RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT W. SNYDER

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Professor Robert Snyder on December 18, 2012 in Newark, New Jersey with Shaun Illingworth and …

Paul Clemens: Paul Clemens.

SI: Okay, and thank you very much for having us here again.

Robert Snyder: Thank you.

SI: To begin, could you tell us how you came to Livingston College? How did you make that decision?

RS: There was always an assumption in my family that I would go to college. Where I would go to college was never discussed specifically, but there was always an assumption that I would go to college. I remember talking to my mother; she thought that I'd probably go to a school in the immediate region like Fairleigh Dickenson, Ramapo State, someplace like that. She'd gone to Hunter College and lived at home and living away was not a thing that was talked about an awful lot. As I moved into my senior year of high school, the decision about where to go to college became much more focused. I was, by then, very active on my high school newspaper and going to events related to journalism, and I was not sure what I wanted to major in. I thought I might want to major in political science. I had a friend from the wrestling team who was happy in a political science major at Stockton State. I had an interest in journalism. I thought that one of the two would probably be the focal point of my study. I had vague ambitions of law school, vague ambitions of graduate school in some ways. Less vague on graduate school, but I was pretty sure that everybody was telling me that law was a good way to make a living and I would think about that as a focal point for a major, pre-law.

Our advising at Dumont High School and guidance was very weak. I remember sitting down with a guidance counselor and he said, "So, where do you want to go to school?"

I said, "New England."

He said, "Could you be more specific?"

I said, grabbing at a pretty state, "Vermont."

Then, he said, "Well, what do you want to major in?"

I said, "I'm very interested in schools that offer journalism majors."

He said to me, "I have no list of schools that offer journalism majors."

I said, "That's a problem."

So, I started poring through college guides. All of my friends were looking, maniacally, at these college guides, ridiculing them at the same time that we read them because we found them all

pretty clueless. I eventually identified a few schools that seemed right. Out of left field came a suggestion from a very smart, humane, innovative guidance counselor at my school who sort of picked up the kids who didn't quite fit the incompetent guy that I was dealing with. She suggested that I consider Hampshire College. It was a new college. It was an alternative college and that was very attractive to me. I felt pretty stifled by my senior year of high school. In some ways I wanted a creative school that allowed students to actively shape their own education, but when I looked at the cost of Hampshire it just seemed prohibitive for my family. It just seemed over the top expensive and there was little prospect of financial aid.

My parents, for reasons I never entirely understood, were very wary of applying for financial aid. They didn't want anybody to know how much they made and they were convinced I wouldn't get it anyway. I continued to look and eventually settled on Penn State, which I knew had a journalism major, Rutgers College, which also had a communications major, but not a journalism major, at least as I understood, and then, Livingston, whose alternative college commitment really attracted me.

It struck me as having many of the things that I liked about Hampshire, but it was a state college. It was much more affordable. It had a very difficult reputation. Only one other girl from my high school had gone there, a girl who preceded me on the student newspaper, and the story was she had been very unhappy and left. It had a reputation as being a dangerous place with a crime problem.

PC: Remind us what year we are talking about now.

RS: This was 1973.

PC: You are a senior in high school?

RS: Well, my senior year. I graduated in '73, so these discussions would have been going on the fall of '72.

PC: Okay.

RS: And the spring of '73. It had a somewhat dangerous reputation as a place with a lot of crime. There was always a hidden subtext that it was the quote, unquote, black school at Rutgers. People sometimes said that more or less overtly. Yes, when I got the catalog for Livingston College I really liked it. I liked the quote from Frederick Douglass on the front page. I liked the mix of courses. I liked the way the urban communications program seemed to mix journalism and urban studies in very interesting ways. The poli-sci department looked interesting. I looked a little bit at history. I didn't look at history that much, but what I did see seemed attractive there, too. So, I applied to Rutgers College, Livingston College and Penn State. I was rejected by Penn State. At Rutgers College I was offered immediate admission at Camden and Newark, and wait listed in New Brunswick. Then, at Livingston, I was offered immediate acceptance. To me, this clinched the deal. I really wanted to go to Livingston out of all of them and that to me settled the issue. I was also really excited that the cost of going to a college would not be a tremendous financial burden. My parents explained to me that they had

been saving since I was born and they had a thousand dollars a year. They could contribute the equivalent of a thousand dollars a year over four years of college for me.
PC: That was plenty for tuition back then.

RS: That was a lot of money.

PC: Yes, I think tuition was like.

RS: I then competed for a scholarship that was offered by my father's company, the Mosler Safe Company. In the spring of '73, we were flown out to the company town, Hamilton, Ohio for an interview. I was one of the finalists. It was the spring of '73. I was excited to be invited out and when I got there, I'll never forget this, they handed us a list of the finalists. [The list identified the finalist, his or her parent, and the parent's job at Mosler.] I think there were seven or eight finalists and they were going to choose four. What I noticed was I was the only kid being invited out as a finalist, whose father was a mechanic. All the other kids were the children of management people. I remember being so angry, so pumped up, like stalking around the hotel room. I said, "I'm going to show them who's smart. I'm going to show them who's smart." I was doing pushups to bleach off my extra energy. My father was looking at me like I was a little bit mad, I think a little bit concerned that I not go in with the wrong attitude.

I went into the interview and I did very well and I got the scholarship, and it was a thousand dollars a year for four years as long as you kept your grades in good order. I was really pleased to get the scholarship. I was excited to get this scholarship. I was a little surprised. I had about an eighty-five average in high school because I did very well in English and history, very poorly in math and languages, okay in science, as long as I was not in an advanced track. I thought of myself as a very average student in some ways and sort of talented in others, but it all blended out to an eighty-five average. I had about a thousand on my SATs as a cumulative score.

SI: I am just curious, was that all internally generated or had somebody said something to you?

RS: About what?

SI: About the children of the managers.

RS: They just sent you a list. Here are the other students that are finalists and you looked at what they were doing and it was sort of obvious. The lowest guy on the totem pole, other than me, was the son of an accountant and that was light years from the work my dad did. My dad was a very skilled mechanic. He was a brilliant mechanic, but in a company that manufactured safes and had loads of mechanics. I mean, there were like forty-five guys working out of the shop at Irvington, New Jersey where my father worked. I thought it was astonishing that they didn't see any other children from the manual labor families as being worthy, so I was determined to show them.

I remember one of the questions they asked me, "To what do you owe your academic success?" My response was, "What success?" Then, I realized that was the wrong thing to say and I said, "Well, I've applied myself very hard in the things that I work well at and there are other fields

that come to me with more difficulty. I've worked there too, and then, the balance, I think I've done well.

I made a very strong point that coming out of working on the McGovern campaign in the fall of 1972 and working on my school newspaper, I saw that my future was in some kind of activity that would involve politics or journalism in some way. I presented myself honestly as somebody who was very interested in a life where I would engage public issues. I think that won them over.

I emerged, parenthetically, from the interview with the mistaken belief that all they wanted to do was evaluate you on what you did best. My sister competed for the same scholarship two years later. Didn't get it and I said, "Going in, don't worry about the interview. All they're going to ask you about is what you do best." But my sister was strong in music, art and literature. They weren't terribly interested in music, art and literature. They asked her moronic questions. She was baffled by what they were asking her. "What's your favorite kind of art?" was one of them. She didn't get the scholarship and I felt bad for her because I thought they were looking in the wrong place if they were not selecting my sister because she was one of the top ten students in her graduating class, and a very talented person, very intelligent.

So, I won the scholarship and I was really glad because what that meant was, with the money my parents saved, a thousand bucks, with the money I got from the scholarship, a thousand bucks, that left about no more than five or six hundred dollars to cover the cost of my annual college education and on summer jobs and working in the school cafeteria, we could make that. That was the agreement my parents set with me, that they would pay a thousand, the scholarship would cover a thousand, and I would be responsible for the balance, and we could always do that. We always met that.

I, in fact, worked a little bit during the year. I quickly found that it was hard to reconcile work in the student cafeteria with full attention to my studies, so I let it drop, but over the summer I would pick up jobs as garbage man, painter, janitor, handyman, furniture mover, and I could easily cover the money I needed to live on in college, and also have a couple weeks at the end of the summer to go away backpacking or something like that which is what I usually used to do at the end of every summer--go out west, go out to New England, do some serious camping and hiking.

So, as I finished high school, I anticipated Livingston with great excitement. I'd felt quite confined after a while in Dumont High. I didn't think it was always as intellectually creative and adventurous a place as it might be. It often seemed to be very inward looking to me. I wanted to sort of get out into a larger world. Livingston seemed to be a great gateway for that.

I went to an orientation to sign up for my courses in the spring of my senior year. I had drove down with two close friends who were going to Rutgers College. We all went to the same high school. They were going to Rutgers College. I was going to Livingston. I'll never forget this, as one of their parents was driving us and as they pulled up in my driveway, I was standing there in jeans, a collared shirt, and just an ordinary windbreaker. That was sort of my concession to the

formality of the day. I was going to wear a collared shirt. Both of my friends are wearing sport jackets and I said, "Oh, boy, maybe I blew it."

I got in the car and I got to Livingston and everybody looked more or less like I did. There were not many people wearing sport jackets. They may have been over on College Avenue, but not at Livingston.

I was still really wary of the place. It had a very spooky reputation among friends and parents. But as I was standing on line, I remember talking to this one woman [who I knew throughout four years of college, and we subsequently joked about this], and I'm talking to her and I say to myself, "She doesn't really seem that radical. She seems like a nice girl from the suburbs whose a little bit counter cultural, but not risky or dangerous in any way." I thought to myself, "I think I can handle this place." So, I went, optimistically, through orientation.

For me, one of the most enduring benefits of orientation that spring was Carey McWilliams, one of the senior professors in political science, was advising incoming freshman. He gave me really great advice. He was smart. He was not in any way patronizing about the fact that we were all sort of fumbling. For me, one of the ironic results was, I was looking for a possible history course. He said to me, "Anything that John Gillis teaches is going to be really good, so watch out for a course by John Gillis. If you see it, take it." Eventually, I did in the spring of my freshman year. I was very optimistic about the place coming out of orientation.

Spent the summer working for the Department of Public Works in my hometown. Went up to Quebec on a road trip with my friends, and then, started school with great enthusiasm. I was down as a political science major, but I was also taking courses in communications. I was really confused about what college work meant, because I got lists of all the books that I had to read and I somehow thought, mistakenly, that I had to read them all before the semester started. So, I was cramming them in in the week before classes started and I said, "Boy, they said college would be tough, but I didn't realize how tough. I'm going to have to really apply myself." I was obviously a little confused.

Orientation at Livingston, in the fall of '73, was a good orientation. We had an Outward Bound exercise setup on our campus. It wasn't done by Outward Bound, but it was that kind of exercise, where ropes and nets and obstacles were setup around the campus. And you volunteered-- not everyone did it--to go through it. I loved this. It sounded like so much fun. My only disappointment was that we didn't get to rappel out of the dorms, because we had been led to believe we'd get to rappel out of upper story windows and I was really looking forward to that. [laughter] We learned to create Swiss seats, which are a mountain climber's device for strapping into ropes that protect you when you're on heights and I just loved it. We were written up in the *New York Times*. I was quoted in it; friends back home noticed it.

What was interesting to me was that the exercise did two things. I mean, one, it taught me to be polite, because not everybody who went through the exercise course was equally talented. I remember one guy, who was kind of overweight, kind of dressed almost formally with dress shoes that gave him no traction, and we had to help him through a lot of things, but we helped him. There was one guy who was really good. I remember thinking, he was just sort of a wiry

and strong guy, very imaginative, and had great ideas of getting people over walls and across obstacles. And we did that and I remained friendly with those people forever after that. They weren't close friends, but whenever I saw them on campus I'd smile and wave and I thought it would be a kind of thing that should be repeated. It never happened again at Livingston. My understanding was that budget cuts killed it, but I thought it was a great exercise.

I also thought that orientation, for the most part, was a remarkably friendly time. People talked to each other a lot. They were thrown together and they spoke to each other, sort of freely sat down in the cafeteria. If somebody sat down across from you it was perfectly normal to start talking to them.

The only disappointment in the orientation period was my room. I had a basement room which got little light. It was kind of isolated and I didn't like it. My roommate was an okay a guy, but even before he showed up I was not thrilled with the room. I also started in that room to get acquainted with the residential areas of Livingston and I was living in quad 3.

The general sense that we had of the distribution of students at Livingston was that quad 1 was mostly white. Quad 2 was somewhat mixed and quad 3 had a reputation as the "Black Quad." That's an exaggeration. Not every student in quad 3 was black, but majority of the kids were African American.

I would hang out in the quad talking to people. Most of the older guys who were there had advice for me. They tended to be African American guys, Puerto Rican guys. I remember one guy saying to me, he said, "Man, duck your head and hold onto the saddle because you're going for one fast wild ride in the woods." I said, "Okay, I'm ready." [laughter]

I saw a fight break out one night in the quad. Came close to a fight, two guys started taunting each other. One guy shouted at the other, "Calvin, you went to bed with shit last night," and the guy shouted back, "Your mama." Eventually, they busted off two bottles. I was astonished. I thought, "I can't believe I went to college to encounter stuff like this," which was much tougher than anything I'd seen in high school.

But eventually, the two guys backed away from each other. They didn't want to have a fight with broken bottlenecks. They both found a way to back off. When they were about twenty or thirty yards apart, they tossed the bottle next to each other and never hit each other and drifted away from each other and the whole confrontation quieted down.

I started classes. I went to a communications class over on College Avenue and I didn't like it that much. There were an awful lot of kids in one big room, and the professor in charge was talking about the meaning of communication and I remember the question he kept saying is, "Can I be said to be communicating with that chair?" I thought, "Boy, this is not exactly what interests me. This is a bit more ethereal than I want." I started poking around looking for other courses that might work better, and I went back to Livingston, and it's curious. I didn't know anything about the urban communications program at Livingston, but I wandered into the office of this guy named Jerry Aumente, who I never met before and had escaped my attention in the orientation period. Jerry did then look like one of the Grateful Dead. He had long hair. He had

a full beard. He had a kind of counter cultural shirt and demeanor about him and I was surprised when I sat down and talked to him to learn that he had been a journalist and, in fact, he taught courses in urban journalism.

The idea was journalism courses that would encourage students to learn about the urban environment and report about urban issues. We talked for quite a while about the work I'd done prior to Livingston. I explained to him how much work I had done on my school paper. I'd also invented one issue of a magazine in my high school. I had also done so well on the writing test going into Livingston, that I wasn't required to take the composition sequence. I mean, I tested out of it. So, I think he probably thought I knew how to write. He said, "Look, I'm teaching a course called Investigative Reporting this fall. If you want to take it, I'll admit you to it." I said, "Sounds great." It was a good course. It was a challenging course and I learned a lot about myself and I learned things that I'm still learning.

PC: Can I stop? I'm just curious.

RS: Sure, yes, sure.

PC: I know something about that course, it's been taught at Rutgers College, or on the College Avenue campus in subsequent years. When you take Investigative Reporting at that time, did they actually send you out on projects? Did you investigate things?

RS: Oh, yes, yes. It was interesting to me, yes. You had to investigate things and the focus of the investigation was always out in the wider urban world, right. So, I had been very active in high school, not very active, but active in the question of prison reform. My mother had brought to my attention this organization in New York City called the Fortune Society which worked to make prisons more humane and frankly more effective at rehabilitating people. I was in high school, very attuned to the glaring discrepancies between the stated purposes of our official institutions and what they did, and that ran from the presidency through the Congress, certainly to the prisons. So, I had been involved, writing letters and things like that. I once corresponded with an inmate until I decided he was a bit too tricky for my taste and let it go at that.

