Irv Meyer

OK, this is February the 12th, 1999, and this is an interview with Irvin Meyer, and he is Building Engineer at Columbia College Chicago.

So, if you could start off by telling us when did you come to Columbia and what the circumstances were.

OK, I started working for Columbia in 1975. The circumstances were, I was a plumber previously, and I did work for Columbia, working for the contractor, a plumbing contractor, and then I quit working for the contractor and just worked exclusively for Columbia. And I... when I first started, I was more or less a helper of another guy there, Jake Caref. So Jake and I were partners, and we did all kinds of stuff for Columbia. We'd build walls, and do plumbing, and just—whatever needed to be done around—the building over at 540 Ohio Street was where I was first started. That was even before they bought 600 Michigan.

OK. And who did you—like, who was your contact at Columbia, and who hired you?

My contact was Jake Caref, because I had worked with him when I was doing plumbing. But who hired me, I think it was Bert's decision, you know. So I went up and asked Bert for a job, or—actually, I talked to Bert's brother Gerry Gall first, and he says, "Yeah, go ahead, ask Bert, you know, he'll"—because he needed more people to work around the place.

And what was Gerry Gall's position?

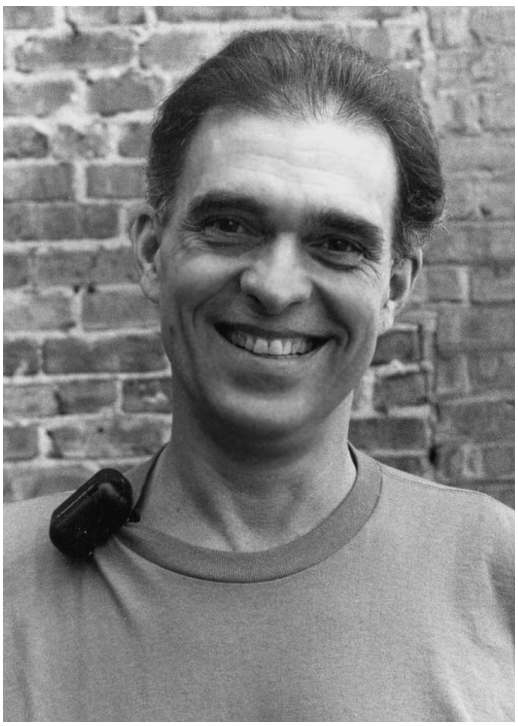
He was almost like where Gordon is now, in charge of printing... whatever, the Print Shop manager, kinda graphics designer kinda thing. Yeah.

And what was the transition like from moving? And maybe you could speak to how that's evolved, from going from the one building, then moving over here and all the various buildings we have, even on this one block.

Yeah. I remember when we first bought 600 building, there was a broken washroom in the back of the first floor, and I didn't even know we were gonna buy the building, and all of a sudden, it was "Irv, we have a broken washroom on the back of the first floor here that needs to be repaired. Let's go over there and fix it up." So it started out as, like, a job, you know. The first time I was here at the 600 building, I was, you know, I had a project to work on. And then it just kept going from there, it was more projects, until eventually—well, when we first moved in, we had a lot of tenants, and all the floors were already full of people that were, like, renting out. We only had a certain amount of floors where Columbia had their offices and classrooms and stuff. So a lot of our projects were taking care of tenants' needs and stuff too, you know. And then as we'd remodel, we did a lot of—we did some of the remodeling, but we did, like, demolition ahead of—the contractor would rebuild the floor, but we would demolish it first, you know. And we did some of the easier projects, you know. Building a little suite of classrooms and, you know, things that a couple guys could handle. And they would contract out, like, bigger projects, you know. The fire alarm system and, you know, big stuff that we needed, core and shell type projects. So, yeah, it was all interesting stuff.

A lot of people, other people that I've interviewed, have talked about, you know, how tight money always has been for Columbia. How did that impact, you know, your job or how things were done? You've already mentioned that sometimes if the job could be done by you and a couple other people, you did it, but could you speak to that further?

Yeah, money was tight, but Columbia—it seemed like they always did whatever they needed to do to get a building in, you know, good shape. And they never were cheap about buying tools for us guys to work with, or any of that kind of... you know, they always maintained... I mean, some of the places, they would install, like, a used air conditioner unit from some other place or something like that, you know. But in general, they didn't mind spending money if they needed to really upgrade



something. So they tried to get the best value for whatever money they did spend, I guess.

