

Rock Voices: The Oral History Project of Slippery Rock University

Irv Kuhr Interview

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BC: Today July 17 [2008]; it is 1:20 p.m. and I am Brady Crytzer.

IK: I am formally Manuel Irwin Kuhr. My friends all call me “Irv” because I don’t use my first name. I was born July 25, 1928 which means I will be eighty years old next week, and I hope that’s part of this project. I was born and raised in Philadelphia, went to the public schools in Philadelphia, went to Temple University for a bachelor’s and master’s degree, and a Ph. D. at the University of Missouri.

BC: Okay, can you explain your affiliation with the university from the beginning?

IK: [Pause] I was an instructor at Temple University and the debate coach and decided I didn’t want to continue as the debate coach, so I started looking for a job and there was a position open here, and I came out here and was interviewed by Dr. [Norman] Weisenfluh—this was 1961, summer of 1961. I joined what was then the Speech Department. By the way, I guess they had just changed the name from Slippery Rock [State] Teacher’s College to Slippery Rock State College, they took out the “Teacher’s” but there were no programs here at the time except teacher preparation, and there was a teaching certificate in Speech, and Speech at the time I guess, before I came, was sort of subsumed under the English Department because there were only two and a half instructors—I guess there were (counting) one, two, three and a half, now [that] I think of who it was. And with me it made four and a half. So as the year went on, I think because I was the one with the most formal education, I was listed as associate professor, and I was ABD, that means I hadn’t finished my dissertation, which was another reason I had to stop being the debate coach. So I ended up being informally the chairperson and the following year they made me the chair of the then separated Speech Department.

BC: Do you know Carl Laughner?

IK: Carl Laughner, Helen Cushman, Milt Carless, at some points before I came, Carl Laughner's wife Norma taught half-time, that’s why I said there was a half person. And then, myself, yeah.

BC: We just had both of them in about two weeks ago.

IK: I'm glad you did that of course because the two of them go back much further than I do. Norma's a native of Slippery Rock and probably, her family has long attachments to the university in many forms.

BC: Okay, we have a section for the transitional period, you already mentioned dropping the "Teacher's" part of the title, do you remember any specific events or have any memories from those transitional periods?

IK: Yes, I think it was the spring of 1962, '63, it was the following year—yeah it was the following year, although we no longer had the "Teacher's" officially in the name, we had no liberal arts programs. Now, understand that we had teacher preparation programs for secondary education, we had all the normal liberal arts departments that you could think of, maybe a little weak in philosophy, but, by and large . . . we had art, music, and [pause], English, obviously speech and drama, theatre was part of the Speech Department, and so on. So the president called us together—at that point I was officially the department chair—and said, "We need to draft a curriculum for a liberal arts program, and we think if we do this and move quickly, we could get it approved." So if my recollection, I may be off a year, but my recollection is it was the spring of 1963 that we sat down, decided what would make up a liberal arts degree: Bachelor of Arts, because before that all we had was Bachelor of Science in education. And it got approved and we were authorized to offer liberal arts degrees beginning that fall, and I think we had one student who was a liberal arts major, she must have been my advisee, last name was Jack, her mother was a school teacher.

The politics of the thing in a sense was that the private liberal arts colleges didn't really want competition from the state college system. And the state college system, I'm going back, I wasn't here, but going back—alright, I finished undergraduate school in 1949 at Temple and got an assistantship in the Speech Department and taught as a grad assistant for a couple years before I went off to the University of Missouri to work on my doctorate. Schools exploded with the benefits of the GI Bill; there was a huge demand for higher education. And the schools were, for one thing, they were looking for faculty members, but space, etc.; lots of schools took advantage of that to take their teachers' colleges and make them multi-purpose institutions. Not Pennsylvania, remember I'm not talking the late '40s, I'm talking fifteen years later, and they had never made that transformation. Obviously I would say its political pressure with the State Board of Higher Education, with whoever supervises degree approval, to avoid competition. So, we finally broke through. And if either of you [referring to student interviewers Brady and Lindsay] are liberal arts majors you know about the language requirements and the things we stuck you with [laughs].

BC: Yeah, we both are [laughs].

IK: I told you about the department . . . . Other positions: I never held any administrative positions. I never rose higher than the department chair. At some point I realized that I wasn't going to be a dean, I should stop even thinking about it.

BC: [Laughs] what buildings did you work in?

IK: When I first came our offices were on the third floor of Old Main. At that point the third floor had classrooms and some offices. And I'm trying to think at what point, the building that is now used I guess by the grad school over here on, what's that little street that comes off of Main and onto the campus?

BC: Keister?

IK: Maltby. [Pause] I think it is the Graduate or Continuing Ed[ucation Department] over there still across from the library (the old library) whatever that building is. It may have been even that fall; the college had purchased that building, by the private residence [the president's house].

BC: Oh, the Lowry Center.

IK: Yeah, the Lowry Center. Thank you. And I did know Bob Lowry also. So the four of us in the Speech Department, and a couple people in the English Department, were sent over there, along with other strays. A couple people in Elementary Ed[ucation] . . . and we still taught our classes down at Old Main, but we had offices up there. The following year, after the new field house opened, and the Phys[ical] Ed[ucation] people vacated East Gym, [pause] Dean—I can't think of who was the dean of instruction—said to me, “You want to teach small classes,” you know, speech classes are usually twenty-five people at most, “Why don't you take East Gym because those classrooms in there are pretty small.” So we moved our whole Speech and Theatre Department, well of course Theatre would be going out of Miller Auditorium, but they taught their classes (other than their Theatre classes, because they also taught public speaking). We were over in East Gym, West Gym—I'm sorry—West Gym, where there are four small classrooms, first and second floor.

