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Dmitri Shalin Interview with Jacqueline Wiseman about Erving Goffman entitled "Having a Genius for a Friend"

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Remembering Erving Goffman

Jacqueline Wiseman: Having a Genius for a Friend

This conversation with Jacqueline Wiseman, Professor Emeritus of Sociology at the University of California, San Diego, was recorded over the phone on December 15, 2008. After Dmitri Shalin transcribed the interview, Dr. Wiseman corrected the transcript and gave her approval for posting the present version in the Erving Goffman Archives. 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 “[?]” The interviewer’s questions are shortened in several places.

[Posted 06-20-09]

Shalin: Is this Jackie?

Wiseman: Yes, it is.

Shalin: Good morning. This is Dmitri. How are you?

Wiseman: All right. And how are you?

Shalin: I am fine.

Wiseman: Before we start, you were going to tell something about the goal of this research; what [end product] is envisioned.

Shalin: This is an archive, the web-based Erving Goffman Archive that collects oral history and shares information with those interested in Erving’s scholarship. Once I complete an interview, I transcribe it, send the transcript to the contributor who edits and redacts the text, and once the approval is granted, the text is added to the Goffman archives alongside other contributions. After that, people are free to use the material for their research. There is a group called “Goffman forum” run by Tom Scheff.

Wiseman: Yes.

Shalin: Tom asked me to share info about this internet project with the people who are on his serve list. Also, the American

Sociological Association has gotten a word about the Goffman project. Alan Sica, who is involved with the ASA main office, told me that he looked up the materials collected for the EGA, found it interesting, and asked my permission to deposit the entire collection in the ASA permanent archives. Apparently the ASA council has been talking about starting something like an oral archive project documenting the ASA history. We have close to 20 new interviews and memoirs on our site, plus the earlier published biographical materials, that will be part of the ASA collection at the Penn State.

Wiseman: That's very nice!

Shalin: So, the word is getting out. I hope you will find this stuff interesting once you have a chance to review it.

Wiseman: I am sure I will. Sherri gave to me [the web address], and I tried to bring it up last night, but I couldn't. I did manage to read your paper, the 25-page paper you wrote.

Shalin: Oh, you saw that?

Wiseman: I assume that it [was based] on the previously published material.

Shalin: That's right. I presented this paper last August at the ASA meeting. More recent conversations are not reflected in this paper, which is quickly getting obsolete.

Wiseman: I see.

Shalin: I have a much better base now on which to ground my research. I see more dimensions to Erving's life and work. One thing I noticed was that the way people encountered Erving's work and took to it may reveal a pattern. I am talking about the impression that Erving's work left on people when they were young, even before they'd encountered him personally . . . Did you find out about Goffman before you met him?

Wiseman: No, I did not.

Shalin: So, you did not hear about him or read his work beforehand.

Wiseman: I may have known about him peripherally. I may have known he was out there, but I do not recall ever checking out his work before I met him.

Shalin: How did you meet him?

Wiseman: May I say something [first]?

Shalin: Please.

Wiseman: When I printed out your paper, I thought, "Oh, he is going to be disappointed, because almost all of my memories of Erving are personal rather than theoretical or sociological." But then I read some of the memories in this project and [realized] that this was the way most people remembered Goffman – from personal interactions. What I learned of Erving's work came primarily from his publications, and then little bit of insight here and there [that he gave] on my papers, and our general discussions concerning various aspects of sociology, the details of which I've unfortunately forgotten. I'm referring to specific insights he offered, during which I remember a wonderful mental stimulation both during and after talking with him about many aspects of sociology. So after reading some of the other interviews I do not feel as shy about sharing my personal experiences with Erving. To my recollection, he never discussed with me "standard" sociological theory or methods per se. Rather, he would offer ideas of how to approach investigations or analyses you were doing or had done. (Of course he discussed all theories of deviant behavior in his class).

Shalin: I discovered that the personal can be extremely important for understanding Erving, his work and his era. There is interplay between Goffman the scholar, Goffman the teacher, Goffman the man.

Wiseman: Yes. The analytic problem is extracting the interplay of these parts.

Shalin: Erving had a life of participant observation where you couldn't easily draw the line between his private existence and his scholarly probing of the world. He was always on the lookout, searching for . . .

Wiseman: Talking to Erving was always a mind-blowing experience. He could illuminate something, or notice a point in your paper, and make you see it in it in a very different or unique way. (Once, when I was a visiting professor at Yale, I had a dinner party in my little apartment for the Sociology Department professors, and I ventured the opinion that Goffman was the only real genius in our discipline. Not surprisingly, this didn't go very well. However, that was how I felt about him. He was the one real genius in our field, while others at Berkeley or Yale were excellent scholars.

Shalin: I rather agree. I think he was an extraordinary scholar, an extraordinary human being, and a true genius in personal life as well as in his work, even if he was . . .

Wiseman: That maybe why, as I search my memory, I remember all the personal things. I had quite a bit of personal contact with him, as you will see, and all of it was memorable. So, you wanted to know about my first meeting [with Erving]?

Shalin: If you have any memories . . .

Wiseman: Oh, yes.

Shalin: . . . and I mean anything – his physical appearance, the way he dressed, manners – anything that has stuck in your memory.

Wiseman: I have a lot.

Shalin: Please.

Wiseman: You will find some of this description in the book, *Gender and the Academic Experience* (University of Nebraska Press) edited by Kathryn Meadow and Ruth Wallace, which has a chapter

on my experiences in graduate school in the Berkeley Sociology Department.

Shalin: I have already ordered it. It should be here any day now.

Wiseman: And have you read my book *Stations of the Lost*?

Shalin: I am sorry to say I didn't, Jackie.

Wiseman: I would urge you to get it from the library so you don't have to order it. It has a lot of Erving's imprint on it even though as you will see, he did not read it all the way through until after it was successfully defended. He also suggested the title. By the way, Herbert Blumer wrote the foreword.

Shalin: Aha!

Wiseman: I first met Erving when I was accepted in graduate school in Berkeley and he was assigned to be my mentor.

Shalin: Do you remember which year it was?

Wiseman: Approximately 1959 or 1960 or the mid-sixties. When was the unrest on campus?

Shalin: Erving came to Berkeley in 1958 and he left for Penn in 1968.

Wiseman: Yes. You know why he left?

Shalin: I hear different stories, would like to hear your version.

Wiseman: You want it now, or go on with our first meeting? Well, I'll give to you now.

Shalin: Sure, we can jump back and forth. That's fine.

Wiseman: This is what he told me. You know there was a growing hippy movement in the Bay area with particular emphasis on San Francisco and Berkeley.

Shalin: That's right.

Wiseman: People were literally losing their children. For example, I had a friend who took a photograph of her daughter and walked the streets of San Francisco, asking if anybody had seen her. And since Skye [Goffman's first wife] committed suicide, Erving was raising his son alone. He told me he was concerned that his son (who was about 12 at the time, I think) was hanging around with a sort of group Erving disapproved. Telegraph Avenue, the main street in Berkeley was teeming with hippies, outdoor living, guitar playing and drugs. Erving was afraid that his son would or later get into trouble so near that atmosphere, and he didn't want to risk that. You know his son went to George Washington University and became, I think, a surgeon or specialist in the area of cancer research.

Shalin: I believe his son is an oncologist.

Wiseman: Oncologist, that's right. So Erving told me he was leaving Berkeley and going to Pennsylvania, primarily, to get his son out of that environment.

Shalin: Very interesting.

Wiseman: Is that what you were told?

Shalin: No, no one mentioned that.

Wiseman: That's what he told me.

Shalin: Erving's son and his problems were never mentioned to me as the reason Erving soured on his life at Berkeley.

Wiseman: There may be other reasons he did not tell me about.

To get back to a description of our first meeting, first of all, he was assigned to me to be my mentor, that's how I was bold enough to go and see him. He said (right after introductions), "You're older than most students I see, but you have a track record in survey research so I'll pay some attention to you." (I had been with the

National Opinion Research Center and the Stanford Research Center in Palo Alto when I had decided to get a Ph.D. because whenever I wrote a report, for which I was the often director and handled the analysis, they put a man's name over mine (even though he had not had anything to do with the project). When I complained, they would say, "We can't have a woman's name on our reports, and we cannot indicate as a major analyst someone without a Ph.D." I thought, "Well, I will go and get one." At the time, I did not realize how difficult that would be and how long it would take.

During our introductory discussion Goffman said, "My advice to you is to work your ass off the first year you are here. Then, if you don't do well as you go through the program here, people will say, "Why, Mrs. Wiseman, have you been ill? Your work is not up to your usual standard. However, if you don't set yourself up with a good reputation at first, no one will cut you any slack later." When you get the book that you've ordered, you will find that he quite cruelly dismissed some women students He decided that they were not worth his time. Now, he told me later, and I am kind of skipping around, "Well, what you get from mentoring good graduate students is that you learn from them. It is my chance to learn." I guess he decided whom he could learn from and whom he might not and that was his criteria for accepting me.

