

Oral History Interview with Dr. Barry Levis
06/14/05

Schreck: Good morning, my name is Corey Schreck. Today is June 14, 2005 (laughter).

Levis: This is going to be in history forever, isn't it?

Schreck: Yeah (laughs).

Levis: Go ahead, go ahead.

Schreck: Today we will be interviewing Dr. Barry Levis. With me is Wenxian Zhang, head of Rollins Archives Special Collections and Lily Velez, a student assistant working on the project with us. So Dr. Levis—

Levis: Yes.

Schreck: Would you share with us some of your family history and your background growing up?

Levis: Well, the first Levis came to Pennsylvania in 1690. (Laughter) Should I go back that far, or uh— (Laughs) And he was the grandson of the Duke of France, but he was a French Huguenot. He became a Protestant and so left France under the persecution of Louis XIV, and then came to America. And then, I've been working on my family history so I'm sort of aware of these things. Did you know there're two Levis' buried in the Vatican? One was an archbishop and one was a cardinal. Three Levis' were executed by the French Revolutionary government.

Zhang: Are they all related to you?

Levis: Yeah, oh yeah. It's not a very, you know, big family. But anyway, so. Anyway, so, I grew up in Pennsylvania and went to school in Abington (??) and then went to Penn State. And went into science, because my father said I had to either be a science major or business major or an engineering major because I had to do something practical. And so I did biology and I hated it. I started two lab fires, scorched the ceiling of the lab, and knew this was not what I was to do. I started taking history courses in my senior year and loved it. Just yeah, this is it. Why didn't I do this a long time ago? Applied to graduate school in biology genetics, got accepted. Also applied in history, got accepted. And went into history. Over my father's dead body practically (laughter). He was never going to speak to me again. I was going to live in poverty the rest of my life. How could I make such a stupid mistake in my life and so forth? So anyway. So that's how I got into history.

Schreck: Any experiences while at college? Other than in your— Any teachers you remember and how they helped you?

Levis: Ah, well I guess that, I guess there was a character by the name of Robert Greene (??) who taught History 13, which is the equivalent of our 113, Early Modern European. And I just loved. He just, he just made the whole thing so entertaining. Because I'd had, I had one earlier history course taught by Warren Hastler (??), who was a Civil Right— Civil War expert, a military historian. The most boring course I have ever taken in my entire— We fought ever battle in the Civil War, you know, minute by minute. Well, all the troops went here, the troops went— He had diagrams all over the board, you know. It was just stultifying; it was just awful. So when I got into Greene's class, you can bet your rinny tin tin that he, that was one of his favorite expressions (laughter), just made the whole thing seem wonderful. And I loved it. And I got really involved in the Reformation; I love the Reformation, which is, you know, how I got into church history. And, uh, what, I forget, were you in Ancient?

Schreck: Yes, I was in Ancient.

Levis: Ancient, that's right. Okay.

Schreck: And then the second half was the European History.

Levis: Right, right.

Schreck: I was a bad girl.

Levis: Right. Right. But that was just really what got me involved and I just was fascinated. But I guess I always loved history, I really enjoyed history in high school. I always got A's in history. Even in eighth grade, I remember I had Mrs. Castle, who was pregnant. And all of this was very shocking; she was showing. This was back in, you know, aught four (laughter), not this aught four. Ah, and so she had to leave halfway through the semester. And she was just wonderful. This was in eighth grade and I just loved her. It was American history and I don't like, generally like American history but she really was interesting. So, so I've always had this love of history but wasn't able to pursue it because I was told that it was impractical. And both my brothers were engineers and were going to make something among themselves one day, and so I had to do that too. So.

Schreck: So then, how did you finally end up coming to Rollins?

Levis: I had, I got my master's and Ph.D. Well I didn't finish my Ph.D. I came here before I finished my Ph.D. I had finished my research for my dissertation. I had gotten married, we'd gone to Europe and spent almost a year in England where I was doing my research, came back. And the decision was whether or not I should just finish up the writing of the dissertation and get the doctorate or— Which my advisor recommended, because he had a friend who was retiring at Alfred University, which is very interesting because that's where Charlie Edmondson is now president, at Alfred university and he said if I got my dissertation that the chances I could get that job were extremely good. But I sort of wanted to get away from Philadelphia. I sort of, I don't know, there was all sorts of things. My ex-wife was trying— thought I should try to see if I could get a job, so I started applying and I got a job offer at Temple University, which is in Philadelphia. And I'd also applied here, only because— I never heard of Rollins College. I

never saw them ever coming. I applied to, you know, schools in the northeast. Never thought of coming to Florida. But my mother in law at the time said, “Oh you should apply to Rollins. I’d like to retire down there (laughter).” She did. “And they have a good tennis team.” So as a joke, I rode off and got an interview, came down, and was offered the job and it paid more than Temple and it was not in Philadelphia. As I said, I wanted to get away from Philadelphia. So I took it (laughter). And here I am, and have been for thirty-seven years.

Schreck: So what was your first impression of the college, the campus, the students?

Levis: Well the campus was a sleepy little place with lots of Spanish moss. I was in the French House annex, which doesn’t stand anymore. It’s where, what’s the dorm is it, it used to be called Cloverleaf.

Zhang: Yes.

Schreck: No, it’s—

Zhang: It was, it was Cloverleaf and then it became Elizabeth Hall.

Levis: No, Elizabeth Hall was different. Elizabeth Hall was still there. It’s the one that, it’s not McKean. What’s the one that’s right—?

Zhang: Ward?

