

# Two Colleagues in Conversation



## *A Joint Memoir*

Sidney Bolkosky & Ronald R. Stockton

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In the summer of 2007, Ron Stockton was in a used bookstore and saw a book by Francois Mitterand, President of France, and Elie Wiesel, the Holocaust scholar. Mitterand had asked Wiesel to interview him as his Presidency was coming to an end. With two such egos, the project inevitably evolved from an interview into a dialogue. It was published as a joint memoir. Ron was taken by this project and decided that he and his colleague Sid Bolkosky could produce something similar. As Ron said to Sid, “We have been around since the campus was young. There are no two faculty who are more different in their backgrounds than you and I are. We both have high visibility off campus, and both of us are dinosaurs. When we leave they will not replace us with people like ourselves.”

Sid and Ron have been at the University of Michigan-Dearborn for over three decades. Sid arrived in 1972, Ron in 1973. Sid is a historian specializing in modern German History and the Holocaust. Ron is a Political Scientist who specializes in comparative non-western politics, especially ethnic conflict, political change, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He is trained in survey research.

Both teach to full classes and are considered unique professors by their students. Both have solid scholarly reputations in terms of publications and in terms of classroom teaching and service, on campus and off. Both are associated with major research projects, Sid for his Holocaust survivor interviews, which recorded in-depth interviews with over 300 individuals, Ron for the Detroit Arab American Study, the most comprehensive scientific public opinion study ever done of Arab Americans. Both have written four books. Sid wrote *The Distorted Image* (1975) on how German Jews saw their position within Germany, *Mighty Myth* (with Greta Lipson, 1982) on how to use Greek myths in the classroom, *Harmony and Dissonance* (1991), a history of the Jewish community of Detroit, and *Searching for Meaning in the Holocaust* (2002), a reflection on meaning and interpretation. Ron wrote *A Time of Turmoil* (with Frank Wayman, 1983), a analysis of public opinion and voting behavior; *Decent and in Order* (2000), a study of church conflict; *Horse Prairie Cemetery of Sesser, Illinois* (with Clara Crocker Brown, 2004), an inventory and analysis of a graveyard; and *Citizenship and Crisis* (with others, 2009), a study of Detroit’s Arab American community after September 11. Both have taken their expertise beyond the academy into the public realm. Both have written high school curriculum units that were widely adopted, Sid on teaching the Holocaust, Ron on teaching the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. Both frequently speak to public groups and the media and are well known off campus. Both deal with sensitive topics.

Both have received various honors throughout their careers. Sid won university-wide awards for Distinguished Teaching, for Distinguished Service, and for Distinguished Research. He is also a past Stirton Professor, the top honor the university grants to its faculty. Ron won awards for Distinguished Teaching and for Distinguished Service, and was a finalist for the Stirton Professorship. Both have been honored off campus, Ron receiving the Founders Award from the Michigan Conference of Political Scientists, for long-time service, Sid receiving the Bernard Maas Award for Jewish Education in the Humanities, among others.

In other ways they are a matching pair. Both came from families unlikely to produce a professor, Sid from a father who was a junk dealer, Ron from a family of coal

miners. Neither had what one would call a rich educational environment at home. By way of background, Sid is Jewish from Rochester, New York, the child and grandchild of immigrants; Ron is from the hills of Southern Illinois with historic roots in Kentucky and Tennessee. Both are married to their college sweethearts, Sid to Lorraine Aroesty, Ron to Jane Williams. Both have two children. Sid has Mariam and Gabriel, Ron has Gregory and Edward. Ron has four grandchildren: Carolanne, Daniel, Sarah, Hannah.

The conversations took place in the fall of 2007. They lasted over ten hours. At the time, Ron was 66, Sid was 62.

The authors wish to thank Chancellor Daniel Little, Provost Susan Martin, and Mardigian Head Librarian Tim Richards for their support.

**Update:** Ron subsequently won the Distinguished Research Award. Sid became a grandfather when Miriam had twin sons. He and Lori were very happy. Sid died in 2012 after a long illness.

## **Dedication**

This book is dedicated to Suzanna Hicks of Bentonville, Arkansas. For years, Suzanna has been a volunteer transcriber for the Voice and Vision Project, the Arab American Oral History project, and now this volume. These projects would have been difficult to implement without her assistance. She exemplifies the principle upon which strong, healthy societies are rooted, that many good things in life never occur unless an individual says, "Since no one else is going to do this, I will do it myself." We extend our warmest appreciation to Suzanna.

Sid Bolkosky and Ron Stockton

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## Chapter One

### Youth, Family, Upbringing

**RS:** Let's start by talking about our lives and our background. Where were you born? What was your family like?

**SB:** I was born in Rochester, New York in 1944. I was an only child. My father was born in Brest-Litovsk in Russia. He emigrated to Buenos Aires, Argentina with his parents and three brothers in 1915. They were there for three years, and then they moved to Newark, New York, about 30 miles outside of Rochester. My father's uncle had come to America ahead of the rest of the family and started a junk yard. He convinced my grandfather to move to Newark and become his partner. My grandfather, who had been an architect, died within a year. He designed the Newark City Hall. You can still see his name on the column, at least you could 20 years ago. The business broke his heart from what I understand. He died when my father was 12. My father never went to high school. He took over the care and support of the family and dropped out of school. He and his mother would ride on a wagon and would sell papers. He was not the oldest but he was the most responsible and got involved in the junk business. He had his own truck and would drive around, buying and selling metals including huge oil tanks. He would be up each morning at 5 a.m., coughing and smoking, and return home around 7 p.m. He died at age 56, I think of smoking three packs of cigarettes a day and probably overwork. He just fell dead in the street. I was 20 when he died. We never got to know each other very well, but when I would have a music gig playing vibes or piano in some club, he would always come to listen. He was an awful businessman, and I recall taking trips to NYC and passing these tanks as he pointed them out with "I own those." But he negotiated with a handshake and when he died at age 56 of a heart attack, all that was gone.

My mother was born in Boston and she moved to Rochester when she was about eight or nine years old. She was the dominant force in the family. She was difficult to live with some time, excessively worried about me. Her sister, who had no children, and her husband were surrogate parents to me. They lived ten blocks from my house and had a cot. I would spend weekends at their house. My grandfather lived with my aunt and uncle and I was quite close with him as well. My aunt was an unusual woman. She always took an interest in what I was doing—unlike my mother. She read my masters thesis on Nietzsche, talked to me about my dissertation. She bought me books from the time I was a toddler. When I was 12 she bought me a copy of *Ulysses*. She had no idea what it was about. We were in New York together once and I asked her to buy me *Tropic of Cancer* by Henry Miller. My uncle knew what it was. He said, "I'll hold this for you."

My mother, on the other hand, was probably the most narcissistic person I ever met. She had no interest in what I was doing. She was always running. She'd go out at 10, 11 o'clock at night meet her friend and take me with her. She would go for coffee. She continued to do that even after our kids were born. We would come to visit her in Rochester and we'd arrive around 10 or 11 o'clock at night. The first thing she'd do was put her coat on and say, "Come on. We're going to the store." She'd go across the street. They were open 24 hours. When she got older, we finally got her into The Jewish Home for the Aged. What prompted that move was that she was shoplifting. The police all

knew her and called us up and said, “She just walked out without paying.” We went immediately to Rochester and there was a social worker in the room with her. The social worker said, “You have two choices. One is that you can go to court and be arraigned for shoplifting and the other is go in The Jewish Home.” My mother said, “I’ll go to court.” And we said, “No. Wrong choice.” So we got her in The Jewish Home. She was not happy. The previous Jewish home was the place you went to die. My grandfather died there. People they knew were dying all over the place. It was like something out of the nineteenth century. The new one on the other hand was very good. Hillary Clinton came to the Rochester Jewish Home when Bill was running for President. She spent the day there examining what kind of health care they had because it was really very good. They still are good, although now they cost a lot of money. My mother died there.

**RS:** You haven’t mentioned your mother’s parents.

**SB:** My grandfather was in the Workman’s Circle. They had an interesting story. They both came from Ukraine. My grandmother was from Kiev and my grandfather was from somewhere else in the Ukraine. I don’t know where. He was in the Russo-Japanese War and was taken prisoner by the Japanese. He was wounded twice and cared for by the Japanese. He told me once that the Japanese treated him better as a prisoner than the Russians did as a soldier. He loved horses. He came to Boston, my grandmother came to Montreal. I think she was 16 or 17. She was supposed to come to be married to some young man and the man didn’t show up. So there were two other men who had also come to meet a woman for marriage purposes, and the woman didn’t show up. So they took my grandmother home with them and I think through them she met my grandfather. She had a sister who lived in Rochester. She came to the United States not knowing anyone. She had the address of her sister so they moved to Rochester and my understanding is that on the train trip – they had two daughters at this point – my grandfather rode with the horse. He was so worried about the horse.

**RS:** Let the family take care of themselves.

**SB:** Apparently my grandmother was pretty tough. She could do it. She died when I was four. She was ill. Her daughters never forgave themselves because she died in a charity ward of some sort.

**RS:** They seem to be arriving about the time there were some really bad things happening in Europe. The Kishinev Massacre was 1903. Did you have any inclination that that was a factor in their immigration?

**SB:** Well, my grandfather didn’t leave until after 1905. I’m guessing 1906. He left before the First World War. He never talked much about it. I mean, my grandfather would tell me all these stories about life in the shtetl [Jewish village] and in the army. He was a very gentle man. At one point he was a night watchman in a Genessee brewery and my mother used to bring him dinner. At 12 o’clock at night she would walk by herself and then she would sit with him a while and then she went home. She would ride



in a wagon with him when he peddled. My aunt was more feminine and there are all kinds of secret stories about her. I suspect she had an abortion. I don't know.

**RS:** This was the aunt you were so close to.

**SB:** Yes. I spent a lot of time with them on the weekends. They ran a grocery store, so I would go after school and I would help run the store. I ran away from home once to stay with them. My mother and I used to fight a lot, especially when I started to date. We had a major argument one night and the next morning I packed and left, eight blocks away. My uncle was willing to adopt me. It created a tension between them and my mother, and they drew apart, but when my mother died we found all these letters. She and my uncle had corresponded and were very cordial, very affectionate in the letters, so something happened somewhere along the line that I don't know about. One day when I was there, the policeman came and took me to the court house where we met with the judge. I was sent home. There was a court order. I was not allowed to see my aunt and uncle again and we had to see counselors. Of course, I saw them anyway, but that was the court order. Years later Lori and I went to the counselor when we got married and we had trouble with my mother and it turns out it was the same counselor. He took out his file and the last thing he wrote about my mother was, she is "impossible." She was eccentric. Everybody talked about how "feisty" she was.

**RS:** What role did religion play in your life?

**SB:** We were not a religious family. My aunt did not keep kosher but my mother did until later in her life. My grandfather was the only religious one. We would attend synagogue services on the holidays. He was active in the Workmen's Circle, a leftist Jewish organization. In fact, we joined when we came to Detroit, mainly for the nursery school. I have some recollections of going to the services and seeing my mother sitting upstairs with the women. They sat upstairs in the balcony. I sat downstairs with my grandfather and my father. One or the other would put a tallis on my head and I would sit there and sleep or whatever. It was a practice I continued with Gabe and Miriam. There must have been eight synagogues within three blocks, so what you did when you were a kid on the holidays, you would just walk from one to the other, hang out with other kids. There was one called the Big Shul which was brought from Europe. It was a huge building. Stained glassed windows and some of the bricks were all brought from Europe and reassembled in Rochester. There was a pretty strong Jewish community in Rochester. It's since almost died off. We have a good friend who still lives there.

I had a bar mitzvah. I went to Hebrew school and hated it. So I had a private tutor who was an obnoxious, uncouth man. I don't know what they paid him. But he got me through. I managed to get through my bar mitzvah.

**RS:** What was the theme of your talk? What was your biblical passage?

**SB:** The passage I had was Isaiah 42, about Israel as a Light unto the Nations. I couldn't do it again, but I've since taught it in English.

**RS:** Was music important in your family?

**SB:** My mother played the piano so she wanted me to take piano lessons. Starting at 12, I took lessons for a year and then hooked up with a friend who was a saxophone player who later became pretty well known as a jazz player in New York. So we formed this band and my teacher didn't like that I was playing jazz, so I quit lessons. When I was 14, I convinced my father to take me to New York City to buy me some vibes. I had heard Milt Jackson play, so I decided to become a vibe player. We walked up and down 42<sup>nd</sup> Street and found a set of vibes for \$250, which was a lot of money then. That same set – they don't make it anymore, the company's out of business – would have cost \$2,000 ten or fifteen years later. I used to play gigs all around during high school and college, especially college. I would occasionally sit in with Chuck Mangioni and his saxophone side man, who had been a good friend through elementary and high school. That became a significant part of my identity as a teen-ager.

**RS:** You paid part of your educational expenses by playing.

**SB:** That and poker. (Both laugh) When I was a junior in college we had a steady gig on weekends playing in some club. When I was in high school I used to sit in at these Black jazz clubs. The one where I went the most often, the Pythod Club, burned down during the riots in 1964. Music became an important part of my life. I had no idea what classical music was. Zero. I had no sense of it whatsoever. I was heavily into jazz. So to have two children who are classical musicians was a little bit surprising for me.

**RS:** I remember Miriam as a little girl playing that cello.

**SB:** She started when she was four years old. We have a good friend who came to visit us and as he got off the plane it looked like he was carrying a baby. It was a viola he had made for her. He had sent to Hungary for the wood and Italy for the ebony and he made it. It took him a year. He wanted to give her something. He said he saw something in her eyes that reminded him of conductors that he saw in the 1930s who were émigrés from the Nazis. So he wanted to give her a musical instrument. The Suzuki method was just starting. There were basically no Suzuki cellists at the time. So she was one of the first Suzuki cellists. By the time she was seven she was picked to go on a tour with six other cellists. They started at the Kennedy Center and they went to Symphony Hall in Atlanta, then Orlando, then they wound up in Carnegie Hall. We took her to Washington – I still can't believe we did this – but we left her and came home. We left her to travel with these strangers. We went to see her in Carnegie Hall, as did Marvin who was the maker of the viola. He met us there in Carnegie Hall. We met during the intermission on the stage. It was very exciting, although she called us from Orlando when we were at my mother's in New York. We got Miriam on the phone and she moaned, "Mom, I don't feel well." She was throwing up and her chaperone wasn't there and she had these two 10-year-old girls who were taking care of her. My mother immediately said, "You have to go right away, now." It was 11 o'clock at night. (Both laugh). "Now! Go to Orlando." So we left Gabe with my mother and went to New York the next day. By the time we got there, she was fine. My kids were very active in theater and in their music.

They don't do theater anymore, which is much a relief. They're both professional musicians. Miriam still plays the cello and Gabe plays the violin.

**RS:** I saw both of your kids on stage. I was particularly impressed when Miriam played the lead role in *The Diary of Anne Frank* in high school. I never told you this but half the way through that play I got kind of spooked because I realized that if she had been there, she would have been there. I know you must have had a similar thought.

**SB:** Oh God. She looked so much like Anne Frank when she was 14. Anne was 14 when she wrote that diary. When I was doing Holocaust survivor interviews, I would get up in the middle of the night and check the kids. I had nightmares that they were on trains. When she was playing Anne Frank I didn't sleep. It was awful. She was good, but it was just awful. The director had me writing the liner notes for the play. I talked to the cast and tried to explain. But what are you going to say to a 14- or 15-year-old kid about this? At one point the director actually locked them in a closet in school and left them for two hours. I was furious. I was beside myself because we knew a Workman's Circle teacher who did that to little kids to show them what the Holocaust was like. I thought I was going to kill the guy. And he's a survivor. I said, "Why do you want to do to our children what they did to you? Why do you want to terrify them?" It obviously had an effect, but there are other ways to communicate that. So that was a rough time.

**RS:** You spoke Yiddish as a child. How did you learn Yiddish?

**SB:** Well, I never spoke it but I understood it. Especially when my parents didn't want me to know what was going on, they would speak Yiddish. It was not the first language of the house, but it was close. And my grandfather spoke it. What I didn't know is that until he died, my father spoke Spanish. I never knew that until after he died but they had lived for three years in Buenos Aires. He spoke Yiddish, Spanish and, of course, English. I can do an interview in Yiddish. It's tough but it's possible.

**RS:** You seem to have survived the psychological stresses of childhood. This isn't easy.

**SB:** No. It's not easy. But a lot of it has to do with my uncle and my grandfather. They were rescuers in a way. When I was a very small child my mother would walk me over to my grandmother's house where my aunt and uncle also lived and she would leave me for the day. I don't know where she would go. She would go out and shop or whatever. But she was always off running somewhere. My aunt once told me that before my grandmother died, she said, "You have to take care of him," which I think she did. Later she got Alzheimer's.

**RS:** Do you still have ties to Rochester?

**SB:** I really don't. I have no family left there. Lori has a brother who's 85 and is in The Jewish Home.

**RS:** She was the baby in the family.

**SB:** Right. Her oldest brother died about a year ago. He was 86. Her second brother is 85 now. Her sister is 79 and then Lori came fifteen years later. I have been to see my old house, which is now in the heart of one of Rochester's ghettos that is primarily Latino. And there is a graveyard. It's on a street called Britton Road. Nobody ever said, "The graveyard on Britton Road." It was just "Britton Road." My grandparents and I think one great-grandparent are buried there. I don't know how the great-grandparent came to America. He died in the 1920s. So they obviously brought somebody over. I'm very fond of Rochester, but it's overlaid with childhood trauma – maybe not trauma, but unpleasantness. Lori and I got married a week before we graduated from college. We went to Highland, New York, went to commencement at the University of Rochester and then the end of that summer we came to Detroit where I did a master's. We escaped and we haven't been back since, I mean back to live. Of course we visited.

**RS:** How did you become a professor. Is the scholar a product of the child?

**SB:** I don't think so. The standard expectation was to be a doctor or lawyer. But a historian? (Laughing) My mother to the end of her life had no idea what I did. Never mind the Holocaust. She had no idea about that either. I think there were a few individuals who directed me. They were teachers. One was Hayden White, whom I met at the University of Rochester. Another was Marvin Bram who made the viola. We shared an office at Hobart. I don't think anybody in high school would have predicted that I would become an historian. I don't know what they would have predicted.

I switched from pre-med to history, took a course with Hayden White and changed my professional life. He convinced me to come to Wayne to study with John Weiss for a masters degree in modern European intellectual history. (I was moving from White to White.) After finishing that in one year, I opted to go to SUNY Binghamton for a doctorate. Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* overwhelmed me with her analysis of Eichmann as a banal, ordinary bureaucrat and her ten pages or so in which she stunningly (to me) described German Jews as more German than Jewish. The book caused an intellectual uproar, especially coming from Arendt, herself a German Jew who lived in a German Jewish enclave on the upper east side of New York in what was known as "The Fourth Reich." Reading Freud and other psychoanalytic literature, I managed to combine research on German Jews with that theory and with leftist anthropological work. Despite my advisor's admitted ignorance in all that, I wrote a dissertation that became my first book, *The Distorted Image*, in 1975.

**RS:** Were you a family of readers? Did you have books in the house?

**SB:** Just me. I read newspapers and magazines. That was it. I never remember seeing my father reading a book.

**RS:** What magazines did you get? Do you remember? We got *Reader's Digest*.

**SB:** We did too, and *Life* magazine. Occasionally I remember seeing *Photoplay*. But we got two newspapers. Rochester had two newspapers and we subscribed to both

**RS:** What did your family do for entertainment?

**SB:** On Saturday nights when I would stay with my aunt and uncle, we would get pizza and then watch wrestling on television. Gorgeous George was one of my favorites. On Sundays we would play badminton with the local kids.

**RS:** Wrestling! This brings back memories. We had the first television in our town. My mom won it in a raffle. It was big, 16 inches, the console type with a record player and a radio, and a rotator box on top to rotate the antenna that was on top of the house to locate the station. We had a big window in our living room and every Saturday night in the summer we would turn the television around to face out. All the neighbors would bring their chairs and sit in the front yard watching television. We would watch Sid Ceasar and the *Show of Shows*. Ninety minutes of pure genius, live every Saturday night.

**SB:** At 8:00

**RS:** Yes, at 8:00. Then would come *Big Time Wrestling*, “live from Kiel Auditorium in St. Louis.” Lou Thez was the champion. No one could beat him.

**RS:** Changing subjects, you were ill as a young boy.

**SB:** I was 18. I started to hemorrhage. I checked into the Emergency Room and my spleen was enlarged eight times. Nobody quite knew what that was. Was it an ulcer? Finally they took out my spleen and rerouted my arteries. I had hepatitis because of all the blood transfusions. Then exactly a year later the surgery procedure failed. Nobody in Rochester knew what to do. There was a young guy from the Strong Memorial Hospital at the University of Rochester who was like 32. He said to my mother, who was hysterical, “I think I can help.” I remember him taking me in February to the other hospital. He stopped the bleeding. He came in the next morning and he said, “I’m going to take you into surgery.” I said, “I don’t want to have any more surgery, I’m not bleeding anymore.” He said, “It’s up to you, you’re 18.” I had turned 18 that day. He said, “It’s completely your decision. I think if you leave the hospital you’ll die in 48 hours.” So I said, “Fine, let me rethink this.” So I was in surgery for 10 hours and it was the fourth such operation they had ever done and two of the three had died. But this guy was a genius. He developed high pressure surgery in this tank. He also invented what’s called the Dal Schwartz Tube, what people use after surgery to clear their lungs out. He saved my life. There was no question about it. I remember waking up and looking out the hospital window – I had a private room – and seeing the Sears sign covered in snow. That’s the first thing I saw, and then I looked over and there was Lori. She was there just about everyday. I was in the hospital about six months. I got to know all the doctors and the nurses. I observed an autopsy. Just walked in. I became a pre-med student for a year and then I couldn’t kill the frog.

**RS:** So you never even got to a cadaver.

**SB:** No, not even close. I talked to the doctor and I said, “I think I’m going to have to not do this.” And he said, “Well, if you ever want to get into medical school, just let me know.” This told me a lot about admission programs.

**RS:** That surgery must have affected you psychologically in your view of the world.

**SB:** Absolutely. I thought I was on borrowed time, stolen time. To some extent I retained that feeling. When I turned 56 – my father was 56 when he died – I was convinced that that was the year to die. In fact, that was the year I had open heart surgery. I was positive that it was going to happen. By then, with my children and Lori, life was too full to give in, or so it seemed. It was a long year.

**RS:** Your friends were worried. We were afraid we were going to lose you.

**SB:** Well, I was very grateful. Just knowing people were worried helped. Everybody kept in touch. They were a great help to Lori, all of you guys were. One year to the day before I had surgery, Miriam got married. They spent their anniversary in Detroit. I remember waking up and both Miriam and her husband and Lori were there. There was an attractive young nurse who took care of me. I was on a respirator so I couldn’t talk and I was trying to say, “How old is she?” I was trying to set something up for Gabe. So Miriam brought me a pad and pencil and I couldn’t sit up, so she said, “We can’t read your writing under the best of circumstances,” so I started to sign because my mother had taught me how to do sign language.

**RS:** Why did she know that? That’s a very technical skill.

**SB:** My mother had a hearing problem. We had a neighbor who was – I don’t know what the correct term is these days – she was deaf and dumb. She couldn’t speak. And she would come and sit and talk with my mother. So my mother taught me to sign. And Miriam caught it, she caught that I was using sign language. Of course nobody else understood it. But I think they got it from the writing. I’m sure the nurse thought, “Here’s this old man hitting on me.” We paid for them to go to dinner that night. They didn’t know that and my son-in-law’s response was if he had know that we were paying he would have gotten a better bottle of wine. (Both laugh)

**RS:** You had another health problem. Your back collapsed. That was a case where you might not have walked again.

**SB:** Yes. I collapsed. I couldn’t stand up. It was the day that the lights went out all over the country.

**RS:** The power failure. It closed down the whole Midwest. What year was that?

**SB:** 2003. As a matter of fact, after the heart surgery I fell into a post-surgical depression. They did a study at Harvard that you can determine how long the post-surgical depression will last by how long the heart was out of your body. I wouldn’t

watch the news – this was after 9/11. I wouldn't watch the news. I wouldn't watch anything but old movies. And I was suicidal at one point. I went to a shrink. This was a psychoanalyst who was also a pharmacological specialist. He helped a lot. So that was that. Then the last medical problem was about two years ago and it was a return of the circulatory problem that I had had when I was 18. I was at the point where my blood count was 7.1 – the average is like 14. So nobody knew how I was able to even stand up, much less walk into the hospital. So it was emergency surgery. That was pretty much touch and go because I was in and out of the hospital three times in ten days. I kept hemorrhaging. That's when Lori quite literally saved my life. She called the doctor immediately and he said, "I'll be there in ten minutes." I don't think I would have lasted an hour. But it's been two years without a hospital visit.

**SB:** We've been talking about me. Let's talk about you. Where were you born?

**RS:** I was born in 1940 in a small Southern Illinois town called Sesser. It had 1,500 people. In a town like that, everyone knows you so you can't get away with much. It was comforting in that sense, but also a bit boring. We were border state people, living in the foothills of the Ozarks. Historically, most of our families were from southern Kentucky and eastern Tennessee. Scholars call us Scots-Irish but we just called ourselves Americans. We are the only ethnic group in the country without an ethnic label or an ethnic identity. I am the seventh generation of my family on my grandmother's side to live in that place. When I go to the graveyards I find my parents, my grandparents, my great grandparents, my great great grandparents. We were linked to the past through those graveyards. We would go there on Decoration Day, which is what Memorial Day was called back then. Even now, I am a graveyard freak. Whenever I am in a new place, I go to the graveyards. I have hundreds of slides from graveyards around the world. I take my grandchildren to graveyards and tell them about the stones. They love it. I even wrote a book about the graveyard where my family are buried, and I organized a class, a lecture series, about graveyards. The students liked it.

**SB:** I heard about this class. They did like it.

**RS:** I grew up in humble circumstances. As a boy, I had a kerosene lantern by my bed. We got water out of a well. When I was in the sixth grade, my dad and uncle put in an indoor toilet for us. Until then, we used the outhouse. It was a two-holer, very up-scale. (Laughs). It was my job to empty the chamber pot every morning, since nobody wanted to use the outhouse at night. Someday I will tell you what it was like in January. We bathed once a week. My mom would heat water on the wood stove in the kitchen. We would put the Number 3 washtub next to it to stay warm, and bathe the whole family, my sister and me first, parents next, same water. My room was in the attic above the kitchen. My dad cut a hole in the ceiling so the warm air would rise up and heat the room. I would lie on my belly and feel that air blow up on my face. We had a Franklin-type stove in the living room with a big black stove pipe going into the wall and to the chimney. My dad would bank the fire at night, then reactivate the coals in the morning to restart it. He would take the klinkers – the residual burned-up coal, like lava – and throw it into the pot holes in the street. We had dirt roads, so this as the equivalent of road repairs.

My mom made us keep our shoes on until school was out. Then it was bare feet until school started. In the early fall, we would rend lard and can food. We had a big copper kettle to make apple butter. I have great memories of stirring that kettle on the Saturday we did the work. The whole family would be there on my uncle's farm: my grandmother, my aunts and uncles, my cousins. But some times it was oppressively hot, and the women had to do the work inside in the kitchen. My mom would can grape juice, green beans, peaches, and pickles. We would have those all winter long. We never went hungry, but we were economically marginal. In high school, I had three shirts, all corduroy, all solid color. I would wear one for a week, no deodorant, then switch. I can only imagine how I smelled to my classmates. You remember that amazing film, *Shoah*, nine hours long? We saw it together.

**SB:** Yes

**RS:** Lanzman interviewed some Polish villagers about their recollections of Jews. One said, "They were rich. The girls wore nice clothes." That resonated with me. I felt that way about the girls in my class whose fathers had better jobs. They were not rich and they were not Jewish, but they seemed poised and confident. Poverty is both objective and subjective. At one level, you don't get your teeth fixed, but at another level, other kids have Levis and you wear work jeans. I was intimidated and could never talk to those girls. To this day, I can't figure out how I managed to talk to Jane when I met her. She was so beautiful, and so elegant, and an A+ student. Maybe I got over it.

**SB:** It's a good thing you did. What was life like in that region?

**RS:** Our life was really simple. In the summer we would swim or go to stock car races. On Memorial Day I would lie for three hours and listen to the Indianapolis 500. My favorite stock car was B-13. It was owned by our neighbor, Goosie Martin. He would work on that car constantly, tuning it and trying to get it in shape for the next race. There were some strange aspects of our culture, some things that even now I don't understand. We had water witches who could find water by walking around with a forked limb. I saw this once, at my uncle's house. The person walked around until the point dropped. He said, "You will find water here, 15 feet down." They dug the well, and there was the water, 15 feet down. There was also a man who could remove warts just by rubbing them with his finger. He lived in the bottoms, as we called the swampy area around the Big Muddy River. My dad took my sister to him. She is three-years younger than I am. I remember sitting in the car as they walked to that old shack where he lived. There was no road to it. His granddaughter told me decades later that he was the town drunk. He got lost in the bottoms one night and thought he was going to die. He prayed to God for help and when he finally found his way back home he gave up alcohol. He never drank again. He realized he had a small hole in his finger that had no explanation. He felt that God wanted him to be a faith healer. He would rub a wound or wart and it would heal. My cousin also went to him. In both cases, their warts fell off in a week or so.

