

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN ALEXANDER

Interviewer: Jewell Willhite

Oral History Project

Endacott Society

University of Kansas

JOHN ALEXANDER

B.A., Wesleyan University, 1961

M.A., History, Indiana University, 1963

Ph.D., History, Indiana University, 1966

Service at the University of Kansas

Assistant Professor of History and Slavic and Soviet Area Studies, 1966-70

Associate Professor, 1970-74

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Emeritus, 2005

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Q.: I am speaking with John Alexander, who retired in 2005 as professor of history and Russian and East European studies at the University of Kansas. We are in Lawrence, Kansas, on July 14, 2005. Where were you born and in what year?

A: I was born in 1940 in Cooperstown, New York, site of the Baseball Hall of Fame. But also it was the headquarters of the New York State Historical Association, of which my father was head. That=s why we were in this village. It=s a tiny place. A very wealthy man, Steven Clark, who was one of the heirs to the Singer Sewing Machine fortune, was always looking for ways to support the growth of Cooperstown. He persuaded the New York State Historical Association, which was very small, to come to Cooperstown, and he subsidized them, so they came. I was born there. We only lived there another year. We very quickly moved to Madison, Wisconsin. So I don=t really remember Cooperstown, except in later years I went to summer camp near there.

Q.: What were your parents= names?

A: My father was Edward Porter Alexander (1907-2003). My mother was Alice Bolton Alexander (1907-1999). They were both from Iowa. My mother was from Des Moines and my father was from Centerville. They met at Drake University in the 1920s.

Q.: I=m from Iowa too.

A: Iowa people stick together, I find. I remember running into Rafe LaFrenz in the hall between semesters and saying, AYou=re Rafe LaFrenz, aren=t you?@ He said, AYes, I am.@ I said, AWell, my parents were both from Iowa and I have regularly reported on

your progress to them.@"

Q.: What was your parents' educational background?

A: I think my father was maybe the first in his family to go to college. I'm not positive about that. He became a history major. He liked writing and English, so he was attracted to that as well. He was good at economics too. I think he was a fairly shy young man. As far as I know, he may not really have had a date before he went out with my mother, who was quite extroverted. She had dated a lot. I think she was a very popular young woman at Drake. My father wrote to her in the summer of 1928, expressing the hope that they would see more of each other. This was before their senior year.

Q.: So he went to Drake also?

A: Yes. They were in the same class, 1929 probably. My mother had an older sister who went to college, so she wasn't the first in her family to go to college. They both became school teachers in Iowa. That was a problem because they got married in November of 1929 during the Thanksgiving holiday. Their honeymoon was a weekend in Omaha. But they taught in different Iowa towns, and had to go back to their towns. They had no car. They were 70 or 80 miles apart and didn't see much of each other. My father was quite miserable alone. He started a diary January 1, 1930. We didn't even know about this until after his death. He'd forgotten about it. It was buried in his desk. He makes it very clear that he missed "Little Alice," as he called her in his diary. We had never heard him refer to Mother as "Little Alice." She was not a little woman. She was very outspoken. That was funny. They were both very academically oriented and excellent students. Both were Phi Betas at Drake, so they were known to be fine students and

became school teachers right away. Looking back on that, I can see that I was home schooled, in a certain sense, before it was ever known because of these very well-educated parents. I had two sisters, Anne, two years older (1938-1984) and a much younger sister, Mary, six years younger (1946-). So it was a very lively household. Like mother my older sister was very extroverted, so there was lots of talking and occasional temper tantrums on people=s parts, but good humored. Both parents and sisters had a great sense of humor. They loved to laugh. They loved to go to parties. As I said, my mother was the more social one. She sometimes would say that she was the one who made the friends but my father kept the friends. They both enjoyed socializing and had many friends over many, many years. I realize that they prepared the way for me, even at the University of Kansas, because my father had known the son of the man who was chairman of the history department. This young man, Jim Anderson, was in Colonial American history and had spent a summer at Williamsburg. That=s where I grew up from 1946. My father offered a kind of summer course. I think it was team taught. Anyway, Professor George Anderson knew about our family before I even set foot in Kansas. That was helpful. My father also knew the head of the Kansas State Historical Society, Nile Miller. They were old friends, and I met him very soon after arriving. That was very nice. Nile Miller=s son was actually going into the Russian field at the time too. Those coincidences really paved the way for me, as I realize.

Q.: So you grew up and went to school in Williamsburg.

A: From 1946. We moved to Williamsburg in the spring of 1946. I was six years old.

Q.: Was your father teaching there?

A: My father went into historical administration. It was always very difficult for me as a young man. I really couldn't understand what my father did. I remember asking him one time. He said, "It would be easier if you just said I am an historical administrator." I didn't know what that meant.

Q.: Was he involved with Williamsburg?

A: Yes. He came to Williamsburg because he was especially interested in restorations, recreating things and especially outdoors on a large scale. Williamsburg was in a way the biggest project of that kind of thing. He loved the job at Madison. He was director of the Wisconsin State Historical Society, which was an excellent, very active state historical society. He traveled all over the state giving talks, etc. I remember Madison. I grew up enough that I could remember it. I liked Madison too. I remember going on the toboggan, playing in the snow and this kind of thing. My father said he had a very good job and was sad to leave it. He said they tried very hard to match the salary of Williamsburg, but he decided it was just too good an offer to pass up. So we drove in our car from Wisconsin to Virginia.

We got there and there was some discussion about whether I would be allowed to continue in first grade, which I had started in Wisconsin. I had a January birthday. I actually had been sent to a Catholic school earlier so that I could go to public school at age five. The people in Williamsburg were not sure whether I was old enough, but they decided to let me try. And, fortunately, I did fine. I am still in touch with many of those classmates. I was in school with them for 12 years, so I knew them very well.

Williamsburg was a tiny place. So you knew people well and people knew about you.

My parents often said it was a great place to raise kids because you had other people looking out for you. If you misbehaved your parents heard about it almost for sure, because it was a tiny place.

Q.: I suppose there were lots of tourists in the summer.

A: Yes and during the year. That was interesting. Part of the setup there was that my father was one of many administrators. His final title was vice president director of interpretation. I don't remember how many vice presidents there were, but there were several, and he was among the important ones. He had a Ph.D. in American colonial history. He was kind of a liaison between the academic community and the public. One reason he liked historical reconstruction was he really thought that history should be presented to the broader public. He was an educator in a broad sense. He felt it was very important to present these things to people in an accessible way.

Q.: Some people don't put much value on history, so that is a good way of presenting it.

A: It was great in Virginia. I think maybe it was the Southern background. There was an assumption that history was important. People talked about Mr. Jefferson as if he lived next door and they had just been talking to him not too long ago. Some of that may have been a little bit of a myth, but people had a lively historical sense. Jamestown was right near by. Yorktown was near by too. Yorktown was one of my favorite places. I loved to climb on the canons and the battlements. Often I would have my birthday party at Yorktown. My friends had a great time climbing over the battlements. So I think I was fated to be an historian, just where I grew up.

Q.: It sounds like it.

A: All of this history was just all around you. I was interested in it. My parents, I think, had a broad sense of that. They didn't particularly push it or anything, but we went to see sights. When we traveled some place, we would go to see the local museum. I was taken to many of the famous battlefields. I remember going to Petersburg at about age 10 and seeing the crater, which made a big impression on me. It was a huge hole in the ground, which was a military disaster for the North during the Civil War. They dug this mine under the Confederate lines and blew it up and then rushed into the hole and were trapped. It was a terrible disaster. But there is this huge hole in the ground that still makes an impression on people. And there was a Civil War earthwork on the edge of town. One of my school friends lived right near it. We would go over and just play in it. We knew it had something to do with the Civil War, but it was just a mound of dirt for us. In that sense, history surrounded you.

I loved the Mariners= Museum in Newport News, one of my all-time favorite museums, because it had all these exhibits that you press a button and the paddle wheels on a model ship would turn. And they had a bunch of small craft out in the courtyard that you could climb on. It was fun for young boys who had plenty of energy. You want to do things. You don't just want to look at stuff. You want to climb on it and look at it up close and all of that. So it was a wonderful place to grow up, I must say. I had a wonderful time and great friends. It was a lot of fun.

Q.: What are the names of the schools you attended? What elementary school did you attend?

A: In Madison I started school at Shorewood Hills. I did about half of first grade there. I

can't even remember what the name of the Catholic school was that I went to earlier. My mother assures me that I loved the Sisters. I have really no memory of it at all. I guess it did eventually help me become a Catholic later in life because I married a Catholic. Shorewood Hills was the part of Madison where we lived. I remember that quite vividly. We have a photograph of my older sister and me in sort of band type uniforms. I can't remember what that was. But we all had outfits that were made, but I don't remember what the occasion was. But somehow it was fairly special. We had a number of good friends in Madison who came and visited us in Virginia. My wife went to graduate school for a year in Wisconsin before we married in the sixties. There were still some elderly friends of my parents there who were very nice to us when we were courting.

