

ROCKvoices: The Oral History Project of SRU
Richard Wukich Interview
March 30, 2021
Bailey Library, Slippery Rock University, Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania
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KM: My name is Kevin McLatchy. Today is March 30, 2021 and we are happy to have with us, Richard Wukich to be interviewed for the ROCKvoices Oral History Project at Slippery Rock University's Archives. And I already asked you Dick, you don't mind me calling you Dick, right?

RW: Fine. That's fine.

KM: All right. Could you give me your full name, date of birth, where you're from originally, and your education?

RW: Okay, my name is Richard Michael Wukich. I was born in Wilkinsburg, Pennsylvania on June 10, 1943. Most of my life, or my early days, I lived in North Braddock. We lived down, and right off of Ardmore Boulevard, Electric Avenue, and then we lived on First Ward, North Braddock. I went to school at North Braddock High School, Britain Avenue School, and I think, I'm looking up here at this picture and I had been searching for this teacher of mine; this teacher was Elsie Krivascy, and my mother said that she graduated from Slippery Rock. She was a teacher at Britain Avenue Grade School, and she was such an influence because her whole room was made up of stuffed animals, and things, and we had the sand tables. We would make math, we would make dioramas; and everything we did was working with our hands. I remember, because that was so much fun, fifth and sixth grade. She had a paddle she called "Susie," and you know, she never beat my ass, but other people, "you get up here," and she would beat their ass. "I'll get my Susie after you!" Bap, bap, bap, bap, bap. But she was a Slippery Rock woman. I don't know how I would ever find her in this picture.

KM: Okay. The question we ask everyone: your affiliation with Slippery Rock University?

RW: Well, I've been a teacher here since September 1968.

KM: The department was the Art Department, right?

RW: I was in the Art Department.

KM: And what was your capacity there in the Art Department?

RW: Well, when I first came to Slippery Rock I figured it was just going to be a year or so, and you know, we did not have an art major and mostly our--the majority of our students, came from Elementary Education and they signed up for what was called an art cognate, which meant that

they had a concentration in art. Which was kind of cool because, when I was student teaching, I really loved teaching elementary school. You know, when I had that couple months of teaching elementary school. And I know my critic teacher, he was very surprised, you know the teacher-- I graduated from Edinboro--the teachers said, "I have to come and see you in person, because I can't visualize you teaching these kids." [Cell phone rings]. Let me take care of this.

KM: [Brief comments about camera adjustment]. Alright, well you had other positions here too at the university? You were a trustee for a while?

RW: Yeah, till the governor threw me out.

KM: Oh gosh, okay [laughs].

RW: I mean my friends said, "we were real surprised you lasted as long as you did." [Laughter]. It turned out, you know, I had this thing with Itzi, Dr. Meztli, who now has passed away. He was a teacher in the English Department, and he was very active in the Democratic Party, and he was critical when we hired the president. We turned down Dr. Mohammadi and he accused us of being racist. And you know, poor Itzi, he died last year. He wanted to go back to Texas. It ended up that Dr. Mohammadi and I realized--we went we went to see him when he was in a nursing home and then he was released and he was on his own, and he had a caregiver because he was bedridden. So, Dr. Mohammadi called me up and said, "Itzi's alone." I think it was over Christmas, and so he and I went over and took care of him. It was kind of crazy; poor Itzi.

Anyhow there was an incident with the acting chancellor, interim chancellor; it's crazy. But my criticism was about, when they had all those negative studies and they were going to develop a game plan, you know, the people who had actually drove this system into the ditch, that they were going to come up with a new game. Because I was very critical, you know, when we had our meetings in Harrisburg. I figured, I'd been a student at Edinboro since 1961 to '65, then I taught for a year at Turtle Creek High School, and then I went to graduate school at New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred [University], and then immediately after I graduate in '68, I came here to teach, and I taught here until [pause] the end of June 2011. And then I [retired], and then later I was appointed to the Council of Trustees. I had in my mind that, you know, I kind of knew a whole lot about Slippery Rock, and I knew a lot about the state college system. I was active in the union; I was one of the, I guess you know, one of the founding members of APSCUF, and I was a membership chairman here and I was on every committee known to man, I served on. And furthermore, Kevin, I know where all the bodies are buried.

KM: [Laughs] Okay.

RW: You understand me? And I made it plain to people, I know where they're buried, you know.

KM: Yeah, alright.

RW: Anyhow, I lasted for a couple years on the Council of Trustees until the governor tossed me off.

KM: Right, all right. We won't get into that, I guess.

RW: Why not?

KM: Alright, go ahead.

RW: No, that's okay. That's all right. You know, my daughter, my youngest daughter Danica, who's a graduate, she works on Wall Street now, she lives in Manhattan and she works on Wall Street. And she described that, and I hadn't heard the term before, self-actualization. And I thought, "Wow, here I am, on the Council of Trustees elected secretary," and I was in line to be, eventually, I was in line to be the president or the chairman, chairman of the committee and . . . I'm self-actualizing because I have these ideas. I have a lot of ideas. You know, I've done a lot here, I've done a lot with Slippery Rock. Especially, to go to these meetings with the Council of Trustees and the very limited amount of knowledge that the members of the Council of Trustees have about the history and, furthermore, as we change administrations, the administrators don't get it. I mean they don't understand how things work why, why did this happen, how did this happen, why did this happen. And one of the things that I knew for sure is that everybody was patting themselves on the back, because of Slippery Rock's success compared to the other schools and I said, "You know, here's the thing: Slippery Rock has three things going for it: location, location, location." And people say, "Well, you know California isn't so far; Indiana isn't so far." I said, "No, no, no. You get on 79 and boom, you're here." You see. You're here and we are centrally located. And we have a beautiful campus, and we have some good programs, we have some *great* programs, but don't kid yourself. It's our location. It's our location. These other schools, Clarion and Edinboro, you know, they have okay programs; California has good programs; Indiana has good programs but guess what?

