

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH EDWARD BELDING

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins the second interview with Ed Belding on April 18, 2024, with Shaun Illingworth. Thank you very much for having me here again. We were just talking a little bit about the political side of going to Rutgers. You were going to say something, go ahead.

EB: Right. What I was going to say was, see, you have to take it back a little bit. So, in other words, the preparation for me to go to Rutgers, I came to Rutgers with expectations, baggage, whatever you want to call it. The experience that I had at Rutgers was eye-opening.

I would say it's a cultural type of thing and an experiential type of thing, where it goes way beyond the classroom, the lecture type of thing, the prof and the student and all that, because student life on campus was fascinating to me. There were so many choices that you could make, all the activities and stuff going on.

I wasn't really a political person in high school. My upbringing was Presbyterian WASP, Republican Party, but I wasn't really into all that in a serious way. I couldn't vote yet, that type of thing. Okay, so, I go off to college, Rutgers. There's stuff going on, but it's sort of like developing as I'm developing there.

As I understand it, ROTC was mandatory before my class there, and then, voluntary when my class started, from then on, so that that militaristic type of thing wasn't as big. I mean, there was a big, heavy thing about recruiting and trying to get people to join the ROTC and all that, whereas before, when it was mandatory, you didn't have that. It was just sort of a given that you had to get involved in it.

There were kids who were into things that would be put in a category of radical. We had, in my freshman dorm, the guy next door was big into Bob Dylan before Bob Dylan became a household name. He was playing this music and the rest of us thought, "Oh, this is horrible. This guy can't sing. It's rotten stuff. It's really bad."

This guy was into weightlifting in his dorm room. He had all these weights and everything. While he was weightlifting, he'd be playing this Dylan music, but he's playing it real loud with the windows open. Dylan was singing about this and that. We really weren't listening to the lyrics that much, but we were exposed to it.

Then, the folk singing thing, with Pete Seeger and all that--we weren't into his background of being investigated for being involved with Communist stuff and all that--but folk music was getting big, the Kingston Trio and all that. I was interested in music. I mentioned that before. But the folk scene was a little different than the rock scene.

[Editor's Note: Singer-Songwriter Pete Seeger drew the ire of the House Un-American Activities Committee, beginning in the mid-1950s, for refusing to testify on people he knew from his prior involvement with the Communist Party and other groups. Seeger faced legal persecution for years afterwards and he and his band, the Weavers, suffered under the blacklist.]

I was into the old-time rock-and-roll, but, yet, there was a spillover with that because of the blues, like John Lee Hooker and all that. Some of the blues guys were singing about some

social issues in a way. So, I was getting involved in it, whether I liked it or not, because of the spillover.

SI: Other folks I've interviewed have talked about seeing folk acts or bluegrass acts at Rutgers.

EB: Yes, because they had *Hootenanny* [a 1963-64 show on ABC] at the Ledge.

SI: Yes, exactly.

EB: Right, right, yes. I was there when they broke the windows in the front of the Ledge *Hootenanny* because the crowd was so big. They were trying to get in and they couldn't take any more inside. So, somebody broke a window or two in the front. They had these long windows in the front, I think on both sides of the door. It was turning into a "happening", to borrow a phrase from the Fluxus Movement. [laughter] It was really getting out of control, but, yes, they had some acts there.

At the time, I thought a lot of those folk singing groups were sort of corny, because, see, with my rock background, old-time rock-and-roll, you know the difference between the black singers and the white singers. You know the difference between Little Richard and Pat Boone, where Pat Boone can't even follow the lyrics and sing what Little Richard was singing. Yet, he'd come out with these rip-offs of Little Richard's stuff and make millions of dollars on it, while Little Richard's making maybe a few thousand dollars, that type of thing. So, I was into explaining the unfairness to anyone who would listen.

I thought some of this folk music stuff was just a passing fad, but it was part of the scene. It was part of that movement, just like the Beatnik thing, too, the Beatnik thing with the poetry and all that, Allen Ginsberg/Jack Kerouac and all that. That was like a precursor, because that was in the late '40s, early '50s.

So, they were like the fathers of a movement that was taken over by the next generation, and the folk singing was part of that. So, Bob Dylan was an aficionado of Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac. Buffy Sainte-Marie comes along and there's a whole mess of people involved in putting folk singing on the map.

We were into the songs, the social movement songs, and there was some spillover. I was interested in some of that, like Johnny Cash when he did [*The Ballad of*] *Ira Hayes*, about "the drunken Indian who raised a flag at Iwo Jima" and all that. I thought that was great. Johnny Cash started as--he was in that Million Dollar Quartet with Carl Perkins and Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash and Jerry Lee Lewis, that type of thing.

So, that was my background. That was unusual coming from Ridgewood, because Ridgewood--Lesley Gore lived nearby, Upper Saddle River--so, they were into more of a pop-rock type of thing, whereas I was into the real heavy, gritty stuff.

I brought that to Rutgers with me. I got involved with this guy who was--I don't know what you'd call him--I think I mentioned him before, Jimmy Wertheim. His disc jockey name was

"Harry Clam," and he had this barrelhouse, boogie-woogie and the blues [show]. I worked as his discographer.

So, he had all this old-time blues stuff from the '30s and '40s. Where he collected all this stuff from, I don't know, but he was from Brooklyn, Bed-Sty. So, he was one of the guys at Rutgers who would go around looking for a place to sleep. He didn't have a dorm; he didn't pay for a dorm or anything. He went around and slept in rooms where somebody let him in.

He just bummed around and he'd bum food off people. He smoked these horrible, twisted cigars from New Orleans. They have a name for them. I forget what they were—"cheroots" I think. He'd stink up the joint with these cigars.

He was a character. He was really a character. He's like an unsung person at Rutgers—a shadow. You didn't realize that this type of person was around. I don't know if he was on scholarship. I don't know if he actually paid for his classes at Rutgers, but he was there and he was involved.

So, I got involved with some characters that I would never have met in my life if I stayed in the Ridgewood scene, because that was all white bucks and chinos and preppy and "keeping up with the Joneses," that type of thing. So, it was a whole new experience, a whole new world. I took advantage of some things and, some other things, I missed, because I didn't understand what was going on. One of the things I regret missing was the Fluxus Movement in art which was just burgeoning in the early 60's and involved some profs at Rutgers. I never heard of it until many years later when I got into art and discovered that I was a Fluxus artist all along!

In the midst of all that, I got involved in the Republican Party, because the guy who was President of the Republican Club at Rutgers was an excellent handball player. I sort of was fascinated with it, in hearing about it. I never played handball before, not Ridgewood. Ridgewood was tennis and I hated tennis. I never got involved in that.

So, I come down to Rutgers and they've got these handball courts in the old gym. I saw them when I had to take the mandatory gym class and all that. I'm looking at the guys playing. I said, "Gee, I think I could do that, sort of got some baseball moves. You're moving around, using your hands and all that."

I was in a dorm. I think this was my sophomore year. Sophomore year was a big year for me. It was a senior dorm. It was all senior independents in there. Stan Kallman was the President of the Republican Club and he had some guys on the floor that were in the Club, too.

So, he said, "Oh, you're interested in handball?" He says, "I'll teach you how to play. I'll teach you how to play without gloves, so [that] you'll be a better player." Well, of course, I didn't know the difference.

So, he says, "But, you've got to join the Republican Club, because I need all the help I can get," because the Republican Club was like an endangered species at Rutgers back then, but it was still viable. So, I got into the Republican Club.

We were involved in a few things, but I really didn't turn political. I was just going through the motions and getting involved with the handball more than I was getting involved with the Republican thing. So, it really didn't mean anything to me to be in it.

Lo and behold, when I do the genealogy thing and I check on the family, one of the founders of the Republican Party was Elbridge Gerry Spaulding, my great, great grandfather. He would've been Secretary of the Treasury if they didn't give it to [William] Seward, if Lincoln didn't give it to Seward, because the deal was, I think Seward was from New York, and so was Spaulding. So, they didn't want to have too many from one state. It was something like that.

[Editor's Note: Elbridge Gerry Spaulding (1809-1897) served New York's 32nd District in the US House of Representatives from 1849 to 1851 as a Whig and from 1859 to 1863 as a Republican. He wrote the Legal Tender Act, which allowed the government to issue dollars not backed by gold or silver.]

