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### Interview with Gene DeKovic, 1998

Columbia College Chicago

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## Gene DeKovic

*All right. Today is January 22nd, 1999, and this is an interview with Gene DeKovic, who is a former administrator and faculty and Board member at Columbia College Chicago.*

**And we'll start with the—if you could answer the question: What were the circumstances that brought you here to Columbia?**  
OK. I was recommended to Mike Alexandroff by Susan Cartstrom, who... I'm not sure whether she—I'm pretty sure she had been a president, as I had been a president of the Society of Typographic Arts. Anyway, that's how... Susan recommended Herb Pinzke, who went on to spend many years as an instructor there, an adjunct lecturer, I guess you would call him, in Graphic Design, and, in talking with Mike, found out that I was more into information theory and communications than specifically limited to design. And I began teaching a course in... let me think a minute... I think it was just called Communications I, for a beginning to that subject. Later on, I expanded that to Communications II, and then I had a Senior Seminar, where seniors worked on their graduation projects.

**Can you give the dates of when you came to Columbia? The year?**  
I'm gonna say 1963 or '64.

**OK.**  
And I think I stopped working with the school... probably '72 or maybe '73.

**OK. Could you describe those early days?**  
Sure.

**Because that was when Mike was re-organizing the entire College, and kind of decided, you know, it was sink or swim time.**

Well, when I first came in to talk with Mike, the school was on Wabash Avenue, and there weren't very many rooms to it. It was—let me see, I think I—maybe one semester, or two semesters later, we moved over to Ohio Street and Lake Shore Drive.

**Mm-hmm.**

And there was still a fair amount of growth in the school in those years. Now, I left the school before it moved over to Michigan Avenue. It was very small. You know, it was connected with some college or school that was in education, that was giving education degrees.

Right. And Columbia was giving education degrees, but most of those education courses—well, all of those education courses were coming from that other school, whatever it was, I don't remember the name of it. And that was an old school, like Columbia College, which, as I recall, started about 1892 or 1893 as a school of speech for young ladies. And then when radio came along in the '20s, and so on, then it became a broadcasting school, sort of. It was probably not much different in that—qualitatively, at that time, than it is today. The students were eager, they all wanted to be disc jockeys, or film directors, you know.

**Mm-hmm.**

And the staff, the faculty was a group of men who had—mostly men, I... I have to stop and think, I... yeah, we had some female teachers, I think, then - who were attracted by Mike. Mike was the

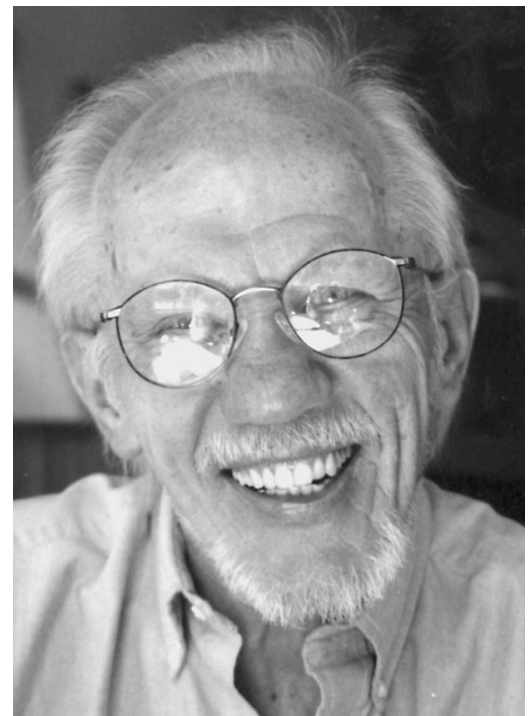
big magnet. When you talked to him for five minutes, you know, you wanted to just say, "Where do I sign?" And it wasn't for much money, as I recall, we didn't—\$20 a class or something like that. But there was a spirit. And a big part of that spirit - I remember talking with Mike about this one time - was that the kids, the students, really liked the school, because we treated them as though they were real. You know?

