

Oral History Interview ---Eugene Roth, 2018 April 17

Participants: Dr. Christopher Breiseth

Dr. Francis Michelini

Dr. James Rodechko

Gene Roth

Sandra Ludwig

Mollie Rance

Date: April 17, 2018

Place: Wilkes-Barre, PA

Transcriber: Mollie Rance

Christopher Breiseth [CB]: Okay, this is Chris Breiseth. It's two days after income tax day, April 17, 2018. We're gathered here with Eugene Roth, who is, by almost anyone's admission, "Mr. Wilkes," a student of the institution, a longtime trustee, the leading athletic supporter of all the trustees, and he knows more probably about this institution and its leadership than any other living human being. And I don't know that anyone that's dead knew as much as Gene knows. Gene, we wanted—this is just conversation. We'd like you to start reflecting on your student days, and what got you here, and I want to segue into the Class of '57, which to my knowledge, as someone who had to deal with alumni, is probably the most distinguished class in the history of the institution, and the reasons that you understand for that that I'd like you to reflect on. But talk about yourself as a student.

Eugene Roth [ER]: Well, I graduated from GAR High School in 1953. I had never taken a final exam; we didn't have final exams. I never wrote a term paper because we didn't write term papers. But it was a unique experience: I was born and raised in the Heights, first generation college graduate. I had 2 brothers, and a sister. My oldest brother graduated from Ohio University in I think 1941, and there's an interesting story about that, but I'm not going to [tell it].

CB: Go ahead, it's important.

ER: Okay. So my oldest brother, as I said, graduated from Ohio University, had been in the ROTC for the period of time that he was in college. In his—I guess right after he graduated from the University, he was supposed to go into the Army as an officer, having spent four years in the ROTC. However, because my mother and my father—each separately born in Hungary—that was at one time Hungary [and then] Romania, I mean it went back-and-forth, back-and-forth. They viewed them as aliens, although they were American citizens, very much so. So, to make a long story short, they [the Army] denied him his commission, and he went in as a Private. And he served in the Medical Corps, and at the time of the Battle of the Bulge, he was killed. 24 years old at the time; brilliant, brilliant guy. Phi Beta Kappa. Really young to die. And then there was my brother Marvin, who came to Bucknell Junior College when he finished with the Air Force, he was in the 8th Air Force, a gunner on the B-25, or B-24, I'm not sure. And then my sister went onto school in New York, she finished there. So, in any event, that was my background, and I

was the baby in the family, and I wasn't a great student. So I decided that I wanted to go to Wilkes. By the way, I had listened to the Wilkes football games, right after the Second World War, and they were phenomenal. They were just a great, great football [team].

Francis Michelini: Blocks of anthracite. I heard stories of them.

ER: Yeah, they were remarkable! They played in Plymouth football stadium. They had 10,000 people at a game; it was a unique group. So in any event, you submitted an application, which I did, and had to take an admissions exam. And I can remember being in Stark Hall, and sitting there waiting, and then Dean Ralston came down the steps, and he said, "Mr. Roth, here's your exam." And I was sitting in the lobby of the Stark Hall, he went back upstairs, and I took the exam. He came back—I don't know, it seemed like a half-hour, or an hour—and I said to him, "Mr. Ralston, what do I do now?" And he said, "You just stay here. I'm going to go mark the exam, and I'll let you know whether you're in or [not]."

[Laughter]

ER: So, I took the exam—I have no recollection of what was in the exam—but I took the exam. He came down, picked up the paper, and about 5 minutes later, he came down. He said, "You passed the exam, you're going to be a freshman." And I was admitted to Wilkes College. It was at a time when Wilkes, in 1953, I can remember my mother and father being invited to a meeting, and the president at the time [who] wanted to meet with what he felt was a representative group of people to decide how large Wilkes should become. Remember, the war [WWII] was over, all of the GIs from the war had gone to the VA [Veterans Administration]

CB: [Chi-ville? 00:08:10]

ER: Yeah. And now they had to get down to serious business about what at that time Wilkes College, and the question was, how should they proceed as a college? And how large should they be? And I remember my mother and father—again, both of them born and raised [in Hungary], came over separately, without any family—but they learned how to read and write. My father read the Boston Journal every day.

CB: That's what conditioned you.

