

Oral History

Interviewer: Dr. Daniel Doyle

Interviewee: Mr. Robert Kissel

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Dr. Doyle: Well, it's a pleasure to be speaking this— today with Robert Kissel, who is professor emeritus of history and government. Was for a number of years the history department chair and, um, taught other subjects as well. And taught at the college, at the Williamsport Area Community College [WACC], from 1965 until 19— his retirement in 1985. Bob, you were raised in a small town: Collomsville. Your father worked at Avco Lycoming. How did that background relate to your eventual teaching at the Williamsport Area Community College?

Mr. Kissel: Actually, uh, Dan, I don't think there was any real correlation between the two, to be honest about it. Uh, my father at Avco — machinist, obviously — and, uh, I recalled, uh, just recently that he was offered a job here himself, uh, when he was at the typ— er, at the Avco. And Ewing Mueseler was one of the people who accepted the opportunity and came here. Uh, it's ironic that fifty years later, I took a position that my father didn't accept. But it really had nothing to do with my coming to the community college, really.

Dr. Doyle: But did it give you maybe an understanding of, of people and students who were interested in machining, manufacturing, things of that sort?

Mr. Kissel: Oh, absolutely. That, plus the fact that over the years — and I don't want to give you a litany of what I've done — but, uh, prior to my becoming a teacher, and during— between semesters at college and everything, heavens, I worked everywhere from a stock boy at L. L. Sterns' to, uh, the Weldon Pajama Factory to the New York Central Railroad to building the Pine Creek dam to helping build the Mosquito Valley Reservoir, which is the, uh, source of Williamsport's water supply and the list goes on — even worked as a janitor for Montour Oil while my daughter was in college. So, basically, I've always had a real empathy for the working man: the so-called blue-collar worker. And it's kind of funny that when I retired, uh, I guess in my teaching I referred to the working man as Joe Dinnerbucket so frequently that my colleagues gave me a black dinner bucket with "Joe Dinnerbucket" name on it. So, no, it's, it's that relationship with the working man. I got my hands dirty in my, in my earlier days.

Dr. Doyle: Okay, thank you. Um, you enlisted, uh, during — toward the latter part of the second world war, right out of high school, uh, into the U.S. Navy. Would you talk about that and maybe where that led you?

Mr. Kissel: That's correct. I went to a one-room, eight-grade school over in Collomsville and then to the Jersey Shore high school in the early '40s, and, uh, I can only say that it

must have been because recruiters were in the high school — now they complain if they're in the college. But they were in the high school, and I was, uh, motivated to join the Air Force, which I was not able to do because I didn't pass the eye test. But myself and about three other guys enlisted in the service and left our senior year to, uh — I went into the Navy, which meant Philadelphia for physical — uh, for a physical and shots, and a long train ride overnight up to Sampson, New York — which is on Lake Geneva — for boot camp, and then from boot camp down to Bainbridge, Maryland, where I got my first, uh — by that time they'd figured out that I was cut out to be a hospital corpsman, and I went to hospital corps school in Bainbridge, Maryland. And when I graduated from that, I got transferred to the Quantico Marine Base, where I was the corpsman for marine air infantry group, and, uh, spent the remaining part of the war there and at the Philadelphia Naval Hospital, uh, upon discharge, in, uh, June of 1946.

Dr. Doyle: And then you became connected briefly with the Williamsport Technical Institute after leaving the service, is that correct?

Mr. Kissel: It was only a, uh, a connection by virtue of the fact that I came here to be interviewed by the, uh, Veterans Administration, uh, to ascertain what my inclinations might be. And I remember taking a battery of tests in one of the shop buildings around here, and then returning the next day for a, uh, a verbal interview. And, uh, they concluded, uh, on the basis of aptitude and psychological testing and so forth that I ought to be in, uh, marketing or in the ministry or in education. And you're smiling already — that's because I had determined I wasn't — I was too bad to be a minister, so, I thought, "Gee, teaching might be nice for me." And, uh, off I went to Lock Haven State — teachers' college at that particular time. And in all seriousness, I do recall walking up that front sidewalk and looking at that administration building and having an epiphany experience, thinking, "This is what I'm supposed to do. This is meant for me." And I enrolled there — I always had sort of a natural inclination for history and government and geography, I liked it in school, and it was sort of a natural thing for me to want to, uh, share that interest. And I majored in history as a major and geography as a minor at Lock Haven, uh, State.

Dr. Doyle: Then after you, uh, graduated from Lock Haven, you were temporarily recalled, uh, to the service because of the Korean War, is that correct?

Mr. Kissel: I graduated in June of, uh, '51, and, uh, two weeks later I was back in a navy uniform. And, uh, to my amazement, uh, there were other members of my class of '51 that went off to Korea, and I thought, "This will be my destiny." But instead, would you believe that they sent me back to Bainbridge, Maryland, where I became an instructor in anatomy and physiology — you figure that out. You know, here I'm a history and government man, and I'm teaching anatomy and physiology — uh, class of about seventy in the class. You learn to lecture, and, uh, you learn to vocalize and articulate, enunciate and project. And to this day I have people I'll bang into who'll say, "Oh, yeah, I

remember you, it's your voice that I remember," you know? So, I guess I was always a big mouth, uh, whatever, but nobody ever had any problem hearing me. So, yes, Bainbridge, Maryland is where I spent another year, then, in the Navy. And upon discharge — June, a year later — I, uh, came home and looked for a job. Never dreamed of sending out resumes to become a teacher. Uh, my father worked at Avco, he got me a job at Avco, I went to work at Avco. And — my father had a little bit of influence there — he got me a job back where they were rebuilding motors, truck motors. And I was involved in tearing them down and disassembly and it was a dirty, greasy, grimy job, and it lit the fire under me to get your butt in gear and get out of here, you know? So, therefore, I did send some resumes around, and I went down to, uh, Susquenita — which, ironically, was another new school system, a jointure between Duncannon and Marysville. And when I got there that night to be interviewed for this job in the history department, lo and behold there were twenty-two other guys there. And they interviewed us one at a time before the school board, and as they come out they left and went home. When I came out from my interview, they asked me to remain. And it was well after midnight that they called me in and told me that I had the job as a history and geography teacher at Susquenita is where I got my feet wet. And I loved it there, spent three years there, ran into a teacher from Montoursville High School at a conference over in Shippensburg, and he said, "Oh, we're going to have an opening up in, uh, Montoursville High School." And my wife and I were happy in Duncannon, but we thought, "Gee, home is really South Williamsport, Montoursville, Loyalsock" — and no offense to Muncy, but we felt, "Montoursville's the town we wanna live in," you know. So, in 19— fall of 1955, came to Montoursville where I joined the faculty of the high school, and remained there from '55 to '65.

