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Denise Denelias [00:00:16] Mildred was a professor and a Student Union leader at Montana State University. Mildred, would you like to give us a little bit of background information about yourself?

Mildred Leigh [00:00:27] I'd be glad to. I was born and raised on a farm in Illinois. And when I was ready for school, I went to the little town two and a half miles from home and stayed with my grandparents and went to town school for the kindergarten, first and second grade. Then my sister became old enough to go to school, so we went to this country school, a little country school, and for the next five years I was there. I missed the town very much. I mean, I missed the town school very much, we had music and we had got to act in little plays and I just loved all my friends and so forth. So I really didn't enjoy country school. But then, when I got ready for high school. The high school in the little town close to us was not- excuse me, don't ever get old. These words... accredited is what I'm trying to say. So I went to the Canton School, Canton, Illinois, which was 10 miles from home, and I rode the interurban down on Sunday evening and came back on Friday night. And I stayed with three very fine families during my high school. And the family with whom I stayed the last two years... Oh, it was just wonderful. And I think that many of the attitudes that I have formed as I've grown older, as I grew up, I should say, came from the Hatfields, and they just treated me like I was their own daughter, and that was wonderful. That experience gave me a feeling of independence and it gave me a chance to be on my own and make a lot of decisions and I had to be resourceful. And I graduated from high school in 1920. Then I had a year at home because I needed to help my mother in the regular farm duties and the... We were building a new house and we fed the carpenters and all the workers all the time and that was just too much for Mother so I stayed home and helped. Cornell College in Iowa was my college and I graduated from there in 1925. Cornell is a very fine liberal arts school. We had only about 500 students, but it had a very fine, rich course in home economics, I felt. When I came out here and watched this department grow and broaden out and deepen, I realized that mine hadn't been so rich as I had really thought it was. For the next three years after I graduated from college, I taught home economics in two schools in Tennessee. They were combination county high schools and Methodist schools, and so they had students who came from the mountains around who lived in a dormitory, and we had a kitchen, dining room, and a dormitory, regular dormitory rooms, one for boys and one for girls. Then the town youngsters came of course just in the day and they didn't stay at the dormitory. I was partially responsible for the food service and of course it wasn't very elaborate food service. I went there for \$75 a month plus board and room, and I think the students paid \$2.45 for their board and rooms a month. So that wasn't very much. The school was dependent somewhat on the donations that they got from the church in the north. That was a real experience. I just loved it. I loved the country. I'm still homesick for Tennessee in the springtime because of the wildflowers and the rhododendron, which of course is wild- all those beautiful flowers. I remember so well, going with one of the teachers on a hike down the valley a little ways from school, and oh it was just beautiful. Third week in April. And I climbed up a little bank and then was on top of a rail fence taking a picture of this valley with all the fruit trees in bloom and I heard this voice way, way back up above me, and I looked up and here was a woman standing on a log cabin up there way up. And she said, what are you all doing down there? And I said, oh, I'm taking a picture of your beautiful country. And she said. Well, if you lived around here as long as I have, you wouldn't think it was so beautiful. And I'm sure life was really difficult for those people, but they were wonderful people, and that was a fine experience. Worked hard, but I played hard, too. After three years, I came back home, and I entered University of Chicago that fall- fall of 1928. And the first year I took

classes in institutional management that was a part of home economics at the University of Chicago. And then the next year, I was the clerk in the commons office where they took care of all the dormitories, food service and the living quarters, and also four large cafeterias on campus. So it was busy place, and it was an excellent experience for me. Fortunately, a job opened up out here in 1st of June, and I came out then- the fall of 1930- to teach institution management courses and to be house director at Hamilton Hall. Now Hamilton Hall was the only dormitory on the campus and it was for freshman girls. All the girls were, freshman girls, were required to live there unless they had a home in Bozeman or if they worked- many of the girls in days worked and lived with families. They baby sat for the children or they did the dishes and they did the rest of the things, you see. That was, I was just really quite thrilled with that.

Denise Denelias [00:10:09] You had an interesting story you'd mentioned earlier about how you came to meet or how you came to be hired.