ER: Yeah. Well, I had a balance. It was interesting: my father was a Republican, my mother was a Democrat. And, not that we had many political discussions at home, but we had enough, so that it was a real distinction between their worldviews. But in any event, the topic for the discussion as they relayed it to me was: A. Should Wilkes be like Swarthmore, or should it be a larger school? And what would be the ideal size of the school? And the answer was—or the question that was posed was—should 700 students be the limit? And I don't recall what the ultimate resolution was but Dr. Farley was satisfied with what he'd done. And so I came to my first day of school, and I met several friends of mine, although I didn't really know them that well, but it was Jesse Choper, Larry Ander, Seymour Holtzman, and [Frank Cassell?] The first day, you know we hadn't yet gotten the dink, remember the dink? And we had to carry toothpicks and matches because they could stop you, and they'd say "give me a light." And if you didn't they'd

make you sing the alma mater. I mean, it was a different world. So, in any event, we're standing in what was then the library, in the back.

Francis Micheli: Kirby Hall.

ER: So we're standing there. We did have our dinks on. And Dr. Craig—I didn't know it was Dr. Craig. Frankly, she looked more like the President of the United States than she did—you know she looked like George Washington! [laughter]. So she walked up the steps, and she was going to go into the library, the back entrance. And she looked at us, and she said, "Young men, when a woman approaches, you're supposed to remove your hat!" So I figure, she walked in, I'm through with after my first year! I'm a dead man! Now, we have to get our enrollment, you know—the courses. And there were mandatory courses at the time, one of which was English. And I was told that Dr. Craig was an English professor, who I could wind up with as an English professor! [Laughter.] So, in any event, I lucked out. I did not have her. I had—

[Laughter]

CB: She could have been the making of you!

ER: She could have been; she could have made me. **[Inaudible]**, who was the teacher I had at GAR, she was very much instrumental in getting me interested in what I should be interested in, rather than what I was interested in. But in any event, who was the—Who handled the Debate Team?

CB: Was it Krueger?

FM and CB: Krueger, Art Krueger.

ER: Krueger, yeah. Now, I'm not going to spend a lot of our time on it, but it was just a novel place to be. Because Krueger—if you remember, he had a twitch. So this was my introduction—I had him with his twitch, I had Dr. Muwey, who taught—no, no—he taught History, World History. And he was a very interesting guy. He'd walk in—with the jacket, and a shirt and a tie—then he would start lecturing, and he would remove his jacket, then he would loosen his tie, then he would open his shirt. Then he would reverse, and he'd put back his things. So, you know, talk about distractions! Now, I go to Dr. Lieu. I'm just a kid from the Heights, GAR High School, and I have a whole new world experience. And he starts talking about 'the garment.' The garment this, the garment that, I don't know. I can't figure out what he's saying! He was talking about the government! But he kept talking about the 'garment!' [Laughter.] So it took me a while to work through that. Then I [inaudible] with Dr. Davies, and I remember vividly that the text we used was a very large book, very large book. So this was many, many years before anybody would walk around with a backpack, so you had to carry your books. That was a big book to carry. So maybe I'm there a couple of weeks, and they said, "Alright, take out your books!" What books? Who was going to carry that big book? And Dr. Davies—do you remember Dr. Davies?

FM: Oh, very well [laughs].

ER: Two stories, quickly. Number one: when we didn't have our books, he got so upset. He said, "Alright, I see what I have here. It's kick your balls, blow your horns. That's college for you! Next time, be sure you bring your books." That was one experience I had with him. The second experience I had with him: He had a quiz. I took the quiz, and I remember getting a D, basically. And I looked at the paper, and I couldn't figure out what I'd done. So what I had done was, I had spelled 'women' [as] 'woman.' W-o-m-a-n instead of w-o-m-e-n. And I went up to see him, and said, "Dr. Davies, I mean, gee whiz! One mistake! I know what the difference is. So he said, "You know, I always call you 'Mr. Roth.' I assure you, you will never, ever make that mistake again as long as you live." Now, I'm 82 years old, and I still remember that story, as vividly as if I could see him! So that was my introduction. I mean, we had wonderful professors. Dr. Mailey, who was—I really think, in terms of the government, the municipal government in the Wyoming Valley—he was responsible more than any other person because he taught these people. You know, you ran for election—half of them, I don't think, could even read back then. So he held classes for them, and trained them, and did—he was viewed as being an expert in his field. Do you remember him?

Jim Rodechko: I remember him. He died shortly after I came.

ER: Yeah, a remarkable guy. I mean we had some real—

CB: Talk about those classmates that you met up with the first day.