Dr. Doyle: And you were very successful there in teaching, and you had, uh, responsibilities advising the, uh, student government, and you were head of your department. And then ten years later, something happens here at the college, it becomes — the Williamsport Technical Institute, becomes the Williamsport Area Community College, and, uh, you apply. How'd that come about?

Mr. Kissel: I loved my ten years at the Montoursville High School: uh, loved the kids, loved the challenge, loved moving from Pennsylvania history to geography to world cultures, going from seventh to eighth graders to sophomores and then to seniors with Problems of Democracy, and I loved every time I escalated to another age level. I, I liked it: liked working with the student council, liked chaperoning dances at the high school gymnasium, liked going to the football games, uh, enjoyed it very much. For some reason or another, unexplained to me, when the college was "born," quote-unquote, and, uh, there was an opening — I don't even know how I learned about it, but I applied. I came up for an interview in Dr. Carl's office with him and Dr. John Bone from Lock Haven State, who was on the board of trustees here: three people. We had the interview. And

when I left, they asked me did I have any more questions, and I said, “When can I start?” And, uh, all jokes aside, I was hired as an assistant professor of history and government, one of the very first of five or six people in that so-called liberal arts program at the time, which was really a nucleus: very few students, very few faculty. And, uh, that was the beginning of another twenty-year episode in my life, of which I also totally enjoyed the train ride.

Dr. Doyle: The term that was used, uh, for you, uh, that small handful you talked about, was “original astronauts,” remember that —

Mr. Kissel: Yeah, I do, uh, because there were so few of us. Today there’s a hundred astronauts, but back in those days there were only like twenty or whatever. I did refer to myself as an original astronaut. I still wear that badge proudly, because it was Tom Vargo, myself, Hugh MacMullan, Ron Thompson — I might miss someone, but there was a mere handful of us in the liberal arts program, now the humanities, and whatever.

Dr. Doyle: So, that liberal arts program, essentially, was for students who would be transferring to other colleges and also provided general education to the students in the vocational-technical programs —

Mr. Kissel: That’s absolutely —

Dr. Doyle: — previously been part of the Williamsport Technical Institute.

Mr. Kissel: That’s absolutely correct, yes.

Dr. Doyle: But, in effect, you were the first teacher of history and government —

Mr. Kissel: Oh, yes.

Dr. Doyle: — at either the Williamsport —

Mr. Kissel: The only one. (*chuckles*) The only one.

Dr. Doyle: Um, do you recall your first faculty meeting when the Williamsport Area Community College convened?

Mr. Kissel: I do. And, uh, again, I sat there with probably my blue blazer and my tie on and listened to Dr. Carl address the faculty, many of which had been here for years because they were part of that technical institute, which had its nucleus in World War II under Dr. Parkes. Dr. Parkes was still around, uh, but Dr. Carl was the spokesperson, and I remember vividly his comments that day about the challenges of the future. And he, in my mind, invented the expression field of dreams long before Kevin Costner ever thought about it, because, uh, he envisioned the college expanding all the way from Third Street to the Susquehanna River. And, uh, lo and behold, “If you build it, they will come.” And, in essence, the college was built and the students came, and they came from everywhere: originally Sayre, Montandon, Montgomery, Loyalsock, Montoursville, Sunbury, Susquehanna, Altoona. And later, of course, they came from out of state to the institution and so forth, but that’s what I remember, uh, so much about the very beginning. But as a liberal arts guy, I was in the minority of a very small handful of technical people.

Dr. Doyle: The, uh, students, of course, were coming primarily from twenty sponsoring school districts, so, uh, in addition to that, from most of the areas in the state. Um, and did you see any differences, therefore, because of that variety of backgrounds or places, uh, that — with your, let’s say, with your seniors at, uh, Montoursville?

Mr. Kissel: Yeah, huge difference. Montoursville was pretty cosmopolitan with regard to race, age levels, et cetera et cetera. When you got the college here, you had a demographic that was more, uh, made up of — other than just college freshmen, you would have married students, you would have veterans, you would have some retirees, you would have, uh, racial minorities, and you would also have some of your own technical institute faculty incorporated in your classes because it was an incentive for them to, uh, enhance their own educational backgrounds: pay-wise, promotion-wise, and so forth. So, it was more of a diverse, uh, teaching group, which made it more fun, more challenging, and more interesting.

Dr. Doyle: You talked about Dr. Carl, the first president of the Williamsport Area Community College, the founding president; what was he like?

Mr. Kissel: I think he was the right man, at the right time, at the right place. Very unpretentious, as were most of the — all of the administrators. There was a — we, we kind of had that Pittsburgh Pirates “we are family” kind of an attitude. And I never saw anybody flaunt their position, “I’m dean of this and that” or look down their nose at you. It was one big family. And, uh, you, you could say hello to a dean or a president or a vice president, uh, as well as you would one of your faculty colleagues, et cetera; it was one big family, really.

Dr. Doyle: You said you and Dr. Carl had something in common when you’d walk around.

Mr. Kissel: Yeah, I guess. It might have been our depression background or whatever, I don’t know, but, we moved — of course, when I first came here, it was virtually night school for me, you know. And, uh, there weren’t that many classrooms occupied by classes. And, uh, I would go down the hallway to my classroom on the way to a class, walk by a classroom where the lights were blazing and no one in, and I would turn it off, turn the lights off. Well, I saw Dr. Carl do that many a, many a time, but he’s the only one beside myself I ever saw turn lights off in an empty classroom, and that’s — we had that in common.

