ABSTRACT – Henry Steck

Interviewee: Henry Steck
Interviewers: Tyler Enright and William Nowak
Date: October 5, 2018
Location: Old Main, SUNY Cortland, Cortland, NY
Length: 02:01:52

Henry Steck was born in Washington, DC on September 22, 1935. He lived in Washington, DC until he went to college, except for a few years when he lived in Germany. After returning from Germany, he graduated from Woodrow Wilson High School in Washington, DC. He attended Kenyon College, a small liberal arts college in Ohio. He attended graduate school at Cornell University in Ithaca, NY for political science. After a short stint teaching at Vassar College, Steck took a job at SUNY Cortland in 1963, and he stayed until he retired in 2014. He taught at SUNY Cortland for over 50 years. Due to his service as a political science professor, Steck was awarded the Distinguished Service Professorship. In this interview, Professor Steck talks about the history of SUNY and his involvement in the progression of SUNY Cortland. He also talks about memorable events that occurred during his tenure at Cortland, including the student strike in 1970 over the involvement of the United States in the Vietnam War. He also talks about the future of the college and tells what SUNY Cortland means to him.
FIELD NOTES – Henry Steck

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Location: Old Main Building, SUNY Cortland, Cortland, NY

Length: 02:01:52

The Interviewee: Henry Steck is a retired political science professor at SUNY Cortland. He was a professor at SUNY Cortland for over 50 years. He began teaching at Cortland in 1963. He grew up in Washington, DC and graduated from Woodrow Wilson High School. He attended Kenyon College in Ohio, and he attended graduate school at Cornell University in Ithaca, NY.

The Interviewers: Tyler Enright and William Nowak are undergraduate students at SUNY Cortland and are both history majors. This interview was conducted for an oral history class with Professor Evan Faulkenbury during the fall 2018 semester.

Description of Interview: The interview took place in two small classrooms in Old Main on the campus of SUNY Cortland. The room change occurred at the 25:46 mark of the interview. In both rooms we sat at large tables near the windows facing each other.

Note on Recording: Recorded on a Zoom H4N device.
Tyler Enright: So today is October 5th, 2018. I’m Tyler Enright, with my partner William Nowak and today we are interviewing Professor Henry Steck in Old Main. Ok so first of all thank you for agreeing to do the interview.

Henry Steck: My Pleasure.

TE: So, the first question we have is, so from the research we’ve done we see that you were born in Homer, NY, but moved around, you went to high school in Washington, DC...

HS: No, I was born in Washington, DC.

TE: So you went to high school in Washington, DC.

HS: Well yes and no. Because my father was a federal civil servant in the Department of Agriculture. And as World War II drew to an end, the US was preparing for the occupation of Germany and in ways I don’t know because I was a really little kid he ended up getting a job where he was sent to Berlin which was occupied by the four powers. And his job was to feed the German population of the American sector of Berlin. He had to feed a hundred thousand people in war torn. And he went in 1945, in May and the war had ended on the 8th so he got there...

William Nowak: At the end
HS: … the ruble was still smoking, so to speak (people talking in the hall). A year later, my mother, my sister and I followed, as did many families of the occupying authorities, military and civilians like my father. So, I lived in Germany from 1946 to about I think 1951 there about and then the occupation had ended in March of 1951 and my parents returned, I didn’t want to return because it was too exciting living there. But, looking back in retrospect, the school that I was in only had 23 students.

WN: Ok.

HS: American students, sons and daughters of military and so we came back now to high school, Woodrow Wilson High School in Washington. From there Kenyon College in Ohio and from there to graduate school at Cornell and then a short teaching job at Vassar and then because I wanted to move back wanted to move back to this area because I had my graduate work at Cornell, SUNY was just expanding. This was 1963 so that’s when I came here. And at the time, since I had my whole career ahead of me, at the time when I was leaving Vassar in 1963 nobody knew what SUNY was, even some people that worked at some of the campuses and I will say a few words about that in a second, so we had no idea what we were coming to. So, I was hired at a professional meeting, everything was not like it is today. So, we came here and if you’re starting a new university or college, how do you attract faculty? You pay them well, you give them fabulous benefits and one of those fabulous benefits was an incredibly good retirement plan, which for me and for people of my generation, its changed since then, they pay all of my retirement costs since the day that I retired so I didn’t contribute a penny and really with the retirement plan what they put into it. I remember once I interviewed a guy, when I was here only a couple of years and he was boasting about where he came from, if it was such a good place why were you looking for a job, that’s my thought, and so we said well the retirement and he said we have a really good
retirement at this college, pays 5%, and we only pay 5%, well that is pretty good, here the state pays more than that and we pay nothing. But, once you got here the salary wasn’t as good as it could have been, but the benefits were good and once you got hooked on those aspects it was a powerful incentive to stay. And they were bringing in other young faculty and we had one small child and a child that was born the year that we came so to start looking for a job after three or four years and move with two small kids, I was secure here, I got tenure as soon as you jumped over the hoops, so you know it isn’t Harvard, Yale, Princeton, but it was good, we were close to Ithaca, which we wanted to be. And one of the things about the time I came here there were only three thousand students or so, it was small, even though it was founded in 1868 and it was just beginning, so now it gets important for what you all are doing. I think I am going to stop and give a little context and background.

WN: OK, yeah sure.

HS: It would do you well, I have written a couple of articles and reviewed some books that you might want read which give some history of SUNY. So, I am going to give you a quick three minute. So, let’s go back to 1947, who was president?

WN: Oh, it was...

TE: Truman was it?

HS: Truman. And in 1947 what was going to happen in a year or so?

WN: The Marshall Plan?

HS: 1948 election and who ran against him in the election?

TE: Was it Dewey?

HS: So, Dewey was governor at the time and Truman was already President. So, a number of things happened this is very brief. One of them is Truman appointed a committee to study higher
education, and they produced a fairly major report which in effect was promoting higher education, access to higher education and higher education as an aspect of Democracy. Which was quiet a change from private schools such as the one I had attended, which was a school that was founded as an Episcopalian school in the 1830s. Even today one of the top, what they call them little Ivies, the little liberal arts colleges. Truman appointed this commission and Dewey didn’t like blasting New York and there were other reasons a lot of GIs on the GI Bill, where are they going to go to school, so they built some temporary sort of barrack type buildings in Binghamton, Harper College, and they kept the name Harper, and then you had sprinkled throughout the state other places for basically returning GIs. Harper being one of them, it last then was absorbed when Binghamton became a University. Number two there were a lot of kids wanting to go to college, but not enough seats in New York so they were leaving the state so that was something to consider. The third of course was the cost. Another problem was there was discrimination in the private sector schools that would astonish you. Somebody knows all of their names, but they are not public and there was prejudice against Jewish students, not that many African Americans going to college, no doubt, but they were...

WN: Still marginalized.

HS: Yeah so you would have a quota, so you might get a school that said, ok we have an entrant class of let’s say two hundred. We’ll have spaces for twelve Jewish students, like that quotas. And also, the quotas were really bad in terms of medical school. Did you take the SAT prep course?

WN: I didn’t take a prep course, but we all took the SAT.

HS: Right, what was the name of the prep course? It is still used, they still do pre-law.

