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Interview with John Schiebel, 1998

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John Schiebel

It is February the 8th, 1999; this is an interview with John Schiebel, the former Vice-President of Finance for Columbia College Chicago.

And Mr. Schiebel, if you would start by telling us what the circumstances were that brought you to Columbia.

Well, I was looking to change jobs, and I saw an ad in, I believe it was, the Wall Street Journal. And I responded with a letter and a resume to a box number which, of course, was reviewed by Mike Alexandroff.

Right.

Mike called me in for an interview and then later on, I came back for another interview with two Board members: Mr. Perlman and Mr. Follett. And sometime after that, I received a call from Mike saying that I was the preferred candidate. I then—I believe my first, my official hiring date was September 1, 1976. Personnel records would probably verify that.

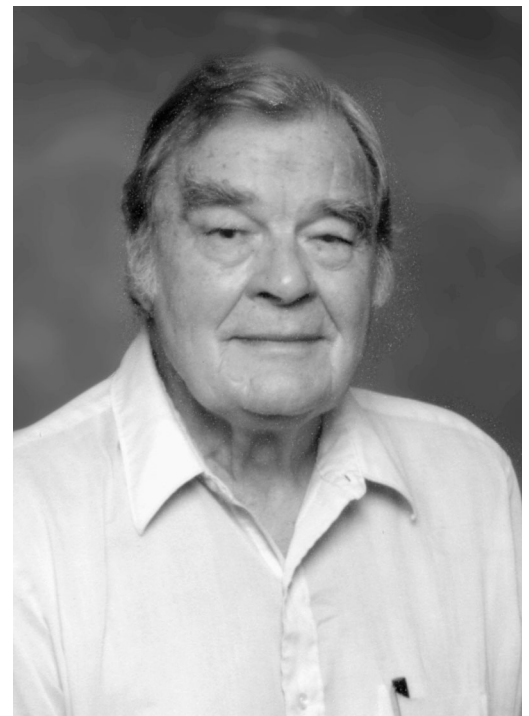
What do you remember of the interview with Mike, and then even the interview with the two Board members, if you remember those?

Well, it was a very long time ago, but it would be a typical interview. I thought it went well, I got along with Mike very well, and we... basically, we just discussed education. He told me something of the history of the College, and—oh, at that time, the College was located on Grand Avenue, in rented quarters. And he mentioned to me that the College had just bought a building and it was undergoing

remodeling for the College. A very typical interview. He had my resume, of course, and he knew something of the University of Chicago, my alma mater, and we discussed that a bit. I can't remember anything else in particular. We got along fine. Then later on, I received another call and I came in to meet with Mr. Perlman and Mr. Follett. That interview, too, went along normal lines. I do remember how... these were real gentlemen, of the old school. And I recall that I had parked some distance away and had walked—it was July, I believe, of 1976, and I had walked about three blocks to get to the College's offices. And I have glass eyeglasses that darken in the sunshine and then lighten inside, and when I walked in, they were quite dark. And, of course, it happens so gradually that I'm unaware of it, you know. I still have that type of glasses. But I recall sitting on a sofa in Mike's office, and I was facing the windows, and then Bud Perlman and Dwight Follett and Mike were sitting in chairs in front of me, and Mr. Follett suddenly noticed that I had the light from the windows in my eyes, and my glasses were dark, and he thought perhaps I had some problem with sensitivity in my eyes (*laughs*). But the thing that struck me was that he was so caring and so gentlemanly, and asked if I would prefer to take a different position, and I assured him that my sight was fine and that it was just the glasses did darken up in the sunlight, and that they would soon clear. But I was struck with the quality of these men, that they were really... really, I don't know any better way to put it: gentlemen of the old school.

Did you know anything about Columbia before you applied? Did you have any impressions of the institution?

I didn't know anything of it. I discussed it with Mike during the first interview, and he told me a fairly quick scan of the history of the College, and the curriculum, the departments, that sort of thing. I was not aware of it otherwise, no. My impression was that it was an interesting opportunity. I'd been in industry most of my life, and I had been in consulting, but also with industrial concerns, and it struck me as being just a very interesting place to work. As a matter of fact, it turned out that way. I didn't realize, at the time, that we were - I don't know if any of us did - that we were just on the brink of a tremendous growth in [FTE] and the amount of money we were handling and that sort of thing. Things were very informal in those days, and it did turn out to be quite an exciting experience.



