

P a u l a W e i n e r

All right. Today is January the 7th, 1999. This is an interview with Paula Weiner, Administrator and Manager of the Liberal Education Department, and Tai Chi instructor.

OK, Paula, if you would start off by telling us what were the circumstances that brought you to Columbia, and when that was.

Well, it was in April of 1981, and I had worked previously in very menial positions my whole life, in the background. I was in the file, or I was in telephone work. I was a switchboard receptionist at an insurance company, and I'd probably still be there today if the company hadn't merged, and I had to find a new job. And from that I went back to school, and went into Printing Industries Institute in their graphic design. And then they got me a job proofreading for the AMA or something, but there wasn't any future in that. And so then a friend of mine, Doctor Zafra Lerman, who at that time was the Chair of the Science Department at Columbia, said, "You know, you really would probably fit into this job here." And she had confidence in me, and so it was for a secretarial position in—at that time it was called Life Arts and Liberal Education at Columbia College. And it was headed, the Chair was Doctor Louis Silverstein, and so I was interviewed by Louis Silverstein and Glen Graham. And... they thought I could try it, and I really—I hadn't even finished my own education, but this would be the furthest thing from my mind, to come into an educational setting. As a matter of fact, I never liked school. And so to think I'd be

in the History Department, and Social Sciences, and Humanities... It was all with us at that time. But I gave it a try, and I was already... I had a son that was growing up, and I needed to get some kind of a job. I don't know if I should tell my age... (Laughs) But I was over the age, I was close to my middle years. And so, to start something completely different—and my first job here was to do a flyer, because they knew I was interested in artwork, for the square dance that Louis Silverstein was putting on for the faculty. And so they liked it, and I think that's why they hired me. (Laughs) And so then, I just stepped in here, and in the meantime Zafra Lerman's department was still part of Liberal Education or Life Arts, but by the end of that summer in '81, she had gone off into her own section of Science and Math. And at that time, we had a small office on the 7th floor of 600 South Michigan, and the Radio Department was on that floor. We also had the AMP Department, which is now Management. They used to be called Arts and Entertainment Management. We also had—there was Career Placement was over there, but they called it something, I don't know... And also there was, in the front of the building, that was the same floor as the lounge, and all it was was a canteen. And when they did registration, they used that canteen area, even for registration. So I think that in that year we only had about 200 graduates. It wasn't a very big—the whole school, everybody was in that one building, 600 South Michigan, except for the Theater and the Dance Studio. But everybody else, all the—everything

was there. And so... oh, I was in the back of the building, and right where the alley was, right across from the Harrison Hotel. And it was quite a horrible sight. (Laughs) And I could look down the halls, and I think I was broken into a couple of times, they'd come up on the fire escape. We had only four little offices inside. Dr. Silverstein's, as Chair, Glen Graham, and Bill Hayashi moved over, and we had a place for part-time. And I remember one teacher really was disturbed about it, because she wanted a place to really make her home, and as a part-timer she said to me "I like a place—I like to nest." I always thought she was a bird, you know. (Laughs) Anyway, so, and she turned out to be—at this time, she's one of our trustees. And so I told her that a little while ago, and she said, "I said that?" So you never know where people are going to turn up. I'm sorry, I'm taking up the whole—would you like to ask a question?



Well, what—how did you get to know Zafra?

Through my son, and her son. They'd gone to school together. Her son was a year older, but they knew people through the school, and they had a parent's organization, and we got together. So, we just got friendly through our children.

How would you describe the mission of Columbia College? And if it's changed, maybe, you know, how you describe it as you saw it when you first came, and what it's become, or if that hasn't changed, how would you define it?