Levis: Ward, yeah. Yeah. It used to be called Cloverleaf. Well anyway, there was, the French House, it was a shack. There were four of us in there. Another— The person I got very close to, she just died a couple of years ago, it’s really a shame, but her name was Eleanor (??) Miller and she taught French, and we just had a delightful time down there in sort of in exile. By, it was just by the French house. There were partitions, but they didn’t go all the way up to the ceiling. And there were window air conditioners so it was just miserable when I first got here. There was one secretary for the entire, it was called— no two secretaries for faculty services for all the faculty. So we had to carry our stuff all the way over to a little building in the grove with trees, which is now where the field house is. I’m trying to remember her name. Benfield (??). What was her first name? Ah! I can’t remember. Anyway (laughter). See me in a moment. So it was, you know— We had phones. Apparently, we were the first group to get, to actually have phones in our office. Usually there was just sort of a central phone one had to go to. The mail was in the, what is now the Rice Bookstore. I was opposed to all this, and the dining hall. Or not the dining, the student, the student center. Which is actually very nice because it was close to where I was and we would go over there. And I’m sure Jack Lane has waxed eloquent about how wonderful it was in the old days when the post office was right there with the food services in the student center, and we’d get our mail and sit around and talk and stuff like that.

So I, you know, I really had some interesting new colleagues. Eleanor (??) was fantastic. She was an inspiration to me. I mean, I knew nothing about teaching. I had never done any teaching. I had, one semester, I had been a TA [teaching assistant], but that was it. I conned my father and my father paid for everything, because he was just anxious for me to get an education

so I could get out and get a job. And so I didn't, you know, I didn't go on scholarships or anything so I went straight through except this one semester. And so that was the only teaching experience I had. And I really learned an awful lot from her about how to teach. And team-taught with her not my first year but my second year. And there were just some really interesting characters on the faculty.

And there was a guy named Lou Bisceglia (??) who was fired, because he was sort of the campus radical. And at the end of the— We had at that time grade reports, where we wrote a narrative about the students and then put the grade down and signed it. And he had taught this, we had taught a course in which we'd read *Catch-22* and in there there's a character who reads mail and censors it, and he would sign his name Washington Irvin, and then Irvin Washington. And so Bisceglia (??) thought this was really cool. So he had taught a course on modern Europe, and so he signed the grade reports: Adolf Hitler, Josef Stalin (laughter), Benito Mussolini. Things like that. They fired him! He was a good teacher, but he was just sort of bizarre. And he ended up getting, as many people the college fired in those days, very good jobs.

And then there was a name, a guy by the name of Dave Hitchens (??) who was also in the history department. He was an American historian. He and a guy named Windom (??). What was Windom's (??) first name? I can't remember. Anyway, they got in a fight with the dean of students, a guy by the name of Fred Hicks, in the, oh what was it? In Harpers. Because they disagreed. Fred Hicks, who was dean of students, had sort of a mafia of the, not the Phi Delt, what were they? The KAs I guess, who sort of kept everybody in line. And he and, Windom (??) and Hitchens (??) just didn't agree with the sort of— They were trying to sort of repress any sort of liberal thought, and sort of liberal activism on campus, to try to keep that line because it was very conservative at that time. I mean, you think it's conservative now; you should've seen it then. And he was sort of like the thought police. So they got into this shouting match with Hitchens (??) and blows were swapped and they were fired. And they also went on to very good schools (laughs).

The best thing to do at this institution back in the sixties was to get fired because you'd get a really good job someplace else. So that, they were the younger faculty and they were really interesting and exciting and sort of offbeat. And then there were the older faculty, who had been here since Alonzo Rollins donated, you know, the land to build the college. A guy— And interesting people. There was a guy named Summers (??), who had actually been an ambassador for a while and worked at the U.N. [United Nations]. Came here and taught in political science.

And then there was Paul Douglas. Paul Douglas took political science. He had been in American University. We suspect he had been fired there. Came down here. He was the only one who had his own personal secretary, and we think he really, we think he had a lots of money and he was paying her. So he had his own private secretary. And he taught courses on American politics and notoriously required for freshman classes a one hundred paged term paper, which everybody knew he never read. (Laughter) And so, he, they would write these papers and what they would do is they would write a page and then they would copy it. Over and over and over again. And they would write all sorts of, all sorts of things in just as long as it came out to be a hundred pages. And he would write, you know, the forms, the grade forms. He would write these glowing comments about how wonderful this report was on modern Indonesian politics and stuff like that. He hadn't read it, they hadn't written it, but he would give them A's and glowing comments about how wonderful these students were.

My favorite was Ray Smith. Ray Smith was in the history department. Taught European history, was an expert on Spanish history. Actually had a very good book on the history of

Spain. And the way he taught a course was he came in and he had the students— Have you heard all this from Jack? Did Jack go into all this?

Zhang: No.

Levis: Oh. Ah, he came in and would sit at the head of the classroom, and the students would then look at his book and other things and write their own history of Spain. And he would just sit there, and they would come up and ask him questions. That's how he taught the course. Other times, when he lectured, he had the loudest voice imaginable. You could hear him throughout the entire building when he was lecturing. He came from Texas; he went to SMU, in which he said it that way in a real deep Texas accent. And then he'd gotten his Ph.D. at Penn. And was, again, one of the sort of the old guard, the old conservative guard of the faculty.

And, I have to tell this, it's a wonderful story. We had, what was the course? I can't remember the course. But we had, it was an introductory freshman course that I was involved with and one of the things, we read some business with younger faculty, we read some sort of radical literature. One book called *The Greening of America*. And I had this on student in my class who was in fact the son of the college physician. Who turned into me a— his term paper was a box filled with paraphernalia on how to be, how to raise consciousness. And he included a dashiki, flip-flops, beads, and this envelope of mysterious tobacco-like product and paper wrapping for it. And I, you know this is true. True. This is true. I had never seen marijuana up to that point. I sniffed it and said, "This does not smell like tobacco." So I went immediately down the hall to Charlie Edmondson's office and said, "Charlie." And knowing he would, of course, know what it was (laughter). So I said, "Charlie, is this what I think it is?" And he said, "Oh my God. You probably need to get this out of your office." And he said, "Hey, I've got an idea. What we'll do is we'll put it in Ray Smith's drawer in his desk and then call campus security." (Laughter) He said, "Then we can get rid of him!"

