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Interview with Gerald Weiss, Professor of Psychology

Gerald Weiss

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MACALESTER COLLEGE
Macalester College Archives, DeWitt Wallace Library
Oral History Project

Interview with: **Gerald Weiss**
Professor of Psychology, 1965-2001

Date: **Wednesday, August 8th, 2007, 9:00 a.m.**

Place: Macalester College DeWitt Wallace Library, Harmon Room
Interviewer: Laura Zeccardi, Class of 2007

Interview run time: 1:57:06 minutes

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Interview with Gerald Weiss

Laura Zeccardi, Interviewer

**August 8th, 2007
Macalester College
DeWitt Wallace Library
Harmon Room**

[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, August 8th, 2007, and I am interviewing Gerald Weiss, Professor of Psychology, in the Harmon Room in the DeWitt Wallace Library. First, I'd just like to have you state your name, and where you're originally from, and then what year you came to Macalester.

GW: I'll just give you, you want a brief biography, essentially?

LZ: Yeah, that would be great.

GW: Okay. Well, my name is Gerald Weiss, with a "G," and—but ever since childhood, beyond memory, I was called Jerry, with a "J." And the, so—and I don't know why. I mean... And there were many Jerrys on Macalester campus. Jerry Reedy, Jerry Rudquist, and some of them spelled their names slightly differently, but we—there were so many, we thought we would form a Jerry Club once [laughter]. And I was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1930, so I'm quite old. And I went to school, graduate school, at the University of Iowa, and I came here in 1965. And until my retirement in 2001. And I enjoyed my time here, overall, and I enjoyed my life in

general. And I feel a great continuity between what I was first aware of as a child, and becoming a professor at Macalester, and then after retirement I felt my interests were the same and continue. I keep a journal which I write in—I try to write in it every day, and even if I don't, I at least enter the day and the date, so I know it's there. And my daughter got me started on that—Shayna. And she's a graduate of Macalester, too. And she teaches creative writing and things like that at a film school in Chicago. She's married to Chris Connelly, sort of a rock star type guy. And they have a new baby, Angus, and live in Chicago, and she writes a column up there. But she got me started on the journal habit. I've always sort of scrawled things on scraps of paper, and I keep writing, and—and I wonder, sometimes, if I'll write a book before I die, but I don't know, time is running out [laughter]. But I feel like my interests from childhood to the present are continuous, they just—I've always been interested in certain things, and, have pursued selfishly my own view of the world. And I sought for a comprehensive view of the world, and was told early, as I've—I talked to many people who have this feeling that people criticize them. They say, "You're interested in too many things, not in—and you should specialize," I was told. Fortunately, I did specialize, and at the... I was a psychology major, and a philosophy minor at Brooklyn College. And in graduate school, I got a master's degree at the Child Welfare Research Station at the University of Iowa, in experimental child psychology. And I was very fortunate in having an exceptionally good teachers—that is, quite a few exceptionally good teachers. And they made a serious mark on me, I believe.

[04:14]

And I think a lot of what I represent, if I represent anything, is a continuity of certain traditions that come through those teachers that are a living tradition. And when you relate to people about those kinds of issues, you feel like a spark is created. There's some electricity that goes through

that, because there is a considerable amount of tradition that is dead, and some that is vital and alive. And I was very fortunate here to meet people who were parts of traditions that were vital and alive, like Jerry Rudquist the painter, or Don Betts the pianist. And I've felt very close to those people. That's one of the good things that I enjoyed about Macalester is that that there were people like that around, and some very powerful intellects, and interesting, stimulating personalities, and... And frequently, we'd meet very interesting students of all kinds, and they were our kind of junior colleagues, and that was a good thing, so. But I got my—I was out of school for about eight years. About the time of the Hungarian Revolution, I left graduate school, somewhat in disillusion with the educational establishment, and returned to school to get a doctorate in 1965. And then I got a job at Macalester here, in 1965, and remained for the entire time I taught here, thirty-six years. And I have not always enjoyed the policies of the college, or their procedures, and like every social institution, they have great weaknesses. One of the weaknesses is they don't fix the weaknesses or address them properly. One time I heard Wayne Roberts, who is a very interesting man, and who has characteristics of the people I have enjoyed here at Macalester—which is that he's socially minded, and intelligent, and can be helpful [laughs]. And, I heard Wayne give a report about weaknesses and problems, and Macalester administration, and he said...and in the report, he would include things such as that there wasn't enough continuity in certain jobs—they would dismiss somebody, or they would move them out, and someone else would take the position, and you would get this sort of thing—and he made a whole series of recommendations. Immediately after his report was put in the file, and I noticed that people were being shuffled around in exactly the same way as he's talking about [laughter]. It's like, you can hear that but you don't act to improve the situation.

[07:26]

Nevertheless, even though people don't improve the situation, we do kind of muddle along, in the sense that Winston Churchill talks about. So we get through our lives that way, we muddle along and, you know, and survive till we cease to survive, and... And that's what goes on a lot in college and life and businesses, and things like that. So, although I am a critic of the school and of educational practices, as anybody must, if you deal with it or think about it—or one's self, even. There still are, you know, we survive, we live, and on a daily way, and most of our living is quite superficial, and I'm quite content to be mediocre in that way. I love it. I love to drink coffee and look out the window and read a book and not be bothered, like most people. And I've enjoyed a lot of things, and had good experiences. As a result of Macalester, for example, I was able to travel widely. And I thought I would never travel, but I did, and I've been many places in the world I would like to be. I'm very Eurocentric, and my favorite courses were teaching things developed by dead white males, and I loved it. And my favorite course was "History and Systems of Psychology," and I still feel very devoted to the issues that are discussed in that area. Where it impinges on most people is that it's a history of the attempt of people to understand people. And we are very deficient in that. I would say the two great deficiencies in human knowledge which I consider of supreme importance is the knowledge of the human individual, and the knowledge of the society at large. That is, when you deal with larger than individual structures, the social structures, and so forth—so all of the social sciences. And we lack a conception, adequately, of the human individual in the Einsteinian sense; that we have no good factual knowledge about the organization and the processes of the human individual. Just as a matter of straight fact, there's our greatest deficiency in knowledge. I don't see colleges, even like Macalester, devoting much time to even thinking about that, letting alone doing anything about it. And I feel that most people are bought off by provincial concerns, which they think are

the most important things in the world. Like who's going to get elected President of the United States. And we can see where that's gotten us, and... So there's a long way to go. Curiously, lately, with the Internet, and changes in society, there's been a massive amount of information accumulated. You hear new information coming from astronomy, cosmology, and physics and subatomic areas. There's so much knowledge that's pouring in—medical, genetic, biological—and what we've become aware of as our knowledge increases is we get a better feel for what it is we don't know. So in a way, we're sharpening up our conception of our ignorance of the universe, of many questions that are important about the world, in the larger sense of “the world.” But I really don't see people devoting their attention to that. They're bought off by their local concerns, which is understandable in a lot of ways, as we really are animals that are—we have our nose on the ground. And you know, we like to eat junk food, and go to B movies, and two-star.

[12:34]

And these are, I'm not really criticizing these. I'm a person who loves these things, and—but that's what we do, we wallow in that, and try to get away from things that cause us pain and discomfort, and we don't think much about things. I think the great disease of humanity is superficiality. I think it is a disease of the educational system. We, in educational circles, we tend to exaggerate certain issues through rhetoric, and rhetoric takes dominance over substance. And we're devoted to maintaining that. If you try to question that more seriously, you will be silenced or marginalized. Take, for example, this interview. When people are retired from Macalester, they really do retire you. And they, what they really are telling you is, you know, we will show you respect as an elder person. Or, having been here, we'll give you medals, and invite you to dinner, but God forbid we should listen to what you might have to say, or do

anything about it. So listening, even, is an achievement, but if you do anything about it, you're just not going to do it. We hired someone once, coming here, inviting an Australian philosopher to evaluate the college and departments and so forth. And he had, he agreed that he would be willing to evaluate and suggest improvements and things. But he had a requirement that if he made recommendations, they would be instituted. Of course, he wasn't hired, then, you see. So, we listened to him for a while. And he gave a talk, which I think is recorded. The title is the best part of the talk. It's something like "The Unscientific Sciences and The Inhumane Humanities." [laughter] There's a lot of human weakness in the way we operate, so people extol virtues publicly, and exhibit great weaknesses [laughs] of personality and soul when they're dealing with you. And administrations are no different. I never liked the administrations at Macalester, much. At their best, they've sort of gone along, and there was always a disconnect between Macalester's administration and faculty and students, unlike certain other colleges that I've seen. And those were good at times. So, the faculty struck me as having more variability in them, and background, and they had more interesting people among them as a result of that. But there were times when—during bad times, what you find out is that we talk leadership, and we show a dismal record with regard to the leadership. Just as America does in the world today. And you can't expect much from that. What happens is some professor goes off and writes a book and criticizes something, and other people extol it and make use of it, and that's where the good things seem to happen, it's sort of doing an end-run around your system.

