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Interview no. 676

Lurline H. Coltharp

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO
INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Lurline H. Coltharp
INTERVIEWER: Rebecca Craver
PROJECT: History of the University
DATE OF INTERVIEW: January 27, 1984
TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted
TAPE NO.: 676
TRANSCRIPT NO.: 676

BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Professor of Linguistics; former student at the College
of Mines, 1929-31.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Recollections of the College of Mines, 1929-31, including
football, the beginning of the Golddiggers, and an anecdote
about Capp Kidd.

Length of interview: 20 minutes Length of transcript: 9 pages

Lurline H. Coltharp
by Rebecca Craver
January 27, 1984

LC: I came out to the University of Texas at El Paso first in 1929 and the name was the Texas College of Mines. I think it was later changed to Texas College of Mines and Arts, but I think it was only Texas College of Mines when I came. When I graduated from high school at fifteen, my parents thought I was too young to go away to school to the big, wicked University. They kept me at home and I came out here. Well, I had gotten my first job when I was twelve. I had my own column in the El Paso Herald--"Cloudcroft News," which ran every summer. Then I had my column "El Paso High News" during my senior year there. Since I'd already been running my own column in the newspaper for some time, I changed the name of my column to "Mines' Diggings" and this was very clever we thought. You know, when you're a teenager these things seem extremely clever to you. I had the "Mines' Diggings" and they ran a column in the El Paso Herald with my own byline, Lurline Hughes, during my freshman year out here, so I had to get around and meet everybody and do all of the fun things. I'm sure there are lots of things in the El Paso Herald file back in that year that I would just chuckle over, but I haven't gone back to do it.

I remember that I was allowed to have a car to come up here, but I think it was the family car and my family had to do without when I had classes. The best parking place was the one right in front of what is now known as Old Main. It was just known as Main building then, and we parked right there. The reason we liked that location is because there were steps there and you didn't have to get your shoes so scuffed up on the rocks. We always had to wear old shoes on the

campus because every place you went /there/ were rocks. The gathering place was the bookstore. You went inside Old Main and the first room to the right was the bookstore and we had a lot of fun going in there. There were not only books but you could buy Cokes and you could stand around and visit with the boys.

That year I pledged one of the two sororities and I can't for the life of me remember the name of it, but I'm sure it's in the annual some place. If I would bring my old annuals out of storage and up to my house I could look it up. The initiation was terrible. No schools would allow that sort of thing these days, but we thought it was tremendous fun, just marvelous. The engineers had their initiation up in Oro Grande in the spring, and that was jillions of fun because the boys smeared the initiates with paint and goo and catsup and made them crawl through one of the old mines. You left the highway at Oro Grande and went around some of those mountains to where there were abandoned mine shafts, extremely dangerous when I look back on it, but we thought it was exciting. I think the boy I had a date with had a Model T, open Model T and we went up to Oro Grande, spent the whole day and came back. Marvelous time, just more fun than... When I look around at children today, I don't think they have much fun out of the things as we did. I don't know, maybe they take their studying more seriously than we did. I can't remember whether this was '29 or whether it was '30, but it doesn't matter, it was the fall or the spring of my first year that I took geology. This was lots of fun because I was the only girl in the class with these /boys/, but the thing was when I signed up for it, I remember Professor Null looked at me and said, "Oh, you've got Hague and Hague." And I looked at

him and I wondered what it was, why he thought that was so funny, but he laughed and laughed and laughed. I was too naive to know that Haige and Haige was the name of a scotch and I was supposed to laugh at his very sophisticated joke. I was a very unsophisticated girl, and I didn't even know enough to laugh at the clever joke. Well, here I was the only girl in the class, and Dr. Hague (Mr. Hague I know now), but I always called him Dr. Hague, and I'm not going to demote him now, so Dr. Hague had an extra class meeting which I was not told about and he gathered all the boys together and laid down the rules of conduct. One day we were doing plane table work out in back of Kelly Hall. Between Kelly Hall and Old Main was all just rocky terrain then. We had the plane table and we got it all set up, got it all leveled and everything was fine. But, I went around to do something and kicked the plane table leg and unlevelled it and I said, "Oh, damn!" The boys just shrieked! They said, "Dr. Hague told us that he would skin us alive if we said one cuss word in front of you, and here you're the one who said 'damn.'" (Laughter) And when we meet now at Matrix Society meetings such as this last spring at the Matrix Society meeting out at the Marriott, Dr. and Mrs. Hague were there and some of the boys who were in the same class were there. We all got together and we laughed about the fact that Lurline was the one said "damn." (Laughter) I'm just remembering some of the real fun things that happened.