I started writing about the problem of recidivism and the percentage of inmates who went back to prison after prison, and this struck me as a failure. I moved into that because one of our assignments was to use a statistic and the statistic I came up with was the percentage of prison inmates in New Jersey who returned to prison for committing subsequent crimes. I'll never forget the long memo that Jerry wrote me about the piece, taking it apart and saying what was good and bad about it. He said, "It's bit of a cross between sort of investigative journalism and a sociological study. Can we move it more towards journalism?" because my lead was something about Dostoyevsky and civilization and society. In some ways that's still what I'm trying to do my own work forty years later, right.

I did a lot of work on prisons. That was basically my beat, prison reform, and I did an independent study the following semester writing about life at a halfway house in downtown New Brunswick, and both were tremendously educational experiences for me. In retrospect, I probably didn't get as much oversight as I might have. I also didn't seek as much oversight as I

might have. I would, every other week, hand off a piece in Jerry's office, run into him later on the campus and talk about it a little bit. It was tremendously, tremendously enriching for me to do that.

Conventional courses; I took, in my freshman year, a wonderful course in literature with Ann Snitow. It was one of the best courses I took in college. She was just very energetic, demanding teacher. She expected you to be there. She expected you to work. At the same time, she was very nurturing. She found out that I was interested in Irish folk music. She mentioned to me that she heard a story on WBAI about a bar in the Bronx. [Editor's Note: WBAI is on 99.5 FM in New York City.] I went up there. It was one of the most fantastic venues in New York City, in the '70s, for traditional Irish music. I went to it for years after that; saw some of the greatest traditional Irish musicians you could ever hear in the world.

I also took an anthro course, which was okay. It didn't work out as well. I'm blanking on the other course, oh, poli- sci course, which was really, really interesting, but in its complex mix of sort of statistics and theory, didn't move me as much as other courses that I took. I did not cotton to sort of quantitative studies and I didn't much incline to theory. I tended to be sort of much more empirical and humanities oriented than theoretical and quantitative.

By the end of my freshman year, I had completed a course that I took with John Gillis, which was the second half of the European history survey. So, it was Europe from 1789 to the present and that was one of the formative courses in my life. I mean, that was the course where I decided I was going to think very seriously about getting a Ph.D. in history, because I was very impressed by the way that John could analyze and contextualize things in class. There was almost no social trend that he in some ways couldn't sort of relate to the larger phenomena that had come before and to me this was really engrossing.

It was also, for me, a very different kind of history. I had always been fascinated by history as a child, particularly military history, I have to say. I grew up with a sense, and I remember discussing this with my mother, that our family really hadn't much to do with making history. I was somewhat jealous of one of my friends in fourth grade who said that Stonewall Jackson was one of his ancestors. I said, "Oh, man, we got nobody like Stonewall Jackson. We are losers next to Johnny Brinkerhoff."

My mother sort of righteously said, "No, your ancestors tilled the fields. They worked the land."

I said, "Oh, come on, ma. Stonewall Jackson is Stonewall Jackson."

Here was John Gillis teaching social history in which ordinary people were important actors in historical processes. Maybe not as individuals, but as a group and I just thought this was a tremendously interesting way of looking at the world and I found it quite compelling. So, by the end of my freshman year, I was really glad that I had survived Livingston. I had found it academically compelling, challenging in many of the courses that I took, broadening with regard to my perspective. I wasn't sure it was the nicest place to live. It was lonely on the weekends, people went away. Campus facilities were underdeveloped. There was a lot of getting drunk on weekends when people did hang around.

PC: That raised a question we were talking about. How did you get alcohol on the Livingston campus? The drinking age was twenty one back then, right?

RS: I think it was eighteen.

PC: It was eighteen, okay. Yes, I think it was.

RS: Well, there were two ways to get alcohol. One was to buy it and I didn't buy that much booze. I did go to bars. I did go to bars. So, the drinking age must have been eighteen. [Editor's Note: From 1972 to 1979, the legal drinking age in New Jersey was eighteen.]

PC: There weren't bars at Livingston.

RS: There were no bars. There was no pub at Livingston then. I didn't like the bars in New Brunswick that much anyway. I went to bars in New York City, particularly this place called the Bunratty on Kingsbridge Road in the Bronx, which had this tremendous Irish music, but I went for the music, not because I was a big drinker. There was one or two places I knew in the Village, but not that well. I hadn't been around that much. I didn't have many favorite bars then.

Students would bring booze onto campus. There was a fair amount of grass. I don't remember much more than grass in my immediate circle. I had friends that did a lot of acid when they were at Livingston, as freshman and sophomores. I did not. I never did acid, but I had friends that tripped a lot and I was not into that. I was also a little worried about what would happen if I did. One of my friends in high school did mescaline once. He said he saw all sorts of things that were really frightening. He said in the middle of his trip he had this thought, "Boy, I'm seeing all this stuff. What would happen to a guy like Snyder who has a really wild imagination?" When he told me that the morning after, my thought was, "Boy, stay away from hard drugs. Learn from your friends," so, I did.

I was, in retrospect, astonished, as I look back on it, to see how freely the school made booze available to students. There were kegs of beer at any student function. There were guys with great pride and skill would tap the kegs and run the things and we were enjoined to get drunk a lot. There's no other way to describe it as a recreational activity. I didn't like that. It kind of bored me.

I was kind of isolated. I remember my parents coming to visit me once on a weekend and they looked around this really empty, kind of desolate campus and they were worried for me. They said to me, "You're a friendly person. You're outgoing. You like to do things. We don't see people here on a Saturday afternoon. I mean, what's it like for you?" I mean, they were genuinely concerned, I could sense that, and I was a little concerned, too, because I didn't like the loneliness of the campus.

I didn't like the isolation and I did think about transferring. I looked at other schools. The choices didn't seem obvious to me. I remember going to look at Emerson College in Boston. It had a big emphasis on communications. The rest of the school seemed a bit thin to me and it

was, to my mind, incredibly expensive. I mean, it just didn't have the same price as Livingston College, and I thought I was getting a good education at Livingston.

SI: You talked about the living, like all the quads, whites in one and mostly black in the other. In terms of the socializing going to the parties, was there more interaction there?

RS: The racial situation at Livingston College when I was there, from '73 to '77 was very complex. It was also very difficult. I remember in the orientation period there was more informal talking. I remember going to a dance to see a band called Black Truth from Trenton, which played funk. I saw kids for the first time in my life doing The Bump which I had never seen in my life. It's a dance where you sort of bump asses and thighs and things like that and I remember thinking, "Oh, my god, oh my god." I mean, I had never seen anything like that. I thought to myself, "Man, if a girl would dance with you like that, she will probably go to bed with you after that. Wow, this is amazing." I was just astonished. It was very different from Dumont High School.

Once the semester got under way, I was aware that social scenes tended to coalesce along racial lines. There were divisions within racial groups. Black and white students were never a monolith and I think that was one of the biggest mistakes that people made at Livingston. There was variety within groups, but that could be obscured a lot of the time. White and black students tended to live apart. They tended to feel themselves to be part of different social scenes.

I was living in quad 3 for the first part of my freshman year and I was lonely. I didn't like the room. I used to look out my window and see a sidewalk and people's feet. This was not a good view for me. I'm an outdoors person. I like the idea of looking around and seeing trees and sky.

So, I went to the housing office and said I wanted a transfer and they offered me a place in the South Towers. The South Towers were two big high rise dorms, at the other end of the campus, and they had originally been all Livingston dorms, but because of Livingston students were less and less inclined to live on the campus, they were being populated by more and more Rutgers students. So, the first few floors of the South Towers were Livingston students, but the upper floors were Rutgers students. They had a bed free, on an otherwise Rutgers floor, did I mind living there? I said, "No, fine with me." I moved in and I was probably the only Livingston student on a floor of Rutgers kids. The dorms in the quads were small. They were arrayed in quads and the idea was that they'd create a more vibrant sense of community. I think that was probably what the design was intended to do, but in fact it didn't work out very well that way.

The dorms in the quads had one entrance. Then, you went up a staircase and branched off to the floors. The dorms in the Towers had everybody on one floor. You went up and down by elevators. You just passed a lot more people in the course of a day going in and out of the elevator. Ironically, in the high rise towers which were supposed to be so impersonal, you met many more people faster and I liked it for that.

I was in a floor with mostly Rutgers kids which I found a little bit alienating because some of them were on my wavelength and some of them were basically fraternity guys who really wanted to be over on the College Avenue campus, kind of unhappy that they were at Livingston and sort

of felt that they were living in a second-class place compared to the world of College Avenue. I gravitated to a couple other kids on my floor, two girls I'm thinking of in particulars who were sort of counter cultural, sort of hippies in their way and we would joke that we were the counter culture on our floor. We were a decided minority.

There seemed to me to be a great amount of suspicion towards Livingston among the Rutgers students that were on my floor. I remember once, black students at Livingston did some kind of protest or sit-in and the Rutgers guys on the floor said how the boys at the frat over on College Avenue were taking notice of things and if these guys at Livingston got out of hand they were going to come over here and straighten things out.

I remember saying to them, "Oh, your buddies from College Avenue are going to come over and straighten things out because they're tough guys because they live in frat houses. Let me tell you, some of the guys here, they grew up in Newark. They grew up in Camden. They saw shit that most people should never see in their lives. You think your buddies from the frat are going to come here and straighten things out? They have a lot of problems." They didn't come to Livingston to straighten things out, but I thought it was insulting, rude, ignorant and patronizing.

I worked really hard to find my own place at Livingston in my freshman year. It sort of felt good in class, after class not so great. I wasn't sure where my crowd was. I was working really hard in school, trying to get oriented. My roommate was a nice guy and although we got along well enough and we had friends on the floor, he wasn't much of an entrée to social life. I had friends on the floor below me who were Livingston students, including a high school buddy, but it's funny: I felt at home in my classes, but adrift socially. I was still trying to find where I fit in in this school.

That said, at the end of the year, I was really happy with it. I thought I'd done well and gotten all A's and B's, mostly A's. I think one C plus in a philosophy course, but I did well in school and I thought I was beginning to find my place. I went out west with my high school buddies that summer. We did a great backpacking trip in Wyoming, Colorado, Arizona, California. We had Greyhound bus passes--we could tour the country for a month for a hundred bucks. My trip through the Tetons with my buddy at that time remains one of the greatest memories of my life, likewise the hike we did to the base of the Grand Canyon and back. It was tremendous. There was still a sense of the '60s in the air in a lot of ways. Felt like we're catching the counterculture and doing the kind of outdoor things we all loved.

I went back in the fall of '74. I was particularly excited about a couple of classes. One of them was a class in military and politics, taught by Carey McWilliams. He had a reputation for being a really tough, demanding professor. I knew guys in the dorm who were sort of in awe of him and I met him at orientation. I had an interest in military issues. I figured it'd be a good course to take. It was a very tough course. Carey was a performer in front of the class. The classroom was his performance space and he really dominated everything. It was a combination of lecturing and questioning. We were expected to read. We were expected to write midterms. We were expected to do book reviews, but he was the strong presence in the classroom. I remember working really hard in the course, harder than I'd worked before.

In the same semester I took a magazine writing editing workshop with a woman named Mel Heath, who was the managing editor of the *Partisan Review* which was still in New Brunswick. I created a magazine that covered the Hungarian community of New Brunswick. That was really an interesting experience. I learned a lot and it was very good. She was a good teacher. Those were two great courses that fall.

Again, I was always trying to sort of both dig deep on campus and get off campus. I was not active on the student newspaper, but I was really eagerly writing about downtown New Brunswick. I submitted pieces to the student newspaper and those were sometimes derived from my journalism independent study with Jerry Aumente, but I wasn't on the staff of the paper.

PC: Now when you say the paper, you're talking about?

RS: *Livingston Medium*.

PC: You mean *The Medium*, yes.

RS: The *Livingston Medium*, which was then a real newspaper …

PC: Yes.

RS: with a serious staff and real aspirations and some achievements too. I also, in my sophomore year, started to look around and try to see how I could fit in better in New Brunswick and I think three things coalesced that were really important for me in the beginning of my sophomore year.

The first was I did really well on military and politics, and I'll never forget this. There were forty students in the class. Four students got A's and I was one of them. I felt on top of the world. I just felt like I had now proved something. All my friends were really happy for me. They were slapping me on the back. One guy was one of Carey's fair haired boys, kept mumbling something about how, "Well, I think he's gotten easier over the years. I think his standards have dropped." I was like, "Dream on, Jan."

I felt that by acing that course, I proved to myself that I was capable of doing serious intellectual work. What that might be, I wasn't sure. I was impressed by Carey as a scholar, but I was also impressed that he wrote columns for magazines like *Commonweal*, which struck me as a very intelligent, analysis of politics and culture. But getting an A in that course meant a lot to me in my intellectual development. If John Gillis' course in the European survey confirmed my interest in history, Carey's course, by setting a really high bar that I had to get over, made me feel that I could actually function really well in an intellectually demanding environment. And to me it just was affirming and empowering.

I also started to find my own place in New Brunswick better and I did that through two institutions for starters. I discovered the Mine Street Coffee House on College Avenue. They had performances on Friday and Saturday nights. On Friday nights they had traditional folk music. On Saturday nights, if I remember correctly, they had singer songwriters. I often went to

the Friday night performances. I was far more interested in traditional folk music--Irish folk music, British folk music, American old time--than I was in singer-songwriters. The coffee house at Mine Street was run by Kathy DeAngelo. She did a great job. It was a very tiny place, a pass the hat operation to pay the performers, but the musicians were really great. Between Mine Street Coffee House and concerts at the Rutgers Student Center of traditional folk music, old time music, bluegrass, I really started to develop my musical tastes. I remember going early in my sophomore year to a concert by a guy named Lou Killen, a great English ballad singer, who I still listen to occasionally when he passes through. It felt that I was starting to get to define myself through the things that I cared about. I had been very interested in folk music in high school, but in a kind of incohate way. By going to Mine Street Coffee House and going to performances in the student center and taking a course on ethnic music of the southern United States, I started to give some meat to my interests.

Livingston also had a great jazz scene. I started going to jazz concerts more and more. Jazz was part of everyday life. Larry Ridley, the director of the jazz program at Livingston, really made concerts widely available. I went to a lot of them. There was always one once a week, whether they were out on the main plaza or in the Tillett Hall. That was our student center. The other way I started to find my niche at Rutgers and Livingston was by getting involved in the Outdoors Club. Rutgers had a really vigorous Outdoors Club that did a lot of activities. There were not that many Livingston students involved in it and it was centered mostly over on College Avenue and at Cook College, so sometimes it could be really difficult to catch up with people and get on outings. I remember being kind of disappointed because I wanted to go spelunking and I was calling this one guy on the other campus and saying, "I really want to go. I really want to go," but I could never get him on the phone and the messages I left never got through.

I really gravitated to kayaking really strongly. I had done a lot of canoeing with my father on the Hudson River and when I found out that they were teaching white water kayaking near the Livingston campus in an old pool that had been part of the Camp Kilmer Army base I was all over it. I dragged one of my buddies from Livingston there. We would go there throughout the winter and practice kayaking and rolling in our kayaks, and then, when the spring came, and also early in the fall, we would paddle in local creeks. We'd paddle on the Millstone a lot. I remember doing a lot of drills on the Millstone. There was a little bit of a small river over near Cook that we paddled on once, too. For me, the combination of the folk music scene centered around Mine Street, and the kayaking scene centered around the Outdoors Club gave me reasons to stick around on the weekends, things to do on the weekends that were more than getting drunk and feeling lonely, which is what I saw too many people doing.

