

1-16-2011

Dmitri Shalin Interview with Dennis Wrong about Erving Goffman entitled "Bobby Adamson Said, "Pooky Is a Genius, and as Soon as He Starts Writing His Own Stuff It Will Be Recognized""

Dennis Wrong
New York University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/goffman_archives



Part of the [Politics and Social Change Commons](#), and the [Social Psychology and Interaction Commons](#)

Repository Citation

Wrong, D. (2011). Dmitri Shalin Interview with Dennis Wrong about Erving Goffman entitled "Bobby Adamson Said, "Pooky Is a Genius, and as Soon as He Starts Writing His Own Stuff It Will Be Recognized"". In Dmitri N. Shalin, *Bios Sociologicus: The Erving Goffman Archives* 1-53.
Available at: https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/goffman_archives/76

This Interview is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Scholarship@UNLV with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this Interview in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself.

This Interview has been accepted for inclusion in Bios Sociologicus: The Erving Goffman Archives by an authorized administrator of Digital Scholarship@UNLV. For more information, please contact digitalscholarship@unlv.edu.

Remembering Erving Goffman

Dennis Wrong

Bobby Adamson Said, “Pooky Is a Genius, and as Soon as He Starts Writing His Own Stuff It Will Be Recognized”

This interview with Dr. Dennis Wrong, Professor Emeritus of Sociology at New York University, was recorded over the phone on December 10 and 12, 2010. Dmitri Shalin transcribed the interview, after which Dennis Wrong edited the transcripts and approved posting the present version in the Erving Goffman Archives. Dr. Wrong also sent in a three page handwritten memoir which can be accessed through [this link](#). Breaks in the conversation flow are indicated by ellipses. The interviewer’s questions are shortened in several places.

[Posted 01-16-11]

Wrong: Hello?

Shalin: Hello, Dennis. This is Dmitri Shalin, how are you?

Wrong: Oh, fine, fine!

Shalin: Is it a good day for us to talk?

Wrong: I guess it is, I guess it’s all right.

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

Wrong: That would be fine. Let me just tell my wife.

Shalin: Please.

[Pause]

Wrong: Hello?

Shalin: Yes.

Wrong: All right.

Shalin: Dennis, if you don't mind, I would like to start with how your family made it to Canada, then talk about the formative influences that shaped your interests and turned you into a social scientist.

Wrong: All right, I don't know if I could remember all that [laughing].

Shalin: Whatever comes to mind.

Wrong: All right. A great grandfather, they were Dutch, the original name was Witterange.

Shalin: How do you spell it?

Wrong: I used it as a name once too – W-i-t-t-e-r-a-n-g-e. Djrck, I think, is D-j-r-k. They were from Holland and they went to Barbados where they owned slaves. They were slave owners, and the slaves had all sorts of variations on their names, apparently. My sister went down there at one point for a vacation and found quite a lot of variations – Wronga, Wrenga, and so on. Unfortunately, the one whose name was "Wrong," this being an English word, went to Canada [laughing]. It would have been better if it were one of the other variations because of the meaning of "wrong" and the endless jokes about it and the hazing to which I was subjected. But it was John Wrong who went to Canada, and I think he had some property, as I remember, in the Niagara Peninsula. I guess it was his children who moved to Toronto, including my father. And my father became a professor of history, a junior lecturer, I guess, in history at the University of Toronto. And then in the First World War . . . he was blind in one eye, owing to an accident when his older brother was carving an apple, he was leaning over his brother's shoulder and the knife went into his eye.

Shalin: Oh, my!

Wrong: He then went to Oxford to study, and he was able to join a

unit at Oxford. The Canadian army wouldn't have him. He was in the trenches but not in active service but in mop-up after active engagement. It was in the course of that that he found his older brother's dead body. And also the body of a cousin to whom he was very close and for whom he cared greatly, as he did not particularly for his brother. Then he went back to Toronto, and when the Canadian Foreign Service was founded, he was determined to prevent another war. He first volunteered for the Canadian Foreign Service, and he persuaded a junior colleague (who was from a poorer background, a son of a not very wealthy minister, named Lester Bowles Pearson), to join him in the foreign service. My sister and I are annoyed that in all the biographies and memoirs on Pearson it is stated that he founded the Canadian Foreign Service, but it was actually our father. And of course we were also annoyed that the local cemetery where Pearson is buried was renamed the "Pearson Cemetery," and so was the "Pearson Inn" that always was the "Wakefield Inn." And now the big thing for tourists is to go and see the Pearson cemetery and Pearson Inn. While we certainly have nothing against Mike, we are sort of annoyed, for it was my father who was really the founder and who persuaded Pearson to go along.

Shalin: Maybe we can set the record straight.

Wrong: Yes, yes. Of course he is buried there, and so is my mother. My sister has a plot reserved for her in the cemetery, and one reserved for me too, although I have indicated that I want to be buried with my wife in Princeton. Now let me see, what else did you want to know?

Shalin: Any of your teachers pushed you along the path that led you to philosophy and social science? Looking back, how do you account for your becoming a sociologist?

Wrong: Well, let me see. In high school I originally wanted to study at the university English and philosophy. I founded that I needed another language for that. I am trying to remember . . . Oh yes [**laughing**], one reason I went into sociology, not a very exalted one, was that my very first girlfriend from freshman year at

the University of Toronto was planning to do the same thing. I was at this time an ardent socialist and I took a job at a factory for the summer. Massey Harris with McCormack Reapers were at the time major producers of agricultural implements in the world, and I lived with my girlfriend's brother-in-law who was married to her sister, and he was a major in sociology also. He had an influence on me and persuaded me to study sociology. On checking it out, I found that all my relatives – my father, my grandfather, and others – were trying to dissuade me. I thought that was a sort of family rebellion – they didn't think sociology was real subject. They even tried to dissuade me from majoring in the Department of Political Economy. As I recall in Toronto in your first year, if you had been in what was called "Social and Philosophical Studies" in the Department of Political Economy, it was an entrée to several fields, including economics. I chose sociology, and that shocked them all. They didn't think it was a real subject and tried to dissuade me. But I wasn't dissuaded, and it was a particularly crucial moment because at that point sociology became very fashionable.

Shalin: Where did your relatives want you to go – some technical field?

Wrong: No, no – into history.

Shalin: Oh, a more established humanities field.

Wrong: Yes, and the history department at the University of Toronto had been founded by my grandfather. He had authored the books on British and Canadian history that were used in the Ontario public schools. He was an important figure in the history of the University of Toronto in that sense.

Shalin: What was your grandfather's name?

Wrong: George Murray Wrong. But I wasn't very interested in Canadian history, which was a strong emphasis in the department because I grew up in Washington, not in Canada at all. Unsurprisingly, the history department at the University of

Toronto strongly emphasized Canadian and British history, neither of which interested me very much. So that is partly why I took up sociology. It wasn't widely taught, and as a new field, it made me take a great many courses in other subjects – philosophy, English, and so forth –towards a degree.

I am trying to remember now. Most Canadians who wanted to major in sociology, nearly all of them went to the University of Chicago on account of Everett Hughes who had married a Montreal heiress of some note, Helen Hughes. They all ended up going to the University of Chicago, but I and Muni Frumhartz were probably among the first who wanted to study sociology and went to Columbia instead. And we did this because of Robert Merton. Merton came and gave a talk, his famous talk on "manifest and latent functions."

Shalin: In Toronto?

Wrong: In Toronto. And we were so impressed by it. We had been exposed to functionalism by our teachers who were former anthropologists. It was a kind of fuzzy holistic view that Merton made so strikingly clear and logical that we both decided after hearing him that we wanted to go to Columbia for study. We were among the first to do this of Canadians who did graduate work in sociology.

Shalin: How do you explain the emergence of sociology as a force? What happened, how did it come into vogue after World War Two?

Wrong: I don't know if I could cast much light on that. I know it did, and I think it is because . . . it didn't have much prestige, it was a field that enabled you to take a lot of other subjects too, and that was important to me. But it was also the influence of Merton and Lazarsfeld. The fact that Lazarsfeld had been a socialist, a leading socialist in Austria, made it very attractive to left-wing students. There were many of them at that time. That was it, that was it. But they were very disappointed, as I was too. I wasn't interested in turning sociology into a regular discipline unifying

theory and research, which was the great Lazarsfeld-Merton gambit. As a result, I got to Columbia and discovered that I was a much better writer than my fellow graduate students and that I already knew a great deal more sociology. I also had anti-Communist political views, so almost the second day I was there I instantly gravitated to the circle of so-called "anti-Stalinist intellectuals."