Anyway, it turned out I had this big, long heritage of the Republican Party. I'm at Rutgers and I'm really sponging off the deal in order to get this thing going. I tell you, Stan Kallman was a damn good handball player, damn good. I'm glad he taught me how to play without gloves, because, that way, your accuracy is so much better.

Then, years later, the doctor that I went to, he's looking at my hands and he says, "What's this? What's going on?" I said, "Well, I play a lot of handball." He says, "Well, you'd better stop," because I was getting a lot of bone bruises and stuff like that. He says, "It's not good for you." So, I gave that up and picked up racquetball and paddleball. I didn't like that as much.

So, that lasted for a little while, but I parlayed that all into a thing at the camp, Camp Winauke. I was up there as a softball and baseball counselor, doing fine. I see the practice tennis wall. It's made out of wood and it's falling apart.

I tell the camp owner, I said, "You've got a lot of kids here who have a background with being exposed to handball. Why don't you make a cinderblock wall and we'll make a handball court there? I can coach it and you'll have a new program." So, he said, "I'll think about it."

So, winter passes and I go back the next year--there's the handball court, all lined out, everything's fine. He even got gloves for the kids. So, we had a handball program that was unbelievable. The kids ate it up.

What they do at the end of the camp season--and there was political stuff going on at camp, too, with one of the kids' older brothers immolating himself on the steps of the UN.

SI: Really?

EB: Yes, yes. It was in *The New York Times*. We had to confiscate the papers because the incident might have upset the campers. I believe it was an Orthodox family, too, or at least a Conservative family.

So, anyway, they made handball the opening event of color war. That's where they divide the camp kids into two teams and they go at it. It is intense. You'd have to see it to believe it, really intense.

They opened it up with the handball, and then, a couple of years after that, they had handball and paddleball. So, I was real proud of that program, because that came out of just the serendipity of me learning how to play it at Rutgers from Stan Kallman. Where is he now? I don't know, but he was an interesting guy.

The Republican Club's days were numbered at Rutgers. You could tell that things were shifting. Staying an independent, not joining the fraternities, because, I would say, all the guys who were from Ridgewood who went to Rutgers got into this certain fraternity. The fraternity was reflecting the socialization that was going on at Ridgewood. In other words, whatever was happening in Ridgewood, that was the attitude at Delta Phi.

I was interested in it towards the end of my freshman year, but, then, I looked at the cumulative average and the lowest cumulative average on campus of the fraternities was Delta Phi. I said, "I'm not that strong a student, so, I don't think I'll be able to handle that."

Plus, I didn't drink, I didn't smoke. I wasn't into any of that stuff, and it looked like there was an awful lot of drinking going on at that place. So, I said, "It's not for me." So, I stayed independent. I thought that was one of the best moves that I made.

Being an independent, then, you run into people that are your non-fraternity type. A lot of the non-fraternity types tend to be on the radical left to the left side of the spectrum. So, I was running into a lot of those people.

Now, it didn't turn me, because I'm not really that political, it didn't turn me 180 degrees, nothing like that, but what it did was, it made me open and responsive to other ideas. I thought that was one of the great things that came out of Rutgers. It opened me up to accept ideas that if I had stayed in that Ridgewood provincial thing, I wouldn't have been exposed to, wouldn't have been open to. So, that was good. That was a good part of it, yes.

SI: Tell me about some of the things that you were exposed to that, again, not 180, but shifted your thoughts and beliefs.

EB: Yes. Well, SDS was coming onboard, I think by my junior/senior year. That was a pretty strong movement. They were doing things with minority groups in New Brunswick, because, at the time--and you're talking about leading up to, well, '64 and '65, and the riots don't occur until '68, '69, '70--so, you're at a time where things are just starting to percolate, and the Vietnam War thing, just starting to percolate.

[Editor's Note: Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) was a popular student activist movement during the mid to late 1960s that expanded across college campuses across the United States. They protested against racial discrimination, the Vietnam War, inequality in the United States and for women's rights, but, eventually, fractured off into various splinter groups that advocated their own interests, sometimes through violent means.]

You have some antiwar stuff going on, but not too much, like with the folk singing thing and Bob Dylan. Bob Dylan really didn't want to [be political]. He wasn't trying to lead a movement or anything like that. Joan Baez was stronger on it than he was.

The thing was, they were interpreting his songs as antiwar, peace, this type of thing, and help out impoverished groups, minority groups, that type of thing--but that was their interpretation of his songs. He was being very cryptic about everything, would be very standoffish and hard to interview, that type of thing.

You had SDS. The police in New Brunswick did not like SDS at all and there was this attitude in New Brunswick, especially in the Hungarian community, that it was Communist-inspired and infiltrated.

So, SDS had these education [programs], like a preschool thing, education thing for black kids in the New Brunswick schools, to try to get them up to the level of, let's say, the average kid in New Brunswick, okay, because you had the North Brunswick kids coming to New Brunswick at the time.

Now, I didn't know anything about this at this time, because I ended up teaching in the New Brunswick System. Then, I learned a lot about it, but I knew that SDS was there and I knew some people that were working in it. I thought it was a pretty good idea, but the cops would be on their case and picking some of them up for minor things, and so forth. There was a harassment type of thing going on.

There were some other movements going on, too. The black students weren't great in number at Rutgers yet. They were sort of organizing, identifying together, trying to be together and that sort of thing.

I think I mentioned to you, with the fraternities, the big thing was a Jewish guy getting into one of the WASP-ish fraternities, because he was a basketball player, that he was good. So, the fraternity wanted to get him in and say, "Look how good we are and how nice we are," that type of thing, but, as far as blacks were concerned, that wasn't happening yet.

Then, what else was going on? There was some movement in the Rutgers Student Council. The guy who was President of the Student Council in the spring got on his motorcycle and took off and never came back. We thought that odd.

There were guys who were going to Rutgers and they would drop out or take a year off or something and just go find themselves, like *On the Road*, Jack Kerouac, that type of thing. I

thought that was real odd. I mean, "If you're here, you're here for a reason. Then, you get your degree and you fit into society wherever you fit in."

So, I still had that mentality of conforming and just stay within the lines, but there were people who were doing odd things--to me, they were odd--but I found that attractive, too. I said, "Gee, that might be pretty good, find out about this, and so forth, take a year off," whatever, but my parents would never put up with that. That didn't cross their spectrum.

So, anyway, I was immersed in this type of atmosphere with this type of stuff going on. I'm trying to figure it out. I'm trying to figure out myself, I'm trying to figure out this stuff. So, it was great. It was a great environment to be in.

Through that, I got to know New Brunswick quite well, and so, I got comfortable [with] the idea of, "I could live in this area and never go back home," and I never did, because my stepfather moved the family down to Brielle, the Shore, I think when I was a senior. Yes, I was a senior.

So, I never went back to Ridgewood and I never lived in Brielle. So, the minute I graduated from Rutgers, it was up to the summer camp, but, when I came back, I found an apartment in New Brunswick. I stayed in New Brunswick for a time.

There's an irony here, because my wife, who was fourteen or fifteen at the time, was at Franklin High School. They had a big connection with Rutgers. Because of their expansion, in building this or that or so forth, they were on split sessions or something. They had free access to the Rutgers Library. She would go over there, but she would not only go over there as a Franklin High School student, she would pretend that she was a Douglass student.

She got in with the SDS people. She was actually teaching black kids in New Brunswick while I was going to Rutgers. I didn't know her at the time, found out about this later, but she was deeply into SDS. So, she was radicalized, if you want to call that radical (and I guess, at the time, it was).

So, she was at that end of the spectrum and, here I was, fooling around with the Republican Party at that end of the spectrum. I wasn't taking it seriously. She was taking it seriously. So, they welcomed her in. The SDS people assumed that she was a college student, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen years old. There's no questions asked. So, that was just an interesting sidelight on the whole thing.

So, I was exposed to it, but I wasn't involved in it. I wasn't actively, directly involved in it, but it was there. It was going on. Things just got more and more intense as you get into after 1965. Things were really heating up, and so, by '68, when you had all the assassinations, and so forth, like that, then, it was really, really something.

SI: Yes. This is jumping ahead, but, since you were living in New Brunswick or teaching in New Brunswick, would you stay in touch with what was happening on the campus?



EB: Yes, yes. One of the reasons was--we can get into the teaching career in New Brunswick, so, let me backtrack a little bit and I'll get up to it.

