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Remembering Erving Goffman

Daniel Albas:

At the Convocation Goffman Said, “One Is Born Near a Granary and Spends the Rest of His Life Suppressing It”

This conversation with Dr. Daniel Albas, Professor of Sociology at the University of Manitoba, was recorded over the phone on November 3, 2010. After Dmitri Shalin transcribed the conversation, Daniel Albas edited the transcript and approved posting the present version in the Goffman Archives. Breaks in the conversation flow are indicated by ellipses. Supplementary information and additional materials inserted during the editing process appear in square brackets. Undecipherable words and unclear passages are identified in the text as “[?]”.

[Posted 02.18.12]

Shalin: . . . I want to ask you if it is OK for me to record our conversation and then send you the transcript.

Albas: Yes, certainly.

Shalin: Wonderful. Could you first tell me a few things about yourself, how you found your way to sociology.

Albas: Well, I went to a French boarding school in Edmonton, Alberta, Collège St. Jean. It was affiliated with the University of Alberta. I took my first year of university there as well. I enrolled in a French course at the University of Alberta in my second year. The prof. told me she thought I was a little too advanced for the class, so I knew I had to find another class. I ran into a former student from the boarding school I had attended, and I asked him, “Are there any interesting courses that you might suggest?” We were fellow hockey players on the same team, so we were pretty close. [He said], “Try sociology.” I said, “What is it like?” “Oh, it’s a lot like psychology, except you deal with larger units and you deal with real life rather than experiments.” It sounded kind of interesting, so I enrolled. Ken Hatt, the instructor, was a graduate student at the time, doing his Ph.D. I very much enjoyed his class.

Shalin: He was teaching.

Albas: Yes, he was teaching.

Shalin: How do you spell his name?

Albas: H-a-t-t. I thought, well, I’d take some more classes the next year, and I did. Again, I found them interesting. I also met my future spouse who

happened to be in one of these classes. That added a tremendous amount. What happened that year was that Robert C. Hansen, and that is H-a-n-s-o-n, from the university of Colorado was invited to give a review of the research that they were carrying out on ethnicity and alcohol consumption, the tri-ethnic [?] project. He was doing it with Jessor, a psychologist. Since we were getting married, and since I was very interested in Hanson's presentation, I thought, "Well, why not a fresh place." So we went to Colorado. The first time I came across Goffman in any sustained way was as a TA. I was charged with presenting a number of chapters in Ray Cuzzort's book for an introductory class. He had a very popular book at that time called *Humanity and Modern Sociological Thought*, and he was also a prof at this university [of Colorado]. Although at that time I was near the end of my training. So I did not take any classes from him before I graduated.

Shalin: That is still while you were an undergraduate?

Albas: No, I was a graduate student as well as a teaching assistant [TA]. That was undergraduate theory. One of the chapters had an overview of Goffman's work. That was the first time I had a sustained overview of his work, and I found it very interesting. This led me to read the *Presentation of Self*, which more than any other book that I had picked up at that time provided the perspective that [Peter] Berger says makes us see the world in a new light, and yet it is the world we have lived in all our life.

Shalin: Could you give me a timeline, which years are we talking about?

Albas: That would probably be . . . I was in Alberta in 1966, that was probably my second year, and in '67 I took more courses and met my spouse. Then in '68 we were married and went to Colorado. When I got to Manitoba I was assigned to teach a course in social psych, even though most of my work was in formal organizations. I was able to read more of Goffman when I taught social psych. At my first sabbatical we went back to Colorado and Cheryl [my spouse] did her Ph.D. And then of course we started carrying out joint research projects. It was not unusual to use Goffman as the main frame to observe the world. We had a few articles that directly drew on and extended Goffman that were widely quoted, especially in intro books. Several readers also reprinted them, such as *Aces and Bombers*, *Post-Exam Impression Management Strategies*. We are continuing to put out research in that direction.

Shalin: And your thesis, what was it on?

Albas: It was on sources of family conflict. It was not Goffmanesque. At

that time I did not have very much Goffman, but Cheryl went back, [and she] had Ray Cusort as one of her dissertation advisors, and he was a very interesting guy, very insightful [and] perspicacious. That further fueled our interest in Goffman.

Shalin: Who did you write your thesis with?

Albas: Robert C. Hanson. He taught theory classes and methodology. I took every class he offered. Very interesting, straight shooter, although he was much more of a Marxist. He didn't know much about Goffman. I did not pursue the Marxian end, I did [not] find it as interesting as the Goffmanesque end.

Shalin: Perhaps you can say a few more words about Hanson as your mentor, as a teacher.

Albas: Oh, yes. He was a very effective teacher, a no-nonsense guy, very rigorous. He had his nose to the grindstone just as we did. I very much appreciated that. He was with the Institute of Behavioral Studies, in the same building as Kenneth Boulding, you know, the famous economist. They were all part of the same team. There was also Eugene Haas. Unfortunately, he got discredited a little later, but he was a very good teacher. They were all part of that behavioral science unit at the University of Colorado. They were quite a prolific bunch.

Shalin: How were they with students – were they tough?

Albas: I would say they were tough [**laughing**]. They had high standards. And that of course served us very well later we came out as faculty members.

Shalin: Did you inherit some of that toughness, the no-nonsense style?

Albas: Yes. I think so [**laughing**]. I think the students would say that I am pretty much like that. I certainly saw him as a role model.

Shalin: It's interesting how we model ourselves after certain mentors.

Albas: It really is interesting!

Shalin: Any other teacher from that era who stands out, whom you would like to memorialize, not necessarily in a positive way?

Albas: When we came back for Cheryl's doctorate I sat in on one of Ray Cuzzort courses. It was a very unusual one, it was "Film and Sociology." They looked at classic movies using a sociological perspective, and of course Goffman was featured considerably because you are dealing mostly with micro themes, although you bring in social class, things like that.

Shalin: That was probably before Goffman published *Frame Analysis*.

Albas: Yes, it was before *Frame Analysis*.

Shalin: How did you settle on your dissertation topic?

Albas: Hanson asked us to do an original paper, using Zetterberg's propositional approach to sociology. There was a lot of literature on family conflict. I thought it would be an interesting thing to focus on, so I made use of that for the paper. It was not too much of a jump to use it as dissertation topic. It started as a paper where we had to make an original statement summarizing in propositional form empirical literature on family conflict.

Shalin: Was it mostly theoretical?

Albas: Yes, it was mostly theoretical.

Shalin: Once you were done with the thesis you went on the job market.

Albas: Yes.

Shalin: And you applied in Canada.

Albas: Yes, that's right.

Shalin: And your first job?

Albas: It was in the University of Manitoba. I taught summer school course before, and the head at that time said, "If you want to come next year for a full time job [tenure track], you are welcome."

Shalin: You landed a full time tenure track job.

Albas: Didn't have to interview for that or anything, right after my summer school teaching.

Shalin: Which year was that?

Albas: That would be '71.

Shalin: So up to that point you did not see Goffman.

Albas: No, no, I had not.

Shalin: And then somehow you managed to lay your eyes on him.