We knew that people from the city looked down on us. Whenever a Chicago newspaper wrote about Southern Illinois, the focus seemed to be on something quaint, or on some bizarre religious practice or crime or some sexual offense. Seldom was it



anything positive. To be honest, we gave them lots of ammunition. We sounded funny. We were poor and had little education. We talked through our noses and spoke broken English. We were narrow and parochial. We used ethnic terms casually and made jokes about people different from ourselves. We had what scholars today call an Oppositional Culture. This occurs when people have a historic grievance against the power structure and an ongoing sense of marginalization. We can be difficult, the first to offend and the first to take offense. We saw city people as our natural enemies. Our preachers taught us a simple theology of taking the Bible at its word. We were called fundamentalists, today evangelicals. I have always thought that the evangelical religious right should be seen as a defiant ethnic group manifesting itself through religious symbols rather than as a religious movement. Whenever I suggest this at a conference, people disagree with me, but I am right.

During the war, we joined the trek of Southern Illinois people to Chicago. We lived in a rented basement. My dad and several members of our family, mostly women, worked at the Mars candy factory. That was when Mr. Mars would walk around and ask people how things were going. My dad never got drafted. There were different stories of why that was. One was that he was the only man in a shift with seventeen women, and Mars had a contract with the military. They needed someone to do the lifting so he got a waiver. Or maybe he just didn't pass the examination for some reason. A lot of small town guys didn't pass. My dad had an eighth grade education. My mom did a little better, but not much. Her family lost their house in the depression and she dropped out of school after the ninth grade to work. She traveled around with a mattress company. They would go to a town and rebuild mattresses for people. She was smarter than my dad, and this created tensions between them. She was a rather unhappy person, not easy to enjoy. I think the depression left serious wounds on both of them.

When the war ended, we returned home. When my dad told his boss he was quitting the boss tried to talk him out of it. My dad told him, "I want to go back to Southern Illinois. Around here there are people everywhere but nobody knows you. I want to live where everyone knows me and where you can walk in the country and see cattle and wide open spaces." The boss recognized the integrity of that position and gave his blessing for a good worker to leave. Back home, my parents went in with my uncle and aunt and ran a general store for a while. Every mine had a store near it. There was a coal stove in front of the meat counter where people would sit around and talk. One of the people who would come by was Billy Grammer, the Grand Ole Opry singer. You may know his song, *Gotta Travel On*. It was number one on the hit parade in the 1960s.

**SB:** I am not sure.

**RS:** (singing) "I've laid around, and played around, this old town too long, summer's almost gone, and winter's coming on..."

**SB:** Oh, yes. I know that.

**RS:** That was before he became famous. His sister attended our church. She came to my mother's funeral last year. Billy has a tombstone in the local graveyard. He is still alive but he has a tombstone. That is how people do it, so they don't inconvenience their kids.

His stone is in the shape of a big guitar, with the line “Gotta Travel On” carved into it. He is elderly now. He lives in Sesser on a farm.

**SB:** If you didn’t stick with the store, how did your family make a living?

**RS:** Mining. I am the son of a coal miner, the grandson and great grandson and nephew and cousin of coal miners, and the son-in-law of a coal miner. Most people in my town were either miners or dirt farmers. The life of a miner is very hard. They live with the prospect of instant death, or of life with a broken body. My dad and uncles had black lung disease. My dad’s “buddy,” his work mate, was killed in the mine. The roof just caved in on him. Once the roof caved in on my dad and covered him up to his chest but he got off with just a broken vertebra. My dad’s namesake was also killed in the mines. He was called Little Ralph. My dad was Ralph and my older cousin named her son after him. He was just 21. He had a wife and two kids. He lived for three days. His dad sat with him crying as he died. He said, “Daddy, I don’t want to die,” and he died. There was nothing anyone could do. My dad never talked to me much about anything but I have a very vivid memory of him coming home from work one day. He was carrying his miner’s bucket for food and water, and the gunny sack miners used to bring their dirty clothes home once a week to be cleaned. He got dropped off by his car pool and started out to the shed. I was playing in the back yard, sitting on the ground, and he diverted over to where I was. He looked at me and said, “If you ever even mention going into the mines, I will kick your butt.” I never knew what happened to make him say that, but that was the only career advice my dad ever gave me. I have always assumed that life is not guaranteed and that death comes quickly. Death is stalking us. That is how miners think.

**SB:** So this was a union family?

**RS:** Yes. The United Mine Workers of America was a central part of our lives. John L. Lewis was a hero, our tribune, someone who fought for us in the face of violence and intimidation from people more powerful. Even now I have a framed picture of him on my office wall at home. I grew up hearing stories of workers being beaten by mine bullies, and about court injunctions against strikes, and of being fired upon by the National Guard, acting for the owners. I grew up with stories of union busting and of “scabs” brought in to break strikes by forcing out the workers. Often the scabs were recent immigrants or Black. More than once, the miners attacked them and left bodies strewn around. Our region was notorious for its labor violence. One incident before I was born killed 29 people. At different times, my family were on both sides of those barricades. The miners had in their ranks people of all ethnic groups, many immigrants, some Black. The miners had all the prejudices of their culture but the leaders knew that ethnic, racial, or sectarian divisions could destroy the union. The *UMWA Journal*, my monthly dose of politics, public policy, and class struggle when I was a boy, absolutely opposed any sectarian divisions. They knew the company would use that to divide the workers. They had a strategy for fighting this danger. Most issues had stories of some worker who had retired after 40 years, or been killed in an explosion, or held some union office. Often the photographs and stories would be of miners who were Black or immigrant or even

female. The message was clear: When you are in the union, you are in the union. There is no distinction of person. It was an ideal I embraced.

When my sons were young, I gave them my own fatherly advice. I told them that there are a limited number of good jobs; there are people willing to kill their mothers to get those jobs; employers are not interested in your excuses; and don't expect any favors. That advice came right out of my life. It is the same advice I give to my students.

**SB:** It sounds as if you are very different from your father.

**RS:** I admired my dad in some ways even though he was not very mature and it was not easy being his son. He knew what he expected of himself as a man: work hard, be responsible, provide for your family. When I was in grade school, he decided he wanted to have a basement in our house. We had a half basement for the furnace but he wanted a basement under the other half of the house for his family. Every day after work, he would come home and dig out that basement using a shovel and a wheelbarrow. It took months and in the end there was dirt piled all around the back yard. I never knew what happened to that dirt. I guess it just got spread around, but when it was over we had a nice cool basement. I really admired my dad for that.

**SB:** What about your wider family? What kind of people were they?

**RS:** My Grandpa Stockton died of pneumonia in 1932 when my dad was still at home. He was a coal miner. My grandmother was a simple woman with a third grade education. She lived to be 89. Once when I was in college she saw a poster in a school with all the presidents, and made a list for me. She knew I was studying government and thought that might help me in my education. I don't know what happened to that list. It meant a lot to me and I wish I still had it. My mom's parents were very important to me, especially my grandmother. She was an immigrant from northern France, from the coal mining region. It interested me to know that this whole branch of my family came from another country. This immigrant side also meant I grew up in a religiously mixed family. In spite of our strong Protestant identity, we had relatives who were not only Catholics but immigrants. I grew up around the French language but they never spoke French to anyone born in the country so I never learned a word. My great grandfather never learned good English and I could never understand him. I think he spent his whole life in a French town that just happened to be in Southern Illinois. My great grandmother was elderly when I knew her but she was very elegant and charming. As a young girl she had worked in the mines. This was at a time when there was no air system so miners, men and women, worked topless. When I learned that I wondered if my elegant, proper great grandmother had worked topless. Emil Zola could have written *Germinal* about my family.

My mother's father was a bit irresponsible. He was a hobo as a youth, and even when he was married he would disappear for journeys out west. He would tell me exciting stories of riding the rails and of hobo jungles. Hobo jungles were where the hobos would sleep at night. The railroads would hire thugs called bullies to chase them away. There was a monthly tabloid called *The Hobo News*. My grandfather once had a story published in it. He described a night in a hobo jungle when they were attacked by a gang of bullies and one of the men was beaten to death. He had a copy of that magazine,

and I was in awe of the fact that my own grandfather had something published. I think that inspired me. Once when I was a boy I asked him to tell me story about when he was a bum. He acted very offended and said, "I was never a bum. I was a hobo." With me sitting there not sure if I was in trouble, he said there were two differences between a bum and a hobo. The first is that while neither one likes to work, when they run out of money a hobo will get a job and a bum will steal. The second is that when it is cold outside, a bum will go to the train station to sleep but a hobo will go to the library to read. Then he winked at me, and I knew I was not in trouble.

**SB:** And you remembered the story.

**RS:** I did. I tell it to my grandchildren. They love the idea that their grandfather had a grandfather. My grandparents lived in Chicago. My grandmother worked in a restaurant and my grandfather worked for the railroad, controlling one of those manual arms that he let drop down when a train came. We kids though it was exciting to go into the small elevated room where my grandfather stayed while waiting for a train to come. In my grandmother's restaurant there was a locker with a big swinging door. She got hit on the breast one day and developed cancer. Anyway, that was what people said happened. Our family believed in divine healing, the laying on of hands, so she did not go to see a doctor until it was too late. She was told she did not have long to live so they came home to Benton, just 14 miles from us. We moved in with them for the last six months of her life. This was a difficult time for me. I was in the sixth grade and had to start a new school where I did not know anyone. I was very shy, even withdrawn, and my grandmother, the person I loved the most in the world, was dying. I was in the house with her so that was good, but at night she would cry in pain. They did not have good pain killers in those days so she suffered terribly. Those moans are still with me. When she died, I cried but I was also glad she did not have to suffer any more. How can a little boy be happy to give up the dearest person in his life?

**SB:** Were you close to any particular aunts or uncles?

**RS:** Several aunts and uncles played a major role in my life. I think in America we put too much pressure on people with our concept of the nuclear family. A Kenya friend says American and Kenyan child rearing practices are the exact opposite. In America the parents have daily supervision of children until they get ready to marry and then they step back. In Kenya, children are raised by their aunts and uncles and grandparents but when they are ready to marry, the parents step in to make sure there is not a bad choice. That system has advantages, although I shudder at the thought of the wife my parents would have chosen for me. Still, family members take pressure off of kids, and parents. They can neutralize parental flaws. My aunts were like surrogate mothers for me, and my uncles were role models. They were important in what I ultimately became as a person.

**SB:** Was religion important to you?

**RS:** It was central to our lives. All of our friends were either from our church or from our family. My dad was a deacon. We went to five services a week. On Sunday

morning, we started with Sunday School. We would read Bible passages and discuss the passage. The purpose of the discussion was to make sure we understood in a correct way. My Uncle Clarence was our teacher and he was a very admirable person so that made the lessons better. Then we would go to the church service. The sermons were of a “hellfire and damnation” nature. The theme was always the same: you are a sinner, you are in danger of hellfire, and you must be saved to escape this fate. Sin had to do with drinking, smoking, swearing, dancing, gambling and sex. Especially sex. I am convinced that concern about sexual behavior is at the center of all conservative religions. On Sunday evening we went to Youth Group, which had more Bible study. Often there were contests to see who could memorize the most Bible verses. I almost always won those contests. Then we had a Sunday night service. Wednesday night repeated the same thing: sermon, songs, altar call. The altar call, always accompanied by a pleading song, was to encourage us to come forward and give our heart to Jesus. “Come Home. Come Home. Ye who are weary, come home. Softly and tenderly, Jesus is calling. Calling, O sinner, come home.” Some of those songs were great: “The Old Rugged Cross,” “I Won’t Have to Cross Jordan Alone,” “In the Garden.” I miss them, even today. I have a couple of tapes of gospel music for when I am driving to campus.

Every year we had a week-long revival meeting and every summer all the churches organized a two-week camp meeting that drew people from all over Southern Illinois. There would be services every night. We would bring in some out-of-town preacher who would deliver powerful sermons. I got saved at a revival meeting in a Baptist church when I was twelve. It was an emotional thing for me, walking forward in front of all those people and kneeling at the altar to pray. A couple of years later, I was sanctified. That was the “second act of grace,” as we called it. Sanctification was to root out sin from your soul. I am not sure it was completely successful in my case. (Laughs). I was baptized in a local lake. I remember one person speculating that perhaps the baptism was not valid since it was not in moving water as Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River. I moved away from this style of religion, but I am grateful because it taught me to sit still for an hour, to listen to a sermon, and to read the Bible. Those are useful skills for a child.

**SB:** What denomination was that?

**RS:** It was the Church of God. It is a small denomination, mostly concentrated in the Midwest. This church was a part of what scholars call “the restorationist movement” in the nineteenth century. They believed that denominations were against God’s Will since they separated believers. They decided to create a non-denominational denomination to restore the true church. Our family had helped found the small church in our town and my uncle had helped found one in Benton, fourteen miles away. In time, the one in Sesser merged with the one in Benton so we attended the Benton church. That was a long way to drive in the 1950s, 28 miles round trip, twice on Sunday. I knew my family had helped found our congregation but I did not know how deeply we had been involved until recently. When my grandfather died, we inherited some religious books about doctrine and the history of the church and some of the great ministers, and their sermons. The books had library-type envelopes in the back. I assumed he had bought them from a library somewhere. Just a few years ago, I learned from my aunt that he had organized a

private lending library. I never thought of my grandfather as a religious person, but he must have cared enough to invest his money in books for other people to read.

**SB:** You had health problems as a child.

**RS:** When I was eight I got rheumatic fever. This was 1949, in December. It was cold in my room that morning. I got up for school and could not stand up. I was a very responsible child so when I told my mom I did not want to go to school, she knew there was something wrong. My knees were swollen and very painful. I was put in the hospital for two weeks, then had to stay in bed for three months. I can't even imagine what it was like for that little boy to stay in bed for three months. I would look out the window at my friends playing and ask my parents why I could not go out. It must have broken their hearts. My aunts and uncles and cousins would come by and play games with me. Family is important at a time like that. Then for some years, I was not allowed to run or ride a bike or take PE. I never learned to play sports like other boys, softball or basketball or track. Since there was nothing in those days resembling rehabilitation therapy, my dad and his uncle went into the woods and cut two small trees to make me crutches. I still have them. They are 36 inches high. My 8-year-old granddaughter loves to walk on them. The next time you are over, look in the living room. They are tucked away in a corner.

**SB:** Were there any ongoing problems from this?

**RS:** The disease left scars in my heart and a murmur. I grew up believing I would not live very long. When I started dating Jane, my mom told her about my condition. Just a couple of years ago my mother-in-law, who is a very healthy 92, told me that she and Jane had discussed this and Jane had said she wanted to be with me for whatever time there was. It moved me to hear that, although Jane says she does not remember the conversation. The danger may have been exaggerated because in time those murmurs disappeared, but psychologically there was an ongoing impact. When I was 23 and living in Kenya my fear created a moment of truth. Jane and I decided to climb Mt. Kilimanjaro with two friends during school break. As I said a minute ago, I had never run or done anything physical so this was a special challenge. Kilimanjaro is the highest free-standing mountain in the world. It starts at 4,500 feet and rises to 19,000. We took five days to reach the top. The last night, we slept at 16,000 feet at the base of the peak. The guide wakes you up at 3:00 to begin the climb in the darkness. I think they are afraid for you to see what is waiting. You rise 3,000 feet in altitude in three linear miles. At that level the oxygen is very thin and the slope is so steep that you think you are falling asleep and if you could just take a nap you would be fine. You are also in skree, which is broken rock, so that your feet sink and you slide back, almost as if it were mud. I would force myself to take ten steps before I rested. This is strenuous even for someone in peak physical condition. My heart was pounding in a way it had never done in my life. I was seriously afraid I would die. It was irrational, but then fear is often irrational. I knew if I turned back, no one would think less of me since one of our party had already turned back, and she was in top physical condition. I decided that if I went back, I would always know that I had stopped when I did not have to. I decided not to turn back. When I got to

the top of that mountain and looked out onto the plains of Africa, I had a feeling I had never had before. I knew then that I had refused to stop. Since then, I have climbed anything I could: Mt. Kenya and Kilimanbogo in Kenya, Table Mountain and the Stellenbosch mountains in South Africa, Picacho Peak in Arizona, Masada in Israel, Champlain Mountain in Maine. Even last month when I was in Jerusalem I walked up the Mount of Olives rather than take a taxi. That Kilimanjaro climb helped me face my fear. By the way, Jane also made it to the top.

**SB:** Were you happy as a child?

**RS:** I was very reserved and insecure, almost introverted. At school I seldom spoke. I had two good friends at school but that was about all. One of them died in the mines when he was in his early 20s. He left behind a wife and two kids.

**SB:** Were you a musical family?

**RS:** My mother played the piano a little. Sometimes she would play in church when the regular pianist was absent. I took piano lessons for three years but never learned to read music. I suspect my mom was fulfilling some wish but it didn't work. I would go home after a lesson and figure out how to play the tune and then fake it. Today, I can't even play simple songs. I am very sympathetic to those kids who say, "I went to school for twelve years but never learned to read." I feel exactly that way. My teachers were very able and conscientious so the problem was somehow on my own side.

**SB:** Do you still have ties to the place you grew up?

**RS:** Yes. I go back and feel as if I belong. I think of the opening line from Isak Dinesen's book *Out of Africa* when she talks about her farm in Kenya and says, "Here I am, where I ought to be." But it was a fantasy for her, and it is a fantasy for me. I go there about twice a year to visit family. I go to graveyards and see the graves of my ancestors, but only a few people know me and it is an illusion that that is my place.

**SB:** What forces in your life produced the professor, especially one interested in international affairs?

**RS:** I have thought about this over the years. Someone said there are two kinds of children, those who are a natural outgrowth of their family, and those dropped from a spaceship. I am of the spaceship variety. I feel a part of my family but I cannot figure out how a professor, especially this one, came out of that family. I think it was a series of small, incremental steps. From the time I was a small boy I read the newspaper every day, all the political stories. An early interest in the world came from being a stamp collector. Once I bought a bag of stamps: "1000 stamps from all around the world. One dollar. From mission stations and foreign businesses. Unsorted. Who knows what treasures you may find!!!" I had a stamp album and went through those stamps one at a time, putting them in the right place. I learned all the countries and the leaders. I could tell you the places in the British Empire, the French Empire, Europe, Latin America,

Asia. Another development was when I was a junior in high school. We had to prepare our schedule for the next year and I realized I had taken all the pre-college courses. My town was really poor and the school did not offer foreign language, physics, chemistry, or advanced math. My parents decided we should move to Benton to continue my education. That was a turning point in my life. It became my second home town even though I only lived there one year. It had 7,500 people and a wider class system. Two of my best friends from church were there and I fell in with a group of people who were more oriented to education. I got a job working in the A&W Root Beer stand so I had some spending money. I took classes in Chemistry, Physics, Latin, Civics, and senior English. My English teacher, Miss Burkhart, was very important in my development. She made us memorize poetry and write a “theme” every week. I had never written essays so this was new for me. It was good preparation for college. She also made learning fun. She would tell us stories about the poets we read, often risqué stories. Once you know about Byron’s wild parties, you saw his poems in a different light. I looked forward to those classes. Her style of teaching also influenced me: challenge your students by forcing them to do more than they have done, and make learning something they like. Just last year I was at a graveyard in Benton and saw her stone. I was not expecting to see it, but it made me happy to see her final resting place.

**SB:** Did you have books in the house?

**RS:** We had the *Bible* and some books from my grandfather, including a first edition of Mark Twain’s *Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*. He probably had inherited that from his own father. But even without books around, I read a lot as a child, partially because I could not do anything strenuous. In the summer I would lie on the porch swing and read. It gets really hot in Southern Illinois and nobody had air conditioning, so reading was a good thing. Benton had a new library and we could take out five books at a time. In the summer, my mom would drive my sister and me over on alternate Wednesdays and I would pick out five books. Mostly they were history or biography, or some book I had heard of. We also got the *Chicago Tribune* on Sunday. They had great comics, but they also had a book magazine. I would read that magazine every Sunday. Not only did I learn about books but I learned about how people analyzed and wrote. When I was in college, an English teacher gave me a bad grade on a book review and wrote “sounds *very* bookish.” She thought I had plagiarized. She had probably never encountered a kid from the hills who could write, so she reached the obvious conclusion. Maybe I should have been pleased that I surprised her, but that was not the way I saw it.

My parents were like so many after the Second World War. They wanted their son to go to college. This was never expected of my sister, only me. They did not know what that would mean, but it was something they wanted, so it was something I thought about. At a certain point, I knew that if I was going to break out, I would have to change. I consciously abandoned my accent, and learned standard English and pronunciation. In ways that I did not fully understand, I pulled away from what I had been. It was an essential process. If I still sounded like my cousins, I would not be a professor. If I went to the church of my heritage, my colleagues would wonder what was wrong with me. There is a price to be paid for moving into the mainstream and taking advantage of what this wonderful country has to offer. This was not as hard for me as it is for others in our



society, but each of us experiences such a thing on our own terms. For me, it was not easy. I paid it. I do not regret it. I don't want to say these things to make anyone feel sorry for me. I am just reporting. There are times when life deals you a pair of twos and you play them as best you can. Few people could break out the way I did, so I am not so naïve as to think that the system is just. It is rigged, and most poor people know it. I was successful. Most others fail.

*The New York Times* did a series on class a couple of years ago. They said you can't really understand the enduring damage of class unless you have changed classes. Those who move up always feel slightly out of place, as if they're frauds who shouldn't be there. This was definitely true for me, but it was more complex than that. I changed class, but also left my sub-culture and my religion. When someone refers to me as a WASP, which implies high status, I'm usually quiet but I want to spit. At a certain point, all of these complexities came together. In my early 40s I had what you might call a midlife crisis. I had really lost a sense of who I was and what I wanted out of life. I was causing grief for my wife, my kids, my friends, and myself. I was in therapy for a time and that helped a lot. Sometimes it's hard to be honest with yourself about what it is that's bothering you. I was able to think these things through and deal with them. Without that, I would probably find it hard to discuss some of these topics.

**SB:** What was your undergraduate college experience?

**RS:** I went to Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, our regional university. In those days the state was trying to increase the number of teachers to accommodate the baby boom so they had scholarships for students who would take a full course in teacher training. I got one of those, so in addition to my major and minor, I was trained and certified in secondary education. Without that scholarship I could never have afforded college. My parents gave me \$25 a week to pay for a room. I worked in the library during the school year, and in farm labor, among other things, in the summer to cover the other expenses. My mother later said she was sorry they gave me so little, but it was all they could spare. College was hard for me. I lacked discipline and study skills and was not prepared for serious study. I nearly flunked out my freshman year. I began to wonder if I had what it takes. That summer I realized that if I dropped out, I would have to go into the mines or go to a factory somewhere, and I decided to go back and give it my best effort. I settled on a major in government (as political science was then called) and began to do much better. I also met Jane, which was very stabilizing in my life.

**SB:** You mentioned living in Kenya. Tell me about that.

**RS:** This was a turning point in my life. Jane and I had just gotten our Bachelor's degrees. I had started a master's degree and was planning to get a job teaching in a high school. I had never been anywhere except for trips to Chicago and St. Louis. We signed up for a program called Teachers for East Africa and got sent to Kenya for two years. This was 1964. We had a six-week training program at Columbia University in Manhattan. I was thrilled. There were more people on each block than in my whole town. Then we went to Africa. It was an exciting time. Americans were really respected. We had spoken against the colonial system and had developed very good relations with

African countries, giving them aid, sending them teachers and agricultural advisors. Americans were seen in a very positive way. Kenya had become independent the year before we arrived. During colonial times, there had been a color bar so the only job a Kenya college graduate could hold was as a teacher. When independence came, the country lost most of its graduate teachers to public service. TEA tried to fill the gap. I taught history and literature, and after one day, Jane was hired on a local contract to teach the first-year students. Her job was to strengthen their English language skills. It was a wonderful two years for us, like a prolonged honeymoon. We were newly married and had no kids. We bought a tent and would often just head off for a weekend in some animal reserve. I grew up a lot during this time and developed my teaching skills. I had found a copy of the Mau Mau oath, which had a phrase in it that "If I reveal this oath, may this oath kill me." I would read it to my students when we talked about the Kenya independence movement. The students were both stunned and surprised, not to mention excited. When I left, some came to me and expressed concern that whoever would replace me would not teach them about Kenya history the way I did. I was very touched. When we got back to the States, Mr. Omondi, the headmaster, sent me a letter saying that the seniors who studied under me had received the highest grades in the history of the school in those areas. Many of them went on to prominent positions in Kenya. It was during this time that we climbed Kilimanjaro. We also took a five-week driving trip to South Africa with two other teachers. It was 7,000 miles in my beaten up old Volkswagen Beetle to Cape Town and back via Durban, Johannesburg and Pretoria. We went through Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Rhodesia had just declared its "independence" under a defiant white settler government, but the fighting had not yet started, so we got in and out without a problem. I would never have believed I could see such an amazing part of the world. On the way home, we routed ourselves through Europe. During seven weeks, we visited Egypt, Greece, Rome, Prague, Austria, Germany, France, Belgium, Holland, and Britain. It was an unbelievable experience for two small-town kids. We were different people at the end of that two years.

**SB:** You were trained as an African specialist. Did your interest start in Kenya?

**RS:** It did. When I got back I wrote my master's thesis on the topic of *Land, Citizenship and the European Community of Kenya*. It was the beginning of my interest in minority groups in the political sphere. I actually started my research in Kenya. I read parliamentary debates, documents, local newspapers, negotiation reports, memoirs, and even interviewed some white settlers. After my defense, one of my professors told a graduate class that my thesis was of dissertation quality. That pleased me no end when it got back to me. It was during our time in Kenya that I decided to pursue a doctorate. I had signed up for a readings course in South African politics before I left. I had to read 1,500 pages, and write reviews of the books I read. My professor, William Hardenburgh, who inspired and influenced me, kept sending back A grades and praising me for my insights. Slowly by slowly, as Kenyans would say, my confidence increased. I realized that I had analytical skills that many other people did not have. I also realized I was good in the classroom, at transmitting knowledge and at teaching students important skills. At a certain point I decided to pursue a doctorate. We had decided when we got married that we would settle down in Southern Illinois and buy a house so this was a change, but Jane

was very supportive and enthusiastic. We later returned to Kenya for 15 months with two small children to do my field work. I organized interviews with 600 Kenya farmers in Nyeri District, the heart of the Mau Mau nationalist uprising in the 1950s. That period was more difficult in an interpersonal sense, but we got through it.

It is a profound learning experience to live in another country, seeing how it operates, and learning to adapt to someone else's expectations. Just this year, Jane and I went to a reunion of those people who had gone to East Africa in the 1960s under this program. So many of them had their lives changed by their experience. Many pursued careers in international education or something related. The association sponsors local schools in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. They do this entirely on their own initiative and without external financial support. An experience like that makes you a different person.

## Chapter Two

### Religion and Faith

**RS:** We have talked of the role of religion in our youth and upbringing. Now let's talk about it in a different way, as something in our lives. Are you a believer?

**SB:** No.

**RS:** What does that mean?

**SB:** I think it means I'm an agnostic. I consider myself a secular Jew. Lori and I attend services fairly regularly on Saturday morning, but our Sabbath service is very much a communal one. We belong to a congregation which has a lot of survivors in it and that's basically why we joined. And Miriam needed a bat mitzvah. Lori goes into the service and sits with friends and I go to the Torah study group, which meets in the school room. I drive the guy a little crazy, my friend and I, because we keep raising questions about the text and why there are contradictory comments and what this means and what that means. He doesn't want to use text, he just brings in basically web pages on a particular reading for that week. I love doing it. I guess I'm a skeptic about God.

**SB:** How about you?

**RS:** I am not a conventional believer. I probably could not pass a heresy test. Fortunately, they don't have those anymore. (Laughs). I very much identify as a Christian but in a cultural and ethical sense. I think being connected to other people is important. This gets lost in our culture. We have a "bowling alone" syndrome where people go off on their own. We lose a lot. I am talking here of congregational connections, not theological connections. I think that that is similar to your point.

I teach Religion and Politics, a course in comparative politics. I have spent much of my career studying religious thinking and religious political movements. Some people would not consider me a religious person, but religion and the search for truth in society has been a central theme in my life. This is a contradiction that I cannot fully explain.

I am active in a congregation as an attending non-member. There is a story behind that careful phrase. I grew up in a religious tradition that did not believe in formal church membership. They saw membership in terms of loyalty to God and to your congregation. Jane came from a tradition with membership and that was important to her. When we moved to Dearborn we started attending a Presbyterian church, primarily because it had a good youth program. I joined that church a few years later, and by the end of the 1980s had become an Elder and was on the Session, the governing body. That means I had governance authority and some ritual functions such as communion. This positive experience turned sour when we hired a new minister who turned out to be totally inappropriate for the job. People began coming to me, mostly women, with stories of verbal abuse, boundary violations, inappropriate comments. Members were leaving. I raised this issue with the Session, which was my duty, and the minister went on the attack. He renounced me, said I was plotting against him, and said he was going to file formal charges against me in the Presbyterian court system. To be honest, I did not even know the Presbyterians had a court system. When I checked their *Book of Order*, their constitution, I discovered that they had a hundred pages on judicial process. The minister never did file against me, it was just a threat, but six women soon filed sexual harassment charges against him. I was told to present my own accusations, that he had defamed me in public and been unwilling to meet or to retract. This is the worst possible way to handle a problem, but it was what those in authority told us to do. I am faculty ombudsman and I always tell people, "If you have a problem with a person, go talk to them. Don't turn it into a formal complaint." I really didn't want to do that but he was a minister who was driving people away, so I finally agreed. The Presbyterian courts rejected all the charges, and then the minister's supporters decided to go after those who had raised the issues. At that point, I submitted my resignation, which is what I should have done in the first place. The women fought back. They took this to the civil courts, accusing him of sexual harassment, intimidation, retaliation and slander. As you can imagine, after three years of conflict, the congregation was devastated. I ultimately wrote a book about this. Insofar as I know, it is the only insider academic analysis of a church conflict, from start to finish. One of the reviewers said it should be required reading in every seminary in the country. Unfortunately, it is an academic monograph, which means "very expensive and available only in research libraries." I wanted it to be in paperback for ten dollars but that is not how publishers think.