So anyway, we had this really odd mix between young, fairly idealistic, and basically very, you know, some really good faculty, and a lot of the old guard, who were basically, you know, sort of going into retirement and come to Rollins because they'd wanted to move to Florida and retire and still teach, and do some teaching. Some really, there were some characters, some interesting people. But then there were some great incompetence there that, that was a problem.

The students were a very mixed bag. We had some that were incredibly stupid. I mean, just, there just wasn't any— A rock could've been brighter than some of these kids (laughter). And then we had some others that were really inspirational and interesting, and who I see all the time still. I mean they still come back and visit me. Michael De Calliano (??) and people like that, who were in some of my earliest classes. And they were interesting, they were colorful, they were really interesting to teach.

Then I had this one. What was his name? I can't remember his name. He informed me that I had scheduled an examination; it was Ancient History as a matter of fact. It was the first course I taught. I had scheduled an examination, which happened to fall the Monday, not even the Wednesday, the Monday before Thanksgiving. And he came up to me and he said, "Well I'm sorry. You're going to have to give me another exam another time because I always have to go to the house parties in Long Island for Thanksgiving weekend and I have to leave the Friday before Sunday night." And I said, "No." I said, "It's in the syllabus, it's been in the syllabus for the entire semester. You have to be here or you will get a zero on the exam, and your grades

aren't very good and you've, you'll very likely flunk the course." And he went anyhow. Because he didn't believe, because nobody would sort of stand up to students. They just sort of, "Oh you want to turn your papers in three weeks late? That's fine." That sort of stuff. And I was, I was a hard-ass from the very beginning, I guess. And I flunked him. And he was just appalled and he said, you know, and he appealed, he went to the president about this. And they actually backed me up, which I was sort of surprised.

But so we had, again, sort of a mixed bag between some— Ken Blakely (??). Just a fascinating type of guy. You know, really, really a clown and fun to have in class, and a good sense of humor. And made being here worthwhile in comparison to some of the lugs that I was dealing with.

It, it has changed some. But we still have that sort of bifurcation here. We have— But the thing is that then they didn't know who I was. I had this one, these two guys who were Sig[ma] Ep[silon]s, which we threw them off campus a couple of years ago. But they were Sig Eps. And they— I wore my college ring then and I was a Sig Ep, and they— One of them got down on his knees next to me while I was tending to another student to see my, look at my ring to make sure (laughter) that it was. And they figured they were in. They didn't have to do a stitch of work because they, you know, I was a Sig Ep also and I would take care of my brothers. I did, I gave them C's (laughter). And it was just, you know, because it's still true to a certain extent today, that students will try new faculty members to see if they, what they can get away with. And you, of course, have never done that, have you?

Schreck: No.

Levis: No? Good. Because I've had, I've had talks with new people in my department about that. I've said, "You know, they're going to try to see how much they can get away with. And you don't let them." So by now, I mean people don't take my courses unless they're willing to do the work because they know I mean what I say. And actually it's very nice because you don't get the rocks, the boneheads in your class. They don't sign up because they know that I'm going to require them to do some writing and it's going to have to be turned in on time and it's going to have to be done well. Or I won't accept it. So. Because it always helps to build a reputation early.

So anyway, that's what it was like. It was really, you know, it was very small, very few buildings, most of them wooden, sort of shacks. We would— The second year, we moved out of the French House annex for the new faculty; we moved into what stood here, the Knowles building, because the scientists, they had moved into Bush and we got their rejects, but it was actually a very nice building. It was really, you know, it had some amenities to it which— It has a big central hall and people would gather there after classes because all the classrooms were off that center hall and then the offices were sort of behind the staircases that led upstairs. The problem was the psychology department was upstairs and they had rats. And one time, I was teaching a class in 101, which had this big conference table. And we looked up and there was stuff dripping down. They had washed out the rat cages by just hosing them, and the effluent was coming down through the ceiling and landing on top of the table, it was disgusting. So that was the downside of the building. But the other part of the building was really— In fact, is that it, in the picture over there?

Zhang: No.

Levis: No? Oh okay. It was a really, it was a nice building because there was sort of a communal area right there that people could meet. I remember there was kid named Bobby Davis, who was actually, taught for us once he graduated, who during the Falkland Wars set up a table. I still have his brochure. And had a picture of me, a drawing of me looking like Kitchner (?). “His majesty’s government wants you to fight in the Falklands,” which, to try to, to get bibs a joke because they— But, yeah. It’s sort of people we’ve had that had good sense of humor.

There was another student named Dorris Jenkins (??) who, they— I, in some of my upper division classes, I require students to cite bibliography in their essays, you know? So and so says such and such, a historian says such and such. So she had, they all made up a name of the historian. And Horace Vandergrit (??) or something like that. And they all cited this guy in their final examination, and they all cited him the same way. This was a conspiracy that they’d done this. And I was going bonkers! I said, “What? Who is this! I should know this guy!” (Laughter) I mean, they were all— They almost had me convinced until I realized, Oh this is a hoax. So, students are a lot more serious now. They don’t have as much of a sense of humor sometimes. They are sometimes so credential driven that sort of the joy of learning just for the sake of learning is not always there. Anyway, I’m going on too long.

Schreck: No, that’s okay. So you were here during the tumultuous sixties and seventies.

Levis: Yes.

Schreck: Did you ever encounter any particular uprising, any conflicts or events in particular?

Levis: We had, well actually, we had a teach in on the Vietnam War. Some students hung an American flag upside down on the fence around the Sandspur bowl and the city of Winter Park was threatening to have them arrested and things like that. And we had a teach in and I talked and I talked about two of my fraternity brothers, who were killed there. And how, what an impact it had had on me. Because I was very conservative when I— Well I came from a very staunch Republican household. I was a young Republican; I was a member of the Young American for Freedom. I mean I was a card-carrying right wing conservative. And the war really had an impact and there’s other things that were involved as well, but I, and I really sort of changed. In fact, my father once told my mother-in-law that he paid to send me to college for eight years and I turned out to be a communist (laughter). I was voting; I became a democrat, but anyway.