Then in Williamsburg I went to Matthew Whaley School, which was a 12-year school. We lived about two blocks away. I could easily walk to school. I went there for 10 years. Then they built a new county-city high school on the outskirts of town named James Blair High School. It was named after the first president of the College of William and Mary, an English bishop. So I went there the last two years of high school. That's where I graduated in 1957. I am still in touch and will go back for my 50th reunion in 2007. They are going to have a kind of general reunion of all classes in 2006. I'm not sure if I'll go back for that or not. We'll see. Both of those schools were excellent. This was the era of segregation, of course, so they were whites only. There was a black high school. But it was very much segregated. I didn't know many black people. Most middle-class families, etc. had maids and they were always black. I do remember our

maids, several of them quite well.

These schools were actually very good schools. In fact, my wife and I visited and spent the night with a couple classmates of mine in Williamsburg a couple of years ago. We had a kind of mini class reunion of people who were in the area. One of our teachers showed up who had moved away from Williamsburg but was living in retirement in Norfolk. He was talking about the school and saying that he was very impressed with the teaching. He said Matthew Whaley was known to be one of the best schools in the state. He was very impressed with how carefully teachers prepared. I remember having many good teachers, mostly women. As far as I remember there were no men teaching in the elementary part. We were all in one building. The elementary part was on one side of the building, the high school part was in the other part of the building. We started to have a few male teachers in high school. I remember a math teacher in particular, John Major. The man who was the first principal at James Blair, George Pitts, had been a math teacher. And of course the phys ed teachers were men for the men and women for the girls. But still the majority of teachers were women, even in high school.

Q.: I suppose you studied history in high school.

A: Yes, I had a superb world history teacher, a man, Raymond Freed, who I knew quite well and liked tremendously. He was a very demanding sort of teacher. He was the disciplinarian of the school. It was not uncommon that you would look through the window and see him going down the hall with some young miscreant with maybe his arm up behind him. He was called in cases of obstreperous students. He was very much a no nonsense kind of guy, who everybody liked, basically. He was not a mean sort of person. He was just no nonsense. I regret that I didn't get to see him once I had gotten in

graduate school and gone into the profession because I really would have liked to have talked to him about his teaching. In my memory he never used a note. And yet he lectured nonstop. You took four, five, six, seven pages of notes every day. I don't know how he did it. He must have had a phenomenal memory. He just talked and it was fascinating. And he did all of world history. That really helped me get more interested in the academic side of history. I was already reading history because there were all these history books around our house. So it was very easy to get interested in it from that point of view. Raymond Freed was a wonderful teacher. I have the warmest memories of him. I had some other very good teachers. The language teacher was only one, Miss Caldwell. We only had Latin and French. She taught both. She was an excellent and very demanding teacher. No nonsense. You didn't misbehave in her class. It was a well-disciplined school. I don't remember people getting in much trouble or mouthing off or resisting, that kind of thing. Maybe it was partly the South because it was *AMa=am@* and *ASir.@* You learned that very early on in life.

One of my earliest friends in Williamsburg was the youngest son of the Wallace family, Sam or Pete. His mother was from Iowa. My mother had heard of her before we came. But she was from a much wealthier family from Des Moines and apparently had gone to a prep school and all of this. Anyway, they heard about each other and I was very quickly invited to their house. I spent a lot of time there. They had a cook. They were the only family I knew who had a cook. They had three cars too. Unbelievable. It was the only family I knew who had more than one car. And two of their cars were Cadillacs. They were a wealthy family. The father owned a lot of property, including the bus

station. He owned a couple of gift shops, etc. I learned a lot from them. They were hunters, for example, so they had all kinds of guns around the house. They had the first TV set I ever saw. They were often the first people to have things like that in town. They were a very generous family and a very different family from my own family. Both the mother and the father had tempers and occasionally they would get really angry at the kids and yell. I had never seen such. I would be kind of shaking. But I was very good friends with their younger son. We were close friends for a long time. He was a terrific athlete in all sports. He was finally sent off to prep school because he was not doing as well in school as they thought he should.

He and I were also sent off to summer camp in 1948 at age eight because my parents went to Europe that summer. So my older sister and I were both sent off to summer camp. The camp I went to was run by old friends of my parents near Cooperstown. I went there every summer but one until 1955. I have very fond memories of that experience. It was an interesting camp run by very interesting people. There was a big bunch of boys from Baltimore at that camp. So I got to know some of them and am still in touch with a couple. The people who ran the camp were teachers at a prep school in Baltimore, the Gilman School. One of their friends was a wealthy man from Baltimore named Walter Lord, who became famous as a writer about the *Titanic*. It was made into a movie, *A Night to Remember*. He had been working for a New York ad agency and quit his job and became a full-time writer. The last 30 or 40 years of his life he was a writer. He wrote popular history. He was one of the first historians to use oral history. He'd go and interview people and was very comfortable with that. He would not use a tape recorder.

Q.: That would be hard.

A: He thought tape recorders would bother some people, so he would simply go and talk to them and then go back to his hotel room and write down what he had gotten. He apparently had a fabulous memory. He was an incredible character. He was from this wealthy Baltimore family. He=d actually gone across the ocean at an early age on the sister ship of the *Titanic*. And he got fascinated with it early in life and collected all kinds of *Titanic* memorabilia. He talked to all kinds of people who were on the *Titanic*. He never married. In fact, he was almost certainly gay. He loved elaborate games. He was a camera buff, so he was the first man I knew who had a Polaroid camera. One of the games he did for the campers was he would go around and take pictures of various sites and then you would have to hunt these up and find out where they were. We also had a thing that was called the eight-inch regatta, where every camper was allowed to make a sail boat. It had to have a paper sail. It could not be longer than eight inches. Then we would have this race. It was surrounded by all kinds of pageantry and ritual. People tried to cheat saying, AMy boat is eight inches long but it is four feet wide.@ Of course, that never worked because there were judges who disallowed it. Walter Lord was always called Athe commodore.@ That was his name. He always came up for a week or two every summer. You would hear, AThe commodore is coming next week,@ and everybody knew who this was. It was Walter Lord, the commodore, a fabulous guy, full of fun. He was one of these men who, in a sense, just never really grew up. He loved boyish games, the more elaborate the better. We also had a turtle derby, where we would catch little turtles and have a race with all kinds of ritual. We would have a big treasure

hunt at the end of the camp. The camp would be divided up into teams. It was a fun camp with a lot of creative people.

Most of the counselors when I went there were from Princeton. So I learned lots of Princeton lore. I knew the Princeton cheers. Then one of the sons of the people who ran the camp became the wrestling coach at Harvard. More and more Harvard guys started to be counselors too. The counselors were very interesting. They were young men with all kinds of interests. You'd learn lots of strange knowledge from these guys. It was very interesting. And it was a fairly informal camp. There was not any camp uniform. There was a camp tee shirt if you wanted to buy one. There was a good deal of freedom. A person was designated as sort of counselor for the day. So you would have to sign in with that person saying, "I'm going to go boating," or "I'm going to do this." So they knew where you were. But basically there wasn't that much control, especially for the older boys. They could do kind of what they wanted.

There was a prep school part to the camp, but that was very small. I really didn't know that part because I didn't need to go to school. This was essentially to help people who needed some extra tutoring in the summer. Those people typically took classes in the morning. But then they were free to do other things in the afternoon. I don't think there were ever more than five, six, or seven boys in that part of the camp. As I said, it was interesting because we had weekly plays. We slept in Army-type, canvas tents with wooden floors that took five boys and one counselor. There were 16 or 17 tents. You kind of progressed up. You started at a lower level. They were grouped by age. The youngest boys were eight. Fifteen was kind of the oldest. The counselors would be 16 or

17. I enjoyed that camp tremendously.

There was lots of boating, lots of sports. I learned to sail there. They had three sail boats. I got very interested in sailing and was fascinated with that. Historically too, I started to read C. S. Forester novels. I became a big fan of Patrick O' Brien in more recent times. So I always enjoyed maritime, nautical novels.

We had a summer house too out on the York River because Williamsburg was terribly hot in the summer, just beastly hot and humid. Lots of water very close to it. So many of the people would have summer places out on the river. We'd live out there in the summer. It was close enough for my father to commute to work. There was always a breeze out there. It was a lot of fun for kids too, crabbing, playing around with the river, swimming. My parents both liked to swim, so all of the kids learned to swim very soon. My definition of summer was swimming. That was the way it was, being in the water.

As I said, this camp was wonderful that way too, lots of swimming. My friend and I, when we arrived at age eight, were some of the most advanced swimmers. We were better than most of these prep school type people. They didn't know much about swimming. But we were pretty accomplished swimmers by then. That was a nice shot of confidence. They had a system where you had to pass various swimming tests to be able to do certain kinds of things. My friend and I were already pretty far up on the swimming qualifications.

As I said, we also had these weekly plays. Those were a lot of fun. There was a good deal of music. There was a kind of recreation hall. Often after supper in the evenings someone would play the piano and we would sing. We learned various Broadway tunes.

