



## John Henley Oral History Interviews, December 22, 2014

### Title

“A Mother's Story/Building Powell's Books”

### Date

December 22, 2014

### Location

Valley Library, Oregon State University.

### Summary

In interview 1, Henley provides a detailed discussion of his parents' lives. He begins by describing his mother's upbringing in Washington state and her early interest in writing. He then relays his father's life history, with emphasis placed on his exploits as a spy during World War II.

Henley then returns to his mother's professional work, her association with members of the American Communist Party, and her commitment to the Oregon State Penitentiary for the Criminally Insane. Follow-up questions delve more deeply into the literary scene in New York during Elizabeth Henley's years of residence; an overview of the lives led by Elizabeth's siblings; and the communist milieu in which Elizabeth circulated during her time in Seattle. Henley likewise speaks, in-depth, on the environment that his mother faced during her years of incarceration and the impact that it made upon her following her release.

From there, Henley details his own roots in the book trade. He then describes the means by which his mother was released from the Oregon State Penitentiary, outlines the role that Mark Hatfield played in bringing this about, and shares his own personal memories of Hatfield. Henley also remarks on his mother's associations with Oregon poets Williams Stafford and Vi Gale, and touches upon her contacts with Bernard Malamud.

Next, Henley reflects on his mother's experiences as a faculty member at Oregon State, noting her strong facility for teaching, describing her creative process, and sharing his memories of her contacts with other faculty members and numerous members of the Oregon literary scene. In addition, Henley reflects on the culture of Corvallis during the 1960s and 1970s.

The remainder of the interview is devoted to Henley's years as a manager at Powell's Books. In this, he provides an overview of the biography of Walter Powell, describes the means by which he came to be employed by Powell, and traces the expansion of the store throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

### Interviewee

John Henley

### Interviewer

Chris Petersen

**Website**

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

## Transcript

**Chris Petersen:** Alright John, if you would please introduce yourself with your name and today's date and our location.

**John Henley:** OK, I'm John Henley, today is December 22nd, 2014.

**CP:** And we are in the Valley Library.

Something that we want to do today is to capture the story of your parents, which is a remarkable story – your mother Elizabeth especially, but also your father Preston – their tale leading up to your birth and beyond that. So if you would, just kind of tell us that story until, maybe, your mother gets to OSU and then I'll jump in a little bit more.

**JH:** OK. Where to start? My father was born in 1913, my mother was born in 1912. My mother was born in Bellingham, Washington; Whatcom County. At that time, it was a logging community, largely; a lot of mills. My grandfather was something of an entrepreneur in the area of logging and millwork. My father came from Iowa. He was sent to military school at the ripe age of five, in Louisiana. There were an awful lot of Henleys in Louisiana. In fact, there was a Confederate general named John Henley who commanded the *CSS Oregon*. He was a Marine and I'm a distant cousin, that's it. But we do have a lot of New Orleans and Shreveport Henleys.

So there he went to school. He studied medicine. Ultimately he was going to become a doctor – or that's what he thought. Then he got disgruntled with Tulane University's medical department; he got in, kind of, arguments with their professors. And he found his way out to Santa Barbara, where he studied Business. There he went out to teach Business at the University of Washington.

Now my mother – who was raised in Bellingham, as I mentioned – began writing poetry at a very early age. When she was a little girl, the best-known woman poet in the Pacific Northwest was Ella Higginson. And she would have a contest every year for schoolchildren to write a poem, a regional poem. She would be the judge and then she would go to wherever that student was and give them some kind of an award. I don't know the nature of the award, but it was a distinction. And my mother, at the age of about six or seven, won Ella Higginson's award. And this was a great distinction. Well she, of course, was then encouraged by her parents to stay in poetry, so she wrote poems for *The Puget Sounder*, which was Bellingham's school newspaper. And then she went, ultimately – well, she went to Bellingham Normal, which is now Western Washington. That's where her archives, a lot of what exists of her papers, are there. Then she went to the University of Washington in Seattle, where she ultimately met my father. Then they proceeded to – well, she was already teaching there and was a pretty well-known commodity. And so she was teaching and got her master's there. That's where she met my father.

They married, my oldest brother was born in 1941. World War II erupted. My mother taught at Hunter and was pretty well-established in New York City as a rising poet, and was starting to get published in *The New Yorker* and a few other magazines that are pretty well-known today: *Ladies Home Journal*, which was much more of a literary magazine than we think of it today. In fact, early issues of the *Ladies Home Journal* published the first American appearances of Sherlock Holmes, although this is some years prior to my mother coming along.

**CP:** What prompted them to move to New York City?

**JH:** Prospects of getting work. My father said, "I can probably get a good job with the banks." So they went to New York City and, in fact, he did get a job with Chase Manhattan. And then World War II broke out and, like many men, my father wanted to join the Army but he was thirty-one years old, and so he was too old. But the Navy looked at him having this military record, military education, and they put him aboard a minesweeper. And he was sailed out of Pensacola. His first night of command, eight hours into the cruise going to look for mines outside of Florida, damn it if a U-Boat doesn't hit him. [laughs] Well, in an act of bravado, he shoots the one and only cannon towards the direction of the U-Boat, flips them off, and then gets his crew safely ashore. Knowing that, once his men were sort of on their way back to the home base, he knew he was going to get court martialed. So without even changing his uniform, he hops a train and he goes up to Annapolis, where knows he's going to have to go because when you lose a boat, there's a court martial. And usually, in his circumstances, they say, "yeah, you got your crew safely ashore, you did everything you could, you didn't have an escort, no fault. Those darn Nazis," and then rubber stamped to a new command.

[0:05:27]

Well my father gets into Annapolis, and he looks at this directory on the wall, and around the corner comes an admiral with all of his adjuncts. And my father gawked. He said, "wow!" like that. A moment later, one of the adjuncts comes back and says, "the admiral wants to see you." And my father was shown into the office of Admiral Halsey, who chewed him out. "You always salute an officer, you shit, I should drum you out for not saluting me." He was really quite angry at my father; instead of [makes gawking expression] he was kind of like this, instead of salute. Then after a moment, he said, "where you from, son?" And my father said, "well, I'm from Davenport, Iowa initially," and the fellow says, "well, who's your mother?" And my father said, "Ruth Roberts." And Halsey stiffens up and he tells everybody to leave, and my father thought, "uh-oh, ok, this is it. I'm going to get shot in the morning." And instead, the admiral says, "sit down, son," pulls a bottle out from under the drawer, pours him a drink, and says, "I almost married your mother." [laughs]

So they talk and the admiral gets to know my father. He knows he's fluent in German, he speaks fluent Spanish, and he sends him on a mission to Panama to infiltrate the Nazi cells down there, which my father does. And he pretends he's a German national and he gets into some pretty sensitive places. And one day, he's walking in to the office where he's reporting for Nazi duty – he's playing double agent – and he hears these two Spanish guys laughing there, saying, "this poor son of a gun doesn't know they're going to kill him." So my father, packing a .45, goes in and he has, basically, a James Bond shoot-out, which, you know, many people are either wounded or dead, but not my father because he has the up on this. And then he gets to the U.S. Naval base and says, "I'm Preston Henley and, holy cow, my cover's blown, I have to get back to the United States in a hurry. I can't be here anymore." So they ship him back and Halsey says, "good job, you did a great job. Now we know where all the Nazis are down there. Thanks."

And his next assignment was to verify all the people that were reported dead in various Naval engagements, and then help send out the telegram to parents. And, of course, at the bottom it says, "if you have any questions, call this number." And, of course, everybody would always call. Well, this gave him quite a strong patriotic sense, mainly because he got thousands of calls. In fact, he always resented any conscientious objector from there on out, even through the Vietnam era. He didn't support the Vietnam War but if you were a CO, boy, you were a coward. Because guys were dying. There is a family story, which may or may not be true, that when he met William Stafford for the first time and said, "what did you do during the war?" and Stafford said, "I was a CO," that my father broke his nose. I never asked Bill if that were true. I was an infant at the time the story happened, but my older brothers claim that they saw this incident.

As for my mother, she was a homebody, she taught at Hunter and raised two boys. I came along in 1951 and they had moved from New York to Pocatello – was it Pocatello or Boise? I think it was Boise, actually. To Boise, pursuing work and coming out west to be closer to her family. And then he came to U.S. Bank in the late '40s. And then I came along in Portland, Oregon; I'm a native-born, Portland is my home.

So my mother taught at what had been Vanport University and then became Portland State College. How she met William Stafford is he had been released and was looking for work, and she hired him as a teacher's assistant. Then when she learned that there was work, she had been offered a job teaching English up at Lewis & Clark, and she said, "I don't know, but my friend Bill," so she helped get Bill Stafford placed. And she also met a young Norwegian – or was it Swedish – immigrant named Viola Gale, who became better known as Vi Gale. Both of these are major figures in the Oregon poetic scene.

[0:10:00]

And at that time, my mother would write a poem – and that, we can talk about that later – but she would write a poem. She would send off without a self-addressed stamped envelope, because she knew it would be published. And every poet on the West Coast who knew her – Bill Stafford even told me, he said, "I envied her, because I would always get my poems back, but Elizabeth." She would send out and they would just publish it because she had been in New York, you see. She was big news. And had been published in *The New Yorker* and, of course, if you're published in *The New Yorker*, you've got to be good. And she was good. She was a good poet.

So there she was and there he was. And then in the 1950s, about the time I was about four or five, a remarkable thing swept over the United States: a fear of communism. And McCarthy's pals sent a guy named Cantwell, who went to the University of Washington, and discovered a lot of communists. Most of them lost their job. And so all throughout the

West Coast, if not the entire country, if you had ever had a communist affiliation, you were bad news. Well my mother, in the 1930s, had been a communist. She had joined the Communist Party. How active she really was, I don't know, but she was pretty close with Sophus Winther, who was an up-and-coming novelist until he was outed as a commie, and then he lost his job and his writing career was over.

And my mother and my father were very scared. What would this mean? And she did not want to bring ruination down on the family and her children, her boys, and he didn't want that. So it was decided by my father and then some people at a high echelon in U.S. Bank – Ed Salmons, Marshall Dana. And I was told this many years later by a woman named Maxine Lipscomb, who was the secretary for these guys. And she told me the story about how this came down. And then it was later verified through Vi Gale, though with a slight variation, but the facts more or less jibed. And then later, Marilyn Greer, who was Bob Packwood's first manager – later Senator Bob Packwood – she confirmed some of this back in the mid-'70s, when I was asking her some questions, she was quite candid.