SI: You worked with the halfway house in New Brunswick, was that the second half of your freshman year?

RS: Yes, yes.

SI: Okay. Can you tell us a little bit more about that?

RS: Somehow Jerry Aumente put me in touch with this outfit called the Morrow Project on corrections which was doing prison reform. They had a halfway house in downtown New

Brunswick. I'm virtually certain Jerry put me in touch with them, although I'm not absolutely positive. I remember going to a meeting in Rahway. I wasn't sure what the guys in Rahway wanted of me. I think they thought I could accomplish more for them than I ever could.

When I went to the halfway house, there was a guy there in charge of it who was an interesting guy. He had some kind of background in social work or psychology and he said, "Look, if you just write stories about the guys who live here, that would be, I think, very edifying for people. What are they like? What are their lives like?"

I remember going in there on the first day, and as I arrived in the front door, he was having an argument with somebody who I think was the landlord and there's a shouting match going on. "Pay up!" "You're overcharging," something like that. I thought, "Wow, this is really interesting. This is real life. This sounds great." So, he was a very open guy. He gave me access to guys. He said, "You want to interview them? You can interview me." He didn't screen his pieces with me.

I would write up, often, profiles of guys--tell stories about their experiences, use the stories of the halfway house to offer ideas about corrections. These were not conventional hard news stories. There were as much opinion stories and essays as anything else, but they were journalism. I was looking at what was going on at the time. They were much more like feature writing, but I liked doing that a lot and I would submit them to the *Livingston Medium* and the *Rutgers Targum.* They would usually appear in both, eventually.

I remember going home and having big arguments with my dad because I wrote about a guy once and I described him as an ex-rapist and my father just looks at me with contempt and says, "What's an ex-rapist?"

I said, "Well, he's a guy, committed a crime and he did his time. He's trying to get right."

He sort of said, "Yes, we'll see how he gets right." It worked out to be a pretty sad story. The guy that I was writing about was doing his best to make a go of it and straighten out. He had done time. He had gone through what many people thought was a good program for sex offenders and at one point he seemed to be doing so well that some of the younger guys in the place started to taunt him, like "You're a fraud. You're not as together as you think you are."

To make a long story short, he grabbed a woman in downtown New Brunswick. He may have even had a knife on him. I don't think he raped her. She got away. I'm virtually certain that she got away, but he clearly was not as healed as we thought.

I remember having a long conversation with the director of the place and he said, "Look, he's going to have to go back inside. He knows that." I remember him saying also, "Look, he's sitting in my apartment right now with my wife while we wait for him to be taken back into custody. I'm not afraid of this guy," alright, and he went back in.

It was, to me, very sobering. It was a way that I was reminded that stories don't have happy endings. Struggles to make people whole don't always succeed. Frankly, I remember, in

retrospect, thinking about it, that I remember one of the guys at the halfway house saying rape really wasn't such a bad crime. The more I think about it, their ideas about this were very badly flawed, but at the time these were all things I was thinking about for the first time. I learned a lot. I learned a lot doing it and I learned a lot about thinking about it afterwards. That was in the second half of my freshman year.

Sophomore year I also started to get involved with the student newspaper in just dribs and drabs. I had a good friend on it from one of my very first classes, Steve Zurier. By the end of my sophomore year, the situation on the Livingston campus was heating up.

The dean of the college at the time was a guy named Emmanuel Mesthene. He had been brought in to, in effect, straighten up the place and make it ship shape. From the moment he arrived, there was a sense that he thought the college was badly damaged, badly flawed, needed to be fixed up. This was disconcerting for a lot of the students. Above all, I was worried, "Am I going to graduate from a college where the diploma that's worthless?" Mesthene's comments about the college didn't inspire much confidence in the college.

At the same time, I thought there was a lot that was good at Livingston. I thought it was a college of great extremes. It had students who were very well prepared for college; students who were not very well prepared for college. Yet, I thought that overall it was a good school, one worth improving, not one to destroy. There was great concern that Livingston College students were less and less likely to live on the campus and great debates about what a Livingston education should be.

By the end of my sophomore year I was, taking a course in environmental history with Allen Howard, which ironically met on the New Brunswick campus on College Avenue, and I was getting more active on the student paper. There was also a great concern that a new university policy that was going to require students to get meal plans to live in the dorms was going to send more Livingston students away from the campus. The argument was that by requiring meal plans, you would increase the cost of living in the dorms. And Livingston students, who were at least perceived to be poorer than other students, would not be able to afford to live in the dorms and the end result would be to take campus that already felt itself under pressure--because fewer students were living there and because the president seemed to lack confidence and commitment when it came to Livingston--and depopulate it even more. That made people very uneasy.

I was working in the student cafeteria part-time cleaning the beverage machines, feeding the dishwasher, so I knew what the cafeteria was like. The food was okay. It wasn't great. I remember one time the vegetarian option was hardboiled eggs and a salad, just peanut butter on the side. I mean, I just didn't think this was very good. As the spring of my sophomore year progressed, which would have been spring of '75, a kind of protest movement began to emerge on Livingston about the school's place within the university. Its focal point was the debate over the meal plans, but its real concerns were much broader--about what's the future of Livingston. What's the integrity of our campus? What's our purpose?

People were angry for many different reasons. People were concerned. There had been protests before at Livingston, black students had a tradition of protesting university policies and there

was still a spirit of protest in the air. I got involved sideways, I don't quite know how exactly, with the movement to protest these forced meal plans. One of the leaders was my dorm advisor in quad 1. I was by then living in quad 1. A fellow named Jim Andrews, a very smart guy, a political science student, good leader, good advisor in dorms, and Jim's presence made me confident that we could make a dent in this. Whenever we would have rallies and discussions out in the quad with a bullhorn, I thought Jim was a master with the bullhorn. He knew how to lead a crowd, but also how to listen to people. He was smart and he was responsible. Things heated up and heated up.

Eventually, the idea emerged that we were going to protest the forced meal plans policy at the cafeteria. Exactly what we were going to do by gathering in the lobby of Tillett Hall below the cafeteria was not clear to me. I remember saying to people, "This is going to be a peaceful protest." We were going to protest the forced meal plans, as we called it.

As we got there, things started to heat up. Jim Andrews is nowhere to be seen. It was my understanding that he was on the New Brunswick campus at that point, getting an award for being an outstanding political science student which he richly deserved, but I thought that Jim's absence deprived us of really sober, intelligent leadership.

One thing led to another and students surged towards the entrance to the cafeteria and busted through. I was one of the students. I would guess fifty, seventy people did this. It was chaos.

I went through the doors and I came up on the inside and I saw a student like in almost a wrestling match with a guy. The guy he was wrestling with was in ordinary dress. I didn't know what was going on, but I grabbed the two of them and I pulled them apart because I didn't want to have a fight in the middle of this. Then, the older of the two guys who was clearly not a student glared at me furiously and it dawned on me. I thought, "I bet you that guy's a cop in plain clothes and he thinks I'm breaking up his arrest, not good."

We get inside the cafeteria and it's soul food night. Some students, I'm embarrassed to say, vaulted over the counter and grabbed food and started to run out the back door with it. Others milled around in total confusion, nobody knew what to do next and in the absence of Jim Andrews, there was no effective leadership.

I was working in the cafeteria at the time and I started to look around to see what might happen next. I went back into the kitchen area behind the food lines, I could do that. As a cafeteria worker, nobody was surprised to see me there and I saw Campus Patrol in there and I said, "Son of a gun, this is getting really bad, really soon."

I go back out front and the crowd is still milling around and at that point, one of the black fraternities, which was doing a step show, a common feature of Livingston life, goes marching through the crowd doing this step show. They were not going to be denied on their big night. It was soul food night. They were going to put on a step show and they didn't really mind if there were fifty or more protestors gathered.

So, what I see is the crowd parting like the Red Sea and this frat doing a step show, moving towards me chanting and stepping. The chant is, "Don't fuck with me campus patrol. Don't fuck with me." I think, "This could really blow up." The campus patrolmen were absolutely blown away. I don't know how many of them, if any, were out front by then, but I remember thinking, when I look at the guys in back and I looked at the cafeteria staff, there was utter confusion. They had no idea what they were looking at.

Somehow, and I don't know how, it more or less ended quietly. People dribbled away. Some people sat down and had meals. The thing ended quietly.

I do think that there was an investigation effected. I know there was an investigation because I ran into one of the guys I knew from the cafeteria, who I worked with. He said to me, "Rob, I was talking to people who were investigating the protest, but I cleared you." I said, "What?"

He goes, "I told them that you were one of the organizers of the protest."

I thought, "Well, thanks a lot."

"But I explained to them what you said to me, that it was meant to be peaceful. It was not meant to be violent."

I said, "Well, it wasn't meant to be violent, but clearly it got beyond that. It was unfortunate." Some students, I think, were charged. I'm not positive about that, but most of them were let off. I'm fuzzy on the ratio of charged to let off. Certainly, I was not charged, but among students at Livingston there was a sense that there had been this fairly muscular event and it hadn't solved anything and there was a need to press on with more protests.

SI: Look.

RS: Sure.

SI: Over the course of this protest movement, was it mostly rallies? Were there any demands sent to the administration or anything?

RS: The rally, the demand that I remember most was no forced meal plans.

SI: Yes.

RS: That was the key one, no forced meal plans. Forced meal plans will depopulate the Livingston campus and create a financial hardship for its students. That was the key demand.

I remember explaining to Al Howard after one of my classes that this is just like the tip of the iceberg. It's really not about the meal plans. It's about all these things that have been building up over the last year. I was just impressed how Al, who was a professor, took what I had to say really seriously, kept asking me really sharp pointed questions, "Tell me more. Tell me more. I

need to understand this, yes." That was very important to me to be able to talk about that and explain what I thought was going on.

There were a whole welter of political factions at Livingston. At the time, it was a very left of center college. So, that meant that democrats, liberal democrats, were basically treated like conservatives and things moved left from there. I was sort of what I am still today. I was an admirer of people like Michael Harrington. I belonged for a long time to Democratic Socialists of America. [Editor's Note: Michael Harrington lived from 1928 to 1989. He was a socialist activist and author. In 1982 he founded Democratic Socialists of America.] I describe myself as a DSA member who's long behind on his dues, but I believed in some sort of combination of political democracy and social democracy. In a European context, I would be thought a very moderate, ordinary kind of person. In the U.S., that puts me on the left.

There was a group called the New Jersey Workers' Organization (Marxist-Leninist) who saw the whole issue of Livingston as a kind of labor struggle. There was a lot of conflict over the structure of student government. What would it be like? Who would be in charge? Would it be a union? There was a student union which was treated it as a labor issue. A lot of people were dissatisfied with that. Should it be a more conventional student chamber, which is what we had at the beginning, but had become dysfunctional by the time I arrived there? There was an outfit, in addition to the New Jersey Workers' Organization (Marxist-Leninist), a Maoist group. I'm blanking on the name of it, but I knew a couple of women in it and what made them more impressive to me than the people in the New Jersey Workers' Organization (Marxist-Leninist) is that these Maoist women, although quite radical, were quite willing to start with the students where they were. That not all students were ready to make a revolution, but they did want to make changes.

There was a lot of concern about budget policies at Rutgers. I've been involved in a sit-in at Alexander Library where we were going to occupy the library overnight in protest of budget cuts. My great moment came when I made sandwiches for two hundred people because we thought that by feeding people at about six at night, we'd make it really clear to the administration that we're going to stick around. Eventually it was settled. We didn't occupy the building overnight, but a lot of this was going on and at Livingston it was heating up.

I don't, to this day, remember how it started, but a group of students went to the dean's suite on the second floor of Lucy Stone Hall on Livingston and basically took over the dean's suite. It was a very inchoate group. I arrived, thinking of myself as part of the protest movement, and I kept thinking, "Well, I'm peripherally involved with the student newspaper."

I talked to one of my journalism professors who was among the faculty members milling around in the crowd trying to sort of keep people calm. He said to me, "You know, we always have a history at Livingston College of resolving these things peacefully. I hope that's the case this time."

I wandered around listening to people and looking at people, and I decided, "Okay, I sort of should decide. Am I going to be in this as part of the protest movement or am I going to be in this as part of a student paper?"

I must be clear: I had no sort of traditional idea of journalistic ethics on one side of the line or the other. It was just to me, "I'm going to have to make a choice right now, which am I going to do?" I know that there was a piece of me that feared that the protest movement was something that I was involved in, but I surely couldn't control it by myself and it was sometimes veering in directions that I wasn't entirely sure of. I decided, I remember that morning, "Alright, today I'm going to cover this for the student paper. That's what I'm going to do."

So, I went around interviewing people, listening to people, talking to people. The takeover began earlier in the day. It lasted into the late afternoon and by early evening it continued. Ultimatums went back and forth. I remember people sending out communiqués. I remember one guy singing this Phil Ochs song called--I think it was a Phil Ochs song--called *Love Me, I'm a Liberal*, which I always thought he was snotty and condescending. I didn't think liberals were all bad people. I didn't think all radicals were heroes. [Editor's Note: *Love Me, I'm a Liberal* is a song by Phil Ochs, a protest singer. Released in 1966, the song features Ochs mocking what he viewed as inconsistencies among U.S. liberals.]

As the evening wore on the students occupying the dean's suite took a vote. "Are we going to stay to get arrested or are we going to leave?" A majority voted to stay to get arrested and I decided, as one of the reporters of *Livingston Medium*, that I would stay to witness the arrest. Clearly the campus patrol was coming. Clearly they were going to get evicted at some point. The only question is what matter of eviction.

I took my *Livingston Medium* press card, which is sort of homemade, but real, taped it to my chest with multiple layers of tape. I had my notepad out and I noticed two things. One is that there were very intense and earnest discussions going on among the students about what to do next. I remember one guy saying, "You know, they're never going to come and bust us, relax. This is all façade." He started playing the harmonica. I remember two women arguing with each other and one was shouting at the other. I'll never forget, she said, "Cops are fucking crazy. You know that. You don't want to be here when they arrive. You don't want to be here. You want to leave." There was a whole range of views being expressed, quite privately, in small groups, people huddled together.

To make a long story short, a majority of people left. If there were 125 people there when the vote took place, and if it was roughly 75-50 to stay and get arrested, over the next half hour or so I would guess, 75 people left. There were 50 waiting around to be arrested. To me this was significant, people were voting with their feet to not get arrested.

The sense of tension was building up. I leaned out the window. I admit, as the atmosphere heated up I got a big kick out of the fact that two girls that I knew from the classes and the dorms were shouting to me, "Rob come down. Rob come down. Don't stay up there. Come down. Come down."

Later, one of my buddies told me he said to them both, "Look, if Rob's into being the last reported out of 'Nam, he's being the last reporter out of 'Nam. Frankly, I suspect he's having the time of his life." I was. I loved it.

I was thoroughly involved and engrossed in the work and doing as much as I could. Over time it became really obvious that they were going to arrest. They're going to evict the students. We are now backed into the back of the suite, couldn't see out very well. All I could see was the door leading into the suite. That was pretty much blocked. Then, I couldn't see this happen, but clearly the police arrived on campus.

I'm not positive whether the Campus Patrol or local cops, but what I do remember is when they appeared in the doorway to the suite they were dressed in riot clothing. They had shiny nylon jackets which clearly would make it very hard to do any physical damage to them. Helmets, big nightsticks, these guys looked scary to me. I mean, I remember when they arrived there was quiet and when they appeared in the doorway, but you could also hear chanting outside, "Pigs off campus." I think the appearance of the police, whatever their jurisdiction--campus police or local police--angered the students. You could hear them chanting, "Pigs off campus."

