Rock Voices: The Oral History Project of Slippery Rock University
Paul F. Rizza Interview
July 11, 2013
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JS: Today is July 11, 2013. I'm Judy Silva; I'm here with Paul Rizza for the Rock Voices Oral History Project. How are you today?

PR: I'm fine, thank you.

JS: That's the right answer [laughter] . . . okay. Can we start with a little bit of biographical information: full name, place of birth, date of birth if you want to?

PR: Okay, my name is Paul Frederick Rizza and I was born in New Britain, Connecticut on the fifteenth of December in 1938 and I began my public school at age four: kindergarten. I graduated from E.C. Goodwin Technical High School, which was a trade school and also from a regular high school, at age seventeen. So I got out of school early. I had a rocky start. I was expelled from school in the first grade. The teacher asked everybody what they wanted to be when they grew up and I said that I wanted to be a "Jap." The war [World War II] was on and that was not a popular thing to be. So they sent me to the principal's office and I [still] said that I wanted to be a "Jap." I remember seeing a picture [of a Japanese soldier] in the newspaper, with a rifle and a helmet. I thought he looked cute so . . . anyway I had to go home. My father convinced me that I didn't want to be a "Jap" so my mother took me down and I got back into school.

Then when I was in Washington Junior High School I got expelled a second time and I was really innocent. A friend of my mine had a switchblade knife and he was showing it to me and I was flipping it open, and a teacher was walking down the hall and said I threatened him with a knife, but I never did. I was just playing with it. So I got permanently expelled from Washington Junior High [and] I had to go to Nathan Hale Junior High School and finish.

Then my dad wouldn't let me go to a regular high school because my brother was going to be a physician, which he became, and I was supposed to learn a trade. So I took up carpentry and went to trade school for two years. Then my senior year I rebelled and went to high school and ended up getting degrees from both places, which was kind of unusual.

Then my academic career: I started—it was Connecticut State Teacher's College at the time—I started there in September and in October I got thrown out of school [laughter] for drinking and raising hell. So anyway I talked to the dean and—I was on the track team at the time—he told me that I ought to grow up. So I joined the Army; spent three years in the Army. Came back, did a couple years in an aircraft plant and worked on construction. Then I went back to school and finished my degree in three and a half years.

JS: A lot more mature by then.

PR: Yeah. Then I got married and got my master's degree at Central Connecticut State as well. [I] then ended up going to the University of Georgia where I got my doctorate in 1973.

JS: And then what about your professional career?

PR: My professional career . . . you want me to start when I was shining shoes or setting pins at a bowling alley? How far back?

JS: If they're colorful. I was thinking around your Ph.D., just before and after.

PR: I taught at the Haddam School in Haddam, Connecticut and it was a very wealthy school district. They built a nuclear power plant on the Haddam River called the Haddam Neck Plant. It was a small town and they had all this money so they were lavishing it on all sorts of things, including teachers. So I had a very good salary and I had a nice position there, but I just didn't like that age range.

JS: What was the age range?

PR: I was teaching junior high and high school, and more in junior high—just a few classes in high school. It was a small school district but wealthy and I just felt like the students weren't really all that interested. They were going through all that growing up stuff: testosterone poisoning and so forth [laughter], you know. So it was a difficult time for them and I didn't enjoy it.

JS: In the ‘seventies too. Was that in the ‘seventies? It was pretty wild.

PR: No, in the ‘sixties. Anyway, so after that . . . well my Naval career came in there too, but that's a different story. When I graduated from college with my bachelor's degree I joined the Navy. I had already had three years in the Army: active duty and [three years in] Reserve. I'd been stationed at West Point Military Academy in New York, where I was a military instructor. I used to teach really important things like motor pool inspection and how to make concrete cylinders, goofy stuff, but anyway I enjoyed it.

So when I joined the Navy I was given a one year contract. They said, "Anytime in the first year if you change your mind you can get out." I said, "Okay." So I went to OCS [Officer Candidate School] and shortly after graduation I got my orders for Small Boat Handling School in San Diego, California. The only place you went from there was the Mekong River [in Vietnam] and my youngest daughter was three months old—no she was about six or seven months old—and it just didn't seem like the thing I wanted to do, so I resigned my commission and got out. That's when I went and taught at Haddam, worked on my master's part time and eventually used the GI Bill to finish it up.

JS: So just to be clear that was during [the] Vietnam [War]?

PR: Right, correct. I was too young for Korea and really too old [for Vietnam]. In between those two time periods was a good place to be.

JS: Yeah, right.

PR: So that's my academic background.

JS: Okay, so after your Ph.D. what did you do first?