[16:20]

The main function of the system—Otto Rank used to maintain that the function of education is to destroy a person's ego and intellect. It's to make you obedient. And we see it in schools when, you know, you ask a class a question, and they just sit there. Now, what's that all about? In the

spontaneous group, they pop up, and they argue, and they're full of, you know, [unclear], you know, questioning, probing, and they're daring. And we've trained them in to sit back and not, you know. And pretty soon you just sit there, eat your lunch, and hope nobody will bother you. And then we learn to study for the test and all that sort of stuff. And we don't really address the serious issues. And it shows up in people's lives, because they then wonder, "What's missing in my life," and... Now, some people do, in spite of it, get something more profound from the college experience. Because they run into the right professor, or the right moment even, sometimes, and they... Or they meet other students who stimulate them to read something, they say, you know, "You ought to read this." And they say, "Is that a textbook?" "No, it's not assigned reading." Or it's recommended, but, you know, something like that, and they do it. So, behind the scenes, it's always at the margins that we have these questions. But we remain good, otherwise, and good means conforming. Also, it means not getting too excited about too many things that... So we—there's a lack of adventure in pursuing serious issues and in solving problems. I think a lack of emphasis on *system*. So, it's not so much that you know, we should just stress facts. But facts are very significant, because the system gives you facts, too, but what you might call higher artifacts, that then you have to struggle with how to apply that to real problems that you have. But most people, schools—look at the questions that you gave me to consider. If you look at them, one of the things you become aware of is this: that the world is a very complicated place. People in the universe are very insignificant. But the questions are all bound up with the people. Very anthropocentric. And sociocentric. And even *there*, in a very narrow way, they're not really big questions. It's not that the issues aren't important or big; it's that, the concern there is that you keep cutting it down, narrowing it, and talking as if it's more and more important.

[19:31]

So the importance is announced as inverse to the, you know [laughs]. Actually what you're doing is understanding. How much we understand ourselves, our lives, our circumstances. Finding purpose in life. And it runs pretty shallow with us, we're easily knocked over. And the people don't get on top of their circumstances very much, they're driven by them. Very often by the—our problems reside right there. We don't really, we don't know how, even, to take the time out. I once did a little mini-collection of quotes about education. I handed it out to my colleagues as a treat, proper name for this sort of thing. And a colleague, who I admired very much, said, "That's very good, those quotes," he said, "but if I listen to what you said, I would have to stop teaching what I'm teaching, stop doing what I'm doing, and have to almost renegotiate from the bottom." And it's hard to do that, so—it's easy to start going along with the system, so to speak. The system always pays attention to the wrong [unclear]. You know, we're always asking questions, what is salaries, students, class size, you know. They don't ask you things like, is that student miserable or happy? Or is the teacher happy? They're not. And they're not in part because they're not addressing that issue of their own happiness and concern, they aren't really confronting it, they've learned to look away from these problems. And so it seems to me there's much to be desired there. But periodically they say, "Let's change the requirements." And what courses are more basic. And what you find is they're so shallow in their conception of what is basic, they're not really looking into—the curriculum committee does not examine the curriculum. I learned that early on, as a member of the curriculum committee. They do not look in the courses. If you do, you raise a *firestorm*. People think you're invading their territory, going to tell them what textbooks to use. And they feel naked and exposed, so they hide behind it, you know. What's the requirement for a teacher? Pick a textbook. This is

crazy, you know, I'd say, "Shouldn't we look inside the book?" Now books are mostly elaborate picture magazines now anyway; we even have a history of it, you can look into that, find out when that was done by the publishing industry and how they convinced colleges to do that.

[22:41]

So it's kind of like we can function in these situations without understanding we're part of the process, but we haven't gotten on top of things that we could—that we could address. And to me, one of the most important things about a student is their involvement. And one of the jobs of the teacher is to create an involvement, or give an opportunity for involvement where a student is hungry for something, but they don't know exactly what. But I didn't see attention being paid to that much. We'd rather them much more sit, and they're scoring a multiple choice exam, or how they write that essay. This significance of a problem in a student writing an essay is inversely related to what gets graded and corrected, in large part. So it's easier for a grader to correct a single word that is misspelled. That's the easiest thing. To then focus on a term and say, "This is the wrong word," or, "That doesn't mean that," is also—and if you grade them in terms of the significance... For example, say the person uses unacceptable grammar, but is making what looks like a very serious point, or moving toward, that gets overlooked, and it's harder to deal with that point. That requires too much time, you'd need sixty graders for one student. So, the situation wears people down, and they grade the things that are more easy to match. So a lot of what goes on in college, and students' lives and all that, is a kind of daily sort of routine and manageability that people like to stay within. They don't like people who rock the boat very much, for whatever reasons, whether it's radical ideologies, or questioning the, exactly the quality control of what's going on. And we don't know how to do that very well. People don't know how to do even what they know is right. We don't even know how to give money to

people who don't have it. And we don't—we're just not good at it. And problem solving doesn't happen. It does happen, and it goes on, but let's say in socially selected areas, where this is the way you do it and that's what goes on. So basically, you keep your head down and work your corner, so to speak. And I feel like everywhere you go there are very nice people, and you run into some students who are very nice, and some teachers who are very nice, and they get together over a problem, work very well on it, and you see those little enclaves and that sometimes gives you hope for things. And well, that's good.

[26:10]

You know, just now, the bridge collapsed, on 35W. I was on that bridge, by the way, four hours before it collapsed, with a truckload of stuff. I have a job now helping people in construction, I'm a building manager for Le Parisien, the building that's going up on Lyndale Avenue. And well, when the bridge collapsed, I was riding along in my pickup truck, which belongs to the company actually, and I turned on PBS, and it announced about the bridge. I wasn't two, three minutes into it when my cell phone rang. It was a student from out east I had formerly; he said, "Are you okay?" He had heard the news the same time I had. [Laughs] So, in a certain way the world's connected. In a beautiful way. Anyway, I've, I feel like I've enjoyed Macalester, because I like the library, for one thing. And I used to notice that when I went here, I once made a list of the books I consider *the* most important books. You know they have that—do they still have that little library of *the* most important books? Like a sub-library of, I don't know, a thousand titles or something?

LZ: I don't know.

GW: They used to have that—

LZ: Okay.

GW: They'd say, let's pick out—they'd have different people recommend it. And it's amazing, even there, what kind of trash shows up. The people do not have a real sense of what is profound or influential or significant. And that's what educational circles should deal with, they should talk about—I don't know, anyway. I used to notice that some of the books I considered *the*, you know, seminal works of something, I'd come in and I'd find them on the shelf, and no one checked them out—and those days, you could see who checked them out because they had stamps in them. And you'd see very few check outs, and they were brought back very quickly, and they had dust on them. [laughs] And during sales they'd get rid of them, and for thirty cents you could buy, you know, something really profound. [laughs] It's really amazing how that works. So. I think the entire enterprise of education is very good, and important, and essential. Without it, society doesn't function.

[28:47]

There is a passage that a friend of mine, Larry Young, called to my attention, I think the second volume possibly of Musil's novel, *The Man Without Qualities*. And it goes something like this: he says, you notice that corporations, banks, large institutions, businesses give money to parts of the culture that need it. Ballet companies, opera companies, research institutes. They give them money, colleges and universities, because they want them to know these activities are important. So but you notice also that all these places, opera houses, and universities, and they're always—research facilities—they're always short of money. They're always lacking funds for things that

need doing. And he said, that's because these other institutions want them to know yes, they're important but they're not that important. [laughter] See? So you get that ambivalence in the culture that's so widespread, we're willing to support to a certain extent, you know. A lot of our education is showbiz. And if you subtract out the show business aspect of things and go down to the serious matters of the disciplines, of which I do not think there is enough, it's almost—our system is kind of like a factory system. If you ask where did Beethoven and Mozart come from, I would say, you put people in a music school and you're guaranteed not to get a Mozart or Beethoven. If you look at Einstein, if you read this recent biography on him, which is very good, our physics departments are not turning out people like that very much. People who are turned out that way are not—the school system itself is guaranteed not to turn out that kind of person. And we're not asking why. So that's what we have to start, we have to become self—the problem is, self evaluation, we're very much a part of the culture, and our culture solves problems by sending in the army, or punishment. During—my son Adam is eighteen, and I was involved with a horrendous divorce, and difficulty over, you know, visitation, all that sort of thing, and one of the investigators said to me, “Well, how do you discipline him?” And I said, “I don't. Matter of fact, I'm not even sure what you mean.” I said, “There's no—you know,” I said, “problems arise, we talk it over.” But somehow, you know, we have these ideas that you should punish people. Punishment is very big in American thinking, and even evaluation and criticism is associated with that. We're very sensitive. We're much more concerned with saying the right thing and not offending somebody than we are with the substance of the issue. So we can get off the subject very quickly by saying, “You're not speaking politely to me,” or something like that. I used to tell my students it was okay to interrupt me. [laughter] I said I would interrupt *them*, and I expected them to forgive me. I said I'll do the same for you, if you

interrupt me, it's okay. It's a skirmish, so you get over it, get on with what needs doing, but...too often, "getting on with it" is avoiding the problem too. Maybe we shouldn't get on with it, we should stop and digress.