I started writing about the reactions of the people upstairs in my notes as I had all day and I made it clear I was a reporter witnessing it. Nobody arrested me.

The students were then taken downstairs. I didn't really see this, but my friends outside described it to me later. Students and faculty formed a corridor by locking arms, so that the students could be led from Lucy Stone Hall, out across Lucy Stone Plaza, to a bus where they would be taken away for booking. The crowd was very angry. People were yelling, "Pigs off campus."

One of my friends told me later, that he had his arms locked with a professor as a student was being led out--the students were led out, they were not dragged out. It was not violent in anyway, but as a student was being led out, he watched one other student from the surging crowd take a big swing at one of the campus patrolman and just narrowly missed him in the head. My friend looked at the professor and they both shook their heads and said, "This is really hairy."

By the time I got out, the students were all inside the bus. The bus was trying to pull away from Lucy Stone Hall. Lucy Stone Plaza has a kind of circular shape to it, but the students kept pounding on the bus, jamming against the bus, almost trying to rock the bus by holding on to it. The bus is trying to slowly make progress through a crowd. I remember seeing it go one wheel up on a curb so it seemed to lurch and I thought, "Oh, boy, this is bad. This is really bad." But then, fine, the bus got away from the campus and they headed off to booking, which I think was in Piscataway.

I remember running across the campus with my notepad and I saw an older guy, Dave Enscoe, who was a journalism major, who I looked up to--older guy, seemed smarter, more worldly than most kids. He just laughed as he saw me running, appreciatively, and said, "Keep running Rob. Keep running Rob. Go get that story."

I jumped in a car. It might have been my car. I'm not sure. We drove to the booking, couldn't get inside the booking. Saw people milling around the police station outside, then went back. It was a party on campus, and a keg of beer and a rock band playing and the people who had been

arrested showed up. They said, "See, we got arrested. It's not a big deal. I'm alive to tell the story."

But then the inexorable questions appeared. Is this a movement to free "The Livingston 50," as they were called? Or is this a movement to address conditions on campus? I had always been very skeptical of the arrest because I thought, "Once you get arrested en masse, the arrest becomes the issue, not the issue you set out to protest." I was well aware of the logic that by provoking a mass arrest, you compel the university to reveal its repressive, violent logic, but thankfully, the arrest had not been carried out violently. People had kept their heads with a lot of effort on many people's parts, and I was very skeptical about where this was all going to go.

I remember covering the trial of the Livingston 50. Most people plea bargained away over the summer. A few people went to trial in a municipal court. I guess in Piscataway, though I'm not positive. The one thing I remember vividly was that the cafeteria manager was a German guy and sort of somewhat stolid and by the book, not terribly imaginative. Rather hierarchical in his ideas in labor relations. I think he thought of me as a hard worker who should've been more obedient to him. I argued with him once when he criticized one of the cafeteria workers for being lazy and I argued with him once when he said I was wasting the ketchup by the way I poured it into the ketchup containers.

He gets up on the witness stand and what I remember is he was asked, "So, could you tell us about the soul food? What happened on the night of," whatever date? He said, "Yes, it was the soul food night."

The prosecutor says, "Yes, and was there anything unusual about the soul food night?"

He said, "Yes, we served the ham hocks and the black eyed peas."

He says, "Yes, and did anything unusual happen while you were serving the ham hocks and the black eyed peas?" [laughter] "Ah yes," the manager says and he goes off to describe his version of events.

PC: You've got to be running two different stories together because I'm a little confused.

RS: Sure.

PC: You're talking about the protest in the cafeteria or in the dean's office?

RS: Protest in the dean's office, good point. You're right about that.

PC: Yes.

RS: You're absolutely right about that. You're absolutely right about that.

PC: There were trials for both of them?

RS: Now this is tricky. Now, this gets very tricky. Boy is that a great question. My understanding was that a few kids were tried for the push into the cafeteria and many more kids were tried for the takeover of the dean's office.

PC: Did you get to cover both trials or just one?

RS: I only remember going to one trial.

PC: Okay, so it sounds like the cafeteria trial if they were talking about ham hocks.

RS: Yes, yes.

PC: Okay.

RS: That was about the Livingston 50 [who were arrested for occupying the dean's suite] for sure. Now what I remember, vividly, was I remember people saying, but that one guy who's being prosecuted for pushing into the cafeteria, he's just a hot head kid who just got caught up in the moment. He's not nasty. You should let it go. My sense, boy...

PC: Well, the details?

RS: No, I think that's a very important question. No, that's a very important question. I'm blurring two stories together.

PC: Yes.

RS: That's a very good question. My sense is, if there were two trials, I know that the only one that I recall covering was the trial of the Livingston 50.

PC: Yes.

RS: It's possible that that line of questioning might have been about the context of the events.

PC: Yes.

RS: Right and the lead up to them, but you're right about that. I'm unreliable on the exact juris prudence of it. [Editor's Note: Between April 24 and May 1, 1975, students took at least two direct actions to protest an administrative policy that required students seeking priority status for on-campus housing to purchase a meal plan. Both the *Livingston Medium* and the *New York Times* published articles about the incidents. This note is based on articles appearing in the *Medium* and the *Times* between April 26 and May 31, 1975. On April 24, 1975, approximately one hundred students gathered outside of the Livingston College cafeteria to protest the new housing policy. At some point, fifty students forced their way past a dean, two university policemen, and three dining hall supervisors and entered the cafeteria without submitting their meal cards. The college punished students who entered the cafeteria, but it is unclear whether or not the students faced legal punishment. On May 1, 1975, Piscataway police arrested either

forty-six or fifty student protestors (the *Medium* and *Times* provide different figures) for refusing to leave Dean Emmanuel Mesthene's office. The town of Piscataway tried the students on May 27, 1975. The students were convicted of trespassing and fined $25 in court costs.]

PC: That's fine.

RS: There's no question about that. What I am certain, though, was this sense of rising tension.

PC: Yes.

RS: On the campus.

PC: What was your sense of why they went into the dean's suite? I mean, what was the, was there?

RS: It was what people did at Livingston.

PC: Yes, okay.

RS: For two reasons. I remember when I was probably a freshman; there had been an interim dean. Livingston is founded by Ernie Lynton, a visionary guy, who then moves on. [Editor's Note: Ernest Lynton was a physics professor at Rutgers, starting in 1952. He then was the founding dean of Livingston College, but had then moved to another university. He died in 1998.] My understanding was that the interim dean in my freshman year, and I could be wrong, was an urban geographer named George Carey, very good guy, thoroughly in sync with the college. The story that I heard once was the students went to occupy George Carey's office. Instead of confronting them, he said, "Well, you know it's getting late in the afternoon. Why don't we order pizza?" So, he orders pizza and eventually everybody has a long conversation and it sort of dribbles away and there's no occupation, and everybody parts amicably, and I always thought that was wise of him.

I had heard of similar stories about Mason Gross, when students protested the Vietnam War. [Editor's Note: Mason Gross was President of Rutgers University from 1959 to 1971.] I had a friend who said, "We marched on Mason Gross' house to protest the Vietnam War. He shows up on the porch. He and his wife bring out some cookies. They share cookies with us; we talk. At the end of the night, we're walking down the driveway, 'Bye, President Gross,' and the whole thing ended well." I thought these were healthy attitudes on the part of administrators. So, there was the tradition of doing this kind of thing at Livingston. We knew there had been a precedent under Dean George Carey.

There was also a sense amongst students that Dean Mesthene was just not on the side of the college, that at a time when the college felt beset, Mesthene was actually sort of one of the college's opponents rather than one of its advocates or defenders. After the arrest of the Livingston 50, the question became really big. What do we do next? I just remember the atmosphere in the school, for about a week or two, felt almost fevered.

I remember going home one week and talking to my parents. It was spring time; we're eating around the picnic table in the back yard and saying to them, "You know, things are really tricky at school. There are a lot of protests. There's a chance I might get arrested. I don't want to get arrested. I just want you to know that I'm trying to be as serious as I can and be principled--at the same, not do things that are rash and counterproductive." There was a belief amongst some students that after the arrest of the Livingston 50, nothing good had happened and I remember two episodes after that.

The Medium came out with a very good issue calling for the dean's resignation. I didn't have much of a hand in that editorial. I did write a piece about the mood in the dean's suite while the students were awaiting arrest and I was very proud of it because a professor of social psychology wrote a letter to the paper saying it was a very revealing account about how people handled stress and conflict and big decisions and he learned a lot by reading it. I was very proud of that. So, the dean was somewhat under fire.

The other thing I remember, vividly, was a belief on the part of many students that we had to ratchet things up one time and that created a sort of a sense of a crisis atmosphere. There was no strongly functioning student government. There was a student union that claimed to represent students the way workers are represented by a union, but I'm not convinced that was a good analogy. It was not as broadly representative as it should have been.

I remember there was a gathering in the big lounge in Tillett Hall one night and there were a lot of students there. I remember people saying, "Look, we have to create some group of representatives who could lead the students." It was a very contentious meeting. There were some older Rutgers students who came over. I remember Andor Skotnes, one of the grad students from the history department who I liked, who I thought well of, but who wasn't known by most Livingston students, and couldn't get much traction in the meeting. Andor had been very active in efforts to protest cut backs at the university, and I liked him and I thought well of him, but I thought his feel for Livingston was less than perfect. How could it be? Not from the campus.

I remember people saying, "You want to nominate people who'd be a kind of government, like a provisional government for Livingston while you get through this period." I remember one of my friends, who I knew a bit from the school paper, nominated me, among other people. I accepted with some concern. I wasn't sure what this meant, but I said I would do it.

We set about deliberating. What are we going to do? We felt that we had to sharpen our actions. At the same time, I confess, I think we were all a little scared. Amongst ourselves we considered a lot of options. One was we sort of do something like a "Day of Rage" in downtown New Brunswick. We would run around causing mayhem like the Weathermen in Chicago. That didn't strike me as a very good idea. I worried that it could get violent really, really fast. [Editor's Note: The Weathermen was a radical left-wing organization. They were operative in the United States from 1969 through the late 1970s. From October 8 to October 11, 1969, Weathermen and their supporters conducted a series of direct actions in Chicago, Illinois that they called "Days of Rage." Their direct actions included the intentional destruction of private property and physical confrontations with law enforcement personnel.]

One other person said, "We've got to do something really symbolic. I know, we'll take a computer and hold it hostage. Think of the pictures of students standing over a computer with a sledgehammer." One of my friends who's a very bright guy, who was a computer science major said, "Don't do that. Don't do that. Don't do that."

At the end of the day we decided we would try to take over a university building, not a Livingston building. We felt strongly that we had to bring this problem to the attention of the whole university and that we had to sort of make its resolution something that the whole university was going to insist on. We'd do that by making things inconvenient. So, my friend Frank Carvill and I, a guy a little older than me, a political science major, very bright, we volunteered to become the scouts. We would go out and look for buildings to take over. We wandered around Rutgers looking at buildings and we looked at their architecture in whole new ways. How many entrances are there? How many exits are there? How is the security on the floors aligned? How convenient are they to the bus lines? How visible are they?

We set on taking over the administrative building, kind of the main bookkeeping office of the university that was up on what was by then called Busch Campus--blocky building, maybe four stories.

We wandered around it looking at it carefully. We were struck by two things. There were only two ways into it. A front door and a loading dock on the back. Once you got in the front door, there were a lot of ways to seal off the rest of the building anyway. There were pods of offices, suites of offices and rooms that led off the main lobby. Well, once you got through the front door, if you lock the door to the suites of offices you weren't getting anywhere.

We scouted the times when people arrived for work. We thought about when we would have to arrive. We calculated the number of students who would need to take over the building and the number we'd need to really make an impressive protest. I know I did this with a somewhat heavy heart. I sort of felt like I was being pushed forward by student demands as much as I was in control of the situation, but I also felt that something had to be done.

The working plan was to get teams of students into cars. I thought we needed at least six cars with six students in each--one driver for each car, five passengers. That would give us thirty students. If we arrived right around the opening time when small numbers of workers were going into the building, I thought we could get thirty students into the building really fast and the students would take over the doors, and then, lock them and keep other people out. Then, go up on the roof. That was going to be hard to do. We didn't see a good way to get to the roof, but we felt that we had to do it very fast and in numbers that were large enough to make it a successful occupation, but small enough that the group would be nimble.

While we did that with a select group--thirty is not a small group--there would be a big rally back at Livingston College. Once we announced that we'd taken over the building, we would call the people at Livingston, announce that we were there. The idea was that they would march over en masse to the building and demonstrate in front of the building. In our best dreams, we had

visions of crowds of people carrying banners, coming across the meadows of Piscataway. In my worst nightmare, I imagined arguments with secretaries that would not end well and arrests.

We held a meeting of the provisional government in Tillett Hall, prearranged time, and it was a very intense meeting. We talked to each other about what we thought we had to do. We believed, as we were holding this meeting that there were throngs of people out in Tillett Hall, waiting for our announcement, waiting for our report of what to do. In retrospect it was badly organized and probably infiltrated too. We made a deal. We would do it. We would go forward and I swallowed hard and went out of the room and headed towards the main hall at Tillett.

There were no students there. It was exam time. People had gone home. It was over and so there never was any take over. It never happened. We got back to our exams and finished the work of the semester. I felt relieved. I felt relieved. It would have been more than I wanted to do, more than I wanted to do.

SI: So, that was the spring of 1975 you said?

RS: Yes.

SI: Okay.

RS: A lot of the turmoil continued into the fall of '75.

There were many different sources of discontent at Livingston. There were a lot of African American activists of many different stripes. The big African American organization was BUST, Blacks United to Save Themselves. The big Puerto Rican activist organization was the UEP, *Unión Estudiantil Puertorriqueña*. I remember going to meetings with them with my friend Frank trying to setup alliances for the protest. We thought that they were cautious. They were weary. I'm sure they probably had questions about us. I think that students in BUST could be pretty fierce in defending their own interests. At the same time, I think a lot of them were worried that if they got arrested in any way in a protest they could lose their EOF [Educational Opportunity Fund] funding and that was a real consideration. We investigated that.

I was also, by the end of my sophomore year, thinking about studying abroad. I somehow stumbled across a junior year abroad program at the London School of Economics [LSE]. I applied for it, waited for word all through the spring of my sophomore year [spring of 1975], while all this is going on, no word. Summer starts, no word. By the time we get halfway through the summer, I still haven't gotten any word. I remember being in the Village one night with my friend Frank Carvill and we ran into another guy from Livingston and the guy said to us, "Man, can you imagine what the fall is going to be like? I mean, the spring was absolute upheaval. What's going to happen in the fall? It's going to only be bigger." I remember saying to Frank, "Oh, man, I feel funny passing up on this. I've been so neck deep in this. How can I part from this? Now that I finally feel like I'm in the middle of the college, I'm going to go away? I'm not sure."

At the last possible minute I keep badgering LSE with letters. They accept me late in August. I go into an absolute tailspin of confusion. "Oh, my gosh, I am going to go to London, but then I'll miss out on everything that I've been involved in. I'll be at a college and just when I'm in it I'll leave."

At the same time, I confess, going to London, there was like almost no student support they had there, made me really nervous. I'd been to London on my own before on a solo sort of backpacking tourist trip around Europe on my own, on winter break of my freshman year at Livingston. The thought of going back on my own, finding a dorm, finding a place to live was really daunting. I remember buying copies of the *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, looking in the classifieds thinking, "Will I find an apartment for rent?" It struck me, in retrospect, that the notions of student services were wildly underdeveloped. I was scared. I didn't know anybody that did anything like this.

