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Interview with H el ene Peters, Professor of French

H el ene Peters

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Interview with: **Hélène Peters**
Professor of French, 1961-1989

Date: **Wednesday, July 18th, 2007, 10:00a.m.**

Place: Home of Hélène Peters
Interviewer: Laura Zeccardi, Class of 2007

Interview run time: 58:44 minutes

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Interview with H  l  ne Peters

Laura Zeccardi, Interviewer

July 18, 2007

Home of H  l  ne Peters

[00:00]

LZ: My name is Laura Zeccardi, and I am a new graduate of Macalester College, conducting interviews for the Macalester Oral History Project. Today is Wednesday, July 18th, 2007, and I am interviewing H  l  ne Peters, Professor of French, at her home. To begin, if you would just like to just state your name, and where you are originally from, and then what year you came to Macalester.

HP: My name is H  l  ne Peters, and as you know, I'm a Professor Emerita of French. I came to Macalester in 1961, and retired, I think, in the early '80s. I was at that time when retirement age changed a little bit. I came with a Ph.D. And I've always been a teacher. My parents even tell me that when I was four years old, I used to line up my dolls and teach them how to read. So it's a vocation. It's always existed in me. The hiring process has changed so much. In those days, it was the dean of students or it was the dean of the college, there was only one dean, there were not two or three deans, who just picked out somebody whose credentials seemed to be appropriate.

[01:19]

LZ: Had you heard anything about Macalester before—

HP: Oh yes, of course. Everybody who lives in the Twin Cities knows about our colleges, which are quite numerous and of high quality, in addition to the university.

LZ: Had you already been in the cities then for a while? Had you been...

HP: I arrived in the cities some fifty years ago. And I spent, of those fifty years, I spent thirty-five years at Macalester. The—when I arrived, the French Department in the early '60s was three faculty, two—I guess one tenured and two appointed faculties. And, when I left, we were eight faculty out of which five were tenured. And we had a dip in the department when the requirements were thrown out of the curriculum of Macalester College; those were the darkest hours of my professional life. The year when Macalester, swept by a strange wind blowing over the country, got rid of all requirements, including language requirements, which have since then still been partially reestablished, reestablished. My relationship with other faculty in administration was always extremely active. I had close relationships with, of course, all the languages: German, Russian, Spanish, and classical languages. I also had relations with the English Department, worked closely with them, because they had a course called “World Literature”, and the History Department, because I think that France and history of the world are intertwined. I had close relationships with the Geography Department, which had an extraordinary, masterful faculty. Hildegard Johnson, she was one of the *greatest* teachers in this country. Political science, of course, and finally, Biology, because of one course that I taught that had to deal with women and biological status.

[04:15]

LZ: So you weren't at that time just teaching the language, you had kind of other topics courses...?

HP: No, no, I just taught languages. But I had relations with—I consider that, that departments had to be interrelated. And for certain courses, you'd contact certain colleagues. And I've had—I had wonderful, wonderful relationships with colleagues. In those days, colleagues were much closer than they are now between the departments, because Macalester was like a family. I mean I don't want to sound, you know, emotional or whatever, but we were very close together. And one thing maybe that's never mentioned, that in the '30s during the Depression, some of the tenured faculty dipped in their own pockets to keep untenured faculty who had to be fire—well, released because of the Depression. That was how close a faculty we were.

[05:32]

LZ: Were there many other women faculty when you were hired?