Well, Louis as the Chair of the Department, it was more a, um... a holistic sort of thing. Not that it wasn't academic at that time, it was, but he was much more into... community efforts through the colleges, and starting organizations like the CAFF, Chicago Area Faculty For A Freeze. I think at that time they were on a nuclear issue, and he was very much into that, along with the Provost, now, who was the Academic Dean, Bert Gall. Uh, and so they were very much out into the community, trying to work on these peaceful issues. We had very well-known speakers in, we had Dr. Robert Lifton, very well known on the East. And I found that—I had no student help, and I had to go downstairs and use their copy machine, because we had none, we had no help, and so to be thrown into this, it was... I had to learn quickly. But it was good, I was going in circles, but—trying to figure out just what I was seeing at the time, and what's happened now... And so we're just huge now. We were smaller, and it was a

friendlier place at that time. But it's like anyplace else when you grow. So we were at the forefront of trying to build the place up with the community. But we're still working on the community now, it's just a different kind of a thing. And the academic—we didn't have a Master's program at that time. And so a lot has changed, and at that time we had—I think we had about 70 teachers at that time. But they didn't come in twice a week. And we only had about—well, we had Harry Bouras, and we had Bob Edmonds, who are now dead. And they were up on the 11th floor. So... and we had the Women's Group—we had—we started—we had classes like for the deaf. It wasn't sign language, it was—we had a course called Sign Language, taught by Yvonne Cooper. And she was very much into the community, working with the deaf people, and she wasn't deaf herself. So a lot of things that were in our department at the time went out into other places. Like we had Nutrition, but it went off into Science. And so... um, I would say our department—then it became Liberal Education, and after a couple of years Dr. Van Marter came to the department. And so... everybody being different types, we had a very academic program starting. And so I would say that the school has had to conform, certainly, to the standards of the community outside and the teacher's organizations and whatnot, too. It was a very good school at that time, it was just smaller, but it certainly was very much in the forefront too, at that time. Although my son went to school here, and he graduated in '86, and he used to think "Oh, well, Columbia, anybody can get in to Columbia." But he doesn't think that way anymore. Because we had

this open admissions policy. It's really—you have to improve yourself...

Could you expand on that a little more, on open admissions? Has that changed as well between the early '80s and the late '90s? What that's meant to the institution, or...?

Well, it seemed that because we were—we seemed to be the latest people to register people; the other colleges, you know, had registered earlier, so the students that were left over get into Columbia because we still had—and then we had open admissions, and all a student needed was a GED, they didn't need any kind of other recommendations or anything. And it seemed pretty easy. Today they have higher standards, they have tests that they give to freshmen. We didn't have any kinds of freshman organizations or things like that. And primarily, the school is known as a communications school, kind of an arty place. So that more creative types were coming here. Now, with the computers and everything, it's, it's getting... it's still very creative, and I'm very happy that it's still that way, but it is conforming to the academic standards, also. And the school—Columbia, through the former President, Alexandroff, and President Duff, want the College to be part of the community, part of what's going on in the world outside. And so it's not just book-work. And the school also was very important because most of our teachers are in their own fields, and that's what draws students here also. It's not just going in class and opening up a book and learning about what happened before. It's happening now, too.

You mentioned the freshman programs, organizations that were not here when you first came. Why were those initiated? What had changed? Or had perceptions changed about the need for something like that?

Well, I guess, to meet the standards, of the state, and the whole country. Like I said, they're trying to form new ways, and Glen Graham, who was our History Coordinator for years, and still is with our department, but he was offered the new position of Freshman Director, Freshman Seminar. And he's been very active in that the part four or five years. And so, uh, I think in Chicago especially, that the standards of the schools have to come up, and so therefore, we have to go along with that, too. Students that are going to stay longer may need more academic help. So they can go out in the world and not just say, "Well, I graduated from Columbia, and I didn't have to read a book or something. But now I'm proud I actually did a lot of work there." So, I think it was probably easier at one time. You know, the people that just thought they were gonna go into their majors, like art or something...

Here, let's pause this for a second. OK, interruption by outside noise. Have the students changed while you've been here?

Well, that's hard... Well, just the years have changed, things like the '60s, the '70s, the '80s. As the generations outside have changed, and the students have gone along with it, uh, as far as dress and everything else. We're pretty open, but... and the students, I think they're more serious now about their studies, about going to school. And I think the whole

country, education is at the forefront, you know, and without an education, without computers, or—you've got to get there. And so here I am, at my age, having been here going on 18 years this year, I myself have grown immensely. Not only for the College—it's for me.

