

Introduction to the Expanded Version

Upon completing the interview, listening to the recording, and reading the verbatim text of the interview, Professor Levy wished to augment the basic text of his recorded interview with fuller coverage of several of the stories he raised. This, he felt, would give various topics he brought forth more fulsome coverage and explanation. Professor Levy's goal here was to have many of the important and often entertaining stories he touched upon in his interview be told with various loose ends not left dangling or laden with gaps and questions, but, rather, fully covered, clarified, and explained.

The written text Professor Levy prepared here follows directly from the succession of topics and from the contents of the stories he Introduced and briefly covered in his interview. His text more fully details many key matters first raised in his interview. In this text, Professor Levy removed nothing he raised in his interview. The sequence of subjects and topics also remains as they originally came forth via the questions which the interviewer prepared. Professor Levy has also not altered any views he expressed about his career as a scholar and educator which he brought forth when interviewed for the SRU Oral History Project.

Professor Levy hopes you will find the contents covered and the manner of their coverage to be both intellectually stimulating and enjoyable.

Dr. Alan Levy
April 2, 2024

Rock Voices: The Oral History Project of Slippery Rock University

Alan Levy Interview—Expanded Version

September 29, 2023

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Original transcript revised and expanded by Alan Levy

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MJ: It is September 29th, 2023, in the Archives, and I am interviewing Alan Levy, Dr. Alan Levy, for the Rock Voices [Oral History] Project. Hello, Dr. Levy.

AL: Hello.

MJ: All right, so first off, could I get some biographical information, like your name, where you're from originally, your education, things like that.

AL: My name is Alan Levy. I was born in Mount Vernon, New York which is a suburb, just north of New York City. I graduated from Washington and Jefferson College in the same area as this. It is a total coincidence that I ended up back here in Western PA, but it proved, on balance, a good outcome. From W & J, I moved West and completed my Master's Degree and my PhD at the University of Wisconsin, in Madison. I taught at Wisconsin for two years after my PhD. I then taught for two years at the University of Louisville, on a sabbatical replacement. From there, I taught for two years at a famous prep school in New England called Phillips Exeter Academy. Then in 1985, I came to Slippery Rock.

MJ: All right, and how did you originally discover Slippery Rock [University]? What's your affiliation with the place?

AL: It came at the time of my appointment. I learned of the job opening in April of 1985. An individual named Robert Stackman had chosen to retire rather late in the academic year, so it was a last-minute kind of application process. But I was flexible at that point, so I sent my application in and ended up with an interview on the campus in July of that same year. The interviews seemed to go reasonably well; I was offered the job, and I accepted it.

MJ: All right. So you started at the fall semester.

AL: August '85, yes.

MJ: Okay. And you were here, let's see, if you started in '85, it was already a university when you got there, so you weren't really present for any of the transitions from college to university. Or were you? If you remember anything about it.

AL: It was already Slippery Rock University. The school had made that transformation two years before. At the point when I became a faculty member the leadership of the university had switched from a man named [Herb.] Reinhardt to [Robert] Aebersold, the latter now a famous

name on the campus. He [Aebersold] officially became the president in November of that very fall. I attended the inauguration.

MJ: All right, and you were hired into the History Department, right?

AL: Correct.

MJ: So did the department into which you were hired change while you were here, and if so, how?

AL: It changed, one hundred percent. I mean, all the people who were on faculty when I came have long since retired, and sadly, some of them have passed away. The chair of the department then is still alive at age ninety-two, bless him, and he lives in the area; his name is Donald Kelly. You should interview him. He knows the history of the school, and the history of Butler County, and especially the history of Native Americans in western Pennsylvania as well as anyone, anywhere.

MJ: All right, I will keep that in mind, because that's a good idea. In what buildings did you work during your time here?

AL: Spotts [World Culture Building].

MJ: The whole time?

AL: 'Whole time.

MJ: All right. And when you first got here, what were your first impressions of the university?

AL: When I first started to teach, or do you mean the first time I arrived on the campus, or both?

MJ: Both.

AL: I knew of Slippery Rock, of course. Additionally, in the beginning of that very year the name of SR had come forth in the news. It's an amusing little story if you want me to explain it.

MJ: Please do.

AL: It was in the fall of 1984, and there was a big battle among several major schools for the number one ranking in college football. Slippery Rock's name popped up here. In background, there's a famous, and a still on-going, story of Slippery Rock's football scores being announced at halftime at the University of Michigan, at the University of Texas, at the Air Force Academy, and at many other college fields. Fans thus learn what Notre Dame did versus Purdue, Iowa versus Wisconsin, or whatever big scores there happened to come forth on a given fall afternoon. Everyone would cheer, and at the end of the litany of scores announced at these big stadiums, one would hear: "... and Slippery Rock defeated Clarion..." at which point everybody would cheer even more loudly. That tradition had apparently begun at Michigan, with the fame of Slippery Rock thus carrying forth. The tradition goes back, I believe, to 1937. That season, Michigan was named number one, but they had lost to Ohio State. So some then declared that

Ohio State should be number one, but others noted that OSU had lost to Youngstown State. Therefore, Youngstown State should be number one. Ah, but Youngstown State had lost to Slippery Rock, and Slippery Rock was undefeated!

