

Regional Oral History Office  
The Bancroft Library

University of California  
Berkeley, California

Watson “Mac” Laetsch

Botanist, UC Berkeley Administrator and Fundraiser,  
Partner in International Development

Interviews conducted by  
Lisa Rubens  
in 2010 and 2011

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Mac Laetsch, 2012  
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## **Watson “Mac” Laetsch Oral History**

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## Interview History—Watson “Mac” Laetsch

Watson “Mac” Laetsch is a distinguished Professor Emeriti of Plant Biology and former Vice Chancellor whose outstanding career as a scholar, teacher, administrator and good citizen has long served UC Berkeley well. Mac has more titles than anyone currently associated with the university.

Joining the Botany department in 1962, his career was meteoric. Having earned his Ph.D. at Stanford, after a year in India as a Fulbright Scholar, and then spending two years at SUNY Stonybrook where he was deeply involved in that new college’s experimental curriculum, he was a tour de force at Cal. He wrote a textbook, co-edited two scholarly anthologies, taught thousands in Biology 1, and directed over 50 graduate students through his lab in the Life Sciences Building—for which he later secured a ten million dollar donation from the Valley Foundation to renovate the venerable structure. He was instrumental in the reorganization of the biological sciences, having already served as director of the Botanical Garden and the Lawrence Hall of Science. He was recruited by Chancellor Michael Heyman to serve as Vice Chancellor for Undergraduate Affairs and then for Development. Subsequently he co-chaired the Bancroft Library renovation campaign and continues to serve on the UC Press Foundation and College of Natural Resources Advisory boards. Today he also co-chairs the Mark Twain Luncheon Club and is very active in the Learning in Retirement program organizing and speaking at panel discussions. He remains an enthusiastic Bear Backer and member of the Berkeley Fellows.

Laetsch’s contributions to the wider Bay Area community are extensive. He was a founder of the now flourishing California Native Plant Society, a board member of the Academy of Sciences and Alta Bates Hospital, to name just two institutions he has fostered. Laetsch also has a well honed business acumen, consulting for economic development corporations and running his own commercial walnut grove. He is a world traveler with an abiding interest in India and Bhutan for which he is a public spokesman.

These interviews took place in the comfortable home near the campus in which his wife Sita and he have entertained extensively and which is filled with art and artifacts from his many travels. His enormous dining room table and a sizeable desk in the living room were covered with file boxes, stacks of papers, photographs, awards which we both rummaged through in preparation for the interviews. The reader will note that during the interviews occasionally we’d stop to consult files and documents. Mac has a distinct manner of answering a question “yes, yes, yes” with a distinct set of tones, which he explains is a common speech act in India.

Perhaps above all, Mac—as he is known to all he meets—has a genial manner and a winning personality that suffuses his many talents. Whether teaching, serving on an institutional board or envisioning improvement and change in Cal programs, Mac’s powerful intellect, good spiritedness, and generous captacity to step up and pitch in where needed, makes him a beloved treasure on the campus.

Lisa Rubens, October 2012



## Introduction—by Robert Middlekauff

Friends of Mac Laetsch know that one of his most frequently used words is interact, or some version of it. He uses the word to introduce his relations with others. He also makes the point that his success in the fields he has touched depends in part upon enlisting others in the work he has in mind. Interactions for Mac frequently involve taking a chance on the untried, or using means no one has thought of. Sometimes his interaction involves running a risk. He is no shrinking violet in presenting his ideas; nor does he lack imagination or courage. Interaction in his life has often involved both.

It would be unfaithful to the character of his career and to this oral history to suggest that the key to his success on the campus can be captured by this one word, but considering his use of it can help reveal one of the most remarkable Berkeley lives of the last fifty years. For Mac in his various interactions has been a model faculty member in an enormous number of roles almost from the time of his appointment as an assistant professor in 1963.

The appointment was to the Botany Department, an old fashioned name for an important discipline that attracted up-to-date scientists and students. Mac was unusual even then, a promising scientist who had broad interests in fields not just in botany but outside it as well. He wanted education in science to reach out across the campus and beyond it as far as possible. He taught as a visitor at Tuskegee and Morehouse in his early years, and drew together faculty and students there with colleagues at Berkeley—establishing relationships at a time when such interaction was not fashionable. Such action became common afterwards.

Mac extended his range in every way possible over the next forty or fifty years. The variety and number of programs in and outside of the university in mathematics and science education, native plants (including the California Native Plant Society), museums, and other institutions and subjects cannot be listed here. There were simply too many. In time Mac took on administrative assignments that allowed—he would say demanded—more money, people, and organization. These included the Botanical Garden, the Lawrence Hall of Science, and as Vice Chancellor for Undergraduate Affairs.

All these efforts had at least one thing in common—all involved teaching and education, activities that have long been at the center of Mac's professional existence. They were not for him just assignments, they were passions. He disguised the passionate engagement with a friendly, often joking, and sometimes-funny demeanor. But the range and depth of his involvement in what he did for the campus is clear to those who have known him.

I can only mention one other large task that he took on: raising money for the university as Vice Chancellor for Development. In fact, he is an active fund-raiser even when he does not bear the title. He recently chaired the campaign with Mike Heyman that has given the campus a magnificent library building, The Bancroft Library. Early on he ran another major campaign.

I can attest to his skill in these and other efforts, having served with him in the administration many years ago, and more recently in the Department of History's fund-raising group and the Mark Twain Luncheon Club.

I mentioned his drive in educational and scientific efforts above. Perhaps the energy displayed in all that he does comes from some deep imprint made in his childhood. His father was a Protestant minister and Mac's rearing probably had much to do with its beginning there. He is not his father, and he is not a minister, but we should recognize the inspiration in his career.

Interview #1 September 3, 2010  
 Begin Audio File 1 09-03-2010.mp3

01-00:00:00

Rubens: Today is September 3, 2010 and we're starting the oral history of Watson McMillan Laetsch, who is known as "Mac" Laetsch to everyone.

01-00:00:14

Laetsch: That's right.

01-00:00:15

Rubens: So tell me something about when you were born and what kind of family you were born into.

01-00:00:19

Laetsch: Well, let me start at the very beginning—which was, in this case, 1743. This is a picture here of my direct antecedent, the Reverend John McMillan, DD, and he lived from 1752 to 1833, but his father, William, came over in 1743. Anyway, my middle name is McMillan. My first name is Watson. John McMillan was the first Presbyterian minister in Western Pennsylvania after the Revolutionary War. He went to the College of New Jersey, which then became Princeton, and, of course, it was a Presbyterian college. So he was a good Scotch-Irish Presbyterian. The family came from County Antrim in Ireland, Northern Ireland, and there are various other Irish and even Scots in the background that came over. The Watsons actually came over from Scotland and they are their own little clan.

John McMillan was an early clergyman who came through the Cumberland Gap and spread Presbyterianism in the West. I have in front of me three books on the Reverend John McMillan, plus another book that traces his ancestry, et cetera. He was quite a figure. He started the Jefferson Academy, which then became the Jefferson part of Washington & Jefferson University. And his son-in-law, the Reverend John Watson, was the first President of W & J.

I'm named after the Reverend John Watson, and after the Reverend John McMillan. Hence, Watson McMillan. That was where the names first came from, but I'm actually named directly for my great-uncle, Watson McMillan Hayes, who was one of the early Presbyterian missionaries in China. And he started many schools in China, colleges and schools. He translated a lot of things into Chinese. He translated McGuffey's Readers into Chinese.

01-00:02:38

Rubens: What part of China was he in?

01-00:02:41

Laetsch: He was in Northern China in the Beijing area and then out towards the coast. He went to China in the early 1900s. He was my mother's uncle and so my great-uncle. He established quite an organization in China, again, all Presbyterian, and then he died in a Japanese prison camp when the Japanese

came in World War II. But it wasn't difficult because—that is, dying, I'm sure, is always difficult—but they treated him very well because when they came and found him, they found on the wall a decoration from the Emperor, because he had saved some Japanese fishermen in 1912. There was a war between China and Japan, or at least heavy skirmishes, and so he saved some fishermen on the coast because he was living there at the time. The Emperor gave him a commendation, and so when the Japanese came and found this on his wall, they treated him and his family with great respect.

And his son, John, was a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford from Pennsylvania and then he went out on the mission field with his father, as did some of the other family. Actually, I met John when I was in college. He had some notoriety because he was on the cover of the *US News & World Report*, because the Chinese Communists arrested him, et cetera, and tried to brainwash him and didn't realize that you can't brainwash a Scots-Irish Presbyterian. So they finally let him go, and he was on the cover of *US News & World Report*.

01-00:04:48

Rubens: Oh, that's amazing.

01-00:04:50

Laetsch: And then he left China, of course, and he went to Indonesia as a teacher, and he was in Jakarta riding his bicycle, got hit by a car, and was killed.

01-00:04:59

Rubens: What a tragedy. Let's stop for one minute, I'm concerned about how loud the parrot in the kitchen is.

So you've got an illustrious family heritage. I would think that was a heavy mantle to shoulder.

01-00:05:20

Laetsch: On my mother's side, very much so. As I say, here are three books on the Reverend John McMillan. This one's *The Apostle of Presbyterianism in the West, 1752-1833*. And then there are two other books on him.

01-00:05:38

Rubens: You want to just name them, just so we have them in this record?

01-00:05:39

Laetsch: Yes. Well, this one is called *Reverend John McMillan, D.D.: Pioneer, Preacher and Educator*. And this one, the most recent one, is *Banners in the Wilderness: The Early Years of Washington and Jefferson College*. Well, he founded the Jefferson part of Jefferson College and so he is featured in here. So, yes, it was very interesting growing up because my mother, who was always very interested in history, and her family. So I had these people in the background all the time.



01-00:06:18

Rubens:

So tell me about you. Let's situate you, then, in this family and how you then became aware of its distinction.

01-00:06:26

Laetsch:

I was born January 19, 1933 in Bellingham, Washington, or as us folks in Washington say, "Warshington". And my father had two—

01-00:06:42

Rubens:

Your father's name?

01-00:06:44

Laetsch:

Walter. Walter Laetsch. So perhaps I should go back a little bit on that, because that explains why we were where we were.

01-00:06:49

Rubens:

Exactly. Let's just say your mother's name at the same time.

01-00:06:52

Laetsch:

She was Lillian Marie Thompson.

01-00:06:59

Rubens:

And are you going to give me a narrative of how they met?

01-00:07:05

Laetsch:

Yes, yes. My father was born in Buffalo, New York. His father was an immigrant from Germany, and then his mother came over from Germany at the age of nineteen and met his father in Buffalo. His father was a brewer. He worked for a brewery there. He also had worked in Germany. His mother was nineteen, relatively uneducated. She was also, as I learned much later, she was Jewish. In fact, it's kind of interesting that this wasn't told because, even though my mother knew it, my elderly aunt knew it, but she converted when she came to the German Baptist Church because she was brought over as an au pair girl, basically, as a housekeeper from Germany by these people who had a store and were fairly prosperous in Buffalo and they were German Baptists. And, of course, she converted. My father was raised in the German Baptist Church and his father died when he was thirty-three, when my father was a year old. His mother was a housecleaner. She was a janitor in a school. They had a pretty hard time as kids. My father's elder brother left school at the age of fifteen, went out to Montana and actually drove a stage for visitors in Yellowstone Park. That is, he drove a horse with buggy stage. Then he went off to Bellingham, Washington, and he went to sea in a sailing ship and then finally he worked his way up and became a sea captain and for many years was a sea captain for the Texaco Oil Company fleet. In fact, he was commodore of their fleet. Lived down in Houston, Texas.

Anyway, my father left school very early and went to work for a tailor as an apprentice. But then the tailor told him he couldn't sew and kicked him out after a few days, and so he went to work for a butcher and he went to work in a library and a variety of other things, until he finally went to work for the

Pierce-Arrow Motor Car Company in Buffalo. And he was there and did quite well for quite a long time.

He was raised in this German Baptist Church and he got the “call,” as they said at one time, to go be a minister. He was also married for about a year to a woman who died of the influenza epidemic after World War I. There were no children. In fact, we didn’t even know he was married for a long time. In those days, when we were little, parents didn’t talk about such things. Anyway, he went to Chicago to a seminary in Chicago, which didn’t require much in the way of any education. He had continued to read and do things but he wasn’t really educated. It was the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. Moody was a famous evangelist. He met my mother there, who, again, was a Scotch-Irish Presbyterian. Good solid Presbyterian. She was there because she had graduated from college. Was well-educated and taught school, and her uncle that I just mentioned Watson McMillan Hayes in China, wanted her to come out and join him in the mission field. He wanted her to be director of music, which was hilarious because my mother was tone deaf. And so she went off to get some religious training and she went to the Moody Institute because it was well-known. It’s not that it had any academic qualifications. And there she met my father. And so here you have this unlikely combination of this uneducated immigrant kid from a German family in Buffalo, New York, with this Scotch-Irish lady whose ancestors had settled Western Pennsylvania and who’s educated. Of course, her Presbyterian background was very, very different from the Baptist background in many ways.

Anyhow, for whatever reason, they got married and then my mother insisted that he start getting an education. So she ushered him through to his high school diploma and she made him study and he did. And then he—

01-00:11:47

Rubens:

But were they both still at the Moody Institute?

01-00:11:49

Laetsch:

No, she left. She left after a bit because obviously it wasn’t her cup of tea at all.

01-00:11:52

Rubens:

Okay. And so now where are they living?

01-00:11:55

Laetsch:

They’re in Chicago. They’re living in Chicago. He actually was working part-time at Marshall Field, the big department store in Chicago, where he worked in the restaurant and learned how to make various things that he made the rest of his life. It was kind of interesting. And so—

01-00:12:13

Rubens:

When are we talking about now?

01-00:12:15

Laetsch:

Well, this would have been in the twenties, early twenties. My mother was two years older than my father. My father left the Moody Institute and entered the Northern Baptist Seminary in Chicago. And so then he took a little church in Buda, Illinois, down in central Illinois. Buda is from Budapest, and was settled by people from Hungary. Even though they were mainly farmers. So he took a little church down there. But he needed really to get a college education. So he went over to a college in an adjoining town, Galesburg, Illinois, where Knox College is. And it's a good liberal arts college. He walked in and told them that he would like to join but he didn't have enough money to pay tuition, et cetera, and told them that he was a clergyman. I guess he was interviewed by the President and the President says, "Well, the Lord must have sent you because we have scholarships for people studying for the ministry and we haven't been able to fill them." So he got a scholarship, continuing to do his pastoral work at the church, and so then he graduated from Knox College and went on from there.

Well, they had this little church down in Illinois. Then they were sent by the Baptist Home Mission Society, to a little church in Hailey, Idaho. It's near where the Sun Valley ski resort is. They went to Hailey, Idaho, just a little bit south of the famous ski area. Hailey, Idaho had one church and it was all denominations. It's all Protestant denominations. All the members were women, except for one man who was the janitor and the chairman of the board of deacons.

01-00:14:34

Rubens:

One and the same.

01-00:14:34

Laetsch:

One and the same. And the reason that there were no men is that it was then very rough cattle and mining country. In fact, the sheep people and the cattle people were still going after each other. So it was a very tough area and Mom and Dad like to tell the story how on the Fourth of July, the miners would come down and the cattlemen would come in and they would set up big tables in the main street of town and gamble. Of course, the ladies came in from all over, as well, to service the miners and the cattle people. There was a woman who was a Salvation Army missionary and she would come and stay at their house, because there weren't any hotels and there was no place where a decent woman could stay other than the parson's house. She would go and raise money from these folks gambling. They were very generous, because these miners never knew where they were going to die and that the Salvation Army would send their bodies to someplace and bury them, which they appreciated. So they were very generous. My mother said this woman wore great big full skirts which had great big pockets so that she could put the money in the pockets. Then she would stay at their house at night.

They had all kinds of adventures in Hailey. Then the Depression came along, and the denomination could no longer afford a lot of their stuff, so they closed

that mission. But they worked it out that he had a call, as they used to say, by two churches in the State of Washington. One in Lynden, which was up near the Canadian border. It's a long-time Dutch and Scandinavian community, and a little rural church outside of Lynden, which is called Laurel. He had two churches, which was not uncommon in those days. It worked out very well because the Lynden Church could pay him a bit. The Laurel church paid him in produce and chickens. He got groceries from one and some money from the other. Plus the fact that the one in Lynden also had a cow for us and the cow was right behind the church, and one of the men in the church milked the cow for us. We had fresh milk all the time from the cow that was just down the road a little bit. I was born in Bellingham, which had the nearest hospital.

01-00:17:13  
Rubens:

But the residence was Lynden?

01-00:17:14  
Laetsch:

The residence was in Lynden. It's still there. We were there a few years ago and it's still there and the church is still there.

01-00:17:20  
Rubens:

And were there siblings?

01-00:17:22  
Laetsch:

Yes. I have an older sister, Margaret, and an older brother, Bruce. My sister is seven years older than I am and my brother is three and a half years older than I am.

01-00:17:30  
Rubens:

So one of them was born probably in Illinois.

01-00:17:33  
Laetsch:

In fact, my sister was born in Illinois, and my brother was born in Idaho.

01-00:17:40  
Rubens:

FDR will take office a few months after your birth.

01-00:17:52  
Laetsch:

Yes, Roosevelt was elected in '32, so he was elected when I was born. I was born midway in the Depression, really, when things were still pretty bad. And so I had a lot of fun with people telling about my first memories. I distinctly remember things before I was a full year old. One of my first memories was my father making headcheese from a pig's head, as a good German. He was making headcheese, which, as you know, is the meat and gelatin from the skull. I remember that pig's head very, very well and I remember my first Christmas. So my memory has been very good until recently. It's not as good as it was. [laughter]

01-00:18:53  
Rubens:

So was it a religious household? Was there a lot of observation?

01-00:18:59

Laetsch:

Oh, very much so. And in those days, my father was fairly fundamentalist. He was never a hooter or hollerer in any sense. But Sunday, you didn't do any work on Sunday. You went to church in the morning, and you went to church in the evening, and Sunday noon was the big meal, usually with visitors from the church. A little later on, which I remember very, very well, it was lots of missionaries and other folks that happened to be around. And then Sunday evening was a very light dinner and you went to church. You might do something uplifting in the afternoon, like taking a ride to see something or other, but you didn't buy much of anything at that point.

01-00:19:52

Rubens:

Did your family have a car?

01-00:19:54

Laetsch:

Oh, yes. They had a car. In fact, when he went out to Idaho from Chicago, and I don't know—because this church was really supported partially by the denomination as a missionary church—whether they bought the car or not. But it was a Pontiac, I remember. And they went out in the wintertime and you couldn't drive, so the car was on the railroad train and then they took it off there and then they subsequently drove it. I remember the car because they had that car in Lynden when we were there. And then he received a call from a church in Bremerton, Washington, where the Navy Yard is.

Bremerton is on Puget Sound. It's right across the Sound, about an hour by ferry from Seattle. It's on the Olympic Peninsula, basically, but it's on Puget Sound, and the biggest Navy Yard in the West Coast is there. We moved there in 1936. That was the first time that my father really was paid sufficiently, because the Navy yard people had pretty good wages. Even though a lot of people had been laid off during the Depression, there were still a lot of people working, and so people in the church could put something in the collection plate.

01-00:21:30

Rubens:

It must have been a larger congregation, though.

01-00:21:32

Laetsch:

It was a larger congregation. Yes, right. It was the only church in that part of town. It was in what we called Manette; which had been a separate town. Or also East Bremerton because it was across a part of Puget Sound from the main town of Bremerton. In fact, not long before we were there, they just had ferries, and then while we were there, when we first got there, they built a bridge. That same bridge is still there. So it was an adventure when I was a kid to go over to Bremerton because that was a city. But Manette was a little community, and it had one church, which was my father's church.

Then, during the war, where we had enormous numbers of people coming in to work in the Navy Yard, the town grew. In fact, it doubled in size and they built new schools, and my father's church started another church where a lot

of the new people had moved in a few miles away. So, again, he had two churches on a Sunday. So he would do the one in Manette, and then he would go out to this other place and do all of that, as well.

01-00:22:45

Rubens:

And so the whole family just followed or did this—

01-00:22:47

Laetsch:

Well, no. We never went to the second. My mother did but we kids didn't.

01-00:22:50

Rubens:

Okay. I was going to ask if the kids went to Sunday school.

01-00:22:53

Laetsch:

Oh, sure. It was Sunday school, and morning service. Then again, as I said, you usually had somebody over for dinner. My brother and sister went to young people's meetings before the evening service; then there was an evening service, which almost all churches had in those days. Now many don't have them any longer. It's been a very significant change, as I've understood, but most churches don't have Sunday night services. In fact, a lot of churches have services on Saturday night. Particularly the evangelical churches have them on Saturday nights. So there are all kinds of changes. But anyhow, Sunday night service was a very common event. So Sunday was basically spent in church or getting ready to go to church.

01-00:23:42

Rubens:

So were you in Manette by the time of your high school years?

01-00:23:47

Laetsch:

No. Still have a lot of ways to go.

Anyhow, when the war came, it changed all sorts of things in a really remarkable way that people outside of that area don't realize, because we were a center for the ship repair for the Navy. I still remember Pearl Harbor. When we came home from church and we were outside on the playground across the street with other kids, somebody said the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor. Well, we didn't believe it at first, and then we found out about it. Then we were very concerned, because if they bombed Pearl Harbor, the next thing that they logically would come after would be the Puget Sound Navy Yard.

We were all organized in our schools to go out into—they had a lot of wood lots in the town, and we all had places outside that we were supposed to go if the Japanese planes came over. We all had sand in our houses, buckets of sand for incendiary bombs, and we had air raid wardens that patrolled at night. You weren't supposed to be out at night, to any extent. Oh, we all had dark window blinds on our houses and the warden enforced the blackout.

01-00:25:06

Rubens: I was going to say blackout curtains.

01-00:25:08

Laetsch: We had blackout curtains. Absolutely. Well, anyhow, when the Japanese bombed Dutch Harbor in the Aleutians, we thought we would be next. But it didn't take an awful lot of thinking, really, to realize that they just didn't have the capacity for their fleet to travel that distance. And there were all sorts of things. There were little Japanese submarines. Little ones came up on the West Coast and lots of rumors.

01-00:25:36

Rubens: There was supposedly some strafing along the Oregon coast.

01-00:25:38

Laetsch: And in California, coastal California. There was not bombing but shells from some small submarines.

01-00:25:48

Rubens: But it's a vivid memory of yours.

01-00:25:50

Laetsch: Oh, well, after Pearl Harbor, a lot of the ships that were damaged were brought to Bremerton, because we were the only place that had facilities. So I remember seeing these ships that they brought in, you wondered how they stayed afloat. And it was Christmas Eve 1941 that Army trucks came into our town and, in fact, all over the area. Just long lines of them. They set up a camp with tents and all the rest and barrage balloons and anti-aircraft guns. In the playground right behind our house we had the barrage balloon, which they let up to supposedly keep the dive bombers from coming in. Large balloon attached by a cable. A very, very large balloon.

01-00:26:38

Rubens: What is a barrage balloon?

01-00:26:39

Laetsch: Yes, they called it barrage balloons. But very, very large things attached by a cable that they put up every morning to keep dive bombers from coming in, because if you had all these things up, if dive bombers came down they would have their wings clipped off by the cables. And then anti-aircraft guns. And so they basically took over the area and there were very bad facilities for the soldiers. They didn't have any hot water or places to wash. So everybody in the area opened up their—a lot of us had these basements, with doors that opened to the outside, and so we opened up our basements and they would come over and shave and wash in the sanitary tubs. I would sit on the basement stairs and listen to them talk and ask questions. I was always a nosy kid. I look at seven, eight year old kids now and I think, "What a difference," in terms of what we did.

And, of course, we became like puppies, you might say, for these guys in their tents, and we would spend a lot of our time with the soldiers. If they had their chow that would come in by truck, and if they didn't like it, they would give it to us. And we were amazed at the amount of meat because we didn't have much meat before the war to eat. You'd have meat maybe once a week. It was a big deal. Chicken was a big deal. And so they had meat, steak, which we rarely had. Anyhow, we became well-acquainted with them. I learned how to dismantle and assemble a fifty-caliber machine gun when I was that age.

That sojourn ended when my father enlisted as a chaplain in the Army Air Forces. And I think one reason he did it was because one of his classmates at the Northern Baptist Seminary in Chicago had been in the Army Reserve and then he was a chaplain and a colonel and he was the senior chaplain in the First Troop Carrier Command. That was when the Army/Air Force—of course, you did not have the separate Air Force. The Carrier Command carried freight for the Army and also paratroopers. So my father joined the Army and went.

01-00:29:55

Rubens: How old would he be then?

01-00:29:56

Laetsch: Well, he was forty-five. He was born in 1897, so he was a bit on the elderly side, and that kept him from going overseas. He joined the Army and was assigned to the headquarters of the First Troop Carrier Command in Indianapolis at Stout Field, which was the headquarters of the Troop Carrier Command. We moved to Indianapolis from Washington in the summer of 1943 and traveled across the country. He was able to get enough gas rationing coupons to get us to Indianapolis, because everything was rationed at that time. And, in fact, we ran out but he was able to beg or bribe a station in Illinois to get us enough gas to get over to Indianapolis in our 1940 Chevrolet.

I had been across the country once before when I was about three. My grandmother, my mother's mother, died in Pennsylvania. No, she didn't die. She was very, very ill, and so she was going to die, and my mother wanted to see her beforehand. We went across country to Pennsylvania to visit her and to visit all my mother's relatives. That was my first cross-country trip by car. Many since then. But then a good deal of it was on gravel roads, which people don't realize now.

01-00:31:40

Rubens: Still—

01-00:31:41

Laetsch: Oh, yeah. Highway Thirty, the Lincoln Highway. A fair amount of that was gravel still. And the tires blew out every few miles. So fixing tires was the major thing. Anyway, we drove back to Indianapolis, and I went into the fifth grade in Indianapolis. My brother was in the first year of high school, and my



sister was not with us. She was in Linfield College in McMinnville, Oregon where she graduated from.

We were there for about a year and a half, and then my father was transferred to Lawson Field at Fort Benning, Georgia. We lived at Fort Benning on the post, the main post, right next to the commanding general, which was interesting because we had a dog. I was given a puppy in Indianapolis. And the dog would bark, and the MPs would come around to our house and say, "The general is complaining about your dog barking." So I had a very early dislike for generals. Also, the general would sometimes walk from his headquarters, which was not very far away to his house, and we had a garden in our backyard, and he would sometimes sort of look at it and say, "Oh, you're having a little trouble with your garden," because insects were just terrible down there in Georgia. Of course, he had two or three people taking care of his garden and it all did very, very nicely. So that was very interesting living on a military post. We had a large—

01-00:33:27

Rubens:

Now, this is still a segregated army, right?

01-00:33:30

Laetsch:

Absolutely. Segregated army. And we had German military prisoners on the base. They did all sorts of menial things. In fact, my brother worked in the PX warehouse, and there were German prisoners that worked in there who, as he said, complained all the time. They should have been very, very happy. But it was completely segregated. The black troops, or in those days Negro troops, were on a separate little post not too far from my father's chapel, which was at Lawson Field, which was the airbase for the paratroopers. And most of the people in his chapel that came were paratroopers. But then he also did services at the black chapel. Of course, all the black soldiers just about were in various types of more or less menial tasks. But then he was asked to come and preach at a variety of churches in the general community, and particularly in Alabama, and particularly a number of black churches. So that was our first experience, my first experience, with the black community because in the state of Washington there were few black people there at the time. I remember, in fact, it must have been right after Pearl Harbor and people started to move in, so the early forties, when I saw my first black person. I guess I said something to my mother about their color and she told me to shut up. But in Indianapolis when we were there, there were, of course, black people but, again, segregation was so strong they weren't in the white schools.

So then when we were in Fort Benning, went over to Alabama because it's right on the border of Alabama and Georgia, some of these black churches—and that was my first real experience with black society. And I'll circle around to that later on because I spent quite a bit of time at Tuskegee Institute while I was here in Berkeley. I went down and taught there for a while and since then

have been very much involved in all kinds of things related to black students and faculty.

Anyway, so that was a very interesting early experience where you really—saw just generally there the terrible situation with segregation. I remember going to Atlanta several times and how the stores had signs. In fact, even in Columbus, of course, was also very segregated. All the drinking fountains had signs on them. Many stores or places they couldn't go in. There were black entrances and so forth. And, of course, in buses. I remember my brother talking about the fact, because he went to school in Columbus and rode the school bus, and how they would jeer and yell at black people as they would pass by.

And then, of course, on the base, as I said, it was segregated. One little incident I still remember was they had a recreational program for children of officers and enlisted men. So we played football, et cetera. And we were playing a team from Columbus, and we had two black players on our team and the Columbus then refused to play us and they went off. And the most interesting thing, though, in a way was I went to the Fort Benning's Children's School when I was in the sixth and seventh grade, part of the seventh, and they had their own school. So that was my first private school, only private school until I went to college. It was, as you might expect, a very good school. They had everything that the school could want. In the South, when you recited you had to stand up always and say, "Mrs. So and So." Or "Miss. So and So." It was a very, very interesting experience.

Then when the war ended and my father was given his discharge—and he had enlisted at Fort Lewis, Washington, and so he had to go back to Fort Lewis for his discharge. And so we traveled across the country in our 1940 Chevy. This would have been in 1945. Went the southern route and came up through San Francisco, and we had a terrible time in Northern California because there was really heavy rains that year and there was a lot of flooding in Northern California and Oregon. We had an awful time making our way up Highway 99 because it was closed a lot of the way. So we went back to Washington where my father had his discharge and lived for a while with some friends that had been in his church. But then we were going to be staying longer. And my father, when he left Washington, had been promised that when he came back from the Army that there would be a church. Of course, he had to resign from the church that he had while he was gone and another person came in. Well, it turned out all the good churches were taken by people when the ministers went off to the war. So he came back and there wasn't anything good available, which I think he was always a little bit bitter about, as he should have been, because Christian charity did not extend that far.

We stayed there for a while, while he was trying to figure out what to do. I went to school. The schools were so crowded then that I went to two schools each day. I had to walk about a mile because we were living in apartments, et

cetera, that had been built for the workers that came to work in the Navy Yard and they were all very basic. It was sort of like a housing development they built for folks in earlier days. I had to walk about a mile to school. Imagine that now, kids walking a mile to school both ways. I didn't mind it. And then we went in the afternoon to another school over in Bremerton, where both my sister and brother had gone. It was a junior high school. So at one school in the morning and then went across by bus to another school in the afternoon and then back again. Well, that was not a terribly good way but we survived okay.

Anyway, my father had made very good friends with a minister in Indianapolis, and they corresponded about things. My father was very discouraged about what was going to happen and this gentleman said, "Come on back here. We have a lot of good churches that are available." So we got into our old car again and went across, this time in the wintertime, which was kind of interesting, going across the country from Washington in the winter with lots of snow and—

01-00:41:07

Rubens:

So your brother was still with you?

01-00:41:10

Laetsch:

Yes. My brother was still with me. My sister was in college. And so we went back to Crawfordsville, Indiana, where this man lived and had a church at that time. He had a church in Indianapolis which we attended during the war. And we stayed with them for quite a while, while my father tried to figure out what to do. And while he was waiting and interviewing with various churches, he went to Purdue to take courses on the GI Bill, which was actually very good for him. And then he received a call to this church in Indianapolis, on the south side of Indianapolis, and we moved to Indianapolis and I started the eighth grade in Indianapolis. After that, I went to the same high school my brother had been to when we first came to Indianapolis during the war to Stout Field, and my brother had gone a year to this high school. So I followed him. It was a different part of town but had a very good reputation and you could go to any high school you wanted. So I went off to that school. Interestingly enough, my brother's wife also went to that high school. So they have known each other since they were in high school.

Anyhow, I went to Thomas Carr Howe High School in Indianapolis. And Thomas Carr Howe had been the President of Butler University. He had also been much involved with the Disciples of Christ Church, the Christian Church, which had its national headquarters in that part of Indianapolis, not very far from the high school. So they named the high school after him. And he had an interesting connection with San Francisco, because his son, Thomas Carr Howe, was well-known in the social pages of *The San Francisco Chronicle* when I went out to Stanford and I kept seeing this name. He was the director of the art museum in San Francisco, the Palace of the Legion of Honor.

And he was Thomas Carr Howe, Junior, is what I think he was. His father was Thomas Carr Howe, President of Butler University. When I came out here to graduate school, I kept seeing this name in the social pages. Yes, it turned out that he was the son and he had gone off east to college and then university and then I guess got in the art world and came out here. So anyhow, an interesting connection between the name of my high school and then what I subsequently ran into out here. So I went to Howe High School.

01-00:44:02

Rubens: Were you a good student?

01-00:44:03

Laetsch: I was a very good student. I was also an athlete. I played football and my senior year was an all-city tackle. I was offered a football scholarship by Purdue. I always thought it was a funny thing to have a scholarship for athletics. But anyhow, I didn't take it. I went to Wabash College instead. But while in high school I also was picked as the outstanding boy scientist in the State of Indiana and this was on the basis of a science project that I did for several years while I was there.

01-00:44:48

Rubens: What was the project?

01-00:44:52

Laetsch: It was assaying for athlete's feet. That is, people carry the fungus. They might have had or didn't have it, but I spent a lot of time swabbing between the toes of fellow students and then culturing it. And, of course, I found the culture of the organism that causes athlete's foot. So I did a lot of that.

01-00:45:20

Rubens: Were you teased for any of that?

01-00:45:22

Laetsch: No one teased me because I was big. I was an athlete. I was a very good student and people didn't tease me.

01-00:45:35

Rubens: Did you suffer yourself? What drove you to do that study?

01-00:45:38

Laetsch: The science? Well, I could probably go back even further. I have always been interested in science in some way, particularly in biology, from the time that my mother would take me on nature walks when I was very, very young. I always collected stuff. I collected bugs from an early age and collected plants and various other things. So it was rather natural that I would do something in biology. And then I became very good friends with my high school biology teacher, who was a remarkable fellow. He, you might say, apprenticed me. So he encouraged me and made it possible for me to do a lot of things. He got me started on an independent investigation of athlete's-foot fungus, actually, when I was in his biology class as a sophomore, and I continued on through

my senior year. He had been interested in that, for some reason, and so he got me started on it and then I went on from there and carried it on pretty much by myself. But he was also very influential.

01-00:46:47

Rubens: What was his name? Do you remember?

01-00:46:48

Laetsch: Paul Klinge. Oh, I remember it very well. Paul. K-L-I-N-G-E. And he also introduced me to organ music, which I still love. He also would take some of us around to cities in the Midwest to basically further our education on what cities were like. So we went to Chicago several times, the first time I stayed in a nice hotel. We went to museums in Chicago. My first time I went to the Field Museum—here's a story I'll come back to—and the Art Institute in Chicago and various other places. And also in Saint Louis. Let's see. We went to Cleveland, the American Association for the Advancement of Science meeting in Cleveland, so that was the first time I'd been to a big science thing. I'd been to the Indiana Academy of Science meetings. And then he also took us to pretty good restaurants and so I learned how to order something in a restaurant.

01-00:47:53

Rubens: Oh, what a wonderful education.

01-00:47:55

Laetsch: So that was as important as the academic stuff. But then I was friends with many of my other teachers in high school. As I said, I was a very good student. I don't think I was valedictorian but I think I was second or third in the graduating class.

01-00:48:10

Rubens: What did it mean to be the outstanding science student of the state, though? Did you go to a convention for that?

01-00:48:14

Laetsch: The Indiana Academy of Sciences recognized me as the outstanding boy scientist in the state in some fashion at one of their meetings and I have a certificate. A certificate and what else did I get? I forget what. They gave me something else. And while I was in high school I subscribed to the journal of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, which is *Science*. Also to *Scientific Monthly*. All started in high school.

01-00:48:52

Rubens: What would you do in your summers in high school?

01-00:48:55

Laetsch: I worked. Let's see. I started working in summers when I was in junior high school, when I left the eighth grade. I worked on a truck farm. Worked ten hours a day, six days a week and earned three dollars a day. Talk about child labor. But it was actually very good. I earned enough to buy a bicycle, and I

also learned a lot about farming and plants and things, so that worked out reasonably well. And I got in good shape for when I went off to play football as a freshman in high school. Then in high school I worked in construction, I think it was two summers, and I'm trying to think what else I did in the summer. Don't quite—

01-00:49:51

Rubens:

But you weren't going to camps?

01-00:49:53

Laetsch:

We always went to a camp. The Northern Baptist Convention became the American Baptist Convention, and that was to stave off the Southern Baptist Convention from taking the name. These two groups have always fought and they're very different. The Southern Baptists are very literal about everything, very conservative, and the Northern Baptists are just like the Methodists, Presbyterians, what have you. But they had a very lovely conference grounds in Green Lake, Wisconsin. It had been the estate of the Krafts, the cheese people from Chicago. Beautiful big estate that is a thousand acres or more right on a very nice lake and then they had built a hotel there. Well, all of this was given to the American Baptist Convention and that was their national summer assembly grounds. So we went there every summer. Then when I was in college, the summer of my freshman year, I worked on the student staff there. I worked in the kitchen for the summer. That was a very, very nice environment. In fact, I met a couple of young ladies, one in particular that I then met again some years later and had a bit of a nice romance before I went off to India and met my wife.

01-00:51:29

Rubens:

We'll get to that part of your life. But just to sum up your own background, how do you characterize your family? We certainly talked about the incredible social mobility that they had and geographic mobility. Was it a warm household?

01-00:51:49

Laetsch:

Yes. Particularly my mother and I were very close, I think for a lot of reasons. One was that I was the youngest one and she was, what, in her thirties when I was born. So we were always very close, I think as is often natural between a mother and a youngest child. Then the fact that we had a lot of similar kinds of interests. She was always very interested in books. She was a good mathematician, and she was always interested in nature. She was always extremely supportive. She was a good Scots-Irish person in terms of not exposing her emotions to any extent. But she was always very solid. So we were very close. My father, we were fine, but he was a very different personality. He was very successful as a minister because he was a very good preacher. He's one of the best preachers that I know and I probably took after him to a certain extent on that. He also had a very good voice, singing voice, and he had taken singing lessons at one time, voice lessons, but he was a very good soloist, which I was not. I'm still not, but I'm good enough to sing in The

Monks, here at Cal. I've been a Monk for many years. So certain things I can do all right. But he had a very, very good voice. And so we got along but, particularly as I became older, and really from high school on, I was increasingly less religiously inclined.

01-00:53:40

Rubens:

That's just what my question was going to be. Did you ever rebel?

01-00:53:42

Laetsch:

Yes, yes, yes. And I didn't do it openly. That is, the whole time I was living at home I went to church on Sunday, et cetera, but I sort of withdrew from some of the other stuff. But just out of respect and all. I didn't want to cause a problem, so I went to church. And even when I was in college, when I would go home on vacation, I would go home to church on a Sunday. But by that time I had fled from religion. In fact, I remember one of the books that I was reading that was quite influential. It was basically on the conflict between science and religion. My father read it and gave me a lecture on how this was against the word of God, et cetera, et cetera. But anyhow, he always respected me. He didn't fuss about it. He was disappointed, I'm sure, that I was not religiously inclined. My mother didn't pay very much attention to it. So my father and I were never as close as I was with my mother, but we got along okay. He was always very, very supportive.

01-00:54:52

Rubens:

So it wasn't a brimstone and fire kind of faith that he practiced.

01-00:55:02

Laetsch:

No, no, no. World War II had a real impact on him, and he was much more liberal after World War II because he had mixed with a lot of very different kinds of people. So he was much more liberal after the war in his theology, and socially he was very, very liberal. In fact, he was very much in favor, both in his denomination and other places, on overturning segregation, to mix people up, et cetera, and he was always very much in favor of that sort of thing. In fact, he was a paradox, because you would think with his background as a child, he would have been a good New Deal Democrat. But he wasn't. He was a Republican all his life. Not a hard core one, but a Republican.

01-00:55:47

Rubens:

Never voted for Roosevelt?

01-00:55:49

Laetsch:

No, no, no. He didn't like Roosevelt. The only thing I could ever figure out about it was becoming a Republican was in some sense joining the establishment. Having been a very poor kid and seeing what the other side of the tracks was like, that this was his way to kind of be on the other side of the tracks, the good side of the tracks. Because his own personal view on things and his attitude towards people, he was as much a New Deal Democrat as anybody, because he was always very sensitive and supportive of poor people trying to make their way and people trying to improve themselves and he

understood what it was like to be poor. But he still voted Republican, and he was not very happy when I could first vote as an ardent Democrat. [laughter]

01-00:56:41

Rubens: When did you first vote?

01-00:56:42

Laetsch: As soon as I could, when I was twenty-one years old. I graduated from college in 1955, so I voted in 1956.

01-00:56:55

Rubens: Yes. You must have voted for Stevenson.

01-00:56:56

Laetsch: Oh, absolutely. Yes.

01-00:56:59

Rubens: How long did your father continue to minister? Did he stay in Indianapolis?

01-00:57:02

Laetsch: Oh, yes, yes. He stayed. All the rest of the time they stayed in Indianapolis. When he retired from the church that he had been in for many years, when he went to Indianapolis, he retired from that. But then he became a—they don't say substitute. But it was filling in for other preachers if a church didn't have a preacher or an in between preacher. So he filled in for a lot of churches, basically, until about a year before he died.

01-00:57:32

Rubens: And when did he die?

01-00:57:34

Laetsch: He died in 1979. He was eighty-five.

01-00:57:48

Rubens: Remained in Indianapolis?

01-00:57:51

Laetsch: Oh, yes, the whole time. He and my mother remained in Indianapolis in the same part of town. He would serve as an interim pastor. That's the term. He served a fair number of churches, sometimes for quite a bit of time, six months, he was at one almost a year. But he worked full-time basically until about a year before he died.

01-00:58:12

Rubens: We have one second left on this tape before we change it. We might as well. Did your mother survive him?

01-00:58:18

Laetsch: Oh, yes. My mother lived until she was ninety-five. So she lived ten years beyond him, and she died in the eighties.



01-00:58:34

Rubens: All right, I've got to change the tape.

[End Audio File 1]

Begin Audio File 2 09-03-2010.mp3

02-00:00:00

Rubens: By the way, where did your brother go when he left home?

02-00:00:01

Laetsch: Okay. Let me tell you about my siblings. My brother Bruce, who is three and a half years older than I am, went to Butler University. Then he went off to Korea as a Marine officer and came back and did a master's degree at Butler, and then he started teaching school. So he was a high school teacher for his whole career, a high school social science teacher at a number of high schools in Indianapolis, and then he continued in the Marine Reserve for many years and retired as a major. He was also a very good tennis player. He was on Butler University's tennis team, and we used to play a lot of tennis and he always beat me. Then he married Joyce Ticen, who was in high school with him. They were married before he left for Korea. And they have four kids, two boys, two girls, and they all have children. So there's quite a group of folks in Indianapolis that are family; one daughter and a son and their families live there. And so he had all the kids.

My sister, as I said, was about eight years older. She went to Linfield College, as I mentioned, in Oregon and then she taught school, home economics, in Oregon along the Columbia River for a time. Then when we were back after the war in Indiana, she came back and went to Purdue to get a master's degree. Then after that, she went to Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge where she was in student services. I think she was in their housing department. Then she moved to St. Louis, I think first as a teacher, and then she went to work in the personnel department of Stix, Baer and Fuller, a big department store in St. Louis. And then she met a man there whom she subsequently married, who had been in business. Then he decided he wanted to become an Episcopalian clergyman. He'd been raised as an Episcopalian, so he went to an Episcopalian seminary in Tennessee and received his degree. He had an Episcopalian church, a small one in Jamestown, Missouri, which is about an hour's drive, an hour and a half drive south of St. Louis, near Fort Leonard Wood, where I served a little time. Then he went from there to Phoenix, Arizona as the vicar of the same church that Barry Goldwater belonged to. Then he died. So my sister then went back to teaching. They have two children, both married.

02-00:04:56

Rubens: But speaking of family, you had a heavy mantle hanging over you in terms of your heritage.

02-00:05:02

Laetsch:

Yes. I've thought a lot about that. One is that, again, because of my mother and her background, that there was always this sense of history and the fact that I was named after these two very distinguished gentlemen was always there. So I always had a connection of some kind. Not necessarily something to live up to but the fact that I was connected to some people who had been very successful, et cetera, was I think very important. But on the other hand, it can't be determining. My brother, who has never really been that interested in his ancestors—we just had an exchange of letters about that—but he's not been terribly interested. And I don't think that the ancestry had as much of an impact on him. My sister maybe a little bit more so, but still not as much. Maybe it's because of my names. I couldn't get away from it very well. And, of course, being named as a little kid, Watson McMillan, that was difficult. I think I was two years old when I named myself Mac.

02-00:06:11

Rubens:

I was going to ask when that started.

02-00:06:14

Laetsch:

Because that would have been too many fights named Watson McMillan. So I named myself Mac and a lot of people never know—some still don't know—that I have any other name. Of course, some people I know think it's Max. That's all been kind of an interesting thing. But it's the fact of having some distinction in one's ancestry and something to think about and look up to. And I just know, as I'm sure you do, an awful lot of people that don't even know who their ancestors are. I'm always amazed that people don't even know who their grandparents are or not anything beyond their grandparents. They don't know where they came from, what they did. They're just kind of out in a big vacuum. And not just myself. There are a lot of people that have well-known ancestral backgrounds, but I'm sure in many cases it has an impact. In some cases, it's probably a burden to them if they're expected to live up to it. But I was never expected to—I shouldn't say live up. It was always expected in our family that we would all go to college. It's just accepted that you were going to go to college. There was never any question about it. And it was accepted that you would be a good student. Didn't have to be brilliant, but a good student. Both my brother and sister were good students. He went through college, got a master's degree and taught for many years. And my sister always did very well in her studies. So it was just part of the family. In fact, we all ended up as teachers. My sister and my brother and myself at different levels and teaching different subjects, but still all teachers. My mother had been a teacher. My father basically was a teacher. In fact, when my sister was going out with the guy she eventually married, and he was a businessman, and my father shouldn't have, but he made a big fuss. "No one in the family has ever married a businessperson. You should be a professional person, but not a businessperson." That was considered beyond the pale.

02-00:08:30

Rubens:

Really?

02-00:08:31

Laetsch: Yes, oh, yes.

02-00:08:31

Rubens: Was he a tradesman?

02-00:08:35

Laetsch: No, no. He was a salesman and then became a clergyman. My father just never thought that business was worthy. You had to be a professional in some way. [laughter]

02-00:08:45

Rubens: And was your father respectful of your mother's heritage?

02-00:08:48

Laetsch: Oh, very much. Well, he was respectful but he wasn't all that interested. For example, when we would go back to Pennsylvania, where my mother was from, we always had to visit the cemeteries. My mother was always very interested in cemeteries. So we'd go back there and we'd go up and down. "Oh, yes, this was uncle so and so and this was" and so on. Just drove my father wild the fact that she wanted to spend so much time looking at tombstones. And I think when my mother and her brothers got together and they talked about their family. Because my father didn't know much about his family, both because his father and grandfather came to this country and then his mother came separately and didn't know much about her family to speak of. My grandfather had two brothers. One was a sea captain and one was a minister in Germany. There were some cousins that my father and mother visited once when they were in Germany years later. But he didn't know much about his father's family and was never terribly interested in that sort of thing.

02-00:10:07

Rubens: He knew that there had been a minister in the background, though?

02-00:10:09

Laetsch: He found that out later on. Yes.

02-00:10:11

Rubens: Oh, okay. And I was thinking there wasn't a lot of extended family around you.

02-00:10:16

Laetsch: No, we never had family around us.

02-00:10:18

Rubens: Other than the brother who was the sea captain.

02-00:10:20

Laetsch: No. Never together. He lived in Houston, Texas, where his ship was out of the port near Houston. No. There was never any family around. We would visit. One of my first relatives I remember meeting was when we were in Bremerton just before the war when my mother's youngest brother and her

father came out to visit. Then when we were in Indianapolis we went to Youngstown and visited my uncle's family and grandfather. I met him when I was real little but I didn't remember. But I met him because he was living with my uncle. Then he died about a year later. I didn't know my grandmother. I saw her when she was on her deathbed. And, of course, my father's parents I didn't know at all. I basically grew up not having grandparents. That was a little different from some people.

02-00:11:40

Rubens: Let's talk about your going to college. You know that you're interested in science?

02-00:11:46

Laetsch: So I got out of high school.

02-00:11:50

Rubens: You're a star science and biology student.

02-00:11:52

Laetsch: That's right. And yes, I was one of the speakers at my high school graduation. Some of the teachers were very worried about what I was going to talk about. I'm trying to remember just what the fuss was about. Maybe because I once walked around school with a copy of Marx's *Communist Manifesto* in my pocket just to shock people. But the title that I gave—now, I should look that up what the title was, what I talked about, because they were going to stop me from speaking for a while, and then saner heads prevailed. They thought I would get up and give a communist rant or something of the sort. Anyway, so that was all very funny.

But no, I got through the high school thing very well. Actually, there were some interesting follow-ups from that. I remained friends with my biology teacher until he died. He left the high school and went to Indiana University as the assistant to the President. There was a very well-known president of Indiana who was almost a saint down there. His name was Herman Wells. He was really the guy that put Indiana University on the map in many ways. I met him when I was an applicant for a Rhodes Scholarship and he was on the state Rhodes committee. Anyhow, Paul Klinge went down as his assistant, and so every now and then, even when I was out here, Paul would call me up, particularly during the Free Speech Movement. He wanted to know what was going on and whether they had to worry about such things back at IU. I told him that they probably didn't. Anyhow, that's a digression. Bring me back to the main—

02-00:13:26

Rubens: Well, because you were the high school—I wanted to ask you what you were aware of in terms of politics, that they were concerned you were going to give a communist rant.

- 02-00:13:34  
Laetsch: Well, that was exaggeration, communist rant, but they were worried about the fact that I might talk about politics of some sort, I think, which would be—
- 02-00:13:44  
Rubens: Did you find yourself particularly interested in the post-war political scene?
- 02-00:13:48  
Laetsch: Oh, yes. No, I was—
- 02-00:13:49  
Rubens: Following debates about the bomb and—
- 02-00:13:53  
Laetsch: Oh, yes. In fact, I won a prize from *Time Magazine* for winning a competition they had on current events. I got a book, I remember. I think it was *The Age of Jackson*. And I forget how widespread the contest was, whether it was local or national. Anyhow, it was enough so that I got a book and they gave me a prize. So, no, I was always very interested in current events, and I'm sure I expressed myself at various times. But the thing is, as you know, the high school culture is very fascinated as to who's in and who's out, et cetera. And so my high school, because of the fact that I was an athlete and also a good student, et cetera, I had sort of multiple access and was very much a part of what you might call the in-group in high school, even though I didn't share a lot of things with them. At the same time—
- 02-00:14:59  
Rubens: You were popular?
- 02-00:15:00  
Laetsch: I was popular, yes. One, I was an athlete, a student, and I was probably considered to be pretty good-looking in those days. [laughter] Anyhow, we—
- 02-00:15:16  
Rubens: Did you date a lot?
- 02-00:15:18  
Laetsch: I didn't date very much because I didn't have a car and I lived quite a ways away from where the high school was. I wasn't the only one. So it was very difficult to date girls there. I dated a couple of girls for a while but I didn't have a car, and then when I was able to drive my father rarely gave me the car.
- 02-00:15:48  
Rubens: That's what I was going to ask. Yeah.
- 02-00:15:51  
Laetsch: Particularly because it was a bit of a way to drive. I actually double-dated with my brother a couple of times when he was actually married. So that was all very difficult to do.

02-00:16:07

Rubens: So you were looking forward to college?

02-00:16:09

Laetsch: I was very much looking forward to college, yes.

02-00:16:11

Rubens: And how did you choose one?

02-00:16:12

Laetsch: I had a number of opportunities but I chose Wabash because they offered me a full ride. You went over there and you took an all day test. And so I did well enough on that that they gave me a full-tuition scholarship. Plus, I liked the school. It was a men's school, of which there, as you know, were many at that time. Most of the Ivy League schools were. So it was a men's college. I liked the faculty that I met.

02-00:16:53

Rubens: Did you know you were going to study science?

02-00:16:55

Laetsch: Yes. Well, in fact, when I first got over there, some of the science people already knew about me a little bit and then I was offered a job in a lab as soon as I got there. So I was very much involved with science. But not only science, I was also much involved in debate and public speaking of various kinds. I wrote a column in the newspaper called *Laetsch Comments*. In fact, I have a copy up there. I've got a whole bunch of stuff you might be interested to glance at. So I wrote a column in the newspaper.

02-00:17:39

Rubens: You hadn't done this in high school?

02-00:17:42

Laetsch: No. We didn't have much of a newspaper in high school. I probably would have if they had had something. As I say, I was much involved in the debate activity. In fact, there is an organization that is the National Debating Honorary or something of the sort, and at a convention, a meet in University of Illinois, I won their prize for argumentative debate or something of the sort. So anyhow, I won the national prize for that that they had, and they gave the college a thing to hang on the wall. I was back there a couple of years ago for a reunion and they had changed some things around and I asked where my prize was. No one had the slightest idea where it was. But I made some very, very good friends on the faculty. In fact, I had better friends on the faculty than I did in many ways on the student body. In fact, I still am very close to Victor Powell, a professor of speech who was also the debate coach, et cetera. Sita and I were back to Indianapolis last spring, 2010 I guess it was, and we had lunch with my professor and his wife; he died the summer of 2011. I talked to another professor, a French professor I'm good friends with. So those were my final connections with the faculty at Wabash, which, again, have been close all along.

Just to go back on connections with the faculty at high school. When I was in India on a Fulbright Scholarship, and while I was there I got a draft notice, but they postponed it because I was out of the country. But when I came back I had to meet with my draft board. The chairman of the draft board was one of my math teachers, and the other person on it was an English teacher and a friend of mine in high school. We can come back to that later on if we want to talk about the Army. But, again, another connection with the high school.

02-00:19:58

Rubens: So four years at Wabash.

02-00:20:00

Laetsch: Four years at Wabash. I had three majors. I majored in botany, zoology and history.

02-00:20:12

Rubens: Any particular focus? European versus—

02-00:20:15

Laetsch: No. It was just general history. But I did all kinds of weird things that influenced my grade average. I took Greek, elementary Greek, because I wanted to be able to read the New Testament in Greek.

02-00:20:33

Rubens: Why did you want to read the New Testament as opposed to reading plays? You were maybe wrestling with your breaking from religion? Or maybe you were trying to impress your father?

02-00:20:41

Laetsch: Well, no. I was not wrestling at that time with that at all. It was just that I had had—with my acquaintance with the Bible, which was pretty strong having read it and so forth for many years. To be able to read it in Greek and the original I thought would be a neat thing to do. So I took Greek in order that I could poke away at reading it in the original, which I did. I think I only took a semester of Greek and didn't do all that well in it. But that was good. I did a number of things like that in college, where I really spread out and, of course, I didn't always spend the time to get good grades in those. But overall I had very good grades. But I didn't have a straight 'A' record because of a few little things like a C in Greek. But no, in my major courses, I was a straight A student.

02-00:21:39

Rubens: You were starting to narrow it to botany?

02-00:21:43

Laetsch: Well, I knew that I didn't want to go to medical school, and I had done a lot of things with plants. I was more interested in plants than animals at the time. But I majored in zoology, too, so I had a lot of animal stuff. But I was really interested in plants. Then I worked with a botanist faculty member the whole time I was there. I did some research work with him. His name was Paul

Romberg, and he became President of SF State University after I came to Berkeley. So it was an obvious connection. Although history in the long run has probably been more prevailing because even though my professional career here was in plant biology how I spend more time reading history. And I'm also much involved in things on the campus that relate to history. The Bancroft Library is a good example. So I'm actually in many ways more interested in history now than I am in science. And certainly my reading and involvements, et cetera, are more in that area than they are in science.

02-00:22:52

Rubens: So there's a real continuity in many ways.

02-00:22:54

Laetsch: That's right. There's a continuity.

02-00:22:56

Rubens: So anything else about college that we should discuss?

02-00:23:01

Laetsch: I already mentioned that I wrote a column for the student newspaper. Well, I graduated in '55 so I went there in 1951.

02-00:23:06

Rubens: Yes. So these are the years of the Korean War. And also the years of the McCarthy anti-communist campaign.

02-00:23:16

Laetsch: That's right.

02-00:23:17

Rubens: Did anything particularly strike you politically?

02-00:23:20

Laetsch: Well, in terms of the war, I was just very happy to have deferments. I had deferments all through and then that, of course, finally caught up with me.

In terms of McCarthy's campaigns, it was something that we followed very closely. And when I happened to be in Washington, DC in 1956, I happened to see a hearing chaired by Joseph Welch, and I think Roy Cohn was there, and of course I knew of them from the Army-McCarthy hearings.

02-00:26:25

Rubens: When you graduated from college, was there no question but that you were going to go to graduate school after?

02-00:26:30

Laetsch: Oh, yes, yes. Absolutely. No, that was always assumed from the time I went into college.

02-00:26:37

Rubens: And so how did you pick Stanford?



02-00:26:40

Laetsch:

I picked Stanford for two reasons. There were, on the faculty at Stanford, on the biology faculty, a couple of people who had been Wabash faculty. One of them was Graham DuShane, the man I mentioned who was going off to be editor of *Science*. He was a professor at Stanford and he had been at Wabash, early on, before I was there. And then another person, Willis Johnson, was a graduate of Wabash, and spent time as a professor at Stanford and returned to Wabash as professor of zoology and chair of the science division. And then I had a very close friend in college a year ahead of me who went to Stanford as a graduate student, and he thought very highly of it. And so I applied to Stanford and to a number of other places, and Stanford offered me the best deal. I also applied to Berkeley, and they didn't offer me anything initially. They admitted me but didn't offer me anything. Then, a little later on, they contacted me and said that I had a teaching assistantship at Berkeley and I told them that I had accepted a teaching assistantship at Stanford, thank you very much. I remember getting a lot of pleasure out of telling them that I was not coming to Berkeley because I was going to Stanford. And I don't know why they did that.

02-00:28:15

Rubens:

And the pleasure was?

02-00:28:17

Laetsch:

Well, to stick it in their face, in a sense. I was interested in coming here, and they didn't give me what I needed. They didn't give me one initially and then they came around later on and said, "Yeah, do you want to come? We have a teaching assistantship for you." When I came to the Cal faculty, I used to rub that in to them a little bit. So that's how I went to Stanford.

02-00:28:36

Rubens:

That's how you got there. Well, should we leave your graduate years for next week?

02-00:28:39

Laetsch:

Let's leave it to next week.

02-00:28:40

Rubens:

Next week we'll talk about the state of science and what were some of the questions you might have been pursuing.

Mac, thank you.

02-00:28:59

Laetsch:

Yes.

Interview #2: September 10, 2010  
Begin Audio File 3 09-10-2010.mp3

03-00:00:55

Rubens: Today is the 10<sup>th</sup> of September 2010, and we're conducting this interview at Mac Laetsch's home. We ended our first interview with you going off to graduate school in 1955, and we covered an amazing span of time. You had some memories that flooded back which you wanted to put some of your childhood experiences in a context that would be relevant to what your whole future would be.

03-00:01:27

Laetsch: Yes. Well, I think relevant in the sense that I represent, in terms of age, perhaps the last generation that was cognizant of the world before World War II. I was born in 1933 in the very depths of the Depression, and I was the last group that experienced the world the way it had been for years and years and years. In other words, in speaking with my mother about her childhood, I had more relevant experiences with her as a child than I did with people later on.

03-00:02:16

Rubens: More in common.

03-00:02:17

Laetsch: More in common. Yes, right. Just as an example. Because it was a very different world before World War II. There were no antibiotics. There were fewer immunizations for childhood diseases. There was no TV.

03-00:02:36

Rubens: I was going to ask you when your family got their TV.

03-00:02:38

Laetsch: Yes, there was no TV. Well, we didn't get TV until I was in high school. No ballpoint pens, plastics, automatic gear shifts and the largest section in grocery stores was canned food. Relatively little fresh food. So my childhood bore more resemblance to my parents', in some ways even my grandparents', than it did to that of the immediate post World War II generations. And that was true of people in my general age group. It's just that I was the last group that really had a memory of that time, because people who were born later, even before the War, but they were little folks and they didn't remember much of anything. So that has had an impact on myself and other people of that generation which hasn't been emphasized to any extent, because it was the vanishing world. And my mother and I talked about this a great deal. Of course, she had a grandmother who was a child during the Revolutionary War. So she was directly linked with that. And so through her and through my mother you have this almost direct link, because my mother's grandmother died before I was born, but not an enormous amount of time before. So you have this short time span that we often forget about in our history. And, again, things didn't change that much for so many years and so people had common experiences.

For instance, I suffered from pneumonia when I was probably five or six. I almost died. I had some of the first use of sulfa drugs. We didn't have antibiotics at that time. And so we had sulfa drugs and that probably saved my life.

03-00:04:37

Rubens: So sulfa, when was a new medicine.

03-00:04:39

Laetsch: That was new right before World War II.

03-00:04:44

Rubens: I thought it was earlier.

03-00:04:45

Laetsch: I don't think it was earlier. Not much earlier. And then, of course, we didn't have antibiotics during the mid 1930s, until really after the war. As another example, at the age of ten I had viral pneumonia. Now, we didn't know what it was at that time. We thought it was just a special type of pneumonia. Did not know it was virus pneumonia. So I was in bed for weeks, and I think I was out of school for five weeks or something of the sort, until it just wore out. I didn't really know what it was until I went to Stanford. Everybody had to have a chest X-ray in those days. So I was called in by the doctor at the Stanford Hospital because he was excited about the fact that on my chest he saw this scar tissue, and he recognized it as resulting from pneumonia. So he did a little antibody reaction and found out, yes, it was viral pneumonia. So that's what the scar tissue was from.

03-00:05:43

Rubens: Oh, interesting. So he could test it already from the—

03-00:05:47

Laetsch: At that time, yes. Well, it was still there. I had the antigens from the viral pneumonia. So, again, now it's common and can be diagnosed. They didn't even know what it was at that time. They just thought it was a type of pneumonia. Fortunately, it wasn't fatal. But that's just another example of how things have changed so dramatically over a pretty short period of time.

Let me just go on with a focus on health just a little bit. In the very early years, I remember the many days of confinement that you had as a child due to measles, mumps, chicken pox, et cetera, which everybody had in those days. Now, of course, they don't have that. And that meant lots of reading, because when you were confined to home—in fact, in those days you had a public health nurse that came and stuck a notice outside the house saying, “Quarantine.” It was a quarantine notice indicating that you're not supposed to go in because this person has a communicable disease. And that was a standard thing and you just knew during your school years, your early school years, that you would have one of these posters, because you would get one of those childhood diseases. And they lasted a considerable period of time. But

that meant reading, because we didn't have TV. You listened to soap operas on the radio, which was all part of life. But that was just a very important element in people's ability and interest in reading during that time. That they had to do it as a child if they had any interest at all in reading.

I don't know if I mentioned last time, but once I learned to read that was a wonderful thing for me. In the first and second grade, Miss Paul was a wonderful teacher. Well, I remember her in all kinds of ways because she was the archetypal woman teacher in those days. Most of the teachers were women because they were not allowed to have other kinds of jobs, which was, again, a major, major change in society that I don't think people fully appreciate. Very talented women were elementary school teachers. Of course, they weren't paid very much. I remember Miss Paul had one black dress she wore all the time. But she was quite good, and she left me alone because she would send me to the back of the room where they always had books, often new books. And I would sit at this big round table and read while the other kids went through their drills. I had to promise not to disturb the class by answering all the questions.

So anyway, I just thought it would be interesting, because some of those contrasts are so vivid for me —just the difference between that and what has happened since then. And, again, I don't think enough has been paid attention to that great transition point, which came really with World War II and then subsequent to that. So, as I said, I had more in common, in some ways, with my mother's generation than I've had with generations since then.

03-00:09:19

Rubens:

So you were closer to your parents' generation than your children were to you.

03-00:09:23

Laetsch:

Oh, by far. Yes, in many ways. Absolutely. And that divide is increasing.

03-00:09:29

Rubens:

I think you wanted to tell me a story about being in Washington. DC.

03-00:09:35

Laetsch:

Yes. I was in Washington, DC because I had finished one year of graduate work at Stanford. I had started Stanford the fall of 1955. And so in the summer of 1956 I drove across country in the car that belonged to one of my professors at Stanford, Graham DuShane, who had just been appointed the editor of *Science Magazine*, and that's published out of Washington, DC. He was flying his family back east. So I drove his car back to Washington, DC because I was going off on a Fulbright Scholarship, as we talked about, and had to be in the Midwest anyhow, in Indianapolis where my parents lived and where I would depart from. So I drove his car to Washington, DC and then I was for a day and a half or two days in Washington. Then I flew back to Indianapolis, and then a few weeks later I went off to India on a Fulbright. But the interesting thing about that trip was not driving across the country, it was

the fact that I was in Washington and I sat in on some hearing with Joseph Welch and Roy Cohn. It was during the Army-McCarthy hearings.

03-00:12:11

Rubens:

Let's talk about why you went to Stanford for graduate school.

03-00:12:18

Laetsch:

Well, I went to Stanford because they offered me some money. They offered me a full tuition scholarship and a teaching assistantship, and so that was something I couldn't really turn down. Then Berkeley later gave me something, but not a full ride. And I wrote back and said, "Thank you very much but Stanford is taking care of it."

03-00:12:43

Rubens:

How would you characterize Stanford at that time?

03-00:12:47

Laetsch:

Stanford was in a transition, interesting transition from being really a rather poor—when I say poor, I mean economically poor school. You associate Stanford now with, of course, lots of money, et cetera. But not at that time. It was just before that. Silicon Valley was just getting started and did not have that much of an impact, although some of the companies were beginning to grow rather vigorously. So it was a school that was just coming out of a rather constrained economic situation and beginning to raise money.

03-00:13:42

Rubens:

Who was the President of Stanford at the time?

03-00:13:47

Laetsch:

Wallace Sterling. He was the President for many years. In fact, the reason I met him was a very interesting story. I wrote a letter to the editor while I was there, because I think I mentioned when I was at college I did a lot of—I wrote a column for the newspaper and was noisy about things, et cetera. So when I went to Stanford, just the general environment, it was very right-wing at that time. Something went on on campus and there was an editorial in the—oh, I know what it was. It was an editorial in the student newspaper basically supporting McCarthy. So I wrote a letter to the editor giving him another view about things. So I received a call from a woman from the administration in Hoover Tower. I remember she had been a secretary to Hoover. She basically said that she was going to try to get me expelled from Stanford because of my views on things and I was obviously a communist or something of the sort.

03-00:15:02

Rubens:

Is this literally on the phone or did she summon you to—

03-00:15:06

Laetsch:

No, no. This was a letter. I probably still have it around someplace. This was a letter. So obviously I was disturbed, because here was the Hoover Tower and this woman, so I went to see President Sterling, which was interesting that you could do that at that time. Sterling found that very interesting, but basically

told me that she was nuts and not to worry about it. So that put that to bed. But that gave me a certain impression of the Hoover Institution.

03-00:15:34

Rubens:

Were you part of a particular cohort when you started your graduate work at Stanford?

03-00:15:59

Laetsch:

Well, one of the reasons I went to Stanford was that a very good friend and fraternity brother at Wabash went to Stanford. And so he told me all about it, et cetera. And then there was the head of the zoology department at Wabash who had been a Stanford professor, quite a well-known one. And then it turned out that there were at Stanford a couple of professors who had graduated from Wabash. So there was a Wabash-Stanford connection of a sort. In fact, there were two professors at Wabash who had been at Stanford. So it was not unnatural that I went there.

03-00:16:58

Rubens:

How would you rank it academically?

03-00:17:00

Laetsch:

In those days, Stanford was just beginning to really come up. In fact, I remember one of my professors at Wabash was a little disappointed that I went to Stanford because he said it wasn't in the top rung of institutions. They had, however, a very good biology department. In fact, the Biology Department had quite a few people who were very well-known.

03-00:17:27

Rubens:

Names of a few of them.

03-00:17:28

Laetsch:

Well, George Beadle was there, who was a joint Nobel Prize winner and he later became President of the University of Chicago. George Beadle had just left. Edward Tatum was still there. They had shared the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in '58. And then you had Victor Twitty, who was a very well-known animal embryologist. You had Arthur Giese, who was a very well-known animal physiologist, and his course at Stanford was very famous. You had a number of other people like this. So it was a distinguished department. Then I met, as soon as I got there, an assistant professor who had just gotten his degree at Harvard named Winslow Briggs, and so I went to work with Winslow and did my thesis with him.

03-00:18:22

Rubens:

What drew you to him?

03-00:18:25

Laetsch:

Well, I was interested in plants and he was a plant physiologist, plant morphologist. He was very young and enthusiastic. Since he was the only person working on plants there who was working in the general area I was interested in, it was sort of natural that I went to work for him.

03-00:18:46

Rubens:

Why don't you describe now what it was that you were specifically interested in?

03-00:18:50

Laetsch:

Well, the first year there I hadn't really picked a thesis topic. I did do that when I came back to Stanford after my Fulbright. So I took courses while I was there the first year and got acquainted with things and met some people who are still close friends, for example, Matthew and Mascia Allen. We lived in a little apartment on the campus, a friend and myself. As I said, we met a lot of other people, some of whom are still friends. We also tried to drink the peninsula dry. And we didn't quite succeed but we made a good attempt. And I became acquainted with San Francisco and with some of the good things in San Francisco.

03-00:19:42

Rubens:

You had not been to the Bay Area before, is that right?

03-00:19:48

Laetsch:

I'd been to San Francisco twice. Once in about 1941 or '42 when my father came down to take a summer program at the Berkeley Baptist Divinity School, which is a Julia Morgan building on the south side of campus. And the American Baptist Seminary of the West is still there. It still functions as a divinity school. It also rents out space for all kinds of other things, as well. In fact, there is a new university that some folks from the Arab world want to start that would concentrate a lot on the Muslim world. And they are renting space in the divinity school, which is kind of interesting.

Anyway, my father went there in the summer and we lived in a house on College Avenue, which is still there, right around the corner from the school. And so we spent a number of weeks there. I went and swam in Fleishhacker Pool, in San Francisco. I still remember that. I saw streetcars for the first time. They had a street car going up Telegraph Avenue at that point. And, of course, the university and students at the university were all a new and interesting world. I remember going to the Oakland Docks, seeing a Russian freighter that had come over, that the crew was made up of both men and women, which was considered to be quite something.

So anyway, I was at San Francisco at that time. And then, after the war, 1945, when my father got out of the Army Air Force, he had to go back up to the State of Washington for discharge at Fort Lewis and we drove through San Francisco on the way up. So I've been to San Francisco twice before.

03-00:22:34

Rubens:

You had indicated that your time at Stanford was pretty limited to the campus. You had plenty of other things to do, though.

03-00:22:39

Laetsch:

I spent a lot of time doing other things, as well. Right. Absolutely.

03-00:22:58

Rubens:

I meant to ask you that since you had played football and you will become quite involved in athletics at Berkeley, were you a Stanford fan?

03-00:23:03

Laetsch:

No. I don't even remember if I saw a football game when I was there at that time. We did, of course, later on. But I didn't pay too much attention to athletics at that point.

03-00:23:13

Rubens:

You were a teaching assistant at Stanford?

03-00:23:18

Laetsch:

Yes. But let's go back a little bit, if we can, because while I was at Wabash I applied for both a Rhodes Scholarship and a Fulbright Scholarship. I think we covered this a little bit last time. Anyway, for the Rhodes Scholarship they have statewide competitions, et cetera. And so the selection committee, I interviewed with them in Indianapolis, and they sent me on to the regional, which was in Chicago. And in the regional they select the people who will be Rhodes Scholars. So I went up to Chicago, and in one of the clubs up there we had our meetings. On the selection committee there was an oilman from Oklahoma, and he asked me all kinds of different questions, et cetera. At that time, the oil depletion allowance for the oil companies was very much in the news. That was when they received real tax breaks because of the fact that their oil was being depleted over time, which is obviously the case. They got great big tax breaks for this. And somehow or other, in the conversation we got off on that and I was highly critical of the oil depletion tax breaks. And so this gentleman who was an oil guy was quite upset with that, and I think he pretty much vetoed me when it came around to the selection. I was not selected, which was an enormous disappointment to me, because I was really hoping for that. Plus the fact that a man on the committee was actually the Dean of Wabash College, who had been a Rhodes Scholar. And he took me up to Chicago. We went up together and came back together, and that was my first ride, coming back, on a commercial airplane.

03-00:25:30

Rubens:

Must have been a pretty quick flight.

03-00:25:31

Laetsch:

Oh, yes. Only forty-five minutes or something. Very quick ride. Anyway, that was my first major disappointment, was not having a Rhodes Scholarship. And I don't know if I learned anything from it or not. But it was also interesting how a lot of the people who were there, in fact, most of them, were from East Coast schools. The Ivy League and West Point have this really—I won't call it a racket, but it's a well-organized system where they send people back, their students, back to the states that they come from, or the regions or they come, to compete for the Rhodes Scholarship. And, of course, they have some definite advantages of various kinds. Plus the fact they tutor them for the interviews. At least they did then. I don't know if they do now. But they



tutored them. And then you also had for the Rhodes Scholarships, in those days, certain benefits for being an athlete. And even though I had done athletic stuff early on in college, I had not really done anything in athletics, so that probably counted.

