

Sonya Margerum Interview

Conducted by Katherine Markee on September 29, 2009



The following interview was conducted with Sonya Margerum (SM) for the Purdue University Oral History Project. It took place on Tuesday September 29, 2009 in Stewart Center. The interviewer is Katherine Markee (KM), the Oral History Librarian.

KM: Welcome and good afternoon.

SM: Thank you.

KM: Let's start off; tell us a little about where you were born and your parents and siblings and early years.

SM: Well for a politician I was born in Washington, D.C. which gave me a leg up. [laughs] But my father worked for the government and went to law school in Washington and so then I lived there till I was sixteen then we moved back to Iowa where my father practiced law and I went to high school in Iowa.

KM: Tell us a little about where you went to grade school, in the district?

SM: Yes, in the district I went to grade school and then we lived in Maryland, Montgomery County and went to Silver Spring, Tacoma Park, and Bethesda.

KM: Tell us a little then in high school, in Iowa tell us a little about any organizations or what high school was like out there.

SM: Well it was...

KM: Things was sort of a change though, huh?

SM: Yeah, it was quite a change in fact, I cried all the way out, [laughs] to Iowa thinking this was the end of my life but I enjoyed it very much and I had lost of cousins and relatives there. Grinnell College is in Grinnell, Iowa. It's a town of about 7,000 so it was a college town and had all the advantages of a college town and so I was active in high school. I was on...

KM: Some student clubs?

SM: Yeah the students clubs. I was president of the student body in my junior year and president or editor of the year book and a lot of other athletic organizations.

KM: What was the size of the high school? Was it a large high school?

SM: No, no it was I think 120 in our graduating class so it was not a large high school.

KM: You got to know everybody.

SM: Yes, right.

KM: Ok then what came next?

SM: Well then I went to St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota.

KM: How did you happen to select that?

SM: Well it was a Norwegian Lutheran College and my grandfather, grandparents, came from Norway so we had a strong family tradition of relating to Norway and my parents were interested in my going to a Lutheran college and that seemed like the farthest one away. [laughs] So that's where I decide to go.

KM: Can't get home on weekends

SM: But it was a good choice because St. Olaf has a very strong science department and I was...I majored in Biology and then had to take so many chemistry and physics courses that I did a double major in biology and chemistry. Plus it was a liberal art college and I very interested in history and political science and great many other things.

KM: Anybody else from your high school that went there or are you the only one?

SM: No I was the only one that went.

KM: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

SM: Yes, I have a younger sister. She's eight years younger than I am, Karen* and she went to St. Olaf also.

KM: Ok, that worked out nicely.

SM: So, that worked out.

KM: Then what happened after you graduated from high school? What came next?

SM: Graduate from college?

KM: Yeah, graduate from college.

SM: Well that was 1952 and so I started looking around for jobs. I had thought at one time that I might be interested in medical technology or research and biology but that was all going to require some more training or a master's degree and I was

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offered a job at Ames Lab at Iowa State University. Ames Lab was kind of the last part of the Manhattan Project which had to do with the making of the atomic bomb. And so this was a highly secret lab. Everybody knew it was there of course but we had to have Q clearance and work under security and my job was...I worked in the control lab and had to analyze Thorium and Uranium and rare earth specimens and to sample the products that were going into the making of Thorium. They made Thorium which was one of the metals in the bomb. So it was a very interesting job. Lots of interesting people and my husband was a graduate student and his major professor was in charge of the control lab and there was about 15 or 20 of us in the control lab and then he had 15 or 20 graduate students who were doing research and assisting and so that's how we met, over a Bunsen burner. [laughs]

KM: That's pretty good. Better than mortar and pestle right?

SM: Right.

KM: Then what came?

SM: Well then he was finishing up his degree and his major...

KM: Did you get married out there?

SM: Yes we were married in 1953 and his major professor was offered a position at Purdue. And he decided he wanted to say where he was but he suggested that he had his bright young graduate student that would be just perfect for it but Dale hadn't finished his degree yet so we picked up and came out to Purdue and he

spent his first year here finishing up his PhD and then getting acquainted in West Lafayette.

KM: What did you do, drive from there to here?

SM: Yes.

KM: What was your impression? You'd never been here before?

SM: No I hadn't been here before.

KM: Had Dale been...

SM: It's much like Iowa so it wasn't all that different.

KM: Had Dale come before for an interview?

SM: Yes...well no he didn't even come for an interview. Those were the days where they didn't have a formal kind of process.

KM: We have an opening and your it.

SM: [laughs] That's right, we need somebody right away. And of course there's still a large number of veterans coming back and they were in desperate need of faculty so we kind of came...

KM: Where did you reside? Where did you live when you first came here?

SM: Well we lived down on Wood Street, on the corner of Wood and Grant where the graduate house is now. And we lived in an old house. We lived upstairs and another faculty family lived downstairs. And in fact that was characteristic of

those times. This would have been '53 or '54 and we lived in that house until 1960 and most of the faculty lived in converted houses south of State Street.

KM: Because there were a lot more houses than there are today.

SM: Yes there were. And I mean, people lived in the village over some of the businesses and I mean things were so bad there that for a while people were sleeping in their cars. I mean it was very tight and a lot of families then took in and hosted students too.

KM: Very tight. Was the varsity apartments, was that built at that time?

SM: Yeah varsity apartment was there. And the village was truly a village then. There was a women's clothing store and a men's clothing store. And Follett's was kind of a, almost a department store. They had a variety of things. There was the piggy wiggly grocery store. [laughs]

KM: I've heard that name mentioned.

SM: And a butcher shop and they delivered groceries for you. And you could just charge them and then they would deliver.

KM: Was the bookstore where it is now?

SM: Yes Follett's was there. University Bookstore was where it is now. University Bookstore was across the street now where Krannert is and that was on the corner there. And the village looked pretty much the same. Von's was there and

there was a big hardware store, Dillon's, which had everything that you could want.

