

AN INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT MCCOLL

Interviewer: Jewell Willhite

Oral History Project

Endacott Society

University of Kansas

ROBERT MCCOLL

B.A., Pomona College, 1960

Ph.D., Ph.D., Geography, University of Washington, 1964

Service at the University of Kansas

First came to the University of Kansas, 1966

Assistant professor, 1966

Associate professor, 1968

Professor, 1978-2003

Chairman of the Geography Department, 1966-2002

Emeritus, 2003-present

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Q: I am speaking Robert McColl, who retired in 2003 as professor and chair of Geography at the University of Kansas. We are in Lawrence, Kansas, on September 10, 2003. Where were you born and in what year?

A: I was born San Diego, California, on September 2, 1938. I was delivered by my uncle.

Q: Oh, really. Was this a home birth?

A: No, it wasn't. It was in a hospital. The story is that I was a difficult birth and this uncle, who was a bit of a curmudgeon, which runs in the family, had decided that he was going to go see a movie and he told the nurses, "Don't you dare relax her and have that baby come while I am at the movie." So I was part of a family tradition in that one part of the family. I think I was the first doctor who didn't remove appendixes or some organ of the body. Everybody else was an M.D.

Q: Oh, your uncle was a doctor.

A: Yes, he was an M.D. Others were dentists, etc. There was a great medical tradition in the family, except for my particular little segment or branch. My father was a tool and die maker or a mold maker. I don't know how many people know what that is. Basically, he made out of steel the molds that made everything from Jello molds to the knobs and devices that run other machinery. So he was a machinist in that regard.

Q: What was his name?

A: His name was Hugh Dougald.

Q: What was your mother's name?

A: Her name was Alice and her maiden name was Frells. That part of the family actually came from LaMar, Iowa. So I came back in a sense to old family roots of sorts. The uncles and everybody of the McColls who were physicians originally came out of Esquizen, Ontario, Canada, through Buffalo, New York, where they did medical school. My great-great aunt was one of the first women ob gyns (female doctors) in the United States. She had one hell of a time going through medical school as a female in an all-male world. So I have all that family history. I am right now the clan chieftain of our segment of the family because my father passed away a number of years ago. So I have collected the family history of our immediate family, when they migrated, who came, where and what. Two families married, the McColls and the MacPhersons. The McColls married mostly MacPherson women. It's a fun history.

Q: What was your parents' educational background?

A: Neither went to college. My mother did a business school. My father finished high school and went straight into work. His work was such that during the Second World War, when many people of his age were being drafted, he had a dispensation because of the technical work he did making airplane parts and things. It's interesting because it seems to be kind of a generational element, in that at the age I was just at the beginning of the Vietnam War, it was still possible to have a deferment because of marriage and children, which I had almost as soon as I started graduate school. As my mother-in-law said, "You are going to be drafted anyway."

I said, “No, because I have studied Chinese and Asia. I assure you that I can volunteer and find a very nice position. I will not have to do boot camp and carry a rifle.” It turned out I didn’t have to go in the military. I have no military service, although the family has had a great tradition of that. I put a brick over at the Dole Center. All the family members who were physicians served in the First World and the Second World War, and then they did missionary medical service in the Congo and in Korea and elsewhere. So we had this sort of neat family tradition. But my father and his father were among the few who didn’t go to college. That happened through a variety of reasons. My grandfather had to go to work to support all the boys who did go to college because his father was unable to do it. So we had this tradition of helping out.

Q: Did you have brothers and sisters?

A: I am an only child.

Q: Did you grow up in the San Diego area?

A: No, I grew up in Los Angeles in a suburb called Southgate. I went to Southgate High School. I did gymnastics. I have the wrong build. For those who can’t see me, I am six foot three. At that time I had a 28-inch waist and weighed 140 pounds. Broomstraws were slightly thicker than myself. I did side horse or pommel, and I did it very well. Because my legs were so long I couldn’t do the kinds of moves that got you gold medals. I never got better than second or third. I couldn’t compete with these guys with no legs.

Q: Since you’ve been all over the world as an adult, did your family travel when you were young?

A: No, they didn't, but my extended family has been all over the world either as physicians or missionaries. My immediate family was not into that and didn't have the opportunities. I just sort of picked that up. My father, before he died, had a great vicarious life of traveling with me, looking at the photos and hearing the stories. That pleased him greatly.

Q: I know you've studied languages as an adult. Did you start that in high school?

A: Yes, but I'm terrible at languages, formal languages. I started with French. I have noticed that I have an ability to speak what I call human. I can talk in a lot of different cultures. I pick up enough of the vocabulary and the phrases that I can appear to be fluent, but I am not. The advantage of that, I have found, and this happened during the Vietnam era, when anyone who spoke Thai or Vietnamese was automatically considered a spy. Some of my friends were shot. This included the Peace Corps. If you didn't speak the language fluently but you tried, everybody loved you, because you were trying to understand their culture. You were obviously not a spy because you didn't know the language. You cared enough to speak Thai or Vietnamese. So they would tell you anything and would be very open and forthcoming. We can talk later about some of the techniques I developed for getting information that people normally wouldn't tell anyone and certainly never told an anthropologist or scholar. I still do that. Now that I have retired, I am doing that in Costa Rica and Turkey rather than in Asia.

Q: I don't think they have geography in school any more, but did you study geography in high school?

A: I think I had a little bit in high school. I then went to Pomona College, which is nearby in Southern California. It's a good little liberal arts school. They call them the associated colleges. The reason there were so many separate colleges—there was Scripps, which was a girls' school, Clairmont Men's College, which was a boys' finishing, prebusiness type school. Then they added Harvey Mudd, which was the undergraduate Cal Tech type thing. I found that the reason they had these was that each one of these colleges got 600 acres tax free. The associated colleges had all these great things. It was a marvelous education. It was similar to Reed and one in Iowa I also looked at. It was a great liberal arts school, very rigorous.

Q: What was your major?

A: I majored in Oriental Affairs. It was sort of the equivalent of East Asia Studies. I had started out premed. But I was terrible at math. I am just horrid in math, so I couldn't do the chemistry and things. I'm very intuitive in physics, so I understand methods. I just can't do it mathematically. I had scholarships to a number of small colleges in physics because I placed in what was called the National Science Talent Search. Until they look at my math grades, everything looks fine. Then they go, "Oh, you can't count." And that is true. But I enjoyed physics. I have a very intuitive grasp of how things work, which translated later into the geography and physical geography. And that includes everything from geology through climate and things like that.

Q: I guess I didn't ask you if you had influential teachers in high school?

A: I had several. One was a math teacher, who was a complete harridan. We were actually friends. But she was the bane of my life, because I couldn't do math and she didn't want me to do anything that had anything to do with math. And she just was merciless on me, which was ultimately was to my benefit, because it took me away from things that I just really have no intuitive ability in. Then I had another one, who was—I think we all get them—like a surrogate mother or grandmother. She was a spinster lady. She had a very interesting background. Her emphasis was English and literature. I've a good grasp of language, as such. She and I had a lot of fun. She would play word games, in which I would be the only one in class who could catch on. When I left, she gave me her copy of McGuffey's Reader. For people who don't know what McGuffey's Readers are...

Q: They were published in the 1800s, weren't they?

A: That's right. And they are the most incredible collection of books. What people don't realize is most college faculty couldn't read and pass the things that are in McGuffey's Readers, and those were done for secondary students. So if you want to know what's happened to the level of education, take a look at a McGuffey's Reader. Realize that the founding fathers, the guys who wrote the Constitution, their average age was 27. The reason it was that old was that Ben Franklin was the oldest old fart in there and he pushed the average up. These guys were in their 20s. And we hardly let people drive or drink at 20, and these people were forming governments and countries.

Q: I suppose they had a much shorter life span and they had to get going early.

- A: They did, but it proves what you can do if you are young. They learned Greek, they learned Latin. They wrote books, and this in their 20s.
- A: That is amazing.
- Q: And today you don't want to push them. Johnny has to have some exercise. How about his brain? Really, we have faculty members, and I could go around and point them out to you, who couldn't handle McGuffey's Readers. Anyway, she gave me this marvelous thing, and I have always considered that I was sort of like the son she never had, since she was never married. It was a good, close relationship. So she had a strong influence on me, but not pushy in any way. She kept feeding me new books to read and sort of pushed me along. So I developed this really strong interest in reading and language in the form of communication, as opposed to formal structure of language. So in terms of communication I learned a lot of skills and am pretty good at just basic communication, regardless of language.
- Q: Did you have jobs in the summer?
- A: Everybody did. I did mostly hourly labor. I worked on production lines in factories. They had just opened a new place there called Disneyland, and I got a job there for a couple of summers.
- Q: What did you do there?
- A: I did everything and had a grand time. I also learned a little bit about unions because we had to pay dues but we didn't join the union because it was a union operation. I learned some interesting things about unions while there. Nothing in the sense of strikes, but just sort of the mechanisms of unions. I worked the merry

go round. I worked on riverboats. I worked on Octopia, little cars. I learned that customers are always right, even when they have just torn the fingers off the end of your hand and you are bleeding on them. You have to say, "I'm so sorry. Did I get blood on you?"