Albas: What happened was that he was invited in 1976 to give a convocation address, and he was also awarded a doctor of law degree by the university. Of course one of the reasons for that was that this was the first university he attended [University of Manitoba]. He initially came in as a chemistry student, but each year he took English courses. You notice these courses coming back in his writings. You know he very frequently draws on authors like Shakespeare and other literary figures.

Shalin: And philosophers like Sartre.

Albas: Well, he took philosophy in his third year.

Shalin: Oh, I wonder if any transcripts have survived from the University of Manitoba!?

Albas: Oh, yes there are.

Shalin: I would love to see them.

Albas: I can see if I can find them.

Shalin: I would be most grateful. I don't think anyone saw the transcript of what Erving took at the University of Manitoba.

Albas: Of course they would not give you his grades, but they will give you the courses he took.

Shalin: That's good enough.

Albas: The first two years he mostly took courses in the physical sciences, with an English course along here and there. This is when he probably met Marshall McLuhan . . . Do you know Marshall McLuhan?

Shalin: Oh, yes.

Albas: They may have been students at the same time. The reason I suspect that they were at the same time is because I know that Marshall McLuhan was here as a student. I also heard a radio documentary on McLuhan when a narrator reported that he took his class to [?] where Goffman was doing his work on *Asylums* at St. Elizabeth's hospital. He said he knew Goffman, but the only place he could have known him was at Manitoba. That's where I am making this inference from. So you have two highly innovative authors who spent at least some time as students at the University of Manitoba. In the third year Goffman switched from the recommended sequence of courses. He took courses in psychology, sociology, and philosophy. That's when he was exposed to Whitehead. Whitehead was his favorite philosopher.

Shalin: He didn't know him personally, obviously.

Albas: Oh, no.

Shalin: Because Whitehead died before. . . . But Goffman doesn't cite him that often, I don't think.

Albas: According to Dennis Wrong, in the seminars that they took, Goffman was very strong on Whitehead. That was his favorite philosopher at the time.

Shalin: Was there a professor who taught Whitehead or Goffman discovered him on his own?

Albas: I am not at all sure, but I could tell you who the philosophy [teacher] was, I can get that document.

Shalin: That would be most interesting. The story you tell me about Erving starting with natural science then switching to social science rings the bell. Do you know when Goffman started at Manitoba?

Albas: I don't have the [information].

Shalin: Probably around 1943, for in 1948 he already was at the University of Chicago.

Albas: I know he went to Ottawa for the National Film Board, that's where he met Dennis Wrong who suggested that a smart guy like him should go to Toronto. He didn't finish his degree at Manitoba. He had difficulties, he was quite an introverted type. He seemed to have periods of depression.

Shalin: What kind of difficulties there were – intellectual, personal?

Albas: I've got quite a few notes here. I've interviewed, or at least had people who interviewed people who knew him.

Shalin: That's fascinating!

Albas: We'll get to them but first of all . . . the first time I heard him in person was when he gave that address at the University of Manitoba. To say the least, it was very unusual. He was to address the graduates, and in his presentation, his convocation address, he made no mention of any glowing challenges or high hopes for the students' future. Usually you expect that, but it wasn't there, it was an off-script. On the contrary, he stated that you must head into a gloomy future with your eyes wide open. I just sketched notes here and there as he spoke very quickly. He is very fast and makes many quips. He went on to say that the mystique of this superior status of adulthood is the funniest joke of all. He said, "You will be thrust into a world governed by aging idiots."

Shalin: Yes, I recall reading about that address. Did you get a transcript?

Albas: No, no.

Shalin: Does it exist?

Albas: No, I have been looking all [over] trying to locate it.

Shalin: I read a newspaper account of his convocation speech. It is posted in the Goffman Archives, with a few snippets from his speech that show it to be one of the most remarkable addresses of its kind [**laughing**].

Albas: Exactly. Do you want me to keep on, cause if you. . . .

Shalin: Please, please go on. What you remember is precious.

Albas: OK, good [**laughing**]. He says that you will be exposed to social forces that no one seems to know much about. Not even today have we learned to make democracy safe for the world. He mentioned pitfalls associated with patriotism, nationalism, and he also brought up the disadvantages of maintaining an ethnic identity, and that features hugely in his life [in connection with] his Jewishness. We'll come to it as I get to my interview with his friend.

Shalin: Sure.

Albas: He said, "The rebellious students in the '60s were right about the weakness of institutions and the adults who people them, but they did not realize the underlying economic strength they [students] possess." He said, "The rebellion ended not with the bang but with the boutique."

Shalin: Boutique?

[Laughter]

Albas: Yes. How do you like that?

Shalin: He had a way with words!

Albas: He gets those alliterations in there, you know. He said, "The past generation whistled their way in the dark, and you will face even more uncertainty. Even the pursuit of social ambition as a goal is less possible as the prestige of class distinction fades, and people are socially left to teeter." Did you notice that Randall Collins picked up this theme? Of course I don't think there is any direct connection between these two in this regard.

Shalin: By the way, they were colleagues at the University of Pennsylvania.

Albas: Oh-h-h-h!

Shalin: Randall knew Goffman quite well.

Albas: Maybe they got to each other.

Shalin: Collins wrote an article about Goffman after his death where he mentions his exchanges with Erving.

Albas: I see.

Shalin: Go ahead, don't let me stop you.

Albas: Randall Collins indicates that those of high status, especially political figures, are much less likely to get off with a ticket today than they would have in the past, because there was much more deference given to established positions in the past. The structures were much more solid, and the macro-world determined much more what went on in micro social

settings. It is reverse over here. Goffman said again, "The only worlds left free for you to explore were those of the mind." You know, those notions that you [should] give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's [laughing]. He urged the graduates to keep their eyes open to face the world as best they could. His words were, "Remain clearheaded and curious." He also mentioned to look after the stigmatized. Just to continue on Goffman, he was born in Manville, Alberta. Did you know that?

Shalin: That's right, and then his family moved to Manitoba.

Albas: We stopped in the town and wanted to see if anybody had memories of him or whatever documents might exist pertaining to the Goffmans. We stopped in Manville a hamlet just off Highway 16, about an hour on the Yellow Head Highway from Lloydminster. We stopped at the community center, and we were fortunate enough to meet an elderly woman who remembered the family. She showed us a photograph of Max Goffman's general store.

Shalin: Yes, the dry goods store, but wasn't it in Dauphin?

Albas: No, no, no. That was Manville, Alberta.

Shalin: Oh, that must have been before the family moved to Dauphin, Manitoba! Goffman must have been two years old at the time or something.

Albas: Yes, he was very young. In fact, on one of your . . . I didn't pull down any of those [interviews on the Goffman site], but judging from the captions, it sounded like she might be been a relative of Goffman's.

Shalin: Yes, I interviewed Goffman's sister, cousin, and other relatives.

Albas: I had a student here at U of M who came from Calgary, probably a daughter of the mother who suckled them both. The grandmother and mother came down to Manitoba to see Goffman and hear his presentation. I am getting what I am about to say my student. The student was with her grandma – Goffman saw them on the way out from the auditorium. He briefly stopped, gave her [grandmother] a peck on the cheek and said, "I am sorry I am here on business. I can only deal with business." And he went off with a group of academics who he had been studying with him at the University of Chicago. Another little point I should mention about his presentation at U of M [has to do] with the picture that they were going to take of him while he was giving the address. Did I tell you about that?