SI: Sure.

EB: 1965, I graduate from Rutgers. I got the certification to teach history. I can't find a job, because I don't have social studies certification. I'm sweating it because the draft is looming. I go up to the summer camp. I get the draft notice. I come down, get the advice to get into graduate school--so, I'm back at Rutgers--and get a job.

So, I get the job at Drake College Business. I'm teaching typing. Before you know it, the director of the school, the branch in New Brunswick (they had six branches in the state), she quits and they need a director. So, they hire me as the director.

I'm, what? twenty-three, twenty-four years old, and I'm the youngest director by far of the other ones. I'm running the show and it's really great. The pay is lousy, because it's a private school and they want to make money. So, I'm there and I developed my own program.

I've got a lot of kids that are graduated from Douglass, "straight arrow" girls who can't find a job because they're liberal arts majors and there's not the jobs available. So, they come to a secretarial program at Drake. Then, they end up with a job at J&J, because we had a connection there. So, the kids were coming in, it was great. We were filled to the gills with kids.

We started to get boys, guys, who were trying to avoid the draft, but they weren't too smart, so, they couldn't get into college. So, they'd come to Drake, take accounting. Okay, so, I guess you could call them "draft dodgers," because they were trying to find this way to do it. So, that was going on.

I was going to graduate school at Rutgers until the job got too much, because I had to do the evening program, I had to do the day program. So, it was getting out of hand. I figured, "Well, my career looks like it's going to be with Drake." So, I dropped out of the graduate school. There, I wasn't doing anything about the social studies thing. I was still taking history courses.

SI: Okay.

EB: So, I wasn't doing anything there as far as the teaching, wasn't getting ready for any move. Then, Middlesex County College opens up. They can offer an AB degree and Drake didn't have a degree. All they had was a promise, "We'll get you a job." So, then, kids who would have applied to us were going to Middlesex County College, because they could take secretarial, whatever, over there. So, we were losing. We were starting to lose. I saw the handwriting on the wall.

Meanwhile, '68, we're talking about, riots, okay, big-time in New Jersey, Newark, Plainfield, all that. Joe Marino, who's the vice principal at the junior high in New Brunswick, he's the assistant to the owner of the camp that I was working at. I took the summers off from Drake, left somebody else in charge for their summer school, and went up to the camp.

So, while I was up there, he's putting pressure on me because they're putting pressure on him to be the principal of the school, because the principal, they fired him. They wanted him to take over and he didn't want it, too much pressure. It was really a tough job. So, he's putting pressure on me to come and teach, okay, because, I think I told you, they lost seventy teachers in the riots.

So, I'm thinking, "Well, Middlesex County College's drawing kids away from Drake. Drake isn't going anywhere and they're losing ground. I might as well get where I'm supposed to go anyway." So, I go over there. I take the place of an English teacher. They give me all English classes. I'm teaching English. Then, I eventually drift into social studies.

SI: You mentioned they lost seventy teachers. I don't think you mentioned that before.

EB: Oh, because of the riots.

SI: Was that because they did not want to teach in New Brunswick anymore?

EB: Well, because of the riots, they actually had many teachers who left before the year was out. I believe that the riots started in March and, by April, I think several teachers disappeared. They just never came back. Some were injured in the riots, some were scared. I mean, it was really nasty.

I remember because I had an apartment on Welton Street, which is right next to the intermediate school, at that time, at Roosevelt Intermediate School. They had the police--from different communities, too--marching up and down Livingston Avenue in their gear, riot gear. It was scary.

I witnessed a guy throwing a Molotov cocktail into the furnace room of the intermediate school. This was when I was still at Drake, which was on Livingston Avenue. So, I was right in the middle of it, not understanding everything that was going on, and so forth. These teachers left, and then, some lasted the rest of the year, but, then, they never came back after that. They took off. The lady whose place I took went to Greece. She never came back.

So, there I am, at what was called the [Albert Chester] "Chet" Redshaw Junior High School. That went up to ninth grade. The challenge that you had was that the "worst kids" in New Brunswick [went there]. I'm talking about behavior-wise and as far as a challenge to teach, because they didn't trust the system, they didn't trust the administration, they didn't trust the teachers. They had been burned many times before. The police had done them in many times, or their family members. So, they were not enamored by the system at all.

Also, these (quote) "worst kids" wouldn't make it to the high school. They'd drop out after ninth grade because of the age thing, and so forth. Many of them had been left back. So, they aged out and never went to the high school, okay, but we had them.

We had to teach them and see what we could do while they were still at the junior high. The attendance rate was really bad. You'd have kids come and go. They might be gone for a week or two, that type of thing. So, it was a mess.

We got Austin Gumbs as the principal. Joe Marino stayed as vice principal. Austin Gumbs took over as the principal. He was from Highland Park, by way of Perth Amboy, by way of the islands in the West Indies. Austin Gumbs was an interesting character. He made quite a name for himself before he got to New Brunswick. He was black. He knew exactly what to do to turn the ship around.

The guy he replaced was a J. Edgar Hoover fanatic. I remember his book collection, behind his desk in his office, all about how to spot a Communist, how to deal with Communist infiltration, and so forth. I mean, this guy was really out of it. They blamed him for the riots in the junior high, because of the way he was running the ship.

So, Austin Gumbs comes in and it's a whole new thing. The only problem was, the teachers who never quit, who stayed on, who had experienced the riots, they became a clique. All the new ones coming in, me included, we're not in that clique. We can never be in that clique, because we didn't experience the riots, but Austin Gumbs concentrated on us and told us how we should go about our business.

Meanwhile, what they found for me was emergency certification. So, I could teach social studies, even though I wasn't certified at social studies, the State making a big deal out of this and Rutgers blowing it, because they weren't coordinated with the State Department of Education. So, the one hand didn't know what the other hand was doing, okay, and I got caught right in the middle of that, but, if you're given a basket of lemons, you make lemonade. So, that's what I did.

So, Austin Gumbs says, "Do anything you want. You teach these kids anything you want you think they'd be interested in. What you want to do is get them to trust you. Don't worry about the content of the course; worry about these kids buying into the system. If your system works for them, then, that's a success, okay? You keep the kids in school, they trust you. There's an exchange there."

I would say ninety-five percent of the teachers that were hired were white and I'd say eighty percent of the kids were black. So, we had to break that divide and we had to get right down there. Some of the teachers bought into it, some of them couldn't do it.

I got into--this was later on, when I went back to Rutgers to work on a master's in education--I got into some real serious arguments with people, because, at the time, their theory was that the Harvard, Yale, Columbia-educated teacher was the best for an urban school environment. In other words, the most intellectual, the highest-achieving people would make the best teachers.

I said, "You can't build that trust level if you have that barrier there of 'I'm smarter than you' attitude. You have to meet the kids halfway and you have to have something experiential about yourself, which you can share with them, so [that] they can share with you." I was going at it.

Still, to this day, I believe that the (quote) "best" teacher candidates are not the best for an urban school setting.

I think it was [Jonathan] Kozol, who wrote about urban schools, he said that, "In every urban school, no matter how bad it was," and he identified East St. Louis as having the worst schools in the nation, at the time, he said that, "Every school, you can find a good teacher--not many good teachers, but you could find a good teacher." Then, he would describe that teacher and what that teacher was doing. What that teacher was doing was what I was doing.

[Editor's Note: Mr. Belding is referring to Kozol's 1991 work *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools*.]

So, I found my niche in an urban school environment and I stayed for forty years. I always had fights with the administration, because New Brunswick was a political town. They didn't necessarily get along with Rutgers that well.

I don't know if there is a better relationship [now] or not, but all through the years that I was there (and I don't think it's elected yet), the Board of Education was appointed by the Mayor. One of the reasons was, as the years went by, it was okay for Rutgers kids to vote in local elections, but the town didn't want Rutgers kids on the Board of Ed.--radical, stuff like that.

Remember, back in the old days, they're still kowtowing to the Hungarian community, which is very anti-Communist, so that you had this thing going on where you have Genovese and the teach-ins at Rutgers and the townspeople are very suspicious of what's being taught at Rutgers and what's going on with the organizations and that sort of thing. "There's some suspect profs there that are very red, okay."