PR: First thing I did was apply for a job. I thought I should make some money and Slippery Rock was one of five institutions I applied to. I was offered three chairmanships and four positions. I chose Slippery Rock because it had the largest Geography Department. There were, I think, eleven people on the staff when I came here. The other places like Pembroke, North Carolina had four people and [another had] two people. They were small; not really stable so I wanted to go to a place that was bigger and more secure. So I came to Slippery Rock and it was a good choice.

JS: Who were some of your colleagues then? And what year was that?

PR: I came here in 1972. Interesting story, I was offered a position and I came for an interview and I met the dean who was Wesley Lang at that time, Dean of the School of Social and Behavioral Sciences. He was a dean and offered me the position as a chair. He was very excited about my coming and called and asked me about this and that several times before I came. Then when I arrived on campus that was the year that the APSCUF contract went into effect, so I was hired as a chairman [and when] I arrived I was no longer a chairman because the department had to vote [for] the chairman. And they voted [for] me and there was no problem and I won every election, every year since.

JS: Really? I have never heard of that: coming in as chair. That's very interesting.

PR: So anyway that was really an interesting time period with that stuff going on. Things were very different then obviously than they are now. Students used to have arena registration, that used to exist in the old days.

JS: Yeah, I did that.

PR: Yeah, right, and they'd have all these cards and they'd be trading cards and turning them in. [The registration process was] really kind of wild. I used to feel sorry for the students. I thought that was a terrible system. Eventually we got away from that.

JS: So who was chair before you came? Why were they bringing you in as chair?

PR: The chairman before me was a fellow by the name of Bill Martin and he did not have a terminal degree. He also had alienated the dean and some other administrators. He was a . . . I don't know if he was really a communist [as he claimed]. He was really kind of a thorn in the side of the department as well. He used to tell students, "Don't ever take courses in this department, it's a terrible department," [laughter] and things like that. He taught a summer course one time and a student complained to me that he told him if you don't come to class I'll give you an A but if you show up I am not going to pass you.

One of the basketball coaches called me up and was all upset over that. So anyway, we had those kinds of problems. But I don't want to give the wrong impression. The vast majority, in fact all the faculty, with the exception of this one person, were excellent people. They were very helpful; they were good people. It's interesting that out of the ten that were here, seven of them still live in the area and we're all friends. We still get together. We had a forty year anniversary party at my house last October.

JS: Nice. Who are some of those? Mostly men I'm guessing . . .

PR: Well, Beverly Buchert, who was very instrumental in the Environmental Studies program, making it successful. Bob Davis, Jim Hughes, Robert Matthew, Andy Grotewold, Tom Hannon, Gene Wilhelm. All these people are still here and we get together on occasion. I'm more friendly with some than others, but we all got along, and I always attribute it to the fact that: I'm not all that great—I mean there are a lot of things I'm not good at, but I seem to have the ability to find what other people are good at and let them do it. So I think our department was successful because the people who loved to do advising, I let them do advising. People who wanted to work on curriculum, I let them work on curriculum. It's interesting but it seemed to work well.

We would have things like we were going to clean out the closet, we had all these maps hanging and field equipment and so forth. Everybody came down on a Saturday and we spent the whole day here working. Just things like that. There was a lot of togetherness. I probably can honestly say that the greatest . . . the people that influenced me the greatest were the people in my department. And I didn't hire any one of them, they were all here when I got here. Except for one.

JS: Well then . . . do you know how large that department is now? It's a lot smaller isn't it?

PR: I don't know what the actual size is now. I tried to keep track of it when I retired in '98 but then a few years went by and you just feel like you don't want to interfere, you don't want to say this is the way we used to do it. But there are some good people in there now, and they are doing good things from what I can see. There was a combination—combined [the Departments of] Geography and Geology, I think it was under Bob Smith's tenure, yeah it was under his tenure, he was Vice President for Academic Affairs and Warren Smith was the president. I never agreed with that decision but it worked out okay. Like anything else, it will work if people want to work at it. It didn't make a lot of sense to me academically, but . . . and I loved Bob Smith.

JS: Which decision? What . . . do you mean to combine Geography and Geology?

PR: Combining Geology and Geography, right. Now one of the things we did shortly after I came here: the Geography Department taught a course on Environmental Problems and a course in Conservation, and there were no other courses on the environment or conservation on campus except for our department. So when the Environmental Studies Program or Environmental Sciences and Environmental Studies became popular our department was well positioned to move into that. And we became the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies. We did a lot of work with the people in Vincent Science Hall. They did the Environmental Sciences and we did the soft stuff: The History of Environmental Thought, Environmental Problems, Environmental Law [and Conservation].