MJ: [Laughs].

AL: Therefore, Slippery Rock should be number one--that's when and where the tradition came from, and it gave SRU some of its fame among college football fans.

To bring the story forward to the year 1984, just before Slippery Rock hired me:

In the battle that year for the number one ranking in college football, Brigham Young University in Utah was among the contenders. They would find themselves in a bit of controversy, however, with the name of Slippery Rock entering at a major point in the debates.

Brigham Young started their 1984 season winning an out-of-conference game against University of Pittsburgh. At the season's opening, Pitt had been highly touted, so, with Brigham Young beating them, BYU ended up ranked number eight or nine in various polls. From there, Brigham Young went into their usual fall schedule, playing such lackluster conference teams as Montana, New Mexico State, and Wyoming. They went through their rather light schedule undefeated. Having begun the season with their defeat of Pitt placing them in the nation's top ten, began to bump up in the rankings, as the teams rated above them lost a game or two. As it turned out that season, the major college teams each lost at least one game. BYU's defeat of Pitt at the beginning of the season really didn't mean anything, as Pitt proved to be a complete dud that season. Nevertheless, BYU had made the top ten. And, after the season was over, they were the only undefeated team, so they ended up being ranked number one going into the Bowl Games. Back then, there was no playoff system tied to the Bowl Games. The Bowl Games were set up through invitations. (The Big Ten would play the Pacific Coast Conference winner in the Rose Bowl...).

Being ranked highly, Brigham Young was under great scrutiny, with everybody connected to NCAA football saying things to the effect of: "You gotta' play somebody good in the postseason." BYU accepted an invitation to the Holiday Bowl, a very lackluster December 24th, Christmas Eve game. There they played a very undistinguished University of Michigan squad which, that year, did not even win the Big Ten conference and was not going to the Rose Bowl. Michigan's coach, Bo Schembechler, huffed that week to the press, "These guys at Brigham Young are not that good. We played better teams in the Big 10." In the actual Holiday Bowl game, Brigham Young did beat Michigan 24 - 17, no major-level victory. Then on January 1st, the major Bowl Games were played. The big teams squared off, and the schools ranked number 2 and number 3 each lost their Bowl Games. This left the national ranking situation even more murky.

The upshot of all this came on January 2nd, just after the major Bowl Games, and with the final number one to be decided in the sports press. On NBC's [the National Broadcasting Company] morning news program--*The Today Show*--host Bryant Gumbel, himself a sports announcer,

received the official news of the final college football rankings. “We just gotten word,” he announced, “that, indeed, Brigham Young has been named number one.” Mr. Gumbel then calmly said: “Let’s pause for a commercial.” Now you know how sometimes you can hear somebody say something into a TV microphone, not knowing the cameras and microphones had not yet switched off? Such was the case here, and thus, broadcast over national television, Bryant Gumbel scowled loudly about the injustice of BYU ending up number one: “So who the (blank) did they beat, Slippery Rock!?”

MJ: [Laughs].

AL: That was on January 2, 1985.

MJ: And that got Slippery Rock into the headlines?

AL: The fame had already been there, and now it was not only because of the amusing nature of the name and all that. From there, the fame of the name grew that much more. I already knew of Slippery Rock because of my prior time in western Pennsylvania, but the whole story reinforced lots of old stereotypes.

One of the results from this 1984-85 story came forth the following fall, something which has repeated itself in subsequent years. By January of ’85, *that* fall’s football season was already fully set, of course. But for the fall of 1986, Michigan found its first game of that season set to be an away game. So Michigan then agreed to let Slippery Rock come to the University of Michigan campus and play Wayne State [University -- in Detroit] for the opening game of the new season. Over 50,000 people came to the University of Michigan Stadium, which has a 100,000+ seating capacity, all to watch and cheer Slippery Rock as they beat Wayne State. Thus, Slippery Rock’s name held some affection in various parts of the country, and it still does. So that’s one of the early memories of Slippery Rock. This coincided with beginnings of my time here.

MJ: I’m going to check the camera real quick, and also. . . .

AL: Sure. I hope I’m not making unnecessary noises, or shifting around too much.

MJ: Oh no, no, not at all. I just needed to make sure I pressed the right button. Now, what about your first visit to the campus?

AL: My first visit to Slippery Rock occurred in the summer, early July of 1985. I remember it proved a bit curious, because I met with the [History] Department, of course, with the chairman, and with other faculty. And that all seemed to go fairly nicely. Many other faculty and staff were away at this point in the summer. I came to campus, again, as I mentioned, just as President Reinhardt had left. The new president was to be Bob Aebersold. He had previously held the post of what was then called ‘Vice President of Academic Affairs.’ He’d just been named to be SRU’s new president, but he was away.