KM: Yeah, so you were here from the state college era in '68 right?

RW: State college.

KM: You were here when we transitioned into a university.

RW: Well, when I started at Edinboro in 1961 it had been, a total, total teaching institution, and in '60 they changed to make it a more liberal arts. So there was like a handful of people there, literally it was dominated by teachers, and at the time you had to be, by law, you had to have public school experience to get a job teaching in the state college system. So, they kind of ignored the rule after they made that transition into more of a liberal arts, or you know, trying to do a liberal arts program but, for the most part, this has been a teaching institution. It was a teaching institution and that kind of ruled over for many, many years, until now, you know, that that's all changed; everything has changed. But again, knowing where all the bodies are buried I said: you had to be a teacher, you had to have public school teacher. So the typical person they taught for a while in high school or elementary school, wherever they taught; they went and got their master's degree; maybe they got a doctor of education, and then they were able to get a job at a state school.

KM: I'm sure that definitely had advantages and disadvantages. And then it became a university in '83. Was that a major change during that period or did you notice any, was it a slow, gradual progression into it?

RW: Well, Indiana lorded over the rest of the colleges, the rest of the state, "We grant doctor[al] degrees." And so, when we were a university . . . and I like titles, I love titles, and it was cooler to be known as Slippery Rock University rather than Slippery Rock State College. But that enabled us to do some changes, to have a little bit more freedom. And essentially what it did was, when we established the faculty union, we had the faculty union and that made a big, big difference, because when they negotiated that faculty union we had American Federation of Teachers, and we had the--and I belonged to the AAUP, Association of University Professors, and then they had PSEA. And I didn't like PSEA; I wasn't enamored of PSEA.

KW: What was PSEA?

RW: Pennsylvania State Education Association. That was the union.

KM: Okay, do you remember what year that started; when you became unionized? Roughly?

RW: You shouldn't be asking an old man like me. I couldn't remember, but I know that when we started that union, in Art . . . eventually we had a vote, a system-wide vote to pick the organization. And of course, I liked the Association of University Professors, because our president was Norm Hawkins. And I want everybody to know this, you should put this up in neon lights: Norm Hawkins was in Sociology, and Norm Hawkins fought in the Spanish Civil War with the American Lincoln Brigade.

KM: Wow.

RW: And I mean, is that cool or what?

KM: Right.

RW: So I didn't want to be in any PSEA or American Federation. I wanted to be with my boy Norm because Norm was a freedom fighter. He was for democracy. Hey man, how cool is that? How cool is that to be a fighter in the American Lincoln Brigade in the Spanish Civil War? But it turned out that the real organizer of the PSEA, which was APSCUF, which became APSCUF, was a guy by the name of Marty Moran. And Marty Moran was a devotee of Saul Alinsky.

KM: Oh yeah.

RW: Okay. These guys, they did that, cuz I know when they were after Obama . . . but Saul Alinsky is like, okay, now you're gonna see somebody knows how to do it, see? And Marty Moran came in and so they were elected, PSEA, and I was like, "Oh God. Oh man." But Marty Moran came in and he negotiated the first contract, you see, the first union contract, which gave us the right to elect our own [department] chairman.

KM: And this is on a statewide level too, right?

RW: On a statewide level, and we could elect our own chairman. That changed the dynamics of the department, see? Because now the chairman wasn't somebody that was handed down by the administration, "You will obey this chairman." And that changed the entire way the system--not changed the entire way--but there was a definite shift and, of course, the pay went up.

But so many things that Marty had negotiated in the first, in the original contract, the state has been trying to undo for the last how many years. You know, every time they come around they try to chip away at it, but not very successful. Although, now really there are some things that, like I said, once at a meeting in Harrisburg explaining that I was a faculty member and a member of the faculty union, and now I am on the Council of Trustees, and so you might say that I've looked at clouds from both sides now.

KM: [Laughing] Right. Oh, okay.

RW: You know, there's certain work rules that need to be changed in order to give the--it's about giving the students a fair shake. See, it's about giving these kids a fair shake.

KM: Talking about that and the students. The Art Department--when you came in there wasn't a full-blown major, right?

RW: No, no, no. Our chairman of our department, again this [was] way before the union, was a woman by the name of Martha Gault.

KM: Oh yeah, sure. The Martha Gault Gallery is named after her.

RW: Oh yeah, well that was my idea. And I also had them changing the Art Club [to] the Martha Gault Society. But then these kids changed it back. "We don't even know who Martha Gault is." I mean it happened, they just did it. They just, one day they voted, "We're going to change this. . . ." Well, Martha Gault--let me tell you about Martha Gault.

KM: Let me just interrupt one sec. [Requests that he move back from the camera because he's getting cut out of the frame]. Yeah that's good, right there.

RW: I wanna get close so I can show my sincerity.

KM: [Laughing] All right. Sorry, Martha Gault.

