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David Brooks: It's May 24, 2006, and I'm David Brooks. I am the interviewer for the University of Montana's Oral History Project and I'm interviewing Merrel Clubb. Mr. Clubb, I guess I'd like you to start out by just giving us a little bit of your personal history and your educational background and what brought you to Missoula and the University of Montana.

Merrel Clubb: Well, I don't know where to begin my personal history. I was born in New Haven, Connecticut, if that makes any sense. But I grew up primarily in Texas where I went to grade school at least from the third grade on through high school. My father was a professor of English and he went to TCU, Texas Christian University; I don't remember the exact date. Well, now that's why I grew up in Texas. Then I went through grade school there.

About the time I was supposed to go to college we of course didn't have any money coming out of the Depression and my father was working at one point for $1,500 a year, which isn't very much for a family of three, I mean family of four, or five I guess the family was, because I had two brothers. He would have liked me to go to Yale because that is where he got his Ph.D. and there was no way I was going to go to Yale; it was expensive, far too expensive. So, he was moving to Oklahoma A&M as chairman, of they called it, head of the department there of English so I just went along and went to school.

The university there had a surprisingly good liberal arts program and with teachers from major—well, it was still close to the Depression so that there were teachers from major institutions—California and Chicago, Yale, Harvard, the works. I got a fairly good education there although I discovered I didn't get much of one at Yale when I went there eventually. But, I guess I was in Oklahoma when the war broke out, World War Two and the bombing of Pearl Harbor and so on. All of my friends, both instructors and student friends were joining up gradually so I came to be about the last person left there. My father was fairly, something of a pacifist by that time though he had been gung-ho to get into World War One, but his eyes kept him out.

At any rate I joined the navy and went to war and came back from that. With nothing else to do I went back to Oklahoma A&M and took a couple of courses in the summer of 1946. Then my father in the meantime had got a job at the University of Kansas as chairman of the department there, so I just went along with him and enrolled—intending to enroll in a few courses to pass the time until I would figure out what to do with myself. I had no great yearning to get into the academic world. So, when I went to enroll in graduate school the dean, who was a professor of English, and the new graduate dean simply assumed that the son of a chairman of the

department ought to be able to teach English and asked me if I wanted to teach. I said, 'Well, I guess so. One course?' He said, 'One course or fulltime.' I said, 'Well, ok, fulltime.'

So I taught at the University of Kansas for two years and I was very fortunate because at that time they required a—I forget I think it was called an Iowa system (?) or something like that, but every student in the university had to take four courses in English. The first one was composition and the rest of them were literature courses. I taught a full range of literature, world literature courses in affect in addition to the composition course for two years. Then I decided well I may as well keep on going and there are about three other people, three of us who were instructors there went to Yale for graduate school.

I was accepted, I suspect, primarily because of my father. So I went there for one year and it was a top-flight school and I got a long okay, but I had to work like the very devil to do it. Eventually, at the end of the year—in the meantime I met one of my students back in Kansas and we got married in 1949. I wanted to take some time out and I took a job at University of Oregon and I taught there for a couple of years. There I was fortunate because I was hired simply to teach composition, period, four courses and that was it, but the chairman kind of liked me I guess and so the second year he let me teach a course in Survey of English Literature, which meant from Beowulf to Thomas Hardy, that was as far as you went in those days.

I used that quite consciously as a means of preparing for comprehensives and went and then decided to go to Michigan instead of going back to Yale to get the Ph.D. primarily because they only required two languages and Yale required three. I remember when I went to Yale, about the first week we were there, we went into a room and some man, a professor, handed out three pieces of paper and said translate them; one was French, one was German, and one was Latin. I managed to struggle through the French one the first time. Later on I passed the German, but I should have been able to pass Latin because I had about six years of it high school, but it didn't do any good. It was Medieval Latin too and that is much easier than classical Latin.

At any rate I didn't want to fool with that and Michigan only required two courses and they accepted the ones I passed at Yale. So, I went to Yale [Michigan] and ended up in medieval literature and got a Ph.D. in it. I was fortunate because my wife [Valerie] was able to teach. She taught grade school, so I was able to go full time to school and I got my Ph.D. in two years, which is much faster than most people did; they usually took four, five, six years. I remember one time that I was there, there was a group of us and we were having lunch or something or other and I was sort of being—speaking in a bravado kind of way and I said, oh, I can pass that exam any time. This other guy said, 'Well, why don't you do it?' So I did and I passed. They had preliminary exams to get you into it, so I was able to start work on my dissertation as a second year and finish it.

At any rate from there I went to University of Houston and they were just beginning to build up and I was one of the fair-haired young men coming. There were about five of us [who] came,

but all five of us took one look at it and started looking elsewhere. It was just impossible at the time; I mean it was still essentially a high school basically, although a man named Cullen built a nice campus. I had a good course set up; I was teaching History of the Language and I think I was teaching a medieval literature course if I wanted too. I guess they were grooming me to be chairman, but I had no—the man that was there was a former instructor of mine and I really wasn't about to get in his hair.