[Editor's Note: On April 23, 1965, at a teach-in at Rutgers University's Scott Hall, professor of history Eugene D. Genovese declared, "...I do not fear or regret the impending Viet Cong victory in Vietnam. I welcome it." A firestorm of controversy ensued and became a focal point in the 1965 New Jersey gubernatorial race, but Rutgers University President Mason W. Gross, with the support of the faculty, resisted public pressure to dismiss Genovese, on the principle of academic freedom.]

Whereas in New Brunswick, like the teachers who survived, the clique that survived the riots, they're very suspicious of anybody coming from Rutgers to tell them how to teach. The administration of the schools was forever getting experts to come in and [force them to] talk to outsiders. The locals, survivors of the riots, and so forth, were very suspicious of these people coming in. You had the drug situation, you had radical groups coming and going, that type of thing.

So, we used to have these "workshops of awareness," how to spot a marijuana smoker and that type of thing. You've got old, bitty teachers in their sixties, teetering on the brink of retirement. You're trying to train them how to spot somebody smoking marijuana. So, they'd be sending kids down in droves who were acting a little goofy in class, for discipline by the vice principal. It was crazy, it was nuts, but every day was something new, exciting, and so forth.

So, the experience was fantastic. Here I was, this WASP-ish guy from Ridgewood, went to Rutgers, ended up teaching in New Brunswick, okay.

SI: Let me pause for one second.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

SI: Before we get too further along, I'll just ask about the Genovese teach-in. Were you there? Did you go there? What was that like?

EB: Yes, I don't remember how many I went to at Scott Hall. I remember that this was late at night and I remember that the place was packed. I probably went there at least two times. There was one professor that I had a couple of times who was one of the speakers, too. He was into [Marxist philosopher Antonio] Gramsci and a lot of radical thinkers as far as education is concerned.

So, I was getting these ideas, and so forth. So, when I listened to the stuff about the war--and, of course, I didn't join ROTC and I am not into that militaristic type of thing at all. So, I was a passive observer. I wasn't an active rabble-rouser, organizer or anything like that.

So, I learned a lot. In other words, these were like lectures. The guys would ramble on and say this and that, but they gave you a lot of information, and so forth. So, I thought they were well worth it.

The interesting thing that came out of it, as far as I was concerned, many, many years later, Bob Norton, who was a catcher on the baseball team--I think he was the captain of the football team during those years, undergraduate--he was involved in getting the Vietnam Monument set up next to Scott Hall.

The reason they picked Scott Hall was because of the teach-ins. I thought that would be something I'd be interested in getting in on, because I was known for some artwork that I had done, and so forth. I was into architecture and stuff like that, drafting. So, he wanted me on the committee to decide which monument we were going to have, what way we were going to go with it.

He said, "Well, they picked out Scott Hall and that little corner, the grassy area when you come down the walkway on the side of Scott Hall, because of the teach-ins." So, I thought this was great. Then, that's the way I could honor Steve Bague, who was the guy from Ridgewood that we started Rutgers together.

So, I was in on it in that respect, but, again, I wasn't taking a leadership role or anything like that. I was taking a participatory role, an experiential role and taking it all in. It was actually helpful to me later on when I was teaching my classes, and so forth, an awareness of this and that. So, I guess you would say I was antiwar, antimilitary, but I wasn't going to take that to extremes. I wasn't going to join any extremist group, and let it sit there.

I figured, as an educator, you don't want to get involved in those extremist groups, like a "card-carrying this or that," because you have these administrators in education who come from a background of "you don't stir the waters." You try to keep things as quiet as can be.

So, while we were talking about "the best teachers aren't necessarily from the Ivy League schools"--and we had one, and I'll tell you about him in a minute--you had the administrators who were from this conservative political (in this case, the Democrats in New Brunswick), "don't want to stir the waters," "don't want the minority groups getting too worked up," or anything like that. Those were your evaluators.

So, if you're a teacher, especially before tenure, we lost a lot of teachers. The ones that came in, they didn't last for tenure because the evaluators got rid of them. There were a couple reasons for that, but the evaluators being from the conservative past type of look at things, and then, the teachers coming in with these new ideas, okay, like that, you know there was going to be some conflict.

Well, the losers are going to be the teachers, especially the ones that don't have tenure. When they were evaluated for class discipline, and so forth, if you had what was called "a soundy class"--and I loved a soundy class. That's an educational term, which means there's a lot of activity in that class. There's a lot of group work, there's a lot of interaction. In the process, you're going to make a lot of noise.

Well, if an evaluator was looking at that, either walking by the door or sitting in there, they would give you a low evaluation, because this was not a quiet, orderly class. One of the teachers, I don't know if I mentioned him, Sid Levine, he was a sergeant, Battle of Normandy, tough-as-nails. They gave him the roughest kids at the junior high. This is when I was at the junior high, not the high school.

You walk by his class, you could hear a pin drop. Everybody was every other seat, okay, nobody was sitting next to each other. Heads were down. They were quiet as could be--high ranking in classroom discipline. "Okay, keep that guy, get rid of the person where the kids are running around the classroom, making things and all that stuff." So, that was one of the things about the environment that was questionable.

Austin Gumbs announced (I think the second or third year he was there as principal) that Hugh Gooheart was coming from Harvard University, the first teacher New Brunswick ever got from an Ivy League school. He's going to be great, okay. Well, Hugh Goodheart came in and you remember *The Dead Poets Society* [(1989)]?

SI: Yes.

EB: Okay, and this teacher is telling the kids to rip the pages out of the book! Hugh Goodheart, this was in the fall, I think, the early fall, so, you just started (or maybe it was the late spring, I don't know), but, in the old junior high, they had the old windows, no screens. So, you lift them

up, okay, insects could come in, the whole bit, right, and it was hot. It'd get hot and stuffy in there.

So, he had the kids line up on the far wall, where the hallway was, facing the windows. He said, "These textbooks that you have, they're lousy. They're no good. They're not going to teach you anything that you can use in later life. So, we're going to throw them out the windows. So, I want to see who can throw the book the farthest, okay, and you'll get an 'A.'" [laughter]

So, they're throwing the books out the window. Now, this is happening in a room which is near my room, not right next to it, but near it. I hear this commotion outside in the street. Well, the vice principal, Bobby Boyler, has parked his car across the street, side street from Livingston Avenue. He's walking towards the school and he sees these books flying out the window.

So, what they did was, they suspended Hugh and didn't ask him back for either the rest of the year or for the next year, but that guy was so talented, and he could play the blues on the piano like anybody's business. He had so much to offer to the kids, as far as his knowledge, and so forth, but he couldn't relate in the program that was set up.

In other words, you can't be that way in a system that's straight-jacketed, whose first priority is security of the building and control of the kids, okay. If that's the priorities, the top priorities of the school, then, as far as building trust, you can't do it. You can't do it. So, anyway, that's some of the stuff that was going on.

In '69, that's when my wife, who was a student at Drake, and I got married. Then, we had a boy and a girl. By that time, we were living in Highland Park. We had an apartment in New Brunswick, we moved to Highland Park.

She turned--like I told you, SDS, and so on--180 degrees and became very conservative in a quick amount of time, and she got really heavy into the church. Now, I was raised Presbyterian and she wanted me to be Catholic, because she was getting back into the Catholic Church in a very serious way. So, I said, "Okay, fine."

So, we actually married three times. We eloped, then, we married [by the] justice of the peace in Franklin Township, and then, we got married in the Catholic church in South Brunswick. So, I became Catholic.

Now, when the kids were there, we were looking in the family history and all that. The doctors were saying, "Well, you should try to find out what your medical history is of your relatives, your father's side." I said, "Okay." So, then, that parlayed into what was going on with my teaching, because along comes Penny Lattimer.

Penny Lattimer's mother was a big [wheel]--I think she was a dean, a prof--in the Graduate School of Education at Rutgers. Mariagnes Lattimer, you can look her up. She was fantastic and Penny was her daughter, okay.

[Editor's Note: Dr. Mariagnes E. Lattimer served as a faculty member and administrator at Rutgers from 1968 to 1986. She became the first African-American woman dean at Rutgers when she served as Assistant Dean of the Graduate School of Education from 1970 to 1980.]

Penny had the idea--she got involved with the New Brunswick School System--for an alternative high school for kids who were underachieving, not bad kids, but kids that should have been getting "As," but were getting "Bs" or "Cs" because they were turned off by the system. So, she said (with Mariagnes's pull, and so forth), "Let's set up an alternative school and let's find a place for it." We found it at Douglass College.