I had my office in that rotunda there that sticks out; I was chair, and that was my office. We were over there until, it must have been about '71, as long as I was chair, and I got tired of being chair because I got tired of dealing with the dean. [Pause] I was chair up until I guess it was the spring of 1971, when Ted Walwik replaced me, and then shortly after that we moved down to Eisenberg [Classroom Building]. I guess they've been there ever since. Eisenberg had been completed or was being built. I remember sitting on the committee that dealt with and talked with the architect about what we wanted in the building. Of course we didn't get it, but that's another story. I wanted radio studios, I wanted potential television studios, I wanted co-axle cable which was the form you used then, so that we could put these little things like this [refers to video camera] in all the classrooms and tape the kids, but we didn't get any of it.

BC: They've changed some things.

IK: Well, you've got it now but it's in self-contained systems, the old system would have been to run a major cable out of each room into a central control room. Oh well.

BC: You said you were from Philadelphia originally. Had you known about Slippery Rock at that point before you applied here?

IK: I knew there was a state college system because at one point in my high school days I contemplated going to West Chester. And then I thought I didn't want to be a secondary school teacher, so I gave up on that and went to Temple. You know, I was explaining this to someone the other day: I lived at home, I could commute to school, I didn't have much money. You want me to tell you how much tuition was in those days? Tuition at Temple was \$100 a semester plus fees. And I had a half scholarship to boot. So you know, I made a choice, I could go to West Chester, I'd have live in the dorm, pay room and board and very modest tuition. I could pay a little more tuition at Temple and live at home, of course I had to pay car fare, or subway fare actually, but it was easy for me to get to school, commute to school. And so I stayed at home and my mother fed me and did my laundry and I went to school.

BC: What were your first impressions when you came to Slippery Rock? What did you first think?

IK: Well you know, that's kind of interesting. I think that you may hear this from other people. My wife is from Chicago and some of your big city kids, now we had both gone to the University of Missouri where we met, which is a small college town, but the university probably, I don't know, the university was obviously a major state university, and had maybe six or seven thousand students including the graduate students, the law students, the med students, and so on. And a town of maybe thirty to thirty-five thousand people—I guess pretty much like Butler. So we had never been in a town this small. And so you come to Slippery Rock and you're like, "Oh [laughs]." And you know, it's probably a good place to raise kids. I had three kids under three when I came; that's another story. And, we thought, this will be alright. And like a lot of other people, "Alright, we'll give it a couple years, I'll finish my degree, I'll get a couple years experience." Those of you who change jobs too often people ask, "Why did you change jobs?" And then we'll see if we want to look around for another position. But, we settled in, we made friends, the kids were happy, we were happy, we liked living in a small town, and decided, "Okay, this is fine, we'll stay with it."

BC: Did you wife work at the university too?

IK: No, no, no. She stayed home and raised the kids until they were teenagers, and then she worked part-time at [pause] the apartments, what's it called now? Pine Grove?

BC: Yeah, Pine Glenn.

IK: Pine Glenn on Keister. Alright, I can't remember what the prior name was.

BC: They used to be College Garden Apartments.

IK: College Gardens, there was College Gardens West over on Cooper Street, College Gardens on Keister Road. It was owned by a consortium I guess, partnership would probably be more accurate, one of whose members, Gerry [Gerald] Chesin was a faculty member in elementary education. We lived--in those days when we first came--we lived in the house where Rock Realty is, an ancient red brick house up on [Route] 173 about a mile north, essentially across from the hardware store. It's been re-modeled, because when Lee Ligo bought it from me, he changed it into his office building.

But I owned a house, the kids lived there, it was great, it was country living. Had an acre of ground to run around, had trees to climb in, the dog chased them around the place, everybody was very happy. We could go sledding on the hill back there, and stuff like that, we were enjoying ourselves. It was an old house and we decided we would like a nice air-conditioned house that wasn't full of holes [laughs] so we built a house on Park Lane Drive, and one of our neighbors was Gerry Chesin and he needed somebody to manage, be the office manager of these two sets of apartments. My wife worked there, part-time, maybe eight or ten hours a week, couple hours a day, from the time the kids were able to come home from school and stay out of trouble. She did that for many years, and then eventually she worked for the Welfare Department in Butler, which caused us to eventually—after the kids left home—to relocate to Butler so she wouldn't have to commute as much. But no, my wife never did that. She wasn't an academic; she only had a bachelor's degree.

BC: Can you talk about your campus activities? In terms of committees, things like that you were a part of?

IK: I was a part of all kinds of things. Obviously I served on a lot of different committees over the years: internal, external. I suppose the most important thing to say is, because of being at the University of Missouri, and Temple, I had belonged to the American Association of University Professors [AAUP]. As I recall, there was no AAUP chapter when I first came here. The faculty had their major affiliation professionally . . . (Dr. Kuhr's phone rings). Oh boy—can we stop the tape?

BC: Yeah, we can.

