

Alma Bingham

SR 342, Oral History, by David Havens Newhall
Portland State University Series



1989 March 3

BINGHAM: Alma Bingham

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Tape 1, Side 1

1989 March 3

DHN: Alma Bingham and David Newhall are sitting in the Ondine¹ on a Friday afternoon, getting ready to talk all the way through some features of Portland State University's history.

Alma, suppose you would begin this discussion by telling us a little about yourself: where you were born, who your parents were and where you grew up.

BINGHAM: Okay. I'm a native Oregonian. I was born in Portland. My parents were both Easterners. My father was raised in Pennsylvania and my mother was raised in Boston. And I had all my schooling, my elementary and secondary schooling, in Portland. Although I'm a native Oregon, I have no Oregon degrees. I have my Bachelor's degree from U.C.L.A. [University of California at Los Angeles] and my Master's and Doctorate from Columbia University.

DHN: When did you graduate from U.C.L.A.?

BINGHAM: 1948.

¹ A building on the Portland State University campus.

DHN: And brothers and sisters?

BINGHAM: I have one sister.

DHN: What did your mother and father do?

BINGHAM: Oh, my mother was a homemaker. My father was a painter.

DHN: And did they come to Portland? I didn't quite get the story of how you arrived in Portland.

BINGHAM: Well, I was born here.

DHN: You were born here. They had already come to Portland.

BINGHAM: Yes. They were married in Portland, but they were both Easterners.

DHN: So you're a native Oregonian.

BINGHAM: I'm a native Oregonian.

DHN: Special friends you want to mention from your childhood?

BINGHAM: We had a very close-knit neighborhood where I grew up and there were a whole group of us and we did things like plant a garden that the adults told us it was too late and it would never grow. We had a neighborhood newspaper that we put out, and we played quite a bit of pinochle, and had lots of informal parties in addition to some more formal ones.

DHN: Which high school did you go to?

BINGHAM: Roosevelt High School.

DHN: And you still live in North Portland.

BINGHAM: I still live in North Portland...

DHN: Not so many...

BINGHAM: In Mocks Crest. Close to the University of Portland, in fact. Dean Anderson said to me when I came here, "Gee, aren't you teaching at the wrong school?" because I live so close to the University of Portland. I told him in a year or two I'd let him know whether I was teaching at the wrong school or not. [DHN laughs] I guess I wasn't, 'cause I seem to have stayed for 27 years or so. [Laughs]

DHN: Anything else about your own background that ought to go into this record, that you'd like to have there.

BINGHAM: Well, I have a varied background. My parents, my mother in particular, was very fond of music and so we had music lessons and ballet lessons. She was fond of opera; from an early age we went to operas and concerts. I was fond of sports, played softball, volleyball and [Laughs] basketball. And loved to read, and quite diverse in our reading, and my parents cultivated good books. We were very fond of books...

DHN: You went out of state to college. How did...

BINGHAM: To California.

DHN: U.C.L.A. How did this come about?

BINGHAM: Well, they had a good English Literature program. I major was English Literature and they had a very good English Literature program down there.

DHN: Your undergraduate major was English.

BINGHAM: Literature.

DHN: And at Columbia?

BINGHAM: My Columbia — my graduate was Teacher Education and Curriculum.

DHN: And Ph.D [Doctor of Philosophy] from Columbia?

BINGHAM: Columbia University.

DHN: And when was that?

BINGHAM: 1957.

DHN: What was your first awareness of Portland State, then College?

BINGHAM: Actually, my first awareness, I guess, was when Errett Hummel called me and asked me if I would come to teach at what then wasn't Portland State; I guess that was the year before it was Portland State. And I didn't come.

DHN: This would have been early 1950s?

BINGHAM: It'd be about 1954. I happened to be at the University of Illinois on a little project for the University of Illinois at the time, and he called and asked if I would come to teach at, I guess it was Extension Center; known as Extension Center² then. I told — I debated, but then I called him or wrote him and told him I thought that I had better go on with my own plans. I had obtained my Master's degree and I was really was on my way to Columbia to complete my Doctorate.

DHN: Do you know how he found out about you?

BINGHAM: I'd had a class from him. I had taken — I taught in Portland, in the Portland Public Schools, and I had a class from Errett and that's how he knew about me. It was a curriculum class.

DHN: I'll just toss in here my first awareness of Portland State College was through someone who had applied for a position here, which she didn't ultimately take, but I knew that there was no such place. [Both laugh] The truth was that it had just been created as a college and it was a brand new college. But so you were in touch with Portland State sooner than I was actually.

