Those of us—students, faculty and friends of the University of Nevada, Reno—who shared the years on campus with our beloved President N. Edd Miller, have memories.

N. Edd (as most of us called him) was a man of small physical stature, with a perpetual smile and a quiet manner of speaking. He did not look like a formidable executive, but he became our pilot during times of storm and uncertainty.

He arrived in Reno from the University of Michigan, serving first as chancellor under President Charles J. Armstrong (1958-67).

Even before he was elevated to the presidency in 1968, N. Edd was popular with faculty and students.

Nevada seemed more isolated from the academic mainstream in those days. About a year after his promotion, during the Vietnam conflict, disruptive anti-war protests upset the tranquility of hundreds of universities and colleges. Campuses in California were especially volatile in the late 1960s.

At the Nevada campus the unrest seemed remote. One morning in October 1969, hundreds of students greeted N. Edd as he arrived at his office in the Clark Administration building at 6:30 a.m. They proclaimed Oct. 16, 1969 as "N. Edd Miller Day" to show their affection. The event brought bouquets of favorable publicity to the University.

This era of good feeling was short-lived. The rising tide of the peace movement and increasing racial tension reached Nevada. Both the black militant movement and anti-war protests came to the Hill in the same year.

In the spring of 1970, the anti-war movement spilled over into a ceremony in Mackay Stadium.

Governor’s Day was a traditional time for honoring ROTC students and celebrating...
the service of Nevadans in the military. The student anti-war protestors, encouraged by a couple of young professors, spilled onto the field to interrupt the ceremony. Several other professors joined the march to urge peaceful protest. (The example of Martin Luther King, Jr. was fresh on their minds.) The tense week that followed reached a successful end, with teams of professors, students and friends arranging organized debates rather than disruptive action.

The low key hero of this episode was N. Edd, the central figure in calming the radicalized students, the disturbed Board of Regents and the press.

Other episodes of lesser intensity followed. At one point, militants stormed into his office with their demands. N. Edd was occasionally criticized in the community and even by a few Regents for not being “tough enough.” But his calm, deliberate manner was crucial to keeping the academic order of the institution intact.

Despite the occasional turmoil, this was a constructive time in the University’s history. N. Edd’s early years coincided with the rise of Nevada Southern University (originally a branch of the Reno campus) into UNLV. The competition for funding was intense; academic rivalries often bitter.

Fans at both institutions anticipated the day when a football rivalry could begin. The first Big Game occurred in 1969, when Nevada had about 6,300 students and UNLV about 5,200. The two presidents made a friendly wager about who was Number One. The result: UNR 30; UNLV 28.

By the time N. Edd left to become president of the University of Maine in 1973, the achievements that transformed the University into a major research institution were pending. The climate of academic tolerance and stimulus were in place to make that possible. A few years later, N. Edd agreed to be interviewed for the Oral History Program. Available online among the Special Collections resources of the Mathewson-IGT Knowledge Center, this document is a testimonial to his modest, candid style.

After his retirement in Maine, N. Edd and Nena returned to Reno and served many community causes for the remainder of their lives.

This is part of a series by Jim Hulse ’52, ’58M.A., in conjunction with Nevada’s Sesquicentennial, visit www.nevada150.org.

For the University of Nevada Oral History Program archive, please visit http://contentdm.library.unr.edu/digitalprojects/unohp/UNOHP-home.html.

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