RW: Anyhow, Martha Gault--I tell this to people all the time. There was a guy in the Art Department named Bob Crane, really great guy. He was in the Art Department and he came to Alfred Summer School to take--we had this legendary summer program, and he came there, and I met him. . . . I wanted to show him [cell phone rings]. He asked me if I wanted to have a show here, and I said, "Yeah." Well then, later in the year he called me or wrote to me, and he said, "Hey, our ceramic teacher. . ." [cell phone rings again]. Let me shut this off, [into phone: I'll call you back]. Anyhow, he said, "There's a job open here. And why don't you come down for an

interview?" And I thought, "Yeah maybe." I was working on an opportunity at Iowa, in Iowa, which was a pretty big-time job. And I thought, "Ah, maybe I should get closer to my mother, get closer to home. Try this out." So I drove down here for the interview, and I was interviewed by Martha Gault. There were a couple other administrators that interviewed me. And then afterwards we went over to Martha's house and had a party. Martha was great party giver. She lived on Normal Avenue. Dr. Sharma lived there [later]. But she had a real nice house there, and so we went over and we're there and I'm drinking and eating and having a good time, and she said to me, "Do you want the job?" And I said, "Well, you mean you can give me the job right now?" She says, "Yeah, if you want the job, I'll give you the job." And I'm there, "Okay."

KM: Wow.

RW: So, that's how I got hired. But see Martha was a powerful, powerful woman. You know why, she was president of the Emma Guffey Miller Democratic Women's Club. And they ruled! Emma Guffey Miller was the chairman of the board and, they loved--Emma loved Martha; Martha loved Emma. And a lot of the women in this town were members. People that don't realize how powerful Emma Guffey Miller was. She was like a power in Harrisburg.

KM: Right.

RW: See? And she could get whatever she wanted for Slippery Rock. I remember there was a story about her driving down with the president and she was going into the capital, she said, "You wait in the car [laughing]".

KM: We have a collection of a lot of memorabilia from her and it's incredible, all the inaugurations she was invited to personally to, you know, the presidents of the United States.

RW: I don't think people really understand. Again it's one of those things, new people come in it's like, Miller Auditorium and hey wait a minute, this woman built Slippery Rock. She was responsible for building Slippery Rock to what it was.

KM: Right.

RW: See?

KM: Yeah and then she had Eleanor Roosevelt come out here.

RW: Yeah.

KM: She spoke at the College. Yeah, powerful woman. Then her brother was a senator, US senator, from Pennsylvania too. So yeah.

RW: Well Martha, my chairman of my department, was good buddies with Emma and nobody messed because everybody knew, if you mess with Martha guess what, she's gonna tell Emma Guffey Miller and then you're in big problems.

KM: Yeah so, the Art Department was then . . . you came in and then, when did it become a major, or how did that all come about?

RW: Well, after the first year Martha had some serious health problems. She had some eye problems, she had some problems with her leg; and she decided she needed to retire, she just couldn't stand up to being. . . . And so we tried to elect the chairman from within, but there [were] some problems back and forth, and then the administration decided they would hire an Art Department chairman from the outside. And it was kind of funny because Watrel was the president, Dr. Albert Watrel was the president, and he [had] played football at Syracuse. And so he calls up Syracuse and says, "Hey, we need an art teacher down here to be the chairman," and they sent down Jim Ridlon, and Jimmy Ridlon was a football player with Jimmy Brown.

KM: Wow.

RW: Okay and, so it ends up that, of course, Dr. Watrel offered him the job on the spot. And he went back to Syracuse and was able to negotiate a better deal for himself at Syracuse. But one of the things that he did, because Dr. Watrel asked him to tell him about the faculty, like evaluate the faculty, and so he told Watrel, he says, "Aw man, that pottery teacher, he's really good. He went to Alfred, he's a really good potter." Which I was pretty hot shot at the time, and my whole life changed because now, this football coach endorsed me and man, I was. . . . So when my protector left, Emma left--I mean Martha left--and then I got this whole new status. So it just always worked out. You know what I mean, Kevin? Just always something comes along and, "Yeah man, this ain't bad." So that's why, that's why I ended up staying.

Well then, when they did hire a chairman, and I thought this was like a big mistake, I thought this guy was kind of . . . his name was Don Wink, and he was from Texas. He taught in Washington. And he came here and he was just so fantastic, he was so smart, and such a great painter. He was a painter and what he tried to do is recognize in everybody what their strength was and then encourage them to do that. Like, you know . . . Myford, he got Jim Myford. He took Jim Myford to this aluminum casting workshop in Pittsburgh, and then he and Jim built this aluminum furnace, and that's how Jim started making sculpture. Jim was an elementary teacher. He taught; he was an educator. He was in the Education Department. But everybody there, he just wanted to see what your strength was and then he would encourage you. And one of the things that he said, what he said that I took it to heart, and he said, somebody said, "Well, we have that system now where you're on these committees and what about people that get on these committees and they don't do anything on committees?" So Don says, "Well, I think it's okay." He encouraged everybody in the Art Department to serve on committees. So I decided--I was on every committee known to man.

And my colleagues, they were on the Curriculum Committee; they were on all these committees that made these decisions. So that's how we built. . . . And Don decided that we should have our own major. And then we would have these meetings at least once a week and talk about how to put together a quality art program, something that had some innovation to it. So we were all pretty big drinkers at the time, and we'd get to these, sometimes we'd have these meetings outside, have a party kind of a deal and just debate about what really makes an artist. And they wrote down this series of attributes that they wanted to instill in our students. And I can

remember most of them now, but one of the ones that always impressed me was “ability to resist premature closure.”

KM: Hmm.

RW: Okay now, you're an artist.

KM: Right.

RW: You know what I mean. I used to think about that all the time because I was one that would always close it up; you know what I'm saying? I would always, yeah [garbled]. Then I started realizing, “Wait, wait a minute. Let's look at this thing.” And essentially when students would come in and they would do, “well, you know what you know and that's all you want to know.”

KM: Right.

RW: You see? But I could recognize this because it's how I started out in junior high and high school, I knew what an artist--I knew what I wanted to do and there wasn't anything else. I mean I had my set of prejudices.

KM: Yeah, doesn't hurt to have someone come along and tell you to keep pushing.

