

Richard Levine 1970, Patrick McMahon 1969

Laura Ross 1998 MALS 2006, Interviewer

June 21, 2010

Location: Telephone interview from Portland, Oregon.

Ross: Okay. So we're recording now. I'll do an introduction. This is Laura Ross. The date is June 21, 2010. I'm speaking by telephone with Richard Levine, class of, are you class of 1971?

Levine: It's Levine.

Ross: I'm sorry.

Levine: That's quite all right. Class of '70 was my, should've been my class. But I think my graduation date I think was '71. But I was in the class of '70.

Ross: Okay. And at some point we may also be joined by Patrick McMahon, who I believe is class of '69?

Levine: That sounds about right. Hang on one second, Laura. Patrick? What class did you graduate from Reed? Nineteen hundred and sixty nine.

Ross: Alright.

Levine: And Patrick will join us in just a moment.

Ross: All right. This is a gap interview about Buddhism at Reed in the late '60s, early '70s for the Reed Oral History project.

Levine: Yes. Patrick will now set us up on the speakerphone because he knows how to do that.

Laura, are you there?

Ross: I'm here.

McMahon: Laura, I'm not hearing you very well.

Levine: Maybe I should hang up this phone.

McMahon: Yes.

Levine: Laura, I'm going to hang up and I believe you'll come through on speaker. If not, would you be so kind and call right back?

Ross: Sure.

Levine: Okay. Here we go.

Ross: Hello? Hello?

Levine: Laura?

Ross: Yes.

Levine: Gee, that didn't seem to work. Hang on one sec. Can we hear you now, Laura? Try again.

Ross: I don't know. Can you hear me now?

Levine: Stay tuned. Hang on. We're working out our technical difficulties here.

Ross: All right.

(Levine and McMahon talking in background.)

Ross: I'm going to pause the recording while we get this straight.

Levine: Yes, please.

McMahon: Going to hell by going to Reed is an overstatement. What's a good Davis boy like you going to a communist, atheist, free-love place like Portland, Oregon. Reed College.

Ross: You know what I'm just realizing, something, I think I may have neglected to push all the right buttons (All laugh) when we restarted after our break. If you wouldn't mind could you just run through your why I went to Reed stories one more time to make sure I have them. Because I think they're both excellent.

Levine: Cue us in to who you want to hear from.

Ross: We started with Patrick last time so let's do that again.

McMahon: I love this because as a writer I love the second pass at anything.

Ross: (laughs) Okay. Thanks for understanding.

McMahon: I love revision. In my senior year I was doing a project on John Dewey, and boy I was looking for some alternatives to the education there in high school, which was directed toward us college-bound kids, specifically University of California at Davis. Studying on Dewey on this project, I got introduced to ideas like no grades. Ideas like student-centered learning, your own interests guiding the curriculum, and then I started kind of agitating with my other teachers and asking them why things were the way they were. Didn't get anywhere. But then, in the process of learning about John Dewey the name of Reed College kept coming up. So I contacted Reed and they put me in contact an alumnus, Jim Tyle with whom I met and I liked Jim a lot. I liked what he had to say about Reed. He was definitely turned on. He was like

nobody I'd ever met before, just a broad range of interests. Next thing I knew I was right there in the Commons dining room in the big world.

Ross: Patrick, when you say you were studying John Dewey and the name Reed College kept coming up, are you saying John Dewey was talking about Reed?

McMahon: I don't know if John Dewey was talking about Reed but maybe a book about John Dewey and his educational theories. Boy, I'd have to look at the book again. It was either John Dewey mentioning Reed or the person talking about John Dewey. Since then Laura, I've actually somehow seen cross-references from one to another.

Ross: Okay. I'd be interested to know what those were. All right. Richard, do you want to tell your story again?

Levine: Sure. Let me interject first that it was a great highlight for me when Lloyd Reynolds [Art Professor, 1929-1969], who was my teacher in many respects and my advisor assigned either me or some group that I was in to read *Art as Experience* by John Dewey, and it was a marvelous read. And I think Lloyd was more than sympathetic with John Dewey's words. The interesting thing is that I later had a teacher to whom I was led from my work at Reed, a Buddhist scholar by the name of Edward Conze. Spelled C-O-N-Z-E. And one of the many, many quotations I have in my memory box from Dr. Conze was that John Dewey was quote "a malevolent demon who was solely responsible for the ruination of the American educational system."

Ross: Hm!

Levine: But that's another story. So I came to Reed as a 16-year-old kid from Flatbush Brooklyn New York. My recollection is having read Jack Kerouac's book called *The Dharma Bums* and the character who represented Gary Snyder in the book was described as having quote "hobbled around the Reed College campus in Portland, Oregon from skiing accidents on Mt. Hood."

[sounds of laptop typing] I knew a little bit, I had read some poetry by Gary and by the other so-called Reed poets—Phil Whalen ['51] and Lew [Lewis] Welch ['50]—and I was very interested in Beatnikism. My favorite rock and roll group at the time was called the Fugs. F-U-G-S. And I wrote a letter to Tuli Kupferberg, who was a founding senior member of the Fugs and as a 16-year-old I expressed my angst about the world and I asked him who the characters were in *The Dharma Bums* and he wrote back a very sweet letter explaining it all and the long and short of it is I very much wanted to be a beatnik, and it appeared that I could enroll in a program of learning how to be a beatnik if I attended Reed College. (Ross laughs)

Ross: Which character did you say in the book was Gary Snyder?

Levine: It's pretty well-known folklore now that the character that Kerouac named Japhy, J-A-P-H-Y, Ryder, R-Y-D-E-R, was Gary Snyder and if I remember correctly, Lew, excuse me, Phil Whalen, Philip Whalen, was depicted by a character named Warren, W-A-R-R-E-N, Coughlin, C-O-U-G-H-L-I-N. But I may have, my memory may have morphed some of that but that's the way I remember it.

Ross: All right. So you both had strong hopes, I think, when you came to Reed and what you were going to find. So my next question is do you have any strong first impressions or early impressions from when you got here?

McMahon: Well, I'll jump in on that. I remember Lloyd Reynolds' art history class. And maybe the first week of class and he said in a very straightforward way, it must have had some context, he said, 'Stop thinking.' And the context was probably get rid of all your prejudices and perceptions and preoccupations and just look at what's in front of you. And I remember walking out of that class in furious debate with some of my fellow students there about this business of stop thinking because I went there to learn how to think. I guess what I could say was that statement was really provocative and, of course, later in my Zen training and practice I got a little more insight into ^{WHAT} that might mean. But as far as impressions of Reed? What that represented was the opportunity to really debate, to take something on passionately; I don't believe I'd ever done that before. Held forth about something I was passionate about and be met by equally passionate pushback force. That's what comes to mind.