Shalin: When was that, when did you get to Columbia?

Wrong: In the fall of '45, right after the war.

Shalin: And you were already an anti-Stalinist?

Wrong: Yes, I had had two teachers at Toronto who were pro-Communist, but I was not, owing to the influence of my first real girlfriend who was a daughter of the professor of German history at the University of London.

Shalin: What was her name?

Wrong: Norman, Jean Norman. Her father was Frederick Norman. She urged me . . . a lot of British children were sent out to Canada during the war to escape the blitz, and she was one of them. She went back in '44, and she urged me, under the influence of her father, to read *Darkness at Noon*, and I read *Darkness at Noon*, and also Orwell. It was Koestler and Orwell – *Homage to Catalonia*, *Animal Farm*, *1984* – those were the books that influenced me and turned me into an anti-Stalinist. And also two teachers, negatively.

Shalin: Do you remember their names?

Wrong: Yes I do.

Shalin: For the sake of history.

Wrong: One was an American who later joined the faculty of the Jefferson School of Social Science in New York, which was a very

pro-Communist outfit.

Shalin: And his name is?

Wrong: Mark Tarail – T-a-r-a-i-l-l. He had been, I think, the director of the Young Man's Hebrew Association in Toronto. He was a social worker. The other was Ray Birdwhistell – B-i-r-d-w-h-i-s-t-e-l-l, Raymond Birdwhistell, who was an anthropologist. They both warned me in my fourth year not to have anything to do with a certain sociologist named Charles Right Mills, C. Wright Mills [**laughing**], or with the Norman Thomas Socialists, because they were all pro-fascists. This was useful information because I silently resolved immediately to look them up and get in touch with them since I was an anti-Stalinist. They also warned me against Dwight Macdonald. I remember the first day almost, the second day I was in a New York at the 116th street subway station seeing a copy of Dwight Macdonald's magazine called *politics*, which had a lead article in it by someone called Ivan Horenstein. Now Ivan Horenstein later wrote under the name Irving Howe, who became a great and very close personal friend of mine. I read him and was influenced by him. He wrote anti-Stalinist left articles, and of course later he was a founder of the magazine *Dissent*, of which I ultimately became an editor, not at the time he founded it. I then wasn't sure I was a socialist anymore, but I appeared in the first issue on the subject of McCarthyism. Irving and I were always great friends. He was living in Princeton at that time and so was I, in walking distance from his house, which is now lived in by Irving Louis Horowitz who had originally been a student of his. I used to walk to the Firestone Library where he was doing his research. He used to walk past my house, and I used to walk the rest of the way with him. So he was really a very close personal friend.

Shalin: I want to make sure I got the dates right. You began your studies at the University of Toronto in . . .

Wrong: Let's see – 1941.

Shalin: And you left for Columbia in 1944.

Wrong: No, in 1945. It was a four year course at the University of Toronto.

Shalin: Any other teachers whose names you would like to salvage for posterity?

Wrong: Well, the great influence on us was Steve Hart – C. W. M. Hart, an Australian. Charles William Merton Hart had a writer's block of some kind but was a tremendously influential lecturer and teacher. He eventually was hired at the University of Wisconsin. He wasn't given tenure at Toronto, I think, because he hadn't published anything. He had some kind of a writer's block. He originally had done a study of an Australian tribe known as Tiwi, but he couldn't do anything else. He couldn't even write up his notes on the Tiwi, that's the story. He had all the information on them, he had been initiated into their tribe, and the sign of the initiation was letting the nail on the little finger of one's left hand be uncut, so it had grown way out. He went to Wisconsin later and gave all this information to – I am forgetting now but I have it written somewhere – to someone else who did eventually publish a study of the Tiwi but depended for information very much on him. Hart was an honorary member of the tribe. He was our teacher.

Shalin: What was he like in the classroom?

Wrong: Oh, he was a very lazy and unprepared teacher. He sort of rambled on and on. I remember a senior course meant to be on classical sociology – Marx, Durkheim, Weber. He never got beyond Durkheim. In fact, he never got beyond one book by Durkheim, *Le Suicide*. I translated – I knew French because I'd been to school at Geneva and learned French – I translated for the class two chapters of *Le Suicide*, then untranslated.

Shalin: How was he with students?

Wrong: He had a bad reputation for boozing and womanizing, which eventually led Toronto not to give him tenure. Then he went to Wisconsin and the same thing was repeated, and he ended up

teaching in Turkey, as I remember. He was a great boozier; he used to hang out in the King Cole Room, the Park Plaza Hotel beer parlour which is across the street from the building where we had all our classes in Toronto.

Shalin: You said you took classes from Birdwhistell?

Wrong: Yes.

Shalin: What was he like?

Wrong: Well, I am trying to remember. I didn't like him and reacted against him. I remember that.

Shalin: Substantively, personally?

Wrong: Both. I am trying to remember now. There was kind of a scandal. He had a love affair with a student who was close friend of mine, with whom I very nearly had a love affair, Elizabeth Bott. She became quite famous as a Kleinian analyst. She had an affair with Goffman too.

Shalin: Weren't they girlfriend-boyfriend?

Wrong: Yes.

Shalin: So it wasn't just an affair.

Wrong: She went to Chicago with him.

Shalin: And Birdwhistell had a relationship with Elizabeth?

Wrong: Yes, something. I am trying to remember, I have it written somewhere. I think also she did. I felt sympathetic to his wife whose name, I remember, was Miriam.

Shalin: You said it was scandalous?

Wrong: Yes, and then he also got involved in a scandal later on at

SUNY Buffalo. He went back to Kentucky to teach, I remember. He was from Kentucky.

Shalin: What happened in Buffalo?

Wrong: Some other scandal of sorts. I think he talked too much about sex in class and possibly had affairs with students. I don't entirely remember. I'd written it down somewhere.

Shalin: What were your impressions of Birdwhistell as a teacher?

Wrong: Well, I remember he sort of rambled and talked about himself much too much. It was more about his own life history. I didn't like that, I really didn't like hearing about growing up in Kentucky.

Shalin: You mentioned Elizabeth Bott – what was she like?

Wrong: Well, she and I were very good friends. Her father was, I think, the founder of the department of psychology at the University of Toronto. She wasn't especially good-looking but she was very intelligent. She and I had a lot in common intellectually. The basis of our relationship was chiefly intellectual. And then she became a near girlfriend, we went in for heavy petting, as they used to call it in those days. I don't know whether I want to go into any detail about that.

Shalin: Sure. When you read the transcript, you can delete things.

Wrong: Right.

Shalin: Do you recall how you met Erving Goffman?

Wrong: Well, I met him at the National Film Board. I had a summer job there in Ottawa.

Shalin: How did you find your way there?

Wrong: I had a summer job. In fact, I wasn't there in Ottawa for more than a few days because I became an assistant camera man to the leading director and producer, producing a film on Newfoundland. So I spent most of that summer in Newfoundland, and then I wrote a senior honours thesis on Newfoundland for the University of Toronto. I was a real authority on Newfoundland, was invited back there several times, toured the island. I wrote a lot about it, but my paper on Newfoundland, my thesis, was based on my teacher Samuel Delbert Clark's book *The Social Development of Canada*. I did it for him. It was the social development of Newfoundland. His book, which I have on my shelf, was full of quotations and reproductions from newspapers and diaries. I had all these clippings from the newspapers, and I think I sent them to the Newfoundland public library, but it burned down, including my entire thesis.

Shalin: It no longer exists?

Wrong: No, no, it burned up, and that was a great shock.

Shalin: Do you recall your first encounter with Erving?

Wrong: I have this written it down somewhere – can I go get it and read it?

Shalin: Sure, sure, please.

Wrong: I will. Just give me a minute.

[Pause]

Wrong: Nuts, I put it aside but I can't seem to find it, but I think I can tell you. He was at the Film Board only because he didn't want to be drafted into the army, which he would have been. He thought that because he was Jewish and very small in stature, he would be a target for hazing if he were in the army. He quite legitimately thought that, so he took a government job and at that time, owing to (I have written it all down somewhere) the King government's policies favoring French Canadians, which was King's electoral

base. There were all those little *colléges* scattered over French Canada, and they exempted from military service anyone who had a passing grade over the average. This was really a sop to the French Canadians, for these colleges were nothing like real universities – University of Toronto, University of Manitoba, or what have you. King was much attacked by his political opposition for this. It was certainly a sop to his electoral base. When I volunteered for the army under pressure from parents who thought I should, I didn't get the full physical pass for overseas service. I felt guilty about this for years, because at the very end of the physical examination I was asked had I ever thought of committing suicide. And I said, "Truthfully, yes, I had." But I knew perfectly well . . . for years afterwards I wanted to think that the rejection was because of my shortsightedness and because of my varicocele – do you know what that is?

