David Brooks: All right. It’s May 24, 2006, and I’m David Brooks, the interviewer for the University of Montana Oral History Project, talking with Tom Roy. And Mr. Roy, I guess I’d like you to start out with just some of your personal and educational background and sort of your path to UM.

Tom Roy: I grew up in Cincinnati, Ohio. Did my undergraduate work at DePaul University in Green Castle, Indiana, with a major actually in history. The honors history program. I wasn’t certain what I was going to do thereafter. My mother desperately wanted me to be a lawyer and, indeed, for graduation gave me a hard case leather attaché case with my initials on it, which one could only use at law school or business school.

I had, at the time, I had some interest in Southeast Asian studies and I had gotten a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship and was going to go to Cornell or Yale and pursue that and then I suddenly one day woke up in a cold sweat and realized I had no facility for languages and that if I was really going to do Southeast Asian studies that one should have some facility for languages. At the time, there was a program called the Rockefeller Brothers—Program and Theological Education, or something like that [Rockefeller Brothers Theological Fellowship Program]. There was a Rockefeller Foundation deal and it was designed—just as the Woodrow Wilson Fellowships were designed to attract people into higher education, teaching higher education. The Rockefeller Fund was designed to seek so-called bright folks who had leadership potential to consider the ministry as a vocation and somebody nominated me for one of these things. And I had no intention of doing it, but it turned out that that’s exactly the kind of person they wanted for these fellowships—folks who would not have otherwise gone to divinity or theology school. And as I went through the process, which was a sort of a national competition, I got more and more intrigued by it and the end result was that I got a Rockefeller Fellowship and I chose to go to Harvard Divinity School because it was the least denominational and it allows you to pursue courses really wherever you wanted.

Actually, it was kind of an interesting experience. At the time, they had about 15 entering students—15 or 18 entering students—next to nobody ever graduated because they required you to take exams in seven areas, and I won’t go through with the seminar, but I mean I couldn’t have passed the exam, one of the exams in any of the areas, when I entered. And the truth was it probably would’ve taken me eight or 10 years to pass the exams.

There was no prescribed curriculum so I ended up taking, you know, Chinese art, and the Bible and literature, as well as some theology courses, but about midway through my stay there, I—about midway through what would’ve been a full stay there—I actually had been out with a
Rome—a Catholic priest who had also had a Ph.D. in economics, who was in the Divinity School at the time. We’d gone to a movie, actually a double feature, had come back, we’d done some drinking and I actually was not feeling well and I lived in a dormitory called Divinity Hall and there were no mailboxes. There was just a big round table. It was about 2, 2:30 in the morning and I thought, you know, I’m gonna get sick. And I had a roommate who was Japanese and a very prim and proper guy, an older guy, and I just didn’t want to go into my room and be sick and so, I thought, I’ll just go down to the head and just sort of see what happens. I’ll grab something to read.

So, I went to this circular table and I picked up a magazine from the University of Chicago and I started reading it and it was about a program in what was called the School of Social Service Administration that focused on community organizing. And when I had been in Divinity School, I had gotten involved in anti-Vietnam War activities and so forth, and so this notion that you could actually go to school and do this sort of thing intrigued me. So, I read it and when Monday morning came around, I thought, well, I’m gonna call the University of Chicago and just ask them what the deal is.

Well, as luck would have it, I was past the deadline for admissions, but this was a new program, they were quite frankly looking for men and they happened to have some funding from the National Institute of Mental Health that they wanted to spend and that they needed to spend. And so, I ended up getting a degree—or I’m sorry, going to the School of Social Services and Administration at the University of Chicago—getting a master’s degree in social work, was the school it was in. Or—well that’s—but it’s a master’s of arts degree with an emphasis in community organizing and social policy. So, that’s my educational background.

As a part of the educational experience, one had to, each year, do a, what was known as a practicum. And my second year, I did a practicum with an outfit called United Community Services of Evanston, in North Cook County. This was a group that did, you know, fundraising, a la Community Chest, or United Fund, but it also did planning. It organized special programs and projects and helped Health and Human Services and so forth.

After I graduated, I took a job there as the associate director. I hadn’t been there nine months and the director decided to leave and I was appointed interim director and actually it was a fascinating experience. But I was still relatively young and my board was the retired chairman of the Continental Illinois National Bank and so forth and so on. It was—socially it was limiting. Let’s it put it that way. So, I ultimately left there, was hired by the School of Social Services Administration at the University of Chicago, Illinois, in a teaching position and taught there, I think, two years.

At some point in 1970, or nine—yeah, it must’ve been spring of 1970, Sue, my wife, and I had just had our first son, Graham, and decided that we were tired and we wanted to get out of Chicago. I should explain that my wife, Sue, had been very active in civil rights, anti-war stuff, as I had been since going to Chicago in 1964, I guess was when I arrived. And we had been very—
when Martin Luther King was killed, the evening Martin Luther King was killed, we were actually in a restaurant, a Greek restaurant in downtown Chicago, having dinner on a Thursday evening because we had tickets to the symphony and there was this—the Chicago Symphony had this deal where you could buy less expensive tickets for Thursday night performances or something. So, we had this Thursday night series.

As we were eating, about to eat dessert there, the waiter came and he had, was just crying and we asked him what was wrong and he said, “Well, Martin Luther King’s been killed.” And we left and went to some friends’ house who lived near a public housing project, Cabrini Green or Cabrini Greens, and soon gunfire broke out and so forth and so on.

Then, when Robert Kennedy was assassinated, we had some friends from Baltimore call and was, I don’t know what time in the morning there. It was 4:30 in the morning when they called us and they said, “Robert Kennedy’s been assassinated.” Sue and I just were—it was like all the air had been sucked out of our lungs. I waited until Marshall Fields opened and I ran down and bought a pup tent. We took the pup tent and we drove up to Fox River, which was a recreation area in the southern part of Wisconsin, just across the Illinois border, pitched a pup tent. We just needed some peace and quiet. We needed to sort of sort through things.

And while we were there looking for some peace and quiet, folks started showing up in their large cars with their stereos and their cookout grills and so forth and so on. So, we had to—we fled back to our apartment in the south side of Chicago, which was in this highrise building. I think that was the turning point when we thought, you know, all those things that we’ve worked for and been concerned about and, frankly, put a lot of time and effort into, just seemed to have, in a sense, come to naught. We need to regroup. We need to find some peace and quiet. It doesn’t seem like that’s going to be possible here.

So I started looking for jobs and Sue and I picked—got a map out of the United States and said, where might we want to live? Montana was really not—it wasn’t on the list; it wasn’t off the list, but somehow I learned of a job in Carroll College. So, I hop on the train, came out. Actually in those—I was so naive about Montana, I thought it was Helena I was going to, not Helena. I assumed the train went to Helena and actually it stopped in Bozeman and you got on a bus.

I’d been in Helena 10 minutes and I knew that Carroll College wasn’t going to work for me. That—part of it was the college and part of it was simply Helena. That Sue and I had always lived in large cities. It just, I thought, oh my god. This just isn’t going to work. I had remembered that there was a college in Bozeman when I had gotten off the train and hopped on the bus to go to Helena. And on a fluke I called Bozeman because what was going to happen was to get back to Chicago I was going to have to take the bus back to Bozeman and spend the night in Bozeman and catch the train early the next morning.

So, I called Bozeman, just the general operator and asked for the Sociology Department and at that time, the sociology department actually included whole bunches of different entities. So,
this operator put me through. I happened to talk to a guy named Dick Shields, who had been there, had been at MSU just one year and he was the director of the Social Work Program and Sociology Department. And I got talking and I kind of explained what was up and he said—he asked me, he said, “Well, do you anything about gerontology?” And this is so ironic. And I said the irony is, I do and it so happened that as part of my assignment at the University of Chicago, I was doing some research under the direction of the two or three people who were probably the best known gerontologists, certainly in the United States, perhaps in the world—Elizabeth Kubler-Ross was one of them who ultimately defined the five stages that you go through when you’re anticipating death and so forth.

So, I told Dick this and he said, “Well, I’ll tell you what, if you come down and will do a seminar for me, because I’m teaching a course on aging and gerontology. If you’ll come down and do this course, we’ll put you up for the night.” And in the context of this conversation, I asked Dick if there were any job openings there and he said, “You know, it’s interesting, we did have a position open and we had 16 applicants and we closed the search and we’re going to offer the position to somebody at the end of the week.” And I thought, oh well. So, I go down to Bozeman, I do the lecture and that [sound of a buzzer interrupts] was funny because—I’ll pick right up where I was.

DB: Go for it.

TR: Okay. So I go down and I say I’ll do the lecture and that was odd because I had a suit and a tie and I went in and I gave this lecture and so forth. And it was only afterwards I realized, you know, I’m, I mean these kids are undergraduates. Here I was loaded with all this latest research on this and that. I mean, you know, I just walked right past these folks. But I was going to get to spend the night in Bozeman and Dick and his wife, Toby, had agreed to put me up for night and I thought, well, this will be dandy.

So that evening, they invited some of their friends over. Most of whom were from the History Department because they had a fellow, Dick Roeder, who’s a Montana historian who was their next-door neighbor and Dick came over, and Mike Malone, who later become president of Montana State, came over. Anyhow, we ended up having a great time.