KM: Like hardware stores used to have.

SM: Yeah, hardware and everything, Halloween costumes and everything. So the village was truly a...

KM: And it was within walking distance, that's great.

SM: Yes, yes so we walked to campus. I worked in the...and then I got a job in the...

KM: I was going to ask you what you did.

SM: Yeah I worked in the chemistry department. I worked in the micro analytical lab so I worked there for about 5 years.

KM: Ok would that have been in what's known as Wetherill today? That building?

SM: Yeah, it was in Wetherill. And professor Yeow, Chinsing Yeow* was my boss and so we were good friends then for many, many years.

KM: Sure, that's nice. Well let's see now then shall we move a little bit to the university and the mayor.

SM: Ok [laughs]

KM: How did you...

SM: Well was a little period in between.

KM: Ok, go ahead.

10:00 **SM:** Our first child was born in 1959 and so we lived as I say down on State Street and then we bought a house, well we built a house where we live presently which is on Seminal Drive which is just off of Indian Trail. And so we moved and then we had a second son so when we moved into that house in 1960 we had 1 baby who was 2 or 3 months old and then 1 and a half year old. And then I stayed home for 20 years and...

KM: Raised the children.

SM: Yeah, raised the children.

KM: What was the area? Was it very built up, Sonya at that time?

SM: It was just building up. That was just Wabash shores as it's now known. Developed by the Lux but that was just being developed so there were...highway 52 was just a 2 lane road and the high school was kind of the end of where the growth was just beyond that.

KM: Hills and Dales was built was that...

SM: Yeah, Hills and Dales was built in the 30's and so Hills and Dales and then it went up to probably Lindburg and then Wabash Shores is north of that between Lindburg and 52 so that all developed during that period.

KM: And of course Smithy's [?] was there too.

SM: And Smithy's was there. And Burtsfield School was established in 1958 I believe or '59. So it was immediately filled with children and they had large classes and all three of our children went all the way through Burtsfield.

KM: That was a great location then for you. It was nice.

SM: Yeah it was.

KM: Then...then what come next?

SM: Well I became active in the league of women voters. My mother had been active in the league and she was a pretty active volunteer when we lived in Iowa. She was president of the hospital auxiliary and very active in the church and the league of women voters was one of her pet projects so I got involved in the league. And it was...the meetings were in the evenings or in the afternoon. You could bring your children. And I met lots of wonderful people who are still my good friends. And so many of the women who are in office or have been in office, in elective office all came out of the league of women voters, both republican and democrat.

KM: Was the league, would that include Lafayette and West Lafayette?

SM: Well that's interesting; at that time they were separate. There was the West Lafayette league and the Lafayette league. And then as I became more active and got on the board I became the president in 19...I think it was in '62 or '63 and we came together then and became the greater Lafayette League and I was always very proud of that fact that we...

KM: That sounds reasonable. Because both of them would be small and you can do a lot with a larger group and working together.

SM: And I think the philosophy of the league has guided me through the years and that is it's a based grassed roots organization that the ideas and the programs come from the membership. And they come to consensus on what the stand is. The league takes positions on issues but never on candidates or on political parties so it's partisan on issues and nonpartisan on political parties. And so that philosophy I think has been important limits has guided me. That you need to study the issue, get your group to come together on consensus and then take action so I really enjoyed that. But then I was active in school organizations.

KM: With the children and things.

SM: Yes. We just went, when we were in Oregon we went to our youngest or next to the youngest grandson was just starting kindergarten and they were asking the parents to participate and I can remember what a thrill that was the first time that I became a real mother.

KM: We never forget do we?

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SM: [laughs] No. Those were important years and then I was active in the church. I belonged to Xavier Lutheran Church right off campus and so I was active in a lot of church, religious organizations also. But the league I think was what certainly got me started and as a...being in the league I went to a lot of meetings and sat and watched government perform or not perform as the case may be and I guess

about that time I thought, you know I think maybe I could do just as good a job as some of those people sitting up there. [laughs] So I began to be interested in maybe getting involved in politics at a deeper level. So I became a precinct committeeman which again is kind of the grassroots approach.

KM: Get to know people too.

SM: Yeah, right. And there's a lot of door to door, one on one but also then putting it all together into an action plan is the part that's always I think important part of politics that it leads to a goal of action. So I got very involved in party politics.

KM: Ok, and then the next step was you decided to run?

SM: Yes in 19...well in the very famous election of 1968 if you remember that battle action that was Jane McCarthy* and Bobby Kennedy and Governor Branigin who was a stand in for President Johnson. And that was the primary in Indiana. And it was a very bitterly fought primary and lots of national figures, Walter Cronkite and Paul Newman came to town and all the candidates and for the first time Purdue really hosted a political discussion. The music hall, 5,000 people showed up for Jane McCarthy and a week later 5,000 showed up for Bobby Kennedy and Teddy Kennedy came, John Kennedy came so that was prior to that. So I think it really began, people began to be more politically conscious of being active in their political party and that they could make a difference. So that kind of spurred me on, [laughs] inspired me I guess.

KM: And then you decided to run?

SM: Yes, so in 1971 I decided that I would run for the city council. And I always say that it's very good to be humbled early in your career [laughs] because you don't ever forget that. And I lost. But...

KM: It's a learning...

SM: That was a learning experience and I think it's important to go through that and to know what it's like and to get some experience. And along the way I met a lot of people that became my friends and supporters and who are still my friends.

KM: You need a core.

SM: Yeah and I think that's one of the things that I have enjoyed about politics is that I've gotten to meet a whole variety of people. People that I wouldn't have known otherwise, students and faculty but union members, people from Lafayette, farmers...

KM: Across wide...wide cross...

