

Sheila Ruth, Professor of Philosophy
Interviewed for 50th Anniversary History of SIUE
Interviewed by Ellen Nore-Nordhauser
August 1st, 2006

Ellen Nore [EN]: It's Tuesday, August 1st, 2006. This is Ellen Nore-Nordhauser. I'm recording Professor Sheila Ruth, retired from the Department of Philosophy for the history of SIUE [Southern Illinois University Edwardsville].

EN: How you happened to come to the university, see ...

Sheila Ruth [SR]: Okay. Okay.

EN: ... the little light...

SR: Okay. Okay.

EN: Winking...

SR: Okay. Um, you want the unexpurgated truth [SR laughs]?

EN: Yes, of course. [Both laugh]

SR: Well, I was teaching at the University of Evansville, in Evansville Indiana. I was married at the time. And um, my husband and I had a very public and unpleasant divorce.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And...one of us had to go...

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: ... and as you might expect it was the woman.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And so, I lost my job.

EN: Okay.

SR: And that was my very first position.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And, um, there, there was some acrimony between me and my chair, head of my department, who wanted to counsel me since I was [EN laughs] a poor, disturbed ex-wife. And I didn't want to be counseled.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: So, I lost my job. I got fired.

EN: Gosh.

SR: And, uh, they gave me, according to AADP rules, one year to go find another job.

EN: Did you, did you have a tenure track contract?

SR: I did.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: But I was not yet tenured with ...

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: ... this was in like my first or second year there.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: And so I appealed to the AADP, but they said since I wasn't tenured, it didn't matter to the university. It didn't matter to them why the university let me go. That they don't have to state reasons.

EN: Oh.

SR: And so, uh, I had no recourse.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: So, I spent a year trying to find another position, but without a letter of recommendation, that was not easy.

EN: Gee.

SR: And I was on my last month's salary. It was in May of the second year. And I was totally out of money and out of luck and out of a job. And I went to the APA convention in Chicago.

SR: Mm-hmm

SR: And I think it was at the very last evening they have a smoker. I don't know if the AHA has the same.

EN: They used to have to have a smoker, I don't know. They probably don't have it anymore.

SR: They probably don't call it that anymore [both laugh]. But they had a smoker on the last night where desperate faculty looking for jobs can throw themselves in the way of professors that they think are giving out jobs. And that's what I was doing. I was wandering around this thing. And the truth is, the unvarnished truth is, somebody pinched my butt. And I turned around and said to him, "If you're gonna pinch my butt, you better have a job to give away." [EN laughs] And he said, "Are you really looking for one?"

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: And I said, "Yes I am." And he said "Well come with me." [EN laughs] And it turned out to be the philosophy department at SIUE [both laugh]. And they were, you know there were lots of them there that night, probably ten or so. And um, they said, "Well you're pretty brave to have quit your job before finding another," said they to some degree. And I said "Not so brave, I got fired."

EN: Yeah.

SR: I figured to come clean. And they said "Oh, that's wonderful, three or four of us have been fired from our last jobs too." [EN Laughs] Um, and we hit it off and I got a one-year appointment, to cover a position for uh, another faculty member who I was teaching for in my field.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And then, um, I got a second year because he decided to stay. And then there's another long story how they decided to...make my appointment continue.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: But they did. And so I came, that was, I was, I came in '71.

EN: You did, okay.

SR: Mm-hmm. And my appointment became continually in '73.

EN: Hmn. Goodness.

SR: So for the better part of my adult life [SR laughs] I've lived here, attached to the effects of SIUE.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: So that that is how I came to be. We're not in Kansas anymore Toto.

EN: [EN laughs] Okay. Well, you, since you came here so early, um the philosophy department was, was, was it still in formation or...? Carol Keene had arrived in '68.

SR: Oh yeah. She came ...

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: ..she was here well before me.

EN: Um, and Charles Corr was ...

SR: Corr was here in fact Corr was ...

EN: And Jerry Rumble.

SR: ...Chair. Rumble was Dean.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: And Corr was Chair ...

EN: Okay.

SR: ... when I came here. And...

EN: Bill Linden.

SR: Linden was here. Actually, most of them were here.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: Um, and they had formed a real community...

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: ...by the time I came here. They, they were all about the same age.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: Young, young people. Um, they liked each other.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: Um... you could feel that.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: Um... It was a community, I would say, more than any other department I've ever been around.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: Uh...philosophy was a community. And they had already started writing, um, working papers which were ...

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: ... not yet required at the time. But they thought it was a good idea, so they already had working papers... I'm trying to remember whether there was... I think I was the second woman in the department. With Carol ... Carol [Keene] was the only ...

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: ...uh, woman in the department...

EN: Yes.

SR: ...at that time. There was, there had been another woman in the department, um but I don't think she got tenured. And I never met her.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: So, there I was, and my specialty at the time was, um, social and political philosophy.

EN: Mm-hmm,

SR: And philosophy of science. Philosophy of social science.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And, and I was hired to teach those two things specifically.

EN: Mm-hmm. Um did you have any interest in women's studies at that time?

SR: It didn't exist.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: Uh, it didn't exist in '71. And if it did, I didn't know about it. I was a...uh an ardent feminist.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And I had been involved in the women's movement...

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: ...In uh, both in Buffalo where I went to graduate school.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And in Evansville. And I have done, oh, lots of speeches and some television work. Um you know people would...

EN: Yes.

SR: ... interview me for you know what is the longest meeting...

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: ... for stuff. And, uh, I was not a member of SDS [Student's for a Democratic Society] in Buffalo, but uh I done hung around in that group.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And was, you know, an activist at the time and after the war happened. And if you were anti-war ...

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: ...then all of the others were pollutants which were very powerful at the time.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: You were up agai- you were with them.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: So I knew, uh, feminist activists and ...

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: ... and I guess I was a feminist. You know right after I was moving.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: Um, this was even while I was a kid.

EN: Was your mother, did your mother work?

SR: My mother did work.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: Um, but, but she was a very traditional woman. Um...

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: She was a typist.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And my father was a construction worker.

EN: Hmm.

SR: And my mother worked because we needed the money.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And uh, but as far as their belief system, they were very conventional. Very conventional.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: My grandfather was a rabbi.

EN: Yeah.

SR: Orthodox. And so, the role of men and women, boys and girls was very...

EN: Very different.

SR: ...Oh yeah. My brother he went to Hebrew school and my grandfather taught him how to pray in Hebrew and so on. And I got to spend my time in the kitchen with my grandmother learning how to cook your chickens.

EN: Okay. [EN laughs]

SR: And keep a Kosher home so that my husband could talk directly to God.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: And not be fussing around with household things.

EN: Hmm.

SR: So that was my upbringing and that was my beginning. And I strenuously resented the differences in privilege between my brother and me.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: And I used to ask things like, "How come Michael gets to go and do this and that"- my brother- "And I have to stay home with you and do laundry?" [EN laughs]. And my mother would say, "Because you're the girl." And when I was very little I didn't think to say, "Yeah so?"

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: But by the time I got to be fifth grade, sixth grade...

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: ...then I started to say, "What's that got to do with it?"

