



## Pat Stone Oral History Interview, July 2, 2015

### Title

“On Finding Continuity in Life and Making a Difference”

### Date

July 2, 2015

### Location

Williston Financial Group offices, Portland, Oregon.

### Summary

In the interview, Stone discusses his family background and upbringing in North Dakota. He then shares a few memories of his two tours serving in the Vietnam War during his years as an enlisted soldier in the United States Army, and likewise speaks of the period of readjustment that he experienced following his return to civilian life. In this, he notes taking classes at Southern Oregon College, rekindling his love of history, and attending a lecture delivered by William Appleman Williams that spurred in him the interest to enroll at Oregon State University.

As he reflects on his undergraduate stint at OSU, Stone provides his perspective on campus culture in the early 1970s and recalls his interactions with a few influential professors, including Mark Sponenburgh - an art historian and "Monuments Man" who inspired Stone's own avid interest in collecting art - and archaeologist Richard Ross. He likewise recalls some of the broader trends that were prevailing in U.S. culture during his time at OSU.

From there, Stone provides an outline of his career path following college. He describes the means by which he arrived at the title business as a career niche, discusses his affiliation with various companies in the world of real estate, and speaks of meeting and marrying his wife, Vicki, in the mid-1990s.

The final third of the interview is devoted to Stone's continuing connection to OSU. He discusses his long-term affection and support for the library, his involvement as a donor to athletics and the College of Science, and his earliest work as a board member at the OSU Foundation. He likewise shares the background behind the creation of both the Stone Award for Lifetime Literary Achievement as well as the OSU History department's Citizenship in Crisis initiative. The session concludes with Stone's reflections on the forward evolution of the OSU Foundation, his co-chairing of the Campaign for OSU, his receipt of the E.B. Lemon Award, and his expression of gratitude toward OSU for the role that it has played in his life.

### Interviewee

Pat Stone

### Interviewer

Janice Dilg

### Website

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

## Transcript

**Pat Stone:** Hello, my name is Pat Stone, I'm a 1974 graduate of Oregon State University, and my current job is president and CEO of Williston Financial Group. We are a national title insurance company appraisal management real estate services company.

**Janice Dilg:** And we are in the financial group's offices this morning and this is Janice Dilg, oral historian for the OSU Sesquicentennial Oral History Project. And today is July 2nd, 2015. Thank you for taking the time to do this interview.

**PS:** This is my pleasure, thank you.

**JD:** If you would begin, just a little about where you were born, where you grew up, then a little bit about your early family.

**PS:** I was actually born in Vancouver, Washington, but I grew up in North Dakota. My father was raised in North Dakota; his father homesteaded around the turn of the century. And my father was raised on a farm in southwestern North Dakota and we moved back there after World War II - I was born in 1947 and we moved back there in late 1948. And I stayed there through eighteen, when we moved back out to the West Coast.

I grew up in a town of about 1,300 people, right on the edge of the Badlands, and it was a wonderful place to grow up. Everybody was self-dependent, I was independent and self-reliant at a very very early age. I received my first rifle to hunt with at nine. I got my driving permit at thirteen. And the reason you got it so young then is because everybody had to work. Everybody had to either drive the hay truck or do something, so you grew up very very quickly but you also grew up in a very self-reliant environment, which was wonderful.

**JD:** And talk a little about your family - who your parents were, siblings.

**PS:** My father was an electrical contractor, a wonderful man, and he and my mother met in, I think, 1939. She and her family had a band and a dance hall, and her father owned the dance hall and all the kids were the band, and my father and his friends used to go there to dance. This was Battleground, Washington. And they met and they got married. My brother was born in 1942, right before my father went in the military - he served three years in Burma and China during World War II. And my mom, just a wonderful, caring human being. When I was in the military, she sent me homemade fudge every other week, [laughs] which is another story I can get into. But wonderful people, love them dearly.

I have an older brother, born in 1942, he's five years older than me. I have a younger sister that was born in 1955, she's seven years younger than me. She's a doctor in New Zealand; was going to retire, got recruited to run a hospital in New Zealand for the Maori tribe, and she is loving it. And we're still, the three of us are still very close.

**JD:** And your schooling? Growing up in this small town, what was that experience like?

**PS:** There were 134 kids in our high school, in four grades. So it was a very very small school and, of course, you play sports because there wasn't enough people to have a team without everybody playing. And it was a very nice place to grow up. I don't think the education was particularly outstanding, it wasn't a place that most teachers aspired to teach at. But, you know, the relationships were very real; there wasn't so many people, people weren't so busy that you didn't get attention. So it was fine, it was a good place to grow up. And, you know, interesting enough, I still stay in contact with some kids I grew up with. So there's a lot in common.

**JD:** And I am guessing there was quite a change of scene between the Badlands of North Dakota and moving out to the Pacific Northwest as a teenager.

**PS:** There was. I went to school for a year, but I didn't feel particularly - I mean at that particular time I was having a lot of questions about what I wanted to do with my life. And I ended up enlisting in the Army in February of 1967, and it was a very good maturing experience for me. I got out in October of 1970 and then spent a couple years reorienting myself before going to college. But it was a change going from North Dakota to the Pacific Northwest; different culture, different environment.

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**JD:** So talk a little bit more, if you would please, about your military service. You said you enlisted, this was very much at the height of the Vietnam War.