Shalin: How interesting.

Wiseman: Is that news to you?

Shalin: Gary Marx wrote an article on 1983 or 84 where he said that Goffman once dismissed a woman as a graduate student because he didn't feel that women belong to graduate school, or something to that effect.

Wiseman: He was very nice to me from the beginning.

During this first meeting, when he told me he'd mentor me, he told me that he was sharing office with Tomatsu Shibutani. Then Goffman said, "Do you want to see my impression of Shibutani elated?" I said, "Sure." He held his face totally immobile, and then

one end of his mouth turned up just a little bit. That was Shibtani elated.

Shalin: Elated?

Wiseman: Elated. Sibutani was apparently an oriental who never showed emotions of any kind. That was the best he could do if he felt elated.

[Laughter].

Shalin: In general, I have heard he was a little conflicted as to whether women belong in the academic world.

Wiseman: That is discussed in the book that you are getting. It is divided into chapters consisting of each woman discussing her Berkeley graduate school experience. But he always treated me as a serious scholar and he told me to come and see him on a regular basis. I have tried to remember just how regularly that was. I think it was once a month or every two weeks, but I'm not sure. The next time I went to see him, he said, "Who are you making friends with? Who do you have coffee or lunch with?" And I said, "I have two children and a husband, and I commute from Redwood City across the Bay. It's an hour commute each way." I should tell you how I pay for my graduate schooling – I run a nursery school in the morning. I applied for a license, advertised and took four children of the same ages as mine, and that gave my children someone to play with. I also gave them lunch. This pays for a baby sitter, so I can go to Berkeley in afternoons and evenings. I told him that running a nursery school, taking care of my children and husband, plus driving to Berkeley and studying left me with little time to sit and drink coffee. (Parenthetically, I took either Monday-Wednesday-Friday classes alternated with Tuesday-Thursday classes each semester, so I could be home with my husband and children.)

Erving said, "Don't you realize that the people you meet and make friends with here, are going to be the ones who will be reading your papers, giving you their feedback, telling you what you ought to change? They are the ones who are going to put you on

committees, they are the ones who are going to see that your papers are accepted for presentation at national meetings and they might even you get a job. Now go out and make friends and tell me who they are next time we meet.”

So I went out and made some friends. And next time when I met with Erving I mentioned some names and he passed judgment (sometimes stringently) on them.

Then one time he asked to see a term paper of mine that he had heard other faculty members comment on favorably. It was survey research multivariate analysis paper from Hanan Selvin’s class and the data was based on interviews covering many subjects with many different backgrounds on a multitude of topics. The intent was to give students many choices for correlation analysis. We were given our own set of IBM cards to machine sort. . . . I am sure you are too young to remember that approach.

Shalin: I am not that young.

Wiseman: The paper I did for this class was to show the relationship between informal socialization in college and academic performance. It was well-thought of by the methodology faculty and was eventually published in the *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*. Manny Schegloff and Dave Sudnow came to me and asked if they could have it for the Journal.

One might think that inasmuch as I came from a survey research background this assignment would be easy for me, however such was not the case. I had worked for agencies that limited their data gathering and analysis to polling to predict outcomes in elections with the only breakdowns being sex, age, income, and political party membership.

About that time, Erving asked to see the paper, so I brought him a copy. Later, he invited me to his house to discuss it. I remember when I went in, his house overlooked the entire Oakland- Berkeley area and it was quite a site. As I walked in I said, “Oh, what a wonderful view.” Erving responded, “Students don’t go in my living room. We will meet in my office.” So we went to his office,

and there were two places to sit—one was an office chair with arms and the other was a fairly tall stool. I sat on the stool, thinking the office chair was his. And he said, “You sit on a chair and I sit on a stool.” That made him [look] much higher than I was, I later realized. I had to look up to talk to him. I heard later that his height bothered him great deal . . . that he wished that he was much taller than he was.

Shalin: How tall was he, just off the top of your head?

Wiseman: Well, I am 5’6 and a half, and we were pretty close in height.

Shalin: So he was 5’6”

Wiseman: 5’7” or 5’8” something like that. You know, to those of us who were lucky enough to be his accepted as his student and thus see him from time to time, he was such a giant. I don’t think he knew that his actual height made no difference [to us].

Shalin: You think he was self-conscious about his height.

Wiseman: Oh, yes. In fact he mentioned this once in a discussion, saying that there were all forms of deviance, and being a shorter than average male is one such kind.

Shalin: In *Stigma* he eludes to that.

Wiseman: Someone else also told me that Erving said, “How does a person make an impression on a stranger in a bar?” He raised that as an ethnographic puzzle. “To a stranger you cannot bring up things about yourself that might impress others right away. For instance, you can’t announce, ‘I’m a well published author, etc.’ It all comes down to how you look.” He did not give me the impression that he was complaining about himself.

Shalin: Right. Coming back to your meeting at his home . . .

Wiseman: So I am meeting him at his home, I am sitting in his chair, and he is sitting on this stool. He went over my paper with

me and dissected it. And you know, I cannot remember even one point that he made. But I do remember that it was such a takedown that after I left, I bought two Heath Bars and I ate both of them.

Shalin: What was it – Heath Bar?

Wiseman: It is a kind of toffee that is covered with dark chocolate. They are small and very rich.

Shalin: I see. Were you upset?

Wiseman: Oh, terribly!

Shalin: OK. So you left his house feeling crushed. If I may probe just a little more, Jackie – when he commented on your paper, was he objective, scientific, matter of fact, or there was some element of derision?

Wiseman: I thought it was purely objective. He brought aspects of my analyses I hadn't thought about.

Shalin: It was a well-taken critique.

Wiseman: Yes, the kind that is hardest to take, you know.

Shalin: Exactly.

Wiseman: **[Laughing]**. [About] the other [kind of critique] you can say to yourself, "What do they know?" On the other hand, when you see it was a well-taken criticism, you realize you could have done a better job. But you know – I don't remember one point that he had made, only that it was crushing. Other faculty had written little accolades in the margin (which he could see), so I expected more praise. Instead I received some challenging and pointed criticism.

Shalin: That means he took you very seriously.

Wiseman: And I took his critique seriously. As I think back, I realize that it was extraordinary he took the time to read it and critique it. After all Erving really had no interest in multivariate

analyses, and in fact (as I learned later) he did not think much of it as an approach to the study of human group life. The fact that he was interested enough in the paper to go out of his way to read it and to offer some excellent suggestions for making better, is quite amazing.

I have one more vignette to tell you. He walked me out to the car. The parking area near his house was on a kind of precipice so the only way to get out was to back up and then go forward. To back up, you had to know exactly how far to go, or you would [slide] back down the hill. It was really quite dangerous. After several tries, I said Erving, "I just cannot do it." He said, "Well, you can do it." I said, "I wish you would do it. Men do these things better than women." (I am embarrassed now I said that). And he answered, "The only thing you cannot do that I can do is write your name in the snow." You know, I have never heard this expression before. I had to ask somebody what it meant.

Shalin: If I may interject, Jackie, how would you describe his house?

Wiseman: In size, it was quite a grand house. It was rented, I understood. I think it was fairly ordinarily furnished. It had a very open design, you could see the living room from the kitchen and it had quite a view, as I mentioned. I do remember he showed me with great pride an 18th Century bench in the hallway that I probably did not fully appreciate.

Shalin: Someone told me he was living in an apartment at some point.

Wiseman: That was later than this session critiquing my paper.

Shalin: His wife committed suicide in 1964. Was she still alive when you worked with Erving?

Wiseman: She was still alive when he first accepted me as someone whom he would advise about graduate school.

Shalin: It must have been before 1964.

Wiseman: I knew Skye only slightly. I worked part time at the Survey Research Center under Charlie Glock. And she was working there also. That's how I met her. She was nice, pretty, very friendly. At one point, she told me, and I hope I have this correct, that her father had died and she had to leave for Boston, and handle the inheritance. She said, "We are going to see how much we can give to charity in order to cut the tax consequences." I don't know if she came back to the Survey Center after that.

Shalin: Anything else you remember about her ways? As you know, she took her life in 1964.

Wiseman: I know. And she left her papers at the bridge. . .

Shalin: That was Richmond Bridge, I believe.

Wiseman: San Rafael-Richmond Bridge.

Shalin: Most people I spoke to are uncertain as to what exactly happened.

Wiseman: When he loaned me his office to use in his absence (I will be telling you about that), Erving said to me something like this: "I have moved out of my house, and am in an apartment. Here is my telephone number." Somewhere in this conversation he recommended that I read "Insanity of Place," and he gave me the name of the journal and the date so I could find it.

Shalin: This was an amazing paper.

Wiseman: It certainly is.