That was a lot of fun. And we always went to the Baseball Hall of Fame. That was thrilling to see some of these famous players. I saw players from the old Brooklyn Dodgers, Pee Wee Reese, Jackie Robinson, Gil Hodges. I was just starting to learn about baseball. That made a huge impression on me. It was so close. It is very small park and you are just right there. Later on we played a game or two on Doubleday Field. That was a lot of fun. I went for most of the summer. Eight weeks was the full term. So I went there every summer but one until 1955.

Q.: When did you graduate from high school?

A: I graduated from high school in 1957. Then I went to Wesleyan University in Connecticut.

Q.: How did you happen to choose that school?

A: That was curious. My father had had a friend in graduate school. He went to Columbia University for his Ph.D. My parents loved New York in the early thirties. That is reflected in my father=s diary too. They had a great time in New York. My mother worked part-time in Macy=s. My father had a fellowship, but he also worked part-time in the dining halls, this kind of thing. They went to Harlem. They went to some of the famous play houses. They saw Mae West. They saw a lot of these famous actors and actresses. They had a great time. They really liked New York. They had good friends. My father=s major professor there was Dixon Ryan Fox. He, in fact, got my father that first job. My father didn=t even need to interview for it. He simply was appointed head of the New York State Historical Association, this tiny organization. I think Dixon Ryan Fox was head of the board. They just appointed him. He didn=t even have to interview

for the job. But it was a better job than teaching, and teaching jobs were few and far between in the thirties. I think my father could have gotten a job teaching in one of the CCNYs or something. He said later that he would have had to teach European history, and he did not feel at all well prepared there. The salary was not that great. The salary at the History Association was better, so he chose that. His first job was at Ticonderoga, the fort in northern New York.

I got off the point. He had this friend who had gone to Wesleyan and always spoke very highly of it. It was an all-mens school, very small. It was part of what's known as the little three, which is Amherst, Williams, and Wesleyan. Wesleyan graduates often have a bit of a chip on their shoulders because they are tired of being asked, "Which Wesleyan is that?" Of course, there are Wesleyans all over the place. There used to be a Kansas Wesleyan, which I think finally folded. Anyway, it had a very good reputation as a school. My father had heard all about Wesleyan from his friend. So when we were thinking about colleges, I was thinking north. My father, in general, had a poor opinion of Southern education because of the racial question. There were certainly some schools in the South that he would have been happy enough for me to go to, like North Carolina. William and Mary was certainly quite a good school, but there was no way I wanted to stay home. And there was no way my parents wanted me to stay home. So I was thinking north the whole way. I looked at all these places. I was very interested in Dartmouth for a while. But I got a chance to go to Wesleyan, actually. An alumnus called up from Washington. He had a son who was going to apply too. His older son was already there. So I was able to go up to Wesleyan for a weekend and stay at a

fraternity house. I loved the place. After that visit, I was going to Wesleyan. But applied to all these other places. I think I applied to Princeton, Yale maybe too. I'm not really sure. It was so long ago I can't remember. Anyway, those are the kinds of schools I was interested in. I had a good record in high school. I did well enough, at least, on the SATs. I also applied for the Naval ROTC program. I couldn't take that to Wesleyan. Wesleyan had none of that. I applied for that and I got put on a waiting list. It finally came through in the summer. I could have gone to the University of Rochester, but I was already set on going to Wesleyan. My parents could pay for it. That was not an issue. I was fortunate.

I loved Wesleyan. It was a small school, 800 students. When I went there at first I was very worried that I wouldn't be able to compete with these prep school guys. Probably half my class had been to prep schools. So I was a little concerned about that. But soon enough I got over that and realized that there is a spectrum among those boys, just like anybody else. Some of them were good students. Some of them weren't. But it was a fine school overall. They paid well, for one thing. So they had a good faculty. For a small school, they had a considerable endowment. I think it was just the right kind of school for me. The size meant we got a lot of personal attention. They put a lot of emphasis on writing. That was invaluable. I like to write. I started doing some journalism in high school. I enjoyed that. I read the newspapers. I loved to read. They corrected some of my grammar lapses. I had some excellent teachers, really good teachers.

Q.: Were you a history major?

A: No, I wasn't. Strangely enough, I am the one member of the family who was not a history major. Both my sisters were history majors. I got interested in politics, so I majored in government, as they called it then (political science). But I in effect minored in history. They didn't have declared minors but I took history courses. By my senior year I realized that I really didn't like the theory part of political science or government. It was really contemporary, recent history that I liked. That's what led me eventually to get interested in Russia. As I said, I wasn't a history major. One of my professors my senior year was in history, David Trask. If I had met him earlier and taken a course from him, I would have been a history major, no doubt, because he was a wonderful teacher. I took several courses with him my senior year. So, in effect, I was becoming a history major my senior year, even though I was still a declared political science major.

But there were some very good men in government. They had two sort of super stars there. One was a German emigre, Sigmond Noiman, who was known to everybody as Sig Noiman. Everybody knew him. He was a golden-tongued man, a marvelous teacher. He taught some of the largest classes, which were maybe 50 or 60 students. That was a big class at Wesleyan. He was a terrific teacher. Then there was also a man who was about to retire named E. E. Shotsnider, who was one of the grand old men of American political science. He was very widely known. Both of those men had national reputations and were good teachers. I'm glad that I took a course with Shotsnider during his last year of teaching. I wouldn't have had a chance otherwise. He was a very interesting man, who talked about politics sort of from the ground up. He had been involved in local Connecticut politics. So he talked about politics and really how you did

it, how you cultivated people, how you went around and saw all the important people. One of the things that he did, actually, the summer before my sophomore year I think I maybe signed up that I was going to take the introductory government course. I did that in government, economics and history, because I didn't know which one I would major in, so I signed up for all three. The government people had an interesting idea. They encouraged people who thought they were going to take that course to go and interview their congressman and do a kind of small study of their congressional district. I did that and it was very interesting. There was a new man who was running for the seat. So I went and interviewed him and it was a very interesting way to get into it.

The way I see it, the demarcation in my academic life was the summer of 1960, when I went to Britain and Europe. I went there because my sister had gone to the University of Edinburgh and had decided to marry a Scott. The wedding was in Scotland. So the whole family went over, but I went over before the rest of them, alone, by Icelandic Air, which took all day and night. I landed in Glasgow and spent a few days seeing my sister and then took the train down to London. I stayed with a couple who were actually son and daughter-in-law of friends of my parents. They lived in a cottage outside London. So I stayed with them for two weeks. I took the train in every day to London. I had a fantastic time. I went to the theatre almost every night. It was cheap. I scarcely ever paid more than a dollar. I went to all the famous sights. I went to Westminster Abbey, I went to Windsor Castle. I was 20 years old. I thought the whole world opened to me. I saw my first opera at Covent Garden. I just had a fantastic time. I went to Wimbledon. I was a big tennis fan. I went to Wimbledon twice to see the matches. They were cheap too. The outside matches you could get to. They were very inexpensive. So that was

fun. I got to know the London tube system very well, so it was real easy to get around. I just loved London. I loved British food. I could never understand people criticizing British food. I've never had a bad meal in England. There used to be this prejudice against British food.

Q.: I've heard that.

A: I think it had to do with the postwar period for awhile when there was rationing. But I've always liked British food very much. I just had a wonderful time. I decided I would hitchhike back to Edinburgh from London. That was really interesting and fun. I met a lot of very interesting people who were very nice to me. I had a wonderful time doing that. So I got back to Edinburgh and we had the wedding, etc. Then the rest of the family went to Europe for a couple of weeks. We went to Germany and to Berlin. We went to Austria. In fact, we stayed in a little resort in the Austrian Alps that was lovely, with a little lake and everything. It was picturesque, a beautiful place. We went to Vienna. We had rented a car and drove down to southern Germany, to Munich. My father was looking at all of the museums in particular. Munich had a famous Museum of Science and Industry and he wrote an essay about the founder of that museum later on. So we saw many parts of Germany. We saw the art galleries and the museums and all the rest of it. The family then dropped me off in southern Germany or Austria. They went on home and I took the train to Zurich, Switzerland. I spent a couple of days in Zurich, then took the train down to Rome and spent about 10 days in Rome. I had a wonderful time in Rome. I stayed in a kind of dormitory type place near the Vatican. In fact, I think it was church connected. It was really a barracks type of place, but cheap.

Q.: A youth hostel probably.

A: No, it wasn't a youth hostel. I had a youth hostel pass. I think it was connected with the church. It was essentially a barracks with beds one after the other and very cheap. I went to the opera. I loved Roman history, so I went around to see the sights and all of that. I met a grad student from Minnesota, who was much more knowledgeable than I. So I followed him around. We had a good time going to the opera, the Vatican, etc. I had a wonderful time. I then hitchhiked from Rome to Florence and spent a couple of days there. Then I decided to use my youth hostel pass and I went to a Youth Hostel not too far from Pisa, actually on the coast. It was an old villa. It was right on the water. You could walk out the door and the water was right there. So I stayed two days there. It was a glorious place to hang out.

Then I went on and finally my luck with hitchhiking ran out when I was on the Italian Riviera. There was autobahns, super highways. People were going too fast. They wouldn't stop for you. So I finally had to give up and take the train to get to Nice on the French side of the Riviera. It had a really nice youth hostel too. Then I took the train from Nice to Lyon. I stayed in a youth hostel there and then started hitchhiking again and stayed in youth hostels along the way to Paris. I spent a week or two in Paris and saw all kinds of people I knew in Paris, fraternity brothers, girls I had met at other places.