**PS:** Yes.

**JD:** Talk a little about your reasons for joining up and as much or as little of your time in Vietnam as you care to share.

**PS:** Yeah, you know, I will tell you this - North Dakota's fairly conservative and you grow up in a very conservative environment. My father was a highly decorated veteran. He was a hundred percent disabled from World War II, but you would never know it because he never told anybody and he didn't act like it. So there was a pretty high standard in terms of how my father conducted himself and the environment I grew up in. So enlisting in the Army was, even in that time, a fairly natural thing for me to do. I did test out fairly well but I enlisted in the Army and I got into electronic intelligence, which was actually the Army version of NSA. We intercepted manual, Morse and radio traffic.

And I did two tours in Vietnam, I volunteered to go back, and my first tour was on a hill in the central highlands. And we had a radio antenna on the hill, and we had a perimeter, and we were sort of isolated, but we would intercept things and they would want to get us off the hill and we wouldn't want to get off the hill and - it was interesting place.

I will tell you I lost a lot of weight. Ate C-rations. C-rations were canned in 1952, so they were a little stale. And then I mentioned my mom, and she would send me these cans of fudge. She'd make chocolate marshmallow fudge and she would put them in a Folgers coffee can and seal it with wax and then wrap it all tightly and send it to me. And she'd send one about every two weeks. And probably about one out of three would break, and it wouldn't be any good, but the other two would show up. And we'd have mail call, and the people I was with, my company, at mail call they'd call my name and it would be, obviously, a can of fudge and the whole place would stop and everybody would stare at me because I was carrying this can of fudge. [laughs] And I weighed exactly fifty pounds less than I do now. So it was - you get pretty thin eating C-rations.

And we eventually upgraded to what was called Company C-rations, but they weren't particularly good either. And this fudge would show up and I was the most popular person in the company; even the officers liked me. And it was funny because other soldiers would write my mom a letter and she'd send them fudge. She was a very popular lady. So you know it was - I'm so close with a lot of my old Army buddies, I still see them. We had some interesting experiences but, by and large, nothing ever gets that bad again, so there's a benefit to it. You look over the abyss and don't ever have to worry about ever being worried about anything else, if that makes any sense.

**JD:** Because you were there during some very intense - I mean, war is always intense but some particularly intense times, the Tet Offensive and...

**PS:** Yeah, they tried real hard to get us off the hill during Tet, in '68. We got hit for sixty days running. So that got a little tiresome; actually got very tiresome. But, you know, that's ancient history. Gosh that's, what is that? Forty-seven years ago. A long time ago.

**JD:** And you talked about returning and figuring out what you were going to do next, which is often challenging, and that was certainly a contentious war, so I'm not sure if that played a role in your reception after you returned.

**PS:** In a way it did, because you learned real quickly not to tell people that you'd been in the Army. Although then the other side of you goes, "to hell with everybody, I don't care, I'm going to wear my field jacket." So you go back and forth on that one, it was an interesting time. I was having, you know, I had a little bit of a readjustment period. Myself and four other veterans, we moved to Ashland, Oregon, and I had a cabin out in the woods. And then I slowly reengaged and took classes, worked a little bit and got my feet on the ground. It took a couple years, but I got myself reoriented.

**JD:** So when you were growing up, and prior to your military service, was going off to college something that you or your parents thought you would do? Expected you to do?

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**PS:** It was something that was discussed but probably not with the same degree of focus we have these days. It was an alternative, but I didn't have a particularly burning desire to be anything, so it wasn't front and center in my mind. I got reasonably good grades in school but I didn't have a vision of the career or profession that I wanted to pursue. So it wasn't something that was dominant in our conversations or something we discussed a lot.

**JD:** And when you started attending college, I know that you had done a couple places, but you were going to what was then Southern Oregon College, now Southern Oregon University. What appealed to you or what had interested you earlier in your elementary and secondary school?

**PS:** You know, nothing. Just to be honest with you, very little. I was curious about everything, but not overly focused on anything. And I ended up getting a degree in history simply because I was interested in learning about things, not because I had any desire to pursue a profession. And I think, to be honest with you, I wasn't that atypical because in the '60s and early '70s, the majority of people went to college to broaden their knowledge base and be better citizens. They didn't go to college in pursuit of a career. That has changed dramatically - people nowadays, by far the majority of people go in pursuit of a skill set that they can then leverage for life. But I always went because I was curious, and I took classes because I was curious. I got a degree in history because I liked to read and I was interested in things. So it wasn't like I had a vision of where I was going to go.

**JD:** Sure. History is a broad subject area, were there particular points in history or areas in the world that particularly appealed to you?

**PS:** Just about everything. [laughs] I was interested in Latin America for a while, I was interested in Europe, I was interested in US political history, interested in ancient - just everything. And I'm still that way, I'm curious about a lot of things, and it has served me well from a business point of view because I like to figure things out. And I have an ability to stay focused on something until I figure it out. So that does help me from a business point of view.

And I'll really make a comment here that may be a little bit of an editorial comment. I worry a little bit about people being overly specific in their education. There is actually a decline now in the amount of entrepreneurs in this country, and there's a lot of arguments about why that is occurring. Some people say it's a byproduct of high student debt. I would argue also that it's a byproduct of STEM education focus, because you think out of the box when you have a liberal arts education, you don't if you have a specific engineering or science education. And that isn't that you can't, it's just that you're not necessarily exposed to a wide range of dissenting thought. Nothing enables you to think better than to have someone tell you that you're an idiot, [laughs] because then you have to think about what you're doing. So there's nothing wrong with STEM education but I think, also, there's nothing wrong with a liberal arts education.