That post of VP of Academic Affairs, now called the Provost, had then been filled by the temporary assignment of a man who had been the Dean of Arts and Sciences; his name was Charles Zuzak. So he was the new provost. He was also away. Charles Zuzak's replacement as dean was a gentleman named Roy Stewart, and *he* was away. I then met the temporary assistant provost, whose name was W.G. Sayre, who'd been a Chemistry professor. And I met the assistant to the provost, who was there to take care of things on the third floor of Old Main with both the provost and the president away. His name was Louis Razzano. So, up and down the line, I met with the 'replacements' replacements.' But Razzano was a very nice person and we got along fine in our interview. W.G. Sayre and I had a nice conversation too. The department members and I had good conversations in the interviews, and they seemed to enjoy the guest lecture that I gave. So, at the end of that day, the head of the department search committee, Professor John Nichols, who retired about 20 years ago, told me at the end of the day's interviews: "I think the job is yours if you want it. Do you want a few days to think about it? Let me know." And it turned out, indeed, the offer did come quickly, so I had to think about it a little bit, but I took the job and that was it.

MJ: Did you say you gave a guest lecture the first day you were there?

AL: A demonstration lecture.

MJ: Ah. What was it about?

AL: Having read some of the SRU Catalogue, I noticed that a course, then called History 202, lay in the middle of a three-course sequence of US History surveys, something that Slippery Rock maintained in the Department of History for many years. (This in contrast to most schools which have all US History taught in but two terms; some allow only one term!) I gave a lecture that was in effect to be an example of how I would begin the 202 US History course, then called *America 1815 to 1900*. I gave a demonstration lecture. I always keep my notes, and I still have the notes I scribbled down for that occasion, some basic points to cover about where America was politically, socially, and economically in 1815 and what we would then be exploring in this supposed class, starting on its first day in History 202.

MJ: Okay. And next question on here: What changes have you witnessed at the university, and were they for the better or worse?

AL: Oh, there have been all kinds of changes, of course; the curriculum has gone through many different phases. There's a new one that's been instituted under Rock Studies, as it's called. Is it better; is it worse? Different people have varying opinions here. My opinion doesn't really count because I'm retired. Indeed, I always emphasized to my colleagues during my last years on the faculty, "Regarding people we hire or any curriculum we adopt in the next year or so, my opinion shouldn't matter; it's *your* department." As it was when I was first hired, my opinion about the future of the department should have then been considered more important than the opinions of anyone who was older and close to retirement. Those who were/are going to be here to run things and affect students in the coming years--they're the people who count, not any old blankety-blank like me. I'm stepping out. The same was the case then 20-30 years ago. Leave it

in the hands of the younger faculty. There has always been that issue and dynamic over the views of people about curriculum, about hiring--what should be emphasized, and what should not be.

A point of context that undergirds many of the present-day debates about universities curricula and configuration concerns issues of funding. The quantity of students coming to Slippery Rock and other schools in PA may possibly be turning a bit lower, I think certain departments may then be compelled to merge with one another. What kinds of configurations this is going to generate--when you have not a History or a Political Science Department, but instead a Department of Social Sciences, involving History, Economics, Sociology and Political Science--these kinds of configurations spark all sorts of debates. The devil's in the details. What such things do we have in a Humanities Department that involves History, Philosophy and English? Do you have a Social Science Department involving History, Political Science, and Economics? You see how you can configure it in a variety of ways. These changes, and the discussions about them are going on and very, very much in earnest, as they should be, because how a university's academic curricula are to be structured makes a big difference for the students, as well as in regard to the hiring of faculty and to the ways that disciplines are going to be taught.

MJ: All right, and what campus activities were you involved in?

AL: I'd say the main thing I was involved in early on was that I took charge of a nominally existing, but really non-existing, University Honors Program. I took it over and revamped the structure completely. Previously, the Honors Program had involved a series of separate courses unto themselves called 'Honors courses.' They had such odd and ill-defined names as *The Physical Self*, *The Cultural Self*. What I did was to recast all offerings so that where, for example, you had *College Writing*, which was required of all freshmen, I had a *College Writing, Honors* section. I had basic History, basic Economics--basic courses that had to be taken by students, and had Honors sections in those classes. Students could then take those Honors classes and gain Honors credit. But then if they chose to drop out or not pursue the Honors program, these courses would still count in the students' general requirements for graduation. Thus, students could step in and try Honors. Those who did not care for it could step out and not have the work completed in the Honors program count for nothing. I integrated Honors more fully within the curriculum of the University, and it seemed to be fairly successful. I was in charge of Honors starting in the fall of 1986. By the fall of 1989, when I relinquished the program, I went off for a two-year leave in Washington, D.C. I worked for the National Endowment for the Humanities. I turned the Honors Program over to Professor John Craig. And by that point, we had 85 students in the SR Honors Program.