I started writing scattershot to the Northwest because I had liked the country around Oregon and I wanted to come to the Northwest. I liked the rainy mountains and that sort of thing compared to the Southwest Mountains where I had grown up with my father. It turned out that there was an opening here in Montana. Oregon wouldn't take me because I'd been there and then they had a policy about not bringing back people who had been there. Of course Washington was pretty much out of the question at the time. Anyhow, the job opened here; I think H.G. Merriam had been chairman for about 30 years at that point. I don't know what happened but he sort of quit, or retired in the middle of the year, which opened up the job.

What's his name, Freeman, Edmund Freeman, was acting as chairman and he looked at my credentials and hired me with no interview or anything of the kind. I knew nothing about Montana; it was just a name to me. Of course, I started looking up and asking questions. One of the things that came up was Leslie Fiedler, whose name was well known at the time. So, that was encouraging and at any rate I arrived with Jack Vinocur who was another young instructor here; I guess we were assistant professors.

DB: And what year was that that you arrived?

MC: That was 1954, so I've been here since 1954. I've had opportunities and I've job interviews but I liked the country. One interview was a much better job in some respects at University of Toledo and I figured that all I'll do is spend my money, the extra money coming back out here for vacations so why don't I stay? So, I stayed and had less money.

DB: Coming from experiences at Oklahoma A&M, University of Kansas, Yale, University of Oregon, University of Michigan, and then University of Houston, there is quite a variety of universities there. From the small just developing university at Houston to Yale, your experiences both as student and as teacher at all those, talk a little bit about your impressions of the University of Montana when you arrived here.

MC: Well, it too was a surprisingly good school, I thought. The department was good, it was a stimulating department, there were good people in it. Leslie Fiedler was, of course, the core of it in a way. His presence made it interesting, very interesting. Other members of the faculty were good and I really enjoyed being with them.

One day Leslie came to me and showed me a form for a Fulbright Grant and it was for a linguist, somebody who had some ability in teaching English as a foreign language. I said, 'Well I am no

linguist.' And he said, 'Well, be one.' So, I decided I was going to be and I applied for it. It was at Cairo and my father had been there that year, the year before, and so I knew something about Cairo and it sounded pretty good. I was accepted and my nominal thesis advisor at Michigan was Albert Marquardt, who's a very well-known linguist. He somehow or another was involved in getting me the Fulbright Grant and so he told me that I should come to Michigan and go to the Linguistic Institute that summer before I went, and that was sort of a prerequisite for getting the grant.

So we went there and I spent the summer, it was very interesting because I took a number of good courses from first-rate people in linguistics mainly, well entirely. Of course, I'd had a number of courses at Yale and at Michigan before that involved linguistics in effect, I mean the history of English language and old English, and middle English, and middle English dialects and things of that sort. I took a course in teaching a foreign language from Charles, I think it was from Charles Fries. No, it was from somebody else, but any rate I got a good introduction to [Noam] Chomsky's work at that time. I'd also—there was a man who was right back from Cairo and he had brought—he was a professor at Rutgers or someplace back there, and he brought to the institute three Arabs from Cairo. He was teaching a course in the analysis of Arabic. We spent most of the summer just asking them questions, eventually arriving at a pretty good picture of phonology of Arabic and also to a certain extent the grammar of Arabic; some syntax, but not too much. That was a very good experience, interviewing these three informants and learning how to analyze a totally different language, a non-IndoEuropean language. I had a pretty fair notion about how at least the Arabic of Cairo was put together.

We headed out for Cairo and about that time the Suez business blew up in 1956. We were told to stop in Rome, which we did. So for the first month we did nothing but stay in a—we stayed in a pensione in Rome; we did nothing but toured the city taking turns; we had two children at the time, two and a half and whatever the other one was, a year younger. We really did a good job on Rome. Then they told us to stay and we went to Perugia and started studying Italian and that sort of thing, then ended up in Naples for a year. I did quite a lot of traveling; my job involved it although I did teach at an institute, Universidario in Jauhe (?).

It was kind of strange teaching because the professors there would just come and go and the students would come and go and you couldn't count on anything. I like to prepare lectures in a long series looking ahead, but I never knew who was going to be in my class the next day and I didn't like that very much. I was giving a course in the application of linguistics to teaching English as a foreign language. Anyhow, where was I?

DB: In Naples, no Perugia.

MC: Perugia.

DB: Perugia.

MC: Learning Italian. Anyhow, we ended up at Naples and I did a lot of traveling where I conducted seminars and things like that for Italian teachers of English. We were teaching Italians to teach English as a foreign language. The second year we moved to Rome and I was attached to the University of Rome, although I never did see it. We lived out of Austria though because it was a lot cheaper and while we were there I also did a lot of traveling. I went to Venice and stayed there for a couple of years, Trieste for a couple of—not years, but a couple of weeks, Sardinia for a month, and then we held month long seminars in the summer. It was really great in many ways.

My wife had to stay home with the two children most of the time. She had a very interesting experience because she got to know the peasantry quite well. She got to know our babysitter and cook who was just a peasant Italian and she thought Slovenia was a great man; he made the trains run on time. She still longed for him and then she would take my wife out to the little villages and so forth. They would just enjoy festivals and have a big time.