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: ...and the answer was, "Don't be a smartass." [Both laugh]. I didn't get any answers. And have I, I was the, the smart one in school. I loved school.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And I did very well in school. And my brother could barely get from one grade to another. He was very bright, but he hated school.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: And my mother used to say, "Someday my dreams for my children are that Michael will go to college and have a wonderful career, and Sheila will meet a wonderful man and get married and have wonderful children." And I would say, " But I wanna go to college and have a wonderful career." [Both laugh]. And I would always get, "Oh, yeah what am I gonna do with that?" [Both laugh].

EN: Oh dear.

SR: So, that may... I didn't have language for it at the time.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: Nobody talked about feminism, never heard that word. And there was no word yet in use called sexism.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: That period would get you into being mid-'60s, early '70s.

EN: Yeah.

SR: There was no, I had no way to capture ...

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: ... the insights that I was having something, that, this is not fair, I used to think. But I couldn't bring much behind it.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And uh, I couldn't capture the feelings. [Paper crumples]. I just thought it was all very unfair.

EN: Did you have any friends at this point or any ...

SR: Oh God, yeah.

EN: ... any aunts or anybody who was a little irregular? You always wonder how people's heads get cracked. I mean you're obviously an intelligent person...

SR: I have no idea where it came from. No, I, I... All of my family, you know we lived in a typical New York City extended family...

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: ... I lived in, I grew up in, uh, a Jewish neighborhood. Orthodox Jewish neighborhood.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And the whole community, it was um, based around the synagogue.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: Which of course you can imagine was pretty conventional. And uh, my mother's family there were five brothers and sisters, all very conventional. All lived right you know, had apartments right next door. And I lived with, right next door to my mother and father's apartment was my grandmother's apartment...

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: ...who was extremely religious. Uh, was born in, in uh, Austria.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: My grandfather too. You know it's funny I'm related almost always to my grandmother. Um, to that on my grandfather was just [intelligible]...

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: My grandmother was... I spent more time with her than with my mother [intelligible]. You know she was religious.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And very conventional in many ways. But I was her favorite.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: Because uh there were four of us, I had two cousins. And my brother and then myself.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: ...you know and my grandma. And they did not like talking about religion or Europe, you know?

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: So we would kosher chicken's and she would tell me about the little shtetl [town or village] where she had grown up.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And uh I, I decided I wanted to be a rabbi.

EN: Mm-hmm:

SR: "Oh, that was too funny for words. Ha-ha-ha, Sheila wants to be a rabbi." To be like my grandmother, to be a rabbi's wife. Could be a rabbi, that would be a great honor. And I said who wouldn't want to be [Both laugh]. She'd say, "Now don't be difficult" a narishkeit, a foolish child, that's not the way it works. [EN laughs]. So, I was startled and think that's unfair. I guess that's where it came from. No one that I can remember...

[long pause] That's an interesting question. I had a not, she wasn't an aunt, but she sort of functioned as an aunt, by marriage several degrees off. There was a woman who encouraged me to go to college.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: Um. So I knew it was a possibility.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And something that could happen. But, uh, we had no money. And uh, I didn't know how it was going to happen. But I thought, "That's what I wanna do." So my, when I was seventh grade, my parents moved out of the city to a little, um village I guess you could call it, north of the city about ah, about 50 miles north of New York, and it might as well have been along the Ganges. [EN laughs]. Just out in the middle of nowhere. We were the only Jewish family for ...

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: ... miles around. And... [both laugh] that didn't make me popular. It was such a change of hair.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: I mean from being you know the rbin's eynikl...

EN: Yes.

SR: ...you know, the rabbis' granddaughter. Big fuss. Major deal. To this little community and we went to a uh, uh, the school, they, they had a central school from kindergarten through twelfth.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: So all the little towns around there...

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: ...and all these kids had been together since kindergarten.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: They were already buddies. And I came in in seventh grade. Huh, I didn't look like anybody, I didn't talk like anybody. I was Jewish, and you know, was proud of it. At the time, and it's it's tough.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: I had a tough high school.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: Um. But I was pretty smart. That was a problem for them, and it was a problem for me. Um, I was either first or second in my class. And I said I wanted to go to college.

EN: Mm-hmm.

[Electric static]

SR: And I don't remember, I think, I'm trying to remember, there was one teacher, I don't remember her name, but she said, "If you wanna go to college, you work very hard, you could do it."

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: "I'll help you." I think her name was Mrs. Frith, F-R-I-T-H. She was my Latin teacher. I really liked her.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And I think they arranged for me, I'd never heard it before, but they said, "New York City has a school and it's free." Called CUNY College [City University of New York]. You can go without anybody else.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: So, uh they applied for me, as I recall. I didn't even know how to do it.

EN: Is it a university?

SR: Well it is now City University.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: In those days, City University didn't exist. There were 5 free colleges.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: One in each um, borough.

EN: Borough.

SR: And Hunter had two schools, one in Manhattan and one in the Bronx.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And the school in the Bronx was within walking distance of one of my aunt's apartments.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And so I applied there... And then I talked my parents into moving back to the Bronx. And we did. And my mother thought... well she...My father didn't want me to go. He kept saying, "What are you gonna do with a diploma? Hang it over a sink?" [EN laughs]. And look, my father had been a farmer in his youth and ...

EN: Yes.

SR: ... you know, women don't go to college. And he was very worried when I decided I wanted to go to college. He says it's a pretty dumb thing to do, you know. And my, my mother though, who had been a typist all her life, ...

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR:...thought that nothing would be more wonderful than for me to get a year of college, because then I could be a private secretary.

EN: [EN laughs]. Okay.

SR: I mean this was her dream, right?

EN: Yeah.

SR: That's what she had always looked up to, you know.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: From her perspective the private secretaries, wow, that looks ...

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: ... They got better salary. They had an office. They wore suits.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: That that was something. So if I could get in a year of college, I could be a private secretary. So she talked my father into letting me go. And the rest is, is...

EN: History.

SR: Yeah, every year she'd say, "So are now you going to quit?" [SR laughs].

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: "Oh no, I'm gonna do another year." And I I loved to, I loved college.

EN: I think that Belinda Carston's one son went to Potter.

SR: Did she? The Manhattan one?

EN: Yeah, I think so. Uh-huh.

SR: That, that was a... The one in Manhattan was huge, you know. It was like a six-story building. It, it was a high rise.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: Um.

EN: I think she did. [glass clinks].

SR: The Bronx one had a campus.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: Which I thought was just too, too wonderful and perfect. [EN laughs]. Um, but then the Bronx campus broke off. [cup clinks]. Um, it became Lehman College.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: I think, I believe it is now Lehman College. But the old Bronx Hunter.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And I don't remember what year it was, but sometime right after I graduated City University came into the system.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And then all the colleges became part of the City University, or the City of New York.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: Something was Cun, C-U-N [CUNY].

EN: Nm-hmm.

SR: City University of New York. And that's where I graduated. And then I went to Buffalo. Which is harder than SUN was.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: I got married. And we went off together. He was in psychology, I was in philosophy, and I went into philosophy 'cause it was the only fellowship open. [Both laugh]. I, I had a political science uh, undergraduate degree.

EN: Oh really.

SR: Yeah. I was not a philosopher.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: But they took me, and it was free.

EN: Huh. [EN coughs]

SR: So, I left.

EN: They had a pretty good philosophy department too.

SR: Huge.

EN: Yeah.

SR: Uh they had like a [electric static] at the time sixty people in the philosophy department. So it was just gigantic.