ER: Well, okay, so here's what happened. I started out, in my first year I was on probation. I didn't know how to study. I didn't have any of that type of training. Fortunately, fortunately, I began to understand what I had to do, and I did alright. I graduated, and went to law school. And the people that I was graduated with here, well we had Larry Cohen, who we're now going to be honoring for his activities here at Wilkes. Outstanding guy. Took a company that his father had developed. His office was in the United Penn Bank building, now known as the Citizen's Bank building, soon to be known as I don't know what, because it's now being converted into apartments. We had Jesse Choper, who was the kind of guy, you know if he got an A-, you know the rest of us were struggling. We had a number of Korean vets, they were another group. But in any event, Jesse Choper was the kind of guy who was so focused in everything that he did. And, of course, he went on [inaudible], graduated second in his class, and then became a clerk to [Warren?], I think.

CB: Yes.

ER: But he was a different kind of guy. He was on the Debate Team with Nick Flannery—and two different people, you could not find. Although Nick went on and became a judge in—

CB: Massachusetts.

ER: In Massachusetts. And Jesse who went on, and ultimately became the Dean of the School of Law at UCLA—

CB: Berkley.

ER: Berkley. And then Seymour Holtzman, who I knew as a kid, because he wore peg pants, pink pants, green shirts. I mean, he was just a different sort of guy. And by the way, I'm naming people who were the children of immigrants. [FM: Inaudible] Immigrants, yes. Ah, Larry Ander. And most of us who were going to college worked after class, worked in the summer. But what was interesting: tuition, at the time, when I started, it was \$225 a semester. Books were, I don't know, ten, fifteen dollars, for all your books. So if your parents didn't have the means to come up with the [money]--

FM: And faculty got paid \$3000.

ER: Is that right?

FM: I started in 1955, and my ten-month salary was \$4000. The whole cost structure that our generation lived through, and subsequent presidents had to deal with, and admissions, as part of what we're trying to reconstruct in a historical sense.

ER: Well, in that sense here's something to look at: I worked for my father in the summers, so he didn't think he had to pay me [laughter], because that was sort of—hey, listen—[laughter]. But for many of my friends, whose fathers were not in business—and I say fathers because I only knew one woman who had a business, and she was a widow. But in any event, you could get a job—go to the Catskills, go to the Poconos—and on tips, over a period of a summer, you could make \$1000, so figure it out. There was enough money, that you could earn in a summer to pay your—

FM: You could work your way through college with a summer job.

ER: You could work your way through—absolutely. And have enough money during the course of the year, to you know, go out and date, go to sporting events, whatever. So it was—and I try to reflect on that, by the way, and say, oh a dollar was [different, with inflation]. But there's no such thing [now]—and I know my own kids—if it wasn't for student loans, my grandkids would've had a very difficult time. So I don't think you could replicate, from an economic standpoint, what we lived through then. But you're right, I mean the faculty, when I went to law school a professor at Dickinson probably made somewhere around \$3000-\$4000.

CB: Gene, when you think of those 4 years, and the green horn you wore when you first started, describe what you think really shaped you up to be a law school admittee, and then to emerge as probably the leading lawyer in Northeastern Pennsylvania.

ER: Well, that's—

CB: Well, you don't have to accept that, but the process, what happened here, what was Dr. Farley's role for you, and for guys like Jesse [Choper] and Nick [Flannery], and Frank Casella, and Seymour [Holtzmann], and Les Weiner.

ER: And Les Weiner. You know, it was an interesting time. The student body was so relatively small, and the college professors—many of them not much older than we were, but many of them much older than we were. But it was the kind of thing where—it's no longer here, but there used to be a cafeteria, two-stories, and you could go into the cafeteria.

CB: Pickering. The new freshmen's dorm.

ER: No, this was before that.

JR: Right by the new [inaudible: building 00:28:24]

ER: Yeah, it had been a garage before and it was converted.

FM: Converted carriage house. The first building Dr. Farley ever added was the extension to carriage house, behind Chase Hall, which became the Commons, that's where I had my first faculty meeting.

ER: That's right. But—so, we would go there for lunch and it wasn't—as I think it is today—just a place where you'd meet other kids to have lunch. The professors used to have lunch there at the same time. So we would sit with the, we would talk to them, they would listen to us. It was like a friendship. And they felt—and I'm not suggesting that that period is so unique, but it's the only thing that I could relate to, because I had the same experience, somewhat in law school. But in any event, I got the feeling that y professors were really concerned about me, and that was such a unique experience for me. And I went on, from semester to semester, maybe I was maturing, or maybe I was understanding how to learn.