And how has your job changed? When you first came, and you said you started as an assistant, you know, what would be the main portion of your day or the responsibilities? And then, how has that evolved over the almost 25 years that you've been here?
Well, I've learned a lot since I started working here. When I first got here, I was a plumber and electrician, and I worked with Jake and I picked up a lot of carpenter skills and just... building, you know, cabinets and building even, like, walls and so... And then as I've worked more here, I was an electrician before I worked at Columbia, but it was more or less new construction and doing, like, apartments and that kinda stuff. So when I got here, these are, like, buildings that have big power needs. Some of the places, like down in the basements, there's, like, 1200 amp services coming in. I've learned to deal with, like, higher power, you know, lines and stuff, you know. And then air conditioning, I learned a lot of air conditioning. I'm now a member of Refrigeration Service Engineers, which I can—I have a permit to buy freon, and I can work on air conditioning problems around Columbia here. So then I maintain, you know, the cooling towers up on the roof, and, yeah, I do a lot more stuff now than I first did when I started over on Ohio Street. Over there, it was a lot of carpenter work with Jake, and we'd build... you know, in the art department, they have those little easel holders that people sit on, and then it holds the painting? You know, we'd build all those, you know, and it was a lot of—it was good, you know, to learn a lot of the skills, carpenter skills. But I don't do too much of that anymore, and I do more electric and plumbing projects now. Air conditioning.

From—and yours is a different point of view, but we certainly want to try to understand or hear from your observation, how you see Columbia, and what do you see as, you know, like, Columbia's purpose and goals as an institution of education? I mean, do you have any observations or thoughts on that, for being here 25 years?
Yeah. When I first started at Columbia, it was much smaller. And I knew just about everybody that worked for Columbia, you know, on a first-name basis. You could—well, you saw them all the time. Our phone list had about maybe a dozen people on it, you know, and now the phone directory is huge. I don't know hardly anybody on there anymore, you know. So it was a lot more of a... and then being that it was so small of a school, I mean, I knew Alexandroff and his wife pretty well, you know, and I knew the people that were in charge of finances, and, you know, I used to take the President of Columbia, Alexandroff, to the store, and we'd buy plants for his office, or fish, and you know, we'd just be, you know—fairly good friends.

What was he like?
Oh, he was a wonderful guy.

I mean, not that he's still here, but he's retired
Yeah. I was fairly close to Alexandroff. I still, like, see him occasionally. He was—it was like a ma and pa school at the time. He was the fund-raiser and he dealt with the bigger issues in the school, and I dealt with—and then Bert dealt with, like, the daily grind kind of issues about what to do with all these different economically and building service kind of big-picture items, and then it would, like, trickle down to where they needed something precisely this or that done, then I would try to do, like, each little project then. So they managed the bigger things. Alexandroff was into fund-raising a lot, and going to the legislature in Springfield or even Washington, D.C., and you know, he spoke to those kind of issues. Bert would get involved with College issues about curriculum or the purchasing of a building and that kind of stuff, and I would deal with fuses being out and, you know, leaks and that kinda junk, you know. Let's see, back to what the place was like then... it was kinda like you were working for a cause almost. It was right after the '60s, I mean, there was still a '60s kind of atmosphere where, you know... Our print shop in the basement at 540—now, this probably isn't real well-known, but we printed, like, protest literature and passed it around to different—you know, protestors and stuff was like a fairly common kind of thing back in those days.

Would this be like anti-war protests?
Anti-Vietnam War protests, yeah.

So you and who—I mean, who would be a part of that?
The guy that was in charge of the Print Shop's name was Dave, and I think Bert's brother Gerry—you know, I don't want to name a lot of names that were—

No, no—yeah.
And Bert, I'm sure, knew about it, you know, and that kinda stuff.

And it wasn't Columbia College sponsored
Officially, no, but still, you know,

it was our Print Shop, and it was a little bit oriented toward—you know, you were doing some good for this world. If you worked at Columbia, you were, like, for the cause, kinda thing. And if something needed to be done, like you had a performance at the Dance Center and you didn't have the bleachers built, you'd stay late and work for days and days until things were... And then sometimes if you weren't real busy, you could mess around a little bit, and you didn't have to, you know, do too much. So that was kinda like working for a cause, kinda thing. And nowadays, it's kinda like you're working for a company a little bit, you know. It's... But that's OK, I mean, it's just the size of the place that makes the difference.

Maybe you could speak a little more to those early days, and describing, you know, the various—because it sounds like, although you were really part of the physical plant, and the engineering or more technical side, but it sounds like you felt very integrated into this larger community.

Yeah. Well, because there was so many... well, colorful people that worked at Columbia, you couldn't help but—you know, you're working with them, you're seeing them all the time, and I could name a bunch of people that were just, like, wild and crazy people, you know. It was...