Shalin: No, I don't think so.

Albas: A photographer came to take his picture. He [Goffman] stopped his address and said, "Stop!" The photographer smiled and briefly put down his camera and aimed it again. And Goffman said, "I mean stop. If you don't stop, I am ending the address."

Shalin: Vow!

Albas: The president, as well as everyone else, was shocked, of course [laughing]. The president said, "I think he means it." So the photographer left. It was a dramatic scene.

Shalin: I am sure everybody was startled.

Albas: Everyone was startled. Anyway, getting back to the Goffman store, they had a book that dealt with the history of the town. In it there was a picture of the interior of Goffman store. As you might well expect, it serviced a few hundred customers at most. It was very basic. In the store we have two dapper looking young men on either side of a potbellied stove, one of which is Max and the other his brother. At some distance off is a much larger man with a hat and a bowtie. On the other hand, the two Goffmans had regular ties. The stove pipe from the stove went about three-quarters of the way up to the ceiling and made a ninety degree turn. It seemed to expel smoke on the side wall rather than from the roof. Of course, the reason for that ninety degree turn and a lot of exposed stove pipe in the store is to help keep the store warm in the winter. See what I mean?

Shalin: Right. It was a very old-fashioned way of warming up.

Albas: And the store was packed to the brim. It would have been hard to move in it. On the counter you have a washboard and a tub; you have woolen socks hanging down from the ceiling, and on top numerous pails, dust penetrating from what seems like a support for the ceiling. I see here a lot of Roger's Golden Syrup cans piled up on the floor. It was very very basic. One of the interesting things that he said on the fly at that convocation address was to the effect that, "One is born near a granary and spends the rest of his life suppressing it."

Shalin: Say it again?

Albas: "One is born near a granary and spends the rest of his life suppressing it." And I thought, "In the impression management terms – concealing it." Does it make sense?

Shalin: Yes, yes, yes.

Albas: So one wonders . . . You know that Scheff makes a lot of shame, that we tend to be very touchy about it. He postulates that Goffman suffered from a life saturated with shame. Perhaps it started right here because they lost their business, they went bankrupt.

Shalin: I didn't know that!

Albas: Oh yes. They had economic difficulties, in the early days especially. . . . He got a loan from the Jewish association in Winnipeg. He came here single, Max Goffman, then he met Mrs. Goffman.

Shalin: Anne Averbach was her name.

Albas: They earned their way of living at Manville with dry goods store, and it failed. I think they went to another place before eventually getting to Dauphin. In Dauphin there was . . . Well, I should say another thing. When they were in Manville, they being Jewish, they probably wouldn't be fully socially integrated in the town. But there was a Jewish doctor, just down the road, in the town of Vermillion. It is at most a half an hour away from Manville. And they did visit with the Jewish doctor's family there. I got that from the son of the doctor who was in Vermillion at the time. He said that the Goffmans used to come to visit.

Shalin: For medical reasons?

Albas: Oh, I think it was social. Because there were no other Jewish people around. It would be very hard to find friends at that time, I suppose. They wouldn't have that feeling of being with one's own kind and getting that feeling of social wholeness and authenticity. You understand what I mean?

Shalin: Aha.

Albas: He indicated that these were mostly social visits. An interesting thing is that I find this pattern continuing. They very frequently see and interact with people who had considerable social status. It starts off with the doctor in Vermillion. Now, they got to Dauphin where there were 17 Jewish families, a lot more [than in Manville], but they still are a minority. And while there is no overt discrimination, only incidental hints here and there, the Jews lived in a three block radius of each other. They were geographically close. One of their friends – this is from an interview I got from a student of mine who went to

her dad for the information, and we sent back the Winkin transcript several times to help stimulate memory and for cross-verification. Do you understand what I mean?

Shalin: Amazing, you are sitting on a treasure chest!

Albas: [**Laughing**]. It is Syva Lee Katz who is the daughter of the friend of Goffman's. Does that make sense?

Shalin: Yes, yes.

Albas: Anyway, Avron Katz, whose father was Alec Katz, was a lawyer, again a high status person in the town.

Shalin: Katz spelled as . . .

Albas: K-a-t-z.

Shalin: I see, Katz.

Albas: You say, "Kahtz"?

Shalin: I hail from Russia where the pronunciation of that name might be different.

Albas: They lived two blocks away from the Goffmans. He [Avron] was about two years younger than Goffman but, as he indicated, they visited a lot, especially at Goffman's home. He doesn't remember the Goffmans coming over to his home very often. He said that both parents spoke with very thick Eastern European accent. Again, perhaps you are getting that shame coefficient that . . . what's his name is talking about?

Shalin: Tom Scheff.

Albas: Scheff. Every time your parents open their mouths, you hear that heavy heavy accent, you are a minority. Then there is that lady's ready-to-wear store. Avron Katz stresses that he [Max Goffman] didn't make his money so much from the store as he did from his frequent trips to Winnipeg to play the stock market [**laughing**].

Shalin: Really?

Albas: Yes, talking about getting your role models early! You know Goffman

– stocks were a very important part of his persona.

Shalin: Knowing how to run your game.

Albas: Exactly. And of course, Goffman's dad was a huge card player. He loved to play cards. So Goffman would have picked this up as a young child very early on, and he became a really hard gambler, so much so that they thought he had an inside information. I don't think it is random that he created these concepts of main involvement, side involvement, dominant involvement, subordinate involvement – it probably comes out of card playing.

Shalin: And situational improprieties.

Albas: Exactly, and getting back to the situational – I always wondered why it is that Goffman emphasized the concept of the situational identity but [wrote] very little about biographical identity. And the line where he says that we are born near a granary and spend the rest of our lives trying to suppress it – makes a lot of sense. Because if you are dealing with the biographical, you have to bring out more details about yourself. You know what I mean?

Shalin: I think you are right on target.

Albas: Thank you. Anyway, Avron is adamant that Max made much of his money from the stock market and not the store. See, what happened here, I gave to – what's his name? – Winkin, who was writing [Goffman's biography].

Shalin: Winkin.

Albas: I gave to [Avron's] daughter Winkin's biography and asked her to take it to her dad and ask him to go over it with a fine toothcomb.

Shalin: Who is she?

Albas: She is the daughter of Avron Katz. She was a student of mine, we had a lot of exchanges, and I wanted to make sure I had double verifications [of facts].

Shalin: And then you passed it on to . . .

Albas: . . . her father, who was Erving Goffman's friend. . . .

Shalin: So it was Avron who was Goffman's friend.

Albas: Yes. He is a son of Alex Katz, the one who mixed very well in Dauphin's society. Of course, a lawyer is a person of high status with a large diversified clientele. Again, you notice a regularity in here: in Manville their friend was [a person of] high status, the doctor. In Dauphin, a close friend a person of high status – the lawyer. There seems to be a theme in here that Goffman continued. Did you notice that, do you see what I mean?

Shalin: Oh, yes. There are reports indicating that it was a pretty competitive world in Dauphin and Manitoba where some members of the Jewish community moved to the more affluent parts of town while others lacked the resources to do the same. There were some tensions along those lines.