TE: I have no idea.
HS: Well I have the idea, but it’s...

WN: Is it GMAT?

HS: No, no the name of the company that created it, anyway the guy who founded it had gone to Queens College in New York City and the reason he founded it, his biography is interesting, he said what stung him was he didn’t get into Columbia Medical School because I went to one of the city colleges and I was Jewish so I didn’t get in. So, when he started this to beat the SATs, to prep people there was a lot of discrimination, so Dewey set a commission, the commission recommended a State University and the private sector fought back tooth and nail, really resisted. Catholic schools in particular for reasons I never really understood. And so founding SUNY was a huge political battle, massive demonstrations, busloads of students coming up. You would think something boring like setting up a state university would be boring, but there was a lot of resistance and some of it was underling discriminatory attitudes. We don’t want students from New York City. How do you spell New York City? J E W I S H. They founded SUNY and they built on scatter of teachers’ colleges and in time they built the university centers. Then when Rockefeller came in, he pushed accelerator to the door and really made SUNY what it is today. So, the year that I arrived, Cortland had transitioned from a teachers’ college to a college of arts and sciences.

WN: Was it just that year?

HS: Well they changed the name to college of arts and sciences.

WN: Normal school?

HS: There had been a number of names, I think that at that point it was college of education, teachers’ college, something like that. But, you know, much of the school was very few arts and science students, they started tuition that year for $400 and if a student transferred from education
to arts and science, they had to pay tuition or back tuition, I wasn’t aware of it. If you want to think of the whole history of the college I would file it into at least three periods. The period I came was the period of transition and it was President Young and it was a very tumultuous period, it was a lot of fighting and intra-faculty politics and at the time I had done some studying of developing countries and that’s what it reminded me of. It was not simply that people said yes and no, it was a big battle, should Psychology be arts and sciences or education. All these things and when I came, I was a political scientist, but Political Science, History, Geography, Sociology, all the social sciences, except for Psychology were part of one department and the people that basically trained secondary social studies teachers didn’t want to give it up. (Lights turn off)

WN: I will get the lights.

HS: So that was the first period, in some ways it was really exciting, but also very painful. A lot of it was unpleasant and they fought the administration, my department was very embarrassing because they resisted a lot of things. That’s period one, period of transition. The second period, we had a president during that first year I came there was an acting president because the previous president had resigned for another job. We had someone for a year, who interviewed me when I came and then he left and they hired a new president. I was so young, so junior, beginning to teach courses and stuff like that and I didn’t pay much attention for a while. So, the president we had finally left. I still can’t remember the year, 1967 or 1968 and then we got this guy sort of dumped on us by Albany. Who was President Jones, he was terrible and nothing happened basically from about the late 1960’s or 1970, that period until President Clark came in 1980. I don’t know if you know the history of the Soviet Union, but there was a time after Stalin’s death, until eventfully Brezhnev was leader, it was a period of stagnation, he killed the Soviet Union. That’s what we were in and I’m thinking we have our own Brezhnev here. Nothing much
is getting done. For example, they brought in, you should read the history book of the college, big
time groups came. One of the groups that came was The Grateful Dead. It packed the gym with
people. The next year, the President always starts the year by giving a talk to the faculty he told us
we had to have all the ambulances outside the building because they thought everyone would be
on dope and drugs and that was his attitude. Then with President Clark we started what I call the
modern period and he came in 1979 or 1980 and it was President Clark, President Taylor and then
President Bitterbaum. If I were writing a history of the college, the one that is out by Professor
Ralston of the History Department, its good I would impose that conceptual framework on it. That
it was three or four periods and that’s when the college really began to grow. A lot of debt to
President Clark because he opened things up, believed in transparency, he was a very affordable
person and then when he resigned I think some time in the early 1990’s. Starting roughly in 1976
New York City had a huge budget crisis, the budget crisis of 1976. Rockefeller built SUNY, he
poured money. One year the library couldn’t spend all their money, there was so much. They
couldn’t write the book orders fast enough. The faculty was growing, it was just a period of growth,
despite the conflict. After 1976, the budget crisis in the city spread throughout the state so the
budgets began to (taps the table to show they decreased). The period of budget austerity has never
really left its always just fluctuating. President Clark retired sometime in the 1990’s, he’s still
around, I don’t know if you’re going to talk to him, but you should. President Taylor came and
Clark had moved us from Jones and Taylor was here during when the Republican administration
of Governor Pataki came in and they sort of did not believe in government. Republicans they said
well there is too much duplication between colleges. Yeah, they all have English Departments,
they all have History Departments and they talked about closing some of the colleges and they just
made President Donald Trump look like a liberal. So, Taylor guided us through that and then you
have President Bitterbaum. That’s the framework that in which I think of the college and the history of SUNY. They built SUNY on this scatter of Normal schools and that’s why we don’t have a flagship university and that has been one of the best things about the State University. It’s like one big college with one big campus that goes from Long Island to the Ohio border. It’s one college, one university. Periodically there have been big fights over tuition as the centers wanted to charge more, we said not this is an egalitarian practice. A student at Cortland should pay what a student at Stony Brook pays. No flagship, so if I said what are the state schools in Ohio, you’d say Ohio State, Michigan state, etc. These are the flagships and then you got all the others. In California you have the University of California, Berkeley, San Diego, etc. Then you have colleges like this one four-year comprehensives then you have community, three structures, we’re one structure. I think SUNY is really good. What do you guy think? Have you ever studied higher education? That’s the introduction.

WN: We saw too that you have been advocating for the equality of SUNY degrees too.

HS: Well they basically are.

WN: Yeah that a SUNY degree from here should be equal to a degree from Binghamton.

HS: Yeah, I think that’s true. That’s a really interesting statement. They’re all state university degrees, but if you went to look for a job and the people that were hiring you knew the difference they say I’ve heard of Stony Brook, but I haven’t heard of Geneseo, what’s that Geneseo, so that’s basically true and periodically we go through periods. When I first came there were a number of programs that connected the colleges and then the Republicans sort of shut them down and said each (Audio unclear) is in the bottom, which is a sort of budgeting concept. I’ve done a lot of reading on university budgets, you have big university, medical school, law school,
etc. Each combo on the bottom, what about the humanities, Latin, Greek, English, History, etc. Each combo on its own bottom.

WN: So that what...

HS: Well we don’t have differential tuition, faculty at the centers get paid more because it’s their research institutions. The main thing about Cortland is that it does have the largest teaching ed programs. There is no part of the college that does not have some teaching degree. In SUNY studying to be a teacher is basically everything except for Drivers’ Education practically. Cortland is the largest teacher’s education program in the state and periodically when they count them across the nation, we’ve always been not the top ten, but once we were twelve, I don’t know what it was, but we have a really big education program across the college. PE, health, history, etc., political, social sciences. SUNY has a democratic aspiration.

HS: Sometime, I think after President Bitterbaum came, maybe before across the country the following sort of change was taking place. Students and their parents became much more concerned than they had been before then for what their children were going to do after they graduate. If you go to the open house and the parents come and I’ll say Political Science is a really good major, History is a good major, English is a good major. What can my daughter do with it? What kinds of jobs can she get? There has been a subtle, not so subtle shift in the curriculum to try to educate job ready students and etc...