BINGHAM: Well, I had also had a class from Willard Spalding. At the time I was teaching, I was always taking classes. I took 17th Century Literature from Jud Biermann, I took Curriculum, I took graduate English History course. I was always taking classes while I was teaching and so I had happened to have had Willard Spalding. So the next year, when Willard Spalding called and asked if I would come to Portland State to teach, I decided to come, against the advice of my graduate advisors at Columbia University. [Laughs] And...

² "Portland State University History," Portland State University, May 24, 2018, <https://www.pdx.edu/portland-state-university-history>.

DHN: What did they think?

BINGHAM: That they had a position for me all lined up at Connecticut that they wanted me to take.

DHN: Oh! So you had some choices there, but this is coming back to your home, really. Wasn't it?

BINGHAM: Right, exactly. And, of course, I knew Willard and was very fond of Willard, and it was a chance to work with Willard Spalding, which...

DHN: Let's come to him in a minute. Let me get this straight. You were taking courses here, but...

BINGHAM: Night classes.

DHN: When you were home?

BINGHAM: Yes. Before it was Portland State.

DHN: But — let us get it straight again. What were the years, then, you were back at Columbia?

BINGHAM: I completed my Master's Degree in 1951 and my Doctorate in 1957.

DHN: So you were home part of that period...

BINGHAM: Yes.

DHN: And you then were doing a project in Illinois, so you were around here enough to tune in on what was going on, so you knew.

Well, now, let's talk a little bit about Willard Spalding. You know, he's one of early figures and I owe him a lot, myself, you know, having arrived here later than you did. But, now, start talking about Willard and the courses you took from him and how he taught and what his role was.

BINGHAM: Well, I had one course from Willard and it was a curriculum course and I was very impressed with him. Of course, he was an intellectual giant. And he was — it was a situation where you didn't work for Willard, you worked with Willard. And he was very creative. He was very humanistic. He was a fighter. He, himself, said he was not a keeper. He couldn't mark time. That was not his make-up. He was tremendously enjoyable to work with.

In fact, I was so taken with working with Willard. And also Willard believed that he should develop his faculty members. He, as you know, I think probably you were in some courses that he organized for the faculty where we just sat around and talked about things. He did that two or three different times.

DHN: Well now, wasn't Willard Superintendent of Schools here for a while?

BINGHAM: He was Superintendent of Schools in Portland, yes.

DHN: Now, you're talking about his teaching after he came and joined the Portland State College faculty?

BINGHAM: In the seminars that he had for faculty, yes, but in the other, he was, I believe, working with Extension Center.

DHN: While he was still Superintendent of Schools?

BINGHAM: No, I'm not sure he was Superintendent of Schools at that time. He had been Superintendent earlier. I think his Superintendency went back until the 1940s, didn't it?

DHN: Well, I just don't know. My whole encounter with Willard Spalding was as Head of the School of Education here at Portland State.³

BINGHAM: Willard had been at the University of Illinois and he had some health problems there and the doctor told him that he had to get into a job that had less stress with it. If I'm not mistaken, I believe that is when he decided to come out here and work with Extension.⁴ In fact, Willard told me one time the doctor said to him that if he didn't get out of there, he would be pushing up daisies within six months. So he left University of Illinois. He had previously been Superintendent of Portland. I guess he liked the Portland area, and so he came to Portland.

DHN: Now you came then as a what? An Instructor, Assistant Professor?

BINGHAM: I came as an Instructor, which again, then, my Columbia advisors were totally against. I said, "Why do I care?" [Both laugh]

DHN: Now, let's nail down for sure the date that you arrived here as a member of the faculty.

BINGHAM: 1955. September 1955.

DHN: That's the same date I arrived.

³ "Willard B. Spalding (1904-1981)," The Oregon Encyclopedia, May 24, 2018, https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/spalding_willard_b_1904_1981/#.WwcdYO4vyUk

⁴ "Vanport Extension Center," The Oregon Encyclopedia, May 24, 2018, https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/vanport_extension_center/#.Wwcd-u4vyUk

BINGHAM: Oh, is it?

DHN: Yeah, and I have a dim recollection that we arrived at the same time.

BINGHAM: Yes, we I think we did. You're right.

DHN: We were immediately put on all those committees.

BINGHAM: Yes. [Laughs]

DHN: Now, say a little bit more about — for you, of course, it was arriving home. You knew the town. But what about Portland State at the time of your arrival?

BINGHAM: It was very puzzling to me. In order to get — I had done some of my — I was doing some doctoral work previous to coming here, that 1954-55 year.

DHN: Well, you were on the home stretch there with respect to your own Ph.D.

