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David Johnson: David, D-A-V-I-D Johnson, J-O-H-N-S-O-N from September 11, 1990 to June 30, 1998.

Christopher Butler: Okay. What was your awareness of UMM prior to your becoming an employee there?

David Johnson: Well ironically, I didn't have much awareness of UMM for the longest time. But by 1960 I was teaching at Luther College in Iowa and preoccupied with- I just lost track of the Minnesota scene though I grew up in Minnesota and in one of the outer counties, Grand Rapids. But then two things happened. Well I was Academic Vice President at St. Cloud. But we came to St. Cloud from Northeastern Pennsylvania. And we brought our son named Andy, with us and Andy was not a happy camper. And we visited Mack [ph?] and St. Johns. I don't remember all and he was totally disinterested. And then we went out to Morris. I asked colleagues at St. Cloud, where can I take this kid? He wanted liberal arts but it must have nothing to do with religion. And somebody at St. Cloud State said, "Well there's this fine campus out at Morris." So we went out there and somebody in admission said to Andy, "What do you like to do?" and he said "I like sports statistics." And they made a phone call and said, "You've got a job." And so he began bringing friends home and I had the impression they were decidedly a deviation or two from the main. They were very interesting guys. And then when I was at Gustavus as the dean of the college, I remember two things. Each spring, late spring, the Mankato Free Press would run a big piece on where all the big valedictorians or something in the Mankato trade area were going to college and I couldn't believe it. It was not Mankato State. It was not Gustavus or St. Olaf or St. Johns. So many were going to Morris and that I must say, confirmed matters that we deans in the Minnesota Private College Council talked about, that we had Hamline forever or St. Kate's forever and the kid was at Morris, so different things came together.

Christopher Butler: So then when you came to interview for the job, which I'm sure was a very grueling process, what were your impressions when you saw it, not as a parent of a student but as someone who might consider working there?

David Johnson: Well I remember sitting with one of-- yes, it was a grueling process. And I remember sitting with one of the committees that was to meet me and I said it

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would have-- they said, "Is there anything we should have provided you in information?" And I said, "It would have been helpful to know where you all were undergraduates yourselves and I didn't have access to that information." And so I think it was Ellen Ordway who said "Well let's go around the room and tell Dave where we were." And I mean, it was- it was Washington and Lee, it was Wheaton of Massachusetts and Williams and I thought oh my gosh, this is really quite interesting that you might say the pioneer faculty had frankly kind of an elitist brand to them.

Christopher Butler: Interesting. And then you accepted the job and I'd like for you to explain to me why you became known as Chancellor David.

David Johnson: I never knew. Students just started calling me that. And I think they were a few faculty who were rather upset with it. But, it was a term that morphed. I think Jack was simply called Jack in his term. So I suppose it wasn't a big transition and I kind of liked it.

Christopher Butler: Really, you sensed that some of the faculty didn't care for the informality of that?

David Johnson: Oh, that would be two or three people that, you've always got them but yeah. But I guess it-- but I sure never thought of it. And it just kind of bubbled up and stuck.

Christopher Butler: And you also had a unique introduction to the living, to living in Morris. What was that?

David Johnson: Yeah, yeah very definitely.

Christopher Butler: So where was your first home in Morris?

David Johnson: Well again it never crossed my mind to live in a residence hall. And I got out there. The call from Nils Hasselmo the president of the university, didn't come until September 7th and Nils explained why the decision had been delayed, had to be delayed. There were a lot of considerations, affirmative action et cetera. But he said I've got a very big favor to ask of you, can you come immediately? He said we can't risk a vacuum out there. And I was all set to start the year at Gustavus and I don't know