[33:26]

LZ: When you came to Macalester in 1965, did you know anything about the college—

GW: Hardly anything—

LZ: —beforehand? Okay.

GW: Hardly anything. In graduate school, I had a friend, Kenneth Goodrich, and he said he was going to get a job here. He applied, and he would probably be accepted. At the University of Iowa—we were at the University of Iowa. And he said that they needed a developmental psychologist, I had some developmental, he said, "Would you be willing to come along and be considered for the job? I recommended you." And I said sure. So, basically, that year they bought three psychologists, one very prominent, they paid him a huge salary, and Ken, who they paid a big salary, and they got me for nothing, you know, I was sort of an add-on. So that was okay. But when I came, I was interviewed by Walter Mink in the psychology department, and Ray Johnson was also there. So those are two guys I think of with warm feelings; both deceased. Ray Johnson has, near the flag, they have those little plaques around, tiny little ones—read Ray Johnson's. It's the best one there. For certain reasons. It breaks out, that one. And I liked these people. Walt interviewed me, showed me around, and there was a snowstorm that year. A

snowstorm like we won't get with climate change the way it is now. We have a hundred—we didn't have a hundred degree temperatures for several days running. And we had snowstorms, and the Mississippi had flooded, and there were jokes about people in Minneapolis and St. Paul having water in basement. There were tornadoes coming through and ripping the roofs off their houses, and the snowstorm. And you know I couldn't get through on the phone, and people said, "Are you sure you want to go there and take a job there?" [laughter] Well, the reason I came was because of Walt Mink and Ken Goodrich. Ken was coming with me to Macalester, and Walt Mink was here, and what struck me about them is they were the best types of humanity there are; namely, they had enormous intelligence. They were so bright—I think Walter's probably the second brightest person I ever met in my life. And at the same time, he was *extremely* nice and a very good person, in a deep sense of the word good, and not punitive. And so, I thought to myself, I want to come to a place where there are people like this.

[36:19]

LZ: Did you know that you were going to go into teaching? Because it seems like—

GW: Well, I...I had it in me way back, because I talked easily. And so growing up in Brooklyn, I'd read books and tell people, so they wouldn't fight with me. I'd tell them stories and distract them. They liked them. And so, I kind of backed into teaching as I was pursuing certain kinds of knowledge and subjects—I tried to understand things. And when you try to do that, you don't do your homework. You read other books. If I did well in school, it was because it overlapped what I was reading, and if I did poorly, it was because it didn't. And the test wasn't on that stuff, but I—someone said to me once, "How do you have time to read all that stuff?" And I said,

“Well what else is there time for?” See, they were doing their homework and I wasn’t. So I had a C average in high school, but I took tests at Brooklyn College, and I did extremely well on the tests, because a lot of the tests showed—were things I had read. So I did extremely well, and they created, they combined your average of the test scores with your high school scores, high school average. So it raised me, and I was able to get in. But, and that’s—so, I always associated knowledge and learning as not being affiliated with the school. The school was there and you could learn it, but you really learned, it was *your* business, learning. It was between you and your friends and a library. It had nothing to do with the schools anymore than a religion has anything to do with churches. There’s a difference, you know. One is going to—you know, if you go, attendance is not what religion is about, or conformity to that. It’s what’s in your heart, it has nothing to do with—and the same thing with education. It has nothing to do with going to school. You’re not a student because you have a card that says you’re a student, you’re a student because you’re learning something. So the teacher could be a student, and the student could be not. You know, he’s there because his father wants him to do that, or something, and it’s, you know... Schools respond to societies very much, and I don’t really see the school as shaping the society, in the way that school representatives profess. I don’t see leadership coming out of the schools. I see followership coming out of the schools. Politicians coming out of the schools. People who say the right things coming out of schools, and that is not what the world is about. And it’s—to educate the populace really means to oppose them in certain ways, and to overcome the worst aspects of ourselves and them. To improve. Basically, everyone is where they are. So you, that’s where you start. And if you don’t start there and you want them to be somewhere else—people who say, you know, “How are the students at Macalester?” What are they talking about? What’s the difference who the students are? You take them where they are, and

wherever they are, you know, different students have different problems. One is rich, and he writes beautiful essays, and he can do calculus, but why? What does he say in his essays? We've had students from disadvantaged backgrounds who wrote broken English, and they wrote passionate, interesting essays. So, somehow, people said, "We have better students now, they write a better essay," but they were boring. And they were empty, devoid of life. So, you know, it's a mix. We have to start from where we are and improve the game. We don't do that very well. Education is very primitive business.

[40:34]

LZ: What has been, I guess, your experience with students overall at Macalester, and just—

GW: Well, I regarded students as junior colleagues. And I like the idea of the senior honors theses, for example, and I had quite a few who did that. And I used to try to interest them early on. I found, when students got interested—and the idea of the project had to come from within them, though they might pick it up. I had a student who came to me and said, Chris Babbit, he said...I said that Piaget's child psychology system is based on adopting his conception of logic—and he wrote a logic book—as the basis for the child's mind. But the book was never translated into English, so they keep translating his stuff, but this had never been translated into English, and he was doing it. So he came to my office and he said, "I want to translate this book." And I said, "Well," you know. He was in developmental psychology class with Mink, there. And he, I said, "Do you have any knowledge of French?" He said, "Well, I took a course or two, not doing very well in it." "Okay, so you don't know French. So you have to learn French to do it." He said, "Yep." And I said, "And you're developmental psychology, you don't really know Piaget

very well.” And I said, “Then there are translation problems, and also there’s the issue of logic.” And I said, “Strangely enough, in logic and philosophy, you don’t really start from zero. You start from minus numbers. When you learn a lot, you arrive on the ground. So you have to actually go somewhere, achieve”... So, I said, “You have no real—but this captures your imagination.” So I said, “Okay, we’ll do it.” See, because to me that was important. He wanted to do it, he saw its importance. Well, it turned out that he had a lot of other problems, including smoking marijuana. And he even dropped out of school. And he tried for several weeks and months and produced one or two sentences. And he dropped out of school, and then he sent me a card. He said, “I haven’t forgotten.” See? That’s what it’s really all about. Well, he came back to school and he really started to work on it. Well, for a senior honors thesis, he produced a translation of about half the book. That’s the only available source that I know of, in English, of Piaget’s logic book. And it was a work of love. And Helene Peters, who was in the French Department, said, “Is this a good translation? No. But if you read it, you would know what Piaget said. In addition, when he starts off, there’s a big gap between him and the text, and as he’s moving through, he’s getting closer and closer.” So that to me, is—and he was motivated to do that. He turned his life around, and went off and became a big child therapist, and also, you know, I think he became head of the whole system in Wisconsin that delivered child services, you know. So, I thought that was wonderful.