Albas: Oh, yes, there were huge tensions. There was a lot of competitiveness. Did you notice Goffman's first paper?

Shalin: On symbols of class status?

Albas: He says one of the indicators of status is who you hang around with. If your friends are high status, then some of it rubs off on you. Today they call it "Birging". I don't know if you are familiar with the term. It's an acronym, meaning basking in the reflected glory of the high status.

Shalin: No, I am unfamiliar with the term.

Albas: It fits one of the observations in his paper on symbols of status.

Shalin: Yes, "Symbols of Class Status," the paper he published in 1951 in the *British Journal of Sociology*.

Albas: He was very sensitive about the issue of class. Of course, he studied with a person who focused on class, [Lloyd] Warner who himself came from a highly status inconsistent family background. See what I mean [**laughing**]?

Shalin: Status-challenged family background.

Albas: Yes, exactly. [Gerhard] Lenski had the concept of status inconsistency – remember? – high in some and low in others. He [Goffman] makes a lot of observations on that in his article. He indicates that you have your more favorable components and your less favorable ones, and on balance you get some placement. There are plusses and the negatives. Anyway, that is a pervasive theme with him. You see it coming from his early biography. . . . Avron was taken with the fact, and he was quite adamant about it, that

Winkin failed to mention one of the major sources of [Max] Goffman's income, because Goffman did well in Dauphin. Avron thinks that the major factor behind this was his buying and selling stocks on the Winnipeg stock exchange.

Shalin: More than his income from the-ready-to wear store?

Albas: Yes. And of course in sociology you don't have only materialists like Marx emphasizing that the way one earns one's living shapes one's [personality]. Avron said that Max left the store to come to Winnipeg and finally took a seat on the stock exchange. He thinks that was the reason he [Max] left Dauphin. And here is the direct quote: "They were definitely one of the rich families in Dauphin at the time." That is a straight quote [from the interview that Syva Lee Wildenmann took from her father]. Again, what you have here is the thick eastern accent, the past bankruptcy, plus the fact that they were ethnically marginal in the town. Add to this that they were rich, and you see the status inconsistency here. And also a close friend like the lawyer. He [Avron] says they had a large well appointed home, but the interesting thing here was that their house had a barn in the backyard [laughing].

Shalin: So Erving's reference to the granary could have been literally biographical.

Albas: That's what I wondered too.

Shalin: It isn't clear what it was used for.

Albas: Well, it was probably where the horses used to be kept, the earlier mode of transportation before the vehicle replaced the horse, so it was probably . . .

Shalin: . . . a car garage.

Albas: Yes. It is a conjecture on my part. His experience of growing up with inconsistent statuses probably sensitized him to the importance of class factors in everyday life.

Shalin: The upward social mobility from the granary to horses to car garage, and so on.

Albas: Exactly. Then I remember the line in his piece on methodology that Lofland reprinted in *Urban Life*.

Shalin: Yes, Erving's talk "On Fieldwork."

Albas: Yes. He mentions there that sometimes you have to make yourself look like a horse's ass. Do you remember that line?

Shalin: Is it in his talk "On Fieldwork"?

Albas: Yes.

Shalin: I know he referred in his presidential address to the art of making an ass of oneself.

Albas: He says you may have to make yourself look like a horse's ass to get rich information.

Shalin: And that's all right if you can get your data this way.

Albas: I am not sure in this regard, but they would probably have to make use of horses, especially when they were in Manville. They would have had rides behind a horse.

Shalin: That makes sense. Goffman was born in 1922, so I imagine they did not have a car right there.

Albas: Yes, they were economically challenged. There simply weren't many customers around, and they simply could not afford those fancy novelties that were coming out. Now, Avron's older sister was a very close friend of Goffman's sister, Frances.

Shalin: What is the name of Avron's sister?

Albas: I don't have the name here, but Avron mentions here that "my older sister was a very close friend of Goffman's sister."

Shalin: I will ask Frances about her friend. She probably remembers her.

Albas: Right. I am sure, they were very close. When we were carrying out these interviews back and forth via his daughter, he phoned up Frances in Los Angeles. She was sleeping that afternoon, so we spoke to Chuck.

Shalin: Chuck Bay, Frances's husband.

Albas: They were close friends, they were competitors on the same block.

Shalin: "They" meaning Chuck Bay and . . .

Albas: And Goffmans. They were both in the store business. And then he [Avron] says, "As a child I spent a great deal of time at the Goffman's home." That's a straight quote. And he goes on to describe Goffman physically: "He was small and boyish looking, somewhat like a Mickey Rooney type." I thought it was kind of interesting, a Mickey Rooney type of appearance.

Shalin: Max Goffman was a similar type, I understand.

Albas: Oh, yes. When you look at the picture where you have two Goffmans on either side of the stove, they look a lot like Erving.

Shalin: You have that picture?

Albas: Yes.

Shalin: I wonder if you can make a copy of it.

Albas: I've written all over it, but I'll see if I can duplicate it. It is taken from the yearbook . . . not from the year book but from the history book of the town. . . . It is in Manville.

Shalin: If you can locate the reference to this book maybe I can obtain it through the interlibrary loan.

Albas: I'll see if I can get it when I pass through the town again.

Shalin: That would be great. I keep interrupting you, but what you are saying is unique. Your story is filling many gaps. Go ahead.

Albas: Avron said, "Even though Erving was older, he didn't mind spending time with me. I don't remember him coming over to our house very much, but I do remember spending time at his house. We would especially spend a lot of time in his bedroom." And then he says, "one pastime we shared was one that we had to hide from our parents. Erving would get copies of Esquire magazine." He said, "It was the closest thing to a 'girlie' magazine that we could get our hands on."

[Laughter]

Then he says, "I was about 9 or 10 and he was about 11 or 12. He would have me go through the magazines and mark the pages that had the sexiest pictures. Then we would sit together looking at the pictures and discussing them." And I said, could this be . . .

Shalin: . . . Another source of Erving's creativity.

Albas: E-e-xactly!

Shalin: Goffman uses a lot of examples drawn from this area of life.

Albas: Yes. And you notice his book on *Gender Advertisements* – this seems to me a direct link to Gender Advertisements. There is a line in Winkin's biography . . .

Shalin: You seem to say "Witkin" – do you mean "Winkin"?

Albas: It is spelled W-i-n-k-i-n.

Shalin: Is it in French?

Albas: There is one in French and there is also one in English. He sent it to me before it was published. I don't know if it is published now, but he was working on it at the time.

Shalin: Winkin published a collection of Goffman articles in French, with a 50 page biographical introduction, but what you have is in English.

Albas: Yes.

Shalin: Has it been published?

Albas: I don't know. I saw a recent publication with his name on it.

Shalin: He has published three articles on Goffman where he cites a few episodes from Erving's life.

Albas: This is a longer one where he uses Bourdieu's analytical concept of habitus. In that biography one of his respondents says that Goffman only felt comfortable teaching when he had slides to show. Again, I think you can see his returning back to the time when he spent time with Avron going through these pictures. He rehearsed and rehearsed, and it became second nature to him. It is a lot easier for him to make a presentation under those circumstances. See what I mean?