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how I did it or Gustavus did it or Morris did it but I was there four days later. And but what there had been no time to do, was to find housing. And when I got there, I realized there was not a room at the inn. Literally the Sunwood was filled with students that fall because too many accepted the Morris offer relative to what the prediction had been. And so there I was and my poor wife as usual was back home packing the house in St. Peter. So Dave Arneson [ph?] called and said, we've got a room in Indy [ph?] and that the person we anticipated to live in it isn't going to come. And I thought well, any port in a storm. I was terribly worried, I mean, at my age and I had reason to be worried when I came and I faced these, I think there were 15 freshmen, about half men and half women in that section. I mean the look of utter bleak horror and despair, you know, on their faces when they saw me. You know, their first night away from home so to speak. I mean they had waited for liberation all these years and who, but me. But it was anyway, for me additionally it was a port in a storm. But I just loved and I'd like to think some of them did too.

Christopher Butler: I bet they did. Any trouble getting to sleep or you know, <Inaudible>?

David Johnson: No. I think not because of them and by the by, this was a little bit different room. I had my own bathroom. I mean I wasn't prancing around and sharing showers and that kind of thing. So that made it easier. No I don't think so. I had trouble getting to sleep but that was worries about the job, not them. They were, I must say, of those 15, I kept very careful book and 13 are Morris graduates, one transferred to Southwest and only one didn't get a bachelorate in those years and she may well have today. I'm rather proud of them.

Christopher Butler: You said you'd been dealing with the College of Gustavus--

David Johnson: Yes.

Christopher Butler: --When you became Chancellor of Morris. I was wondering if you could-- and I'm not asking you to speak ill of Gustavus or Mellon [ph?], but what did you notice about the campus climate that was different from one place to the other?

David Johnson: Well I think that the students at Morris were probably more PC, Politically Correct. I would say that I don't mean that they were mugwumps at Gustavus but I think that points of view that were not liberal sometimes rather doctrinarial liberal

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were resisted more at Morris than at Gustavus. I'll give an example. We were engaged in one of those dreadful exercises called strategic planning. And I said that I'd write an environmental scan of what was going on in America, in Minnesota, in the university as a preface to the strategic plan. And I wrote that one of the great assets in Minnesota was the fact that we had, and I forget now exactly, but 16 Fortune 400 corporations. Well I thought that was a very important point. You know, that we were the home of General Mills and it speaks to the future of the university. It didn't play well at Morris. It was kowtowing to business interests, that kind of thing. I think that was probably wouldn't have happened at any Gustavus, more parents worked for General Mills.

Christopher Butler: Universities aren't within themselves. They are not just ivory towers. They relate to the area in which they're situated. And one of the things you're credited with, with being one of the founders as The Center for Small Towns. So let's talk about that a little bit. First of all you know, the genesis of the idea. Who was instrumental? What was your vision for it and then who were the people who started it up? So let's just begin with where did the idea come from, The Center for Small Towns?

David Johnson: Well this is going to sound self-serving and I hope that Roger McCanon [ph?] would not take offense. But I think it just sort of popped out of my being unintentionally. It was not the result of strategic planning. I hadn't talked with the continuing education group about it in advance. Roger and I went down for his annual evaluation. Well, the continuing ed unit's evaluation and we sat with the dean. And it just sort of popped out of me. It was as serendipitous as living in the dorm and Hal Miller, the dean, looked up with a smile and Roger seemed to feel good and I felt good and it just was.

Christopher Butler: Then what was the original vision? Why did you feel it was a necessary solution? What did you want to for it to accomplish?

David Johnson: Well I think the central role for the dean is finding and maybe a better word is refining the niche of an institution. And I think it's simply isn't enough to say small residential liberal arts. And so I know that in the back of my mind, I was saying for a long time, here we are. We're Hollywood central casting idea of a rural community and though many of our students are not from rural communities, we should turn this into an asset, because it was so- it's so often bemoaned, you know, we're just hicks from the sticks. It has to be turned into an asset, to give students from Eden Prairie or Blaine the chance to work in a service learning project in a small community, was to

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enhance their understandings coming as they did from rather faceless suburbs.

