

00:00 - 09:35 Getting hired at PLU, living arrangements, sports

Oral history interview with Grace Bloomquist, who was professor of English at Pacific Lutheran University from 1939 until 1976. The interview is taking place at Grace's home on June 5th, 1992. My name is Paul Benton, and this is tape number one. And this should be working now, I think.

Is that your own recorder?

Yeah, and I bought it so I know, I'm pretty sure I know how it works. I'm a little frightened of the ones I borrow from somebody else. Last minute I can't make them work.

That's a good idea.

Well, I've heard your story about how you got here. I think that would be good.

Well, I arrived on the train. I got on at the Old Union Depot, and I didn't know really what I was coming to. I had been interviewed in the depot in Jamestown, North Dakota. Dr. Tingelstad had some property in North Dakota. He always had some interesting things going, and he had this property I think he had inherited from his family. And he had to make this trip to check on something. And so, he was also hiring teachers. And when he found out I lived in western Minnesota, he thought I could get over to Jamestown. But because he came in – at that time there were two trains each day, the Northern Pacific, one going east and one going west – And he came in on the eastbound train. And he had about two or three hours before the westbound train came. And so, he wondered whether I could meet him. And he could take care of his business, other business during those three hours.

He had written you a letter.

Yes. And so, that worked out. I got over there, and I was interviewed in the station in Jamestown. And then when it was over, he had taken care of his other businesses. So, the train came in, and he went back to Tacoma. And so, that's how I got the job.

But you had been at Syracuse before that, and then you were teaching, what were you doing?

I had taught before that, and before I went to Syracuse. I had taught three years in Mall, North Dakota, up near the Canadian line. It was a really good experience. And so that I had that, and then I had been at Syracuse. And then I had this interview, and I got the job out here. It was a time when it was difficult to get jobs, during the Depression. And so, I accepted it.

How old were you then?

Let's see... I taught in Mall three years, 24. I was about 26 or 27.

I think it's exactly the same age I was when I came.

Oh, that's interesting. And so, I had this ride, and then this meeting at the station. The Union Station was a very busy place at that time. And I came out here, but I had thought, you know, those days, wore hats and gloves. And I, of course, I used to get a new hat every season. And I bought this flycat with a red ribbon in back. And then I thought, well, this is it. I didn't know how strict the college was, or... I just didn't know. And so, before I... One day I cut off the red ribbon. And Mrs. Kreidler, who was Dean of Women, said, "That hat doesn't look exactly right. What happened to it?" I said, "Well, I took off the ribbon because I thought it might not fit here." So that's the story. And I've been teased about it ever since.

And, of course, I found it a very open place, really. It was not so strict as Concordia College where I'd gone to school. They were much stricter than PLC. PLC was always I think more liberal. Probably many of the teachers who came afterwards didn't think so. But it was more liberal than most of the other church schools. They were more legalistic, I think, and more puritanical than PLC was.

Was this Tingelstad's influence?

I think so. He was a different kind of person. He was a very friendly person and a very humble person. However, he was quite a student. In fact, he had his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago, I think it was. And his dissertation was on the New England Premier. So he, of course, was interested in education as well as the other subjects in the liberal arts. But I always thought it was interesting that he should have that kind of background.

And while the school was small, I don't remember what the enrollment was. But at the time I came there, the Akres were living downstairs on the south side, the first floor apartment in Old Main. And Mrs. Kreidler lived on the north side, two apartment-like. I don't know whether they're apartments now, but they were.

This is sort of the ground level, the basement level?

No, this was the first floor, and the basement floor was the dining room. And the kitchen was there, and the boiler room was down there. And we had all the students, of course, ate in the dining hall. And we had waiters who wore white jackets, and there were servers. And we had a faculty table in the center of the dining hall. And the faculty who ate there, some of them did, were all, you know, were there.

And we had a very nice conversational group. In fact, I remember we used to bet on the ball games, the football games. Football was so important. It started to be very important at the time that I came. Cliff Olson was here, and it was either the second or the third year. Well, I don't know when it was, but we had a good team. And we all went to the game, all the faculty, and all the students, I'm sure, went. And we used to go to Bellingham and Cheney to games, I remember.

You drive up the faculty on the train or in the car?