SM: A whole cross section of people who care about their government and want to be participants. And I value that experience. And I've learned a great deal from all of those groups of people and individuals that I've interacted with. One of my early friends and supporters was Stan Jones who some of you may remember was the student body president of Purdue at the time and was at that time I think all though Purdue was described as a bastion of campus rest. There was some unrest and there were...there was a sit in at the Union and a kind of riot in the streets of State Street so there was quite a bit of agitation.

KM: Some people refer to that in other interviews as the Unrest.

SM: The unrest, yeah. I think Newsweek quoted us at that. That's where it came from.
[laughs]

KM: Where it came from. [laughs]

20:00 **SM:** It was a bit of unrest. [laughs]

KM: They didn't cite the source. [laughs]

SM: But still people got involved. And Stan's offered to help me in that campaign and even though I lost [laughs] I did appreciate his help and he was a great political organizer he really...

KM: Nice person.

SM: Learned a great deal from Stan and as you know he ended up as chairman of the higher education and is now in Washington working for the department of the gates foundation and education so he has continued, took that role. But in 1972 he said well I think I'd like to run for the state legislature and why don't you be my campaign manager? So I don't know where it was quite the blind leading the blind, [laughs] inexperience leading inexperience.

KM: Or learning from each other.

SM: Yeah [laughs]. So we learned a great deal but Stan lost. [laughs] But he was very active. The thing that was again the hard to remember is he conducted that whole campaign barefooted. So that was the stile then. Everybody went

barefooted and it was casual and they marched on the state house to try to keep tuition down and I thought that it was interesting the contrast to the last increase in tuition and there was hardly a ripple but at that time it was a little more active.

KM: Different times.

SM: But then in '74 Stan ran for office and was successful.

KM: He was doing the senate right? State senate?

SM: No he was in house.

KM: Ok, in house. I forgot which one it was.

SM: He was in the house then for 16 years. But he continued to be...he wasn't my campaign manager but very active in all the campaigns that I ran and Margariette Trachtman* who husband Lee Trachtman* has been an active faculty member for years was my campaign manager for six terms and Stan's campaign manager for six terms. So that's...

KM: That's nice.

SM: She's got quite a...

KM: Good experience.

SM: Good experience and we both were very grateful to her for her help. But I think that's the kind of thing that's interesting about politics is that you get to know people that you wouldn't have known otherwise who work very hard for you and you've never know them before and then maybe your best friend doesn't

participate at all because that's just not their thing. They just don't care to do that.
So it's kind of interesting that...

KM: The differences in the people that come and what their willing to give for that thing.

SM: Yeah that's right.

KM: And they give it in different levels.

SM: That's right and I certainly would never blame anybody because they didn't do this or that but it's just interesting how many people have come along and said I like what you're saying I'd like to help you and then really work very hard on your behalf and I said that the...

KM: You value that.

SM: Yeah and you get to know people at their best and at their worst and they also see you at your worst and your best so it...

KM: It's a big sharing and you learn each day and you look back on it and you still learn from it.

SM: Yes you do even the times when you felt the lowest. [laughs] You take something away from that and should I mean that's part of life is to gain something from that experience.

KM: [agrees] And a lot of people don't take advantage of gaining like something and they should. It's an individual kind of thing.

SM: Yeah that's right.

KM: Well good. Now can you tell us...go ahead.

SM: So then 1976 I decided that well I would run again. Now my 2 children, the oldest 2, the oldest one graduated from high school in 1976 and the younger one graduated in '77 so that seemed like a pretty good time to do it. They were well launched and by then we had another son who was in eighth grade and so I thought that would be a good time.

KM: You could work it in.

SM: Yeah. And so I ran for the city council then. And I was successful so I was launched you would say. I was finally successful.

KM: I'm on my way.

SM: Yeah right. Although at the time I certainly wasn't looking much beyond that. I was just trying...

KM: One win a day.

25:00 **SM:** Yeah that's right. Try to keep everything together. And then I guess I began to think if I'm going to be involved in politics and government whether I run for office or whether I'm a volunteer or whether I maybe end up teaching or doing something else I need an advance degree. As I said my degrees were in chemistry and biology. So I decided to go...Purdue was starting a public policy program. And I thought that sound just exactly what I wanted to do. So I enrolled

in that program and so I worked on my masters then from '76 to '79 and that was again a great experience that was brand new during the early days of computers when you had little boxes full of cards and if you tripped and dropped them your semester work was done. [laughs]

KM: I heard about those cards. [laughs]

SM: And then I learned to be like a student. Go over to the math building and sit on the floor at one o'clock in the morning waiting to get on the computer.

KM: With my cards?

SM: With my cards. [laughs] But I learned a great deal obviously.

KM: Isn't it an appropriate time in your life to do that kind of thing?

SM: Yeah it was it was...

KM: Just worked out nicely with what you'd been doing up till then.

SM: Yep it was and it was kind of a step forward. And I took several courses in public policy and then quite a few courses in civil engineering. Which at the time I didn't think about it but that proved to be very valuable. Transportation course and one in systems analysis. Then the computer statistics course and economics and...

KM: Nice balance.

SM: So I was able to put together a program that I thought would be useful for me and actually I finally got my...things began to change a little bit because the person who started to program left and so I actually got my degree in political science

then. But it was the same program and they continued for a few more years but I got my degree in 1979 in May and was elected mayor then in the fall of 1979. So that was...

KM: A new era, a new step.

SM: But that was a very difficult time as you can imagine, go to school, keep up with children, and family. And at the same time my husband was head of the chemistry department. And so it was...I look back on it and I don't know how we did it except I was quite a bit younger then. [laughs]

KM: We could do it. We can do it. [laughs]

SM: But it was very good and I was...the person I ran against was Katie Hunter who was a council member with me and so for the first time 2 women ran for the mayor and we said you know those who are against women in office had no place to go. [laughs] They didn't have any choice. But it was a very I think a good campaign. And I was fortunate enough to win so I was obviously thrilled. And then I always remember thinking...I don't know if you remember the Robert Redford movie *The Candidate*? You know he's the sort of unknown person and they push into the presidency and at the end of the film he's sitting in his seat and he looks at the camera and he said what do we do now? [laughs] And I must admit I had a little bit of that.

