School of Design, trained high school youngsters, really thoroughly enjoyed a style.

Q: Heaven sakes. That was certainly a diverse area.

A: Now you understood [inaudible] career.

Q: Yes, I do believe that. Now your husband, was he born in America or was he . . .

A: He was born in Russia, and his mother was a White Russian with quite a background. And Igor at ten was one of the youngest chess champions Russia had ever had. So when they tried to get out of Russia . . .

Q: And this was about what year?

A: They, well, let me see. If he was ten that was probably . . . oh, 1930.

Q: About Stalin time then.

A: Yes.

Q: Right. What was his mother's colorful type, kind of background? You remember any of the . . .

A: She really had grown up with wealth and had been extrememly well-to-do, and the reversal was something she really couldn't get over. It was very hard for her to live a . . . well, no, what I really ought to explain is the father had been investing money over here for years with the idea that he would bring them out of Russia

Q: Since the revolution though, right?

A: Yes. And needless to say the same thing happened to a number of Russians, in that when they invested it with someone they really had a great deal of faith in, they came to the United States and discovered there was nothing. There was no accounting for the money.

Q: Oh, my.

A: So, Igor's father was a certified public accountant, his mother a spoiled White Russian, and Igor worked at the Fifth Avenue Public Library. His father had no trouble, really getting an appointment. He, although he spoke classical Russian, his English was impeccable. It was very hard to recognize him as a Russian at all.

Q: Now, where has he learned the English?

A: He had lived with his mother and a brother in England.

Q: Oh, I see.

A: Really through the major part of his education. They had really gotten out of Russia, had moved to England. The father had died and the mother had wanted to go back to Russia, so she took these two sons with her.

Q: She did want to go back?

A: Yes.

Q: To see family or . . .

A: Yes, because of her family ties.

Q: Just for a visit or to live?

A: To live. Igor's father during, really just post-revolution, recognized the fact that he was doing very well financially, and maintained a double identity. He had one business and residence in Moscow under the name Sugarman, an English name he considered which, evidently he was not Jewish and Sugarman very often is . . .

Q: I was going to say, yes, another liability.

A: And in another town removed from Moscow, maintained another identity and his family, his wife and his son. And it was in one occupation, and that was under the name Sugarman, that the money was sent to the United States, in, I guess, an illicit sort of, illegal sort of way. And the money that he had sent at that time was considerable, something like $50,000. So when they really plotted to get out of Russia, it was with his proof that he actually had been born out of Russia . . . the father.

Q: How did he do that?

A: By establishing the fact that he had been born in Indiana and that the floods had destroyed the birth certificate.

Q: Wow, that was . . .

A: So I'm sure this sort of thing has been used repeatedly.

Q: That was the only way he could get out of Russia at that point in time.

A: Yes, and this was still a somewhat frightening experience because through his wife, as I said who really did have a good deal of influential background, they made a connection with a general of the army in Vladivostok. So they went from Moscow through Vladivostok to get to the United States, and ended up in New York, penniless.

Q: He had counted on that money.

A: That's right. Then the man to whom he was sending the money was never located, was never identified, so he became a fiction so to speak. So they moved into New York. Father had no trouble getting employment, but it was a hand-to-mouth sort of existence. When Igor was a little bit older, he had a job working in the Fifth Avenue Public Library, and went to Stibson High School which was the high school in New York for gifted. He finished high school went to Stevens Institute of Technology and finished as a mechanical engineer, got his master's in physics, and then went to Brown for his applied mathematics Ph.D.

Q: Now what line of business was his father in?

A: He was an accountant.

Q: And he did that in Russia or . . .

A: Yes, although in the two identities one of them was related to sales, and the other one was a straight accounting business.

Q: I see. So then he did do accounting in New York, as well.

A: Yes.

Q: Okay, so . . . then . . . let's see where are we in here?

A: Okay, I ended up in Providence, Rhode Island with Igor getting his doctorate at Brown, living in a typical New England salt box, post-war with no building, housing very short, and in a very miserable circumstance. Not necessarily financial, but maybe more emotional. I learned that living with someone with a kind of foreign background, and let's say, established customs was something very difficult for a midwestern jerk. So it was a matter of selfish survival.

Q: Right. Were you working at that time?

A: Yes, that's when I was working as a stylist in a large department store in Providence [and] doing some work at the Rhode Island School of Design. I loved my job.