**How long were you at Columbia?
From '76 until...
'89.**

OK.

I retired on August 31st, 1989, so it was about 13 years.

Yeah. And could you describe maybe the early responsibilities—and you could also address, if your job changed, you know, as you just said, with the College growing so rapidly. And also, if you could speak to any of the unique challenges that the institution, you know, from your point of view as Vice-President of Finance, the challenges that the institution faced and how they were met.

Well... obviously, in the beginning, the College was quite small. As a matter of fact, if memory serves, we registered 2,000 students that September. And, of course, I had no means of—nothing to compare that with, but I did notice that everyone else was quite excited. The College was—that represented quite a bit of growth over the preceding year. It was basically a situation where everybody wore three or four hats. Mike did much more than he had to later on, when he could concentrate on being a president, you know. Bert Gall, obviously, was handling a dozen balls in the air at once. And it turned out that so was I, and indeed, most of the people on my staff, which, of course, was quite small at the time. As we grew, the challenge was to... basically, to keep up with the growth, and to build staff, and to train people and begin to distribute some of the workload. Money was a problem in those days, but one of the big responsibilities was to get control of the flow of money and to manage it properly and meet payroll (*laughs*), which is obviously very important.

Had anyone managed it before you came, or were you—

My predecessor was a fellow named Ron Kowalski, and he had been with the College, I believe, about four years, and then he decided to move on. And he had done quite a bit of work, although he, too, had difficulty keeping up with the workload because of a very small staff, and it just—I believe it was somewhat overwhelming. And basically, I just picked up where Ron left off, and had the finances and the handling of the cash and the accounts and that sort of thing. It was fairly informal, at first. And the whole problem was getting more formalized, and operating more like, well, we used to say, like a real business, you know. And that was a never-ending process, and that was going on when I left, and my successor, Mike DeSalle, picked up the ball when I left. And I'm sure, from what I hear—it seems to me that Lou mentioned to me that you now have about 9,000 students, and I think we were approaching 6,000 when I left. Now, of course, the computer is omnipresent, but I remember days when we didn't have a computer, so getting the computer up and on-line over a period of several years was a job. And then, of course, we, during my time there, floated three bond issues, backed by the—I believe they call it the Illinois State Educational Facilities Authority.

For the layperson, maybe explain what that means. Because part of—I think what your contribution—you know, this is always, or frequently, an untold kind of aspect of the history of an institution. And so, if you could maybe explain what the bond issue is, and also maybe the idea that Columbia's tuition driven. I

mean, is that where most of the cash flow came from, from tuition?

Yes, yes. Most of the cash flow came from tuition, although as we became better known, and through the generosity of many of our trustees, we were able to begin to out together an endowment, although it was never very large during my tenure. We were growing, and we needed to—basically, we needed to acquire buildings. We needed to acquire space. And we did not have enough money on hand to fund the complete remodelings that we necessary. In those days, we bought the building on Wabash Avenue, and then we bought the theater building, and now I understand there's two or three more buildings that have been purchased.

Right.

We needed money to do that. The Educational Facilities Authority is a state—well, I don't know what you'd call it. It's an authority, a group of people who operate under the aegis of the state and review applications for bond issues. The significance is that the bonds are tax-free. Now, the state does not take responsibility for the ultimate payment of the bonds, but the state, through the operations of the Facilities Authority, reviews all the applications for bond issues, and insures, as best they can, that the bonds will be paid off, that the organization requesting the issue is bona fide, and probably able to make good use of the money. But the aegis of the state enables the bonds to be sold as tax-free bonds, free of federal income tax. Well, it's quite a process, of course. You have to make up a prospectus—they call it a... of, I forget now, they called it the general statement or something like that. But it's a prospectus for the bonds, and it requires, you

know, the indenture has to be prepared and—it's six months of work, whatever you do it. Of course, we were borrowing, I think, first two million and then four million and, I believe, the last bond issue we did during my tenure was for 10 million dollars. And it was a very interesting process, but as I say, it requires a lot of intensive legal and accounting work. I found it fascinating, anyway.