RW: Being in that process because Glen Brunken, Mike Changnon, Bob Crayne, then we had some other people that were there for a little while, like Diane Samuels was a member of our faculty. She's a Pittsburgh artist; she's very, very well very, very highly thought of.

KM: Robert Bruya? Is that how you pronounce it?

RW: Bob Bruya, yeah. He came a little later.

KM: Okay.

RW: He wasn't in that original group that was founding. We started out with a Bachelor of Arts in Art and then, then we eventually built the BFA.

KM: Yeah. Can you recollect the years of that?

RW: Oh God, I wish you would have told me; I would have written this stuff down.

KM: Yeah, we can probably look it up somewhere.

RW: But this is one of the things that was very, very important. That we had connections, political connections, because, you know, campus life is politics. Anybody that doesn't think that politics aren't important at this university, at the college, at the university. It's very important. You might have the best ideas in the world, but you didn't have the juice to get it done, and so. . . . We had this one fellow from--he's passed away now--Lou Razzano.

KM: Oh yeah, sure.

RW: You know Lou?

KM: I knew him briefly, but he did an interview for us up here, yeah.

RW: He was a great, he was a big-time Democrat, see? And he lived in Grove City. His son and Myford--Jim Myford's son played basketball together.

KM: He did an interview for us, and he was instrumental in getting Madam Cheng's [papers].

RW: Oh yeah, man! That was so terrific. That was so terrific how he found her. But he was the Assistant to the Provost and it was his job to present these programs in Harrisburg. And he carried the football for us, man, he took that thing, and at the time there [were] other actions by Edinboro and IUP. They didn't want another program, but we had to demonstrate that we had something unique to do, and we did.

KM: Nice.

RW: He was able to get that approved in Harrisburg and, like I said, he and I were good buddies, we were Democrats and he was very active in the Democratic Party. But then he did these things like with that Madam Cheng, and then that became kind of a joke, because, I was always getting myself in trouble somehow, and Dr. Aebersold was president then. And one of the things in Dr. Cheng's book, excuse me, Madam Cheng's book was a struggle session, and that was fascinating to learn. In China, the Cultural Revolution; what they would do is students would denounce their professor and other people would denounce him. She was denounced, and what they would do is capture them and take them into an auditorium, a gymnasium, or some kind of building, put a dunce cap on their head, and set them up on a stool and then everybody would come around and poor mouth them, "I never liked you, etc. . ." until the people--it would go on for hours, and it was called a struggle session. And so I started referring to some of our meetings with Dr. Aebersold, "What are we gonna have? Are we gonna have another struggle session? Is this what it's gonna be, another struggle session?" But that became the big joke, but no, Lou found that Madam Cheng; that was great.

KM: Getting back to the Art Department and the transitions over the years. What were some other milestones? You got it started with the major and there are two majors in the Art Department now, aren't there? There's a BFA?

RW: Yeah, there's a BFA and there's a BA.

KM: Okay, good. Okay.

RW: A couple things that really changed my life in the Art Department, changed everything in the Art Department. I'm scheduled for another interview here with Alice Del Vecchio's group because it's twenty-five years since the founding of her program, and she kind of wrote me in to do the first Empty Bowls dinner. Which, [laughs] we went around, we had this meeting, and

there's one woman, the president's assistant, she says, "I will do the publicity. And then this other woman says, "We will grow the squash," then it's Food Services, "We will make the soup." And then I think it was Nora Ambrosio, she was there in the Dance Department, and she says, "And we will do a dance to interpret the hunger." And so then they come around the room to me, and I'm sitting there, because I didn't know what this was all about, and they look at me, and Alice says, "We want you to make 1,000 bowls." I said, "1,000 bowls? Why can't I do the dance?" [Laughter].

And that's how I got in with Alice. It's like kind of a resentment kind of thing at first, and then it grew into--Alice is great, you know. What Alice does . . . Alice is great, she is just absolutely great. But then the other thing we were doing, and this started at The Hoyt, is part of our program, we had this summer program at The Hoyt that was based--we did some work through the IU and it was a . . . The limitation was Lawrence County and all the contiguous school districts to Lawrence County, so that we could bring Slippery Rock and some of these other school districts in.

KM: Oh yeah, the Hoyt Institute of Fine Arts, yeah.

RW: And simultaneously my friend Bill Strickland from Manchester Craftsmen's Guild, I brought him up and introduced him to Dr. Aebersold. He brought up his model of the Manchester Craftsmen's Guild building. It was designed by Tasso, the architect Tasso Katselas, and the Manchester Craftsmen's Guild was a model for the airport. Tasso was the architect on the airport. When you see those barrel vaults and the elements Tasso used. And so, Bill came up and met with Dr. Aebersold. And Dr. Aebersold just, I mean Bill is a dynamic person, and he was a dynamic person, and he told him what this idea was, and I've known Bill for years, I mean. So, Dr. Aebersold just fell in love with Bill, and anything that Bill wanted to do, he just, you know, 'cuz Dr. Aebersold was really sincere about building our African American population. And so Bill asked, he called me up once and he said, "Dick, I want to put a summer program together." And so Glen Brunken and I, and Bob Bruya, and Mike Changnon we put this two-week program together and we called it The Summer Art Academy. We did this in [pause] 1988.

We did the first one, we had twenty students and then the second one we had twenty-one or twenty-two students, and it was a fantastic success. But the program at The Hoyt, this is way before Kim Koller-Jones, and they just did such a terrible job. I mean, they just didn't understand how, what an art program was like. So finally I told Glen, you know, my sidekick Glen, I said, "Glen, I can't stand this." So in 1990 he said, "Just to shut you up, we can do, we'll do this at Slippery Rock." And I talked to Virginia Moore, whom I had known years before at the Intermediate Unit, and we got a little bit of seed money from The Governor's Schools of Excellence, and we put together a program that had students from the Intermediate Unit: Butler, Lawrence, and Mercer County. And that's how we started.