[Pause]

IK: The faculty had an affiliation with the Pennsylvania State Education Association [PSEA] under the title the Association of Pennsylvania State College Faculties, which eventually got

changed to APSCUF [Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties] when they got university status. And that was basically a political lobbying arm, because our salaries, and our salary schedule, as well as the universities budget of course were part of the state legislative package. When I was hired the salary was set by a law, I can't remember which one it was, but I met the qualifications for associate professor, and Dr. Weisenfluh said, "What are you getting at Temple?" And I told him, and he said, "I guess we can give you an increment over that or two increments" or whatever, and he offered me what I thought was a pretty generous salary, and so I took the job. And then we had five percent and it was a structure where I think it was seven steps, each five percent, over the base at each faculty rank, and then they overlapped; you had to have a doctorate to be a full professor. After I finished my dissertation, got my doctorate, I got promoted to full professor. I was doing very nicely, at least comfortably of course. But we had to have somebody to go down and pester all the people in Harrisburg on our behalf, so we had this.

So in those days we had both organizations. I think it cost us five bucks to belong to ASPCUF, and I don't know what AAUP was, maybe ten bucks. Then when the collective bargaining act went through—Public Employee Act 195 if my memory serves me right, went thought about 1970—permitting public employee bargaining. The question was: Is the faculty going to unionize? The maintenance staff were quick to unionize, AFSCME [American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees] and from my perspective, hell, if all the maintenance people are unionized they'll be harassing management for raises, we better unionize also. Besides I grew up in a union family, so to me it seemed like the obvious thing to do.

And we had a bargaining collection, so here I am, and in those days I think, what do you call if I was president of AAUP at that point? But you know what? I was on sabbatical, I wasn't doing anything, I was on sabbatical. So I came home from sabbatical, and they said to me, "Which group do you want to support? We're having an election in the fall." And the [pause] State Education Association people had hired a union organizer who had worked for the Amalgamated Clothing Workers [of America]. (Harry, I can't think of his last name, it'll come back to me). And I thought: they're the best bet. So I threw in my lot with that, and I was actually at some point over the summer, filled the vacancy and became president of the APSCUF-PSEA affiliated you know, on the ballot you campaigned for that; the AAUP people, I don't know if you know any . . . Rhoda Taylor was active in that, and others.

We won the election, and I was the first president of APSCUF, for about a year, then I think it was Don Voss who replaced me. So I was the president when the election was held and, I don't think I was the president when we signed the first contract, but I was active thereafter.

After I lost the president [position] I did other things [in the union]. I worked briefly as their legislative person, I spent many years as chairman of the faculty grievance committee. I'm not going to tell you the details; in fact I probably ought to burn the files. But [pause] you know, we

had a few faculty members who would do stupid things and get themselves into trouble, and faculty members who just don't get along with other faculty members. It was a very interesting job.

I ended that when I had heart surgery at some point; I had to resign. So that's what I did mostly, in that sense. When we were still AAUP is when we went through the Bob Carter mess. Do you know about President Carter?

BC: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

IK: Okay, here I am active in the AAUP chapter, and I had personally taken a disliking of President Carter, as did many faculty members, and when the faculty members made that known actually probably we were almost indirectly invited to make it known by the board of trustees, some of who were also disenchanted with him. [Pause] He of course resigned and, I don't know how much of that you want me to get into at the moment. And we sent a letter. Now, in the previous hiring process when Weisenfluh left, there was a man who was president whose name I don't remember. And then Carter came in, and that's a mess incidentally. Has anybody told you about him?

BC: [Pause] Well we, we've heard a little bit, but we can ask you this in a little bit, in another section.

IK: Okay. When that went through, we had nothing to do with hiring Bob Carter. I mean the faculty wasn't consulted, we were just told, "He's the new president," you know, like that. [Pause] And so we decided that's not the way it oughta be. So we wrote a letter to the board of trustees on behalf of the AAUP chapter and said we think that faculty should be consulted and we wanted a committee to meet. And of course I was on the committee, Martha Haverstick, ah, who else was it Bob Crane maybe? And who was the head of the Chemistry Department . . . and in the course of this I realized that this board of trustees, I'd better be plain, really didn't know how to proceed. And, [pause] they appointed . . . if I'd looked at the list. One of the board members lived here in town, and her husband had been head of the Science Department, but I can't remember her name, she lived over on Center Street Extension. They appointed her to sort of be the interface with us, but it quickly became clear that we were going to do much of the screening and made suggestions, actually handled some of the applicants. And ultimately that ended up . . . so we got involved in the selection of Dr. Watrel, who came to us, he had been an intern in a program at, I think, San Jose State in California and there were some foundations and businesses sponsoring would-be college presidents for internships in college administration. I guess he'd been a dean up in Cortland State in New York and he looked like the guy who was the right guy for us. He took the position. We were under a lot of heat from Middle States to fill the vacancy; they were a little upset with Slippery Rock. I think Middle States felt that every time there was a change in the control of the governorship, the control of the state, they changed

presidents in the state colleges, or at least they started looking for new ones you know. They just thought that it was too much, both formal partisan political interference and too much interference between local townspeople--that the boards were too close to both the faculty and the community to maintain some distance from it; that they let personal policies and politics get in the way. And they wanted to make, we just showed up when they wanted to make a statement and we got all the heat. So they were under considerable pressure to [pause] replace Carter promptly. Bob Lowry served, briefly, as the interim president. And he—well that was a big mess; I hope it's in the records. I mean he was signing the checks . . . so to speak.

BC: You know, with this section about presidents, can you talk about the presidents that you recall working with and some of the details about it?

IK: I remember walking into Old Main one day and I saw all the old pictures of the presidents hanging downstairs. I'm looking, you know, I started with Weisenfluh. And he retired, I guess—who was president when he retired?

BC: Was it Aebersold?