Has that been influenced by Columbia, though? I mean, maybe you could expand—
Oh, absolutely.

Expand on the Columbia experience here for you personally.

Well, after my son graduated, then finally I could go off on my own and do my thing. And when I saw a student here, one of our work aids, who had been here for four years, and she was an older woman, a black woman, and finally she graduated, and it, like, spurred me on. Her name was Janice Washington. And I said, "Gee, if she could do it, why can't I?" And so I started taking classes that summer, right after she graduated. And so, fortunately, because of Dr. Van Marter allowing me to do that, not—they're trying to let the staff take classes too, but it's difficult when you're not supposed to be taking them during the day, but on the other hand, when are you going to take them? So we worked it out here, that I could do the work plus take some classes. And I tried to take night classes, or summer classes, and I'd take about two classes a semester. And I'd had all my—I had a lot of credits, I was halfway, I guess, because I had gone to the Art Institute many, many years ago and never finished. So I had my English at the University of Chicago, so I didn't have to take that. But all my other academic subjects were here. So I had a lot of them in this department itself. Which also helped me understand

more the teachers here, and the problems they were facing, and the problems the students were facing with teachers. So it's made my job much more important here, because now I feel like I'm right in the middle of it all.

You're a liaison.

And with the administration, it's really helped a great deal. So, um... and I didn't—I've never been a historian, I did like so many of the other art students here, picked courses, for instance... I was—you know, they're looking—they're not looking for U.S. History and things like that, they're looking for courses that they can take and get through. And so History of Chicago appealed to me, and The 1960s, and I found a lot of other art students back there. And it was like the science—a terrible time with that. But other than that, I came out with almost a 4.0. I would have had it if I hadn't had the science. But so I went through the graduation and all, and I saw how that went... So being a student and being an administrator and being a little of everything here. And teaching. And then I went into my own thing, because I took—the first class back was Mystical Consciousness with Bill Hayashi during the summer, and I had finally been able to write—I wrote 100 pages that summer—and I hadn't been able to do anything. The journaling was very important, and finally it, like, really cleared me out. So it was the beginning of a new understanding of what education was about. And my job here, I could always do my job, somehow, I could manage, I could do it... I did it naturally. But not really ever appreciating education that much.

Well, elaborate on that a bit. You said you finally learned what education really was, and I assume that you're saying for you personally, but what did it mean in general here at Columbia, that it could have meant for other students? How did your vision of education change?

Well, with the numbers, and the budget here, and, you know, I had to take science classes, I began to understand what it was all about, that we weren't just here, you know, living and breathing every day, but we actually had to have an education, we had to learn the computer. That was one of the things I certainly said I was never going to learn, and years ago I said, "It's the end of the world." And today I'm doing scheduling and everything else here, and many things on the computer. So it's just like—it's opened my eyes, and it's opened the other students' eyes, and that's why I can go into a class, and inspire them now, because they see "Well, it's not too late. If Paula could do it, why can't I?" And so it's through my own experience that I've been able to relate with everybody else and show them that this kind of a thing; it is important, it feels good to have a diploma. It's not just a piece of paper, but something I've earned. And I had to work at it. And I found that I could work at it, and I could do all the things that they're doing, so they're complaining "Oh, I was up all night last night," I said, "So was I." And I worked all day here, too. But it's just—we all wake up at different times. And who knows why.

But it sounds like, and correct me if I'm wrong—

But it was because of Columbia.