Q: Did he feel that you should not be working? Or you know, was it some of the old Russian customs of the woman being in the home, or those kinds of things, caused conflicts or . . .

A: I think, there were cultural differences that could not be surmounted. I think because of the role his mother played as a grand dame, somehow it was anticipated that I would use, let's say, my art talents.

Q: Oh, the cultural . . .

A: Yes. I loved the kind of life we were leading. You know, going to the Boston Symphony and all the exhibits. This sort of thing was fine. But I was a possession.

Q: Right.

A: And . . . as an independent woman I just simply couldn't tolerate the possessiveness.

Q: Were his parents still alive and in the vicinity at that time?

A: Yes, they were in Europe.

Q: So you went . . .

A: And of course there were frequent trips, yes, to Europe.

Q: That added to it, I'm sure . . . the problem. You know the Russian women are still having trouble today. The Russian women themselves are having trouble fighting the old male traditions and expectations. Still goes on. So, what did you do at that time?

A: I came back to Illinois feeling very, very, insecure, moved in with my family--my mother and my grandmother at that point--and an aunt. And

took about three months to really face the fact that I had become a very insecure individual. So insecure that I couldn't drive a car. I was really on the verge, and finally snapped out of it and decided that I would get a job. The remotest thing from my mind at that time was teaching. So I became an interior decorator. And one of the local furniture stores where Myers Brothers furniture is now, was Dirkson's. And I knew the Dirkson's, I decorated for them, thoroughly enjoyed it, and one of my high school classmates and an old love came back. So I ended up marrying Ted; moving back to Marshalltown, Iowa. And I married really with the idea that I wanted children. So it took about a year and a half, but I had John then and he's now twenty-six. We moved from Marshalltown back to Illinois after about three years. Ted was an insurance agent and a . . . a very personable guy who was his own worst enemy. He drank himself to death . . . So . . .

Q: Did you work during that time, then? While your . . .

A: When we moved back to Illinois things were so inseucre. I had an invitation in Mason City, and ended up being offered a contract. So I taught in Easten, which is a very small town between Mason City, Illinois and Havana, Illinois. Taught in a very small town unit school, fourth grade, and loved it. So at that time I got busy and was certified with an elementary certificate.

Q: You had to go back to school to get this?

A: Yes. Yes, and my education is very funny, too. Having majors in art and then picking up something like sixteen hours to get an elementary certificate and then finally getting a master's. But . . .

Q: Now how old was your son at that time?

A: One, one and a half.

Q: And you started to teach full time then. And what did you do?

A: Yes, wonderful baby sitters. Mothers with children the same age.

Q: I see.

A: And then we moved back to Petersburg, Illinois, and I applied in Springfield. So I commuted from Petersburg for a long time, when my son was in junior high, the seventh grade.

Q: Now he went to school in Petersburg?

A: Yes. He didn't move in here. Stayed out there. Not with my family at all, and so I started teaching in here; taught at Enos; moved to Hay Edwards, Lawrence, DuBois. And let me see, I was at Enos five years teaching fourth grade. And when I moved to Hay Edwards I went into the more academically able program and started teaching gifted youngsters. So as you can see, the majority of my experience in Springfield has had something to do with gifted programs.

Q: Now your husband died in what year?

A: Well, let's see. . . . January 26th would have been fifteen years, so it's eleven years ago, twelve years ago.

Q: So that would make it 1964.

A: Yes.

Q: Why did you pick some of the jobs that you did that seem to be basically male oriented?

A: I think I felt after teaching a year in a girls' school that I needed to get closer to a man's profession. I felt there were certain things I could do that fit into the man's world, and I felt perfectly capable of competing. I knew when I went to Washington that I was going to replace a man who was going to be sent overseas. And although I dealt with a great number of men, probably more than I did women, all along the way I felt again that I was doing something a man could do. I don't know whether it was ego building; it certainly wasn't hunting for a man, that wasn't the thing at all. I think that even in my field of education through these years of getting into administration, I have been willing to compete with men for those positions. And it certainly isn't the women's lib kick, because this is certainly prior to that. And I don't know that I'm total sympathic with it, because this has been a way of life with me. It hasn't been an issue and I don't feel that I have been denied a lot of opportunities because of men. So that really is it. I think that perhaps in many ways I don't relate as well to women in a typical female philosophy as I do to men.

Q: Your initial career choice, do you think that that was affected by the fact that you were a girl? You think that you may have chosen another field if you were a boy?