Shalin: No, but you can tell me.

Wrong: All right, well, as a youth I was kicked in the balls by a horse [**laughing**], and one of my testicles had a condition known as "varicocele," a hanging sort of thing. There was a danger of hernia. People who had it were not considered fit for overseas service. I like to think that the rejection was because of my shortsightedness and because of my varicocele and not because of my alleged mental instability, but I felt guilty over this for years. However, I didn't want to go and manage a munitions dump in Northern Manitoba, so I took advantage of the ruling favoring French Canadians and went back to university.

Shalin: And so did Erving?

Wrong: And so did Erving, oh yes. I met Erving at the Film Board, and he told me he didn't really want to go back to the University of Manitoba and study philosophy in which he was majoring. He said philosophy was too specialized for his taste, so I said, "Why not try sociology?" That's how I got him to study sociology. I remember I once was in the Ottawa public library . . . I have all this written down but I can't find it at the moment. Even before I met him I was told by a friend of Ralph Collins (he joined the foreign service

and served on my father's staff in Washington) not to tell Ralph when he came back to the Film Board that his fiancée was going around with this "creepy little guy." The creepy little guy was Goffman. When I took up a summer job at the Film Board, she made a point of cultivating me with Goffman, so she could ask me also not to tell her fiancé, for she didn't consider Goffman "marriageable."

Shalin: What was her name?

Wrong: Jane Irwin, I-r-w-i-n.

Shalin: She took up with Erving but she didn't want this to be known.

Wrong: She didn't think he was marriageable material, and she was engaged to Ralph Collins, and she later married him. He was scheduled to be in Washington on my father's stuff. My father was Ambassador, so I got to know her quite well.

Shalin: You came to the Film Board in which year?

Wrong: It was in the summer of 1944.

Shalin: Was Erving already there?

Wrong: Yes, he was already there. I remember I was in the Ottawa public library one day, taking books out. I remember the books I was taking out – C. E. M. Joad, *A Guide to Philosophy*, and Will Durant, *The Story of Philosophy*, which was almost a bestseller at that time. Erving came up to me and said, "Why do you read these popularizations? Why not read the originals?" I was terribly impressed with that [**laughing**].

Shalin: Erving was well read in philosophy.

Wrong: Oh yes, yes, he really was. He told me later that summer that he had no taste for philosophy, it was too specialized for him. I was terribly impressed that he had read all of Whitehead. I had

struggled with Whitehead, you know, and Whitehead was a major influence on him.

Shalin: This is most interesting!

Wrong: *Science and the Modern World*, and the very difficult *Process and Reality*. This impressed me enormously. He said philosophy was too specialized, and I said why not try sociology and volunteered to write letters to the relevant people at the University of Toronto to get him accepted as an occasional student. That worked, and he was accepted as an occasional student, and he eventually got his B.A., took up with Elizabeth Bott and went to the University of Chicago as most Canadians do. He hadn't gotten his degree at this point, and she got her degree very quickly and was offered a job at the University of Edinburgh. He got to Edinburgh with her and for a time he worked in a hotel in Edinburgh. He noticed in particular the way the serving girls went into the kitchen with their faces distorted, shouting angrily when they dealt with cooks, and then they would go through the swinging doors to the restaurant proper and their whole demeanor would change as they would now be gracious looking. This was the idea that formed the basis of *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.

Shalin: Is this the research he did on Shetland Isles? Wasn't the hotel there?

Wrong: No, I think this wasn't on Shetland Isles, I can't quite remember, I have it written down.

Shalin: Is Edinburgh on Shetland Isle?

Wrong: Yes.

Shalin: And Erving was there with Elizabeth?

Wrong: Yes.

Shalin: Sounds like one of the reasons he went there and did his dissertation research on Shetland Isles was Elizabeth Bott.

Wrong: Yes. Then he was offered a job at the University of Manitoba after that.

Shalin: Was he?

Wrong: No, no. I am not quite straight on this (I have it all written down some place). He wanted to go back to the United States.

Shalin: In 1949 Erving defended his M.A. thesis and in 1953 he got his Ph.D. at the University of Chicago.

Wrong: Yes, he wanted to go back to the University of Chicago. She, Elizabeth Bott, decided she didn't want to marry him.

Shalin: What happened?

Wrong: She wanted to stay in Europe, in Edinburgh. After that she got involved with an anthropologist there, Jim Spillius, and eventually married him. That's it – she didn't want to go back with Erving to the United States, so she didn't marry him.

Shalin: So the reason they split was that he wanted to go back to the States and she didn't.

Wrong: That's right. That was it, definitely.

Shalin: And if Erving stayed, they might have ended up together?

Wrong: Oh yes, I imagine so.

Shalin: Eventually Erving married a fellow student at the University of Chicago, Schuyler Choate.

Wrong: I know he later married someone else at Penn. My wife knew her. My wife was an anthropologist. She knew her work . . .

.

Shalin: If I could backtrack to the University of Manitoba, Erving never finished his studies there, he dropped out.

Wrong: That's right.

Shalin: Why, what happened? I hear different stories, some say he was depressed.

Wrong: I think there was some reason why. It can have been that he had too a low grade average to avoid the draft. It can have been because of that. For some reason he felt threatened by the draft unless he took a government job. That was it. Perhaps he didn't have right language credits. I don't remember fully, but that was it. He didn't want to continue in philosophy because he felt it was too specialized, as I explained to you.

Shalin: You said something about Erving's grades, that they were not too good.

Wrong: I don't know, they can have been bad, or he didn't have the right courses or the right language credits, something. So he took advantage of the King government's sop to French Canada in avoiding the army by taking a government job. He was at the Film Board when I persuaded him to go to the University of Toronto.

Shalin: You mentioned Erving's small stature – how tall Erving was?

Wrong: Oh, he was shorter than my wife. He was only 5'6.

Shalin: You said 5'6?

Wrong: Something like that. He was very short. "A little creep" as Ralph Collin's friend called him [**laughing**].

Shalin: I thought he was rather athletic.

Wrong: He was what?

Shalin: He was athletic.

Wrong: I don't remember that.

Shalin: How would you describe his appearance?

Wrong: He was short, with black curly hair, not bad looking, but darkish in complexion. I don't know if I could say much more than that. He looked quite ordinary, quite normal. There was no abnormality in his appearance.

Shalin: Somebody mentioned that at Toronto he was something of a lady's man.

Wrong: I think that's quite true. I think he was quite a womanizer.

Shalin: That means his advances were reciprocated. He must have been fun to be with, so interesting women chose to take up with him.

Wrong: Yes, yes. Well, the intelligence and the liveliness, certainly.

Shalin: And the story with Ralph Collins's girlfriend never blew into the open, right? Eventually she married her fiancé.

Wrong: That's right, in Washington.

Shalin: Anything else comes to your mind about Erving in Toronto – was he showing signs of his future intellectual interests at that time?

Wrong: I have written it somewhere. I don't remember it very well. He lived in a house on Dufferin Street with a lot of other Westerners, if I remember, who were from Manitoba and who had also worked at the Film Board in order to stay out of the armed

forces. That's where he lived. One night I had to be way up in North Toronto for some reason, I can't remember why now, something to do with. . . well, I don't remember. One of these Westerners, Bobby Adamson, lived up there, moved up there, and I stopped at his house for a drink. He was Erving's fellow high school student in Winnipeg. I said something about Erving, and Bobby said, "Pooky," which was his nickname, "Pooky is a genius." This upset me, and I said, "I am very bright too!"

[Laughter]

Wrong: "I am a straight 'A' student." Adamson said presciently, "No doubt, but Pooky is really a genius. As soon as he starts writing his own stuff and not interpreting others, it will be generally recognized."

Shalin: This is very interesting!

Wrong: Indeed. Erving didn't like being called "Pooky." I remember a couple of years later at the American Sociological Association I had a few drinks, came into a room and saw him from behind sitting on the floor in a circle with some other people, and I shouted "Hi, Pooky!" And I still remember how he winced **[laughing]**, very visibly he winced. He didn't want the nickname to be remembered.

Shalin: By the way, what did "Pooky" mean?

Wrong: I don't know. I don't know. Pooky – P-o-o-k-y.

Shalin: I think Elizabeth Bott mentioned this nickname.