[44:04]

Now, the requirements at that time for doing a senior honors thesis were nothing. You had to have an interest, and apply for it, and they would let you do it. Now the notion was, if you had a committee, the committee could say, “It’s unacceptable, so we can’t accept it,” or, “It was good,” or, “It was exceptional,” so you’d get highest honors. Then, the administrators got a hold of it,

and it was turned over to people who said, “You have to have a certain average.” Chris Babbitt had a low average. He did well later, but... So he would never have qualified to do that, once they had that system in place. So I said, why do that? Why not let anyone who wants to do it, do it? And if they don’t succeed, many would quit because they couldn’t turn out the product—so you had to write a lot, I mean, it was a thick thing he wrote. And so, and that was a big requirement for my students, I said, “Write more.” And I said, “I don’t care whether it’s good or bad, you keep writing more.” [laughter] Well, they got better. They would say to me, “Well, I said this, and this is obviously wrong, but you didn’t correct it.” I said, “You know now—you’re correcting it now, aren’t you?” They said, “Yeah.” I said, “We’ll have to just let you go and keep going, and you’ll come around to fixing it yourself, won’t you?” So, the thing is to get the person into the thing, into the subject. And I had one student approach me, he was a Buddhist monk, and he wanted to write about Buddhism, and he wanted to write about it sociologically, theologically, psychologically, and he had ideas about it. And his average was extremely low. They refused to accept him in the honors program. I said to him, “You know, this is a very personal thing,” and he said, “Yes,” and I said, “We’re going to do it anyway. It doesn’t have to be a senior honors thesis, we’ll just do it.” So, he did it with me. And he wrote it, and we sent it—when we were done, he said, “I want to send it to the honors committee.” And they said, “Very nice, but we still can’t accept him in the honors program.” Now, he graduated. He was then asked to give talks on this. He gave a talk at Carleton. They paid his way there, paid him like two hundred dollars for each talk or something, gave it to him. Graduate students would come up and say, “Can I use your material in my papers?” And he came back in at Macalester, they would not accept it as a senior honors thesis. He did it anyway. And later he went into graduate schools in, I don’t know, political science, theology I think. And he’s written a couple

of books and many articles, but starting with that work. So he's become a prominent teacher and researcher in that field, but Macalester refused to recognize his—that's bureaucratic nonsense. You see, and we can get caught up in that kind of mentality, or absence of mentality if you wish to call it. We're looking for, again, that conformity. He didn't look nice, academically. You know. This is ridiculous.

[47:48]

LZ: Have there been other instances, and I guess maybe tenure is one thing that comes to my mind, as requirements kind of tighten, it changes the process, or—

GW: With issues like tenure and stuff—well, I never cared about those issues, and I didn't do well as a result. I didn't get raises and I didn't get promotions. But what happened is, early on, it turned out, because—again, because of administrative nonsense, I was, they felt that I deserved a raise, you know, but they said the raise was contingent upon, associated with tenure. So I got the tenure by accident, because they had to give me the raise, they felt at that time. Once that happened, but then they never did anything beyond that, there was... So, I felt—well, if I had published more, if I had written and published more, I think I would have gone along. But some people take care of their professional identification, and they work on that. I have an anti-professionalization attitude, and I have that both with respect to being a teacher and being a psychologist. And because I feel that those aspects of the things are similar to these—they're external issues, you see, but people are very concerned about them first. They may say they're not, or whatever, but they are concerned with salary, they're concerned with tenure, they want protection. Everyone craves safety and that sort of a thing, and so those things become matters

of bitter debate, and Macalester in the past has had some terrible ones over that sort of thing. They've been really bad. I've always felt the Psychology Department was a safe haven, in the midst of all the nonsense going on in the world and in the college, which reflected the larger world. But, again, I don't know, I was fortunate enough in having good teachers, I was fortunate in my own psychological development, and I felt I was achieving something in my own orientation. I was also happy with students I was getting. There were certain students who I related to very well, they related to me very well, and you know, that went very well. And in addition, I was permitted to—because I had tenure, partly—I was permitted to function somewhat independently of the system. I didn't always do the best job for the system, but I always felt, I don't feel the system did the best job for me either, or for anybody, for other people.

[50:52]

So there were people who worked the system very well. And it's a standard joke in things. We know that somebody who is very good, and they're getting moderate rewards—quote, unquote, as the system defines it—and then there are people who are lesser abilities, but very good at working the system, and those people that work the system get the highest salaries, and the biggest promotion. From the very start, when I arrived at Macalester, I saw there was one professor who had his own secretary, and the department didn't, the rest of the department didn't. I saw the—people were saying, “Well, you go to a very rich college, you know, everybody must be wealthy, you must be wealthy.” No way. What I saw was hills and valleys. There were rich people in the college and poor people in the college, you know, it had nothing to do with that. Very bitter disputes, very many of the years during the so-called “bad times,” but I didn't see much to admire in that. There are some very admirable faculty people through that

time, and I felt I really... Wayne Wolsey, I admired a great deal. Wayne—and at first, I started out as a kind of a... I felt he was too conservative and stuffy. But I said to him once, “How can you hold this view here, and this view here?” And he smiled and said to me, “Compartmentalization.” And I thought, “I’m going to like this guy” [laughs]. Well he turned out over a long period of time to be one of my heroes, because he fought the good fight for certain kinds of issues on campus and so forth. There were people with whom I disagreed with politically, who I’ve admired and could work with, and there have been a lot of—but, you know, one thing is good intentions, or a good view of something. In a good intellectual atmosphere, you can have disagreements. You can carry on reasonable discussions with people. I have certain general tenets, informal rules I used to tell my students toward the end. I’d say, “Let’s start off with two principles,” whichever course it was. One is people are irrational. And even rationality is a form of irrationality if you know how to look at it right. And second is language is ambiguous. The third is bullshit makes the world go ‘round. Fourth is people are not important, cosmically speaking. And if you can get those in perspective and argue about those and improve—because, strictly speaking, they all have something wrong with them, because they sort of, in self-referencing fashion refer to each other. But there’s an awful lot of nonsense and pretense. What you see is within the subject, a person may do a magnificent job, but it’s narrow. There’s too much concern for these external things, I think, and people have not learned to manage properly.

[54:34]

One thing that interested me is the MacArthur Awards, the Genius Awards. Now, I don’t know if that’s working out, but I don’t see that it’s any worse than places that require you to fill out forms and... You always feel that when you work for a reward, you’re being victimized along

the way. I used to feel they should hire three people. We should clone. Get two clones for each faculty person you hire. The first one should worry about the subject matter, and the teaching. Just studying and working out—they're teachers. The second does research, and looks, you know... The third is the administrator, fills out the forms and all that. I, one time my chair said that he felt I should get a higher raise, and they said, "Well, he didn't fill out the form." A few years ago I'd written a letter saying I had considered filling out the form as a form of evil. If you have to write down the things you've done during the year that are good, I feel that this is, this is not good. You're creating the wrong kind of person in the faculty, to do this. And the letter was there, and the letter was—but then the next term, it was forgotten, and you start all over again. They send you the letter to... When I first came here, my first—Anne Pick was here; she was moving to the university, she'd taken a job there. She was a good researcher, teacher, interesting person. And Herb Pick, her husband, was also—they were both very well known researchers. And Chuck Torrey was the replacement for them. He was a perception man, which is one of our fields. And she was distraught, she was depressed, and I said, "What's the matter?" She said, "Well, I'm leaving the school." And so she gets a letter—this is the recognition she got. The letter was, "Turn in your keys, you can't leave without turning in your keys." Well, she was very upset, so I went to see Lou Garvin, who was the provost at the time, and he said he was very glad that I came. I said, "I just arrived at the college and I see this person is being treated very badly, you know, made to feel like they're being kicked out." And, you know, so there was a scurrying around, he wrote a very nice letter, and all that sort of thing. In a very short time, I saw that what he did was an exception, and things went back to normal afterwards, and people were still...

[57:33]

When I retired here, I asked if I could hold onto my keys a little longer, so I could get into the department and do this and do that, and you know. And so someone in one of the administrative offices got on the phone and said, “Professor Weiss is here, and he would like to know if he can hold onto his keys.” Then she said over the phone, “Oh, he’s terminated.” [laughter] I’m standing right there. And she’s very nice, you know, she didn’t mean anything by it. But you know, so and you see, one feels marginalized, and that’s the way I feel as a senior, in the college, when I’m invited back. I can, you know, attend a talk as a guest of the college, as a senior person, and they’ll say a nice thing about me, but god forbid I should say something that might be a matter pertaining to policy. We are screened out. I’m sure the president has a device which he turns off so that—he doesn’t want to hear anything coming out of our mouth, or even in writing, I think, because he has his own agenda, the school has their own agenda, they go on this way, you see, and you’re not on that train. So we are symbols, we’re symbolic, we’re delegated to limbo. And we feel that way, we feel we’re not being used. I thought to myself, wouldn’t it be interesting, I thought, if my colleagues—there’s some interesting people there. You know, guys like Henry West, Chuck Green, these are bright people, very able and they still hang in there and do things. And Wayne Roberts. And well why not, you know, get some of these people together to brainstorm on some of these problems of education, and really do some innovative, effective things, or how to tune the system up or improve it or develop some plans. But in no way, I think—I think, not only is it ineffective, I think it’s actually resistant. See, we’re dead. I have the same feeling when I go up to the Psychology Department. There are some people who recognize me, and I feel like there’s an enthusiastic greeting, which subsides then, to, you know, ignoring you, and treating you like you’re in the way; so I imagine elderly parents feel this way, and grandparents, and you feel like you’re being marginalized. And no

one really cares what you say. Of course that's true of life in general. I had an uncle who said that once, "I'll tell you my opinion," he said, "but I've learned my opinion doesn't count for much." [laughter] And that's the way it is. But you have people here with a lot of experience, and they have, you know, they have been, some of them, hurt over the years. We hurt people a lot. We hurt students, we hurt administrators, we hurt the gardener, and the janitor, we hurt them by ignoring them, and not, you know. But these people have something to offer.