A: Possibly.

Q: But then after you got into the career which was very women-dominated you felt that you would rather be in a field that was a more male-dominated to prove to yourself that you could do the same kinds of things that men could do? Do you think that that may have been it?

A: Or that it really didn't matter.

Q: That you were a woman?

A: Yes.

Q: And, of course during the war, I assume you know men could do something very visible, you know, and very concrete as far as helping the country. And for a woman it was maybe a little more difficult to really show something very specific that you had done, you know, to help the country.

A: That's right. It couldn't be as active a role, certainly.

Q: Right. And yet the job that you got, you said you were replacing a man that was being sent overseas.

A: That time military intelligence was looking for women with degrees who were competent enough to replace men who had been doing the same jobs.

Q: Do you think if the war had not been in effect would you have gotten a job of that sort?

A: Yes.

Q: You think you would've.

A: Yes. I think that I . . . now I'm not so sure that the man element, that that facet of it would have been present. I feel very strongly that I would have gone through similar experiences and that I would have liked, I would have explored other jobs. I really feel that I'm in education initally through that need, because when I came back into it with a small child I kenw that in time he was going to be in school; I was going to need the free time. And as he became older I was urged by administrators to get into administration, which I might add was a break that men gave me.

Q: Right. Why did you feel, do you think that you felt that the kinds of things that men were doing were "more important" than the jobs that women were doing?

A: Yes, I possibly have thought they were. And I think I felt, I have felt that conversationally, men were more stimulating. I could talk to them much more easily than I could the bridge club gals who talk about child rearing and menus. I just didn't have the talent. (laughter)

Q: But you have spent, of course, most of your time in a professional area. You have been "outside of the home" so you have not spent a large block of your life doing those kinds of things. Do you think this was, was this specifically by choice that you did not stay home when your child was, you know, preschool age?

A: No, it was necessary for me to work. Financially it just had to be. I spent a couple of very miserable years, not totally unhappy, but unhappy that I wasn't with my child.

Q: Feeling guilty that you were not able to stay home with him.

A: And really checking out the babysitters and being very concerned about being away from home at times when I wasn't working. And yet, I look at my son today, and I feel in no way that John suffered as a result of having a working mother. I think in many respects the fact that I was motivated to do a number of different things helped him to be independent and to be motivated in a number of different directions. I hope I've had that same influence on the youngsters I've taught.

Q: Did you ever have any problems leaving him with sitters? Did he ever object, you know, cry when you left kind of thing?

A: No, not really. He's been the sort of youngster you could reason with, as long as he knew why you were doing this.

Q: But you still left him at age eighteen months, and at that time you felt that he could understand what . . .

A: Yes. He felt very . . . secure with the woman with whom he was staying. She had a youngster a little bit older, a local dentist's youngster was there. There were three boys, and not only did the sitter and her husband really work with these youngsters in providing multiple experiences, but so did the grandparents. They had experiences that made them anticipate tomorrow. It wasn't a matter of feeling in any way neglected.

Q: Now you stayed home with him though until he was eighteen months old?

A: That's right, I did. I had no jobs during then.

Q: Okay, then you were in the home. How did you feel about that? Did you enjoy that?

A: I loved it, because I had wanted a baby. As a matter of fact, if I'd had a choice, I'd have ended up with three, and I probably would have worked at different times.

Q: But stayed home during the early year, you think?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay, so you moved around in the schools here. Was that for promotional purposes or what? They just did it.

A: No, it didn't take me long to discover . . . well, I went into the M.A.A. Program, the More Academically Able Program, the second year it was organized.

Q: Now, can you explain that?

A: Okay. These were youngsters who were selected because they had above average achievement and I.Q.'s. At that time we were using the cut-off I.Q. of 115. We were screening other abilities the youngsters had, examining achievement test, and we had at that time four schools that were involved with the More Academically Able Program. It began in the fourth and went through the sixth grade. At no time was it lower than the fourth. So when I moved to Hay Edwards, as I said the second year the program was in effect, I stayed with the same youngsters for three years.

Q: Oh, that's the way it was.

A: And this really is quite an experience. Because at the end of three years I had twenty-six children instead of one son.

Q: Right, I can imagine. Were they all from Hay Edwards School or were they picked from other schools?

A: No, no. They were picked from the area around. Not even what would be considered a feeder school.