BINGHAM: Yes, and it was very puzzling, because one of — at Columbia in order to get a doctorate, you had to take a course in Administration of some kind. Well, I took a course in College Administration and I thought — and Willard was talking to me about coming to Portland State. One of the things you had to do in that course was to make a study of a college or university. So, I thought, "Why don't I make a study of Portland State?"

And so Dean Anderson had been in touch with me, too, so I wrote him and asked him to send me materials on Portland State, which he did. I went through all the material very carefully, five or six times, and there were things in them that I just could not find that one needed in order to complete this study. And one of them was the type of

college that it was. It wasn't labeled Liberal Arts, it wasn't labeled a Teacher's College, it wasn't labeled a Technical, and these materials didn't show that.

So I took this to the professor that I had, and I said, "This is just something that I just can't find."

He said, "Oh, it's got to be in there someplace." He said, "Every college has some kind of a designation." So he said, "Let me take the materials." So he took the materials and he couldn't find it either.

So I arrived on campus not knowing yet what kind of an institution this was. But, actually, it didn't matter, I guess. [Laughs]

DHN: What was your first teaching assignment?

BINGHAM: I supervised student teachers. It was in the School of Education and I supervised student teachers and we had really, literally, no program at all. It was lots of fun and tremendously challenging, because we had no instruments developed to measure people's growth or we had no instruments developed to interview people, to make some judgements about whether it was appropriate for them to go into student teaching or not. There was just literally nothing, so we were starting from the ground up and we were building, and that is a very exciting time to be at a University, is during this building process. It was all very, very exciting during that time.

DHN: So you were out and around the town, supervising students...

BINGHAM: And holding seminars.

DHN: And seminars on campus. What about the students that you were working with at that time?

BINGHAM: I can remember the first class very well. There were 16 of them. They were a mixed group. There were some very strong students and there were some very weak students. And I can remember grappling with the problem of where we had a couple of students who were very weak and I really questioned as to whether they should be in the classroom with children.

I sat down and I talked to Dean Anderson and I said, "You know, this is a situation where you're really changing a person's whole life if you think they are not appropriate. Here they've prepared for Education and now they're at the point where you are questioning whether appropriate and I don't think one person alone should ever make that decision. There should be more than one person looking at that student, because maybe somebody else can see something that you didn't."

And so, out of the very first class we established the practice of more than one person going out into the classroom and visiting that student, so there could then be discussions and a decision made on whether we wanted to recommend that person for teaching or not. And when [Derek Lee?] was the second person to come into this student teaching program and for a while we just automatically each visited the other one's students, because we wanted them to feel comfortable when either one of us came in. And that way we did have a two person judgement, probably without getting the individual too upset if somebody other than their regular supervisor came to visit them.

DHN: Then when you came, there was the School of Education, that was already...

BINGHAM: Yes, that was established.

DHN: Part of the college. And as I recall there was a division of Humanities and Social Science and Division of Science. Now, one of my recollections, and maybe you can elaborate on this, is that Willard wanted the entire faculty aware of and contributing to the teacher training program, and he involved a great many people. Now, elaborate on that policy a little bit, because that seems to be important.

BINGHAM: Well, for one thing, he considered that the background of these people who are going to teach is very important. It's not a matter of just taking two or three Education courses and then stepping out into a classroom. But prior to taking Education courses he wants to lay — have students develop a good academic background, because, after all, they are responsible for a tremendous number of different subject areas in the classroom and he felt they should be well-grounded in those various subject areas. But, of course, there wasn't really any way that they could develop a major in each subject that they were going to teach, that would have been very impractical.

But, he very strongly thought that the whole institution was responsible for Teacher Education and Teacher Education should collaborate with the whole institution. And he established committees where there was a mix of people from all different parts of the university on what were basically education affairs and education problems. And he held these seminars that was not for the School of Education, but for throughout the university for anyone who wanted to come in the evenings. He was the person who was always suggesting various kinds of activities that would cause the faculty to intermingle. And I guess, maybe, he had been at institutions where there were some "us" and "them" kind of situation...

DHN: He was always fighting that.

BINGHAM: The academics and the educators.

DHN: We were sort of intermingled willy-nilly over there in old Lincoln Hall, weren't we? It was the only...

BINGHAM: [Laughs] It was the only building we had, so we had to.

DHN: What are your recollections about the facilities at that time?

BINGHAM: Well, one of the things, of course, one of the main recollections was the library. Do you remember the library? It was on the second floor?

DHN: [Laughs] Let's hear yours.

BINGHAM: On [10th?]. Initially, when, the year we came, we could get in either door. It took the whole west wing of the second floor and we could enter either door. And the librarians, of course, were very helpful and very friendly. Everyone was feeling his way, so to speak.

