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Jennifer Ruehling

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ORAL HISTORY

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DATE 8/29/88

Jennifer A. Ruehling
(Signature - Interviewee)

(Address)

DATE 8/29/88

William H. Morrow
(Signature - Witness)

SOCIETY OF YEAGER SCHOLARS

INTERVIEWEE: Jennifer Ruehling

INTERVIEWER: Michele Shank

MUH-YS-19

TYPIST: Gina Kehali Kates

INTERVIEW DATE: 3/24/88

MS: This is one in a series of taped interviews on the Society of Yeager Scholars. My name is Michele Shank and with me today is one of the Yeager scholars, from the first Ashland class, Jennifer Ruehling.

MS: We're at the Yeager offices on March 24, 1988. So, we're ready to talk to... Jennifer, okay?

MS: Alright, Jennifer, first of all, tell me when and where you were born?

JR: I was born in Akron, Ohio on January 13, 1969.

MS: Okay. And tell me a little bit about your home town. What was it like growing up in Akron?

JR: Ummm...well, I lived actually south of Akron in ^{Canal} ~~Kanawha~~ Fulton, which is a small town of about three thousand people, and it was originally ^{Canal} ~~Kanawha~~ town, from the name you can tell, and so, um, there's a lot of history in the town, a lot of historical buildings and it was a really cozy atmosphere, to live there. And, ummm, everybody kinda knew everybody, in one of our towns, but it was really nice to live in a small town but, be close enough to a city to be able to get anywhere I wanted to at anytime.

MS: Kinda nice. [laughter] Okay. Tell me about your father and mother. What was your father's occupation?

JR: Ummm, my father's name is John and he was originally ummm, a pre-med major at a higher state university but ummm, he changed his mind about that and he taught biology, chemistry, physics and computer programming in, ummm, several high schools till about three years ago and then he changed jobs and now he is the manager of a computer store.

MS: And your mother, does she work outside the home?

JR: No, she doesn't.

MS: Alright, tell me about when you were growing up. Ah, grade school, ah, have you always lived in the outskirts of Akron?

JR: Yeah, I've always lived in ^{Canal} ~~Kanawha~~ Fulton. Umm, the grade school I went to was a small school. Ummm, it's in the, it's in the middle of downtown ^{Canal} ~~Kanawha~~ Fulton. It's...it used to be a high school, ya know? I mean, everybody from

JR: early 1900's has gone through this school and the teacher there and the atmosphere was really nice. It wasn't, it wasn't ummm, a stressful experience to attend school there. It was, it was just really no major discipline problems, it wasn't like a inner city school or...

MS: Was there, were you an...ah...student who...ah...who excelled in grade school?

JR: Yeah, ummm, even in kindergarten I always had the highest grades in the class. And, I was...always at home, I was pushed to do my best. And...there were really no gifted programs in my school until just very recently. So, I missed out on all of that. But, at home...since my father was a teacher, and he knew...uh, he knew what was important and why it was important for me to do well in grade school and in order to do well later in life. And...so I was pushed at home. Not...to the point where I could, you know, I...it was too much pressure and I couldn't handle it, but they just wanted me to do my best. And, they knew that I could do well.

MS: Okay. In high school, tell me about what your studies were like and what your extracurricular activities were like.

JR: Um...in high school I was always considered to be the brain...um, [laughter] because I never had a "B" in all of high school.

MS: [background] Shame on you! [laughter]

JR: Um...I was involved in a lot of things. I was on the volleyball team for three years and the track team for two years. And my junior and senior year I was the business manager and the editor-in-chief of the yearbook. And...although I did spend a lot of time studying to keep my grades up-by this point I didn't really need to be pushed anymore. I knew what I wanted to do. And, I got my work done on my own. I didn't need that extra push behind me to keep me going. So, I had a lot of extra time to socialize, and to do anything really that I wanted.

MS: Did you have any certain career goals at that time? Were you thinking of what your future wanted, you wanted to be in the future?

JR: Not really.[laughter] I still don't know.

MS: Well, that's good. I don't know what I want to be when I grow up either. Ummm, you say your parents influenced you because of ah, your father being a teacher. Do you have any brothers and sisters?

JR: I have two younger brothers, one of them is three years younger than me and one is eight years younger than me.

MS: Are they good students?

JR: They try [laughter]. Mike is sixteen right now and so he's kind of at the stage where he doesn't really want to do the homework. He wants to go out and have a good time. But, ummm, he's been doing pretty well. He's been on the Honor Roll.

MS: Was there any special teacher in grade school or high school that influenced you or made an impression on you?

JR: My second grade teacher, Miss Walderhouse was the biggest influence on my academic achievements because she had older children who were, well, her daughter graduated from high school when I was in her class and her daughter was the valadictorian. And she explained to us what that meant. And, you know, what you had to do to get there, and I went home from school that day and told my mom that I was going to be valadictorian of my class. (And were you?) Yes. [laughter]

MS: Great! Okay, when did you start thinking about college and ah, what did you do in effort to pick the right one?