EN: Were there any women?

SR: In my department none.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: I was, and that is where we kind of... that's when my feminist life really...there was no feminism.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: But, um. [electric static]. Graduate students were um... The university was in a suburb of Buffalo. I don't remember the name of it. But it was an old school, over 100 years old. It had been Buffalo College. And uh... graduate students were given uh, private houses, along the outer edge of the university where, you know, the graduate assistants had offices.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And it was like a 20-minute walk from the philosophy graduate office to the main campus.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: And you know Buffalo, it snows all the time.

EN: [EN laughs]. Yes.

SR: So, it was always cold and snowy. And I was the only woman, in the graduate group at the time.

EN: Gosh.

SR: So the first issue was, where the hell are they going to put me? Where am I gonna go to the bathroom? That was a major issue. And, will I put flowers in the kitchen? They were worried about that, the other guys.

EN: In the house?

SR: Yeah. Well, you see cause the kitchen belonged to everybody.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And there was one bathroom. And it was one of those... It was an old house, and the and the toilet was under the window. So, the distance between the toilet and the door to the bathroom was easily from that door to here.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And it had no lock on the door.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: So clearly, the one girl in the department could not use that bathroom as far as they were concerned.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: You know somebody might walk in on her. This would be the end of the world. [EN laughs]. So, I used to have to trudge up this 20-minute walk through the snow every time I had to go to the bathroom.

EN: Oh dear.

SR: Uh, and you know I was so happy to be there I wasn't going to argue.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: But after about 6 months of trudging [both laugh], I said, "Couldn't I please use the bathroom." And I would hang a sign, and so then there was this, all grad students got together

and they had this big meeting about where Sheila could go to the bathroom. [EN laughs]. I swear to God this happened. [EN laughs]. And finally, they all agreed that if I didn't mind the possibility that they might walk in on me, I could go there. I was so happy not to have to trudge through the snow every time I had to take a whizz. Fine, I mean I grew up with a brother and cousins.

EN: Yes.

SR: What did I care? [EN laughs]. So, I'm sure I don't mind. And it became a joke. And so then they accepted me very comfortably. But I, I do remember that. And then the second thing that really opened my head. Every year they had a contest going back to the early days of the school, where all the undergrads would elect their favorite faculty person, and they would name him Mr. Faculty.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And at the end of the year, he would be presented at the student do-da [phonetic] and, and given a prize. So, one of the dormitories nominated me. And the big question was, what were they gonna call me? I wasn't Mr. Faculty, that wouldn't do. "Well, how about Miss Faculty?" And I said, "No, that has a long implication for all together." "Well, could you be Mrs. Faculty?" And I said, "No, I couldn't do that either." "Well, then what'll we call you?" And I said, " Well, I guess I'll just have to be Mr. Faculty." [EN laughs]. There was no alternative.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: And I remember that opening my mind in a big way.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And I did get elected, and, and in fact, here is my Mr. Faculty.

[long pause]

EN: Oh no. [EN laughs].

SR: Oh yes. Uh-huh. Oh yeah, there.

EN: Mr. Faculty! [Both laugh].

SR: Ah, far out. Huh?

EN: Yeah, that was...

SR: And I thought, you know... I mean this caused my awakening.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: Geez, there should be something to call me. And there wasn't. And that was before 'Ms' was introduced. That was long before 'Ms.' So, when the women's movement started to really articulate ...

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: ... some of these ideas... Man I was into it up till my hairline.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And I kept thinking, my God, I mean, ya know I mean, my god that's right my God that's right. And the man that I was married to was very interesting. In the beginning, uh he very much supported my views. That that my career was as important as his, that my ideas were no less meaningful than his. And in '67 that was unusual.

EN: Yes it was.

SR: And that was after, uh some of the literature started to come out. *The Feminine Mystique*...

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: ...I had read as an undergraduate.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And I had tried to get into the law program at Hunter. And they wouldn't let me.

EN: Mm.

SR: That was right about when I was reading *The Feminine Mystique*. They said, "No, no." Uh, I had gone to the law, you know the director of the law program, and said "I want to go into the pre-law program," and he said, "Why?" And I said, "Because I wanna go to law school." And I did. I really wanted to go. And he said, "No no, you don't wanna do that." And I said, "Yes, yes I do." And he said, "Miss [intelligible], you (...) you will never finish the prelaw program."

EN: Huh.

SR: "And if you do, it won't help because you will never get into law school. And even if you got into law school, you would never get a job. And even if you got a job, you couldn't stay because you're gonna get married and have children, and that would be a big waste. So go do something else." And so when I read Betty Friedan...

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: ...you know, all these things came together ...

EN: Yes, came together.

SR: ... just you know, it was just... It was like, um, I was learning more from these life experiences than ever I read in a book. And in philosophy, you could only imagine what they thought about women.

EN: Mm-hmm. Well, I I have an intimation on what they thought about them here. [SR laughs].

SR: I bet you do! [Both laugh]. Oh dear, yes well. That's another thing altogether. So, when I came here I had like two intellectual lives, separate and apart.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: One of them was philosophy, which I loved.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: Um, and one of them was feminist literature.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: But I never ever had thought to put the two together. They...they had nothing in common. There was no such thing as women's studies that I knew of. And I think in my second year here ...

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: ... In my first year, I did a paper in Texas and began to doubt that I belonged in philosophy. This is the ...

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: ... a huge deal. Uh, I wrote a paper about that that's floating around somewhere.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: Uh, [Gerald] Runkle was Dean at the time.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And he called me in and said, "Sheila I understand you were interested in feminism." I don't remember, women's liberation is what they...they didn't call it feminism ...

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: ... they called in women's liberation. God, my memory is old. [EN laughs]. And he said, "I understand you're interested in women's liberation." And I said, "Yes I am." And he said, "What do you know about women's studies?" And I said, "What's that?" And he said, "Well, this woman from St. Louis is apparently doing some search about women's studies," about yeah, academic women's liberation in academia or something. And he said um, "She'd like to interview someone here, and you are the only person I know who's interested in women's liberation."

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And I said, "I don't know anything at all about women's studies, I never heard of it." And he said, "Well would you mind if, uh, she interviewed you?" I said, "No, I can't tell her much but..." I'm perfectly, I can't remember her name right now, but I, I will. So she came. We had coffee or lunch or something, and she's telling me about this academic area where people were looking at women's lives. I said, "Jeez, where is that?" And she said, "You know I don't know anything about it, but I understand that Gloria Steinem is going to be in town next week, and she's speaking at such and such place. Why don't you go and talk to her?" And I had heard of Gloria Steinem. So I said, "Okay I'll do it." And I did. [EN laughs]. And I don't remember how she wrangled me the ticket to go and hear her. And I don't know how she did that. But afterwards, it was all very relaxed and informal, and I remember Steinem was sitting on the edge of the stage, and people were going up and asking her questions. And I introduced myself and I said, "I understand there's a field called 'women's academic feminism' or something'." And she said, "Well, there are a couple of faculty people out east who are kicking it around." And I said, "I would like to know about this." And she gave me the name of Sheila Tobias...

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: ...who was at that time was the Provost at Wesleyan.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And she gave me a phone number, and she said, "Call this woman up, and tell her you have an interest and see what she says." I was too dumb at the time to be scared [EN laughs]. I didn't know. So I went home and I called her up, and she said, "Funny you should ask, in a couple of weeks we're gonna have a conference here about women in academia..."

