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# Jelle Zeilinga de Boer Oral History Interview, Dec. 11, 2015

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## Interview with Jelle Zeilinga de Boer by Christine Foster

Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut, December 11, 2015

Christine: Okay. This is an interview with Dr. Jelle Zeilinga de Boer by Christine Foster on the Wesleyan University campus in the Science Tower on December 11th, 2015. As we discussed I'd love to start by hearing about what your early life was like. Where you were born, what your family was like. What those early years were like for you.

Jelle: In the very short I was raised in Indonesia. Unfortunately the Japanese decided to invade, then spent about four years in concentration camps separated from my mother in the last three years, and then we became fugitives because there was a revolution in Indonesia that followed World War II. They wanted to liberate themselves, which is logical, and we wound up as fugitives in Holland. My father unfortunately was killed on the railroads. Do you know the Burma line? Many of those prisoners of war from the Japanese were actually brought to Thailand and Burma to build a railroad. Those were slave camps and he was transported there and he died there.

My mother came as a widow to Holland, and was not very well received because we were typical of what you called in France, le pied noir, the black feet. The colonists had had it better than we here in our motherland, and so we didn't have any money, for instance, because we couldn't prove that my father had died and things like that. The first years in Holland were tough, but not in comparison to the four years before that.

Christine: Wow. How old were you when you came back to Holland, then? Came to Holland.

Jelle: When I went into the concentration camp for boys and men I was ten. When we came to Holland I was thirteen.

Christine: That's a question with a big answer. Tell me what it was like once ... You described it being hard initially in Holland?

Jelle: It was because obviously I had an accent. In addition to that I was brought up, of course, in a market system which was oriental, and that means that you bargain for things. In Holland you don't bargain. That's very bad if you do that. The first years we spent in an apartment that we had, that my sister had in Amsterdam, and when I went shopping I started to bargain, and the thing that I received usually was what we call an "klap," a bang around the head, because there was people there that were selling materials like food and so on were not accustomed to it, and were not willing to accept that there were people from another country that suddenly had to come to theirs.

Christine: Wow. That's amazing. Tell me what it was like for you? You then went to school there. You were, it sounds like, sort of headed towards high school as you arrived.

Jelle: I had to go to special steam schools they call it. Those were for children that had scars of TB and for children that were behind two, three, four years in their education. Those were not bad at all. They were tough, but not bad. Then I was very lucky. I went to a boarding school, in a small town that was run by the Freemasons, and I went to one of the best schools in Holland that was associated with that, and so I had a very good time in my middle school period in Holland. It was wonderful.

Christine: Then how do you make your way ... You then go to university from there.

Jelle: Yes.

Christine: Tell me about that. I have where you went to school. Tell me where you went to school.

Jelle: I went to school in Utrecht University, which is a center of Holland. It's like the Chicago of Holland, where all the railroads come together. The reason I went into geology was rather complex, because I was going to be a navy pilot, and after the screening period as we call it, when you're slapped around by the officers at higher levels, they found that my left eye was deviating, and they said, "Okay. You cannot be a pilot. You can stay with us because you have already chosen, but you have to go into administration." I said, "No. I'm not going to do that." I went back home very sad, and then my mother said, "Why don't you go to Utrecht and see whether you can find any place where you get something that you are interested in?"

As I was walking on a very dreary day, in December actually, it was around this time, along one of the water ways in Utrecht I saw a very familiar figure walking in front of me, and I recognized that man by that time which had been ten years since was the one who saved my life in the boys' camp. I asked him, "What are you doing?" He said, "I'm studying geology." I said, "What is geology?" He said, "Why don't you come along?" I came along, went to a big building that was the geology department, and right there it turned out that virtually all the professors and the students were just like me. They had been in Indonesia.

Many of them were older. I was among the youngest, but there was this immediate contact, obviously, between us. I decided to study geology, and had a wonderful period of studying in which I traveled and worked all over Europe.

Christine: Right. Can you step back a little? You mentioned the man who saved your life at the camp. Can you describe a little bit more of what happened there?

