Robert M. Wesley Memoir

Wesley, Robert (Bob) M.
Interview and memoir

UIS Alumni Sage Society

Robert M. Wesley, the current Executive Director for Regional Medical Programs at the SIU School of Medicine, discusses his early life and experiences at SSU from 1970-1975. Wesley received his bachelor’s from the University in 1973, his master’s in 1975 and also worked for a time in the Center for the Study of Middle Sized Cities. Wesley, himself a Vietnam veteran, recalls that SSU was very open to veterans and other not-traditional students. He especially remembers professors Robert Thorsen, Ted Cloak, Jerry Colliver, Conald Faust, Collum Davis, Regan Smith, Dave and Judy Everson, Jackie Jackson, Proshanta Nandi and Chuck Strozier. Wesley remembers the University’s commitment to public service and community involvement and cites his exposure to these principles as important in his life today. The interviewer is Cullom Davis, professor emeritus of history at SSU/UIS.

Interview by Cullom Davis, 2010
OPEN
Collateral file
Q. This is an oral history interview on November 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 2009, with Robert “Bob” Wesley. The interviewer is Cullom Davis. Bob, I think we ought to understand and let’s just pick arbitrarily, more or less, the year, 1970. Where were you in your schooling and in your life that eventually led to you being involved with the University?

A. Very briefly in 1970 I was, for most of that year, in the Republic of Vietnam.

Q. Yes.

A. I had started college at Blackburn College in Carlinville, Illinois in the fall of 1967. I did three semesters, enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps for two years, did my training, and was deployed to Vietnam in August of 1969. I returned in late July of 1970.

Q. Late July of 1970?

A. Right.

Q. And had you grown up in Springfield?

A. I was born in Springfield but left Springfield for a variety of reasons when I was eight and was actually raised in Alton and Jersey County. I had a lot of family here in Springfield but the major reason why I came here and actually finished my active duty in December of 1970.

Q. Ok.

A. And came to Springfield then because I had friends from Blackburn who had moved from Blackburn to Springfield to go to Sangamon State.

Q. Who had transferred?

A. Yes, yes.

Q. Cost reasons or?

A. Nope, just Blackburn and just some dissatisfaction. Blackburn at the time was still trying to enter the 20\textsuperscript{th} Century, and that’s why they left.

Q. Ok.

A. And in fact, you probably know him or you may recall him, Dennis Palys? He worked with you and Jim Krohe on the pamphlet for the Race Riot.

Q. I can’t...Palys? P...
A. P-A-L-Y-S.

Q. I should remember. I don’t.

A. In any case...

Q. He’d been a student at Blackburn? You’d known him when you were there?

A. Yes, when I was at Blackburn, yes.

Q. You didn’t go back to Blackburn to finish your degree?

A. No, I came to Springfield because Dennis and his wife Trudy at the time were here. They had told me about Sangamon state and I was fortunate. I didn’t leave a job behind, I didn’t leave a girl behind, I didn’t have anything and I didn’t owe anything, so I could go pretty much where I wanted.

Q. Uh-huh.

A. And so I came to Springfield for the purpose of going to Sangamon State sight unseen, based on what my friends had talked about.

Q. By virtue of his recommendation and you had some other friends who had.

A. Yes.

Q. So you had probably had the GI Bill to help?

A. Yes, I had the GI Bill and actually a state scholarship. Well, the state at the time gave scholarships to veterans, so I went. All I had to pay was for fees and books; tuition was paid and then I got GI Bill on top of that.

Q. Not bad.

A. The state of Illinois was relatively good to veterans.

Q. Yes.

A. And so I actually started in the fall of 1971 at Sangamon State and actually had my eyes opened immediately. I had a class with Dr. Cullom Davis my first term there.

Q. My gosh, that old reprobate?

A. Yes, it was your historiography course and I’m trying desperately to recall the name of it but it’s not coming to me. Yes, you were one of the first faculty members that I had the pleasure of meeting at Sangamon State. From that point on I stayed, I graduated in 1975 and worked for the University for three, maybe four years, three years, after I graduated with a master’s degree.

Q. Doing what?

Wesley
A. I worked in the Center for the Study of Middle Sized Cities for Dan Johnson. Names I remember from there, a lot of them, Phil Gregg, Anji Reddy, Martin Jaeckel, Mangi Agarwal, Proshanta Nandi. Regan Smith worked there for a while, Chip Bayley did some work in that center and a variety of others.

Phil Kendall was the dean at the time of Public Affairs and I think we had four Public Affairs Centers. That’s where I really cut my teeth on applied practical research, how you go about doing it. In any case but to get back to the main question, I came to Springfield to go to Sangamon State University.

Q. Then you started living in Springfield in the winter of 1971?

A. Yes, actually I had a great experience. I was released from active duty on December 9th, 1970, and I hitchhiked home from California.

I left California the day I was released and got to Springfield coming the southern route through the Rockies and Arizona and New Mexico and wound up in Springfield in time for Christmas, which surprised my grandmother that year.

Q. So your grandmother lived here?

A. Yes, and that was the whole point was to surprise her. It’s probably the freest I’ve ever felt in my life. So then when I got to Springfield I drove a taxi cab, I worked in a nursery planting trees, I drove a school bus. In fact, that was my major source of income when I was a student during most of that time was driving a school bus.

Q. Interesting, you were picking up jobs.

A. Yes, just enough to make it through.

Q. Where did you live, with your grandmother?

A. No, I got married and divorced in a very short amount of time. It was not the smartest thing either one of us ever did. I just lived in a variety of places around town – the student’s life. For most of that time, I was single and not really attached to any place or anything. I didn’t want to spend a lot of money, so I found the worst place I could find and that’s where I stayed, a lot of different areas.

Q. I understand, Ok. But you had friends in Springfield?

A. Yes.

Q. Even from your childhood?

A. No, I had family from childhood but not really friends to speak of.
Q. Any brothers or sisters?

A. I have four brothers, and they did not live here in Springfield. One of them lives in Washington State now, one of them lives in Georgia, and two of them live up by the city of Chicago, in Cook County but they never did live here. Well, the youngest one did but the others never did live here. Made a lot of friends.

Q. Now, in applying that winter or spring, you visited the Admissions Office, you suppose?

A. Well, yes. Actually, it goes back a little further than that. As I mentioned earlier I had three semesters at Blackburn, which put me a little short on hours. Sangamon State was actively seeking students at the time, and I did what was referred to as CLEPed in.

Q. Credit for Prior Learning?

A. Yes, something like that and I really don’t recall what the acronym means but that involved some level of testing. It involved writing an essay.

Q. Kind of a life story?

A. Yes. Based upon both the test and the “life story”, the Admissions Office and I’m assuming some faculty committee, determined how much “credit” I might be awarded for that. At the time, Sangamon State was really open and this is an odd thing but really open to veterans.

Q. Yes.

A. There were a lot veterans there at the time. I believe that as much as anything was something that permitted me to get the rest of the credit I needed to get into the university.

Q. So you think the Marine experience probably counted a fair amount for them giving you the credit to enter as a junior?