Q: Did you get free rides?

A: Well, you did if you knew the people. They would give you for yourself and the immediate members of your family gift tickets books, so that you wouldn't steal tickets. But everybody knew that right after work you could go ride a ride. But after a while it got kind of boring. It was a good social experience.

Q: So you went to Pomona College. Was this a four-year college?

A: A four-year-college. I went in initially as premed, but everybody does, boys and girls. You would go to a dance, and everybody would be premed. It was absolutely brutal. We would take biology classes and the exams were based on footnotes, believe it or not. I didn't take a class that covered any of this material. It was competitive as the dickens. I mean you wouldn't tell your roommate what you thought would be on the exam. It was extremely competitive, but very good. It pushed you. We would do an average of three to five 25-page papers every semester. So I learned to write well and really fast and cranked. At that time Pomona had a rule that you did not matriculate, you did not become a member of the college, until you had a "C" average. There were people who got all the way to being seniors and had not matriculated yet. They goofed around. It was extremely competitive. A "C" was not a "C." Almost everybody there was used to being straight "A's" in high school and now they were looking at grades they

had never even seen in their lives. We were used to goofing around a lot. In that part of California you could literally ski in the snow on Mount Baldy in the morning, come down, swim in the pool in the afternoon in the sunshine and that evening go down to the beach at Newport and have a weenie roast. So it was a rather unique environment. It led to not an emphasis on studying the books, let's put it that way, until you saw your first semester's grades. Then reality struck. I managed to matriculate in spite of horrid grades in chemistry, because of the math, and French, which I could not do. I can speak French now in France but I couldn't do book class type French. I got an "A" in physical education because I taught weight lifting. That was an automatic "A" if you were an instructor. And you got a five dollar gift certificate to a men's store. To me this was a no brainer. So that saved my butt in the first semester. The first semester was a reality check for a lot of us. We were used to coasting, and you didn't coast with this group.

Q: Did you have influential teachers from that college?

A: I had probably two or three. I tend to be pretty much a loner. I had my Asian professor, who comes from a very distinguished family in south China, the Chun family. He had a very interesting experience during the Second World War because he escaped just ahead of the Japanese, who were trying to arrest him and his whole family. His brother was a professor of languages up at Stanford at the same time. So Professor Chun was my first introduction to the Oriental scholar gentleman, which I appreciated greatly. I had a professor of political science who I related to well. Probably because of that I ended up in political geography focusing on Asia. So these things sort of fit together. But there were absolutely

no geography classes, none. I didn't know you could take a geography class. So I graduated in basically East Asian Studies. At that time—this was in 1960—the Peace Corps had not yet started. That started when I was up in (unclear). I can tell you a story about that. The Russians had just put Sputnik up and there was this big thing, the National Defense Education Act to pay for people to study sciences in foreign areas, because we had nobody who knew anything about Russia, China, didn't know the languages. They were depending primarily on missionaries and there weren't that many. China was a very awkward thing. When I was in college, it wasn't so much of a problem. But this was the McCarthy era. When I got to graduate school, a lot of my professors and their friends had been abused and some had committed suicide from the McCarthy era. There were things I couldn't say or do and I was taught a particular structure that I can get into later. The National Defense Education Act included Title IV and Title VI. One was for studying foreign languages and the other was for studying the foreign area. I don't remember which was which. I had applied at Harvard and Seattle and any of the schools that had a good China and East Asia program. I had not applied at Cornell, because it was Southeast Asia. I didn't want to go to Stanford, because half of my family had gone to Stanford. I didn't want to deal with the overburden of family that is in a situation like that. I wanted to get out of California. I was married and we had just had our first son.

Q: When did you marry?

A: I was married in 1959.

Q: While you were at Pomona?

A: That's right. My last year at Pomona.

Q: Did she go to Pomona also?

A: Yes, she had graduated. She was working at the Clairmont Graduate School at that time.

Q: What is her name?

A: Suzanne. She has been very active in the community here, AARP, University Women's Club, etc.

Q: What was her field?

A: Her field was sociology. We took a number of classes together. I took her sociology classes, which I thought were putz. She would take Chinese language classes. I loved to draw Chinese characters, so I could do the writing and she could pick up the spoken faster than I could because of all the tones. When I heard from Harvard, I wrote back and said, "I am just married and I have a new son. How's the housing?"

They responded, "It's terrible. We suggest you leave your family at home for the first year or two."

I thought, "I don't think so."

The secretary at Seattle had said, "You don't really want the language thing because you are not that good in languages. I have automatically applied for the area studies for you, which is a broader program. It doesn't force you to take all these languages. I hope you don't mind."

I thought, "Here is somebody who cares."

The secretary also said, “There is all kinds of housing. We will help you take care of it.” I am going to go work with people who are human. So I blew Harvard off.

I talked to somebody there later who said, “If we knew who did that, we would have fired her.”

I said, “Actually, I am very happy with what I did. I’m glad I didn’t come to Harvard.”

Q: So you went to Seattle.

A: The University of Washington at Seattle. I went as an area specialist. At that point it was a very prestigious program in Far Eastern and Russian languages.

Q: Was your area Southeast Asia?

A: China. That’s why I didn’t go to Cornell. Cornell was Southeast Asia. I had people tell me earlier, “Being an area specialist is not going to get you a job. If you want to teach, you have to be with a department or a discipline, such as political science or history, something people hire you in. They don’t hire China specialists.” Well, it made sense but I didn’t really like it either.

When I went to Seattle, I went over to the political science department. I remember the chair said, “I see your background. You are going to have to take courses in the state and local government of Washington.”

I said, “Why? I can’t think of anything more useless to me.”

“Well, if you go out and teach, you will have to teach these classes.”

I said, “You are assuming that I am going to stay in Washington State.”

“Well, that is our requirement.”

I thought, “You guys are really morons and I would have to spend how many years working with people with that mentality. I don’t feel comfortable with that.” I went to history. I like history in a context understanding, but I don’t like it in sequential year type, the way they teach history. I was taking a geography class because I had never had a geography class in my life, and there was a course called The Geography of China. I thought, “That’s something I don’t know. I’ll go take this class.”

I got to talking to the chair of the geography department. He looked at my transcript and said, “This is really neat. But I don’t understand why you took weight lifting.”

I said, “I didn’t take it, I taught it. I got an automatic “A” and a gift certificate.”

He said, “I don’t see any problem. You are going to have to do some remedial work where you don’t the background.”

I said, “That’s not a problem.” So they were very flexible. So anyway, I had absolutely no geography until I got to Washington. I had a three-year fellowship. Everything was paid for three years, I knew that. I think it was a Title IV or VI.

Q: Did you have to do something for this fellowship, such as teach?

A: No, in fact you were prohibited from teaching. You were to study. I finally at one point...I knew that by teaching you learned things a lot better. I offered to teach in the geography department after I got the background. “We have a problem,” I said. “You can’t pay me.”

They said, “We have never had anybody who wanted to teach for free.”

I said, I don’t want to teach for free, but I can’t take the money, until my last semester. They you can pay me double if you want to.”

They said, “We are not going to do that.”

I said, “I didn’t expect that.” So the object was that you studied. That’s what the pay was for. It was reasonable pay, but not enough that you would become a permanent student. What I did was I told the chairman—he and I were very good friends—G. Donald Hudson was his name. He had come there from the TVA, he had worked for the Tennessee Valley Authority. I said, “I’ve got three years. I’ve got a wife and child. I want a job in three years. I want to plan to be out of here in three years. I have had very good training in research methods. I know how to use libraries, I know how to write, I am very disciplined. I can do a lot of work in a short period of time and it is good work. So what I want to do is bypass the master’s and go straight for the Ph.D. Is that possible? I don’t need the training that a master’s is really designed for.”

He said, “People don’t do that. What are you going to do if you don’t get it?”

I said, “I guess I could fall back and get a master’s.”

He said, “We don’t view it as a consolation prize.”

I said, “Obviously, I would have to do the work. That is not the point. The thing is I want to do this if it is possible.” So I don’t have a master’s degree. I bypassed the master’s, to loud moans and groans by some of the other faculty.

Q: So they made an exception for you.

A: I think I was the first one to request it or to discuss it.

Q: In some of the sciences they do that.

A: That's right. But this was a social science and this wasn't done. But I really didn't have the time. I didn't know what would happen to me in two or three years. I might end up in the military. So I said, "Let's shoot for it. It's my risk, not yours. I am the guy who is putting all his eggs in one basket. If I am willing to do it, you should be willing to allow me to commit suicide. This is something we will work out as we get down the line." So we did that. I (unclear) East Asian studies and political geography. My dissertation worked in a very strange way, in that it fit exactly what was happening at the time and after that in Vietnam and around. Anyone who has looked for a dissertation topic knows that the first frustration is, "Everything has been done. What could I possibly write on that hasn't already been written on?" So there is this huge frustration that there is no way to find a topic. I was reading a book by Trotsky at the time. They were talking about some things in China called Soviets, not like Soviet Russia. These were guerrilla bases basically. They were little mini states of sorts. Only it didn't say that. I thought, "I've never heard of these things." I looked a little more into them and I realized nobody else had heard of them or talked much about them and studied them. And they were exceptionally geographic, where they were, how they operated, how they started.

