

UF 303

Interviewee: Sidney Homan

Interviewer: Dirk Drake

Date: March 28, 1996

D: This is March 28, 1996. We are at the home of Sidney Homan. The address is?

H: 1500 Northwest Thirty-Sixth Way.

D: In Gainesville, Florida. Dr. Homan's first name is Sidney, middle name?

H: Ramsden.

D: And last name Homan. I would like to start with a little life history. You were born?

H: I was born in South Philadelphia in 1938. I am from a real blue collar family, my dad was a telephone installer.

D: What was the day of your birth?

H: May 21, 1938.

H: Real integrated neighborhood and a highly political neighborhood too. We were always organizing things in the city. I lead the childhood of a tough South Philadelphia kid with a South Philadelphia accent that talked like this [demonstrating the accent]. [I] planned to become an apprentice telephone installer with my dad after I got out of South Philadelphia High School but my mom was socially pretentious. She pushed my father, and pushed him and finally in my high school years we moved out of Philadelphia to a suburb of Philadelphia: 605 Roseland Avenue, Fox Chase Manor. We were sort of middle class now. I finished my high school in May 1956, right in the middle of those 1950s. [I] had a summer job and then had a two week vacation before I was to begin on September 1, 1956, as an apprentice telephone installer with my dad. My mom was an actress, she just died recently. She was coming home from work one night in the theater and she stopped by Leary's Book Store in Philadelphia and they were having a sale of novels by F. Scott Fitzgerald. For some reason, probably because it was cheap, she bought his novel *Far Side of Paradise* which is set at Princeton. Fitzgerald went to Princeton for three years and then got TB and had to drop out. The next morning when I thought I could sleep late because this is my two week vacation she came into my room at five o'clock as she always would during school days with her cheerful mothers, rise

and shine Sid. The subtext to that rise and shine was my mother was always humiliated, this is my mom's mentality, that my father was only a telephone worker and she wanted me named after my father to be something more. So that rise and shine was get up, make something of yourself, be more than your father, rescue the fortunes. I looked like my father. All that I wanted to be was like my father. I adored him. I remember grumbling at her under the pillow, why the hell do I have to get up at this hour? She said you are going to Princeton. I said what is that? She said that is a college in New Jersey and a guy named F. Scott Fitzgerald went there. You are going there. No one in my family or neighborhood had ever gone to college so we had no idea how you went to college. When you get into a new situation you tend to use old patterns to deal with it. My mom was used to dragging me into the theater from about age four. She would drag me into a producer or director's office and say this is my son Sidney Homan. This kid has a lot of talent. Sid do a little dance for them and I did. She just imagined Princeton as a great big booking agency and we get in our 1938 dodge, black four door, bought the year of my birth to celebrate birth because apparently I was a hard time coming. I was six foot even then. My mom was four foot eleven, flaming red hair. I of course had a DA haircut, pegged pants, pimples all over the face. I was just a South Philadelphia kid.

D: But this was from the suburbs.

H: Yes, but I was still in my zoot suit era. We drive right up to Princeton, right up to their Tigert Hall which was Nassau Hall, and she takes me in tow and she charges into the administration building searching for the dean of admissions. Secretaries are shouting out, madame, can we help? My mother learned in the theater you do not let secretaries interpose between you and directors. She goes right to the offices of Walter Lipenkod of the publishing company family who was the dean of admissions and she charges right to his desk. He shushes the secretaries away. This is an environment I had never seen before. This is an Ivory League dean's office. He had a pipe in his mouth and good books on the walls and wines and things like that. My mom says to him in a wonderful, I will tone down the Philadelphia accent a little bit because it is hard to hear. She said Lipenkod, this is my son Sidney Homan. The kid, he has some talent, I think you ought to look him over. I think you will like him Lipenkod. This wonderfully genial man who later became a very dear friend said, Mrs... My name is May Homan. Actually it was Mary but she changed it to May because she thought Mary sounded too Catholic. This is my son Sidney. Mr. Lipenkod said, Mrs. Homan why do you not have a seat in the outer office while I talk to your son. She does not like that, she wants to be next to me as my agent. She gets up and looks a

little forlorned and crosses to the door, because she has got to have an exit line as an actress, [she] puts her hand on the door handle, looks over and says, Lipenkod let me tell you, you will like the kid. She goes out. He immediately apologized to me.

D: She has read the Fitzgerald book?

H: Yes. So I immediately apologize to him. I said, I am sorry my mom is so forward Mr. Lipenkod. This wonderfully kind man, he is my first real hero, he said to me, no actually Mr. Homan I find your mother rather refreshing. You see most of my days are spent speaking to wealthy Republican women from Scarsdale. We had an hours conversation, an hour and a half maybe. I had never had a conversation like this before. He asked me my thoughts on things. I had never been interviewed like this before and he was in earnest. At the end of the interview he said, I tell you what we are going to do Homan. This is the 1950's at Princeton. There were no women, no minorities to speak of. They were all Anglo Saxon Protestant boys from wealthy families whose fathers and grandfathers had gone to Princeton. He said, we are going to admit you as a special student. I in effect was the tough, white, inner city kid with this nice acceptable last name of Homan but I was not black or hispanic, or a minority. That is how I got to Princeton. I kept working in the theater but I fell in love with the idea of professors. These are men who knew how to pour wine, they talked about books. All of the other guys in my class, there were 800 guys, they all became lawyers and doctors because this was the fifties. They all went into the high power professions. I just wanted to become now like these new father figures. In fact, I was the only English major. There were eight English majors to graduate school in English. Things have changed a lot. All the rest of the guys majored in English to go to law school and medical school. I went to Harvard to be like these men, there were no women on the faculty then.

D: That is graduate level?

H: That was the graduate school, yes. That was in 1960.

D: I want to backtrack on your mom just a bit. Her name was Mary?

H: It was Mary Renock Homan, she was from Polish people upstate in the coal mining district of Pennsylvania. Then she married my father who actually came from a very famous family during Shakespeare's day. They were a part of the Homans family. My father's part of the family argued with the main Homans, split off and dropped the "s". For 450 years [they] were blue collar, but they kept one

aristocratic affixation. The first son of each new generation was named Sidney Ramsden Homan. I am Sidney Ramsden Homan the seventeenth. I was the last hope for my family to produce heirs, so when I produced my first son being a democrat I thought I am going to get rid of this affixation. I abandoned the line and called my first son Christopher Ramsden Homan. All sorts of Homans came out of the woodwork to protest this.

D: That is a very Catholic name, Christopher.

H: Yes, that was my family background. My mother took great pleasure in marrying my father who, though he was impoverished he was only a telephone worker, was Episcopalian and she thought that was the religion that people like F. Scott Fitzgerald practiced. There were Episcopalians at Princeton, so she wanted her boy to be like that.

D: Polish-Catholic before that.

H: Changed her name never getting the official government sanction for it. I remember her inquiring about that. You could change your name for \$200.00 back in the 1950s but she just changed the Mary to what she thought was the more Episcopal sounding May Elaine. That is what she imagined that women in print dresses and holding martini's.

D: I have got the same parallel in my family. The Irish ____ have always had pretensions of being the _____. Folks are currently Episcopalian now. Irish grandmother became Episcopalian.

H: For me it was just a radical change going to a place like Princeton. Those guys drank bourbon and seven. I drank Schmidt's Beer which is what we drank in Philadelphia. Those boys had their wealthy girlfriends from Vassar and Smith come down on weekends.

D: Argyle socks?

H: Yes! I tried to be like them. I bought a pipe. I tried to keep it lit. I saved my money and got my first tweedy coat. I found very quickly at Princeton you got positions in activities by inheritance whether as a football team or the editorship of the newspaper. I managed to disguise myself, lost a bit of that South Philadelphia accent, and actually grew to admire very deeply. We have to combat class prejudices both ways running. I had to combat my own class prejudices. I met guys in my class that are dear friends even to this day that I

very deeply admire. We were just on the edge of the great changes which would come over the Ivory League schools. Like many of those so called private schools, we needed a little bit more of the civil rights movement to come, and Vietnam. It would be ten years after I graduated [that] Princeton admitted women. I think we had three Afro-Americans in my class at Princeton.

D: Out of how many?

H: Three out of a school of 3,000. I do not remember seeing minorities there. There may have been, but then things would change. I was the safe, white, tough kid. That was my only credential.

D: Do you remember the date that you met Mr. Lipenkod and that admissions? That would have been Spring of...

H: It was Summer of 1956.

D: You were able to attend the Fall of 1956?

H: I came in the Fall. It was a hurried application.

D: Lipenkod moved it over?

H: There I was. I was a bright kid, I had city smarts, but my schooling was something out of blackboard jungle essentially.

D: Was it a struggle as an undergrad?

H: Yes, I remember the first grade I got in a political science course. I got a seven and all of the other guys are getting twos or threes. I thought that is great until I found out that one was an A, two was a B. I had to work real hard. I also fell in love with those men that taught me. They were my heros. You would say something and they would ____ you. They would sort of love you to death with questions. You would say something shallow like I think Hamlet was a little bit insane. Well what do you mean by insane? It is the same methods that I use now. Also there was a real tradition at Princeton in those days. We had two things. We had on one hand the classes were called precepts. That was Woodrow Wilson's idea when he was president of Princeton. He wanted preceptorials in each course. They are not just small classes but they are courses that there classes were seven or eight people and a professor talk about the material of the course but you are continually interrelating that material

through all of your other courses. You have those precepts in whatever course you are taking. Whether it is organic chemistry with 250 students or north eastern poetry with ten. Small class seminar does not quite describe them. The Princeton guys, we learned to speak a lot on our toes because in preceptorial you were always interrelating stuff. The other tradition was to give real showmen like lectures. The faculty used to almost without fail publish lecture notes ahead of time. You would get the notes as you went into the lecture so you could watch the performance of the lecturer.

D: Like a program?

H: Yes, and being in the theater I saw those as some dazzling performances. That idea of performing, of loving an undergraduate to death, pursuing them, pursuing the _____. I remember one of my teachers once told me at Princeton he said, when I am talking about Plato's Republic with you guys, the issue is not me, it is not Plato's Republic the guy is dead, it is that pimply faced undergraduate wrestling with Plato's Republic.

D: Soaking it in.

H: Yes. I thought that was the greatest profession in the world. I still think so. The other tradition at Princeton had its motto Princeton in the nations service. Princeton more so than Harvard or Yale had that notion that if you went to Princeton, it was a bit snobby but a bit idealistic, that you were then to go out and do something very useful in the world. Ralph Nader is the proto-typical Princeton graduate.

D: He is a Princeton man? I did not know that.

H: The irony was then I go to Harvard which was a wonderful place, but the mood was so radically different. It was not activist. It was graduate school. It was Harvard, it was Cambridge. I loved it, do not get me wrong, I loved it but that was 1960-1965 and I was at graduate school the civil rights movement is heating up and things are starting to happen in Vietnam. Here I am and now my hero at Harvard is Alfred Harbidge who was their great Shakespearian scholar. Now I am into an entirely different life. It is not that activist life of Princeton, it is becoming a scholar. I always had the theater because the theater always seemed a sort of activist expression. I just did not have to talk theoretically about Shakespeare or the death imagery in Hamlet, I could get _____. Boy, predictably when I got to the University of Illinois which was my first teaching job right out of Harvard, I was a young assistant professor. I was the new Shakespearian. I

was trying to publish and not perish. I was trying to teach the way my Princeton teachers taught. A couple of assistant professors and I interested in theater found out about this old abandoned train depot of the Illinois Central Railroad in Champaign that had once been a passenger depot but now was unused. We rented it for \$200.00 a month and we established a theater there. The Depot Theater. On one hand I am trying to write articles on Hamlet and I am talking to that pimply faced undergraduate about Hamlet, but I am down to the theater every other night staging stuff and acting in things.

D: Princeton gave you that sense of service.

H: Yes it really did.

D: It was originally a Presbyterian school was it not?

H: It was Presbyterian school with that sort of activist _____. You work so you justify your place in heaven and you prove yourself that Calvinist thing.

D: Harvard had been a Puritan school.

H: Puritan school and it was status quo. Harvard in the 1960s was not a Berkeley in the 1960s. We had protests there. I got into the movement but in graduate school it was just a sort of different mood. I loved it, do not get me wrong. It is part of me which still... Oh, I love it. I have done nine books and now at age fifty-seven I have made a promise to myself. It is funny. That does not interest me anymore. Even as I know how lovely that is. I know how lovely it is being like a monk in that cubicle fashioning that book, but of course what are you fashioning it for? You are fashioning it for a university press run of 3,000 copies which essentially go to university libraries and you are talking to a very small circle.

D: Cultivating elite information.

H: Yes, and I like that to some degree, I understand that. When one of my colleagues rather snobbishly says yes, but we English professors are guardians of the culture and the barbarians are at the gate. In a sense he is right. We would not read Shakespeare's the *Winter's Tale* nowadays if it were not for Shakespeare scholars who publish. There is part of me that likes that, but there is the other part. It is the blue collar kid, it is the kid who maybe should have become the telephone worker. When I go back to South Philadelphia, when I used to go back to my old neighborhood my old neighbors would say, oh, yes you are Sid Homan's kid. Yes, your dad was a man. When he came home at

night... He installed telephones... What do you do son? I say well I work in the theater and work with words. Oh, a sissy's profession, huh? You do not do anything. 97 percent of me wants to say, no you are wrong this is a man's profession, but there is three percent of me that cannot refute their arguments. As you get older you probably develop increasing _____ to see yourself as you are doing it. Look at my vita. You can just chart what has happened over the last fifteen years. What has happened is as the body gets dried up and gets more practical as that happens and you get a little bit more mellow and a little bit more sure of some of your principles which is not a very good idea. I have found myself trying to bend what I am doing to more and more practical things. That is why I have taken my prison tours and things like that.

D: Yes, I want to get into all of those. You have jumped nicely from Princeton to Harvard to now. At Princeton as the working class kid, were you a scholarship student?

H: Yes, I never paid for a penny at Princeton. It was great.

D: You had high school test scores that allowed that?

H: Yes.

D: The audition with Lipenkod.

H: It worked fine. I also worked twenty hours a week making hoagie sandwiches and things like that and I went out for everything. I was on all of the sports teams and the newspaper and the radio and the humor magazine because Fitzgerald had been editor of the humor magazine. First year I go out for Air Force ROTC because my mom wanted me to come back on vacation to Philadelphia wearing that blue Air Force uniform. I flunked our real quickly. I was not the type to do a column left and spit shine my shoes.

D: My father flunked out of the Air Force ROTC.

H: Did he?

D: He later spent a career in _____ in the Navy.

H: I ultimately wound up having a wonderful time at Princeton because once the faculty, especially the English Department, found that I was not going to law school or medical school but I was going to try to be like them. I had three of

them come to my wedding. I married a couple of days after I graduated. I got all of that special attention. I became as much as one could personal friends with those faculty members.

