

Rock Voices: The Oral History Project of Slippery Rock University
Gary Wakefield Interview
April 10, 2009
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TD: Today is April 10, 2009; I am Teresa DeBacco for the Rock Voices Oral History Program and I'm here today with Gary Wakefield. How are you today?

GW: Good morning. I'm fine.

TD: Well I'm going to start with asking you to introduce yourself. Can you tell me a little biographical information, maybe your date of birth and where you're from?

GW: Right, of course. Well my name is Gary Wakefield and I was born in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, in Cambria County, May of 1944. Lived in Slippery Rock from 1974 'til present, 2009. Moved here from Washington D.C. and worked for the university from '74 to '88. Then I went into private business and have been there ever since.

TD: Do you want to talk a little bit about your education before you came here to teach?

GW: Sure. Both my bachelor's degree and master's degrees are from Penn State University, main campus. I spent almost seven years on that campus, did a bachelor's degree in forestry and a master's in wildlife management. [Pause] Actually I was responsible for initiating the Bear Research Project in the state of Pennsylvania under my master's program.

TD: Can you talk a little bit about your affiliation with Slippery Rock University?

GW: Well again, I guess it began in 1974 when I was recruited while here for the National Rifle Association, doing a workshop. The Recreation Department had a summer workshop and I was part of a team that came up from Washington and they happened to be looking for a wildlife manager. I had two small boys at the time and didn't really like raising them in metropolitan Washington D.C., with all the crime and everything, and the opportunity came and I was offered a position and I came here.

TD: What Slippery Rock era were you here: the teachers college, the state college, or the university?

GW: It was a state college.

TD: And can you talk a little bit about that? Were you here for any of the transitions between the state college and the university?

GW: Yeah, when they decided to rename it a university, I was around. I can't remember whether I was still on campus or not, but I didn't see much of a change at that point.

I noticed in reviewing your questions you were asking about changes. The one change I saw which was evident to me and to a number of the faculty I worked with who'd been here a long time—one of which was Gene Boyer: he and I shared an office in the Parks and Recreation Department which is where I worked—was the increasing size of the administration. [Pause] Gene Boyer always made the statement, "There's about three times as many administrators here now as when I began to teach." And I think that I probably feel the same way. They cut back on the teaching faculty but increase the number of vice presidents and deans to the point where it's become ridiculous. Well, a lot of it all starts with top heavy administration. Education has become a big business.

TD: Definitely.

GW: It's a big business, and it's being run as a business, not necessarily with the goal being to educate young people. It's retention, retention because if you retain people you keep tuition dollars and that pays the salaries.

TD: Can you talk a little bit about the department you were hired into?

GW: It was the Parks and Recreational Department. At that time the department chair was J.W. Shiner, Bill Shiner. He's the one that hired me, and it was a very active, growing department at that time and it grew well over, at a point, well over 500 majors. And it slipped back now, probably, I don't know what the enrollment is now. I know Bruce Boliver who is the current chair of the department; he was an instructor who was hired after I was. But he came in, he had been a student here, a graduate student, and ended up getting a position here on the faculty and just kind of stayed and had some longevity. He's a good man, and he's overseen the department for the last few years.

TD: What buildings did you usually work in?

GW: Eisenberg [Classroom Building]. The department was centered in Eisenberg and my office was up in the second floor of Eisenberg.

TD: When you first came here what were your impressions of Slippery Rock? What was it like when you first came; what really big changes did you witness and were they good changes or bad changes?

GW: Well when I came here—I was originally a small town boy and I was actually scared of Washington D.C. Again, I didn't want to raise my family there. And I was attracted by the small town atmosphere of Slippery Rock. A woman I knew, a Sunday school teacher when I was

small, she had been a teacher and she had graduated from Slippery Rock. It was the name that always intrigued me.

And so the possibility of coming back to Pennsylvania, which is my home, and teaching in a small town at a university—or the college at that time. Slippery Rock intrigued me and the fact that the cost of living was going to be much less than in Washington D.C., that drew me here. I found the campus very friendly. One of the things, Brad Keith at that time was dean of the Physical Education Department, and he said whenever you walk across campus here everybody says hello to everybody and says good morning. Well we kind of lost that now you know, but it was a very friendly place. People did do that, they did say hello to you, they did acknowledge your presence on the sidewalk and things like that which was nice. It was nice.

TD: Well let's talk a little bit about your campus activities. What were you involved in: any committees, maybe APSCUF-affiliated at all?

GW: I tried to stay away from committees [laughs]. They always tend to be very political and take up a lot of time and don't accomplish a whole lot, and so I pretty much stayed out of committees. I tried to concentrate my efforts on working with the students. And the reasons I left here were political.

I really missed and still miss working with the students. They were fun. They were fun and they were motivated—most of them were motivated and you helped them, you gave them some guidance and it was a lot of fun. But the down part was always the politics of playing the game.