Anyway, I had also applied for a Fulbright Scholarship, and these were pretty new at the time. In the spring of that year I received a letter saying that they didn't have enough money, so they were not going to offer scholarships that year but that they might well in subsequent years and they would keep my name on file. So that was very interesting because the next year when I went to Stanford, along in the spring I had a letter from the Fulbright people saying, "You have won a Fulbright Scholarship." And I had indicated in my application that I wanted to go to India.

Now, why did I want to go to India? One reason I think is that on this trip, I was in Washington DC, that I mentioned earlier where I went to the Army hearings, et cetera, I saw a very beautiful woman, a girl, and she was Indian, dressed in a sari, and I thought, "My goodness. I'd like to meet somebody like that." Well, so that was one reason. The other was that you're supposed to go on a Fulbright to a university and study with some particular subject and presumably with someone. So there was a well-known botanist at Delhi University. In fact, his textbook on plant embryology was the standard textbook, so I knew about that.

03-00:28:04

Rubens:

What was his name?

03-00:28:04

Laetsch:

Maheshwari. M-A-H-E-S-H-W-A-R-I. P. Maheshwari. And so I put down that I wanted to go to Delhi to study plant embryology. In truth, it was a way to get over there. So I was selected, so I went off to India. Do we want to do that now or—?

03-00:28:24

Rubens:

I think so.

03-00:28:30

Laetsch:

Yes, well, you see, I was out of Stanford for two years. So maybe let's cover that intermediate period. This was in July of 1956.

03-00:28:46

Rubens:

How'd you literally get there?

03-00:28:48

Laetsch:

Well, we flew in a super constellation from the airport in New York, which flew out of—it wasn't LaGuardia. It wasn't called Kennedy at the time. It was called Idlewild. But the old terminal is still there. It was a propeller plane, and there were, I think, about four or five other Fulbright people there that I met at that time, one of whom worked for *The Chicago Tribune* as a reporter. He was

going over there to do journalism of one kind or another with India newspapers. And like myself, he met a woman in India whose sister was at the Fulbright office in India. She had a younger sister. She was Anglo-Indian. That is, from a background of both India and British and a very, very good looking sister. Hal Bruno. Does that name ring a bell?

03-00:29:57

Rubens:

Vaguely.

03-00:29:58

Laetsch:

Okay. I'll tell you why, and I'm sure you'll remember. Hal and this young lady became entwined, and then they subsequently got married, even though Hal was very worried about it, because he was concerned about whether his good Jewish mother would think she was a good Jewish girl, which of course she wasn't. But Hal then went on in his career in journalism, and it was some years later that I began to see this guy on TV at various national events at one kind or another, and particularly the discussions in Washington, DC, that this was Hal Bruno from the—what was it—Associated Press or something. Anyhow, he was a well-known name. He was always involved in the presidential debates. I never had any interactions with him subsequent to that but that was an interesting little sideline.

03-00:30:50

Rubens:

But so you kept in touch with him while you were in India so you knew about his marriage.

03-00:30:52

Laetsch:

In India, yes, right. And then I would hear, because going—well, no, actually I was going to say through his sister-in-law that I heard about him. And I did later on but I forget really what it was all about.

Anyway, so I went off to India, went to Delhi University and lived in a dormitory there for graduate students. It's called Gwyer Hall, G-W-Y-E-R, because the first Vice-Chancellor of Delhi University, which was not an old university—it was actually founded in the forties. The first Chancellor was a man named Morris Gwyer. He was an English academician from Cambridge. And so he patterned Delhi University after Cambridge in many ways and the idea that it was an Englishman—of course, at that time this was standard. And so the graduate hostel, as they called it, was named after Morris Gwyer, an Englishman. And you knew that they did it just right because they had fireplaces, just like an English room. And they were all set up like English rooms in the hostels, in England.

03-00:32:20

Rubens:

And so did you meet in the afternoon and have sherry with your professors?

03-00:32:24

Laetsch:

Tea. Not so much sherry, but tea is, of course, standard. But I was fascinated with the fact that we had fireplaces in the room. We didn't need fireplaces.

The chimneys became runways for rats. Anyway, I lived in this hostel. Made a lot of friends and—

03-00:32:41

Rubens: And who were your fellow students?

03-00:32:44

Laetsch: Well, they were in all different disciplines. They were in the sciences, they were in the humanities.

03-00:32:52

Rubens: Primarily Indian students, though?

03-00:32:53

Laetsch: They were all Indian students. There were two other non-Indians in the hostel, both from Germany, who were there studying at the Delhi School of Economics, which was quite a well-known place at the time, and still is, to a certain extent the current prime minister of India is a former faculty member. But not as much as it had been in the past. So they were there at the Delhi School of Economics. And I was in the Botany Department. So I was the only American male student. Sita went to an affiliated college called Miranda House. Miranda was the daughter of Sir Morris Gwyer, so he named this college after her. There were a couple of other American women who boarded for a time in the dormitory of the college: Bella Abzug and Gloria Steinem, who became so important in the women's movement. Sita remembers them sneaking out of the dorm and jumping over a wall to avoid curfew.

03-00:34:23

Rubens: How did she end up there?

03-00:34:25

Laetsch: Well, Steinem went over to India for some reason. I guess she wanted to know about India. But she didn't last very long because she was asked to leave for being too liberal. Yes. Anyway, so I started off in a graduate program; did work on a little plant in India, on the embryology. That is, in a seed you have an embryo, and that grows into a plant. So I worked on embryology. But what I really did was, to a much greater extent, to meet people and see things and travel around. During that year I traveled all over Northern India. Went to Nepal, because another Fulbrighter was an architect and he was offered a job by the Point Four Program, which was the first of our technical assistance programs. It now has another name. But it was one that did good things for countries around the world. So he went to work for them in Nepal, and actually designed a school, which we visited just a few years ago in Nepal. Anyway, he was an architect and then he subsequently came to Berkeley and he was in our architecture department.

My future wife, Sita, and I visited the Tuleys in Nepal in June of 1958, and we met a Berkeley graduate student named Leo Rose who was working on his PhD thesis. He was a student of Bob Scalapino who was a professor of

political science and Director of the Institute of East Asian Studies. We became good friends with Leo when we came to Berkeley. He was a lecturer in the Political Science Department and a member of IEAS.

Leo had begun to work in Bhutan, and wrote the first book on its government. He became good friends with Dawa Tsering, Bhutan's foreign minister. I leave again for Bhutan next week, and this relationship began in Nepal in 1958.

03-00:35:57

Rubens:

What was his name?

03-00:35:59

Laetsch:

Tuley. T-U-L-E-Y. James Tuley. He was married. He was the only Fulbrighter in our group that was married, and we were very good friends. They lived in Old Delhi. Then when they came to Berkeley, he was here before I was, and so we had a lot of interaction over the years. He came to Berkeley because he had met Dean Wurster of Architecture when Wurster was traveling in Nepal. He saw Jim's buildings and eventually asked him to come to Berkeley. Then he moved to University of North Carolina, and he left Annie for a younger woman. Happens, you know. And then he died and Annie's still very much alive, and she married an older man, and now they live in Annie's home in Louisiana. Anyway, all from the days of Fulbright. So I traveled all over India, all over Northern India, had all kinds of adventures. Went hunting, tiger hunting several times because you could still hunt tigers at that time. I never shot a tiger.

03-00:37:02

Rubens:

This is just ten years into India being an independent country.

03-00:37:10

Laetsch:

Oh, yes, and there were still many, many evidences of that in all kinds of ways.

03-00:37:17

Rubens:

Evidence of the Raj?

03-00:37:18

Laetsch:

Yes. There were still Brits that lived there, still acted like they did during the Raj. And the government was small. During that time, I met Nehru twice. Not just met him, but met him and talked with him. Again, the government was relatively small. Everybody in the government, the civil service, knew each other. And, of course, most of the people in Delhi at that time were associated with the government in one way or another. There were only 300,000 people in Delhi. There are now, what, over ten million. And the government was small, and they all knew each other. I still remember a classical music concert in New Delhi, and it wasn't a very large group, and I was sitting there and a man came up and I recognized him. He leaned over and he says, "Hello. My name is Nehru." I said, "Well, I'm so and so." We had a little chat. But very friendly. Then I met him again at a reception, and I was there a little earlier at

a building that the meeting was going to be held in. He was running around insisting that the windows be open because it was too hot. So I met again and I reminded him that we met and chatted with him. But he was just really on a tear of going around and making—he was renowned for that. He had a very, very short temper and could get very mad and really, as they say in India, blow people up. So we had a chat, and I followed him around while he was concerned about the windows being open. Here is the head of a very significant country at the time and worried about the windows being open. But it also said something about what India was like at that time. It was really a small government. People knew each other and they were concerned with a lot of rather pedestrian things. Well, as an example, Nehru had letters and representations from people who were concerned about whether their children were doing this or that. In fact, when Sita and I began to see each other, that case went to Nehru, because it was considered to be a major scandal that here was this American going out with this Indian girl. And the Chancellor of the University was concerned about it, because he had been told. We saw him around. And I figured he took it to Nehru or somebody and Nehru just sort of told him to get lost, this was nonsense because, of course, he had an affair some years earlier with Lady Mountbatten.

03-00:40:31

Rubens:

I'd heard that but didn't know it was true?

03-00:40:31

Laetsch:

Oh, yes. Absolutely. In fact, we were just talking this morning. A friend of ours, I think it was her mother, had had an affair with Nehru, and so it was not—

03-00:40:31

Rubens:

It was just well-known? It was something that was talked about?

03-00:40:44

Laetsch:

Yes, yes. And his wife had died by that time. He obviously had interest and, as was shown with Lady Mountbatten, there's no doubt about that. But, of course, she had affairs with just about everybody. She had apparently dozens and dozens of affairs and, of course, her husband did, too, but with a different sex. He liked boys.

03-00:41:09

Rubens:

That was just known?

03-00:41:10

Laetsch:

Oh, yes.

03-00:41:16

Rubens:

So you've introduced Sita. Why don't we talk about how she had come to India?

03-00:41:19

Laetsch:

Yes, let's tell it because that's a good story. She was listed as a foreign student, because she came from Trinidad and Tobago. There was a foreign students association there, most of whom were Indians from other countries. That is, lots of Indians, of course, went to Trinidad, to Guyana and lots were from the Fiji Islands. A huge number of Indians went to Fiji Islands to grow sugarcane. There were Indians in Africa, particularly in Kenya, Malaysia, Singapore. There were a lot of Indians from all around Asia and the Caribbean, who went back to India as students in the universities. As I say, I was the only American, and I think we had these two Germans. That was it in terms of foreign students. Oh, there were students from Africa. Africans from Africa who had a very, very difficult time, by and large, in India because the Indians tend to be very prejudiced about skin color. There was a woman, an African American from the US that went there on a Fulbright. She had such a difficult time; she had to go home early. People forget that the so-called untouchables in India are very dark, for the most part. So there's a lot of that prejudice there.

03-00:43:15

Rubens:

How did you actually meet Sita?

03-00:43:16

Laetsch:

Well, let me tell you how I met her. I saw her at one of these foreign student social functions. At that function, since I was one of the only Americans there, and another American was there because he was visiting someone, and so he came to this meeting. At these Indian social functions, they always wanted people to perform in various ways and they liked them to sing. This was a very common thing. Here were these two Americans, and they wanted us to sing. Well, that wasn't my major strength and it wasn't his, either, and so we tried to decide what we would sing. And so we thought, well, we both know *Home on the Range*, so we sang a verse of *Home on the Range*. I had noticed while we were there that it was an auditorium, and there was a balcony and sitting in the balcony was a young woman that I thought was very, very interesting, indeed, and so I found out afterwards that when somebody asked her about who was there, and she said, "Oh, some stupid American was there that couldn't even sing. Didn't know any songs. He was just an idiot." Well, I saw—

03-00:44:40

Rubens:

So her first impression of you was?

03-00:44:41

Laetsch:

Her first impression was not favorable. So when I saw her I wanted to meet her. She was in Miranda House, a women's college, and there were some women graduate students in the Botany Department also at that college, and so I asked them about her, et cetera. So somehow or another—Oh, the foreign students were going to take a trip to Kashmir as an excursion and I tried to find out if she was going. No, she didn't want to go. She had been there

already. Didn't want to go back. And so I said, "Well, if it's a matter of affording it," I said, "I'll pay her way." Well, when this got back to her—

03-00:45:30

Rubens:

It was a second insult.

03-00:45:32

Laetsch:

A second insult. That's right. And then, finally, a little bit later there was a foreign students' excursion to a well-known ruin outside of Delhi. It was not really a ruin. It was a very old tomb built in the form of a dome structure and walls around it. You would think it was a fort. But it was actually Tughlak's tomb, who was an early ruler of Delhi. We were at this event, and Sita was there, and I was trying to figure out how they built the dome, et cetera, looking at the rocks and how they were placed, et cetera. A wall had a walkway on the inside of the wall up high. And I heard this voice. I turned around and she was looking. "Well," she says, "why don't you come up and join us," which I did. And that was the start of our association. She said she felt sorry for me because I didn't seem to be talking to anybody and I was there by myself. I said, "Well, I was looking at the wall structure."

So anyhow, we got acquainted, and then there was another excursion to Agra to visit the Taj Mahal. That was her second visit, and my first visit. We had already become acquainted and become quite friendly, and we had seen each other or had met together on the campus. We went there in October, and in October the moon is very full and the Taj Mahal is very spectacular at night with the full moon. You can read a newspaper. It doesn't get that dark and then you have the reflections off the marble. So I took her for a walk down amongst the trees in front of the Taj. She was scared to go because she thought there were snakes, and she accused me of leading her into a dangerous pathway, and then we went up to the Taj and walked around the outside and below one of the minarets—there are four minarets—and two of them are on the River Jumna. We were behind a minaret by the river and I kissed her for the first time. And it's hard to think of anything more romantic than kissing a lovely lady on a bright moonlight night at the Taj Mahal. That was sort of the start of things, and it went on from there.

03-00:48:28

Rubens:

Okay. So let's situate her, then. How soon before you married? This was October when the romance really begins.

03-00:48:34

Laetsch:

This would have been October of '56. And I stayed on until August. I think it was the end of August, or was it September of 1957, and I left. The Fulbright was over, so I left to come back to Indianapolis, because I'd received a draft notice so I had to go back to Indiana rather than back to Stanford. And then she stayed on for, oh, maybe another month and she decided that she wanted to leave. We had already decided that we were going to get married. In fact, when I left India, I left from Calcutta; Sita and I went on the train to Calcutta

and then I think it was a day after we got there, that I went off on the British India Line, Sauthia. This twenty-one year old woman put me on the boat and we waved goodbye. It was just like the opera *Boheme* and I felt like a Pinkerton as I waved goodbye to her from this ship in Calcutta.

03-00:50:20

Rubens: A scene from *Madame Butterfly*.

03-00:50:21

Laetsch: *Madame Butterfly*. Right. Exactly. And so she then got on the train, and went back to Delhi by herself. If anybody had taken a bet at that time on the chances of us getting together after all of this, because here I was going back to the US, she was going back to Delhi, and then she went to London before going back to Trinidad. The issue was how we were going to get together. Now her parents didn't know about any of this for a good while. And, in fact, we corresponded through a friend of hers in Trinidad who was of Syrian background. There were a lot of Syrians in Trinidad, and her friend was a classmate in high school. She worked for a bank, when I got back to Indianapolis, I would write letters to her in care of the Royal Bank of Canada. She would get the letters, and then we talked on the phone a couple of times. Then she finally told her parents about this and, of course, they were not happy at all.

03-00:51:44

Rubens: Yes. I think it's important to situate Sita and her family.

03-00:51:46

Laetsch: Well, they lived in Port of Spain, Trinidad. When I got back to Indianapolis my brother, who had been a Marine officer in Korea and was still much involved in the Marine Reserves, found out about a program in the Army that was for people who were essential for national defense. And it was only three months of active duty, and then you went into the reserves after that. So he told me about it and I didn't do much at the time, but when I was called by my draft board for an interview it turned out the chairman of the draft board was my high school math teacher, and another person on the draft board was one of my high school English teachers. So they, of course, asked me what I was doing and what I wanted to do. And I told them where I'd been and I wanted to get back to Stanford to graduate school. I remember at the end of the interview, they looked at each other and said, "Well, we need to get this young man back in university as soon as possible," which they did. And then this other program that my brother told me about that I applied for and that was okay. So I was able to go into the Army for three months.

03-00:53:23

Rubens: And where were you literally?

03-00:53:25

Laetsch: I was in Indianapolis at the time. I was able to go into the Army for three months. But before I went in, because it was quite a delay before they took me,



so I had from fall until—I think I went in the Army in June. So I had this whole year. So what was I going to do during this year? My brother, who was a teacher in a high school in Indianapolis, knew the situation pretty well. He says, "Well, why don't you be a substitute teacher?" They accepted me as a substitute teacher. For, well, six months, I was out almost every day in classes ranging from third grade to high school physics classes to high school biology.

03-00:54:21

Rubens:

Where did you live?

03-00:54:23

Laetsch:

I lived with my parents in Indianapolis. The education department liked to send me to junior high schools because most of the substitute teachers were elderly women and some of the junior high schools, not as bad as they are now, but they were still some of them pretty tough and you have big boys, et cetera. And so they would send me to these difficult schools, which was a very, very interesting experience because the boys were difficult. But they didn't pay too much attention in those days to corporal punishment. And there were any number of times when I just literally picked them up and threw them down because they were so nasty. And then, almost always, we got along great after that.

03-00:55:07

Rubens:

Once you established your—

03-00:55:08

Laetsch:

Once I established my male supremacy. Then they were okay.

03-00:55:13

Rubens:

Are these working-class kids?

03-00:55:14

Laetsch:

These were working-class kids, yeah, or even out of work working-class kids.

03-00:55:19

Rubens:

But we're not talking about ghettos or immigrants?

03-00:55:22

Laetsch:

No, not really. No. These were just from the poor section of the town. Or, as we say, the Kentuckians and Tennesseans, because in Indianapolis you have a lot of people that migrated up from Appalachia. So the pejorative term then wasn't racial, it was these geographic and class distinctions. And it still is true back there that the real low-performing groups in the schools are not African Americans; they're what they call the Kentuckians and the folks from Tennessee. And it's still that way back there. It's a fascinating phenomenon that hasn't been much studied. And you go through the town and some of the very worst sections, where you can see it's poor and people aren't doing much, they're white.

- 03-00:56:11  
Rubens: Could you hear the accent?
- 03-00:56:12  
Laetsch: Oh, yes. Absolutely. Yes. Anyway, I taught school then for a year.
- 03-00:56:20  
Rubens: So you didn't know that June would be the induction date?
- 03-00:56:25  
Laetsch: Well, I knew it was along in there at some point, yeah. I knew that it was coming but I wasn't sure where.
- 03-00:56:27  
Rubens: But it didn't afford you enough time to get out to Stanford and resume studies there?
- 03-00:56:29  
Laetsch: Oh, no, I couldn't do that. Plus the fact that Sita and I wanted to get together. And I was really tied up. I couldn't go anywhere because I could have been called at any time.
- 03-00:56:48  
Rubens: Why don't we stop and change the tape, and we can start with how you and Sita then literally get together. Did you explain to your parents what who she was?
- 03-00:56:57  
Laetsch: Oh, yes. No, my parents were great.
- 03-00:57:59  
Rubens: Your father was?
- 03-00:56:59  
Laetsch: Well, my mother was even better.

[End Audio File 3]

Begin Audio File 4 09-10-2010.mp3

- 04-00:00:00  
Laetsch: Yes. I just wanted to talk about the substitute teaching because that had a real influence on me, which was shown and manifested in later years when I was at the university and teaching. What was very fascinating to me at the time was that I was fine from about third grade on up. Maybe I once had a second grade class, but I was not really good at the lower classes because the kids were so young and I just wasn't particularly good with really young kids. Not only that, but it takes a different talent. There's a separation there in terms of the age of the kids, the emotions, how you respond and interact with them and some people are good at that and I think, in many ways, women are much better at that than men in terms of interacting with these young kids. I just

wasn't good at that. I didn't have the experience with young kids to know how to really relate to them. With older kids, that was fine. And one of the things that really impressed me was the fact that they didn't care who you were. That is, whether you had degrees or no degrees. They were mainly interested in whether or not you could talk to them and understood how to teach them. And my frustration sometimes was that since I had not had any teacher training about kids, sometimes I probably wasn't as good as I might have been because I didn't completely understand them. But at the same time, I found that very interesting. Later on, of course, it was your qualifications, how smart you were, on and on and on, that was important. The kids know. They're only interested in whether you could communicate with them and whether you were nice. Or, sometimes stern, as I said, when I had to beat up some of the older boys. And so that was a very great lesson to me in terms of later teaching, of what is required to interact effectively with students, and it became apparent to me later on that in that sense, there isn't that much difference between a fourth grader and a college freshman. In some ways, there isn't. We think that because kids go off to college they're suddenly different people than they were in high school, but they're very, very similar.

04-00:02:34

Rubens:

Can be, yes.

04-00:02:34

Laetsch:

Yes. And the other thing, of course, that made a great impression on me was about seventh grade, which I think is the hardest instructional job in the world. Teaching kids was a new experience, which was very important to me later on. Now, I'd taught before because I was a teaching assistant at Wabash College my senior year in biology, for freshmen biology, and then I was at Stanford, a teaching assistant for freshmen biology as well.

04-00:03:24

Rubens:

That first year.

04-00:03:25

Laetsch:

But, again, you're dealing with very different sorts of people. In Stanford, the biology students, most of them want to be pre-meds and they're a different species. And so it was quite a different thing. And having these kids, as I say, that are only interested in whether you're nice and whether you can relate to them and teach them; that sort of strips everything else away from the interaction of the teaching experience. It removes the ego, and that was very important in a lot of ways, as we'll see maybe later on as I talk about teaching at the university level.

04-00:04:05

Rubens:

Did it affect at all your attitude towards having children yourself?

04-00:04:09

Laetsch:

No, no, no. It was very difficult. I would sometimes come home, at my parents' home in the evening, after the school, and since my parents didn't

drink, I would have to take a real long shower to relax, because I found it was very emotionally difficult with the kids. And, again, I had not been trained to teach kids, so I had to learn it all by just the seat of my pants.

04-00:04:45

Rubens:

I imagine you're not making too much money doing this?

04-00:04:48

Laetsch:

I was making \$75 a day, which wasn't too bad. In fact, I was able to earn enough doing that to bring Sita over and then to pay for our honeymoon in Canada, which I'll tell you about in a little bit. Then, when I more or less finished teaching, is when Sita was able to come over to Canada. She could not get a visa for the United States, because there was a woman in the consulate at Trinidad who would not process her applications. Trinidad was not yet independent as a country so they had a consulate. There was a woman in the consulate that did not approve of local girls marrying American men, because there was a naval base in Trinidad. So it wasn't uncommon that there was fraternization and some marriages that came out of that. Well, she was very much opposed to that and tried to stop it. So Sita naively, when she went to get a visa to come over here, was truthful about the reason why. Rather than saying tourist, she said she was going to get married. Well, this woman stopped it. It was a very, very nasty situation. Sita had lived in Britain and she had lived in India. So she got approvals from both countries for a visa very quickly but Trinidad wouldn't give her approval because the woman just kept it on her desk.

04-00:06:36

Rubens:

Did her family have any pull? We haven't established what her family was, did.

04-00:06:40

Laetsch:

Well, oh, okay. They did. They did. In fact, we'll get into that because it was very important a little bit later on. She was able to come to Canada, because in those days you could go between the commonwealth countries easily. We arranged that we would meet in Windsor, Ontario, because that was right across the river from Detroit and that was the closest entry point to Canada from Indianapolis. We're talking about April of 1957 when we arranged to meet in Windsor, Ontario. She informed her parents that she was going to do this. They were not happy about it at all, but her father did take her to the airport and she left. I met her in Windsor. I drove my '47 Chevrolet, which I had acquired, up to Windsor, Ontario and met her at the airport, and then we got married very quickly by a justice of the peace. We became rather good friends with a woman in the office because Sita went there to apply for a visa to the US, and we met a woman there who was sort of a justice of the peace. She was very pleasant, helped us out a lot. We were then married by a judge in his chambers, and this justice of the peace woman was a witness. Then I think we had a policeman also who was a witness. Then she invited us to the annual ball of the Northwest Mounted Police, and we went to this ball as

guests and Sita wore a sari. There weren't that many Indians in Canada at the time.

We went to the Northwest Mounted Police Ball, and we got this big carton of canned food, fruit and stuff, because we were the most unusual couple at the ball. That's why they gave it to us. And we kept that thing. We took it back out later on out to Stanford with us and had it for a long time because it was almost a ceremonial object. I think we finally made pie or something out of it, out of the pumpkin.

And then we waited for her to get her visa from Canada to come here and we looked out every day from Windsor out to Detroit and we called that the Chrome Curtain. Remember the Iron Curtain that just come up as a—

04-00:10:42

Rubens:

Of course. There was the bamboo curtain also.

04-00:10:43

Laetsch:

So we called that the “Chrome Curtain” and we'd look longingly at Detroit. In those days, Detroit was a fairly interesting place to go to. The car companies were doing very well and it was prosperous. Very different from what it is now. We looked out at Detroit but nothing came, and finally Sita said, "I will call my father." She called him and asked what he could do, because the American consul in Trinidad was a very well-known man, Philip Habib. He actually was a Cal graduate, an alumnus. He became very famous after he was in Trinidad. He was a leading UN person in Syria; he arranged the peace in Syria. And he himself was of Syrian origin.

He was a distinguished guy, and he knew my father-in-law. In fact, my father-in-law had given him a little statuette of one of the Indian gods, which he kept on his desk, so they knew each other well. Sita's father went to see him about the visa problem. Habib had also, at the request of Sita's father, had an FBI report on me, since her father had never met me and wanted to know, who was this fellow that his daughter was going to marry. Later, Sita found this report among her father's papers.

In the meantime, we had run out of money and so—

04-00:12:31

Rubens:

How long were you in Windsor together?

04-00:12:33

Laetsch:

Five weeks. And I ran out of money, and I had just a few dollars left, some of which I used for Sita to call her parents. And then we moved from motels. We kept going from one motel to another down the economic chain. We were at real fleabag places. I decided I was going to have to go back to earn some more money. I arranged for my mother to come up to be with her, and we moved her to the YWCA in Windsor. Then I left and the next day my mother

came up to be with her. It was kind of interesting, because this was the second time that I had left her somewhere because when I sailed off from Calcutta and left her on the dock, and this time I left her at the YWCA in Windsor, Ontario. But my mother came up on the Greyhound bus and met her. The day after driving home I had a telephone call. The visa had been granted because her father had asked Phil Habib to arrange a visa and he got it done very quickly. She had the visa, and they took a Greyhound bus to Indianapolis. My mother was very upset, because they questioned her at the border. She wasn't used to being questioned about her citizenship, because she had good old pre-Revolutionary War ancestry.

They came back to Indianapolis, Sita and I stayed at my parents' house. My father didn't think we were properly married by a justice of the peace, so we had an evening when I had some friends over, including some professor friends from Wabash, and in the living room of the parsonage, we got married again. I have photographs here.

04-00:14:33

Rubens:

Oh, wonderful. Let's see if that shows. Hold it up at your jaw line. We can scan it into this transcript when we're preparing the final version.

04-00:14:41

Laetsch:

We were married properly by his standards in Indianapolis, and Sita still has her marriage sari.

04-00:14:54

Rubens:

Well, let's just give some background to Sita now.

04-00:14:59

Laetsch:

Of course, is probably the most famous woman in Indian mythology. She was the wife of Ram, who was a manifestation of Vishnu, one of the three primary Indian gods: Brahma, Shiv and Vishnu. It's a common Indian name and usually tacked on to a Brahmin, and Sita is from a Brahmin background. But not always. So it's a pretty common Indian name, and her middle name is Priyadarshini, which I won't bother spelling for you.

04-00:15:40

Rubens:

And her last name?

04-00:15:44

Laetsch:

Capildeo. C-A-P-I-L-D-E-O. And that actually is a misspelling of the Indian version, which is not Capildeo, but Kapildev, which starts with a K. But even that isn't accurate, because when her grandfather came over from India, they registered him by his first name, and his first name was Kapildev and they didn't know how to spell it, so they spelled it Capildeo. Although it is sometimes spelled that way in India. You'll find Capildeos in India. But that was really his first name, not his last name. His last name really was Dubey. D-U-B-E-Y. And the Dubey—*in fact*, this is kind of interesting, because I was just e-mailing today, before you came, to a Brinda Dubey, whose husband

was the former Counsel General here in San Francisco, and then he was ambassador to Denmark, et cetera, and they're good friends. They were just here a couple of weeks ago with us.

The Dubey's are Brahmins and they're the worst kind of Brahmins because they consider themselves to be the most Brahminical. As you know, in every club, some people think that they are holier than the others. Well, the Dubey's consider themselves to be just right up at the top as far as the Brahmins are concerned. Her village, the village that her grandfather came from, is near Gorakhpur in Eastern United Provinces, UP [Uttar Pradesh]. And we have visited that village. The village is called Dubeygawh, which means Dubey Village. So everybody there is a Dubey. Her grandfather was a Dubey, and when he came into Trinidad they got things mixed up and put down his first name as his last name. And it can be a last name in India. But in Trinidad the Capildeos are a well-known clan, and all from his first name.

04-00:18:04

Rubens:

So she's the third generation of Indian descent in Trinidad?

04-00:18:06

Laetsch:

Well, on her father's side, yes. Her grandfather came to Trinidad from India.

04-00:18:17

Rubens:

What drew them?

04-00:18:18

Laetsch:

Oh, sugarcane. He was brought in as an indentured servant. Almost all the Indians in the West Indies, Suriname, Fiji, South Africa—remember, Gandhi was in South Africa? Well, that was because of the sugar-cane workers. It was the same thing in Trinidad. Because the British needed workers in the empire for sugarcane in particular when slavery was eliminated. Remember, slavery existed in the British empire until 1833. And they needed labor, so where did they get labor? India.

04-00:18:57

Rubens:

So despite his Brahmin class? It didn't have anything to do with their economic status?

04-00:19:01

Laetsch:

Not necessarily. No, you have Brahmins in India who are poor farmers, et cetera, even though they are the so-called priestly class.

04-00:19:17

Rubens:

So indentured servant brings servitude.

04-00:19:19

Laetsch:

Yeah. And this was done in just a very interesting way. It went on, as I say, all over the empire. So for seven years, they would come and work, and then they were paid some during that time. But then at the end of that time, they were given a cash settlement and they could either go back home or stay and they

would be given a plot of land. Well, a lot went back but more stayed in their various places. In Trinidad, the Indians basically were in the countryside. The folks of African origin went to the cities, for the most part. They became the police, the legal folks, et cetera, whereas the Indians in the countryside were the farmers. But then as they became educated, which they did after the first generation, they became the lawyers and they became businesspeople and then a lot of them went abroad.

04-00:20:26

Rubens:

What was Sita's father's employ?

04-00:20:31

Laetsch:

Her father was a lawyer, actually a solicitor in that system. Her grandparents were able to acquire a lot of land and quite a bit of property, as well, in several of the towns, including Port of Spain. They became very well off. And her father then studied law with a lawyer. He was an apprentice, as was often done in those days, and then became a lawyer, as I said, actually a solicitor, and he dealt mostly with real estate. He didn't try people. Well, he did do some trials. That is, he was involved but he wasn't the actual person that stood in front of the judge. But he was a very, very bright fellow, very capable, and he was very successful. He became a member of the Parliament in Trinidad and his brother, his younger brother, went to England, went to University College, got a PhD in mathematics and then became a faculty member at University College London.

Well, my father-in-law had this idea that the Indians would be able to achieve political power in the country if they could get one of theirs to be prime minister, and he thought that his brother was the person that could do that because of the fact that he had the education. He would counter the African politician named Eric Williams who had a PhD from Oxford. He had been much involved in the independence movement and then after independence, Williams was elected prime minister.

04-00:22:36

Rubens:

Trinidad and Tobago become independent in 1962?

04-00:22:48

Laetsch:

I was at Stony Brook. So it was 1962. A big item of the election was the race between the Indian doctor and the African doctor, and the African doctor won.

04-00:23:01

Rubens:

So he literally did come back to the country and run for it?

04-00:23:05

Laetsch:

He came back for a period of time and made a run for it. In fact, he came back, and then he was elected to the Parliament as well. So here he was, a reader in math at University College, and he got leave to come back and be a politician in Trinidad. Well, after a while that didn't work very well and he gave up his politics and went back to England. He and Sita's father didn't get along very



well after a while. But Sita's father was in Parliament for a long time, as well as having a large legal practice.

04-00:23:40

Rubens: Let's talk about Sita's mother.

04-00:23:43

Laetsch: Well, her mother was married when she was fifteen, not well-educated at all, which was very common for women at that time.

04-00:23:54

Rubens: How many generations had her family been in?

04-00:23:57

Laetsch: Well, hers had been there longer. In fact, she was from a family from the south of Trinidad.

04-00:24:02

Rubens: But Indian?

04-00:24:03

Laetsch: Yes, from San Fernando. They were Brahmins, as well, and they were from the various places in India, the various grandparents on that side. The family was fairly well off, and they had land. Sita's father had an arranged marriage with her mother when she was very young. He did his apprenticeship with a lawyer in San Fernando, so they lived down there when they were first married with Sita's grandparents, maternal grandparents. Sita's early years were with her maternal grandparents, and she always got along very well with her mother's family and didn't get along well with her father's family. Her father's family was very talented intellectually but they were often not very pleasant. I don't know if there's a correlation or not. [laughter] They were very talented, very bright, but they were not pleasant people, for the most part. So she liked her mother's family far better than her father's family, although, of course, she was very close with her father. Not so much with her mother, because her mother was so young. And I'm sure this happens a lot. That in some ways her mother almost looked at her as a rival when she grew up a little bit.

04-00:25:37

Rubens: How many were in the family then?

04-00:25:38

Laetsch: There were three. She had two brothers. Sita's the oldest.

04-00:25:42

Rubens: But was it assumed that she would be educated?

04-00:25:44

Laetsch: No. Let's put it this way. She went to a Catholic high school run by nuns, attended by daughters of the well off, et cetera, in Trinidad. Then when she

was getting ready to leave high school, the Indian Counsel General suggested to her father that he send her to India so that she would learn about her background. And who knows. She might meet a well-to-do Brahmin or some one like that there. That's how she got to India. But if she hadn't gone to India, she would have been married off.

04-00:26:34

Rubens: Why had she been in England?

04-00:26:36

Laetsch: Her father went to Britain for a year to practice law for a time in order to broaden his background. And he even thought for a time of immigrating to England. But he decided after he was there for a while that he didn't want to do that. So at the age of fifteen she spent a year in Britain in school.

04-00:27:02

Rubens: A formative time.

04-00:27:03

Laetsch: Which she enjoyed very much. It was a time before lots of Indians had come to London, and they weren't looked upon in the way in which they subsequently were. She had a great time in the school in London and enjoyed it very much, and then they went back to Trinidad after a year.

So the nation is Trinidad and Tobago, two islands. Trinidad is very multi-ethnic but now it's a little more than half the population that is of Indian origin, whereas Tobago is all African. Tobago is the holiday resort, and Trinidad is mainly industrial. Was a lot of agriculture, very little any longer, but they have oil in Trinidad. Oil and gas, and they now have a lot of manufacturing, including a steel mill. Their beaches aren't spectacular. They've got a couple of nice ones, but most aren't. Whereas Tobago is lovely, has beaches and is much more the typical West Indian island.

04-00:28:14

Rubens: And so was she going to school to be “finished” or to—?

04-00:28:20

Laetsch: Basically to get more education, to be finished. Yes, right.

04-00:28:25

Rubens: Have an “Mrs.” degree.

04-00:28:25

Laetsch: Yes, or something. But I intervened.

04-00:28:29

Rubens: And so she waited quite a while to tell her parents. And then didn't rely on them at first when she had the visa status.

04-00:28:38

Laetsch:

Yes. She only went back to her parents when she had the visa problem, and they fixed that up. And then we had relatively little interaction, communication with them, until our first son was born. When our first son was born we were in Stanford in graduate school, and her parents came and her brother came to visit us. That was what established the rapprochement, you might say.

04-00:29:09

Rubens:

When was he born?

04-00:29:24

Laetsch:

He was born in January of '59.

04-00:29:26

Rubens:

So just before returning to Stanford you did basic training.

04-00:29:37

Laetsch:

Yes. I did basic training at Fort Leonard Wood in Missouri. A terrible place.

04-00:29:47

Rubens:

And Sita lived with your parents?

04-00:29:49

Laetsch:

She lived with my parents, and then she became noticeably pregnant and wasn't very well during that time.

04-00:30:01

Rubens:

How far had she gotten in her education, by the way, at Miranda House?

04-00:30:08

Laetsch:

She was there for two years, two and a half years. So she didn't get her degree. But if she had stayed there another four or five months, she would have gotten her degree.

04-00:30:16

Rubens:

She gave up a lot. What was she studying?

04-00:30:23

Laetsch:

English literature. And she wasn't really that, I should say, motivated.

04-00:30:29

Rubens:

Or ambitious.

04-00:30:29

Laetsch:

Yes, right. And that's one reason that she left. Well, for two reasons. One, because she hoped to be reunited with me and the fact that she just didn't want to be bothered with it. So I went into the Army for three months, did basic training, and then everybody in this three month program was put into the Army Engineers. I spent a month and a half in engineering school at Fort Leonard Wood, which was very interesting because some of the people in it were being taught fractions and how to multiply and divide and since there

were about three or four of us in this particular program who were college graduates, they would tell us, "Don't ask any questions and disturb the class. If you can, go find someplace to hide out of sight." So we survived that, and then it was in August that I was discharged. And supposedly—

04-00:31:45

Rubens:

So there was no task that this Army Corps of Engineers did?

04-00:31:48

Laetsch:

Well, they knew we were going to be leaving. In fact, they called us draft dodgers. "And you draft dodgers are going to be leaving soon so we are not going to pay any attention to you."

04-00:31:59

Rubens:

Did that program come to an end?

04-00:32:01

Laetsch:

I think after some time it must have come to an end. I lost track of it. And one reason I lost track of it was we were supposed to be seven years in the Army Reserve. Well, when I left, they never contacted me about the Army Reserve, and I never had to go to the reserve meetings. About seven or eight years later, I received a letter from them saying that I had an honorable discharge from the Army. I probably established a record because I never made it above buck private, I didn't even make private first class, which didn't even bother me at all. I've never figured out why I wasn't assigned to a reserve unit, but I figured I was just dropped. Or they said "Let's get rid of these guys." Don't need them around."

04-00:32:55

Rubens:

So once you go in in June you know you're going to be done in time for you to start up at Stanford again?

04-00:33:01

Laetsch:

Yes, and when the Army was finished I went back to Indianapolis for a little while and then piled our meager belongings into our '47 Chevrolet and drove out to California. Carried enough water with us so that in the West, whenever we went up over a pass, we could fill the radiator because it always boiled over. When we got above a thousand feet, it would boil over. Had a terrible time coming across Donner Summit. In fact, even more than a terrible time because Sita had forgotten to fill the container with water, the big jug of water that morning when we left. We got up on the top; it of course boiled over. Fortunately, there was a stream close by.

04-00:33:53

Rubens:

I had this image of that kind of gunnysack hanging from the radiator.

04-00:33:56

Laetsch:

Oh, for the front, yes. No, I don't think we did that. So, we came out to Stanford in the fall of 1958, to resume my graduate work.

04-00:34:10

Rubens:

You were also a teaching assistant that year.

04-00:34:12

Laetsch:

Yes. And we moved into the Stanford married students quarters, Stanford Village, in Menlo Park. That's where the Stanford Research Institute is now. SRI. And it was a military hospital that was converted into apartments. Now they have very nice married student apartments on the campus, but at that time they were in this old hospital which also had a laundry and a barber shop.

04-00:34:51

Rubens:

Now, just in that short period of time that you had been married, did you experience ever any reaction or discrimination because you were a mixed couple?

04-00:34:58

Laetsch:

Oh, later on.

04-00:35:00

Rubens:

Not in this first—

04-00:35:01

Laetsch:

Not at that time. In Indianapolis—

04-00:35:04

Rubens:

Or your travel across.

04-00:35:06

Laetsch:

I don't think so. And in Indianapolis we didn't have any because we were considered to be just an interesting oddity. People didn't know what Indians were. They didn't know any Indians. They didn't know what they were. They'd never seen somebody in a sari. People in my father's church came out to see Sita as a strange object. They came around to look at her and see what—

04-00:35:38

Rubens:

An exotic.

04-00:35:39

Laetsch:

An exotic captive, yes. But we didn't have any problems in Stanford.

04-00:35:45

Rubens:

Staying at motels or—

04-00:35:46

Laetsch:

We didn't have any coming across staying in motels that I can recall. In Stanford we never had a problem. We had considerable problems later, in fact, even in Berkeley. In New York we had some real problems. And Sita could go on and on about the situations. In Berkeley, she can tell you that people would say, "it's not done," speaking of mixed couples. And it was not good at all when we first came here in all kinds of ways that I'll tell you about later on when we get to moving to Berkeley.

Sita looks upon the time in Stanford Village as one of the best times of her life, because the old Army hospital was a series of—it had had these wings all connected on one end by a hallway. So each wing was separated by a space, and they had put fences between the wings so that the space became a playground. And the back steps of every apartment exited to this playground. It was a huge playpen for the kids and at that time most of the couples had kids and a lot of the couples were a little older. Just very nice. Sita did not know how to cook. She didn't know how to do anything.

04-00:37:37

Rubens: She'd been raised with servants?

04-00:37:38

Laetsch: Oh, yes. And so the other women taught her how to cook. I taught her how to cook and they helped out. And once we had a child they were great in terms of being advisors on a baby. She had no idea about such things. And so every morning the women would go out and have coffee on their back steps and the kids would be in this big playground milling around, and it worked out very well.

04-00:38:08

Rubens: So your first son is born in January, and his name is John. Was he named for anyone?

04-00:38:13

Laetsch: Yes. His name is John Watson McMillan Laetsch, and the Watson McMillan is after me, and the John is because one of the ancestors was John. There were two Johns. John Watson and John McMillan, the two originators of the whole thing that we looked at. So it was John. I burdened him with the other names, which he's never used, but John worked out very well.

04-00:38:43

Rubens: Now, your second son Krishen has an Indian name. Was that kind of an agreement that—

04-00:38:48

Laetsch: Yes. Well, we just thought at that time that we would have one with an English name and one with an Indian name. The first name is Krishen which is a variation of Krishna, who is a version of Vishnu. And then his middle name is Arvind. A-R-V-I-N-D.

04-00:38:09

Rubens: And when is he born? Were you at Stony Brook or still at Stanford?

04-00:39:17

Laetsch: We were at Stony Brook. So, he was born in January of '62.

04-00:39:33

Rubens:

All right. So you're at Stanford. You're living in the married students housing. And then is it that year, that first year that you're back, that you pick what your research topic is going to be?

04-00:39:45

Laetsch:

Yes, right. And I worked on a little water fern, because you can culture it, grow it in test tubes. And so I did all kinds of things with it, worked on everything from the influences of day length, the amount of light during a daily cycle on its growth, the impact of various growth hormones and a variety of other things. Well, the day length thing was very good. It was fine for that period but it wasn't spectacular. It got me a PhD, and I got about three publications out of it.

One was done very quickly and then two came very quickly after that when I was at Stony Brook. I had a National Institutes of Health Fellowship for two years. When I went back to Stanford, I taught for a year, and then I had a full fellowship for two years. That enabled me to get along pretty well, plus the fact that I was the night librarian in the biology library and I earned a pretty good amount from that. We had season tickets to the San Francisco Opera, which I haven't had since. So it shows you we had some discretionary income.

04-00:42:03

Rubens:

Had she grown up with high culture?

04-00:42:07

Laetsch:

No. And she never really liked opera. She did it because she went along with me but she never really enjoyed that much classical music, et cetera. She likes theater a lot. She likes going to plays more than I do and I like going to concerts more than she does.

04-00:42:31

Rubens:

So you're going to be there through August 1961. Is there anything just to remark on Kennedy's election or the kind of cultural transformations that are taking place?

04-00:42:42

Laetsch:

Oh, yes. The Kennedy election was something. We spent a lot of time on that, talking about it, listening to the debates. We're delighted that he won. That was a major issue. When you talked about Kennedy, I thought you might be referring to Donald Kennedy, who became President of Stanford. Don Kennedy came to Stanford when I was there as a graduate student. And he came as an assistant professor. He had been at the University of Rochester. And his laboratory was actually the laboratory that I was inhabiting because it had been the laboratory of a previous member of the department who died, and they put me in there to keep another department from getting the space. I was still there when Don came, and we shared a laboratory for the rest of the time that I was there, so I got to know him very well.

04-00:44:01

Rubens:

Were there women in your graduate program?

04-00:44:04

Laetsch:

Sure. The same laboratory. There were two women who were graduate students. Another one that spent much of her time there has since become well-known, was an undergraduate.

04-00:44:17

Rubens:

Because I was struck that you said there were women students in your graduate program at Delhi.

04-00:44:21

Laetsch:

Oh, yes, a lot of the students at Delhi were women, because this was botany and botany was very much favored, for all kinds of reasons, by women. Plus the fact that there were many women's colleges, all of which required instructors. So there were a lot of women graduate students. So, Don Kennedy I knew well when he was an assistant professor. He was a chain smoker. Then we had a lot of interaction later on when I was Vice Chancellor he was the President of Stanford. Every year, for the Stanford football game, they would either come up here or we'd go down there. So we interacted with him a good deal for that reason and for other reasons, as well. They came to our Stanford Village apartment for dinner and we would go to their place for dinner. He was one of the youngest members of the faculty, so we were much closer in age. And then, either before he became President there or after he became President, he stopped smoking. And like so many people who stop smoking, he becomes an evangelist and forgot that he had been a chain smoker for a very long period of time.

04-00:46:37

Rubens:

In the lab, do they—

04-00:46:38

Laetsch:

Oh, yes. Well, I was just looking at some pictures, going through old files related to this, and there is a picture, I think it was up at the Lawrence Hall of Science when I was director, and I was smoking a pipe and somebody else was smoking a pipe in the buildings at Berkeley and at Stanford. Well, my major professor was a chain smoker and during his lectures he would sometimes smoke two cigarettes at once because he forgot that he had lit one. But everybody smoked.

04-00:47:15

Rubens:

Did you smoke?

04-00:47:17

Laetsch:

I still smoke cigars, yes. I never smoked cigarettes, no, except for a little short time in the Army. But I started smoking cigars in college and I still smoke cigars, good cigars. But everybody smoked in classes in those days. And when I came to Berkeley, people smoked in seminars. They smoked in their offices.



I smoked in my office. It was just done. It was standard. Yes, you probably remember that in your classes, I'm sure people smoked.

And now, of course, it's not at all and there are very few faculty that smoke. In fact, Carlos Bustamante, two doors down, he's a member of three departments and he likes good cigars. So we get together and smoke cigars every so often. But we think we're perhaps the only two faculty that still smoke cigars. Maybe I've heard of one other that's possible. But that's an amazing transformation.

04-00:48:24

Rubens:

All right. Let's finish up the Stanford years and capture some sense of being on the cusp of a new era. JFK promises to put a man on the moon within the decade.

04-00:48:35

Laetsch:

That's right.

04-00:48:35

Rubens:

I meant to ask you about the reaction to Sputnik. We haven't talked about the new emphasis on science education.

04-00:48:46

Laetsch:

Well, the emphasis on science education started, yes, in 1957 right after Sputnik. They hadn't made much progress at Stanford, but things were going full scale when I got to Berkeley, particularly in the National Science Foundation and some of the other areas. And then I was much involved with that when I was at the Lawrence Hall of Science.

04-00:49:18

Rubens:

All right. So let's just do a little bit more, and then I think we should end for the day before we get too worn out. Do you want to say any concluding observations? You knew that you were going to go into research and academia? That was clear that that was the trajectory.

04-00:49:34

Laetsch:

Yes. Absolutely.

04-00:49:35

Rubens:

So how did you get to Stony Brook, then?

04-00:49:36

Laetsch:

Well, one of the things to remember is that the job market was very good at that time, for those of us born in the depths of the Depression, when the birth rate went way down. And the universities began to expand about the time we were coming out.

04-00:49:54

Rubens:

Stony Brook was new when you got there.

04-00:49:59

Laetsch:

Well, Stony Brook was founded two years before I got there. Every university was expanding, because the baby boomers were coming in and they all needed faculty, so jobs were plentiful. Particularly in science, people had jobs right out of their PhD. That's unknown now. In science, some people spend ten to fifteen years as a post-doc before they get a faculty job. We just had a problem on campus because the graduate students—or not the graduate students, they have a union. But it was the post-docs that formed a union here at the University, not just our campus, the whole University, because they were being paid, and still are, very low wages, \$35,000 a year for a person with a PhD. And some maybe \$40,000. I think there were a couple fifty. But very low wages. And they have to spend a lot of time until something opens up, particularly if they want an academic job, because they're still pretty rare for financial reasons and birth-rate reasons. But anyway, we were fortunate, those depth of the Depression babies, because we came out during a time when universities were just desperate to hire new people.

04-00:51:31

Rubens:

So did you have other offers or were there other places that you considered?

04-00:51:33

Laetsch:

Yes. I considered some post-docs, but I was offered what I thought was a good situation in Stony Brook. I thought it was a new university, it had some interesting possibilities.

04-00:51:44

Rubens:

You were hired in what department?

04-00:51:49

Laetsch:

This is Biology. Oh, there were probably about eight people, if that. In fact, the year I went there, there were two of us hired. It wasn't in Stony Brook at that time; it was in Oyster Bay on the north shore of Long Island. It was the estate of a former Standard Oil executive, William Robertson Coe, on Chicken Valley Road. It was a big estate called Planting Fields. It had been his estate, and then it was given to the State of New York and one of the parts of the higher education system, that they trained people in horticulture because they had greenhouses. They decided to temporarily put the new State University of New York there, and it was going to be at Stony Brook, but they didn't have anything at Stony Brook and they had facilities at some buildings and things. They put up Quonset huts, and they had been there I think it was either one or two years before I got there. My office and classrooms were in a big Quonset hut. There were about 500 students, maybe 700, I forget.

04-00:53:21

Rubens:

Only undergraduate.

04-00:53:23

Laetsch:

Just undergraduates, yes. I was thinking if there were any masters degree people but, no, I think they were all undergraduates. Then they begin to build

the buildings for the new campus at Stony Brook. The first year I was there all the classes were on the Oyster Bay campus, and then they built a biology building, which was one of the first buildings they built at Stony Brook. And so my second year there I had classes at Stony Brook. We lived in Bay View, Long Island, which is close to Oyster Bay, and it's right on the beach of Long Island. We rented a part of a house, and our front yard was beach and the Sound was right there. When it was warm weather, you just stepped out of your front door and you could go and swim and wave to Connecticut across the way. So that worked out in a very interesting way. Why don't we stop here and I'll continue with Stony Brook next week.

04-00:54:46

Rubens:

Perfect. And we can aim to include your coming to Berkeley.

Interview #3 September 15, 2010  
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05-00:00:00

Rubens: Hi, Mac.

05-00:00:01

Laetsch: Good morning.

05-00:00:01

Rubens: It's the 15<sup>th</sup> of September. This is our third session and we last left you working on the new campus of Stony Brook, part of the University of New York system.

05-00:00:16

Laetsch: State University of New York at Stony Brook it was called. Which actually was still at Oyster Bay partially at that time, as I said earlier.

05-00:00:22

Rubens: You had taught there your first year at Oyster Bay and then moved—

05-00:00:24

Laetsch: That's right. But my laboratory was still there, because they built a biology building at Stony Brook and I didn't move out to it at that time. I taught out there, and I went out once or twice a week for courses. But I didn't have my laboratory there. It was still in Oyster Bay on the campus there and we continued to live in Glen Cove, New York, which was very near Oyster Bay. It was a split campus, and there were a number of other faculty that went back and forth.

The most interesting thing about being involved in an institution that was brand new, that is, a brand new university, is how reluctant they were to try anything new, because they were so concerned about status and that they were the new kid on the block and they didn't want to do anything that would cause people to look at them in a critical manner, where they were inferior because they were new. So what did they want to do? They wanted to be a carbon copy of the institutions that they already knew. One of the phrases they liked to use was that they wanted Stony Brook to be the Berkeley of the East, or the Cal Tech of the East. And, of course, with everything that they assumed was prestigious about those institutions. As a result, they were not really experimental for the most part in terms of trying new things. New governance, new ways of giving courses, new ways of promoting people, all kinds of things that you thought they might have been willing to do because it was a new group. But the gleam of fame as defined by the established universities was too strong, and they continued to try to emulate what went on in places that they thought were very prestigious. And I think they missed a major opportunity as a result of that because they had the opportunity to really try new things and they just didn't.

05-00:02:33

Rubens:

Were there certain things that you thought could be done?

05-00:02:37

Laetsch:

Well, yeah, right. I was a new assistant professor. I was, of course, trying to get my research program started, and I did some new things in teaching with an undergraduate course that I had.

05-00:02:57

Rubens:

Was that basic botany?

05-00:02:58

Laetsch:

I did teach a botany course there. However, the basic course was biology and then I gave a course at least once a semester on plant biology. And then I had an upper division course where I had students doing projects. So it wasn't that I was after anything necessarily revolutionary, it's just that, particularly in thinking about it, even then, particularly in hindsight, how there was so little interest in experimentation and of doing things in any sort of a new or interesting fashion. Everything was sort of coalesced around the idea of what you had to do to be up to what the current good universities were. So it was a follow the leader.

05-00:03:55

Rubens:

Were there a lot of young faculty that you were a cohort with or did it also have the—?

05-00:04:02

Laetsch:

Well, the people that were there, a fair number were older and they had been at other places and had been recruited. They were good people but not research folks, for the most part. And in my department, I was the second youngest at the time. Again, they were pretty set in their ways and wanted to do what was considered fashionable and current at other places. So they just weren't willing to be experimental. You can't blame them, because if their peers were going to be judging them on the basis of tenure promotions and all the rest of it, they didn't want to be revolutionaries. But it still was a really missed opportunity. And, as a result, the institution has never really become top flight. It's got some good people there. They have a medical school and it's big but it's not really in the first rung. So by imitating people they thought were on the top of the heap, they ensured their place in the second tier.

05-00:05:28

Rubens:

So shall we just say what you began researching? And also, let's talk about your first publications.

05-00:05:34

Laetsch:

I think I published three papers during that time from my dissertation.

05-00:05:54

Rubens:

Were you involved with professional organizations?

05-00:05:56

Laetsch:

Well, I had been a member of the Botanical Society of America since I was in graduate school. I'd been a member of the American Association of Plant Physiology. And I've been a member of that and active and given papers at both places. So it was just something you sort of continued on. Then I got a research grant from the National Institutes of Health, yes. That was my first research grant. Which was kind of interesting, because they were not thought of as a place that gave money for plant work. But it turns out I had an old friend who was a program director there and he encouraged me, and I sent a proposal and it was accepted. I was funded very early in terms of research monies.

05-00:07:03

Rubens:

And so what was the focus of that research?

05-00:07:05

Laetsch:

I was working with plant tissue cultures and I don't exactly remember what it was I was after at the time, but I was doing some physiological work with plant tissue cultures.

05-00:07:20

Rubens:

This developed into your work on chloroplasts?

05-00:07:24

Laetsch:

Yes. Yes, it did.

05-00:07:24

Rubens:

Okay. So we'll talk about that when we get to your coming to Berkeley.

05-00:07:28

Laetsch:

Yes, because that really started to go when I went to Berkeley, even though I had anticipated that that's what I was going to do. I was working with plant tissue that you grow in a test tube. It's just a little hunk of tissue, or as much as you want. And it was green. I thought, "Oh, here's a good way to study chloroplast development and study photosynthesis," and I took those cultures with me from Stony Brook to Berkeley.

05-00:07:57

Rubens:

So you're a young man with a young family and you're managing a lab and you're teaching and giving papers.

05-00:08:04

Laetsch:

Right. Well, it was typical.

05-00:08:06

Rubens:

Is this the expectation of the profession?

05-00:08:06

Laetsch:

Yes. That's what you do. And then another important thing that happened there was the only summer I was there we went to Trinidad because my wife wanted to go and visit her home. We then had two children. I contacted an

agriculture research station in Trinidad, which was run by the big sugar company Tate & Lyle, Ltd., the British sugar company. The Director of the research station was a plant physiologist whom I had known by name but hadn't actually met. I wrote to him and said I would like to come and spend some time in his labs, and he said, "Fine. Come ahead." So we went to Trinidad and stayed with Sita's parents, and I went out every day to the Tate & Lyle Research Lab at the Caroni, C-A-R-O-N-I, Caroni Research Station, which was their research facility for investigating things related to sugarcane.

05-00:09:24

Rubens: And so what were you looking at there?

05-00:09:26

Laetsch: Well, I went there because I'd become involved with tissue cultures, and I made tissue cultures of sugarcane and worked out how to do that and to get successful cultures, which took a while.

05-00:09:42

Rubens: This was like a little sinecure that I see showing up in your bio through the early days of Berkeley.

05-00:09:48

Laetsch: Well, yes, because I had some research funds from Tate & Lyle, Ltd. And then I visited the lab down there several times and then continued the association when Vlitos, V-L-I-T-O-S, Chuck Vlitos, who was the director there. He went to London to head their whole research program and they set up a big research laboratory south of London. I visited there when I was on sabbatical in London. I spent a lot of time out at the research station. It was a relationship that went on for some time. As a result of working with tissue cultures of sugarcane, I was able to make them turn green and, as a result, I worked on the photosynthesis of sugarcane in the tissue cultures, which was quite interesting because the sugarcane, like many grasses, tropical grasses, has a different pattern of photosynthesis than you have in temperate plants. The first product is different and the leaf anatomy of these plants is different than the leaf anatomy of many other grasses. And so I was able to do some work on photosynthesis in sugarcane, really the first work done on photosynthesis in sugarcane. Combine that with the leaf anatomy and that developed into a whole program and, I had a graduate student, David Stetler, who did his thesis on the chloroplast of sugarcane, and it went on and on and on.

05-00:11:36

Rubens: Here at Berkeley?

05-00:11:37

Laetsch: Yes. That's all at Berkeley. So we'll leave Trinidad and we'll come to Berkeley.

05-00:11:43

Rubens: But was there something you were going to say about Sita experiencing discrimination in New York?

05-00:11:48

Laetsch: Oh, yes. When we were hunting for a house to rent, we were given a hard time by the real estate agents. They thought that she was maybe of Puerto Rican extraction, and they just didn't want to have anything to do with that, and they were still kind of uneasy about it.

05-00:12:09

Rubens: Was it just obvious to you?

05-00:12:10

Laetsch: Well, yes. They pointedly said it, that colored folks aren't something we want to deal with. Not that they're prejudiced, mind you, but other people might be, you see. And then she had some difficulties with merchants in Oyster Bay, which was, of course, a supply shop, you might say, for the large estates on the North Shore. And we had some rather unpleasant experiences because of that. She did.

05-00:12:54

Rubens: So were you looking to get out of the area?

05-00:12:56

Laetsch: Yes, yes. Well, she did not like it at all. She did not like living in New York. And it was fine. The apartment was okay. I got along well with people and things were going okay. But I wanted something more challenging that offered greater opportunities.

05-00:13:17

Rubens: And I guess graduate students. You didn't have graduate students at Stony Brook?

05-00:13:20

Laetsch: No, we did not have a graduate program. And so that was also at a time—I think I mentioned this—when people my age were in great demand because we were born at the bottom of the birth rate, the early thirties, and universities were all expanding, or there were brand new universities like Stony Brook. Every other university was growing because of the influx of the baby boomers, and there were lots of jobs available. They came after you, in addition to you going after them. I looked at some other jobs while I was there. I was invited to Brown University to give a talk and to talk about the possibility of something there, which I did, and everything seemed to go well. The last day they offered me a job there. I said, "That's fine. Let me know the details when I get back and we'll go from there." I wasn't really that interested in going there but I wanted to know more about it. I never heard from them. Never heard from them at all. And when I came to Berkeley, there was a faculty member in the Botany Department who had just come from the faculty at Brown. I asked him what happened there. I said, "I was quite mystified. Not



that I cared that much, but I was just mystified by why they offered me a job and I never heard from them.” And he says, “Oh, didn’t you know?” I said, “No.” He says, “Oh, you’re Jewish and you have an Indian wife.” And I said, “Well, that’s interesting.”

Well, my grandmother was Jewish, so maybe that gives me something. And that was still the case then in Ivy League institutions, that they were very difficult for Jewish faculty.

05-00:15:30

Rubens:

That’s a good story. What made them think you were Jewish?

05-00:15:33

Laetsch:

A lot of people thought I was Jewish.

05-00:15:36

Rubens:

Just by looking physiologically?

05-00:15:37

Laetsch:

Well, that or the fact that I sometimes express myself and talk with my hands or have opinions. It was sort of the caricature aspect of things. A lot of people have over the years. Lots and lots of people thought I was Jewish. So I guess I inherited my grandmother’s background in some way. Anyway, that was a kind of a fascinating thing. But then I got a call from Berkeley. They were expanding; two others came at the same time. And there had been two hired two or three years before, and one of them left when I came because he didn’t get tenure. And then after I got here, the other one, after about two years, he left because he didn’t get tenure. So of the three of us that were brought in, in that crop all received tenure.

05-00:16:57

Rubens:

Who literally recruited you?

05-00:16:59

Laetsch:

Oh, okay. Well, things happen, as you know, in kind of interesting ways, and when I was at Stanford I had met some of the people at Berkeley. Then when I was at Stony Brook, I went to a professional meeting at Asilomar. It was either when I went to Stony Brook or just before I went to Stony Brook. And the chairman of the Botany Department at Berkeley, Leonard Machlis, was there and some other people. It just turned out that we had some evening social activities and some discussions, et cetera, and so they then knew who I was, and so they had some faculty positions. And, of course, they knew that I had been at Stanford. They knew my major professor at Stanford, who was very well-regarded. So they were looking for people in the Botany Department, and I guess my name came up or they remembered me. So they asked me to apply. Things were quite different in those days. You did not have any affirmative action activities of any kind, so if they saw somebody they wanted to hire, they could just go ahead and hire them. They asked me to come out and give a seminar, which I did, and met people. And then they,

bang, offered me the job and it was a hard job to refuse. Sita jumped with joy when she knew we were going to come back to California.

05-00:18:37

Rubens: So you come here already with a National Institutes of Health grant.

05-00:18:46

Laetsch: Yes, the first one was NIH.

05-00:18:48

Rubens: So during your first year at Berkeley you had that?

05-00:18:50

Laetsch: At Berkeley I had that. And then I applied for an NSF grant and received that. Oh, it must have been maybe nine months or so, a year after I came here. But I had the NIH grant going for a period of time. So they overlap.

05-00:19:09

Rubens: So you come and how is it? They give you a lab right away?

05-00:19:12

Laetsch: Oh, yes, sure in what at that time was called the Life Sciences Building.

05-00:19:16

Rubens: Okay. Is that where your office was, too?

05-00:19:17

Laetsch: Well, that's where the department was. That's where all the biology, just about, except for agriculture, was in the Life Sciences Building. So my office was initially on the second floor on the west side right next to the then department chair, Leonard Machlis. Then Melvin Calvin's lab, which had been in some temporary quarters on the campus, they had moved into the basement of the Life Sciences Building before I came. Then when he got his Nobel Prize, they built him the roundhouse, the Calvin Lab, which you probably know where that is. Which is going to be demolished.

And so he had moved up there, and that meant that all that space in the basement of the Life Science Building was available and a lot of it was given to Botany, both for the faculty offices—there were two other faculty members down there with me and a couple of teaching laboratories and then our own laboratories. So I moved from the second floor down after a year or two. But I think it was maybe three years I moved down to the basement of the Life Science Building.

05-00:20:45

Rubens: And so from the very beginning do you have graduate students or does it take a year or so before you take on graduate students?

05-00:20:50

Laetsch:

I think it was that summer or fall I had my first graduate student, who is now retired and living with his wife in Montclair until recently when they moved to North Carolina to be with their son and grandchildren. He called a few minutes ago.

05-00:21:05

Rubens:

Who is this?

05-00:21:06

Laetsch:

David Stetler, whom I mentioned earlier and he was the one that then worked on the photosynthesis of sugarcane. He was a faculty member successively of the University of Minnesota, Dartmouth, and Virginia Tech.

05-00:21:30

Rubens:

Why don't we take a minute to situate the Botany Department in 1963? It's part of the College of Letters and Science. Under Leonard Machlis, the chair, the Department entered a growth period.

05-00:21:48

Laetsch:

Well, it was not so much under him as the fact that the campus was growing and so we had new positions. And the Department had always, and increasingly so, offered a lot of big undergraduate courses. The Biology 1 wasn't started when I first came here. It was offered about three years later. But they still gave a couple of large introductory courses and then there was increasing demand for lower division courses so that they made a case for new faculty.

05-00:22:23

Rubens:

You came with Robert Ornduff and Daniel Branton. Ornduff would then succeed you as the Director of the Botanical Gardens, yeah.

05-00:22:35

Laetsch:

Yes. And he came from Berkeley. He did his graduate work at Berkeley. Berkeley then, and probably still does, hires its own in many cases. And Daniel Branton did his PhD in Soils and Plant Nutrition, in Agriculture which is now part of our College of Natural Resources. But he had been on campus and knew people. He was on a post-doc in Switzerland, and he came from that, and Bob Ornduff came. Let's see, he'd been here and then I think he went someplace else for a year on a post-doc and then came back. And Melvin Fuller, a graduate student in the Department, had been a faculty member at Brown.

05-00:23:22

Rubens:

He's the one that tells you the—

05-00:23:23

Laetsch:

Yes, right, that he's a mycologist.

05-00:23:27

Rubens:

So should we first talk maybe about the state of botany and its relationship to the other natural sciences that are evolving at Berkeley? Then we can talk about how you experienced Berkeley as a campus. After one year, the Free Speech Movement is going to break out and it's just going to be ten years, really, of political upheaval.

05-00:23:55

Laetsch:

Yes. Well, Berkeley had always had a pretty strong program in the plant sciences because it had a large agricultural college for years and years. We had a School of Forestry. And all these people had to take plant science courses.

05-00:24:54

Rubens:

You had a station at Bodega Bay?

05-00:24:26

Laetsch:

Well, the Bodega Bay station was actually a Marine station. That was started by Cadet Hand who was in zoology at the time. And then we had a station up in the mountains, Sagehen. And again, the campus was growing. The Botany and Zoology Departments offered a large course for non-majors. And that's what I first taught when I came here. There was a biology course for non-majors and I taught it with a professor in Zoology. So we offered that course together.

05-00:25:48

Rubens:

It was a team-taught course?

05-00:25:49

Laetsch:

The two of us taught it. I taught with Richard Strohman, who died this last fall. And so we taught that course for a couple of years, and it had non-majors from all kinds of programs.

05-00:26:04

Rubens:

How many people in the class?

05-00:26:05

Laetsch:

There were 350, something like that.

05-00:26:07

Rubens:

So these are larger classes than you'd ever experienced at Stanford.

Laetsch:

Well, no, no. At Stanford, the general biology course that I was a teaching assistant in, that had several hundred students. Because all the pre-meds took it. One of the main products of the Biology Department was turning out pre-meds, just as all biology departments do.

05-00:26:30

Rubens:

When you start is it exciting to be on the Berkeley campus?

05-00:26:34

Laetsch:

Oh, yes. Very, very much so. At that time, the abundance of facilities and money available for all kinds of things, supplies, was just a very different world in many cases, because we had not yet had any of the budget cuts that came later. The first real budget cuts were during Reagan's administration, and the campus was rather severely cut. We still haven't recovered from that.

05-00:27:10

Rubens:

His administration as Governor. Starting in '66.

05-00:27:12

Laetsch:

Yes, Governor. And so we really haven't recovered from those cuts and a lot more since then. Anyhow, there weren't limitations then. Here is an example. I had a number of graduate students, and the department had received some extra money from some federal program that had poured money into the campus and some came to the Botany Department. And there was money available to take graduate students to national meetings. Well, that was great but that money then, after a while, went and didn't return. So people forget how flush we were with funds in the sense that we weren't limited, by and large. There was research monies from the campus for the departments, good instructional budgets, and those were very, very interesting days.

05-00:28:14

Rubens:

And so how would you literally characterize the field of botany? You write a review of an essay in the American Institute of Biological Sciences, entitled "The Welfare of Botany Reexamined."

05-00:28:34

Laetsch:

Oh, yeah. That was, I forget, a screed of some kind that I wrote.

05-00:28:39

Rubens:

You were responding to an article by James Bonner.

05-00:28:41

Laetsch:

Oh, yeah. Well, Bonner was a guy at Cal Tech. Basically, what he was saying, if I recall, was there was one way of—just certain things that you needed to study, and I think I was arguing that you wanted to have lots of things that you study.

05-00:28:56

Rubens:

Right. Including that the classical—

05-00:28:59

Laetsch:

That's right.

05-00:29:00

Rubens:

You quote Barry Commoner, actually, in his defense of biology, who says we can't allow classical biology to decline, and so you make the parallel case to botany.

05-00:29:10

Laetsch:

That's right. Well, and of course, in botany we had enormous amount of work, always have had, in plant taxonomy and plant ecology, and we have one of the largest herbariums in the country, here at Berkeley, which had produced lots of very, very good people, both faculty and students. Then we had a botanical garden. So we had a very diverse group of people and interest and research going on and training students in lots of different areas. That's the other thing, of course, that the Department did, was it never had a large number of undergraduate majors. A lot of students took our courses, but we didn't have a large number of majors. But we had a lot of graduate students. And so we were like Berkeley, by and large. We are a graduate student factory, and that's what we really do.

05-00:30:04

Rubens:

So did you have any trouble attracting students?

05-00:30:07

Laetsch:

No.

05-00:30:08

Rubens:

There were people who wanted to study plant tissue and photosynthesis?

05-00:30:10

Laetsch:

Oh, yes. Well, I had a number of other thesis topics, as well. No, I had no trouble. In fact, just accepting some of the people that wanted to work was sometimes a little bit of a problem because, for several reasons, the Department was really divided between people that had been here quite a long time and then us young guys that came in together. And so the graduate students coming in tended to gravitate towards the younger people, which is often natural. So the fact of being young, having an active research program, so there wasn't any trouble attracting graduate students. I had a fair number of quite good people.

05-00:31:01

Rubens:

So in terms of what was the cutting edge of botany, is there something there?

05-00:31:07

Laetsch:

Well, it depends on what area you're in. That is, you can be in plant ecology and that's cutting edge for lots of things. You can be in plant taxonomy that can be cutting edge. You can be in plant physiology. You can be in—

05-00:31:20

Rubens:

Is that where microbiology fits in?

05-00:31:24

Laetsch:

Well, microbiology would basically be concerned with microorganisms like yeast, bacteria, et cetera. And we had a Department of Bacteriology on campus, and then over in the College of Natural Resources, which was then the College of Agriculture, they had people working in microbiology. Quite a few of them.

05-00:31:55

Rubens:

So very soon you're going to be involved in a number of committees. Well, should we first talk about your NSF grant? It seemed huge to me. \$24,500 for the structure and physiology of cauliflory.

05-00:32:16

Laetsch:

Yes, yes. That's a type of flowering behavior where—

05-00:32:24

Rubens:

On tree trunks?

05-00:32:26

Laetsch:

That's right. Yes. And that never went anywhere really.

05-00:32:30

Rubens:

Really? Because you had that for a good—

05-00:32:32

Laetsch:

Yes, I had the grant, which was fairly modest, but that grant was really used for photosynthesis. And the cauliflory thing had never really panned out too well. It was an interesting project and I had a graduate student who did his thesis on it. This was in *Theobroma Cacao*, the chocolate plant where you would get chocolate. And that all stemmed from my work in Trinidad, originally, because I had made contacts there with the Imperial Tropical Research Station in Trinidad, and they worked on a number of things with tropical plants, including flowering in cocoa, because cocoa was a big crop in Trinidad, producing chocolate. And, of course, it is in many tropical countries. And, of course, cocoa originated in South America, and so they had cocoa in Trinidad for years and years and years. It's no longer a crop that can be grown commercially to any extent in Trinidad. Almost all the cocoa in the world is now produced in Brazil and West Africa.

05-00:33:48

Rubens:

What you're saying reminds me of the argument you made in "The Welfare of Botany Re-examined" for continuing on with classical botany; that the field knows a fair amount about the descriptive aspects and the biochemistry of a few plants of the temperate zone. But it seems all the other zones were open for investigation.

05-00:34:05

Laetsch:

That's right, that's right. And they still are. And the problem is that work has become increasingly narrow over the years in many areas in biology. For example, now there is one plant that's used by lots of biochemists and physiologists. Just one plant, because it has a fairly simple genetic structure and they can do all kinds of things with it. So everybody concentrates on this one plant. *Arabidopsis*. Most of the plants in the world have never been studied. And probably never will be.