And the major reason for the raising of this money was to purchase buildings as the College grew?

Yes, yes. Educational facilities. So it was definitely for—we couldn't use it to pay salaries, for example. Or to buy equipment. We had to use it to actually buy a building and refurbish it. It was an educational facilities—that was the use of it. But it required, when we did acquire a new building, it required a great deal of money in a short time, naturally we would try to get the building into shape as soon as possible, and move our classes into it.

Right.

So it—you know, it required a lot of investment, and that's the way you acquire the investment.

Mr. Perlman, that's who I was interviewing earlier today. Buddy Perlman?

Yes.

How is he?

He's good. He's very good.

Oh, I'm glad to hear that. He is—

He had been sick, and it took a while to schedule the interview, and he said that he had been diagnosed with emphysema, but he said it's not gonna kill him and, you know, I think he said,

"Being an SOB might, but not the emphysema."

(Laughs) He's a great guy, I tell you. You know, most of the Board members—we were all very friendly, and most of them, I knew them by their first names, we were on a first-name basis, but always I called Buddy Perlman and Dwight Follett, I referred to them as Mr. Perlman and Mr. Follett.

Yeah.

They were... I'll tell ya, they were heroes in the early days, when the College was small and about the only people that knew about it were some friends of Mike, you know, that sort of thing. But they were two sterling gentlemen. I just have so much affection for them and keep them in my memory. So I'm glad to hear that Buddy is still perking along.

What were their, maybe, specific contributions or talents that you drew upon or you relied upon or that they helped the institution with?

Well, they were both businessmen, and they were older, obviously, and... just their general knowledge and guidance. Everything we proposed to do, other than what we were going to teach, obviously, but everything we proposed to do in a business sense we ran by them. It was—you know, Mr. Follett owned a string of bookstores.

Right.

Follett Bookstores on college campuses were well known all over the Midwest. And Mr. Perlman was a... he managed real estate.

Right.

Bought and sold it, and he was very smart. I mean, they were just like having... maybe a wise old uncle looking over your shoulder and telling you "I think you ought to do this" or "Don't do that" or that

sort of thing. They were just—they were additional assets, people you could lean on, people you could talk to and get a straight answer. And people with a lot of accumulated wisdom. That was their contribution.

And did you work pretty closely—I mean, would that have been who you worked closest with, or how—with the Board of Trustees, or were there other departments or—you know, you said it was somewhat informal, so was it kind of like the President, Mike, and you and the Board, or... How did that work?

With respect to what? With respect to the College finances?

Yeah.

Well, I was fortunate in that I was working for a president, Mike Alexandroff, who was very conscious. He didn't have his head in the clouds. In one way, he was a dreamer and an inspirational type, but he also knew what a dollar meant *(laughs)*. That was very helpful. The Board, in general, was very supportive. There were a number of businessmen on the Board. I used to think of them as wise old owls that we'd lean on, you know. We did not work day by day with the Board, we handled it pretty much ourselves, but we met with the Board once a month. And once I got going and had regular monthly statements coming out and that sort of thing, why, then we'd use those statements as a point of departure for the discussion. And if we had a specific problem that we thought one Board member or the other might be able to help us with in terms of advice, we would certainly call him. But normally, we would meet once a month at a Board meeting, and report to them what we were doing and why we

were doing it and why we thought it was all right and then they would comment. I would say that they were always available for counsel or whatever. I would say that... to tell you the truth, the College was actually run by Mike and myself and Bert Gall. And the Board gave us all the support we could require. I don't know if that's responsive to your question—

Yes. No, and so if you've got that kind of triumvirate, how would you—and with you as Vice-President of Finance, Mike kind of overseeing everything, it sounded like, and what was Bert Gall's kind of role?

Oh, Bert was... a sort of a general factotum (*laughs*). Bert worked much more closely with, for example, the faculty and the department heads than I did. As a matter of fact, as I look back over the years, we were growing so fast and acquiring buildings and Bert seemed to have a flair for working with architects and working with the various academic department heads to determine what they needed and what would be the best way to lay the facility out, and that sort of thing. He spent... oh, goodness, in my tenure there, he must have spent 85 or 90 percent of his time on that sort of thing. And, of course, that's enough to keep a person busy, you know. Basically, he worked on the acquisition of buildings and the remodeling of them. And, of course, also the general operations of the various departments. Some of them were quite equipment intensive. I would have to say that Bert knew more about the actual classroom problems and what they needed. Well, of course, I was working on other things, you know. But between the three of us, we pretty well had the place covered, you know.