WN: That’s why they have all those job fairs now?

HS: It is not only that, but it is like if you go from department to department, I’m sure oral history is really good, public history which Faulkenbury does is very good, but also if you go to business school and you’re a history major and you get out and its hard finding a job in the pricing division of General Motors you can always say, you need historians around to chart the history of
this institution, General Motors and I’m a Historian and I know business, you’re lucky to have me applying. The utility of an education in the market becomes increasingly important over educating human beings.

WN: When did that concern really start?

HS: Well I have a friend, he was a student here and he got a PhD in Philosophy. Then he came back and taught here in the Philosophy department, then he was dean and got a job in Albany at SUNY and I remember the debate between the faculty in the Brown Auditorium over this and someone who majors in Philosophy, I saw him recently because he came back and visited, I teased him well even the Philosophy department changed from being a Philosophy with only one major to a department of social Philosophy. I don’t know early 90s. In my department we shifted one of our programs, Public Administration to a bachelor’s of arts and science. It’s a difference between a bachelor’s of arts and science and a bachelor’s of arts. BS degree doesn’t need a foreign language, well less, for a long time no language, but the BAs do have a language requirement, which I believe in. Ok.

TE: So, you started at Cortland in 1963, right?

HS: Correct.

TE: Could you tell us a little bit about what the college was like when you came in.

HS: Yeah, I think it still had a lot of the Normal School about it because that’s what we were and then one year we change. The next number of years we’re a process of change, a lot of these were bitterly debated. Breaking up the social science department into the department of history, political science, sociology, geography. Why was Psychology not part of it even though it’s a social science? One of the reasons is because Psychology has a lot of students because there are quite a number of students who want to go into education and Psychology, and work in schools.
There are a lot of kids who are going to be school teachers, they figure they should know some ed psych. When I came here and for a long number of years, I would say it was one of the best departments at the college. They thought of themselves as a university, but they were good. Teacher education was still dominate, we were mainly service courses, it took a while before we got our majors. My department, I remember a big, huge debate in the social studies department, which was close to thirty people of all the subjects. We met and I think we debated, I was so young and I didn’t know all the people and we had this meeting and it seemed natural, you’re going to have a colleague in history, political science, sociology, etc... There was some big argument, one of the most senior people on the faculty, Ralph Brown, after whom the auditorium is named, stomped out of the meeting, well he got as far as the door people said sit down Ralph (laughing). There was a lot of objection to making the separate departments. Some of the questions people asked was who is going to supervise their student teaching. Hello political science, they’ll be in a social science department, which is history because you know history people are trained as history teachers, not political science teachers. It was a period of transition from a Normal School to a college of arts and sciences. If you got new faculty coming in they brought different values and aspects, in other words for myself and some of my colleagues, who had gone to schools like the one I went to, in fact one of them and I are writing a paper now on higher education. We thought, the college is changing and we can do things, in fact you can track down, maybe a year or two after I came, they pulled new, younger faculty, I was somewhere in my twenties into working and changing the college. In time I got more and more involved in doing things and ultimately things like doing a lot of scholarship and stuff. I’ve got a lot of papers that I wrote and put in a drawer and never finished or published, there was always something to do and eventually I was appointed a SUNY Distinguished Service Professor based on the service I gave over the years. I’ve lost my
train of thought. It was a period of transition from a Normal School to a college of arts and sciences. For people like myself that had a meaning and this meant some of the older people teaching education were being displaced. The curriculum was changing and so forth and so on. I mentioned before, I always compared us to a third world nation, a developing nation, we were transforming the college. I came here when we were 3,000, now we’re over 6,000 in enrollment. New buildings went up, Corey Union, was named after someone who was here when I came Fay Corey, they built the PE building, they built Dowd and it was one building after another. At times you thought you were in a construction site, where they also offered classes, they tore down the barrack type shacks over there (pointing toward the Miller building parking lot). In a way it was very exciting, it was like we were building a different type of college and a type of university. One of the things that they set up from Albany was to give money to faculty for the Summer for their research projects. They set up a committee and people applied, I’m doing research and I need the $1,500 fellowship, or expense money and this is what I’m purposing to do. So, there were a couple of us and I was one of them that got put on these statewide committees. We’re sitting at this table and there are people from Binghamton, Geneseo, and other schools. Binghamton was new, Stony Brook was new, SUNY bought Buffalo. Albany existed I think they had the first, second high school education program there. Albany’s always been weird, but then it became the fourth research center. They bought Buffalo, they built Binghamton, they built Stony Brook. Now I’ve never understood the history of Albany. I never bothered to learn it, but Albany was already there. So, I’m sitting at a table with people from other colleges with a stack of applications from people for money. I remember sitting there thinking we’re like one university, not thirteen colleges of arts and sciences, four centers, four medical schools, etc. No ESF and so forth. It was a period of institution building. Personnel, curriculum building, large enrollments as all of those students that the university was
built to take began to come in and as long as we had governor Rockefeller, the money kept coming. The salaries were good, the benefits were good, the library was good, all these buildings went up. In the short order, if you want to date the modern SUNY, you have to go back to the year that Rockefeller was first elected governor, which I looked up the other week, but I keep forgetting. He was governor until roughly the Nixon administration when he became Vice President. Then the Republicans dumped him because they were already moving towards the conservative party they are today. In fact, for a long time, have any of you lived in the dorms?

WN: I used to.

HS: Yeah for a long time the money that you paid for the dorm went to pay off the debt that Rockefeller incurred building the dorms. There were a lot of really good senior faculty, but the faculty really grew in size as well. It’s a broad question.

WN: That’s ok we were giving you space to answer. How about when the student strike began in 1970?