So I did my dissertation on the origins of Chinese communism, using these guerrilla bases, with the idea being that, now wait a minute. Everybody says that Communism is such a thing that it's so wonderful and everyone will

recognize it and sort of instantaneously choose to be a communist. And here were the Chinese running around saying, “We are going to set these little bases up and teach everybody how to be a communist and show them and sort of make them do it.”

Q: So these were not just military groups?

A: No, they were very much social. They had a military thing at the end. What it amounted to was the Chinese Communists were being attacked by Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalists at that point and literally driven into the countryside. You had to run to stay alive. What they did was they ended up piling up together in a few places and creating a nest, if you will, then hoped to reexpand. It became quite a process that was then applied all over the world and still is used. I got into that and understood it. There were funny little things. Sometimes you had to know the Chinese to appreciate the nuances of these states. So I read some of Mao’s work in the original Chinese, as well as the translation. The translation doesn’t say what’s in the original. For instance, translating the concept of, not the word, peasant. Because for the Chinese anybody in agriculture is a peasant, which is not the same thing Westerners think. What they did was...”We are running like hell, and if they catch us they will kill us. What do we call that? We call that mobile warfare.” I loved these little games that they played. I got into this. Remember again this is 1960 through about 1963. Vietnam is really starting to crank along at this point. In 1963 I was out of scholarship money. I took a position at the University of California at Santa Barbara teaching, although I was not quite through with my dissertation. Well, this topic, of course, just fit

everything. I was lecturing. Remember, I had never been in the military, never served in the military, never been drafted, I had never worked for them. There are a lot of myths and stories about me and my background, but the facts are I had never done that. But the work that I did researchwise was terribly applicable and meaningful. So I got called in to lecture in all kinds of places, including Leavenworth, Fort Benning and the U.S. War College.

Q: How did they hear of you?

A: The articles that I write. I wrote an article that predicted where guerrilla bases would be established. Then I did some predictions on things in Vietnam and elsewhere. So it got to be very practical and very scary at times because it was also very important and it was very good. That, of course, was of great interest to people. So I lectured at the Air Academy and at West Point and Fort Bragg and a number of places. I was made an honorary Green Beret at one point. I was never drafted. I'm not going to go out and do this. We did a bunch of push ups and some other crazy things. Then I was doing field work in Thailand. As a civilian I could go to Vietnam and to Cambodia where military people couldn't do the things that I did because they had restrictions. But I was a civilian.

Q: Had the war begun then?

A: Oh yes, but they were pushing tourism at the time, believe it or not. You would see things in Hong Kong. "Visit Bung Tao. Rumors of the war are greatly exaggerated."

"What, are you nuts?"

"It's a marvelous beach."

“Well, it is, but it also has land mines on it, for God’s sake.”

Q: So this was while you were a professor at Santa Barbara. Did you do this in the summers?

A: Yes. I couldn’t go into China because the United States and China...and China was my real training specialty. But remember my dissertation was on how the Chinese Communists used and developed this technique. Then Guevera used it and Ho Chi Minh used it and the people in Indonesia used it. Then you get it in Africa and all over the world. So I’ve got people coming up to me. “Look at this problem in South America. Can you look at this problem in Africa? Can you come lecture to our guys?” And in the process, of course, I learned a long time ago that the one person you want to avoid is the expert. So I knew I was never an expert. But all the guys around me had faced the bullets. They were the experts. So I spent a lot of my time when I would go to these lectures talking to these guys and getting the stories and getting the truth, as opposed to the nonsense that would appear in press reports. So then the next time I would write an article I would have all these marvelous, on-the-ground stories. Some people thought, “Oh, that’s because you are a spy. That’s because you did those things.” I had some of the weirdest rumors about me. So that was when I was at Santa Barbara.

Q: I can’t remember the exact dates of the war. The United States was involved in the Vietnam War at that time, weren’t they?

A: Oh, yes, before I graduated. I had given a course to some military people in Seattle. They were going in and out of Vietnam as advisors at the time. By the

time I got to Santa Barbara we had the teach-in type stuff, I think about 1965. I had a second son at that point. I have only two sons.

Q: What are their names?

A: The oldest one is called Kevin. He was born in 1960. The youngest is Ian. He was born in 1963. They were both born in June and their birthdays are about four days apart, which was not planned.

Q: When you went to Vietnam, what were you studying? Were you studying guerrilla tactics?

A: Because I was a civilian and I didn't have a grant—if I did I would be under everybody's control—I would have contact with people I had met, either in Hong Kong, etc. who would take me around and tell me the stories and I could ask the questions that I wanted. You couldn't do formal research because (1) there was a war on and I didn't have any protection. They couldn't officially take me to the front. I didn't want to go to the front anyway. Getting shot was not one of the objectives of my life. But I could get information there and see the environment, feel it, smell it, sweat, get the things that are the realities that you can't do in a library.

Q: Jungles are different.

A: They are nasty. I couldn't work in China but I could work in Thailand. I could do some things there. So I would stop in Vietnam for never more than about a week because, again, I was a civilian. One time I wanted to go to Angkor Wat in Cambodia. Well, I had to get permission from the Vietnamese government to get on a plane, Royal Air Cambouge, to fly to Cambodia. Well, the Vietnamese

government had Buddhist holidays, Catholic holidays, American holidays, French holidays, and Vietnamese holidays. So I'm thinking, "When do you guys work? And how in the hell do I get this thing?"

So you take your passport in for a visa and they would say, "Well, come back in three weeks."

"I can't be here in three weeks. I've got to have this thing tomorrow."

"Well, come back tomorrow but before noon because then we go on this kind of a break."

"How do you guys even operate?" So I managed to get this and I flew Royal Air Cambouge—Sihanouk was king of Cambodia at the time—from what was then Saigon to Phnom Penh then on to Siem Reap, which is where Angkor Wat was. I just wanted to see these things. I wasn't doing any kind of study, I just wanted to see. Well, it turns out that the airline I am on is the Vietcong courier flight. The guys were flying barely above the treetops and waving so they don't shoot at us because it is all filled with Vietcong going into Cambodia. Well, I didn't know that at the time, but I found out. That was an interesting piece of information. Then, if you are there, you pick up things. You can't get that same information in a library back in the States. So I didn't do any formal research as such. I simply was available in the area for information that happened to be available. To give you an idea how that worked one time. I think it was the second time I did that. I had come to KU at that point. One of the families here, the Palmerlys—I think he was in engineering—had a couple of sons, both of whom ended up in geography. Well, I didn't know them at the time. Tom Smith,

the fellow who recruited me here, said, “You have to go see Al Palmerly, who is working in Saigon. He is working with this group called Captured Documents Exploitation Center. They were using some of the articles I had written and so, again, remember I am a civilian. I go in and it is so classified that they don’t let anybody in who does not have clearance. I had no clearance. I’m not even in the military or in the government in any way. But I knew the tricks. First of all, I had Al with me, who ran the thing. When I was stopped by—the Vietnamese wouldn’t stop me because I was an American. I was an American in civilian clothes and the only American in civilian clothes who would be in that area would probably be CIA. So their assumption was that no tourist was going to do this. I knew enough to spit shine my shoes, so I looked official. I didn’t look real scruffy and I wasn’t dressed like some kind of a hobo. When I got back to an American MP, who asked to see some identification clearance, I looked him square in the face with my little shiny shoes and my sport shirt and said, “Soldier, do you have a need to know?”

He said, “No, sir.” I had a burr haircut at the time and I could stand just as straight as you wanted. I never lied. He made the assumption because you don’t want to mess with somebody who is CIA because he had a nice job in Saigon and if he screwed up, he might end up on the front getting shot at. So I went right straight through into the back room. It was interesting times. Let me finish from Santa Barbara to KU.

Q: How long were you at Santa Barbara?

A: I was in Santa Barbara from 1963 to 1966, three years. We were creating a geography program at that time. It had been part of sociology, anthropology and geography and they were dividing up. Geography had no chair. I had very good relations with the dean. I was too young to become a chairman, but they were trying to move me in that direction. It turned out that quite a number of years later I was talking with someone who said they were actually trying to groom me toward a chancellor type position. I said, "I'm not a good bureaucrat." I am, but I don't like it. So anyway, I was recruited by KU and that is a story in itself. I made the decision and took the letter down. Then I got called into the dean's office and he said, "You've just been selected as the next director of the University of California in Hong Kong."

Q: They had a branch in Hong Kong?

A: Yes. This was for all of the things. He said, "The competition was (unclear) Berkeley and everywhere else, so we didn't want to tell you that we put your name up. But you have been approved."

I said, "I just accepted another job."

He said, "Renegade."

I said, "I won't do that. I just can't do that morally." I said, "I wish you had told me. I could have postponed it." Well, I don't have any regrets, believe it or not. It would have been a nice prestige, but Hong Kong was a dead end. You couldn't go into the mainland at that time. Remember, this was 1963. We had no relations with China that weren't angry. So then I came to KU in 1966.

Q: Were you looking for other jobs when KU made you an offer?