Mildred Leigh [00:10:16] Oh, yes. The two real jobs that I ever had came sort of on a fluke, and this one was no different than the other one. Dr. Branegan, Dr. Gladys Branegan who was chairman or head of the Home Economics Department, had rounded up a very fine person to have this job that I took later. And she was a fine person. I think she went to Iowa State and she was an institution management person. And Dean Herrick, Dean Una B. Herrick for whom Herrick Hall is named, was the Dean of Women and she also was the Academic Dean for the Departments of Home Economics, Art and Secretarial Sciences, we called the Business Department then in those days. She, therefore, had to approve any appointments that Dr. Branegan made, you see. So she had, she was not home when Miss Branegan had settled her mind on this, but she came home from being on a trip or something, and Miss Branegan gave her a picture and the papers of the gal that Gladys had thought was a nice person for the job and she took one look and she said, "Gladys, I couldn't work with this girl. I think she has Negro blood in her." Well, so that settled that. Dean Herrick was a Kentuckian. Her father was a politician. He never had an office. He never ran for an office, but he, it sounded to me as though he managed the Democratic Party of Kentucky. Of course, it's hard, I imagine, for you people... And I think it's sad, of course, that the white people of the South, particularly, just couldn't think of Negroes being in positions of this sort. And so, Dr. Branegan had to start all over. And fortunately, she appealed to University of Chicago. And I met her for my first interview with her in the big Union Station, railroad station in Chicago when she came back from the National Home Economics meeting at Detroit that June of 1930. I knew when I saw this very professional-looking woman, she was tall and quite a large woman, coming up the ramp, you know, she just looked like a professional person, so I knew that had to be Dr. Branegan. So, I went up to her and I introduced myself. Before she said hardly anything to me, she looked from the top of my head down to my toes and back up again and said, "Well, you aren't so very big, are you?" And I didn't know what to say, but I said, "Well, big enough, I hope." That was my introduction to Dr. Branegan. Um. And so I came out then the fall of '30, September 2nd of 1930, to take my new job and take my first college job. I, I had a... fine trip on the train. I loved the North Coast Limited. Dr. Branegan met me at the station and before noon I had been all through Herrick Hall, Hamilton Hall and the horse barn. Now why we went to the horse barn... But she wanted to see somebody that was down there. And then she took me to her own home and kept me a few, um... Nights, days, until Dean Herrick came in from her summer vacation, because Dean Herrick lived in Hamilton Hall, you see, and so I went up and lived up there, began my tour of duty up there. As I say, I taught institution management courses, and those courses were Organization and Management, Marketing, Food was a great part of it, but Furnishings too. And then we had the what they called Institution Management Experience for our

senior majors and Quantity Cookery, which we had in the kitchen of Hamilton Hall two times a week per quarter. And the girls planned and cooked the dinners for the girls in Hamilton Hall. And they liked that very much, the Hamilton Hall girls did, because it was a change and also our girls seasoned up things a little higher than what our cooks really were supposed to do. And so that was a real experience. Class ran from about two to seven o'clock twice a week, and it was hard. There were some interesting things that happened in there. Two of the funniest things that I think I remember. I couldn't get this one group of girls to remember to look and check what they were cooking. And I would ask them if they'd checked, and they'd go and do it, you know, but they just couldn't remember. So I decided that the only way was to let them find out what happens when you didn't check. And so this one day, one of the girls was peeling potatoes, and your potato peeler has a carborundum, very rough surface in the kind of a jar business, you know, on the round sides and then on the bottom that turns and that was carborundum too and that threw the potatoes up against this carborundum, this rough carborundum and that takes the peeling off. Well, um... I noticed that they weren't paying any attention to the potatoes, and I just waited to see what was going to happen, and they finally one of them decided, well I guess it was the one who was responsible for potatoes that day, went over and looked in, and all she had were little potatoes just that big, and of course they didn't have any peelings on them. The old potato peeler that we had didn't know when to stop, you see. Then another time, I had three beautiful pork loins. We were going to have roast pork that night. And all afternoon the girls upstairs smelled this gorgeous pork odor coming up there, but nobody was looking at the pork. And even though it made me sick to think of what might happen to it, I didn't say anything. And finally somebody opened the oven door and they were burned to a crisp. Well, what to do? Well, I knew that this certain boy would be in the parlor because he always was and came to see one of the 50 year class- she was a freshman then, and I called up and asked if they would take my car and go down to the butcher shop for me. Oh yes, they'd be tickled to death to, so they did. And they got cold ham, roast ham, you know, sliced ham. And, um... All of the girls were so disappointed that night because they thought they were going to have this wonderful pork roast and all they had was just the sliced ham. Well, things like that go on. But I loved this class because they hadn't had any experience in it at all, most of them. And when you... I remember when they took... Unwrapped the 35 pounds of hamburger that we'd have for meatloaf. They were just astounded. They were afraid of it to begin with. Then they got used to it and they were so pleased with themselves. And then they also knew that they were going to use their Quantity Cookery. I had some girls who were not majors in institution management because they were going out to teach and they knew that the town where they were gonna teach would expect them to know how to do everything and one of the main things was to serve banquets, you know. And this was awfully good training for them. So that was fun. The experience was a quarter when the senior girls came in either to the dormitory or they went to the local hospital or then after we had the Student Union they came over there and they observed and then helped and acted just as one of the workers and then they took the supervisor's job and got their experience of working in an active institution and that was very good. And I'm glad to say that the girls always said that they felt Montana State girls were as well prepared as any the other girls who went on for their hospital dietetics or the regular... commercial restaurants. Some of them went into commercial restaurants. They felt that they were as well prepared as anyone else in the group that went on for their fifth year of training. So that was always a nice thing. We had one year, there were 16 institution management majors, and oh, they were a grand bunch of gals. They were hard workers, they have to be. Well, so much for the classes. Then, part of the time in Hamilton Hall, I was responsible for social life too, as well as the housekeeping and the food service. That kept me a little busy, but I loved it. I loved the girls, all many personalities. It was just delightful. Dean Herrick was home that first year a