KM: That's ok. That's part of the process. I'm here.

SM: But it is rather awe inspiring and to all of a sudden the day you walk into office you've got to make a hundred decisions about things you know very little about. I had been active when I was on the council and I tried to understand as well as I could what was going on in government and Mayor Dean Hart* who was the mayor at that time, I asked him if I could sit in on council meetings. He was republican but he was willing to let me do that so I had a little experience but it's nothing like when you're sitting there and you got to make the decision. And so...

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KM: The buck stops here.

SM: That's right so it is at first certainly...

KM: But you grow with it.

SM: Yeah. You do and I had some very good people to help me.

KM: Which you nurtured over the years.

SM: Yes and we had a...there was a majority of democrats who were elected with me so that helped a little bit. It was four to three and then one of the democrats left and when and took another job and so it reverted back to the republican four to three. But that was not a huge thing to overcome because they were people I knew somewhat but I think the key is having good people who you can depend on and who's judgment you trust. I mean obviously I'm not a civil engineer. I learned a great deal about it but you got to have an engineer who when he says this is the way it's gotta be. Here's how you have to run the wastewater treatment plan, here's the rules.

KM: This is an expert that you can depend upon and really knows what he or she is talking about.

SM: And I think the mistake sometimes that mayors or people moving into new jobs think they have to decide everything and that they've got to micromanage everything and you know eventually you do have to know a great deal more but at first you really need to depend on other people.

KM: And you learn from them too.

SM: Oh absolutely.

KM: And that's part of it. That's what education is all about and you...they bring something to the table that can assist and you value that.

SM: Right, and I had a very good city attorney, Bob [inaudible] who had been...actually he was Stan's friend and then he kind of came in to help me and he's a very, very smart guy and my father was an attorney and so he was of course very interested. They came, my mother and father, came for the inauguration and obviously they were very proud of their daughter and so my father said is well first thing you gotta do is get a code, the Indiana code and I said well why do I need that? I'm not a judge and he said but you need that. And I didn't realize at the time but I soon realized you got to know state law as well as your local ordinances. In fact state law and federal law are probably a lot more important than ordinances because you can always change the ordinances but you have to obey the state and federal law.

KM: That overrides it.

SM: And that I think is the hardest thing because I think you can make some very serious errors just not knowing...

KM: That there's another law that supersedes it.

SM: Yeah that supersedes it so having an attorney and also there's a lot of smart people in West Lafayette who are a lot of people in civil engineering and biology and all the environmental issues that certainly would tell me and were quite vocal about telling me if I was wrong or need some more information.

KM: [inaudible] and the overall results which might occur.

SM: Yeah and so that's very important to be open to information and then the real challenge is how do you sort out the information and decide which is more important and then how do you apply that then to the actions that have to be taken. And that's part of that experience thing and it always reminds me of a joke that I used to tell about the guy who worked for a company and made this terrible mistake and caused 10 million dollar lose to his company and so the boss calls him in and he said well I suppose you want to fire me and he said no I just invested 10 million dollars in your education. You can stay now so. [laughs]

KM: [laughs] Good line.

SM: So I think that was important. But the issues at that time were really starting in the 60's of course. There had been the movement of students into the housing surrounding campus and that set up real conflict with the neighborhoods around

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campus who when they got lots of students next door and they stayed up late partying and they had children put to bed and trash left in the neighborhood so there was...it was a very difficult time because we had no way at that time of handling that. It was a brand new change. And also Purdue had changed their attitude. Well it was nationwide and no longer if there was a problem off campus could you call up the dean of students and he would call the people in and say stop doing that or they'd call their parents. In local parentis was gone. Was gone by then so once students were off campus it was the responsibility of the city and so that was a very difficult time. We managed to get a code enforcement program and it was a big struggle but I'm proud to say that's still the program we're using. And that was done in about '81 or '82. So it's proved that...it's been modified but basically the code enforcement program is...

KM: Was it during that time they started the building of the apartments too?

SM: Yes....

KM: Because before that, I've been here a long time as you know, there weren't a lot of apartments. Students of course lived on campus but there wasn't as many as there are now.

SM: Yeah and then students just started moving off campus in droves so it changed the nature of neighborhoods.

KM: The whole landscape.

SM: Yeah and then there was...as I say the conflicts became really quite difficult. We also instituted a noise ordinance which again is still in effect and it's worked and the purpose of the noise ordinance was if it's too noisy that it offends you then it's too noisy. And we went through a big process well you've got to have certain decibel limits and all that. And found out that that was very difficult to do. We had a class at Purdue that worked on that. But we were able then to kind of put the lid on the excessive noise late at night and after 12 and that gradually had made a difference and also the change in attitude in students and Purdue has changed over that period of time. But those were very difficult times.

KM: Yeah, your partnership with PRF particularly that development of the Purdue research park. You had a liaison with that. You want to comment on that?

SM: Yes, that has been long, as you know. PRF really developed all of the land north of the bypass. All of Barbury Heights...

KM: University Apartments.

SM: Yeah because those were all Purdue farms so they actually developed Barbury Heights and then sold it to various builders and University farms then they sold off that and the developers did it themselves. And the very beginnings of the research parks then started when Hencial* who many people remember was the head of PRF and it moved very slowly at first and there were some serious problems with drainage and zoning and I think some of the kind of the early problems were that Purdue felt that at least some of the people on the administration that they knew best how to do things. And that they really didn't

need to be subject to local controls and that began to cause some problems I think. Well not I think, I know. [laughs] But then that whole land began to develop and it was certainly in both of our best interests that West Lafayette would grow because the University was just growing at a huge rate and there was not enough housing by a long shot and that's why people started moving out, they started building apartments and then the issue came of tearing down older houses and putting apartments in place and so there were a lot of conflicts.