A. Yes and the alternative would have been a semester at Lincoln Land, which would have been fine.

Q. Sure.

A. But I’m glad it didn’t work out that way. Sangamon State was an exciting place in those days.

Q. Do you feel doing some of these hoops that you had to pass through, CLEP, were kind of Mickey Mouse, or not?

A. Actually, I think it got Mickey Mouse later.

Q. (laughs) Ok.

Wesley
A. It became much more formalized, the CLEP test did, and that sort of thing. Perhaps it had to, I don’t know about these things. But no, what I actually felt was that Sangamon State was looking for certain kinds of things that it didn’t know how to test for.

Q. Ok, very good way to put it.

A. And maybe there isn’t a way to test for it, I don’t know.

Q. It’s tricky.

A. But in any case, no, I thought it was fair.

Q. Ok.

A. And the school had the power to grant something I wanted, and the things it asked me to do to make its decision were fair. At least, that’s my recollection.

Q. Did you get to know anyone in the Admissions Office?

A. Boy that is reaching a ways back.

Q. Yes.

A. I’m trying to think. Was Jerry Curl?

Q. Jerry Curl was, I think, maybe worked there. Bob Marshall was the registrar but you wouldn’t have gotten to know him.

A. No, I didn’t know him.

Q. Jerry Curl, possibly, Ok.

A. And I don’t know about so much that office as Student Affairs. I remember Pearl Mounce.

Q. Ok, Pearl Mounce.

A. Pearl Mounce was one of the…Pearl died three or four years ago.

Q. Yes, I know.

A. And I read about it in the paper. It broke my heart.

Q. She was a sweet woman.

A. She absolutely loved students. She took care of us and believe me, I spent a lot of time in that office (laughs)

Q. Of course. How about Homer Butler? Did you know him?
A. Homer I think actually, I don’t recall that Homer was there in 1970. He might have been.

Q. He was.

A. Then I didn’t meet him then until a few years later. So I never met, I know Homer and all that but that actually came later.

Q. Ok. So it was pretty easy to get admitted, relatively?

A. Yes.

Q. At that point you decided a particular major?

A. Well, when I was at Blackburn I started out as a history major. When I came to Sangamon State, I found out about the individual option and that interested me for a while. I have some close friends who actually graduated with the individual option. But quite honestly, the experience I had within the individual option led me to believe that that was one thing the University had done wrong.

Q. Really?

A. Yes, I didn’t… I did not believe that it fostered enough breadth in a student.

Q. Yes, you could really focus.

A. Yes, yes.

Q. Interesting.

A. And I think there’s room for that in higher education but I think that’s why there are graduate degrees. At the undergraduate level what I finally decided, and actually this was based in part by experiences I had with you, you probably recall Bob Thorsen?

Q. Sure.

A. Bob Thorsen was a sociology professor and he was my, actually, my second faculty advisor and the one I stuck with. Conald Foust was my first and he didn’t…I wound up not having much respect for Conald.

Q. I’m sorry.

A. No, it’s...

Q. Yes, Ok.

A. Mark all those notches because I’m going somewhere with this theme. Thorsen, I had a great deal of respect for and he never told me I should get out of the individual option. He asked me questions, so sort of the applied Socratic method and over the course of probably a semester or two, I think we were on quarters then, what he was able to do during those sessions was help
me to understand that if I’m going to focus, I have to come from somewhere so there’s got to be a foundation. Consequently, that led me to feel that the individual option was probably not appropriate at the bachelor’s level, maybe master’s level.

Q. Ok.

A. And that was my judgment.

Q. That was, as you say, a Socratic way for you to reach your own conclusions.

A. Yes.

Q. And this occurred maybe during your first quarter, second quarter?

A. No, it would have been the spring of 1972 that I made that change and curiously enough, I decided to be a soc [sociology] major but that term was the first time we ever had a sociology course.

Actually, Thorsen was instrumental, very instrumental to me. When I use the term advisor, I mean that sincerely for Bob Thorsen. He was the one that said to me, “Why don’t you sit and talk with Jerry Colliver.” And he was the one I sat down and talked through functionalism with, trying to figure out the difference between what Bob meant as a sociologist and functionalism and what Ted Cloak as an anthropologist meant by functionalism. So when I look back on that period of time, what I’ll tell you quite distinctly, when it comes to the kind of work I do, when it comes to some of the opportunities I’ve had, I can trace it back to those three men.

Q. Colliver, Thorsen and Cloak?

A. Yes, all three of them were exceptionally important to me. Jerry Colliver still lives. He works at the School of Medicine and I see him, not often but regularly. Ted was actually one of the first 12 to be denied tenure.

Q. Right.

A. He was still in town after that and I sat with that man every Saturday morning for a year at a Mel-O-Cream Donuts store at 15th and Cook. We were reading a cultural anthropology.

Q. Textbook?

A. I’ll call it a textbook but it really wasn’t a textbook. It was an introduction to cultural anthropology written by a Marxist anthropologist whose name doesn’t come to mind right now. I think it was called Anthropological Theory. Anyhow, it doesn’t matter. And that is where I learned a whole bunch, not so much about anthropology though that was the focus, but what I learned from Cloak and Thorsen was that there is a systematic way to approach human behavior, Ok?

Q. Yes.
A. And what I learned from Colliver is that counting is not a bad thing, measuring is not a bad thing. They might not be the only thing, but they are not bad things. There was a heavily anti-quantitative bias at Sangamon State.

Q. There sure was.

A. So to this day, I have tremendous respect for all three of those men.

Q. And what were the pillars, other than being Socratic, did he bring any sort of rigor or perspective to...

A. Yes.

Q. Ok.

A. He had a course called “Social Concepts in Practical Sociology” and according to him, he styled it as an advanced introductory course. I still have the book he used, by Robert Bierstedt. I actually wound up taking that class twice and the reason why I took it twice was because Bob wasn’t going to pass me. (laughs)

He wasn’t going to pass me because to his way of thinking, I had not developed any discipline about how I approached what he was teaching and what I was reading or not reading. So at the end of that term, bear in mind this is my advisor, toward the end of this term he called me into his office and he told me that.

He says, “You’re really not doing well here.” He said, “But that’s not my problem, that’s yours.” And Bob was very good about that. In fact I kind of adopted that from him. I don’t mind helping you with your problem, but it’s important to me that you know whose problem we’re dealing with. (laughs)

So I went home that weekend and thought about it and went back into his office on Monday morning and asked him if I could take the course the following fall, he was teaching it again. He permitted me to do that and that was the beginning of discipline and I mean academic discipline.

Q. Right, when you had to face that issue and deal with it.

A. Yes, yes. And actually, that was seminal because I still hadn’t had a course from Cloak yet, I still hadn’t had a course with Colliver yet. I hadn’t encountered them. I was still busy working my way through Bob and that was tough. But he was a very honest, hardworking man himself and that’s what he expected from students. And I did very well the second time around and paid attention and actually learned a lot.

Q. Good.

A. But yes, I remember him fondly. I haven’t seen Bob in ages.
Q. I don’t even remember when or roughly was it still while you were at Sangamon State that he left?

A. He left in, I’m going to say, the late 1970s, and I was still working at Sangamon State but he went back to the priesthood.