The next morning, they take me down to the train station and Dick said, “Well, you know, I’m going to go talk to the dean and see if we can’t open up this search.” And, so, I go back to Chicago and a few days later we got a formal invitation and I come out and the long and short of it is, I get offered a job at MSU. Everything seemed to be going hunky dory. In fact, after my first year, I won some award. I can’t remember what that all was called, for being the outstanding first-year teacher in the college or something. And I got two weeks paid to take my family and me to some conference at Carmel in California.

That fall, the fall of my sec—oh and I’d gone to the department chair and said, “You know, I realize I’ve got a ways until tenure and so forth, but we have an opportunity to buy a house and
I don’t want to do that unless, you know, you think things are okay and all.” Yeah, things are fine, go buy the house. Well, that fall, I made arrangements to bring a guy whom I worked with in Chicago, who was an organizer. A guy by the name of Saul Alinsky, who was a very controversial person, but he’d appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine and was considered one of the few people to come out of the Civil Rights, anti-war movement, pure in the sense that he’d always been an organizer and he hadn’t sold out to anybody and so forth.

Well, anyhow, I, we bring Alinsky to Bozeman and somehow, the department chair of the Sociology Department, gets it into his mind that I brought Alinsky to Bozeman to work with me to get the department chair driven from his position. And there was some—we hadn’t brought Alinsky there for that reason, but indeed I had been working with a couple of newer faculty members in the department and we’d been talking about the fact, you know, this could really be a cool place if we could get rid of the guy who’s the department chair. He was a nice guy, but he was—he had a terrible case of hypochondria and he hadn’t done anything wrong, it was just there was no energy, no vision there.

Well, the long and short of it is, about three days before Christmas I get a telegram from the president of Montana State University, Carl McIntosh, whom I don’t think I’d ever met, saying you’re fired at the end of the school year. And the faculty at MSU was not unionized and I didn’t have tenure, so technically there was—I didn’t have a leg to stand on, but it seemed so bizarre to me and so I fought it and I fought it, and you know, and there weren’t really any regular procedures. There was a certain appeal procedure and some folks in the sciences were on the committee and looked at it and said, “Well, you know there’s some merit to this.” They did end up concluding that even though there was merit to the arguments that I was making, the fact was the department chair had the prerogative to fire me an untenured faculty member if he chose to.

Well, it so happened the dean of the college had become ill and this acting dean came in just as a report from this faculty group, which was mostly folks in physics and chemistry, which were the two most respected departments in the college. This acting dean had just taken over when this report came in and he came and looked at it and said, well, you know, this is nuts. I mean Roy has been falsely accused of things and so forth and so and so.

I was reinstated without prejudice and nasty notes were put in the department chair’s file and a few other folks’ files who had been in cahoots with him about this, but in the meantime, they’d hired my replacement. So, I found myself for the next two years in this very awkward situation where I’d went to my office and suddenly I found somebody in my office and I had to share the office and I got all the crummy courses and so forth.

Well the first year of this I thought, by god, I’m just going to gut this out and show them. And by the second year, which would’ve been my fourth year in Bozeman, I thought, this is nuts. I’ve gotta get out of here. Ironically, Dick Shields, who had been the fellow that’d put me up that first night in Bozeman when I’d come down from Helena on the bus, had since come to the

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University of Montana and was in the Social Work Department and he called me one day and said—and he’d known of my troubles at Bozeman—and he called and he said, you know, there’s an opening at the University of Montana and would you have any interest?

I happened to have started running in 1973, I think or something of that sort, and I had been to Bozeman for the first—Missoula for the first, what was then called the First Bank Race and I thought, you know, this is a fascinating place. It looks like a more exciting university, a more vibrant, real community than Bozeman. So I said, sure.

Now the irony here was that Dick Shields, when they were trying to fire me, Dick Shields had taken a sabbatical and was in the Philippines and the folks that were trying to run me out in Bozeman, claimed that Dick Shields was the guy who really wanted me out. And I had never known because I—I mean, in those days there wasn’t email and I somehow, I don’t even know that I knew whether he had a phone or not. I mean I just never corresponded with him. So, that was, what I say is sort of irony that it’s indeed Dick who calls and says there’s this opportunity in Montana.

Now, this is really bizarre. So, I come up to Montana and the chair of the Social Work Department at Montana is a fellow by the name of Mort Arkava—A-R-K-A-V-A. Mort had started the program here. It was the largest undergraduate social work program in the country and what had happened was that there had been some amendments to the Social Security Act that had—that had required that recipients of what in those days was called AFDC, Aid for Dependent Children—had to have case work services. Well, there weren’t. The only place that was training social workers were graduate programs and people who were spending time in graduate schools of social work had no interest in working with AFDC families. They wanted to go to private agencies and do psychoanalytical practice or things of that sort.

So, imbedded in these, in this amendment of the Social Security Act was funding for states to create undergraduate social work programs and somebody at the University of Montana was smart, saw an opportunity here. They hired Arkava. Arkava was very aggressive, very shrewd and somehow got the jump on other states and, you know, created one of the first undergraduate or baccalaureate programs of social work here and had brought in tons of funding.

So, I come up to interview for this position and Arkava finds out that I’m one of the—I mean there were three or four of us who founded the Governor’s Cup, started the Governor’s Cup Marathon and Arkava finds this out and he’s a bit of a runner and he tells me, asks me if I’ve run, how many marathons I’ve run or something. And at the time I didn’t know, I’d run maybe four or five or six or something of that sort. He’s asked me if I had ever broken three hours, which at that time was some sort of mark of something. I can’t remember what. And I said, oh yeah. You know that I’d now—I didn’t initially—but that I now regularly run under three hours. He said, “You’re hired.”
So, I come to Mont—so, in the fall of 1974, I start in the Social Work Department here on an appointment that’s 50 percent hard-funding, that is state funded, and 50 percent soft-funding, on a grant from, through the Department of Corrections. I don’t really remember how long I was in the Social Work Department. You’d think I would remember this, but I very quickly—I was hired in as an assistant professor. Arkava came to me one time and he said, “You know, I’ll promote you when you win a marathon.”

Honest to God, quite unexpectedly, the very next fall, I go out and there was a marathon here and I win this damn marathon and as a joke, in the fall, at faculty review time, I go into Mort and I said, “Look, sonofabitch, I—you said if I won a marathon, you’d promote me.” He ran things. I mean we didn’t have any committee process or anything. I mean, he hired everybody; all the funding really was seen as coming to the University of Montana was coming because of Arkava. And, so I was just kind of joking and I’ll be damned, he says, “Okay, put this guy in for a promotion,” and so forth.

Well, I shouldn’t keep running on about this, but after I had been in the Social Work Department here, I don’t know, three, four years, I begin to hear rumors from some of the folks who’d been here since 1969, which was when the program started, that there was something amiss with what Arkava was doing. And it wasn’t that he was doing anything wrong through his position at the University, but he was rarely at the University and that he had some sort of side deals going on that probably weren’t up to Hoyle.

Well, and then indeed he did. He had conspired with several colleagues in other parts of the country who had ran either other undergraduate programs or were directors of training programs for the state departments of welfare to, in effect, let’s say, double-bill the federal government for some things. He steps down as chair because he’s under a cloud and I finally realized he was under a—I’d heard these rumors, but I didn’t know anything about it and at that point, at the Social Work Department, we had offices in three different buildings and I was sort of off by myself in the Social Sciences building, so I didn’t have a lot of day-to-day contact with my colleagues.

But, when—at one point I’m sitting in my office and two guys come in—and it was funny as hell, it’s just typical. I mean, they didn’t have trench coats on, but they practically had trench coats on and I knew as soon as I—I always keep my office door open and I sensed there were two guys standing in my door. And I knew right away they had something to do with the law. I thought at first, I thought, goddamn, I don’t think I’ve done anything. And they ask if they can sit down and chat with me and I said, well, sure.

So, they start asking me about a paper I had written. Now, Arkava had asked me, at one point, he said, “I’ve gotta turn a report. I’ve gotta produce a report in four or five days on types of group care for kids...for adolescents that are being used around the country.” And sort of—and there were different models for how you could do group home care for adolescents and I had been involved in getting a group home started in Bozeman and had been real involved in

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something called Missoula Youth Homes here and getting some group homes started here. So, I knew a little bit about it. So, it seemed logical that if he was going to ask anybody in the faculty, he’d ask me.

He said, “You know, the problem is, I’m going to need to have this done in”—I may be exaggerating—“let’s say two weeks. And spare no expense. Make calls. Gather what information you can.” Well, I, so I thought this will actually be kind of interesting. So I get on the phone and I start calling around and there were two situations where I called some guy in Ohio State. I can’t remember what his name is, but he had developed some model of group care. And so I’m talking to him about the model and so forth and finally at the end of the conversation, he said, “Say,” he said, “Tell Mort ‘hi’ for me” or something like that.

Okay, there was somebody else I spoke with, I think down in Wyoming. I don’t rightly remember and it was the same kind of exchange. After getting all the information, this person and I just sort of chatted informally and then he started telling me that he knew Mort and that I make sure I tell Mort x and y. So, when I get to give Mort, go to give Mort the report, I type this thing up and it was probably 20-, 25-pages long and when I come to talk about the model that this guy in Ohio State has developed—and at the time it was a rather well-known model—at the end of it, I put in parentheses—let’s call this guy Jerry—that Jerry says to say hello to you Mort, or something like that.