I got off track, but the reason I originally brought up Mr.

Perlman—he talked about—and I don't know if this is before your time, so let me know—but that there was kind of a special relationship between Columbia and Continental Bank, and he really didn't—couldn't explain it except that Continental took an interest in Columbia. Was that the case still by the time you got here, or no?

By the time I came to the College, the—Continental was the bank for the College, and their initial borrowing to fund the rehabilitation of the main building at 600 South Michigan Avenue, the bank had advanced the money. And I'm trying desperately to remember the name of the man there and I can't now. He was one of the VPs, and he was their main contact. I would say that, over the years, the relationship grew more close, you know. When I came in, and of course, I trotted right over to the bank to meet these people, you know, and as a matter of fact, as a little vignette, when I came in, we were working on the 600 South Michigan Building. We were still at our offices in the rented quarters on Grand Avenue. And we needed another half million dollars to finish, and we didn't know where we were going to get it. And we didn't have any money. And so there was some discussion of "What are we gonna do? Probably the bank won't lend us any more money," that sort of thing. So that December, by which time I had my feet fairly well on the ground, and had acquired a couple more people, so I had a little bit of time to think—and I prepared a statement to date, for the year. We hadn't had regular statements before that, and I went over to the bank and talked to our fella... God, his name was Bill something, and I feel—

It'll come to you before the end of the interview, I bet.

Yeah (*laughs*), 3:00 this morning I'll get it. Well, anyway, we had lunch in their dining room, at the bank, and I showed he and a fella who was going to be helping him and be a contact for the College the statements, and we talked about this and that and I told them about the work on the 600 building and that sort of thing, and finally, we were at dessert, and they looked at me and they said, "John, what do you want?" And I said, "I want a half a million dollars." Both of them leaned back and laughed and said, "You got it!" (*Laughs*)

You're kidding.

I'll tell you, it was an exciting time. I think Mike had taken a week off about that time, it was around Christmas, you know. When he came back I was so overjoyed to tell him we got the money, you know. But that's the kind of relationship we had. And then, of course, as we got bigger and better, and began to acquire some excess funds, they were able to put us into something that paid more than a checking account, which didn't pay anything, you know. And they were good guidance all the way through, and I, over the years, worked with several people over there. And then, of course, when we did the bond issues, they underwrote the bond issues. So I would say that we had a very, very good and very close relationship with the bank.

Yeah. I think that is something that people would find hard to connect with today. Banks are so huge and so, you know, national. Well, it was quite a large bank in those days, but they had, you know, they had about 33 vice presidents, I suppose, and these were... they certainly seemed to hire people that

were good people, and who understood and tried to help and understood the function of a bank, you know. They were really very nice. I enjoyed my association with the people at the bank all the way through the years. As a matter of fact, you know, the school threw a party for myself and my assistant, Elsie Kotulic. We retired at the same time, and two or three of the people that we were working with at the bank came over to the party. I was quite touched.

Hmm. I've asked this of every interviewee, and I think that it's important to ask you as well. Of course, this might be a little bit different perspective, say, than from, I don't know, a faculty member, but how would you describe the mission of Columbia College? And did that change at all while you were there, or evolve in any way?

Well... we had a mission statement, which Mike, quite properly, had prepared and you know, Mike is the philosopher and the inspirational one and the dreamer and that sort of thing, and I just... you know, I'm a bean counter.

(Laughs) But you certainly must have bought in to what Columbia—you know, I mean, what Mike was trying to do and what the College...

Well, I thought—and of course, I met frequently with the department heads, and... well, it was the idea of... well, I remember one of his key phrases was "College is not preparation for life, college is a part of life," you know, in your youth, or whenever. And we tried to... well, first of all, we educated in the fields that we had, radio and television and—

OK. So you had said that you

were educating in the fields that Columbia specialized in.