D: A real mentor relationship.

H: Yes, that was real good. I wanted to stay at Princeton for graduate school and they said no, no, no you need to go somewhere else. They were right so I went to Harvard.

D: But you fulfilled your mother's legacy.

H: I fulfilled it, although the funny thing is my dad died about ten years ago but my dad would call me about once a month where ever I was and we would always have a wonderful conversation. He would say, so Sid you went to Princeton. I said, yes dad. He said, and those boys, your friends they all became something, lawyers or doctors but you, you went into the teaching profession. I said, right dad. He said, but you could change could you not son? I would humor my father especially as he got older. I would say, yes dad I am considering options. Later in the conversation as he mellowed out he would say, but you know Sid I look at it this way I install telephones and you are an English professor. You know we are both in communication son. That was the way he would resolve that. He liked that.

D: I forgot to ask you about siblings.

H: My brother John, an interesting case.

D: You are the oldest?

H: I am the oldest.

D: First born son.

H: Right, I am the first born son and the only other child is my brother John who is three years younger than me. That was real interesting. I am the right brain character. I am after my mom. I have my mom's personality, although I do not look like my mom. My mom was into theater, I am into theater. My brother is my dad, left brained, great at mechanics and things like that. My parents probably now that I look back at it had a very unhappy marriage. My mom resented my father for only being a telephone worker. She was ambitious. If she could be in

the 1970s with Helen Reddy she would be the head of the woman's movement, but she was frustrated. She felt little women stayed at home. She stayed at home and she made Easter bonnets and made a lot of money selling. She wrote a column for the local newspaper and got paid by the inch. But the idea of leaving the home and taking a job was just unthinkable to her. She could not conceive of that.

D: How many kids?

H: Just two. What happened was I was clearly to become the Sidney, I am named after my dad, I was to become the Sid that would redeem that family. I would become the type of husband that she wanted. This is real D.H. Lawrence *Sons and Lovers*. I was my mom's boy in a period when you did not get divorced. Only bad people did that. They stayed married but I was my mom's boy and my brother was given to my father.

D: What is your age difference?

H: Three years. My brother went to technical school, became an engineer, and is just as good at mechanical technical things as I am bad at those. It was interesting. My brother and I were never close because we each were taken by a different parent. He was sort of slopped off.

D: You had a younger brother who went on to be a technical engineer. A Princeton man as well?

H: No, no John was taking to go to Ursinus College which is an obscure, piddling little college in Philadelphia.

D: Sounds Catholic.

H: Might be. It is a college you would never want to go to. John flunked right out of there. It was only later when John married and once you are married in my family you are deserting your mom. Once John married then he went back to school to Temple University, the city university of Philadelphia and did well. Both boys really could not blossom on their own until they got away from their mom. Then he proceeded to do okay. We are still as different as night and day. He still lives in Philadelphia. He had worked as an engineer in a company in Trenton, right across the river, but got laid off when the company down-sized and now is one of those guys in his fifties, fifty-four, with like four jobs. Working at Builder's Square things like that. Here is the older brother comfortable as a

tenured professor can be. We did discover something. As much as we were taught that John was my father's boy and I was my mother's boy and that we were as different as night and day, and we never saw each other. Never saw each other as brothers. When we got married we never saw each other. We are not close in that sense. When I remarried one of Norma's first suggestions was why do you not go up and see John, this is ridiculous. We had not really seen each other for years. We were in our thirties then. I married Norma when I was thirty-eight. We go up to visit and almost from the moment we saw each other we realized that the interesting thing was it was my father's values which are those of relativity and compassion. My dad for example, this is my blowing, in the racist 1950s my father was a boxing fan. Very unusual. My father did not like to call Afro-Americans negro. He just thought that was demeaning.

D: That is pretty progressive.

H: Yes, it is interesting. In boxing, at least in those days, black boxers would wear white shorts and white boxers would wear black shorts. So my father's name for blacks was white panties and whites were black panties. Even to this day occasionally I will catch myself thinking of blacks as white panties. What my brother and I discovered was my father's principles were like still in deep water. They ran deeper. It had actually been my father who in terms of our politics. Our politics we found it exactly the same. In fact John became a Quaker, we are both against the death penalty, we are democrats. It was my father, that quiet man, that failure, that mere telephone worker. My father's values had run deeper. We had somehow felt them at some inarticulate level. I have got my mom's values on the surface. It is the moving of the hands and the personality that is real out there. It is theatrical. That is very much opposed. I can hear myself, even now as I am talking, crafting the words the way an actor would. The way my mother would. Norma catches me all of the time, come on Sid you are not a – I cannot dismiss that personality and I use it as a teaching personality, as a stage personality. But it is all to me a transitory thing.

D: I know exactly what you are talking about because I am on stage seven, eight hours a day.

H: It is my dad's values which are essentially those of the home, of relativity, of perseverance. There was a wonderful episode [wherein] Dr. Johnson in the eighteenth century was walking with his biographer Boswell down the streets of London in a horribly made-up syphilitic [costume], [and] prostitute comes over to Dr. Johnson and propositions him. Boswell, a fairly self-righteous individual

expected Dr. Johnson to deem her. Dr. Johnson put his hand on the prostitute's shoulder. Boswell records this in diary and says, I am sorry, madame, it would not do. I always think of my father when I think of that because that was my father's way of handling things. It was always when humans failed him, when there was someone who was strident in his or her view, my father always understood the relativity of his own views. I try for that I do not succeed very often in it. I try for it. It helped my father. It gave him an ease that he got through life.

D: A lot of compassion.

H: Yes, yes.

D: I need to get back to your life? Princeton was undergraduate, English department. Did you from the very first day know that you were going to get into the theater? That is what you wanted to study? Did you dabble in anything?

H: I had always worked in the theaters from four years old. I sang on the Magic Lady Radio Hour, station WIP in Philadelphia with Eddie Fisher. He would go on to bigger and better things before his fall.

D: Were you neighborhood chums?

H: Yes, see South Philadelphia was a real neighborhood. The only way you got out of South Philadelphia was on basketball scholarships or show business. Fabian, a singer from the 1950s, you are too young for him.

D: I know who he is.

H: He lived just right down the street. He was that real handsome Italian boy, not much of a voice but talent scouts came into the neighborhood. They saw Fabian and they made _____. Little Richard moved to South Philadelphia at the age of seven. Mario Lanza was in that neighborhood.

D: Did you know Little Richard?

H: Yes, I knew that he was in the neighborhood but I did not know him. Mario Lanza, those sort of guys. That is how you got out. I got out the atypical way.

D: Academically?

H: Yes, academically. Otherwise, you stayed in that four block area, that was your world.

D: You knew from your first semester that you were going to pursue theater academically?

H: Yes.

D: Were you pushed into the law areas?

H: Oh, I wanted to become a lawyer like all of those other guys and I wanted to go to the Woodrow Wilson School of Politics at Princeton. Then I sat down sometime in my junior year and I said, what am I doing? I am involved in theater all of the time. I wrote for the *Princeton Triangle Show* which was their musical organization. I played in their experimental theater. I did theater all of the time. I said, you do not go into theater. I know, I will compromise. I will go into something respectable. I will become an English professor.

D: What you had admired from the beginning?

H: Yes, which I had admired from the beginning, but that was really respectable. My mother would like that. She would not like that as much as a doctor or lawyer. Even as a graduate student and all the way through the rest of my career, I kept working at very least with my left hand in the theater. At very most in more recent years, I have been able to work with my right and left hand but that is a later story. I know why it is, again it is that blue collar mentality. Talking about the theater is one thing, and do not get me wrong, you can skin that cat a lot of ways. It is wonderful to talk about Shakespeare and write scholarly articles. Yes, there is death imagery in *Hamlet*. He does not have to be just a dramatic text. You know from your own work in the theater that what the text means just becomes infinitely larger when you are working on stage. There is the whole visual, physical, gestural, temporal thing not to mention the audience. There is a little bit of me now in the middle of my career here which says that English departments are cheating a little bit when Shakespeare is considered. This is an old complaint, it is nothing _____. When you consider Shakespeare as a literary text it is a marvelous literary text. He had an Irishmen's vocabulary. We know from running his plays through a computer he had a vocabulary of over a 100,000 usable words. You and I get along in life probably pretty well with 17,000. The text did beautiful things. I know the pleasure that an English professor of Shakespearian can have with just the text. But the point is, once you are seeing _____, once you have known how it is to work with an actor with a

subtext and the gesture, once you know how the physical part is so significant that Shakespeare himself was an actor, then I cannot in good conscience do it the old way. Also it just pleases my practical South Philadelphia thing. When you do a play, that is installing telephones because you have got to worry about the physical part of it.

- D: The way my Irish grandmother puts it is getting their eyes to light up. It is not just from reading books. _____ reminding me of that.
- H: When I went to the University of Illinois, which was my first teaching position, and those were the days when graduate students could have any job that they wanted, it was a seller's market. My first wife and I, we said we want to go to the mid-west.
- D: Okay, let us get there after Harvard. We still have to cover Harvard. You had been groomed by the English department at Princeton, you were excepted as a graduate student. Were you an English TA there?
- H: That is an interesting story. First year at Harvard in those days you were not allowed a teaching assistantship. You had to prove yourself that first year. They would flunk out about half of the graduate students the first year. You got the terminal MA which was a badge of disgrace. Getting an MA from English in Harvard in those days that was bad. The first year at Harvard you had to find jobs. My first wife was finishing up her second year in social work. She was a Simmons College getting a master's in social work. I had to get a job, but you could not teach at Harvard. So there was an ad in the paper Garland Junior College in Boston was looking for an English teacher. I go down and it is there on Boston Commons, just seven blocks above the Commons. It is a series of former old mansions along Connell Wealth Avenue, but I do not have any sense of Garland Junior College. I go into the dean and he interviews me. He said, now Mr. Homan if you were going to teach English, where would you start? This would be the introduction to English. I said, I guess at the beginning. What do you mean by the beginning? Well, *Beowulf*. Oh, so early? I said, I guess I could start with Shakespeare. He said, you do not understand Mr. Homan. What he wanted was someone to teach the latest novels to the girls at Garland. Garland was in effect a two year finishing school. They were essentially girls from wealthy families who were not very bright, who were sent to Garland so that they could marry a Harvard or MIT boy. But they needed to get real cultured, real fast so the English course was to teach them the latest novels so at cocktail parties

they could sound _____. The coolest one that the French teacher was an elderly woman.

D: What novels would those have been?

H: Just whatever was current back in the 1960s. That is what he wanted. I prostituted myself. I wanted that \$3,000 a year. There I was the poor South Philadelphia kid teaching in this former ballroom and all of the Garland girls they were all dressed in Bongratella dresses. They had nice Republican names like Vaughn and Chadwick.

D: It was a strictly female college?

H: Strictly female college. The coolest one was the French teacher was a heavy drinker, an old lady. She called up one day and she said, Sid, can you take over my class in French, I cannot make it. I said, yes, Janet. Where are you at in the text? No, no we are learning the word faux pas. I said, what do you mean? She said, well do you not know what the hell we do here? They learned French words to sprinkle in their conversation.

D: At cocktail parties?

H: Yes. I get in front of the Garland girls and I write faux pas out on the board. I give its definition. Then the blue collar devil in me comes out and I said, now, ladies, this is a word that as you know when you make some social blunder or something like that. Here is how you pronounce it. Now follow me, I want to make sure you pronounce it correctly. Fox's paw. I drove them bonkers pronouncing it fox's paw. That is how I took my revenge on that pseudo wealthy school. By the second year at Harvard I had been deemed worthy of continuing on. Then it was something funny. It was a religious thing. There were three types of jobs you could get as a graduate student at Harvard. You could be a grader in a course, that was the c-level job. You could be a section leader in the course. You could run the discussion section while the big Harvard professor lectured to the 200. The top job you could have that was the best was to be a tutor at one of the Harvard houses. They were like the individual colleges at Cambridge or Oxford. You lived there, you ate your meals there, you had your office there. They had a full faculty from famous [persons] to just TA's. Walter Jackson Baite who was a great eighteenth century romantic scholar was at Elliott House who was in the chairperson of Harvard's English department, he recommended me to John Finley, third generation Irishman, classic scholar who was the master of Elliott House. You had to be approved by Elliott House. I was

recommended by the English Department but you had to be approved, so you had to be interviewed. I go into Master Finley's office, wonderful Irish man and he said, Ah, Mr. Homans how nice to have you here. You know you come from such a distinguished family. In fact, your great, great, great, great, grandfather was the third cousin of Princeton. I noticed you went to Princeton. We certainly would be thrilled to have a member of such.... There were many Homans in Boston. The famous Homans were all in Boston. It would be wonderful to have a member of the Homans family here on the staff of Elliott House. I had the good and bad angels debating. I said, Master Finley, I am sorry but my name is Homan. No "s"? No, no we cut that "s" off years ago. You are not a member of the Homan's family? Well, technically not. Oh, I see. Nice to speak to you Mr. Homan. The next guy going to the English Department and Walter Jackson Baite became a dear friend. He is just enraged. He said, that goddamn Irishman he is not approving of you. He said, how could it be Sid? I said, well professor Baite I am afraid to say it is a little bit of bias. He said, God, that goddamned ____ third generation Irish. He charges down to Elliott House. Baite was one of the most distinguished faculty members at Elliott House. I get a note later in the afternoon that said, Master Finley would like to see you for cocktails. I go into _____. Finley is all and he apologizes. I said, no need Master Finley I understand. We have a few drinks and he says to me, but tell me Sid, would you indulge an old man? I said, sure. He said, if you become a tutor at Elliott House you know occasionally one of our social gatherings would you let this old man introduce you as Sidney Homans? I could hear my father _____. Certainly Master Finley it would be my honor. So, I was Sidney Homans as far as he was concerned for the next year. I wound up being a tutor at Elliott House. That was great. That was great because my Harvard and Radcliffe students would come for individual tutorials.

- D: That is an important theme in post-immigration American life. The grandmother I referred to was a McCloskey which they changed to the Scottish McClaskey just having pretenses of being less curt when they were shanty _____. Same thing, wow.
- H: It was a _____ experience being at Harvard at the Elliott House particularly because in that English style every Friday afternoon all of the tutors ate at high table while the undergraduates ate one foot below. My place at the table was, get this, I love this. I was the nobody, one of the nobodies, but we had wonderful faculty there. My place was between B.F. Skinner and Eric Erikson. They sat on my left and right. You cannot imagine two people more diametrically opposed in their view of life. There was B.F. Skinner with the Skinner box and everything is

deterministic and you are setting here because. Then there was Eric Erikson, that great chauvinistic psychologist, psychiatrist, social critic. I never spoke, I just listened to these two guys. Of course, I know where my liberal sympathies went. They went over to Erikson. It was just great. It was great being at Elliott House.