I remember one time we went to Paris, my wife and I went to Paris and left the two kids with Antionetta and the little girl, my little girl wasn't talking when we left. When we came back she was just chattering away in Italian. It was kind of funny. The second year there at Rome there was a big shot from Cornell, Robert A. Hall Jr., who was a very good French linguist, romance linguist. He prided himself on his Italian and he came in, and I am changing the subject a little bit but, my son had also learned English and Romanesco. I remember that Bob Hall started talking to him in Italian and my son refused to talk to him because he knew he wasn't a native speaker of Italian. It was kind of funny the way he reacted, he knew—he was talking Italian very easily, very fluently, but Hall was good in Italian but he wasn't good enough. I could tell that myself.

At any rate that was kind of an interesting experience and we got to see—I got to see—a lot of Italy, all over quite literally. We traveled around Sicily on our way out and went and circled the island. I had a brand new Fiat for that purpose, couldn't take it home with me. We managed to get up to France, and Germany, and Munich, and London and met my brother who had married a—he had a Ph.D. from Yale too and he had married an English girl so we visited them in London which was of course nice. All in all that was a very interesting two year, much better than it would have been in Cairo I suspect.

DB: And did you come back to the University of Montana?

MC: And then I came back to the University of Montana.

DB: So your job was here?

MC: Because my job was here and I came back here. So, I taught two more years and then another opportunity, Fulbright opportunity opened up in Syria, Damascus. I was accepted for that and I was all set to go to Damascus and I was beginning to read about Arabic history and

that sort of thing, Muslims and so on. Then that fell through. They decided they didn't want any Fulbright people and I already had a leave of absence. The people in the Fulbright office in the state department offered me a job in Burma.

So, we went to Burma and lived there for—we were there before the military government took over which was great because the Burmese people are just wonderful people, very similar to Italians in some respects in their attitudes towards life, that is, ordinary people. We enjoyed that, we had five servants there; you can't beat that. It was kind of interesting; they refused to talk Burmese to us. I ordered them, I ordered Mahmut (?) to speak Burmese and he just flat wouldn't do it. They just insisted on talking English.

Same thing was true in the bazaars, you couldn't talk Burmese. They all insisted in talking English, so we didn't get much chance to learn to talk Burmese. I studied Burmese and learned how it was organized and put together and all that sort of thing, the phonology and the grammar. I learned phrases, of course, and I managed to travel around Burma quite a bit. I went up all the way to Bhamo, which is pretty close to the Chinese border. We took a trip, another Fulbright and I, a grantee and I took a trip down the Irrawaddy all the way to Mandalay. I got dysentery on the way down. I couldn't stand drinking beer all the way and tea all the way, I had to drink water somewhere. I took one swig of water and that was it bacillary dysentery, an Indian doctor told me in Manadalay.

Of course I got over it, but any rate a military coup took place along about March, I guess it was. General Ne Win was the one who led it and took over Burma. He kicked everybody out; I was going to stay another year. I already had another Fulbright grant, but I also wanted a job with the Asia Foundation because they would had given Mercedes Benz and that was what I wanted to have with a chauffeur. So at any rate I was set to stay another year in Burma, one way or another, and I'd given up my job here for that year. When the military coup took over they kicked everybody out; they kicked out all of the Americans, and the British mostly, I guess except for the British counsel. They kicked the Russians out, they kicked everybody, the Israelis they kicked them out and so on.

I was footloose and fancy free and I thought I was going to go to Saigon. My wife tells me it was Danang, which is where the marines landed eventually a year or so later. But I was planning to go there, but I wanted to go home so I came here for the summer and discovered later I couldn't go back they wouldn't pay my way. They'd pay my way but not my family's way back. Well, I couldn't pay their way back to Vietnam, so I said no way. Then they offered me a job in Colombia, in Bogota.

So, I went there, and by that time we had four kids. Well we had four kids in Burma of course. We systematically went around the world when that trip took place. Stopped at Katmandu and Calcutta, Katmandu, New Delhi, Agra, and went to Kabul. I had been offered a job there and I wanted to see what it looked like. I took one look at that and that was enough because all of the Americans lived in a compound with a wall around them. All the British lived in a compound

with a wall around them, similarly the Russians and while all the Afghans were wonderful people. You could ask them to your house, this I was told this, you could ask them to your house and they would go, but then it would be picked up on the way out by the government. I just couldn't see staying in a foreign country where I couldn't mingle with the people. That's when I was offered the job at Columbia.

DB: And what was the job there?

MC: Same thing, I was running an English language program down there. Down there I also was assigned the job of supervising the first contingent of Peace Corp people who came down. My job was to go all around Colombia to the universities and prepare them for the coming of these Peace Corp people. My Spanish—I could make my way around in Italian okay and I was beginning to learn Spanish, but I went around trying to talk to these people in Spanish and it was just hilarious. I remember I went to the University Casajuana (?) and talked to an assistant to the president or something of the sort and I struggled and struggled trying to tell him about these Peace Corp people coming in and after about half an hour he started talking to me in fluent English. He was being too polite I think.