Christopher Butler: What were some of the original projects in The Center for Small Towns?

David Johnson: I'm sorry Chris.

Christopher Butler: What were some of the original projects?

David Johnson: Well I can remember some history students conducted oral histories with senior citizens in one of those towns. I remember that Edith, the late Edith Farrell in French, had her students translating the diaries of French priests who came up into the Pon de Tier [ph?] or Lake Traverse area. And of course my favorite and maybe it still going on, was when Peneg [ph?] and others used their statistics classes to develop a better plan for snow plowing priorities. Is that still going on?

Christopher Butler: It is and it's actually extended to bus routes as well. They've moved on the school bus0s and said yeah, it makes a lot of sense, right?

David Johnson: Sure. Sure. Well I am so grateful to Roger and all his colleagues who stepped in and nurtured that concept.

Christopher Butler: It's also interesting, it's not that I'm going to flatter you but I also think it's particularly visionary because rural America was in such a state of change at that time, right?

David Johnson: Absolutely. Absolutely and we have a-- I'm a sociologist and very interested in communities. And now this many years later, we have a spate of very interesting studies but very bleak about towns that have succumbed to meth [ph?] manufacturing, the towns where every fourth person under the age of 30 has left. And I think too, it was an idea whose time had come in that the Blandin Foundation, which I know well. It is headquartered in Grand Rapids where I live when I'm not here, had turned its focus to small town leadership. So they invested substantially in the center.

Christopher Butler: I'm glad you mentioned them by name because that's right. They

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do deserve a lot of credit for that. Interesting. What was your impression of the campus during your tenure? I know it changed from Rod to Jack to you. Your relationship with the U, with the big U, how did you feel that they viewed Morris?

David Johnson: Well I think first of all, we owed Jack a great deal because of his charm and his ability to win over regions and the senior administration in Morrow Hall. I think that is Jack's greatest legacy and without which we might have been Waseca. Waseca was a campus that was closed. But he was so adroit and I was able to piggy pack to stand on his shoulders. And I have another impression and that is that bless Nils Hasselmo, a graduate of Orgasana [ph?] College in Rock Island, a fine liberal arts college as was Patricia Hasselmo and I think it was in Nil's blood to understand the small liberal arts college and he had inordinate pride in it. That said, I think there was a great deal that was changing between Jack's time and mine. When Jack and Lucy used to talk about going down for regions' meetings and all the spouses came. Never mind the regions were mostly men then. And the senior administrators, mostly men, brought their spouses and so it was very couple oriented. And Lucy again, was very adroit at playing the Morris card. By the time Jean and I got there, I mean that was passé. Spouses had their own careers. I never met any of the region spouses. So it was a different ballgame for me. There wasn't the socializing that the Imholtes knew.

Christopher Butler: That's interesting because Lucy talked a lot about that this afternoon. It was a very big part of their--

David Johnson: Oh yes. Yes, very much a part of Lucy's identity and yeah.

Christopher Butler: How was enrollment during your tenure?

David Johnson: Well, when I came it was great. The longer I stayed, the greater the problems that were emerging. But I think I can explain that. When I came in 1990 and I'll never quite know how we ponyed up the money to make this possible. We gave every student in the top, I may have my statistics wrong here, but in the top five percent of the class, got \$2,000 and I don't think it cost more than four board room and tuition to go to Morris. And every student between the 95th and the 90th percentile got \$1,000 well I mean that was from a fourth to a half of the cost. And but as the tuitions of the university, given the faith of the university mounted, that \$1,000 or \$2,000 scholarship didn't amount to a hill of beans, relatively speaking. So I think that was a factor. Morris played that puppy for all it was worth. I think also, historically when I first came and the

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twin cities that Rod and Jack knew, Twin Cities campus was not very aggressive in recruitment of students. If you want to come, fill out an application and we'll see what happens. Now enters the guy who coincidentally is my boss in this work I'm doing in applications and the university brought Wayne Sigler [ph?] to run a very big deal dynamic, take no prisoners, admissions process. And they were out- their road warriors were out on our turf. They were in Glenwood High School, they were in Demson [ph?] High School. They were in Morris High School, wooing the students. So it got tougher for Morris.