D: When Skinner came to Gainesville in the 1980s did you network him?

H: No, no because all he knew of me was this is the guy that sat next... Typical of Harvard democratic fashion, I sat at the head of the table. That is the lowest member sat at the head. Harvard had that tradition. After all it was also a liberal tradition. That was great. It was just wonderful being at Elliott House, wonderful to have those scholars there, famous historians, Stanley Cavell and people like that. It was just great. It was just a good experience.

D: What was your masters thesis?

H: I did not do a master's thesis. My graduate advisor Alfred Harbidge was a Philadelphian and he was a real democrat. He believed in the public theater. Shakespeare was good because Shakespeare wrote for average people. He hated the indoors private theater of the Renaissance where there were all little boy actors and there were _____. He had a real democratic bias. A lot of scholars have now corrected his view of it. The public theater was not quite as public, there were intellectuals there. He had that idea that the public theater is the people's theater.

D: The masses were down on the flag. The Globe theater?

H: Right the Globe. Shakespeare was strong because he, like Walt Disney, perfected his art for the common person. Now to some degree I think that is right but I _____ also bought a private theater in 1607. They are playing both sides. He and I got along real well because I had those same sort of blue collar biases like that. I wrote my thesis. You were not allowed to write it on Shakespeare with him. You had to win your right later in your career to write it on Shakespeare they way he had done it at the University of Pennsylvania thirty years before. All of this has changed. I have to pick a public theater dramatist, Thomas Dekker and a private theater dramatist, Thomas Middleton. My thesis was on Dekker and Middleton and the contrast between these two men. One who chose to write for the people, and one who chose to write for the _____. Probably one of the worst dissertations ever written, probably one of the most boring. I got a couple of articles out of it early in my career, but it took me awhile

to get out... I had a problem with father figures all of my life. I had mother figures as we all do. It took me a while to get out from under the shadow of Alfred Harbidge to write my first article on _____ and Shakespeare. The nice thing about being in the theater was [that in] the theater you do the playwrights that you like and/or are going to succeed with the public and/or will not be commercial bombs. You do not do Decker or Middleton, you do Shakespeare. Even he is a little risky.

D: At your graduate level at Harvard, we talked a lot about your academic pursuits and the thesis, what was the social life like? You described some of that at Princeton.

H: I was married when I got to Harvard, so I lived with all of the fellow and impoverished graduate students. That was a nice bonding community. The graduate students at Harvard were pretty much apolitical, overall liberals I guess. I cannot imagine English professors not, point in fact that is not true. I have had a couple of colleagues at Florida who were Republicans, but they were all liberal. They were just too much embroiled in the English Department in their graduate work just trying to survive as a graduate students to do anything political. I kept working in the theater and I kept very much involved in the civil rights movement. That is going all the way back to my dad's white panties and black panties.

D: I would like to talk about that.

H: So I was a little bit of the odd graduate student. I tried to balance all of that, balance that marriage and trying to be active politically. Harvard was pretty active politically but it was not a Berkeley. It was pretty good.

D: I know you had mentioned to my strike force students years ago that you had worked with Dr. King. Were you a freedom rider?

H: Yes, I was part of the freedom riders for a couple of years on and off.

D: As a graduate student?

H: As a graduate student, yes.

D: Did you go to Mississippi in 1964?

H: Yes, I went all around.

D: I think I have some taped footage of you.

H: The kids were saying this.

D: I think I do, it is a guy that looks like you. You were there in _____ and Jackson?

H: Yes and we went all about the South. I was in Washington a lot. When I got to Illinois, my first teaching job, I was real active there as an assistant professor. When I look back on those days I have a funny perspective on it. I am probably not very unique on this. Of course we were doing the right thing and even as I say that I am hearing that tone, of course we were doing the right thing. As I look back on it now I begin to realize that our motives, that is whites motives, were very complex. Our black brothers and sisters probably understood this. That as we were doing a lot for other reasons to. I have not become moderate in my political views it is just that I realized that when you support a cause, the cause is also supporting you. It is doing things for you. The most graphic example was I remember one time we were marching somewhere in the South. I had right behind me one of those wonderful, old, liberal, white church ladies with a flowered hat. You know those tennis sneakers. You know that type. She tapped me on the shoulder and said, hey Sid, we are marching, is it not a good thing what we are doing for those niggers? I remember that is one of those things which stayed. I also remember conversely having one of my black brothers one night we had a few drinks and he was real vulnerable. He turned to me and he said, you do not think, Sid, that some of that stuff they say might be true? Like we are not as smart as you all? That we are genetically inferior? The funny thing was years later when I was writing an article on Othello being a scholar, there is an extraordinary line in *Othello*. Othello was not black by our standards, he was Moroccan, but black by Shakespeare's standards. Othello is convinced that Desdemona had been unfaithful and he says "my name _____, my reputation which was once as white as Diana's visage is now black and begrim'd as my own face" I was working with a black actor at the time and I said to him, what is he saying? He said, I think you want to tell me, Sid. I said, he is touching that first spot in his heart were the racist view even infiltrates the victim. Black is not beautiful, he was raising that possibility. When I look back on that Civil Rights involvement, I am glad we all did it. I think to some degree it made a change with a lot of slippage since then. I also realize that we whites were not pure. I am a little embarrassed by the 1960s in this since now that I look back on it and on myself. It was an arrogance era, a sense that I would not have as a middle aged man. That my dad would not have. I remember once someone said, what is your aim Dr. King? He said, I want to learn how to love that redneck southern

sheriff who beats me. There is a wonderful line in *King Lear*. King Lear having suffered everything he says, "None does offend, none I say none. I'll label them. No one offends. We have no right to make judgements on others as offending more than ourselves." We need to extend that love to the redneck southern sheriff. Dr. King had that sense which does not go very well with real black, activist politics. It does not fit into the anger mode, not that he did not have enormous anger. I heard a little bit of my father in his voice. That is something that I am really trying to get. I like to imagine that Shakespeare has that. One thing I know as an actor is when you are an actor you want the audience to love you even if you are playing a villain. What is extraordinary with Shakespeare is the villains are never cardboard villains. They have dimensions to themselves. He does not just put them in easy categories.

D: With the Civil Rights thing, does not have the pure compassion that you would feel now?

H: It did not.

D: Your activities and what you saw and experienced because as an historian and as a teacher trying to carry on that same legacy in my work with the decedents of the same population, I see that horribly, romantically. There is such a glamour attached to anyone who was a freedom rider. Anyone who really went that far.

H: Well, under a _____ people like Mrs. Viezo, the one women who was killed with six kids that came from the blue collar family. She was pure as an eye.

D: You knew her?

H: No, I did not know her, but knowing that type of background she was pure as an eye. Her sacrifice was far greater.

D: The majority of them were college students.

H: The range of motives was...

D: A lot of white guilt?

H: Yes. I remember in fact years later when I was teaching at Boston University during the Vietnam War, and I was the liberal professor, right in the middle of a lecture one of my students, this is a student I loved, he and I had beer once a week together, he and I were buddies, he came racing down the isle and

grabbed the microphone from me. He said, you cannot talk anymore because you are an employee of a capitalistic pig, private University. I said, Oh, John, that is an interesting point. Let us discuss that, that is the nature. Let us discuss. No, there is no need to discuss with you capitalistic pig employees because we are beyond the stage of discussion. There is no need for intellect. Oh, that is an interesting point John, I said. I just wanted to play the professor. Mercifully the bell rang. The next day I was in my office and he comes in hat in hand and says, hey Sid listen man I am sorry I did what I did yesterday but it had nothing to do with you. I said, what do you mean? He said, I was not attacking you. I said, no but John I do not mind that I was glad. He said, oh, no it had nothing to do with you. I said, what do you mean? He said, well you know Sid the VSIDS is having their elections in a couple of weeks and... I said, Oh, John let me figure this out, you are running for president of VSIDS and you need an incident to propel you above another candidate. Yes, he said. Tell me something John, what does your dad do? He says, my dad is a dentist in Brookline, Mass. How much does your dad earn? I forget the figure, but today it would be comparable to like \$200,000 a year. Why do you ask Sid? Nothing, nothing John. There is a lot of white guilt, anger at father figures. Yes the frustration of that and I understand that. I am a little embarrassed by my fellow liberals, especially my fellow liberals who have not gotten out of the 1960s. I like Bill Clinton. I am not so sure of my views anymore. I want to be able to love. God, Danny and I were riding to school a couple of days ago [and] we saw those damn 5,000 little white crosses there all over that church and I wondered. Danny picked up my hand and goes what do you think? I said, Danny, I would like to take this goddamn car and pull it over the curb and run over them goddamn crosses. A women has a right to her own body, blah, blah. Is it not interesting that the pro-life movement is headed by men.

D: Pearl War.

H: Yes, or Pearl War. Men also who do not want their power over women taken away. They plant the seed. But saying all of that, I need, I try, I fail, but I need to understand the human being behind that view and that is not some abnormality. I keep invoking that image of my father and my studies as a scholar ought to lead me to that. The theater ought to lead me to that to. One of the things you know about the theater is it is full of options. There is not a way to do anything. It is option.

D: You have an overriding theme of over **alterism** and everything that we have talked about.

H: Yes, I believe in that. I like the rehearsal process in theater better than performance. Performance always seems to me you are finally committing your self to something, but rehearsal you are still playing options. You got that freedom.

D: Let us get some of the civil rights. We have got a lot of the theory, the ethics, and some of your feelings about it in the past, but in those involvements you came to the south during the summers [and] between semesters?

H: Yes and once you got a little further into graduate program, especially when you are writing your dissertation, you just sort of take off. It was pretty flexible.

D: Was your wife involved with you?

H: No, she was a social worker. She was working at a wonderful name, New England Home for Little Wanderers, which was the nineteenth century name for adoption agency. That was our life.

D: Were you ever beaten? Gassed?

H: Yes, prison a couple of times. I got the cattle prod stuck on me. That hurt.

D: Where was that?

H: I think that was in Selma.

D: You knew Dr. King personally?

H: As one of the marchers, as one of the guys, one of his disciples.

D: _____ with him?

H: Yes.

D: Were you close to any of these figures we know about? There was that guy in Mississippi Bob, soft spoken?

H: I am blurred.

D: I did not do my research good enough.

H: I have forgotten a lot of that. Typical as a scholar I guess I can remember the details. I have been writing a collection of short stories about my life.

D: Historical details?

H: These are the stories I have told to the kids so I am just putting them down. I have performed these stories as an actor. I do not have a lot of stories from that whole period. Now there are a couple other probable reasons. That was an unhappy first marriage, that was beginning to fail so I probably pushed a lot of emotions out.

D: Emotional shelving.

H: Also I am a little embarrassed by protestors. One of the things I am doing nowadays for example, I am working with the Arts in Medicine Program. They have been connecting a lot with people who were into alternative medicine in Gainesville. I believe in alternative medicines, I guess but maybe I am becoming an insurance salesman in Orlando. Maybe I am getting that mentality.

Business is about motives. I am going to be embarrassed when I say this, I do not want to spend too much time around scruffy people with beards who's social statement is not taking bathes and _____. There is a little conservative streak in me there. I can feel that. It is probably middle age bit. It is funny, artists no problem, actors no problem because the whole focus of the actor is on performance. It is giving up themselves to their role. That is fine. Actors in real life they are all sorts of loony types. It is when one tries to connect ones real life activities with ones real life self, you begin constructing yourself in terms of what you imagine.

D: It sounds like you are avoiding a lot of the ego that is part of that. There is a crazy ego?

H: Yes, it is. I even remember when I was at Illinois doing an evening of skits, I was an actor and I wrote some of them, parroting the civil rights movement. I remember one I wrote where I played the black guy and a black actress played the white girl. **[END OF TAPE A]**

H: I was playing the black guy and as I remember the core of the skit was, _____ strike force skit, she was so eager to prove to me that not only did she think whites like herself were inferior to blacks, but could never repay blacks

for all they had done. This is affirmative action gone to the end degree in that she needed to degrade herself. I as the wily black guy, I was taking advantage of that. I remember that being the core of the skit.

D: Very cynical play.

H: Yes, it really was. We had a lot of blacks in the audience and they understood this instinctively. They absolutely understood this. It was funny because the white liberals in the audience they did not dig the skit. It may have been coming a little too close to home. The dialogue was something like, yes, yes you are inferior to me. She said, I am really inferior to you. I said, you are so inferior to me, you are not even a toad. I keep upping the _____. I remember that skit. That is one of the things I remember from that really interesting period at Illinois where the civil rights movement was still continuing. Although now I was on a mid western campus. There are only five members of the **SDS** at Illinois.

D: Summarizing, historically it is obvious you know the contribution you made in the civil rights movement, but personally, emotionally, ethically, you see through a lot of that?

H: Yes, yes.

D: Now in hindsight as a westward parrot, _____ teacher, we know there is still a long hard road ahead.

H: When you are protesting for workers rights, it would also be rather nice if you did the hard work of finding jobs for displaced workers. Do not get me wrong, that was a wonderful, wonderful spirit but we have a South Philadelphia, well actually it is an Amish expression, we grow too soon old and too late smart. The thing is how to balance that. How not too loose that idealism, but at the same time put that idealism in a context where you understand the full range of your motives or your objects as we would say in the theater. I do not know if they are compatible. Maybe they are not.

D: I would love to do this philosophical thing but I want to get back to some of the historical details. When you mentioned your analogy with the workers protest, did you get involved in any education projects? Were you a marcher, freedom rider, registerer?

H: Voter registerer but essentially a marcher, protestor.

D: So you were in the _____ under privileged.

H: No, that is what...

D: You did not bring any theater to McComb, Mississippi?

H: No, and that is a wonderful question because without jumping the gun on this that is what I realized I have been trying to make up for later in life. The practical stuff like taking the theater to the prison, Strike Force, that sort of stuff. I wish I would have been able to do emotionally both at the same time. More graphically than that, although it takes it out of the area of race is I am really into the Arts in Medicine Program now. What I do in the Arts in Medicine Program is for example, I do an acting workshop every Friday for teenagers who are housed in the psychiatric unit.

D: Eighth floor, Shands?

H: Eighth floor, Shands. I do not use the theater therapeutically for them, we do not do skits directly that talk about the illness. I am teaching them a craft which lets you get in touch with yourself and gives you pleasure in your body and your voice and lets you step into other people's shoes. I have become really heavily involved in the Arts in Medicine Program and I know exactly why because it really comes out of your question. In fact that questions crystallizes it for me. It is the other half of protest. I have been reading this wonderful biography, **Doris Godwin Kern's** biography of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt. They were the perfect pair because Eleanor had the vision including [those] on issues of civil rights. Franklin Roosevelt who was often a little bit too practical for her concerns, he was the politician. He put to the best of his ability, but never enough for her, he put those visions into very concrete policies. They were the perfect complementary pair like that.

D: He had the kinetic energy and she had the....

