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Erving Was a Brilliant Scholar and a Mensch

Joseph Gusfield
University of California, San Diego

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Remembering Erving Goffman

Joseph Gusfield: Erving Was a Brilliant Scholar and a Mensch

This interview with Joseph Gusfield, Professor Emeritus of Sociology at the the University of California, San Diego, was recorded over the phone on December 19, 2008. Dmitri Shalin transcribed the interview, after which Dr. Gusfield edited the transcript and gave his approval for posting the present version in the Erving 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 04-20-09]

Shalin: Greetings. This is Dmitri Shalin. Is this Joseph?

Gusfield: Yes.

Shalin: Joseph, you kindly agreed to talk to me about Erving Goffman. Today is supposed to be the day. Is it a good time for you to talk?

Gusfield: You have to speak loud because my hearing aid or phone isn't working too well.

Shalin: I will do that. First of all, would it be OK if I record our conversation and then send you the transcripts?

Gusfield: Go ahead. I'll see what I can do. I have another phone here that might work better. Go ahead.

Shalin: My first question is whether it would be OK if I record our conversation and then send you the transcript?

Gusfield: Fine.

Shalin: OK, thanks a lot. I want to make sure you can hear me.

Gusfield: I can but let me put this phone down and try another one.

[Pause]

Go ahead.

Shalin: OK, is it any better?

Gusfield: A little worse [**Laughing**]. I'll go back to the other one.

Shalin: You will be doing most of the speaking anyway, and I can hear you well.

Gusfield: Yes, go ahead.

Shalin: Joseph, to give you an idea what interests me and some of the tangents I would like to explore – I would like to know how you came to know Erving, what impression he made on you, and from that point on anything you can remember about his dissertation and beyond. I understand that you knew Erving well. These are very general parameters. You can take the conversation wherever you want.

Gusfield: OK. I don't remember when exactly I met Erving. Let me give you a little background on myself. I think from '46 to '47 I was at a law school at the University of Chicago. I've gone through the college as a student. I've been in the army, came out as a veteran, went to a law school, then also started teaching at the undergraduate college in Chicago, and ultimately was lured away by more intellectual ambiance, the environment in the college. So I was teaching in the college and at that point had gone to the graduate school in sociology. I was in graduate work from about '47 to '50. I left to go teaching upstate New York, but I came back every summer and continued to teach one quarter in college. I don't know if I met Erving before I left Chicago [during] a good deal of time I spent there in 1950-1955. But at any rate, I was in and around there for 6-7 years. Erving was part of The University of Chicago at that point had quite a lot of graduate students in Soc – maybe as many as 200. So there were small groups, and Erving was part of a small group that I was part of. I can tell you roughly who they were.

Shalin: That would be interesting.

Gusfield: Howe Becker was part of them, Bill Kornhauser, and Ruth Rosiner who later married and still later divorced, and Erving. [We] all lived in a small redbrick apartment, which had a name I forgot, on 57th street, very close to the campus. Other people who were part of this group as I remember were Saul Mendlowitz who was working on a doctorate in sociology but that evolved into a research project in the law school. He became more interested and took a degree in law and was a professor of law since, teaching mostly at Rutgers. I suddenly forgot his name – my God, my close friend. . . .

Shalin: It will come back.

Gusfield: When you are 90 years old, it sometimes [**Laughing**]. . . .
. [Herman Piven and his girlfriend, later his wife, Francis Piven – she was in

City Planning and he was in Social Work]. At any rate, he was in social work, working for a Ph.D. in social work. He was part of it. The Langs – Gladys Lang and Kurt Lang – who weren't married at the time but got married later, were sort of on the periphery of it. Helena Lopata was part of that group. I am trying to remember all of us.

Shalin: Robert Habenstein?

Gusfield: Who?

Shalin: Robert Habenstein.

Gusfield: Bob Habenstein was certainly part of it. And some guy Bill Wesley who was in Canada since. Maybe I am leaving some people out. But we as a group got together fairly often for parties. Jerry Handel was part of that. Often we would have parties at our house. So we got to know Erving. We were part of a poker group that got together. I don't remember everybody, except an anthropologist named Erving Kaplan who later went to work in the government and his girlfriend Judy Callahan [?]. So it was a mixed group. Ruth Rosiner was also a sociology graduate student and a very good one. Bill Kornhauser was probably the focus of the group. He and Ruth – I think Ruth – he and Erving lived in one place, in one building, and I saw Erving quite a bit. He was at one point married to Schuyler whom I knew very fleetingly, really.

Shalin: Erving was married to Sky, right.

Gusfield: Yes.

Shalin: Was Angelica part of that group?

Gusfield: What?

Shalin: Was Angelica part of that group?