**RS:** Did you ever have a break with your faith?

**SB:** Well, when we came to Detroit we joined the Workman's Circle, which is a secular Jewish organization and it had nothing to do with any kind of a religious observance. We mainly joined because they had a great nursery program, which had both non-Jews and Jews in it. Our kids went there on a daily basis when they were very small. And then they went to Sunday school, which is basically as you said, an ethical, not ritualistic curriculum. I guess at the time I had serious questions. I don't know if it was a break, but after I was working with the Holocaust survivors they began to talk about their attitudes toward God and religion after the war. There are some very Orthodox Jews who believe that the reason the Holocaust happened was that the Jews in Europe were not observant

enough or that Zionism was responsible, because there should be no Zionism until the Messiah. When I heard that, about the Holocaust, I just went sort of ballistic.

Even my son, who was twelve years old, had a Hebrew teacher who said something to that effect. Gabe asked him how he could say that when there were innocents and small children killed. The only response he got was that the teacher said, "It's very complicated. You don't understand." Gabe probably understood better than the guy did because he knew a number of survivors by that time. When he came out of Hebrew School, he said "After my bar mitzvah I'm not going back." We formed an agreement that he would read literature of Jewish content, but not religious stuff. That stopped after about six months, but it still was good. He identifies himself as a Jew but he will not attend services. I think that had something to do with it.

I also have a very strong Jewish identity, but it's not religiously connected. I don't think I have a break with it anymore. I have survivors who come up to me and say, "I stopped believing." They attend services every day or every week, but they're not believers. I think it has something to do with their families, their history, their feelings of obligation to those who didn't survive. So yes, I had somewhat of a disaffection.

**RS:** I remember when that happened. You told me how Gabe was upset, and you were upset on his behalf more than anything else. I think children can be damaged more than adults. For those of us who are a few decades into life, if something bad happens, we just move on. But if you're a young person filled with trust and hope...

**SB:** He still remembers that really vividly, twenty years later.

**RS:** As a famous rabbi once said, "Better a millstone be tied about your neck and you be cast in the river than you lead a little one astray."

**SB:** A rabbi said that?

**RS:** That was Jesus. (Both laugh)

**SB:** I don't imagine that anyone in my immediate family would be too upset at how I describe my attitude toward religion. There was never really strong faith. My grandfather was the only one, as I mentioned. My parents were not very religious. Lori keeps kosher. When we go out I have no compunction about eating anything. She tries to not eat meat. I don't know where this came from. We don't eat shellfish. She used to, but not any more.

**RS:** I know that you fast on Yom Kippur, 25 hours. That surprises me a bit. It doesn't seem consistent with other things that you've said.

**SB:** You know, it's just something you do. Gabe does it. It's a meditation day for him. We do it and go to services. We don't spend all day there. We come home and go back. I think it's a communal thing and the synagogue we belong to has a lot of survivors in it. So when you're there on that particular holiday, it's a very sad holiday, even though it's presumably a new beginning. I remember the survivors telling me what Yom Kippur was like in Auschwitz and they're all there. When I go into the service and sit with them,

their heads aren't where we are, their heads are right back the way they were before. If you ask, "Did you pray in Auschwitz?," someone would say, "Are you kidding? Why would we want to pray?" Someone else would say, "Of course. That's all I could do. What else could I do?" But they're with their families. So I sort of feel a part of that community. But I've been fasting since I was 13. It's just something you do. I don't know anything else I would say that about, just something you do. It's certainly not religious. It's what we do. You have dinner at 6 o'clock. Service starts at 6:30 and the sun goes down around 8, so it's 26 hours. And then there's a break fast. The meal is the same every year. But it tastes good at the time.

**SB:** What about your experience? Did you ever have a break in your faith?

**RS:** When I was a young boy, 13 or so, my minister preached a sermon that salvation comes through Jesus. There is a text on this. He said that people who did not accept Jesus would not be saved. This did not have to do with Jews, by the way, but with people in distant lands who had never heard of Jesus. This made no sense to me and I told him I disagreed with him. I was polite, but I could not see why a righteous person could not be saved. It was a bold thing for a person so young. So early on, I had doubts about doctrine. I did have a break, though, a time when I lost confidence. It was when my grandmother died. She had cancer and we were staying with them. The minister came in and prayed for her. He was a very fine minister, and we were in a tradition that believed in divine healing, the laying on of the hands. We were not Pentecostals who believed in tongues or shouting but we did believe in healing. Everyone in the room put their hands on her, including me, and he prayed for her. Then he said, "If everyone in this room is a believer, she will be healed." Well, my father was not a believer, and everyone knew that. Later he became a believer but at that time he was not. I felt at that time that the minister was scoring points on my dad. I knew that my grandmother was going to die, and he was trying to guilt trip my dad into religious behavior. That caused me to question the whole nature of what religious authorities said.

The ministers of my youth were not well educated. They spoke of God, salvation, sin, damnation, that sort of thing. I quickly moved away from that. If religion does not have a self-reflective, ethical, social justice dimension, it is not what I need. Did I have a break? I don't know. Maybe I just began to pull away.

**RS:** Do you think all religions share a core of values or are they very different?

**SB:** I don't know. My view of Jewish values isn't necessarily consistent with the Orthodox view and I'm guessing there are different levels of values Christians actually have as well. The same is probably true for Islam. I just don't know enough about them. Those values I admire are so basically different. I do believe you don't need religion to be an ethical and moral person. I don't believe you need to have some reward waiting for you to do the right thing. That's self-evident, but not to some students. We had discussions in class about why would you do this unless you had your reward waiting? I remember one student who was very upset. She and her family were atheists, but they all claimed they were doing the right, ethical, moral thing and the class could not understand

where she was coming from. So again, it's not self-evident, but most people I know think pretty much the same.

**RS:** That was the way I was brought up, to see ethical behavior as rooted in religious teaching. I remember a conversation years ago with one of our senior colleagues, Bernie Klein. I told him he had taught me something. I did not realize it but I always assumed that ethical behavior grew out of a religious faith. He was very ethical but not particularly religious. There are things we grow up with, but then something happens and we have to reassess. We don't even know we have those assumptions, but then suddenly something doesn't fit. That may have been happening to your students, something didn't fit. The same thing happened to me. Religion can be positive or destructive. It is a great force for good, but also for evil. One of my students has a tag line on her email: Without religion, good people will do good deeds and evil people will do evil deeds, but it takes religion for good people to do evil deeds. That's chilling.

**SB:** There's one survivor who was really ethical but hard nosed. And he used to speak at the Holocaust Memorial Center and he'd tell classes of high school students that all the evil in the world came from religion.

**RS:** That would be shocking for a 16-year-old child.

**SB:** That's what he believed. He made a very strong argument, religious wars right down to the Holocaust. He was also very leftist from the time he was a teenager, so that sort of explains part of it. That was his religion, to be completely anti-religious.

**RS:** When I teach about Islam, I sometimes pass out a page of statements and ask students to classify them as Jewish, Christian or Islamic. All are from the Koran, which surprises the Christian and Jewish students since they sound like teachings in their own tradition. Of course, that is the purpose of the exercise. I am active in interfaith and ecumenical affairs. I see shared values within religions. That is the best case for displaying the Ten Commandments in public places, that they exhibit the universal values of all legal/ethical systems. I sometimes speak of shared values, but I believe the three main religions are different in their culture and history. They are also different in their positions within the world power system. We live in a common society and have to get along, but these religions are not the same.

**RS:** Is there any aspect of your religion that you particularly like, or don't like?

**SB:** I don't like the religious police, people telling you how to behave, what to eat, when to attend services. I think it's dangerous, like any religious extremism. I like the historical tradition that draws people together in joyous ways, the social community. I like going through the book to find things like "do unto your neighbor which you would have them do unto you," which I think first appears in Leviticus.

**RS:** That's one of those universal teachings that gets passed around from tradition to tradition. Not many Christians realize Jesus was quoting the Torah when he said that.

**SB:** I like that universal dimension. And there are some aspects of the service that I enjoy. We belong to a Conservative synagogue which is very interactive, a lot of singing, dancing, celebrating at various holidays. So I sort of like that. But again, it's all very social. How about you? Is there anything you like or don't like about your religion?

**RS:** I suspect my answer will surprise you. Christianity is a doctrinal religion, and I am not doctrinally oriented, but there is a doctrine that I like. It is the doctrine of original sin. [Sid looks surprised]. The doctrine means that all of us are so flawed and corrupted by our own interests that, unless we check ourselves, we will press our will onto someone else and do harm. It's very close to classical conservatism. St. Paul says the only way to escape this is to acknowledge it. Once you recognize that you cannot escape your tendency to sin, you can monitor yourself and control yourself. At its core, original sin tells us that our knowledge is incomplete, and our actions are motivated by desires that we cannot recognize. Hopefully, the recognition of this will lead us to personal humility, to the concept of limited government, and to religious freedom, since we cannot know another person's faith. Every human being is flawed. None of us is free of the corruption of our nature. The more we deceive ourselves that we are free of these things, the more we are going to be surprised by what we do. It should also lead us to believe that we share a humanity with our enemies. They are neither as evil as they seem, nor are we as virtuous as we believe, so perhaps we can find a common humanity. What I don't like about my religion is its doctrinal nature. Ideally doctrines should unite, but they divide more often than not. This produces factionalism and sectarianism. It has sent the religion careening into extremism in the past. There is a violent history that is painful to acknowledge, but it must be acknowledged.

**RS:** Do you have a favorite character in the Bible?

**SB:** I do, but I get it from Thomas Mann's *Joseph and His Brothers*, my all time favorite book. The character is Tamar. [Genesis 38]. She is promised – well you know the story – she's promised to Judah's son and on their wedding night the son dies, so the second son has to take his place. That turns out to be Onan, who does not do what he's supposed to do and he also dies. Judah refuses to give his third son, so he tells her to wait. She waits and waits and she realizes that he's lied to her. She sits outside a town pretending to be a temple prostitute. He's on his way to a sheep shearing and stops and asks her what her charge would be. He has no money, so she tells him she'll take his staff and seal and he can send somebody back for it the next day. So they sleep together. He leaves the staff and the seal, and the next day he sends one of his servants to take the payment back but she's not there. Somebody in the town said, "We don't have any prostitutes in this town. You're wrong." So then she becomes pregnant and when Judah hears, he orders her to be burned. Then she sends him the seal and the staff and said that the owner is the father. So he realizes this is his sin and he said, "She is a more honorable person than I." She has twins, Perez and Zerah, who are the descendants of Judah who receives the blessing from Jacob in the end. But then according to Thomas Mann – everything he wrote was based on a lot of Talmudic research – she becomes a substitute for Joseph in Jacob's eyes and Jacob teaches her everything about family and about tradition and about



the history. She passes this on to her children, who Jacob then realizes deserve the blessing because they, like Joseph, know the story. The rest of his sons couldn't care less. So she becomes kind of a matriarch of the clan, of the tribe. And she's not Jewish. She starts out as a Moabite, but she wants in. When Jacob finally gives the blessing, she's standing outside the tent and she's ecstatic when she hears. It goes to Judah because the first three sons have committed some terrible indiscretion and Judah's the fourth son, so he is the logical one to inherit the blessing. Joseph can't get it because he's become an Egyptian. Presumably those two sons are founders. That's shortly before they become Jews. Thomas Mann believes Tamar is the most heroic character because she stands up for her children.

**RS:** It's her determination and defiance.

**SB:** Right, and for the right thing. She should have gotten married to one of the three sons. Of course, why she would have wanted that, I don't know. But only because she had the sense that Judah will be the one to get the blessing. He's suffered. He hasn't committed any serious crimes like the two older brothers, who slaughtered towns. So yes, she's my favorite character. She and Job. I think I identify with him too much. (Laughs)

**SB:** And who is yours?

**RS:** I like the prophets. They appeal to my sense of social justice. Ezekiel and Jeremiah are some favorites. I have a love/hate relationship with Saint Paul. When he is talking about the human condition, I find him profound and reflective. When he says, "I do the things that I hate" or "Be angry but do not sin" I can understand that. But then he gets off on gays and women and brings in his doctrinal issues, so I can't go with him. In some ways, my favorite individual, not really favorite but the one I find very interesting, is Joab, David's nephew who is also his commander. [2 Samuel] He is very much overlooked. He plays an instrumental role in the murder of Uriah the Hittite. You recall the situation: David's army was fighting and he was back at home, which was a problem in itself. And then he fell in love with a beautiful woman who was the wife of one of his elite commanders, Uriah the Hittite. When David discovered that she was pregnant, he ordered Uriah to come to the capital for consultation, hoping he would spend the night with her and be the presumed father of the child. But Uriah says his men are sleeping on the ground so he slept in the stable. When he returned to the front, David gave him a letter to deliver to Joab saying to put Uriah in the front line and then pull back, letting him take the brunt of the attack. After the battle, a message arrived saying, "We have won the battle but your servant Uriah has died." Then Nathan, the priest, confronted David with his offense. Since it was a personal message and Joab was the only person who knew what happened, it is obvious that he had tipped off Nathan. This was an impeachable offense, to have a commander killed for personal gain. The punishment was that the child would die, David would be cursed to have a troubled reign, and his offense would be known throughout all of Israel, which means "in history" since "Israel" includes people today.

Joab was also instrumental in the rebellion of Absalom, David's son. In the story, Absalom is the most popular person in the kingdom. David's armies are pushed back

until defeat is imminent. But then Joab reverses the fortunes. Absalom flees and is caught in the forked limb of a tree and is then killed. David had given orders that he be spared, so for Joab to kill him was an act of grievous insubordination. But from his point of view, David was once again allowing his personal interests to interfere with matters of state. Everyone knew the rule: a traitor had to die. Two messages arrived for David. One says, “your armies are victorious and your kingdom has been saved.” The other says, “Absalom has been killed.” David goes into mourning. His army is waiting for him to salute them on their victory but he stays inside. It is Joab who goes into the tent to deliver an incredibly blunt message: “These men put their lives on the line to save you and you are acting as if you wish they were dead and your rebel son were alive. Now go out and salute them.” And he goes. How many people could get away with telling the king that? This man is so fascinating. We know almost nothing about him, but he is there at those critical moments. He just doesn’t hold press conferences. I wish Thomas Mann had written a book about him. (Both laugh). Later they had a falling out. David was a vengeful soul.

## Chapter Three

### The Events of Our Age

**RS:** We have spent our whole lives in war, the Second World War, the Cold War, Vietnam, the Gulf War, the Iraq War. How has this shaped you?

**SB:** I remember being frightened every night of an atomic bomb, thinking about bomb shelters, although we didn’t have one. We had a basement. I was about 8 or 10 years old and I remember that. I think the next experience was the Vietnam War, and that was when I was in college. The day I turned 18, I was in the hospital and I was proclaimed 4-F so I was spared. It was a relief, of course. Even at that point, I knew something about the war and the “advisors” being sent in. When I went to graduate school, that’s when I got involved with politics and protests. When I taught at Hobart and William Smith College in New York, which was before I had my degree, the campus went on strike. There was an infamous raid on a dormitory where I think three students had a tiny amount of marijuana and they were taken out. And somebody realized that one of the provocateurs was an FBI agent.

**RS:** Tommy the Traveler, a notorious provocateur. He went from place to place inciting incidents and getting other people arrested.

**SB:** Before the police could leave with their prisoners, five hundred students who were still left on the campus surrounded the police cars and let them go. This was like 10 days after the four students were killed at Kent State, so everybody was very nervous. The National Guard was called out. They were just up the street. We were at a bar and Lori and I left early because she was pregnant with Miriam. But the rest, the young faculty who were there were all called to the scene. One of them pulled out the distributor from the police car and waved it in the police chief’s face. They struck a bargain. They would

release all students and there would be a depressurization and everyone went home. They did turn over one police car. Next morning at 6:00, 7 people were arrested and taken to jail. At 7:00 somebody called me and asked, since I wasn't there, would I be the treasurer of the defense fund? What did I know? So I did, and somebody running for state senator grabbed on to this and made it his *cause celebre*. So it became very public and our phones were tapped. There were regular demonstrations in front of the flag pole. Ultimately all but two were released. Those two spent, I think, 13 days in the local jail. But from that point on, we went to Washington, we went to Philadelphia, we were involved in protests there. Our phones were tapped. So Lori would call her mother and they would speak in Ladino and I would talk to my mother in Yiddish and then I would ask if they got that, if they wanted me to repeat that on the phone? It was pretty blatant because of clicking. So I was involved a little bit. Then we got involved in the Gene McCarthy campaign. That was my political involvement in the Vietnam War. I was not involved in the Gulf War and have not really been involved in the Iraq War, except to talk to people about it.

**RS:** But growing up in an age of war definitely affected who I am. I was a little boy during the Second World War. I was brought up with stories of my uncles who went to war. I had uniforms and guns and comic books about soldiers. I had my army uniform, my navy uniform. This was my anti-fascist stage. (Laughs). I knew that when I grew up there would be war, and I would be a soldier. I was apprehensive about that but I knew that was what I had to do. I didn't know what that meant or how you prepare for it. My mother told me that my uncle, who had been in Europe, slept on the ground so I decided to prepare for that. All I could think of was sleeping without a pillow, so every night I would put my pillow on the floor. This was very uncomfortable, but it was my boy's version of war — life without a pillow. (Laughs).

Actually, my time never came. My war would have been Vietnam, but because I had a heart condition, I was spared. I was an early supporter of that war. I bought the domino theory, saving the world from communism, backing up democratic regimes, regional security, and everything else. But the rhetoric began to turn me off. My hero in politics was Senator Paul Douglas of Illinois, one of the great senators. I even considered naming my son, who was born in December, 1967, in his honor. But then the Senator made a passionate pro-war speech saying this was the battle of Thermopylae and western civilization was at risk. You hear these speeches today about what we are doing in Iraq, about the survival of the world. I knew that was not true and began to doubt the war. I also decided to name my son Ronald Gregory, a very good name.

My real turning point was the Tet Offensive in January, 1968. I realized the war could not be won. Henry Kissinger once said that when a conventional army is fighting a guerrilla force, for the conventional army to win it has to defeat the guerrilla force, but for the guerrillas to win, all they have to do is not be defeated. I knew we had lost in Vietnam. I was very distressed by the high fatality rates, sometimes 500 Americans a week. Uncle Walter Cronkite would tell us every Thursday how many Americans had died in Vietnam, and how many Vietnamese in the different forces. They used the concept of the "body count," the ratio of how many of ours died compared with how many of theirs. When the battle of Khe San occurred, and 500 marines were trapped in that place, I thought that if Khe San fell, it would cost us 500 lives but that was the

number we were losing many weeks anyway and the defeat would be such a shock to public opinion that we might reassess our policy and withdraw. That was a terrible way of thinking, but that was how I was thinking. I knew that when the French base at Dien Bien Phu was overrun in 1954, the French had pulled out, so maybe something similar would happen. Later I had a friend who had been in Khe San. I realized that these grand analytical models, and the political and military choices that go with them, are not just abstract things but involve individual costs paid by others.

**SB:** Were you a protestor?

**RS:** Not really. I was married and had two small boys and was trying to stay in graduate school. I used to joke that one day my sons would ask what I did during the great struggle against imperialism and I would say to them, “Every time you cried, I put something in your mouth.” (Laughs). I was once in a demonstration at MSU that got out of control and demonstrators smashed every window in the administration building. You can’t tell it by looking, but they replaced the windows with bullet proof glass. I was also on campus the Sunday after the killings at Kent State when demonstrations occurred on campuses across the country. It was in the spring and I was going to my graduate student office with my little boy. As soon as we arrived, I saw helicopters overhead. The Michigan National Guard was aligned along Grand River Avenue, about ten feet apart, all holding their weapons up and ready, facing the campus. There were tear gas canisters falling from the sky. I was holding Greg’s hand and walking faster to get into the building before anything happened. He said to me, “Daddy, why am I crying?” I said, “Governor Milliken is bombing us with tear gas.” He was satisfied with that answer. Kids just want to know what is going on, and assume their dad knows. That was the first time I was ever tear gassed. It has a special place in my heart.

I was teaching a course in international relations that semester, and demonstrators came to my class to close it down. They were very polite: “Sir, we are here to close down your class.” Our Chair had said if we cancelled classes our salaries would be cut, so I told them I was sympathetic but I had a family to support and could not close my class. I offered them a deal. *The Pentagon Papers* were just out, and I said I would shift the curriculum to focus on the Vietnam War for as long as the students wished to do so. Would they accept that? They said they would. I explained the arrangement to the students, and told them we would vote at the end of each hour whether to continue or return to the regular curriculum. The alternate curriculum went on for several classes, then they wanted to shift back.

One terrible memory is that final American retreat from Vietnam, with helicopters dumped in the bay to keep the Viet Cong from getting them, and the final helicopter leaving from the US embassy with desperate Vietnamese clinging to the landing boards. These things traumatized me. They traumatized a generation. Even now, we have never gotten over the Vietnamese War. If you remember the attacks on Bill Clinton when he ran for President, and the Swift Boat attacks on John Kerry, you know what I mean. This is an ugly side of America. It has never healed, and the wounds of the Iraq war will be equally traumatic, maybe even greater because the consequences of that war.

**SB:** What did you think about Watergate?

**RS:** When the Watergate Committee began its investigation, my aunt and uncle asked me if I thought Nixon was involved in the break in. I said, “I suspect he chaired the meetings.” It was an overstatement but I could see that this was leading to a deep involvement that could force Nixon from office.

**SB:** I think it was – maybe not as violent as the war – but it was a traumatic experience for a generation. It was high drama, being on television. I watched the whole thing, every day. Much of the country watched it.

**RS:** So did I. Fifteen years later when President Reagan lost his concentration -- he had early Alzheimers -- we were confronted with another dilemma, the Iran-Contra Crisis of 1987. Congress had prohibited any money going to the Contras – this was the Boland Amendment – but Reagan had arranged funding anyway. Reagan later apologized for what had happened, but there is no doubt that this was an impeachable offense. The Democrats controlled both the House and the Senate. Tip O’Neil, the Speaker of the House, called the Democrats together and told them that the country could not stand another impeachment. O’Neil told the Democrats that there are certain questions they should not ask unless they were ready to vote for impeachment. They went after Ollie North, Elliot Abrams, and Admiral Poindexter, but never after The Gipper. No one ever asked the hard question: “What did the President know and when did he know it?” That was the question Senator Howard Baker, a Republican, asked during the Watergate hearings. People forget that the decision to remove Nixon was bi-partisan. It was four Republican Senators who met Nixon in the White House and told him they would vote to remove him. That forced him to step down. When we compare this with the impeachment hearings against Clinton, we can see the difference. Not a single Democrat voted for removal, and several Republicans voted against.

I think it was the poison of that age that produced the malice of the Clinton impeachment. That decade was a time of hope and transformation but also a time of destructive confrontation that left counter-productive impulses in its wake. The civil rights movement and the women’s movement opened up opportunities for Blacks and women. There were new programs for the poor. My high school, which I left because it did not have pre-university courses, now has those courses thanks to federal aid to education. The political process was opened up and the university curriculum was transformed. Persons accused of a crime have rights and educational programs they never had. There were crude ethnic and religious terms and jokes that deserved to die a quiet death. But that decade also produced the rise of identity politics and white cultural politics as a counter-movement. It produced “wedge issues” in which groups are divided and manipulated by appeals to anger. It produced a hyper-sensitive, self-righteous political correctness. Even the University of Michigan had a classroom code that said any faculty member who caused a student to feel “uneasy” could be charged with an offense. It took a federal judge to kill that policy. Our friend Tom Tentler got tumultuous cheers from the faculty Senate when he said, “I teach about religion. If my students do not leave class feeling uneasy, I have not done my job.” As someone said, we have become a nation of sore losers and sore winners. The corporate media, especially cable news shows, learned to use confrontation and inflammatory reporting to boost profits. Voting

fell off and people stopped identifying with parties. Voters were up for grabs on the basis of candidate personalities, social conflict issues, and negative advertising. Frank Wayman and I addressed this as early as 1981 in our book, *A Time of Turmoil*. When Ralph Nader ran for president in 2000, saying there was no difference between Gore and Bush, he illustrated that 60s mindset very nicely. All of these things make it difficult to address fundamental issues. As I tell my students, mad is not a political position.

**RS:** Let's go to a different topic: How were you affected by September 11?

**SB:** That morning I was doing a survivor interview and the man's wife came into the room and said something strange is happening on television. So we stopped and we watched from his house and I asked him if he wanted to postpone the interview. He said no. So we finished and then we went and watched what was going on. I was heartbroken, terrified, angry, what everybody else was feeling, and very confused. What are we going to do now? I had eight calls from survivors each of whom said, "We're supposed to be safe here. How could this happen?" Yes, it was probably the most traumatic. Miriam was on an airplane flying back from England and they rerouted her to Montreal and they did not tell anyone on the plane what was going on. When they got to Montreal, all the monitors were turned off. Nobody let them know. She wound up on a bus coming to Windsor and it took me six hours to get across the border to her. It was pretty frightening. It sort of remained that way.

**RS:** The Canadians really came through for us, not only on September 11 but in the months after. They supported us in every way they could.

**RS:** I teach Middle East politics, so I got a lot of phone calls from the media. In the year after those attacks, I probably did over a hundred interviews.

**SB:** Provost Simpson saw you on CNN when he was in China.

**RS:** He turned on CNN International and saw one of his faculty being interviewed. It's a real bonus when your Provost realizes you are known internationally. That morning of September 11, I had a class. The first tower fell just before class started. I thought about dismissing the class but then I thought, "I am supposed to do something for these students." So I decided at least we could talk about it. In the middle of the class somebody said the second tower has just gone down. I told the students that probably 20,000 people were dead. That was based on reports of how many people are typically in the building, and the assumption that nobody above a certain floor would survive. Of course that was a dramatic overestimate, but at times like that people make what are reasonable comments that turn out to be wrong. I talked to the students about what was probably true and probably not true. For example, there were reports that the Palestinians had done it. I told the students this was not Hamas. They do not conduct operations outside of their own territory. I think we knew by the end of the day that Osama bin Laden had done it. He had issued his *Declaration of War* on American and done other things, so the people in intelligence fingered him very quickly.

For weeks I could not sleep. I became obsessed with the fear that Al Qaeda would blow up Chicago. I figured, if it were me, I would try to blow up Chicago. I love Chicago. I got up once in the middle of the night to see if it had been attacked. It was totally irrational but it was my state of mind at the time. I was also very concerned that first day about attacks on our civil liberties, especially Arab American civil liberties, but also the rights of the general public. I think those fears have been realized.

In retrospect, we probably reacted wrong to these events. I supported the invasion of Afghanistan. Any country that allows this kind of operation to be conducted from its territory has to pay. But the goal of this kind of atrocity, I am speaking as a Political Scientist, is to produce a counter productive over-reaction, to get you to go crazy and damage your own interests. Every country in the world was sympathetic to us. Even the Iranians held a memorial march. The president of Syria sent President Bush a personal message, and the President of Iran. We had so many allies, and we threw it away.

The Iraq War, which grew out of this, was a total disaster. I thought we had Saddam in a box. We were squeezing him very effectively. There had been several attempts to assassinate him. Sooner or later, somebody was going to get him. It was a matter of time. All we had to do was wait. Bush, the father, and James Baker had it exactly right in their memoirs. If we had gone into Baghdad in 1991 during the Gulf War, we would have lost our Arab allies, would go in without a way of getting out, would destabilize the region, would create a nasty refugee crisis, and would incite sectarian conflicts. We would start a guerrilla war that we did not know how to fight, and could fragment Iraq. It is very significant that the current President Bush was asked if he talked to his father before he went and he said, "I talk to a higher father." His father was the single most experienced person in dealing with Iraq and he didn't even talk to him.

**SB:** Perhaps we should have been more attentive during the 2000 election.

**RS:** Which was stolen. I guess I might as well say what I am thinking on this. Tens of thousands of Black votes disappeared in Florida, 88% of which would have been for Gore, and thousands of Jewish votes were shifted from Gore to Buchanan, even though everyone knows that Jews consider Buchanan hostile to them and even though Buchanan said none of those were his. And thousands of overseas military votes had no dates or official signatures and were apparently cast *after* the election. With all of this, they spent weeks looking at 537 pregnant chads. It was pure slight of hand. Just before the election, I said at a faculty panel that Bush came from the centrist wing of the Republican party and would not be as bad as some people feared. I told my wife after the election that the Republic has survived worse than George Bush. She reminds me of that. (Both laugh).

**RS:** One of the major issues in our life is the issue of race, and the civil rights movement. Did any youthful views or experiences influence you?

**SB:** I went to an integrated high school. For me it wasn't a major issue, although I think it was more of an issue in that place than I realized. I think there was a real separation and in general the Black kids tended to be very active in athletics. All the sports teams were pretty much three-quarters Black athletes. We had one kid who made it to the Olympics. He was a runner. He broke Jessie Owens' record for the 100 yard dash.