When I quoted this guy from Wyoming, I put parentheses around it and said, something. I mean, this guy in Wyoming had actually told me a funny story about Mort and I kind of picked up on that and put that in. I give Mort this thing. I think Mort paid me 300 bucks for doing this, which at the time, I thought, you know, it’s probably worth a little more than 300, given the amount of time, but I thought, what the hell. Fine, you know, I didn’t think anything about it.

Well, these guys—so, now these guys come back and they’re in my office and they start asking me questions. And it’s clear they’re from this report that I had written for Mort maybe two years ago and I kept thinking, God, I don’t get this. And they’d read sections and they’d say, “Is this your writing—is this you?” or something and I’d said, “Well, it sounds like me, but you know, the content sounds like the stuff I was doing and the way it’s worded sounds like the way I’d probably write it and so forth.”

Well, then they showed me the front sheet of the thing and it had my name and so forth and so on and the title of this and said, “Is this yours?” I said, “Well, I think it is” and so forth and so on. And then they said, “Well—” Well, one of the guys said to the other guys, “We’ve finally found our third leg to the stool.” And I suddenly realized, wait a minute! They’re talking about me. Now, what in the hell did I give them that was the third leg in the stool? So, I said to them, “What’s going on?” They said, “We can’t tell you.”

I should say that they were federal investigators from the Department of Health and Human Services. Well, they—the end result was that—oh, Mort, in the meantime steps down as chair."
And I become chair and now I was sort of an unlikely prospect because I was one of the more junior faculty members. I don’t have a doctorate in social work and so forth, but I was seen as someone who probably could do well at the internal campus politics and that if indeed there were some real problems with Mort, which by this time, I think everybody sensed there was, that perhaps better than at least some of the others on the faculty, I might better be able to handle that from a public relations standpoint or something. I mean, I’m not exactly sure.

DB: What year is this?

TR: Well, I think this is like 1982 or ’83, something of that sort. Somewhere right around in there.

DB: Mm-hm.

TR: So, here I am. I become chair of the Social Work Department and I’m chair—I’ve only been chair for about a month and I go to Great Falls to do a workshop for, actually the department then was known as—the state agency wasn’t Health and Human Services at that time. At that time it was known as Social and Rehabilitation Services. And I’m in Great Falls at the Rainbow Hotel for three or four days doing a workshop for state employees.

And on the day that I go to checkout, I’m standing in the lobby and I’ve just checked out and I turn around and there’s Mort. And I said, what the hell are you doing here? And he mumbled something and I don’t think anything about it. Well, so long and I’m going back to Missoula. See ya later. See ya in the fall or something of that sort. Shortly thereafter, I get an expense request for reimbursement for expenses for Mort saying that he had attended this conference that I had been at, and that his hotel bill was this, and his mileage was this, and so forth and so on.

At the time we got—we got so much federal money and so many people out traveling and so forth that I didn’t really stop and look at it. I just signed off on it. Well, I don’t know, a month or two later—a month, six weeks later, back through one of the university offices, I get a printout showing, you know, the expenses for the previous month and what I’ve approved and I stopped and I did look at those carefully and then I looked at this and I thought, well, wait a minute! Mort says he was at this conference; I was there for four days and I never saw him there and I approved those expenses. And I suddenly realized, my god, this is part of his little game that he’s been playing.

So, I contacted Ray Murray, who was head of the Graduate Research Office at the time and he—who was absolutely terrific about the thing that unfolded. And I got to back off here or I’ll tell more than I, I mean I could go on for hours about this, but the long and short of it is that Arkava was subsequently indicted. My wife, ironically, was the clerk for the federal judge, Judge [Russell] Smith, whose court this was heard in. Arkava, in the end, copped the plea.
Now he was the ring leader; he copped the plea. I don’t know what happened to the other three folks, but one of them was actually, that came to trial here, I was called as a witness, on behalf of the state to testify against this guy and in fact, to testify against Arkava. Because what had had in fact happened was this paper that I had written for Arkava, what he had done was he would contract with other states, with various states and I don’t know how many, but let’s say with several states, to produce a report on models of group care. And I mean, if—and I don’t know what he was getting for the paper, but you know, thousands of dollars—but all he was really doing was taking my paper, crossing out my name, putting his name on it and shipping it off and you know, doing it in West Virginia, Illinois, and Oregon and so forth and so on.

I mean, there were a lot of other things he was doing that were just unbelievable, but I subsequently learned about them. I was called to a federal grand jury in Billings, walked in and at the time, I had come to understand, by that time, what he had done with my paper and I just sort of blocked it. I sort of rationalized it as, ah, I didn’t see it as plagiarism in particular. Well, he paid me for it. You know, if anything I should’ve asked him for more money and that’s sort of how stupid I was about the thing.

I went into the grand jury room and they just went after me like Johnny B. Good. Well, don’t you see that this and so forth and it was—it was then that I finally realized what this was about and so forth.

Well, my wife and two sons had left that morning to drive to Seattle because we planned to go on a vacation when I got done with this grand jury in Billings and I had, and I had to wait until later in the evening in Billings to take a flight to Seattle. And while I was in the waiting room at the airport in Billings, two guys come in that I’d never seen before and they start talking in the most animated fashion and I could tell that they were talking about Arkava. So, I went over and joined them and one of them was a psychologist and one of them taught at Portland State or something. I can’t remember how it worked. And they had also been called before the grand jury, had been taken by Arkava and were sharing their experiences.

So, I got on the plane and sat with them, you know, learned more and more. So, by the time this thing—by the time this thing came into, came to trial, here in Missoula, I mean, I knew what the whole story, although it was even then incredible. I went down and was made to sit in this witness room and there must’ve been 25 or 30 people in the witness room that the federal government had called and people were crying and it was almost like a therapy group. Like, my god, what’d he do to you? My god, what did he do to you?

It turned out, my thing was just peanuts, but mine just happened to be the one very clear piece of evidence where they had a physical piece of property that they could show he’d misused as part of his scheme. Well, what ends up happening is we get through that year and, I mean through the trial, and Mort cops a plea. This other guy is found guilty at the trial and I don’t know what. One of the other guys, I think, fled the country and I, I don’t know what happened.
to the third, the fourth guy. There were at least one of our faculty members who was under a cloud and potentially had faced indictment and we had some retreats and somewhat to get over this and so forth and so on.

So, we’re through all this and you’d think I’d have enough sense to say, you know what, I mean, smooth sailing ahead. It turned out for the faculty that had been there since 1969, they’d known a lot more about this then they probably recognized, but they never really sat down as a group and talked about it or they really would’ve realized something was going on and I think they were just—everybody was just relieved that it was out in the open, but it was also behind us and we could move forward. And I suddenly, personally, I suddenly thought, wow, this was pretty exciting. It wasn’t very pleasant, but it was pretty exciting. The future, well, it looks smooth, but it almost looks too smooth.

In the meantime, I had—

DB: And you’re still acting chair?

TR: Yeah, I’m actually not—yeah, I am the chair of the department, but two years prior to that, prior to all this, the Social Work Department had decided, you know what? We have way too many faculty members and as the University goes through—it had a series of retrenchments when they were cutting faculty. And we had always been right up there on the list for being retrenched, if there is such a verb. And so several of us had sort of sat down and said well—for example, I have a colleague, John Spores who has a double major in social work and Southeast Asian studies—and so he, you know, started working in Southeast Asian Studies program. And Mary Birch got involved in the Women’s Studies Program and so we thought, well, we can sort of begin to protect ourselves that way.

Well, I had, as a volunteer, become very involved in political campaigns here. I’ve run several political campaigns for folks in Chicago, in Illinois, and so I had done some of that when I came to Montana. And I had gotten involved with a group called the Montana Environmental Information Center and become president of their board and this was at a time, this was in the early ‘70, at a time when the conservation and environmental community in Montana was really becoming formative. That is, many of the groups that today would seem like household words were just getting started in the late ‘60s, early ‘70s. So it was a matter of time and I happened to be at the right place at the right time.

People early on found out that when I was associate director, and later director, of this United Community Services of Evanston, North Cook County, a lot of what I did was fundraising, so I could claim to be a professional fundraiser. I did not claim to be and I frankly at times got tired of it, but these groups were just getting started and they found out that I had some fundraising experience and nobody had, and so they were sucking me up like Johnny B. Good. So, I had created a certain reputation in the conservation environmental community as a guy who knew how to get things done and so forth and so on.

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I had thus started to participate in the environmental studies program, which at that time, a
guy by the name of Ron Erickson, who was a physical chemist, but who had switched over to
environmental studies, was the director of the program. And environmental studies at that
time was a graduate program only and we probably admitted 12-to-15 or maybe tops, 18
graduate students a year. So, we maybe had 30, 35 graduate students tops, in terms of
numbers. And Ron ran through the program through an executive committee and at some
point I got on the executive committee and then I—we were still on the quarter system—and
then I was asked to teach a seminar and at that time, what they had was, students had to take
three seminars. One fall, one winter and one spring that were environmental studies seminars
and I was asked to teach the fall seminar.

So, I had been on this executive committee and was teaching this fall seminar.

DB: How long have EVST, Environmental Studies, been around?

TR: Well, it started in 1969.

DB: And did Ron start it?

TR: No. A fellow by the—a group of faculty. Ron was one of the founders. Clancy Gordon was
the guy who was best associated with it. Oh gosh. Les Pengelly, who was a wildlife biologist,
was the director for the first year and then he stepped down after one year. And then Clancy
Gordon had been the director and Clancy came down with liver cancer and stepped aside and
then Ron had become director.