OK. It sounds like you're saying it wouldn't necessarily have happened at another institution.
 Oh, I say, I'd probably still be behind the switchboard, and everybody would say to me all the time—I'm selling artwork and everything—but they'd say, "Why are you just sitting here?" Sitting there looking out the window. I mean, my whole life was changed, and it's really due to Columbia, and I really thank Zafra Lerman so much for knowing that I should be here. And so it's incredible, because—no, I might even be dead. Who knows? I mean, I wasn't doing anything. And to just waste a person without using their mind, I mean, you know... So I'm so excited every day that I come in, because there's a new learning experience. And just dealing with all the different people in this department, I've always felt that this department was sort of a special thing, because we have everybody from—it's a melting pot of the world. Everything from soup to nuts. (*Laughs*) And in between. And to be able to deal with these people... if people could learn what goes on here, we could take this into the world outside, you know, and work out our difficulties, work out our problems. And so that's what I offer here. And that's why—but I learned it because I've done this every day, and you deal with it. And to have students come in, and really thank me for giving them extra time or something, that's incredible. And so we each help each other, and so that's the kind of a school this is. It's the kind of place where you just don't come in and go home without interacting. If you do, you miss the whole experience of what this place has to offer. I don't know, I wouldn't probably have the same feeling of being at Northwestern, or anyplace

else, DePaul or anything. Because, you know, this is a friendly place—of course, we each have to do our own thing, I mean, we have to interact, we have to be... You know, it's up to us, too. We can either put up a wall, or we can interact with people. So to finally have a place, a forum, to really be me, and that's what so many other students—I was in Senior Seminar, also, at the very beginning of it, and I found that to be very helpful, because, though I had a job, the students were dealing with what was going to happen to them after they got out, and how we could help each other to make little inroads. And so it's a very important—I didn't take Freshman Seminar, but I mean, I think that's probably helping them get into the school, and Senior Seminar to take them out, and into the world, where they know what they're going to have. And we had community involvement, and we each interacted with each other and journaled, we did all kinds of things. Very important. And through it, I was inspired to go on to compete for—we had prizes at the end and all that. And so I was in there with these students that were younger, and I hope that we will have some more older people coming in. I think continuing education is something I really feel, and to bring in to older people, because there haven't been that many older people in this school. We had some, and the ones that did graduate were very effective, with their classes, and helping other students that were younger. They were respected, and that also inspired me to go on. And so I wasn't the first one.

Who were some of the other individuals that helped you come to this realization? You mentioned

Louis, you mentioned Zafra, and Bill Hayashi, of course. Were there other people you remember, particularly maybe from the early years that you were here that gave Columbia its character, or really added to it?

Oh, yeah, there was Al Parker, the chairs like Thaine Lyman, I was fortunate to know him in the Television Department. And I was very friendly with his assistant, Carol Beland.

Why do those people maybe stick out in your mind?

Because they were really very big names—and what Columbia College was, primarily, at that time, at the beginning, was Television. Television ruled the whole College. And then Radio, and Al Parker was at the Radio. And then John Mulvany, of course, had both Photography and Art. But it was mostly Television and Radio that were bringing the students in. And now—and so the school is different this way - because now we have a Dean and Bill Russo with the Music Department, and Dance was always very popular too—but everything is getting more together, with getting, you know, we're going all over the place, with all kinds of buildings... But they're trying to work it together with these committees, and form some kind of—now we have a dorm. And even though we're fragmented, it's being brought together. And I think that's what the goal is, the mission is to really get it together so it's all one school, even if it's the Dance company way over there, and Theater way over there, and now we have the Music building, and we have three of them right here. And being in this Torco Building is very historic too. You go to

Wrigley Field, you'll see the Torco sign, it's like, "We're right here." We're really a very big part of Chicago, and I just did some performances of Tai Chi at the Field Museum, and that was my way of being out in the community, and I certainly was bringing Columbia College all around here. And I would talk to people about where I was working, and they'd say, "Oh, that's a great school." And I get on the 146 bus over here that cuts through the Museum, and it passes the school all the time here. And the people are always looking out and saying "Oh, that's Columbia College." So Columbia College is not just a little school anymore, it's very well known, and I'm very proud to be a part of it. And for me to have seen it grow, and expand into so much, and now, in our own department here, we have close to 160 classes currently, and we have faculty coming twice a week, and 85 part-time and 14 full-time. And now we have two floors here. And so it's really—student help, a secretary, gracious. And now even the part-time are forming a union, and it's just like everybody wants to be little part of something, to feel they belong. And I think that's what Columbia is. Columbia is a huge microcosm of how effective a school could be in a community setting, and yet maintain its independence.