JS: I think I read something in *The Rocket* about the MS3 [Master of Science in Sustainable Systems] program. You supported moving it.

PR: Yeah, that was after my time and there was a . . . . I asked about why. I asked the President why it was going down the tubes and the basic problem was the only people in the program were people who were subsidized by the institution so if they could get money to go into the program they did, but we weren't attracting people outside that would pay the fair share for that degree program.

JS: Of students?

PR: Yeah. It's unfortunate but . . . .

JS: Yeah, it was unfortunate. Okay, well that's all very interesting. Alright, so . . . any other positions that you held on campus? Committees or things like that?

PR: Yes, I was an acting dean for two years.

JS: Oh right, right.

PR: I think it was from'78 to'79 or '79 and '80,'80-'81, right in there.

JS: And that was the School of what?

PR: Social and Behavioral Sciences and we had a wonderful dean by the name of Tip McFadden, who went on to a school in North Dakota and eventually ended up in Houston at a Catholic college where he was president, the first non-clergy president that they ever had. He's still a friend; we visit occasionally. We'll probably look him up when we go down next month. Great guy and he encouraged a lot of interaction within the departments in the School. Then he had a real difficult time with the administration, which sort of pushed [him] out I think. He left and he became the president of the school in South Dakota. I can’t recall the name of it [but] I represented the University at his inauguration. I went to the inauguration and met some interesting people, a lot of them.

JS: Where you involved in the Union?

PR: Yes, when I came here I really didn’t like the idea of a union. But I joined because I thought everybody should. I didn’t like the way . . . I thought they tended to protect people who were incompetent on occasion. They also did some good things for faculty and for benefits. So I decided to not oppose the Union but get into the Union and be actively engaged with it. Then I became the grievance chairman.

JS: Oh good.

PR: I was the grievance chairman for the University. I went to Harrisburg several times and decided what cases were going to go to arbitration and that sort of thing. We had fairly good, I think, presidents of APSCUF all the time I was here. In fact it is kind of interesting, I feel like there was a tremendous improvement in the Administration from when I got here till when I left. There seemed to be an incremental change over time. They kept getting better and better and better. We ended up with some really good people that helped this institution a lot.

JS: The presidents of the university or the president of APSCUF?

PR: Both.

JS: Okay, so like Irv Kuhr and Wilma Cavill early on.

PR: Yes. [Bill] Taylor, McCoskey. They’re all . . . .

JS: Kate Brennan.

PR: Yeah, Kate was more towards the end.

JS: Yeah, right, right.

PR: I think part of it was when I came here I don’t think there was an administrator . . . maybe there [were] one or two female administrators. They were almost all male. I think once they started bringing female administrators in that really helped a lot to improve the overall institution.

I remember arguing with one president when I was acting dean. We used to have cabinet meetings every week and he said that we have to cut the budget for the library: we can’t afford journals anymore. And I said, “We can’t have gaps in journals.” You can’t have several years and then all of a sudden cut it off and go back again. You really have to maintain the collection.

JS: Thank you! Yes.

PR: So we had this agreement. He said there is no place that we could find the money and we looked at the budget. We had $50,000 set aside for buses to take the band here and there. I said I don't think we need to do that [laughter].

JS: Thank you.

PR: I'm sure a lot of people didn't agree with me but anyway, that was the year . . . that was my second year and I was told not to apply for the permanent dean because I wouldn't be considered. So I said fine and I went back to [being] department chair, and I'm glad I did. Being a dean back then was nothing but personnel problems. You had faculty members who were drinking too much, you had faculty members who were having marital problems; I had a faculty member whose wife was dying of cancer and he was in my office crying every other week and he couldn't meet his classes. It was just one headache after another. You really . . . I had this vision if you were dean you could bring people together and do all these wonderful things with curriculum. You know, really do some exciting stuff but I found myself bogged down in personnel problems. I just didn't like that.

JS: I'm surprised it wasn't the case as chair also, to a lesser extent, that that wasn't a lot of personnel issues. As chair you said you were able to appoint people to do curriculum and to make people do useful things that worked out well at a different level.

PR: Yeah. I also chaired the University Curriculum Committee for two years. In fact I just had the old folder. I threw my minutes away from '91-'92. I don't think they are going to need them anymore.

JS: We have them. We have them in the Archives, don't worry.

PR: I kept them for I don't know what reason but I had two big loose-leaf binders and the one I just threw out was '91-'92. So that was one of the years.

JS: I hope we have them, actually [laughter].

PR: Anyway I know one of the things you had in your list was people who influenced you and I mentioned how my department and my faculty members did. But there were some other really good people here.

JS: Tell me.