Jelle: I was small and the youngest at that camp and could get under the barbed wire for smuggling food. We had clothes. Indonesians didn't have clothes. They had food. We would give whatever little clothes we had and exchange that for food. I did it a few times well. Then I was betrayed and I was brought to the Japanese camp commander and then being punished for it. Fortunately this man, who was a boy at that time, seventeen, around that age, those were the oldest boys that were in our camp, he actually picked me up after this procedure, and he helped me with getting my wounds taken care of, and then actually he smuggled in some food himself but via the kitchen. He worked in the kitchen.

He would bake little bread in the ashes of the kitchen, and he would feed me with that. Without that additional food I probably wouldn't have made it according to the people in the camp.

Christine: Yeah. That's amazing, and then to see him again. It sounds like ...

Jelle: To recognize him was ...

Christine: Five years later?

Jelle: Ten years later.

Christine: Wow. That's amazing.

Jelle: Yeah.

Christine: Then he's the one who introduced you to geology.

Jelle: He was the one that got me into geology.

Christine: Yeah. Tell me about your education at the university there then.

Jelle: It's a typical Dutch education. You had these very famous professors who had all been working in Indonesia and had published about Indonesia, and they were very understanding obviously of what had happened to us, but in addition to that they were very knowledgeable, I would say several of them, worldwide. We were sort of grateful that we could get something flowing off from their knowledge, and we had several very strong rules. We had to work in the whole summer in another country doing fieldwork. I loved fieldwork, so the first year I was sent to France, and the second to Austria, and the third again to France, and the fourth sent to the Pyrenees and the fifth year.

You camped out. You were totally on your own working and mapping. For me to have that independence and be able to do that kind of work was absolutely wonderful. The lectures I could set aside, although sometimes they were very interesting, but all the summers when I gained this experience were wonderful.

Christine: Yeah. You did that work and then were you there through your PhD?

Jelle: All up to my PhD. We don't have the system of what you have master's here. We have something called a little bit different. It's a doctoral instead of PhD. Then your doctoral. It's one of those nonsense that you have in educational systems.

Christine: Then I know that that's the point at which you start looking to come to the US. Can you describe what happened there and how you ended up here?

Jelle: We were not happy. I had met my wife by that time, fencing, by the way. I was a fencer. She had to learn fencing, and I was going to teach her. I had a very well known instructor, a Hungarian instructor, who had actually fled Hungary during the revolution. Every week, several days a week I would go there, and then he would assign me to teach the sorority girls which I actually liked. We loved to be because our parents were still there. My mother was still alive and her parents were alive, but Holland was not for us.

It's very densely populated. People always look at other people, what they have, and what we don't have. There's a sort of egoistic strain running through it, and I know I'm generalizing and that a lot of people will, if you ever write this down, will say, "Well. Come on. I remember Holland as the most wonderful place on this Earth." Yes. It is for tourists. For us who had to live there and had to see if they could find jobs and things like that there was still some discrimination against Indonesian Dutch, and so it was something we didn't want to spend all of our life. We decided to write just a few letters to the U.S. because I had worked in the Pyrenees, and I had worked in the Alps, and I wanted to work in an older mountain range where the oldest, the most deepest roots of the mountains are exposed.

The Appalachians are such a mountain range. I found the addresses of a few state geologists in the Appalachians, and Virginia and Carolina and here in Connecticut. Wrote letters and said, "Are you interested?" At that time many people were interested in my study, because I had just started a new sort of study. I was just part of a group that did what is called paleomagnetism, that is the magnetization that's caught into rocks, and you use that to determine movement of plates and kind of things like that. Up to about the '60s people still believed that the plates never moved. It was just all static.

When this paleomagnetic information came in, they were very, very excited, and so many people in the U.S. here had heard about these studies that were done first in England, then in Holland, and then came here. They were anxious to know whether some work like that could be done at institutions, research institutions and universities here in this country. I got three postdoc, how do you call them, letters for postdoc applications, and we read them over, and there was one that was very personal. It talked about Connecticut in general, how beautiful it was, how interesting the geology was, how nice they would like for me to come to this small college and so on.