Gusfield: I think of her as Skye.

Shalin: Right.

Gusfield: She was really on the fringe of it, as I remember. Why – I don't know. They were married. Erving was one of the graduate students in Chicago who were from Canada, largely because Everett Hughes taught for 10 years at McGill University in Toronto. No – in Montreal. So we had a number of students from Canada. You know where Erving was born?

Shalin: In Manitoba?

Gusfield: Right, Winnipeg Canada, which is a fairly provincial city. And I don't know what his father did. I wouldn't say he was publicly well known, but he was kind of well known among local people.

Shalin: Known in which way?

Gusfield: What?

Shalin: What was about him that he was known for?

Gusfield: I wouldn't say publicly known. He was fairly well known locally. If you get on the train, for example, the conductor would know who he was. I don't know that he was publicly known. As I said, it was a provincial city, a small city where it was easy [to be known]. I think he was a merchant, but I am not sure. I really don't know a great deal about Erving's background. He knew enough Yiddish to sprinkle it in his conversations.

Shalin: That's interesting.

Gusfield: Erving was always seen by most of us as very abrasive, very funny many times. Have you ever seen a picture of him?

Shalin: Just one picture [displayed on the ASA web site].

Gusfield: I have a picture I took of him. Don't know what happened to it.

Shalin: That would be great if you could find it.

Gusfield: Well, you know he didn't like to have his pictures taken.

Shalin: I know, I know.

Gusfield: I took one of them and he was about to object, then he saw it was me and said, "Oh, OK." We got along very well. We called him, the bunch of us – I don't know if you heard about it – "the little dagger."

Shalin: Yes, I read about this.

Gusfield: Oh, you did?

Shalin: I think Gary Fine wrote about it.

Gusfield: Ah-h-h-h. [I didn't know] Gary ever knew him, but maybe he did.

Shalin: He might have heard it from you or someone else.

Gusfield: Yes. And that sums up the affection we had for him, and at the same time, his incisiveness. He had a good way . . . A group of us, we played a game that the black community used to call "the dozens." You sort of find a weak spot in somebody and you speak kind of insultingly. Everybody knows it was not really meant to be cruel, but it does have a tinge of cruelty in it. Erving was just quick to observe what was going on, very quick to see things.

After we left graduate school, I often saw Erving at meetings. One way or the other, we would always find a way to get together. My wife once gave . . . My birthday is September 6, which often coincides with the sociology annual meetings. So we would celebrate in one fashion or another. My wife, whom Erving was fond of and whom I think he admired, gave a surprise party for me at the meeting. Erving was very impressed by it. A number of people who were about to wish me happy birthday were queuing [?] down the escalator.

I didn't see a great deal of Erving in the ensuing years, but we did see each other at some of the meetings, and we always got together very well. Somebody said about Erving that he was a terrible boor. I never thought so. I always thought him to be very considerate. To me at any rate, he was very considerate and very friendly. Others thought of him as terribly abrasive and often cruel.

I saw much more of him when I came to the University of California San Diego to start the [sociology] department. Of course one of the first people I tried to get was Erving. Erving didn't want to come unless he could teach only one seminar a year.

Shalin: When was it?

Gusfield: 1969.

Shalin: That was when he went to the University of Pennsylvania.

Gusfield: I don't know when exactly he went there. He was very very well known by then.

Shalin: In 1968 he left Berkeley and went to the University of Pennsylvania.

Gusfield: Ah, OK. Also, I should tell you . . . but I must back a little bit. *Presentation of Self* was published originally in Edinburgh as part of the general series in soft cover. I have a copy of it. And I remember telling

Erving that the copy was stolen from the library. I thought it was very flattering. I mean that was a great book. You read it I assume.

Shalin: Of course. I studied it with care.

Gusfield: Yes. I was still very much in touch with him, because he sent me the book. After I started the department, I tried to get Erving. He told me that he would come only if he could teach one seminar a year. Well, UCSD already had a few Nobel Prize winners, and they couldn't teach one seminar a year.

Shalin: That's interesting!

Gusfield: I said I couldn't do that. But he came fairly often. He used to put it this way, "Do you want me to give you a cheap lecture or an expensive one?" I don't remember the exact words he used. "If you can pay me, I will give you a different kind of lecture than if you don't pay me." But we were always in touch, particularly with two other guys. [One was] Bennett Berger who was not part of the University of Chicago graduate school. He had a degree from Berkeley, but he admired Erving and got to know him quite well. The [other was] Fred Davis. I should have mentioned Fred, because Fred was one of the group in the graduate school. I had recruited both to my new department

Shalin: He died not long ago, I think.