Well, my mother decided that, rather than bring ruin on the family, she would commit herself to a sanitarium and just say, you know, "I've been known to do crazy things." [laughs] So this is what she does. Well, instead of being put into kind of a nice little, what we call a rest home, she's actually put into the Oregon State Penitentiary for the Criminally Insane. Which is the very first place I visited her when I was old enough to remember meeting people. But, again, we can go on that story too. So anyway, my father remarries or starts having other paramours, what have you, and so their relationship dissolves over a period of years where they're separated. They were probably coming close to being on the rocks anyway; I think they were divorcing as all of this was happening. This was part of the whole tension of the era.

I was not allowed to visit my mother because she was a communist; therefore, she was a danger. Now later, they started saying, "well, you can see her once a month, as long as there's..." Well, Vi Gale and Bill Stafford discover what happened to her, and they petition a very young Mark Hatfield, Governor Hatfield, saying, "there's been a horrible mistake." Mark Hatfield made one call to the head of Oregon State, and my mother was given a job teaching English to the students that they wanted to put on the football team. Which, in Bernie Malamud's books, are called "the D.O.E. students." And we had a lot of football players who are young guys, really good athletes, but have never been taught composition. So her job was to elevate them so that they could at least pass through college; get a C in English. Well, she did actually, and she actually did much better, she could usually get these guys into A category, she gave them a lot of special attention. And I can remember her having classes in her living room with these football players.

So my mother started here in about '58-'59, that area, and I got to know her over, you know, once a month. My father remarried in, golly, 1966, '65, and I lived in Portland, Oregon and went to Grant High School. Then started scouting books in high school and ultimately became a book seller. Now I appraise rare books. So where would you like to go from here?

[0:15:21]

**CP:** Well, let's back up a little bit. I'm interested in a few things related to the New York time period. Your mother, you mentioned, was mostly a homemaker, but she was establishing herself on a national level as a poet, if she was being published in magazines like *The New Yorker*. Was she part of the literary scene at all in New York City? Did she ever talk about that?

**JH:** You know, I have no evidence; I don't know that she was. I mean, I'm sure – she was very good about going to all faculty events. I know for a fact that she had gotten to know John Ciardi, who was an Italian-American poet. They had some correspondence. I have some evidence that she had at least some introduction to people who knew Virginia Woolf, though Virginia Woolf was long gone. But she had some contact with the English crowd. She probably knew Elmer and Berta Hader, but everybody knew Elmer and Berta Hader, who had their place in upstate New York, and it was a place where a lot of the social activity revolved around. I know she had met Laura Ingalls Wilder, and she talked about some of these people.

As for the literary scene in the 1940s, in war-time, kind of hard to peg. You have a lot of young men are going off to war, or they're like Kerouac and Ginsberg, they're finding alternate service. It's a very interesting transition period in American literature. If someone were to say to me, "who are the best known poets of World War II?" I'd have to scratch my head and say, "you know, that's kind of an interesting, quiet period." Because you have, right before that, the whole Paris generation – Archibald MacLeish, Hemingway was still very big. Out here in Oregon, we had H.L. Davis. But as far

as national prominence, that's all we had, versus New York, which was where a lot of activity was going on. I'm trying to think of who the best sellers were besides Hemingway in World War II, and you have a lot of various authors like John Gunther, *Inside Europe*; William Shirer writing about the Third Reich. These are the best sellers. A lot of journalism books were being sold, *Guadalcanal Diary*. I mean, the war is preoccupying our reading quite a bit.

**CP:** Did she have a mentor or a patron or somebody who helped her make some early breakthroughs in her career?

**JH:** Well, Ella Higginson's introduction, winning that award was big. At the University of Washington, I gather that she was very close with Sophus Winther. The Winther family, Oscar Winther was a great American western historian, he wrote the book about wagon roads, early bicycle roads, the evolution of the freeway system up to 1950. I mean, Oscar Winther's book is *the* history of transportation in the Old West up to the era of the interstates. And she he was around there. Frank McCaffrey was publishing up in Seattle; he was publishing a lot of off-beat, interesting items. She was no doubt connected with that.

Now, her older sister Ruth had gone to the University of Washington and, holy cow, Ruth was a good fifteen or twenty years older; a much older sister. And her sister Ruth actually knew old Mr. Boeing. [laughs] And how that came about is hilarious. They were on the University of Washington campus and she was in an Astronomy course, and they thought they had discovered a new bipolar star system arising that was uncharted. And so she drove – being one of the few people who could drive – drove a car up to a hill to get a look. And instead of it being a star, it was something coming off the ground, taking off, and it was Mr. Boeing trying headlamps for his airplanes. So then she drove down and wanted to see what this was all about. So my aunt Ruth was quite a character in her own right.

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Very quick sub-story about her: she was not allowed to study German, because she went to school during World War I, and then, German was not taught. She went to Chicago where she got her degree in Chemistry, and she worked her way through school, and her boss – she worked as a secretary, and this is no kidding, she worked for Al Capone at the Lexington Hotel as the bookkeeper for the Lexington Hotel. And to the day that she died, she said, "all those horrible stories they say about Al Capone was just people being anti-Italian." She said, "they're just picking on this immigrant." She said he was not capable of all these horrible things. And I would say to her – and she was quite an interesting character – I'd say, "Ruthie, there's just too much evidence that the guy was a killer." "Oh no, he was a sweet, sweet man, and it was just that they hated Italians and they blamed him."

Well, she was an interesting duck. She comes home in the mid-1920s with this woman named Peggy, and she says to the family, "Peggy and I are going to get married as soon as they legalize it." [laughs] Shocked the family and for years they didn't want to talk to her. But when the Depression came, here she was teaching Chemistry at the University of Washington, so she would be the one sending checks home to everybody. And suddenly all of the criticism stopped. "Peggy's fine, Peggy's fine now." But Ruthie was a good friend with Fermi and she had a passing meeting with Albert Einstein. And she was consulted on the Manhattan Project. She wasn't part of the actual project, but she certainly was very busy with Hanford. Because at those times, chemists, physicists were often in the same boat. They weren't quite as separated as they are today. So that's aunt Ruthie.

And then older sister Kitty, I should talk about Katherine Stimson very quickly. Katherine Watts was my mother's other older sister, and Kitty married a comedian/physician named Ed Stimson, so she became Kitty Stimson. And she always had a political thing, and she worked very hard with Senator – who would later become Senator Henry Jackson – she worked with him from the very beginning, all the way up, and had his ear for a long time. Her son, Edward Stimson Jr., was a major lobbyist for the airline industry of Washington. And Kitty was always involved in politics; always in Democratic politics in Washington state. Very big there.

**CP:** Listening to you talk about your mom and her siblings, they all pursued the life of the mind on some level. It sounds to me like education was a big deal in that family.

**JH:** Oh yeah, it sure was. And then there was her little brother Arthur, who went on to become a surgeon doctor, and also a very distinguished career. He remained pretty much in Bellingham, but he was certainly a central figure in Bellingham history too.

**CP:** Do you think that the roots of your mother's interest in communism as an idea, was that something that came out of the family? Were politics and social ideas something that the family cared about? Or where did it come from?

**JH:** I don't know. I think that, for her, one of the big pivotal moments was when – she had been very impressed by World War I, and seeing the veterans come back without arms or without legs, and being basically poor and not treated well. And she, I think, developed – because the rest of her family didn't really seem to care, one way or another, about politics. Never quite the same level. And after she started teaching at Oregon State, she never voted, she was very quiet on her politics; never outspoken again, because of her experience. But I suspect that the big moment for her in college was when the troops fired on the Bonus Army in Washington. I know she was very angry about that, "how can you treat our veterans in this way." And that was, you know, "we've got to change the system."

**CP:** Was there ever any conversation with her about the communist milieu in New York City? Or wherever she was at the time?

**JH:** Well in New York, I don't know that she was busy with them there. I think she was busy being a mother of two small kids and what have you. The apartment they rented in Greenwich was above a song writer whose name I've immediately forgotten, but he wrote a lot of songs for Hank Williams. [laughs] And so she would hear him tinkling on the floor below. I don't think she had time for politics at that time. I think that later, very late in her life, she began to open up to me about her communist experience because I was, myself, starting to get anti-war. And I joined different, shall I say, socialist organizations for a period of one week, then I'd read the literature and join another, and read that literature and up and over again.

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And she, I remember, looked at me one time and said, "oh John, whatever happened to – just remember what became of the socialists of the '70s." And I said, "what do you mean, mom? I'm in the '70s." And she said, "oh, you make me feel old." She meant the 1870s. [laughs] Because I know she had seen the old socialists. And, you've got to remember, a lot of the immigrants of the 1870s revolutions in France and Germany and what have you, came west because they didn't want to be arrested or they had been imprisoned and wanted to get out. So she probably ran into an awful lot of those old free thinkers.

Rarely did her verse have anything to do with politics. Once in a while, but most of the time it was really focused on family and children – children, family and maybe a little bit of history. I can think of only one poem that we selected for her book that has to do with, has a strong political message.

**CP:** So her involvement, then, predated New York; it was in Washington, is that correct?

**JH:** Washington state, yeah. By the time she gets to – she wasn't in New York all that long, just about four or five years. So it wasn't long enough to get settled in. And I don't know about the Communist Party scene at that time, but in the World War II, generally speaking, there's kind of a large national – sort of like, we were allies with Russia and nobody thought about communism one way or another. I know that when you go to Astoria and you to the old cemetery, there's an awful lot of merchant marine cemeteries that have the hammer and sickle right on the cross. They were merchant marines. So being a party member during that period, I mean, like I say, we were Soviet allies. The big fear would not come for another five years, after the stealing of the atomic bomb secrets.

**CP:** So it was out in the open and it was part of the academic culture of the time, it sounds like.

**JH:** Yeah it was. And many of them paid a severe price.

**CP:** I wonder about the relationship between your parents in the '40s. It was well-established I'm sure, between the two of them, that your mother had been involved with the Communist Party and your father, as you mentioned, was becoming increasingly patriotic.

**JH:** Yeah, and I think that leads to the split too. She always remained on the liberal side of things and he went very conservative. Oddly enough, had she lived long enough, I think they probably would have come to being friends again. Or

they could have. But her experience, I think, in the Oregon State Penitentiary home, actually I think that made her crazy. [laughs] I mean, I think she had post-traumatic distress.

**CP:** I'm sure. What was that time period? What were the years?

**JH:** About 1956 to 1958, '59, somewhere in there.

**CP:** So ages five to eight, roughly, for you.

**JH:** Yeah. So there was a period where I have no memory of her, and I had actually forgotten who she was. When I met her it was like, "oh wow, I have a mom?" Of course I do, but nobody talked about her. And the wives and the mothers of the neighborhood would always invite me to come over and play with their kid; they were always overly patronizing to me. They'd kind of whisper about me to each other, "his mother, blah, blah, blah." I wouldn't hear it, but I could tell I was getting treated, in some sense, deferentially. Either pity or what have you.