Shalin: A lot of people mention Goffman showing slides in his classes. Some found it fascinating, like Eviatar Zerubavel, others found the format boring.

Albas: Then there is a mention of this laboratory. He had that Gilbert set that he talks about: "We are not going to advance by putting on a uniform like a chemist and have our little tool props in front of us. We have to get our hands dirty," so to speak. And of course there were explosions in the room that he [Avron] talks about. Those are well known.

Shalin: In his basement.

Albas: Yes, but in Dauphin he also had [a lab] in his bedroom. He also goes on to say, "I don't remember him having a lot of friends." That's another thing that goes along with Goffman, his paucity of friends. He indicates in here [in Avron's interview] that "he wasn't a very sociable person." This again, I think, makes sense if we take Scheff's notion of shame and he being saturated with it. When one is saturated with shame, one does not make oneself highly visible.

Shalin: That's why Goffman didn't like his picture taken.

Albas: Perhaps. It is of course only a conjecture. Then it says, "He was extremely bright but not tolerant of people who were not in his league." He said that he found him "aloof and distant." "Furthermore," he goes on, "even though he did spend time with me, I had a feeling that he was bringing himself down to my level in order to interact with me." This is the son of a lawyer talking, two years younger [than Goffman]. One of the titles [of memoirs] that you sent me, the one from Bill Gamson, says, "A Stranger Determined to Remain That." It resonates.

In terms of Jewishness, he didn't appear to internalize its precepts. One story that his friend told was about a professional slaughterer in Dauphin – you know what I am talking about?

Shalin: Right, the shochet.

Albas: Yes, shochet. He couldn't make a living, so he left. Avron's mom, the lawyer's wife, had a live chicken, and she wanted to have some meat, so the chicken had to be slaughtered in a humane way. So Avron's mom mentioned this to Erving who came to her assistance. He chased the chicken and grabbed it, got an ax and beheaded the chicken on a block. Of course, it ran around for a while without a head, you know, before [you could] put it into the

chicken soup [**laughing**]. Mom was shocked by what she saw, and after that she began to order meat from a kosher butcher in Winnipeg.

[**Laughter**]

Shalin: And this is Avron's mother?

Albas: Yes, the wife of the lawyer, the high status man.

Shalin: And what is the name of Avron's daughter?

Albas: S-y-v-a, hyphen, L-e-e Katz. She was married, but she is no longer with that husband, and her current married name is Wildenmann – W-i-l-d-e-n-m-a-n-n.

Shalin: Is she alive?

Albas: Yes. They of course lived very much like secular Jews, they were not orthodox Jews. He also appeared not be very proud of his heritage [Goffman]. In his biography Yves says that Goffman would spice his language with a Yiddish word here and there, and Avron said, "I am very surprised with that. It was very out of character for him when we were kids." In *Presentation of Self and Everyday Life* he makes a lot of the notion of self-made [?] character. Furthermore, Avron says that "he [Goffman] had a bar mitzvah, a bar mitzvah of sorts just like mine, but it was more like a party than a real bar mitzvah if you compare it to what people in Winnipeg had." Suppose that some of these rites of passage to the degree that you have to invest a lot of yourself and learn the lines and the history of the Jewish people . . .

Shalin: . . . recite your Torah portion.

Albas: Yes, the more you invest yourself in something, the more committed you tend to be to it. Of course he didn't have those advantages that came with "embracing the identity," to use Goffman's word. You know, he talks about "role distance," "role embracement"?

Shalin: That's right. You distance yourself from your past rather than embrace it.

Albas: Yes, exactly. Again, we are getting to that notion of shame, perhaps. He says, "I remember one year during the Jewish High Holidays, Erving and I did not attend school as was customary for Jewish children in the

town." And he [Avron] says, "When school was over and the non-Jewish children returned home, they saw us and asked us why we weren't in school. Erving made up different excuses. He did not admit that he missed school because he was Jewish." Do you remember his early piece on face-work? Also, you will notice that his first marriage was not to a Jewish woman.

Shalin: I think both of his marriages were not to Jewish women. Schuyler Choate was of protestant stock.

Albas: Yes, she was what they call a "Brahmin."

Shalin: A Boston Brahmin.

Albas: His girlfriend in Toronto when he went there – her parents were both professors, so she would have been extremely high status.

Shalin: That's not Schuyler?

Albas: No, Elizabeth Bott.

Shalin: Oh, yes. By the way, she contributed a memoir as well.

Albas: Yes, I saw that.

Shalin: Did you read it?

Albas: No, I haven't had a chance. I've been going nights and days here, you know. I am lucky I just got a minute.

Shalin: And the two were girl-friend/boy-friend in Toronto?

Albas: Yes. He always went to the higher status. In the university it couldn't get better – one was the head of the psychology department, the other was a professor in it, you know, and here is their daughter. They both decided to go to Chicago. In Chicago I was talking to – what the heck is his name? It will come to me.

Shalin: Professor or a fellow student?

Albas: He would be a student at the time of Goffman.

Shalin: Joe Gusfield, Saul Mendlovitz, Howard Becker?

Albas: None of those.

Shalin: Habenstein?

Albas: No. I know Habenstein with his funeral [studies]. He did a book with Elkin. You know *Child and Society*?

Shalin: Kai Erikson?

Albas: No. The name will come back to me. He told me that he was friends with Elizabeth Bott. She came over . . .

Shalin: Gerry Handel by any chance?

Albas: Handel. Gerald Handel [**laughing**]. Gerald Handel told me that he was friends with Elizabeth, they were in Human Development or something like that. It wasn't exactly sociology, it was more psych. He said Goffman came to his apartment with Elizabeth, and the first thing Goffman does is go over to his bookshelf, looks through and says, "Pretty ordinary." This made him feel deflated as heck [**laughing**]. Again, as Scheff indicates, shame is associated with aggression. Shame and aggression go together. This gesture was a pretty aggressive move in terms of a putdown. He [Gerry Handel] said he certainly felt put down by the statement. Anyway, to continue . . .

Shalin: Daniel, this is just golden. I thought you would just talk about the University of Manitoba episode, and here you are with all these stories. Go ahead.

Albas: Thank you. Another student – he must have been a student of mine 25-30 years ago, said his mom was a girlfriend of Goffman's and he remembers his mom telling him that at one point Erving [used to carry] a huge tome authored by Malinowski. She remembers it was titled *The Sexual Lives of the Savages*. She asked, "Why do you do that?" And he said, "Because it looks impressive."

Shalin: [**Laughing**]

Albas: Here you have a case of dramatic realization long before his fieldwork on the Shetland isles.

Shalin: It was an embodied version of the presentation of self.

Albas: Exactly.

Shalin: It was not Elizabeth?

Albas: Oh, no. This happened in Winnipeg.

Shalin: So in Winnipeg Erving had several girlfriends?

Albas: Oh, yes. He did. She would have been one of his girlfriends. He dated, he was quite the Romeo, he enjoyed company of the opposite sex. Speaking of the opposite sex, do you remember the one line, I forgot where I read it; I think it was at a funeral where someone mentioned that Goffman mentioned to him, "You forget that I grew up in a town where [speaking] Yiddish was equated with [being] a homosexual."

