

Chap Freeman

...seventeenth of March, 1988. Let me start by asking you how you got to Columbia. What were the circumstances that brought you here?

Well, I came to Columbia in 1970 trying to reintegrate the split in my interests about film. The film industry is a strange place. It's split so that the people who make movies know a lot about making movies—and they're very good at that—but they don't talk about movies as art or culture very much and the people who talk about movies as art or culture—the scholars and the critics and so on—usually don't know anything about making movies. So, I was interested in both. My undergraduate degree is from Columbia in New York and it's in English. But I was there at the time at the French New Wave and Fellini and Antonioni were starting to hit the United States. So that was the first time that Americans were taking movies seriously as art and culture. And we were all very interested in that. And then I went to Iowa at the Writer's Workshop doing a Master's, an MFA, in Creative Writing. But I started taking film-making classes at Iowa. And, again, we were really interested in movies as an art form. We started a film festival when we were there. But I learned something about making movies and then I came to Chicago in the late '60s and started making movies here. And I was having a really good time making movies, shooting. I was a producer/director/writer. And, but the people in the film industry didn't really want to talk about movies. The only person I knew who could do both

was a guy named Bob Edmonds who was the chair of the Columbia Film Department. And so I asked Bob if I could teach a course here as a way of getting back into that kind of discussion and he said, "Well, I'm just stepping down as the chair now, but go see this new guy—Tony Loeb is taking over." So I came and talked with Tony and here I am.

How did you know Bob Edmonds? From the Director's Guild here in Chicago. The DGA, in some parts of the country, in New York and on the West Coast, is a regular union for directors. In Chicago, at the time, it did do that, I mean, we were members of the union, but the thing was much more social. And it was a place to look for work and a place to talk with your friends and the meetings were pretty open. So, my wife and I would go to those meetings and Bob was a person who could talk about film beautifully.

Can you tell me, what kind of courses—now, you were hired full-time or part-time?

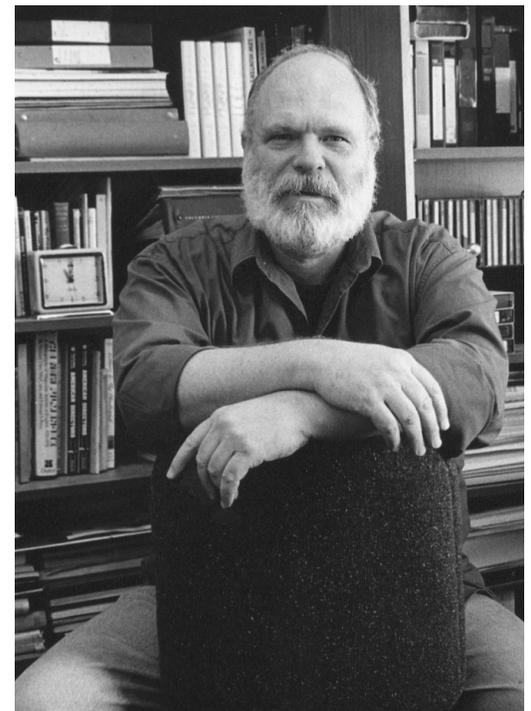
The first semester I was hired part-time. I replaced someone who was not meeting his classes and they needed somebody to fill that. So I took that job. And then, the second semester I became full-time. So then I was teaching a full load, you know.

What courses were you teaching? I was teaching Screenwriting to start with. And then at the beginning of the second semester, Tony asked me and Michael Rabiger to sit down with each other and structure or restructure the two production classes that start our curricu-

lum: Tech I and Tech II. Because they were not well integrated. The people who had been teaching them were not all teaching the same thing and the continuity between Tech I and Tech II was not perfect. So, Michael and I went over to a Greek restaurant—over here in Greektown—and sat down, and Michael's more of a technician than I am and had done some professional camera work and that kind of thing. So, he took Tech II and I took Tech I. And we sat down and we structured the whole thing, wrote the exercises and put together the small shooting exercise that starts Tech I, which is still being used. So, that, that's the most famous movie I've even made, more people have seen Hide and Seek exercise in Tech I than any other movie I've made, if you count all those thousands of students.

What other courses have you taught since then?