**CP:** What do you remember about those visits?

**JH:** Well, the early ones, they were great. I mean, imagine if you will, at that time in 1960 through '65, Oregon State had an award-winning – well, they had a good football team. Terry Baker. And imagine, I was allowed to sit with them on the end of the bench, and the guys would let me wear their shirts and such. I had a gas. I was treated like royalty. And Corvallis was a small town and everybody kind of knew everybody. And nobody knew what to make of my mother. Again, this was an era where a divorcee and some rumors about communism, a lot of people stood off from her here in the local area. But academia loved her. Here she was an award-winning poet and she was doing the courses the other English teachers didn't want to do.

[0:29:57]

**CP:** So you never actually visited her in the penitentiary?

**JH:** Once.

**CP:** Do you remember anything about that?

**JH:** Oh, it was horrible. I was picked up by this guy who looked like a ham except a human – pink as a ham – a police cop. And I got a ride in his car and I was wondering, "what the heck?" And he drove me down there and we come to this building with barbed wire and some of that ribbon wire, which I didn't know what it was called at the time. And I was escorted in and then I was allowed to watch her play the organ on the service; that was as close as I could see her. And she's walked in with one guard and a row of the inmates all got up – I don't know, I think these guys may have had some mental...how would you call it? Dual diagnosis. Not only were they criminal but they probably had some kind of brain damage. And they got up and they grabbed at her dress and tore it almost off. And the cops took out their billy clubs and beat the shit out of them. [laughs] I saw blood on their heads. And then she got up there and she saw me, and I could see her crying as she was playing the organ and trying to keep up some sort of dignity through all this. And then we were driving home and the cop says, "yeah, that's your mom," and let out a laugh, and handed me off to my dad. I'll never forget the laugh. It was like, "yeah, poor kid."

**CP:** Did she ever talk about this time period with you, later on?

**JH:** No. It was too traumatic for her.

**CP:** Yeah, I'm sure.

How did you get interested in scouting books at a young age?

**JH:** Oh, well. About fourteen, fifteen, somewhere in there, my father said, "it's time you got some sort of good part-time job and learn to work," and a I said, "ok, fine." And so I asked around to a couple of my friends and one of my friends said, "oh, Wong's Restaurant. I'm leaving this job that I do on Saturday mornings there." And Wong's Restaurant was a

terrible Cantonese-style Chinese restaurant on Interstate Avenue. Now at that time, Interstate Avenue was, in fact, the interstate road to go to Washington, and it was a trucker's place. And the motels were places that you would find cheap dates, the bars would stay open late, motels for either passing out in or taking your date in. The Chinese restaurant was just wretched food. I was, once a week, I was the entire sanitation of the place. So I would put on my rubber gloves and I'd clean up these horrible toilets and what have you, and sweep the floors. They had a bar that always needed serious cleaning, but there were usually people dropping money and Mr. Wong left it there for me to pick up, so it was kind of him, an extra two or three bucks. And the bar was great; they actually had a t.v. – "wow!" – a t.v. in there. So I would turn on the t.v. and watch Saturday morning cartoons and sweep in there, and then I'd go do the toilets.

Well, about noon, Mr. Wong's son Harry, I think, would come in. He'd cook me a nice Cantonese meal, then give me fifteen bucks and that would be it, I'd come back the next week. Well, I was made to put this in my savings account. Well, one day someone says, "hey, you want to make an extra fifteen or thirty bucks?" And I said, "tell me." "Well, there's this thing called an underground newspaper."

"What do you mean an underground newspaper? Like the underground railroad?"

"Well, kind of. It's not legal."

"You can have an illegal paper?"

And he said, "no, it's called *The Willamette Bridge*"; it would later become *The Willamette Week*. And it was kind of like *The Berkeley Barb*. Kind of that ilk. And I would go down and I would go to this office at Third and Burnside, and there was this really large guy with hair as long as a woman, longer than a woman's, the first time I'd ever seen a man with long hair. I was totally blown away. And he was a lawyer, his name was Don Chambers. And Don Chambers would represent prostitutes, drug cases. He was what we would call a beautiful loser. But he would go in and he would stand for these people, and he was also one of the guys in charge – he was not the sole factor of *Willamette Bridge*, but he was there.

And that's where I met a guy named Walt Curtis – who is still up and at 'em – a street poet. For a while, very big. Gus Van Sant made a movie of his book called *Mala Noche*, which was Gus Van Sant's first movie. But anyway, there was this group of hippies there – certainly anti-war folks – and I would buy a stack of these for ten bucks and I would take them down to Portland State and sell them, and I would turn my fifteen into thirty. And I never thought anything of it, one way or the other. And the newspapers were kind of funny, they had naughty cartoons by a guy named R. Crumb and things like that, and I got a kick out of it as a teenager.

[0:35:12]

So one day I go down there after my Wally Wang trip and there's police cars all around the place with their lights on. And I go in, like an idiot, and here's old Don Chambers with his hands up against the wall, and he looks over at me and he says, "get my coat and get the [inserts intentional pause] out of here." So I grab his coat and I leave. And in his coat was this baggy with this green stuff. [laughs] Well, I showed it to a friend and he said, "well, you smoke that." Now that starts another 1960s part of me.

So anyway, the next week after, I go down and *The Willamette Bridge* is soaked up, closed down, they're gone for a while. They do re-emerge, but not for a while. And I would later have many a good drink with Don Chambers before he died; good guy, good man. Definitely left of center. My mother would have loved him. They could have met, but I never got them together. Although she wouldn't have liked his long hair. She was conservative in some of her tastes, interestingly enough. She had very little use for, say, e.e. cummings' verse. She wanted verse to rhyme and have meter, she was very traditional on some levels.

Well – I'm getting to the books. [laughs] So I go into this *Willamette Bridge*, it's closed, and I'm wandering around town on my bike, and there's this antique store at the corner of 5th and Everett, next to a place called Acropolis, which was a ballet dancing/Greek restaurant. And they were reputed to have had card games every Saturday night for the big shots in town; the cops, they would turn their head and actually protect the guys rather than bust them. Later, that card game moved to the Multnomah Athletic Club. And they wouldn't let Neil Goldschmidt in because he was Jewish, so he raided the place and then suddenly he was invited. It suddenly changed the whole tenor.

It was an antique store and it was called Finnegan's. And I went in there and here's this guy, he's got this cigarette that's this much ash, [holds fingers two inches apart] I mean, it's all ash. And he's looking around and he's just acquired this estate, and it's mind-boggling, there's books on the floor, furniture everywhere stacked up, it's really a mess. And I'm walking around and I see this set of beautifully bound books, and it says *Cook's Voyage*, and I open it up and it's Captain Cook. Now I knew who he was, and I said, "what is something like that worth?" And he said, "what you got?" And I said, "I've got fifteen bucks." He said, "yeah, fine. Gimme." And so I picked them up and put them in the basket of my bike, went home, and I showed them to my dad. And he said, "I think you did pretty good." And I was flipping through them and I was going crazy, I couldn't read it, because all the s's looked like f's. So here I am, fifteen years old, and I'm trying to read about Captain Cook's voyages. [mimics text with s's replaced by f's] And it's all that written. And then it's like longitude/latitude here, there and everywhere. And it's like, "well, this is boring." Then I pulled the beautiful, large map, and it got up to California and there was a bunch of dots. And I said, "idiot, doesn't even know where Oregon is. C'mon, everybody knows where Oregon is. Idiot." So I lost interest right away.

Well the next week I went down, after Wally Wong's, to see if *Willamette Bridge* was open and they weren't open. So I'm riding my bike around town and there's this place called Cal's Books and Wares, and I wander in there. "What's this place?" And here's a guy that's got a black Stetson hat, and he's got a scotch in one hand and a cigarette in another, and he's jabbering with a guy. The guy hands a notebook and he opens his cash machine and gives a ten-dollar bill. And I'm thinking, "six volumes, ten dollars, sixty bucks." I race home, get my books, bring them down, and I present them. Cal says, "hmm, you mind if I call your father?" I said, "nah, he's at home, go ahead." So he calls and "Mr. Henley, your son is selling a very valuable set of books, do you know this?" And my dad says, "yeah, they're his, he can do whatever he wants.

So he asked me where I got them, and I tell him, and he says, "ok, I'm going to give you a deal. First of all, I'm going to give you \$600 for the set of books." Now, \$600 at that time – ok, you could buy a house in Portland for \$3,000, ok? So \$600 is a lot of dough, it's a lot of money. And he says, "ok, you come down here every week after Wong's, and I'll give you \$20 to go spend money on books and bring them back here. And if it works, I'll give you a reward and if it doesn't, well, I'm not going to make you pay me back the money." So Cal Hancock taught me the rudiments of the book business, but not a lot. He was also teaching a photography – a young man who was buying photographs and ephemera, his name was Alex Lundell. So sometimes I'd run into Alex Lundell on some of these, and sometimes I would just go on my own.

[0:40:17]

Well, then I got a real good job working for Kentucky Fried Chicken, so I didn't do as much scouting. And then they opened up a – for a brief period, Colonel Sanders was going to try to open up a beef sandwich place, sort of like Arby's, and I was one of the assistant managers at this experiment there. Again, this is just a lot of crazy teenage stories.

So I go to college. I figure out I want to be an actor, so I go to Southern Oregon College. "I'm going to get into that Oregon Shakespeare Festival, by golly. I'm going to be an actor; I'm going to be a famous actor." Nobody bothered to tell me I couldn't act, but that would become apparent. Or at least not in a traditional sense. And while I'm there, I'm scouting books, and there's a place called the Blue Goose Bookstore, and I would scout for her.

Then, in 1974, I come back to Portland and I work at Portland State University Bookstore in the New Books section, but I'm also scouting used books for them. And at the corner of 12th and Burnside was this little itty-bitty bookstore, it had been open about a year. A big guy, about 400 pounds, named Walter Powell, and he had three sections in his bookstore: Fiction, Non-Fiction, and Cult. And everything was a buck, regardless of condition, regardless of edition, regardless of whatever the market was; it was all a buck. So I would pick out things I knew would win, and if they were science fiction or current literature, I'd take it to Garvin and Livens; if it was history, I'd take it to Old Oregon. I didn't like going to Old Oregon because old Mac – he paid the best, if he liked it he paid the best, but if he didn't like it he'd actually throw the book at you and say, "my copy's better." So I didn't like him very much. And then there was Frank Isabel, who also bought history but he paid you very little. But he always looked like he was going to jump out of his skin. He was always, like, frightened. And then there was Wright Lewis at the Green Dolphin bookstore, but Wright was usually quite drunk by about noon. And so if you didn't get in on time, he's be sort of slouched back. One time I can remember taking his pulse to make sure he wasn't dead. And all these guys became my friends over a period of time.