**JD:** And so you're taking a variety of courses at SOC and how did you then end up at and graduate from Oregon State University?

**PS:** Well, so, I had read *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* by William Appleman Williams, and I had gone through a period where I was trying to figure out how we how we ended up in Vietnam. What was our real intention? Where would we go? And this is going to sound silly, it sounds silly saying this in 2015, but this was the era of the domino theory. So I was sort of trying to understand the thought process, so I read his book and I thought his book was interesting. I didn't necessarily agree with all his points, but he was obviously the first, probably, major work that questioned the American diplomatic behavior during the Cold War; pointed out that a lot of it was economically driven and pointed out a lot of things that were maybe incorrect before we were going and how we went about it.

So I enjoyed his book and then he came to speak at Southern Oregon College, and I went to see him speak and then they had a reception afterwards. And I was a really good student in what classes I took, so I got invited and went and I found him interesting. He was a very very brilliant man. I don't think he was - I want to be careful how I say this - I don't think he was particularly concerned about how friendly he appeared to be. [laughs] But he was very very smart and he was very articulate. So it intrigued me a little bit and I thought, "well, maybe I should go somewhere where there's a broader range of subjects and classes and work." It sort of stimulated me a little bit to take a hard look at Oregon State because he was teaching at Oregon State at the time.

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And so I transferred to Oregon State and I loved it. I loved the – I mean for someone to grow up in North Dakota then went to Southern Oregon College, this was like a candy store. There were classes in everything, there was this multitude of things that you could explore and learn and be exposed to, so it's wonderful that way.

**JD:** So can you expand a little on what campus was like, what was going on at OSU in, this would have been what 1973 that you transferred there?

**PS:** Yeah, I graduated in '74. The school probably had half the student population it has today, so about half the size. I think that it probably, you know, Oregon ranked very high in support of higher education in the mid-'60s and was declining at that time, but it was still a pretty good school. It was a great school, excuse me. [laughs] It still had a pretty good reputation and so it was attractive for good professors. So it was a good quality education, it was a wonderful place to be for someone that had been in the military and then was sort of still reacclimating a little bit. It was very non-judgmental and Oregon State has always been very non-judgmental, which I really really like. And very tolerant of a wide range of behavior. And, candidly, I am a person that believes that humility is your best virtue by far. It is amazing how people will listen to you if you're humble, and they don't listen to you so much if you're arrogant. And Oregon State is a very humble place, but a very accomplished university.

So, you know, to describe it, it was a wonderfully friendly campus, non-judgmental. I can't recall a single negative experience as a result of having been a veteran, which was wonderful, because there were a lot of places where that would not have been the case.

**JD:** And were you aware of other vets on campus? I mean, you were clearly a little bit older, more mature than the average college student.

**PS:** One of the guys I was in Vietnam with was my roommate at Oregon State. He ended up getting a degree in Forestry. And we were so close friends, and we were roommates. He was the only other veteran I knew. I wasn't particularly involved socially, although I did go to different things of interest. But yeah, I wasn't really involved in any veteran organizations.

**JD:** And his name?

**PS:** Mike Collins. He lives in Medford, Oregon and he's retired now and I've known him a long time; good man.

**JD:** And so you were clearly taken with Professor Williams, who are some of the other professors or courses that you took that really stood out for you and made a difference?

**PS:** Probably the one that had the biggest impact on my life was Mark Sponenburgh. He taught art history. I didn't know it at the time; I mean, I knew he'd been in the military because we shared that in a conversation one time and I think he liked me because of that, but he was one of the Monument Men. He's actually part of the Monument Men website. Mark passed a few years ago, but he was a phenomenal human being, a wonderful lecturer. But he taught art history and he got me interested in art. And he looked at art as sort of a window into the soul of a culture, if you will. That sounds a little corny, but if you really look at art as reflecting what's going on to challenge a culture, how a culture is evolving, it has a very poignant historical aspect to it. So it really resonated with me, got me very very interested in art. And he made me stand up in front of a lecture group - because he gave me the highest grade he ever gave anybody, he gave me a 99 on a midterm test - and he made me stand up in front of everybody, embarrassed me, and he said it was the best midterm paper he'd ever had but he couldn't give me a hundred because he couldn't give anybody a hundred.

So, anyway, to the extent that you can have professors and students be friends, we were friends. As a result of my relationship with Mark, I continued my interest in art and I've been an avid art collector, and been very involved with the Portland Art Museum as a trustee. And then I was a trustee of the Santa Barbara Museum of Art and then the chairman of the Santa Barbara Museum board for a couple years. I've been an avid collector of art now for thirty some years and love it; I love my art and I still subscribe to all of the art magazine and go to shows and go to auctions. It's a bit of an addiction, if you will.

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**JD:** And you had mentioned that Mark Sponenburgh had been a Monuments Man, expand a little and tell people that are listening to this what that means, what those men did.