Yes, and we wanted to give the best education possible. And I think in certain areas, we certainly did do well. And also, too, we didn't want to be selective. We wanted to open the doors to anybody that wanted to come, in effect. If they were—no, obviously, we had the Admissions Department, and they wanted to be sure that the people could benefit from the education. But if they could benefit, then we made great efforts to ensure that they could attend. So we spent an awful lot of money on financial aid, obtaining financial aid from the state and from the federal government with the programs that were available, and eventually, we had enough money that we were able to fund in-house scholarships and... I would say democratization of the College. We didn't want to be an Ivy League college. We wanted to be a... oh, a college of the streets, I suppose, would be the way you'd describe it. I was very sympathetic with that. Now I live in Florida, and I'm happy I don't see snow anymore, but you can take the boy out of Chicago, but you can't take Chicago out of the boy.

Yeah.

I love the city, and I love the people of that city. I worked there all my life, I've known Chicagoans from the North Side, the South Side, the West Side, the East Side. All very fine people. That's where my roots are, that's where my family roots are, my father and mother were raised in Chicago and so on, and I just think it's a wonderful city. And I thought that, you know, we were doing something pretty good there, you know. We were educating people in the field where there could be some impact on their ability to make a living, and to work at something that they enjoyed, and

something creative. And our—what we were trying to do was bring it to, in effect, the masses, you know.

Mm-hmm.

And we spent a great deal of agonizing times as we would prepare a budget, trying to keep the tuition as low as possible, and the fees as low as possible so as not to let money be a bar to anyone that might come and might benefit from it. So we were always kind of scrimping, because we were tuition-driven, and we were always—well, we were trying to put five pounds in a one-pound bag, you know. We tried to keep the tuition low, and yet at the same time, improve—for example, some of the equipment that we required is quite expensive, and we would make two and three year plans to acquire equipment, especially in the technical areas like TV and film and, to some extent, radio, and even when we opened up a science department, I remember we finally got a spectrometer. I was excited as hell that we had a spectrometer, you know. I'm not real clear on what it does, but—

I don't know what it does, either. I have somewhat of an idea of what it does, but I wouldn't try to claim any expertise in the area. But anyway, Zafra finally got her spectrometer, and I was very excited about that. So it was—ah, it was almost like a crusade, I suppose. Anyway, that's as near as I can tell you what the mission was.

No, I think that that point's well taken, and that it's come up before... Columbia's role was in the Chicago community, and that's something that, I think, in the late '90s, is lost or, you know, or people aren't aware of, or whatever's happened. But it's

that you are not the first to talk about that it was integral to, you know, the community, the larger community of Chicago.
May I interject a question?

Sure.

Do you work for the College?

Uh-huh.

Beg your pardon?

Yes, I do. I'm a part-time instructor and I teach history here.

I see. I see. Well, that's fine. Well then, you must have some sense of what the heartbeat is over there. Of course, I have to realize I've been gone almost 10 years, and—

Well, it's really been through this Oral History Project that I've learned it. I came in 1990, and I must say—and it's more difficult, too, as a part-time instructor than, perhaps, a full-time instructor—but that the sense of the College's history is... you know, it certainly was lost on me until I started working on this project.
Yes, I can see how that would be, sure.

Yeah. You said that you met frequently with department heads. Who do you remember the best? And why, or, you know, who sticks out in your mind?

Oh, there were a number of people—early on, Thaine Lyman, who started the Television Department, when he made cardboard boxes with tin cans on the front to mimic a television. *(Laughs)* [We didn't have] the equipment. This was before my time. But Thaine Lyman, Al Parker... there's a fine man, Al Parker. You know, it's strange, but as I look back now and think about them, I'm surprised at the affection I have for all of them yet. It was more than just a place to work. I

mean, we were really... there was a spirit there, there was a spirit there, and I remember those people with such great affection, and I guess that was part of being involved all together in this thing where, oh, sometimes you don't know if you're going to make it, you know. But we did, and we all had the same idea. But there were a number of them. Gee, Ed Morris came in after Thaine died, and he was a great guy to get along with. John Mulvany is a guy I remember with a great deal of intensity, you know. John Schultz had been there forever, and—

Now, would these department heads come to you and say, "I need a bigger budget" or "I need more money," or how did that work? I mean, when you met with them, were you telling them "Here's how much money we have for you and your department," or—

