

Interview with Luella Gross Goldberg

Interviewed by Ann M. Pflaum

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Luella Gross Goldberg - LG
Ann M. Pflaum - AP

AP: What I wanted to go over with you is your parents' background at the University. Do you remember the year they attended and what they studied?

LG: Let's see. They both graduated in the class of 1925.

AP: Did they meet at the University?

LG: Yes. My mother was in the College of Education where she was a member of the Pi Lambda Theta honorary society. It is comparable to Phi Beta Kappa. My father graduated from the Law School. Because my parents first met when they both were students, through the years I've been attributing my very existence to the University of Minnesota.

AP: I remember that your dad was chair of a task force on athletics in 1963, when the University needed to chose a new athletic director and was considering ways to reorganize athletics.

LG: I also remember a somewhat earlier involvement in 1958 and 1959, during the time when Murray Warmath was the football coach and there had been two very bad years, with more losses than wins. I recall the president coming to my dad, saying, "Lou, what should I do? Everybody is getting pretty worked up about this demanding Warmath's resignation." My father said, "Does his contract say how many wins he has to have?" The president said, "no." My dad said, "Then I think you ought to keep him." The next year Warmath took the Gophers to the Rose Bowl. My father had previously served for a number of years as one of two representatives from the Minnesota Alumni Association on the University Senate Committee on Intercollegiate Athletics.

AP: So it really must be part of a family legend that your family and Sandy Stevens created the Gopher's only Rose Bowl win.

LG: A little bit so. Going back to my dad while he was at the University, he played football. He was on the team when Memorial Stadium opened in 1924 and played virtually the entire game. Minnesota upset favored Illinois that day, and according to the stories I heard, it was my Dad, at left tackle who stopped the famous Illinois player Red Grange. He was also was a member of the track team, competing in the discus throw and shot put. He turned out to be the conference gold medal winner, awarded to the outstanding student-athlete in the entire Big Ten Conference.

AP: That's remarkable.

LG: That's something he was very proud of, of course.

AP: I can well imagine. What business did he then go into? The early twenties would have been an okay time to go into business. The thirties must have been very tough.

LG: In the mid-twenties he actually took a coaching job with Dutch Bergman, who was head coach at Catholic University in Washington, D.C. My dad was asked to come out there and help him coach, which he did for a while. It turned out that my uncle, my dad's younger brother, Phil Gross, who played his first year at the University of Minnesota, then went on to play at Catholic University under my dad and Dutch Bergman. He became, I think, the first Jewish player who was named to the Catholic All-American team. He's the same uncle who contributed the Gross Family Board Room in the offices of the University of Minnesota Foundation in the McNamara Gateway Center. The Gross Family Board Room was contributed in memory of my parents and in honor of his nieces and nephews: Dr. Stanley M. and Luella G. Goldberg, Drs. Henry and Linda G. Cohen, and Bert and Susan Gross.

AP: What a wonderful thing to have done.

LG: It was interesting, at the time that he made this gift to the University, my uncle said that although he had left Minnesota long ago (he lived all over and in Michigan most recently) and was years and years away from it, he had left his heart at the University of Minnesota.

AP: That's very nice.

LG: Back to my parents . . . I think, in their lives aside from family nothing was really more important than the University of Minnesota to them. They just felt a great allegiance to it. I remember my dad seemed to be very helpful to various presidents along the way. So he knew James Morrill and Met [O. Meredith] Wilson. Met and Marian were good friends of my folks, and wonderful people, of course.

AP: Tell me your mother's maiden name and a little bit more, if you know it, about her experience in the College of Education.

LG: My mother's maiden name was Beatrice Rosenthal. She graduated from South High School at age fourteen, I think at that point, its youngest graduate. She received her education degree from the University at age eighteen and had to "fudge" a little bit on her age when she went to teach in Cocato, Minnesota. At eighteen years old she was teaching English to high school students who were just about her own age. She loved the University and felt it was a wonderful opportunity to be able to go there. She would tell the story about how she lived in South Minneapolis, but close to the University, and how she'd have to walk over the Washington Avenue Bridge to get to class. She said my dad would always walk her home and then walk back to football practice.

AP: Oh, that's very romantic. Of course, football practice would have mostly been in the fall and hopefully not too much snow, but that's still a pretty heroic walk.