Wrong: Yes, I remember Bobby Adamson saying, "Pooky is a genius."

Shalin: What was social life like in Toronto at that time?

Wrong: I don't remember really. I was not there in the summer. Our family had a cottage not far from Ottawa where I

would . . . I guess I lived there and had to drive into Ottawa and drive back, which was about 25-30 miles near Bell lake. I don't really know about the social life. I did hear there were a lot of parties.

Shalin: Did you ever see Erving dancing?

Wrong: I don't remember if I did.

Shalin: I see. Once Erving moved to the University of Chicago, did you keep up with him?

Wrong: Well, I told you about meeting him at the American Sociological Association.

Shalin: Was it in the late '40s, early '50s?

Wrong: Late '40s.

Shalin: You don't remember where it was held?

Wrong: I think it was in Chicago. I am not certain.

Shalin: Did you interact with Erving, meet him socially?

Wrong: I don't really remember.

Shalin: Nothing stands out. Did you ever meet Erving's wife, Schuyler?

Wrong: Which one?

Shalin: The first one – Angelica Schuyler Choate.

Wrong: I think I did. I have it written down somewhere but I don't remember it very well.

Shalin: Do you have some sort of a diary or autobiography?

Wrong: I can't find it. I have to institute a search.

Shalin: Those could be very valuable.

Wrong: I have to look for it. I do remember of course his marriage to Gillian Sankoff.

Shalin: When did he marry Gillian?

Wrong: I don't really remember that. . . . She was at Penn and he . . . oh, I can clarify this. He was at Penn. Before that he was teaching on the West coast and he didn't like the West coast.

Shalin: He taught at Berkeley.

Wrong: Yes, he was at Berkeley, and then he took a job at the University of Pennsylvania for which I strongly recommended him to the chairman. He owed me something for getting that job. I also recommended Philip Rieff to the chairman at the time. I was offered a job there myself. The chairman was the old chairman of mine at Brown – Vincent Whitney. He was building an elite department at Penn. Erving wasn't there very long when he contracted cancer.

Shalin: He died in 1982.

Wrong: Yes. It was there that he met Gillian Sankoff and had been married to her for only a short time. Had one child, I remember.

Shalin: Did Erving ask you for a recommendation for Penn or you were approached by the chair?

Wrong: I think I was approached by the chair. I don't think he asked me. Yes, the chair approached me. For some reason, he kept asking me all the time. I didn't have a very high opinion of him intellectually. Vince Whitney was sort of a professional chairman type. He kept asking me about these people, "What about Erving Goffman? What about Philip Rieff?" There was

someone else – Todd Gitlin, I think. I spoke glowingly of all of them. I told him that Goffman and Rieff were two of the best minds in the whole country. Goffman and Rieff didn't get along.

Shalin: They were very different characters.

Wrong: I remember a tale about Goffman teasing Rieff for dressing like an Englishman and wearing spats.

Shalin: Did you know Rieff personally?

Wrong: Yes, certainly.

Shalin: Maybe we could return to him some day.

Wrong: I knew his wife who left him.

Shalin: Susan Sontag?

Wrong: He married Susan Sontag.

Shalin: What was Philip Rieff like?

Wrong: Well, I remember he was very fussy, very precise. I don't remember much more. I probably have it all written down somewhere. But he wore spats, and he was very anglophile, and Erving teased him over that. I think I visited him in Oxford when I went there in the summer of '48.

Shalin: You respected Rieff's work intellectually, right?

Wrong: Yes, I thought *The Triumph of the Therapeutic* was a terrific, tremendous book. I remember Nat Glazer, Nathan Glazer, a good friend of mine, brought him to a party I was giving with my then wife at her parents' apartment when her parents were away in Florida for the winter. Nat and I were very impressed. I went up to him, and I said that I thought *The Triumph of the Therapeutic* was terrific, and she said, "Yes, we think it's the best thing he ever done." She sort of spoke for him very knowledgeably, and shortly

afterwards she left him. She was a lesbian. But at that time she spoke for him. Of course she was a great beauty. She had been a student in his class at the University of Chicago. She once was Miss California, I think, in the American Beauty contest.

Shalin: She was Miss California?

Wrong: She was Miss California. I have it recorded somewhere. Yes, or she was a runner-up. Well, I think she came third in the Miss American contest in Atlantic City.

Shalin: I didn't know that.

Wrong: Yes, I think that was it. She came third, and she was representing California. So she was really something.

Shalin: You brought up the first and second editions of *The Presentation of Self*, the first being published by the University of Edinburgh and the second by the Anchor Press.

Wrong: Oh yes.

Shalin: I have a copy of the first edition that Erving gave to his mother who passed it on to Erving's cousin who gave it to me.

Wrong: Oh, that's great! Either I or Nat Glazer to whom I sent it lost the copy. I remember very much how it looked. Erving sent it to me, and it was full of typos, misspellings, bad binding that fell apart. I was so impressed with it that I sent it to Nat Glazer who published it. Of course it became Erving's first book. Nat or I lost that original copy.

Shalin: I digitized it and it is on the website.

Wrong: Oh!

Shalin: You can find it if you go on the internet.

Wrong: I am not very good at that [**laughing**].

Shalin: The copy I have is with corrections that appear to be made by Erving. I don't know it for a fact, but given the book's provenance, the corrections of misspellings must be in Erving's hand.

Wrong: Probably.

Shalin: But it is remarkable that you recognized the importance of the first edition and sent it to Nathan Glazer.

Wrong: Yes, I definitely did that, and Glazer was so impressed that he brought out *The Presentation of Self* and that set Erving on his career.

Shalin: Do you know if Glazer met Goffman in person, did they interact?

Wrong: I think they did.

Shalin: It would be interesting to get his memories.

Wrong: Yes, I think they did. Is Nathan still alive?

Shalin: I believe so.

Wrong: He was on the faculty at Harvard.

Shalin: Yes, but I don't know if he is still teaching.

Wrong: Well, this is an episode in my own biography. . . . Nat had a column that he had created at *Commentary* (Nat was an editor of *Commentary*). The column was called "The Study of Man." One column was a critical review of Stouffer's book *The American Soldier* that was then praised to the sky for making sociology scientific. I was enormously influenced by this review. I had a review in the same issue, and I had a lot of copies of it (*Commentary* used to be lavish in sending copies to authors). I was teaching at Princeton that year and I handed out the copies to all

the members of sociology department. One of them was Marion Levy Jr. whose teaching assistant I was and whose work I absolutely hated. I detested it so much that I made a decision that sociology was not for me and took exams for the Canadian Foreign Service. It turned out his work wasn't really sociology, sociologists took the same view of it as I did. But some years later Nat was visiting or speaking, I think, at Princeton and we were having lunch at the faculty club when Marion came in, saw Glazer and immediately zeroed in on him and said, "You wrote this attack on the *American Soldier*, on scientific sociology." I have this written down, I don't remember all the details. But Nat answered him very effectively. He said he didn't believe sociology could be a science like natural sciences. That was the point, and it enormously influenced my whole orientation.

I clashed with Marion who succeeded over his career in costing me three jobs at Princeton I could have had were it not for his objections!

Shalin: Were you blackballed?

Wrong: Well, he was consulted on my first job. When I was a freshman I was his teaching assistant. I thought his book *The Structure of Society* was awful, and I was foolish enough and unsophisticated enough to say so to him.

Shalin: That earned you his enmity.

Wrong: Yes, then two or three years later I was a research assistant to George Kennan at the Institute for Advanced Studies, and for two years in a row Kennan recommended me to the Woodrow Wilson School of International Relations located here in Princeton. Marion was teaching in the School solely because his dissertation had been on the family revolution in modern China. Both times Marion vetoed me. I was to be his colleague there, and if he didn't want me, that was it. So three times he did me out of a job at Princeton.

Shalin: How would you describe Erving's political leanings?

Wrong: I don't know, I think he was a conventional liberal. That's what I would call him. I felt he was not sufficiently interested in politics.

Shalin: But his work is consistent with the liberal tradition.

Wrong: Yes. I have to look some of this up in my notes. If I find anything important, I'll get back to you.

Shalin: That would be terrific. Do you have an autobiography written or published?

Wrong: Yes . . . there are autobiographical pieces in my last two collections of essays. One of them is *Reflections on a Politically Skeptical Era*, Transaction Publishers, 2003. The other is *The Modern Condition*, Stanford University Press, published two years earlier. Both of them include autobiographical pieces.

Shalin: And if you have some notes that you haven't used in those books and that you would like to make public, please do so. Now, what about Erving's Jewishness – how would you describe his relationship with Judaism?