So, the Gibbons Campus, there's an activity building that they have with the language dorms, I think, were around there for Douglass, there were tennis courts and that sort of thing. So, she sets up a school there. It had about four rooms in it. She starts interviewing people who want to teach there.

Well, none of the old clique want to teach there. They were the ones who were the veteran teachers that should have jumped on that right away, because it was a great opportunity. Well, I jumped on it right away, went for the interview. We hit it off real well.

So, I got to run my own social studies department. By that time, I had social studies certification. The state told me what I needed to take. I took the course at Middlesex College, and then, I became, like magic, a social studies teacher.

So, then, I'm over at the Gibbons School, and she said (this was like Austin Gumbs, "You design your courses the way you want to do them. The thing is, we've got to have these kids buy into the system. They're good kids. They just need to make that leap from 'C/B' to 'A.'")

So, I went gangbusters with it. We were covered by *The New York Times*. We had programs going on, community service programs, all sorts of things going on. The only thing we couldn't do at the school was science, because of the lab. So, they had to get on a bus in the afternoon and go up to the high school.

Well, there was friction between the high school and the Gibbons School, because they were saying that we were taking their elite kids and they were left with the garbage. At that time, they also had the North Brunswick and Milltown kids going to New Brunswick. So, things were heating up, heating up.

Then, an independent mayor comes along who beats the Democratic candidate that Penny Lattimer backed for Mayor of New Brunswick. That guy, I forget his name, he closed the school down. He said it was too expensive. We were operating on a very low budget. It wasn't a big deal at all, mainly paying for the secretaries.

SI: How long did the school last?

EB: About four-and-a-half years, yes. So, then, I went back to the junior high, and then, I went up to the high school. At that time, that's when North Brunswick High School was built and they



had to have a deal with the State where they could accept so many New Brunswick kids to go, if they wanted to, to North Brunswick.

I would say that ninety percent of those kids lasted there less than a semester and they came back. Culturally, the environment, and so forth, just wasn't for them, and they made no allowances for it in North Brunswick. They didn't want them there in the first place. So, they came back to us, but the pullout of the North Brunswick kids then put us on a danger level as far as the number of teachers to retain.

So, I lost my job twice because of seniority and there weren't enough kids to teach. That was a rough time. That was a rough time. That gets you up to the '80s, but New Brunswick was always political. You had to fight tooth-and-nail for everything you got.

We had a motto, the new teachers that came in at the junior high, "Steal to Teach." We used to grab things here and there and everywhere that we'd use in the classroom, because we didn't have the money for the stuff we wanted to do. They weren't accepting the stuff that we wanted to do. The principal was, but not the Board of Ed., which was Mayor-appointed and all political, etc., etc. So, we had to deal with the system.

To deal with the system, then, you could deal with the kids on a level that built trust. As I say, that was more important than the content, the course content. Whatever course content you teach--see, with social studies, it's a lot different than with the math and science. Your math and science is going to be the dividing line between who's considered smart and who isn't considered smart, with your SAT scores and that sort of thing.

So, every year was a new thrust in education. We had behavioral objectives, we had integration of courses, cross-course discipline stuff, all of what you call "tinkering with the system," but you're trying to train the old timers, who have their old system that they're never going to deviate from, and you have these new people coming in, especially the administrators.

They have to justify their existence. So, they've got to come up with a new idea. There was always that friction, always that friction. Some of those years, I was a trainer of some new program; other years, I was not. They were new programs, controversial, and so forth. So, New Brunswick had a history of that.

SI: How long did this older clique have power?

EB: They lasted into the early '80s. It was interesting, because, as I understand it, back in the '50s, there was a shortage of teachers. They had pulled in several educators from Pennsylvania, rural areas of Pennsylvania, who had gone to schools in Pennsylvania, Stroudsburg and that sort of thing, to teach in New Brunswick. That was a core of the men, because they had what was called "the men's club." That was for men only and those were the male teachers.

Some of them smoked like fiends. I went to the Board of Ed. and said--this is before smoking was banned--I said, "You've got to cut this out. This is not good. It's not good for the people who are smoking, it's not good for the people who are taking in the secondary smoke," blah,

blah, blah. There was a couple of Board of Ed. members who wanted to get rid of me. Luckily, the truth will out and they banned smoking, because, if you went into the teachers' lounge, there'd be this haze hanging up there and it was just unmerciful. I couldn't go in there.

So, I got a reputation as being a wild card, that I couldn't be trusted by the old clique, although I made some friends within the group, on an individual basis. The new teachers was where you could find some comfort level and sharing and that sort of thing.

We had some old bitties that were really nasty. They were nasty with the kids, they were nasty with their peers, but you have to deal with that. Like Kozol said, "Every school, no matter how bad it is, you can find a good teacher." I just wanted to be one of those good teachers.

I thought I had my weaknesses, and so forth, but, overall, I think I did a pretty good job. I look back on it and I went through a lot of controversial stuff, fought a lot of battles, but, in the end, I was happy with the final results.

SI: From the early 1980s onward, you're probably now in the older group, a new older group.

EB: Right. I'm one of the veteran teachers now, yes. Once you get tenure, then, I guess you might say it's all downhill. [laughter] The thing is, even if I had tenure, still, you didn't have job security in New Brunswick. Like I said, I lost my job twice, once for a semester. They were playing games, and it was the Teachers' Association that was playing games.

Now, the irony of ironies, remember I told you, when I started, I had to teach English because I just took a teacher's position? Well, they took a teacher who was an English teacher and, for the next year, they made her a social studies teacher.

This is when they had the reduction-in-force, RIF. When they made her a social studies teacher, she had seniority by a year over me, okay. That got rid of me, because I didn't have the seniority she had. So, those who kept their jobs were not the best teachers evaluation-wise, they were the teachers with the seniority. That's how the Association played it. That's how the administration wanted to play it, because, then, they could get rid of people who were thorns in their side.

So, there were games that were being played; turns out another social studies teacher, she went in for surgery halfway through the year. So, I was asked back, okay. Now, some teachers who were reduced-in-force never came back, but I wanted to come back, because I had my tenure, I had all the years built up, security and all that.

So, I came back and I got my job. Then, the next time there was a reduction-in-force, it was statistically. So, it was on paper I was going to go, but, then, somebody retired or whatever. So, I stayed. So, that wasn't impacted at all.

For that half a year, when I was over in Highland Park, my wife and I were the superintendents of apartments. That was my summer job, etc., etc. So, I had to quit that job when I went to Kendall Park, moved the family there, but, then, I asked the apartment owner if I could work for him after I lost my job. So, he hired me on as the painter and just jack-of-all-trades guy.

By that time, he had three apartment complexes, one in North Brunswick, one in Highland Park and one in Plainfield. So, I was taking care of all that. So, that got me through. I made enough money to make [it]. Then, I got lucky with the lady who had to go in for surgery, and then, I got my job back--but there were games being played.

I thought the worst thing that happened [was], there was this guy, Steve Farkas. Now, when Joe Marino retired, they had Steve Farkas as the vice principal. He was a good friend of Joe's and I thought Steve Farkas was a good friend of mine, too, but it turned out not to be the case. He's from that old clique, okay.

My wife had cancer. She had to go to the Cleveland Clinic, bone marrow transplant, the whole nine yards. So, I'm out there with her. It's getting close to September. School's going to be opening up. I want to stay with my wife, okay.

Farkas says, "You can't do that. You have to be back for opening day." Okay, now, anybody can run opening day in a school. You could get a sub in there and it doesn't make any difference to the kids, doesn't make any difference to the administration, because nothing's really happening. Then, I wanted to stay longer than that, not just opening day. I was missing orientation and all that stuff.

So, he said, "If you don't come back, we're going to dock your pay and your job could be in jeopardy." So, he was very adamant about it. So, I had to leave my wife and go back. Then, when the first vacation came up, then, I had to go back out, because she was out there for months.

So, I thought it was cruel. It was cruel because some people got breaks. They could take a medical thing, leave of absence for a while, and so forth, but not me. I couldn't do it. So, that was bitter. That left a bitter taste in my mouth.

SI: Sure.

EB: But, then, you find out who your friends really are and you find out who are not. There was a lot of that going on in New Brunswick.

