

## B e t t y   S h i f l e t t

**If I'm right, January of 1998. We could start out with the question about how you got here. What circumstances brought you here?** What circumstances brought me here, strange ones, of course. I was in a private workshop with John Schultz, who founded the Writing Department, now known as Fiction Writing. And right after he started offering Story Workshop class instruction as a private workshop that he was running, I entered that workshop. And Mike Alexandroff had twice, at least, communicated with John Schultz that he wanted him to come and do this wonderful, strange thing called Story Workshop. And John had just turned it down because he thought that he would never be doing anything in academia. In fact, most of what he had put together for Story Workshop was in revolt against the way writing is taught in academia. So that was a conundrum for him. And then he sort of got interested in the idea—what the heck, we'll try it. And he came in the, I believe, in the Fall of '66, and then I came in the following semester. I taught two two-hour, I think, workshops—whereas they now would have been four hours—for a long, long, long time back to back in a classroom that in no way resembled a classroom. I think it was something to do with the library and the students walked in a long hall all the way around it and the temperature was ninety-eight all the time. And people would come in and say, "Is this really freshman English?", because we were doing things that they thought was considered to be unusual... to say the least, and unheard of, say a little more. And

it was pretty much a delight for anybody that was expecting what we jocularly call Bonehead English.

**Was it listed in the catalog as an English course?**

It was listed, I believe originally it was listed, but I'm not sure how it was listed originally. It went through several permutations in catalogs. Pretty soon, it was called Writing Workshop I and Writing Workshop II, a two-semester package for the whole freshman requirement, and the very same course for fiction. But the course design, goals, aims—outside of the difference between the forms, between fiction and expository writing—of course was essentially the same as he originally conceived it. We developed what we do in the classroom. It's been my pleasure to help with that but it was John's original conception. We ran certification procedures right, you know, for Story Workshop Institute.

**Now did every Columbia College student take this course? Theoretically, it's like any other required course. At any given moment—I understand this is still pretty much true for the English Department—at any given moment if you counted the people who had had, who were, you know, enrolled and who had taken any of our courses—Fiction or English—it would come out to about a third of the student population. That's because of transfers, transfer students, who often did not need, you know, academically had qualified for their Freshman Composition, didn't have to take Fiction. And while everybody thought that this was the course that everybody had to take, that's not what happens**

**when you start surveying how many students have taken it. Where was this?**

It was a required course though.

**It was a required course, OK.**

**What was the location of the, what building and...**

Oh, the building? On Grand Street near Lake Shore Drive, Lake Shore and Grand.

**In an interesting room?**

Interesting room? The room I was talking about?

**Yeah.**

I guess. I think it was used for other classes but it didn't look like a classroom. I forget what it had to do with the library but I know it had something to do with it.

**And what was it like to... tell us about it.**

Well, you had to wade through the shock of the students who truly thought they had gone into the wrong classroom in self-confusion. And then they'd check their regis-



tration slips. But they were delighted. At that time it was not a required course. Anytime you put “required” over the name of a course a certain kind of thing, of course, will begin to fit in. Students just simply were very thrilled to be doing anything other than regular English. I think seventy percent, maybe, of what we do is oral telling or oral in some way, but there’s perceptual coaching from the teacher. We call the teacher a Director, Story Workshop Director. We now have Master teachers and several levels under that. If you want me to go into explaining it, I will.

**Yeah, just for a few minutes.**

Well, students always sit in a semi-circle. That’s so that every student can take in the body English in terms of response—audience response is what this is for—of anybody. We have a lot of word exercises. The Director sits facing this, and usually with his or her back to the wall, so this format is, of course, it’s not a circle. And everybody is visible all the time. Nobody can hang back on a desk; we don’t have desk arms, we have to get chairs that don’t have that kind of paraphernalia that they can hide behind and, you know, the body alertness is important. It’s what we think is useful to a dramatic situation, a dramatic telling where you might be using your hands, moving your arms around a lot. They don’t get out, jump up and get out of the chairs, but we do use space to tell it, you know, to indicate where something is, to indicate a point of view, things, all sorts of technical things that come along in telling require space and an oral situation.