As I said earlier I found that education was a big business. And when you flunked two or more students in a class, you got called in by the dean, "Why'd you flunk these people?" Because when you flunk people they fail: they drop out or flunk out of college, and they didn't have the tuition dollars anymore. So if you demanded academic excellence and some of the people couldn't cut it, you got called to the carpet, because they're not passing or the grades are not good enough. And so, you know, you had to give out a certain amount of As. I mean there wasn't a quota, but if there wasn't a normal distribution of As, Bs, Cs, Ds, and very few Fs (they might tolerate one), then you're not teaching right. And I was known in the department among the students as probably one of the toughest graders in the department. But I had students come back to me after they graduated and said, "You know you were the toughest grader, but I learned more from you than anybody else while I was here."

I'm saying what are we here for? Are we here to teach or to help pass out grades? Because I remember teachers I had while I was in high school and college, you know the ones that made you bust your hump, those are the ones you really remember. You remembered them, you didn't want to take them again, but you learned the most from them, and that's what I tried to do. I tried and I had very difficult tests, and pop quizzes. I didn't spoon-feed the text material to students. I said, "You read the text, I'll lecture on the pertinent material. If you have any questions on the textbook, bring them out. If you don't have any questions on the text reading, I will have some." So that would initiate a discussion in every class. I'll ask them, "Does anyone have any questions on the reading assignment?" And if we had a ten-fifteen minute discussion on the reading

assignment then I'd go on with my lecture. If we didn't then I'd pass out a quiz. So I said, "If you don't have questions on the readings then I do." And that worked very well.

One of the most humorous—you're talking about teaching [laughs]—they always complained about how tough my tests were. And I said, "Okay, alright, I'll let you guys make up the test. Everybody submit a question. Everyone in the class submits a question, I'll pull the questions together and that will be the test." Well that sounds really great, everybody got into that. But what everybody does is they go back to their dorm room or their apartment and they figure I'm going to make up a question that only I know the answer to, so I will be the only one who gets 100 on the test. But they all do that. You end up with a, excuse the phrase, a real ball-buster of a test. I mean worse than anything I could've ever put together. And fortunately I didn't put the names of the students who submitted the questions on there, or their classmates would've gone after them, but it was terrible, I mean it was *awful*—it was so difficult because everybody put the question only they would know the answer to. It's some minor little point. And everybody did it and they kind of shot themselves in the foot with that. So, it's kind of humorous.

TD: Let's talk a little bit about your accomplishments while you were here. When I researched you I found a lot of things about you. Do you want to start with Camp Whitewood?

GW: Camp Whitewood was . . . the university was approached by the Mentor School District, over in Ohio, about cooperating with them in an outdoor education program. And we had a course in our curriculum, I think it was Parks and Recreation 351, in which we taught about organized camping. Camping and Outdoor Education it was called. It was about organized camping, like Boy Scout camps, Girl Scout camps, YMCA camps, commercial camps, summer camps for children, things like that. It was about administration, organization, and operation of one of those.

And what the Mentor School District was doing was: they had a program which all of their sixth grade students, every year, went to this place called Camp Whitewood. It was near Windsor, Ohio. And they went there and for five days. They bused sixth graders there and they came with their teachers and they put them in cabins, girls and boys cabins, and then they had an outdoor education experience from Monday 'til Friday. And they needed counselors. Well here was an opportunity to provide everybody in the 351 classes, there's usually two sections of that class, with a counseling and outdoor education experience. And some of them had had some of that; many of them had never been in a camp overnight. And so [pause] we, the university, came to an agreement with them that we would supply counselors through 351. So every one of the students in 351 would have the—this was very difficult to do because we had to have the cooperation of the faculty, not only our own faculty but all faculty. The kids would miss a week of class work. And they would work with their instructors and teachers to make sure it all got made up, and at the time they would have to work on things.

But they would go over there on Monday, [I'd] take them over by van and they would be assigned a cabin. And they would be over there for the full week with these children. I would go back over with a female faculty member from here on Wednesday—on Tuesday evenings, and we would have a critique. We'd break out: the teachers would take the children and we would

take the Slippery Rock students and we would meet. And the female faculty member would meet with the young women teachers and I would meet with the young men. I'd say, "What kind of problems are you having; what are you experiencing here?" and then it would be a teaching moment. We'd talk about situations they were facing, what they were seeing, commenting on how they couldn't believe how much energy these little sixth graders had [laughs]: that was one of the things they learned.

And then they would come back from that experience very committed and some of them said they really changed—we ended up having a lot of people join us from the Elementary Education Department. They started sending people; they also wanted to go too. And we had a number of them say it recommitted them to their major. But we had others say that they now decided they didn't really want to be elementary teachers [laughs] after working with kids. But that was good they found that out now, you know, not after four years and a degree and going to work. They found that out now.

So it was a very great experience and the people at the Mentor School District and Mentor School System were very helpful [pause] and supportive, and that went on for a number of years. I'd say six or seven anyway, that went on, and it was really valuable for our students. It took a lot of logistics, and it took a lot of cooperation from faculty but it was a lot of fun too. [The] kids learned an awful lot about organized camping in that five day intensive period, and they'd come back and they were always really pumped up. So it was really a lot of fun.

