James Boyd Interview
Robert Zimdahl, Interviewer
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JAMES BOYD: --with the certain kinds of cards that I received.

INTERVIEWER: I thought you'd enjoy that one.

JAMES BOYD: Uh-huh. Right.

INTERVIEWER: No?

JAMES BOYD: But actually, I'm kind of complimented by Casanova.

INTERVIEWER: Well, I think you and Giacomo have a lot in common. Yeah.

JAMES BOYD: Without the lurid overtones.

INTERVIEWER: I try every year to top the previous year.

JAMES BOYD: I look forward to it every year. Oh, my.

INTERVIEWER: You missed an interesting chat with Rick Miranda yesterday.

JAMES BOYD: Yeah. State of the University, right?

INTERVIEWER: Mostly money and tuition. He had a very interesting-- he's a mathematician and was chair of mathematics for some time. And a question was raised about how rapidly tuition is going up and what a burden that is. He had a plot he just drew on the board.

And I don't want to take that away. That's quite nice, though. You seem to be writing some haiku in there.

JAMES BOYD: Not intentionally. Well, close.

INTERVIEWER: But he said, if you take a student and adjust for inflation and adjust for the number of students, the tuition from 1990 to now is flat. It's an increase of 4% over that time. But if you also plot the tuition versus state support, it's just like this: tuition's gone up, state support has gone down. In 1990, state support was two thirds of the budget and tuition was one third. Now they've just switched. It's quite interesting.

INTERVIEWER: Are we on, Dan?

VIDEOGRAPHER: Yeah, I'll need to confirm, but I think we are.
INTERVIEWER: Dan is a master's candidate in English, and--

JAMES BOYD: Good. English literature?

VIDEOGRAPHER: Creative writing.

INTERVIEWER: His assignment is to write a few articles for the alumni news about people that we're interviewing.

INTERVIEWER: So, first question I have for you is, give us your full name and date of birth.

JAMES BOYD: My goodness. Full name?

INTERVIEWER: Full name.

JAMES BOYD: James Waldemar Boyd.

INTERVIEWER: Date of birth?

JAMES BOYD: April 16, 1934.

INTERVIEWER: Where were you born?

JAMES BOYD: Are all the questions that easy?

INTERVIEWER: No.

JAMES BOYD: Where was I born? In Manitowoc, Wisconsin.

INTERVIEWER: And did you grow up there?

JAMES BOYD: I grew up there, all through my high school years. A kind of interesting working-class town, shipyards, cement plant.

INTERVIEWER: A lot of immigrant people?

JAMES BOYD: Not-- yes, second-generation Roman Catholic, Polish and German, on the south side of the river. And on the north side, Norwegian Lutherans.

INTERVIEWER: Really conservative people.

JAMES BOYD: You already got me talking. When you first asked, should we have an interview, my first reaction was a kind of Norwegian Lutheran Garrison Keillor reaction, which was, you don't talk about yourself. You may have some inside hubris, but never, never in public.

INTERVIEWER: You certainly don't boast.
JAMES BOYD: You don't boast. Sorry, I just got-- go on.

INTERVIEWER: What were your parents' names and occupations?

JAMES BOYD: My father's name is Rufin Waldemar Boyd. He was a musician in the early years, played organ for silent movies in Marshalltown, Iowa. My mother, her name is Mardelle Hastings Boyd. She sold tickets across the street in the box office at the rival theater.

INTERVIEWER: Where your father played?

JAMES BOYD: Where my father played. Her story's wedded to his, from that point on.

INTERVIEWER: They were not immigrants?

JAMES BOYD: No. My father was third-generation Norwegian. His father was a Lutheran minister, and his grandfather was a Lutheran minister, back, back, back, back through [INAUDIBLE]. My mother, interesting, French Canadian background, Roman Catholic, married to an Englishman named Hastings, that is her mother was.

So I've got that interesting mix in the background. My father grew up in a very strict Lutheran household. That showed in the first part of my life. But by the time I was in high school, my mother had beer and wine in the fridge, which was her way of conquering that. [Laughter]

INTERVIEWER: Did your parents-- your father grew up in Manitowoc?

JAMES BOYD: Yes, actually he grew up in Manitowoc. His father was the minister there.

INTERVIEWER: Tell us about your brother and sister.

JAMES BOYD: Well my brother's Marshall. We called him Skip. He was four years older--three years older. Best sense of humor I've ever known. He eventually became a principal, and then superintendent of schools in Wisconsin, as was my father. He was principal of the high school I attended. That's a story.

And my sister's three years younger, Carol Mardelle. And she now lives in San Francisco. But she grew up in the same town.

INTERVIEWER: When you were a young boy, say through high school, what were your favorite hobbies? How did you spend your time?

JAMES BOYD: I discovered music in sixth grade. I came up-- we were all musicians. My father has five brothers. They were all first-chair clarinet in all the bands in Wisconsin and Illinois--University of Wisconsin, University of Illinois too.

So I grew up in a household-- my father was a church organist for 29 years. So music was essential to our upbringing. So when I discovered the oboe when I was in high school, it became
a passion of mine, and I eventually became a double-reed teacher of the oboe. And I played semi-professionally, earned money, through my college year. That's how I made money.

INTERVIEWER: Do you still play the oboe?