HS: In some ways, that’s a really good question, in some ways if I had to recreate one period it would have been the 1970’s and the 1980’s. That was true all over the country. What we had going on all over the country, one, the Vietnam War. I remember I was teaching summer school and a student came up to me, we were coming up on the final for Summer school, and said, “Professor Steck if I don’t pass this exam, I’m going to be drafted.” You don’t want to have that laid on you, but that was true across the board, he was just frank enough to sort of ask me to pass him whether he deserved it or not. He wasn’t belligerent, he was very nice. I remember that because if I say this isn’t a very good exam, F or D-, you know the next communication he’ll receive is from his draft board. One of the Vietnam movies came out and I forget which one it was. It was about these people who were drafted and they go in and they are all on the base horsing around.
They’re just waiting to get on an airplane, there were all these piles of stuff and one of them asked the sergeant what are all of these piles. They are body bags. So that period, you had the war and the antiwar movement, which was very strong across the country. You had the civil Rights movement. One of my colleagues was named Bill Griffin and he would go south during the Summer, I think to Kentucky or Tennessee, to teach summer school to African American children. I remember he came back at the end of one summer, he was in jail probably more times than not, very active activist, with the side of his car filled with bullet holes. You had the civil rights movement, you had the antiwar movement, you had the beginnings of the feminist movement, you had the counterculture. Boys suddenly appeared with long hair, girls with no bras and you had the whole counterculture beginning. There used to be a barber shop down there and they had a big sign that said, “We don’t cut the hair for hippies here.” (Laughing). You had a lot of active faculty. One of the best things about that period, despite the war, you had civil rights, feminist, and student power movement across the country as well. Plus, the distinction between hippies and more politicals. For a while you had an SDS chapter, Students for a Democratic Society, you can look it up on google I’m sure. Tom Hayton, who is not deceased was married to Jane Fonda for a while. They both came here, the hottest social ticket in town, on campus was to get invited to Bill Griffin’s house where Jane Fonda and Tom Hayden would be. The interaction between faculty and students was pretty high. One of the big gathering places was the Hollywood. In fact, when my kids come back to visit, my younger son, who’s now a college professor too, he always wants to go and eat at the Hollywood, even though the food isn’t that great, just out of nostalgia. Once there was a big fist fight over the war and one of my colleagues who favored the war and one who didn’t. The one who didn’t was, I’d say about 90% of the faculty was opposed to the war, an artist he given another student a nice drawing when one of his children was born. The argument got so fierce that the one
left the Hollywood, walked home because he lived on Groton, got the drawing, crumpled it up, came back and threw it in the face of the artist. Faculty would gather every night at the Hollywood. There’s a lot of faculty, student interaction outside of the classroom and campus. That’s the period that I really cherish as a memory. It was also a lot like my college that I went to, which was fairly small, when I graduated I think we had an enrollment of 500 and like a lot of small liberal arts colleges there was a lot of faculty, student interaction outside of the classroom. Social interaction, so it reminded me of that. Anyway, schools like ours all over the country trailed the bigger colleges like Berkeley of course, Cornell, etc. On May 4th, 1970 there had been a demonstration at Kent State. What they were demonstrating against was I think Nixon had invaded or was bombing Cambodia...

WN: Yeah, he wanted to invade Cambodia.

HS: Yeah strikes started across the country. I don’t remember the sequence of events, it might be in the Ralston book. There was a meeting in the function room.

WN: Yes

HS: There was no place to sit down. This meeting went on and I’m sitting there because I’m a social scientist, I know you can’t run anything with a thousand people, but so be it. I think they finally passed a resolution for something to happen on campus, which would continue until the war ended, or something else, whatever came first. I’m thinking right Nixon and the Pentagon are going to end the war because of this resolution. It was a fervor of political activism amongst students, and that was something that has faded. After Kent State, there was a meeting in the Brown Auditorium and one of my colleagues, someone I disliked intensely. We had tried to fire him and he filed suit and kept his job unfortunately. He was making this speech and people were just rolling their eyes. Finally, one of the students, Tom something, one of the students I was friendly with got
up in the back and said, “Enough of this nonsense” meaning just talking, let us go over and see the president. So, they all left the Brown Auditorium.

WN: While he was talking?

HS: Either while or when he finished, whatever. It would have come no matter who was talking. He was hired the same year I was, that was a mistake and finally he was sort of forced out. He kept making passes at undergraduate women. There was a lot more male faculty, female student romances, sex, and marriages. I know a couple of faculty that have married former students, I know of at least two.

WN: And there used to be more of that?

HS: Yeah there was a lot and that was true across the country, especially at places with graduate programs because you have graduate students in their mid-twenties and faculty that are in their thirties. There were a number on campus that married former students. Anyway, this guy was talking and they got up and marched across. I don’t know if there was a demonstration in Washington at the Pentagon the same day, I think. Roger Seifert, who was in your department, he and I drove down to Washington to do that. We took my oldest son who was still under five. So, when Roger and I went downtown to stop the war and float the Pentagon off the ground my son stayed with my parents in Washington. So, they marched across, they wanted to go see the president that was it and I think some of the secretaries looked out of the window of the Miller Building which was constructed between 1966, 1968. They look out and see all of these students coming and they were freaked out because every day you picked up the newspaper and there were student riots at Columbia and Berkeley and here and there. Buildings were occupied, secretaries raped, but who knows. All the secretaries fled the building. The students enter the building and
guess what, everyone had left. They were left with the building. They did not go over there to take the building, but when the secretaries all left, they were left with the building.

WN: They ended up taking over the building anyway (laughing).

HS: They took over the building and stayed overnight. There was a big meeting in the Moffett gym maybe the next day or two days later. The student strike was really interesting. You have all these students in the building and some faculty as well, that was in the afternoon. At dinner time ASC sent food over. President Jones, who as I said was terrible, he was off campus, but came back that night and found the building had been taken over. His first instinct was to call the state troopers to end it. Everyone knew that there couldn’t be a worse idea, outside of Nixon invading Cambodia. The provost at the time, who had been in PE and had founded that part of the school, talked him out of it. They met in a room on the first floor and a number of us sat against the wall as they talked and he talked him out of it. Thank goodness because it would have been awful. How do state troopers clear out a building? Either with batons or tear gas and that would have been terrible, arrests and all that. What happened was there was a big meeting in the gym in Moffett and I think it was written about in the Ralston book. What they decided because the strike was spreading across the country. Something that struck me at the time was the fact that in schools like ours, whether public or private, distinguished or not distinguished, were following the major centers, Berkeley, Michigan, Cornell, etc… I thought that we should think for ourselves. They passed a resolution that classes were suspended or students could stop and take the grade that they then had. If the faculty wanted to continue to teach some classes, they could; few students attended them. It split the pro war antiwar and President Jones, when the case was made to him about the Vietnam War, his response was the President knows what he is doing, we don’t, follow the leader. There was a school where the President of the college sort of led the march that went through the
town or the campus or something like that. Not Jonesy. I remember one of my colleagues in Geography, very conservative, everyone acted a little foolishly, everyone going past his classroom and there's one student and him, two conservatives. That was the strike and I really liked that period. I think that the students were involved in what they were doing. They were involved with their studies, some of the best students I ever had. We have a lot of good students here, but I think the whole level was higher. It wasn't just that I have a class, five or six really good students, should all go to graduate school. There was a general uplift.

WN: That uplift, did it last after the strike? Was there a certain energy?

HS: The way it happened across the country because this was 1970. I think the reaction also sent a message to the White House. This is going on across the United States so I was glad they did it at Cortland, even though Cornell was our local model. We had a lot of bright students. A lot of active students. I think as the national administration began to modify. Nixon was elected in 68, when was Johnson elected? Johnson came into office in 63 when Kennedy was assassinated. He was elected in 1964. I don't know if he was reelected. I'm really blanking.

WN: He was re-elected and Nixon came after that.

HS: Johnson withdrew in 1968 and then Hubert Humphrey ran against Nixon and lost. Nixon apparently sent the signal to the South Vietnamese because they were already negotiating a Paris and he sent a message saying don't come to an agreement with Johnson and we will do better for you. Nixon was elected in 1968 as I was doing a post doctorate work at Yale in 1968. I voted for Dick Gregory of the Peace and Freedom Party. Even a social scientist who knows better did that. On election night I was in New Haven at Yale and that was a really close election, 1968. I remember watching on TV and I'm saying is my vote, meaning people who voted for the Peace and Freedom Party going to split the vote and throw Nixon and I really began to be angry at myself
for my foolishness. That didn’t happen, I felt confident that New York state would not do that, but still that close, it just bothered me that I threw away a vote. I always thought that we’re not a European country with multiple parties, we are a two-party country. At Yale they had a big meeting too. The year I was there on a post-doctorate. They had the huge meeting, maybe 3,000 people on an issue, the war or civil rights, and they took a vote and out of 3,000 it turned out exactly the same number on both sides. Did you ever read Dickens’ *A Tale of Two Cities*?