Ross: Okay. Richard?

Levine: I recall feeling that I had made the right move. That the program that I was seeking was in fact right there before me and that manifested primarily as finding a number of kindred spirits, of people who I befriended very rapidly, and I had a group of friends, some of whom remain my friends to this day. I also remember that my eight o'clock, 8 a.m. math class was not going to work. That I was staying up late. There was an upper class woman I met. I should say not in

any romantic context, but we befriended one another, and she introduced me before the month of September was up to the pot of the month club (Ross laughs), whereby, I think it was five bucks a month, I got delivered a little baggie of pot to my dorm room. That seemed like a really integral part of the program as far as I was concerned. Even though I had almost excelled in math as a high schooler, and in fact subsequent to my Reed career I studied math again, but somehow I got the notion that I was not suited to math. It turned out I was not suited to an 8 a.m. class when I had been partying the night before. But I later ended up taking the class, which was casually known as math for poets, which meant for people who had absolutely no hope of learning anything about math, we did things like read the biographies of mathematicians (Ross laughs). And so the sciences in particular were difficult for me early on, and in fact, it's Lloyd, again, who pointed me and many others to William Blake and Blake said famously, 'Art is the tree of life. Science is the tree of cruelty, misery and defeat.' And not yet knowing what a metaphor was I took him quite literally and decided that aptitude tests to the contrary, I was an artist and, you know, did not have particular aptitude in the sciences. So that all happened right away as I arrived at Reed.

Ross: Do you recall your first impressions of Lloyd Reynolds, Richard?

Levine: I do. I think my first impression was that Lloyd had just won some award, some national like university, ten top university professors of the year award, or something like that. I have no recollection under what auspices that occurred. But I remember my father pointing that out to me before I ever went to Reed. And then I learned that my Beatnik role models had all been either students or close friends of Lloyd when they were at Reed. I learned pretty quickly

that Lloyd was the headmaster of my own personal program, and if I could get his attention—and I remember seeing him around and he seemed awfully old at the time. I guess he was in his early sixties or something like that at the time. Not so old in retrospect. But he was just a very encouraging, energetic, kind-hearted man, who to me sort of embodies all the possibilities of wisdom and compassion in a teacher.

Ross: On your bio sheet you said he was your advisor, your mentor, and your lifesaver?

Levine: Oh, yes. Yes. That's the truth. That's the truth.

Ross: Can you explain that?

Levine: I remember, vividly, sitting with him in the Commons. I remember what table we were sitting at, and I basically laid out to him that I was a miserable, confused young wretch, and I had no idea what I should be doing. I was, the academic program that was being presented just wasn't working for me. He said, and I quote, 'Well stop doing what you should be doing and start doing what you need to be doing.' I'm not sure I know exactly what that meant, aside from the fact that he was willing to accept my abject confusion and give me some good-humored encouragement. The other thing he said during that same discussion was, 'You have to go to the bookstore and get a book by Philip Whalen. He's the greatest poet of the twentieth century. Just read his book.' Which I did. It was a book called "Like I Say."

The other thing he said was, I told him I was thinking of studying religion, and he said, 'Oh yeah. That's a great idea.' And there was a teacher at the time who may just have left by

'68 or so and if I remember right he had health problems and may have died at a young age. His name was Dan [L. Deegan] [Religion Professor, 1957-1969] D-E-E-G-A-N. And what he said, what Lloyd said was, 'Dan Deegan understands mythology.' And that seemed to him the key to being a good teacher of religion, and that sort of served not only to give me some practical guidance as to what to do but I got turned on to this idea that mythology would likely prove to be a gold mine. Lloyd actually helped point me to a number of specific books on mythology after that.

Ross: Mm-hmm. Now Patrick do you have similar feelings about Lloyd Reynolds?

McMahon: I wasn't as close to Lloyd. He was provoking to me. Another provocative thing he said and I quote—In a calligraphy course that I took, which I didn't finish, actually. I stayed in for a couple of weeks, was deeply influenced by it. I don't know why I didn't continue with it—He said, 'Hang your ego up at the door.' Well, ego. Hang it up. Again, very, very provocative. How would someone possibly leave their self, and I confused self with ego, outside? But a less provocative, more intriguing memory I have of him is after class, seeing him sitting, I don't know what the name of the hall is, probably the largest lecture room at Reed, there was a kind of a stage, and he, I remember seeing him sitting on the edge of the stage after class continuing conversation with students. I always wanted to be one of those students brave enough to hover around the master. Although it just looked so darned informal. I wish that I had.

Ross: These ideas that Lloyd is expressing, I don't know if they're directly influenced by Buddhism, but they're clearly in line with Buddhist thinking. Was he a practitioner? Was he a meditation practitioner? Did he consider himself Buddhist?

Levine: I'll start out on that one. I think Lloyd might have said that he considered himself Buddhist, although perhaps not. I don't think that he had a regular formal practice of what you call Za Zen, which is the traditional sitting meditation that you do in all the schools of Zen. But he definitely came from a very explicitly Buddhist point of view. If you look at the bibliographies he offered, ~~there were also these~~ D.T Suzuki and R.H. Blyth come to mind. At that time, there weren't so many books in English. But Suzuki, Blyth, Alan Watts. But Lloyd was a very direct guide in our Zen practice.

This is not in sequence, but I'll tell you and I don't know Patrick if you were present at this visit, but one day we got into the VW bus of one of the people who lived in our house, which was then known as the Portland Zen Center Incorporated, we actually incorporated. There were a number of Reed students in the group, including Patrick, myself, I could think of half a dozen Reed student names and maybe two or three other non-Reed people, but we got in this VW bus and went over to Lloyd's house. We called him up. He was the kind of person you could call up and say we want some conversation or advice. We laid out this plan to him that we were going to initiate an urban Zen practice center, such as we already had, and we wanted to get land in the country and we were going to support all this through a scheme of practicing crafts. Several of us were getting fairly fluent at calligraphy. One person was a very skilled woodworker—he was building looms at the time. And a couple other people were weaving on the looms. And there were other such crafts people among us. And we said to Lloyd, 'Well, you know, that's our

plan. Well, I guess it's pretty presumptuous.' And Lloyd answered, and this is a quotation, 'Hells bells, of course it's presumptuous! Now go right ahead and do it.'