DB: And was EVST just here? Was it nationally—

TR: No, it—

DB: —a program? How did it, what did it come out of?

TR: It mostly just came—well, that’s an interesting story what it came out of. There were—this
was a campus that, given we’re in Montana and the Intermountain West, was fairly active in its
opposition in the Vietnam War. And some of the faculty who were involved in that, Bert Pfeiffer
who was a physiologist. Ronnie Silverman who was a geologist. Mike Chessin, who was a
botanist, and others. Ron, when he came to campus, had been active in ensuring that at least
there was, at least, discussion of the Vietnam War and the people engaged in critical thinking
about it.

In the process of their involvement with that [we] came to realize that, came to realize a couple
of things. Number one, that the American people simply didn’t know from an information
standpoint, particularly from a science standpoint, what was going on in Vietnam. Bert Pfeiffer
was one of the first persons in the world to uncover the use of Agent Orange in Vietnam and its harmful effects, not just on plant life, but on human life as well. And these guys came to believe that they had a, as scientists, they had a responsibility to share with the public scientific information so that, so that citizens could use this information when they cast their votes or when leaders made policy decisions.

The second thing they came to realize was that as we became an increasingly technologically focused world, professionals, including scientists, would have increasing roles in driving policy decisions, which in a democracy, should be made by the citizenry, not by the professionals or elites. And yet this was sort of inevitable because of the language scientists and technocrats used and so they came also to understand, in a sense, we needed to demythologize science or demystify economics and take, and have some body of folks who had enough grounding in science. Enough grounding in economics. Enough grounding in understanding about the dynamics of the environment that they could take that technical information and translate it into a more popular vernacular so that the public could then decide, you know, is this wise policy or not?

The upshot of that was that they started something, I’m not going to get the exact name right, but it was something about western scientists and the public interest, or something of that sort. And their first endeavor was to create a library and they got some funding from the National Science Foundation, hired a guy who had a master’s in geography, Bill Tomlinson, to create a library. And they decided that they would focus on environmental issues in Montana and Clancy Gordon had a particular interest in the aluminum smelter at Columbia Falls.

There’s a—to the northeast of the smelter of Columbia Falls—there’s a mountain that has no living vegetation on it anymore and it’s sort of affectionately known as “Arsenic Mountain.” Well, Clancy had demonstrated through pollution studies that the reason that the thing had lost its foliation was because of these emissions from the smelter. At the same time, a consortium of power companies in the Midwest, the north central—oh what the heck was it called? North Central Power Council or Power Consortium, something of that sort, was looking at the coal in Northeastern Montana and Southwestern Montana. I’m sorry, Northeastern Wyoming and Southwestern Montana—south. Northeastern Wyoming, Southeastern Montana, was looking at these, this coal deposit at Fort Union coal deposit and they came out with a study that proposed x number of open pit coal mine, coal-fed generating plants be created in the West.

I can’t remember whether it was 24 or 48, or something of that sort. And that got these guys really jazzed because they suddenly realized, my god, nobody knows what the effects of burning this coal could be on human health, on the natural environment and so forth. So, there, they turned their focus to the library, particularly to what did we know from anywhere around the world about coal and what the burning of—what the creation of these open pit coal mines might do and so forth and so on.

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Kind of coincidentally, at the time, we had a historian, K. Ross Toole, who came out with a book entitled the Rape of the Plains, or maybe it’s the Rape of—


TR: The Great Plains. The Rape of the Great Plains. And he was in large part stimulated to write that at that time because of this proposed development in Montana and what he sought to show in that book was simply the current example of how Montana was always seen as sort of a colonial state that was used by banking interests from outside, the rapists of our resources and this was about the latest rape. Well, that jived nicely with what the scientists were trying to do and so forth. So, this library actually really took off. At one point, we had over half a million monographs, articles, books and so forth.

But that’s how the program started. They started the library and very shortly after the library got started, they, the faculty that was involved said, well, you know what? What we’ve done is created an information resource here, but we still haven’t done that second piece, which is the need to have people who are well-grounded in environmental science, environmental policy, who can take this information and translate it into more popular vernacular so that the citizens can decide what in fact should be done. And so they decided, let’s create a gradual, an interdisciplinary group graduate program and that program, the Environmental Studies Program, was approved by the Board of Regents in 1969. It is either the—we think it’s the second oldest such program in the country.

A woman, several years ago from San Francisco State University, she called me and said she was doing the history of such programs around the country and she had first thought we were first, but she had uncovered one in Georgia that may have been first, but she wasn’t sure and I never heard from her, but we’re one of the—certainly one of the earliest programs.

DB: So, I want to stop and say this here and that you’re connecting the start of EVST here, one of the first of the country, first or second, with things like Bert Pfeiffer’s work on Agent Orange and you also mentioned the high rate of activity, in terms of Vietnam protests and awareness in the Intermountain West and previously, the University of Montana had been described as relatively calm and not active in those sort of protests. And the example is that the one protest in the trashing of the ROTC building was sort of quieted in one speech by [Robert] Pantzer, I believe, who was the president at the time and that this wasn’t an active campus and partially because of isolation. So, speak a little bit more about how this place was active—what was going on.

TR: Well, first I should say, I wasn’t here then, so I didn’t come until the fall of 1974. So, that said, Bert Pfeiffer was originally in the zoology department, which is now the biology department, but he chose to take his retirement in Environmental Studies. Arnie Silverman, who was one of the activists, was on the EVST executive committee. Walt Koostra, who was a
microbiologist, who was active in the efforts, was a member of the executive committee, the EVST executive committee.

My understanding is that it’s not entirely true that this hadn’t been an active campus. I had forgotten who, when Leslie Fiedler was here, a literary critic, and he had spoken up and had been—he got some contentious points there. There was an economist who was here, it might’ve even been pre-Second World War or immediate post-Second World War, who was rather outspoken and I do think in the end he was forced to leave for silence, but he did have his period here when he, when I—I’m embarrassed—I can’t remember who it was or what it was about.

It’s interesting. When Bert Pfeiffer died, about six months after his death, Jean, his wife had a memorial service for Bert and asked for four or five us to speak at the services and she—which was up in one of the UC, at the University Center—and along the wall she had pictures and plaques that Bert had won over the years. And one of them was a letter from Bob Pantzer. It turned out Bob Pantzer and Bert Pfeiffer were good friends. And in fact, in an award that’s given to the person who’s done the most to make the university a humane campus, the Bob Pantzer Award was won by Bert Pfeiffer. After he retired, Pantzer was—I was not here when Bob Pantzer was president, but to hear those folks that were here and had been here since Pantzer. Pantzer was a brilliant president. That is, he, according to Jean Pfeiffer, Bert’s wife, Bert was accused of being one of the one’s who inflamed the crowd to destroy the ROTC building. Bert always claimed that was not the case, but he, out of that, he developed a good working relationship with Pantzer and I think he went to Pantzer and said, you know, here’s what I know, and Pantzer accepted that he did. He did not try to stifle Bert’s—he did not tell Bert, you cannot talk about Vietnam, and so forth. As you long as you keep it with, as long as it’s non-violent and so forth, it’s perfectly acceptable.

I mean, the truth is I wasn’t here. I just don’t know, but I do know that alone, among campuses, certainly in this part of the country, Missoula, by the time I came in 1974, had a reputation for being a place where you could risk saying things that you couldn’t risk saying in Bozeman or perhaps even Laramie, or you know—

DB: So, the University or students or faculty may not have been burning buildings or trashing documents, but there was a dialogue.

TR: I would certainly say that and part of it was we had a minister, Bill Kliber, who could come into the First Methodist Church here and, you know, played an active role in anti-Vietnam War movements and so forth and that it was okay with the congregation, or at least enough of the congregation, that he was able to maintain his pulpit and so forth. So, there was a kind of, some community understanding that this might go on in a university. I suspect the majority of Missoulians didn’t approve of it in the end, but they did recognize that this was, so long as it was lawful, it was something that you could expect from a university.
I think the important point, in terms of the Environmental Studies Program, is that from the outset the Environmental Studies Program has been characterized by being interdisciplinary and having, what at the time we called, an advocacy emphasis. The—when I got on the executive committee of the Environmental Studies Program, I was blown away by how open the discussions were about, by god, you know, we need to tell this part of the story and it needs to be grounded in science and it needs to well-reasoned and so forth and so on, but if the science shows this and if it’s well-reasoned, we not only shouldn’t hold back, we have a scientific obligation not to hold back.

[Bell rings]

But the program is always, from the outside we had this, we used to call it advocacy, then people felt that that was—that that meant we were advocating a position as opposed to saying no, in a democracy, citizens need to be the advocates for what they believe is, you know, supported by the facts and by reason and so forth. The advocate, in term, as contrasted with being passive, I guess that would be it.

DB: Let me ask this. You know, looking at your sort of circuitous and serendipitous route to here, you started out in history, we’ve got divinity school, possibly Asian studies, that goes by the wayside. Social work and now you’re into EVST, at this point in the story as well, as you’ve organized them or helped been in on Missoula Youth Homes. You’ve started marathons in Helena. So, one would maybe say, that sounds a lot like just the force of your own personality or people like you, that is interdisciplinary and advocacy and involved in community. How much of it also was an appetite of students, things students were looking for. Was that at all part of it?