JAMES BOYD: Unfortunately, no.

INTERVIEWER: But you play the piano?

JAMES BOYD: Yes, although my wife says I don't play it enough.

INTERVIEWER: That's better than saying you play too much.

JAMES BOYD: And then as a double reed, I launched off it to bassoon. And I went to Lawrence University and was a major in music and English.

INTERVIEWER: We'll get to that. When you were growing up, did you have any particular role model in your community?

JAMES BOYD: In the community?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, or in your family.

JAMES BOYD: Role models were clearly my father and my mother. My mother had a spontaneous, ebullient spirit. My father called my mother Bubbles. And that exactly tells you who she was.

She was effervescent in her total outlook to life. Even when she had chemotherapy for breast cancer, she joked about the fact that as her hair grew back, it became curly. And now she didn't have to pay the hairdressers to do it. That's her, whereas, my father was a historian by nature and a musician, and much more serious minded. And I hope that balance informs my life.

INTERVIEWER: What are people outside of your family or community whom you admired?

JAMES BOYD: Good question. At first as a young man, I remember admiring some of the ministers in the church, because they were scholars. They knew the Greek text, and they gave sermons that were based on the Greek text. And that, I think, influenced me.

INTERVIEWER: How did it?

JAMES BOYD: My later years, I became a student of textual studies in the Buddhist, Hindu, Sanskrit, Pali, [UNINTELLIGIBLE] and Japanese traditions.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have any particular mentors in your young years?
JAMES BOYD: Beyond my parents, my brother. My brother-- he kept my feet on the ground. He's the one that's practical-minded. He's the one that said, I can build this go-cart for you. But he never got the steering straightened out, so that when you turned like this, the go-cart went like that. He gave me the honor of testing it down the biggest hill in Manitowoc, Wisconsin.

INTERVIEWER: It was what?

JAMES BOYD: Testing it. I was the test driver. Many crashes. He was that kind of a mentor. As a superintendent he built many schools. He had an educational philosophy I agreed with. He taught me. That kind of mentor.

INTERVIEWER: Do you recall any particular experiences during your early years that shaped who you became?

JAMES BOYD: The music, and the scholarship in the church.

INTERVIEWER: Where was your elementary and high school education?


INTERVIEWER: How was it? Was it a good experience?

JAMES BOYD: You know, I remember very little about it, about grade school. Junior high, what I remember is what my brother did. He was famous for putting a foul-smelling acid into the air conditioning system. They had to evacuate the school.

INTERVIEWER: But you would never do anything--

JAMES BOYD: I would never do anything like that. But that-- I dared him on a lot of things. I dared him, when we were young. I was in grade school. I dared him to throw a brick through the basement window.

INTERVIEWER: At your house?

JAMES BOYD: At my house. Boy, I never thought of this one. And he took the dare. And he got a licking. This is the time when lickings were real. Where am I going with it? High school. Remind me of the question. Where are we going with this?

INTERVIEWER: The question was, comment on your educational experience, high school.

JAMES BOYD: I was not really taken by studies. I coasted through high school. People-- I was sort of a, I suppose we call it a "geek" at this time of the day. So my friends put on a campaign to make me president of the senior class because they thought that I would sustain the reunions, and so on, which I have never done.
INTERVIEWER: That was your first political experience?

JAMES BOYD: That was my first political— they ran the campaign, and suddenly I was president of the class.

INTERVIEWER: And your last political experience?

JAMES BOYD: No, there's an interesting story in the high school experience. It stands out very much. Father's a principal, I am a student. He taught not only the band and orchestra, he taught music appreciation. I went to his music appreciation class as a student. Have you got time to tell you this story?

I'm sitting in the class. It's in the music room with a piano up here and choir stalls here, and the class sat in the choir stalls. And the bell rang. My father entered and sat at the piano. And then he just sat there.

I became increasingly embarrassed. Why doesn't he start the class? And I was mortified. After some time, he turned to the class, from the piano, and he said, what did you hear? And then on the piano, he said, did you hear the car ferry horn? And he played a third, exactly what the horn was, a third interval.

Did you hear the railroad train? And he played a fifth. And then he said, did you hear the sleet against the window? And then he played, up in the treble part of the piano, a kind of glissando. And it sounded just like it sleeted.

INTERVIEWER: These were things--

JAMES BOYD: He said, that was the first lesson in how to listen.

INTERVIEWER: These were things that actually happened?

JAMES BOYD: Yeah. And from that point on, I lived in a world of what I would call soundscapes. And that's a gift from my father. And what a way to teach, right?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. I assume your mother and father were both in favor of education and your going on.

JAMES BOYD: Education was central to the whole upward-- it was assumed, interestingly enough, that we'd all go to college. My uncles have PhD's in music, and so on. Interestingly, they weren't that certain my sister should go. That's quite a generation difference. And my sister never did finish college. Interesting generational difference.

INTERVIEWER: When you were in high school, did you have a rather clear vision of where you going?
JAMES BOYD: Not at all. I thought I would be a professional musician. I was a pretty good oboist. I remember after a concert-- my father was a concert pianist, and he had played the Grieg Concerto, and I was in the orchestra. And that has a wonderful interplay of the piano melody with the oboe.