Shalin: I see it as counterpoint to his *Asylums* where mental illness is treated as a purely interactional phenomenon, while in this latter work he acknowledged that mental illness might have "organic" roots.

Wiseman: Sherri mentioned that point to me, but to tell you the truth, I did not see it that way when I read *Asylums*. I thought he was saying, "Look, those people have serious mental problems, but

the treatment available to them (i.e. psychiatrists and institutions) doesn't help make them get better – it makes them worse.” And if you know what kind of life they have in those places, such an outcome is not surprising.

Shalin: R-r-r-right.

Wiseman: That is the major point I took from the book. I will have to read it again with the point you suggest in mind. I thought he was saying that institutional treatment was not very helpful and could in some ways be harmful. His research indicates that the mental hospital creates a world that is somewhat insane itself and we are oblivious to the fact that those mentally crippled people (he did not use this term, I did) have to cope with it because they are stuck here. Some of the coping mechanisms that he describes were quite unusual and at the same time very understandable. Remember how he noticed that patients tried to preserve some semblance of an independent self by putting their personal belongings in what Erving referred to as “nests” where they could keep them from being stolen or confiscated, and so on. I think he felt that the mental hospitals pay no attention to the environment they create but only consider what “therapy” they offer. But I didn't think he dismissed the mental illness out of hand. Rather he called attention to the blindness of those operating mental hospitals not to notice what happens in “the other 23 hours.”

Shalin: It's just that he put “mental illness” in quotes in *Asylums*, but by the time he was writing “The Insanity of Place,” he removed the quotations marks. In the book he says nothing about the “organic” roots of mental illness; he does so in the article written after his wife's tragic death. This makes me wonder to what extent his account might have been autobiographic. I learned from Mel Kohn that Erving's wife saw a psychiatrist at the time when Goffman had worked at St. Elizabeth's hospital. And apparently Erving was unhappy about the treatment his wife was getting. *Asylums* might have been an expression of his displeasure with psychiatry, at least with psychoanalysts who were popular at the time. Someone mentioned to me, and this might have been Renee Fox, although I

have to double-check it, that Sky might have been a patient at St. Elizabeth's.

Wiseman: I have never heard that.

Shalin: I have to verify that. The other thing I heard was that Erving left for Berkeley while Sky stayed behind with their son, that the two lived apart for perhaps as long as a year.

Wiseman: I didn't know that.

Shalin: You mentioned that at some point Erving moved out of the house at Berkeley and then came back. That caught my ear.

Wiseman: At one point he gave me his telephone number and said, "This is how you can get in touch with me. I have moved out of the house for a time. That's all he said and I felt our relationship was such that I couldn't ask him personal probing questions the way he could ask me (i.e. requesting the names of my friends.)"

Shalin: There was clear asymmetry in your relationship.

Wiseman: It was very asymmetric, which was OK, as that was what I expected. I was a student, and he was a professor. (In earlier parts of my life, when I was a research director at Stanford Research Institute and later at Field Research Company, I was treated like a colleague.) But this was different. As a graduate student I definitely knew my place. I should mention and that in those days he called me "Mrs. Wiseman" and I called him "Mr. Goffman." However, during an interchange he often called me "Honey" or "Kiddo." Did anybody else tell you he called others names like that?

Shalin: Yes, Sherri Cavan did. She said he called her Kiddo.

Wiseman: Let me elaborate a little. Upon first addressing me, he would never say, "Honey, come here." He'd say, "Mrs. Wiseman, come here. There is something (on this paper) that I want to point out to you." And then he'd say, "Look, Honey, the best thing to do with this area . . . etc."

Shalin: That was probably a common form of address at this age.

Wiseman: I think so. In fact, Lynn Lofland said, "Did he get away with doing that?" And I said, "Yes. And on top of that, I was sort of pleased, you know." It seemed friendly at the time. It never occurred to me that it might not be what we now call a politically incorrect way for a male professor to address a female student. And of course, I could never call him Kiddo or Honey!

Wiseman: I set aside preparation for the orals to study French and then Italian. Erving once told me that the average graduate student loses about two years of their lives meeting this requirement for the doctorate – to be able to read sociological journal literature in two languages. He was right. If you failed, you had to wait three months before re-taking it, while still trying to enlarge your vocabulary and enhance your knowledge of the rules of grammar. I failed French the first time. For Italian I paid a tutor and passed the first time. After passing the language exams, I went back to studying for the orals.

At one of my regular meetings with Erving he asked how my preparation for the orals was going. I told him that the library typing room where students could put their portable typewriters and type notes from books that have a limited checkout time, was gone. The library had changed it into a computer room. I remember thinking, what do they want that for? I did not realize that was the wave of the future. I told Erving, "This is a real loss to me inasmuch as I only come to Berkeley three days a week." He reached into his pocket, pulled out a key, and threw it across the desk and said, "Go out and have this key duplicated. You can use my office any time you want except on Tuesday afternoons when I have to be here for office hours." And I had his office for a year.

Shalin: How nice of him.

Wiseman: However, there was a catch. When I asked him to serve on my orals and dissertation committee, he refused.

Shalin: He refused, you said?

Wiseman: Yes, he refused. He said it would not look good. He said, "I am loaning you my office. The faculty might think I couldn't be fair in judging you. Therefore I cannot serve on your committee."

Shalin: Was that the dissertation committee or the orals committee?

Wiseman: The Department used the same committee for both. Given he wasn't going to be on my committee, Erving then made suggestions as to who would be best on my committee. His first general suggestion was, "Don't get anyone who is sociologically young." He said, "If you get a young assistant professor, he will be so busy impressing other members on the committee with his sociological sophistication, that he will kill you in the process."

Shalin: I see.

Wiseman: Erving also suggested Herbert Blumer be the chair. He said Blumer could keep the committee gracious. He suggested that I take a seminar or tutorial from Herbert Blumer. I remember going to Herbert Blumer and asking him if he would accept me for a tutorial. I said, "Unfortunately, I never had an opportunity to take a class from you." Herbert Blumer stood up, half-bowed, and said, "Madam, it is my loss." And I just about fell over. He was that kind of man. He also accepted me for a tutorial, and it was very helpful.

Erving also recommended David Matza for the committee and suggested I take a class from him. I knew he was teaching deviant behavior. I told [Erving], "Well, I have already had Deviant Behavior from you." He said, "Well, Matza will have some valuable things for you to learn also." Erving was right. David's seminar was excellent, and he was very helpful on the dissertation, as well.

Wiseman: I also selected John Clausen, who had arranged for me to have a fellowship (with a stipend) through the Department of Public Health after I passed the orals. In his relationship with students, John seemed to me to be a very uptight man. Whenever I met with him, I felt as though he didn't think I was good enough. I remember having a cookie or something in my hand in a

napkin, and crumbling the whole thing while talking to him because I was so nervous. Later, I told Erving that I didn't think John Clausen liked me, and I wondered whether or not I should keep him on my committee. Erving answered me by saying, "You had better hope that he doesn't like you, because he is such a straight arrow he would bend over to stand up straight, and he will do more than the right thing by you." Now, that was a very nice thing to say!

Shalin: That was Erving telling you about Clausen? At some point I'd like to hear more about Blumer and the impression he left on you.

Wiseman: But to go on . . . before I took the orals, Erving called me in and wished me luck. I think I told him that I was really worried. He said, "They want you to pass, you know." I said, "They do?" Actually, I did not think they cared one way or the other. "Yes," he said, "they always want to pass the student if they can." Then he said, "Call me and let me know how you do." I said, "I'll call you if I pass." And then I said, "I guess I can be adult enough to call you either way." So, I passed, and I called him. He said. "One of the pleasures of teaching is shepherding promising and talented students through their graduate training. And now I may call you Jacqueline, and you may call me Erving." I was so touched that I started to cry, although he didn't know that. I almost cry now when I tell you this, it was such a beautiful speech. Parenthetically, he never did call me Jacqueline or Jackie. I called him Erving and he continued to call me Honey or Kiddo, although he dropped addressing me as Mrs. Wiseman.

Wiseman: I did continue to see Erving about my dissertation. At one of our meetings I told him I wanted to study alcoholism, specifically, why some middle class men can drink and stop while others cannot. He said, "Look, Kiddo – that's too big a problem for you to tackle. Millions of dollars have been spent on that problem. Find something that you can reasonably handle."

I went to see him later with a new idea. What happened in the interim was that I met the head of the San Francisco Department of Public Health and told him about my interest in alcoholism. He said, "First of all you will have trouble with your sample. Middle class

men will not admit they are alcoholics. What you need to do, is to look at lower class men, who already admit they have a problem with alcohol and are already known as alcoholics. I suggest you do some preliminary interviewing in the Skid Row area where they hang out." So I did a little bit of that. Since Erving had told me to look at the interactions and noticing their continually changing living arrangements, I asked some of the men, "How do you keep track of your friends?" And one man responded, "We never worry about friends that are missing because we know they are out making the loop." When I asked what the loop is I learned that it is going from a city jail to a county jail to the mental hospital and to the Salvation Army, and back to Skid Row. They go round and round to these various agencies intended to help them with their drinking problem. So I decided I would go around with them – go to city jail and county jail and the mental hospital and Salvation Army, and I would interview them at each place. Erving thought that sounded wonderful. He said, "They sleep in all of those places. I suggest that you go to the Salvation Army in drag (i.e. men's clothes) so you can interview them in their dorms. I said, "Erving, I don't really want to do that." I don't know whether he was serious or not. He did like to tease.

