



## Andy Blaustein Oral History Interview, February 3, 2017

### **Title**

“Unravelling and Combatting Amphibian Decline”

### **Date**

February 3, 2017

### **Location**

Valley Library, Oregon State University.

### **Summary**

In the interview, Blaustein describes his New York City roots and his upbringing on Long Island. He likewise notes his early interest in insects and animals, as well as his initial experiences in the working world that strengthened his desire to pursue a college education. From there, Blaustein traces his undergraduate years at Southampton College as well as his graduate research and teaching at the University of Nevada - Reno and the University of California - Santa Barbara.

The session then turns its attention to Blaustein's years on faculty at Oregon State University. In reflecting on his OSU career, Blaustein notes his initial hire as an instructor, the path that he took to a tenure-track position, and his strong interest in OSU's athletic programs. He likewise comments on OSU colleagues who made an impact on him; setting up his research program; and important studies that he has conducted in the areas of host-pathogen biology, amphibian deformities and population decline, animal behavior, and chemical ecology. In discussing his research, Blaustein notes the controversy that it has sometimes engendered and speaks of his experiences as a target of conservative media outlets. He also touches upon his work on asteroid collisions with Earth; outlines his views on climate change; and shares his thoughts on the importance of scientists acting as public citizens.

As it nears its conclusion, the interview touches upon Blaustein's field work, his sense of the culture for ecologists at OSU, and his years as an administrator in the Environmental Science program. The session winds up with Blaustein's thoughts on his work as an editor of scientific journals, his methods for staying positive in the face of ecological decline, and his reflections on OSU as it looks toward its 150th anniversary.

### **Interviewee**

Andy Blaustein

### **Interviewer**

Chris Petersen

### **Website**

<http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/oh150/blaustein/>

## Transcript

**Chris Petersen:** Today is February 3, 2017 and we're in the Valley Library with Andy Blaustein, who is a Distinguished Professor in the Department of Integrative Biology here at OSU, and we'll talk to him quite a lot about his long career at OSU, his research, his experiences in Corvallis, but I'd like to begin by developing a broader biographical sketch of your life, so I'll ask you where were you born?

**Andy Blaustein:** OK, so I was born in Brooklyn, New York, and the early years of my life were in Brooklyn, and then I moved to Long Island where I went to school and including undergraduate, so I'm probably a New Yorker, and I still have an accent, I guess, to some people, so...

**CP:** Which town did you live in on Long Island?

**AB:** OK, I lived in two towns, one you might laugh at, one was called Hicksville. There really is a place called Hicksville, the other one's Oyster Bay, that's where I went to high school.

**CP:** Can you tell me a bit about your family background?

**AB:** Yeah, my family, well, they're Eastern European...well, there's a lot of them around so, my parents, my father's side came from Austria and my mother's side came from Lithuania, Russia, and some of them got out before the Holocaust happened, and some of them didn't. So we lost some of them at Auschwitz, actually, and my wife is from that area too, but she's Catholic, I'm Jewish so we have a mixed marriage and all that, kinda fun that way. So we're both Eastern European peoples.

**CP:** Was religion important to you growing up, to your family?

**AB:** Actually, religion is not that important to us. So, you know, my kids, they do their thing. They were born here.

**CP:** But the legacy or your history is not something that can be escaped.

**AB:** The legacy is there, yeah, on both sides.

**CP:** So, can you tell me a bit about community life in the towns that you grew up in?

**AB:** OK, so Brooklyn I barely remember, but my mom was a teacher at Bed-Stuy, Bedford Stuyvesant, kind of a rough area. When we moved down to Long Island it wasn't that bad, Hicksville was just kind of a blue collar white neighborhood, then I moved to Oyster Bay, which was - I was in an Italian neighborhood and learned to love Italian food, and some of my best friends are Italian-Americans and that was kind of fun. Oyster Bay was different racially than Hicksville, so it was about 20% African-American, and I was a real minority there, actually, but there were no problems, really, we had no problems, it was fun growing up, I love Oyster Bay, it's right on the tip where the ocean is, right on the sound, right across from Connecticut. All my relatives still live in Brooklyn and Manhattan though, so we're the Long Islanders but my brothers live in that area and all my relatives are still in Brooklyn.

**CP:** So there's a strong connection to the city growing up, I have a feeling.

**AB:** Yeah, I'm a city kid. But I always loved animals, that was the weird thing. And there were animals in the city.

**CP:** So tell me about that, I'm interested in the earliest germ of interest in science.

**AB:** I've always had an interest in science, very unusual, 'cause my parents are not that way. I collected animals as a kid, I collected insects, I caught bees on flowers, I caught snakes and turtles and all kinds of stuff and just took them on home, snapping turtles, anything. I don't know what it is, I don't know if it's genetic or not, but I had it.

**CP:** So you'd take them home and classify them?

**AB:** Nah, I'd just take them home and have them as pets, and my father would release them. We didn't have normal animals, we had a few dogs here and there but I had really strange ones like snapping turtles and snakes and iguanas. I had a monkey as a pet that I sent for, and my mom opened the package and it ran out. I had a lot of stories like that. I had a kinkajou, you can look that one up, I had a little anteater, a lesser anteater. I didn't think they could bite, because they have no teeth, but they have claws about – they can rip anything, so as soon as they open that package it ripped a couch, I had a lot of weird animals. I have a really weird background.

**CP:** Well, tell me a little bit more, was there other things you were interested in besides animals?

**AB:** Yeah, I loved sports, and I was not a good student, until I got to college, so people didn't think I'd go to college. I could tell you stories about that. You know, in between college and before I went to college I was a construction worker, I dug ditches in New York City. My first real job, I was a custodian – not the normal way to become a professor, so I remember cleaning gum off of desks, things like that. Ditch digging was tough, so I said, "I can't do this forever, I'm going to college," so I did that.

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**CP:** How lengthy was this period in between?

**AB:** Six months of all that, I had a lot of odd jobs.

**CP:** So this notion of college then was attractive to you as a way to seek out a better life, basically.

**AB:** Ah, I think I was expecting to go, both my parents went, they're the only ones in their generation that did go, their families, so they wanted me to go and I did it. I didn't know what I wanted to major in, I thought science would be too hard and here I am, but once I got to college I was a bit more serious, that was shocking to people, 'cause I was definitely not serious in high school or before.

**CP:** So you went to Southampton College, which is on Long Island...

**AB:** I went to Southampton College, and I always tell everybody I don't have an undergraduate degree, because Southampton College got bought out by another university, and then they closed it. So there's two of us in our department that went there - I won't tell you the other guy's name - which is very strange, 'cause it's a tiny little school on the tip of Long Island on the Eastern part.

**CP:** Tell me a bit about those years.

**AB:** Well, those were crazy years because that was during Vietnam era. And there were lots of riots, and all kinds of demonstrations, and actually, my college closed when the US invaded Cambodia, the riots got so bad that Stonybrook and Southampton both shut down and I have, if you look at my transcript, I don't have grades for that, I have Pass/Not Pass, luckily I got Passes 'cause I wasn't doing that well. So those were crazy years, the Vietnam Era.