- 05-00:34:44  
Rubens: You also wrote that the number of people investigating a problem largely depends upon the interrelationships between fashion and the economic and political values of the discipline.
- 05-00:34:55  
Laetsch: Right, that's right. I would still.
- 05-00:34:59  
Rubens: And so what do you mean by the economic and political values?
- 05-00:35:02  
Laetsch: Well, look at everything that comes along that looks as if it might give rise to something which can produce wealth of some kind. People go into it. Look at what we have on campus right now. We have this big group of people supported by British Petroleum, BP. Why? Because it's the idea that they can find ways of making gasoline or fuel out of plant material. Look at all of the work on medical research. It's much the same thing. If you're trying to do work in an area where there are no commercial possibilities, that limits the funding. And without funding, it's very difficult to do any work that requires lots of equipment. Well, basically equipment and supporting graduate students and post-docs.
- 05-00:36:06  
Rubens: So there is a connection between industry and the University and you're seeing that when you're—
- 05-00:36:15  
Laetsch: Oh, of course. And it's more and more now. I think BP right now is a good example of that. But there are many, many other examples.
- 05-00:36:23  
Rubens: Now, in 1966, you're also getting money—not a large amount of money—from the American Cancer Society to study chloroplast development. It's about \$2, 500.
- 05-00:36:36  
Laetsch: Oh, yes. I think that came somehow or another through the Department. I forget just what that was but that was—
- 05-00:36:44  
Rubens: A minor part of—
- 05-00:36:46  
Laetsch: Very minor. I'd completely forgotten about that.
- 05-00:36:49  
Rubens: I was wondering if any of the work you were doing was leading to medicine.



05-00:36:51

Laetsch:

No, no. They were just giving money to support graduate students. As I say, there was a lot of money available at that time and used for all kinds of things. Most of it I think for good purposes but now the faculty, particularly younger faculty now, just have a terrible time. Money, particularly in biology, particularly in—not particularly in plant biology but just in biology generally. Young faculty have a terrible time now getting grants because there's so much competition. And without grants, they can't have graduate students to any extent, and it's hard to get tenure.

05-00:37:30

Rubens:

So your first year at Berkeley, '63-'64, looks like they don't give you, or you don't take, administrative or departmental responsibilities. But by '65 and then '66, and it goes on for quite awhile, you're on the Botany Plant Growth Laboratory Subcommittee of the Buildings and Campus Development Committee. Are you appointed to that? Do you choose to join it?

05-00:37:53

Laetsch:

No, you're usually appointed by the chair, with consultation. Or if there is a committee that's larger than a department, then the department chair will recommend that you be on it, et cetera.

05-00:38:10

Rubens:

Ultimately, you've spent so many years dealing with growth of the campus and raising money. At that time, are they looking for a new laboratory space? I don't know what the focus of that subcommittee is.

05-00:38:36

Laetsch:

I forget exactly what we were doing. We were looking for probably controlled environment space so we could grow things in different kinds of temperatures and light conditions and so forth. I suspect that's what it was.

05-00:38:54

Rubens:

Okay. So that committee doesn't stand out in your mind as so important?

05-00:39:00

Laetsch:

No. I soon got on all kinds of committees.

05-00:39:01

Rubens:

By '65 you're on the Chancellor's Special Committee on Visiting Lecturers to Negro Colleges and Universities.

05-00:39:15

Laetsch:

Oh, yes. Right. That's a major one. This all resulted from President Kennedy's speech in which he said that the northern universities should really work together with the historically black, in those days called Negro, colleges and universities and that they needed to do a lot more to bring them up from the standpoint of their academic conditions and even their economic conditions. On this campus Edward Barankin, B-A-R-A-N-K-I-N, a professor of statistics, took that speech literally, and he was able to get some money from I forget

which of the foundations to form a committee for the Relations with Negro Colleges and Universities. And he asked me to be on that committee. I'm trying to think why he asked me. But I guess people thought that I was somebody that would be interested in that.

I suspect that it might be because maybe he knew I was married to an Indian and had some interaction and sympathy with minority groups, et cetera. I'm not sure just why he picked me. But anyhow, I joined that group.

05-00:41:01

Rubens:

And then in 1967 you're vice-chair, you're on leave '68 and in '69 you're the acting chair.

05-00:41:06

Laetsch:

Yeah. I'd forgotten I was acting chair. Anyway, he had an idea that was very different from what other campuses were doing. That is, a lot of interaction between northern campuses and black colleges developed but they were institution to institution. That is, the administration of a northern university or college would contact the administration of a southern negro college about having exchanges. Well, in most cases not much happened after that. But we went the other way, which was to establish direct contact with faculty at these colleges, so that the interactions would be between faculty members that had a joint interest in interacting in a variety of ways. And as everybody that knows anything about universities knows, that what happens is a result of faculty action, not because the administration says the faculty ought to do something.

So we began to establish connections with some of those colleges, and I established a very good connection with Tuskegee Institute, and that was because a professor in the Biology Department there was a plant physiologist that I had known through meeting. So we had a ready access. And he had been there for many years. I think he was chair of the Biology Department.

05-00:42:43

Rubens:

What was his name?

05-00:42:44

Laetsch:

His name was James Henderson.

05-00:42:47

Rubens:

Was he African American?

05-00:42:48

Laetsch:

Yes. All the faculty there, with few exceptions, were African American. I contacted Jim, and they invited me down to teach. So I went initially for a couple of weeks and gave lectures in one of the courses and interacted with faculty, learned about the place, and interacted with their administration. Then we had people from Tuskegee that come here, including Henderson. And I went down there, oh, I don't know, maybe three or four times, various lengths of time, and then I had other people from here go, one of whom was Lincoln

Constance, who was the Vice Chancellor at that time and one of my colleagues in Botany. So he went and particularly interacted with their administration. Roderic Park, who then subsequently was Vice Chancellor—

05-00:43:40

Rubens:

But also had come from your department?

05-00:43:41

Laetsch:

Yeah. And so I sent him down. And then we had people down there that came up to Berkeley. And that resulted in establishing some very nice relations and then just having that experience was very interesting. It wasn't just with Tuskegee. We also were in Atlanta at Atlanta University and Morehouse College. And then a little bit with Miles College in Birmingham, Alabama. But I was mainly at Tuskegee. Faculty from there came up here to spend some time. One of their students came to our graduate program and eventually became principal of an Oakland high school. Well, the first time I was there, there were still lots of difficulties in the South and there were still things going on in the general area that were very difficult. Tuskegee had been starved financially really. It was not in terribly good financial condition. Buildings, many of them were in very bad repair. In fact, one of them was still pretty much the same building that Booker T. Washington had built, and it still had rough hewn plank floors that they had made. They had a number of foreign faculty. They had, I think, two Indian professors. They were fine but they were in areas where there weren't very many black professional scientists being produced. Jim Henderson, who I then had lots of contact with over the years, was from Washington, DC, and so he had a very different sort of background. He went to the University of Wisconsin. But there were just very few black professionals, so they hired—particularly Indians were always looking for a place to go, so they hired Indians and I think they hired a couple from someplace else. And they hired some northern whites, as well.

And then Spelman, I spent a little time there. Not an awful lot. I taught at Morehouse College for a couple of weeks, and that was, again, a very interesting experience. Morehouse was all men at the time. There was a women's college nearby and that was Spelman. And I went over there a couple of times. I think I gave a seminar there, and the best looking girls I think I've ever seen were in that college. It was most amazing. And the large number of American Indian, black mixtures, because, of course, in the South you had lots and lots of interactivity and so there were a lot of—even in Tuskegee—there were a lot of people there of partially Native American origin.

05-00:47:34

Rubens:

Do you remember other people that served on that committee with you? There were very few African-American faculty at Berkeley. There was Blackwell in Statistics.

- 05-00:47:41  
Laetsch: Yes. Blackwell, and he was about the only one. I can't remember who else was on that committee.
- 05-00:47:55  
Rubens: Yes. Or if it had as much success as your—
- 05-00:47:58  
Laetsch: Well, Ed Barankin went to a number of the places. He and I went to Tuskegee once together. Oh, he did a lot at Morehouse, established some good relationships there. And we had faculty from Tuskegee and from Morehouse who came out to Berkeley and spent time with us. He had some and I had some. And I'm trying to remember the other people on the committee, but I can't.
- 05-00:48:28  
Rubens: In 1968 O'Neill Ray Collins, who had been trained at Iowa, became the first black member of the department.
- 05-00:48:36  
Laetsch: Oh, yes.
- 05-00:48:39  
Rubens: And I was wondering how long that committee existed? I don't see you on it after—
- 05-00:48:46  
Laetsch: It disbanded. Let's see. I went off on sabbatical in the Academic Year 1968-1969. I came back during that time. They flew me back because of some activities with the committee and some other things. And then I came back after that in '69, and it must have disbanded soon afterwards. I think it was a matter of funding. I don't think that they had renewal funding.
- 05-00:49:18  
Rubens: You become so involved in the issues of affirmative action and diversity in admissions. The way you describe it, it is a very collegial and generative kind of experience.
- 05-00:49:36  
Laetsch: Right, right.
- 05-00:49:39  
Rubens: There were no attributions of paternalism or—
- 05-00:49:41  
Laetsch: No, no, no.
- 05-00:49:42  
Rubens: Because what I'm really trying to get at is that during that whole episode of the Free Speech Movement and then the anti-war movement, there's not a real

push to diversify the staff and student body of the University of California. That's going to come a little bit later with the Third World strike.

05-00:49:59

Laetsch:

Well, a number of things. It came, in terms of the faculty, in a variety of ways. There was constant interest, et cetera. And with the student body, it came basically, a lot of it, when I became Vice Chancellor. There were very few minority students on campus before that. Another connection with some of the things we discussed earlier with Tuskegee was that the first time I visited Tuskegee—I think I mentioned this—was when I was a kid and my father was stationed at Fort Benning, Georgia. And we went over to Tuskegee and spent part of a day visiting it because—

05-00:50:47

Rubens:

Your father knew the historic significance.

05-00:50:48

Laetsch:

Well, we all did. After all, it was not just Booker T. Washington but George Washington Carver and the Carver Institute, which was there, and he was a man that made all kinds of things out of peanuts. Actually, he was still there when we visited during the war. Didn't know it but he was there. And then, of course, when I went to Tuskegee, the Carver Institute was a research institute on the campus, and a lot of his memorabilia were around that you would see and people were there that knew him. So he was very, very much of a person who was known. In fact, I had been in the area as a kid and then coming back and seeing, it was interesting. In fact, the airbase there where they trained a lot of the black pilots, known as the Tuskegee Airmen, was still there. It wasn't being used anymore. I remember Jim Henderson and I went out and had a look at it. So it was just interesting how things have cycled around over the years and had some of the same interactions with people.

Let me talk about Miles College, just a little bit. That's in Birmingham, Alabama. I visited that just after the riots there. Remember the little girls that were killed and then there were marches. I remember going onto the Miles campus and there was a man in a car with a shotgun patrolling because they had white people going onto the campus raising hell. So one of their employees was there with a shotgun to keep people off the campus. And then I will always remember going to downtown Birmingham with some of the people from the college, and it was one of the few times in my life I was really scared, because here was a white man walking with these black people and you could just feel the hate. It's a very strange thing that you feel such things, almost as if there was a radiation of some kind that was being produced. It was very scary.

05-00:53:10

Rubens:

Were you involved in any of the civil rights activities that were on campus? I was remembering when you said you were in Birmingham. I know that there

was a delegation of faculty that went down to Selma, when they were turned back, at the Pettus Bridge.

05-00:53:28

Laetsch: Yes, right. Well, that was a march, but I was not in that, no.

05-00:53:33

Rubens: Okay. And there was also Campus CORE that was trying to get more hiring of African Americans in supermarkets and—

05-00:53:46

Laetsch: Oh, yes, right. I remember that here in the town. That's right. To get employees in the supermarkets. I remember that. No, I wasn't involved in that.

05-00:53:54

Rubens: Okay. What about with the Free Speech Movement. Did that affect you at all? The biology students, were they—Strohman was kind of an activist, wasn't he?

05-00:54:02

Laetsch: Oh. He was always activist in various kinds of things and Leon Wofsy in Bacteriology was always active in such things. No, I was not active in any of those things. I kept track of the stuff, and, of course, a constant noontime recreation was going over to see what was going on in Sproul Plaza.

05-00:55:04

Rubens: So you did pay attention?

05-00:55:05

Laetsch: Oh, sure. Lots of attention. Right. In fact, I have a photograph around. I think it was one of the strikes. And it was just when they took the police car and surrounded it and then they had all the activity after that. And there is a photograph of me right in the front line of protest and I was just there observing. But it is there, this photograph of me right up front.

05-00:55:37

Rubens: Were you attending faculty Senate meetings that were—

05-00:55:40

Laetsch: Oh, yes, I did all those things. Yes. Absolutely.

05-00:55:43

Rubens: The faculty in the main was not supportive of the students in the beginning. There was a faculty 200 group that was led by Larry Levine.

05-00:55:50

Laetsch: That's right.

05-00:55:53

Rubens: He had come in '62.

05-00:55:54

Laetsch:

And he was in History. You know his colleague Reggie Zelnik was killed on campus in a freak accident.

05-00:56:07

Rubens:

Yes. And Larry Levine died just a few years ago.

05-00:56:07

Laetsch:

That's right, that's right. No, that committee of 200, I was not a part of that. I have never really been that involved in popular political kinds of things. I've always preferred to work on things that make a difference.

05-00:56:25

Rubens:

Let me just ask you one more question, that I feel compelled to ask you. There's the historic meeting of the Academic Senate.

05-00:56:33

Laetsch:

Yes, I was there.

05-00:56:35

Rubens:

And you must have voted in favor of the students.

05-00:56:37

Laetsch:

Oh, sure. Oh, yeah, sure. Everybody did. It wasn't that the faculty wasn't interested; it's just that you had the usual thing of some of the people being out front and making noise. Do you remember Pogo, the comic strip? You remember the cowbirds and Pogo?

05-00:56:55

Rubens:

I don't. No.

05-00:56:56

Laetsch:

Oh. Well, the cowbirds were sort of Marxists, always reciting slogans. Well, I always refer to some of these people on the faculty as academic cowbirds, that they were always out front and making the noise but what actually resulted was minimal in many cases. No, I was at that Senate meeting, went to all those Senate meetings, and you come out of those and you have students that you knew say, "Oh, Professor Laetsch, so glad you're here." But those were interesting times. And, of course, some of the faculty that became well-known because of their speeches that they would make, some of them would always get up and make some speech of some kind or another. One of the funniest ones was by Daniel Arnon, who was the sole member of the Cell Physiology Department—it was in Agriculture and then Natural Resources, and it was one little department there that he was a sole member of. Of course, he was a very well-known guy and he was a very, very good scientist. Probably should have gotten a Nobel Prize. But he made quite a figure. He was a little short man, but he was very broad in his shoulder, had a deep voice and so everyone thought that he was at least six foot tall, even though he was about five six. And so he would stride to the front of the room.

05-00:58:49

Rubens: Of the Academic Senate meeting?

05-00:58:50

Laetsch: Of the Academic Senate. And particularly I remember that particular meeting. He would stride to the front of the room and he had this deep voice. "Daniel Arnon, Cell Physiology." A lot of people I know thought that that was a very big department and he really represented a good fraction of the college faculty. He was the only person in the department. And the reason he was the only person in the department was that no one could get along with him, so they created a department for him.

05-00:59:22

Rubens: Let me interrupt you to put in a new tape.

[End Audio File 1]

Begin Audio File 6 09-15-2010.mp3

06-00:00:00

Rubens: Was there discord or upheaval in your department?

06-00:00:03

Laetsch: Okay. Well, let's just take the campus. When you moved during the Free Speech Movement and all the demonstrations, et cetera, you moved off of the Sproul Plaza area or around the part of the campus around the administration building, et cetera, and there wasn't much going on. In fact, it was like different worlds. You go over to where we were in the Life Sciences Building, you go to Engineering and there was nothing going on. The faculty were not that involved. In fact, if you take the sciences generally, with a few exceptions—there were some people in Physics, a couple in Biology who were very active, but by and large in the sciences and again over in Natural Resources, there weren't that many people that were really actively involved. And, of course, during some of the demonstrations when the troops came—well, I was gone when the troops came on campus, but even after that—

06-00:01:02

Rubens: You were gone the year of People's Park.

06-00:01:03

Laetsch: Yeah, that's right. But even before and after that there were a few times when we had things around the Life Sciences Building, we had some police there I remember at one time. But by and large that end of the campus really wasn't involved. It was like two different countries. And Engineering by and large wasn't involved in any of this stuff. In fact, I can't remember very many faculty from Engineering that were vocal and noticeable in the whole business. So there were just very different communities on campus and there were people here, I'm sure, that were in Engineering or up in Math or something that never knew anything was going on. Well, it was pretty hard not to at



certain times but by and large it's not something that influenced people on a daily basis.

06-00:01:56

Rubens:

And was Strohman trying to recruit you to the—he was active in the faculty peace community.

06-00:02:00

Laetsch:

That's right. Right. No, Dick was very involved with that. No, he never really tried to recruit me. In fact, I think he was rather critical of me because I didn't join the forces. In fact, even my old professor at Stanford apparently stated that he was surprised that I had become part of the administration or something and was not supporting the forces of good. But people on the outside, it was not a simplistic situation, as you probably know. And particularly as things went on, it became a public battleground. And probably hasn't been paid enough attention to. The people that came to the campus because they've got great difficulties or there's something going on they could be involved with. So we had all kinds of folks coming to the campus and giving speeches and trying to get things going.

06-00:03:06

Rubens:

The "outside agitators"?

06-00:03:08

Laetsch:

Outside agitators, yes, and there was an awful lot of that. Well, when they surrounded the police car in Sproul Plaza and I was there and saw all of that, and then our Senate meetings that came after that. And it became increasingly extreme. That is, the first ones, the Free Speech Movement, that was all pretty tame and the people involved with it had some pretty good points. But it was all really pretty tame. And then it was after that things just became more and more polarized, more violent, and it got to the point after a while where we were parasitized as a campus by just an awful lot of people coming from the outside and using the campus as a place to vent their particular grievances.

06-00:04:14

Rubens:

What's the word you're using? Parasitize? Like a parasite?

06-00:04:16

Laetsch:

Parasitize. Yes.

06-00:04:22

Rubens:

Well, now you were actually engaged in some curriculum development at this time.

06-00:04:27

Laetsch:

That's right.

06-00:04:29

Rubens:

A minor part of the Free Speech Movement was a critique of the curriculum: classes too large; not relevant, impersonal.

06-00:04:50

Laetsch:

Well yes, that's right. I remember some students in Biology, in the laboratory, talking to them and they wondered what they were studying, whether it was relevant to the wheels of the world, et cetera, and I said, "Well, it's relevant to you getting into medical school if you want to do that." I often said, because of my background, that this was the first generation, the Free Speech Movement people, the first generation where most of them perhaps didn't go to Sunday school. And they were responding as the people for the first time being involved in a movement outside of themselves. Well, I remember when they marched into Sproul Hall. I was there when that happened. They reminded me so much of a revival meeting where you'd have a gospel preacher and then they sing. In fact, we had Joan Baez on campus.

06-00:05:56

Rubens:

You were literally there?

06-00:05:57

Laetsch:

Oh, yeah, sure.

06-00:05:58

Rubens:

What would draw you? Just to keep—

06-00:06:00

Laetsch:

Just interest, yes. See what's going on. And there was Joan Baez as a gospel singer and Mario Savio as a gospel preacher, and they then marched, just like people marching up to be saved. They marched into Sproul Hall. And a number of demonstrations, looking at people and seeing their emotions was very similar to what I observed as a kid in my father's church, of people who thought they were being saved and had to go to the front. They went up and confessed their sins, et cetera. Very, very similar. And these kids, as I said, a lot of them had never had any kind of religious experience.

06-00:06:38

Rubens:

Because Mario himself had been well tutored in Catholicism.

06-00:06:43

Laetsch:

Oh, yes. Oh, very much so.

06-00:06:44

Rubens:

And then Steve Weissman had come up through Jewish organizations.

06-00:06:46

Laetsch:

That's right. Oh, yes.

06-00:06:50

Rubens:

So those were the places where some literally got training in how to run meetings.

06-00:06:57

Laetsch:

There was Bettina Aptheker, whose father was a well-known Marxist theorist.

- 06-00:07:04  
Rubens: Those people have experience in running groups and—
- 06-00:07:07  
Laetsch: Right. And, of course, at the time we had, in the Greek Theatre, where we had—
- 06-00:07:19  
Rubens: Where Kerr is addressing the crowd after the arrest of the students.
- 06-00:07:22  
Laetsch: That is correct. That is correct. And Kerr and Robert Scalapino in Political Science.
- 06-00:07:30  
Rubens: Yes. I interviewed him for the FSM Oral History Project.
- 06-00:07:38  
Laetsch: I knew him because of involvements with India and Asia, et cetera. And so when Savio got up and gave his talk and then the police man tackled him and everything went on from there. Some of Savio's associates were very happy because something was really happening, and they acted outraged but this was a really good opportunity for them.
- 06-00:08:09  
Rubens: But, again, you were there because you wanted to keep abreast of—
- 06-00:08:11  
Laetsch: I was there. Yes, sure. A lot of us went. It was, "What's going on that's new? Let's go up and see what's happening." I wrote an article for the *Cal Monthly* a couple of years ago that discussed the Free Speech Movement.
- 06-00:08:32  
Rubens: Now I asked you earlier, we were going to get into some of the curriculum innovation. Because you got grants to do that.
- 06-00:08:42  
Laetsch: Yes. From the campus and then there was another big grant we got. I was looking at stuff the other night. I'd forgotten all about it. I think it was a very large NSF grant to do some things. But I think that was—
- 06-00:08:57  
Rubens: That was in the seventies, I think.
- 06-00:08:57  
Laetsch: That was in the seventies. Yes, right.
- 06-00:08:58  
Rubens: I think in 1975. It was a \$100,000 Robert Wood Johnson.

06-00:09:02

Laetsch:

No, the Robert Wood Johnson thing was for Lawrence Hall of Science. No, this was for campus courses and this was also when I went to the Lawrence Hall of Science. Yes, it was. And there were about eight departments that got quite a bit of money from—I think it was NSF to do various things with their introductory courses. But I can get that in more detail.

06-00:09:27

Rubens:

Okay, all right. So we'll get to that later. I have a note about Lincoln Constance, who claimed that because you were a small department, the graduate students were involved in department meetings. I can't imagine that meant all meetings but—

06-00:09:48

Laetsch:

Well, we always had a representative. Let me put it this way. I don't think that they came to faculty meetings. They were involved in a lot of the other things in the department but I don't recall that the graduate students came to meetings.

06-00:10:05

Rubens:

Okay, then I could be wrong. But this seemed like a very modern and open thing to do.

06-00:10:11

Laetsch:

Right. Oh, yes. What we weren't modern about, was our faculty diversity. The first woman was not hired until 1973.

06-00:10:28

Rubens:

Nancy Vivrette.

06-00:10:29

Laetsch:

Vivrette, yes. Came from Santa Barbara.

06-00:10:30

Rubens:

She was an ecologist.

06-00:10:32

Laetsch:

That's right. She was there, what, four years, and she didn't get tenure. In fact, there was a man at the same time, a young guy that didn't get tenure either. But the business of having women in the Department, talk about a change in times. Some of the senior members of the Department, would argue that, well, women just aren't ready for this sort of thing and they were really very, very prejudiced about having women on the faculty. Well, let's look at the faculty of the whole campus. We had just a handful up until the eighties. We just had a handful of women faculty.

06-00:11:16

Rubens:

Their numbers start to grow in the seventies.

06-00:11:17

Laetsch:

That's right, yes. But just a very, very small number.

06-00:11:21

Rubens:

Now, women had been very involved in the non-academic parts of the Department of Botany in the early days. There had been—who ran—is it the herbarium?

06-00:11:34

Laetsch:

Well, no. There was a woman who was actually a former student. She had a PhD in botany, and she was a student of Willis Linn Jepson. Helen Mar Beard was her name and she worked for the Jepson Herbarium. Another woman was a curator in the Herbarium. And then Marian Cave had a PhD and she did some research at the botanical Garden, and then there was Alice Howard, who administered the Herbarium. She became very active in the California Native Plant Society. And other than that there were no women really actively involved as far as I can remember.

06-00:12:30

Rubens:

A couple other names are associated with the Botanical Garden. Priscilla Avery. This is early. This is in the thirties. Muriel Bradley, Mildred Thompson and you mentioned Helen Wheeler Mar Beard. I think.

06-00:12:46

Laetsch:

Beard was her married name. She married Colonel Beard. On Oxford Street, just off of Cedar, there is a great big white Victorian house with a tower. Her father Mar was a sea captain, and that tower was built when he built the house, and he would be up in the tower so he could watch ships come in and out of the bay. Beard was an engineer. And, well, when we get into the California Native Plant Society because they were—

06-00:13:41

Rubens:

This is actually just what I wanted to ask about next. The society's website says that the California Native Plant Society was formed in 1965, but I saw something about the Botanical Garden, that it's really formed around kitchen tables in '64. Anyway, how are you recruited into this?

06-00:14:12

Laetsch:

We'll come back to that house with the Native Plant Society because we had many of our early meetings there. The California Native Plant Society was an outgrowth of the campaign to save the Tilden Park Botanical Garden, and the Tilden Park Botanical Garden had a director named James Roof, R-O-O-F, and he had started that garden and he sort of did it on his own without any real permission from the regional parks administration. He always said everything he did he did it his way. So he was a real pain in the rear end for them, and particularly for the Director of the East Bay Regional Park System, William Penn Mott, who then was appointed by Governor Reagan as state Director of Parks and Recreation.

Anyway they wanted to do away with Roof when Mott was head of the regional parks because he wanted to do away with the Botanical Garden, Tilden Park Botanical Garden. So, of course, Roof raised hell about that or

started to, and a group of people got together who were interested in native plants. One of them was Leo Brewer, B-R-E-W-E-R, professor of Chemistry. Very distinguished professor of chemistry. He was a faculty research lecturer, and he lived in Orinda and had a couple of acres of native plants. And there were a number of other people around who had been involved and were interested in native plants. So they formed a group to support the garden, the native plant garden in Tilden Park, and I was asked to be on that. I'm not quite sure how that connection was made, but somebody in the Botany Department, I guess, had recommended that I might be interested. So they came to see me and I said, "Okay, I'll do that." That seemed like a worthwhile thing. And we mounted this campaign to save the garden.

06-00:16:49  
Rubens:

And you formed this society?

06-00:16:52  
Laetsch:

Well, that came a little bit later. This was a committee to save the Tilden Park Botanical Garden. And we met with the regional park board, the chair of which at that time was Robert Gordon Sproul, and he was beginning to be a little dotty but had a very big voice. Well, I'll give you the old story about when he had his office in California Hall. He would occasionally—now I'm going back a bit. When he was comptroller, he had his office in California Hall, and I knew an individual that was occasionally there. President Campbell asked what Mr. Sproul was doing, and he said he was "talking to Sacramento," and so the guy says, "Well, why don't you use a telephone?" because he had this great big booming voice. And so here we met Robert Gordon Sproul when we were protesting this. And we enlisted Melvin Calvin in our effort to have some more juice. And, of course, Leo Brewer in chemistry. Calvin in chemistry. That's how the connection was made. And so we had Melvin Calvin and some other folks that had some name recognition, and we went and met with the board and they finally realized that we were a force that they didn't want to fight, and they said they would continue the garden.

06-00:18:23  
Rubens:

Was the garden very big?

06-00:18:26  
Laetsch:

Have you ever been up there?

06-00:18:27  
Rubens:

I have not been up there.

06-00:18:27  
Laetsch:

You ought to look at it sometime. In fact, there's a former College of Natural Resources graduate student, a TA in Biology 1 that I had that's the director of it now. And it's a very interesting garden from a collector's standpoint. There are lots of very nice native plants and they have a stream with plants along the stream. It's really very nice. Overall, the landscaping is pretty bad. He made

walkways and walls out of rocks, but the plants themselves are very good. You ought to just go and have a walk through there sometime.

Anyway, I still remember the meeting. We had won our battle there, and so they were talking what they'd do next and I said, "Well, why don't we form a society to protect native plants?" And the people thought that was a good idea, so we formed the California Native Plant Society, all of which came out of Roof's fight with William Penn Mott, who was head of the regional parks, then head of the National Park Service.

I later became quite well acquainted with him, and it was kind of interesting reminding him of the battle, because when we were trying to protect the garden, of course, he was the bad guy. Well, if I had been in his position years later I thought I would have done the same thing he did because Roof was such a pain in the neck. And it turned out Mott was a talented guy and did a good job with the parks or wherever he was. And a nice guy. Anyway, we formed the California Native Plant Society and there were about eight of us. One of the things I want to do, hopefully for the next time, is to try to find my files on the Native Plant Society. I looked through one drawer and they may be in a couple of other drawers. But I want to look through those files because it turns out that the Native Plant Society people now—and the local chair is actually the wife of a member of the Plant Biology Department and we talked a bit about it. And they don't know the history. They don't have any good files. And so I want to find my files so they will have them.

06-00:20:55

Rubens: So you became the first chair?

06-00:20:58

Laetsch: I was the first president. And we met in our living room. We met in Helen Mar Beard's place and I think those two places most of the time. Well, Roof was a drunk and a little bit of a nut, in addition. And then we had a woman named Mary Wallers who was very active. She had been in the nursery business and she disliked Roof intensely. So every morning, almost, I would have in my mailbox a long screed that she had written complaining about Jim Roof.

06-00:22:00

Rubens: So we're talking about the year—

06-00:22:01

Laetsch: This was 1964, 1965. And, of course, how to raise money was a problem. It must have been after we incorporated that we opened an office down on University Avenue. I'm trying to think what is there now. Well, you know where the Berkeley Alternate School, or the school that was part of the high school.

06-00:22:39

Rubens: Yes. Oh, way down on University.

06-00:22:40

Laetsch:

Yes, way down. And we were across the street from that, maybe up a block or two. Again, I hope I find my files so I can find the address. So we opened that and this woman that I just mentioned, we appointed her the secretary. And so she set up an office there.

06-00:22:59

Rubens:

Her name?

06-00:23:00

Laetsch:

Mary Wallers. And she actually really helped support the society to begin with. She was really very, very important. If it hadn't been for her, I'm not sure we ever would have really gotten off the ground. And she was not wealthy at all, but she put some of her own money in, and then we all got together and paid the rent and then began to try to raise some money. And then we started a membership program once we were formed.

06-00:23:37

Rubens:

There was no California—this was the first branch?

06-00:23:40

Laetsch:

This was the first branch. And we didn't have many people from the Botany Department. We had a member of the Jepson Herbarium, Remo Bacigalupi, Larry Heckard and that was about it. The people you might have thought would be interested in the Botany Department really weren't that interested. People like Herbert Baker really didn't play a role. Bob Ornduff subsequently became interested and became President for a bit, but at the beginning it was all people outside the University, with the exception of Leo Brewer and Helen Mar Beard, as I said, one or two people from our department. But other than that, they were all people who were just interested in plants, native plants.

06-00:24:29

Rubens:

How often did you meet when you were setting this up?

06-00:24:30

Laetsch:

Oh, we used to meet once a month. Once or twice a month. Something like that. We met fairly frequently.

06-00:24:42

Rubens:

Did it really take off? Did you start to get more chapters?

06-00:24:44

Laetsch:

Well, it took off. Yes, yes. We started it with just a group here and then Gualala, the town up north, there was some grandma and grandpa somebody had a lodge up there. They heard about us and they wanted to form a chapter. So fine, we gave them the authority to form a chapter. And then I still remember we went down to Southern California, and one of the people that became very active early on was the wife of the Director UC Press, August Frugé.



Anyway, he was interested but his wife, Susan, became very interested. And she was very good at lots of things and she really helped us a lot. We went to Southern California and met with some people in Southern California that had been interested in native plants and they formed a chapter. It just grew after a time and now there are chapters all over the place. I recently went to a meeting in San Jose; I had not been to a meeting since that time. These were presidents of the different chapters around the states and there was a room full of people.

06-00:26:34

Rubens:

I don't know. Is it possible there are 300? I forget the number now.

06-00:26:38

Laetsch:

Yes.

06-00:26:39

Rubens:

It's a broad based organization. But how long did you stay involved with it?

06-00:26:43

Laetsch:

Well, I was President for I think a year and I was an assistant professor and I just—

06-00:26:51

Rubens:

You had a lab. You were writing.

06-00:26:52

Laetsch:

Yes. And I said, "I can't spend any more time at this and so I'll stay on the board, but you have to find somebody else to be President because I just can't spend the time." Ledyard Stebbins at Davis was a very well-known plant geneticist, he had joined. He had heard about it and was interested. In fact, he heard about it because he was going up University Avenue and saw this sign in the window that says California Native Plant Society and he stopped. We had a number of people like that, stopped and asked about it. We invited him on the board after a while, and when I left he became President. In fact, I have an article that he wrote in the Native Plant publication. Like a lot of such people, he assumed that he had started the organization, which was kind of interesting. John Taylor is a professor of plant biology, and his wife is the president of the local chapter. She says that they just don't have early records, and so I hope to find mine and give it to them.

06-00:28:29

Rubens:

Was Sita involved with it?

06-00:28:31

Laetsch:

She was not actively, no, but she was—

06-00:28:33

Rubens:

Hosted things at the house.

06-00:28:34

Laetsch:

Yes, at the house. Oh, the other thing we did early on was to have field trips. We organized field trips to various places in Northern California and those went very well, and we attracted people through that and she always went on those. But, again, I've often thought of this. We never really had that much help. In fact, no help at all from the Botany Department. We had some people interested and were involved but overall it might have been one of the more interesting things that ever came out of the Botany Department.

06-00:29:10

Rubens:

Except that the Botanical Garden is going to—didn't it have a native plant section?

06-00:29:17

Laetsch:

Oh, it does. It always has had. Yes. And we had the first sale for the California Native Plant Society at the Botanical Garden. Now, was it at the Botanical Garden? No. It was actually at the community college in Oakland, at Laney College. I think the first sale was there. Because there was a horticulturist there that gave courses and she was involved with this.

06-00:29:50

Rubens:

And when do you think this took place, about?

06-00:29:53

Laetsch:

Oh, it was after I became director of the Garden. But anyway, yes, there was interaction to begin with with the Botanical Garden but not an enormous amount.

So anyway, I stayed on the CNPS board for a couple of years and then other things took my time and I really dropped out of active participation.

06-00:30:54

Rubens:

How exciting to create a brand new organization that's now—

06-00:30:57

Laetsch:

Yes. No, it was. And now it's a big organization. Very big and very important. They publish their monthly or bimonthly publication.

06-00:31:08

Rubens:

How soon did a publication start coming out?

06-00:31:10

Laetsch:

We started one very early. In fact, I think it was our first publication; the cover was designed by the guy that did drawings of California native plants, a very well-known guy.

06-00:31:28

Rubens:

Oh, very well-known. [Henry Evans] I still have a set of those. They sold them at a place on Vine, The Artiferie. They were woodcuts.

- 06-00:31:42  
Laetsch: Woodcuts. And he produced a number of those for us and I think our first publication had that on the cover. And, again, I hope I have that in my files.
- 06-00:31:53  
Rubens: Well, we've been talking for almost two hours. I'm wondering if we should just stop and see if there's anything loose that we want to pick up here. So the names we want to add to the Native Plant Society are?
- 06-00:32:41  
Laetsch: I mentioned there that Mary Wallers was very important to the society. If it wasn't for her it probably wouldn't have survived, because during the time that we were getting started she supported it not only with time but also with some money and effort, and she was the one that got Stebbins involved. And she has not been given anywhere near the credit, I think, in the general history of things that she deserves, because she was also a difficult character. She was very strong-minded and liked her way of doing things, which is okay. But I think she saved the thing in its formative years. It wouldn't have gone anywhere without her. She really ought to be in their pantheon of heroes and I don't think she is. And then we have Joyce Burr, B-U-R-R.
- 06-00:33:40  
Rubens: And her husband worked at Chevron.
- 06-00:33:42  
Laetsch: That's right.
- 06-00:33:42  
Rubens: Was that important that he worked at Chevron? Or just that they had—
- 06-00:33:45  
Laetsch: I'm trying to think. No, it was just that he was there. He was not too active. She was very active. She was very active. I had a telephone call from her every day. Another reason why I stepped down as President was that these people were constantly calling and they were constantly fighting each other in various ways.
- 06-00:34:01  
Rubens: Well, it sounds like a lot of women with time on their hands. And Leonora, Strohmeyer. I just want to spell it out for the transcriber—S-T-R-O-H-M-E-Y-E-R.
- 06-00:34:07  
Laetsch: That's right.
- 06-00:34:08  
Rubens: Leonora Strohmeyer.
- 06-00:34:07  
Laetsch: That's right. And she had a big garden, still does; I was just up there recently. They had something that I was invited to a few months ago and I was up there

for a tea. She died not too long ago and her husband was still alive but was in his sickbed when we were up there. She has a lovely garden on the hillside that they support. They have a gardener. And it's all native plants.

06-00:34:41

Rubens:

All right. This was a good session with lots of information. Thank you.

Interview #4 October 27, 2010  
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07-00:00:00

Rubens: It is the 27th of October, 2010 and we are starting our fourth interview. You have recently just returned from Bhutan.

07-00:00:14

Laetsch: I just came back a little over a week ago from Bhutan, and one of the things which I did there was that I carried the first volume of Mark Twain's autobiography across the Pacific Ocean. It was not officially published at that time—it will come out next week. I had an advance copy that I took to Bhutan. Then Bob [Robert] Hirst, who's the Director of the Mark Twain Papers Project, went to Japan two weeks later to talk about Mark Twain and took a volume with him. So we were missionaries to Asia.

I also took a volume of the annotated *Huckleberry Finn*. And I presented those books to the Royal Thimphu College, which is a new college started by two former Cal students. It's a bachelor degree institution on a brand new campus that they have built, a lovely campus on many acres on a mountain side. The President is, as I said, a Cal alum. So I presented the autobiography to him for their fine new library. This was interesting in a number of ways, because Mark Twain recounts in his book *Following the Equator* that he was in Darjeeling, India and had a very nice time there and describes it in great detail and his ride on the little railroad. Well, Darjeeling is not quite within sight of Bhutan but it's not very far away. It's probably about eighty miles away from the border, if that. Probably less than that. Anyhow, this was the first invasion of Mark Twain into Bhutan, and Twain would have loved to have gone to Bhutan, I'm sure, but he couldn't at that time. When he was in Darjeeling, Bhutan was in the middle of civil wars and was very dangerous and closed to foreigners. Bhutan didn't really open up until the sixties. So we could look out over towards Darjeeling while presenting the autobiography.

In addition to my son Krishen and me, three Cal alums were with us. Robin and Peter Frazier are very active members of the Mark Twain Luncheon Club, and Ruth Strand was my graduate student. They left about a week before we did and we went to see Sikkim, which is an Indian state, and a former independent state in India before the Indian union was formed. That's within shouting distance of Darjeeling where Mark Twain was.

07-00:03:32

Rubens: You've been traveling to Bhutan for about twenty years now.

07-00:03:35

Laetsch: No, more than that. Our first trip was in 1981.

07-00:03:38

Rubens: And what was the occasion of that trip?

07-00:03:40

Laetsch:

The first trip was because the youngest daughter and younger sister of the fourth king came to Berkeley, and we had some connections and she came to live with us. Her family wanted her to live with a typical American family. So we were a very typical American family. And then we had Leo Rose, in the East Asian studies program, and he was a well-known scholar of East Asia and he was one of the few people who had written about Bhutan and he was well-connected with people in Bhutan. So when they inquired of him about coming to Berkeley, he really helped to set it up. He recommended that she stay with us. And so the princess came to stay with us for a year, and then she came back for the next year and rented an apartment and had her maidservant whom she brought over with her.

07-00:04:43

Rubens:

Did she have a maidservant when she lived with you?

07-00:04:44

Laetsch:

No, no. I guess Sita was in a way, kind of the maidservant in a sense.

07-00:04:50

Rubens:

Also a chaperone?

07-00:04:53

Laetsch:

Well, she did pretty well on that. But Ashi [Princess] Kesong Wangchuck was completely incapable of doing anything that we would consider to be fairly normal in terms of how you take care of anything, because she had never had to do anything. Everything was done for her. She loved to be around when we had guests, and she liked to help prepare things because she had never done that. It would take her about a half an hour to cut up a carrot, because she had never done that before. But she found it all quite fascinating. She had never swept anything before, so she liked to go out and sweep the front porch. And, again, it would take her a very long time because she didn't have any of the motor skills for sweeping.

07-00:05:29

Rubens:

Was it her initiative that brought her to Berkeley?

07-00:05:31

Laetsch:

No, it was the family who wanted for her to go outside the country for education and because of the fact that the foreign minister at that time was very well connected with Leo Rose, and he recommended Berkeley. And then subsequently the foreign minister's [Dawa Tsering] two children, his oldest child, who was a daughter, and his son, then came to Berkeley and graduated. And every time we go back we spend time with them. We spent time with the daughter, the last trip to Bangkok because she works for UNESCO in Bangkok. She has quite a position there. The son was in the foreign service, but he's now a very wealthy man—in fact, the family's very wealthy. He became a real estate developer, and so he stayed in Bhutan.

07-00:06:25

Rubens:

So your first trip to Bhutan was after the princess lived with you.

07-00:06:27

Laetsch:

When Ashi Kesang, was going back to Bhutan she was in New York and I was there at a meeting. She asked me to come and meet her mother, who was staying in a Waldorf-Astoria penthouse. Her mother was the mother of, at that time, the current king. The fourth king. So I went to visit her. First time I'd been in a suite in the Waldorf. And she invited us, Sita and me, to come to Bhutan. As stated previously, I was for many years on the Indo-US Subcommission for Education and Culture, and we were having some kind of a meeting in India. So I said sure. We went to Bhutan before this other meeting in India. We spent a number of weeks in Bhutan as the guests of the Queen Mother. That was quite an experience because, just as I said, Kesang had never done anything that was manual in any way. While we were there Sita never had to do anything, including pour her own tea or coffee or carry her purse or anything of this sort.

07-00:07:44

Rubens:

Tell me about the Indo-US Subcommission.

07-00:07:47

Laetsch:

The Indo-US Subcommission was a joint venture between the two governments to support educational programs of various kinds and those were established in a number of countries which had received American aid after World War II. Those countries paid back money that they borrowed, basically, in the form of scholarships, cultural programs, et cetera. Fulbright programs are an example of that. This subcommission was set up to promote interchange between this country and India, particularly in cultural and educational relations. That was the only thing going on between India and the US for many years, because our government, starting with John Foster Dulles, basically put India on the black list because India would not do everything the US requested.

A major issue then with the US foreign policy or any major issue was to thwart the Soviet Union. And India insisted on having some activities which this country considered to be socialist. And, of course, if they were socialist then they were obviously communist. Plus the fact that they had established good relations with communist countries, including the Soviet Union. So the US basically stopped having much in the way of any kind of economic activities with India. As a result, India turned to the Soviet Union. Indira Gandhi built close relations with the Soviet Union, because there was nothing much here to keep her in the fold, which was very, very tragic. The only thing going on with India at that time was cultural stuff, and we were the cultural vendor.

07-00:09:46

Rubens:

And when and how did you get on that commission?

07-00:09:53

Laetsch:

The first time I went to India on subcommission business was in 1975, and I was a member from 1978 until it was eliminated in 1996. That permitted me to meet many of the Indian leaders because at that time there wasn't much going on between India and the US. When we had a meeting we would often meet with the prime minister and other high functionaries in India. That gave me a very interesting insight into a lot of things going on in India.

07-00:10:40

Rubens:

How often would you meet?

07-00:10:42

Laetsch:

Well, once a year. It alternated between India and the US

07-00:10:47

Rubens:

And the ones here were in Washington?

07-00:10:48

Laetsch:

Washington, yes, but not always. We actually had a meeting in Texas at one time because the US co-chair for a time had been US ambassador to India and then he was the President of the University of Southern California. But he was from Texas, so we met in Texas and we met in, I think it was Arizona or New Mexico once.

07-00:11:12

Rubens:

How many were on that commission, about?

07-00:11:14

Laetsch:

Oh, on the American side there were about six. About the same number on the Indian side.

07-00:11:22

Rubens:

So you were able to piggyback is what you were saying in a way.

07-00:11:26

Laetsch:

That's right. So when I went to Bhutan, the first time, I basically piggybacked, although all of our expenses were covered in Bhutan. We had a wonderful experience there. Following that we went back to Bhutan by invitations, not of the royal family, but by other people, quite a number of times. You had to be invited to do any traveling with a tour company. And then we began to do Bear Treks to Bhutan.

07-00:11:50

Rubens:

Now did you organize that?

07-00:11:50

Laetsch:

Yes. And then a variety of other things as well. Two and a half years ago, I was asked to come over to advise on a new university that they planned to start, which still hasn't happened.



07-00:12:05

Rubens:

Oh, not this one where you presented the—

07-00:12:08

Laetsch:

No, no. That's a private university. This was going to be a government-funded university. And that's still on the drawing board. Whether it happens or not, I don't know. Something like it will happen eventually, but Royal Thimphu College is a completely private institution.

07-00:12:33

Rubens:

Did you do business, too?

07-00:12:35

Laetsch:

In Bhutan? I didn't do business in Bhutan. I did some business in India. And then, in addition, my son Krishen, a Berkeley alumnus, has been to Bhutan more than I have, he's done everything from business to education. He started the first import of anything from Bhutan into the United States, which was red rice. And you can still buy that in fancy stores. Well, he started that, because they grow it in one of the valleys and it's kind of a unique product. As a result of that he became involved in a lot of other things. He's also been involved in some of the tourist activities. When I was over advising on the university, he was there twice that year advising on schools with the Bhutan Education Ministry. I was supposed to go with him in 2010 when we had a Bear Trek scheduled and then I had an operation and I couldn't go, so he led it with Jack Dold of Golden Gate Tours. It was a great Bear Trek.

07-00:13:44

Rubens:

It's over thirty years that you've had some connection.

07-00:13:48

Laetsch:

That's right, yes, and the country has changed enormously in that time in a very fascinating way. Because like countries that have been very poor and rural, Bhutan is becoming urbanized and their education system has improved greatly in that time, so you have a rural area to urban area migration. When we first went there, Thimphu, the capital, had maybe 20,000, probably less than that. It's now about 150,000 and it's growing like topsy. As a result, you have all of the issues associated with urbanization in a less developed country. You have crime now, which was very rare. You have urban poverty. You have teenage prostitution. You have drugs. A lot of good things are happening, as well, but it's just the fact that it's now becoming an urbanized country. The other thing, of course, now is television. They did not allow television in until, oh, about ten years ago, and now they have all the stations that everybody else has. The kids have grown up on the same TV stations that our kids grow up on.

07-00:15:15

Rubens:

It's primarily US programming?

07-00:15:18

Laetsch:

A lot of it, yes, but they have their own Bhutan broadcasting system, and the person in charge of their radio programs spent a year in our School of Journalism.

07-00:15:23

Rubens:

What's the state language?

07-00:15:26

Laetsch:

Well, that's an interesting question because it's two. Dzongkha and English. Dzongkha was one of the main languages that has been in Bhutan for a long time. There are many, many other languages in Bhutan, many of them derived from Tibetan, as is Dzongkha. And then there were some local languages, as well, from way, way back. So you have what is typical in many Asian countries. You have people in the eastern part of Bhutan who don't speak Dzongkha, and they can't be understood by people in the west who speak Dzongkha. But actually, many people speak English much better than Dzongkha because they start with English in the first grade and that was a decision they made to be part of the world. The people who are educated aren't very good at Dzongkha. In fact, they just passed a law that the people serving in the government have to pass a test in Dzongkha, so the people that have been there, fairly high civil servants, now have to pass a test in basic Dzongkha.

07-00:16:38

Rubens:

Where are the elite educated?

07-00:16:40

Laetsch:

Oh, the elite were educated historically in private schools in India and then a variety of places around the world. Some Indian universities and then the US. For example, the student princess who came over when we started our interactions with them led to bringing more students over. And these are now folks in very responsible positions, both in government and out of government. But the current prime minister has a master's degree from Penn State. The current king, the fifth king, has an undergraduate degree from Williams College, and a graduate program from Oxford. And, of course, they're still being educated in India.

07-00:17:33

Rubens:

What was your effort at Cal to bring students from Bhutan after the princess first came? Now, when you said bring over, that princess initiated that originally?

07-00:17:40

Laetsch:

Well, we had two students before that. The current foreign minister graduated from Berkeley in 1979. I did not know him at that time. We've become good friends since then. And there was one other person from Bhutan who had been here even earlier. Since then, we've had five students who have graduated; one was here for a year and a half, and a couple who came here for journalism.

In fact, one of those individuals is now the head of all their radio programming.

07-00:18:23

Rubens: And the Bear Treks, you said that started —

07-00:18:25

Laetsch: Well, the first Bear Trek we took over there, I think was, oh, ten years ago, maybe even a little longer than that.

07-00:18:35

Rubens: Had you been leading other Bear Treks?

07-00:18:36

Laetsch: Yes. I started leading Bear Treks in 1988. The first one was a Bear Trek down the Rhine River, and we had another one down the Danube to the Black Sea and on to Istanbul. Following retirement was when I really started leading them in conjunction with Jack Dold of Golden Gate Tours. We teamed up for many years. I've led over thirty treks and Sita has been on most of them. A number of them have been concerned with Mark Twain in California, Nevada, New York, and Connecticut. Bob Hirst of the project has been the lecturer. We will have another Mark Twain trip in August.

07-00:19:18

Rubens: Did you try to lead a trek to Bhutan every year?

07-00:19:24

Laetsch: No. Not to Bhutan. In fact, that first one to Bhutan and then I think the next Bear Trek was the one that I think my son Krishen led a year ago in April. We just took some friends with us on the last one in September 2010. It wasn't really a tourist thing. Friends just went along with us. I leave for another trip to Bhutan and India in April 2012.

07-00:19:52

Rubens: So is there anything more that we should say about your recent trip and Bhutan? You said you wanted to talk about this while you were fresh about this trip.

07-00:19:55

Laetsch: Oh, yes. Right. Well, I just wanted to point out some of the other things that have happened as a result. Not only do we have Cal alums who have a new college—in fact, that in itself is an interesting story, because among the people who started it, was the princess who lived with us. As typical in Bhutan, women often inherit the property. That is, in a certain class they inherit the property. She had a lot of property through the royal holdings, et cetera. And then the Cal alum whom she married, he graduated here from mechanical engineering. He started over there working with the government on power plants and then the princess—

07-00:20:50

Rubens: Was he from Bhutan?

07-00:20:51

Laetsch: Yes. He was Bhutanese. Very much so. The princess was previously married to an army officer, and they split, and then she and this Cal alum got married. And they've had a child. It was really her property that allowed them to start this university. They have divorced, because she was having an affair with a police officer. The royals over there are pretty free in terms of their relationships. The princess has three sisters and they've all had problems with their marriages, et cetera. But that's not unusual because marriage there is not as solid as it is other places. And, in fact, the women are the ones that often initiate the separation. And all you have to do there is just kind of work out a little deal that you're separated and divorced and then it becomes registered. But in many cases it's the women who kick out the—for example, one of our Cal alums, who's now the government's liaison person with all of the monasteries and the monks. His wife is a travel agent and we always work with her. He was married before to the youngest sister of the four queens of the previous king who was married to four sisters. And that's not uncommon in Bhutan, to marry sisters. But he married four of them.

07-00:22:44

Rubens: In succession or—?

07-00:22:47

Laetsch: All at once.

07-00:22:48

Rubens: So there's polygamy?

07-00:22:49

Laetsch: He married them all at once at the same time and has had children with all of them. In fact, the youngest one was here visiting us about three years ago, and she brought her two children here. She wanted to introduce her son to Berkeley because he had just finished Sandhurst, the military academy in Britain, and they had the idea of him coming to Berkeley. She brought him over, and we spent a day here on the campus. Very, very attractive accomplished woman. And the daughter was with her, as well. We visited the admissions office, and met with the Chancellor. They made application and subsequently the admissions office lost the application, which was a major embarrassment. The eldest son who was the son of the second oldest queen—they were all sisters—who is now the king because the fourth king willingly abdicated, which is historically a very interesting phenomenon. And he's a hero. People love him in the country. But he abdicated in favor of his son, which is very unusual. He also was the last head of a state to lead an army into battle for about 300 years.

07-00:24:30

Rubens: And what was that about?

07-00:24:31

Laetsch:

The battle involved Marxist guerillas from the state of Assam in India who crossed over the Indian border into Bhutan and set up camps so the Indian army couldn't get at them. They would go into India and make raids, so the king went there disguised as a monk to check them out and see what was going on and talk with them. And then he led the Bhutanese army one morning, just as they were having breakfast, and captured most of them and killed some and chased the others into the jungle and now they've been caught. But it's the first example of a head of a state leading an army into battle since, I suspect, the seventeenth century.

07-00:25:16

Rubens:

When was that about?

07-00:25:16

Laetsch:

That was about four years ago, five years ago.

07-00:25:19

Rubens:

And when was this abdication?

07-00:25:22

Laetsch:

He formally abdicated two years ago. Yes, about two years. Krishen was there about two years ago during the inauguration of the new king.

07-00:25:35

Rubens:

So just to stay with the Berkeley connection for another minute. What happened with this prince whose application had been lost? Did they let them in anyway?

07-00:25:49

Laetsch:

He did not get in. It went by the wayside but he probably would not have been admitted. He's now working in Bhutan, but I don't think he would have been admitted because he wasn't a really great student. It was just extremely embarrassing for that to happen.

07-00:26:03

Rubens:

I've wanted to know when heads of state or members of the very elite come to Berkeley, isn't the University notified by them? Is some acknowledgment or oversight established?

07-00:26:14

Laetsch:

It varies a lot and I don't know everything that happens now because I've been out of administration. But in former times, yes, we would know about it, and we had considerable discretion in whom we could admit or not admit. Now that's been pretty well closed off.

07-00:26:31

Rubens:

We'll be getting to that when we follow your careers into the Vice Chancellor position.

07-00:26:35

Laetsch:

Yes. But there was quite a bit of discretion, and so when we had students from Bhutan, for example, who were good students, had good grades, test scores, et cetera, I always figured, and the Chancellor and others agreed, that this was all part of the diversity of the student body and it was very important to have people from other countries come here where they would be influenced. This has proven to be true there because all of these people have gone back and made great contributions to their country. For example, another student who was here in architecture and went back and worked in architecture in Bhutan, worked for the government for a time. He is from a prominent family. His father was commander-in-chief of the army. Then he went to Hawaii for a master's degree and met and married a woman from Japan. She's one of the few Japanese living in Bhutan. We had dinner with them while we were over there in October 2010 and her experiences have been interesting. Anyway, he has started a school, upper elementary, junior high and high school, which will graduate its first class in about a year. Beautiful building that they've built. He has instructors from many different countries.

07-00:27:54

Rubens:

This is a private school?

07-00:27:55

Laetsch:

It's a private school, yes. The good schools, many of the good schools, are private schools. He has a very interesting school, and while we were there we watched a student judo contest between boys and girls. They have a big room where they teach judo. And the reason, of course, is that his wife is Japanese. But anyway, it's just an example of the things that are going on. So the students who have come here from Bhutan and are back there have made a very significant contribution to the country and are continuing to do so.

07-00:28:47

Rubens:

Would UC have any direct interest in Bhutan?

07-00:28:54

Laetsch:

I just don't know. I'm sort of out of that now. I've talked about it with a number of people. I've talked about it with the current Vice Chancellor, about people from there coming over here. I've talked to some faculty and some deans, et cetera. So I think there certainly would be interest. It's just a matter of having someone who will facilitate it and promote it and carry it on.

07-00:29:24

Rubens:

And probably having the successful state university in place. This is all fascinating. Is there anything else we should add to this?

07-00:30:15

Laetsch:

Well, I think that covers the basic elements of it.

07-00:30:46

Rubens:

I want to be clear about the name of the princess.

Laetsch: Her name is Ashi Kesang Wangchuck. Ashi means princess and that always goes with her name. A-S-H-I. And Kesang is K-E-S-A-N-G. Wangchuck is the name of the royal family.

Many people in Bhutan only have one name and they often don't have family names. So husbands often have different names from their wives. As I say, they're not family names. When a child is born, they bring in a priest who gives it a propitious name. It usually has to do with Buddhism. But in other cases, people do have surnames and they maintain those. The Wangchuck Dynasty is one example. The former foreign minister I mentioned, his last name is Tsering. All of his kids are Tserings as well. So it's a very mixed thing. Many of the names are the same, and as an example, a number of our friends are named Karma Dorji. D-O-R-J-I. There are hundreds, probably thousands, of Karma Dorji's in Bhutan, and you might ask how they keep them separate in schools, because many of the kids will have the same name. They do it in a variety of ways. The teachers often number them. Karma One, Karma Two, Karma Three, et cetera. But it's a fascinating thing because, again, you have such redundancy in the names.

07-00:32:38

Rubens: How big is the population there?

07-00:32:40

Laetsch: It's small. It's about 650,000. It's varied a great deal over the years, not because the population has changed but because they count it differently. And for many years, the population was about 1.7 million. But that was a UN figure. They invented this figure for the United Nations, because they got aid based on population. So that was highly inflated. Now they've finally gotten away from that and it's been working itself down. They don't really know how many people because they estimate about 30,000 people are laborers from India, from West Bengal. And, in fact, you go to Bhutan and you see all these people who look different than the Bhutanese. Well, they're all from India. They don't quite know how many there are. Most of them have come in on labor contracts, but then there's some who have just come in.

07-00:33:41

Rubens: But do you think Bhutan will remain an independent country?

07-00:33:45

Laetsch: It's been an independent country now for hundreds of years. It was completely cut off until the middle of the last century. And it is now, as I say, becoming urbanized. It has a stable government.

07-00:34:03

Ruben: And what sustains it?

07-00:34:06

Laetsch:

Oh, well, it's sustained financially in several different ways. The Indian government puts a lot of money into it and always has, because of its geographical location right next to China.

07-00:34:17

Rubens:

It's a buffer.

07-00:34:18

Laetsch:

And, in fact, Bhutan opened up to the world when the Indo-Chinese War in the sixties started. Since China's right on the border and they could easily have invaded through Bhutan—because the Chinese part on the other side of the Himalayas is high but relatively flat, so you can move armies. India is down low and they have to move up through the mountains, so it's much more difficult. When that war started, India built a road from their border to Thimphu. And that was the first motor road built in Bhutan. It was in the early sixties. And the Indian army moved in. Had a large force there for a very long time. The Indian army is in charge of a lot of the road maintenance and building. They brought in workers for the roads, so most of the people who maintain the roads and built the roads, are from India and they're there on contracts. Some of them have been there for years. And that's a whole interesting thing unto itself.

But a main problem in Bhutan is that they're supported by India. Hydroelectric power now is big. They supply a lot of power to India. They have dams, and they're building new dams. They've got three or four big new dams which are being constructed. So lots of power. And tourism has increased very significantly. In fact, they want to go up to 100,000 a year. Well, in a population of 650,000 and you have 100,000 tourists, that presents all kinds of issues. And you already see the result of this. For example, in the center of Thimphu you've got a five story or six story hotel from the Taj group in India. Very luxurious. You have the Amman group, which builds small luxury hotels all over the world charging \$2,000 a day. They now have five of those in Bhutan. The hotels have increased enormously in number. And that's changed a lot of things.

In addition, the agriculture, which of course was traditionally the mainstay and still is important, but marginal agriculture can't survive any longer. So there are lots of fields that have been deserted as urbanization has come in. The richest valley in the country, and also the center of a lot of tourist stuff, is becoming urbanized. In five years it will not be a tourist attraction. So what they don't quite understand, is that as more and more people come in, it's more and more settled, more urbanization, they will cut off a lot of their tourists, who will go elsewhere. They will still have the mountain climbers, and then they will have, as is already happening, tourists from India because tourists from India don't have to pay the minimum fee. The minimum fee for going in is \$200 a day. But the Indians don't have to do that. So they'll have



more people from India, which will mean more of mass lower-level tourism. So that's an issue that's going to come to a head.

And the problem with power is that it has increased the prosperity of the country tremendously but that doesn't employ many people. It employs a lot of people to build dams, but once you have those done, to maintain them there's hardly anybody. So their biggest problem I see is jobs. Their educational system has improved greatly but they are training a lot of semi-literate people who will go through, say, the elementary grades and maybe some secondary, and for various reasons will drop out. Or even if they finish their colleges, with some exceptions, they're not terribly well educated and they're not very employable. As an example, their Bhutan broadcasting system, this Cal person was telling us, that he recently had an opening. 130 people applied, out of which he selected five to interview and didn't find any of them satisfactory. And this happens over and over again. So they have a lot of semi-educated people.

Employment opportunities are not great and it is in time going to be a time bomb which I don't think they fully appreciate. You already see this in Thimphu and two other pretty good sized towns. But particularly in Thimphu. You see this in many ways. As I mentioned, you have crime now. You have juvenile delinquency. You have gangs. You have on evenings, particularly weekends, hordes of young people just roaming the streets looking for something to do. They've had disturbances.

07-00:39:28

Rubens: All the upheavals and acids of modernity.

07-00:39:30

Laetsch: That's right. Absolutely. It's a case study almost.

07-00:39:35

Rubens: Let's stop this discussion and figure out a roadmap of where we are. I'd like to return to our chronological narrative of your career. We had left off with your activities in '64 and '65, and you had made observations about the Free Speech Movement. Since we talked, I came across a book review that you wrote for *Cal Monthly* in 2004 on the Cohen and Zelnik book on the Free Speech Movement. Your praise of the book suggests I should ask about the impact of that movement on you and why you look back at it in that review?

07-00:40:24

Laetsch: Well, all of us who were here at that time were involved in some way, many more than others. I was not really as directly involved as a lot of people. In fact, the book that we're commenting on, and Reggie Zelnik, who became well-known on campus, was a lecturer when he first arrived.

07-00:40:53

Rubens: He couldn't vote in the Academic Senate.

07-00:40:54

Laetsch:

He wasn't even assistant professor. He was a lecturer, I think.

07-00:40:57

Rubens:

Right. He hadn't finished his PhD.

07-00:40:58

Laetsch:

He hadn't finished his PhD. And so I remember him in Senate meetings standing up and making speeches of various kinds. And then there was a committee of faculty, I think they called themselves the Committee of 200 who were very pro-FSM and very critical of the campus. I was not in that group. I was asked to be in the group but I was not for a couple of reasons. One is that I had been at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, which had the first student strike in modern history of a US university. That was in 1962, and so I remember that strike, et cetera, and all of the ramifications of it and the reactions of the faculty. Some faculty were very supportive of the students, others very much opposed to what was going on. And the faculty was split and divided over this whole business. People didn't speak to each other. It was all very nasty. Having gone through that and seeing what impact it had, I often said that I had antibodies that had developed against such activities in terms of my own personal involvement. Also, just watching people who were so involved with it here, particularly those students and faculty, they were true believers and they acted like people who had just been in a revival meeting.

I said that once before about students, but the faculty are the same way. That these are people who suddenly had a big emotional involvement of some kind they could be part of. It was like joining a club.

07-00:43:04

Rubens:

Did you feel that was the case with Strohman? You were teaching with him.

07-00:43:09

Laetsch:

Oh, yes. Absolutely. So I just felt that my antibodies had developed to the point where I was not going to be so overtaken with the commitment. But I was a very keen observer, and I enjoyed actually seeing what was going on and reacting to people. The Senate meetings were dramatic performances because you had various members—I don't know if I mentioned this—various members of the faculty who were really performers. They insisted always on getting up and making very emotional speeches of various kinds. I was very amused by all of that. And then the other thing, of course, was the fact that the campus changed so dramatically in many ways after the FSM movement. It was a very different place from what it had been in terms of the opportunities and the freedom of students to do various things, to form organizations, to challenge the authorities, to challenge the curriculum. All kinds of things that just had not happened previously. It was a major watershed for the campus, much of which was good, because there was far more openness I think on the campus generally. The unfortunate part was what it spawned. You consider

the fact that Berkeley became the place in the country for anybody who had a cause of any kind, and they would come here and demonstrate, et cetera, try to get something going and, of course, we had have various student strikes, disturbances, many of which were things I was not sympathetic with at all. I thought they were either imaginary or cooked up or not that important. But they did great damage to the campus.

07-00:45:08

Rubens:

These are things we'll get to, then, in succession?

07-00:45:10

Laetsch:

Probably in succession later on. But anyhow, a lot of those things did an awful lot of damage to the campus and we continue, to a certain extent, to have a little residual aspect of that but not as much because so many of the people are gone now and the students don't have any remembrance of what went on. In fact, while I'm thinking of it, there was an article in *The San Francisco Chronicle* the other day about students who have started independent courses on campus, and one course that they've started, you probably read that, was on the currently popular TV program *Mad Men*. And these are students who are looking at the sixties as ancient history. In fact, I think they were looking at a movie in the late sixties, it was.

07-00:46:01

Rubens:

It's a De-Cal class. [Democratic Education Program at UC Berkeley]

07-00:46:02

Laetsch:

Yes. That's right. But they were looking at something in the sixties as if this was very long ago, et cetera.

07-00:46:10

Rubens:

But it is.

07-00:46:12

Laetsch:

I guess it is but I still think of this as being something fairly recent.

07-00:46:20

Rubens:

So how did you come to write the review?

07-00:46:20

Laetsch:

Well, I knew the editor of the *Cal Monthly* pretty well, and I had a fair amount of interaction with him in the past, and he had asked me about things over time. So he came to me and asked me if I would write this and he gave me some money to do it. So I said, "Sure." Of course, when I wrote this the number of people that are around that had been actively involved had decreased considerably and so here I was a survivor. There were other people, of course, that were around at the time but a lot of the main actors had gone. For whatever reason, he thought that I had a remembrance of it and so that's how it happened.

- 07-00:47:11  
Rubens: Yes. I bet also remembrance but a little distance from it, too, since you were a partisan at heart, if not in action.
- 07-00:47:13  
Laetsch: That's right. Yes. Yes.
- 07-00:47:15  
Rubens: You're very praising of the book.
- 07-00:47:19  
Laetsch: Well, first of all, it was just good to have it down and the fact that it did bring out some of the things that were very important, and one thing in particular, as I mentioned in the last paragraph, which is that if this kind of abridgement of rights could occur in an institution of learning, there is no telling where it could spread. That brief statement, more than anything else in this fascinating book, tells why the FSM was successful. So in that sense it was good. The aftermath was very bad.
- 07-00:47:55  
Rubens: Well, one of the aftermaths, it seems to me, is a lot of talk about the curriculum being relevant or more accessible.
- 07-00:48:05  
Laetsch: Yes. Well, when I say the aftermath I don't mean so much about its effect on campus so much as all of the disturbances that use the FSM as a blueprint. And that was unfortunate. In terms of the things that you just mentioned, I think there were quite a few things that have come up that have been sort of trivial. Like this course that we just talked about.
- 07-00:48:28  
Rubens: But I see very early on that you have money from the National Science Foundation to overhaul the introductory biology course. Also, you offer a class in BED, the Board of Educational Development.
- 07-00:48:50  
Laetsch: Right, That all came out of the FSM.
- 07-00:48:56  
Rubens: You taught a class for it and then you also become a member of the ad hoc committee to review the Board of Educational Development. That's in '72, The course is offered in the fall and spring. Fall of '67 and spring of '68. So you teach Biology 2 for BED. What was Biology 2X?
- 07-00:49:22  
Laetsch: 2X. That must have been a seminar of some kind. Maybe it was a freshman seminar. That could be. I did a number of freshman seminars. And that must have been what that was.

07-00:49:35

Rubens: And you're also on the Academic Senate Committee on Teaching that same year.

07-00:49:38

Laetsch: That's right. Yes.

07-00:49:41

Rubens: So you already had it in your mind that—

07-00:49:42

Laetsch: Well, to go back to maybe what we covered earlier. The fact that I had been a public school teacher, and the fact that I also grew up in a minister's family where things were always discussed and education was important. So you might say I was pre-adapted for being interested in these kinds of things and I'm always very interested in teaching and education and the ramifications of all of that. It's probably not too surprising that I got involved in all of those things. Maybe I was really a missionary.

07-00:50:23

Rubens: But for what? It seems to me you had two books. And then by '74 you have a distinguished teaching award. And as I said, you had gotten grants from the National Science Foundation to overhaul the major curriculum.

07-00:50:45

Laetsch: Right, right.

07-00:50:46

Rubens: So there's something more than just a missionary drive. There's some view that biology and botany can be made—

07-00:50:53

Laetsch: Well, sure. It was all part of just the basic interest in education at every level and to multiple audiences.

07-00:51:01

Rubens: So part of it, when you talk biology, these were the years when Berkeley was on the quarter system. So you had to chop that up into three sections.

07-00:51:13

Laetsch: Right. Right.

07-00:51:15

Rubens: And then you change it. You shorten it to a two-semester course. And there's a lot of emphasis on audio-tutorial.

07-00:51:23

Laetsch: Audio-tutorial, yes. But we started that. Well, I shouldn't say we. Bill Jensen in Botany had started an audio-tutorial course for non-majors in Botany. Botany 10, which he taught. There were lots of experiments in the area going on around the country and, in fact, even on our campus there were a number

of experiments. There was one in Engineering, there was one in Physics, and there was some others. Teaching large lecture courses in alternative ways was something that was happening in a number of places.

07-00:52:05

Rubens: And you're pointing out a need for this in the sciences. We know it was happening in the social sciences and humanities.

07-00:52:10

Laetsch: Right. But also in the sciences. I don't know if I've talked about the graduate program that we started. The PhD program in Math and Science Education.

07-00:52:26

Rubens: No. Let's talk about that.

07-00:52:28

Laetsch: Oh, okay. This was called SESAME. Search for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Education, and it was started by a number of us in the sciences. A number of people in Physics, for instance, Bob Karplus, who spent much of the latter part of his career on developing new curricula for elementary schools. The Science Curriculum Improvement Study, which became a national/international program of teaching science better and differently in elementary schools. And Fred Reif was very much involved. He had developed an audio-tutorial course in introductory physics on campus, and he was very interested in instructional innovation. He went off to Carnegie Mellon and he's still involved in that sort of thing. And then my colleague, the second director of the Lawrence Hall of Science, Alan Portis, a professor of physics, was also very interested in educational innovation. He did not do much in his own course. Dick White in Electrical Engineering had started an audio-tutorial course. So what we were doing was something that was going on generally in the country.

07-00:53:56

Rubens: Somehow you all knew each other? Someone made a call?

07-00:54:00

Laetsch: Well, we formed a graduate program. It was officially the PhD program in Math and Science Education. And the acronym was SESAME, which was Search for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Education.

07-00:54:15

Rubens: When is this, certainly before you go to the Lawrence Hall, so this has got to be '68?

07-00:54:22

Laetsch: I would say it's maybe '70, '71.

07-00:54:26

Rubens: You think so? You're not the director of the Lawrence Hall yet?

07-00:54:30

Laetsch: No.

07-00:54:31

Rubens: But you're at the Botanical Garden?

07-00:54:33

Laetsch: That's right. And then I think that really got started when I was an associate director of the Hall.

07-00:54:38

Rubens: Does this program still exist?

07-00:54:42

Laetsch: It's now run out of the School of Education. We had it as a separate program, and we did not have it in the School of Education purposefully because some people don't take the School of Education, as you know, terribly seriously, particularly in the sciences. So it was people in Biology, Physics, Chemistry, and Engineering who were involved. We had set it up and we gave PhDs, in fact, I had five or six students who got their PhD in the program.

07-00:55:17

Rubens: That program was set up very quickly. Usually it takes a long time to—

07-00:55:20

Laetsch: It happened pretty quickly. I think it took about a year to get the approval to give the PhD.

07-00:55:24

Rubens: This is during the same years when Women's Studies is trying to have a major and there had been the Tussman Program and Muscatine's Strawberry Creek College.

07-00:55:31

Laetsch: This wasn't a particular faculty member that was trying to do something like Tussman. This was a group, a coalition of people from mainstream departments, so politically it wasn't too difficult to do. It was a very good program. I forget how many students went through it in its early years but it's still in existence. I was a thesis advisor for a student in it a number of years ago when the program was in Education and I've really kind of lost track of what's happened to it. But as far as I know it's still in existence. But when it was then transferred—It must have been in the early nineties that it was shifted over to the School of Education. I just don't know if there are still any science faculty members around who are involved with it. Somebody who would probably know an awful lot about this, because I think she might still be involved—is Elizabeth Stage, who is the current Director of the Lawrence Hall of Science. She came to Berkeley as a lecturer in that program.

And when Fred Reif was chair and over the years we had a number of young people that we brought in as lecturers in that department.

07-00:57:09

Rubens: So these aren't FTEs but they're—

07-00:57:12

Laetsch: No. They were. And they helped to guide graduate students, as well. It was a very interesting program, and these students who went through the program, I'm still in contact with a number of them. One of them, John Falk, is now a professor at Oregon State. He had started his own big research program in Maryland, in Annapolis. And he is very well-known in the country in the area of informal education that we can talk about in a second. Another one is a professor at the University of Nebraska. And I think she's an associate dean. Another one of my students is the former Director of the Carnegie Museum of Natural History in Pittsburgh. Another one is in an interesting position in educational research in Israel.