[1:00:53] [Note: tape change]

LZ: You were in the middle of speaking, I don't know if you wanted to continue on what you were talking about—

GW: Well, at my age, I don't have to remember what I was talking about. [laughter] The interim term was interesting to me because—my attitude about these things, I could do with it or without it, it doesn't really matter. That's because I'm such a superficial person, very easily impulsive and I move off easy. But interim term struck me as very interesting actually, and it was a one-month single course, and there always tensions in it with people. Some people felt—there are people who are more rigid, and those who are more flexible, and the rigid people are very disturbed by flexible people. The flexible people couldn't care less about the rigid ones, they just... And there's a comparable thing in students, what they call the syllabus-bound students and the syllabus-free student. The student who can move freely, and the student who feels they want every step marked out and they're not safe unless it's, you know, printed in advance. I always liked Chuck Green's attitude. Chuck Green devised the technique we used, and we had classes, Chuck, Walt, and I—Walt Mink—and I, had several classes together that

were freshmen seminars and things. Chuck was one of the people who instituted freshmen seminars, and Chuck would give out a syllabus at the end of the term, and basically it would be a record of what we did. So if we had a guest speaker come in—now, if you schedule someone to be a guest speaker, and suppose they don't show up. So your syllabus is wrong. Suppose you start lagging behind the syllabus's time frame. It's wrong. So, life being what it is, this is what happened. Chuck did it the other way around. He recorded everything that went on, and then produced it at the end, so you got a syllabus at the end as to what you had done. You see?

[laughter] That's great. So, I liked the interim term, and there were those who felt they should only teach what their degrees were in, and what they were trained to do, and they stuck with that. Now, the whole idea of the interim term was to teach anything, or something else, or to take something you loved, which was a part of your own subject, and work on it. The classic example given if you were interested in geology, you would go to a mountain for the month and dig. That sort of thing. Jim Smail was a biologist friend of mine, and he would take a group to Hawaii every year. But same course, you see, every year.

[1:03:57]

Now, the whole idea of interim was to try something different; well, you're not trying something different if you do the same thing over again, so I tried to generate a completely novel course each time. I'd take whatever my interest at the moment was. I'd probably do, if I was teaching now, and they had one, I'd do one on Japanese cartoons, or manga and you know, that sort of thing, and comic books. So I must have done more different kinds; possibly, I would put myself for maybe having the record of having the greatest variety of interim courses. I also would like to know if they have the attendance records, because I had one course on humor, that I did. I used Freud's—as a textbook, I used Freud's *Jokes and Its Relation to the Unconscious*. This was

a course in humor, but most of the—I was amazed, I had students from all the colleges around, and they had it, I had to get the biggest room in the college, because I had over a hundred people in there. And people always wanted to put caps on this; I said, “Let ‘em come.” And so they came in. And in the end, they put on a show. I had two pies thrown in my face that interim term. I think they caught them both on video, and the—one was an actual pie that they baked or bought, and you know, I was set up for it. But they got lucky. And then another one was, turned out to be—and I didn’t know about this, but these kids in the class were great at that—they have a fake pie that has a lot of water in it, and it’s made of paper and curls, and it looks like a real pie, and they hit you with it, and you get water all over yourself, but it’s actually not a pie, you know, it’s a show business pie. And we had a master of ceremonies who was a riot, he was a stand-up comedian. All the kids were great, and that was the final [laughter]. It was terrific.

[1:06:20]

The most exciting interim course I had was—I have three pictures on my wall, my office wall, there might be some old photographs that show it, and they were Freud, and Einstein, and Russell. And they’re giant-sized posters. And most people recognize Einstein, and some recognize Freud, and almost no one recognized Bertrand Russell, who was the third. And students would ask me, “Well, what are those guys doing on your wall? Who are those guys?” And I said, “Those are the three greatest theoreticians of the twentieth century.” And we would talk about them occasionally. And finally with one student, he said, “Well who else would you put up there?” And I said, “Well, if I move to the nineteenth century, I’d put Darwin and Marx, as representatives of covering certain areas, you know, in terms of influence, and significance of work.” So that would give me five, right. Well, then I began to think about that, and it sort of enlarged that notion, and came up with an interim course, which I called—originally I called it

“Eleven Men.” Because one, there were eleven, and second they were men. And my daughter hit the ceiling. “What do you mean Eleven Men?!” So, I said, “Well, there are eleven men.” “What about women?” “Yeah, well, what about women?” But so, I immediately gave her a challenge. She was kind of younger, in those days, and I said, “You come up with a woman and I’ll include her.” And I said, “I’ll tell you what I have in mind.” But, anyway, I thought about it a while, and I took out the word men. No change for me. “Eleven.” So, these are the eleven. One of the things I dealt with in the course is why I chose these eleven, and also, what I knew or didn’t know about them, because some choices were made on basis of reputation, others were made on personal connection, and also my assessment of what should be done. So, I started with these five, then I thought, there are six more that I should include. One: three to represent the arts, and the choices I finally made were Beethoven, Shakespeare, and Michelangelo. And then there were three I felt I couldn’t do without, and that was Plato, Aristotle, and Newton. So, I put them up, and I said, “What I had in mind is these people accomplished something, and I could hand you the accomplishment, or a representation of their accomplishment. This is piano sonatas by Beethoven, that’s an achievement. Can you point to the achievement? And the achievement is significance in human culture for all human beings. You see, that’s an accomplishment.” And so we raised the issue of these eleven, and I had—it was a four week course, so the—now, I think it was one of the best courses I ever had. I had somehow touched a nerve in students, and I felt they were—the class was crowded, people were sitting on the edge of their seats, some of them were even trembling, you know.

[1:09:55]

And they, in other words, there was something in this that grabbed people. This is humans with an accomplishment, and you can point to it and name it, and it was for everybody, and they

wanted to get close to that, you see. They weren't quite sure what that meant exactly, but they really wanted to get close to that. Now, I brought in eleven lecturers. Ten from Macalester, one from the U [University of Minnesota] to lecture on Newton, Professor [Alan] Shapiro, who was in the History Department, the history of science. And Sung Kyu Kim recommended him to me, and I contacted him and he agreed to come. So, I had a different person talking about each of the persons. And so that was it. I had eleven lecturers, and they had—and the first assignment was write a paragraph on each one, because some they didn't know, and some they did, so they had to look it up and write a paragraph and produce it. The second thing I asked them to pick out and write a more extended treatment of the person. And the third week, and the fourth week, I had the really heavy-duty things. I also shared with them why I chose them, my relation with them, whether I was ignorant of them or knowledgeable, and to what extent, whether it was personal or not. And also who I didn't select and why. And the third one was, who else would you pick to stand in this company, and why. In other words, state what their achievement is, what they have done, or what they represent and why you think this is a worthy person to come into this pantheon, and the last one was even—and that was terrible. The answers I thought were terrible in general. They were easy to guess. I'll mention three persons that were suggested. Margaret Sanger, who was even one of the people I had filtered through in my mind. Jesus Christ. Gandhi. So these were the three, for example. But in general, I would say the choices were not too good. And then the fourth assignment was really the most significant, and at the heart of education I think: what project is worth doing, or needs doing, that you could suggest, that would be such that if it was done, by you or someone else, that it would make that person who did that a member of this kind of group? You see, what needs doing? See, name the problem, and it could

be anything—whether you wanted to write a novel for some reason or other—but you had to spell it out. In principle, as it were. And that was the worst answers of all. They were terrible.