I remember when I showed my dad a really impressive flyer from LSE and the head of the school has something like BA, MA, PhD, OBE. He just sort of looks at it, and he points to the string of initials after the guy's name and goes, "You get one of those if you go there?" I felt like about an inch tall. I felt really stupid. I don't think he had ever meant to do it, but it really sort of took my confidence down a lot and I agonized. I agonized really hard. I talked to friends. I sat up late. I called one of my high school teachers, "What should I do? What should I do?" At the end of the day decided not to go. I stayed at Livingston for my junior year.

Politics was hot in the fall [of 1975]. A lot of protests, a lot of confusion on my part, some dumb journalism that I committed in *The Medium* misunderstanding the demonstrations I was writing about. We got attacked at *The Medium* for doing a bad job which in retrospect we deserved.

I kept thinking, "Oh, my god, I could've been in London. I could've been on the other side of the world. I mean, I could've been doing something really interesting."

I remember being really depressed and just sort of walking across the parking lot and I just pass John Gillis and he saw me. He said, "Are you okay?" I said, "Yes, yes, yes." He told me afterwards that I just looked so miserable, so unhappy. I stumbled on an ad in one of the academic offices for a junior year abroad program where you could go for one semester at a time. LSE had seemed to me to be one year and that made me really nervous, but this was a program that would just be for the spring semester. When I saw that you could apply in the fall of my junior year and go in the spring semester, this was really intriguing to me.

I showed it to John. He said, "You know, you have two options. There are probably people in England I can set you up to study with independently. On the other hand, this is like a more firm structure." I said, "I think I'll go with the more firm structure. I like the idea."

So, I signed up to do a junior semester abroad at a place called Warnborough House in Oxford, England. It was very unusual for students to study abroad then. I had one friend who was going to Mexico. He had already gone under a Rutgers program. I didn't know anybody else at Livingston who was doing it.

So, the fall semester [of 1975] wound down and I did a big oral history course with Al Howard where I did more work than I've ever done in any other course, than I've never assigned to any student I think in my life. It was a great course, an oral history of a utopian colony in New Jersey.

Then, I flew over to Oxford in I guess it was early February, late January of 1976 to settle into a house in the Jericho section of Oxford and take courses with, what were in retrospect, sort of adjunct instructors hired by the people who ran the Warnborough House.

Jericho was kind of a working class neighborhood, not far from Worcester College and I was immediately struck by the fact there was only one other guy in the program who was from a state college, a guy from Kansas. I sort of felt somewhat socially awkward being thrown in with all these kids from Princeton, elite liberal arts schools. I remember writing a note to my mom saying, "Look, I'm stuck with a bunch of upper class nerds and preppies, only one other guy from a state college." I can't believe how bitter I sound when I reread the letter.

The teaching style was a tutorial system. You went to visit your instructor on the set morning every week. The instructor gave you a question, usually one sentence--Discuss the significance of the Irish question and British politics from 1880 to 1930--hint on one or two books. You had to go off, find more sources, research, and write an essay of a thousand words. Bring it back the next week, read it out loud, tutor comments, gives you a grade, another assignment. I took one course on British history from the late nineteenth century to the present, one course on the poetry of Yeats and one course on the history of the city of London.

Between the courses I was taking and living in Oxford, I thrived as I never had before. I just couldn't believe it. I was very happy there. It was a small university town with a million things going on. You could go to political debates. You could go to concerts. You could go to poetry readings. I mean there was a really well-developed intellectual life there for you, not just in the classes, but in the city. I learned as much in and from the city as I did in my classes.

What I also liked about it too was my neighborhood was on the edge of a rural area, just outside Oxford, a big common meadow called the Port Meadow and some university forests beyond. I just loved the fact that from my little house I could walk down to a canal, walk along a canal, and then, in fifteen minutes, be in this big beautiful green meadow where cattle and horses were grazing and walk along what was basically a small version of the Thames, called The Isis. Beautiful little pubs, little sort of hamlets, really part of suburban Oxford more than anything else, but quite beautiful. There was medieval chapel. I just adored it.

I got really active in the folk music scene there. I joined one folk club that met up at a pub every Sunday night. I also hung out at another one called … I think it was the Greyhound, sort of Irish, Irish Republicans, that was free. You just walk in and listen to the music any night. They pass the hat.

I also got really involved. Made a vow to myself I would not watch American made television. I totally watched the BBC throughout the semester and to me the difference between American TV and British TV was striking. I read only British newspapers. I just really wanted to immerse

myself in the place as much as possible. I loved it. I loved it. I made friends with a lot of the kids on the program, a little bit to my surprise, but I became quite close to some of them. Found a lovely girlfriend in my spring semester, a wonderful person, did long distance hiking trips in the Cotswold Hills, went to Amsterdam and Paris on my spring break. I loved Amsterdam. I was utterly intoxicated by Paris.

I went to Paris because I thought you should go to Paris like people tell you, "You should go to the Met [Metropolitan Museum of Art]." I thought it would somehow be "good for me." The cultural equivalent of eating vegetables.

I went to Paris and was just absolutely, absolutely just smitten with the place. I walked endlessly. It sounds melodramatic to say that I walked until my feet bled. It's true that my feet bled. It's also true that my boots didn't fit well. I had very light socks on. I had not prepped my feet for the long amount of walking that I did.

Contrary to American stereotypes, I found French people endlessly friendly, very helpful. I was lost when looking for a youth hostel and this one older guy, probably about fifty, smartly dressed in a sport jacket. I assume he had some position of authority in life. In my fumbling French, I asked him directions for the hostel. He said he'd show me. He spoke to me in English. When I explained to him that my father had been in Paris with the American Army during World War II, he could not have been more welcoming--walked me to the hostel, made sure I got right where I wanted to be. Loved the hostel, got along great with everybody. Totally ran out of money [laughter] and made it back to London hitchhiking on the edge of Paris. I got a ride straight from Paris to the bottom of my friend's block in London. She wasn't home, so I talked my way into a youth hostel in exchange for agreeing to do chores the next morning and eventually got back to her place. Found her at home, finally. Mooched some money and made my way back to Oxford.

It was a wonderful trip and a wonderful semester. For me it just confirmed to me, very strongly, that I wanted to live in a place that I found stimulating, that I found engaging, that in some ways allowed me to express my full range of interests, from study, to culture, to political questions, to the outdoors. To me, in a very funny way, Oxford was a very nice place to live. It was an elite university to be sure, but I knew people at Ruskin College, so I had a different angle on the place. Ruskin was a college affiliated with the trade unions in Britain. At the same time, Oxford was not just a college town. It had a big industrial component to it, particularly an auto plant in Cowley. My neighborhood was a working class neighborhood. A lot of the people I met around folk music were working guys as well. The country was just a fifteen minute walk from my house. I thought it was the greatest combination.

When I got home I was sort of bitter. I went home because it would be Op Sail that summer. It was 1976. I was looking forward to the 200th anniversary of American independence and all the celebrations that would surround that. [Editor's Note: Operation Sail, or Op Sail, was the name given to nautical parades during the Bicentennial.] I know that when I got off the plane I was not a happy guy. I had to confess to my parents, "Sorry I'm so grumpy around the house, but really I had such a great life there. I'm sorry to see it come to an end." So, that was the end of my junior year. My senior year, the fall semester was defined by an internship that I did at *More Magazine* in New York City.

PC: Your senior year?

RS: Senior year, yes.

PC: Okay.

RS: Yes, senior year. So, I came back at the end of my junior year. I began my senior year. My adviser in the Livingston urban communications program, Dave Sachsman, had mentioned to me that there was an interesting magazine being edited by a woman that he knew from Penn [The University of Pennsylvania], [where] he had attended as an undergrad. It was a magazine that was a journalism review. It covered journalism. He thought I might be interested at working at it and I interviewed there and I did well on the interview. They concluded over the summer that I would start there in the fall.

The deal with my folks was that because the Warnborough House Program had cost a bit more than ordinary Rutgers tuition, we'd cut back on the cost of college by me living at home that semester. It would also be an easier commute to New York City. So, I lived with my parents that fall, visited Livingston and New Brunswick often on weekends.

I worked at *More Magazine* four or five days a week. We were supposed to meet at a seminar at Livingston once a week. I went to it often, but not all the time. I think sometimes I probably told the magazine I was going to Livingston and told Livingston I was going to the magazine and went off and went hiking. I know I did that at least once or twice.

I loved working on the magazine. It was journalism review that covered journalism. It just gave me, I thought, a very unique vantage point. It was founded by Tony Lukas [J. Anthony Lukas], just one of the great American journalists of his generation. Richard Pollak, Ron Rosenbaum, David Rubin, a professor at NYU. [Editor's Note: Richard Pollak is an author and journalist. Ron Rosenbaum is a journalist and author. David Rubin is professor and dean emeritus at the Newhouse School-Syracuse University.] I was brought on as an editorial assistant and that meant the first few weeks I was doing things like getting coffee for people and bringing the postage meter to the post office. When David Rubin found out about that was happening to his NYU students he got annoyed and he started to argue for why we needed more substantive work. I started getting a bit more substantive work as a researcher, going out to get photos to illustrate articles and things like that.

There were a lot of big gun journalists that wrote for *More* at the time. What was interesting for me was one of the guys that became fondest of was Ken Auletta. What was the difference about Ken Auletta? One, when you did research for Ken Auletta he told you what he wanted and why he wanted it. [Editor's Note: Ken Auletta is an author and journalist. He has written for *The New Yorker* since 1992.] This was really great. He just didn't bark at you and say, get me X. By telling you what he wanted and why he wanted it, I could make a more informed choice for him as a researcher. He would also say, "Could you," which was better than just ordering me. When we had staff meetings, Ken would look around the room and take in everybody with a glance,

both the lowly editorial assistants and the senior writers and editors. That made me, and I think other people in my kind of slot, feel included.

We were operating the magazine on a shoestring. It was in the middle of an editorial transition, but it was exciting. It was exhilarating. I was there at least four days a week and sometimes five and I was one of the stable of editorial assistants. There was a head editorial assistant, a freelance writer who was being paid nothing to do that job, but was doing that, I think, to build up her credentials. She got very sick. She had to take off a couple weeks. To fill the gap, they made me head editorial assistant and they were really, really happy with my work.

They immediately started encouraging me to do bigger and more demanding kinds of jobs, way beyond photo research, way beyond fact checking, writing, editing, vetting manuscripts. I mean, it was a really classic case of being in an understaffed place can let you rise, suddenly. I felt very bad for the woman who I subbed for because when she came back to the office and told the managing editor she wanted her job back, the managing editor said, "I'm sorry, Rob's been doing it really, really well for the last three weeks. We just don't need you back." So, that was my job for the rest of the semester. By the end of the semester I was writing pieces.

Some of my early writing was fumbling, took me time to find my voice. I wasted too much time trying to sound like the managing editor when I wasn't, but as soon as I wrote in my own voice the work came out really well. Did a back of the book piece on the First Amendment, on censorship. That was fun too.

In my spring, and final, semester at Livingston [in 1977], I was living on the campus again, taking courses, but also doing an independent study at *More.* So, I took a course on medieval English poetry that I liked. Took a course with Norman Markowitz on socialism in Europe and America. I did the equivalent of two courses--took four courses a semester at Livingston in those days--by working at *More Magazine* and that worked out well. I did a lot of writing. I was no longer the head editorial assistant. I wasn't there enough. There's another guy who had become the head editorial assistants and he was quite competent and he got the job because I couldn't be there that much, but it worked out well. I liked it. I was very happy to be there.

At some point they said, "Would you consider leaving college to work for us?" I said, "I've only got a semester to go. I'd really like to finish college." They said, "Well, we can't pay you anything." I said, "You can't pay me and you want me to stop college a semester before I'm done? That doesn't sound like a very good job."

So, they hired another guy and they didn't pay him much and he had dropped out of college, so he had no encumbrances that way.

I finished out my senior year that way. Towards the very end of my senior year I saw a notice that they were asking for a student speaker at the Livingston commencement. One of my best friends was going to put in for it. I thought about it. Maybe I should put in for it too. I thought I had some things to say about the college and I wanted to say them. I thought they needed to be said and if I didn't say them at the very end of our senior year, when would they be said?

I applied to be the student speaker and I was invited to the interview. When I got there, the entire interview team was faculty members and administrators and I, in classic Livingston fashion, was ready to say, "Why are there no students here?" I did ask why there were no students there and they said that students had been invited and they had not taken advantage of the opportunity. I said, "Well, that's where we're at."

I told them that what I wanted to say was that for all the complaints people had about Livingston, for all the feelings that we were beleaguered that we've been banged over the head many times, for all that we knew that was wrong with the place--god knows there was a lot to be fixed--it was a really valuable school and it was attempting important things in that we had accomplished a lot as students and faculty and that it had, in many ways, prepared us to do things that other schools didn't even yet aspire to and that it had prepared us to move forward into a world that we could help change for the better.

I closed by saying that the ideals behind Livingston may be dated to the '60s, but that they were in fact timeless and we needed to extend them into the future, into future generations.

When I finished people cheered. One of my best friends from my hometown was in the seats, gave it the ultimate compliment for a guy from Dumont. He said, "Rob was like a moment at a basketball game when you sank the big basket." People just jumped and started cheering.

The funny thing was I couldn't bask in it because I didn't know how to sort of play an audience that way. I sort of nodded my head and went right back to my seat, but people were cheering, I mean they stood up, they cheered, they clapped. It went over really well because I think that I had affirmed ideals that people took very seriously there. Only the seriousness with which we took the place explained the great heat behind the protests, the arguments at the faculty meetings, the earnest debates late into the night about our curriculum.

The commencement continued. We all got our diplomas. I vividly remember one guy, to show his contempt for Dean Mesthene, showed up in Native American dress and took a feather and he threw it at the dean's feet just before he accepted a diploma. I think that student thought of this as a really deep insult, but nobody else knew what it meant. I went out and had dinner with my parents at a nice little Hungarian restaurant, basked in a lot of congratulations for the next few days. It felt really, really good. It was a good ending to a good education. I really did believe that the education I received there had been challenging and innovative and it encouraged me to be independent. It encouraged me to think for myself. There were still plenty of things that I had to learn. There are plenty of things I had to learn about learning, but I really left Livingston in the spring of 1977 with a belief that I was ready to do a lot and I think that belief was well grounded.

SI: Now, do you think.
[TAPE PAUSED]

PC: Maybe we should go back.

RS: Yes.

SI: Oh, sure.
[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: We were just talking about *More Magazine*.

RS: Sure.

SI: Alright

RS: *More* lasted, I'm going to guess now, maybe five years. It was founded before I got there. Its original design, under Richard Pollak, was much like the *New York Review of Books*; so sort of a tabloid sized newspaper, printed on conventional newsprint, and it was a journalism review. When I got there in the fall of '76 it had a new editor, Michael Kramer, and it was being sort of remade. They called it *The Media Magazine*. It's interesting to see that shift, because *More* was conceived, originally as a magazine written by journalists, for journalists, who were frustrated with journalism, who thought that journalism, as Tom Wicker said, could be better than it was. I remember Wicker saying this vigorously once, somehow, he said, we need to be freed up to do our best work. I remember the phrase he used, "Spurious notions of objectivity often get in the way of our ability to say what we really know is going on."