Q. That’s right. He was one of our charter priests.

A. (laughs) No kidding, priests, ministers, rabbis, there was a whole bunch of that around here.

Q. (laughs)

A. But no, Bob went back to Cincinnati and took a parish there.

Q. Nice guy. Really?

A. He told me about that once. He said, I don’t know if you know this or not but Bob was raised a Lutheran. He came from, not a wealthy background but a well-to-do one, light industry and raised a Lutheran in, I think it was Wisconsin. It might have been Minnesota, but I think it was Wisconsin. He came late to the Catholic Church as a convert.

Then he went to the seminary and got a parish out of the seminary. But then, what he told me was that, it’s almost like he woke up one morning and decided that he didn’t know enough about the world that he lived in. So he went to his bishop and said he was going to take a leave of absence. The bishop said, “No you can’t do that.” Bob said, “Yes I can.” So it lasted about 25 years. (laughs)

And in that time Bob was a businessman, he was a faculty member, he was a social worker, a variety of things. When he was ready, he went back to a parish. I actually visited him at his parish, a few years after he took it over. Yes, it was a delightful visit. Then I saw him once following that. It was sometime in the 1980s, and he was passing through Springfield. We had dinner together.

Q. That was a great relationship.

A. Yes it was.

Q. And Colliver you still have and Ted Cloak I remember and White. But I guess after he had been denied tenure he still met with you weekly to go through this heavy-going Marxist work on sociology.

A. Yes, anthropology.

Q. Yes, I’m sorry, anthropology.

A. Yes, he was looking for a job and sadly, Ted never really got back into that. He wound up going to New Mexico and he actually got another degree in information technology and retired from the University of New Mexico. I still hear from Ted quite often.
Q. Do you really?
A. Well, via email, I mean we don’t talk much.
Q. Right.
A. But via email I still hear from him, and he’s still out there on the left wing doing what Ted does best.
Q. (laughs) Didn’t he come from a fairly distinguished academic family?
A. Yes, his father was an academic. Ted was one of the, let me start in a different spot. Ted was two people. You had Ted with the long red hair and wild bushy eyebrows who was this fist-pounding leftist. Then you had Ted who was an extremely exacting academic.
Q. Really?
A. Yes. Ted’s undergraduate degree was from Michigan in the philosophy of science. He got his Ph.D. from Chapel Hill in anthropology, cultural anthropology, did his field work in Trinidad. Ted was, if you read cultural anthropology from the first hundred years, it is fascinating stuff, very weak on methodology, very strong on observation and that sort of thing.
Ted wasn’t satisfied with that. He believed that the theory of evolution, the thing that bound together the science of biology was also the thing that binds together the “science” of anthropology. He spent a great deal of time developing a theory of cultural evolution. And the thing that...Now, I was a blank slate, I didn’t know anything from anything, so I’m learning from my teacher.
But I learned it well. Ted could gain, if you gave Ted 25 words to describe whatever he wanted to describe, whatever you wanted him to describe, he would come up with the most precise use of those words that I’ve ever encountered. He is very precise in what he writes and he was also...Ted was a lousy lecturer. For a year I was his student assistant, and I came to understand that part of my job was to get Ted excited.
Q. (laughs) Yes, right.
A. To get him to say something outrageous, to get him wound up. Once he got animated, the students were his. But until he got animated, you had to wake him up. (laughs)
Even there, [Ted had] just a fascinating breadth of knowledge. He knew the physics and biology of evolution and he was also responsible for one of the most profound for me at any rate, insights that anyone’s ever given me. And it wasn’t Ted that did it. Do you remember University Week? How we used to do University Week?
Q. Sure.
A. I loved University Week.
Q. I did, too.

A. I forget what the theme of this particular University Week was but Ted invited a faculty member by the name of Wes Jackson from San Fernando Valley State of all places, to come and be part of University Week. He lectured in one of Ted’s classes and I said one, actually, he gave me two of my favorite images.

The first one was and this is how he started off the first lecture. He says, “10,000 years ago humans bent over to plant crops, and we’ve been trying to stand up straight ever since.” And it’s beautiful. His thesis is that humans really weren’t meant to be the mega creatures that we are now. I accept that whole heartedly.

The other one was this was how he started off the second class. That’s what this guy was good at. He went up the blackboard and do you remember how in the early days of Sangamon State, creativity was an almost mystical notion? (laughs)

He went up to the blackboard and he said, he just wrote on the blackboard, “The essence of creativity is control. The essence of creativity is control.” You ever watch Jimi Hendrix’s hands when he’s playing the guitar?

Q. No, I’m afraid not. I know who he his.

A. Did you ever watch, who’s you favorite musician?

Q. Probably, Art Tatum.

A. Ok, the concentration, the practice, the reach of the fingers, combining the feet movements. It’s like if there is...if there’s anything mystical about any of that, it escapes me.

Q. Yes.

A. That is hard work and that is control of every move you make – same way with a potter and same way with words.

Q. Right.

A. You’re a man of words; I’m a man of words. I make half my living as a writer. If the words don’t say what you want them to say, than the people are going to read a different message than you’re sending.

Q. Right.

A. You have to know how to control that. It took me awhile though to really grab that, to understand the simple profundity of those few words, the essence of creativity is control. Now, I gotta tell you, I won’t tell you that I would never have gotten that experience anywhere else, I don’t know. I didn’t go anywhere else. But I will tell you clearly that stuck in my mind all these years and that’s close to 40 years ago, 35 anyhow.
Q. Well it’s wonderful that you’ve identified those sources of inspiration for you. You were a vessel ready to be inspired. I mean, I can’t help but believe that. You were not just a run of the mill student. And I don’t know what it was, maybe Blackburn, maybe your innate qualities, maybe it was your Vietnam experience but you looked for inspiration intellectually.

A. I was angry when I came back to Springfield.

Q. About the war?

A. Certainly that was part of it, other things, too. But at that age, it was the focus. When I left Blackburn, I couldn’t have told you if I was in favor of the war or not. I was 19 years old. A friend of mine much later said to me, “I cannot imagine you in the Marine Corps.” And I said, “For Christ’s sake, I was 19. What do you expect?” (laughs)

And I was. I was 19 years old, came from Jerseyville, Illinois. I’d gone to school in Carlinville, Illinois, to Blackburn and the homogeneity of both those counties, as much as I love them and I do. My work today takes me to rural areas all over the state, and I love going back to rural areas because there’s a part of me that belongs there. But the homogeneity of those experiences does not prepare one, particularly at 19, to make a decision about a war that’s going on twelve thousand miles away. Particularly when you grew up believing, believing.

Q. Right.

A. I mean, I’m a JFK kid? I believed, and I believed that we were the good guys and the bad guys lived somewhere else. It wasn’t so much that I wanted to go into the service. I was just having difficulty adjusting to I don’t know, I guess, independence, freedom, whatever. Blackburn was not a stimulating place.

Q. Right.

A. But at that time there was a draft and I’d worked at a steel mill in Alton, Illinois, Laclede Steel, the summer before. And all I really wanted to do was quit school, go back to the steel mill and work. There is something, to this day, to me there is something rewarding about hard physical work. It’s simple, it’s straight forward, and there is a sense of accomplishment at the end of the day that you might not have from a lot of other things. I was just confused.