Q: Right.

A: They were from a radius around Hay Edwards. Really was an ideal situation. That's an extremely good location for community education. And at that time, for instance, we could use all the government buildings. We could use the federal building; we could walk downtown. So we had great experiential learning. We did a unit on economics, when we plagued the local banks, and even today as long ago as that was, one of the bankers had said one of the youngsters had asked a question they had never answered. So we could do a unit approach. We studied aliens, and went to a naturalization ceremony. We had a good many professional parents, so Fridays were devoted to learning, really, what we're teaching in career ed today.

Q: Now who was involved in setting up the curriculum for this? Was this your option as a teacher?

A: Yes, really had not total uniformity. I think maybe in a way that was an advantage, in that each one of us structured our M.A.A. Program with some supervision, in such a way that it fit our personalitites. I think my only concern over teaching let's say, one class of children for three years is that I ended up at the end of that time knowing that they really had been cheated as far as their sciences were concerned. So I got busy, got a summer grant, a National Science Foundation Grant, went over to DePaul University and picked up as much science in one summer as I possibly could. It made me very aware of my shortcomings educationally. So I really laid in and finished a master's degree as well, because I thought this was essential. The thirty-two hours I have beyond the master's have always, are my effort at trying to make up some deficiency.

Q: Then were you able to incorporate this science to these particular children?

A: Yes.

Q: Good.

A: Went from there to Lawrence School where I continued with the More Academically Able. Then when I was going into administration, I was assigned to Mr. Bonafest at DuBois School, still with the M.A.A. Program, but assisting him as a trainee.

Q: I see. So you were still a full time teacher.

A: So I was still a full time teacher, but not really, as an assistant principal. I had no real authority, and that's the way it worked in those days. Then I was appointed principal at Lindsay School.

Q: Now during your post, in courses that you took did you take administration?

A: Yes, some. I took some courses in supervision; I took some courses in new techniques of teaching which would equip me to be a better supervisor of teachers.

Q: Why do you think that you wanted to go into administration?

A: I really didn't, in a way. I had a strong feeling for youngsters. I really didn't like the image of the administrator, and yet . . . I don't know, I thought basically that this was something that maybe I will be able to help because the image I felt was a very remote one.

Q: Negative.

A: I realized, too, that it was the time for women to get into administration. I knew that I always had the alternative of going back to the classroom if it was something that I didn't really like. I have never gotten over missing kids.

Q: So you . . . you did always enjoy the personal contact with the students?

A: Definitely.

Q: It wasn't that you ever became disenchanted with the teaching aspect?

A: No. As a matter of fact, when I was told I was going to move down to the board office and have a different job I cried for two weeks, and I'm not a crier. But all I could think of was, "Well, I enjoy playground supervision," you know. I enjoyed the lunchroom, I enjoyed the litte sessions with kids, and the idea that I was really going to scarifice all of this was almost more than I could take.

Q: And you felt that you had no choice?

A: True. I definitely felt I had no choice.

Q: At this point.

A: I think . . . I . . . yes, I guess I could have said no. And I could have said, "Yes, I'll go back to the classroom." On the other hand, the gifted program has gone through a lot of changes over the years, in that we can no longer separate the gifted children into homogeneous classrooms. And I felt that with the experience I had, I owed it to the gifted program to continue monitoring it, as opposed to turning it over to someone else. And I think I probably had more experience with the inservice training of teachers, through the gifted program. And, I was assigned this, it was a challenge, and again I still could go back to the classroom.

Q: Right. But you had the mixed emotions at the time.

A: Definitely.

Q: Now this More Academically Able Program, what were the years that this was in existence? Do you remember that?

A: I'm trying to remember. Four, eight . . . this was ended eight years ago and it ran for eight.

Q: Okay, so it would have ended in 1968, so it started about 1960. Did you always feel that that was a valid and/or beneficial kind of way to educate these children?

A: Yes, I do. I felt that the homogeneous grouping of gifted youngsters not only gave them the opportunity to become accelerated, it also provided enrichment experiences for them.

Q: Right.

A: And while I can recognize individualized instruction today, I can see how it's central perhaps from many standpoints to have heterogeneous groups. The ideal grouping of very able students provides tremendous opportunities, not only for the students, but the teachers.

Q: What about the other students?