**Mm-hmm.**

And we were there to help. And help them become something. It was an inspiring time. As we progressed through the '60s and the protest movements and so on, the school was active in that, and people felt strongly about those matters, you know?

**Right.**

It was about the time that I left that the school was being accredited, going through that process. And I didn't have a degree, I had



done everything for a Master's degree at the University of Chicago except a thesis, but I didn't have a Bachelor's degree, 'cause at that time you could take tests and come in on graduate work.

**Right.**

So I was sort of... once the school was becoming accredited, then a degree became essential. And so—for a variety of reasons, that wasn't the only reason... let's see, that was in the '70s... yeah, there was a lot of stirrings in my life, and I thought it was time to make some changes. So, within a few years, we had moved to California, and I've been doing other work.

**Who are some of the people that you remember best at Columbia, and why do they stick out in your memory?**

Hmm... I can remember the people better than the names.

*(Laughs)*

Ah, the students had a man who worked for... I think it was WGN TV, um, who was in production, you know? And he really knew the workings of a TV studio. A gung-ho guy. He and I had our desks in the same room for a while. Maybe the name will come to mind. You know, my database is so full now, it takes my hard drive a long time to drag data, you know? Um... and there was a film guy who was very nice. Gee, this is terrible, actually.

**That's all right. And if they come to you during the interview, just, you know—**

And um, we had—I had recruited the man who headed up the making of educational films for Encyclopedia Britannica Films. So that, you know, everybody there, teaching at that time, was a work-in person.

**Right.**

A professional. And we may not have been great teachers as such, but we were able to expose the youngsters to the real thing, you know? Uh... oh, gee, I can't—

**Let's move on from that, and then, you know, like I said—**

Listen, I can send you, or I can call you, and fill that in.

**OK.**

'Cause I think—I was doing catalogs for the school for some years, and I bet I have one or two of those around, and I can tell you exactly who those people were.

**OK. And I sent you a biographical information sheet, so you could attach it to that as well.**  
Oh, great.

**It should be fine.**  
Great.

**OK, we can move on. And could you describe the mission of Columbia College, you know, as you understood it, or as it evolved in those early years of the school?**

Well, the mission was to provide an education to those that wanted it. Uh, we had open admissions, but then the student had to produce, you know? Had to do the work, and achieve the skills that were necessary for that particular area. Other than that, Mike felt very strongly about being a door open to everyone. No, you know, no gender, no color, no... no barriers at all. But once they were there, they had to do the work, they had to apply themselves. And there was... the humanity of the school was incredible. We probably fumbled in many ways, in technical things—not technical, of school technique, you know, educational technique. But I can remember, we did the counseling for the students on their

[dentals] and so on. And I can remember one student saying—he wanted to change his major, and he was very hesitant about it, and I said, "Gee, that's great." And he was perplexed. And I said, "Well, look it, what you're doing here going to school is sampling a universe. And if the tastes that you're getting in that sampling are not productive for you, you know, you should move on to something else. That's what school's all about. Why wait until you're out in the working world, doing something you're not really happy with, and wishing you could make a change?" So it was that kind of attitude about it. You're here to learn, you're here to be exposed to a variety of things, and it's up to you to respond to those, that material, and not to feel that you have to follow any particular path. And, you know, a lot of the kids came in wanting to be disc jockeys, and they left, I'm sure, deciding that they were going to write the great American novel, or the great film scripts, that they changed while they were there, you know, that we broadened their perspectives, their horizons, so much, just by being who we were. None of us were—down specific slots, you know? The faculty. So that was—I'm not sure if I answered your question, but that, I remember that. And there were other incidents like that, that were—the students could come to us with all kinds of questions. Two men that I now remember that were very central to the school was Harry Bouras, the artist, and Bill Russo, music. Others will come to mind later.

**And why do you remember them specifically?**

One could hardly forget them.