And but that more than anything that's an illustration of the fact that he was the old man in town for us. There were no, there were visiting Zen teachers but there was no local Zen teacher in Portland at that time.

McMahon: I don't know why I wasn't in that bus, Rick. I was part of that, lived in that house. Be that as it may. The calligraphy that I practiced, and I continue to practice even though I think I dropped out of that class, it was first experience with integrating mind and body, which actually was probably the most striking thing later as I got into Zen, which put a great emphasis, of course, on the body and on physical work. I would say I didn't particularly care if Lloyd had a meditation practice but he introduced me to practice. Full engagement with activity. I remember him talking about, even posture. Sitting up straight being very important almost a Za Zen posture in a chair. So later when I encountered Za Zen, I found that he had already introduced me to it.

Levine: I think that's very importantly true and is exactly as my experience. I would say Lloyd taught handwriting as a yogic practice and I think he, he was a proponent of the so-called perennial philosophy as in the book titled by Aldous Huxley and as expounded by Ananda COOMARASWAMY ~~Koomra Swami~~ [phonetic] both of whom were favorite authors of his. In that sense Buddhism was a form of yoga, but more particularly handwriting was a yoga—he used to say “it's *handwriting*, not finger writing.” Using, when you're doing italic handwriting, for example, you're, there really is to this day I practice it, a yoga of quieting the fingers and using the whole

hand at the wrist as the agent of primary movement. He was explicitly aware of that, so I too feel that Lloyd introduced me to practice with a capital P. I think in his view, Buddhist meditation constituted perhaps a rarified form of practice and then the various crafts, calligraphy in particular, were more a kind of a particular physical manifestation.

McMahon: You know, Rick and I have been having a conversation lately about Buddhism and especially regard for Buddhist texts, both the respect with which they're handled and also the depth with which they're written. He's informed me that, to broaden it out a little bit, that the transcribing of the Torah is a religious activity, by trained scribes and there's very careful instruction about how it's done, mainly to cultivate the mind that from which accurate and beautiful handwriting comes. The same thing with Buddhism. It's a practice to copy the what do you say Shakia is the name of that?

Levine: Shakyō.

McMahon: Shakyō.

Levine: S-H-A-K-Y-O.

McMahon: Yeah. And it's the daily practice of in Sino-Japanese—actually in Chinese characters—to copy the central Sutra of Buddhism. The heart sutra. Again, most people who take up the practice of Shakyō don't have a meditation practice per se or a Za Zen practice per

se. But the daily practice of writing out the heart sutra is their religious practice, is their access to what we call the dharma.

Levine: Laura, if I may, and stop me if you find this to be a digression or out of the flow of what you want to get at. In January of 1969, actually beginning in December of '68 into January '69 was the first so-called Paideia session at Reed. I have the impression somehow that it's still done to this day. But be that as it may, during that Paideia period, myself and a few other Reed people went to a Zen monastery in California called Tassajara. And when we left Tassajara in early January '69, we had invited a really fine Zen teacher from Tassajara to come up to Reed. And sure enough in January of '69, a monk by the name of Kobun, K-O-B-U-N, Chino, C-H-I-N-O, came up to Reed, and he gave a meditation instruction and a little talk about Zen and he did it in Lloyd's, by Lloyd's invitation in Lloyd's graphic arts studio. I see it vividly. He kind of looked around and was wondering ^{WHERE} he should sit and so forth and he just jumped up onto this, one of the tables we used to write on and crossed his legs in the lotus posture and gave a marvelous talk. Lloyd was in the back and I remember for weeks afterward him, Lloyd, referring to that marvelous monk and how wonderful ^{HE} thought it was that he had given this lecture, particularly that it was done in the graphic arts studio. Not long after that, he came down to San Francisco and Tassajara and visited the San Francisco Zen Center, which is on Page Street, and the Tassajara Zen Monastery and gave a lecture discussion in each of those places. And he was given an interview with the founding abbot of Zen Center, a man by the name of Shunryu, SHUNRYU, Suzuki S-U-Z-U-K-I Roshi. Shunryu Suzuki Roshi and Lloyd met, and I remember later asking Lloyd what it was like, and he just loved Suzuki Roshi. He said he asked him quote, "is it growing fast enough?" Meaning Zen in America. Suzuki Roshi laughed and said, "Too

fast.' (McMahon laughs) I remember various other things about that interview but that's probably enough. There was another Zen teacher from another tradition, a man named Joshu Sasaki Roshi from Los Angeles who came up and lectured in the Commons to a very big audience. He too was really, really marvelous. I think, in fact I know, Lloyd had a particular sense of kinship to and fondness for Suzuki Roshi.

Ross: Now I heard that Suzuki Roshi came to campus at some point and gave a talk. Is that true?

Levine: That's very true. It was in the spring of '71 and he, I'm not remembering that he gave a talk on campus, yes he did. He gave a talk in the Commons because I remember pointing out the West facing windows of the Commons and trying to orient him geographically to West and North and where the Columbia River was and the Willamette River and so forth. He gave a lecture in Commons and then he did a two-day sesshin. What's the name of that craft center? Do you remember the name, Pat?

McMahon: I don't remember the name.

Levine: It was the something center ^(*) up in the northwest. And it was, in fact, at that ~~sesshin~~^{sesshin}, he left early, in the middle of meditation, which would be very unusual for him because he was feeling sick, and he was staying at the home of a Portland artist by the name of Rowena Leary, and Rowena described to me that he comported himself with great dignity until he came to the front door of her house, and he walked through, and she said it looked like he deflated, and he

(*) - It was "The Hillside Center"

said to her, Oh, now I don't have to be a Zen master anymore. (Ross laughs) It turned out that was the earliest manifestation of the illness that took his life in December of '71. So this was just six months before he died.

Ross: Mm-hmm.

McMahon: I remember that vividly, Rick. One of my most intimate meetings with Suzuki Roshi was at the work period right after lunch. There was an announcement that Suzuki Roshi, would anybody like to give a massage to Suzuki Roshi, he's not feeling very well. I didn't know massage very well I was just kind of your Reed massage, your popular massage. And I put my hand up right away. Right? Indeed, I got this chance to put my hands on the Zen master. He actually taught me how to do massage. He taught me many things, but he said your thumbs need to go up right next to the spine. All the way from the base of the spine up.