FM: All of the above.

ER: Yeah, all of the above. But yeah, it became a mutual thing. So there was this—you had sort of a friendship with these professors. Now with respect to Dr. Farley, who was a unique human being—I mean, he always seemed to me to be about 7'2". And as he approached, it always seemed to me the best thing I could do was, see where he was going, and go in a different direction.

[Laughter]

JR: A lot of faculty felt that way too! [Laughs]

ER: Because he seemed like a very unique human being. That's what he was.

CB: A younger generation would say "awesome."

ER: Yeah, awesome. Now, if I can just jump ahead, a little out of context, talking about Dr. Farley. When I came back from law school, the first thing I did—as a matter of fact, when I was in law school—I attended an alumni meeting. Joe Savitz, who was my mentor—in the practice of law, we call him a preceptor—he invited me to come down to a meeting of the Alumni Association.

CB: He was the first alumni head [of the association], right?

ER: He was the first alumni trustee. And, if I can take the credit, I had suggested that we should have a representative on the Board of Trustees, and Joe turned out to be the representative. But in any event, when I came back from law school, I immediately got involved with the Alumni Association because I felt, I just felt that Wilkes had saved me. That it gave me—I mean, me going to law school? I can remember—I'm jumping around a little bit, but I'll pull it together. I can remember being sent down in my senior year in high school. No, my junior year in high school [being] sent down to the principal because I was in a math class, you know we had a student teacher, and I sort of didn't respect student teachers. [Laughter] I mean, that was student teachers. That was like a day off, right? So they sent me down to Mr. Hensley. Now, Mr. Hensley at GAR, I mean, he was a very difficult guy.

CB: This wasn't Robert Hensley?

ER: No. He was not empathetic at all. He really didn't know the people from the Heights. So he said to me, "I want you to go home, get your mother, and bring her back." Well, in those days, mothers were at home, so it wasn't a big shock. So he sends me home to get my mother, and my mother said, "What's the matter?" And I said, "Mom, Mr. Hensley wants to see you. I'm innocent! I'm a victim." So we then go back, and he tells my mother what I did. And he said, "Mrs. Roth, I think you'd be very wise if you took your son out of high school, and got him a job driving a truck." That's what he tells her.

FM: Now, that's a guidance counselor if there ever was one!

ER: My mother looks at him, and she said, "Mr. Hensley, my son is going to graduate from this high school, and he's going to go to college." And Mr. Hensley started to laugh. And my mother really got angry. She said, "You'll see! You'll see!" So that was my [experience]. But in any event, going back to Dr. Farley. So I became—I was elected the president of the Alumni Association. I was already practicing law at that time. And I came up with this brilliant idea to solicit the alumni for the annual fund, and I presented that to the group, and they thought that was a great idea. A couple of days later, I get a call from Dr. Farley. He'd like to come and see me. Because he's great, terrific. So I bring him into my office, and I'm at my desk. It was a small office. I was sitting at my desk, and he was sitting across from my desk. And he said, "Gene, I heard about your meeting. And your idea about raising money from the alumni." I said, "Yeah, and I think people are really excited about it." And he said, "Well, it's an interesting thought, but you have to understand: Wilkes is a very young school. And most of the graduates don't have the means to make contributions. And I said, "Well, Dr. Farley, I mean, you don't have to give a lot of money. All we want to do is get it started." He said, "Well, I appreciate your intentions, but

this is not the time.” Listen, he was still pretty big. He was sitting down, but [still]. That was the end of my entry into fundraising! [Laughter].

CB: Well, it wasn’t the end. Because you became one of the great fundraisers.

FM: A small digression: One of my first conversations with Dr. Farley was in 1963, when I first got into the administration, had to do with fundraising. And we were going through the roster of trustees, and he would give me his analysis of them. And I said, “Dr. Farley, what’s going to happen when all these people [are gone]?” They were all elderly by then. “What’s going to happen when all these people are gone?” The Carpenters, the Sordonis, you know. And he looked at me, and he said, “Mike, the future of this college will depend upon its alumni. Those kids right outside my window.” And he always had a window you could see out of. “It will depend on [them] to determine the future of this institution.” So he worked every—he understood exactly what had to [be done] to transition.