*(Laughs)* We had a soul-searching

conference held up in a hotel, up north of Chicago, and we spent about four days defining the school, you know.

**Mm-hmm.**

And everybody let their hair down, and Harry and Bill were most vocal about things. They were artists, you know.

**Mm-hmm.**

More of an artist than I am. So you can't forget them. Harry was the one who, in the elevators, as we were going up, filled with students, he said, "The only thing wrong with masturbation is you don't meet any interesting people." That kind of a approach to saying "Well, you know, things can vary greatly. You can do all kinds of things. Nothing is forbidden or taboo."

**Mm-hmm.**

That's an old joke now, but at the time, it was very startling.

**(Laughs) Can you describe these conferences? Did you attend more than one?**

Well, we only had one that I knew of. Now, there probably were others later on.

**What was that like?**

Well, it was, you know, a debate on what we should be doing, what we were about and so on, and as with anything like that, you can take a major thrust and it'll have all shades of possible interpretations, you know? And meanings. And so then it involved rather intensive things. Mike was wanting to get more input from the faculty, and more, I suppose, individual... actions, you know, taking things on their own, and so on, and really become participants in the philosophy of the school. And, um... we all did that, to whatever degree we

could, but Mike was the major thrust, you know. He couldn't—as long as he was there, it was going to be a supplement to Mike, not a replacement of philosophy, you know?

**Mm-hmm. You had said that after five minutes with Mike Alexandroff you were ready to sign on the dotted line. Can you describe his personality and character further, you know, to illustrate what you meant by that?**

Well, he was... probably still is, maybe even more so now, mad at the world that dwells on privilege. And excludes people. And that's the kind of spirit that I was... having done communication studies at the University of Chicago, and especially a minor in philosophy was wonderful for me. And so I was ripe for this kind of rhetoric, and I didn't care—you know, Mike, at times, sounded like an unconfirmed Marxist, which was fine, you know. But... you didn't hear much of that, at least I didn't hear much of that in the world that I was working in. I was doing analysis work for publishers and for advertising agencies and so on, and here somebody was sounding more like Thomas (recorder cuts off) people that I'd been working with, you know?

**Mm-hmm.**

And I assume that that would be true for most of the adjunct faculty, at that time they were all working in the world of promotion and communication and so on. And practical people didn't talk about those kinds of things. Unquote, you know. And Mike did, and that was attractive. Also, he had incredible respect for the individual. You know, he stroked me probably more than anybody else ever did. And a lot of it was just simple bull, but it was pleasant to hear, you know?

**Mm-hmm.**

So that was what attracted—and I'm sure that would be true of anybody. Another great name that didn't last too long, I think he was too sensitive for the school, was Jim Newberry, a photographer. And he'd come from the Institute of Design, and he headed up the development of the Photography, still Photography Department.

**Mm-hmm. What do you mean by too sensitive? Or why would this have been—**

Jim was a very gentle person, very, very gentle. It was like, you know... the passing of the elevated train on Wabash would disturb him, you know? I can remember Mike saying "He's such a great guy, but he listens you to death." Jim would stand there, you're talking, and you finish talking, and he stands there with those unblinking eyes, and you feel compelled to say something more, and pretty soon you're saying gibberish, you know?

**(Laughs)** He was a wonderful person, a wonderful photographer. Very sensitive. I've lost touch with him, and I feel badly about that.

**And what about Bill Russo? How would you describe him, or what is one of your favorite memories of him?**

Well, Bill was a... he started the Center for New Music there, and he had done the same thing, he had been doing the same thing in London. Apparently he had been connected with Mike in some way, earlier, and then he came back, and... Bill attracted... Some first-class musicians played up—I mean, jazz musicians that I was very impressed with would come and play with this group, and you know, not for money. And he had done some composing, which—he was just a first rank, you know,

music person, which meant that he had to be a pretty high quality individual. He was a pain the butt to work with, and, you know, at times, sounded like a crybaby, but he seemed to get what he wanted. *(Laughs)*

**Did your experience at Columbia change your vision of what education was, or what it could be?**

Probably so. I hadn't thought too much about it, I was—there were things about what took place when I was at Chicago that bothered me, as far as the procedure and the process was concerned. Um...