**PS:** Recently, about a year ago, a movie came out about the Monuments Men. And what they did was, these were art historians and art experts that salvaged a lot of the art that the Nazis had stolen or impounded and kept stored in vaults and hidden away in caves. And the Monuments Men tracked it down and basically rescued it to the extent that they, actually, if I remember the story correctly that Mark told, they actually drove all night in a convoy through the lines with a load of art one time. You know, something that was really sort of a high risk attempt to save some culture. And they did - they saved a tremendous amount of art. And, you know, they researched it and it was really - some people were very very dedicated to preserving art that could have been destroyed or would have been destroyed had they not been there to do that.

**JD:** And some that is still resurfacing even recently, yes?

**PS:** Yes, absolutely. I mean there are still pieces showing up and debates about who owns pieces. I mean, the Nazis took a tremendous amount of art and it was a very unfortunate period of history.

**JD:** Well, and I think it reflects on your comment you were making about the role of art in a culture and why it's important.

**PS:** Well, you look back, there are some very famous pieces of art that everybody knows about; you look at it and you can almost get emotional about it. But when you study art, you study the progression of the painting style - I collect Barbizon paintings, which is a mid-nineteenth century French landscape art. And it basically was a style of art that evolved after the classical art. And in the early nineteenth century, if you looked at the fine oil paintings of the landscape it would always have some sort of classical motif in it, it would have columns or it would have some kind of Greek temple in it. And the Barbizon painters painted in an area called Barbizon south of Paris, and they painted natural landscapes. It was the first time landscapes actually emerged as an art form in and of themselves, so there were some very very good painters - Corot, Harpignies. So it's been fun to collect that.

And then I collect post-Impressionist painters, especially painters that were impacted by the Industrial movement. For example, I have quite a few Raffaelli paintings. And he was really taken by the impact that the Industrial Revolution had on society, because we didn't use to have homeless people or people that were down and out, begging for food. He did a series of paintings called "The Rag Pickers," and they sold rags. And I have a painting that's been on a couple tours, or been on a couple exhibitions, of a gentleman going through a garbage heap - obviously a homeless man. And in the background is a factory. And this was painted in the 1880s. So just the impact of the Industrial Revolution on society, that was captured in these paintings.

**JD:** And you also have mentioned your interest and love of history, and I believe I've seen mentions that Paul Farber was perhaps a favorite professor of yours.

**PS:** Paul Farber was wonderful. He was young then [laughs] and a very bright guy, and he challenged you to think and challenged you to express yourself. The thing I liked about him was, he didn't want you to regurgitate what had been said or what you read, he wanted you to actually try to interpret it. And it was very very good that way; he was a wonderful professor.

A gentleman named Richard Ross, I took some Archaeology classes, I went on a dig with him, and he was a wonderful man. Probably the people that resonated with me or impacted me were people that related to you or made you try to express yourself; not just reiterate what you'd learned but actually try to use that knowledge to express yourself. And Paul was wonderful, Richard was great, Mark Sponenburgh had a tremendous impact on me.

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**JD:** And where did you go on the dig with Richard Ross?

**PS:** We dug down just south of Seal Rock on the Oregon coast, and we excavated - there was a kitchen in there where the Indians would harvest shellfish and kill seals and occasionally whales. And they would basically eat the food there

and then they would carve bones. And there was a lot of projectile points and things like that. And then we also did a dig down by Bandon right across the estuary from Bandon. And we did that for the state, because the state was going to wrap the bank there to prevent erosion. And there was an Indian burial ground there and that was interesting because we found burials with beads and things that had come from the Hudson Bay Company in the early half of the nineteenth century. So that was fun too, that was very interesting.

**JD:** And were there other activities, other groups, that you were involved in during your time at OSU?

**PS:** No, you know, I met a lot of people but I was still going through a period of not wanting to belong to anything formal [laughs]; that was a byproduct of the military. So I wasn't really active in any groups at that time.

**JD:** And were you working? How were you paying for your college education?

**PS:** I worked a little bit, and then I got \$95 a month from my G.I. Bill. So that paid for everything. So I lived pretty humbly.

**JD:** You had been moved by a William Appleman Williams talk down at SOC - I'm not really sure what the topic was or if you ever took any other courses from him when you came to OSU.

**PS:** No, I sat in a couple lectures but never took a course from him. And he was talking about American diplomacy and this was an extremely brilliant man who made a tremendous impact; I think he's probably regarded in the top three political historians of the twentieth century. But he was not someone that - he didn't relate with his students that much. People learned a lot from him, and I don't mean that to be a critical comment, but he didn't. I gravitated towards people that helped me grow intellectually, as a person. And I think he - if I remember the history correctly - he moved out here from Wisconsin to basically get away from having to tutor grad students and so forth. So he had an impact on me, but I think really the other people I mentioned probably had more to do with my personal growth than he did.

**JD:** And often a university has famous lecturers, artists, authors come to campus; events that are going on in the world - were there any particular things like that that you remember influencing you or instigating new ideas in you?

**PS:** You know, I'm embarrassed because it's been forty plus years, so I don't remember specifically. I do remember sitting in gas lines. [laughs]

**JD:** Explain that a bit.

**PS:** Well, Saudi Arabia and some of the Arab states that produced a lot of oil resented the U.S. backing Israel in the 1973 war. And so consequently they put a halt to oil exports to the US and so we had a shortage of gasoline. And so you had to sit in a line of cars to fill your tank up, and sometimes it would take an hour in line before you got your gas, sometimes longer. The line of cars would be fifty deep to fill up at a gas pump. Oil's price went way up. So I remember that part very distinctly.