Then, what happens, the reason I got back to graduate school at Rutgers (this is where Rutgers comes back in), the only Mongolian student ever to go to New Brunswick, (Joanne Telemchinow), she's half Czechoslovakian, half Mongolian, she was in my "US History I" class.

It was a cross-discipline with English, US history. I had an archeological activity where we'd go out to an archeological site and dig for actual stuff. That's that soundy class, where you're actually doing stuff, and so forth. She loved it. She thought it was great.

Then, there's some other things. I did a genealogy thing. We did something on the "fourteenth colony" during the [American] Revolution. We made up our own colony and the whole history of it and everything.

She was really a sharp student, very quiet, very seldom spoke, intimidated by a lot of the other kids in the class, but she was a good student. She was taking it all in. She went to Douglass College. At Douglass College, they had a thing where, when you're ready to graduate, you can write an essay about your favorite teacher.

So, she wrote about me; didn't know. I didn't know about it. Then, the Principal calls me in and she says, "Hey, you got this award from Rutgers." "Oh, yes? Well, I didn't know anything. I didn't apply for anything. I didn't know anything about it." She says, "Yes, you were picked as Teacher of the Year," along with a couple other ones. So, it wasn't just one teacher, "and you get a scholarship from Rutgers and you get a stipend," blah, blah, blah.

"All you've got to do is show up at this thing." So, the Principal was there, the Superintendent was there, I was there. It was at Old Queens. I think there were three teachers in the state. It turned out that Joanne, her essay had been picked to acknowledge me. What it was was education for life at Rutgers.

So, I was so busy and I had all these things going on. I had clubs I was working on. I had the Asian American Culture Club. I was coaching a cricket club team. I was doing a whole mess of stuff with New Brunswick kids. I had a chance to go back to graduate school. So, I applied.

I got everything for free. All I had to pay was a student fee, activity fee, and there I was, taking classes again. I didn't know where it was going to go, but my wife was really encouraging me to do it. I found the time to do it and I ran into some very interesting professors. Ken Carlson was one; we hit it off very well. He was the prof of my first class that I took. He was a real down-to-Earth guy.

He was the type of guy that would agree with me that the Harvard/Yale sophisticated type isn't going to do good in an urban setting. As I progressed on, I found some people that I didn't agree with, and so forth. So, I got enough classes, courses, in to get a master's; applied to the State again. The Prof said, "Oh, your classes are good. This is no problem at all."

The State sends back, it says, "You don't have enough courses with the word 'curriculum' in the title of the course. You can't get a master's." Well, I had gone through the thing with my BA and I was ticked off about that. I had to spend money to take courses to get the social studies thing. Now, I've got to take more courses--not going to cost me anything--but I've got to take more courses with the word "curriculum" in the title of the course.

I had two profs write letters to the State saying, "Much material that we covered was curricula and, even though the name, the word wasn't in the title, we still covered that type of thing." The State rejected it. Now, I was getting angry at the State, those dunderheads down there, but, also, I was upset with Rutgers, because it wasn't coordinated.

Like, if you went to a state teachers' college, it would be coordinated. It would be automatic. You take this course because you had to take this course. The State approves it, "Boom, boom, boom." You got your certificate, you're out there, you're a teacher, okay.

For some reason, Rutgers was having this problem with the State Department of Education. So, I took the two courses, I got my master's, and then, I had to take more courses for my doctorate. I wasn't even interested in the master's, actually. I just went back to take the free courses and I did get something out of that.

Then, people were telling me, "Oh, you've got to go for the doctorate. You went this far, you might as well go that far." So, I'm working. This is in the '90s now; we're into the 1990s. So, I start taking the courses. I'm having fun with it, hit it off with some profs. Some profs, I don't hit it off with. Then, they assigned me to Professor [Nobuo] Shimahara.

Now, Shimahara had a language problem. It was very difficult to understand him in a lecture setting. I was trying to get him to do some hands-on activity stuff in the classroom, where he could go around to small groups and talk to them. That's something. He was uncomfortable with that, because he was from the old school, "You lecture, people listen, take notes," that type of thing, but there was a lot of grumbling and complaining.

Anyway, he was my advisor for the doctorate thing. He wanted me to go to Japan. I hate to travel--I'm not going to go. It sort of fell apart. Then, my job, I'm doing this, I'm doing that. For me to work on a doctoral thesis and do the fieldwork and that sort of thing--and the thing that bothered me the most about that was, you had to be within these strict guidelines.

You couldn't deviate and go out here, okay. I'm big on emic data and emic data is out there. If you're in these strict guidelines and you can't do this and you can't do that, you've got to get approval [for] this and you've got to do that, and so forth, that wasn't me. I wasn't going to get involved in that.

I was making enough money as a teacher--and then, I got into administration--that I didn't need a prof's salary, which would be lower than what I'm making already. So, the doctorate thing wasn't working out for me.

To get to the doctoral program, you had to take an SAT thing, but it was like writing essays and stuff like that. It was at the Graduate School of Education. I'm sitting there in an office. I was at somebody's desk, because they scattered you around the building. There were two ladies in the same room with me. They were at other desks and they've got their computers with them. They're looking at their computers.

Now, I am not computer savvy and I wasn't into computers at all back then. Now, you're talking about the 1990s. A lot of people were. So, these ladies were looking on the computers, getting information, and then, writing the thing. I thought, "That doesn't sound right. That's not kosher to me." So, I'm writing away and thinking about this stuff and trying to recollect.

I thought that was a downer. I don't like that. Then, the other thing was, they wanted me to take some computer courses, to be up to a certain level to do computer work in the research for the doctoral thing. I was real turned off about that.

So, things were leading to the point where I'm not going to go for the doctorate. I took all the courses, but never got to do my thesis stuff. So, that's where I ended it with Rutgers. As I look back on it, I say I got the mileage out of it that I wanted. I just wasn't comfortable making that leap into the doctoral world. I wasn't comfortable.

With my writings and all that, I didn't need the doctorate. I mean, what I was doing was pseudo-intellectual, but it wasn't intellectual. I got into the mystery writing, using history as a backdrop, and I felt very comfortable with that. So, I found my niche without making that leap into the doctoral thing. Hey, again, it was taking advantage of some stuff and not taking advantage of other stuff.

SI: You said you got into administration.

EB: Yes. What happened was, Penny Lattimer became the Assistant Superintendent. A lot of teachers, again, from the old established thing, could not stand her. I was one of her favorites, of course.

So, when she got into the administration of the New Brunswick School System high up, she was right under Dr. Larkin, Dr. Ron Larkin. He was a character. He was a blue-collar guy who became a superintendent. So, he knew the mean streets. He was streetwise, and so, he had his hand on the pulse of things in New Brunswick.

So, I wouldn't say he was a great superintendent, but I would say he was a superintendent for his time. He was the man and Penny Lattimer, who was different from him--it was an interesting team--she was Assistant Superintendent. So, she was in charge of the administrators that would be over the teachers, the department chairs, the supervisors, that sort of thing.

So, I'm going along as a teacher, I'm doing my thing--big on the cross-discipline thing, working with an English teacher, social studies teacher, having a lot of the advanced kids. I'm having a good time. She says, "I want you to be the social studies chairperson." I said, "Okay, fine."

The problem with that is, they take classes away from you, so that you can evaluate teachers and supervise them, that sort of thing. So, I became the protector of the teachers from the politically-driven administration, and I was comfortable in that role. I had to defend them.

I had some characters in the Social Studies Department, real characters, and so, they needed protection. [laughter] One was very big in the union, so, there was a lot of contention there. Then, we had a string of kooky principals at the high school. So, I had to work with that, too, but that was the administrative end of it. I was the department chair

SI: By this time, had the anti-Communist strain lessened?

EB: That was a moot point by then. What took the place of that, of course, was all the Civil Rights thing, and not Black Lives Matter, but "Black is Beautiful." It was just coming in with the thing of how you interpret the history and what you stress, what you don't stress and who's wrong. So, in other words, the big heroes, like during the Revolutionary War or something, who

happened to be slaveowners, so, therefore, why put the emphasis on them? Why not put the emphasis on something else?

Okay, so, yes, that was going on, but not the Communist thing. No, that was over with. So, anyway, when Lattimer was forced out, that was political, because they didn't want her to be superintendent. Larkin was retiring. Now, you're getting into the late '90s.