A: Of course, this was one of the big arguments in those days, and my counterargument to this is that among gifted youngsters you have perhaps a greater percent of leaders. Now, it's not all leadership by any means. But by homogenously grouping gifted children, you provided an opportunity for leadership and some position, academic position, among those average youngsters.

Q: I see. So they would by necessity, these others being taken out, would have to assume some of this.

A: Assume a leadership, of course. In some respects it reduced the behavior problem, too. Because when the classes became average, and even down to the remedial children, gifted youngsters are impatient because they learn quickly and it's hard for them to understand those youngsters who can't keep up.

Q: Right. Now why was this program disbanded?

A: The state of Illinois, when we really were getting into the question of segregation, looked at this and realized that in homogenous grouping for full-time schooling that we were segregating a group. And this really was the philosphy of the Illinois OSTI at that time. The office, the Illinois Office of Education was changing. And it is permissible today, according to their rules, to group for certain periods of time. But they take a very dim view of the homogenous grouping as we maintained it then. And this was our criticism, and this is the reason we changed. I can understand their philosophy.

Q: What was the attitude of the general school population toward this class of "gifted children?"

A: Almost all the time, it depended more on the attitude of the parent than it did other teachers and the children. This is something we had to work very hard with. As a matter of fact, there . . . teachers who were dealing with gifted youngsters were ostracized to a certain extent.

Q: By the teachers?

A: Along with the children. Because I think there was a prevalent feeling that if you taught gifted youngsters, then you must consider yourself gifted. So you had to really build up your relationship with faculty members. Youngsters whose parents felt that this had a social advantage, in "My child is the in the M.A.A." type of attitude, would find their children at home and in the neighborhood very unpopular.

Q: The ones in the program.

A: The ones in the program. They too had to sort of establish their relationships. I think it became clear to parents and children when you put it on the fact that, "You're lucky, you have these abilities; these are God-given. So you know, use them to advantage, but don't flaunt them." Once they learned this and that it was up to them to get along with other people. I think then after the first four years the program was accepted.

Q: Now what about parents who maybe were disappointed that their children didn't make it into this?

A: In most instances this was explained to parents. We did have youngsters who couldn't make it, who were in the classes. And this was somewhat hard for parents to take, but youngsters suffer badly when they recognize the fact that they're not measuring up to the rest of the group. Yet it's emotionally hard on them and they act out, or something happens to them. And it is not hard for parents to recognize this change in youngsters like that. In most instances, they were perfectly willing to have them removed. In some cases we would add a child on a trial basis, and I don't know that I always approved of that. Because the class was established. It's very hard to add others and hope for their making up what they had really lost.

Q: What about this, the competitive aspects in the class? Did you have a lot of "I got a higher grade than you" kind of thing, and "Let me see what grade you got on this," and that kind of problem?

A: No. In most of the cases, we really made no emphasis on grades at all.

Q: You didn't give grades, i.e., letter grades?

A: We gave grades, but they were almost all the A/B category.

Q: I see.

A: And minimized them. Because actually what we were doing with gifted youngsters was . . . through experiential learning there are certain things which you can't really evaluate.

Q: That's true.

A: And, you know, who did what better. We really worked at a kind of social service, too. A good example, we were . . . the class studied the Mary Bryant Home. They were the first group of children to go in there. They had to face the fact that these people were handicapped and couldn't see. So they structured everything they did at the Mary Bryant around touching and hearing. So we would do drama and we would tape it. Each child would take someone at Mary Bryant to be near. We take refreshments, something that was different in the taste line. This sort of thing of recognizing the limitations of other people made them aware of their own, and appreciating how others can compensate for shortcomings. This is something we studied. We studied enough psychology to set up a rat maze, my mouse maze, and be into the research angle, of all kinds of recording of data. Now these are things that you really can't measure.

Q: Right.

A: And we followed a lot of individual interest with youngsters. So you see, in a situation like that grades aren't important.

Q: Right. How were the children selected for this? Was it strictly I.Q.?

A: No, it was really an examination of about five different things. Yes, we did consider I.Q., and at that time maybe more emphasis was put on it. We examined records that had the child a year to two years ahead of grade placement on an achievement test. It was by teacher observation. And when I say teacher observation, anyone dealing with the child. In some instances, it was by interviewing parents. In administrative decisions, maturity of a child had a good deal to do with the final decision.

Q: Did you find that you were able to have what's referred to now as an open classroom type of situation with these children, because of their motivational level?

A: Definitely.