07-00:58:19

Rubens: You would have graduate students through this program and then through—?

07-00:58:21

Laetsch: Through the Botany Department, as well. And they sort of coexisted and actually interacted in some ways, in an interesting way. This interdisciplinary experience contributed to an ongoing interest in other academic worlds by both groups.

07-00:58:31

Rubens: I'm going to have to change the tape, so let's stop this for a minute.

[End Audio File 7]

Begin Audio File 8 10-27-2010.mp3

08-00:00:00

Rubens: The thread that we're following now is about educational innovation and change. You had talked about the SESAME PhD program that you'd been involved in establishing. And then in '67 you are appointed to the Lawrence Hall Advisory Committee. The Lawrence Hall will open in '68. I suppose we should talk about the Lawrence Hall all at once.

08-00:00:25

Laetsch: Right. Right.

08-00:00:28

Rubens: But I just didn't know what the advisory committee was, if you thought that you were going to be in, or were being groomed for an administrative position when it first starts.

08-00:00:39

Laetsch: Yes. I think I was involved as a result of my being Director of the Botanical Garden, but "grooming" wasn't an issue.



- 08-00:00:51  
Rubens: Well, you weren't director in 1967. But you're on the Landscape Architectural Advisory Committee.
- 08-00:00:54  
Laetsch: That's right. That committee. Yes.
- 08-00:00:55  
Rubens: You're on a lot of committees. You're on the Photography Lab Committee. You had been on the Plant Growth Facility Committee. I think those are all Academic Senate committees.
- 08-00:01:06  
Laetsch: The ones mentioned were department committees.
- 08-00:01:09  
Rubens: And there are some other departmental committees that you're involved with. And you're still pulling in a lot of grants. And you're pursuing your research, as well.
- 08-00:01:23  
Laetsch: That's right.
- 08-00:01:24  
Rubens: \$59,400 in 1967 from the National Science Foundation to work on chloroplasts.
- 08-00:01:31  
Laetsch: Right, right.
- 08-00:01:32  
Rubens: You have a lot of publications. You're reviewing manuscripts for journals and also for publishers.
- 08-00:01:38  
Laetsch: Right, right. That's what you do.
- 08-00:01:41  
Rubens: Is that what you do? You were also raising a family.
- 08-00:01:46  
Laetsch: Reviewing papers is not something you get paid for, et cetera. It's what you do as part of your professional activity because if you are reasonably well-known in an area and if you're cited in papers that have been submitted for publication, the journals send those papers out for review and so you get them all the time. They'd ask you if you'd do it and yes. And then you review them and send them back and then that usually results in doing more reviews, but professional scientific papers, for the journals, you're not paid. That's all part of what you do as campus citizenship. Then the publishers also would send you out reviews for books. Sometimes you'd get paid a little bit for that but

sometimes you wouldn't. That's just all part of what you do as a faculty member.

08-00:02:52

Rubens:

What leads you to produce *Biological Perspectives*, the group of introductory readings? In '69 it comes out and it's Little, Brown. I see in your vitae that you had reviewed texts for Little, Brown. And, of course, your big textbook on plants will come out from Little, Brown.

08-00:03:10

Laetsch:

Well, books of readings were rather common at that time. And they've gone now. They do them, as I understand it now, just in a course or on a campus. They'll put together things. But books like this were not uncommon.

08-00:03:23

Rubens:

Well, there wasn't easy reproduction of articles then.

08-00:03:26

Laetsch:

That's right, and these were common things in those days. I don't know what it is now. But you would have representatives of the publishers coming around to your office all the time, often to sell you books, to try to get you to use the book in your courses. And then they were always hunting for authors. So for whatever reason in discussing these things, they asked me if I would put together a book of readings in this area. And so I did this one and then there's another one, as well: *Plant Growth and Development*.

08-00:04:17

Rubens:

And so this was something you put together that you could use in your own courses?

08-00:04:27

Laetsch:

That's right. But I did that without the idea of just having it in my course. In fact, when it first came out I don't think I even assigned this in the course because of this concern that a lot of us have that if you write a textbook, having it then assigned in your course is really taking advantage of the students.

08-00:04:56

Rubens:

Oh, but I thought that was also the way it was done by many professors.

08-00:04:59

Laetsch:

Well, some people do it that way but some of us don't.

08-00:05:02

Rubens:

There was a moral problem for you?

08-00:05:02

Laetsch:

There was a problem with that. So, for example, this book here. Of course, I wasn't teaching a botany course when this was written. That is, an introductory botany course but—

- 08-00:05:13  
Rubens: You're referring to *Plants: The Basic Concepts*.
- 08-00:05:15  
Laetsch: Yes. But I probably would not have used this in my course.
- 08-00:05:18  
Rubens: Really?
- 08-00:05:19  
Laetsch: Or I might have. I don't know. But it was the same with these anthologies. I never really assigned these, I don't think, except once I had it used in biology and some students criticized me for it, and probably rightfully so.
- 08-00:05:36  
Rubens: I just remember that the textbook that we used in US history was *The American Experience*, a wonderful book. Kenneth Stamp was one of the authors.
- 08-00:05:42  
Laetsch: Oh, yes. Right.
- 08-00:05:44  
Rubens: We always understood that was how he was able to buy a house in Tahoe.
- 08-00:05:51  
Laetsch: Yes. But that's also why some students didn't like that kind of thing. It always was a gray area, and it was a concern.
- 08-00:06:00  
Rubens: So it'll be ten years before you come to write the plant textbook. So we'll talk about that later.
- 08-00:06:04  
Laetsch: Yes. Well, they were after me to write one all during that time, and it took me a long time to get around to it.
- 08-00:06:11  
Rubens: I bet. Is there anything more about teaching that we should discuss. Oh, yes. You taught a class in Environment Science in, 1970, '71, '72. That must have been, I don't know, experimental or certainly one of the cutting edge courses.
- 08-00:06:40  
Laetsch: Oh, you know, I don't even remember it.
- 08-00:06:41  
Rubens: Okay. In 1971, '72, when you're also director of the Botanical Garden, and Associate Director of the Lawrence Hall, you're teaching the basic biology. Biology 1, A, B and C. You're teaching environmental science and basic horticultural practice. That's an extension course.

08-00:07:00

Laetsch:

Oh, okay. Yes. I taught a lot of extension courses. I shouldn't say a lot. Oh, I know what that was. I didn't teach that. I think I was the supervisor of the course, and that was when I was Director of the Botanical Garden. The course was taught but I didn't teach it. But it was listed, I guess, under me. But I didn't actually teach it. I had somebody from Laney College who actually taught it at the Botanical Garden. Or there was a staff member up there. Anyhow, I did not actually teach the course.

08-00:07:45

Rubens:

Okay. You were the professor of record. And then do you remember being on the ad hoc committee to review the BED program?

08-00:07:54

Laetsch:

Yes. I remember being on it and I don't remember the things that we did. But I remember being on it.

08-00:08:02

Rubens:

And you're also chair of the Department Educational Policy Committee. So that's in the Botany Department.

08-00:08:19

Laetsch:

And that was just a committee. Well, I have a couple of articles here that you might want to look over and one of them deals with committees in sort of a humorous fashion.

08-00:08:30

Rubens:

Oh, okay. Yes, that will be very helpful. In these same years—we're talking about '68, '69, '70—you're the chair of the Campus Committee on Natural Land and Water Reserve System.

08-00:08:46

Laetsch:

Right. That is now the Natural Reserve System. They shortened it a bit. But I was on that committee for quite a number of years. This is a very interesting part of the university that a lot of people don't know about. But the University of California has what is almost equivalent to a national park system. And the Natural Reserve System was started in the sixties, I believe, and the person who started it really was a professor at Santa Cruz. Roger Samuelsen was the first director. He is a Cal alum and also out of Boalt Hall, and he was President of the Class of 1958. That is interesting because that class gave its fifty-year class gift of over one million dollars to support the Mark Twain Papers Project. The reason that they did that was that Roger and I had worked together when I was on the Natural Reserve System Board, and we've interacted a lot ever since. Roger came to me once and said the class was considering its fifty-year gift, did I have any ideas? And I said, "Yes. The Mark Twain Papers Project." Well, he took it to his committee and they bought it and so they raised over a million dollars to support the project as an endowment. Roger is now the co-chair of the Friends of the Mark Twain Papers Project, and guess who is the other co-chair.

08-00:11:02

Rubens: You, of course.

08-00:11:03

Laetsch: And so I have a lot of interaction with Roger.

08-00:11:05

Rubens: And all that comes from this campus committee.

08-00:11:08

Laetsch: That's right. It was not a campus committee. It was a University-wide committee.

08-00:11:23

Rubens: Was there a campus branch then?

08-00:11:28

Laetsch: Well, yes. There was a branch.

08-00:11:30

Rubens: There must have been because you go on the committee, and then you're chair '70 through '73.

08-00:11:34

Laetsch: Okay. That was the campus committee. Then I was also on the statewide committee. Of which that was a subset. And it was the statewide committee that was really the important one. The campus committee didn't have all that much to do. But we had a couple of reserves, like the Bodega Bay Reserve and Strawberry Canyon, which is formally in the Reserve System. The Reserve System was started up to preserve critical ecosystems in California for research, study and instructional purposes. It now has over thirty properties around the state. It's relatively unknown to most people but it's the only university in the country that has anything approximating that. It's almost our own little national park system, although it's not used for public stuff. It's all for research and teaching purposes. We have them all over the state. Along the coast, we have the Hastings Reservation down in Carmel Valley, which was one of the first reserves, and that's about 3,000 acres just up Carmel Valley. Lots of research that goes on there. And then we have them up in the Sierra. We have them in the redwoods; we have them in the desert. We have them along the coast. So, again, the idea was to have a reserve representing each of the important ecological areas of the state.

08-00:13:18

Rubens: Are you on—

08-00:13:20

Laetsch: I'm no longer on the board.

08-00:13:21

Rubens: But were you on that committee as a result of being director of the Botanical Garden? Would that naturally put you on it?

08-00:13:29

Laetsch: I suspect that had something to do with it.

08-00:13:39

Rubens: Okay. We'll pick up how you become Director of the Botanical Garden and what you do with the garden. And I think we also need to look at the first committees you served on for the Lawrence Hall of Science.

08-00:13:50

Laetsch: Sure.

08-00:13:51

Rubens: Because your leadership of both overlaps. You're beginning to get research grants for those institutions and then there were two other things I wanted to just ask you about. By '74 you're a member of the Electoral Council of the Berkeley Chapter of Sigma Xi, the scientific research society.

08-00:14:14

Laetsch: That's not terribly important.

Interview #5 November 5, 2010  
Begin Audio File 9 11-05-2010.mp3

09-00:00:00

Rubens: Today is the 5<sup>th</sup> of November and it's our fifth interview. I have a left-over question from last week. We talked about your second book of readings, *The Biological Perspective* by Little, Brown, which came out in '69. But we didn't talk about the first book of readings.

09-00:00:28

Laetsch: Yes, this was *Papers in Plant Growth and Development*. Let me just read you from the foreword. "The biology courses at all levels are currently emphasizing development and the number of people investigating developmental problems is rapidly increasing. That is the development of organisms. There is every reason to expect that this trend will continue for a considerable period. It is for this reason that we felt it was necessary for some of the relevant literature in plant development to be made readily available. Our basic intent has been to select particular areas in this vast field and to treat each area in depth by providing papers illustrating the sequential development of concepts and how they are presently conceived," on and on and on. So that's basically the reason for this. And, again, it's in the general area of plant development. Bob [Robert] Cleland, who was co-author and who's also a plant physiologist, he was not teaching in this particular course. This is listed as being in Seattle because he left Berkeley and went to the University of Washington.

09-00:01:30

Rubens: Regarding Biological Perspectives, you collaborated with Richard Strohman.

09-00:01:32

Laetsch: Yes. And Dick Strohman was a professor of zoology. He just recently died. But this first one, since we both taught general biology, which was a laboratory class for non-biology majors, this was not a product of a course. It was just the general area that we wanted to have papers in that would then be used in biology courses. That's the origin of this, and as I said, books of readings of various kinds were popular at that time in many fields. This book was for biology, particularly biology for non-majors, and I was teaching that course at the time with Dick Strohman, who was a professor of zoology. It was kind of a sequel to the earlier book of readings with the same idea: to get original literature into the hands of students

09-00:02:24

Rubens: How long did that stay in print? Did that do well for a while?

09-00:02:26

Laetsch: It did for a while. Yes. Neither of them were bestsellers. As I mentioned, I was listening to Bob Hirst this morning talk about the *Autobiography of Mark Twain*, which now has preorders of 260,000. So nowhere near that. So it was modest. And then it was really out of these, an association I had with Little,

Brown, that they were after me to do a general biology text, which took quite a while to do, because I was very busy on other things. But we finally got that out. And I don't know if you're going to talk about that a bit this morning or not.

09-00:03:05

Rubens: Well, I think we'll wait because that's '79.

09-00:03:06

Laetsch: We'll wait. Okay, that's fine. That's right. That was later. You see, I forget when all of these things took place. They all kind of merge together.

09-00:03:13

Rubens: Well, they do. And these are very intense years, '67 to '79. Very, very active and productive years. By the way, we didn't mention that by 1974 you have the Distinguished Teaching Award. I think that's a rare and prestigious honor. It's students who vote for that, isn't that right?

09-00:03:35

Laetsch: No. You're recommended by your department, usually. So I was recommended by the chair and then that goes to a campus-wide faculty committee and they then take evidence based on students. Student opinions are usually gathered for courses, et cetera, so they base some of it on that.

09-00:04:00

Rubens: That's quite an honor.

09-00:04:01

Laetsch: And they're still doing it.

09-00:04:02

Rubens: Yes. So maybe we should take the thread of the Botanical Garden. Even though you go on an advisory committee for the Lawrence Hall of Science, then the Associate Director while you're Director of the Garden—and then you're director of both institutions. So how does it come about that you become Director of both?

09-00:04:20

Laetsch: Yes, I was Director of both for one year. Well, I was very interested in the Botanical Garden for a bunch of reasons, and I used to complain to the director at that time that the Garden had historically been a refuge for research of certain people and much of what went on in the Garden had to do with plants that had been collected by the first Director in South America. I think I may have told the story that the reason the Garden got started was because the chair of the Botany Department at the time—William A. Setchell—was very interested in tobacco. He smoked cigars and pipes. If you go to the Faculty Club and you look at the big photograph over the registration desk—at the entrance there is a big photograph—of about thirty-some odd men, faculty members who were members of the club, sitting there for some occasion and they had a portrait of the whole group taken. If you count the people there



who are smoking cigars and pipes, the majority of the people are doing this. And right in the front row was Professor Setchell, who was the chair of the Department of Botany, with a nice big cigar. And he was always smoking cigars. Because he was interested in tobacco he persuaded the first director of the Botanical Garden, T. Harper Goodspeed, to do research on *Nicotiana*, which is the genus to which tobacco belongs. Goodspeed spent years making field trips to South America to collect species of the genus *Nicotiana* and he brought these back and planted them in the Garden and then he worked on the genetics of *nicotiana* and had some well-known publications on that. So the Garden was for many years a large garden for tobacco plants. There are still a couple of plants up there from that time but much of the Garden was planted in tobacco at that time and all because Setchell was interested in cigars.

During his tenure there was little student or public engagement with the Garden. When Herbert Baker became Director, and that was in 1956, I think, he opened it up a lot more for instructional use, but there was still no real public involvement. The public could come in, et cetera, but there was nothing for them. When I came on the faculty in 1963 and I became interested in the Garden and kept agitating for more public involvement, and also, because I was teaching a course that used the Garden, for more instructional use, as well.

09-00:07:24  
Rubens:

Tell me about that course.

09-00:07:25  
Laetsch:

We had field trips to the Garden. There were already some courses that had some Garden field trips, but it was not used in a general sense, and I kept agitating for that. When I was in England on sabbatical in 1968-69, Herbert Baker resigned as Director of the Garden and the Department asked me to take over. As I was told, "You've been talking about this stuff. Now's your chance to do it." Well, I couldn't resist that, so I became director of the Botanical Garden in 1969.

09-00:08:07  
Rubens:

And so were you given time off from teaching to do that?

09-00:08:11  
Laetsch:

No. When I was director of the Garden, I had a part-time secretary, but other than that I did not get any time off from teaching.

09-00:08:20  
Rubens:

Unbelievable.

09-00:08:22  
Laetsch:

I didn't get any extra money either. After I left they had a stipend for the director of the Garden and probably some time off but I didn't have that.

09-00:08:32  
Rubens:

But you did have an office? Or did you use your own?

- 09-00:08:34  
Laetsch: No, I used my own office. Actually, I had a little space in the laboratory that they constructed—a sort of little office. The secretary for the Garden worked in that office. Again, I think she was part-time.
- 09-00:08:50  
Rubens: So how did you go about administering it? I mean, you had been—
- 09-00:08:53  
Laetsch: Well, I spent time up there. I was up there during the course of the week. Sometimes every day I would be up there for a while. Oh, I know what else I got. I got to use a University car so that I could travel back and forth from the Garden and the campus. So that was one thing. But other than that I didn't get any remuneration. I spent a lot of time up there because it was a time of growth in the Garden for a variety of reasons. I think I had mentioned I was able to get them to build a greenhouse.
- 09-00:09:28  
Rubens: Oh, no. We haven't talked about this at all.
- 09-00:09:31  
Rubens: No, nor the considerable expansion that took place while you're there. So just to give an overview of your directorship—.you're there from '69 until—
- 09-00:09:38  
Laetsch: 1973.
- 09-00:09:48  
Rubens: Starting with '70, you're Assistant Director of the Lawrence Hall of Science and then Director. So there's two years—
- 09-00:09:57  
Laetsch: That I was Director of both. Yes, right. Well, when I became Director of the Garden there were several things that needed to be done. One was just a very basic housekeeping thing, which was they had roads in the Garden but they weren't paved. So during the rainy season they were almost impassable. And I was able to get them paved, which I was very proud of, even though it was not a great academic endeavor. We didn't have any place in the Garden for groups to meet, but what they did have on the books was an earlier request for a new greenhouse. When I found out that that was in the offing, I worked with the people who manufactured the greenhouse to make it into a classroom. It was built like a regular greenhouse except it had shingles and not a glass roof but the sides were glass, et cetera. And then I also put an addition to that classroom as a little greenhouse so that we could have horticulture courses or other kinds of courses there where we would need to grow plants.
- 09-00:11:22  
Rubens: Whom are you reporting to?

09-00:11:22

Laetsch:

Our chairman. At that time I reported to the chairman of the Botany Department, who was very supportive. And so we—

09-00:11:28

Rubens:

And there was a small budget? Obviously there were some funds.

09-00:11:31

Laetsch:

There was a small budget, yes. In fact, there was not only a small budget but I became director when Ronald Reagan was elected Governor. He slashed the University budget. As a result of that slash, the Botanical Garden budget was cut rather dramatically. For example, there was a staff member at the Garden named Marion Cave who was a trained botanist doing research there, et cetera. Well, her position was cut. Money for supplies and for gardeners was cut rather severely. That was the first big manifestation of the Reagan budget for me. But there was a request on the books that was approved for the greenhouse and so we went ahead, we turned that into a classroom or meeting room. That room has been upgraded a bit and they have a nice little area outside it that's used by the Garden now for all kinds of things, and when the Friends of the Botanical Garden was established that became the center for many of their activities.

09-00:12:44

Rubens:

Now, were you involved in the establishment of the Friends?

09-00:12:48

Laetsch:

I was at the beginning of that and then I left, and Bob Ornduff really took it over. But I was involved at the very beginning of it and promoted it because it was something that we obviously needed. I had brought some people into the Garden to act as volunteers even before that and they formed kind of the nucleus for the friends.

09-00:13:08

Rubens:

Was there some overlap with the California Native Plant Society?

09-00:13:12

Laetsch:

Well, no. The California Native Plant Society, which I was a founder of—

09-00:13:15

Rubens:

We talked about that.

09-00:13:16

Laetsch:

—and the first president. We had interaction. There was interaction with the Botanical Garden. I think a couple of the early California Native Plant Society sales, plant sales, were at the Garden. And there was quite a bit of interaction initially. That then over time that sort of faded because the Plant Society took off on its own and the Garden then took those initial sales and started to do them themselves. And so the sales from the Garden became a big issue just for them.

09-00:13:52

Rubens: And was this under your administration?

09-00:13:54

Laetsch: No, that came after.

09-00:13:55

Rubens: All right. How many gardeners did you have? Do you recall?

09-00:14:00

Laetsch: Oh, I don't know, half a dozen.

09-00:14:04

Rubens: And now wasn't it under your administration also that you acquired some more land and started expanding the—

09-00:14:10

Laetsch: Yes. That was the Mather Grove. Across Centennial Drive from the Garden was some land that belonged to the Garden which was a big redwood grove. The redwood grove had a fence around it and I was told that it belonged to the Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory. When I checked the records, I found that when the LBL built the Field Free Laboratory on the road that goes past the Botanical Garden, up on the left hand side, they needed to have a fence around it to prevent people from coming in because of the laboratory. It had no nails or metal in it, because it couldn't have any magnetism because of the instruments they had. It became obvious that when they built that laboratory and put up that fence that the people who built the fence took the path of least resistance and they came down and cut off the Mather Grove. And they didn't do that because of maliciousness. It was just that workmen were taking the easiest route and no one complained. The Director of the Garden at that time didn't complain about this because, oh, my god, the Rad Lab's doing it, it must be all right.

Well, then I checked in the files of the Garden and found that the Mather Grove has been very much a part of the Garden since its inception, which was initially because Boy Scouts had planted the redwoods and also, later on, the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] came in and planted, as well. But it started with the Boy Scouts and they were going to plant the whole East Bay hills in redwoods in commemoration of Stephen Mather, who was the first Director of the National Park Service and a Berkeley alum. So that was the connection. When I found out all of this about the Garden—in fact, a little amphitheater that had been dug out but there was no remnant of any longer—I took this to the Director of the Rad Lab, whom I knew through relationships with the Lawrence Hall of Science. This was Edward McMillan, and he was the co-Nobel Laureate with Glenn Seaborg.

So Ed's hobby, it turned out, was growing orchids. So when I went to him with the proposal that we get that redwood grove back, he was very sympathetic, and it shows you how things move sometimes over stuff you

can't predict. If he had not been an orchid grower, he probably wouldn't have been as sympathetic. He put in a request with the US government that this land be reallocated to the Garden, because it had been mistakenly taken over by the Rad Lab.

09-00:17:20

Rubens: What part of the US government?

09-00:17:23

Laetsch: The Atomic Energy Commission. That's whom they reported to and anything like that had to go through them, and I believe there was some kind of an act of Congress to give that federal land back to the campus. We got it back, and they put up a new fence along the route that they should have done initially but the old fence remained and that's been valuable because it's kept people out.

09-00:17:52

Rubens: So that was a significant acquisition, right?

09-00:17:55

Laetsch: Oh, it was a very significant acquisition. And once we got it, the folks in the Botanical Garden went over and cut out the brush, et cetera. But when I left the Garden and Bob Ornduff became Director, he was the one who really persuaded the Save the Redwoods League to put some money into making the trails and also to put in the amphitheater.

09-00:18:23

Rubens: And the purpose of that was?

09-00:18:24

Laetsch: To have meetings over there. Meetings, lectures, and demonstrations. Now the main use of that is for weddings, which is kind of interesting. Which is good for the Garden because they pay. But we had all kinds of events there.

09-00:18:40

Rubens: Such as?

09-00:18:40

Laetsch: And they still do. Well, going a little bit farther along. When I was Vice Chancellor for Development we had a number of our meetings of the Berkeley Foundation up there. In fact, one of the meetings we had was when the campus had just raised the money for the new Computer Science building [Soda Hall]. The widow of the person who contributed the money was there, and it was a time to honor her. She had parked along Centennial Drive, and the campus police came and ticketed her. It was a typical Berkeley phenomenon. Here this woman is responsible for giving the campus \$60 million and she gets her car ticketed. We tried to explain to the policeman, "Hey, this is not right." "Well, you have to follow the rules." Good Berkeley bureaucracy.

09-00:19:43

Rubens: Someone took care of the ticket, I assume.

09-00:19:44

Laetsch: We took care of the ticket. Right.

09-00:19:46

Rubens: Now, you said that one of your concerns was making the Garden more public; to have accessibility.

09-00:19:55

Laetsch: That's right. But it was tied into, again, repairing the roads, having a place where the public could meet. And then I tried something the very first year, which was kind of interesting. I had always been interested in places like the San Francisco Zoo and other places that have loudspeakers that you could press a button or a key—put in a key that you buy—and then it tells you about things. Well, I was able to get some money from the campus to do that in the Garden and so we had these speakers out in the Garden. You didn't have to buy a key but you pressed a button and it told you what was there. That was controversial. There were some people that thought that I was disturbing nature. There was a well-known professor of engineering who wrote me nasty letters because he walked in the Garden in the morning and he wanted to be by himself and have silence.

09-00:20:52

Rubens: Well, you didn't have to press the—oh, but he could hear if other people—

09-00:20:54

Laetsch: He could hear other people doing it, you see, and so his own selfish interests were much more important to him than being able to provide some educational stuff for the Garden. These speakers were also used when school groups came in, as well, because they could press a button and get some accurate information. After a time, they were pulled out, and probably rightfully so. But it was a—

09-00:21:18

Rubens: But you had more volunteers to be docents by then.

09-00:21:21

Laetsch: That's right. And you only succeed on things if you keep trying. As a good friend of mine on the faculty often said about me, I had a lot of ideas and some of them were even good. And this was true with those speakers. We began a very large school program so that the Garden parking lot was full of school buses almost every day. And that was at a time when the schools still had money for field trips, which they don't have as much anymore.

09-00:22:03

Rubens: So do you have an assistant that's helping to—

09-00:22:03

Laetsch:

I had mentioned earlier that we had Marion Cave, a PhD, pretty well-known, who was conducting research at the Garden, and that was all right except it really wasn't doing much for the Garden and I needed that money. So I vacated that position and used the money to hire some graduate students and even one undergraduate who were interested in education. In fact, they were involved in the SESAME program that we've mentioned earlier, the PhD program in Math and Science Education. I hired some of them to develop educational programs for kids. So they developed a very ambitious program and one of the things we did was develop tapes for tape recorders that the teachers could take the kids and turn on the tape recorder and they had a guided tour, just like in a museum. And that all worked very well. This was in, what, 1969, I guess, or '70. I started a field trip for Biology 1, the big general biology course that I was then teaching. We brought those hundreds of kids up every year for a field trip in the Garden, and we had the tapes that they used and we didn't need to have any guides. Teaching assistants would come, but they often didn't know anything about the Garden. But you had the tapes and they worked out very well. In fact, I think up until recently they were still using those tapes.

09-00:23:53

Rubens:

So you were expanding also research gardens in areas of specialty?

09-00:24:01

Laetsch:

Yes. When I was Director of the Garden Bob Ornduff was the Associate Director, and he was really in charge of the collections. I did the administration, I did the education stuff, et cetera, but he was a plant taxonomist, systematist, a very good one. And so—

09-00:24:17

Rubens:

Hired through the Botany Department or—?

09-00:24:19

Laetsch:

He was a professor in the Botany Department. He came the same year I did, was a professor in the Department of Botany and Director of the Herbarium, so we collaborated very closely. He had a big program there, and some other faculty had programs at the Garden. And I grew plants at the Garden. In fact, some of the plants that I first used for research are still there in the tropical house; they are *Theobroma cacao*, and its seeds are the source of chocolate. I had a graduate student who was working on some interesting aspects of *theobroma* at the time. So I grew them in the Garden and some are still there. Oh, another thing in the Garden was the need for a place to grow tropical trees. They approved another greenhouse, and I wanted one where you could grow big tall things. Most of the commercial greenhouses aren't tall. I persuaded the greenhouse company to take one of their standard greenhouse forms and double it in height, which is what we have. As a result of that, though, because they were tropical plants, we needed to have heat, and they put heaters in the greenhouse, which you often have. But guess where they put them? They put

them up near the roof because that's where they normally put them in a single story greenhouse. Well, with a double story greenhouse or a triple story, they still put them up. What happens to heat? Hot air rises. A lot of people kidded me about that for a long time, that I didn't realize that hot air rose. But anyway, that has—

09-00:26:09

Rubens: It worked.

09-00:26:10

Laetsch: It worked very well and it still works, and they have a good collection in there. It's still used in their educational programs.

09-00:26:18

Rubens: Now, because you're Director of the Botanical Garden, does that put you in a position of meeting with state agencies or even—

09-00:26:26

Laetsch: No, not really. Not really. But I will come back to that. I forget the year. It was '71, was it, the "Great Freeze" that we had in the Berkeley Hills. This was two weeks of below freezing weather in Berkeley and a lot of people lost plants. We lost a lot of plants in the Garden. For example, in the desert garden area where all the cacti are. Well, a lot of them froze, and then it got warm all of a sudden and they thawed out very quickly and split. So they were open to fungal infection. I invited the press over for that, and they wrote a number of articles in the *Chronicle* about the great disaster at the Berkeley Botanical Garden. I emphasized that this was a major problem, and that we really needed to have a lot of gifts in order to recover. We got them, and that started fundraising in the Garden. We lost a lot of valuable plants as a result of the freeze but it gave us a lot of publicity and it really was sort of the start of the fundraising program for the Garden.

09-00:28:02

Rubens: The friends grew out of that?

09-00:28:06

Laetsch: Well, all along we were kind of pointing to that, and then, as I mentioned, I had some people who were involved in various things at the Garden that we brought in. But it really got going officially when Bob Ornduff became Director and he concentrated on that.

09-00:28:53

Rubens: So would you say that you had brought the Garden up to a certain level and then you were so involved with other responsibilities—well, you were appointed Director of the Lawrence Hall, so eventually you gave it up.

09-00:29:06

Laetsch: Well, I kept it for, I think, it was two years, and then I couldn't continue to do it because we were expanding in all kinds of ways at the Lawrence Hall, as well, so I had to do that full-time.



09-00:29:11

Rubens: Now, by the time you left and Ornduff was elevated at the end of—

09-00:29:22

Laetsch: Well, he took over as Director, yes.

09-00:29:23

Rubens: Did that become a full-time position or was that also—

09-00:29:26

Laetsch: No. It did not become a full-time position until a couple of directors after Bob Ornduff. And it is now a full-time position, but we have a retired professor, Paul Licht, who's doing it now, mainly out of the goodness of his heart. But it is basically a full-time position. And the person before him was full time, as well.

09-00:30:04

Well, the thing was that again, Bob had been involved. His research, a lot of it, was there. But he was also actively involved in teaching, and I did not think it was a good idea, and still don't, to have a non-faculty member as Director. And this is one of the problems that they're going to have when Paul retires if they appoint a person who is not a faculty member. Because a person who is not a faculty member doesn't have the credibility and the ability to marshal resources like a faculty member. They just—

09-00:30:48

Rubens: Not the status or the—

09-00:30:49

Laetsch: No, not the status. And now we have the anthropology museum. The Phoebe Hearst Museum of Anthropology is a non-faculty person. The art museum is not faculty. The Lawrence Hall of Science is not faculty. And that's all very serious, I think, because of the cuts in budget. It's just easier to do that when you don't have strong faculty involvement at the head. And people tend to forget that —that this place is run by faculty members.

09-00:31:20

Rubens: So is there anything more that we should say about the Garden? Let's stop for one minute and just regroup because we're going to back up and talk about the overlap with the Lawrence Hall.

09-00:31:36

Laetsch: Yes. And that is that there's very little faculty research being done at the Garden now, and there was quite a bit for a very long time. But as the Biology Department, and even the Botany Department and its new avatar Plant Biology Department, has changed so much that you don't have too many people that are involved in the kind of research where they need to keep plant collections going. And as a result, I don't believe there are any faculty really doing research in the Garden. That is a death knell. So there is now a committee that's working on getting more faculty involved. Part of the

problem is, as I mentioned earlier, that you have people who were not faculty members, and so they didn't relate as equals with the other faculty. So getting them involved is something that people sort of forgot about. And Paul Licht, who's done a terrific job with the Garden in many ways—but he's not a botanist. And he's not doing research in the Garden. So it's a little hard for him to attract research people. Now, they do have some other faculty now who are working hard on this and I'm sure they'll overcome it. But it's been an issue. Again, with the budgetary constraints that we have, the campus will find it very difficult to support things where there isn't a lot of faculty involvement.

09-00:33:15

Rubens: Now, we did mention your research. So you were working on chocolate and on—

09-00:33:23

Laetsch: Well, I actually had a graduate student that worked on that for a time because it has a very interesting development of the seeds in cacao. In fact, I had an NSF grant for a while. I had a graduate student who worked on it for a time but then I was doing other things and that research just went by the way.

09-00:33:52

Rubens: And any other kind of research that you were pursuing?

09-00:33:54

Laetsch: Oh, well, yes. I have a long list of titles of the papers that I hope to find for you.

09-00:33:58

Rubens: If you find it we'll include a publication list as an addendum to these interview. They are listed in your academic personnel file.

09-00:34:00

Laetsch: Yeah. Maybe what I can do is go through and summarize that for you. Save that for another session.

09-00:34:03

Rubens: Fine. Let's do that. Tell me a little more about the committee that is trying to—

09-00:34:15

Laetsch: Well, the chairman of it is Lewis Feldman, who's the Associate Dean of the College of Natural Resources.

09-00:34:22

Rubens: By the way, is there any reason to talk particularly about Lincoln Constance vis-à-vis the Garden and vis-à-vis the Botany Department? These are the years when there are more hires in particularly Molecular Biology, and then eventually it'll become part of the College of Natural Resources.

09-00:34:40

Laetsch:

Well, it was in Letters & Science and then it became part of the College of Natural Resources and was combined with the people who are doing microbiology. So it's now the Department of Plant and Microbial Biology. We had a Department of Bacteriology at one time and that was done away with in the reorganization of biology. And out of this came the Department of Plant and Microbial Biology, So you have people working on plants and working on microbes in the same department.

09-00:35:18

Rubens:

And then were you involved at all in the reorganization of it?

09-00:35:26

Laetsch:

I was not involved much in the actual planning of it. I was involved in something and I can't remember exactly what it was. But anyway, that went on in the seventies, the late seventies.

09-00:35:50

Rubens:

So it's not until '89 that the Garden is placed under the control of the College of Natural Resources. And then reports to the office of the Vice Chancellor for Research in '96.

09-00:35:58

Laetsch:

Right. And so the Garden remained during that time, I believe, under the Botany Department.

09-00:36:06

Rubens:

But in terms of the creation of the College of Natural Resources? Was this—

09-00:36:08

Laetsch:

Well, no. The College of Natural Resources has been there forever. It was the College of Agriculture for years, and then they changed the name to the College of Natural Resources when we were no longer doing a lot of things relating to agriculture since much of that was at Davis. I'll get the date of that. I think it's 1974.

09-00:36:35

Rubens:

So you're there for four years. You're there '69 to '74.

09-00:36:38

Laetsch:

That's right.

09-00:36:40

Rubens:

That's a long time. Oh, did Constance—

09-00:36:45

Laetsch:

Yes, you want to talk about Lincoln Constance.

09-00:36:47

Rubens:

Yes, a little bit.

- 09-00:36:48  
Laetsch: Well, when I came here, Lincoln was Academic Vice Chancellor, and then later on he was called The Vice Chancellor. He was still active in botany and still had a research program. It was during the FSM or right after that that he retired. But he was always much involved with the Botanical Garden. He kept a lot of his plants there. And then he's actually written a historical reminiscence which perhaps you've seen about the Botany Department.
- 09-00:37:35  
Rubens: Yes, it's about the first hundred years and he does mention the—
- 09-00:37:37  
Laetsch: He does mention the Botanical Garden in there.
- 09-00:37:37  
Rubens: Oh, yes. And mentions you.
- 09-00:37:40  
Laetsch: I'm not sure he ever really understood what I was doing.
- 09-00:37:43  
Rubens: Did he remain a force around campus?
- 09-00:37:48  
Laetsch: After he left as Vice Chancellor, not that much.
- 09-00:37:55  
Rubens: I'm forgetting my list of chancellors. Who's your Chancellor when you're director of the Garden, just before Heyman.
- 09-00:38:09  
Laetsch: It was Roger Heyns. And before that we had Martin Meyerson, just for six months, January to July 1965.
- 09-00:38:48  
Rubens: And so as Director of the Botanical Garden did you have any interaction with—
- 09-00:38:52  
Laetsch: I had a lot of interaction with Roger Heyns, and I think a lot of it because of one of the committees I was on or chaired or something on the campus. So we had quite a bit of interaction.
- 09-00:39:03  
Rubens: Was he a supporter of the Garden?
- 09-00:39:04  
Laetsch: He was very supportive. He was a very good guy. We had a lot of interaction, actually, when he left the campus and he was the director of the Hewlett Foundation. And I was at the Lawrence Hall of Science at that time.

09-00:39:26

Rubens: What discipline did he come out of?

09-00:39:29

Laetsch: He was a historian, I believe. And he had been at the University of Michigan. He was Vice Chancellor there before he came here. And I know one of the areas that I used to talk with him about after he retired was athletics, since I had athletics as one of my charges when I was Vice Chancellor. He gave the explanation as to how they did well at Michigan even though their athletic department was under the College of Physical Education and they even admitted students through their extension program. That's why they had a good football team. As he said, there was no interaction between the academics and the athletic side of the campus. They were two separate communities.

09-00:40:15

Rubens: Not the model that Berkeley—

09-00:40:16

Laetsch: Not the model that Berkeley had, no. But Roger was a very good guy in many ways. And then I had a lot of interaction with him later on in the Bohemian Club, which we'll talk about later. Oh, the other thing I had in common with Roger is that he smoked cigars and on first meeting with him I found that he smoked Roi-Tan Cigars. Roi-Tans were the cheapest cigar that you could buy in the drugstore, so I brought him some good Cuban cigars, which he duly appreciated. I would always bring him cigars while he was smoking.

09-00:41:05

Rubens: Shall we move to discussion the Lawrence Hall of Science?

09-00:41:09

Laetsch: Sure.

09-00:41:10

Rubens: How is it that you come to be appointed on the advisory committee?

09-00:41:18

Laetsch: Well, I was interested in, again, a lot of aspects of education and one of the things I—

09-00:41:23

Rubens: Of course, this is before you go to the Botanical Garden.

09-00:41:24

Laetsch: Yes. But one of the things I didn't mention was that I think from almost the time that I came here, I had NSF grants for working with high school biology teachers, science teachers. I did that for many years. The NSF had an active program of having institutes in the different areas of science for high school teachers.

09-00:41:55

Rubens:

And these institutes would take place on campus?

09-00:41:56

Laetsch:

On campus and so you would get money from the NSF. One, it paid you a little bit of money, a stipend. If it was for the summer program, it paid the teachers a little bit of money, and then, of course, for supplies. So I got one of these very soon after I came here for—they're called In Service Institutes in Science Education. Pre-service is before you become a teacher. In-service is while you are a teacher. Once a month on Saturdays we would have an all-day program in biology and mainly in plant biology for high school teachers, and that would be a combination of lectures and laboratory work. I used the facilities on campus for that.

09-00:42:49

Rubens:

And who's doing literally the work of finding the teachers and producing the curriculum materials?

09-00:42:55

Laetsch:

Well, I produced all of the curricular material and then we had a group on campus, an office, that was a predecessor for the Lawrence Hall of Science under Harvey White. He had a program that facilitated the interaction with NSF on these institutes. Summer and in-service institutes. In-service was during the school year. So for quite a number of years I ran these institutes, as I say, once a month and had, as a result of that, lots of interaction with high school teachers. And some of those teachers I kept in contact with for years and years. This was, for many of them, their only outside intellectual stimulation. And having been a teacher myself, I would never have been able to keep on day after day, year after year, without something else going on. And, of course, at the university we have sabbaticals for that very purpose. High school teachers don't have that and so they get tired and bored and stuck in the mud, so to speak. Well, these institutes provided them with a real outlet and provided new intellectual stimulation for them. And so many of them were very devoted to that. As I said, I kept in contact with a lot of these people for years after I stopped giving institutes and they would write to me how much they missed that interaction and what it meant to them to have the university so involved in their courses. And it's too bad that we don't continue to do that on a large scale from the university.

As a result of this, I kept in contact with a lot of the things that teachers worry about and are concerned about at the school level and at the same time I was doing a lot of stuff on campus that related to teachers. When Alan Portis, my predecessor at the Lawrence Hall, who was a professor of physics, retired—when he took it he was only going to keep it a couple of years. And since I was an associate director, it made sense for them, I guess, to consider me as a possible candidate. So they went through that business and asked me to be director.

09-00:45:24

Rubens:

So let's just back up a little bit. You start on the advisory committee in 1967.

09-00:45:29

Laetsch:

Something like that. And then I became an associate director in '71.

09-00:45:39

Rubens:

How advanced were the designs for the Lawrence Hall or the concept of what it would be in '67 when you joined the advisory committee.

09-00:45:59

Laetsch:

When Harvey White started the Lawrence Hall—and Harvey White was a professor of physics—he was one of the first people in the country to use TV a lot in instruction, and particularly in laboratory demonstrations. He actually was on TV, a national program—where he did experiments, et cetera, for people teaching physics. So he was pretty well-known for that. I'm not sure whose idea it really was to build the Lawrence Hall of Science. Glenn Seaborg always said it was his idea, but he thought everything was his idea, so I wasn't quite sure how much Harvey was involved. But I suspect Harvey was significantly involved. When they decided to build the Lawrence Hall of Science, it would be funded by the Regents as a center for science education and for working with teachers. So because of his TV show, and the fact that he had been interested in this for a long time, Harvey was made Director. He had some staff on the campus before they built the Lawrence Hall, because it took a couple years to build it.

09-00:47:31

Rubens:

The records at The Bancroft Library go back to '59 when there's first some discussion about this thing. The University was looking for a way to honor Ernest Lawrence.

09-00:47:39

Laetsch:

That's right. They decided the way to honor Lawrence was to have an institution that was devoted to science education in the schools initially. But Harvey also kept the notion of TV for years and in planning the Hall he planned a big TV studio and even the auditorium was set up so that you could do TV and it had a tripartite stage in the front of it. The stage rotated around so you could have TV setups, different kinds of experiments, et cetera, on one, then you could rotate it around and have it all set for the next one. Well, that was never used.

By the time the Hall was built, the country was in the post-Sputnik interest in science education and that gave it a lot of impetus, in addition to wanting to honor Lawrence. The NSF had funded a number of programs around the country, rather sizable ones, on curriculum development in schools. The Hall came along in that flush of interest in working with the schools and in developing curricula and when my predecessor Alan Portis, a professor of physics, became Director, they were really mainly interested in working with schools in developing science curricula. When the Hall was built, there were

things built for the public, so they had a public program from the time the doors opened.

09-00:49:26

Rubens: That was part of its mission.

09-00:49:28

Laetsch: That was part of its mission, right. And that involved everything from having some model laboratories when they could give basically everything from chemistry to instruction for teachers of biology and even to the general public. We had the exhibition hall upstairs where they had a lot of things that you could do related particularly to physical sciences.

09-00:49:57

Rubens: How big was the advisory committee by the time you join it in '67? Roughly.

09-00:50:04

Laetsch: Oh, probably about fifteen. I don't know.

09-00:50:06

Rubens: And how often are you meeting?

09-00:50:07

Laetsch: I don't remember. Must have made a big impression.

09-00:50:13

Rubens: Well, you're doing a lot. You're teaching, you're running the Botanical Garden; you have an active research program all at the same time.

09-00:50:19

Laetsch: A very important person who had been involved with the Hall since it started, and who was also an associate director, was Robert Karplus, and he was a professor of Physics. In the post-Sputnik era he had become very interested in elementary school science education. The National Science Foundation was handing out a lot of money for people to do various curriculum programs with schools. So Bob received a major NSF grant to start the Science Curriculum Improvement Study, S-C-I-S, or "skis" as it is pronounced. This became a national program, and when the Lawrence Hall was built Bob was very much involved. So SCIS became our first big curriculum project at the Lawrence Hall of Science. It had a big staff and, of course, lots and lots of involvement with teachers both locally and nationally. It became a national program and even international program. And that was the initial driving force for curriculum development projects at the Hall, which is what it was primarily doing in an academic sense. That is, aside from the public stuff.

I started two programs. One, the Health Activities Project, and there's a folder in there about that. And so that is still, I think, going on. I started that and then I started a biology program which was called OBIS, Outdoor Biology Instructional Strategies. Well, in fact, both these projects were the result of an interest I'd had for a long time, and some ways still do, and that was to get



science out into the public in a variety of ways. OBIS was started as a program in biology for non-school groups, and particularly nature centers and all kinds of museums that had outdoor programs: scouts, campfire girls, summer camps, all these kinds of things. OBIS became a big program very quickly. It was published by Hubbard Publishing Company, the same company that produced the study guides and equipment that was used outside. And it still is going on. It's a very big program for all kinds of different organizations.

09-00:53:36

Rubens:

Now, this developed while you were Director or before?

09-00:53:38

Laetsch:

Well, I started it before I was Director.

09-00:53:42

Rubens:

Well, that's what I was going to ask. What did it mean to be an associate director? Were there several associates?

09-00:53:46

Laetsch:

Yes. There were four of us. They were Bob Karplus in Physics, myself, there was Leon Henkin, who was in Math and was interested in math education. There was Harry Morrison in Physics.

09-00:54:11

Rubens:

Well, this OBIS sounds like it must have had some kind of, if not connection to, at least the spirit of the Botanical Garden.

09-00:54:18

Laetsch:

We actually developed some of the initial activities at the Garden while I was Director there. As an example, some of the very popular activities developed were with ponds and pond life and that all came out of a pond we had at the Garden. In some ways that pond was the inspiration for at least parts of OBIS.

09-00:54:44

Rubens:

One of the things you and I talked about in planning this session was what was the role of Frank Oppenheimer?

09-00:54:53

Laetsch:

Yes. Frank had nothing to do with anything that we did.

09-00:54:55

Rubens:

He began his study of museums with a Carnegie grant.

09-00:54:58

Laetsch:

That's right. That's quite possible. I remember we met with him when I was an associate director of the Hall and he came over to the Hall and talked about things. Then he started the Exploratorium in San Francisco. He used the philosophy that we had at the Hall, of inquiry. A great buzz word at the time. Inquiry and I hate to—

09-00:55:29

Rubens: Interactive?

09-00:55:30

Laetsch: I hate the term now, hands-on science. So he developed that at the Exploratorium, as well, and did it very well and it was almost all physical science related. But then Frank and I became very well acquainted because we worked together. We were both on the board of the Association of Science and Technology Centers. In fact, we were both founders of ASTC, as it's called, which is now a huge international organization.

09-00:56:01

Rubens: ASTC is chartered in '73. You must have been talking about it the year before. I'm just wondering about your planning.

09-00:56:18

Laetsch: This actually started when Alan Portis was the Director of the Hall, and he went to a planning session for what became ASTC. And I remember him coming back and saying he didn't think it would ever go anywhere. But then I came on board and we had a number of planning meetings, and as you say, it's chartered in '73. We were meeting before then.

09-00:56:57

Rubens: So are there some other museums or science centers that are your models?

09-00:57:02

Laetsch: Well, there were some science centers for a long time, but none were models. The best known one was the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago.

09-00:57:11

Rubens: That came out of a great exhibition at the world's fair of 1893.

09-00:57:15

Laetsch: That's right. And the director of that was a member of the original team. COSI. The museum of science in Columbus, Ohio, and they were part of the original group.

09-00:57:29

Rubens: Minnesota had a—

09-00:57:30

Laetsch: That came a little bit later. But there was the Boston Museum of Science and the director of that was an interesting guy who was a brother of Professor Washburn in Anthropology here on campus. Then there were a couple of other interesting places. OMSI. The Oregon Museum of Science and Industry, in Portland.

09-00:58:03

Rubens: And you give a talk there. Yes.

09-00:58:05

Laetsch:

And so those were the primary folks and we got together and actually formed ASTC, as it was called, Association of Science and Technology Centers. Had a meeting in Southern California. Oh, the California Museum of Science and Industry in Los Angeles was also part of the original group. That's right next to the University of Southern California. It's near the Coliseum. In fact, I think they administered parking for the Coliseum for some time.

09-00:58:45

Rubens:

So how are you categorizing what this organization is?

09-00:58:50

Laetsch:

Well, it was an organization of science centers and science museums. Many new ones were being developed. This grew out of, again, the national concern about doing things in science, in this case for the public, but they also all had interactions with schools. And so it was just part of the national interest and effort in science for the general public.

09-00:59:19

Rubens:

It's like an interest group but I can't think of the word that you use to call this phenomenon. It's not a professional organization. It's a—

09-00:59:28

Laetsch:

Well, in some ways it is. Anyway, for years and years there's been the National Museum Directors Association.

09-00:59:57

Rubens:

I'm going to stop to change the tape.

[End Audio File 9]

Begin Audio File 10 11-05-2010.mp3

10-00:00:00

Rubens:

We were trying to talk about the American Association of Museums.

10-00:00:04

Laetsch:

Right. And I was, for a number of years, on the council of the American Association of Museums.

10-00:00:16

Rubens:

When did you go on?

10-00:00:17

Laetsch:

Oh, it had to be after I became Director of the Lawrence Hall of Science, and I forget the exact date. I was on that for a number of years. The Association of Science and Technology Centers really started off as people who were directors of science museums, et cetera, and they all belonged to the American Association of Museums, but they wanted the Association to be more concerned and interested in programs related to science museums. Well, the

real powers in the American Association of Museums were art museums and history museums and they really weren't interested in science museums.

10-00:01:09

Rubens: These were the more classic—I can't think of the word—all-inclusive or encyclopedic museums.

10-00:01:15

Laetsch: Well or just art museums. And art museums aren't interested in anything but themselves. So it was not a place that we felt very comfortable with because they weren't really interested in what we were trying to do, so as a result we split off and formed the Association of Science and Technology Centers.

10-00:01:38

Rubens: Makes logical sense now but then it was very new.

10-00:01:40

Laetsch: Makes logical sense. And it's grown like topsy, as they say. They have members now all over the world, and they have international conferences and they have been very successful. I get their newsletter, and I find recently they're beginning to question whether or not they have, hit a crest in terms of public interest and not quite sure where they're going from here.

10-00:02:10

Rubens: Really?

10-00:02:11

Laetsch: Well, there's been so many changes now with the internet.

10-00:02:23

Rubens: Then it was such a fertile time in terms of museums, children's museums, science museums, the whole phenomena of interactive experiences. But why did you say you hated the terms hands-on?

10-00:02:34

Laetsch: It's a cliché. It's just an overused cliché. And people have even had versions of it. Rather than hands-on, minds-on. I just think it's sort of silly.

10-00:02:46

Rubens: Okay. But there are starting to be a lot of studies that are being done right in this period, too, of how the public and how children and parents—

10-00:02:53

Laetsch: Well, I know, because we were the first people to do that.

10-00:02:55

Rubens: So mention that.

10-00:02:57

Laetsch: Well, before I do that, I had something I wanted to say about ASTC, just that they became a very big and vigorous organization. And then I was President

of that after a couple of years. I was not the first President. I think I was the third President of ASTC. And during that time, I began to emphasize the need to really authenticate what we were doing and to study what it was that we were doing and the effect of it and whether or not we were making any difference on anything. Out of that interest and then the fact that I had a number of graduate students who came in over the years, we began to actually study what people were doing in museums, not what the administration said they were doing or what the people in museums said they were doing or not what people learn by giving them pre- and post-tests before their visit and after their visit, but actually looking at what people were doing. Basically ethnology.

10-00:04:28

Rubens:

Observation.

10-00:04:30

Laetsch:

That's what we begin to do in a considerable way. I had a number of graduate students whose training had been in animal behavior, and so we adapted a lot of those techniques to studying what people actually do when they are in a museum.

10-00:04:45

Rubens:

So some of it came out of studies of a zoo?

10-00:04:48

Laetsch:

Well, I had one graduate student who did study what people do in a zoo, and he was in the SESAME program. All these people were in the math and science graduate program.

10-00:05:01

Rubens:

There was a Jeffrey Gottfried who literally studied what was taking place at the—

10-00:05:10

Laetsch:

No, he worked on the school visit programs at LHS. To actually see what it was that kids did when they came to a museum or science center. What they did versus what people said they did. He would start by riding on the buses with them beforehand and then going on the buses after they left and seeing what the interactions were and what they thought was interesting.

10-00:05:36

Rubens:

This just hadn't been done? Not at the Smithsonian?

10-00:05:39

Laetsch:

Hadn't been done most anyplace—definitely not at the Smithsonian. There were a few naturalistic observations. There was one person, I'm sure I've cited him at various places, back in the twenties, I think, and he studied what people did in the New York Public Library.

10-00:05:58

Rubens:

There was also a report done on the '39 World's Fair here in San Francisco.

10-00:06:05

Laetsch:

Probably, right.

10-00:06:06

Rubens:

It came out of the Carnegie Institute or someplace in New York, I can't think of it now.

10-00:06:11

Laetsch:

Some of the papers I have on this would refer to some of these studies. But there just had not been very much of this. I took a fair amount of abuse when we started, because it was not considered to be scientific. Because to be scientific all of the people that were taught about evaluation—Bob Karplus, for example, had evaluators on SCIS and what they did was pre-test/post-test stuff. So the whole discipline was based on quantitative measurements of what people learned or didn't learn while they were there. Of course, what we found is that people would say, "Oh, yes, I learned this and that," but if you followed them around you found that they didn't look at any of the things or do any of the things that they said they did.

10-00:07:05

Rubens:

So a lot of these studies are coming out in '79 and '80.

10-00:07:08

Laetsch:

Right. A good example is Marcia Linn, who is still around here. I think she's on the School of Education faculty now. She worked for Bob Karplus initially and she had a PhD in psychology. Anyhow, she was the archetypal pre-test/post-test person and then she got involved with us in one of our projects at the Lawrence Hall of Science and so she changed her tune somewhat. And there were some investigations using free choice experiences. So it had somewhat of an impact on what was going on. These people who were involved who are in universities and are still doing this kind of work. For example, Judy Diamond, who is at the University of Nebraska, and she has her own research center there, and she's still doing naturalistic observations.

10-00:08:18

Rubens:

You co-authored several papers with her.

10-00:08:21

Laetsch:

That's right. And then also up in Oregon State University. John Falk. And he's still very active in this whole area. And he has a number of books on evaluation and free choice learning. And then another person who did his PhD with me is the former Director of the Carnegie Museum of Natural History in Pittsburgh, and he did a lot of work. His thesis was basically on work on groups at the California Academy of Science, and then he came back for a time and was Director of Education at the Cal Academy. Then he went off and finally became Director of the Carnegie Museum in Pittsburgh.

- 10-00:09:19  
Rubens: Now, who are you reporting to you when you became Director?
- 10-00:09:25  
Laetsch: When I was Director of the Lawrence Hall of Science I reported to the Chancellor Al Bowker—most of the time it was Al Bowker.
- 10-00:09:53  
Rubens: Was he a proponent, supporter of LHS?
- 10-00:09:56  
Laetsch: Oh, yes. He was a very good supporter. In particular, he appointed some of the people on the Berkeley Foundation Board that he established by that time to be the representatives in interactions with the Lawrence Hall of Science. So we had a number of people, considerable donors, who were basically assigned to us and who we'd work closely with and they supported the Hall. I worked with them for years after that.
- 10-00:10:32  
Rubens: Are there any names that we particularly should say were big donors?
- 10-00:10:38  
Laetsch: One of the first was Gene Shurtleff. His wife is still alive and lives over in the Towers in San Francisco.
- 10-00:11:02  
Rubens: Now Bowker created the Berkeley Foundation.
- 10-00:11:07  
Laetsch: Yes, it was primarily Al that did the Foundation.
- 10-00:11:17  
Rubens: And the Foundation was for the purpose of raising money for the campus.
- 10-00:11:20  
Laetsch: Support and funding. If he wasn't the actual founder, he was the one that built it up into something and then it really came alive under Mike Heyman.
- 10-00:11:37  
Rubens: I'll be looking at the earlier records of the LHS for next week. Obviously by the time you became director, the building was up.
- 10-00:12:05  
Laetsch: Yes. The building was built, actually, in the last year of Harvey White's tenure and when Alan Portis became Director the Hall had been finished.
- 10-00:12:15  
Rubens: There was a competition for the design?
- 10-00:12:18  
Laetsch: And there's actually an interesting follow-up on that with relation to the Botanical Garden because Anshen & Allen was the architecture firm for the

Hall. They were a good-sized firm in San Francisco. They had actually been involved in the design of the Golden Gate Bridge.

When I was Director of the Botanical Garden, we had two half-time fundraisers at that time for the whole campus. And one of them, Joe Mixer, came to me one day and said that there was a man in Sausalito whom he thought would be a supporter of the Garden. This was Steve Allen, who was the partner of Anshen & Allen. They lived in Sausalito and they had a very nice house, quite an older house, and a very nice garden. The reason for the interaction was he wanted his house and garden to be preserved when he and his wife died. They had no children. We went over to see them several times and it was always very interesting, because he always had a glass of what he said was ice water which was actually gin that he was sipping even early in the morning. We had a fair number of interactions with them, and then when I left the Garden, Bob Ornduff continued it. The Allens gave the house and garden to the Garden, really to the University for the support of the Garden. And there was money to support the gardens and house. One of the concerns of our garden after I left was what would they do with all of this. The donor's idea was that there would be gardening classes and horticulture classes at their place in Sausalito.

10-00:14:35  
Rubens:

Far afield to administer.

10-00:14:37  
Laetsch:

Well, it was far afield to administer and the question was whether it was going to cost them anything. Well, it turns out it's been a very good relationship. The current director of the Garden would attest to that. We were just talking about it recently. And the fact that they do receive money each year from the establishment over there because people have to pay to use the house and garden.

10-00:15:03  
Rubens:

So the University owns this?

10-00:15:04  
Laetsch:

Yes. It's called Tanglewood, and they have all kinds of stuff related to horticulture, et cetera. So that was just a very interesting little add-on that came along.

10-00:15:25  
Rubens:

Is there room in the house for meetings and "state-like" events

10-00:15:26  
Laetsch:

Yes. Oh, yes. A lovely house. And great big garden which is well landscaped.

10-00:15:30  
Rubens:

Never heard of it.



- 10-00:15:31  
Laetsch: Yes. Most people haven't.
- 10-00:15:32  
Rubens: By the way, was there already a newsletter coming out of the Botanical Garden when you were Director?
- 10-00:15:42  
Laetsch: No, we didn't produce a newsletter.
- 10-00:15:49  
Rubens: Now I see that they have one.
- 10-00:15:49  
Laetsch: Oh, yes. Well, Paul has done a very good job.
- 10-00:15:51  
Rubens: And now they have one online, as well. I love the name of that, *Garden Clippings*.
- 10-00:16:03  
Laetsch: Again, there were things that they've done since then which have been very, very good but at that time we had a huge school program and they haven't had anything that large since. We had curriculum development projects, as I said, in the Garden. OBIS got started in the Garden. So there was just a lot of things that we were doing that hadn't been done.
- 10-00:16:26  
Rubens: That had been my original question. How does it kind of blend into the Lawrence Hall?
- 10-00:16:29  
Laetsch: After I left the Hall several staff members worked for the Garden, and some of their educational programs actually came from the Lawrence Hall. They'd been involved with these educational programs at Lawrence Hall.
- 10-00:16:49  
Rubens: Should we just wrap it up?
- 10-00:16:49  
Laetsch: Yes, I think we should probably wrap it up.
- 10-00:16:50  
Rubens: I was wondering, how big a budget did you have? Did you see that budget with the Lawrence Hall going up each year?
- 10-00:16:58  
Laetsch: All of these curriculum development projects were big budget items. It was in the millions. I don't remember what it was.

- 10-00:17:07  
Rubens: And you're pulling in a lot of grants. We talked about the \$100,000 Robert Wood Johnson Foundation—it was probably more than that—which was particularly for the health science.
- 10-00:17:18  
Laetsch: The Health and Activities project. Yes.
- 10-00:17:21  
Rubens: By the time you become Director of the Lawrence Hall of Science, I assume you had time off from teaching.
- 10-00:17:28  
Laetsch: Yes, I had time off at the Lawrence Hall.
- 10-00:17:31  
Rubens: But you were teaching?
- 10-00:17:31  
Laetsch: I continued to teach. Yes, yes.
- 10-00:17:34  
Rubens: The Lawrence Hall then had a lot of social events, too.
- 10-00:17:41  
Laetsch: Oh, yes. Yes.
- 10-00:17:43  
Rubens: It really became a kind of touchstone. So would you say from that position, that gave you a closer relationship to the structure of the University, certainly to the fundraising arms, to development?
- 10-00:17:55  
Laetsch: Well, we didn't have *one* full-time development person at the campus.
- 10-00:17:56  
Rubens: That's what you said. There were two half-time people.
- 10-00:17:57  
Laetsch: Right. That's right.
- 10-00:17:58  
Rubens: Yeah. So you were raising funds.
- 10-00:18:00  
Laetsch: That's right. Oh, yes. Well, I hired the first fundraiser on campus outside of the development office.
- 10-00:18:07  
Rubens: How did that come about?
- 10-00:18:09  
Laetsch: Well, because—

10-00:18:10

Rubens: You needed the money.

10-00:18:12

Laetsch: Well, in fact, all these things are interrelated. Roger Samuelsen, whom I was with this morning at the Berkeley Breakfast Club, was the Director of the Natural Reserve System that I served on for quite a while.

10-00:18:30

Rubens: Which we talked about last week. Right.

10-00:18:31

Laetsch: He was at Cal as an undergraduate and then received a law degree Boalt Hall. And he hired a fundraiser for the Natural Reserve System. And then I guess their money ran out for that, so he recommended a fundraiser, Bill Davis, for me at the Lawrence Hall of Science because I guess I had made noise that we needed to have a full-time fundraiser for the Hall itself in addition to all these development projects. So he recommended Bill, and we got on well and I hired him. He was the first fundraiser on campus outside of the development office.

10-00:19:13

Rubens: Which you said only two half-time?

10-00:19:15

Laetsch: They had a couple of half-time people, right. In fact, I had to get permission from the Chancellor, from Al Bowker, to do that. And he basically said, "Well, I guess that's all right and maybe you can do something." Bill came on to the Lawrence Hall as a fundraiser and we raised quite a bit of money over time.

10-00:19:38

Rubens: Was he a grant writer as well?

10-00:19:40

Laetsch: He wrote some grant applications to charitable foundations, yes, but he wasn't a scientist but he was good at all of the facilitation things and, of course, he was great with donors. So the whole fundraising apparatus for the Hall was built up at that time. He went to Southern California. Lost his wife and then died as well. Anyway, it's interesting. All these things interact. Like the fact that I was involved with the Natural Reserve System. And the co-chair of the Mark Twain Luncheon Club Board, now, along with me, is Roger Samuelsen.

10-00:20:20

Rubens: This is what I like about oral history, it's easy to bring up a variety of times and domains that illustrate the kind of networking that takes place.

10-00:20:32

Laetsch:

And, of course, then Roger was chair of the Campaign for the Class of 1956, their fifty-year campaign. So they raised over a million dollars for the Mark Twain Papers Project. Did I tell you how that started?

10-00:20:48

Rubens:

Yes, I think we discussed it earlier, but it's useful to reiterate.

10-00:20:48

Laetsch:

Because Roger and I were on this fundraising board for the College of Natural Resources for years and he had been in the College of Agriculture when he was a student. That was before the College of Natural Resources, so we were at an event and we're having cocktails, and he said his class was contemplating what its gift should be. And so Class of 1956 the gift came about from our discussions.

10-00:21:39

Rubens:

Great stories, here, Mac. We'll stop for today. Thank you so much.

Interview #6 November 9, 2010  
Begin Audio File 11 11-09-2010.mp3

11-00:00:00

Rubens: This is interview six with Mac Laetsch. It's the 9<sup>th</sup> of November 2010, and we're talking about the Lawrence Hall of Science. I'm interested filling in a little more about the structure and status of the Lawrence Hall in the years '69 to '72, just before you become Director. We talked about why you were well-suited for the job, why Portis wanted you. I never asked where advisory meetings took place. At LHS?

11-00:02:03

Laetsch: Yes, because the Hall was built at that time. Alan Portis was the first person there as a director. Harvey White was there for about a year after the Hall was built. When we started off, the big question was what do you do with this place, because it had been built, a lot of it, for public activities of various kinds. They had this big auditorium and they would have lectures and they wanted movies and demonstrations and they wanted to produce TV programs. Pretty much what Harvey White had done earlier when he had his TV program.

11-00:02:36

Rubens: Was the exhibit hall already finished?

11-00:02:40

Laetsch: Yes. The exhibit halls were already done, and they mainly had things connected with physics. However, one of the things that they did build were a couple of laboratories which were to be the model laboratories for teaching kids and for teaching teachers. On the staff at that time were a former biology teacher, a former physics teacher, and a former chemistry teacher well-known in the area. They developed various programs for high school and elementary school kids. That going in the Hall itself, but it was really up to Portis and the rest of us to decide what the Lawrence Hall was going to be, because it was no longer going to be what they originally built it for. And, of course, the building was a problem from day one.

11-00:03:41

Rubens: Oh, how come?

11-00:03:41

Laetsch: Well, it leaked because of all of those odd roofs that they had, et cetera. Lots of concrete.

11-00:03:47

Rubens: Architecturally it was a modernist structure.

11-00:03:51

Laetsch: That's right. And they had this big plaza in the front with offices and other rooms underneath the plaza. Well, concrete ceilings leak and so—

11-00:04:00

Rubens: And was anyone concerned about the electromagnet being outside the—

11-00:04:04

Laetsch: No. No, no. That was one of the first magnets that was used when they were doing the original research on the atom. So those magnets were involved in the first atom smashers.

11-00:04:29

Rubens: I always wondered if one had to worry about radioactivity or—

11-00:04:31

Laetsch: Oh, no. There's none of that. Actually, the first little cyclotron was on exhibit up at the Hall and it's a little device about this big, about six inches. But no, those were all remnants of some of the early work on atomic energy.

11-00:04:49

Rubens: I interrupted you. So the building leaked.

11-00:04:51

Laetsch: The building leaked and the building was never really very functional. We made it function, but it was in a sense making do with something that if it had been designed right in the first place would have saved a lot of energy. The other problem with the Lawrence Hall of Science was it's on top of a mountain and yet it was to be open for the public. You had a narrow road that people didn't know where it was and then you'd get up there and initially there was not very much parking. But the main problem was it was just hard to get to and people didn't know where it was. It was not where you would put a large facility where you wanted a large public to come to. And that's always been a problem with it. It's even more now because parking's even more of a difficulty. So there are a lot of inadequacies. Then, again, they built their exhibits so that they were relatively static. Not much you could do with them, but we made do, and we were able to bring in temporary exhibits of various kinds over time.

But going back to when we got started, the first real involvement I had with the Hall from the standpoint of curriculum development was the outdoor biology instructional strategies project. And that was actually started with the idea that we would work in the Botanical Garden but then a little later on we developed things at the Hall and, of course, we worked with teachers, et cetera a good deal. But that's how I really got, first of all, involved in curriculum development on a wider scale.

11-00:06:44

Rubens: And that's as an associate director.

11-00:06:47

Laetsch: As an associate director, yes. And simultaneously Director of the Botanical Garden.

11-00:06:51  
Rubens: Still teaching and still running your own lab at the Life Sciences Building on campus.

11-00:06:56  
Laetsch: That's correct.

11-00:07:16  
Rubens: To be an associate director, are people being lined up to be Director?

11-00:07:26  
Laetsch: Not necessarily. But when Alan Portis, who only intended to be there for a couple of years, and then when he—

11-00:07:33  
Rubens: Because he was—

11-00:07:34  
Laetsch: Well, he was a professor of physics and he wanted to work on it and get it started but that wasn't where his long-term basic interests were. And so he left after, what, three years, I think. And then, of course, they had to select a director. For whatever reason, they asked me to take it over.

11-00:07:53  
Rubens: So who literally does it? Is it the advisory board? Is it the Chancellor?

11-00:07:57  
Laetsch: No, it's the Chancellor's Office.

11-00:07:58  
Rubens: And you must have been aware that Portis was leaving. Did you ever think that you would—?

11-00:08:06  
Laetsch: I don't think I ever thought about it very much.

11-00:08:10  
Rubens: Right. Well, because you were Director of the Garden.

11-00:08:12  
Laetsch: Yes, the Garden and I had plenty of things to do, so I didn't worry about that.

11-00:08:13  
Rubens: So Bowker comes to you and says—

11-00:08:16  
Laetsch: Well, it was actually his Vice Chancellor, Mark Christensen, who was in charge of that search. They had a committee, I guess, as usual, and they looked at various people and asked me if I would do it.

11-00:08:29

Rubens:

What was the status of the Lawrence Hall of Science in '72? It seems that it had gone through several periods.

11-00:08:40

Laetsch:

Well, it had always been out of the Chancellor's Office, and so its status was always a little murky because it didn't really fit in the established order of the campus, you might say, and it wasn't part of the School of Education, which was a good thing.

11-00:09:04

Rubens:

Because?

11-00:09:05

Laetsch:

Well, because the rest of the campus would not have paid very much attention to it, unfortunately, although we had some faculty from the School of Education faculty who were very much involved with us at the Hall. They were very good. But most of what the School of Education was interested in didn't fit very well. Plus the fact that we wanted to have people from the sciences involved, which we did from the very beginning.

11-00:09:56

Rubens:

What role did Bob Content play?

11-00:09:59

Laetsch:

Well, Bob was an administrator, and he was the Assistant Director. He took care of personnel and finances and all that stuff. I was involved but that was his main role.

11-00:10:39

Rubens:

So how long did you have him?

11-00:10:57

Laetsch:

Bob Content left after three or four years and I asked George Moynihan to become the Assistant Director. George had been with SCIS, and Bob Karplus since it began. I had worked a lot with him, because he was in the building, and he knew what was going on. I asked him to take it over, which he did and did a great job. He went on to become Director of the Pacific Science Center in Seattle for many years. He retired a few years ago. He was very successful there and played a large role nationally in science center activities. Other people from the Hall went up to the Science Center in Seattle with George. We had people who went to some other places, as well, but we really kind of colonized the Pacific Science Center in Seattle.

11-00:12:08

Rubens:

When you become Director in '72, are you feeling pretty secure about your funding?



11-00:12:16

Laetsch:

Yes. The funding was, of course, built in originally, and Regents' funding provided the base funding. We had some money from the Chancellor's Office and, of course, much of it was curriculum development projects of various kinds. We also charged admission, charged admission for school visits, sold food and had a very successful store.

11-00:12:32

Rubens:

I went through LHS records, up to 1970— The Bancroft Library has no files past that date—there's some concern expressed by the staff; that the staff is concerned about how many teachers are going to be there. I think originally there were nine teachers, and then they were bringing in six fellows.

11-00:12:53

Laetsch:

Well, originally, you see, they were going to have model courses up there of various kinds. But that never really worked out. So by the time I got there, we had teacher institutes because those were supported by the National Science Foundation. We had kids who came in every day and they were given programs and had activities in the laboratories. So it was both a combined teacher training program and also a public center for kids to do science.

11-00:13:33

Rubens:

Did you have a vision when you came in as director of directions you wanted the Hall to go?

11-00:13:44

Laetsch:

Well, I'm always a little suspicious of visions. And I'm not sure I had a vision. I think I had a pretty good idea of the things we ought to be doing. We had lots of stuff actually going at the time, and then that expanded. As I mentioned, the Outdoor Biology Instructional Strategies Program, which is now a very large program in this country and many manifestations of it in other places in the world. Then we started the Health Activities Project that I had mentioned.

11-00:14:13

Rubens:

Say a little bit more about that because I don't think we covered that in depth.

11-00:14:15

Laetsch:

Let me go back a little bit. The oldest program, OBIS, was for non-school groups and that's where it was kind of revolutionary, because it was the first National Science Foundation grant of any significance that was not for schools. These were for community groups, youth organizations, various kinds of museums, little museums around the country, of which there are a great many. Children's museums, but not schools. Some of the things were used in schools but it was primarily for a non-school program. So this really broke new territory for the National Science Foundation. As I said, this became national in scope. Wadsworth published the material and it's used all over the country and even other countries.

Then we started the Health Activities Project because I thought that giving people an opportunity to explore their own bodies would be very interesting to them and a way for them to learn science in a very personal way. We developed many such activities. The project had some very good people. One was Herbert Thier, T-H-I-E-R, who had been the Associate Director of the Science Curriculum Improvement Study with Bob Karplus. He worked both with OBIS and with the Health Activities Project. We hired some very good people, and all these programs had to be tested, so we tested them all around the country and had quite a structure say, for testing our activities where they would be used. We had training programs at the Hall. The Health Activity Project, or HAP, as it became known, became used all around the country in schools, and by other science centers, all kinds of youth organizations, small museums.

11-00:16:46

Rubens:

You would be sending people to these different science programs.

11-00:16:49

Laetsch:

Yes, we would have people who would go out, or we would hold the equivalent of institutes where people could come to the Hall and be trained.