HP: When I arrived, there were thirteen women faculty out of a total of one hundred and twenty-five faculty. And I understand now that it's close to half and half. I think, I don't know. But something that lasted throughout my whole stay at Macalester was the unevenness of our salary. And it's the one spot that I regret about Macalester is that until I retired, my salary was inferior. Though I was a full professor and head of department, my salary remained under the minimum full professorship salary. I've never done anything about it. If I had been a young jerk, I would have sued I guess. But I love too much my job and Macalester to do such a thing. Macalester

became in the '70s part of a five-college association, which still exists, but that's when my husband... What I thought was extraordinary about Macalester when I arrived, was the World Press Institute. W-P-I. I thought that was one of the greatest things in American education, and this fall, I really was *very* touched when I heard that it had been canceled. I think that's one of the things that made Macalester great. Also, what made Macalester great, in my eyes, was the number of foreign students. It was such a marvelous campus with a variety of students from all over the world. And we always were a foster family for a student from Cyprus, another time from Dubai. And we were really a world campus in the best sense of the word. My personal experience at Macalester... Okay. The French—well, what did I do when I was—when I arrived at Macalester, I was one of three faculty. And I contributed— The only courses that were taught were beginning courses, introduction and intermediary, and *one* upper-division course. And now, I think there are about, I don't know, fifteen upper-division courses, and I created most of them. I created eighty percent of them. Of the Women Studies Program, I was involved in it marginally because it was already part of my teaching. In all of my curriculum, I would always insert a dimension, a female dimension. But I did create certain courses that were strictly women studies courses, two of them in particular. One was “Women in French Literature from the Middle Ages to the Contemporary”, and I team-taught this with Virginia Shubert. And the other one, which was mine, which was called the “Existential Woman”.

[09:18]

LZ: Were there quite a few students within the French Department? Did you find, was that a large—

HP: Well, it was an up and down. Of course, we increased largely when I added all these advanced courses. We begin—began to have students. And I think there were two or three hundred students in the French Department per year, you see. And many of them were the same students who registered in the same classes, you see. Rarely does a person take one class in language and then bye-bye. No, you continue to take them. So I would say that it was between two or three hundred at our peak, at our peak.

LZ: Did you develop, then, close relationships with some of those students that you would have had—

HP: Oh, I was going to say that at the end as a closure statement. I was wanting to talk about my former students.

LZ: We can save that.

HP: How bout—let's save it for the end. Okay. Let me see. The Humphrey Endowed lecture was terrific. It was one of the greatest, greatest lecture series that ever was. It brought us scholars from all over the world. I remember bringing, in my classes, scholars, you know, from—with international reputation. I thought that was terrific. Does it still exist?

LZ: I—not to my knowledge.

[10:58]

HP: Oh, things like that really should not, should not perish! Now, personally, it says here you have received numerous of awards. I hate to, of course, seem to, you know, to brag, but I was president of the AATF, American Association of Teachers of French, for Minnesota and the Dakotas. I was president of the Alliance Française of Minneapolis and St. Paul for many years, and program chair there, and still do now volunteer work there. I was awarded by the French Government. My diploma was signed by the Prime Minister. A—first a knighthood and then an officership in the Academic Palms, which was a society founded by Napoleon. And it was simply to reward all teachers. The French have many more awards than the Americans. Americans have the Distinguished Medal of Congress, and, you know, that's it. But in France, Napoleon had all these awards, in teaching, in agriculture, and other things. So I was made an officer of the Academic Palms, as—in recognition of what I had done for French language and civilization.

[12:37]

LZ: That was an award that Borghild Sundheim had also—?

HP: No, not Borghild Sundheim. Oh yes, I think she was knighted. Yes. And Virginia Shubert had it also. But I was officer. And—

LZ: Did you ever get to, I guess, meet Borghild Sundheim? I know she's a very—

HP: Oh, she hired me.

LZ: Oh, okay.

HP: I met—she was one of the most *wonderful, beloved* persons that I've ever met in my life! She embodied the real spirit of Macalester. She was adored by the students, and she died of cancer three years after I arrived. Wonderful person, Borghild Sundheim. And Anne Blegen was the other person of the two faculty when I arrived.

[13:28]

LZ: So was it all women faculty then within the French Department?

HP: Yes. It always has been heavily women. And some people have said that that wasn't good, because, because it had too much of a female identity. Well, so be it. We tried to do our best—but our chairs, Karl Sandberg, who is now deceased, and Laidlaw, were men. They chose men for chairs, and then we women, well, we stayed under the chair.