I brought the kids up from Manchester Craftsmen's Guild 'cuz they had taken a year off, they were working on a study, and I put them on a bus with us, and I just wanted to see how the kids would get along. And so they came up for the weekend and we went to New York City. We took a trip to New York City with the whole group and I thought, you know, we looked around, "this thing could work."

So that's when we started The Summer Art Academy, which was a full-blown art academy. A year or two later we started creative writing, and then jazz, and then we had a full-blown program. Part of the program, because like I said, Glen and Virginia and I would do this, we'd talk about this all the time, how we would do this and what really you needed for these kids in the summer. And actually some of them, because you know they have that Governor's Schools of Excellence, you know the art school, and the music, the fine arts, and blah blah blah. And in order to get into those programs you really had to have a very sophisticated portfolio, and you had to have a letter. And so what you did is you took this elite of the elites that came from a great program.

But what was out there for these little schools that had maybe one art teacher that was struggling, they didn't maybe have much of a budget? And again, Glen was so much about this because he would always talk to these kids about how being an artist was a very honorable, an ancient and honorable position. And of course, it was in 1990 and wasn't as bad as it was when Glen and I wanted to be artists, wanted to be a teacher. His father was a milkman and my mother worked in a factory, and this is pretty shady, you know, pretty sketchy but even in the '90s, for kids to come, and the thing is that we learned this in The Summer Academy first with Bill Strickland. And we had an African American man here who worked with Minority Affairs and one of the things he wanted to do one weekend, we took him out to dinner at a nice restaurant. He says, "You know they don't experience this." And then when we had the final art show after two weeks, we put together this art show. And he sent a bus down to Pittsburgh, picked up all the parents, brought them to Slippery Rock, and we had a dinner here, we had speakers. Bill Strickland was the speaker, and I had several other speakers that I had brought in.

KM: Oh nice.

RW: But it gave--you showed the parents. You showed them: here's your kid in school successfully, accomplish something. And so, whether it's for minority students, or for any kind of kids, and I always tease Christian Kuharik, who now runs The Hope Center for The Arts in Sharon. You know The Hope Center?

KM: No.

RW: It's a Manchester Craftsmen's Guild rural replication.

KMP: Oh, okay.

RW: Oh God, you gotta go up there and see it. It's great, it's great! They do art. They have a most fabulous ceramic studio in the country and then they do vocational training. They do just like Manchester Bidwell. That's the dream of Bill Strickland. They have a full-blown one in Cleveland; they have one in Kansas City; they have one in San Francisco; they have one in Israel.

KM: Huh, then they have one in Sharon of all places.

RW: Well, they decided they would put these little ones in. These little country--they call them rural replications. They did the first one in Brockway. Brockway, Pennsylvania because Peter Varischetti, he and Bill were on the Board of Directors of the University of Pittsburgh, and Peter's a very wealthy investor. He's a very wealthy businessman. They own nursing homes, they own race cars, they own rental companies and factories. And it's a great idea. These people they get a high exposure to art and the whole idea of the Manchester Craftsmen's Guild was to keep these at-risk kids off the street.

KM: Right. Now when we started the program in Slippery Rock, what was the age group? What was the span of the ages? Was it elementary to high school?

RW: No, no, no, it was it was tenth, eleventh, and coming twelfth.

KM: I'm sure some of those students even thought about coming to Slippery Rock too.

RW: Oh, a bunch of them did! A bunch of them did. Like one of the ones from the first academy, we had Sharif Bey, who is now--he just had a couple of major exhibitions, and he teaches at Syracuse.

KM: Nice, wow.

RW: Another one who was in photojournalism, Gabe Tate, and he came to Slippery Rock and now he is, I can't remember, he was teaching in Arkansas, he has his PhD; I'm sure he has his PhD. And then a bunch of students that were in music and creative writing. You should see our alumni, I mean, it's an amazing accomplishment. And I did it up until 1997 was my last year, and then the following year they failed to get the funding.

KM: Oh, okay.

RW: They failed to get the funding and I put a program on for that year on a shoestring. But hey, we had a lot of people involved. In former years I got--I know how to hustle money, you know? I know how to get grants. Once we got a grant from the Giant Eagle Foundation, we had a grant from The Andy Warhol Foundation. Andy Warhol's brothers, John and Paul, used to come up here and visit regularly.

KM: Huh!

RW: Okay. They're both passed away now, but they would come here. Then the other program that really changed Slippery Rock, really changed our department, was when I wrote that grant to have the exchange in Bratislava. We had an opportunity, they had a grant advertised . . . was in '92, something like that, and I wrote this grant which was . . . there was a Samantha Smith Memorial Exchange. Samantha Smith was a little girl that wrote to one of those Russian leaders that was there for six months, seven months. Andropov maybe, it was Andropov before . . .

KM: Gorbachev?

RW: Before Gorbachev; before him. And this girl wrote to him, about “Hey, why can't we all get along?” And he brought her. . . .

KM: Oh, that sounds vaguely familiar, yeah.

RW: Samantha Smith. She ended up dying in a plane crash. I mean unrelated to this thing, but they set this thing up called the Samantha Smith Memorial Exchange to have programs in the countries of the former Soviet Union. [Brief technical issues]. So we got this grant that paid for bringing students to Slippery Rock from the Academy of Fine Arts in Bratislava. The first guy we had was David Charsky, who was . . . he was so dedicated, and it was tough because we didn't have much funding. We did that before we got the grant. And it was Steve Banjack. Steve Banjack who taught in the Phys Ed department, and he was Slovak; he spoke fluent Slovak.