RC: Tell me about another one.

LC: In the 1930's I was going with one of the football players. That year we had brought in a bunch of ringers. They had played for other

colleges, and they were way beyond the age of college people and big and strong. We brought them all in to UTEP and we won every game that year. (Chuckles) And I thought, "Oh, look how manly, look how wonderful." So, I was enchanted with one of these professional football players (Chuckles), who was supposed to be a college student. One morning I parked my car in front of Old Main and got there a little early and had the perfect parking place. I remember that he came up to the car window to speak to me and I said, "Oh, how are you?" I was so thrilled to be talking to him that I was leaning out of the car visiting with him and visiting and in a little while he had to say, "Excuse me, I gotta go." The next day I learned that he had been chewing tobacco when he'd come up and seen me, and he didn't want me to know that he chewed tobacco so he couldn't spit. He had swallowed instead.

RC: Oh no!

LC: And this great big, husky football player was laid out for 24 hours up in Old Bary Hall in the dormitory. That was a dormitory up there across from Kelley Hall, and so he was laid out for 24 hours because he wouldn't spit in front of Lurline. (Laughter)

That fall, the fall of 1930, and the reason I know it was that I had been given a basketball sweater by my boyfriend the previous spring, four stripes and two stars on the orange and white sweater.

RC: Was that a signal that you were going together?

LC: That was the signal we were going together in that spring. And so that fall a bunch of us said, "There's not enough pep for all these football games." And we thought we were so lucky to have all these fine football players decide to go to Mines. Of course, it was only later that I found out that they had all been purchased. But, anyway, we said, "We've got to have more pep," so a group of us got

up a little pep squad and my mother dreamed up the name of "Golddiggers." My mother, Mrs. Frank A. Hughes. This we thought was very funny because we would never have thought of being a golddigger. We were the kind of little girls that had been brought up, when a boy took us on a date and we stopped at a drive-in for a drink and he said, "What will you have?" We'd say, "I'll take a small coke, please," because we weren't going to spend more than five cents of the boy's money. Money was too scarce a commodity then, so we thought the name "Golddiggers" was funny. But I remember that we all got some sort of an orange top and white skirts. I think we all owned white skirts already. And I remember I wore this basketball sweater for my orange top. We marched in the Homecoming parade, and I can still see, to this day, marching past the Cortez. Of course it was the Orndorf then, marching past that and all of us lined up and marching about three or four abreast and marching down with the parade. The Homecoming parade went through El Paso in those days.

RC: That's what I had heard.

LC: And so we stopped all the traffic and, we thought this was just such fun. We all sat together at football games and yelled extra hard because we were the Golddiggers. This has been a source of great pleasure to me to look back at the fun things. Now the second year I was here, I did not have the newspaper column and nobody continued it. So we had the newspaper column, "Mines' Diggings," for only one year. Oh, by the way, I was paid the munificent total of fifteen cents an inch, so if I had a ten-inch column, which is a lot of news, I got a dollar and a half for that day's work. But that was good pay in those days,

and I loved having that.

My sophomore year, I just can't tell you how many good things happened that year. I just remember my sophomore year as having stars all around it 'cause it was such fun every day. You know, the world was your oyster; it was beautiful. I was elected president of my sorority and everything that was going on that year. I was elected one of the three school beauties both years I was here and oh, it was heaven.