And I said afterwards, you know, I'd really like to be a musician. And his response, because he had been a professional musician, was it's a hard life. Think twice. And I really didn't know.

And it was in college, at Lawrence University, where I really sort of woke up to ideas. Never in high school.

INTERVIEWER: Did you do a lot of reading in high school?

JAMES BOYD: No. I was totally into music.

INTERVIEWER: So books were not part of your life?

JAMES BOYD: Isn't that interesting? Books were not part of my youth, contrary to my later life.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have jobs when you were in high school?

JAMES BOYD: Yeah. I had two outstanding jobs. My first job was as a delivery boy for-- and this is the mid-'40s, end of World War II. I was a delivery boy for a German butcher. And boy, did I learn prejudice on that one. But the other one is-- Oh, golly, what was I going to say? I've forgotten. I had another great story.

INTERVIEWER: You learned prejudice. Say some more about that.

JAMES BOYD: When I learned the prejudice, they were outcasts in the community. Their business went down and down and down.

INTERVIEWER: The Germans?

JAMES BOYD: The Germans, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Because they were German?

JAMES BOYD: Yeah, because they were German. That was World War II. That was that whole period when, later when Sputnik came up, there was a refusal to teach Russian in school.

INTERVIEWER: So you were a delivery boy for a butcher. Any other jobs?

JAMES BOYD: Yeah. That was the other story. My first sense of a job-- and my brother kidded me about this my whole life-- was, one summer my father said, if you're going to stay home and not get a job, you're going to paint the house. And we had this big, two-story house.
And fortunately, the owner, the founder of the Manitowoc shipyards, who was ailing, his sight was failing, he needed a driver for the summer.

I interviewed. My father lined it up. I interviewed at the shipyards. I was 16 years old. I had just gotten my driver's license the week before.

And he said, would you be my driver, chauffeur? So for that summer-- and I had learned to drive in Manitowoc, Wisconsin. We got into his Oldsmobile 88, and I drove him down to Chicago, terrified because of four-lane, five-lane, six-lane traffic.

I remained his chauffeur in the summers for the next several years. He paid me $8 a day for driving. We spent the summer over in Saugatuck, Michigan, where there was an art colony.

He took one of his foreman sheds from the shipyards, shipped it over to Saugatuck, Michigan, put it on top of a sand dune, and there we lived. And then I drove him wherever. As I said, I got paid $8 a day.

And the top of the story is this. When it's time for me to go to college, he paid my tuition for four years. And then I went to Lawrence University.

INTERVIEWER: You were a chauffeur seven days a week?

JAMES BOYD: During the summers.

INTERVIEWER: When did you marry Myvanwy?

JAMES BOYD: I married Myvanwy in 1960-- Jenny was born in '69-- '67. I had a Fulbright. We got married. I suddenly got a Fulbright to India.

She didn't want to come along. We couldn't afford it. So I spent my first married year in India. And Myvanwy spent it in Evanston, Illinois teaching Spanish.

INTERVIEWER: And tell us a bit about the children.

JAMES BOYD: My daughter, Perry. Elizabeth Perry was born in Indiana. I was teaching at Purdue University as an instructor in philosophy. And then I had a foster child, Beth Waters.

And Perry and Beth spent one whole year in Sri Lanka with me while I was doing my dissertation, with Myvanwy. Then my son was born, conceived in Sri Lanka and born in Fort Collins. My son's name is James W. Boyd Jr.

INTERVIEWER: How long were you and Myvanwy married?

JAMES BOYD: You ask hard questions. Almost 20 years.

INTERVIEWER: And you and Sue Ellen have been married--?
JAMES BOYD: 20 years, as of three days ago.

INTERVIEWER: You were never in the military?

JAMES BOYD: No, I was 4-F. My eyesight was bad.

INTERVIEWER: Now you've already mentioned it, but tell us more about your undergraduate experience.

JAMES BOYD: I met a professor of history, William Chaney, and he introduced me to what they call the "life of the mind." History was fascinating. He was a medieval historian.

INTERVIEWER: At Lawrence?

JAMES BOYD: This is at Lawrence College, not Lawrence University. Small school, 1,200 students, high standards. I remember Mr. West-- I was a chauffeur for Mr. West-- he's going to pay my tuition. He said, why don't you go to Lawrence? And so he introduced me to the president of Lawrence-- when I was a high school graduate-- Nathan Pusey. Nathan Pusey then became the president of Harvard.

Lawrence was an excellent experience. And I majored both in music and in English.

INTERVIEWER: But the man for whom you were the chauffeur picked your college?

JAMES BOYD: He suggested it. He also suggested that I join a fraternity, his fraternity. Well, I had a roommate. And my roommate was Japanese American, from Hawaii. None of the fraternities would accept a Japanese except one, Beta Theta Pi. That happened to be Mr. West's fraternity.

So I had no choice. But we were very poor fraternity brothers. So my roommate whose name is-- I named him Kimo. His name is James [? Uweida ?]. We still meet each other every year in Hawaii. He and I became Beta Theta Pi, what?--

INTERVIEWER: For four years?

JAMES BOYD: --reluctants. No, we faded away.

INTERVIEWER: How did you pick your major?