Levine: Yeah.

McMahon: Later I realized I had a very sick man under my hands.

Levine: Yeah. Yeah.

Ross: Maybe this is a good time to go back and talk about when you first became formally interested in either Buddhism or meditation practice at Reed.

Levine: Pat, do you want to answer that question?

McMahon: Yes, I do. I do. I was thoroughly miserable. I was just short of suicidal. Certainly very depressed and disturbed. This was probably the spring of '68, and I was talking with an equally miserable person by the name of Joan Schwartz ('70) and she said the only thing I really found to touch this, to relieve my suffering, is meditation. And so I, why I'll try anything here. I cast around for some instruction and read some really crazy books about meditation but whatever they said I would try to do. And then at the Paideia that Rick just mentioned, which this would be December of '68 and January '69, Suzuki Roshi had been invited to come up and give workshops and give meditation instruction. But one reason or another, I thought it was health really, he didn't come, and a guy, I walked into the chapel for the introductory talk on Zen and there was a guy standing at the podium. He was Caucasian. Big guy. Looked a lot like me, just kind of a Westerner, who was holding forth on the advantages of Za Zen, including to study better then you sat up straight and focused on the book that was in front of you as a material object and everything else that was happening and that would really focus your mind. This was Dick Baker, who later became the successor to Suzuki Roshi and took over as the abbot. Then maybe the next day, was it the new gym, yeah, it must have been the new gym that had been built by that time. Big room. Full of people. Richard Baker gave Za Zen instruction. As preparation, he said bring some pillows. Make sure they're not a soft pillow. A good firm pillow. So I went to Woolworths or whatever getting this hard pillow and sitting on it as he gave instruction in the big room there. And just getting quieter, and quieter and quieter in my, the suffering that'd I'd been, the anxiety I'd been feeling just gone. And I got up from that and started a daily practice that continues pretty much uninterrupted to this day. Because it works.

Levine: That's pretty marvelous because I do not remember that, Pat. My recollection was that Dick was in Japan during that Paideia period. I'm wondering if it might have been earlier on than December '68, but I don't trust my own memory on that.

McMahon: Well, I trust your memory. Could the Paideia have started in '67?

Levine: Well I don't think so, but I suppose it could.

McMahon: Well, okay.

Levine: I wonder if it was before I was at Reed? My first year was '66, '67.

McMahon: No, no, no.

Levine: Could it have been '65?

McMahon: Absolutely not.

Levine: Okay.

McMahon: It was, I believe, Paideia. The new gym had been built, which it wasn't when you first came. The main part of that was if you're asking what were the early experiences, I would

say, which is the basic tenet of Buddhism, life is suffering, and there's no way around that, and there's a way out of that suffering, which is what Baker taught me that morning.

Ross: Patrick, do you have a sense of why you were so unhappy at that time?

McMahon: I could tell you now what I understand about it and I didn't understand it then, which was I really was coming to the end of the satisfactions of mental activity. I was sincerely wanting to penetrate the veil of thought to the thing itself, a direct experience of myself and my surroundings, and the mind just wasn't getting me there. And I was really cranking it up at the time. When I first went to Reed I was in the library twelve hours a day, no exaggeration. That began to fall apart with me, and then my senior year, or my junior year, I guess, is when psychedelics hit the campus. And that was a ticket out of the, I suppose I could say a ticket out of ordinary mind. But it had really unhappy consequences afterwards. A lot of the misery I was feeling was a combination of I need a way out of here, out of the mind. And also just the comedown from attempting to do that with psychedelics.

Ross: Now, Richard was your experience similar in your first formal interest in Buddhism?

Levine: Well, first formal interest, I was reading books by that time, like I said in high school I had read *The Dharma Bums*, which is full of Jack Kerouac's Zen appreciation for Buddhism. As Alan Watts later said that was what he called Beat Zen, and it did have a bit of a spin that celebrated the aspirations of the American Beatnik of the time. And it turns out that while it carried many or even most of the centrally important attributes of Zen, it kind of, there was a

little flavor of psychedelic drug use and of partying in general and various other things that it turns out aren't part of the central message of Buddhism.

In my case, my interest, formal introduction was in June of '68 when I was beginning my summer in New York, and I went to two places in one afternoon. One was the Zen Studies Society, which was then on the upper West Side of New York and then downtown at the so-called First Zen Institute of New York and I had formal Za Zen instruction by the man later known as ~~Aido~~ ^{EIDO E-I-D-O}, Roshi and a woman named Mary Farkas. Her group was associated with Rinzai and with Ruth Fuller Sasaki and a teacher named Isshu Miura Roshi. So in September of '68 I came back to start my junior year at Reed, and it turns out that that summer a couple of friends of ours, of both Patrick's and mine, guys who were in my class at Reed, one was a fellow named Sam Schrage ('70), who's now a professor at Evergreen. And Len [Leonard] Brackett ('70), and Len was the brother of a woman named Virginia Baker, who was married to the man that Patrick referenced earlier, this Richard Baker, who was a successor to the abbotship of San Francisco Zen Center. So Len had this close connection to Dick Baker and thereby to the San Francisco Zen Center. In the summer of '68 Len and Sam went to Tassajara for I don't know how long, a month or three or whatever. When they came back up to Reed for their junior year they lived at a house, I don't remember the address, but it was known among the students as the Cosmos. It was owned by a couple of Reed professors but there must have been a half dozen students living there and they started a zendo, that's a meditation hall, in one of the rooms. They would get up early in the morning, and do Za Zen and then again, I think, in the afternoon, although I'm a little hazy on that. I lived quite some distance away but made an effort when I was able to get there for morning meditation. That's where I started practicing communally with other Reed students.

McMahon: The Cosmos, yes. The glory days. I similarly, let's see it was the summer of '69, I guess, I went down to Tassajara. That was one step beyond what Rick, the following year, and I found myself at Tassajara in '69 because of the community practice that I was introduced to at the Cosmos. I remember very well coming early in the morning across town. God, why would I get up so early. Entering the room, it was actually, the floor was covered with Tatami mats, rice mats, which Len and Sam had brought that kind of thing up from Tassajara land. The room just full of this wonderful smell and sitting in the, it was pretty cold. I think it was January and Suzuki and Kobun was actually at that day of meditation, and that was my first introduction to a Zen master.