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: ...and women's liberation and stuff like that. Would you like to come?" And I said, "Yes, I'd like to come. I gotta find out if I can get some money to do it."

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: So, I went to Mr. Runkle, and I told him what I'd learned and that I wanted to go out to Connecticut. And he said, "Sure, I'll, I'll pay for you." So out I went. And lots of the people that you hear about today having been the founding mothers of women's studies were there.

EN: Hmm.

SR: And I, and they were all so wonderful. It was so different, from uh, an American Philosophical Association meeting.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: You know, any of the, what they in those days would call 'male-identified conference' or 'male-identified program'. They were so...like Sheila- I, I think it was Tobias- came in and she intro...you know she said, "Good morning." This was at Wesleyan. "Um, before we start, does anyone have a tampon, size regular?" [Both laugh]. Count me in, I'm home! This is wonderful!

EN: Yes.

SR: It was so friendly ...

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: ... and informal and uh, it was, it was extraordinary. It was um, I think we did three days, I can't remember exactly. I think it was three days. And at that conference, we named it women's studies.

EN: Oh, I see.

SR: What shall we call this new study that we're doing?

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: And some people suggested feminist studies. And there were those who said, "You know that's really going to knock these guys on their can if you say feminist. They're so afraid of that word."

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: "Why don't we call it..." First, it was women's research, and then it was this and that... And they had a bunch of different, and women's studies came out of that conference.

EN: So, you sort of paved the way for Camille Paglia. [Both laugh].

SR: So different, but we don't use that word. So... [both laugh]. She um... Sheila Tobias, I think, was the leading proponent. Um, and the woman who set up the feminist press. Um, what was her first name? Howe was her second name... Uh, she founded the feminist press.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: Kirsten Amundsen I think was another one on the list.

EN: Hmm.

SR: A lot, lots of the people that wrote the first important book.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And then, sometime during those three days, they were handing each other articles that they had written or articles that they had seen. "Here I wrote this, here I wrote that. Here I got this from a woman in a march in Washington." And so, I came home with a stack of articles...

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: ...which was the beginning of my reading. Cause you couldn't find it in traditional ...

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: ... texts. And also, names, people, uh, you know, the titles. There were...some at um, in Springfield, and um I'm trying to think... Well they were all over the place. And they, I lit up like a Christmas tree, you know I read them, and I was just like, "Oh my God, oh my God, oh that's right! Wow, didn't think of that." [EN laughs]. You know just, it was wonderful. But I think it was the beginning of my thinking that I could be a philosopher.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And an academician. And do some serious work in women-related issues.

EN: Well, was this the origin then of your first book?

SR: It was.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: Uh, because what I did...I think the following year, I introduced the course called 'Issues in Feminism.'

EN: Mm-hmm. This would be 1972, right now?

SR: I got here in '71. This would be either '72 or '73 ...

EN: Okay.

SR: ... I'm not really sure which.

EN: Okay.

SR: But I introduced that course, and I, I had to go before the committee I don't know how many times. They just kept sending me...

EN: The departmental committee?

SR: Uh, interdepartmental...

EN: Okay.

SR: ... the school in

EN: ...school committee...

SR: That maybe had...It was called the School of Humanities.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And it was made up of English, Philosophy, and I think Foreign Languages.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And, and I kept introducing this and they kept saying, "No, no, no, this is not sensible academic work." But finally, they said on an experimental basis, they would let me give it a shot for a year. And, ha, students were just crazy to sign up.

EN: Yes.

SR: There were some men, um I-I'm guessing out of uh 40 students in the class- I think in the beginning is what I had, 40-45, I can't remember exactly- but there maybe 3 or 4 men who wanted; mostly it was women and they were just, crazed to sign up.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And it was wonderful, courses were absolutely wonderful.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: And there were no textbooks. There were no books, I mean what could you assign? So I used these articles.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: And then people would send me, you know as I...

EN: Yes.

SR: ... would write to other people and talk they would send me articles. And so it started to be a stack about that big.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And then the students would come and I, I mimeographed these...I mean we didn't...

EN: Yeah, I know.

SR: ...We didn't have any computer, so we mimeographed them. And I used to have stacks when I walked into class.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: Like fat, big...And then students would come up and say, "You know what? My mother reads this stuff. Could you give me an extra stack for my mother? [EN laughs] Would you give me an extra stack for my sister?" And I'd say, "Sure, have a stack." So that stack of articles started to be refined.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: You know I dumped some, I put others in. And one afternoon, I was sitting in my office, minding my own business, when a man knocked on my door to sell me philosophy books, and he said, "By the way, do you have any projects you're interested in doing?" And I, I don't know where it came from, but I said yes, 'cause I surely did not at that time...

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: ...Uh have any project like this on my line. I said, "Yeah you know, see that stack of articles over there? That ought to be made into a book."

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: And then we talked a couple of minutes and he left.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And low and behold, I had a phone call from a lady in Houghton Mifflin. Said, "I understand you're interested in doing a book?" And I said, " Well, I have this stack of articles."

EN: Yeah.

SR: And she said, "Why don't you write me a prospectus." "Sure," says I. Like I know what the hell a prospectus is. [EN laughs]. Which I didn't. I had no idea. And I wrote this thing and sent it to her. And she called and said, "You don't know what a prospectus is, do you?" And, I said, "Truly no, I don't." And she said, "Well I'll send you one so you can see. Then you write me one and we'll see where we go."

EN: That was nice.

SR: It was. She was lovely.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: And so, we signed a contract. And what I did was I essentially wrote ten lectures...

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: ...in different topics and took the articles that were attached to that topic from my class and wrote. And interestingly, I was almost half-finished - It was two years that I'd been working on it or more. And they never called me back. I'd you know leave messages and say, "You know I have some material for you to see." And finally, I started getting suspicious. I'd phone, they wouldn't answer the phone. I'd leave messages, nobody would call me back.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: And I thought, something bad is going on here.

EN: Did you have a contract?

SR: Yeah.

EN: Okay, well.

SR: I did.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: But I was so green, Ellen. I didn't know nothin' about nothin'.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: And I don't remember who it was, but I was sitting in Schwartz's... Do you remember when Schwartz's...

EN: Yes. Yes, uh-huh.

SR: ... had breakfast. I was sitting next to some faculty member, and I was telling him how I couldn't get ahold of these people, and he said, "Sheila, editors pester you about getting done."

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: "If they won't answer your phone calls, something terrible is going on." And I said, "What do I do?" And he said, "I don't know. You better get 'em on the phone."

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: And they told me that the woman who was my editor had resigned.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: She wasn't working with them anymore. [Tape skips or recording stops] ...Will phone you at nine o'clock. And it turned out to be the president of the company.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: And he said, "You know, don't, don't just agree to any old thing." And I'm thinking, whatever. Well, it turned out that they had done this to a number of authors...

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: ...who were, in their quote, "women's literature division."

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And so he filed a class-action suit.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: Which scared the living daylights out of the legal beagles.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: So, this guy called me up and said, essentially, "What do you want?" And I said, "Oh we can give you this money, we can give you this time." And I said, "Look, I want two things: I want you to publish this book ..."

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: "...and I want you... you know, I waited and waited to hear from you, and now my sabbatical is over..."