TR: Yeah, that’s a damn good question. Let me answer this is in two ways. I think, particularly in its early years, EVST attracted faculty who one could say were restless. One might even more kind of say, dilettantish, in some ways. I mean, Ron Erickson, my predecessor and director, started out as a physical chemist, he then got into a program called Round River, which was an undergraduate program, but in some ways laid the seeds for faculty who had an interest in environmental things coming together and coming through that association—that association probably was instrumental in faculty subsequently believing they could put together a degree program in Environmental Studies. I mean I don’t know that, but I would’ve hypothesized that.

But Ron then shifted and taught for a while in the humanities program and yet when he was—became involved in the Environmental Studies Program, he became involved because people wanted somebody from a chemistry background. By the time he left the environmental studies program, he was talking, teaching a course in Environmental Utopian Literature and so, there’s no question about the fact that the program, from the faculty standpoint has been energized, to use your verb, by folks who tend to themselves, have diverse interests.
I’ve always felt that the real driving force behind what made EVST go as a program, once it got started, was the students. And the student—because while the curriculum itself is supposedly interdisciplinary—it seemed, it’s always seemed to me that the really important interdisciplinary dynamic in the whole program was the fact that the student body itself was interdisciplinary so that you might have someone who’s an art major in college and someone who’s a zoology major and everything in between and that when they come together, it does create a certain dynamic you’re simply not going to find in a disciplinary kind of program. Now that doesn’t—i’m not suggesting it’s necessarily a better dynamic, it’s just a different dynamic and it is a dynamic that tends to, I think, energize.

I think you’re forced, as a student, to both think through your own position a little more fully because you’re constantly being challenged by people who are coming at you from different perspectives. I think in some ways it’s maybe a—in some ways it’s not as competitive because you’re not all going for the same thing; you’re each sort of choosing your own path, but in its own way it’s very competitive as well because you’re trying to stake out both who you are and your path as being a legitimate way to put together science, policy, politics, literature, history and so forth. And how that and the way you’re putting it together, in your course of studies, is the way folks who were really serious about conservation and the environment should think about things.

So, there’s this constant, just sheer energy. One of the things that just—I, for example, last night met a, one of our graduate students who’s going to be the editor of a student publication called Camas next year and he wanted to talk to me about, oh some things about Camas, etc., and he asked me how we got the writing program—we have an emphasis on environmental and nature writing—and how that got started. And I said well, I mean it was—we just one year we happened to have four students who entered the program who all had majors in English literature and they were very bright, very aggressive and very self-confident. One of them had gone to Smith, one of them had gone to Vassar, one of them was a Rhodes Scholar who taught at Deerfield Academy, and the other was a young woman from Oberlin College.

They came into the program along with 30 other students or something and over time found one another, shared their interest in literature, expressed their frustration with deconstructionist effort in literature and so forth and their interest in nature writing and that kind of literature. [They] started coming to me and saying how come we didn’t offer something in that and so forth and so on. I was like hell, I don’t know? I don’t even know what you’re talking about, was kind of my response. The upshot was I said to them, we were still on the quarter system, which for EVST had huge advantages.

DB: When is this?

TR: Oh, I don’t even know, 15, 18 years ago.

DB: I mean, you’re beyond just teaching a single seminar for EVST at this point.
TR: Oh yeah. I’m the director of the program at this point.

DB: Okay. So we have—

TR: I’m sorry. I took over as director in 1984 and so this might be 1988 or something like that. I don’t know. Or ’90. Something around there, and so I finally said to these [students], well let’s do this. I’ll schedule a seminar, put myself down as the instructor. You guys, you folks create the reading list. We’ll just get together and you know, we’ll read, you talk and we’ll see where it goes. So they did that and, you know, at some level I guess it was satisfying for them, but then all that did was whet their appetite and they said, well, we want this to be real. I mean, you know, you’re a nice guy, but come on.

I happened to have a friend, so I happened to have a friend, Geoff Foote, who owns a ranch up out of Ovando, who had been involved in the Round River Program. He was never a faculty member, but they used his property for Round River and we were up at his house one night for dinner and he said, you know, he said, there’s a piece that’s been, a two-part piece— and I think it was the Atlantic or Harpers—one of the two, called the Blind Corral by a guy named Ralph Beer, who lives over in Clancy and he [buzzer rings] and so anyhow, I—Foote tells me about this Beer guy. I read the article, which subsequently came out in a paperback book and is actually a wonderful book, and I call Ralph Beer up and I said, “How would you like to come over teach a class in writing, environmental writing?” And I don’t even know if he technically would’ve [been] called, but he did environmental writing or so, but he said fine. And so he came, actually winter quarter, drove over from Clancy and, you know, [taught] for three hours on a Tuesday night or whatever the heck it was, and that’s how our Environmental Nature writing class got started.

It turns out we’re the first graduate program in Environmental Studies, Environmental Science, environmental anything to offer such a program. I wouldn’t have been smart enough to figure that out on my own. The students came, they said do it, you know, we did it. I mean, much of what’s happened at EVST has been that sort. Where the students challenge us to think in new and different ways and fortunately we’ve always, I think, there’s where it’s been a nice mix of students and faculty. Students are constantly challenging us. Faculty, themselves, have never been too wedded to a particular discipline not to be open to new possibilities and frankly, the program, up until, I would say five or eight years ago was always so marginal in its funding and always seemed to be under such constant threat that we were, were just flat out opportunists and, you know, if something looked like a possibility, we’d go for it. If it didn’t work, fine, but if it worked fine, but we could not afford to pass up the things just because we were always scrambling to both to justify ourselves within the campus and then to the larger world, to justify what we’re doing in terms of the legislature and so forth.

DB: So, I’ve got a two-part question that comes out of that, and one is, it sounds like you have a pretty close and unique relationship between the faculty and other faculty in the department,
as well as faculty and students in EVST at a time when you hear most departments talking about with schools large enough, at this point, that really relationships between faculty and students have changed and diminished from what they were. So, you have that going, but it also sounds like you have an awful lot of leeway in your curriculum and the department in general and so I want to know about the relationship between the department and the rest of the university based on, I mean, how did you have that amount of leeway? Who were your opponents to that, and the advocates?

TR: Yeah, yeah, sure. Okay. Let me just—

DB: And I probably should’ve divided that into two separate questions. You can certainly answer—

TR: Yeah, I forgot the first question was...

DB: Student and faculty relationships.

TR: Yeah, I, I will say this about that because I feel so strongly about this. There have been moments, from the day I took over or became the director of EVST, right until the day I was finished, I’ve had many moments when I kept thinking what in the world am I doing, doing this? First of all, there are always doubts about was I really the person best qualified to do this? I can remember when I first became director, I’d never taken a biology course even and we require our students have, had or take, an ecology course. I’ve never taken an ecology course. I have very little science in my background. I was very self-conscious about that and I remember, oh, within the first six months of my being appointed director, I went over to the old Freddy’s Read & Feed [Freddy’s Feed & Read] here and bought a book by Ernst Mayr, who was a world-renowned biologist at Harvard, and bought this great big, thick book and I vowed that I was going to read through this and so forth and I could never get my way through it. So, I’ve always, you know, so there’ve been those sort of personal doubts.

Those faded over the years when I realized, well, you know, I could count on other faculty to provide the substantive thing. There were some things that I could do simply because of contacts I had and my ability to relate to people in generally positive ways, that maybe I could do better than they could do, and they could do some other things. So, that all worked its way out, but nevertheless there were still times when we’d get hammered internally, or particularly, get hammered externally. And frankly, I used to teach, I mean I was director of the program, I would teach three courses in social work, I would teach three courses in EVST, plus be the director of this program that went from 30 to 35 graduate students to over 100 graduate students and, you know, one, one-and-a-half faculty. I had it, I still had up until three or four years ago, my tenure, my appointment was still in social work. So, I was half-time, technically, in social work, half-time in EVST, and yet I was directing the program, teaching three courses. I mean I—it was—and there were times when I thought, what in the hell am I doing? This is nuts.

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I never got paid. I mean got this dinky little summer stipend. I worked full-time during the summers and always started the fall angry and, you know, often I’d think what in the—what am I doing? The—and this does sound a little mushy, but it’s the truth that I think for the older EVST faculty, they’d all agree with this, the thing—at my lowest moments, what I would always come back to was the students. Not on any principal way, on my part, particularly, but just that it was so much, in the end, fun and there’s such a sense of, such a sense of, of sort of family. I mean, we have a couple of faculty members that I used to—started this tradition that, like after school is over, like about now, early June, the faculty would get together for a day or two and we’d just sort of debrief. Open agenda. You could say anything you wanted, but let’s particularly talk about where you want to be five, eight years from now, so, you know, so, and let’s try to adjust things so we can meet people’s needs and so forth.

Inevitably, I’d always, I would never, I mean, I’d always figure I’ll go last and I’d start with faculty. We’d never get around to me because, inevitably, generally one, but sometimes another faculty, would just, at some point break down and say, “You know, EVST is my family. This means everything to me.” And it was just like, we couldn’t go on. And I know that sounds a little corny, but there’s an incredible loyalty among EVST students towards themselves. I think loyalty to the faculty and a real loyalty to the program and somehow that, you know, in our worst moments, you always thought, well you know, goddammit, there are alumni out there who are going to be disappointed if we don’t fight through this, if we don’t stick this out.