A: No, not particularly. But what had happened was that on my travels, particularly in Hong Kong, I had met Bob Burton, who was at KU and had been a secretary to one of the founders of the Communist Party of China. Bob had all these great stories and knowledge of the people and the era that I did my dissertation on and did my research on. And I thought, “Oh, this is just an opportunity that is just too good to be true.” Then KU has one of the best geography programs in the country, particularly at that time. It was one of the top three to five. To me this was a no brainer.

But people said, “You’re leaving Santa Barbara for Kansas?”

I said, “But I have been to Lawrence and you haven’t.” I grew up on the West Coast, so I knew beaches. Lawrence is one of the great secrets of the U.S. It’s not bald prairie and tornadoes.

Q: I think so too.

A: You have to realize that at that time a lot of the faculty were graduates of Harvard and had an Ivy League background. Everybody had the New York Times flown in. So I came in 1966. There were nice, easy three-year breaks. From 1960 to 1963 I was a graduate student, from 1963 to 1966 I was at Santa Barbara. From 1966 to 2003 I was at KU. I am not one of those guys who look around and try to up their salary and status by moving. I just stayed here. I came to work with Bob Burton. Bob and I were good friends. He’s dead now. But he had some psychological problems, in that he just couldn’t do things. He wouldn’t finish. He had a book. He knew all these inside stories of (unclear). Somebody else finally had to finish that great, huge two-volume book. He just had that bent that

he couldn't finish. So that was a waste on that side. But the department was good. I was brought in on a joint appointment between East Asian Studies and Geography. At that time George Beckman was here and he had brought in a lot of Ford money for the area programs, particularly East Asia. So I came in funded in a split appointment, but the real funding was from the Ford Foundation. And, again, that was interesting because watching that and watching a number of things, everything from how the unions were operating at Disneyland, I developed very intuitive administrative skills and knowledge of how things were done, as opposed to what the rules were. So how you could do things... You could get a joint appointment, we'll split it and you can get it done. I can do that and did do that for the last few years while I was here officially, but it was not an objective of my life. I did not want to be a chancellor. I did not want to get into that kind of social bureaucracy, shall we say.

Q: That would have cut down on your travels.

A: Yes and no. You could do that and do very good things with that, but you are also having to put up with a lot of idiosyncratic individuals, none of whom would like you, unless you gave them all the money in your budget, and then they probably wouldn't like you either. I didn't need that. I dealt with angry people who shot at you around the world. I didn't need to deal with that. I had no interest. I wanted to do the research and work and do the travel. As I say, the initial focus on the travel was always getting a sense of place. And then on that basis and on the people I would meet and learn about there I would get an idea what the social stability and instability elements were, and then I could do the research and

writing based on are you really going to have a guerrilla war, and if you do, will it have any chance of success? There was no chance ever of success in Thailand. Felix Moos and I were both working Thailand. Felix is a professor in anthropology here. He, Grant Goodwin and I are all Seattle University of Washington graduates. We didn't know each other there. But we had this series of little links and we are all good friends. Well, Felix was convinced that Thailand would go communist. I said, "There is not a chance on this green earth of Thailand going communist." We would have these great disagreements on this. They were intellectual and fun. "Ha, ha, ha, Felix. I was right and you were wrong." There are a lot of reasons for that. In that process and in those debates I refined my knowledge, models and techniques for analysis of social instability. At the same time in those days it cost \$2,000 to buy an airline ticket that would take you around the world and be good for a year. It was an open ticket. It is not much more expensive today. Well, it cost that much or more just to fly to Hong Kong and back from Kansas City. So I took an around-the-world ticket every time I went and traveled every summer I had a sabbatical. So when I was through working in Thailand or Southeast Asia, I would then work my way through a series of new and different countries.

Q: So you could stop wherever you wanted to?

A: Wherever you wanted for as long as you wanted. And it was good for an entire year. You couldn't go back and you couldn't go south of the equator and things like this. So what I would do is I would go in the field every summer. I would add three or four new countries that I had never been to and didn't know anything

about. So I did India, I did Afghanistan, I did Iran, all kinds of interesting places. I was in Afghanistan a couple of times. This was way before the Russians got there.

Q: I suppose it was a very primitive country.

A: If you can fly in, it can't be that primitive. And they have hotels. In the process I would meet people. At that time there was a program at the university called University Field Staff, which was run by the Institute for Current World Affairs. This put people into the field to write an article or report every month on any topic they wanted. Then every third or fifth year they came back and lectured in all the member universities. That was a very good program. At that time we knew a lot of those people, and one was a specialist in Afghanistan. His name was Louis DuPris. So I would stop in Afghanistan to see Louis DuPris and then he would take me around and introduce me and show me all the things about Afghanistan. So I traveled all over Afghanistan for a while.

Q: How did you travel at that time in Afghanistan?

A: Land Rovers, bus. It was very interesting. I've managed to do a lot of things that I thought I would never do, in the sense that you would read these old travel books of people on camels and caught in floods and stuff. That sounds so exciting, but I have seen that and it is really ugly. You don't want to do that if you don't have to. It turned out that because I would go to these semi remote, primitive areas, I would have those experiences, but not necessarily on a camel. It would be in a jeep and it didn't feel bad at the time. I felt I was really in luxury at the time. I had some absolutely marvelous experiences that were just very good.

When I would come back, I would teach this. I would fold this into my lectures on world regional geography. “I’ve seen this, I’ve been there. Let me tell you about this.”

Q: I guess I should ask what courses you taught at KU.

A: The primary ones were on China and political geography. Then I also did some work on Asia. I did a general Asia course. Then ultimately I focused primarily on world regional and China. I was asked at one point to develop a course on how to do field work. When you get out there, how do you do what you do? Where do you get the data? How do you operate? So I developed and taught a course on that.

Q: So that was a course you originated.

A: Yes. Another one that was fun that I taught I still think is one of the great ones. It was Adventurers, Travelers, Geographers and Spies, How we Learn About the World. The British sent around all kinds of people, basically spies, that did all this geographic intelligence. There were all kinds of great periods in the Victorian age when women wrote travel books that were absolutely spectacular and were very important in how we learned about the world. One did things on Livingston in Africa. He was actually supposed to go work in China, but there was the Boxer Rebellion. So the British Bible School, or whoever sent him out, said, “You can’t go.”

He said, “I’m stuck in Cape Town right now. Can I just stay in Africa?” So that’s how he ended up in Africa. I didn’t know that. So I had as much fun learning these things as teaching them. I still think that would be one of the fun

ways to teach about the world to a small group. You can't do that in a large class of 200.

Q: To teach about the way geography has been done in the past?

A: And how we found about the knowledge that we have. Today, we use satellite imagery. I taught a course on using satellite imagery to understand China and Asia. What we've learned is absolutely marvelous. I have done a lot of work with satellite imagery, what is called geographic information systems. So I have always been able to stay on the cutting edge technologically of information about the real world, as opposed to library work. I use libraries. I gave my collection to the American Geographical Society. I have some of the most marvelous books in the world, particularly on China, atlases and stuff. So I use the library, but it doesn't mean anything unless you go into the real world and say, "Wait a minute. You're showing a lake there and there's no lake there. I've been there and it's not there." Or the reverse. "I've been here and you are not showing this huge lake. There's this really huge lake here." For example, satellite imagery became available to civilians in probably 1972. I began to obviously use it to look at China, things I knew and places I wanted to go. There's a thing there called Lop Nor, which is well known to China scholars. It is where they did some testing of their atomic bombs and stuff. Well, since 1972 there has been no water in Lop Nor, but every map shows water in Lop Nor. I remember I lectured on this a couple of times and I suddenly found my lectures ending up in textbooks in China and elsewhere. The evidence is here. Here we have empirical evidence. It is like a photograph. There is no water. Quit showing water. So I've had a lot of fun

working with satellite imagery. And, again, that was one of the great things about coming to KU. KU was one of the first universities in the country, in the world, to begin working with satellite imagery with NASA. That is why we have a big NASA building, the Nichols Hall, the NASA programs.

Q: I didn't know that.

A: We were one of the first in the world to work with that stuff. It hasn't been worked from a geography and a social science point of view to the extent that I think it can be. And as a chair, I made a great effort to bring those things together and keep that going, to enhance that kind of reputation. We lost some of the key people who started that because neither the University nor the department could recognize...It's a fear of technology, "I don't understand, I don't want to deal with that. I work with maps and books."

Q: And it's expensive.

A: It was, but it was all being paid for by the Feds. You could get all kinds of money for this. Now, of course, it is absolutely crucial for the world we live in today, from intelligence to monitoring. Everything that cost us literally millions of dollars is now available at the click of a mouse on your computer. So anyway, I introduced those courses and taught that and The World Regional. I could bring in all my personal experience. As I said, every time I traveled, whether sabbatical or doing summer field work, I would then take in an extra four or five countries I had never been to and knew nothing about. So on that basis I added Turkey, Italy, Egypt, Greece, and Morocco, and all kinds of places. Since then I've been back. I do a lot of travel. As my wife said, "You just don't stop thinking."