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: "...and I have to go back to work, so I want you to give me a sabbatical for two, you know two semesters, pay my salary. And publish my book."

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: And he said, "Okay." And so that's how that book came about.

EN: Hmm. And now it's been in three or four editions. Hasn't it?

SR: Five.

EN: Five? Okay.

SR: Five.

EN: Uh-huh. [EN laughs].

SR: After...

EN: And they must have made enormous amounts of money on it.

SR: Oh, you know what? It actually when it really made money... That book was the only textbook in women's studies.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: For several years. And I think it was, I had called them after about five years and said, "You know, maybe we ought to update it. There's a lot of you know..." No, they didn't want to do that. Okay. So that, I think it was like ten years after it came out, I got a call from...Frank-something, who was an editor at Mayfield Publishing.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And he said, "I li-that's a nice little book."

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: "How do you feel about Mayfield taking it over and doing... We can do a second edition?" And I said, "Well it belongs to Houghton Mifflin." And he said, "That's no problem, we'll buy it." Which I didn't know they did.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And I thought this guy is, you know, who is this?

EN: Yes. [SR laughs].

SR: He said, "I'll come out and see you if you'd like, or you know you can come out here? We'll pay your way." It was in California. "You can meet the people here and..." I said. "Okay." And I did, and they were wonderful. So they bought the book from Houghton Mifflin and it was they who did all the successive...up, up through the fifth edition and then Mayfield was purchased by McGraw-Hill...

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: ...couple of years ago, and I have not done another. I did not like working for that huge company.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: I mean you could never get through with questions, and I was ready to retire.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: And the other thing is that that women studies literature, and women's studies itself, has changed dramatically. It... what some people talk about is, it has gone almost entirely into identity politics.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: You know, what it's like growing up a Native American girl.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: What it's like um... Hey, baby.

MAN: Hi girls. Girls, girls, how are you? How are you?

SR: [unintelligible] You know Ellen?

MAN: Yes, been a long time. Mike [unintelligible]. I haven't seen you in many months...

EN: I haven't seen you in a long time.

MAN: ...many months. I mean are you getting, Is she a good interviewer?

EN: Yes, a good storyteller. [EN and SR laugh]. [Recording stops] It's become identity politics.

SR: More than anything else.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: They, you know how the women's movement has really morphed into something else today.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And it doesn't... It's not as reflective as it was in the '60s and '70s. And it, it in some ways reflects the culture as it, you know, what people care about today.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: You know, get a job, how much money can I make. The, the issues that really motivated me and women like myself in the '70s, how to improve the world, you know what's the...

EN: Yes.

SR: ... you know, let's, let's make things better. All that stuff. They don't talk about that stuff, they don't talk about that much.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And, and the other thing that happened that really made me give up writing the book- every time I get a new edition, the editors would say, "You know, you need to simplify your language." [EN laughs]. And I'd say, "In what way?"

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: "Well, they can't read this." And I'd say, "What do you mean they can't read it?" "Well, your vocabulary, you need to, sort of stick, with two-syllable words ..."

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: "... simplify it." Oh god. So I would do that, until finally the last time when they, I had... For my last edition, I wrote this whole section on the nature of theory, and what theory meant, and why it was important to feminist analysis.

EN: Yes.

SR: And how it fit into the sciences, and I thought it was great. [SR laughs] I really did, I thought it was the best edition I had done. And they said, "You need to drop this. They'll never, first place they can't read it and second place they don't have any interest in it."

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: And I said, "I won't drop it. It's important." Each edition that the editor would send out a questionnaire to say half a dozen schools that were using the text, and they would ask them to comment both on my text and on the articles, what they liked, what they didn't like...

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And I'd always get three or four of them that said, "You know, this, this book uh... We have a very bright student body and, and you know, this book has the substance they need, and we want that. And there were a like number that said, "You know, well, we leave out the, Sheila's text because they can't read that. And we just read the articles, a good selection of articles." But as time went on, there was more of, "The students can't read this stuff."

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And it really, it wasn't hard. It was written for undergraduates.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And I found myself, um, resisting...

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: ...what they were asking me to do. And finally, I just put my little flat foot in the ground and said, "No." So when they got sold to McGraw-Hill, I did not pursue another edition.

EN: And what, what year was that? About '95 or?

SR: Let me see, now the last edition came out in, um... [Recording stops]

EN: Yeah. Um, it's an interdisciplinary book...

SR: It is interdisciplinary.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: And the, the fundamental direction of the book...

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: ...is theoretical. Um, and it is in the area that one would call "radical feminism."

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: Okay, so you know, what do I what do I mean by that? Um... It was a quotation in- and again I, I have to remember what book it was. One of the very earliest feminist books which said, "What we mean by radical...if you look at the base of the word, radical, it means root. We go to the root of the issue. And if there was a word bigger than revolution, we would use it." So, it's theoretical and it goes all the way to the revolution.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: American feminism has moved away from that approach.

EN: Uh-huh

SR: British feminism and Australian feminism is still there.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: French feminism is in an entirely different arena.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And most people in this country don't want to write from that perspective anymore.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: So what... it, it is not history in the sense that it's not descriptive, although its history is included.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: It's not purely political, because although that's included, the... the point of the book is to understand.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: So, it is essentially philosophical.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: Analytical. And revolutionary.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: Okay. Now, is that where the women's movement is today? I don't think so. I don't think it's revolutionary. I don't even know if the women's movement exists as a women's movement anymore. I mean, the, the EEOC (United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission) is gone.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: Right, um, people have overturned affirmative action.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And nobody screams about it. Nobody even knows it's gone.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: Um, we're about to lost abortion rights, and there are no women in the streets.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: Uh, feminist... I have a great interest in feminist religion and feminist spirituality.

EN: Yes, that was your last book, wasn't it?

SR: That was my last book, but it is my ...

EN: Your last one that you wrote.

SR: ... Yeah.

EN: I mean so far.

SR: Yeah, uh that was *Take Back the Light*. And that is as radical.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: Although there were many in women's studies who figured that I'd lost it altogether. [EN laughs]. "Ah, Sheila's gone over the, you know, she's gone over the other side." Um, I don't hear, I don't even see that anymore. I mean, yes, there are women who want to be ministers, and they're fighting the fight and you know. But they're not fighting them from the perspective of, "this will improve your religious understanding." They're fighting it from the perspective of "I have as much of a right to do this work as you do."

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And I think the second idea is based on the first idea.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: Um you, religious or spiritual analysis entirely from the male perspective ain't even half the story.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: But you don't, you don't see much of that in in the literature anymore. So, people may not want to work on this kind of book.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: What they, you know if your friends had any interest, what they need to do is pick up a textbook and look at it, see if it's anything.

EN: I'm sure they're familiar with it. I think it's what's used at SIU [Southern Illinois University].

SR: Is it? Is it still ...?

EN: Yeah, I think it is. I, I think it is. I'm not sure.

SR: Well I, I know one or two people, um I know for sure don't use it.

EN: Hmm.

SR: Um, but I don't know if anybody still does use it.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: I have nothing to do with the Women's Studies Program at SIU.

EN: Okay.

SR: I don't even know who's in it.

EN: Uh-huh. I'll have to ask. I bet Annie [Valk]...I bet Annie's used it. Not-

SR: And you know, I I'd love to have somebody, um do, do a religion...