On the car. There was a great deal of school spirit, school loyalty. It was really a very, it was a family, really it was. And Dr. Pflueger, who taught religion and was one of the most loved teachers I suppose that PLC ever had, was a trainer, I think. He was at all the games, sitting down on the bench, you know, yelling and shouting for the team. And Michel Franck, who taught political science and was born in Hungary, also was an enthusiastic supporter. And the football and basketball were the main social events, almost, at that time.

Did Tingelstad and Hauge and so on, were they part of this, too, or was it more of the faculty?

Oh, yes. Dr. Hauge was at all the games. When I say all, I suppose there was some he missed, yes, but he was an enthusiastic supporter. It was very important to the whole school. And of course that's the way that, finally, that PLC became better known because of the team. So I suppose, from a public relations point of view, it really was quite important. But I remember that kind of bonding together for games.

And then the faculty members themselves, those who lived around here, were so hospitable. Of course, I lived in the dorm at the time. And so they would wonder where I was eating and whether I wanted to get away from the dormitory meals. They'd ask me to dinner. They were just most cordial. The most hospitable place I ever came to, I think.

09:35 - 19:47 Faculty members

I have a list of some of the faculty, and you mentioned many of them, really. Michel Franck, his wife was named Ruth, is that right?

Yes. She taught English. Yes, she was Ruth Swanson. And she was from up here, Graham. But she had gone to New York and had a degree in journalism. And I think it was there that she met Michel Franck, who was a Hungarian, real authentic Hungarian. And they were quite a couple. And of course, at that time, my husband and wife couldn't teach full-time, so she taught part-time. She taught English and journalism. And she was the advisor to the Mooring Mast for quite a few years. She was really a very fine teacher. And they also were very hospitable. And Michel was a great cook. He would make all these stews and soups and things from Hungary. But we had a little international flavor.

Were the Francks Lutheran? They were exceptions to the Lutheran?

Well, in a way they were, but they joined Bethel Lutheran Church in Tacoma. They were very good friends of Pastor E. Arthur Larson, who was teaching Swedish at PLU at the time. And they joined. Ruth, of course, was, I think, growing up Lutheran.

But it was different for me. I don't know what his background was, but he became a member of that church, too. And so they fit in quite well. And there was a Mrs. Bondy, who taught German at that time, when I first came. And Keith Reid, who was the business department, did you have his name down?

I do.

He was from Tacoma, from quite a well-to-do family in Tacoma. Came out every day and taught business courses. He lived on Yakima Avenue, North Yakima, down there. And he would invite the faculty into their very nice home, which was really kind of special, too. So the faculty wasn't entirely Scandinavian really.

I mean, there are multiple of these names I am familiar with. The science people, like Jordahl, Harold Leraas, LaRoss. Ramstad, of course. And then Cliff Olson. These are the ones I'm familiar with. And Rhoda Young, who once became just about the same time you did.

Yes, I think she came a year before I did, and taught PE. And I think a couple of years before the May Festival had been initiated. There's a Maypole dance out on the front campus. And Carol Talovic was the first May Queen I ever saw.

Rhoda Young, she started that?

It had been started before she came by a woman who came out from Tacoma and taught PE. I can't remember her name right now. But then Rhoda took it over and really made it a big thing for many years. She developed it into a real ethnic folk festival, you know. Before that, it had been mostly dancing around the Maypole, as I remember and a May Queen. It was a beautiful, beautiful thing.

And after the Mayfest dances, we come from that era that the traditions still go on.

Yes, it still goes on. We still have them. But that goes back to the 1930s.

Anna Nielsen came at this same time.

Yes, Anna Marn and Nielsen.

Did she go by Anna Marn?

Yes, she was from Iowa. And of course there was an Education Department before she came. And that's where the Children's Literature class was taught by someone in that Education Department. It was quite small and Anna Marn did a great deal to make the department known in Tacoma. She was a real public relations asset and really developed a very strong department of education. She was a big woman, very hearty. Physically big. She laughed a great deal. She was very popular with the students and she was very good with them. She had been trained in Iowa. I think one of the – Iowa State, one of the colleges there that was really famous for preparing teachers. And she had gone to Columbia University.