**CP:** What is your personal memory of that time?

**AB:** It was just chaos. You know, a lot of chaos.

**CP:** But you got more serious about your studies during this time, it sounds like.

**AB:** Yeah, I got a little bit more serious, yeah, I was thinking about graduate school, but I had no clue how you go to grad school or where you go and all that. My parents were no help, my father's an engineer and my mom's an elementary school teacher, they didn't know what – none of my friends, a couple of my friends finished college, but most of them did not, most of them were construction workers or other things, so I didn't know what to do when I went to college, I said "Maybe I'll move out west." I didn't want to move really far west, I didn't want to move to California, that was too far. So I went to Nevada, which was where I went was Nevada, Reno, which was about 20 miles from the California border, but I thought it was going to be a little closer. You know, I had never been west of New York, so I drive out there and there I am.

**CP:** What was your major as an undergrad?

**AB:** Undergrad I was a biology major.

**CP:** And was this driven by the interest in animals?

**AB:** Driven by the interest in animals, yeah.

**CP:** And how did you specifically find Nevada, Reno?

**AB:** OK, so I did a senior project at Southampton where I got really interested in mammalian ecology, and I looked at all these schools and it looked like they had a really good mammalian ecology program at Nevada, Reno – what did I know – so I said "ah, I'll try that one". That's how I did it. I was really naïve. I had a really good time at Nevada, Reno, I'm not knocking it, it's just...I had never even heard of Berkeley in those days, or UCLA, what's that, that's something down there, I didn't know what I was doin'.

**CP:** Tell me about the transition to Nevada.

**AB:** So here I am from New York. First thing I do is, I say, "Wow. I'm pretty far from home, and these mountains don't have trees on them." They had the Sierras in the distance but it was a desert, and it was really different. I mean, New York metro area to Reno, Nevada. Now when I went to Nevada, the population of the whole state was about 400,000. Now the population of Las Vegas alone is probably close to 1 million. Reno had 3 high schools, I think they have 8 now. They had one mall when I went, this was in the 70s, and now they have a bunch, I mean it's really grown up but when I was there it was rural. And the gambling was there. I became a teaching assistant at Nevada, Reno, we would put some of our paychecks down on the gambling tables. It was kinda fun. It was crazy, so...I went to Southampton College, which is a resort town...you know, the Hamptons! And I went to Nevada, Reno, that's a resort town. Then I go to Santa Barbara, which is also kinda like a resort town. So I'm a resort town kinda guy. Something like that.

**CP:** Corvallis might not qualify...

**AB:** Corvallis does not.

**CP:** Well, I'm interested in learning more about your academic progression as a graduate student, sort of becoming a graduate student. What was that like for you?

**AB:** So, once I went to grad school at Nevada, I hooked up with some people who were really into research. It was a brand-new PhD program. So, I had never camped before – I did a little bit, daily camping –and first week I'm there, they take me out to rural Nevada camping, and it's in the winter, OK?

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It wasn't first week but it's in the winter, and I didn't have any of the right equipment, I froze my butt off, man, for 3 days. It was just...snow on the ground, all that stuff. But I got interested in all the animals, we saw coyotes, I had never seen a coyote, it was different types of ground squirrel, we didn't even have ground squirrels, we had grey tree squirrels, all lizards...there were no lizards out then, but I did see lizards when I moved to Nevada, everything was new, so I got really interested, and actually I studied Kangaroo rats for my thesis, so I studied mammals like I wanted to, which I don't do now.

**CP:** And this was your first experience of doing research?

**AB:** This was my first experience. I had kangaroo rats in the lab, we had them in the field, we trapped them – live trapping, not kill trapping – bring them into the lab and I studied their behavior.

**CP:** Animal behavior.

**AB:** Animal behavior, yeah.

**CP:** How about teaching? This is also your first teaching experience, correct?

**AB:** No, I was a teaching assistant. Now let me give you a little perspective there...teaching assistant. Now I'm coming from New York, I smoked about a pack and a half of cigarettes a day...I was smoking cigarettes in the lab while I was a teaching assistant. You could do that in those days, can you imagine that? So the day I passed, I was going to take the defense of my thesis, they said, "You cannot smoke in here." It was May 22nd, 1973. That was the day I quit smoking. Never had another one. I just quit. Crazy.

**CP:** Was teaching something that came fairly naturally to you?

**AB:** Teaching did not come naturally to me even though I'm kind of outgoing. I was scared, and I was nervous for about six months, and then I got over it, but I'm still a little scared. I teach here, at Oregon State, a class with 1,200 students in it, the first week I still get a little jittery. And if you don't get jittery, I don't know, maybe that's not good, but I do. I take it seriously, and it's kinda scary, I mean there's 1,200 students out there and I go, "Woah!"

**CP:** Do you remember the process that you went through to develop your toolkit as a teacher?

**AB:** It's a long process but you definitely learn some of the tricks to the trade, and one thing is you have to definitely not talk down to students in my opinion, you treat 'em as equals, and that's a big philosophy of mine, and there really isn't such a thing as a stupid question, and you never would say that. I learned a lot of other ways to do it and when I started out I didn't know what I was doing and I made some errors, but if you treat people like you want to be treated, including students, that is really the take home message in my opinion.

**CP:** Did you have a mentor in Nevada?

**AB:** I had a major professor. And actually, it's pretty funny, his name was Art Risser. Ever heard of Paul Risser? He used to be president of Oregon State, this is his cousin, little did I know. So I got to know Paul Risser a little bit, but he was a professor in the Midwest somewhere at that point.

**CP:** Miami of Ohio.

**AB:** Ok. And Art Risser, his cousin, was my advisor and he actually did not like academia, he quit and became head curator of the San Diego Zoo, but I got along with him great.

**CP:** What was the specific topic of your Masters research?

**AB:** My Masters research was competition in Kangaroo rats. Or actually, heteromyid rodents, which is a family, called kangaroo rats, pocket mice, and other types of rodents.

**CP:** And in the midst of all this, you decided you wanted to pursue a career as an academic?

**AB:** Not yet, but I was fooling around with it. I didn't know what I was doing still, but I got my Masters, I got a couple publications, I got my Masters in good journals and it kinda was – I loved it, so I said yeah, maybe I'll do this, and then I had to pick where I wanted to get my doctorate.

**CP:** And how did you choose Santa Barbara?

**AB:** Another random way. You know, I applied to schools like the University of Illinois, University of New Hampshire, and I met some people at Nevada that did their undergrad at Santa Barbara and they wanted to just take me down there to see it. I went down there, drove down there from Reno, and there were palm trees and it was warm. And that's how I chose Santa Barbara. Even though it's a dynamite school, I wasn't thinking that, I was thinking palm trees and warm, so, it worked out, 'cause I don't think I can get into Santa Barbara these days. It's so good that, I don't think I could do it, so I got lucky.