Wiseman: John Clausen and Andie Knutson arranged for me to receive me grants from NIMH and NIH, which would help support me. Erving applied to The Scientific Advisory Council for Licensed Beverages Industry Inc. for a grant that would pay such expenses as living out of town while interviewing at the mental hospital, having the interview tapes transcribed, hiring and training coders for the data, and having the final form of the dissertation typed.

After the dissertation was passed by the committee, Erving asked me if he could read the final form. I gave it to him, and a little bit later I received a call from him saying, "I'd like to discuss this with you. Why don't we meet over lunch?" I said fine. I met him, and we went to a restaurant where all of the items were up on the wall, and you pointed out to the server what you wanted. Before we ordered, Erving turned to me and said, "What would you like – that you can afford, of course – because don't think I'm going to buy you a lunch."

[Laughter].

So I bought something I could afford. I remember he banged the dissertation manuscript down on the table with sort of gesture that said, "Well, that's that!" It was huge, 500 pages (the book ran about 300 pages), so it made quite a bang! Erving said, "Well, I found a few things in this that I can use." I cannot remember anything else he said. I gathered that he thought it was OK.

I remember I thought this was a good time to ask him to change my grade in his Deviant Behavior course so that it would reflect the grade he gave me on the paper, since that was to be the course grade as well. Here is what happened. I was driving across the Bay Bridge to take him this term paper when I got caught in traffic. After crossing I went to a phone and called him and asked him move his deadline for papers from 11:00 a.m. to 11:30, so I could still hand it in. He said that he couldn't wait to turn his grades in, so he would give me a grade of "B." Then, when he received the paper, he would put the true grade on it, and if it was different, he would arrange to have it changed on my transcript. This was to be the grade for the entire course. When I received the paper later, he had given it an "A." That is why, during our lunch, I asked him to change the course grade in the registrar's office. He groaned, saying it was too much trouble, too many forms to fill out, etc. I said, "Well I earned the "A" so I should have it on my transcript."

He said, "Look Kiddo, where you are going (to university teaching appointments) they don't look at transcripts. They look at letters of recommendation, and I will write you very good letters. That is where your jobs are coming from – the letters. So I am not going through the bureaucratic hassle of changing a course grade." So I knew the issue was closed and didn't pursue it further.

In fact, some time later I accidentally saw some of the letters of recommendations that he wrote for me, that I was "one of the most promising, one of the most insightful, etc., etc." . . . few of the things that he ever said to me personally. I was just amazed at his kindness.

After I received the Ph.D., I saw that Erving was right (about making friends in your field and about the power of letters of recommendation). I was invited to give papers. I was hired by San Francisco State University. Later I became a visiting professor at Yale and after that a visiting professor at Dartmouth. I'm certain those letters helped.

Shalin: You don't have those letters, by the way?

Wiseman: No-o-o-o! They were in my personnel file. I wasn't even supposed to see them. There weren't any Xerox machines nearby, so I couldn't copy them.

Shalin: They are probably still in your files in all those places.

Wiseman: Oh, yes. They probably are. Ultimately, Erving was the one who suggested the title for the study when it was published by Prentice-Hall.

Shalin: And the title was . . .

Wiseman: *Stations of the Lost: The Treatment of Skid Row Alcoholics*, which was, of course, a take on the "Stations of the Cross." And later, after Prentice-Hall stopped printing it, the University of Chicago Press picked it up. I still get some small royalties from the University of Chicago Press.

Shalin: Jackie, if we could backtrack a little bit . . .

Wiseman: OK.

Shalin: You must have taken some of Erving's classes or seminars.

Wiseman: Yes.

Shalin: Could you talk about Erving the teacher – his teaching style, grading habits, things like that.

Wiseman: This is so embarrassing. I remember more about our personal interactions than actually learning specific aspects of Erving as a teacher.

Shalin: Why?

Wiseman: I don't remember any details. Maybe we could come back to this topic and I will try to remember more.

Shalin: What about general impressions.

Wiseman: He had sort of informal way of lecturing, yet he wouldn't tolerate any interruptions. I still have my class notes somewhere.

Shalin: You do?

Wiseman: Yes. I typed all my class lectures in order to fix them in my memory. As a result, my notes are quite complete. Thinking of my notes from his deviant behavior class, I do recall he covered, quite completely, various theories extant at the time, followed by a critique pointing out flaws in each when used as a theoretical and/or a methodological approach to various aspects of human group life.

Shalin: This could be very valuable. It would be great to have a copy of those at some point.

Wiseman: OK.

Shalin: Then we can see which classes you took.

Wiseman: I took "Deviant Behavior." I think that's all I took from him. What else did he teach?

Shalin: He had a seminar, I think. He co-taught a seminar with – what's his name – Matza?

Wiseman: Matza.

Shalin: Yes, David Matza. He co-taught a seminar with Erving.

Wiseman: He also urged me to take seminars from sociologists who analyzed data with so-called sophisticated mathematical manipulation, an approach which I had no intention of using. Once, he suggested I read some of the journal articles featuring sociometry as a method. I resisted and said, "Why do I have to read that? I'm never going to do that type of sociology. He said, "We have to know what the enemy is doing." I've never forgotten that bit of advice.

Shalin: An interesting remark.

Wiseman: As a result, here I am, a devout Democrat, reading William Kristol years after Erving's advice, because you've got to know what the enemy is doing. I still think of Erving when I force myself give some attention to something I consider "unworthy" of my time and would prefer to ignore.

Shalin: [**Laughing**]. By the way, how would you describe Erving's politics? Anything you've noticed?

Wiseman: Nothing. However, I assume that anyone as intelligent as Erving would have to be a liberal.

Shalin: That's interesting.

[**Laughter**].

Wiseman: I think it is strange that I cannot remember substantive comments on my work, aside from his statement that he got a "few useful things" from it. He had such a memorable personality, and that took precedence and stayed with me longer than what he said about my work or his own.

Shalin: Right. We profess not only through our words and lectures but also through the kind of human beings we are, through our embodied actions, which stay longer in students' memory than the theories and methods taught in class.

Wiseman: I think that is quite right. It all makes me feel better about being interviewed. As I told you before our interview date, I

was concerned that you would be disappointed that my memory does not include something he said on research methodology or sociological theory.

Shalin: Not at all. If you'd seen my paper [on Goffman], you would know that the biocritical study I pursue is based on the premise that great works of art and scholarship feed on the creator's embodied experience, on emotions, that such work tends to be autobiographical in some respect.

Wiseman: That makes me feel a great deal better. Additionally, before this interview, I read John Lofland's [1983 tribute to Goffman] in which he discusses the contradictions in Goffman's presentation of self, and that is very insightful description. I haven't read all of the interviews, but I do note that those I have read seem to remember primarily their interactions with Goffman.

Shalin: That must be for a reason.

Wiseman: One important thing – he was always analyzing things. Another time when we went to lunch together in the student cafeteria, he began to watch a couple at another table, and then he said to me, "That woman is trying . . . or that man," I cannot remember which, "is trying to impress that woman in order to get her into bed with him," or something [like that]. And then he turned to me and said, "How do I know that?" I said, "I don't know." And he said, "Well, I'll have to think about that."

One other illustration of Erving's constant observations should be included here: When women attending the ASA, based that year in a New Orleans Hotel, discovered that one very nice dining room was "for men only", they decided to hold a sit-in to protest. Shortly after the sit-in started, Erving joined them! I'm not certain whether or not other ASA male delegates' joined in support of their colleagues (because I learned of this incident second-hand), but I feel certain that Erving did it primarily to study the interaction. Apropos of this conjecture on my part, when Berkeley was hit with the Free Speech Movement, he chided those sociologists who joined the protestors in the picketing, etc., saying

"Sociologists don't take part in collective movements, they study them."

Anyway, I can give you more of my memories of Erving after I became a professor at S. F. State University and then at Yale as a visiting professor. You can tell me when you are tired.

Shalin: Oh, no – I'm never tired of hearing that. I am afraid that you might be tired. So please let me know when you are.