Wrong: I don't really remember very well. I don't think he had much of a relationship. I have to check my notes, but I don't think he talked much about that, except that he was aware that being Jewish and of small stature he would be hazed in the army, as I mentioned earlier. That's one reason why he took a government job.

Shalin: When you look at Erving's work from the vantage point of the present, do you have the same high regard for his ideas as you did early on?

Wrong: I think I do, yes.

Shalin: His work stood the test of time.

Wrong: I think so.

Shalin: When you went to Columbia, you already knew the work of Merton and Lazarsfeld.

Wrong: Well, I went on account of Merton.

Shalin: What was Merton like as a teacher, as a person?

Wrong: Terrific as a teacher. As a person, I remember him quite formal, but I thought he was a tremendous teacher.

Shalin: Did you have a chance to interact with him outside classroom?

Wrong: I don't really remember. I think I have this written down. I have a sort of memoir of him somewhere.

Shalin: And it was published?

Wrong: I think it was in one of these two books I mentioned.

Shalin: I will check them out. But as a person you found Merton somewhat formal.

Wrong: Yes, yes. Oh, and another thing, he never made much of his . . . in fact, I felt he tried to conceal . . . not to conceal but to avoid mentioning his Jewish background. His real name was Meyer Skolnick.

Shalin: He spoke about his Jewish background in 1994 when he gave his Haskins Lecture.

Wrong: That's right. My mind goes slowly, but I knew all of this. His name was Meyer Skolnick, and of course he was from Philadelphia, so was Ed Shils, and my friend Digby Baltzell was also from Philadelphia. In fact, Digby was a historian and celebrant of Philadelphia.

Shalin: You said you knew Paul Lazarsfeld, what was he like?

Wrong: I wasn't particularly interested in his courses. There was some reason I didn't like him – he was so hooked on survey research. I have to refresh myself on that. I was not interested in survey research. He was recommended to me as a socialist.

Shalin: By the way, do you still identify with socialist ideals?

Wrong: Not very much. I became a welfare state liberal. I remember when *Dissent* was founded, Irving Howe was a friend of mine. I didn't join the editorial board because I thought that its commitment to socialism as stated in its first issue was much too strong, although I contributed to the first issue and was a personal friend of Irving's. But then Irving himself moved in the same direction and became a welfare state liberal. Two years later he asked me again to join the board and I did. I still am a board member.

Shalin: You were friends with Irving Howe.

Wrong: I was a very close friend of his.

Shalin: Would you care to sketch a thumbnail portrait of Irving Howe?

Wrong: Well, he was so highly intellectual he was in some ways quite naïve about personal relations. I had written about it somewhere; at the moment I can't quite remember it. I think he didn't realize how careerist most people were. He was strictly oriented toward their ideas. And he could be very blunt. I could mention one thing, just very recently a former student of mine who became a celebrity in his own right, Richard Kostelanetz, wrote a book in which he attacked Irving very strongly. I had recommended him to Irving, and Irving didn't like his work and said so quite bluntly. That prompted Richard's attack on him. I remember writing to Richard and saying, "Look, you and I both have an upper middle-class background in Manhattan, we were taught to be euphemistic even when being critical, and Irving

wasn't. He came from a low income working class background in the Bronx. So he is quite blunt in his way of speaking."

Shalin: Do you feel that Irving was unfair in his judgment of Kostelanetz?

Wrong: No, I always agreed with him, except that I didn't have his commitment to socialism, as I said.

Shalin: And Digby Baltzell was your friend?

Wrong: Yes, we were very good friends. He and I were the only two upper middle-class WASPS studying sociology at Columbia and that drew us together. I never shared Digby's conservatism.

Shalin: How do you remember him?

Wrong: Oh, I liked him a great deal. He was a very fine person.

Shalin: You said you also knew George Kennan?

Wrong: Well, I worked for George Kennan. I was his research assistant for one year. I would have been for two years, but then Truman appointed him ambassador to the Soviet Union. As his assistant I was quite upset by this. I was very naïve and worried about money and everything. I was quite upset when the two year thing fell through. In the end his assistant Robert Strunsky, took me on, and I wrote a number of papers. My work for Kennan broke what I had thought was my writing block, writer's block. It was very important that I wrote pieces for him that were published in *Commentary*. I sold myself to him more or less as an authority on population, based on one course I taught. The university had pushed on me this course that I knew nothing about. I learned it when I was working for Kennan and then wrote my own dissertation at Columbia on population. I became a demographer for a time. I really was a demographer.

Shalin: Any memories of George Kennan as your boss?

Wrong: I thought he was always very fair. I didn't see anything to criticize him for.

Shalin: Did you meet Talcott Parsons?

Wrong: Oh yes. I knew Parsons, I knew Talcott. I thought he was very abstracted in his ideas, quite impractical about many things. But he had a big influence on me, and I defended him . . . Oh, gosh, I am not remembering it very well – there was a session celebrating Parsons quite recently at the ASA, and I was on it, and I struck a critical note, I thought, but not in a personal way. It was only about his ideas, not the man. But at the time, when his book came out, only two of us who were students at the University of Toronto read it (none of the faculty had read it). The other student was Erving Goffman. When Parsons came to speak, Goffman and I asked him questions. I remember what my question was: "What exactly do you mean by 'structural generalization of goals'?" Our fellow students and the faculty were very angry at us for asking such questions. He then proceeded to talk at a level that was quite beyond them, assuming he was talking to deep-seated students of his work. Goffman and I may have been that, but nobody else there was [**laughing**]. That's worth mentioning.

Shalin: And Erving was also eager to press him?

Wrong: Yes, Erving was into it too.

Shalin: Did he like Parsons' work?

Wrong: Yes, at that at time he did. He thought it was a great book!

Shalin: When was it?

Wrong: What?

Shalin: When did Parsons come to give his talk at Toronto?

Wrong: That would have been 1945, our senior year at Toronto.

Shalin: And the talk was well received?

Wrong: Well, we thought so, Erving and I. But others thought . . . I have written somewhere what it was all about. We were very impressed. I know it had to do with Parsons' version of the "ends-means schema," as he called it. I greatly defended him on that. I thought that he was taking into account the point of view of the actor, which was absolutely vital in his view of structure. There were positivist sociologists who didn't. It was this that I liked him for. I was very puzzled before to the point of almost having a nervous breakdown. I was so hyper-intellectual. My only virtue was my intellectuality and I couldn't cope with the mind-body problem, as I remember it, until I read Mead who really transformed my whole view. George Herbert Mead's *Mind, Self and Society*. I linked Parsons somewhat to that. I thought that Mead explained why and how human beings oriented themselves in terms of "ends-in-view," as Parsons called it. I have it all written down in my own words somewhere.

Shalin: When you wrote your paper on the oversocialized concept of man, I think it was interpreted in part as a critique of Parsons' abstract theorizing.

Wrong: It was that!

Shalin: Was it self-conscious critique of Parsons on your part?

Wrong: Yes, yes. I was critical of him but it was one of the very few articles that he responded to. He usually did not respond to critics but he did to that one. I was certainly had gotten through to him.

Shalin: Did you know Herbert Blumer?

Wrong: I don't think I knew him personally. I never met him.

Shalin: You mentioned that your sister was critical of the participant observation that Goffman did in St. Elizabeth's hospital

when he worked on *Asylums*.

Wrong: Yes, she was.

Shalin: You also mentioned that your sister was instrumental in getting Erving the job at St. Elizabeth's?

Wrong: She was. Well, I guess she was on the staff of St. Elizabeth's hospital in Washington and he wanted a job, and I wrote to her and recommended him for a job on the ward there. It was apparently through her support of him that he got this job. And then he wrote *Asylums*, which she certainly didn't like, which became in many ways his most controversial and his most widely known book.

Shalin: The book helped the deinstitutionalization movement.

Wrong: Yes.

Shalin: What is the name of your sister?

Wrong: Elizabeth June Rogers.

Shalin: Is she alive?

Wrong: She is still alive, oh yes.

Shalin: Do you think it might be possible to talk to her?

Wrong: Yes, she lives in Ottawa. She is not very well at present, but she seems better the last few times I spoke to her.

Shalin: Perhaps you can tell me how I can get in touch with her.

Wrong: If you wait just a minute . . .

Shalin: Sure, I will wait.

[Pause]

Wrong: Hello? She is in a nursing home called "Renata's Gardens." You can call and ask for her, the number is <...>.

Shalin: If you speak with her, maybe you could mention that I would like to call her.