good deal more than she ordinarily would have been. Many times, most years, she had been invited out to the sororities and fraternities and other occasions, on other occasions too, to somehow think something else. But this was the year of the student strike in the fall. And, of course, the strike was against her. Because the students wanted, I guess it was a half hour more time, hours for getting into the dormitory on weekends, a half-hour later than what they were. And Dean Herrick just wouldn't give it to them. Now why, I don't know, but anyhow. As President Atkinson told me later, he said she just hadn't changed. And she came out in 1911 as... Dean of Women and lived in the dormitory and Hamilton Hall was built that year. They got in the same time. She came out and went into the new dormitory. So Hamilton Hall was built in 1911. She just, she was one of the finest persons I know, most interesting. Interested particularly in training the girls to feel at home in any social situation. And, of course, things were much more formal then than they are now. I think the principles still work and apply. Being polite to people is the way that you'd like to be treated yourself, and this was her policy. But she was very strict, and the girls were afraid of her, really, and many of them were. And she was the person that you either... thought very, very highly and liked her so much, or else you didn't like her because you were afraid of her, you know. Very, quite a good-looking woman. And when she came into the room, you knew someone had appeared. You know, she didn't- she wasn't a mousy person. She was, she had a very strong personality. She had been an actress. She was married to a doctor who died very suddenly. Oh, several years before she came out here, and she also, in order to make her living, not only did she act in a small theater on the north side of Chicago, but she also posed. And the artist, Loretta Taft- who's a sculptor and did a lot of very fine pieces of sculpture around the city and down in the state- used her hands in many of them. She had beautiful hands, and she used them all just so interestingly and always appropriately. And she, um, was the brains, I guess, back of Woman's Day. Now, you don't call it Woman's Day now. It's where they get the honors and scholarships.

Denise Denelias [00:28:36] Should be Recognition Day.

Mildred Leigh [00:28:36] Yeah, that's what it is. Well, anyhow, she started that. Well she started a great many things that have continued or have been developed on campus. And she, well, she could express herself so well. We had, in those days, we had every month a formal birthday dinner party, and the girls invited... Well, I did the inviting, but... They decided whom they liked, usually faculty people. And everybody was, all the gals were in their long formals and the men always were dressed up. They didn't wear tuxes or anything, but anyhow, they always looked very, very nice. And after dinner, then... They came up to the parlor and we had demitasse coffee in little demitasse cups and everybody visited. You see, this was a thing to, not only to recognize that their birthdays of the girls that were in that particular month, but also to give them a feeling of confidence in meeting people that they didn't know. Carrying on a conversation and so forth. And of course, people always seemed very glad to come to Hamilton Hall for the formal dinners. And during the week after dinner, if she were there and wasn't busy, she always read to us. And some of the things that she read were just very, very interesting, and of course her dramatic training made her a beautiful reader. And I tried in my small way to carry on many of the things that she had started. And when you talk to the girls who lived in Hamilton Hall, they just loved the old place. It was very, very, nice. We had two cooks, and those were the only full-time people that we had. We had a study supervisor. They had study hours from 7 o'clock to 10 at night, Monday through Thursday. And there was a study supervisor who looked after the front desk, answered the telephone and the doorbell and so forth, and anything that the girls needed upstairs if they got into difficulties [unintelligible] the study supervisor helped them out. And that was usually a graduate

student. We had them from home economics and from art, both of them. And the girls enjoyed them, and Mrs. Paisley, during the last two years in the 30s, was our study supervisor. And later, we had a social director, and I was relieved of that.