JR: Well, I really had no ideas up before my junior year of where I wanted to go to college. There were a lot of schools that sounded good but sometimes it was just because I liked the football team. [laughter] Umm, I got hundres and hundreds of letters in the mail and I would look through them and sort 'em out according to, which ones were just, ummm, didn't wha...if they were mainly Liberal Arts background I kept them or if they had a strong science program but if it was an education school, I knew I didn't want to do that. I just uh, kinda sorted 'em all out and then, I requested more information on the ones that really interested me. I went to a lot of the meetings held in the area from schools like Princeton and Harvard and things like that.

MS: How did you hear of the Yeager Scholar Program and had you even heard of Marshall University before?

JR: I'd never heard of Marshall [laughter] uh, I knew where Huntington was because I had relatives who lived here, but I'd never heard of Marshall. I got a ummm, card in the mail and my dad was kinda more enthusiastic about it than I was at first. He says, "Oh, Chuck Yeager, you know who he is, don't you"? And I did but, he convinced me to send it back in. And then I got more information and it just sounded terrific and I couldn't pass it up.

MS: So when you made your decision, was...what was the deciding factor on Marshall as compared to Princeton and Harvard and...?

JR: Princeton and Harvard were just out of the price range. [laughter] Definitely. But umm, there were a few other schools I was considering and it just depended on what kind of scholarships I could get there. But the problem was they didn't notify of scholarships until after May 1st. And we had to accept by March 21st. So, I really had to think about it for a week. And I just decided that...it wasn't really important where I went to school, it's what I put into it and this was just a super experience and I could get a lot out of this...this program, more than I could just being a normal student at a different school.

MS: So you haven't decided on a major yet, or you have decided on a major here at Marshall?

JR: Well, right now I'm a mathematics major. But, I'm really not sure what I want to do with it so, I'm considering...once I decide what I want to do, I might have to change the major.

MS: And has the Yeager program met all your educational expectations?

JR: I think so. I've talked to friends who go to other schools. I have a friend at M.I.T. and I've talked to her and I...I think I'm learning as much as she is, honestly, ummm, she has, she goes to the prestigious school that costs all the money, but...her classes are really no harder, she spends no more time studying than I do, you know. I think I spend more time studying, and I think I'm learning a lot more than she is because I'm in...this interesting program where I have to do well. And, I have to push myself to do well.

MS: Give me an example of one of your days. A day in a life.

[laughter]

JR: Ummm, well, I usually get up around 7:30 or 8:00 and get ready for classes, and I go to breakfast and then I'm in classes for usually most of the morning. I get out around one o'clock on some days and right after classes I go back and kind of relax for a little bit, watch a little bit of television and change my clothes. But then, in the afternoon I try to get as much work done as I can so that I have the evening free so I can kinda relax in the evening if I have time. This semester I've had a lot of less free time than last semester. Because, I just....I just got more classes and the ones I have are harder. So, I've been spending a lot more time studying. In the last few weeks I've spent most of my evenings and most of my afternoons doing homework, and I still don't think I'm caught up.

MS: How many hours are you carrying?

JR: Eighteen.

MS: Um-huh. Tell me about the seminar, some of your experiences with those.

JR: Well, when we first walked in to last semester's seminar-it kind of-it wasn't anything that we expected. It wasn't anything anybody expected because we didn't have the computers. So, it was-the whole seminar had to be restructured, and it was really very vague going-going through the seminar. We didn't, we didn't know what we were going to be doing-depending on whether the computers or not in the next week. So everything was kinda vague and we were really unsure of how we were doing and, once it was over and you look back on it, it really was a good experience. But ummm, at the time we were really, really scared because we had no idea where our grades were coming from. Or umm, where the next week was going to take us. (mmm-hmm). This semester, it's a lot more work. It's a lot of reading. There's a lot of work outside class. A lot more than we expected. But, it's really an enjoyable class. They're trying, I think, really hard not to put too much pressure on us so that we feel like we can't get our work done. And umm, you know, we just can't handle all of it. It really hasn't been that bad!

MS: Ah, at the symposium in October, the first Yeager Symposium, you had a chance to meet several personalities there and, and listen to several of the speeches that the, ah, invited guests made. Ah, what were your impressions ah, of that event? What did you enjoy most?

JR: I think what I enjoyed most was, just meeting these people who, they're just people you never ever think you're ever going to meet in your life. And, umm, it was just really interesting to hear them talk about their experiences like, Bud Anderson talking about the first space shuttle flight, and showing films of that, and um, then um, Ralph Albertazzi talking about Air Force One and different presidents who flew on the plane, and their, you know, the way the, the, the different administrations changed, the way it operated. And it was just, things you never really hear about, they're not in history books and they're not, it's not just common knowledge, it's not something you see on the news. And it, it's just really interesting to get an inside look at tht kind of, that kind of thing.

MS: That's something you wouldn't have a chance to do unless you... (right)...were a Yeager scholar. When did you first meet Chuck Yeager? And, what were your first impressions of him?