Wiseman: While I was teaching at S. F. State, John Lofland, who at the time was chairing the program for the Pacific Sociological Association annual meeting in San Jose this year, had created a qualitative methodology session. Inasmuch as there is no explicit set of methods concerned with this type of research (unlike survey research which is more completely developed), John thought that persons who had done qualitative work that had been published could describe approaches they developed for gathering and analysis they have developed. He invited Erving and me and approximately two others, I think, to discuss their methods. Parenthetically, John Lofland also mentioned to me that while most of the session participants will share many of their methodological approaches, Erving probably would not because (John thinks) Erving fears that if he teaches others just how he does his type of sociological investigation, then they could easily learn his approach and, as a result, he would lose his edge. I don't know how true that is, but as I recall, Erving gave a rather general presentation on qualitative methodology while the other panel members (including me) were much more specific in discussions of some special ways they had developed for data gathering and analysis.

My home at that time was located down the Peninsula from San Francisco in Redwood City, closer to San Jose than Berkeley. Before the day of the PSA meetings, John came to me and said, "Erving would like to stay at your house the night before his presentation. Erving hates to pay for a hotel." I said, "Sure, he can stay at my house." Immediately upon arrival Erving started making remarks about furnishings in the house, which incidentally was a lovely old two-story house in Edgewood Park with a swimming pool,

the nicest part of Redwood City. My son, who was about eleven at the time, had painted on one wall, or hung on one wall, a huge "peace sign." My daughter, age nine, had put a lace tablecloth on my dining room table, which is a very old fashioned thing to do. And he said, "What this peace sign is doing there?" I said, "That's my son's." He said, "You know it is very corny to have a lace tablecloth on your dining room table." I said, "My daughter put it there. I am trying to give my children a feeling this home is theirs." I am trying to think where my husband was at the time, but he wasn't there. I think he was in Sacramento on a job – he was a newspaper reporter. Erving also noticed a mural that I had painted on one wall, and he said. "Oh no, you didn't paint it yourself, did you!" "Oh – I couldn't afford a mural, so I had copied one that I really liked. I think I did a darn good job, too." I also remember he went to my kitchen and said, "There are crumbs on your toaster. Don't you ever wipe the crumbs off your toaster?" I said, "Well, I've been busy writing a proposal for an extension of my research grant concerned with a comparison of coping mechanisms of wives of alcoholics in Finland and America. That's what I was doing with my time rather than cleaning crumbs off my toaster."

That evening, John Lofland, John Irwin, and others I don't recall, came to my house the evening before the PSA sessions. Erving held a kind of seminar in my living room. It was not planned, but when he sat down, people just grouped themselves around him, and what followed was not a general conversation – everything was directed to Erving, and he responded. Did you hear about that?

Shalin: John Irwin has a short version of Erving's staying at your place, I believe. It is in his memoir posted in the Goffman archives. I will send you the web link to Irwin's memoir.

Wiseman: That's fine. I had a PSA Editorial Committee meeting in the morning so I had to leave earlier than necessary for the Methodology session in which Erving and I were giving papers. So I asked him, "Do you want to get up and have breakfast with me or do you want me leave coffee, orange juice and muffins you, and I'll go on ahead?" He said, "You can just leave coffee and muffins." So I left coffee and muffins and went to my meeting. Later on I found

a note [from Erving], by the coffee pot, and I think I remember it correctly. It said, "Your house is a message and an icon, and I learned a great deal from it. But don't expect it will ever be written up in *House Beautiful*. Love, Erving."

Shalin: [**Laughing**]. You wouldn't happen to have this note? Did it survive?

Wiseman: No, I didn't know enough to save it. I wish I had.

Shalin: You never know.

Wiseman: Then, I was invited to be a visiting professor at Yale by Kai Erikson. He had read the manuscript of the *Stations of the Lost*. I would be among the first women [teaching there] after they opened Yale to women. I talked it over with my husband and told him I didn't see how I could possibly accept. I said, "I should be with my nine year old girl and eleven year old boy and you." My husband said, "This is a chance of a lifetime, you should do it." So I accepted the visiting appointment. My husband and children put up a schedule of things to be done in the house in my absence. My son learned to cook during that period and still enjoys it very much.

Shalin: Your family didn't go with you?

Wiseman: No, I went by myself.

Erving called me from time to time when I was at Yale. He would call to chat and ask me how things were going. How did I like the students? . . . what subjects was I teaching? . . . did I talk to this or that faculty member? etc. When I told him that I was going home during spring break, Erving, who seemed to know all the airline schedules, said, "You can take such and such airline from Yale to Philadelphia, then you can schedule the next flight to leave about five-hours later. That way we could have lunch and then you can go on to the West Coast.

Shalin: He already was in Philadelphia.

Wiseman: Yes. I said I would treat him to lunch. He called later and said, "Be sure to take a taxi from the airport to (he named a hotel in downtown Philadelphia that had taxi stand) because I'm not going to drive to the airport to pick you up. He met me at the taxi stand, and to my surprise, he gave me a kiss like you are supposed to do when you meet somebody from out of town.

Shalin: A social kiss.

Wiseman: Yes. We went to lunch and he let me pay. We ate in a sort of gazebo that was very pleasant, but he wouldn't let me tip. He said, "Women don't know how to tip."

Wiseman: Then we decided to walk around and talk. We walked through some kind of a street fair where Erving bought some ceramic or china plates. "These are for my son who breaks them up to make mosaics. My son is doing very well."

Shalin: Did you, by the way, have a chance to meet Erving's son?

Wiseman: No.

While we were walking the streets of Philadelphia, three pretty young women were coming toward us on the sidewalk. There were doves somewhere, and the doves all of a sudden flew up in front of the women. One of the women put her arms up in a gesture of [either] surprise or defense, and Erving said, "Did you see that, did you see that reaction? That was such an old fashioned and feminine gesture. Did you notice how her hands momentarily came to rest on her breasts?" And then he went on about what it meant, I cannot unfortunately remember what he said.

Shalin: He was always on the lookout for [meaning]. He was always a participant observer and observant participant. No sharp division between Goffman the scholar and Goffman the man.

Wiseman: No, none. Well put. You were with him but not of him, so to speak. He was [always] being ethnographer, even though we were having a social time, he was still being an observer.

At the end of our after-lunch walk, he turned to me and said, "Well Kiddo, I've just spent three hours with you. At my current rate, you owe me \$3,000." That was his price for a three-hour speaking engagement. I said, "Well, Erving, at my current rate, which is \$600, I owe you only \$2,400." Then we walked to the cab stand, and he gave me another social kiss, the kind that is expected when you are saying goodbye to a friend who is getting on an airplane and flying to the West Coast.

Shalin: I see.

Wiseman: Here I another Erving Vignette. And undoubtedly you must have heard about the time a number of us (all Berkeley grads, as I remember) were standing in a little circle in the lobby at a convention, he ran up to us and said, "Don't go away, because if I don't find anyone more prestigious than you, I'll be back to have dinner with you."

Shalin: Did you hear about this story or witnessed it?

Wiseman: I was there.

Shalin: Do you recall where and when this was?

Wiseman: It was a convention at San Francisco, I think.

Shalin: An ASA meeting?

Wiseman: Yes. I know John Irwin was there. I think John Lofland was also.

Shalin: Three of you.

Wiseman: I think there were about four of us, maybe five. I can't remember who the others were. But he did come back.

Shalin: He did!

Wiseman: Yes. And he did have dinner with us, and was his usual, wonderful self, and the center of attention, naturally.

Shalin: Could you tell me a bit more about Erving's ways at restaurants, with friends at a party?

Wiseman: [**Laughing**]. I think he never stopped making quips that were wry and sometimes too pointed (i.e., hurtful) observations. For instance, I was at a party where a group of his graduate students gathered (I felt lucky to be included), and they were all smoking pot. I think Erving was the only faculty there. I had never smoked pot (I had never smoked cigarettes). And so they were coaching me, saying, "Inhale deeply. Hold it in," etc., etc. And then, "Are you feeling that?" I said, "I don't feel anything. I am getting a sore throat." And then Erving said (with what to me sounded like disdain in his voice), "Oh, you are so middle class."

Shalin: [**Laughing**]. Who said that?

Wiseman: Erving. That was the last thing I wanted to hear.

Shalin: That was a real putdown.

Wiseman: That was a real putdown, "You are so-o-o middle class."

Shalin: Was he participating in pot smoking?

Wiseman: Oh, sure.

Shalin: He was?

Wiseman: Well, actually, I assume so. Now that I think back, I don't really know. I think everybody but me [did]. The onus was on me to smoke pot and join the crowd. . . .

Shalin: So he was very much in the middle of merrymaking.

Wiseman: Oh, yes.

Shalin: Making quips.

Wiseman: Yes, although I don't remember any of them.

Shalin: Was he always the center of attention?

Wiseman: Always, and he always seemed to be enjoying it.

Shalin: Did he crave the attention, what's your feeling?

Wiseman: I never thought of it as a craving. He was so charismatic that he just naturally became the center of attention. It was as though he couldn't stop himself from making clever remarks, which he made, as though he didn't care if they might be hurtful. If he saw things in any situation that [called for] a good remark or a putdown, he didn't hesitate to say it. We expected it, enjoyed it, and endured it even when we were the butt of a joke.