Levine: That's when he came up, Pat, for Paideia, for I think it was a one-day sitting and after doing that lecture at Reed he did this mini sesshin and he gave ^{DOKUSAN} ~~do~~ ~~sons~~ [phonetic] in Lenny's bedroom.

McMahon: I remember climbing the stairs up to this darkened room, there's a figure up sitting on the bed. My goodness my heart is in my throat. I explained to him whatever predicament I was in at that time. Maybe I was having a hard time relating to people because that truly was the case at the time. And he said, 'You know. You should play ping pong.' And he mimed ping pong for me and brought to life this whole easy relationship that I might have with other folks.

Levine: Very nice.

McMahon: That was his Zen master truth that he imparted to me.

Ross: Now Richard you mentioned a couple of times that reading *The Dharma Bums* was a big influence in your decision to come to Reed, and I wonder if you ever had occasion to meet Phillip Whalen or Lew Welch or Gary Snyder?

Levine: I never met Lew, but I'm going to answer at least partly for both of us. Patrick and I both knew Phil Whalen quite well. Philip ended up after various peregrinations, he ended up living at the San Francisco Zen Center starting in about December or January of '71, '72. I remember just about that time meeting him and telling him that Lloyd Reynolds had told me he was the greatest poet of the twentieth century, and we then lived in that same community. I lived in or around the San Francisco Zen Center for roughly twenty, actually more than twenty years starting in roughly 1970. I spent a three-month, so-called practice period at Tassajara with Philip. In fact, my apartment was right next door to his in a building next door to Zen Center. We'd go back and forth asking for a half cup of sugar and that kind of thing. For a while, down the road, I later went to medical school and became a physician and Philip, on occasion would knock on my door with a medical complaint. So that was a vehicle for interacting with him. He also taught classes in poetry and various other things at Zen Center. So Philip became a friend. An important friend. And teacher. Older brother sort of friend.

Gary Snyder, I think Patrick knows better than I, but I've corresponded with Gary and I've met him on a number of occasions and continue to regard him as an important mentor in my life.

McMahon: Yeah. Gary became important to me. He was important to me at the time. I got on the road hitchhiking, we're on our way man, out of town, go hitching down that Highway 99. So I took those things very literally. Later I connected with, I found myself in the neighborhood of a zendo, a Zen Center, up in the foothills of Northern California around Grass Valley, where Gary had founded a Zen Center. Built a zendo and collected various carpenters of the counter-culture sort and they had very quickly put up a zendo, which I walk into some years later and practiced with Gary and I was close to Gary in other ways. Talking about, again, going back to Len and how these things all interconnect, Len also lived in the neighborhood. Len Brackett, who Rick mentioned as being one of the people who had gone down to Tassajara and basically brought Tassajara back. Because of Gary settling in the San Juan Ridge, that's what the area was named, Len showed up. Len bought a piece of land and started a Japanese construction business based on the apprenticeship he'd served in Japan for, gosh, some years. So you've got the zendo, which is Gary's baby, and then you've got Len living in the neighborhood. What is there in the zendo today is an altar built by Len. A beautiful, beautiful example of Len's work that will stand there for, who knows, generations. So it's a pretty tight community and continues to be so.

Levine: There are a number of Reed folks from our generation who used to live there. A guy named Steve ~~Memmeroux~~ ^{Nemerow} and Dennis, oh why don't I remember Dennis. Dennis and Steve were good friends. Dennis became an acupuncturist. It's escaping me. (* (DENNIS TUCKER)

McMahon: There's at least one more in here. We're getting older Laura so our memories—

Ross: What about Layla Smith ['68]? Didn't she live there?

McMahon: Say again?

Ross: Layla Smith?

McMahon: Layla Smith. Oh Layla. I'm jumping in on this because I'm so fond of Layla. She lived there at the Portland Zen Center Incorporated. She was one of half a dozen characters there, one who subsequently became her husband, Jim Bockhorst ['70.] Layla, I saw not long ago. She's a very mature, fully developed Zen student and teacher who lives over on Mount Tamalpais.

Ross: I think she told me that she left Reed prior to graduation in order to study at the Zen Center.

Levine: She may have. But we all lived together. Going back, Patrick mentioned that he spent the summer of '69 at Tassajara. Well I did too. And when we came back up North, this would've been my fourth year at Reed, we started a Zen community, the Clinton Street Zen community, and in it lived Patrick McMahon, myself, Layla Smith and her future husband, Jim Bockhorst, a woman named Jacqueline Warshall who was at Reed a couple of years, ^{LYNELE} ~~Leneal~~ Jones, Deborah Green, and Victoria [Anne] Palmer ['70,] who later became a medical doctor and was a Reed student. When I described the bus trip over to Lloyd's house I'm almost certain Layla and Jim were part of that. Jim was central to the idea of a craft community, and he's the one who took out papers of incorporation. But if Layla told you she didn't graduate, I'm sure

that's true. Jim famously wrote his thesis, and never handed it in, and I don't want to put words in his mouth but my recollection is that at that time and place, the thought of having a bachelor's degree was not a particularly, not thought to be a particularly noble accomplishment nor useful and, I think, Jim having finished his thesis, I think he thought it would be about as much use as wrapping it up and mailing it to his parents as there would be to submitting it to his advisor and trying to get a degree. But I don't know what Layla might have thought about all that.

McMahon: This is a little off track, but those days, the Clinton Street house, and the richness of the brew there, which was not strictly Zen, and not strictly San Francisco Zen Center, do you remember Richard Albert coming and having dinner with us?

Levine: I certainly do. I answered the door and let him in. I remember it very vividly.

McMahon: Do you know who we're talking about Laura?

Ross: I don't.

McMahon: Richard Albert. He was a sidekick of Timothy Leary and where some of those folks, they went in different directions. Richard Albert, who later became known as Baba Ram Dass, went to India, and where we sat at the feet of Shunryu Suzuki Roshi, he sat at the feet at one of the saints, Neem Karoli Baba. Extremely influential since then in bringing that form of meditation and devotion to the West. So there he was, right there, a natural place for him to come and visit was the Clinton Street house.

Levine: We put him up when he was in town. He famously wrote a book called “Be Here Now” about that time or a little afterwards.

Ross: Right. Of course. It sounds like all of this was very much in tune with the way Lloyd Reynolds was teaching. But I wonder how it affected your work in other classes?

McMahon: Our what?