DB: So obviously the university was in support of you traveling and taking these—they weren't sabbaticals, but leaves?

MC: They seemed to be so but I remember in Colombia the Leslie Fiedler was chairman by that time. My first job here was to elect him chairman which is a little strange because I didn't know anybody in the department.

DB: And that is after you got back from these Fulbrights?

MC: No this is when I came, arrived here the first time.

DB: Before? And he handed you the Fulbright application?

MC: Yeah and he was chairman at the time. He wrote me a letter, rather plaintive letter saying, who are you? Which was saying come on back, just let us know who you are because I'd been gone. I'd been here two years, been away two years, and then back two years, and away two years. We were fortunate because we were traveling pre-Americanization of the world, so we saw it in what you might call its original virgin state, all of these places. I remember the first supermarket coming into Rome; supermercato, I guess it was. At any rate we sort of had our fill of traveling by that point and never have done much of it since.

DB: So obviously you both thought that the University of Montana was a good place for you and they must have thought you were a good candidate for them, allowing you to go and come, and go and come like that. You did mention that when you first got here you could tell that this was a good department. You've mentioned Leslie Fiedler, how about a little more about the

department itself at the time when you were first here, the curriculums, students, what attracted you, what made you feel like this is a good place?

MC: Well the students were good and I think, I guess we were teaching three courses that most of us, well I guess almost all of us were teaching three courses at the time. I had an opportunity to teach whatever I wanted to. I taught history of the language and I taught medieval literature, and I organized an entire year course in medieval literature over three quarters; we were on the quarter system then and that was good.

The people were stimulating to me. Walter Van Tilburg Clark was here, he was a good writer at the time. Nelson Olverman (?) came for a time and with Leslie here he sort of attracted good people, or visitors so that Oden, William Auden was here for a few days, or a week, whatever. William Faulkner came and Faulkner was interesting. He gave a public lecture which—my wife won't like me saying this—but it was a miserable lecture. It was just given in a monotone and it was uninteresting and he didn't say anything. He came to a party at the Fiedlers' afterwards and it was quite a nice gathering, people talked back and forth and he talked and opened up quite a bit. Somebody asked him to read and so he read and it was just the most marvelous thing I ever heard at the time. It was really something startling to listen to him read from his own works.

DB: And Leslie Fiedler was one of the main draws to bring people like that at the time?

MC: He was one of the main draws for people like that. Anyways, it was a lively department and people seemed to enjoy each other. They had parties together and they interrelated and so forth.

DB: How about relationships with students at the time?

MC: And with students, they had good relationships with students. I enjoyed teaching my courses and I enjoyed the students that I had.

DB: Where were you on campus when you first got here?

MC: We were in, I guess we were in the liberal arts building over there, I guess it's over there.

DB: Right, it still is.

MC: Things change considerably since I've retired, but anyhow, it was over there and it was just plain pleasant to be here. I had opportunities for other jobs and as I guess I told you, to go and I didn't want to take them. We ended up staying here and it's a good place to bring up children, it was then particularly. They had good music for the kids and we had four children and they were all musical. One of them played the violin quite well, another played the bass, and another sang, the other one, the first one played violin too for a long time.

There was some kind of city-wide grade school orchestra. I forget who ran it, but that's good and they all played in that orchestra. Of course there was the high school orchestra and they played in that. Well, three of them did, I guess my daughter turned out to be a singer and an actress. Then of course at a higher lever Eugene Andre had started up the civic symphony and he ran that. One of my sons took violin lessons from him and that was of course a great thing to do; for quite a number of years he took lessons with him.

DB: How about extracurricular activities here on campus that you were involved in, or aware of that students in your department participated in?

MC: That I don't have much sense of, really. What I remember most is the, as I say, is the interrelationship of the faculty, both in the department and outside of the department. After Leslie, well I guess, who was the president then? This is where my mind starts slipping, but at any rate—

DB: Before Pantzer?

MC: Oh way before Pantzer.

DB: McFarland?

MC: McFarland! McFarland was president when I arrived and he was quite a man in his own way, he really ran things. I remember that while I was gone I guess he made Nan Carpenter, who was a professor, she was sort of crippled by polio, and she had a degree from Yale and she was a good scholar; I guess a very good scholar and a good teacher, I think, and she played the piano very well. When—let's see now, Leslie was chairman and I guess he was supposed to be chairman for three years and he wanted his third year and he had received a visiting professorship at Princeton, which was going to take the place of Blackmere (?) there I think that was it. He wanted to go and we sort of all agreed that we would elect John Moore, who was a professor of the department, as chairman, which we did.

We went over to McFarland's office and he always had a silver dollar that he would use to tap attention and that sort of thing. He had a great big judge's—he had been a lawyer, and he had a great big judge's chair, which was a huge things, had a big back to it. He'd sit there and a very tremendous presence and he just called the department in, it was fairly small then. We'd elect whoever the chairman would be and elected John Moore because we had agreed to do that and Leslie is going to come back and take over was the idea.