LZ: So you never were chair of the French Department?

HP: I was chair for ten years.

LZ: Oh!

HP: For the last years of my stay at Macalester. Yes. And I was looking forward to be a chair. Okay. Now...

[14:24]

LZ: Before we go on to talking about some of the changes, I was wondering if you would like to comment about kind of the shift in campus climate from the '60s, when you arrived, into the '70s during the Vietnam War Era. And also I know there was the EEO program that was prominent, and was wondering if you...

HP: I don't know if the essence of Macalester has really ever changed very much. I think it was a liberal college. I mean I shouldn't say that. The students, and probably most of the faculty, with exceptions, was liberal. And I don't think, as far as I know, that that has changed very much. I was not interested in politics. I was not interested in committee work. Never. I was interested in my—I shouldn't say my—in *the* French Department, and increasing its offerings and enriching its courses. To me, that's why I was on campus, and I did not ever be a part of these prestigious committees. You know, the curriculum committee, the personnel committee, the something something committees, you know. To me, it was just a waste of time, because I had a family life and I never wanted to neglect my family life. Every day at three o'clock, which was the time when committees started to meet, I would say bye-bye, Macalester, and go home to my little family. And then when I had taken care of them, around ten and eleven, I started to work for Macalester, sometimes into the early morning hours. Which was very, very hard to be a woman professor in those days, when you wanted to balance work and family. Because our salaries were low, couldn't have much [unclear]. I won't dwell on that.

[16:47]

LZ: So you taught classes then in the morning fairly early?

HP: And in the afternoon until three o'clock. My last class was at three o'clock. I never left Macalester after three-thirty or something like that. But I arrived early in the morning. At seven-thirty, I was at my desk. [laughs] I had wonderful assistants. The—I don't know if you still have student assistants.

LZ: Yes.

HP: You do. Because when I arrived at Macalester in '61, that's when they started the program of student assistants. And I had the *best*. I'll talk about them later. Oh, I couldn't have done it without them. They were extraordinary people to whom I could delegate...because my greatest pride about having been at Macalester was in creating the French study-abroad program. From scratch! Which was an independent program that has been canceled after I left. You—we farm out our students now to other programs, but we had, under my directorship, a Macalester study-abroad program that was advertised nationwide! I had students from Harvard, from Berkeley, from New Orleans, who came on my program. My program had up to thirty-five students. I couldn't find them at Macalester, you understand, because they were for French majors. They were for advanced students only. You had to have finished your intermediate stage plus two advanced courses in order to enter my program. It was unofficially, strongly recommended to all our majors. And all of our majors, during my stay at Macalester, went to study in France. And you're going to ask me how could they afford it. They found scholarships and helps.

[19:25]

LZ: How long were they in France then? Was it a semester?

HP: Eight months. We left at New—on New Year's, the day after New Year's. We spent an interim in Paris. I spent it with them, with the students in a hotel, to get them accustomed to living in France. I did not nanny them. I was against these programs that sent a professor with them in France. I was only there one month in January. They were given a daily allowance. They had to find their own food. And every day, we had seminars in the morning, seminars in theater and in culture. And I hired French professors. I did not bring any assistants from Macalester. And I had a program of hiring French students from the Sorbonne, from the University of Paris, who would meet in little groups of three with our students to take them around, they could do what they want, I couldn't care less. I gave them, I gave each one of these French students, I paid them a little money, you know, a little, just a little. A few pennies to take them around the city, and take them to discos maybe, if they want. The things that I didn't do, that I wasn't interested and able to do. And so they had direct—sometimes these students would invite them to their homes. And so we had a very rich month of January. Then I took them to Avignon or Toulon, whether they were humanity students, or economics, law, preschool students. And there they went to courses in the French universities under the supervision of French people. There was a little society there that took care of them.