So then we had a couple of our kids that went over in January, but Bratislava was, oh man, it was tough in December, January. They burned coal in places. It wasn't Communist; Communism was over, but the maintenance, everything was like so. . . . But anyhow, we sent a couple tough kids, Tony Mel Smith and Mike McAdams, and they went over. And between the first guy who went up . . . then the following year, we had a kid from Punxsutawney, Rick Smith, he went over.

KM: Probably a good experience for them.

RW: Oh, this is the greatest thing, I mean, this really built the Art Department. You know? You understand? Because people that are teaching here now like, oh, Barbara Westman, she was from the program we created in Poland. Okay, so we had a program we had in Poznan, Poland, we had in Bratislava. I got the first grant to do the program in Bratislava and then they called me from the USAID, which was part of the State Department, United States Information Agency that doesn't exist anymore, but it was part of the State Department, that's who is administrating the grant. And they talked to me, and they said, “Hey, why don't you apply for another grant?” And I says, “I thought you can only do one.” He says, “Just add another school.” So Glen had been in Bratislava and he went to this sculpture workshop, this soft sculpture workshop and met these boys from Poznan. And I thought, “Pshh.” So I wrote the grant, we never even asked them, I mean we just. . . .

KM: [Comment about lights going off].

RW: So I wrote the grant up; we got another. We got the grant three times and it paid for everything. So all these people, these kids, you know these people were pretty poor. They're very poor. They couldn't afford to travel and now they end up coming to Slippery Rock and. . .

KM: Nice, I wondered about that program and how. . . .

RW: . . . we're international. We've exchanged hundreds of students! Look it up sometime and see how many students have been exchanged. And it's had a profound effect. Glen went over to teach several times. They loved Glen in Bratislava; I mean, they loved him over there!

So our students got to travel. It just changed the whole complexion of the Art Department because now we're international. And Slippery Rock--when I came to Slippery Rock in '68, you know, Slippery Rock is a gym school. Okay? [Laughter]. Slippery Rock was a gym school. But I want to tell you something. And especially when we had President Aebersold, he was all about arts and culture. Okay?

KM: Okay. I didn't know that.

RW: Oh absolutely! And Bill Strickland, as I said, he loved Bill Strickland, and loved the program, loved the Manchester Craftsmen's Guild. And every artist when that building opened up, the first artist we brought in was Dan Rhodes, who was a teacher, my teacher at Alfred but he had retired a dozen years earlier and lived in California and he had written like the bible for ceramic pottery, *Clay and Glazes for the Potter*, and not only that, but these Alfred boys all worked at Black Mountain College.

KM: Right. World famous.

RW: They were there at Black Mountain. My one teacher, Bob Turner, he built the program there, and we were just, I was just talking to a friend of mine about having an exhibition--we have this Dan Rhodes collection--having this exhibition. And one of the things that, I can't think of her name, she wrote the book *Centering*. [*Centering in Pottery, Poetry, and the Person* by Mary Caroline Richards]. That Black Mountain College was just an amazing. . . .

KM: Yeah, you had Cy Twombly and all these people there.

RW: Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

KM: Yeah, it's pretty amazing.

RW: Robert De Niro's father studied painting at Black Mountain College; that's Robert De Niro's father.

KM: Yeah, right, he's a good painter. I know his work, yeah. All right; that's good. Anything else about the Art Department? Like the building was renovated, and I know you were at West Hall, which is now Carruth-Rizza Hall.

RW: Oh God, my first year at Slippery Rock I was in the basement of West Hall. The janitor had mixed all the chemicals into one big bucket. [Laughter]. It was tough. My friend, my former teacher at Edinboro, another good friend of mine, that taught at Purdue, they came down to visit me and they said, "Where's your shop?" And I said, "Here." And they go, "Are you kidding me? Are you kidding me?" Then we got to move.

There was an old maintenance building behind Weisenfluh that's now a parking lot, but it was a big old rambling building. They let me move--they let me move out of the basement just after I got better when that football coach told the president I was okay. [Laughter]. We went in and built that shop. I got a whole bunch of [potter's] wheels. And we were first class, I mean we went

from just a couple potter's wheels. We were first class; we were big. I love to build kilns; we had kilns outside and I had a big office studio. I always kept a jug of "Dago" red and the maintenance guys would always come to see me to get a little hooch, to get a little shot 'cuz they knew I always had a jug, see. They'd say, "Hey Dick, you need anything?" I said, "Yeah man, let's have a drink." But that was then, this is now. [Laughter].

But then the building was messed up, windows were broken, roof was leaking. And so they decided, the maintenance guys decided, we were going to fix this up. And this is the truth; honest to God, this a true story. So they're on the roof doing this, or patching the windows, painting and everything, and so Dr. Watrel drives by. Okay? He drives by and he goes, he shouts out, "What are you doing?!" And Eddie Leone told me, and Eddie Leone was a carpenter he is the chairman, I mean, the foreman of the carpenter crew, and he goes, "We're fixing up this building for Dick." And he says, "Stop. Stop now. I want him out of sight!"

KM: Oh no [laughing].

RW: So then they moved me to where the pottery shop is now. That used to be the maintenance building, the heating plant. And that room where we're in was a storage room for a civil defense hospital. There was a complete hospital in there in case we got atomic bombs. . . .

KM: Really? Wow.