PR: When I first arrived and I was a brand new chairman, in fact, the dean called me up and said, "What are your course offerings for the fall?" Registration started in two days, and I had no idea. Nobody [had] told me about this. I was supposed to put that together [laughter] but I didn't know that; it was my first day on the job. So I got a hold of Jim Hughes and Jim said "Oh no problem, we'll put it together." Jim's good at that stuff. So he put together a schedule and it worked out fine. Then I met Bob Aebersold who chaired the PE Department . . . the Physical Education Department. He said, “If you need anything or you’re not sure what to do, give me a call anytime,” and I said, “Okay Bob, I will.” So I started to call Bob, “What do I do with this? What about this budget issue? How do we . . . ?” He was really very, very generous with his time and helping me. And Bob Duncan in the History Department was a chair and he also was very helpful. Kind of a quiet low-key guy. But he was a good guy too.

Later on I got to know Ted Walwik. Ted and I became good friends. We worked together in Rotary and we worked together on campus. We had all kinds of stuff going on. Bob McCoskey was another guy. I’d go down to his office and let him carve away; we’d smoke a couple cigarettes and shoot the breeze. But he was also a guy who had some interesting ideas and good thoughts. These were all very productive people. They did good stuff here.

JS: He was very interested in the environment.

PR: Yes, he was.

JS: The Alter Project.

PR: Sustainable Systems. In fact the McCoskey Center wouldn’t have existed without him. It’s a shame to see it now kind of . . . it’s there but not really doing what I think most people wanted it to do. Then when Bob Aebersold became president I thought that was great.

PR: I think he did a wonderful job. I also liked Larry Park; he was a good guy. Then I think both the Smiths [G. Warren and Robert] were good and Cheryl [Norton] now is an excellent president. She has only been here about a year and I’m still learning about her, but everything I’ve seen is very positive. We have some people who I think care about the institution in a way that they didn’t before. I mean maybe they did but it didn’t come across to me anyway.

JS: Was Reinhard president when you were here? And then Park?

PR: Yes. He’s the one I had to . . . .

JS: I was going to guess that [laughter]. That was my first guess but I didn’t want to say it. So Reinhard, Park . . . I don’t know if in that order . . . .

PR: Al Watrel was [president] when I first came here.

JS: Oh, so you were here for that.

PR: And Al Watrel, believe it or not, I have seen him several times since he left, mainly through Rotary. He became a Rotarian and a district governor. I have met him at Rotary International and zone meetings. He is a very pleasant guy, very different than what I recall. Of course he was kind of distant: he was up there and I was down here. I think he turned out to be a really nice man.

JS: Did you think he was railroaded or do you, I don't know if you want to say it, but I know he left on kind of uncomfortable terms?

PR: I think that he was definitely undermined by some administrators and I think he was probably ill-advised by others. He did some things that I don't think he ever intended to be something nasty but it turned out that way. I don't know there was a . . . core group that was here. I think they are just about all gone and retired or dead by now. But there was a core group here who were kind of the locals. They knew the local farmers and they knew the people downtown. Isaly's was the place that they all met for coffee. I remember Bob . . . what's his name . . . he owned Isaly's. His first name was Bob.

JS: Ward? Was it Ward?

PR: No. But I went in there one time and he said, "Oh, you faculty members all earn too damn much money and you're hanging around the coffee shop again." And every time I went in there he would insult me in some way . . . jokingly. I finally just said, "I'm not going in there anymore." Other people did. Bob Aebersold worked into that group but I never did. I mean not that he thought like that but he . . . .

JS: He could get along with people.

PR: Right, so anyway.

JS: Any characters or memorable people? Not necessarily leaders.

PR: Oh God, yeah. There were lots of them [laughter]. Many, many . . . I don't know where to start. Okay, the guy in English, he wore one black sock and one white sock . . . .

JS: Hunter.

PR: Hunter Davis, yeah. He played the harmonica and he was quite a character. He smoked a little dope, ya know . . . . We'd go to an APSCUF party and he'd have a bottle of brandy he'd bring out. He was really quite a character. He was colorful.

JS: Yes.

PR: We had other people who were characters but in different sorts of ways. I think I'd rather not talk about that anymore.

JS: Oh that's fine, that's fine. Let me come back to my notes here. Let's talk a little bit about your accomplishments. For example, the Fulbright.

PR: Okay, yeah I got a Fulbright to Finland—a Senior Fulbright Scholar to Finland in 1976. I applied for the Fulbright never thinking [I would get it]. I mean I'm a guy who just threw my name in the hat. I got called a few times and went down to Washington D.C. and I met the

Finnish Ambassador and I went to DuPont Circle and met a whole bunch of other Fulbrighters. This was before I was selected actually. I found out—I was out with my family camping out West when I got a phone call through my mother-in-law in California. She told me that I'd gotten this and I had to call Washington right away. So I called, of course I came back here and a very interesting thing happened: I found out, at least I was told, that I was the first person to ever get a full Senior Fulbright Scholarship at this institution, no one had ever had one before. So I thought that was kind of neat.