Ross: Your academic work in other courses.

McMahon: Okay. Well I’ll jump on that. I reached the end of the mind road, the intellect by my senior year. And I was coming into, I was actually come out of psychedelics and really moving into Zen. Everybody did that differently. But there was a slide and then a sudden plunge into Zen practice for me. No more psychedelics. But what I did my entire senior year was I sat meditation and I wrote as a daily practice, you might say, looking as closely as I could at what was in front of me and I would take walks every night and just look at what was there. Kind of the way Lloyd had counseled me my freshman year. Stop thinking. Just look. Just be there. Just be there now. And then I’d come home and I’d let my mind start to work on that a bit as far as to record every moment that I could possibly recollect and right down to the moment of writing. That became a journal which I called Journal of an Exhibitionist, which then became my thesis. At the end, as I finished the last page of that, it’s like I closed the book, and I closed the book for many years to writing and to reading. That was my last word.

So your question how did it affect other courses? I chucked, pretty much, course learning and Reed was so permissive at the time they gave me, basically a collection of independents, independent courses. I rarely stepped on the campus my entire year, '69. Lloyd's teaching and my experience with Za Zen completely undid the academic model and freed me up, really to completely enter my own experience.

Ross: Was that considered a creative thesis?

McMahon: Yeah, it was a creative thesis.

Ross: And Richard what about you?

Levine: Before I answer your question directly Laura, let me throw out a recollection that just popped into my head.

Ross: Sure.

Levine: And Patrick please correct me because you're in this. I remember that Patrick and I were living at Tassajara, this Zen monastery, deep in the wilderness in California in the winter of '72. We had both finished with Reed by this point, but we had a job in pretty rugged weather. Cold, cold rain. Not much sunshine during the day. Short days, long nights. And Patrick and I were down in the area called Grasshopper Flats, and we had a job, which was to take these rocks and put the real big ones over there, and the tiny little ones over there, and the in betweeners over

there. About that time while we were working one or both of us got our Reed bulletin or whatever it was called back then, and we were reading through the class notes and there was all this great news about people on their way to their doctorate in anthropology, and so and so was doing some distinguished research at this institute. There was all kinds of stories of accomplishment and publishing and academia and general distinction. And Pat and I mused to one another, you know we should send them a letter saying Patrick McMahon and Rick Levine are sorting rocks as to small, middling and large (Ross laughs) for an esoteric fringe group in the California wilderness. (Ross laughs) It did have that little bit sort of feeling that in choosing a life of practicing Buddhism, you know what, I'll leave it right there. I think the ironies are obvious enough.

But, Laura bring me back. What was the question we were discussing?

Ross: That was a wonderful story, by the way. I like that. Well, I was trying to understand how you could pursue the rigorous academic studies at Reed and your developing interest in Zen at the same time. I was wondering how those things worked together or didn't work together, as the case may be.

Levine: Yeah. In my case I had an interdisciplinary major, namely, mine was religion and philosophy. The greatest learning that was going on for me was reading books, and Lloyd was guiding me vis a vis a bibliography. But when it came time to, and studying religion first with Dan Deegan and then with a professor John [C.] Staten [Religion Professor, 1969-1976] who now owns and runs Fieldstone Winery up in the Napa Valley, and only spent a couple a few years at Reed if I remember. But he was my thesis advisor, although in actual fact Lloyd was.

My topic was titled, 'Some Aspects of the Prajnaparamita-Madhyamika tradition' [phonetic] so and this was hardcore Buddhism that I was writing about. Really, I didn't get much guidance from my formal classes. One of the things, a pet peeve of Lloyd, was that a Reed education at that time seemed not to acknowledge that there was an Eastern hemisphere. That we got a real good grounding in the Classics of Western thought and literature and so on. But the Eastern hemisphere, and particularly the Asian religions, were not only underrepresented but really not represented at all. You couldn't, unless you did it independently, you couldn't learn about Buddhism through direct coursework. What I did then was I had this thesis topic, an aspect of Buddhist literature and history, and I moved down to, this is the reason why I'm in the class of '70 but actually graduated in '71, I wrote my thesis while residing at the San Francisco Zen Center and it turned out that probably the most prominent scholar in the area I was interested in looking at was, by coincidence, doing a guest professorship at Cal Berkeley. So while I was living at San Francisco Zen Center he was giving lectures on the very topic I was addressing at Cal. I spent, I don't know what, six months or something like ^{that} doing nothing but reading books in this area, attending his lectures and writing my thesis. Ultimately when I finished my thesis, I sent him a copy of it and he didn't, he may have known ~~me~~ my face, but didn't really know me. He permitted me to audit his classes. But I guess I must have left a return address with my thesis because he wrote me a letter after some time, and it was very supportive, very encouraging and he wanted to get together and discuss it. And this was just great by me. Because he was somebody that I revered. He had written about twenty books and was a real authority in this field. So we conferred, and he had another guest professorship coming up, namely at UC Santa Barbara. We agreed that I would go down there and become his secretary. So during one academic, I forget if it was a semester or quarter but I actually lived, there were some guys about

our age who had a similar but Southern California version of our histories, and they had started the Santa Barbara Zen Center. They were students of ~~Mizumi~~^{MAEZUMI} Roshi and I lived with them and worked with Dr. Conze.

McMahon: Oh, that was Conze. I was waiting for you to name who it was!

Levine: Yeah. This was Edward Conze, who I mentioned earlier as well. And Lloyd had pointed me toward Conze as being the scholar whose writings would tell the right story about Buddhism.

McMahon: This'll be just a reflection from my point of view on Rick and what he was doing there as kind of a bridge between Reed and Zen Center. I remember meeting you, Rick, when you just came down in the flop room there, and not knowing you were coming down. Just kind of oh, there's Rick. But you were so out of context. Not really the Zen context. I was quite surprised. But what I was most surprised by is that you were continuing to work on your thesis when I had completely left that behind. I just didn't see anyway to put those two worlds together. It was just, I couldn't quite understand how you were doing it. Why don't you just drop the books and sit Za Zen. I didn't say that, but that's what I felt.

Levine: Right. I can understand that.

Ross: Now what kind of reaction did you get from other students on campus who weren't interested in Zen or did you even interact with them very much?