Back in 1986, when I took the Honors Program appointment and began recasting the Honors curriculum, there were but two students in the entire program. With 85 students in 1989, the program had grown quite a bit. *The Rocket* (the SRU student newspaper) once listed the "two students" statistic of 1986, but they mis-typed the date as "1989" not 1986." There was a big difference in that mis-print. But the student paper misprinted it, and people kept saying the Honors Program had built up no students. It certainly had. *The Rocket* just put "1989" instead of "1986." 'A mere typo', but what a difference!

MJ: And I read, also in *The Rocket*, because I went back through the old ones, that you were University Faculty Grand Marshal for a couple of years. What does that involve?

AL: It involved some degree pomp and circumstance. The fun part about it is you stand up in front of the whole gathering of students, parents, and everybody, and you say, “Welcome to Slippery Rock graduation, congratulations to everybody.” It is a very happy occasion, and the warm feelings are palpable. You lead the lines of academically-robed professors into the arena, plus all the staff and, of course, all the students. As Grand Marshall, you're the first one in. Thus you get to be the leader of the whole ceremony, which is fun. One aspect of it that was not fun was that you had to stand there during the entire time that the students are crossing the stage and shaking hands with the president, and behind the president, you are the one that has to hand the president the diplomas as he or she hands them out and shakes hands. So you're standing there, endlessly passing things on. You can start to feel like--have you ever seen the movie *Modern Times*, with Charlie Chaplin? I highly recommend it to you, but he's . . .

MJ: Actually, I might've.

AL: . . . in the movie [*Modern Times*], Chaplin does a lot of mechanical assembly-line factory work and he walks away from the assembly line still full of nervous anxiety, moving/twitching his arms and body as people may be apt to do after a long spell on an industrial assembly line. As you hand out diplomas to the University President, you can come to feel a bit like that. The work of ‘Grand Marshall’ is not all so grand.

MJ: Is that Chaplin film the one with the sequence where there's a dinner and then, something like a napkin going across his face with another automated thing feeding him dinner, or something like that?

AL: I think that may be elsewhere in the movie.

MJ: Okay. Now, what about your accomplishments during your time at Slippery Rock?

AL: Well, I published a fair amount. I had published one book by the time I started at Slippery Rock. In the ensuing years, particularly from 1997 to 2013, I researched, wrote, and published several others. In that time period, '97 to '13, I published . . . [begins counting] eight books. So if you do the math, that's sixteen and a half years from March 1997 to December of 2013, and I published eight books. So, if I may, I think that's a pretty good accomplishment. And, with regard to each of the books, the reviews were generally quite positive.

That was all done in the context with me devoting every winter break and every summer, as well as a couple of sabbaticals, entirely to work in Washington. I would situate myself in Washington, D.C. and go to the Library of Congress and the National Archives on a daily basis. There I would go through old newspapers and archival materials. I would gather and assemble evidence, putting together books on various topics. One was titled *Government and the Arts*. It was a history of the debates over the subject of what government should or should not do in support of the arts in

America. I wrote a biography of the American composer Edward MacDowell, the famous American composer of the late 19th century.

I published several books on American sports. Three were on baseball topics. One was on football, specifically the Jackie Robinson story of football's segregation and desegregation, a struggle and transformation which occurred at virtually the same time as Jackie Robinson's famous breaking of the color line in Major League Baseball. Robinson's story of baseball's desegregation received vastly more press coverage at the time than did the NFL's transformation. Pro football actually achieved racial integration a year before Robinson integrated the Brooklyn Dodgers. When I wrote the book—*Tackling Jim Crow*—much of that story in football had not been fully told. The book prompted a television writer to produce a TV documentary—*Third and Long*--on the desegregation of football. It was all based on my book. The documentary appeared nationally on CBS Television on Christmas Day in 2010. Subsequently it has appeared on ESPN and on the NFL Network.

I later published a book about the boxer Floyd Patterson, and a two-volume biography of a renowned New York congresswoman named Bella Abzug, a famous feminist leader in the 1970s, '80s, and '90s. So I got a fair amount written.

I always considered such activity to be central to what we as professors are supposed to do. Of course we teach, and we serve on committees, and we serve the campus and the community, but we also are supposed to be active in a scholarly capacity, and I always took that in earnest and went forth with it with as much energy as I could muster.

MJ: All right. And during your time teaching, what were your best and worst teaching moments?

AL: That's hard. [Pause] I cannot really think of a bad teaching moment per se, but there were moments where, as I look back on it, where I could have reached out perhaps more fully to students that were having, or who appeared to be having, personal difficulties. It's always tricky business because you have to respect people's privacy. Yet there are times when you do reach out, you find the student very much appreciates the extra effort, but you've got to be careful because you don't know onto what you may be intruding. It's all part of the sensitivity and respect one must pay to the issues at hand. So, one must try to tread gingerly.