Denise Denelias [00:32:24] How many years did you teach Institutional Management?

Mildred Leigh [00:32:27] I taught that from 1930 to '47, so that was 17 years, and I asked to be relieved because the Student Union just was getting too big for me. When Dr. Roy came in, Dr. Katherine Roy, who preceded Dr. Roskie, Dr. Gertrude Roskie who was killed in a car accident. And um... And for whom Roskie Hall was named. There isn't anything named for Dr. Roy, and I'm sorry because she was a very fine person, very different, she was very calm, and she got things done where Dr. Branegan decided on a course of action and she got something done, you know. And so many times Mrs. Paisley and I say to each other, "Well, if Gladys Branegan were here, I bet she'd do so-and-so, you know, to fix something." One of the things I forgot to say was about, or was the fact, that one of the teachers, Miss Clow was such a good teacher of Nutrition and Dietetics, the girls had a wonderful scientific basis for that. She's much more scientific in her mind than I am. I'm interested in the persons, you know. I mean, I like people, and I'm interested in their attitudes and how they get along and so forth. I have great respect for science, but I'm not nearly as... as good in it, as Bertha is certainly, or was. So that was one benefit that the girls had. It was just great. Well, let's see... Excuse me.

Denise Denelias [00:34:58] Oh, I was just going to say, after you'd finished teaching Institutional Management or in the process of teaching Institutional Management, you said you started working with the Student Union Building?

Mildred Leigh [00:35:09] In 1940, September of 1940, we opened the Student Union building and I went over there as director of Student Union. That meant you were responsible for everything. We had two cooks who were full-time. The head cook was wonderful, and we had some great people as cooks. And that was... and a full-time coffee shop supervisor. And the little coffee shop. Have you ever gone over to the annex east of, uh... I guess it's still there... east of Montana Hall and gone through the lower hallway? There are some old time pictures in there. And the coffee shop is one of them where they were... the students were lined up on counter stools at the counter, and then there was a row of, I think there were ten tables, four chairs each, and a row of ten booths that had great big windows. And you had a feeling that you were in a dining car when you were in there, and you looked out on a beautiful garden, which of course is the big dining room now. Let me see, where was I? Well, I was responsible for everything. And, oh, I went in with all the enthusiasm that anybody could have. And the reason why we didn't have any more help, any more full-time people, was that... We didn't know what our finances were going to do to us. And so we had to be very, very cautious. And so, we knew that we just had the very minimum of full-time people, all the rest were students. And you just cannot imagine, maybe you can, I imagine you girls would do the same. But those students just took over and took the responsibility, and doing all sorts of things, just everything, you know? And they worked for 35 cents an hour, above three hours work for their... three meals. See, worked for three hours for for three meals and then anything over they got 35 cents an hour. It embarrasses me now and especially when I know how good they were but they... and you just can't imagine how pleased and thrilled the students were to have a student union.

Denise Denelias [00:38:46] You started to be the director of the Student Union when it originally...

Mildred Leigh [00:38:50] I opened it.

Denise Denelias [00:38:52] And that was what year?

Mildred Leigh [00:38:53] 1940.

Denise Denelias [00:38:55] And how did you come about becoming the director of the Student Union?

Mildred Leigh [00:38:58] Oh, well, that's... The architect had made a very small front office, a director's office. And Dr. Strand, President Strand said, he told me, and I've heard him tell other people when I was present several times, that he looked around on the campus and he said that... I was the only one he thought that would fit into that front office, and so I got to come over there and be the director. And it was a terrific amount of work, you know, starting something like that, but it was, oh, it was just thrilling. And the students were so pleased and they took such good care of it. I've seen students go by that west door of the big lounge and look in there and see somebody, not very often, but see somebody with their feet up on a sofa maybe. And they'd go in and pick his feet up and put them on the floor. It was their home, and both in the dormitory and the student union, my goal was to make as good a home as I possibly could for the students away from home. Make a home away from home as good as I possibly could.

Denise Denelias [00:40:34] How long did you work as director in the Student Union Building?

Mildred Leigh [00:40:37] Well, I retired in '68, so I was 28 years there, and 10 years at Hamilton Hall, so that made me 38.

Denise Denelias [00:40:46] What kind of changes did you see happen?