JR: The first time I met Chuck Yeager was at the symposium. But, I didn't meet him in a formal situation like most everybody else did. I was just walking out of the Yeager suite and he was walking in and Mr. Hunnicutt introduced me to him, you know, just right there. And, I was surprised at first when I saw him just walk in the door, it just kinda took me back. But he was just so friendly and so down to earth. And, he was just always telling jokes and never took anything seriously and it just really surprised me that he was like that.

MS: What about Mr. Denman, your director? Ummm, has he helped you this year or uh, what has his role been for you?

JR: Well, uh, I think the biggest thing is that he's always here and we know if we have a scheduling problem, if we have a problem in our classes, or just any kind of problem, he's always here to...to talk to. You know, if we just wanna tell somebody something, you know, he's here and we can talk to him. He's really been very supportive of us. And, he's tried to get everything done for us, help us, help us with our, you know, all of our scheduling and our classes and um, just um, he uh, organizes all kinds of special things for us to kind of enrich our educational experience so that we have a more wide variety of...of...I don't know how to

JR: say it [laughter] (experiences) experiences, so that, to um, prepare us so that we're really sure that what, with what we want to do and where we want to go in our lives.

MS: Joe Hunnicutt, the founder, have you had much interaction with him and what were your impressions?

JR: Yeah, umm, he was here last semester (he was here most of the semester; he had an office here), and he was always asking us questions to make sure that everything was going alright. And, just to see, in general, how we were doing and how our classes were going, how we were liking...liking th dorms, the food, that kinda thing and he was always just, I think, he wanted to really see what was going on with us and what we liked and didn't like, so that he could try to, if there were problems, he could try to fix them; or if there were something that we really liked he could bring that out more.

MS: And, Dr. Nitzschke, have you had much contact with President Nitzschke?

JR: No, I really haven't had much contact with him. Umm, the only time was during the finalist weekend last February. I ate dinner or breakfast with him a few times and, he was really very friendly. He seemed like he was in support of the program. But, we just never really see him around here very much.

MS: Ummm. He's a busy man. (yeah) [laughter]. Being part of the first Yeager class and the Ashland class, what responsibilities if any do you feel?

JR: Well, I think it was our responsibility, this year, to make sure that the Yeager program gained respectability on campus. When we got here, they thought, you know, there were so many misconceptions going around on campus, you know, about money and about our classes, our curriculum, and I think we kinda had to clear that up so that the program was understood and more accepted so that it can go on in the future and it can be respected and it can have a strong future ont he campus.

MS: Okay. You've had lot's of press-a-being the first class umm, did you, you find that interesting or did you find it a pressure situation to be constantly interviewed by the press?

JR: There was a lot of pressure. Umm, there were a lot of things being reported that were false. But, were very misleading and they were just hounding us. You know, the story about Yeager scholars go 'Greek' and thier "Real People, too". They didn't treat us like real people and we had to kinda stand up and say, "Why don't you just let us along and let us be real people"? "Then maybe we can fit in on campus". But, umm, I think most of the press was pretty good. (mmm-hmm) Ummm.

MS: What about the students, did they receive you fairly well?

JR: In most times they didn't know I was a Yeager scholar when they met me. So, they got to know me just then realized that I was a Yeager scholar. And, they were surprised because, we were kinda sheltered when we were brought down here last February, and we came on campus for interviews and to see the campus then we went to a basketball game. But, we were very sheltered. They kept us in a little group and didn't let us mingle with the school, so, they thought that we were gonna be this elite group of snooks who...[laughter] who just walks around campus and we'd just live in this neat little dorm of our own or something with all the luxurious things. But, umm, I think once they realized who we are and how we act and, you know, that...that we have fun and we like to do the same things they do, that it's been pretty good.

MS: Is there anything about the program, Jennifer, that you would like to change or you see some improvements or any comment you'd like to make about the program?

JR: Ummm, in general, it's just a terrific program and I'm so glad I'm here. There are a few things umm, some of the pressures put on us to...to do well. People have dropped classes just because they don't think they can get an "A" in a class and it will bring their grade point average down, so they drop the class. And, that kinda thing, I think, hurts a lot. But, sometimes we just feel a lot of pressure. Ummm, I think that most of the professors do what they can to alleviate the pressure. But, I think it's always going to be there and it's just something we're going to have to handle. But I'm not saying they should layer-they should lower the requirements for us but, we need to know that we can relax a little bit and not worry about it constantly. Umm...other things to change...just...um, it needs time to grow. you know, it's the first year and they don't, nobody knew how it was going to turn out

JR: and we didn't know what we were getting ourselves into at all. (um-hmm) So, it's just gonna take a couple years, I think, to...to see how things go and as things come about, you know, if there's a problem, change it, if it works, well, keep it that way. And, it's just going to take some time.

MS: Well, thank you very much for this interview. I appreciate it and good luck.

JR: Thank you.

END OF TAPE = END OF INTERVIEW