There was a line in the magazine that has stayed with me the rest of my life which I still swear by. "The only sacred cow in journalism is journalism itself." *More* vowed to look closely at journalism. [Editor's Note: Tom Wicker lived from 1926 to 2011. He was a journalist who worked for the *New York Times*.]

I'll never forget what I found. I mean, in interviewing reporters about their stories--how they did them, potential conflicts of interests--I was astonished. They were cowards. They wouldn't come to the phone. They would fob me off on the communications department. They would say, "Who told you that?" I'd say, "Answer the question first."

It was a real revelation because in so many ways they struck me, a lot of them, as guys who could dish it out, but couldn't take it. I've never been spun upside down so bad as a reporter as I was by journalists when I was a young kid working at *More Magazine*.

The contrast is when I covered a small village in the Hudson Valley after I got out of college at a small town newspaper. I got there and I asked the senior reporter, a very sharp guy named Tim McQuay, "How do you handle it when they lie to you?" Tim said, "Well, they don't really lie. They don't go out of their way to advertise their mistakes, but it's a small town. Everybody knows everything. It's kind of hard to keep secrets in a municipal government. If you're fair and you're straight up and you look, you'll find everything you need to know."

I said, "They don't stonewall you? They don't send you to somebody else? They don't call the communications department?" He said, "Nah, it can't happen in a little town like this."

To me it was really edifying because these small town local officials who were paid a pittance to be members of their village board, who in many ways, were much more forthcoming than the big time journalists that I interviewed at *More*. It made me take their work very seriously in this little village.

I mean, I locked horns with them plenty, but it made me take what they did very, very seriously and one of the results for me, coming out of the experience of *More*, is that some of the more sanctimonious stories that journalists try to tell about themselves never really worked with me very much. *More* took journalism very seriously. I take journalism very seriously, but I still think that the motto that I picked up at *More*, "the only sacred cow of journalism is journalism itself," is something to take really seriously, then and now. *More* tried to make American journalism better by holding it up to a higher standard, to its own standards, and in pieces by people like Garry Wills, Rosenbaum, David Rubin, Tony Lukas, we all learned there was a lot more to journalism, both in the individual story of the day and the way it approached things like poverty.

When I was at *More* though, it was in the middle of the transition. It was becoming more of a media magazine and journalism was one piece of the mix. It was still a very strong piece of the mix. We didn't cover publishing that much. We did more with TV. It was more of a news media magazine, but it was not as sharply oriented towards journalism as before. It was a glossy magazine, more expensive to produce. It looked a lot more like *New York Magazine*. If the old *More* looked like the *New York Review of Books*, the new *More* looked more like *New York Magazine*. We brought a lot of *New York Magazine* writers in like Richard Reeves and Ken Auletta.

More didn't last much more than five or six years. In an utterly, utterly weird turn of events, it was eventually sold to *Columbia Journalism Review*, in some way, and they became a joint publication briefly, and then, *More* disappeared. This struck me as something that was ridiculous. It ought to be illegal. It's like selling *Time* to *Newsweek*. They're supposed to complement each other by being different, not exist under the same roof so they can duplicate each other.

More did think of itself as being more a journalist's magazine and we thought of *CJR* as being more academic. I don't think that was entirely fair at all. I think *CJR* is good at going after journalists. It wasn't an academic journal. Only a journalist would mistake *CJR* for a narrowly academic journal. The editor then, Jim Boylan, was a historian, a journalist, but with a very great instinct for what journalism needed. I think *CJR* was a worthy complement to *More*, but I don't think they belonged under the same roof. The fact that one died, *More*, and the other, *CJR*, is with us is a shame. It would have been better if both perspectives had stayed alive.

SI: I wanted to go back to your time at Livingston. You had been very involved, both in and covering this protest movement that you described, and then, you went to England, and then, you got involved with the magazine, but you must have still been following it. Did you see it getting better or getting worse or staying the same? How was the situation evolving?

RS: That's a very good question. There was an enduring question that hung around Livingston College, which is that it was born in an effort to create a school that was going to be the MIT of the social sciences. At the same time, after the events of Newark and other Jersey cities in '67, many of the faculty and the founders of the school thought it was important to address inequalities in American society, pick up urban questions. We recruited a student body in an effort to be part of that solution, so we had students who were products of strong high schools, maybe even college educated families, and students who had gone to really troubled high schools. There was a wide range of abilities in a Livingston classroom often. I remember Vicky de Grazia, who taught at Livingston for a while, saying that on one end you had students who you'd find at any good state university; she said, "Like at the University of Michigan," and you also had students who'd you expect to be at a community college and you had them in one room. I think it could be challenging for teachers to learn that, to teach in that atmosphere. It could be challenging for students to learn in that atmosphere. There was an ongoing discussion about how to do that.

I remember one of the left factions got really mad. There was a proposal for a literacy exam at Livingston and they mounted demonstrations under the slogan, "We want a guarantee no exams for literacy." This played really well in an editorial in the *Daily News* a few days later. We looked like idiots.

On the other hand, there was a reasonable discussion to be had about how you take students who don't know how to read or write and get them to where they need to be to finish college and that struck me as a really sensible discussion. I felt that if anything, the state ought to be putting more money in helping the kids get to where they needed to be. I felt that if it took you five years of full-time study to get to be where you needed to be, then darn it, New Jersey ought to give you five years of money. Don't expect somebody to make up for years of an inferior school, through no fault of their own, when they get to Livingston College, but give them a long time. I even suggested that why don't we create prep schools in effect for students who are bright, but have not gone to good schools up to now. EOF was an attempt to address this, but there were always really bitter debates on the faculty about this, bitter, bitter, bitter debates.

I remember once I was at a meeting at the faculty chamber and in the way of Livingston, it's like liberal Democrats vying with people--liberal democrats out to Maoists. There were very few genuine conservatives at all at Livingston. Irving Louis Horowitz, the sociologist, is trying to make a point and he's getting shouted down. And he was probably on the conservative edge of the political alignment of the campus. This one kid goes, "Quiet, quiet, quiet." He silences the crowd, big room. I thought, "Oh, boy, what a moment. There's a student dedicated to here, letting all sides be heard, wonderful."

Then, it reaches total silence and Irving is about to have his piece. The student shouts out, "Let the reactionary motherfucker speak." As Norman Markowitz said, decades of academic refinement left Irving's face. He was on a playground in the Bronx. He wanted to grab that kid, get him in a headlock and pound the living daylights out of him. He looked so furious.

Of course nothing like that happened, but people brought very strong emotions to these debates. So, that was one way in which I think the campus was in turmoil. There's the turmoil that comes

from Mesthene and the pressure from Rutgers as a whole. There's the turmoil that comes from the challenge of educating students of different abilities.

The other end of it, and it's complicated, but it needs to be thought through, is race relations on the campus--which were trouble. They could be tense. There could be a lot of mistrust, a lot of lack of contact, and in mutual ignorance and bitterly held attitudes people could clash. The place where you saw this most was in the cafeteria. For reasons that I don't understand, the cafeteria seating tended to align. There'd be areas with mostly black students and areas with mostly white students, a few mixed areas as well, but you can sort of look around the room and see people sat with who they sat with and it was not evenly mixed across the board. So, there was that degree of separation.

There was a degree of separation in residences. There were, it seemed to me, far more African American students in quad 3 than in quad 1. So, you wouldn't necessarily meet up in your residential lives. It was trickier when it came to courses. There were certain history courses that would get a lot of African American students--Al Howard's courses on African history, Ralph Carter's courses on American history, but in the courses that I took on European, relatively few African American students, Norman Markowitz's courses on the history of radicalism, relatively few African American students. Courses with Al Howard, on oral history and environmental history, again, relatively few African Americans students. African American students tended to concentrate in economics and community development, and if you weren't in those courses a lot, you didn't have that many black students in your classes. So, there was a degree of studying and living apart.

Social scenes could be really different too. From what I could see, the social scene of African American students was hardly monolithic. There was some very radical kids who were into all forms of black radicalism. There were kids who, basically, just wanted to study and get through like anybody else. There was a vigorous African American social scene around the fraternities like Groove Phi Groove, sororities like Swing Phi Swing. African American students tended to be most strongly represented in the sports scene at Livingston College and that was an area where there wasn't much mixing as there might have been.

For some of the white students, and I would include myself in this, we'd gone to college to go to a college that would not replicate traditional experiences. We were alive to the spirit of what was new. I say that as a, more or less, first-generation college student. My mother had gone to Hunter College, but she'd lived at home all the time and the thought of living away from home at college was a big thing to her and my dad and guys I met on my dad's job were always sort of impressed that I was living in a dorm at college.

Yet, I think, for some of the African American students, they wanted the kind of college experience they'd heard about before with fraternities and sororities and sports teams, social functions, formal dances. It's not a world that I wanted to be a part of and those worlds were quite separate.

Where it could get heated in the cafeteria was sometimes, some of the black frats would cut the lines in the cafeteria. The lines could be long. They would insist on being served before

anybody else was served and this could lead to confrontations. It could get nasty. There was a rumor in the back of our minds that some of the black kids--and this is sort of also a sense of the times--that in quad 3 there were guns, black kids who got guns. I always took this with a grain of salt. Only many years later did Al Howard explain to me, yes, they did. Black veterans of Vietnam were instrumental in talking students into the need to get rid of those guns, that they had no place on the campus.

In our fevered dreams we thought that maybe one day a police state would be declared and the National Guard would come to Livingston campus and somehow these guns might sort of scare them off. I mean, this is a crazy idea. One student said she saw a Guardsman around the campus, around the summer once. Maybe that meant they were planning to have a takeover someday. I thought, maybe, but there was a heated atmosphere around some racial issues around Livingston for sure. I think black students felt particularly keenly the sense of being beleaguered under the pressure of Rutgers College.

PC: Well, let me, I was going to break in.

RS: Sure, sure.

PC: What existed in Livingston, in terms of what we might call traditional social life? Were there dorm parties? Were there dances? I ask that in the context of what you were just talking about if we can go to that sort of thing.

RS: Sure, sure. Yes, okay. So, for traditional social life, what was there? Every semester there'd sort of be a keg and some loud music or a band; a keg and a band in the basements of the quads. That was a real common thing, once a semester.

PC: Okay, let me follow up.

RS: It wasn't much.

PC: If you go into a quad's basement and there's a party going on with a keg, are you playing soul music? Are you playing rock music? Are there blacks there? Are there whites there?

RS: Depends whose party it is, depends whose party it is.

PC: So, you're in quad 3 were there blacks and whites both?

RS: Quad 3--funk. There would be funk.

PC: Okay.

RS: I remember the night Muhammad Ali won the heavyweight championship by beating Ken Norton in Kinshasa. [Editor's Note: On October 30, 1974, Muhammad Ali beat George Norman for the heavyweight belt in Kinshasa, Zaire. This fight is known as the Rumble in the Jungle.] I was dimly aware that the fight was going on. There was a rumor there was a guy at Rutgers New

Brunswick who was giving ten to one odds, so if I laid down ten bucks, I'd win a hundred. I felt myself way too much a Puritan to gamble, but when I heard the roar coming from quad 3 and the music and the fireworks, I said, "Damn, Ali won. I would've made a lot of money."

Quad 1, the place I lived most at Livingston, more white; music is the Grateful Dead and the Allman Brothers. There was a band that my friend had, called Austin Riggs, named after a kind of mental health hospital in Massachusetts that did a lot of Eric Clapton, a lot of stuff off *Layla*. I'm still friends with him and his wife. Hickory Wind, a kind of country rock band run by a woman named Sandi Kimmel. They were very popular in quad 1 as well.

Quad 2 was a little bit mixed. I mean, quad 2's reputation was being neither here nor there.

The more formal events, the more organized events were like socials run I think by African American students, probably through their sororities. I remember there was one for Latino students as well, probably organized by Puerto Rican students. One of the problems at Livingston was social life was mostly separate. You didn't mingle socially that much. I had African American friends in one of my dorms in quad 1 and please get me back to that because maybe it's the single most important conversation I had in college was with them. Social worlds were quite separate.

At Livingston there was no pub my freshman and sophomore years. I don't even think there was a pub in my junior year. I know there was a pub in my senior year because I remember going there. We were worried. We had seen lots of fights and near fights in the cafeteria and please bring me back to that because I must talk about what those were like. When we opened a pub, which was going to be the only pub on campus, the thought of serving booze with the kind of combustible population that we'd seen in the cafeteria was daunting. It was going to have big glass walls and I remember talking to one of my friends saying, "Oh, my god, can you imagine a chair going through one of those walls one day?" He's like, "I know. I hope things are mellow."

I must say this. To the eternal credit of Livingston College and the jazz scene, the pub became a mellow place where people actually mixed. The jazz scene at Livingston, the audience for jazz at Livingston, was integrated. That was the one thing. Jazz was always found in the kind of plaza outside Tillett Hall, so you get black and white students listening to it in the warmer months and inside the big lounge at Tillett Hall or in the small auditorium at Lucy Stone Hall. Black and white students mixed around jazz, I would say, in ways they didn't mix anywhere else.

So, when the pub opened--we had really good jazz at Livingston, we were really proud of that--it created, to my absolute wonder and delight, something like an integrated social scene, for the first time that I saw there. Music was great. There were not fights. People got along well. I was really proud of the place. I would invite my friends over from Rutgers and say, "Hey man, that's really cool, man. You don't need to go to a frat party. Let's go listen to some jazz tonight." I was really proud of it. It was wonderful. It was one of the best examples of taking Livingston's diversity and making it a strength. It was not utterly unique, but I think we did it very well there.

The jazz scene was a good one that way, but the cafeteria was not. I don't know why, but I'll give you two episodes. They were both among the nastiest. They were not utterly unique though.

This is the problem--long lines to the cafeteria, waiting for food. One of the African American fraternities has got maybe six or eight guys lined up. Way behind them is a friend of mine, a Vietnam veteran, an ex-Marine. The lady behind the counter says, "We don't have any more hamburgers right now. If you want something other than a hamburger, come right around the front, pick up whatever else you want." So, my friend doesn't want a hamburger. He goes around, up to the front of the line. As he starts to pass the front of the line, he tells me, one of the frat members says, "You don't eat before we eat."

My friend says, "I don't want a hamburger. She's serving. I'll get something else. I don't want to wait for hamburgers. I want to eat something else." The guy says, "You don't eat until we eat." [My friend], I mean he had been in combat in Vietnam, as he said, just looks at the guy and he says, "You want to step outside?" The guy goes, "Yes."

When I come in on this, I hear a huge crash. A huge stack of trays is coming down and two of the deans are in the middle of this swarm of fraternity members and my friend. One of the deans, big guy named Scully Stikes, who, the story was, once had a tryout with the Pittsburgh Steelers, has my friend under his arm like a football. He's like carrying him bodily, pushing his way out of the crowd to get him out of the fight. The other dean, a guy named Norm Stewart, is in the middle of the crowd grabbing guys and shredding them and throwing them in all sort of different directions.

I said, "Son of a gun, there is a side of Norm Stewart that I never imagined before. He is like right at home in the middle of this brawl. Here's a guy who comes to work in a jacket and tie every day and there he is pulling guys off."

So, I go to interview Scully Stikes for the student newspaper about this. I say, "This seems to be a problem. What do you think?" "My biggest concern is that it get addressed without guys using weapons."

I'm like, "Weapons?" I think, "If that's his concern, we're in a more dangerous place than I imagined."

Then, I said, "So, what do you think the solution is?" Then, he looks at me and says, "I think the solution is: This is going to go on as long as you guys take it." Now, Scully is African American. I'm white. I'm thinking to myself, "Scully, it's not a good idea to encourage the white guys to start fighting the black guys in the hope that it's going to make the fighting stop. It's only going to get worse."