IK: Yeah it must have been Bob Aebersold. Sure. And, I looked at them and thought how few of them have left voluntarily. [Pause] Weisenfluh was pushed down . . . the guy who served-- Weisenfluh had gone on sabbatical, the man who was dean of students, he didn't have a clue, that was the title then, it wasn't vice president for Student Affairs, was acting president in his absence for a spring semester. The board of trustees . . . have you heard this before?

BC: No, no I haven't.

IK: The board of trustees had a June meeting or something like that, whatever they're having, their quarterly meeting, suddenly decide that they need a, a retirement policy. And they declare that no faculty member or president should serve after the semester in which you turn sixty-five. Weisenfluh had just turned sixty-five, so in effect they sent him a telegram or a letter or something, and he was in Florida or somewhere, told him that this was the new policy and they would replace him effective in the fall. So out he went.

There was a shift I guess from the Shapp administration, I forget, maybe the Shapp: the Democrats to . . . whoever replaced them, come back to me I guess. Whatever Republican replaced him [Thornburgh], and the board now was under the control of the Republicans instead of Democrats, is what had happened, you know that kind of stuff. So they put in this interim president, this guy, but as soon as they hired Bob Carter which they did in the middle of the spring semester, then they told him to take office immediately. He was teaching at Denison. He said "I have to finish out my semester," and they said "Oh alright." So, I think he changed his teaching schedule so he could get a long weekend, I mean he'd come up here every other weekend. The interim president was still here, he asked if he could live in the president's house,



Weisenfluh had left town, he was living in Elizabethtown. [Pause] And Carter, he asked the board if he could stay the rest of the semester, he had a kid in high school or something. He wanted to finish the term and then he would move on. And I guess he felt he had permission to stay and Carter suddenly decided when the semester ended that he wanted to relocate from Denison which was like the first of June, that he wanted the house. The other guy said “I won’t be out of here for another two weeks or so.” Carter told them to turn off the water and the utilities. It made *Time Magazine*! That’s not very complimentary to your institution! And the rest of us sat there and said “Who the hell did they hire?” [Laughs] You know, “What kind of guy is this?” And that set the whole thing going for three difficult years! [Laughs]

Anyhow, Carter then came in and of course [pause] managed to offend the board of trustees at the time, so he resigned, encouraged by a vote of no confidence. At that point—you asked me about my role . . . Carter decided that, very traditional thinking, the president of the university, or college at the time, was the president of the faculty. And therefore, we used to meet annually. We used to meet once a month, the entire faculty met, of course, at one point we could all fit in one room. We used to meet once a month and the president would conduct a faculty meeting once a month, the whole faculty. And so Carter’s like “Okay, we need a constitution for our bylaws for the faculty; we ought to have bylaws.” And I thought that was a good idea; remember I was active in the AAUP. I said alright, we were going to work out what was the relationship, between president and the faculty.

So, Marc Selman, who was in the Political Science Department, had a history of working in the state government and was assistant to the president. He assigns Marc to meet with us to work out the details. It ended up being like a, it was the most extensive bargaining session I’ve ever had in my later experience as a union member, as an officer. We bargained all summer on what would be bylaws for the faculty, what we could and couldn’t do and how we would meet. And the highest faculty officer, the only elected faculty officer actually, was the secretary and I was it. I was the secretary. And Bob Carter presided as the president and with his absence, I guess the dean of students, no the dean--whatever the academic dean was. I don’t remember using the title provost in those days--[the dean] would preside.

So the time came when the board went around one day while one of my friends Bob Duncan was president, chair of the Social Science Department, who was pretty well plugged in, came to me and said “Would you sign a petition to the board saying that we think that it’s time for Bob Carter to go.” I forget exactly how it was worded. It was going around and I looked at the signatures, then, you know, they wouldn’t be doing this if they didn’t know it would be well received. So I signed the thing, and then we were scheduled to have a faculty meeting and we had decided we were going to move for a motion of no confidence and I said, “What do we do if someone wants a secret ballot?” So I went to the meeting carrying a briefcase, minutes, the usual votes, and enough blank paper for secret ballots. And Bob Carter stood up and . . . oh God the names are getting away from me. [Pause] I can’t remember who we asked to make the motion.

And he did and Bob Carter said “That’s the way it is.” And if I recall he may have walked out but he understood exactly what was going on. He said “I’m going.” And he had, because every college has to have somebody in place as its acting president in case something happens, he had to devolve Marc Selman.

Now normally it would devolve on the senior academic officer, whatever his title is nowadays, it would be vice president provost, or it might have been the dean of instruction at that time, or vice president of academic affairs. Whatever the title was, Marc was just assistant to the president so this was kind of ignoring the chain of command. And so Marc acted like he was the acting president for a while, until the board had enough I guess and put Bob Lowry in. So we had several interims in there! Until that resolved and Watrel came and everything quieted down again until Al Watrel, I guess, I don’t know the details of this one. I don’t know if . . . .

Jim Roberts I guess, I don’t know what the conflict was, but Watrel got pushed out. And Watrel got pushed out with nine years of service and he needed ten years to invest his pension; he was real upset about it. So he obviously, you know, in some respects college presidents are like baseball managers. They all understand the pearls of the job and they sort of try to help each other, but Watrel got pushed out before he wanted to go, and he ended up in North Dakota, where is he, in Aberdeen, South Dakota at a state college in the Dakotas. [Laughs] So you know he had a tough year somewhere along the line, and got himself another presidency, just like baseball managers always end up somewhere, somebody finds them a job whether they’re scouting or doing something. So you know that was Watrel and don’t ask me who comes after all that. If you name one I’ll tell you what I know about him, but, by the way, I even know the current ones; I’m on very friendly terms with both Smiths.