Please do, I mean—

Because they were in the art community, and then a lot of them were, like, other issues, there was gay and lesbian people that were there at Columbia, and that was, like, cutting-edge kinda things back then too, you know. And I think you grew as a person just by being around and knowing all these colorful people, you know. It was great. And it expands your horizon, and, you know, you feel good about working for a place that you think you're doing some good in the world, at least I'm not working for a factory that's building atomic weapons or something like that, you know what I mean? We're educating students in the arts and communications, and... Some of the people that I worked with, at least early on—Barry Burlison used to come to school on his Harley-Davidson, and he had all kinds of schemes going on how to get rich quick, and it was just interesting. And then a guy that—

Wait—what did he—was he a faculty member?

He was a teacher in the Art Department. And he was real, you know, he had adventures all the time. He was, you know, the Harley-Davidson kind of a guy. And then a guy that was in the same office as him, Jim Gail, was like a photographer in Hollywood, and then he taught photography at Columbia College. And I remember always, I used to laugh... Jim Gail had this thing about keys. He would have two big key rings hanging on his belt, and he'd leave his—they'd get—so he'd leave his keys at lunchtime, on the table, and Barry would slip a couple old keys on his keyring all the time, and the things kept getting bigger and bigger, and Jim Gail would never throw them out, because he thought he would need them for something. He didn't know what they were for, so he ended up walking around with two huge keyrings, and everybody would hear him coming, because he'd be walking around with this—and there was just funny stuff like that that was going on all the time. It was—and, you know, there's more, there's plenty—you know, I can't remember all the little things, but it was just kind of a fun place to work, you know.

You said that the experience here broadened your horizons. Maybe if you could spend a little time talking about, in general, the type of person you were before coming to Columbia, and how it influenced you.

Well, before I worked at Columbia, I was working for a plumbing contractor, and before that, let's see, I was an electrician, I worked for an electrical contractor. And before that I went to Loyola, I majored in chemistry in college. And then when I was in Loyola, that was when they had the Kent State thing happening, you know, so I was a protestor, and we, like, shut down the schools and did all that kind of stuff, you know. Did our marches and burned my draft card and all that kinda stuff.

Really?

Yeah.

At Loyola!

I know. I was a hippie. I had an earring, and I had a big beard and a ponytail, and I was kinda like, you know, at that time, that was more normal than not, you know, to be somewhat... that kind of generation thing, you know. And so I had views that were a little bit—not conservative or whatever, you know. So I was kinda oriented towards working for a place like Columbia. I liked—I thought I fit right in, being here. But I just hadn't personally experienced a lot of the things that were going on at Columbia, until I got here and hung around with the people that were doing all this crazy stuff, you know. So it was kinda cool, I really liked it.

What were the—because you couldn't have been all that much older than a lot of the students. Particularly then, they had a lot of adults and—
Right.

So maybe describe what the students were like then.
Ohh, there are stories about students that I probably can't even tell you on tape.

Just don't use names.
OK.

We don't have a lot of this information, I mean, even anecdotal, to kind of illustrate the point. A lot of people haven't spoken to it. So, you know, a couple of examples would be great.
Yeah. The stairwells and the bathrooms would smell like pot all the time, and when you'd come in in the morning, you know, there was even people having sex in the washrooms and stuff. It was pretty, uh, loose. At least over on Ohio Street, that campus. There was—yeah. It was that kind of an atmosphere, you know, of crazy... not crazy, but, you know, like, free love and kids were doing all kinds of—but there was tremendous talent with a lot of these kids, and they had all this anti-establishment, like, viewpoints, and there were so many outlets in the art that they could say what they wanted to say through the different forms of art, you know. It was just amazing. I don't know. The students—I mean, there are so many funny things that happened, I don't even know where to start.

Did your work get tied into that? Like, were there ever special requests from the Theater Department, or did the students ever request special accommodation that would have affected you in your job?
Yeah. We did a lot of—like, for classes, we'd hook up electric for a vacuum floor machine for the Art Department, or, you know, that was, like—oh, you mean as far as—

Well, like you said, up at the dance studio, they might need extra bleachers or something for a performance. I mean, were you doing things that were, maybe, non-traditional or wouldn't be done necessarily at another institution, but at Columbia—
Yeah. Well see, I'm not in a union, so I could almost do anything I wanted to do, you know, as far as—they didn't have to call in a union electrician and a union plumber and a carpenter and all these other union tradesmen. I could do just about anything, so if they needed something to happen, I was like the jack of all trades kind of a guy that—

What was the most unusual project that you had to work on, or thing that you were asked to do?
Officially asked to do, or asked by other people just to help them out to do stuff? I mean—

Both.
I helped this guy Jake build a coffin for one of his friends.