11-00:16:57

Rubens:

Did you work with anybody in the School of Education?

11-00:17:00

Laetsch:

Yes. There were two people there we worked with a lot. The primary one was Larry Lowery, Lawrence Lowery, and he had been a very experienced teacher, so he knew classrooms, he knew teachers, et cetera. He was very much involved with the Hall in developing things and adapting them and involved with the teachers. He is still involved with the Hall and has a program developing science programs for schools. That particular program, I think Encyclopedia Britannica sponsored, it's widely used.

11-00:17:57

Rubens:

And the other person at the School of Ed? You said there were two of them.

11-00:18:00

Laetsch:

That was David Miller who was involved with the LHS for a period of time. And he also did some nice things but he died young. But Larry was the primary person from the School of Ed that worked with us.

11-00:18:10

Rubens:

Now, one of the original missions of the Lawrence Hall of Science was to connect research on the campus in different departments to the public. Did that work well? Was that one of the foci that remained?

11-00:18:26

Laetsch:

Well, we had faculty lectures, and we'd bring some faculty in contact with teachers, but that was not a major activity, because research on the campus, an awful lot of it, was not something that you could work directly with kids on

very well or even directly with teachers. We had public lectures all the time from people on campus. But that wasn't our main focus by any means.

11-00:19:05

Rubens: So in those eight years—that's a long period of time.

11-00:19:09

Laetsch: We had an awful lot of interaction with people teaching science on campus. And I think in some of this material there is a description of a major project supported by the National Science Foundation with a bunch of departments and that was basically administered through the Hall. I think I was a principal investigator of that.

11-00:19:32

Rubens: Oh. Is that the Anatomy of Student Investigation?

11-00:19:36

Laetsch: No, no. That's another one. We'll have to dig it out.

11-00:19:39

Rubens: Okay. I don't think I have that. There's Communicating Science to the Public. That's the CEBA Foundation.

11-00:19:46

Laetsch: No, this is another one. We mentioned SABLE which was one of these that was used on campus, for science on campus. But there was another major project that I'll have to dig out. And that went on for quite a few years.

11-00:20:02

Rubens: SABLE was Systematic Approaches to Biological Laboratory Explorations. That was a national program that focused on developing materials. So you had been working with that in the—

11-00:20:14

Laetsch: Yes. Well, I think that was ours.

11-00:20:16

Rubens: You think through the Lawrence Hall of Science?

11-00:20:21

Laetsch: Yes.

11-00:20:22

Rubens: But also applicable to your biology course.

11-00:20:26

Laetsch: Well, it was all done on courses on campus. It was just administered through the Hall. Physics 1. I think, and Chemistry was involved and then Engineering was involved. Dick White in Electrical Engineering was very much involved with us. He developed, along with some other courses on campus, an audio tutorial course where people were given tutorials by a tape that they could

explore and do things in their course. But their course was self-taught but had student discussion groups.

11-00:21:14

Rubens: So what is your relationship to the campus administration and to the system-wide administration?

11-00:21:22

Laetsch: Well, when I was Director of the Hall I reported directly to the Chancellor's Office.

11-00:21:25

Rubens: And so do you meet with him? Is there a—

11-00:21:28

Laetsch: Well, I met with his Vice Chancellor. It was Mark Christensen and then Mike Heyman.

11-00:21:30

Rubens: There's the Deans Council. Is there any council that's—

11-00:21:34

Laetsch: No, no. It was direct report to the Chancellor's Office.

11-00:21:39

Rubens: And we were trying to explore a little bit the Regents. Did they have a specific interest in the—Pauley [Regent Edwin] had sat on the advisory council.

11-00:21:48

Laetsch: They were out of it by that time. Even John Lawrence, the younger brother of E.O. Lawrence, who was a physician and actually had a big program in our Student Health Service where he was looking at various aspects of radiation. He was around, but he didn't involve himself much with the Hall. We had a number of meetings but he wasn't really very actively involved. I always had the sense that his brother's fame was a problem for him.

11-00:22:22

Rubens: So you had a lot of autonomy then?

11-00:22:25

Laetsch: Yes. We were very autonomous.

11-00:22:28

Rubens: And is this a period of growth? '72 to '80? You're talking about the curriculum development?

11-00:22:33

Laetsch: In terms of our budget and programs. Oh, yes.

11-00:22:36

Rubens: You had a dedicated fundraiser.

- 11-00:22:38  
Laetsch: We had a fundraiser and we kept getting new projects and programs?
- 11-00:22:42  
Rubens: What about you making connection with industry in the Bay Area?
- 11-00:22:48  
Laetsch: That was never our focus.
- 11-00:22:51  
Rubens: There was a representative of Bechtel who had sat on the original—
- 11-00:22:55  
Laetsch: Yes, I know. But that was all at a time when they didn't know what they wanted to do, so they took a vacuum sweeper out and swept up all these guys and brought them in and thought that that would give some status, which it might have, but they never had any impact on what was going to happen.
- 11-00:23:11  
Rubens: When did the Equals Program start? Was that after your tenure?
- 11-00:23:14  
Laetsch: No. That was while I was at the Lawrence Hall. I hired Nancy Kreinberg.
- 11-00:23:17  
Rubens: Oh, talk about that a little. That was a really innovative program and had national resonance.
- 11-00:23:25  
Laetsch: That's right. Well, it did.
- 11-00:23:27  
Rubens: Equals. Did it stand for something? They were trying to make women equal to men in science.
- 11-00:23:32  
Laetsch: That's right. And I don't know if that was an acronym. It must have been an acronym but who knows. In those days acronyms were like fruit on the trees.
- 11-00:23:43  
Rubens: Just as grants were, right?
- 11-00:23:44  
Laetsch: That's right.
- 11-00:23:44  
Rubens: There was a popular joke phrase, while you're up, get me a grant.
- 11-00:23:46  
Laetsch: I think Nancy came to the Hall with the idea of starting a program for women. And she basically started from almost scratch and then we got funding.

11-00:24:06

Rubens: What was her background?

11-00:24:08

Laetsch: I think she had been in media of some kind but I don't really remember.

11-00:24:13

Rubens: Not a scientist?

11-00:24:14

Laetsch: No, she was not a scientist. But she had this idea of doing science for women, young women, because they didn't do as well as boys in those days in science courses.

11-00:24:33

Rubens: Well, during the seventies with the Title Nine of the—

11-00:24:38

Laetsch: Well, you could see this on our campus. The science majors were predominantly men. Engineering was basically all men. Mathematics was all men. In fact, the Director of Education for the National Science Foundation for a time, while I was at the Hall, and he was a professor of math at UCLA and I guess a good mathematician. Here he was director of math and development of mathematics materials for schools, et cetera, at the National Science Foundation and he told me point blank that women couldn't do math. So this was a very common kind of thing.

11-00:25:25

Rubens: And it's persistent with Larry Summers saying the same thing at Harvard when he was President there.

11-00:25:29

Laetsch: Yes, so Nancy started that program to get young women involved in math, and it turned out to be very successful.

11-00:25:38

Rubens: So she came to you. She had this idea. You said, "Let's do it."

11-00:25:41

Laetsch: Yes. That was my remembrance of it. And that was very successful, I think, and it continued on and I don't think it's functioning any longer. Probably doesn't need to function so much any longer because there's been enormous change. Just like the number of women going into science and universities, is now equal to or exceeds men now. I think the statistics are still not as many women as men but it's improved enormously over the years and will improve more. So I suspect that that program is something that did a very good job and may be a victim of its own success in terms of continuing on.

11-00:26:30

Rubens:

Are there any other programs that came to fruition under your tenure? While you're thinking about that, let me ask who were your associate directors and whom did you meet with regularly?

11-00:27:00

Laetsch:

Well, I think some of the same ones. Karplus and I think Henkin and Harry Morrison while he was still around. I met with the programs all the time, and each program had a director and I would meet with them and sometimes I would meet with the staffs of the programs. It was a full-time job.

11-00:27:32

Rubens:

So this is not a period of cut backs? You're not having to lay people off or deal with cut backs?

11-00:27:36

Laetsch:

No, this was a period of growth. It was a period of cut backs on the campus.

11-00:28:01

Rubens:

Yes, in 1967. And then under Jerry Brown, who comes in '75.

11-00:28:04

Laetsch:

Yes. And he wasn't very kind to us either. But the first real cuts were Reagan's cuts. But those are nothing compared to what we have now.

11-00:28:14

Rubens:

But didn't seem to really affect the Lawrence Hall of Science because it had its own—

11-00:28:17

Laetsch:

No, we had our own base and they couldn't touch that. And then we were helped in various ways by the campus and the Chancellor's Office. But most of it was external grants and fees that we charged. For example, the school groups that came in would pay. Even our little store we did very well.

11-00:28:44

Rubens:

Exactly the question I was going to ask. Was there already a store when you—

11-00:28:48

Laetsch:

No, no, no. I started that.

11-00:28:49

Rubens:

It was a brilliant store. It just had wonderful imaginative—

11-00:28:54

Laetsch:

That's right. And it did very well.

11-00:28:55

Rubens:

Where did that idea come from? Don Fisher loaned a marketing person from The Gap to enhance the store at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

11-00:28:57

Laetsch:

Well, if you have a museum, you have to have a store. After all, stores are very much a part of fundraising in every museum. Diane Arroyo. Was the first person to run the store? Barbara Ando would probably remember this; she's whom you just talked with about getting the post-1970 records of LHS to The Bancroft. George Moynihan was very much involved with that—I mentioned he was the Assistant Director—because he had a marketing background. It did very, very well. But you were talking about art museums in stores. One of the reasons for art museums is to have stores and restaurants, and for many people, that's all they do. They go to the store and the restaurant and then have parties.

11-00:30:27

Rubens:

Well, that became one of the ways of bringing in money, wasn't it? You had space at the Lawrence Hall that you rented out for birthday parties or other celebrations.

11-00:30:37

Laetsch:

Yes, we rented out space.

11-00:30:39

Rubens:

And was there a cafeteria?

11-00:30:41

Laetsch:

Yes, yes. We started a cafeteria. And that did well. Oh, we also had the campus radio station with us for quite a while. And it was a problem all the time.

11-00:31:06

Rubens:

How come?

11-00:31:08

Laetsch:

Oh, because the people there would come in at odd hours and they didn't pay attention to how they should behave. They tended to be a little flaky anyhow, so it was a constant problem.

11-00:31:23

Rubens:

Now, what about a communications network? Did you have a newsletter? That's what I was looking for in the Bancroft records.

11-00:31:30

Laetsch:

Yes, we did have publications and I can't remember exactly now but I'm sure in some of my files I—

11-00:31:42

Rubens:

Why don't we take a second and stop this and we'll make a note about records to find. Mac, tell me a little bit more about ASTC, about what you did with it and how it operated.

11-00:31:55

Laetsch:

Well, ASTC, Association of Science and Technology Centers, a national organization that had actually started up before I became Director of the Hall.



Some of this will repeat our discussion of ASTC in earlier interview. I think Alan Portis came to their first meeting and then I came on right after that and was then put on their board.

We founded the Association of Science and Technology Centers. And these were people from museums, science museums from around the country. And then we were able to get some funding, but also each organization contributed monies and so we were able to hire a director right away. And we had meetings during the year of various kinds. And, again, this was an organization that originally had its discussion about starting it within the, American Association of Museums. I had mentioned this earlier. They weren't that interested, so we went off and founded our own. We had a couple of national meetings a year and that was very important in terms of this building up collaboration and communication with people interested in this area. I became President. I think I was the third president. I forget if it was for two years. But anyhow, I was President for a time. We started right away having national meetings every year and then we had regional meetings.

11-00:34:00

Rubens:

Did you have a newsletter that went out?

11-00:34:02

Laetsch:

There was a newsletter, the ASTC newsletter. I must have some copies around somewhere. And then it also went international. Maybe it's another topic, but I was sent over by the National Science Foundation to India in 1975. Because they had started some science museums in India. In fact, they had some that had been there for quite a while. And they wanted to do more things and they had a very entrepreneurial director of the national organization. So I went over and visited the museums that were there. Oh, golly, it was quite a number of weeks. And then—

11-00:35:00

Rubens:

Did Sita go with you?

11-00:35:02

Laetsch:

On that trip she didn't. No. Her brother got married in Bombay right after that, we met in Bombay. Sita didn't go with me around to all the science centers. Those visits could be quite tedious because they work you seven days a week. They really put you through the grind. I had finally to say, "No, I'm not going to do anything today. I'm too tired."

11-00:35:36

Rubens:

So were you pulling these people into ASTC?

11-00:35:39

Laetsch:

Well, they were forming their own organization but, right from the beginning, they had a lot of interaction with ASTC. Now, of course, ASTC is international.

11-00:35:50

Rubens:

Forty-five countries their website says. Six hundred members.

11-00:35:53

Laetsch:

That's correct. And, of course, many of these places in India are members of ASTC as well as their own organization. We had people from India coming over from their museums and this was supported by various funding agencies to spend time in our science centers to find out what was going on and how they could develop programs.

11-00:36:24

Rubens:

I think we mentioned off camera that there was a program at the Lawrence Hall of Science of Indian visitors.

11-00:36:30

Laetsch:

Yeah, that was earlier. That was before ASTC. But we had a lot of people from India who came over through an NSF program with India. They adapted a lot of what we did over there. But they weren't the only ones. A big science center was started in Singapore and that was in the late seventies, I believe. I think I might have mentioned that Anshen and Allen, the architects who built the Lawrence Hall of Science, were also the architects for their building. They copied features of the Hall in that building, as architects always do. I think they did a better job, though, over there. But a very impressive building and program. Then one of our staff members at the Hall who had been in charge of some of our programs in the physical sciences for schools, et cetera, he was asked to be the Director. He spent a good part of the year as Director of the Singapore Science Center, and adapted many of our programs to the Singapore Science Center. And then I made a number of visits over there. They are now a very big well-known organization.

11-00:38:09

Rubens:

When did you start visiting them?

11-00:38:10

Laetsch:

Well, my first time there was when they were building it. They were just getting started. So that must have been the late seventies. I was over there another time, in the 1980s. But that was a very nice example of how we were missionaries. Also, they developed a science center in Kuala Lumpur and I went over and consulted on that, as well. Oh, and then Hong Kong, they built a science center. I went over and spent some time with them and then I have a copy of a speech I made there. Here's the Hong Kong report. And I think this was when I went over and gave them a talk in 1991. They brought me over for the opening of the science center in 1991 after I'd actually retired. And then I traveled around several times in India with science centers. We had people coming over from there, and then I also was involved with them in Japan, as well. So that was a time when everybody was building science centers. Many of them, of course, utilized various features of the Lawrence Hall.

11-00:39:39

Rubens:

So there seems to me a sort of contradiction in a certain sense. There's this great flowering of science curriculum, science centers, child-oriented museums. And then in '83, *A Nation at Risk*.

11-00:40:02

Laetsch:

Well, that had to do only with schools.

11-00:40:02

Rubens:

Seaborg lends his voice, he wrote about crisis in education in the Reagan era.

11-00:40:05

Laetsch:

Yes. Well, that was Seaborg and our former President of the University, David Gardner. But that was all about school education, which they were talking about.

11-00:40:17

Rubens:

But it seemed to me that that prompted a lot of writing, especially on your part, to show how successful science centers were—and science education.

11-00:40:24

Laetsch:

Well, as you see in some of these articles that I've written, that they all have pretty much the same message. You have to know who the learner is and have to meet the learner on their terms to a certain extent and do things with them that they find interesting. So it's a fairly simple message. But as I stated in this one article—I think it's the one that you just had there, it's my letter to the London museum, about what museums don't do. And, of course, along with that is what schools don't do.

11-00:41:19

Rubens:

I'm looking at a conference paper that you gave at a CEBA Foundation conference and then literally later is published in a John Wiley book called *Communicating Science to the Public*. What you're doing is challenging the primary claims that were commonly made for scientific literacy.

11-00:41:50

Laetsch:

They're all utilitarian. Yes. They're all utilitarian. It makes us richer. It makes people richer. It makes people understand what they have to understand to run the world, et cetera. So they're all utilitarian motives. And I think what I said is something quite different.

11-00:42:06

Rubens:

Yes. You said that generic literacy is the goal of scientific education or scientific literacy. Also to fulfill the natural curiosity of human beings—that it's a natural state to be curious. You also write that science education contributes to the appreciation and understanding of one's surroundings. There's an aesthetic satisfaction, as well as an intellectually satisfying component to what this generic literacy is.

11-00:42:45

Laetsch:

It's basically the difference between the business person and the humanist.

11-00:42:51

Rubens:

You're saying that scientific education is a humanistic enterprise. And there's a cultural literacy that's required for scientific education, for scientific literacy. And there's always a crisis of education. Is that what you said?

11-00:43:12

Laetsch:

That's right.

11-00:43:13

Rubens:

It's just like a migration of cranes. You can just count on it coming?

11-00:43:13

Laetsch:

That's right. You can count on it. Every few years you will have the drums beating that we must revise things and that we have a real problem, et cetera. What they miss is that there's always a bit of a problem, and it's something that you just have to keep going on. But the idea that there's suddenly a great crisis, well—

11-00:43:35

Rubens:

Why does Glenn Seaborg get into that? As head of the AEC?

11-00:43:43

Laetsch:

Yes, as head of the AEC. Well, he was a Nobel Laureate. That's one thing. If you have a Nobel Prize, that opens all kinds of doors, whether the doors should be opened or not. But that happens if you have a Nobel Prize. Then he went off to head the AEC for years and then came back.

I think I mentioned at one point Glenn actually reported to me for a while when he was Director of the Lawrence Hall of Science for a couple of years. The Hall reported to me. So when I asked Glenn if he would take that job and he said, "But then I'll report to you," and I said, "That's right." He says, "But do you realize I've never reported to anybody but the President of the University and the President of the United States." I said, "Well, Glenn, there's always a first time for things and I think we'll get along fine." And we did.

But Glenn never really knew very much about what was going on in science education. It wasn't his field. The person who really developed that report was our former President of UC, David Gardner. Before he was President of the University, came from Utah. And so it was Gardner I think got Glenn involved because Glenn had the name. Gardner had a very minor academic reputation. And so they teamed up and said that the nation was at risk, it became the title of their study.

Gardner was the primary push on that. And they said that schools are in great difficulty and that we must do something; otherwise the nation's at risk. It

cannot educate a competitive work force. That is something that you read in the newspapers almost every day. And maybe some of it is right. But it would be nice if these people would actually keep working on the problem. In fact, one can say *A Nation at Risk* might have been one of the reasons that he became President of the University of California.

11-00:46:14

Rubens:

All right. Well, to be resumed next time.

11-00:47:16

Laetsch:

Okay, fine.

Interview #7 November 24, 2010  
 Begin Audio File 12 11-24-2010.mp3

[Significant editing to this portion of the interview may have caused incongruities in the audio recording and the transcript.]

12-00:00:00

Rubens: Today is the 24<sup>th</sup> of November. We're on our seventh interview, and I want to ask you about your textbook, *Plants: Basic Concepts in Botany*, published by Little, Brown in 1979. You had said when we talked about your two anthologies earlier, that Little, Brown had been after you to write a text.

12-00:00:23

Laetsch: And several other publishers, as well.

12-00:00:27

Rubens: Oh, is there no question but that you would go with Little, Brown?

12-00:00:29

Laetsch: Well, I had a relationship with them because of the other two books and I knew that they were pretty good to work with and I knew the people. I also got a nice advance. Which I would have gotten with other people but I'd already established a relationship with them.

12-00:00:50

Rubens: Sure. Or maybe you let them know that other people were interested in you.

12-00:00:53

Laetsch: Oh, of course. Well, they knew.

12-00:00:54

Rubens: I'd like to know what your vision of the textbook was and how it sold. Would you call that an administrative leave in '76?

12-00:01:10

Laetsch: No, it was a sabbatical.

12-00:01:24

Rubens: Who took over at the Lawrence Hall?

12-00:01:25

Laetsch: It was Bob Karplus. He was an associate director and was much involved in the Lawrence Hall of Science because he directed one of the major curriculum development projects. And he became Acting Director for the time that I was out.

12-00:01:44

Rubens: Your records suggest you were gone about six months.

12-00:01:45

Laetsch: Yes, it was about that. And, of course, I told him that he shouldn't do anything.

12-00:01:50

Rubens: Because?

12-00:01:52

Laetsch: It's the usual thing. When you're in residence, it means that things will always come to you. It's a mistake to take a sabbatical in residence, because stuff will always come to you, and stuff did. And also the fact that we had lots of things that were going on. I was coming back in six months. It just made no sense for him to have any major new initiatives while I was gone. And by and large he didn't, so it worked out well.

12-00:02:20

Rubens: So tell me a little bit about the writing of the text. Had you mapped it out before?

12-00:02:24

Laetsch: Oh, yes. I had had a pretty good idea what I wanted to do and the main thrust, and something that made it different from almost any other elementary science text was that I wrote it so that it could be used by almost anyone. In other words, it didn't have to be used by college students. I thought it would be of interest to people who just wanted to know more about plants. And, hence, we called it plants rather than a college botany text. And I wanted it to be used both by courses for majors and non-majors because the non-major market, of course, is much larger than the pure botany market. And also by biology classes, et cetera. So that's what I was interested in. And particularly, I wanted people who had any interest in plants to read it and get some interest in plants. And I think from what I gather, both by reviews and by people talking about it, that that more or less succeeded. There were a number of people who wanted to publish it abroad, and I'm not sure we ever followed through. It was probably my fault. But there were colleagues in Germany and Japan who wanted to publish it. I don't think I ever did that because I was very busy on other things and just didn't follow through. But it could have been published in other countries.

12-00:03:47

Rubens: How long did it stay in print?

12-00:03:50

Laetsch: Oh, quite a while. I don't remember exactly.

12-00:03:54

Rubens: And did you overcome your moral inhibition and use it in a course?

12-00:03:57

Laetsch: No, I never used it in one of my courses.

12-00:04:05

Rubens: We talked in a previous interview about your moral view on that. I found the sections on Darwin and on supermarket taxonomy, quite innovative and new. Were they?

12-00:04:24

Laetsch:

Yes, it still would be because a lot of what I wanted to do was based on my experience in teaching and wanting to do something fundamental to get students interested but what is often ignored is to start with the familiar and go to the unfamiliar. As you'll see, I started with things that people knew about or had some interest in and then go from that down to the specific plant level and then down to the cell level, et cetera. So that was a basic way in which it's different from any other elementary text, whether biology or botany. Because they all follow the standard course outline, which is you start at the most abstract and go on up and finally you might get to the whole plants and communities and then into ecosystems. Well, that's just not the way in which students learn. If you want to get people's interests, you start with something they know about. And, again, a lot of people outside the university, colleges, read it and some people bought it just to read it.

12-00:05:40

Rubens:

I went through your file and I found some wonderful letters commending the book to the publisher.

12-00:05:48

Laetsch:

So that was what it was all about. It sold reasonably well and I forget how many years it went. But textbooks only go for a couple of years. A lot of textbooks then have to go through another edition and they have new editions just so the used book market doesn't overcome their new books. And even though they might not change very much, they change a little bit, and then they say you have to have the most recent edition. That's a scam, a major scam. So I never wrote a new edition. One, I didn't have time to and probably didn't really need to. If I redid it now, then I would have to do revisions. In fact, later on after I retired, I had some interest by people in working with me to produce an up-to-date book, up-to-date from the standpoint of the cell biology and the chemistry and so forth, but I just never was able to do that.

12-00:06:48

Rubens:

I'm looking at some letters in a file of yours from professors and students from other universities. One is saying how much they like the supermarket taxonomy and this one's saying, "I like its approach," meaning the text, "particularly the emphasis on aspects of economic botany."

12-00:07:08

Laetsch:

Yes. And one of the reasons that, after a time it sort of was a little bit passé is that botany courses around the country decreased enormously and botany departments are pretty rare now. They're all biology departments. And there are relatively few introductory botany courses. General biology is what you have. And then you will have upper division courses on various aspects of botany. But the introductory botany course that used to be standard has gone in many cases. So the market for the book decreased considerably.



- 12-00:07:50  
Rubens: And this evaporation or this sort of winnowing of botany as a study per se is because like microbiology were supplanting it?
- 12-00:08:00  
Laetsch: Well, yes. For all kinds of reasons. One is the number of students majoring in botany decreased. And also budgetary considerations. If you have a small department you merge it with a larger department. And it became just more fashionable to have biology departments than to have the taxonomic related departments like botany, zoology, bacteriology, et cetera.
- 12-00:08:34  
Rubens: One other thing about the text is that people pointed out how pretty it was, that there were—
- 12-00:08:39  
Laetsch: Yes. This was a major effort, and it was one of the first introductory college texts that used a great deal of color. Before that they didn't use much color. But the fact that this has color all the way through it was a real change.
- 12-00:09:01  
Rubens: The promotional literature speaks about that.
- 12-00:09:03  
Laetsch: Right.
- 12-00:09:06  
Rubens: Good. So anything else to say about the textbook?
- 12-00:09:10  
Laetsch: No. I think it was a very—
- 12-00:09:13  
Rubens: It was a real achievement.
- 12-00:09:14  
Laetsch: It was an achievement. Good thing to do. Again, I probably should have done another edition or two but by that time I was doing lots of other things and just didn't get to it.
- 12-00:09:28  
Rubens: Right. So you take this leave in town. You didn't leave the area. And finish up the text and go back to the Lawrence Hall of Science, as well as to your teaching and research.
- 12-00:09:39  
Laetsch: That's right. I did leave the area, by the way, while I had it. I spent some time in Trinidad. In fact, I wrote a couple of chapters in Tobago, and then we went to England and I did some things over there. We also toured in Europe and I gave seminars in Germany and Switzerland. So I wasn't here the whole time. I'd say 85 percent of the time I was here.

12-00:09:56

Rubens:

Were you still doing your sugar research in Trinidad?

12-00:10:01

Laetsch:

At that time, yes, I think I was.

12-00:10:06

Rubens:

So when you come back to the Lawrence Hall—I thought we did a nice session last time on covering most of it but I just want to know if there were more exhibits or programs for which you were responsible, that you're proud of for having brought to the Lawrence Hall. Perhaps you could explain what the biology strategies project was? Did that continue your whole time at LHS?

12-00:10:32

Laetsch:

That's OBIS. Outdoor Biology Instructional Strategies. And that was a main project that we started. I probably explained it earlier, but this was to be for non-school groups. That meant junior museums, museums, natural history museums, but also Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, 4-H clubs, anybody outside the school environment. Also for local natural history programs, et cetera. So it was the first curriculum project that was not school focused.

12-00:11:14

Rubens:

And that starts really when you come in, in '72?

12-00:11:16

Laetsch:

I actually got it started when I was at the Garden and at the Hall. Yes. It's not going any longer as a development project, but it still is being funded by publishers and so there is still some residual activity. I don't know if I gave you a publication announcement on OBIS, but it's one of the publishing companies that does a lot for school publishing. They still publish it, and it's used now in many places around the world.

12-00:11:59

Rubens:

Those kinds of things become sustained income, as well?

12-00:12:03

Laetsch:

Well, again, if they buy the materials that are put out by the publishing company that I think I showed you for the health activities project—it was the same publishing company. So if they buy materials from those companies, then they provide income for the publishing companies. But they have a contract then with—such as the Lawrence Hall of Science or the University, that they have to give some of the royalties back. And what that is now, I just don't know.

12-00:12:32

Rubens:

By the way, who is the Vice Chancellor that you reported to?

12-00:12:40

Laetsch:

I initially reported to Mark Christensen, and then when he left, to become Chancellor at Santa Cruz for a couple of years, then Mike Heyman was the

Vice Chancellor and I reported to him and then continued to report to him when I became a Vice Chancellor, after he became Chancellor.

12-00:13:00

Rubens: We're going to get to that part of your career soon. Off camera I had asked you if there was an ongoing relationship with the San Francisco Exploratorium.

12-00:13:12

Laetsch: Nothing official. Just unofficial and Frank and I were both on the board of the Association of Science and Technology Centers, which became a big international program. We talked about that. So we had interaction there. But there was very little interaction other than that because they were not involved in curriculum development or formal programs with schools. They were all based on people coming in the door. And also, it was heavily physical science oriented, because Frank was a physicist and they had almost no biology, I think more developed over time, whereas we had lots of biology, as well.

And, of course, we were involved with university instruction of various kinds, as well. So they were in many ways very different institutions. We had public programs and then we had exhibits and the exhibits, again, tended to be for a somewhat different purpose. So we had some similar activities but then a lot were—

12-00:14:22

Rubens: But there was a lot of emphasis on interactive exhibits.

12-00:14:28

Laetsch: That's right.

12-00:14:29

Rubens: I think of both of these museums as developing those. But you really said you were ahead of the game on that.

12-00:14:36

Laetsch: Well, the thing is that they were all physics. We had lots of biology, chemistry, all kinds of stuff and then most of our activity wasn't the exhibits on the floors but it was in the specialized programs for kids that would come and they would actually have activities. One of the things we did was to develop a big program for shopping centers. We had a national program to develop science activities that traveled from one shopping center to another and we worked with one of the country's largest shopping mall developers. They funded it; it traveled around to shopping malls. I went out on the first ones, which happened to be in Indiana because the company is from Indianapolis. I went out to shopping malls in Indianapolis just to figure out what was going on. It was all very, very interesting. And they traveled around the country.

12-00:16:04

Rubens: Is this just an idea that pops into your head?

- 12-00:16:13  
Laetsch: Well, not completely. I'd been interested in shopping malls for a variety of reasons as possible places for people to interact with science, because shopping malls were growing rapidly and that's where people went. That's where young people went. I assume they're still doing it. That's where they spent their time.
- 12-00:16:36  
Rubens: Sure. A safe place to just roam around.
- 12-00:16:38  
Laetsch: Yes. Well, and they're boys and girls. The idea of doing something in shopping malls had been around with us for a long time. We had talked a lot about it. And then we had interaction with a shopping mall developer.
- 12-00:16:53  
Rubens: Do you remember their name?
- 12-00:16:55  
Laetsch: Yes. Simons. And they are the biggest in the county. One of their malls is very famous. It's a huge mall in Minneapolis.
- 12-00:17:08  
Rubens: Is that the Mall of America?
- 12-00:17:09  
Laetsch: Yes, right. They funded the development of this because, we knew a person here who had worked for Simons. In fact, he was doing something out here but no longer with Simons but he had been high up in the Simons organization, and he put us in contact with Simons. They sent some people out and then we worked out this exhibit.
- 12-00:17:30  
Rubens: Who designed the exhibit?
- 12-00:17:35  
Laetsch: We did all the design. They just paid for it.
- 12-00:17:38  
Rubens: And were these in-house or did you find people?
- 12-00:17:42  
Laetsch: Most of our stuff was built in-house. We had a big shop at the Hall; we built a lot of stuff in-house. We had a graphics department, so we basically did everything inside.
- 12-00:19:05  
Rubens: We talked about ASTC last week. I noticed on your bio sheet you still served on the council of American Association of Museums. And what does it mean that you served on a council?

12-00:19:26

Laetsch: I was on their council that ran the whole organization, I forget how many years. Many it was three years.

12-00:19:36

Rubens: Do you remember anything distinctly about what you worked on while you were there?

12-00:19:41

Laetsch: You review their programs. It's the accrediting body for museums. Many art museums, history museums, et cetera. You have to have certain things to be a member. And then they also have programs and publications. They have a national convention and regional conventions.

12-00:20:09

Rubens: You remain involved with this?

12-00:20:11

Laetsch: Yes. For a period of time. I was also with ASTC, as well, because I was the President and then on their board for a long time. And I forget just how long I was with the AAM, but it was several years. It was good because it was a lot of interaction or possibility of interaction with science museums, plus the fact that a lot of natural history museums belonged to AAM.

12-00:20:37

Rubens: Did it ever meet in San Francisco? Were you ever instrumental in bringing it out here?

12-00:20:43

Laetsch: I was involved in some meetings. I don't remember if the AAM met out here while I was here, but I don't think so.

12-00:20:49

Rubens: They were always so East Coast oriented. When Jack Lane was Director of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, he was able to bring the AAM here in the late '80s or early '90s.

Well, is there more, then, that you want to say about the Lawrence Hall of Science?

12-00:21:13

Laetsch: I don't know if there's more except to emphasize the fact that it was involved in the beginning in the development of science curricula. It was involved in the beginning in the development of ASTC, which then became worldwide, and LHS had a lot of international activity. And then it continued for years to develop creative materials for schools and youth organizations.

12-00:21:43

Rubens: Its status certainly rose dramatically and its presence.

12-00:21:44

Laetsch: That's right.

12-00:21:46

Rubens: I was going to ask you if there were any—equivalent wouldn't be the right word but similar kinds of institutions in the rest of the UC system.

12-00:21:58

Laetsch: No. No, no.

12-00:21:59

Rubens: Nothing that has that kind of public—

12-00:22:00

Laetsch: Well, there's still isn't in the country a similar program where you have—

12-00:22:07

Rubens: Connected to a university.

12-00:22:09

Laetsch: Well, one, connected to a university which has a public program, which is unlike things connected with universities, except for art museums and maybe natural history museums. But the fact that it had this enormous outreach, but also the research in science education. Remember that we also had the graduate program here in science education. SESAME. And a lot of the people there, a fair number, were involved with Lawrence Hall of Science.

12-00:22:40

Rubens: Yes. Some of them did their PhDs on audience response to science museum and zoo.

12-00:22:42

Laetsch: That's right. So the fact that you had a strong academic component to the Hall, which is unlike any other museum in the country. Or I shouldn't say museum but such a place that has a strong academic component. Natural history museums do. But ours was even tighter. And then to have that strong academic component, to have development of science curricula materials for schools and other places in the public makes it very different from any other such place. And the fact that it was also the first place really to develop materials, science materials for the general public, and that was a result of the fact that in the same building you had academicians and you also had programs for the public. So it's not too surprising that finally this spread out. And this wouldn't happen in other institutions because they don't have the same groups of people working.

12-00:23:45

Rubens: So were you happy with what you were doing there?

12-00:23:50

Laetsch: Yes, I would say by and large, like every other institution that one works with, if you're there for quite a long time, things begin to be the same. And so by

the time I was there for close to ten years; I was Associate Director and then Director for eight years. And even earlier on, by the time I left, I was ready to leave. Another aspect of it, though, that we should make sure that we cover because it was very important, is the international work of the Hall. My own international work. Did we cover that?

12-00:24:31

Rubens:

I think we did. We mentioned going to India, Singapore, Thailand, Hong Kong and Japan.

12-00:24:34

Laetsch:

Well, and also then my involvement with the Indo-US Subcommittee on Education and Culture.

12-00:24:39

Rubens:

Well, let's say a little bit more about that, then.

12-00:24:41

Laetsch:

Okay. This was started by a joint agreement between India and the US and it was on cultural and educational activities and lots of museum interactions of various kinds. But what was interesting about that was that this was really the only major US program between the US government and India at the time. Indira Gandhi didn't make Mr. Reagan very happy. So there was really nothing going on between India and the US. There was very little economic activity, there were no arms deals, so cultural stuff was what was left. Just compare that with what is going on now, where you have arms deals and enormous amounts of commercial activity.

12-00:25:35

Rubens:

So this was before private companies went in, like Union Carbide?

12-00:25:38

Laetsch:

Oh, yes.

12-00:26:05

Rubens:

So you're saying that kind of investment or manufacturing was nil?

12-00:26:08

Laetsch:

Well, that was an incident but there was very little economic activity. That is, India at that time bought quite a bit from us. In fact, the balance of trade was much in our favor. It still is, unlike a lot of places in the world. And we were shipping agriculture products and manufactured products of various kinds to India. But there wasn't an enormous amount of business. And that was also before we begin to have this large number of Indian students and graduate students who stayed here. Then Silicon Valley developed. See, this was before Silicon Valley. And Silicon Valley really didn't start to develop until the nineties. It then had lots and lots of Indians who were educated here and started companies. Some went back home and started companies, and now you can hardly tell the difference. So it's just a whole different world.

- 12-00:27:13  
Rubens: Well, how long did you remain on the subcommission?
- 12-00:27:15  
Laetsch: I was on the subcommission for eighteen years, something like that. Until it was killed in 1996.
- 12-00:27:20  
Rubens: And how often did that take you to India?
- 12-00:27:25  
Laetsch: That took me to India at least once every two years, sometimes every year and there were a couple of times when I was over there twice a year.
- 12-00:27:31  
Rubens: And what kind of things were you—
- 12-00:27:33  
Laetsch: Well, again, I was mainly involved with the museums, the science centers, because they were just starting to develop them. But our meetings that were held over there weren't just on that. We had an Indian committee and an American committee and so we would have joint meetings. Lots of traveling programs, scholar exchange programs, people coming here to study. So it was all academic stuff and other things related to culture.
- 12-00:28:05  
Rubens: So even when you became a Vice Chancellor you served on it?
- 12-00:28:09  
Laetsch: That's right.
- 12-00:28:23  
Rubens: And how were you picked? I could see that you would be a good fit for them but do you know how that came about?
- 12-00:28:30  
Laetsch: I think because of the Lawrence Hall of Science and because they were just starting to interact with some of the Indian science centers. There were a couple of science museums in India and they wanted to start more of them. They just started the Indian Council for Science Museums and so they were looking for people over here who they could interact with. And the fact that I had had previous experience with India, et cetera, just all fit together.
- 12-00:28:59  
Rubens: Well, we talked about your travel to science centers in Singapore and Hong Kong. You mentioned Japan. You also said that you consulted on one in Kuala Lumpur.
- 12-00:29:24  
Laetsch: Yes, right. Singapore, Malaysia. Thailand. I went to Bangkok and Japan.



12-00:29:47

Rubens:

And China later in the nineties starts a lot of science centers and museum. But you weren't in China then?

12-00:30:00

Laetsch:

No, I didn't go to China for that purpose.

12-00:30:02

Rubens:

In 1980 you are asked for or you submit your views on a controversy at the Natural History Museum in London. And you write a piece for—is it their magazine? *Biologist*. You're asked to comment on a controversy that's taking place there about exhibits, and you have a wonderful formulation about it.

12-00:30:46

Laetsch:

Well, some of the conservative people didn't see the need for interactive exhibits and things that weren't just strictly taxonomically oriented where you have exhibits that you set up and people come and look at the exhibits. They had started a program which had a lot of interactive stuff, which was, of course, stimulated and inspired by the stuff going on in this country, particularly in the science and technology museums. They had put on an exhibit in the Natural History Museum in London, which I had been to a couple of times, and then you had some of the human dinosaurs who escaped from the museum and begin to write articles about how bad this was and it wasn't what they should be doing or blah, blah, blah. This became a heated controversy over there and I wrote to basically support the activities of the British Natural History Museum. I tried to get across to them what has happened in the world in terms of how people viewed museums, the direction they were going and the necessity for museums to work with where people are, at least initially, and go on from there.

12-00:32:03

Rubens:

You write that people are more interested in themselves than in any other organism and this is why the human biology exhibit there is so refreshing.

12-00:32:10

Laetsch:

That's right.

12-00:32:11

Rubens:

Well, after all, that's how you had begun your health program at LHS, on the human body. I found it a useful formulation that you speak about two cultures of museum exhibition that are in conflict.

12-00:32:24

Laetsch:

That's right. One is the static looking at things behind glass or a statue in the middle of the room and the others relate to communication.

12-00:32:41

Rubens:

You argue that our artifacts have primary value as elements in an educational process.

12-00:32:46

Laetsch:

Yes. You can see this going on right now with the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco, which is—if you've been reading about—that they are bankrupt. And one of their problems is that they haven't gotten away from the old-fashioned way of exhibiting things. And it's just incredible. We were over there recently. They had an exhibit of Bhutanese art. They have all these nice things, but they're just lined up and they expect people to find that interesting. And unless you're an expert, you don't. It's wallpaper. And they don't ever get the message. It's a very, very interesting phenomenon.

12-00:33:27

Rubens:

All right. Well, should we move on?

12-00:33:28

Laetsch:

Yes, let's move on.

12-00:33:29

Rubens:

So how do you get the tap on the shoulder from Mike Heyman? Was there any controversy in him being selected as chancellor?

12-00:33:37

Laetsch:

Well, no controversy. It's just the way it happened. Let's see if I can recall. Bowker left.

12-00:34:04

Rubens:

He had been chancellor for 9 years.

12-00:34:04

Laetsch:

As he said, everything began to be the same. And this is what you find in administrative positions. And Al never really had a sense of doing things new or different. He didn't have a calling, as you might say. He was an administrator and he did that very well. But after a time, as he said, everything was the same. And so he left here and became an assistant secretary in the new federal Department of Education, then was a dean at the University of Maryland and went elsewhere after that.

Bowker leaves and then they had a search and they selected for the Chancellor the provost at the University of Pennsylvania, Vartan Gregorian. He was a historian, I believe, and so they selected him as Chancellor, much to Mike's great disappointment.

12-00:35:24

Rubens:

Heyman had basically put his hat in the ring.

12-00:35:25

Laetsch:

He wanted it. Oh, yes. And fortunately, Gregorian decided that he would not accept the appointment, because they had a change in the presidency of the University of Pennsylvania, and he thought he was going to be made President. And the person that was the President of the University of Pennsylvania had

been the gentleman who was here as Acting Chancellor during the FSM, Martin Meyerson. It's interesting how these things go around and around.

Meyerson retired and Gregorian thought he was going to become President. I had met him because I had a friend, again through ASTC, who was Director of the Natural History Museum at the University of Pennsylvania, and she had invited me back to give some talks. He was the University administrator the museum reported to, so I met him then. He didn't make a great impression, from what I gather, on folks here. But that wasn't really the thing. He was offered the job by the Regents and he didn't take it because he thought he would be the President of the University of Pennsylvania, which says something, and then he didn't get that job. And he didn't get the job, in his own words, and I had a fair amount of interaction with him after that, because he was too foreign. And I got this from other people in Philadelphia, as well. Because he had a beard, he was Armenian, he looked foreign and—

12-00:37:42  
Rubens:

Did he have an accent?

12-00:37:44  
Laetsch:

Didn't have an accent. He was born and raised in this country. But he obviously wasn't a WASP, and that's what the Mainline folks in Philadelphia still wanted. It was a great disappointment to him and he took the job as head of the New York Public Library. And then he was made President of Brown, and that's when I had a fair amount of interaction with him, because he was on the Indo-US Subcommittee. We had a subcommittee meeting in Providence, and so he invited me out for lunch and spent time on a tour of the campus. He said when he first went there and met with some of their donors and other people, that the women would ask him if he knew about rugs.

12-00:38:46  
Rubens:

Oh, dear.

12-00:38:46  
Laetsch:

Yes, can you imagine that?

12-00:38:47  
Rubens:

The racism?

12-00:38:49  
Laetsch:

Yes, about rugs. And if it was in their house he would say, "Oh, well, a little bit." And they'd say, "Well, would you look at this rug that I just bought?" And so he said he would bend over and pick up the rug and feel it and look at it and say, "Oh, this is a very fine rug," no matter what. And that made them happy. But he never really fit in there, and he was not very happy. The other thing that got him going in our tour of the campus was that he was very concerned about the buildings, the ancient buildings that were falling apart, and they were spending too much of their budget on repairing the buildings and they needed new buildings because a lot of the old buildings weren't

satisfactory for modern uses. He was in this vise, you might say, of protecting the old and ignoring the new. I was not at all surprised when he left there to head up the Carnegie Foundation that I think he's still heads. I've met him a couple of times when he's been out here for one thing or another. Very interesting guy.

Anyhow, then Mike Heyman was appointed.

12-00:40:07

Rubens:

He wasn't going to be churlish because he was second pick?

12-00:40:09

Laetsch:

No, no.

12-00:40:10

Rubens:

He was happy to have it?

12-00:40:12

Laetsch:

Oh, yes. And, of course, I had known Mike for years. In fact, I had him come and give a lecture to my general biology course in the 60s.

12-00:40:29

Rubens:

On what?

12-00:40:29

Laetsch:

Well, one of his main interests as a lawyer in the law school was in San Francisco Bay. Remember when the Bay Commission was going on, and they were doing a lot of things about conservation in the Bay and he was much involved in that. He was also involved in activities related to Lake Tahoe and the national parks and various other things. So there was a lot of environmental stuff he had been involved in. And so I had him come, when he was doing the Bay, and I had my Biology 11 course, which was a biology course for non-majors. I had him come and give a couple of lectures on what was happening to the Bay. We first met at the Berkeley ice skating rink.

12-00:41:21

Rubens:

What a smart idea making it relevant.

12-00:41:22

Laetsch:

Oh yes, it was great. And we had a lot of interaction and then of course, when he was Vice Chancellor I reported to him when I was at the Lawrence Hall and then when he became Chancellor, he had several goals. You can get this out of his oral history. In fact, we'll come back to that. One of them was to build new buildings. The campus needed extensive renovation. Another one was minority enrollment. Another one was undergraduate education. So he asked me to come onboard and to do two of those three things. And then the other one was he selected Rod Park, who was my colleague in Botany, as his Vice Chancellor, Academic Vice Chancellor. And so Rod and I had known each other for years. I don't know if Mike suggested to Rod or Rod suggested to Mike that I would be a good person for the Vice Chancellor for

Undergraduate Affairs, which was a new office that Mike created. He created it in order to promote the things that he was interested in, particularly minority recruitment and lower division education.

Let's back up a bit because of an interesting event which happened at this time. I was contacted early in 1979 by a "head hunter" to see if I would apply to be director of the Field Museum in Chicago. This is one of the world's pre-eminent natural history museums. I visited the museum so they could look me over, and I could look them over. They offered me the job and I visited again with Sita, John, and Krishen. Sita was shocked by Chicago's winter weather and didn't want me to take the job. I was so deeply involved with Berkeley that I was not anxious to move. The issue was resolved when Mike Heyman offered the Vice Chancellorship. I never regretted the decision, but I have wondered what the future would have held if I had accepted the Field Museum position.

12-00:42:47  
Rubens:

So when do you start?

12-00:42:49  
Laetsch:

I started in June 1980, when he became Chancellor. I came in right at the beginning, when he was putting together his cabinet.

12-00:42:57  
Rubens:

So let's just say goodbye to the Lawrence Hall of Science. What did you do about your replacement?

12-00:43:04  
Laetsch:

A committee was formed, a usual Academic Senate type of administrative things. And they picked Howard Mel, who was Professor of Biophysics, here at Berkeley. And I'm trying to recall why the—well, he applied for the job, obviously, when it went out that they were recruiting. I'm trying to remember why he was selected. I had had some interaction with him previously.

14-00:29:52  
Rubens:

Had he been on an advisory committee for LHS?

14-00:29:56  
Laetsch:

I don't remember him being on an advisory committee, and I don't remember him being all that interested in science education. But he was a faculty member who wanted to do it. I don't know if they had any other faculty members who were interested. He became Director, but for a short time only. Then he went back to his department and became Director of the Study Abroad Program in France. He was quite a Francophile.

14-00:31:17  
Rubens:

Well, who succeeded him?

14-00:31:19  
Laetsch:

Glenn Seaborg, as an Interim Director.

14-00:31:22

Rubens: And he had been at the AEC.

14-00:31:26

Laetsch: Yes. He came back again on campus at that time. He was involved with the Rad Lab, which some of us still call the Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory because it was originally called the Lawrence Radiation Laboratory. And he was on my Lawrence Hall Advisory Committee. When we were thinking about who could step in quickly to head LHS, because we didn't want to have to go through a long selection process, we "Well, why not Glenn?" And so I still remember when we met and I had asked Glenn if he would take it. He immediately said yes he'd do it.

14-00:32:26

Rubens: That was your purview to do that.

14-00:32:29

Laetsch: Yes. Well, Rod Park and I had talked about it and Rod thought that was a good idea and so that's what happened.

14-00:32:35

Rubens: You've told that wonderful story earlier.

14-00:32:38

Laetsch: About the fact that he had only worked for presidents before? Yes.

14-00:32:49

Rubens: Well, so how long did he run LHS?

14-00:32:51

Laetsch: I think it must have been about two years.

14-00:32:54

Rubens: And did he do all right?

14-00:32:55

Laetsch: Yes, he was fine. And he had a good Assistant Director, Bob Knott, who had worked with me at the Hall. K-N-O-T-T. And he was good. He knew the Hall well, et cetera. He and Glenn got along very well and so things worked out fine. And then he didn't want to continue on for a long time and so that's when we did a recruitment and Marjorie Gardner came. Actually, I shouldn't say we did a recruitment. Glenn did the recruitment. He had known Marjorie Gardner in Washington, and so he basically selected her out of the candidates we had, she was not my first choice. My first choice was the Director of the Science Museum of Virginia.

14-00:33:40

Rubens: Who was an astronomer?

14-00:33:41

Laetsch:

Yes. He went on to become the director of the Adler Planetarium in Chicago. I think I might have mentioned that they didn't select him because he didn't give the impression that coming to Berkeley was his dream in life, and so rather than negotiating they went with Marjorie, who was very, very anxious to come and Glenn wanted her.

14-00:34:09

Rubens:

And what was her discipline?

14-00:34:13

Laetsch:

She was a chemist. That's one of the reasons Glenn liked her.

12-00:44:57

Rubens:

Why didn't you move up one of your associate directors?

12-00:45:02

Laetsch:

They would not have been academics. When she left, her successor was Marian Diamond from what was then called the Physiology-Anatomy department at Cal. The current one, Elizabeth Stage, is the first one who is not a faculty member. The main point is that I did not have control of the process of appointing a director. There was a selection committee reporting to the Chancellor.

14-00:34:45

Rubens:

There was a story about Marian Diamond in the *Chronicle* yesterday.

14-00:35:08

Laetsch:

Yes, and of all the great things that she's done, it didn't mention the Lawrence Hall of Science, which is interesting.

12-00:45:35

Rubens:

So you weren't thrilled about Gardner, but at least you were leaving the Hall and moving into the Chancellor's Office.

12-00:45:39

Laetsch:

That's right. And they had a reasonably good advisory committee. So, as I say, it continued to report to me, so I was still involved.

12-00:45:54

Rubens:

I have one more question that just popped up in my mind about your being Director of the Lawrence Hall of Science. Did you have much interaction with the Phoebe Hearst Museum; I guess it was still called the Lowie Museum then? Were there any other natural history kind of museums like this?

12-00:46:09

Laetsch:

Oh, sure. We had a big natural history program on campus. You have the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, the Museum of Paleontology, and the Anthropology Museum, the University Herbarium—actually, herbaria. There are two herbaria. And now you have a Museum of Entomology.

12-00:46:46

Rubens:

Now, these are small, right? Except for the Phoebe Hearst?

12-00:46:46

Laetsch:

Oh, no. The Museum of Vertebrate Zoology is huge.

12-00:46:53

Rubens:

Where is it?

12-00:46:55

Laetsch:

The Valley Life Sciences Building. They have enormous collections there. It's a big program. And then the University Herbarium is one of the major herbaria in the world. These are for the study of plants. It's a collection of dead plants, basically, but there's all kinds of work related to that. The Entomology Museum is good size. Again, it doesn't have public stuff, and the Herbarium doesn't have public stuff, but it has lots of education programs and it has paid membership to Friends of the University Herbarium. The Museum of Vertebrate Zoology [MVZ] has some public programs, but you can't just go in. You can go in but they don't have regular hours of visitation and they don't have permanent exhibits, et cetera. Go into the Valley Life Sciences Building, the basement on both sides, and then up to the next floor and you'll see exhibits from the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology. They may still have their exhibit of fetuses in jars. The MVZ has big exhibits outside.

12-00:47:58

Rubens:

And so what would be your relationship to these? Did you try and cull speakers or programs out of them?

12-00:48:02

Laetsch:

Well, I'm trying to recall just what interaction we had. Not an enormous amount because they were all research-oriented. In those days they didn't really have much in the way of public programs. They didn't have school programs. We probably should have done more.

12-00:48:30

Rubens:

We meaning the Lawrence Hall of Science?

12-00:48:31

Laetsch:

Yes. But, again, we had lots of things to do and it just didn't happen that there was an awful lot of interaction.

12-00:48:37

Rubens:

The other question I had as a transition to your role as Vice Chancellor is about your service on a committee to pick the Associate Vice Chancellor in charge of Development. That would have been the first full-time fundraiser for the campus. Were you on that committee because you were so successful at the Lawrence Hall raising money?



12-00:49:07

Laetsch:

Yes. We had, as I think I mentioned, the first fundraiser. There was little other fundraising on campus, really, until Mike came in. And then we had Bob [Robert] Kerley, who was the Vice Chancellor for Business and associated services of various kinds. He had been Bowker's Vice Chancellor in charge of business. And then he continued on with Mike. He retired and Mike made him the director of development. And so that happened for about two years or so. And then he brought in Curt Simic from the Indiana University. So Curt was here until 1987, I think. When he left Mike asked me to be Vice Chancellor for Development. So I succeeded Curt, who went back to Indiana, and he just retired from the Indiana University. When Curt came, we had a person for the first time with great experience in that area who developed a centralized fundraising operation, which we had never had really before. In the meantime some of the units had started to raise funds just as I did at the Lawrence Hall of Science. And most particularly, some of the academic units, particularly engineering, had started their own fundraising program.

12-00:51:23

Rubens:

I know that Ernie Kuh, when he was Dean of the College of Engineering spent a lot of time on development.

12-00:51:27

Laetsch:

It was actually Karl Pister who started the fundraising. And he was very reluctant—is a nice way of saying it—about the Chancellor's Office starting the fundraising program.

12-00:51:41

Rubens:

Because of competition?

12-00:51:42

Laetsch:

Yes, so some of the units, particularly Engineering, were not at all cooperative with Curt when he first came to set up a campus-wide fundraising program, which we, of course, had to have. You can't run these things out of individual units. It has to be a central office with clear authority for fundraising.

12-00:52:28

Rubens:

So was it fun with Mike Heyman coming in and all these new people?

12-00:52:33

Laetsch:

Oh, yes. Oh, absolutely.

12-00:52:34

Rubens:

There was a sense of new developments and—

12-00:52:36

Laetsch:

Sure. We were all evangelical, I should say, about things because, again, it had been the first time on the campus for a long time where lots of new things were being proposed. So there was a sense of being—maybe pioneer isn't the right word but at least doing things that were new and different and initiating things. And a lot of things happened.

- 12-00:53:03  
Rubens: So do you want to start talking about what some of your responsibility was? I guess maybe I should just ask, how often did you meet as a staff?
- 12-00:53:11  
Laetsch: I'm sure it's the same thing, is still going, has been going ever since. It's the weekly chancellor's senior staff meeting where everybody gets together.
- 12-00:53:21  
Rubens: How big a meeting were those?
- 12-00:53:23  
Laetsch: Well, the room is still here. But the Chancellor's conference room is a big room, and I would say thirty people can sit around the table. And so the Chancellor's meetings had probably in the twenties, maybe high teens.
- 12-00:53:47  
Rubens: So it's all the upper administrators and staff?
- 12-00:53:48  
Laetsch: That's right. His Vice Chancellors, Provost and Graduate Division Dean, head of Budget and Planning, head of all the other areas. So it was basically his staff.
- 12-00:54:01  
Rubens: Did he run a good meeting?
- 12-00:54:02  
Laetsch: Sure, but not only in terms of having things well laid out but very open to suggestions. Much more so than his successor.
- 12-00:54:18  
Rubens: Okay. Well, maybe we'll get back to this if there was ever any controversy or conflict amongst whose bidding for programs.
- 12-00:54:26  
Laetsch: Well, I don't think so much. But Mike was famous for his temper.
- 12-00:54:32  
Rubens: I didn't know that.
- 12-00:54:32  
Laetsch: Oh, yes. One of the funny things that happened, and anybody around at that time would remember it. Mike used to be a very heavy smoker. He was a chain smoker, so he would consume several packs a day. Then he was advised to quit, which he did, cold turkey, boom, just like that. But then for quite a while after that he was very, very difficult because he—
- 12-00:55:10  
Rubens: Are we talking about when he became Chancellor—was he still smoking?

- 12-00:55:12  
Laetsch: He was still smoking when he became Chancellor.
- 12-00:55:14  
Laetsch: Yes, right.
- 12-00:55:15  
Rubens: Smoking at those meetings there?
- 12-00:55:16  
Laetsch: Oh, yes. Right. Well, everybody used to smoke in all the meetings. Oh, yes, he would smoke, and then he quit cold turkey. He had always had a good temper. But his temper really developed then, and it was sometimes a little bit difficult to be around Mike because he would get going and throw a tantrum.
- 12-00:55:38  
Rubens: Were you ever the victim of—
- 12-00:55:41  
Laetsch: I don't think I was ever really the victim. I think maybe, along with some other people, he would be displeased about something or other. But no, never really a direct victim of it.
- 12-00:55:51  
Rubens: Was he a pretty hard working Chancellor?
- 12-00:55:53  
Laetsch: Very hard-working. Yes.
- 12-00:55:55  
Rubens: Did his day start at 8:00?
- 12-00:55:58  
Laetsch: I would say generally, yes. Lots of times we'd have breakfast meetings, and they would go late. In fact, I still remember Mike calling me in once and telling me I was spending too much time there. I was working too hard.
- 12-00:56:16  
Rubens: What time would your day start?
- 12-00:56:18  
Laetsch: It would start certainly by 8:00, usually. Sometimes at 7:00. And then I was often there until eight o'clock at night.
- 12-00:56:26  
Rubens: So let's sketch out what your job looked like when you start with him. First I'll change the tape and then we don't have to interrupt that story.

[End Audio File 12]

Begin Audio File 13 11-24-2010.mp3

[Significant editing to this portion of the interview may have caused incongruities in the audio recording and the transcript.]

13-00:00:05

Laetsch:

When I was made a Vice Chancellor, there were three Vice Chancellors. There was *The* Vice Chancellor, there was myself, and there was the Vice Chancellor for Business and Administrative services. Subsequently, there became a Vice Chancellor for Development. I believe now there are twelve Vice Chancellors or something of the sort. We have had over the years an enormous inflation of academic titles and, of course, along with that goes academic salaries. My job—even adjusting for inflation, they're still higher. They have subdivided a lot of the units. For example, the stuff that I did, I think that there are now about four Vice Chancellors, three or four Vice Chancellors, that do—and maybe they're not all Vice Chancellors, some of them may be associate Vice Chancellors—that are doing what I did. And so there's been an enormous inflation in administrative units and titles and positions, et cetera. And maybe that's because, as I said, I worked many, many more than fourteen-hour days, and six days a week. I was usually there all day Saturday as well.

13-00:01:31

Rubens:

Where was your office?

13-00:01:31

Laetsch:

In California Hall. As you walk in the front door, go up the first floor and turn to the right and it's the first group of offices right there.

13-00:02:02

Rubens:

And you have two domains for which you were responsible.

13-00:02:03

Laetsch:

At least.

13-00:02:05

Rubens:

Yes, all right. How do we start attacking those? Did you have a vision from the beginning of what you were going to do?

13-00:02:12

Laetsch:

One of the things that Mike wanted to do when he invented the title of Vice Chancellor for Undergraduate Affairs was to try to marry Student Services with Academic Programs. Student Services had always been off on their own and they were always the poor person in the house in the sense that they were not—my predecessor for about half of what I had responsibility for was an Assistant Vice Chancellor, and he had a lot of the student service units. But he was not an academic. That was Norvel Smith. We'll get around to that.

One of the interesting things that's happened is that they now have gone back to that. In other words, it was an academic position. It was the only reason I took it. And that's what they wanted because they wanted to have an academician who could be equal to the faculty on anything that came up that related to issues of concern. And I think that worked very well. Plus, I had some academic units that reported to me. When I left, they began to separate some of those things, and now it's completely separate. They separated out all of the things that had formerly been sort of academic, and they are now back to the Vice Chancellor for Student Services with just the student services under his domain. And he's not an academic. So by changing the title, changing what was responsible, you take away that whole influence and emphasis of trying to keep academic activities and student services of various things related to students together. And, since the person is not a faculty member, he is not an equal.

13-00:04:17

Rubens:

Did this critique that you're pointing out, did this show up in the recent efficiency report?

13-00:04:23

Laetsch:

I don't think so. Because as far as I know, they haven't done away, and don't plan to do away, with any Vice Chancellors. So it isn't part of it.

13-00:04:36

Rubens:

I'm sort of surprised at that because it seemed like there could be some paring and pruning.

13-00:04:39

Laetsch:

Well, I'm surprised, too, but when you have people in charge of the—maybe that's too harsh—but when you have people in charge of the study they often aren't going to cut into their own piece of pie.

13-00:04:59

Rubens:

Oh, I thought this was an outside evaluation.

13-00:05:00

Laetsch:

Well, the outside people came in and made some recommendations. But it's been an inside committee that's really—Well, actually, in fact, they just finished, as I understand it, the survey of reorganizing the administration on the campus and academic units. And that was done by academicians. Keith Gilless, who's the Dean of the College of Natural Resources, chaired that committee. I was with him the other day and he said they had just finished after a very, very long and hard set of sessions.

13-00:05:41

Rubens:

Anyhow, so you're starting at the rise of this, your position and portfolio are new.

13-00:05:41

Laetsch:

Right, yes.

13-00:05:43

Rubens:

Let's talk about what programs that you had in mind or those you were asked by Mike to undertake.

13-00:05:54

Laetsch:

Well, one of the main things was to increase the number of minority students on campus because Mike was very aware of the demography of California and knew that if we didn't have alumni who were from the minority communities in California that we would eventually suffer greatly in terms of support from the state of California. There was a time, people forget, when a good percentage of the members of the legislature, state legislature, were University of California alumni, a lot of them from Berkeley. That disappeared in the eighties, and now it's a very small number of people. If you look at the number of people in the legislature of non-white background and they are—I forget the number, but they're going towards a majority in the legislature. If they don't have any connection with the University, they're not going to care an awful lot about it. And this has proven to be the case. We could go on and on because this is, I think, one of the very major issues in the state. It's a major issue in the country, but particularly in California. And so what are we? We are still predominantly Anglo and Asian.

13-00:07:25

Rubens:

And when you say 'we' you're referring to?

13-00:07:26

Laetsch:

The student body. And the largest single group, are now Asian Americans and then you have Anglos and then a small number of Hispanics and African Americans.

13-00:07:39

Rubens:

Sure. Well, you were opening up that, increasing the enrollment. Then it's knocked down by Prop 209. And before that the Board of Regents. [SP 1 & 2].

13-00:07:51

Laetsch:

That's right. So that was one of my first goals, to increase minority enrollment on the campus.

13-00:07:58

Rubens:

So how are you going to do that?

13-00:07:59

Laetsch:

Well, we did that in a number of ways. I did not appoint a special person to do that. We worked with the colleges and the departments to persuade them, which wasn't very difficult, that they needed to increase under-represented minorities in their colleges. This had nothing to do with graduate students because the graduate programs are still on a departmental level in terms of admissions. I was speaking just of undergraduates and that we had to increase the number of undergraduates in the under-served populations for all kinds of reasons. I worked with the deans of the colleges to do this, and, in fact, I established a group that I met with, with the deans or the deans in the colleges

responsible for admissions. I had a little council and we met about once a month.

13-00:09:08

Rubens:

Now, how is this going to work? Why is it that departments would have some kind of influence? Because aren't you admitted to the university?

13-00:09:14

Laetsch:

No, you're admitted to the colleges, to letters and science, engineering, natural resources, et cetera, et cetera. But then all graduate admissions is done by the departments. And, of course, the schools, for the most part, don't have undergraduate programs. At least they don't have freshman coming in. The School of Business you come in as an upper division student. So we're talking about the colleges that admit freshmen, so I worked with the deans of those colleges very closely and then—

13-00:09:48

Rubens:

Was it a hard sell?

13-00:09:51

Laetsch:

No, no. People understood that for the most part and were very cooperative.

13-00:09:55

Rubens:

The issue was standards and—

13-00:09:57

Laetsch:

That's right. And just sort of knowing how to do it and to make it work. Well, the other thing was we began working with the high schools, particularly the high schools in our vicinity from which we drew a high percentage of our freshmen class. And so we established a group of principals from these schools that we would meet with every so often. Actually Mike would have them for dinner at University House, and they loved going there. And we would go out and visit the schools, and Mike would often come along. We'd establish relationships with the teachers and the administration.

13-00:10:49

Rubens:

This was something that hadn't been done?

13-00:10:51

Laetsch:

No. We had an Office of Relations with Schools. We had and we still do have, and they would go out and do things in the schools, but it was never really focused on minority students. Plus the fact that they work at a certain level. They would work with advisors in the schools but they never worked very much with the teachers and the administrators and the principals. For example, one of the things we did was to set up a program with about twenty-five principals of our local high schools, the ones that sent us most of our people, and the principal could have a special-action admission quota. If they said they wanted, let's say, five students and really wanted those in, we'd admit them.

- 13-00:11:43  
Rubens: Is this under the term affirmative action?
- 13-00:11:45  
Laetsch: That's correct. That's right.
- 13-00:11:47  
Rubens: That term was being used?
- 13-00:11:48  
Laetsch: Oh, yes. Very much so. And it was University policy that we could admit a certain number of students who did not have the grades, et cetera, and the test scores that were required. It was called Special-Action Admission. And you could admit seven percent of your undergraduates on the basis of Special-Action Admission.
- 13-00:12:17  
Rubens: And this is a campus decision? Program?
- 13-00:12:20  
Laetsch: Yes. Well, you don't admit on the campus level. Most of those came through the College of Letters and Science. But other colleges, if they wanted to, could do that. Now, this had been used primarily for athletes, and it still is. Even though we no longer have Special-Action Admission for students overall, since the state rule that came out with that wonderful legislator, Ward Connerly.
- 13-00:12:54  
Rubens: Yes. The African American that—
- 13-00:12:55  
Laetsch: That's correct, yes. That hated himself. Anyway—But they still have that for athletes. It's kind of interesting.
- 13-00:13:20  
Rubens: Do they?
- 13-00:13:21  
Laetsch: Yes, I believe so. Yes, yes.
- 13-00:13:25  
Rubens: So how soon did you see the picture changing? The complexion of the campus.
- 13-00:13:33  
Laetsch: Oh, it was very quick. I don't know if I still have the figures, but within a couple of years we had greatly increased the number of minority students. By the time I left, in 1990, we were up close to the percent in the population of African-American students. And it greatly increased the number of Hispanic students. I developed some staff members who were particularly involved with that. One of those who was very, very essential to our Hispanic student activity was Francisco Hernandez. Francisco went from Berkeley to Santa



Cruz as Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, and he's now Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs at the University of Hawaii. He came from an immigrant family, a farm workers family that had nothing, and he was able to get into the university and graduated from Berkeley and then went on.

13-00:14:40

Rubens: Was he an academic?

13-00:14:42

Laetsch: He had a PhD in history, yes. And so I hired him early on because he had a lot of experience in recruiting students in other programs and he was very tied in to the general Hispanic culture. He really set us up to begin to recruit Hispanic students.

13-00:15:02

Rubens: So is the Admissions Director under you?

13-00:15:05

Laetsch: The Office of Admissions and Records and the Office of Financial Aid were all under me. All of the student services except for the student hospital were part of Undergraduate Affairs. So we set up teams in the colleges with the folks in admissions. Another person who became very important was Professor Russell Ellis, from the College of Environmental Design. I hired him as a special assistant, and again, to work on a number of things, but particularly with African-American enrollment and progress—

13-00:15:54

Rubens: And he was someone that was known to you?

13-00:15:56

Laetsch: Well, he had actually gone to Mike and said that he wanted to help work on recruiting African American students. We met and got on well and I appointed him to that position. In fact, I have a letter in here somewhere; I was just reading it, asking him to be appointed. And I'll look at that again to make sure that what I said was correct. And so Russ was very good because he was a faculty member, and knew the campus.

13-00:16:24

Rubens: Was a minority himself.

13-00:16:26

Laetsch: Was minority himself. Well, the other important thing was he had been a star track athlete at UCLA where he graduated. He was a sprinter. So he had that whole sense of things. In fact, I sent him out at one point to go to a number of universities in the country that had strong athletic programs to see, one, how they were admitted and, two, to see what they did with respect to their grades and their academic support programs, and also to look at their dropout rates. He went to Notre Dame, to the University of Michigan and I think one other place of note and he spent a fair amount of time. And, of course, going there as an African American he was able to ask questions and do things that would

have been very difficult for other folks. But what he found in the University of Michigan, when they were very, very successful, in particularly football, was that the students were admitted to the university by the physical education department. And some of them weren't even admitted that way. They were admitted through their extension program. The university's extension program admitted athletes, so there were no qualifications. And I once asked, after he retired as Chancellor, Roger Heyns, about Michigan, because he had been Vice Chancellor there. And he said, "Oh, yes." He says, "They have their own program, did the special things. They didn't interfere with anybody, no one interfered with them. They did whatever they wanted and we just left it at that because you had a monster that had been created. A winning football team."

13-00:18:31  
Rubens:

Yes. I remember Berdahl talking about the power of football at the University of Texas.

13-00:18:34  
Laetsch:

Nebraska was the worst one. We got this from a former President of the University of Nebraska; that the legislature meets in Lincoln, Nebraska, where the university is, and the legislature gives money to the University, et cetera, a lot of it depending on the football team. So you have to have a winning football team in order to survive, because on football weekends—and the other thing is everybody in Nebraska comes to a football game and so they all come and that's the most important thing. And the legislators come, et cetera. So football isn't just a student activity. It's a statewide entertainment that is looked upon as absolutely essential.

13-00:19:27  
Rubens:

Now, you did have this Special-Action Admission Program working.

13-00:19:31  
Laetsch:

That's right.

13-00:19:32  
Rubens:

So there was some pressure by the big teams, basketball and the like.

13-00:19:38  
Laetsch:

You have to admit some students, by special-action if you're going to have athletic teams that they compete nationally. It's always been that way.

13-00:19:56  
Rubens:

Under the current administration they've eliminated three teams.

13-00:20:01  
Laetsch:

Well, two teams. Right. Baseball and gymnastics, but they have been reinstated.

13-00:20:05  
Rubens:

Rugby?

13-00:20:07

Laetsch:

But they won't get rid of rugby because that has never been a varsity sport, has never been an NCAA sport.

13-00:20:11

Rubens:

And plus they raise a lot of money.

13-00:20:13

Laetsch:

They raise money, so that's not a problem. Baseball they should have done away with years ago because baseball requires more time from its players than any other sport. They're probably still the same, but when I was there its schedule was similar to a minor league baseball schedule in terms of time. I used to have baseball players come to my office and almost cry because they couldn't study during the time that they were playing and as a result they didn't get good grades, in many cases. Or they could take just the minimum number of courses, and that meant that it took longer to graduate. So it was a mess. I was delighted when they did away with baseball. Should have done it years ago. But, of course, the thing I find discouraging is that they are paying so much from the Chancellor's Office to cover the deficits in athletics. And rather than saying, "No, we're not going to supply any more from the Chancellor's Office," they are still getting about \$11 million. That will support a small department. And along with this, there's nothing about the football and basketball staffs being reduced in salary. I could go on and on and on. We can get back to that.

13-00:21:39

Rubens:

Well, really, we were talking about admissions as the focus.

13-00:21:41

Laetsch:

Right. We would go out and search for students, which hadn't really been done to that extent before. Search for students, good students, but also students that were promising. And, of course, for that they needed to use the Special-Action Admission. And most of that was for minority students and poor white students. They still have the returning program for students.

13-00:22:15

Rubens:

For women, too.

13-00:22:16

Laetsch:

Yes. My wife was much involved with that. And then, of course, some for athletes.

13-00:22:23

Rubens:

And so did you have to also set up tutorials to—

13-00:22:29

Laetsch:

Oh, well, we can come to the Student Learning Center, because that was a very essential part of the whole business. You don't just bring them in and let them go. You want to make sure they succeed. And so the Student Learning Center that Kurt Lauridsen was Director of—Kurt is a good, good guy.

13-00:22:58

Rubens: Was he a minority?

13-00:23:00

Laetsch: No.

13-00:23:11

Rubens: We can talk about Kurt next time. In concluding today, do you want to say anything else about admissions?

13-00:23:12

Laetsch: Well, we can come back. There's lots on admissions. It goes on and on.

13-00:23:23

Rubens: Who was your Admissions Director?

13-00:23:35

Laetsch: Robert Bailey. He remained the whole time, and he left after I left. He was very supportive and did some good things. From day one, in getting all the people together, talking about stuff, they were all in favor of, of course, more minority admissions, et cetera. So they were all very cooperative.

13-00:24:10

Rubens: So for next time we will have a roadmap of topics to cover.

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Begin Audio File 14 laetsch\_mac\_14\_12-8-10.mp3

[Do to editing the transcript of this interview does not correspond precisely with the original audio.]

14-00:00:08

Rubens: I want to just start by clearing up something. In Mike Heyman's oral history, he speaks of you as Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs.

14-00:00:27

Laetsch: No, it was Vice Chancellor for Undergraduate Affairs. It had previously been for Student Affairs but because I had Academic Programs and a whole variety of things in addition to what had been under that title, it changed to Undergraduate Affairs. I never would have taken it if it had been Student Affairs. What Mike wanted was to have a strong academic component to the position.

14-00:00:57

Rubens: Did you have to report to the Academic Senate?