**So a student tells a story in his...**

I’ll just give you a very simple sample format, OK? At the beginning we try, there’s an oral recall of the previous session—that would not be true of the first session of the semester. The reasons for that are multitudinous: it creates a common memory bond; more than that, it brings back the important and the most vivid energy from that class—anything told or writ, imagery from that. And you can do that with the movements, you can work on voice, you can work on anything. After that we could go into the word exercises in the format I’m giving you. We do something called One Word, where each student gives a word around a semi-circle. There’s a lot of perceptual coaching for that; it’s not just any word. We say it’s any word in the first word, but very quickly they’re asked to be aware of what they’re saying, giving the semi-circle, with their voice. We make a great deal out of the connection. This is an all-important connection between the spoken voice and the voice that gets things down on paper. We do not ever let ourselves get caught up with saying that telling and writing are the same thing. First of all, they’re two entirely different medias. Writing is a permanent media on paper; but telling is spoken on water, it’s spoken on the air, it’s gone. This voice that we speak within the voice box, it just starts with a voice box, but it is important that it is audible. It includes everything about the person: their history, their personality, their lives up to their moment. You know, it is totally inclusive at its finest development, it’s what most people would call style. And to call it style in the beginning is to miss what it really is, I think. So there would be

many levels of word exercises. When that [is done] we nearly always do [what] is called Take Place. And it not only builds scene; it builds movement and character. There would be writing, they would be told to write it the way they told it, to get that down on paper. Now that’s all right to change it, of course, but not to throw away the problem solving that went on and the vividness that went on and the actual sequencing and so forth, all the valuable things, to try to preserve those and to get them on paper, to get them about paper. Especially when you come to gestures, immediately. To get the gesture on paper you have to do a lot more than just speak while you were talking. You had to do something different, not necessarily more, but do this, you know, or turn around. How am I gonna get this on paper? Or somebody’s head turns, or any number of a million things that could happen that are important to storytelling. They are told to write, they are encouraged to write whatever feels strongest to them at that moment, to go with the strong thing. Then there would be what we call a Readback, some people call it, you read back. And again, there’s not time, even in a four-hour section, for everyone to do it but people get to do it, you know, it’s a class that meets four hours once a week, you get to do it regularly. The student reads back what they have and there’s light coaching from the teacher. All of what I’m talking about is then observed by the rest of the class; they’re learning from each other. And then there are the oral readings. We could’ve had the oral reading right after the opening recall. In an expository product class, that would be the normal

place to have it so it could be a model out there; in fiction classes we don't do that nearly so often. It's good to change it around. We'd have readings probably from as much as three different sources. You know, and they always try to include something that's, you know, different point of views, technically, I mean first, third person, gender variety, background variety, content variety.

**This is material other than...**

Published material. But in John Schultz's text *Writing from Start to Finish*, there's always a student example. If this were a freshman course or if this were a beginning, intro, or fiction course, we would always use the student examples from Columbia College. A student sitting in a semi-circle just like this, maybe thirty years ago, told and wrote this piece. So there's a tremendous permission for subject matter, for language; they don't have to leave their language at the door when they came into that class and are encouraged to use their language, mixed diction. They're getting examples from published sources, from Melville, from Tolstoy, you know, they're getting the King's English, whether it's in translation or not, their getting the teacher's English, and they're using their own vernacular also. So we work toward a very strong, mixed, diction. And then there's a recall at the end of that session.