Shalin: It was Dell Hymes who remembers this encounter.

Albas: Dell Hymes, that's exactly it. Again, you can see that underlying notion of shame.

Shalin: Rage and shame trading places.

Albas: It makes sense, he went on his own a lot. His depression may have been related to that as well. He left the university without completing his degree. He went to work for ammunition's company in Transcona, which was a very working class part of the city, and he worked the midnight shift. That's another interesting thing – why would you go to work on the graveyard shift?

Shalin: Where was it?

Albas: In Transcona, a suburb just on the outside of Winnipeg.

Shalin: He did not finish his studies at the University of Manitoba and just dropped out?

Albas: Yes. He just dropped out.

Shalin: Was he in his second or third year?

Albas: Third year.

Shalin: He quit cold turkey and went to work.

Albas: Yes, just cold turkey. His dad said, "If you are not going to be in

school, come and work in the store.” Goffman was not going there [laughing]. For the Jewish people working in a clothing store means being in the rag trade – you are not given much status.

Shalin: You are a peddler.

Albas: Y-e-e-eh. You know, he has a lot of references to peddlers. These things come up. Another thing, Avron says, about Goffman that surprised his friends was that one time a cat ran up a tree so high that it was afraid to come down. This widely shared perception of the event gave him heroic status, or in his terms “character” – poise under pressure. I gave them [Avron and Syva] Winkin’s biography to read and asked how close it fits your perception of what happened at the time. Avron is surprised to find that another friend, closer in age to Goffman, intimates that Goffman may have been responsible for the cat’s behavior. He suggests that Goffman fed the cat alcohol that he himself distilled.

[Laughter]

The cat “under the influence” climbed to dizzying heights and was too afraid to move. Avron said that the above story was plausible as Erving was bright but impossible. He was always into tricks. It is, perhaps, episodes like these that provide the background for his concept of “frames” as well as his greater emphasis on closed, suspicion, and pretense awareness contexts than open awareness ones [?]... Yes, mischief. He was called “goofy” at the time. He was all out to break the rules or what have you.

Shalin: Eli Bay’s father called him “goofy Goffman”

Albas: Avron says, “People wouldn’t so much say it to his face as behind his back.” I was thinking of that *Esquire* magazine episode. It fits the concept, he had that concept of segregating audiences, you know, front region and the back regions. Goffman’s whole dramaturgical model had much of its basis in his early home life. His mom was an amateur thespian, she put on the plays in Dauphin. Avron says she was a very beautiful woman. He had a particular memory of her performing in a local production of the Mikado, and he remembers her being on stage, playing her part in full dress, makeup and everything on, and then running home to do an errand and then running back. He says there was that incongruity of the uniform, the costume, the makeup, and the streets. Goffman’s mom, plus his sister, would have talked

the stage at the dinner table, indeed, almost anywhere, as you can well expect.

Shalin: Erving's sister also became an actress, and she is quite well known. She was inducted into the Canadian Hall of Fame.

Albas: Yes, exactly. You can see here Goffman's early socialization and how it [influenced] his dramaturgical perspective. You know that book, *Presentation of Self*, was really innovative.

Shalin: Yes, it is brilliant.

Albas: And you can see the groundwork being laid at home with his mom being in charge and his sister doing so well as an actress. You can imagine the talk around the dinner table. This would have been part of Goffman's everyday life. Plus, add to this his dad's propensity to be "where the action is" – playing poker as well as investing in the stock market in the early 1940s and doing very well. Later on Goffman took pride in the fact that even though he was the highest paid sociologist then (I think he was [earning] \$30,000), he bragged that he had made at least one third more of his income in the stock market. Again, there is this continuity with his father as a role model, the early formation of Goffman through his home life.

Another point that I have here is that John Johnson, one of the editors of *Symbolic Interaction*, indicates that apparently on the day when John Kennedy was assassinated, Goffman was giving a presentation, I gather to graduate students at Johnson's [session?]. Johnson said, "When the news came out, Goffman's first thought was – 'stock market!'" Not about how bad things were but that he had to go out and sell. Again, you can see how much he embraced the financial part of his life, much like his dad did in Dauphin and Winnipeg. [Note that a principle of incongruity pervades his work].

Shalin: Did you read about that or you heard it from Johnson?

Albas: I heard it from Johnson directly.

Shalin: He did not witness this first hand, just heard about it.

Albas: I was telling him that I was interested in Goffman, and he said, "Well, I will tell you one anecdote that I have." And that's when he told me the story.

Shalin: He must have heard it from someone else.

Albas: I thought he was present at the time. I think he [Goffman] was talking to students.

Shalin: And then the news came in.

Albas: Right, and that is how he reacted.

And I think that's about it for Goffman that I have here, anyway. Let's see, you know Carol Gardner said, "I don't have words enough to describe Goffman's generosity." There is a point in Yves's biography when Bott indicates that she had an assignment to do on slides or something like that, and Goffman gave her so many leads that she got an "A" whereas Goffman only got a "D." That shows the generosity that was also a part of his character.

Shalin: And Winkin cites this story in his biography?

Albas: Yes.

Shalin: Because that is what Elizabeth Bott wrote for the Goffman Archives. She says that Goffman told her, "You are just an exam passer, I am an unrecognized genius."

Albas: [**Laughing**]. Again, that generosity was there. He was a complex person.

Shalin: You say that you have this biography of Winkin – is it a manuscript or a published work?

Albas: At the time, when he sent it to me, it was not published. He just sent it as a work in progress.

Shalin: Was it a substantial piece?

Albas: I'll go get it, it is on my desk.

[Pause]

Albas: Yves Winkin – W-i-n-k-i-n. And it is "Erving Goffman: An Ethnographic Life." It says, "This is a manuscript in progress, spellings will be checked, syntax will be corrected" things like that.

Shalin: How long is it?

Albas: It's 70 pages.

Shalin: I don't know if you would be comfortable sharing it. I would like to take a look at it, but it's your call.

Albas: Oh, I will be happy to share it.

Shalin: I would be grateful if you could copy it or scan for PDF, whichever is convenient.

Albas: Sure.

Shalin: Anything else comes to mind? By the way, I jotted down some questions, and once your memories taper off, I would like to revisit a few points you made. How tall do you think Goffman was?

Albas: He was just about five feet.

Shalin: Really?

Albas: Not too tall.

Shalin: The lowest estimate I heard was 5'1, the tallest – 5'8.

Albas: I think he was 5'3 or 5'4.

Shalin: I looked at the photographs that France showed me, pictures taken at her wedding, the two seemed pretty close in height, and she was like 5'2 or 5'3.

Albas: Avron says he was just about as tall as his mom, and she was very petite.

Shalin: His mom was close to 5 feet.

Albas: Scheff makes a lot of the fact that he was vertically challenged.

Shalin: This is in his book *Goffman Unbound*?

Albas: Yes.

Shalin: I read an introductory chapter but I never worked my way through it. This is something I will do some day.

Albas: I really enjoyed this book. I found it really stimulating. Erving was kind of hard on him as a student, but he thought he also played a part in shaming Goffman when he was teaching. He thought he got his pay back. His hypothesis is that shame produces aggression. He uses the concept at the international level with people like Hitler and Lieutenant Kally in Vietnam. He indicates that Kally suffered a life of shame. . . . He hints that he and other graduate students inflicted shame directly upon him.

