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Herb Lang

Anchorage, Alaska

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Leslie McCartney, interviewer

Herb Lang talks about his personal background. He was born in New Jersey and left in 1947. He traveled up to Alaska in August of 1947. He started school at the University of Alaska in Fairbanks. He got a job working at the agricultural experimental station. He also had room and board out there. He thought it sounded like a good idea for a job. He talked about the process for choosing a major. He received a degree in agriculture in 1951. He said the university was rather small before WWII. After the war there were a lot of vets with a G.I. Bill. The University of Alaska appealed to them. A lot of students were older than average. Many spent a year or two and left. He said the school had about 200-250 students. The university started to expand. The state had expanded during the war. The Highway was built and homesteading was still available. There were just eight agriculture majors in his graduating class. Dr. Bunnell finished his career in 1949. He had a variety of titles. As a student the president was accessible. He talked about the different dorms on campus. Hess Hall was the girl's dormitory. The vets dorm was built in 1948. He said all of the buildings are gone now except for Hess Hall.

Most of the students were from outside Fairbanks. Most of the students that lived in Fairbanks just commuted. He talked about college flats where students lived in cabins. He ate in the cafeteria. The menu was challenging. The university had a lot of frozen food that was left over from WWII. He talked about eating beef heart. He said tuition wasn't very high. They didn't have many holidays but they had a long summer to get a job. A lot of people hired students. He had several different jobs. He worked for the Bureau of Land Management. He served as an apprentice carpenter and worked with Jay Hammond. He worked one summer down in Fort Lewis, Washington because he was in ROTC. The university was changing at that time. They were modernizing programs. They changed the name of the university. The Geophysical Institute brought a lot of scientific attention to the university.

He later learned that the legislature had failed to appropriate any money to the university in 1949. There were plans to defund the university and start a new university in Juneau. Judge Bunnell and the banks in Fairbanks raised enough money to keep the university going for a few months. The legislature had a special session to fund the university. When he graduated he got a scholarship to go to Sweden. He spent his time in Lapland doing research on reindeer.

During the Korean War he was commissioned in the infantry. He spent a couple years in the war. He then attended school at the University of Pennsylvania and had a degree in finance. He worked for the territorial government and did different things. He and two partners ended up with Anchorage Sand and Gravel.

At the university there was always something coming up. He was appointed to the Board of Regents in 1979-1985. He had been appointed by Jay Hammond. He applied for the vacancy. He was in South Africa when he was appointed. He got to know the earlier history of the university. He learned about the problems in 1949. Being on the Board of Regents was interesting. Money was available at that time. The legislators from the cities were supportive and gave appropriations. Some of the Bush people weren't. He was made treasurer of the board. He would lobby in Juneau. They were successful sometimes. They had qualified people in the accounting section of the university. He understood quite a bit because of his background. Sherman Carter was the comptroller of the university. He talked about appropriated money. The university was growing. Anchorage, Juneau and the community colleges were added to the university. The board had to decide which university segment would emphasize what. There was a request for a medical school, law school, veterinary school, etc., but the university couldn't support those. They did have the WAMI program which involved UA, Washington State, Idaho and Oregon. They could send students from Alaska into the other states with in-state tuition. It was very practical. The community colleges wanted to teach more and more. They wanted to give bachelor degrees. They wanted a community college at Pt. Barrow. They wanted a college that would be run independently under the umbrella of the university. They had to divide up the money. He discussed articulation. Some of the community college classes weren't being accepted at the university level. Students coming from the Bush into the university were failing. They found that the educational system in the Bush is challenged to keep students in the school. They needed preparation. He talked about the academy to help rural students in Fairbanks with good results. They didn't run the details of the university as members of the Board of Regents. Before he served on the Board of Regents there were four presidents in one year. He said choosing a good president meant that the Board of Regents was successful. He interviewed candidates for the position of president of the university. They started with 113 candidates. He said different types of presidents were needed for different times. When he served on the Board of Regents there was a lot of building on the campuses. Juneau was getting into fisheries, nursing was at Anchorage, and the sciences were at Fairbanks. Oil money was coming in. The permanent fund was being created at this time. He had also served on the city assembly so he knew how to partition his time.

He talked about his time at the university. He said there weren't many holidays when he was attending school. There wasn't a lot going on in the winter. The clubs had dances. Leslie asked about memorable professors. Herb said he took course that he found interesting, but may not have applied to his major his first two years. He had to get back on his curriculum after that. Lynn Hollister ran the agriculture program. He took a year of economics from Dr. Wagner. He took accounting which turned out to be beneficial. There were good people teaching. The classes were small and you could get help. He talked about the agriculture classes he took. A few of the students had foreign backgrounds. He worked for the territorial land office. The university was a land-grant college. The principles for agriculture didn't quite work up here in Alaska.

As a regent he felt they brought some good people in. They made some tough decisions about allocation of resources throughout the system. They had to decide who was going to carry out which program. He said he doesn't hear about the conflicts so much anymore. They got money for programs. He said it is a lot of work being a regent. There were labor negotiations to deal with, too. He said the university is a

good university and the standards are good. He went to a prestigious university in Pennsylvania and was able to get through it after attending the University of Alaska. He was the only agriculture student to take the MBA program in finance in two years.