**Has this process changed over your years here?**

This, I left out one important part of it. After the oral reading, students read with perceptual coaching from the teacher. Same kind that's been going on during the telling. That would be to see it, coaching for whatever, the surprise

elements might be, to listen to your own voice as you're telling it, or listen to your own voice as you're reading it, listen to your voice joined with the voice of the story, not the author but the story. And that's a very fine line moment. If a student's able to do that, hear his own voice or her own voice, and then hear it joining with the voice of that really powerful, published piece, you will see an increase in their writing in the next two or three weeks. You'll definitely see a jump; they never know that this is going on. But after the reading, they recall from the reading and they recall what they notice. Everything we do is on the basis of what you notice, you know, which is another permission. What you notice is important, you know, what you think is dramatic is dramatic. If you don't think it's dramatic, we're not going to think it's dramatic. It may be something very common and ordinary, you know, it may be everyday secrets—it often is in good writing. And the Director, the teacher, is able to work that toward any kind of technical emphasis they want to, or they can just let it be brought, take whatever comes. But usually there's some molding toward what's being worked on that night. You know, in that week and the next week and so forth.

**Has this all changed, how you use this over the years, has this evolved?**

It's evolved, it hasn't changed, you know? We're still doing, basically, what the original private Workshop was doing. The way that we can work the exercises, the richness that we can instill, that we have been able to evolve, that is much greater than when it started out. But the principles, the elements, and the basic design of all the exercises are really intact.

**Tell me about the students when you came.**

Students? When I first came? I can say definitively—and I guess everybody else who's been here, you know, anything like going through time like I have, which has been, I think I'm going on to thirty or thirty-one years now—everybody was male and blue collar and there were almost no women and almost, literally, no minority students.

**Now, was that the College as a whole?**

Yeah. They were nearly all in Radio and TV. That's what the College had then and it had a wonderful reputation for supplying training.

**Tell me about the change in this, since obviously that's not the case anymore.**

Well, when, as you probably know, it began somewhere around 1898 or '95, like so many schools, it turned into something else. One year I think it was sort of a women's finishing school. And it went through some permutations I'm not very familiar with between that and...

**College of Oratory and College of Dramatic Arts and Expression, I think...**

Oh, is it?

**...I have to stop and look...**

Still, like finishing school stuff, though, maybe not, I don't know. But Mike Alexandroff's father was the founding—not the founding President, because it had existed that long, but he was the President before Mike. And he had brought it to a real excellence with TV and radio. And when his son, Mike Alexandroff, came in, it was his vision to see it as an arts and communications school. It was clearly a communications school. So

he started, he brought in artists to work, which is to say he brought in those who were in the television and radio industries to work. And that's been one of the powers of the school, that the artist is a teacher. And artists are not always good teachers.

**I'm curious about having radio and TV students in your writing classes. Are they, were they then different kinds of students than...**

Than they are now?

**...than they are now. What were the other kinds of students?**

Well, the ratio on gender make-up is very different now, but I think that the backgrounds of those students, outside of that—which can make tremendous differences in those, especially in minority areas—but I think, for instance, that the white students are not too different. Are you looking at me?

**No, no.**

To me they're always good natured, alert, very interested and good in your semi-circle. And I get pretty much that from any of the TV students and radio students. You're thinking there's not much in common there, is that what you're thinking? Well, you might think, "They're not so arty." And this is an arty course. That's a kind of myth, false myth that we were quite surprised too. We have a lot in common, actually, a very great deal in common. That's something I've learned at Columbia College. That makes us good, any kind of mix is really, you know, if you're talking about gold bricks or something, the mix is the strength.

**Let's shift gears for a minute to some of the people you've been, you've met and dealt with here at**

**Columbia. Who are some of the ones you remember best?**

Well, Mike Alexandroff, of course.

**Can you talk about him just a little bit?**

Well, it was his vision to turn this into an arts and communication college, to bring in the arts components and to have that be in combination with what were considered in a little more strict sense communication. But he realized, I think, that all the arts are a communication, not simply the ones that bear that obvious title and deserve it. There were some very unusual teachers here in the first five years that I was here. Jon Wagner, most people don't know anything about Jon Wagner. He was in social sciences out of the University of Chicago and he was, I still know Jon. He lives in California and I see him frequently in the summer at the University of California. I don't know how to describe Jon except that he was a delight to students; he was an inspiration for the College. He was a quick thinker; he saw where the school needed to go and could help Mike in turning it toward that direction.

**What was his job?**

Well, there weren't any departments. I believe TV was the first one, I guess. I could be wrong; if Jon would have been here, he would have known if it's right. We were the first arts department, I believe.