EN: But, anyway, that's you know ...

SR: Yeah. [EN laughs]. But you know, I, I thought about that for a while. I thought of contacting some of my friends in Australia.

EN: Yeah. That's a good idea.

SR: Well ...

[Recording stops]

SR: I've done a lot of publishing in, of women's studies. Both here and, and they did some wonderful stuff, and they moved to Australia.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: So uh, and, and they are a group of [intelligible] they really are. And I would be, I would trust them to do the work.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: And, and I'm not worried about working, you know, with Australia or anything. Um I just don't know if I want to go back to working. I, my memory doesn't work the way it used to. I'm not as fast at writing, and I'm blind. So, I, I just don't know.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: I love being unemployed. [Both laugh].

EN: I think I really do too. I think this, I see this project, The History of the University, as a...

[Recording stops]

SR: You know, people always ask me what I'm doing, and I don't know how to answer this. "Are you, so do you have a project?" I always hear from ...

EN: [Laughs]I know. You hear that from people.

SR: Aww, "So what are you working on," and I always have to say, "Nothing."

EN: Yeah,

SR: Um, the truth is the project is me.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: And...and my traveling. If I were to say it to ...

EN: Traveling. [EN laughs].

SR: ... anybody else, the answer is, "Yes." Interiorly, I'm traveling inside, and out. Now that sounds pretty bizarre, but I, I um, am very interested in consciousness, and spirituality, and inner development.

EN: You still go, are you still a Quaker?

SR: Yes.

EN: Yes, so you know [Steve] Tamari is?

SR: Yes, yes, yes. Oh, they are lovely. They are lovely people. Yes, I do.

EN: So, are you writing something...Are, are you ...?

SR: I do write.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: Um, but I don't write for publication. And, and I don't even write for anybody to see it.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: I, I have a mentor at the meeting. Uh, he's quite wonderful and he's been teaching me a lot. And I write for him. And I write for me. But, I can't imagine publishing this. It's so personal.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And people...

EN: There's a lot of interest in that now, though.

SR: You know ...

EN: In, in autobiography. Annie Annie Valk, Shirley Portwood, and I read, read women's autobiographies.

SR: Really?

EN: Yeah.

SR: Interesting.

EN: All the time. We, we meet about once a month.

SR: Really?

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: And what do you, glean from that?

EN: I don't know, I guess we're looking at other people, I don't know. [EN laughs]. Not looking at ourselves. And learning about what... They're always somehow connected with American history.

SR: Ah, well, of course, you're a historian.

EN: We're all American historians.

SR: Sure, sure.

EN: Women, women who had been in the civil rights movement.

SR: Yeah, yeah, well that makes sense you would be reading that. Yeah, and um, I have been reading autobiographies of people who have been studying Zen and been studying Buddhism...

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: ...and I'm very interested in that. But I'm not [unintelligible]...

EN: Sounds fun.

SR: It's you know I... uh... When I try to explain to people sometimes where I am, what I'm doing...

EN: No, it sounds wonderful to me.

SR: Oh good god, people look at me and kinda scratch their head and think "Oh, another one of those dabblers."

EN: Oh.

SR: And I'm not a dabbler.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: Um...

EN: Anyway, what's a dabbler? I mean what is wrong?

SR: Playing.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: I don't ...

EN: You don't come out of it pretending to be a Buddhist. That to me, that's a dabbler.

SR: Yeah.

EN: That's a true dabbler, someone who reads...

SR: I mean you got... but, but people do look at me, uh, when I say that, and you know. I was at a university function last year. I don't remember which one, but it was a retirement thing or something. And uh, one of the administrators who shall remain, you know be nameless, at this point, said, "So Sheila, what are you doing with yourself?" And I said uh, "Oh, nothing." [Both laugh]. Cause I don't know what to say. "What do you mean nothing?" And I said, "Well I mean nothing that anybody would be interested." And he said, "I can't believe that. You were always so energetic." And I said, "I'm, I'm still energetic, but I like being retired."

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: "Well are you traveling?" "Um, not exactly," I'm not gonna say, yeah, I'm traveling inside, into my conscious. And I said, "No, no actually, I don't. Uh, I always thought that I'd want to when I finished. But I really don't have any interest in it."

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: Now, that I know sounds...

EN: No...

SR: ...narrow.

EN: I think that, that's sort of in a way a form of dabbling. The way it...

SR: Yeah, yeah, I, I'll take one of those trips where you see fifteen different countries in two weeks, not my thing.

EN: Yeah. Uh-huh.

SR: When I did go to England, I was odd man out. I, I found places I thought were extraordinary. I want to plunk down there and stay there for three weeks and sit and look at it. But that is not what the rest of the company wanted to do. So... I uh, I love where I am. Um I... Mike, Mike, and I have a boat in Kentucky.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And it really makes you go there.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: And I'm not a boater as in, let's go to another harbor. I love to sit on the back of the boat and watch the wildlife. It's like, your garden.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And I don't have a garden, but I love the wildlife.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And, and I love the environment. I love to just sit and look at the water and the trees and the sky. And it puts me in a different place emotionally. And I'm never tired.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And that is what I spend a lot of time doing. And that, leads me to an understanding and experience that are like, sugar candy. I can't get enough of it.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And I spend much of my time doing that. I, I just love it. I like to read a lot for the same reason. Uh, I spend a lot of time with the cat, for the same reasons. And uh, that's what I do. But you know, to say the university people, "Oh, I'm spending a lot of time with my cat," Just, doesn't go down right, you know? [EN laughs]. You know what I'm saying?

EN: I know what you mean.

SR: So... And I don't feel apologetic about it, but when I try to communicate that to people and I get that funny look, I become apologetic.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: So I don't communicate it. Uh, not that that I'm trying to keep it a secret, but I don't know how to put it into words. So I don't. I, you know, I would love to work with students in a non... I used to think that when I retired...

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: ...I could be the old fart of the department.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And spend time with students. Help them with their philosophy if they wanted.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: Um, God I got about 42 years training in logic, and they hate it, and I can teach it. They had no interest in that.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And so, then I could share some of what I have evolved into.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: But I don't think that's very likely gonna happen.

EN: No.

SR: They don't want it. I don't want to teach again as in, term papers and grades and you know eh...

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: I am so past that. But to teach in terms of sharing understandings with my students- this I would love. But that is not going to happen. I mean, how are you going to offer that?

EN: Well you'd probably do it in the meeting. My sister Annie's a Quaker and...

SR: Oh really?

EN: ...I've gone to the meeting with her in San Francisco. And people really say wonderful things in the meeting. I'm sure you're one of those sometimes.

SR: Yeah, sometimes. Uh, the last time I was there, the last time ...

EN: That's a great form of teaching.

SR: It, it is. Uh, I, I love going to meetings. And I've been doing it thirty-five years. Thirty-seven, something like this. I think I started in '73. But the longer I'm there, the more I learn to keep my [whispers] mouth shut.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: I mean...

EN: Oh, yes.

SR: Not to speak until you have something truly valuable to share.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And so, you know, the longer I'm there the more uh, what's the word?

EN: Reticent.

SR: No, well yeah, but cau-cautious.

EN: Cautious.

SR: Um, um, now understand my ...

EN: Maybe thoughtful?

SR: ...Is this truly an insight of the eternal for the value of the people who are here?