[1:13:07]

Of course, I didn't flunk anybody. If you took the course, you passed, as far as I was concerned, because you were there to just consider these things, or experience them. But students are not prepared to face that, or even ask what is a significant issue, what—see, there are two things. One is, what in the world do we need? What needs doing? And the second is, what do you love? And what do you care about? Never mind what the other guy cares about. I like the bumper sticker that came out in the '60s and all, that said, "Are we having a good time yet?" I mean, that's... [laughter] It's like, you ask somebody else whether you're having a good time? You're really out of touch with yourself in a critical way. You know, this is ridiculous, but that's, see now, they had no way to even know. It's like graduate students who are looking for a doctoral dissertation, or people who are looking for a senior honors thesis. What is something—so you, if you have an assignment, you pick it out and then you hand it in and you go your way. Well that's—if you can pick it out and you can't go your way, because it won't leave you, it haunts you, you are on to something. Your life has meaning like it never had. A student was doing a senior honors thesis, went into every class saying, "Can I use this for my senior honors thesis?" You see? They want to ransack that course. "This? Nope, can't use that. This is, wow, I could use this stuff." You are looking for material, so the world became something you were hungrily examining to filter stuff for what you needed. You see, that's what these guys were all about, you know. Isaac Newton said, you know he said, "How do you solve a great problem?" He said, "You worry about it a lot." [laughs] Now, psychology has not advanced to improve on that yet. [laughs] See what—that's what it's all about. It's what you care about. If

you, you know—that’s really, it’s the whole thing. But anyway, there was a lot of excitement about those courses. And then I formed the idea of forming an interim course, which I never taught. Who made the most powerful significant contributions you can think of, who is not known? And in those days, a name I picked out was Frege. I think you could argue that Frege is a great contributor. Now, when I came to Macalester, I looked Frege up in the encyclopedia. No reference. No mention. Years later, I would see a little paragraph appear, and now there are articles on him, but then there was nothing. And it turns out there are many people like this, who have made powerful contributions, you know. Who is a great painter who people don’t pay that much attention to? They may even know it, the name. So I was looking for people even whose name was not known; you see people say, “Who’s that?” you know. But who made that achievement so that the people who you admire are looking at this guy, you see, or this work, or this thing. It has nothing to do with race, it has nothing to do with gender, it has nothing to do with age! You know. I once did a section of a course on people who accomplish things very young—someone who died when they were nineteen years old, but who wrote great music and it’s still being played. Arriaga, for example. The Spanish Mozart, they call him. I played that on a TV program for Man and His World, the freshman seminar. And Don Betts said, “Who?” You know, these are professional musicians, and you know who... I had a student who named her cat Stumpfy after Carl Stumpf, because she heard me lecture about Carl Stumpf. A sociologist, McGee, here, said to me, “I swear why she’d make these people up.” [laughter] But they’re there, you know?

[1:17:46]

So this is the—well, the course that got me the most publicity, of course, was the pornography one, which you asked about. And I was always very interested in sex, and someone said to me—

and the pornography as part of it, and everything from romantic poetry to—in fact I did one once on love, or in public works like operas, Broadway plays, romance, you know, that sort of thing. But when I did the pornography thing, it sparked a furor, and started because it was really begun by several women on the campus who had formed a feminist group, and some of these feminists were extremely uptight. There are different kinds of feminists, I've been informed, and I have a friend who talks about feminists in the trenches, feminists, you know, in the schools, feminists in—you know, there are different. Well these were feminists in the schools here, but there are different types of them too. But they asked me, you know, "Why are you doing a course on pornography?" And, of course, like everything else I do, and I gave a flip answer, "Because I like it." Well, I might as well have lit a fire to a rocket, it went off, and I was soundly criticized and people were speaking against me and all that. And at that time, people, I remember one of these women, who I will not mention, went to speak to my wife at the time, who is now an ex-wife, but who I'm still friendly with, and said, "You know what he's doing? He's doing a thing on pornography." She said, this is what she told them, she said, "If you know *him*, he'll have them down at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts." [laughter] I thought that was really funny. Well, we had so much furor over it, I had students—one student quit the class and others joined, and you know I had—it was, we were in furor. People tried to dissuade—I got threatening letters from staff. I had a file of letters that should have been published in a small book with some commentary, it would have made a great book. I had attacks—I was attacked by a group of Macalester women, who were graduates, they had graduated and they lived together in a house, a whole bunch of them. They wrote me a scathing letter attacking me as a male chauvinist pig, who—pornography was seen, "Pornography was the theory and rape was the

practice,” is a slogan that appeared in the book *Take Back the Night*. And this was the mentality, and it was very...really, tremendously incendiary, you know.

[1:21:00]

And so one thing I'm very interested in, and love to do studies on, is ideology. Because it's amazing how you can be friends with somebody, and then the next night they want to kill you, because they suddenly learn something about you, like you voted Republican—which I would never do. And so that's very interesting, what turns a person into that kind of raving maniac, and raving maniacs is what ideology is about really, you know, it's not about the... Now, I always thought of myself as being in favor of certain people and certain causes, until I met the people for the causes who read me out of the—I had a student who was Hispanic, and he got up in a group of mixed students, but many black students, and he said—and he referred to himself as black. And he got booed and hissed, and he was told, “You're not black, you're Hispanic,” you know. So I've been in situations like this where people are very keyed up, and they don't—and how do you get to discuss and analyze issues. I got invited by this feminist caucus group to talk to them about pornography, and I felt it was a waste of time. It's kind of like Shostakovich trying to justify himself to Stalin or something. Never happens. It just doesn't, can't take place, because it's just, you're guaran—you're guilty before you walk in the door. And also people not willing to be light about it. Now, my attitude toward pornography is really simple. First of all, I think it's really a necessary part of human life, and the people who are against it are also against dealing with human problems pertaining to sexuality. My daughter, by the way, same one who objected to my including more women, men, when I wanted to say eleven men, said to me once... She used to, she was very clever, my daughter, really impressive, [unclear]. And I have two daughters, both impressive. And she said to me once, “Mythology is the *other* person's

religion.” So, and she had similar ideas about pornography, which I read too. “If *you* liked it, it’s erotic, but if *they* like it, it’s pornography.” [laughter] See? You get around that. But I had in the pornography class, I had really good people, men and women, and girls and boys, and one student... By the way, the TV programs came into the room. The first day of class they were filming students walking out and talking to me at the desk. And I asked them to step outside, you know, because they caught me unawares; it was channel five, I think, I forgot which. And one of the students came to me just—he was trembling and perspiring, he was upset, he said “I want to withdraw from the class,” he said, “because this will appear on the news, my mother will see that I’m taking the course.” He came from St. Thomas and he was horrified. He said, “And would you tell her if she sees me if she calls you up that I was there for some other reason?” You know, and he was just horrified, terrified. And that’s kind of society’s whole attitude of not confronting these issues. Now, the other thing was this—by the way, the head of the Biology Department then used to carry the course description. Because people would say to him, “Well that guy’s really a pervert, isn’t he?” I think perversion is normal. He carried the course description with him, and people would say, you know, make snide comments about that, and he would take out the description, he said, “You read this description and you tell me what you think.”

[1:25:27]

And now, the reason I came up with it is at that time, I was pressured to do an interim course at the last minute. And I had—I always made some notes, so I had a list of things to think about. And at that time, the president’s commission came out, on porn, so I thought, “Ooh, it’s not in the book.” That was the background for it. Well, what I was going to do is run it as a trial, and that was in the course description, if you read the original course description. I got a call, by the

way, when this started, from somebody in the Political Science Department, said, “This is not the first pornography course at Macalester. I taught one before.” And he told me his experience. And so a lot of—you learn a lot. He also ran into troubles too, because he took the students to a strip club at that time and there was all kinds of sensation with it. It appeared in the headlines, and people here, you know, they dropped their false teeth when they saw the headlines that’s “Macalester Students in Strip Club.” There was so much nonsense about it. By the way, there were some students, I learned later there was a student who came to Macalester *because* they had read about this. They were in Japan, and they read an account, and they thought this must be an interesting place, and they came here. All wrong. [laughter] But I received threatening letters, and I was told that they were engaging in...pursuing, you know, financial goals, and getting contributions to the college, and I was harming the college. And that they—and that I should be ashamed of myself, et cetera, so forth and so on. And what I discovered is people—well, see, this is the thing. People are stupid. They are unintelligent. If you ask if Einstein is intelligent, you have to ask with respect to what? With respect to average people, he’s very intelligent. With respect to the problems that he’s looking at, he’s not that smart. H.G. Wells recognized that a long time ago, he said, you know, our brain isn’t big enough for the problems we have. And people are not very bright. For example, when you see discussions about religion, you can teach the Bible in college. That’s not the same as advocating the Bible, and the fact that people can’t distinguish presenting it from advocating it, in matters of value, is significant. And it’s the same with pornography. There’s no difference whatsoever. You just present the facts, and then you deal with differences of point of view, and with values, and clashes and emotional reactions and so forth. In the course, for example, I told the students they didn’t have to see any or hear any. If they wished, they could, but it was up to each student to decide for themselves whether

they wanted to participate in any particular activity outside the class. Several students by the way, got it so that they actually showed some pornography here, and had people watching it, but they can choose to watch it or not.