But there was a draft on at the time. I had a student deferment; it didn’t work that way. If I quit school I’d get drafted. I knew that. One of my brothers had enlisted in the Marine Corps six months before and if my brother can do it, I can do it, Ok. I won’t tell you that the Marine Corps was bad to me. It wasn’t. It was hard, I mean, as a drill instructor once told me, “I have nine weeks to train, to take a civilian and make them a Marine and I don’t get that done by saying pretty please.” And they did. (laughs) But it wasn’t really until I got to Vietnam and did some things.

And came back and realized that somewhere along the line we’d lost our way. And that is, to this day, I can’t stand to listen to Robert McNamara. I cannot stand to listen to that. Well, when Robert McNamara first published his whatever it was, he was on the radio and I’m sitting at a
stoplight in Springfield screaming at my radio. “Do not tell me go to the Wall.” That’s what I was screaming at him.

I was angry when I came here. I guess it was also fair to say that I no longer believed. I no longer believed anybody. I believed that what I knew and understood was as good as anybody’s knowledge and understanding. And then I started bumping into some rational people and, Cullom, you were one of them.

I mean, I remember in your class it wasn’t an argument, but it was a good healthy discussion. You and I wound up on opposite sides of this conversation. You had given an assignment. I don’t remember what the assignment was but this was a presentation in class. This was during the time when Lieutenant Calley’s case was really in the forefront of all of our minds. As I mentioned earlier, I was angry. But I had a certain strategic notion about Calley. You probably won’t remember this.

Q. I don’t remember this.

A. Well, what I said to you and to the class, I argued that Lieutenant Calley’s massacre at My Lai was a military victory. He killed a hundred and some odd people and I said, “Let’s just assume that ten of them were enemy soldiers.” That is who we fought against. They fought against our technology. So I was in an eight inch howitzer battery. You knock down one of my guns and then all I am is just a rifleman. If they don’t knock out my guns, I can stop them 12 miles away and I can drop it right on their head.

So what I was actually arguing was that, just as the gun they put out of action on my hill one night when they did that was a victory for them. We fought an anti-personnel war, they fought an anti-technology war. I remember arguing that point almost to the point of jumping up and down and screaming. It’s like, you’ve got to understand this.

I even drew a map of the hill and showed everyone where they came in that night, onto my hill, and what they destroyed in their pathway. It’s not that they didn’t kill marines that night, because they did. But that’s not why they were there. The guns were why they were there.

Q. And I disagreed with you on some of that? That’s Ok.

A. What you took issue with was I said that My Lai was a military victory because that was a strategy. We had an anti-personnel strategy. They had an anti-technology strategy. And if 10 out of those 120 some odd people were the enemy, then they were. In fact, I had difficulty with you historians (laughs). I had a class with Chuck Strozier and it was a delightful class. You probably recall that Chuck was a psycho-historian.

Q. Yes, I do indeed.

A. And at least at the time and I don’t know if it’s still true or not, I don’t know if psycho-history is even still in vogue, but at the time, the most studied figure in history by psycho-historians is Adolf Hitler.
Q. Yes, exactly.

A. Well, I had a World War II hobby. My adopted father drove a tank in Patton’s 4th Armored Division, spearheaded the 3rd Army in the European land war. There was a time in my life when I could tell you virtually every battle that happened from the invasion on. Chuck made a commentary one time. “It’s not just Hitler; it is also Nazi Germany that is of interest to psychohistorians.” He used the term bizarre to describe Nazi Germany and I took issue with him on that. I took issue because the problem with Nazi Germany is not its rarity. It is its commonality.

Q. Yes, Hannah Arendt’s same argument, the banality of evil.

A. Yes, you are actually one of the first people I’ve bumped into in ages who remember how that book was subtitled.

Q. I do.

A. That is just such a powerful argument. I asked him if the 20 million Kulaks that Stalin had killed was in the same league or how about the British in the Boer Wars or how about our western campaigns? The problem with knowing a little bit about history is that you know a little bit about history (laughs). So Chuck and I had a huge argument about whether or not Nazi Germany was bizarre, and I think I pushed his Nordic buttons a little bit because I think his opposition became a little bit more than academic. I think I pretty well demonstrated that this isn’t bizarre, that it is all too common.

Q. Anyway, that’s interesting.

A. Yes but I thoroughly enjoyed the book. I actually suggested a book to him called The Psychopathic God. It’s a psycho-history of Hitler that he didn’t know about, and I thought that was pretty cool.

Q. Right. So you were an angry man looking for answers, not having faith.

A. I was, yes. I think that the fact that I walked away from Sangamon State with so much of value is not a testimony to me being open. It is a testimony to the commitment of a number of faculty that I’ve never forgotten.

Q. Well, that’s a great tribute, and I won’t disagree with that. As I was saying, you were a vessel seeking to be stimulated intellectually.

A. You and Jerry Colliver and Ted Cloak and Bob Thorsen and Joel Adkins and Larry Shiner. I told you earlier that I could trace my career, the roots of my career back to those three people, back to Jerry and Ted and Bob because of what I learned there and how to do. I spent a good part of my career doing research.

Q. Yes.

A. I spent a good part of my career working in administration and the social sciences and measurements that are supposed to help you in those things. But I do not mean to exclude the
value of what you gave me. The value of even Conald Foust whom I came to disrespect because I didn’t think Conald was intellectually honest. The struggle to get to that understanding of Conald was worth it and that, I promise you, I could not have gotten at Blackburn College because they’re too regimented. I don’t think I could have gotten it in many other places because they were too big.

When I was here there were roughly 800 students, 50 or 60 faculty, do the math. I could go into the cafeteria at noontime and have lunch with a historian today, a psychologist tomorrow, an anthropologist the next day and, get to know them. In that sense, it really was much more like how I think of an academy.

I know there were some questionable folks at Sangamon State (laughs), and I’ll say two things about that. First of all, that doesn’t separate it from the rest of higher education. Secondly, despite that, I believe from the day it opened and certainly from the day I walked onto that campus, it was possible to get as good an education at Sangamon State University as anywhere in the United States. You just had to pay attention to where you were going because there was a lot of experimentation.

Q. Of course.

A. You could take, which I did, a philosophy class from George Shurr and get lockstep logic.

Q. (laughs) Yes.

A. Or take a philosophy course, which I did, from Larry Shiner and get intellectual honesty in a much less regimented way. And both have tremendous value in the work I do. So anyhow, I’ve never ever regretted my choice to go to Sangamon State, and I’ve never accepted the University of Illinois diploma.

Q. That’s interesting because a few others have told me, among the very earliest Sangamon State students and maybe in part, it’s because they’re successful already and don’t need a particular diploma to get into a door, which is why a lot of younger students and I understand that. But in your case it’s the vivid experience that you had.

A. Absolutely and I don’t blame anyone. My wife accepted a UIS diploma. She graduated from Sangamon State. The closest thing I can come to telling you how I feels, is that I didn’t go to the U of I. I went to Sangamon State. The biggest mistake that the University of Illinois at Springfield’s foundation makes, is not giving me room to be an SSU graduate. And we are rare; there’s only a few of us. We were around for 25 years. And in 25 years, we’re going to be gone. They’re going to keep graduating U of I students for probably the rest of eternity because now U of I owns it.