**CP:** Well, tell me about your experience there.

**AB:** Santa Barbara, I still studied rodents. Coastal rodents this time in sloughs on the coast, and had a great time there. I learned how to do disease ecology down there with a couple of professors, I started getting interested in diseases, in ecology of diseases and I did some papers on ecto parasites of rodents. I also got sick from something that we don't know to this day what it was.

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I had fluctuating temperatures for about three months. Pretty bizarre. They think it was from some kind of urine from a rodent so...I got really interested in diseases down there, I got a couple of publications, and it was a fun time.

**CP:** What prompted this interest?

**AB:** The diseases?

**CP:** Yeah.

**AB:** Some of the professors were doing it and it just really interested me.

**CP:** So you had professors who made an influence on you at Santa Barbara.

**AB:** Through every single place I went to actually, I had really good professors that influenced me. There was a guy at Southampton whose name was Ed Coer, and he's gone now, but I loved that guy. I didn't find out until later that some of the stuff he believed in was really not accurate, but he was so stimulating. He was an insect taxonomist but he just stimulated. Santa Barbara had all kinds of professors, and Nevada same thing.

**CP:** And teaching?

**AB:** And teaching...I always wanted to teach, a lot of my family are teachers, but different level. Thing is that teaching at the university level is a little different, you know, my mom goes, "Well, do you have to make lesson plans?" I go, "No", you know that kind of thing. You just have to pick it up, and TA-ing is not teaching, when you give a lecture, but I don't want to go to a research institute, I want to do both teaching and research, and I got the ideal position at Oregon State, 'cause it's a research institution where you can do some teaching. Some people don't like the teaching aspect - I like it, and actually I volunteered to teach General Biology because I love it.

**CP:** By the end of the Santa Barbara time, did you feel like a West Coaster?

**AB:** Yeah, I was starting to feel western, yeah, but I still feel my roots are in New York. I go back several times a year, and as I said my whole family is still in the New York Metro area, so...I'm going back next month, so...

**CP:** 'Cause you went to OSU, you've been here a long time.

**AB:** I've been here a long time, yeah.

**CP:** Tell me about that, how did it come about, OSU, for you?

**AB:** This is a good one, so here I am, I'm a Distinguished Professor, which is unbelievable to a lot of people, including myself, but I started out as a non-tenure track instructor that was part-time. Well, I don't know, wasn't part-time but wasn't tenure track, and they had a job opening for a position that I applied for and I actually got it, and that's a long story of how I got it, and then I just worked myself up.

**CP:** Do you want to talk about that long story?

**AB:** The long story...I could talk about the long story, but essentially I got the position almost by accident because it was a split vote, everybody in the department wanted it, I'm here, so I know all about this. Everybody in the department wanted their own person, and it split the vote so I got the vote. It wouldn't happen these days like that. So I got it but, some people who didn't support me are some of my best friends on campus now, I mean it was not personal, it was just they wanted it to be filled by this thing.

**CP:** So you had already been here as an instructor?

**AB:** I was here for a year, yeah, and it wasn't an inside job by any means, they got five people to come in and interview and some of these people became big guns, so one guy's at Yale, tenured at Yale, I'm not going to mention names. So one of these guys interviewed at Yale, one guy was interviewed at Arizona, and he got that, and...some pretty big guns.

**CP:** Can you tell me a bit about your early impressions of OSU and of Corvallis when you first arrived?

**AB:** Yeah, it was small. All I gotta say is, first of all, I was a little bit intimidated, because here I am, at a research institution and you have to get tenure, and to get tenure, you really have to publish papers. I thought I could do that, 'cause I was publishing as a grad student, and I actually liked doing it, but still you gotta get a grant, gotta do that, and then I had a really heavy teaching load when I first got here. The students, the teachers who come in now don't know how well they have it, they get a setup fund, some of them get a million dollars. You know what my setup funds were? \$1,900, and I got a refurbished lab from somebody who just left, OK? But you can do it if you have the drive, so I did it. My teaching load was relatively heavy, it got a little lighter toward the – you know – later times, I got a normal load. I loved the sports here 'cause it was Pac-10 in those days, so I got season tickets to football, I've had season tickets to football/basketball since I got here. I love the sports. I got friendly with a couple of the coaches, Pat Casey's a friend of mine. His kids played with my kids in high school. He's the baseball coach, you probably know. I got friendly with a couple of the basketball coaches, so that's my other thing, I love the sports.

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**CP:** Interesting. You were here for some memorable...

**AB:** I was here for the Ralph Miller years...

**CP:** In different ways, for basketball and football anyway.

**AB:** Yeah. Football was bad, getting better. Got good and bad, but I love the sports, so...how can you beat Pac 12 sports? I mean it's great stuff. Then was I was a kid I had season tickets to the Knicks in New York. Now I didn't buy those – my best friend just happened to have a father who was the beat writer for the New York Knicks and the New York Jets so I would go with them to all the games and sit behind the bench. Amazingly enough, my best friend Craig Janoff, became the director of Monday Night Football. There's a story for you – he's the director for 18 years for Monday Night Football on ABC, when it was on ABC. I would go to all the games with him – all the games on the West Coast, I went to some East Coast games. I have stories about that I could tell you too, 'cause it affected my OSU situation.

**CP:** Please do.

**AB:** So here's one. This has to do with, my friend was also the Pac-12, Pac-10 director for its tournament, the Pac-10 tournament in the '90s, and they did away with the tournament in basketball, and it's back now, so on my time when I'm not teaching or doing some research, I fly down, I think this was at UCLA, yeah, it was at UCLA, at Pauley Pavillion, and in order to get in you have to wear an ABC coat. I had my ABC coat on, my friend's directing it, and I'm sitting next to these famous sports guys, I don't know if you know these people, but Elgin Baylor, Oscar Robertson, John Havlicek, they're all retired, I'm sitting in this group with them, and who comes over and says, "I think I know you," and it happens to be the provost at OSU, whose name is Graham Spanier, and Spanier goes, "What do you have to do with OSU, I know you have something to do..." and I said, "Well, I'm a professor in your department, and you probably have my tenure, my promotion documents," I was going on for full professor in those days, and I said, "Would you like to meet some people?" Spanier was a sports nut. So I introduce him to all these famous people I'm sitting with, and he loved it, and he wrote my chair, not going to mention my chair's name, you can look it up, and he said, "I met Andy Blaustein at the tournament," and all that, and I got a letter of censure, saying I'm not supposed to take off and go to sporting events when you're, during the year. It was pretty funny. So I showed it to Graham, and he laughed too, and it was kinda funny. So I still have that letter if you want to see it sometime.

**CP:** He's a guy who comes up an awful lot.

**AB:** Yeah, Graham...yeah, Graham had some problems later on.

**CP:** Well, I'm interested in knowing a little bit more about the environment around athletics if you want to talk about that at OSU. I mean, you were here for probably the pinnacle of basketball...