Dr. Doyle: You talked about it being essentially night school, would you explain?

Mr. Kissel: Well you couldn’t get into — because we were teaching in Klump [Academic Center], which was still the high school, until the castle on the hill was built — no pun intended there or whatever, it’s a wonderful institution. But at any rate, I had to wait for Dr. Jones— no, not Dr. Jones, Mr. Jones, the high school English teach, to vacate his class until I could get mine in there. So, basically, we couldn’t begin classes until four o’clock. For the first several years, my teaching career was a four o’clock, a

seven o'clock, an eight o'clock, that kind of thing on Monday/Wednesday/Friday or Tuesday or Thursday. The Tuesday/Thursday classes were obviously ninety minutes, the Monday/Wednesday/Friday classes, fifty minutes, which is still pretty traditional with regard to class time, et cetera. Yep, leave here many a time at ten o'clock at night.

Dr. Doyle: Where was, where was your first office or offices?

Mr. Kissel: Uh, my first offices, our first offices here at the technical institute, which became the community college, was, uh, I was in the Strailey Building, which was immediately west of the gymnasium on Third Street. And, uh, Hugh MacMullan and I shared an office there, and I think later you may have been in there, Dr. Doyle, and it was later razed, razed, whatever the word is, for construction, and then we moved into cubicles over on the trolley barn. You had to go up these concrete steps with c— no, with steel railings and that sort of thing and be in your own little cubicle, which is much like some of the ads you see on TV today for businesses. But it was fun and it was part of the process, you know. That was our offices. then, later, we moved into the high school because of seniority, I guess. I was fortunate enough to have and to share with you, Dan Doyle, the old yearbook office, which had windows to the west. And it was a very pleasant environment, you could see students coming down the hallway to go to their classes; you could here 'em. Enjoyed it there a great deal, and I think later on Jim Logue shared that office, then Dick Sweeney as well.

Dr. Doyle: I thank you for picking a wonderful office with a great view and the sun —

Mr. Kissel: Oh, I picked that one.

Dr. Doyle: You did a great job. Um, what was the campus like when you came in '65?

Mr. Kissel: I've jokingly referred to the — with, with, speaking to students about the campus, I would say to use the word "campus" loosely. Uh, you had to use your imagination to refer to this as a campus if you'd been to Lock Haven State, Bloomsburg, and Penn State and so forth. But a campus to me in many ways is like a church that's destroyed in a hurricane, typhoon, or a tornado: the campus is made up of faculty and students and administration, and in that sense, we had a campus in the truest sense of the word. The comradeship, the atmosphere was here. But in, in all true sense of the word, a campus, as you would imagine it, did not exist. It was not until the late 1970s that we had our first building expansion and boom under Dr. Feddersen, which it was welcomed and envisioned. And then, of course, later in the late '80s under Dr. Breuder and the current president, uh — my, oh my, oh my. You drive aboard now — I bring people from out of town for a ride up here just to show them the campus that I'm so proud of. Uh, it's, it's like being on the campus of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. It's wonderful, and it's, it's, it's great to live to be old enough to see it. Yep.

Dr. Doyle: Well, it brings back memories of the, uh, Strailey Building you talked about a few minutes ago, was on the corner of Susquehanna Street and, uh, West Third Street. And Susquehanna Street went down what is currently the mall (*unintelligible*) —

Mr. Kissel: That's correct.

Dr. Doyle: — the AHS. There were a lot of trucks going down that toward the end of the property to the city dump. Do you —

Mr. Kissel: I do.

Dr. Doyle: — talk about that?

Mr. Kissel: I, uh, well, I do remember that for a long time, we shared this campus with things other than a, a, a college. Uh, there were right-aways that existed, uh, businesses on the fringe of the campus that existed. And, needless to say, that you don't overnight, uh, remove them. I do remember those trucks, yes.

Dr. Doyle: Um, describe some of the classrooms other than in the academic — what is now the academic center that you taught in once the liberal arts classes, Gen Ed classes, switched to daytime, even before the college got —

Mr. Kissel: Mmhm.

Dr. Doyle: — hold of and ownership of the current academic center.

Mr. Kissel: Yeah, well, see, the current academic center, the classrooms would have been traditional high-school-type classing — classrooms: blackboard, fixed furniture, lectern, maybe, et cetera. But, uh, later on, of course, then we started filling all the nooks and crannies around this place as the enrollment increased, and I remember, uh, going up the steps beyond the school nurse's — uh, college had nurses in those days, I remember the two originals — but up the set of steps to a very low-ceilinged, concrete-floored room that was narrow and long, students wide left and right, narrow this way, and, uh, not well lighted — and, uh, that was one of them.

Dr. Doyle: That was when the Unit 6 —

Mr. Kissel: That was in Unit 6 —

Dr. Doyle: — was in the trolley barn?

Mr. Kissel: That's right. That was the administration building —

Dr. Doyle: Right.

Mr. Kissel: And the trolley barn. Yeah, kind of a cold environment.

Dr. Doyle: And where else did you teach?

Mr. Kissel: Oh, let's see.

Dr. Doyle: Rishel? Did you teach in Rishel?

Mr. Kissel: Uh, we taught in the Rishel building. Again, you could hear, you could hear the, uh, furniture, the machines running upstairs, uh, from the, uh, manufacturing that was going on while you taught your classes — that's, that's a truism as well. But it was an interesting experience, yeah.

Dr. Doyle: Uh, the, uh, liberal arts program was completely new to what had been the Williamsport Technical Institute. Um, were you involved in curriculum developments and selection of courses that you would teach and so forth?

Mr. Kissel: Well, for quite a long — lengthy time I was chairman of the curriculum development committee, but basically, uh, most of the development was projected on needs. We, we found out that the college needed this or needed that, and the area that I was involved in, basically, I always had a catalogue from Lock Haven State, Millersville, Mansfield, around, Lycoming, to look at the four-year program of those people. And you could see you that you needed general psychology, you needed sociology, you needed intro to — no, not intro to ed. You needed Psych I, you needed, uh, Lit I, and all these basic courses if you were going to have people prepared to transfer to other institutions. So, that pretty much dictated what we added. Plus, as the years went by and the enrollment increased, the demand increased for a wider variety of things, in journalism and in elsewhere. And we, uh, devised courses to meet those needs.