Q.: So you were in a fraternity in college.

A: Yes, Wesleyan was very much a fraternity school. But they were not very selective fraternities. Basically, you could be in a fraternity if you wanted to be in one. And there was a thing called the John Wesley Club that people who didn't want to be in fraternities

could choose to be in. Actually, it was fairly prestigious because some of the smartest guys in the school were in the John Wesley Club. So people had a healthy respect for the John Wesley Club, even though it wasn't a fraternity. I joined Sigma Chi, which I had stayed in when I visited the school. I liked the guys. Our chapter of Sigma Chi had been a local fraternity before it joined Sigma Chi. Many of the guys were upset about the racial clause. Sigma Chi did not accept nonwhites. So our fraternity tried to get the national to change. They would not. I'm not sure if they have to this day. Then we went local again, and I was in favor of that. Our fraternity was heavily in favor of going local. I always thought it was a little bit hypocritical because I think we had no intention of pledging a black. There were maybe five black guys in my class, many of whom were very well respected. One guy was a top athlete and a great student. He went to Yale law school. He was from Des Moines, Iowa. My grandmother was always kind of proud that there was a boy from Des Moines. I'm not sure she realized he was black. But anyway, we went local. It was the principle of the thing. This was the civil rights era. My parents had always been very uncomfortable with segregation in the South. They didn't agree with it intellectually. They thought it was kind of immoral.

Q.: When did you graduate from Wesleyan?

A: I graduated from Wesleyan in 1961. To pick up again, after that summer in Europe, I came back for my senior year. One of the things I'd been doing that summer was trying to come up with a senior thesis topic. I thought that would be a good thing to have on my transcript. It was common enough to do. But you had to have a topic and a tutor,

essentially. I did not come up with a topic that I thought could be done, so I got to back to Wesleyan and I had a hole in my schedule. I had to have another course to graduate. Off the top of my head I decided to take Russian. Out of the blue, in a sense. The experience in Europe had very much made clear to me why foreign language was important. I had taken two years of German. I had an excellent first year of German and a terrible second year. But I did know some German, thank God. That turned out to be important later on in graduate school. I had an excellent first year, which was six days a week at 8 o'clock in the morning with Herr Bensinger. That was a terrific course, very demanding. I think in general at Wesleyan I had good teachers. But there were a few bad ones. The second year German teacher was from Australia. We couldn't understand his English, much less his German. So that second year of German was not a great success. Anyway, I was the only one in the family, when we got to Europe, who knew any German. I knew precious little. It brought home to me why you need to know these things. To this day, I feel a little bit guilty that I never quite got over the hump with German. I can read it rather slowly. But it was uncomfortable. And I come from a partly German background. My grandmother was from the Milwaukee German community. She could still speak German as an old lady. I think she was disappointed that her grandson couldn't speak to her in German, darn it. That experience brought home to me why foreign languages were important. and it opened the whole world to me. So I came back and wanted to travel and I was starting to think of foreign service as a career. I knew you had to have foreign language for that. So that's partly why I decided I would do Russian. And, fortunately, I had an excellent teacher for first-year Russian,

who was a native Russian. He was finishing his Ph.D. at Yale, a good looking guy with lots of personality, tough, no nonsense. The course emphasized speaking. It was the first language course I had ever had that was almost entirely oral.

So after that first year I went out to Indiana that next summer for second-year Russian. The people in Indiana couldn't figure out what was wrong with me because I had the most strange knowledge of Russian. I could say a few things. I could understand a few things. But I didn't know much grammar. So I remember being called in by the teacher and kind of grilled about what was the nature of my previous Russian training. When I explained it, she decided that I could do second-year Russian and I did. I found Russian difficult.

Q.: Oh, yes. It has a whole different alphabet.

A: Yes, but that is not actually that big of a problem. But it had a reputation of being tough. I found it difficult. Actually, in the end I found the grammar not as difficult as German grammar. There is a strange word order. I never got over that. Russian does not have that. It is actually very nice in that regard. But I knew, because of my interest in foreign service and going abroad, that I would use this language. So that was a tremendous incentive. So I worked at Russian. The course at Indiana was really good but tough. It was a military total immersion type thing. We had two different teachers. Again, it was eight weeks. You got the equivalent of a year in eight weeks. You were supposed to speak only Russian, which was not quite honored. There were a bunch of people who were going to be there four weeks and then went to Russia. I didn't do that part because it cost more money. And this was the first time in my life that I was paying my own way.

I had saved enough money. I had a part-time job at Wesleyan.

Q.: What did you do?

A: I worked in what they called the press archives. They essentially cut up newspapers and filed them by topics so you could use them for papers, etc. and look up whatever the issue was. In some ways it was great training. We had The Christian Science Monitor, The New York Times, all the time. It was my job to cut these things up and paste them on sheets and categorize them. So it was a neat job in a way. It didn't pay much. But I did save some money to finance my next summer. And I loved coeducation after single-sex Wesleyan. Oh, God. This was just heavenly. I loved coeducation. In that summer Russian I would say that probably half the students were women. So that was wonderful. I really loved that. Indiana for some reason was a place for summer Russian. It had a lot of Russian teachers and a good program. There were people from all over the country there just for the summer. They were highly motivated. So I started picking up some of that. I was just going there for the summer. I didn't intend to stay. But I stayed.

Q.: For your master=s?

A: Yes. I stayed then. I also decided I=d switch to history. But I continued to work on my Russian because I knew that was so important, since I still was thinking foreign service. So I took another intensive course. They had an intensive course during the regular semester. So I took third-year Russian in the fall of my first semester there. And I passed the Russian reading exam after that first semester. That=s when I really made the breakthrough in Russian. I was still not quite sure I could do this language. But the third year persuaded me that I can do this. I liked Russian in a way I had never liked any

foreign language before. Some of the teachers were women. The third-year teacher was a very cultured elderly lady. And she encouraged students to memorize poetry. It was optional.

Q.: In Russian?

A: Yes. It was not required, but it was one of the things she encouraged you to do as a kind of extra part. We would do two or three hours in the morning. At the end of the session we would recite poetry. Again, quite optional. I loved doing that. I had a good memory and I just loved the sound of Russian. Russian poetry is very musical. In fact, much of it is very quickly converted into song. Pushkin, I now know a lot about him. I love Pushkin=s poetry. It is very musical. Many of his poems were set to music almost immediately. So I loved that part. I had liked poetry all right but it had never really turned me on. But I just loved Russian poetry. Fortunately, Maria loved it too. When I met her at Indiana, she was an undergraduate.

Q.: Was she in history too?

A: No. She was, in fact, a Russian major. She was of Slovak background. I had a job in the Slavic Reading Room. They had set up a small reading room. It had just been set up then. So I had a part-time job there. The man who was chairman of the history department was in Russian history. He=d gone to Amherst. So I didn=t have to explain to him what Wesleyan was. He really got me this job at the Slavic Reading Room, which was great. My boss was a Ukranian. He didn=t bug me. He sort of let me do what I wanted to do. I did plenty of studying and not very much library work. But I did see this young lady come into the Slavic reading room. When I heard her speak, I knew she

wasn't American. She spoke too precisely. I thought she might be British. I just knew she wasn't American. I very quickly found out who she was.

Q.: So she wasn't American?

A: No, she's Slovak. She was born in Czechoslovakia. She didn't come to the U.S. until she was 12 years old. So she had to have a crash course in English. And her English was simply very precise, very much bookish English. Americans are pretty sloppy and free and easy in how they speak. This person didn't speak like that, so I knew she wasn't American. But I didn't know who she was. She had a long list of admirers, so I joined the line. It turned out she was secretary of the Russian Club. So I very soon joined the Russian Club. It turned out we had this interest in Pushkin in common. She had had the same teacher, not the same class. She also liked learning Russian poetry. So on one of our early dates, we recited Russian poetry. Isn't that romantic. She worked in the library too part time. I found out where she was and made occasion to see her. So we started dating and got more interested in each other. But that brought me even more into the field. Again, I liked the language.

I was taking both history courses and I did an M.A. in history but also in Soviet and East European Studies. They had kind of a core program. So I took a course on Soviet economics, a course on Soviet geography, Soviet literature, again, a kind of area studies kind of thing, which would be very good for somebody preparing for foreign service. I really liked that. I liked doing different disciplines. I liked history, but I liked other things too. And I did better in graduate school than I had ever done as an undergraduate. In undergraduate school I had always been a kind of AB+@ student. My last year I think I

had an AA@ average. But that was the only year I had an AA@ average. And I did graduate with honors in general scholarship.

Q.: From Wesleyan?

A: Yes. But I was not a Phi Bet because my average was not very good my first two years. It was very average, a AB@ type of thing. That was not going to get me into Phi Bet. But I think I finally grew up by the time I got to Indiana. I loved coeducation and I was a lot more serious about studies. I started seeing where this was going to take me. I worked at it and I enjoyed it. So I did really well in graduate school.