Christopher Butler: Interesting because you don't-- and it's interesting you know, I've spent so much time looking at the history and in fact, just this morning at the University of Archives, in 1970 I found an article that says Morris is growing so fast, it's considering a second campus. And then nine years later, 1979 there's another article that says, Morris struggling for enrollment and then you know, and then the '80 and then you talk about 1990 eleven years later and it's <Inaudible>

David Johnson: That's right.

Christopher Butler: It's always been a bit of a problem.

David Johnson: Yes. I think too, in the '60s and '70s, if you had a degree, you know, warm body with degree, you got into dental school, law school, Carlson School et cetera, much more readily. But as it became more competitive and as the job market changed, the liberal arts are a tougher a sell, yeah.

Christopher Butler: Well that's a nice segue because I wanted to talk about the liberal arts. That's an excellent segue. I mean, it does continue to be a difficult sell. But you are obviously a big-- educated in the liberal arts, administrator in the liberal arts. Why would you say the liberal arts are still relevant as a higher--

David Johnson: I'm going to start on a negative note and say, I learned, don't talk about the liberal arts as disciplines, because it's lose, lose. The disciplines you named pout because they didn't get a bigger name and the ones you didn't name, are your enemies forever. But there are people who do that. Literature is liberal arts but composition writing is not. That's somehow crass and vocational. So computer science is techy and not to be confused with mathematics. So I avoid that term. I learned to avoid that term like the plague. But I do talk about- did talk and still do talk about liberal

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education and its importance. And I- it depends on the setting. But if it was at orientation of the new students and their parents and I was with the parents alone, I'd ask all who had experienced unemployment to raise their hands. Well they didn't know one another and so they were less shy and you know, a hand would go up here and a hand would go up there and then I'd say how-- I don't remember the sequence but, how many of you are doing something very different than you started out doing or thought you were going to do? And pretty soon every hand was up in the room. And then I would say, that's why we need liberal education to fortify us in the periods when we're out of work, underemployed and made the mistake of retiring too early and we can't find anything in our lives other than golf. So I think that's a way to present liberal education to parents. Now it wouldn't mean squat to the students, but I think it effective. I think with students you pitch liberal education in a different way. You tell them and I'll eat my shirt if this isn't true, that the CEOs of major organizations in America will testify over and over that they have no trouble finding technicians, people who can do a task, but they can't find and hire people who can lead. You look at somebody and you say, I'd like to put you in charge of a work group and you spur them on. And so many turn out to be anti-social. I mean just utterly lacking in anything but technical knowledge and their fellow workers can't stand them. And then at another level, I think we hear this from CEOs. I need somebody that I can send to a conference at Brussels, but we sent Wanda Lou and she was a disaster. She couldn't talk- I mean her counterparts from Japan, from the Pacific Rim, from Europe could talk about the common market. They could talk about ballet and Wanda Lou could only talk about accounting procedures. And that's the value of a liberal education.

Christopher Butler: That's funny. You said these things back in the 1990s but they seem as relevant. Especially, they seem even more relevant someplace today.

David Johnson: Yeah, I think there's a great pitch to be made. But again, I want to say, but call it liberal education. Don't talk about the liberal arts as though there's a list of pure disciplines. Yeah.

Christopher Butler: It's also unique that Morris is a public liberal arts as opposed to a private liberal arts as in Gustavus or St. Olaf or Carlson. Do you see any significance that it's a public liberal arts college as opposed to private? Do you see any significance to that?