Well, we did it a little bit more detailed than that. There were a number of different categories of expenditure in each department, and of course, salaries were the big thing, and payments to adjunct teachers and part-time teachers and all that. That we handled in a different way, but they needed equipment, they needed expense money, there was a whole variety of—we had, I don't know, perhaps 15 or 20 accounts that were in common use. And they... they got to know how I like to work, and so they would prepare their requests, and would organize them the way I had organized the accounts. And so they would—we would meet, oh, we'd begin meeting in... oh, I would say Spring. And we would set up appointments, they would come up, sometimes with their assistants and sometimes alone, and, my God, they got to where they were making professional presentations *(laughs)*, you know, it

was quite impressive. And why they needed this and that, and then we would discuss it. And I had some idea of what we—I would—well, between Mike and Bert and I, we would make forecasts, and I had some idea of what we could probably afford. And then in some of the areas where there was a great deal of technical business—well, for example, the TV, the—well, even in the Art Department, and the Film Department, they always required a great deal of very expensive equipment, and I—my feeling, and I would tell them, "I want you to have this, except I can't afford it. How about next year? Can you make it out? Is there some other way, or can we rent this stuff, or something?" I really agonized about it. Bert Gall had more of a—well, he spent more time with them on the floors, you know, around the classrooms, and he would sit in on those meetings as a sort of an independent view of it, and would make his thoughts known. And quite often, the discussion would get down to where I'd be sitting behind the desk listening and Bert and the department head would be discussing what he needed, or arguing about it, or something like that, you know. And it was just—it was all informal, but gradually, we would work out something that—if not mutually satisfactory, at least something we could go ahead with. And that's there I would meet them, mostly, although I knew them all, and got along with them all, and it was no unusual thing for any of the department heads to walk in the office and sit down, have a cup of coffee with me, and just talk.

Mm-hmm.

And I got to know them pretty well that way. So, I mean, it was...

we weren't—we had procedures that we followed, but they weren't terribly, terribly formalized. I mean, we were friends, we were trying to work it out, you know.

No, that seems pretty clear.
Beg pardon?

I said, that seems very clear that that's how it worked

Yeah. Yeah, there were times when... to tell you the truth, I mean, they would need some piece of equipment, and it was usually with respect to equipment—oh, they needed travel budgets and things like that, dues, budgets for belonging to various professional organizations, and that usually didn't cause trouble—but because of the nature of our curriculum—

Right.

And the way we taught, which was hands-on, you know, they needed these things. And I wanted them to have them, you know. And now and then, I would agonize, and I'd say, "John, I want you to have it! Is there any other way to get it other than paying for it, you know?" And I think—I think that they understood that, that I really wanted them to have it, and if I told them "We can't afford it," they generally believed me. And they could, I was telling the truth, you know, as best I could. There were times when a Fall registration would exceed, by far, our forecasts, in which case, I could call them back and say, "Well, John, you wanted this super-duper machine, I think we can afford it now." And I think they knew that, too: that if we could possibly do it, we would get it for them, you know. So it was—it was structured, but it was not formal. In the end, we would put it all together on a spreadsheet—I never did get into computers, I did

it all by hand—and then Mike and I and Bert would meet and hammer out the budget. And that's the way we did it. Of course, it got to be a bigger and bigger job as we got more complex and added departments and, you know, the place grew, and we had more buildings... it got to be quite a large thing.

But, of course, I really had an excellent staff. They were wonderful people. I remember, I took them out to lunch twice a year, once around Christmas and once, usually, in the late spring. And I'd have to tell them, and I did, I'd tell them "You people are making a hero out of me." And I used to tell them, also, and it was true, "I love you all. Just love each other and help each other to get through each day." And boy, they responded. What a fine bunch of people they were. And they did make a hero out of me. *(Laughs)* Now and then, the Board used to say nice things about me. To my face, you know. And I would tell them, "It's gratifying to hear you say that, but I have to tell you that I'm backed by a very able staff." I'll tell you, it was just—it was a nice, nice job. It was trying, and it seemed like we never had enough, none of it was easy, we were battling the elements, so to speak, all the time, but by golly, we were a team. It was good. It was good. It was the best time I ever had.

Was it hard to retire, to leave?
Beg pardon?