Still, I can speculate that there have been instances in which I feel that I could have, may have, should have stepped forth more fully. In any such case, one can never know for sure. I'd like to believe that if I had interceded more into what I perceived to be some personal issues that someone may have been having, could I have made more of a difference? I'd like to think so, but at the same time, you can also step onto turf and cause someone to become defensive, whereupon they can readily communicate to you that they are not terribly happy about you or anyone entering into business they'd prefer to keep to themselves. In general, I think it best, in any such situation, to proceed carefully and lightly.

In contrast, as I think about the ways that students have written me and stayed in touch with me, some happy examples come to mind. Soon after I retired from teaching, I received many notes

and statements in which students said such things as: “I really appreciated your course on Russia, because I enjoyed this topic or that story. . . .” Independent of the classroom, I recall one student who knew me when I first arrived here in 1985. She was then about ten years old. (Her father was on the Slippery Rock staff). It wasn’t exactly a teaching moment, but her father and family had kindly invited me, a newly arrived professor, to dinner. I had brought them a bottle of wine. And as we were just sitting down to dinner, I said to this 10-year-old young lady, “Let me show you precisely how to pour wine. The key point,” I said, “is that, when you pour and are about to finish, turn the bottle just slightly. That way, you don’t spill any drops.” Decades later, when I retired, she wrote me, and in her little note she stated: “I’ll always remember the lesson you taught me on how to pour wine and not spill it.”

MJ: Huh.

AL: So a tiny little lesson like that--you don't much think about it at the time, as it may appear so trivial, yet there, that one little statement, had formed a memory for a ten-year-old. She's now well into her forties, and she still remembers it.

MJ: And she can still pour wine.

AL: Indeed--and without spilling a drop. That second, instrumental point is of the utmost importance! It's not the instructor; it's what he or she instructs that counts.

MJ: Next question: who are the--you've mentioned them already, but who were the leaders when you first came to campus, you know, the people who've been there forever, the people who were really making changes (the phrase you used here was “movers and shakers”), and what were your impressions of them?

AL: I always try to separate the personal from the professional. I don't think I had a problem on a personal level with terribly many people in all my time here. There were a few (here some may say “more than a few”) who may have had some personal problems with me; I will freely accept that. But I always believed that one should be open, frank, and clear about one's convictions, be it in the pursuit of professional standards in regard to curriculum or scholarship or teaching or anything else. And there were some people on this campus who were, it seemed to me, intent upon showing how important they were, largely by a posturing of how much influence they had over such matters as curriculum. And in some such cases, I detected very little in the way of academic substance that lent any kind of legitimacy or support to the apparent, or at least the alleged, influence they felt entitled to wield over such important campus issues as curriculum.

What I often did here was simply ask what proved to be some somewhat uncomfortable questions as to what such a person was doing in regard to genuine matters of scholarship. As I noted, I wrote eight books, and some of these people had never written so much as a book review, much less an article or a book. Challenging the standing, not on a personal level, for I genuinely do not care what background someone may have, or whether their family roots are, or are not, local. I certainly do not care about a person's race, religion, gender, or anything else. None of that matters to me, and I don't think it should matter to anybody in any sort of ‘final

analysis.' I tended to ask, "Do you have something to say that's valid, with the matter of academic validity stemming from any established validity in any academic field via published work in that academic field?" In steadily challenging some people along such lines, I think I ruffled more than a few feathers. I stuck to my guns and kept asking. This led me to have to take on challenges from some campus colleagues who wanted to try to diminish the impact that my words were apparently having. Here I did not back away and kept on with the question of academic qualifications in people's respective fields. I think some colleagues were disturbed about that. I was merely surprised here only by the fact that such simple, straightforward lines of inquiry had proven to be so unique and different from the norms of discourse on campus. But I really couldn't let this bother me, because 1) I knew this was quite normal at any well-regarded university, and 2) I always knew in my own heart that I was never being personal in raising my inquiries.

If, then, I discovered that somebody was claiming to have published an article or a book, and the book/article didn't actually exist (some people actually did this), I would always be willing to challenge the dishonesty that was clearly afoot. It would always be so obvious: when somebody lists a book, and the publisher is named, one can always try to look up the publisher. And if the publisher/publishing house doesn't actually exist--how can someone claim they've gotten a book out? So, in challenging things like that, I definitely ruffled some feathers, and I may have helped plunk some people into a little hot water, including some administrators whose positions within the state, as they held official roles of leaders on campus, can indeed be put in jeopardy. For if they, as official campus leaders, approve of such people getting ahead, people who postured any demonstrably invalid levels of academic attainment via any such obvious levels of dishonesty in what they postured about their accomplishments in their professions, it's not just that individual who can get in trouble. Rather, it is the administrative officials that can get in trouble with the powers that be in the chancellor's office, in the legislature, or even in the attorney general's office. And some of that did happen as a result of my insisting that such standards be maintained. Standing up to what were clearly false claims of publications which did not exist--this seemed so straightforward and obvious a thing to confront. Yet in doing so, some feathers were indeed ruffled.