[Laughs] We had appallingly few books for a university. Thank heavens for Reed College. They were very nice and used to lend us a lot of books, or we could go out there and get books. And their library really was pretty good and I always appreciated being able to use Reed College library. Because there were so many things we didn't have.

Of course, our Multnomah Library was quite familiar with. That was pretty good and one time they did have education books at the main library. They, then later, developed a branch and put it out east with the education books. But they did have all kinds of books that were helpful to us at Multnomah County Library.

Then, you see we graduated. The first thing that happened, and after a couple of years I think, we had to go through only one door. We had to walk down, all the way down the hall and go in the one door, because we started losing a few of the books that we... [Laughs]

DHN: Couldn't afford to lose the books at that point.

BINGHAM: Couldn't afford to lose! And everybody was suggesting resources and materials and things we should buy. But, of course, we had a very limited budget. And people were donating a lot of books and we all would talk to publishers and say, "Well,

now, you know, if our students are ever going to become acquainted with your materials here, we should have them in our library.” So we did get a lot of books that way. A lot of publishers helped us a great deal with getting books.

DHN: The whole faculty and all the classrooms were just in that one building at this time, weren't they?

BINGHAM: Yes, yes. In fact, my whole domain was on the second floor. My office was on the second floor, the library was on the second floor, the classrooms I taught in were on the second floor. I had no need to go up to the third floor or down to the first, except to see Dave Newhall [DHN laughs] when we were on Academic Requirements Committee. You had an office on three.

DHN: Let's get to those committees in a moment, but, you know, you mentioned a couple of other people that I'd like to hear you say something more about. Dean Anderson, now, what was his role at that time?

BINGHAM: Dean Anderson was supervisor – do you know, I'm very bad on titles. He headed up the student teaching program. I don't know what his title was. In fact, I don't know what Willard's title was. I know it wasn't dean because we didn't have deans at that time...

DHN: We didn't have deans, did we?

BINGHAM: And I don't know what his title was. Dean headed up the student teaching program and there were the two of us, Dean and myself in the beginning.

DHN: Alright, and Errett Hummel?

BINGHAM: Errett Hummel was Assistant to the President, to President Cramer. And I don't think he was called the vice-president, was he? I don't know.

DHN: He was the second administrator. But he also had taught courses. You got to know prior to this, earlier.

BINGHAM: I knew him as student and teacher...

DHN: Earlier than 1955.

BINGHAM: In fact, Errett used to tease me. He used to say to me, "You know, when I called you and asked you to come to Portland State, you wouldn't come, but when Willard called you the next year, you came." [Both laugh] He never let me forget that. He always used to tease me about it.

DHN: In those early days, did you have any particular contact with President Cramer?

BINGHAM: Yes. I did because, for one reason, we had, at that time, only one State car and I had the State car.

DHN: [Laughs] We being the School of Education?

BINGHAM: No. The we being the whole school, the whole college had one...

DHN: That ought to go into the record for sure.

BINGHAM: Had one State Car and I — we later got another, we got a Ford, but that first year we had just the one. Now sometimes, Cramer needed the car and so they would have to call from the President's office, because I had the car locked. [Laughs] The

students — I had 16 students and I believe every single one of them were in a different school and there was an awful lot of traveling from one place to another, so I had the car constantly in use. Except when I was on campus, you know, for seminars and things. And so I had a lot of contact with [him] over the State Car. That's how I got to know the President. [Both laughs]

DHN: You were sharing the car with the President.

BINGHAM: Yes, we did. We were sharing the car, really. Then for a couple of years, a few years later, I don't remember whether it was the second or third year that we got another car, and Ray Wolfe came on campus, and we got a Ford. This one car we had was a [Chevrolet] and I had the Chev and then Ray took the Ford. We just had two cars for quite some time. I don't remember how long. But, we felt lucky to have the two cars. [Both laugh]

DHN: Maybe that kind of comment leads on into your recollection about the problems that you were dealing with in those days. What occurred to you as the...

BINGHAM: You know, I'm sure it wasn't a problem, free time, but it seemed that way to me because I was free to sit down and develop whatever instruments I wanted. I was free to academically to conduct my seminars any way I wanted, to make my visits any way I wanted, to organize activities with the teachers in the public schools who were working with us any way I wanted.

One of the beauties of that there was no one here who when you wanted to do something, wanted to try something, said to you, "Hey look, we have done that for the last 50 years that way and this is the way we do it." There was no restriction like that. It was really a heyday. You were just free, my experience was, you were just free to go ahead and develop. You didn't have to go through umpteen committees to get approved

and then come back to you and say, “Yes, you can, indeed you can do this,” or “You can operate that way.”