She was a vivid personality. And she built a home in Parkland where the Kittlesbys now live. She built that house. And her father and mother came out and lived with her. They were old country Danes. They were part German and Danish. They were just really nice people. And Anna Marn was a great hostess, too. She entertained a great deal in that house. There were many, many happy times there.

So there were very important women faculty almost from the beginning?

Well, it was rather unusual when you think about it. And then the art teacher, Mrs. Kreidler, had been a dean of women and an art instructor. But she had retired when I came. Probably she taught some art classes. But very soon after that, Dora Berg came and taught art. So that was another woman. There was Ruth Swanson and Anna Marn. Oh, and George Reneau. And Mrs. Bondy. George Reneau was really a character too.

I have his name down here.

That's a woman.

George Reneau?

Yeah.

I'll be darned. I have George Renault's name down here, but I didn't know that was a woman.

She lived in Tacoma too and came out on the bus. She and Keith Reid often came on the bus. I think he had a car a little bit later, but she always came on the bus from the North End.

She taught history?

She taught history. She was really quite a scholar. And she had special interests, especially in her later years. Of course, I thought she was old when I first saw. But in her later years, after she retired, she became interested in Scientology. But she'd always had this interest in animals and plant life. She would not step on a bug or an insect or anything like that. You'd see her picking up worms and bugs on the path. We didn't have any sidewalks at the time, so I thought they were quite a few bugs and insects crawling. But I remember her doing that. She was a very kind person. And I think she was a very good teacher. She knew a lot about many, many things.

Was it American history or European history? Was it world history? What kind of history? Do you have any idea?

Well, I have a feeling that she probably taught Europeans, or emphasized the Europeans, because she taught political science. Well, I don't know. Probably she did that before Michel Franck came. I don't know. But she was in the social sciences.

Actually, they came about the same time. She came in 1933, and he came in 1935. And then Elvin Akre, he came in 1937.

Yes. And he taught American history, I'm quite sure. And of course, those years, too, we had the Academy as well as the college.

19:47 - 28:08 High school teaching, activities on campus

How did that work?

That was essentially a high school. Yes, it was a high school. And some of the college, well, we all taught something in the high school, too. I taught English, and I taught Latin in the high school, those first years.

Were there on-campus high school students?

Yes, living in the dorm, which wasn't always the best idea. And some of the very loyal Scandinavian people did send their kids to high school here. But we also had, I don't like to be quoted on this, but we also had some problems with children at that time, too. Well, we had problems somewhere else. But there weren't so many, but it was enough to make the teaching in high school sometimes a little difficult.

There were different classes going with the high school group, but all in Old Main?

All in Old Main, yes. The library was new. Xavier Hall was new that first year when I came. It was just being used, and there were classrooms over there. And then there was the Old Gymnasium to the south. And the little brown Chapel on the other side of Old Main.

Was that where chapel services were held?

Yes, it was.

That was still here when I came. They tore it down the second year I was here. It was in part of the same project when they built the new University Center and moved the Art Department into Ingram. They moved the art stuff out of the Chapel, which is what it was being used for. But I never actually went inside.

It wasn't very big. We had chapels there, and then downstairs, that was the Art Department, I guess. The art department was downstairs in that old Chapel. And then at one time there was a room there for the Delta Rho Gammas. Those were the day room girls, they were called. They were the commuter students in Tacoma and various areas. It was a place for the day students to spend some time and recreate when they had free time. That was done there. They had quite an active organization. And I think the alumni group from Delta Rho Gammas still meets once in a while.

There wasn't a similar group for men for community?

No, I don't think there was. There were dorm groups, both men and women. And there was an Associated Women Students Organization. I remember that organization sponsored special speakers and gave teas. We had teas quite often.

What would that be like?

Just an afternoon affair where we served tea and cookies and things like that.

You had to dress up?

Yeah, we dressed up for them. And we didn't have many places to have a reception. So often we used the basement of the Old Trinity Church. You've seen pictures of that. I remember we had some of our college meetings over in that basement. We were very limited in facilities.

What would be these teas that would be faculty and students or parents? Who all would come?

Well, it would usually be faculty and students. Sometimes it would be for a particular occasion the AWS, the Associated Women Students, might honor certain people. There would be special reasons for a tea. There would be a program. Somebody would give a talk. And there would be music.