KM: I would imagine.

SM: And then at what point do you sort of say well that's the way things are going well just have to give in and how much do you insist on maintaining standards that maybe are not still quite appropriate. So at some point we sort of made the decision that south of State Street was going to be a student area and we would, we had to insist on safe conditions and was one of the things that we found. That there just and running for office and knocking on doors and crawling up ladders into apartments that went on the top of a roof we realized that there had to be something done about code enforcement. And so we instituted a lot of things like smoke detectors and fire walls and new construction so there were a lot of things that were done at that time.

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KM: You put in new railings on a lot of those too that did...even if there was a walk down at the end you put a small railing there and I mean at home we have apartments there.

SM: Yeah but each one of those little steps were always struggle because then developers didn't want to pay for them. And then they would tell the students that they would cause their rent to go up and so we always tried to balance these in contending.

KM: Little faction came in right?

SM: That's right.

KM: Of course then Discovery Park came along then too.

SM: Yes well of course that was just a huge jump forward and that just has made an enormous difference and the research park was I say very slow to get started but it wasn't quite time yet. I mean research I think the North Carolina research park had been successful but nobody else had really done that much so that's...

KM: But now the times it really caught on and expanded.

SM: Oh just tremendously.

KM: Exactly, talk a little bit, would you, on that town and [inaudible]. Was that going on before or during your administration when Dr. Jischke came or? The researchers might want to know about the town.

SM: Yeah, well I would say before 1980 we really existed side by side with really not much relationship between the two. It was really interesting there; I mean Grant Street was just like the river. [laughs] I mean there was Purdue over there and there was the city over here. But then that broke down as I say after...when the

increase in population, campus population increased so tremendously. And it spilled over into the city. And I think the early conflicts were that Purdue began to think about expanding into the city on the other side of Grant Street. And that really caused some serious problems. Because if you look at a map of West Lafayette you can see that its sort of a narrow spot between Grant Street and the river and of course at that time there was no Wabash Landing and then it kind of comes down into a cone and then it goes up around the outside of campus until it gets north of the bypass. But that area right between us and the river was getting squeezed and our contention was that you got all this land to the west why aren't you expanding to the west and so that caused some real friction. I think that the last one was when they took University, the bookstore on the corner of Grant and State Street for the Krannert and it was sort of no more. [laughs] And so that was a very severe problem and Purdue was, the administration was looking after what they considered the best interests of the University as a worldwide University at the same time the city was saying look were providing waste water service for you, police protection, and your faculty lives in West Lafayette so we need to have a world class city as well as your looking at a world class university we've got to be able to have room and the resources to do what we need to do.

KM: To maintain it.

SM: And I think some of the conflicts were well we know the best way to do it and if you don't go along, city you're not cooperating and that got kind of tense from time to time. [laughs]

KM: Little testy there, yeah. [laughs]

45:00 **SM:** But we tried to keep it on as a even a plane as possible and I think in both instances we both know that the other, we were totally dependent on the other and so we were able to work them out but just things like when the first section of the research park went in, the subdivision control ordinance requires sidewalks and they did not want to put sidewalks in because it was a big expense. It was a huge expense because it was a lot of land. And we insisted and that, that was a very tense time. But I've always felt we were correct and it's proved that was important now and people use those sidewalks and if there not there of course people don't use them, if they're not there was their contention.

KM: Now you got the trails. That's another thing that's really changed over the years to isn't it. Right.

SM: One of the other big issues was the waste water treatment plant. And we had lots of problems with that. It was...the people running the plant were from the old school. You just did the best you could and if rained well you just had to open the gates and let it go but with the Clean Water Act you are under criminal penalties if you had that happen so we had some very tense and very difficult times just internally with our own staff and with some of the, I hate to call them environmentalists because they were really more agitators [laughs] who wanted so say you know you're doing all kinds of terrible things and we were doing the best we could and then of course in order to make these changes, in order to meet the requirements of the Clean Water Act we had to make some very large

investments and the city handles all the waste water for Purdue and of course half the flow is from Purdue. And the cost is based on the flow and so they felt they should get a break and we're saying you know well it's by the gallon and if you want to reduce how much inflow you've got from rain water and other things well that's good but we can't have two schedules, one for Purdue and one for everybody else so that was kind of a tense time and the fact that some of the problems at the north end of the city, Purdue's at the south end they didn't think they should have to pay for it but that I said well that's the one thing I learned in systems analysis. That everybody in the system is affected. [laughs]

KM: Those horses came to brute, right?

SM: So that course really came through for me. [laughs] But I think the big difference was when Martin Jischke became president and it was somewhat of a subtle difference. I mean things were not bad, terrible, but they were not as harmonious as one would hope and the first thing that President Jischke did was he asked me and Mayor Riehle who was the mayor of Lafayette at the time, and the three legislators to come to breakfast. That was before he was even sworn in. And first thing he said was what can Purdue do to help you? And we all went [drops jaw]. [laughs] It was really a seat change and it was interesting how everybody down the line also bought into that idea and things I think really changed tremendously.

KM: He appointed that committee, didn't you have a committee?

SM: Yes and then that was one of the things we said, if we had a committee so we can discuss these things publicly and we got to include the students too I mean

they're part of this and they were not used to doing that. Having students on these discussion committees to talk about some of these issues and bring them out in the public and not just have them behind closed doors. And he was very willing to do that and he put Tom Robinson and his highest officers on that and I sat in on it so that we showed emphasis.

KM: And it was well publicized too.

SM: Yeah.

KM: And a lot of things came out of that.