ER: Oh, yeah. He just said it wasn’t the time.

FM: And we also, in sharing past presidential experiences, it’s fascinating to see how that Board evolved, and the different casts of characters. The other thing that you lived through, and I’m sure you did not appreciate it at the time, we discussed the history of the faculty. And you had the World War Two refugees, the discipline of the European traditions. But you also had the community. It’s amazing to look back at the roster of the college bulletins, and see how many adjunct faculty there were at Wilkes. The successful people in the community were contributing to that educational progress. And then the critical factor was the World War Two population of students. You had 22-, 23-, 24-year-olds, like George Ralston, who had Purple Hearts, who had medals from war. They were no nonsense. You gave them a hill to climb, they didn’t ask how—how many resources will we have? The character—Dr. Farley had a very lean administration.

ER: Oh, I remember. Yeah.

FM: In fact, I became Dean because Admiral Harold Stark insisted that he have somebody in a position who understood what was going at the college besides himself. And that nucleus of the Ralstons, the Schwaluks, the Whitbys, the Al Grohs, the guys that had the experience of WW2: you gave them an assignment, you never heard about it until it was done. And your football team was a perfect example.

ER: Oh, yeah.

FM: That generation came back to education, which no generation prior to them ever had the advantage of. Pre-WW2, three percent of the high school graduates went on to college. After WW2, it climbed over fifty percent. The GI Bill significantly changing all [American] culture. So we’re trying to piece together that profile of events, and people, and we want your insights of the people that did things that—they’re indefinable. They were influencing you.

ER: Well, listen. I remember when my brother Marvin came back. He, in his senior year, also at GAR, he was 18 years old. At that time, they said, “If you enlist in the Services, you’ll automatically graduate from high school. My brother Marvin was one of these rough-and-tough kids, and this was an opportunity for him to get out from under. So he enlisted in the Air Force. It wound up that the number of missions kept changing, and changing, and changing. He wound up with about 30 missions. He was short 2 missions. When the war was over in Europe, he came home on a 30-day leave, and he was to go then to the Pacific, and continue, until he got his missions. While he was home, they dropped the two atomic bombs. He was notified that the war was over, and he was free and he had to sign up for the GI Bill, and so forth, and so on. But the transition was nebulous. I mean, he didn’t go back to camp, he just signed up wherever he had to. And now, his view was, at that time he had to make up—well, he was there four years, so at that time, [he] was about 23 years old [or] close to 23 years old. And now he had to take all those years that he viewed as being lost years, and make up for them. So when he became—he was a lousy student at GAR. I mean, I think our family had the record, except for my brother Philip, of being the worst students ever at GAR. But now it was serious time. And I can remember when he would have some of his friends over to our house, still living in the Heights, over on Long Street. And I would sit there, and I would listen to them talk about what they wanted to do, and what they were going to be. And this [friend] wanted to be a doctor. Very interesting story: his name was Fyne, F-Y-N-E, but it really wasn’t Fyne, it was Finkelstein. And he went to school, he was going to the University of Scranton, [named] St. Thomas at the time. And Harry [Fearworker?] was there. And he was at Bucknell Junior College. Ultimately [he] had a jewelry store in Lazarus, and made a nice living for himself. And there were a couple of other guys, and they were so determined. And I’ll never forget Harry turned to Fyne, and he said, “Hey, Finkelstein, where the hell did you get the name ‘Fyne’?” [Laughter]. You had to know Harry—that was Harry. And he said, “Listen. Do you know how hard it is to get into medical school?” Because, as you know, there was a quota. And he said, “I figured if I went to St. Thomas, and my name was Fyne, I’d have a pretty good shot of maybe getting into medical school. I don’t know whatever happened to Fyne. So they confronted this whole thing about [making up time]. First of all they wanted to meet girls as soon as they possibly could, because they wanted—you know, they were 24 years old. It doesn’t sound like very much. I was 21 when I got married. So 24, by that time, for a man and a woman, was old. And now you have four years of college. So they accelerated everything. My brother finished his 2 years here in a year and a half. Then he went to [University of Pennsylvania], to Wharton School, and he finished there, but he was married when he went to Philadelphia, and his wife worked.

CB: That was the norm.