Dr. Doyle: Now, the students that you were advising were going to many of those institutions that you named, particularly the State College system as it was known at that time. Uh, do you have any memories of students transferring to various colleges (*unintelligible*)?

Mr. Kissel: Oh, I do. And I had, uh, no relationship with working out any agreement between those institutions — which, originally, I had at the very beginning — the administration people did that sort of thing. But I do recall sitting down with students and, uh, realizing, “Now, what are your long-range plans for yourself?” you know, “What do you — where do you expect to be four years from now?” and that kind of thing. And, in light of that, I would always make sure, uh, that we were tracked them into courses that were going transfer and would and not spin their wheels and waste their time when they got to that four-year institution, and you wanted to make sure that all the courses that they were taking were transferable. Time was money, credits are money, and you wanted to be efficient as you could be along those, uh, particular lines. And, uh, frequently I would have students come back, and I’d meet them at a party or something somewhere or whatever, and they would tell me how grateful they were for the one-on-one advising that they got from their instructors — not just me, but from everybody in the, uh, humanities in the liberal arts area, because they didn’t get that always at some of the institutions that they transferred to, according to what they told me.

Dr. Doyle: So, that small size of the, of the liberal arts program fostered that closer relationship —

Mr. Kissel: I think so, yes.

Dr. Doyle: Okay. Uh, what about the relationship between the liberal arts faculty and what was then called the applied arts faculty?

Mr. Kissel: I, I think that the — it was tremendous. There was a lot of comradery. There was no one who felt that “Because I wear a shirt and a tie, I’m better than you, who wear a smock.” There was none of that kind of an attitude, I think, at all. But over the years I’ve been kind of disappointed at the lack of integration that took place between quote-

unquote “college transfer people” or the professors as opposed to those who were technical instructors, because I don’t think we ever really integrated as much as we might have. Witness the picnics that were held: uh, they had picnics and they were dominated by the technical arts area, which would be natural because they were greater in number, but not many of the “liberal arts” quote-unquote people chose to attend those things. Today, if you go to a retirement dinner, which I have for twenty plus years, you’ll find a mere handful: myself and one or two other people there from that area. And I don’t know what it is. That it — that blending has never really been what I wished it would have been over the years. I don’t think it’s any better-than-thou attitude; I don’t think it’s that. It might just be that they feel they don’t have something in common with a welder, or whatever. I don’t know.

Dr. Doyle: You talked about the picnics; where were some of those, uh, first picnics held?

Mr. Kissel: Uh, some of our first picnics were with Brass — Clyde Brass’ farm. And, uh, they were great: the food was great, the outing was great, it was fun. And, uh, just in general basically, that’s where — he hosted the earlier ones, and then later we actually started to split into where the technical areas had theirs. And there was one big college picnic; it could be down at the, uh, at the, uh, Kremser[’s] Landing in Montoursville, where we had a picnic and played ball and softball, and Breuder aggressively participated in these things. But, uh, then we had picnics in some of our private homes. My wife and I entertained our faculty group out at Route 87 for many, many years and tremendously enjoyed having people there.

Dr. Doyle: And Best’s beach I believe was (*unintelligible*) —

Mr. Kissel: Oh, yes, that was early on. I’m glad you reminded me of that.

Dr. Doyle: How did that connect with Bill Best and the sign-painting at the college? Do you remember?

Mr. Kissel: Well, Bill Best had the sign-painting division, and he had this trailer park for mobile homes or whatever up on the Loyalsock and a small picnic pavilion area along the Loyalsock, and he graciously shared that with us, uh, in the early years. Yes, I went there with my wife and others.

Dr. Doyle: Instead of the college counsel and governance system that exists today, there was a loosely-structured, uh, all-faculty and all-administra— academic-administrative-staff approach in those early years of the community college that would meet, uh, in large rooms and eventually in the auditorium of the now-academic center. What do you recall about those gatherings?

Mr. Kissel: Well, I recall them quite vividly. Now, you’re talking about before we just had our divisional meeting with our deans or whatever. Uh, obviously we, uh, nearly filled that high school auditorium. And I remember pretty much it was, uh, to go there and to listen more than it was to participate in a dialogue. And, uh, very rarely did one

stand up and, for example, confront Dr. Breuder with, uh, questions, which, I recall, that I did on more than one occasion. And, uh, would have faculty say something to me about it afterwards, because I affectionately referred to Dr. Breuder as Dr. von Breuder: you listened to him, you didn't tell him, you know, and that kind of thing. But I wasn't — I'd been around long enough, and I wasn't apprehensive about, uh, sharing whatever views I might have had with him. It was not a give-and-take session, by and large — not the main group.

Dr. Doyle: Well, you always did that with a smile on your face, I think that's why (*unintelligible, overlapping*) —

Mr. Kissel: Yeah, well, perhaps.

Dr. Doyle: But I was thinking even earlier than that, when, uh — in the time of Dr. Carl, in particular, uh, and shortly after that — where all faculty would come together and literally vote on curriculum issues and things of that sort. Do you remember any of those meetings?

Mr. Kissel: I remember the meetings, but specifics I'd be pretty shady on. (*clears throat*)

Dr. Doyle: Uh, when Dr. Feddersen became president in the early seventies, uh, you had been a department chair of history for a number of years, and he created a divisional structure. Would you explain the difference in, in — from an organizational standpoint?

Mr. Kissel: Before I answer that question, if I could flash back to your previous one just for one brief moment: I do recall an issue that came up in these meetings with regard to the quarter system. We had a spring semester and a fall — I mean, a fall semester and a spring semester, which meant, of course, that your students got here sometime after Labor Day, and got out some time after a, uh, lame duck session after the Christmas holidays. And many people thought that that was an inefficient way to operate. So, the college did vote on a quarter system, which meant that you functioned pretty much year-round. And you had students in, uh, various programs, which meant they didn't all interlock. And it was quite a confusing situation — which, by the way, did not fly after a while. Fred Bierly, who went on to Bucknell, was partially instrumental in bringing that about. But that was an example of issues that were brought up that we tried, but was not successful. Just a flashback to what you —

Dr. Doyle: Sure, thank you.