Gosh, I've taught a lot of courses. I've taught all the levels of



Screenwriting and I used to coordinate the Screenwriting program. I've taught all levels of Directing and I coordinate Directing now. I've taught in the Film Studies and Analysis area. I've taught French New Wave, New German Cinema, various other history courses. I've taught chronological history classes for a while. And I taught Composition and Optics, which is part of our Cinematography program. That was a course that I rewrote years and years ago. And then, back when Robert Buchar came in to head our Cinematography program, then he took over that section. I'm teaching a section on Optics right now, as a matter of fact, I like that. It's an eye-training course. And the other area that I teach in is sort of a loosely defined area of conceptualization and idea development, that kind of thing. Image and Story, for example, a course that I put together with Peter Thompson from the Photography Department—the goal of which is to help students be able to develop their ideas for whatever area they're working in. And it's an interdisciplinary course that uses different art forms as a way of getting to creative sources and that kind of thing. I'm very omnivorous when it comes to my art interests. My mother was a painter and my dad was a commercial artist and one of my sisters is an art historian and one of my sisters is a sculptor. And so I've always had a lot of interest in all the arts. And one of the things that I can do in our department is to go between the different art forms. So this seems to be really helpful in terms of getting students to understand what they want to do.

Who were some of the people, in your career here, that you remember best? If you could pick a few...

Well, of course I remember a lot of my colleagues, people like Michael Rabiger, people like Tony Loeb; people that I've taught with over the years. I remember a lot of administrators: Mike Alexandroff, Lya Rosenblum, Bert Gall. All those people have been important to me. I guess the people I remember most powerfully are students. Charlie Carner, who is now a fairly well known director and won an alumni award from us last year for his contributions to filmmaking, and Lisa Gottlieb, who was in Tech I with Charlie, who is a director now on a movie called *Just One of the Guys*. And Walter Clayton, who was in that same class, who is an underwater photographer and develops techniques for underwater photography. All three of those people were in the same class. So, that makes a strong impression on you, or at least it did on me. Bob Schnieger, who has won a Peabody Award and is working with the guys who made *Hoop Dreams*, editing their new movie, is someone who was a student of mine and has been a friend of mine for a long, long time. Debra Schelinski, who's a production accountant for Merchant Ivory, she did *Mr. and Mrs. Bridge* and so on, is an ex-student of mine who became a friend of mine; somebody I remember very well from the time she was a student, and on and on. Susana Perry, the daughter of a European diplomat—Yugoslav diplomat—who is Scorsese's music editor now. So, for me the most powerful images have to do with the travel that people make from being a film student to being a film professional. And the thing that's most impressive to me and most—the

thing I enjoy thinking about most is the history of that and my connection with that and how that operates. It's wonderful to see people actually doing what they hoped they'd be able to do, which it, you know, they come in, they want to work in the film industry and then years later they do. And their personalities have changed along the way, so that's really a thrill to me.

Tell me a little bit about the students, maybe more generally. Are they the same now as when you came?

Well, I would say that some of the students are the same as when I came but that the mix of students have changed a good deal. When I stated teaching at Columbia—I don't know if this needs to be on the record, actually—there was a joke that went around that Columbia was a school where the students helped the teachers get off hard drugs. That wasn't actually the case; I've never seen drugs at Columbia. But it was a wild place. This is, you know, 1970, 1971. It was a leftist college with ideals that were very, very progressive. It was a place that attracted students who were truly alternative to the main system. It was a place that gave people a chance to do things in college that they weren't able to do in other colleges and universities in that we were a hands-on place. It was a place that let students work out their own program so that we were getting students who had had a difficult time and an unhappy or an unfulfilling time at other places who were coming to us. It was an extremely urban place, so the way in which the city affected the college and the way in which we drew our student body from a urban environment, lots of inner-

city students, lots of older students who were coming back to school, that kind of thing. Lots of people who were working professionals who wanted not a degree, but one or two specialized courses. And so at that time, the mix in your class would be extraordinary. In one screenwriting class, a single class, I had a fifty-five year old woman whose kids were in college and who decided that rather than taking a macramÉ class she would study film, study screenwriting; a gay liberation leader who was transferring from the Art Institute; an incredibly shy young woman who is now a very well known editor; and a working, black pimp from the South Side who was a highly creative person. They were all in the same screenwriting class. So, the situation then was almost anti-homogenous. And I found that very exciting.