WN: No

TE: No, I haven’t

HS Opening line, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times”

TE: I’ve heard of that line.

HS: That’s how I felt about the 1960’s. What happened in 1964? Three civil rights workers, two white boys and one African American boy killed in Mississippi. There were other shootings. There was a school teacher from Detroit, she was shot and killed. Bill Griffin, who I mentioned, he was radicalized as one of his students, older student from another part of his life did a solo march through the South and he was killed. It was like the second Civil War. This terrible speech that President Donald Trump gave the other day where he attacked Dr. Ford that was in Mississippi. You put a Republican in Mississippi and the worst happens. When was the big riot in Mississippi when they called in the National Guard, air troopers of the last Airborne? I’m a patriotic American, but I think we overlook the dark side of our history from roughly 1780 on to the present, if not 1619 when the first slaves came. That was 1970 and then we sort of lapsed into that period with President Jones. The class of 1968 held their reunion recently and they asked me to speak, which I did. One of them was a radical student my wife and I were friendly with. The radical students were great. They always came to visit me and my wife. Guess what time they
always came to visit, just about 6 o’clock at dinner time (laughing). He came back for his reunion. He’s been doing well. I said Jeffery a group of students met at our house and we were waiting for you. I looked out the window, we lived on West Court Street just a few blocks away, and there you were wandering around on the street on LSD or pot of something. In terms of my own life and for a lot of reasons that was a really good time. Some of my students went on to do really, really well. To go back to a question that you answered, I could give readings in class that I couldn’t give today because I just think it would go over the head of too many students. Not people like yourselves because there has always been a good minority that could have went to almost any school in the country at any level. Increasingly I just found that some of the books, some of the readings just over their head. The reason that I think of it is that I just took a book home, I’m supposed to move out of the office, and I was up yesterday and I found one of the books that I used all tattered called C Wright Mills *the Power Elite*. Have you ever heard of it?

WN: Yeah.

HS: Get it out and read it. I used to do that book in class. I couldn’t do it in class now.

WN: So, you think our students are kind of declining now?

HS: I don’t want to use a word like that, but I don’t know who to blame high schools, the general culture. There are a few little changes. It used to be if you got on the elevator on the ground floor in this building and there were three students in there, okay what floor, I’m going to the third floor, second floor. As the elevator rode people would say the snow’s awful or they world just make idle chit chat. Everyone in the elevator (acts like he is texting), except for me though.

WN: I noticed that too. When I walk around (acts like he is texting), except for when it rains, I like when it rains because no one is on their phones then.
HS: Before you had the computers on the phone with the key boards people talked and they still do. When I used to have a class in Sperry I’d walk back and forth between class, everyone was on their cell phones. Who are they calling in the five minutes between classes? It is interesting, some people call their parents a lot. At some point very rebellious teenagers become attached to their parents. I don’t know who they’re calling. Facebook makes it worse. I would say most interesting period in my life and I was fully active during that period. Cortland was not an island off by itself. There was a time when there was a huge discussion about doing a big civil rights movement in town. March down from the college to Main Street.

WN: I heard of that.

HS: Maybe when Martin Luther King was assassinated. I would say that even students who were relatively unpolitical were non the less engaged in things and my college was very conservative and went to Washington for the march on the Pentagon. I think it started from the Washington Monument and marched to the Pentagon. So, I want and I’m standing there and I see this sign coming down from my college, most conservative, nonreligious college in the United States of America and here’s students from my alma mater I couldn’t believe it. It was sort of a school, you think of Oxford and Cambridge in England, they put up the walls and the students are inside. I was thrilled because when I went to college there wasn’t that much political activity. Cortland was part of the national movement, and there was a lot of faculty support for it. I think that if we had had a different President, it would have been even more different. There was a lot of people plus some good groups. Jane Fonda, Tom Hayton, the Grateful Dead. All of these groups, they were super big ended up in Cortland for some reason and the college was smaller, it was still growing I think that makes a huge difference.

WN: Absolutely.
TE: Earlier you kind of had a fondness when you talked about President Clark could you
tell us about that.

HS: Yeah. I’ll tell you one other thing, before they built the PE building, Moffett was the
PE building, so the two things that are worth noting from your point of view and the book that
Randi Storch and Kevin Sheets are doing for the sesquicentennial I looked over drafts of their
chapter and I came down heavily on the following point. The PE departments, health, PE, whatever
used to be in Moffett and in this building on the bottom floor at this end of the building, right
below us used to be a snack bar. Wasn’t very big so it was always crowded, and people came from
over there, here. So, if you went down you’d see faculty, maybe students from all over the college
and you knew on Monday mornings during fall they would be talking about the NFL games from
the day before. My sculptor friend, people from PE and there was a real sense of community. I
think that as the college grew at the faculty level and at the student level the sense of community
diminished because of size. The school that I went to had an enrollment of five hundred when I
went and now 1,700, it was all male, now its coed. So that sense of community was split. In a way
we have two colleges here now don’t we? We have a College of Arts and sciences here and we
have a College of Professional Studies there. They could be separate schools. Have you ever had
a class there?

WN: No, but I’ve been down there.

HS: For what purpose?

WN: My car (laughing).

HS: Oh, you parked there. I was annoyed when they put the dining facility in the Student
Life Center. I’m beginning to think about things and maybe I was wrong because you might get
students from different parts of the college coming together much more than they did before. Is Neubig still a dining hall?

WN: Yes, I’m a manager there, I’m an assistant supervisor.

HS: How’s the customer flow?

WN: We get the most at Neubig. They’re trying to prop up Bistro, but it’s out of the way so you know less people will go there, but they push the healthy food and the good athletic food down there, but we always get more people at Neubig. We’re by far the best. Then you have this other new one that opened up, Pomodori, I think.

HS: What’s that?

WN: Another dining area.

HS: Where’s that?

WN: Right across the street from Neubig.

HS: In Corey?

WN: Next to Corey.

HS: In the basement of Corey

WN: Oh, wait yes it was the Under-Construction Café before.

HS: There’s a really weird thing that happens. For many years I ran and got elected for the ASC board.

WN: Ok

HS: The reason that I did that is because they have a big grant program. When I came here who got that grant program? Football in summer because they had to come back. They had to be fed, they had to have towels and I thought there has to be a way to change it. I ran for ASC board and I was on it quite a bit over the years. They would ask what committee do you want to be on. I
would say finance committee because we did the grants. On the board I remember one day I read in the *New York Times* and it was a long article about the changing nature of campuses. What was beginning to influence campuses across the United States were malls.

WN: Brick and mortar malls?

HS: Brick and mortar malls. All malls have what? A food court that was the thing. This was an article about Boston University that had a food court, one of the first ones. In it they mentioned Oswego. I said well that makes sense. At the next meeting I said I have an idea. I think we should have a food court. In fact, you could put it in Neubig and you could build like you see on a throughway, a walk across corridor from Corey to Neubig. Everyone laughed at the idea of a food court and brought hysterical laughter at the idea of the walk. I don’t know why I suggested that.