And then from that point on—that usually occurred in October—from that point on its November and early December for the rest of the course, those classes were really a lot of fun, because people had been through this experience together. It was something that unified them, and you had no problem bringing up discussions and have them realize why this is important and that's important; because they've been there and they've done it and it was fresh in their experience.

TD: Let's also talk a little bit about the ski course that was built, near campus, on campus

GW: We got that all started when I was brought here as a faculty member in the Parks and Recreation Department. I was also assigned to teach some Physical Education courses, and those courses were canoeing down at Moraine Park, basic camping, and cross country skiing. At that point I'd never had a pair of cross country skis on in my life, and we had a fellow here who was working at the Union, was a Hungarian immigrant, and he had been quite a cross country skier. So he and I and one of the people from the Union, A. J. Huadleston, went out to one of the game lands around here in the snow that winter and he taught me to cross country ski—some of the rudiments. And then I self-taught the rest of it and started teaching the courses, and that was back in the mid '70s.

And then we got to know—I can't remember how to contact was made, but we made some contact with the United States Ski Association. And of course they're—one of the things they like to do is to see the sports, games advance and expand. Then they found out we were doing some things down here and so they offered to come down and do some workshops; they came down from Vermont. We got a relationship developed there and we were trying to create more

awareness and the subject came up of having a race here. Well where are you going to race? You know, we're talking about cross country not Alpine. We're talking about cross country, Nordic.

And so [pause] I can't tell you the details now, but we got together with the Buildings and Grounds people and we created a cross country ski course on campus. It ran from where the present ski lodge is, through the woods toward Branchton Road. Then it ran up into the fields on top of the hill past the water tower, and down into the pine woods at the end of Cooper Street and circled back around and came up past what used to be the old ball field up on top of the hill, back past the water tower and down over the hill behind . . . partway down the hill behind the new dorms, where they are now, because all that woods is gone, and back up on top of the hill and came down the ski slope and that was just one lap. There were like three laps in the race.

We ended up getting that trail laid, all grubbed out and in some places it had to be dug into the side to get it leveled off. I was able to get the trail groomed and prepared for a race and the U.S. Ski Association brought in members of the United States Ski Team, who came in for that race and to help with the workshop. And we ended up, you know, big thing in the paper.

We did a race here and a race in Venango County at the Two Mile Run county park up there. I also had helped them construct the course up there. So we had two ski races, one was on a Friday and one was on Sunday, I think it was. We got a lot of coverage in The Butler Eagle and The Allied News and The Oil City Derrick and the Franklin newspaper. It was all kinds of coverage, and we had a lot of good times, a lot of good times with that. But having the United States Ski Team here on campus racing was a big draw. It was big stuff then. That was leading up to the 1980 Olympics.

TD: I also saw that you even had your own ski business: you had the Tamarack Lakes Ski Touring Center. Do you want to talk a little bit about that?

GW: Yeah, well that came out of [the] experience of people wanting to be taught workshops, besides the courses. Also taught some workshops between the semesters in winter on cross country skiing. A lot of local people had started skiing and they had no place to go. My wife and I owned a small farm south of town and so we turned that farm and adjacent property into a touring center. We took a building we had on the property, turned it into a ski house where we had rental skis and we made trails through the woods and groomed them. In fact, we got some very advanced grooming equipment.

We drew people to that from as far away as Cleveland and Morgantown and east, I don't know how far east, Clearfield anyway. We drew from a large area. And we were in that for a number of years until snow gave out. Up until probably ten years ago, we were still getting calls. Every now and then people would call, "Are you still running that?" And of course we hadn't run it probably since '82. So as late as 1998, '99 we're still getting calls about it, telephone calls about it.

TD: I also saw that you were a referee for the 1980 Winter Olympics. Do you want to talk a little bit about your Olympic experience?

GW: Certainly. That was a high point. It came from the involvement with the U.S. ski team and the U.S. Ski Association because of what we'd been doing here. When they started looking for voluntary officials, they asked me if I would want to participate. And I went to the dean and I told him that I had been asked to be an official for the Winter Olympics and they gave me permission to do it. They knew I was going to have to be away for a week in 1979 and two weeks in 1980, up at Lake Placid. In '79 they do an event, what's called the pre-Olympics, which is the shakedown for all the events, so that your team is pulled together with the people you are officiating with, and you all learn your jobs and you work with the officials. I was the assistant finish referee for cross country and biathlon.

I worked with a gentleman named George Carrow who was from Brattleboro, Vermont. George was the finish referee and I was his assistant. And what we—what my duties were on cross country and biathlon was what's called "pre-call." I was stationed about 100 meters from the end of the race, and I was hooked up via headset to the timing building. I would pre-call the numbers of the skiers that were coming in, in what order they were coming. They had all the times running on a computer, but they would have to call up the right time, you know? If skier number 88 was coming in you'd call and have them pull up number 88's time, so when they broke the beam at the finish that it would set to him. So if I had number 8 overtaking number 76, I had to say that at the finish—you know when it was coming to the finish—and I would come and give the timers a little warning as to what was happening out there so they could be ready, when they came to the finish. That was exciting to see that because everything happens right there at the finish, you know, if there's going to be any juggling for positions it begins to occur right there at about the 100 meter mark. So that was my job for that.