H: She was the younger one in that sense. The younger version. We would not have wanted her as president. We would not have wanted her as Eleanor Roosevelt. As much as they did not work together maritally as a team, they worked together perfectly as team in that way. Part of this current thesis is that she deserves a lot of credit for the philosophical impotence of the new deal and especially the post new deal period, but he however cynical one can be about his personality and the things he did, he had that more mellow, more mature vision

about what would be possible for integrating. How far the Navy would go in integrating the services.

D: Let us get back to Harvard. God, I would love to talk with you just on all of this stuff in private. You finished your Ph.D in 1965 and took a position at the University of Illinois [at] Urbana-Champaign.

H: Right in the center of the corn fields.

D: You were there for four years?

H: Yes, my oldest son, Chris, was born our last year of graduate school so when we went out there he was a baby. Chris was unbelievably asthmatic. One of the things we discovered was he was allergic to the smell of soybeans. There are soybean fields all around. I loved it, I loved being in the mid west. I loved being at a proto-typical state university. That was a good tonic after Harvard. I loved it, it was great. I got involved in the theater. I began doing my articles as a scholar. I kept active in both theater and the civil rights movement. We also by the way, three years into that, because Chris was so allergic and because my wife had been an adoptive social worker we adopted our daughter Elizabeth. We were prime candidates since we knew a lot about adoption. By the beginning of the fourth year we had to leave Champaign _____ because Chris was just not making it as a kid. I enjoyed those years, that was a good decision going out there. It was a little bit ugly. All of the elm trees had died with the Dutch Elm Disease. It was real flat and stuff. In fact I have a short story about those days in Illinois. Those are my assistant professor years. I was heavily involved in the Depot Theater and things like that. I began doing my scholarly articles, but was not yet making a connection between my work as a scholar teacher and my work in the theater or someone using the theater in an activist way. The two were a little separate at that point although I knew I wanted to combine them.

D: Then you went to George Washington University?

H: No. Anyway I went to the chairman's office beginning of the fourth year and I said we have got to leave. Chris my little boy cannot take it anymore. So I got an offer from Boston University. I was at George Washington one summer, we went one summer because I just wanted to be in D.C. One of the reasons why I went to Boston University was a children's medical hospital was in Boston and we had a friend who was the head of the children's allergy clinic. It was for that reason primarily. It was fun to go back to Boston.

D: Was that the beginning of Arts in Medicine for you?

H: No, not really. That was just great to be able to take... Chris's asthma predictably got better. Of course Boston University was then all aflame with protests. Vietnam is beginning to heat up. The French are leaving then, and we are beginning to make our **limited**, things like that. Am I right on that date?

D: Let us see, 1969, we were full tilt.

H: Yes, that is right we were full tilt in Vietnam.

D: You had a very radical student body?

H: Yes, BU was radical, real radical. It was great to get back to Boston. It was not quite as romantic as when I was a graduate student. Now I am paying income tax and I am doing that sort of stuff. Published my first edition. It was an edition of A Midsummer Night's Dream. I was there at Boston University for three years. [I] did not quite like the Boston University faculty. They tended to be old Harvard Ph.D's who could not bear leaving Boston, but did not get asked to stay under at Harvard. They kept their apartments in Cambridge but they condescended to go and cross the river and teach at this public school. **John Silber** came to Boston University. Matter of fact, I was on the faculty committee that hired him. That was sort of interesting. I was on the faculty bomb squad. We had a lot of Vietnam protests.

D: Silber is the one who privatized the schools?

H: He had been the liberal chancellor at the University of Texas and fired from Texas because he was too liberal. BU had a series of retired Methodist ministers as presidents, so we hired him.

D: You hired him as president? So he has been president _____?

H: Oh, yes. The trustees loved him, the faculty hates his guts.

D: Still do.

H: Oh, he will be there forever. Brilliant guy but dangerous, **mynarical** personality. I remember the one time I had a wonderful run in with him was the students wanted to stage a protest at the Navy recruiting base on campus. Silber had told them they ought to stage the protest down on the Boston Commons. But they

wanted to go on the Navy recruiting base. The SDS was real powerful at BU at that point, the administration and the students had to agree upon some mutual observers acceptable to both sides. I was picked as one of the neutral observers. I was a producing, up and coming faculty member, but I was also a popular teacher with the students so I was acceptable to both sides. The Boston Police had new regulations those days. Whenever you called them on campus they could come in with their dogs, and their mace, armed because they had been beat up too much. The hundreds of students are milling around the seven steps leading up to the recruiting place. The SDS comes and _____. They said, let us occupy the building, burn it down. The students rejected the SDS's extreme demand. The SDS _____. Silber comes across the street to address the students. Now they are all lined up on the pavement. As he goes to the top step to talk to them, they will later claim that he stepped on them, and kicked them with his feet. He claimed he was just trying to step _____. He gets on the top step and he tells them in a condescending fashion that they are not mature enough to have profound political views about the Vietnam situation and he does not speak to mobs so they should elect five of their members and they can come across the street in the sanctimony of his office and he will discuss the issue with them. The moment he goes the students start to [roaring noise demonstrated]. Silber calls the Boston Police. The Boston Police come racing in. The mace is flying, the guard like that. How do you tell when a protester is about to throw a brick or when he is holding his ankle. There was a bloody malay there. Me the wonderful scholar, the neutral guy, I right my report. I try to be fair to both sides because I was condemned by both sides. That was an interesting event that was the beginning of his decline in the affection of the faculty and the students.

D: That would have been what year?

H: That was 1971. Now he did other things which angered the faculty, telling apartment chairpersons whom to appoint to faculty and things like that. He was dynamic, I liked him but he was a dangerous guy. Anyway, what happened with Florida was... In the mist of all of this, the marriage is falling, getting worse. I do not like the BU English department, they are a little bit too much watercress sandwiched type of people, weak tea type of people.

D: This is part two of the Oral History interview with Dr. Sidney Homan. Back on the porch not nearly as much wildlife or storms in the background. Today is the March 29, 1996. So you did not like the English department at Boston University?

H: No, I _____. I call it that sort of watercress sandwich type. Something _____ wild. The students at Boston University were great. When I went to Harvard, BU was just a tough city school. When I went back there after teaching in Illinois the students had become pretty good. Probably lured there because it was in Boston. BU could always count on that. So the students were great and they were in their radical phase then too, the Vietnam War protests.

D: We talked about some of that yesterday.

H: I was there for three years and then Richard Greene, who was a med-evil scholar at Illinois when I was there, very much a father figure, man I liked a lot, he had come down to the University of Florida as the new chairperson of the English Department. He asked me just to come down and spend a couple of days visiting him and his wife, looking around the department, maybe being looked at a little bit. It was not the formal process of the job. What was interesting was, never having been south of Philadelphia in my life, not knowing that you fly to Gainesville through Atlanta, I got this flight to Jacksonville and then got this little single engine plane from Jacksonville to Gainesville. I get to Jacksonville and I am one of these people that has to be at the airport three hours before the plane leaves. I need to be settled and ready. It is part of my fear of rejection if I do not get there on time. I am there three hours before I have to leave and it was a lovely day. I go and just check out where this little airplane is supposed to be. I see where I am to get it and that is fine. This guy comes walking up and says, are you Professor Homan? I said, yes. He said, I am the pilot. You are going to be leaving on the six o'clock flight but would you like to fly around a little bit? I said, sure! He said, you are my only passenger. I get in and I sit next to him. He takes me on this wonderful tour of Florida. We are swooping down over orange groves. For a kid from Phila this is all new. We are going along the Ichetucknee and things like that. We had a really wonderful flight all over. This was a brand new world to me. I had not seen anything like this before. He finally gets me there around six o'clock. It was a good introduction. I had a good four days down here. I am a person who is pretty conservative when I make judgements. In fact, very conservative, everything is weighed carefully. One of the things that pushed me into the judgement was the marriage was failing and I had this absurd notion that somehow if we change scenery things would change. That was one of the ten factors. The other nine factors were I just liked, there was a nice feeling about the place.

D: You had a bird's eye view of it.

H: I had a bird's eye view of it, I stayed at the Reitz Union. At the same time I was there the ROTC was having the Miss Military beauty contest. Here I just left Boston University with mace and guard dogs and violence and things like that. On one hand I thought, oh, my god you would never have this at Boston University. On the other hand that sort of proletariat part of myself said, **ghese**, you know that is something too. You just get enough of muted intellectuals sitting over bad coffee at Harvard Square. You just get enough of protesters who are patting each other on the back reminding themselves of how bad the establishment is. I liked the whole feel of the place. It was really just an emotional feel. Florida's English department at that point in time had been in a long state of decline. It was an old boys English department, a lot of Florida Ph.D's in the department. Nothing particularly wrong with that but these are people who would have never gone anywhere. It was insular. Florida brought Richard Greene in he was a John Hopkins Ph.D. and a distinguished medievalist at Harvard and Princeton. They had brought Richard Greene in as the new chairperson, the new blood. I was his first appointment. **Ira Clark** who was another Renaissance scholar. I and Ira were the first two appointees. Richard Greene helped build that department back up.

D: This was the fall of 1972?

H: 1972, I came down here then. Now you ask me any questions you need otherwise I will just go on narrative. I guess for the first couple years here I was the dutiful associate professor trying to get things published. [My] marriage [was] failing and now at a quantum rate. [I] loved the place, I liked the whole feel of the place. Richard was succeeded by a fellow named **Ward Helstrom**. In fact you have got the son, that is Ward's son at **Westwood**.

D: **Josh Helstrom**.

H: Ward is a great big, tall, six foot five former basketball player. Ward really pushed the notion of the department as a service department. Teaching never quite enters into the equation here. Are we going to try to be like Harvard, are we going to be a scholarly department or are we going to try to be a service department? Not that Ward neglected scholarship or teaching, he published a book himself and was a moderately decent teacher. He really got into the service business. We would do the composition courses and go out into the community. I sort of got bitten by that bug. Although I suspect it was not so much Ward's influence as I started publishing books. My first book was a

collection of essays by various people in Shakespeare. Then I published my own book on Shakespeare.

D: So Shakespeare was your full focus at this point?

H: Yes, Shakespeare was my full focus. I thought publishing the first book would be a bigger thrill than it was. Oh, it was a thrill do not get me wrong, but still the blue collar kid in me came. What got me was I had been appearing as **Vladimir** in a production of Beckett's [Samuel Beckett, an Irish novelist and playwright] Waiting for Godot twenty years after Beckett had brought that play to this country. We had performed all around the south east, Tampa, St. Petersburg, Miami, Atlanta.

D: This was a UF theater production?

H: No, it was a production with some **Hippodrome** friends many of who finally went into the Hippodrome.

D: Were you a part of the founding of the Hippodrome?

H: No, I was one of the people who was on the first board. I was with them when they were still out in the little former 7 Eleven way up there. Then they moved to **George Kirkpatrick's** bar up near 441. Part of my connection with the Hippodrome had to do with this production of Waiting for Godot because **Rusty Solling** was in that production. He is still at the Hippodrome and **Dan Jesses** is working now in town. We had done this play, but I was a Shakespearian scholar and Shakespearians tend to be very snobby. Shakespeare is the best. How could you possibly have room for any other playwright in your mind, in your heart? I did not know much about Beckett. I knew my part. I knew a couple of plays by Beckett, but I was not a Beckett scholar. I got a call one night from the father of one of my student's she had mentioned that we had this play Waiting For Godot and the father was the then warden of Florida State Prison in Stark, the maximum security prison. He said to me, Sid my daughter Jenny tells me you have a play called Waiting For Godot. I said, yes. He said, would you like to bring it up here and do it for the inmates? I said, gee, I never thought about that. I knew nothing of the history of Waiting For Godot. The history is when they brought the play to this country in 1952, 1953, they could not get a New York theater to take it because the argument was who would want to see a play about two men waiting for someone named Godot who never comes? There is no plot. They premiered it at the Coconut Grove in Miami Beach and all of the tourists walked the hell out the production was so

boring. Then they finally got a New York theater to take it and the company took out an ad in the New York Times saying that they would like intellectuals to come to see this new play by Samuel Beckett. Every pseudo intellectual in New York came and they all walked the hell out because there were not any ideas they could grab on to it was so relative. Then the American Theater Company had a wonderful idea. What about if you put on this play about men waiting before an audience of men waiting. So they took it out to San Quintan and the inmates dug it. They loved it. Two of those inmates later got playwrighting fellowships and lived with Samuel Beckett and his wife in Paris. I knew none of this.

D: Did the warden know this?

H: The warden knew nothing. He just knew that we had a play and as he said the guys just watch television at night and are unruly, maybe we could give them a play. As a matter of fact he said, is it a radical play? Do you think it will stir them up? I said, no.

D: He did not know the San Quintan history?

H: No, and I did not know. I did not know at all. I said, no it will not stir them up, nothing happens in the play.

D: What year was this?

H: This was 1973 maybe. We get up to prison and I had no experience with the Florida prison system then. I have had a lot of experience since then, but I had no experience then. We get outside this massive gate and this big spot light shines on us and a voice comes, who are you? What is your business? I said, Sid Homan with his company. We are going to do a play called Waiting For Godot. He said, all right and the gates open. It takes a long time to get into a prison. You have to go through all sorts of locks and gates. So we repeat this process of being interrogated two or three times and we finally get into the cafeteria. That is where we are going to do the play at eight o'clock. The cafeteria held about 1500 inmates and there were then three thousand inmates in the prison. **Pally** did a lottery earlier that day to see which half of the inmates could come to see us. We get ready, we have got ten minutes, we put the rock down in the center with the tree upstage right. We get into our costumes and at eight o'clock promptly comes 1500 inmates, 80 percent of them black which is a commentary on our justice system. They are all noisy and they all sit down. We are back stage. The warden gets up and he, I am not even going to use the language on this tape, but he tells these inmates you goddamn, fucking,

cocksuckers, you unworthy bastards you, we have got some visitors from Gainesville here who have been kind enough to bring up a play for you goddamn, fucking _____. I want you to shut the fuck up. You are not worthy of even seeing this. I am sitting back stage just saying, oh, god this is a warm up act. Oh, this is great. He gets off of the stage and he calls the playwright, Beckett and it is Waiting For Godot. We come on the stage, well nothing to be done. Come around to that same opinion myself. Yes, I keep asking my... We get to about the third line of the play and you know when you do a play fifty times every audience is different but you get used to the variation. You generally get this much of a laugh at that line. If you get a little bit more it means it is going to be a real good audience that evening. If you get this much a response to that line, if it is a little less, you have got to do some stuff. Nothing in all of my experience in the theater can ever match what then happened. We got to the third line of the play and this inmate gets up and he says, hey, stop it. Hold it, hold it, hold it. What did you mean by what you just said to him? I look at my fellow actor and do we answer this? The guy says, hey I asked you a questions buddy. I look at him again with his eyes he says, Sid you better answer him. I said okay. So I go walk down stage and say well here is what I meant by what I said. He said oh, okay yes. Get back in the play now. So we get back in the play. Two lines later, hey, wait somebody else says. What we did not know was that we were getting the very same response that Beckett's company had twenty years before, exactly the same.