Well, John Moore went off to Michigan, which he did every summer, he had a cabin up there, his family did. While he was gone McFarland just arbitrarily appointed Nan Carpenter chairman. Boom! Like that, without asking anybody anything. She was a lousy chairman, a lot of people didn't like her and the department was divided somewhat into two factions at the time—

DB: Over?

MC: The Fiedler faction and another faction.

DB: What was the other faction?

MC: Well Nan Carpenter was part of it.

DB: And what was the rift between the two?

MC: I don't know, well, mainly they didn't like Fiedler and wanted him to go I guess. I don't know if it was jealousy or what, but he was hard to get along with in some ways and very arrogant in some respects, made no bones about what he thought about people. He didn't think much of people like Nan Carpenter and Walter King, and some of the others. They were very sensitive to that and they were both—Walter King and Nan Carpenter were both very good.

I had known Walter King at Yale; we were very close friends there. When I was there for the M.A. and he was just starting, too, and we used to swim together in the Yale pool to get exercise. We sort of got together with other people and so on but, I got so sick and tired of him I couldn't stand—and he was somewhat arrogant too and he knew everything, which he did compared to me anyway. So, we were sort of at odds just by the time I left and then we ended up here. He came the year after I did and I sort of suggested that he probably shouldn't, but that was overruled. The people that brought him were sorry because they didn't much like him. It was sort of split that way, mainly with the circle of Fiedler in one group, which was the larger group, and the better group naturally. I was in that group too.

DB: Of course. So Carpenter takes over as the chairperson—

MC: She came over, or took over the job for a year or two and then she was sort of booted out. I forget what happened, I think we brought somebody in and then another man named Vedder Gilbert was chairman for a long time too. We had two or three people coming in and then eventually I became chairman. So, I was chairman for 17 years. I sort of took after it and did the same thing that H.G. Merriam did in terms of time. I enjoyed that job in a lot of ways. It came along right at the right time, I was burned out of teaching and I remember that my head would just ache coming up to school having to teach three classes and I just was burned out. This came along and it came at the right time.

DB: And when did you begin as chair?

MC: I can't remember. Well if you could just take 17, 18 years back. Well, I guess I started the summer of '68. It was temporary at first; the idea was that I would be temporary chairman. After about the first year they decided to make me a permanent chairman.

DB: So it went from temporary to 17 years? You came in at a time that I've heard different people describe as quite volatile on the campus, just because of Vietnam, as well as the growth of the student body and faculty. I'm wondering how those things played out in your department, or how you guided those things as the chairman, or if you would say those were even factors for you?

MC: Well, Vietnam wasn't a factor for us in the department. I don't remember. I guess the '60s were supposed to be years of upheaval and so forth but in the department I don't think we noticed it particularly. I felt that my job in the department was simply to try to make it possible for everybody in the department to work and to do their job and that is what seemed to me to be the job of a chairman really. Similarly the job of a dean, just make it easier for the faculty to work and that is the way I looked at it and that is the way I tried to run things and do things, and of course in a democratic way too.

The only thing that I remember about Vietnam, I became quite friendly with Bert Pfeiffer, who was somewhat notorious on the campus too. We were very close friends and we hunted together, fished together, and that sort of thing. He was very active socially, I mean in social ways and so forth. He made two or three trips to Vietnam using his own money during the war and he was very much antiwar, anti-Vietnam war. He went to NOA one time, or maybe a couple of times, I don't know and ran into Jane Fonda and all that sort of thing; he admired her a lot.

At any rate during the Vietnam business I do remember that the students were really up in arms too about the—well I guess everybody throughout the country ultimately became up in arms so to speak about the war. I remember that Bert Pfeiffer was leading the student groups and they took over the gym over here, I think the big gym hadn't been—whether it was built or not I don't think so, I think this was it, took over the ROTC and it was quite a business. I wasn't really involved with that because for some reason or another I was essentially apolitical most of my life.

All during World War Two I know I was, I had no awareness of what was going on, no real awareness of what was going on for years afterwards. I could figure that out, it had to do with my relationship with my father and that sort of thing. It was only after I retired that I became conscious of what was going on in the world. I've had to learn an awful lot since. The department really wasn't much involved in all that.

DB: How about relationships in the department between faculty and students? You mentioned that when you first came it was pretty congenial and faculty got along—

MC: Oh yeah, it was very congenial.

DB: —and you had mentioned the one division, but as the department grew and as the school grew did that stay?

MC: Oh yeah I think that all the time I was—the early part of the time we saw our way, our function as to teach students mainly and to be interested in students and we were. I think almost everyone was in one way or another. It was a teaching faculty is what it was, and that is the way we looked at ourselves primarily. We believed that service was necessary, so called, which is being on various kinds of committees and so forth, both departmental and university. We also believed in research up to a point, but we weren't a research institution, at least I didn't think so. People weren't really forced to do research, they were expected to do some and do some writing and so on. I think mainly our main, primary concern, and primary pride was in the fact that we did a good job of teaching.

So, we had good relations with the students while I was here as far as I know all along the line. As you probably know we had a very good creative writing program, which was nationally known even then. Actually, H.G. Merriam is the one responsible for starting it way back. I think that has a long history, its name had been written by now. We always had good people in that.