In the relay races I was tag referee. I had to monitor the relays and make sure that the skiers actually touched each other when they were on the relay. There was a very interesting thing that came out of that, a lot of interesting stories. At that time the Cold War was still at its height and the Russian team, the Soviet team, was pretty much dominant in women's cross country skiing. And they were pretty much expected to take the gold medal in both events, men's and women's. [Pause] The women's event was first, the woman's 4x5 kilometer relay was first. And in the third leg of the relay the Russians were winning. But in the fourth leg, the anchor leg, the East Germans passed them and the Soviet team ended up with the silver medal.

Now, custom was, and this is for all teams, all skiers, when they finish a race, after they went through the finish line, there was an area, a kind of cool down area, they went in there—teammates usually came over, they threw a blanket or a jacket over them so they didn't get chilled and they helped them take their skis off because they're exhausted at this point. They pick their skis up for them and maybe give them a drink or something, let them get their breath and [pause] they carry their skis for them and they help them. Then they go back to their team trailer or wherever. We'd been seeing this in all the races.

So here comes the girl from East Germany and of course all the East German support team is there and they're helping her and they're cheering, they're tossing her in the air in a blanket you know "Woo!" Great, fine, they leave. Okay. Here comes the Russian girl. She comes across the line, finishes, comes in to the cool down area, there is nobody there. Nobody. She had to find her

own jacket; she had to take her skis off. They left her by herself. Nobody ever came to help. They were sending a message. The next day, the men's relay was run. Guess who won the men's relay? The Russian team. They got the message from the day before, that this would not be acceptable.

Saw some incredible performances. We had a performance in the men's 15km in which a skier—it was the men's 30[km]—a skier was Juha Mieto, from Finland, and he won by like 1/100th of a second, which is about the length of your nose, after a 30km race. I was on pre-call, and he was coming up the hill and there was a guy in front of him, and he called for the track. Now in cross country skiing, when a skier overtakes you and he calls for the track, which is the track they're skiing in, you have to step out. It's like, you know, I have the right of way. They were coming up; they were in the last 100m; he called "track" and the guy didn't step out. And he lost the gold medal by 1/100th of a second. So they had a news conference after and I was at the news conference, and I just asked him outright, I said, "Do you think that cost you, that skier not moving from the track?" And gracious sportsman he was, he said, "There were a hundred things that could've happened, on the course that cost me; it wasn't just that." So he didn't take anything away from the individual. But it was a fantastic finish, and I still have, somewhere in my records at home, the finish results of the race with the autographs of the top three medalists on it, which I kept because it was such a fantastic race.

One of the things you saw in biathlon, which is when they ski and shoot, was the camaraderie of the competitors, regardless of where they came from. There was this little skier from Korea [pause] he had no business being there, he really didn't, and he was representing his country. Everybody, including the Americans, lapped him. I mean, he was so far behind, everybody had finished. But everybody stayed and applauded him when he came across the finish line because they knew what it takes to get there. And even though he wasn't the same caliber they were, they honored his commitment in the sport.

It's a grueling sport. Some people don't appreciate biathlon, I mean these guys are out there, they're racing, women too, and they're racing on cross country skis up and down hills, they're breathing like a freight train. They come in to a shooting range, and they have this rifle which is basically an upgraded .22 rifle, and they got to sling it off their shoulder, and they have a sight that has no optical advantage, no, there's no telescopic sight. They've got this target at 100m which is 12.5cm across which is about that big [holds two fingers slightly apart]. And they got to hit that sucker five times. You try, you exercise that hard then stop and try to aim a rifle; your rifle is going to be all over the place; your eyes are going to be watering, you have trouble seeing. And these athletes are so well conditioned that they come in and they can pull up, and sometimes they have to shoot lying down, so they have to flop down with their skis on to shoot. Then they have to shoot standing up which is called off hand, which is the most difficult. Well that position comes later in the race when it's going to be most difficult to do that, and they're standing there holding this rifle and trying to hit these five targets and if they miss any of them, they either get charged penalty time or they go ski a penalty loop. Either way they are penalized for not hitting the target. So you have to be a good marksman and a fast skier; you can't be one or the other, you got to be that good at both of them.

I saw the gold medal performance in one of the races. I remember I was standing, was working—we were standing because we were working the finish. The range is behind us. I'm watching, and here comes this guy; he was a guy from East Germany. And the range is probably [pause] 200 feet long, with multiple shooting positions. And when they come in to the range, there's a range master and he points them to a shooting position. And he was up there and he hits his targets then once he's done he leaves. I timed him from the time he entered the range until he left the range. Skied in, went up into his shooting position, fired off five shots—these are bolt action rifles—stick his poles in the ground, take his rifle off his back, hold it up, calm himself down, hit the five targets, put the rifle back on, grab his ski poles, turn around and leave. Forty-five seconds. Forty-five seconds from the time he entered the range 'til he left it. It's incredible. Hit every target. You know just—you see that type of performance, that guy is—talk about conditioned. He's got to be able to slow his heart rate down, he's got to get himself under control to be able to hit his targets like—he didn't miss a target. I think there were like three in that race, three sessions of shooting and he didn't miss a target. He was like a machine, and just, that was amazing to see.