JS: From Slippery Rock?

PR: Yes, Slippery Rock. Now other people had Fulbrights but they had travel grants, they had for teaching a course, but nobody had a senior lecture position to a foreign country. But anyway, that was kind of neat. I was told the dean, Tip McFadden at the time, was thrilled and said, "No problem; go and have a great time." I said, "What about insurance?" "Oh, your insurance is all taken care of. It's just like you were here, but you're teaching over there."

I was scheduled to teach at four universities: Helsinki School of Economics, the Vaasa School of Economics, University of Oulu . . . Oulu and Vaasa are both on the Gulf of Bosnia on the coast. Then the University of Joensuu, which is in the east on the Russian border. They had a variety of places that I lived and taught. Some places I only had doctoral candidates, which was kind of nice. I had just a few guys, or usually guys—occasionally women—that we worked with. But I went over and everything went fine. I came back and then I found out that my family didn't have any insurance. The university had canceled my insurance while I was gone. Then I found out that that semester was not counted toward my tenure so I lost a semester worth of tenure, which interestingly enough, when I came here there were four other people hired in my department at the same time. Three others plus myself and so we were all at the same step. Then all of a sudden I dropped below everybody on the tenure list.

JS: Oh, no!

PR: But that's okay there was never retrenchment. There was talk about it but it never happened, thank God. But anyway that was quite an experience. I was really disappointed when I came back and that happened, and in fact I filed a grievance and APSCUF wouldn't support it, about my tenure, or about time and service. It wasn't until many years later that—I think it was Taylor, Bill Taylor called me up and said, "Can't we get this thing done? It's been hanging around for years." I said, "Yea, I really hate to do that because I'd rather be a thorn in the side of APSCUF than give in on this, but," I said, "you're right. I'll sign the papers or whatever." Got it over with and done.

But I mean that was a wonderful experience for me. Jim Hughes and I had done a lot of work together. We published a couple of books and we did papers at meetings, and you know, all kinds of stuff. We have been professionally very active together. We team taught in the auditorium for several years: Discover Geography, which the kids call "Disco Geo" [laughter]. And it's interesting because we were kind of a comedy team in the auditorium with 200+ kids in there; we really didn't get to know anybody. But at the same time you had all this . . . you had all these kids out there. And interestingly enough, years later, even now within the last year, people come up to me and say, "I had you in Discover Geography. It was the best class I ever had at Slippery Rock" or "I really enjoyed that."

JS: How nice.

PR: My wife and I were at a hunt ball at the Rolling Rock Country Club in Ligonier about seven or eight years ago and there was a band with a female singer and she called me over and I said, "I think she likes me, I'm going to go talk to her." [Laughter] We went over and she says, "Are you Dr. Rizza?" I said, "Yeah." "I had your class Discover Geography in Slippery Rock several years ago". She said, "Best class I ever had." I said, "Well I'm glad, thank you very much." She said, "That's where I met my husband." I said, "In my class?" She said, "Yeah, he's the lead guitarist." So she called him over and I met him. It was neat how these things happen many years later.

JS: That's nice. Yeah. Where did you meet Carolyn, if you don't mind me asking? She's from Texas right?

PR: Yep. That's another thing nice about Slippery Rock: it's where I met Carolyn. In fact Tip McFadden introduced me to her on the second floor of the Spotts World Culture Building outside the Political Science Department office door. We chatted for just a few minutes. I had just met her and I had just gotten back from Egypt. I was on that program with Claire Settlemire and Bob Davis. We spent six weeks in Egypt. It was a wonderful program.

Anyway I met her for the first time and she looked pretty nice, you know. Then as things progressed we became friends and then I was in the process of getting divorced. She was in the process of getting divorced. I got divorced in February and she got divorced in April. We got married in July and everybody said, "You should never get married right after you get divorced. It's a rebound marriage. It never works." Thirty-four years, we're doing pretty good.

JS: Oh I'm glad. That's nice. That's really nice.

PR: We are really happy.

JS: Good. I like your wife.

PR: But I'm grateful to Slippery Rock for introducing me to her. And even Tip. We had drinks with him down in Texas a few months back. We were talking about when I first met Carolyn and how he introduced me. It was really kind of funny.

JS: Do you want to talk about Carruth-Rizza Hall at all?