D: At San Quintan?

H: At San Quintan, exactly the same. That is every two or three lines they would stop, hey why are you talking to him like that? Now you two come down here. Now let us just talk about that.

D: Interactive audience?

H: Yes, interactive. These inmates, of course probably none of them had ever seen live theater. They did not know you were supposed to shut up and not ruffle your popcorn bag. What was really happening was, what I know had happened to Beckett's company, these men they were seeing themselves in that play and that so called fourth _____ did not exist for them. In fact, the stage was not just what we were on, but the stage became the whole house. At first it was very frustrating because you are trying to stay in character and you are talking to these, but after a while we began realizing they were not being rude. They wanted to be in the play. They were in the play. Once we did that it was

exhilarating because it was like we were putting on two plays at once. A play we had carefully rehearsed and done fifty times before straight audiences, and this new play which had 1505 characters. It took hours to get through it because we are running two plays simultaneously. When we finally finished, the warden was angry as the devil at me because I had fouled up the bed check. The whole prison operated on absolutely rigid schedules. He gets up on the stage. We are just back stage. We are back stage behind the curtain trying to get into our clothes to get back to Gainesville and he says, you goddamn _____ line up _____. So the guys all line up like one of those **Jimmy Cagney** movies. Suddenly, totally disobeying the warden they all come moving towards us. We panicked. I thought, god are they going to rape us? We had two women in the cast, a woman playing **Pottso** and a woman playing the boy. I had those phobias you get when you are ignorant of a situation. I thought, did I remember to leave my credit cards in the car? This huge black inmate, a foot taller than me, comes right up to me, he is the sort of spokesperson for this group. He picks me right up and he says to me, hey, Homan we want to talk to you, we have some ideas about who this Godot fellow might be. Now of course, who Godot is has been the subject of scholarly essays and books, and actor conversations for years. We made some quick negotiations with the warden and for the next couple of hours with each one of us handling hundreds of inmates, you talk, you talk, no you just talked. We had the most elegant, eloquent conversations that a teacher could ever have with these inmates. They each were reading themselves into Godot. Godot was death. Godot was all the things you wait for. Godot was a woman. It was just mind-blowing. When we finally got back to Gainesville we were just all hyped from this experienced. I wondered what would happen if we took more people around for the discussion sections? What would happen if I involve my students and colleagues? I applied for a grant to the government and we got a grant to take the production around to nine other state prisons, male, female, minimum security, maximum security. Now taking along a lot of people and having negotiations ahead with the warden and his/her staff which said we could have discussions.

D: And discussion groups after it?

H: And discussion groups afterwards. Those discussion groups just became a natural extension of my classes. At every prison we played at it was always the same, this wonderfully productive interruption by the audience and these heart felt discussions. The performance I remember best of all was our last one. It was at Cross City Prison. Cross City is on the Gulf Coast. It is a former army base. The prison is not a single monolithic building it looks like dormitories. We

had a typical four hour production of Waiting for Godot and then our scheduled two hour conversation with the inmates. Then after the inmates were sent back across the prison yard to their dormitory like cells in the far end of the yard. Then we had an hour discussion with the warden and his staff. You could not talk to the warden and his staff and the inmates at the same time. There were about a 100 of us going around, my students, my colleagues. We finally finished talking with the warden and his staff. It was April.

D: Were they receiving the play critically as well?

H: Oh, yes.

D: They wanted to know?

H: Oh, yes.

D: So you educated the staff and the warden and then the inmates?

H: Yes, well they educated us because it was one of those types of conversations. We are getting out near the gate and at the far end of the prison yard we could just see the darkened outlines of the dormitory like cells where the inmates had supposedly been asleep for an hour. There is a big **falix** of guards leading us out. There had been some riots at the prison the week before so they were a little edgy. We just get to the gates and suddenly all of us, guards and Gainesville _____ we hear windows, barred windows to be sure, being pushed up. The guards they go into attack formation. It was the inmates, they were waiting up to say goodnight to us. So across this darkened prison yard, just voices, no faces, just goodnight Sid, goodnight Betty, goodnight Bill. The guards their subtext is these liberals from Gainesville. In the mists of all of these goodnights, just tender goodnights, this inmate named John... John was from the Bronx, we all knew John. John was a troublesome inmate and when you are troublesome they tend to move you from prison to prison to break up your drug connections or your power connections. Tonight's performance of Waiting for Godot was the fourth one John had seen. He had seen our production four times. He was our resident Beckett expert. We all loved John. John shouts out, hey Sid. I said, hey John. He said, that Beckett fellow, he wrote another play called Enging did he not? I remember this thrill coming up in my chest, he knew Beckett's second major play, Enging about the old man facing death. I said, yes John, he wrote Enging. What John said to me sounds so absurd, so simple and yet so profound. He said, well look buddy, why do you not all come here tomorrow and do that Enging thing for us? As we got back in the car the kids

were saying, Sid does he not know you have to rehearse a play over weeks? How can he be so stupid? Then we flipped and we said but wait, look at this guys concept of the theater. The theater is a conversation, the actor is the one who talks, the audience is the one that listens. Of course in our prison experience with Godot those roles of actor and audience kept reversing themselves.

D: You thought you knew all of his plays?

H: Yes. What a profound concept this guy had of the theater. When I got to my faculty cubicle that next day, it was like one of those things that Joyce talks about. One of those epiphanies where something happens and your life changes. Now it does not change like that, it has been building for years. Some of your questions yesterday now put this epiphany within a context. It is more a process. I did something no Shakespearian ever does, I took that book of Shakespeare and I pushed it to the far right corner of my desk, let him stay there for a while. I took my Beckett and I plunged into Beckett. I read everything that he had written, everything about him for the next couple of years. I dragged my students and my actor friends through every production of Beckett I could do. Out of that came a book called Beckett's Theatres: Interpretations for Performance. It is a book from a director's perspective. It really came out of that experience with Waiting for Godot. It really came out of that seemingly simple but also profound comment that that inmate named John said. I found this gradually beginning to influence everything I did as a teacher and scholar here at Florida. Influence in the following ways, one, I stopped lecturing about playwrights. That is not interactive enough. Discussions about the play gradually gave way to the method I use today which is I do not care whether they are freshmen in a freshmen course with me or graduate students in English seminar, I explore the theater with my students by doing it.

D: Reading?

H: Every student gets a partner and they do scene work. The class is a rehearsal. You and your buddy have gotten the last part of Godot to do and you rehearse it together and you come work with me if you want. Then you do it in class and I work with you as a director with all of the other students directors over my shoulders. We begin to pay attention to the text in a very large sense, the dialogue, subtext, etc. I do it that way.

D: Just the way I wish I could teach history. I tried for a year.

H: My publications they took a radical turn. The books that then came out after this were all books that came out of my own experience as an actor and director. Before that my critical approach had been **medrodramatic**. The theater sort of self-reflects of dimension, the ways in which the theater is talking about itself. I think that is the scholarly other side of the moon here. For example, Beckett has written five television plays. I had commented on those television plays in a subsequent book on Beckett. I looked at myself one day and I thought, christ, I do not know what I am talking about. I have never directed for television, I have directed on stage. I got a grant from the Office of Instructional Resources at Florida, gathered my students together, gathered technicians together, and I made television films of Beckett's five television plays. I made every mistake you could ever possibly make in the book and I corrected every mistake. When we finished, we because I am relying as much on my technical director, we had videotape of Beckett's five television programs.

D: With channel five studio?

H: No, in fact of all places and I say this with a little bit of dismay in front of a teacher, with a guy named **Don Loftis** in the basement of Norman Hall. The television studio there was mostly meant just to film three heart surgeons setting around a table talking about a cardiac arrest. It was the crudest of all studios. We all learned a lot about Beckett. When we finished the tape that was it for me. Now I could write a book, which I did, about Beckett's television plays. Now I had something I could say. Some of the people connected with productions said, hey Sid, why do we not make these tapes available no cost, to people about the country? I wrote to Beckett's agent, _____ and he sent me back a really snobby letter. He said, you are nobody, you are at Florida. Besides we are public television, we have got a million dollar contract we are going to be _____. So you do not have my permission. If you want you can write to Mr. Beckett but do not expect an answer. So I write this letter to Samuel Beckett in Paris and I tell him who I am. Norma, the kids and I had just the year before gone to China where I taught and directed and things like that. The Chinese were very interested in Beckett. I did a lot of Beckett with the Chinese. I had written an article about that. I said to Mr. Beckett in my letter, I have learned so much about... I know why you wanted **exsolve** there instead of a cut and I know why you wanted that shot held for three seconds. Look I would like to have your permission to make these films available. I would like to have your permission and I am glad to pay royalties, but if I do not get your permission, if you say no, that is fine too because I just feel I know so much more about your television work. By the way here is a copy of an article I wrote. I thought it might interest

you. It is an experience I had with your plays when I was in China with my family.

D: Did you send him the videotape?

H: [I] did not send the videotape. Two weeks later, going through the English department mailroom to get my mail there is this little tiny envelope [with] Paris, S. Beckett on the top. I open it up and it says, I have got it verbatim, Dear Professor Homan, I am so thrilled that you would want to make my television plays available most especially to students. I thank you so much for that kind remembrance about China. Of course you have my permission, I would not think of your paying a cent of royalties. Of course you have my permission to do whatever you want with those. Would it be too much trouble, and I would be glad to **recempence** you, if you would send me a copy of it. Yours, Sam Beckett. I felt like some high school student getting a fan letter from a movie star. What I am suggesting with all of this is what has happened over the years is my teaching and my scholarship had gotten increasingly just to reflect the work I do.

D: That was my next question. You mentioned that your books were no longer **medodramatic**, but what would you...

H: The critical term they call it generally is performance criticism and what Shakespearians and modern dramatists tend to mean by performance criticism is pretty much what the name suggests, scholarly criticism that is based on actual performances. The scholar will go and spend three months with the company or the scholar will go and observe five productions of Hamlet or he will interview actors and directors. Mine is like that, the only difference of mine is it is also performances in which I have worked as a director or actor and often involved my students. That has made me feel much, much better. That has allowed me to begin to resolve some of these feelings. It is a sensitive issue. I have some problems with my colleagues in the English department sometimes. I think sometimes they think that I am saying that only someone that actually does it can talk about it. I am not saying that. Once a text comes out of an author it is on the Internet. You can do anything you want with it. One can take Hamlet and look at it as an example of Shakespeare's **colonious** views. All that sort of stuff. I cannot do that. I have got to do it within the medium for which he wrote.

D: Hands on?

H: Yes. Also I must say the one case where I do put my foot down. The problem with most English departments and most courses in English departments in the theater on plays is they are only touching the iceberg of the text because what about the subtext, what about gesture, what about blocking? A play is not just verbal the way a **Henry James** novel is. I guess I am a little bit of a crusader on that issue. Going back to that point yesterday, my views about what the truth are all far too relative for me ever to dictate anything like that. All that I know is just for me personally and from my sense of integrity as a teacher. I cannot do it otherwise. I cannot have a discussion on the reiterative death imagery of Hamlet. There is reiterative death imagery in Hamlet, right, but that is not how an audience responds. The audience is not saying, oh, here comes the third example of that... The audiences like the actor. You know this as both an audience and actor. You go with that play moment by moment like breath. We know the ending in Hamlet. We know how it ends but we do not experience it with the end in mind. We are going moment by moment, beat by beat. That is the way I have done it and that has lead me over the years to expand the definition of what my classroom is because I think I must have had maybe ten grants over the years from the Florida Endowment for the Humanities. The state agency which is the small version of the state version of the National Endowment.

D: I worked from them.

H: Their principle is you bring humanist university scholars which is a wonderful title it seems to me. Humanist, our concern is humanity. Bringing him into contact, get him off campus, bring him into contact with the general public.

D: They rode me down to the Seminole Reserve.

H: Oh, yes. I have done the theatrical complement to the sort of stuff that you have done. We took a production for example, **David Mammoth's** play Duck Variations about two old men setting on a park bench talking about the ducks in a pond, but really talking about themselves. Well, where do the ducks go during the winter? We took that and we played it at twenty retirement centers around the state. From wealthy retirement centers to despicably poor retirement centers and then engaged the audience in conversation with that.

D: That was Florida Endowment Humanities?

H: Yes, yes. So those grants, all of those I have involved my students. In fact the most radical involvement I have had with the students happened a couple of

years ago. For four years I had a joint appointment in the theater department. That was great. That is where I got to head Theater Strike Force and that was something I was glad to do because that satisfied my notion that theater is not just for the watercress sandwich crowd. Some of the people in the prison had called me up and said, hey you know we are still talking about that production of Waiting for Godot. Somebody had made some formed acting companies and we knew that. He said, do you have anything that you can do for the prisons? Well I had Theater Strike Force at the University [with] about seventy or eighty students in it. I went up to Tallahassee to talk to the Bureau of Corrections and what we proposed talking together was what about taking some of my best Theater Strike Force people around for a week to prisons all around the state doing skits on topics of interests to the inmates. Very intelligent and sensitive people in the Bureau of Prisons, you tend not to think of that but they are, beginning with **Mr. Singletary**. We met and I got a list of topics that were of interest to the inmates. So we knocked out over the next couple of months typically Strike Force stuff. I got an assistant director, my assistant director with Strike Force, then we had auditions and we picked four men and four women undergraduates, got a grant from the Florida Endowment with the Humanities and we had a schedule. We were going to travel for seven days in a big van, playing a prison in the morning, driving, playing a prison at lunch, another one in the afternoon, another one in the evening. All types of prisons. We played them all over the state. We would finish a performance, hop in the van.

D: All state facilities? County jails as well?

H: County jails, everything. All types of prisons. We wanted a geographic spread panhandled down to Miami. We went to all types of prisons. The first prison of all things was **Rayford**. You get in there, I had not been there for years, and you go into that yard. It was a cold morning, we were all scared to hell. A 1,000 men milling in that prison yard. You start moving among them to the basketball court. You are the do-gooder intellectual, they think, coming to look at them. You are invading their home like my coming into your home, even though it is a parody of a home.

D: Do you get a sense even in these early performances that they thought you were reform-minded? That these were reforming type plays?

H: No. They are whispering, they are shouting obscenities at you and we have women and we got men, and we start performing. I told the guys, come on I am scared too but you have a responsibility. Gradually as we start performing they

start coming around and soon we have the 1,000 there. They are challenging you.

D: But they do not think you are reforming **morals**?

H: Once they understand that our Strike Force was not a preach shop. One of the things I did not want Strike Force to be was I wanted to be absolutely neutral. For example, I wrote a skit once we were doing parallel skits we did use in the prisons. One was making fun of pro-lifers, the other one complementing it making fun of pro-choice. There is a general liberal view to Strike Force but we tried our very best.