Gusfield: Fred died in 1992, I think, certainly after we both retired. We all recognized Erving as exceptionally brilliant. As he got to be quite famous, he was still quite close to most of us. A lot of people saw him very differently – I didn't. When I was still at the University of Illinois, he came to lecture. Ed Shills had been there recently. We were already a little miffed – he came right before the lecture and he left right after the lecture.

Gusfield: Erving did this?

Shalin: Ed Shills done this.

Gusfield: Oh, Ed Shills. I see.

Shalin: When Erving came he also came right before the lecture began and he was going home right after the lecture, but my wife said, "Erv, we planned a reception for you!" So he said, "OK, I will come." Which he did. I don't know whether he personally liked to be glorified. I never figured that out. . .

I was a visiting reviewer for the honors program at Swarthmore College. I don't remember the exact date but I think I already was at UCSD. Yes, it must have been because Erving was already at Pennsylvania. A couple of things about that still very much stick in my memory. First of all, he asked me to stay with him. You know, the visitors usually stayed overnight. He got up in the morning and made breakfast for me. I said, "Erving, you are ruining your persona." He looked as if he didn't understand it, but I think he knew because he was quite famous by then.

The night before, the woman whose name I cannot remember [Magali Larsen] but who wrote an interesting book on the rise of professionalism, and who taught at the Temple University, heard that I was coming with Erving. She told Erving that she wanted to meet me. The three of us had a dinner together. While we had a dinner, we talked a little bit about Phil Rieff – I don't know how much you know about Phil Rieff.

Gusfield: Several people I talked to mentioned the relationship between Philip Rieff and Erving Goffman.

Shalin: I never knew what that [relationship] was, really. These two people I always thought were the brightest and most likely to make a big mark.

Gusfield: Was Rieff part of your group?

Shalin: No, no. Phil was only tangentially in sociology. Rieff was in almost everything. He was close to Robert Maynard Hutchinson, then president of the University of Chicago. And Phil I had known because Phil was a sophomore when I was a freshman. And both of us were teaching in the college, so we knew each other. Also, he had graduated from the same high school as my wife. Her father was actually my mother-in-law's butcher. But Phil was very . . . I don't have the right word for it, but he became very anglophilic. He came to UCSD once with the project that we ran, wearing [?], straw hat, and carrying a cane. He was a formal person who maintained this picture of the 19th or early 20th century British literary critic. In fact, I once went with [?] to his club in London. We were talking about Phil – and you have to tell me about the relationship between Phil and Erving . . .

Gusfield: It was complicated.

Gusfield: Uh?

Shalin: It was a complicated relationship.

Gusfield: It was what?

Shalin: It was difficult.

Gusfield: Yes. I imagine it would be because Erving would find Phil an object of satire. Anyway, we were talking and [the name of] Phil Rieff came up. And this [woman] sociologist said, "I never met him." Erving said, "You must go and meet him. Let's go right now – now!" Erving knew – must have known as I certainly knew – that Phil was a very formal person, not a person who would like to be seen without a tie, not a person who would like to be called without further notice. He was being somewhat cruel to Erving [?] and funny at the same time. They both lived in Rittenhouse Square, which was a very elite area of Philadelphia, of central Philadelphia. So he knew where Phil lived, he went there and rang the doorbell. Phil came out. He didn't have a tie and he was most perturbed. He said he couldn't [entertain] right now because his wife wasn't home. His first wife, incidentally, was Susan Sontag.

Shalin: Yes, I know.

Gusfield: She died a few months ago.

Shalin: That's right.

Gusfield: At any rate, that gives you a little bit of flavor. I told this story many times.

Shalin: This is golden, Joseph. I am grateful you are willing to talk. Now, do you know if Erving knew Philip from Chicago or they came to know each other in Philadelphia?

Gusfield: Hold on a minute, I have an incoming call.

Shalin: Sure, go ahead.

[Pause]

Gusfield: Yes.

Shalin: Do you know if Erving and Philip knew each other in Chicago?

Gusfield: Yes. You were saying something?

Shalin: I was asking if Goffman and Rieff knew each other during the Chicago years.

Gusfield: He must have known Phil. Whether he was at all close to Phil – I was reasonably close to Phil – but I don't know if they knew each other. He

[Goffman] must have known who he was. But you say their relationship was not amicable?

Shalin: They respected each other but according to Renee Fox, they disagreed on things.

Gusfield: Oh, I am sure they would because Phil really belonged in the humanities. He was at his best as a critic, he was an expert on Freud, and certainly [representing] not the kind of sociology that Erving had enormous respect for.

Shalin: Right.

Gusfield: Phil was a smart man, and I am sure he [Erving] had a respect for that.

Shalin: That is exactly the case. So that was a visit to Philip Rieff's house.

Gusfield: What?