PR: Yes, I think that was very nice. My father-in-law had died and my mother-in-law wanted to do something to celebrate our retirement at Slippery Rock. Then, what's his name, Barbara Ender's predecessor: Bob Mollenhauer, he was very good with my mother-in-law. He went down and bought her flowers and lunch and stuff like that. He cultivated her [interest in Slippery Rock] very nicely. He came up with this deal: you give $2.5 million to name this building. My mother-in-law said, "Yeah, we can do that." So she did. That's how that building [was named Paul and Carolyn Carruth Rizza Hall].

JS: Just because you and Carolyn worked here, right? That was her only connection with the university?

PR: Right. She wanted to honor our combined service and our retirement.

JS: That's really wonderful.

PR: And also after that happened—my father-in-law always liked fountains, so the fountain in there, which I paid for, is dedicated to Buddy Carruth, my father-in-law. I think Carolyn's mother's gift to the University was very nice but it also helped reinforced our feelings about giving money to the University. I think before I die, if not before I die shortly after I'm dead, I will have given back to Slippery Rock University more money than I ever was paid in salary.

JS: Wow!

PR: I think that's going to happen.

JS: You guys are involved with Storm Harbor [Equestrian Center] too, aren't you?

PR: Correct. Storm Harbor was my horse. Is my horse, I'm the owner. I bought the horse for Carolyn. She rode it and when he was doing very well someone offered me $50,000 for him. I said, "I'm going to sell him." She said, "No you're not. He's now my horse." I said, "Okay, dear." Now he is worth glue money? I don't know, but he's retired.

JS: But he's immortalized.

PR: Right.

JS: So you're both very involved with Storm Harbor Equestrian Center?

PR: No, Carolyn is more involved with the Storm Harbor Equestrian Center. I'm on the Slippery Rock University Foundation Board and I'm on the Investment Committee. We have a meeting next week, Wednesday.

JS: Well, remember the library. I'm so glad you were a supporter of the library back then [laughter]. We still need you. Alright, how about . . . you mentioned the classroom a little bit.

The class you team taught with Jim [Hughes]. Do you want to talk about best and worst teaching moments?

PR: Well, I think team teaching with Jim was probably sort of a high point in terms of actually teaching. I had a low point in teaching: I think it was my first or second year here I was teaching classes on U.S. and Canada, The Geography of U.S. and Canada. I went in the class one day and I was having a bad day. I don't know why; things were not going well. I remember not feeling particularly well. I had my notes and I put them on the lectern and I turned around and went to pull the map down. The map came off the wall, hit me in the head. I stumbled back, stepped into a trash can and fell over. And I felt . . . . Everybody was laughing. I mean it must have been funny to watch, but I didn't think it was very funny. I had a little knot on my head. It wasn't a big thing, but it was very upsetting. In fact, I told the class I have to leave for a few minutes but I'll be back. I went out and got a drink of water, rinsed my face off. Went back in and taught the class but it was . . . I felt embarrassed by it.

JS: Yeah, that would be a low point for sure.

PR: I think the real high point of teaching for me was . . . I taught cartography. I was the only one who taught cartography in the department in all the years I was here. And classes were small because you only had so many drafting tables. We had a maximum of twelve students. Occasionally we could fit a thirteenth one in, but then they were on a light table and that wasn't good. It was a required course for most majors so it was always full but because it was a small class—I used to teach a three hour session every Wednesday afternoon—I would get to know these kids. I mean I knew their names, I knew about their families and we just got to know each other. At the end of every semester—I first started doing it with the advanced cartography class which would be only seven or eight students—I'd invite them to my house for dinner and I'd cook them dinner.

Then I started doing it with the regular cartography class. So I'd do it twice a year and I would tell them, "If you want to drink responsibly, that's up to you. I will not provide you with any alcohol. But if you want to bring a couple beers, wine or something, that's okay." And so in the spring I would barbeque outside, and in the fall and in December I'd cook them a meal inside. And that was really a fun time. Some of those—one guy is still in the CIA, he went from here to there in the late '70s, mid to late '70s, around '76 or'77 [he] graduated. He is pretty high up in the CIA now. But he still emails me; we still talk. He visits me every once in a while, not often but every two or three years. His kids are all grown; he has grandkids now. We're all older. But it's nice to have that kind of relationship.

Actually toward the end of my career—teaching career—I was unhappy with the way things were going. It wasn't just Slippery Rock, it was everywhere. I had hosted students from all over the world through Rotary at my home. They came and stayed for two or three days, a week, whatever with different programs. Never had a problem and then all of a sudden, after 1998, around 2000, they decided that you could no longer have a person in your home unless you have a criminal background check. So I had to get a criminal background check to host a student and I said, "I'm done with that." I felt it was insulting.