Q: That you did not have to have a strict kind of discipline, an "everybody in their seat" type of thing?

A: No, no.

Q: Then the children were pretty free to pursue their own thing?

A: Yes, and I can remember getting into a little bit of trouble over this. Teaching youngsters like that really not confined to cognitive learning. A lot of it is so effective. So, we had enough of an open

sort of relationship with youngsters that my point to them is that I am not absolute. I am guilty of saying something very incorrect. And you have the right to challenge any statement I make. And I would bait them when we were beginning this. So that if they contradicted me, the only thing I asked is they be able to logically explain why they did not agree with me. This is certainly remote from . . . the traditional classroom, the more regimented condition. And when these youngsters got through with the sixth grade, and they went into a much more traditional middle school situation, it became very difficult for them to make the adjustment.

Q: So this was over as of sixth grade? It was just for three years.

A: Now many of them could stay together in middle school. There were some classes composed of not a hundred percent, but with many of the gifted kids in them. But the methodology at middle school was considerably different than it had been. And after all, those youngsters had to adjust to all kinds of situations.

Q: Right.

A: But . . . I'm not sorry I created the openness.

Q: Were they tracked at all in junior high? And are they at this point in time?

A: No.

Q: There is no tracking at all? In high school? Not in high school either? That is . . .

A: No. There are some courses that are weighted as far as differently is concerned.

Q: I see.

A: The tracking is, is . . .

Q: Out. Educationally, right.

A: This again gets back to . . . the segregation idea. And as we get into desegregation, I think in order to maintain racial balance in classes, we have to consider the fact that it will be hetergenously grouped.

Q: I think there's no other way. About your open classroom kind of discipline, do you think that this would work with a hetergenous class?

A: Yes.

Q: You think it can work? So you do believe in . . .

A: I think an open classroom can work as long as . . . if it is possible to convey to children at a very early age that they must assume some responsibility. It's crucial. Because they, as long as they can be responsible for their own actions, it follows that they can maintain

their self-control to follow a program in an open classroom. Open classroom does not imply bedlam at all. It does imply learning at different rates of speed and following interest areas. And I think it's great. But it takes much more time and much more planning than a traditional "everybody turn to page three."

Q: Right. But what about the children that everybody always says are, you know, not motivated, are "discipline problems" in that kind of a situation? You know, how would you handle that kind of a child?

A: Okay, now within an open classroom, it is not implied that . . . there is no grouping.

Q: Right.

A: That's it, everybody doing something different. So I believe it's possible to group those youngsters. I think in many instances it would be wise if we would say to parents, "In this building there is one classroom set up in an open classroom atmosphere, there is one very traditional, there is one halfway between the two." And say, "Which program would you prescribe for your own child?" This would be the ideal thing. And this is one advantage in having a school of limited numbers of grades, because it's much more possible to create a situation when you can give a choice to children and the parents.

Q: Right. The present situation seems to be that it depends upon the individual teacher. And it's for . . .

A: Yes, and the make-up of the child.

Q: Right. And as for as the parent is concerned, it's taking potluck, in effect, as far as the form of discipline that's being used or the type of classroom situation that there is. Is there any way that . . . well, you do foresee that may be possible under a different way of structuring?

A: Definitely.

Q: You think that the "less academically able children" are able to function in an open classroom using their own self-discipline kind of a set up?

A: Yes. Because they learn, let's say, at a slower rate doesn't mean that you can't teach them a kind of independence and a self-reliance. Now true, they need a little more spoon-feeding, but I still feel that any situation in which we can help the child become more responsible for his actions and for his learning, we get closer to the more adjusted adult. If we go ahead and tell them the rest of their lives, where are they when we suddenly turn them loose? I feel that we're building better people by having them have some expectations for themselves, feel it most strongly.

Q: Right. That, though, is always the argument of people who feel that the more traditional is the better approach. The fact that some children "are not self-disciplined," and, give them free reign, they are going to create havoc rather than learn, if they are given a choice.

A: See, a lot of this goes back to the home, too. And this is, if there is some cooperation between the home and the school, and the parents recognize the responsibility that must be put on children. Now I'm not talking about superhuman responsibility. I don't want them treated any way but at the age they are, and assuming only that responsibility that they're capable of assuming. But if the expectation of the teacher of the school and the parent is the same, regardless of their ability, you know, be it strong or weak, they'll progress. Unless they're exceedingly lazy.

End of Tape