Shalin: Erving brought you to Philip's house.

Gusfield: I didn't know this was Phil at that time [?]. I learned about it later.

Irma, my wife, was in Philadelphia when Erving was already in the hospital. We were talking about that last night. She doesn't remember whether she called him. She knows she didn't go to visit him, and she felt badly about that because we both liked Erving a lot, and I think he liked us a lot. He had an inner group of people with whom he felt a little freer perhaps. He had become – certainly when he went to Pennsylvania, he had already been a major figure. I mean I had some differences with Erving too, which were really sociological differences. But Alvin Gouldner, whom I think he also admired, had [shown] that Erving's work was historically located. He wasn't talking about something universal as it seemed to be, but something that was more specific in some respects. David Riesman, another man whom I deeply respected and whom I worked with, was fond of Erving.

Shalin: Do you remember the last year of Goffman when he got sick, when he came down with cancer? Did you communicate with Goffman when he was dying?

Gusfield: No. There is one other story I should tell you.

Shalin: Please do so. I don't mean to interrupt you.

Gusfield: Yes. I don't know whether I knew he was in the hospital or learned it when Irma went to Philadelphia for a meeting.

Gusfield: At any rate, I think Erving was much affected by Skye's suicide. Schuyler had a lot of mental difficulties. And I don't know what Erving's relationship was with women. He was certainly not a midget but he was short.

Shalin: How short – could you tell me approximately his height?

Gusfield: I couldn't talk about a measurement. I would say that if you met him, this would be one of the things you'd record and mention. He was likely to be the shortest male in any group, but not pathological. Not pathological but short.

Shalin: You said that Sky was troubled – do you know what her problems might have been?

Gusfield: No. I am trying to think who would know Schuyler well. Maybe Ruth Rosiner, but she is dead. I don't think Gladys did. I don't really know anybody who would have [known her].

Shalin: I had an interview with Rodney Stark.

Gusfield: I didn't know he knew Rodney.

Shalin: Yes, they knew each other when Goffman was teaching at Berkeley.

Gusfield: Aha.

Shalin: And Rodney knew Schuyler rather well. He thinks that she was bipolar, she had sharp mood swings.

Gusfield: Yes. Yes.

Shalin: Now, Joseph . . .

Gusfield: Call me Joe.

Shalin: I am sorry. Joe, do you know when Goffman came to the United States?

Gusfield: No, I can only give you my guess. It would be late '40s.

Shalin: Right, maybe '48.

Gusfield: Could well be.

Shalin: And he came to do graduate work.

Gusfield: So far as I know, yes.

Shalin: He must have married around 1950 or thereabout.

Gusfield: Right.

Shalin: Do you know anything about his dissertation, how it started, how he was writing it?

Gusfield: Let me see what I can remember. There was something I wanted to tell in this relationship but I'd forgotten. Yes, we all took written examinations, Ph.D. examinations, about the same time, and it was possible to get a high pass. Most people got a pass, and we were certain that Erving would get a high pass, but he didn't. He got a pass. We had heard – and this may have been just a rumor – that the faculty couldn't read his handwriting. They figured that if they couldn't give him high pass, they could certainly give him a pass [given] what they knew of him anyway.

Shalin: Interesting.

Gusfield: Now about the dissertation. I lost contact with him, he was oversees on the Isle of Maine, wasn't he?

Shalin: I think he was on the Shetland Islands.

Gusfield: Yes, it was Shetland Island. How he got there, why he went there, what his motivation was – I don't know. I never talked to him about that. I should have. There may be something in the original [edition]. If you hold a minute, it is behind me on my shelf.

Shalin: Sure, sure.

[Pause]

Gusfield: Hello?

Shalin: Yes.

Gusfield: It is published by the Social Science Research Center at the University of Edinburgh as a monograph in 1956. Hold on a minute, I got another call.

[Pause]

Gusfield: Dmitri?

Shalin: Yes.

Gusfield: I'm gonna have to cut you off for a while. Can you call me back in ten minutes?

Shalin: Yes, in ten minutes I will call you back.

[Break]

Gusfield: Hello?

Shalin: Greetings, Joseph – is the timing good?

Gusfield: Yes, go ahead.

Shalin: Good. We were talking . . . let me see. . . .

Gusfield: I was going to look at the Edinburgh edition.

Shalin: Yes.

Gusfield: It does not tell me anything about it, except that it was done on a Ford Foundation grant and that was done under supervision of Ed Shils. Do you know this?

Shalin: I know a little bit about this edition, not much.

Gusfield: I did not realize that he got his dissertation in Chicago in 1953.

Shalin: That's right.

Gusfield: I always thought that *Presentation of Self* was his dissertation.