I was immediately sort of taken by it. Fortunately, the brother of my wife had been studying in Boston, and he had passed by here one day, and he said, "Yeah. Yeah. I recognize the place. Very nice little college. You will be much happier there than one of the other institutions like University of Pittsburgh." Which was one of the places that was interested in my work. A few months later we were on the boat and arrived at the U.S. One of the first things we did was we got a car because there were students that had actually left a car on the cay of the Holland America line. These were the students that played in little bands that went up and down the Atlantic with the tourists. They used that car when they ever are here, and so here was this ten year-old Cadillac with the key under the mat.

I said, "Well, let's take it." Because we had been given the okay, of course. We drove with that to some very close friends of ours who also came from Indonesia who were living in New Jersey, spent a few days there to acclimatize. Then we decided to go and visit Wesleyan. We took the car and drove along the highway and the first thing we saw, of course, when we got on the highway were these big portals and these little baskets hanging out at each side and that we had to stop obviously. We couldn't figure out what to do with the baskets. Finally one of the controllers came running and said, "Hey, buster. What in the hell do you think you're doing?" After I had a row of honking vehicles behind me.

He explained to us that you need to have quarters. I said, "Well, we have no quarters, but we have a dollar." "Okay, here's some quarters." He gave us the quarters which was very nice, and we had to explain that we were just arrived from Holland. He said, "Welcome. Welcome." The next thing that happened was that we found our self here, and this was totally different.

Christine: I'm just going to close the door so that I can hear, that we don't lose anything. Hang on.

Male: Sorry.

Christine: That's okay. Thank you. We'll just close it, just in case. I just want to make sure we get it all on the recorder. Go ahead. They were friendly.

Jelle: Very friendly, and very welcoming. Then we came here and we came up along the reservoirs, of course, via Meriden and things like that. We were looking around in here, and we were looking for Wesleyan Place it was called, or it became known as Peoples Place. These buildings weren't here. That building, yes, but this large building and the one right below us weren't here. There was a street here, and on that street was one house, and that's where Joe Webb Peoples lived. That was known as the Joe Webb Peoples Place or house. When we arrived it was about, I would say, 5:00 or so in the afternoon.

There was a yellow flag was hanging out on a pole and on it was a cocktail glass in red. That indicated that it was the cocktail hour for the faculty at Wesleyan. At that time the faculty at Wesleyan would very often get together. Almost once a week they would gather over there take a drink and talk to each other, and so on. Here we're talking not just about scientists like nowadays when we are all isolated on these floors. They talk about people from the first division and second division who also would come, and they were a much smaller faculty and much closer faculty.

We walked in and he was very surprised. Joe Webb was very surprised to see us, and saw that we were friends of his children. Then he recognized who we were and he was even more surprised. Anyhow, again, there was all this welcoming. Everyone in that group, there must have been about fifteen, twenty professors there, and they were all interested in us and happy to see us, and so on. We drove back because we had a son by that time, a young baby, and we had the dog that we brought from Italy. I did all my PhD work in Italy in the Alps, and we had found a little dog there and we decided to bring that dog to the U.S.

We had a son and a dog, and still staying with our friends in New Jersey, and a week later we were here and we were looking around for housing.

Christine: You came as a postdoc and then you never left.

Jelle: Then I never left. I did leave but not as in a position.

Christine: Right. Tell me about the chronology of your time at Wesleyan.

Jelle: That's not easy because Wesleyan gave me a lot of freedom, and so when I was invited to work for all the United Nation development projects, for instance, they said okay. First place, of course, you have the periods in which you have a sabbatical, and then if you would need any leave time or something like that they would very often say, "It's okay. As long as this work goes together with training students." Especially, we had a very small graduate student program at that time. I was invited first to work in, for instance, the Philippines, and there the government had decided they wanted to build a nuclear plant which, of course, is not possible in the Philippines really, because it has all these volcanoes, it has all these big faults. It has all these earthquakes. It has all the tsunamis.