BC: Oh yeah? Let’s see who was after that? It would have been Watrel. That would have been in the ‘80s right? It would have been after Watrel came in right?

IK: Yeah it was . . . yeah the guy came up from Florida, stayed four or five years, left voluntarily. He took a job in Kentucky. And then I think Aebersold came along because by then he was the vice president.

BC: Okay [pause] do you have any people here that influenced you when you first arrived or while you were here?

IK: Well, Carl Laughner and Milt Carless always talked like they hired me. [Laughs] They would talk to me like they were my big brother, or you know like “We took care of you.” [Laughs] Running the department when there are only four, five, six people wasn’t much of an administrative problem. Actually, when I first came, all the scheduling and class assignments were done by the dean of instruction, so I didn’t even control that. As soon as I got control of that I saw to it that I didn’t have any Saturday classes, and I didn’t have any eight o’clock classes; I’m not a morning person. On the other hand, Carless would come in and say, I’d say

“What do you want to do with the Theatre people?” You know, what theater classes are offered. He’d tell me, and he’d tell me when he wanted to offer them, and he’d tell me what classes he wanted. He always wanted to teach first, you have to understand that, I was very fortunate. He liked to teach eight o’clock classes. He wanted to teach from eight to noon, go home, take a nap, come back in the evening and rehearse his plays. I wanted to come wandering in around nine or nine-thirty in the morning, teach, then when everybody left in the afternoon I could sit down in my office and write letters and memos because nobody was around. So we got along fine, the department grew, we added a couple of people. [In] 1963 we added a technical theatre person so there were two of them over there. Oh boy, that department grew. Eventually they split Theatre off; into a separate department.

Who else? Bob Duncan, who I mentioned was chairman of Social Studies, was a personal friend, and had been here a long time and I think understood things. I played bridge with him for many years. Ray Biswanger, who came the same year I did, was chairman of the English Department, and another personal friend, probably another Philadelphian, but different part of town. I don’t know what to tell you about that kind of thing.

People on staff: we had good working relations with my colleagues, I don’t think I ever had problems with my colleagues. Speech changed, somewhere in the early ‘70s, after Ted Walwik came in. To me it’s marketing: “Communication” sells better than “Speech.” But it also represented the fact that we were no longer primarily into public speaking, interpersonal communications, or speech therapy. That type of stuff, we were going to get more and more into the mass media. We had always taught the radio class, and some of that . . . television. So when we moved over that way, and of course as I said, as that progressed, when they finally reorganized somewhere in the late ‘80s, and created the School of Business and Information Sciences, Ted interacted with Dean Mastriani, and we went over to Business and Information Sciences. Theatre got split off and went over to what eventually became the Fine Arts [Department], of course I think initially they were just over in Liberal Arts, however that got reorganized. So, and the department was more and more focused on mass media and . . . it represents a shift in some respects from thinking of communication as a humanistic study, with some aspects that are social science, to one that is perhaps more heavily social sciences. Numbers, matching, and that type of stuff, unless it is humanistic.

I’m a rhetorician; I trace my discipline back to Aristotle and Plato, you see? Maybe before that. Knowing of course that there are ways to test the efficacy of principles of effective communication using structured studies. It’s still at heart; you listen to a speech or read a speech, critique it on the basis of the standards which an English teacher would critique a work of literature. You obviously won’t get other things that an English teacher looks at because you don’t just look at the content of the message, you look at the environment it was given in. English teachers . . . English people might do that too. There’s a shift in where the discipline is

going but that was not only true for Slippery Rock, it was true nationally. The national organization evolved into the National Communications Association.

By the way, that reminds me of something. I was active in what was then the Pennsylvania Speech Association; they changed their name and now they're the Pennsylvania Communication Association. I'm the past president of that, past editor of their annual. So I did my turn.

BC: Do you have any major events or activities you remember when you were here in terms of national significance or things that happened on campus?

IK: I gave a lecture a couple of years ago for the Institute of Learning in Retirement. Eleanor Roosevelt came here to speak in the spring of 1962, okay? [Pause] She's getting on in years; in fact she died within a few months of being here. Oh you asked me who influenced me; I have to tell you about Emma Guffey Miller. [BC laughs] [Referencing Brady] You started to laugh, do you know of whom I am talking about?

BC: Yes.

IK: Ok, well, Emma was on the board; she was a board member. And [pause] that would not have caused me to know her, the reason I knew Emma Guffey is my wife got pulled into two activities while we were here, which made her happy. One is she got involved with the Slippery Rock Democratic Women's Club, of which Emma Guffey Miller was the "good gray eminence." [BC laughs] Nowadays I think they may even call it the Emma Guffey Miller Democratic Women's Club, but in those days she was still alive, and she was obviously a member and if she showed up the club revolved around her. And I'm trying to think--my wife ultimately became president of the club.

The other thing is my wife got pulled into was girl scouting, I have three daughters, and [she] was a troop leader. She had a degree in journalism so one day somebody said "Would you help edit the, whatever the newsletter is for the Keystone Tall Tree Girl Scout Council?" And beginning with that she ended up being first a board member, then officer and all the way to president of the Keystone Girl Scout Council for several years. And because of that, she said to me, "You understand some numbers, I'm putting you on the finance committee," so I became . . . I'm a life member of the Girl Scouts [laughter]. So I was active with the Girl Scouts in an administrative capacity. Occasionally I did a little teaching and meeting procedure and stuff, so except for helping my wife with the girls I never was a leader of anything.