My friend, Don Pasquello, who teaches film down at SMU, came to visit once and sat in on one of my classes and said, "You don't know how lucky you are. In my screenwriting classes, everyone is white, middle-class, Christian, and they've lived their whole lives in Dallas." So, here you are with this pot of people and the advantage of that is that no one owns the territory. So, I enjoyed that a great deal. Those students and that kind of mix still exist at Columbia but over the years as we become more legitimate, as we become more accredited, as we become larger, as we become more famous, as we become more successful, we also now have a much larger percentage of traditional—which is to say middle-class, white college students—who are coming to college because if you grow up middle-class in the United States you go to college.

Also, I think that parents have stopped resisting their children when it comes to my own department. I think it used to be that kids would have to fight their parents to go to film school. Now we have Steven Spielberg and many visible—not many, but some—visible millionaires who went to film school. And so the way in which that looks to a parent is different now. So more middle-class parents who want their kids to have a successful life and be secure are willing to let their kid go to film school, whereas in 1970, no sane parent had a model that would say that that's something that a kid should do. So, and all of those things have contributed to a shift in the ratio of different groups in the College. And, so, that has homogenized the student body to some extent.

I still try to mine the territory which is about individuation, which is about individual speaking voice because—as far as I'm concerned—we can teach you the technical processes, getting to be a good filmmaker. But, the difference between a really good or successful filmmaker and somebody who's just working in the industry has to do with what you've got to say. So I think that having something to say comes from being a person, and the more of a person you are the better that is. So, I find that part of my work more difficult now than it was a long time ago, because the tendency is not individuate or how to fit in, and certain social forces which—I'm not blaming, I hope this doesn't sound like I'm bashing white, middle-class students at all—but social forces having to do with the need to find work and that kind of thing have caused students to be less willing, I think, to take risks and to differentiate

themselves from those around them. A fair number of the students that I had in the early 1970s and even into the '80s were career oriented but they were also high-risk takers. I like the fact that our students find careers, I think that's really good. And anyone who wants to have a career in film is automatically a pretty large risk-taker. But the willingness to address your own individual concerns was something that was—students brought more of that, I guess, themselves in the early period than they do now. So if I work now, to work harder at that area and to encourage students to do that. There's always somebody in your class who will do that and so that's a start.

When you came here were a lot of your students looking for careers in television, radio...

Not my students. No, those students would have Beginning TV or Radio, yeah.

There wasn't much crossover?

Well, there are, there is, of course. I mean, the screenwriting process, for example, is similar and so I had students like Linda Barons in Television, who took screenwriting courses from me. And there's a little bit of crossing-over but television is structured along corporate lines. The film industry is structured along entrepreneurial lines. And these are essentially different ways of looking at a person's career. So, when you work for television, even the people who are in the creative end of television are working in what everyone conceives of as a corporate structure. So, for example, producers create material and creative groups do writing, OK? And this is the way, this is the way corporations develop ideas.

In film, the idea is entrepreneurial, which is to say, an individual human being takes risks on something that he believes and comes to plant that in the economy in some way or another to make it sell. The mentalities are different. And the kind of person who is attracted to film is often—in fairly deep ways—a different kind of person than a person who is attracted to television. One of the things that I like best about Columbia is that the student, who of course may not know what kind of attractions he has or where his talents lie, it is very easy here to go from Radio to Film to Television. You won't get me in other departments but you will get, you can do that, you can answer those kinds of questions for yourself without having to change schools. The other thing I like about our program is that it's not a mass media program. That is to say, a lot of colleges and universities have fairly small programs in which they attempt to teach all of these disciplines in alternation or you get a little bit of radio, a little bit of TV, so on and so on, and so you never get far enough into any one of those areas to really get professional level skills. So this, to me, is just an ideal situation here where we have a whole department that teaches Film and Video, a whole department that teaches Radio, so the curriculum is neither watered-down, nor is it separated for the students in the sense that they can, you know, they can look around until they find the right fit.

Do you think this model has had an impact on education? Has this difference always existed, sort of not really changed?

Which part of Columbia are you thinking about when you ask about, are you talking specifically about our public arts component?