Or, you know, there’s so and so and so and so and so and so and so, who I’m working with that goddammit, these are really good folks and I mean, I could like—when I was downtown last night meeting with this graduate student, I’m just...I mean and I know, I hope this doesn’t sound egotistical, because I don’t mean it that way, but you know, I’m no longer director of the program. I’m retired and blah, blah, blah, but this guy says, you know, let me take you out for a beer, and so forth, so you can tell me how Camas got started and—which is this student-run environmental publication and so forth. So, we get down there and in the course of the conversation he said, you know, he said, this is incredible, he said. He’d gone to a university in Canada and one in the United States and he said, “I’ve never had an opportunity to talk so personally with faculty” and he didn’t mean just with me last night. I mean, he meant that that had been his experience the whole year.

While we’re there, a guy who graduated eight or ten years ago came in and sat down and started not just talking to me, but to the other guy and pretty soon—this guy had just lost his fiancé and automobile accident in December and unloading all this shit and he tells me he’s just been to Florida for the wedding of one of our students and there were seven alums, EVST alums, who’d gone to the wedding and I look back [and think] I have never, there wasn’t a single person I went to graduate school and divinity school or Chicago with that I have any contact with. And so, it is pretty phenomenal. And there, that’s enough on that.

The second question was, who has been supportive of the program? Who’s been against it? Well—

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DB: Especially considering the leniency, it seems you’ve had to change, add—

TR: Let’s, let’s just, I will just add that I need to be careful here because I could go on forever about this. Well, first of all, I should say that what has probably the, our strongest, most vociferous, bravest, most courageous supporter was a guy named Jim Flightner, who was dean of the college for 13 or 14 years, who happened to be what—let me go back. When I first came in as a director of EVST, a guy named Howard Reinhardt was the dean and Howard was the statistician from the math department and he just was a very wise man and he had, he was, an extraordinarily gracious man as well. And he used to come over to my office and just drop in and just ask how things were going and talk. I think he didn’t do anything, I mean he probably did, that I’m not aware of, but he didn’t do anything internally, within the greater campus community necessarily to advocate for EVST. He may have. But I always knew that Howard both understood and wanted to understand what was going on here and to be as supportive as he could and that was huge, particularly for me in my first year or two because I really felt under—to be honest with you—felt under siege and that, at that time our program had a very heavy science emphasis, a much more heavy science emphasis than we do now. And I was a non-scientist and I knew that a lot of people in the sciences just thought that I was the worst possible pick to be director of the program.

Then, Jim Flightner came in as dean and Flightner’s one of these guys who—I mean, he’s hard to follow sometimes, he’s elliptical, he’ll start here and suddenly he’ll be over here and he’ll figure out—I don’t know how he got from here to here and you know, there are some things about him that are puzzling and so forth, but when he believes in you, he’ll go to the mat with you. And he believed in EVST and he went to the mat with us. Now, part of it was a personal relationship quite frankly. Jim’s oldest son, Barry, was very good friends with our youngest son. They both were the same year. They went to a different high school, but they were both the same year in high school. They both swam. They were both very competitive swimmers. Actually Barry was better than our son, but Barry was an exceptional swimmer. Probably one of the best swimmers Montana has ever put out.

So I got to know Jim and his family because as parents we’d go to these swim meets, you know, Butte and Havre, and all these god-awful places and we’d never particularly talk about business. I mean, rarely did we, but there was a way in which we became friends and sometimes it was a little hard when it got to business stuff, but on the other hand, in his own way, Jim, at various points made it clear that he would put his considerable heft between me and whoever was giving us shit and that he wouldn’t hold back and he didn’t. And I think, more than anything, or more than any single person, he deserves credit for helping, giving me and my faculty and our faculty and the students the space to grow the program in the way we wanted to grow it. I don’t know that another dean would’ve had as much confidence in me. I mean, the short and simple answer is Flightner, in the end, for whatever reason had absolute confidence in me. He knew that I, he knew the history of EVST, he knew we were going to venture outside the lines at some point. I think some, for some reason he had

Tom Roy Interview, OH 408-019, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
confidence that I had enough sense not to venture too far outside the line and I certainly felt that I didn’t have to go and explain everything with the dean or dot every i or cross every t before I made a move with the dean. That we did have some leeway to be imaginative and so forth.

Flightner’s grandfather was a gyppo logger. He knew what it meant to work in the woods. Both from the standpoint of that being your livelihood, but also of what had been done up in—his family’s from up around Darby—what had been up, done up in the Bitterroot. So, there was another part of him that was very sympathetic to our concerns about forest service practices, for example. I mean, he got it. I think Jim also was a guy who, in his own, in his own way, enjoyed knowing that there was some program that was rustling people’s feathers.

I’ll never forget one time, I was writing a grant proposal to the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, and in it I had to explain our position within the University and I said something to the effect that any good university ought to be able to commit some portion of its resources, maybe only 5 percent or 3 percent or something, to efforts, to programs that were innovative, maybe a little ornery, maybe a little outside the norm, but that pushed the envelope and that may be the best test of the vitality of a university over a college and so forth. And Flightner latched on that like Johnny B. Good. I mean, I think that was the other piece.

I think Flightner always felt, you know, we’ve got great programs and that this was like history, the creative writing program in English and so forth and so on, but you know, there oughta be something that sets us a little aside here and in Montana it oughta be the environment, and we’ve got a program and yeah, it’s a little pesky, and a little ornery and rubs some people the wrong way, but by god, it should. Because K. Ross Toole was, in a sense, right. Our natural resources have been exploited and somebody needs to stand up and not just say so, but try and do something about it and I think that just was a part of Flightner’s personality and then we had this personal trust, I guess one would say, and again the stars kind of just aligned right.

I will give George Dennison credit here too. He’s not been an aggressive supporter of the program, but he is a firm believer in the academic freedom and freedom of speech and he has never backed down from supporting us when we found ourselves in hot water, so long as we, what we were saying, you know, was factually true. I mean, he was always, always been insistent on, “Goddammit, Tom, I need to know what went on here exactly.” Don’t—and he wouldn’t use these words, but in fact, he’d say don’t bullshit me. I mean, he’s saying don’t bullshit me. You know, but if this is true and if this is true and these are the facts, don’t worry about it, I’ll take care of it. I mean, you know, but make sure, in that sense, he’s been good to work with because you always knew, if you did, shoot straight with him and so forth, you know, you’d be okay no matter what somebody in the outside world thought. And internally our biggest critics have, at least historically, have been folks in the sciences and this has been a really interesting phenomenon.
They’ve been critical of the fact that we don’t offer enough science, but yet what’s happened is, and this isn’t entirely the fault of the sciences, but—of the scientists of the sciences departments and programs—but what’s happened it’s been this kind of catch 22. They’re correct. We don’t offer nearly the amount of sciences in EVST that we once did and we don’t have—it used to be that virtually every student who came into EVST had majored in a science, biology, often, generally biology, but some sciences. Today, that’s a minority of our students who come in with a degree in sciences and a lot of people will point to me and say well, what do you expect? You appointed a director who’s in the social sciences at best. The irony is, in the early years of the program, of all the things, that’s the thing I most fretted about. I was probably over-reactive to it. [I] worked overtime to try and retain the science thing because I knew that people were suspicious of me and where I might be taking the program, but a couple of things happened.

One was when we went from the quarter to the semester system, it was a lot less easy for faculty—and this is what, how the sciences were taught in EVST—faculty had to volunteer their time to teach a course. So, if the course was out your hide—I mean, we didn’t have any lines. So, whereas Arnie Silverman used to teach a course from something, natural resources, and be able to list it as an EVST course and somehow count it as his load, because it’s only 10 weeks, not 15 weeks, and you know, there are three quarters, not two semesters and so forth. That became less easy to do, but the real killer was when we went to this—and I know this is a combination of things—but we went to this notion, you know, that productivity quotas within departments and how many FTE faculty were generating and so forth and so on.

Well, suddenly departments were looking at us and saying, well, wait a minute, if Arnie is free to go over and teach a course in Environmental Studies, that’s going to look like, to the out—to the funding, you know, the budget people in the university—like, you know, there’s not enough demand in geology for him, so we need to find another geology course for him and then if he wants to do this, fine, but we can’t. And so the whole spirit changed and the group that was most hit by it was the sciences. And the reason for that is because the sciences then—and this is something Dennison came in and did, and frankly I’ve never—I’ve always thought Montana should have more modest ambitions more than grandeur ambitions, but in certain ways. But, you know, Dennison has been insistent that we move from a, you know, we once were a Level 1 research institution and now we’re a Level 2. He wants us to get back to Level 1, or whatever it is. Well that means that you have to have be producing x number of Ph.D. students. You have to have y number of Ph.D. programs. Until history finally reinstituted its Ph.D. program, I mean they long had one. It was dormant and they reinstituted it. There were no—that’s the only PhD program in Humanities. The only Ph.D. in the Social Sciences was in psychology. All the sciences had Ph.D. programs, with the exception of physics.

So, when this push came to emphasize graduate education, particularly Ph.D. education, and the budgeting process said, oh my god, if you’ve got faculty who are free to lend their time to teach someplace else—the sciences found themselves in a terrible position if they are scientists who wanted to work in EVST—found him or herself in a terrible position because internally they
were going to get rewarded only if they started taking on more Ph.D. students, which also meant that they couldn’t take on EVST students and that they really needed to concentrate their teaching on their own department so their home department wouldn’t lose lines, because that’s what it came down to.