Really?
Yeah. And, you know, he was into the Chinese-American Friendship Committee, so Jake was, like, the second flight over to China after Nixon. Yeah, he was kind of involved in that, and one of his Chinese friends died and didn't leave much money or anything like that, so we built him a coffin. And then, I don't know, there was numerous, like, special little projects that we did for—a show would go up at the library, and we had to make the, like, the little booth that we would have our Columbia College presentation in, or... in the main lobby at 600 building, that big mural that has all the people, like, in—actually, it's a shadow that they just outlined people on.

Right.
Jake and I built that, and we built it, and then we took it to the artist's studio, and built it again there, so that they could paint it all, then took it apart and built it in the lobby over there so that the people could, you know, view it and stuff. So there was just all kinds of funny projects that we—and that was nice that, you know, I wouldn't walk to work in a factory where you turn the same screw every day, all day long. That would be—not my ideal working conditions. So here I can do different things all the time. I do a lot of the same kind of things, but everything is different, and, you know, it's more fun this way, you know. It's a variety of stuff.

Now, you were at Loyola, and you said, you know, that it was—Kent State was '70, is that right?
Yeah, right.

So that was an unusual time, compared to now, at least, to be in college. But, at the same time, Loyola, I would imagine, was a very different place than Columbia.
Right.

And so from that perspective, how do you view, like, the education at Columbia? Did you—
I like Columbia better. If I had a chance, I would—you know, I'm still taking classes at Columbia.

That was my next question.
Because they're free for people that

work here. So last semester I took a ceramics class. I don't really need it for my career or whatever, to use it to make money off of learning something, but I just take classes for fun. So, you know, I feel like a kid in a candy store when I go through the schedule and see which class I'm gonna take this semester.

So you have a lot of contact with—you've had a lot of continuous contact with the students over the years.

Yeah. I like that, though. Because, you know, being in Building Services, I end up fixing a lot of the things that the students break, or the students need this or they need that, it gets to be kind of annoying sometimes. But if you get in a classroom situation, and you see how talented these students are, and they really are the purpose that we're around, is because of the students, so it gives you a little bit better perspective on—you know, I'm here because of the students, you know, kind of.

And how have they changed, for better or for worse, over the years?

They're the same.

OK.

Yeah. The names and the faces and the styles have changed, and all that kinda stuff, but there's still wonderful people that come to Columbia, you know. I just—the students here, from what I can see in the classes that I take, when you're sitting next to them in a classroom, oh, just tremendous talent and—not all of them, some of them are probably, you know, jerks or whatever. But, you know, you can really—I just like it, you know, I just appreciate talented people. And there's a lot of talent at Columbia. And there's a lot of opportunity, like I said before, for people that have something to say, to get into whatever field or whatever where they can express themselves. Through art, or through television, or, you know, journalism, or something, you know. You don't have to be a graffiti artist or mark up the washrooms, you can go to an art class and put it on canvas, you know.

So are Columbia students pretty respectful of the physical—

No. They tear the place up pretty good. I would know, because I end up fixing up after them a lot, you know. But that's probably normal, you know, for their age group or whatever. The classes that I take are usually at night, so I get a little bit different level of students, too. The night classes are adult educated, you know, some of them. But they, you know, they wreck the place too. That's kinda not too good, but what can you do?

So has that been kind of steady?

The same, yeah.

I just wonder if they're any different than other schools, or—

I know. We did the 33 East Congress, just remodeled a couple floors there for the English Department or whatever, and I took a computer class, like, a couple weeks after the floor opened. And I walked into the washroom there, and there was just—from the floor to the ceiling, just spray paint and graffiti all over these brand-new walls. And it was just—oh, man. These kids don't understand that that's gonna cost them to get it fixed, and... what's the point? I mean, if they're that angry about something that they have to be vandals, you know, destroy things, they should channel that into a class somewhere where they can say what they want and get some credit out of it or something, you know. I don't know. I don't understand that part of it. But I guess it's always gonna be there, so...

Well, has your personal vision of education, or from your own experience, your own college experience, and then continuing your education throughout your years at Columbia, has that changed at all? Has that evolved?

Yeah. When I went to Loyola, like I said, I majored in chemistry. And I thought I was gonna be some kind of a chemist or, you know, work for corporate America, kinda. And then I ended up getting into the building trades, and started working at Columbia, and I took classes here that—you know, I took some technical classes, computer literacy classes and television classes, where you'd use television editing machines and that kinda stuff. But I did it for fun, not for, like, career enhancement, kinda. So now my perspective on taking a class or being educated is just something that I feel like I would enjoy doing, you know. And I didn't really enjoy—well, I had fun at chemistry, too. You know, it depends on what your professor was like, or something.