**RS:** What percentage of students were African American?

**SB:** Thirty to forty percent. It wasn't inner city, but not a suburban school. It was on the edge of town. It was the largest high school in the city. It had 3,000 students. It was a WPA Project [Works Progress Administration]. The Civil Rights movement and race issues came home when I was in college in 1964. They were the first riots in the country. It stunned everybody. There's a book on Rochester called *Smug Town* and it was written in the '30s or '40s and it indicated that there were subliminal problems in the city that nobody wanted to talk about and one of them was the race issue. When the riots started it really stunned everyone. Lori and I were at the University of Rochester campus and her parents lived in the inner city. They would go for walks around the block and the one time they got scared was when the National Guard came in because they remember them in the war. So Lori sort of grew up with Black friends. I think that sort of galvanized us in the city. I used to sit in at a Black jazz club. I think there were three white people in the place. But later I went there and saw the place filled with angry young men. I realized that we weren't going to get in there anymore.

**RS:** Something had changed.

**SB:** Something had changed. It later burned down during the riots. When I got to college, it was very safe. There was nothing going on. When I got to graduate school we marched in Washington twice. We went with Martin Luther King – not with him – it was the March on Poverty. A friend and I got on a bus with some other students and spent 24 hours in Washington. Andrew Young showed us around. Basically what he said was, why don't you go see some of the sights in Washington, because we were in the way. All I remember is they put up these shanties. So after a number of hours trying to figure out what we could do to help, we went to the Washington Monument and just wandered around Washington. That march was a flop. He had marched in Chicago and the people were very attracted to him, but the civil rights movement was on its way downhill at that point. So that's pretty much my youthful involvement. I don't think there's been much more. Well, when I was in Binghamton there was an Interracial Center. We worked with a social worker who was a young Black guy and there was an interracial couple that lived in a trailer. They called us to come right away and this guy had pulled out a gun because his neighbor had been calling his children names, racial slurs. He was drunk and he had this gun and his wife was panic stricken. His kids were in the bedroom. We were trying to get the gun away from him and our partner, the social worker, finally managed to do that. I think Lori was terrified. I was just too stupid to be that scared. Like Rochester, there were all kinds of racial tensions. What about you?

**RS:** I envy people like you who grew up with Black friends. I grew up in an all white county where Blacks going between Memphis and Chicago could not even stop for gas. It was not a "sundown town" but a "don't even slow down" county. I used *Nigger* as a word, not as a swear word. It was the word of choice. I remember the day, even the minute, I decided I would never use that word again to describe another person. I was standing alone on the second floor in my high school classroom. I don't know why I made that decision, but somehow I knew there was something wrong with that word.



That decision was memorable, not because I felt I had risen to a higher moral level but because I knew that using a different word would separate me from others in my community, as if I were somehow saying I was better than they were. It was comparable to when our teacher told us we should say *aren't* instead of *ain't*. Everyone said *ain't*, so saying *aren't* implied a pulling away from who we were. I always felt strange using the word *Negro*. It never sounded quite right. When the Black comedian Dick Gregory made jokes about how white people said “knee-grow,” I felt, “This man has my number. He’s poking fun at me.” I was very happy when the term *Black* came into vogue. It made sense to me and resonated with my understanding of what the problem was. I have always thought the word should be capitalized, but editors always shift it to lower case in my writings. I am going to capitalize it here, just because I can.

I had never met an African-American until I went to college and had two Black housemates. That was a learning experience for me. Later, living in Kenya for three years made me think yet again in a very different way. When you are white in America, you don’t think you are white. Other people are Black. But in Kenya you are white and Kenyans are not Black. They are just Kenyans. The issue is who stands out and by what trait. There were so many different personalities and situations that the whole issue became blurred. White people in Swahili were called *mzungu*, which means wanderer, someone out of place. But the term also applied to my African-American co-teacher Chuck, who grew up in Harlem. Once Chuck said to a Kenyan, “Why do you call me white? Look at this skin.” The Kenyan said, “I know you are *mweuzi* [black] but you are an *mzungu mweuzi* [a black white man]. Chuck was stunned. In English, I was a “European,” a term that grated on my American consciousness. I wanted to say, “I am *not* a European. I am an American. Have you never heard of the American Revolution?” But I realized that in a cultural and historical sense, I *was* a European. So were Chuck and my Chinese-American friend Jim. This was a totally different way of defining categories and it made me think a lot. Being part of a visible minority made me very attentive to my actions and words. If I said or did anything out of order, it would reflect on all white people, or, if it were the British who were there, on all Americans. That was a heavy burden. Often when I was doing research, I was the only white person around. In the rural areas, children would run down the path saying, “Mama, mama, there’s a white man.” People would ask to touch my hair just to see how it felt. Someone asked me if white children were born blond and got dark hair later. I never resented these things. They were rooted in a combination of parochialism and curiosity that I could understand. Anyway, Kenya culture was very open. I admire it a lot. And after all, I was asking them questions, so they had the right to ask me questions.

**SB:** How did you react to the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s?

**RS:** I was very sympathetic to the sit ins. As a boy we took a vacation in the South and I saw signs on bathrooms that said “White Ladies” and “Colored Women.” I knew such things existed, but seeing them brought segregation into reality. What offended me the most about this situation was that the system did not treat people in terms of an inherent personal worth but in terms of categories. That sounds naïve today, but at the time it was not an easy position to hold. I guess my union training kicked in. When you are in a union, everyone is the same, and that seemed to me to be a good public policy to pursue.

I have thought about this over the decades and I think there was also a religious component to my reaction. There is a children's song that "Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world. Red and Yellow, Black and White, they are precious in his sight. Jesus loves the children of the world." If that song is true, then discrimination is wrong. It's significant that most of the leaders of the civil rights movement were either ministers or the children of ministers. As a political scientist, I can explain that: The Black church had not been penetrated by white power so Blacks could define their own priorities; and the sons of preachers have skills of diplomacy and speaking that are the natural qualities of leaders. But I don't think political science theories are enough. There was also a religious, even moral component to that movement. Discrimination is just not right in the eyes of God.

Several of my personal heroes came out of that age. Andy Young, an amazing person; Vernon Jordan, who committed himself to practical things, getting jobs for people. No speeches, no rhetoric. He just went to work; Martin Luther King, a hero to us all; Jesse Jackson and Mohammed Ali. Ali later became a parody of himself, but he gave up his title for a principle. These were people who put their lives and their careers on the line to achieve something. I think it is a shame that young people today don't have heroes. As soon as a hero arises, someone reveals that they had an affair, or used drugs or made some insensitive comment, and there are public attacks and the spirit is gone. Heroes are not saints. They are humans who overcome their imperfections to achieve things the rest of us can only admire.

**SB:** How did these early experiences affect the way you are now?

**RS:** Like so many other white people, it took me a long time to realize that segregation was only the outward and visible sign of a deeper problem, and that many of our hopes and dreams about the country, and even our union, did not apply to Blacks. I think the Black situation in America is unique. I do not agree with those who speak of "people of color" as if that is a meaningful political category. There is a historic, structural marginalization of African people that is different from what any other group experienced. Treating this as a matter of skin tone blurs the issues. And replacing Affirmative Action with "diversity," as the Supreme Court and public institutions appear to be doing, is not good. The Department of Education now reports the percentage of faculty who are *not white*. This diverts our attention from more fundamental issues and is not in the interest of African Americans. I am glad for all of my colleagues from overseas. They make a real contribution. But there is a historic injustice that is not addressed by hiring someone from overseas with a Ph. D.

When I started my career, I hoped I could play a positive role in the lives of Black students. There was probably an element of white paternalism in this, but it was more than that. I believed that if we could strengthen and empower young Black people, it would make the country a better place. I knew I had been able to play that role in Kenya and I hoped to play it here. Some Black students over the decades have sent notes after graduation to say I contributed to their success. One was alum of the year and asked me to be her guest at the banquet. Another just this month sent a note after graduation. He said he was from a non-educated family in Detroit and was nervous that he would not succeed. Mine was his very first class. He said his cell phone went off that first day and

he was afraid I would throw him out. But he said he gained skills and insights from the class that made a difference. Every professor looks forward to those notes, but the very fact that I can remember specific ones tells me that there are not as many as I would like.

## Chapter Four

### Favorite Books, Films, and Public Figures

**RS:** Do you have any books that influenced you as a younger person?

**SB:** I had an eclectic interest and it actually turned my career around. I was heading to Rutgers University to study classical history and wound up having a seminar on fascism at Wayne State University where we read Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. This was when it first came out. I was astonished. One of the things that surprised me was maybe 10 pages of treatment of German Jews. A whole new world opened up to me the first moment she was talking about Eichmann and the perpetrators in general. Then when she said "our German Jews" it was a revelation to me.

**RS:** What did she say that was so shocking?

**SB:** She, being one of them, described them as very German, far more German than Jewish. They were cynical, sarcastic and critical of Eastern European Jews to the point of being anti-Semitic, some of them. And that's a deeply rooted European cultural division that has carried over to the United States. I was so taken with this that I wrote a dissertation on that. That was one book. *Civilization and Its Discontents* was another.

**RS:** By Freud.

**SB:** By Freud. Between those two books, my dissertation was based on having read some of her stuff and on more research on German Jews, but it was very psychoanalytically oriented. I just leaped into the study of psychoanalysis. I'm not a Freudian, but I'm a great admirer of his. So those two themes were very influential. Both were relatively short books. From there I worked with *Joseph and His Brothers* by Thomas Mann. I think I identified a lot with Jacob, who was the trickster, and to some degree Joseph, who carries on after his father. These opened up a whole different aspect of my Jewish identity I had never even thought about. Those three – there have been lots of others – were pretty influential.

**RS:** I guess it's not surprising that academics are turned around by books. That's what we do for a living, read. When I was in high school, our senior English class was British literature. We read a lot of poetry and each week we had to memorize something and recite it. I can still recite some of those things that we learned. Memorization is excellent intellectual discipline. We also read *Macbeth*. Shakespeare electrified me in terms of the English language. When you see how your language was shaped 400 years ago and you're able to analyze it, it changes everything.

**SB:** You gave Gabe a *Riverside Shakespeare* collection.

**RS:** I did. There was a reason for that. (Both laugh).

**RS:** My senior year, I read Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. That was a shock. The thought that human nature could be changed by social engineering was totally new to me.

**SB:** Did you read *Brave New World Revisited*?

**RS:** I didn't like that as much.

**SB:** It was an essay, sort of post-summary. "Look at how much I predicted." That and *1984* and *Animal Farm*.

**RS:** Yes, *1984* is another one that goes along with *Brave New World*. I never thought of the idea of a totalitarian society before and it just came home to me. It's hard to forget Orwell's line, "If you want a vision of the future, think of a boot stomping a human face, forever." That was chilling. I also read Guy DeMaupassant. I bought a paperback collection of his short stories in a garage sale. The cover was torn but the stories were in place. I remember particularly "Ball of Fat," about a prostitute, and "A Piece of String" about a poor man unjustly accused. DeMaupassant taught me to love short stories. I tend to read in spurts. When I find an author I like I go off on a binge. I did that with Huxley, Phillip Roth, Graham Greene, Kurt Vonnegut. Once I read DeMaupassant's short stories, I also read Huxley's short stories and Poe's short stories. Huxley's stories are wonderful, and of course Poe is unique. Later Bobby Ann Mason's *Shiloh and Other Stories* excited me. She grew up near me, just across the Kentucky border, so her stories are really about my family. My encounter with Freud was *The Interpretation of Dreams*. My university had a reading room with broad interest books. At the end of the day, I would cut through the library to get to my dormitory. If I had time to spare, I would stop at the reading room for a while. One day, my first quarter in college, I encountered *The Interpretation of Dreams*. I couldn't put it down. He said that our dreams were acting out subconscious thoughts that we could not acknowledge, and most had to do with sex. The first night I picked it up, I read case after case. I am not sure if I really missed my dinner that night, but that is how I remember it. And it makes a good story.

**SB:** I'm surprised about *The Interpretation of Dreams*.

**RS:** If you've never encountered that idea before, it just opens your mind.

**SB:** How everything means something else.

**RS:** Everything means something else. And much of it has to do with repressed sexuality.

**RS:** What about movies? Do you have any movies you like?

**SB:** My first thought is *Casablanca*, of course. But of the really good movies, a sort of semiprofessional one, is *The Sorrow and the Pity*, which was long, but another one of those shocking movies about the Holocaust. Another is *Judgment at Nuremberg* with Spencer Tracy, and *On the Beach*, about the aftermath of nuclear war. They had a major impact on me. I guess the other one would be *Shoah*. That's an old wound. For me it's got problems.

I loved *Tootsie*. I remember just laughing at that. We were in New York once with my brother-in-law and sister-in-law. He had taken us to a play and then we went to the Russian Tearoom. Gabe was about 13. There's a scene in *Tootsie* where a waiter comes to their table and he's dressed up like a woman and Dustin Hoffman says to the waiter, "nice blouse." So the waiter came to our table and Gabe said, "nice blouse." The waiter knew what he was talking about and we all cracked up. Gabe knew the whole movie by heart. It was one of the rare movies that I really laughed heartily. I don't do that very often. But the serious ones, *Nuremberg Trial*. The other Nuremberg movie is Marcel Ophuls's *Memory of Justice*.

**RS:** I've never seen that.

**SB:** It's long, down to earth, but it's a wonderful film. He was a great filmmaker. How about you?

**RS:** I love films. When I was a boy, my dad would take me to cowboy films. Those were my favorites. When I was in high school, I got a job cleaning our local movie theater on Saturday morning. In addition to getting paid, I got free admission to movies. I probably saw every movie shown during that time. There are several films I enjoy seeing over and over again. *The Godfather* is one. *The Godfather* and *Godfather II* are masterpieces. I tell my students, you cannot understand politics unless you have seen *The Godfather*. Many have not seen it. The pursuit of power is so brutal and so amoral, it reveals something. The baptism scene near the end is one of the greatest scenes ever filmed. *Clockwork Orange* is something I can't forget. Beethoven's Fifth Symphony has never been the same. The lovable sociopath Alex is a great fan of Beethoven.

**SB:** And "Singin' in the Rain."

**RS:** Ah, the cringe scene. A friend called it a fascist melodrama, as the gangs align with the elite to control society. Whatever it is, it's unforgettable. Kurosawa's *The Seven Samurai* is one of the greatest adventure films ever. Watching the young Tashiro Mifune, the Japanese John Wayne, strutting and doing his thing is pure pleasure. For entertainment, I like *Hoosiers*. It's a guy film. It is also like *Godfather* for the large number of quotable lines. You can just say "My team is on the court" and anyone who has seen it can regenerate that scene in their mind.

**SB:** It's like saying "plastics." (Both laugh.) *The Graduate* is a film that our students don't know. I have seen it thirty-two times. I used to use it in a class. Recently I mentioned it, and not a single student had ever seen it. What a loss.

**RS:** I have seen Gilo Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers* maybe fifteen times. I show it in my class on Revolution. The music penetrates your psyche, and the story is gripping. The female revolutionaries destroy all expectations and stereotypes. When I first started showing it, it was considered a film of the far left. Now the U.S. military academies show it to cadets, to teach them about guerrilla warfare. Apparently, the film has shifted from the left to the right without moving. I still haven't thought that one through. For pure fun I like *My Cousin Vinnie*. What can I say? It's one of those films you don't have to explain or make excuses. I could watch it over and over. *The Apostle* with Robert Duval was called by the *New York Times*, "the greatest film ever made about a man of religion." Every time I see it, there is more to Sonny's character. His moral collapse and moral resurrection are better than volumes of theology. By way of classics, I would add *The Gold Rush* with Charlie Chaplin. I watched it recently with my small grandchildren and they loved it. Chaplain is so physical and so entertaining. You can't take your eyes off of him. Someone said you can tell if a film is going to be a success if people leave the theater with at least three scenes they want to share with their friends. All of these movies have far more than three.

**RS:** What public figures do you admire?

**SB:** Bill Clinton. I thought he was one of the smartest, most savvy, well intentioned politicians I can ever remember. He got a terrible raw deal. I came to admire Bobby Kennedy. I think I fell victim to the propaganda. I mean, I see him as this almost saintly figure. I don't think he was a saint. But I think he could have been a very good thing for the country and if anybody could have turned around what's happened since, I think it was Robert Kennedy. Those are political figures.

**RS:** You put that nicely, about the propaganda. I didn't like Kennedy at the time because of his association with Joe McCarthy. He seemed to have a right wing, authoritarian tendency. But today, I see him as you do, as someone whose election would have helped us get beyond some wounds. It's funny how our views change.

**SB:** I liked Paul Newman because I think he was a great actor and a philanthropist as well, and sincere. It's why I like Dustin Hoffman, because of *The Graduate*. I don't think he's ever surpassed *The Graduate*. I thought that was one of the great roles.

I admire one survivor who's since died. He had no *mazel* – as my mother would say – he had no luck. He was fourteen when he went into Auschwitz and it went downhill from there. He died this year. He had a sad marriage, his son contracted a disease and all kinds of terrible things happened. But through it all, he had a great sense of humor. He was obsessed with the experience of the Holocaust, but he overcame a lot. I don't usually talk about survivors as overcoming, but I think he actually did.

I admire my son, because he's a *mensch*, a decent human being and he's very talented. He doesn't want to compromise. I guess he wouldn't be a hero, but he comes close. Trying to think of anybody here on campus. Bernie Klein. I admire his sense of humor. That's about it, I think. What about you?

**RS:** I would have to start with Franklin Roosevelt. I was just a young boy when he died so I don't remember him, but he saved the country from something awful. I grew up with stories of Roosevelt, how he stood up for us. Both sides of my family came out of the depression grievously wounded by that period of history. My dad was in the CCC, the youth jobs program, and in the WPA, the adult jobs program. I wish we could do something like that today. I wish we could say to an 18-year-old kid or an unemployed adult, we will get you a job if you don't have one. Send them off to the national parks to clean up things. It would do a lot of good for society. Woody Guthrie wrote a song when Roosevelt died. It has the line "he taught us how to walk." Of course, Roosevelt could not walk but he gave hope to broken people. John L. Lewis makes my list. He was the head of the United Mine Workers Union, our family union. He was our tribune, our champion. He fought for us against stronger people. He got us health care benefits when there was no such thing. When I was a child and was ill, everything was covered by the UMWA Welfare Fund. It may have saved my life. I don't know, but it made a difference in our lives. I admired Senator Paul Douglas of Illinois for his commitment to social justice. He was one of the great Senators. More recently, I admire Jimmy Carter. As a President he worked for peace in the Middle East, for energy self-sufficiency, and to get our hostages out of Iran alive. After leaving office, he became the most significant ex-President in history. The man is 83 and never slows down. He is absolutely committed to justice, peace, and healing the wounds of society. His boyhood memoir, *An Hour Before Daylight*, is wonderful. Jane and I listened to it on tape. He is a master story teller. It's as if you are sitting in his living room and he is telling you stories. I met him once. We were in Americus visiting Andersonville Prison and we realized Plains was just a few miles away. He was teaching Sunday School so we went. When it was over, he greeted every single visitor. He is a deacon and the duty of a deacon is to greet visitors so he did his duty. This is a man who always does his duty, building houses for the poor, speaking up for justice, trying to cool down a conflict somewhere in the world, advocating a cautious and justice-based foreign policy, trying to make elections honest, explaining to dictators why they have to give up office. He never stops doing what he can do. Today I admire Barak Obama. When I read his book, *Dreams From My Father*, I knew this was a person of depth and substance. And when I read *The Audacity of Hope*, I realized he had significant policy perspectives and was not just an appealing personality. We have wounds so deep in this country, we don't even know they exist. One person cannot fix everything, and some things are probably not fixable, but Obama has the potential to be a historic person. I hope he is President some day, either next year or in the future.

**SB:** Do you think he can win?

**RS:** I think so, but we'll have to see. Right now, Hillary Clinton is the odds-on favorite. My three little granddaughters all support her. They want a "girl president" as they put it. It's ironic that by the time these interviews are in print we will know the answer. When Obama was running for the Senate he made a campaign stop in my home town. I do love my people, but they are skeptical about politicians from Chicago and they are skeptical about politicians who are Black, and he was both. He met people in private and in public and he won them over. That was an amazing achievement. Both events were significant, meeting in private with the mining interests and meeting in public with the voters. A

politician has to be able to do both. This tells me quite a bit about the man. His political skills are phenomenal.

**SB:** What was amazing was his speech at the Democratic Convention.

**RS:** Which electrified people. He still has a long way to go, and the country has a long way to go, but he has a lot of potential. And the election of a Black president just forty years after Martin Luther King was assassinated, especially *this* Black president, would be of historic significance. Those of our generation could never have dreamed of such a thing.

## Chapter Five

### Teaching and Research

**RS:** We've both won teaching awards and are said to be good teachers. We both teach sensitive topics. What problems do you encounter? What are you trying to do in your classroom and what do you hope to achieve?

**SB:** Yes, we do. Theoretically I want to help students think better, more critically and more generously. I remember a colleague who wrote that he hoped to produce students who could appreciate the mathematics of Euclid, the tragedy of Oedipus and the poetry of Sappho. He meant the scientist, poet, humanist. He had students who had no idea what this stuff was about. It still remains to me a challenge to get them to appreciate the variety of the texts more and to learn how to write better, communicate better. In terms of the sensitive subject, I really don't believe that teaching about the Holocaust will stop genocide. It hasn't up to now. But if one or two or ten students sees a pattern of behavior or recognizes the pattern of thinking in perpetrators, whether they be bureaucrats or racists – most of them were not racists, I don't think – most were just indifferent to the plight of a human being. If they recognize that in one behavior, if they say, "this reminds me of something," then I have achieved something.

I had a student once – I may have told you this. We used to come to a six o'clock class and he had a white shirt and tie and jacket. He clearly had come from across the street. [Reference to Ford Motor Company]. He'd sit for the three hours and he'd get up and leave and never speak. One evening I had lectured for three hours about the railroads and the profits businesses made from the Holocaust. Everybody got up – there were about 50 students in the class – and walked out when we were done, and he just sat there. So I thought he was ill or something. He sat way up in the corner every week, sort of the last seat. I went over and said, "Are you ok?" He said, "Do you remember the Pinto?" I said, "The Pinto, the car? The one that blew up?" And he said, "Right. I was an engineer on that. When we planned the car, we knew that one in maybe 10,000 cars, if we didn't put a particular bolt on it, was going to blow up and catch fire and could kill people." I said, "So what was the big deal? You put one bolt on." He said, "Well, the bolts were 50 cents a piece. If you're making a million cars, it's a lot of money. I was involved in the planning of it." Then he started to weep. I thought, you can't think he's committed



genocide. On the other hand, he made a connection between a railroad bureaucrat who was sending a train somewhere that was going to kill people and what he had done. I thought, that's something that he will recognize in a committee meeting and maybe face a similar decision. That's pretty much the most you can hope, one at a time.

One of our former colleagues, he retired a few weeks ago, came over to Lori and said, "Tell Sidney not to wait, he's wasting his life." This person thought being a teacher was a waste of life. I don't think that. Occasionally I get, as you do, messages from former students who keep in touch and occasionally say "I remember this in class, I remember this book." That's very important to me. That's gratifying. It's been far from a waste of life for me.

**RS:** I feel exactly the same. I am at the age when I could retire. When people ask, I just say, "I plan to teach for five more years and then reassess." I know the impact I have on students, and how much my classes shape their thinking. When students stop coming by after class to discuss issues, or when they stop sending articles they have found, then I will know the time has come to step down. Until then, I plan to hang on.

I once wrote an article on teaching the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. You know that article since you read it for me before I sent it off to the journal. I wrote that in some subjects, our culture has pounded into our heads "correct" answers so it becomes hard for us to understand the complexity of problems. My two most sensitive courses are The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict and Religion and Politics. In both of these courses, I focus upon what I call "unlearning." I try to undermine those cultural "learnings" and force students to engage ideas they don't necessarily like. When I teach the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, I have students read Herzl's call for a Jewish state in Palestine, which necessitated pushing out the Palestinians, and the Hamas charter, which does not recognize the legitimacy of Israel. This is painful for students who are Jewish or Arab, but also for students who are neither. Then I tell them to write an essay comparing these two arguments. I tell them that their job is to analyze these and discuss them without revealing their own perspectives. Until they can explain a perspective to the satisfaction of the person who holds that perspective, they do not have the right to an opinion since they do not have enough insight to know if they agree or disagree. They like this. It frees them from taking positions and allows them to discipline their thinking. When we read Osama bin Laden's *Declaration of War* on America, I tell them to leave aside their feelings and explain Osama's perspective, not their own. Students find this approach liberating. They are intuitively aware that they are being subjected to biased news and heavy duty brainwashing, but they don't know what to do about it. This gives them a strategy and a methodology to free themselves from that. Many of my classes are taught from primary documents, which bypass the mass media or cable network pundits. Students who see me decades later tell me they still have those course packs.

**SB:** How do you deal with issues of objectivity in your classes?

**RS:** A decade ago the American Council of Learned Societies had a conference on Advocacy in the Classroom. I represented the Middle East Studies Association. In my presentation I used the term "unintended advocacy." People liked that term. It got quoted later. I said that when students come into the class with strong views, which they have

been taught are the “correct” views, for me as a professor to present a range of perspective as if they all have integrity, can be seen as propaganda. They view their own perspectives as balanced and rooted in neutral facts, so by definition, I must be *not* balanced. For example, in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, when I say “over the past five years the number of Israelis killed is so-and-so and the number of Palestinians killed is so-and-so, and the kill ratio is so-and-so,” this may upset some people, especially if they are taught to believe that “we are the victims and they are the murderers.” They want to hear those words, which make it clear who is morally right and who is morally wrong. But I can’t do that in the classroom. Not only would such judgmental comments wreck my credibility but I lack the professional training to say who is morally right and who is morally wrong. As a political scientist my approach is to analyze the structure of conflict and how it is evolving and how it might evolve in the future.

I pass out to my two sensitive classes my *Rules for Effective Studenting*. The central points of these Rules are to keep intellectual humility and to keep an open mind. For humility, you have to begin with the assumption that you don’t understand. If you don’t start with this assumption, then there is no room for learning. By keeping an open mind, you must constantly say to yourself, there are things I need to understand that I have not understood before, and may be resisting. Students quote these rules and tell each other about them. I think they have been effective in doing what I want them to do, which is tell students how to approach difficult material. [The Appendix has the Rules].

**SB:** What do you do with students who are clearly opinionated at taking media censored information, rumors, gossip, web sites, whatever, and won’t look at the source material the way you want them to look at it? On occasion I get students like that, in the course on the Bible, for example. Not a lot, but a few, who simply would not talk about social context or political context of chapters in the Bible. What do you do with these students? I haven’t had this, but I can imagine having a student come in and say, why are we studying this, the Holocaust didn’t happen. I don’t know what I would do at that point. I taught a course on the Bible in history, why it was written when it was, who wrote it, what their political goals might have been. I had maybe four or five students who were upset about this. Two who were Evangelicals kept saying, you can’t read the Bible this way, it’s blasphemous. They didn’t drop the course. I had a couple of African American students who were involved Baptists who were fascinated with this and kept coming in and talking about what this meant. They went to church raising these questions with their ministers. I’m assuming they didn’t get ex-communicated or whatever.

**RS:** This comes up from time to time in my Religion and Politics course, where students come in with “correct” views from their own traditions. I try to help them get beyond that with some preemptive thinking. On the first day, I tell students this is a class on politics, not religion. It has nothing to do with God. It has to do with human beings and how they understand God. I tell them if it is going to upset them to see their most sacred texts analyzed as if they are a party platform, they should probably not take the class. I always try to make a joke, that if within the first two or three weeks I have not said something about your faith tradition that you find distressing, if you will slip me a note I will try to do so at the earliest possible opportunity. (Both laugh). It pushes them back, and makes them think. This is not Sunday School. I tell students to be very careful about discussing

what we learn with their parents. Students go through a process of learning analytical techniques to help them understand the material, and it is not fair to throw these ideas out to people without that training. It will leave some people in distress.

I have very few people that I call ideologues, people who have an interpretation that explains everything and are aggressive in resisting other interpretations, and reach bad conclusions about anyone who doesn't embrace their view, such as a professor. I think that is what you are talking about. I had someone like that last year. I just tried not to confront him since I thought there were probably stresses I could not understand. Other faculty had problems with him as well. He ended up writing awful things about me, but there was nothing I could do about it. Occasionally there is a problem from the retirees program. The people in that wonderful program are open and thoughtful and intellectually engaged. It's a real asset to this campus, and the undergraduates love to have people the age of their grandparents sitting in class. But once in a while you encounter someone who has spent the last seventy years talking to people exactly like themselves, and then they hear me and are in shock. A couple of years ago, I had one who actually wrote to the Dean and Chancellor complaining that my Rules for Effective Studenting proved my bias. It is hard to know what to do with such a person. I find most students are very open when I tell them to write an essay and explain Osama's views, and if I see any evidence of their preferences I will mark them down. I always add that this material is very sensitive and, if at the end of the essay, you want to add a personal statement, I will read that carefully but will not consider it in your grade. About a quarter take me up on that. They feel that I am being open to them, but by separating analysis from perspective I am also teaching them an analytical skill.

**SB:** Do you ever take those personal statements into the grade?

**RS:** No. I always grade the paper before I read the personal statement. I've always kept faith with them in that regard. I can't allow that to influence the grade because they say so many different things. They say, "I agree with this part, but disagree with that one," or they tell a personal or a family story, or they say, "This part really upset me." That's fine. That's what I want them to feel comfortable doing.

**SB:** In the Holocaust class the most problematic students I've had have been Jews, because they come in with that arrogant attitude, "We already know this, what can you tell me that I don't already know?" Of course, they have no idea what the historical event was about. They take it from Sunday school, or whatever. They don't do well. They don't listen, they don't think. Some of the best students I've had have been Muslim students. The overwhelming majority have been non-Jewish, sometimes retirees but 75% in their 20s. I guess that matters to me as well, to get them to think in terms of the complexity of an issue, to see it's not black and white, to avoid the "terrible simplifications."