D: These are not morality plays to reform the inmate?

H: No, I was under a lot of pressure in the theater department from the chairperson to do that and I said I just think that is a useful function of theater but not theater at its highest. I wanted to be more **Brechtian**. You sort of put out complex signals and the audience has to work on it. They have to come to _____. After a while you win the inmates over. By the end they want to come up and touch you and talk to you but we had to jump away to the next prison. For the first couple of days we did their material. The first couple of nights I made sure we stayed in really good motels.

D: You said Brechtian like?

H: **Berto Brecht**. Brecht's notion that the theater does not argue for something it is flexible, it is neutral in that. In fact, Brecht wanted [the] lights to be on [in] the house all of the time. He did not want the audience in the dark. They are co-equals. I have done a production of Brecht's Galileo at the Acrosstown back in 1985, typical of Galileo. He is not the champion of science he is not the pathetic victor. Brecht wanted a thinking audience not a theater that served to the establishment or liberal views. What was fascinating was the first couple of nights when we got to the motels we had our drinks and dinner and parties and stuff like that. By the third day we were playing somewhere on the west coast of Florida and there is a sort of underground railroad in prisons, in the spreads that we were covering. We got up to prison to do a skit that we had planned and this inmate gets up and says, hey Sid, you are actors right? I said, oh, yes. I want you to do something about **Jody**. I said, Jody? Yes, Jody. You do not know who Jody is man? I said, no. The inmates all start laughing at me. I said, I do not know who Jody is. Jody is inmate slang for the guy who takes your girl while

you are in prison. The inmates are obsessed by this. They are obsessed by the fact that someone will take their girl. All this made more complex by the increase in homosexuality. They feel very defensive about it. It is very complicated. He said, you do something about Jody. I turned to my kids I said, hey, we are supposed to be an **improv** company. let us do it. We start this skit where the inmate decides after he gets out of prison not to call his girlfriend but to make a surprise visit. He gets to a door, knocks on the door and Jody of course is in the bedroom. I say freeze. I say okay you guys, does she open the door and let him in or does she pretend she is not home? They start debating this. Okay you want to let him in, so we let him in. He comes in. _____. Hey, what is that jacket on the chair. Freeze. I say to the guys, look at that jacket. Does she say that she has knitted it for him or does she tell the truth? Lie. He goes to put on the jacket it is too small. Finally, the Jody character comes out. Freeze. Does she try to pass him off as her brother? Pretty soon the inmates, I did not even have to shout freeze, they start shouting freeze themselves. [laughter] At the end of the skit it was funny because now everything has been revealed. I say freeze. You guys, you have got to end this skit for me. How do you end it? They had unbelievable endings. Let her go stay with Jody, kick the goddamn inmate out. Let her go with the inmate guy. The most popular one which was very revealing I thought, kick the bitch out. That is what they wanted. Two guys, your buddies, get drunk together and go play some pool.

D: So they do not have them kicking Jody's ass?

H: No, no the two guys which is real interesting. From then on we had to throw away all of our skits we had so carefully prepared. We are improvising for two and three hours at every performance here. This is an audience that is not polite. Your not funny, your not funny. The kids and I we learned more about improv let me tell you. What was fascinating was that Wednesday night and from then on talk about class, we were traveling all about Florida but there was no Florida for us. All our focus was on how can we improve that, how do we do this? We would get into the motel at night, did we fool around? No, let us get some new possibilities.

D: Strategy for the next prison?

H: Yes. We had wonderful experiences playing in women's prisons, etc. When we got back after seven days, we found it took all of us about ten days to get debriefed. The University seemed so small, so insignificant. It was one of those radical changes.

D: Depressurized.

H: Yes. I had a wonderful time with those kids it was the best possible teacher-student, but it was a nice, fair teacher-student because I was on stage with them trying to hustle and trying to do my best as an actor too.

D: What I need to do for the sake of history right now is get some dates. You were full professor of English at that point in 1981. In 1991 you became an English and theater professor. These prison tours..

H: They were 1992 I think.

D: The very first one though where you met John and you were doing Waiting for Godot...

H: Oh, that was 1973 I think. In fact, yes it is that grant _____.

D: Did that grant just go for that season or did that carry...

H: It was typical _____ it was like a two month grant. We went for a couple of months on it.

D: From 1973 to 1991 you were not touring prisons?

H: No, no I was doing other variations of that, the nursing homes..

D: Right, the retirement villages and focussing on Beckett. Then you reached this expanded definition of the Homan classroom. I am just trying to put some dates in my notes here.

H: Those will correspond to the list of grants in the back of that vita. You will see that and you will see exactly where the second prison tour was and things like that.

D: Okay so I can get that, the vita has the grant dates there. But the Theater Strike Force when you were a theater, English department professor from 1991 to 1994, that first seven day tour, the Jody experience, what was that? Was that 1991?

H: That was 1991. Well I should tell you about the Arts in Medicine too because that is the final thing in here.

D: Okay and that started?

H: That started five years ago. That is also 1991. That made the final change.

D: How did that come about?

H: You have really helped me put this in perspective. As my interest in scholarship in the pure sense of that word, as that began just for me to wane, as my concern for bringing the theater into my classrooms or bringing my classrooms into the theater for performance criticism as that began to grow along with those public service type of grants from the Florida Endowment of the Humanities... You know my daughter is figured into things so often. I did a stage in a film version of Pinter's play Old Times for no other reason in that my daughter is now a doctoral candidate in theater in Missouri. She asked me to read the play. That led to a book. My last book was on Pinter. It was an account of directing the play for television and also for the stage. Just from my perspective, it is not a criticism, I just found things have changed in the English department so radically. English departments are now into television scripts and movies. They have a very flexible definition of communication. They are into third world literature. We are in all of those debates about challenging what ought to be the canon. We are into computers. When I was at Harvard, the graduate students in a typical course, let us say on **Spencer**, you spent half of the course studying history of the period and then studying Spencer for the other half of the course to show how Spencer gave voice to the issues of the age. It was that all historical criticism. Things have changed so radically now. Now we are talking in English departments about what the author does not say. We have those deconstructionist notions that the author is not fully in control of the text. That he is a product of his or her culture of all sorts of forces that he is not aware of. That the text is not just the responsibility of the author but it is sort of written by the culture. Working in the theater a lot helps cure you a little bit of that because I essentially have to deal with the text that Shakespeare gave me. I have not kept up on these things. These things do not interest me. They are all the rage nowadays. When I say all the rage I do not mean that in a critical way. I am not interested in that. I am not interested in, just for myself, applying some preexisting critical design... **[END OF TAPE B]**

D: The English department is changing?

H: Yes, they have changed but to me it is still the sort of crafts type of work that you would find in a medieval guild, illustrating medieval manuscripts. One scholar with a preexisting critical design and a gender exploring literature and announcing his explorations, and let us be honest about it, in print to a small body of fellow scholars. In those wonderful moments when the scholarship is related to the teaching, conveying in a somewhat diluted form that scholarship to his or her students. Understand me, that is the noblest possible calling imaginable. I cannot do it. I cannot do it that way. I have got to have a public. I have got to make my work immediately useful to a public. It has got to be hands on. It has got to respect the nature of the medium, mine just happens to be theater. I have got to become a student with my students. One of my biggest thrills is acting on stage with my students because I am there just as vulnerable as they are. I am not a 1960s guy, I am not denying the authority of the teacher. I am driven by my own needs and those are needs to be as useful and manifesto at what I do as my father was installing those telephones.

D: It sounds like your mother is involved there with getting into the community.

H: Yes. In 1991, my daughter asked me to meet a wonderful, which turned out to be a close friend, John Graham-Pole. He is a professor of pediatric oncology at Shands. He is one of the worlds authorities on children's cancer. Of all of the jobs doctors could have I cannot imagine that one would be ore stressful or painful. He works with children with leukemia. We are roughly the same age. He is a professional clown, a poet of real ability, and while he is perfectly part of the establishment in medicine he is also very much interested in alternative medicines and in the role of the artist in the hospital. The connection between art and medicine is a very ancient one. Physicians in Greek society were acquainted with artists. The basic principle behind Arts in Medicine as John explained it to me is that performers have just as much to do with health and wholeness as physicians. His vision is a vision of a hospital in which artists are part of the staff. Artists and physicians work together. This is not just bringing art, for example theater into the hospital to cheer up patients although if it does it that is certainly a positive thing, but to use art as a mirror to pick up Shakespeare's word in Hamlet. As a mirror by which patients can themselves contribute to their health.

D: How long has he been running this?

H: He started it in 1991 and I joined him at the beginning. It is a large part of my life right now. I am on the executive board. I edit the newsletter. I have gone about

the country delivering papers and giving workshops. We have had a national convention in which I played a part. I have staged productions that focus on the issue of health. For example, Pinter's play A Kind of Alaska which is based on a real medical case. Typically what I am doing right now is on Fridays I work with teenagers in the Psychiatric Unit at Shands. [Doing] acting workshops because I find that the theater and theater workshops, the exercises we do as actors, are the perfect thing for teenagers who are mentally ill because teenagers who are mentally ill shrivel up. They lose their imagination. That is one of the first things you discover. They cannot make those imaginative connections. They lose their imagination, they lose pleasure in their body, in their voice and they most certainly do not interact with other teenagers. Mental illness closes you down. Theater exercises are all designed to... They are ensemble work, they are designed to stretch your imagination, your body, your voice. I work with a recreational therapist, **Maggie Hennen**, I just did it today, and that is how I use my work in the theater. This in a sense brings to a close I think the things you probably want about my **pedagogical**, philosophical, psychological history here as a teacher at the University of Florida. I came here in 1972 and now it is what twenty-six years later and I am very different as a teacher and a scholar and even as a member of this University. I do not just stay in Turlington Hall. I walk down to Shands everyday.

D: Let us talk about being a member of the University.

H: I love the concept of the University and I feel that with some exceptions it is our best and last hope for a strong, healthy society. I like the diversity at a university. I certainly like having as my clientele people who are forever eighteen to twenty-one years of age because I like that sort of idealism. I like being at a state university. That is just part of my political emotion having gone to two private universities as an undergraduate and graduate student. Do not get me wrong, Princeton and Harvard are marvelous places but they are not as marvelous as you think.

D: What are the strengths at UF?

H: The strength at UF are it does not have too much room for pretension because it certainly is not a Harvard. There is a sort of vulgarity here. There is a sort of vulgarity about Florida. Vulgar, I am going back to the Latin roots of vulgar, common, not spitting on the floor. I think one of the reasons that attracted me to Florida back in 1972 when I came here was... After all I was living in Boston. Who would not want to live in Boston, the hub of the universe, Boston Fine Arts

Museum, Boston Symphony? But I come from South Philadelphia. One of the things I liked about Florida was it did not have the brains to have pretensions.

D: Nobody is eating watercress sandwiches.

H: Yes, no one is eating watercress sandwiches here. I sort of liked that because I went to elitist universities. Now they were elitist but they were also highly liberal and democratic. A lot of my colleagues get very nervous about the fact that Tallahassee is breathing down our back and all of those yokels up there, some of them are not UF graduates, and they want to make sure that we teach maximum moral.

D: Maximum what?

H: Maximum moral. My kids laugh at me. I teach two courses a semester. I am saying this to a middle school teacher. If I wanted to I have got tenure, unless I rape a student or stab a student I do not need to publish anything more. I am a full professor. If I wanted to I could go in there and teach two courses which have under fifty minutes each a week and that would be it. If I wanted to.

D: What are you doing as opposed to that?

H: I teach them. I am directing students in plays, I am taking on independent study students, I am publishing, I am working in the community. I view, for example, my work with my wife, Gainesville Association for the Creative Arts as part of my job description now. That might not be necessarily the Universities notion. Now, I have the leisure to do that because it is an argument for tenure in a way. I am working harder now than I have ever worked in my life. I worked harder when I went on sabbatical than I ever worked in my life. I am defining that work and I define that work fortunately in terms of those guys in Tallahassee. In terms of public service. You know universities, including Florida, for too long had it for too good. They were like corporations in which the people gave their money but had no control over the product. We get all huffy at the University of Florida when those yokels in Tallahassee tried to tell us about the product.

D: It is a credibility issue.

H: I am not so sure that is such a bad idea. I will tell you frankly and I guess my colleagues would put me down as an anti-intellectual, I think that most scholarly work and scholarly publication is absolutely useless. It is not thought that way by the person doing it, but I cannot be convinced and I will include some of my work

in this, that it makes its way into the persons teaching, that it is new in any sense of the word. It is essentially to gain points, to gain tenure, to please the individual psyche of the person writing. Do not get me wrong, I know how pleasurable that can be. Less of that goes on at the University of Florida than at Harvard because first of all we do not have the same high percentage of brilliant researchers. There is a fascinating thing, I do not have the figures exactly right. Sam Proctor would probably know them better, but apparently the American Historical Association did a study of the last 1,000 Ph.D.'s granted by American universities in history. This is just going to be rough. Of those 1,000 Ph.D.'s, 600 never went into the teaching profession in any sense of the word. Of the other 400, something like 300 of those went into teaching but not teaching that would demand publication. Of those 100 who went into universities or colleges which were saw as published, of those 100, and I know I am right on this one, only six can be considered of those 1,000 really publishing scholars. The point of this was, and this is an extreme argument do not get me wrong, why have Ph.D. programs in history if you are only going to get six real publishing, researching scholars out of every 1,000? Those are real bad odds. As classically understood the primary function of doctoral programs is to create researchers. Now one can argue, researchers who are also university teachers. We all know the truth about that. I do not mean to get on my high horse here. Until we have been made to be a little bit more accountable, teaching has absolutely nothing... I am not a full professor because I try to be a good teacher. I am a full professor because I have got nine books. All those tenure meetings I went to in the English department and it does not mean _____. We are all decent people. I do not ever remember, maybe once or twice in twenty-five years, a comment ever being made about someones teaching. Never anything positive, no need for that.

D: The focus was on the publications?

H: The focus was on publications absolutely.

D: If I interpreted it right one of the strengths of UF in this **vulgaric** theme is that there is strong teaching going on.

H: Well the strong teaching is going on because, point in fact, we have not had the leisure or the talent across the board fully to indulge in ourselves as a research university. Now we do a lot of research. My ideal is the person who publishes twenty-five books and is a great teacher and coaches at the Boy's Club on Saturday and goes out for the Florida Endowment of the Humanities and is a

visiting humanist in **Podeque** that is the idea. That person, and I know some like that, and we have them here at Florida, they need to be rewarded at the highest level. What we get from that on downward are some wonderful teachers who have never published anything, some lousy teachers who have never published anything [and] some researchers and publishers who are not good teachers and we have them in the English department. I am not too sympathetic to the last group because they are getting subsidized to do that medieval guild craftsmanship work.