LZ: So is that traditionally, then, how you spent your January term at Macalester? Instead of staying on campus and teaching your course, you were—

HP: Twenty-five years I was in Paris. We went to the theater, we saw the great plays of the day, we took excursions, we went to Versailles, we went to the Loire Valley, to visit the castle, we went to Chartres, we went to Saint-Denis. You know. But I let the students discover Paris on their own, with their French student friends. They were—I was very pleased with that interim. And I was very, very sorry when that was canceled. I thought Macalester shouldn't have... But they found other things to do, I guess.

[22:39]

LZ: Were there other programs at that time that established study-abroad?

HP: Oh yes! Oh yes. There was an arts program, a German program, a Spanish program. They all took ours as a model and they even established a study-abroad program. The Germans had a program in Vienna. And the Spanish, I don't know what they had. And, everybody, every department, language department, took their—and some of the other departments, I think, made trips abroad also.

LZ: So you said when you left, that that program was, I guess just closed—

HP: When I left, the program was dropped. I use a generous word, was dropped, because quote—now you can quote me—and I will not deny, it was too much work. I didn't get any extra class relief for it. It was on top of my chairmanship. Now, the other thing that I am very proud of—well I use a word that I hate, proud. Another program that I started was the French house. We were the first one to have a language house and promptly after, there was a Spanish

house, a Russian house for a few years, a German house. And we rented a house, no we didn't rent it, it was part of the Macalester high wings. We had a French house. It was so wonderful. And I brought, in that—of that also I am extremely pleased—I brought two students from Avignon, France to be in charge of the French house. And the French house, we had speakers there, we had programs at the French house. Really, the French house is one of the things that many, many French students and graduates remember. Because they all tried to be in the French house, at least for one semester, because French was required there. Not a word of English was spoken in the French house.

LZ: So the house, then primarily, is for majors, French majors?

HP: Not necessary majors, but advanced students, students who could lead a conversation in French. We had a lot of double majors. That was one of the things that saved us in our number of majors, you know. They were double majors in science. One of my majors is now one of the leading surgeons at Abbott Northwestern. He was a, I'm not going to say his name because I'm invading his privacy. He was a French-biology major, and—but if he hears this thing, he'll recognize himself. I'm still in relation with him. And history-French, political science-French. It was wonderful. The number of double majors, or double majors of German-French. Not so many of language double majors but other departments.

[26:24]

LZ: We had—we talked briefly about the women studies program, but I also came across something called the Women's Career Symposium? I imagine that was probably earlier on in

your—?

HP: Now, I didn't do much about that. I was more interested in the teaching.

LZ: We could probably if you—did you want to talk about—well I guess we already talked about Vietnam War, and how—

HP: About something else? Let me see here. I have marked a couple of other things. What issues or events did students regard as significant in your last few years of teaching at Macalester? Well when I arrived at Macalester in the sixt—in '61, the women students were interested, at the end of their studies, in getting married and having a family. They were happy if they had that little ring on their finger. And when I left, the women were all interested in seeking jobs. That was a wonderful evolution. The students, they thought—and I had students all over the country, in jobs everywhere. They continued to graduate schools. A lot continued to graduate school. A lot went into teaching because you know, what can you do with French? You see? And I'm in touch with many of them around the country who have lovely positions. And that to me, was the greatest and most significant change in the women students at Macalester from '61 to the '70s and the '80s.

LZ: Was the ratio of women and men students pretty much the same throughout or...?

HP: No. It was mostly women, mostly women majors. Though we tried! We tried to attract men. But it was mainly German attracted men. Spanish I think it was a mixture of both.

[28:48]

LZ: How then did you decide that you wanted to teach at the college level? Seeing as...