But that, you know, that was a very exciting time because there wasn’t a lot of students who were involved. A lot of students sort of scoffed. But there was a small group of very dedicated politically, almost radical. One young woman wore a red fist on the back of her graduation gown. Another had things, messages on top of their caps and gowns at graduation. So that was in I think ’70, 1970. I don’t remember when it was, but it was— I was involved in— I belonged to an organization known as the Episcopal Peace Fellowship. And I was involved in talking to students about conscientious objector status and stuff like that, to try to help them deal with the draft. My father hired a lawyer . But there are other ways that it can be done. So yeah, it was, that was the exciting time. I look back on those times very fondly always.

Schreck: Would you mind sharing with us some of your teaching approaches? I mean, I notice you were talking about your teacher in college who was very entertaining and I noticed that's come into your teaching style having been in your class. Can you tell us more about that?

Levis: Well I came in from a state university whose idea of teaching was professor in front of 300 students at a lectern, talking. And I, when I took the job here, I made these elaborate sets of lecture notes. I mean, I had every word down there. And I would stand up there and, you know, I came down fully prepared just to read my lecture notes because that's what I— That's as I said, I had no teaching experience. And that was sort of the experience, that's what I thought college teaching was! And it was people like Eleanor Miller and my colleagues in the history department. We in the history department talk a lot about teaching. We're almost obsessive about it, we talk so much about it and it really made a difference in my approach so that I, I mean I don't lecture much, do I?

Schreck: No.

Levis: Because I found out that is not the way to get students engaged. You just see the sort of a blank stares coming across the face as they become mesmerized. And it doesn't engage them and then they, you know, and then you end up with them just regurgitating what you said on the exam. It doesn't really challenge them. So I changed my approach very early on, because I found that it wasn't really very effective. And, you know, we were encouraged.

You know, at that time, when I came here, Rollins did not put a lot of focus on publications. We did a little bit, it was expected. But it was not something that was seen as our main function. Our main function was teaching. And I've always thought that we, that that was something that was really important. Because people came here.

Kids went to state universities; they ended up in these huge classes there. The person they had contact with was a TA who really didn't give a damn about them. Because I was a TA for a semester and I didn't give a damn about them. I was much more concerned with getting my course work done, working on my dissertation, you know, those sorts of things. I couldn't care less about the students that came in. I did my obligatory office hours. Nobody showed up, which is good, because I got my work done. And you know, it was just terrible and I saw here that the faculty were really interested in the students and making a difference in their lives. And we did, because you could see people grow in a way at a small school that you couldn't in a big state university.

I mean, I only had one teacher that really knew me well as an undergraduate. And that was just by chance because I was in a— he was the teacher of the chemistry course that I took and I happened to end up in his, what we called, recitation (??) section. So he got to know me and I took him for one other class. Smith. And he actually wrote a very nice letter of recommendation for me for graduate school, which I didn't do. I wasn't interested in biology.

But I didn't see my advisor until my senior year in college. I saw the secretary. And I believed her when she said I had to take a Saturday class. She said, "All freshmen are supposed to take Saturday classes (laughter)." Lie. But I believed it. And so, you know, so that sort of personality just, I knew had not worked for me and I saw the difference here so I, you know. And it's fun. It's fun to watch students, what they become and how, you know. You get letters. I have a file of letters I have gotten over the years from people who've written back and said, you

know, Thank you for this, that, and the other thing. And it really makes a big difference. And I would not have gotten that if I had stayed the way I was. I would've been just God awfully boring (laughter).

So yeah. I mean, and I think that's true. And I think in some ways the college has moved too much toward the publish focus. I don't think it has served us well. I think that, are you discussing among the younger generation. I mean, I don't give a damn, because I'm tenured, I'm a full professor, I'm going to retire in a couple of years, and so there's nothing they can do to me. But the young faculty, I think, feel tremendous pressure and neglect some of the community aspects of being here, which I think are important. They don't spend as much time in their office so they're not as available. They, they don't—I mean one of the things I got involved with very early was interdisciplinary teaching. Because we had, when I came, freshman foundation courses. There was one on science, there was one on natural science—and one in natural science, one in social science, and one on humanities.

And this, my second year here, I taught a humanities one which was a two semester course. It was, it dealt with the seventeenth century and the eighteenth century. And it was with Eleanor Miller who, as I said, had a tremendous impact on me. And it was a wonderful experience. I learned more than the students did, just sitting with other people talking about their disciplines, their, you know, and it was just, it was a wonderful experience. And faculty members are afraid to do that now. I know that Duncan is trying to encourage people to become more involved in interdisciplinary stuff. Which I think is good. And it's, you know, we've gotten to a point where, well, you know, I taught an interdisciplinary course with a guy named Kerry Surren (??) in the English department and we had, they let us do it but we had too few students to do it. That was the whole thing, you had to have enough students to do it and do these things. And you know, we do it, and it's really a tremendous experience, so. Anyway, where was I going with that? Oh, my teaching! So.

Schreck: Okay, I was reading about the Master of Liberal Studies Program that you—

Levis: Yeah.

Schreck: —helped start. Could you tell us a little more about that?

Levis: There was a— When I came back from my sabbatical in '84 and they had just hired a new dean for the Holt school named Bob Miller and I had— After I got my dissertation done, I had started teaching at the Holt school, which I loved. The Holt students are phenomenal because they are older, they have life experience, their main interest is not where they're going to get the next date or the next drink, they're often paying for their own education so they have more at stake. They're really, they come to class prepared. They talk. You don't have to throw things at them; they don't sit there with their baseball caps on backwards in the back of the class like this. Not that I'm casting dispersions on anybody or anything. And so I, you know I taught in the Holt School and I'd become the director of the humanities program in the Holt School. And so, Bob Miller had all the people that were involved in the Holt School come over his house for a trim the tree party. And Bob and I sat on his back patio getting fairly lubricated, and talked about some ideas.