D: That just serves a very small elite?

H: Yes. I like Florida in that sense. When we are bad, we are real bad.

D: Give me some examples.

H: Despite all that talk about merit scholars and fantastic students here, we have some students here who should not even be in universities. I just finished marking some papers in a Shakespeare course today, middle school level. We have some people here, especially some of those who have gotten grandfathered in the old days, who really need to be teaching at **perritory** schools who are not real scholars. We have got some scholars here who are terrible teachers. My vision of the University is its primary function is undergraduate education. That ought to be the very core of the University but we all know that some people get a kick out of just being surrounded by their graduate students. I spoke to a friend of mine at the University today, **Keith Leg**. I do not think Keith would mind. Keith who is in the political science department, is the head of the honors program. One of the kids in my sons _____ class wants to major in political science and I said I will call up Keith and ask him to give me the names of the ten best universities. Keith's answer was one I should have realized. He said, Sid, for an undergraduate do not pick the department in terms of the quality of the political science department because in point of fact if it has a great political science department probably all of the focus goes on the graduate. Just pick a good university. A good university is Oberlin who has good people in the political science department he says, and I tend to agree with my friend Leg on that. I think essentially undergraduate education has been historically cheated. In this wonderfully vulgar state responsible to those yahoos, I like to call them that, most of them are yahoos.

D: The good ole boys in Tallahassee.

H: But there is something nice, those good ole boys have a set of practicalities that academicians would be well to look at. They got to worry about being elected. I sort of like that. I like that it sort of brooms the University down a little bit. It makes it a little bit more common. I have had offers to go to other universities, prestigious universities and I have never taken them. I am very committed here to the University of Florida.

D: You are a Gator?

H: Yes. Even as I say that I am probably not a very good University member in the sense that I am not interested in the workings of the University. I am not interested in department politics. In the best sense of the word politics. I guess to be honest I am not even really interested in the latest teaching methods and things like that. I am happy in the classroom but it is not quite enough for me so I have to walk down to Shands.

D: Are you involving English students in the Arts in Medicine Program?

H: Oh, yes, yes. I have a lot of them involved there.

D: And they are there as volunteers or do they get course work out of this?

H: Oh, sometimes I give them independent study for it, sometimes I am just pros to the honors programs that I give a course in theater in which they will also do a practicum by coming over to Shands with me and working in the theater with patients. I do not want to publish anymore books. I am being a little fake here but I have published enough already and how many books do you have to publish? It does not turn me on anymore. I had a talk with my chairperson about that, my chairperson **Howard Clark** who is a wonderful chairperson. If the function of the University is research and publication and trying to make improvements in undergraduate teaching... I just got one of those **TIP Teaching Awards** so that means my salary gets a \$5,000 edition every year.

D: Congratulations, I wish I could get _____.

H: Yes, I wish you could get it too. Universities are struggling. We never had teaching evaluations when I was an undergraduate. Universities are getting pressured and it is not just the state universities. If my son goes to Emory that will be \$29,000, short of what Emory will give us. You be damned sure I want to make sure that at \$29,000 is worth four times the University of Florida at \$6,000. I am not so sure about that.

D: Is your son considering UF?

H: Oh, yes. I hope they consider him too. It is such a paradox. Florida is so prototypical. It is way too big, it has way too much emphasis on research. I think there is a real cleavage, I can speak mostly of my own department, between the interests, scholarly abilities and things of the faculty and the so called Republican trickle down theory about how that gets into teaching. I cannot imagine any place more beset by problems than Florida but with more promise.

D: What is the promise?

H: For me the promise is that given this pressure we could really become of service to the state. That is my notion of it. Maybe that means by the way we do not have room for the scholar who publishes that book on that obscure eighteenth century figure. Not that obscure eighteenth century figure is not significant and not that in some very vague way his work on that eighteenth century figure gives him some insight into the literary process and that influences _____. Maybe we do not have room for that.

D: No, I am with you man. This state is beset with a lot of big problems.

H: Maybe it means the University has to do more things with the public schools. This is going to sound boastful and I do not mean it. I am just struggling, I am just trying to do the best I can. We have **Marjorie Kenning Rollings Society** within in the English department because Rollings and my colleague **John Check**, the wonderful scholar teacher of children's literature theory. He has taken one of Ms. Rollings short stories and made it into a play and asked me if I would stage it for the Rollings Festival. Now typical my fashion I have take twelve of my undergraduate and graduate students they are working with me in independent study and we are working on the new play. That is different than working on a play where the text already exists. But Norma and I have a grant in with the GACA for the fall to take that play to ten public schools in this city, elementary to high school, and to combine them with workshops. **Joel Sakke Henderson** one of Norma's teachers will give a workshop for the public school teachers and kids on how dancing can express ideas. I will do one on acting and John will do one on writing. It did not take me long to think of that. That seems to me natural. It seems to me that universities, I would like the University of Florida to do more of it. We do not do very much. A wonderful teacher in the **IB program** at **Eastside**. I adore her, she is David's eleventh grade English teacher, **Denise Sanderford**. I have come in a couple of times because I love to

do that because that is my boy. When I come in I take over the classes for the whole day.

D: Come into my middle school class, I have got one of your sons there.

H: She was saying she has not much success in getting faculty members to come in even though those faculty members have kids in that IB program. I do not know what the reasons are. I would like us to be much more of service than that. What passes as profound literary scholarship for the most part is shop-talk. You purposely create a complex language.

D: Crafty shop-talk.

H: Yes and that book **Prof Scam**, I do not know if you know that one. A wonderful expose of what goes on and it struck me. I forget who the author is, it is called **Prof Scam**. It is essentially making the point I am making but with much more detail.

D: Is it a new book?

H: No, it is an old book, maybe ten years old.

D: I see the same things. I came out of the Proteach program with my masters and the longer I have been in the field teaching public school the less relevant that jargon is.

H: All that I know is for whatever reason because it does not have full confidence in itself as Harvard has, because it has got those guys up in Tallahassee, because it is so vulgar. I have had the liberty and the privilege of trying to be a more useful person here. Nobody cared. As long as I am there teaching those two classes and do not do anything illegal I am free. You find often when you are given absolute freedom you can find yourself by your own principles, needs and agenda more. My schedule is obsolete. _____ if I were teaching. I know the legislators would like this as if I were teaching instead of two courses a semester, fifteen as if I were a middle school teacher. It is just as locked in. I am doing the locking in myself.

D: That is a strength at UF that you have been given that freedom?

H: Yes, it is. It just represents some real democratic principles. When David applies to colleges, one of the colleges he might apply to, and whether they will

accept him or not we do not know, Oberlin. Oh, boy Oberlin, 1,500 students, magnificent faculty. David, University of Florida, 30,000 students. They are balancing things, not just the cost factor. They are balancing things.

D: You said it was too big and you have seen UF grow, what was the student body when you came here?

H: I cannot remember but I bet it was not more than 2,500.

D: Dr. Proctor would probably know. For its infrastructure?

H: It is a little bit big.

D: Too big for its paradigm?

H: Not too big for its infrastructure just too big in the sense of working against that close community for undergraduate and their teachers. I know what it is like. When I was at Princeton it was 3,000 students, it was roughly that then. But you are there with the faculty all of the time. You see them, you have coffee with them.

D: That does not happen often here.

H: It happens enough because the real great teachers, the wonderful teachers who tend to also be wonderful scholars it does work kind of in hand. I really believe that.

D: My favorite professors were the ones I smoked cigarettes with.

H: They make it happen. They have got the extra time for that.

D: Or the eviction.

H: They have got that extra time.

D: But the larger school does not allow that like it should.

H: Well a loss of physical invitations. One thing I loved about Harvard was, it was broken down into houses the Harvard Houses were like the Oxford College so I was a tutor at Elliott. That worked nice. University of Florida has a lot of masters that it is serving to. There is research we have got to do for **lthis** and this and that. I am not real proud of writing nine or ten books. I did not need to write so

many. That took time away from me, from my students. Especially those earlier books. I enjoyed being in that cubicle writing that book, in control of my world, not having to worry about that snot-nosed little kid who comes to me arrogantly asking why he got a "D" having only written one paragraph on a three hour exam. There is that monkish pleasure in doing that and just being with Shakespeare.

D: But you would have liked the time to have dealt with his...

H: I should have. I was thinking of that just recently one of my boys called at the house and I said, oh, shit I told him I did not want them calling my house. He called back again and Norma said, Sid, you need to talk to this guy. He said, Sid, can I talk to you?

D: A UF student?

H: Yes. What happened was he and his girlfriend were going to get married and he does not want to marry her. He just wanted to talk with me about that. He was a wonderfully sensitive boy. He was worried about what might happen to her. We sat and talked.

D: Not related to the course material?

H: No, not related to the course, he was embarrassed by that. In some sense it is related to the course because he had been picking up signals from me in the way I handled him as an actor in the course and the way we worked together that I might be someone on whom he could depend for good advice, who might listen to him or who might understand him if I could understand the character I was working on with him. He did not say that but that was what was happening. I felt real good about that conversation. The only advice I gave him was the advice he was already giving himself. He needs to talk to her about it and maybe take a walk in **Kanappa Hill Gardens** when they are talking about it. We hugged when we finished. I told him, Norma and I will be around this weekend give us a call if you need us. I do not have any abilities as a counselor or anything like that, I have abilities as an actor and teacher. He was responding within a larger definition of that medium. University of Florida is like an old car with its oil leaking out, and its parts hanging out but there is a sort of pleasure in that.

D: It has got charm.

H: Yes, I sort of like that.

D: What do you think of the sports program at UF?

H: I played sports in college although _____ and I _____ it did not matter. I have a typical faculty view, I wish they were all just intermural sports. That is foolish we have to have a football team and then that brings us some recognition and we have to have a basketball team.

D: It seems to be the only focus in society.

H: Yes, I agree with most of those studies which really suggest it is a separate world here. It is not connected. I do not have to lecture anyone on the facts which show there is not correlation between good sports teams and support for the academic life of the university. _____ in Chicago would be bankrupt. I see no reason for the existence of sports at this level and this expense at a university. I reverse myself of course we have to have it. I am watching those with my old football in my hand and I am loving every minute of it. I think it has no real relevance to this University. People do not need to lecture me in athletics about healthy minds, healthy bodies. Shit, my undergraduates we do half an hour theatrical warm-up exercises, we are getting healthy enough. But I am one of a million voices whistling in the wind, that will never, never change because there is something deep in the psyche of people. It is just like some alien that is in our bodies and it is there.

D: You have got to have a team.

H: You got to have it, everyone else has it.

D: Does it bring a lot of money to the University or does it bring money to the sports program?

H: Well I would like to see those records. I think it brings money to the sports. Figures are that once and a while they will make a donation to the library or something like that, but the sports program is self-sustaining. My undergraduates they do not want to be into classes all of the time, they want to be into sports but the percentage of them who are really on sports teams is **infantestently** small. I am all for big building as we just did, big Gainesville Health and Fitness clubs on the University. I am all for that, that is great. I am into that myself but these are foolish thoughts of a middle-aged man. Nothing will ever change that. Nothing will ever, ever change it but it does not help us in the academic profession when they only know about our sports teams or when there are scandals in our sports teams.

- D: I see that in middle school. When I teach middle school kids they know more about the Gators than about Ponce de Leon.
- H: Yes, but that is so deeply rooted in the American psyche. The land grant universities and the sports. It is a nice preexisting professional league. You have got college teams to play. I love sports, I adore them. I read the sports pages first. I have read everything about the new basketball coach. I love all of that. I just think we are not in the same world, physically, most certainly not academically. Do you learn things playing sports? Yes, for example Danny is on the select soccer team. He has learned an enormous amount about team responsibility.
- D: He is your youngest son?
- H: Yes. Sure I guess those guys and girls are learning that sort of stuff...
- D: And he is a great student by the way.
- H: But that stuff can also be taught by giving kids a team project in the course. My kids with their acting partner they learn how to work with another person. I give them the same grade. So when you work with Sally as your acting partner, you get the same grades in acting. You are dependent on each other. The one academic value of sports it can be done in so many other ways.
- D: Are you happy with the facilities at UF?
- H: Yes, I think we have a good facility. We have lousy salaries. The salaries are way too low. There is a real problem with moral in the faculty. We are ranking in salaries and things like that. We are way, way too low. Facilities, yes and no, we do not have enough classrooms.
- D: You have crowded classes?
- H: Not so much that the classrooms are crowded, it is harder in scheduling. Physically though, I like this University and I have been to worse. Boston University, see what that looks like.
- D: You have made your home in Gainesville for fourteen years now?
- H: Since 1972.

D: No, twenty-four years.

H: Twenty-four years and I am never going to leave here. Never ever, **wield my body** to Shands. I have got to stop.

D: We are going to pick it up here on April 2, 1996, Dr. Sidney Homan, the third of our interview sessions. What do you think Sid?

H: I am speaking to the larger purpose of these interviews, whatever use they are or are not to other people, they are of enormous value to the person being interviewed. 10 percent of that is the ego. It is very satisfying being asked to talk about yourself and being able to do it without appearing immodest. Maybe you do appear immodest. The 90 percent is the reverse side of oral history. It is the person talking knowing that it is not natural talking. Knowing that it is going down. It is like writing a diary. Knowing that it is not it seems to me you inevitably put an intellectual or historical or philosophical grid on what you are talking. So you start putting your life in order. I thought of some things in this interview that I guess I had way back in my mind about patterns of ones life and things like that. When you are living you are not so much thinking in terms of patterns. If you think too much then you start living it. It is the old Hamlet problem. If you act without thinking you are an animal, if you think without acting they are contradictory so you have to navigate. Universities are peculiar in that sense because they are primarily thinking places but since the 1960s onward they have not been allowed to be just thinking places. For example, I remember that my undergraduate school Princeton, during the Vietnam War took a position as a university against the war. There was a lot of controversy about that. Are universities people, that is can we without being like a theological school, can universities have positions? Do they have political positions? I remember for example, a couple of years back, this is so typical of the University, my friend Hernan Vera in sociology... Hernan had been with the **Aliendian** government during the liberal days of Chile and then was kicked out with the **Peoshay** government and the rightist coming in. Then he came to this country and became a sociologist.

D: You worked with him?

H: Yes, one year we and eight others were selected as Lily from the pharmaceutical company, a mixed blessing. It was like this **Lily Teaching Fellows**. We were given a semester off just to meet with each other and talk about our teaching because you know university faculty never talk about their teaching. They only

do that in the College of Education. Of course we are to "good for that". Our only charge was to talk about our teaching, to meet once a week and possibly if we wanted to join courses. My son, Chris was then a teenager and pretty sorely and inarticulate. I discovered that the one time we could talk together was we liked to watch the old TV show Wild, Wild West which had been new in my day and now we are watching re-runs. We would watch it every afternoon together and it was a sort of historical bonding. He knew that when I was a kid I saw that new and now we returning to that.