Shalin: First there was the dissertation he defended in 1953, then there was a monograph published in 1956, after that the Anchor edition came out in 1959.

Gusfield: Yes.

Shalin: I heard that Erving had hard time defending his dissertation – do you know anything about it?

Gusfield: Hard time getting his dissertation?

Shalin: No, defending his thesis. According to Anselm Strauss, Erving had to sweat it out.

Gusfield: Who was the big critic?

Shalin: [Lloyd] Warren. He expected a more traditional dissertation that had to do with social stratification.

Gusfield: [It depends on what] his dissertation proposal was.

Shalin: Erving focused on the communication practices among Islanders.

Gusfield: I don't know whether he had social stratification in mind. Erving was really a student of interactions, and Warner wrote some very important material on ritual, so I would have thought that this made him more congenial to Erving.

Shalin: I understand that Everett Hughes weighed in and urged the committee to cut this American Simmel some slack.

Gusfield: Certainly, what he did would be very congenial to Hughes. Hughes was social anthropologist. Erving actually did his work at Edinburgh with a social anthropologist in the sociology and anthropology program. It is hard for me to see that Warner would be that antagonistic. People like Ogburn would have been, maybe . . . I forgot his name. At any rate *Presentation of Self* draws a lot from his dissertation.

Shalin: Oh, yes, it is based on his dissertation with some revisions. Now, you said that sometime you played poker at the [University of Chicago]. And Goffman was interested in gambling, as you know.

Gusfield: Oh, yes. I am too, but not professionally. My wife and I just went to one of those casinos yesterday, and we've been to Vegas many times. I couldn't get in touch with him the one time that I was in Vegas when he was there. I know that he wanted to become a dealer, but he couldn't do it. They wouldn't accept him.

Shalin: Why not?

Gusfield: From what little he told me about it – they didn't trust him. [Not that they thought he] was going to take money but that he had some other motif [like] studying gambling. The essay he wrote on gambling is magnificent.

Shalin: "Where the Action Is" – it is excellent. It might tell us something about Erving as a person as well.

Gusfield: In what way?

Shalin: He liked to take chances, be aggressive. He appreciated the importance of chance in life.

Gusfield: That's quite true. I never knew him getting into Well, sometimes he and Piven would seat in front of the television set and bet on the next thing coming up. Piven was very much given to that.

Shalin: Who was that?

Gusfield: I cannot even remember his first name [Herman Piven] and he is a great friend of mine! His nephew was Jeremy Piven, the movie star. Why do I forget this?

Shalin: And Piven is spelled P-i-v-e. . .

Gusfield: . . .e-n.

Shalin: I see.

Gusfield: Frances Fox Piven was the president of the American Sociological Association. Now, he divorced his first wife sometime ago.

Shalin: Erving liked to play poker?

Gusfield: It's Herman Piven. Herman. This is what we call social poker. No one can lose more than three dollars. Callahan had a slide rule that she used to determine the ratios.

Shalin: OK. Was Erving good at poker?

Gusfield: I don't know. I am not very good myself [**Laughing**]. However, he shows a good grasp of the world of crap shooting in "Where the Acton Is."

Shalin: Renee Fox mentioned that Erving might have been in a movie playing a Monte Carlo dealer.

Gusfield: I never heard that.

Shalin: Neither did I, but she mentioned this. You said there was partying at the University of Chicago – do you remember what those parties were like?

Gusfield: A lot of them were at my house.

Shalin: Was there drinking, dancing?

Gusfield: There was very little dancing. I don't remember heavy drinking. . . . There was some dancing. People making passes at each other. A lot of talk, a lot of talk. I wrote an introduction to the book on the Second Chicago School where I was recounting my graduate days. I mentioned the time when my wife was terribly upset because she didn't know where I was. It was very late when they found me under the lamppost talking to Erving. What I most remember about the graduate school was that many of us lived in a relatively confined space. Most of us were veterans. We lived over the [stretch] of several streets, so you can walk out and you would meet somebody. What I remember was talk, talk, talk. Constant, constant talk.

Shalin: What would you talk about?

Gusfield: Sociology, philosophy, mostly intellectual talk, and politics.

Shalin: You said that your wife knew Goffman as well.

Gusfield: She knew him, yes.

Shalin: Her name is Irma?

Gusfield: Irma, yes.

Shalin: I-r-m-a?

Gusfield: Yes.

Shalin: Do you remember Sky being at those parties?

Gusfield: No.

Shalin: She wasn't there.

Gusfield: I don't remember it. I don't know if that is because she was shy, marginal, or because she just wasn't there. There is another person you might want to talk to – Jerry Handel. I think he is now at the City College in New York. You can reach Saul Mendlowitz.