I'm thinking here about the ability to move around from one field to another and explore a little bit and then go deeply into one field. Well, it has not had as much impact on American education as I wish it had. And the reasons for that are economic. The mounting of a film program, of truly professional level training, is a tremendously expensive affair. Second semester students commonly use pieces of equipment which cost ten thousand dollars apiece and you need many of them, OK? And more, OK? So, most colleges and universities are unwilling to invest in that kind of capital and make that kind of capital investment. Or, if they are, they want to make it only in one area with which they then specialize in. The unusual thing about Columbia is that we understand that this is what we teach and we have a small administration. And so the line between you and the final decision to spend those is short. And I'm not sure that other colleges and universities are very equipped to do that even if they wanted to. Now, the other fine film schools in the country are mostly connected to very, very large systems. And so NYU, USC, UCLA are connected to huge systems and they are also fed by their proximity to the hot centers of the industry so that they, in film they have been able to capitalize the way we have and build programs. I don't frankly know very much about the television program or the radio program at any of those schools but I suspect that those schools, which have very, very fine film programs, have much less well developed radio or television programs than we do because those places are concentrating on the fact that they're right next door

to Hollywood. So, in some ways, I think that we're unique—well, unique may be a little bit exaggerated, but I think because of the way we're structured, there are few places where students can do professional level shopping in more than one area like this, you know.

What is it, is it simply the accident of the small administration, administrative budget that accounts for this, what accounts for this, the vision of Mike Alexandroff?

Well, first of all, I don't think it's any accident. I don't think the smallness of the administration is very deliberate. It's certainly a belief of Mike Alexandroff's, who was a highly imaginative and some would say visionary person, who is also a sensitive and shy man. And his natural way of behaving was to be extremely gregarious and fascinated with people, but he was also shy and not the sort of person who wanted to have large meetings where people pushed on him a great deal. So, keeping the administration strong is partly a function of what—keeping it small and not piling on a whole lot of middle people between the students and the President, so to speak. That's one reason it happened. I think the fact that we are a private, independent college and not part of the state system certainly helps along those lines. I remember being at Iowa in grad school and taking film courses there and I had an internship to build new editing things, equipment, movie editing equipment. And it took us two and a half years to get that equipment because requests for those amounts of money had to pass all the way to the Board of Regents in the State of Iowa. So here, they had to pass through your chairman, Bert, and the President. And these are people whose offices you can actually go

[to]. So part of it, part of it is that. Part of it is also we developed in this way because it was an area that wasn't already occupied. In the Midwest, the Art Institute was already teaching film, or fine arts as they call it, as one artistic tool among many for people who want to learn that as well as painting and various other things. Northwestern was already teaching film as film studies, as a scholarly pursuit, and criticism and scholarship. And they are one of the great universities in the world. Our program is very good in that area but our Film History program teaches that in the light of the fact that all the students are going to be filmmakers. So when the Film Department at Columbia was building, we were, if you wanted to study practical filmmaking in this part of the country, we were it. So, the, so there was not a need then to support, and likewise with radio and television, so there was not a need to spread out your efforts. In addition to the fact that nobody around here was interested in starting a school of mining. We didn't need to have that kind of spread, we could stick to our guns and do what we were doing. So, I think all those things had to do with the way things got through.

I asked you, I asked you on the phone, about the mission of the College in relation to American society. Let me ask you that here on tape.

That's a complex... The present form of Columbia, that's to say the form put together by Mike Alexandroff and those that followed him, is the only Columbia that I know. So the part of this that I can comment on is the modern day Columbia and its role in society. At the time that I came to Columbia, and for a few years before, the role was quite clear. And that was that

we were offering a deliberate alternative to other forms of college education. We were open admissions, we were professional but not a trade school, we were cultural but not divorced from the doing—practices. We intended to do exactly what I came here to accomplish in my own life, which is to pull together the cultural and the practical; the craft, the craft part and the culture part and not let them separate. And, the timing was great on that because American society... I think there were a certain number of people in American society who were tired of the separation between culture and world. And there were a number of artists who were tired of the distinction between what used to be called High Art and the Low Art, OK? In my own area, the critics who swept movies into cinema were a part of that movement. And Columbia's timing was great in that regard because what we proposed to do was fit movements in the culture that were very powerful. I think that we still do fit movements in the culture. They have, now, more to do with the seeming universe of desire, in my area at least, of everybody under thirty seems to want to be a film director. So, perhaps we're now living with the results of our success, you know. The cultural forces that created the desire to have self-expression and a career are still at work. They work in a slightly different way now, I think. They have to do with recognition. They have to do with the fact that some people have exposure and access to enormous numbers of people, say Oprah Winfrey or Steven Spielberg, or somebody like that is at the top of that heap and that, that is a form of success which is another way of attaching to the public media.