Isn't that the truth. Do you think the students are facing different challenges in the 1990s than they were in the '70s?

Yeah.

And what would some of those differences be?

I'm glad I grew up when I did, because I think it's harder on kids nowadays. I have older kids, I have four children, and my two oldest ones are in college. And I wouldn't wanna be growing up nowadays

compared to when I grew up. Some of the reasons are, like, nowadays there's AIDS and there's all kinds of—well, you hear about, you know, more sexually deviant things going on, and I don't know, maybe there was things in my day that we just didn't know about, but I think things are harder on kids nowadays. A lot of times we would get a second chance, and nowadays, sometimes you don't get that second chance. You just... have to be more careful, I think, nowadays. And being a person that grew up in the '60s and early '70s and—

You were talking about how different it is for students today, and that you think it's harder.
Yeah.

It's more dangerous, in a lot of ways?
Right. And I think nowadays, people need a college education to get fairly decent jobs. And I had, like, a couple years of college, and I still got into a pretty good—the building trades pay pretty well, and I have a pretty decent job here at Columbia, where I—if I was coming into the job market nowadays, you probably almost need a college, at least a college Bachelor education to get an equivalent position where I'm at now, you know. To run big buildings, with all kinds of heating and air conditioning equipment, and... So, yeah, I think... I don't know, it's harder nowadays.

It's just interesting because the two periods that you're comparing, you know, a lot of times we look back and think that it must have been pretty difficult to be a youth in the '60s and well into the '70s, because of how tumultuous the time was, and the fractions, you know, serious political and social. But, you know, you witnessed and experienced both, and you think it's tougher today?
Tougher today, yeah. 'Cause when you live, when you were young, and you didn't have too much to lose, back in those days, there was an air of freedom about. You were - at least you thought you were - close to political revolution, and all kinds of lifestyle changes, and you were against authority, kind of, and there was a lot more of that going on. And that was easy, to be against all these things, and you thought you knew it all and—you know, that was pretty easy. And you were - at least I was - associated with a bunch of people that were like-minded, that we, you know, could change the world, kinda, if we only did this and that. And nowadays, it's, you know, people are looking for a way that they can focus on how to live their life, and how to, maybe, do good things for their, I don't know, for their families and their, you know, themselves. So, I don't know, it's getting kinda... it's harder today, I think, to be involved in doing something that you really feel that you're doing good for the whole world, you know. I don't know.

Well, you said that when you came to Columbia you were comfortable here, because of your political and social tendencies prior to it.
Right.

And that working here, you felt like you were working for a cause. And there were other students that, obviously, and faculty, I mean, many people at Columbia obviously felt the same way. What if Columbia hadn't existed? You know? Were there other—
Yeah. I'd probably still be a plumber somewhere, or working in construction trades, 'cause that's kinda what I oriented towards, and I think I'm fairly good at it, you know. I think I'm better at working with plumbing and electric than I am with working with people. I have more job satisfaction—like, turn the water on and it doesn't leak, and everything is—the hot and cold is on the right sides and, you know. Sometimes when I work with people, it's hard to get that feeling of job satisfaction. At the end of the day, you don't know if you did any good or not.

And I was also thinking, though, was there any place like this, elsewhere, that you knew of as a young person? Do you know what I'm saying? And for the students here at the time, too, that found Columbia and felt comfortable here.
No, I can't think of any other places. Columbia was like a little island. I'm sure there were, but I just didn't know about them. Loyola certainly wasn't. That was real—my chemistry professor was doing government research. He was one of the inventors of Teflon, you know, so he was—but he was the establishment. And Loyola was kind of an establishment place. And so I couldn't—you know, we closed down Loyola, went on strike, and the semester ended, and we all just got a passing grade. It wasn't a A or B or whatever, we just passed.

I did not know that happened at Loyola. That's where I eventually got my degree from.
Yeah. It was 1970. And then we marched from Loyola to Northwestern, and the Dyche Stadium, we had the big rally there, and closed down Northwestern, and everybody talked about what was going on

with the National Guard and all this other kinda—serious things were happening, you know. We were all trying to a little bit good for the world. 'Cause my draft number, I was in the lottery for the draft to go to Vietnam, and my number was 134, and they—I know for a fact the guy that had a number 130 did get drafted and ended up going to Vietnam, and he came back and... he was not the same guy, you know. He had a lot of baggage from killing women and, you know... whenever we would get drunk or something together, he had all these terrible stories that were... you just didn't want to be in a position to have that happen in your life, you know.