It was interesting period of time in the US because we had, Nixon resigned in 1974 and I think that was fairly traumatic for the country. We had withdrawn from Vietnam for the most part in 1973, so we were going through some soul searching as a nation. So it was an interesting period of time; there were a lot of questions in that, economically, things weren't very good. So you look back at the mid-'70s and you look at where the U.S. was and what was going on in the country - and I don't want to say there was apathy, there was a lot of concern, people cared, but no one knew which way to go. There was a real wondering, a real concern, that the U.S. had seen its better days. And then, of course, as you get older you realize you get to see that about every twenty years, whether you want to or not. [laughs]

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I remember a lot about that time but I don't remember specific things. I went to a lot of different events, but I can't tell...

**JD:** Did you attend the formal graduation ceremony?

**PS:** I did not - one of my biggest regrets ever. Not because I cared, but because it would have been very nice for my parents, and I wish I had done it for them. But I did not. I was, again, I was a little bit older and a little bit more - I really dislike the term cynical but I suppose I was. My father always told me, be skeptical but don't ever be cynical. And it's been advice that I've used very well in business, be skeptical but don't be cynical. But I was still trying to get rid of some cynicism at that time, so I didn't participate.

**JD:** So then, kind of the age old question, after college - what?

**PS:** Well I spent some time and I thought about going to grad school, and I decided that I probably didn't have a deep consuming passion that would cause me to do that. So I spent a little time in Mexico oyster diving and tanning myself. And I came back, I was looking for a job, and I was walking down the street, and I saw a sign for a title examiner trainee. And I had no idea what it was, but I went in and I got the job and I worked at it for about six months. And I decided that it was going to be a little bit too slow paced for me so, because I was employed, I went and got a job as a stockbroker trainee. And I spent two years doing that and realized I didn't really want to do that and went back to the title business.

And so I've been in the title business for forty years now, and all around real estate. So it's more of an OJT-type of situation. But it is an interesting part of our economy in that the underlying premise of real estate law varies from state to state. And so business practices vary state to state. So there's always something new to learn, there's always a different way of doing things, there's always room for process improvement. And that's probably been my strong point, from a business point of view, is figuring out how to do things more efficiently.

**JD:** Can you expand just a little bit and define what the title business is?

**PS:** So what we do is we close real estate transactions. The transaction will be brought to us by, in some markets, by a realtor. If it's a refinance, a lender brings it to us. In some markets, the attorneys bring it to us. If it's commercial, an attorney or developer will bring it to us. But what we do is we make sure all the documents are executed properly; we research the property to see what affects the property. We issue a title report that says "this person buys this property, it is subject to these things, and there's a lien on it, there's an easement, there's something." And then when the transaction closes, we give the purchaser - if it's a buyer we give the buyer - an owner's policy that says they own the property subject to these legal items of public record. So it's basically a research function with a guarantee that you own the property.

And then our escrow or settlement services component does all the documents, executes all the deeds to make sure that everything is proper. So we're doing, my little company - I started this company about five and a half years ago. I was retired for a while and that didn't work real well. I started this company about five and a half years ago and were doing, probably, in owned operations, about 13,000 deals a month. And then we have about 1,200 agents that write policies for us around the country in forty-six states. So it keeps us busy.

**JD:** So what changed between your first experience with the title profession that, you said, "eh, this is too slow paced," and then you ended up being entrenched in it for forty years?

**PS:** I got into the sales side. I got out of the exam and research side into the sales side. I couldn't sit still long enough to be a really good examiner, and I have a lot of respect for people who have the ability to sit and exam and build a chain of title. But especially on a large commercial deal, on a property that's changed hands many times, there's a lot of things that affect it. It takes patience, it takes intelligence, it takes focus to be able to build a record and make sure that things are done correctly. I don't sit still real well.

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So when I came back, I got into the sales side and that was very very enlightening for me because, you know, one of the things when you sell is you have to figure out how to differentiate what you do from how somebody else does it. So that tends to, if you're sincere about what you're trying to do, then you tend to try to make what you do better than what somebody else does. So I really liked the sales side, and on the sales side I got more into the management side. And I spent about ten years with a company called Stewart Title and worked my way up and actually owned part of a couple operations, and I was a district manager.



And then I went with Fidelity National Financial in 1989, and we had a very interesting and, for a long time, very profitable relationship, started by my approaching them to lend me some money so I could buy an operation in Portland, Oregon. And they decided they would give me stock in the company, but they would buy it and I'd run it. And it turned out really well because, at the time, Fidelity was a very very small company. And they gave me a nice chunk of stock valued very very low, and six years later I became president of the company nationally. And when I became president nationally, we were doing about four hundred million, and nine years later, when I stepped down, we were doing five billion. And we've become a Fortune 500 company. And I think on my watch we did fifty-nine acquisitions and went from about 1,500 employees to 29,000 employees. So we had a lot of fun with it. The hardest part was I traveled too much, but it was fun and we had a good time.

**JD:** And you did, of course, have a personal life in all of this. Maybe talk a little about meeting your wife Vicki and your family.