**AB:** Yeah..

**CP:** ...and the low point of football, and I'm wondering what it was like to be in the stands.

**AB:** Well, it was great while we were #1 in the nation, and those were the years of Ray Blum, Steve Johnson, Mark Radford and all those guys, Ralph Miller. We never did win tournament games, but we got into the tournament, we'd lose in the first round, you know, Kansas State and all those. I would even travel to some of the away games, and I got slightly friendly with Lester Conner, if you remember him, he was one of our great guards, and he would see me, he would say "You're here?" Yeah, I'm a sports nut too, I have to say. Football, have season tickets to football, but it was bad 'til Dennis Erickson showed up, and I took my whole family to the Fiesta Bowl, and that must've been 2000. I can't remember the exact date, but...I always wanted to see Notre Dame, cause growing up in the New York area, everyone roots for Notre Dame and I don't. We beat Notre Dame. That was an awesome Fiesta Bowl, and I was very friendly with Jay John 'cause his son played with one of my sons. Ok, so we would travel, one of my sons was on a AAU traveling team cause he was really good, both my sons played for Crescent Valley High School, and Pat Casey, as I said, his son played too with us, so I got friendly with those guys. I knew Eddie Payne 'cause his son played with one of my sons too, so I got friendly with all those guys. It was fun.

**CP:** Did you know Ralph Miller at all?

**AB:** I met Ralph Miller a couple of times, but I really didn't know him that well.

**CP:** Alright, well...

**AB:** He signed my book though. [laughs]

**CP:** Back to the academic side, how would you characterize the department, the Zoology department, when you arrived?

**AB:** The Zoology department's definitely changed, it's no longer the Zoology department, it's Integrative Biology. So, it was organismal-oriented, animals, and all that. It's become less than that now. There was a guy named Doc Storm, Robert M. Storm, who just passed away a couple of weeks ago, I just went to his memorial service actually last weekend, who was instrumental in showing me the ropes around here, he was a...he studied amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals, one of the old time naturalists around, Doc Storm.

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There were some other people around, I took the place of a guy named John Weins, who actually came back to retire at Corvallis, he was an ornithologist, so there were some people like that, very organismal. There were some fish people, there were some wildlife people I hung around with. BJ Verts, who studied rabbits in fisheries and wildlife, but right now, it's a little different, so I'm kinda feeling a little bit isolated about the organismal thing, there's a couple of people left that do that, but I hope they don't get too far from organismal biology.

**CP:** Had Jane Lubchenco arrived yet?

**AB:** Jane Lubchenco and Bruce Menge were here...as a matter of fact I went to the basketball game with Bruce last night, the...husband and wife. Yeah, they were here, and Jane was not that well-known then. And Bruce wasn't either, so we're all young people. But I guess, my opinion except for Linus Pauling, Jane's probably the most famous person ever at OSU. And they're friends.

**CP:** Had you...have you developed any connection with George Poinar, he's courtesy faculty in Integrative Biology, but...

**AB:** I do know George, matter of fact, we know each other from various points of view. I worked with a guy named Armand Kuris from Santa Barbara who happened to work, Armand Kuris worked with George Poinar when he was a grad student at Berkeley, so we have that connection, and my wife played in the orchestra with George Poinar, they

both played string instruments, so I do know George, and I know his – matter of fact, we did a PBS show together on extinctions of dinosaurs, and George told them he thinks disease was important to the extinction of dinosaurs, and I said diseases were important in the extinction of amphibians and we worked together, and PBS did a show where we were both featured.

**CP:** Well, so, you were here for a year, and the department managed to choose you, through whatever means, you move into this new position where you're teaching, and you're conducting research. Tell me about getting started with research with your \$1900.

**AB:** Well, getting started with research with \$1900 – I bought mammal traps, so I could live trap mammals and get them into the lab, and I put in some NSF grants, and couldn't get funded. And then I met this guy in our department who happened to be a grad student. His name was Rick O'Hara, and he was a grad student of John Wiens, who I replaced, and Bob Storm took him over, Doc Storm, and he studied amphibians, and I said, "Hey Rick, I have some questions. Can you do the following with amphibians that I can't do with mammals?" and he says, "Oh yeah, I'll teach you the ropes," and I said, "I'm switching projects," and that's when I started working on kin recognition, which is how mammals recognize one another, because mammals are way too hard to work with for lots of reasons, because of how they bite, make you sick, run around, but frogs...you can take them as an egg and grow them up all by themselves. Ever since I met Rick O'Hara, and I tell him this all the time, a grad student who taught me the ropes, how to work with amphibians, I switched to working mostly with amphibians. Then I got my first grant on amphibians, and then I've been doing well ever since, so that's how that started.

**CP:** When about was that?

**AB:** I would say that would be about 1980. And Rick is a professor at Chemeketa Community College, he became my post-doc, I funded him for five years as post-doc. And he taught me about amphibians. So, we're buddies.

**CP:** And away you went.

**AB:** And here's a case where the student taught the professor how to deal with it, 'cause I had never worked with frogs. I'm a mammal guy. And I worked for two ornithologists. Not frogs, so I'm known as a frog/amphibian guy.

**CP:** Well, I'd like to dig into your research in some depth, and it seems from looking at your website, your list of publications, it's divided up topically rather than chronologically, so I'm assuming anyway that these topics overlapped over time and it wasn't one led into the next, but it looked to me like host pathogen biology might've been an early topic that you were focusing on, is that correct?

**AB:** Yeah, host pathogen biology I picked up at Santa Barbara was Armand Kuris, and he's a card-carrying parasitologist, and we studied ectoparasites on rodents and we wrote this major paper called "Hosts as Islands" which has to do with island biogeography theory as applied to host pathogen systems and the fact of the matter is it was one of the most controversial papers written at the time, and I was a grad student when I wrote it. Matter of fact, a very famous ecologist told me never to publish that paper because it was too controversial and would ruin your career. It actually didn't, it's considered neutral now, but when it first came out, it was ripping a lot of people.

[0:30:01]

Matter of fact, it ripped [laughs]...it was very, I would say, it was bad because we ripped the now Main Editor of the journal *Ecology*. But in those days I didn't know what I was doing, and we're friends now, you know, this is old time stuff, we laugh at it now. But host pathogen biology was big, and I've continued that.

**CP:** Can you talk about, I'm interested in trying to get a sense of how these topics evolved and some of the major milestones.

**AB:** Ok, well, I'll tell you an example. In the early 1990s, we would go out and look for amphibians for our chem recognition work, had a bunch of grad students and starting to get difficult to find amphibians. And I started mentioning this to some people and they're saying "Yeah, we're finding it hard to find amphibians too," and there was this international meeting, where the Englishman said he was having problems, the Australians were having problems finding

amphibians, and I'm having problems where they used to be in Oregon and all that, so we came together at UC Irvine, I think it was about 1990, 89 or 90, and we said "There's an amphibian problem. We can't find them anymore." And there's this major thing called the amphibian declining problem and all that and here's an example of when you go out to try to do some other type of research and something else props up, so then I started on why there aren't any amphibian populations and all these hypothesis came out. One of the major hypotheses, and I'm a guy who says all of them are affecting amphibians, but I started with ultraviolet radiation. This was my first papers, this increasing ultraviolet radiation due to ozone depletion, and we did experiments that showed it killed eggs in the field.