And all they need to do is say, what we want is a Sangamon State University endowed chair. I’d contribute to that at UIS. I’d contribute to that. But I’m not going to give my money to the University of Springfield. I am not doing that. Quite honestly, even right now, this interview, it’s because they’re getting ready to celebrate their 40th anniversary.
Q. Right.
A. They’ve got 14 years in. They don’t have 40 in.
Q. Right.
A. And that’s just how I think about that.
Q. Ok.
A. And I don’t hold anything against the Army either. But I didn’t serve in the Army; I served in the Marine Corps. (laughs) It is. Sangamon State University, out of the gate, told me it wanted to do two things with me, with me and people like me.
Q. Right.
A. We are in the state capitol; it wanted to provide an education, a broadening experience, to midlevel state managers. Ok, cool, that is a valuable function.
Q. Right.
A. The second thing it wanted to do was to instill within me a commitment to involvement in my community.
Q. Yes.
A. And I remember those two things.
End of Tape 1

Begin Tape 2

Q. This is the continuation of an oral history with Bob Wesley on November 2nd. You were talking about the two things that you knew from the very beginning from the very beginning that established the university that distinguished it. You were talking about the second one which was community or public service, I guess.
A. Yes, yes. To me, have done that.
Q. Yes.
A. I have done both. I work at a state university and I guess you could call me middle management. I understand the world I live in and that sort of thing and what the job is.

The business of public affairs or the business of involvement, well, I’ve been a party chairman, I’ve been a committeeeman, I’ve led the ACLU, I’m involved in the Citizen’s Club, I sit on the Board of Health, I sit on the Board of Dentistry. I mean, it’s like to me, this is where my kids live, this is where my grandkids live and if I’m not involved, I’m not doing what I can do for them, let
alone generally. I actually owe part of how I feel about these things to my high school American problems teacher.

Q. Well Ok, I wondered, yes.

A. Here name was Cuma Lee Frost. Cuma Lee was... well, she was aptly named. She was not a warm person. (laughs) To me when I was 18, she probably seemed ancient but she was probably in her forties or fifties at the time. And she told us I mean, this was a civics course; it was called American problems.

Q. Yes, right.

A. She made us read the Constitution and understand all of it, but she beat the hell out of us with the Bill of Rights.

Q. Really?

A. And I remember her. This is yours. I remember her saying that. “This is yours. Nobody gave it to you. This is yours. You’re an American; this is for you.” Ok? Nobody has ever explained the Bill of Rights to me in terms better.

Q. That’s wonderful.

A. It is. And then she was hell on wheels on the labor movement, but that’s high school.

Q. (laughs) Right.

A. A lot happened between high school and Sangamon State. One could say that Sangamon State was a model of a place that wants you to share, wants you to, not necessarily lead. I mean, I don’t think you need to lead; I just think you need to show up. I think you need to take part. And if you’re not doing that, which you can’t—this is America, but I think you’re failing as a citizen if you don’t. And Sangamon State integrated that, not just into how its faculty dealt with things, but literally into the requirements to graduate from there and the applied study term.

Q. Did you actually do applied?

A. I did. It’s how I came into contact with the learning community the first time.

Q. Ok.

A. I did my applied study term at the learning community.

Q. Yes, that seems like a quaint requirement now but I believed in it strongly.

A. Me, too. Me, too. Still do. There was another component to Sangamon State that made you aware of the community and that is that there were no dorms there. You had to live in the community.
Q. Right.

A. I never saw that as a problem, but I guess some folks did. I want to go back to something that I alluded to earlier. That is that, yes, I was angry. Yes, I was all kinds of things and there were some faculty who were willing to accommodate that anger. There were others who were not. The disagreement you and I had over My Lai was not an accommodation. I don’t know to this day who’s right, although did you ever see Apocalypse Now?

Q. Yes.

A. Did you ever read the Heart of Darkness?

Q. Yes, long ago.

A. I wouldn’t go see Apocalypse Now until I read Heart of Darkness.

Q. Yes.

A. Then when I finally did, it’s like that’s what they were going after Colonel Kurtz for because he was taking the war to them the way they brought it to us.

Q. Right, right.

A. And the beauty of that movie is so much broken technology lying around and the soldier on the boat upriver, gets killed with an arrow.

Q. Yes, interesting.

A. So to me, that’s what I’m saying. Their war was anti-technology. Ours was against them. At any rate, doesn’t matter. But that was an honest disagreement.

Q. Yes.

A. Conald wasn’t honest. I’m just saying they were both there. I don’t think Conald was being dishonest intentionally. I just don’t think Conald...I think a lot of things about Conald, doesn’t matter.

Q. Yes, Ok.

A. But there were a lot of folks there that if I wanted my opinion, that was Ok. But if I wanted to be real with that opinion, I had to work for it. That’s what Thorsen was about.

Q. Yes.

A. And as whacky as that was, that was what Cloak was about. And as quiet and even tempered as he is, that’s what Jerry was about. And Jerry’s a little bitty guy, but I have never seen him intimidated ever.

Q. Right.
A. You remember Bob Reid?
Q. Yes, of course.
A. Bob Reid had his office in the psych area.
Q. Yes.
A. That’s, of course, where Jerry’s office was and I don’t know what the argument was about, but Bob Reid’s tall and slender and Jerry’s...
Q. Short...
A. ...diminutive. And Bob Reid tries the tall guy thing, leaning into him?
Q. Yes.
A. Jerry just leans right back (laughs). I could tell by the expression on his face, that Reid wanted something from him that Jerry wasn’t about to give him. (laughs) And to this day I admire that about Jerry Colliver. You cannot intimidate that man.
Q. Right.
A. That’s impressive.
Q. You’ve mentioned a few other professors and we don’t have to go into great detail. You’ve mentioned Larry Shiner and a few others. Are there any whose courses, in addition to the ones you’ve talked about, so unusually positive or negative in your memory, that’d you like to talk about them? You mentioned, of course, Chuck Strozier.
A. Chuck, to be quite honest about it I think Chuck was a real bright guy who hadn’t quite matured. (laughs) That was sort of my feeling about it. Real bright guy, but he liked his Nordic genes and he liked his pipe and he liked his opinions.

And we all have egos and that kind of stuff but I guess what I’d say is that, I don’t regret taking his class. I just walked away from it feeling a little...I don’t know that I would have said to myself, “One of these days he’s going to be better.” But I think walking away, he could be better.
Q. Ok.
A. But not really a disappointment, just a little dis-ease, if you will. There were very few circumstances where I felt, “This just wasn’t worth doing.”
Q. Ok.
A. And Conald was one of them.
Q. Yes.
A. To be quite honest about it, Larry Shiner was the one who set me straight on a couple of things because Conald always talked about phenomenology. By the time Conald and I had parted ways, I had totally rejected phenomenology. Not even to this day can I exactly explain where I was with it.

Q. Right.

A. But Shiner was also a phenomenologist.

Q. Right.

A. And with a good deal more rigor to him, and a good deal more grounding in this method, this process, this tool, if you will.

Q. Right.

A. There was nothing mystical about it. Conald liked the mystical side of things, and I was raised a Catholic. I know a priest when I hear one, and that’s what we finally got to. I was disappointed in Caryl Moy.