McMahon: What I have to say is that I pretty much at that point was isolating myself. I didn't have a lot of interactions and the people I interacted with, if they weren't Buddhists, if they weren't interested in Zen or meditation, they were involved in one thing or another that was branching off from this trunk that I would say of the way out. The way out of the Western bind to give it a rather grandiose phrase. They might have been studying Shamanism. They might have been studying this or that. But those are the people I was hanging out with. It kind of hardly mattered what path you were taking. You had found a path and the more academically inclined, well, I just didn't have much contact after a certain point.

Ross: Mm-hmm. What about you, Richard?

Levine: Well, I guess, in a way if we were to do taxonomy of society of undergraduate society at that time at Reed, you did have your kind of mystic Buddhist types. And you had your potheads, psychedelic users. You had your left politics people. There was a war going on and many of us had the draft in the background of our minds as well. So there were the progressive left politics people. There was a little bit of I think it was probably a bit of cultural residual from the late '50s and early '60s but this kind of folk song, acoustic guitar, folk dancing crowd. And then you did have people who were just there to study. And I'm sure at least, you know, innumerable other groupings. I think, in my experience was, that there was a lot of fluidity among these groups and ¹felt a fair kinship to somebody simply because they were a Reedie. With some exceptions no doubt there was some presumption of bohemian values if you will. Of living simply—a necessity for college students often enough. I think there's maybe a little bit of, I mean there was supposed to be, and there was in some places I'm sure, a bit of a conflict

between the hippies, that is to say, people interested in Buddhism and psychedelics on the one side and the politically oriented people on the other. But I personally never, I felt an identification with both of those groups. In fact I remember our Zen Center, when there were marches against the Vietnam War, our communal living situation, most of us would go and march against the War and so forth. So I must say I did not feel a sense of being isolated as a weirdo within the context of the Reed community.

McMahon: Well, in fact, Rick I think there was a certain status that went along with sitting Za Zen and meeting Suzuki Roshi. At least, in my own eyes, I was pretty cool.

Levine: Well yes, I would agree. We were legends in our own minds.

Ross: (laughs) What's the best way of formulating this question? I'm thinking about the Reed motto, "atheism, communism and free love," and I'm thinking how these Eastern influence, spiritual paths were being honored at Reed, and I'm wondering about Western religious traditions, were people openly Jewish. Were they openly Christian? Or do you think that would have been tolerated as well at the time?

McMahon: You go on that, Rick.

Levine: Well I'd say firstly, as Gary Snyder said, never mind communism for the moment, but communalism, that's what we were all about. We lived cooperatively. It remains for me a

beacon of how people can live together. We weren't just each renting a room in a house. We had real familial bonds.

Ross: You're talking about the Portland Zen Center here?

LEVINE:

~~McMahon~~: Yes. I am talking about that, but even whatever living situations, particularly when we were living as a Zen Center yeah, we had common purposes. We'd get up at the same time in the morning to meditate and share cooking, and there was a spirit of caring for the house, and it was quite neat. We had a very disciplined life. I mean by that to account for the communism in that motto, Laura.

The free love part, yeah I would subscribe to that at the time. Whenever possible, there was a pretty happy feeling of people, there was a certain God knows, we were all age 20 or 23 or something like that, so everybody's pretty interested in sexuality, and it wasn't a[^]orgiastic kind of degeneracy, if you will. But there were great dancing parties and people had boyfriends and girlfriends. There were situations where somebody's current girlfriend was somebody else's ex-girlfriend or boyfriend, or whatever. So the communism and free love part, I was all for it.

The atheism part, yeah, it's interesting. I must say, Laura, I was and am Jewish and I identified as being Jewish, and I don't think I missed a year at Reed or elsewhere of going to ~~KOL NIDRE~~ ^{KOL NIDRE} kolnedray [phonetic] services at some local synagogue for Yom Kippur or Rosh Hashanah services. So I think the atheism part appealed to me as a Buddhist and as a Jew simply in the spirit of iconoclasm. What's the word? The iconoclastic spirit of breaking icons, like God for example, or to put it more mildly of examining uncompromisingly our presumptions about what

God is all about was central to the spirit of the times in my experience. As a very religious person, the atheism part, that was part of the program as well as far as I was concerned.

McMahon: Communism, atheism, free love. Free love, of course, that was a very attractive promise, and I didn't mention that earlier, but as a young high school graduate who really had not much experience with sexuality is part of the reason it took me to Reed, and I was very disappointed for the first couple of years. It just didn't pan out. (All laugh)

Levine: Yeah. I got that as well.

McMahon: But when we began to live communally and when we began to practice Zen together, the community became an excellent place to meet girls for the boys and an excellent place for girls to meet boys. There was a very happy integration of the two, and it continued to be so as we went to Zen Center and Tassajara and so forth. I met the woman who later became my wife at the Cosmos, for example.

The atheism part, I don't relate to the God, no-God part of it so much as being fervent in some belief and what I feel is that if you scratch the surface of say an iconoclast or a non-religiously oriented counter-culture person, which is how I would identify myself, ex-Catholic, I'll throw into the mix, very much ex, when you scratch the surface of that person you might find someone who is really yearning for some structure, for some values. And that I found in Zen. I hope I feel a lot freer about that forty years later, but at the time I just got, I got with the program. I would say for the four or five years after Reed that I knocked around in those circles,

of Tassajara and the Zen Center and Green Gulch. I'll throw that into the mix, I was a true believer.

Levine: Yeah.

McMahon: It was ~~not~~ pretty jagged. It was going pretty jaggedly from one to another. So it's like if you want to use the term atheism, I became, going from a fervent atheist to a fervent theist.

Levine: Yeah.

McMahon: Throw out God from that, and a non-believer to a believer.

Ross: What else were you hoping to be able to bring up in this interview that we haven't covered yet?

McMahon: By the way Laura, you're doing really well, (laughs) keeping up with the two of us.

Ross: Oh, thank you.

McMahon: You're pulling quite a bit of material out.

Levine: Yeah. Agreed.

McMahon: Yeah. Well, what for you, Rick?

Levine: I don't know. Nothing is, I don't have a kind of a pressure to add much else. I have a very vivid memory for names of people who were at Reed practicing Reed at that time, and it's interesting, most of them are still doing it.

McMahon: Mm-hmm. Or if they're not doing it, let's think of our fond friend Sam Schrager, Sam was one of the most influential people for me in introducing me to Zen, one of the Cosmos, one of the two people with Len who went down to Tassajara and basically brought Tassajara back. Sam rediscovered his Jewish roots. Is that fair to say?