And so when you came here, as well, it must have been—refreshing's not the right word, but to see an administration that, from my understanding, was fairly supportive of student activism.
Yeah. Yeah. It was real good, and I appreciated it. That I was working for a place like Columbia. So then you—because you have these extra... you really like the place where you work, then you don't mind doing the extra whatever things to do a good job for Columbia then, you know.

And are you able to feel that way as well today even though, like you said, it's not mom and pop any longer, and it's really big? Do you still have that feeling of-
Well, yeah, to a certain extent, like, once you get—it's inertia. Once you're that way, you just kinda—it's hard to change. Although my wife is a nurse, and she worked for a lot of years from three 'till midnight. So I had to get home and get the kids from the babysitter—I get off of work at 4:00, so for like an hour and a half, the kids were at the babysitter and I couldn't stay too late because I had other—I had my family responsibilities, too, to look for. So I would try to get as much done each day as I could, but I couldn't, like, stay late and, you know, do that kinda stuff.

Was the school accommodating of circumstances like that as well?
Oh yeah.

They were sympathetic?
Always.

So were they kind of ahead of the game? Because those are issues that are really being dealt with today with a lot of companies and businesses that families are torn or trying to juggle schedules. Did you find that they respected that, or—
Well, I don't know if it was the official policies of the school or anything, but if I ever needed something, you know, I could just talk to whoever I was working with, and, you know, there really wasn't a problem. I felt like I was... like an insider a little bit, or, you know, I had... although I never get sick, I never take my sick days and that kinda stuff, so I probably... It's nice when you work at a place where you feel even with where you work. That you don't owe them, and they don't owe you, and it doesn't create problems. Like, you know, people that think that they're not getting paid enough, and that say, "Columbia owes me because I'm, you know"—then you get into problems like people stealing stuff and all kinds of that type of feelings, you know. But if you feel even, or maybe that you owe them a little bit, then you don't have to worry about that kinda stuff.

And has that been able to stay fairly consistent? I mean, have you felt that—
Yeah. Yeah. I feel like they're paying me, you know, for what I do here, they pay me well, and I'm making a living and—yeah, I feel even. I don't think they owe me or I don't owe them. It's nice that way.

Yeah. What have been—what are some of the events, or, perhaps, challenges that the College has faced in the last 25 years that you've been here? Whether it be specific to your work or even more general to the College itself. But what events stick out, maybe, for whatever reason, and then if you could talk to, you know, challenges, hard times and things that the College has really had to-
Yeah. Well, when I first started at Columbia, money was a big issue. We were trying to build up, like, our Film Department and TV Department facilities, and we did almost everything in-house, we didn't hire out too much. So Jake and I would make wooden sinks for the darkrooms, you know, out of plywood, and we'd go to the plumbing place and, you know, get the drainpipes and put everything together and, like, varnish the wood so it would hold water.

Are you kidding?
Yeah. We did all kinds of—

Was that cheaper than—
Cheaper, sure. Plus we could work with that, we could make a sink any size you wanted, and put the trays in there. Yeah. It's like the opposite of a boat, though. We used marine stuff, whatever, epoxy on it.

But it was custom made.
Yeah. And occasionally, we'd go over to the School of the Art Institute and just kinda lift ideas from then on how to do- because they had a lot of money. So we'd go sneak ideas out of there, and do things ourself that, you know... So money was a issue for a long time, you know. And we got in the 600 Michigan building, and we had tenants, and we had to try and keep them happy. And then we'd buy property, we bought 11th Street theater, and then, you know, that had its own little set of things going wrong there. Try to clean that place up and get it running good, and we'd buy Wabash building and that—so it was kinda like was as the school expanded, you just get another building with another little set of problems to try to... Pipes would freeze up, and then you'd try to make it so that the next winter, you know, you wouldn't have to worry about that problem again. And then someplace else would freeze up, and you'd try to—so we would get it down to where, like, this winter, we didn't have too much of a problem with—yeah, with things happening. You know, we're trying to get the bad spots worked out, so that it's easier to handle all these buildings that we have now. And Columbia's good about that. They don't mind spending money to repair mechanical problems. They don't just want to Band-Aid it, you know, they really fix things. It's nice to work for a place like that.