They needed the World Bank to provide them with money for that, and I was ... General Electric was very interested in building that structure. There were other groups of people that were not so interested. They said that first you have to know what the geology is all about, like, for instance, the nuclear regulatory committee in Vienna, and so that was why they asked me and three other faculty members from other schools to go there and take students along and work on the geology and find out what the situation really was all about.

Christine: You did, along the way as you were teaching here, you were also doing these consulting pieces along the way, and Wesleyan was supportive of that it sounds like.

Jelle: Yeah.

Christine: You did your postdoc work and then you were hired on as a professor from there.

Jelle: After a year of postdoc I became an assistant professor.

Christine: Okay. Can you just talk a little bit about your work over the years? You're describing a time at which you were entering the field where people didn't know the stuff we take for granted now. Can you describe what that academic work has looked like over, really, five decades?

Jelle: Let me start with not forgetting to mention, I had one other person who was very important to my stay here at Wesleyan, and his name was ... Let me see. Jim Balsley, of course, but there must have been, I'd say there were several that were very important. Jim Balsley was also the geology department, and the geology department was four people, and I was number four. Jim Balsley was in the first place very well educated. He came from Harvard, but he was also very knowledgeable and knew how to handle the USGS, the United States Geological Survey where he had the job. He was hired away from there, from them, to actually do some research here.

Jim was also in that field of paleomagnetism, and of the very few people in America that had begun in that new direction in geology, that new discipline, he was one of the outstanding ones. Here I come and I've come in the department of four people with one of those specialists. I didn't know that beforehand, and only found out later when I was here, and it was just such an enormous advantage for me that we together built a little paleomagnetic laboratory and using that laboratory which was in Judd Hall, we were at Judd Hall at that time, I was able to collect rocks from all over this area of New England as well as the Appalachians and measure those samples and determine movements of the North American continent, for instance, that date back about two hundred million years.

It went very slow and it was an up and down type of research. At times it went very well. At other times it was more difficult. Most of the research that I did independent of any consulting was actually associated with working with students on studies in the field in Rhode Island, here in Connecticut, and further south, but not much further south, New York State a little bit.

Christine: Can we talk a little bit about what Wesleyan has been like over the years, so you describe a very close faculty during those early years and that sort of casual, they welcome you in, come for cocktail hour. Can you describe some of what



that was like, maybe even sort of going by decade or by whatever mechanism seems right to you to describe what the trajectory has been like in the culture of the campus over time?

Jelle: That's a difficult question, because it's a long time ...

Christine: It's a long time.

Jelle: ... to begin with. There were certain highlights in it and low lights in it. The highlights were especially that those people that were actually professors in other departments were truly interested in your research and your work. I was invited several times to talk about my work in Europe in the Alps and I had, one of my thesis had to do with the volcanic eruption, the Santorini volcanic eruption. I don't know whether you have heard about that one. I had done some of the very early work there on dating purposes. People invited you for that, and so through that, which was sort of more an interdisciplinary research that I did there which had a lot of archaeology associated with it, you had more interest of people that were not really scientists.

Scientists were not insulated or isolated, whatever the better word is of the two. I would say that that extended for at least ten years. Then came the very difficult period in which we had the war in Vietnam, and at that time there were all kind of ... How to describe it? There was all kind of restlessness in the campus, which especially had to do, for instance, with the students, and I was at that time a member of the committee that was reviewing thesis for the honors, and I still remember very well how the student came in and this was in the place, I forgot the name of it now, right at the end of High Street -- that beautiful white building.

The Honors College, I believe, they still call it. The student came into the room, and we talked a little bit about them, and all he was interested in is to talk to us about the war. We said, "Yeah, but you're not here for talking about the war. We gladly talk with you about it but outside of this room. Outside of the purpose of your visit." He said, "I'm not interested in anything that you have to say or you have to do. I'm just interested in getting us out of Vietnam." Which, in principle, I could only agree with, but it was not something that I wanted. He was so offensive that I sort of suddenly saw Wesleyan through different eyes.