It was just — it occurred to me to be (I’m sure it wasn’t) a problem, free time, because we had the support we needed, and yet, we had not a lot of tradition to restrict us.

DHN: I remember morale as being really very high during those first two or three years, at least. It had something to do with the size of the school. We knew everybody. You probably knew everybody on the faculty at that point.

BINGHAM: Fairly to close to it. And actually, I think there were only about 1,400 students, weren’t there?

DHN: You know, my recollection is that we started the 1955-56 school year with something over 2,000 and attrition was tremendous in those days, you know, and we ended well below 2,000 that first year. So I don’t have the figure 1,400 in mind. Compared to now, small school.

BINGHAM: But see, we knew a lot of the students, too. We didn’t only know the students we taught, but we knew a lot of the other students. They would bring their friends in and we would talk with them and so that it wasn’t a matter of just knowing the students you were working with, really.

DHN: We’ll come back to the students, I guess. But, now, what about all these committees? You mentioned a lot of committees straight off. What are some of the committee experiences that you remember? And focus on the early days, rather than the more recent.

BINGHAM: [Laughs] Well, I guess somebody figured that we had to get organized and the way to do it was on committee. And the first committee I was ever on, was the first year I was here, was Academic Requirements and Pete Peterson headed it up. You were on that committee, too, weren't you?

DHN: It seems to me and Dean Anderson was on it. You were on it, I was on it and Thurman Peterson was the chairman of that..

BINGHAM: And there had to be somebody from Social Science, Humanities, [Education] — because committees were constructed that way, that we have a person — this is part of the intermingling. This, probably, is why we got to know each other, is because that's the way committees were structured. One person from each area and then you may have had two in some cases form an area, or even three depending on what your committee was.

But I remember meeting down in the basement and here's Peterson's office and in the northwest corner of the building and sitting amongst of all the books and papers that weren't — it looked like he was in the process of organizing like a lot of the rest of us were. And in trying to figure out what policies would help develop Portland State and its programs and what kinds of rules and regulations we should have and how they should be handled. I don't remember starting with having anything. I think we just started from the ground and built up.

DHN: Let's underline that. We were really making academic policy at that time.

BINGHAM: That didn't have to be approved by the State Board. [Both laughs]

DHN: I don't know who it had to be approved by, but that's what we talked about, wasn't it?

BINGHAM: Yes. And we had a few cases, early as it was, we'd get a few cases, which helped us see some of the kinds of things we needed to think about, because it...

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

Tape 1, Side 2
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BINGHAM: Students — very often wasn't the 18-year-old out of high school. Some of our students were mature and they had had all kinds of experiences. And in developing committee policies we needed to take into account the tremendous range in this university population that we had.

DHN: One of my recollections is that a great many of the students in those early years were the first members of their family to go to college. What do you remember about the kind of students that came to Portland State in those days?

BINGHAM: The kind of students that we had — I thought that our students, for the most part, were very enthusiastic. They put a high value on education. They recognized that they were getting an opportunity that many people in their family had not had and might not have even in the immediate years to come. So they were there to get all they could out of their college education. And it was interesting keeping pace with them, so to speak. It was very challenging and I think that they got to know each other quite well, probably because the student population was one of the things that helped that. The student population was quite low.

DHN: Do you have any particular recollections about student government or any of the student body presidents or student activities that...

BINGHAM: Well, no, you know, the general government, I really don't recall. I'm sure we had elections for student body president. I remember some of the campaign posters that were up on the walls in Lincoln Hall. At that time, it was "Old Main." But I don't remember a lot about the college student president. Don't even remember who it was.

Now we had activities. We had for Extension, an Education and Teacher Education Club for some time. But one of the things about the various clubs in those early days was

that it was hard to get people to come to meetings, because most of our students, a great percentage of our students worked. And they were busy people. They were going to school. They had a job on the side; some of them even had a family. And so, there was not time for a lot of social activities, although this is a very important part of any college or university. And I can remember the problems they had in getting people, oh, for rally squad, for instance, and for the various clubs.

DHN: Let's come on forward a little bit and let me hear what you have to say about your awareness of changes that crept over the campus or the faculty as the years went by.

BINGHAM: Oh well, of course, there were tremendous changes. If you could really document those very early years and look at it now, you wouldn't recognize it as being the same institution, the same policies, the same spirit at that time. Not that there isn't good spirit, because there is, but there was an extremely high spirit in those early days.

And I think, of course, we've seen student activities change a great deal. We have sororities and now and we have all kinds of clubs that we didn't have at that time. We have seen the program grow tremendously where students have a lot more options than they did when we were first here. And it's not only in terms of options of courses, but it's in terms of options of instructors.