Going back to your question about my impressions of these people, there was a certain level of self-entitlement that I detected among what many at Slippery Rock called 'the old guard.' This involved names that are long gone. And again, it's nothing personal, but these were people who felt that they were some sort of 'king of the hill.' But it proved to be, recalling Jonathan Swift's term, a hill that was so utterly Lilliputian' in nature. I mean, to be a big shot at Slippery Rock--in itself, that is neither good nor bad. But in either case, it's a rather tiny universe. And if any such 'king of the hill' posturing involved any clear, obvious corruptions of professional standards, as occurred with claims to have published articles or books that didn't actually exist, then I always felt it was, to borrow from President Lincoln "altogether fitting and proper" to raise challenges, and to do so without blinking. That did, indeed, ruffle some feathers internally. I really wasn't happy to do it, but I wasn't sad to do it either. (Even more, I would have been very sad if I had refrained from raising such challenges). If any such airings got certain individuals in trouble

for indulging false postures of accomplishment, I don't think it was a bad thing to point it out. The fault here lay not in the messenger. If the message proves true, the messenger is not to blame, no? And if this made some people have to step away from Slippery Rock University, I do not think the school was made the worse for it.

MJ: On the other hand, with whom did you work best, would you say?

AL: Various colleagues would have said, I tend to work best . . . “Levy tends to work best alone.” And I was happy in that way, too. I did not co-author many pieces. I did not engage in collective research. I wasn’t avoiding people, but that was [me] believing that the work of scholarship was intended to be an individual pursuit. So I worked with people in hiring committees and curriculum committees and in other departmental work of various sorts, sure. And I think I got along best with those who shared the view that the standards of what represents good academics should be based on standards that are common to the profession across the country, rather than just on more *sui generis* bases of personal friendship, connections, and relationships within the community. The two worlds should be in harmony with each other, but when they are out of harmony, then the local [community] should consider yielding to the more widely-held definitions of common sense and professional quality that apply across the board of the profession.

MJ: All right. And other people who influenced you or were significant during your time here-- could be students, could be faculty, it could be administration.

AL: I think many of the students impressed me most. Those for whom I held the deepest respect were the veterans of the military and the non-traditional students who, while they're raising children and/or holding down jobs, would also be pursuing their degrees and doing remarkably well in that busy context. To that end, I very much enjoyed teaching, and made a habit of teaching, at least one class per semester in the evening part of the university’s class schedule. Thus most Monday nights, from 5 to 7:30, or from 5:30 to 8, I would have a class. And in the early years particularly, up until somewhere in early the 2000-teens, at least a third of the class would be people who worked full-time, or who were raising children, or who were coming out of the military. They were often taking on many different aspects of life than was normal for most students. They were going through all of this while they were coming to campus and pursuing the work involved in an undergraduate curriculum--all to make their lives better.

Thus, when various undergraduates were coming to me about a make-up time for a test or an extension on the due-date of a paper assignment, usually because “I have this or that social event on Tuesday...,” my thoughts often turned to some of their older classmates, just out of the military, raising children, and/or pursuing a profession in life. All these older people could always come up with excuses for make-ups and due-date extensions, for they did, indeed, have scores of things to which they had to tend--taking the kids to the Little League or doing this aspect of a job. . . . Yet I seldom received such requests from these older students. They made it very easy for me, not to be harsh with any student, but just to turn to these undergraduates of normal college-attending age, eighteen to twenty-two, and say to them, “I’m not being hard on

you, but I am saying, “If you have these other social obligations, do what you have to do to pursue those, because that's part of your life, too, but don't let such matters get in the way of your real education.” And here the example to which I could always point was, “look at what your colleagues in this very class are doing.”

As I recount some of these examples, one student certainly sticks out in my memory. This student was blind. He took an evening class with me. He had to make certain arrangements, of course, but he made it all so easy to carry out--he had children and they would come to class on the night of tests. I would give his son a copy of the test; they would go off to the library. I said, “If you need a little extra time, please go forth with it.” But this student never asked for any such favors. On exam night in a 5:00 to 7:30 PM class, the test would normally run from 5 to 6:15. At 6:30 PM we would then reconvene, meet for the last hour of that two-and-a-half-hour class, and introduce some new material in the course's new unit. This gentleman and his son would always hand in his test on time, as well as complete all other assignments. (The method by which he took the tests was that, on any multiple-choice section, the son would read the multiple-choice questions to his father, and he would then choose A, B, C, or D, with his son writing down the responses. Then his son would read the essay questions, and his father would sit at the computer and click out an answer. I would get the answers and essay from him, with all content just as valid as anything I received from others).