WN: Well we got the food, not the walkway.

HS: Well I don’t know what the argument for that was. It was a good idea, I forget why. I said food courts are growing and everyone laughed at me. What do we have now? Food courts.

WN: We have several food courts.

HS: They got rid of the snack bar downstairs. The Hilltop’s a food court, Bistros a food court. I don’t know about Neubig.

WN: Neubig, Bistro, Hilltop, we have the Bookmark at the library.

HS: That’s a Starbucks sort of thing.

WN: Yeah. Then another small one is going to be in the basement here. That’s Dragon’s Den.

HS: Really, finally. When they got rid of sandwiches downstairs it was terrible. ASC at that time was slow to catch up. I was on the board of ASC and I think I made an impact because
they started to advertise the grant program. I would go to people and I would say I want you to vote for me to be on the ASC board and one of the reasons is the grant program. And that happened, I had an impact certainly. Kept promoting it very heavily. Like the Brooks series that Professor Sharon Steadman runs I was the coordinator of the project on Eastern and Central Europe and I used to apply for money. No matter what I applied for they gave me $900. Asked for $1500, $1200, got $900. I was pleased because I think it helped a lot of groups on campus. The only groups it didn’t help were the students. When I first went on there the students applied for money, student groups. A fraternity applied for $90,000 to renovate their fraternity house, hand written application. I think that really changed the campus because I thought it was important to build up the cultural, intellectual life of the campus. That was my contribution to that. Money for the art gallery, money for the poetry series and then they moved into the CALS program. You know it wasn’t me who did it, but I think on a number of issues I had ideas which I brought from my alma mater or my general sense for things. We did over the years a number of strategic long-range plans and it’s something you might want to look into. Why didn’t I do more scholarship and research? College was changing and what was really good about the school in 1963 and the years that followed is that younger faculty were involved in the life of doing these things. No one said, “You better wait until you’re an associate or full professor.”. In my second year I was very friendly with someone who was older than me somewhat, in Philosophy and in retrospect he used to tell me how to live my life. I sort of resented it. What was he doing? He was doing it before we used the word, he was mentoring me. In retrospect I wish I had paid more attention. He was very bright, very sharp, very shrewd, we were good friends and he would tell me how to live my life. He was right. He became Dean of Arts and Sciences. With the President that came in 1964 I think, Ken Young, 1964-1965 he said, “We’re going to have a strategic plan.”. They set up a committee and they put
me on it. We ultimately wrote a strategic plan. I wrote it because I had all these ideas and position papers. They said we have to pull it together and they sort of offered $1,500 if I spent the summer writing it. Since I have two small children under 5, the youngest being 2 years old. The President had the idea, which he called individualized, self-directed study. This was the mid to late 1960’s. Across the country you had experimental colleges popping up. I was aware of this and the friend who was mentoring me was aware of this. You had a New College in Florida, you had Evergreen in Washington, you had Hampshire college in Massachusetts. A lot of experimental colleges and a lot of them had to do with loosening up the curriculum. Putting more responsibility on students to direct their own education. We wrote a strategic plan, it’s about this thick. It’s called *A College Charts its Course* if you can find a copy its worth reading. I did a really good job writing it. Really good at writing bureaucratic stuff like its written by a literate person. The President took it and rewrote it into bureaucratic language, but the ideas are there, it’s not as exciting to read. That was the vision, never came through because there was so much turmoil at the college and he was at the end of it. This is the way I always described Ken Young as a president, he was a younger person. This is the metaphor I always used he was like a captain of a ship. You know it is going from this port to that port that’s its destination, but he doesn’t know how to steer the boat. First, he had this idea, he had a PhD in higher ed, turn to your senior faculty because that’s who the college is built on. Next turn to your younger faculty because their the flood of people coming out of graduate schools, they have the idea. He never knew how to be a good leader, but what can you do. He didn’t drink alcohol and if you went to a party because there was a lot of social life among the faculty, if you found him there he’d have a glass in his hand of milk. That’s what he drank and of course this was a really heavy drinking place. The optics of it were terrible. I never said this, but I thought about saying, “Ken just get a glass of Ginger Ale and if people ask what are you drinking,
say 7 and 7 and Ginger Ale and something like that.” (laughing). I think he was a Mormon, but I don’t know he didn’t do well and there was so much turmoil. A member of my department, we tried to fire him and he brought a law suit. The lawsuit was terrible, the same one who drove from there to the building, and he got all these students protesting on his behalf. They should have fired him, but we didn’t have the procedures at the time that we do now. Ken Young was a good person, with good ideas, but he just didn’t know how to be a good leader, a good President. Then we got Jonesy. Then Clark. You asked me about Clark?

TE: Yeah.

HS: He was very open and transparent. It was easy to go see him. He had some serious flaws, still alive so you should talk to him. On balance I think he was perfect for the times because he just opened everything up. They did an evaluation of the college from Albany of the President, which is basically the college. They were very critical of the Education Department, should have been giving the numbers of what it did. Why wasn’t it doing more? And taking the lead of teacher education across the university, if not beyond that. Why not this, why not that? All these things that we were not doing. Clark they said didn’t handle is immediate subordinates well, meaning the Vice Presidents. You got somebody in the job that wasn’t very good, they just stayed there. He just opened things up and I remember when this report came out, critical of the faculty for feeling sorry for itself. The other thing that was happening was that the Faculty Union was beginning to grow. Both across SUNY and here. The person that I spoke despairingly of, who was awful was the leader of it. I think he wanted the union as a way of keeping his own job. I didn’t get active for a long time. It didn’t make sense. Finally, things were happening, they had discontinued people’s employment, laid them off. There was a big faculty meeting in Dowd, this came at the time of the Christmas holidays and faculty’s very upset. People are being laid off and you don’t know what
going to happen, a couple of friends of mine got into a fist fight with each other, it was awful. They finally said, let us get someone to go over and get the President to come and tell us what is going on. They went over and they came back and said the President is having his eggnog party for the whole campus, which was you come to the office and get a glass of eggnog its what bosses do. When they came back and said that, I had this feeling somethings got to change. That sort of began to produce the role of the faculty union, which is what we have now. The union that we have now for all the state universities negotiates with the state of New York, not the local guy. The state of New York negotiates with us and if SUNY doesn’t like what they negotiate tough. They’re the bosses and the union has been good for everybody over the years. After this report came out I remember walking back with Clark from Corey. I said Jim you made this report, which is so critical of you, of the faculty, of this and that and the other, why did you make it public? It bordered on being harsh. He said it would have came out anyway, but he had no sense of why should I keep it secret. I think his openness offset a lot of the things that one could be critical of. I think balancing is really important for this particular college.

WN: For that time.