One of them was to create an introductory course for Holt Students. So many of them come from junior colleges and didn't know a lot about what a liberal education's about, didn't

have certain basic skills, and it was, you know, it was a sort of a gate keeping course called Introduction to Liberal Arts, which we still teach. And we talked about a graduate program, because he had, I had not heard of them. He had heard about graduate liberal studies programs. There was, it was sort of a new movement and he said, "This would be perfect for the Holt School!" And so I was involved in both of those projects. I wrote, actually, two grant proposals to the National Endowment for the Humanities to start both of those programs and they were both funded. In fact, I had dinner one night with Lynne Chaney, the vice president's wife (laughter). And because she was, she's so conservative. She was head of the National Endowment for the Humanities at the time, a big push on traditional education. She was very much opposed to feminism and all the new approaches that were taking place. And I sat there and talked about our program and made it as conservative as I possibly could. You know, the great books approach. I don't know. This was just an over dinnertime conversation except we were at Johns Hopkins at a meeting, and we got funded.

So, I've written two of the three NH grants that this college has gotten. I'm very proud. And then I was the first director of that and it's a perfect fit for the whole school because these are people who, it was designed for people that'd gotten their undergraduate degrees in business, they slept through their liberal arts education courses, or they drank so much that they don't remember anything about their liberal arts courses. And they all of a sudden come to a realization that there's a big gap in their education. And so they take, this graduate level work, but they're really coming back because they want to learn. They want to know something about the Greeks, and they want to know something about art, music, and stuff like that. And they're a wonderful group of people. And I designed it with Bob Miller, who's dean now, and Socky O'Sullivan. In fact, we did it in the club car of an Amtrak train coming back from that conference in Johns Hopkins, because Bob Miller was afraid to fly. And so he took the train whenever we could and so we took the train up and back and we planned the program in the club car of an Amtrak train coming back. Because I really did believe, I liked the great books approach, it was a fairly traditional approach. O'Sullivan wanted something much different and so what we did was combine the two. So it has a core of sort of a great books approach and then electives, which are supposed to non-traditional sorts of things. It's a really, it's a very exciting program.

And I was director of it until I got into a quarrel with the president and the, well I guess he got involved with it. They wanted to raise institution and I was opposed to it because I felt it would take—I did not want it to become a program designed for rich Winter Park junior league types who could afford to pay, because yeah, we were relatively expensive. At the time, Duke was charging twenty-two hundred dollars, of course. Dartmouth also had a program, which charged like three thousand dollars. I mean, they were outrageous and I didn't want us to do that because I thought it would just cut off some really good people. We had a lot of teachers who did not want to have, they had to take courses, they did not want to take education courses, but they could do the MLS program and they really liked that, because it was actually interesting material rather than education courses (laughter). So, it's been, we've had really interesting people. We had a bankruptcy judge, who did it. And Karen Generman (??), she was wonderful. There were doctors and stuff like, people like that. They really were excellent students.

Schreck: What other research and scholarly oriented activities have you been involved in?

Levis: I am, well, I am the founding editor of the *Journal of Graduate Liberal Studies*, which is the official journal of the association of graduate and liberal studies programs. I was on the board. Rollins—I got conned into holding one of their annual meetings here and in order to, you know, entice me they put me on the board and I was treasurer or something like that. But the president at the time was a guy named Charles Strand (??) from DePauw University in Chicago and he said, “We,” you know, he said, “We should have a journal for the association, so that students, graduate students and faculty who teach in these programs can have an outlet for some of the stuff that they’ve done.” And I said, I thought that was, “I think that’s a great idea. Is there anything I can do to help?” He said, “Yeah, you can be the first editor.” (Laughter) So I am, still. And so I do that, and I’ve published not a lot. I mean, I’m a very slow worker, I’m a perfectionist. I can’t let things go because they’re never quite good enough, and I’ve been involved with a lot of other things as well, but I’ve mostly published stuff on English church history in the eighteenth century.

Charlie Edmondson (??) and I did an article once on the Russian famine during the Russian revolution, mainly on a bet because he made some disparaging comments about the Church of England, which I could not abide. He said that the archbishop of Canterbury named, a man by the name of Davidson (??), Randall Davidson (??), had, he said he discovered, withheld aid to people starving in Russia unless the Soviet Union eased up on its persecution of members of the Orthodox Church. You know, I said, “That certainly couldn’t happen. The Anglican Church does not do that sort of thing.” And so I was on sabbatical; I was doing some other research, but I also went through Randall Davidson’s (??) papers and some other stuff while I was over there and discovered of course I was correct. And he was wrong. And we jointly wrote an article about the, you know, what had happened. Davidson (??) made it very, tried very clearly to separate the two. He was protesting the way the Soviet, the new Soviet government, was treating the Orthodox clergy; on the other hand he pushed very strongly for famine relief. So he really did say these were two separate things and he didn’t— And when it was suggested to him by some people, in actually the foreign office, the English foreign office, the British foreign office, to combine them he refused. So I was vindicated.

And I’ve done some other— I just, I recently had an article published on church music. I just sent off an article on church architecture. I’m interested in the impact that politics has on the church in a variety of ways. So I have this one article showing the, you know, that changes in the government and politics have an influence on the type of music that was acceptable in the church. And same thing with architecture. I’m now working on preaching in the same notion, the types of sermons that were preached. So, you know, that’s the sort of things I’m really interested in. I have this one diary that I’ve been transcribing. You’ve probably seen me up there in front of the Microfilm machine for years because this man’s handwriting is absolutely abysmal and I’m typing it out and trying to annotate it. So, stuff like that.

Schreck: Can you tell us about your involvement with the community of Rollins?

Levis: Ah, I have always been pretty active in college governments. I’ve been president of the faculty twice; I’ve been chairman of just about every committee that we’ve had. And you know, because I think that’s an important part of being a faculty member. So I’ve been very involved in doing that kind of stuff. And I have the crown to prove it. The last time when Carol, I call her Carol Owers (??) president of the faculty, and she had me crowned. She gave me a crown and scepter, which I have in my office. Do you remember that?

Zhang: Yeah, I do. I do.