SM: Yeah.

KM: And a lot of people who really were supportive and worked on that.

SM: Yeah. It made a big difference from the dean of students' office and some of our council members. So...

KM: Is that committee still going do you know?

SM: I'm not sure whether it still is or not. I know that it was still going when Jan Mills was mayor because I remember she was one of my appointments to that committee and that was one of the ways she got involved. But I don't know. I haven't heard much about it recently.

KM: I hadn't either, that's why I wondered but I'm just not sure. We'll have to check on that.

50:00

SM: Yeah, they may have broken down into more subcommittees but I think it made a big difference because we could bring things out...

KM: Changing the subject a little bit, on the Morton Community Center were you involved, was it during your time that that came to [inaudible]

SM: Oh yeah, and that was...

KM: For researchers I think they would appreciate that.

SM: Well that was the direct result of this movement of students off campus. And you know historically that school served everybody south of Meridian I guess. And that was the grade school and it also included married students' courts. So all the students from married students' courts all were in that school.

KM: Could go.

SM: So it was a very unique school with lots of foreign students which wasn't so prominent then and we didn't have as many foreign students in school. So it was really quite a unique school. And it's a wonderful building that's the one thing I've learned about it. People still say you know I just love this building and there is something about it that just...

KM: It reminds many people of the school they may have went to as grade school. Cause it's similar. You know grade school kind of sticks in your mind.

SM: Yeah and it had big wide halls and nice rooms with lots of windows and so it was a wonderful school and so what was happening then is that population of that school began to drop because of the influx of students...

KM: And also moving to the county.

SM: And there began to be a movement of the county. The county schools got better, new housing in the county and the development of University Farms and Barberry Heights so all the new young families were moving into those areas and not as many in the older areas so there came a time when the school corporation said we've got to decide what to do with this and one of their choices was to sell it and we knew what it would be, student apartments. And they would make a million dollars or so on selling it and the other choice was that the city would buy it and the third choice was they would give it to the city. So there was a real serious conflict between the school and the city.

KM: I imagine.

SM: And the school felt that they were, again this idea of being separate that they had a different mission than the city itself, so I said well what we need to do is we need to talk to the patrons and the city patrons so we called a meeting at Morton School about 3 or 4 hundred people showed up and it was a I would say contentious but overwhelmingly that it should stay with the city. Half of them thought that the school corporation should give it to the city but I think that the idea of selling it so then there was an appraisal done and there was a question was your appraiser better than my appraiser kind of thing and if you appraised it

on just the square footage it came out around 6 or 7 hundred thousand. If you appraised it with the intension of becoming student housing then it was more like a million. But we were finally able to purchase it, the city purchased it for 600 thousand dollars and absolutely the best thing we ever did and it is...

KM: That's not a bad deal.

SM: No and it has been well, and I would say the school corporation did a wonderful job of keeping it up. It was in good shape and we haven't had to spend, we had to eventually build a new furnace and fix the windows and all that but over a period of time we probably put a million dollars into it but it has served first primarily senior citizens but now dance, music...

KM: A lot of events are held there and of course you got that playground is good and it's good a parking thing right there.

SM: Oh it's just perfect.

KM: Cause around there the parking is limited.

SM: And it's interesting I said someday this will be the center of rejuvenation of the village and now with a new apartment complex there and all those new shops...

KM: And the public library.

SM: And the library. That has happened so it's kind of come full swoop you know. One time that was the village, it was active with a whole variety of things and it went downhill and now it's beginning to come back. And I think we're going to

see in the future renovation of some of the older houses and people are going to want to be closer to the University. Not everybody but a certain number.

55:00 **KM:** There would be some interest.

SM: And maintaining that core building of the public library and the Morton is just I think essential.

KM: Very good, let's see. Executive breakfast, those were started during Dr. Jischke?

SM: Yes, yes those were and...

KM: I think the new president is continued. She meets with them once a month or something like that. Maybe the Chamber of Commerce or something of that sort.

SM: Yeah I'm sure she's doing that and I do give him credit for being very active in the Chamber and all of the United Way and all of those things. Purdue is much more engaged than they've ever, ever been with the ethics program and with the engagement policy...

KM: Has really taken core.

SM: It's made a huge difference and it's made a huge difference in how people feel about Purdue. Especially people from Lafayette who were even more removed from the campus and the appreciated that.

KM: Well I think the greater Lafayette, the names you've merged and things of that sort and the bridge which brings up the alumni, that special award. I think that's very nice about the fountain there.

SM: Well I was very pleased...

KM: How did you know about that? I always ask people like if you've got a Sagamore, you have a Sagamore don't you? Some people say well I don't know, they don't want to mention but I like it because I think it's a surprise.

SM: It is the first one that I got was when Evan Bayh became governor. I was on the transition committee. I was very active in the Indiana association of cities and towns...

KM: And you were the president.

SM: And I was president of the Indiana...so I was on the transition committee which was very exciting and I loved it. And he gave me a Sagamore I said I don't know I really deserve that one.

KM: For all the work I enjoyed doing.

SM: Yeah, I enjoyed doing and then when Governor Kernan was governor and he was a fellow mayor himself and so I was [inaudible] gave me that one and I was very pleased.

KM: That's nice.

SM: That was a surprise. But now when they told me that they were going to dedicate the fountain I really was surprised because I had never, it had never entered my mind.

KM: See now you and Dr. McGinley* in common. The fountain out there and you've got to compare notes.

SM: [laughs] That's right.

KM: How the water was, the spray and whatever.

SM: But that, Joe Pain* is the parks director and was my parks director, that was his idea and the idea of it kind of the spray kind of mimicking the court house I think is...

KM: It's wonderful. It really is and it's just a great location because people do the walking over there and skating rink, it's perfect.

SM: But I think it also symbolized the cooperation between the two cities and as you know Jim Riehle and I were...Jim was the...