HS: I think he opened the door. When Taylor came, it was during the Pataki period. I remember Taylor set up a priority group, priority for the college, how do we reorganize, stuff like that. Should they reorganize, we have three schools now, they had three schools then, maybe we should have two. They went through all of this stuff and we ended up with three because the work each one does is so different. I didn’t say it, but my thought was, “Why are you fooling around?” You have a school of education, you have a school of PE with PE, health, exercise science and all of those other things and you have arts and sciences. You can’t reorganize all of those and make one big college. You can polish these separations, but it is still going to happen. You need a Dean
of Education, who knows education, etc. The budgets had been bad beginning in the later Rockefeller years. They were bad in the 1980s after the New York City budget crisis. They were terrible afterwards because of the Republicans that came in with the Pataki, who didn’t believe in spending the tax payer’s money on things like us. Maybe we’ll close a couple of the colleges. The other thing they said is why do we need one big state university, so we’ll keep that, but every college is sort of on its own, which meant that you started competing. It meant that the university went from being like this, it was more like this. If we wanted money and Oswego wanted money and Geneseo wanted money we were thrown into competition with each other. That was bad. There was an ultra-conservative on the board of trustees, who’s responsible for the general education program, which he thought was too much. There were not enough serious, real subjects being studied. She came up with all these new courses that were residues from the hippie period. Faculty teaching courses on comedy, TV, all that sort of stuff. Women’s studies at New Paltz held a Women’s studies conference. They had panels on things like sex toys and that made the Wall Street Journal. What’s happening to our universities? Taylor set up this group, it was under attack from the trustees and the budgets were super tight and we sat at this table in Miller and Taylor said to this group of maybe 15 people, we’re going to take a minute, everyone thinks about what they think the main priorities should be. There was silence for about ten minutes and everyone thought and wrote down their thoughts. Then he said well and people talked. While we were supposed to be doing this I was watching him across the table. He was just looking at the table, ok time’s up what do you think. Finally, he says no the priority is survival. My thought was holy cow. So, Taylor was good for that period. Jim Clark could not have led us through that period, I’m convinced of that, as much as I loved him and his wife personally. We had three Presidents that were perfect for the time, it is just incredible, I can’t believe it. Next question.
WN: One thing that I wanted to ask you about that I thought was interesting was in the mid 1980’s you were protesting parking tickets. Or parking fees for the faculty and the students. You almost went on strike.

HS: After this meeting at the eggnog party, up to that point the person in my department who’s so awful that I’ve mentioned many times, he’s dead. They finally fired him for fooling around with undergraduate women. I mean it wasn’t serious stuff, but at that time it got you in trouble. You couldn’t try to give coeds a kiss and then claim that in Europe when you meet someone it is like that. I think he did have an affair with a student, who was actually a married woman, maybe late twenties, early thirties. They were both adults, but still you don’t want to see him walking across campus with this woman when his wife has come to his office to pick him up. He was terrible and he was active in the union. Something happened and Frank Burdick, who was in the History Department, I was not in favor of the union for a long time, and he came one day and said, “I’m going to run for President of the union.”. We were close friends and he said, “Would you be Vice President? Sure.”. Whatever people ask me to do, I do. When the union came in I think it was very important. We like any union hold regular meetings with the management. In my judgement, we’ve always gotten along well with the administration. In all these 34 years because we all want a good college and we want to treat people well. We’ve had some tough periods, but in general I think it has been good. The first meeting we had with Clark, the way we did it is the union got there early, maybe six or seven of us, and we sat on one side of the table, labor, management. Clark came in and I think he expected to find malcontents, radicals, people who had been active in the unions at public schools, we had a number of former school teachers, misfits. He comes in, one full professor after another, and he realized that we were responsible people so we got along well with him. What did you ask about?
WN: I was asking about the parking tickets you were against.

HS: So, one of the things you find out is that when you are in a union, you have to do things for your members that deep down you don’t think are important enough. The college needed money and Clark was tough saying if we can’t have parking fees, we’ll have to have layoffs. We decided to sort of call his bluff. You’d be surprised, there was someone in my department, she’s no longer here, very conservative, I don’t know how she voted, but she was very conservative. She drove and she drove over from Ithaca and she said give me a sign and I’ll picket. There was something about taking away a free benefit and parking represented something more than parking. If you were on the faculty at Upstate, they pay a lot to park. Cornell pays an enormous amount for faculty parking. Here it was free. The settlement was we pay $15 to park a semester for paperwork, to get a sticker. We fought it, little things get to people.

WN: I know at work we have a lot of problems with our employees trying to park. They can’t find enough spaces, they get ticketed, they are complaining all the time.

HS: In some schools your car has a designated lot. Your employees, you can tell aren’t the only ones. The only thing to do it to get to work earlier.

WN: We need more parking spaces.

HS: All the way down, past the stadium, all the way to 281 there’s parking. They could run a shuttle, they do, but they could run a separate shuttle just for parking. That would help. There’s not a campus in the country, how much do your employees pay for parking?

WN: The union pays for it.

HS: That’s right. We could get you parking, we could charge $150 to everybody. Then your spouse will drive you or something like that. Exercise, one of the easy standards of advice
for getting a lot of exercise is park as far away from the building where you work as possible. Then you have to walk it.

WN: I remember parking in that far lot, my first semester here in the D lot past the stadium.

HS: Do they run a bus there?

WN: They do, I never took it, I just walked it. A lot of walking.

HS: Well that’s why you’re in good shape. (Laughter) I think there are a lot of benefits. The Student Life Center, can ASC employees use it too?

WN: Yes.

HS: When my children come here, middle age sort of people, my son who is an exercise fanatic to stay in shape and in good health says that if you were in a big city you’d pay no less than $100 a month for this place. That is a really good benefit. What else?

WN: Based off what we have been saying, these changes that have been going on throughout the college, what would you say the future looks like? What direction are we heading in?

HS: That’s a really good question.

WN: Or am I jumping too far ahead?

HS: No, I was about to say this, just before you asked the question. I think the value that’s driven me and the thing that I find just thinking abstractly about higher education is the following. One of the functions of the public institution is the democratic function. Where I went to college at a private school, we had Ohio State and there was no tuition, when I went came here there was no tuition. It started the year that I came. $300 a year and if you graduated from high school, you got into Ohio State. Someone from Ohio State once told me we hire a lot of faculty’s wives because it’s their job to flunk the students out the first semester, who aren’t very good. Nonetheless, and
if you are really interested in this, there is a really good book on state universities. It has had a huge influence on me. Here I am from a private Liberal Arts college founded by the episcop al church, though its stance is virtually nonexistent. Had a lot of kids that came from immigrant families, you had Italian kids, Jewish kids, German kids and a lot of farm boys from Ohio, but you know the last time I visited with my wife, she said this is a school for rich kids. She was looking at a student driving a fancy Volvo. That’s true, it’s a really good school. It was a pure liberal arts school, you are sort of talking about preparing for careers now, the disease affecting higher education. It was a pure liberal arts school, strongly influenced in its culture by the image of Oxford and Cambridge. I’ve always felt that that was what a liberal arts education was. You’re better off studying poetry, than business economics. You want to go to business school?

WN: I am a manager right now and I will take online classes in management for graduate school.