We also had a disease called sacrolognea which is a worm mold, when UV hits these amphibians, it messes up their immune system and they get diseases, so all this was happening. And this is in the 90s, the early 90s, and no one knew what was going on, and of course my UV stuff became very controversial because it has to do with not only ozone depletion but climate change, we got some climate change things, and people don't like to hear that, especially these days. The climate change thing is extremely controversial, so it went from there where people from certain industries did not want to know that chlorofluorocarbons from spray cans go up to the stratosphere and knock out the ozone, even though there was a Montreal Protocol, which was a treaty signed by almost every country in the world saying we should stop production, which they have, it was still not throwing to the companies that made those things. So, that's how that started. I also studied diseases at the same time, and we studied contaminants, and we think it's altogether affecting amphibian populations. So I have to say, I was one of the first ones, along with guys like Dave Wake from Berkeley, who set the alarm off that amphibians were declining, as a matter of fact, I'll put this in. Dave Wake is going to be coming for a seminar next month because we have a new lecture series dedicated to Doc Storm for Zoology. Somebody donated some money, and he's going to be the keynote speaker.

**CP:** And being in the midst of controversy led to some interesting experiences for you.

**AB:** Yeah, we had some really interesting press. The first thing I heard, well there were a lot of things coming on here. The CATO Institute did not like it at all, so they put me on their webpage, saying that the research was flawed. I'm on the Junk Science homepage, on all these things. There's this syndicated columnist who writes anti-environmental pieces, and I can't recall his name right now – probably blotted it out – but in 1994, I think I was voted, and this was syndicated, so it was in all the papers, mostly it was in business-oriented papers, but I was voted the second worst scientist in the world. I show that to my class. And in the world, I'm not talking about Biology, I'm talking Physics and all that, and I'm proud to have that. I should put it on my homepage, but...there were lawsuits involved, OK, there have been some lawsuits here and there. Anyway, there's that, National Enquirer did a piece on it and they were actually accurate. They were the most accurate paper around. World Weekly News was not so accurate. I had to write Senators and Congressmen because they were asking me what was going on, you know, and Hatfield wrote me, I have all these letters back and forth. It was crazy.

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There was an editorial in *Science* in the mid-90s all about my research and how people think that it's not realistic, and how some people think it is realistic, and then about fifty very famous ecologists wrote an editorial backing me up, so that was kinda fun. You know, I was on the Rush Limbaugh TV show that didn't last too long, 'cause he has his talk show, but he had a TV show, and he held up the papers and said "This guy studies frogs and we give him money to do this?" Kinda frank stuff. So...

**CP:** So the controversy was engendered by people who didn't like you sounding alarm bells about the ecological...

**AB:** Alarms? Yeah. Climate change and UV radiation and who cares about frogs anyway? So I give lectures on why you should, but there's a bigger picture involved. Lot of controversy.

**CP:** Can you talk a bit about why we should?

**AB:** Sure. There's a lot of reasons why, first of all, there are some pharmaceutical products that come from the skin of frogs. There are peptides, and there are antimicrobial peptides. We have some things that actually slow the growth of HIV from frog skin. We have some things from frog skin that destroy herpes. We also know that frogs are like a signal that if something's wrong with the environment, they'd be going first. People like frogs, Kermit the Frog, they're kinda cool looking. They're important in history – one of the ten plagues of Egypt had to do with frogs raining down. There are

numerous reasons why frogs are important – they're predators and prey in ecosystems. If you take off all the frogs from one pond, you will have a lot more mosquitos, for example. People eat frogs. Lots of reasons.

**CP:** What was it like for you to be under such widespread attack?

**AB:** I lost some sleep over some of the attacks, but there are these lawyers out there – there were some lawsuits I said that were involved – that actually come to your defense for no fee, and it never got that far. I show them some of these things and they laugh and it's kinda funny now, some of the things, but there are certain newspapers that keep doing it, every time I publish a paper, they get on me. *The Wall Street Journal* is wonderful, I can show you things about *The Wall Street Journal*, and it's really funny because, here's one for ya, I co-authored these things with this guy Dave Wake, who's a National Academy member, and Dave and I write, gives his address as UC Berkeley and all that, mine always has Cornvallis, Oregon, not Corvallis, they always put Cornvallis, and I think it's purposeful, 'cause it's been three times now. That's *The Wall Street Journal*. They're a very unconventional thing here.

**CP:** What was the perception on campus of what you were going through?

**AB:** Well, everyone was supportive. Actually, Fred Horn, the old Dean of Science, he's the first guy who sent me one of those *National Enquirer* articles I didn't even see it. He said "Hey, just thought you should know." I had no problems on campus at all.

**CP:** Well, back to the research topics, the next one I have on the list here is animal behavior and chemical ecology.

**AB:** Yeah, I've done a lot of animal behavior in my day, that's what my master's thesis is on. A little bit of my doctoral thesis is on that, and I teach animal behavior on campus, I've taught it for years. I used to teach it with a guy named Bill Stephen, who passed away. He was an insect behaviorist, I'm more a vertebrate behaviors, and we put that course together from scratch, and it's been going. It's peaking at about 100 students, we have about 60 now, and it's a fun topic. I like teaching it.

**CP:** You mentioned the kin behavior. Were there other areas you were investigating?

**AB:** Yeah, we'd do all kinds of behavior. We'd do mate selection, mate choice, kin recognition, cannibalism, things like that, all kinds of behavior.

**CP:** And mostly with amphibians.

**AB:** Mostly with amphibians, but we've done some mammal stuff, too. I've had students do doctorates on chipmunks, deer mice, voles – a vole is a rodent without a tail. I still do some mammal stuff.

**CP:** We've talked about amphibian population decline, but could you touch upon amphibian deformities as well?

**AB:** Amphibian deformities, so I mostly hooked up with a guy named Peter Johnson who's at University of Colorado, and he did the classic paper as an undergraduate that was published in *Science* when he was an undergraduate, showing that trematode parasites, which are flatworms, are one of the major causes for deformities, it's not really contaminants or pollutants or mutations.

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There seems to be these parasites. We followed that up and that's what we think is going on. We've done a ton of papers with Peter and his group on that.

**CP:** Were you on the forefront of this research?

**AB:** I would say I was not on the forefront of the deformities research, I was definitely on the forefront of the amphibian decline research, but I hooked up with Peter Johnson, I mean, I was right there at the beginning, but it was all his ideas. And we did a lot of the research in my lab, but they were all his ideas.

**CP:** Yeah.

**AB:** And he was an undergrad when he was doing all this, and he got a lot of crap, let me tell ya. And I stuck up for him, and it's in a book, you could see the interaction. Where all these big wigs are trying to kill him over this trematode hypothesis and I stand up and said, "Just test it. Let's see if it works". But it's in a book, it came out in a bunch of books that came out on this.