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: And I don't mean, God in the simplest sense. Nothing like that... But um, my insights- are they mine, or are they truly of the universe? I will value, I don't want to talk for me, I should talk for them. I mean that that really is what meeting is about.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: So more and more I listened in quiet. When I was a youngster, I had a big mouth. [EN laughs]. Well, laugh. It's like, you know I, I don't know how to garden I envy that.

EN: I go out there and, 8 o'clock in the morning and I'll come in at 4 in the afternoon.

SR: Really?

EN: I've been out there all day.

SR: Really?

EN: And a lot of times I am just looking at, just quietly looking at the insects and...

SR: Yeah.

EN: ...you know.

SR: Yeah.

EN: Watching birds and.

SR: Yes. Yes, I understand.

EN: Or just looking at the ground and thinking about it.

SR: Deeply moving, isn't it?

EN: Uh-huh. Yes, it is.

SR: Yeah.

EN: I really love it.

SR: Yeah. Deeply spiritual. That's what I do on the back.

EN: Yes, that's when you say you like looking at the clouds.

SR: You just sit there. And be with it.

EN: Yeah.

SR: Do you have the time to do that now?

EN: Well, um, actually that's, it's taken with this terrible drought, it's taken a lot...

SR: Oh, God yeah.

EN: And uh, I don't know [EN laughs]. Yeah, and all the, I don't spend, I don't have as much time as I want to have out there.

SR: Is that, is there any way to manage that? You, you, this is the main...

EN: Oh, this is the main thing in my way. It's really definitely the main thing. And I do manage it. I spent the whole weekend out there.

SR: Oh wonderful. Even though you were looking, you know...

EN: You know I was, deadline coming up on this but...

SR: Oh my god.

EN: No, it's, it's... I think what you're saying is when you reach a certain age, you get to see what's really important. And that's terribly hard to get back to...

SR: Bullshit.

EN: [EN laughs] Yes. Once, once you've turned the corner it's very hard to go back.

SR: You don't go back.

EN: No.

SR: You can't go back.

EN: Can't. So, so um uh oh uh... It's soon going to be over.

SR: What would happen if you just stopped?

EN: Well, uh...well it would be pretty bad because I don't know. I found out in doing this I found out...Sharon Hahs the one who asked me, and I have to say that I did say, "You know you should have asked Steve Kerber to do it, I know that he was ..."

SR: And he was the archivist?

EN: He's the archivist who's been, always been, so horrible. Our president can't stand that, you know. And she said, "No, you know, uh..." Whatever, I don't remember what she said. And I should've said, "No, I'm not doing it. You have to ask him." But I didn't. That was my mistake.

SR: Could you have...

EN: And now, well now, it's just, she's had a whole lot of things fall down on her you know. She's, she's... Did you know what's happened to her? It's Kim Kurr [phonetic]... This is how this this new guy works. And I think he's a change for the university, although maybe things have always been this bad, but I don't think they have. Kimberley Kurr [phonetic] one day, she just was shoved down into this little office, it's like a little closet. And she's told it, the guy who's coming from... Well, now Sharron Hahs is in a little office in the back building [EN laughs].

SR: Really?

EN: Yes.

SR: Really?

EN: And I think she's still looking for a presidency, but I don't know if she's going to find one or not. And I know, I, I know I've never, I was never one of her one of her greatest fans. No, we shouldn't be recording...

[Recording stops]

SR: I don't feel that way, I don't know how, but somehow, I am lead to go inside, and maybe the answers are there.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: That, you know...

EN: Are you thinking you'll have an insight in...?

SR: You know, the the great sages all talk about withdrawing for a time.

EN: Yes.

SR: You know, here's Buddha sitting under his tree.

EN: Yeah.

SR: And then, taking what he learns out. I am still sitting under the tree, I don't know enough, I don't know anything. And, and I find that not knowing [EN laughs]...okay. I don't know where I'm being lead. I don't know what I'm... I feel when I'm with it. That there is some sense of meaning that I can just dimly see and, and almost grasp. And I have this strong sense that I need to stay with it, to be there, to, to look at the lake, to watch the creatures there telling me stuff.

EN: Oh, when you were teaching, you did have such a powerful influence on people. You know, they formed this organization.

SR: Yeah, yeah.

EN: And they are, I'm sure they're all continuing to be influenced by you.

SR: Well, I, I, I've...

EN: I think they are.

SR: There were, there were people like that, and, and I loved doing that.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: I did. And even in my lectures, when I went out into...you know I did lecturing for businesses and universities.

EN: Yes.

SR: And I always snuck it in under cover of other things, but I talked about the importance of understanding, and personal growth, and spiritual, and I mean that in a non-religious sense. The importance of almost a platonic sense of becoming. And people responded to that because I think they starve for it. Uh, I don't think it's available. And the old religions are too goofy to appeal to uh, like...they get...

EN: Oh.

SR: Pretty goofy, come on, I mean you know. And they know it. They know when people harangue them about...

EN: But it seems like many, many people are, are attracted to that too.

SR: Yes.

EN: I'm just thinking, but I think of you as someone always created islands of people or people who are not, people who are going to be all right.

SR: No, they were ...

EN: In their heads, they're going to be alright ...

SR: Yeah, they are. I think all I did was to say to those people, "It's all right. It's all right." You know you, follow, and I still feel that way. You know me... Some of the sages say, you know, if you find that center in yourself...

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: ...it, it moves after to other people. And, and I have uh... in in these later years when I've said, "How could I serve?" It was different from when I was younger, being on marches were how I served. [EN laughs] I, I don't think that went... I mean you know clearly here was the women's movement, and I really felt it was a service. But it's gone. Where the hell did it go? Now, there have been changes, I'm not sure all of them are what we had in mind. But now, I feel that I serve in very small ways, with individual people. And by just finding my own center.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: Maybe that's the way to serve. So, I can't tell that to people at the university who say, "What the hell are you doing?"

EN: What are you doing, right. [EN laughs].

SR: You know so I say, "Nothing," I can't tell them that. They would think I had gone completely daft. Well, don't you think they would?

EN: Yes, I think most people would probably.

SR: Right. Yeah. I think they would. And they, you can see it in their eyes. It's like, "Woah, really, mhm, very nice, I think I have to go talk to somebody else." [Both laugh]. I know, so I don't do it.

EN: Yeah.

SR: But you know, I think many of us who went into teaching, went into the university, had these very altruistic goals.

EN: Well, you were very involved in the union.

SR: Yes.

EN: And so tell me about that.

SR: Well, that again was service...

EN: Yeah that's that's um...

SR: I think people thought it was very different when I did it, that I was being a pain in the ass. Um I had always believed in unions.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: My father was a strong union man. And being a construction worker, and a truck driver, and so on. He had always said that that the safety of the common man, the worker, was in being with other workers.

EN: Sure.

SR: You know, unions. And I believed that. So, so I had always felt that union was a good thing. And I don't remember the year, the NEA [National Education Association] showed up on campus.

EN: I think it was about 1974.

SR: Was it...

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: ...that early?

EN: It was before John Rendleman died. Because I, because John Rendleman... they always expected to deal with the unions.

SR: But Rendleman ...

EN: They didn't they didn't go out and hire a big union busting firm like later administrations did.

SR: You know, men ...

EN: That's so they had a little exchange about, "What are we going to do about this?" Basically, they said, "Well you know we'll work with them"

SR: "We'll work with them"

EN: You know, that's how they handle things.