Shalin: On Goffman? In which way?

Albas: They didn't think Goffman was teaching in a way that they had been exposed to by people like Shibutani. It was only much later that he realized the wisdom, the originality of the man. But he thought that the students [Goffman lectured] did because they gave him a standing ovation when he finished the class: "Students appreciated him, but we the graduate students did not." Very interesting.

Shalin: So you encountered Erving only once during his address at Winnipeg.

Albas: That's right.

Shalin: You tried to locate it but couldn't.

Albas: Yes. We tried to locate the talk but we couldn't get it. He would not give any of his notes to the press reporter who asked for them.

Shalin: The only place where it might exist, then, is in Erving's own archives, which he closed, I understand.

Albas: Right.

Shalin: You said there may be records of classes he took. If you could locate those, that would be valuable. Then we can see how he grew away from the sciences. Do you know if Avron is alive?

Albas: I am not sure if he is still alive.

Shalin: Are you in touch with his daughter?

Albas: No, I haven't been since she left.

Shalin: You did not communicate with her for decades.

Albas: Maybe a decade, yes.

Shalin: Perhaps there is a way to contact her. If you find out how to locate her, that would be helpful.

Albas: I'll do that.

Shalin: You mentioned Erving's Jewishness – do you have any more thoughts on this subject besides the fact that he was not a practicing Jew?

Albas: Yes, that he had some shame associated with it in the sense that he would not acknowledge the fact that he did not attend school because of his Jewishness.

Shalin: He resorted to accounts to cover up the fact.

Albas: Yes, he diverted [attention] from it. I can see that playing a part in his paper "On Face-Work." You know, it was one of his first ones?

Shalin: Yes, I think he wrote it about '57.

Albas: Oh, no, it would be a lot earlier than that.

Shalin: His first publication was in 1951, "Symbols of Class Status." In 1952 came out his second piece "On Cooling the Mark Out." He defended his dissertation in 1953. In 1954-56 Erving was working in the Institute of Mental Health, which is where he wrote his paper "On Face-Work" along with other essays like "Moral Career of Mental Patient." Goffman collected them in *Interaction Rituals*.

Albas: That's right. That was '67.

Shalin: Yes, it came out in 1967.

Albas: I am suspicious that this work was written in 1955-56.

Shalin: Did you hear anything about his first wife?

Albas: No, the only thing I heard was people using his model to interpret what had happened. When she took her life, she did not use the big stage like San Francisco bridge; she took a very small stage.

Shalin: Right, Richmond-San Rafael Bridge.

Albas: It kind of contradicted his dramaturgical model, his idea of giving a performance. She didn't face the city, she faced the ocean [absence of an audience].

Shalin: Did people say why she committed suicide?

Albas: They thought she was getting back at Goffman.

Shalin: Oh.

Albas: Some people thought he was kind of hard to live with. Maybe he played a part, but that is something I know nothing about. It is all hearsay.

Shalin: Right. But it tells us something about the public perception. And the sense you got was that the choice of suicide venue was to avoid a big splash? Yet, somehow she might have wanted to get at Goffman. I was told that she was only the second person who committed suicide at this location.

Albas: She was only the second person?

Shalin: Yes. And the folk interpretation was that it had some significance. It was not meant to be a big, splashy gesture.

Albas: You know from Garfinkel that one could make sense of absolute nonsense. You remember Garfinkel's experiment where he had medical students give a personal problem to a therapist in a form that could be answered "yes or no"? The answers given were random yet most students concluded that the experience made sense.

Shalin: That was Garfinkel's experiment.

Albas: Yes, the danger [is that] we can make sense of absolute nonsense. This is one of the interpretations that were going about.

Shalin: You mentioned John Johnson's story about Goffman's reaction to the Kennedy assassination; you told me about the reaction to Schuyler's suicide – were there any further elaborations of that? Was there any indication that she was mentally disturbed?

Albas: Oh, yes. According to Winkin, she did apparently suffer from mental difficulties. But I have absolutely no data, and I don't like to talk when I don't have data [**laughing**].

Shalin: Of course. Speaking of hearsay, one thing I discovered about the Goffman archives is that even hearsay is a form of data. My focus was exclusively on Goffman at first, then I heard people talking about their

teachers, their education, other academics, and I realized that the EGA can illuminate how memory works, the way people remember things, how the same event or fact, like Erving's height, is refracted in different minds. So even the second and third-hand accounts can be of interest. Any other stories you might have come across, whatever their provenance?

Albas: Well, some people thought he had his head so high in the air that he thought he was above the crowd.

Shalin: Meaning he had a high opinion of himself.

Albas: Yes. There were quite a few of those kinds of observations, usually from graduate students, but they usually were the disaffected ones. If he shamed them, they might have shown aggression in return. Do you see the cycle?

Shalin: Yes, it is passed along from one generation to another.

Albas: So I have heard those.

Shalin: Anything else about Goffman in the classroom besides his fondness for slide shows?

Albas: Gary Fine really liked him. You know Gary Fine?

Shalin: Sure.

Albas: I heard others say that he was not very good in the classroom. On the other hand, Scheff said the students gave him a standing ovation at the end of the year. That was the class [that he taught] while he was writing *Stigma*. It's pretty hard not to get involved in stigma – it is so humane and compelling. I can see the students being affected in a very positive way. Anybody who was showing such concern would have to be a v-e-e-ry nice person [**laughing**].

Shalin: It was extremely discerning, compassionate.

Albas: Very perspicacious.

Shalin: Even though he himself could be stigmatizing sometimes.

Albas: Yes, that's the strange thing for me.

Shalin: You know what Auden wrote in his 1939 poem, "People who were done evil to, do evil in return." [The right quotation is, "Those to whom evil is done / Do evil in return"]

Albas: That's right.

Shalin: This is the cycle I see in Russian history. Erving might have been passing his own stigma down the road.

Albas: Exactly.

Shalin: What about his politics? Any thoughts on that?

Albas: Not political.

Shalin: Apolitical?

Albas: He was apolitical. This is one thing that differentiated him from his peers in Winnipeg. Most of these peers were concerned about socialism and the plight of the working class. He had no interest in this at all. You notice in *Frame Analysis* he says something to the effect that, "Some people complain about the fact that I don't make much mention of politics, [but] my observation is that when it comes to class issues, sleep comes quickly. All I want to do is watch how they snore."

Shalin: It's a very stark passage – I don't disturb the slumber of classes, I just want to hear them snore.

Albas: Yes.

Shalin: I try to figure out how much of this is bravado, how much a belle mot, and how much he was really masking his compassion.

Albas: That's right.

Shalin: What you said about Erving and sexuality was of interest. There are plenty of sexually charged passages and examples he brings up in his writing.

Albas: Oh, yes, sure.

Shalin: I wonder if therein we can find some more clues to his sociological imagination.

Albas: That could very well be. I don't know much about that other than his interest in young women at the time.

Shalin: And then he dated prodigiously in Toronto.