**CP:** So that was the sort of major milestone then in deformity work.

**AB:** I think it was, yeah.

**CP:** You seem to have done something on asteroid collisions with Earth.

**AB:** Yeah, that was a good one. There was guy named George Somero who was a National Academy member who was here for about five years. He hooked me up with this NASA scientist, Cockle, and we're talking about UV 'cause, when an asteroid hits, it blasts down to Earth, particulate matter goes up, and it knocks out the ozone in a little area. So we just formulated...we have two major papers and a book on the effects of UV radiation and asteroid impact, so that made little bit of press too. So he did all the physics and I did all the biology.

**CP:** It does seem a little far afield from the rest of what you've done.

**AB:** Yeah, it's a little far afield, and I never get cited 'cause I put it in the wrong journal. It's in a great journal that's got a high impact, and no one reads it 'cause, it should be in an astrophysics journal, and it's in an ecology journal. The funny thing is, I got asked to be a keynote speaker at the Society for Astrophysics in Hawaii, just to show the biological impact of it. I went, 'cause it's a free trip to Hawaii, and I gave this talk, and I know they didn't know what the hell I was talking about and I didn't know what the hell they were talking about, but they all said, "Wow, those frogs are really cute", but it was fun.

**CP:** Climate change is something that's obviously in the news these days, I'm wondering if you could talk a bit about the early conversations about climate change when that first started to circulate in your world.

**AB:** Yeah, that's been going on for a long time, and I hooked up with who became my post-doc, he was a grad student somewhere else, Josh Lawler, and Lawler is a modeler for climate change, and we published a bunch of papers on what would happen if certain climate scenarios occurred to animals. Other people have done it with plants, and some people have done it with insects, we did it with vertebrates. We modeled how mammals, birds, and amphibians would have to switch their ranges or would die off and things like that. Those papers are highly cited too, and there's...it goes back to disease. I had a student just finish – her name was Giselle Xie, Yang Xie – she came out from China, and did a great thesis, and she was a student in my lab, simultaneously, while she was getting a Masters in Statistics here, she did a PhD with me and we mathematically and graphically modeled what would happen to the major disease of amphibians under different climate change scenarios, and that paper just came out a month ago. And it's starting to get looked at, so we're into climate change, and we think that diseases – a lot of people before me have said this – diseases are going to shift with climate, and that some of the vectors like mosquitos that carry diseases, they're gonna shift too, so it's a big topic now. And we're going to have problems with climate change because of the current administration, but we already had problems with the Bush Administration. I publish with federal scientists who weren't allowed to say the word "global warming" – they got it exxed out. I don't have to do that, 'cause we're not under those rules, but we'll see what happens. Climate change is real, folks.

**CP:** Are you hopeful at all?

**AB:** No. Not under this administration. But I'll still publish, see what happens. We are all very depressed about this, because science is under attack. Now, I'm a member of the Aldo Leopold Leadership group, there's about 300 of us. Do you know what that is?

**CP:** I do not.

**AB:** This is a group of ecologists and some non-ecologists that was put together in 1999 or 2000. One of the people who put it together was Jane Lubchenco, to teach certain scientists how to convey science to the public and to legislators and to various other people.

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So I was one of the first cohort there. And there's a letter going around now, where three hundred of us signed this letter to the president about how important science is, we don't think he'll listen to this but, there's a lot of things going on.

**CP:** Well, I kind of feel like it's important to mention this. We've done 234 interviews for this project and you're the first one in the new administration, and it's certainly a different feeling right now on this campus.

**AB:** Well, we are going to keep mentioning it. And my message...science to the public is really important, when Jane Lubchenco started this whole group there – actually we used to teach a course called Human Ecology together where we did this – but I give lectures to all kinds of groups like, go downtown to, I forget what it's called...

**CP:** Science Pub...

**AB:** Yeah, Science Pub, I've done this all over the country though. And I've done in elementary schools. I've done it in lots of the states, and I try to teach my students, my grad students, how to do soundbites. You have to do this, you have to know how to deal with the press, you have to convey science in a meaningful way, and that's one of my things.

**CP:** What is the feeling right now in your circles? About...it's been a crazy two weeks, really.

**AB:** Let's put it this way – we have heads of all these groups, heads of all these departments, State Department, everywhere; they're not scientists. How can I explain this? Jane Lubchenco used to be the head of NOAA. The guy that he's going to put in is an anti-climate person. Head of the EPA doesn't believe in climate change. I mean, it's pretty bizarre. So, we're not too optimistic, but we're not going to stop. I mean, if you really come down to it, I would say it's well over 90% of the scientists believe climate change is a real phenomenon. It's not controversial, it might be 95%, maybe more, I mean, Bernie Sanders would say that, you know, old Bernie, but who's listening now?

**CP:** Back to your research a little bit, I'd like to know more about your fieldwork. Any memorable stories you might have from working in the field – you've worked in Costa Rica a little bit, but mostly in the Northwest, is that correct?

**AB:** Yeah, we've mostly worked in the Northwest, California, Nevada, a little bit of Costa Rica, a little bit of Spain. You want to hear a funny story?

**CP:** Yeah, sure.

**AB:** Ok, so we put out these experiments, the little cages where we put eggs in a cage of amphibians like put shields over them to see if UVs are gonna damage them. We're doing this one project in rural Washington state and I had two post-docs – one was Adolpho Marco from Spain, one was Doug Chivers, was Canadian. Besides their squabbles – because in those days, Spain and Canada were going at it over fishing rights – and you know I would instigate, "yeah, yeah", we left Adolpho up there. I can tell you two stories about Adolpho. The first story is, he had yet to camp out. This is the middle of nowhere. The first story is, a bear came through our place and ripped up all our cages. And Adolpho would never go back 'cause he was scared to death of that, and on the way back, we're in the car with him, and he's driving. It's a state vehicle – I shouldn't say – he had a driver's license. We're all sleeping, right? And he's going about 95 miles an hour on the Interstate and we get stopped by a state trooper. And he says, "You know how fast you were going?" We're all going, "Uh oh, we're in trouble now." Adolpho couldn't speak English. He just spoke Spanish. And we think we're going in and he's just nodding and nodding and nodding, and the cop said, "Just slow down" and he let us go. So there's two funny stories. They were funny at the time, anyway. So there's that, lots of stories and Grant Hokit, who's now a professor, he was my grad student. He's a Professor at Carroll College, which is a small little Catholic school in Montana. He's from rural Colorado. He was in a state vehicle, we used to get state vehicles. Forest Service would give us some vehicles 'cause they were helping to fund the project. And in those days it was spotted owl problems. He got pinned down by people shooting at him. Because they saw a state vehicle and thought he was doing spotted owl work. I mean, that's scary stuff out there. This is in rural Oregon. Had a lot of those. Mostly everything's been fine. But you never know.