DB: How much did that affect or coincide with success of your department? Certainly the creative writing department, there are plenty of nationally known names that have been through and people who taught as well, and so no doubt you would have been in contact with a lot of those writers who were teaching as well.

MC: Well I remember Walter Van Tilburg Clark quite well. I was quite friendly with him and I liked him a lot. I was sorry to see him go. And various other writers I got along fine with. Richard Hugo, of course, was the big name for quite a long time.

DB: And he came during your time as chairman?

MC: During my time as a chairman, I think. No, he must have come maybe a little bit before. But about pretty much the same time. I remember the first year he was here. He always liked kitchens and he was in our kitchen for quite a long time. I took a picture of him that appears on his first book. Didn't get any credit for it, but—

DB: What was his attraction to kitchens?

MC: I don't know, but he liked to sit in the kitchen and that's where he would gravitate to in whoever's house he was in. He was a very good poet and he was interested in students and, of course, he attracted students. Very interesting man in a lot of ways. Then I guess Greg Pape is still here, isn't he? He came just about the time I quit, or retired. I retired as chairman in 1986, I guess it was.

DB: During the time you were both chairman, as well as before, what kind of curricular changes took place in the department that either you were part of or saw happen? What were the emphases of the department, as well as the interests of the students?

MC: Well, I don't know that—I can't remember if there were any great changes at all. I'm really not prepared to say. I can't remember too well. The curriculum grew and it just—that's about it.

DB: I guess I'm thinking of, you know, clearly the English Department here as well as elsewhere teach modern literature, and so that is a way that departments have to continually keep up, so to say. Now, this department here is somewhat known for regional literature and I wonder if any of those things were happening as you were there.

MC: Well that was growing at the time. I guess what I did, and I was criticized from some people for doing it, but I tended to let people teach what they felt they wanted to teach. So if somebody wanted to teach Montana literature, why, I'd let them make a course and do it. Bill Beavis came while I was chairman and he gravitated in that direction and built up that quite a bit.

DB: In teaching regional or Montana literature?

MC: Yeah, teaching regional and Montana literature. But mainly, I think, for the most part, as long as I was chairman we tried to have a balanced program. We were interested in—we had some good American literature people, we had some good British literature people and I taught medieval literature for a long time. We tried to offer that regularly. And we offered history of the language fairly regularly. I taught that fairly regularly. I introduced linguistics and I brought in Bob Hausmann and he sort of really took the ball and really ran with it and developed a full department of it, I guess, and it's separate from the department now. But it used to be part of our department; all the courses were part of our department. I started most of them and then he came and began teaching them.

DB: And when did that become its own department?

MC: That was after I left, I think. He was working in that direction at the time. He was also interested in teaching English as a foreign language and he's done quite a lot with that I gather. But that's all since I was in the department. And now I guess he travels all over the places and goes to Japan and all kinds of places.

DB: When you first came was the English department all undergrad students or was there a graduate program?

MC: No, we had a graduate program. We had an M.A. program. I think it was a strong M.A. program. Of course, we offered, originally they had a degree in English with a creative writing

interest and eventually that broke off and someone developed the idea of an M.F.A. program and got that going.

DB: During your time here is when that broke off?

MC: During my time, uh huh, but not during my chairmanship. That was begun before that. And so we had that and we also had an M.A. program, which we very consciously tried to keep going. Some people wanted to start a Ph.D. program, but I never could see any point in it, at least at that time. There seemed to be plenty of good schools far better equipped to have a Ph.D. program than we were. And I could say the same thing for some of the other departments, but maybe I was wrong. I do know that microbiology had a very good program, a Ph.D. program. And two or three other departments did too; history has a nice one, a good one. But it was just developing, I think, when I was here.

DB: So during your seventeen years, which, as you've pointed out, is one of the longer stints as a chairperson.

MC: Well I guess they got so sick of me that they decided they better put it on a three-year basis! [laughs]

DB: So is that one of your legacies?

MC: That's one of my legacies. That's what I left the department.

DB: What else would you say you left the department in that amount of time that you might consider significant, if not historical?

MC: I have no idea really. In my opinion, I did my best to keep the department going and developing and getting people to teach what they were competent to teach. That was going against the grain sometimes because that involved teaching all kinds of, well, several different kinds of weird courses in popular literature and this and that and the other thing. But I think that all of that, if it was taught by a good man in a good way, it tends to be a good course usually. So that's what I tried to get people to do and let them do and I suppose that, I don't know, I don't see any legacy. I don't feel that I had one really. So after seventeen years, that's too bad.

DB: Well you said one of the things you always strived to do was keep the department going, keep people teaching what they wanted to teach. Certainly it seems like the English department, as well as many of the departments in this school in general, has kept faculty here for a long time. Not that many people leave, which might not be what you'd expect from a rather geographically isolated university here, at the time. What about this department, the English department in general, do you think attracted people and kept them?