HS: I’ll tell you about our conference and then I will come back to this. I have been very active in promoting the college’s International Studies Program. I think we’ve come a long way. I don’t know who was President, Taylor or Clark, he sent me and a colleague to a conference in Atlanta about an international business education program for undergraduates. We got a free trip to Atlanta, I thought it was a waste of money and time, but nonetheless. I don’t believe in business education at the undergraduate level. The keynote speaker was a Vice President of Coca Cola. He gave this speech and the first question he got was, “I’ve got this student who would like to work for Coca Cola, in international business.”. His response was two-fold, he said everyone who works for Coca Cola starts on a truck. I was impressed with that. He said, “Every Coca Cola company - we used to have one in Cortland, but it is not here anymore- is separately managed. Its highly decentralized even though it’s a franchise type thing.”. He says, “I cannot answer your question.”
and he didn’t. Then the next question he got was what kind of courses do you think are good for kids who want to do international business? This was his response, I thought it was a good response, he said I can’t answer that. I was a History major at Princeton. What he was saying is a good liberal arts education whether its poetry, history, philosophy, you name it, it will serve you well as a person, as a citizen and in whatever profession you chose. In today’s world students change not simply jobs, but they change careers in their twenties. Liberal arts educators, we think, we have values, you think in mature ways, you give judgements in mature ways, you write well, you think well. You’re not just learning how to be a technician of some kind. I’m a frank believe of it. On one hand, I think schools like this across the country do serve a democratic function, and on the other hand I believe strongly in a liberal arts education. If the two of them go together well in today’s world is what every parent worries about is what their kids going to do when they get out of college. Will my kids get a job and a career that will allow them to do better than we did? I don’t care if they do or don’t take Shakespeare. I’m torn between those two values. My alma mater and its every place has an alumni magazine and the most recent issue has an article on diversity. Are we admitting enough Asians, African Americans etc. I think they are doing a fairly decent job in holding onto their roots and one of my classmates wrote a really intense short essay about three or four pages saying we have no business doing this. We do a liberal arts education, but there’s all this business in the alumni magazine about diversity and inclusion. That’s not what we are about. Those are the two directions of education. I’ve always felt torn in that way. I suggest students who say I don’t know what to take, here’s a good poetry course, here’s a good history course, have you taken any history course, no. So, since our time is almost up, I’ll answer your question with this. I had a student, who was really good, who got the student excellence award. I was advising him and I couldn’t figure out his course. I said I can’t figure out your courses. What are you a junior or a
senior? No, I’m finishing in three years. That’s why it was so confusing to me because I think in four-year blocks. Someone in three has to meet all the requirements in less time. It was really confusing because I had never had that experience before. I said why? If I ran the world college would be five or six years. It’s the only time in your life when you have a chance to study and read and grow. It’s a great time. He really didn’t have an answer except to get through and get started and he was a really bright kid. He got through, he got started and he went to law school, I am not sure what he is doing now. In this conversation I didn’t understand this. I said have you taken any art courses, art history, no, regular history, no. Literature, poetry, novels, no. All of these things that broaden you as a person. I said, “Well some day you are going to have a job in a fancy law firm and the law firm in Manhattan is going to have a reception in a commercial art gallery and it is going to be an open reception. All these special, elite type people are going to be there and you’ll be there and there will be all these pictures on the wall and people will be talking and guess what you won’t be able to talk because you haven’t studied anything. Except, business, economics, political science and anything else that can get you through in three years and get into law school.”. That’s my philosophy.

WN: And that’s what we are facing now

HS: That’s what we are facing now. It is not illegitimate for parents to worry about their kids. You know what I read whenever I’m in the Miller Building? Have you ever been in the Miller Building?

WN/TE: Yes.

HS: You ever taken the elevator in there? Take it from the ground floor. You don’t have to take the elevator, but go to where the elevators are. Above where the elevators are is a plaque from World War II veterans in effect thanking the college. It is written very simple, but its moving, so
I would read it and that’s what we have done, we’ve had so many kids that are the first ones in their family to go to college. It changes their lives in more than the usual ways. That’s liberal education, we’re not a trade school. One of the big things in American higher education today, which you may have noticed with the trouble that Harvard and Yale are having is with Asian students. A couple of summers ago, I was in Boston, we have family up there and we said let’s go to Cambridge. We walked through the Harvard campus. I thought I was in Hong Kong and that’s true everywhere. Now Harvard and Yale are under attack for discriminating against Asian students because if they did it on merit only, they would have that impact, despite the athletes and despite the ones who have family that are higher up. I don’t think we have many Asian students here, not a visible.

WN: They are here, just not as many.

HS: Boy go to some of these other schools. There are a lot more. I think we have done well with African Americans. I agree with whether it’s a poor kid from a farm family in upstate New York or an African American kid from Rochester, Asian kid from Chinatown, Manhattan I think we serve society in that way. Yet the traditional liberal art is in decline. If a kid can’t do it, they can’t do it, but you have to accommodate them. I think those two values are really tough.

WN: I do have one more question that we are required to ask you. This one’s pretty open ended, it should be easy. What does Cortland mean to you?

HS: The college or the city of the county?

WN: We’ll go with the college.

HS: That’s a good question. I think it gave me an opportunity. If you look at different schools, especially major research centers, other types, junior faculty are on a ladder. You work your way up the ladder. There are a couple of things. One of them, that sense is not here. You have
a first-year faculty member we go out of our way to try to get them involved in the college, as long as their classes and their scholarship. I felt valued in the first year I was here. I think it values people. I have had friends that have taught at much “better schools” and I wouldn’t trade it because they were like, I don’t know if you have ever been at Cornell at night during the week. If you go to, a movie, a theater, a play or something, or when I was at Yale on a post-doctorate on campus, you go through the Cornell campus, let us say you leave a movie or a lunch or something at 11 at night you go through a lot of buildings, the lights are on because to be a research scientist and do that kind of research that’s what you do. Working at a business, we have to get a new car model out and I think we have a good community here. I don’t like how my department developed in the early years, I do now, but I think it’s a good department. History is good. I think there’s a sense of community and a lot of my closest friends are not from my department. When I had been here fifty years, Erik Bitterbaum had the idea that I should have a celebration because I was the longest serving faculty member in the whole state university system. Then I had to say something and I think I ended with these words. Janet, my wife and I came to Cortland for a job and we found a community. An intellectual college community. That’s true. I think one of the things we’ve lost, it not our fault, the requirements for school teachers have gotten stricter.

WN: High school or college?

HS: K-12. If you have any friends that are in K-12, or any other teaching programs, state lays down the requirements. I used to go to some meetings that were set up across campus. I remember once a dean sitting there and kids that are in education, especially the K-12 are so loaded up with requirements and student teaching that I don’t think they get a good education. Maybe they’re good teachers, maybe the secondary is better, but you have to major in it, the same for English. I remember sitting at one of those meetings and the dean is holding this piece of paper,
now they have to offer something on bullying. Yes, I want teachers to know how to deal with bullies in their classroom, but now we add that and we add this. You have kids who, my former daughter-in-law is a school teacher in Massachusetts. She started out as a parent volunteer, then a substitute, then there was a big budget crisis. They kept her on because they had a problem and they had a child with special needs. Her job, if you can believe it was to work with that child all day, every day, every week, every month, every school year. One student, one teacher. That’s the depth of problems that that child had. People like that need training. As college grew the community got stretched and people, but in the old days PE, arts and sciences over lunch, the NFL from the night before.

WN: Is there anything else you would like to add before we shut the recorder off.

HS: No.

Ended on 75:40