So, I think that in areas like mine and in like Television and like Radio and some of the other areas—Dance even—the impulse has switched from being an impulse of reintegrate your craft and art skills towards the other aspect of the mass media, which is access to very large numbers of people and the kind of individuation that comes when you are a person who can do that successfully, you know. I don't disparage that on the part of students. And, in fact, movies are so expensive to make—even student movies—are so expensive to make that it seems to me if you have absolutely no interest in reaching a mass audience then you have to ask yourself why you're making a movie. So now we get people like Ted Witcher, we get people like George Tillman, black filmmakers who are searching, culturally, for a voice for their generation and who are interested in coming to study with us because they are hoping that this will allow them to become spokespersons for a large and, you know, hitherto undiscovered audience. And for people, in their cases middle-class black people, to see themselves on the screen in ways that they haven't been able to see themselves before. So, our most exciting students now, to me, are people like that: gay and lesbian students who are interested in getting the visibility for groups of people who have not yet seen themselves on screen as much as they'd like to; Latino students who are interested in developing that; women—in general—who are interested in women as an audience. So that, that's a different take on the same medium, it's, you know, and a good one. I applaud the way in which Columbia students are looking at the mass part of cinema, you know, trying to deal with that.

You mention about five or six things when you mention the mission of the College. Do you think any of that has affected higher education?

I believe we were one of the first colleges to say so clearly: Getting a job and having a career should be and can be an outcome of going to college. And that, and that is certainly truer now of American colleges than it was in the 1970s. Now, whether they were copying us, I don't know. I do know that in some small ways American education did copy us because, for example, when we were being accredited the first and second times, it was clear to me that some of the people from North Central Association were coming to look at us not so much to see whether or not we fit the mold, but to figure out how we could be so successful and growing so much in an environment in which other small private colleges were dying. And they were hoping to get us close enough to look at. And they must surely have seen that one of the reasons that was happening is because we were saying, "If you study with us, if you do it successfully, you can get a job." So perhaps there was a direction through organizations like that. In any case, we were ahead of the curve. That trend in American education is something that we were trying to do before other people were trying to do it.

What about open enrollment, has the meaning of that changed?

Not to me. I think we all interpret open enrollment in our own way. I have always thought that open admissions carried with it, then, the obligation to be very honest and very clear about what the demands were on the other side. I think that, at best, the open admissions program at Columbia says two things. It says: We are going to

admit people without restraint—or up to the limit of our physical capabilities—to have college degrees but we are also going to teach you, say, filmmaking in my area, at a level which is truly pre-professional and the standards to which we are going to be holding you are no less than the ones held by the industry. It will take you several years to get to that level but even in Tech I, even in a Beginning Screenwriting class, we teach truly professional standards. We're teaching very, very rudimentary things there, very basic things, but those basic things are being taught to a very high standard. And if you know about the film industry, you know the technical standards of performance are excruciatingly high today. So these two things, to me, are the double-sidedness of open admissions. Whether other people in the College in other areas have access to tools which are as excruciatingly difficult that they can hold up as a standard is another matter. And I'm not absolutely sure how that works in all parts of the College, but that's the way it works in my area. So, so as long as that's happened, that's good. I do believe that if we, I do believe that if we get ourselves in the position where we admit people and we don't hold them to very high standard of performance and, I should add, provide ways for those people who need help getting to that point to get that, to be able to get to that level, then I think we're doing something, which is a lot. So, so there's my sort of basic take on open admissions. And then if you apply that to American society in general, I believe that we're a microcosm of both the successes and the problems of—for example—multiculturalism, of democracy and so on in the whole society.

My feeling is that access to the processes should be extremely open and that insistence on those skills should be the immediate second step to access. So, you know, I see open admissions at Columbia as a microcosm of that and I think we don't do a perfect job of following up on our open admission, but the society doesn't either, you know. I'm very much for affirmative action, for example, and I think that affirmative action should be followed by, I think once you have access you need to have excellence, so...

Do you think there's change in the way Columbia handles the its obligations here?