**Like what?**

Oh, I can't—I can't say. Some of it was bureaucratic, and so on.

**OK.**

And my committee, the committee I was working under, was an interdisciplinary committee on communications. Uh... they were not too sharp. Those guys were not too sharp. And yet they were doing, you know, very well in the school. And I think they could not—I put challenges on them to look forward to what it is they wanted to accomplish, and I would write out these—I remember writing out a lengthy paper and saying "Now, there's a big gap between me and you. And here's where I sit." And I laid out three or four pages, and all I got back were practically correcting typos rather than addressing the issues, you know? It was that kind of thing that bothered me, and I felt that the—if I was going to be involved in education, I really had a responsibility to students. To level with them, to make sure that I had the stuff they needed. Or else send them somewhere else. You know? Um, that kind of idea, I

think, was really brought home at Columbia. Really brought home. 'Cause all of a sudden now, I was on the other side of the desert. And I saw—and Mike reinforced that, in everything he said and did.

**During the 10 years or so that you were here, do you remember any specific events that you feel were particularly important in the history of the school, or in your experience at Columbia? You mentioned, you know, the 1960s and the protest movements, and that the school participated or the students participated in that. Uh-huh.**

**Any, you know—could you expand on that, or are there any other examples?**

I can't think of any, you know, really turning points. The process of the school, the progress and process of the school, was cumulative. It kept—we kept adding curriculum. Um, we kept adding facilities. You know, when they built the television studio... in the building on Lake Shore Drive—

**Right.**

That was a big step forward, in terms of... providing an environment which the students would be facing when they got out into the world, if they went into that field. Um... a rather healthy kind of growth rate, I had the feeling that the growth rate accelerated in the '70s. Obviously, it had to, and in the '80s, to be—what have they got, 9,000 students now?

**Almost, right, over 8,000.**

Yeah, well, I think when I started, we probably didn't have 100, really.

**Right.**

So... but there were no, you know, big turning points that I recall, or anything that was an epiphany that changed everybody's vision.

**How did Columbia fit into the larger culture at the time of the '60s?**

Well, we fit in quite well. We had a—I remember we had a conference called "Art in the Inner City." And it involved, you know, a lot of black folk, and they were excited about it, 'cause they were looking for... connection into the establishment, as it were. Not that we were the establishment, but we looked like we might have been part of it. And that conference, as I recall, got a lot of publicity, and was very good for the school, and very good for people's perception of what the school was about. Um, the blacks—I can remember one black man saying to Mike Alexandroff, he says, "You know, I'm not mad at you, but you're the only one I can reach out and hit," you know. The idea that they were so angry at the white establishment. And, as they pointed out, what you really needed was a—there was more art in the inner city than there was in the outer city. The suburbs were devoid of art, relative to the kind of art that was being produced in the ghetto. Um, there was a growing awareness, throughout the whole community, of Columbia College, year by year.

**Mm-hmm.**

Then—let's see, well, that was '74, so [another day] is the Dance Department had a big space up north, Broadway, I guess it was, Clark Street, I'm not sure which. And the school was constantly doing things in dance and in music and in art and the public was coming in to those things, you know?

**Mm-hmm.**

That was a—I don't see that as being any revolutionary steps, it was just evolutionary growth.



**Well, oftentimes, colleges are so isolated from any kind of community, they're kind of these little islands set off, you know, far away.**

I know, I know. Well, that was another part of Mike's philosophy. He wanted the College to be out into the community. And at that time, there was... three or four were kind of—there was the dance thing, I remember distinctly. I'm sure there was—there was a theater thing somewhere else.