Q.: When did you get your master=s?

A: I got my master=s in 1963. It took me two years. I did a thesis. That was a substantial piece of written work.

Q.: What was that about?

A: That was on the same topic that I ended up doing my doctoral dissertation on. It was @The Imperial Russian Government and Pugachev=s Revolt.@ Pugachev was a famous Cossack rebel under Catherine the Great. He claimed that he was her murdered husband. But he wasn=t. He was illiterate. But it is a fascinating case of impostorship. That whole impostor business fascinated me. There are other instances in Russian history. So that got me more and more interested in Russian history. The M.A. was very good because I did a substantial thesis, which prepared me to do a longer one for a Ph.D.

Q.: Did you stay at Indiana for your Ph.D.?

A: Yes, I did. So it took me two years to do the master=s. The second year I was a teaching assistant. I taught a section. They had a big lecture section of several hundred students.

Then they divided the students up for discussion sessions. So I had a couple of the discussion sessions. I did that the whole year. That was great experience. I really hadn't had any teaching experience before that.

Q.: Did you like teaching?

A: I liked it. It was enjoyable. The students were enthusiastic. It was the Western Civ course, basically. It was the first part. It started with ancient history and got up to 1500. I did that part of the course both semesters, which was good because it took me into areas that I didn't know that much about. I had liked Roman history long before. I really enjoyed that a lot. It was better for me because I got paid for that. So that was pretty good. The first year of grad school was the poorest I had ever been. I had that part-time job. I had a couple of other little jobs. For example, I took tickets at Indiana football games. I got free admission and I got probably five dollars, I don't remember what it was. I had a few other little jobs like that, but basically I was very poor. I lived in half a house with two or three other guys, which was incredibly cheap. I think it cost me about \$25 a month for my share. It was a crummy house but very cheap and very near campus. We would all do our own breakfast but we divided up the evening meal. We'd take turns. It was actually a lot of fun. My second year one of my roommates from Wesleyan joined me. He was starting a Ph.D. in psychology. We knew each other well before he joined me. He got married, though, the next June.

This is a story I can't resist telling. He had had a very wonderful girlfriend at Wellesley and had given her a ring. She was supposed to come and visit him. They had both graduated. He was in Bloomington and she was, I think, in Cleveland. She was

supposed to come visit him and there was a freak snowstorm. So she didn't come because of the roads. He went out on a blind date with a woman who was teaching Russian in St. Louis, who I knew slightly. She was of Slavic background, Czech background. Maria knew her too. Neither one of us particularly liked her. Anyway, he went out on this blind date and that was it. They were engaged by Christmas and married by the next June. Big mistake, because it was a marriage that didn't last. Very unfortunate. I really liked his Wellesley girlfriend. She was a much more promising person. His life would have been much better if he had married her, but he didn't.

Q.: Did you and Maria marry while you were still in graduate school?

A: We married in June of 1964. During my third year of graduate school she went off to Wisconsin. She had graduated as an undergraduate. She was behind me. We were the same age, but I was young for my class. I was always one of the youngest. She was maybe a year behind because of coming late to the U.S. She went off to Wisconsin to graduate school and was a T.A. there. If it had been all up to me, I would have gotten married a year sooner, but she was stubborn and wanted to be on her own. I went off to visit her a couple of times to make sure the home fires were still burning. It actually worked out very well. It did a lot for her confidence. We did get married then a year later in the Catholic Church. This was before Vatican II, so we couldn't be inside the communion rail, for example. I had started going to the Catholic church with her parents and family while she was away. So I had gotten quite used to it. I did all of the instruction which you had to do. I had no problem with that, so we were married in the Catholic Church in June. We went off to Chicago for our honeymoon for a few days.

We had a great time there. Then we came back to Indiana to take more language in preparation for going to the Soviet Union. We had by then been selected to go on an exchange of graduate students and faculty. We then were going to be sent to Leningrad. So we went there in September of 1964. We stayed a year in the Soviet Union in both Leningrad and Moscow. Of course it is St. Petersburg again now, but I tend to call it Leningrad because that's what it was when we were there. I had wanted to go there because my topic was 18th century Russia. Leningrad is an 18th century city so I wanted to be there. The Soviet scholars who were working on my topic were in St. Petersburg. So it was a logical place to go. We were the only couple.

Q.: Was it difficult to be in Russia at that time?

A: It was in the sense that the living conditions were not great. We lived in a rather shabby dorm. We had showers twice a week, maybe. They didn't always work. There was a period during the winter when we didn't have any hot water, period. There basically was no running hot water in the dorm. It was all very cold water. There was no refrigeration either. There were a couple of gas stoves, so you could cook some things. It was kind of like camping out in a way. We lived in one room with metal beds with rather weak springs. It was very cold. We were on the north side of the building so the wind in the wintertime just came right through the windows. It was cold and we would put on two and three sweaters and every blanket we could find and it was still cold. I'd get up in the morning, and the first thing I would do was to take the tea kettle down to the kitchen and heat it up and bring it back so that Maria could do her morning routines. But we were happy to be there. We were young and it was exciting in this beautiful city. We

saw a lot of the city.

Our dorm was full of all kinds of different people. It was graduate students basically. There were Russians, there were a fair number of central Asians, there were a few Scandinavians. Then along came a group of Italians. They were a great fun and made a lot of noise. You always heard the Italians when they were around. We would refer to them as people from a semi fraternal country because some of them were supposedly Communist. But they were very lax Communists. It was fun because we met a lot of different kinds of people. As I said, we were the only couple, so we had one room together. Some of the other guys were married but just hadn't brought their wives because they thought it was just not a good idea. A couple were not married. We tended to stick together because there were seven Americans. We tended to do things together. Several Americans lived with Russians, so we got to know their roommates. We got to know a good number of Russians. We also got to know a couple of Estonians. There was an older Estonian man who was doing English linguistics. He wanted to know native speakers of English. So he became a very good friend. Also, Maria came to know two Russian women. One was Russian, one was Estonian. They were both studying English. So they became great friends and sort of exchanged lessons. They just hung out together and helped each other with their studies. But it was a lot of fun, actually, in the dorm. We got to know a number of Russians quite well. There was one young woman who was doing a Ph.D. in English linguistics. She wanted to recruit some English native speakers to do some exercises, to tape some things. So we got to know her very well and still keep in touch with her.

We had some very good teachers too. We continued to have some instruction in

Russian. We had an excellent teacher in phonetics, who really worked on our accents. We both improved our Russian a lot there. That helped. You lived on the economy because there were no so-called dollar stores in Leningrad. During the winter the diet got really problematic. There was not much in the way of canned goods and there were no frozen foods at all, period. It just got tiresome after a while. It kind of wore on you. By about March we had just about had it. And this was our first year of marriage, so just adjusting to each other, being in this one single room was a bit much at times.

But we went to Moscow in March, and that was a lifesaver. It was like another world because you could use the embassy commissary. They also had a hard currency store, which was much better supplied with Soviet products and some foreign products. They had very decent prices. So, as people put it, you could live like an American in Moscow. The rooms at Moscow University were much better. You had your own shower, toilet, etc. In our dorm in Leningrad there were toilets at the end of the hall. Maria had to go down one floor because basically our floor was a men=s floor. There were only a couple of women on our floor. That got really old after a while. You just got sick of it. But, again, we were happy to be there and excited. But, thank God, we went to Moscow in the spring because it was much different. And I had good reason to be in Moscow because one of the major archives was there. So we went there. We switched rooms with a Canadian couple. They wanted to be St. Petersburg, so they took our room and we took their room. They had an especially big room too. So we really lucked out. It seemed like heaven compared to camping out in Leningrad.

Then we went on a trip with the rest of the exchangees, a kind of-end-of-the stay trip. We went to Central Asia, to the Caucasus and all these places with the group as a whole,

which was neat. Only a few people stayed on for the summer, and we were two of the few. So we stayed on and actually lived the last month and a half in Moscow. And we got the same room again. Moscow University was deserted in the summertime. There was hardly anybody around. So we really lucked out. We had a much easier time. There was another couple there, whom we knew quite well. So we did a number of things with them. We had a good time. We spent time at the embassy. We saw sights in Moscow. The weather was lovely. The Moscow area can be very pretty and very nice. So we had a really good time that summer. Then we took the train from Moscow out.

We actually missed our connection in Prague, so we got stranded in Prague, which turned out to be a blessing in disguise because we went to the tourist agency and they said, "There's a dorm up by the stadium. You can stay in that." It was cheap. I think it was a dollar a night or something like that. We were a little concerned about the money side of things because we were going to spend time in Europe. So we just spent a night there and then got our train on to Munich. We spent a few days in Munich and picked up a VW car, and then we drove that into Czechoslovakia to visit Maria's relatives. She had never been back since 1953 and she had a lot of relatives there. So that was a lot of fun. We spent about a week with her relatives in extreme eastern Slovakia, way out near the Soviet border, a beautiful part of the country. Those people love to eat and drink, so we ate and drank. Prague, too, seemed like heaven compared to Russia. The food was so much better and more plentiful. We really had a good time.