Wrong: I will be speaking to her, definitely. I always phone her on Sunday. I should have phoned her yesterday, and I'll probably call her tonight.

Shalin: That's great. Mention to her that I am trying to salvage memories of Erving. She could be golden in bringing to light this particular episode of Erving's career. I don't know if you are aware of the fact that Erving's first wife committed suicide.

Wrong: Yes, I remember that. She jumped into San Francisco Bay.

Shalin: Yes, in 1964. When Erving began his work on mental institutions, she was already seeing a psychiatrist, which makes this connection particularly intriguing.

Wrong: I think I knew all this but I had forgotten all this for the moment.

Shalin: I feel there is a link between Erving's interest in psychiatry and his unhappiness about the treatment his wife was getting.

Wrong: I think there was.

Shalin: I don't know if you know Mel Kohn . . .

Wrong: I know who he is.

Shalin: He was Erving's colleague at the Institute of Mental Health, and he remembers that Erving was very critical of psychiatry, which might have influenced his view of the subject.

Wrong: I am sure it did. I knew all about this at one point, but I have sort of forgotten. I am sure this is all true.

Shalin: If you come across memories of that episode, please let me know.

Wrong: All right, I will check it out.

Shalin: Dennis, that's been wonderful. I am in your debt for all the memories you shared with me. I have a few more questions but I think I better let you be, you must be tired.

Wrong: I am but that's OK [**laughing**].

Shalin: Maybe I could call you on some other occasion.

Wrong: Sure, maybe tomorrow or on Sunday.

Shalin: Whenever it is convenient for you. I can call you the same time.

Wrong: Yes.

Shalin: And if you speak to your sister, please alert her that I will try to get in touch with her. And thank you so much.

Wrong: OK, you are entirely welcome.

Shalin: Bye-bye.

Wrong: Bye.

[End of the recording]

Part II.

Shalin: Greetings Dennis. How are you?

Wrong: Oh yes, I am fine.

Shalin: Did you have a chance to talk to your sister?

Wrong: She doesn't remember anything, I am afraid. She said she could be of no help at all.

Shalin: OK, that's understandable.

Wrong: Sorry about that.

Shalin: That happens. But you do remember interesting things she told you in the past.

Wrong: Yes, she is at the nursing home.

Shalin: Just to recap what she told you in the past, she was on the board of St. Elizabeth's.

Wrong: That's right.

Shalin: And she was instrumental in getting a job for Erving.

Wrong: Yes. I think I told you everything I knew. She helped him get a job there. I think she helped him to get a job there as an observer to write about it. And of course when he wrote very negatively, she didn't like that. That was it.

Shalin: But then Erving was employed by the National Institute of Mental Health when he was working on *Asylums*, sometime between 1954 and 1957. Erving wrote that he was employed as an athletic coach in the hospital.

Wrong: As who?

Shalin: As an athletic coach. He was like a trainer there.

Wrong: I really don't remember, I am afraid.

Shalin: You said that some doctors might have lost their jobs because of the publication of the book.

Wrong: Oh yes, yes. I do remember that.

Shalin: You don't know any specifics.

Wrong: No, I don't. I know the book was very controversial.

Shalin: You mention several people like Bobby Adamson who knew Goffman.

Wrong: Yes.

Shalin: You also mentioned Ralph Collins. Are any of them still around?

Wrong: I would think so. But I think Ralph Collins died and his wife Jane Collins is still alive and lives in Ottawa. She must be about a hundred years old.

Shalin: I wonder if there is a way to get in touch with him.

Wrong: I think he died, as I said. You know, this phone reception is very poor. I can't hear very well. There is noise. Let me try to call you again, OK?

Shalin: That's fine.

Wrong: OK, right away.

[**Break**]

Shalin: So neither Adamson nor Collins are alive.

Wrong: I forget about Adamson, but I know that Collins isn't.

Shalin: What you said about Adamson was interesting because he seemed to have known Erving in high school.

Wrong: Oh yes, he was at high school in Winnipeg, I think.

Shalin: That's why I would have liked to talk to him, assuming he is alive.

Wrong: Well, I just don't know. You could ask the National Film Board, I suppose, they might have an address for him.

Shalin: They might have some contact information.

Wrong: Yes, they might.

Shalin: Can you think of anyone else who knew Erving?

Wrong: Well, did I mention Grant Maclean?

Shalin: I think you might have mentioned the name.

Wrong: An assistant camera man I worked with in the summer when I spent most of the time in Newfoundland. I really saw very little of Erving who was of course in Ottawa. I was in Newfoundland.

Shalin: Grant might have met Erving.

Wrong: Oh yes, he probably would have.

Shalin: I imagine he would be quite old today.

Wrong: He must be. I don't know if he is alive or not. He would be older than Erving.

Shalin: Erving was born in 1922. When were you born?

Wrong: 1923.

Shalin: OK, you are one year younger than Goffman.

Wrong: I was born sort of at the very end of 1923.

Shalin: So it is closer to two years.

Wrong: Closer to two years, yes.

Shalin: The Film Board might know about Maclean.

Wrong: They might. He was a camera man, producer.

Shalin: This Film Board is still in existence?

Wrong: I think, as far as I know. I am forgetting a lot of details, but I think it still exists.

Shalin: Perhaps there are some archives.

Wrong: There might be.

Shalin: It is in Ottawa, right?

Wrong: Yes, certainly in Ottawa.

Shalin: That's a good lead. I'll try to contact people there.

Wrong: OK.

Shalin: One thing that caught my eye in your memoir was that Herbert Blumer granted Goffman a Ph.D. retroactively.

Wrong: That's retrospectively.

Shalin: How do you mean it?

Wrong: I am trying to remember now. When Goffman went to Edinburgh with Elizabeth Bott, it was there that he wrote *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, and he sent very badly

marked copies to me and I was very impressed and sent them to Nathan Glazer. Somehow they got to Blumer. Blumer saw them too. Glazer showed them to Blumer, I guess.

Shalin: Or it might have been Anselm Strauss.

Wrong: Maybe. Anyway, he saw them and immediately decided – he was trying to build this elite department – and he immediately decided that he wanted Goffman and he granted to him retrospectively a Ph.D.

Shalin: There is a problem with this story. Erving went to work at Berkeley around 1958, but as the record shows, he defended his dissertation at the University of Chicago in 1953.

Wrong: Aha.

Shalin: I have a copy of the dissertation that he defended in 1953. I wonder if there is a way to reconcile your account with these facts, because Blumer left Chicago in 1951, I think.

Wrong: I just don't remember.

Shalin: Anyhow, that's an interesting tangent to pursue.

Wrong: Yes.

Shalin: You said something interesting, that your last name was the source of jokes by your peers.

Wrong: I should think so, with a name like that [**laughing**].

Shalin: That's going back to your school years.

Wrong: Yes, very much so.

Shalin: Your fellow students were making fun of you.

Wrong: Right. I remember one student at the International School

whom I came to admire very much, he told me "You ain't done us wrong yet," using my first name too. I thought that was brilliant [laughing].

Shalin: But that wasn't a putdown.

Wrong: No, it wasn't. Of course I was put down about it.

Shalin: Did you fight back?

Wrong: Yes, yes! I remember even fighting back violently at some point when I was teased. That was about something else. That was about my first name – I was called "Deenis-penis."

[Laughter]

Wrong: That enraged me.

Shalin: Was it in the middle school?

Wrong: In Upper Canada College. It was in my last couple of years in high school.

Shalin: And you fought, you were strong enough to respond?

Wrong: Oh, I wasn't bad. I was never much of an athlete, but one sport I was somewhat good at and took part in tournaments was boxing. I became a fanatical follower of boxing, but that was partly because one day in Washington when I was sick my sister was taken by the nurse to Sheridan Circle where the heavy weight champion of the world came by and gave a little talk. She got an autograph from Carnera. And so, that got me interested and I followed Carnera and began reading the magazines. Oh, I remember when I was in Switzerland I read a book in French by Carnera's manager, Leon See called *Le Mystère de Carnera* in which he claimed that Carnèra had been built up through fixed fights in Italy and France, so he had a phony career. I wrote about this to the editor of Ring Magazine, Nat Fleischer, and he didn't want to publish my letter because he thought that would discredit boxing,

but he wrote back to me in person. The book wasn't translated or published in English. . . .

Shalin: Perhaps you have this letter lying around someplace.

Wrong: I doubt this.

Shalin: So you actually stepped into the ring and fought in tournaments.