David Johnson: Oh, immensely. One of the most exciting things that we did was- was to form the COPLAC, the Counsel Of Public Liberal Arts Colleges and that

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incorporated- we incorporated attorneys from the University Counsel's office at the University of Minnesota drew up the papers and the whole group came out to Morris in the summer of '92 and it was a done deal. And we have a great story to tell, that we have a niche that you don't have to go to a private institution. And I have made sure. Since I left Morris, I've been a consultant to many of the Scandinavian universities, always talk with the students there who might be interested in coming to the States, but who are not accustomed to paying tuition, much less \$38,000 worth of tuition about publics including your alma matas of Miami right, of Ohio. But to go back to the COPLAC group was very exciting. The problem with it was that I think that some schools got in that don't deserve to be in and we're all kind of nice at heart and nobody knew how to veto them.

Christopher Butler: I can think of some of who those are.

David Johnson: Yeah and I think that harms us, harms the group.

Christopher Butler: I see.

David Johnson: But that's--

Christopher Butler: I wanted to shift to talking about just being a chancellor, being the head of a school. To me it seems like a very hard job in ways that a lot of people don't appreciate it at all, especially when times are difficult, right? When cash is flush and the classrooms are full, even then people are unhappy, right? I mean what did you find to be the most challenging aspect of your job?

David Johnson: Well I think to get the attention of Morrow Hall. I often carried this metaphor around in my head, that Morris was like a little chipmunk, cute little animal, dancing with a big smelly bear called Twin Cities and with a fairly smelly chimpanzee or an orangutan called Duluth. But we were a chipmunk and Kirkston [ph?] was a Marmouth in my mind. But what I mean is, it's very hard. When you go down to the Twin Cities and you sit at the table with those big deal gains from Edison, from the Institute of Technology, from the Carlson School, I mean they play in very big leagues, internationally. And what does a chipmunk do in such a setting? So I think that's when it takes I think, a great deal of adroitness to find little ways of yeah, getting attention.

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David Johnson: What about on campus? What was the most difficult part of your job in Morris?

David Johnson: Well I think there are moral issues that go with not so much a small town but an isolated small town, spouses who don't find employment, staff members who don't find adequate housing, students who don't find off campus employment. I think you know, there are so many compensating things but I think one has to work very hard at Morris to point out the compensations. The house that would have cost 350 in the university, in the Twin Cities better neighborhoods, is 175 in Morris. The job that the student can't find in Morris, keeps that student earning credits and graduating on schedule, rather than being seduced into a five or six year degree because she's working at Har Mar Mall. But--

Christopher Butler: So moral issues--

David Johnson: It can go sour.

Christopher Butler: Okay.

David Johnson: Thank goodness for all the people out there in the staff, in leadership positions who modeled creative living out there. All the spouses who found very interesting niches, the West Central Environmental Services for example, Grace [ph?] Hospital at Wilmer.

Christopher Butler: I mean that is a running theme in people you speak with who've been in Morris for a long time is they like the invent-- there's something about Morris and its isolation that sort breathes inventiveness. You have to really be a creative person to make it there. Would you agree with that?

David Johnson: Oh yes. Yes I agree and I think Morris isn't for 95 percent of academics who will speak now of the staff and faculty. But for the five percent that it's right for, it is so right, the healthy environment, the chance to be green, children who are in a school system where they don't get lost, those are incalculable advantages.

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Christopher Butler: Another question I wanted to go back and ask you about Center for Small Towns, I shifted from that too quickly. I was wondering with this new institution, service learning, reaching out to community, did you ever get any feedback from the community and what was it?

David Johnson: I think that one of the problems of being the chancellor or high up-- this is well known sociological principle, is that sometimes you don't hear the negative. The dean hears more of the negative. But I could float around and you know, nobody wanted to be a sour puss I guess, so much. So I didn't hear any negative but I heard much that was positive about the creativity of connecting students and towns people, not just in Morris of course but in all of those communities. I think everywhere the older generations feel very acutely the loss of contact with the young. And they want desperately to get to know for example, the students at Morris but don't know how. And the students don't know how to meet the older generations.