**When was that?**

I came... well, it was before, well before 1970 but it may have been as early as '68. I can't remember when it was officially called a department. Robin Lester, who worked in tandem with Jon Wagner and did a lot in sports communications, but who was also a very artful person and artful

teacher. They were quite a combo. They both gave a lot of strength to the school at the time that the school was having conferences to see about its vision and, you know, quiet little conferences over the weekend; a conference at Lake Forest, I think, was one of them. And...

**When was this?**

I don't have the date. It was somewhere in, somewhere between '66 and '68 I would say, maybe '69. That went on with various conferences for quite a while. I think Jon Wagner and Robin Lester were there. I don't know when they left but probably by '70 they were gone. And I'm sure... I've been here a little longer. Harry Bouras, artist, lecturer, sculptor, and sometimes writer...

**Why, why is he, why do you remember?**

He was one of the hallmark personalities of the early era and he was here quite a long while, 'til just before his death. Bert Gall, who is still with us, and who was a student when I came, a graduating student, I think, in the first or second commencement that I went through.

**He was a student in your workshop?**

Not mine but in John's, yeah, John's first fiction workshop. Those are the names that I mainly remember. John himself, who happens to be my husband. If he hadn't been I would still have remembered him.

**What about students? Any students you remember from then? Well, there must be lots, but are there any that pop out in your memory?**

That's a tough one right now, OK,

for names. I'd like to take a pass on that one.

**OK, let me move on then. Any other administration from a little bit later on from the later '70s, early '80s that stand out in your memory?**

Administrators?

**Administrators, yeah, and I want to go back to faculty.**

No, I think I've mentioned them.

**OK, and faculty?**

Faculty? Well, Bob Edmonds was, in the early days, chairman of the Film Department; he was the first chairman of the Film Department. And after he retired from that position he was full professor for a long time in a sort of emeritus position. He gave a lot of shakes for the school too. Thaine Lyman, of course, who was—I should have mentioned in the first group—the first chairman of the TV Department and had been here a long time. I guess not as long, maybe not as long as Al Parker but something like, on that hour.

**What was it like having a college without departments? I mean...**

What was it like having a college without departments? Well, there are a lot of things I could say about that. Much has been said about this college and other colleges that departments are sort of territorial sometimes. A lot has been done in this school and other schools to work against any negative effects of that but there are also a lot of positive effects. I think departments give a lot of leadership. We've always had, not in every case, but I think we've had some real luminaries. I've never worked in a college except Columbia, except for small things, you know, visiting things. So I don't get the full impact

except from friends. I think departments really do shape the school though. Whatever hassles that may lie between them at times, they are the flavor of the school and create the components of the College; but the totality of the school is shaped by those departments and the departments are responsible for acquiring the kinds of students that they want, which sounds like I'm speaking of some high degree of selectivity. I think the main thing and the original conception of the school and the stated mission of it is that it's an open admissions school. And it was always an open admissions school. Now from time to time that's been fought bitterly by people who came in, somehow not understanding that mission. And since we have artists teaching, we often have people who have never been in an academic situation of any kind, have never dreamed that they would really have to get something across, you know? It didn't get through to them that they were gonna have people sitting in their classrooms from different backgrounds than the people who were sitting in the classrooms that they were in. If they were then even paying that much attention to other students in an ordinary lecture class, you know. I don't think Columbia has too many ordinary lecture classes. Harry Bouras used to be the big lecturer, but his were not ordinary. They were always extremely lively and engaging and students were not just sitting, listening.

**What was he teaching again?**

He taught a lot of things. I can't name a single course right now, but he taught a lot of things that worked between humanities and arts, worked together... unique courses. And then the teachers would get frustrated and blame other departments, you know, that

these kids can't write, these kids can't talk, they don't do this, they can't do that, which wasn't even true. So then they would say, "We've got to have more selectivity here." And open admissions, then, would be under attack.

**Were there any times when this was particularly a subject of debate?**

Always, always a subject of debate, but your question's well placed because at some times it has been waged at a more maximal level.