Issues... I mostly deal with the physical plant problems, so that's, you know, it's still a money thing for that. Probably the Sherwood Music School could use a new boiler, the 600 building could—

And now that was just purchased, the Sherwood, I mean, within the last couple months.
Yeah. Right. And we had contractors in there putting in air conditioning, so, you know... But the boiler is still an old clunker boiler. The Dance Center boiler is an old clunker, so, you know, in the middle of winter the tubes inside the boiler will spring a leak or something, and then you've gotta—

And do you or someone that works for you, I mean, do you get in the car and go out there?
Yeah. Well, if it's too big of a job—

Do you travel from building to building?
Yeah, I go to the Dance Center all the time. I was there last week. We had a violation that the boiler inspector, city inspector came in, and saw that a little brick pier on the back of the boiler- a boiler is like a train locomotive, it has a firebox on one end, and it has, like, a round part that sticks out with all these tubes for the heat to go through, and water around them, you know. So the one end, the little brick pier, was like crumbling apart. So I had to go get a house jack and jack the boiler up on the one end until next summer, when we can work on it without—yeah.

So you go around from building to building. Has Columbia made, in your opinion - and if you don't want to say this, answer the question, I guess that you might not want to - but have they made any real estate mistakes from your perspective? Like, are there things that they should not have done, or...?
Well, I think—I'm not part of, like, the big plant issues, but I see places where they'll remodel a floor, and then, like, a year or two later, tear it all apart and remodel it again, which seems to me like—I don't know what the reasoning is behind it. Maybe there was a good reason. I'm not really—I don't understand some of that kinda stuff. So there—you know. Maybe it doesn't cost that much to knock down the drywall and metal studs and rebuild or something, I guess.

Well, it also could be—I mean, other people have spoken to, and this could be relevant or not, but that it's felt that because the school has grown so quickly within the last handful of years that the lack of—or maybe since Mike left, that there seems to be a lack of, maybe, a long-term plan.
Yeah, I don't know. It seems like—

They don't know what to do with the growth or something.
Right, right. We're always expecting to be like other colleges, where they're starting to shrink a little bit or even, you know, lose out on students. But it seems like every semester, the enrollment just keeps going up and up and up, and everybody's waiting for that shoe to drop where we're gonna slow down or start losing people, you know, students. But that never seems to happen, so it... I don't know how you plan for enrollment.

That's true too.
If I were to try to project into the future, that would be tough. I don't think I'd be able to. So, in the meantime, I'll just *(laughs)* go fix my leaks and get my wiring, you know, in shape.

That was my next question. You know, you talked about the challenges, and money, and with the acquisition of buildings, the prob-

lems that that brings up. But what do you see—again, it could be from your own personal perspective and work, or more general for the institution—but where do you see Columbia heading? Or do you think that's something you can't—
Well, it's the same thing. I think Columbia has that initiative where they started out going in the right direction with their—they tried to get minority students, and they tried to get open admissions policy kinda people, that... It's like all this talent of the Columbia students, and it's growing so that people can express their talent that can't go to, like, a regular—like Loyola or DePaul or some other college. So I think that our initiative is in that right direction, so maybe that's why we keep growing when some of these other places aren't or something, you know. So as long as we keep that same perspective of trying to make it easier for these talented people to come to Columbia, then I think we'll probably keep growing.

So you think it's important that they remember that that's why they're here.
Like our mission or something, yeah.

To provide an opportunity or an outlet for these students that don't hack it other—or don't want to—
Not your typical Loyola student kinda thing. People that can't afford to go to where they do government research, universities, kinda.

We referred to the students before, but anybody in particular, whether it be student or faculty or administration, any other people that particularly stand out in your mind as influencing Columbia or being influenced by Columbia and, you know, and leaving Columbia and...
Making their impact on the—yeah. Yeah, there was a certain core group of department chairmen that Alexandroff put into place, and Thaine Lyman was the TV Department chairman, and I was a little bit of a personal friend of his, you know.

A lot of people—tell me what was special about him. His name comes up a lot.
Yeah.

And I know he had passed away.
He was just a great guy. He worked for WGN, I don't know exactly what position he had there, and he was the department chairman for the TV Department, and he brought the perspective of—he would teach the students how to make a living in the TV industry. He would teach that in the classroom, or he had his teachers keep that perspective. So I took some TV classes—I don't think he was alive when I took the classes, but Al Jones, my first TV teacher, was the same type of person, that worked at a TV station. And the first day of class - maybe not the first day - he would tell you what the situation was with the unions, you know, cameramen and electricians and—