Because as my friend Frank Carvill and I talked about a lot at Livingston, the stereotype of our students was that the white kids were liberal, effete, hippy kids. This is an utter misnomer. I've heard this repeated again and again. The vast majority of my friends were the first kids in their family to go to college. The majority of my friends came from working class backgrounds. I'm

talking white kids and some of us came out of towns where fighting and toughness were traditional definitions of masculinity that we had been around and wanted no longer to have any part of. We went to Livingston to get away from that garbage.

Frank joked to me, he said, "Boy, it's like we started college at the height of the '60s. We're going to leave at the height of the '50s. It's West Side Story all over again." I joked back to him, I said, "Yes, let's go down to Cliffside Park and kick some ass."

Frank said to me later on, that he just roared inside when I said that because that was the language that they spoke in Carlstadt where grew up. He knew that if I had joked that way, one, we had grown up in the same kinds of towns and two, we both had independently seen through the idiocy of such behavior and no longer wanted any part of it, but we had all been raised to know how to take care of ourselves. I didn't want to fight people, but I didn't want to get pushed around either. The thought that a dean would say to me, "This is going to last as long as you guys let it," did not strike me as constructive advice.

Years later when I told this to my wife, she was absolutely blown away. She said to me, "Rob, where were the women in this dispute? When men start fighting, women don't propose, 'fight more and maybe that'll solve it'."

My own nasty incident with this came when I worked in the cafeteria. I used to work mopping up messes, feeding the milk machines, cleaning the dishes, mopping the tables, busing the trays. One day I come around the corner, there's a bunch of guys standing there, all African American guys, sort of laughing, gabbing among themselves. At their feet was a busted glass filled with fruit punch. I said, "Oh, I got to clean this up."

I go get a mop and I sort of approached them. They're going to have to step aside for me to use my mop and the whole thing I kind of felt like a *schlemiel*. I said, jokingly, "Alright, who's the man with the good hands who dropped this cup and made this mess?" They all laughed at me. I sort of laughed too, trying to make light of it, but I start mopping, one of the guys goes and he fills up another glass and he holds it up, and the other guy deliberately, while I'm watching, shoves his hand as hard as he can to knock the glass out, so a second glass shatters on the floor.

At that point I am really mad. I throw down the map and I put my fists up and I get in the guy's face and I start screaming at him. He puts his fists up too and there's a smile on his face like if we were going to fight, that was just what he wanted.

I thought to myself really hard, two things. One, I mean, my perception of time seemed to slow down and I remembered a girl from an anthro course saying, "White people and African American people have very different verbal styles and black people yell. They don't mean as much by it. You have to really learn to sort of negotiate different cultural styles when it comes to speech." I think, "Maybe the fact that this guy is screaming doesn't mean that he really wants to fight me."

My second thought was, "This is an utterly stupid job that I have here at the cafeteria. I am about to get into a fight on behalf of the Livingston cafeteria job? This is really moronic."

Then, I thought of something that one of my coaches had said in high school, "Don't be the guy who throws the first punch," which leaves open the question of who throws the second punch, but alright, I said, "I'm not going to throw the first punch, but I am not going to back away either and I stood there screaming at this guy at the top of my lungs with my fists up. He screamed at me and eventually we drifted apart and the thing ended peacefully.

Two things were really fascinating to me after that and really moving. I get back into the kitchen in the dishwashing, where all the ladies who work are African American or Latino. They were so angry at that guy. They were so upset. They kept running him down in the most uncompromising way. The woman, who was in charge of the service workers, older African American woman, was just sort of mothering me to death, running down that guy, up and down, so sorry that this had happened to me. This never should have happened. So, I learned a lot from that.

The other thing I learned was I wasn't sure which guy I had almost had a fight with. I saw two guys in the hall the next couple days, we looked at each other funny and I thought to myself, "I don't know whether it's that guy or that guy."

If I was that close to having a big punch up with a guy and I can't identify him two days later, eye witness identifications are worthless. Because boy, you'd think I would know who the guy was, but I was so overwrought that I couldn't tell which of the guys I had made eye contact with in the halls had been a bystander, more or less, and which had been on the edge of getting into a fight with me and I remember thinking about that. Never trust somebody when they see an eyewitness ID'd. It's unreliable on the fighting scene.

SI: Sure.

RS: Confrontations like the one I had in the cafeteria and the one my friend had in the cafeteria were troubling to me because they brought up ugly emotions that I didn't want to have. They almost felt like they were dragging me into a kind of world of mental alignments and social alignments that I didn't want to be part of. They made me less optimistic about the future of an integrated America. In some ways, in summoning up that whole world of fighting, that I so wanted to leave behind, Frank and I both felt like it was a terrible regression. This is not what we went to college for. This is not what we went to college for. We had grown up in towns where that kind of thing happened. We didn't want to be part of it. We had never really been part of it, but we had known we had to sort of find our way in that world, but you want to leave that world, and then, you find yourself in college where it's happening.

But it should not be the last world on interracial interaction among students because very important to me, and I'll never forget this, is an exchange that I had one night in the dorms when I was living in quad 1.

I didn't know that many black guys in Livingston, a few. There were two guys in the dorms though that I knew well enough to kid with, chat with late at night in the dorm, talked candidly about things. One night I'm sitting there and I hear them talking, goofing around, and speaking

in what to me sounded like impossibly posh, upper-class, affected rich people's accent. "Hi, where are we going tonight for dinner?" They were just laughing and they were running this routine like this endlessly. I said, "What are you guys doing talking like that?" They said, "We're talking like white people." "Yes," I said, "but my friends and I use that accent all the time. We don't think of it as a white people's accent. We think of it as a rich people's accent and we use that accent all the time to make fun of rich people." They said, "You mean you do this kind of accent not to make fun of white people, to make fun of rich people?"

"Yes," I said "That's how we imagine rich people talk and we use it to ridicule them. Nobody I know who's white talks like that at all."

We just looked at each other and there was this unforgettable moment where we just realized that our mutual perceptions of each other in our world was so much more complicated than there was room to express. I still consider it one of the most valuable conversations I've ever had in my life. I was mentioning it the other day at a session with some people from the Smithsonian for an exhibit on race, ethnicity and advertising.

So, although the Livingston experience could be trying and it had, in certain racially inflected situations, real moments of combustion, there were also moments of real learning like that moment late at night in the dorm lounge with those two guys about white people and rich people, and like the jazz scene. Those are really valuable.

The third one, which I'll never forget, was when I got the yearbook. In the weird racial alignments of Livingston College, most of the newspaper staff was white. Most of the yearbook staff was black, radio station maybe a little more mixed. I kept wondering, "What's a yearbook put together by mostly black kids going to look like?" No idea. I thought it would reflect their experiences which I assumed to be completely different from my own. I get the yearbook. It is a kind of "remember when feature" and a dozen things. "Remember when you had to wait a long time for your registration fees. Remember when you had long lines in the cafeteria. Remember when you went to the truck at night to get a sandwich." For the most part, those reminisces were exactly what I remembered.

I thought to myself, "Son of a gun, here we were on campus, many of us perceiving that we lived in different social worlds, but in fact having very common experiences. What the heck is that about? What can we do to bridge that? Will I ever sit down and talk to some of those guys who seem to be so different then, living in another world even though we were only a hundred yards apart in our dorms?" I thought there was much to be learned from that and I've tried to remain alert ever since to things that people have in common despite all the apparent differences.

SI: Well, I was curious, just in terms of how it may have related to your experiences and what you observed, your interactions with other types of communities. You mentioned Vietnam veterans a couple times. Was there an actual veterans' community that you would note or you just happened to know that these guys were veterans?

RS: There were vets on campus. There may have been some kind of office that dealt with them. I'm not sure. I tended to meet them socially, hanging out. A few vets lived in the dorms. A lot

of them were commuters, so I met them in class. Guys who were vets were usually not shy about being vets. They'd sometimes bring it up in class. For reasons I never entirely understood, a lot of the vets thought that I was a vet too. I mean, more than once I'd get, "So, you were there, right?" I'd say, "No, I'm never a vet." They'd say, "Oh, well let me explain." The one time that got really deep was, well, one of my friends, we were sitting in the pub, same guy had the near blowup in the cafeteria that ended up with everybody being pulled apart by the deans. We were drinking in the pub one night and he was talking about an incident in Vietnam. They were told, he said, as he put it, to attack, I'll never forget his phrase, "This insignificant little hill." He said it was obvious they were going to get slaughtered on the way up and he said it was equally obvious that when they got to the summit, the other side would have fled. It would have been a meaningless victory. This sergeant kept exhorting him to do it and he said that they shot the sergeant. My jaw dropped a little bit and he said, "Well, you know what it was like. You were there, right?" I said, "No, I'm sorry. I was never there. I wasn't in Vietnam. I was never in the Army." Sort of shrugged, went back to his beer. That quite shook me that he was walking around carrying that. He's a good guy. I liked him very much, but that was in the back of his mind, an episode, clearly. So, the vets were there, a little older, maybe not ahead of us in classes, but slightly older than the other students in class.

SI: Also, what we now call the LGBTQ, just maybe four years before you came to Rutgers they'd started some of the first student chapters at Rutgers. What was the status of that community? Was there any interaction there? Or was it separate?

RS: In retrospect, it was there with limited appreciation for the seriousness of the issue. It came up in different ways. My freshman year my roommate was probably gay, given the way he talked about his life; sophomore year my roommate was either gay or bisexual, so I was alert to the idea that people have different sexualities. I thought that when I was a freshman, a lot of the guys on the floor were really nasty to the guy who was my roommate.

I went away winter break my freshman year to traipse around Ireland and England and Wales. When I got back I was really upset, from one of the girls I knew on the floor, to see the guys on the floor had been really rotten to my roommate while I was gone. They knew he was sort of high strung and studied a lot and they would pound on the doors late at night to wake him up and I was really angry. I made it a point that I would somehow let them know what I thought of them which I did once.

Guys on the floor are really proud that one of them screwed some girl in the middle of the afternoon and brought the condom out afterwards and it was sitting on the floor in the hall. They were looking at this spent condom that this guy had proudly dropped there, as if it was radioactive. I thought about how much they tried to make life hard for my roommate who was a nice guy. I saw the condom and it clearly terrified them. Weird, it struck me as weird. I'd had sex already. I knew all about it. I thought, "Oh, man this is amazing."

I had big, heavy hiking boots on. It's really hard to kick something with a hiking boot, but I got the angle just right. I got the toe of the boot right underneath, like the sole of the boot right underneath it, kicked it and lifted it up with a kind of move I worked on in soccer and I landed it right on the stomach of one of the biggest, rudest guys, and he just thought he was going to die. I

just thought it was so funny and I just laughed at him and I shook my head and walked away. That was one of my many little ways of showing them. "Guys, I don't think that you're cool. I really don't think you're that cool."

At Livingston, there was the women's studies program beginning when I was there. It was much under discussion. I remember people saying a woman quipped to another woman involved there, "What are you going to be when you get a degree, a woman?" I mean, it was not well enough understood. There was low consciousness in a sense. I remember one year there was, I thought, an utterly brilliant, utterly brilliant demonstration by LGBT activists in which they said they're going to take a census of the number of gay people in New Brunswick and, "The way we'll do it is on a certain day everybody who's gay should wear blue jeans and you'll be counted as gay." I remember they had an ad for it that said, "Come out, come out, wherever you are."

I thought this was the most brilliant tactic in the world because two things happened. You got these earnest letters to the *Targum* saying, "How dare you infringe on my right to wear blue jeans?" I said, "What, you idiot?"

It was all set for College Avenue and so I remember working in the cafeteria that day and I was wearing blue jeans and I said, "Son of a gun, what's happening on College Avenue? What could be going on?" So, after my shift in the cafeteria I get on the bus and I go over to College Avenue. Nothing is happening on College Avenue. It's like an ordinary day. If you didn't know it, you wouldn't think there was anything happening, but I mean it was just so brilliant, both in trying to demonstrate numbers on one hand, right, for LGBT people, but also trying to sort of get students who weren't to think what it's like to live with something that might be thought of as a stigma. It got everybody thinking. I thought it was the greatest sort of ideas I'd ever come across.

There were a few lesbian women on campus who were openly active, not a lot, but they were there. In general, I would call it sort of fairly low consciousness on this stuff. I was there, but I think that the first generation of activists were far more evolved than the students and much of the faculty, frankly. I don't remember it being taken with the seriousness that it should have been, yes.

SI: Well, we can come back at Livingston at any point, if you think of anything you want to add, but I wanted to ask. You said you had had thoughts of graduate school, considering a Ph.D. in history at one point. Were you thinking about graduate school in the spring of 1977 or did you want to get experience?

RS: In the long run, yes. I remember in the long run, yes. It's ironic. I really wanted to get done with school and just do what I wanted to do for a while.

SI: Alright.

RS: I felt like I had studied really hard. There's a piece of me that had felt a little bit confined, wanted to get on with the next stage of my life, as only sort of an ambitious, energetic, twenty year old can, but I also knew that my scholarship said you're supposed to study through four

years and do well. I didn't want do anything that would muck that up. I'd gone away to England for a semester. I had done a semester working in New York. So, I felt like I'd been around. I knew that some form of grad school was out there, but I had no idea what it would be.

I remember one of the political science professors, Dennis Bathory, encouraged me to get an MBA because Yale just had a new MBA program and I'd get right into it and I could apply the skills I learned there in all sorts of ways. I thought, "I am the last guy in the world who should be crunching numbers." Numbers and theory have been my two fields where I'm either lacking in ability or lacking in great interest. So, I didn't see that kind of graduate program as being attractive to me. I thought about the PhD. I was still thinking about it. Master's degrees didn't weigh that heavily on me. I had a sense that I can get a journalism job without a master's degree. I didn't know what other kind of master's degree programs were out there at all.

So, I had definite thoughts of grad school and these became very clear to me when I was wrapping up my senior year. I was planning to go out to Oregon right after the end of the semester. There was a girl out there. We were sort of interested in each other. We had been writing since we met in England. I remember this very vividly. I was leaving *The Medium* office to go buy my bus ticket from New York to Portland when this guy shouts to me, "Hey Rob, there's somebody on the phone for you." I'm like, "Who." He shouts to me, "A guy from the *Village Voice*." I'm like, "Whoa." So, one of the editors at *More* who had moved on to work at the *Voice* had recommended me for a job at the *Voice.*

I went with the heaviest of hearts, went for the interview. I didn't want the job. I really wanted to bust loose for at least a summer. I was interested in this girl in Oregon. I just did lousy on the interview and I usually do well on job interviews if I want the job and I just didn't do well. So, I didn't get the job, but I was anguishing about this because after the interview I was hanging out with my buddy one night, we're walking around down by the Millstone Creek. I don't know what possessed us to wander down there, but we were chatting and I said, "What do I do? What do I do? What do I do?" I mean this is a big job. If I get offered, how can I turn it down?

He said, "Yes, but you're going to go to grad school someday, right?" I said, "Yes, someday I will." He goes, "It probably doesn't mean that much. If you're going to grad school, a job at the *Voice* or not, it's not going to make a huge difference in your life."

"Probably true."

Well, I didn't get the job at the *Voice* and I took the bus to Portland. It did not really work out with the girl anyway. I had all sorts of adventures though. I went backpacking in Alaska and British Columbia. I did a lot of backpacking in Idaho. It was a great trip. I did a lot of backpacking and hiking in the Sierras, but I came back to New York that September, ready to get to work.

