

Bruce Bishop Oral History

Recorded October 12, 2024, at Pacific University in Forest Grove, Oregon, during Homecoming / Reunion.

Interviewer: Jenny Johnson-Riley ("JJR"), Pacific University Class of 1998.

This transcription was made through AI with manual edits, Feb. 2025.

[JJR] 0:02

This is Jenny Johnson-Riley. Today is October 12, 2024 at Pacific University Homecoming, and I am sitting with Bruce Bishop, class of 1968 Correct? Yeah, tell me a little bit about your time at Pacific.

[Bishop] 0:17

Well, in 1968 I was here. I graduated, but arrived in 1964. Came up from Los Angeles, planning to stay for a year, and then decided to stay for a second year because I met my current wife. So I extended, and then ended up doing all four here rather than going back down to California. So I was a political science major member of Gamma Sigma Fraternity [and I was] on the student government my junior year. Okay, that's pretty much it.

[JJR] 0:58

Where did you live when you were at Pacific?

[Bishop] 1:00

I lived a year in McCormick, two different rooms, and then moved into the Gamma house for a year and a half, and then spent my last year and a half in apartments in Cornelius and Forest Grove.

[JJR] 1:15

What stands out to you about the biggest change that you saw where you were at Pacific?

[Bishop] 1:23

Well, that period from '64 to '68 was a pretty tumultuous time. Forest Grove was fairly well removed from a lot of that stuff, but, you know, it was kind of the start of political activism involving civil rights and the war and all of that. So you know, we caught a little bit of the side effects of that, but we weren't a hotbed of activism.

[JJR] 1:52

What kinds of things did you see on campus? Or how were all those political activities?

[Bishop] 1:59

Nothing really too significant. A lot of politicians who would come out and speak and that kind of thing.

[JJR] 2:09

And then you graduated in '68?

[Bishop] 2:14

Judy and I got married and moved to San Francisco that summer. And so the change from quiet, peaceful Forest Grove to San Francisco in, you know, the center of the hippie movement and all of that, was pretty dramatic... A lot more political activity in San Francisco those days.

[JJR] 2:45

What do you remember most fondly about Pacific? What was your favorite time here?

[Bishop] 2:54

Well, the stuff I can tell you about...

[JJR] 2:58

There's no censorship!

[Bishop] 3:02

...was meeting my wife, dating for three years here, and then getting married. And the fact that we're still together, that was the most significant part. I was surprised yesterday when I went into Mac Hall [McCormick Hall, a dormitory]. Some similarities, but it's been remodeled since I was there, and reconfigured in a way that I couldn't quite relate to the way it was before. So it's been improved and upgraded, but I finally figured out that what happened was, when we arrived, they had just opened up the University Center [i.e. Washburne Hall, which has housed the university's cafeteria since the 1960s], so we were the first incoming class to use that.

[JJR] 3:50

And prior to that?

[Bishop] 3:53

The Dining Hall was in the basement of Mac and we never went into it; we didn't use it. Used the basement for [?] when we arrived, but I think I never actually went into the basement for some reason. I think it may have been storage or being remodeled or something. So the year I was in the dorm, I never went there.

[Bishop] 4:20

And then when they remodeled in the 80s, I guess they named the basement the first floor, so all of the numbers in the basement are now one hundreds and two hundreds. When I was there, the first floor was the one above the basement. So all of that seemed kind of disorienting. And you know, it wasn't similar, and didn't register a lot.

[JJR] 4:47

I'm a little rusty on my Boxer history. With Boxer I, were you here when that disappeared? Or was that after?

[Bishop] 4:54

No, that was our year. Well, it disappeared the year after. It disappeared in September of '69; I left in May of '68.

[Bishop] 5:13

Well, Gamma Sigma had had it since January of '67, when we acquired it; and then we had it all through that period of time. We tossed it out in the spring of 1968. That's when Pete Truax, who was the fraternity president then -- and then was former mayor of Forest Grove for 12 years [in the 2010s-2020s] -- he rode in a car from Hillsboro out to Forest Grove in the trunk, holding the trunk lid down because he was afraid he'd get latched inside and not be able to get out.

This is his story, not my story. The car drove into what was a parking lot between Marsh and the then-new Library [later renamed AuCoin Hall] and Old College Hall, before it became Trombley Square. They drove in and started to circle around the parking lot. And there were students all around the parking lot. They knew something was going to happen. And this old car, probably from the 40s, early 50s, with two elderly women in the car, drove in, and the kids were basically saying, "You need to get out of here, it's not safe," and they're just driving, strolling through the parking lot and stop; and Pete Truax pops open the trunk, jumps out, throws the statue one direction and goes the other direction himself.