It's not all isolated in a dark corner.

No, it's here, and it's growing in a very special area. There are so many colleges all over here, in the South end, and we built the South end up. So it's expanding, and with the rate of growth that I've seen for many years, why, it's really—I think we only had 2,000 when I started, or something like that. And now it's over 8,000.

What have been some of the major challenges that the institution has faced since you came here? You mentioned the unionization of part-time faculty, have there been other kinds of things that stick out, turning points? Well...

Do you want me to come back to that so you can think about it? Yeah.

OK. You mentioned that people— Oh, I know.

Go ahead.

Well, we didn't have any Human Resources Department, either. And the faculty had started their own organization, the full-time faculty, the CCFO, Columbia College Faculty Organization, and then it wasn't too much later that some of us staff decided that we should get in to some organization and start our own thing, but what happened was, it didn't get very far, the big talkers went on to other places, and the little ones were—hard to say. In the meantime, though—

When was this?

Well, it was right before Human Resources started, but I guess we made enough noise that Human Resources came in, and they started. And they've been here maybe 10 years. But ever since Human Resources came in, we have more benefits, too. We didn't have dentistry, or all these things. So only the staff has come out with better ways to... So, in that way, and in the 10 years—different issues that they've gone into now. But those were—having Human Resources in this school has helped immeasurably. And to make it more like it is in other schools, too. We're a big organization, and we

need to really get together and find out what other places are doing. It's not just an individual or family operation. And that's they way Columbia was. It was pretty friendly, and pretty just—well, it was small. So it was a little community, and now it's a big, you know, so... And so they're having their little problems as it's going along, and everything's not squeaky clean, but it's moving. And so we're making inroads, and so... They're dealing with harassment issues, and all kinds of other issues. But they deal with them, you know. Nothing is put under the rug. So... uh, I think that's important. And they've tried to modernize, at least they've tried to keep up. And the elevator situations, and situations with catering and things like that, well, you know, there've been things that we would rather have a place where we had a—where students could have more of an organization. We've tried to have student organizations, but—and we don't have sports here, and of course they talk about it, but we just don't have the room. And so space-wise, that's one of our biggest problems.

And that's always been—I mean, that's a continuing problem.
You can't imagine how small we were at one time. I got a refrigerator, and you talk about—we had no Xerox machines, we had nothing. And we had to go downstairs to get our mail, I mean, there's so many things, it's just incredible when you find out where we were. But that's growth, and coming close to the millennium, you know.

Some people have been very concerned about growth at Columbia, to the point of it's completely, you know, a bad

thing, and other would question if it—(coughs). Excuse me. You seem pretty optimistic, and positive, or not afraid of it.

Well, I'm not afraid of it, because I've seen this happen to me. And if I can grow by leaps and bounds like I have, then why can't the school? You know, because I'm part of the school, and it's helped me to do that, and we can help each other, and it just—of course, it takes funding and everything else, but it can be done. And I have never seen the school fail. I mean, we have gone up every year, and they worry about it over and over, "We're gonna have registration earlier, we're gonna make up"—but they made it, and I've been here 18 years already, and so I think that's a pretty good record. And I don't even see it—I wonder, I'm gonna ask somebody in Public Relations, why we don't advertise in the paper. I don't see Columbia doing anything anymore. And yet, even without that, we're getting more students here. And I think they have a better record of staying.

What was the response from the PR department as to why they don't—because I know what you're talking about. U of C—I haven't asked them.

—DePaul, Loyola, yeah, a lot. But you haven't—

No, but I'd like to, because I always think about that when I open up the Tribune or something, and see "Well, where are we?", you know.

Is there a downside—I mean, has Columbia lost anything due to its phenomenal growth, do you think, or are there challenges that come out of that, you know? I know you mentioned the one thing, is that it was a friendlier place because it was smaller. Are there

other issues that have come up?