Q. Oh.

A. She taught a course on human sexuality.

Q. Right.

A. You’ve got all these young men and women running around right in the middle of the sexual revolution of the century.

Q. Right (laughs).

A. So, I went to the first meeting of the class and so we do the normal, let’s everybody introduce ourselves to one another. So we did that and then she starts off. She looks at the class and says, “Now I want everyone to say fuck.” I’ve been saying fuck since I was eight years old. (laughs)

So I’m listening to this and thinking, Ok. We went through that with a number of terms. I think this class was meeting...in fact I’m certain it was meeting at night, and I left after the first hour and dropped the course.

Q. Really?

A. Yes.

Q. It’s just a waste of time?
A. Well, human sexuality is absolutely one of the most fascinating things in the world to a twenty-two-year-old.

Q. Yes.

A. But on the other hand, I just felt that this was—let me think—gentrified. That we’re going to say all these dirty words so that we can come to understand it’s Ok. Well fuck, I knew it was Ok.

Q. So it was a little simplistic?

A. Well, I thought so.

Q. Yes.

A. Now, I didn’t stick around to find out but I made up my mind on that. I didn’t care much for guerilla theater and Ron Sakolsky.

Q. You didn’t like that?

A. Nope didn’t. That is not to say it has no value, it is to say that I didn’t see any value to it, Ok? You just kind of make up your mind about these things and I just thought it was lightweight. I mean, running up and down Stevenson with a plastic gun. It’s like, “Dude, really?”

Q. Yes.

A. Or spitting on a bank president, it’s like, these are...

Q. Childish.

A. They are, and so I didn’t see any value to that. In fact, I thought that was hurtful to the institution’s image and this is back in the days when Senator G. William Horsley was our pet critic, as you may recall.

Q. I do indeed.

A. And so, I didn’t care much for that. I loved the wide-eyed fascination of the world that Rich Damashek had.

Q. Yes, wide eyed is the right word for it, too.

A. Yes it is.

Q. Bug eyed, almost.
A. Yes, but he would also spread his eyelids when he talked. He just had this almost breathless exuberance about him.

Q. That’s a good description. So you took a literature course with him?

A. I took a survey course with him.

Q. Ok.

A. Of some sort, it escapes me right now. Bob Jackson.

Q. Yes.

A. Ponderous.

Q. (laughs)

A. When Bob was off, he was way off.

Q. (laughs)

A. But when he was on, he was absolutely compelling, just boom, boom, boom. And Jackie and I parted ways, but I have to admit that Jackie Jackson has a way of teaching people how to write that is inviting and it’s effective.

Q. Yes.

A. And I had the pleasure of two classes from her. Now, the nuns taught me how to write. Jackie taught me how be free with how I write because the nuns don’t teach you that. (laughs) Let me tell you that, they don’t do that. I’m trying to remember some of the others.

Q. Either of the Eversons? Did you know them?

A. I had a class from Dave Everson and I actually sat in on Judy’s class on science fiction but never took the class.

Q. Right.

A. Dave was a PAC, a two hour PAC and it was on analysis and advocacy, which was absolutely phenomenal.

Q. Great.

A. You’ve got this... political scientists are a type. I mean, they are professionally more cynical than anybody in the entire academy. Dave had that, but he had it with a light hand, not a heavy
hand. He introduced us to a seminal paper written by the American Political Science Association in the early Fifties that explained in a very straightforward way the differences between analysis and advocacy and that you could have both, but you had to know the difference. It was wonderful.

Q. Good, yes.

A. Judy, I don’t think there’s anything that she doesn’t do well but there might be.

Q. Right, I’ve never confronted it.

A. Neither have I and I sat through, as I mentioned, her science fiction course. She gave as an introduction to some substrate of science fiction behaviorism the best 20 minute presentation on operant conditioning I have ever heard. She had B.F. Skinner bagged and tagged and down and just in that wonderfully distant but engaging way of hers. I don’t know how else to... Their son was a committeeman for a while.

Q. Yes, I know he was.

A. During my time as chairman and that was actually pretty interesting. So I never really had a course from Judy but I sat through that one, and Dave went way too quick, way too quick.

Q. Yes, I’ll say. How about, I’m just trying to think of early faculty. Bob Crowley, did you ever take any psychology courses?

A. No, not from him. He and Pancrazio, Jim Pancrazio, were the behaviorists on the faculty and I never had a class from them. Although Bob actually became politically involved after I went to Sangamon State one night, when I was chairman, to address the Young Democrats. He was there and has since become a committeeman. I don’t know if he still is or not.

Q. I don’t think so.

A. But he was for a few years and I remembered him. He didn’t remember me. I’d never had a class from him and actually had a pleasant conversation with him.

Q. Regan Smith, did you take sociology?

A. Yes I did, yes I did. Social Problems Analysis through Sociology, it was also a PAC. Ok, images, images, this was a PAC and it was a critique of how sociology actually defines and studies social problems. He opens up in that deep, rich baritone, big black beard and headband and all that sort of stuff. He opens up his fist lecture, he wouldn’t call it a lecture but I thought it was a lecture. He opened up his first lectures by saying, that when it comes to malaria, there are two vectors. There’s the Anopheles mosquito and human beings. You can eradicate malaria by
killing all of either one. Now, this is a model problem and solution, Ok. When he first said that I’m sitting their thinking, “Duh.” Then it’s like, “Yes!”

Q. Oh (laughs).

A. Yes, you could. The mosquitos would be just as happy.

Q. That’s right (laughs).

A. And you would eradicate malaria in the human population by doing so. And that was how he approached the critique of social problems.

Q. That’s interesting.

A. Well it was. Regan is an entertaining lecturer and at times in willful disagreement, let’s put it that way, but always entertaining and always worth listening to. At least he was in that class. So yes, I had a class from Regan. I took part in... this was always Dan Knapp’s big thing about... You remember we used to have those campouts?

Q. Yes.

A. I took part in those. I never had a class from Dan although there was a time I spent a lot of time talking with Dan.

Q. An interesting character.

A. Very interesting, totally anti-quantitative and all that sort of thing. But yes, just a very interesting man and I think, I think even though I never had a class with him, intellectually honest. I never thought Ron Sakolsky was, but I thought Dan Knapp was. And go figure, they were my impressions. Proshanta Nandi, I had a great class from him. And I’ll tell you, Proshanta was both one of the best and one of the worst experiences for me at Sangamon State, at two different points.

Proshanta Nandi is an excellent teacher. This was an advanced social theory course. He knew it, had it locked down. He knew the classical papers, knew the current papers, and knew the gist of each theorist that we studied, and so I had no complaints. This was a great learning experience and all that sort of thing. Plus I had a great experience with a student in that class, too. I'll get to it in a second.

I graduated and went to work in the Middle Sized Cities Center for Dan Johnson, and Proshanta was working on a project and he was totally inept. When you move from the world of this theory to where I lived, which is the nuts and bolts, the words have to say something and you’ve got to decide something here, Dr. Nandi. It was a big disappointment when I found that
the faculty, not the faculty, there were faculty with whom I had learned, who weren’t really very good scholars—really were not very good scholars.