And you know, so, we had a nice life here at Slippery Rock involved in activities. I'm going back to Emma Guffey Miller: here I know a prominent board member. She's the Democratic National Committee woman from Pennsylvania. Do you know why Miller Auditorium is named for her? Did anyone tell you this story?

BC: No.

IK: Well let me tell you the story as I've heard it. It may be apocryphal. I told you Weisenfluh was in under the Democratic leadership, I think, Emma may have been Chairman on the Board of Trustees. By the way, the board didn't have that much power then, anymore than it has a great deal of power now. In those days, there was a Bureau of Higher Education within the State Department of Education, and that bureau granted fourteen state teachers colleges, which were seen, of course, as part of the process of running the public school system. And each one was responsible for certain disciplines; ours was phys. ed. Everybody did elementary and secondary ed. and everybody did something more. We did phys. ed., Edinboro [University of Pennsylvania] did art, IUP [Indiana University of Pennsylvania] did business . . . I'm trying to think what else they did. Westchester [University of Pennsylvania] oh I guess music's down in IUP and stuff like that. Industrial arts is at California [University of Pennsylvania]. But anyhow here we be.

So I knew a board member. Alright the story is that in those days the capital budget for putting up buildings was passed by the legislature every two years. They didn't meet as much as they do now. And Emma came in, I don't know why she was on campus, but she went to see Dr. Weisenfluh, the president, his office in those days was on the first floor. And he said, "I'm glad you came in, I'm having a problem. The legislature is considering the capital budget, we're anxious to get this auditorium through, because otherwise it would otherwise it will be held up a couple of years, and do you think you could help us?" She said, "Sure, could I use your phone?" This is the way the story was told to me, not by her. So she picks up the phone and she calls David Lawrence, that's whose name I couldn't think of, the governor of Pennsylvania. You know, the conversation, I can visualize this, I knew Emma long enough, and she says, "David, this is Emma." "Yes Emma, what can I do for you?" "I'm over here at Slippery Rock at the president's office. It's important that the funding for the new auditorium go through now because it will be delayed." "I'll see what I can do, Emma." or whatever; I don't know the text of exactly what happened, all I know is it got approved. You know, she had that kind of connection to get it done. And so what else could they do but name the place for her?

Oh by the way, when it was built, which it came online I think in nineteen . . . when I got here in '61, it had already been in use for about a year. There's a little theatre in the basement of Maltby, the old library down there, that they used to use. It seats maybe one hundred and fifty people. Miller seats eight hundred and some. Miller was intended to seat the entire student body. Okay? [Laughter] Tells you what's happened to the place, or why we need a new one.

But Emma, knowing Emma was something else. When I was active at the Pennsylvania Speech Association, each year we'd give out an award to the speaker of the year. We'd given it to Fred Rogers, I'm trying to think who else, we probably gave it to David Lawrence, prominent people of all kinds, not necessarily politicians. And one year, at executive committee, I suggested we give it to Emma Guffey Miller, and I told them a little bit about her and who she was. So we

were meeting in Pittsburgh that year so we agreed to give it to Emma and she agreed to come. I was in Pittsburgh; my wife brought her down because she didn't drive. And you had to know Emma, because Lois tells me as soon as she got there she said, "I need a cocktail." And so they went into the lounge and she got a cocktail, this was before, I guess it was a dinner meeting and it was in the afternoon. And she came on and she gave this nice extemporaneous speech on "My life in politics, how I started out as a little kid," and her father was sheriff of [pause] she lived in Greensburg but, are you from Pennsylvania?

BC: Mhmm.

IK: I'm trying to think what county it is. Westmoreland! Her father was sheriff of Westmoreland County when she was a kid I guess or something. She loved politics. I think she was remembering when she started talking about her first recollection of a political contest, I think it was 1884 or something. She graduated from Bryn Mawr in 1901 or some such. If I'd brought my notes I could tell you, as I said I gave a lecture on her at one point. So she'd been in politics all her life and she gave this long rambling speech.

A former colleague of mine, actually he was both a colleague and a professor of mine, both at Temple and Missouri because he changed, he went from Temple after I left to Missouri where I still was and was working for Smith, Kline and French, now taken over by somebody else, as their in-house communications person who trained detail men on their sales pitches and they would go around and give speeches to Rotaries and service clubs and other groups on developments in pharmaceuticals. So that's what he did. Bob Hockinson was his name. So Bob, we had taped the speech and Bob arranged to have it, to do what you're going to do, to have his secretary transcribe it. And of course we told Emma we'd print it. It was an interesting speech. So they sent it to Emma and suggested that if she wanted to edit it I would help her with it. So I ended up making several trips; she lived out here on West Water Street, you go right across Wolf Creek, up the far side of Wolf Creek. So she'd call me up and she'd say, "Irvy, this is Emma. Can you come out at 5 o'clock today or tomorrow?" No more than that and I'd say, "Yes, Mrs. Miller." "Well I'll see you then." She was hard of hearing, so there was no point in trying to carry on a conversation. [Laughter]

So I'd drive out there and the typical meeting would go something like this: I'd arrive, and I'd come in and her housekeeper would say "She'll be down in a few minutes," and I'd wait then she'd come down and she'd say, "Come with me." And she would take me into what I guess is technically the butler's pantry, and she would get a tray of ice cubes out of the refrigerator and she'd put them in an ice cube thing and she'd take a bottle of bourbon and take it out to the sitting room and she'd get a glass and put some cubes in it and pour herself a couple inches of bourbon and hand me the bottle and say, "I never pour for a gentleman." [Laughter] So I'd pour some whiskey in there and I would drink it, sip, and then we'd go over the manuscript. I think about two round-trips did it on that case.