JAMES BOYD: I thought it was going to be music. So I ended up with a triple major, music, English literature, and education. I didn't know what I wanted to do. I had no idea. I certainly didn't want to teach.

INTERVIEWER: You didn't?
JAMES BOYD: I came from a family of teachers. I was terrified. I didn't want to teach. But Father said, take education courses.

INTERVIEWER: So your father had a pretty strong influence on your undergraduate time?

JAMES BOYD: My father was a strong influence. We would call it patriarchy at this time of day.

INTERVIEWER: Did you participate in any extracurricular activities?

JAMES BOYD: No. Music was everything extracurricular. And if you've done music, you know. Your choral rehearsals, your-- I created a quartet and a quintet. And we played-- earned money that way, too.

INTERVIEWER: But it was extracurricular?

JAMES BOYD: All extracurricular? So you're always in rehearsal. You're always practicing. You're performing. And then you squeeze in studies.

INTERVIEWER: Did your experience at Lawrence lead to your graduate experience?

JAMES BOYD: Directly, no. I knew I was interested in ideas, in value systems. But when I graduated from Lawrence I went into teaching at Lake Forest, Illinois. Junior high teaching. Junior high teaching. I got a plaque--

INTERVIEWER: And where was that?

JAMES BOYD: Lake Forest, Illinois. And my first day of teaching I still remember. I almost quit the night before. All night, I couldn't face this. So I wrote up everything I was going to say. This is a junior high class, seventh grade. And then if I ran out of things to say, I had records to play.

This was a social studies class, which I was not qualified for at all. I got through that day, but I can remember the Christmas of my first year teaching. Fred, Freddie was his name, a student, seventh grader. Freddie came up to me and said, Mr. Boyd, remember the first day of class? No. He said, you didn't know what to say that first day, did you?

INTERVIEWER: Seventh grade?

JAMES BOYD: A seventh grader. You didn't know what to say. And I didn't. But it sparked-- I realized that I loved to tell stories, I loved young people. And they just-- they introduced me to teaching.

And I realized that there are times when I could connect. So I taught there for three, four years. And then I got restless. And I went back to graduate school.
INTERVIEWER: Where?

JAMES BOYD: I went back at Northwestern University.

INTERVIEWER: And why did you pick Northwestern?

JAMES BOYD: A scholarship. A scholarship in English literature. I spent a semester--

Studied English and realized-- and it was a Renaissance course. And there was a study of Luther and Erasmus. And I realized that my interests were not literary. My interests were in the ideas that those two men were wrestling with, Luther and Erasmus, Reformation and the Enlightenment.

So I was able to transfer my scholarship to a department called the History and Literature of Religions. And that's where I found my passion.

INTERVIEWER: Was this a Master's program?

JAMES BOYD: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: And the scholarship was from Northwestern?

JAMES BOYD: Yeah.

So I eventually got a Master's in History and Literature of Religions, Comparative Religions, but there was a Fulbright in India in the meantime.

INTERVIEWER: And after the Master's you stayed on in graduate school?

JAMES BOYD: After my Master's I got another Fulbright. I've been very fortunate with the number of Fulbrights I've had. I've had six. So, it's been-- it's made my career.

INTERVIEWER: You applied for each one?

JAMES BOYD: Yeah. I learned how to write research grant proposals. Apparently, they had enough integrity to them that they were funded.

At any rate, I spent a year in India. Then I came back and did a year in Wisconsin because I was interested in Buddhist Studies.

INTERVIEWER: A year in school in Wisconsin?

JAMES BOYD: Yeah. They had a brand new Buddhist Studies program, PhD.

INTERVIEWER: In Madison?
JAMES BOYD: In Madison, Edward Conze, leading scholars. They expected their PhD's to learn Hindi, Sanskrit, Pali, ancient Chinese, contemporary Chinese, and Japanese if you so chose. I soon realized that no I'm not a linguist. And it's a long story, but eventually went back to Northwestern to do Comparative Religions.

INTERVIEWER: So your doctoral degree is from Northwestern?

JAMES BOYD: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: How long did that take?

JAMES BOYD: Ten years.

INTERVIEWER: Ten years.

JAMES BOYD: Yeah, because I spent another year in Sri Lanka on a Fulbright. I spent three years teaching at Purdue University as an instructor in the Philosophy department. And then finally finished my PhD.

INTERVIEWER: So, Madison, then back to Northwestern, two years teaching at Purdue.

JAMES BOYD: Three.

INTERVIEWER: Three years. And then back to Northwestern?

JAMES BOYD: Then back to Sri Lanka, where I finished my dissertation, then came back to Northwestern and defended it. And when I defended it, I then applied for jobs.

While I was in Sri Lanka I applied for jobs in all the western states. I didn't want to live at Purdue. I didn't want to live in Indiana. I didn't want to see cornfields. I wanted to see mountains.

I applied-- oh, I got to tell you this story-- I applied from Sri Lanka to all these universities. I heard from Wyoming, Colorado State, and Willamette University in Oregon.

INTERVIEWER: But you just picked these because they were in the West?

JAMES BOYD: Because they were in the West. And I had a leave of absence from Purdue. And the solid offer was from Willard Eddy in the Philosophy department at Colorado State University. What's interesting about that is, I was sweating this out because it had become April and I had no offers, and I had tell Purdue am I going to return?