Mr. Kissel: Now, with regard to your current question —

Dr. Doyle: The switch from a very many small departments to, uh, elimination of department heads and creation of the divisional structure, which would combine, for example, in what eventually became, uh, integrated studies — um, actually, two separate divisions: communications, humanities, and social sciences, and then math, science, and allied health. Uh, that was by Dr. Feddersen in the, around the mid-70s.

Mr. Kissel: Yep.

Dr. Doyle: What do you recall about that?

Mr. Kissel: Well, I recall — and I say this with no ego in mind at all — but I recall being offered the chairmanship of that particular division. But I was happy doing what I was doing; I was not an administrative-type person, and I chose not to do it. But I remember Middleton and others, like yourself, who were chair of this particular — Veronica [Muzic], of course. And, uh, it was wonderful: the comradery, the cooperation that existed in these divisions. I remember our meetings, I remember the advent of the computers, and how, uh, we could communicate with off-campus people, the growth, the expansion that took place in that area. And, uh, it was, it was great; it was another stepping-stone, in the, in the expansion and the diversification of the college.

Dr. Doyle: During the early '70s, the general education were core requirements for, uh, general — for, uh, Gen Ed were significantly changed, which followed sort of a national-wide trend to give students more selection in their courses. Uh, as a result, history was dropped as a requirement in most programs, uh, and that meant that you had to teach more than history because fewer students were now taking history. So, uh, what, what happened, and what was that experience like?

Mr. Kissel: Well, that's very true. Uh, originally, I taught Western Civ., which I was never really happy with because I didn't that I was really, truly qualified to give a great course of Western Civ. And, fortunately, you came along, and I could pass it on (*chuckles*). But, uh, American history was easy, my forte — American government: easy, my forte. However, I did, uh, uh, adapt to sociology; it's an easy course to teach, it's a course that students are interested in. And Introduction to Education was — I, I loved teaching Intro to Ed, and, later, Problems of Secondary Education. And it showed my interest in, in teachers, because early in my career, I had student teachers at the Montoursville High School from Lycoming College and from Lock Haven State. And, uh, I had this relationship between education and teacher training. And, uh, in my early years here at the college, I also went over to Lycoming College and taught some courses as later people did like Jim Logue and perhaps yourself, I'm not sure. Went down to the federal penitentiary to teach some courses. But all of that made it a natural thing for me to spill over into some new challenges, which I accepted with, uh, delight; I liked the change. It was interesting.

Dr. Doyle: Uh, college admissions in the early — in the late '60s, after the formation of the college, early '70s, it faced some opportunities and challenges. Would you talk about that?

Mr. Kissel: Explain yourself a little.

Dr. Doyle: Well, as far as, uh, the campus, in particular, and housing —

Mr. Kissel: Oh, I understand what you're driving at, yes. College admissions. Well, needless to say, with graphic arts and some of the unique programs in the technical area, including, uh, architecture and so forth, we had wide appeal beyond commuting distances, which attracted students from out of town: Altoona, Sayre. They would come

here, talk with the admissions people, talk with the curriculum people, sign up for a program — with their parents with them — women among them, young girls out of high school. They would, uh, leave this session with their administrative people here at the college and go out into the surrounding area to seek housing on Third and Fourth street, and come back and tell Lucille Cohen, director of housing — or admissions, was it? — that, uh, they couldn't stay. They had to withdraw before they really enrolled because they could not leave their daughter in housing like that. And I remember Lucille Cohen telling me with tears in her eyes that this was true. And, uh, that played an early role in eliminating women. From now — when you look at the demographics today, we have women's lib here at the technical institute, which became the college, in every sense of the word: from enrollment to faculty — because we built state-of-the-art housing, uh, we built things that were necessary for people who couldn't commute on a daily basis to be housed in housing that their parents could be comfortable with, that they could be comfortable with. And hooray for the people that had the foresight to see that this was a necessary ingredient. Because a lot of people thought, "What does a community college need with housing?" You know, you meet the needs of your sponsoring districts and let it go at that. But we went far beyond meeting the needs of our sponsoring districts. Even the library: I remember, uh, one of the members of the board of trustees, when library funding was mentioned — and I give this quote as I remember it, it is not embellished in any way, shape, or form — "What do they need with money for a library for? What's a technical institute need with a library?" The guy must have had his head between his tail or something, you know? Uh, how can you function as an educational institution without a library? You know, it's like a kitchen without tools, you know? So, therefore — and look at the Madigan Library today. I walked in there, and how proud I was to see that place and, uh, just to think, "My, oh my, how far we've come," you know?

Dr. Doyle: Did students ever describe the housing they were in or did you ever see student housing?

Mr. Kissel: I saw it. And, uh, yes, they would talk about it when you went through advising areas. Even had some students living with a guy, you know, and I'd say, "I don't think mom would like this all that much," you know? Had one girl come in crying one day because one guy had shoved her around. And I recall telling her, "Get out. Go home. Pack your bags and move immediately." Because, uh, some of that housing just left a great deal to — I hate to call them, uh, opportunistic landlords, but they didn't provide very well, and, uh, — yeah, I saw some of that stuff.

Dr. Doyle: Of course, there was no supervision.

Mr. Kissel: No supervision. No oversight. The city didn't really monitor it like they seem to do today for off-campus housing.

Dr. Doyle: Well, when the Williamsport Technical Institute became the Williamsport Area Community College, one of the new opportunities it had was college athletics, and you had some, um, experience with that. Would you talk about that, please?