**PS:** Yeah, actually when I was talking about approaching Fidelity to borrow money to buy the company in Oregon, which they ended up buying and having me run, Vicki was running a department for that company. And I met her, and a couple years later we started dating and we got married in 1995. And she had two little girls from a prior marriage and they're, in effect, my daughters - they call me dad - and they were three and five when we met. So they've been with me a long time. And then we had another daughter in '97 who's a character. [laughs] Anyway, so we have three daughters and a granddaughter and we've been married over twenty years. She's my partner and she's been a wonderful partner, I love her dearly, got really lucky.

**JD:** Well that's an important piece of someone's life and the two of you have continued to do things together. I want to talk a little - or have you talk a little, if you would - about how you've continued your relationship with OSU. You've been very involved in philanthropy and the OSU Foundation, and I was intrigued to read somewhere that you had started donating money to OSU not long after you graduated, perhaps to the tune of twenty-five dollars a year. And I was intrigued by that and would love for you to just talk about why that was important for you to start doing that and kind of how that grew to your current giving.

**PS:** So one of the things that I really liked - when you asked about going to Oregon State, I didn't mention, one of the things that I love is the library. I loved the library because there was all these books and I used to go there and study, and I spent a lot of time in the library. Enjoyed it, I would wander and look at things, I'd go to study sometimes, other times I'd just go there to sit. So after I left, I just really thought the library was something that was worth giving back to, if you will. I mean, that's a tired expression nowadays, but it's *apropos*. So I made donations to the library even though I didn't have much money, and I gave money to the library for quite a few years in a very small amount, but I did so.

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And when I was doing the Fidelity thing, we were actually - to kind of build out that story a little bit - we actually did two spin offs that became public companies that I was involved with. I was the chairman and CEO of one and the president of the other one. So I was beyond busy at that time. But when we sold one of the companies, there was a fairly significant pay day, so it created an environment in which I could give a substantial amount of money to Oregon State, which I did. And then I got - I don't remember, I think Kevin Anderson, who is now the athletic director at Maryland, was at the Oregon State athletic department at the time, and he sort of reached out to me. And he got me a little bit involved in the athletic department, but he said, "you know, there's other things going on here that need help."

And so one of the things that he got me involved in was with Sherm Bloomer and Joe Beckman in the College of Science. And Joe Beckman, at the time, needed a mouse house. He was doing research on mice, but the problem was he was doing this genetic research about ALS and if a mouse got sick and died that would ruin it because he needed to follow it over many generations. So he needed a climate-controlled, germ-free mouse house. So we donated the money for him to do that.

And then Kevin got me involved in a couple other things. And I've been very fortunate, because being involved as a C officer in three public companies I had liquidity and the ability to make contributions. And so Kevin got me started and he got me involved and he introduced me to the Foundation people. Right about that time, the university hired Ed Ray and

then he brought in Mike Goodwin. And I met Mike, and Mike and I hit it off, so I joined the Foundation in, I think, 2004, if I remember correctly.

So I joined the Foundation in 2004 and participated and, I can't tell you all the things I've given money to, but it's been quite a few and it's been wonderful. It's been wonderful to be involved and help support the university and the Science department and the Linus Pauling Institute. And Vicki and I established an Art scholarship in Mark Spontenburgh's name, and this, that and the other thing.

**JD:** And one other award that was established - it's actually the Stone Award for Lifetime Literary Achievement - happened in 2011, if I have that correct. If you would, talk about what that award is and what your inspiration for creating it was.

**PS:** Well, so, Shawn Scoville, I think, deserves a lot of credit for coming up with this idea. I had given to the Science department, and Athletics, and Linus Pauling, and a few other things. And I had expressed a desire from time to time to do something for the College of Liberal Arts, because Oregon State is known, rightfully, as an earth sciences/engineering/oceanography school, and ranks very highly and is very accomplished. And I give Ed Ray tremendous credit for developing a strategic plan which has led to a reemergence of our university, and I think our university is gaining a lot of credibility because of that. But at the same time, I'm a College of Liberal Arts graduate and I still feel strongly that a liberal arts education is invaluable, so I wanted to do something. Shawn knew this, and he had talked with Larry Rodgers and came up with the idea to start a literary award, because the Master of Fine Arts program in Creative Writing at Oregon State is one of the best in the nation. And I tell you, you could take a poll of a hundred Oregonians, and no one would know that.

So he approached me with the idea of establishing a literary award, and I said "I think it's a wonderful wonderful idea and I'd be happy to do it." So I think we gave 600,000, or earmarked 600,000 for this award. And they came up with the idea to do a biennial award and pick out a prominent author who is also involved in education. And I told them numerous times, and so did Vicki, they don't need to call it the Stone Literary Award, but they wanted to do that, so they did it. And it has been fun; we've had two winners so far - Joyce Carol Oates, who is a fascinating lady, and Tobias Wolff, who is a fellow Vietnam veteran and just a wonderful human being. So I think it's been good for the Master of Fine Arts program, it's been good for the College of Liberal Arts, and you feel like it is helping.

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I also did give some money to the History department to have what's called the Citizenship in Crisis series. And that's really had a profound impact. I mean, I think I've been surprised - as have Ben Mutschler, who heads the History department, and Christopher Nichols, who is the historian principally in charge of this, and Larry Rodgers, who's the dean of the College of Liberal Arts - have been not only pleasantly surprised but actually sort of stunned at the reception this has gotten. And I think they'll go a long ways with this. But it's been fun to see.

**JD:** So again, I guess, if you would explore a little behind your interest or your support of this Citizenship in Crisis initiative.