I had previously helped [pause] a friend, Charles [Halt]; he taught social studies and Charlie had for his doctoral dissertation at, if I recall correctly it was Syracuse, had written a dissertation about Emma's brother who was a United States Senator, served two terms from 1934 to 1946. And we had gone out and taped Emma so that he could have a record to work with when he was working on his dissertation. And I had run, in those days, a reel-to-reel tape recorder, he took me along and I had the tape recorder and I knew what to do with it, so I met Emma at those occasions so she and I were on good terms. She was a real character. Occasionally she would have some sort of gathering and whether Lois got invited because she was one of the local Democrats, you know. She always showed up to the annual picnic for the Democratic Women's Club. Knowing her was one of the most interesting people I have ever met. Mentor? No.

I'll finish this story up, when the Bob Carter thing blew up although Bob was brought in by the Republicans on the board, and Emma was a good Democrat, she was still on the board. And we decided at the meeting in which the board was going to consider what to do about Bob Carter that we would go sit in, the theory being that it was an open meeting. In those days, there was no formal law that made meetings open, the sunshine law or whatever. It was before it was passed, but we just presumed it was, and we knew the meeting was going to be held down at the Field House and they found a big conference room down there. So about a dozen of us showed up and sat down while the board was having lunch. Emma walked in, and turned to George Kiester, local judge in those days and chairman of the board, and said, "Who are these people?" And George said, "This is your faculty." And she was a little upset with us, I can tell you that.

My youngest daughter went to Northeastern and I was in Boston one time and Emma's papers are up at the Schlesinger Collection [the Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America]. They're not here, what's here is some odds and ends. There is stuff here, but all the important stuff is up at Radcliffe [Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University] in the Schlesinger Collection on women's history. So I go up and I look at Emma's papers to see if there's anything, I keep thinking, some days I toy with the idea of writing a biography or something. That's more labor than I plan on getting into. And I find myself in the index. And somebody, Lila, the board member from Slippery Rock had written her a letter and told her about who were the activists who were upset with Bob Carter [laughter]. So there I am, buried in the documents.

Wherever we are . . . ramble on to the next question.

BC: Okay, well what do you miss about being at SRU?

IK: I don't miss very much at all. When I retired . . . my wife's dead, but she was still alive at that point. We'd come over here and we could audit classes, and so we took some classes, and then when she died I continued to take classes. Then we organized this ILR, the Institute for Learning in Retirement, I was one of the founders of it, and I teach and I take classes. What more

could I want to do? You teach the things you feel like doing, but mostly I run the current affairs discussion group. Occasionally I've done other things like this lecture I gave on Emma Guffey Miller and Eleanor Roosevelt, and [pause] so I work with people who want to be there, who aren't required to be there to meet some curriculum [inaudible]. I sit in on classes of people whose teaching I appreciate, I figure I'd learn something, once in awhile I hear someone I don't think too well of, but that's beside the point. And you know, you learn what you need to learn, I don't have to worry about exams, even though I was auditing classes I didn't take the final exams.

BC: What words of wisdom do you have for current or future Rock community members?

IK: Rock community members? You define community as faculty or students?

BC: Uh—everybody [laughs].

IK: As far as students, because I wish they had more breadth of curiosity, that's all. They seem to be . . . now remember I taught a fair portion of my teaching until the day I retired in required courses and the saving grace was that I got to teach one or two advanced courses. And the kids in the required courses, I say kids of course, they were eighteen, nineteen, twenty tops. The kids are . . . they want to get a degree. They're here to get credits, diplomas, and then I suppose entry to the world of work. And in many cases their interest is "What do I need to know to pass the exam and get a grade," whatever grade they decided they wanted to get out of the class. I have a feeling many students came into a public speaking class and said, "I'll be happy for a C," when with a little effort they could've had a B or an A. And so they're somewhat limited, a good question in a sense is whether it's actually said or not is "Will it be on the exam?" not "What can I learn from this today." That's what is nice about teaching seniors who show up voluntarily you know, but [pause] that's my advice to the kids, and frankly I have the same attitude towards my grandson who is about to start college, I have a feeling he is going to have tunnel vision too.

Now, as far as the faculty? Well you know some of that carries over to the faculty. When I got finished with my oral exams for my doctorate, they shook my hand and said, "Welcome to the community of scholars." And [pause] there was still some of this attitude that there was such a thing as a community of scholars, that we were educated people with broad interests and a desire to know things. Sometimes I think that there are a lot of people floating around with doctoral degrees, and you're still students you need to figure that out for yourself, who know a lot about a little and don't care much about anything much else. Now, it may be generational, it may be that they care a lot about things that I don't care about, I know that is true for example with music. I like classical music; we grew up going to the Philadelphia Orchestra as a kid. I mean from the time I was a teenager on, if I wasn't otherwise occupied, I could go down and stand in line and get a rush seat at the Philadelphia Orchestra, of course in those days it was fifty cents [laughter], and you know hear the symphony. In the days when records weren't very good and not much of



it was broadcast. I went with my brother more often than not, and he's five years older than me; he did the same thing. And of course we went to the library . . . .

[Sound of computer logging off in background]

IK: Does that mean we have to put another disc in?

BC: No, it's . . . unrelated [laughs].

IK: And so, you know, there was this kind of attitude growing up, my father was a tool and die worker, I didn't grow up in an academic or professional family, but the family had a lot of curiosity. And we read the papers and we talked about the news, and the news included what was going on at the art museum or the symphony or something. That attitude, I don't know if it is still around, you know, a lot of these kids.