He also did a very clever imitation of the way that sociologists at national or regional meetings would act around each other. In his parody, he would rush up to an invisible person and say, "Oh, Joe, so good to see you! We must get together . . . Oh, there is Jim – Hello Jim, we must get together sometime! Oh, there is John. . . " The idea was that the sociologist was working his way up to someone really important, while showing others that he was there, while really not caring for any of them. I think that was the motivation behind rushing up to us and announcing that if he couldn't find anyone more prestigious, he would settle for eating with us!

Although he seemed to be quite permissive toward smoking pot, he seemed to have a different attitude toward alcohol at least, on one occasion. At an ASA council meeting when he was president-elect, he asked me to find a nice inexpensive restaurant that would accommodate the whole council. I knew just the right one – a country French restaurant that had a very reasonably priced menu and a private room for us. If I tell you they served wine in a pitcher, that gives you some idea of the price. When the pitcher came to me, I started to fill my wine glass when Erving stopped me and said, "Put a couple of ice cubes in your glass before pouring." I said, "That will ruin the taste of the wine." He said something like, "The most important thing is that it doesn't go to your head." He then put a couple of ice cubes in his glass, but I refused to put any

in mine. He sort of glowered at me, but said nothing and we got through the dinner.

As another illustration of his straightforwardness, I remember when it was the style for women to wear high fitted boots and short skirts, and I was dressed that way, too. In those days, I liked to think of myself as someone with pretty good legs. I was sitting across him, in the lobby of some hotel, and we were talking when he said, out of the blue, "You know, that's the outfit of prostitutes in New York City."

Shalin: Erving telling you that.

Wiseman: Yes. I said, "I didn't know that." He said, "Well, it is."

Shalin: If you don't mind me asking you this, Jackie – I found it interesting that while Goffman did not appreciate women in graduate school who, as you said, might not have been seriously committed to studying, he appears to have treated female graduate students somewhat differently. I don't know, but I got the feeling that he could come down harder on male graduate students. Did you get any sense this might have been the case?

Wiseman: No, not while I was there. At the time, I didn't think I was treated any differently than the men. I knew I was accepted in this charmed circle of students he liked to work with, and that was it. I didn't see in him any sexism at all. I didn't realize how really mean he could be toward male students until I read some of the interviews in your collection. I was surprised [reading in his memoir] that John Irwin, who once told me he loved Erving, decided not to have him on his committee. I thought Erving's quips to me about my dress, my house, the crumbs on my toaster or my failure at smoking pot, were personal put-downs quite apart from his assessment of my work.

Shalin: Erving stayed unmarried for quite some time. Sky committed suicide in 1964, and Erving remarried around 1980, I think.

Wiseman: I don't know.

Shalin: Apparently, he was a bachelor all these years.

Wiseman: I think he was.

Shalin: Nothing is known about his private life in this period.

Wiseman: Nothing. He didn't encourage discussions of his private life.

Shalin: He was private about his ways.

Wiseman: Once I finished the dissertation, and began to teach at San Francisco State, I had no reason to contact him in the same way that I did as a graduate student. And he didn't start calling me in a sort of equal friendly way until I was at Yale. And despite his speech about how we could be colleagues, I didn't feel at ease calling him. So, I don't know.

Shalin: There was nothing unusual about some quips he made at the time. I was wondering if he might have admired women graduate students more than men.

Wiseman: I really don't know.

Shalin: Did you know Erving had a sister?

Wiseman: Not until Sherri Cavan told me in first discussing this project. He never mentioned his family to me when we talked. . . . He was a very private person, for the most part. He made the decision concerning what, of his life he wanted to share.

Once he took me out to a faculty parking lot in Berkeley and showed me his car with obvious pride. He had a Ferrari or a Jaguar or something. He wanted me to see it. I regret to say I didn't know much about cars then. He pointed in the general direction of the cars and said, "What do you think of that?" I said, "Which one is it?" And he said, "Oh, my God! You don't even know . . ." – I forgot which it was. I said, "No, I am sorry. But it is very nice!" But it was too late. I had lost points.

Shalin: [**Laughing**]. Do you remember the color of his car?"

Wiseman: It was too dark.

Shalin: It was dark?

Wiseman: It was dark enough so that the color didn't stand out. It was probably late in the afternoon in the winter when it gets dark early.

Shalin: Sky had a red Jaguar, which she drove when she jumped off the bridge.

Wiseman: No, I don't recall the color

Wiseman: Oh, I have something interesting to tell you about Erving.

Shalin: Please.

Wiseman: I went to an ASA meeting in New York and while there planned to sell quite a large diamond my mother had left me. My husband and I wanted to use it for some remodeling. I walked to the diamond district which was about six blocks from the Hilton Hotel. I didn't know what to expect. All the stores were locked and you had to be buzzed in. I took out the diamond and showed it to a man. He looked at it and said, "How much do you want for it?" And I said, "What would you give me" And they'd say, "How much you want," and they wouldn't mention a sum. So after trying a few stores, with the same results, I gave up and went back to the hotel. I was in the lobby telling my experiences to some friends, Erving was among them, and he suddenly said, "I'll sell it for you, Honey."

Shalin: So you mentioned it to Erving.

Wiseman: Erving was part of the group listening to my diamond district experience. After volunteering to help me, he took me aside and said, "I'll tell you why you can't sell it. Those are conservative Jews (in the diamond district), they do not like to do business with women. Here's what we will do. Give me the diamond to carry in a little envelope. You come with me, you are my sister and you don't

open your mouth." So we went together. Erving did all the talking. At one point they wanted to take the diamond into their back room and remove it from the mounting. I started to object because I feared they might substitute it for a less valuable stone. Erving looked at me angrily and said under his breath, "Quiet." Erving sold it for three or four thousand dollars (about or more than I had had it appraised for, although I hadn't told Erving about the appraisal). They paid me in cash and I put it in a pouch underneath my clothes, and then we left. We were laughing about something and I felt quite giddy from the experience. I said, "I'll buy you a diner tonight." He said, "You can buy me an ice-cream cone. I've got to catch a plane in an hour and a half." Then, I realized he took time just before catching a plane to help me sell a diamond! So we ate the ice cream cones while walking back to the hotel and laughing all the way about something, although I cannot remember what. I have a very happy memory of that episode.

Shalin: That must have been a store run by a Jewish family living in the diamond district. Now, how would you describe Erving's Judaism? He was not religious, right?

Wiseman: I don't know, but I do know he was very proud to be a Jew.

Shalin: Could you elaborate on how he related to his Jewishness?

Wiseman: I'll give you one illustration. In the days when I first started graduate school (maybe about a year in) I would go to his office for our usual "mentoring meetings." Our talks would range over many topics, and I always left his office exhilarated at new ideas he would put forward. Every now and then, in the course of some discussion, he would say to me, "The way we Jews look at this," or "we Jews feel this way, don't you think?" I always agreed because I wanted to be accepted as Jewish with him and Berkeley sociology students because they were so bright and exciting to be with.

Anyway, one day he used the expression "We Jews" in one discussion about five times, and I began to feel like an imposter. So I said, "Erving, I've got to tell you something. I am

not Jewish. I grew up in Nebraska. There was only one Jewish family there. They owned the dry goods store, and a ladies ready-to-wear shop and were quite wealthy and much admired. Every year at Christmas and Easter, they would visit one of the churches in our town. We were always thrilled when they came to our Episcopalian church. (I could hear grown-ups in the background saying, "Oh, they are coming here!" since the way their car was parked, they could have easily gone to the Lutheran Church across the way. And they sounded very pleased.) I didn't know anything about anti-Semitism. In fact, until I got to college, I thought that the term was "antisemantic," and I couldn't figure out how anyone could be against semantics. After my declaration there was a long silence. Then Erving said, "I've always thought there was something the matter with you."

Shalin: [Laughing]. This is a funny.

Wiseman: I don't know if I want it in, though. Do I have a choice?

Shalin: Of course! You can delete anything in the transcript when you edit it. This is a great story, though.

Wiseman: He never treated me any differently after that. I continued to meet with him on a regular basis.

Shalin: But he must have assumed all along that you were Jewish.

Wiseman: Oh, yes! That's why he used the term "We Jews" when talking to me. Then after my confession, he never used the term again until I received the C. Wright Mills Award.

Shalin: What award?

Wiseman: The Society for the Study of Social Problems awarded me the C. Wright Mills Award for *Stations of the Lost* as the best book in the area of social problems. It was my dissertation published by Prentice-Hall. Erving stopped me in the hotel lobby right after the announcement and he was obviously elated and said, "We Jews showed them, didn't

we?" And I replied, "We sure did!" Erving said, "You won, didn't you!" So I figured he reincarnated me, he had accepted me as . . .

Shalin: . . . an honorary Jew.