**Such as when?**

Hmm?

**Such as when?**

About every five years. The next... we have a lot of people with Ph.D.s and sometimes that influx of Ph.D.s—but when you have a lot of people who have a high level of academic only background, then you have a periods where those people have to butt up against the fact that Columbia means to stay as is, to continue its difference, you know? And I'll probably come back to that in several places that you ask.

**Yeah, well, I wanted to go on to ask about the mission of the College. How would you describe the mission of the College in relation to American society, American higher education?**

Well, I think it's been a lesson to higher education and I think it's been imitated. Nobody admits to imitating it but I think that it has been imitated in several instances, I can't prove it. A lot of things that we've always done—for instance, open admissions have become the mark of higher education. As early as the '70s, the '80s, the '90s, nobody thinks anything about it any more. Open admissions has

often received only lip service in other institutions. We've come close to that here but we've never really changed our process.

**So the College has been a model for other institutions?**

Yes, it's been a model for other institutions. In some cases, they take one thing or another thing. But the idea that, that everybody is, and it sounds like a President's speech, the idea that everybody is entitled to an education. That the arts can teach, you hear that all the time now. But you didn't hear it at all when I first came in here except for this institution or from artists who were doing something privately. I think artists, a lot of artists, most, I think, the better the artist, the more they understand that, they don't all want to do it because it's very time consuming and it takes the same part of your brain that your own work does. But some have always been very passionate about it, through history. The idea that everyone should be given a chance to develop his or her talents.

I think the main reason that Mike Alexandroff was interested in Story Workshop is that everybody has a certain amount of God-given ability and talent—talent, whether we're talking about art or not, ability, potential ability—that they are important people, as they come in we say, "Your voice is central to you. It's important to you and to us, when you walk in the door. It's not important because of what we're going to make you into." We do not ask you to lay your brains on the doorstep and become somebody else and learn something foreign to your—to what you are, you know? Maybe new to what you are but not opposed to what you are. To shut it out and keep education for the select... English used to

be the axe course. When I came here, English was the axe course. Every institution understood that: Get rid of the undesirables when they flunk English. You understand what I'm saying?

**Yes, I know exactly what you're saying. When you came here was that the case?**

Was it being used as an axe course here? No, not here, but it was pretty usual kind of design for the English classes at the time.

**Here? And has that changed?**

I mean, they were not using it to get rid of students. It might inadvertently get rid of students. I'm not sure what your question is.

**Is there an attempt here to avoid that?**

Oh yeah. I'm not in the English Department. We were the English, we were the Writing/English Department, I directed the freshman program for fifteen years up until about 1985 and taught in the Advanced Fiction area and a million other things.

**I'm just curious, when did the English Department begin as a department?**

As a department that was not called English/Writing, just English?

**Yeah.**

Oh, about '86, '87. And I'm not speaking for anything that they do or don't do. Whoever has the freshman program, it tends to be a political... because when people get unhappy they bring that course up.

**I'm just curious now, are there students who can't make it through your workshops?**

You mean do we give Fs? We don't, it's two different questions alto-

gether. Yeah, there are people who for—you know, lack of skills knocks a few people out, you know, their lives come apart... so forth and family matters. Lack of money is the main thing. Lack of money has always been the main reason to lose a student. The hustlers don't fare very well with us. You have to come up with the work and we require sixty typed, double-space typed pages of good effort related to the assignment, directly related to the assignments, per semester. And that's quite a lot. We've always required that it be typed. But you know, one of the pleasures that I've noticed developing, many, many, of our teachers were once students—whose names I remember—are now teaching for us. They've gone somewhere else first and gotten their degrees, usually; higher degree, a second degree, sometimes third degree. But I have observed and trained in many ways and supervised and conferenced with class observation. We observe a class; we sit in on a full class. We've done a tremendous amount of that and still do, and I still help with some of it. And the... where in the world did I start out, what did you ask me most recently?