RW: Oh yeah. So then, my friend was the vice president, Don Thompson, who was great; he was really smart. So he calls me up, he goes, "Dick, well you have to move." And I said, "God damn it, Don!" I said, "I built these kilns. I build these kilns and then I gotta move. I'm just getting my shop set up." He goes, "Whatever you need. [Tell] me whatever you need." So we got some more equipment. They built a lean-to on that and we built some kilns in there. We caught it on fire but pssh. Then they built that permanent; they built that brick addition. Myford was upstairs and he had his pounder on the second floor.

KM: Yeah. And then, now they're located . . . the new sculpture building.

RW: So what happened was, again, it's Slippery Rock. They got rid of all the guys that were like—see, here's how it was: the guys that were, like, in Maintenance, they worked their way up. And they were plumbers, they were and . . . so they had juice. And then they started bringing in, they wanted to bring in experts. They wanted to bring in people with degrees, and they just quit asking. They just quit. I mean, there was one time where we were doing a survey for the Art Building. They wanted to locate the Art Building between the Field House and my shop. They wanted to build a whole new building down there. And so the engineer, the architect, they were interviewing everybody and I told him, I said, "I'm gonna tell you something, pal. Every pipe, every pipeline goes underground there. Everything that feeds all of this campus, it's underground. Are you gonna build a building on top of that? You're going to have nothing but headaches." And I says, "What you should do is, that Martha Gault Building, that Martha Gault, that Art Building." I said, "Build that all the way out to the parking lot." And they said, "Well we can't because there's utility lines in there." I said, "Hey pal, I have been here for like, a long time, and if there's a utility line there, it has been dug up. They have never ever dug up that back part

of the Art Building.” And they go, “Really?” I said, “Check it out, man. Just check it out.” And that's why they built that wing on there that goes back to the parking lot. And then of course, in the basement for the dark room, I mean, you need darkness [laughs].

KM: Right, right.

RW: So they put the dark room down there and they put the print studio towards the front. And that's how that building came about. But they wanted--they were all, “We're gonna build this down. . . .” They wanted to build it next to the Field House, and it would have been a disaster.

KM: Yeah. It's a nice building.

RW: Oh yeah.

KM: Yeah. Alright. Sometimes we ask people what we have the best moments and worst moments featured at Slippery Rock?

RW: Oh hey, my wife said, “Are you gonna talk about this?” And I says, “Ah yeah, I think. I dunno.” When Robert, not Robert, but G. Warren Smith came to be president. Okay? And then he put Anne Griffiths as the acting--he fired the provost, and made Anne Griffiths acting vice president and provost. So right away she took our gallery. She took our gallery down in the building, down in the. . . .

KM: The old union or the?

RW: No, no, no, no.

KM: Eisenberg?

RW: Eisenberg. She took our . . . we had a double room there and it was pretty nice, we could have our openings there and then we had the auditorium because every time somebody did an opening, they would do a slideshow and it was pretty nice gallery. And it was very functional. And so, she said, “Well, you know what, I want to make this into a computer lab.” And she just took it. And she told Dr. Pitluga, “Find another building; find some place that would be suitable.” So they looked around, looked around. Finally, they were going to give them that shanty across, by the cop station.

KM: Oh right, sure.

RW: So they said, “Okay we're going to have that--I guess we'll have that building will be our new art gallery. But they didn't do anything to it, so when the semester started. . . . I was in the Art Club, the Martha Gault Society, and the kids started complaining, which they have the right to do that, we don't have a place for a gallery. One girl says, “Hey why don't we just get a wagon and put art on a wagon and tow it around campus?” And I thought . . . hey, you know how they put those shanties up for Apartheid? When they put those campus shanties up when they were protesting Apartheid in South Africa.

KM: Oh, right.

DW: And I said, "Let's build a gallery." So right out front of the Art Building we came out, we came to my house. Now I got a lot of junk I got a big farm and I always have windows, and sheets, and posts. So, we build this gallery it's like The People's Gallery, we called it. And Tom Gaudi, they took this big piece of cardboard, this giant piece of cardboard, and they painted this kind of Abraham Lincoln sitting on a throne with the G. Warren Smith's face on it. And so we covered everything up with a tarp and then the next day was a beautiful day, and at that time there was a walkway that was open and people were always walking back and forth. And so we had paintings and we had sculpture, and of course, we had generic cheese curls. And so we opened up The People's Gallery. And so, G. Warren Smith came over and he says, because we had his face on this thing, "It's our gallery. We don't have a gallery." He said, "But you have a gallery." And I said, "No, go look it. See if there's a gallery there." And he goes, "Oh, I didn't realize this." I said, "Well, guess what." And then he talked to the students and he does an interesting number, interesting. And I said, "We don't have a gallery. We should have a gallery, because we wouldn't have a dance department without a stage, a music department without it. This is what we do. We make art. We need a place to show our art."

And so that day, they go over to that building and start hammering and fixing it up for a gallery. Then the next day or day later it started raining and the cardboard was soggy and the new vice president was Robert Smith, we called them Big Smitty and Little Smitty. See? So Little Smitty comes over and he wants to know who's in charge of this People's Gallery and he goes to the secretary and she says, "Well Glen was the chairman at time and Glen was in his classes, I don't want to bother him." But I'm like, "Blah, blah, blah, blah." And so, oh was he mad. And anyhow Glen--we had a faculty meeting and Glen says, "Who's in charge? Who was this all about?" He knew, he knew. And I said, "Hey man, I did it. I did it and we had fun. And he goes, "Oh." Because we sit at either end of those big tables because I'm senior faculty and he's the chairman. And he goes, "Oh, you had fun, did you?" And he does this perfect imitation of Robert Duvall. You know how Robert Duvall, "Oh, so you had fun, did ya?" [Laughter]. And I'm there, "How did he do that? It's perfect." I said, "I've been trying to do that Robert Duvall thing for so long." And I look in the mirror, and I'm like oh bobblehead, "Oh yeah." Anyhow, he does this perfect Robert Duvall he goes and he looks at me, "Aw shit, you had fun now, did ya?" And we didn't talk for a month. I mean, we were best friends, but we did not talk for a month. Because Robert Smith, this cat was vindictive. You understand me? You know him. I mean he's the one that everybody thinks that, "Oh, they fired G. Warren." Huh-uh. He engineered that. See? Well, at least, that's been generally said. Okay? It's been widely proposed that he knew the chancellor and so he became president. That's why G. Warren's out the door.