Then we went to Western Europe on our way home. We spent a few days in Paris. Maria had never been to Paris. Her French is quite good, actually. She knew all about

Paris but she had never been there, so we spent time in Paris. Then we visited a French family that I knew, with a French boy who had lived with us when I was a junior in high school. So we looked them up. I had looked him up when I went there in 1960. They are really nice people. So we spent several days with them, and they were just wonderful to us. It was like a second family. We went to Amsterdam and flew on home and came back to Indiana. I actually spent a month in Washington first doing some library research. And I needed to be there to pick up our VW, which was being shipped over and which arrived damaged. I picked it up and drove back to Indiana.

Maria by then had gotten us a trailer to live in. They had trailer courts. It was pretty good, actually, because it was a brand new unit. It was pretty cheap. So our final year at Indiana we lived in Walnut Grove Trailer Park. That was really quite nice. I got a draft notice that summer. But, fortunately, Maria was pregnant. And she had to go to a doctor to have that confirmed. That got me a deferment. So I then wrote my doctoral dissertation in that trailer. I got my Ph.D. the next June and taught in summer school in Indiana. Maria then gave birth to our son in June in Indiana. Then we came to Kansas in August.

Q.: So you came to KU right after finishing your Ph.D.

A: Yes, I had my Ph.D. and I came to KU in August of 1966. I think I was interviewed in February. I hadn't had any interviews yet. I remember being a little nervous about it because it was sort of getting a little late in the game. My advisor kept saying, "Haven't you heard from Kansas yet?" He had a good friend here. Finally I did get a telephone call from KU and was invited out for an interview. I came to the old Kansas City

downtown municipal airport. I knew that they had already interviewed another person. So there was at least one other person competing for the job. Fortunately, I got the job. This other person got a good job at Georgetown University. So that was a time when there were plenty of jobs in the Russian field. It was really going well as a field. You could be pretty sure of getting a job, but you couldn't be sure where it would be or whether you would be able to do mainly Russian history. The job here was ideal for me because they had Oswald Baccus, who was a Medievalist, although he taught everything. He'd been here since 1950. He's the only one I had heard of at KU. But he was away in Europe, so I didn't meet him when I interviewed. But the other person was Herbert Ellison, who did 20th century. They really wanted somebody who kind of fit between them. And they were both popular teachers, so the enrollment was there. They needed another person to help carry the load there. I fit very nicely between them.

Q.: What was your title when you were hired?

A: Assistant professor of history and Soviet and East European studies, I think it was called at that time. Later it became Russian and East European studies. It was just the ideal kind of job for me because I really wanted to be in a place that had an area studies program. That would be partly preparing people for government service and doing the kind of core program that I had done at Indiana. So it was an ideal job. The only other jobs I had heard about, one was at Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisconsin. That was already filled by the time I heard of it. Another one was at the University of Saskatchewan at Saskatoon, way out there in the frozen north. They paid more than anybody else, but I didn't even interview for that, because I had the KU job. I didn't

have any other interviews. The KU job was ideal. I felt real comfortable when I arrived because Professor Anderson, the chairman, already knew about my family. The man who was really kind of piloting my hiring was Herbert Ellison. Did you know the Ellisons?

Q.: No, I didn't.

A: They left fairly soon after we arrived, a couple of years later. He was a very popular teacher and a very personable guy. And he had spent a year in Leningrad, so he and I had a lot of common. Many more Americans had spent time in Moscow rather than Leningrad. So the Leningrad core saw themselves as a special group. Herb and I got along very well, and I think that helped me get hired. It's been an ideal job. I was then able to work on revising my doctoral dissertation for publication. Indiana had accepted that in their series. So I worked on that my first year or two, redoing it and preparing it for publication. I got that published in 1969.

Q.: That was the book about the revolt?

A: Yes. It has a really long academic title. It was called *Autocratic Politics in a National Crisis: The Imperial Russian Government and Pugachev's Revolt*. So it is a fairly long title, if not terribly exciting. That was in a way the publication that helped me get tenure. I also had this book translation published.. I had translated that and that had gotten accepted by KU Press, the University Press of Kansas, and I was very fortunate there. Oswald Backus saved that book. At one point I was about ready to give up on it. I started translating that book when I was in graduate school. My Russian was not all that great, but also I didn't know the period that the book was about. It is earlier Russian history. So I made a number of mistakes. I was trying to get it published and got turned

down by several presses. And I was about to give up on it. But I talked to Oswald Backus, Ozzie, as he was called by everybody, a very personable guy, who died suddenly of a heart attack in 1972.

Q.: They were our neighbors.

A: He was a great guy. He was really good to me. He saved that book. He and I sat down in their living room and went through it. And so he took it over with me to the Press, which had a new editor at the time, and sold it to them and they bought it. It turned out very nicely. It was one of their bigger sellers for a while. They did a really nice job with it. I made a fair amount of money on it, of all things. That book, in fact, in Russian, is one of the first written books in Russian history in Russian that I had ever read. I was absolutely charmed by it. It is a wonderful, charming book. It was about this interesting period of imposters and Boris Godunov and all this strange stuff. So I was absolutely taken by that book and just delighted that it did get in print. This man has a very big name in Russia, Peter Platonov, and there was essentially nothing to read in earlier Russian history for students.

Q.: This book in English is called *The Time of Troubles: A Historical Study of the Internal Crisis and Social Struggle in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Muscovy*.

A: Anyway, I feel really good about that book because it did sell nicely. The Press was happy with it. And it was used quite a bit. In fact, it is still in print. I don't think very many people even know about it any more. You can still get it if you try. It did sell very nicely because they put it out simultaneously in paperback and hardback because they knew it would do all right as a course thing. The original paperback cost, I think, \$2.45, which was a fairly good price in those days. So we knew it would sell pretty well,

because there was nothing like it. And it did very well its first few years. It just did gangbusters.

Q.: Now you came to KU shortly before all the troubles that began in 1968 and 1969.

A: I remember some of that but I was not directly involved. I remember being very tense about it at times, feeling very unsure as to where things were going. One of the odd things I remember vividly. This must have been about 1969, I guess. We were having some friends over for supper. We lived south of the field house on 19th Terrace. There is an electric substation right next to our lot. We were having supper and suddenly there was this huge explosion, a really loud bang. One of their voltage regulators or whatever had gone off. It wasn't anything. But it was so loud and it was such a tense time. I thought this might be a bomb. Really, it was scary. I think everybody felt kind of tense and kind of uncertain as to what was going to happen. I remember some of those demonstrations and the outcry. I had a couple of kind of radical students. I remember two guys, who were sort of hippie looking guys, and one girl. She was very attractive but they were both kind of scrungy looking. But anyway, they viewed themselves as kind of radicals. They were taking my course in Russian history. They were amazed when I told them, ANo, you can't get *Time Magazine* in Moscow. You can't get these kinds of publications. They are not available. They were amazed at that. I told them some rather simple facts of life about the hostility between the Soviet Union and the U.S. They were very naive young people. One of the guys later did get into trouble. He was put on trial. I think he was found innocent. I can't even remember what the deal was. But he was involved in some kind of funny business. But I think he was not sent to prison, as I

recall. I never heard of them again after that course. I always felt a little sorry for the girl because she was much more attractive. I thought she was smarter and more sensible than these yahoo guys. Anyway, I do remember there being a few vaguely radical students, but I didn't have any other direct exposure. But I do remember feeling very tense much of that time. I know at one time they had faculty kind of patrolling the campus.

Q.: My husband did that.

A: I didn't get involved in that. I felt a little guilty about not being involved, but we still had young kids, so I had obligations at home. But I do remember feeling very tense and worried about where things were going. I was not sympathetic to the Vietnam War myself. I had felt that way even when we were in Russia as graduate students. I was reading the *New York Times*. And of course there was very heavy Soviet propaganda against the U.S. about that. I just felt it was a bad situation and that the U.S. was never going to prevail in that conflict. So I was not sympathetic to it. But if I had been drafted, I would not have gone to Canada. I would have gone in. I was raised that way. There is this military ethos in the South in particular that you do your duty. So I would have gone for sure. Some of my classmates were in Vietnam. I could not go to Vietnam-themed movies. I think I have seen only one, *Apocalypse Now*, which I didn't like. I avoid them. I have a lot of ambiguous feelings about the whole Vietnam conflict. I just try and push it away. I don't want to fixate on it. Yes, I remember that time very vividly.

Q.: Your son was Mike and you have another child.

AA: Yes, Daria is our daughter. She was born here in November of 1968. We wanted to give her a Russian name. We didn't know what gender the child was going to be. In fact,

when Michal first appeared I thought he was a girl because he had a full head of hair. But he was a boy and we gave him his name, Michal, named after Maria's favorite grandfather. My mother said, "You are going to regret that because people are going to correct that," and they do. He's always getting corrected on the spelling of his name. But it doesn't bother him now. We wanted to give our daughter a Russian name, but we hadn't agreed on one by the time she was born. But Maria thought of Daria, an old Russian name that has now become fairly popular. It is not that uncommon in the U.S. Our Russian friends were just delighted when we told them she was named that. They thought, "Oh, that's an old Russian name." They were delighted with it. Now Michal was born in Bloomington just before we came here. Daria was born here. They both grew up in Kansas and both went to St. John's School for their elementary education and liked it. I think they got a good elementary education. They both went to Lawrence High and liked it too. Michal was in Danny Manning's class. So we knew about him. We like Lawrence a lot. Lawrence is a great town for raising a family.