I said, “What’s the point of having a mind if you’re not going to think? I don’t just want to sit and float on a boat and eat and get fat. I have come up with some interesting analyses of the early history of Turkey and developments there. I’ve moved my interest from China to central Asia and Mongolia. I don’t remember the exact year. In 1992 I was the first American ever and the fourth foreigner to be made an honorary member of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences Institute of Geography. That was by accident. I had never been to Mongolia. I am probably one of the few people at KU who is a member of an Academy of Science in a foreign country. So I decided that if they were going to make me a member, I ought to go visit the country.

Q: You hadn’t been there?

A: I hadn’t. I worked on central Asia and sort of that kind of environment in China, but I had never been to Mongolia.

Q: Was someone reading your papers?

A: That and then I was nominated by the American Geographical Society. They said, “We want someone....one of our guys... They said, “We don’t have anybody who is alive any more who works on central and inner Asia. Aha, McColl! That crazy fool goes anywhere. He has worked there and done some articles on it, so we will put him up.” So I ended up on the Institute there. We did some training for them in remote sensing, and I’ve been back a number of times.

Q: Do they have universities?

A: Yes, they are much more sophisticated than people realize. They had cosmonauts. I got to know one of their cosmonauts who had gone up into space with the Russians. I got him an award in the American Geographical Society. So anyway, I went to Mongolia to get this thing. They were having a famine that year. You had to take your own food. I said, "I'm not doing that. I am not going to stay here if you are not going to have food." This is a country with two million people and something like 40 million head of livestock. I said, "Don't tell me they don't have food. There are moose walking down the street. There are cows all over the place. What do you mean you don't have food? You are just standing here waiting for somebody to feed you. The Russians ruined you. Take a damn knife and go out and kill that sucker and there is all kinds of food."

"Oh, you can't do that."

"Why can't you do that?"

"It might belong to somebody."

"Then it is his problem. This is food. Have him kill it and deliver it to you." Well, anyway, that was an interesting event. The fellow who had made me a member had died. So I had to start a whole new set of associations. But it was interesting. I have been to Mongolia a number of times. I just finished a whole special research issue of what's called *Focus Magazine* in geography on Mongolia. It took forever to do but it came out really well, I am told. So I ended up sliding from the jungles of Southeast Asia to the deserts of Central Asia.

Q: In the meantime, you had only been at KU a few years before all the difficulties began.

A: Yes, all of which were related to Vietnam.

Q: You must have had some opinions about that.

A: I not only had opinions, I had some experiences.

Q: Like what?

A: There was what I used to call the Seven Days in May. Lawrence Chalmers was the chancellor at the time. I was teaching in the mornings and there was a big rally to be held in the stadium. I walked into a large class that I was teaching, 150 to 200 students. I had a similar problem with teach-ins on Vietnam when I was at Santa Barbara. I said, "I am probably one of the few people in Kansas who has ever been to Cambodia and can tell you what's going on. Are you interested?"

The first question was, "What's going to be on the exam Friday?" That was the level of interest.

I said, "I don't know what is going to happen, but let me tell you this. If they decide to close the university early and you feel that is a position you have to take morally, then morally you don't deserve a grade because there is no cost to your action. And I won't give you a grade. Anybody who doesn't want to take the exam is not going to get a grade. And that will make you feel better morally because then there will be a cost to your moral indignation. Because there was no moral indignation. There was none.

Q: Among your students.

A: Not at all. We had this large classroom. I think one of the younger Dockings was in it. I said, "If the governor wants to close the university, that is fine. He can assign the grades, whatever he wants to do, but this is my class and my

responsibility. It turns out that there were about three of us who took that position, Clark Bricker, myself and I forget who else. They then decided that they would shut down the university. I had a call. They were all angry with me in the administration, as you can imagine. I said, "It is very simple. I had a class of 150 to 200 students and we made an agreement, all of us who were there. You've broken that agreement. If you want them to have that option, you have to personally call all of those students individually and tell them there is a new option. That is the only way I will accept a change. If you won't do that, I'm not going to do that. I already have a contract with my students. You changed it. It is your responsibility to say, 'Okay.' I will go with you but you have to call every one of them individually."

"We're not going to do that."

"Then I'm not changing. These students will not receive a grade from me in this class."

Q: So I assume that they showed up.

A: No, they all went home. And the university went nuts, of course. They said, "You are in violation." There was a lot of pressure. They had Clark Bricker in tears. They called me in.

My chairman came to me and said, "They would like you to meet with them."

I said, "There is nothing to meet about. They know my position." I thought I was alone. We had no idea there were other people involved, none of us. I said, "I will tell you right now, because I am a cranky old fart, if they want

to really push this, I would bet you that I could go to the Kansas Legislature next year and get a separate budget line because I held the line and they folded. They really don't want to have a public hearing on this. I feel very comfortable with my position, morally and academically."

"Well, this is a problem."

I said, "Yes, and I am ready to pay the price. I have paid it before for taking positions I believe in. I'll show you the scars. I have been beaten up a lot."

The chairman said, "Would you allow me to sign grades?"

I said, "Yes, but you will initial them, because they are signed by you, not by me. I had a student come to me to ask if I would give him a grade. I said, "No, we had an agreement. If you didn't take the exam, you didn't complete the course, you don't get a grade."

"That's not fair."

"Maybe not, but that's what we all agreed on and you didn't object."

My chairman said, "Work with your teaching assistant and sign the grades. He knows how you would grade."

I said, "That's fine, but you will initial them. These sheets will not be signed by me. I won't do that. That's my moral position. Whatever you want to do after that is up to you." Well, the funny thing is that the next year I won a teaching award. It really angered a couple of people in the administration, who would not show up. The students voted for this. This dean and (unclear) would not show up at a party that was given in my honor because I was such a difficult

person is the politest thing that could be said. But I found that students respect you if you are honest with them and tell them what's going on and why and what the consequences are. But they are like any other child. If they think they can manipulate you, they will. And I watched that earlier when the students were manipulating faculty on the Black Student Union and all the civil rights problems that preceded some of this. They were just as abusive as the dickens to some of the faculty. And they were never to me. I asked one of the students one time, "Why are you beating this guy up and you don't try that stuff with me?"

He said, "You fight back. He just whines and folds. You'll fight back. We're not going to fight you."

I said, "I don't mind a debate, as long as it is an honest, open debate. I used to do this when I would talk and lecture to the military. They had a very interesting position that I learned, that I wish more people understood and more academics followed. That is when I come into a room and lecture and some of these were very touchy subjects, as you can imagine, everyone is free to disagree but no one may be disagreeable. You have no right to be disagreeable. You have every right to disagree. We are gentlemen and we are scholars. We are going to go to dinner after this. Disagree and scream and yell and then we just go and have dinner. To me, that is what the academic world should have been and isn't. Today we are all political correctness. You can't disagree. You can only be disagreeable. You see it now in national politics. Look at this terrible party system we have now. It has nothing to do with politics. It is the most disagreeable, personally vindictive nasty kinds of stuff. Aren't you trying to get

to the same end? The answer is no. We want to kill the other guy. It was a very nice pairing of what my image of what the academic world should be, which is gentlemen scholars, and when I worked with the military—I worked predominately with the officers. I didn't have to get out with the guys on the dirty ground—they were all gentlemen scholars.

Q: Did you continue to work with the military while you were at KU?

A: Yes, because we had Fort Leavenworth nearby. So I would lecture there. I was one of the few academics in the country who had actually been to Vietnam and had studied these things and was not an angry, knee-jerk liberal, or whatever they called them. I remember going in one time to lecture at Leavenworth. This was right after the university closed down and Cambodia (unclear). I was giving a lecture at Fort Leavenworth to a group of allied officers as well as Americans. They were not happy with academics in those days, to say the least, because all academics were Communists, dope smokers, probably slept with their students and his daughter. We were just evil incarnate. I walked in to this room and I was introduced as a professor from KU. You could just hear everybody sort of silently boo and get angry. For some reason, I don't know why—I had been with this kind of group before and I had a great sense of confidence—I said, “Gentlemen, I know what your opinion is of academics. I know we are all supposed to be Communists or Communist sympathizers. We either smoke dope or sell dope and we probably all sleep with your daughters or all the coeds. I wish some of those things were true, but they're not. I don't care. The bottom line is that in this country civilians rule the military. I'm a civilian. You're not. When I

want your opinion, I'll ask for it." I had white knuckles. They were so angry they could have killed me. But they didn't and they couldn't say anything because in the military you have absolute discipline. If you did that here, students would scream, yell and throw books and really be rude. I said, "My job now is to tell you what I've come to tell you. And your job is if you can confound me, prove I'm wrong, deny anything I say as invalid, then that's fine. And I will learn from that. I expect that. I want that. I'm not some little woosie guy who hasn't been there. I know all your code words. I know Operation Cedar Falls, etc. I've been there. I know this stuff. That's the only thing I'm going to talk to you about. Any time you want to confound me on fact, that's fine. All this other hooey, keep it to yourself because you are under civilian authority in this country at this time, unless you want to change that." So I really had their attention. But if I had faltered, I would have been rended in every direction, nothing but bloody pulp. And by the first break I didn't have all their support but I had their respect. By the time we were all through, then we were all buddies and they were saying, "How can you stand it at the university?" We were all good pals. But I had to prove it. I don't mind it. That's good. I wish our students would accept that kind of rigor, instead of, "Oh, you're a feminist," or "You're an anti this." I don't need these words. Deal with facts. If you want to confound the facts, that's fine. I got into a debate one time. I was giving a lecture on geopolitics and conditions in the Arabian Peninsula. I was using some examples from Aden and Yemen, relative to the British Special Air Services (BSAS). I had never been to Yemen at that point. I made that clear. "These are what I know and the stories I have been

given. If you have an alternative, I would welcome hearing it. But this is what it is.” So I told the story. I had a couple of SAS officers come up to me. I didn’t even know they were in the room.