Sure, of course there is. And the easiest way to look at that is just to look at the sheer numbers. You can't administer, you can't even begin addressing your obligations to the number of students, to eight thousand students in the same way that you address your obligations to one thousand students. Our Film Department is the largest film program—practical filmmaking program—in the world. It is now larger than the entire College was when I started. Those acts alone mean that you address these students and your obligations. I think that another big change that's happened is that we have finally begun thinking to address the sink or swim notion. Columbia has always tried to say, "We admit you democratically and freely and we hold you to high standards, but one of the results of that is that some students didn't make it." In fact, a lot of the students don't graduate from Columbia. Those figures aren't as bad as they look because a lot of students don't intend to graduate from Columbia but still, a lot of people did sink. And I think that one of the finest things that Bert Gall and Caroline

Latta have done, trying to address that, is to say, “OK, what is the College’s obligation to deal with the students who will otherwise sink?” We can’t just keep doing the thing of opening the door, throw people in the pool, and see who swims and who drowns, OK? We’ve got to do something about giving people the skills that will help them survive college. And so I think that there’s been a shift in the way the College does its business, having to do with more insistence on doing your prerequisites first, more insistence on making sure that those prerequisites really are stringent. Because I think the people in Liberal Education and Math and Science, and those areas whose job it is to teach those skills, are more concerned with the importance of that and providing assistance that will deliver that. And I think that’s a good change.

Can you explain a little bit, in 1971, how from the point of view of a not very strong student who had trouble reading or writing or something, what’s the difference in that student’s experience of either the humanities courses or courses that you teach?

Well, when I started teaching we didn’t have a lot of humanities courses. And a student who had poor reading or writing skills was in a real bad position because I didn’t have time to stop. When I was in graduate school I did teach basic English skills as part of my assistantship in grad school, teaching Freshman English. I can teach Freshman English but I can’t teach Freshman English and Screenwriting in the same class. So, the, one of the students I was mentioning earlier actually was not able to succeed with us because he lacked those basic skills—which

puts the teacher in a terrible position of either stopping teaching what he’s trying to teach and teaching the other thing or letting the student sink. So, we could point people to other areas, but at the time I started teaching, our English program—our Creative Writing program has always been terrific and strong—but our English program was not as strong, not, you know, we were not teaching that part of the usage of language. In fact, if I remember correctly, and I’m not sure about this, I think we also didn’t even have a Writing Center where you could go and get tutorial help. We had some people who were very interested in teaching our students about the culture, people like Louis Silverstein, people like that were always teaching in what then was called Life Arts program and is now Liberal Education. But we didn’t have those... students inside the program, inside the College to help them deal with those kinds of... Then we got the Writing Program and then Mary Dougherty and I and Eileen Cherry started a program called Artists in Apprenticeship which didn’t last a very, very long time but it was a very successful program at teaching people college skills, college study skills. Because that’s another reason that students fail. It isn’t even just literacy, sometimes it’s just, like, not knowing how to study a textbook and stuff like that. So, I don’t think that we have completely succeeded in saving all of the students that we’d like, but I think that we’ve gone a lot further. The Freshman Experience program—the program that’s voluntary, admittedly—but, you know, that allows freshman students to go

through and experience taught by people from various different departments, and that is the equivalent now to the Artist in Apprenticeship program in that it teaches students how to structure thinking. And that’s, all of those things have been a really big help for me because it gets me out of the bind, it makes me feel freer to teach... If I’m teaching a French New Wave class or a New German Cinema class, I need to be able to say to my students, “Now give me, for your final exam here, a fifteen page research paper properly footnoted and in good English which explores some specific topic here.” If I’m gonna teach the subject matter of the course then the amount of time that I have to teach how to write a college paper is pretty limited. So, and I think that’s still a problem, but I think they’re doing better.

This is a school with a lot of working professionals teaching. What about that, has it changed? I think we still have a lot of work in professional teaching. I think some of us have become more teaching than professional in the sense that it’s relatively difficult to have a full-fledged career as a filmmaker if you’re also administering a program with, you know, twelve other teachers and so on. And so over the years there’s a tendency to, for your teaching to engulf other areas, but the new people coming in really are, at least in my area, people who do what they teach. And, but I don’t see a lot of change in that. I suppose one change that’s occurred is that now that we have a graduate program, some of our beginning level classes are taught by pre-professional people. They are taught by, like most programs, graduate programs, our top-level, our thesis level graduate students