What I particularly remember, in addition to the fact that he--despite the obvious disability (one is not supposed to call it a “handicap” anymore, although he actually never minded anyone using such a vocabulary)--always went forth with the materials of the day, finished them all, and did very well. What was especially moving was one thing that occurred late in the term. I had assigned each of the students in the class, which totaled about 50, to present a short oral and written report on a topic of their choice, in which they took one of many specific subjects upon which readings and class discussions usually, but briefly, touched, which they would then research to greater depth. Everyone was to give one oral report, and hand in a short paper, on the chosen topic. He [the blind student] chose his topic and prepared a report. When he gave his little 15-minute presentation to the class on the assigned night, there was quite a reaction. Normally, after a student gives a report, everybody in class claps politely, but when this student gave his report, you could sense the feelings from the heart that came forth from all assembled in the classroom that evening. It brings out a level of emotion in me right now, just to think about it. The students really did connect with a tonality of emotion that was quite unusual. They all clearly appreciated who this very special person was and how honored they felt to have had the course of their lives intersect with his. It didn't take a genius to figure this out, but it was very special.

Other memories are not quite so gut-felt, but nonetheless important as well. There were a couple of times where I had parents--one in particular, but there were others--who brought their children to class. One parent/student had her two daughters sit in the hallway. I'd offered them a place to relax in my office, but their mother felt they would best sit in the hallway with their computers,

clacking away at things while she/mom sat in class. I suppose it was a way to have a kind of shared experience in academic work. In any case, Mom thought it was a good arrangement.

I always enjoyed the students who wanted to bring their dogs to class. I always allowed this, so long as there were no disruptions. Over the years, we had a couple of 'class puppies' during evening classes. It was always fun. All such little variations were present throughout the years. (During the Pandemic, I taught via Zoom means in the two semesters of 2020-21. Then we had several cats snuggle up to the computer screen from home. But I never had an in-class feline). Such classroom animal stories kind of dot the landscape as I think back on it. Thirty-eight years--there's been so much in the way of such little details that stick out for me.

MJ: Next question on the paper here is major events and activities while you were here, like building projects, cultural things, national events with local impact. . . .

AL: One that pops into my mind, that was and remains most extraordinary, of course, was 9-11. [Pause] It was a Monday, and I remember several things about it. It was an absolutely glorious, clear-blue-sky late summer day. The foliage was just beginning to turn color. I went to the gym early in the morning and went out jogging. When I came back into the then new [The Robert N. Aebersold Student] Recreation Center, (it had just opened the previous year), I saw a bunch of people standing around the TV in the lobby. I wondered, "What's causing such a gathering?" At that point, only one of the two towers of the World Trade Center had been hit, and everybody was talking, "What's going on here?" Then, while I was watching, live, the second plane hit the tower. From there, all through that day, people were gathering in the classrooms where the professors would tune in the latest news through the computer to show what was going on. We had class but nominally. Students, faculty, staff--all our attention lay elsewhere.

What caused a bit of lament in my mind was the fact that the campus officials seemed to be slow in reacting. Some students got busy and drew messages via colored chalk on the campus sidewalks, then a new method of disseminating information. Later in the week, on Friday evening, we had a gathering in front of the Bailey Library. I thought the campus leaders were then a little slow in reacting here. A gentleman named G. Warren Smith, whom I personally liked, was at that point the SRU President, and he tended to be a little bit undynamic--slow to react to things. Given the intensity of feelings nationwide, I think that slowness resonated a bit negatively on the campus. The turnout in front of the Library that Friday was still pretty good. People were anxious somehow to demonstrate some level of involvement and concern. That was certainly a major event that pops into my mind.

MJ: What about building projects specifically? Because if you've been here since the '80s, you would have seen a lot of the campus around us sort of pop up.

AL: Yes, certainly. When I was first here, Swope Music Hall was the very end of the campus--aside from the football field. There was little to nothing beyond there. There was a high-rise dormitory called Founders [Hall]. That was in the new dormitory area where Watson Hall and everything down there would later be constructed. Aside from that tall, older student dormitory, there was nothing east of Swope. There was no Aebersold Recreation Center. None of those new

dormitories; there was no baseball field; there was no soccer field; it was just [an] open series of grassy areas.

The old-timers of the day, of course, talked about how, going back into the 1950s and '60s it was even more starkly contrasting because the campus basically stopped at the [Morrow] Field House. There was no Vincent [Science Center], there was no Swope, there was no Eisenberg [Classroom Building]. In effect, I came at the point of the second phase of Slippery Rock's expansion--all those new dorms, the baseball field, and the more fully structured use of the land as athletic facilities, rather than just open fields--all the sports areas that were constructed on top of the hill where Branchton and Harmony Road crisscross, and all those baseball fields--it was just open space back then. We used to go up there and utilize it as a driving range. (We supplied our own golf balls). There were some softball, baseball, and rugby fields, but it used to be little more than just wide-open space. We always advertised that we had more acreage than any other campus (we still do) in the [Pennsylvania] State System [of Higher Education], but particularly in the 1980s and before, much of that acreage was just wide-open, grassy fields. So much of that has been developed now. That's a big change, and for the better, I think.