Then we came to, it was a general meeting in front of Judd Hall and there were probably a few hundred students there gathered, and they were all screaming and this, and I went with a graduate student of mine from Iran, Iraj Rastegar. We sat down there and they started screaming about, "There is no freedom in this country." Iraj and I looked at each other. He had gone through a very difficult life in Iran with all kind of problems with the Shah and the secret police. I had gone through my not freedom in Indonesia and we are saying, "What are these kids talking about?"

At one moment he got up and he said, "What are you talking about? What do you mean by freedom? What do you mean there is no freedom in this country?" They started screaming, "Oh, you. You're a foreigner. You don't understand," and this and that. That offended me so much that I went home that day to my wife and said, "We are leaving." She calmed me down and we thought some more about it, and then realized because by that time we also had a daughter, actually, by that time we had two daughters I believe. Yeah. Two daughters. The youngest was just born. We said, "Well, we'll see what happens." Things fortunately changed.

Within my period at Wesleyan that was a very essential, that point, where I came very close to leaving. In the meantime I had had several offers to go to other schools because they were, like I said before, interested in my specialty. Every time I got one, a letter, I went to Joe Webb and talk with Joe, and Joe said, "Why? This is a beautiful place. You have a very nice ... It's a little department. You don't have these enormous research entities," and so on. Illinois was interested in me and they had something like fifteen professors already. They have now twenty or thirty in one department.

He said, "Stay. You will be happier here." He convinced me every time. I still thank him very much for that, because it was seductive to go to these larger research institutions and to have many graduate students and so on, rather than here where I stayed with just a few graduate students, but it wouldn't have given me the opportunities that I had in subsequent times. For the rest in the period, in the Wesleyan period there were a few highs and lows and so on, but they were insignificant really in comparison to that specific one during the Vietnam period.

Christine: Can you talk a little bit, you talked about the opportunities you had going forward after that, and sort of your gratitude for having stayed. What are some of the things that happened post-Vietnam war that made you glad that you stayed here?

Jelle: In Holland we have a saying that if you're lucky you have fallen with your nose in the butter. I have been lucky actually throughout. I was lucky I got out of the camps, and I was lucky in my education in Holland. I was very lucky in getting this position here at Wesleyan, but in addition to that I was also lucky with several other type of things. It turned out that I was assistant, and sort of associated a joint professor. Not associated -- a joint professor at the University of Rhode Island at the Marine Sciences Institute. One of the graduate students there was Bob Ballard. Ballard is the one who found the Titanic.

Bob always thanked me for the help I gave him with his PhD work and so on, because I was one of his PhD supervisors. A number of years later he came and said, "Jelle, would you like to do some deep diving with me with the submersible Alvin. We are going to the Cayman Trough in the Caribbean, collecting some rocks, and what do you think?" Very few people do these dives with the Alvin, and so that was for me a fantastic opportunity to do something

which very few people do in general, and nobody will go back to that place where I dove with the Alvin. From that came research and contacts and things like that again.

Then I was also invited, many years later, to do work in Greece. The work in Greece had to do, again, with the Greek government wanted to put in nuclear plants, and they wanted those nuclear plants not so much for the energy that they produce so that they no longer had the air pollution in Athens, because right now they were still burning coal and brown coal, actually, bad stuff. Many of the monuments they had to actually bring into the buildings because they were melting away from the acid rain. People don't realize that very often. Anyhow, they wanted it primarily as a counterpart against the Turks. A political statement saying, "Look. We have a nuclear plant. We can make nuclear bombs. You better keep quiet."

Again, a lot of people were for it, and a lot of people were against it. Again, geological studies were needed. I did need geological studies and on one of those studies at Olympia I drove back through, north through the mountains and I found a road that led to Delphi. I said, "Well, I'll take that road." As I took that road I looked at the side and saw a magnificently exposed fault plane, the actual plane along which different parts of the Earth has actually moved differentially. I was so surprised because faults and planes, fault planes are invisible in most of the world because of the erosion and so on, and they are usually valleys that are filled in, and you know there is a fault, but you don't see the fault plane itself. You can't go like that.