[1:29:01]

But it's very interesting. It's almost like it's a stimulus that tells you a lot about people. You present the word and you see how they react. And a lot of people are bought off by terminology, so if you change words—now, I went to the library, looked up pornography, couldn't find anything. So I looked up other subjects, like art, Japanese art. Then looked up words like “erotic.” And then I discovered, if you kept pushing it, we had massive amounts about pornography, including the ethics of it, and the court trials and all these sort of things. And many great works of art had been labeled pornographic, and the Bible itself has been labeled pornographic; and it is if you know how to read it, there's some great stuff in there. There's some *great* stuff in there, you know. They don't tell those parts, or they don't dwell on them, but they're there. What I was going to do was run a trial, and have some students appointed as prosecution, and some students defense, and then witnesses, and examine different aspects, and run a trial, and bring in the material of the presidential commission, and evaluate the issues. So, really, it was an evaluation of the evaluations of pornography. That was the way it was going to be run. However, because of the immediate reaction that was so overwhelming—you know I once had to go home and shut off all my lights in the house, and I sat alone in the dark, and my phone rang incessantly, and people were banging on my door, and I sat there and waited until it all subsided. And I had a conversation with the president of the college at the time, and he said to me, maybe it would be best if I withdrew the course. He was terribly upset, and he asked, couldn't I have called it by some other name? Done something slightly different? So would I

give it up? And I said, you know, “Ordinarily,” I said, “all my feelings are I should give this up.” I said, “Because I’m very unhappy with the way people are responding to this, and I do not feel good or comfortable and I want to give it up.” I said, “But I’m not going to, because I cannot now give it up. You know, I have to see it through,” I said. So I asked myself, what would Bertrand Russell do? I have to see it through, fight the good fight, and face the issues. And I had to revise the course entirely, because of, some of the description does not match what we did, we did not do that whole trial. But, we got a lot of help. Because I got phone calls from every—I got television coverage, and we were filmed for a video, but it never appeared. Because some crisis arose in Costa Rica, and the news team had to go down there, and we were on interim term, so we were not shown. But they studied us, they sent a crew down of three people, you know, and we were sent—they agreed to show us the script, and we could help edit it and so forth, so that we wouldn’t be misrepresented, and... But we also got contact, the newspeople were very sophisticated in covering what is called “adult entertainment,” and we, for example, our students try to do things, like contact pornography establishments, and ask if they would give us a tour of their place, to see what they showed and what they did. And they blocked us out. None of them would cooperate, they saw us as the enemy. So, we were being attacked for this, and—but the people of the industry saw us as, you know, scrutinizing them in that kind of light that would, you know. So, there’s one group that didn’t want us to watch and the other group that didn’t want us to watch. [laughter] But nevertheless, society shows it. So, the news team was able to get us—this guy was so experienced, he was able to call the right people, and we got invitations to come down. And only those students who wanted to attend, we were shown around, we were shown everything, the contraptions, books, literature, movie things, and then we could stay and watch a movie or not, you know, that sort of thing. So, even among

the group who went, some didn't stay. And a group of us went to see some pornographic movie theaters, which they had more of than too. But the whole thing was to examine really this whole phenomenon, and it was a very interesting and exciting time.

[1:34:13]

Now what we did is we produced two books. I may have them around somewhere here. Plus I had a file of letters. One set of letters, people would tell me personal stories that were horrifying about their lives, how it was made miserable; like they would have a store, and they sold some pornographic materials, and they were barely making a living, and they needed these materials in part to contribute to their subsistence, and how some community would ban them or outlaw them and how they lost their business and their money and they were in bad shape. Other people would send me letters trying to sell me films, and videos they had in their basement, you know, sight unseen. There were other people who attacked me and people who defended me. One person who defended me was a professor who was—made foul language a cause célèbre. And he wrote books of cuss words and dirty language, and translated them many languages. He had multiple—you could cuss in many languages, and he said people didn't have enough colorful swear words in their language. And he called names of all the quote unquote "feminists" who were attacking me. Now, the Macalester women said, in their letter, "You should not be allowed to teach a course in pornography, because you're a man, so only a woman should teach it and only women should be allowed into the course," was one of the suggestions. And, "You have no more right to teach that than you would as a white professor"—they couldn't say Anglo-Saxon in my case, by the way, but— "you had no more right to teach this than you could a course in white racism." Now, there was a course at Macalester in white racism before. I taught it. And I was asked to do it by radical students who came to me and said nobody else would take the course. I

would do that a lot. So I'd say sure, and basically I was a puppet manipulated by them, but they had great speakers, and I thought it was wonderful. [laughs] So I thought that was a very, you know, sort of amusing aspects of the thing, but oh well. My concern always was, you know, when do you hurt someone. If you show a film of certain—are you hurting someone? If there's someone who doesn't want to see it, are you making them see it or do they have the option of not seeing it? You know, all these kinds of questions are of interest to me, and my notion is that a lot of claimed harm isn't harm at all. There are a lot of moralists out there who think they know what God is saying. I think they only talk to George Bush. And they are very sanctimonious, and kind of, they have these rigidities where they can't distinguish the difference between having the film available and the idea that you don't have to see it. That's disturbing—they don't want anyone to see it. They want to control that, you see, and I think that's overstepping the bounds, and they're very wrong about those things. People have bizarre ideas about criminality, health, all value judgment issues, and pornography is one of those. It really has to do with sexuality. Pornography is ancient, it's prehistoric, and... So, anyway, we ran the course.

[1:37:52]

LZ: When interim was finally dropped, years later, were you, I guess, had that experience kind of soured your kind of your ambition to continue—

GW: No, I liked interim term. I supported it, would have supported it, preferred it to the...didn't, I felt that the reasons given for getting rid of it were inadequate. I felt that much of when people—you know, there's, there are old sayings to the effect that if something is working, let it go. Do it. And if it's not working, change it. I didn't see interim as causing any great

harm, or, you know, so what was wrong with doing it? But you know, there are moral issues behind it, and also there's, strangely enough, financial issues, and schedule issues, and issues that are kind of, they get into the act. You know, I remember when they voted to allow students into faculty meetings, and they didn't previously. And I saw that when the same vote came up a second time, when students were present, certain faculty members changed their vote. Because, they would vote one way when the students were not present, and when the students were present, they voted a different way. This is a type of hypocrisy I have trouble with. I don't like that. You see the same thing with Nixon's impeachment, on people who would vote when the cameras are there and when they're not there. This is duplicity. Socrates wouldn't like it. We have a lot of problems. One student—by the way, students came to faculty meetings in the droves, there were vast numbers at first, and they dropped off so quickly. I remember a student coming out, and he looked positively mortified. He was really—I guess that's not the proper word. He was *stunned*, he was shocked, and he said, "But I thought these people were intelligent." He realized that faculty meetings are a bunch of nonsense, run by elderly infantilists. You know, it's just ridiculous. You know, you find out they're not as intelligent or as nice as you thought, and so it's disillusioning. You know, it's like finding out your parents are people, you know, when you're little. [laughter] I'm embarrassed by idiocy. [laughs]

[1:40:50]

LZ: Has your research been as varied, or I mean, have you really committed to any certain research project, or has it been kind of as varied as your interests are?