And I’m not a good scholar. I’m a real smart guy and I figured out how to live in this world, but I’m not a scholar. Jerry Colliver is a scholar. You are a scholar. That’s why they call it discipline. You’ve got to know this stuff. And you’ve got to know content and you’ve got to know methods. That’s what defines a discipline. If you don’t have them, I’m not sure what you are. But if you don’t have them, so Nandi was a disappointment along those lines albeit a tremendous teacher.

Q. Yes, yes.
A. A tremendous teacher.

Q. I liked him as a colleague. I didn’t know about his teaching.
A. Yes.

Q. Now, you mentioned a student in his class?
A. Yes, his name was Clyde Berry. Clyde Berry was six-three, six-four, black dude. If you look at one of the things that all the classical social theorists share, it’s that they’re white and they’re typically middle or western European. I don’t even remember what the example was, but let’s start at a different spot here.

Proshanta had us each select a theorist and make some kind of presentation and Clyde went first. This was, there was maybe a half a dozen or so people in the class. Clyde was the only black guy and he was very nervous about making his initial presentation, but he did it. Then at another time, Nandi, we all went through this and then Nandi was espousing on something. Clyde said, “That’s white, that’s white.”

It could have been a very angry way of putting it, given the times, but it wasn’t. He said, “That interpretation is white.” I couldn’t turn that corner. I didn’t know how to turn that corner, but I knew there was a corner to turn. Before he said that, I didn’t. I think since then I’ve managed to turn that corner. But he was the one that just by saying that—that’s white—I’d never heard it put quite that way before.

Q. That made you realize, my heavens, I’ve never thought of things that way.
A. Yes, exactly. He wasn’t a faculty member and I don’t know whatever happened to Clyde but it was the only class I ever had with him.

Q. Interesting.
A. Well, these things stick.

Q. They sure do in you. You’re remarkable.

A. Well, they just stick because they’re kind of like signposts.

Q. Yes.

A. It’s kind of like, I didn’t understand before Clyde said that. And I still didn’t after he said it, but I knew there was something to understand.

Q. Right.

A. That’s important to be able to tie that kind of thing together. I’m trying to think of other faculty.

Q. Well, John Walsh, another priest but you probably didn’t...

A. I didn’t. He was a biologist, as I recall. Dick Sames he was a biologist; I didn’t take anything from him. I heard a lot about him because he and Cloak didn’t get along very well.

Q. Yes, I’m not surprised.

A. Yes, they didn’t.

Q. Did you know Spencer at all?

A. Only in passing, only in passing. I knew Kendall after I went to work there at the University, but I really didn’t know him before. There was the three K’s, Kaiser, Kindschi and Kendall.

Q. Right.

A. Kaiser landed well.

Q. He sure did.

A. Yes. Kindschi, I don’t know what happened to him.

Q. He did alright. He wound up at Grand Valley State College up in Michigan and to my knowledge, retired there or maybe is still active.

A. Phil [Kendall] got kind of pushed out, as I recall.

Q. Yes, he did.

A. And landed ok but not great.
Q. Didn’t he have a heart attack and lost a job or two? It was tough; I lost track of him.

A. I always liked him.

Q. I did too.

A. He hand an interesting operation with... He hired good people, Dan Johnson and a big guy to run the Policy Studies Center that...

Q. John...

A. John, yes. He married one of the...

Q. Yes, married Nancy Ford.

A. Yes, yes.

Q. Yes, I can’t think of his last name, nice guy.

A. Yes, John Collins.

Q. Thank you.

A. John Collins, yes. Leon Cohen was there.

Q. Leon Cohen, right.

A. And Bruce Holroyd.

Q. (laughs) That’s right. You knew Bruce?

A. I knew Bruce, yes. Seems like there was another person there, but it’s not coming to me. John Collins and Dan Johnson, you just don’t get them any better and both of them solidly feet on the ground and willing to work—trying to move something, trying to create something. Phil hired them.

Q. Tells you something.

A. Yes.

Q. Did you take graduate courses?

A. I have a master’s degree, yes.

Q. I thought you did and that was also in sociology?

A. Sociology and anthropology, yes.
Q. With a lot of research emphasis?
A. Yes, I actually worked with Jerry Colliver on, it’s somewhere between a thesis and a project. I had something to present, but it was very quantitative in its implications and all of that. It was on evaluation of faculty by students.

Q. Now, you said you finished your bachelor’s in 1975?
A. No I finished the master’s in 1975.

Q. It’s the master’s. I wondered, Ok. So you were on a fast track.
A. Yes.

Q. A fulltime student, as well as working?
A. Yes.

Q. So you entered in 1971, graduated probably in 1973?
A. Yes.

Q. And then got your masters in 1975?
A. Yes, yes.

Q. Did you participate in graduation?
A. No.

Q. Particular reason?
A. To this day, I don’t like those things. I don’t go to graduations, I don’t go to weddings, I don’t go to funerals unless I have to and sometimes you just get boxed in.

Q. You’re just not a ceremony kind of guy?
A. No, no, it’s nothing that matters to me, and it didn’t make me anymore graduated.

Q. Right. Now, you did mention the University Week experience.
A. Yes.

Q. We’re you heavily engaged in one of those?
A. No.
Q. No? It was just that you enjoyed yourself there?

A. I was there for every minute. I thought they were a wonderful idea. I was one of the first people in the United States I know to see 8mm or 16mm film of Chinese doctors doing surgery using...

Q. Acupuncture?

A. Acupuncture, only.

Q. Yes, yes.

A. I was one of the view people in the United States that was permitted to listen to James McCord before the judge shut him down. (laughs) I mean, those are golden moments.

Q. Right.

A. I listened to Wes Jackson give me two of the most quotable quotes I have in my life. And all I had to do was show up and be there for these things.

Q. That’s true.

A. These were broadening experiences, tremendously broadening experiences and they were spice to a relatively ordered, academic sequence.

Q. Uh-huh.

A. And boy, I think they ought to bring that back right now.

Q. Yes, I agree with you.

A. It was just wonderful stuff. But you can’t... and concentrated, I mean, University Week, it was in a week where everything just changed for that week.

Q. No classes; just do it.

A. Yes, you just did it.

Q. I thought it was a great idea.

A. Yes.

Q. You said and I know, I remember there were a fair number of veterans on campus.

A. Yes.
Q. Were they organized on campus? Was there a club?

A. No, no. We...no. The veterans I knew were doing the same thing I was doing and that is in the immortal words of Clint Eastwood in the *Unforgiven*, “I aint like that no more.”

Q. (laughs)

A. No, if there was an organization... Well, there was a chapter of Veterans Against the War and I wasn’t a member of that. I wasn’t joining anything at the time. But as far as I know, there was no real organized veteran’s organization there. But there were a lot [of veterans]. In fact, this is also a once in history kind of phenomenon. A lot of veterans and a lot of older students.

Q. Right.

A. I had two classes with Bud Budinger.

Q. Yes, sure.

A. Bud comes to mind because he was a well-known name at the time. But two of my best friends were older women, Jane Saxle and Wilma Spring.

Q. Oh.

A. Two women who had raised their kids and... Well actually, Jane was still raising her kid, but she was back in school. Wilma had raised her kids and come back to school and just interesting people. Charlie Lockhart, great big, big afro, big dude in the prime of his life, larger than life.