But at Powell's in 1975. So I buy this stuff, Walt Powell looks at me one day and he says, "do you read all this shit?" And I look at him and I say, "I don't read all these books, no sir." And he said, "what do you do with them?" And I said, "well, I sell them." He says, "do you make money?" And I said, "well yeah, I do." And he said, "hmm." And he thought about it and said, "well, would you price books for me?" And I said, "ok." Well, by the end of the week, we're the best friends. And though I never really had the title as such, I was his manager. And the first thing we did was we got more sections organized, we cleaned up the store, we started regular sweeping, things like that. And then, over a period of time, I started paying more for books and that brought more book scouts, and they'd sell us things they'd find.

And we quickly jumped from about six to twelve employees. And then one day, somebody asked me for some kind of classic – *Moby Dick* or something – and we didn't have one because we would usually get what you can get. And I went to Walter and I said, "Walter, can't we carry some Penguin editions of books. Just some kind of reprints. Just some new books, so we don't – we shouldn't be out of classics." And he and I had this kind of wonderful relationship, he'd say horrible things to me and he'd call me a name, and I wouldn't carry that kind of stuff. I'd get angry and I'd say, "Walter, I bet you I can sell two boxes of Penguin books in two weeks." And he said, "ok, you're on. Fifty bucks." So we put our fifty – well, I didn't have fifty bucks but he always carried about \$3,000 to \$10,000 on his person, so I knew he always would have it.

So we made a bet. Well, I ordered the Penguin books using a credit card of my own. In come the books and as I open them, he comes up, he has a damn stopwatch and clicks it, set for two weeks. Well, two weeks go by and I've sold all but one of the books. And I got up to him and I say, "ok Walter, you won. I didn't quite pull it off." And he looked at me and he said, "no John, you pulled it off. You've won. But there's something I want to ask you." And I said, "what's that." And he said, "don't order that book again. Don't ever buy any copies of that book." So we started carrying new books, so I was the new book buyer.

[0:45:04]

And then our business jumped. Within a year, we were up to sixteen employees and making – when I started at Powell's, we averaged \$78 a day, give or take. I remember one of my favorite Walter Powell stories, one of the jobs I'd held for a while was as a cashier at Fred Meyer, and cashiers at Fred Meyer had to average \$300 an hour, because they figured that showed you were keeping the pace. So I had told this to Walter. Now, Walter's real name was Vladimir Pavelko and he was very proud of his Cossack heritage. And over the cash register was a picture of Repin's "Zaporozhian Cossacks." So after I told Walter that, the next morning I come in and there's a picture of Fred Meyer over the register. He says, "maybe if his face is here, you'll start averaging 300 an hour." [laughs] So we had that kind of relationship. And then, shortly thereafter, up with the Zaporozhian Cossacks again. But with the new books, we jumped up from \$78 a day, we were starting into a whole thousand a day. "Holy cow!" You know, big money. And then, as time went on, it went up to \$10,000 a day and so on.

When Walter died, his son took over. And while his son and I are friends, it really wasn't the same experience for me. So I went in and got involved at the Great Northwest bookstore, which is where I spent twenty-some years.

**CP:** Let's go back to your mom for a little bit.

**JH:** Oh, sure.

**CP:** So Hatfield basically brokers some sort of deal to get her here, do you know a little bit more about this?

**JH:** I really don't know an awful lot. Now, as fate would have it, I would become a very good friend of Mark Hatfield's, but only because – through my profession as a bookseller. Late in his life, I did ask him about that and he wouldn't say anything, his eyes would mist over, he would say, "that was a terrible thing that was done to her," and that was all he would say. You have to remember, he was the guy who pardoned all of our death row prisoners. Some people believe that his outwardly going Christian persona was an act to get votes. I think he really did walk the walk of that religion. Not that there weren't hypocritical moments. When I was appraising his papers, I read things that made – well if I had hair, it would raise, because it's like brokering deals with the devil. You know, politics is a very dirty business. I have read things that I can't talk about as an appraiser, because I've sworn to silence, but I wish I could go tell the world how Bush really got into power and things like that.

**CP:** Yeah. Well, speaking of power, Hatfield was an exceptionally powerful man.

**JH:** He was a powerful man and, you know, he could have been president had he just shut up about his stance on the Vietnam War. Now, a guy named Sid Ussiger? Unsiger? Oh my God, I can't remember, I think it's Unsiger. He was a big Democratic party persona in Oregon, and he ran against Hatfield for the Senate post in '66. It's about that time you start hearing stories about Hatfield being gay, and I believe that it was Sid who put those stories out there. I have no reason to believe that there's any truth to that. However, I'm afraid there is evidence about Gerry Frank, at Willamette University, when he, Gerry Frank, was very closely associated with Mark Hatfield. And Gerry Frank also was a roommate of Hatfield's for a while. So I mean, there's always some kind of grain of truth to the story, but I don't think so. I never saw any evidence of it.

**CP:** You got to know Hatfield as a person through your work, you said.

**JH:** Well, he may have already known who I was, but I do know this – I'll tell you this story of how I met him. I'm working at Powell's, and we would have these short rushes – you could almost time them, the 1:00 rush, the 3:00 rush, the 7:00 rush. And by "rush," I mean maybe six people wanted to buy books at once. [laughs] But if you're the only guy running the store, that's a rush. And, as fate would have it, the phone rings and it's some guy who will not get off the phone. I'm trying to tell him, "look, I've got to ring up some sales, can I call you back?" "Well no, one more thing." And so I turn my back on my customers and I'm dealing with this phone call, and finally it ends and I'm like, "thank God." Well somebody shoves two copies of the same book under my nose and says, "this one's three dollars, this one's ten dollars, what's the correct price?" And I'm frustrated because I've just dealt with this kind of irritating customer and so, without looking up, I say, "why, you want them both?" And there's this pause and then followed by a nice deep laugh, and I look up and it's Senator Hatfield. And I think, "oh my God." And I say, "I'll charge you three dollars for whichever copy," because again, we didn't have any kind of computer system. You'd buy a book one day and you might pay a buck for it, and the next day you might pay three bucks for it, and you priced it accordingly. And then later, as we would section the books out, we would sort of correct the prices based on condition or edition or what have you.

[0:50:46]

Well, the very next week, old Walt Powell is sitting up at the front desk. And Walt Powell was 400 pounds if he was an ounce, and his belly went up over here [gestures near chest]. He would send me down to Burger King and I would get him a Whopper sandwich. He could literally place the Whopper sandwich on the top of his belly and eat on it, while working with his hands. And he would do this and, of course, tomato and things would spill out. And he had these, like, tie-dye looking shirts except there would be a tomato sticking out of his pocket or what have you. Never thought he was at all – he was a working man, right? So Walter's eating his Whopper sandwich and working, and in comes Mark Hatfield with his entourage. And Hatfield says, "do you have a young man here, dark hair, probably in his twenties? What is his name?" And Walt mumbles something with his mouth full, "probably John Henley," and Hatfield comes right towards me and I go, "oh no, I'm gonna get chewed out for being rude." And instead he comes up, he says, "Mr. Henley, I have decided that you are going to be my bookseller, here's my want list, and I want these editions of if you can find them. And you can just call my office, here's my number and here's my home phone, you're welcome to call that." And that began the relationship as I helped him build his collection.

He collected books signed by presidents and books signed by vice presidents. And he also collected Oregon books signed by Oregon governors. And if he couldn't find a book, he'd take anything signed by an Oregon governor. I could not, for the life of me, find him an Addison Gibbs book. But I did find postage stamps, because in Oregon the governor would be the guy who franked the envelopes during the Civil War period. So you'd see these Civil War era letters and instead of there being a frank or a post office box, it's "Addison Gibbs" written over it. So I did find him that, which is kind of cool in another sense. It's a bit of history with history on it. But I never did find him a book. I'm sure there may have been at one time. Somewhere around the state of Oregon, there's probably some barn that had Addison Gibbs' books.

But I helped Mark build these three collections, and he would come in. I would get this call from his secretary, "Mark Hatfield will be in town" for a speech or a meeting, "and he wants to see you between 10:15 and 10:20." And I'd hang up and say, "that's ostentatious, man," you know, to make an appointment to see a bookseller. Well, as I get older, I kind of dig where that's coming from, because now I'm starting to live my life that way. It's kind of, "ok, I've got how many minutes with you?" and whatever. So he'd come in and after we'd do our transactions – I would always have something

for him – he would say, "now what can I do for you?" And I never understood what that meant. I didn't understand, he'd say, "are there any senatorial favors I can do?" Finally, one day, somebody explained to me – I think it was Trevor who said, "you know, he's telling you he could do you a big favor." I said, "oh is that what that means?" He's not just being polite. Duh. So he came in the next time and he said that, and I said, "well, can you get me Gennifer Flowers' phone number?" And his wife, from across the store, yelled, "you better not have it!" [laughs] That was Bill Clinton's first girlfriend; or at least, the first big scandal. Later with Portland's own Monica, the tie salesman. [?]

**CP:** A couple other associates of your mother – William Stafford and Vi Gale.

**JH:** Bill Stafford had been a conscientious objector during World War II. He was in Waldport where he was affiliated with William Everson, later Brother Antoninus, and later William Everson again. Stafford managed to get work because of my mother, they remained close throughout her life. My mother could be difficult and Stafford never had a problem with that. He always seemed to be able to rise above it. I remember he came down to see her and he wanted to show her a poem that he had written, he was very excited about it, it was called "Traveling in the Dark." And he asked her, "do you think I need to do anything with this?" And she said, "don't do anything with it." He'd gone to meet – there was a group of poets in the Portland area, run by Professor Hanson. I wouldn't say run, but he was sort of the ringleader...what was his first name? Oh, it'll come to me later, but Hanson at Reed College. And his select students included Carolyn Kaiser, Richard Hugo, a lot of the big western names, Barbara Drake. Just about everybody who was a who's-who poet.

[0:56:04]

Now my mother was never a part of that circle, but Vi Gale had looked up my mother, and my mother loved her. Vi Gale had no formal education, she was a Swedish immigrant, she taught herself poetry, she won things by writing jingles for advertising. And I remember she won a refrigerator, but her place way out on Prescott Street didn't have electricity, so she had all these appliances she had won but nothing to plug them into or connect them to. Now whether or not Vi Gale is a great poet or not, I don't know. But she became, because she was a busybody in poetry, she went and introduced herself to every poet. And Hanson liked her, so he pulled her in to this little inner circle. Vi Gale was the kind of person that she would go to the YWCA and teach poetry; it was basically her reading poems to other ladies. My mother really thought highly of her and Vi loved my mother.