They said, “We’ve served there. So we take disagreement with what you said.”

I said, “Fine. Was anything I said factually wrong?”

“Well, no.”

“So the disagreement is based on interpretation.”

“Well, yes.”

“I know exactly which interpretation you are disagreeing with because you’ve got to give the British credit. Unlike what the Americans did in Vietnam and elsewhere, when the British get thrown out of a country, as in Yemen, they’re standing in the water literally dodging bullets trying to get on their ships saying, ‘We grant you your freedom.’” I said, “Now that’s class.”

They said, “Well, it wasn’t quite like that.”

“What does ‘not quite like that’ mean?”

“Well, we prefer to think of it as a strategic withdrawal.”

I said, “You were in the water dodging bullets.”

“That’s true.”

I said, “You got thrown out. The classy part is you granted them freedom. Then they couldn’t do anything except say, ‘Come back. We haven’t defeated you.’ You just declared victory. That is the greatest trick going.” I said, “I gave you great credit for that.”

He said, "Yes, but we don't like to think of ourselves dodging bullets when we are leaving."

So we would have these interesting discussions and I would meet very interesting people and get lots of additional information that way, both in my lectures and in my travels.

Q: You said that some people thought you were a spy.

A: Oh, yes, including administrators and faculty here. They did some terrible things to me.

Q: I guess I thought it was when you were in a foreign country that somebody thought you were a spy.

A: No. Well, they probably did that too. That you can deal with. Because of what I studied and where I went and the things I did.

Q: You mean Southeast Asia.

A: Well that, and I worked with the military and lectured to them. But we had a lot of faculty who did those kinds of things. I think in part it was because my life was more exciting than their life.

Q: No doubt. But who did they think you were spying for?

A: They thought I was working for the CIA, I guess. I had a student one time want to sit down one to have coffee with me and I said, "Fine." I enjoy talking to students. He sort of hided and hawed.

I said, "What is it you really want?"

He said, "Well, the rumor is that you are a CIA agent interviewing Vietcong prisoners in Cambodia or Laos."

This was so mind-boggling. None of this was possible, let alone did I ever do that. I said, "It's very interesting. I can deny it all I want and, of course, you prefer the rumors over my denials. So I am not going to go there." Yes, I know people in the CIA. We have trained a lot of people who work for their analysis groups in geography in East Asia. They tried to hire me a couple of times. I said, "There is no way. I like my life better than that." Secondly, I asked why they wanted to hire me.

They said, "Your kind of analysis is exactly what we need."

I said, "Think about this. If you hire me, who trains the students to come do the kind of work that you want? If you take me out of the academic world, then you are not going to have anybody to come work for you."

"We hadn't thought about that."

I said, "That's why I won't come work for you. You don't think ahead."

A couple times they said, "We have all kinds of information that you don't have."

"That's true, but you don't have any ideas. You've got a lot of data and all this secret stuff you know, but you don't know what to do with it. You don't know what it means. I live a very nice, comfortable life. I can think about this. And I don't have anybody trying to kill me." I did have somebody try to kill me at one point.

Q: Where was that?

A: This was in Southeast Asia. I didn't know about it at the time. I had some friends kind of rush me out of one of the countries there. He said, "It was because you were on their assassination list."

I said, "What?"

Q: Which side?

A: The bad guys. I got in trouble with both sides. I said, "One, why would they even know I was here? And secondly, why would I be on that list?"

He said, "You were on the bottom of the list."

I said, "You are missing my point. I shouldn't be on the list."

He said, "Most people would object if they weren't at the top of the list."

I said, "I'm objecting that I am on the list." This was many years ago. I was never told this until about five years ago. This is 20 or 30 years after the fight. Because of the things that I wrote and the way that I thought, I was viewed as a problem by each side. From the government's side I was viewed as somebody who taught the guerrillas, the insurgents, how to do it better. So my articles have been torn out of magazines and found in guerrilla camps, even in South Africa. On the guerrilla side I was viewed as teaching the government how to find and kill them. So each side got angry. And I got angry, thinking, "I must be doing something right, but I am going to go away because nobody is paying me to get out here and get killed. So I am getting out of here." Because of that and things that would occur in places that I went, it was assumed by some.... This led me to a lack of respect for a lot of my academic colleagues, who would not bother to confront me or check the facts. They would just pick up these rumors

and they would tell people, and this cost me some grant money and positions at times. That worked, from my point of view, to my advantage because it kept me very independent. To give you an idea, in 1989 when they had the Tienneman, I was in China and was way on the north side of Tibet. Everybody who had a federal grant was told by the U.S. government, "You will come home or you will never see another federal grant." They had to leave. There was no problem where I was. People were leaving in tears because they had to leave students and research projects behind. I was one of about four Americans in all of Western China. At that point because I had stayed through all the bad times and all the other Americans had to leave, I had a letter of introduction everywhere from the governor of the province. I was a friend of the Chinese people, all kinds of good things took place. I had a marvelous time. If I had had a federal grant, I would have been required to leave or I would have been abused.

Q: So you paid for your own travel.

A: I paid for all my own travel. It is not that expensive. It took less time to save the money to do it on your own with less encumbrances, fewer reports to have to write or someone to kiss up to and keep happy. I did anything I wanted. I went anywhere I wanted. I had absolutely no restrictions. You can't buy that. So, as I say, these guys basically did me a favor. It was sort of like Br'er Rabbit, "Don't throw me in the briar patch." And they did some terrible things. And I did find out about them later. But the bottom line is, I actually benefited from it. That was very nice, thank you. So it kept me extremely independent and allowed me to be very idiosyncratic. For example, when I would lecture at Leavenworth, as a

civilian I could say things that no government official could say. I would just absolutely terrorize my American host, the officer who would host this class, because I could go in and say, and I did one time. We were talking geopolitics and it was oil and energy and this was back during (unclear). I had some Mexican officers in this class. Now remember, I was a civilian. So I pointed out the facts of life. Persian Gulf oil is important to the United States. It is not essential. We have access to oil in Canada, Mexico and Venezuela if we need it.

Somebody said, “What if they won’t give it to us?”

“We are the United States. If we needed to we would physically go and take it.”

And this poor American officer said, “Oh, my God, you can’t say that. We have all these allies here.”

Then the Mexican officer came up and said, “You are the only one who has been honest with us. Of course we know you would take it. There is no question. If you needed it for your national survival, of course you would occupy Mexico. We know that. They just won’t say it. You are the only sucker who has come in here and told the truth.”

“I said, “Ah, but I am the only one who is not in the government. I can tell you the truth. I don’t have to be polite to you. I can be honest with you.” I’ve had some marvelous experiences.

Q: It sounds like you have.

A: I don’t want to literally go through them all, but it gives you some sampling. It gives you an idea why others, looking at what I do and did, the experiences,

would come up with, “You just can’t be mortal. You must be in the government. You must work for the CIA.” The bottom line is had I ever worked for the CIA, I would probably been shot by somebody in one of these foreign countries. They always gave me this stuff, even when I was in graduate school, they would try to recruit me.

I said, “You are too dangerous to work for. I don’t trust you.”

“We can protect you.”

“No, you can’t. I’ve never heard of anybody you protected. (unclear) got killed working for you.” So I had no interest in that. Today when students ask me if they should work for the CIA, I tell them the following. “If you work for the CIA you will never be able to work for the Peace Corps, get a foreign grant or anything else because you are contaminated. Period. Even if you lie, everybody can find out. Just assume that you have no other life at that point. The advantages are—we are not talking about guys running around playing spies, novel type stuff—if you work with them, you have access to the most recent technology, the cutting edge, satellite imagery, all the computer power in the world. You see things and look at stuff the rest of the world can only guess even exists. But you can’t tell anybody, you can’t use it, you can’t write about it, except to the guy sitting next to you. If that’s what you want to do, then work with them. It’s neat stuff, but you can never tell anybody about it. You can only talk to each other.” I obviously made my decision. I’ll take the leftovers and have a lot of fun. If you have a sharp mind, you can come up with most of what they’ve done anyway.

Q: You were director of the China Maps and Imagery Depository.

A: It started with the satellite imagery. We got full satellite coverage of China that we could use to do analysis and teach with. Then every time I would visit China I would go to what is called the Cartographic Publishing House. I bought every map and atlas they published.

Q: This was in China?