**CP:** I bet there's a lot of those.

**AB:** There's a lot of those, yep.

**CP:** What is it like to be an ecologist at OSU?

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There are a lot of people that are, would fit themselves within that definition, I would suggest, in multiple departments. It seems like it would be a real strength here at OSU. Is that correct?

**AB:** We have a definite strength in ecology. There are all the departments – Fishes and Wildlife, they're all ecologists. In my department, there's mostly marine ecologists. I might be the only non-marine ecologist in the department except for Dave Lytle, actually his wife too. There are a couple of other ones, but we had more members of the Ecological Society of America at OSU I think than at many other schools. Matter of fact, the ESA, which is 10,000 members loves us so much, they keep wanting to have their national meeting in Portland, which is going to happen again this summer, we just had it here a few years ago, and then a few years before that. They just love Portland, they love Oregon, and it's ESA, 10,000 members. They don't show up when it's in Florida. They don't show up when it's in California, but when it's in Oregon, they love it. So, we have a strength here, ecology.

**CP:** I'd like to touch a bit on administrative work as well. You were the director of the Environmental Sciences graduate program for several years.

**AB:** Yeah, for about 13.

**CP:** Do you want to talk about that?

**AB:** So, I was idealistic when I took it over. I thought we could really build up interdisciplinary programs, and it worked out OK. Some of my best grad students of my own went through that program. Matter of fact, Kat Surl got a PhD with me, she's now a professor at Purdue, I mean there's a bunch of them. Lisa Belding's at Virginia Tech, these all went through Environmental Science, but it's tough because the funding isn't really there, it's not a lot of administrative support for interdisciplinary programs, so kinda got frustrated and I finally, we gave it up. But it was 13 years. It was like having two full-time jobs, too, with the price of one, to tell you the truth.

**CP:** What were your duties in this context?

**AB:** I did everything. I mean, I did all the admissions, I did all the administration, I did all the getting of the grants, I finally had an assistant, after ten years I got an assistant, but it's too hard.

**CP:** Am I correct in my understanding that Environmental Science is a program that came about while you were here at OSU?

**AB:** Yeah, and I wasn't the first director, and I can't remember the name of the person who was.

**CP:** Do you remember much about how it came into being?

**AB:** I saw all those documents, but I don't remember how it was. Yeah, I was involved with a little bit but not much.

**CP:** You were also co-curator of the Natural History Collection?

**AB:** Actually, no, I wasn't.

**CP:** You were not?

**AB:** No.

**CP:** You're listed in one of the catalogs as having been.

**AB:** That's pretty funny. Not to my knowledge [laughs].

**CP:** Have you had any connection with that collection at all?

**AB:** No.

**CP:** OK.

**AB:** How 'bout that?

**CP:** Any other noteworthy involvements at OSU? Institutional involvements over the course, you've been here a long time.

**AB:** Yeah, I've tried to stay out of administration, so I did the Environmental Science and then just regular duties as a professor. Teacher and researcher, I like doing both of those.

**CP:** No significant committee work that made an impact on you?

**AB:** I like being on the Distinguished Professor committee because you get to pick who will be a Distinguished Professor, or help pick. You have some influence there. And I've been on so many committees, I don't know. I'll tell you the truth, I don't like doing committee work and I don't like administration. I love doing research and I love teaching. Those are my things. And I think I'm good at those, but the other ones? I'm OK but not the best. There are better people for them.

**CP:** Who are some OSU people who have been important to you over time?

**AB:** Like Doc Storm?

**CP:** Yeah.

**AB:** Bruce Menge's a good friend of mine. I had a good friend here for a number of years named Mark Hickson, have you ever heard of him? We went to grad school together, and he was here for many years, and he left, he went to University of Hawaii, so there's some...I haven't published a lot of papers with people in my department, but I have published with Doc Storm and Joe Beede who was Acting Chair for a while. I published some papers with Bob Mason, that's about it there. My really good friend, Bob Anthony, who passed away about two years ago, he was my best friend here. He was a Fisheries and Wildlife professor and the head of the Oregon Cooperative Wildlife Unit. We had season tickets to football and basketball together for 30 years. We published papers together and we went to sporting events together, and we would always go to Duck games together at their place and root for the Beavers and get tickets in the middle of the Duck section, and he was the toughest sucker I ever met.

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And we'd go with a couple other guys who were Vietnam vets and they wouldn't mess with us. Bob Anthony was probably my, yeah, he was definitely my best friend here.

**CP:** I've asked a lot of people about their memories of the early 1990s. Ballot Measure 5 was passed and I'm interested in your memory of that and the impact that it made in your corner of the university.

**AB:** Ballot Measure 5...so, you know what? Ever since I've been here, we've had budget crunches, it didn't make an impact on me at all. Every year, we're going to have a bad budget every year, so, I don't see it.

**CP:** It's just the external funding that's worried you.

**AB:** Yeah, well, sometimes we didn't get raises, you know, and we were low paid, if you look at pay throughout the country, so it's just par for the course.

**CP:** So that didn't make a big impact on your world?

**AB:** Yeah, it kinda upset me a little bit, but...what could I do?

**CP:** Well, you've been very involved with a lot of organizations outside of the university, and I'd be interested in knowing about some that mean the most to you.

**AB:** Well, the Aldo Leopold Leadership Program is probably the most important one, but there was a thing called SEPTS, you ever heard of that? I can't remember what it stands for, but it was, my wife was involved with it, and it's conveying science to the public, and those are really meaningful to me. Lots of things outside the university. I'm a member of all of these societies. I became a fellow of three or four, I guess four, societies now, so I'm involved with those, ecological society, AAAS and all that, so I do some interactions with the major science groups there.

**CP:** And you have been an editor for more than one journal?

**AB:** I'm the editor of two now, now I'm just on the editorial part of one. I've been an editor of *Conservation Biology* for, I don't know, maybe 18 years.

**CP:** Can you talk about what that entails?

**AB:** Mostly just tailing papers that come in to review and sending them out to reviewers. And then breaking ties and things like that, but you know, it's extra duties but, I am a conservation biologist. I'm one of the couple of people that are interested in conservation biology in my department. Now, Fisheries and Wildlife, there are many people over there, but I have to say, *Conservation Biology* to me is extremely important, and that journal isn't that old. It's been around a little bit, but that's another story I could tell you. The head editor of *Conservation Biology* was on campus here. He was one of the head honchos that started it, and he left. The guy just before him who did start the journal, I can't remember his name, he's at Rutgers, I have this paper go in, to *Conservation Biology*, first one I ever submitted, and I submitted with two very well-known people, and I'm the lead author on it. And it took a year for them to review it, because they said it was controversial, and we didn't think it was. And it had to do with amphibian declines, one of the very first papers on amphibian declines, and how you determined whether amphibians were going extinct or not. Then it got accepted, and the editor said, "You should not let this paper get published, it will ruin your career" another one of those. So here's a guy telling three people, here I am, now I'm a Distinguished Professor, in those days, I wasn't. The other guy was Dave Wake, who's now a member of the National Academy, and the third author was Wayne Souza, who's the Chair of the Department of Biology at Berkeley. I think, so, I wrote him back and said, "I think I know what we're doing." It's now my most cited paper. It's never been controversial. And it's the tenth most cited paper in the field. And that's pretty good. So, there's *Conservation Biology* for you, so I'm proud of that paper, got like 1000 citations now.