I told you in the first part of this . . . I was talking about music. My grandsons, I'm sure, know a lot about music, they just don't know anything about the kind of music that I know about, and I don't know anything about the kind of music they know about, so it's not maybe that they aren't curious, they're just not curious about what I am curious about. But you know there is that kind of a . . . it is partly a generational shift. The mass culture . . . I still . . . well.

I was just talking to Bob Fidoten yesterday; the Communication Department retirees get together for the last couple years and have a picnic. Our dear former chairman Ted Walwik is still around and he still organizes things so . . . [laughs]. Bob Fidoten was there, we were talking, he lives in Pittsburgh, Nancy [Mickle] and I go to the opera, we go to the theater. Ken Harris was there, he's the former head of the Theater Department. But if I looked around at other members of the retirees who were there, I don't see many of them. So whether it is difference of interest, I don't know. It's like [pause, sighs] I don't know.

Of course the fact is that I took my kids to the symphony and I don't go anymore [laughter]. One of them is really into theatre; actually all of them probably go to the theater.

Hey, did your mother give you dancing lessons when you were smaller? [Referencing Lindsay] Yeah, mine did too [inaudible] ballet. I mean *my* kids. The fact is I also took them to . . . I had the feeling that kids ought to grow up feeling at home at a baseball game, we took them to football games, we'd take them occasionally to see the Pirates play, you know they ought to be at home at almost any kind of activity, it's part of the broad spectrum of American culture. I hope that's true for the undergraduates but sometimes I wonder.

BC: Alright how would you like to be remembered?

IK: [Laughs] Coming up on eighty? A lady sat behind me at the theater last time I went, tapped me on the shoulder and said, "How are you, Dr. Kuhr?" And I turned around, of course I

wouldn't recognize her, after all the last time I had seen her she was probably twenty-two years old [laughs]. And I asked her when she got out and I think she said 'sixty, somewhere in the sixties; she is now retired from teaching.

I'd like to be remembered, I'd like people to think not only will I remember him but I hope it's kindly. But I'm sure some people think I was a bore. You know, when you teach twenty-five students there's probably a couple who get some sense of really trying to learn, some who just aren't going to make it through college anyhow, just filling up space because they can't think of what else to do with themselves. I think . . . I started teaching as a grad assistant in 1949, and I retired in the fall semester of 1991.

What was I going to say . . . there had been a change in the students . . . oh! Alright; with that expansion, when I went to college there was a major shift: World War II was a marketer. My own brother, who is five years older than me, couldn't afford to go to college when he got out of high school. He went eventually on the GI Bill. None of my first cousins who were older than me went to college, male or female. Every one of my first cousins, beginning with my brother and one cousin who was a year older than me, and all of us younger [ones] went to college.

If you go back to the '30s, I don't know if even twenty percent of the population even tried to go to college, and maybe ten percent finished. And now we want to send fifty or sixty percent of the population. So we're educating a different group of people. Now, I'm not saying they're not capable, but they're being drawn from different stratas of the social system I guess. We make college kind of . . . right, and I have no problem with that. My problem is I think there are a lot of people in college . . . college is an academic thing, not all intelligence is the kind of intelligence that works in the classroom. And I think there are people sitting in those classrooms who would be much more successful, and I suspect happy, if they were apprenticed as electricians or machinists, like my father, you know, or other trades that make them *do* things rather than sit still and listen. You know they're not book learners. Because they don't know what to do with themselves they come to college, and then after awhile, what's the attrition rate, about half? Only about forty percent graduate in four years. Throw in another ten percent if you round it up to six. So about half the students, or a third of the students who come, really aren't . . . I'm not saying they're not college material, really don't have the learning styles and the interests that fit being in college. And obviously they create problems for the teachers and we probably create problems for them. But I don't know, in this present economy, we make college degrees necessary for all kinds of things which used to be doable with a high school diploma probably.

BC: Okay do you have anything else to add that we haven't touched on yet?

IK: What else is on your list that we may not have touched on? Oh my I've led an interesting life, I've enjoyed it for the most part, I've always had good friends, best and worst teaching

moments . . . I think I've contributed some to the college, as I've said. [Pause] Repeat the question again.

BC: Anything else you'd like to throw into the mix?

IK: I like young people; I still like them. I suspect that my teaching . . . that was the other thought I had. Teachers have teaching styles and students have learning styles, and if they mesh, the student is happy with the teacher and vice versa. If they don't mesh, the student isn't. That might not mean that student won't go down the hall, take a different teacher and be happy.

So, it was an interesting life, I don't regret a bit of it. And I'm always glad I came to Slippery Rock; my wife and I were very happy here. We used to wonder about the kids growing up, we both went to selective high schools in big cities and academic preparatory programs and our kids went to Slippery Rock High. But you know the kids did okay when they got to college, my middle daughter went to Carnegie Mellon, came home, and said, "You know I didn't learn much in my high school physics class; but I've discovered nobody else did either, so I guess I'll make it." [Laughter] So it's like that, they got an education because they wanted to get an education. By the way, that one is an engineer, I'm proud of my kids but you don't want to get me on that. So yeah, I was in town yesterday visiting a couple old friends, academics; unfortunately, we're all getting up in years.

BC: Alright, well on behalf of myself and Lindsay and Rock Voices, I'd like to thank you for coming in today.

IK: I should thank you, you're a good audience; you encouraged me to talk. If you hadn't responded I would have probably shut up.

BC: Alright.