Of course, no dances and that kind of thing.

No, there were no dances. So we had teas instead. I guess we went to the basketball games mostly. There were parties of various kinds. And roller skating parties and ice skating parties. We'd take busloads of kids out to the ice rink and the roller skating rink.

Out in Spanaway?

One was out in Lakewood, but there was also one in Redondo, the roller skating rink where we'd go.

You mean up toward Seattle, Federal Way?

I don't know about the Redondo.

There was something out at Lake Spanaway, some kind of resort out there?

Yes, there was. In connection with the park. And there were picnics. We had Campus Day in the spring. You probably heard about that. We got the day off to clean up the campus. It was before we had so many custodians.

That's kind of tradition. That was still going on when I went to school at Whitworth. Campus Cleanup Day, we called it.

Oh, was it? That was really fun. And the faculty and the students would work together, you know. And then we'd have a picnic afterwards. And games. In the spring. Everybody would be out. Mr. Stuen would bring all of his hoes and rakes to help out. We didn't have enough equipment.

How was it that he had lots of hoes and rakes?

No, he just had some at home. We didn't have very many, I guess, on campus. I remember him bringing his own rake and all. And I think probably Dr. Pflueger did that, too. He just lived right nearby. He could do that.

I want to return to Dora Berg, who you said taught Art in the 40s. What kind of art did they do? Paint? Or hand crafts? Or sculpture? A little of everything?

It was painting for one thing. You know, an introduction to art. Not sculpture. And I don't know that they did much with crafts. I think it was more just the classical art study. There were a number of classes. And she also lived in Tacoma and commuted back and forth on the bus. The bus was really, really important in those days.

So how many faculty actually, you were living, at least for time, in Old Main? How many of you have been teaching and living there at the same time?

The Akres lived there at one time. The Satres, Lowell Satre was Dean of Mean at one time and he and his wife lived there. And the Schnackenberg, he was Dean of Mean at one time. And they lived in Old Main, in that south apartment.

So there were several apartments for faculty?

Yes, that's right. That was almost traditionally so. It had always been until probably, I don't know. Margaret Wickstrom had an apartment there one time.

28:08 - 31:59 Teaching and dean duties

But when you came, you were hired as the assistant dean of women and teaching.

And instructor of English. I think that was it.

I recall a story about you being stuck with teaching Latin, too.

Yeah, I taught Latin also, yes. Well, I had a major in Latin in college. So I had some background for it. And so I taught Latin in both high school and college. I had some very good Latin students who went to the seminary. Some of the best students I ever had were two men who went to the seminary. And they had studied Latin and Greek

What was your, trying to get a better sense of what you did in your first two years? How much of your time was spent teaching? How much of your time was spent supervising students? Can you recall how many classes you would have had?

Well, I had a full teaching load. I had five classes. I usually had two in high school. And I had three in high school and two in college when I started, I think. I taught freshman English. I had about thirty-five or forty students in the freshman English class. Composition in Old Main. And then I lived upstairs in the dorm. And Mrs. Kreidler wasn't very well. She was the dean of women. And so I did a lot of that work, you know, the running around particularly.

And at that time we had only one telephone. It was in the, the boy's dorm was on one side, the girl's dorm on one, and some classrooms in between. And the telephone was, I guess, in the in-between section. And after the main office closed downstairs, all the calls came to the girl's dorm. And I think I had a telephone and I got all the calls after, at night. So I had to answer the telephone for all kinds of emergency. And there were some from time to time.

And then we didn't have a resident nurse. So I spent part of my time taking temperatures. Whenever they'd all come down with sore throats and I'd paint their throats and take their temperatures.

It was almost like the missionary efforts. You were doing a little bit of everything.

Well, yes, you know, you had to at that time. And so, and I hadn't, I hadn't had any work in children's literature. But at the end, previously, the course had been taught by someone in the education department. But she had resigned and left. They didn't have anyone else to do it. So the new people usually got the classes, you know, that were vacant. So that's how I happened to teach it. So I learned at the same time that I taught. I don't like to think of what the classes were like. I learned from them anyway.

But you taught school before yourself.

Oh, yes, I'd had three years of teaching. And I had taught Latin in high school in Mohawk.