Wiseman: And I was thrilled. That answers your question, doesn't it?

Shalin: Oh, yes. I don't think he was religious, but somehow he was very much aware of his roots.

Wiseman: Well, in class, he talked about the fact that Denmark was one of the few nations that got their Jews out to Sweden during the Holocaust. He would talk about the Holocaust once in a while.

Shalin: What would he say?

Wiseman: That's the only thing I remember clearly. I'll think about it a little longer.

Shalin: So you would see Erving occasionally, mostly at the meetings. I imagine you got your Ph.D. around 1967 or 68.

Wiseman: Something like that.

Shalin: You must have finished your dissertation in the late 60s or early 70s.

Wiseman: Late 60s, I think. I can look that up.

Shalin: You must have seen Erving about once a year.

Wiseman: Oh yes, maybe more. We both went to the same scholarly meetings.

Shalin: Did he like to come to those meetings?

Wiseman: He always seemed to be in high spirits during the meetings. For instance, there was a meeting I attended when I had just returned from Europe, with my husband and children. I am trying to think if that was in San Francisco. I think so, because it

was easy for me to go. I had caught some kind of bug by eating street food in Barcelona (which I should have known better than to do) and I was getting sore throat. I ran into Erving, and he said, "Come and seat next to me at the banquet." And I said, "Erving, you don't want to sit next to me. I am getting sore throat, and I won't even be able to talk to you." He said, "You don't have to talk. You can listen to me talk."

[Laughter]

Shalin: He must have really enjoyed your company.

Wiseman. So I was very pleased and sat next to him. In fact, he did that every now and then at meetings. He would say, "Come and sit next to me," referring to some group dinner we were both going to attend.

Shalin: Erving died in 1982.

Wiseman: Oh, yes, and I have some things to tell you.

Shalin: Please, please.

Wiseman: Here is something important I want to tell you. He was elected president of the ASA much to everyone's surprise. Certainly none of us who called ourselves symbolic interactionists, ethnographers, or qualitative researchers thought that the ASA would elect him president, given the ASA membership emphasis on mathematical analyses and survey research and, if I may say so, perfectly boring research. The first year he served as president (I was on the ASA Council at the time) he proposed to do a survey among the members to see what they liked about the ASA journals and what they did not like – did they think the journal articles were readable and informative, did they cover a wide range of methodological and theoretical interests of their members? I thought it was both a daring and an excellent idea. I think if he had been able to persist, he might have helped improve the *American Sociological Review* and give it a broader readership. I thought it was both a daring and excellent idea. He never got to follow through on the survey because of the development of cancer.

Wiseman: I know.

Wiseman: He called me before I knew he was so very ill to ask me to set up a reception for people attending his talk. I said, "Yes, [I'll do it]." And he said, "I want very good food – beef, etc., and none of those little squares of cheese and drinks," etc. "You set it up, and then you call me, and I'll put my credit card on it."

Shalin: He was willing to pay himself for it?

Wiseman: He was going to pay personally for it.

Shalin: And that reception was for what – ASA members?

Wiseman: I am not sure, but I think this was to be served after his presidential speech. By the way, I noted in John Irwin's interview, that he also asked Marsha Rosenbaum to do much the same. I don't remember what eventually happened. I do know, I did not buy the food.

Shalin: He never got to give his presidential address. I believe he was elected in 1982 and was supposed to be giving a talk in 1983 [Goffman was elected ASA president in 1981, and his presidential address was to be delivered at the 1982 ASA meeting]. So he was going to pay for the reception for the entire ASA membership?

Wiseman: I doubt it was the entire membership. Probably it was for the Council and perhaps persons in charge of the program and/or or plenary speakers, something like that. . . . Of course, it never happened at all.

Shalin: It would be rather unusual [for Erving to underwrite this]. He wasn't particularly happy to part with his money, I understand.

Wiseman: No-o-o! He was known for that. Parenthetically, he once told me how to fly first class while paying coach.

Shalin: What did he tell you?

Wiseman: I don't remember. It sounded too complex to try.

Shalin: But his mind was working in this direction.

Wiseman: That's right. His mind was always trying to figure out how things work. Anyway, to get back to the reception food request, I said, "I'll do my best with arrangements and we shall celebrate your reign." And he said, "Yes, my reign," in a funny tone of voice. Looking back, I think he already knew he did not have long to live.

After his cancer was announced in Council meeting, I wrote him a sort of an encouraging letter, telling of friends of mine who had beaten cancer. I waited a little while and then I called him and he said, "Why are you bothering me?" I said, "Erving, I am very worried, and I want you to know I am thinking about you, and that you have my support," etc. I tried to tell him that he should be brave, if he had to go through chemotherapy. He said, "Don't call me again unless you want to talk about sociology or you have a sociological analysis problem," and then he hung up without saying goodbye.

Shalin: That's odd.

Wiseman: And so, I tried desperately to think of some pretence on which I could call him. He wasn't an easy man to fool, as you can see. And he would catch me in a minute if I tried to discuss a made-up problem because I wouldn't be able to discuss it in depth.

Shalin: Right.

Wiseman: In the meantime, he died.

Shalin: That was the last time you spoke to him.

Wiseman: That was the last time we talked. It was a terrible blow! After he died, I had a dream which says more about me than about him.

Shalin: No, no, that can be very important!

Wiseman: The dream was – I ran into him and I said, “Oh, Erving! I feel terrible. I didn’t get to call you or talk to you again.” And he held up his hand, and he sort of waved it back and forth the way he would do when he wants to stop somebody from talking, and he said, “Don’t worry about it, Honey.” That was the dream.

Shalin: Hm-m-m, and the sentiment was sort of “Don’t worry about it. It’s OK.”

Wiseman: I hope so. That’s what I have been telling myself.

Shalin: Meaning, he forgave you. Or maybe it wasn’t really important.

Wiseman: Yes, that he forgave me, that he understood, that it was OK.

Shalin: Well, maybe he was indeed waving at you from afar . . .

Wiseman: That’s what I would like to think. The dream was so clear and real.

Shalin: . . . from another world where he is now doing ethnography.

Wiseman: Wouldn’t that be wonderful! . . . But I suppose you know that when he knew he was dying, he called John Irwin, John Lofland, and I don’t know who else of his favorite male students, but he didn’t call me.

Shalin: No, I didn’t know that.

Wiseman: What I was told by John Irwin was that Erving did not tell any of the faculty at Penn or Berkeley [about his illness]; that he was closer to his students than to the faculty. Now, I know that you interviewed Joe Gusfield. I don’t know whether Joe was given a different treatment. Anyway, I brought up [the issue of] whether he called any faculty to tell them that he was dying. As I recall John Irwin said that he called only his favorite male students.

Shalin: Not female students.

Wiseman: Not female, so far as I know.

Shalin: And those students were Irwin, Lofland . . .

Wiseman: For sure John Irwin and John Lofland. . . . It could have been others. I remember that John Irwin told me that when Erving told him [about his cancer], he (John) had burst into tears on the phone while talking to Erving.

Shalin: Did Erving ever explain why he ran for ASA presidency?

Wiseman: It never came up.

Shalin: Sherri Cavan had some interesting insight on that.

Wiseman: Oh, really?

Shalin: According to Sherri, Erving told her that he did it for reasons of self-validation.

Wiseman: Well, that's good enough.

Shalin: Somehow it was important for him. He had something to prove after all.

Wiseman: . . . I was more surprised the ASA membership wanted him! I don't think he ever published in the ASA journals, or the AJS, either. I don't think he ever had anything good to say about the statistical-manipulation approach to data as a way for finding out what is really going on. I was also surprised he even wanted to do it, because he was so careful of his time. I think the reason he gave Sherri Cavan is probably the true reason. He wanted mainstream sociologists to recognize his work and his approach to doing it.

Shalin: Yes. There is apparently a file at the ASA office, marked "Goffman 1982." It must be related to his election, votes, reference letters. I am trying to get a hold of it, but I was told that it might be confidential. Now that the ASA is interested in the Goffman

archives' materials, I am trying to see if they are willing to grant access to the Goffman file. We'll see what happens. So that was the last time you spoke to him.

Wiseman: Yes.

Shalin: Right, but that's OK. It is valuable. One thing that puzzles me with Erving is that no one, so far as I know, ever saw a single page of his field notes. I wonder if he ever wrote field notes in a technical sense.

Wiseman: Oh, I think he did.

Shalin: Here is something I would like to have your opinion on. His entire life Erving studied other people's back stages, yet he was very protective of his own back stage.

Wiseman: Oh, yes.

Shalin: He rarely talked about himself, except in the private circumstances you'd mentioned, and when he died, he apparently cut all access to his archives. He didn't want anyone to know anything about him, except what he put himself in the public domain.

Wiseman: That puzzles me too. However, he may have not had archives. For instance, I finally threw away all the notes [I had collected for] *Stations of the Lost*. After that, I went over and interviewed wives of alcoholics much in the way of archives either. You keep them for a couple of years and then you need the space for something else.