**RS:** I just got feedback from two students. One took the online Methodology course Frank Wayman and I teach. There is no course more boring — research design, how to analyze data, statistics. She said she was in a government position and that the skills she acquired -- how to interpret and present data -- were very valuable in her job. That was wonderful praise. The second student is a double major in Political Science and

Women's Studies. She had taken all the courses I offered, and all the courses from Suzanne Bergeron, our colleague in Women's Studies. When she came for advice on where to apply for graduate school, I reminded her that I had previously said I thought some feminist rhetoric had marginalized itself. I said, "You have taken all of her classes and all of my classes. Why are we your two favorite professors?" By the way, Suzanne is my good friend. I respect her and we have a lot in common, but I wanted to know from the student what drew her towards the two of us. She said that we both focus upon power and how politically marginal groups struggle against it. In other words, she is learning from both us, *because of* our different approaches, not in spite of them. I like that.

**RS:** What is your philosophy or strategy of writing? What do you hope to achieve?

**SB:** I've done four books. One is a children's book. It interprets Greek texts for middle and high school students, which is pretty sophisticated. The editors and publisher didn't bother to read it. We talked about homosexuality in Greek culture and about misogyny. They never came down with a need to change anything. So that was one. Another book is on German Jews. I mentioned that earlier. The last book was on meaning and the Holocaust. That was based on the survivor interviews, although not exclusively. That's probably what I'm going to try to do when I take my sabbatical next semester. I do a lot with oral history, although I do try to use documents if I can. I tend to distrust oral history by itself. It's not that anybody's lying, but oral history is not as good as historical documents. Some support from written resource is standard. I'm very careful with choice of words. I think that words don't have as much importance anymore and I think that they should. I guess this comes from studying about psychoanalysis because every word is carefully selected. And it also has to do with listening. So I'm a slow writer. I can write things in a hurry and then I go back over some things fifty times. I'll keep going back and changing it one word after another. So that's my approach to writing -- very cautious and meticulous.

**RS:** In my research, I have jumped around with my methodology and paradigms, but to me there is a trajectory in what I am doing. My doctoral research was in Kenya, in an area that had been the focus of the Mau Mau nationalist uprising in the 1950s. I organized interviews with 600 farmers, asking about their political views and history, including their involvement in the uprising. It was approved for publication but a new editor came on board and cancelled the African series. That was a great disappointment.

My first book was co-authored with Frank Wayman. We did a public opinion study in Dearborn and traced changes over time. It was a panel study, which means we interviewed the same people three times over three years to see how their opinions shifted. A major component of that study had to do with how people shape their values. We were ahead of many public opinion specialists back then because we saw how cultural factors -- race, crime, and sexual or life style issues -- were breaking up the New Deal coalition. That coalition was based on class and strong party identity. There was a new dynamic that manifested itself more fully in the 1980s but we realized early on that it had great power. We also saw that voters were making personal evaluations of presidential candidates, something that had been seen as subservient to other issues before that. My second book was on church conflict, which I talked about earlier.

My current project is The Detroit Arab American Study. This involved in-depth interviews with a scientific sample of 1,016 Arab Americans from southeast Michigan. Nothing like this had ever been done before. It originated from an interaction between UM-D and community leaders. They were concerned that there was little accurate information about Arab Americans so that unfriendly stereotypes dominated discourse. Dan Little asked David Featherman, head of the Institute of Social Research in Ann Arbor, to campus and we decided to do a study. I was made one of two principle Investigators. Five other people from Ann Arbor were involved. We realized immediately that we needed community support for this to succeed so we created a twenty-person advisory board from community organizations. This was a working committee that helped us prepare the questionnaire and publicize the study. Drawing a scientific, representative sample of Arab Americans was technically complex. Getting people to talk to us was also problematic. This was 2003, in the aftermath of September 11, when Arab Americans were under surveillance, and the American army had just entered Baghdad. Some of us were worried that we might get a meaningless 25% response rate. In fact, we got a 72% response rate. It was stunning. People were eager to be interviewed. The data were so unique that we released it into the public domain as soon as we could so that scholars and graduate students could use it for their research. As we speak, the research team is putting the finishing touches on our book. This is a team project so we each took different chapters for our own writing assignments. I am the exclusive author on two chapters, on foreign policy attitudes and on attitudes to civil liberties issues. Just between you and me, I think these are the two essential issues to most Arab Americans. I believe this will be a definitive book on Arab Americans. I am proud that UM-D played such a central role in it this project, and that I was involved. It's the greatest research project of my career.

**SB:** You have done research on your family, haven't you?

**RS:** Yes. When I was 19, a professor asked if I knew about my ancestors. Professor Ridgway had been studying her own family and they had interacted with the Stocktons. She said if I could find out about my family four generations back, she might have some information. She thought we might be Quakers. That had never occurred to me, that we might be Quakers. I never confirmed that, but the idea that we could learn about ancestors we did not even know existed stuck with me. Now, decades later, I have become my family genealogist. I have my mother's family traced back fifteen generations. I have written a 144-page book on a family graveyard. A woman and I compiled biographical and genealogical data on all 829 graves and I did an analysis of death patterns across sixteen decades. For example, half of the graves in the nineteenth century were of children ten or below, most dying within a few days of birth. And there are nearly seventy unmarked graves, most of which would be children. Today, most funerals are of venerated elders but in those days, a funeral reflected destroyed dreams far more than gratitude for a life well lived. An article based on this data was published in the *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*.

I have discovered family members involved in historical events. During the Civil War, someone on my dad's side was a cavalry officer from Kentucky and the unit was involved in the effort to liberate Andersonville, the notorious prisoner of war camp in

Georgia. Ironically, people from my mother's side and from Jane's family were dying in that camp even as the Kentuckians were being driven back. Another incident is from the Revolutionary War. The British had urged their Iroquois allies to attack settlements on the frontier to draw Washington's forces from the battle in New York. Our family was attacked. The father was killed, and the grandparents and a young aunt were burned alive. My third great grandfather, a boy of six, was taken away with his mother and siblings and was raised as an Iroquois. Six years later, he was kidnapped back by his cousin. This incident caused American settlers to flee this whole region. As soon as the British evacuated New York, Washington sent General Sullivan to depopulate the region of Iroquois. It was a tragedy all around. None of these things were known until I discovered them. My strategy is to integrate family stories into history. Genealogists tend to be self-involved, collecting minutiae of no interest beyond their own bloodline. I try to put my family into historic context. I have presented some findings to an academic conference. I hope these efforts will lead to academic articles.

All of my research has a personal dimension to it. Actually, I remember a conversation we had about this. You and Michael Rosano were in your office talking about research. I popped my head in to say hello and you asked me if I had ever written anything personal. I laughed and told you that everything I write is autobiographical. In some sense, I think that is true. I grew up with religion, identity, class struggle, history, and a sense of marginalization. Those have driven everything I have ever written. All play a role in my teaching and my research. You and I are the same in that regard. There is something in our background that makes us want to pursue certain topics. Research is really hard. It's boring and it takes a long time to produce anything. If we lacked passion we would not do it, and if we did not have our professional training, we would just be writing stories that satisfy our own interests.

**SB:** Diary entries.

**RS:** Yes, diary entries. I have read your writings and you have read mine and I think you and I exhibit a common pattern, of linking these things together.

**SB:** A number of years ago I was having difficulty with depression. The therapist said, "You expected to interview Holocaust survivors for 20 years and not get depressed?" In one of the sessions, I called my father a "survivor." And all of a sudden, the therapist just looked at me and said, "Did you hear what you said?" He reminded me that I really didn't know that much about my father. His suggestion was I was trying to find out through survivors more about him. There is clearly that personal dimension. The Voice/Vision web site [<http://holocaust.umd.umich.edu/>] that we've set up has over three hundred interviews, about 80 of them on-line. We get a million hits a year from people all over, Saudi Arabia, Israel, England, all over Europe, all across the United States. The average stay is 20 minutes. So as a rule, there is great curiosity just to know about personal history and how it fits into contemporary life.

**RS:** I'll tell you what I think. I think we are priests. Our profession grew out of the priesthood, and you and I are priests. We are trying to save souls. We are not just doing abstract academic research. You and I have not dedicated our careers to exchanges with

other scholars. We exchange with our students and with a broader audience. Of course, we want our colleagues to respect our work, but that is not what we are doing.

**SB:** And we're unabashed about it, although I spend a good portion of the Holocaust class trying to be as objective as possible, not getting emotionally involved. All of our educational programs are done with survivor excerpts. I deliberately try to avoid the tears and the breakdowns so often associated with that history.

**RS:** Which would be easy, given the stories.

**SB:** Fifty percent is an academic project, but the other 50% is not. It's a human exploration. I don't claim that I'm good friends with the survivors but I know them, and have relationships with them.

**RS:** Let me ask you about the Honors Program. You founded this program. You're the godfather of it. Just this summer I organized a group of immigrant students to write letters to their great-grandchildren telling them about their immigrant experience and the process of adjusting to American society. They really got into this. The six of them, all were women, have written over three hundred pages of text, with two more starting just this semester. Two of them were from non-Western countries. They said that the Honors Program played a major role in helping them understand the Western way of thinking. This program focuses on reading classic texts, which I realize is out of vogue these days. What thoughts do you have about this program and what is it trying to do? How did you create it?

**SB:** Well, it's ironic. When I was at Hobart I was working with some of the brightest intellectuals in the country. *Everybody* at Hobart, every discipline, taught in the Western Civilization program. It was the required course for all Hobart students. I came with seven young faculty members who were all rebels. We created a counter-culture course to tear apart the Western Civilization program, because we didn't think it should be required. We were reading everything from Marx to Theodore Roszak, Albert Memmi to Freud, Norman O. Brown to Herbert Marcuse, Simone DeBouvoir to Emma Goldman, LeRoy Jones to Bobby Seale. It was a wild time and one that prepared me for teaching about both western culture and the counter-culture. Then I came here with the express mission to create a Western Civilization program. It was a new curriculum and it was supposed to be interdisciplinary. It was going to be a staff of eight people of different disciplines. But by the time I got here, it had been reduced to one year instead of two years, and the staff was cut in half. We had a mathematician; we had people from the humanities; people from social sciences. The idea was to try to get students to think analytically and critically and not take anything for granted, including and especially Western civilization. When we read Plato, I tear him apart. He's misogynist, I think he's overly competitive, I think he's got authoritarian strains that are scary sometimes. That's the approach we take when we look at the Greeks. We take the same approach with the Bible in the first course. So it's a critical approach to the West. Our approach is, "Look at how provincial it is, but here's how we can think about it." That's how every one of these courses is supposed to go. The specific content is secondary to that. They're all

methods courses. And when the university curriculum fell apart, it seemed that there needed to be a place where students could still do that. There was a nominal honors program, but there was no program, no curriculum. There was just a bunch of students and they could take a course and say, "Here's my honors course." Then Gene Grewe, the Dean, asked me to head the Honors Program. I said, sure, and applied because he asked me to do it. So that's how we got started. It was a long time before it really started to click, and it clicked because we got people like Gerry Moran and you teaching tutorials, and Michael Rosano. We got good faculty who came in and were dedicated to helping. We used to admit 30 students per year and then the Dean and the Provost wanted to grow it. So now we take in 80 and that I think is far too many.

**RS:** How can you possibly have a discussion-based class with so many students?

**SB:** Well, with 80 students a year, if we have five sections of each course, we have 15 students in each section. On the other hand, we're now struggling over what the enrollment cap for sections should be. The Dean wants to raise the cap to 20 or 25 and that would defeat the purpose of the program. And there used to be team-taught courses.

**RS:** I did that once.

**SB:** It's going to be done one more time, next semester. Then it's over unless we can rally the troops. The faculty are very upset about that, and the alumni are very upset. The two things they remember the most are the class sizes and the team-teaching, and to have them go away... Anyway, that's what the program is supposed to be. It's very laid back but very intense. It involves a lot of writing. The "propaganda" is we want to help students think better and write better. Ninety percent of the time there's demonstrable evidence to show that after a year, the quality of the writing is up by a quantum amount. So I'm generally pretty pleased with the way it's gone. But it's more than just Western thinking. I've been through the culture wars a few times actually, and I think for the time being people are going to be satisfied. So that's the honors program.

**RS:** It's a signature program, no doubt about it.

**RS:** We have both been associated with major programs, you with Voice and Vision, me with the Center for Arab American Studies. You have mentioned Voice and Vision, your holocaust survivor interview project, but could you say more about it? How did it get started? What are you hoping to do with it? You've interviewed over 160 people.

**SB:** We have 300.

**RS:** You did 160 and other people did those others?

**SB:** About 200 were mine, probably more.

**RS:** So what got you involved in these interviews? This has taken a couple of decades.

**SB:** More.



**RS:** It's not easy for you psychologically, and it's not easy to get these people to talk.

**SB:** It's easier now. In the beginning nobody would talk. They were suspicious. "What are you doing this for? Who are you anyway?" One man at the end of the interview said, "Why are you doing this? You're not Jewish." I said, "Nobody every said that to me before." We wound up doing 19 hours of interviewing.

**RS:** With one person?

**SB:** With one person. I had to interview three people for my dissertation, German Jews. I hated doing this kind of stuff, but I thought I should. After that television mini-series, *The Holocaust*, I taught a course on the Holocaust, about which I knew very little. This was 1978. People kept calling me to talk on the subject, even though I was a critic of the program. Then somebody called and said, "We want you on this committee on Holocaust Education." A group of survivors was trying to create a Holocaust Memorial Center in West Bloomfield. I was invited to represent the Workmen's Circle on that committee. I said, "Sure. I'll be glad to help." So I went to this meeting and met Dr. John Manes, a survivor. We met at John's house. The meeting was supposed to start at 7:30, so 7:30 comes then a quarter to 8. We had what became a tradition, a *l'chaim*.

**RS:** A toast.

**SB:** Yes, a toast. He would give me a glass of schnapps of some sort. So I said, "Who else is coming?" He said, "Oh. Nobody else is coming." I said, "It's just you and me?" He said, "It's actually just you," because he wasn't going to do any interviews. He said, "I'll call them and I'll set the meetings up for you, but we don't have any volunteers." So I said ok, and a couple weeks later I did three interviews in one week, which is completely crazy. So that's how it started. I just got into it. We tried volunteer interviewers who lasted a couple months and then they didn't want to do it anymore. So I continued. At first the survivors were skeptical. Why shouldn't they be? But gradually they became like family to my family, attending my children's bar and bat mitzvahs, their concerts (both are professional string musicians) and eventually my daughter's wedding. We, in turn, attended similar occasions as well as holiday dinners, Passover seders, and even joined a synagogue because many of them belonged to the congregation.

**RS:** So this was linked to the Holocaust Memorial Center?

**SB:** We had originally planned to have a cooperative relationship with the Center but because of differences of opinion between the Director of that Center and me about how to use the material, we decided to bring the project here. The issues were whether the interviews should be allowed out of the building, whether we should let students come and listen to them. If you're not going to let them listen, what are you doing this for? Just to stick them in a vault? For a couple years we gave the Center copies of whatever we had. Now we give copies to the Holocaust Center in Washington, D. C. Basically I wanted to have it here where we could do a professional job. We moved the project to

campus in 1983 after two years of interviewing. We started doing videotape interviews and the university began to provide unbelievable support: studio time, tapes, financial assistance and intellectual and moral support. The administration and faculty colleagues rushed to corroborate the work and eventually, in 1994, we founded the Voice/Vision Holocaust Survivor Oral History Archive. The website receives about a million “hits” a year from all over the world. We get hundreds of inquiries from researchers, students and scholars like Christopher Browning who visited our campus after using numerous interviews for his last book. When he was here, he met the survivors and talked with them as a group.

**RS:** I was at that event. The auditorium was packed.

**RS:** You’re going to Israel in a couple months to do even more interviews, aren’t you?

**SB:** One month. There’s a special group who were rescued by a British man who saved almost 700 Czech Jewish children before the war started and a dozen or so live in Israel.

**RS:** Changing topics, we both did a curriculum unit. Your focus is on teaching the Holocaust, my focus is on teaching the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. What were you hoping to achieve with your unit? And what do you think your unit contributes that had not been previously available? Do you have any pedagogical techniques that you use to help students understand the process that you’re trying to study?

**SB:** The unit has 18 lessons, although it can be broken up to smaller amounts. There were three of us who co-authored it. One is a high school teacher who contributed some pedagogical techniques. The other was the director of social studies curriculum in Oakland County schools and he proofed it. Then I was responsible for the content. We didn’t think anybody was going to take 18 days in a world history course for it. In a course like that, they go from the big bang to the day before yesterday in one semester.

We decided to use videotapes. One of the benefits of using the videotape is that it personalizes the history. I mean, there’s history with the capital H, the history of the Holocaust, and history with a small h, which is really memory. When a 15-year-old kid in a classroom hears a survivor on the videotape say, “I was 15 years old when I got off the train to Auschwitz,” there’s usually some sort of a connection and they’re drawn into this personal story of a real person. So I think that’s useful to be able to use those testimonies, although I don’t think you can get a history of the Holocaust from survivor testimony. You can get that person’s experience and frequently a student will know more about the history of the Holocaust than a survivor will, because they only know what’s happening around them, which is more than enough. It takes forever to communicate that. But you can get a sense of what life was like before, how it was disrupted, what the impact has been long term, for example for the raising of their children, things like that. No written sources can communicate that the way an oral conversation does.

What I hoped to do with this was to bring a professionalism into the high schools. High schools don’t teach about the Holocaust. They watch the *Diary of Anne Frank*, or they read it, or they watch some movie. We found when we did an impromptu examination of high school history textbooks, that the average textbook had 70 words on

the Holocaust or on World War II. Everybody claimed it was too difficult to talk about the ubiquitous complicity of Europe – not just Germany. It involved the bureaucrats, the architects, the police, whatever. I think that it's possible to do that in high schools. And that's what I hoped to do. So I went to primary source material, Nuremberg trial records, and documents from companies, like the company that made the crematoria. Those records are astonishing. The crematoria were used so much that there were cracks in the chimneys, so they had to bring in engineers to fix the cracks in the chimneys. And they explained how they did that. They were witnesses in the trials. They were not on trial.

**RS:** This sounds very technical, very different from the typical high school class.

**SB:** The problem with teaching about a business or a history of bureaucracy is that it can be boring. And I think the survivor testimonies mediate that kind of boredom. On the other hand, when you find out somebody was calculating exactly how much the SS had to pay the railroad companies to send 6,000 Jews to Treblinka, you learn something. The fare depended on how old the people were. Children under 12 went for half fare, children under 4 for free. That means every person on the train had a name, an age, where they're from, what their occupation was, whether or not they could be used for labor. Somebody had to keep all those records and somebody had to do the calculation of how much money it would cost. No money, no trains. Of course, the SS took the money from the Jewish community and paid the railroad companies. They made a fortune. And it didn't get in the way at all of the war. It didn't interfere at all. It's one of the reasons those trains took so long. Every train had a priority assigned to it. If it was a war material train, it took first priority. If it was a harvest train or a passenger train, it got second priority. Jewish trains had no priority. So if there were two trains coming at the same time and they arrive at the same crossing, the Jewish train had to get shunted aside and wait for three or four hours. They were dying of starvation and thirst and disease and they had to wait. If there's a second train coming in ten minutes, they had to wait another few hours. I don't even think there's any anti-Semitism involved. It's just strictly bureaucratic procedure.

**RS:** Are students capable of understanding this?

**SB:** Well, that's a good question.

**RS:** These are young kids, probably 16 or 17.

**SB:** We had really good feedback. It was one of the National Diffusion Network preferred curricula, so people were using it all over the country. The material is set up so that it's fairly easy, straightforward and understandable. But that's what I hoped to do. Instead of saying, "Here are these monsters. Here's Hitler. He hypnotized the whole nation." None of that is accurate. Hitler was necessary but not sufficient. There were 12 million civilians involved in one way or another. That's what I wanted to do, to make that point, and for the most part I think it works. There's a mock trial of a doctor based on three doctors' trials. The testimonies come right out of them. There's one doctor who's a witness and when he's asked about Dr. Mengele, he said, "Oh, I think he's a good physician. He was a conscientious doctor. He did his job." This is a doctor who

refused to do any experiments and refused to work the platform to separate people. But he was a doctor and he thought Mengele was an ok guy. I just don't get it. Anyway, that was the curriculum. At this point, it's out of print.

**SB:** How did you come to write your unit on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

**RS:** In 1991 UM's Center for Middle East and North African Studies (CMENAS), got a grant from the U.S. Institute for Peace to develop high school curricula on Middle East issues. Betsy Barlow, the energetic outreach director, was instrumental in this. I am a Research Associate at the Center and they asked me to create a unit on Teaching the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. There was little available for teachers, other than by advocacy groups. I was told to think of two weeks in a junior or senior class in world affairs or modern history. My first task was to narrow down the topic. I decided on five lessons. The first was the historical context. People assume that the Middle East is inherently unstable or that Jews and Arabs have interior pathologies that predispose them to violence. How many times have we heard someone say, "They have been fighting for 2,000 years" or "It is just Ishmael and Isaac at it again?" In fact, the age of violence began in the aftermath of World War I when Britain and France partitioned the region and created ethnic regimes which they felt they could control. My first lesson was on the Partition of the Middle East. The second and third lessons were on The Condition of the Jews, including the emergence of Jewish nationalism, and The Condition of the Palestinians, including the emergence of Palestinian nationalism. The fourth lesson was Turning Points, times when the very nature of the conflict changed: 1947, when Palestine was partitioned; 1967, when Israel captured the Palestinian territories and reunited Palestine; 1977, when Menachem Begin started the settlement programs full bore; and 1987, when the first Intifada proved that the Palestinian territories were ungovernable by outside forces. The final lesson focused on four possible outcomes: the status quo of occupation, a unitary state, two states, and the expulsion of the Palestinians (or the Jews). I pointed out that none of these outcomes was likely, and why. This sends students into reflection about what might happen, since none of the outcomes is likely. All lessons included a reading by me, data, key events, terms, and documents. Assignments ask students to take roles or explain the logic of alternate positions. Two-thirds of the material was in the teacher's section. I knew teachers would feel insecure unless they knew more than the students, so I gave them a lot of supplementary background information. I listed problems that might emerge and difficult questions that might come up. I told them things not to say and words to avoid. In 1993, the unit was revised and put on the internet.

**SB:** How was it received?

**RS:** The reaction was very positive. The unit was adopted in high schools around the country and was used in discussion and study groups. I put my email in and invited users to contact me, so many did. Several Arab groups recommended it, but so did Jewish groups. The very first contact I got after it went onto the internet was from a teacher in a Jewish day school who was taking a summer class in Israel. The unit had been recommended to the teachers. The Jewish community in Washington, D. C. put it on

display, and the Jabotinsky society put the chapter on Zionism on their web site (without my name, which was ok with me). Five years ago when we did an NEH workshop [National Endowment for the Humanities] on teaching the Middle East, two teachers who had used the unit signed up specifically to work with me. I was very pleased. When the unit was new, I got a lot of inquiries and complements, even from overseas. One teenage girl in Belgium wrote to the Center and said, "I want to marry this man!" It was cute. She had been desperate to find material and this was exactly what she needed. I told my friends it was the first internet proposal I had ever received. The unit had a resurgence when the Iraq war started. Just recently I got a message from a career military officer who found it on the CMENES website and said it had given him insights into the nature of the conflict. I am sorry to say that some local Jewish leaders have fought the unit from the beginning and even met with CMENAS officials to try to get it dropped, but these things happen. Twice in the last year I was asked to update it, and I hope to do so. It fills a niche that is otherwise not filled.

## Chapter Six

### Jews and Anti-Semitism, the Holocaust, and Israel

**RS:** Throughout history Jews have always had difficulties wherever they were. How do you explain that and what insights do you have on that?

**SB:** Let me throw out an historical perspective. I think an initial enmity toward Jews started around the fourth century A.D. There was lots of conflict and warfare in the ancient Middle East, but it's not just the Jews who are getting pounded on in warfare.

**RS:** They weren't being singled out.

**SB:** They weren't singled out. There were conflicts between empires. But by the fourth century it's a religious question. Part of it has to do with vying for converts between Christianity and Judaism. That was a big thing in Alexandria, for example. Jews were worried about losing people from the flock, Christians were worried about the new religion dying out. For some at least, Jesus had said don't go to anybody but the Jews. Be sure to get the Jews. So it starts out as a religious thing, I think, and then it becomes a kind of cultural problem. So now we've got Jews in the Roman Empire who are alien. They dress differently, they speak differently, they pray on the wrong day, they have this unusual worship that most of the host country is not comfortable with. They eat differently, they eat separately, they're isolated. It grows worse because of the economic situation. They're forbidden from taking part in a vast array of professions. They can't join the guilds. They can't own land. So it becomes a kind of separate entity and there's a kind of mythology that grows up along with it. Because they're isolated – obviously this is much too simplified – they become mysterious, and as a function of being mysterious they become conspiratorial and dangerous. That mythology is fostered by some churches, not all.

**RS:** How did that work, the role of the churches?

**SB:** One of the times I was in Germany I remember walking into a cathedral in Cologne, a beautiful cathedral, and looking at some of the stained glass windows with paintings of the crucifixion and resurrection. I thought, if I was an illiterate peasant, I would walk out saying, “find me Jews to kill because they killed our Lord and look at how awful it was.” By the time it gets to be the early modern period, where the culture becomes more secularized, if Jews become assimilated, they’re taken into the culture. They become Germans, for example. They’re the most assimilated Jews in the world, German Jews. That’s around the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. They come flocking in from the east because they’re running from Cossacks. Then I think the nineteenth century is sort of the final, lethal piece in this puzzle because Jews are considered to be a race. Once you become identified as a race, there’s nothing you can do. You can’t convert. In the Middle Ages, if you converted you were fine. You could become a priest. You could become a bishop. In the secular period if you took on the trappings of what it meant to be a citizen of that particular nationality, you were accepted. But if you’re a race, there’s nothing you can do about it. It’s like blue eyes and blonde hair. You can’t change. So the logic in the nineteenth century is kind of pseudo-scientific. The only thing you can do if you want to get rid of people is to kill them. By this time a mythology has grown up. It moved from conspiratorial groups to international conspiratorial groups – *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for example. And there’s a sexual theme that comes into play. When it becomes racial, people fear that Jews are going to pollute the race, the so-called “Aryan” race. The elements of the Holocaust are sort of ideologically fixed in the nineteenth century. That doesn’t mean there’s going to be a Holocaust. There’s nothing inevitable about it. The practical aspect of it seems out of the question. How are you going to kill all the Jews in the world? Nobody can imagine or dream about it. Even Hitler couldn’t imagine that. But the logic is there. Himmler is reported to have said, “If you have lice in your house, you don’t invite them next door.” In other words, you kill them. So that’s how I think it sort of develops historically.

**RS:** Where did that racial idea come from? Do you have any idea? Because it’s not found earlier, or is it?

**SB:** Well, you frequently hear Jews called a “race,” but nobody knows what a “race” is. I think it substitutes for a nation, or people. This new way of thinking starts around the mid-nineteenth century, and in different countries. Houston Stewart Chamberlain is English. Count Gobineau is French. There are a number of German theorists. Germany was the most enlightened of the Enlightenment countries (although it wasn’t a country yet). Oddly enough, they’re the least anti-Semitic because people like Kant and Lessing, and Schiller were the source of the Enlightenment, Enlightenment thinkers.

**RS:** We have a colleague – this makes me feel very uneasy – who says that the Holocaust is byproduct of the Enlightenment, that where you had more conservative religious thinking, they viewed Jews in terms of religion, not in terms of race. This is not a marginal theory, as far as I can tell. There are a lot of people who feel that it grew out

of this process of rationalization. As someone who identifies very much with the Enlightenment, I don't like this conclusion, but I wonder what you think of it?

**SB:** I think there's some truth to that. From the Enlightenment you get objective thinking, scientific thinking, bureaucratic thinking. Bureaucracy's a great thing. It's what makes us more efficient and in some ways more progressively advanced than pre-civilized primitive culture. Where would we be without bureaucracy? We wouldn't be here. But it can be taken to an extreme. When an objective way of thinking about the world becomes inclusive of human beings like Jews, then it can be a problem. When you apply bureaucratic rules like, "keep your private life separate from your professional life," don't get the two mixed up and be sure that everything is done according to the rules, don't step outside your own purview, you're an expert on what you do, don't worry about the next office. Trains are on time, whatever. I think then we get into trouble. There are a number of really good books that make that case and it goes back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which I think is more intelligent than saying it's got roots in religion. I mean, Luther didn't help, but...

**RS:** He was a pre-Enlightenment thinker. He had *religious* hostilities.

**SB:** His work on *The Jews and Their Lies* is a very careful scholarly analysis of segments of the Torah, where he takes the language apart and reinterprets it to say Jews have lost their connection with God. That's why they're going to be punished and if you see one you know you've met the devil, and all that. It's a religious tract. It shows his considerable learning in theology.

**RS:** You are being very kind. It may be scholarly but it's also a nasty piece of work.

**SB:** But it certainly is not in any way connected with the bureaucratic aspect of what happened. But the Holocaust managed to avoid it in some respects. Some 12 million civilians were involved. These were not only party members, not in Nazi uniforms, who were involved in one way or another. So I think it's got a long history. It's completely irrational and not a little flash in the historical pan. It's gone on for fifteen hundred years or more and it's led to some terrible, terrible events. So you wonder how a whole continent of people could... I mean, Germany was the most literate country in the world at the time, so you wonder how they could be caught up in this sort of absurd series of legends. I once was in Canada doing a series of workshops on teaching the Holocaust. I had somebody come up after six hours of lecture. He's walking around me while other people are asking questions and he said, "do you have horns?" I thought, "It's a joke."