I got a cable-- this is the time of cables-- I had a cable from Willard Eddy which I received on April 21. I can remember that because that's my mother's birthday. And the cable said, if you are interested in our offer, please respond by April 16. It had been sitting at the post office for I don't know how long. I quickly wrote back and, no interview.
I found out later that Willard Eddy had spent a year teaching in Japan, and he knew what it was like to apply for a job from overseas. And he had compassion, and he hired me.

INTERVIEWER: So, no interview.

JAMES BOYD: No interview. The first time I saw it was the first week of class-- saw Colorado State. It was at first a very disappointing thing.

INTERVIEWER: Why?

JAMES BOYD: Because I was going to-- I didn't like Indiana, I didn't like Lafayette. You know why? There was a railroad track running through the university. I came here, what's the first thing I see? A railroad track running through Colorado State. Oh.

Went up to what is now the Eddy Hall and I went up to meet Professor Eddy, with his bombastic voice. And he said, "Welcome to the Department of Philosophy." And before I said anything else, he said to me, "You're overqualified for this job, but I expect you to stay here a few years." So, that's it.

From then on, Colorado State's been very good. Philosophy's been very good for me, because I've had the colleagues in Philosophy. I'm trained in comparative philosophies of religions. And it's been a very good dialogue for me. And they've let me go. I think I've been absent on an average of every third year, living in India, living in Sri Lanka again, living in Iran, living and studying in Japan. So my colleagues would say to me, every time I came back, what are you doing here?

INTERVIEWER: Other than the railroad, what impressed you about CSU when you arrived?

JAMES BOYD: The foothills and the mountains.

INTERVIEWER: What about the university?

JAMES BOYD: Oh, the university.

INTERVIEWER: You're giving geographic references.

JAMES BOYD: Let's see, besides the university, what impressed me were my colleagues. It was a rough start. I had just finished my dissertation. I had spent 10 years, and that involved studying a lot of languages, Pali, Sanskrit, Greek, because it was a comparative study of Christian and Buddhist symbols of evil.

My second or third week here, the Philosophy department had a meeting. And the meeting was about abolishing Religious Studies in Philosophy. There was a strong prejudice against the whole notion of religion. And I'd just been hired
Willard Eddy at the end of that meeting said, if the department wishes to proceed to abolish Religious Studies, please consider this first. 60% of our students are enrolled in our Religious Studies program. Somehow that faded away. But it was a bad beginning, a very bad beginning.

Fortunately, I didn't carry that resentment too far because I was involved in my own work. And then I met colleagues that were supportive.

INTERVIEWER: Who were your initial and good colleagues?

JAMES BOYD: Don Crosby was initially my real supportive colleague. And Don Crosby, in the early years, and Holmes Rolston and I would all exchange our first draft manuscripts and compare them.

And then eventually, through my research, I got interested in aesthetics. That's always been my interest. And then I met and started working with Ron Williams, and we've had a 15-year collaboration.

INTERVIEWER: So they were the people who had the greatest influence on your first years at CSU?

JAMES BOYD: Yeah. Don Crosby, Holmes Rolston, Bernie to a certain extent, and then Ron Williams.

INTERVIEWER: When you came, how long had the Philosophy department existed?

JAMES BOYD: Very. A few years because Boersch, Al Boersch was the chair. He had been -- not the chair. But he had been instrumental with Willard Eddy to take Philosophy out of English and become an independent department. So it was only a few years old. There was a time—

I'm talking now, '69 I came, 1969-- that was the time when they were a new department and they were hiring. They hired me and they hired Bernie. Go ahead.

INTERVIEWER: Who was the president when you came?

JAMES BOYD: I have no idea. I know who later presidents were. Isn't that interesting? I have no idea who the president was.

INTERVIEWER: It was Ray Chamberlain.

JAMES BOYD: No, he came later.


JAMES BOYD: Well, if it was Ray Chamberlain, then I did know, because one of my absent years I taught in Iran at Palev University. And Ray Chamberlain came through. I had already
spent a year in India, and I was at this year in Iran, and Ray Chamberlain came through. And I had an interview with him in the hotel, The Cyrus Hotel in Shiraz, Iran.

And in that interview, I said to him, I have to offer to stay another year in Iran. I was setting up a pre-engineering, pre-med, liberal arts program. And Ray Chamberlain said to me, "After two years people tend to forget who you are." I decided to come back to Colorado State University and not accept that offer. So thank goodness, because at the end of that year was the revolution in Iran.

INTERVIEWER: How many years did you work at CSU?

JAMES BOYD: Since 1969.

INTERVIEWER: And when did you retire?

JAMES BOYD: Several years ago, because I had several leaves of absence. I had many leaves of absence.

INTERVIEWER: And during your leaves you weren't paid by CSU?

JAMES BOYD: No, they were all fellowships. All fellowships. As I said, Rockefeller, American Institute of Indian Studies, Fulbright.

INTERVIEWER: So during your time at CSU, you're assistant to associate to full professor.

JAMES BOYD: I came as an assistant, that's correct.

INTERVIEWER: You held no other positions at CSU?

JAMES BOYD: No.

INTERVIEWER: When you came, what were your goals, your professional goals?

JAMES BOYD: At the first, my goal was to stay here briefly and move on.