ER: I mean, that was the deal, the wife worked. And these guys went 12 months a year. All they wanted to do, is they wanted to get out, and they wanted to make a living. And they wanted to have all the things they dreamed about through such a horrendous period of time. I mean I’ve read a number of books about the 8th Air Force, and when you read about what they endured, the number of people—400,000 that were killed in the 8th Air Force. So it was this [drive to get going]. And they were so driven, and they were so prepared to learn. Far moreso—I don’t know what would’ve happened to my brother, Marvin but for those events.

FM: We've talked a little bit, too, about the Al Grohs, and the John Whitbys, and John Chwaleks, and whatever. And the influence that Al Groh would [have on] a belly-gunner, a B-17. He almost cracked up until he went to the waist-gunner side. Buddy Rothstein. Some of the experiences those guys would never talk about, but influenced the discipline that they brought to a job. That Al Groh, he made people face fear in that theater, that as a biologist, I could not comprehend for many years until I got to know Al better, and [inaudible]. And they were a unique generation.

ER: The Greatest Generation. Loyal to this country. Remarkable. Remarkable how loyal they were.

FM: And actually the roots of our socialization of the Jewish—of the populations that had been excluded: the black population, the women's movement—the seeds of that whole revolution were planted during WW2.

CB: Speaking of which—because if you've really got a meeting at 2:30, we've got to say this is session 1, and we'll reschedule for session 2. Say some things about the Jewish community and Wilkes as we come out of this war [WW2], and, I was saying before you got here: as I recall up in the Heights, on Park, there were how many families lost?

ER: On my street, which was between Northampton Street and Market Street, my brother, a young guy by the name of [Alan Collins], another man by the name of Goldstein, a fireworker. So there were, out of that one block, there were five or six Jewish boys killed. So the impact was significant. Now, bear this in mind: just about everybody I knew in the Heights spoke with an accent. They had come from Europe. Now, there were the Hungarians, there were the Lithuanians. And you know, the Hungarians didn't like the Lithuanians, [etc]. That's why we had five synagogues on the hill. On one street! Five synagogues! And one on Lincoln Street.

FM: Well, the Catholic Church had more than that, you know! [Laughs.]

ER: So, in any event, at the time, when I was growing up, the only place you could get a college education was at the Penn State—they had on Washington Street, which became, ultimately Dick Maslow's offices. That's where they would hold classes. I don't even know what kind of classes, but that was the only place you could get any kind of an education. And I don't even know if they granted an Associate's degree. I really don't know much about that. So Wilkes comes along, and now it represents an opportunity.

CB: And goes to 4-year status.

ER: Yeah. But I'm just starting with the [2-year program].

CB: [inaudible] [with FM]: At BUJC.

ER: Yeah. Just starting there, the fact that there was a place to go to college. And somehow the Jewish community felt that having a non-denominational school, where boys and girls could go where there was no quota was—

CB: Heaven on earth.

ER: Everything they dreamed about. And it was an opportunity. They knew that it was an opportunity. And Dr. Farley, he reached out to the community. My mother and father thought he was going to—

FM: Well, our preparation for even starting this project was [to] read Dr. Farley's book. Because his balancing of all of the divisive societal elements, whether it was ethnicity, or religion, or racial, or sex—

CB: Or industrial labor.

FM: —Are totally broken in the early composition of those early boards.

ER: Plus, there was a commitment by the faculty to the community. I mean that was felt. The Maileys, and there were so many others.

CB: Rosenberg.

ER: Rosenberg. I mean, there were so many who related to this community and saw something that we never did. You know, the one thing I became convinced of when I was at law school was that we had a [psychological] complex in this area. Nobody thought they were really good enough, because they came from backgrounds where they really weren't good enough. You know, my mother's mother died in childbirth, and she had three siblings. Her father, again, in Hungary, was taken into the Army. So my mother and her siblings went to live with their grandmother. My mother revered her grandmother. Her grandmother was her idol. The First World War is over. Her father comes home. He brings my mother, and her three siblings to live back with him. He meets a woman. And remember, at that point, my mother had raised these three kids for a period of—I don't know—three years. She didn't see her father in all that period of time. He comes home, he gets married, and now this woman who married her father, is now taking care of the kids. My mother couldn't handle that. So she left. She left [at] 16 years old. She left. She went back to her grandmother, and she stayed with her grandmother for about a year. Her grandmother was very talented, and taught her how to sew. So my mother leaves her home, I don't even know where her home was. I once asked her, "Why don't we go and visit where you were?" She said, "Why would I want to do that? I couldn't wait to get out of there!" [Laughter] So that was the end of that!