**RS:** But it was not a joke.

**SB:** It was not a joke. He had come from some frontier area in Canada, was now living in Brunswick and had been taught that Jews had horns.

**RS:** Amazing.

**SB:** And I said, "I have a good barber." (Laughs).

**RS:** What else could you say?

**SB:** Ultimately, it's completely irrational and it's really disturbing because of that. You can't argue with somebody about it, if somebody's diehard. Anti-Semitism is a misnomer because it implies that there's a "Semitism," that there are "Semites," which could include Arabs as well as Jews. It's anti-Jewish. It's a problem of how you define a Jew. This problem has bothered two groups more than others. The Nazis couldn't figure out a definition, and the Jews can't figure out a definition. You ask two Jews to tell you what a Jew is, they can't agree. It's not a fact. It's an opinion, how you define a Jew. But it's anti-Jewish, not anti-Semitism. I remember a couple of experiences when I was in high school, anti-Jewish encounters. They were never violent, although one came close. Some guy gave me a ride when I was hitchhiking and he pulled up to this parking lot and there was a bunch of hoodlums. One of them came over and he said, "So you picked up a kike." I was really taken aback and the driver said, "I'm just going to drop him off." That was it. That was the most vivid for me, because I was scared then.

**RS:** It came out of nowhere.

**SB:** Just out of nowhere.

**RS:** How old were you?

**SB:** I was 15.

**RS:** Back when people used to hitchhike.

**SB:** When it was safe.

**RS:** Yes, exactly. I did it myself.

**SB:** That was the closest I've ever come to anything violent. As I said earlier, we grew up in an integrated high school. I would think maybe 30% of the students were Jewish, maybe 30% or more were Black. The minority students were white, Anglo-Saxon, Italian. Again, there were 3,000 students. My kids used to experience it and they never told us. We used to hear about it on parent-teacher night.

**RS:** What kind of experience?

**SB:** Name-calling.

**RS:** They were trying to protect you.

**SB:** Yes.

**RS:** I've heard this before, children trying to protect their parents.



**SB:** When they were in elementary school. I don't think it was in high school, but I don't know. I suppose I should ask them.

**RS:** I was in the German Jewish Museum in Berlin a few years ago. It's a wonderful museum. There's an anecdote on display. Hannah Arendt's husband came home and said, "The Nazis are making threatening comments about the Jews but we don't have to worry because this would be totally irrational. The costs – diplomatic, economic, political -- would be enormous and no one would ever be willing to pay those costs." She said, "You're absolutely wrong," which is interesting because this happened early on, well before anything bad beyond legal regulations and harassment. I think this is your point, that this doesn't make sense. It is not a rational thing. There's something beyond that. I find the Holocaust beyond comprehension. I recently read Ron Rosenbaum's book, *Explaining Hitler*, in which he discusses the various writers, mostly Jewish, who have tried to explain exactly why the Holocaust took place. The only one that makes sense to me is the "No Hitler, No Holocaust" argument of Milton Himmelfarb. His political views are not mine, but he has convinced me on this point.

**SB:** I would just add that Hitler was necessary but not sufficient. If it was just Hitler, it wouldn't have been enough. You had to have an enormous administrative system.

**RS:** Someone said that if you had put a person to sleep and awakened them 20 years later and told them what happened, they would have said, "Those damn French. They would do anything." Germany was the last place where you would expect such a thing.

**SB:** I interviewed some German Jews and they still can't believe it, long after the horror. But most of them don't go back to Germany. With the French it's got something to do with the Dreyfus case. There's a long history in France, and less of such a history in Germany. It's unthinkable to think about street violence in Germany. Even when the Nazis were in power there wasn't street violence because the Germans wouldn't tolerate it. If you followed the law, and the law says "the Jews have to go," that's one thing. But if you just walk around the street beating up German Jews, that's not good. *Kristalnacht* lost support from the Germans because there was a public display of violence.

**RS:** Lenin once said that the German workers would never take over a train station unless they had bought tickets. (Both laugh).

**SB:** How did you see these issues when you were growing up?

**RS:** I have thought about this a lot over the years, about what I might have learned from my culture about Jews. The Holocaust forced all of us to think of what might be lurking within us. I can conjure up what we believed about Catholics and about Blacks but I cannot conjure up any consistent thing that we believed or were taught about Jews. I was brought up in a very conservative Christian environment so on Easter Sunday we got the crucifixion sermon, complete with detailed descriptions of scourging, nails in the hands, and a sword in the side. Several passages in the Bible mention that "the Jews" were involved in this. Today all the main Christian traditions emphasize that those passages refer to specific Jewish leaders, but that's not the way it reads, so we could have picked

up some negative feelings there. I have always assumed that negative attitudes towards Jews and African-Americans permeated American culture, including myself, so for me, the issue is not whether it was there but how it originated and what form it took. As Saint Paul said, you can only deal with certain issues if you acknowledge that they exist.

Jane and I have talked about this in the past. We both remember “jew” used as a verb, as in ‘I jewed him down.’ We also remember a song we sang as kids that was very un-nice to Jews. Somehow, we never thought of it as anti-Semitic or even having anything to do with people. It just seemed funny, even silly, like a stupid Polish joke.

There’s a town in France  
Where the ladies wear no pants  
And the dance they do  
Is enough to kill a Jew.  
If the Jew don’t die.  
You can poke him in the eye.

It goes on from there.

Had there been a lot of Jews around, we would have realized that this was offensive, but the fact is, we didn’t know any Jews. There was only one Jewish family in Sesser, Mr. Berman, the jeweler. My dad bought me a wrist watch from him when I graduated from grade school. And at the same time, we drove to a nearby town to buy me a sport coat from Mr. Kohlsdorf. He gave me a tie as a gift. Both of these men were seen in very positive ways. When I was a senior, I had one classmate who was Jewish. There was a Young Christian Association which I joined and he was an officer. To us, he was no more *different* than a Jehovah’s Witness or a Catholic, which could have seemed even stranger. As we saw it, Judaism was just another religion. Jews had not accepted Jesus, which was important to us, but at the same time they were chosen of God. I would say we got mixed messages in what we received. There was stereotyping but not hostility. One year there was a long mine strike and our dads were home all summer. Years later when I was reading about American Zionism, I learned that my dad’s mine was owned by Henry Crown of Chicago, a very prominent Jewish leader. No one ever mentioned that the company was owned by a Jew. I don’t think the union would have tolerated that kind of thing. The problem was The Company, and The Company was not a Jew. The Company was The Company. One theory of anti-Jewish thinking is that it grows out of class conflict. That may be true elsewhere, but not in the environment that I knew.

I think films played an important role in shaping how we thought. There were a large numbers of so-called “religious” films during that time, *The Ten Commandments* with Charlton Heston as Moses, *David and Bathsheba*, and *Samson and Delilah*. Most were pure Hollywood but we saw them as pure Bible and flocked to them as if they were prayer meetings. All legitimized the Jews as a people of faith. There were also the Zionist films, *Exodus* with Paul Newman, and *Cast a Giant Shadow* with Kirk Douglas, showing how an American colonel became commander of Jewish forces in the 1948 war.

**SB:** Did these things affect your thinking about Israel?

**RS:** We were very pro-Israeli. When the 1967 war occurred, I was thrilled at the Israeli victory. In college, I had a friend who was a Palestinian, Sami, and I would laugh behind

his back at how he complained about losing his family lands and being exiled. I was very unsympathetic. To me, the Palestinians were simply in the way of what God intended. I am embarrassed at that in retrospect. How could I allow my religious thinking to dehumanize a fellow human being, a friend no less? In 1968 when Bobby Kennedy was assassinated by a distraught Palestinian, I was really upset. He was a refugee, Sirhan Sirhan, a Christian from Jerusalem. A few weeks later Israel conducted a bombing raid on a Lebanese refugee camp and killed large numbers of people. That had nothing to do with the Kennedy assassination, but I felt some pleasure at that raid, that perhaps it was some kind of vengeance, to kill large numbers of people. Now I think I can understand those young people in refugee camps who, out of distress and anger, cheered when the attacks of September 11 occurred. I was one of them in my own way. That is not something I am proud of, but I have to acknowledge it as something in myself.

**SB:** When did you learn about the Holocaust?

**RS:** I first became aware of the Holocaust when I was a teenager in the 1950s. I read a book entitled *The Scorge of the Swastika* by Lord Russell of Liverpool, written in 1956. It may have been one of the first popular books on the Nazi death camps. I don't think the word holocaust was used, and it did not single out Jews. So many people died in those camps, Jews and non-Jews, but the magnitude of the deaths and the focus on Jews made it clear that this was not just a normal war crime. That has to be one of the most influential books in terms of shaping my intellectual and emotional thinking as a youth.

In lectures on the Holocaust, I stick to the basic issues. I give numbers of pre-war and post-war Jewish population, so students can get an idea of the numbers killed. I note that this is an almost unique historic event in that its goal was to eliminate a whole people from history. There are so many massacres and genocides that studying them has become a growth industry among academics, but the only one I can think of that is comparable was what happened in Rwanda in 1994, where there was an organized structure, an ideology of an alien people, and a goal of total extermination. Nothing else is really comparable. I emphasize this to my students.

**SB:** I altogether agree. That's what makes the Holocaust different from other mass murders and genocide and that's what it has in common with Rwanda. It's very organized. Large parts of the society were involved in the killing, either that or turned their backs. People were either too afraid or too indifferent to interfere and there was an ideological goal to kill the whole population. Those are the three unique aspects of the Holocaust that differs, say, from the Armenian genocide. There wasn't such a clear, systematic approach with the Armenians, or the Indians of Central American for example. That was also kind of randomized. But this was carefully planned and I think that's what makes Rwanda so scary. Yes, that's pretty much it.

**RS:** I tell students to avoid Nazi and holocaust analogies, especially in the Middle East. I say, "Don't talk of the Jewish holocaust of the Palestinians, and don't say the Palestinians are trying to finish Hitler's task." These are not helpful. They are inflammatory and hurtful. And they are bad history. I realize that to many Western people the Holocaust is the definitive moral crisis of the twentieth century, and that using

it as a moral standard or rhetorical polemic is the coin of the realm, but I advise against it. In my class on non-western politics, I have students read key passages from the Genocide convention of 1949. When you look at the legal definition of genocide, it is very, very slippery. For example, it relies on intent. If you kill a hundred thousand people, did you *intend* to kill them, or were they killed as a byproduct of other policies? I doubt that the families of the dead care what your motives were, but it has the advantage that it is a legal document.

**SB:** This is by Raphael Lemkin?

**RS:** Yes. Lemkin coined the term genocide and played a role in getting the international community to adopt the Genocide Convention of 1949. It's very interesting to have students look at the official definition, look at the research on the conditions that produce mass murder, and then have them look around the world at different situations and see if they meet the standard. I give them an example. This is distressing example, but in a good way, a challenging way. I tell them to suppose the big countries of the world got together and decided that having a Jewish state in the middle of the Muslim world was a mistake. It was not the fault of the Jews. It was not anyone's fault. It just happened. And they decide they are going to dismantle Israel. Every Israeli will be given a million dollars resettling fee and granted the right to live in the country of their choice. They guarantee that in the move not a single dish will be broken, and they guarantee (since this is made up) that they and their descendents will never suffer a single slight or slur for all of eternity. Does this meet the standard of genocide? Nobody dies, nobody is harmed. You can argue that for many Israelis, their lives will be safer. All they lose is Israel. This really provokes students. Once you use the standard of the Genocide Convention, you realize that we think of genocide as killing people, which was the original concern, but international law also includes undermining the structures of society. We always have a good discussion on this. It makes students think differently from how they had thought of these things before.

**SB:** Genocide requires killing people. That is what the word genocide means, killing a group of people.

**RS:** That is true about the word, but the definition in the Convention includes causing "serious mental harm" which brings in what is commonly called cultural genocide.

**SB:** When you were a kid, had you heard any of the mythology about Jews?

**RS:** I never heard any of those things, about horns, for example. I never heard the blood libel, that Jews use the blood of a Christian child for their rituals, or that the Jews controlled the banking system. Some of those ideas are European and I think the American perspective, as I experienced it anyway, is different. Our view of Jews had to do with religion. To the best of my recollection, I never heard stereotypes about bad personal qualities, that Jews were dishonest or deceitful, although I suspect they were there. We didn't see them as powerful, as controlling society. Of course, seeing people in abstract or ideological terms is bad enough. To see Jews in terms of the Bible, as if

they are out of history, not subject to the normal complexities of human existence, or even the normal patterns discovered by social scientists, is dehumanizing. You hear people talk of Jews, Blacks, Muslims as if they are all the same, almost an abstracted personality. This denies individuals the right to be individuals. It also seems to me to be a precursor to hostile action.

**SB:** Of course, the Midwest was rife with those mythologies. Henry Ford's newspaper *The Dearborn Independent* reproduced *The Protocols*, and there was Father Coughlin with his anti-Semitic sermons, that were broadcast live around the country.

**RS:** I've never figured out where Ford got these ideas. I don't want to get too far into this because I don't feel qualified. Do you have an opinion on that?

**SB:** Well, *The Independent* had a huge readership. There are two books on Ford and Jews and one of them says he was a big time fan of *The McGuffey Readers*. If you read *The McGuffey Readers*, there are stereotypes of Jews. He sent several million copies to public schools, just gave them away. Where Father Coughlin got his ideas is anybody's guess.

**RS:** I know this book, by Baldwin. When it came out I read a review that said *The McGuffey Readers* were anti-Semitic. That surprised me, since I have read parts of the *Readers* and never saw much reference to Jews at all, much less anti-Semitic references. I actually checked this out and I think Baldwin got it wrong. There are a couple of questionable entries. The trial scene from *The Merchant of Venice* is included, although it dropped the part when Shylock is given the choice of abandoning his wealth or his religion and he agrees to convert rather than be poor. Baldwin included a grievously offensive illustration of Shylock that he suggested was in the *Reader*, but when I went to the actual McGuffey, it was not there. I think that's a serious misrepresentation. Another story he cites, *The Good Son*, about the high priest trying to purchase a diamond, ends with the priests in awe of the young merchant's integrity. They lay on the hands and bless him. It is very pro-Jewish, not anti-Jewish, but Baldwin selected words to create an impression of hostility that is not there. I am not making excuses for Henry Ford, whose offenses were very real. He did a lot of harm, and Baldwin gets credit for documenting that. But to be honest, I am not convinced *McGuffey* had anything to do with it or that Baldwin even read the *Readers*. His footnotes quote other sources, few of which are actually *McGuffey*. On Coughlin, I have read some of his sermons and speeches. He was very anti-labor and had policies associated with the hard right in that day. As you know, when the war started, the church silenced him.

**SB:** At one point he was for the workers, a populist of sorts.

**RS:** I just finished a biography of John L. Lewis by Saul Alinsky. Lewis considered him anti-labor. During the Flint sit-in strike in 1937, which was organized by the UMWA, Coughlin sounded like a GM spokesman. He may have been pro-worker in the sense of Mussolini, but he was anti-union, which to a worker means anti-labor. He may have been influenced by the 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum* of Leo XIII, which called for Catholic

leaders to protect the workers and even create unions, but not worker-controlled unions. I have my students read that encyclical in my course on Religion and Politics so it's fresh in my mind. It is a very significant document. It led to Dorothy Day and the Catholic worker movement, but by logic it was paternalistically pro-worker, not pro-union.

**SB:** 1937 was later. He had turned against Roosevelt and shifted to the right at that point, so it's possible we are both right on this issue. A prominent Jewish judge whom you know said that when he was a kid his father drove him up to Coughlin's Triangle Tower. This was at night. He took him over to the tower and there were the Ten Commandments, *in Hebrew*. He looked at him and said, "How can he be anti-Semitic? It's got Hebrew on the Tower." The father used to give money to Coughlin.

**RS:** Amazing. I wonder if those Commandments are still there.

**SB:** The Tower's still there. Now they have Holocaust memorials in that church.

**SB:** Your mention of your first awareness of the Holocaust got me thinking. I have very vague recollections of when I first heard about it. We have no personal stories but many years ago my mother said that they used to send packages to family members in Poland. They would get letters back until 1943, and then they stopped. But that's it. Nobody ever talked about it in my house. I never read about it in high school. Even in college I don't think I had a course that even touched on the Holocaust.

**RS:** There were no courses when we were students.

**SB:** Western Civilization courses might throw something in, but nothing very significant. I was a graduate student when I started to learn about it. Again, it was Arendt's book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. This was 1966. Eichmann's trial had been in 1961. The book was published in 1965. I still have my copy with notes in the margins. I won't give it up.

**RS:** Is this what led you to create your Holocaust course? That was not your original area of expertise.

**SB:** That course was started in part because that awful television show, *Holocaust*. Media people were calling the university asking for someone to talk about the Holocaust and there was nobody else around.

**RS:** You must know that for many people that program was powerful and moving.

**SB:** Yes. A hundred million people watched it.

**RS:** It was interesting to see the discussion. I was reading *Commentary* at the time on a monthly basis. They had so much debate over that, some of it very intense and very polemical, but much of it intellectual as to what was wrong with that. Why did you find it flawed?

**SB:** One of our retired colleagues, Rick Axom, identified the sets as the same sets they used in soap operas. That's what it was to me. It was like a soap opera. I mean, one family is in all these major places? And when Meryl Streep, who is a wonderful actress, goes to the gate at Dachau and knocks on it and wants to get in because she wants to become a prisoner, that's ridiculous. I think Topol was in it and all I can think of is Topol was in *Fiddler on the Roof*. It was a trivialization. I was a critic.

**RS:** I know you've been very critical of badly trained interviewers and of Holocaust tourism or whatever you call it, people who seem trivialize it in their research.

**SB:** All of a sudden, there are media presentations. There are movies getting academy awards, and best selling books. I remember going to see *Schindler's List*. I thought it was a very good movie, but I'm not sure it was about the Holocaust. It was a very entertaining, very uplifting movie. You walk out of the movie and you feel wonderful, these people putting stones on his tombstone. It was great. But when I teach my course, if somebody walks out with a smile on their face I think I've done something wrong. I remember we were sitting behind some people who were saying that there were more Armenians killed in the genocide in Turkey than Jews killed in the Holocaust. As we walked out, I asked them, "How do you know that?" "Well, it says so in the Holocaust Memorial Center." But the Center doesn't say that, so that was a mistake. So we watched the movie and I thought to myself, "Those people still think what they thought when they started out."

**RS:** It didn't change them in any way.

**SB:** Not at all. They learned about 1,200 people who were rescued and they didn't learn anything significant about the 5,000 Crackow Jews who weren't. It's easier to get the information through a story about a hero and a rescue than it is through books or interviews. But that's not it, that's not what it was. If people want to do interviews they need to do some research. It'd be nice to know where Europe is and where Warsaw is. It'd be nice to know a little bit about the experience in Auschwitz. When I go into interviews I take a street map. It's the details that are important. The interview projects, most of them, don't do that. They just take these people and throw them into the room. I worked with this quite famous group, and we were supposed to do an interview with a survivor. There were ten people in the room and each one was given ten minutes to do it. It was a hidden child. I introduced the woman and we had talked at lunch and none of them knew what a hidden child was.

**RS:** Ten people, and not a one knew.

**SB:** Not a one knew.

**RS:** So they had not been prepared.

**SB:** Not a thing. They had her name. They knew where she was from. But half of them didn't know where Hungary was. So I did the interview. I was supposed to sit behind

her and instead I got next to her. That upset the people who were running the training. I said, “You can’t do this. This isn’t right. You can’t put them in this situation.” It’s hard for survivors and to add to the difficulty by being completely ignorant just supports what they think about Americans, that they don’t know what they’re talking about so why should they want to listen. I’m worried about the Americanization of the Holocaust. It reduces it. *Schindler’s List* was a good movie. It was entertaining. But understanding the Holocaust is not entertainment. In many respects it’s boring. You have to get down into the nitty gritty. But that’s what it was about. If people want to know how it happened, then they have to know the nitty gritty.

**RS:** You mentioned that you began to teach your Holocaust course after that television program. That’s a big project, developing a course.

**SB:** Well, it seemed like the right thing to do at the time. I was teaching the course before I was doing interviews. I remember putting the course together. I spent weeks reading the Nuremberg Trial accounts. I thought it was crazy. The most troubling thing is that the course always enrolls over 40 students and I always wonder why they’re there. [Note: 40 is the standard room size]. I mean, I *get* the Jews in the class – all three Jews, there aren’t that many. There will usually be a half dozen Muslim students and the rest are just traditional students. I always walk in and think I’m going to see somebody with jack boots and a swastika. I’ve had the jack boots, the people in military garb. They take the course because they think it’s going to be a military history course. But I’ve never had a Holocaust denier. One student was very upset, a German student whose grandfather had been imprisoned by the Russians until the late 1950s. She happened to say that her grandfather came home and said it was the Jews who kept him in prison and her whole family knew that it was the Jews. There was an older Jewish woman in the class and she just erupted and chewed her out. The German just got up and ran out in tears. She never came back. That was awful.

**RS:** It’s a shame she didn’t come back because often those are teaching moments. When that kind of thing comes up you can help people think through, “Why did you say that? Why did you react that way? Can you explain this further? We don’t understand you?” It’s a shame you couldn’t bring her back. It was a trauma for her, though, for both of them. She couldn’t come back.

**SB:** Another thing, I had a Yemenite student. She said, “What do you do when a friend of yours says, ‘Why are you taking this course if you don’t have to?’” I said, “What did you answer?” She said, “Well, I showed her all the books. I told her what was going on. I told her what we were learning and she wouldn’t listen because she had this web site that she kept going to.” I told the student, “Well you can’t fight with this. It’s not going to go anywhere.” The same student went to the Holocaust Center here. She took notes and she found all these mistakes.

**RS:** Based on your class and the reading.



**SB:** Yes. I said, “What did you do?” She said, “Well, I thought that given who I am it would not have been a good idea to have any criticism.”

**RS:** To point out that these numbers are wrong, this date is wrong.

**SB:** So she didn’t. But I thought that was great.

**RS:** You always have Muslim students. What have you found about those students?

**SB:** They’re probably a self-selecting group. In the most interesting class I had, three students waited until after class before they brought this up. The last book we read talks about superfluous populations and stateless people. Their question – this is many years ago – was about the Palestinian situation. Of course, there’s no plan to kill them or exterminate them. But yes, they are a stateless people. Somebody sees them as superfluous, either Israeli Jews or other Arab nationals who won’t allow them into their countries. Somebody sees them that way, but the state position was the main point. That was one in which we had several weeks of conversation.

**RS:** Those students trusted you enough to ask that question. In my Israeli-Palestinian class, I always suggest that students take your class. If I encounter an Arab student who shows particular interest, I will personally suggest it. I tell them that there is so much misunderstanding of this, and it is so important in how people think, that you need to understand what happened. I had an incident in the Middle East when I was talking to a friend. She was a very intelligent person, very kind and decent. She had been educated in the United States and had a close friend who was Jewish. She had studied Hebrew on her own and was actively trying to understand Israeli perspectives. At a certain point, I realized she was confusing Herzl’s *Der Judenstadt*, which calls for a Jewish state, with *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a fabricated conspiracy theory. I tell students that Herzl and the Zionist movement were transparent. They had public meetings. There were reporters present. There were minutes taken. You can agree with them or not, but it was not secret. *The Protocols* is a fabrication about a secret society trying to control the world. Confusing these is easy, and correcting the confusion is a very simple thing. It takes about as long as I have taken to discuss it, to disabuse people of that, especially since I have students read a chapter from the *Protocols* so they can see the difference. But the two are close together in some ways. They both seem to be asserting Jewish power and Jewish interest, whatever you would call it. People who are not well informed can confuse them. I have a lot of Arab students, born in this country, very comfortable with their American identity, who want to play a role in public affairs. I tell them, “You do not want to make the mistakes that your parents and grandparents made. Take Professor Bolkosky’s class.” So I send some of my best students over to you.

**SB:** They’ve always been really great. In the Voice/Vision Archive we had a young Arab American woman as a student intern, Ayella. She is a covered Muslim. She was an ideal representative of the project, speaking on its behalf and doing extraordinary work with the tapes. I had one student long ago who over Spring break went back home to Lebanon and he took Elie Wiesel’s book, *Night*. He said every night he would read it to

his family. Everybody was very moved. I said, "Do they all speak English?" He said "No, I read it in Arabic." So I set him up with a correspondence with Elie Wiesel and it looked like he was going to translate it into Arabic. Wiesel was very excited. I don't think it ever happened, but they did have a correspondence. It was terrific. This young man made contact, and Wiesel was very gracious.

**RS:** I also have a pep talk for Jewish students who talk to me about this. I tell them they have a unique opportunity on this campus that most Jewish students don't have, the opportunity to meet and to know Arab students. There is so much division in our society that we have to grab at any opportunity to reach across barriers. One of the real pleasures in teaching this class is the stories students tell me about making friends from the other side. This is not something I anticipated. I remember a young woman a decade ago who had worked with me on various projects. One day, she came to talk. I knew she had made Arab friends from my class and had worked with them on common projects. I told her she was the kind of person that I could see playing a role in her community in the future, which she agreed was something she wanted to do. I told her that her parents and grandparents were from generations so wounded by history that they found it hard to step back from that. I told her never to dispute with her parents, but she had Arab friends, and had the opportunity to achieve things they could not have achieved. I think she liked this.

**RS:** What do you see as the link between the Holocaust and the creation of the Jewish state in 1948, the creation of Israel?

**SB:** I get really annoyed when people say something good came out of the Holocaust, the state of Israel for example, because nothing good came out of the Holocaust. I don't know a single survivor who would say, "If it meant the creation of the state of Israel, I would sacrifice my family." They wouldn't. There's nothing good related to the Holocaust. The two of them in my mind are not connected. I suppose there was international sympathy because of the Holocaust. That couldn't have hurt. But I think the state was coming whether the Holocaust occurred or not. The Holocaust ended in May 1945, so that's the end of the course and we don't discuss Israel. People like to make those connections.

**RS:** You're familiar with the writer Ann Roiphe. She says this is the only case where a country has come into existence because of guilt by the great powers. I often encounter that idea. I was doing an NEH Summer Workshop a few years ago on how to teach Middle East topics. These were 30 master teachers from around the country. Each had to create a curriculum unit to incorporate something from the program into the classroom. One teacher said she wanted to show how the UN vote in 1947 to create a Jewish state was an act of penance by guilty world leaders. I asked her, "Exactly which leaders do you think were motivated by guilt?" Of course, she had no answer. I told her that in 1947 there were only five countries whose votes counted, US, UK, USSR, France, and China. These were the Allies, who called themselves the United Nations. Russia was led by Stalin who had killed millions of his own people and never felt a twinge of conscience about anything. Not only had he lost 20 million people fighting the Germans but he probably thought he was going to get an ally out of it. Most of the Zionist leadership

spoke Russian, and many were Marxists. The British were mad at the Jews for blowing up the King David Hotel so they abstained on the vote. The French voted yes but they had bigger fish to fry, as did the Chinese, who voted “no” in any case. Palestine was peripheral to their interests. Harry Truman was sympathetic to the Jewish refugees in Europe but he was also concerned about the Palestinians, and did not want to replace one set of refugees with another. This idea of guilt as a historic force is accepted by many people. I call it received knowledge: people repeat it so often that no one bothers to check the facts. Even a prominent intellectual like Anne Roiphe believes it. But I think the Palestinians probably have it right. There were hundreds of thousands of desperate Jews in Europe. Nobody wanted them and the Europeans used the Palestinians to pay the cost of their own anti-Jewish policies, rather than confront those policies. Not surprisingly, the Palestinians feel very bitter and resentful for that. I can see why they feel that way.

I agree with you that by 1948 a Jewish state was on the way. By 1937 the British had their partition plan to divide Palestine and create a Jewish state. That was never implemented, but it reflected reality and it shows British thinking. It was revived in 1947 in UN Resolution 181. The dynamic for this state had almost nothing to do with the Holocaust, and the idea that killing six million Jews would somehow advance the Jewish national cause makes no sense. I think people are so wounded that they have to find some good out of this. I can see why people would think that way, that the Europeans leaders felt guilty. They should have felt guilty. But for us as professors to explain historical outcomes, we have to point out that there is a disconnect between these events.

**SB:** Everybody’s trying to find meaning. You can’t, or at least it’s very difficult. There is no meaning at all. My last book was called *Searching for Meaning in the Holocaust*. I don’t think there is any. We were talking before about how to approach the Holocaust. It’s a very difficult topic. You and I probably teach the hardest courses in the university.

**RS:** I think so, yes.

**SB:** It’s like a minefield.

**RS:** With this kind of material, you can unintentionally offend, upset people without intending to do so and without necessarily realizing you have done so. There are times when we know we are going to upset our students and can anticipate it and incorporate their reaction into our lesson plan, so to speak, turn their distress into an opportunity to learn. As professors, we know how to do this. We go into class saying, “This will upset the students, then I am going to have them discuss their reaction.” But when you offend without realizing, it creates a different situation, a more difficult situation.

**SB:** My approach is to always concentrate on the perpetrators. Three fourths of the class is on the perpetrators. There is little you can learn from the victims. You can learn about the irretrievable loss, and total, systematic, cold blooded indifference. But on the other side you have businessmen, bureaucrats, civil service people, doctors, workers, plumbers, teachers, construction engineers, the whole society, judges, lawyers, chemists. My approach is just to detail the careers of such people to see how they fit into all this. Eichmann never literally killed anybody. He just made sure that many people got on the

right trains to the death camps. They may not have even been anti-Semitic, but just following the routine rules of the company or their country.