So, then, my buffer, my protector, and so forth, was going. The Principal thought of the great idea of saving money by getting rid of some chairpersons, okay. Now, I had seniority over every chairperson. So, what they did was, they'd get rid of somebody and they'd put me in charge of that department. Now, remember the certification thing?

SI: Yes.

EB: Okay. They had me doing Home Ec., Vocational, JROTC, Art, Music. I had to evaluate all those teachers and the social studies teachers, okay, by a certain deadline. It was like almost impossible to do, but I did it.

I loved it, because some of those things were stuff that I was really into, the art, the music, okay. The JROTC was military stuff, I wasn't into that, but it was somewhat related to social studies in that you study wars and that type of thing. The vocational, I didn't have a clue what was going on there. Home ec., I was completely lost, but I had to evaluate the teachers.

There was a rule of thumb. Then, Larkin had this [tactic], "If a teacher is suspect, not doing the job that you expect them to do, get rid of them before they get tenure, because it's awful hard to get rid of them after they get tenure." The hidden agenda was, you could save a lot of money if you get rid of a person before they get tenure and hire another person (and possibly two people) to take the place of that one person. You'll save money, okay.

So, there was this revolving door-type thing, where these people would come in and New Brunswick would let them go before they had a chance to really prove themselves. I was fighting that and protecting the teachers who were up for tenure, but looked like they were going to be let go.

You don't have much power, because the Principal has the power. Then, if the Superintendent backs the Principal in the judgment, well, then, the teachers lost. The Association can't do anything because they don't have tenure. So, that was a dog fight. That was really, really rough. So, some good people left. They went to teach in another school district and made out very well.

One of the humorous programs that we had, I thought it would be good, because, at this time--you were asking about the Communist thing, and so forth, like that--well, you had the African American Culture Club, big, of course, a lot of kids in it, and you had the Hispanic American Culture Club, okay.

We had about twenty-five, maybe thirty, Asian ancestry kids in the school. I said, "Well, why don't we have an Asian American Culture Club?" That's where the cricket came in, where we

actually organized a club sport and played different towns in cricket. Anyway, I got the kids organized and we had luncheons with Asian food and all sorts of things.

We combined with Jamaican students to form a cricket team. The kids that we had were from Guyana. That was British Guyana. They were the descendants of the Indian servants who came with the British to British Guyana. So, they were from India, okay. That's where the Asian stuff comes in.

So, anyway, Rutgers has this program for engineers and they want a big thrust in it for minority students. So, they go out to the communities surrounding and they contact New Brunswick guidance. Guidance rounds up all these minority group kids, okay, from South America, Central America and Black Americans from the States, okay.

So, they take a group of about ten to twenty kids over to Rutgers. In that group are several of my Asian American Club kids, okay, because they're from Guyana originally. They go to Rutgers. They get there and the person in charge--the guidance lady told me about this--she said they looked them over. They said, "What are these Indians doing here? We don't want them here."

They sent them back. They didn't get in the program. I was livid. I was so upset, and the guidance counselor was so upset, too, because Rutgers didn't spell out--I guess they couldn't. They couldn't say, 'We don't want these. We leave it to your discretion to decide, but you decided wrong. Therefore, we're going to tell you.'

The kids were upset, too, because those kids were sharp as a whip. They were very good in math, very good in science. They would've made ideal students in engineering. A lot of those Guyanese kids were from blue-collar parents, worked in gas stations and stuff like that in New Brunswick. So, it was cruel. It was cruel, but we press on. If you lose one battle, doesn't mean you lose the war and that's been my attitude through the whole thing, too.

Then, let me see, what else happened? Then, after Larkin left, we had [Richard] Kaplan come in. Kaplan eventually came to the idea, "We don't need department chairs at all." So, he did away with all department chairs.

I had one year to go to retire. So, they put me back in the classroom and curriculum design, those are the two things. So, I had a very light load in teaching. I said, "Oh, great, I'll finish up at New Brunswick teaching, like I started. That'll be really good." So, they had me.

Now, here's an irony of ironies--I had taken psychology instead of political science and that's what prevented me from getting the history certification. So, I had taken psychology at Rutgers. Okay, well, it turns out that they wanted me to teach a psychology course, a new course at New Brunswick. Oh, fine, okay, I've got a background in it. I can do it. So, they got me set up. We get it started.

The AD of Physical Education says that, "That's a physical education course, recognized by the State of New Jersey." Here we go again. "You can't teach it because you're a social studies



teacher." I should have said, "No, I'm not, I'm a history teacher," [laughter] but they took it away from me.

They gave it to somebody who was certified in phys. ed. who was a special ed. teacher, okay. So, she got to teach the course and I didn't. That meant that I was then given more curriculum writing responsibilities to do. That's how I finished out my career at New Brunswick.

SI: This whole time, you were writing, also. When did that start?

EB: You're talking about creative writing?

SI: Creative writing, and some of the histories.

EB: Well, let me get back to the genealogy stuff.

SI: Sure.

EB: When I was at the Gibbons School, the alternate high school at Douglass College, they had this community service program. I was assigned to go and check on the kids that were on the campus doing community service. There were some kids at the library, Rutgers Library. So, in my rounds, I would stop at the Rutgers Library.

Now, they give you about two or three hours to do this. So, you check on the kids, it takes a few minutes, that type of thing. So, I had this time to kill. At the time--it was like 1975, '76--*Roots* was big. We were doing a thing on genealogy and black history and stuff like that. So, genealogy was big.

At this time, I didn't know that much about my paternal side and all that. I had a couple of clues, this and that. I wasn't really that interested in checking it out, because years had gone by, but, again, the medical history was the thing that was bugging me. My wife was bugging me to find out and I didn't know who to contact.

So, I'm in the Rutgers Library and I'm looking up the name Spaulding. I'm looking up this person and this person and this person, so forth. I'm not getting anywhere that I can make any connection. Actually, some of the names I looked up are related to me, but I didn't know it at the time.

So, this reference librarian and comes over and he says, "Can I help you?" I said, "Yes, I'm trying to find out if there's any record, any book that has any mention of," and I gave the names. I gave my name, Edward Selden Spaulding, and I gave my father's name, because I knew from the adoption my father's name was Edward Rich Spaulding.

I said, "I think he was out in California, probably Santa Barbara. I think either one of them had something to do with education." So, the guy says, "Well, let's go look at some of these books that [we] have about," one of the things he mentioned was private schools, "and we have it state by state."

I said, "Okay, good." "But, they're not on the shelves. I have to go down in the basement and find them." He goes down, he comes back with this volume from 1938. It's got the private schools in it. In the back, it's got the listing of the headmasters and stuff like that, in alphabetical order. There's Edward Seldon Spaulding. I said, "Ooh, that's my original name." So, we go and it's the Laguna Blanca School in Santa Barbara, California.

I thought, "This must be my father and he's one of the founders of the school." They give all the statistics and all that stuff. That opened up a window, okay, but, at the time, I was thinking, "Oh, I was named after--my father's name must be Edward Selden Spaulding," but it really was Edward Rich Spaulding. That's the one there, for that one. So, he's the son of the headmaster of the school. So, I was one generation off.

So, then, from that, I found out about the genealogy going back to Elbridge Gerry Spaulding, going back to the Revolutionary War, and so forth, like that. Then, I find out that, in Buffalo, there's two relatives still alive, but it was from an old source, another old source from Rutgers.

So, Rutgers was great in getting me started in finding these people. It had the old addresses without zip codes. So, I took a chance. I wrote the old address up to Buffalo with a Buffalo zip code on it. The Buffalo Post Office sent them to the guys, who were in Florida and South Carolina. There happened to be two uncles of mine, one an eccentric and one dying of cancer.

The one dying of cancer wrote back to me and said, "I can't really help you. I'm not into this genealogy stuff, but my brother, Allen Perkins Spaulding, who has a tree plantation in South Carolina, he does genealogy. So, you've got to contact him."

I said, "I think I did mail to him, but I didn't hear from him." "Well," he said, "here's the address that you need." Okay, so, I mailed to him and he actually visited my father. He knew him personally; got a cold reception out there. That's where the wife wouldn't come from upstairs, right. So, he got me turned on about the genealogy stuff, set me straight about this and that, and the Buffalo connection, and so forth.

Then, we found out from my father's brother about the medical thing, the Huntington's chorea. So, that all came out of that visit to the Rutgers Library, because of the community service thing at the Gibbons School. So, it's all connected.