Mr. Kissel: Oh yeah, it was wonderful. Uh, my gosh, they had basketball, they had, uh, hockey, they had, uh — I don't remember if they had hockey or not, maybe I need to take that back, but they had girls' basketball, boys' basketball, they had wrestling. A great wrestling team — Max Wasson, uh, developed a wrestling team here that, uh, competed very, very well with the Penn State campuses, with Bucknell's JVs, with Lycoming's JVs. I used to be the scorer and, and I loved it. Uh, they had archery, and I recall, uh, in recent years they've been, uh, uh national champions in, in archery. Uh, they've done well, and they still have a great athletic program. And I probably did not, uh, elaborate enough on some of those early teams that they had, but, uh, they had 'em, and, uh, I'm still — I was so glad they still have 'em. They had a band; there was a college band at that time. They called 'em the, uh, Wildcat Band. I don't know whether that exists today. They had a yearbook, which I'd like to talk about afterwards. Uh, they had, uh, a lot of things that they don't have today that I would like to see a college of this stature have. For example, I'm going to talk to some people about a rebirth of the yearbook. Uh, I'd like to talk to some people — I wear this college ring from Lock Haven State proudly, I've worn that for over a half-century — I don't think the college has a class ring. I would like to see some competitive bidding on design; I would like to serve as a chairman to help select a ring; I would like to purchase the first one manufactured. I'd like to buy the first of the renewal yearbooks available. And, uh, I'd like to see those things happen to the college. Uh, they still do, uh, fortunately, a great deal of, uh, of, uh, programming. By programming, I mean lectures, and, uh, musical people. I remember they had Stan Kenton, they had the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, uh, Jesse Owens was here, and I'll never forget Neil Diamond. We had Neil Diamond, we went to the concert; we were in the high school gym, and here he is in the little hick town — he thought — in this little gymnasium with hardly anybody in it. And at half-time, intermission, he wanted his money. He wasn't sure he was going to get paid. But I've been a Neil Diamond to this, uh, to this, to this day. And I remember Bob — uh, English, uh, prof, oh, he and his wife, Rita — Ulrich. They became great Neil Diamond fans and they traveled all over the east. Go to, go to — Neil Diamond fans. But, uh, the college does still does programs like that, and I'm glad. Every college ought to have a cultural arts program — whatever they refer to it. But we had it. We had astronauts. I'm not sure whether it was, uh, Neil Armstrong or Carba— Carpenter or whatever, but we had some astronauts here as well. That's where I got that original astronaut thing.

Dr. Doyle: (*chuckles*) As I recall, you were advisor to the activities when Neil Diamond was here, and I believe you stepped in and said, "No, you're going to, uh, get your pay after you do your final performance."

Mr. Kissel: That's correct, isn't it? Yep.

Dr. Doyle: You told me that story the very next day.

Mr. Kissel: Oh, really? That's —

Dr. Doyle: (*laughing*) So, it's stuck in my brain, too. Thank you for sharing it. Uh, increasingly during the '70s and '80s, the twenty sponsoring school districts challenged the college administration in a variety of ways, particularly, primarily in passing the budget.

Mr. Kissel: Yes.

Dr. Doyle: Um, what was your experience in passing that, since you came from one of the important school districts: Montoursville. Did you experience comments at home and from former colleagues at the high school?

Mr. Kissel: Well, uh, interestingly enough. Montoursville was an original sponsor, and rightly so should have been, because when I was at the high school, we had many students who were not academically inclined. And that does not mean that they were any less in any way, shape, or form, but they came here as we call them "tech rats," they enrolled in automotive, they enrolled in welding, they did this, they did that, and some of them still exist in the greater Montoursville area today doing their businesses, which are commendable. And, uh, the college recognized that there was a need for a technical institute, needless to say. And, yes, they were one of those original twenty sponsoring school districts, which, unfortunately, entered into a twenty-year agreement. And time clicks, you know, the bus goes by my house every half-hour in Montoursville. And the first thing you know, five years becomes twenty years. But over the years, Montoursville as well as the other districts sent many a, many a, many a student. I can go through yearbooks and pick out name, after name, after name, after name who attended here. Uh, and, therefore, I could easily see why they would want to be a sponsoring school district. But as they themselves became a broader educational institu— Lycoming school jointures, and he referred to them as Montoursville Area Joint School, Jersey Shore Area Joint School in the beginning. Then he decided that word "joint" wasn't the best terminology to use, and they dropped that particular na— Jersey — er, just the Montoursville School District. But as they grew, enrollments increased, budgets increased. And, uh, therefore, the, college budget became, uh, a, uh, source of, uh, criticism for some on the local school board, uh, who begrudged the money — even though if they would've looked at the books, they had plenty of kids enrolling here. And, therefore, it was a good thing for them and for the college and for the community. Because as I (*stutters*) said one — facetiously said one time in an interview: "When you go to the Williamsport Area Community College, when you graduate, you get a job." And our students were still being gainfully employed almost immediately. So, therefore, why Montoursville ran out of patience — uh, they shouldn't have, but they did. And as far as my relationship: no, it had no bearing on it. No one ever looked down their nose or

looked at me or any other faculty member as a threat to their, to their existence in any way, shape, or form. To this day, I'm as much of a family with them as I am here. As a matter of fact, I get invited to all the retirement dinners and to all their class reunions and so forth — to this day I still do. And I go, I might add.

Dr. Doyle: Your teaching, uh, years at the community college also cover the time — most of the years of the Vietnam War. Um, you were returning — you were a veteran yourself. Uh, what was your experience with students who maybe were (*unintelligible*) male students who were coming to seek deferment from the draft, and for veterans who were increasingly then coming after they had served in the war. Do you have memories of that?