**PS:** [laughs] OK, I'm going to get out here on you a little bit. I think the biggest mistake that has happened in my adult life, in terms of our country and our society, is abolishing the draft. And I would ask any viewer of this video to give me a second to explain that. My reasoning here isn't a desire to promote the military - I've been quite a pacifist in my old age - but I think the lack of involvement by our society in our country is alarming. And one thing about the draft - and when I say abolishing the draft, I'm talking about promoting participation by people in our country, rather it's military, Peace Corps or whatever. I think there should be some form of mandatory service that every young person has to do, two years of mandatory service, so they have equity in the country and so that they have the experience of relating with or interacting with people from other backgrounds, socioeconomic levels, education and so forth and so on. It is an incredibly enlightening experience to share something with someone from a completely different walk of life. Most people don't have that experience. And when you have that experience, you have a different view of the commonality of purpose as a society and a culture. And we lack that now; it's becoming more and more apparent that we're a nation of individuals and not a society anymore.

So that was sort of the genesis behind my getting involved in this and wanting to support it, is that I think, as citizens, we need to ask ourselves what are our obligations as citizens? Just for fun, go ask people, "what do you consider your obligations as a citizen?" First of all, they haven't used the term "citizen" in years. They don't view citizenship as an obligation, it's a right. So, I mean, right there you have an interesting quandary. So it's been fun to promote this, because I think it started the conversation at an academic level by very very bright people. So I'm hoping that it kind of gets us to think a little bit about what are we as citizens? What does it mean to be a citizen in this country? Is it just a right, so you can make all the money you want to make? Or do you actually need to participate in making sure that it continues? You know, so that's one man's opinion. [laughs]

**JD:** And after you set up these funds and set these programs and awards in motion, what's your ongoing involvement with them?

**PS:** You know, being involved in the Foundation has allowed me to be involved in them, and I'm coming to a point in time now that I've just stepped down from the Foundation after eleven straight years. So my ongoing participation will be at their request, and I hope I continue to be involved. My intention is to continue to be a financial supporter of the university in any way I can. I love to participate and I go to the events when I can. I've sure enjoyed the two authors that I've had dinner with; I got a real kick out of both of them - brilliant people, but really good human beings.

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**JD:** I'm intrigued by the fact that the person that is selected needs to be a, I think the term is "dedicated mentor," or you had said education. What was important about that piece?

**PS:** Well the College of Creative Writing, the people who were involved in sort of designing the award, they wanted to have an award that was very distinctive. It wasn't just throwing something at the wall, they wanted to actually recognize people that were kindred spirits in trying to teach people. They were accomplished authors, but also people who were interested in educating another generation or other people on how to write and how to do creative writing.

And one of the things about the people that are at Oregon State in the Master of Fine Arts program in Creative Writing, they all have been published multiple times. We really have a distinguished faculty there. And they wanted to make sure that they recognized people that did this, and I think it was wonderful to get that level of specificity in the award. And the two recipients so far have been just outstanding people.

**JD:** And because they actually come and interact with students on the OSU campus.

**PS:** Yeah, well both of them are teachers too. Joyce Carol Oates is teaching, I think, at Princeton - is it Princeton? My memory is fading, yeah I think it was Princeton. And [unintelligible] taught there for a long time and published fifty some books. She's interesting to sit down and have dinner with. [laughs] She asks a lot of questions, it's great. And her writing style reflects that - very very complex and very analytical.

Tobias Wolff teaches at Stanford and is an active professor. And, again, another human being that is very interesting and helping people develop their skill set. And a wonderful writer; I got such a kick out of his book on Vietnam, and I'm sitting here embarrassed that I can't remember the name right off the top of my head. But it talks about his experience in Vietnam. And I'm reading the book and he gets out of the Army and he's lost, and I think, "Gosh, this guy and I have a lot in common." And he wanders around a little bit and then he finds himself at Oxford, and I found myself as a part-time student at Southern Oregon College. So maybe the parable ended there. [laughs] I kidded him about it when we met; really a wonderful human being.

**JD:** And will it be 2016 or 2017 that the next recipient...?

**PS:** Next year, 2016.

**JD:** I'll be anxious to see who it is, because the first two have just been stellar. What was your reaction when you cast your net out to Joyce Carol Oates and she said yes?

**PS:** You know, I'm not involved in that part of it. They are nice enough to keep me informed of what they're doing; they don't have to, and I've told them over and over again that I'm supportive no matter how involved I am. But they've been wonderful to keep me at least informed of what they're doing. My reaction was stunned, surprise and delight. I mean, a tremendously accomplished author, very very highly regarded, and what a great initial award winner. It established the credibility of the award immediately. And then to follow it up with Tobias Wolff, who is equally as wonderful, they hit a home run.

**JD:** And you've touched on your, I believe, eleven years of service on the OSU Foundation, the board of trustees. What drew you to that and why is that important to a university's whole culture?

**PS:** Well I, on a very high level, strongly believe in education to start with. I believe in higher education and making sure that higher education is available to as many people as possible. So that's a starting point. I will tell you that I gained something at Oregon State that has served me very well in my life, both as a human being, as a father and family member, but also as a businessman: I gained intellectual confidence.

And it's hard to quantify intellectual confidence. You know, we talk about degrees, we talk about accomplishments, but the most valuable thing I got out of it all was a high level of confidence that I could use my mind effectively when challenged by an opportunity or a problem. And I could, as a result, impact, successfully, almost anything I did.