**Right.**

Oh, and theater—Lucille Strauss in Theater, that was her married name. She was a Goldberg, her brother was Marshall Goldberg, the architect who built those... what do you call them, corn cob buildings? Along the river?

**Oh, yeah. Yeah.**

Know which ones I mean?

**Do you mean the Marina Towers?**

No. This would be... I think they're just west of Wabash... or State, on the north bank of the Chicago River.

**Mm-hmm.**

There're two buildings, and they were—corn cobs because of—the outer edges were all curved

**Right.**

Are they still there? They haven't taken those down, have they?

**No, I think they're still there, yeah.**

OK, anyway—

**If they're the same ones I'm thinking of, where they had, like, some levels parking, but it was—the buildings were—**

Lucille Strauss came from a very wealthy family. I was doing some graphics for the school at the time, and she had a theater production

coming up, and I was going to do the graphics for it. And she wanted to use a [Vassirelli] drawing that she had. So I came into her apartment on Pearson Street. God, it was like the Museum of Modern Art. It was incredible, the collection she had in those walls. Just wonderful. Well, here was a woman who had everything, she was about 60, but she would work her tail off on those drama productions. So, it was that—again, another example of the spirit of the school. And the school allowed people with that kind of energy and talent the outlet to do so. You know?

**Mm-hmm. Do you remember any crises or challenges, major challenges that the school faced while you were here, or, you know, as you served as a representative on the board, or board member?**

Uh-huh. Yeah. Monthly budget problems.

*(Laughs)*

Monthly money problems. You know, Mike was doing things—he was... a hustler. A gambler. And so he was making commitments that he really couldn't pay for that day.

**Uh-huh.**

But he somehow or another always got the money. And the Board had some wonderful people on it. There was the real estate man who owned part of, probably, or maybe even the whole building at Ohio Street and Lake Shore Drive, who always managed to find space for Mike.

**Is that Perlman?**

Yeah, Perlman.

**OK.**

Perlman. Just wonderful. There were several people on the Board, I

may guess their names as we move along, that, you know, did it. They came through for Mike. And so that's the only crisis. I know—you know, there wasn't anything negative that took place that was threatening to the school that I can recall. But it was just simply money. I remember Mike was quite relieved when he got Dwight Follett to come on the Board and be Chair of it for a while. Dwight Follett was the head of Follett Publishing Company, and Mike felt that he was getting into the Protestant world by having Dwight there, rather than being totally Jewish. So... I shouldn't say totally Jewish. I was on the Board and I'm Bohemian. *(Laughs)* Anyway... again, that was an example of the school reaching out into new segments of the community. And Dwight Follett was delighted to do so. He had a feeling about education, and... was just great.

**How has Columbia influenced your work? Or, you know, it's been quite some time, obviously, since you left the school, but what kind of things— I mean, you've spoken to several of them already, but what kind of things stayed with you that you might have experienced or learned at Columbia?**

The main values, I think, or what I brought away from Columbia, was the experience of having worked with a much more diverse group of people than I had been. I'd been working in the graphic arts and in communication, and it was a fairly new thing. In fact, the reason I'm not in graphic design today, I didn't want to do that as a—to continue in that area for the rest of my life, was that it got to be awfully boring. And, um, some of the people working in it were boring also, you know? And here at Columbia, it was just as diverse as could be. And out of that came the

awareness that there are many different perspectives about anything, whether you're talking about art, or drama, or writing. Oh, John Schultz was another significant person on the faculty. John Schultz started the Story Workshop. And the thesis was—this is for writing—the thesis was that everybody has a story to tell, and his procedure was to... for people to start their stories by speaking. And, you know, the class would be sitting in a circle, and each person would speak a certain amount. And, eventually, those people were writing. And one of the—I remember Mike talking about—one of their students was a very overweight woman who finally, after she started writing, was able to bring her weight way down. And keep it down. You know? That whole different sense of self.