One of my other problems, I guess, in terms of working with the early program, I didn't stay in student teaching too long. I came in and taught Education courses and it sometimes, from what I taught, because I taught in the Social Studies and I taught in the Humanities because I had background, you know, in both those areas, and it occurred to me that, you know, that in many cases, I was the only instructor that that student had for all his professional courses other than Student Teaching, somebody else had him for Student Teaching. I thought that was a very poor kind of a thing for a student to experience. But we were so limited in our faculty and who taught what, that they didn't have too much of an option then. And, of course, now there's tremendous options and I think that's as it should be.

DHN: Bigger faculty and there's many more students, too.

BINGHAM: Many more students and many more choices. Many different kinds of help, in terms of financial, that weren't available in those days; in terms of tutoring, that was not available in those days. Any tutoring that was done, was done by the professors. [Laughs]

DHN: What about the campus itself? I know we've seen that grow.

BINGHAM: Oh. Yes. [Laughs] When you stop to think of being in Old Main on those three floors, those rooms, and having that meet all our needs, and our contract that now there are buildings on our campus that I've never been. [Both laugh] And maybe never will get in because I've had no reason, unless you were on a committee. It's only recently that I've been in the Engineering Building when, out of senate, I was on the Committee on Committees, and the person who headed up happened to be in Engineering and we had our meetings over there. That was how I got to be in Engineering Building.

DHN: Are you still — we were talking a little bit about committees and then we wandered off into some other things. But are you still serving on committees?

BINGHAM: No, I'm not at this time. I'm only working with the retired professors group, trying to get everything set up. [Laughs]

DHN: You know, I guess most of us would say that Portland State has had its opposition in the state system. Do you want to make any comment on the battles that this college, and now university, has waged through these years as it has developed?

BINGHAM: Well, one thing that impressed me in the early days, is that you heard about all this competition between Portland State, Oregon State and the University of Oregon.

And there were people, you know, on the University of Oregon campus that never thought Portland State should give degrees. It's all right if they have a collection of courses, but then they should come down to the University of Oregon or Oregon State to complete their degrees.

But in those early days we had quite a bit of intermingling with, particularly, the people from University of Oregon. And I guess that came largely through offices and state organizations. I was president of the Association for Student Teaching. Well, there were Oregon State and University of Oregon people that put us in close contact where we were holding state conferences, we were one from each institution, maybe, on a panel and things like this. And so we got well acquainted with a lot of our counterparts on those two campuses and we got along beautifully. And a lot of those people I highly respected and I really enjoyed working with them. And I used to think to myself, why is it that on the personal level, we are so willing to share and so willing to help each other out, and yet on the level up above, there's this strife and there's this one trying to keep the other down or one trying to outdo the other, whatever it was?

I clearly remember, I can remember an individual on the University of Oregon campus. He happened to say it when he was up at Portland State one time (one of the deans), that over his dead body would Portland State ever grant degrees. Well, we got permission to give Bachelor's degree and he lived. Then it was over his dead body would we ever grant Graduate degree. Well, we got the Master's degree and he lived.

So, it always seemed to puzzle me as to the difference between the personal and the official level. Because we quite enjoyed and borrowed from each other very freely in terms of all kinds of forms and all kinds of organizations, and were happy to share.

DHN: Do you want to extend those remarks to include any kind of comment about the relationship between Portland State and the Legislature?

BINGHAM: Well, of course, you know, we really were not too, individual faculty members for a while, active in the Legislature. I belonged to the National Association for

Education of Young Children and we had a state organization. I was president of the state organization at one time and it was at a time when we were lobbying the Legislature for funds or for some kind of recognition for developing early childhood programs. And we, as faculty members and school employees, at that time, were not supposed to go down and testify before the Legislature. It had to be — that was something that — since we were state employees. So we used to get the other people that weren't involved with working for the state to go down and do this.

So in those early days, on a very personal basis, and a face-to-face situation, I didn't have that with the — we had to be careful what we said and what we did. And then, of course, later that changed, but it was some years later that it did change. I think we were maybe, I don't know, four to five years without being able to do that.

I think that, probably Portland State has had an uphill battle all the way through with the Legislature, although we had our friends down there, who really did a lot to help us, and without them we probably wouldn't have come as far as we have.

DHN: How about coming at this in another way. You were strongly urged to go to Connecticut or somewhere [Laughs] when you began your teaching career. Have you had any regrets about coming back to your hometown and devoting your career to Portland State?