D: Oh, yes, I love those re-runs.

H: One day as I was flipping to it [and] I accidentally flipped on the public television channel. This is perfect for a UF historian, they were having that **Steve Allen Meeting of the Minds Show** which is an old format. Martin Luther was arguing with the Pope and Marie Antoinette and **Resputen**, those various characters around the table. Chris said, dad get Wild, Wild, West on. I said, just a second Chris, let us just watch it for a second. We watched for a couple of minutes then we got Wild, Wild West. Our routine was after we would watch Wild, Wild West we would get on our bikes and just ride around Gainesville for a while. Riding on the bikes was our chance to talk to each other. Those were the conditions. We are riding along and suddenly he starts talking about the difference in Catholicism and Protestantism. This non-intellectual kid, he just picked it up from that Meeting of the Minds. I get back to the University and in the next couple of days the dean asked me to be head of the honors program for the college.

D: What year would this have been?

H: Oh, boy, it was probably 1974 to 1976, for several years. It was just during that phase when the College of Liberal Arts and University College, which they were two separate entities... University College was for the first two years. The University College was on its way to being disbanded and made part of the four year school. I was to head the honors program during that transitional year. I met with the potential honors kids and I said to them, tell me real bluntly, what is missing here academically for you? With that wonderful naivety of youth and disarming bluntness they said, too many dull teachers. I said, what does that mean? When I got them to refine it a bit they argued that they were not sure whether the teachers here, we are talking about politics, were committed to anything. Was there any relationship between a scholars work and his or her world views? I said, that is interesting. I put that together with this experience

with my son riding down the hill talking for a couple minutes about theological issues and I proposed that we would have an honors seminar which would be like Meeting of the Minds. What I would do would be, I would call in colleagues of mine and the only requirement was they not be themselves, that they be an historical figure. Usually the historical figure on which they had spent a lifetime working [on]. They did not have to dress up like the historical figure, they just had to be addressed as it. In other words if your thing was Abraham Lincoln, we would address you as President Lincoln.

D: Did **Seldon Henry** do that part?

H: No, I just pulled that out of the thing. I remember **Greg Altmer** did **Una Mono** and Hernan Vera did **Lupes de Vega** or something like that. I did Shakespeare's **Yago**. A woman colleague in the German department did **Kafka**, etc., like that. Then we could bring combinations, Kafka and **Rousseau** would be both guests one day. Now, some of them dressed up for it. Again the minimum requirement was you not speak in your own person, you speak as if you were that person. **Omer** had just published a book on Rousseau. He could certainly speak more like Rousseau in terms of for Rousseau than probably anybody around. There is a confidence factor. The role of the honor students was just to be like hosts at a cocktail party, just chatting with these famous guests. What we found was first of all the kids loved this. It gave them a sort of power. It was not teacher-student it was host and guest. Secondly, my colleagues under the guise of playing a character, not having to be "themselves", began speaking very often passionately and out of deep conviction as if they were really playing somebody else. In other words they could be more committed to things playing a role than being themselves. We began to get requests to come back and return visits and things like that.

D: What did you call the program?

H: I just called it a sort of meeting of the minds. It was the core seminar of the honors program. It was a wonderful thing. It was just absolutely wonderful. It was one of those early moments when the theater loosely defined here, for me crossed over to academic life. That is when I got to know Hernan Vera. A few years later after that honors program had been disbanded when the colleges joined...

D: Do you remember what year that was?

H: This was 1984. Hernan and I kept our friendship up and in about 1984 you may remember there was a big controversy here in Gainesville. There were some allegations that Marshall Criser who was then president, and the head of the Chamber of Commerce were getting together and advocating increased business growth for Gainesville. The developers and non-developers. Some faculty members [had] apparently been drafted to speak the University Chamber of Commerce's position to the community. Hernan was then head of the new faculty union at Florida.

D: What department did he teach in?

H: In sociology. There were several faculty members who as private citizens had gone to speak against Marshall Criser's position, this endorsement of unlimited growth for Gainesville. Apparently Criser had stereotyped these faculty members as no growthers, wide-eyed liberals and things like that. Hernan sent a long letter to Marshall Criser saying, I protest this. I protest that you and the administration and you as the president take a position on this. You are supposed to be neutral as a university. I resent your intimidation of faculty members who are speaking out against your position.

D: Very confrontational.

H: Well, hell Hernan had battled the rightist in Chile for twenty years. As the head of the new faculty union that union was meeting a lot of opposition. Faculty members tend not to unionize. We are "too good" to be union members. Me, the son of a member of the telephone workers...

D: Were you a member of the union?

H: Yes, I had just joined it. Criser sent Vera back a sort of generic letter saying, professor Vera there is no problem here. I have always supported freedom of speech, rights of faculty members. That is it your letter is not to the point. Hernan went into a fit and called me up one night. When Hernan gets angry he starts to stutter. He is a former stutterer. He was stuttering in anger. I said, Hernan you have got to channel that anger. He said, all right I will get back to you in a day. He comes back to me in a day. He says, I will tell you what I am doing. He said, I am going to have a conference here on freedom of speech and faculty and I will invite that marxist professor in Maryland who had been kicked out for his marxist views. I will invite various faculty...

D: Was that **Eugene Genovasi**?

H: I cannot remember. He was going to invite a variety of speakers on the issue. I said, Hernan, that is great. That is really a productive use of your anger. He said, but Homan, you have got to do something for me. I want you to stage something dramatic for the opening night of this three day conference. You have got to pay me back. Well, I said, okay I will do it. I will do a readers version.

D: Pay back for what?

H: For telling him to channel his anger and now he has to organize this three day conference. I said, okay I will get back to you. I thought what play would be appropriate? Brecht's Galileo, because Brecht revised that play before the dropping of the atom bomb when he wrote it. Galileo was the bold, inquiring scientist venturing into unknown lands opposed by this irresponsible, repressive Catholic Church. After the dropping of the atom bomb, Brecht seriously revised the play and tried to present a more balanced view suggesting that indeed we cannot in a society exist unfettered. Scientist have obligations that we continually have to make our research meet political and social needs of society. The bold individual adventurer can often be counterproductive to a society. This was a bit of Brecht's marxist views here. Now whether the play has ever succeeded that way, I do not know because we tend to identify with Galileo. I decided I would do a readers version of [it], no memorization. We just get some actors and do it once. Then the Acrosstown Repertory Theatre heard that I was doing this and they said, hey how would you like to do a run of Galileo? I said, okay. Well talk about the relation of the University and ones life in the community, I had a colleague **Andy Gordon**, very fine actor, very good scholar. He was at that very moment in time about to go into a legal suit with the chairperson of the English department a fellow named **Melvin New** who is no longer chair. This is Andy's version, I will be neutral in the issue. Mel had told Andy that Andy had to publish so many more pages per year if he wanted to be promoted. Mel had criticized according to Andy some of his scholarship. In effect, Mel was as chairperson dictating the nature of Andy's scholarship if Andy wanted to be rewarded with promotion and tenure. From Andy's perspective this was an infringement on his rights as a faculty member. Andy and Mel were really at odds with each other. So, I cast Andy as Galileo.

D: In the Acrosstown Repertory?

H: Yes, in fact Andy would pick me up every night for rehearsal and drive to the theater and on our way to the theater we would not talk about his part, we would talk about his latest skirmish that day with the department. So by the time we got

to the theater Andy was really in a mood. Quickly the allegory became clear, the Catholic Church was Mel New and the English department and Andy was Galileo. Andy had a rather romantic view of Galileo. What I tried to do as a director was be more balanced the way I knew Brecht wanted it to be. It turned out to be one of the best experiences I had as a director. It was a play which was at every performance having ramifications and spilling over into my real life role as a faculty member. Hernan and the union came to see it and enjoyed it. The other thing which was amazing was we expected to have only a three week run, that is three weekends, which would be the typical thing for the Acrosstown. The Acrosstown in those days, and still today, always has a problem attracting an audience. [There are] a lot of productions at the Acrosstown with six or seven people in the audience.

D: I guess Marshall Criser did not show?

H: No. But for whatever complicated reasons we had to extend that play for several more weeks. We had full houses, we could hardly manage the audiences. I do not know why. Maybe the production was okay, I hope it was. There must have been some other reasons. It may have been the University kind of touched those cords.

D: I was an undergrad then and I remember hearing it was good and planning on taking a date and it was sold out.

H: Yes, it was always sold out. **Jimmy Evangelista** the muralist he did a mural around the entire theater of the heavens and the stars. We dressed all the monks and officials of the church, and Galileo and all of his assistants in the same non-descript robe to try to make it as neutral as possible. We did not use any scientific equipment. We mimed all of the telescopes, and everything like that. It had a historical setting, it was sort of timeless. You were not actually seeing physical things. The other thing, you know that space in the Acrosstown, we took three stages. Each of the stages was a twelve foot circle raised a foot. We had three stages like islands. The audience sat like an ocean all around those stages. So when Galileo moved from his living room to his laboratory he had to walk through the audience. There was no off stage, when actors finished a role in a particular scene they would just sit with the audience. Brecht had all of those notions that the audience was to be actively involved.

D: I was going to ask you that, is that _____ Brecht?

H: Yes, I try to do it as faithfully as I could to his concept of where the audience is not just sitting there in the darkness, insignificant as the meaningful illusion on stage takes place, but the audience is a co-equal partner. That really has a lot to do with the way I perceive my role as a teacher in the classroom.

D: Hands on, interactive.

H: We are partners. I probably know a little bit more about some details of Hamlet than my students, but that needs to be shelved when that student is trying to do **Polonious** to my Hamlet in Act II, Scene II. There is a bit of the 1960s guy in me where we are all equal. It is all very democratic. This is not fully compatible with the classical definition of the University where the faculty member/researcher has been to the promised land and found out some things and here come the students and they are _____ under his/her tutorage go through those steps. That is a beautiful, romantic, classical, significant dimension of the teaching process. For me it is not the full way of doing it. It is a little adverse to the way theater works, which is much more collaborative. Theater is a good analogy. The director is in charge of the production but the actor after all is in charge of the part. Or as my actors like to say, Sid, opening night you are just going to be sitting there.

D: It sounds to me and I have heard it referred to as such, that your teaching style is very unique and very pioneering. Have you influenced other departments? Are there models of your teaching style out there in academia?

H: I am not sure I know a lot about that just statistically. In a very large sense even English departments, I say even, I do not say that sarcastically, move towards a more co-equal balance between the text and the reader. We talk about reader response criticism. For example, my colleague **Norman Holland** is involved in that at work. The readers response to the work becomes text in itself. When you read King Lear it is the text of King Lear as it exists in your mind which is at least as significant as Shakespeare's document. There are lots of movements to make a more equal balance between the person receiving the text and the text. That eventually is going to influence teacher-student relationships. The problem with English departments is most of the people teaching Shakespeare or modern drama do not have stage experience, but I have no problem with that because we all have audience experience. From my view the audience and the actor are co-equals, they are just as significant. Actors without an audience are just in rehearsal, they are not in performance. Audience without actors are just people sitting in the house, but they are not at a performance.

D: Echoes of those prison performances.

H: Yes, and I do believe that as a matter of principle. That latent leans to a sort of flexible definition of theater, but saying all that the notion of your teaching style being influenced by the nature of the medium in which you are working. I do not think that is very common. I do not mean to say that I am unique or anything like that. To put it the other way around a more modest way is drama in an English department is always sort of an odd duck anyway. It is not literary but because English departments appropriate Shakespeare. After all if you are losing Shakespeare in the English department you are losing your star, right? For example in the film studies program of the English department, there is a case where it is hands on stuff. They are not just studying films theoretically, or having discussions about the philosophical issues in 2001 as we used to in this department when we first started having courses in films.

D: They are making films?

H: Yes, they are making films.

D: Is that what cross-cuts is?

H: Cross-cuts, they are making films, they are making documentaries. There is a parallel. I think when a scholar writes an article let us say on a Shakespeare play, that article is properly a critical performance. That is the recreation of the play in the mind and imagination of that scholar. That interested me much more than the notion of, and again I am going back to the way I was taught in graduate school which strikes me as a fallacious way of teaching, that is the older notion which is still very much practiced that the function of the scholar is to unearth the facts and the context of the work so that armed with those facts and context we can come to a true understanding of the work. I have no interest in true understanding of works. That smacks to me of search and destroy methods. You know, there is a truth at the center of that work and somehow if we arm ourselves we can get oh, wow. Not in this **extrastensial** age of ours.

D: I think you described that old school style as metadynamic?

H: No, my first scholarship was metadramatic scholarship. That was not something that senses old school, that was an attempt to see what the work of art was saying about the nature of the medium.

D: So, Sid where is your mind right now in the department of English at the University of Florida?

H: Well, it is in a funny state and I can mark exactly where that state began. Two years ago I had my first ever sabbatical at the University. You can get the year sabbatical at half pay easy, but who wants to have half pay? To get the one semester at full pay those are few and far between. I got the one semester one. I made up my mind during that one semester that I was not going to do more of the same. It is not a case of getting burned out. It is just a case of interests changing. I have kids arranged from Danny at fourteen to Christopher thirty-four so I have been telling bed time stories to my kids for two generations now and I have been telling them stories about my growing up in Philly. I decided to take all of those stories I have been telling them and write a novel collection of short stories. I did a play Boston Baked Bean. This time I did a play in which I controlled the whole play instead of working out of a theater department I did it all. I did a bunch of other things. I also spent a lot of time at my home which was nice. Me, who normally is at the University at seven thirty rolling up his sleeves getting ready to... I have my father's union mentality. You put in eight hours like they did.

D: I have seen you on your bike.

H: I came out of that semester, it was a good semester for me because when I got back it was not that I had lost taste for my regular routine at the University...

D: Was that Spring of 1994?

H: Something around there. I have **no sense**. All that I know is I just could not go back to the same old routine. I guess what I am saying is I find myself an embarrassment. I am fifty-seven and I can retire at sixty-five. I can retire at seventy. I do not want to have early retirement, my wife would go crazy. Besides we need the money [with the] kids going to college. So something **confedered** with the fact that I will be teaching maybe thirteen more years at the University. The issue is either to change my career completely become an actor/director [or] run a health institute. I do not want to do that. I think what I would like to do is see to what degree at the University of Florida I can use the flexibility of the University so that without cheating them, that is I will do my job, I will write my books, I will teach my classes, but I can begin reshaping my sense of how I am supposed to work within the University. I have an abiding faith that the University is flexible enough, liberal enough to let me do that.

- D: Great, okay. Any interesting ideas you are going to throw into the tail end of this tape?
- H: No, no that is essentially it. What that really means is here it is 8:57 I am beginning to redefine things all over again and just when I thought I was safely home as Beckett's home talk about an Irishman, safe to haven. No, no that haven keeps changing it seems to me.