**You were talking about students who become teachers.**

Yeah... Well, I'll just say, I think one of the finest experiences I've had here is when I was observing a lot of freshman classes taught with the Story Workshop approach to teaching. And if you walk into one of those and people of all backgrounds—and we have a good age spread, as you probably know yourself—are finding themselves engaged in writing and even interested in the rules of grammar and spelling and punctuation. We have some ways of getting at that that are pretty fun to do. They're writ-

ing and enjoying each other's writing and reading it aloud and doing all these things and seeing that light in their eyes and on their faces and all the laughter and esprit de corps in a small group and what's going on between the teachers. I know what I started out saying: between the teachers and students, that's one of the finest experiences I think I've ever had. Considering the way it's usually conducted and, you know, the lack of all of the above. You were asking me: Are there students who can't get through? The supervising teachers, the first thing I would say is, "What did the teacher do that did not help the student get through?" But then I ask, were they a new teacher? There are students who just will not get through because of one reason or another. But if things are right I think they get through. And the [thing] I liked is, we don't like to see people getting Cs, though.

**Has that changed at all? Are the obstacles to students making it? The obstacles to students making it?**

**Yeah, from when you first came here.**

I don't think so, in broad outline. It's nearly always money; money is the big factor.

**Which makes students take other jobs or just simply quit.**

They just simply can't pay their tuition. Well, we see that most definitely at enrollment time, but it happens in the middle of the semester too.

**Has the student population changed a lot?**

Yes it has.

**And higher education has been changing; more people go to college, one way or another. I'm**

**just wondering if that has an impact on what you do or anything else that you can see.**

Well, if I can go back, about the changes. I said we first had white, male, blue-collar students; that was it. Anything else was an exception. Then we had gradually more women and pretty rapidly, at a certain point—which I hope you don't ask me any years—the African-American enrollment began to happen. And that grew enormously, to our great pleasure, for quite a while, and then it's been tapering off. The percentage, the number, the volume has stayed about the same while the school went through this tremendous expansion. There were less than two hundred people enrolled at Columbia College, something like that. We're between eight and nine thousand, I believe, right? So the numbers of African-American students has stayed almost exactly the same but the percentage has been dropping, and dropping, and dropping. And then we have, we've always had a sprinkling of foreign students, exchange students. Sometimes that's more; sometimes that's less. The Latino enrollment has been very much developing lately.

**How would you describe the mission? If we go back to the mission of the College, how would you describe it in relation to the arts? How has it affected the arts or in communications?**

Has it impacted on the arts community? Well, it must have impacted television and radio because we just supply and supply and these people are needed and wanted and sought. It must be tremendous, because that's who's out there. And they frequently become big names, but I mean they're also there at the

cameras, they're in the control booths, they're everywhere.

**And the writing...**

In the writing area, and some of them are directing and so on. I have to jump from that to my own area. I think we've had a subtle impact, but a large one, on writing because there's, for the same reason, the numbers. Who was it? One of the programs that I started was the Visiting Writers Program for writers and editors and agents and so forth. Word came back to us recently—sometimes it comes from Europe, sometimes it comes from China—a writer in New York said that Columbia College's Fiction Writing Department and graduate programs were the best kept secret in the nation, you know.

**Has your personal vision of education changed over the years?**

No, not since I came here. I was fortunate enough to have had, I think anybody that has one good teacher in their life, one really fine teacher, the kind that bends your mind around, you know, in a good way. And I happened to have had three, the last of which was John Schultz. And I had had two before that and also had a background in my undergraduate work in art and art education and so forth, and taught art for quite a while. And I had had... Toni LaSalle, a woman who's ninety-six and still painting and still teaching things. I went back to see her this summer and thought that she was probably dead but she wasn't, and visited her, which was a great thrill for me, as well as my art education professor, Dr. Maxey. And then I had been in theater games with Viola Spolin and Paul Sills at Story Theater here. And these things mesh pretty well. I learned a lot more, when I was here, through the Story Workshop

approach and a lot more became accessible to me, you know, in education, a way of educating and teaching. But it did not change my ideas of what education was.