INTERVIEWER: To?

JAMES BOYD: Well, Emory University, Santa Barbara, Wisconsin.

INTERVIEWER: Because?

JAMES BOYD: Bigger universities. That was the kind of attitude one had, but I soon lost that. I became intrigued with the teaching and research.

INTERVIEWER: So other than the goal of leaving, did you have--
JAMES BOYD: At first.

INTERVIEWER: Professional goals.

JAMES BOYD: Other goals?

INTERVIEWER: Things that you wanted to accomplish in your specialty.

JAMES BOYD: I wanted to raise my family in Colorado. My family was a real focus. And then I wanted to pursue my research. And that research had led me in different paths. So those were my goals. I wanted to be a teaching scholar.

INTERVIEWER: And were they consistent over time? Did they change?

JAMES BOYD: My research focus changed, but not those goals. Family, research, teaching, in that order.

INTERVIEWER: A common goal for faculty members is their research program, resulting in publication. How did that go?

JAMES BOYD: Well, it's interesting you ask that question, because I was primarily interested in discovering the ideas I was dealing with. Ideas is perhaps too abstract.

I'm interested in approaching and entering other philosophical religious traditions. So I have met and worked with Zoroastrian high priests for 30 years, Hindu scholars at Banaras Hindu University. I've worked with a Japanese sensei, Buddhist sensei in Kyoto. I've worked with Muslims in Iran. I've always had teachers. I worked with Walpola Rahula in Sri Lanka.

And what I've always wanted to do was somehow get inside that world view, that mindset, that value system, to see what life was like. How did they perceive life? How did they live it? And I've had these fantastic teachers. I've just named them. Because they were informed by their tradition and those values, and they tried to live it.

And so that research is what I-- that's what I was interested in. That I published it was secondary, always. That I taught it-- that's what always informed my teaching. Because what I taught was-- In a sense, I was the third person when I taught. I tried to teach what my teachers taught me. I was just a conduit. Granted, it came through my perspective. That's always been my goal.

So publication came about naturally. I have never written anything in order to publish something.

INTERVIEWER: Are there particular things you are most proud of?

JAMES BOYD: Yes. I worked for 12 years on a manuscript with Dastur Kotwal, the Zoroastrian high priest. We spent a semester here together. We spent another semester at Harvard together. We came out with a volume, which is a primary source material, called A
Offering. And it documents and interprets perhaps one of the oldest rituals in the history of the Western world. It's a fire ritual. It's a Persian offering.

It was well-received. One of my colleagues at Harvard said - now this is a non-Garrison Keillor comment - that's primary research. That will serve scholars for a thousand years.

INTERVIEWER: So you think your work has made a difference?

JAMES BOYD: In the field of Zoroastrian studies, yes. In the field of Shinto studies, which is a recent concern, yes. In the field of Buddhist studies, one or two articles.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have professional activities outside of CSU?

JAMES BOYD: Yeah. I direct committees in the Association of Asian Studies, American Academy of Religion. Gave a lot of conference talks, a lot of panels. The Rocky Mountain Social Science Foundation. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: When you first came, tell us about your office and the facilities that were provided.

JAMES BOYD: Eddy Building. I wanted an office that looked on the mountains. Seems to be a motif, here, doesn't it? For the first year, I had one. But then we were-- eventually, the Philosophy department was moved down to the basement. And you know that story well. And for some years, the basement was flooded, and I lost every piece of my library and research.

INTERVIEWER: So when you came, your primary role was your research or teaching?

JAMES BOYD: Together. Couldn't separate them.

INTERVIEWER: And teaching was a particular delight for you.

JAMES BOYD: It was a real delight. I loved it, especially that age group. To borrow a phrase, I loved to ignite those headpieces filled with straw. I just thought, wow.

Yesterday I heard from a student I taught at Purdue, a PhD in physical chemistry. He took my Philosophy of Religion course at Purdue. And he said to me yesterday, he said on the phone, would you come and be a visiting scholar at our Jewish temple? And I said, well, my focus is really Asia. And he said, yeah but it was your Philosophy of Religion course that woke me up to the fact that there are children's ways of looking at religion and informed, adult ways. That's why I'm in this temple. Well, that was a mind that was ignited. Right?

INTERVIEWER: Did you create the courses that you taught?

JAMES BOYD: Every one of them.

INTERVIEWER: Every one. How many different ones?
JAMES BOYD: Oh, I have no idea. Introduction to Eastern Thought, Western Thought, Religious Thought. I tend to avoid the word religion because that's not appropriate in the East. I mean, in India, China, Japan. I know I could get chastised every time I do.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, you do.

JAMES BOYD: Oh, yeah. Mysticism East, West, seminars. Oh, I created 10 courses.

INTERVIEWER: Did you advise graduate students?

JAMES BOYD: Master's students. The Philosophy department decided that we were a small enough faculty, we could do a Master's well. We didn't have the resources to do a PhD. So I've had quite a few Master's students.

INTERVIEWER: The next question I will not ask because you've already answered it.

JAMES BOYD: What's that?

INTERVIEWER: Tell us about your international experience. You've already done that. What were the biggest challenges?