GW: Well, I've had some bad experiences with research, so I was discouraged. Really, my biggest—a lot of the problems are me. It has to do with self-discipline, and so a lot of the problems are myself. I have trouble filling out forms and cooperating with certain things. When I first came to Macalester, I planned a research study, wrote up a project, applied for a National Science Foundation grant. And they wrote me back a wonderful letter saying, "This is a terrific grant and we would fund it, but we're out of funds." And I wasn't asking for that much money anyway. And I went through so much work to do it, I hated it, so I never re-applied for that. So, a lot of my work I turned away from doing empirical work, and started to do reading and analysis and things of that sort, did more philosophical and methodological work, and I'm still working at it. I was told—this is my cell phone. Let's see if it's working. It's off, I shut it off. Probably didn't want to be interrupted during this interview, but... [phone sound] Now this cell phone has a word on top. I don't know if you can catch that in the camera. Should I bring it closer? Can you see it? Got that? The word on top. Pantology. You see it? Okay. This is it. Now, pantology, I coined the term, and it means the study of everything, obviously. And then I looked it up in the dictionary, and there it was. It was in the dictionary, and it struck me as that's normal, because it's an easy coinage. That's my subject, pantology, the study of everything. And, what I've discovered, is that most people—like physicists speak of a theory of everything, but they don't know what they're talking about, because the theory of everything isn't about everything. It's about hardly anything. It's really about certain aspects of quantum physics, and stuff, and how much particles and so forth. And what they mean is that it has to do with everything, but that's not what the theory is about. The theory is a portion of everything, in a way. I'll give you a simple example. There is nothing whatever that accounts for what you mean by logic, or what role it plays in the universe. No experimentalist ever runs an experiment

to determine, empirically, what logical validity means. In fact, you can't do it. So something's wrong. You see, and what's wrong is the conception of, we have a framework, and the framework narrows us to a certain way of looking at problems, and when we say "everything" we really mean "around here, as I see it," you see? And much of what's in the world is excluded. You see, now this is a big problem, so one problem is "what do you mean by everything?" And if you can come up with something, and it isn't part of your system—if you say, "the world" and what do you mean by the world? Everything. You say, "What about God?" Well, God created the world. You mean he's not part of the world, he's outside? Then that's not everything, because everything would have to include God as well as the world. Now, if quantum physicists do talk about this. They say there is nothing outside what we're talking about. They have that as a principle even, now, I've seen it in some of their texts. So this is the problem, you see, of how, "What do you mean by everything?" And then how would you handle it? Now when I was a kid, they say you're interested in too many things, specialize. Well, I did specialize, and I fortunately specialized in areas that are critical, I think. Problems—I was very interested in the mind, how does the mind fit into the world? You see, what's that all about? And a lot of the problems we have are precisely because we can't manage that very well.

[1:45:28]

We don't know how to think about thinking. Or it's, the world is kind of like a Mobius strip in a way. It's one thing, we're all part of it, but the complications are that there are things in the world that can think about the world [laughter] and so we can generate paradoxes and contradictions and all kinds of problems. We can't settle. But that's part of figuring out what it is. So actually, there are clues, and it's—there are others who have done the work. I mean people have done the work, and we have a culture that's sort of like a junkyard, and we are kind

of like metal sculptors rummaging around in the junkyard to find what we need to create what we need. And as technology changes, we'll change too. And so, you know, maybe we won't have Beethoven, but you'll have somebody doing some kind of a different kind of a thing. But nevertheless, you can still do the old thing. See, we can make silent movies today. They would be very different in tone and manner and everything, they would lack something that Charlie Chaplin had, and we lose. But we can come to understand much more about the world because of the many specialties in it, and we can understand empirical science and formal science is like logic and mathematics. Most theories of everything, as they talk about it, are portions of physics, and not theories about everything. They don't tell you anything about economics, or anthropology, that sort of thing, so they're really rather restricted; but they never tell you anything about math. Mathematicians don't know what math is. I discovered early on that you could flunk people in their own subject. Mathematicians do not know what a number is, but they use it. Aristotle said when you ask questions like that, you're no longer in the discipline, you're in a different discipline. See, so the question is how do you put them all together, get them together? Probably a major clue comes from Bertrand Russell, and his *Principles of Mathematics*, 1903. His theory of relations is absolutely critical for understanding the world, and you can see how inadequate most intellectuals are in handling that aspect of it. They sometimes are very good in their area, taking account of it. But, well, even if you study relations in mathematics books, they really have, you might say, a restricted notion of relations which is not adequate, because the notion of order escapes them. And order is a relation. So even when you start to study elementary mathematics, you can see they're already off base in certain critical ways. So people seem un-self-conscious about this, they haven't mastered how to go in and out of their own frame of reference and into other frames of reference. But it can be managed and it

can be handled, it can be done, so we can really understand the world in a bigger way, and understand what role philosophy or ontological analysis play is.

[1:48:50]

And by the way, that's the sort of thing I was interested in, which would horrify some of the people who were looking at pornography, whether pro or con. And that is, I was interested in things like what the ontological status of pornography is, you know, what does the term mean in terms of reality, and can you deal with reality without the term, you see. And there are many questions that are not raised by people who talk about sexuality or other aspects of the human life, and we have a tremendously impoverished sense of what the human mind is all about. And one of the curious thing is, I used to watch students, they'd say, "I'm interested in communication," they'd take a course in communication. And they'd come out, and you could see they were disappointed. Somehow, the course seemed to promise a lot and deliver very little, and intuitively they felt that, but they couldn't put their finger on it. And it's the same with all these other subjects. They do not deliver. The deeper gratifications are not there. And that's part of our problem, you see, is how to get that. So, and, people don't even know how to ask the questions, like someone who feels their life's not complete, so they take up running, or join a religion or something, or do exercise, or think if you do pilates or work out, you know, it'll solve those problems. But it doesn't, you see, so there's always that feeling around the edges that you're not quite getting it, and really do I have a purpose in life, and you know... It's like Peggy Lee's old song, you know, Is That All There Is? [laughter] Well, there is more, you see, and we can do it, but it's a question of becoming more profound and less superficial. You say, "How do you do that?" and you become systematic, in that sense, where the systematics is not just obsessive-compulsive working, but really relates to people's most...deepest desires. And how

gratification can occur, you see, and how do you reconcile that with all the, you know. We have such a morass of immoral moralities that impinge on us, that they're in the nature of things that hamper us from solving the problems, rather than doing it. They want to keep order and maintain the status quo in a certain way. And of course those things get broken anyway as new information comes and technology bypasses this sort of thing, so people practice their peculiarities, you know, in private or on the side. So we haven't integrated ourselves very well, or society. So religions fail miserably. They do not address the question. A person standing in front of the escalator saying, "What would Jesus do? Should I take the escalator or not?" is not going to come through with—there's no answer there. It's irrel—in other words, the questions that, you know, and not that that's an important question necessarily, but people can get tied up at that level, so. That's why I think people who waste time are as useful as people who are useful. [laughter] Or significant. Yes, they're probably doing just as well.

[1:52:37]

Yeah, I was going to tell you before, because even though I may seem very discursive, I can keep track of a lot of different things, and I didn't finish, for example, what we did in the pornography courses. We had two booklets we produced, one was a series of essays, reports, like journalist reports, almost like a newspaper book of various speakers we had, questions, information. It was like a compilation of materials on pornography. And then we had a collection of newspaper articles that were written on us, including cartoons in the paper, portraying me as a dirty old man, which I thought, that's accurate. Isaac Asimov said in one book, "Dirty old men also need love," he said. [laughter] And he was one, he knew. He said, you know, see that's our real problem, we *all* need that, you know, and... We underestimate it. People who look at sex without affection are making a big mistake, and people who look at

affection without sex are also making a big mistake, though that's a more livable one. So, we have a long way to go. We're really very...limited, but we try to get by. I hope the world improves a lot more, but you know, we're constantly besieged by coral reefs disappearing, and arctic ice disappearing and all of that. It's marvelous, really. So, we're here in a process and who knows what's going to happen one day. You know, we're considered being in the Holocene geologically, and roughly in the, I think, if I remember correctly, it's about like eleven thousand years, and that's when last—the Pleistocene Ice Age, the last one, peaked. And so we're in what's called the post, the retreat phase of the Pleistocene Ice Age. That's our current status; independent of global warming, or whatever that possibility is. You know, looking at that perspective on things, you know, when I see things going on, it's kind of like people are jerked around by the events of their lives, and then they sort of make the best of it. Then you die.

[laughter]

[1:55:24]

LZ: I know we're going to run out of time pretty soon, and I was wondering if there's—

GW: That's my job, is to make you run out of tape. [laughter]

LZ: No, no, no! I mean just this tape! We can keep going, but I was wondering if there's something that you wanted to end with, or we could probably keep going as well, if you want.

GW: I'm trying to think—there's a German writer that influenced Robert Schumann and others, a German romantic writer, Jean Paul Friedrich Richter. And I read an essay of his as a kid, and I

was astonished, because he ended the essay in mid-sentence, and didn't continue the sentence, he—three dots. They said this was a stylistic device he always used. He just quit. [laughs] And I feel like this is really, you know, we like to polish it off. Freud called that secondary elaboration. We do that in dreams. We tell a rounded story. But life isn't like that, you... So you stop in the middle, and you end, but ending isn't really ending, it's just the broken sentence, you see. And that's the way it is, so we're all *in medias res* that way. And so the only thing I can do is come back for part two [laughter].

LZ: We might have to have you back!

GW: [unclear]

LZ: Well, thank you so much, it's been—

GW: Well, you can invite me back if you want.

LZ: Yeah, I mean, that could be a definite possibility.

GW: We could see whether I die first or you run out of tape. [laughter]

LZ: Oh, goodness!

[End of Interview, 1:57:06]