MC: Well I think we were a good department. We had good people and we had a good program, an interesting program, and people enjoyed teaching, they enjoyed the students and other people. And of course the mountains keep people here, and the streams and that sort of thing. It's kind of interesting, though, a lot of people who just don't take any advantage, really, any serious advantage of the physical features of the country still stay. So there must be something about it that attracts them. Just what, it's hard to say, really. But you're right, a lot of good people in all the departments come and they stay and they like it, even if they gripe a lot sometimes. It's kind of hard. I don't know what keeps people here, really. It's not the best school in the world by a long shot, but it's good and I think it's been a very good school for students.

DB: How so?

MC: I think they get as good an education here, at least as good an undergraduate education here as they get anywhere else.

DB: And what makes that so?

MC: It's the teachers and the various programs that the departments have. I'm sure that some of it, as I say, some of the graduate departments, particularly at the Ph.D. level, are quite good. But it's still not a research institution by any stretch of the imagination. People do good work, and that's about all I can say.

DB: So you've been retired for just over twenty years now?

MC: Just about.

DB: And you've just come out with your first book.

MC: And my last.

DB: Why don't you say a few words about that and pursuing that after your academic career?

MC: Well it's kind of funny. I didn't do any writing much while I was chairman. I had a one-track mind and all I could do was focus on what I was doing then. Some people, of course, can keep a lot of balls in the air, but I can't juggle very well. So I just gave up any idea of writing when I became chairman. I may have done a few things but not much. And so about the time I retired, I don't know, I started wondering what I was going to do after I retired. Everybody goes fishing and hunting. Well you can only do so much of that, really. I did enjoy it. I enjoyed hunting elk. I just tracked them all over the place for years. I didn't take it up until I was 50 either, but it was a passion once I took it up.

But anyhow, I started casting about and I came across some letters that I had written home from the war, which I called my war letters. My mother had saved them, thinking I might want them some day. I hadn't looked at them for 40 years. I knew that they were there, in a nice little box with a round top to it. A little trunk, a round-topped trunk. So about the time I retired I took them out and read them and they seemed to me pretty good for what they were. So I got the idea of trying to put them into a book just as a book of letters, which I think I called *The War Letters.* And I began peddling that and I sent it several places but I sent it to Georgia, in particular, the University of Georgia Press, and the director there liked it very much. He read the letters and called me up and said they were fine and so on and he was going to give them to readers and so forth. He gave them to the first reader and that reader, apparently, was a professor of English at the University of Georgia for all I know, but also a veteran of World War Two. He wrote about a four-page critique. Some of the things he said I thought were nonsense, but he also said that the letters, he thought, were worth publishing but not in their present form, that they needed what he called context: commentary and analysis. It took me two years to figure out what to do and by the time I figured it out Georgia was no longer interested. They had changed completely.

It sort of grew and I had another book too that I was working on at the same time and I sort of kept the two back and forth, working on them both. Gradually they just developed and I wrote a man at Princeton who had written his memoir of World War Two called *Flights of Passage*. I thought it was a great title. What he did was simply describe how a marine pilot is made. It interested me because I didn't know anything about how a pilot came to be. He had developed the book in terms of a series of tests he went through in the process of becoming a pilot ultimately. The final test was flying a plane over Okinawa, I guess. I wrote him and I asked him about publishing. I wasn't getting too far with mine. He said it took him 11 years to get it published, and he was a professor at Princeton and he had lots of in's that I didn't have.

He encouraged me with that so I just kept on going and eventually it got picked up by the University of Washington Press. Now I can see that it needs marketing in the worst way and they're not prepared to it. They rejected the other book, which is essentially one that would do best with a commercial press. The director there at Washington rejected it because, in the first place, he felt he couldn't get it through the faculty committee, and in the second place he felt that they just weren't equipped to market it and I know they aren't on the basis of what they've done with this book. At any rate, they were all very supportive and that made me feel good, of course. They thought it was a great book and so on and so forth. They just put it right through.

DB: So between writing your first book, hunting, and fishing, do you keep abreast of The University of Montana since you've been retired?

MC: I haven't had anything to do with The University of Montana since I retired. I've had nothing to do with the department. I don't know anybody in the department, except I have kept in touch with one man, Jesse Bier, who came the year after I did. While we're not close friends, we're, say, good friends and have been all along. When this book was published, he

asked me if the department had done anything. Well I couldn't imagine the department would do anything in the first place because they didn't know anybody here as far as I knew to speak of. And he asked me that two or three times and eventually the chair of the department, Phil Knight or something like that, called me and asked if I'd come to a departmental gathering for people who had written books or something like that. So I thought it was in honor of everybody who had written a book in the past year or something like that. Turned out it was in my honor and Jesse had pushed the thing, I guess. It was really quite nice to have the department have this shindig over in the Honors Building there. I was very pleased with that.

DB: How about you finish up here with any other stories or memories you have of your time at the University that I haven't gotten you to talk about yet.

MC: Oh there are so many things, I can't remember.

DB: How about some of the ones you do remember?

MC: It's hard for me to remember anything these days, to pick it out of the air.

DB: Or just lasting impressions of your time here.