HP: Oh yes. I was *scared* by high school students! I wouldn't have taught high school [noises]. I was scared! I was—and when my, my own children, I was so scared I said, “Oh when they're high school students, I'm not going to have any control of them!” I was really scared by high school students. I always wanted to teach. And when I came to this country, in 1958, I think, after the war, I went directly to a college, to the College of Idaho, which was a Presbyterian college like Macalester. Macalester was a Presbyterian college, and it had a marvelous chaplain, two marvelous chaplains. I don't know if it still has a chaplain. Maybe it has dissolved its ties with the Presbyterian Church, but when I came, it was a Presbyterian college, as was the first college that I taught in, the College of Idaho, in Idaho. I was the only member of the French Department, I remember. And I just had a master's degree. Then I came to Minnesota, prepared my doctorate. And when I had my doctorate, I applied to Macalester.

[30:21]

LZ: Did most professors then at that time have a doctorate, was that...?

HP: No. But they, if they didn't have it, they worked on it, because they were told, “Get your doctorate, or move out!” So a lot of my colleagues in the English Department and in the French Department got their doctorate.

LZ: Was that basically needed then to be tenured?

HP: Oh. We had a dean, Garvin, who said, “No Ph.D., no tenure.”

LZ: In what year did you receive—did you receive tenure pretty soon after coming to Mac?

HP: No, I did not. I was, in my opinion, discriminated against as a woman. They waited a long time. Then there was a change in the deanship for me to be, to be tenured.

LZ: Um-hm. Was that true of most other women faculty at that time?

HP: Yes. I believe most of the faculty in the French Department, except for the chair, were not Ph.D.’s, were masters. And then when they got their Ph.D., if they didn’t get tenure, then they went elsewhere. They went to one of the other five colleges, who received them with open arms.

LZ: Um-hm. Was personal publication or I guess—

HP: Yes.

LZ: Was that a big part of...

HP: Yes. Oh, absolutely! I can remember I was told, “No publications, no tenure.” So I published, I published articles in the French Review. And I organized a lot of workshops for

my—I was so interested in teaching, you know. They didn't—they seemed to think that they should publish, that's the best thing you can do. For me it was teaching. But I published articles. And then the year I retired, I published my book, *The Existential Woman*, at Peter Lang's, which is a very, very prominent but—and then what I did also, I translated a lot of books. I must have translated about, oh, six or seven books on the drug situation. I have a big list of books that I translated. I was very pleased with that. I translated either. If they were written in French, I would translate them into English. If they were written in English, I would translate them into French.

[33:18]

LZ: When you say the drug situation, what are you referring to?

HP: Well, my brother was professor of medicine at Columbia University and at New York University. Studied cannabis—marijuana—and cocaine, and wrote books on those. And I translated them. If he wrote them in French, he was French like me, I'm French you know. I was French. I was born Egyptian. I was—I became French when my father died, and my mother was French. And then when I came here and married an American, I was naturalized.

So I've had three nationalities. And my next nationality is Jupiter or Mars or the moon.

[laughter] I've had it. So what was your question again?

LZ: I was just curious what the topics were.

HP: On drugs. Yeah. Drugs. I translated a lot of my brother's books on drugs, on cocaine,

marijuana, cannabis. And I translated a book that he wrote also on the resistance called *Network to Freedom*, a wonderful, wonderful book. So I was very involved in publication, but my first love was teaching. Was teaching really. I think that's what, what faculty are for. And it's a shame that some faculty, egged on by the administration, have neglected teaching for books. Sometimes, they've done both, and cheers to them.

[35:09]

LZ: Do you feel that faculty have progressively gotten more focused on publication than...?

HP: I don't know. I'm out of touch, you know. I left in the early '80s, and I don't know what the faculty is like now. I have no idea. I think that there's more affectability, I think. That teaching is—but teaching was not really recognized. My teaching was recognized by the French Government! [laughs] Can you imagine? Yeah. I think I'm out of touch really with the administration at Macalester. I don't have any friends in the administration. I have friends still in the faculty, but not in the administration.