So, then, we found out about the medical history. We haven't shown any sign of Huntington's chorea, so, the kids don't have any sign of it. So, we got through that. We did okay.

SI: What about the mysteries that you wrote?

EB: Okay, now, what happened was, I was always interested in the Revolutionary War times. I got involved with doing some stuff here for the local history. We had moved to Kendall Park in '76. I forget the very first stuff that I worked on, but I was doing a little bit of research for Ceil Leedom, who is the predecessor of me taking over as the township historian.

She had all these files here and lots of information, and so forth. So, I was looking up stuff. I thought, "Well, maybe I could develop something out of this." Then, I took the big issues first, like the two Battles of Trenton, the Battle of Princeton, and then, I got into the skirmishes that were around the South Brunswick area.

Out of that, the Kingston Historical Society decided to publish two of my writings. So, those are the first two books. We had a book signing down at the lock tender's house, right where the bridge crosses over to Princeton from Kingston. That was great. I had an illustrator for the books and he was there. We were signing them, having a grand, old time.

Then, I got into the bigger ones, the two Battles of Trenton. Those are still in manuscript form. Those have never been published, but what I was doing was writing in a poetic way about this history, and then, putting tons of notes, footnotes, in the stuff, so that it was historically accurate, but it was creative at the same time.

The publishers didn't want to touch them, other than the Kingston Historical Society--they had it printed by Rutgers, by the way--because they said it wouldn't sell, that the poetic form of a war battle is way past its prime. That was back maybe [in] Civil War times. They might go for it, but not now. So, those have been moldering away, not getting published.

So, then, I thought of the idea of, "Well, I'll get more into the fiction end of it and write these mysteries. I'll take local characters and put them at the time setting," and I picked the time, so that I already wrote about the Revolutionary War, about the years before. So, I wrote about 1773, 1774 and 1775.

So, I have three mysteries written. I have a fourth one that'll go back to 1772 that I haven't started yet, but I've done a lot of research on. This one, *Iron Water*, I just got the call from the publisher that they want to do it. It will be available in November, 2024.

SI: Oh, good.

EB: So, this will be the second one that they're going to publish. The first one, it worked out great, really worked out great--not going to make any money on them, because, again, it's for a niche audience. It's not the type of thing that's going to sell like a Stephen King novel.

What I've done--again, being creative--I've taken local history and I've filled in with fiction, with characters and action, and so forth, and come up with my own thing. I have it in a mystery series, so that there's intrigue and that sort of thing, having fun with that.

Then, the poetry, I've done the poetry since the 1960s. I was doing some poetry at Rutgers. I was cranking out these chapbooks every year and sending them out [at] Christmastime. That was quite popular with the people who were receiving them, but I didn't think I'd go big time with that. Then, I had a couple of poems published here and there, some anthology, this and that, but nothing too serious.

Then, I got real serious with the poetry with the history. That led me to branching out to other stuff. So, then, I've been taking places in South Brunswick, like a house, and writing a poem about the house, but bringing in (a lot) the characters who lived in it, and so forth, like that.

So, that led to the "17 Places," which got very popular readership locally. Again, this is stuff that's a niche and probably wouldn't sell. I mean, poetry, it is hard to sell it. It's hard to sell, but, then, what that branched off to was a poetry workshop, which was two years in the thinking about it, and then, finally came to fruition.

So, now, I run a poetry workshop here. It works out great. We're going to have a Zoom conference next week and put the poets, potential poets, on display. They're looking forward to it. We're having a great time with it. Our first public poetry reading will be in November of this year.

We take participants work, we share it with each other, we break it down, build it back up, try to make it better than it was before. So far, it's working out great. So, that, the poetry end of it, is working fine.

Then, after I retired, that's when I really got serious with the writing and, also, got serious with the painting. I've been doing paintings since then, but, again, I'm sort of outside the lines. I'm doing a lot of work with found stuff as a Fluxus artist would do.

So, the canvases I find or stuff that's thrown away, I use a lot of wood boards to paint on. The frames are thrown away--I restore them. I use latex paint, mostly. If somebody throws away acrylics, I use those. The brushes are thrown away. I find them. I use those.

So, what I do is, all my material is (quote) "found." What I'm doing is getting revenge on the market, because it's so expensive. It's a very expensive hobby and I decided I'm not going to spend any money on it. So, I've been getting paintings in exhibits. I'm not taking it that seriously, but I'm having a grand time with that.

The trouble with that is, it's time-consuming and it takes me away from the writing. My first interest is in the writing. So, whenever I get the chance, then, I do some painting. So, that's it. So, in my retirement, I'm doing the prose writing, the poetry and I'm doing the artwork.

SI: When you were at Rutgers, did you write for any literary magazines?

EB: No, mainly because I didn't know much about them. I know Douglass had a good one. I think I was toying with the idea of submitting something, but I didn't, because I didn't think they would like what I was writing about. At that time, I was writing a lot of stuff that was corny, jokey stuff, more like Ernie Kovacs, Soupy Sales type skit stuff. So, I didn't get involved in that.

I did a couple of cartoons, I think for *The Targum*. I think that was about it, but I was doing a lot of sketching, drafting and automobile design, things like that, in my dorm room when I just had some free time. So, I guess you could call that artwork, but I wasn't really into it. As far as the

writing's concerned, I was writing poetry, but not sharing it with anybody. So, I saved that until later on.

Then, when I lived on Welton Street and was at Drake, graduate school, we had some graduate students in there who were big literati. They would be the post-Beatnik type people who were like the next generation. I shared some of my stuff with them. Two of them were interested, "Oh, you should get this published. You should do this and that," but I never followed up on it. So, there was a little smattering of it, but not a big deal at all--yes, so, nah.

SI: Is there any other aspect of your life that you'd like to talk about that we didn't get into?

EB: Well, I don't know. I mean, my family life, we raised a boy and a girl. The girl had heart problems and she passed away just when she reached fifty. She left us with six beautiful granddaughters. My son, he has two kids by his wife and his wife has three kids from her previous marriage. So, we have a big family now.

All the girls are special in their own way and lots of joy. Some have faced difficulties. My daughter was into drugs and she was into alcohol and into smoking. She was supposed to be on a list for a heart transplant, but she wouldn't stop smoking and she wouldn't stop drinking. So, therefore, she couldn't get on the list and she eventually passed away.

We ended up raising three of her kids. The father of the last two, the twins, he's raising them. They're the youngest ones. The second oldest one was raised by the father. They range in ages from thirty to fifteen.

Then, my son's kids, they had their ups and downs. They had a flood up in Milford, New Jersey, a big hurricane thing. The house was flooded out. They had to move out of there and live somewhere else for a while, down in Frenchtown. That was a problem, but they're doing okay now.

So, we've had our ups and downs with the family thing, and so forth. The Beldings are doing fine. I have my millionaire half-brother Jay and he has moved from one mansion to another. He's in Doylestown now. He was in Newton, just above New Hope.

He went from a forty-acre estate to a three-acre estate, but the house on the three acres estate is larger than the house he left on the forty acres, so, go figure. Anyway, he made his millions in bagel chips. He had New York Style bagel chips. He was one of these Midas guys--anything he touches turns to gold. He was very successful.

He went to Trenton State and he was sort of a "C/B" student, but he hit his mark when he got out into the business world. He started with sheltered workshops out in Pennsylvania. His motto is, "You've got to lose a million to make two million."

He had his ups and downs in the beginning and all that. Then, everything else, just shrink wrap, he divested in the type of stuff that he worked on, his factories. He invented some machines for

making the bagel chips, because it was a new idea at the time, but he did very well. He's close to retirement, but he's still involved in it a little bit.

Then, I have my half-sister. She has a daughter who's a model and she's an influencer now. She's doing quite well. So, there's some people that are pretty good. Then, on the Spaulding side, I don't have much touch with them, but I have the black sheep cousin I told you about, Georgia Spaulding Edwards. She's doing fine in retirement, and so forth. So, family-wise, I can't complain. It's good. It's good.

SI: Very good. If there's anything you want to add later on, you can, or I can come back. For now, we'll wrap up for today. Thank you very much, I really appreciate it.

EB: Okay, great. Hey, I enjoyed it.

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 10/23/2024

Reviewed by Ed Belding 10/25/2024