Wrong: We had boxing tournaments at both St. Albans in Washington and at Upper Canada College in Toronto. I won my first bout and then was badly beaten by the eventual winner in both cases, one of whom later became Lieutenant Governor of Ontario and a member of Parliament, John Aird. The guy in Washington was Chuck Smith, and he had a very successful career too.

Shalin: Your first bout was in high school or later?

Wrong: In high school.

Shalin: Did you fight in college?

Wrong: No, not at all. . . .

Shalin: Did you have pronounced intellectual interests in high school?

Wrong: I think my intellectual interests developed after two years in Geneva. When I came back and the war broke out, as I remember, I began to follow it by putting maps of the battlefields on the walls of my dormitory room in the Upper Canada. That was resented and looked down upon by my fellow roommates, but I thought since I was there, I ought to be an expert on Europe and Hitler and the outbreak of the war. I bought a book I still have, the first book that I bought told the whole story, *Fallen Bastions* by G. E. R. Gedye, who was a journalist for *The London Observer*, I think, or *The News Chronicle*. Towards the end of the book Gedye said that the only way to win the war was for the world to embrace

socialism. I converted to socialism as a result of that. Then I went to the same book store where I got Gedee's book in Toronto and bought a pamphlet by John Strachey, *Why You Should be a Socialist*. I became a socialist. I think I became an anti-Stalinist during the period of the Stalin-Hitler pact. I was a "premature anti-communist," as someone later coined the term, some writer for *The Nation*, I think.

Shalin: I ordered a couple of your books, *Reflections on . . .*

Wrong: *Reflections on a Politically Skeptical Era*.

Shalin: Yes, and another book of your essays.

Wrong: *The Modern Condition*, I think.

Shalin: I think so. This is where you have your observations on C. Wright Mills, I believe, along with some autobiographical remarks.

Wrong: Yes.

Shalin: I imagine you also mention there Erving Goffman.

Wrong: I don't remember at the moment, but probably yes.

Shalin: I want to ask you about a few other people. Did you know Greg Stone?

Wrong: Who?

Shalin: Gregory Stone.

Wrong: I don't think so.

Shalin: Did you encounter Joe Gusfield?

Wrong: That draws a blank too. . . .

Shalin: And I imagine you knew Irving Louis Horowitz.

Wrong: Oh yes! I knew him very well, still do, he is a neighbor right here in Princeton. He was my publisher. He developed heart murmurs and handed over the publishing house to his wife, Joan Curtis, and she is bringing out a book of mine. She is in charge of Transaction Publishers.

Shalin: She also published your book *The Persistence of the Particular*.

Wrong: Yes, yes, that's the book I am talking about.

Shalin: I have it, it has been published already.

Wrong: Yes, I've forgotten for a moment. I have a copy of it, but there was some . . . oh, I remember, she left out one page of footnotes to one chapter, and I got her to reprint the copies of that page. When I send copies to my NYU colleagues, I particularly want them to see that chapter. I am just waiting to get the copies of the book that she sends me in which I can insert the missing page before I send them to my colleagues.

Shalin: Do you mention Irving Horowitz in your memoir?

Wrong: I can't remember. Probably I did.

Shalin: Anything in particular stands out in your mind about Irving?

Wrong: Yes, much. I think I've written about him to you.

Shalin: About Irving Louis Horowitz?

Wrong: He was a protégé of Al Gouldner. And earlier than that, he was a protégé of my two very very good friends, Irving Howe and Lewis Coser at Brandeis. They supported him for a Fulbright in Argentina, and for his first book and for his first teaching job rather, at Hobart and William Smith Colleges. It was in the Buffalo area that he took up with Alan Gouldner who, oddly enough, was an

enemy of Howe and Coser at City College, for Howe and Coser were anti-Stalinist. Gouldner at the time was a Stalinist.

Shalin: Was he?

Wrong: Al Gouldner, who I think actually was a member of the Communist Party, associated with Communists (I have this written down somewhere) in Buffalo and found them bigoted and ignorant, putting down people he admired as sociologists. When he started the magazine *Transaction* and got them to write for it, Irving Louis became his assistant. When he moved to Washington University in St. Louis, he took Irving with him. Then he died suddenly of a heart attack, I think (or was it cancer?). So as a result, Irving Louis Horowitz inherited the whole enterprise. Then he moved to the right politically, which Coser never did.

Shalin: What was Gouldner like?

Wrong: Well, I remember what he looked like. I thought he was dogmatic and opinionated, but I don't remember very well. I do remember what he looked like. He wrote this book, I have it, a long commentary and critique, *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology*, and I sort of objected. The title was borrowed from a famous book by Fritz Sternberg, called *The Coming Crisis of the West*. And since Sternberg's book was about world history, Western sociology being a very minor part of it, I remember writing him a big critique of it. I have some correspondence with him in my files. He welcomed my critique, he was quite civilized about it. My main point, I think, was that it was presumptuous to take a title of world historical importance and simply extend it to a minor discipline.

Shalin: Are you sure Gouldner consciously took the title of an earlier book? It wasn't just a coincidence?

Wrong: I think he never denied it. I accused him and he never denied it. . . .

Shalin: You say that he was civilized about your critique, some people say he had a temper.

Wrong: I heard that, I don't really remember it very well. I think I once saw him blow up at the American Sociological Association's meeting over something. But I always had a civil relation with him. I can check it out, I may have some notes on that. I do remember his blow up but I can't remember what it was about.

Shalin: This was at a public session of some kind?

Wrong: Of some kind.

Shalin: What about Lewis Coser?

Wrong: He was a very good friend of mine, very good friend. I thought highly of him. I knew his wife first, and she of course had a reputation as a sociologist.

Shalin: Oh yes, she is a fine sociologist.

Wrong: Yes, yes. I knew both of them very well and was close to them.

Shalin: I hope your memories about these people will be preserved somehow.

Wrong: I think I've written about Lew. I knew Rose first because she was a graduate student at Columbia. I remember we were in Merton's class, and it turned out that she and I knew way way more sociology than other students in the class. Her husband at that time was employed by Dwight Macdonald on the magazine *politics*, I think. He was an active Trotskyist. I can't remember very well, but I think I recommended him and played some role in getting him admitted as a graduate student at Columbia.

Shalin: Rose wasn't married to Lew at the time?

Wrong: I don't remember if she was married or not, but she was certainly living with him.

Shalin: You remember Rose as very well read.

Wrong: Yes, and very talkative. She sat down in front in Merton's class, I remember. . . . I mainly remember that both of us were a lot smarter than other students in the class. And we were anti-Stalinist, that was the big thing.

Shalin: Both of you had already moved away from the Stalinist Left. As you sat in Merton's class, what impressed you about him?

Wrong: Oh, he was a tremendous teacher, very very effective. I went to Columbia on account of having hearing him speak and how good he was as a speaker.

Shalin: Do you remember what kind of grader he was?

Wrong: I think he was pretty hard. I don't really remember. He graded me well [**laughing**].

Shalin: And you took a couple classes with him?

Wrong: Yes, I took all the classes I could with him, and also with Robert Lynd. Since Lynd was an apologist for the Soviet Union at that time, I argued with him in class, and the class didn't like that. Oh yes, I appeared on a panel with him, discussing . . . Lynd invited me to create a socialist club at Columbia. He knew that I had been a head of such a club at the University of Toronto, so he invited me to create a socialist club. With the friend of mine who later became a German national and a key advisor to Willie Brandt of all people, Harry Hurwitz, we wrote a constitution for the socialist club, in which we said we opposed all forms for totalitarianism. That was deliberately meant to be anti-Soviet and aroused tremendous controversy. One of my friends in Canada who worked for the Oxford University Press at this time and was a friend of mine in high school and later became an important figure in his own right, said, "The word 'totalitarianism' was invented by people who want to conceal the difference between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union." I'd written on this somewhere, and I said, "Yes, you are quite right, these are people who want to emphasize the

similarity between them, and I think they are right.” But the word became controversial for that reason. Originally it was used favorably by Mussolini.

Shalin: Did you take a class with Lynd? How do you remember him as a teacher?

Wrong: Oh, as I remember, he was very chatty, not very well organized. I don't remember too well. That's the main thing. . . . He was outspoken. I don't remember him as a person. We wrote about this in the socialist club constitution and organized a panel on which his son was a member. His son was the pro-Stalinist member, I was the anti-Stalinist, and a man, whom I later got to know quite well, Jim Macpherson, sort of put both of us down. The audience didn't like my point of view, neither did Lynd. One person in the audience who defended me was Nathan Glazer. He asked me then to write for *The New Leader*. It was he who got me started on writing for the New York intellectual magazines and later became a great friend, someone whom I admire enormously. I list him as one of the five most intelligent and superior people in my life.