MC: Well I enjoyed very much my time here and I've enjoyed my retirement immensely. I do remember right at the end there was a man named Leonard Robinson who was married to Patricia Goedecke, one of our poets. He was in his 80s and I usually have lunch with him on a fairly regular basis. Just after I retired he was talking about my 'writing career' and he was extremely supportive of my 'writing career,' as he kept talking about it. For crying out loud, I'm not a writer and never will be! I don't know what a writer is, really. But he kept talking about it and he's a former editor and has done a lot of writing himself and so forth. So he was very, very supportive and he read a lot of the things I wrote and so that gave me support and sort of pushed me. Then I came across some other letters that formed the basis for another book and I've just really enjoyed it. That's all I've done.

I go out in the mountains, well, I kept hunting for a long time. But I go out in the mountains and pretty soon I noticed that I was just carrying my rifle around for the fun of it, basically. I wasn't shooting, I was passing up shots and all sorts of things. I was just enjoying it. I have an Alaskan camper, which is very much like a sheepherder's wagon, which I call my sheepherder's wagon. It's something that you can pump up and stand up in and so on. So I could just drive anywhere I could drive a pick-up. I could stop and camp. So I camp up near the divide or I'm down in the middle of sagebrush.

What I'm getting at is eventually I discovered that I wasn't hunting anymore, I was just pretending to hunt. So I was writing most of the time. I didn't do much reading in the camper, I just wrote. I probably drank too much and leaned out the window. I still smoke cigars at that point. I gave up smoking cigarettes 35 or more years ago. But I puffed on cigars, I didn't inhale

them, and blew the smoke out the window. It was a great life. I could spend a week, two weeks, three weeks out in the mountains all by myself. I was always by myself, virtually always. I just enjoyed it very, very much.

For a while I did get elk every year and I would get deer and I liked to hunt Rocky Mountain sheep. I got several ewes. Getting a ram permit is just virtually impossible but I did get one finally. I got almost a full-curled ram the year after I retired. But I gradually gave that up. I remember one time I was hunting. I was way up in something called the Wagner's Basin over in the Sun River and I shot a ewe. As I say, it's impossible, very difficult to get a ram permit because so many apply for them, but it's easy to get a ewe permit, ewe only. So I got way up in there and I shot a ewe and it was climbing way up but I only wounded it. The poor thing was struggling trying to get up. I must have broken its back or something like that. So I was trying to climb up to it and get to where I could shoot it and put it out of its misery and I discovered that there was a little lamb with it. The little lamb came over and nuzzled its mother's head and lay down by it. I had to go up there and scare the lamb up and shoot its mother while it stood there watching and that was just a terrible experience for me and that's when I really gave up hunting.

I did have a moose permit, too. They're hard to get but I finally got one the year after I retired, I think. I remember I was out, it was a beautiful day out in the middle of a clearcut, somewhere way up in the mountains somewhere, and two moose came up, a cow followed by a calf, a big calf. I glassed it very carefully and it was a spike is what it was. And I glassed it and glassed it and glassed it, making sure that was what it was. Then I started putting my scope on it and for some reason I put it down and watched it. It was having so much fun. It was a beautiful, sunny morning and it was gamboling all around its mother and so forth that I couldn't shoot the darn thing, so I just let it go.

DB: Likely a wise decision.

MC: It was, but the irony of it was I knew moose were up there, I knew where they were, and I went after them all the rest of that fall and I would follow the tracks through the snow and come up on a cow munching away on a bush and I never did get a moose. So eventually I just sort of pretended to hunt until the last and just enjoyed writing is what I did.

DB: So you did have a writing career after all.

MC: I guess I did. I wrote a lot of articles at the same time and I wrote stories and so on and I published a couple of them. I have a very good story about that ewe and the lamb but it hasn't gone anywhere. But I've really enjoyed it and I guess I have had a writing career after all. I've written two books, published one, and published some articles. So it's been a very good life in a way. The whole thing has been interesting. In other words, the teaching career was very good and I enjoyed my administrative work. People say they don't enjoy it but they do, I think, and I certainly did and I make no bones about it. Not because it gave me power or anything; I just

enjoyed making it easier for other people to work is the way I look at it. And my career afterwards has been very satisfactory. So all in all I've enjoyed it, I guess.

DB: It's kept you here in Missoula.

MC: And it's kept me here in Missoula and I have three children over in Seattle. One of them [Emily] in the opera over there. I just went over to see her last weekend and she was great, naturally. But she's a good singer and that was a good experience too. Two of them are doing quite well over there, two of the boys [Charlie and Maury]. And my oldest son [Dare] is an associate professor at the University of Iowa. He writes plays. He had a play off-Broadway put on by one of the theaters there. We went to see it. He had the audacity to call it *Oedipus*. There are only two others. One was Sophocles and I think Seneca had one and I can't remember his name, but a French writer at the time of Moliere, wrote one called *The Oedipus*. And my son comes along and writes one.

DB: He's in good company.

MC: Yeah, he is.

DB: All right, well thank you very much for your time here. I appreciate it.

MC: Well it's a pleasure. I don't know if I've really said anything much. I don't remember too much about the institution as such.

DB: Well, you know, it's not our job to decide what's going to be history for somebody else. It's just to put it down.

MC: Well I'm not sure it's history, anything I have to say.

[End of Interview]