Shalin: Right, but more importantly, Goffman discovered conartistry at the core of our existence, and it must not have been easy for him to carve out a persona for himself in this world.

Wiseman: I don't know, what do you mean by "carving out a persona" anyway?

Shalin: What I mean is [not that he sat down one day and decided on the kind of self he wished to present in public]. His Master's thesis was on how we put the show on, present ourselves in public [in the best possible way]. But that posed a dilemma for him personally. His self-presentation, it seems to me, would have to be an anti-self-presentation.

Wiseman: My feeling about his interaction with others was different. Your analysis never occurred to me. I thought he was one of the few people I know who somewhat indulgently allowed himself to be himself whenever he felt like it. Frankly, when he threw the key to his office across the desk to me, I don't think he thought, "Well, should I do this for a student of mine? Would it look bad that she had my office when I am not in it? Would she take advantage of me?" I got the feeling that a lot of his [actions] were on the spur of the moment.

Shalin: So it was spontaneous.

Wiseman: I thought it was very spontaneous. I thought a lot of his quips were spontaneous. He had a charismatic personality combined with wit and wisdom which drew others to him. I'm just guessing, but I believe he enjoyed his gifts.

Shalin: You are an ethnographer, your expertise helps me figure out what kind of human being he was, what existential traits he embodied.

Wiseman: Well, he didn't want me to sit on a high stool and placed me on a low chair.

Shalin: Right, that's part of stagecraft.

Wiseman; "Are you experiencing any role conflict?" That is how he greeted Ruth Wallace who he had only known as Sister John the Baptist but who was now in street clothes after quitting the Order. He was always thinking sociology.

Shalin: That's what Erving told her?

Wiseman: Asking her, "Are you feeling any role conflict? You were once a nun and now you are not dressed like that anymore, not called sister anymore." I never thought of this as staged, and I could have been just innocent and wrong. I thought he couldn't resist spontaneous remarks and jibes, regardless of who the target might be and how they would feel about it. Of course, that is the advantage of being able to hold the attention of a small crowd. Even though someone is hurt by a remark, there are others who laugh and appreciate its cleverness.

Shalin: So he went out of his way to be himself. He went with the urge as opposed to dressing it up for the occasion.

Wiseman: I thought he allowed himself to be himself. He was relaxed in his ability to make right-on-target comments that were also humorous, unless you were the target, and even if you were, you might catch yourself laughing.

Shalin: He was not afraid to go against the convention. He was constantly testing the limits of those conventions. He was not afraid to test the limits of the interaction order.

Wiseman: Yes, it would seem so. You might think that he would say to himself, "Well, here goes the interaction order – I'm going to throw a brick through it, rupture it." I didn't think of it that way. I looked at his notable remarks and/or judgments as spontaneous reactions. For instance, when he said, to me, "Oh, you are so middle class!" in that disparaging tone of voice, I think the judgment occurred to him and one second later, he just said it. Keep in mind that although he may have may hurt my feelings, there were plenty of others who appreciated his on-the-spot analysis.

Shalin: Do you think he differentiated among the students who wrote dissertations with him?

Wiseman: I really wouldn't know. I never heard of comparison discussions among his students.

Shalin: Tom Scheff published a book in 2006, *Goffman Unbound*, where he wrote how Goffman humiliated him. Eviatar Zerubavel, who wrote his dissertation at Penn, apparently also had hard time with Erving and surviving the experience. Then you pointed out that when he knew he was dying, he called some of his students like Lofland and Irwin, but not others. I am trying to figure out why Erving would call some of his students and not others. I don't think he called Tom Scheff or Zerubavel, for instance.

Wiseman: As I recall, it was John Irwin who told me that Erving called him and John Lofland. Tell you the truth, when John said this, I was hurt that Erving didn't call me.

Shalin: Sam Heilman also wrote his dissertation with Erving.

Wiseman: I don't know how he decided whom to call. John Irwin said that Erving called only men, and only with whom he felt very close. John emphasized that it was students and not faculty that Erving called.

Shalin: The very last thing, if I may, Jackie.

Wiseman: Yes.

Shalin: When you look back at Erving's scholarship, do you feel that your appreciation of Goffman's dramaturgy has changed over time?

Wiseman: I think I was more impressed by his insight into what might be called micro-sociological analyses of face-to-face interactions. And of course, he expressed analytical points with cleverness and a marvelous turn of phrase. During our discussions, I felt that he had a way of phrasing things so clean and clear, along with an ability to make you appreciate mundane aspects of life that I felt, as the saying goes, "blown away." I often told my students (and myself) that before they start a paper, they should write, "I am not Erving Goffman" 100 times, because there was only one. I think Erving's work sounds deceptively easy to emulate.

Shalin: [**Laughing**]. I think he had a literary gift.

Wiseman: He did, he did! I read *Asylums* recently. I was just so impressed with his turn of phrase, and also, but that's not the right word for it, his unorthodox organization.

Shalin: His was very nonconventional sociological writing.

Wiseman: Yes, that's even better – nonconventional writing.

Shalin: I think he was driven by literary insights, he disregarded conventions, he was crossing the borderlines separating disciplines, and his capacity to find the words for his insights is precious and rare.

Wiseman: It is.

Shalin: In some ways, Erving interests me more as a literary figure, as a philosopher than . . .

Wiseman: Yes, I think he actually was [a philosopher], in many ways.

Shalin: Those notes could be golden if you can find them.

Wiseman: Had I known . . . had I thought . . . You think things will go on forever, or at least until we both reached a reasonable old age.

So I was really pleased when Sherri wrote me [about the Goffman archives]. I am pleased that you are doing this. I look forward to reading some of the other interviews. I suppose my experiences don't sound to you any different than many others.

Shalin: Your recollections are among the most insightful and personal takes on Erving I have come across. You may have had somewhat unusual relationship with him.

Wiseman: Yes, I think so. I don't think I realized it at the time, and I wish I had.

Shalin: But your memories serve you well, and I hope others will benefit from what you have to say.

Wiseman: I think you have a ground-breaking project. (I am assuming that you and/or a team will analyze the data that has emerged from the many interviews you will have, with a focus on the possible origins of his genius.) However, I think he [Goffman] would not have anything good to say about it.

Shalin: I don't think Erving would have appreciated it. I don't think he would have liked others visiting his backstage.

Wiseman: I think, perhaps without admitting it, he might have appreciated it. Openly, he would have said, "Why are you asking all these things about [me]?" And so on.

Shalin: Do you think he would have told us to cease and desist?

Wiseman: There is a good chance he would.

Shalin: Because I do wrestle with ethical questions. I wonder if people related to Erving, for instance his children, would have wanted to learn certain things about their dad. I raise these issues in my ASA paper.

Wiseman: I think that's very good. You should be careful of what the family might think.

ADDENDUM

Gleaned from my memories, I feel there is a strong indication that in the early years Erving was determined to penetrate the culture of any given small world of his interests so as to operate successfully with the people in them. I think he believed that this was the key to doing successful ethnography. (Of course I don't think he fully realized the terrific plus of his incisive writing, and clever turn of phrase, as well his eye for detail added to the luster of his presentations.)

In his lectures he pointed out that the best way to learn about a society or its culture is to become a spy in it. He pointed out that in order to gain acceptance in this mini-world and not be thrown out or

executed, the spy-to-be had to learn all the idiosyncratic gestures, mannerisms, language, dress, and so on that would allow one to blend in and know almost instinctively the "right" actions necessary to get by and be accepted. He gave as an illustration (from a story he had read that took place in a middle Eastern country) of a spy whose identity was unmasked when, in a public urinal, he failed to bend his knees slightly while urinating, thereby unmasking himself as an outsider! Additionally in his classes he often spoke of authors of fiction who, in writing about a fictional town, could give the reader a feeling for the whole culture and where various people fit into it. I remember he recommended Dashiell Hammett's book, *Red Harvest* as leaving the reader with a rather broad understanding of just how things worked in this small town.

Both Erving and I read books by George V. Higgins and Elmore Leonard. In fact, we traded copies and would often briefly discuss them. Both of these authors were well known for their ability to create a small system and/or an integrated culture inhabited primarily by men of low income, education, and/or job skills. The plots were usually built around the planning and execution of petty crime of some sort, such as stealing fur coats from a warehouse and re-selling them. These books were so written that the reader could see – even if the central characters could not – what the odds were for some kind of success or abysmal failure. Both Higgins and Leonard were known for their "dead-on" sense of lower class criminals, their interrelated lives, and especially their conversations. I read them for their humor and pathos. I think Erving read them as a marvelously recreation of a social world. (Frankly, I think the earlier works of both were best. *The Friends of Eddie Coyle* by Higgins gives this sense of lower class men caught in a world they don't quite understand and being surprised when they make things worse. It was made into quite a poignant movie.)