Well, I think that we need not only space, we need more help. And so the ones that have stayed, so many have gone off, because they burn out 'cause there isn't enough help. And so our jobs, the ones that have stayed, have really grown too. And so to manage two floors and doing all the things for the Academic Deans, and taking care of everybody's payroll, and everything else, my job has grown five times. But anyway, and then having the only computer in the whole department that can do all the scheduling, and even opening up classes and everything... So, it's like—so those are problems, because you wonder just how much more can you do? And so because of the growth, and now people are talking about having registration someday on the phone, phone registration, they always look at other schools and say, "Well, they can do it better." So we're slowly coming out. But our equipment is getting better, and... But because it's bigger, it's harder to keep track of everything, too. And then there are little—our catering, and you know, the restaurant business, it's been kind of hard on people not knowing where to go to get a bite to eat around here. And those people are being inundated [by Border's] too, and not knowing where to turn. I'd say our vending consultants are having lots of problems. And for a building like this size—now the Torco Building, it used to have that. I guess this was the State of Illinois Building, and they had a little catering place, a little place, that we could come, as students, and we could go up there and get a sandwich or something, a take-out place. But this particular building doesn't have anything, a couple of

machines. I see this as a problem in this building, because they just don't fill up anything. They don't even put things in there. And that's a problem for students, too.

Because they want to go and get a meal or something, and so that's a problem in this building.

Hopefully, they'll straighten it out someday. And the faculty lounge is in this building, too, in the same area. They kind of cut the student lounge there, too. So students need a place for—

Quality of life issue, kind of? I mean, outside the classroom.

Right. So... that's a problem.

Uh...there's just problems getting around with so much equipment, into the elevators. They are working on elevators. But we have some students that, no matter how nice you make it, they're going to wreck it. So you see a beautiful door, and all of a sudden it's all scratched up.

Any other individuals that stick out in your mind, or stories or anecdotes that you could share?

Well, Harry Bouras was wonderful. And Bob Edmonds. I have a painting here by Harry Bouras.

Oh.

And Harry Bouras had been on the radio with Studs Terkel on WFMT, and he was an artist, and sculptor... he was a true genius. And I was very—I mean, so many students, he actually had the biggest classes of any faculty. He was very unique. And his classes are not even being offered now, because no one could handle them. Taboos and Culture, I think there were about 100 students in that class. 150, it was in the Hokin, and it was a big class. But he had a terrific following—

Now, why were they not replicated? Have the times changed, or the demand, or no teacher?

He knew the subjects. I mean, he had a way of being able to deal with any kind of a subject. He was truly a marvelous, marvelous person. I told him to save it, it might be worth something some day, because we were in the—I mean, that's just the way—he was just very outspoken, and very unique. He was one of the top draws as a teacher.

For the listener, you know, it's got a bit of—it's abstract, and a little—

He was very flamboyant.

OK.

But he had a very big following; actually, Claudia Traudt has taken over his Critical Vocabulary for the Arts. And she's pretty much like him.

Oh, really?

He was very outspoken. And Bob Edmonds was very much into the film—he was into the film festivals, all over the world. And he and his wife, both of them, I learned a lot from him too. And he was—they were judges and everything at the film festivals. And he went to Poland, and he went off to Europe every year, and he got these directors, he'd get these people from all over, producers, directors... But he was very instrumental. He had been the Film chairman, in the Film Department. Um, Dominic Pacyga, and Jim Martin, were in the Southeast Historical Project. And the came into our department and worked with us, and now Dominic has been writing books all over the place. He was on television this morning. I took The 1960s with him, the history course, and I learned a lot, and I thought "Well,

I have to take that course 'cause I lived through it."

You knew it all.

Actually, I learned a lot. Many, many of our teachers were very instrumental. I took Abnormal Psych; I still correspond with a lot of these teachers that are away from here... and I did Urban Anthropology, and the things that I learned there, about half the year was China; and Albuquerque, New Mexico, have just come right into my view of Tai Chi. Because the Tai Chi center is in Albuquerque, and the Chinese influenced me. So these kind of things were... actually, there've been very few of the faculty here that I've had any problems with, and I've learned an awful lot from all of them, and hopefully they've learned something from me.