KM: Yeah, worked very closely together.

SM: We worked very closely together. And we both had the attitude and Dave he also reflected the same that what's good for Lafayette is good for West Lafayette and viva versa and Purdue. And sometimes the city of Lafayette hasn't always been as active on this side of the river but Jim really cared about what happened over here. He always showed up for everything that we asked him to come over here and I think railroad relocation kind of brought community together.

KM: I think that's, when I think of him and I think of many people and there are new people that have come since that's been finished, they can't believe the tracks actually existed.

SM: Yeah I know.

KM: Unless they see a picture it just blows their mind.

SM: Well of course the fascinating thing about the tracks and I'm sure you've probably know the story but I'm sure it's worth repeating that John Meyers was the republican congressman for many, many years from here and he became a good friend of Jim and mine and a lot of other people and he'd been hearing about railroad relocation but his daughter went to school at Purdue so one time he came to visit her and they were driving down 5th street and all of a sudden he looked in his rearview mirror and here comes the Amtrak train right behind them on the tracks and he about fainted and he pulled off the tracks and just barely missed being hit by the Amtrak train and he said now what's the stuff about railroad relocation?

KM: Tell me a little bit about it right?

SM: And he became a super advocate for railroad relocation and was personally responsible for getting a major share of the federal funding which would never have happened without that.

KM: And it was continually...they saw it in the days when it was really weak and you were able to get it.

01:00:00 **SM:** That's right. And it was truly a community project. And then using the old bridge and converting it into this pedestrian bridge and then West Lafayette helped with money that we had from transportation and helped financed that bridge and I think it was symbolic of the bridge between us and...

KM: Between the two cities.

SM: And then the idea of the linear downtown came out of our strategic plan but it was also part of the kind of Chambers involvement. So that from hilltop to hilltop, from the top of the Purdue hill all the way up to ninth street hill and it's proved to be a legitimate and real bridge between the two cities and you know if your familiar with any other cities we just came back from Eugene and Springfield. I mean they have a highway between them. It was as if the other doesn't exist. And I know that Bloomington, Normal, again their two separate cities although Lafayette and West Lafayette are two but I think we've been able to bridge it.

KM: Display more unity these days.

SM: Yeah...

KM: Which has taken time but it exists. And it's working out very well I think. One other award I was going to...you also got the distinguished alumni award from the college of liberal arts. That's very nice.

SM: Yes, I was very pleased.

KM: Yes, very nice.

SM: Yes I was...

KM: What post mayoral activities, tell researchers what you do now.

SM: Before we leave this I did want to mention the one thing that I would say I'm most proud of is being during my mayoral term was in 1987 we decided that I...one of my professors at Purdue was fellow named Graham Toft* and he went on to work in Indianapolis and be head of the economic development division. And he did a lot of assisting cities with strategic planning so I had talked to him about this and so we said well how would you like to do this for West Lafayette? Could we hire you to do that? So he did and he also brought a couple people with him, Tim Monger* who a lot of people know here who started the crisis center and a number of other things was working in Indiana polis on center city, Indianapolis and so they came and we did a lot of talking to the population about what roles should the city play? Should we just fix street and hire police and you know just kind of take care of things or should we be aggressive and try to make some big differences? And at that time Sears had closed and gone and it had been abandoned for 5 years and there was a junk car lot if you remember. The levee was really very ugly. And...

KM: Almost reminds you of what people said years ago when the river did overflow down in that area. I mean years ago before your time they used to talk about it, the flooding down there.

SM: Yeah and it was...

KM: Older people that were here in the forties and whatever.

SM: Yeah, no it was in very bad shape and ugly.

KM: To people coming into the city.

SM: Yeah right it was a very, you know, unpleasant view so we then put together a large steering committee and tried to make it representative of the city, part of the city, both political parties, and a whole variety of people to do strategic plan. Well we spent a couple of years at it, did a lot of talking and people hadn't done strategic planning for cities. I mean that had been the popular thing you know that came out of the army, the defense department but nobody had done much of it for cities. So kind of the theme that came out of it was West Lafayette was a knowledge centered community with Purdue, with our strong school system and with the research park. And that what we need to do was to put our efforts and our resources into those things that made a difference and be strategic and how conducted ourselves and going along with Purdue's standard of excellence that that was something that we need to strive for. So we developed the plan of redevelopment of the levee. The trails and that was certainly the thing that came out of all the discussion was people wanted a beautiful city, run with green and one that was attractive and one that they would enjoy. And then the development of the research park and about that time there was a big push to get the chip plants for computers. And West Lafayette was a place they were looking at. And I did not think that that fit in with our plan at all and that was kind of a bode of contention. I really drug my feet and I was concerned about the safety because I

01:05:00

know what's happened in other chip plants. There's a lot of leakage into the groundwater and that's where our wells are and I did talk to some of the people on campus and they agreed that there were some safety issues. Well lucky the chip company went to Idaho, and I noticed they just closed down the other day. So [laughs] I'm glad we didn't but there was a tremendous push to do that. And so that was the time that we decided the Research Park we were going to put our money and our efforts into that and of course that's Purdue's baby not really ours although we did do all the sewer work and the infrastructure and the sidewalks and the curbs and streets. So that was the three pronged attack and the levee or Wabash Landing was center piece because that was what we were trying to do. And so we found a developer who was willing to work to develop that land. And he had a person who actually I just saw him yesterday at the Purdue game, or Saturday at the Purdue game. [laughs] And he was saying oh that was the best thing we ever did. And he built the apartments down there and that; we had to redo all the sewers down on the levee. The state put in brand new roads there. We had to put in a whole bunch of new roads and then they developed the land. And before we started it we did something that I was a little worried about. The consultant said well let's ask people how much public money you want to spend on this. And I said well how can people know that? And they said well they'll get an idea you know is it 5%? 15, 20, 50%? And they came up with kind of a 15% so the cost should be no more than 15% for public money. And so this took place over about a four year period which is pretty fast because we had to take down power lines, remove power lines.