CB: So much for roots!

ER: So, in any event, she winds up going to Budapest, and she gets a job in the theater making costumes. She was that good as a seamstress. She spent, I don't know, a year, two years there. And then at 18 years old, she makes up her mind: she's coming to America. And she saved up

enough money to get on board, and came to America. [She] went to New York City, got a job in the Garment District, and went out, and got a one-room apartment, and started her life in the United States. And, again, I reiterate that my mother and father were—they loved the United States with such a passion, as did all the people I knew growing up. I mean America was the Golden World. So when you put all of the things together, and their respect for education, because they had very little education—but a teacher, to them, was like God. I mean they just revered education, revered the faculty. It was just a different time.

CB: Even Dr. Craig. [Laughter.]

ER: I never had Dr. Craig. And you know what? My brother did have her, and he said, “You know, you made a terrible mistake. She was an excellent professor.” [Laughter.] I said, “I know, but--” [laughter].

FM: I’ve got to tell you a story about Frank Davies and Chuck Reif because you mentioned Frank Davies and his discipline. Frank Galia, Francis Galia from a little [town] outside of Scranton. His high school chemistry teacher called Chuck Reif one time and said, “He’s not a student at Wilkes, but he’s got to go to Wilkes College because I vouch for him; he’s going to be a good student.” So Frank Galia went through the Biology Department curriculum [earning] straight 4.0. But he had never taken the English literature course, which was required, with Frank Davies until his senior year. And [Frank Davies] gave him a C. And Chuck Reif went ranting and raving in to see Dr. Farley. And Dr. Farley calls Frank Davies into his office, [and says], “Okay, what’s your problem?” And Chuck Reif pounds the table, and says, “This student has a straight 4.0 for four and a half years, and he gets a C in his senior year in English Literature from that man!” And Frank Davies is sitting there, with his arms crossed, and he says, “But Dr. Reif, that’s the grade he earned.” End of argument! Even Chuck Reif couldn’t face down from Davies.

ER: Art Meyer was another guy I went to school with.

CB: Yes, and came to the basketball games, too.

ER: Art Meyer tells a story about Dr. Davies. You know, this is a great thing, it really is. He is on the basketball team. Short guy, but brilliant student.

FM: I had Art as a student. I came in 1955. I had Art Meyer, Gus Weiner, Jerry Stein.

ER: Yeah, so he’s in World Lit. and Dr. Davies says, “We’re going to have an exam on Thursday.” Or Friday, or whatever it was. So after class, Art Meyer goes up to Dr. Davies, and he said, “Dr. Davies, the basketball team is playing at Ithaca, and I really have to leave early in the morning, so is there any possibility that I could take the exam before [the exam date], and I promise you I will never tell anybody. Dr. Davies said, “Mr. Meyer, you could either get an A in basketball, and an F in World Literature [or vice-versa], but it’s your election.” And with that, he turned away. And that was the end of his basketball career at Wilkes. [Laughter.]

CB: But there were consequences that flowed from taking responsibility. You've got to go, but I really hope you'll do more of this. Some of the topics we want to talk about are Max Rosenn, and your view of him, both as a senior colleague, but also as a member of our Board, and the premiere local citizen. And how you watched the Board of Trustees evolve and its relationship with its presidents, as well as dealing with the faculty at different periods. And a huge topic, which is your long-term sense of the role of the college become a university, and the Wyoming Valley Area which you have been part and parcel of in almost every dimension. So I hope you feel that there's more that we can do.

ER: Oh yes, I'd be more than happy to do that.

JR: And [talk about] our athletic programs, too.

CB: Yeah, that was going to be our opening theme, because you're the most loyal fan, not even [just as] trustee, but certainly the most loyal trustee. But even sitting next to Steve Tillman. [Laughter]

JR: I told him about how Steve was escorted from the game. [Laughter]

ER: Oh God, I felt so badly for him. Oh my God.

CB: But you've never yelled that loud.

ER: No. But you know what? From that day forward, Steve never opened his mouth.

CB: Well, that's like you with that principal! [Laughter.]

FM: Trust me, Gene, you will enjoy the conversation. It's so wonderful for us when we get together. All the way home in the car I'm thinking about things. We hope it would become fun for you.

CB [simultaneously]: Tim [Gilmour] wanted to be on this [session] today.

ER: Well, it's been fun for me today, but I love to hear myself! [Laughter]

[End of interview.]