KM: Hmm.

RW: So, do you think I'll get sued for this? I don't care.

KM: I don't know. We can always. . . .

RW: Yeah, I don't know. I don't care. I mean, I'm just saying if you want to check it out, if they want to go on trial, G. Warren Smith was a good guy, he was a real good guy. And what he

wanted to do is allow everybody to have their own space and to make their own decisions. You see, when he would appoint you to a position and. . . you know, I took them down once, I took G. Warren, and Robert Smith, and the dean, I can't think of his name now. I was on the board of directors of the Braddock Carnegie Library. That's the first library, the first Carnegie library in America! And we build a pottery shop there; we built a very successful pottery studio. And we had done these kids' classes. We would bring kids up from, you ask about elementary students, we would bring these young kids, we had a little art program. And we would bring them up to Slippery Rock for a day and we had class. A very successful program and I just wanted Slippery Rock, because Aebersold was all in on it, he was all in, he loved the idea that we were working in Braddock. And that was before Braddock was popular. Okay? That was way before Braddock was popular now with John Fetterman and everything. Braddock. Well, we were doing programs like that for years.

KM: Yeah, nice.

RW: Alice would have those mini care breaks down there. Every year, we would have two mini care breaks; people, the fire department would come. Braddock, North Braddock, Turtle Creek, East Pittsburgh, Rankin. It's an institution.

KM: Yeah.

RW: And he just rejected the idea of continuing our partnership. Just rejected it. I mean he sends a signal to all his subordinates that well maybe this isn't such a good idea after all.

Dr. McKinney. Dr. McKinney was the dean, and he had his background in industrial history. So he's down there, and he sees this is US Steel, I mean Carnegie, this is Carnegie's first steel mill, and I know we had this conversation. I said, "Dr. McKinney, you just go up around the bend and you have Westinghouse Electric. So, in that little valley you had alternating current, first radio broadcast, this is Westinghouse Electric, you had Carnegie Steel, the first Carnegie steel mill. This is history, baby. This is big time history." And so he was all excited and then all of a sudden everybody, they get cooled down a little bit. You know, kind of how Trump would do it with that coronavirus, "I don't like masks."

KM: All right. I think we covered a lot in that Art Department.

RW: Well what was great, Kevin, was that we built it.

KM: Yeah.

RW: We built it from scratch. No one came to say, "Hey we want an art major" like you do with these other programs. We built it. It was just a grassroots thing and same with the Summer Academy.

KM: That's a lot to be proud of.

RW: Penn State tried to do the summer art academy; Indiana tried to do the summer art academy; Clarion tried to do the summer art academy; Edinboro tried. They all failed. You know why? Because the faculty didn't, you know? It was an administration idea, and they just didn't have the enthusiasm for it.

KM: Yeah. All right, let's see, we have some closing questions here. Let's see. Anything that you miss about SRU now that you've been away?

RW: I miss this . . . I missed some of the students. As I got older, I was involved with a lot of political things, with the water filter project.

KM: Oh right, yeah.

RW: I was traveling to Afghanistan; I was traveling to Iraq; I was traveling. . . .

KM: I'm glad you mentioned that, because I wanted to ask you about that. That was a major thing to do, and you've been to Iraq and war zones.

RW: Oh yeah.

KM: Yeah. Helped people get some clean water.

RW: Yeah, I looked at the TV and see out there in Darfur, Sudan. [Cell phone rings].

KM: Well, I don't want to keep you. Sounds like someone's trying to get you. Any words of wisdom to current or future students?

RW: Again, Slippery Rock, I love Slippery Rock. We built the Art Department. No one, like I said, no one told us to do it. We built the Summer Art Academy; we had so many students, and like I said about Christian Kuharik, I teach him all the time because he's very vocal about--he came from Sandy Lake and started really seriously making pottery. His first teacher was David McDonald, who is a teacher at Syracuse, a great potter, one of the great professors, ceramic professors of all time. This kid comes in, and he walks into his summer class, and guess who the teacher, David McDonald. And I always tease him and I said, "You guys, you didn't even realize. You were like stopping on the road when you're coming down here to pick up roadkill, because you didn't realize we were gonna give you lunch." [Laughter].

K:M Alright. Well thanks, Dick.

RW: All right, thanks a lot for having me. I appreciate it.

KM: Yeah, this has been very insightful. I mean you've been here for a while.

RW: It was great, it was great to build that. We built the program. No one told us to get a grant; no one told us to have an international program. They do this with all the other departments. Oh,

why don't you have an international . . . ? We did it. See? We just did it. And same with the Summer Art Academy; we did it.

KM: Yeah.

RW: And same with Manchester Craftsmen's Guild; we did it. See?

KM: That's great. Well, [we'll] wrap it up here. Call it an interview, I guess.

RW: Okay.

KM: As I said, thanks again so much.

RW: All right. Hey thanks for having me, I appreciate it.

KM: Yeah.

RW: I mean if I get sued I could declare insanity. [Laughter]. If you could say that, "Yeah man, I looked and he had a wild look in his eyes. His eyes were darting all around." It's okay, Kevin. See ya, man.

KM: Alright, thanks, a lot.

RW: Ok, bye bye.