Same thing at Slippery Rock: my students, particularly in the cartography class, female students at the end of the semester often came up and gave me a hug. "Have a nice Christmas Dr. Rizza," "Thank you, you too." Maybe in the fall when I saw them they might do the same, they might not. Some did, some didn't. It was not a requirement but I think it was a natural show of affection. Then when they said you can't hug students, you can't have a female student in your office with the door closed and all these other rules came in, and I thought, you know really in a way for me it ruined the kind of close . . . close association and affection I had for some of my students. I thought that was . . . I didn't like that part of it. So in a way I was glad that I was retiring so I didn't have to put up with that anymore. That's done.

JS: You can have a student wanting to talk about something confidential, but if they happen to be female you wouldn't be allowed to have that conversation.

PR: Well I have had female students come in and tell me they were pregnant. And I'd refer them to the people up there who do the counseling. I'm not qualified to handle that one. But I mean they'd talk to me about breaking up with their boyfriends, their mother died or, you know, whatever it was.

It was like the Buckley Amendment when that came out. I thought that was a terrible rule. The Buckley Amendment restricted professors and teachers from discussing the students and their academics with their parents. So I had a young lady who was here, she was having a very good time. She was drinking and doing drugs, and I was her advisor. She said she had a problem; I advised her to get counseling and she wouldn't do that. Her father owned a ranch, he was a retired . . . I think Air Force general. And he had a ranch down in Costa Rica, or Nicaragua somewhere; he brought me a bag of coffee. He came up and wanted to know how his daughter was doing. And I really couldn't tell him; I really couldn't be honest with him and say, "This kid . . . ." I did say, "I really think she needs help." He asked me how her grades were and I couldn't tell him. I think a lot of things have been done that have been instituted for the primary purpose of protecting women, that maybe hurt women too. I don't think they've always been helpful.

JS: Yeah, interesting. Well, we have talked about influential people on campus and movers and shakers and all that. What about major events or activities while you were here? Could be building projects or local things or national things that had an impact on you while you were here.

PR: No, I think one of the things that I found particularly disturbing and I don't remember if there was a time frame where we had bomb scares. Some kid would call up and say there's a bomb in Spotts World Culture Building. We'd have to clear the building. It disrupted class, it disrupted the rhythm, it disrupted your schedule. Those I found very disturbing. But there was really nothing you could do about it. You had to go with the flow the way they did it.

Everybody knows that the campus in 1972 versus the campus today . . . you wouldn't know it's the same place except for Old Main, North Hall, a few places, the old library. But basically the campus has changed tremendously. I did something for I think about three years: I advised a fraternity and really, I didn't like that. I felt like, they needed to have an advisor, I understand that. And I would sit and talk with them and they'd be fine but then on the weekends they'd get drunk and do whatever they did.

JS: Yeah crazy party time in the '70s. The fraternities . . . I was just reading about a fire and the different things that happened.

PR: Right. So I wasn't going to go down every Saturday night to police the frat house. That was beyond my responsibility. I tried to give them good advice but . . . . I know Jim Hughes did it for years. He [advised] a sorority for years. Maybe girls were different. I'm sure they are much nicer to work with. But, anyway that was not a good experience.

JS: What about protests or anything like that? Student protests?

PR: No. The protest period was largely when I was teaching at the University of Georgia. Vietnam was hot. I was hired as a teaching assistant mainly because I had teaching experience in high school. So I was given a teaching assistantship when I went to the University of Georgia to work on my doctorate. Every quarter I would just get a class. Then I'd have a class of usually forty. Sometimes I'd get the bigger lecture room and I'd get eighty. They told me, "This is the book we're using." I said, "Okay," and they'd let me alone. But that was a time when Vietnam was hot. I would have, I don't know how many guys I'd have in my office saying, crying, "If I fail this course they're going to send me to Vietnam. I'll lose my deferment." I tried to explain, "It's not me that's doing it. It's up to you to perform or not." I think a lot of those kids probably shouldn't have been in college anyway. They were going just because they didn't want to get drafted, and I can understand that too. That was a tough time period.

Then when we had demonstrations on campus I would tell them, "I would rather you not go to the demonstration, I'd rather you come to class. So let's talk about Vietnam. Let's talk about what are the issues? Let's look at the culture, let's look at the background. Let's look at the history, let's look at the geography. There are lots of reasons why these things are happening. I'd rather do that than have you out there demonstrating and yelling."

Then I worked for the ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union] during race riots in Athens [Georgia]. I had a clipboard and I'd go around—they had a fenced in area where they were putting people, mostly Blacks. I was trying to get names [of people being held and] to find out where they lived so we could go back and tell their families through the ACLU. But I got turned off by the ACLU. That was my only time: I did it for a couple days and then I was done.