Q.: What classes did you teach at KU?

A: I taught all kinds of Russian classes. I taught the Medieval Russian course. I was asked by Oswald Backus to teach it one semester. He didn't want to. He had gotten ill one semester teaching that course, so I had actually taught part of it and helped him grade the finals. The kind of bread and butter course that I taught was called Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union, so it was modern Russian history starting with Peter the Great. I taught that starting my second semester. I taught it more than any other course. In fact, I also

have a correspondence course based on that course that I am still doing. It has been a bread and butter course. I never got tired of that course. I always taught it as two lectures a week and a discussion session. In the old days when I would have 50 students a semester I would have three sections of the discussion. So it was more work for me. But I really liked having the discussion part. I didn't like just lecturing. I felt that was kind of too cut and dried. The discussion part was unpredictable. You never knew what would come up. I had some very interesting experiences with the discussion course. There would always be great differences between two or three sections. One section would be like pulling teeth. You couldn't get them to open their mouths. Another would be very talkative. I could just sit back and let them do the talking. That's what I tried to do, actually, is to encourage them to talk and say, "I really want you to participate." That's one reason I could teach that course so often without getting bored with it, because it was always different. And I did try to change the books regularly too. I had a lot of interesting students there. The first semester I taught it Sara Paretsky was in that class. I never forgot her because she had the wildest hair just going all over the place. She was an excellent student. I had some other very good students. I had a football player in that class the second year I taught it, who was a little guy. He was my size. I always thought of myself as small. This was Tom Anderson, who was a safety on the Orange Bowl team. He was a very strong tackler. Boy, you didn't want to get hit by Tommy Anderson. But I noticed him because he had a broken arm. He had broken his arm in spring practice. He was an excellent student too and went to Med School and is a doctor somewhere. I had another local boy, Mike Glover, who because some kind of

prosecutor.

Q.: I remember the name.

A: He was very interesting and personable guy, who I came to know quite well. One of those first years I had a graduate student. I did teach an occasional graduate course. But that was often very interesting because they were very well motivated, some of them military types. I enjoyed having those because typically the people in the military were from the officers= school at Leavenworth. They had been abroad in foreign service. They often knew some foreign language. They were very interesting people to work with. I first had a class with almost entirely military guys in the summer of 1969 when I taught in summer school. In general I didn=t teach in summer school. I tried to avoid it because I was trying to pursue an active research program. That summer I taught in summer school and I had almost entirely military guys. I thought, AHow are these guys going to be? Are they all going to be right wing?@ They weren=t at all. They were very good students, very interesting guys. That was a wonderful class, a great class. And I have kept up and run into some of those people over the years at other places. That was very interesting.

What I started to say was that one of those first few years in one of those graduate classes I had the ex-wife of Wes Santee, the runner, Dana Santee, who was an excellent student. I think she was doing an M.A. I was doing a lecture about Russian medical history, which I was just starting to get a little interested in. I put some statistics up on the board about the numbers of doctors in Russian. I got them out of some book. And she raised her hand and said very politely, AI don=t understand those statistics. They

don't make any sense to me. I looked at them and said, 'You're right. They don't make any sense to me either.' It turned out they were taken from a book in German but misinterpreted. So they really didn't make sense the way they were explained. After I finished with the (unclear) I had done a couple of articles about him and done a little book called *Emperor of the Cossacks*, which I couldn't get published. It sat around awhile. I kept sending it around to people. The University Press had said it wasn't scholarly enough and the commercial presses said it wasn't commercial enough. So I couldn't get it published. It sat around for a while.

I had gotten promoted to associate professor with tenure after four years. That was pretty fast. I felt fortunate to do that. But I knew that to become a full professor I needed to do another major research thing. So I had to come up with another topic. After that summer course I went to Washington for a couple of weeks to work in the Library of Congress. I had the idea that I would do something about a big plague epidemic in Russia, which had happened two years before the Pugachev revolt. So I'd seen references to it. I didn't know anything about it. I didn't know anything about plague. But I thought this might be a possibility and I would look into it. And I did at the Library of Congress and got some very fine help there. There was a man who was a Ph.D. from Yale, who had done his dissertation on Catherine's reign. In fact, he lent me his dissertation. It was not generally available. He had never published it. But he was a very good scholar, Robert Allen, a very nice man. He did me all kinds of favors. Anyway, I very soon realized that, yes, there was lots of literature on this plague and it was an eminently doable subject. So I decided that's what I am going to do. I thought

this would be a nice quick article or little book. I can do this in two or three years. Well, it ended up that I spent about 10 years on that topic. But it was a wonderful topic, very, very interesting. I was able to publish several articles. I got very interested in the Russian medical profession and all of that. That=s where it helped that I knew some German because there was a fair amount of stuff in German. Thank God, I could use some of that.

Q.: So did you write a book about that?

A: Yes, I wrote *Bubonic Plague in Early Modern Russia: Public Health and Urban Disaster*. That was originally published by Johns Hopkins. This is the second edition. Oxford picked it up. It went out of print with Johns Hopkins. In some ways that is my favorite book because that was a really new type subject. Pugachev was a Soviet type subject. There was a huge literature on Pugachev. It was a very good topic for somebody getting into the field starting out. But it was not exciting from the point of view of saying anything new. In fact, I had to scratch really hard to find anything new to say about Pugachev. But it did lead me on to this. Originally, I thought it would be a nice, short, small book. Well, it turned out to be much more interesting because it got me into all kinds of other things, into the history of weather, for example. The weather is terribly important for plague. The whole Russian medical setup, doctors in Russia and all of that. There were huge amounts of archival stuff. The Russians are real pack rats. So the archives in Moscow were just crammed with stuff about this. And the Russians were not interested.

Q.: Was this on the level of the plague in Europe in the 1300s or 1400s that we have heard about?

A: Yes. Well, this was a little later. Plague really dies out in Europe after the big epidemic in Marseilles in the 1720s. After that, there are no significant outbreaks of plague in Western Europe. Nobody is quite sure why that is. I hoped that I would solve the problem, but I am afraid to say I didn't. But it is still being thrashed over why it is that it seemed to die out in Western Europe. But this turned out to be a fascinating subject. I was just absolutely obsessed by it for about 10 years. I think I maybe went a little bit bonkers on it.

Q.: Did you teach it then too?

A: I did. I actually developed a course called Plagues and Public Health. Part of the idea was that we would get some pre med types in there. So I taught that course a few times. It was quite interesting. But I really enjoyed that topic. It was very exciting because there was all this stuff that had never been used by anyone else. So I really had the unusual experience in my field at least of finding a topic that had been given not much attention. There had been a few things written, but a lot of them were no good because they were too early before they really understood what the plague was about. And there was some Soviet scholarship that was extremely slanted in a very stupid way. So it was really very easy. All the historians in Russia who I talked to said, "Oh, that's a great topic. We haven't done anything significant about that." So I got tremendous encouragement from the scholars there, which was really nice because you are not going to be able to do significant research in another country if the local people don't support you. There is no way. I got a lot of very good guidance from Soviet scholars just telling me about different archives, etc.

Well, let me give you an example. I found out that there had been a German physician who had kept temperature records. This was very common to do because there was a general notion that weather had something to do with disease. People didn't really know how exactly, especially with plague. They didn't know about rats and fleas and all that. But they knew that plague was a warm-weather disease. So I realized that the temperature stuff would be crucial, if I could find that. This guy had done that. Well, where was this stuff? This guy had died way back in the 18th century. So I talked to my mentor in Leningrad, who was very proud of me. I had done better than any of his foreign students had ever done. So he treated me extremely well. So I asked him, "Where do you think I might go to find out where this guy's stuff might be?" He said, "I don't know where it is, but I know a man who probably does know." So he called up this acquaintance. My mentor was a leading Communist, by the way, but a very genial man. Everybody knew him. He was in solid with the party, so there were no political questions or anything like that. And he was dean of the history faculty. So he was the number one guy. And he knew everybody and everybody knew him. This friend of his knew. And it turned out it was in a Quonset hut out away from the city of Leningrad, something called the Chief Geophysical Observatory. So they told me how to take a bus out there. I went out there and sat for an afternoon taking this, which was written in Latin, by the way. But I could easily read it. It was mostly numbers anyway. So it was easy enough to use. But that was very exciting to discover that stuff because this guy was there during the epidemic. He kept these temperature records. He just confirmed what I knew, that the weather had been absolutely crazy that year. That had a lot to do with why

they had a big plague epidemic. Normally, you wouldn't have a plague epidemic in a place like Moscow. It's too cold, too far north. But the weather was just absolutely nuts that year. It was that kind of thing that really got me very excited. As I said, this is kind of my favorite book, because that is the one that I really felt I got new material and had new interpretations and all of that. I sent a copy when it came out to my mentor there. He said, "This is a book for the ages." Of course he couldn't read it. As far as I know, none of the libraries there had it. But I went to a conference there on Catherine the Great in 1996 and I took a copy of the book and gave it to Academy of Sciences library. So they had a copy at least.