When the boys had their initiation at Oro Grande that spring (there was an organization of PE, girls PE organization and every girl had to take PE and had to join) we got together and we said, "We are going to initiate the new girls," so we took them over there, over in back of where the English Department building is. It was a sort of a canyon, and we went down a little path, and we made everybody walk down this little path. There were no roads over on that side then.

RC: So it's by where the freeway is now?

LC: Well, it was between the English building and the freeway because where the Sun Bowl Drive is was all filled in, so probably it was about just where the parking lot is, but we went down this little canyon and I was Saint Patricia. I combed out my hair flowing. I had long, flowing hair and a long green robe and all the girls had to come up and kiss the Blarney Stone.

RC: What is the Blarney Stone?

LC: What was the Blarney Stone? I don't know where we picked it up but we got one. (Laughs)

RC: Did you paint it green?

LC: No, we just had a Blarney Stone, plain stone, and they had to kiss

the Blarney Stone, and I think we daubed them with something for initiation. I think we put a little "x" on them, but I don't think it was, well, we didn't threat them badly like the boys did (Laughter) but we initiated all the new girls. Of course, this was an unofficial, completely unofficial, and if somebody didn't show up they didn't get initiated, but in those days we all showed up for that sort of thing. We didn't hold back from it, we all were /there/. Of course, the college was a lot smaller then, and we all hung together and we all pitched in and did all of these fun things. So I came here my first two years.

/PAUSE/

There was one other thing that I thought was a lot of fun. I was allowed to be a member of the rifle team, and this met in Old Main. We used to go in the front door and go past where the stairway is and go into a thing that was a basement. It was just sort of dug out of rocks in there with an earth floor, and we would set up our targets and we had our target practice there in back and underneath the stairs in Old Main. The nicest bunch of boys were on the boys' rifle team. They had matches with a lot of other schools, and those of us who were on the girls' rifle team got to go along and cheer for them. We never did have any matches but we did get pretty good because we would go in and practice because that was a lot of fun, too. Now, I remember the Rifle Team with great pleasure.

RC: When you were talking about the football team, Kidd Field wasn't built then, was it?

LC: Yes, Kidd Field. It was there but the far side didn't have any...

RC: Any bleachers?

LC: It's just this side of. . . near Holliday Hall, and we used to have meetings of the student body there, and we'd all have to go to student body meetings, and we'd all hike up that hill and sit on this side that's next to Holliday Hall.

RC: And Holliday Hall was built then, too?

LC: I don't remember whether Holliday Hall was built then or later. I don't remember it being there. I just remember going past Kelly, past Barry, up the mountain and sitting at the top of the bleachers while the people down below yelled up at us and we had school meetings. We had assemblies. We had those every, I don't remember what the, how frequent they were but I do remember that we had them.

RC: What do you remember was on this side of the campus, like where the Liberal Arts building is now? Were there homes?

LC: The old house that has been torn down, the President's house was there and up in front of Old Main down to the, if you are looking up toward Old Main to the right down here, Capp Kidd's house was there and Capp and Mrs. Kidd.

RC: Did you have any classes with him?

LC: Well, if you want the story about Capp Kidd, when I first came out here, I was thrilled to death to be coming to Mines because I wanted to be an engineer. My father was an engineer and I wanted to be an engineer and Mrs. Kidd was such a precious darling. I loved her so dearly, and she used to have me over and we had a lot of fun. So, I was talking about being an engineer, that's why I was taking geology, you see. I was

getting all ready for all of this, and Capp Kidd took me aside and he said, "Lurline, in order to be an engineer you have to have calculus. I am the only one on the faculty who teaches Calculus, and I do not want you to be an engineer. I do not want a woman bothering my engineering department." He said, "I don't care if every paper you turn in to me in Calculus is 100 percent, I'll still give you an "F" and I will fail you in Calculus so that you can never be an engineer." And he meant it. So, I became a History major, and then my parents said, "Look, you've got to have something besides History," so I took an extra major in Education, so I had two majors when I graduated. But in my junior year, I went back down to the wicked University.

RC: The big one?

LC: The big one--UTEP at Austin. (Laughter) I love that.