And there's, there's KGW newsreel footage of that, where you can see him getting out and running away from it [see "Boxer Toss Film," PUA_MS95_174]. And that started the scrum in 1968. The results of that were that Phi Beta Tau, another fraternity on campus, they acquired possession of Boxer eventually, and they sent one of their members who had a car off with the statue.

[Bishop] 7:45

There were three fraternities, and the other [involved in the chase after Boxer] was Alpha Zeta. They gave chase, and the lead car had an engine malfunction out on the Wilson River Highway, so he was sidelined, and the chase car came up and asked him if he'd like to turn over the statue, or if they'd like him to take to take it from him. So that's how Alpha Zeta acquired it, not actually from the fight on campus, but as the beneficiaries of a questionable decision about sending one guy out in the car. But that's kind of the way the fights were. They didn't always think things through.

[Bishop] 8:38

Anyway, a little inter-fraternity rivalry. That's how the Alpha Zeta fraternity acquired Boxer, and within a couple of months, they were able to take Boxer to a campaign event attended by Richard Nixon when he was running for president [and] was in Oregon for the Oregon primary. So there are pictures around of Vice President Nixon holding Boxer with a couple of fraternity members around him. The AZs [Alpha Zetas] kept Boxer from the spring of '68 until the fall of 1969 when they tossed it out again. And that was the last toss of Boxer, of the original Boxer -- which then disappeared for 55 years.

[JJR] 9:39

Would the toss be kind of something scheduled, or would it just happen spontaneously from whoever had possession of it?

[Bishop] 9:48

Generally not scheduled, but whispered about... so if you had a Flash, a "Boxer Flash," that's when you'd show that you had possession of it, but you weren't going to relinquish it. You had to sort of come up with an approach that would allow you to show it, without having to give it up. I mean, people didn't respect those lines. If they had a chance to grab it, they would.

But one example of a Flash was during a football game at halftime, when the Gammas had it: we hired a helicopter and flew the statue over the field on a rope, okay, so everybody could see it and see that we had it, but couldn't grab it. It was above a height that was reachable. So that would be a Flash. There were other ways to flash it: you would show it, put it in a car, drive by and say that you had it, or whatever. But a Toss would be more spontaneous, although there would be whispers, like, if, if we were in class, in Marsh Hall, and somebody whispered "Boxer," the entire building would empty out --

[Bishop] 11:19

Because they thought something was going to happen. Which is, in fact, what happened when it got tossed. Then it just got tossed out, and whoever could get it away got it for the next round.

[JJR] 11:32

When somebody captured it, was it something that was publicized, or was it secret that you had it because you don't have people to come take it away from you?

[Bishop] 11:40

Secret. More secret -- I mean, you could show it that you had it, but you weren't going to get publicity for it, because people would steal it. If I can show you a picture of my wife and I when we were at a dinner dance in downtown Portland in 1967 while the Gammas had it and were dressed pretty formally for college students, you know, long dress and tux and stuff with Boxer sitting on the table between us. And so a lot of fraternity members got their picture taken with Boxer.

But what you couldn't see in the picture was that there were two security guards on each side of us, sort of like, "What's going on out here?" So if somebody decided that they wanted to grab it, at least we had security there to try to prevent that. Because if any other fraternity or group knew we were there, there was a risk of losing it. So you didn't really advertise those things very much, only when you were ready to get rid of it.

[JJR] 12:56

Were you involved at all in Boxer coming back to campus, or what? I saw you out there [during the Reunion event where this recording took place] looking at it. I don't know if you were just visiting it or if you had a role to play?

[Bishop] 13:10

I was involved. I commissioned the construction of Boxer III -- fundraised it, and then we dedicated it to the university in 2018 for our class' 50th Reunion.

[Bishop] 13:34

There was a story in the alumni magazine about Boxer that mentioned Pete Truax. As a result of that story, he got a call

from somebody he didn't know in California who said, "I think I know where Boxer is. What should I do?" And Pete Truax said, well, call Bruce Bishop. So I got this call from a guy who knew a guy who probably had Boxer. That was in 2018. It took us five years to both confirm that it was in possession, that it was in existence, and to work out an arrangement for it to return to campus.