JAMES BOYD: Wait, you talked about goals way back when. This goal evolved because it evolved out of my own personal history. My goal at Colorado State has been to internationalize students and faculty. I've taken four faculty groups, one with you, to India.

INTERVIEWER: Two. We did that Fulbright twice. Your group, my group.

JAMES BOYD: Yeah, no, and then I did two more Fulbrights. As I look back, that has been my primary goal.

INTERVIEWER: Did you succeed?

JAMES BOYD: I don't think so. With certain individuals, yes. I succeeded with my colleagues, Crosby. They started teaching Hindu thought in their Philosophy program. Ron Williams now deals with Indian and Eastern aesthetics in his Aesthetics course. I've had-- our groups, I think they have profoundly. Dave McComb started teaching a world history course. Is that success?

INTERVIEWER: What were the biggest challenges when you first came?

JAMES BOYD: I mentioned it. Being in a department that wanted to do away with Religious Studies.

INTERVIEWER: Welcome, and goodbye.

JAMES BOYD: Yeah, welcome and goodbye. Exactly. That was quite a challenge. I was a newly minted PhD and I had just spend 10 years trying to earn that degree.
INTERVIEWER: Toward the end of your career, were there things that you knew that you wished you had known when you began? I guess the other way to ask the question, did you learn anything?

JAMES BOYD: I've learned a lot. One aspect I learned was the institutional structure of the university. It often has more rhetoric regarding internationalization than it has deeds. I think internationalization has been an uphill fight. And the rhetoric is just annoying.

INTERVIEWER: Has the professorial role changed with time?

JAMES BOYD: My perception is that contemporaries my younger colleagues are so focused on research and publication in their own area that they no longer see themselves as committed to an institutional structure. So the Asian Studies program that Loren Crabtree and I founded is no longer, because none of the faculty will-- it's extracurricular, if you will. It's interdisciplinary. None of them will join that. They're interested in their research. So I see a narrowing and less of an institutional commitment.

INTERVIEWER: So that, in effect, has changed the challenges these young people have.

JAMES BOYD: I think that's right. To their credit, they've got great challenges.

INTERVIEWER: How do they differ from when you began?

JAMES BOYD: It seems to be that the record of publication is foremost in their career. For me, it was an aftermath of what I was interested in. I think I'm fortunate in that respect.

INTERVIEWER: Make some comments, if you can, about the role of the university, locally, nationally, internationally.

JAMES BOYD: Your questions are very provocative.

INTERVIEWER: Good.

JAMES BOYD: What I have focused on is the relation of the university to the public school system in Fort Collins. I have run three National Endowment for the Humanities Institutes on Asia, to teach Asian thought and history with other colleagues to public school teachers in Fort Collins twice and once in Wisconsin, where my brother was superintendent of schools. That's made a difference. The IB program now has a world history, they have Asian studies.

INTERVIEWER: In high school?

JAMES BOYD: In high school, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: And you did that.

JAMES BOYD: With colleagues I think I can take some credit for that.
INTERVIEWER: Were there any events that you remember that were particularly significant that affected your role of the university, national, international events?

JAMES BOYD: That affected my role in the university?

INTERVIEWER: Well, that influenced your teaching or your scholarship?

JAMES BOYD: Not within the university. The major event that changed my direction in my PhD program was John Kennedy's assassination. I was at Wisconsin trying to learn-- I mean, I had a Sanskrit course, a Pali course, a Hindi course, then I had three other courses. As I said, I'm not that good of a linguist.

And that moment so changed, what was so reflective. Everything stopped. The university stopped, the classes stopped, the nation stopped. And I said to myself, am I doing what I really want to do? And that led me back to Northwestern and comparative religions, rather than linguistic studies.

So that was outside the university. Within the university, I can't think of anything at the moment.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned the change in orientation of your colleagues in Philosophy. Is there any other significant changes in the university during your career?

JAMES BOYD: I just finished, for the fourth time, teaching Semester at Sea, around the world. And so I have-- just this past spring-- so I was introduced to a different kind of a student group. Maybe this is what you're after or not, I don't know. I'm introducing students to Shinto, Buddhist, Japanese culture, and then we land in Yokohama.

I mean, what a better way to teach my world. Already, in past years, I taught them demon exorcist rituals, and then I take them to a demon exorcist ritual in Sri Lanka.

These students in the past, void. I only had maybe a handful of students who really grappled with the material and tried to bring what we talked about to what they experienced in the port. The rest of the students, I felt, were someplace else. They never left their email. They never left home.

Whereas when I in my previous voyages, they were a community on a ship. They were out of touch for a long time. And then they were in Japan. And then they were in Sri Lanka.

There's a whole different environment that's going on. I'm sure it has its pluses and minuses. But in terms of my teaching, they didn't seem to take seriously the uniqueness of the Japanese world or the Hindu world. I don't know. They never left home is my--

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

JAMES BOYD: --notion.
INTERVIEWER: How has the university changed?

JAMES BOYD: What you were saying earlier before we talked. Less and less state support. Higher and higher tuition. Larger student body. There are what? 23,000? They're thinking 25,000.

INTERVIEWER: 27,000.

JAMES BOYD: Up to 27,000.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

JAMES BOYD: I went to a small liberal arts college of 1,200. I think that's an enormous change.

INTERVIEWER: And what's the effect?