I came back to New York in the fall of '77 and got a job as a research assistant for an author. Then, that job died by January, February.

I felt very glad to be back in the New York metro area, really, really glad to be back. I remember vividly thinking about that. I remember the bus let me off in the Port Authority Bus Terminal and I grabbed the 167 Bus home to Dumont and I picked up a copy of one of the New York City newspapers and I read this column by Jimmy Breslin. I thought it was right up to speed on the local politics. I walked through the door in the house. My parents were so glad to see me and immediately start talking about, "What do you think about the mayoral race in New York City?" I said this and that. They said, "Oh, he's been reading Jimmy Breslin." Back and forth. It just felt so good to be at home. I felt like I'd come back to the right place.

Then, in February of '78, I interviewed for a job at a small town newspaper in Tarrytown, New York and I got that. I tried for a job at a bigger paper in Nyack; didn't get it, but the editor liked me and said, "I'm going to recommend you to a smaller paper. When something opens." I went and got the job and it was a good first job out of college. It was a good first job.

SI: How long did you work in Tarrytown?

RS: I was there about a year-and-a-half, no more than that. I had sort of always felt that I missed not going to LSE, the way I might have. I always thought about getting a master's degree, but it was a very vague idea. There were things that I loved about the *Tarrytown Daily News*. I just thought that it wasn't using my full brain, that my own ideas, my own thoughts, my own research, my ability to go into things in depth, didn't always matter as much as I wanted. If I was going to be a journalist, I wanted to be in a different branch of journalism, not hard news. I gravitated more towards magazines and opinion writing.

I remember talking to my parents about my interests and maybe going back to England for a year to get a master's and maybe an LSE. I remember my father saying to me at one point on a car ride with my mom and me, he said, "Look, if you want to do that, we have enough money to help you. We could help you. We could give you some money if you want to get the master's." I said, "Gee, that's really kind dad, you know, let's see."

Before I really acted on that my father got cancer and that, in my mind, completely took off the table of any idea of going overseas or asking him for money. Whatever I was going to do, I was going to do on my own. So, I never went overseas to study for an extended period the way I planned and I organized my life around being in the New York metro area. That was not a hardship to me. To me, the issues I cared about, cities, ethnicity, labor, politics, they reached a fusion and intensity in New York City which I found extremely compelling.

I talked to my old Livingston professors about grad school. Initially, they discouraged me, because they said, "Look, it's a really uncertain job market. What are you going to get yourself into?" This would've been '77, '78, but over time I think I convinced them that I had a reasonably good idea of what I was getting into and a plan B if it didn't work out. I applied to MA programs at Rutgers, Columbia, NYU and CUNY. The MA program I applied to at CUNY was at Hunter. I was accepted at all of them and NYU actually offered me tuition remission which sounded great to me because then that meant I'd go to school for free. I didn't understand the difference between MA programs and doctoral programs. I was really genuinely only interested in getting my feet wet.

I didn't understand that often, applying for an MA program, you rule yourself out for any money because the Columbia history department called one day and said, "Are you interested in our doctoral program?" I said, "Well, I'm really interested in the MA." "Are you really sure you're not interested in the doctoral program?" I'm utterly naïve in the way I answer this question. I said, "Yes, I really just want to get an MA. I want to see how it works out." They said, "Okay, thanks." They admitted me for the MA. Clearly they were sounding me out on the doctoral thing. So, I accepted the offer at NYU. It was the best one, I thought.

The thought of getting paid to go to school to me was utterly intoxicating. I couldn't believe that things like this existed. I had assumed that I would sort of work as a firefighter or something like that and go to school part-time. The thought of going to school full-time was amazing.

When I got home from a long hiking trip in Scotland in the spring of '79 and there was a telegram for me from Bob Scally, a professor at NYU. He was a close friend of John Gillis. It said, "NYU has opened up new fellowship programs," X number of years, X amount of money for people who want to pursue the PhD in history. "Does this interest you?" I immediately grabbed it and said, "Yes, let's talk."

I gulped really hard because I felt, "This is going to get me in a lot deeper than I ever imagined. On the other hand, they're paying me to go to school. What can be better?" I mean, I was vaguely aware of what Columbia had been sounding me out on, but this was much more direct and up front. Although it accelerated me into graduate school much faster than I'd ever planned, I didn't see anything else that was good happening out there. I didn't want to stay at the *Tarrytown Daily News* any longer. I didn't see an obvious journalism job that was going to be thrilling for me out there unless I put in a bit more time there. I also thought that if grad school didn't work out, work in journalism would be somehow still there for me.

Accept the offer. I started in the fall of 1979.

SI: Before we leave Tarrytown, what kind of stories did you cover for the paper?

RS: It was a lot of things. It was village government. I covered the police. I had the police beat. I would go to police stations early in the morning and check on what had happened the night before. My basic key obligations, always, week in week out, for most of my job there, were the police and the village government in North Tarrytown. A small village, interesting mix of working class people--Latinos, African Americans--and sort of a more posh middle-class area, further up the Hudson River, big GM plant with a union there. I enjoyed covering the plant and the union.

It was a great place to be a reporter. You could pick up a lot of stories and depending on where you wanted to run with them, you could do a lot. I did a lot with the GM plant. I did stories about a conference convened by Willy Brandt and former Prime Minister Heath of Great Britain at a local conference center. [Editor's Note: Willy Brandt was chairman of the Socialist Democratic Party in West Germany from 1964 to 1987 and Chancellor of West Germany from 1969 to 1974. Edward Heath was the Prime Minister of Great Britain from 1970 to 1974 and

leader of the Conservative Party from 1965 to 1975.] The Rockefellers were always up to something. Nelson Rockefeller and John D. Rockefeller both died when I was up there and I got to cover their funerals and that was really interesting.

There were moments when I was covering them that I felt that by working at a real small town on small issues, I was losing sight of some things. I remember I was covering this conference with Willy Brandt and Edward Heath. I see them from about fifty yards off. I said, "Oh, damn, I got to interview them. What am I going to possibly ask them about?" I thought, "God, back when I was in Oxford, I had all sorts of ideas about British politics, NATO, Europe. What am I going to talk about? Phil Zegarelli and the dog walking ordnance in North Tarrytown, gulp, gulp, what am I going to do?"

So, I think, "I know, I'm going to ask them what brings a former leader of the Conservative Party and a former leader of the German Social Democrats together in one conference." That was a good question and they took off from it in really interesting ways and I liked it. It was a lot of fun.

I went to an event with Henry Kissinger and I noticed how Henry Kissinger can charm the socks off most reporters, and he was doing that with me, and it was fascinating to watch him do it. It was also fascinating to see how these guys talked among themselves after hours because we were drinking and I was drinking and chatting with them. You know how people would publically posture against each other, in private clearly had ways of getting along. I mean, this was tremendously edifying to me.

Over time, I got a job writing about sort of big issues that transcended the boundaries of any one village. I wrote a couple big pieces about politics and government in Irvington, New York, Tarrytown, New York and North Tarrytown. I tried to take the political temperature of the place. I tried to look at conservative activists in the village who I thought were ascendant and important because I felt they tied into national currents and politics.

Really rewarding to me was I did an oral history of a United Auto Workers local. I interviewed a lot of guys who had been autoworkers in the '20s and early '30s, before the UAW came in, and they had a lot to say. It was really, really interesting. So, I enjoyed the pieces that I did there, but I didn't like the pace of daily journalism. I felt like I didn't get to go into things with enough depth.

SI: Was the oral history printed as an article in the paper or was it something you did on the side?

RS: Yes, yes, yes, it became a two part series, yes.

SI: Okay.

RS: It was my crack at being Studs Terkel. I took the interviews and transcribed them and I edited them down, got pictures of the guys, pictures of the plant, pictures of what the plant used to look like. I was very proud of it. I was very proud of it. [Editor's Note: Studs Terkel was a

radio and television host and author. He is known for his books of oral history compilations on the Great Depression, World War II and other topics. In 1970 he assembled *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression* and in 1985 he assembled *"The Good War:" An Oral History of World War II* for which he won the Pulitzer Prize.] It drew together a lot of my interests in ways that I found really rewarding.

SI: Let me just pause for a second.
[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: Alright, now we will probably continue this more in the next session, but can you just kind of tell me about getting started with grad school once you accepted at NYU?

RS: Yes. I worked for most of the summer, knocked off, flew to California to visit my buddy in San Francisco. Hitchhiked out to Yosemite and did a great backpacking trip across a place called Red Peak Pass, great long trip. Came back to New York and I was living at home with my parents. I'd given up a bedroom I had in an apartment in Tarrytown. I thought it was best for me to be home a lot when my dad was sick.

I was confident to myself as a student, but grad school tested me in ways I hadn't really anticipated--ideas about historiography, about scholarly literature were relatively new to me. I had my enthusiasms and interests to go on, but I sort of was more interested in what happened in the Industrial Revolution than the historiography of the Industrial Revolution. That was a mental shift that I had to learn to make.

I remember taking one class where I thought, "What do you have to do to do well in grad school?" I was in a class with Tom Bender. It was a great class on American cities and I said, "Alright, it's my first college paper. Let's do the very best I can and hand it in and see what happens. I'm not going to agonize and rewrite it three times. I'm just going to do the best I can and hand it in." I did the best I could. I got a B plus. I said, "Alright, next time revise it one more time, and then, send it in." I got A's and I did fine from there on in.

So, I learned that by doing a little polishing and a little extra effort, I could hit the mark. Tom's course was a great course, great course. I had another course in labor history. I remember the professor, Danny Walkowitz who went on to be my advisor, really lambasted us one night for doing a terrible job. I was wondering, "What have I gotten myself into?" I remember going to a bar with two other students drinking, like, "What have we gotten into? Oh, my god. Are we just over our heads?" I got lost on the subway. I wound up in the South Bronx. It was baffling.

Gradually, made my way forward and I became comfortable with it and I liked it. I liked my work as a teaching assistant. I worked with a wonderful guy named Dave Reimers in a course on immigration history. I liked grad school and I was doing well. I found it a very different world from the one I'd been in. Livingston, your life was defined by the college. In grad school your life was defined by the department.

I was well aware that this was a giant step away from the world I'd grown up in. It's funny, at *More Magazine* one of the things I noticed for the first time in my life, literally--I can't believe

how old I was when this happened--was that grown men do not all have rough hands. My dad had rough hands. He was a mechanic, what would you expect? All his buddies had rough hands. They were workers. They all had rough hands.

I noticed one day when I shook hands with all the editors at *More Magazine*, they all had really smooth hands. I said, "Son of a gun, these are grown men that don't have rough hands. I get it. If you do work like theirs, you don't get rough hands." I had somehow thought my hands would automatically get rough when I grew up and I said, "Son of a gun, I'm headed to being a guy who doesn't have rough hands, interesting."

In grad school, I mean, that was taken to an all new level altogether and I found that a bit of a social adjustment sometimes. NYU was a history department sort of elevating itself at the time. I think it was a very interesting place. It was strong in urban history, strong in social history, strong in labor history, growing emphasis on women's history there too, and then, later, public history. So, it was a good fit for me that way. By the beginning of my second semester I'd found an apartment in Greenwich Village and I just thought I was in heaven. I mean, I was in grad school living in the Village. This is the kind of thing I wanted to do all my life and here I was doing it. It just felt great. I loved it.

I remember when I saw the notice for the apartment and I had to go and interview with the guy living there to see if I can get the spare room. It meant cancelling a trip to the Olympics in Lake Placid, and I told my friend Frank Carvill that I might not be able to go to Lake Placid as planned. He said, "Oh, Rob, go on this interview. You got a chance to live in America's Left Bank, do it man. The Olympics will always be around." I did and I got the apartment.

It was a tight fit, but a nice guy and a good apartment to live in, three blocks from the NYU campus, cheap rent, a lot of elderly Italian ladies in the building. Coming home at night after classes to the smell of the cooking there was just delicious and the music scene was great. You can buy a newspaper. You get a late edition of the *New York Times* at eleven o'clock. There were bars that I knew with good music. There were coffee places where I could sit, you know, yacking with people. … I lived often on things like tofu, stir fried with peppers and onions and brown rice, but it was a good life. I liked it. I was very happy living in the Village. The first three years of grad school felt really great. I had good funding, was doing well. I could not have been more pleased.

I always had a degree of wonder, where was this going to go because there was a sense that the job market was shrinking on everybody, but for me, grad school was just a great thing to be doing. It was intellectually challenging in ways that I liked. The one thing that I found difficult was adapting my writing to grad school. I think it was a funny period in American history. I think that more quantitative works of social history had actually, I think, done some kind of damage to historians' ability to think of themselves as literary craftsman and writing mattered a lot to me. I remember once a conversation with Tom Bender which he was talking about my writing and I don't know what he said, but I got almost upset with him. Tom's a very formal guy. It's one of the few, sort of personal points I ever made with him. I said, "Tom, for a long time I always thought I was a really good writer. People paid me to write and they liked my writing, so it's very strange for me to come to grad school and get told I'm not doing well [as a writer] and I

want to figure out how to become a good writer again because it matters a lot to me." Tom was very sympathetic and we talked a lot about ways to create a new kind of course that would emphasize writing. It didn't happen when I was there, but it happened later and I think that was all to the good. What did come out of some of my efforts as a grad student was I organized a workshop in historiography, because we were all befuddled by historiography. So, I organized a workshop in historiography that became a course in historiography. I also thought at one point, "We're not getting the best deal as teaching assistants." I organized a teaching assistants' association in the history department which sort of bargained for us. The chair, Carl Prince, was a reasonable guy in the end and it was not an adversarial thing, but it was a way for us to air concerns that might not reach him otherwise.

SI: Did you have to write a thesis or a dissertation?

RS: Yes, yes, a dissertation. I was moved along pretty fast. There was a master's seminar for a semester--you would write a paper--or a doctoral seminar for a year and Danny Walkowitz who was advising me said, "Look, instead of doing a master's seminar for a semester, just do the doctoral seminar for a whole year." So, in my second year I wrote an essay that both covered my doctoral seminar requirement and completed my master's. It was about a Yiddish language singing group called the Paterson Jewish Folk Chorus that was originally in the orbit of the Communist Party, but then became a group of singers who were part of a kind of secular Jewish radicalism. That was my second year of grad school essay and that was eventually published in *American Jewish History* and the interviews I did for that were deposited in the Jewish Historical Society at a Y in Wayne. So, that was really rewarding. I wasn't sure what my dissertation subject was going to be. I didn't think it was going to revolve around Yiddish. I didn't want to learn another language. I passed my language requirement with Spanish and that was enough for me. So, I did start to look around then for a dissertation topic, but doing that master's essay was a lot of work. Publishing it was rewarding too.

SI: How did you settle on that topic?

RS: Danny nudged me to do it. His relatives had been involved with it and he thought it also correctly tied together a lot of my interests in sort of politics, culture, radicalism and urban history. So, that was a good topic for me. In retrospect it didn't direct me towards a dissertation topic and I'm always telling my students now to, "Make your first big research essay something that will be a chapter of your dissertation." I think I mastered a whole literature on Yiddish speaking radicals in the United States and culture of the Jewish left in ways that were great. I did a lot of conferences, published it, did some really interesting stuff off of it, but at the end of the day, that's not what my dissertation was and I thought that amounted to a kind of a detour, a useful detour though, in my grad school progress.

SI: Alright. Well, let's conclude for today.

RS: Okay.

SI: We will set another session.

RS: Sure.

SI: We will pick up with continuing your graduate studies.

RS: Sure, sure.

SI: Alright.

----------END OF TRANSCRIPT----------

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