LG: Right . . . probably good exercise for him.

AP: That's a wonderful story. Tell me, then, you and your siblings, I remember in our other interview, you must have memories yourselves of going to Gopher games.

LG: We do. We all went from a very early age. I think Linda and I probably started going when we were eight or nine with my folks. My brother was seven years older, so I can't remember exactly when he started going to football games. He went to the University and graduated summa cum laude in three years. Then he went on to Harvard Law School, so by the time we were in high school, he was away. As long as I can remember, Gopher football games were our family's Saturday afternoon activity. We would march over to Memorial Stadium and had a great time. My dad, at one point, after Stan and I were married, was made homecoming king.

AP: I have a picture. Have you seen that picture?

LG: Yes.

AP: On the cover of the November, 1962 Alumni Magazine. That's a lovely picture.

LG: Right. We all got a big kick out of that. He remained involved in one way or another in University affairs. He was one of the earliest trustees of the University of Minnesota Foundation. I think he had talked with the president and the group that were the five or six founding trustees and shortly thereafter became a trustee of the Foundation. I can remember when Curt Carlson called me in 1975 to ask me to become a trustee, which was a bit after my dad had finished his service. Curt said, "You know, you've got to follow in your father's footsteps." So I agreed to do it. That was a lot of years ago.

AP: What was part of your decision not to go to the University? Was it a hard choice to choose Wellesley College over the University?

LG: It was interesting because the University was such a big part of our family's life that Linda and I had just assumed that we would go to the University. One day a counselor at Washburn High School had us come into her office at the beginning of our senior year and said, "I think you ought to consider going East to college." We said, "Why?" She said, "I think it could broaden your horizons in ways that you might not imagine." So we went home and talked to our parents about it. They said they would try to be supportive of whatever decision we wanted to make. So we pursued it and in the end decided that it looked like an interesting opportunity, although we had never seen Wellesley before we arrived. It wasn't the era when everybody went college shopping as much as they do today. I was very lonesome for Minnesota the first year, especially at football game time, because somehow the Ivy League just wasn't what the Minnesota football games had been. Then when I finished Wellesley I did come back and had a teaching assistantship in the graduate school in the Department of Philosophy, thinking I wanted to become a philosophy professor, which I didn't pursue. Linda ended up getting her Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota quite a few years later after getting a master's from Harvard. She went back maybe fifteen years ago to get a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology.

AP: That's one of the premier departments in the country, so that shows what a strong student she was. We should explain for the interview that you and Linda are identical twin sisters, and you both went to Wellesley, is that correct?

LG: That's correct.

AP: And then came back for graduate work at the University.

LG: Right. She got a master's degree from Harvard in the history of science right after Wellesley, and then came back here, was married, and taught at the Summit School, then Blake School for quite a few years. Then she decided she wanted to go back and get her Ph.D. in Educational Psychology, which she did in a record amount of time.

AP: What has she done? Has she been doing research?

LG: She's a licensed consulting psychologist with her own practice. As I said, my brother went to the University, receiving his undergraduate degree in economics and my sister Linda's husband, Henry Cohen, went to Medical School here. My brother's wife, Susan Hill Gross, graduated from the University, and my husband Stan Goldberg spent many years as a student— B.A. 1953, B.S. 1954, and M.D. degree in 1956. Following his surgical residency, he joined the clinical surgical faculty in 1963, serving as a clinical professor for more than twenty-five years. From 1972 to 1992, he headed the Division of Colon and Rectal Surgery. In 2000, the Stanley M Goldberg Chair in Colon and Rectal Surgery was established in the Medical School in his honor by more than one hundred former trainees and grateful patients. I'm probably the only one in our family who doesn't have a degree from the University. I feel like I've made up for it

with twenty-five years or so—twenty-six now—spent as a trustee of the University of Minnesota Foundation and serving as its chair from 1996 to 1998. I was the first woman selected as chair.

AP: That means you joined the Board in the 1970s.

LG: 1975.

AP: 1975, okay. In the last twenty-five years, you have seen a lot of change at the University. What are the things that you are proudest of, that you think were the greatest successes?