**RS:** You make this point in your book: anti-Semitism doesn't explain what happened.

**SB:** Because for the Nazis it wasn't a religious issue. It was a racial issue. So that kind of anti-Semitism just does not explain it. Maybe 10% of the Germans were die-hard resisters and 10% die-hard Nazis, but the rest were just trying to get through the war one way or another. You need to examine the victims, but it doesn't produce the kind of the information that a document does. The memories are frequently flawed. They only know what their very narrow experience was. Maybe you can learn about some resilience, like choiceless choices. Every choice is a wrong choice. It's like *Sophie's Choice*, where she has to decide which child will die. The Holocaust was unprecedented. What makes it that way is the total involvement of society, the planning, the execution, carefully organized, administratively ordered. Raul Hillberg called it "the destruction process, the ongoing, total annihilation of the Jews."

**RS:** He's your favorite Holocaust scholar, isn't he?

**SB:** He was. He died about a year ago. He did not like to use testimony. He didn't trust it. I once had a correspondence with him and I said, the documents that he sort of worships are really people putting stuff down on paper. You can't question the document. You can raise questions about it, but you can't question a document. It is real. But you can question a person. I don't think this sort of thing has occurred anywhere else except maybe Rwanda. I don't like comparisons with other genocides or mass murder, they just don't work. To talk about Israel, they need to be disconnected. That's a very painful topic for me, as you know, I never talk about it. I've read accounts of nineteenth century collective visions in the *shtetl* when the nice people come running out of their houses and see Karl Marx in the sky and Marx tells them to go.

**RS:** He's Abraham calling them to the homeland.

**SB:** And they go. Can you imagine? It's like a Woody Allen movie. They went to found a socialist state. I've read of organizations like Organization for Retraining (ORT). They were retraining Jews and Arabs to become farmers, industrial workers, and it as always meant to be a joint process that Arabs and Jews would build the country together. This was the dream very early on. I think that the essence of the Jews who went in the beginning was that their Jewish identity was grounded in ethical values. They tended to be secular. I suppose ultimately some of it might derive from the Bible, but it's the secular aspects that they were looking for. Their focus was on secular issues, communal issues. I don't think any political entity exists that was not founded on violence. For me, it's a sad state. I think that Israel behaves like all the other states. It's difficult for me to trace the origin of Arab-Jewish hostility. I don't think it even matters anymore who fired the first shot. I think Jews need a state. I think Palestinians have the same need for the same kinds of reasons. It's a mystery to me how people are going to resolve it and that's one of the reasons I just don't want to talk about it, it's so depressing to me. I'm very

disturbed by the settlements to the point of literally pulling my hair, I just can't understand what rational people over there are doing. But I'm also disturbed by children who might be raised with a kind of demonic picture of Jews. I'm upset about the lack of concern for children on the one side and lack of concern for human life on the other. That's one of the reasons I'm still ambivalent about going on this research trip to Israel next month. Every place I look I'm afraid I'm going to be depressed. I won't talk about it with anybody. It's not just you. I won't discuss it with anybody.

**RS:** Of all these conversations, this is the first one where you have said something I did not already know. I don't mean that I know all the details of every topic, but I know you as a person and this is entirely new. You and I have never talked about this. I can see now why you don't like to talk about it. This matter of Israel being like other states is complex. David Ben-Gurion said he wanted a "normal" state for the Jews. The Zionists believed that in Europe, Jews had what some early Zionist leaders called an "abnormal occupational structure." They were mostly in the commercial and middle classes. They wanted Jews to have the full range of occupational and human experiences. Of course, in Eastern Europe there were Jewish working classes, but the people who founded the Zionist movement did not think that way. Ben Gurion said he looked forward to the day when a Jewish policeman would arrest a Jewish "john" for going to a Jewish prostitute. Then he would know that the Jews were "normal," because they would have all the sins and virtues of everyone else. I just got back from the Middle East, and someone asked a difficult question of one of the Jewish intellectuals we met, about the creation of a Jewish state. He said in the nineteenth century, empires were breaking up and it was very common to think of an ethnically homogeneous state. It was also common to think of pushing native peoples off their land and taking it. We Americans know this very well from our own unfortunate history. He says what the Jews did in 1947 and 1948 would have been common eighty years earlier, but, historically speaking, "that train was leaving the station as the Jews were arriving from the other direction." They were out of synch with history. The western world was ending the colonial age, just as the Zionists were arriving. There was a story in the Israeli press during Secretary of State Powell's first visit to Jerusalem in 2001. One of Mr. Sharon's aides asked why the Americans were so critical of Israel when Israel was just doing what we had done to Native Americans. Many Israelis feel that we are very hypocritical on this issue. But leaving aside hypocrisy, I think that is a very telling and disturbing observation on both American history and on the creation of the Jewish state, although I doubt that it impressed our Black Secretary of State.

**SB:** What is the role of the settlements in this?

**RS:** Like you, I think the settlements have created problems. I have always told my students that I thought a negotiated settlement was possible based upon some mutually-agreed variant of the 1967 boundary. But now the settlements, especially around East Jerusalem, and the wall, which Israeli leaders now say will define their border, have created a new situation. Had that wall been built on the 1967 border it would have been the most electrifying breakthrough for peace since the 1949 Armistice but today it is a catastrophic impediment. Like you, I have lost hope that there can be any negotiated

solution. When I was there last month, I spoke to two fathers. Both had lost their daughters. The Palestinian father lost his ten-year old when she was shot by Israeli soldiers as she came home from school. The Israeli father lost his fourteen-year-old daughter to a suicide bomber. She was on Ben Yehuda street in Jerusalem shopping with her girl friend. Both fathers said the same thing: I will not allow my personal pain to dehumanize those on the other side. The enemy is the occupation, not other people. Neither one thinks that a negotiated solution is possible, but both refuse to give in to their anger and fear. I told some friends I am not sure I would have the moral strength to do that. At this point, I think these two fathers are just trying to avoid compounding the damage. I wish there were a solution, but I cannot see one. No one is looking to a good future. As Bishop Tutu said recently, it is hard to be optimistic but we have to hold onto hope. The downside of this conflict is very dangerous and very ominous.

**RS:** Let me ask you another question. This is a difficult question. By any objective assessment, the Jews of America are in a Golden Age. They identify very strongly with this land and with their role in it. But you studied the German Jews who were very similar. I remember once you said to me, "The German Jews loved Germany as much and maybe more than the American Jews love America." I was stunned a few years ago when I had a Jewish leader talk to my class. A Black student had critiqued Israeli policy, and the speaker said to him, "You have absolute certainty that there will be Black people in this country in fifty years, but I cannot be certain that there will be Jews in this country in fifty years, and I have to save Israel for the sake of my children and grandchildren." I told that story to another class a couple of years ago, and one of my Jewish students said she was taught in Jewish school that it was "not if but when" the American Holocaust would occur. What is your thinking on this? Have you encountered these views?

**SB:** First of all, the Holocaust is very specific. It was planned. There was an organized structure to carry out the plan. It involved everything from the civil service to government to workers, and it was total. I really can't imagine something like that happening in the United States, not least of all because of the Constitution. America is not Germany. It's not the same. My mother used to say, "Never say things like that."

**RS:** Because you're inviting a problem.

**SB:** As soon as you say it, it'll happen. From an historical, sociological and political perspective it's just not feasible that there could be another Holocaust of that sort. I don't think it could happen to any group, but certainly not to Jewish Americans. I can't see it happening, even if there was a war. We haven't imprisoned Iraqis in this country, and I don't think that's going to happen. But in Orthodox Jewish schools, when they teach the Holocaust they teach that it was God's punishment.

**RS:** For secularization.

**SB:** For Zionism and for abandoning the commandments, which drives survivors up the wall, as it should. So I don't think that that's an accurate view of what Jewish kids are being taught. I have a special problem in teaching the Holocaust with some Jewish

students. They come into class. They've learned about the Holocaust and they think they have it all down. So they don't read, and they come up with the idea that this is a function of anti-Semitism, and there's always been anti-Semitism, there always will be anti-Semitism and that's the end of it.

**RS:** In my course on non-western politics, I have a whole unit on ethnic violence. There are so many cases of it. When the French colony in Algeria ended in 1962, 90% of the French settlers left within a month, perhaps 900,000 people. The Uganda Asians were expelled *en mass* by Idi Amin. The whites in Zimbabwe were pushed out, just within the last few years. The Armenians in the Ottoman Empire were massacred and expelled. There are so many cases that there is now a lot of research on the pre-conditions of this kind of thing. One key element is whether the group is integrated into the power structure: the military, the cabinet, the bureaucracy. By that standard, the Jews in America do not meet the standard of vulnerability that would make them a potential target. But these fears are not always rational. I once heard Rabbi Kahane, the hard right member of the Knesset who was later assassinated, speak to a Jewish audience here in the Detroit area. He had said there is only one reason for a Jew to be in America, and that is to help the others get out before the Holocaust. Someone challenged him from the floor and said, "American is different." The Rabbi said, "Of course, America is different. Who said American is not different? But Germany was different; Spain was different; England was different; Russia was different." He went through the litany of places where Jews had been massacred or expelled. At the end of that list, the audience had fallen silent. He had not convinced them, but there is a history, a bad history that I think resonates with people. I am with you on the historical process. As a social scientist I can't see this happening. There are social factors, constitutional factors, the integration of Jews into the country, the philo-semitism of the culture. I can't see these being reversed. But people are afraid, and I think this fear dominates a lot of thinking about Israel and even about domestic issues.

**SB:** Before we quit, I want to ask you the question you asked me: How did you get involved in teaching the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict?

**RS:** I was not trained as a Middle East specialist. I have never lived in the region more than six weeks at a time. It was after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon 1978 that I got involved in teaching the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We have a lot of Lebanese students and there were some tensions on campus between some protesting Lebanese students and one of our less reflective colleagues. One of the Anthropology professors was a specialist in Arab culture and history. He came to me and said that there was nothing in the university curriculum that addressed this conflict. He suggested that we teach a joint class. He would cover the historical issues, I would cover the political issues. I agreed on the spot. Since my area is non-western politics and political change, I had several units on the conflict in my different courses and could pull them out for my half of the lectures, but I was worried. I knew I did not have enough expertise to teach the course. He was going to help out, but I was also afraid there would be conflicts and clashes. In fact, it turned out fine. We brought in speakers from the Arab and Jewish communities. There were no problems, and the students thought they had a good educational experience. The

next year my colleague left the campus, so I had to decide whether to continue the course on my own. My sabbatical was that year and I decided to spend part of my time in Israel. You can't learn a lot in a short time, but I got a feel for the country, what it looked like. Geography is important there, far more than in the U.S., so I could see how places looked. I treated this new course very seriously and did a lot of research and reading. I made trips to the Middle East and interviewed leaders. By 1967 I had my first publication on the topic. That is the point when you have credibility, when your colleagues want to read what you have to say. Since then I have taught this class every year. Like your Holocaust class, it always fills up. And with one or two exceptions, I have never had the problems I feared. It is very rewarding class to teach.

**SB:** The three musketeers will be taking it again next semester. (Both laugh).

**RS:** For those who don't know, we have a retirees program on campus. There are three Jewish men who have taken the class five times. Last year I asked them why, since they had heard all the jokes. One said, "We are slow learners." I just saw three women yesterday who have also had it two or three times. They said, "We are embarrassed but we are going to take it again." I know they don't agree with me on all issues, but they feel they learn from it.

**SB:** They may agree with more than you think. Have your views changed on this issue over the last twenty years or so?

**RS:** They have. When I first started teaching this class, there were very few settlements. I thought it most likely that the Israelis would give most of the Palestinian territories to Jordan. This was the Allon Plan of 1968. It was discussed by Palestinians and by Jordanians, not to mention Israelis. Then after 1987 when the first Intifada started, the uprising against Israeli control of the Palestinian territories, the Jordanians realized they could never control the Palestinians. My thinking began to shift. I thought that perhaps a two-state solution could come about. I have said since then that such an outcome is possible, but now I think the settlements and the Israeli wall have so compromised the viability of a Palestinian state that even if a Palestinian leader signed something it would collapse. Creating a truncated Palestinian mini-state, which seems to be the plan, would discredit whichever Palestinian leader signed the agreement, and it would explode into violence. A Palestinian state has to be strong enough to meet the needs of the population. I have always blamed the leaders for the failure to work out something: Arafat was inconsistent, Barak was equivocal, Netanyahu was an extremist, Sharon was violent, Olmert is the weakest prime Minister in Israeli history, Mahmud Abbas, the current Palestinian leader, has no political base, Clinton started too late, Bush hasn't a clue. I could go on and on. Now I no longer think the failure has to do with poor leaders. At this point, I doubt that a convergence of the wisest leaders conceivable could resolve this problem. One good sign is that Israeli leaders are now saying openly that they have created an apartheid-type structure. The last three prime ministers, Barak, Sharon and Olmert, have actually uses the A word, which is so offensive to American Jews. Their argument is that if they don't agree to a Palestinian state, this could lead to the end of



Israel as a Jewish state. I think they are right, but I am afraid it is too late and this war will go on and on until something crashes. It is a very discouraging conclusion.

**SB:** Would you have ever called yourself anti-Israeli?

**RS:** My immediate answer is no, but I think the question deserves a fuller response because there might be some people who think I am. I was very pro-Israeli early in my life. It was the Tet Offensive of 1968 that made me begin a reassessment. I shifted on Vietnam from pro-war to anti-war and was seeking out an anti-war candidate. Eugene McCarthy was my choice. Sometime around 1969 I remember a discussion of graduate students in which I said, "Israel is the last country in the world still acquiring land beyond its borders." Those words surprised me at the time because they were so different from what I would have said just a couple of years earlier. I had come to see Israel and my own country as comparably aggressive. I still have an admiration for Israel in spite of its sins, but I am very critical of its policies. I suspect that discussing the U. S. and Israel in this way, comparing them in a moral sense, tells you I have not entirely moved away from the things I learned in my youth.

I think it is important to let students know where you are on major issues. I begin my class by telling students my thinking on this. I tell them I am doing this no to convince them, because I may be wrong, but so they can tell if a bias creeps into the lectures. I say I support a strong, secure Israeli state within the 1967 borders and a strong, secure Palestinian state within the Palestinian territories. Both states should have their capitals in Jerusalem. I used to add that, even knowing the human suffering that came out of the creation of a Jewish state, I cannot bring myself to say it should not be there. The nuance and complexity of that statement was confusing and didn't make very many people happy, including me, so I dropped it. Some people consider me pro-Palestinian, but that is because I respect the integrity of their existence. I don't stereotype them or dwell on their failed leaders. I respect their national aspirations and their right to justice in their own homeland. I am also very critical of Israel's control of the Palestinian territories, which I think is escalating tension and will someday lead to a disaster. As a citizen, I am a member of the American Civil Liberties Union and Amnesty International so that may put my thinking into perspective. Those criticisms of the Israeli occupation are similar to my criticisms of U.S. policy in Iraq. Perspectives like these are jarring to some people. I am not a disembodied transmitter of bland facts, which I do not consider possible. Nor am I an advocate or an activist. I don't march in rallies, and I almost never sign petitions. I have a very clear image of myself as an educator. My goal is to challenge my students and to enhance their understanding of the issues and the complexity of those issues. On my course evaluation, I have a supplementary question that asks if students feel they got fair coverage of all different views, and if not, please explain. In the last five years, I have probably had no more than a handful of students who felt the class was not fair, and some consider me pro-Israeli.

**SB:** I have some survivor friends that are extremely right wing. When I talked to them one day and some awful bombing had taken place in Israel, a massive strike of some sort, and there was Israeli retaliation, I cited something from the Bible which said that's not what you're supposed to be doing. Their response was, "Why do we have to have a

different standard than every other state?" It's not a bad question, but my response is, "Because we're who we are."

**RS:** This is what you and I would say about our own country, right? This is what John McCain says about Guantanamo: "No, we're not going to torture people because this country's different. We're not going to do it, even if other countries do."

**SB:** But it's a theoretical answer.

**RS:** And some disagree.

## Chapter Seven

### The University of Michigan-Dearborn

**RS:** Why did you come here? What were your first impressions of the campus?

**SB:** I was teaching at Hobart and William Smith College in Geneva, New York and got a call from Peter Amman. I had been his teaching assistant at SUNY-Binghamton. He said, "Can you come give a talk? We're trying to find somebody to head up a Western Civilization program." They'd just instituted a new interdisciplinary curriculum. This was a Sunday night. I said, "Sure. When do I come?" He said, "Can you get here on Wednesday?" So I threw together a talk. I came here, gave a talk, did the twenty-minute, down-the-hall scene, meeting everyone. At the time, it was very exhilarating because I saw Bernie Klein and Don Anderson in Political Science, Fran Cousens in Sociology, Ed Sayles in Philosophy, then Don Proctor, a historian who was chairman of the Social Science Department. You saw somebody from a different discipline in every office in the same hallway. By the time I left that night, Peter said he thought they were going to offer me a job. I didn't hear for another three months but then I got the offer. What could be bad except it's in Dearborn? I can't go teach in Dearborn. It's got a terrible reputation because of its racist and anti-Semitic history.

**RS:** You were aware of that reputation?

**SB:** Oh yes. I was aware of that. But it was a job and I hadn't even started to look for another job yet. I had a year left on the other contract. So that's pretty much why I came here. I didn't think we were going to stay.

**RS:** What year was that?

**SB:** 1972.

**RS:** A year before I came. What made you stay? I was discouraged when I came here. Were you discouraged?

**SB:** Yes. I was discouraged because I didn't think it was a real university. There were no dorms, no housing. I liked my colleagues and I loved the job because it meant putting together a new curriculum with people from different departments, from math to humanities, and everybody was teaching together in the same courses. There were three historians, somebody in philosophy, somebody in math, one person in literature and then eventually somebody in anthropology. It was lots of fun. We would sit in staff meetings every week and we would talk. Everybody was responsible for working up lesson plans for the rest of the staff on their own fields of expertise. So I did a thing on Nietzsche, for example. That was the first thing I did. Also on the Greeks. Somebody did something on Kafka. The odd thing was to be supervising Peter. That was unnerving because I had just been his graduate assistant and now all of a sudden he's under me.

**RS:** And Peter was a nationally prominent scholar.

**SB:** He was. So I liked the colleagues and the students as well. First course I taught was in the summer and that was a European Intellectual History course. I thought the students were as good as those at Hobart. They were all juniors and seniors. UM-Dearborn had started as an upper level transfer school for people coming out of community colleges. I think they started a four-year program the year I came here. I didn't have any freshmen. And they were very eager. So I wasn't terribly discouraged. But I still didn't think I was going to stay. I think the job got more interesting. My colleagues got more interesting. I was amazed at the kind of academic freedom we all had.

**RS:** We really were present at the creation, weren't we? We were starting from scratch. We were conceptualizing what a university was.

**SB:** I taught a course on the ancient Middle East. Students learned to read ancient Middle Kingdom Egyptian. I was carrying this huge book around – it cost \$15 at the time. Now it's \$160. You really have a hard time finding it. They had to learn the first eight lessons of this book, Gardner's *Ancient Egyptian Grammar*. It is what Freud used to learn hieroglyphics, and nobody said, "You can't teach this course because you don't have any background in this." So that was pretty much the general tone. You could do almost whatever you wanted. People trusted each other and if somebody wanted to teach a course on something they weren't an expert in, they were allowed to do it. Nobody said, "You can't do this." I really liked it. I decided to teach a course on *Finnegan's Wake* and I had no credentials to teach *Finnegan's Wake*. It made up for putting history in the Social Sciences instead of the Humanities. In my undergraduate and graduate work, history was the humanities. You just took that for granted. All of a sudden, it's in the Social Sciences, which means quantitative studies and all that.

**RS:** Was that good or bad?

**SB:** It didn't matter. I think the disciplines were randomly distributed in the departments to foster what was supposed to be an experimental campus. So instead of having sociology in the Social Sciences you had it in the Behavioral Sciences. It's in the wrong department, but nobody was really certain. Nobody said, "You can't do this because it's

not statistical enough.” So I used a lot of literature. I actually taught a history of psychoanalysis one year. That kind of freedom was one of the reasons I didn’t start looking right away for another job.

**RS:** I have always thought I would like to teach a course called “Six Books I Read in the Last Year that Really Made Me Think.” I would love it and the students would probably learn from it. In the past, that probably would have been approved, but today probably not. That creativity was very much there.

**SB:** One conflict that I remember having was about fifteen years ago. Gerry Moran proposed a course for the Honors Program and there was one other faculty member who said, “I’d want to see more about this, a syllabus.” They want to see a reading list. They want to see a more in-depth proposal, and I went berserk.

**RS:** With Gerry, you should just say, “If Gerry wants to do it, then ok.” You know whatever it is, it’s going to be a great course.

**SB:** If Gerry wants to do a History of Broommaking, that’s fine with me. So I really lost my cool. I think that’s the only time that happened. I think we all have a history with each other and we really do trust each other in terms of our academic credentials. If Gerry or you or whoever wants to teach a tutorial or a course on whatever subject, it seems fine with me. In the past, it would have been easy to get a course like that approved. Now we have to go through the curriculum committee.

**RS:** I came here by accident. I had finished my doctorate at Michigan State and was working for the Michigan Department of Social Services in their research unit. We were studying HMOs, which at that time were very innovative, and very different from what we call an HMO today. I was getting publications, and a good salary, but I had my heart set on an academic career. The graduate advisor at MSU told me there was an opening at the University of Michigan-Dearborn and he had sent off my resume. He was a little sheepish, as if he should have checked with me first. To be honest, I had never heard of this place, and like you I was not sure it was a real university. I was not sure how to get here so the day before the interview, I spent the night with friends in Ypsilanti so I would not get lost, but then I got lost. I was an hour and a half late. I walked in just as my talk was to begin. I once heard about someone who threw up in the middle of a job talk, so that was worse, but being an hour and a half late did not inspire confidence. My colleagues must have taken pity on me because they offered me the job. I was not sure I wanted to come because I did not want to live in a major city. I told Jane I was not willing to commute an hour and would not take the job unless I could find a house within bicycle distance of campus. We found a place in west Dearborn, and that worked out fine.

For the first couple of years I was discouraged. I took a 10% pay cut to come here and the salaries were bad. There was little money for professional development, things like conferences, and I didn’t even have a desk. I had a table without drawers for nearly two decades. Finally, Abe Raimi, a really nice businessman who taught courses in economics, bought me a desk. Since we had small kids, and Jane stayed home with them for a time, we really struggled. At one point, I considered starting law school at night. I

thought, I can't support my family on this income. There were only three ugly buildings on campus. As you said, it didn't even look like a campus. Our offices were in those temporary barracks that we called modules. Today we look back on them with some nostalgia since we were all together in one space and there was a lot of comradeship, but in those days they were grim. When the Michigan economy tanked in the mid-1980s, I had nightmares that they would close the campus as a cost-cutting measure, and I would come in some morning and see my module on wheels being carried away.

**SB:** You seem contented. What turned you around?

**RS:** There were several good things that turned me around. One was the quality of my colleagues. The campus was growing during an academic recession. The baby boom had peaked and other universities were not hiring as they had been. We were able to hire some very good scholars, people who were intellectually engaged. We had a lot of discretion in creating new courses, as we saw fit. There was a lot of intellectual synergy. I think the Department structure helps in that regard. Having historians, political scientists and economists together generated good conversations. Many of those people turned out to be good friends as well as good colleagues. There was a spirit of encouragement that doesn't get recognized enough. I remember when Frank Wayman and I went in to talk to Don Proctor, our chair, about our public opinion study in Dearborn. We had run out of money. Don said he would cover our expenses. Just like that, he gave us \$500, which at that time was a lot of money. He probably didn't have it, but he could see that it was a serious project and our careers depended on it. He later got in trouble for overspending but he was willing to help us, and that boost led to our book, *A Time of Turmoil*. Gene Arden, our Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, was also very supportive of junior faculty. We always knew he was on our side. I also liked the students. They were bright and were linked to their communities. Many worked to keep themselves in school, and many were night students. I have always considered our students to be one of the best assets of this campus.

I came to like Detroit. Being a small town guy, I always thought I wanted to be in a small college or a university in a medium size city. But Detroit is constantly interesting, in spite of its flaws. I like the fact that we were created as the urban campus of the University of Michigan and have that local focus. The campus in Ann Arbor is not really in Michigan. It just has a Michigan zip code. It has a different mission. It is a good mission, but I like the one we have. We have always been aware that we exist in this Detroit environment, and we have responded to that. You and I have specifically been involved in research relevant to the place where we live. I think that makes the institution different and I think that makes you and me different.

**SB:** In 1981, when I started to do the interviews with Holocaust survivors, immediately the university was supportive. To be frank, I was stunned. Studio time if we needed it. They came up with cash for tapes and tape recorders and it just got stronger and stronger. The project grew because the university gave the support that it had. I will forever be grateful for that. It came from the Provost, first Gene Arden, and then Robert Simpson, who became the Provost after Gene. Then eventually the support got stronger with Dan Little when he came. I think the administration sees it as the only connection this campus

has with the Jewish community in the northwest suburbs. Whatever the reason, that support has been there from the beginning, right down to Greg Taylor, who is the engineer in the studio. He was a student when we started this and has been with the project since it began. Even now when we do an interview in the studio, he's the person who runs the control room. I'm constantly amazed at how deep that support has been, just as I think the institution supported the Center for Arab American Studies, although that may have been more of a battle. Did you have any obstacles in your way? I was on the College Executive Committee some of this time, as you were. I think there were some stops and starts.

**RS:** Yes and no. The Center for Arab American Studies was created in 2000. It was a very innovative project, the first such Center in the country. A convergence of forces led to this development. A couple of years earlier, we had a planning process to identify those areas in which UM-D had unique strengths. I was on that Steering Committee, and I and others made a strong case for the Arab American population as an asset. By 2000, Paul Wong was the new Dean of CASL. As a young academic at Berkeley, he had created the Asian Studies Center, the first ethnic studies center in the country if I am correct. He had good institutional instincts. Dan Little was our new Chancellor and was committed to creating a signature program for the campus. When Dan met with Ishmael Ahmed of ACCESS and other Arab leaders, they suggested that he move in this direction. In 2000, we met with local academics interested in the Arab community and created an Academic Advisory Committee. I became the director of the Center that fall. This was well before September 11 when other places "discovered" Arab Americans. I spent my first year meeting with community leaders. Many people don't realize how complex this community is. There are Christians and Muslims, Lebanese, Iraqis, Palestinians, Syrians, Yemenis, Jordanians, Egyptians, religious and secular. Without those initial contacts, it would have been hard to conduct the Detroit Arab American Study, which started in 2002. I had a few goals as Director. One was to start an Oral History project. I offered a course on Oral History and we interviewed ten or so people. This was to be a seed program that we would expand with external funding. Preserving the documents and records of the community was a central goal so we started an archive. We acquired several valuable contributions, including the FBI file of Abdeen Jabara, a civil liberties attorney, and the records of the Druze Society. We got a major grant of nearly a million dollars to study community attitudes towards organ donation, and another major grant to train Arab American teaching assistants as professional teachers. We also got research grants for local research. Nancy Wroble, for example, conducted very innovative research on what psychological tests work best in measuring dementia in the community, and Daniel Davis has done superb work on how Arabic influenced local English.

**SB:** So far, so good.

**RS:** There was a debate early on over whether to recruit a high profile Director or use the money to hire two junior faculty who could teach and do research. I was willing to continue as Director for a three-year term. Hopefully, with two new faculty, one would emerge as a leader to replace me. In the end there was a decision to find a Director, which in retrospect was not the best decision. We spun our wheels for a couple of years, then

made a hire that was not wise. Just this semester, we reverted to the first strategy and hired two promising junior scholars. Unfortunately, we had five years with no progress.

The main difference between this program and your Voice and Vision program was that there were faculty lines associated with Arab American studies, and you needed resources of a different nature, space and technical support. There was no faculty resistance to CAAS, although there was a definite lack of faculty ownership, and some resentment. The Center emerged as a top-down institutional strategy rather than as a bottom-up, faculty-originated program. I was on the college executive committee during this whole time and people were uneasy that the program was getting lines while other line requests were either delayed or denied. And there were concerns about the type of people the search committees were trying to find for the faculty line. The person hired as Director never identified with the university and its programs. She left after two and half years, a year of which was actually spent out of state. And the person they ultimately hired for the faculty line was totally inappropriate. He stayed one year, had few students, and left in a huff. The new people are good. I think the Center is back on track.

**SB:** Do you think it's ironic that the two of us are doing this work in the same department in the same university? It's almost like we do *this* for *them* and we do *that* for *them*. We're an equal opportunity university.

**RS:** This is one reason why I thought you and I were perfect for these conversations. Our careers have been circling around some similar themes and issues, but in very different ways.

**SB:** Our two projects and the senior scholars program have done an awful lot for public relations for the university. That program allows retirees to take classes for a modest registration fee. I think there are over a hundred people in the program. I think you and I are two of their favorite professors.

**RS:** It gives us external visibility.

**SB:** Yes. People in *The Jewish News* get information from some of us. They have done stories featuring both of us. They know it's a wonderful place with great teachers. I wouldn't be surprised if somebody tried to get a feature piece on that program.

**RS:** Dearborn had a bad reputation. Henry Ford had a bad relationship with the Jewish community and Orville Hubbard had a bad relationship with the Black community. That had nothing to do with the university, but we got blamed for it. It took us a long time to work those things through, and there are still some residual bad feelings.