So, we’ve been sharply criticized by the sciences. I think, unfairly. I mean, the criticism’s fair, we don’t have as much science in the program. I mean, that’s factually true. This was not our choice. We would love to have science faculty participate in the EVST. They choose not to. I think they choose not to in some ways because of institutional constraints. And this is, this is another problem. The president, I’m speaking of Dennison, is hugely ambitious. You know, he wants international programs. He wants interdisciplinary, he wants this, this, and this. The fact is you can’t do all those things or at least do all of them equally well. I mean if you choose to push Ph.D. education, for example, and use the kind of budgetary formula that the state mandates we use, you’re going to have to work extra hard to enable interdisciplinary programs to flourish because the institutional structures that encourage Ph.D. programs and that drive the way we’re budgeted, the budget, the way things are budgeted around here really mitigate against faculty saying, oh, I’d love to participate in EVST and teach a course and so forth.

I mean, you know, those have been some of the kind of internal problems. I can give you an example though. At one point it was so awful we had about 110 graduate students one year and I was, I was running and we had Vicki Watson and I think Ron had just retired, I can’t remember—I think maybe we had one faculty member—I mean, it was ridiculous. And Flightner, but Flightner kept telling me if we can keep the numbers up, if we can keep the quality up, we’re going to be able to get you some lines. So we, that’s the other thing, we’ve always been in this, in this push-pull situation where in some ways, you know, the program made more sense to [admit] only 15 to 18 entering graduate students rather than 35—30 or 35—but some years we had like 40 entering graduate students and we just didn’t have the resource base and we had people from other disciplines pulling back because they felt they had to. And rumors started circulating, and faculty in some of the sciences started speaking up and outwardly telling Flightner, goddammit this, and using really foul language about EVST and so forth and so on.

Flightner finally hosted a dinner upstairs at the Depot where he brought me together with some scientists. One of them was a close friend of mine, but who just hated EVST because he just thought that the only really disciplines were—well, the only real work that should be done in the academy was disciplinary-focused and so forth. And you know there’s a part of me that sympathized with him, but so he had guys like that, but he also brought some scientists who he, it turned out, I’d never known this, were sort of friendly to EVST, but had been reluctant to speak up in their own departments about it.

We had this dinner, it was the funniest, it was—on the one hand I was a nervous wreck doing the thing, but it was also comical because these guys who had been very critical, when they saw the lineup and then Flightner sort of set out was going to happen, they just backed off and
Flightner wanted them to out front say what they told him, to tell me and let these other guys here and so forth, so we’d have it out. And we finally, in the end they did, but the upshot was that Flightner just told the biology [department] that, OK, Lee Medsker is going to teach a course in Environmental Studies and so and so is going to teach and that’s the way it’s going to be. And there may be too many graduate students in EVST, but I’ve been monitoring this with Tom, that’s the way it should be. Blah blah blah blah, you guys... So that’s the kind of stuff Flightner did.

The other, the obvious, the more serious threats to EVST have always come in the greater community from the legislature from the governor’s office, actually from federal agencies that have had concerns about us. I mean, at one point, a letter had been sent to the Clearwater National Forest indicating that some trees in the forest had been spiked and the suspicion was that the letter emanated from one of our graduate students. I mean, nobody knew who, but that that’s where it had come from, and that Ron and I were somehow implicated in this, and I mean it was horrendous. I had a graduate student, Karen Sandstrom, who was just the nicest gal in the world, had a degree in rhetoric from Oregon.

I’d been president of the Y—we built a YMCA building and all this and that—and Karen had gotten a part-time job out there teaching swimming and her husband, Per, worked in one of the offices of the School of Forestry, did some kind of GIS mapping on a research thing. Well, FBI agents showed up at the YMCA, revolvers drawn, took Karen out of the YMCA in front of all these kids and so forth and so on and whisked her away. I mean, I got this hysterical call and it turned out that they had been eavesdropping or playing peeping tom or something on their house and Per had had a map of—in a room in their house—that had all these various forests and had all these, I don’t know, pins or something on them, which was part of his research. Not, absolutely nothing to do with the Clearwater National Forest, but they’d seen that and they were jumping to conclusions. They busted into, without a warrant, into [the house of] Jake Krellick and Jake was a fairly rough character, but one of our graduates who’d founded something called the Native Forest Network and Jake had been arrested and so forth.

But Jake was renting this house from this young undergraduate and they went and not only confiscated his stuff, confiscated her stuff. I think it took her four or five years and she had to sue and the government never gave her back the original. She was one of these people who kept a diary since she, you know, she could write and they confiscated that. They never did give it back to her. They only gave her the photocopy back and so it was really awful. I mean I, at one point in the course of a day, five different students called to say that they’d gotten subpoenas to appear before a grand jury and most of them were, you know, beside themselves, wondering what this was about and I got so upset. I went in to see Flightner and I actually broke down crying in his office, said, “You know, this is ridiculous and this is going to destroy us. I mean, we can’t, we just don’t have the strength or the energy to deal with this,” but once again, he stepped up to the plate, in a funny sort of way, and this was Flightner.
I decided, I mean, we decided we were going to fight back. My wife’s an attorney and I can remember all the folks that’d been subpoenaed, we met at this table and tried to figure out what the hell we were going to do and some of the students, you know, wanted to be smart asses about it and they wanted to go—you could get, do your depositions here in Missoula, which is what my wife preferred because she could be in attendance, so forth and so on, but the subpoenas to appear before the grand jury had been issued out of Boise and under a very conservative judge and court. A couple of the students thought, well, this will be a lark. We’ll go down there. They’ll have to pay to put us up. We’ll get a per diem and so forth and so on and, oh god, I can remember going around and around and around. We’d counseled two of the students. I actually thought that one of the students probably had been involved. It turned out I was dead wrong, on that particular student.

But, the—I mean it was just an awful time and I got so overwrought about it. I mean I was teaching six courses and directing the program and now we had this and I knew that this would also then lead to some stuff with the legislature. I mean, it was inevitable and so forth. And I thought, you know, all the blood, sweat and tears that folks had put in and then—the one thing about EVST is, I think one of the reason’s it’s made—it’s always been a bit unique. It started as a labor of love and conviction and it’s always sort of been that. I mean, you know, and to somehow think, ‘god, I’m presiding at the wake’ and, I don’t want to do that. And I got so—I must’ve been pretty uptight.

I mean, I didn’t realize how uptight I was. I remember returning home one night and we were sitting there having dinner and Sue said, I could tell she wanted to tell me something. I said, “What is it?” She said, “I can’t tell you.” She said, well, she said a few things actually, when I come to think about it, it’s kind of silly, but she said Flightner called. I said, “Oh god what’s the deal?”

She said, “Well, he told me not to tell you.”

I said, “Well now you’ve let the cat out of the bag.”

She said, “He’s so worried about you.” This was like mid-November or something like that. “He’s so worried about you, he called me to ask if I could take three weeks off” because he was going to pay for Sue, my wife, and me to go on a three-week cruise, just to, you know—so that’s when I say—I mean, you know, and of course, when she told me, I had to laugh and then four or five days later, I went in and chewed Flightner’s ass out and you know, and so forth. But, you know, at the time it was one of those things just to know that somebody was behind you because we’d learned all sorts of things.

I mean, the legal counsel for the University found out that Campus Security had allowed FBI agents to come into our offices and they’d taken a typewriter that actually was in my office. They’d taken fingerprints. I had some pictures on my wall, for example. Somebody had given me a picture of the Flathead Alps and it was supposedly a $500 thing that somebody had given...
me as a thank you for something, took it. I’ve never seen it again. You know, they claim it wasn’t taken. University legal counsel, who was a woman whose name I’ve forgotten called me up one day and I went into her office and she said, “Look, this has got to be off the record” and so forth and so on. I wouldn’t tell you except she ended up quitting and actually had a nervous breakdown, but she said, you need to know that the President’s Office gave authorization for, to Campus Security to allow—they weren’t FBI agents, they were agents, investigative agents for the US Forest Service—to allow these guys to come into your office, that the President’s Office has given your personnel record or file to the agents, given Ron Erickson’s and so forth. [She said,] This is illegal. I shouldn’t have done it, but you need to know that to know what’s going on.

So, I was in this peculiar position of knowing that somebody—there were folks out there playing real hard ball with this and yet, the University and President’s Office was saying, “Oh, what can we do to help you?” I knew damn good and well they weren’t gonna do anything and so, there again, having Flightner there, who maybe didn’t know exactly—I mean, I never told Flightner about the personnel records and some of that stuff, but, you know, I did know that I had him there. And I think that the upshot is, you know, it turned out. I mean, the irony of ironies was, turned out nobody had done anything and the people that we most suspected of having, might have done something, were clean as a whistle. But that ate at us for, oh, I think that lasted for two or three years. And it really gave fuel to the, our critics on campus and particularly to our critics off campus. I mean, this was like, you know it doesn’t matter if it’s proved or not, you know, investigations like this don’t happen without cause and so, anyhow.

DB: So, aside from the turbulent history of the EVST Department, you know, as the director of it for how many years?

TR: Twenty-two or 23.

DB: Twenty-two, 23 years and recently retired from that. What, if you, you know, if it’s possible for you to say, what things have you left there, left the department in a situation that you would call significant, historical that you could name.