Q. Right. Exactly.

A. Charlie [Lockhart] was there. This is all happening as the war is closing down and more and more veterans are coming and more people from Springfield, IL, not a bastion of liberal politics.

Q. No (laughs).

A. [They] were encountering some people (laughs) who came from their worst nightmares.

Q. (laughs) Right.

A. But encountering notions and ideas and myself included, encountering notions and ideas that would never have happened for that group of people if Sangamon State hadn’t come here.

Q. True.
A. It’s too hard when you’re 55 and go to Decatur or wherever you’re going to go. But they came and a lot of women and a lot of older folks. I think at one time, early on, the average age of students there was like 29 or 30, something like that.

Q. Yes, I’m trying to think, it stayed that way for a while.

A. Yes it did, and that’s actually pretty impressive.

Q. It was terrific to have for a history class to have ages 19 to 75 because their defining notion by experience of a war could have been anything from World War I to Vietnam, and so that kind of loadstone they had differed tremendously.

A. Yes, amen.

Q. So I enjoyed that. I thought it enriched classes a lot.

A. I thought so, too. Even when I not only disagreed but adamantly disagreed with some of them, it’s like, it is not required that you agree to learn something. It is required that you take part.

Q. Right.

A. And that you keep your brain open.

Q. Uh-huh.

A. And to say it again, it was the faculty that forced my brain to open. Some folks that...I don’t even know why. I don’t know why, yourself included. You have always been open to me. We’ve never been close.

Q. No.

A. But you’ve always been open to me.

Q. Well and you to me.

A. Yes I have. And that was true of a lot of the faculty there. Your joy was in passing something on, and it came to be my joy—it came to be my joy to accept that.

Q. Yes, good way to put it.

A. And that is real.

Q. I don’t think I can think of anything. Were there any other campus issues or controversies that particularly affected you?
A. Well, yes. The first time tenure decisions were made.

Q. Right.

A. As you may, as you probably recall, probably even better than I do, there was a lot of confusion on the initial vice president for academic affairs.

Q. Yes, yes.

A. Who didn’t even see the doors open as I recall.

Q. George Cohen.

A. Yes, George Cohen. Evidently, he had led recruits, faculty recruits, to believe that tenure wasn’t a thing at Sangamon State.

Q. I see.

A. And I know that was Ted’s contention. I know that was Bernie Brown’s contention, and there were a couple of others whose names escape me right. Ted maintained that he was misled; that tenure was not an issue here. But in any case whether it was or not, it was certainly a loss for me when Ted left.

Q. Sure.

A. And I think a loss to the institution, but so it goes. So that certainly was a defining thing at the time. I don’t know that it is now, but it was at the time.

Q. It’s kind of developed into a pattern, and it’s largely accepted. There was fear that it was political, might be political, would be political and that it was, whether it was really necessary to have such a system, tenure system. And Bob Spencer bore the brunt of all that.

A. Yes.

Q. And one of the odd things and I shouldn’t be talking, it’s your interview.

A. No.

Q. To me, always one of the odd things was that a lot of people were so drawn to George Cohen, who was a wonderful conversationalist. I worked with him until he was fired in August of 1970. He was a wonderful conversationalist, and he drew a lot of people. But they were drawn initially and continually by the ideas, and the ideas were Bob Spencer’s.
Public affairs, experiential education, community involvement, communitywide governance system, a library at the center of the University, all these were Bob Spencer’s ideas. So he was a visionary; he was really the educational visionary.

Not many people appreciate that, I think. He made mistakes and he was less effective as a presiding executive than he was in starting the place. But he did and then it was hard for him because he had to work with the kind of a board that didn’t respond too well to initiative, I thought.

A. Well, most of the people on the Board when I worked at the Board of Regents and that was after Spencer’s time.

Q. Yes, right.

A. Lacy was the president when I was there.

Q. They weren’t high powered.

A. They don’t get it.

Q. Right.

A. The last time most of them dealt with this school was when they were in school.

Q. Right.

A. And higher education is...most citizen boards think these things should be run like businesses.

Q. Right.

A. It’s not a business. Beyond which, if we run it like so many businesses are being run right now (laughs), I’m not sure what we’d gain but Ok. Anyhow, I can honestly tell you I really didn’t have an opinion on Spencer. I just didn’t know him.

Q. Yes.

A. The Erenburgs

Q. Oh!

A. Mark and Mary Erenburg.

Q. Mark and Mary both, right.
A. Yes, actually they got divorced.

Q. Yes.

A. Mary Hotvedt became her name but both of them very eloquent people.

Q. Yes, I agree.

A. Guy Romans, I never had a class with him.

Q. Did you go to any of his plays?

A. Yes, I went to *Les Miserables*.

Q. *Les Miserables? Marat Sade?*

A. I don’t recall going to *Marat Sade*.

Q. Ok.

A. Do you remember Austin Carley?

Q. Of course.

A. Delightful little Irishman who could talk your leg off and lift your wallet while he was doing it.

Q. Right, right.

A. I mean, just (laughs). Yes, I remember him. Gus Stevens?

Q. Yes.

A. Just so many people, so many people.

Q. Well you drank deeply with this experience.

A. I loved this.

Q. You hung around.

A. Yes, yes, I loved this. I don’t think we can recreate it today. I wish we could because there was a kind of freedom at Sangamon State that I have not found. I taught at Lincoln Land for a while, I taught at Illinois College for a while, worked at...for Christ’s sake I work at a medical school...

Q. (laughs) One of the better ones though I would say.
A. No, no, I’m quite happy there...

Q. That’s what I mean.

A. Yes.

Q. Yes, well, yes.

A. But all of that, no matter how much that remains the same, Sangamon State in that era was, I mean there was hope there, there was a commitment there, there was a belief there that we can make a difference. That the faculty, whether I liked them or not on an individual basis, collectively the faculty communicated that and collectively the students believed it or came to believe it—that we can make a difference here. I don’t think that’s very common anymore.

Q. No.

A. I think what is common is, we can succeed. Ok, and that’s a different.

Q. Very different.

A. A totally different thing and yes, I loved that. That was a pretty special time.

Q. Well, I think...

A. And that’s why I’m not willing to say that I graduated from the University of Illinois at Springfield. I don’t hate the place, I don’t think it’s a bad place, I don’t... I don’t know. I don’t deal with it.

Q. It’s just not your place.

A. It’s not my place. I know my place, and I miss my place.

Q. Well, a lot of us do, though I also realized time marches on.

A. It does.

Q. I’m not saying the institution is the worse for being the U of I; it just isn’t the same.

A. No, It’s not.

Q. But it’s good. Well, do you have any final closing words because I think we’ve probably pretty well covered it? I don’t want to make you repeat yourself because I think you’ve been eloquent in the way you remembered people and experiences.
A. Well, they impressed me. I guess I’d wind this up by looking you dead in the eye and saying, “Thank you, Cullom.” I appreciate the opportunity today but I really appreciate what you and my teachers did, when I was a young man. I’ve never forgotten it and I won’t.

Q. We’re lucky to have been involved in your evolution as a very successful individual.

A. Thank you.

Q. Thank You.

End Tape 2

End of Interview

1 hour 30 minutes 31 Seconds