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Peter Zelchenko

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## Remembering Erving Goffman

**Peter Zelchenko**

### **Goffman Got up and Moved to the Center of the Room and Began Doing a Mime Strip-tease**

Peter Zelchenko offered this memoir based on recollections of his mother, Gladys Meirovits, and approved adding the present version to the Erving Goffman Archives.

[Posted 07-12-13]

**July 9, 2013**

Hi, Sherri and Dima. I'm sorry this took so long.

Phyllis Zelchenko (the former Gladys Meirovits) was studying English at the University of Chicago while Goffman and Birdwhistell were completing their Ph.D.'s. Phyllis spent time with them in the 1950's, and this particular event probably happened sometime in 1952, after Goffman got back from Europe but before he went to Maryland. I believe this was before Goffman and Angelica were married. My mother said she knew Angelica but she was not at this party.

Phyllis had other little stories but this one sticks out as a real anecdote. As she tells it, she, Goffman, and Birdwhistell went to some mixer at another student's house in Hyde Park. The living room had about 15 or 20 people but it was very quiet, with people nervously sipping their drinks, "and nobody really looking at each other or talking to each other." At one point, Goffman got up and moved to the center of the room and began doing a mime strip-tease, starting with "taking off" his tie and proceeding gradually to other and more intimate items of clothing. My mother said she started laughing out loud, and at first nobody seemed to understand.

When people realized what Goffman was doing, they quickly began finding whatever excuse they could to start conversation with their nearest neighbor. What were they talking about? "Absolutely anything they could come up with." What happened then?

"Then we just left the party and went somewhere else."