[36:02]

LZ: Kind of on that same vein and the administration, if we could talk about maybe who was president when you were hired, and maybe presidents that —

HP: When I was hired, the president was Harvey Rice.

LZ: Oh, okay.

HP: He was well known, Harvey Rice [laughs] because he was a very—how can I say? I respect Harvey Rice, but he was a very soulful president. And he courted money for Macalester! So he would, you know he, oh, he was wonderful! And there were lovely receptions at the president's house. You know, there were, there were lunches and teas, and oh, it was just wonderful! I think Macalester should be also a little bit closer to its professor emeriti. Until the last few years, we had a yearly luncheon, just the emeriti, at the alumni house. And in the last years, it was dropped. It was one of my *favorite* activities. I would meet all my old, all my old friends, and it was the only way I could stay in touch with them, an annual dinner for the emeriti. Maybe you can put that in my interview, and ask the new president to reestablish it. I—after Harvey Rice, I knew all the presidents, and particularly John B. Davis, Jr., who was a star. He had star quality. I'm still in touch with him. What a wonderful person. He stayed there ten years. He's still in... You've interviewed him?

LZ: Yeah, we interviewed him.

HP: Oh! What a great person he was! What a...

[38:10]

LZ: Do you have any memories of the time when Arthur Flemming would have been president? He was after Harvey Rice, I think.

HP: Arthur Flemming was a person who was very harmful to Macalester. He wanted to build

up an enormous administration! And never mind the faculty, those teachers there. And during his stay, he built up an *enormous* administration, and all of the money went for salaries! And I don't think—he came from the Eisenhower Government. He was a director of health, eh? I didn't think he knew a thing about, about private colleges. And so I, I distanced myself from the Flemming years. I built up my depart—ah, the French Department. I say my, which is very unfair, because it was as much the department of the others as it was mine.

[39:23]

LZ: Was it hard to build up the French Department with lack of kind of funds? And I know the college had some financial difficulties.

HP: Well, they would tell us, “Offer that courses! And see who comes.” And to their greatest surprise, students would come! I can remember when I arrived at Macalester with the beloved Sundheim, Borghild Sundheim, I said, “I want to teach a course in French civilization.” “Tell me, who's going to come?” I said, “Let's try it.” Thirty-five students. Everybody wanted to learn about—it was an advanced course. You had to have already had—because once they had beginning and intermediate, there was no place to go! So that's how I built this class. And I was given permission by my department head and by the dean, of course, to offer them and see who would come.

LZ: Um-hm.

HP: Okay!

LZ: So before you started those courses, was it mainly language-type courses?

HP: So the courses that I added were literature courses. And I managed to have—oh it was wonderful. And students would come. I added—I managed to have a course for each, for each century. And I can still remember when I told Borghild, “Borghild, I would like to teach a course on twentieth century,” because that was my, my area. She said, “Nobody will come.” I said, “Let’s try it.” And we had five students and that was the minimum for a class. And then it grew and grew. It was wonderful. I can’t tell you how good Macalester has been to me.

[41:23]

LZ: So what is—you were saying that they’ve done away with kind of the emeritus dinners. Do you have any sort of —

HP: With what?

LZ: Do you have any sort of relationship to Macalester today, in terms of —?

HP: I have some—I have some friends. But I don’t—I’m not a doer, you see. What Macalester does—my relations with my colleagues are more personal, friendships. And so many of my dear friends have died. John Bernstein, who was such a terrific guy, in the English Department, died. Karl Sandberg, head of the French Department died. I have had some deaths. Evelyn Albinson in the German Department died. It’s so sad, you know. But that’s the way the earth goes, I

guess.

[42:24]

LZ: Something I thought of, was the French Department always in the same building? And, I guess, where was—where was the French Department?

HP: The French Department was in the humanities building. It was always—you know, at first we were in the, we were in the, in the administrative building, you know. Old Main, it was called. And we're up on the third floor. It was, [laughs] it was so terrible, you know. And then they built the humanities building, and there was a whole language department. And... And a lab. That's the other thing that I am responsible for. The language lab. And I pushed that with *everything* I had! Everything I had! And the language lab, under the direction of Tom Browne—you have to really—is he still there?