JAMES BOYD: Bigger classes. Less-- When I was full time teaching in the department, I would guess that in addition to my classes, I spent five to 10 hours per week just in office hours with students. I don't know if that's happening if you have a class of 250 students.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. So the emphasis on teaching has diminished?

JAMES BOYD: I don't know. It's hard for me to say. I talked to Ann Gill the other night. And she said there is a different emphasis, but the teaching is still strong and the students are still learning.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

JAMES BOYD: That's OK.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think the students change over time? You mentioned how they just aren't there.

JAMES BOYD: Well, the majority weren't there for me. That may have been my lack of teaching and my occasional seasickness. Good possibility.

INTERVIEWER: But I thought you said that--

JAMES BOYD: But I have always had-- I've taught at-- I started teaching at Northwestern. I taught at Purdue. I taught at Semester at Sea. I taught at Harvard. I've always had some excellent students, no matter that range.

INTERVIEWER: When you left CSU, your classes just weren't taught.

JAMES BOYD: That's correct.
INTERVIEWER: I mean, when you went off to Sri Lanka or something.

JAMES BOYD: There's another sore spot.

INTERVIEWER: Are they taught now?

JAMES BOYD: No. Some of them, yes and no. But let me talk about the sore spot.

My world was to study in Asia, right. That was my field. So I did field work there, and I worked with these teachers that I mentioned. When I came back, the philosophy department said, you've been on vacation for a year. You did not get a raise.

They had no concept of international studies field work of what I was doing. Because-- this is my over-generalization-- but philosophers deal with books and ideas, and they sit in their chair and think. I was on vacation, at great expense and so on.

INTERVIEWER: Did that change? Willard certainly had that--

JAMES BOYD: Willard had that view.

INTERVIEWER: But then it changed.

JAMES BOYD: I think they finally caught on. It's taken me some-- how long have I been at CSU?

INTERVIEWER: I don't know.

JAMES BOYD: Since '69. It's taken me that long to get an Islamic philosopher into the department. I have worked on that for year after year. And they say, why Islam?

They finally, I think, have begun to realize, especially some of my colleagues who are now working in international aesthetics, that to study Chinese paintings says something about gerontology.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

JAMES BOYD: You see. So--

INTERVIEWER: That's Pat McKee.

JAMES BOYD: That's Pat McKee.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

JAMES BOYD: So that has changed. But the beginning years were a little rough.
INTERVIEWER: Did the fact that you were at a land-grant school make a difference?

JAMES BOYD: Probably not.

INTERVIEWER: If you look at--

JAMES BOYD: Except that there was a kind of-- my colleague at Harvard said, when I met him in Iran, he said, how often do you get sabbaticals? How often do you get leaves of absence? And I said, oh, maybe every third year. He said, if you had been at Harvard they wouldn't let you go.

So maybe there was something about the university and its laissez faire that allowed me to pursue my career.

INTERVIEWER: Of course, when you left, you didn't take money with you.

JAMES BOYD: I took--

INTERVIEWER: Have your money--

JAMES BOYD: Maybe they were glad to see me leave--

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

JAMES BOYD: --'cause they had my salary.

INTERVIEWER: Right. Yeah. Send you on vacation.

JAMES BOYD: Yeah. Send me on vacation.

INTERVIEWER: If you look ahead, Jim, what do you think are the big issues facing universities? With this particular university?

JAMES BOYD: Well, I'm not that well informed, but I would suggest that possibly individual, highly focused, specialized research may trump teaching. I've had the good fortune of enjoying the integration of research and teaching my whole career. I don't know if that's the case for many people.

INTERVIEWER: And why is that?

JAMES BOYD: It may be due to my field? My personality.

INTERVIEWER: No, why--

JAMES BOYD: Why is what different?

INTERVIEWER: Why has it changed for new faculty?
JAMES BOYD: Well, I think it's changed as we talked about, the demand for publication record in order to be promoted. And that, by the way, is not so much the fault of the administration as our colleagues. It seems to me it's our colleagues who have bought into the notion that publication is the measure of scholarship.

Well, to me the measure of scholarship is the passion for learning. It's a much broader thing, but then you don't quantify that. So, it's that whole realm. It's fitting an institution to an individual's life of thought. Don't know how you do that?

INTERVIEWER: People now don't know how to do that?

JAMES BOYD: No. I think it's always been a problem. Certainly a problem in the Islamic world right now. That's a whole other world.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

JAMES BOYD: But that's what's going on.

INTERVIEWER: Jim, I'll tell you the same thing I've told almost everybody else.

JAMES BOYD: What's that?

INTERVIEWER: These are fascinating.

JAMES BOYD: Are they?

INTERVIEWER: Oh, yeah.

JAMES BOYD: Well, your questions are provocative. And they--

INTERVIEWER: Well, that's good.

JAMES BOYD: And they brought up-- I probably told more stories then I was supposed to?

INTERVIEWER: Well, I know a lot of your stories.

Do you have any final comments you'd like to offer?

JAMES BOYD: No. Is this the end?

INTERVIEWER: That's a question, not a comment. Yeah--

JAMES BOYD: It's nice that you're doing this. It's good that there might be some kind of a record.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.
JAMES BOYD: It's flattering. I don't know if I

(end of recording)