

University of Illinois Student Life 1928-1938
Oral History Project
Carl V. Milburn – Class of '37
Arlington Heights, Illinois
May 2, 2001

START OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

Ellen Swain: This is an oral history interview for the University of Illinois Archives. The interviewer is Ellen Swain, the narrator is Carl Milburn, an alumnus from the class of 1937. We are at Mr. Milburn's home in Arlington Heights, Illinois and the date is May 2, 2001.

Could I ask you your full name and birth date?

Carl Milburn: Carl, spelled with a C, Carl. Vencil, V-E-N-C-I-L, Milburn, M-I-L-B-U-R-N.

ES: Okay and when were you born?

CM: Oh, June 26th, 1914.

ES: Tell me a little bit about your family background, what your parents did and where you grew up?

CM: Well my father was a paving contractor and I grew up in Rockford, Illinois.

ES: Did you have brothers and sisters.

CM: I had a sister who was 6 years younger than I was.

ES: Where did you go to school there in Rockford?

CM: Rockford High School. There was just one high school in Rockford, then.

ES: How did you get interested in the University?

CM: Well, people I knew went there, and it seemed just like the right place to go.

ES: You didn't consider other schools?

CM: No, not that I know of.

ES: Did your parents think education was important, did they push you to go to college?

CM: Yes.

ES: What about other students in your high school, were they able to go to school? Was there a high percentage of students who went onto college?

CM: I'm not sure, I knew the students that went there, but I'm not sure what percentage went from my high school.

ES: Was there a large percentage too?

CM: That's right, yeah.

ES: What are your first memories of the University of Illinois? Now you said you started in 1932?

CM: '32.

ES: Do you remember your first day or what your first impressions of the campus were?

CM: Well, I was somewhat familiar with the campus. I had been down there previously. Otherwise, I can't think of too many things.

ES: Why had you gone down previously? To sporting events or—?

CM: Yes, that's right.

ES: How were you able to go to school during, now 1933 was in the middle of economic Depression?

CM: That's right. Well, my family wasn't hit too hard by the Depression, so I was able to go.

ES: Did you have to work while you were in school, did you have other jobs?

CM: No I didn't.

ES: Why did you want to go to college? Did you have a career goal in mind, or a certain thing you wanted to study when you went away?

CM: The only thing I thought of studying was engineering. My family was in the paving business actually, building roads, you know. So I gravitated towards that.

ES: So you started out in Engineering, but you didn't stay in that field?

CM: That's right. I changed to Liberal Arts, majored in economics, and minored in philosophy and sociology. See I was interested in more fields than engineering. I was pretty interested in philosophy, so I wanted a more rounded education. So, I actually graduated in economics.

ES: What do you remember about the department, did you have any favorite professors or—?

CM: Right off I can't think of any.

ES: What were the relationships between faculty and students back in the 30s? Did you know the professors outside of the classes at all, or were they mainly people that you saw in the classroom?

CM: That's mostly ones I saw in the classroom, that's right.

ES: What do you think the strengths of your academic education, the strengths and weaknesses of it were?

CM: Well, I think mostly strengths, but I ended up with a rather well-rounded education, major in economics and a minor in philosophy and sociology.

ES: What did you want to do with those majors? When you changed majors was it because you thought you could—?

CM: Well after I first got out, I went into the family paving business and then later I decided I wanted to do something else, so I went back to school and majored in economics.

ES: It wasn't so much to get a job, it was more what you were interested in that's what led you into these fields?

CM: Yeah that's right, yeah.

ES: Oh, okay. Do you remember what kinds of rules and regulations there were for students on campus? What kinds of things you could do, I know people have said you couldn't have a car on campus.

CM: I don't remember that [*laughter*]. I didn't have a car so—

ES: It didn't affect you.

CM: That's right.

ES: Do you remember the Dean of Men at all? Did you have any impressions of him? I think it would have been Fred Turner in '32.

CM: Yeah, yeah, I remember him, that's right.

ES: How did students view him, or did you have any views about him?

CM: Well I think he was well liked as far as I remember.

ES: Was he pretty visible on campus, was he accessible, could you go talk to him?

CM: Oh yes, yes, uh-huh.

ES: Let's see. How did religion figure on campus? Were students active in the foundations at school or the different religious organizations, was that a part of student life?

CM: I think so.

ES: You weren't involved in that kind of thing?

CM: Not too much.

ES: Okay. Do you remember anything about the President of the University? I guess I'm interested if students knew who the President was or had any kind of contact with him at all?

CM: Yeah, I think I knew at the time.

ES: But you didn't, you weren't over at the President's house for anything or—?

CM: Yes I now recall being at the President's house for some functions. I was pretty active in the YMCA, and I knew men at the Y pretty well.

ES: Tell me what kinds of things you were involved in and what kind of student organizations.

CM: Well, I was in a fraternity, Alpha Delta Phi.

ES: Why did you join?

CM: Well, I knew someone from that fraternity, I went through rush week and I knew one member of that fraternity and I joined that. Did you remember John Hayes by any chance?

ES: No.

CM: He was the lifeguard in Buena Vista, up in Wisconsin where we spent the summers. And I knew him. I had rush dates with different fraternities.

ES: How did that work, did they contact you and invite you to pledge or how did the system work, to rush a fraternity?

CM: Yes that's right they did.

ES: What kinds of things did you do with the fraternity, did you live in the house?

CM: Yes, I lived in the house.

ES: Did you have—?

CM: Well I was in some activities. I was out for freshman track.

ES: Oh yeah?

CM: And, that was, I went to a freshman camp that they had in those years and met people at the YMCA. And so I was active in the YMCA.

ES: What kinds of things did the Y do?

CM: Well, they had a freshman camp that I attended. A lot of it, these memories are sort of hazy now, you know [*laughter*].