And Vi, in the 1970s, becomes a very big – by the 1970s, she is the hub of the Oregon poetry scene. Everybody who's doing anything is either publishing through her publishing house or she is writing letters, she's very well-connected with the poetry scene on a national basis. I don't know that I could say the international. But her letters and her correspondence all reside at Lewis & Clark and they are fabulous. That's where you can actually find letters from my mother, talking about her poetry career. And other very interesting letters from Carolyn Kaiser and other major poets, I'm trying to think of who else. Some of whom, a guy named Rob Petersen, who goes down to teach poetry and all he can land is a community college in the San Jose area. But one of his students ends up being Jerry Garcia, and Petersen then becomes a songwriter for the Grateful Dead. So, kind of how people disappear and then come through.

My mother was a part of that but only marginally. She was always viewed as, "you're not an Oregonian" or "you're not really part of this scene." But Stafford always made time for her, always called her, at least once a month, to catch up on things. And my mother adored Stafford. And Vi Gale, like I say, she was a busybody. She was everywhere. So she would turn up at my mother's, then she would drive across the state to talk to oh, like, George Venn or whoever. I mean, she was all over the place. And then eventually, by the 1990s, Vi's eyesight, she was virtually blind. And that kind of put a kibosh on her ever getting out and being a busybody. And she was very close to John Laursen of Press 22, and touched many lives. Touched many lives, as did William Stafford.

**CP:** How widely known was your mother's situation when she was in the penitentiary?

**JH:** I really don't know. I really don't know how widely known it was. I would have to guess it was well-known within certain circles, very widely well-known probably amongst them. You know, I was five. My world was sweeping the broom or whatever a five-year old thinks about, because I was not attached to the adult world in that sense.

**CP:** I ask in part because of the connection with Bernard Malamud. Apparently your mother is a character in *A New Life*?

**JH:** Oh yeah.

**CP:** But their time did not overlap that much at Oregon State, if at all.

**JH:** No. Malamud is down here at Corvallis and he comes here and he stays a very short period. The story goes is that he went to the wrong school. He thought he was applying to the University of Oregon and came to Oregon State by accident, because he didn't know the difference. And that's the story.

[1:00:15]

My mother is the character of Avis Fliss. Avis Fliss is one of the main characters of *A New Life*. She's neither a good guy but neither is she really a bad buy. Malamud's depiction of her is dead-on accurate except that it leaves out the better parts. He doesn't mention that she's a great poet, he doesn't mention that she does have a kind heart, that there's many wonderful aspects to her. He focuses largely on her teaching the English and being kind of a lapdog of the head of the department, who was actually Herb Nelson. And that's very true; all of that's true. And there's a scene in the book where Avis Fliss comes on to the character Solomon, and she undresses and there's a scar beneath her breast. Well, that's true; my mother had a scar under there. So either Malamud saw it or he had talked to somebody in the English department who had seen it. So it was very true.

**CP:** Was there any personal memories of Malamud for your mother or for yourself?

**JH:** I remember meeting him and his daughters, I believe it was, and playing with them and hanging out watching t.v. with them. But I don't really have any clear memories. He never did a reading or any activity that I remember distinctly, myself. My visits would only be for one weekend and there wasn't a lot of time to fit – my mother wanted a fair bit of time for herself with me.

We would take some wonderful rides around. She always had a friend or two with a car in the English department here, who would take us for wonderful rides through the countryside. And we would have picnics or go to interesting places. She loved to go to Salem and the Marion Hotel, which had a great buffet. It was *the* place to be seen for the social set in Oregon. So she would like to go there. And if she would see a beautiful grove of trees or a river or something, she would have us stop, and she would walk me down there. She was very much a naturalist, she would say, "this is a primrose," or "this is a wild strawberry, this is peach tree." She was very interested in, "this is this kind of duck or that kind of mallard" or whatever. She was very interested in that. So she was sharing with me always, that. And we would go for some wonderful drives – Marys Peak, just to stand up there and look over, which way you looked, one way the ocean, one way the valley. And then she very much enjoyed riding around the countryside. She did love the Oregon landscape very much. Very much taken with it.

**CP:** Did she ever comment on Malamud's book?

**JH:** Oh yes. She didn't talk to me directly, but Malamud came back to town, to Corvallis, to give a talk – very brave of him – a few years after the book came out. And my brother Prest was at this, I didn't hear this myself, but she went up to Malamud immediately after the talk and said, "you know, you hurt us very badly. You really hurt us all. That was very cruel." And Malamud didn't have anything to say because, what I think he wanted to depict, is how anti-Semitic this community was. But instead, he beat up probably the people who were the least anti-Semitic, if not even in his corner. People who actually knew who he was, versus the rest of the community who were, "well, there's a Jew." They said, "oh, Jew, come on, man!" It is a book that is well-written but it didn't say what I think he wanted to say. But yeah, he's pretty hard on my mom, he's very hard on Herb Nelson, he's very hard on a number of the characters – Fred Staver, [Chester] Garrison – he doesn't paint really great pictures of them.

**CP:** Let's talk a little bit more about your mom's experience at Oregon State.

**JH:** Sure.

**CP:** Did she ever talk to you about the transition? I mean, it's a radical change in her life, obviously, from being institutionalized to teaching football players English.

**JH:** Oh, she took to teaching like a duck to water. She loved teaching, she lived for teaching, and she was very good at it. Her students adored her, so far as I could tell. Maybe with one exception, Ed McClanahan was part of the Kesey inner circle, I don't think he liked her traditionalist take on things. But she was very well – she had designed the very first syllabus for children's literature, back in the '40s. And she was one of the first teachers to teach children's literature as an Education/English course, here at Oregon State. One of the very first schools to do that program in the country, maybe in the world. And she loved that class especially. And she would sometimes have children come in and critique books; tell her students what they liked to read. So she was also an innovative teacher in that regard too. And she took her teaching very seriously. She'd go home and she would grade the papers; she would spend a lot of time with each student, so she was a very good teacher. But she also had a sense of timing like, "ok, it's 4:30, time to stop this, do the dinner thing, and then I'll just continue with it in the morning." She knew how to time, she was really quite – I remember one teacher, Dallas Brown, said, "she taught me how to painlessly grade papers." So she was very much a natural at that.

[1:06:11]

She had a hard time with the men, and she resented very much the fact that she was paid fifteen percent less, just because she was a woman. She really resented that. And she really didn't like being hit on by men in the department. Again, this is no sexual harassment laws. And she was hit on quite a bit because she was an attractive woman. And she didn't really care for that. She eventually – she and Herb Nelson actually had a long-running affair. Now, I don't know anything about Herb Nelson's side of the story and, again, he's depicted actually quite accurately in Malamud's book, but their affair was never mentioned in that book. At least, not overtly. It's kind of hinted at.

**CP:** Was the fifteen percent salary piece a matter of policy?

**JH:** Oh yeah. That was probably state policy, because Oregon State has always been a state-run school. So that was throughout whatever the state ran, woman, fifteen percent less. And I don't really know the rationale; there must have been some rationale, but I don't know it.

**CP:** What was her own creative process like as she continued to publish?

**JH:** An idea would start boiling in her head. You could see it, something was going on in her head. And then she'd kind of start whistling under her breath [makes whistling noises] and she would get focused. Then, after dinner sometime, she would say, "I've got to write now." And that was like, "back off, go watch t.v., go wherever you want to go, but don't bother me unless it's really important." And she would usually pour a drink or something, and she would write and she would write and she would write. And she would scribble, scribble, scribble, and wad things up, and scribble again. And then I'd go to bed and I'd wake up in the morning, and she was just finishing the poem. She would get out her typewriter, put it out there, send it, and usually by the time I would visit her again, she had gotten a hundred bucks from some magazine another – *Atlantic* or wherever. And then she'd have that money.

She did have one important fan: Jackie Kennedy would send her fan letters. And I don't have any of that correspondence, I don't know where it went, but Jacqueline Kennedy would write as "Mrs. John F." She actually sent her, "I loved that poem in the magazine, this is better than the last one," or "I love this theme, keep running with that." They had a dialogue. I really don't know if my mother ever wrote Mrs. Kennedy back or not, I don't have a clue on that, but she might have.

**CP:** I'm very unfamiliar with what it must be like to agonize over a poem like that. I mean, the hours involved for something that is not actually that many words; there's obviously a great deal of thought placed in every single letter that you're using.

**JH:** Well, for her it was. I can't speak for other poets; I don't know the creative process of poets. I've written some that certainly don't put the work in that she did. Now for my appraisal work, I think I do. Not that my appraisals are poems, but I put in that same effort. There's also legal ramifications – if I blow it on an appraisal I can be sued. The poet, I don't think, can be sued, but the poem's not going to be as good. You know? "Oh, that's a bad poem, let's sue her."

**CP:** I'm sure that as you made these visits, continuing through your teenage years and a little bit later in your life, your interest in books was shared with her, I have to imagine.

[1:10:03]

**JH:** Oh yeah. She never got to meet Walter Powell or that part of my life, or the bookstore scene. Though when she died, it was the Powell's who sent the large floral bouquets for her. And most of the people she had known here at Oregon State were gone or alienated or what have you. But there was Roger Weaver who actually did an event around her at the time of her funeral, down here. And recited her poems and tried to elevate this area. It's really interesting to me that *Calyx* was starting here and somehow they never connected. Margarita and my mother would have, I think, really loved each other, but somehow they did not connect. I do not know why that didn't happen, because that's something that should have happened. Because *Calyx* was '72, '73, somewhere in there, my mother was still here, but she wasn't teaching anymore. But she was also – she had broken her hip in 1969 and wasn't getting around much. But somehow they didn't connect and I've always felt that was sad.

**CP:** Who were some of her important colleagues? You've mentioned a couple already, but from the Oregon State world?

**JH:** Well, she was pretty tight with Herb Nelson, she was pretty good friends with Garrison. She had a good connection, John Haislip down at the University of Oregon, and they were good pals whenever he was up this or she was down that way. I know she knew Jim Hall at U of O, but I don't know if they were particularly close. She didn't really know the Kesey scene at all. Everybody knew of Kesey, of course, but she was never directly related to that.

My older brother Preston had met Kesey. He was pumping gas here in Corvallis when the bus came up. And a young lady ran off the bus and was crying and said, "please get me away from these guys, they raped me." And Kesey and some of his guys came out and were trying to tell her to get back in the bus. My brother, being kind of a tough guy, said, "you have to go through me first." And they sort of mumbled about it. And I think Cassady would have, except they probably had pot on the bus and they didn't want an incident, so they just drove off. And then my brother drove her, that evening, up to Portland to some relatives.