MJ: All right, and any other big, memorable events you can think of?

AL: Hmmm. Well, 9-11 certainly keeps popping into my head, because it was a day when so many wider issues of the nation and the world came crashing home. We've witnessed such events as the outbreaks of violence on other campuses. The ones that stick in my mind were the shootings in Virginia. There was the 2006 violence which occurred at what we used to call 'VPI, or Virginia Polytechnic Institute.' The Virginia Tech shootings of 2006 underscored for me--fortunately, it hasn't come true (not yet, anyway)--that such possibilities are present in regard to a campus like Slippery Rock. They can happen anywhere. If it can happen at Virginia Tech down in Blacksburg, VA, it can happen at SRU--that was the lesson I drew.

I tried to make this point to various administrators over the years. We have to be a bit more on our guard. We cannot sleepwalk our way through day-to-day events, much as some may prefer to. We can't ever think that we're immune, because, again, it happened at Blacksburg, Virginia, on the Eastern slope of the Allegheny Mountains, so it can happen in Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania, on the Western slope of the Allegheny Mountains--the same longitude. It's not downtown Philadelphia or downtown New York, but it's not entirely disconnected countryside. So it's not all positive memory, but it's very real, and I think it touches upon social/economic dynamics to which we must maintain our attention.

MJ: Sounds like you've been retired for a couple of years now. What, if anything, do you miss about. . . .

AL: I just retired in May of 2023.

MJ: Oh, okay. Good to know. What, if anything, do you miss about being here?

AL: (Please don't worry about getting a particular little date incorrectly. Your question is a good one). Whatever I could articulate as far as what I miss about would logically translate back into me saying, "Gee, I wish I was thirty-five years old again and had the strength and energy of a thirty-five-year-old."

To amplify with a bit of personal backdrop: I used to live in a very active manner. Indeed, I still try to be a bit athletic every day, as the sloppy gym clothes I'm wearing indicate. I try to do some kind of workout every day to maintain my health. Back then, I did so vastly more, and did it consciously in connection with the professional work I was doing. What do I mean by that? In all those years in Washington, DC, I would go to the Library of Congress and the National Archives six days a week. I would get there early in the morning when the Library would open (at 7:45). I would work all day, taking maybe 20 minutes for lunch, and continue with my work until about 3:30 PM. Then I'd pack up my note cards into a little side pack--'fanny packs', we used to call them. Tying my 'pack' round my waist, I would then jog from the Library of Congress down the length of the [National] Mall from the Capitol Building, past the Washington Monument to the Lincoln [Memorial], and North into Rock Creek Park. I'd run past Connecticut Avenue and come out of Rock Creek just beyond of Adams Morgan, north of Dupont Circle. (I lived in the Dupont Circle area during most of my times in Washington). There, I'd pick up 19th St. and jog downhill to the Hilton Hotel, where I had a sports club membership. Then I'd do some weight work and swimming. So, I would pile athletics on top of my research.

I'd do the same sort of thing during my many semesters of teaching. I'd go jogging before or after a day of teaching, and swim and lift. The point of all this is: I miss doing that, certainly, but I no longer have the strength to do that. I'm seventy-one years old! So when you ask: "What do I miss. . . ." My answer focuses on not having that kind of energy any more. Well, that's another way of saying, "Gee, I sure wish I was thirty-five and not seventy-one." Well, who doesn't wish that? Nobody likes to be seventy-one as opposed to thirty-five, but that's life.

MJ: How would you like to be remembered by the community here? [Pause] Or do you have an opinion on that?

AL: Sure, I do. [Pause] I guess I'd like to be remembered as someone:

--who was what he genuinely presented himself to be: an active scholar and a genuinely concerned teacher, and servant to the public, who tried to approach all the materials that he mastered and taught and about which he wrote with an unrelenting level of integrity; and

--who, from there, let the record speak for itself as far as how students and colleagues reacted to what he wrote, what he taught, and how he served.

MJ: All right. And last question for you: do you have any words of wisdom for current and future Rock community members?

AL: *Be yourself*. [Pause] So much comes down to that simple point. Back when I taught at the prep school, Phillips Exeter Academy, the work there involved living in a dormitory, coaching

sports, and being, in effect, a local parent for students, as well as teaching. The intimacy inherent in such work could be severe. In such a context, I always said to people, “Whatever you try to hide that which you may not want people to know about, folks will somehow detect it; members of a community will often detect a sense of someone hiding something. Conversely, whatever you put up as a front that truly isn’t you, folks will see through it.” My point here was, and still is, that this precious thing we have called ‘life’ doesn’t really last that long, so please, make the most of it. Be who you are. To that end, find out what it is you want most and best to do and pursue it to your utmost. If the choice here is teaching, great! If it’s not, that’s okay too, but, whatever it is, be yourself and go after whatever it is that animates your spirit. And do so to the n’t degree; ‘cause there’s not a lot of time to do it.