TR: Oh, I think if one were to look at it, I mean I—if I look at it objectively, here’s what I’d say. I don’t tend to look at it that way. By objectively, I mean just sort of, you know, what are some specific things you can point to? I don’t think that those, in the end, are as important as what I’m going to say more subjectively, but I think if one looked at it sort of from an objective factual standpoint, what one could say is we’ve moved from a program that was always on the margins, to a program that is now secure. I mean we have a thriving graduate program. We now have a growing, brisk undergraduate program. We now have a tenured faculty—we now have six tenured faculty lines in Environmental Studies. We’re probably going to have a seventh. I mean, the future has been secured.
DB: And I assume the Doris Duke money is significant. I know it places you in quite good company in terms of universities around the—

TR: Yeah, that, that’s exactly right. So, that’s certainly one thing. A second thing would be that, I—this may sound a little immodest—but I don’t think any program in the college has been as successful at raising outside funds as we have and particularly raising endowed funds. I mean, we have the, we have the only fully endowed chair in the college. The Kittredge Chair in Environmental Nature Writing. But we’ve been very successful at getting money and the truth is that’s largely. I mean, that’s—all those funds or almost all of those funds are funds that I was successful at raising. Flightner always used to say, and I think he was right in some ways, you know, you’re Mister External. That’s what this program needs at this point in time. And he certainly was right in the sense that I’d never had any interest in—we have a committee on campus, ASCRC, Academic Standards and [Curriculum] Review Committee, you know that worries about catalog copying and all that. I mean I—that stuff just leaves me cold. So, he was right in that sense.

The other thing that I was able to bring to the program, it’s going to seem a little silly, but in some ways—and it wouldn’t have made any difference had we not gotten in trouble and it probably wouldn’t have made any difference had I not simply stayed around so long—but I, despite the fact that are certainly some people who don’t like me and some people who don’t like the EVST program, generally, my reputation at a personal level is pretty good. Not necessarily for what I’ve done in EVST, but people in the conservation community respect me for what I’ve done there. I mean, I’ve been named Aldrich Conservationist of the Year. I was a MIAC Conservationist of the Year. What I’ve done in the social service sector. I mean, I got a youth home named after me. I’m honorary, number one membership, at the Missoula YMCA and so forth.

I was on the State Environmental Quality Council for three terms. I mean, I’ve done a lot, been involved in a lot of things that have given me an opportunity to meet folks who, for example, a lot of our faculty have—are people who stayed primarily in the academy who just don’t have a chance—and that’s, I think, in the end played a subtle, but huge difference., cumulatively. Not, I can’t point to any one thing, but, for example, when we were having trouble with these investigations and stuff and I was, at that time, we were involved in raising $4 million to build a new Y and I was heading up that effort. And, frankly, a lot of the people involved in that were, I’m sure had no use for EVST and, you know, probably didn’t politically agree with me or there wasn’t much agreement at all. But they did know me personally and I knew them personally and we worked together on something that we both, or all of us, agreed was important and had value and worked successfully together and it did in the end have some impact because some of those folks ended up, you know, contacting legislators who wanted to do us in, simply saying, “Look, at least take a second look. This Roy guy ain’t the bad dude, entirely, that you’ve been hearing about. I mean, he may be wrong on this and he may be wrong on that, but he’s not a total asshole. Sit down and talk with him.” So, I mean, that’s something again that is, it only
made a difference because the program was so small and modest and we needed to come to some stability.

I guess the only other thing I would say—now let me switch over to things more subjectively, that are more important to me. I think the things that I’m proudest of are the thing that you referred to, that there is a strong sense of—a feeling, I think, of pride on the student’s part of saying, ‘I’m in EVST.’ And it, there’s just a real sense that for students this was one of the more significant points in their life. We’ve got in the first and second year students, right now we have six couples that are ultimately going to get married as a result of this. I mean, one’s a 38 year old guy who graduated from Stanford and worked in a jet propulsion lab and who’s, you know, hooked up with some gal from North Carolina and so forth and this is the happiest guy you’d ever meet.

He was over here the other night and broke down in tears because he’s leaving, he’s done, his two years are over and so forth, but he said these have been the greatest two years of my life. I’ll never forget this. And he’s made lifelong friends, regardless of what he does career-wise in conservation, you know, in conservation and he’s going to do some good things though. And I guess it’s just nice to know that you’ve been part of something that enriched other people’s lives.

So, I would say, of all the things, that’s the thing I feel most satisfaction about or the thing that I’m proudest of, in terms of EVST. It’s not going to show up in any numbers or anything like that. I’m also, I guess, modestly proud of the fact that we’ve got some exciting programs. I mean, we’ve got the Environmental Nature Writing Program. We were the first in the country to—we’re one of the only few in the country. We’ve got an endowed chair. We’ve got Camas going and that thing’s been secured. We’ve got a transboundary program. We’re the only school in the country that has that. That looks at issues, you know, on an international transboundary bases. We’ve got this program on—I can never remember the name—PEAS, Program on Ecological and Sustainable Agriculture or something of that sort.

Now, and this is spawned also, and not only—it’s not just that we have the PEAS Farm, but we, it spawned all sorts of things. We now have the Food-to-College Program. We’ve got the Schools-to-Farm Program. This thing has gone off in a thousand different directions. And here’s the other thing I’m proud of, and this is the—I’m pleased with. The one thing—I’m not very good—the truth is that I’m not very good at very many things and maybe that’s why I sort of succeeded in EVST because there are always plenty of good people. There are plenty of people who were smarter than I was. Plenty of people who were more knowledgeable than I was. The only thing I was smart enough to realize was, give these people room and in a sense do what Flightner did for me. Flightner trusted me. He gave me room. He gave me comfort and shelter when I needed it and otherwise he said, go.

We’ve hired…I don’t know. Six, seven years ago we hired this faculty member, Neva Hassanein, and when she first came in she told me about her interest in agriculture and we had this very loose relationship with the PEAS Farm and I decided, we’re gonna, we’re gonna, a leap of faith—I think Neva can make something go with this. To make it go, we have got to, we’ve got
to bring on our staff, Josh Slotnick, who runs the PEAS Farm. I mean, he’s qualified to do that and so forth and so on. We have no money to do it. We weren’t going to get any money from the administration to do it. I just said, “Let’s go for it. It’s going to cost us 40-or-50 thousand dollars a year to pay for a salary and benefits. I’ll go out and I’ll raise the money or we’ll go out and we’ll raise the money and we’ll make this happen.”

Now. It did. What I did was, you know, I had that faith in Neva and I said, let’s take a chance and then the one thing I did have to do was raise money and I went out and raised—and Neva raised some money, but in the process and this is what’s amazing. Not amazing, but I guess of all the things—just as I’m proud of the students, I’m equally, at least as proud of the faculty because Neva has, she, I mean, she might’ve blossomed a little without me, I’m not saying that I made her blossom, but I mean, she’s just blossoming incredibly. She went out and a year or two ago she won the Cox Award as the best teacher in the college. She’s, she’s gone out and raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for us in endowment funds. She’s worked with students to start these other food programs and so forth. Now, none of that would’ve happened had we not had made the commitment to the PEAS farm and to paying Josh because that was the original draw, but it wouldn’t have gone beyond that had Neva not also seen that as an opportunity, you know, and seeing that okay, there’s some space here and run with it. And then when she ran with it, that created more space and that led her to some more people who had an interest in that led to some more money and some more opportunities.

So that’s been exciting. I’ll tell you, I do have a concern about the Environmental Studies Program and it’s going to kind of sound strange. My concern is, frankly, that actually having faculty lines in EVST and so forth may in the long run may be our undoing. That it may, it may—there was always, I mean, you don’t want too much of this, but there was always something to be said for the fact that we always felt like outliers in that we needed to stick together, that we needed to rally. We needed to really work and support one another because god, if we didn’t, nobody else would. And you don’t want too much of that, but I do worry sometimes that things could get a little bit too comfortable. That some of that hunger, some of that I’m doing this not because this is my job or something, but because I love to and frankly because it’s a little risky and it’s a little adventurous. Sometimes it’s a little bold and that kind of turns me on, but some of that’ll get lost as EVST becomes more and more institutionalized.

I frankly did not favor an undergraduate program and I was in the minority of the faculty and lost on that. I don’t want to see our graduate enrollment get any larger than it is. Although we’re under—and that’s been another problem over the years—these competing pressures. There’s no money for new lines, but yet EVST is particularly attractive to out-of-state students. Out-of-state students pay full tuition. So, we’ve had enormous pressure to increase our graduate enrollment. Always on the come. You increase your graduate enrollment and you’ll get a new line. We were to get a new line this year because we, as a reward for that. We didn’t get it. You know, so now the faculty has to say, “Well, maybe we should pull back a little bit.” On the other hand, if you pull back, you could lose a line at some point. And the graduate school’s saying, no, no, no, no. You know, this time it’ll be your turn, to keep pushing the
enrollment. You know, there’s a...I think there’s a...I don’t know what the perfect size for EVST is, but I do think that our ability to respond to the needs and interests of students, in part, was facilitated by the fact that we were never too big. That we never had too many tenured faculty. That we never had too many faculty who said, “Wait a minute. We can’t go in that direction because if we do than I won’t have enough students,” you know, “under me, and I’ve gotta have, you know, six or seven or eight students or whatever the hell it is.” And then, well, we could say, you know, it really doesn’t matter because we’re all in this together. That’s changed and that, I think, that’s a challenge, you know, that the faculty faces together. So.

DB: Well, unfortunately we’re going to have to end with that possible prediction for the EVST program. We’re about to run out of tape here, but I appreciate your time.

TR: Yeah, that’s good.

[End of Interview]