**Yeah.**

And strength came from that process. Um... so. That was a—John was a very significant person. I'm trying to remember where I was heading when I came up with—

**I had asked you about how the Columbia institution influenced your work.**

Oh...um... and perhaps it affected my life negatively, in terms of making money. 'Cause I work too broadly, you know. And I'm not able to achieve the efficiencies in production that if I stuck with one thing I could do it. And also get a name for that thing, you know?

**Yeah.**

But I'm not—there's no complaint behind that statement. I'm delighted with what I have been doing in the last 20 years. And that, I think, is the major contribution. I mean, I didn't learn any

techniques, but my mind was broadened. When I combined with what I learned at University of Chicago and at Columbia College and working with these people over those years, uh... wonderful. Simply wonderful.

**Can you speak further to your experience on the Board?**

**Because I really haven't spoken with anyone from that point of view.**

Well... I was not a good Board member. I'm not very good in those situations. I had gone through some of that, I'd gone through the officerships in the Society of Typographic Arts, and things like that. But as far as being... I'm much more of a writer than I am a speaker, and I'm not good at... making oral presentations, in that kind of context, with that group of people. Um... there wasn't much—there wasn't the kind of interaction and debate that took place in, for example, that definition conference that we had up north in Chicago with the faculty.

**Mm-hmm.**

At the Board meetings. The Board meetings were not... what do I want to say... big information exchanges. Mike would present problems and accomplishments, and there was very little input from the Board members, unless there were problems that were put to them. You know? And it isn't that they were not... they didn't participate, they participated in everything that was going on, but it wasn't a matter of having three of them insisting on some different direction in some area, you know. Um... they left the operation and pretty much the philosophy of the school up to Mike. And they were there to help provide resources

when needed. Not that they gave him, you know, signed, blank checks, but still, they were very supportive. Very supportive.

**Earlier you talked about, um, when you described the mission of Columbia College, you spoke about open admissions. And today, that has become somewhat... I don't know if controversial is too strong a word, but it has also a lot to do with the enormous growth of the College. But, if you could, in the 1960s, in the early '60s, or while you were at Columbia, what did that mean, "open admissions?"**

Well, it meant that you could come there without a high school degree, and register, and be accepted for a course, you know, or—I don't know, whatever—first of all, the night school was bigger than the day school. You know, most of the students were working, and those that were in class during the day were working at night somewhere. We had people working in post offices and grocery stores and all kinds of places who had visions that they wanted to, you know, fulfill. And as long as the student did the work, we didn't care about—if I remember correctly, anyway, we didn't care about what his high school grades were. Or her high school grades. And so that was a... a very alluring thing for these—most of them were youngsters, or, you know, some of them were in their early '20s. Um, some of them were in their later '20s. But it was wonderful for them to have this opportunity. And, as you know, a lot of kids don't achieve their potential in high school.

**Mm-hmm.**

And rightly so, the way high school is conducted many times. Um, and so here they were free to be. To become. And yet, obviously, we

had—there were some dissenting opinions about that sometimes, about some of the students that were let in. From some of the faculty. Um... but on the whole it worked, it worked fine, from where I sat. We put too much emphasis on grades and tests. For example...

**At Columbia, or our culture?**  
Our society.

**OK.**

I got intrigued by the (noise interference) of the MENSA society, I guess that was the middle '60s. And so I took the test and then I went down to the University of Chicago and they had a proctored exam and I became a member. Well, I was too busy to participate in meetings and all that, but I was getting the monthly magazine. And it seemed to me there was an awful lot of complaining about how society didn't appreciate us. And I came to California and I still didn't get involved, until they were gonna have—the Bay Area was going to have a gathering in the Napa Valley, and by then I knew something about the Napa Valley, I had done a book here, and I knew the wineries, and I could—I said, "Gee, I ought to do something for the society," so I offered to help. And they said, "Fine," and I set up some tours and tasting activities for them and so on. Got a speaker for them for the banquet on Saturday night, and my wife and I sat at the main table with the officers and so on. And I never heard so much carping in all my life, you know, about the world. And I thought about MENSA, and I'm thinking "I will bet that nowhere will I find MENSA at the upper levels. Either the CEOs of the Fortune 500, or the highest scientific societies,

wherever, you know... that these people learn to pass tests. And that was all. The ones that I had met in this process were, you know, fairly... lower level people working [in ordinary] work. And it was just an example of how tests and test passing can affect one's attitude about oneself, and what should happen to one. You know?