Albas: Not in Toronto. I think he was mostly with Elizabeth Bott. I think he was quite exclusive in Toronto. I gather he was pretty exclusive. In Winnipeg he had several dates. But I think in Toronto he was pretty exclusive, he was with Elizabeth Bott. And again, as I indicated, she was high class. There seems to be that continuity.

Shalin: I was also wondering that she departed for England before Goffman. I thought his decision to do his fieldwork in Shetlands might have had something to do with this fact.

Albas: That could be.

Shalin: It's just a hypothesis.

Albas: What I heard in that regard was that Warner was asked to send somebody to do a community study, and I think he saw Goffman as the most brilliant of his students and so approached him. That's how I think he got there.

Shalin: It is possible that Erving got a stint in Europe first, and that might have influenced Elizabeth's decision.

Albas: Sure, sure. Both of her parents being profs, they would have had extra income and could have easily sent her to those fine European places.

Shalin: Then Erving met Schuyler, a fellow student at the University of Chicago, and she defended in 1950 a very interesting thesis on the personality traits of upper class women. And she quotes Erving in her thesis.

Albas: Interesting.

Shalin: Erving defended his thesis in 1949 and she did hers a year later. Both talk about class status and how it could be signaled; there is a lot of continuity in their professional interests.

Albas: He does that in his paper on status systems. He mentions five or six restraints on status faking. First being moral, then practical limits, etc.

Shalin: Right, I spied in that piece a footnote on breeding where he says that in women large breasts would be a symbol of class status and in men that would be their height, their stature. I read it and I thought, "H-m-m."

Albas: Exactly: Durkheim mentions height in *Division of Labor*.

[**Laughter**].

Shalin: I don't remember that.

Albas: In there he mentions that upper classes, because of good nutrition and absence of hard work, will tend over time to have greater height and body bulk.

Shalin: Interesting. That's what Erving seems to be saying.

Albas: It is mentioned in Durkheim's *Division of Labor*. I remember reading it way back when.

Shalin: I must have missed it when I read it, which was a long time ago. Now it would have jumped at me.

Albas: Exactly [**laughing**]!

Shalin: I know I am taxing you, and I am so grateful for your time. We shall be winding down shortly. Perhaps we could come back to it once you read the transcript.

Albas: Sure.

Shalin: More memories might come back to you when you go through the text. I have noticed that people sometimes change their views of Goffman as they grow older, becoming more critical of his exclusive focus on micro issues. I hypothesized that perhaps we are more attuned to Goffman's emphasis on self-presentation when we are young and moving up, when we are struggling to be noticed, but once we have settled in our skins, such concerns tend to fade off. I want to ask you if your take on Goffman has changed over time.

Albas: Oh, it sure didn't. He is the genius of our time, I think.

Shalin: He is one of the very few. Our field abounds in talent, I believe, but true genius is very rare.

Albas: Yes, I think so.

Shalin: Part of the Goffman phenomenon might be that he was not just a sociologist. I find him more interesting from the philosophical and philological standpoint.

Albas: Yes.

Shalin: Which is why there might not be many student who walk in his steps, who still carry the torch.

Albas: Yes, somewhat like Simmel. A style [of his own].

Shalin: To wind it down, you said you can share the biography of Goffman. Do you have an email address?

Albas: Ye-e-eh, sure, but . . .

Shalin: I can dictate to you my address, or perhaps give it to your secretary. Then you said you have that photo but that it is marked.

Albas: Badly marked. If we pass through Manville, I'll see if we could . . .

Shalin: . . . locate it. That would be great. Also, see if you could find out how to contact Avron's daughter.

Albas: Right.

Shalin: She may have more memories.

Albas: Sure.

Shalin: You mentioned Dennis Wrong – did you know him?

Albas: No, I did not. I've read his book where he has a lot of footnotes on Goffman. That's where I got that from.

Shalin: I contacted him in 2007, he told me he has things to tell me, and we were planning to converse, but then he disappeared. I was told he had something like Alzheimer's.

Albas: Oh-h-h!

Shalin: I think he is alive but not communicating.

Albas: His last book is worth it. There are quite a few references to Goffman in there.

Shalin: Is it the one on sociological ambivalence?

Albas: No, it must have appeared a decade ago.

Shalin: Yes, he had a collection of essays, I recall. I should look it up. You mentioned that student from Calgary who attended the commencement

ceremony at Winnipeg.

Albas: I had that student from Calgary. Her mom had come all the way from Calgary to Winnipeg because Erving was getting an honorary degree. What I gathered, or at least that's what the student told me, Erving's mother was ill, so Erving being young and still needing milk, apparently went to Calgary and lived with his aunt in Calgary. It appears from the title [of one of your interviews] that they both suckled from the same mother.

Shalin: Yes, it was Esther Besbris who says they were bosom buddies.

Albas: It seems to me there is just too much overlap. I thought that must be the same person.

Shalin: I think you are right. Do you know how to contact that student?

Albas: I have no idea. I don't even know that student's name.

Shalin: I see, there is no way to track her.

Albas: I would contact the one who mentioned [the episode].

Shalin: Actually, I did, but somehow Esther couldn't locate the person.

Albas: All I remember was that the student was going to enter the RCMP. If you talk to her, ask if there is someone you are related to who went to the University of Manitoba.

Shalin: Esther knows the person, and she tried to track her, but for some reason she couldn't.

Albas: Because there is too much of an overlap.

Shalin: No doubt this is the same person, a relative of Goffman.

Albas: That's the same one.

Shalin: The other thing, I wonder if there are faculty or students who might

have attended the convocation ceremony and heard Erving speak.

Albas: Well, the one who would have been there was Simkin [?]. She is the one who wrote the letter to the president nominating him for that award.

Shalin: For the honorary degree?

Albas: Yes, she was the one who wrote it in. She had an economics degree from the University of Chicago – F. Simkin [?] with his wife. They came back to Winnipeg. I don't know exactly what her position here is. She was the one who nominated him, because I have the letter of nomination.

Shalin: Maybe you could make a copy of it.

Albas: Sure.

Shalin: You think she is accessible?

Albas: I think she is in Winnipeg. She was relatively young. See, they were politically very very active, very intelligent, and I think Goffman felt some shame in interacting with them because they were so much more politically astute.

Shalin: Can you locate her?

Albas: I think I can.

Shalin: She may have independent memories that are worth salvaging. And anyone else who comes to mind and who may be worth approaching.

Anything else you want to add, Daniel?

Albas: I think that's about it.

Shalin: Thank you so much. I will transcribe our conversation and send it to you. Is there someone else at your department to whom I can forward the transcript via email?

Albas: Yes, if you could send it to the sociology department.

Shalin: In whose care, whom should I contact?

Albas: It would be, let's see, Dianne Bulback is her name.

Shalin: I imagine she has email. I'll check out on your department web site and see how I can contact her. Maybe she could print out the transcript and give it to you.

Albas: Right. . . .

Shalin: And see if you can forward to me some of the materials you mentioned. I am at the department of sociology at the University of Nevada in Las Vegas. I can pass my address to Dianne.

Daniel, thank you so much!

Albas: You are very very welcome.

Shalin: OK, bye-bye

Albas: Thank you. Bye-bye.