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I got that at Oregon State and I got that combination because of the quality of people that I dealt with, the quality of the institution, but also the personality of the institution. There's a lot of places I could have gone that I would not have had the same result. I think I would have been either intimidated by the formality or the arrogance of some universities, or the exclusionary environment of some universities. Oregon State was an environment in which I never felt like I couldn't try. I didn't feel like I would have been embarrassed by anybody and never felt like I didn't belong. So consequently I have an affinity for Oregon State. I've have a very very deep affinity for Oregon State for that reason. Then that coupled with my desire to try to let as many people have the opportunity as possible is why I got involved.

And once I got involved in the Foundation, it was fun because the Foundation was intimately involved in executing Ed Ray's plan. And from a business point of view, there's nothing better than being involved in trying to execute a strategic plan, because rarely do they ever work as originally designed. And I can honestly tell you – and I am very fond of Ed Ray, wonderful human being, Ed and Beth are great, Beth was a wonderful lady and they've been great for Oregon State University. Ed had a strategic plan, he devised a strategic plan in concert with the deans, and when he laid it out, I will tell you that I, for one, was going, "well, that's aspirational, [laughs] we'll see how it goes." And his ability to get buy-in and be inclusive but also have a very clear direction was inspirational, it was fun to be around. He brought Mike Goodwin in, and Mike brought Shawn Scoville and some of the other people in. A very very professional organization.

So it was fun being involved helping them build it, it was fun helping them get it tuned up. Great to be involved in doing it and then we had the financial collapse and that gave me an opportunity to make a contribution in terms of helping get things organized. It's just, it's been great. I love – why do I do business? I don't do business – this is going to sound really stupid and pointless to anybody listening - I have not been motivated by money. Very little was money ever a motivation for me. I haven't been doing it for money for a long time. I do it because I like to make things work. I do it because I enjoy building things. I do it because I enjoy people having fun realizing their potential. And so being involved in the Foundation had all of that. It's great.

**JD:** And you were specifically involved in the capital campaign.

**PS:** I was co-chair of the capital campaign; Jim Rudd and Pat Reser and I were co-chairs. And again, that was really interesting because it started out as a 625 million dollar campaign. And I'm taking the liberty of speaking for Jim and Pat when I say this, but I think the three of us were all kind of like, "holy cow, what did we get into? Will we ever get to it?" We had never had a capital campaign at Oregon State and the idea of raising 625 million seemed a little preposterous. But well, OK, we're on board and we'll try. And we were beyond surprised at how successful it was. But that reflects Ed, Mike Goodwin, Shawn Scoville, the staff. That reflects the professional methodology they brought to the table. Jim, Pat and I

enjoyed it tremendously. And then we raised the goal to 850 million, which we all gulped about. And then we raised it to a billion and we ended up at a billion-one-hundred-forty-million.

And what a tremendous thing to be involved in. And to be real candid here, our role was not that significant in the overall impact. But it was significant in that we got to help create a continuity and focus. And we had a strategic planning committee and campaign steering committee; reviewed proposals; helped get proposals that were worth running, get them launched; and the ones that weren't, get them re-tuned. So we got to get involved in a lot of the decisions about where the money would go and what was done with it. So that was really rewarding, it really was, it was tremendous.

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If I may just tell a story off the cuff here, Sherm Bloomer and Joe Beckman came to the campaign steering committee early on with this desire to build a building. And they weren't really sure what they wanted or why they wanted it, but they needed a building because I think at that time science was being taught in twenty-three different locations on the campus. [laughs] But anyway, they came in and it was heart-wrenching, their sincerity, and their commitment was absolutely compelling. But the vision was very rough. But these are two very very bright people and they worked, with our feedback, towards crystallizing and focusing their vision, and the end result was the Linus Pauling building. And just to watch that thing go from a need to an actual building, it's a wonderful building, it's great to be involved in that.

**JD:** And you seem to like being behind the scenes more, but at one point in 2009 you were given the E.B. Lemon Award, how did that come about?

**PS:** I don't know. [laughs] It was very very nice of them to do that. And one of the things that I've always liked about Oregon State is you don't have people saying, "look at me, look at me, look at me." I was surprised to receive it, honored to receive it, and it's fun – Vicki and I go to the event every year, and always will, because it's just a phenomenal place, wonderful people.

**JD:** So I've been mainly asking the questions and if there's some areas of your experience, either at OSU or since then, that you want to make sure get included in this footage, this is your time to insert that.

**PS:** The thing that I probably would say, and you would probably echo this, is that as you go through life and you watch things and you see things, you live in a society that's a data point-driven society and yet things that are accomplished are usually long-term commitments, right? So we have this tremendous disparity between the daily input we get and what we try to accomplish as human beings. And being involved at Oregon State has given me – not just the education but the involvement in the Foundation and my small contributions in the interim – has given me continuity in life towards trying to make a difference, to try and accomplish something. And for that, I feel like I've been the recipient and not the giver. I feel like I've gotten more out of this than I gave. The account's still uneven, I still owe. [laughs] But it's been phenomenal to be involved with Oregon State and I've had a rich and rewarding life, in large part because of Oregon State.

**JD:** Well that seems like a perfect closing note. Thank you so much for your recollections.

**PS:** My pleasure, thank you for interviewing me.

[1:03:40]