**CP:** Hmm.

**JH:** Yeah, little stories you don't hear about much.

**CP:** Your family has a way of intersecting with these major figures.

**JH:** All families do. All families do. I got to know Ken through Powell's. He would come in at this point and he would sell me copies of *Spit in the Ocean*. And I never really much cared for him, persona-wise. If you started to ask him a question or talk, he would interrupt you and speak louder. He had to be the center of attention. That's ok, but I didn't really care for that. I wasn't as moved by his books as some people. I always thought his women characters were two-dimensional and in *Sometimes a Great Notion* they're horrid. They're not even two dimensions. *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is a classic, but Nurse Ratched being the only female character, there's no other character that says, "yeah, gals aren't this treacherous." So he's got some issues. But oddly enough, I would appraise his papers. When I was handling all this stuff that he did on the bus, I was almost tempted to wear rubber gloves for fear that there would be some LSD left and I'd start seeing the ceiling drip or what have you.

At Powell's, I got to know quite a few authors; some very well and many in passing. I did set up the speaking engagements that Powell's later became famous for, so I set up that department. We would have authors come through – Carl Sagan, people like that, I got to meet at least in passing, at least talk to them or help them get through the book signing ceremony. Often they would read and then sign, and then somebody would have to get up and say, "ok guys, that's it, you have to go home. I've signed books, bye."

**CP:** What do you think your mother's macro-level assessment of Oregon State was? It sounds like there was some mixed feelings, obviously.

**JH:** She always resented the fact that women were treated horribly. Not paid the same and also were abused. So she kind of had a grumpiness about that. She certainly respected her fellow colleagues on the level of professors here. She was very proud of being in the same university as Linus Pauling and others. She did like aspects of this. And she loved the general Corvallis, small town, next to farmlands. She loved that. Because if you walked from her house out to 36th avenue, you were suddenly in farms. Farms as far as the eye could see with oak groves. For a mile walk, you could get into some very wild places. Witham Hill was just an oak grove; it was a wonderful place to walk. There was one kind of little road

running through it and no housing developments there or anything. So that was, again, within a half mile of her house. She would love to take walks up into the hills or even the fields.

[1:15:48]

She was a block and a half from old Reub Long, the western character. He was a wildy character guy, always full of stories, and definitely old school – "oh Mrs. Henley, come in, let me get you something to drink." Just very gracious. But it came at a price: you had to hear a story. And since you didn't get to select it, and since he also couldn't remember what he told you last time, there was a good chance it might be the same story you heard the last three times. But he was a dear fellow. And old Mr. Jackman, he was absolutely the opposite, he was just narrow, straight, clam-mouthed. But he and Reub and pals. I mean, they were separated at birth or something.

**CP:** Yeah. Both iconic figures in this place.

**JH:** Yeah, right. They were characters. And then you had the various and sundry churches here. My mother was a practicing Congregationalist, she would say. I would not call her – if she was a Christian, it was, I think, for the social aspect of it. She did like Christmas; I was born on Christmas, so for her it was always a fun holiday. Easter, usually she would just get sort of thoughtful about her parents and what have you. It was a time for reflection. But she never got incredibly excited about most religious holidays and didn't hang with the churches an awful lot. Though she was pretty close to the pastor who was the head of the Congregational Church here in town. I want to say his name was Walker but I could be wrong.

**CP:** Was she familiar with the story of Ralph Spitzer?

**JH:** Oh yeah. I mean, she knew an awful lot of the characters. She wasn't really too much of a gossip, but sometimes she would drink a little bit and get on the phone and either gossip or get gossip. One of her good friends was Dr. Stu Nachtwey. Do you know Stu Nachtwey? He ran the radioactivity center or, that's not what you call it, the reactor. And the only Oregonian that I know of to win the Order of Lenin. He went to Chernobyl and helped them sort of work through that as much as one could, and died of cancer shortly thereafter, based on his exposure to the radiation. He also wrote the very first publication warning the world that the ozone layer was in trouble. Written right here in Corvallis in the 1960s, saying our ozone layer is in trouble, watch out for fluorocarbons, watch out for this or that. And as time went on, people started paying attention to him.

**CP:** He was a friend of yours, correct?

**JH:** Yeah, he was one of my wedding guests at my wedding. You could say he was my best man; I had sort of an offbeat wedding, I didn't have a traditional best man, but he would have been it. And he was a good friend of my mom's. And his sons went on to do some – well, there was also...oh gosh, I'm going to call him by his nickname, Punch Worthington; Dave Worthington. And Dave Worthington had taught here, I think in Math or Physics, the sciences. And Dave did go on and get his doctorate in physics. But talk about left wing, he was always down on the quad with the "Get out of Vietnam War" marches and what have you. But he was also a tough. He had been a football player, and a good one, here at OSU. And I can remember one guy came up and started shouting at him about being unpatriotic, and quite to the surprise of everybody, he beats the guy down and then stands over him and says, "you started this," which was not exactly pacifist behavior.

[1:19:47]

But he was called Punch Worthington because he was a hardline commie of the old school, you know, "ok, you can push me so far and then I'm going to kick your butt." And he died a few years ago of cancer, bless his memory. He was a character. He was always around; when my mom needed something, he would come and help. And he was a friend of mine too. He was an anti-war activist; he and I have some fun stories. He was very active with the Mexican-American community here in Oregon, very active. In fact, at his wake, it was very touching, the local Hispanic labor union – which the name again, I'm spacing on – they had a very charming salute to him. They got up and did a roll call of all the officers and then they said, "Punch Worthington, Punch Worthington," and then everybody in the group got up and yelled "*presente!*" at once. So he was very active. And he was really kind of remarkable, he could tell by somebody's outfit

which country they had come from. "Oh, you're Honduran" or "you're Costa Rican" or whatever, just by the way they dressed.

**CP:** Wow. Well, tell me a little bit more about your own engagement with the university and with the town during your trips down.

**JH:** Well, Corvallis was a small rural town and I love it at the time. You could bike ride through it very quickly, like a half hour going east-west or north-south, within a half hour you would be out of it. Philomath really was a long ride away and the river was wide open, just hanging out. The people in Corvallis really didn't have much use for the school, the school was kind of this insular place. But there was a kind of small town feeling even in the university. There would be an event during the summer where all the professors would ride up to the Marys Peak along with the community, and they'd have this large picnic up at Marys Peak called "Marys Trek" or some such thing. The mountain named for Mary Erickson, one of the pioneer women who came here in 1843, and their family is still very prominent in Corvallis history, they have owned a lot of land around.

Basically I would hang out with the other faculty brats. You know, the Lonseths, Arvid Lonseth, in fact Arvid Lonseth still lives. There's a mathematical prize given out at Oregon State called the Arvid Lonseth Sr. Award, for the best mathematical contribution to a peer-reviewed article. And that person has to come to Oregon State and read it, and get, I guess, a certificate; I don't know if there's any cash involved. Some kind of like, "I won this award," which can be useful in that career. And so the Lonseths were very close. Mariam Lonseth was sort of a homebody, and she and my mom would pal around and sometimes get a little too much into the sherry. A lot of girl talk. I can remember them rating the various and sundry professors for their looks and activities, in all manner of departments.

But Corvallis was, you had one Chinese restaurant – Toa Yuen – just one, and it was Cantonese style. You had one pizza parlor...where was that? I think it was on Kings Boulevard, before you got to Circle Drive. You had, downtown, you had a five and dime of some sort, and you had a Lipman's. Lipman's was where you could get the better class clothes and what have you, but most of the time, people drove up to Salem to Meyer & Frank. There was an 88-cent store that always had the most marvelous crap for 88 cents. There was one restaurant that was kind of good...what was that called? Wagner's. And they had pie and such, and people would hang there. There was one bookstore – Correl's, I believe it was called – and it was basically just brand new stuff that the publishers were slopping on it. But for all of that, the best bookstore in town was at Oregon State in the Memorial Union. They had a bookstore that always had better toys, better clothes, better anything than anything else in town. The Memorial Union actually had a really good restaurant at the time. I mean, I thought it was better.

[1:24:42]

But the town was very small and insular. Avery Park really was almost out of town; the space between campus and it were trees and things, and you weren't sure where Avery Park really began until you got to the entrance. Then of course, this was a logging community. So in the height of the logging season, every morning around four o'clock, you would hear the diesel engines power up. The whole city kind of had this soundtrack for about an hour, this [makes whirring noise], as they wound up their cars and the guys went out and put their log trucks together and got their assignments going. And their wives would come out into the dark and hand them their lunch pails and their coffee that they would brew. And they'd throw their pike spikes and other logging equipment in their truck. And they would go away and they would be gone a week. Rarely would they come through town without logs, but once in a while you might see – and this was when logs were big, not these piddly little fencepost trees, but these were the big ones. If you've ever seen *Batman*, the one that had the Joker, the most recent version, whenever the Joker appears, there's this hum in the background. Well, when logging mornings happened, there was this kind of hum, this insane hum all through the city. [makes humming noise] Every street, every street. And the town almost vibrated.

If you weren't a logger, you worked in a mill. And there were always guys going out with their fingers cut off and their legs or half their foot missing. You would hear these stories every week, some kid in town would say, "yeah, my dad got his arm chopped off." And you would go, "ooh, I never want to work in a mill!" If you were really lucky, you got to work in a wigwam burner, which was just burning stuff and breathing that putrid smoke and probably getting cancer. And there was a wigwam burner – all the way to the coast, every half mile or less, there was a wigwam burner. Now we recycle that

wood, we don't burn it. But they would have these wigwam burners all over the place. The timber industry was the big thing.

And then going out this way was Shedd and the farming community. And Tangent and all this. So there was a lot of farmland going that way. And then, sort of between here and Shedd, were our Agricultural Stations, which seemed like they were way out of town. And in the 1960s, I remember that a lot of the students were growing pot in those Ag sections. And they were telling their professors, "yeah, this is a rare" something from Southeast Asia or whatever. And the professors would go, "I don't know, are you sure?" Maybe a wink-wink here and there, but that was how Oregon State smoked pot was the Ag Stations were actually growing it, by student investment of labor and time and whatever seeds they could get their hands on. I'm sure University of Oregon partook of the crop. We probably developed the designer weed they smoke today, right? Nobody's documented it. But you'd see these things going on.

**CP:** Land Grant mission.

**JH:** Yeah. But again, Oregon State's always been a conservative school. It still is in many ways. But in every academic setting you're always going to find some rebellion.