Shalin: What was he like in person?

Wrong: Very gracious, forthright, calm, brilliant. I had an enormously high opinion of Nat Glazer.

Shalin: Did you have a chance to interact closely with C. Wright Mills?

Wrong: Oh sure, sure, absolutely! I was told by two of my teachers at the University of Toronto when I went to New York to avoid this fellow, C. Wright Mills, and the Norman Thomas socialists because they were really pro-fascist. I thought that was absolute nonsense. I was already an anti-Stalinist [**laughing**]. That was useful advice because the first thing I did was look them up and take his courses. I later broke with him over the New Left, but I was certainly influenced by him. I'd written about him.

Shalin: Nathan Glazer and C. Wright Mills, they were quite different.

Wrong: Yes, Mills was controversial and outspoken; Nat wasn't, as I remember.

Shalin: The socialist club constitution – was it published?

Wrong: I don't think so.

Shalin: Do you think it is lying around someplace at your home?

Wrong: It only lasted for . . . it died after the first term. I was the only person who was ever president of it. It died on the basis of this controversy over Harry Hurwitz and me opposing all forms of totalitarianism. That was the end of it.

Shalin: When did the first meeting take place?

Wrong: The first year I was at Columbia – that would have been 1945-46 – that was the end of it, it didn't survive.

Shalin: And you wrote the club's constitution.

Wrong: Harry Hurwitz and I wrote it.

Shalin: Even if it didn't exist for long, it is of some historical significance as it shows how the Old Left was coming apart.

Wrong: Well, when I got at Columbia, I was already an anti-Stalinist and my fellow students at Columbia were not. I gravitated instantly to the anti-Stalinist circles. The only places where they had some intellectual prestige were New York City and Boston.

Shalin: Who were prominent in the anti-Stalinist circle at the time?

Wrong: Oh, gosh, Walter Lacqueur – that was one very important person. I know this all perfectly well, but at the moment I can't

think of it. Names like Dwight Macdonald, C. Wright Mills, there were others too, Walter Lacqueur, Koestler – oh, Arthur Koestler and Orwell were two most important people! I met Koestler in my senior year at Toronto, and I came to Columbia as a great advocate of both of them. In fact, on my visit to Columbia to look it over when I was still a senior at Toronto, I picked up *The Yogi and the Commissar* in the Columbia book store. I still have that book, and it influenced me enormously. I had already read *Darkness at Noon*, all this because of my first real girlfriend. I think I told you this, she was the daughter of a professor of literature at the University of London. He was very well informed and anti-communist, and his daughter told me to read *Darkness at Noon* and Orwell.

Shalin: This was the turning point for you.

Wrong: No, I had already become politicized during the period of the Stalin-Hitler pact. This was simply a reassertion of the views I had already held or been exposed to.

Shalin: Did you meet Koestler?

Wrong: Yes, I remember I went to hear him speak. I went with my then girlfriend who later became my first wife, who was pro-Stalinist. She had gone to a school in New York that was very famous for its left-wing point of view. I went to hear him at the Carnegie Hall.

Shalin: How did he impress you?

Wrong: I thought he was very effective.

Shalin: He spoke without accent?

Wrong: Without what?

Shalin: Did he have an accent?

Wrong: No, he had an accent. After *Darkness at Noon* I picked up *The Yogi and the Commissar*, and I remember it ended my

friendship with Muni Frumhartz from Toronto, my closest friend with whom I'd gone to Columbia because we both admired Merton. But he started going around with a woman at Columbia who was kind of "Stalinoid" as we used to say. There was a subtle distinction between Stalinoids and Stalinoids. He came from a Bundist family from Toronto, if you remember what the Bund was.

Shalin: Sure, the Jewish socialist organization.

Wrong: Yes, they were almost hereditary anti-communist socialists. He watered his views down and later he became chairman of the department of sociology at the New University – Carleton – in Ottawa. Then he got Alzheimer's and died quite quickly. But I saw him later on, he invited me to speak there as we sort of became friendly again.

Shalin: Did you hear Orwell speak?

Wrong: Yes, in England.

Shalin: Any memories of him?

Wrong: I don't remember much. I thought he was very effective.

Shalin: What is the difference between Stalinist and Stalinoid?

Wrong: I am trying to remember now. I think Stalinoids were vague apologists for the Soviet Union whereas Stalinists were straight out communists who supported Stalin. Stalinists would say that "after all they are socialists." I remember someone saying that "after all." I wrote a polemic against called "After what?" [**laughing**]. After the collectivization of farms, false trials, Stalin-Hitler pact, and everything? The Stalinists were defenders of these things.

Shalin: Did you come across Sigmund Diamond?

Wrong: Yes. I am trying to remember.

Shalin: He was a professor at Columbia University, and he was part of the polemics of those years.

Wrong: Yes, he was. At the moment I can't recall, but he was a big influence on me and an important figure.

Shalin: He wrote about status inequality in the colonial times.

Wrong: I remember how he looked. I think I took some of his courses.

Shalin: When I left the Soviet Union in 1975 and came to Columbia University, I took classes with Merton, Diamond, Allan Silver.

Wrong: Oh yes!

Shalin: You knew Allan Silver?

Wrong: Yes, I knew Allan Silver. I had a controversy with him for some reason. I had all this written down somewhere, but I don't at the moment remember.

Shalin: If you wrote about this in your essays, I will find it.

Wrong: I think I published it. I fell in instantly with the anti-Stalinist Left when I came to New York, the first day I was there. I remember I saw at the Columbia subway station news kiosk with Dwight Macdonald's magazine *politics* which had an article by someone called Ivan Horenstein who later changed his name to Irving Howe and became a close personal friend. He was one of the first people I read, his article was called "Powerless People."

Shalin: Dennis, looking back at you long career and political evolution, would you describe yourself as a moderate socialist?

Wrong: I would say "social democrat," a "centrist social democrat."

Shalin: Were you at any point a real Stalinist?

Wrong: For a few months at the age of 15, that's all.

Shalin: Your girlfriend must have been an influence.

Wrong: Yes, but also the Stalin-Hitler pact, that was what really influenced me, and the invasion of France in 1940. A friend in Geneva who later became quite well known himself, Stuart Schulberg, we both were appalled at the invasion of France.

Shalin: The Molotov-Ribbentrop pact was a turning point.

Wrong: Yes, absolutely, that's right. That was a big shock. I thought I was the only person in the world who became an apologist for communism after the Stalin-Hitler pact, but only for a few months and then completely dropped it after the invasion of France. I think that was true of Stuart too. I was influenced by Stuart who was influenced by his brother who was an active Communist in Hollywood, quite a well known novelist, Budd Schullberg, author of *What Makes Sammy Run?*

Shalin: How would you describe Merton's politics? Was he leaning in the conservative direction?

Wrong: No, he was always kind of a liberal. I think he was always a liberal. He was, using the term publicized by C. Wright Mills, a "Cold-War liberal," not an aggressive liberal. I came to be a Cold-War liberal from very early on. The term was coined by Mills and meant invidiously. In fact, Mills first used it in correspondence with me, naming me as one. I didn't agree with his opposition to the Second World War . . . oh, what am I saying? – his opposition to the Cold War.

Shalin: Your correspondence with Mills could be of value. If you come across it . . .

Wrong: Sure, I will.

Shalin: Just to wrap things up – and thank you for finding time to talk to me – when you look at your professional career, which of your ideas or theories or insights are most dear to you?

Wrong: I must have written it somewhere. At the moment I am sort of drawing a blank.

Shalin: Perhaps your writings on the oversocialized concept of man.

Wrong: Certainly, I was very early a critic of functionalism. And I was called a conflict theorist, that was the term used then, conflict vs. consensus theorist. I was considered a conflict theorist, though I didn't go along with all of them. It was a term that referred to Ralf Dahrendorf.

Shalin: Coser was also considered a conflict theorist.

Wrong: Yes, that's it fundamentally.

Shalin: Any other concepts you have been attached to?

Wrong: I think the "oversocialized man" pretty much states it. And I became a critic of Parsons who had been initially a great influence.

Shalin: Well, thank you for your time, Dennis. If you discover more of your notes on Erving and other colleagues, let me know. On our site we have a section for diaries and autobiographies where your materials could be housed.

Wrong: I'll check it out, OK.

Shalin: And thank you so much!

Wrong: Well, thank you!

Shalin: Bye-bye.

Wrong: Bye.

[End of the recording]