SR: That was not when I came in.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: I, I don't remember that time, I was here in '74, but it seems like we...

EN: No, no I'm okay. [EN laughs].

SR: Are you alright?

EN: I'm alright, yeah.

SR: Okay. Um, uh I think, I can't remember, but I think my involvement drove later maybe in the eighties.

EN: Maybe, yeah, the... There was elections in, there was an election in '89. There, there was an election in '88 for where you, where people overwhelmingly voted to have an agent, but there was, there was they were split between AFT [American Federation of Teachers] and IEA [Illinois Education Association].

SR: Where ...

EN: And then no agent, but the majority voted, for clearly a large majority, voted for some agent. And then, they had an election where everybody tried to get together the AAVP and the AFT and the IEA, but that, then it broke down.

SR: I don't remember ...

EN: And people voted for no agent.

SR: That may have been later. When, when I was working with the union, there were two unions. Well of course AAUP [American Association of University Professors] had been here.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: And NEA [National Education Association] showed up, or IEA of Illinois Education Association.

EN: Yeah.

SR: And I did not want to get involved.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: And I don't remember what or why, but...

EN: Well it was known as an organization mainly of, um of I think mainly high school teachers, and ...

SR: I didn't want to get involved in the union period.

EN: Yeah. Uh-huh.

SR: And I didn't want to get involved in public. I just wanted to read my books and write my articles. And there was, I can't remember the names, boy I'd pay you off, I bet I never could. But there this young man who was one of the agents for the IEA, and he came ...

EN: Was it David Bichoff [phonetic]?

SR: No, he was one of them, but there was the other one who's name was, they used to call him 'The Force'.

EN: Oh, okay.

SR: He was mister [claps] energy.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: And I can't believe... I think he's settled in Edwardsville. He was, I don't know...

EN: Oh, okay.

SR: Maybe, I could find him.

EN: Uh-huh. Well I could look and see... There's David Vale's [phonetic] the one I, I have known so, I I had. Remember the other guy, yeah, yeah.

SR: I had worked with this guy, and it was before they built that building over near, on Center Grove road, you know?

EN: Yes, I know where it is.

SR: It was before that building.

EN: Okay.

SR: And so, this I, maybe he was with David, at the time, but he stopped in at my office. And I think he was just going from office to office...

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: And he stopped into my office said, "Can I talk to you?" And I said, "You're the union guy, aren't you?" [EN laughs]. And he said, "Yeah." And I said, "Sure." Uh, so you know, just to be nice. And he sat down in my office and started telling me about what unions were and stuff. And I said, "You, you don't need to say any more to me. I am pro-union. I have always been pro-union..."

EN: Yeah.

SR: "...but, uh." "Oh," says he. I think his eyes lit up, as in he'd caught one [EN laughs]. And I said, "But, I, I said, you know um... I don't think this place is ready for a union." "Well, you know you gotta do this and that to get ready," and so on. And he said, "I would love to talk to you about what I believe you could do here. What are your main concerns?" And I said, "Well you know, I'm, I'm concerned about my salary and and other issues like that," I said. "But that's not my main concern. My main concern was, at the time was the, the diminution of faculty rights and..."

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: "... that the fact that university academic decisions were being taken over by non-faculty people." And I thought that was wrong and I said, "Classroom size, and I mean how could we teach when you've got 50 kids in the room?" And he said, "That's just what we're concerned about. Can't we get together and talk about...?" And I said, "You know, [both laugh] I don't think I want..." "Oh, please, just give us a chance to talk to some people." And I said, "You know why people really care about that?" He said, "But, but if you could just gather a half a dozen..." I said, I probably could get a half a dozen." "Oh good, let's meet at your house at the [unintelligible]. [EN laughs]. Before I knew what I was doing, I said yes. And so we gathered in my living room, Dave Bichoff might have been there.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: But this other guy, who ...

EN: Yeah, I can find him, John Drueke gave me a whole archive of stuff.

[crosstalk unintelligible]

SR: If I thought I could recognize his name and I ...

EN: Seems like it's Netzger or Nezler [phonetic].

SR: I mean there were a whole bunch of guys involved. Then, so this young man, and I believe Bichoff might have been with him, and maybe a half a dozen people from SIU, and I do not remember who they were ...

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: ... and myself met in my living room. We sat in a circle. I don't remember much of the conversation, except we talked about the things we were concerned about. And I remember specifically what this guy said, which turned my crank was, that, that we believed in academic standards.

EN: Mm-hmm.

SR: Uh, we do not want to take the low road. We wanna take the high road. We are committed to values. We're committed to good teaching. We left, you know...

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: ... I mean he just turned my crank.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: Everything that I cared about. [EN laughs] And, and he was distinguishing himself from AFT, and he said, "They're more a down, down and dirty, but something that, they're more confronters. They're more aggressive. We want to reason with people." And, and it turned out that way. And I said, "Well, that attracts me." Because there was this contention between NEA and, obviously, what they were doing was trying to win, 'who's going to be the leader' and, and I was attracted to this guy, who was very bright. He understood academia.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: Uh, I had met the AFT people and I, and I agreed with his assessment, that they were a tougher bunch...

EN: Yeah.

SR: ...um. Now there were a lot of my friends who said, "That's what we need. You know, that's what we need. You know, we need somebody ...

EN: John Farley was an AFT.

SR: Farley was.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: And, and I think Rosanda [Richards] was AFT ...

EN: Yes, Rosanda was ...

SR: And I had a lot of respect for Rosanda, I still do. I thought, hmm, the fact that she was AFT, really made me stop and pause. But the more these guys talked, the better I liked them [EN laughs]. And so when I got into it, it was never my intention to do what a contest, this kind of stuff, but that's what happened.

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: And it started to get nasty. And, and when it got nasty, then I got more confronted. I didn't want to do that. And I, and I remember finally it came up for a vote. This is after three years...

EN: Uh-huh.

SR:...yeah three years. And the, and I kept saying, "I don't I don't want to be the, the head of this thing." The more I said that, the more I found myself... They kept saying my name as head of the NEA. I thought, "Oh no, that is not the idea."

EN: Uh-huh.

SR: But...and I'd forgotten the name... Oh, one of the guys who worked with us has since become the provost. I think ...

EN: He's still.

SR: ... from sociology.

EN: Oh yeah, he was from Speech Communication.

SR: Oh, Speech Communication. And, but ...

EN: But in his interview, he told me that that, he sort of, after a while he, he really had second thoughts about it. And he's the one who supported Bud Hirsch to be president of Faculty Senate. [Both laugh]. I guess he's a, now he's a high administrator, who's trying to do something about his past there.

SR: Yeah, well he might have.

EN: I've saw things by him, I mean he, he published letters to the editor, and...

SR: Yeah, yeah he was very active. And, and I was really very surprised to see him shift views. But, he you know, sometimes you do change your mind.

EN: Yeah.

SR: I don't think that's an impossibility. And I had a lot of respect for Dave, when he was working with us. And, especially you know I, a lot of the people were... Hi pussy. This is Sam who owns the house.

EN: Oh, yes.

SR: Hi baby.

EN: We had a black cat named Ester. She lived to be 23.

SR: Really?

EN: Yes.

SR: Oh, I hope you do that.

[Recording Ends]