JS: What if anything do you miss about being here? Sounds like you were ready to go.

PR: I think the most important thing that I miss is the students. Having access to the students, and of course but it was changing just before I left so maybe . . . I don't think it would be the same if I [were] here now. Maybe, I don't know. I miss the library, believe it or not. I used to love to come to the library and read *The Economist*, or pick up *The Wall Street Journal*. I used to order *The New York Times* and go pick it up in the bookstore and then try and get a half hour to read it somewhere along the way. The people in the library were always very nice. I can't ever remember having anyone who was nasty or curt. Jane Scott of course is a friend of mine too. Jane was wonderful. I was doing some research on irrigation and I'd look for things and I'd get stuff on interlibrary loan. She would call and say, "Well I found this, would you be interested?" I mean it's almost like . . . I can't describe it. But I always felt very positive about the personnel office and about the library. It was always very good.

Buildings and grounds . . . we used to have a guy, he was a colonel in the Army: Hamby was his name. He said, "We're going to cut down all the trees because it messes up the campus and we can't mow grass. So we are going to get rid of all the trees." He was all for cutting everything down. We of course were in the Environmental Studies Department saying, "We want more trees. No, don't cut them down." So that was a big issue.

JS: Who won that?

PR: Well he won for a while but then he was gone. He was here in charge of campus maintenance when I came in '72. I don't think he was here for more than a couple years. And again they found somebody who was really more professional, who had a background in that sort of thing. People like Scott Albert today. These guys are good; they know what they're doing. Back then Colonel Hamby got the job because he was a retired army Colonel I think. Or maybe it was Air Force, I don't remember what branch it was.

JS: Cut the trees down. Make it easier to mow. That makes sense. Okay well actually we're to the last question. Do you have words of wisdom for the current or future Rock community? And how would you like to be remembered?

PR: Well, I would like to be remembered in a kindly way but it's not up to me. I mean there were some people that liked me and some that didn't. I'm sure that will be true down the road.

In terms of words of wisdom [pause]: I used to enjoy sitting down with students and finding out what they really wanted to do. And often times they'd say, "I want to be a doctor or I want to be a nurse or I want to be an engineer or I want to be a biologist or whatever." And then they're majoring in education. I said, "Okay, what do you really want to do? Stop and think about it." If you really want to do something, I don't care if you're majoring in philosophy or history where there may be no jobs, but if that's what you really want to do and you really love it then you should do it. And I think I tried hard to get that message across to people.

I remember one summer I had a young lady come into my office and she said she wanted to major in Geography. And I said, “Why?” She said, “Well, I don’t know what I want to do. I’m kind of interested.” She said, “I’m a transfer student and I had a course in geography and I liked it.” I said, “Where are you from?” She said, “Grove City College.” I said, “Okay, well why are you transferring?” She said, “You really want to know?” I said, “Yeah.” She said, “My dad said, ‘Slippery Rock’s a lot cheaper than Grove City and if you go there I’ll buy you a new car.’” [Laughter] So she transferred over here to get a new car and she left Geography after a couple semesters.

I just think it’s important for students—and faculty members are supposed to facilitate or help them do these things. Don’t dictate to them, but support them and find out what they really care about and encourage them to move in that direction. They often find out what they think they really want to do isn’t really what they want to do. I mean I started out in school, I was a physics major and a math minor and I ended up being a geographer. And only because in my master’s degree—I was working on in economics—I took economic geography and I was so fascinated with it I switched to geography from economics.

JS: Interesting.

PR: You know your whole life, if you don’t succeed in something that doesn’t mean you can’t succeed in something else. I think professors have a real obligation to support students to help them find what they want to do. To not lead them but give them opportunities, show them opportunities they may not be aware of. And if you don’t want to do that you shouldn’t be teaching, in my opinion. Because I really have enjoyed my association with students. It’s interesting because I didn’t really like advising so much: filling in the blocks and making sure they get this course in here. But I did enjoy talking to students and finding out, “What do you really want to do? Where are you at; how do you like this now that you have been doing it?” Kids are amazing. I think we are fortunate. I never ever had any discipline problems in thirty years here. No students being—a couple may have been rude, made a couple comments out of place. Say, “Hey, that’s inappropriate” and that ended it. Never, I mean, basically good kids. A lot of them were first generation college students. They’re nice ones to have. ‘Cause I was, and my brothers and sisters were.

JS: Nice.

PR: Okay, are you getting tired?

JS: No, but I think that unless you have anything else you want to add that we didn’t cover . . . .

PR: No, I don’t think so. I can always think of other things to say but I think this is [good].