[Bishop] 14:31

As we were getting closer on doing that, I told [Pacific U. President] Dr. Coyle that she could be instrumental in getting the statue back. She made a call, and then pulled the deal together, so I was able to go down with her to California when we picked it up.

[JJR] 14:52

I wonder what that's like: your reflections on being here right before it disappeared, and being instrumental in its return?

[Bishop] 14:59

55 years is a really long time. The conventional story about Boxer was that it had disappeared; that it had been melted down; that it had been thrown off the Golden Gate Bridge; you know, any number of stories, and that it was gone. And history seemed to prove that, because nobody had seen it for 50 years. As part of the process of figuring out if somebody actually had it, we were sent a picture of the statue, and it was clearly the original. It was it! And so that verified that it was in existence. And then it was a question of negotiating for its release.

[Bishop] 15:51

You know, 99.9% of students and faculty and staff believed it was gone, would never return and with justification -- but it did!

[JJR] 16:12

Yeah, that's quite a legacy. Quite a legacy. So that's how come we have to both the original and the third one. The second one [Boxer II], which was constructed in the early 80s, has been gone since about 2007. So it's been gone 17 years. It disappeared, got stolen by somebody, and hasn't been shown since, and so now we're turning our attention to finding the missing middle one, and trying to reunite all three of them together.

[JJR] 16:56

And so your Golden Guard [50th Reunion] here would have been 2018. What was that reunion like?

[Bishop] 17:02

It was the best reunion that any class had ever had. It was our 50th. It was our class that made Boxer the official mascot of Pacific University. It was voted on by the student body that year, in 1967, actually. And then ratified by the Board of Trustees in '68 and became the official mascot in '68, the year we graduated. The current AuCoin Hall was dedicated in 1968 and opened up as the new library our year. So there was a lot going on in our year, and we got a good turnout for our Reunion of '68.

[JJR] 17:54

One of the questions Martha will ask us on the Alumni Board is: "What does Boxer Spirit mean to us?" And I'm curious what your answer to that question would be.

[Bishop] 18:05

It's a real puzzle. You know, I think most students today, they know there's this logo of Boxer... or they have no idea what it is, or any real connection to it. It doesn't take very long to talk to old alums to figure there's something else going on, but it's not something current students are necessarily connected with. So I think Boxer Spirit actually ties back to the statue itself. I mean, it's nothing more than that. It is a long-standing symbol of Pacific University. The original name of the statute was "College Spirit." And then probably after the college had had it for 10 years, or close to 10 years, they changed the name to "Boxer" because of the Boxer Rebellion in China. So, you know, that was just a name that was attached to it, but initially it was College Spirit. And so that's the connection I think, historically, to what Boxer Spirit is.

[Bishop] 19:25

When we when we gave the Boxer [III] statute to the university in 2018 they put it on display in the library, in a display case. And we said, it's not very secure. This was in the new library, Tran library. And we said, it's not very secure. And they said, "Don't worry about it. We've got cameras all over the library. It's the most secure building. It on campus, and there's always staff in it when it's open," yada yada yada. And besides, nobody cares. And so within three or four months, a couple of students cased the library, decided they were going to grab it and took it out of the library.

[Bishop] 20:28

It wasn't a very complicated operation. So their motivation was to try to restore Boxer Spirit. Instead, they got threatened with a felony for stealing University property, and they returned it. And I think they were well-motivated. They were trying to draw from the history of Boxer and the practice of taking it and, you know, exposing it and all of that, but they got thumped pretty hard.

[Bishop] 21:10

so since then, the university has been much more protective. [They've] put it in a secure place that is not disclosed and seldom used or brought out. I'm really pleased that the university has both versions on display today, and it's, I think, the first time it's been really available for alums and families and everybody to see the two and compare them. I think that's the way it should be, rather than talking about something that people can't relate to.

[Bishop] 21:54

I think it ought to be used a lot more. I don't know if the Alumni Board has ever seen it officially.

[JJR]

We have. It came to our last meeting.

[Bishop] 22:05

Okay, that's the kind of thing that I think should be done in lot of student gatherings and alumni gatherings, everything else. And that, just relating to a physical object, I think will be much more significant for people than sort of a logo -- a stylized logo that doesn't really tell that story. And Dr. Coyle is the greatest cheerleader for doing that.

[Bishop] 22:39

She didn't say it today at the at the lunch, but you know, she literally bleeds black and red. She is a inveterate Boxer and alumna.

[JJR] 22:56

Was there anything else you'd like to share with me about your time at Pacific?

[Bishop] 23:00

No, not that I can think of. Thank you so much.