14-00:01:07

Laetsch: I didn't have really very much direct interaction with the Senate. Mike and I had a number of occasions when we met with them. That is not the whole Senate but with the chair of the Senate and some other people.

14-00:01:23

Rubens: Perhaps the Budget Committee.

14-00:01:25

Laetsch: And other committees of the Senate. But I was not, myself, active in talking to the Senate. In fact, I don't think I ever actually did talk to the whole Senate.

14-00:01:38

Rubens: Okay. So we mentioned that you had picked up intercollegiate athletics that had reported to Bob Kerley before. And Heyman says that Bob Kerley was on the administrative side and athletics had—What does he mean by that?

14-00:02:02

Laetsch: Well, it's not unusual for athletic programs to report to the business side of campuses because it's such an interesting part of the finances of universities. That was why it reported to Bob Kerley, even though some of the major issues surrounding athletics are academic. But they had been treated as a business. As an example, we talked about the University of Michigan in the previous interview. And that was a good example of what happens with athletics and universities. If you go around the country, I'm sure you'll find most of them report to the administrative side and I think that's where athletics reports now, is to the budget officer on the campus.

- 14-00:02:50  
Rubens: So that was a big load to pick up? How big was their budget, do you know, at that point?
- 14-00:02:57  
Laetsch: Well, I forget what the budget was. It was never, from their standpoint, enough. They complained about it all the time. But I forget exactly what it was.
- 14-00:03:07  
Rubens: But it had to be significant—
- 14-00:03:09  
Laetsch: It was significant. Yes.
- 14-00:03:09  
Rubens: —compared to other budgets that you were managing, as well.
- 14-00:03:14  
Laetsch: The largest budgetary unit was Admissions and Records. Because they employ a very large number of people and, of course, through them they give student grants and aid, which was big. And so that's a big program. And by that time the Lawrence Hall of Science was a big program.
- 14-00:03:36  
Rubens: Right, which is reporting to you, as well.
- 14-00:03:37  
Laetsch: That's right.
- 14-00:03:39  
Rubens: Well, we'll follow up the trail of the Lawrence Hall of Science in just a minute. I want to stay with athletics and ask you about the establishment of academic support.
- 14-00:03:51  
Laetsch: There had been academic support through the Student Learning Center, because many athletes need help before they get here. Not just athletes. Others as well. And we had a program. I forget if it had started before I became Vice Chancellor, but I supported it a great deal, which was the summer program for people who needed extra work. They would come in the summer for a number of weeks; it was sort of a pre-school semester almost.
- 14-00:04:23  
Rubens: A beefing up.
- 14-00:04:26  
Laetsch: Beefing up. Which is not all that unusual. For many years earlier on, universities around the country would give a pre-college program. And the student learning centers have been a part of universities for many, many years and had been one when I was involved. But I think what we did was to give it

more support, emphasize it, encourage it, and, of course, they had a program for athletes, as well, both before the school year and then during the school year.

And then we had two faculty members in Political Science who became interested in the issue of athletes, and they proposed that there be an Athletic Study Center that would be supported by the administration and a lot of the budget came from my office.

14-00:05:23

Rubens:

That was Jack Citrin and Ken Jowitt, I think.

14-00:05:24

Laetsch:

That's correct. Citrin and Jowitt, and Jowitt was the motivating party. And they cooperated with the Student Learning Center. But it was a special directed program to athletes. It was housed in the student commons building, and that worked very well. It was important for the athletes to try to keep their grades up and try to stay in school. Of course, it was not, as always with athletics, not universally successful because there are a lot of students who probably shouldn't have been here to begin with. So the failure rate with the program was significant. They trimmed it down but it still happened. Still does.

14-00:06:13

Rubens:

Were there any to-dos, particularly, that you needed to talk about while athletics was reporting to you? Is that when Maggard—

14-00:06:21

Laetsch:

Yes. David Maggard was the Athletic Director when I became Vice Chancellor and then he was Athletic Director for some months after I left.

14-00:06:34

Rubens:

I think Heyman says that he, Heyman, played a role in persuading Maggard not to accept a position at the University of Virginia.

14-00:06:48

Laetsch:

Yes, he did. And I forget details of that.

14-00:06:54

Rubens:

The alumni here were not happy with the football team and men's basketball. They believed that they should have been doing better.

14-00:07:04

Laetsch:

Oh, sure. Alumni always think they should be doing better. That's universal. But David was a typical athletic director in the sense that—of course, he never had enough money, support—thought that the administration should always support more. But on the other hand, he played by the rules and he was very careful about budgets. And always stuck within his budget, which, of course, has changed enormously since he left. Athletic budgets have just accelerated.

- 14-00:07:40  
Rubens: Now, he reported to you.
- 14-00:07:41  
Laetsch: That's right.
- 14-00:07:42  
Rubens: Does that mean that you met with him throughout the year?
- 14-00:07:43  
Laetsch: I met with David more than anyone else, I think.
- 14-00:07:46  
Rubens: How come?
- 14-00:07:47  
Laetsch: Because athletic folks are always complaining. They never have enough and they're always crying. But we had at least weekly meetings.
- 14-00:08:03  
Rubens: Weekly?
- 14-00:08:04  
Laetsch: Oh, at least. Sometimes more than a week. We were on the phone all the time. It's a constant, I say, babysitting service with athletics. It never ceases. It keeps on going all the time. Because here you have a group of people whose jobs depend on their win-loss record and they have to keep winning because memories are very short. You can win for years and then have a couple of years that you don't win and you're out. So the coaches are always on this very short tether and their jobs depend completely on their winning.
- 14-00:08:50  
Rubens: Now, did any of the coaches jump the hierarchical ladder and come talking to you directly?
- 14-00:08:54  
Laetsch: Oh, some did. Sure. That was always an issue. The Athletic Director never liked that but that, always happened to a certain extent. It wasn't a major issue but it did happen. The complicating factor in athletics at that time was that Women's Athletics was a separate department from Men's Athletics. So I had two athletic directors report to me.
- 14-00:09:16  
Rubens: Lue Lilly headed the women's athletics program.
- 14-00:09:17  
Laetsch: Lue Lilly had been hired by Kerley, and she was the Athletic Director the whole time I was there. After I left, they combined the two units and Dave Maggard left. He and Lue would never have been able to work together, and one of the reasons why the two units were not together is that these two folks didn't like each other at all. And the third player in this was the recreational



sports program, which became even more of an issue after the Recreational Sports Facility was built.

14-00:10:03

Rubens: That was Kerley's big—

14-00:10:04

Laetsch: Well, he had started it, yes, and then I came along and I finished it.

14-00:10:08

Rubens: Really? Boy, that was a huge responsibility and budget you had to attend to.

14-00:10:11

Laetsch: That was right. But anyhow, the two athletic directors didn't get along very well with the Director of Recreational Sports, Bill Manning. So the three of them were constantly battling.

14-00:10:32

Rubens: Do you, in retrospect, have a strong feeling about whether the women's and men's should have remained separate?

14-00:10:40

Laetsch: No, no.

14-00:10:42

Rubens: It was Title IX that basically—

14-00:10:43

Laetsch: Well, we had Title IX even before then. But it was always something of an issue because, even though the amount of money could be worked out so we followed Title IX, they did not have the same resources. For example, the facilities for women were not good at all.

14-00:11:02

Rubens: Women couldn't find softball fields to use for practice.

14-00:11:04

Laetsch: And there was always competition between the coaches. For example, basketball. There were two basketball coaches. The men's and women's were constantly battling over practice time. And just all kinds of silly things happened as a result of that, mainly on the part of the men. The women, overall, I found to be very cooperative and very sensible about things. Even though Lue was very strong-minded and she had, for good reason, sort of a perpetual victim attitude. But a lot of it was deserved. So she was constantly battling other forces and—

14-00:11:43

Rubens: So this is someone you would be on the phone with regularly and meet with?

14-00:11:46

Laetsch:

I would talk to her a lot, yes, and meet with her all the time. And then Bill Manning, head of Rec Sports, because he controlled a lot of the space. He controlled all the space in Harmon Gym, so that was always an issue of who could play when. When the Rec Sports Facility was built, that helped out a great deal but it was still an issue because both men's and women's teams didn't use the Rec Sports Facility. In between seasons they couldn't practice officially, but of course they would go and play. That resulted in some interesting things. So we had these three tribal groups.

14-00:12:41

Rubens:

So was Lue Lilly the equivalent in terms of the hierarchy of Dave Maggard? She didn't have as much money in teams or respect probably. But was she on the organizational chart the same level?

14-00:12:53

Laetsch:

Yes, right.

14-00:12:54

Rubens:

So it's more than personality that makes them not get along. It also had to do with competition for space and—

14-00:13:00

Laetsch:

Well, it was primarily personality. That's right. Well, personality and Dave, like again, a lot of athletic directors and coaches, was you're either with them completely or against them. So anybody who had independent ideas about things didn't get along very well, and Lue was very independent-minded.

14-00:13:22

Rubens:

So looking back just to the question I had asked, do you think that they should have been collapsed as they were eventually?

14-00:13:32

Laetsch:

Well, I think that was a good move, and it would have been done earlier if the personalities on both sides hadn't been so strong.

14-00:13:39

Rubens:

I see. Okay. I think Lue was ultimately fired, wasn't she?

14-00:13:42

Laetsch:

I don't know fired but there was a—

14-00:13:46

Rubens:

Strongly pushed out.

14-00:13:48

Laetsch:

Well, when the units combined, she was sort of pushed out. And I can't remember now if she sued the University or not. There was a coach or two, women's coaches, who sued the University. I don't know if Lue did or not. I don't think so. But I know that there was a swimming coach and another coach that sued.

- 14-00:14:06  
Rubens: Under your—when you were—?
- 14-00:14:06  
Laetsch: No, this was after I left.
- 14-00:14:07  
Rubens: Okay. So to bring it full circle, the study center for the athletics, worked well and that was a good idea.
- 14-00:14:19  
Laetsch: Yes. That was a good idea.
- 14-00:14:20  
Rubens: By the way, did you spend a lot of time going to games?
- 14-00:14:24  
Laetsch: I spent a lot of time. Both Sita and I spent a lot of time going to games. We went to all the football games. We traveled with the football team. We went to—which I'll come back to later because that had some interesting aftermath to that. And then we went to all the basketball games, both men's and women's. Went to other sporting events. I would go to some. Not all. I would usually go to all the track meets that were here. And a variety of other sports, as well. Just doing that took an awful lot of time. We didn't travel with the basketball team but we did travel a lot with the football team.
- 14-00:15:12  
Rubens: Well, why don't you finish that discussion?
- 14-00:15:13  
Laetsch: Alumni have always traveled, or had for a long time, I presume they still do travel with the football team to away games, because it was usually a chartered plane. Bear Backers would come along with the team. It was one of the perks of being a generous Bear Backer, so we would always be with that group. That was in some ways a very good thing for my next position as Vice Chancellor for Development because the only—well, we had started to begin to raise money more actively on campus but we didn't really get going until Curt Simic came as Vice Chancellor for Development, and he came in, what, '81, I think it was. And that's when the campus first started seriously raising money. But before that, one of the primary fundraising programs was athletics.
- 14-00:16:29  
Rubens: So traveling with the team. It bode well for later fundraising, I imagine, but did you have some stories you wanted to tell about actually going to games?
- 14-00:16:39  
Laetsch: One of the more interesting and unpleasant stories is that the whole time that we traveled with the football team to away games, I think we won two or three games. So there's nothing like being on a plane with the coaches after they

had lost. They were not ever very happy folks and not very pleasant to be around when they lost. The whole athletic thing is very interesting, because you see this still all the time with alumni and others. They never grow up in some ways. They're still adolescents.

14-00:17:17

Rubens: So even when you became Vice Chancellor for Development, athletics continues to report to you?

14-00:17:35

Laetsch: That's right.

14-00:17:37

Rubens: And so that was a shift in the org chart.

14-00:17:38

Laetsch: Yes. And the Lawrence Hall of Science reported to me. And I forget what else reported to me but I think it was mainly athletics and the Lawrence Hall.

14-00:17:46

Rubens: Did you have to spend time on raising money for the athletic programs?

14-00:17:53

Laetsch: Oh, I didn't have to spend a lot of time myself raising money because they had an effective organization. I went to all of the sessions and the meetings and spoke to alumni and did a lot of that. But I didn't put an enormous amount of time into just raising money for athletics.

14-00:18:17

Rubens: When you look back, do you think that you have a different view of whether athletics brings money into the campus or not?

14-00:18:30

Laetsch: Well, I knew then what happened. We did not bring money into the campus directly. There are very few athletic programs in the country that do. One of the famous ones is Ohio State, that does bring money into the campus, and maybe there's a couple of others. But most of them are in deficit. And this has been written about time and time again, but you still hear all the time the fact that you need athletics because they bring money to the institution. Yes, they bring money but the institution pays out a lot of money. As I said, not too long after I left, they began to pour money in and it went up to about fifteen million a year, and it's now been pared down with the recent committee that's worked on it to, I think, it's five, six a year now that the Chancellor's Office plans to give. Which we never did.

And Dave was a very good financial manager. They had to live on what they were given. They were given some student registration fees, and they were given what they could earn. So there was a tub, the boat was on its own bottom, and the idea of us giving money from the Chancellor's Office just was not in the cards. We never would have done, it because there are too many

other things that are needed and the Chancellor's discretionary monies, which he gets from donors who don't designate but just say, "Use it for whatever is important," that's the most valuable money the Chancellor has because that's his start-up money. That's his venture capital money. And so it's very, very important. And the idea that a considerable amount of this goes off to support athletics is unconscionable.

14-00:20:11

Rubens: Was there any move while in these ten years to disband or get rid of some of the athletic teams?

14-00:20:21

Laetsch: Oh, to modify, yes. In fact, I don't know if Mike talks about it in his oral history, but his—

14-00:20:32

Rubens: There was the Smelser Report, wasn't there?

14-00:20:33

Laetsch: Well, but this was even before that. This was conversations with the President of Stanford, Don Kennedy, about basically forming the nucleus of a new league which would be local, so there wouldn't be the extensive travel that you had.

14-00:20:52

Rubens: That the Pac-Ten report?

14-00:20:54

Laetsch: That's right. And it's not just the Pac-Ten, but they always play teams outside the Pac-Ten. They travel all over the country playing and that costs a lot of money and it's not always covered completely by the gate. Well, Don Kennedy didn't want to do this, because he didn't think he could. And so we played with it. And then Mike gave his famous speech at the NCAA meetings in Texas, and I wrote his speech for him.

14-00:21:29

Rubens: Oh, talk about that. You wrote the speech?

14-00:21:31

Laetsch: I wrote the speech. Right.

14-00:21:32

Rubens: Oh, this was a storied presentation, a much talked about occurrence. Why don't you tell us the essence of the speech and then what the—

14-00:21:38

Laetsch: If I recall, the essence of the speech was they should de-emphasize intercollegiate athletics for a whole bunch of reasons. Academic reasons and financial reasons. So that was the essence of it.

14-00:21:53

Rubens: He gives it in Texas, where—

14-00:21:56

Laetsch: That's right. And so he got a lot of feedback on that. What do they call it? Backlash?

14-00:22:03

Rubens: Blowback?

14-00:22:03

Laetsch: Yes, blowback on that, and the funny thing is, with a lot of the alums who blamed Mike forever for wanting to do away with big time athletics, most of them had never read the speech but they just heard by gossip that had been spread around. Probably some of it by the athletic departments. Because that's one of the things that always was a concern. Dave Maggard would talk to me and then he would go to complain to Mike about me, and then he would come to me to complain about Mike. And, of course, athletic directors never want to report to anybody but the President or the Chancellor.

So Mike's speech became rather well-known. But he was absolutely right and it's coming to fruition. All over the country these expensive athletic programs are just not going to be able to manage and so what are they doing? They're all cutting back. And we've just gone through that here, where we had a committee, and you've been reading about it, where they cut two sports. Actually, one and a half sports. We talked about that already. And both for good reason. But they need to probably cut more.

14-00:23:22

Rubens: Now, what about intramurals during your administration?

14-00:23:26

Laetsch: Intramurals was encouraged and, of course, we built the Recreational Sports Facility. And Bill Manning was the director of Recreational Sports, and I got along with Bill very well. He was a very good manager. And because he controlled territory, he always had a little feud going with the two Athletic Directors.

14-00:23:51

Rubens: Now, his territory was literally the RSF?

14-00:23:54

Laetsch: Yes, and the playing fields. That is, a lot of the fields around the campus that are used for intramural sports, such as the one up in Strawberry Canyon. The field right by the stadium, Witter Field, and there were several other fields around the area that he controlled, and, of course, this was always an issue.

14-00:24:13

Rubens: Did the issue over the California Schools for the Deaf and the Blind occur during your administration?

14-00:24:19

Laetsch:

That's right. The California Schools site was finally given to the University with the exception of some of the buildings that are now elderly citizens' homes. We turned the buildings that were available, the residence halls, into dorms for freshmen and sophomores so that we could house all of them who wanted campus housing, which we had not been able to do before and so—

14-00:24:46

Rubens:

Were these specifically for athletes?

14-00:24:48

Laetsch:

No, these were students overall. We've never had an athletic dorm. There has been pressure at various times to do that or suggestions but we never wanted to do that because we did not want to create a separate caste of people. When the Foothill project was built, we were then able to house almost all the freshmen who wanted to be housed on campus and then the new dorms in the south of campus that were built, as well. So that was all very important.

14-00:25:20

Rubens:

I know that John Cummins has been doing a lot of interviewing of key actors regarding athletics. And he interviewed you.

14-00:25:33

Laetsch:

That's right. He interviewed Dave Maggard. Yes. It might be a good idea to get a hold of that interview. Because we're probably recounting some of the same things.

14-00:25:43

Rubens:

Yes. Well, I just wanted to make sure you've said everything here that you may have said to him.

14-00:25:47

Laetsch:

And that I agreed with myself.

14-00:25:49

Rubens:

That's right. But did John Cummins figure in your interactions, because I'm surprised that Heyman asked you to write the speech. I thought that he had his own chief of staff.

14-00:26:10

Laetsch:

Well that's probably because at the time he had no interaction with athletics. I was the one who knew about athletics.

14-00:26:13

Rubens:

Right. It comes to Cummins long after you're gone.

14-00:26:32

Laetsch:

Did I talk about the visit that Russell Ellis made?

14-00:26:38

Rubens:

Yes.

14-00:26:51

Laetsch:

Yes, Ohio State. I talked about that. Well, that, in a nutshell, is a lot of what is wrong with intercollegiate athletics, particularly the big programs and particularly football and basketball. Did I mention talking after that, in fact, quite a few years later with Roger Heyns? Roger had been the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs at Michigan before he came here. So he knew all about the athletic situation. And I knew Roger fairly well while he was here and got even better acquainted with him when he left.

14-00:27:40

Rubens:

Where did he go when he left?

14-00:27:41

Laetsch:

He became Director of the Hewlett Foundation. I had a lot of interaction with him while he was Director of the Hewlett Foundation, because we got money from them. I had a lot of interaction with him at the Bohemian Club, particularly the Bohemian Grove. And so he told me about Michigan's athletics. I might have mentioned that.

14-00:28:05

Rubens:

You did talk about it—how athletes were admitted differently, and not through the academic program.

14-00:28:11

Laetsch:

That's right. I've wondered recently whether they still have that practice there because their football team hasn't done very well recently, and I wonder if they domesticated the program and as a result they're not getting the top athletes.

14-00:28:31

Rubens:

Well, the question is what other lens was on that program, because they were the ones who took affirmative action admissions to the Supreme Court.

14-00:28:40

Laetsch:

That's right. Yes.

14-00:28:41

Rubens:

And they prevailed in that case, whereas we did not. Which might be a good segue way if you want to talk about the issue over Asian admissions or did you want to wait and just see if there was anything in your papers about that?

14-00:28:55

Laetsch:

Well, let me look at this material first. And then, sure, I'll talk about it.

[Irrelevant conversation omitted]

14-00:36:17

Rubens:

So let's see if there's anything else that we want to talk about today before you get a chance to look at Mike Heyman's oral history and those notes that



you have. So your tasks were athletics, intercollegiate athletics, admissions and particularly minority admissions, the Lawrence Hall of Science—

14-00:36:43

Laetsch:

But then I had, again, all of the service departments. I had a batch of academic programs. And then I had, of course, the Student Learning Center. I had Career Planning and Placement. I did not have the Student Health Service but I was very much involved with them, and the Director of the Health Service was always on my council. I had a council of all the programs, and we met once a month. Student Health Service folks were always much involved with this because they were—well, the Counseling Center was under me. Jane Moorman, who was Director of the Student Counseling Center, was a psychiatrist. That was always an important part of the whole program because people at Berkeley forget the fact that with the very bright students that we have, there's often a correlation between bright students or bright people and neuroses of various kinds. And so the program that Jane Moorman had was always very, very busy because of the advising center and students have enormous problems, many of them.

14-00:38:40

Rubens:

Sure. Now, were alcohol and drugs a problem?

14-00:38:42

Laetsch:

It's not quite as bad as I read in the paper recently. But it was a problem, sure. A very significant—

14-00:38:55

Rubens:

The parties on the weekends?

14-00:38:57

Laetsch:

The parties on the weekends, in the fraternities. But it even went on in the dorms. It was a very significant issue.

14-00:39:06

Rubens:

So that's got to come under your purview, too.

14-00:39:08

Laetsch:

That? Oh, yes, right. And then the student discipline was under my purview. So you had those issues but just mental issues of students. Nervous breakdowns, depression. Big depression problem with a lot of students. And, of course, things that we maybe didn't recognize as much then but bipolar problems were there, often not recognized. And so that whole side of university existence, which is often not talked about much, but was a very significant percentage of students had what were then called emotional problems.

14-00:39:59

Rubens:

Did you see during those ten years in administration an increase of the numbers of counselors and—?

14-00:40:05

Laetsch:

I'm not sure it was the numbers of counselors, but in terms of it being an increase in the number of students suffering I am under the impression that there was. Because it became, all during that period, increasingly selective in terms of the academics. In terms of who's getting in. It was a steep curve. And as a result of that, you had just an awful lot of kids who were under enormous amount of stress. And, actually, one aspect of that, that I haven't seen talked about anywhere else, was with the increase in the number of Asian students. Not that they suffered from this any more perhaps than anyone else but they had almost no family support for these things because mental illness in Asia is considered something that doesn't happen. You don't talk about it. It doesn't exist. And the number of situations with these kids that really needed help and not from their families, they couldn't even talk about it to their family. I remember one student in one of my freshmen seminar programs. Real, real psychological problems as a result because he had to succeed and he was in, like so many, going into sciences, et cetera; he wanted to be an artist. He was good but he couldn't—so he would do art stuff here on campus and keep it on campus in a locker because he couldn't take it home.

So you have this whole kind of subterranean issue that was very difficult to bring out in the open. But, of course, it was there and the ramifications of it. Each year we would have suicides or attempted suicides. And this still goes on. But somebody really ought to do a study of that sometime because as we increased our selectivity you have perhaps an increase.

14-00:42:29

Rubens:

The common term bi-polar started to be used.

14-00:42:36

Laetsch:

That's right. And it wasn't even talked about then.

14-00:42:37

Rubens:

Yes, they said manic-depressive then.

14-00:42:48

Laetsch:

That's right. Well, another thing that we didn't really recognize to that extent then, but more and more so is dyslexia. And did I tell you the story about one of the professors on campus who had a student that I happened to know? The student actually worked in my lab for a time as a student helper. He was dyslexic and had problems in his courses of having this acknowledged in some way, because the faculty was very, very unsympathetic to the whole idea of a kid who was dyslexic. They always assumed that they were trying to get out of work. What we tried to do, and the Student Health Service was very important in this, was to provide dyslexic students with an option that they could take their exams orally. And that was resisted by faculty. This particular student was in a chemistry course, and I knew the instructor. And the student had done poorly in the course, and he tried to get the professor to give him an oral exam or have the TA give him an oral exam. And I talked with the

professor and persuaded him to do this, even though he was very resistant. But after the student did it and got a very high grade, the professor came around and said he finally realized that the students weren't trying to pull one on him, that this was a real condition.

And I think now they probably have that all pretty well covered and people accept it and know about it. But it was really tough on these kids initially. And I just think of all the kids that probably flunked out because they were dyslexic and it was never recognized.

14-00:45:13

Rubens: This is very interesting and important to discuss.

14-00:45:17

Laetsch: Well, just to go back. Well, for quite a while I was the chair of the program committee for the Commonwealth Club of California, and so I introduced a lot of the speakers. We had a program once, which I helped organize, on the issue of reading problems. The person who was the main speaker was Charles Schwab, of the big stock brokerage company, who graduated from Stanford and lives in San Francisco. He is severely dyslexic, and he could hardly read. He told the story when he talked about trying to read *War and Peace*. He got through the first couple of pages and that's all he was ever able to manage. So here's this billionaire, highly successful, and is dyslexic. Well, we had an overflow crowd in one of the hotel ballrooms, and people would come up and talk about how they were, or their children were dyslexic.

In *The New Yorker* last week there was a big article on Eli Broad, the philanthropist in Los Angeles. Well, he is dyslexic and had a hard time reading, et cetera, but he was great with numbers. It's fascinating.

14-00:48:06

Rubens: By the way, when did you become active with the Commonwealth Club?

14-00:48:14

Laetsch: Oh, I have an article on that, which will tell you about it. But I've put together a whole stack of stuff of what happened after I left the University.

14-00:48:23

Rubens: So basically that's after 1990?

14-00:48:26

Laetsch: Yes. That was afterwards.

14-00:48:30

Rubens: But your story related to the problems students were having, so I get it.

14-00:48:34

Laetsch: And that was because Claude Hutchison, Jr., whom I worked a lot with because he was the President of the Cal Alumni Association—. When he was head of the association, he and I would travel around giving talks to alumni

associations around the West Coast so we became good friends. He became President of the Commonwealth Club, and he asked me to be the quarterly chair. In those days, each week they had a speaker, usually in one of the hotels, and it was a bigger event than generally what they have now because they would meet in the ballroom and there'd be lots of people. During that time I introduced Bill Gates and sat with him. Strange man. We can maybe talk about that. And a whole bunch of other very well-known people that I was able to introduce. And then they put me on as chairman of the program committee for the club, and I was that for quite a while, and I continued to be involved with the speakers and introducing some. So I was involved with them for ten years.

14-00:50:02  
Rubens:

So we'll pick that up. All right. So let me tell you the things that I think we have left to talk about. Of course we're going to end with your becoming the Vice Chancellor for Development. That's a whole topic. But there's the issue of the Asian admissions controversy. And I also want to talk about your own ongoing research.

14-00:50:33  
Laetsch:

And the other thing that's perhaps most important, considering the goals that Mike Heyman stated, was the improvement in lower division education and minority admissions.

14-00:50:46  
Rubens:

Well, we did talk about minority admissions. So is there any other thing that we want to pick up or just say? You weren't involved with that civic roundtable that Heyman created with leaders in the administration of the City of Berkeley, from where Dan Boggan gets selected by Heyman.

14-00:51:25  
Laetsch:

No, I wasn't involved with that. In fact, that basically happened after I went over to Development, I think.

14-00:51:34  
Rubens:

Now, Pat Hayashi ends up being an Associate Vice Chancellor? He was an intern under Heyman?

14-00:51:43  
Laetsch:

No, under me. Well, he was under Heyman. He started with me. He worked in my office, not as an intern, but he was employed in my office. He was also working on his PhD in the School of Social Welfare. After I left that Rod Park had him working, in his office. I forget what he was doing. Again, considerably after I left, Rod removed Bailey and put Pat Hayashi in as Director of Admissions and Records. And he had worked for Mike, too, for a period of time as sort of an intern.

14-00:52:35

Rubens:

So was it the luck of the draw that you got him or did you know him in some other—

14-00:52:38

Laetsch:

He was highly recommended by—I forget who. I think maybe it would have been Bud Travers who had been involved with him and highly recommended him.

14-00:52:45

Rubens:

Who was Bud Travers?

14-00:52:50

Laetsch:

Bud was one of my main lieutenants and had mainly Admissions and Records and a number of other programs

14-00:53:40

Rubens:

Okay. Who's Robert Haro? H-A-R-O?

14-00:53:45

Laetsch:

Oh, Robert, Roberto, Haro. He worked for me but he had worked at some time or another as an intern with Mike. So when I took the job, Mike was very interested, and rightfully so, in trying to promote underrepresented minorities in administration. And so he wanted Haro to be an assistant Vice Chancellor in charge of the Student Learning Center and Jane Moorman's program and something else. Because Roberto was very articulate. He could tell a good story. And Mike was very impressed and wanted to have, in those days, Chicanos be promoted. The problem with him was that his people who reported to him couldn't stand him. He was, as a friend of mine used to say, a stranger to the truth. It was not a good situation. People like Jane Moorman, who was very senior, very, very experienced, very knowledgeable, supposedly reported to him, and he couldn't hold a candle to her. But he did very well. He went off and became involved in the new campus of the University system in Merced. I was still there when he left, because they asked me for a recommendation, and I wouldn't give him a recommendation. And he went there for a while and left. And he's retired now and I don't know what he's doing.

14-00:55:48

Rubens:

Were you involved with the Merced campus at all?

14-00:55:57

Laetsch:

No.

14-00:55:58

Rubens:

Well the tape is about to run out, so we will stop for today.

14-00:56:02

Laetsch:

Okay, we'll stop.



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15-00:00:00

Rubens: I want you to identify what was the controversy over Asian admissions, which became a very public attack on the university and Cal specifically. Do you remember how that came about?

15-00:00:41

Laetsch: We had been admitting quite a number of Asian students, particularly through special action admission. And there was a person in the admissions office that, I guess, made a practice of doing that. That was what I was told. And, of course, this was at the beginning of the large numbers of Asian immigrants coming over from Southeast Asia in particular. And then we had, as you have indicated earlier, a year when apparently we decreased the number of students. And this was because the overall number of applicants went way up and we had more people in the special action category than could be admitted and so we also had to decrease them in order to let in kids that were eligible.

15-00:01:45

Rubens: Plus, you were really on a campaign to get African-American and Latino students. Their numbers were going up.

15-00:01:51

Laetsch: That's correct. And so there was a decrease one year in the number that came in. Well, we had some people in the community. I think there was a committee for affirmative action for Asians in San Francisco, and the leader of that came over and we had some meetings. And he and some other people were very surprised when I told him that a lot of the kids that had been coming in were admitted through special action admissions. They didn't realize that. They thought we were discriminating against kids who were highly competitive, which was not the case.

So, anyway, it was one of these situations which got blown out of proportion, plus the fact I think the Director of Admissions perhaps was not as diplomatic as he might have been in the whole issue.

15-00:02:50

Rubens: In terms of his dealings with the press or—?

15-00:02:52

Laetsch: Yes. And with some of these community groups. It became a big brouhaha. It's kind of interesting when you look back on that and look at what we have now where, what is it, 30-some percent of our undergraduate students are of Chinese origin. And when we talk about Asian admissions, it was really Chinese. There were very few other Asian groups that were actively involved, and they were relatively small numbers.

15-00:03:23

Rubens:

So there were even state agencies interested in this? Did the Chancellor appoint a committee to investigate this? Mike Heyman talks about his testimony at a hearing in the California State Senate in his oral history.

15-00:03:39

Laetsch:

Oh, yes. That is right. That was up in Sacramento. I remember that.

15-00:03:44

Rubens:

Did you go with him?

15-00:03:45

Laetsch:

I was there but I didn't testify. But, again, it was an opportunity for some people to make a noise over something for their own reasons. And I can understand their concerns, et cetera, but it was twisted around a great deal, and a lot of it didn't have any basis in real fact.

15-00:04:12

Rubens:

I think it was a 5 percent drop in the number admitted.

15-00:04:15

Laetsch:

That's right. Again, this guy that was the head of the Chinese for Affirmative Action in San Francisco was absolutely flabbergasted when I told him that many of the kids were special action admits and he didn't have anything to say about that. He then went to a state agency. But I was very happy to forget about him.

15-00:04:41

Rubens:

Okay. So that's all there is to say about that then.

15-00:04:45

Laetsch:

Right.

15-00:04:46

Rubens:

Now, I think you also wanted to talk about the improvement in lower division education. What was the manifestation of that?

15-00:04:53

Laetsch:

Well, one of the goals of the Office of Undergraduate Affairs, from its founding, and one of the charges given me, was to do whatever could be done to improve undergraduate education. Because you have this phenomenon in universities. It's sort of like having campaigns for conversion to various denominations. I've said that before; that's my clerical background, you see. But it's true. Every so often, you go over the same things. And so the history of universities in this country, the large ones, is supposedly ignoring undergraduates and then people getting the message they should pay a lot of attention to them and do things for them, and then that passes, and then after a while they reinvent it again.



I was just reading an article about a former professor here in the early part of the twentieth century in History who's very, very popular, and the person who wrote it was also then a professor in a university who had been one of his students. And talking about how in those days, the faculty really were concerned about students and that people became well-known for their teaching and that people wanted to teach and that teaching was considered the highest order of activity. It was only later that research became the all and faculty didn't do teaching, they did research, et cetera. So we've had this strain going through for a very long period of time. But I think one does have to say that, yes, in large universities undergraduate teaching is often ignored, and even on our campus it is ignored by some. We have a lot of very good teachers at the undergraduate level. We have faculty—I just heard about some the other day—that hardly teach at all and this has been true now for some time. So it's a constant battle. And when you consider the fact that the rewards are for research and when you consider the very substantial amounts of money that have gone in to support research in universities and, of course, that becomes immensely important and so the faculty are judged on whether they bring in research grants. Well, if you are judged on that in terms of promotions, what are you going to spend your time on?

15-00:07:44

Rubens:

So tell me if you remember specifically being engaged in some programs to improve lower division education during the Heyman years.

15-00:07:52

Laetsch:

Yes. Well, one of the things that we did, we gave out money to people.

15-00:07:58

Rubens:

To faculty for teaching?

15-00:07:59

Laetsch:

To faculty for teaching. And I've got in my records here somewhere; I've got a file on that. But we gave out money. We supported—

15-00:08:08

Rubens:

You initiated this? This was a new—

15-00:08:09

Laetsch:

Yes.

15-00:08:10

Rubens:

What about “Outstanding Teacher of the Year”?

15-00:08:11

Laetsch:

Well, the outstanding teacher came under Undergraduate Affairs, so we supported that. But we gave out some monies to individuals and we had a program where if they wanted to improve their courses we would give them money to improve their courses. And we started some courses, or at least we funded some courses that were started. And in here someplace—

15-00:08:40  
Rubens: Do you want me to stop for a minute so you can look through your files?

15-00:08:42  
Laetsch: Yes, stop for a minute.

[Break in recording]

Okay. Well, one of the things that we had a program where we provided grants for people who wanted to improve their courses. And that was a pretty substantial program and that had an impact all over the campus on people doing things to improve their courses.

15-00:09:20  
Rubens: Were there certain criteria that—?

15-00:09:20  
Laetsch: Yes. And we had a group that reviewed it.

15-00:09:24  
Rubens: And this was a program that was initiated in your administration?

15-00:09:26  
Laetsch: That's right. Right.

15-00:09:27  
Rubens: And where did the money come from for that?

15-00:09:29  
Laetsch: That money came from the Chancellor's Office, basically. Mr. Errol Mauchlan, who was the Assistant Vice Chancellor for Budget and Planning, he was very, very supportive of Undergraduate Affairs and provided funds for a lot of initiatives. And this is just one example. This is a course that was started, a lower division course in world civilization that Richard Herr in the History Department started. And, again, we supported it. It was very, very popular and it was basically something that was given in a lot of colleges. Sort of a contemporary civilization type of course. We don't do that now; we became a lot fancier about things. But it was a lower division course, and it was a large course. It became very popular and one of the people who audited the course was Gordon Getty's wife, Anne. She took that course and did well. She took some other courses, and I think she finally took enough courses formally that she—I don't know if she had enough to graduate or not. But it was out of that relationship that later on she and Gordon gave, what was it, fifteen million, I think it was, for the Washburn Laboratory in Valley Life Sciences Building. So that was money very well invested in a lot of ways.

So this is just one example. We also funded a course in public speaking. In fact, I funded a couple of courses in public speaking. One in the Business School and one in the College of Letters and Science. At one time, we had a Department of Speech. And then it became the Rhetoric Department, and

some of the people that had been in the Speech Department were then folded into the Rhetoric Department, and a couple of them were very well-known people on campus. Garff Wilson, who was in charge of public ceremonies, came out of that department. They gave very popular lower division courses, and many students remembered those faculty later on as the greatest teachers they had. The fact that when they folded Speech into Rhetoric, they stopped giving Speech courses.

15-00:12:21

Rubens:

It became more research-oriented and theoretical.

15-00:12:22

Laetsch:

That's right. And the course in public speaking became an upper division course, and so you did not have a course that any student could sign up for. Well, one of the former members of the Speech Department wanted to start such a course, and I encouraged him and gave him money and we offered that beginning speech course again. I don't know if it still exists or not. And then we did one over in the Business School because the Business School folks coming in were very, very highly selected. But many of them admitted that their greatest fear in life, as is true for lots of people in the country, was to give a public speech. So here you had people going into business who couldn't talk. And, in fact, just generally, here we think we're preparing people for the real world and forget that speaking is the primary criterion in many cases for success and advancement.

But we put that way, way down on the list of things. It's better that we teach them obscure facts about this, that and the other thing, which is not bad, but the fact that if they can't speak it's going to be very, very difficult. Well, we had kids, highly selected students in the MBA program who were terrified of giving a speech, so we started a program for them. But this is something, just nationally, it comes up every so often that at various times more people have been afraid of giving a speech than of dying. And I know people, myself, who just completely tremble if they have to get up and give a speech.

That's sort of a diversion, but the fact that here's a very important part of human existence that we tend to ignore, and this particular course was an effort to at least help out. Often, as I walk through campus, think that we should do another kind of course, and that is to teach particularly young women how to speak, because not just what they say but how to say it. They've never learned what part of their anatomy they need to use to speak because they speak with the front parts of their mouth. And as a result you get this through their nose and you get this kind of semi-nasal sort of thing. You know, the Valley Girl type of talk.

15-00:15:01

Rubens:

And you think that's more a sex or gender issue?

- 15-00:15:03  
Laetsch: Yes. And I think for a whole variety of reasons. But you hear it from women more, and I keep wanting to say, "Come on, get the sound back down your throat."
- 15-00:15:14  
Rubens: Well, yes. Part of it is also ending a sentence on a rising inflection instead of going down. Which speaks to a certain kind of insecurity or timidity.
- 15-00:15:26  
Laetsch: That's right. And yet that now has become common on TV with announcers. I find that they increasingly have an inflection, a rising inflection, at the end of their phrasing, which drives me crazy.
- 15-00:15:39  
Rubens: In these years, wasn't Women's Studies expanding, or were there issues about faculty equity?
- 15-00:15:56  
Laetsch: The Women's Center, which was a program to recruit and aid women who were non-traditional students, particularly older women, women with families, became very active and I think effective. But I don't know if that would be the same thing. It was a research center as well.
- 15-00:16:12  
Rubens: Did that start under your office?
- 15-00:16:14  
Laetsch: I don't think we started it but we supported it and I put a lot of effort into it. They were one of the units that reported to me. The director of that was Margaret Wilkerson, and I interacted with her a lot. She was always very good to work with. She then went on to the Ford Foundation.
- Rubens: It was a real period of confronting the fact that there weren't the same percentage of female professors and administrators.
- Laetsch: That's right, yes, and they were right.
- 15-00:16:16  
Rubens: We've talked about support for undergraduate education in terms of the Athletic Study Center and then there was this Women's Center.
- 15-00:16:29  
Laetsch: Right. And I supported a whole variety of other kinds of things. I have in here some place a thing that Bob Middlekauff, when he was Dean of Letters and Science, started. Seminars, freshmen seminars. Again, that's something which has had many births and where you have small seminar groups led by faculty.
- 15-00:16:52  
Rubens: With leading faculty.

- 15-00:16:53  
Laetsch: Yes. And, in fact, Errol Mauchlan, whom I just mentioned, was very much involved in supporting that program before I came along. And then we, with Bob Middlekauff, supported a program in Letters and Science for freshmen seminars, and I had conducted a number myself.
- 15-00:17:15  
Rubens: Oh, did you?
- 15-00:17:16  
Laetsch: Oh, yes, sure, while I was Vice Chancellor.
- 15-00:17:19  
Rubens: What were your seminars?
- 15-00:17:20  
Laetsch: I forget what the titles were but they were basically on university functioning, university governance. What a university's all about really. And so I did that for a number of years.
- 15-00:17:41  
Rubens: Oh, that must have been fun. I hope you find one of your syllabi.
- 15-00:17:46  
Laetsch: Well, I don't know if I had a syllabi or not, but I will look.
- 15-00:17:50  
Rubens: Did you feel that teaching put you in contact? Gave you a real sense of what the student body was like?
- 15-00:18:00  
Laetsch: Oh, absolutely.
- 15-00:18:02  
Rubens: Is that one of the reasons you did it?
- 15-00:18:03  
Laetsch: Well, no. I've always liked teaching and so even while I was doing official things in the Chancellor's Office, I always felt like I was teaching, whether it was students or colleagues or the public. While I was in Undergraduate Affairs, I had lots of interaction with the public over a whole variety of things. And then when I became Vice Chancellor for Development, of course, I was in many ways sort of the spokesman for the campus in a lot of areas for a lot of people.
- 15-00:18:34  
Rubens: Sure. Well, should we get to that? But let me just ask you—we're going to talk about your research a little later. You still had a lab during this whole period and you did research?

- 15-00:18:43  
Laetsch: Yes. I had a lab up until about 1990, I think it was. I think the whole period I was still funded.
- 15-00:18:55  
Rubens: Well, let's do that at a separate time so that we make sure we cover your research. So you taught freshman seminars; were you teaching any botany or biology classes?
- 15-00:19:06  
Laetsch: I taught Biology 1, the main course for majors, the first two years I was in the Chancellor's Office, and then it was too much. So I had to stop it.
- 15-00:19:18  
Rubens: Tell me about the relationship to Blackhawk, because that seemed to me something that you were trying to, I don't know, expand the University and—
- 15-00:19:29  
Laetsch: Well, I have a whole file in here on that.
- 15-00:19:31  
Rubens: Is that right to get here before we get on to your being Vice Chancellor in charge of Development?
- 15-00:19:36  
Laetsch: Yes, that's fine. Well, that all started because Ken Behring, who was the developer of Blackhawk, along with many other places. He was a poor kid from Michigan who went off to University of Wisconsin to play football. Things didn't work out, so he dropped out after about two years, came back to his little town and began to sell a few old used cars. He had a few little old cars on, as he said, a little lot and that went well. And then he got a dealership. I think it was General Motors or Ford, and built that up and was successful. Then he was down in Florida.
- 15-00:20:23  
Rubens: Yes. That's where he made his big money.
- 15-00:20:26  
Laetsch: He was down in Florida and he got involved in some real estate deals and that worked out well, and they kept going and going, and he started a city in Florida. He became one of the major real estate developers in the country. And then he found out about Blackhawk Ranch, which I had had some interaction with, in fact, the campus had because it was a fossil site. And so I had been out there even before it was sold to Behring, and the Paleontology Department used it a good deal.
- 15-00:20:56  
Rubens: What kind of fossils were they?

15-00:20:57

Laetsch:

Oh, these were mammalian fossils. Well, they were fish on up through mammals. That area through Mount Diablo has a large vein that's full of fossils.

Ken bought that operation and started to build, and after he built a lot of it he had the idea of an auto museum because he had begun to collect classic automobiles. This is something that Ken does. He gets very enthused about something and works very hard at it for a few years and then his interest goes to something else. He had all of these nice automobiles and what to do with them and he thought, "Well, maybe the University could be involved." And so he came to us and asked whether we could have our name on an auto museum out at Blackhawk. And then, of course, he provided some money for the campus.

15-00:22:10

Rubens:

He had not been involved in contributing to the campus before?

15-00:22:12

Laetsch:

Not at all. And so I was somebody who was asked to deal with him. And then he formed an advisory group, a board, actually, for the Blackhawk Museum and I was the campus representative for that. And one of the reasons for all that is I had been much involved in museum work of various kinds.

15-00:22:42

Rubens:

Of course. We've discussed your extensive work with museums in previous interviews.

[review discussion omitted]

15-00:23:05

Laetsch:

All right. Fine. Something, though, I've thought about since then is the fact that being involved in ASTC for many years, being its president, I was on the board for the American Association of Museums, the Indo-US Subcommission., which we've talked about some, because it was a major set of activities. All of that time I spent on those things would have been a full-time job for many people and these were all sidelines that I did along with other things. But these were very major efforts of various kinds.

Anyhow, the thing was that I probably had more experience with museums than just about anybody on campus and so I was put on this board. And we developed a nice exhibit out there, initially in cooperation with Anthropology.

15-00:24:01

Rubens:

So this was still his museum but with the University being an advisor?

15-00:24:04

Laetsch:

That's right. Well, again, it was called "in cooperation with the University of California Berkeley".

15-00:24:15

Rubens: And what did the University get out of it?

15-00:24:17

Laetsch: Money. He gave us some money. With a promise of maybe a lot more coming down the pipe. And I don't know how much was finally given. I sort of lost track of that. But I saw in a campus newsletter recently that he's now involved with the School of Public Health.

15-00:24:39

Rubens: Oh, I thought it was Education?

15-00:24:40

Laetsch: Well, that was some time ago. There's one most recently. He was at some event. I think it was Public Health. Anyhow, he was involved, and I thought, "Well, good luck."

15-00:24:50

Rubens: Having him deliver?

15-00:24:51

Laetsch: Ken is a very interesting kind of a guy. After a while, I went off of the board of the Blackhawk Museum. He was very displeased with me, because I kept insisting that they follow good museum practices. And one of the things that he would do would be to sell cars in the collection, if he got a good deal on one. And I said, "You can't do that if you're going to be a respectable museum. You have to have a policy of accessioning and de-accessioning." All museums get rid of stuff but they have a policy of how they do it. And it's not because somebody comes in and wants to buy one of their masterpieces that they sell it to them. Well, Ken does not like any opposition. And he does not like to be questioned. And so he asked the Chancellor to take me off that board, which I guess finally did happen. Or maybe it was when I left the University. But in any case, he became very unhappy with me because I questioned things.

15-00:25:57

Rubens: One of your associates left the University to work for him.

15-00:26:03

Laetsch: Oh, that was Ron Wright. You see, when he started the museum he needed a director, and he and Ron had become acquainted.

15-00:26:14

Rubens: Ron's position had been what?

15-00:26:16

Laetsch: Oh, he was a Vice Chancellor for Business and Administrative Services. He followed Bob Kerley. Ron came from Nebraska. And through all of these dealings with Blackhawk he became acquainted with Ken Behring and Ken, I think, offered him a very lucrative position. And Ron had some financial issues, and so he took that job and moved to Blackhawk and bought a house



out there. And that's another part of the Blackhawk thing that is kind of an interesting subset, which is the fact that we bought a house at Blackhawk, which caused some fuss aired in the articles that came out by this kid.

15-00:27:02

Rubens: With the *Chronicle*, you had said, who was already gunning for you with the Asian admissions?

15-00:27:04

Laetsch: No, no. It was not the same writer; very different.

15-00:27:19

Rubens: So what was the to-do over?

15-00:27:21

Laetsch: Well, the fact that this reporter for *The Daily Cal* thought that I had been given a lot of privileges of various kinds and as a result of that I was putting the University's name, et cetera, behind the auto museum. And that I had been bribed. And one of the bits of evidence he presented for that was that I had bought an old Rolls-Royce and he maintained that Ken Behring had given that to me in some way. Well, Ken Behring had nothing whatsoever to do with it. Yes, we did buy a Rolls-Royce but this was from Alta Bates Hospital. It had been left to Alta Bates by a wealthy lady in Piedmont who died, and the director of gifts at Alta Bates was a good friend who had been the Director of the California Alumni Association. Scott Sherman. And so Scott just called me up and said that he had a nice car, good price, would I be interested? And so we were and so we bought it. And it had nothing whatsoever to do with Blackhawk.

15-00:28:37

Rubens: And so this reporter is layering the charges against you?

15-00:28:38

Laetsch: That's right.

15-00:28:39

Rubens: He's saying you buy a home, presuming that you got a deal on that.

15-00:28:42

Laetsch: That's right. And so the other thing was that we did buy a condo at Blackhawk as an investment and, in fact, Mike talks about it a bit in his oral history in which he said it was all nonsense because I had talked to him before we bought it as to whether this was something that we ought to do. And he said, "As long as you pay market price, no problem." So that's what we did. It was a very bad investment. [laughter] Something that we learned in real estate was that it's fine to have a house that's rented as long as there's a renter. But if you have a period of days, weeks, what have you, or months when you don't have a renter, then it's not a good—

15-00:29:24

Rubens:

So you were not planning on moving there? Or having one of your children—

15-00:29:25

Laetsch:

No, no. Purely an investment. So anyway, that's, again, another example of a lot of time and effort being spent on something that has no significance. It was just all a waste but this kid was out to make a name for himself, and I hope he is in a position now where he can reflect on his sins.

15-00:29:56

Rubens:

So somehow the frothiness of the Asian admissions issue and then the Blackhawk smear, and the leaving of Curt Simic, had Heyman decide you would be the perfect person to fill—

15-00:30:11

Laetsch:

Well, who knows what some of the origins were. But I never had any sense that my being asked to be Vice Chancellor for Development had anything whatsoever to do with these events.

15-00:30:29

Rubens:

Okay. It wasn't a disenchantment with your work there. It was seeing you were the perfect person.

15-00:30:33

Laetsch:

That's right. Well, he couldn't be disenchanted with my work as Vice Chancellor for Undergraduate Affairs because we had had lots of very good successes, and again, fulfilling several of Mike's own platform entities.

15-00:30:50

Rubens:

So we were talking about Blackhawk and Ron Wright.

15-00:30:57

Laetsch:

Right. And Ron went out to become Director of the Blackhawk Museum and bought a house out there. And so he really helped build up the collection and do things with it and advertise it. Then I had a telephone call one day from Ron, who was very distraught—and we had seen him and his family quite a bit socially—that he was leaving Blackhawk because he just couldn't put up any longer with the fact that Ken was so arbitrary about everything. And, as I had mentioned earlier, if he wanted to sell a car, he'd sell it and doing all the things that any respectable museum would consider to be anathema. So Ron left. He went to Sacramento. He was involved in some construction programs there, and I haven't heard a word from him, and I don't think anybody else has since then, which is too bad.

Then Ken hired another gentleman who had a lot of experience in museums. I know his name but it won't come back to me right now. Anyhow, he was from the southeast. Had run a museum back there. Very nice guy. And so he came out and began to really build up the museum as it should be built up. In fact, one of the things he did in the new building was to put in a classroom in the museum building where they had people come in; and they had events and all

kinds of things. And he put a sign up on the wall calling it the Mac Laetsch Classroom. It was the only bit of a building ever dedicated to me. I doubt if it's still up there. Things went along fine, and then he called up about the same problems that Ron had had. That he could not agree to a lot of the things that had been done in the museum. So he left. And then I've sort of lost—well, not completely lost track because one of Ken's son took it over and, I think is probably still the director of the museum.

15-00:33:39

Rubens:

So just to flash forward. What happened to the museum?

15-00:33:42

Laetsch:

It's still there.

15-00:33:44

Rubens:

But is it a part of the University? Is there any relationship?

15-00:33:47

Laetsch:

I don't know what the current situation is.

15-00:33:49

Rubens:

I wonder if Behring or the museum had anything to do with Heyman going to the Smithsonian.

15-00:33:56

Laetsch:

No, no. Well, the reason that that came up was while Mike was at the Smithsonian, Ken gave \$150 million to the Museum of American History. There's the fact they knew each other, but I don't think there was any cause and effect there.

Anyway, I have run into Ken at various times because he's gotten involved in other things. He was much involved in giving wheelchairs to underdeveloped countries and he had done something in India, and I met him over at the Indian Consul General's house for an event one evening and then a couple of other places. And as is true with such folks, they don't carry any background. That is, when I say background, you would think that since he was very unhappy with me at that time, that he would maybe still be. But no. As if nothing of these things had ever happened. He was still a friend. And so I've run into him a couple of places and he's always been very gracious. It's very interesting.

15-00:35:07

Rubens:

There was a time when the University wanted ROHO to interview him, and it was very hard to get it going, to get a meeting with him and you said don't bother.

So by the time you became development director, did you know that was not an avenue or did you still think—

- 15-00:36:13  
Laetsch: Well, a lot of my interaction with him occurred after I became Vice Chancellor for Development. I forget the exact—
- 15-00:36:26  
Rubens: You left the board, after you had already become Vice Chancellor for Development? So you served on it quite a while?
- 15-00:36:34  
Laetsch: Yes, right.
- 15-00:36:35  
Rubens: So we were talking about how you became Vice Chancellor for Development. In moving positions, it didn't have to do with anything that was untoward. It was that, in fact, you had fulfilled many of the goals that—
- 15-00:36:50  
Laetsch: Well, I think the major thing was that Mike needed somebody to do it. And he could have had a national recruitment effort. But we were in the middle of a capital campaign, and he couldn't have that lie dormant for very long. And so he looked around and felt that I was the one that best fit for the job, so he asked me. I was not all that enthused about doing it, but it was a very important time in the university so I agreed to do it. It was 1987, I think, or '88. '87, I think. And so I kept some of the things that I had had. I kept athletics.
- 15-00:37:49  
Rubens: Right. Who makes this decision? Do you—
- 15-00:37:52  
Laetsch: I told Mike that's what I wanted to do. And I'm not sure if I kept the Lawrence Hall or not. It doesn't matter. But I did keep athletics because that was so much involved in many things related to fundraising, plus the fact that my wife enjoyed going to football games.
- And then, of course, we started an international program in fundraising and I've got a lot of stuff in here on that that we can talk about maybe at a future time. We really started a big international program, particularly in Asia.
- 15-00:38:32  
Rubens: This began under you?
- 15-00:38:33  
Laetsch: Yes. There had been some forays when Curt was here, before he left. The first significant contact was when we went to the Japan Bowl when Cal played football with Washington State in the Japan Bowl in Tokyo.
- 15-00:39:00  
Rubens: So they would host American teams?

- 15-00:39:02  
Laetsch: Yes. And I don't remember if Curt was still here at that time or not. But anyhow, I went over and then we also went from there to Taipei and to Taiwan.
- 15-00:39:18  
Rubens: And there had not been a systematic effort of raise money in Asia?
- 15-00:39:20  
Laetsch: No, we had never done anything. But we had many alumni in both places. And they were interested in having this done and so we had our first fundraising event in Asia, again, in Korea. We also went to Singapore and to Taiwan. And then as a result of that—
- 15-00:39:46  
Rubens: And when you say “we went,” would it be Mike and you?
- 15-00:39:48  
Laetsch: Yes. And then we had some people from the Alumni Association. But I think the trip to those other places included Mike, myself, wives and a person who then became the head of our office in Tokyo, Eric Rutledge. He was a graduate student who was very fluent in Japanese.
- 15-00:40:31  
Rubens: So you're setting up an office there?
- 15-00:40:32  
Laetsch: We hadn't decided then to set it up but we were aiming in that direction.
- 15-00:40:37  
Rubens: Was Ernie Kuh part of this?
- 15-00:40:40  
Laetsch: Ernie Kuh didn't go with us. I think Ernie advised on some things maybe relating to China but he wasn't a part of that. And then later on we had a program in Taiwan where I took three of our Nobel Laureates to Taiwan. And we can go into that later.
- 15-00:41:17  
Rubens: The economies in Asia are just booming, then?
- 15-00:41:22  
Laetsch: Yes, that's right. Well, what we did, we had a lot of alumni in these places and we felt that this was a very good place for raising money. We'd never done it before. We had lots of alums. The folks were prosperous. We had some very rich people in Taiwan and Singapore and Korea, as well, and so it made just a lot of sense to go over and start cultivating.
- 15-00:41:47  
Rubens: And was it pretty instant that you were securing funds?

- 15-00:41:51  
Laetsch: Well, in Asia things are never really completely instant but we began to work on it. And then Eric Rutledge who, again, spoke Japanese very fluently went with us, and I set up Eric in an office in Tokyo. And he did a really fine job there and set up an advisory group and raised quite a bit of money from Japan.
- 15-00:42:30  
Rubens: What kind of money are we talking about? Was this a substantial increase in what had been coming in?
- 15-00:42:34  
Laetsch: Oh, yes. Well, we didn't have much from Asia
- 15-00:42:35  
Rubens: Well, I don't mean from Asia but I mean representing overall.
- 15-00:42:38  
Laetsch: Oh, yes. We had some very large gifts. I can't remember exactly the individual ones. We had multi-million dollar gifts.
- 15-00:42:50  
Rubens: And so how often were you traveling to Asia?
- 15-00:43:00  
Laetsch: We went over that first time and then I went over again with Ernie Notar, who was in the development office at the time, and we spent a lot of time in Japan and Taiwan. Actually, that first visit we met with some very prominent industrialists and businessmen and as often happens over there, even though they speak English, they insist on having a translator so they can speak in Japanese and have this translated. And then Eric, of course, talked to them in Japanese and they were just absolutely flabbergasted because they never heard of a—
- 15-00:43:43  
Rubens: A “haole” or whatever they say.
- 15-00:43:44  
Laetsch: Speaking such good Japanese. And so they stopped their Japanese business because they knew then that he could understand everything and started speaking in English.
- 15-00:43:57  
Rubens: Now, how big was your office? When you become Director of Development, how many people are under you? Who do you have access to?
- 15-00:44:02  
Laetsch: I forget how many. We had a whole building full of people.
- 15-00:44:06  
Rubens: Where were you located?

15-00:44:08

Laetsch:

Well, we were over right across from the Zellerbach Hall, in a building that the University owned; all of development was in that building. Now Development has moved to downtown Berkeley. The bottom floor had several retail business and shops We had to do all of the gift processing, all of the solicitation letters and activities. We had a legal department.

15-00:44:56

Rubens:

Your own legal department?

15-00:44:58

Laetsch:

Yes, right. Because of all the wills, the bequests. It was basically the department of bequests and wills. And we had several lawyers working there. In fact, Brad Barber, an alumnus, ran that. He then went off to University Hall and was much involved in things there, and now he's the head of development for Children's Hospital Oakland. So Brad and I sort of circled around. And then we had a bunch of fundraisers that were involved in particular areas and particular units. One of them, Mike Desler, is now CEO of the Valley Foundation.

15-00:45:43

Rubens:

What was your relationship to Cal alumni? Was it competitive at all?

15-00:45:46

Laetsch:

No, it was very congenial. I spent, what, ten years giving talks up at the alumni camps. So I had good relations with the people there. And then another major thing that I started at that time was leading Bear Treks.

15-00:46:09

Rubens:

Just what I was going to ask you. So this was donor cultivation?

15-00:46:10

Laetsch:

I think it was it in 1988 that I led a Bear Trek down the Rhine.

15-00:46:18

Rubens:

Now, Bear Treks had existed previously?

15-00:46:20

Laetsch:

Yes. As a travel program. That's right.

15-00:46:23

Rubens:

But you just got a yen for it and thought it would be good for development?

15-00:46:28

Laetsch:

Well, no. I didn't volunteer. I was asked. These trips had been going for quite awhile and they always wanted faculty. And since I had talked to lots and lots of alumni groups all over the state, I was well-known to people. Caroline Sheaf ran the travel program at that time, and I was well-known to them. They asked me to lead a trip down the Rhine and then about a year later, the Danube, which went all down to the Black Sea and then to Istanbul. And I had been to Istanbul a number of times so I knew the area. After that I worked

with Jack Dold, who owned Golden Gate Tours, who had done a number of trips with Caroline. And I suggested to her that we do a trip on the Santa Fe Trail. I had been reading about the Santa Fe Trail, and we went down and followed it and then came back. I talked to Caroline about the possibility of a trip and she said, "Well, this is something Jack Dold would be interested in, who does our programs in the US?"

So Jack and I got together. And he had never heard of the Santa Fe Trail. But we worked it out and developed a trip. Then Sita and I had been in India and on the way to India we stopped to see a significant donor as a result of the trips we had made to Hong Kong. We went out to eat in a fancy private club and they had oysters and I love raw oysters and so like a fool, ordered raw oysters. Well, it turned out that then when we got to India—first we went to Pakistan and then to India and then to East Africa where we had friends and wanted to see some animals. In East Africa I began to be ill and it turned out that I had developed hepatitis. We left Africa early. I was out of it all the way back and went from the airplane to a bed at Alta Bates. Anyway we had planned this trip to go to Santa Fe and I couldn't do it. I was still recovering. So Sita went.

There were other trips after that, of course. We went on the Oregon Trail.

15-00:49:29

Rubens:

Now, was this part of your portfolio or were you paid for this?

15-00:49:31

Laetsch:

No, no.

15-00:49:36

Rubens:

This is your contribution?

15-00:49:36

Laetsch:

Well, the thing is that I think we did two while I was still working and then in 1990 I retired and so I still went on.

15-00:49:47

Rubens:

They'd pick up your expenses, though?

15-00:49:48

Laetsch:

Oh, yes. Sure. I think I did about twenty-five Bear Treks, and the most recent one with Jack, which was a Bear Trek to Bhutan about a year and a half ago. But I couldn't go because I developed a pinched nerve in my spine. But my son led it. Then we went back to Bhutan last April. And we talked about that. Anyway, that's been another whole part of my life.

15-00:50:28

Rubens:

We've been talking about an hour today. Do you want to stop?

15-00:50:31

Laetsch:

Okay.



15-00:50:34

Rubens:

We'll make a road map for what we'll talk about next.

Interview #10 February 4, 2011  
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16-00:00:08

Rubens: Mac, hello. I haven't seen you for a while and it's the 4th of February. We missed all of January. And in reviewing the interviews that we've done together, I think there are some initiatives while you were Vice Chancellor of Undergraduate Affairs that we need to cover. So do you want to talk first about the effort to establish an endowment for Indian Studies?

16-00:00:35

Laetsch: Yes, yes. This is actually something that was a little bit outside of my purview, but since I have been so involved in things relating to India, this chair actually resulted from interactions I had with Kishan Rana, the Indian consul general in the eighties. The discussions were about starting an endowed chair in Indian studies and that would have been in the Department of South Asian Studies. And so I started with the Consul General.

16-00:01:17

Rubens: How did you know him?

16-00:01:20

Laetsch: Well, I knew all of the Consul Generals because I had been so much involved with India. Especially my work with the Indo-US Subcommittee for Education and Culture put me in contact with a lot of diplomats and others from India. My work on the subcommittee continued on until 1996. So being on that, and being involved in a lot of things in India, all the Consul Generals knew who I was when they came and so we had a lot of interaction. The idea was to raise money from the Indian community to start a chair in Indian studies on the campus. And in those days there weren't very many Indians in the Bay Area. There were some quite wealthy ones, but in terms of numbers, it was nothing like it became.

16-00:02:17

Rubens: And you're speaking of specifically West Coast, San Francisco and Silicon Valley?

16-00:02:23

Laetsch: Right. And when we really started on this, Silicon Valley was just getting started. So that's been one of the more interesting things I've been involved with over the years, seeing how the Indian community has grown in such size and complexity. There was a time when everybody knew everyone else and there was lots of social interaction amongst the same people. But now it's of course dispersed, and you've had whole new generations that have come in.

But the idea was to have a chair in Indian Studies and that particular Consul General then went on to become ambassador to several countries around the world, and we still have interaction with him. So we started talking to the Indian groups about this. We didn't really raise much money. In fact, I'm not

sure we raised any. But we talked a lot about it and laid the groundwork. Well, when his successor came in, a man named Sati, S-A-T-I, Lambah, L-A-M-B-A-H, and when he first arrived here and we first met—it was actually at a dinner at the home of Bob Goldman, a professor in South Asian Studies, I raised that issue to him. He said, “I’ll do it. I’ll raise the money.” And he and his staff went out and raised money for an endowed chair for Berkeley. So the Indian government paid for it basically. Paid for the staff doing this. He had a very interesting technique. He would go around to rich Indians and he would tell them what he wanted. And he or his staff wouldn’t leave the offices of these people until they had come across with some dough.

Lambah went on from here to become ambassador to Pakistan. As I said earlier, on one of our trips to India we stopped in Pakistan, and he arranged for us to go to Peshawar, right next to Afghanistan. A very different place then compared to now. That was a very interesting trip. But that’s another whole story. Anyhow, Sati took this on, and he and his staff went around and basically twisted the arms of the rich Indians to give money. It worked, and they got a chair. Actually, I have a picture from when they had an event on campus—I had left by that time, I wasn’t at it—where they presented the chair to the campus. And Sati has been back here a time or two since then and we’ve chatted about it. And I see him in India when I go to India. And I will see him a month from now in May when I will be in Delhi.

16-00:05:08

Rubens:

So that was a successful effort.

16-00:05:09

Laetsch:

Oh, that was very successful but that was a sideline, since I was not directly involved in those departments, but because I had many contacts, the Indian contacts, that this worked out very well.

16-00:05:23

Rubens:

Well, let’s talk about some of your other initiatives, too. Some of them may have spanned your many activities that you did participate in while you were both Vice Chancellor for and also for Development. Tell me about your involvement with community colleges and the issue of community college transfer to Cal.

16-00:05:53

Laetsch:

Yes. One of the things that we were very interested in doing was to revitalize the transfer function and specifically to work with the community colleges in doing this. There had been some interaction with the colleges but not really very much. Mike Heyman was very cooperative, and we’d take Mike out to the community colleges and I would go out and other people would go. But we had a lot of really good meetings with Mike out at the colleges around the Bay Area. There are a couple dozen community colleges that supply most of our transfer students. There are also some in southern California, as well, but the ones we concentrated on were here in the area. And so this is the first time

a chancellor or a high administration official had ever gone out to these colleges. We had people from the Office of Admissions that would go out but not beyond that. So a lot of it was really giving them respect, which was very much appreciated.

16-00:07:04

Rubens:

I understand that those students ended up doing very well.

16-00:07:09

Laetsch:

Yes. If you took how they did after their last two years here, I'm not saying every single one, but many of them, and as a whole, they did better than the students who came in as freshmen. And I always thought that was really quite remarkable because so many of the community college students were not eligible for the university when they graduated from high school. Because they knew what they wanted to do and studied hard and took advantage of things available here they did very well. It's just another example that it's so hard to predict who's going to be successful academically. It depends on so many things. It's not just tests that people take when they get out of high school.

16-00:07:57

Rubens:

Now, sort of correlated to this or reflecting another side of assessing students, is that you started a deferred admissions program.

16-00:08:07

Laetsch:

Yes. There were two aspects of this. One was for students who graduated from high school and applied for Berkeley. They were, as we used to say, eligible but not competitive, which is that they had all the grades and basic requirements for admissions, but in comparison with everybody who was applying in terms of their grades and their test scores, et cetera, they weren't on the very top rung for admission as freshmen, so we offered a program of deferred admission. It started out actually as a suggestion as a result of conversations that I had with the director of the extension program. They offered to give a fall program for students who would then be admitted in the spring for those students who didn't quite meet the mark. We did that and that went on and on.

16-00:09:12

Rubens:

Do you have an idea about how many students that involved?

16-00:09:23

Laetsch:

Yes, I suspect it was probably about a hundred. And they had many of their meetings over in the Baptist Seminary on Dwight Way, which I always thought was kind of neat, because as a kid I had spent some time there because my father was a Baptist minister. So they would meet there and then they would be admitted spring semester. That worked out very well. They took the same classes that regular freshmen would take. Introductory math, Subject A, English one, social science. Not science or math. This was through the extension program. And then if they made Bs in their courses they would

be given admission in the spring semester. And, again, these kids would come in, and at least for a long time, they did better than the wunderkinds who were admitted in the first semester. The last I heard about it—this is a couple of years ago—I think it was 10,000 kids that went through that.

16-00:10:33

Rubens:

Yes. I think in part it served a function when the University had over-admitted.

16-00:10:38

Laetsch:

I think so. And I had heard at one point they had formed an alumni association of some sort for going through that program. So that was just a very, very successful program. And it relates to another thing that I hadn't realized until going through files, and that is I had suggested that we actually have a program, another campus particularly for people coming in as freshmen. That never happened.

16-00:11:28

Rubens:

You mean another site near UC Berkeley?

16-00:11:30

Laetsch:

Another site. At one point there was talking of using a facility in the Peralta Community College District. That never happened.

16-00:11:32

Rubens:

I think I've read that Heyman didn't want to have any satellite campuses. It could have been something like the California School for the Blind —isn't it called the Clark Kerr campus now.

16-00:11:38

Laetsch:

Yes. Or it could have been an association with another institution around the Bay Area. Anyhow, that never—

16-00:11:45

Rubens:

And what function would that have served?

16-00:11:46

Laetsch:

Well, this had to do with the fact that we couldn't take all eligible "freshmen" and this would give them, let's say, the first two years and then there's usually room for transfer students. And it would have been a steady source of good transfer students. Anyhow, that didn't come to pass. But we did then work with our community colleges. We had this deferred admission program. I should back up. We had the program for kids who were deferred admission until the spring semester but then we started another program where if kids went to community college and made Bs, that they would get automatic admission for their junior year.

16-00:12:34

Rubens:

Wasn't that part of the California Master Plan originally?

16-00:12:36

Laetsch:

No. The master plan was for the university to take transfers from community colleges, just like the state colleges do the same thing. But it wasn't an organized program with the University, and there was no guarantee of admission. We guaranteed if they went to listed community colleges and had a B average that they would be admitted. Now, this was the College of Letters and Science because engineering has their own requirements. But a lot of them did go into engineering. I don't know if it's still going on or not. I presume it is. [Later learned it is not.] But it was very successful in all kinds of ways. It cemented relations with the colleges. It gave kids who might even have been eligible but for various reasons, either family reasons or financial or maturity reasons didn't come here. There are a lot of kids who feel that they're not quite ready to go to the university because this place has a reputation of being a big, cold, hard place. Some kids just feel they're not quite ready to go and by going to community colleges for two years, they grow up.

16-00:13:58

Rubens:

Another factor in your job had to have been a phenomenal number of people who were pressuring you to get their kids in even though they weren't qualified.

16-00:14:14

Laetsch:

Yes. Every Cal alum, I think, thinks that their kids have a right to come to Berkeley.

16-00:14:22

Rubens:

As if it's a legacy.

16-00:14:24

Laetsch:

That's right. And I was told many times by alums, "Well, we've sent people to Cal for the last four generations." And I said, "Well, that's fine but it doesn't work that way any longer." This was a very common thing that Cal alums think that they had a special privilege, and. I would tell them that if we only admitted the children of Cal alums, there would be no room for anybody else. Of course, some of them think, well, that's probably all right. We're special. So that created a lot of angst among some alumni.

16-00:14:58

Rubens:

I think we talked about, in the context of the Asian admission controversy, that there was an alum who was really pushing their son who had good grades but not good SAT scores.

16-00:15:11

Laetsch:

Yes. He had great grades from high school but he had low verbal SAT scores. What people tend to forget is that even more important in many ways than math scores are verbal skills, their ability to write the language, et cetera, and understand the language. Maybe I've told this story, but I remember kids of Asian origin in my biology class who would—when I say Asian it's really

primarily Chinese that we're talking about—get together and study. And sometimes when they would come to my office for advising on the course, they would have two biology texts, one in English and one in Mandarin and they would have underlined in Mandarin what they were assigned. Many of these kids just did not have the facility to communicate in English.

And it was never accepted by this Asian task force. They were so sure that anybody of their background and ethnicity ought to be given admission.

16-00:16:26

Rubens:

Now, we talked about your belief in —and the fact that you were holding some seminars in the Business School—

16-00:16:33

Laetsch:

Oh, that was on speaking.

16-00:16:39

Rubens:

I understand that you've found a thick file of talks that you gave to graduating classes in a variety of programs.

16-00:17:09

Laetsch:

Yes. They were for Chemistry, Business, Rhetoric, Biology, various biology programs. I know there were two or three other graduation addresses I gave on campus.

16-00:17:34

Rubens:

Did they tend to have a theme? Was there one thing that you were hammering on?

16-00:17:37

Laetsch:

Yes. And I think what I would like to do is to review some of those and we can talk about it later.

16-00:17:42

Rubens:

Let's have one, perhaps what you gave to the Department of Rhetoric, in the appendix.

16-00:18:13

Laetsch:

Yes, I'll give you a copy.

16-00:18:22

Rubens:

I want to stick with the theme of initiatives, particularly vis-à-vis education. And why don't you tell me about the primate behavior class that you thought would be useful.

16-00:18:36

Laetsch:

I advocated it and talked a good deal about it. It never happened.

16-00:18:43

Rubens:

What was the point?

16-00:18:45

Laetsch:

The point was to teach about human relatedness. When I was on the board of the San Francisco Zoological Society, I used to spend a lot of time in the zoo watching the chimpanzees and the gorillas, and I read a lot about them. Anybody who's paid any attention to them, and has read or studied at all about their behavior in the wild and seen them in captivity, understands that we of course are very closely related. We share most of the same DNA. So I've often thought that we ought to have a required course for freshmen on primate behavior, in which case they would understand an awful lot more about their fellow humans by observing things that primates do, particularly our closest relatives, the chimpanzees. We're both very territorial, we're both violent, and we are kind of nasty beasts in many ways. Primates cooperate with each other, chimpanzees cooperate, and we do, as well. I was reminded of the violent side watching the recent battles in Egypt, two groups throwing stones at each other reminded me again of chimpanzee behavior, because they throw stones.