Mildred Leigh [00:40:50] In the Union? Well, in '56 we put first addition on, and then the year that I retired, the second addition came on. And then there's been the big one, and I never can remember what years, um... That last addition came on. But that's the one that made it what it is now. And it's six times an area larger than what it was when we started. And everybody said at that time, oh, a lot of faculty and townspeople, what are you going to do with so much space? You'll never use this whole building. And I'd go to the National Meetings of College Unions Association, and many of them talked about, "How can you get students to come into the Student Union?" And I was so pleased because my problem was how do we find enough space for them when they come in because we had no difficulty ever having the students come into the union. And that was a pleasure, I tell you.

Denise Denelias [00:42:28] When you look back now, why did you choose home economics as a profession, do you remember?

Mildred Leigh [00:42:35] Well, I had some very good home economics courses in high school, and I liked it, and I thought... Well, it just was a good thing to, uh... to have. And I'd be working with girls, helping them to... make a life for themselves that I thought was a good one.

Denise Denelias [00:43:10] Were there any people that were influential that you can think of that helped you make some choices?

Mildred Leigh [00:43:18] Well, the thing that made me go into institution management was the fact that I liked the organization activities and then after you got it organized then to carry out your activities. And I got that from my mother, I think. And this sounds pretty silly, but our farm was about a quarter of a mile from our great-grandfather's place and a great-uncle and two great-aunts lived on this farm when I was growing up. And then it had been a big family, and so there were lots of deaths that I experienced during my childhood. And mother always, those funerals were always from this big old house of the grandparents, great-grandparents. And mother was the one who planned the thing and always was a big dinner of course and she planned these funerals and did a good job of them and did it rather easily. It was hard work but... and I suppose I got it from there. The institution part. That seemed more interesting. And then I had a chance in college to manage some teas for small groups and larger groups. It was fun.

Denise Denelias [00:45:06] When you look back on home economics now and the time you spent in institutional management and with the student union building, do you have any thoughts about the changes you see that have occurred?

Mildred Leigh [00:45:19] Well, um... The one thought that I'm concerned, and I've been concerned about that not only in the last few years but for many years because on... A reputation that the home economics had. Other departments didn't respect it as much as they really should. The fact that it was so broad, maybe, I don't know. They felt it wasn't scientific enough and they felt, but... To me, of course, the family and family life and any living is so important, and Home Ec certainly gives one a lot of experience and knowledge in that field, and that to me is the most important. You should get one of these chairs. I hate to have you standing. I guess this is going to be cut out. And so I'm sorry that it seems to be kind of... Getting away from us, but I don't know maybe it'll come maybe it will come back. We've had oh, very able people... The heads and deans of home economics and all the... I know most about the ones in in uh... Uh... Land grant colleges such as we are... Were just wonderful people. And one of the advantages of being here was that I used to go to the National Home Economic Association meetings with Dr. Branegan and she was wonderful to introduce you to everybody. It didn't make any difference whether they had a little tiny position or whether they were the dean or who they were. She always introduced you. And about a third of them had either been born and raised in Montana, or they had worked in Montana or lived in Montana. It was just very interesting.

Denise Denelias [00:48:11] Well, I think that that is nice and I don't think we have any other questions unless there's some other information that you wanted to put in right now that you feel we didn't have an opportunity to address.

Mildred Leigh [00:48:28] I can't think of anything else. I'll probably think of it later.

Denise Denelias [00:48:32] Well it was wonderful to hear everything that you had to say, I mean you just filled us with facts and information that was delightful to hear, so thank you very much.

Mildred Leigh [00:48:40] Well thank you. Montana State has been so good to me and I've just loved it and the friendships among students that I've made and other people too have been so valuable all through my life and I'm so glad that I got to come out here.

Denise Denelias [00:49:09] I'm sure that people who had you for a teacher were very-

Mildred Leigh [00:49:12] Oh I-

Denise Denelias [00:49:12] -happy and I'm happy that I had a chance to meet you.

Mildred Leigh [00:49:15] One thing was, when I came, three of the heads of departments that I knew pretty well had each been here about 10, 12 years, and I wondered how anyone could stay so long in one place. But I found out.

Denise Denelias [00:49:34] Many years.

Mildred Leigh [00:49:36] I couldn't think of going to live any place else.

Denise Denelias [00:49:43] Thank you.

Mildred Leigh [00:49:45] You're very welcome, and thank you for having me.

Denise Denelias [00:50:01] Thank you. Thank you, that was very nice, Mildred. You told things today that you didn't have a chance to tell yesterday and or not yesterday but the other day.

Mildred Leigh [00:50:13] Well, I enjoyed your visit the other very much. I think it's pretty hard of you to, uh..