A: So every year as long as I could go I went, and I had the best atlas and map collection in civilian hands outside of China and even in most of China. I had Chinese coming to work with this collection. So it was a major research thing, but it is all in Chinese. But it was marvelous stuff. It is now all up with what is called the American Geographical Society Library in Milwaukee. The reason for not leaving it at KU was that more people will have access to it and use it there because it is geographically focused. The other thing is that it will be kept as a collection, and at KU it would be dispersed through the library. I put too much time and a lot of money into building that thing. There's a lot of money cumulatively. I would buy an atlas that in any other country would run you \$200 or \$300 for it and I would pay maybe \$5 for it in China, because I would be paying Chinese money for it. It would cost me more to ship it and bring it home than it cost me to buy. But these were opportunities. They only would print so many of these, and then they would never reprint them. So I was getting stuff that literally doesn't exist any more. So that was the background on that. All these sheet maps. I would get things in China that were secret that they would give to me. I would cut off the edge that said it was classified and bring them home.

Q: You talked about a teaching award you received in 1969. You've had some other honors, I believe.

A: Oh, yes. I can't remember.

Q: You were an Outstanding Educator of America.

A: Yes, I got that. We did a series of what were called scholar-diplomat exchanges at the State Department, which was where they would bring in academics to work on various area desks, such as East Asia or Southeast Asia. So I would meet people who were later ambassadors, or something like that. I got a Mortar Board Outstanding Teacher Award in 1982. As I said, I was made a member of the Mongolian Institute of Geography in 1992. The only other people outside the country who were made members were a Russian and a German, as I recall. So there were only three or four of us who had that honor. Everybody said, "That is really great."

I said, "That and a buck and a half will get you a hamburger." Nobody cares, but it is unique. I feel very honored by it, nevertheless. I met some really good people through that. I've done a number of other things, interviews as a distinguished geographer. I've given special lectures at West Point, at the Air Academy, at Fort Bragg and at what was then called the War College and is now called the National Defense University in Washington, D.C., because defense sounds a lot better than war. I lectured one time at one of these institutes. What I learned was that I would buy a tie, for instance, from Fort Leavenworth, or a tie tack or cuff links. I enjoyed them but there was another reason. For example, the Carlisle Barracks at the Army War College, their symbol is the torch of

knowledge but in a mailed fist, the fist of an armored type guy, which is, I think, very interesting. I learned to read symbols very carefully. So I collect them just as kind of mementos of where I had been. And I would, periodically, if I were lecturing some place unique to me and I didn't know who all would be in the audience, wear the tie tack or the tie. Then I would have somebody come up to me and say, "Oh, I see you are at Leavenworth." And I found out these were sort of like clubs. You would gain both credibility and new insights. An attache would come up to me and say, "I see you've got a Leavenworth tie on. Were you a captain?"

I knew all these terms. I would say, "No, I was such and such. This would, again, open doors. It was sort of like wearing spit shined shoes when I would go some place and they would make assumptions. So I never had to work for the CIA or be in the military, but I could get all the same amount of information and treatment as a civilian, if I knew how to behave. That would be a short haircut and not look like a slob, and wear spit shined shoes. I got all kinds of really neat stuff that way. Then I used the same type of tricks later as I worked outside of political geography on cultural things, including magic amulets in the Philippines to I'm now doing research on the old Catholic churches in Costa Rica.

Q: You have very broad interests.

A: Yes, I do. I have a lot of fun. And I've been doing some work in Turkey, particularly along the coast and in the ancient political geography of the Greeks and the Phoenicians the Persians and the Lithians. I very much enjoy looking at how the environment, the real geography, affects and manipulates history and

historical events through all time. And I've done a lot of work in deserts. That's why I was asked to develop that course on how do you do it. How do you go to the field and get information that is either secret or can't be....In some areas if you have a map they will either shoot you or put you in jail. You can't have a map.

Q: Why is that?

A: Because it is military. You can't have a map. You can't take pictures of bridges. You can't do this, you can't do that. So you find out ways and tricks of doing that without doing that. You can't ask, "Tell me what's secret?" But you can ask a question.

They will say, "I can't tell you that. It is secret."

"Well, then don't tell me that."

"Well, if you don't want to know, I'll tell you."

I learned that there is absolutely nothing you can't find out, no matter how classified it is, if you know how to find a back door to it. Just don't go knock on the front door because they'll tell you no, and that will get you into trouble. And trouble can be anything from a ride to the police station to a ride to the airport with an armed guard. You don't need that. Again, as a civilian, unless you really are a spy, you don't really need that information. It's just sort of nice to know. I like to find out what's going on. Sometimes it's by accident. I would, for example, when riding trains in China have an atlas of the train routes. And there would be these little spurs going off into the mountains. I would get to that station and I would say, "What's this?"

“Oh, you can’t know about that.”

I said, “But it’s on the map.”

“Yes, but that’s a secret rail line.”

I said, “Then why is it on the map if it is secret? It shouldn’t be on the map.” They would get all excited. I would say, “What’s up there?”

“I can’t tell you that. It’s secret.”

“Okay, then don’t tell me that. But why is it on here?”

“Because that’s where we have the factory.”

We would get into these fun discussions, all by accident. I didn’t want to know. “Don’t tell me that.” For example, I had found some patterns while looking at satellite imagery in China that always bothered me. I didn’t understand them. They looked like little moated villages, and they would sometimes be in the middle of the desert. I got to know numbers of people way up in the government in China because I had gone so many times, in the Academy of Sciences, etc. I asked one of them, “I don’t understand these things. These look like moated villages, but I can never seem to get near them.”

“That’s because they are Sam missile sites.”

I said, “You can’t tell me that.”

He said, “Everybody knows that.”

“No, they don’t. I don’t know that, and you just told me that. We have got to talk about something else, or you are going to get in trouble and I’m going to get in trouble.” Well, once you know that, you can see them everywhere. I then knew the whole missile defense system of China. See, I didn’t know that. I

called one of my students who was working.... and said, "You see all this crazy stuff out in the desert."

He said, "Yes."

I said, "I don't know what it is, but I'll tell you what I think it is and you tell me if I'm right, because you can't tell me what it is. I know that. But it looks to me like what they're doing is driving trucks out and backing up with a missile to reposition it, because these patterns have no other meaning. They are in the middle of the desert and they don't go anywhere. They sort of go out and come in."

He said, "If they don't shoot you, we're going to shoot you because you find out too many things."

"What are we talking about?"

He said, "That whole line of mountains is filled with iron doors. We can count the rivets in those doors. We watch those doors every time we have a satellite over there. We don't know what is behind those doors. You don't even look at the doors. You don't know they're doors. You are looking out at this other scale and you've just given us an answer to something we have been trying to figure out for five years."

Q: This was a CIA person you were talking to?

A: This was a guy who was working for the CIA. I said, "Now you know why I don't want to work for you guys. You are too damn dumb. Here I am a civilian looking at civilian satellite imagery, nothing special. I just look at patterns and have this analysis. And that's probably why some people think I'm a spy. I like

that kind of thing. It's fun. It's like decoding anything. That's all research is. You look at patterns, you decode them and you understand what they are and you explain them. On that basis you make predictions. That's science. I don't care whether it's physics, medicine or biology. That's also what spies do.

Q: Okay.

A: So what's the difference between a spy and a doctor doing a diagnosis when someone comes in and says, "I've got a pain here." Each takes a little bit of information and finds out what is known, what is unknown. Then you use other devices, maybe X-rays or whatever to find out and predict. So it's the same process. Now is the doctor a spy and the spy a doctor? No. It's what you do and who pays you. Do I do spy-like things? Yes. But who doesn't who is an intellectual person with curiosity?

Q: You said you have had published articles. Have you ever written a book?

A: I did a little book with Glen Maris one time and it never really took off. I don't think the publishers really...It's one of these little things out of (unclear) and it met some needs for our classes. I'm not into books as such. I like doing articles, I guess, because they're quick and people can use them or not and you can get a response to them. Writing books has never been appealing to me. It is not one of my things. I like quick, simple, clean, terse kinds of things.

Q: Are there outstanding former students who have gone on to greater things who you remember?

A: Yes, but none that I can talk about, if that makes sense.

Q: You mean they work for the CIA?

A: Some did, and I had some military guys who went off and 20 years later they tell me they have done all this great stuff. “Thank you. I couldn’t have done it without your work,” and this kind of thing. That’s gratifying to know, because I know that I taught them to be moral and responsible and not gung ho killer type things. So I have a number of those. I feel good about that. Some have gone off and won teaching awards and written books and done some nice things. But I don't keep collections of that, if that makes sense.

Q: I suppose you belong to professional organizations.

A: I did and then I dropped because I found that the Association of American Geographers and others weren’t terribly meaningful. They got so busy just trying to find jobs for each other and talking to each other. They weren’t scholarly any more. I then chose two other groups to become members of. One was called The Institute for Current World Affairs. Those of us who are members are mostly retired academics and diplomats and a few reporters and scholars and things like that. This is the group that I said sent people around the world to live for two years, all expenses paid. They have to write a report a month and they can write on anything they want. So we are trying to fill the world with knowledgeable foreign experts, who both have the language and know the culture and don’t have all the academic claptrap that goes with it. The other group that I joined and have gotten to be a part of is Rotary International. It has service above self. It is a great international organization. It’s made a great effort. We are right on the edge of wiping out polio. It has gone around the world providing free polio treatments. Polio Plus is what Rotary started. We've almost wiped it out. That is

a big thing. I've been able to do a lot of international things. Even in Mongolia there is a Rotary Club.