We never got such a course on that. That was similar to my effort to have a speech class at least available. I think I mentioned that I advocated and worked with some people from the old speech department. In fact my office gave funding for teaching fellows for courses in speech. In a lot of the talks that I gave, this is sort of a recurrent theme, as well. That we have courses in quantitative reasoning. We have courses in mathematics, we have courses in science, et cetera, that we require people to take and yet most people earn their living by speaking, and we still don't have a required course in speech for lower division students. We did at one time way back but then they didn't think that was academically respectful enough. And so it's okay to have people take courses on writing and math, but they forgot the importance of oral expression. It's becoming even more so because everyone is on a cell phone so much of the time. Have you been reading Doonesbury?

16-00:22:19

Rubens:

No.

16-00:22:29

Laetsch:

Oh, it's wonderful because two of the main characters have met together for lunch, and they both have their smart phones. There are no words for a couple of the panels because they're fooling with their smart phones. Then the waitress comes and asks them to pay and they say, "Well, but we haven't had lunch." Well, it turns out they'd eaten their lunch and forgotten it. I have seen students walking on campus talking to each other on their cell phones and they were next to each other.

16-00:23:28

Rubens:

Another initiative that came under your purview was the Southside community crime prevention group. How did that come about?



16-00:23:44

Laetsch:

We had a very high crime rate on the Southside for all kinds of reasons. It was mostly people from the outside coming in. Again, what people forget is that the Free Speech Movement and things after that gave a lot of publicity to the campus. As a result, you had people from all over the country coming to Berkeley because they thought this is where various sorts of things were happening. And then, of course, always around students you will have people who feed on students in terms of crime. So the situation really became very, very difficult.

16-00:24:20

Rubens:

Crime was going up in the eighties all over the country.

16-00:24:24

Laetsch:

Yes, and even more so here. I met with the chief of police of Berkeley and, of course, our police department on campus and we started a Southside Project, we called it. Our group rented space on Telegraph, and set up an office. A sergeant in the campus police force, Calvin Handy, who then subsequently became captain, and later became head of the campus police at Davis and retired from there, was put in charge of that.

16-00:25:07

Rubens:

You got some money out of the Chancellor's Office for that?

16-00:25:08

Laetsch:

I think the money came from my office. And we then worked very closely with the Berkeley police. In fact, one of the first people on it was Sergeant and then Captain Pat Phelps. I just had breakfast with him this morning at the Berkeley Breakfast Club— and breakfast with two of Berkeley's former police chiefs, Ron Nelson and Doug Hambleton. Ron wasn't very enthused about the project to begin with and then he came along after he assigned the sergeant to the program. Now we're all retired. We formed this office and worked very closely with many of the constituents, not only increasing the number of patrols on Telegraph and the area but working with the merchants. Part of it was just cleaning up the area. The streets were dirty and we worked with the city to sweep the streets and to wash the streets down. We worked with the merchants to sweep their sidewalks. We hired a recent graduate, Steve Finicum to manage the Telegraph office. Steve is a longtime member of the Campus Planning Office and a newspaper columnist.

16-00:26:02

Rubens:

Of course People's Park was really a Mecca to the homeless, not that they were the criminals.

16-00:26:04

Laetsch:

Oh, yes, it still is.

16-00:26:06

Rubens:

Volleyball courts went in, didn't they?

16-00:26:14

Laetsch:

Yes, to give people there something to do. That is still a very unfortunate problem, because nothing has been done. They just let it go, hoping it will solve itself and it hasn't. You probably have to wait until the people who are so worked up about it and look upon that as the high point of their life until they die and then maybe they can do something. But anyway, we started the Southside project and it worked very well. After I left, I think it lasted another couple of years, and then it stopped. People don't think that you have to keep doing the same thing over and over again, but the police forces understand this, that you have to keep patrolling. You have to keep up the communications between business and city government and the University. And you have to have police out patrolling. If you don't have them, then bad people do things. And they just sort of forgot that. Well, it's improved so much but it's not solved and now according to the papers there's a review group from both the Berkeley police and the campus police to reinvent this whole thing over again, thinking that they're doing something new. People don't get any credit for just continuing something on. But if they can start something new, then they get credit. So it's again going back to primate behavior.

16-00:27:57

Rubens:

I suppose it says something about how short the institutional memory is.

16-00:28:00

Laetsch:

That's right, that's right.

16-00:28:01

Rubens:

That's one of the virtues of these oral histories, I think.

16-00:28:04

Laetsch:

That's right. And the other thing is that every new administration that comes in feels they have to change everything.

16-00:28:12

Rubens:

Shall we switch topics now and talk about your role in the California Academy of Sciences?

16-00:28:40

Laetsch:

Well, I went on the board of the Academy, I think, in the early eighties, while I was the Vice Chancellor.

16-00:28:53

Rubens:

And how does one go on the board? How does that come about?

16-00:28:53

Laetsch:

Well, you are nominated. The Cal Academy of Sciences is an interesting organization in that the governing body is the Fellows of the California Academy and the fellows are scientists who have been nominated for the fellows and then are elected—

16-00:29:16

Rubens: Elected by the other fellows?

16-00:29:17

Laetsch: That's right. There is a president, there are officers. But the board is really the governing body for the Cal Academy, and they are sort of the ultimate decider, you might say, about things. So it's a very interesting relationship. Anyhow, I was nominated as a fellow. They just pick people who they think have some reputation in science and so they elected me to that. And I served on the board and then I was vice-chairman of the board for a number of years. I forget how long I was on the board but it was quite a long time.

16-00:30:30

Rubens: And what kind of things did you do on the board and as vice-chair?

16-00:30:30

Laetsch: The board is responsible for hiring the Director of the California Academy, and we had about three or four of those that we had to hire during my time. The board determines policy for the Academy.

16-00:30:56

Rubens: And what is the relationship between that and the museum?

16-00:30:59

Laetsch: Oh. Well, the California Academy of Sciences has the museum. It's made up of the Natural History Museum, the Aquarium, Planetarium. But it's all part of the Cal Academy of Sciences.

16-00:31:16

Rubens: Where did you hold your meetings?

16-00:31:18

Laetsch: At the Academy. On the top floor they had a large board room and some meeting rooms. And in the new Academy they also have a large board room. I've been to a meeting or two since then.

16-00:31:43

Rubens: So under your administration there, when you were on the board and then when you were vice-chairman, were there any issues that were particularly outstanding?

16-00:31:52

Laetsch: There were the successive new directors of the Academy. So one had to find new people and review them and then appoint them, and that took a lot of time. And then there's just a lot of stuff that keeps coming up relative to personnel, relative to public programs, to the budget. There was a lot of stuff on budget, fundraising and all the rest of it. The normal stuff you have in any such organization.

16-00:32:25

Rubens:

Were you involved in the decision to reconstruct it, to tear it down and build a new edifice?

16-00:32:33

Laetsch:

Well, let's see. I'm trying to think if we had actually made that decision. It was talked about at that time. But much of the actual construction, occurred after I left. I think the original idea to start fresh was scoped out while I was still there; because the man who then became the chairman of the board was on the board when I was there but was not chair.

16-00:33:09

Rubens:

Were you on the board when you then became Vice Chancellor for Development?

16-00:33:14

Laetsch:

Yes. I stayed on the board even after I retired from the campus.

16-00:33:19

Rubens:

Did you ever find yourself in competition over fundraising?

16-00:33:25

Laetsch:

No, not really. I gave, I think, a fair amount of advice, but it was never competition. Some of the big givers here were on the board there or had given money. So it was all very compatible. There wasn't really any competition.

16-00:33:47

Rubens:

Compared to the portfolios of other vice chancellors there during your ten years, it looks like no one had as many outside administrative positions.

16-00:34:02

Laetsch:

Well, I think that's true and I think it's probably true before I was there and probably since then. But I had, again, so many outside involvements, both locally, nationally and internationally, that it was really quite unusual. And you might say, "Well, how did I do all of it." I spent a lot of hours working.

16-00:34:22

Rubens:

I guess your children were leaving for college.

16-00:34:44

Laetsch:

In fact, I know they were leaving and graduating from high school, because the youngest one, Krishen, graduated from high school, and I was not able to go to his graduation because I was being given an honorary doctorate degree at Wabash College so I had to miss his graduation. I remember that.

16-00:35:05

Rubens:

Tell me about that honor.

16-00:35:06

Laetsch:

Oh, that was interesting. But, in fact, I felt sorry about missing his graduation. Well, I graduated from Wabash College, and at some point, actually, they had

also inquired whether I would be willing to apply to be President when they had a change. And I said, “No, I don’t think so.” And I was just reading a letter from a man who’s still my friend who was the Acting President at the time, and he says he understood why I wouldn’t leave Berkeley. And my wife would not want to move to Crawfordsville, Indiana.

16-00:35:51

Rubens:

Another of your “outside” activities during this time was serving as chair of the program committee of the Commonwealth Club.

16-00:36:15

Laetsch:

Yes.

16-00:36:15

Rubens:

And we were just looking at a picture that you had in your files of you with Senator Lugar. Did you arrange to have him speak at the club?

16-00:36:27

Laetsch:

Of course he was a Senator from Indiana. I think it passed through the program committee. But I forget just how that was. But he came and we had lunch, and we had a very nice time talking because of my old Indiana connections. In fact, I remember when he was first elected to Congress that he came and gave a talk at Wabash College, a chapel talk, as we called them, to the student body. And he was very, very young. In fact, he was a Rhodes Scholar. That was an interesting thing because I came very close to being a Rhodes Scholar. So we had a good talk about Indiana and about his coming to Wabash and things going on in Indiana. I think we upset some of the other people at lunch, because we were spending all of our time talking about old times rather than the most current political situation.

16-00:37:22

Rubens:

Well, there was something else you were going to talk about since we’re talking about the Commonwealth Club. I don’t think that we have discussed how you came to that.

16-00:37:31

Laetsch:

One of the things that they had in those days were regular Friday talks, usually in a hotel ballroom. And they would have a quarterly chair. Each quarter of the calendar they would have somebody who would be the chair for those talks. Claude so he asked me to be the chair for a quarter, which I was, and met all kinds of interesting people who came to talk, including, Bill Gates, of Microsoft. I was just looking at a picture of Bill Gates and myself. He was holding a glass of wine in his hand, but that was all fake because he didn’t touch his wine during lunch. I sat on one side of him and Claude Hutchison on the other and he didn’t say a word during lunch. Completely non-communicative. He didn’t eat and he had a habit of folding his arms in front of him and bobbing back and forth like this. And that’s what he did. But then he got up and gave a pretty good speech.

16-00:39:42

Rubens:

On what was going on in the world of computer programming?

16-00:39:45

Laetsch:

That's right. We had several hundred people there in the ballroom of the Sheraton, and he made a statement there that I still remember. When somebody asked him whether or not they were going to open facilities in India he said no and he hoped their competitors would open in India and good luck to them. Well, of course, he's had to eat his words a hundred times since then and they now have facilities all over India. In fact, just two years ago I was in Hyderabad where Microsoft had just opened a huge multi-acreage facility employing about 5,000 people. And I keep thinking of Bill Gates saying they would never go to India.

Speaking of Claude, he and I used to go around the state talking to alumni groups. This was when I was Vice Chancellor for Development. We flew or drove all over California.

16-00:41:22

Rubens:

What did you talk about?

16-00:41:24

Laetsch:

Well, I would talk about the student body, for example, when I was with Undergraduate Affairs. I'd talk about the issues related to admission: who was coming and particularly I would have information on schools in their area. And that actually is an interesting topic in itself. I'm sure it's still the case that Berkeley draws a very high percentage of its students from a relatively small number of schools. Of course, those are schools that are favored in lots of ways in terms of the affluence of the school, the people who attend, the academic programs they have. For example, Lowell High School is one of the major ones and one of the larger ones. Always has been. Berkeley High is one of the major ones. So you have a whole bunch of very, very good schools that send a lot of kids here. But you have high schools in rural areas and small towns. Very few kids go to Berkeley because they have not had the same education and they often have low SAT Scores. They might be the best student in the school, and this has happened, actually, best student in the school who can't get admitted to Berkeley. They may have the grades because the grades are very squishy from one school to another but they don't have the test scores.

16-00:42:50

Rubens:

In recent years it's been a big issue. Especially with the end of affirmative action, new ways of evaluating students have been devised. As you say, one of the great inequalities stems from some rural school districts not offering the critical electives that improve a candidate's profile.

16-00:43:12

Laetsch:

That's right, that's right. Well, I started a program of preferential admission for small towns and high schools in rural areas. And that worked very well.

And we had quite a few kids from those areas coming in. I remember talking to some of them after they had been here awhile and hearing about the shock that they experienced when they came here because the academic environment was so much tougher and rigorous than what they had been used to. And some of them couldn't handle it. But then, after their first year they were generally all right. The other problem, not just for them but for a lot of kids coming to Cal, they were the best students in their class in high school and they come here and they realize that they're in the middle or they're even in the lower part and that takes some real getting used to. But that's just another example of how preparation is so many other things than just getting a high school diploma.

16-00:44:21  
Rubens:

Or getting good grades.

16-00:44:22  
Laetsch:

Of course.

16-00:44:27  
Rubens:

How significant is fundraising from alumni associations?

16-00:44:34  
Laetsch:

Well, the major fundraising doesn't come through them. Most alums don't give anything. The last I heard, and maybe it's off a bit, something like 15 percent of the alumni contribute.

16-00:44:58  
Rubens:

Then you've got big donors.

16-00:44:58  
Laetsch:

And then you have a small number of big donors.

16-00:45:00  
Rubens:

People like Gerson Bakar or Warren Hellman.

16-00:45:03  
Laetsch:

That's right or many others. But most people don't give or if they give they give quite small amounts. For example, some people just support athletic programs. A person in the Bear Backers would give twenty-five dollars a year and think that's a big deal, say, "Oh, yes, they're big contributors to the campus." But this is one of the major problems that the campus has had, and one reason in the past is that they didn't start major fundraising until Mike Heyman came on to really get it going. So that was all fairly new and they've done remarkably since then. And then you have so many of the people that don't give for all kinds of reasons. The people who give have been those who have been involved as students in various ways in the Greek system or in various undergraduate activities or people who have been here for a time and for whatever reason went off and made a lot of money and thought, "Well, gee, maybe Cal had something to do with it." But that's still a major issue of how do they increase the number of donors.

In comparison with private institutions, of course, it's very, very weak. One of the things I understand is that they've started a bit but they probably ought to do a lot more, working with students while they're still here, which all the privates do. Privates start fundraising when kids come in as freshmen. Now, one of the differences, of course, is that we have an awful lot of kids of much poorer financial backgrounds than you have in most of the privates. The privates may have a few poor kids but we have lots and lots. So the ability in many cases isn't there.

And the other thing that's so different from the privates is that an awful lot of our students are not resident students. Now, that has changed somewhat. We can now house many of the freshmen but overall the number of students who commute is pretty high. And all you have to do is be down at BART in the morning or the afternoon and you can see the vast numbers. Those kids are still in their own home environment so they don't really become part of the community. You have a lot of students who are living here but not in tight social groups and if they're not involved in those in some way, they just don't have the same affinity to the campus. And it's a major issue. Always has been. Probably always will be. But I've always thought that they should put in an awful lot more effort into bringing all the students into a community where they can benefit from so many things that relate to being part of the community. You just don't have the same kind of attachment or involvement if you're coming in the morning, and then going back home in the afternoon. Some of them work. Probably not as much now as used to be, but I used to have lots of kids, particularly from immigrant families, where they couldn't study at night because they had to help with the cooking and the dishwashing, at home or working in the family business.

And particularly the females. The sons might be given time to study and often the women would not because they had to help with all the housework, and particularly with a large family. And there are of course many students who work on campus. But that's a whole big issue that I had to deal with. I still don't think that they pay as much attention to that as they really should because the future of the place already is going to be money from the private sector and they have to realize that they have to do a lot with the source of that, which is their undergraduates, far more than the graduates, because they tend not to give although for all kinds of reasons, including that they constitute a smaller number.

16-00:49:36

Rubens:

Let's talk about some of your specific efforts to raise money but not from alums. For instance, tell me about your relationship to the Valley Foundation. You had known John Stock before he ran the Foundation?

16-00:49:46

Laetsch:

That really got started because John was an insurance man. In fact, the big sign up in the stadium, on the scoreboard, was from his insurance company.



He would go on a lot of the away football trips, and Sita and I would go on a lot of those trips, as well. We became well-acquainted with John. You would always go to an away game a day ahead, so we would have an evening and you would have an opportunity for what John would call a few pops at the bar. We became well-acquainted with John and became good friends. As a result of that, when the Valley Foundation was established formally, after Wayne Valley died—it had been a foundation but the money came in after he died from the estate—it went from a very small foundation to a foundation that had \$500 million in its capital. In terms of foundations, it's middle-sized. But in California, it's one of the big ones.

16-00:51:02

Rubens:

What was the Valley money?

16-00:51:03

Laetsch:

Wayne Valley was the largest homebuilder in America, and that is where the money came from. And John Stock had been Wayne Valley's good friend. And the other people on the foundation board were good friends of Wayne Valley and, of course, John was a Cal alum. So when we begin to raise money for the Keeping the Promise campaign, and I talked to John, he invited me to a meeting with Gladys Valley and the Valley Foundation Board. She was a horse woman. She loved horses and had horses and rode a lot. I told her the story, which was apocryphal, of former President Sproul, who had a man who came to him and said he wanted to give some money to the University. And Sproul said, "Well, that's fine. That's very good." And the man says, "But I have one condition." "What is that?" He says, "I want you to give an honorary degree to my horse." So Sproul said, "Well, that's no problem. We can do that." So in the spring they had a graduation exercise and President Sproul stood up and said, "Now I have the honor of giving, for the first time in the history of the University, an honorary degree to a complete horse." Well, she thought that was the funniest thing she had ever heard that had to do with horses. So we got on very, very well after that.

16-00:53:29

Rubens:

Weren't you and Sita invited on a sumptuous cruise she organized?

16-00:53:30

Laetsch:

That was I think in '95 that she wanted to commemorate a cruise that her husband and she had put on with friends that went to the Greek islands, for which they invited people and paid for everybody. Well, she wanted to have a duplication of this as much as possible, but this one was to be a tour around the Italian peninsula and down to Sardinia and then up the east coast of Italy over to Dubrovnik which was then Yugoslavia, and ending in Venice. She invited about a hundred people, many of those who had been on the previous trip and then some new friends, and Sita and I were invited on this trip.

16-00:54:21

Rubens:

And she paid for everything?

16-00:54:22

Laetsch:

She paid for everything. We didn't pay for anything, including stocking the cabins with all the booze that you had ordered beforehand. And we had excursions on land. Those were all paid for.

16-00:54:40

Rubens:

Who was on the cruise with you?

16-00:54:42

Laetsch:

Oh, there was a bunch of people. Their friends and, of course, John Stock was there. I think I mentioned we had a couple of football coaches. I think Knox, who had been the coach of the Minnesota Vikings and I think one of the other teams. I forget.

16-00:55:01

Rubens:

Oh, because Wayne had been one of the founders of the—

16-00:55:04

Laetsch:

He had been one of the founders of the Raiders, Oakland Raiders. To his dying day I was told he was very bitter that the current guy basically took the team away from the people that had started it. So anyhow, it was quite a cruise.

16-00:55:33

Rubens:

Gladys was a pretty devout Catholic. She had invited some priests and a bishop?

16-00:55:33

Laetsch:

She was a devout Catholic, yes. And she had invited John Cummins, who was the bishop in Oakland, and so he was on board. We had a nun from one of the schools and then we had two or three other priests who were on board. And they had mass every morning. And my wife who went to a Catholic school, she of course was a Hindu and not Catholic, but she went to a Catholic school. So she would go to the mass in the morning just to kind of make Gladys feel good. And then John was a very congenial guy. And the sister liked her schnapps so we had lots of fun in the bar. It was a great trip.

16-00:56:18

Rubens:

The Valley Foundation has continued to be a large donor to Cal.

16-00:56:22

Laetsch:

They gave fifteen million dollars to the rebuilding of the Life Sciences Building and that was in "Keeping the Promise Campaign". That was one of the first really big gifts. It is now the Wayne and Gladys Valley Life Sciences Building. This tour came after it but I had known John before that, of course, from all the football trips. And then they gave money to build this new building that's on campus that will replace the old school for public health.

16-00:56:56

Rubens:

And they gave to The Bancroft.

- 16-00:56:58  
Laetsch: Well, yes, and I was going to get to that. They gave ten million dollars to The Bancroft Library.
- 16-00:57:04  
Rubens: Were you responsible for that?
- 16-00:57:07  
Laetsch: Yes, right. And so they did that, which was very, very good. And then—
- 16-00:57:11  
Rubens: Not a hard sell, particularly, but dependent on interpersonal relations?
- 16-00:57:15  
Laetsch: Members of the Valley Foundation board, and we gave them some information about The Bancroft and the Mark Twain Project and they liked that. Of course, they had decided ahead of time they were going to give it. It's quite interesting: in his five-year review, the current Chancellor, talked about all the great things he did, and mentioned how he was responsible for that gift, but he had nothing whatsoever to do with it.
- 16-00:57:53  
Rubens: Well, you'll decide. He's claiming it because it happened under his watch.
- 16-00:58:01  
Laetsch: The Valley Foundation has been very generous to the campus and will continue to be until they go out of business. They have said that they will go out of business in eight or nine years. That's their intent, to spend down the corpus.
- 16-00:58:25  
Rubens: Is John Stock still someone you see?
- 16-00:58:30  
Laetsch: Oh, yes. John is now confined to bed. His legs don't work anymore and his hands are not in great shape either, but his mind is good and his sense of humor is still good, so we see him every so often and I talk with him on the phone. [He died in the fall of 2011.]
- 16-00:58:48  
Rubens: I'm going to have to change the tape.
- 16-00:58:51  
Laetsch: I think we should end for today. I have more files to go through and cull some more details.
- 16-00:58:53  
Rubens: Good, then I'll see you soon.

Interview #11 February 21, 2011  
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17-00:00:00

Rubens: Hi Mac. Today is the 21st of February and we're going to talk about more of the responsibilities you had and initiatives you made while you were Vice Chancellor for Undergraduate Affairs. We did talk about improvements and that you had made specifically regarding undergraduate education, for instance the seminar that you ran at the Center for the Studies of Higher Education. What was your relationship to that center, and how did you come to teach a class there?

17-00:00:58

Laetsch: Well, the reason that I was involved with them was because, again, we were making many initiatives in the undergraduate program, particularly lower division education, and we were working with the schools. And they had had a program there of seminars that related to community colleges, and I became involved with that because community college transfers were part of what I was involved with. And then we extended that over into high schools, as well. But most of what we had with the Center for the Study of Higher Education had to do with community colleges. I ran a seminar for a year or two on the transfer function.

17-00:01:40

Rubens: You mentioned before we began taping that you came across a survey in your files, that was given to community college student transfers and that they spoke about their high satisfaction rate. Did that refer to their preparation and their ability to adapt to Cal?

17-00:01:53

Laetsch: Their ability to function here and their preparation, yes. The transfer students were generally satisfied with Berkeley. Half are very satisfied. One-half found Berkeley to be different from what they expected. Transfer students, especially from community colleges, tend to be older, had spent more time out of school. Community college transfer students include a higher proportion of high risk students but their rate of graduation is equal to and slightly higher than that of students admitted as freshmen. Because they're so diverse it's hard to generalize. But the real issue here, and I push this a lot, and we had even more evidence later on that the community college transfer students did as well as the very, very highly selected students coming in as freshmen, which just points out, again, the fact that there are many factors that influence a person's academic career. And, of course, that was reinforced by the students deferred to spring semester, who did better than the students who came in in the fall. Again, the main message is that the community colleges perform such an enormously valuable function because students who, for whatever reason, are not highly selected when they finish high school. When given opportunities, many became fine students.

- 17-00:03:26  
Rubens: What do we do about the fact that it said half are not prepared?
- 17-00:03:29  
Laetsch: Well, this refers to they don't think they're prepared and they may have some difficulty the first semester or so and then they tend to come along.
- 17-00:03:39  
Rubens: Now, one of your areas of responsibility was the Student Learning Center.
- 17-00:03:45  
Laetsch: That's correct.
- 17-00:03:45  
Rubens: And I read that it was effectively the second largest college on the campus because so many students went through that. Did you have any specific programs for the community college transfer students?
- 17-00:03:57  
Laetsch: We did not have any specific programs for them, because they all are majors and they are into colleges as juniors and they're in the departments and so their advising, et cetera, would come under the departments. So we didn't have anything specifically for them. Just generally speaking, as I said, we had this seminar that went on for a couple of years with the presidents of community colleges and we greatly extended our reach and we visited some colleges
- 17-00:04:32  
Rubens: But regarding the Student Learning Center. Is there anything you want to say about that per se?
- 17-00:04:36  
Laetsch: Well, the Student Learning Center was just a very important part of the whole campus and a lot of students coming in who were not necessarily well-prepared—they would go to the programs there. We had a summer program. With the increasingly diverse student body, it was just absolutely essential for many students to make their way there. So it was extremely important.
- 17-00:05:08  
Rubens: Now, where was that located?
- 17-00:05:08  
Laetsch: In the T buildings. These were temporary buildings that went up in response to the increase in students after World War II. They were located where the huge lawn is in front of Doe Library.
- 17-00:05:07  
Rubens: Then you relocated the center.
- 17-00:05:18  
Laetsch: Well, we went into the old student union building, the basement of the student union building, which had been a large cafeteria and dining area. And we did

consolidate services —there were a lot of them doing the same things, it's just they had a better place to meet. Their physical situation in the T-buildings was pretty awful.

17-00:05:56

Rubens: You had said something to me about seeing it as a ghetto, certainly substandard, physically.

17-00:06:00

Laetsch: Right. It was. We had many students. Many minority students, many low-income students coming, and the first thing we did was give them a shack to work in. And it never seemed to occur to people that this was an initial slap in the face and told these students what the campus thought about them.

17-00:06:18

Rubens: So was the relocation and consolidation something that you were pushing?

17-00:06:20

Laetsch: Oh, absolutely.

17-00:06:22

Rubens: How was the relocation financed? You showed me a report in which you're asking the Regents for a loan to facilitate—I think it was going to be a five million dollar renovation.

17-00:06:30

Laetsch: Yes. And I think that was for the dining commons renovation.

17-00:06:43

Rubens: You also had a relationship to the ASUC.

17-00:06:51

Laetsch: Well, almost anything that had to do with students came through me in one way or another. So I had a lot of interaction with the ASUC and, of course, they were constantly on my doorstep about all sorts of things.

17-00:07:02

Rubens: Do you remember any issues particularly that you had to deal with. I read a note in your files that came from two students who were ASUC officers.

17-00:07:15

Laetsch: It's a certificate of appreciation from the President and the Executive Vice President in 1986, '87. But I knew a lot of them and got along well with almost all of them. Some, of course, we had a little bit of an issue. One in particular whom I worked with a lot, Tom Malinowski, who had been a Vice President for the ASUC. He went on to a very distinguished career and is on television now and then as a commentator on human rights policy. He was a Rhodes Scholar, and then he came back and worked with programs in Washington, DC, and he still is in one of the big international programs there.

But I've kept in contact with him. In fact, the last time he was here a couple of years ago sitting right in front of the fireplace with his new girlfriend

We generally got along well with the ASUC, but he had some very serious concerns about some of the issues related to athletics. It had to do with drug testing of athletes that was kind of controversial and Tom was very concerned about all of that. That was one of the major issues we had. But overall I got along with the ASUC fine. The Graduate Assembly, they were a little bit more testy. In fact, our current Assemblywoman from this area, from Berkeley, was with the graduate assembly at that time, Nancy Skinner; and she was always in my office or the Chancellor's Office complaining about something.

17-00:09:22

Rubens:

Another area that came under your domain was student conduct and there was something you wanted to say about a couple issues that you had to deal with.

17-00:09:40

Laetsch:

One of the big issues was the football players and the supposed rape in the Dwight Derby complex. That was a big issue and many of the women faculty were very concerned, which was fine. But it turned out that it wasn't rape in the conventional sense. And the most interesting aspect of that was how the African-American women on the campus were very concerned about those students—who were football players, and I think they were all African American—whether they would be railroaded; because it's a very common thing for African-American men to have difficulties of various kinds to be assumed guilty. And so when it turned out that they were not guilty as charged and the issue was dismissed, they were quite appreciative. But, of course, I think a lot of the women faculty and some staff, Anglo or white, they never quite accepted the fact that these people shouldn't have been hanged. And it was a very difficult thing because they didn't want the examination and the investigation to run its course. They wanted to hang them right away. And I thought for academics this was not a proper way to go about things.

17-00:11:21

Rubens:

I also read in some of your papers that there was an effort to educate students about alcohol abuse. It's always been a big problem here at your campus. And it's related to date rape.

17-00:11:34

Laetsch:

But it's a perennial problem since the stone age of young people getting stoned. And with affluence and access to transportation, alcohol is more available and a problem. People forget that for many many years you couldn't buy a drink within a mile of campus. And they don't have *in loco parentis* anymore. So it became, along with affluence and permissive parents—one of the things that always got me was the fact that the fraternity, during football season at home games the fraternities and sororities would have parties for the parents. Well, in many cases the parents would come and there would be plenty of booze available. And unfortunately for a lot of those parents, it wasn't uncommon for

the kids to have booze at home, even when they were in high school. I knew some in particular in Piedmont High School, where when the parents were gone, high school kids would have parties and use the parents' alcohol. In many cases, the parents would turn over their alcohol cabinets to the kids. There were some very, very bad incidents as a result of all of that.

17-00:13:01

Rubens:

I think they're always wrestling with this problem.

17-00:13:02

Laetsch:

There's no solution. That is they crack down on things and then after a while they relax and then it starts up again. Most serious problems don't have solutions and it's very hard for people to accept that fact. This will be a case with young people always and always and always.

Just like in the paper this morning. There is the tragedy of the two kids who tried to raft down a creek that swelled in the storm and were drowned. Well, young men are always putting themselves at risk because that's who they are. That's where the hormones are. And there will never be a solution. So when I was the age of the students we're talking about you didn't have access. If you had a middle-class family, you had much more control at that time. You didn't have cars to the same extent. Maybe not less drinking, but certainly in terms of drinks in the home, it was much less.

17-00:14:16

Rubens:

Well, I think there was less fraternizing between girls and boys because girls were subject to stricter cultural norms then. And not that you didn't think about it, but you didn't do it.

17-00:14:36

Laetsch:

Well, it was just a whole different society and social situation.

[Discussion of women's issues inserted into Interview #9. Some irrelevant discussion was excised.]

17-00:20:07

Rubens:

I want to also ask you about your relationship to ROTC. And you mentioned that Stanford sent students to Berkeley's ROTC

17-00:20:19

Laetsch:

Well, Stanford and a number of other places. Stanford at the height of their being righteous, during the anti-war period, did away with ROTC but they still had students who wanted to do it. They came up here and went through our ROTC. We had students from various places. ROTC didn't report to me directly but I had a lot of interaction with it and in fact I think I'd mentioned that I went up to Fort Lewis; the commander invited Sita and me to Fort Lewis in Washington state for the training program they had for ROTC. We went up there and watched them shoot and carry on.



And I forget just how it was that I became acquainted with the ROTC commander and got along very well, and I interacted with him a good deal. And then I also was invited on this tour, this voyage, of the aircraft carrier.

17-00:21:30

Rubens: You also had some relationship to or an experience with the Navy.

17-00:23:36

Laetsch: That was because a professor in anthropology worked on things related to the armed forces, and she had very good connections in the Navy and she had been invited to go out on the USS Carl Vincent, an aircraft carrier anchored beyond the port in San Diego. The Dean of Letters and Science came along and a professor in Business came along. And we went out on a two-day voyage. We flew down to San Diego and then in a Navy plane which went out and landed on the aircraft carrier because they were having maneuvers with their task force.

17-00:22:30

Rubens: What's in the interests of the Navy to court university professors and administrators?

17-00:22:36

Laetsch: The Navy gets a lot of students from our ROTC program. We had Naval ROTC, Army ROTC and I think they wanted—the fact of having good relationships with a prestigious university was something they were interested in. It was a city of 4,000 people onboard. They had everything that you can imagine. Round the clock activities. And with the planes taking off and landing and then the maintenance of them and all of those intricate activities, it was just incredible. We then we spent time up on the bridge where I even got to steer the aircraft carrier. Supposedly.

17-00:23:24

Rubens: Did anything specifically come of it or it was just in the category of maintaining relationships.

17-00:23:27

Laetsch: This was in the category of maintaining relationships, et cetera, and nothing else really happened to any extent.

17-00:23:37

Rubens: You were often called upon to do this kind of public relations. You said that Heyman didn't particularly like the socializing aspects a chancellor was asked to do at times.

17-00:23:50

Laetsch: Well, Athletics was one of them. In fact, just the other day Mike and I were talking about this and he said how he had escaped from a lot of the stuff you have to contend with that might be involved with athletics because he gave it all to me. So I had the problems.

17-00:24:09

Rubens:

You had a wonderful story about the Rose Bowl.

17-00:24:16

Laetsch:

Yes. Well, I was the Vice Chancellor and remained in charge of athletics for eight years. I think we went every year to the Rose Bowl because each campus of the Pac-10 would have their Chancellor or administrator go, along with the faculty representative for athletics and the athletic directors. It was always very interesting because they had all kinds of programs for us. This was in Pasadena. The Rose Bowl committee, had a black-tie dinner for the person who leads the parade, the grand marshal, we always met with him. It was Danny Kaye, the actor, one of those years. Another time it was Lee Iacocca who was the head of Chrysler when it more or less went bankrupt who then supposedly brought it back. So I had an interesting conversation with him which didn't give me much confidence about various things. I told him that his cars were no good, because I'd had one. The most interesting and pleasant was Gregory Peck. He spent a year at Berkeley and was on the crew.

17-00:26:07

Rubens:

Let me ask you something we didn't mention when we talked about Health Services.

17-00:26:23

Laetsch:

Yes, we planned for its moving to other quarters because it became apparent that Cowell Hospital, the building where we had a health service was going to be torn down and the space utilized by a new building for the Business School.

17-00:26:39

Rubens:

How do decisions like that come about?

17-00:26:42

Laetsch:

There's a campus planning group that works on that sort of thing. Long range plans, et cetera. Then there's a building committee. And so we were searching for a new site, but we were not going to build a hospital. The old one was a student hospital. And that was built in the days when a lot of students were actually confined to beds while they were students, because in the days before antibiotics and vaccinations and immunizations of all kinds, a lot of students were rather seriously ill while they were here or they were there for a period of time. So there was a full-scale hospital with lots of beds.

17-00:27:26

Rubens:

Ed Roberts, who initiated the disabilities rights campaign and who needed an iron lung lived at that hospital.

17-00:27:35

Laetsch:

By this time, the people there for communicable diseases and various other things had diminished enormously so there weren't really many students who required hospitalization. If they were really serious, they would go to either home or to local hospitals. So it was mainly a drop in clinic where you might keep a student overnight, or a day or two if you wanted to have them under

observation. But the number of student patients in the hospital was very small. It really became an outpatient clinic and an organization involved in advising of all sorts. For example, psychiatric treatment, which was a very significant program because the number of students with psychiatric problems increased. We talked about that in an earlier interview. I think it's still very significant. But it was during that period we saw a rather large increase in the number of psychiatric students. It seemed to go along with our increased selectivity for academic oriented students. I don't know if this means that academically successful students also have other problems, but they might well.

17-00:29:04

Rubens:

You mentioned that students who were young geniuses had trouble adapting. Well, you certainly had said that about the early admission students.

17-00:29:12

Laetsch:

Yes. It was early admission for very high-testing students. It wasn't so much that they had psychiatric problems; it was just that there are maturity issues and particularly when they were with the other students who were much more mature than they were. But the whole mental health situation was a very significant part of what Cowell Hospital did.

17-00:29:38

Rubens:

So while you were the Vice Chancellor, that process of determining where the new center would go and what would—

17-00:29:47

Laetsch:

Right. We had initiated that. Yes. And it didn't really culminate in the new building until I had left.

17-00:29:55

Rubens:

And that was down on the lower part of Bancroft Way, the Tang Center.

17-00:30:07

Laetsch:

Yes, and that came about because Tang was a big garment clothes manufacturer in Hong Kong and one of his daughters [Leslie] came here and another daughter [Nadine] had a master's in psychology, and she was an advisor at the student health service and served as the President of the Berkeley Foundation. And so between the two of them, when they built the center they worked out an arrangement. I met with him in Hong Kong at least once during the capital campaign. Leslie Tang, who is a Berkeley alum, is now a UC Regent.

17-00:30:55

Rubens:

Did we say enough about your relationship with the health services? Did that occupy a lot of time?

17-00:31:02

Laetsch:

A fair amount. But Jim Brown, the Director of the Health Service, was extremely competent and very bright and very cooperative. So we had a very good relationship. Unfortunately he died of AIDS after I left. I remember

going to his memorial service, and oddly, when I came back from our trip around the world which I think we discussed I was in the hospital, for several days with hepatitis, and Jim was there for a little bit, as well.

17-00:32:04

Rubens: I was wondering if issues of gay and lesbian harassment, and similarly other kinds of hate crimes, came to you.

17-00:32:19

Laetsch: I remember a fight between a fraternity and Hispanic students; because fraternity members harassed the Hispanic students when they passed the fraternity. I wouldn't say we had any hate crimes but there were some issues at various times that came up, yes. It was part of the landscape.

17-00:33:24

Rubens: There's another program that started at your initiative, which was the idea of a College of Berkeley Fellows.

17-00:33:32

Laetsch: The idea was to have a lower division college and have faculty involved who were particularly interested in lower division students, of which there were a fair number. And the Berkeley Fellows kind of came out of that program, which was something that I funded and we had people who were designated Berkeley Fellows who would be teaching undergraduates, non-majors, perhaps. Neil Smelser was one of those. In fact, I think I showed you his picture in a campus news letter.

17-00:34:26

Rubens: Yes, in *Teaching at Berkeley*.

17-00:34:32

Laetsch: Yes, that was under—Barbara Davis, I think, was the editor of it. She has now left the University. I think we started it, but I don't remember. It certainly developed while I was there, even if it had begun earlier, it really blossomed during that period.

17-00:34:50

Rubens: Now I'm looking at a fall '87 edition of the *Teaching at Berkeley* and it's also talking about the Smelser and Elsberg Report. So there were a lot of things happening in parallel.

17-00:35:02

Laetsch: That's right.

17-00:35:05

Rubens: Because I don't think that this College of Berkeley Fellows was an idea that came out of either of those reports.

17-00:35:10

Laetsch:

Not out of these reports. I think that's something that I had been working with people, talking about it, et cetera, and so just talking with people we came up with a proposal. It never happened. As somebody once said about me, I have lots of ideas and some of them are even good.

17-00:35:38

Rubens:

And some of them even get institutionalized.

17-00:35:40

Laetsch:

And some get institutionalized but some don't.

17-00:35:45

Rubens:

You said that you were also responsible for the Office of Relations with Schools. We talked earlier about you going to high schools to recruit students.

17-00:36:17

Laetsch:

The thing with the high schools wasn't so much recruitment, but establishing relationships because no one had paid any attention to them before. That is, you would have people who went out from the Office of Relations with Schools to meet with students and advisors but no one had paid any attention to the principals or to the faculty generally and the leaders of the faculty. We went out to treat them like colleagues, and it's the first time that had been done. And I suspect it's no longer happening. We initiated an annual dinner for high school principals from our main feeder schools to have dinner with the chancellor at the chancellor's house, which they loved. We did the same thing with community college people and the presidents of community colleges. So there was just an awful lot of that outreach. And the reason for this really is—and I made a note of this somewhere—is that my interest in all of this and the fact that there was more involvement there in those things either before or since was the fact that I had been a teacher.

17-00:37:52

Rubens:

Well, and also your long history at the Botanical Garden and then at the Lawrence Hall of Science.

17-00:37:58

Laetsch:

Yes. But even before that, I'd been a teacher in schools. And so I was pre-adapted and so obviously had an interest in that kind of thing and knew about teachers and had a lot of experience so we were able to get things started.

17-00:38:18

Rubens:

Well, and that speaks to one other idea you had which I think didn't get institutionalized and that was giving some kind of preferential admission—was it admission or support to graduate students who had experience teaching?

17-00:38:36

Laetsch:

No, that didn't happen at all. I had some support from the dean of the Graduate Division but there was no support for it from the deans of colleges. And the idea was to bring in graduate students or give them extra credit for admission

as a graduate student if they had had previous teaching experience. And the idea there was that some of them would go off to teach after college for a bit, and then with the idea that this would help qualify them for admission to Berkeley. But that never—

17-00:39:09

Rubens:

You said you had enlisted Doris Calloway, who was the Provost and Dean of Professional Schools and Colleges. That sounded like a terrific idea.

17-00:39:25

Laetsch:

Something else we did was to establish preferential admission for graduates of rural and small town high schools. And I don't think that's happening any longer. But that was important because graduates from high schools in small towns and rural areas just don't get the same education, and their performances on SAT tests suffer. But they come here and after the first year they do fine. And maybe I told you this, but one of our sons went to community college. He came out of Berkeley High and had ordinary grades. He went to community college, then he went to Chico State for part of a year, and part of that year he went to Washington, DC. But then he came to Berkeley and he saw that good grades were difficult to get; if you got an A, let's say, at Chico State, it could be a C here. So just the level of competition and what was expected was an order of magnitude greater than anywhere else and so a lot of these kids just had never had that kind of experience. And it's often forgotten. We think everybody is the same if they graduate from high school. No. There are just enormous differences.

17-00:41:12

Rubens:

An A from a high school in backwater communities is not the same as—

17-00:41:14

Laetsch:

Is not an A out of Berkeley High or Lowell. Because of the competition. You may have a few kids in the class who are really academically oriented but that leads back to where they come from. That is, their families usually aren't academically oriented.

17-00:41:31

Rubens:

Should we switch gears now? I wanted to ask you about your interaction with UCOP, the Office of the President. You had chaired a search committee for the Vice President for Agriculture and Natural Resources. How did that come about?

17-00:42:09

Laetsch:

That's right. It was during Gardner's presidency of the University. I'm not sure how that exactly came about. But I had known David Gardner before he was President. I knew him when he was an administrator in some relatively unimportant position at University of California, Santa Barbara. That's when I first met him. He came out here and gave a talk. I think in fact he gave a talk at the Lawrence Hall of Science when I was Director. So I met him there again. And then when he came in as President I interacted with him in a

variety of ways, but I can't remember all of them. So I guess he thought that I would be good to do that.

17-00:43:11

Rubens: Well, I think you were going to say something about who you picked and didn't pick. That was a kind of ironic story.

17-00:43:15

Laetsch: Oh, yes. Ken Farrell was who we picked and he came out of Washington, DC. He's been much involved in agricultural issues in Washington. There were four people who we had on the final list that we gave to him and he picked the one that we recommended. Farrell was at the top. Barbara Uehling was also on the list and she was the President of the University of Missouri. David Gardner really liked her, and as he told me when we gave him our recommendations, that he was going to recommend her as Chancellor of Santa Barbara. And that came to be.

17-00:43:56

Rubens: She may have been the first female Chancellor in the UC system.

17-00:44:00

Laetsch: I think so. I suspect that she was. And then she had some problem there. I forget what it was, but after a couple of years she left and then she was in San Francisco and she was actually on the board of the Commonwealth Club when I was on the board of the Commonwealth Club, so we had some interaction there. And I have no idea what's happened to her.

17-00:44:23

Rubens: Well, another way in which you surely must have related to Gardner was in '88 and '89 that the budget for the University of California is really assaulted under Deukmejian. What was my figure? Sixty-four million dollars was cut out of the budget. Clearly that must have put more pressure on you once you'd become development director.

17-00:44:48

Laetsch: Yes. Right. And, of course, we involved David in this because he has a degree from Cal. But I don't recall exactly how much that caused us to interact. But we were certainly active in going out after funds.

17-00:45:10

Rubens: Sure. Now, one of the things we didn't talk about was the Keeping the Promise Campaign. And so you were involved in that both when you were Vice Chancellor of Undergraduate Affairs and then specifically as Vice Chancellor for Development. And that was a very successful campaign. Was that primarily for infrastructure?

17-00:45:35

Laetsch: Infrastructure and endowment.

- 17-00:45:39  
Rubens: You have a note from Clark Kerr penned on a letter you wrote to him in 1990.
- 17-00:45:46  
Laetsch: That's correct, after it was over. If you can read the note, which is in his usual microprint, it says: "Mac, your leadership on the campaign was superb." And in microprint it's initialed, "CK."
- 17-00:46:19  
Rubens: Is there anything you want to say specifically about the campaign "Keeping the Promise"? You've talked about your relationship to the Valley Foundation. We talked a little bit about the Getty. I just wondered if there was anything else that we wanted to include under this domain. And if we think of it later we can add it.
- 17-00:46:46  
Laetsch: Yes. Let's do maybe that later. I'm sure there are some things that I need to say about that.
- 17-00:47:00  
Rubens: Another area that we haven't talked about in the "effort" to—I guess it's called humanize Berkeley, but really to make it more friendly and accessible and not perceived as such a bureaucratic institution. You had staff retreats every year. And is that a place where you would be generating ideas?
- 17-00:47:27  
Laetsch: Yes. And we went to some nice places. We went down to Asilomar a number of times. We went up to the conference center the University has up by Tahoe.
- 17-00:47:44  
Rubens: I don't know about that.
- 17-00:47:44  
Laetsch: I think they still have it. The California Alumni Association had a property up near Tahoe. We also met at Silverado, a golf country club up in the wine valley. The idea was to bring together Undergraduate Affairs people. We always had academic representation of various kinds. I know Bob Middlekauff was with us a couple of times and we'd bring in other folks. And we would just talk, have discussions, reports on things related to issues in the whole Undergraduate Affairs program. And then, of course, we addressed things that were going on on the campus. So this was a way of bringing the staff together to blueprint programs for the coming year and then to develop relationships amongst the staff, which had never really been done before.
- 17-00:49:19  
Rubens: How many people are we talking about that would attend?



17-00:49:23

Laetsch:

Several dozen people. At least three dozen. I forget how many. But a lot of people. And it wasn't every staff member on every unit but it was certainly the heads and their top people, et cetera. So we always had a lot of people.

17-00:49:38

Rubens:

One thing that came out of that was a system of recognizing staff, having staff appreciation events and milestones. You write about in *Teaching at Berkeley*.

17-00:49:50

Laetsch:

Yes. I remember that we developed a project to humanize admissions and records which had always been thought about as the height of bureaucratic ineptitude and unfriendliness. The people who were there were actually unfriendly to students. But then Cheryl Haigh came in as the Director of Records, and she worked very hard with her staff. She held training programs on how to interact with people, how to really support the students and the whole thing changed. It was really quite remarkable.

17-00:50:32

Rubens:

Putting a friendlier face on the University.

17-00:50:33

Laetsch:

Well, and a helpful face. That is they are there to help, not to provide barriers to students. That helped out a lot with relations with the ASUC, for example, because they knew about it. So it just was a lot of very sensible kinds of things that hadn't been done. As a result you had a lot of staff who were very much like the people where you get your driver's license, the DMV. As if they were there to be a sort of police and not to help the students but to set up bureaucratic hurdles. So trying to change all of this is something we worked on a lot and I think we had a fair amount of success.

17-00:51:29

Rubens:

One of the efforts resulted in giving staff appreciation awards and having articles written about them, for instance in the *Berkeleyan*. Now, I think also what we left off having talked about is the Study Abroad Program and your involvement vis-à-vis India.

17-00:52:34

Laetsch:

Oh, yes. The Study Abroad Program, which was administered at Santa Barbara. But each campus had a faculty member responsible for students from their campus. And so our office here was much involved with the study center in Delhi, India, which was the center for all of India. Students would go over there and spend time at different universities but the head office was in Delhi. There were a lot of problems over there for a variety of causes, much of it from here, where there were some administrators not on our campus but other places, I think even for a while on our campus, that just had things kind of fouled up. And so I was asked to go over, because of my long experience in India, and to have a look at it. And I forget if I was going to be there anyhow or if I made a special trip. I think it was probably that I folded it in somehow

or another to the Indo-US Subcommittee activities. But they paid for it. I just ran across a note on that recently. It helped that I had been a Fulbright Scholar. So I went over a couple of times and met the director of the project and met with the office in India that deals with students from the US and also administers the Fulbright program.

I spent quite a bit of time there interviewing students and made some recommendations and I think they finally got things more or less worked out, although it was a problem for a while because the local person there who really was the one who looked after the students, and he had had some bureaucratic problems with the organization here and so he was very demoralized. Just getting that all straightened out, which I think it finally more or less happened, was just a very interesting—not a side light. But it just goes again to show how people impose their own views and problems onto a program and thereby create problems.

17-00:54:59

Rubens: Was that a pretty large program?

17-00:55:03

Laetsch: Yes. Well, they had students who came from all the campuses, right. So it was quite large.

17-00:55:13

Rubens: And when you say, "I was asked," what was this about?

17-00:55:17

Laetsch: Somebody here, maybe it was the dean of one of the sciences, asked me to do it. There was a person on the Berkeley campus, a faculty member who was the person who administered that program in India.

17-00:55:43

Rubens: So let's change the tape and then—are you up for continuing?

17-00:55:50

Laetsch: Yes, oh sure.

[End Audio File 17]

Begin Audio File 18 02-21-2011.mp3

18-00:00:00

Rubens: Let's discuss your relationship to UNESCO.

18-00:00:10

Laetsch: I was asked to go down to Trinidad and Tobago in 1981 to advise them on the establishment of a science museum in Trinidad and Tobago that UNESCO would fund. And the person handling the project, or one of the individuals, was from Trinidad. I think that's whom I had met and I think that's how they got my name. Or it might have just been because of my long involvement in

science center activities. Anyway, they paid me to go down to Trinidad, which was interesting because that's, of course, where my wife is from and I knew a lot of people there and all her family was there.

18-00:00:56

Rubens: You had been doing research down there also for Tate & Lyle, Limited. We talked about that early in this oral history.

18-00:00:57

Laetsch: Well, five years after we were married, I went down and did research at Tate & Lyle's Sugar Research Laboratory and then went down many times after that. So by 1981, I'd been there a lot and knew the place pretty well. The government asked me to come down and advise them on setting up a science museum, which I did. It was another one of the outgrowths of my long involvement with science centers, science museums and education programs that emanated from the Lawrence Hall of Science.

18-00:01:50

Rubens: You maintained your membership in the Association of Museum Directors.

18-00:02:07

Laetsch: Well, I continued to have interactions with them and with the museum world and did a lot of publishing on issues related to science education. And I still had graduate students who were working in that general area while I was Vice Chancellor.

18-00:02:57

Rubens: We mentioned that when Tien came in he basically wanted his own development person.

18-00:03:11

Laetsch: That's right. And I have an annoying habit, which is that I sometimes question people, and his ego would not permit that. He was enormously, enormously ego intense, and he did not have discussions in his meetings. He would tell us his views on things and that's how it was supposed to be.

18-00:03:42

Rubens: Quite a contrast to Mike Heyman.

18-00:03:45

Laetsch: A very great contrast with Mike Heyman. And I, for good or for ill, am not somebody who always keeps my opinions to myself. Well, he didn't like that at all. Plus the fact that when we would go out and visit alumni groups I knew the people. I was a foot taller than he was and I spoke English well. And so I was able to interact with these people in a way that he never was able to and so he was sometimes—and I never tried to do it, but it was inevitable. He was sometimes cast in a shadow. His ego was enormous, and he could not bear that. So it just came to the point where he wanted to be on top of his own pillar.

18-00:04:38

Rubens:

And so did he just say, "Mac, it's time for you to go?"

18-00:04:41

Laetsch:

Yes. He called me in one day. We had meetings, of course, fairly frequently. He called me in one day and said that, "I want to make a change." I said, "Fine, go ahead and make it." And then I negotiated to keep my salary for a year. But then I left and went off and did other things.

18-00:05:03

Rubens:

So when you left in 1990, is that when you became emeritus?

18-00:05:06

Laetsch:

Yes. Well, actually, I became emeritus officially in '91 I think. Because I stayed on for a year.

18-00:05:21

Rubens:

And you had been running a lab up till then?

18-00:05:24

Laetsch:

And that's something that we maybe want to talk about the next time, is graduate students and what they're doing. But I had a lab going at that time and then when I left I still had grant money which I of course could utilize in plant biology. So I kept that lab going I think for another couple of years. And I had an associate at that time, Dr. Valerie Vreeland, who had worked for quite some time with me on components of algal cell walls. And she was very good, very accomplished. So she kept things going. I think when that grant ended, then I was no longer involved with research on campus.

18-00:06:18

Rubens:

We need to talk as well about when you were on the board of directors of the Faculty Club.

18-00:06:33

Laetsch:

Yes. It was for quite a long time in the eighties, and I don't remember exactly when it was. But I was on the board of the Faculty Club as a director. And we ran into some real financing problems. And then we had a manager of the club who was not very good in a number of ways. He was good in some ways but in terms of finances he was not good. A committee was appointed to look at it from the financial standpoint. I think I was off of it by that time. And they made some changes and brought in a new manager.

18-00:07:37

Rubens:

So you served how long, about?

18-00:07:39

Laetsch:

Board members are elected by members of the Faculty Club. And I forget how long I served. It was quite a while. Four, five years, maybe. Because I was singing with the Monks at the time, and so during the Christmas program I

would always get up in my Monk's robes and tell them about the Faculty Club and how they should support it, et cetera.

18-00:08:06

Rubens: When did you join the Monks?

18-00:08:09

Laetsch: I think in 1980, in 1981.

18-00:08:11

Rubens: So around the same time that you're a director. Just say for the record what the Monks is.

18-00:08:15

Laetsch: Oh, okay. The Monks is a men's choral group, founded not long after the Faculty Club was founded, which was about 1905. So they are over a hundred years old. Probably the oldest continuous organization on the Berkeley campus and they had been singing for that period of time.

18-00:08:41

Rubens: And so are you invited to join?

18-00:08:42

Laetsch: Yes.

18-00:08:44

Rubens: How big is it about?

18-00:08:46

Laetsch: Oh, we have now forty-some people. And most of them can sing pretty well. I'm a baritone bass. But I can't admit to being one of the stars of the chorus.

18-00:09:02

Rubens: But it's something you enjoy?

18-00:09:04

Laetsch: Yes, but it's increasingly becoming a little tiring.

18-00:09:07

Rubens: How would you have time to practice that with all of your other activities?

18-00:09:11

Laetsch: Well, we only appeared four times a year. One of the things I did do with that was to start a new feature. They had had performances three times a year for members of the Faculty Club. So I said, "Let's have this available." I think I did that after I became Vice Chancellor for Development. "Let's have one for members of the Robert Gordon Sproul Associates," which is one of the giving categories for the Berkeley Foundation. And this is a good way to bring them in and support things and give them an idea of what's going on in the Faculty Club.

18-00:09:40

Rubens:

To have them come to a performance?

18-00:09:41

Laetsch:

Well, to have a dinner for them, just a dinner in addition to the regular Faculty Club dinner. So we started that, and it is still going on, although I find that the development office has sort of withdrawn from its direct involvement. Again, I would appear always as Vice Chancellor for Development and talk to people and that continued for a bit after I was gone. But in the last few years there hasn't really been anyone from the Development Office that even come to these things.

We'll talk some more about development. But before I forget, I wanted to say something about Graduate Student Instructors because the institution runs on Graduate Student Instructors, GSIs as they call them now. Here's a report that I commissioned for the Academic Senate Committee on Graduate Student Instructors. At that time there were 1,800 Graduate Student Instructors on the UC Berkeley campus. They do a very large percentage of the teaching in the lower division. And there hadn't really been any systematic attention paid to these folks in terms of training. Some were well-trained because of the departments. It all came under the departments, and so depending on the department, some were well trained and some were not.

In the Biology I course, I always spent a lot of time when I was involved with that in training the TAs. But there were a lot of courses that didn't really do this. So it was a very uneven business. What we were trying to do was to develop some systems for the whole campus and one of the recommendations of this committee was that the administration should identify one senior administrator with general oversight for Graduate Student Instructor affairs. No one was authorized to coordinate policy. And then this officer should be assisted by a committee of faculty and staff members experienced in training and supervising Graduate Student Instructors, who should be appointed in consultation with the Academic Senate. Every department with Graduate Student Instructors should identify an officer, develop formal policy and procedure for the Graduate Student Instructors. Well, this all is commonsense, you would think, but I don't think it was ever implemented. Some departments may have used it to improve what they were doing but certainly there was never an administrator who then had responsibility. And it's really unfortunate because, again, a good deal of our instruction at lower division is done by graduate students and there's no uniform approach to training and evaluation and it's just ignored, which is one of the slaps that we constantly get for not paying attention to instruction for our undergraduates.

18-00:12:54

Rubens:

There were some alternative mechanisms students created to evaluate teachers.

18-00:13:06

Laetsch:

The student evaluation forms are now pro forma for courses, and that was started by the students themselves right after the Free Speech Movement. And that grew and now is something that's done I think for just about every course.

18-00:13:24

Rubens:

Would that be administered through the departments?

18-00:13:27

Laetsch:

Well, I think it's probably administered through the courses. I'm not completely certain what it is now but there's a rating system. But the thing is that there is no reward or penalty as a result. That is, if people get very good ratings they may get some reward and people that get good ratings for a long time, maybe they get a teaching award. But if people don't do well, there's no penalty.

18-00:14:00

Rubens:

Or remedy.

18-00:14:01

Laetsch:

Or remedy, yes. So people get bad reports. And if they do good research, they don't pay any attention to it. That's what has always gone on here. That is if you do good research you don't have to do anything else very well. And if you do really good teaching it may help you but it doesn't help you if you do poor research.

Now we haven't really covered very much about my graduate students. We've talked so much about my work in other areas but I still continued to have graduate students, but with a unique twist. And that is with my doctoral students in Botany, and I continued to have those up until I became Vice Chancellor. But I didn't take any new Botany students after that. But I continued to have the students in the PhD program in Math and Science Education called SESAME, Search for Excellence in Science and Mathematics Education.

18-00:15:29

Rubens:

We certainly talked about the creation of that program.

18-00:15:31

Laetsch:

We created that and it was important that it was not in the School of Education. It was a group of faculty in the sciences and it has a lot of involvement when I was there with the Lawrence Hall of Science. I had continued to have some students in that program. Just going back to the Botany students a bit. My very first PhD student, whom I've mentioned before, was David Stetler. We had lunch together today and his wife joined us. He worked on chloroplasts, which was something I was much involved with at the time. He finished up his career at the Virginia Polytech at Blacksburg and now he's come back out here again in retirement because his wife is from Montclair. By the way, he's helping this project that we're doing right now. In

fact, you met him at the reception we had for the beginning of this oral history. They now have moved to the coast of North Carolina to be close to their son.

And, again, the students went off and they were all in good positions. One in particular was on campus just this last year at an event. This is Bob Kennedy, who's now the President of the University of Maine. So he's had a very distinguished career.

18-00:16:44  
Rubens:

This is a Botany PhD.

18-00:16:47  
Laetsch:

Yes these are both Botany PhDs. And I had people going to a whole variety of other places. But I mention Bob Kennedy because he claims as President of the university he learned an awful lot about how to do things when he was with me as a graduate student. So that was a nice compliment. The other program was, again, the PhD program in Math and Science Education, and I had a bunch of students in that. And we'll talk maybe a little more about it because I want to show you a journal in the museum field.

This is a recent issue of the *American Scientist*, which is a prime journal in science and one of the main articles is by a former student and his wife, who was in the PhD program in math and science education. John Falk. F-A-L-K. And he is sort of the leading person now in an area that I was much involved in getting started, which was to look at science education and particularly as it related to museums, nature centers, work in parks and a whole variety of institutions. In fact, I started a program at the Lawrence Hall of Science that was funded for years by NSF called Outdoor Biology Instructional Strategies, which we talked about in an earlier interview. That's now all over the world just about. Anyhow, John has this recent article in which he talks about the fact that there has been so much discussion on how people in the US have very poor science education but he makes a very important point that's been ignored, that this is true for people while they are in school, but if you look at adults' knowledge of science, compare it with other countries, we lead. So an awful lot of people learn their science or get involved with science after they leave school, which is sort of a condemnation of a lot of the science programs they have at school. But they get involved in things when they get out. They join all kinds of organizations that are involved with science, from astronomy clubs to gardening to bird watching. They take their kids to science centers and to the zoos. And so they learn a lot of things from that and this extends into television programs and a variety of other kinds of programs in science. And he deals with all of this the article. So I think it's a rather important article. But it continues a theme that we started way back. And continues to go on.

18-00:19:41  
Rubens:

I'm sure it's gratifying to see this.



18-00:19:44

Laetsch:

I just sent him an email on it congratulating him and pointing out some of his errors. As his old advisor I can't help but be critical as well.

18-00:19:56

Rubens:

Are these errors of substance?

18-00:19:59

Laetsch:

No. There was an article just recently in *Science* on high school biology teachers and science programs and how you have now only about 30 percent or so of the teachers that they've evaluated accept evolution as real. Maybe even less. Twenty percent, maybe. And this has been going on for years. And for the population as a whole, of course, this has been going on for years and years and years. Most of the population does not accept evolution and a good percentage of the population thinks that the world was created in seven days.

18-00:20:54

Rubens:

I know that a good majority think men did not actually land on the moon.

18-00:21:00

Laetsch:

I wouldn't be surprised. In terms of what people believe and don't believe, it's just remarkable. So you have a certain number of teachers, a minority who are well-educated and know their business and, of course, accept the science. Then you have teachers who hedge their bets because if they have in the community people who are opposed to evolution then they, of course, will often straddle the fence. And so they teach both creation and evolution. And then you have teachers who don't teach it at all. They don't even bring up the subject. And then you have others who actually teach biblical interpretations. After they get interested in science, I asked John this question, do their views on evolution change later on? And I don't know if they do or not. Perhaps some of them do. But I've always felt that we probably teach evolution in the wrong way. We teach it at the beginning and it runs into people's attitudes about religion. And, of course, we think the evidence is clear but it still is hard for many people to accept it. I've always thought that we should teach biology after some time spent on astronomy and the universe and then on the basis of geology, the history of the earth. Because you can't contravene the science of the history of the earth. You can't say that, "No, it's only 5,000 years old." If you accept anything at all, you have to agree that it's an awful lot older. Well, if you have this very ancient universe, very ancient earth, and then you have this long history of development of organisms on the earth that can be demonstrated, then you have a much stronger position to start teaching about evolution. But they don't do it that way.

18-00:23:14

Rubens:

Now, you had reorganized the basic biology course. But that wasn't moving it from a—

18-00:23:21

Laetsch:

Well, I used to teach a lot of it that way. And perhaps they still do. But it's not a standard thing. And so just an awful lot of it doesn't get taught. In a high school biology text you have stuff on evolution that teachers often don't deal with it.

18-00:23:52

Rubens:

It's very disturbing that 30 percent of teachers don't accept evolution as a science. That's really shocking to me.

18-00:23:53

Laetsch:

But for years over 70 percent of the population as a whole has not accepted evolution.

18-00:24:00

Rubens:

Were you involved at all with the controversy about textbook adoption in California and their coverage of evolution or creative scientism, a code for biblical interpretation? California was a huge market for texts.

18-00:24:21

Laetsch:

Oh, yes. And they've trimmed their sails on a lot of things, the textbook people have over the years. I can't remember all of the details.

Now to finish up about my SESEME graduate students, their research stemmed from an ethnographic approach. What people actually do in these places rather than what people say they do or given pre- and post-tests to figure out what they've learned. But this is actually observing what people do, because they often lie about what they do. We started a lot of work in this whole area.

18-00:25:20

Rubens:

Yes. I thought we covered that very nicely. Did you want to conclude with your involvement with Lair of the Bear?

18-00:26:22

Laetsch:

Okay. Well, the Lair of the Bear is the California Alumni Association's camp up in Pinecrest in the Sierra. I was invited up every year as a faculty speaker, I think for about ten years, and Sita and I would stay usually for a week. I'd give a talk several times a week.

18-00:26:54

Rubens:

And what was the focus?

18-00:26:55

Laetsch:

It was always about what was going on at the campus and it gave me lots of interaction with alumni. I think I was the only senior administrator who had ever gone up there to give talks and so I spent a lot of time with the alumni and found out what they were thinking about, et cetera.

18-00:27:14

Rubens:

And whose initiative was it that you would come up there?

18-00:27:17

Laetsch:

Well, I was invited by the Cal Alumni Association. And I'd been involved with them, in all kinds of stuff with them and I knew them quite well, et cetera. So I was up there a lot and this was very good, particularly during the Keeping the Promise campaign because I had met a lot of alumni up there and then also knew some of them from going around to alumni programs in the state. So it was a very good background for the Keeping the Promise campaign, and I'm sure helped that out in terms of dealing with people and telling them what was happening on campus.

18-00:27:54

Rubens:

And so your children were grown? You weren't taking them there?

18-00:27:56

Laetsch:

No. No, they were all up and out by that time; it was just Sita and I who went.

18-00:28:07

Rubens:

So the Alumni Association of the University of California is probably the largest—

18-00:28:17

Laetsch:

They maintain it's the largest in the country. And this is based on dues-paying members. Now, there are other places that have had more alumni than we've had, but these are actually members of the Association. And the last I heard it was the largest. One of the more interesting periods at the Lair was when we took a friend of ours from India up with us, and we had known her since she was a little girl. She was visiting us, so we took her up for the week. She had never experienced anything at all like that. It was a very, very—

18-00:28:55

Rubens:

Meaning what? That it's really very rah-rah, isn't it?

18-00:28:58

Laetsch:

Well, it's not so much that. It's just the fact that you have people coming and staying up there in tents and bringing their kids and the kind of interactions that went on. And they don't really have that kind of thing in India. And so it was a whole level of interaction with people that she had never experienced before. And she comes from a well-off family and was well educated.

18-00:29:23

Rubens:

Is the Bear's Lair made up of two camps?

18-00:29:28

Laetsch:

Three. They have a camp blue and a camp gold. And then there's another camp now that they bought. They bought some adjoining territory and I don't know what that's called. It's all the Lair of the Bear. It's the same area. They're cheek to jowl. And the Cal Alumni Association runs the whole thing

and they have the different camps because there are so many people who want to go they can't accommodate them in any one camp. And they are all sort of the same but they have some different programs. And they have joint programs and, of course, they have pretty much the same recreational facilities.

18-00:30:17

Rubens:

But you would go to these different camps. Is that right?

18-00:30:19

Laetsch:

That's right. But there were just two at the time. Blue Camp and Gold Camp. We always stayed at Camp Gold, which is the older one. But we would go to both of them. Yes.

18-00:31:15

Rubens:

I think we'll stop for today. But we still have ground to cover.

Interview #12 February 24, 2011  
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19-00:00:00

Rubens: Hi Mac, today is Thursday, the 24<sup>th</sup> of February and there are some people that you worked with when you were Vice Chancellor for Undergraduate Affairs that you particularly want to acknowledge.

19-00:00:13

Laetsch: Yes, they were on my staff. And we can do the Development Office as well. I should mention some people there. Anyhow, Bud Travers, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Undergraduate Affairs, had worked with Norvel Smith as his Assistant Vice Chancellor. Then he came with me and he was involved with lots and lots of things, particularly important in all of our minority recruitment efforts and with lots of things related to admissions and records. And then when I left, he got sort of crossed up a little bit with some of the other folks higher up. We had that whole issue of the minority admissions, et cetera. And the Regents even had a little hearing on it. And Bud was asked to go and talk with them. And he didn't do very well. But it wasn't fair that they had him do that. Should have been done by the Vice Chancellor.

19-00:01:12

Rubens: Meaning it wasn't his *métier* to speak—

19-00:01:14

Laetsch: Well, yes. Here he's presented before all these people and they ask him some tough questions, and he really wasn't used to dealing in that arena. And so he got a lot of flak as a result of that, which is unfair. He did an awful lot of good things on the campus. Another key person was Kurt Lauridsen, who was director of the Student Learning Center, which was a very, very important organization. Kurt had a PhD in history, and a law degree. He was very good and was a real academic. And then Jane Moorman, who was head of the counseling center, had a PhD in psychiatry. And the counseling center became increasingly important. As the campus became increasingly selective, you also had more and more kids with various kinds of emotional problems. We talked about that, but I wanted to note that Jane was a very wise person, very experienced. And, of course, that also involved much cooperation with the hospital.

When the health service moved down to its new building on Bancroft Way, I think it was about that time that Jane retired, as well. She was really a very solid person. Jim Brown, who was head of the Student Health Service, Dr. Jim Brown, with whom I worked closely, was also very good. He was excellent. In fact, Mike Heyman used to talk with him occasionally just to kind of find out what was going on in the heads of students and found that very valuable. And Austin Frank was head of the Office of Student Research, and we worked very closely with him. The office was a very important part of everything we did because in the whole minority recruitment and enrollment program we had

to have good statistics, and they were very good at providing all of that. I asked them for a lot of data. In fact, they kind of came out of the shadows when I came in because I really relied on them a great deal because we had a lot of issues that relied on statistical information. And not just statistical but attitudes of students as well.

And in admissions a lot of good people. Bob Bailey was the director. Bob took a lot of flak for various reasons, because he wasn't very diplomatic about things. But he was very important in our minority recruitment activities and did good work there. Cheryl Haigh was excellent. She did a lot to really reverse the attitudes of Admissions and Records. And I think I showed you a picture the other day. And so she was behind a lot of that. And she is still there actually. She's now married to Vince Resh, a professor on campus who was a former director of our research station. Gump Station, in the South Pacific on the island of Moorea. But now he's doing all kinds of things. Anyhow, they got married. They met at our house at one of the parties. I used to have people over all the time and they met here.

19-00:04:42

Rubens:

Literally at your house?

19-00:04:44

Laetsch:

Literally at the house. Right. And then also Peter Kerner, who was head of the campus TV, who was very, very cooperative. I even had one of his staff members go over to India to work on some activity that I was much involved with through the Indo-US Subcommission.

19-00:05:08

Rubens:

You had someone come along with you from—

19-00:05:10

Laetsch:

No. They went over on their own. I had them invited to go over, and they helped them on educational television in India. And we'll get into the subcommission staff in a minute. And then I hired Francisco Hernandez as a staff member to work on recruiting Hispanic students. He had a PhD in history from Berkeley, and then he did an awful lot of work in the Mexican American community—or Chicanos, as we said in those days—and voter registration. A lot of stuff. Very knowledgeable guy. And so he came on board, particularly for our recruitment activities, particularly with the Hispanic students, and did a wonderful job. He became Dean of Students. After he left Berkeley he went to UC Santa Cruz as Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, and from there he went to the University of Hawaii as Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs. I was just—well, it was, what, two years ago we had a Bear Trek to Hawaii and had nice meetings with Francisco. He said I taught him all he knew. I don't believe it but it was nice to hear that. And then two faculty associates, Russell Ellis in Architecture; he's African American, and he was terribly important in our recruitment activities with the African-American students. Then when I left he became Vice Chancellor for Undergraduate Affairs. And then Bil

Banks, a professor in African American Studies was also very important in a lot of the stuff that we did. I showed you the journal for student articles that they published, and Bil was responsible for that. But he did a lot of other things.

19-00:08:13

Rubens:

When you became Vice Chancellor for Development, did you have a particular strategy that you were going to pursue? And if so, how was it different than your predecessor? We've talked about your connections with the Valley Foundation. We talked a lot about you traveling with the alumni.

19-00:08:36

Laetsch:

Well, yes. When I became Vice Chancellor for Development, I took over from Curt Simic, and the Capital Campaign was pretty well along. And so I didn't have to come in fresh and start things. I actually took something that was working well and continued it.

19-00:09:20

Rubens:

Did you want to mention some people you worked with in Development?

19-00:09:29

Laetsch:

Well, one of the individuals I was just at a meeting with was Brad Barber, who was a Cal person and he was in the Development Office. He went to Boalt, had a law degree He was in charge of all the will stuff, and so we worked obviously closely together at that time. I was just at a meeting with Brad today because he now, at my suggestion, is the head of development for Children's Hospital Oakland. And so we're still meeting together all the time on things related to the fundraising.

Another person with me in the Development office was Michael Desler. After Mike left he became the head of fundraising for the Athletics Department, when the men's and women's athletic departments merged. During that time he became well-acquainted with John Stock, who was very close with Wayne Valley and was then on the board of the Valley Foundation when it was started. Stock's insurance company had supported athletics a lot. In fact, the scoreboard up at the north end of the stadium was from his company. Anyway, they offered Mike a job as the Director of the Valley Foundation. So he went there and we still continued to work together. And, of course, the Valley Foundation gave \$10 million for The Bancroft Library. So there are a lot of interconnections there.