Shalin: . . . Hello? Are you there, Joe? Let me call again. It looks like I have lost you.

[Dialing]

Gusfield: Hello?

Shalin: I think I have lost you.

Gusfield: Yes, I don't know why, but you did.

Shalin: Something happened. You mentioned someone.

Gusfield: Saul Mendlowitz.

Shalin: M-e-n-d . . .

Gusfield: M-e-n-d-l-o-v-i-t-z.

Shalin: Where is he? Do you know?

Gusfield: Rutgers Law School would know. He is still teaching there, although he is formally retired.

Shalin: I see. One thing I discovered, Joe, was that Sky was a student at the University of Chicago. She had an ABD in anthropology.

Gusfield: She was what?

Shalin: She didn't finish her thesis but she was done with her exams – all but dissertation.

Gusfield: All but the doctorate?

Shalin: Yes, yes.

Gusfield: I didn't know that.

Shalin: Rodney Stark says he was trying to help her finish her Ph.D. when she was at Berkeley.

Gusfield: She died at Berkeley?

Shalin: Yes, she committed suicide at Berkeley in 1964.

Gusfield: I didn't know it was that late.

Shalin: Yes, in 1964 she jumped off the bridge. Do you know anything about Erving's reaction to his wife's suicide?

Gusfield: No, the '60s was the period when I saw less of him.

Shalin: She was quite an intellectual herself.

Gusfield: What?

Shalin: A social scientist herself. Hello? Are you there, Joe?

Gusfield: Hello? Dmitri?

Shalin: Yes, I am here.

Gusfield: OK, I am on the other phone.

Shalin: I hear you well. So, Sky was an anthropologist.

Gusfield: That I knew.

Shalin: You were not present at their wedding.

Gusfield: No. Where and when were they married?

Shalin: I think sometime around 1950.

Gusfield: That early?

Shalin: Yes. Their son, Tom, was born around 1953, I think. [Tom Goffman was born in 1951].

Gusfield: Have you talked to his son.

Shalin: No, I did not. Did you know Tom?

Gusfield: No, I never met Tom.

Shalin: He is an oncologist.

Gusfield: Somewhere in the East?

Shalin: Right. He studies cancer, which I thought was an interesting choice of specialty given that his father died of stomach cancer. . . . Do you know anything about Erving's first job?

Gusfield: All I know is that that was the basis of his book *Asylums*.

Shalin: That's right. I have heard that Erving had hard time finding a job in the academe.

Gusfield: He might have. First of all, that was not a good year . . . Well, it wasn't too bad, as a matter of fact, 1951. I never knew he had [the hard time]. I know he was a participant observer at St. Elizabeth's, although I thought he did that much later. . . . He got his degree in 1953.

Shalin: And then he went to St. Elizabeth's.

Gusfield: How was that arranged?

Shalin: I believe he got a grant, and stayed there until 1958 when Herbert Blumer offered him a job at Berkeley.

Gusfield: That's when Bill Kornhauser went there.

Shalin: Before 1958 Erving didn't have an academic appointment.

Gusfield: How was he living?

Shalin: I think he worked for [John] Clausen who headed a lab where Goffman worked while researching his book *Asylums*. . . . There was also Mel Kohn at the time.

Gusfield: I know Mel. Is he still living?

Shalin: Oh, yes. He knew Goffman well. Now, you didn't see Erving much when he was teaching at Berkeley.

Gusfield: No, I was at the University of Illinois then. I might have seen him at meetings. Probably saw him at meetings. That might have been a period when I . . . No that was much later when I went to Philadelphia. . . .

Shalin: You said Erving became famous later. Did he change as a result or did he remain the same as you knew him at Chicago?

Gusfield: Not with me at any rate. With the people he was close to he remained pretty much the same. Others spoke of him as terribly abrasive. But he always was abrasive. . . .

Shalin: How do you interpret this – was he ribbing, mocking, teasing?

Gusfield: He was. Now, Jackie Wiseman can tell you more how he was as a thesis advisor.

Shalin: She gave me a very good interview.

Gusfield: What did she tell you about his abrasiveness?

Shalin: She told me that Erving did not like women who chose to go to graduate school just to fill their time, housewives who wanted to have a bit of diversion. He liked Jackie because she was a serious student, so he was serious with her. . . . He was very good to her. She remembers him fondly. But when in 1982 she learned about Erving's cancer and called his home to inquire about his health, Erving said something like, "If you want to talk to me about sociology, go ahead, but I am not going to talk about such nonsense." And he hung up on her. He did not want to talk to her about himself.

Gusfield: I always felt this about Goffman. You couldn't push him too far.

Shalin: Was he a private person.

Gusfield: Um?

Shalin: Was he private?