BINGHAM: No, if I had, I probably wouldn't have stayed as long as I did stay, because there were plenty of jobs floating around and people were always telling you about various jobs and this is the just the job for you. And that was true not only in the state, but also in some foreign countries as well. You know, there were tremendous opportunities for educators in foreign countries.

DHN: How about putting on this record just a few comments about the double appointment that you had for a number of years, where you were spending time at the University of Maine? Build that into this record.

BINGHAM: Oh. [Laughs] I taught more summer sessions at the University of Maine than I did here. I taught very few summer sessions here, actually. That all came about fairly early in the game. I came in from teaching a class one day and Willard Spalding said to me and said, "Just a minute. Not so fast. Come in here. I'm writing a letter about you."

And I said, "Well, to whom are you writing?" [DHN laughs]

And he said, "To Mark Shibles."

And I said, "Who is he?"

And he said, "He's the Dean of Education at University of Maine. I thought you wanted to teach at the University of Maine."

I have no idea how Willard found that out. And so I thought to myself, "Well, okay. Let him go ahead." This was about March and summer programs are set, pretty well set. "Nothing will come through this year." But, Willard sent this letter and within a very short time I had a letter back from Mark Shibles offering me a job at the University of Maine for the summer.

So, then I had to decide, do I want to go or do I want to stay and teach on this campus, 'cause we were in the process of determining classes for summer session. So I decided, "What do I have to lose? I'll call him."

Well, as you know, I went and I went back and I went back. After the third summer completing the summer teaching, Mark Shibles called me into his office said, he asked, "We'd like you on the regular faculty here. Would you join the University of Maine staff, faculty?" And I talked to him and I told him I appreciated the offer but (and this was relatively early in our days at Portland State) but we were in the process of doing a lot of building, and that I thought I would like to go back and work with Willard on some of these things. So then, he said, "Well, would you make Maine your second university then and come here summers?"

So I said, "You know, that's very attractive, but let me go back and talk to Willard."
[Both laugh]

Willard and Mark were friends. And, in fact, I think Mark had worked with Willard in Massachusetts in the school system at one time. So I came back and I talked to Willard and Willard said, "You know, that is a nice opportunity for you and it's not an opportunity that a lot of people get. But I wouldn't want you to have to tie yourself up so that you couldn't say here are some summers when we might need you." So it was agreed with Mark that it wouldn't have to be every summer. Though, I would say, most of my summer teaching was at the University of Maine.

DHN: That was really very nice. Good recognition for you, too.

BINGHAM: Well, it's a delightful place to be in the summer.

DHN: Oh, is it?

BINGHAM: Oh! And the really nice thing, their summer session I liked, was a six week session instead of eight weeks. Classes were an hour and 15 minutes long, instead of the 50 minutes that we had. I never really cared for 50 minute periods. I don't think you can do a lot in them. I found that hour and 15 minutes just so much easier to develop concepts with and get to the point with students so when they left, you know, they really had hold of something that they could take and extend for themselves. And our classes tended to be small. Of course, I guess they were here, too, in the beginning, because we didn't have all that many students. But all through, classes tended to be small, and if you got a real big one, which I did at times, well, the summer session director simply divided it into two or three groups.

DHN: We have to wrap up here pretty soon, but how about tracing your thinking through the several deans of the School of Education? I'm not sure I can even name them. Maybe I could get you to do that. But I'm thinking, now there's Willard that we've talked about

considerably and was a fountainhead really for educational development around here. Eric [Lincoln]? Dave Willis?

BINGHAM: Who's Eric [Lincoln?]

DHN: [Laughs] Well, maybe he wasn't the head of the School of Education, but he was a rather prominent figure who was here for a while during this period. Or if that doesn't ring a bell, we can let it go.

BINGHAM: Doesn't ring a bell. Well, for a while, Ray Wolfe was an interim dean.

DHN: That's right. You mentioned Ray Wolfe earlier.

BINGHAM: Yes, and Ray Wolfe, and Dean Anderson was a dean, interim dean, you know. We've had a lot of interims.

DHN: Well. [Both laugh] Okay, carry on with...

BINGHAM: Ray Wolfe took over the student teaching program from Dean. Dean became – again, I'm not good on titles, I just don't know...

DHN: He was in the President's office for some length of time, but I couldn't...

BINGHAM: But that was previous to this. That was previous to this. Dean went into something else and then he went to the President's office. I don't remember what his title was. But Bill Jenkins was dean here. Hal Jorgenson was an interim dean fairly recently. And Don Leu. And Don Leu was a fabulous person.

DHN: Very recently.