teach Tech I and Tech II. So about a third, I think, of those classes are taught by graduate students, a third by industry professionals, and a third by full-time faculty. It certainly is that way in Screenwriting. So that's new because we didn't used to have that pool of graduate students, I mean, I say new, eighteen years old, however long we've had the Graduate Program. But the whole business of the working professional seems to be pretty much where it was at. One of the things, one of the things about that is that not all working professionals can teach well. And several years ago, the Film Department admitted to itself that some of us were going to have to spend some time teaching the teachers how to teach. And we now have a program where if you want to teach in our Tech I program or in our Screenwriting program or in our Aesthetics program, you have to take a course where you learn not only the curriculum, you learn the techniques, or some of the techniques, to get that across. Now, we weren't doing that for a long time because it's another layer of work for us, but finally it became obvious that if you were going to manage so many classes and make them all come out even for the next level, someone had to do that, for example, in the large areas, in the Tech II and Tech I area and the Screenwriting area and the History and Aesthetics area. So we're dealing with large numbers of classes and large numbers of students. We have a formal training program for people coming in because otherwise, we won't get the kind of standardization that we need. And that's helpful but, you know, there's an outside group of professionals and

that is, some working professionals can teach school and some can't. One of the weirdest experiences that I ever had when I was in school was to be a student of Kurt Vonnegut's. He is a wonderful person, an excellent novelist, and a totally delightful guy to be with, he really cared about the students, and he can't teach worth a damn. So what good does it do to sit in a class with a fabulous, famous, you know, working professional? Kurt, he's not able to teach you anything. And I believe that he would be the first to say this, he didn't teach very well. I would say the same for Nelson Algren. He was a teacher of mine and, you know, that person is a world class novelist. But, so, you know, they are different activities: teaching and practicing. Right now, in the Film Department, I will have to deal with that.

Has your personal vision of education changed over the years?

You asked that the other day and when I started thinking about that I was really surprised how little it had changed. I hope that my techniques are better, I hope that my ability to get across a broader range of thought is better, but my personal vision of higher education hasn't changed very much, you know?

This is what you want to do?

Well, yes, it is, but I guess my vision of higher education—I've always had a sort of idealized notion of what that would be for the perfect person. I don't have children of my own but you can think about that in terms of, you know: If I had a child, how would I ideally want that child to be educated and what would I choose for a child of mine? And the answer that I would give you, would have

given you in 1970—I'm actually a little bit surprised that the answer would be so much the same.

The Columbia experience hasn't shaken you up or...

No, in terms of my vision of higher education, no. Maybe to overgeneralize a little bit, I'm a person who has always believed that the ends want each other, institutions and fields and modes of thought and so on were the most useful places, and that the middle were useful. So when it comes to higher education, I think I was extremely lucky to be a scholarship boy who went off to Columbia University and got a degree in 18th Century British Literature in a school where they didn't even teach 20th century because who knows whether it's any good? And this is not quite British but close, and the whole idea that you were going to school to get an education meant that you were going to learn about the culture in order to be able to join. Not that you were going to get a job, it had nothing to do with that. That's one end of American education.

The other end is the craft-oriented kind of thing that I do now, where I'm teaching students employable skills and so on and so on. If I had a child I'd make sure that my child had both of those, and the middle doesn't seem to make sense. So I think I was very, very lucky with my own education, I'm glad that it came in the order it did. If I have one complaint about Columbia it is, I think that many of our students would profit if they'd first study the culture in general—the great books of the entire world, the ways in which other cultures operate—and became citizens of the world or joined the adult society

through this learning first and then became professional filmmakers. My one bad feeling about this program is that we do agree—and I do this all the time—we do agree to take people who are eighteen or nineteen years old and teach them to be professional filmmakers, and I do wonder when they're going to read their [Euclid] and where they're going to get their Homer, because those things are tremendously important. And when are they ever going to learn about culture, you know, and when are they ever going to—the huge university that I went to actually let me take a Near and Far Eastern art course where I studied, you know, the art of the Indian; not for very long, but at least I know a few things about the way Indian art is structured. So, I'm afraid that by teaching such young people a specific professional level, that they may never curve back to the general again. And that is a problem for me. But my vision of education when I started here was that this was, in a way, a completion of the other end of education. But actually—in terms of what I've experienced—but actually that happened when I went to grad school. I went from a very, very general cultural education—as an undergraduate—to a grad school of trained fiction writers. I did Writer's Workshop and I was very focused in that way. But I thought that then, and that's what I think now, you know?

I think we're about out of time here. I'd like to ask you about events, important events that happened. Let me just ask you, if you could just name them while we have the tape running. Important events in the life of Columbia?

Yeah.

Surely the accreditation, certainly the Hayden Woods retreat where Lya Rosenblum and various others of us tried to structure some form of College governance that, we recognized the need for that...