Levis: Yeah, a testament to my sort of loyalist tendencies. And in the community I guess, actually I haven't actually this last year but I always try to do some volunteer work in the community. I've worked; I volunteered at Sentar (?), I volunteered at Health and Hope, I was involved with the Differo with the Boys and Girls Club of America, you know, so I try to do that sort of thing, that's important. I haven't as of late because I was on sabbatical and I haven't; the group I was working with doesn't need me anymore. So I've got nothing else to do. And I'm involved with other things like the English speaking union; I've been a member of the English speaking union since I got here. Been on their board and often do programs for them within the scholarship community. And I, you know, and I often, it's because we have so many retired folks in the community. There's groups like the University Club and they're always looking for free lectures so I've lectured to all sorts of groups, you know doing sort of dog and pony shows, which they love. I try to make them slightly scandalous. Get them to titter. Get their blood pressure up above ten. And so, I've been involved. And I haven't been involved locally that much, politically, until this last election and all that's been going on. I'm sure my father's rolling in his grave over radical liberal organizations like that.

Schreck: Okay, so you've been with the college for nearly forty years now.

Levis: Thirty-seven. I just finished my thirty-seventh year.

Schreck: Right. How do you view your career at Rollins? Any significant moments that you remember?

Levis: Well I think, well I mentioned the two NEH Grants and the MLS program. I mean, the MLS is the dream I've wanted. That has been my single most important contribution to the college. I don't know, you know. It's interesting talking about this because I'm sort of winding down, I plan to retire in a few years and move back to civilization out of Florida. Are you a Floridian?

Schreck: Yes.

Levis: Oh, I'm sorry.

Schreck: I am too.

Levis: So, you know, that's been important to me. And I really love the place. I mean we've had some awful faculty; we've had some awful presidents. And things have not gone quite as far as I would've hoped to come, but I mean, the college reputation has improved significantly. We were, as I said, the only thing my former mother in law knew about the place is that it had a good tennis team when I applied for a job here and I don't think that's the case anymore. So it's really, I feel really good about being here. I'd looked, I'd had some— at one point, I thought of leaving and I applied for some administrative positions. I was a semifinalist for a couple of them, but they didn't pan out so it's just as well. For one thing, we looked at,

there was an offer at Baltimore but we didn't like Baltimore so it wouldn't have worked out anyway.

So it's been good. There's been the really wonderful students. I mean, I, there's this one— I took students, three times, to Britain during winter term, when we had a winter term, and they're the people that I've really gotten the closest with, some of the people I took along on those trips. And there's this one woman by the name of Colleen well, it's Shoemaker (??) now, she wasn't married at the time. And she babysat for us when she was here. She taught my son to read when he was four years old, a book called *The Giving Tree* by, what's the guy's name? He also wrote *Where the Sidewalk Ends*.

Schreck: Oh yes. I don't remember either.

Levis: We can fill this in later. Anyway. And, she's kept in touch over the years. Her son came to Rollins. He didn't work out here, he just didn't work. But I was his advisor. She's helped me house hunt in Philadelphia because she said I have to move to Swathmore (??). I don't know if we're going to move to Swathmore (??) or not but you know. So people like that have really made this well a worth it as far as, you know— And I don't think you can get that at a big school. I don't think you get those sorts of connections with people who hound you. Michael Del Calliano (??), who I guess is on the Alumni Board. Every time he's in town he comes and he visits me and we sit and chat for an hour. And that's really sort of special.

Schreck: Moving to a lighter note, could you tell us who was responsible for the department of history's yearbook pictures?

Levis: Well this one, this one was not the way we actually wanted it to be. I had suggested that we have a picture where Jack was standing with his back to the camera at the urinal and Charlie Edmondson be, Charlie Edmondson wore— Charlie Edmondson was colorblind. And had absolutely the world's worst taste in clothing and often wore colors that clashed and so what I wanted was Charlie sitting on the stall with his pants down around his legs but just because of the bad clothing. My colleagues vetoed that and so this is what we did instead. And so this was one of them. I actually had dark hair at that time, didn't I? This was, this was— We all came up with these strange ideas. This one we did because Thad Seymour did magic.

Schreck: Right, right.

Levis: You know, that was the magic one. When we weren't talking about teaching, we were talking about some of the yearbook pictures that we did.

Schreck: You all started a trend. The science department picked up on it and—

Levis: Copycats! There's just no originality.

Schreck: I know!

Levis: Did you see the one where you couldn't see us because we were so far away? They moved us, when they built this building; they moved us over to the Park Avenue building.

Schreck: You were not even visible

Levis: We were not even visible. And Charlie use to call it "Casa Siberia" (laughter). Instead of Casa Iberia. So anyway, yes, these were actually I thought rather clever of us. But we started; we started it. And then the other copycats. But now nobody takes department pictures anymore. I don't know why. They use to call us up and then we'd sit there and brainstorm. I think the last one we did was when where we were on a swing set over in the children's. We'd done the swing set before when _____ (??) came, so when Leann Wheeler (??) came, we did that one.

Schreck: There's a feature in the *Olin Info* newsletter, "Books That Made a Difference". Are there any books that influenced your life particularly?

Levis: Well, I think my interest in religious history was sparked by Roman Banes' book, *Here I Stand*; that would be one. Of the history books I've read, that probably had a greater impact on the things I was interested in than anything else.

I think the *Tower Treasure* was very important to me. Don't know what it is? It's one of the Hardy Boys mysteries; it was the first one I read. And it really got me reading. And I inundated my grandchildren with the *Harry Potter* books and other books because, and actually it's gotten the eldest one to read a lot. And it's really made a difference. I mean, just the fact that I became a reader. I guess I had an influence because my mother was a reader. My mother just read a book, you know, she read a book a day practically. She just devoured them and I think that had a lot to do with— My father didn't read anything but newspapers and books that attacked Franklin Delano Roosevelt. But other than that, yeah. He didn't read and my brothers, neither of my brothers read. They're both engineers and they don't have a book and they don't read. And I think I just got intrigued. And another book that my aunt and uncle gave me that I reread recently, it's very interesting. Stuff like that. So I think just the fact of reading had a tremendous impact on the way I am. You know, I read, I'll have five books going at the same time and it's just wonderful, stuff like that. And it's just wonderful. But as far, you know, and there's, I mean, there's been other things along the way that have had an impact, but I think books are just really important to me. Oh my God, this is interesting stuff. It's just fascinating. The whole relationship between politics and theology and the role the church has played in our society and so forth. It's just really fascinating.