The Russians [pause] you could interact with them; they were there. They were very boisterous. There was a communication barrier, and you would try to deal with that. They would laugh. I had a Russian give me a fishing pin and he said, "You fish?" I said, "Yeah" and I went like this, [motions with hands] like a big fish. And he said, "Ah, I see you fish." We all know all fishermen are liars.

During the races when I wasn't working as the finish referee, if it was a long race, would sometimes be out on the course helping course stewards. You made sure there were no people on the course. There were fences along the course, but every now and then you got somebody from the news media, some photographer who wanted to get out there for that special shot. I ran into one of these one day and he was—always from Eastern Europe. He was maybe an Albanian or Bulgarian or something like that. And I caught him out there, and I, you know I was telling him he had, I was using Russian "Nyet, nyet, nyet" and he went behind the fence. And he was trying to pretend he didn't understand but I got it through to him. And he was trying to find out some way to insult me, and finally he said, "You Russian?" I said, "No, I'm not a Russian." "You look Russian." [Laughs] So telling an American he's a Russian I guess was an insult.

So those were the moments, as far as some of the ones that jump out at me. The whole experience—being at the Olympics as an official—was wonderful. There were light moments; there were a lot of fun times. You would see ski jumping; that's something that's got to be seen to be believed. I mean, these guys are crazy.

We went and saw speed skating, saw a hockey team. [I] was in the arena when the U.S. hockey team won. I saw all of those games live. I didn't have credentials to allow me in the arena, but we found ways of getting in. You went in and out through the Zamboni entrance; they kept the Zamboni outside, which is the thing they groomed the ice with, and they left that door open and you could walk through. And we get in there and watch the games. Watching those games with the U.S. hockey team: I'd never been in an arena with that type of home field advantage. I mean that was everything. The whole crowd was chanting, "U.S.A! U.S.A! U.S.A!" So much, you

thought the roof was going to come off the building. And anybody that happened to be members of the Russian team had to be intimidated beyond belief because it was major. I've been in places where they chanted "U.S.A."; not like this. That place was jammed, we're standing six, seven deep in the aisles and everybody's chanting. Those kids had to be, the U.S. team had to be skating five feet off the ice; they had to be so high. It had to be so intimidating to the Soviet team, and any team they played. It was just—it was a real home ice advantage, one I'd never seen. Of course the place went nuts, you know; to see that was worth the sacrifice of being there, being away from my business, away from my family.

We saw bobsled, we saw luge. Luge is another one of those sports you got to see for yourself. It's just, those guys and women are going so fast, it's hard to believe. If you see them up close they have these body suits on, and you see all these pin holes in the body suits. Those are from ice crystals hitting the suits; they poke holes in them, they're moving so fast. And those courses aren't smooth they're rough, and you hear—what you hear, you don't see that on television. You hear them rattling on the course as they're coming down. You know if you're on ice that's uneven it's hard to steer anything, and they're trying to steer these sleds like that.

Some of the lighter moments, you know after you're there for two weeks you get kind of giddy. You're tired. You're up every morning at like four in the morning because our venue, you had to be out by the venue usually about six because the races would start at eight or nine. We would be done by noon just about every day when we were running our races. So we would be back into the Olympic Village around Lake Placid. Of course they had all the streets closed off; it was all pedestrian only traffic. And we would run into these people, and they had no idea what the Winter Olympics were about and they would stop and see we had officials' uniforms on, and they would ask questions. We got to the point where we started giving them really stupid answers.

They would ask us what they wanted to see—what they should see. We would say, "Well, have you seen the ski jumping relay yet?" [Laughs] "No! What is that?" You know or "the luge relay" you know that was another one we had or the "mixed doubles figure skating." We invented these events. I remember this one couple from Texas and they had these big long—both of them—big long mink coats on, went down to about your ankles, and cowboy hats, and cowboy boots. And they were there for the Olympics and they wanted to know what to watch and we really, we had a lot of fun with them [laughs].

So it's little things you do when you get there, but it was the camaraderie of the Olympics, the international flavor of getting to know people from different nationalities. You find that the politicization of the Olympics comes from the support team. It doesn't come from the athletes. The athletes are bonded by the common effort it took to reach that plateau of performance. And they appreciate each other's sacrifices, and they congratulate each other. Any rivalries or things that are trumped up are trumped up by the sports teams, by the media. The athletes themselves, I've seen them come, you know at the end of a 30km race, be racing for the finish, give it everything they got, come across the finish line and collapse. And when they get back up, they don't speak each other's language, but one will reach over and touch the other and say—and they

both smile, because they were racing, and they were doing what they love to do, and that was the joy of seeing that type of competition, up close and personal.