**CP:** I'm wondering how you're able to maintain your...I don't know how to phrase this quite, but you work on a lot of projects that seem kind of depressing.

**AB:** Yeah, like amphibians going extinct and UV radiation coming in?

**CP:** Uh huh. How are you able to stay upbeat or hopeful or focused or I'm not sure what.

**AB:** First of all, I'm hyperactive. Second of all, I watch a lot of movies, and I'll tell you a little inside scoop. If you go to my papers, I love publishing papers, if you go to my papers, I would say 80% of my papers, read the acknowledgments. They're all movie character names. OK? Now, I've been caught twice. My latest one is the best. You just go and see if you can figure out, it's in Bloss 1 it just came out, it's that Climate Change paper by, senior author Xie, X – I – E, look at the acknowledgments.

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So that's how I get a little bit of...I put a little extra stuff in there to help me out.

**CP:** Sports and movies are the secret then?

**AB:** Yeah, this last one is not movies, but you might be able to recognize it. You're a little too young, but my grad students recognized them! There are some John Wayne characters in there, the entire cast of *Casablanca* is in one of them. I got caught twice. One guy, editor, just circled it said, "Got ya", let it go, one guy said, "You take it out" but then you get page proofs back and I put it back in page proofs, then he really got upset. There's some great characters in there, though.

**CP:** Well, you've been at OSU for 38 years...

**AB:** That's right.

**CP:** You'll stick around for a while? I mean, what's coming up for you?

**AB:** Yeah, I'm not ready yet to retire and I have to still finish some grad students, but I told...when Steve Arnold and Bruce Menge go, then I'll start thinking about it. They're older than me. I'm still having fun and I still like it. So, and if I'm not doing a good job teaching, then you can...then I'll go. But I still get good teaching evaluations.

**CP:** How do you feel like you've evolved as a teacher? We've talked about teaching a fair amount already, but...

**AB:** I've definitely evolved. I was not a great teacher when I first started, and I learned some of the rules I try to tell my friends that are teachers how to do it. And General Biology, I love it because I try to be totally up to date. I re-do my lectures every summer before the fall, and I'm, my topics are really right out of the newspapers, so if there's a new virus hits, like I gave a whole lecture on Zika virus this year, so that feeds what I do, I try to be up to date and I relate it to what they're supposed to learn too, so, there's things you learn, things you don't say as I alluded to.

**CP:** You mentioned before we started the interview that you've taught 28,000 students at one place.

**AB:** I added it up. In that one course since 1984, 28,000. And then I've taught other courses too, so – I could tell you stories about that too, people see me from all over. OK, let's just take the 28,000. I'm coming back from Mexico, crossing the border, and you gotta go through customs. Customs guard goes, "Dr. Blaustein", I go, "Uh oh, how does he know me?" "I had you in Bio 211 in 1994." I'm in New York City at Barnes & Noble, "Dr. Blaustein," how does he know my name? "I had you in Bio 211 in 1992". This happens to me all the time. So it's kinda funny. Every single pharmacist in the state practically had my class. My son's a pharmacist. I go to dinner with these guys and they all had me. All the MDs. All the nurses. They all took Bio 211. Think about it. There are 30,000 of those dudes out there. And they're all still in Oregon. So, it's kind of interesting. I don't know if anyone else has that.

**CP:** It's hard to say.

**AB:** It's like 30,000 students out there had my class. Not saying they all like me but they had me.

**CP:** Well, a couple of concluding questions here. We touched on this obliquely I think, a little bit, but if you could talk a bit about change over the course of the time you've been here within the department, and within maybe the College of Science as well. Zoology is no longer Zoology it's the Department of Integrative Biology. Some memories of change over the course of time.

**AB:** Well, the university's changed, right, I don't know how many students were here when I first got here, but it's a lot bigger now. It's run differently. The president now is totally different than the old president. I think generally he's done a really great job. But different philosophies, our department, the one thing I'm not thrilled with is we almost never have a chance to say who we want, what direction we're going in in our department. We get good positions, but sometimes, you know, they're by accident. But our department has done well in terms of getting good positions, and luckily, the people we get, they're great. As a matter of fact, I don't know if I could compete with any of the new ones that we get. These guys are really high powered these days. I was just on an orals exam yesterday with one of my students and two young guys, not tenured yet, they asked really great questions. So we're getting great people, there's a lot more pressure on them, I think, now, to get grants and publish than there was, even though I did it, the pressure on the new people is really tough.

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And in my opinion, I try to do everything I can to help these guys out. In the old days, there wasn't as much help. There's a lot more help now. People were not aware of diversity – that's a good thing. Our dean is a champion of diversity. My lab is very diverse and I'm proud of that. There's only one male in my lab, for example, and it's a good thing. But in the old days, that did not happen. As a matter of fact, when Jane Lubchenco was hired, years before me, it was almost impossible in our department to get hired if you were a female. Obviously that's not cool. And there are various other things that are gone, but we've done a lot better now. Just look at the politics, I shouldn't be saying politics, but it's a hell of a lot more to my liking now. We do well that way. And I think a lot of it has to do with the president, and the dean is really good too, so...and the chair, so we're all on the same plane.

**CP:** And then the last question is one that we're asking to many of the people we interview, and that's just to give their sense of where OSU is at and heading as it looks at its 150th anniversary.

**AB:** I think it's definitely a first-rate institution. I can compare where I went to school and all that, you know, Oregon State University is really good. We've got really good people here. It doesn't always get the credit it should, I mean, you know, you've got Bruce Menge and Jane Lubchenco, and other people that are just fantastic. I mean, Jane could go anywhere she wants. I mean, so could Bruce. And I can't, because I'm not of their stature, but I'm pretty good, I think, so are the other distinguished professors, but we have really good people here. I mean, the Linus Pauling institute, Fisheries and Wildlife had some unbelievably good hires. So, in terms of research, it's so much better than when I first got here, I think, and it's a first-rate institution, so I think the president has a lot to do with some of that. It's gotten bigger, but I think it's a good thing, so I just think we don't get the credit all the time. We're good.

**CP:** Simple as that.

**AB:** Yeah, it's a good school. I mean, I sent my kid here. I have twins. One went here, we did an experiment, one went to the University of Portland. So one had me in Biology 'cause he was a pharmacist with 1200 students, and his twin had biology with 32 students. Pretty interesting difference. I saved a lot of money by him going here, though.

**CP:** Well, Dr. Blaustein, I want to thank you for this, it's been a lot of fun.

**AB:** A little unconventional, but...

**CP:** Well, I appreciate that.

**AB:** Ok, cool.

**CP:** Thank you.

**AB:** Yeah.

[1:08:09]