Mr. Kissel: Yeah, I do. And, uh, first of all, let me make it quite clear: because of my age at the time of World War II, uh, and, uh, the Korean War, had I not existed I would not have been in the service. Therefore, I'm not a combat veteran. So, I want to preface my remarks by that. But yes, I was quite aware of the fact that we had this deferment issue. But again, uh, I'm a believer in, uh, in, uh, people doing what they're inclined to do, and choosing not to do what they're not inclined to do. So, therefore, I never, ever looked down my nose at someone that I felt was not inclined to serve their country in a military way, nor did I, uh — if I can choose — if I can use the word “gay,” if I recognize that this particular guy's a little effeminate or whatever, it never, ever occurred to me to be prejudiced against him or her. And by the same token, the same as those who opposed the Vietnam war. The campus was divided, the student body was divided, but not as they are today, where they get so much more vocal and violent over issues. But we did have these issues; it was divisive; we did have our debates and our sessions. Uh, and to my knowledge, I've never had a day where you and I were on opposite sides of the coin. But it never affected our personal relationship, I don't think, for a day, and nor anyone else on the faculty at that time. It was a subjective, uh, problem to be dealt with, just as the Iraq situation is another repeat performance which is dividing the country. It's not wholesome. I don't know what the alternative is or what the answer will be, but we ultimately solved it in Korea, and hopefully there's a light at the end of this tunnel, which will, uh, not be detrimental to the nation, whatever the solution might be.

Dr. Doyle: Thank you. In 1973, the college faculty went on strike, uh, which resulted in a temporary closure of the college for classes for three weeks. You were a department head at that time, and therefore were not part of the bargaining unit, and therefore not on strike. What, what are your recollections of that time?

Mr. Kissel: Well, yes, I do remember that. And, uh, I know your PhD background and your interest and so forth in the working man. And I, too, had — but for some reason or another, I never, uh, gravitated toward unions or, uh, belonged to a union, which they had in Montoursville High School after I left. Uh, they, they formed a, a teachers' union and they had it here at the college, which by virtue of the fact that as you pointed out I'm a

chairman, I wasn't involved in it. So, therefore, I was not involved in the emotional aspects of it and the economic aspects. Fortunately, it only lasted three weeks. And what they did with me: they sent me down to the aviation unit at the airport, where I basically babysat a, a, unit and just occupied space and held things together until this, uh, solution came along to resolve the problem. Fortunately, it was not a long knock-'em-out-drag-'em-out affair. And I don't think it did permanent damage — again, as I don't think the Vietnam War. Now, maybe there are harboring, uh, illnesses between certain people over that and over Vietnam, but if there is, I don't recall them or feel them or ever experience them. But no, I, uh — that's what happened with me.

Dr. Doyle: Which made you feel more of a fish out of water: teaching anatomy and physiology to, um — in the Navy or teaching aviation for that (*unintelligible*)?

Mr. Kissel: Well, the answer to that is easy because, uh, I didn't teach anything in the aviation unit — I, I occupied a space and a presence, uh, basically. But at the, uh, at the Bainbridge Hospital Corps School of all things, the Navy gave me an outline of the course: here's the course, here's what you teach. And basically, it was a, a, a subject of me staying three days ahead of the students, learning the terminology, the *materia medica*, and being able to, uh, vocalize it, project it, and get it done — and I did, you know? So, uh, no, that wasn't a challenge.

Dr. Doyle: Now, you continued to teach for several years as an adjunct once you retired, teaching Introduction to Education. Uh, what was it like to return as an adjunct and teach one course at a time?

Mr. Kissel: Well, it was a blessing in many respects, because, uh, it was 1985 when I retired at fifty-eight years old. And, if you'll allow me to flash back to my beginnings again: we all know that education is not — you don't get rich, you're not a CEO of some corporate — whatever. But my beginning salary at Susquenita was \$2,800. My salary when I went to, uh, Montoursville High School with a master's degree from Bucknell was \$3,600. When I came to the college as an assistant professor in 1965, my salary was \$7,500. And thirty years later when I retired — with no hospitalization by the way — uh, my salary was \$30,000. Well, at that time — as you indicated earlier in the discussion — enrollments were down. Budgetary issues were a challenge here. And the college offered a buyout incentive of \$10,000. I'd never seen \$10,000 in one lump sum in my life. And my wife and I had been going with the kids to Sanibel Island in Florida, and I had this offer, and I'm sitting on the beach at Sanibel Island, thinking about whether I should accept \$10,000 and thirty-five years of experience and call it a day or not. And maybe that wasn't a good place to make a decision with a margarita in your hand, because I did, and I sent in the retirement papers, much to my mother's chagrin, who said, "You're too young to retire." And also said to me, what do you want to do, going down to Florida with all those old people," you know? (*Dr. Doyle chuckles*) But nevertheless, I've had great years of retirement. And those few years I came back to teach a course was sort of a

weening process, and I very much enjoyed that as well because it kept me into the thing. But because the semester didn't end until someone — somewhere around a week before Christmas, I didn't — I don't like the cold well enough to hang around that long. So, I gradually stopped doing that. Then, the college showed me some respect by bringing me back after I stopped teaching to be an advisor to some special-challenged students whose schedules were kind of complicated. And they paid me an hourly wage; I'm not sure — I think it was \$10 to schedule some students on a part-time basis. I did that a few hours a week for a while and then ultimately, uh, washed my hands of the situation. I had a couple homes in Florida — over the winter only — spent fifteen years down there, tired of that, sold the homes, washed my hands, and came back to (*sings*) “my home town” — that's the guy from Jersey's song, and Montoursville's my home town and we're happy there. I can put up with the weather even though I don't like it. You know, so here we are.

Dr. Doyle: Is there anything of significance that you would like to add to your experience here at the community college for '65 to '85?

Mr. Kissel: Uh, do you mind if I just glimpse in my pocket for a moment and just see if I jotted anything down that we may have missed? Those fall weekends were neat. The road rallies that they had were neat with sports cars.

Dr. Doyle: What fall weekends? Explain —

Mr. Kissel: Fall weekends, yes.

Dr. Doyle: Explain those.

Mr. Kissel: We had a May queen, we had a spring queen, and the kids had a chance to be a part of a college atmosphere for a weekend. They had picnics and it was wonderful. Uh, the boy-girl thing was wonderful. The dating thing, uh, was nice. And they had those fall weekends, which I thought added to the college atmosphere. I'm not sure that they put a — still put a float in the Mummers Parade, but I bet they do. I, I would think that they probably do. The school newspaper, the Spotlight, does that still exist? The young man probably knows.

Dr. Doyle: No. No.