It was kind of, like I say, I remember it being a smallish community. And I remember with great joy, this valley gets a sultriness in late July and August; kind of a humid, almost like a greenhouse effect. And then like clockwork, about 4:15, maybe 4:30, I can't remember, the winds from the coast would blow through the pass at Marys Peak into the valley, and the smog would just lift. And you would go from this sultry, "oh my God, I'm going to die," kind of like Southern thing, to this like, "ahh." It would not be cold; it would be a lot cooler.

And then the meadowlarks would come out, back when the meadowlarks just abounded in this town. There were meadowlarks everywhere. You would hear their song when you were walking down the street. I don't think I've seen a meadowlark here for generations, but there used to be meadowlark nests in our tree. Very noisy, they have a beautiful little song, very unusual. But I think as we have gotten more people, they said, "ah, the heck with it." A lot of larks in the area. And I remember tons of geese always, in the wilds. And this was always within a very short ride or walk.

**CP:** What do you remember about the Vietnam War era in this town?

**JH:** Well, there was a lot of patriots, of course, because I guess it was conservative. My brother Preston, a woman by the name of Susan Henry, who later became his second wife – and that's a different story – and Punch Worthington were the radicals. I mean, they were the three primary radicals. And a lot of people hung around them, whose names I don't remember. But every day, they would go and they put up this table with anti-war literature and anti-war buttons or various things. I would sometimes, as I was getting older, would sometimes hang with them for days and help them do that. Eventually there was an underground newspaper of sorts but I cannot, for the life of me, remember what that was.

[1:30:35]

In the early '70s, I went to Southern Oregon College and I didn't get up here an awful lot, but Oregon State transforms. From about '68 to '70, it goes from a very conservative pro-war environment to an anti-war, very hip school. Such that, actually, for a little while, the Oregon State dramatic companies here at the Oregon State theatre, were doing cutting-edge theatre that nobody else was doing in the state of Oregon. There was a big change here. Big change. That's when Margarita Donnelly gets going with *Calyx* and there's a big change towards a liberal side of Corvallis. You start seeing sandwiches served with sprouts for the first time, and the word "organic," and a food co-op gets set up. Corvallis becomes a very hip little community at that time.

They also, around then, had the first H-P factory. Hewlett Packard set up here. And so there was suddenly, the loggers who had been out of work, at least their kids and their wives were getting jobs at Hewlett Packard. Because by 1970, the trees are pretty much gone and the mills are starting to close and the wigwam burners, within ten years, the wigwam burners would all be gone. I mean, that short of time. Because, by 1980, I remember driving around and there was no wigwam burners. I was saying, "where are they?" and I actually spent a half a day driving around the coast until I found one. I was like, "oh, thank God, there's a wigwam burner." It's in Toledo by the way. Toledo, Oregon has the last wigwam

I know of, and it's still burning stuff because Toledo has got – what's left of the Oregon logging community is down there by the Siletz reservation.

So we transitioned and you start seeing it a lot more, like, long hair by 1970. But in the '60s, not so much. This was not a center of cultural advancement at that time. Although very subtly we were, we had Linus Pauling for God's sakes, who's light years ahead of everybody and is waking them up. But he's out there in the world, he's not hanging out here. He's out there in the rest of the world doing amazing things. Later, a good friend of mine would become a good friend of his. Linus Pauling would actually save his daughter – she had Stage 4 colon cancer and Pauling checked her out and said "here, take this much vitamin C a day," and within a few months, she was in remission. That's Dr. Bernie Rimland, who I got to know because he's an autism expert, and we haven't even touched on that side of my life, not that we're here to do that today.

But the point is, everybody has got this Forest Gump aspect where we all intersect with moments in history, we just don't know it. There's that game called, what, "Seven Degrees from Kevin Bacon," I think we all are interconnected. I mean, that is the miracle of existence, is that we are all interconnected, we just don't know it. That you're actually just that close to whoever you admire or really hate or whatever, whether they're famous or infamous, we really are that close. And Corvallis can be the center of the universe as much as any other place. And I believe we're all centers amongst centers. But Corvallis was a hub of activity; it is *couer de la vallee*, it's the heart of the valley.

**CP:** Your mother passed away in 1981, did she stay in Corvallis for the rest of her life?

**JH:** Yeah. She not only retired here but she stayed here, and towards the end of her life it was very difficult. The nursing home situations weren't very good at that time; they're still not great, but they really were pathetic in this area at that time. There was no place I could find for her here. And I would drive down every weekend from Powell's – I'd leave Powell's, drive down, try to get her set up for the week and make sure she had enough to eat and was being watched over to some extent. She had slipped and fallen in a bathtub in '68 and nobody ever caught the fact that she broke her back. And so ultimately, what had been a slight fracture became osteoporosis and that's what ultimately killed her. She died on January 2nd of 1981. I don't know if she would have liked the Reagan years or not. I kind of don't think so. I think she was sensing that this conservative backlash was coming and she thought, "ok, time to check out."

[1:35:19]

But she died right here in town at the new medical clinic at that time. And she's buried, at great expense I might add – cabbng dead people is expensive – but we rented a hearse that drove her all the way up to Bellingham, which is where she wanted to be. So we had a funeral for her there, and I read all the poems she wanted read, and there she resides to this day.

**CP:** I'd like to talk a little more about Powell's if we could.

**JH:** Sure.

**CP:** We've sort of touched on this in sketches but, very clearly, Powell's became a major operation over the course of the time that you were there, from a very minor operation. Was this intentional? Or did it just sort of happen organically?

**JH:** Well, the story of Powell's in a nutshell, up to a certain point, goes like this. Walter Powell comes to the United States and his real name is Vladimir Pavelko. He's Ukrainian, gets through a technical schooling in New York, the Great Depression happens and it wipes out his savings again. He's got a wife, they have a son, the wife, for whatever reason, up and leaves Mike and his dad. Just takes off. I do not know why or wherefore, Walter would never really address it other than the fact that his heart was broken. He puts Michael into a foster home and he comes all the way to Seaside, Oregon, where he does sidewalk chalk illustrations for pennies.

Now, Walter's old school Ukrainian. He's anti-Semitic, he's got crazy viewpoints – some liberal and some conservative. He's a mix of beliefs and thoughts. He is hired by a guy names Morris, a Jewish fellow, and he doesn't know how to deal with that, but Morris and he became good friends. Morris Ginsberg. And Morris takes him in and they start doing house painting, house restoration. Eventually, Ginsberg either dies or, I don't know, he disappears off the season – you'll have to ask Michael Powell about that – but Walter is doing tons of odd jobs. One of them is he's goes fishing on the Columbia and he would stay into the darkness of the night with his nets out, hoping to catch fish that the other guys didn't catch. He

also is a janitor, he took all sorts of odd jobs, but he was always investing in real estate. He would see a house and buy it, so he was getting landlord money.

He marries a woman by the name of Evelyn Corbett. Now the Corbett family is very large in Oregon history – Senators; Corbett, Oregon is named for them. But there's no apparent benefit to marrying her. She's a Baptist, very religious – annoyingly so, if I might say. Every time I would see her, "do you have a relationship with Jesus?"

"Didn't we cover that last week?" you know. "Nothing's changed." And that's cool.

But Walter earns money and then, at the age of 65 – and this would be about 1969 – he retires. And suddenly he kind of was depressed a little. Now, backtracking back to the '30s, Michael grows up in a foster home, and then when Walter marries Evelyn Corbett in the late '30s, they bring Michael out. Michael then goes to Grant High School and he goes to the University of Chicago. At the University of Chicago – it's the '60s – a bunch of students are mad at the school and the textbook operation within, that they're gouging the students. So they set up a cooperative. A building is bombed by the Weathermen and they move their stock in there, and Michael, having had all these various experiences, rebuilds. His dad has taught him how to rebuild, so he rebuilds this bookstore.

Well, all his friends take off and he's stuck with this, so he says, "well heck, I'll just call it Powell's." So he becomes a bookseller and he becomes a very respectable bookseller. So in 1969, Michael marries Alice DuPont – I think her last name was DuPont. Jewish. Walter is outraged. "How dare you marry a Jew!" That's his own creation, this is horrible. Well, they try to ignore this for a while.

[1:40:14]

In the meantime, Walter is acting like he's really depressed. So Michael says, "I'm going to go on a honeymoon with Alice. Come and just watch the store." Walter goes there and he doesn't have to do anything and people just bring money and throw money at him. He doesn't have to shelve any books, he can point at employees and say, "shelve those books" or do this, do that. He says, "why was I ever doing manual labor when I can be sitting here as a manager?" He's totally dumbfounded by this epiphany. So he comes to Portland and he goes to all the junky bookstores he can find – like Goodwills or whatever – and he buys every book he can find, and he prices at a buck, and he starts Powell's.

Well, he becomes quite aware that he doesn't know what the heck he's doing. He doesn't know the book business, he's not trained in it, he doesn't get it. He talks to other booksellers and most of them treat him with disdain. "How dare you come into our turf?"

"Well I've got plenty of money, I can build a bookstore, I have all kinds of money."

At this very moment, old Mr. Corbett dies and who does he leave his millions of dollars to but his niece once removed, Evelyn. And this is out of the blue. Walter goes from being a fairly well-to-do guy to a megamillionaire. "Well, ok, I can afford to lose money every year." Well, I start working for him and he says, "John, I want to build a bookstore. I have nothing but money and you've got the know-how." And I said, "well Walter, I don't know that much." He said, "then we'll learn together."

So we start buying books and now that he's got money, people start paying more attention to him and the business starts growing. And as time goes on, I have to make a policy. "Walter, can I make a policy about shelving books?"

"OK, sure." So I write a policy.

"We've got to do something about used book buyers, there's not enough of us. Can I set up a used book buying department?"

"Yeah sure, go ahead."

"Walter, I want to have new books," I told you that story already. "Walter, I want to do this. Walter, we need to have a how to treat customers policy."

"Ah, better-" he would say things like, "bum to that. Better good help than a bum customer." And I said to him, "don't ever say that in public, please. Never say that in public."

So I was developing policies and departments. And anyhow, the store grew monumentally. But Walter and Michael were not talking, because he had married a Jew. Then one day, Walter has a small stroke and I say, "if you don't call your son and get him out here, I will." And he knew I meant it. So he called Michael and Michael was right out. Well, Walter and I had, in between that time, had a big fight about a Judaica section. I wanted a Judaica section and he wouldn't have it. I set it up, he tore the sign down, I set it up again. I called Rabbi Rose and said, "could you come down and buy some books," and Rabbi Rose and a bunch of guys came down and bought books, and Walter said, "ok, it's making money, we can have that section." And he starts softening because I kept bugging him about it. Now, I'm not Jewish but I just did not handle that.