Zhang: Okay, we still have a few more minutes. I have a couple of follow up questions. You've been under—

Levis: How much am I paid for this (laughter)?

Zhang: —four administrations. McKean, Critchfield, Seymour, Rita, and now Duncan. Could you give us your reflections of their administrations?

Levis: Hugh was a nice a man. I have to give him credit for that. He was not a very effective administrator, leader, you know. He couldn't ask people for money. Rollins missed its opportunity in the fifties to raise gazillions of dollars because that was the time when everybody was giving lots of money to colleges and he just wouldn't go out and ask for it. I was approached, this was the end of my freshman year, by a group of faculty who asked me to sign a petition to the board of trustees calling for McKean's removal and I signed it. And I was untenured, I could've been thrown out the next day, which I obviously wasn't. So he was short of let go at the end of my first year. Well he wasn't being let go, he was made chancellor, which means he was kept upstairs.

And they brought in Jack Critchfield and he was like a used car salesman. Smiling Jack Critchfield, the man with a forty watt smile, the glad hander, surrounded himself with basically corrupt—Charlie Zellers (??) who gave himself a mortgage for his house at like, three percent when mortgages were anywhere around thirteen. People like that. Just really— The guy he brought in to head the Holt School, which was the School for Continuing Education, Dan Weaver, whose wife always said, “Don't I look a lot like Doris Day?” And she'd back you into a corner and bore you to death. But anyway, he went for the lowest common denominator for the Holt School. The Holt School was seen as strictly a way of making money for the college. And there were some very good students there but there were just some awful things that went on. I offered a course where I, he called me up and said, “You have that many books?” He said, “Normally for a Holt class, we only have one. These students don't have time to read.” Wait a minute. No. So, and, you know, and Jack went on and went what he was meant to do. He went into the business world. You know, went to United Telegraph, Telephone, and then to Florida Power and managed to sell off both of them. He got both of them in a position where they could be sold off and the stockholders made lots of money by having it sold off, which is why we got rid of Florida Power, because he— Well that's another story.

Thad. I really, I mean of all the presidents we had, I like Thad the best, because he was the most like a college president. Even though he was much more a student president than a faculty president. He was always very much closer to the students than he was to the faculty. And so, there were some issues there. I was head of the housing review board, which, every year, reviewed fraternities and sororities for their housing, and we had a charge and it was to review the fraternities. Each year they had to set up some goals and objectives and they could keep their housing as long as they did it, but if they didn't, if they didn't do these things that we said they needed to do, then they'd lose their house.

She's a marvelous typer! Are you getting all this down?

Velez: Most of it (laughs) hopefully.

Levis: And, so Thad called me into his office and said, “Now I know that it's quite likely that if the board meets this year that the KA's will be kicked off campus.” And he said, “What I'd like you to do is just not call the board into session. Just, please, we don't need that controversy right now.” And I said, “Thad, I can't do that! That's, that's, you know, it's faculty mandated. We have to go through the faculty and have them pull the plug on them, and I can't do that.” And of course exactly that happened. He refused to remove them from their house, but they were supposedly kicked out and then they were given another year. He finally did get rid of them. But, so I went to him, we had a _____ (??) party at the end of the school year after graduation. You ever wonder why the faculty won't be there to greet you after you graduate?

We've all gone up to the _____ (??) party. Well, it's not a _____ (??) party anymore. But it use to be over at Hugh McKean's mansion. Hugh would put out a big tent and there were hors d'oeuvre and _____ (??) were made by John Tiedtke and they were actually very good. Did you ever have— no, you weren't here; you haven't been here long enough to know about that. They were actually very good. The ones the Beans bakes are just lousy.

But we would go. We always said it was like the serfs being called up to the manor house after the harvest had been collected (laughter) because I was sitting there one time with my _____ (??) in the hands and inside the house, looking at this painting and saying, "My God, it's an El Greco." And it was. And so he had an El Greco. Anyway. And so I went up to Thad at the end of the, during this, and I said, "Thad I know you and I disagreed this year but I just want you to know that even though we might have different approaches, you know, our goals are the same for the betterment of the college." And he just ripped me apart. He was so angry, because I caused trouble this year for him. Anyway, he apologized the next day. But despite that, I really think that he, you know, and he did a lot of quiet work that Rita benefited a lot from as far as fundraising. She really— he cultivated the Cornells at the beginning and other people that have given money to the college since then mainly during Rita's time. So a lot of the groundwork was done by Thad first.

Rita, she never understood us. She was not a student president; she wasn't a faculty president. She was a fundraiser, and she was good at it, she excelled at that. And she and I differed on a lot on certain issues, especially domestic partner benefits because she was scared to death to go to the board, and I pressed her on at every occasion I could get. And then we finally got them but it took a while, and she thought I was a pain in the neck. And I was. But she, you know, I remember having this conversation with her one night on campus just before I was going to a Holt class and she said, "I don't understand why the faculty has so much respect for the Holt students, the Holt faculty, or the whole program. We should be focusing on arts and sciences because that's where our money comes from." And I said, "Yeah, but you have to understand that this really energizes me as a teacher, working with these students." And the funny thing is she came from that type of program. She got her degree as a part time evening student and she just didn't understand our devotion to it. And so, you know, I mean, she did a lot for the college, I respect her for that, I don't respect her as being as engaged academically with the faculty as Thad was. Thad was just a nice person all around.