LZ: He just retired.

HP: He just retired. Tom Browne was fabulous! Tom Browne would do everything I asked him! He put whole programs on tapes. Oh, he put the whole Art in France, the School of Paris, L'École de Paris, he put that whole thing on tapes. He was wonderful! And the language lab, under his direction, took off!

LZ: How did you come up with kind of these models for the lab and the language house and the study-abroad program? Is that anything that you had seen elsewhere that you had been or was

that...?

HP: I told you, I was a born teacher. [laughter] Those things, they came to me as indispensable to all the French people—had no French house. I knew there was a French house in New York at Columbia University, but why, why not Macalester? Huh? I always thought, why not Macalester?

[44:52]

LZ: So you retired in the 1980s, and what have you been doing since then?

HP: Since I retired, I am doing a lot of volunteer work. I am doing volunteer work with the French Alliance. Le Alliance Française de Villes Jumelles. Le Alliance Française de Minneapolis et St. Paul. There, I am on the board. I am a life board member. And I meet with the board every month. Then, I am head of the library, and we have a library of five thousand books—the largest library after the university and colleges, the largest French library. I'm in charge of that. That takes me several hours every week. And I'm in—I have a book club. And I have a conversation group that meets at the institute every Tuesday. So I am very active in volunteer work.

[46:04]

LZ: Um-hm. Do you get back to France much, or...?

HP: Every year. I die if I don't go to France. This year I couldn't go, because the dollar is so

low and the euro is so strong. I couldn't afford it. It's the first year in maybe thirty years, and I am heart broken, but next year nothing is going to pull me back. I've started to save. But the euro is so strong, and the dollar, well, I am not going to say anything political, but as long as we spend trillions at war, the dollar is not going to be a strong currency. And education will not flourish.

[47:01]

LZ: Before, I know you wanted to save speaking about your students towards the end, is there anything that you want to talk about before we move to that that I haven't covered in my questions?

HP: Whatever you want to know. [laughter] My life is an open book. I say that to my children. My life is everything I do. I—and I meet with, with people on a one-to-one basis, just for an hour of talk, to talk French with them. A lot of people want to talk French. You have no idea because France—what really hurts me a lot is the way France has been treated in the last few years. Ever since France came against the involvement of the United States in Iraq in the Iraq War, because Jacques Chirac opposed the war. He has been—France has been, you know, downgraded in this country. England, of course, because of Tony Blair, who supported the war, was the big friend. So that has made me very unhappy to see how France, you know, how French is, French is less taught in the schools. St. Louis Park closed their French program in the public schools. That's very sad. French is such a *beautiful* language. It has such a beautiful literature. And France is such a lovely country. Americans go to France! They buy houses in France.

[48:58]

LZ: Was the French Department still very strong when you left Macalester?

HP: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. We have the French depart—we had everything, but then they chopped off the study-abroad program. And I think now they have a—the head of the department, Professor Francoise Denis, is an extremely outstanding person. And I think that under her direction, the French Department is going to hold her—its own. She is a scholar! She has published. And she is an open mind.

LZ: So do you have contact with the French Department in that way? Through...

HP: Sure. Sure. Sure. Yes. I have contact with the French Department. Not very much, of course, because there have been new people hired. Some very fine people have been hired, but I don't know them personally. I only know the persons that I knew before I left.

LZ: Do you feel that Macalester could do more to draw retired faculty back to campus, or utilize—

HP: Yes. Yes. Yes. For instance, the first years that I retired, I was asked to come and give a lecture on my specialty, for it's on the existential woman. Nobody has ever contacted me. So I'm ready to give a lecture on that aspect of France, if asked. For the, for the French students, I'd love to give a talk to the French students on existential literature, which was my, my specialty,

my research.