Right, because he was working in it.
He was in the industry. And you would learn how to make a living doing this, what he was teaching you. So it was, like, added value. It wasn't just... it wasn't just being an artistic video maker or whatever. I mean, you can be artistic once you learn how to do a—how to have the camera skills, and how to record, and how to—first you have to learn a few basic things that aren't too hard, but you have to learn them first before you can take it to the next step and be artistic and be able to say something with what you learned, you know. So, like, the next TV class after the studio one class, then we had to make an independent project. And that was—in television, unlike photography, where it's one guy taking a picture, in television, it's like a group effort. You need somebody to do lighting, you need somebody to do sound, you need somebody to do video, you need... So our project was with three guys, and we went to a health club and did, like, a training video for this—how to be a health club instructor. It was kinda interesting, you know, but we got a bunch of raw footage on a video camera, and edited it down to, I don't know, three or four minutes, and the video track, we had to put sound, and we had to put voice on another track, and, you know, when people are talking, you have to make the sound not as loud, you know, and we had to learn all the little things that video involves, you know. And it was, you know, just great learning experience, and I even use it nowadays for my—my one daughter is a basketball player, and she was pretty good, and I videotaped and I edited down, like, a highlights film. And I sent it to a few colleges, and she got a scholarship playing basketball at Lake Forest, which is a pretty prestigious college on the North Shore. And I like to think that part of the reason she got her scholarship was because of a nice video that I made to... So things have their own little way of rewarding, you know.

That's a great story.
Yeah.

I bet she liked the tape, too.
Oh, yeah, that's like a—it made her look like Michael Jordan or something. I only ever put in the good ones, the good moves and, you know. Yeah, it was nice.

That's a great story. So that goal of Columbia's to really give the students hands-on experience and to learn from professionals working in their fields, you've experienced that directly.
Yeah. And I'm a little bit selective in the classes that I take here, occasionally.

By the instructor, perhaps?
Yeah. I like to take an instructor that I don't really know, that doesn't know me as being one of the Columbia old-timers, kinda. I take a new teacher—

Really?
Yeah, 'cause I don't want to have, like, any baggage or any advantage or whatever, you know, 'cause I take them for credit and I get a grade, and I usually do pretty good in classes, because I only take one and I take one that I think I'm gonna enjoy, so, you know, I don't mind doing the work for a class, so I usually get pretty good grades. And the instructors... like, I took an acoustics class in the science department. And the instructor there was an acoustics—he was into MIDI, which is computer-driven, like, sound. He made music on a computer, and it was like—almost like a keyboard kinda thing, but it's a little bit like newer than New Age music. It was a little bit hard to understand, but it was interesting to learn where music is going nowadays. Or in the future, even. How you can make pleasing sounds and things that people want to listen to on a computer keyboard, you know? You can see the sound waves, and you can learn all about what frequency and speed of sound and all this kinda stuff, how that impacts—if you go to see a concert in the park, if you're sitting this far away, how you get the sound travels and the wind direction effects that, and location of speakers, and it was all interesting stuff that I, you know—and everything in acoustics, you have to figure out with a calculator, though.

Really.
Yeah.

But then do you—OK, you see someone, you're looking through the catalog, this sounds interesting, see the instructor, you don't recognize the name, they're new or you, you know—do you then find out if they are professional in the field? I mean, do you research it further then?
No, no. Most of the time, I don't even know the instructor. And I don't want to know the instructor.

Right. It's the topic and the fact that you don't know the instructor.
Right. And then I'll take it.

So there was never anyone that was just such a hot teacher at Columbia that you really wanted to see what they did, or—
No. Yeah, no, I don't want to know a teacher ahead of time. Just because. And I've always had good teachers here. I never really took a teacher that I disliked. I used to always get As in my classes, 'cause, you know, I can concentrate on just one class a semester, that's—and then, my Art History II class, because I wanted to take, like, the next class, the II, well, the second teacher, I got a B. So that was like—then I could relax after that, I blew my GPA, now I got a 3.9 or whatever. So now I can just take classes and enjoy them and not even worry about getting an A on them anymore, because I already blew my 4.0, so I... now I can relax in the classes.

Now, are you just—you do this a lot for your own personal enjoyment, but obviously, you've applied some of the stuff you've learned. Are you getting a degree as well, or—
No.

You probably have so many hours.
Yeah, I think I'm probably a junior in college, like 60 some hours or something. But I don't think I'll ever graduate. I'll probably retire and graduate in the same year or something, you know.

They'll give you an honorary Master's at that stage.
Yeah.

So, anybody else that you remember, or that stands out?
Yeah. I remember this guy—let's see, his name was Ernie... something.

Whitworth?
Whitworth. He was, like, the first Art Department chairman. And I learned—he was kind of a wild guy. And I learned, like, jewelry making in one of his classes. And that was—I think that was on a non-credit basis. I would just stay over after work and learn how to make belt buckles and rings and, you know. That's kinda where I got into taking classes, with Ernie. He was just kind of a talented, real... crazy guy, you know. And I think I kinda gravitated towards fun people, and he was a lot of fun to be around, you know. And let's see who else—