Was it hard to decide to retire and leave Columbia?

No, I... I was 64 years old, and I was getting tired. And certainly, I was getting to the point where I never wanted to see another winter, you know. And I was about due. And I've got other interests in life, too, besides work. So... no, I was ready. Obviously, there's always a—

you know, you're seeing some people, maybe for the last time, people you've worked with so closely, and who you've come to really, really like a lot, you know, and... But then I told myself, "Well, I'd be coming back, you know." I think I came back once and I haven't been back since. And now, of course, with the new president and... oh, I just—now, I think if I came back, it may be that everybody would look and say, "Who the hell is that old man?" *(Laughs)* Is Lya Rosenblum still there?

Yes she is.
I'll be darned

Yes she is. I interviewed her the last go 'round.
Uh huh. How's she doing?

Very well. I don't—you know, I don't know her very well, but I remember, you know, the interview being very interesting. She talked about how greatly her, you know, responsibilities have changed over the years that she's been at Columbia.

Well, yeah, she was Dean of the College in the beginning, and it was quite a burden. And Lya, my goodness, Lya was... well, she's a year younger than me, I guess, and I certainly don't want to work anymore. *(Laughs)* I'm surprised she's still there, although I think the College and her job was her life. As long as she's happy.

Yeah.

She and her husband, Lou, are two fine people. I'll tell you, I just... you know, just speaking with you now, and harking back to all these people, it just...

Brings back a lot of memories.
A lot of memories, yes. And we were—we were always on a crusade,

we were always working too hard and never had enough money, you know, and trying to do too much with what we had, and yet, we felt a certain—because every year, we advanced, quite a bit. In terms of—certainly from my point of view, in terms of money, you know. We finally had enough to do most of the things we wanted to do, and we were developing some respect in the academic community, and then we went through a... when the North Central comes out, accreditation process again. That took some time, but we came through with flying colors, and it was just—there was a feeling of accomplishment, as we—well, it was a period of great growth, and it was fun.

Now, you've already addressed several examples of this, but were there any other major challenges that the institution faced? You know, you've talked about acquiring the buildings, and certainly, not having the money at hand, and then the expense of upgrading the equipment or acquiring equipment, particularly specific to—
That was my job, finding the money.

Right.
And then spreading it around. I mean, that's what I did, you know.

Did you start to rely—like, did the nature of the Board of Trustees change at all, did you start to look to them to raise more money, or...
Well, we did, and those kind of relationships were more in Mike's area.

OK.
But we did, and they were as

generous as they could be. I recall that Mike used to tell me that he hoped to have an endowment of 10 million by the time we left. I don't think that we had anything like that, but I mean, I certainly wouldn't presume to lean on them. I certainly told them we need money, you know.

Well, no, I didn't mean lean. Mr. Perlman had said that that's one of the reasons he left. Not that he was being leaned on, but he felt that he had made—that the nature of the Board of trustees was changing, perhaps. That his strength was in real estate, and advising and that—
Yes.

But that what the College really needed the next phase was people to come in and raise money, and he was uncomfortable doing that. And I certainly know that the current—under the current administration, that has been an important thrust.
Yeah. Well, I... I was never much into actually fundraising. Jack Wolfson, of course, was in charge of development. You're aware of Jack Wolfson?

No.
He's somebody you should talk to.

Tell me a little bit about him, because he has not been mentioned
Well, I—

He was in the Development office?
He was—yeah, he was in charge of development and, basically, money-raising, you know. And all of the things that go on in that area. And oddly enough, he was a friend of Mike's, I think they'd grown up together as boys, and he had been in this area of work for most of his

life, and eventually either met Mike again or something, and came with the College. He was there when I came in, and I think that the whole development effort was Jack and maybe one assistant or a secretary or something. But he... golly, he would put together brochures, and he would meet with all the Board members, and he would go out and raise money where he could... whatever a development officer does, that's what he did. And he had said, at times, to me, that the function of a Board was to come up with money, and I really didn't think of it that way. I thought of them as advisors and help when we needed it, in their areas of expertise. But I rather had the impression that Jack... I mean, whenever we had an affair where we'd have, you know, all the Board and their wives and friends of the College and this and that, Jack was the one that set it up and chaired the whole thing. You know, that's what development officers do, I think, you know, make those kind of arrangements. Really, do look into Jack Wolfson.