And I don't know about Duncan. I haven't quite figured him out yet. I wasn't here in the fall because I was on sabbatical and I just haven't, you know, gotten that much impression. Although some of the stuff he's done and said I feel were very good. I think he handled the whole Boy Scouts issue very well and stuff like that. Because we could never get Rita to deal with that. She kept waiting for, you know— She kept avoiding it because she didn't want to cause any controversy. The faculty had voted to defund the Boy Scouts from the United Way campaign and she wouldn't do it because of the discrimination policy. And Lewis Duncan came in and just did it. So.

Zhang: You mentioned about your student trip to your mother country (Levis crosses himself, laughter). Tell us a little bit more about those trips and other interesting courses.

Levis: They were interesting. I always had a sort of an odd collection of people. The first time I had some students, Ken Blakely (??) was there and some others from the group that still comes back who were just terrific. And along that trip there was a guy that taught here who

had actually been principal of the old Park Avenue school, his name was Nelson Glass. He and his wife Jane came on the trip and they were in their early seventies and they were more energetic than our students, which was amazing. They kept up with me, and I walk very fast. And they just boiled ahead and the students were straggling on behind (laughter). But I had some really interesting students here, and they really liked it. It was a five-week tour. We spent three weeks in London and two weeks on the road. We went by charter bus and we went all around the country. And I had some kids who were really into it and did the work and other kids who were there and didn't do the work and— At that time we gave grades and I gave these students C's and they were just horrified. I said, "You didn't do the work! You showed no interest. You know, I'm not just going to give you an A." Then I had a group of Kappa's. You're not a Kappa, are you?

Schreck: No.

Levis: Are you a Kappa?

Velez: Nah-uh (laughs)

Levis: A group of Kappa's that, A: When I was on the trip I always gave them passes to the underground so that we could get around quickly. In London, you don't take cabs because they take forever. The traffic jams are just horrible. And so they had these passes, the Kappa's wouldn't use them. They didn't take 'public transportation'. It was beneath them (laughter). And so they'd take cabs and they were always late for everything. And all they wanted to do was shop at Harrods. And, you know, Harvey Neck's (??) and stuff like that. They had no interest in this stuff. So one time, we went to the British Museum, and I gave them a checklist of stuff that they were to see and to write some reactions to it. And I said, "You know, just go and explore on your own but make sure you see these things." I figured that when I sort of set them free in places like that, they didn't stay there very long. So I went outside and stood at the entrance and within two minutes after I set them free, they were walking out, they were walking out on their way to Harrods I'm sure. I said, "You better get back there because right now you're flunking this class." After they had paid, you know, an outrageous amount of money.

And then the last trip was the time that Colleen McCraine (??) went with me with the guy she, they were a sort of a thing at the time, it never worked out. That was a wonderful trip because when we were taking the bus trip, we got caught in an ice storm, and the bus couldn't go up the hill or couldn't back up the other way, and so we were just stuck in this valley on our way to a stately home that had been opened for us just for our visit. But the students wrote a short story, it was a movie script called *Bus Slide* (laughter), and it was about the trip. And that was a good group. And interesting. You know, that was interesting, because you really got to know them well because you spent so much time with them.

Let's see, what other course? I really liked that course I mentioned before about the freshman foundation course on seventeenth and eighteenth century. That was exciting for me. We did slide presentations to sort of introduce the themes of the course with music. And we start off by a shot of, a portrait of Louis XIV, and is it a Beatles song, "Here Comes the Sun"?

Schreck: Yes.

Levis: Yeah. We played “Here Comes the Sun” to open that one up with Louis XIV and stuff like that. It was fun, real fun. And that’s the sort of thing, when you’re working those things out, it’s so interesting. We, I’m in charge of the Introduction to the Liberal Arts at the Holt School and I’ve taught at that several times and we do those sort of things too. We sit around and plan these courses. “Oh, wouldn’t it be great to do this and that!” You know, and of course the students don’t appreciate this. But we have a wonderful time coming up with those things. We did a course called Madness Creativity with a woman who’s since died, an artist. And then another course called Fundamentalism, Art, and the Society, which was fun, because those are the sort of things I’m interested in. So I’ve been involved with that. And then we did a course with Edge and Barbara Carson and Carol Lower (??) called All in the Family, and it was about the history of the family. It was great. So those sort of interdisciplinary teachings and courses I’m really fond of. They’ve always been especially exciting for me.

Zhang: You know, the last year you were awarded the Most Challenging Award by SGA. You already talked about your approach. What are the students’ reactions after they took your course? Do they still hate you?

Levis: Oh yeah, I mean some of them do! Right?

Schreck: Some are foolish enough to come back for more.

Levis: Yeah, and some are foolish. Well I figure that’s always a good sign, you know. I think that the faculty members who don’t challenge the students actually don’t have much respect for them, because they don’t believe they can do the work. I believe they can do it. I really, I believe that they are perfectly capable of doing this stuff. If they need help, I’ll be glad to give it. I’ll read rough drafts if they want me to. I mean, I’ll be glad to help them if they seek it out because I know they can do it. And it’s when you say, “Well, yeah, you should just blow this off” it’s demeaning to the students. And you know, they’re paying a hell of a lot of money to come here. And if they’re coming away without ever having learned anything, they just wasted a hundred and sixty thousand dollars. And you know, it may be as far as they’re concerned a good way to spend their cash but it doesn’t seem very useful to me because, you know. And as I said, the things I appreciate are the students who write back and say, You know, this has really helped me. This sort of, the methods we teach in our course about research, I get reactions from the students at grad school saying they’ve used this and they think it’s really helped them. And that makes you feel good. But, you know. Claire, who’s the secretary for the MLS program, even they, some of the students who hear about my reputation, she warns them, “All you have to do is exactly what he tells you to do. If you do what he tells you to do, you’ll get a good grade. It’s just when you don’t follow directions.” Right?

Schreck: Right.

Zhang: Okay, thank you so much, Barry.

Levis: That’s it!

Zhang: We really enjoyed your conversation and thank you for your contribution to our oral history project.

Levis: Was this for me?

Zhang: Yes.

Levis: Oh good, I'll drink it.