KM: It's a big...

SM: bill. And it was an interesting collation because it was the developer, it was the city, the state at that time put in quite a bit of transportation money, we got federal money, and the unions, the international carpenters union was one of the investors. And they said well this is a good place for our pension money. This provides jobs for our members and I can tell you we had no labor problems on that job at all and when they needed more bricklayers no problem. We got the bricklayers right away. [laughs] And we...

KM: We can work with you.

SM: And some of the developers said gosh we've never worked with unions before and they had a wonderful relationship and just shows if you have a common goal and everybody has a benefit out of it...

KM: And they all buy in on it.

SM: They sure did. And so it ended up then that all the apartments came in about that time and it ended up being a 100 or 150 million dollar development and if anybody ever told you, told me that I would ever have anything to do with 150 million dollar developments I would have said no way. I don't even know what I would but it was again a team effort and we had a really good city team that did all the background infrastructure work and then this group from Indianapolis and then the banks. We had to build a parking garage, the city did. And the local banks bought our bonds without any property tax backup, we couldn't do it with

property tax backup. And so they have been paid so I mean it, the parking garage was essential to making the thing work and then of course the hotel came in and that. And then a local family, the McDonald's, gave us 150 thousand dollars to start the ice skating rink which was a nice touch which we've never counted on but it was a big project because we had to fill that whole area.

KM: Isn't the newest addition of course Sonya will be the rowers.

SM: Yes, yes right.

01:10:00 **KM:** What a great enhancement that is going to be.

SM: And that was started about that time too. And I'm so thrilled about that. We just had the ground breaking and so that whole idea of protecting the waterfront, utilizing the waterfront, and with the bridge and the apartments and it's being used all the time and the other thing that when we did the planning was everybody said it's got to serve everybody. It can't just serve West Lafayette people or students. It's got to serve everybody and that's what it has done and it's not perfect. There's still area that hasn't been developed yet but...

KM: But overall it's...

SM: But overall it's...

KM: And all big events are now, that bridge just brings people together and it's just perfect.

SM: Yeah so that's...

KM: [inaudible] Plaza that's just nice.

SM: So that came out of that and then the trails which haven't...didn't get a lot of publicity as they were being done but there were lots of pieces that had to be done that took a lot of time to get those little pieces all put together. But again I've had more people say that's the best thing you ever did were those trails that everybody uses them.

KM: Along with everything else.

SM: Everybody uses them. Older people, people with strollers and it have just been great...

KM: It just adds a nice quality. It enhances the quality of the city.

SM: And then the research park is the jewel. I mean it has then because before that West Lafayette was almost entirely dependent on residential housing to finance their city and so with the research park and then there's like 2 or 3 thousand employees up there now which is as big as Subaru.

KM: That's right. Exactly.

SM: So the strategic plan really was, if there was anything that I would say I'm most proud of that by far was the jewel because it....and because it's an ongoing project. It's gonna I think 20 years from now there's still going to be things happening.

KM: They'll have to send us a car, you and I. [laughs]

SM: Yeah. [laughs]

KM: Bring us up to date, right?

SM: Yeah.

KM: Well in closing I was going to ask you is your post activities and then how about a favorite Purdue tradition?

SM: Oh, ok. Well I guess right now I've been working in the arts. I helped put together a strategic plan for the arts which I enjoyed.

KM: And did you...

SM: It was entirely something different and yet it did drawl on some of my experience with strategic planning, again citizen participation, grassroots and then take action. As president of the art museum and I'm on the school foundation, parks foundation, and the library foundations, so I've stayed in a sort of not as active a role but I've still stayed....

KM: Keep busy.

SM: And I'm very active in my church. We're doing a family promise for homeless families and I've been active in that so I have not wanted for anything...

KM: That's fine. You're doing the things that you enjoy doing and you're not overdoing it.

SM: Well I probably am. [laughs] But that's how I prefer it.

KM: Your busy but enjoying it.

SM: And a favorite Purdue tradition, gosh that's hard to say. There are so many things but I don't suppose there's anything more exciting than a fall football weekend. I mean it seems to bring everybody together to campus to celebrate their days on campus. Always to honor somebody that's prominent now and the excitement of the students and their future. So I guess a fall football weekend and if it just gets more on the winning side instead of 2 points behind it will be better. [laughs]

KM: Right, better. [laughs]

SM: But I think the leadership of Purdue has been good and I certainly think that's got to continue is that partnership and collaboration that's what made Lafayette and West Lafayette strong is the collaboration with the business community, our business community is quite active and very far thinking and progressive. Everybody that's worked with the business community said this is a different place than I won't mention any other towns but other towns in the mid-west and so I think we've been very fortunate with that.

KM: I'll leave it up to you, any closing as you look, I'll leave any closing comments or anything you'd like to share with us?

SM: Well it's been...

KM: Or something I forgot to ask?

01:15:00 **SM:** Well it's been exciting and challenging to be the mayor for 24 years of a college town.

KM: Probably didn't think you'd be in there that long did you?

SM: Never thought I would ever do that. Or be there that long or do the things we did.

KM: Cause its rough. You know running.

SM: It was and there were times when I laid awake at night thinking how will I ever solve this problem but I think the real key is involving other people and being able to use the resources that you have and...

KM: And then that you can draw upon.

SM: Yes and people really want to work together and they just need to have a common vision and I think that we've pretty well been able to have a common vision for this area and from Purdue which is excellence and moving ahead so...

KM: That's very good. I want to thank you.

SM: It's been a great journey.

KM: Thank you Sonya. This concludes it, I thank you very much. My pleasure.

End of Interview

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*Proper names may be spelled incorrectly