I stopped and studied it, and then I realized when I had continued along the plane that it led right to the Oracle. Then I went past, followed the road further down to the other side of the Oracle and saw another fault plane there that had been exposed now by man by making a parking area for the large buses that the tourists that came from Athens everyday. I put one and one together and found out that the fault goes underneath the Oracle, and then I started reading up Plutarch and many of those studies ... How do you call it? Descriptions of what went on in the Oracle site, and I realized that most likely the old stories about The Pythia being influenced by gasses might be right.

These were gasses that came up along that fault. I gave a paper about that in London. It was so widely received. All newspapers started writing about it and so on, and I was very completely surprised because I hadn't proven anything. I just came up with an idea. I said, "Okay. Now I have to prove something." I met an archaeologist and the two of us went back there and we said, "How are we going to solve it?" Then by means of finding and collecting stuff, rocks, newly formed rocks near springs on the Oracle site we were able to have those analyzed and found that they had, indeed, gasses had indeed come up there. Then the whole thing burst open. There were documentaries by ... I mentioned them.

Christine: I saw that. Yeah.

Jelle: There are four or five things all over the place in the period 203, 204, 205, I believe. There were newspaper articles all over the place in all different languages because everybody was interested. Many of them had the weirdest angles like "The Pythia was High." That was, of course, very favorable sort of heading-- more of these ridiculous headings. Again, that was very lucky there because had I not taken that road and not seen that fault, I had never come to this thing. It filled my, at least four or five years of my research and so on. Again, I could bring students there and work with them. There were the two highlights really, the work on the Bartlett Trough at very deep levels and the work on the Oracle site were the most important, let's say, the highlights of some of the research.

In between, I did publish a number of papers and so on. I haven't mentioned that because I hate those vitae that are nothing but papers. I think a short vitae is usually a little bit more acceptable. All I mentioned here were those two highlights but in the meantime I had a wonderful time working for United Nations in Costa Rica, for instance, and extended that into Nicaragua and then to Panama. I went back and forth there for at least ten years.

Christine: Were all of the UN development projects about the sort of nuclear power ...

Jelle: No. Those were not. No.

Christine: ... or different? What were those?

Jelle: Those had to do with mineral exploration. Also a little bit with the tectonic setting because people there had just had another earthquake and they wanted to know what's the reason for the earthquakes and so on, so where are the faults and can we expect more.

Christine: Let's pop back to campus a little bit. You mentioned about the Vietnam era and what that was like. Can you describe what Wesleyan students were like when you arrived here and how you've seen them change over the years, and, again, recognizing generalizations, but what have you seen over the course of your time here?

Jelle: The department was a little bit unusual. In the first place it was small, and secondly it was not the department which when you had graduated from it in geology that it was easy to find jobs. At that time the oil industries were way down. They were not hiring, things like that. The students that we would get were very often not from Greenwich and New York and so on. They were very often from Wyoming and states that were not known for their wealth. Let's put it that way. They were students, and also because you went with them in the field and you got to know them much better, they were students that you could relate with much easier, and better.

In general with a few exceptions I have only good memories of working with the students in that early period. Then the decision was made to have Wesleyan grow. These buildings were put down, and so on, and from that time on everything sort of seems to have changed. In the first place we became more marginalized by being away from ... if you could call it a campus, we were now the south end, we're now in the Tower. We were also not only more marginalized with regard to the whole campus, but also very much separated from floor to floor. I was chairman at one part of that time, and I decided ... I was asked to design these floors, by the way. Not the building -- that was all done by an architect in New York, but the specific offices and labs and all kind of things like that.

I over emphasized that I thought the department would grow, and the president had said, "Yeah. Build it for seven faculty." Sorry, design it for seven faculty. I did. That meant that we wound up with too much space. We had two floors here, the third and the fourth, so what to do with more than half of the third floor? The archaeology and classics department, the classics department was looking for space especially for their archaeologists. I got along very well with the chairman of that department and we said, "Why don't you come away from the little house that you're in now, and you come with us." Everybody was upset because classics doesn't belong with the sciences.