[50:56]

LZ: Well, would you like to talk about kind of your relationships with your students, and maybe some that stand out in your mind?

HP: My students have always been a very vital part of my life. I owned a very big house on Lake of the Isles. I would ask *everyone* of my advanced classes to come at the end of the course for a meal at my house. All of my advanced classes came to my house. And then, of course, all of my majors, I invited them to come to my house, and I invited them to eat! And my assistants were very close to me. They came and they had meals at my house. And I had, of course, foreign students. I was foster to two students who spent the vacation in my house when Macalester was closed. I had a third floor that was used by a student, Miltos Miltiadou, from Cyprus, whom I still, I still have—so my students were part of my life, you see, part of my eating and my meals and my afternoon. And, when they graduated, I stayed in touch with quite a few of them, and I considered that now I have a sort of a ring. I don't want to use the word crown, but a sort of a ring of former students that I see. They have become parents, and some of them grandparents, which makes me a great-grandmother. Isn't that something? When my students became, became grandmothers, I said, well, I am a great-grandmother. I have these students in California, in Michigan, in the Twin Cities. I see them regularly. In Arkansas, in Wyoming. We exchange letters at Christmas. And when they come to the Twin Cities, I see them. And we're very close. They're wonderful people. I think teaching is rewarded, as a profession, by that. It's one of the rewards of teaching because teaching is rough. Teaching is a rough, is a

rough profession. If you want to become a teacher, watch out because you'll have to spend a lot of—you'll have to burn a lot of midnight candles. But the reward of having friends for life...

[54:23]

LZ: Well on a closing, do you have a kind of favorite memory or kind of a little story about Macalester that comes to mind when you think of your times here?

HP: You know, I put something there. I can't remember what, what I had put here. Oh, I think one of my favorite memories are the symposiums that I organized. And two in particular, I organized in—I can't remember what the date was. A symposium on Islam. Because I am from Egypt, you see, though I am a, I am a Protestant. But I thought that that was something that students had to learn about because it wasn't very—it was very present in American life. We are pretty much self-centered. So I organized a symposium on a national basis and I had people come from all over the country for this. It lasted a whole week. And I had professors from Columbia University too, for a seminar on Islam-French literature. I had an artist come to have a seminar on Islamic art. You know, Islamic art is very interesting because they're not allowed to reproduce the person, so they are entirely graphic. And he gave a seminar in the Art Department. And I had all of the departments, Political Science, Religion. I had a professor of religion from Temple University, which is, which has a large Islamic department, come and teach a course on the Qur'an. That was one of my highlights at Macalester. And then, the other one was a—also a symposium on existentialism. I had specialists on existentialism from all over the country. The biographer of Jean-Paul Sartre from St. Louis, from St. Louis, Missouri came to lecture. And a person, an editor of the works of Sartre from the West Coast, I think Berkeley, came. I mean it

was a nation-wide... So those are the highlights. Plus, I have so many of them.

LZ: Were those more towards the beginning of your career or towards the later—

HP: Always.

LZ: Always, okay.

[57:18]

HP: The end of my career, I always had... I was on—I was—I've presented papers at MLA, you know, the association of modern languages. Those were nice highlights, especially—I would take students with me because I gave quite often courses on French art. I was very interested in contemporary French art. There are beautiful French artists. And there's the School of Paris, from Picasso to the current, the current painters and sculptors. And I had prepared a whole collection of slides on that. And I gave, and I gave lectures at the MLA, the Minneapolis Language Association. Those were things that I loved.

LZ: Well, we've covered all of the things that I've written down. And is there anything else that we should talk about?

HP: Nope. Not that I can think of that would interest anybody. [laughter]

LZ: Well, thank you. This was very nice—

HP: Yeah, well—

LZ: —to hear about your speech.

HP: I was delighted, and I was—and I'm flattered and honored to be asked this. Goodbye,
Macalester.