BINGHAM: Yes, very recently. He just preceded Bob Everhart. But Don Leu was more, in some ways, more like a Willard Spalding. He believed in getting people together. He was very outgoing. He believed in intermixing all kinds of responsibilities. He believed in using retired people on committees. And in fact, when the Dean of the School of Education, it was when he was dean and he was being evaluated, that was all done by, the committee was all retired people because, you know, they had nothing to lose. [DHN laughs] They did all the work and just give him the results and so all the comments could remain shielded from -.

So we have had quite a number of deans. And the other thing that we had in the School of Education that started that, (and I'm not sure whether it started when Ray Wolfe was in the office or whether somebody else did) and that was getting retired teachers from the public schools to come in and supervise, take a quarter and supervise student teaching or maybe teach a class if they had an area specialty or something. That program ran for several years with the — using retired teachers to augment the faculty. I guess there were times when there really was not enough money for definite faculty appointments, so they went to using — one of the things they did, they were not like an ad hoc professor. They really came in and were, that was their full job and worked on the faculty.

So, yes, we had a number of deans and a number of different personalities in them, and a number of different strengths in the various deans we had. Bill Jenkins was kind of like an intellectual giant, like Willard. Intellectually, he was very, very stimulating, and a very interesting person. He had an agenda that he wanted to accomplish and he worked hard at it, and I think he did quite a bit for the School of Education.

DHN: Suppose we wrap up by giving you a chance to just mention anything else that occurs to you that has been important in your career, or that you see as especially significant about the Portland State story.

BINGHAM: Well, I think that...

DHN: Think about personally or institutionally here for a minute, Alma.

BINGHAM: I think what's especially significant about the Portland State University story is that there were a nucleus of faculty who worked diligently, had vision, and were determined to see this succeed as a major university. And without those people being willing to put in so many hours and being willing to go out on a limb in many cases, we probably wouldn't be where we are today.

DHN: Yeah, yeah. And what about you, personally? What have been your biggest satisfactions in your long career here?

BINGHAM: I think probably one of the satisfactions, of course, is seeing the school develop, being able to come in, in the beginning, and kind of follow through the development. And another satisfaction being is that we really have had some very, very, excellent students who were stimulating and who have made contributions to the school systems and to society. And we've even had a few of our good ones leave because teachers are so poorly paid. [Laughs] You hated to see them go out of the classroom, but they went into industry and...

DHN: You trained them as teachers and then they left that profession and turned...

BINGHAM: They stayed for a while. But then, as one of the ones, Ken [Lauther?], said, "You know, I don't have to have a lot of money, but I feel like I should be able to provide things for my family that I'm not able to do on a teacher's salary." And so, he did go out and that was a terrible loss to the classroom, because he was a terrific person. I supervised him in student teaching. I watched him as a teacher those first few years that he was out. And we needed that kind of person with us.

DHN: What is it that you enjoyed most in your career?

BINGHAM: Oh, I guess the people and the opportunity to mix with so many different people and to carry out various kinds of responsibilities with them. One thing I've regretted, on some of these committees, is not keeping a diary. I'm sure that a good book could be published on [Laughs] certain committees and on the kinds of things they had to face and the funny things that happened in committee.

I can remember when we were on Academic Requirements once, getting a petition for a fellow that was transferring from Reed and he wanted to take 26 hours and his record didn't show that he really, that we should grant that. He was giving us reasons why he should be allowed to take that number of hours and one of the reasons he gave was that expressing himself was never a problem for him. He was a good speller, he was a good writer, and I think every third word on the petition was misspelled and we had a hard time figuring out. Things like that, that come up. [Laughs]

DHN: Well, Alma, what are you doing now?

BINGHAM: What am I doing now? I'm doing some travelling. I'm working very hard trying to get the Emeritus Professor and Retired Professor Association going. I'm working with Friends to the Elderly. I've worked with Community Schools. I'm even taking a class; I'm taking a course in Calligraphy this quarter...

DHN: You started doing that, huh?

BINGHAM: At the Community Schools. I've worked with Community Schools for the last two years but I've never taken a class. So I'm doing that now. I'm visiting faculty. In fact, you know, being retired makes you so busy, I wonder how I ever had time to work.

DHN: Okay. Maybe that's a good place to wrap this up. [Laughs] Thanks a lot.

BINGHAM: You're welcome. Interesting.

DHN: Anyone who listens to this interview will realize that there were quite a number of topics that were either not touched upon at all or very inadequately probed. As we stopped talking, Alma plunged into a discussion of campus activities during the 1960s, especially the anti-Vietnam activities, on the part of the students. It occurs to me that for getting a good coverage of that episode in Portland State's history, a group of people might be selected, each of whom would talk specifically on their perceptions of what was going on during that period.

[End of Tape 1, Side 2]

[End of Interview]