**Mm-hmm.**

Um...passing a test doesn't really tell you whether that person can do the work.

**That's a funny story.**

Whether their mind can do the work, you know. So I... I dropped out at that time.

**Yeah.**

So, anyway, how did we get to that point? I forget. What is your next question?

**(Laughs)** Let's see... when you... I'm not sure if you'll be comfortable addressing this, but I was wondering if you thought of Columbia as something that was specific more to a time or an era, like the '60s and the '70s. Um, you know, there's a lot of questions today about where Columbia is going, and that it has... leanings, you know, very much toward the mainstream, and its growth, and etcetera, etcetera. And I was wondering if you had any opinions or feelings about where Columbia was heading. Or you could even talk about when you left, if you're not comfortable talking about it in the 1990s, but in the 1970s, where the school was headed

Well, um, yeah, that leads me back to tests. And certifications and so on. Um... the school was becoming more certified. It had gotten accredited, and so in order to do

that, it had to show that its people had the tickets, had their degrees and so on. And... I think that... there can be, for even a school of 10,000 students, an intellectual ferment that can help those 10,000 students become more human human beings. You know, we have—a lot—in my experience, I've come across some pretty highfalutin MBAs who were so narrow in their perception of the world and life, you know? No visual sensitivities, no aural sensitivities, you know? Certainly no social sensitivities, beyond their narrow spectrum of society. There's no reason why an accredited school has to avoid the kind of intellectual stimulation and cultural stimulation that I think Columbia was providing. Sometimes not as well as it could have or should have, but they did the best they could. Uh, there's no reason why a school that big can't have that. And have it be an exciting place, a rewarding place for each student. And each student will come away a different person, they won't be stamped out like many of our degree-bearing people have become in getting their CPAs and their MBAs and so on. Does that sound, um...?

**No, but it sounds like you're saying that a school—that it is still possible, even in a school the size, you know, 8,000 to 10,000, that you don't have—** [I think so.] And that may be the challenge that the administrators have. I don't know how to run a school of 10,000 people, so I can sit here and say that. But that would be the challenge. That would be the challenge that Mike laid down in his graduation speeches every year, in effect, indirectly. But that was what he was saying. And...



how to do that is something that has to be worked on, and people learn to do that by doing it, I guess. But, you know, it doesn't have to be simply going by the form, and in turn stamping out incomplete human beings.

**You mentioned Mike's graduation speeches. What were graduations like in the 1960s? Could you describe—**

Well, they were fun. One of them was taking place in the auditorium in the Prudential Building.

**Mm-hmm.**

That's the one at Randolph Street, right, the Prudential Building?

**Right.**

Anyway, and we had to wait until Father Jones, who was an activist Episcopal priest on our faculty, got out of jail, so that he could say the invocation, you know. Um, we had—Mike was selecting wonderful people for honorary degrees... um, we had Duke Ellington, we had—oh, what's his name, the consumer—Ralph Nader. My wife and I drove Ralph Nader out to the airport that June night, and that was just about the time that Robert Kennedy was being assassinated. Um, but anyway, it was that level of people that were getting degrees, and apparently seemed to be very happy about it. Uh, Gwendolyn Brooks was another faculty person. Wonderful poet.

**Right.**

Incredible human being. She was teaching. Um, Harry Petrakis, the novelist, was teaching. They're coming, they're coming...

**Yeah. (Laughs)**

Um, yeah. You know, it was that mixing pot of personalities that was just so wonderful there.