So, it seems like you're indicating that it might not be a strong division or hierarchy between someone who's staff or administration and faculty. At least, your personal experience was that you've been a more peer as opposed to...

Yes. Even more, the fact that I didn't have my degree was very interesting. And our Chairman, Les Van Marter, gave me an honorary CS degree years ago, Common Sense. (*Laughs*) And to be able to work with people who are very academically oriented [in the place all the time], and still learn from them. And he's taught me how to do the budget and the whole program for next year, and I said, "I'll do the budget my own way," but I mean—so I have learned many other things from all these people, and then... But I mean, these were the people that were here the longest.

I want to make sure before our time is up that you said that even before you came to Columbia, you were always producing art and you had taken courses at the Art Institute. How has your own work changed? Because if you've been doing it continually, and maybe, you know, again, the Columbia influence.

Oh, absolutely. Because years ago—I could always draw, and I could do things like a photograph. But to really be original, when I was in my last year of college here, I was taking Wood Sculpture, and I was taking Ceramics, and Painting, and even having to take a color course, I was afraid of it because I thought it was too academic, and it turned out that I learned a lot, and that was one of my best teachers. Carol Haliday McQueen. And even if I had to do the color wheel over twice... very original one, and she didn't knock it down, she said, "Well..." (Laughs) But I mean, you know, it didn't destroy me, and I did it again. And a lot of our students have to do those again, you know. They're a different kind. But the work that came out of me the last year, it's all over this office here, and it just... came out. It was like—I don't know where it was coming from. I would pick up—I didn't have anything in mind, and all of this stuff just poured out. It just poured out. And so I haven't been doing a lot lately, and I hadn't been doing anything before. A very important teacher that got me out into the creative was Tom Taylor, who's still here. And he teaches Multi—some kind of media, I don't know what it's called.

Anyway, it... well, being a student in his class, there we were, and he got me to really thinking. And he said, "Now, let's go around, and every week, you're going to do a

piece of plywood." We had about a foot square plywood that we'd take home. And we had to find articles, anywhere, you know, find a hair on the rug, anything, and make a composition. This was extremely creative, because I thought "What? I'm gonna pick up garbage and put it in this? You know, this is far out." I mean, I was very much out of all that stuff. Years ago, I thought—

You were in the box.

Yeah. I wanted to be Rembrandt, I wanted to be somebody, and I really thought all this other stuff was far out and these people are crazy, you know. But to be smashing cigarettes and everything else into paintings and—you know. That wasn't my thing. But I'm telling you, once I got started, I was—all of that stuff just came out. And that really changed me. I put everything in there from pills to everything, you know, I was really creative about things I'd be throwing away. Now I don't throw anything away, and I have things that I could just take them, just to get me started again. It's just incredible to do that. And some of them were... quite interesting. And so, when I finally ended up in his class, I have a picture of this head that I made. We were supposed to re-do the top of our head. And that's an example, right there, of what happened. That is—that is the culmination of what was happening inside of me. Mind you, at my age, I sat there and I took screen, I took clay, I took all kinds of materials, and out it together, so that it—it fell over already, but I mean, when it was in its heyday—

The inspirations pouring out.

Yeah. It just poured out, and it was all in three hours. I did the whole thing, from—it's got a base, and wood all the way through with clay

that hardened... And he said, "The only thing that's missing is"—the color was red clay - "needs some color." And I had plaster on the bottom there, as a base, that I found. And I took my hands on the plaster, rubbed them around, and put it right on the clay. I mean, there it was. And people have said that the thing belongs in a museum or something. But I mean, it just flew out. And so finally, my last piece was the thing from the—what do you call that—from the graduation.

From the mortarboard, the tassel.

Yeah. So I put that on the head, and I said, "There." So that was actually—that piece says it all. I mean, my creativity has just flown out. And with the Tai Chi, too, it's just—my intuition and everything has just... And so I am very happy to say I got this at Columbia. This is where I became this other person.

Well, I think that's a perfect place to end the interview, with that illustration of, you know, what the experience here has meant to you. Thank you very much.

You're very welcome.

Great.