Was a lot of fun. You realize that a lot of what we hear about on television about the Russian team and that sort of stuff, that's coming from support people. The athletes, they appreciate each other. So that's kind of—when you look at it, it was a lot of fun, a lot of fun.

TD: Any other accomplishments you'd like to talk about before we move on?

GW: I can't think of any. That whole—well, one of the other things we did which was unique, we did this for a number of the years in the summer: I'd run a workshop. It was called "Colorado Wilderness Workshop" and it was a two week workshop; it was three credits. It was for undergraduates and graduate students. We usually had a mixture of both and we would take usually about eighteen students on a wilderness trip in Colorado. We would start here and we would caravan by car from here. It would take us three days to get to [pause] up near Gunnison, Colorado. We stayed at a ranch called the Seven-Eleven Ranch, which is near Gunnison.

We worked with an outfitter and everybody would be matched up with a horse, and we would spend seven days in the West Elk Wilderness. You weren't allowed to bring a radio, at that time transistor radio . . . today you wouldn't be able to bring your cell phone. Everybody was limited to forty pounds of clothing, including a sleeping bag. And we would spend seven days in the wilderness with no contact from the outside. Traveling on horseback from point to point in the West Elk Mountains and we would be up over 14,000 feet and make camp and it was very primitive. We had to dig latrines. We stayed in tents or slept out in the open, cooked all our own meals, and the students were assigned—they were broken out into task groups. One day this group would prepare all the meals. Same day another group might be collecting firewood, to get the fire going. Another would be to help with the horses, unsaddling and saddling the horses, and another group would be on clean up. Those functions rotated every day. So everybody did it.

We have eighteen people on horseback plus myself, the guide and a wrangler. You have probably at least twenty-one mounted people and probably seven to eight pack horses. To get those all ready to go every day, it takes quite a bit of work. So they had to learn to be around them, and I have required all students to keep a journal, a journal of their experiences. [Pause] There was a movie out at that time which may still be used. It's called "Future Shock." It was about how the pace of our culture is having an effect on us and what we do. And what those seven days in the wilderness did, would desensitize these kids—the participants, to the outside world—to the pace and the noise and everything that's going on around you. You don't realize how much there is, because when you're out there, there's no noise, except of a horse passing gas, or a jay calling, or the wind blowing through the spruces. That's it, or a fire crackling. And after a day or two, you start to unwind and the entries in the journals get more philosophical. They start appreciating the natural beauty, their place in the universe; things start happening, and people really start doing a lot of self-examination. You talk about these things; you sit around the campfire and you talk.

The outfitters name was Rudy Rudiebaugh. And the kids always asked, “Rudy, how far is it to our camp?” Rudy’s stock answer always was, “About a half an hour,” or it was, “It’s up around the next bend.” So an hour later they’d say, “Rudy, when will we get to the next camp?” “Oh, it’s just up around the next bend.” “How long until we get there?” “Half an hour.” An hour later, we’re still riding. “Rudy, I thought you said a half hour? How far is it now?” “It’s about a half hour.” “Where is it?” “It’s up around the bend.” They learned after a while that it doesn’t matter how far it was, you had to go there anyway, you know? So don’t worry about how far it is. Enjoy what’s happening. Don’t worry about how far you have to go. Enjoy the journey. And that was a message that got across to them. They learned by about the second or third day that there’s no point in asking Rudy how far it is to the next camp because he’s not going to tell you. You’ll know when we get there. He translated that philosophy to them. And they learned to, again, value the natural world.

One of the most dramatic examples of how it affected the participants was, we would always come back after eating all this camp food. Well they would talk about “Aw, I’d like to have a pizza man, pizza,” you know, college kids live on pizza, and these kids wanted pizza. Okay, well when we get back to the ranch on the seventh day—we’re trucked back to the ranch and everybody get a shower, get cleaned up, I’ll take you to Pizza Hut, in Gunnison. So everybody got all cleaned up, showered up, jumped in the vans and cars and we went in and I got us some pizza. We go in Pizza Hut, sit down, order the pizzas, no sooner than we get the pizzas than I have one or two come over, “Mr. Wakefield can we go back to the ranch?” “Why?” “It’s too noisy here.” [Pause] This is an environment they were normally in before they had this experience, and now their ears are being assaulted by all the noise. They didn’t like it. They wanted to go back to the quietude of the ranch. And that really—that really impressed them—going back and talking about it, how that had really impressed them. It was just a shock to go back to all that noise, and that hubbub and that movement.

And that became a very popular workshop. We ran that at least six years. Took a lot of organization to do it [pause] but we had a lot of good times with that. And I still see people that were among the people that were on those and we talked about how great a time we had on those, and they learned so much from them. So that was one of the accomplishments I think that I really enjoyed, the Colorado Wilderness Workshops.

TD: Well we’re going to go in a little bit of a different direction now. Can you talk a little bit about your best and worst teaching moments?