**And what were the students like at the ceremonies? Wasn't there a certain degree of participation or performance, ever?**

No, I think—no. I forget now, what the whole program covered. The graduating students were there in their caps and gowns and they were just as happy as clams, obviously. And their parents were there, also happy. Um... as I recall, there were not, you know, big—not like—what do they call it, the art people, when they have performance things? Anyway, they weren't big performances. There weren't any big protests that I recall, from anybody.

**Right.**

I think that was '68, with Father Jones. Is that his name? Think so. Anyway, um—

**That's funny.**

Yeah.

**Did Columbia bail him out?**

*(Laughs)* I don't think they had to, but they got him out, you know. He was arrested in a protest, and he was furious. He was furious at the reception afterwards, the way they had treated his wife, who was also involved in the protest. And I had an uncle who was a retired Chicago policeman, and having the vision of my Uncle Rudy, I made the mistake of saying to Father Jones "What do you expect from a Chicago policeman, you know? You're not gonna get a philosopher." And he wasn't placated. And so... that was when the police were first struggling with the idea that not all women that they pick up are prostitutes.

*(Laughs)*

So... fun times.

**So in the few minutes that we have remaining, if maybe—I think**

**it would be helpful if you talked a little bit about your background.**

**You said that you attended the University of Chicago, but were you born in Chicago, and maybe if you could just give a little bit of your background information? I know I'm sending you a biographical sheet, but I think that that might help understand, too, where you're coming from, and your experience at Columbia.**

Well... yeah, I was born in Chicago, and went to public schools in Chicago during the '30s. And spent a little bit of time at Northwestern in some night courses in the early '40s, and then went off to the services, and... I was in the Air Force, a navigator, and flew in Italy, was shot—our plane was shot down, and I was a prisoner of war for 10 months. And perhaps one of the most significant experiences of my life at that time was to have to get into the trenches in our prison camp outside of Frankfurt, when the British came over at night and were dropping bombs everywhere. And to be on the other side of what I had been doing as a navigator on a big bomber was really, you know... that was an epiphany for me. I became a confirmed pacifist as of that moment. And then later on when I read about what we did in Dresden, while I was in prison camp, I was just so appalled. Incredible. Well, we're still doing it, you know? We're dropping smart bombs now, presumably, not on people, but people are still getting killed

**Right.**

OK, so then I came back, and... I went to a—the government had a state employment agency that had counselors for veterans. And at that point, I had done some photography and liked it, and somehow or

other I agreed with the counselor that I should go down to R.R. Donnelly, the printers, and talk about an apprenticeship in the photography. Well, the apprenticeship program at Donnelly's was a wonderful one, but it was really set up for 16 year olds.

**Mm-hmm.**

Not for veterans, you know? So that lasted for about a year or so, and then I started working in advertising. I worked as a production manager at an ad agency, and I was doing freelance photography, and then I worked with an advertiser in a design studio, and then ultimately, in the early '50s, another man and I started our own design company. And then later in the '50s, I started doing consulting work in communication analysis. That's when I came into the school.

**Yeah. I was curious—your evolution as a pacifist, did you—I would imagine that you were fairly supportive of the antiwar movement, then, during Vietnam.**  
Yeah, but not active. I was supportive, but... I'm not one that can get out in the streets.

**Mm-hmm.**

I guess for a variety of reasons. But I was certainly supportive of it, and... that changed my whole perspective as to the possibility of protest producing change. You know?

**Mm-hmm.**

I had—when that first started, I thought, "What a waste of time." But it certainly wasn't.

**Yeah.**

I mean, we saw Rosa Parks the other night, on the TV, you know, sitting next to the First Lady. I don't know if you saw that or not.

**No, I didn't.**

Anyway, you know, that... that changed my life, my perspective on what was possible.

**Right. Well, I want to thank you very much for the interview. It was great.**

Thank you. Thank you. And you are Erin...?

**Erin, E-R-I-N.**

Got that.