Mr. Kissel: My goodness, we need to re-give a rebirth to the Spotlight. What are all these journalism students doing, you know? Where are their faculty advisors? I need to light a fire under someone, and I'm going to attempt to do so at lunch today. Uh, the 197[0]s — wonderful time: journalism, broadcasting. Many of our journalism and broadcasting students went on to — they had to take broadcasting, by the way — they went on to be some of the nucleus for WWPA. And I would see them at the Bloomsburg fair or at the, uh, uh, Hughesville fair; they would always call me over for an interview. Many of the people that are still with WWPA, uh, were here as journalism students and broadcasting students. (*pause*) Oh, you ask about, uh, style earlier and I didn't really respond to it. But, uh, uh, did I bring the same approach to the college as I had in the high

school? And the answer is that I don't know for sure, but I do remember that someone in the technical area, carpentry, built me a little lectern, which I carried from one classroom to another. And I remember teaching on my feet ninety percent of the time, unless it was in Intro to Ed class, which lent itself to a little round-chair-discussionary-type thing. But I remember also showing up in a vacant classroom where my class was going to meet and putting an outline of my notes for the day on the board, and as I lectured, rather than having to write on the board with my back to the class, I simply would refer to whatever I had already written on the board. And then later, when we got into computers and copying machines, it was easy for me to then hand out a copy of — just like a minister with his sermon. I would hand out a, a, a, an outline of what I'm going to be talking about today. And, again, I thought it was a technique that, that helped and so forth — I, I did that. (*sounds of paper crinkling*) Don't want to hold you up here, now. Let's quickly do this. Oh, I, I just want to mention, too: the long journey from the original cafeteria to the Le Jeune Chef, "The Young Chef," can you imagine? Now serving food at the Kentucky Derby — yes! Our people, you know. And what a long way we've come, and, uh, with those people. They certainly had their heads screwed on — know what they were — knew what they were doing, and developed a fine program, uh, which, uh, is widely known now — even have their own television program occasionally. But what a long journey they've traveled.

Dr. Doyle: So, what was food service available for students and, and faculty when you came in '65? Was there anything?

Mr. Kissel: Yeah, there was hot food available, uh, at a very moderate cost. Uh, I, I remember you went over into that — what became the first administrative building. Again, where, uh, there was a, uh, — school buses came up around the front of the building and left off those school students that still came here from the sponsoring dif— districts. I don't know what the name of that building was, but there was a flagpole out front. Almost directly across from Klump. It would have been immediately east of, uh, the auditorium — or, the gymnasium.

Dr. Doyle: You're talking about a new building built in the '70s?

Mr. Kissel: Yeah, evidently.

Dr. Doyle: — (*unintelligible*) Learning Resource Center?

Mr. Kissel: Yeah, well —

Dr. Doyle: Yes.

Mr. Kissel: — back, back in there, there was food, hot food, available.

Dr. Doyle: Okay. What about in '65, though? Before that?

Mr. Kissel: Oh, we went over to Cillo's. We went to Cillo's, which is directly across the street from, uh, the Strailey Building.

Dr. Doyle: So, there was no place available, really.

Mr. Kissel: No. Then, also, there was another little place down at the corner of — is that Basin Street at the other end down there? You go down Third, and the first righthand turn — there was another, uh, little bar and grill in there that you could go to.

Dr. Doyle: Danny’s [Tech] Diner, you’re talking about?

Mr. Kissel: Well, I’m not sure what the name of it was.

Dr. Doyle: Danny’s [Tech] Diner was located on Susquehanna Street, down below what was the railroad tracks, which no longer tries — go across the —

Mr. Kissel: Yeah.

Dr. Doyle: (*unintelligible*) Okay.

Mr. Kissel: Yeah, well, I remember that. Uh, didn’t refer to it earlier. I, I guess that’s (*unintelligible*).

Dr. Doyle: As you look back on your career at WACC, what do you have the greatest satisfaction regarding your teaching career and your interaction with students?

Mr. Kissel: Well, I hate to use a cliché like “I made a difference,” but in many, uh, aspects — whether you’re a kindergarten teacher or an elementary or middle or high school or a college teacher — I think the opportunity exists to have an impact on some people’s lives. And it is gratifying for me to know that the former DA, that the former Mayor of Montour— of, uh, of, uh, Williamsport, the, uh, some of the magistrates that are currently sitting, uh, city councilmen, teachers up at the high school had been in my classroom at one time or another — the college solicitor. And, uh, I could go on and on and on with a litany of names that have, uh, crossed my path at one time or another. And it’s very gratifying, rewarding, to have one refer to me one time: “Oh, there’s one of my heroes.” I said, “How could that be? I was never one of your football coaches or your wrestling coach. How could that be?” Well, and they would go on to expound — and I don’t want to blow my horn, but — how “You made a difference in my life,” you know? And, uh, teaching — and I repeat: at whatever level — can be a very gratifying journey. And, uh, it has been for me. It’s, uh — twenty years went by here so quickly. And, in a sense, I regret that I’m still not here as a gray-haired old guy — with no hair, I guess — still, uh, holding a captive audience. And I do admit that you have a captive audience, so they don’t have a lot of choice in putting up with you. And not everybody loved Robert Kissel — I’m sure of that. Many did, but not everybody did, I’m sure. But it was a great experience. I loved every minute of it. As did I my high school career. I loved every grade level — seventh and eighth grade as well: inquisitive, fun. Yep.

Dr. Doyle: Great. Well, thank you, Bob, for sharing your memories. Uh, it’s so clear that you had then, and still have, this enthusiasm for teaching, for the community, and especially for students. And a little while you used the expression “to light a fire in” people. It’s so obvious that you then, and still have, this fire and have shared it with us all.

Mr. Kissel: Well, thank you very much. I consider it a compliment that you asked me. Uh, my memory is rather shaky in some of the areas, especially buildings, but my fondness for the college, my dedication to the college, and my hopes for its future will never dim.

Dr. Doyle: Well, I think you said it so well: uh, the campus was people more than it was buildings. Thank you.

Mr. Kissel: (*unintelligible*) Thank you.