This is a good place to talk about my involvement with the Children's Hospital and Research Center in Oakland. I was asked to go on its board of directors in the early 1990s and to chair the board of Children's Hospital Oakland Research Institute [CHORI]. Soon after I joined the board, the hospital purchased the building which had been University High School. The high school was closed in the late 1940s and the building became the site of Peralta Community College. It received a lot of attention, because of the

activities of the Black Panthers movement. The building had been vacant for many years, and vandals did a lot of damaged to the interior.

I instituted a capital campaign committee to raise funds to renovate the building for CHORI. We obtained a \$3.5 million gift from the Valley Foundation for the renovation. An additional \$1.5 million was subsequently given by the Valley Foundation. CHORI has become well-known nationally and internationally for its research. This is in interesting contrast to the hospital which is well-known in Northern California but not internationally.

CHORI not longer has its own board, but I remain active on the CHRCO board and its executive committee. My involvement has been a very rewarding part of this phase of my life.

19-00:13:35

Rubens:

Shall we talk about the Indo-US Subcommittee? We talked about its origins and you getting on it and we've talked about it up until, oh, just about 1980. I think.

19-00:13:44

Laetsch:

Okay. I was first asked in 1975 to go to India on the part of the subcommission and to look at the public science centers which were starting in India. That's when I was Director of the Lawrence Hall of Science and so they came to me for that purpose. So I went to India and traveled around the country looking at the science centers, meeting museum people, advising, and then made recommendations to the subcommission.

But then another interesting thing happened, which again helped us cement the relations with India. And this was while I was Director of the Lawrence Hall. They sent some people over to tour around the US and look at museums and science centers and the like. And one of them was K. R. Narayanan, the current Vice Chancellor of Jawaharlal Nehru University, which is in New Delhi. He came to the Lawrence Hall, and we spent quite a bit of time together. He then became Indian ambassador to the US. So I visited him in Washington a number of times. He also came out here. In fact, my youngest son Krishen actually stayed with him once in Washington.

When he went back to India he was asked by Mrs. Gandhi to go into politics. He became the Minister for Science for India, and I interacted with him when he was the minister. It wasn't the full title but that's basically what it was. So we interacted a good deal there and then he became Vice President for India. And, again, we would see him when we would go over there, and he gave us a number of receptions at his house. He became President of India, and he was President of India for a fair number of years. I didn't see him during that time; I consciously did not poke my head in because I didn't want him to—well, seeing the President and doing things with him is just a very complicated thing. So I didn't do that. And this was India's first President elected from the lowest caste.



19-00:16:40

Rubens:

What's the date?

19-00:16:42

Laetsch:

This is 1997. July 18, 1997. And he was what used to be called an untouchable. Now they call them dalits. He was from Kerala and from this caste. His father had been reasonably successful, a very difficult thing to do. But his son was very, very bright, and he obtained a scholarship to university. Then he went off to Oxford and then he was a newspaper man for quite a long time. But the fact that he came from that background is fascinating. And, in some ways, that helped his political career because they were anxious to present as many folks from that community as possible. After his time as President, Krishen and I were in India and he invited us to his home for lunch along with the ambassador from Sri Lanka. His wife by that time had Alzheimer's and then died about two years later. He died about two years ago. So it was a very, very long relationship with him.

19-00:18:02

Rubens:

How long was he President?

19-00:18:05

Laetsch:

Well, you're President for basically as long as the parliament wants to keep you in power. And, of course, the President is not completely ceremonial. A lot of it's ceremonial, but you are the head of state and you can fire the Prime Minister if you think you have an opportunity to do that, which they don't.

19-00:18:26

Rubens:

Did you engage Berkeley people with the subcommission?

19-00:18:35

Laetsch:

Yes. One of the more interesting groups was led by Hartman Lomawaima, who was the hereditary chief of the Bear Clan of the Hopi, and he was here in Berkeley at the Lowie Museum because he'd become acquainted with Jim Deetz, the new Director at that time, who was a very well-known, good guy. He brought Hartman in and we became well-acquainted. I had Hartman go to India, and he took some of his relatives who were artists from the reservation in New Mexico.

19-00:19:45

Rubens:

So sponsored by the—

19-00:19:46

Laetsch:

Indo-US Subcommission on Education and Culture. The interesting thing, of course, is that this was probably the first time a group of American Indians went to India. They loved it over there. In fact, the President of India came to meet him, and they had a nice conversation during which the President insisted that US Indians were really relatives of the Indians in India for some strange reason.

Hartman then became the Director of the Arizona State Museum in Tucson, and really developed it and did a lot of good work. He died rather quickly about two years ago from leukemia, which is too bad. His wife is an anthropologist, and she was in the Anthropology Department here. She was also Native American. He was Hopi from Second Mesa and she was from Arizona. She was also a very talented person and is still at Arizona. He traveled to India with his group. He had a painter and a weaver, and they traveled around India and put on demonstrations and it was really very successful.

Well, the Indo-US Subcommittee first sent me to India in 1975, and I traveled around the country. Then a couple of years later I was asked to be on the subcommittee, and I was on that until the Subcommittee for Education and Culture ended in 1996. And we'll talk about that a little bit later, because that's an interesting story. Anyhow, some of the people that were on the subcommittee: Joe Elder, University of Pennsylvania, American Institute for Indian Studies. And Vartan Gregorian, President of Brown University, who of course was asked to be Chancellor here, and he wanted to be President of the University of Pennsylvania. He bowed out and Mike Heyman then was asked.

There was John Hubbard, who was a former President of the University of Southern California; myself; and Elizabeth Moynihan, Senator Moynihan's wife, who actually had a project in India that she worked on for a long time. She was an architectural historian. And then Tom Pritzker, the President of the Hyatt Corporation, from the Pritzker family. He was chair of the subcommittee for a number of years. But it was a very interesting group and, as I mentioned, I was on it for a very long time. The subcommittee was really the only American entity during that time that really had much to do with India. We had the Fulbright office there, but other than that there was nothing going on between India and the US because diplomatically there was a real rupture. In our meetings, we often met with the Prime Minister, and we met with senior cabinet people.

19-00:23:47

Rubens:

I think you said that the meetings were sometimes over there and sometimes here. You alternated.

19-00:23:51

Laetsch:

One year would be here and the next year over there. And then there were some other times when I went over for various projects that they were involved with. So they alternated the meetings. When we were in India we met with top government officials, top cultural folks, and as I said, a couple of times with Prime Minister Narashimha Rao. And I met with him a couple of years earlier at a lunch at the home of the Indian Consul General in San Francisco. He had a very impressive belly. So it gave you some indication of how little was going on politically between India and this country, and that's been such a major change. Instructional television, science television was an

example of some of the programs. We had exchanges in these areas of instructional TV and other programs between the Berkeley and Indian universities and institutes. Bob Cremer from our TV office went over there and interacted with folks in TV to get them a little bit more up to date on educational technology.

19-00:25:06

Rubens: Who was the leading sponsor of this subcommission?

19-00:25:09

Laetsch: The Indo-US Subcommission in this country reported to the State Department.

19-00:25:12

Rubens: Was there somebody there particularly who was pushing it?

19-00:25:15

Laetsch: Well, no. It was set up initially with India when Kissinger was the American Secretary of State. And then, of course, influential folks in India. The joint commission was funded by money from the sale of wheat to India. It was the PL-480 fund. Public Law 480. And this was the one that provided wheat and other grains to a bunch of countries around the world after World War II when they were having difficulties. And those were the countries that supported the Fulbright program. They used PL-480 funds to support it. And that's what supported the Indo-US Subcommission, both India's side and our side.

It was called the rupee fund because we did not ask for repayment for these big loans that we'd given for food in dollars, we asked for it in rupees. It supported our programs in India until the rupees ran out. We had an executive director in this country and he had a staff and they were in New York. For example, some of the other things we did had to do with the use of computers and other technologies in science museums. Workshop on new approaches to planetarium education and that was all from the—much of it from the Lawrence Hall of Science when we developed a planetarium. Another one was interdisciplinary approaches to environmental education, and we had a lot of stuff from the Lawrence Hall there, as well. The Lowie Museum had an exhibit from India on living legacies. The subcommission sponsored the "Festival of India," which sent programs and museum exhibits from India to museums all over the US. And, for obvious reasons, a lot of things that related to Berkeley.

I have a large file on some of the other programs we did that's kind of interesting. Here's a newspaper clipping from an Indian newspaper on one of our meetings in 1996. And here's a picture of Ron Brown. Remember Ron Brown?

19-00:28:00

Rubens: Oh, of course. The Secretary of Commerce who died in a plane crash.

19-00:28:02

Laetsch:

That's right. He was there, and I met him and had a nice conversation. There's also a picture here of Frank Wisner. Now, you will know that name because he was the person who just went to Egypt to negotiate with the President. Here's a plaque from Frank in 1996 announcing that the subcommission was closing shop and this expressed, "His appreciation for your excellent work over the years as a member of the Board of Directors of the Indo-US Subcommission on Education and Culture." Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. "And your wise counsel and intimate understanding of Indian culture have informed many of the board's major decisions. I hope we can count on your continued service with the board as we sort out the future of the subcommittee over the coming year."

Well, they sorted it out by saying they were just ending it. And that was a huge mistake. He wanted to get more into the science exchanges. People from the State Department that I met in subsequent years said it was a great mistake to end the Subcommission on Education and Culture because it had promoted so much interesting interactions between people and between institutions.

Another person that I had a fair amount of interaction with during that time because his wife was a member of the subcommission—was Pat Moynihan, the Senator. He often came to the meetings to be with his wife, and he was interested in India as well. Very interesting guy, as many people have said. One of the things that they don't say, by and large, is that he was a drunk and that he was potted much of the time. In fact, he would often have to go off in the evening fairly early because he would often start his nips at noontime. But, again, an interesting fellow.

19-00:30:06

Rubens:

Was this during the period when he was Senator?

19-00:30:08

Laetsch:

Yes, this was the time when he was Senator. And his wife really had to look after him and take care of him, because she would often have to make sure that he would get back to the hotel and could function. But that was an interesting little aspect of the whole business.

19-00:30:27

Rubens:

So it put you in an arena where you really met people who were movers and shakers; leaders and future leaders.

19-00:30:30

Laetsch:

That's right. Oh, absolutely. This is a bunch of pictures of our last meeting. The Minister of State for External Affairs, Mr. Salman Khurshid, who's still in the government over there, with members of the Indo-US joint commission in New Delhi. Well, there is Liz Moynihan, Pat's wife, the gentleman I just mentioned who was the head of the Hyatt Hotel chain, et cetera, and there I am giving them a lecture on some forgotten, but obviously important subject.

This excerpt I'll read summarizes a lot of the things we did. This was the last communication from our office in New York, the subcommission office from Ted Tanon. "The time has come to write the memo stating officially that the secretariat of the Indo-US Subcommission will be closing down. A sad day but I believe we must." Blah, blah, blah, blah. "In a real sense we accomplished more than many from both countries would have thought possible due to the help of many of you," et cetera, et cetera. And he lists then some of the things we did. But anyhow, it was a very interesting experiment.

19-00:32:21  
Rubens:

Did you find yourself having more time for it once you left the University?

19-00:32:25  
Laetsch:

No, I spent a lot of time at it when I was at the University, and I went over there frequently while I was here. So I don't know if there was more time but it was just one of the things that I continued to do, because I had more flexible time. And just to talk about India a little more. This is from K.K.S. Rana, who was the Indian Consul General here in San Francisco for the Western US during the latter part of the eighties. He left here and became ambassador to Mauritius, which I want to talk about in a little bit. And then he became ambassador to Germany. We kept up with him all these years, and he would at various times come over. We'd see them when we were in India. He's now retired out of the foreign service. But he wrote a nice little note. This was in '89. "I'm writing to convey warm thanks for all the assistance received from you as our principal ally at UC Berkeley. We do count on remaining in touch with you and hopefully receiving you in Mauritius." And, indeed, we went to Mauritius.

19-00:34:02  
Rubens:

So is that how you were invited there?

19-00:34:04  
Laetsch:

Yes. That's how we were invited to Mauritius. We were doing a trip around the world. This was after I left the Vice Chancellorship. That would have been in the spring of 1991, and so we had been in Hong Kong, where I picked up that awful illness that didn't manifest itself until I got to Africa. And then we were in India and then we went to Pakistan. We stayed there with a man—and we'll talk more about him—Sati Lambah who had been Indian Consul General for the Western United States, and then he went as ambassador or as high commissioner to Pakistan. Ambassadors in the British Commonwealth are called high commissioners. We were going around the world, and he invited us to stop. So we stayed with him at his home in Islamabad and met some interesting and highly placed people in Islamabad. He arranged for us to take a tour using one of his cars up to Peshawar, which was quite peaceful at that time. And you've been hearing an awful lot about it since it's become a war zone for the US. This was when the Soviets were in Afghanistan. There were a lot of Afghan refugees in Peshawar, and the United Nations had a huge camp up there. But that was a very fascinating trip and, again, seeing what has

happened to it now, we wouldn't be able to go now but in those days it was no problem, although I was watched very carefully by Pakistan's internal security people. They watched the Indians closely.

It was a functioning government at that time, but they were still a little suspicious of people coming in. In the old part of the city, in Peshawar, we had dinner with a young man who was the son of our main contact. He went on that night about how terrible the US the west were and basically saying the same things that they have been saying now. So it was not something that they invented recently in terms of their concerns about us. It was a fascinating trip and then we went from there to Mauritius and stayed with Ambassador Rana.

19-00:37:11

Rubens:

Tell me a little about Mauritius. It's an island.

19-00:37:13

Laetsch:

Mauritius is an island in the Indian Ocean and it's very far away from everything else. It was a British colony, but it had at first been French. The native language is French and, of course, with English on top. I think it was in the Napoleonic wars that the British got it. But a lot of the people there were French sugar planters. It was a big producer, and still is, of sugar.

19-00:37:45

Rubens:

So he knew your interest and expertise in sugar?

19-00:37:47

Laetsch:

Yes, and when I was there I interacted a lot with some of the sugar people. They had a large sugar factory there which we visited, and I talked to a bunch of people in the sugar industry. I gave a couple of speeches there. Maybe we'll come to it as I go through my files. But anyhow, that was a fascinating visit. And then from there we went to Kenya, and then my hepatitis kicked in and I came home and went straight to Alta Bates hospital.

19-00:38:32

Rubens:

So the purpose of the trip to Mauritius was not business.

19-00:38:35

Laetsch:

Well, the purpose there was we were traveling around the world and that was on the way. I had this invitation and so obviously we stopped, met the Prime Minister, met high officials of all kinds. I had no business interest there at that time.

The Sati Lambah story continues. He was the Indian Consul General here, and then he was the high commissioner to Pakistan and then he was some other things after that and then retired. But when Afghanistan was taken back from the Taliban government, he was sent by the Indian government as part of the group negotiating to set up the government of Afghanistan. So he kept his hands in very generally. But this refers to another thing he was involved in. I told you about the chair in Indian studies. This was something that I had

started with Kishan Rana; that I had been involved in working with the Indian community, raising money for a chair in Indian Studies at Berkeley.

Here is a photo of the second US-India Bilateral Forum at Berkeley in 1991. Fred Wakeman was the director of the whole business. And Shankar Bajpai is pictured here. Shankar was the Indian ambassador to the US, whom I first met in India, and then he became Indian ambassador. We had a lot of interaction while he was ambassador and I invited him to give a lecture on campus. When his ambassadorship was over and he was going to retire, I worked it out that he came out here as a visiting faculty member, and we got a Regents professorship for him. He came out as a Regents professor to Berkeley, and he was here for a better part of a year and gave some courses and seminars. After that, the South Asian Studies Department asked him to stay on as a Visiting Professor. He stayed here then for two more years as a Visiting Professor. This was in the early nineties.

And here is a little picture of Shankar. And he continues to come over here because he's a member of the Bohemian Club so he came to that. That came about when he was Indian Ambassador to the US. But then he has two sons educated here. One lives here and one lives in Britain. So he had all kinds of reasons to keep coming back.

One of the interesting visitors he had while he was here—over by what is now the Clark Kerr Campus. There's a little white Cape Cod cottage right next to what is now the senior citizens residence, Redwood Gardens. That belongs to the campus, and they rent it. That's where he stayed as a Visiting Professor. So there was a lot of Indian-related activities that he would hold. He was a great cook and he loved to entertain. So that was kind of the center for a lot of Indian activities for that period of time. One of the more interesting guests was the Indian ambassador who came after him. Karan Singh, whose father was the last Maharaja of Kashmir. When India became independent there was a big issue about Kashmir, because the Maharaja couldn't make up his mind. He wanted to remain independent but that wasn't going to be possible. We talked about that in an earlier interview.

Karan Singh, his son, was appointed as the Governor of Kashmir when he was a very young man. Actually, he was in the law school at Delhi University and in the fall of 1956. I was in Kashmir and I was invited, because I think he knew I was from Delhi University. I was invited to what was the Maharaja's palace, which was then the house that the governor lived in. He and his very lovely young wife, who was a Rana from Nepal, invited myself and another guy over there. I saw him again when he was the Indian ambassador to the US. He wasn't a very good ambassador, but he continued to be very active in Indian politics and I would see him frequently when I was there on the Indo-US Subcommission activities. He was an interesting remnant of the old way of doing things over there. His wife, who I said was very attractive when she was young, but he was such a difficult guy she became an alcoholic and lost

all her looks. He was also the high commissioner to Trinidad, so Sita met him when he was in Trinidad. And Sita's parents knew him as a result of that.

I also led a Bear Treks to India, so all of these things just keep on mixing together in one way or another. I think that probably takes care of India pretty well. Did I mention our visits to Saudi Arabia?

19-00:47:17

Rubens:

We have not gotten that in. What year are we talking about roughly?

19-00:47:28

Laetsch:

Well, it would have been the late eighties. And I can probably dig that out. The Indian Consul General, Ishrat Aziz, whom we knew very well, became the ambassador to Saudi Arabia. One of the reasons that he was sent there is because he was Muslim and there weren't an awful lot of Muslims highly placed in the Indian foreign service and he spoke Arabic. They sent him there and we'd become very well-acquainted with him and his wife and she was from Lucknow and we had visited her and some of her family in Lucknow several times. He invited us to stop by in Saudi Arabia on the way to India, which was quite a convenient thing to do. We visited with him in Saudi Arabia, in Riyadh, the capital. Very interesting visit. Met lots and lots of people, folks high up in their government there.

19-00:48:44

Rubens:

Is this when you took a side trip and camped in the desert?

19-00:48:46

Laetsch:

Well, that was the second visit when we spent quite a bit of time in the desert, and that was when we met the crown prince who is now the king of Saudi Arabia.

19-00:48:57

Rubens:

He just happened by? Did he come to see you?

19-00:48:59

Laetsch:

He was out near the royal encampment, big tents that they take out and put up and pretend like they're still Bedouins. He was driving not too far from there in a Land Rover and we were in a Land Rover. We came together on the roadless desert and stopped. He was wondering who the hell we were. But it turned out that Ishrat knew him because of his ambassador work, so then everything was friendly and fine and we had a nice conversation and he was a very delightful guy. We were in Saudi Arabia two times. And these have been very interesting experiences. Sita had a view of Arabian society that males don't have, because she would be invited out by the women. The women would throw aside their covering garments when they were together and they would drink and dance and have quite a wild time.

While we were there, we met a man who had been at Berkeley, and he was a fairly high government official. His father-in-law was the equivalent of the



treasurer of the country. Very wealthy obviously; he had a big farm about a hundred miles from Riyadh, and we drove there at about a hundred miles an hour and spent an afternoon and an evening. Sita was along but she went in a women's-only van, and she had to stay in the women's quarters while we were up with the men and drinking tea poured by an African servant who had probably been a slave, or his family had been slaves a little earlier on, because they still had slaves in Saudi Arabia until very recently.

I forgot to mention that a few years before he was ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Ishrat Aziz was ambassador to the United Arab Emirates. We visited him in Abu Dhabi and also visited Dubai. It was a very different place from the forest of skyscrapers it has become.

19-00:51:27

Rubens:

You have travelled so extensively, on your own and for a number of institutions. I know you travelled in Asia for UC. Have you been to China?

19-00:51:28

Laetsch:

We've been to China for a day. And I've been to Hong Kong many times and have been to Taiwan. But we just got into China for a day. I've been invited many times but just haven't worked it out, and I suspect I probably won't do it. In fact, I just had an invite the other day from the gentleman who lived with us here for a year. He was one of the Chinese scholars who came over, the first group of Chinese students who came over. That would have been in 1979. There were about eight of them who came over here as part of the initial group that came over from China.

19-00:52:17

Rubens:

Yes. Ernie Kuh talks about that in his oral history. How is it that you put him up?

19-00:52:25

Laetsch:

Well, no. What happened was my wife was very much involved with the faculty wives association and they were asked by International House, I think, if we would take a Chinese scholar when they first came here and have them stay here for a couple of days until they got acclimated and found a place to live. So we said sure, we'd take one. Well, after Zhang Yuman was here for a couple of days he asked if we would mind if he stayed here. We have a room downstairs that he stayed in and there's a little kitchen. So we said, "Okay, fine." He stayed here and was kind of a member of the family. We have an extra entrance downstairs so he could come and go as he wished. But then, often on the weekends, the Chinese scholars would come here. So we became well-acquainted with all of them and had a lot of very interesting evenings. After about a year Zhang Yuman, who was in Nuclear Engineering, went off to work in nuclear science in another part of the country and another scholar came. "Would we take him?" We said, "Okay." So he moved in and then when he left, we still had a lot of contact. We still interact with him. He was in Naval Architecture. And then he went back to China, and then he came here

and worked for a high tech company and lives now in New Jersey. He visited us recently with his sisters from Shanghai, and he and his wife expect to move there.

19-00:54:30

Rubens: Is there anything more you want to say about Sita's involvement with the faculty wives?

19-00:54:34

Laetsch: Well, she was involved. I don't know if there's very much I could—I couldn't say much about it. But that was one of the examples of a fall out from her activities. And then she stopped being involved. I'm not sure quite why.

But anyhow, regarding the third Chinese scholar. One day there was a guy downstairs and he said, "I'm living here now." And so they just passed it on. We had about two more after that and then that was it. We finally said no more. For five, six years we had somebody living there. And then, of course, it was during that time as well that we had the princes from Bhutan living with us. So we have had a lot of international interaction of various kinds.

19-00:55:32

Rubens: Yes indeed. Let's stop while I change the tape.

[End Audio File 1]

Begin Audio File 20 02-24-2011.mp3

20-00:00:00

Rubens: Mac, how is it that you, a botanist, become involved with a bank?

20-00:00:26

Laetsch: In 1991 I had decided to retire for a whole bunch of reasons. One is that I was tired. Two, I had been away from my research for a long time, so I couldn't really get back into that, and I wanted to do something different. So I looked around at things for a while. Then Claude Hutchison, who had been the President of the California Alumni Association, and who I became very well acquainted with—and we used to travel around talking to alumni clubs. I shouldn't leave that completely, because last night I was at the Berkeley Fellows dinner at Chancellor's house. The Fellows are an honorary group, and we have a black tie dinner each year at the Chancellor's house. And I was talking with the President of the Berkeley Foundation. He's a very rich lawyer from Southern California. We were talking about the old days, et cetera, and about the need now to go out and really talk to the alumni because the University is in a very, very precarious position. In fact, the Chancellor made a big issue last night about how we now get more money from the federal government than we do from the state. There was an article in the paper the other day about that, which points out that student fees now give us more money than we get from the state. The ramifications of that are I think extremely serious because we can say, "Yes, we're getting a lot of money

from the feds but that is money for research and support of graduate students and post-docs and faculty research and that is almost all in the sciences and engineering. What happens then to the humanities and the social sciences?" I asked the Chancellor that question last night.

20-00:02:30

Rubens: What'd he say?

20-00:02:33

Laetsch: "Oh, well, we're doing some other things. Because we have money in these other areas we can spend now some of the state money for sponsoring programs in these other areas," which is not going to make up for it.

20-00:02:48

Rubens: So you were talking about that here this man is talking about going into alumni groups which you had done that very systematically when you were Vice Chancellor for Undergraduate Affairs and Development.

20-00:02:55

Laetsch: Yes. That's right, and we were talking about that, and he agreed that the campus folks need to get out around the state and tell people what is happening in terms of the budget and tell it to them straight. And they haven't done it, because they have this notion that, well, we don't want to give the alumni bad news. I've already said, "No, the alumni are bright people and they will understand and they don't want to be given a song and a dance. Tell it to them straight, what's happening to their university." And he agreed. Harry Hathaway is his name.

20-00:03:26

Rubens: All right. So let's focus on how you come to work at a bank.

20-00:03:37

Laetsch: O.K. I was casting around for something interesting, and Claude Hutchison, who had become the CEO of a new bank, Civic Bank of Commerce in Oakland, asked me to come work for the bank. Here's an article about when I came on—this was in 1991, November—and it says, "Our new institutional services division, designed to attract new institutional clients, such as non-profit organizations and high tech companies, is directed by Dr. Watson Mac Laetsch. Mac just ended a distinguished career with the University," blah, blah, blah. So that's how I got started in banking.

20-00:04:30

Rubens: So what did you literally do?

20-00:04:32

Laetsch: What I did was to try to get some of these organizations, such as high tech companies and a whole variety of other organizations, to put their money in the bank.

20-00:04:46

Rubens:

Were you successful?

20-00:04:48

Laetsch:

Modestly so, I think. But one of the things I did during that period of time was establish an arrangement with Del Monte Corporation. I knew the CEO of Del Monte. He was interested in India and he said, "Why don't you go to India and see what you can do about getting Del Monte set up in India?" I was at the bank at the time so my consulting fee went to the bank, so they never lost any money with me. I brought in some other consulting fees, as well. So I went to India to meet with Indian companies to see if we couldn't set up a joint project with Del Monte. I met with the CEO of Pepsi Cola in India. Pepsi Cola had set up a program in India where they were not just making Pepsi Cola but the Indian government insisted they help them in some agricultural activities. So they invested in raising and canning vegetables. I went to India a couple of times and worked with some people in India whom we knew and then went around and met with companies and looked at things to see if we could work out something in terms of Del Monte going to India. I must have gone twice. But then it was not a very good time, because although India was starting to welcome investment, it was still difficult to do things there. I have a history of starting projects too early. Being a pioneer is not always profitable. It is interesting that the CEO of Pepsi is an Indian woman.

We met with lots of very high-powered people in Indian industry but Del Monte was having trouble financially and the CEO that I was working with was replaced, and the new people coming in, as always, weren't interested in doing it. So the whole thing ended. But it was an interesting activity. I also worked—this was later on—with a couple other companies, food companies, to see what could be done in India. One was Mocha Milk, the substitute dairy product. A friend of mine, his wife's family and her father started mocha milk and her brother was the CEO. So he thought, "Gee, that'd be great. Maybe we could get this into India because it would make a lot of sense in a variety of ways." So I went over and talked to people in India about it but nothing ever quite came together.

20-00:08:00

Rubens:

But this you did as independent consulting?

20-00:08:01

Laetsch:

This was after Civic Bank. So anyhow, I went to work for Civic Bank and worked with getting business customers. Again, the Del Monte thing was one of the things that I did. Also, I consulted with the Asian Art Museum at that time, and that was through Civic Bank because the museum was going to move into a new building for them. But it was the old library building right by Civic Plaza. That building had been the San Francisco Public Library, the main branch. I knew the man who was much involved in raising money for that project. He was a Cal alum, and he was talking about whether I knew anybody who could help them out and I said, "Well, yes. Why don't you hire

me,” which they did. So I helped them raise money. We raised quite a bit and got that project off the ground. Of course, now it’s a functioning institution but has real financial trouble, and this last year they almost closed because they couldn’t meet their loan.

20-00:09:17

Rubens:

Didn’t you give a talk there recently on Bhutan?

20-00:09:21

Laetsch:

That was about a year ago. The connection there was that I still knew some of the people there as a result of earlier work, and then the woman who was head curator for East Asian and Indian art was the wife of a botanist who used to work for me at the Botanical Garden. Everything is mixed up. I’ve known her, Therese Bartholomew. She had also been to Bhutan so we had another connection. And she had just been to Bhutan—took some other people over and they brought back a couple of monks from Bhutan. They also had art objects, sculpture of various kinds, so they put on an exhibit, and they wanted a symposium to kick off the exhibit. She knew my involvement with Bhutan, and she asked me to talk about Bhutan generally, what was happening there. I gave them a talk on the modern Bhutan amongst all of the folks talking about art and sculpture.

So back to Civic Bank. In 1991 or ’92, there was a banking crisis that you might remember. We had a recession and the banks were having difficulty. Civic Bank had done quite well, but they had made some loans that weren’t very good, like a lot of banks. What happens when that occurs is that the CEO goes. So Claude had to leave, and since Claude had brought me in and I was not a banker, really, I said, “I can get out of here.” So a couple of weeks after he left, I left. But it was a very interesting experience working for a commercial operation and for a bank.

20-00:11:35

Rubens:

Tell me about Fort Point Financial Group.

20-00:11:38

Laetsch:

Well, this was after I left Civic Bank. My eldest son John had been doing a lot of consulting work, getting businesses to go to India, et cetera. And he had made contact with the Fort Point group in San Francisco, which was really one guy who also was a Cal alum. His nice office was in the Transamerica Building up on the twenty-eighth floor.

20-00:12:22

Rubens:

How do you describe what this was?

20-00:12:23

Laetsch:

Well, it’s an investment company. It went out to seek investments from people to invest in companies. So it was an independent little investment group. I went to work for them, but you ate what you caught. I didn’t go there for the salary. It depended on what business I was able to bring in.

And this was then when Claude Hutchison, who was working in some other areas out here after he left the bank. We were able to establish some activities in India, and so we all worked together. Then we left Fort Point and started our own little group called BreakThrough Solutions.

20-00:13:31

Rubens: So you were with Fort Point for about three years.

20-00:13:33

Laetsch: No, I think it was less than that. I forget how long. But it wasn't all that long.

20-00:13:42

Rubens: Your resume states you were with BreakThrough in 1995. So tell me about creating your own company.

20-00:13:45

Laetsch: Claude and I and my oldest son John, who was the primary person doing this, set up a company, and he named it BreakThrough Solutions. "Solutions" were very popular in the business world at that time. "Solutions" were used for all kinds of things. This solution and that solution.

20-00:14:07

Rubens: Was it conceived as an investment enterprise?

20-00:14:09

Laetsch: Well, actually, it was more a group that would help people get money to invest in various things. So we worked with a number of companies, quite good-sized companies in a variety of areas. And then we became involved with the opportunity to work in India on a project in Tamil Nadu, which is a state in the southern part of India. It goes all the way down to the tip of India. Madras is the capital of that state. We were able to become involved with an opportunity to buy a large land tract, about 3,000 acres, with the idea of making that into an industrial park. This was brought to us by some people who had been over there and had some contacts. We went over and were able to get some money from some outside investors and also from the government of Tamil Nadu and bought this land with the idea of it becoming an industrial park. A lot of things happened, and it was very interesting because we worked a bit with the chief minister of Tamil Nadu, who was a very interesting fellow, and a number of other people. But we were never able quite to get it off the ground.

And then we became acquainted with an individual whose father was very wealthy. He came in because his father put up quite a bit of money and basically bought the property and then he brought in some of the people that he knew. And so we were basically put on the sideline as a result of that.

20-00:16:30

Rubens: Did you make some money on that?

20-00:16:32

Laetsch:

A little bit. It covered expenses, et cetera, but not an enormous amount. It was very interesting, and for Claude Hutchison it was quite an adventure because he had never had any experience like that before in another country and particularly in India. He found it enormously interesting. It was not commercially successful but it was interesting.

20-00:16:56

Rubens:

Perhaps since we've been talking about getting land to develop, we could segue to talk about becoming a farmer in California. But let's take a break and get some water.

Laetsch:

Okay.

[Irrelevant discussion omitted]

20-00:17:29

Rubens:

All right. So let's hear about the botanist becomes farmer.

20-00:17:34

Laetsch:

I have always been interested in growing things, and I had talked for a very long time about getting some land where I could grow stuff, be involved in agriculture. So we started looking in the early eighties, even maybe in the late seventies, traveling around Northern California within relatively easy driving distance looking for a place. We looked at a variety of properties, and then we had a friend who just lived down the street who was raised in Lincoln, which you probably know is north of Sacramento. She had an old school friend who had the main real estate company in Lincoln, so she put us in contact with him. And it turned out that there was a piece of property over on the Feather River near the little town of Nicolaus that was for sale and had some walnut trees on it and then a fair amount of land that was used for other kinds of farming. We looked at it and thought it was a very good thing and so we were able to buy it.

20-00:18:50

Rubens:

How big?

20-00:18:51

Laetsch:

When we bought it, it was ninety-six acres. We were able to buy it, and I started planting more walnut trees and over a number of years planted the whole property out in walnut trees. And now that walnut orchard is flourishing and is a very nice orchard. And walnuts now bring in a good price. It's always done pretty well but now it's really doing well, because the Chinese started buying walnuts last year and again this year, so for two years, they've bought lots and lots of walnuts, more than anyone else, which is interesting because they are the largest walnut producer in the world. They grow more walnuts than we do, but their walnuts aren't very good. And they use walnuts differently than we do. They don't sit around cracking open nuts and eating them. They take the meat and mix it up with spices and cook them in various ways and then eat them as snacks.

20-00:20:08

Rubens:

I had your walnuts. They're terrific. Did you do experiment with grafting?

20-00:20:13

Laetsch:

Well, all walnut trees are grafted. I think we have four varieties. But all walnuts are grafted. You have to. They don't live long on their own roots and so you graft them on so-called English California black walnut, or on a hybrid between the walnut and the black walnut.

20-00:20:47

Rubens:

How long lived are these trees?

20-00:20:50

Laetsch:

Oh, they'll live and be productive for fifty, sixty years. They tend to tail off after about forty years.

20-00:20:59

Rubens:

How old was the orchard when you bought it?

20-00:21:01

Laetsch:

The oldest trees when I bought it had been planted in the mid-sixties. So they're now getting along quite nicely. And some tailing off. I lose a couple every year.

20-00:21:17

Rubens:

How much time did this take? Were you managing it yourself?

20-00:21:20

Laetsch:

Well, no. We bought it from a farmer who lived a short distance away. He was a dairy farmer, and then he had bought this land and he put in some walnut trees. He didn't really know much about walnuts so he didn't really put them in right. But they were all right. So we bought it from him. And then I couldn't obviously take care of it. So he had a person whom he knew very well who was a local, just lived down the Garden Highway from us, who had walnut orchards. He also had alfalfa and lots of rice and so he agreed to manage it for us. And now, of course, it's a much larger—and he still manages it for us.

20-00:22:17

Rubens:

How do you market your crop?

20-00:22:22

Laetsch:

There are about forty companies in California that are wholesalers. When you harvest the walnuts, and it's now all machine harvested. So you harvest the walnuts, then you have to dry them and then you put the walnuts in great big bins with heat coming up from the bottom.

20-00:22:49

Rubens:

On the property?



20-00:22:51

Laetsch:

No, this is at a sorting and drying facility. You take them to the dryer and then you take them to a wholesaler or have the wholesaler pick them up. We sell our walnuts to a company in San Jose, of all things. But there are a number of large—well, there's one very, very large company, Diamond, that was a co-op and that's the same name as with the almonds. But then there are a bunch of independent companies, as well. They take the walnuts, and the first thing they do—if they're going to sell the nuts in shell, about half the walnuts now in commerce are sold in shell, so you have to crack them open. You buy them in the shell. But they bleach them. They soak them in bleach and that makes the hulls lighter in color. For example, if you take the nuts that I gave you and compare them with those in the store, the ones in the store would be a lot lighter.

But it makes no sense except that they look prettier. But it means that you have to pay more for them. So if they're going to be in shell they bleach them and then sort them by size and then they sell them or they crack them open. They have big interesting machines that do that. They crack them open, then separate the meats, the size, all the way from good halves to powder. And the powder and the smaller things go to the confectionaries because they use them in baking. As I say, in China now they only deal with the meats. They don't buy walnuts in the shell. And Japan is a major buyer of walnuts and they use them in baking. And Spain, even though they grow walnuts, they are a pretty good customer. Germany is a good customer. Israel is a very good customer. But 55 percent of the walnuts now are sold to the international market. And, of course, California produces most of the walnuts in the country, just like almonds, or as we say, almonds.

20-00:25:12

Rubens:

Do you grow anything else?

20-00:25:13

Laetsch:

Well, we grow all kinds of things but commercially we just grow the walnuts. We have everything. We have about a half acre of grapes and we make wine. It's merlot. And I have about 200 fruit trees, apples and pears and plums and peaches and citrus of various kinds. So all kinds of fruit.

20-00:25:44

Rubens:

So your manager brings in the crews as they're needed for pruning or picking.

20-00:25:49

Laetsch:

That's right. He has his own people who work for him. Actually, it's people who work full time.

20-00:25:53

Rubens:

So what is the greatest challenge for you as a botanist? What is it that you're particularly drawn to?

20-00:26:01

Laetsch:

Well, what I'm particularly drawn in terms of the walnut orchard to how you keep the trees healthy and satisfied, you might say, so they produce a good crop so I make some money. It's doing very well now and they will continue to do well. And my son Krishen is a partner, and that we do it together.

20-00:26:28

Rubens:

But the other, the wine, the grapes and the apples, those are for—

20-00:26:31

Laetsch:

Just fun.

20-00:26:35

Rubens:

But have you been experimenting with old apple varieties?

20-00:26:43

Laetsch:

Well, I have about, I'd say, 200 apple trees. And the varieties, I think about thirty varieties. I don't spend an awful lot of time with the apple orchard. We have to irrigate and do some pruning and so forth. But if the trees die, they die. And I might replace them, I might not.

20-00:27:21

Rubens:

But I thought you told me that you used to try and get away up there. That was your retreat, your R & R.

20-00:27:26

Laetsch:

Oh, yes. When I was Vice Chancellor that was my R&R. So I would get up there and do things and get away from people complaining or bringing problems to me and all the rest of the stuff that you had to deal with.

20-00:27:37

Rubens:

Do you know Michael Pollan?

20-00:27:40

Laetsch:

I don't know him but I know of him, yes. And from my standpoint, he has a lot of ideas that aren't very sound. He's an advocate of all organic stuff, and I find that to be basically nonsense from a scientific standpoint.

20-00:28:08

Rubens:

Oh, say something more about that.

20-00:28:10

Laetsch:

Well, here's an example. Recently I was at a Learning in Retirement program on campus. I was talking with old friends, one who's a chemist in our Chemistry Department, and he was going on about Alice Waters and her work with the schools, et cetera. And she's, of course, a great organic person. And so I was telling him—and there's nothing wrong with all the local stuff. But the thing is that your notions on organic food and what it does or doesn't do, and what you can do, much of it is just nonsense. And the local food is all fine but they think—in fact, this gentleman the other day was telling me, “Well, farmers only should be doing twenty-five acres and raising all their stuff in a

particular way.” I said, “Well, we’d starve to death if that was the case.” You can’t do it. It just makes no sense whatsoever. And, of course, you have a place like Berkeley where people are pretty affluent, so they’ll pay a lot more for the organic food that they could get cheaper and just as good at the local supermarket.

20-00:29:23

Rubens:

There is a difference in tomatoes. Locally grown tomatoes seem much more tasty.

20-00:29:28

Laetsch:

Yes. And the reason is that if you are going to pick tomatoes and ship them, you have to pick them when they are still somewhat green, because if you didn’t they’ll smash. You can’t ship them. You can’t put them in a truck. When people, for example, see the canning tomatoes up in the Valley where the trucks come by and the tomatoes bounce off the truck and bounce and people say, “Oh, well, that’s because they’re not ripe,” blah, blah, blah. No, it’s a whole different kind of tomato and it has much more solids in it, so it’s relatively little liquid and so they are hard.

20-00:30:15

Rubens:

They’re bred that way for the large commercial market.

20-00:30:16

Laetsch:

That’s right. You want the high solids because they’re all canning tomatoes, and so you don’t want water. You grow a tomato plant and you take the tomato and you cook it and you can see it’s all water. There are very few solids. And yes, you can buy them, but if you’re going to make tomato paste, which is what most of the tomatoes are used for, you have to have something which has high solids. But they’re good tasting. Even when they see them, oh, well, they’re green. No, actually those tomatoes are pretty good.

20-00:30:53

Rubens:

Let’s talk now a little bit also about the Bohemian Club. That’s a pretty interesting and prestigious organization with a long history.

20-00:31:02

Laetsch:

It was started in 1872 by newspaper people and writers and musicians. They were basically a bunch of drunks who wanted to have a place where they could go to, a clubhouse, and put on plays and musical performances and drink. In those days it was a great thing to go out into the nature. So they started a program in the summer where they would go off in the woods at various places.

20-00:31:38

Rubens:

Well, mainly up in an encampment?

20-00:31:41

Laetsch:

Well, that was even before that. They went to all kinds of places up in the redwood area, a lot of which was being logged off at the time. They would go and camp for a few days and put on plays and have music and drink.

20-00:31:55

Rubens:

These were all men?

20-00:31:57

Laetsch:

All men. Yes. And over time they were having trouble financing the whole thing so they started to invite businessmen in basically to finance the club. Well, now it's primarily not just businessmen but professional people, and they still have lots of musicians and artists. They are brought in at very low dues. They pay basically nothing for admission, the admission fees or for dues, and they provide entertainment for the rich folks.

20-00:32:39

Rubens:

Is there also an academic track?

20-00:32:40

Laetsch:

There are all kinds of tracks. The clubhouse in the city has a program every Thursday night which is a play or music of all kinds, and at the Bohemian Grove there are about 130 camps where people live in camps, quite rustic for the most part. And one camp is for singers. Another camp is for instrumentalists, another camp for the orchestra, another camp is for the band. So there are lots and lots and lots of musicians and artists.

20-00:33:18

Rubens:

How were you invited to join?

20-00:33:19

Laetsch:

Well, because they have slots for faculty, and I knew a lot of people who were members.

20-00:33:26

Rubens:

Did you have a sponsor?

20-00:33:27

Laetsch:

You have to have sponsors. I knew a lot of members because a lot of Cal alums are members as are some faculty.

20-00:33:45

Rubens:

So had you been up there before you were a member?

20-00:33:47

Laetsch:

Yes. I was invited several times. They wanted to know if I wanted to join and so I did. I joined in 1991. I'm much involved. For example, we have a museum up where we have natural history exhibits. And then we have a big outdoor auditorium next to it where we put on talks every day. The museum talks are on various aspects of science and history. So I'm on that committee. Then we have nature rides through the grove. The grove is 2,700 acres, and, of

course, the redwoods were almost all cut down before the Bohemian Club bought the grove. There are a few of the redwoods left from earlier on and many are being replaced. And there are open buses for transportation in the area where most of the camps are. We have these trips where we take people for field trips and take them around the grove and talk about nature.

20-00:35:13

Rubens:

So you've given these, are they called Lakeside Talks?

20-00:35:16

Laetsch:

No. The Lakeside Talks are given by an artificial lake and they are given each day. But those are usually politicians, distinguished public figures of various kinds. The museum talks, which are in many ways more popular, are all on science or history. I've given them and I'm on the committee that selects people to give them.

20-00:35:47

Rubens:

There's been some controversy, some to-do over the redwood trees.

20-00:35:55

Laetsch:

Yes. There was a member of the club who thought he knew about trees, et cetera, and he thought that they were cutting too many trees.

20-00:36:04

Rubens:

Were they selling them off for lumber?

20-00:36:05

Laetsch:

They sell Douglas fir, not redwoods, because when you cut redwoods Douglas fir comes up in succession and they grow up and then after a time the redwoods grow and they take over, but it takes a long time for that to happen. So we plant redwoods. We've planted thousands and thousands of redwood trees. But in the interim, the Douglas fir grew up so the Douglas fir is what we sell as income and also to clear off so we can plant redwood trees.

There was an issue about this one guy who had been a member who thought we were cutting redwood trees, which we weren't. And so he didn't think that we ought to be cutting any trees and so he made a fuss. But that's basically all been resolved, yeah.

20-00:36:36

Rubens:

What about disease?

20-00:36:58

Laetsch:

Well, we have a disease problem. Not with the conifers. Well, we do. We have a disease that has gone through a number of conifers and angiosperms, as well, in the state. And we have that in some of the trees up there. But it's not the redwoods and it's not the Doug fir.

20-00:37:28

Rubens:

Is there some controversy over using pesticides or—?

20-00:37:29

Laetsch: Not really.

20-00:37:32

Rubens: Was Mike Heyman already a member? And did you invite Charles Faulhaber, the Director of The Bancroft Library to join?

20-00:37:37

Laetsch: Mike came in while I was there but he left after a couple of years. But I did play a role in getting Charles Faulhaber to join. Very much so.

20-00:37:39

Rubens: So there was not a slot for the head librarians at Berkeley.

20-00:37:40

Laetsch: No. For faculty, particularly from Berkeley, Stanford and a few other places, it's basically open admission. You see, if you apply and are sponsored, it can take fifteen years because there's such a long waiting list. As just an example, my son Krishen, who has just become a member, applied back when I became a member and I've been a member then for at least fifteen years. He applied when I came in to the club and he's just now going to be coming in.

20-00:38:20

Rubens: Is there a cap? Someone has to die in order to free up a slot?

20-00:38:23

Laetsch: Yes, yes. There's a cap on the number of members, so they take in just what is the replacement. But, again, the average age is such that people are dying all the time. In fact, over at the Bohemian Club in San Francisco, there's a little notice that has the people who've died that week. There's always somebody up there, because the average age of the club is probably low seventies and, of course, an awful lot who are older.

20-00:38:52

Rubens: What's your camp?

20-00:38:54

Laetsch: It's called SunDodgers.

20-00:38:56

Rubens: Do you choose what camp you want to belong to or is that again—

20-00:38:59

Laetsch: No. You're chosen. It is the largest fraternity system in the world. It's almost exactly like a fraternity system. So you rush, in a sense. If you know people and you come in and you've known them and they want you, then you join their camp. Most people come in and they move around. Just like rush in a fraternity or sorority system where you go and visit, et cetera. And then you like the camp and they like you, they'll ask you to join.

- 20-00:39:31  
Rubens: How many total members are there?
- 20-00:39:34  
Laetsch: About 2,300.
- 20-00:39:36  
Rubens: I didn't know it was that large. And how many go on the July encampment?
- 20-00:39:38  
Laetsch: In the July encampment, you will have that many and sometimes more because you have guests.
- 20-00:39:46  
Rubens: You can bring a guest.
- 20-00:39:47  
Laetsch: For most of the time you can't bring guests from California. But they come in from all over the world.
- 20-00:39:55  
Rubens: So do you try and make that every year?
- 20-00:39:57  
Laetsch: Yes, I'm there every summer. Absolutely. It's fun, and we have some good speakers and it has good music programs, although there's more and more jazz, which I don't care for. But it's a good experience and you meet lots of people.
- 20-00:40:17  
Rubens: There have been protests at the entrance; they had been picketed for a while, right?
- 20-00:40:22  
Laetsch: Oh, they're picketed every summer.
- 20-00:40:24  
Rubens: By women's organizations?
- 20-00:40:25  
Laetsch: All kinds of organizations. On the weekend, particularly the middle weekend which is the busiest weekend, you will have—at the entrance to the grove all kinds of people there with signs on everything that you can imagine.
- 20-00:40:40  
Rubens: Oh, I see. So it has to do with international politics.
- 20-00:40:42  
Laetsch: International politics, domestic politics. And they assume, because they think that the people that come there are the deciders in the world and therefore they try to get their message across. It's kind of interesting because they're often kind of amusing and I talk to them, even though we're not supposed to talk to

them. They feel good about coming and protesting for their causes and it doesn't do anyone any harm. We have people who sneak in sometimes and then they write about it. It's interesting what they write about, because you would think they were on a different planet, that they weren't there. They make up all kinds of things about it.

But it's very much like a fraternity. There is a big central dining area under the trees and people eat there at night. It's very good food and then there are performances every night. Musical performances or theater. And the number of music performances is just enormous because, again, you've got the singers and the instrumentalists and you've got opera singers and you've got jazz and you've got just about everything you can think about.

20-00:42:16

Rubens:

So you came in just about when your sojourn into business was coming to an end. I wonder if you had still been with Fort Point or Break Through if—

20-00:42:26

Laetsch:

I left that because I really didn't like it very well. Plus the fact the whole, what, ethos of business is just not very congenial. People who do well in it are often very ruthless. Very competitive, very ruthless. One of the things that I had to learn very quickly in my banking experience was that it doesn't matter if you have friends. They won't do business with you unless it's to their advantage. Which is okay. That's the law of business. The sharp dealing and working on the edge all the time. So most of the stuff I was involved with didn't have much of that. But just the general thing. I'm not a businessperson basically.

20-00:43:52

Rubens:

When you look back over this, it's just extraordinary the kinds of activities and roles that you played.

20-00:43:56

Laetsch:

Well, I'm glad I had the opportunity to talk about them.



Interview #13 March 25, 2011

Begin Audio File 21 laetsch\_mac\_21-03-25-11

21-00:00:02

Rubens:

Hi Mac. Today is the twenty-fifth of March. We haven't seen each other for a while. One of the things we'd like to do is fill in some of the gaps in your history. You were telling me that you had spent a summer at Woods Hole in 1954.

21-00:00:21

Laetsch:

This was the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute. They have summer programs, summer courses, for college students and others. It's in Woods Hole on Cape Cod. It is a big organization that does all kinds of stuff in marine and ocean research. I went to the summer program and took their summer botany course, which was on was marine algae. They have a number of courses that they give, for both undergraduate and graduate students. This was interesting for a number of reasons. One, it was my first trip to New England. The other was it was my first experience with a large research organization, because Wabash College had good people, et cetera, but it still wasn't what you have at Woods Hole. Plus the fact that a lot of scientists would come there in the summer. Partially a vacation, to spend time on the beach. They could work in labs and a number of them gave courses. So we had a bunch of very well-known biologists there whom I met early on.

One of them—I won't say more interesting, because he wasn't interesting, but he's become very well-known, and this was just after Watson and Crick had published their paper on the structure of DNA. One night in the local bar—the Captain Kidd—where everybody went at night to drink beer, a thin, tall guy came in and blinked and looked around and we looked up and saw this guy. We wondered if it was the village idiot. [Laughter] Then it turned out it was Jim Watson. His work was just becoming known, and he gave a lecture there, which everybody went to because then we knew who he was. It was a good enough lecture. It was just that it was very interesting that this very famous—future Nobel Laureate—was mistaken for a village idiot in the Captain Kidd bar at Woods Hole.

21-00:02:36

Rubens:

That's because he had a bumbling, blinking—

21-00:02:38

Laetsch:

He came in and blinked, as if he didn't have any idea where he was or what he should do or not do, et cetera. And again, it was as if somebody was just completely out of it. Anyhow, that was a very interesting summer for me because it really introduced me to a lot of well-known biologists. Or at least I saw them, met them. It was my first introduction to what you might call big-time science.

21-00:03:07

Rubens: It reinforced your sense that you would eventually go to graduate school and become a research scientist?

21-00:03:14

Laetsch: I knew that anyhow. It's just that this was part of the nurturing, you might say, of my career. It was very useful for many years, because I kept meeting people who had been there and knew about it, and other people had gone there. It was a part of the education, but also contacts and meeting other people, which is a very important part of the whole operation, because an awful lot of stuff goes on with people whom you know in different ways. Things can obviously happen when you know people that wouldn't if you didn't.

21-00:03:58

Rubens: Sure. So you think we did enough on that?

21-00:04:01

Laetsch: Yes, I think so.

21-00:04:02

Rubens: Why don't we turn to a program that you developed at the Lawrence Hall of Science that we should include?

21-00:04:28

Laetsch: Well, that never really was developed. It was an idea I had, and I wrote a little bit about it. But it was a good idea and still is a good idea. Just to present it here to show the kinds of ideas that we batted around at various times. I call this the Fuller Brush model, for working with high schools in particular. There was a time when the Fuller Brush man or woman was a standard feature. They'd come and knock on your door to sell you Fuller Brushes. They became very familiar with people. It worked out well for the people they were selling brushes to, and it worked out for them. Again, it might be similar, in a way, to the agricultural extension service, where you have people whose job it is to go around and work with farmers. And also, in many cases, some programs for kids. But we don't have anything like that really formalized in education. Schools of education work with teachers, but they don't have, generally speaking, people who are out constantly visiting teachers and, rather than bringing them the gospel, finding out what they need. What kind of brush do you need?

So I presented this notion of employing teachers at the University, and they would have a regular beat, just like a Fuller Brush person. They would go out and work with teachers, not on necessarily any particular project, but to find out what they needed, what they wanted, and then to find the resources or the materials, or the expertise, to help them out. This is something that is just really very lacking in the schools, in terms of science education, that people often just don't have the contacts that would enable them to really grow and do new and different things.

21-00:06:33

Rubens:

So that's certainly different than the model you were developing about taking science curriculum to schools or shopping centers or alternative public sites.

21-00:06:45

Laetsch:

They could work in conjunction, but this is different in the sense, these were people who go out and—just like people finding out what the problems farmers have. And then, not with a preset agenda, it's, what is the problem and how can we help you?

21-00:07:00

Rubens:

What do you think inhibited that kind of program?

21-00:07:06

Laetsch:

Part of it, of course, was funding. It was a new and very different thing. As you know, it's often very hard to start new and different things.

21-00:07:14

Rubens:

Well, you were starting so many.

21-00:07:15

Laetsch:

And there's a lot of other things going on. Everybody is set in their programs and ways and schedules.

21-00:07:22

Rubens:

But you did have high school teachers coming to the Hall for classes, as we discussed earlier.

21-00:07:24

Laetsch:

Oh, yes. We had a lot of high school teachers, but they came on our terms. All of this would be going out and working on the teacher's terms, which is a different way of doing things. I was just reading some article that I had written about the two systems of education that we have in universities and colleges. One is for the faculty and graduate students, and that has to do with the things that really interest them. It's a good example of how science faculty and graduate students work together very, very closely. Then you have the other system, which is the courses that are given to undergraduates, which don't really derive very much from the basic interests of the faculty or graduate students. But they're given, and much of it is ritualistic. You get up and lecture to a batch of students, and then they take an exam, and everybody goes on their way. It is not considered really what the faculty feels is their primary objective, which is teaching graduate students and doing research. Anyhow, it's an interesting idea that, like a lot of ideas, never went very far.

21-00:08:53

Rubens:

Well, some of these ideas, you were addressing also when you became Vice Chancellor. You particularly were working with Graduate Student Instructors and community college instructors.

21-00:09:05

Laetsch: Yes, right.

21-00:09:08

Rubens: You wanted to talk about the Cooperative College Preparatory Program.

21-00:09:13

Laetsch: Yes. This is one out of the Lawrence Hall of Science, and this was basically invented by one of the people there named Louis Schell. This was with the Oakland schools, and a very intensive, long-range program of revising the math curriculum in the upper elementary and junior high schools. This had a real impact on the math education of these kids. It went on for a long time. Lots of things were written about it. But then it stopped, as these things always do, and then what happens after that?

21-00:10:03

Rubens: Would teachers come up to the Lawrence Hall?

21-00:10:07

Laetsch: Some would come up, but he did the work in the classrooms. One of the interesting things of the program was using peer instructors, in which they found that often the brightest kids in the class were the ones in the most trouble and not doing well academically. They were often the leaders. They were usually males. Louie would work with them, and they would become the tutors. It basically played on their own leadership skills, which were considerable, but directed it to working with the other kids. So it worked out very well.

21-00:10:45

Rubens: Did you raise money for that particularly?

21-00:10:47

Laetsch: We got money from a variety of sources. It was all funded externally.

21-00:12:15

Rubens: In an earlier interview we talked about some of your students, including three who now serve on the advisory board of the journal called "*Curator*." But there's an article that you were asked to write for it. It links you and your students and your previous experience, and shows how, in the year 2000, you still had something to say about museum education and science education.

21-00:12:54

Laetsch: This is April 2000. Education, generally. "Process and Product" is the name of it. Much of formal education is primarily concerned with products. It's producing graduates or people who have passed a course, or producing courses, et cetera. Then the other is the process of learning. Then I applied all of this to museums, in which I called museums a product-dominated education system, where it all deals with things. You have cases and cases of things and you have labels on them, and so you go through this very much as if it was a big textbook. You go through this big textbook behind glass and look at the

things, which curators, who are not that different from many teachers, give you information about them. But you don't have any real opportunity to really get close and interact with anything.

21-00:14:02

Rubens:

We also talked a little about the interactive model that you were trying to set up at the Lawrence Hall. Wouldn't you say that there's been a lot of advancement in that area, whether it's pushing buttons, listening to oral histories?

21-00:14:17

Laetsch:

The pushing buttons, yes. There's been a lot more of that. Listening to the tapes as you go around. Yes, that's fine. But again, those are lectures. It's just in a different form. The pushing buttons stuff, a lot of that is, I think, gone by the. I don't think it was ever really very effective. We had some of those at the Lawrence Hall of Science. We didn't think that they worked very well.

21-00:14:45

Rubens:

Are there examples of things you want to talk about in terms of process?

21-00:15:13

Laetsch:

I'll just read from this article little bit: it's in *Curator*, volume forty-three, number two, April 2000. "Research Model for Museum Public Programs." "Why can't university natural history museums"—and this is a lot about the universities—"why can't university natural history museums become living laboratories, dedicated to studying how best to present the science of the natural world to audiences? Interaction, experimentation, collaboration, and communication become the hallmarks of university museums. Broadening concepts of exhibits and programs, including those outside the walls of the museum. One example of a potential for interaction beyond the walls of the museums, docents pushing carts loaded with artifacts is endemic to many public natural history museums. Has this ever been sighted on a university campus? Why not have a roving team of museum-trained docents interpreting the natural history of the campus? It might work, it might not, but no one will know until the experiment is conducted. University natural history museums have the luxury to do this kind of experiment. University natural history museums are surrounded by huge, captive populations, whose members are bright, creative, and often bored. Must they always have to enter the museum temple to participate in museum activity? Aside from the faculty and a few biology majors who work in the temple and school kids who enter under guard, the rest of the community rarely interacts with these museums, and they have scant opportunity to participate in research." I go on talking about how this could be changed and—

21-00:16:43

Rubens:

So you were specifically talking about university museums.

21-00:16:45

Laetsch:

This particular one was about university museums, right.

21-00:16:55

Rubens:

Maybe we can segue into how you are currently dealing with issues at the University. For instance we could start with how you came on the library committee; I think that's in 2005. How did you get appointed?

21-00:18:16

Laetsch:

In terms of the library, and some of these other things I became involved because they thought my fundraising experience would do them some good, which it has. That's really how I got involved with the University Library. Then, of course, an awful lot of my work has been with The Bancroft Library. I'm the co-chair of The Friends of the Mark Twain Papers Project. Then I'm on the board of The Bancroft Library, the fundraising board, and also on the University Library advisory board. Two libraries and one project within one of them.

I was the co-chair with Mike Heyman, of the campaign to rebuild The Bancroft, the building called the Doe Annex, which houses The Bancroft Library. It was completely gutted. Nothing but the shell left. The University provided funds for the foundation, et cetera, and then we raised \$35 million for continuing building The Bancroft. The big gift for that was \$10 million from the Valley Foundation.

21-00:19:50

Rubens:

We had talked about how you had cultivated and retained a good relationship with that foundation.

21-00:19:54

Laetsch:

That was a spin-off of earlier work with the Valley Foundation and their gift to the Life Sciences Building.

21-00:20:01

Rubens:

So the \$25 million you had to shake loose from—

21-00:20:04

Laetsch:

We received \$10 million from Valley Foundation for The Bancroft. We had a number of other pretty good-sized gifts, a number of multi-million dollar gifts, and then lots of smaller ones that were still good gifts. That campaign worked very well.

21-00:20:20

Rubens:

How long were you involved in that?

21-00:20:23

Laetsch:

I think it must have taken about four years.

21-00:20:45

Rubens:

What does it involve, being on the board of The Bancroft now, once the building was completed?

21-00:20:55

Laetsch: Well, they continue to raise funds.

21-00:20:59

Rubens: Are you actively engaged in that still?

21-00:21:03

Laetsch: Well, yes and no. Let me circle around to that a little bit. The library, of course, is now in a capital campaign to redo the old undergraduate library. They want to raise \$65 million for the Moffitt Library. I'm on that library advisory board that's involved with such things. The Bancroft has a board, and I'm on that as well. Of course, they continue to raise funds. Then, of course, I'm involved with fundraising for the Mark Twain Papers Project. It costs \$1,500 to join the Mark Twain Luncheon program, and we have two programs a year with interesting speakers on things related to Mark Twain. I think there are now about seventy members. That contributes annually a fair amount of money to The Bancroft. Then we've had some gifts that have come in. The class of 1958 gave over a million dollars to the Mark Twain Papers Project. I mentioned that. Anyhow, they continue to raise money. They're doing pretty well.

21-00:22:46

Rubens: You told a great story, in an earlier interview, about bringing a copy of the newly-issued autobiography of Mark Twain to Bhutan. And I know that you made the suggestion that the class of 1958 donate to the Mark Twain Papers Project. How often do you meet with these various committees?

21-00:23:06

Laetsch: Usually they meet a couple times a year. The Bancroft is the same way. The Mark Twain folks—I meet with Bob [Robert] Hirst, who directs the Project, a lot, and Roger Samuelsen, who's co-chair of the Mark Twain Luncheon Club board. Again, that shows you how things cycle around. We've covered, I think, some of my time on the Natural Reserve System for the University, when Roger was the director of that. We've kept in contact in various ways. He was involved with the library as well, also with the College of Natural Resources, and it was really from knowing him that he asked me about a project for the class of '58. And now we have a number of those people in the class of '58 who are members of the Friends of Mark Twain Papers Project, and so they continue to contribute. It's interesting how things interweave over time.

21-00:24:22

Rubens: That's what you started talking about today, your connections from Woods Hole. Is there anything more that you want to say specifically about being on these three library committees?

21-00:24:40

Laetsch: We can move on. Of course, something that fits into that, which I should talk about a bit, is I'm also on the UC Press Foundation board. That has been interesting, particularly now that Mark Twain's autobiography is a roaring

success. It's sold now over five hundred thousand copies. It's been on the bestseller list for a very long time. It's by far the biggest thing that the UC Press has ever done; it's having quite an impact. Of course, that is very good for the Mark Twain Papers Project, because a good bit of the royalties comes back to them. They're making now a very significant amount of money on the sale of the book, the sales of the book, they predict, will continue. They're going to put out three volumes. The first is out. The next one will be out within the next year, probably, two years, then the next one after that. And it continues to be written about.

21-00:26:07

Rubens:

I think articles about the book and project are listed on the project's web-site. How did you get on the UC Press—is it fundraising committee or advisory board?

21-00:26:54

Laetsch:

There is an editorial advisory committee and I'm on the fundraising committee. We review manuscripts nominated for endowment support. It's basically the fundraising committee. They have an advisory board that's appointed by the President's Office, but this is their fundraising group that they've had for a long time. There is a new editor-in-chief of the UC Press, Alison Mudditt and she's very good. We also meet twice or three times a year.

21-00:27:37

Rubens:

You're quite active on behalf of the university in many areas. You're also involved with the Learning in Retirement program. Why don't you talk about that?

21-00:28:01

Laetsch:

The Learning in Retirement has been going on for about eight years. There are a number of retired faculty who are very active. For instance, Larry [Lawrence] Waldron, who's a professor in Soils and Plant Nutrition; Al Riley who is an emeritus professor in Psychology. He's our chair and has been on the campus for many, many years. Other recent members are Louise Clubb of Comparative Literature and Carol D'Onofrio from Public Health. Bob [Robert] Middlekauff, from the Department of History, was on the governing program board. He got off and wanted me to go on, which I did. We are pretty independent from the Retirement Center which is the parent organization. There are about three or four programs a year. I've put together recently two sessions to discuss the impact of rapid change on the campus; one is with Neil Smelser and Michael Heyman; the other is with Budd Cheit and Karl Pister. We had one in the fall that I also put together, on some biology topics. Then they had another one this fall on drama primarily in Italy. They had people from the various departments on campus for that. They're doing another one in a few weeks on C.P. Snow's *The Two Cultures*, on his notion that there are two cultures, one related to and understands science, and another that doesn't, and that these two cultures operate rather differently and are sometimes in conflict, but most of the time it's just mutual ignorance.



21-00:30:56

Rubens:

Did that book and argument have impact on you?

21-00:31:32

Laetsch:

Well there was a lot of attention to it in the early sixties. And I had been working for a long time, trying to either have students learn about science or have the general public learn about science. So I was much involved in those kinds of discussions.

21-00:32:00

Rubens:

You were talking about your role on the committee that organizes the Learning in Retirement programs. That must take some more—

21-00:32:09

Laetsch:

That takes time, yes. For example, the one that's going on now has taken a lot of time, even though the people who are doing it, I know well, just getting them to talk about what they're going to talk about and make sure that they understand the audience. Everything from how long you should talk to the usual sort of thing.

21-00:32:46

Rubens:

But it sounds like you have fun with that; that it's intellectually stimulating.

21-00:32:48

Laetsch:

Yes, it's fine.

21-00:32:51

Rubens:

Let's stop here for a minute and then see where we want to go. Mac, I think there are a few development committees that you've served on that we've forgotten to talk about, including in 1993, there's the Young Musicians Program. Tell us about that.

21-00:33:15

Laetsch:

The Young Musicians Program [YMP] was started by a faculty member in the Music Department many years ago. The purpose was to identify young people, quite young people, with musical talent, and then have a summer instructional program for them, where they could have good instruction and a program during the school year. This got to the point where it got too big for him and he wanted to go off and do other things. Then Olly Wilson, who was in the Music Department, was very much involved with it. They set up a board. I was much involved with it in the eighties, because I was able to get some money for them and some good support from the Chancellor. It's a wonderful program because it takes kids that, without this special instruction, just would not have an opportunity to really do anything in music, particularly. A key figure in its development was Errol Mauchlan who was Assistant Chancellor for Business and Planning. He found a substantial amount of money to support the program and some funds are still provided by the Chancellor's Office. Errol's support was critical to the survival of YMP.

21-00:34:20

Rubens: Are these college kids?

21-00:34:21

Laetsch: No, no. They start off with even grade school kids and have junior high and high school students. They have a summer program, which is not only music, but they also work on academics. These kids do very well academically. They get help on that. It's just a wonderful example of how talent, if given an opportunity, really makes great strides. These kids, many of them are from—in fact, that's part of the criteria that they have, is that they really have to be from lower economic and social status. So these kids have gone on—they all go to college. A number have gone on and become professional musicians, and others have gone on and are doing very well. It's a wonderful program because you can see the impact of having the program, and then what would happen if you didn't have the program. That's kind of rare in educational things, to really be able to have that striking difference. The current director is Daisy Newman and she is very, very good. I've worked closely with her since she came. In fact, just saw her at an event the other night. It's been a terrific program.

21-00:35:47

Rubens: Are you still on the board of that?

21-00:35:48

Laetsch: No, I'm not. I went off the board after a while. It was just too much. I was co-chair of this campaign for the financial aid, and I guess they did pretty well. I don't remember the details of it. Anyhow, that's been an interesting program.

21-00:36:45

Rubens: I see you have a journal put out by the Native Plant Society, *Fremontia*. Of course we talked about your role in starting that organization.

Are you involved with the society at all?

21-00:38:52

Laetsch: No, I'm not. They invited me to come and give them a chat in one of their recent meetings. I think it was last spring. But I don't have any more direct contact with them.

21-00:39:26

Rubens: Do you feel kind of paternal about it?

21-00:39:27

Laetsch: I feel paternal about it in a sense, yes. Seeing how this thing has grown and developed, all from a couple of people sitting around a kitchen table. But that's how revolutions happen, isn't it?

21-00:39:38

Rubens: Indeed. We've talked just under an hour. You want to take a little time?

21-00:40:01

Laetsch:

Yes, and decide what we're going to do next.

21-00:40:06

Rubens:

Are there other fundraising activities that you're involved with that directly relate to the campus?

21-00:40:13

Laetsch:

I'm on the College of Natural Resources Advisory Board, and that deals a lot with fundraising, too. I'm trying to think of anything else.

21-00:40:42

Rubens:

You were involved with the Friends of the History Department, was that earlier?

21-00:40:45

Laetsch:

Yes. That was started by Bob Middlekauff, I believe in the early nineties. Of course, another thing that I just had in this stack of files on the table was my involvement with Bob when he was Director of the Huntington Library and Gardens. He left the campus in the eighties and went there for five years as Director and then came back. He had me come down several times and do some advising on the Huntington Gardens. The Huntington had serious financial problems, and Bob turned it around and started a host of new endeavors.

21-00:41:34

Rubens:

Was there a particular aspect of it or—

21-00:41:37

Laetsch:

Just the gardens. They needed to do some other things, and he didn't think it was getting quite the attention it should get. So he asked me to come down and advise them on what they might be doing, which I did. Then I became involved with another garden, the Los Angeles County Arboretum and Botanic Garden, in the town of Arcadia. The arboretum is located across the street from Santa Anita Park, the horse racetrack.

They heard about me, I think, as a result of some of the work I did at the Huntington, because those people tend to do some of the same sorts of things. They asked me to come down and advise them on their educational programs in the garden; this was in 1991. It was interesting because their chief fundraiser was the daughter of Wallace Sterling, the former President of Stanford. I think I probably told you the story of my meeting with Wallace Sterling. Well his daughter, who's a very nice person, was their fundraiser. She was there for a number of years, and I just found out the other day she is at the Huntington, working as a fundraiser for the Huntington Library and Gardens. So everything goes around and around.

We were talking about Bob Middlekauff and the Huntington and how I became involved with the Friends of the Department of History. I did some

work for Bob at the gardens when he was there, and after he came back to Berkeley, he started the Friends of the Cal History Department, which is a fundraising program. Twice a year, they had History Day, in which they would invite people from the history faculty to give a seminar. They'd meet on a Saturday in Alumni House and have a long session. That worked out very well, and people paid to be a friend of the Cal History Department. It was a nice source of income. I was on their board and helped Bob identify alumni of the History Department who could be on the board and who also had some money. He had some good people on that. This was about five years ago, I think. The chair of History at that time thought that they would try to change that from just raising unrestricted funds for the History Department, particularly for undergraduate students, to help them with financial aid during the summer or other times. Bob was always very interested in the undergraduate students. The chair of the Department at that time wanted to change it to support faculty research and graduate students. Then he just really stopped doing anything, and the group gradually fell apart.

It's interesting that a number of these people on Friends of the Cal History Department Larry Bach, whom I got on, that I had known—he had worked for PG&E—Bert Barker, who was head of the Alumni Association, Dix Boring, who's a very close friend in San Francisco—these are all history majors. Steve Harper in southern California who's well-known. David Keightley who's in the History Department. Myself. Bob Middlekauff, Dick Morrison, who I got on, who's a very well-to-do venture capitalist. Steve Onderdonck from Pasadena, whom both Bob and I knew. Linda Papafsky. Mark Robinson, who was an undergraduate, History major here, who I knew well. He's a financial advisor. They had this golden pot, in a sense, where they didn't have to do all that much except put on some talks twice a year.

I'm looking at an announcement from 2000. Sheldon Rothblatt talked about the University of California's place in the history of higher education. Reggie Zelnik talked about the Free Speech Movement, revisited. After it was over, I took people around campus and we talked about trees.

21-00:48:57

Rubens:

That would be so interesting. I'd love to do that with you.

21-00:49:14

Laetsch:

Here's the history board of the Friends of the Cal History Department. Oh yes, Don Franson who's a lawyer in Fresno, California whom I had met for a variety of reasons, he was on it. Francisco Hernandez, who worked for me in Undergraduate Affairs, and then he went off to become Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs at Santa Cruz. That's interesting. I hadn't looked at this for a long time. Anyhow, that was another adventure.

21-00:50:05

Rubens:

How did you know Middlekauff originally?

21-00:50:10

Laetsch:

When I became Vice Chancellor for Undergraduate Affairs, he became the Dean of the College of Letters and Science. We worked together a lot, and we obviously intermingled a lot because he was interested in doing things with undergraduates in history, and then I had some money, so I was able to support some of the things that he did. So we worked on a lot of joint programs and became good friends. Then he went to the Huntington for a while, and then came back, fortunately, and we continued to meet and work together. He began to do research on the Mark Twain, and we formed the Friends of Mark Twain Papers Project together. Also, when he went off the Learning in Retirement program committee, I took his place. So there have been interactions of various kinds over the years.

I was also a member of the Oakland Museum of California Council. They asked me to be on that because the Director of the museum was Dennis Power, and I knew Dennis, because he was the director of a museum in southern California. During my museum days, we became acquainted. He came up and directed the Oakland Museum, and then asked me to be on their board. I can't remember very much about what I did, but anyhow, it was another board. Dennis and I had a lot of interaction because of our background in science museums.

21-00:52:24

Rubens:

Do you know how long you were on this?

21-00:52:26

Laetsch:

I don't recall now.

21-00:53:41

Rubens:

Shall we stop for today? Who knows what else you will discover you were involved with when you finish going through your files?

Laetsch:

A constant theme in this narrative is the multitude of programs and projects with which I have been involved. This has characterized my career, and I hope to escape the charge of dilettantism. In any case, it is a major theme of my careers, and I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to contribute in so many ways to so many endeavors.

[End of Interview]