**Some people who teach here kind of wandered in and maybe they were selected, but weren't necessarily in tune particularly with what it means to be in the College.**

I know (*laughs*). I'm quite familiar with what you're talking about. They're the ones that have trouble with the open admissions thing, as I say.

**All right, what have been some of the most important events to occur at Columbia during your tenure here?**

Some of these may be countable. I'll try to keep this sort of chronological: getting accredited, I think, by North Central. Before the visiting team—of course, we were visited several times before we were actually accredited. The team that came before the team that gave us our initial accreditation... I was here to teach at a four-hour workshop starting at nine o'clock in the morning. I knew the team was here. I didn't know they knew who I was. Each set of people, team, will have its own kind of flavor. And they're a combination of bean counters and F.B.I. One man grabbed me in the hall, as I was on the way to teach the workshop, and he said, "You're Betty Shiflett." I said, "Yes." He said, "Is it true that you teach four four hour classes?" I said, "Yes," you know, it was on the books, he knew that. And I got full-time after that, right after that. And that was in the time that we were having a department, I guess. I wouldn't have had full-time if we hadn't had a department. And

when the next group that came, I was acting chair and John was on sabbatical in Mexico at that moment, and he was writing. And I had just published this College English article, it was the lead article, and they didn't have any women to speak of and certainly none were chairs at that time. And they propped me up in front of the elevator with my College English article in my hand, which everybody had been given anyway, and took me into a meeting where they made much of the fact that I was acting chair. So much that I felt they were almost saying I was the chair; it was kind of weird. But that was a very propitious visit and accreditation opened up for us then. I remember the Financial Officer we had was named Ron Kowalski, and we got out of the red and into the black. That was a very big deal.

**As a result of accreditation?**

You know, there was a big jump in enrollment and I don't remember how closely that was tied to accreditation. Of course accreditation helped, but we were always making, I mean, we often made a big jump in enrollment, but there was particular, I guess... jump or succession of them that allowed us to get the debt paid off and to be in the black and stay in the black after that, which was something we weren't so sure we could do. Let's see, what else? It goes way back. Those are the ones I remember, those were big turning points, very big turning points.

**Where's Columbia heading now?**

**Where do you see the College in the future?**

Well, I think it carries with it the battle to be itself, always. I can't remember a single year when that wasn't some kind of a battle cry or a battle cry that needed to be sounded. It is, as far as I'm

concerned, it is always the issue. As we've expanded the full-time faculty and expanded the administration and so forth. And generally speaking, we've been very self-aware of that. I think that we're going to have to sharpen that self-awareness as we go into this twenty-first century. We're going to have to sharpen it a lot, because I think the school needs to back its teachers and its teaching because that is, that is why students return here; that is why students come here. It's one thing to say that and another thing to protect it because it's not the only part of the golden egg, but it's a big part of the golden egg. And if we lose, if we lose that golden egg... we would just simply not have Columbia College as a unique institution.

**What needs to be done to back the teachers and teaching?**

Well, I think they need to be more in the classroom and less in committees. I think they need to be what they're about rather than being kept busy with things that often don't turn out, either here or there, when everything's said and done.

**For example?**

I better not. It's always a struggle, it's a classic struggle here.

**I think we're just about out of time. Anything else that you want to add?**

I'll say that when I go home... No, I'll just stress this again: Any kind of situation, any kind of teaching, any kind of choosing of faculty, any kind of choosing of students that says, "These but not those" will be the death of what makes Columbia fun and exciting. Vernal Richway just said that. That kind of selectivity—sometimes it's very subtle, sometimes it's not intended, but it's



at the core of whether we stand strong and vital and continue to develop. I'm not talking about staying small...

**Do you think size is gonna be a problem if the College keeps growing?**

Well, everybody's always thought it would, and I guess I thought it would. I don't know that it has to be. I think the things I'm talking about, what... that of course gets harder to guard when there are more people doing more things in the name of the College. But I don't think it has to be the death of the College, or the death of the vitality of the College. I think that depends on leadership. And I think, essentially, we have strong leadership.