Q: I didn't know that.

A: In Papua, New Guinea, there is a Rotary Club. And in Monaco there is a Rotary Club. They are always the leaders of the community. In the one in Monaco we have a councilor to the Vatican and the Pope, in addition to the head economist for the entire European Union and others. In Mongolia you will find former prime ministers and the head of the Red Cross, in addition to some of the foreigners, the Brits and New Zealanders. They are people who are geared to doing things, as opposed to being corrupt and just raking in the bucks. As somebody once said, "You should never vote for anybody who was not president of their local Rotary Club. It is sort of like vetting their moral stature. (unclear) in Costa Rica as well. Usually in Rotary we can bring in wheel chairs and things that are necessary. If you try to do that any other way, everybody either steals them or charges you a lot of money. Rotary just gets things done. You usually have former presidents or head of customs. It does things. I like people who do things.

Q: You mentioned Costa Rica. Are you still continuing your work there? What are you doing in Costa Rica?

A: Yes. I've got some property down there. So I can go stay. My condo is down there. It started as an excuse to explore the country. I've started a collection of the churches down there. All of them are very idiosyncratic architecturally and reflect the history of the time, whether they are coffee barons or whatever.

Absolutely marvelous. So it has gotten me into a whole new set of history and culture. I speak a little Spanish. I picked it up automatically in California, when I lived in southern California, the pronunciation, the vocabulary, etc. People who take me around speak no English, so I have to work on my Spanish. Again, as with some of the other things I have told you about that are accidents, you go into some of these old churches and most of them are fairly unattended. Like anything, most people practice it by abstinence rather than activity. The people around are all the old ladies. I tell them I am doing a documentario para Englesia and they tell me all these neat stories about the church and the culture and the history.

Q: So you are doing a documentary about the churches.

A: I am basically collecting the stories on each and putting them into a computer data base. I'll either do a book or a put up a web page with all the stories. One of the things I found in my studies, particularly in Costa Rica but also in Turkey and the entire Mediterranean, is the fact that a lot of these churches and shrines are dedicated to women.

Q: The Virgin, of course.

A: Ah, but Our Lady of Guadalupe, Los Angeles. In some of these the woman is over the altar and Christ is at the back of the church. And you go, "Whoa, I'm not a Catholic, but isn't this kind of different?" One side of the church is for Mary and one side is for Joseph and you must be Catholic, I don't know.

Q: No.

A: Anyway, do you know what the nave comes from? The nave, the central aisle, comes from the Latin for “navy” because it was the ark, Noah’s Ark. Originally people were to stand.

Q: I didn’t know that.

A: So I am getting all this neat insight into my own culture plus theirs and finding all these women. There are a lot of churches to the Virgin, even in Italy. When you get to Italy, the Old World, Turkey and elsewhere these are on top of original temples to Athena. So the female, female, female comes all the way through. I’m having a ball. I’m very eclectic. So it’s hard for people to classify me. But basically I’m a curious scholar with geographic training who looks at environment, context, and all of the history that goes with it, whether it is political, religious, economic, or whatever. It really doesn’t matter to me. It’s this decoding human history, whether it is archeological or contemporary. So I have a great deal of fun. I travel in all kinds of places. And I always learn something really neat and new, whether it’s in Easter Island or Papua, New Guinea. Even though it is not my area of expertise, I learn a lot. The more I know, the more I can interpret other things that I know.

Q: Anything else you plan to do in retirement, or are you just going to continue what you’ve been doing?

A: No. I’m having a ball. Part of why I retired is because literally you can’t afford to keep working at the university. It costs me too much money. It’s not a wage that is satisfactory. It’s disconcerting to see the values done, as you’re aware, where an athletic director or somebody in charge of PR makes a half million

dollars. I would like to take that money and hire 10 faculty members at \$50,000, as opposed to that. I understand economics. I am very good at economics. I make a lot of money outside the university with my knowledge of economics. Haven't we forgotten what a university is supposed to be about? The reason you have an athletic director and an athletic program is because you have a university. The reason you have a university is because of the academics, not because of football, for God sakes. You've got dogs wagging tails and tails wagging.... There is no sense of propriety and proportions. The fact that you have the money and can do that with the money, that's fine, but the reason you can have that money is because you have a university. But you are not paying the people who make it work. You abuse them. Today in my field we have a subset, a specialty, called GIS, Geographic Information Systems. I can send a master's student out who can make three to five times what my faculty make. So how do I hire a faculty member to come teach them?

Q: What sort of things are your students hired to do?

A: These aren't my students, particularly. We'll say geography students. They end up working in city planning, environmental protection, sometimes they work for the CIA. They work with companies doing GIS, geographic information systems and marketing. All kinds of things. It is going to be useful in homeland security. We can literally not fill the demand for these positions. They're probably five positions for everybody that we can train. They come and hire the faculty away from here for these companies that develop this. So who can I hire to teach them? The only people we can hire are Chinese, Indians and foreigners because they are

the only ones willing to work for the miniscule salaries, which look high to the other academics. But when they can go out and make three times that in the commercial world, the answer is, no American is going to take that position, until they have already made their millions and now want to retire as a university professor because it has prestige. But they don't need the money. Because there is no money, even if we paid them the highest salaries on the campus. It's irrelevant money. You pay more money to an athletic director. So what do the Chinese get out of it? Why are they doing it? They get a green card out of it, so of course they are going to come teach. That's why we can only hire foreigners for a lot of these positions now. Something is wrong in the whole system. You are going to hire Chinese because they work for nothing and then you are going to pay half a million dollars to an athletic director because he is going to make your football team famous. Who the hell cares if you don't have the university? What if it were the former University of Kansas and its football team? Because there are no faculty. All you can do is hire people who can't get a job even at McDonalds, because you won't pay them anything. So I mean it is sad to see universities go in some of the directions they have gone. And there are reasons that can explain it. It's sad.

Q: I guess I forgot to ask you...You mentioned being chair. How long were you chair?

A: It seemed like eons. I don't know.

Q: Oh, is being chair in your department a long-term thing?

A: It can be but I did not do a long term. I think it was probably about five years.

Q: So one of your problems as chair was hiring faculty.

A: Yes. In fact, one of the reasons I retired when I did, other than I wanted to, was that we had a position that we had to fill that had been empty for two or three years on this GIS. We were losing graduate students and our credibility as a program to train people because we had no faculty left. Our faculty had been hired away. This was a couple of years ago that we had all this budget crunching. All positions were frozen. I said, "Our program can't survive not filling this position."

"Well, we don't have any money to fill that position."

I said, "Yes, we do. What we are going to do is you are going to keep this position and not just tell me it is for the future. I will retire and you will have my salary available for that position. But I won't retire if you don't fill that position. I won't give you the money unless you use the money."

"Well, we need that money."

"No. If you need that money fire the chancellor, fire (unclear) and somebody over here making hundreds of thousands a year. You don't need my faculty money. You need faculty." So I said, It's very simple. I will retire. You will take my salary and you will use it for this position. If you agree on that, we go ahead." So they agreed and that was a very nice thing. I wanted to retire anyway. I was able to use my salary to fill a position that we had to have. So now they have the position and everybody's happy, I think. I'm happy anyway.

Q: I think you've probably already answered the last thing I usually ask, which is an assessment of KU or your department, past, present, hopes for the future, that kind of thing.

A: Well, as I said at the outset, it is sad to see that we are no longer referred to as Harvard on the Kaw. There was a time when many of us remember that was our stature. Why? Have we gone downhill? Not really. But we have, relative to other programs in other states, such as Missouri who put a lot of money in and have come up so high that we are no longer the outstanding university in the Midwest. Other universities, for a variety of reasons, including leadership, have simply done more and done better. In some respects, and I am reasonably active here politically as well, we did very well with Dole and Kassabaum. We managed to bring federal grant money to the university. Of our two current senators, only one has finally figured out that that is what you are supposed to do, send federal money to your university and state. The other won't do it. Missouri pumps money in like mad. Kit Bond and the guys over there just put more money into their state than they deserve. And KU and Kansas gets nothing or very little. That puts you behind. So we go out and try to find private money. Then you get into a fight with the state. Who pays the bills at KU, the state or private money? Private money pays most of it, but the state is the one who pays the buildings and the salaries for the other people who support the guys who bring in the big bucks. So I understand all that but sometimes I don't think our administration does and certainly our current U.S. senators don't. One does, but the other doesn't. So that will put us behind, relatively speaking. Are we worse than we were then? No.

It's just that everybody else has come up so high we are no longer outstanding, relatively speaking. And, again, we can't keep our best people. I lost my best GIS people to (unclear). They are going to pay them and these guys are going to go. So money is what makes it work. Some of the faculty whine about other guys making more money than they do, but they are not competitive. Yours isn't the field that can bring down \$150,000 to \$200,000 a year. That's hard for them to understand. It's hard for somebody in English to take a barely living wage when somebody in the sciences or in the Med Centers is making a half million dollars a year. So there is this problem of equity and equality in all kinds of things that have to be adjusted. So it is a big adjustment time. That has been more than you ever wanted to know.

Q: It has been very interesting, thank you very much.