I will.
I thought of Jack as being—certainly not in—he wasn't a [wine] officer... not even as much as I was, but he was out on the edge there, doing the College's business, you know, trying to raise money. I'm surprised that no one's mentioned Jack to you. To tell you the truth, I think Jack was there when I left, so if he's not around now... Well, of course, Jack was getting on, too, I imagine he'll retire eventually too. You know, we're all getting on.

You talked about the importance of your staff.
Yeah.

Are there any longtime staff members that you remember, care

to mention? And their, you know, special contribution?

Well, they were all great. I can mention a whole group of names to you. Norma [Callalang] was Controller. She was a Filipino lady of Chinese descent who was Controller for a number of years, and then—reporting to me of course—and then she finally left, and Ann Kennedy took over. And gee, I remember Ann when she was only 17 years old. She was working in the mailroom when I came in. But she wanted to get into the accounting department, and we had an opening and she came to me and said, “John, I’d like to apply for the job.” I said, “In accounting?” And she said, “Yes.” And I said, “Ann, what you want to work in accounting for?” She said, “I think it’s fun!” (*Laughs*) Well, anyway, she went to College, got her degree, got her CPA, and now, the last I heard, she was still Controller over there. And Pearl Cristol was a tower of strength. She handled the payroll, which was one of the most difficult jobs, getting it right, because of so many different conditions of employment and that sort of thing, and the College growing by leaps and bounds, so I remember Pearl very well.

I’m interviewing her later this month.

Say hello for John.

I will.

Tell her I love her. She’s a great, great person. And then my assistant, Elsie Kotulic, was a tower of strength. Elsie was highly intelligent and could do anything. She could learn anything. And I had worked with Elsie before in other places, and developed tremendous respect for her.

Did you bring her along here

eventually?

No, I couldn’t afford her, for a while. But as—toward the end of ‘76—well, maybe late Fall ‘76, we could afford her, and so I, you know, called her and asked her if she’d like to work at the school and told her about it, and she said, “Yeah,” you know, so she came over and she—she handled a whole variety of things. She was my assistant, but it got to the point where she was really a force unto herself. Among other things, she handled all of the health insurance claims and the policies and the mechanics of getting enough money into it to pay the claims. She was—well, at one time, she kept all the personnel records. I guess they’ve got a Human Resources Department now, but she was the human resources department, too. She was highly intelligent and could do anything. Then there was Peggy O’Grady, who was the Chief Bursar. And when I came in, Peggy had maybe two or three people working for her, and eventually, that got to be quite a large department, because of, you know, you need so many bursars per hundred students, that sort of thing. So that department grew quite a bit, and Peggy supervised it all the way through and Peggy... you know, a lot of people think of it as the accounts receivable department, but basically, they did a lot of counseling to kids and helping them out. I mean, hell, we had students that wouldn’t go to the counselors, they’d go to their bursar to talk about their hopes and ambitions and dreams. Peggy was—she was just kind of like a mother hen. She was great. Peggy O’Grady.

Huh.

And well, of course, Bernadette McMahon. She runs the computer, and came in, oh, some years ago,

when we were just really getting into computing, and she came in as an assistant to Ed [Eddons], who was our first rational computer person that we had, and ultimately, Ed got very sick and left, and Bernadette took over and did a hell of a job, and as I understand, is still doing a hell of a job. And then there were a number of people—[Cathy Tupey] was Peggy O’Grady’s assistant, she was a real smart girl. And there were just a number of people there that were really, really good. Really good.

Well, anything else? We’re winding up the hour, and anything that we haven’t talked about that you feel should be included, or...

Well, I’m not clear on exactly what you would want from me, but I—from what Lou told me, the College is shooting up like a rocket, and I think that—I think it’s fine. Actually, I’ve learned more from you, and just from sitting here and thinking back to those days, you know, in response to your questions. I think it’s—it has become a force to be reckoned with in education in Chicago, and I’m proud of my association with it. It was a happy, exciting time, and I just am happy that I was part of it.

That sounds—I mean, it’s clear that you have a lot of fond memories.

Yes, yes. You know, day to day, obviously, there are strains and—