The big turning point of his anti-Semitism came, it was one of the anniversaries of *Kristallnacht* and the police came and said, "Mr. Powell, the neo-Nazis are going to hit you tonight, it's the anniversary of *Kristallnacht*." Walter said, "I'm Ukrainian, I'm anti-Semitic, they're not going to hit me!" And the cops said, "look, they think you're Jewish."

"What, because I've got an accent?"

"Yes, because you have an accent and you're rich. They think you're Jewish." He didn't believe them.

Well, I stayed that night with a flashlight and a broom as my only weapons. And the neo-Nazis came and they smashed windows and tried to break in, and I would flash the light in their face and scare them. The next morning, Mr. Powell came in and here I am – and we were already half a block long at that time – and he found me sweeping the glass up and white spray-painting over the swastikas. And he actually broke down and cried. And I said, "Walter, hatred just is stupid. It's all stupid." And he said, "but I'm not Jewish." And I said, "it doesn't matter, hatred is stupid." And I said, "you might as well be Jewish." And Powell's was hit for a few *Kristallnacht* anniversaries up until about 1989, I think that was the last time. The events got less and less. As time went on, the Portland police got a little more sensible about patrolling. Usually the morning after, there would be on swastika at least, or some crap like that. So Walter had mellowed out about the Jewish thing, so he and Michael and Alice would reconcile. Plus, now there was a grandkid, and Walter wanted that. Emily Powell.

[1:45:24]

So Evelyn Corbett dies and Walter's heart is basically broken. He's way overweight, he's diabetic, he's a mess. He's not taking care of himself. He has a stroke and heart attack at the same time, something that would have killed most any of us, but he managed to live through it. He was in nursing care for about seven months, he was a mess. And we actually kept a bed on the premises for him. And we actually hired his nurse; we hired her away from the nursing facility. And she would check his blood sugars and blood pressure, and she was always, wherever he was, she was within eyeshot. She's still there; she's still at Powell's.

Well, Mike Powell began to assume – Michael wanted a bit of a change. And he had in mind a kind of a team of people he wanted in the organization that he wanted. And I could see that, while we were ok with each other, I wasn't really part of that. My relationship with Walter was that I could lip off to Walter and Walter could lip off to me, and we could argue, and it was over. At the end of the day, it was over, no matter whether Walter was wrong or right. How does that old saying go, "love the sinner, not the sin?" That's how we treated it. It was like, "ok, we had a big fight yesterday, forget it." Walter changed the way that I looked at management and how I treat people in business. He taught me how to be a businessman.

One story I'll have to share with you, because this is one of those moments that changed me forever. Up into that time, if something went wrong, it was usually somebody else's fault or they had a lot to do with it. I would look at myself as being the culprit last. And if so, it was, "oh, I couldn't help it, circumstances," I'd have something to blame. Well one day, a guy comes in and he has some Upton Sinclair books, and I misidentify them as first editions and I pay him five-hundred bucks, which was a lot of money at the time. And then when I finally found some reference tools, I realized, "oh no, they're not first editions, these are regular old, just, editions." Oops.

So I went to Walter, and I said, "Walter, I just blew five-hundred bucks, I'm sorry." And he said, "well, tell me about what happened," and I told him about it, and he said, "how do you know that they're not," and I told him. He thought a minute and he pulled a hundred-dollar bill out of his pocket and he said, "take Kathy," that's my wife, "to dinner." I said, "man, what are you doing? I just lost you five-hundred bucks." He said, "no, when you're wrong, I'm going to back you three-hundred percent because you need my help. When you're right, I'll only back you a hundred-percent, because you don't need my help." [laughs]

And then it was like, after that I began to understand management was having a sense of charity and also assuming that, if there was a problem, it might start at the managerial level. It might not just be the employee. Maybe I didn't tell somebody clearly, I wasn't effective in communication. Or maybe I just spaced out and did not mention the entire job expectation at all. And then I began to understand that, in business, it's a three party system. There's a manager-employee relationship, and it's also the overall organization that we have a relationship as manager and employee, but we owe the organization too, and it has expectations. And once I kind of understood that, then the personal issue between me and the employee became much nicer, and I understood, "ok, it's the organization that has a problem. And as manager, I should know what it's needs are so that I can relay that to both myself and the employee."

So he started changing my viewpoint. But man, there were some places I had to change his viewpoint. But by the end of his life, he was much mellower about the whole Jewish thing. And I saw him do incredible acts of kindness. A guy had just escaped from the Soviet Union, found his way into Powell's; Walter pulled \$10,000 out of his pocket and said, "here, start a new life. If you need more, come back and see me." And of course that guy, ever after, if Walter made a phone call, "I need a bookshelf repaired," that guy was right there. That was Horst Pedisch. [?] Horst was a plainspoken Cossack in his own right. I remember one day, Horst came up and he had just talked to Mike Powell about something, and he was just red. He said, "for you, I work all day for nothing. For your goddamn son, I don't work one day for anything." [laughs] And he stomped out. But Mrs. Pedisch would come in every Friday night and bring us piroshkies and stuffed cabbage rolls.

[1:50:26]

For a while, we rented from Weinhardts, and Weinhardts was run by Henry Wessinger. And I would take the rent check over to Wessinger, and Wessinger and I would carry back bottles of Blitz beer and drink it and eat pierogis. In those days, everybody smoked everywhere, so I would be smoking there as I shelved books and God knows how many books have burns on them because I let the cigarette burn down to the spine or something. It was a different world. I remember at Portland State, everybody smoked. I mean, everybody smoked at one point; I swear, the planet smoked. For those who didn't smoke, it must have been a horrible experience. But I can remember classrooms at Portland State where there were various levels of smoke – a yellow level, a blue level, and a gray – where people were puffing and listening to lecture, and teacher puffing away and lecturing.

But anyway, that's kind of Powell's in a nutshell. But what happened then, Wessinger – how to start this story – 1980, Chrysler goes out of business. Lee Iacocca takes over and turns it around. There's a building one block down from us that's owned by Chrysler, it's the AMC Wentworth-Irwin auto dealership. And that's at 10th and Burnside, which is now Powell's current location. Wessinger had wanted to buy it.

Now, at the same time, a power tactic was being used against Blitz to make them sell. One of the – which brewery was it? I forget which brewery. One of the brewers bought all the bottle caps and wouldn't sell them to Wessinger, and he couldn't get bottle caps for his beer unless he sold. And Wessinger's sons didn't want to take over the business, so he said, "oh shit, I'll sell the place. Dammit, ok." So he sells.

But this building comes up. Now he had been trying to buy that building, because it was right next to the brewery, for years. Instead he goes to Walter and he says, "the building's for sale." Walter turns to me and says, "John, how much money you got?" And I said, "well, I've got ten bucks." And he said, "put it in this bag."

"OK."

And he empties his pocket and there's about \$20,000, and he throws it in the bag. Change too. He says, "empty the cash register," I go up and I pour the cash register in there. And our customers and our staff are like, "what? That was our till, man." And Walter starts asking them, "you got some money? You got some money? Put it in the bag." And Walter being

overweight – this was before his stroke – he waddles and I follow behind, and I've got this real heavy-ass bag I'm lugging. And he goes to the broker that's got the real estate, and knock, knock, knock. His secretary says, "he's in a meeting." Walter says, "bullshit," and he's busts into the guy's office – he's eating a sandwich – and Walter says, "the building at 10th and Burnside, I want it."

"God, we haven't even listed that, man. How did you know about it?"

"Henry Wessinger says it's for sale. I'm Walter Powell and I want to buy it."

"Well, that'll be, what, \$15,000 earnest money."

"John, empty the bag." We pour it out, coins rolling everywhere, dollars floating around. And he's just like, "huh?" And Walter says, "count it, John." And so Walter says, "here's my DUN number," he's talking turkey about DUN number ratings and says, "I've got this big bank account, here's my phone number. I've got the money, but here's my earnest money."

So I counted it out and we had like twenty-six grand and some change, way over the amount. And a lot of it was in stacks of quarters and dimes and pennies. So the guy says, "wow, ok." So he scoops it back in the bag and they sign an agreement, and Walter starts planning to move the bookstore down a block. So where Whole Foods is at the corner of 12th and 13th is where that location was. Now, before that, we had been across the street where Spartacus sex boutique is now. And if Walter had lived to see that, he would have loved that. He was a mensch.

Riding back from a book buy in a store, we were passing Sauvie's Island and he says, "John, in 1936, I screwed every woman on Sauvie's Island." And I said, "what? All two of them?" [laughs] Sauvie's Island, for years, was one or two farms. In fact, in the Depression or before they put in the dikes, half of Sauvie's Island was underwater. People don't know that, that half of it was flooded, and after they built the dikes there was more available land. But if those dikes every break, Sauvie's Island, every winter, will flood out. Then they'll be like, "sorry."

But Walter was quite a mensch in that way. He would love Spartacus being at his first location; he'd get a kick out of that. And the second location now being where Whole Foods is, what my employees used to call "Whole Paycheck," and then we moved down after we bought the build we're currently in. And Michael has been slowly remodeling it now. They just finished doing the main level, but that's not how it was supposed to be. But since 2001 and this continual recession, more recession, whatever this economy is, business has not been – and also Amazon, Kindles, whatever – Powell's business has ceased being huge. And so, of the four buildings they were going to build on the block, they've only finished two. And the two other buildings were brought up to code simply because the original plans had been called [?] for one thing, and the city said, "ok, time's up, you've got to finish." And they said, "well, I can't finish this."

"Well, how about you at least do this?"

"Yeah, I can do that."

So Powell's is hanging in there, but barely. And I worry about them, because if we lose it, that will be –well, there's only been one other bookstore like it in history, and that was the Temple of the Muses in London. A guy named Richard Lackington had a multi-storied, huge bookstore. In fact, they issued their own currency in book trade, and that was the first huge megastore. And Powell's – after Lackington died, I think it closed, and I wonder what will happen to Powell's.

**CP:** So it's on that level, you think? Sort of a world historical institution?

**JH:** It is. It's the largest bookstore on the planet; I don't know of one larger. Folios of London is big, but nothing like Powell's. The Tattered Cover in Denver is big, but not Powell's. Powell's is huge and they have several locations, though the mothership is the biggest. I'm very proud of the contributions that I made to that store. I set up the new book department, I established the used book department, I set up the rare book department. Many of the policies I wrote are still the framework of their policies today. And it's part of my story. Now I appraise rare books, which is a lot easier on the back.

**CP:** Well, I think this is a good break point here. What I think I would like to do is close for now and we can come back and talk about some more stuff in a second session. Sound good?

**JH:** OK, sounds good.

[1:58:05]