LG: The number of endowed professorships I think is just a wonderful. This happened in many ways through the generosity of so many people and with leadership by the Foundation. The other program was the Regents Professorships. The Board of Regents formally approved the Regents Professorships in 1966; the idea and funding came from the University of Minnesota Foundation. (Regents professors receive a stipend as well as recognition associated with having been selected for the highest honor the University can bestow.) Those two programs have made a significant difference, and particularly in more recent years, the number of endowed professorships made it possible to attract and retain exceptionally talented faculty. Of course we've always had outstanding faculty members here. The other thing, again, in more recent years, I think there has been a renewed emphasis on the undergraduate education, and real attention paid to it. As I hear about the honors program for undergraduates these days, I think it's as good as any undergraduate education in the country, really outstanding. So I think those areas, and of course the amount, just the sheer amount, of private generosity to the University is impressive. We're in a \$1.3 billion campaign now, and as of June 30, 2001 have raised just over \$1.1 billion dollars. When I joined the Board in 1975, we were raising annually approximately \$27 million dollars in voluntary funds and in the year 2000-2001, we received \$217 million dollars in new gifts and future commitments.

AP: Right, both the campaign gifts and the annual giving are very impressive.

LG: Exactly. It's just a remarkable record of how much people really do care about the University of Minnesota and believe in what it accomplishes

AP: Do you see any ongoing challenges about which you would say, "I wish we were working on these issues harder?"

LG: Well, I think there are always challenges. One of the things that I've found so interesting about the work with the Foundation is that the president of the University has a chance to meet with the Foundation trustees, particularly the executive committee. The executive committee is a small group of people with whom he can really discuss issues and whom he can use as a sounding board. This makes service on the executive committee particularly interesting. In addition, I think it's a major and continuing challenge for our universities to make sure there is a clear understanding of their importance by the public-at-large and among various political and civic groups. In my view the University of Minnesota is so central to the success of the state of Minnesota that we must take every occasion to make as clear as possible the ways the University enhances the well-being of the state. Through the years the foundation has also been concerned about the governance of the University and the quality of the Board of Regents. We have tried to think about ways that the selection process could be as effective as possible, and as a result of Regent Selection Advisory Committee efforts, there has been an improvement.

AP: Remind me, was the Regent Selection Advisory Committee a project jointly of the Foundation and the Alumni Association, or did the Alumni Association lead on that?

LG: I think a lot of people talked about it, and honestly I'm not sure I can say accurately which took the lead. The Alumni Association's extensive contacts throughout the state and their Legislative Network were helpful at the time the Regent Selection Advisory Committee was established. I also know that many

people connected with the Foundation supported the idea of a broader the pool of candidates in the Regent selection process. Then there was the major tenure issue that came up. Although it was peripheral to the Foundation's work, in this case we weighed in on the question—something we do not usually do with issues that are in the hands of the Regents. But we could see a disaster coming to the University if it were to have moved unilaterally to make significant changes in the tenure system. If that had proceeded, it would have been very negative for the University. Although our position was not in accord with that of a number of Regents, we were supporting the President who was equally alarmed at the implications of the proposed changes. Perhaps changes in tenure codes might be considered nationally (although I'm not sure), it's certainly not good for one institution to consider major changes in isolation. Ultimately, after more than two years of debate, an agreement was reached in May of 1997 and resulted in very modest changes in the tenure code. I think the Foundation support for the President was appropriate and, in my view, helped contribute to a workable compromise.

AP: Looking forward, are there any particular things that you see on the horizon that perhaps we haven't talked about?

LG: As I say, I think one of the big challenges will be to be sure that state funding is doing its part. I think state funding is actually less than most people realize in terms of a percent of the operating budget of the University. If it isn't maintained at a certain level, I think it will affect private donors. Private donors, from all that we've learned at the foundation, want to feel that their contributions are making a difference for excellence, or greatness, not simply a substitute for what is the state's rightful responsibility. I see that as the biggest ongoing challenge for the future. I think, obviously, donors feel more generous when the market is doing well. Almost inevitably, it will be more difficult to raise funds now that the market is not as strong as it was at the end of the 1990s.

AP: That is very helpful. Is there anything that I have not asked you that you would like to say?

LG: I think we've pretty much covered it. I would simply say I feel it's a privilege to have been connected with the University in the ways in which I have been involved and to be part of the Foundation board for so long. Then to have had the opportunity to chair the Foundation Board has been a wonderfully interesting and enriching experience for me.

AP: Terrific. I thank you very much for your time.