Nowadays people talk very differently about that. Archaeology is becoming more and more what science is nowadays, but in those days, no. Classics belonged to the second division. It should not be here in a science building. Fortunately, he didn't let that overpower him and he moved in with his group. That meant that I also had more opportunity to work with him in the field on archaeology, so he was working in Italy at that time on Roman sites, and I would go there visit him, and get more and more interested in archaeology myself. That was also that lead back again to the situation.

It means that there was a lot of movement at Wesleyan at that time. The fact that the classics department would decide, "Okay. We're going to go to this science building. Okay." Meant that suddenly there was, again, a little bit less of a marginalization. We are a little bit more incorporated second division, so to say that they knew that we were there and they knew our names a little bit better because they were in contact, of course, with their classics professors. That isolation, because there is no really other word for it, actually did continue in my belief over time. Has only gotten worse. It has gotten so much that we hardly see our people in the biology department very often or very more.

We have now one professor who is part biology, part geology, but I hardly know him. Since he came here I have probably met him ten times or something like that, or met him in a sense that we could talk with each other about something different from his interests. I very often compare it to a series of little islands, specific islands, that formed when the big island fell apart, tectonically. At one time we were a big island where most of the people would talk to each other and live with each other and so on, and then very gradually over time they

became all little islands with their own fiefdoms, or their own dominance, and so on, all going for the same pot of money in North College. That did not make things better.

I'm not totally negative because I realize that this is a sign of the times. I've seen it happening in other departments, and I've seen it happening in other schools, but it is still also influence to students, because the students have, in my opinion, less opportunity to have this closeness that they at one time had with all members of a department. Now it is with one member of a department who is supervising their honors thesis, and they give a talk in the classroom about what their research is all about and you sit there and you say, "Oh, wow. Jeez. I wish I had known a little bit more about this, because I could have added this to it or that to it."

No. During the period that he was preparing, or she, preparing the honors thesis there was virtually no contact. You hardly knew what they were exactly working on, and that was the same situation with the few graduate students that we had. When I had graduate students here at Wesleyan and the last one is twenty years back or something like that, we had a much closer contact. We would regularly ask other faculty members, not only in this department, but, for instance, in physics and in chemistry, "Can you help with this or that? What do you think? Can he do this? Can he do that?" It was no longer there. It has not been there for at least two decades.

Christine: What about the change in the diversity of the campus, both in terms of adding more women, adding women, and diversifying racially and ethnically? How does that change?

Jelle: I think it's a good thing -- especially with adding the women and with getting more minorities in. I have not seen any really major consequences of it, because I still think that we are short women in many departments. We are lucky, we have two women, but I would have expected more from them. More than, for instance, one of our professors here is very much into the, I would say, the women's lib, women's education, all kind of directions like that, and she has been doing an awful lot of good. You hear about her basically from outside Wesleyan, not so much of how it affects Wesleyan. How it affects the USGS, or things like that, that's what you hear.

With minorities we have never been very lucky with getting minorities into geology or into the sciences in general, which is unfortunate. Believe me, we have tried. For one reason or the other it's the requirements that are often causing the troubles. We required, for instance, a reasonably good background in math and things like that. It wasn't there, and so when they then found themselves in courses where they had to use some mathematics or formulas or whatever, they got discouraged. They couldn't deal with it, and so they were not well enough educated for that field in this university or in any university for that matter, because I don't think it's unique to Wesleyan. It's all over.

It was much easier for them to do well in English and history and departments of that type than in economics and sciences in general. Gradually I learn that it's getting better and better, but it's still not an ideal situation, and the recent unrest indicates that very clearly.

Christine: What do you think of that?

Jelle: I have a lot of troubles with it because I believe that the problems that we are seeing around us, that has to do in the first place, of course, with the Islam and secondly with race I should say in the first place with the race, and secondly with the Islam, that those are much more important to them since they have to grow up with that and are going to be very much influenced by it than just talking about those things that I understand they're angry about, but I don't understand why they cannot look over it. For instance, the girl at Yale, I believe, who was not being let into one of these parties.