**SB:** I still know people who won't buy a Ford. They're pretty old by now, but still...

**RS:** We also had our own internal limitations. When I came to this campus in 1973 there was only one female in the Social Sciences department, Noriko Kamachi. She had been hired to teach Asian history, which had never been taught before. The year after I arrived, we Political Scientists hired Helen Graves, who had been here on a one-year

appointment. She developed a course on Women in Politics. That was the first course on campus that dealt with women. You historians also had an African-American lecturer who taught Black History, which I think was the first course on campus that focused on African American subject matter. The Engineering program had a mission statement on the wall as you walked into their building. It said their goal was to train “gentlemen.” This certainly sent a message to women. I think there was just an assumption that women didn’t do certain things. Now the Historians have three female faculty members, the Economists have one and the Political Scientists have two. You have an African-American faculty member who has brought in rich content. At one point the Political Scientists had two Black faculty members and the Economists had a Black female, but they all left for various reasons. We have all been aware of the need to expand the range of faculty interests and backgrounds.

**SB:** In the 1970s I was riding with a senior Humanities colleague who went on at great length about how ridiculous it was to talk about women’s history. They were just part of history. He thought it was an artificial distinction. As a junior faculty at the time, I thought, “I don’t want to get into an argument with this person right now.”

**RS:** You were not tenured. (Both laugh).

**SB:** He’s since retired. We were on the cutting edge of this. We were right out front. We had Elaine Clark, Leslie Tentler, Norkio Kamachi. All were very dynamic and in some cases very controversial. They were wonderful scholars and wonderful teachers. What always surprised me was that we had these really good people that were here and for the most part they stayed here. I’m sure a number could have left. I had an offer at one point and I just wouldn’t go. It was hard to pick up a family at that point. We had established roots in the academic, Jewish and non-Jewish community. It was flattering to get an offer but I didn’t even give it a single thought.

**RS:** I was twice invited to apply for jobs by the chair of the search committee, but I never followed up.

**RS:** What about today? What are the problems facing the campus?

**SB:** Money. I think we’re always concerned about compromising the standards of the admission program and a lot of faculty are concerned because they get discouraged in the classroom. Kids who can’t write, don’t speak, can’t read with any sort of critical, analytical style. I worry about that. It’s potentially a major problem.

**RS:** When we came, the state of Michigan covered 70% of our budget. Now the figure is closer to 30%. We are no longer a state *funded* institution but are a state *supported* institution. Student tuition covers most of the rest, which means it becomes harder and harder for students to afford a college education. It also means there is constant pressure to admit less qualified students to push up enrollment to keep the budget afloat. We have always been told by our leadership that this will not happen, but the faculty are very skeptical that this is happening without our knowledge.



**SB:** We have increased the number of scholarships. We may be one of the leading five universities in terms of the percentage of money we give to scholarships. But tuition has continued to creep up. Not as quickly as many other Michigan schools, but there it goes.

**RS:** We never had that person in the legislature who was always slipping in some extra money for us. Other campuses had that person. Each new building was a major struggle and a major achievement. It was also a major drain on our resources. Our debt service is very high, to pay off those buildings. Our recent acquisition of the Ford building, 3 or 4 years ago, our north campus some call it, opened up great opportunities for us. In the 1980s, when the Michigan economy crashed, there was a proposal to merge our library with that of Henry Ford Community College. HFCC is a good college, but that proposal was very threatening, as if there were no differentiation between the two institutions. I seriously thought they might close the campus as a cost cutting measure. It actually came close to that at one point. A budget report during the mid-1980s financial meltdown suggested shutting us down, but we persuaded the governor to delete that section.

I think there is a class shift occurring in our society. When we were young professors, the gap between the rich and the poor was much less than it is now. I would pass out data showing that the U.S. was the most egalitarian society in the industrial world. If you look at the ratio of the top 10% compared with the bottom 10 or 20%, we were more equal than any other country. That is just not true any more. Now we are among the least egalitarian. This class shift is hitting the Black community first. People point out that there are more young Black males in jail or on parole than in university, which is a disaster. I think the Black community is the canary in the mine. They get hit first with what is coming to others in time. I am very worried about this. I am worried about the high tuition. I wish there were more opportunities for poor kids. Today I think it would be nearly impossible for a person with my family situation to go to college. I think we need something like the British have. The government pays your tuition, but when you start earning, you get a tax surcharge to pay it back.

**SB:** I had federal loans for those going into teaching. We had ten years after the final degree to start to pay back. We would pay ten percent a year or something like that. It was a federal loan. I don't know that I could do it now.

**SB:** Do you think there's still a hangover from the Orville Hubbard days, that Blacks stay away from here because of the reputation of the campus?

**RS:** I think it's going to be very hard to overcome that, to make the campus welcoming to Black students. And Wayne State is in Detroit and is seen as very friendly to them.

**SB:** That is also true of Jews. Now for the Jewish community at least, we're perceived as the Arab campus. Jewish students automatically assume that this is a hostile environment. I think there's a terrific opportunity to make some inroads in that community, because if our tuition is creeping up, Ann Arbor's has grown in leaps and bounds and we could be the leading second choice of this region.

**RS:** There is a militant blogger who has named us “The University of Michigan-Dearbornistan,” obviously a fearful image. I see the situation in the exact opposite way. I tell Jewish students who talk to me that they have an opportunity here that few Jewish students have, the opportunity to meet Arab students, and to know them as persons. I see this as a definite advantage. I intentionally moved to East Dearborn to give my children a multi-cultural experience. I wanted to live where my sons would have Black classmates, something I never had, but I could never figure how to do that. I think this is something we should market to Jewish students. There are occasional problems, but these happen everywhere. The benefits far outweigh the problems.

**SB:** The problems have been few, as far as I know. The campus needs to get the word out, that we are a welcoming environment.

**RS:** On a different point, I am afraid the culture wars are coming to our campus. I am reluctant to talk about this because there were problems that needed to be addressed, and some that still need to be addressed, but fixing one problem should not create another. I can think of very few people who are a part of those wars, but I can also think back to several times over the past few years that I have raised some point and someone has said, “But you are a White Male.” I have heard the Honors Program described in similar terms, as focusing on “Dead White Males,” and Michael Rosano’s courses on political theory are dismissed in this way, although the students, male and female, love them. I can’t imagine that such a derogatory thing could be said about any other element within the university community. To say a social problem is caused by ethnic or gender or racial groups is something we have been fighting for three centuries in this land. It makes it very hard to discuss difficult issues. I keep hearing the voice of John L Lewis in my ear saying, “They are trying to divide us. Don’t let them.”

**SB:** It’s like a refrain every three or four years that comes back and it gets more intense each time. There’s even been talk about alternative Honors programs, one for African-American culture, one for women. I respond, “Do whatever you want but don’t come near *my* Honors program.” If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it. You keep fixing it, of course, but that’s not the problem.

**RS:** Three years ago, I had an experience that I think illustrates part of the problem. I wrote an op ed piece for the *Detroit Free Press* on Arab Americans. It was a bad time for that community because of the attacks of September 11. I quoted Abraham Lincoln, who had commented in 1858 on problems immigrants were having during his own day. Their identity as Americans was being questioned. Lincoln said that being an American had nothing to do with ethnicity or lineage but had to do with whether you accepted the principles of American democracy and social justice, things he believed America represented in its best aspirations. He said that those who embraced those things were as fully American as those descended from the Founders. They were “blood of the blood” as he put it. I quoted that phrase. The reaction was stunning. Many Arab Americans sent warm messages. It was the most positive response I have ever received. Of course, I got the predictable hate mail. No surprise there. But from several academics I was accused of intimidating Arab Americans, belittling their situation. I couldn’t believe it.

Well, I could, but it was surprising. I think this polarized reaction tells a lot about how some academics think.

**SB:** As Hannah Arendt would say, “It’s thoughtlessness.” To be an academic is perceived as being knee-jerk critical, so you can’t say anything positive about somebody’s work. It’s like critics and reviewers. I remember that piece.

**RS:** You and I spend a lot of time working with students. You have mentioned that. I have mentioned that. What are your experiences?

**SB:** Pretty good. Our previous chancellor funded a request to take two students as interns to the Social Science History Association Conference. He did it for two or three years and Dan Little has continued that. He’s given us a little less money, but still.

**RS:** You take the students.

**SB:** Yes. They’re required to attend the Holocaust sessions at this conference and a few other sessions, and to take care of audio-visual needs for the ICPSR in Ann Arbor [Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research]. That’s always been a wonderful experience. Students get money to go to professional conferences and they make comments. Several years ago someone went up to our Chancellor and said, “You have great graduate students,” because they had both made comments. Dan said, “Not only that but we have great *undergraduate* students.” They were both undergraduates. So that’s been a very positive experience. Working with Honors students has been great for the most part, although when something goes wrong – when there’s a case of plagiarism or whatever – it’s doubly discouraging. Generally, I’ve had good non-academic interactions with students. I have also had good experiences with independent studies, so many I can’t count them anymore, and with very small classes occasionally. I still maintain that we get some very good students here, although I think that we’ve eroded. As we’ve said before, I wonder where things are going to wind up because of tuition. For the most part I think our students are pretty sharp.

**RS:** I agree. Our students are one of the best aspects of the university. They are very bright. The fact that they live and work in their communities adds a reality you would not get in Ann Arbor or Michigan State. When you discuss a political problem, it makes sense to them. It resonates. I always have my upper level students over to my house during the last week of the semester for an evening of discussion. I usually have a few general discussion questions relevant to the course, and then let the conversation evolve. These are often rich, reflective discussions. I know you have done this also.

I have to comment specifically on the Arab students. I think I have had some success with those students. Ishmael Ahmed, one of the founders of ACCESS, said to me recently that from his point of view one of my significant contributions was the number of Arab students I have sent into the public arena. I urge them to get involved, not just in their community, but in the general society. Right now I live in northeast Dearborn in a neighborhood overwhelmingly Arab, mostly Lebanese. I joke that I am the person who makes the neighborhood ethnically diverse. There is a saying that if you become a

teacher, by your students you'll be taught. If I have helped my Arab students, they have also helped me. I came from a small town where everybody was pretty much like myself. To live in Detroit, which is so mixed ethnically, has been an enriching life experience.

I have to say that when I came here I didn't know much about Arab Americans or the Middle East. That first time I taught the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on my own, I had four Palestinian students. One day they marched into my office and told me I had misunderstood the Palestinian position. They had documents and magazines for me to read, from various Palestinian groups. They also had family stories. I could see what had happened. They had decided I was missing some important insights, I meant well, and I was probably going to be around for a while so they had better help educate me. It was a very positive and mature approach. Now when I teach that course, I always tell students that story and tell them they are welcome to contribute to my education, to tell me their stories, and tell me if they think I have overlooked something. And they do. That has been a real bonus. I think without that interaction, I could not have headed the Center for Arab American Studies or been a PI on the Detroit Arab American Study.

**SB:** I don't have anything quite so dramatic. Occasionally students come up with things we have never thought about, and that's always a pleasure. Now and then when I teach the course on the Holocaust we'll get a survivor and that's sometimes unnerving. They know experientially what I'm trying to talk about. Once we had a sort of confrontation over Hannah Arendt. There was a survivor in the class. For two weeks we talked about the book, and I said, "Everybody understands that her position on Eichmann was that he was not a monster. He was a kind of banal person." The survivor just exploded. "How can you say that he wasn't a monster?" He had sat there for two weeks and participated in the discussions, read the book, and then he just couldn't take it. He was from Czechoslovakia, which became Hungary, and Eichmann was responsible for sending him and his family to Auschwitz. I was completely taken aback because it came from what I thought was out of nowhere. I should have seen it coming. I mean, you could see his face getting red. Just as your Israeli-Palestinian conflict course has at least a Detroit-wide reputation, I think the course I teach on the Holocaust has a similar reputation, for better or for worse. Sometimes it gets to be a burdensome thing. Gabe performed at the Fair Lane recently and people were asking, "Are you Gabe's father?" I prefer that to "that strange Holocaust guy." I wish I were known as something else.

**RS:** I was with you at a student wedding a few months ago and someone hijacked you to talk about the Holocaust. He was very excited to talk to you but that was not how you wanted to spend the evening. Your story about the upset survivor reminds me of an experience I had after September 11. I was asked to talk to the editorial board of a major newspaper. We'll be vague about which one, but it is the one to which I subscribe. In that talk, I said it was important to understand that Osama bin Laden is an honorable man. As soon as I said "honorable man" a person in the audience made a dramatic objection and stormed out. I was stunned. Later he stormed back in and made another dramatic statement. While he was out, I joked to the reporters, who were sitting there also stunned, "I hope that's not your editor." They said, "It is." (Both laugh). The first rule of journalism is that you never challenge a source. You exploit a source, to understand them. You don't say, "No, you're wrong." This person went ballistic. But think about

the point. People obeyed Saddam because if you didn't he killed you. People follow Osama because they see him as a heroic person. That's a fundamental difference between those two. Osama doesn't have an army or territory. He doesn't have much at all except his reputation. You can invade Saddam but not Osama. But in the wake of September 11, it was hard for some people to accept this point, even though without this point you can't understand Osama's survival. There are probably twenty people right now who know where he is hiding but none of them are talking, even for a \$25 million reward. I think when people are hurting it is very hard for them to hear that it is not evil monsters who are causing so much grief.

**SB:** You can make a sophisticated, intellectual argument all you want. It's not going to go much deeper than the surface.

**RS:** The reaction was visceral, not analytical. And our job is to make it analytical, to analyze, to put it into context, to give some historical perspective.

**SB:** In both of these cases it may be impossible.

**RS:** I think it may be. Some people just can't move beyond their fear and anger.

## Chapter Eight

### Reflections on Marriage, Family, and the Future

**RS:** We both married our college sweethearts. Jane and I will celebrate our forty-fifth anniversary in two days, and you and Lori are not far behind. What observations do you have on marriage, parenting, any of those topics?

**SB:** Actually I knew Lori in nursery school, but we weren't sweethearts at the time. Lori and I started to date when we got out of high school and went to college. It was my illness that kept us together. I'm not sure we would have stayed together if it had not been for that. Everyday for six months she was in the hospital on a daily basis, staying by my bedside. I almost died. It was pretty awful. We went to college together, of course, and there didn't seem to be any question that we were going to get married. Then we ran away. We had a wedding and I accepted an offer to Wayne State for a one-year scholarship to do a Master's degree. We got out of Rochester as quickly as we could and never went back. I couldn't possibly live there.

Lori's family came from Macedonia. They were descendants of Spanish Jews, or Sephardim. They spoke Ladino, a fifteenth century dialect of Spanish sprinkled with Hebrew. Her father's family located in or near Skopje and her mother's in Monastyr or Bitola. All this became part of Yugoslavia after World War I. For some reason, Rochester drew a large Sephardic population from Monastyr. When we were married, it seemed like a mixed marriage since Ashkenazic Jews [European] had little to do with the Sephardim. The two cultures differed in numerous ways, even in religious rituals and customs. A Sephardic service sounds like a mosque — the melodies in particular. The

prayer books have a significant amount of Spanish, written in Hebrew script. It took years to overcome some of those differences. For example, Eastern European Jews name their children after dead relatives; Sephardim name after living relatives. A problem.

I think the biggest decision in our lives was to have children. Lori's the most natural of mothers that I ever met. We pretty much followed our instincts but she was caring, nurturing, maternal, all the things you're supposed to be as a mother. Both kids acknowledge that. Gabe once said that whenever there was a question about parenting, Lori and I would think of what my mother would do and do the opposite. That was our philosophy of parenting as far as he could tell and there's some truth to that, I think. Neither of us got really attentive, loving, parental guidance. That doesn't mean they didn't love us. They just were not capable as parents. I just followed Lori around and did whatever I was supposed to do. If we would leave the bedroom when Miriam, my oldest, was starting to cry, one of us would go back in the room and sit on the floor and read a book until she went to sleep. That's the extent to which we didn't want to upset our kids. Gabe once had a friend who said when he did something bad his father would hit him. Gabe said, "I've never been hit in my life by parents." His friend said, "What do they do to punish you?" He said, "They stop talking." So that's pretty much our household.

Subsequently and especially in the last seven or eight years, I had heart surgery and back surgery and Lori's been a phenomenal caregiver. She's literally saved my life at least twice, getting me to the hospital. At one point I was out cold and she called 9-11. But we've had a pretty strong bond since the time we were 17, which is a long time. We've been married 42 years. Not quite as long as you but we're catching up.

**RS:** Jane and I met in a psychology class at Southern Illinois University in 1960. She was pretty and intelligent, and got an A. She was her class valedictorian, and her mother had been class valedictorian, so she came from good stock. (Both laugh). I later joked that I got a D and a wife out of that class, so it was a good term. (Both laugh). I was very interested in her, but I didn't know her. When a dorky guy walks up to a pretty girl and tries to start up a conversation, it often doesn't go well. My first effort was a total failure, but fortunately, the professor had a required visit to a mental hospital and by chance we went on the same day. It was one of those old-style mental hospitals with a fence and grounds. We walked around together and she got to know me as more than just a pest. I asked her out and she agreed and the rest is history. We got married two years later, in December, 1962 when we were seniors. She sometimes tells people we met in a mental hospital, which is true.

Jane is very nice, very personable. She is like Lori in that regard. She never speaks ill of anyone. She is very mature. Some people start life mature, but I was not one of them. I was lucky to have a wife who encouraged me and appreciated me and helped me become a better person. We enjoy talking to each other. We can drive 500 miles and not get bored. She is also a great editor, which was an unanticipated bonus. I have to say that most of the credit for the good things in our marriage goes to her.

We always assumed we would have kids. My father was one of those old-style dads who was rather distant. I decided I was going to be a hands-on father. When we brought Greg, our first born, home from the hospital, I held him in one hand. He was so small. I just stood there looking at him. Jane had been around small children quite a bit, but I never had and this was an amazing adventure for me. I realized at that moment that

some day this tiny creature would be a grown man and that whatever he turned out to be would have a lot to do with me. I was not a perfect father, probably a bit too stern, and Jane was far more important in raising the kids than I was, but I played with the guys and talked to them about politics and history and films, and they turned out really well. Both are better husbands and better fathers than I was. And I'm a good grandfather.

**SB:** Do you have any thoughts on a successful marriage?

**RS:** When you get to a certain age, people ask you this question. I am not sure I can give a definitive answer but I do have some thoughts. I would say that part of it is avoiding bad decisions. If you don't have a survival instinct, you can easily end up with a bad match that turns into a bad divorce. You also have to realize that marriage is not 50:50. On any given day, it is 90:10. If you are not ready for that, you probably shouldn't get married. You have to like the person. W. H. Auden once said that awareness of similarity is friendship, awareness of difference is love. That tells a lot about a marriage. Both are necessary. You have to realize you are living with a different person, and be flexible about that. I like the phrase, "being alone together." At times you have just to do your own thing and let the other person pursue her interests.

Once after Jane's family reunion, she said to me, "Did I bring you a good family?" Indeed she did. Her mother is a wonderful person, vigorously healthy at 92. Her father was also a wonderful person. He was a star athlete in high school. He died early, at 55. Her sister is a special person who is very dear to all of us. I really lucked out in getting her and her family.

Our marriage has been successful. I have to say that most of the credit goes to her. I was not an easy husband for a time, but we both worked hard to make it work.

**RS:** Do you have any secrets to share with whoever reads this?

**SB:** You told them all. (Both laugh).

**RS:** Marry the right person, right? (Laughter).

**SB:** People used to think when Lori and I were in high school that we were brother and sister. We used to do our Latin homework together. The night we graduated, we had just completed our high school commencement ceremony. I was looking for her and she was looking for me and one of us turned around and the other one was there. So we gave each other a big hug and she started to cry. She was leaving for New York with her sister and brother-in-law and nephews and niece and that was the moment I think that we both knew. She was going to the University of Rochester, I was going to the University of Buffalo. We decided to go to the same university so we would not be separated. She was far smarter than I was and she still is. But the culture of the day got in the way.

**RS:** The options for women were limited in those days. I have three granddaughters. I want those options for them.

**SB:** They will all be doctors. (Both laugh).

**RS:** That would be fine if that is what they want. It would also be fine if they decided to stay at home and care for their young children, as long as that was a choice and as long as they had options. The critical thing is that they have education and a range of interests. Then those options will always be there. Those choices are not made just once. They are made over and over again throughout our lives. Girls didn't have as many options when our wives were young, but they both had rewarding careers.

**SB:** I think Jane and Lori both made the decision to stay home with the kids.

**RS:** That's true. Staying home to raise her children was Jane's first choice. She pursued her career as a physical therapist only when the kids got bigger.

**RS:** Let me ask you, what would you like to be on your tombstone?

**SB:** I've thought about this a lot because of these conversations: "Mensch."

**RS:** That's it?

**SB:** It means a decent human being. But it has connotations of generosity and caring and all that. I think if there's a word on my tombstone, that'd be nice to have.

**RS:** Actually, I have put a lot of thought into this because of my affection for graveyards. A few years ago I saw the gravestone of Adam Smith in Edinburgh and was inspired by what his stone said: "Adam Smith. Author of *The Moral Sentiment*, *The Wealth of Nations*, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera" I thought that would be good, but then I realized I am not Adam Smith, and my books are not world famous. (Both laugh). I hope to be buried in my home town graveyard where many of my family are buried. I saw a gravestone last year in New Jersey that touched me. It said, "Two souls at the end of one life." That's nice but a bit too mushy. Maybe I'll just put it here in this conversation instead of on my tombstone. I want my stone to be simple but informative. It is unlikely that my descendents will see it very often, so perhaps it can just say that I was here and am home, something like that. It should mention my time at UM-D and list the names of my children and grandchildren. That's really all that counts and all I want.

**RS:** Sid, you and I are both "hoary heads" as the Bible says. We've been around for quite a few decades. And we've spent our careers studying society and history. Do you have any sense of how history is moving? Are things getting better or worse?

**SB:** I mentioned this earlier, that after years of trying to study this question to which I have devoted my career, I've never been able to see anything rational or reasonable in the whole issue. It has no logical basis in history, no basis in religion, no basis in cultural or social practice. It's just there like other forms of hatred or racism. It grows more and more disturbing as I get older. Like other things, when coupled with political and religious extremism, it gets more disturbing and dangerous. Both sides in the Middle East seem to me to have lost their humanity to some extent and their sense of what one



Holocaust historian once called the sanctity of life, which I think I believe in. We know more and we know it faster. That makes me feel that things are getting worse. On the other hand, given that we each teach these very difficult subjects, history has always been a depressing, bloody mess, just more secretive and further away from us. It didn't get to us as fast. Word of mass murder in 1941 or 1942 took time to arrive and then seemed unbelievable until after the war. Maybe the capacity for mass destruction has grown more real and more imminent than ever before. Much of what I hold dearest – children, peace, community – what Marx called species consciousness, the treatment of humans as fellow creatures, seems to have slipped away or is in the process of disappearing. My work on the Holocaust has to do with objectification of both perpetrators and victims. If there's a reason to write the curriculum, it's the hope to prevent the creation of either of those categories. That the students, I hope, will not become victims and will not become perpetrators. I was very moved by the story of the two men you met on your trip to Israel who refused to dehumanize and objectify.

**RS:** The ones whose daughters were killed. That was a very powerful encounter for me. It affected me very much as a person. In Bill Clinton's Millennium Speech on January 1, 2001, he said that technology is rushing forward but human wisdom is lagging. I sometimes say that I believe that those of us alive today were virtuous in a different life and God rewarded us by letting us be reborn during any time and place that we wanted. Those of us born into 20<sup>th</sup> century America chose this time and place because the benefits of technology and science were available but the collapse of world order had not yet occurred. We were born into what may well be the most creative century in human history but it was also the most violent century in human history. When I tell students that the 21<sup>st</sup> century may be more violent and destructive than the 20<sup>th</sup>, they do not disagree. They sit in silence. I think they sense that something very terrifying is just over the horizon. Of course, we are not carrots who are planted in the ground and have to stay where we are planted. (That's a line from a play I saw decades ago). We can choose what we do and how we behave. But as individuals, little is under our control beyond our personal behavior. I was in the Middle East just a few weeks ago and met quite a few Israelis and Palestinians. One person said to me, "I do not believe that I as an individual can make a difference in the outcome of this conflict, but I do believe I can help people talk to each other." This is where I am, and I suspect it is where you are. If we can save one or two souls a year, we have achieved something.

**RS:** We are about finished with this project. Do you have any final thoughts?

**SB:** I was reflecting on our conversations. First, I was a bit surprised at how similarly we feel about the Middle East conflict. I have very deep feelings about this, partly because of what I know about Jewish history and about my own Jewish identity. I don't believe that my identity or history are defined by the Holocaust, although it certainly forms an integral part of both of those, but that's not all there is. More immediately there have been recent intensifications of anti-Semitism and racism. I think some on Arab web sites, but others from more traditional hate groups. They've taken the forms of old fashioned conspiracy theories that come from 200 years back. Some of them are updated, like the myth of the Jews staying away from the Trade Center on September 11. It occurred to

me that Marilyn Rosenthal's son probably didn't get the e-mail that day. [Note: Marilyn Rosenthal was a faculty member at UM-D. Her son Josh was in the second tower when it collapsed. He had just helped some other people get onto an elevator and escape].

**RS:** That's right. It's painful to read that kind of foolishness.

**RS:** I recently read the book *Gilead* by Marilynne Robinson. It won a Pulitzer Prize. It is about an older man who marries a younger woman. They have a six-year-old child when the man learns that he has a terminal heart condition. The book is written to his son, telling him all the things he wishes he could tell him if he had the opportunity. It is a very moving book, very honest about emotions and feelings. At one point he says to his son, "I wish I could leave you certain of the images in my mind, because they are so beautiful that I hate to think they will be extinguished when I am." That struck me. I have a writing project that I haven't mentioned but this may be the point when I should. I have a great grandfather who is something of an icon in my mind. He was born of a settler family in frontier Indiana, served in the Civil War, and was a homesteader in southwest Missouri. It was his grandfather who was raised as an Iroquois. He was named after him, Nathan. I know facts about him from the public records, but nothing about him as a person. I would be so happy if I had a letter in which he described how he felt when he learned that Lincoln had been assassinated, or what he thought during the Siege of Atlanta. I realized that someday I might have a great grandchild who would be equally curious about me and perhaps I should leave some record. I decided to write a *Millennium Journal* for my descendants in the year 2100, telling them about a year in our lives, the year 2000. As I wrote, I had actual people in mind, descendants whom I would never meet but who might know my name. Each night after Jane went to bed, I would enter the events of the day into the computer, our conversations, our thoughts about what was happening in our lives and the world, our fears and concerns. I wrote in the introduction that I would tell what they would have heard had they stopped by the house in the evening and participated in one of our conversations. Every time we discussed a relative or ancestor, I would write up a profile of that person, so they have a very nice sense of our family and our history. Some of the entries are things we have discussed here: the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement, the Nixon impeachment. I was also doing genealogy research that year, so I included that as an appendix. In the end, it was over 600 pages. I am going to leave copies for my children and grandchildren and also donate it to some archives for whatever purpose they may wish. Maybe in 50 years someone will find it interesting.

This is something that intrigued me about these conversations, the desire to preserve something. Robinson says that preservation is an act of creation. You and I have both been driven in that direction in our careers, to preserve memories and events that would otherwise be lost if we didn't do what we have done. Some memories can't be preserved. I think of standing on the top of Kilimanjaro or of holding my newborn son in my hands. But those are personal memories, and everyone has those. What we are trying to do here is preserve some societal and institutional history, looking at ourselves as representative of broader patterns of our age, and of how the university developed. I told you when we started this project that in a sense we are dinosaurs, that when we are

gone the university is not going to replace us with people like ourselves. We are preserving experiences and perspectives that will seem strange to people in twenty years.

This brings me back to the question of what I want for an epitaph. I think all we can say about life is, "I was here. I did the best I could. I hope I left behind some good things that would not have occurred had I not been here. I hope the harm I did was minimal, and I hope my mistakes will be interred with my bones."

**RS:** Well, I think this is the end. We have covered all the topics we wanted to cover.

**SB:** This has been a good series of conversations. Thanks for organizing it.

**RS:** I've enjoyed it.

### **RULES FOR GOOD STUDENTING**

Two key characteristics of effective students are the ability to **maintain intellectual humility** and the ability to **keep an open mind**. The following rules are designed to help you in your effort to acquire these traits. The rules will work in any class but they are particularly important in a class where the basic concepts are so different from the way we usually think and where students carry around considerable passion, cultural baggage, and distracting preconceptions.

#### **RULE ONE: Learn to understand, not to persuade:**

Keep in mind that your job as a student is to understand, not to persuade. Keep repeating to yourself, "I cannot learn with my mouth open."

#### **RULE TWO: Until you can defend, you cannot critique.**

Keep in mind that your task as a student is to study arguments and models until you can explain them to others and answer questions or criticisms of them. Until you can do that you do not truly understand them. Always assume a writer is a brilliant person who has insights that you can only grasp if you think about them a long time. (This is, indeed, true).

#### **RULE THREE: Assume that you do not understand:**

Keep repeating to yourself, "Everything I thought I knew about this subject before I began this semester is flawed and incomplete and I have to start from scratch."

#### **RULE FOUR: Don't disagree. It deteriorates into argumentation.**

Anytime you find yourself disagreeing with a writer or thinking the writer has overlooked some important counter-argument, say to yourself ten times, "There I go again."

#### **RULE FIVE: Beware of the unforgivable sin of No New Learning.**

Before you allow a thought to bubble to the surface as a comment, always ask yourself how that thought is different from what you would have said before the semester began and before you read the assigned readings. If there is no difference, then you are guilty of the sin of "no new learning."