ES: Sure.

CM: Yeah.

ES: Did, do they have social activities? You were active in it after you became a student at school? Did they have volunteer programs, or dances, or what did you do as a member?

CM: Well, I pledged to a fraternity right away almost, so I became active in activities through the fraternity.

ES: Through the fraternity.

CM: Uh-huh.

ES: Did the Greek students, the students who belonged to the fraternities, get along with the students who didn't, did they socialize? Or, how did that work?

CM: Well, they worked, sure they socialized.

ES: Did you think it gave you more prestige to belong to a fraternity?

CM: Well I think it, I think it opened doors into activities. And then of course fraternities encouraged people to get into activities. And, that's about it.

ES: How long did you run track?

CM: Well, during my freshman year and then I had a strep infection in between my freshman and sophomore year and it had affected my heart some, so I didn't participate in track after that

time. But, I have something I was just looking at, there are some interesting things in here, [referring to the *Illio*]. I was active in the Y, in the YMCA mostly.

ES: Did you travel around to the other schools, to the other Big Ten schools to run track your freshman year?

CM: No, freshman year, most of the things were confined to that campus.

ES: I see.

Mrs. Milburn: What about the Glee Club.

CM: What?

Mrs. Milburn: What about the Glee Club.

CM: Yeah, I was in the Glee Club at the University of Illinois. And—

ES: Was that something you had to audition for?

CM: Yes. Well, I took voice lessons, so I was in the Glee Club. Take a look in here, try to refresh my memory.

Mrs. Milburn: You should have been studying.

CM: What?

INTERRUPTION.

CM: In charge of certain committees at the Y. I was in charge of what they called freshman fellowship. It ran freshman activities, and a freshman camp and different things like that.

ES: So your committee was in charge of producing all the Y—?

CM: Freshman—

ES: Freshman, I see.

CM: Yeah, that's right.

ES: What kind of time commitment was that?

CM: Well, it took some time. We were involved in quite a bit.

ES: What kind of things did you do for fun, when you had time?

CM: Well, we had dances, and you know social activities, dates, you know and so on.

ES: What did you do on a date, did you go, where did you go, or—?

CM: Well, it was mostly for fraternity or sorority dances.

ES: If you had free time during the day, what did you do, in between classes, did you go to the library or—?

CM: Yes, we could do that [*laughter*]. Well, you know, if you can think of things that I can—

Mrs. Milburn: If he could walk, he would. He's a great walker. ().

ES: How deeply do you think the Depression was felt by students on campus? Were you aware that people were having trouble?

CM: Well, I was aware that my family was having some economic problems you know.

ES: What did they, was it difficult for them to keep you in school, financially?

CM: I think so, yeah.

ES: Do you remember in what ways? What kinds of things you had to do?

CM: You are going back a long ways.

ES: Sure, sure.

CM: She's laughing because—I think I was lucky to be able to go at that time, at that period in history though. Uh-huh.

ES: Do you remember black students on campus at all? Or have any contact with black students or Jewish students on campus?

CM: Well, I remember that there were black and Jewish students. And I think there's a Jewish fraternity if I'm not mistaken.

ES: Do you have a sense of how they got along? Were there any problems that you were aware of, in student body? You don't remember?

CM: I don't think there were nearly as many black students in school as there were in later years you know. And I think they had black fraternities and sororities in later years, but, and then of course, the blacks were active in athletics later, but in my time, they were in the minority.

ES: Were there black students on the track team?

CM: I don't remember any.

ES: When you were in school, how aware of national events and other things going on in the world were you, when you were on campus? Did you know what the economic situation was nationally? Or, what was going on politically in the United States?

CM: Yes, we were aware of it. Of course we got the newspapers same as people did in other places though.

ES: Were students on campus involved in political activities outside of campus or—?

CM: Not too much. Do you think they were involved in political activities when you were—?

Mrs. Milburn: No I don't think so. They were very much concerned about the war and things going on. (). As far as the newspapers we, you read them mostly just for the sports, basketball scores and things like that, that was about all we read it for.

ES: Did you have a sense of whether the campus was more Democrat or Republican in orientation?

CM: I think the people I knew were Republican.

ES: They were Republican.

CM: Excuse me, I'm just getting refreshed on different things here. Oh I know, what to tell. I was looking for the track team one, when I was on it, but that was in, that was, down at the bottom, down there, that's in the early 30s [*laughter*].

ES: Did you go through Commencement ceremonies?

CM: Yes.

ES: Was that a big occasion for your family?

CM: Uh-huh, yes that was a big occasion.

ES: I forget you did have siblings, did they go to college?

CM: Yes. I had a sister who graduated from the University of Wisconsin.

ES: So, she had already graduated, she was older than you?

CM: No she graduated, she was 6 years younger than I.

ES: Were you the first one in your family to graduate then? Had your parents gone to school?

CM: No.

ES: You said, a little bit about this, but what did you do after graduation?

CM: Well, I went into the family paving business. And then I later I decided to go back, I was kind of dissatisfied you know. I went back to school and majored in psychology and sociology.

Mrs. Milburn: You went back to the University of Chicago.

CM: I went to the University of Chicago, yeah that's right.

ES: When did you get those degrees?

CM: Well, I didn't get another degree, I—

ES: You just got some more...

CM: Yeah, then later I got a job with Commonwealth Edison, and I was in the personnel department there. And then I was drafted during World War II. And after I came back from there, I went back into the paving business [*laughter*].

ES: How do you think your education has influenced your later life? Your experience at Illinois, how is that influence what you've done in later life?

CM: Well, ... gave me more opportunities of course.

ES: Well, thank you I think you've answered my questions. Is there anything else you want to say?

CM: No, I see, let's ...

END OF INTERVIEW.