Yeah. Things can be offensive, but people are offending each other in all different fields whether they are black or white or yellow, and they are minor in comparison to what is happening surrounding them and what will influence them in the near future, and so instead of concentrating on that and through that getting better acknowledged with each other's ideas, they just have these protests. The only word that I can use for it is, it looks at this age and stage and at my age looking at these things, insignificant, but that may be just a question of my age.

Christine: Let's see. What about sort of the administrations who have been in charge over the time you have been here. Are there people you specifically remember as leaving a mark of a specific kind during their presidencies?

Jelle: Sort of. I don't know anything about the present president. I've never even met him. I know that I should be because he apparently writes an article about it every week, but no. That's not the way I like to get to know presidents. Formally, like [Edwin] Etherington and Colin Campbell and so on. They were presidents that would, I would say almost regularly, at least once a month, would call you when you were a chairman and say, "Would you mind going have lunch with me," or stop by or something like that. You would do that, and then he would ask you, "Okay. What is happening in the department? Tell me." You sat there for an hour and you talked about the difficulties in the department and the good things in the department and you felt that you were one of the school.

Now we have presidents and vice presidents and vice vice presidents and an administration which is bulging and gets larger and larger and is much larger than the group of professors that we have on this campus, and that growth means so much waste, so much that is not accomplished that could be accomplished in different ways. From that view point Wesleyan has sort of become a university rather than retain its college sort of entity. Now we have actually different colleges, right?

Christine: Right.

Jelle: Is it a sign of the times or is it really a deterioration, because too many people spoil the soup as you know.

Christine: What do you think about Wesleyan today?

Jelle: I don't know. I don't think I can answer that question very easily because in the first place I have not been ... This is the second time I'm at my office this year, because I had a CA and I had to through all kind of chemos for six months. I don't know exactly what is happening at the campus. I don't hardly know what's happening in any other department. I have good friend, another Dutchman on the other side of the wall and he tells me occasionally what has happened, and things like that. I have no idea how to answer that question.

Christine: I asked most of the things that I had on my list, but I'm wondering if there's something I didn't ask that you wish I had asked. Something about your time at Wesleyan that you really wish we could talk about.

Jelle: Like I said before, I have been lucky. That means that my view on Wesleyan in general is positive. The fact that I worry about the direction it has been going especially in regard to this enormous growth of North College and the separation between what is called the president's office and everything associated with it, and the department entities. That I see very negatively. I'm afraid that that cannot be changed. That is something which has evolved, and many things that evolve need a revolution before they can be changed. I don't foresee a revolution because everybody seems to be relatively happy. They are complaining to me very often about, "Why do I have to fill this in? Why do I have to do this? Why do I have to do that?"

It gets more and more complicated. Our secretary is full time taking care of just the bills. I was at the department here as chairman, and I had a secretary, one, for the whole department, which was at that time five people, and she would do all our correspondence. She would type all our letters and everything else and she was never complaining because she was also paying the bills. It wasn't so complex. This lady has now to spend about a full day on just paying bills, every week at least. Then the rest, she has to organize stupid things like lunches and all kind of things that the secretary shouldn't be doing. It has been so compartmentalized that also up north in North College everybody needs to have his own fiefdom and you get continuously being asked do this, do that, fill this in, fill that in.

I just bought some books and found out I still have to be paying for that fund. Now, you see the number of papers that have to be filled in so that I get the money back for some of the books I bought which were purely for research and for publication purposes, so they should be paid almost directly by that fund. The fund was set aside for that.



Christine: It's a different world.

Jelle: A different world, but I'm 80. Over 80, and so I understand that it should be a different world. To what degree it's worked out to be better, I don't know.

Christine: Well, you've certainly seen a tremendous amount over your time.

Jelle: Yes.

Christine: It's amazing. Thank you for your time. I very much appreciate it. Hopefully it came in on both of our things. Appears to be.