Gusfield: [**Sigh**] I don't know. I thought that he was always aware of his own persona. But in many ways it may have been a great defense. It was hard to believe that he wasn't somewhere defensive about his shortness.

Shalin: A-ha, you think it was a factor.

Gusfield: I don't know.

Shalin: A stigma of sorts?

Gusfield: It had to be. I don't have any evidence for it.

Shalin: [I want to run by you a hypothesis]. Erving discovered the backstage of social life, yet he worked hard to protect his own backstage . . .

Gusfield: That's not so difficult to understand that that would happen. What is interesting to me about his work is that he was always interested in deception. He was more interested in how they deceive than in how they present a fact. He saw people as always acting. In fact, he ends his Edinburgh book by saying that the whole world is a stage.

Shalin: Right.

Gusfield: I published a book a few years ago *Performing Action* which owes a lot to Erving, but I am interested in the other side of [interaction] – how people decide what someone's persona is.

Shalin: My hypothesis is that Erving might have had hard time defining his own persona after he told the whole world about the deception at the heart of social existence. He might have faced a strategic difficulty presenting himself in public in the way that was authentic, that was not deceptive. He chose a persona of abrasiveness as a pathway to authenticity. Do you see what I mean, Joe?

Gusfield: I see what you mean. It makes sense. The problem is that you can come up with a hundred of schemes but how do you substantiate them? I don't remember him ever poking fun at his own shortness. I wouldn't have dared to do so.

Shalin: Even in the game of dozen?

Gusfield: No. I never found anybody who would dare to do that because of the fear of retaliation.

Shalin: Could Erving be angry at times, visibly angry?

Gusfield: I don't remember that, but I am sure that he could have. You would have to be with a person for a long time before such a situation would come up. Unlike Al Gouldner who could get angry at a drop of a hat.

Shalin: Did you know Gouldner?

Gusfield: Oh, yes. First of all he was very smart. Secondly – and I talk about people who go on an [anger] scale from 1 to 10, [starting] slowly – 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. So when Al got to 3, he immediately moved to 10. He was very very quick to get angry. He was also very self-centered, although he did things that were considerate.

Shalin: How do you explain the roots of his anger?

Gusfield: . . . I felt that later in his life, whenever a big argument caused Al to blow up, he was always held responsible for the [ensuing] argument. Often he wasn't. He got to be so pinned to that persona that it was attributed to him even when that wasn't the case.

Shalin: That's very important. You said he could be considerate.

Gusfield: Yes, at various times [he was considerate] to people.

Shalin: Do you remember any acts of kindness toward you from Al?

Gusfield: No, but we were colleagues for several years at the University of Illinois and friends after that. He was at my 50th birthday in Amsterdam with – God, what was her name? – Janice [?], his third wife. . . .

I don't know what else to tell you, Dmitri. Ask me something.

Shalin: You saw all those legendary people who are part of our disciplinary lore. What kind of teacher Al was?

Gusfield: Students, a number of them, found him very inspiring. Some saw him a little unconcerned with them at various times. Al was quite an enigma. I tried to bring him to UCSD when I went there. He came for one quarter, then I tried to hire him permanently, but some people in other departments said they would resign if he came to the university.

Shalin: In sociology department?

Gusfield: He was in sociology department.

Shalin: People in your department said they would resign?

Gusfield: Not in my department. There was a great deal of opposition to him – not because of his abilities. Dave Riesman [?], another close friend of mine, felt that I was doing it to create a pastiche of a department, which wasn't true. I was deeply appreciative of his abilities, and I also felt sorry for him at that time because he became untouchable.

Shalin: Because of his personality or his politics?

Gusfield: Not of his politics – his personality.

Shalin: You feel that this reputation was in some ways unfair?

Gusfield: Sometimes it was, sometime it wasn't.

Shalin: I see.

Gusfield: He was essentially taken out of the department at the University of Washington where he was going to be chair. Because he was so difficult, they made him a research professor . . . so he wouldn't have colleagues.

Shalin: Was he removed against his will?

Gusfield: Yes.

Shalin: I didn't know that.

Gusfield: I think he was made a Max Weber Professor of social science or something.

Shalin: That was at the University of Washington?

Gusfield: Washington University.

Shalin: That's right. Going back to Goffman, do you know what he was like as a lecturer or mentor?

Gusfield: He was a good lecturer because his material was always so good. He wasn't the most skilful lecturer but he was good. Well worth listening to. Aaron Cicourel and Allen Grimshaw were involved with him in linguistics, and some others too.

Shalin: And as a mentor?

Gusfield: [Jackie] Wiseman would know better about that. He had very few students. He did not like teaching classes. He reached more people through his books than through his lectures.

Shalin: I also wonder if you have an opinion about Goffman's decision to seal his archives.