GW: Well obviously that was one of my best teaching moments, was the wilderness workshop. But in a classroom situation . . . I taught a college course on wildlife management, of course that was my major in graduate school. And I would say some of my best teaching—it’s very hard to isolate any, but it was—it was giving a student some understanding of relationships that species have with each other and things that were interrelated, and how habitat destruction is a major threat to wild species today all over the globe. It still is and it’s becoming more and more. It’s not overhunting, it’s destruction of habitat. The preservation of individual species of animals means nothing if they don’t have any place to live. Best teaching moments.

Worst teaching moment . . . I guess the worst teaching moment—I wouldn't really call it a teaching moment—was what I alluded to earlier: when you get called in by the dean, or a chair, for giving too many Fs. Because that, to me, that degraded the education process. You know if—I had students in classes who had no business being in college. They couldn't even spell. I mean, they were there.

I had one student who was—I was her advisor for four years, and she was on probation every semester that she was here except the last one. They continually readmitted her. She'd be on it, they'd readmit her, readmit her, readmit her. This whole thing about probation is hooey. They want the tuition dollars. That girl graduated with a degree from Slippery Rock University, and her having a degree degrades everybody that really earned one. Because she did not have the knowledge; she had not learned. She was a very, very poor student and continued to be readmitted. And I would say that is, as far as teaching goes, a bad teaching moment. I saw that being degrading when people like you and other really fine students that I had—they do wonderful work and students are motivated and really want to learn and it's just fun. Then you have other people that are taking up, they're just taking up space. And that's one of the reasons I got out of here.

TD: Can you talk a little bit about the movers and shakers while you were here; people that were leaders? Maybe presidents or deans or even department heads?

GW: Well, hey—Bob Aebersold was a shaker, a mover and a shaker. [Pause] Bob had been to Europe and had seen some things they were doing over there. I remember him talking about putting in a climbing wall. And it was a wonderful—the first time I went into the ARC [Aebersold Recreational Center] and saw a climbing wall there I thought of him, because twenty years before that he'd been talking about that, about doing that. And so it was nice to see that dream come true for him.

I think as presidents . . . I was I was here during the Watrel days when state police took over Old Main. I was here for that. So from there on . . . I'd have to say the best president I've seen here is the current one, Dr. [Robert] Smith. I've had an opportunity to talk to him on a number of occasions, and from everything I hear from people I know who are still on the faculty, others, he is a wonderful president.

Some of the other ones, not so wonderful. I just reserve an opinion on any of them. I think the current one you got, he's really a gem; he's a keeper. Some of the other—when state police come over and come in and take over Old Main and lock everybody out, that's a bad sign [laughs], that's a really bad sign. And so you know having seen, I've seen both ends of that spectrum now, the really bad and the really good.

TD: Any other people who influenced you while you were here?

GW: Probably the most was my officemate, Gene Boyer. Gene Boyer had been a native of Slippery Rock. After high school he went and served in the Navy in World War II. Had the—I don't want to say privilege—he had the experience of being at Normandy on D-Day. He was a

crew of a landing craft that brought the soldiers in to Omaha Beach. In all the years I knew Gene, the sixth of June was his D-Day. It was the hardest day for him to get through in the year. He told me that, because all his memories came back, of all those dead boys. And they got so—then in the last few years we were together I would find him, no matter where he was I would find him on the sixth of June, and we'd go have lunch together, or we'd have breakfast together, because I knew he was hurting that day.

I ended up doing an oral history interview with him, about his war experience, and [pause] he had some awful, awful things that he saw. And it affected him. He went in very philosophical and he came back to Slippery Rock He went here to college, got his bachelor's degree then he went down to Carnegie Mellon got an advanced degree down there, graduate degree at Carnegie Mellon. Taught down there for a while then came back and ended up on the faculty here at Slippery Rock and taught here until he retired.

Gene was one of those people who—nothing rattled him. After what he'd seen on Omaha Beach, there was nothing that really rattled him. I mean you couldn't scare the man; he had seen the elephant. He had seen the worst that man had to offer. So nothing you could do—he just did not get rattled about things. So he was a very calming influence and his overall philosophy of being calm and his approach: really loved the students, absolutely loved the students, loved Slippery Rock. And he was—sharing an office with him was a privilege and I would say I learned more from him than—he was a real influence on me and he was just a really quality person, a quality person, Gene Boyer. He died here a few years ago, and I was really sad to see him pass because he was, he was a fixture around town. There are a couple people who still know him.

His nickname, who was it there, there's the gal who's still around—Jean Hamilton, she always called him “Beanie.” And I said, “Why are you calling him ‘Beanie’?” She said, “When he was a little kid still in high school, he was always hanging around up here at the university, up at the field house, and he was always wore a beanie.” And so he was known as “Beanie Boyer,” and ‘til the day he died that's how some people knew him, as “Beanie Boyer.” I never called him that. He was just a wonderful friend, a wonderful colleague, and any time I would get upset about some things I saw happen politically he would have a philosophical answer, “Don't get too upset about it.” He served as chair for a while for the department, but he was one of the persons who wasn't after a political advantage. It didn't really mean much to him except that he could serve the students.