Q.: I know that one of your major research interests has been Catherine the Great.

A: Yes.

Q.: You wrote a book on that also.

A: This is the fanciest edition. I have been very fortunate in that it came out in 1988, actually, although it says 1989. But this is the Folio edition from the Folio Society in London, which came out in 1999 or 2000. As you can see, it is very fancy.

Q.: Oh, yes.

A: It has colored prints. It is just marvelous for me. I am so happy. Frankly, I had to do almost no work for this. They did all of the graphics and had these nice double-headed eagles in the cloth. All they wanted from me was would I expand the bibliography with titles in English. They didn't want stuff in Russian because they figured their audience wouldn't read Russian. And they asked me to do a different introduction to it. So there was almost no work on my part. I had never seen one of their books. I knew they were

nice. But I was just flabbergasted when I got several copies of this. That=s a very famous picture of Catherine on the cover. This is the day of her coup. In fact, before I wrote the book, I knew I wanted that to be the cover of the book. I didn=t know how the book would be but I knew what the cover would be.

Q.: When did you first become interested in Catherine the Great?

A: Through my doctoral dissertation. That happened during her reign. So I got interested in her then. Initially, I was rather hostile to her. To some degree, I soaked up some of the Soviet view, which was on the side of the people and the rebels, you know. So Catherine is kind of the villainess there. Actually, in doing my dissertation I realized I was getting more and more interested in Catherine. She was quite fascinating in her own way. To make any sense of what the government was doing, you had to pay attention to her. So I found her really very interesting. As it turned out, publishers were falling all over themselves to publish stuff on her. She had such name recognition.

Q.: Oh, really?

A: I didn=t realize that at first. I was writing this book about her and I remember the guy who was then head of the Area Studies program said, ANow tell me, why do we need another book about Catherine the Great?@ I said, AWell, Bill, there really aren=t any good books about her. That=s number one. And there=s a lot more to say about her.@ His attitude, in a way, was rather common. A lot of people said, AWe know there are all these books about Catherine. So why do we need another one?@ It really was a case that a lot of the books were very poor, written by people who didn=t know any Russian at all. Or they were super detailed scholarly things that nobody but scholars read. So my whole

idea was, AI=ll write a book that will appeal to Joe Blow in the street and will be acceptable to scholars.© I wasn=t writing it for other scholars. Historians have been saying this for years, AWhy don=t we write for the broad public? Why do we just write for two other people?© People have been saying this forever. So I was going to follow that advice. I had always tried to write books that I thought were accessible and were interesting and exciting and could be read by anybody. So it didn=t really change my way of working. But I found that the more I learned about Catherine the more interesting I found her. And, frankly, the whole gender thing was fascinating too. That became a big deal, especially in the 80s and 90s. It was gender, gender, gender. So I was right in there, you know. This was acceptable and it was fun. It=s funny the title we came up with, *Catherine the Great: Life and Legend*. This refers covertly to a particularly outrageous story about Catherine. I won=t even repeat it to you because it is a bit embarrassing. But it is very widely known and now it is all over the internet. So you can look it up. Is it true that Catherine...? It is a totally stupid story. It makes no sense at all. But it is incredibly widespread. So it is historical data in and of itself, even though it is totally silly and stupid and all the rest of it. So I knew that I was going to deal with that story. Some of the older people in my field are very teed off with me for even talking about it. This is pandering. You shouldn=t do this. This is ridiculous. The people of my generation say, AWhy wouldn=t you talk about this? Are you an idiot? Don=t you know what sells books?© Well, anyway, this book sold very nicely. It got chosen by a number of book clubs, etc., which was a bit of a surprise to me, a wonderful surprise. The History Book Club, the Book of the Month Club adopted it for just a very short time. I

was amazed at this.

Q.: You received the Byron Caldwell Smith Award.

A: Yes. That's a nice award for best book by a Kansas author. I felt awfully good that they awarded that to me. It's been a marvelous thing. And as I said, I am so happy about the beautiful book in the Folio Society, which is out of print. You can't get that any more. There is another publisher. I didn't bother to bring it along because it's a less fancy book. But there is another fancy American publisher called Easton Press that does the same kind of thing. They did an edition. It's not nearly as fancy as this (the Folio Society edition). But they are the same kind of publisher. They have fancy covers. They are sort of leather covers, but it is not nearly as fancy as the Folio edition.

(The tape was turned over. A little may have been lost.) He interviewed me, by the way, for the Dean's office. The dean, George Waggoner, wasn't around at the time. Francis and I have been good friends ever since. He said, "You know, Jay. I don't think anybody knew you were around this university until you published that Catherine book." There's a grain of truth in that. I think I was an almost invisible professor for a long time. But that book, for better or worse, put me on the map. I remember former Chancellor Budig saying to me when the book came out, "Boy, you have had a really good year, haven't you?" It has been a wonderful book. It is one of those books that I had had in mind for a long time before I actually wrote it. And I didn't write it as a biography either. Oxford University Press marketed it as a biography. I didn't realize that there is a big difference between a biography and history.

Q.: So you were writing the political history of her reign.

A: Yes, I wrote what I thought was a history book that I was going to call something like *Crises of Catherine the Great*. I was going to focus on the plague, Pugachev, these things that I already knew a lot about, but I could sort of have a different perspective. So I didn't write it as a biography. But just before it went into production with Oxford, the British side of Oxford Press said, "We think this book should be marketed as a biography." I didn't know that biographies were considered a completely different genre from history.

Q.: I didn't know that either.

A: And for biography bigger is often better. I was thinking, "They are going to tell me to cut this thing. It is going to be too long." Actually, they didn't. They didn't want it cut, but they didn't want it any bigger because my editor at the American part of Oxford said, "We want to keep this under \$25. We think if it is more than \$25 that will really hurt its sales." So it came out at \$24.95. It immediately went up in price in just a year or two, but it got introduced at \$24.95. I learned a lot about commercial publishing from that book that I didn't know. I had no notion that biography was different from history. They also put 1989 on the book, even though it appeared in the fall of 1988. When it is that late in the year they put the next year on it because they don't want it to age so fast. So I learned all of these little tricks of the trade that I had not known about. Anyway, it turned out to be the book that put me on the map, as it were. And it got some very nice reviews by scholars. So I feel pretty good about that part of it. But I didn't write it for other scholars. People in the field had been saying for years, "Somebody really needs to do another good book on Catherine the Great." So I was the one to do it. Actually, I

almost got beat out in that the British scholar, Isabel Dumaderiaga, a good friend of mine and the senior scholar in that field, published a big book on Catherine the Great called *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great*, which is not a biography either. I had been thinking that I would do a real big book on Catherine, maybe even multi volumes. When she came out with that, everybody knew that she had been working on this for years. And I met her. I stopped by London on my way to Russia in 1975 and had supper with her. I asked her very directly, "The Catherine book, how is it coming?" She said, "It is coming very slowly." Nobody knew when she would finish. Hers came out in 1980, before I even started working on the topic. And I realize now that she did me a tremendous favor because I had to do a different book. She'd done the big book, so there was no point in redoing that. So I realized I knew this crises thing. And we hadn't decided on a title. The title was only decided on about a day before it went into production because they said, "We think you should call it *Catherine the Great, A Life*." I said, "I don't like that at all. It is so dull. We could do something better than that." So that's what we came up with, *Life and Legend*. Actually, the editor had given me the idea. She wanted the last chapter of the book. She said, "Why don't you call the last chapter 'The Legend of Catherine the Great?'" That's where we got the idea for the subtitle. I am so happy about that. But it was a near thing. It was about to go into production and we had to decide.

Q.: Now that you are retired I see that you still have an office here. So do you still have continued involvement with KU?

A: Yes. I'm still doing that correspondence course. I think I'll do that for a while. It is

very little work for me. I have only a few students at a time, usually five, six, seven at the most. They turn in assignments, etc., so it is really very easy for me. I grade it very quickly. I have some good students for that version of the course too. So it has been pleasant. But I am not really intending to do much more teaching in history. I haven't really made up my mind about it, but I'm thinking that I may try some fiction. Maybe I can do both things. I may do a kind of memoir sort of thing. I'm not sure. I've actually written at least a piece of a memoir thing, which is a kind of short story memoir of a disastrous date I had in high school that I remember vividly. It is very much in a kind of memoir style. I eat lunch with a bunch of guys, mainly from English. We talk about writing and fiction and that kind of thing a lot. Supposedly, one of the daydreams of most historians is writing some fiction.

Q.: Oh, really?

A: So I am not unusual. I actually started on a historical novel, but I didn't get very far. I'm not sure if I will pick that up again or not. We'll see. It's a possibility. I'm going to do some different things anyway. I am not going to do much in the way of old style teaching.

Q.: Anything else you plan to do in retirement?

A: Well, travel. Maria wants to go on the Tr