Gusfield: I wanted to ask you whether you are planning to do a book or not.

Shalin: Well, it is a web-based project. I have about two dozen memoirs/interviews at this point and want all those interested to share their views. As for the future, [publishing these materials] is a possibility, but I want to keep this resource available to everyone, and publishers usually frown at the prospect of bringing out a book when it is available on the web. You see the problem?

Gusfield: Sure.

Shalin: I am trying to move quickly, reach people like you, and then right away make their views available to others.

Gusfield: What other interviewees [have you spoken to]?

Shalin: Do you have access to the internet?

Gusfield: Sure.

Shalin: I sent you the list of interviews and memoirs I collected. I can re-send it to you.

Gusfield: Just get it to me through the internet.

Shalin: I have interviews with Jackie Wiseman, Sherri Cavan, Renee Fox, Sam Heilman . . .

Gusfield: Who is that?

Shalin: Sam Heilman. He wrote a dissertation with Goffman on synagogue life.

Gusfield: Ah, he did.

Shalin: Yes. And then, a number of others, including those I am trying to reach who might still share their memories. That's why I am so grateful for your time.

Gusfield: I see.

Shalin: So, you don't have any thoughts on why Erving wouldn't want to make his archives available, why he wanted to be judged strictly by his published word.

Gusfield: Well, I don't know. There may have been things. . . . I have heard a little bit about his relations with women.

Shalin: What did you hear?

Gusfield: Well . . .

Shalin: You don't have to say anything. Or if you say so, this can be confidential.

Gusfield: He was at one time apparently involved with a woman named Elizabeth Bott, an anthropologist. I don't know if she is still living. It was a relationship with the outcome of which he was not happy.

Shalin: Was it in Chicago?

Gusfield: It might have been in the '50's, before Schuyler. I don't know.

Shalin: Is her name spelled B-o-t-h?

Gusfield: B-o-t-t.

Shalin: I see. That was in the University of Chicago era.

Gusfield: I don't know. Never saw her. Somebody else talked about her who knew. [Who knows if] it's factual.

Shalin: It's unclear why it didn't work.

Gusfield: Yes. I don't know anything about it.

I want to repeat again that I loved Erving. I found him very helpful, considerate person. [My wife] Irma loved him. I mean I have various criticism of him as a sociologist. I talk about him in the introduction to the book on Kenneth Burke, about the difference between Goffman and Kenneth Burke. They are often put together as both being dramaturgical. I didn't think Burke was quite that dramaturgical, although he leaned in that direction. But Erving was one man in sociology besides me who, I knew, read any Burke. But I had a profound admiration for him. I think he had a big impact on sociology and social science in general, as well as on humanities in general. I miss him. He died quite young, as you know, at 61.

Shalin: I thought he was 60. He was born in 1922 and died in 1982.

Gusfield: Ah-h-h, so he was 60.

Shalin: He didn't deliver his presidential address.

Gusfield: That I knew. . . . Well, I enjoyed talking with you.

Shalin: Yes, and the very last thing – did you have a chance to meet Herbert Blumer?

Gusfield: Ha-ha-ha – did I have a chance? Herbert was my main dissertation advisor.

[He was a bit distant, I felt; never talked about himself, always acted like a professor with us. He didn't publish a lot. Once he asked me, "How do you manage to write so much?" We used to play baseball with him at Chicago. You know that he was a professional football player and continued to do so for seven years while teaching. He was in his 50s and in a magnificent shape. We played some day when the ball got caught in the tree. Everybody was looking up to Blumer who went to retrieve the ball. It seemed like he was struggling, but he kept saying, "Don't help me, don't help me." Blumer was a popular teacher, clear and polemical].

Shalin: Maybe I could speak to you about that some other time. You see, [in the course of my conversations] people started talking to me about Greg Stone, Herbert . . .

Gusfield: Greg was also somebody who was partly in this group. Partly.

Shalin: He was also at the University of Chicago at that time?

Gusfield: Oh, yes.

Shalin: I didn't know that.

Gusfield: Greg went to Washington University, then somewhere else, died young.

Shalin: Well, I would love to talk to you about Stone and Blumer but maybe not today.

Gusfield: No, not today.

Shalin: Maybe a week from now we can talk again. I want to preserve your memories as much as possible.

Gusfield: OK. Call me and we'll see.

Shalin: Maybe next Friday?

Gusfield: Possibly. I haven't looked in my book yet.

Shalin: OK, maybe after Christmas.

Gusfield: Yes.

Shalin: Thank you so much. I appreciate your wonderful memories.

Gusfield: You're welcome. You will send me the transcript.

Shalin: Of course, I will. Take care.

[End of the recording]