TD: Let's talk a little bit about major events or activities that happened while you were here. Maybe academic events, cultural events, building projects, anything that really sticks out in your mind at all?

GW: You know, it's kind of a gray area. There's just so much that happened over the years. You saw buildings—well you saw [Spotts] World Cultures go up, you saw Swope Music Building go up. And then the expansion: the expansion of the university, the growing size of the student body, and how it changes the community, those are all impressions.

Major events . . . nothing jumps out at me right now. The work, there were people on campus, there were notables, but they were all part of a constant parade of things that were happening.

They were notable at the time and they're probably still notable, but I can't recall them off the top of my head.

TD: What, if anything, do you miss about being at SRU?

GW: Students. The students, people like you. It's just wonderful sitting across talk about their dreams, talk about where they want to go, what they have to do. How they're going to get the job [pause], give them the benefit of your advice and your counsel and some of them are smart enough to take it. There's a period of time when you are growing up from a time when you're about seventeen 'til a time when you're about twenty-two that you think you know everything in the world. And you think your parents are dumb as posts and anybody over forty is out of touch. And then somewhere around maybe twenty-three, twenty-four, twenty-five, you start to get smart again, and you start to realize these people have an awful lot to teach you and you have an awful lot to learn from them. And if you'll listen, it's going to make your life a whole lot easier, because they're just trying to help.

I raised three sons, and I went through that period where I was the dumbest guy in the world. And now anytime anything happens they pick up the phone, "Dad, how about this? Dad, how about that? Dad, what should I do here?" And they're all in their thirties. They've learned that, and I always tell people—I see people raising young boys and I say if you keep from killing them 'til they're in their mid-twenties you're doing alright [laughs], because that period of time right there in their teens, and their early twenties you just want to choke them sometimes. It's just they, you—you think you know everything. You think you know everything. And then later you find out you don't. You thought you did, but you don't. It's called maturity.

TD: Any words of wisdom or any other things you would like to leave for current or future Rock community members to know?

GW: I had a professor tell me when I was in graduate school—this is again at Penn State—he said, "Gary, these are your salad days." Now people couldn't see the reaction you just gave me, but that was the same reaction I had: "Yeah, right." He was right. These days are the best days you're ever going to have. They were wonderful days. They were the days of freedom, of very little responsibility, of times when you could be who you are, and they were my salad days. I look back at them and I would love to be able to go back and be a student again, at that age, again. Because it was so free. I didn't realize I was so free. "Oh I have a test to do; I got this to do, I got this." But it's all about you and you're advancing yourself and it was with all the social contacts, with people my age and friends all around and things like that.

You realize, when you take a diploma, walk out that door off campus to a job and it's all gone. Those people are gone, most of them forever; you're never going to see them again. And now it's you against the world. Things start getting really serious, really quick. And you realize it's easier when you had it here on campus. College [days] are things you should really cherish and really enjoy them while you can. In a wholesome way—enjoy your relationships, enjoy the experience, enjoy the ride. What do the old cowboys say? "It doesn't matter; you have to go

there anyway.” So enjoy what’s around you, enjoy the journey. You can’t wait until you get a degree. Enjoy the journey; the degree will come soon enough.

TD: How would you like to be remembered?

GW: [Pause] Well that’s a really wide open question [laughs]. Depends on by whom, you know? [Laughs] By my grandchildren, I’d like to be remembered as a loving grandfather and someone that really cared about them. But in general [pause] I would like to be remembered by the students I had as somebody who really cared about them. In general, I’d liked to be remember as a successful writer, because that’s something I’ve taken up since I left the university and [pause] it’s a career I’m working on and not without some success. So I guess that’s how I’d like to be remembered, like that.

I’ve been married—happily married for forty-three years—to my high school sweetheart. We have three fine boys and six grandchildren, five of which are girls and they got their grandfather wrapped around their little finger [laughs], which girls do to grandfathers. Yeah I guess that’s how I’d want to be remembered. Somebody that enjoyed life, is optimistic, good humored, and never stopped learning. The world’s a great place—lot of things to learn out there. You just open yourself to it.

TD: Anything else you’d like to add before we wrap up?

GW: Oh, there’s lots of things I could [laughs] but I don’t exactly know what you guys are looking for. This is why we addressed these questions. I’m sure that gives you some idea.

I’ve seen the town change so much since I’ve been here, when I came in ‘74. It’s growing so rapidly. I bet you don’t think so because you’re here for just a short time, but how this community has changed since ‘74, it’s absolutely amazing. With all the growth that’s going on around it—take a drive some time, just drive around this community and look at all the residential areas that are new, that have been built or are being built. And there’s a lot of growth occurring here—it’s going to be the next Cranberry Township. I fully believe that with what I’ve seen in the last ten to fifteen years, because it’s gathering momentum. It’s getting bigger and we see things happening. And it’s those changes are somewhat upsetting, because I used to live right in town, now I live out of town because it’s a little bit too busy. And I like nature a lot better too. But that’s all. Saying good luck to all of you, and go Rock!

TD: Alright well I’m going to thank you for being here today and that’s it. Thank you very much.