Christopher Butler: Yeah but that was you know, that's something I didn't mention but a lot of people credit you with having done a lot of the legwork to getting that funding come through.

David Johnson: Yeah. Well I really moved down there. I say I slept on an army cart in the halls of the legislature that the security police didn't know about you know, to be there.

Christopher Butler: Did you really?

David Johnson: Well no. But I slept, it was worse, the Kelly Inn across the street. It was a dump and it was just to be there all the time, to be a pest.

Christopher Butler: As rural America has changed, so has the institution that is you know, met now. You know, it was an Indian boarding school and then it was an <Inaudible> school, now it's Morris. And now Morris is moving towards this green, you know, focus, what do you make of that relationship? What does that, how do I ask this? What do you think about it?

David Johnson: Well I think it's great, the transition to a changing rural America. But I

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don't want to get too swept away with sentimentality about one aspect of it. The Indian Boarding School was logical when there were Native Americans who were willing to attend such a school. The West Central School of Agriculture had its day and no more. But Morris campus was never a rural institution. I am convinced its student body did not for the most part come from small towns and high schools. That's a stereotype that's hard to die. But when I got there in 1990, if my memory is correct, 40 percent of the students were from the suburban Twin Cities, something like that. And the good folks out in West Central Minnesota who in the late 1950s farmers contributed every tenth pig or every tenth ear of corn was sold to a fund to lobby for the campus. Those good people believed that Morris would be an institution for their children, to keep them in West Central Minnesota. Well it never was from the get go. The students came from elsewhere. And if the-- if Briggs and the early leadership at Morris had played upon the rural America theme when it came to getting students, we would have been closed long ago. We wouldn't have had, there weren't enough students to shake a stick at.

Christopher Butler: I must say that's an interesting <Inaudible> I never head that said, but you're right. You're absolutely right.

David Johnson: Yeah, I remember, you know, I'm a bean counter like many sociologists and I asked the Director of Admissions for a map which would tell how many students came from each county. And Stevens County borders at least is catawampus to Traverse County. Wheaton is the county seat and there was one student in the Freshmen class from Traverse County and I screamed and said, we aren't doing our work well out here and the director, if we can't get more than one student out of a neighboring county, this is embarrassing. And the director said, how many graduates of high school do you think there were in Traverse County? Thirty-one. Wheaton was the only high school and they had 31 grads the previous year. So one out of 31 is three percent, not bad. But I used that as an example of the fact that there just aren't people out there.

Christopher Butler: You're right and you're absolutely right but a the same time there's this, I don't want to say that people are actually coming back to rural America but there's this attempt to use green energy as a way to sort of vitalize the area.

David Johnson: Yeah, well I think Morris' role is to serve rural America, not to-- through its outreach. Not to be a haven for the education of rural Americans who overwhelmingly, if you're from Wheaton or Sleepy Eye, the last thing you probably want is to go back to Wheaton or Sleepy Eye. You want the bright lights.

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Christopher Butler: That's a good point. That's a nice way to put it. Our mission is for outreach but not to be a haven, yeah, yeah. Okay. Well that concludes all my questions Dave. Was there anything else you'd like to say?

David Johnson: Not for the film but I think you guys will understand as I thought about this. I feel as though I'm part of a five child family and I'm the middle child, the third of five and the only one who knew everyone, I mean Sam and Jackie didn't know Rod and I hardly knew him well, but I knew him. Jack and I were housemates. He lived two years at my place. Lucy had moved down here and that sort of thing and I hired Sam to be the dean and now I've gotten to know Jackie and very-- I think she's an excellent choice for you. And so I feel a responsibility to history to- because obviously this is off the record. But since Jack can't articulate, Jack knew Rod very closely but that's kind of by the by.

Christopher Butler: Yeah, yeah that's sort of real interesting.

David Johnson: Yeah and from what I know of the five of us, I think we've all been rather different. But right now I feel like the middle child, you know.

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