Levine: I guess so. Though I'm not sure, God knows what he would say, but I suspect he'd say he never really lost them. But I don't think so.

McMahon: Yes, I don't know that that was a case. I think for some, especially Jews who've gone the route or part of the route in Buddhism, of which there are many, it's the case of really getting to the heart and soul of their Judaism. Sam is really definitely a case of that. I visit him, and I'm continuing to do Za Zen, and he'll cross his legs with me from time-to-time. But where I feel like Sam has really brought the teaching into his life is as a Jew. He's one of the cornerstones of the synagogue up there.

Levine: If I may, another memory just popped into my head. In spring of '67, Allen Ginsberg visited Reed and they put him up in my dormitory, which was Woodbridge. This was all very

fortuitous, because I thought he was the cat's meow. Prior to meeting him I was very well aware of his poetry. He was closely aligned with the rock-n-roll group I mentioned earlier called the Fugs. One of their oldies but goldies was called, "I saw the best minds of my generation rock," which is a music version of Mr. Ginsberg's famous poem called "Howl." Anyway, Allen stayed in my dormitory. He spent a weekend or so, I don't know how many days, at Reed. Sam, Sam Schragger and I knocked on his door, and the three of us had a marvelous discussion, some of which I remember to this day. One of the things that one of us asked him was, you know, we're interested in Buddhism. What's a good book to read. Oh you should get Nancy Wilson Ross's book called "*The World of Zen*." That was kind of marvelous, because later on I [sounds of laptop typing] became acquainted with Nancy and told her that story and she had nice things to say about Mr. Ginsberg. But the other thing that Allen did was say, 'Oh you're interested in Zen. Do you know who Gary Snyder is?' And we both said, 'Oh yeah.' And Allen took out of his book bag or whatever it was a letter he had just received from Gary and it was written in what some people at the time used to call Reed-writing, which was kind of a version of italic calligraphy as taught by Lloyd Reynolds. So Gary's letter, "Dear Allen. So and so and so and so." I just remember the last line he wrote: "I long to walk with you again in the woods of our lands, dear comrade. Yours, Gary." And I just thought that was tremendous and fell right in with all my enthusiasm about what Zen is about. About, among the many things we've talked about, also it's about fraternity. About, in Buddhism the technical word is Sangha, S-A-N-G-H-A, meaning community, but one of the qualities of this Beatnik life that I aspired to seemed at least to be filled with meaningful friendships and I think that's true. It was true then, and it remains true. There's a story that a fellow came to the San Francisco Zen Center and was very intimidated by the severity of people's attitude. Everybody seemed quite formal and sober. He

found his way to a room called the dining room in the back of the building, where he kind of went for refuge. A tiny Japanese man approached him. It was Suzuki Roshi, and much as I describe Kobun Chino jumping onto a table and crossing his legs, Suzuki Roshi jumped onto a dining room table and crossed his legs, looked at this fellow and said, “There are three things required to practice Zen.” Let’s see if I can remember them. The last one is the point. “Strength, clarity, and a hippie way of life.” (All laughs) That, too. That for me was the dovetailing of being a bohemian and being a religious person. That they were mutually informing and mutually necessary.

Ross: So it sounds like—Patrick, go ahead.

McMahon: I could tell—there are stories and stories and stories. But I just want to, I feel that we’re coming to the closing here. I just want to really confirm what Rick said about fraternity. The value of fraternity and the experience we got at the time allowed friendship around loyalty to each other. Doing things together. It was a real, I was talking about breaking out of the mind box but another way of putting it was breaking out of isolation. I would say if there’s one enduring influence of those days that were all a fluid mix of free love and sangha as Rick used that word, and calligraphy and art and poetry and so forth. The one thing that endures for me is that value around fraternity, and I’d say it infuses, it’s what gives my life its flavor. Just as an example of that, really, the friendship that Rick and I enjoy, along with Sam, it just gets richer and richer as we go along. The ground for that was really laid at that time.

Ross: Patrick. You're familiar with the term that gets used around Reed a lot—"the life of the mind."

McMahon: The life of the mind, yeah.

Ross: What does that mean to you in the context of all of this?

McMahon: Okay. That's a really great question. I would say the life of the mind as I've kind of gone the route from 'stop thinking' through Zen practice to the present has been a realization of the fullness of the life of the mind. It's not "mind-no mind." It's when using the mind, integrating that fully with your whole life. At present, I'd say the main thing I am is a writer. Integrated with that I'm a gardener. Those two things dovetail with each other. I'm writing about Buddhism and literature, Western, Eastern. But the way I'm writing it is very different than it was back then. And the way that I study is very different than I did when I was more academically, in the academic mode. It's really letting my friends inform me. It's the conversations that I have with my friends like Rick and like Sam that enter directly into my writing and then I share them back. It's not a matter so much of being clever, for me. Or being particularly well read or educated—any of that in itself. It's all of that, but it's all in the service in, the life of the mind is a communal life, I guess, is where I could end it. There's no such thing as a separate mind. The conviviality of the mind is a phrase I might use. Just as an example, I'm writing a piece right now, so much on the topic of what we've been talking about, calligraphy and Buddhism that comes from an experience I had while watching my housemate, Michael MacPherson, copying out Gary Snyder's translation of what's called the Cold Mountain poems,

which later was subsequently published by a Reedie. Rick just reminded me of his name, John Laursen '67, with a press he started at the time. Handwritten and then a printed version, calligraphed version of Gary Snyder's translation, which I became very keen on recovering that book. But I don't have it in my library, so I called up Rick and said, 'Do you by any chance have a copy of Michael's book.' And he said, 'It's sitting right here on the chair next to me.' So I come pick it up, and that, I have it in front of me right next to my computer now, where it really is totally entered into this piece I'm writing. And so it goes. So it goes. The life of the mind, the full life of the mind.

Ross: Richard, do you have any thoughts on this?

Levine: On that question?

Ross: Yes.

Levine: Well, I very much like how Patrick answered you. I thought that pretty much stands for me. But let me say that when I hear that phrase, the word mind is one of those enormously loaded words, such that, I see it very differently if you write the life of the mind with a lower-cased "m" or the life of the mind with an upper-cased "m." I would go with the life of the mind with a capital "m." What does that mean. Well that for me, here's an even more loaded word, the life of the soul. And from there, I go to Blake again and a particular comment that Lloyd liked to quote and has had enormous meaning for me. Blake said, "The body is that portion of the soul which is visible to the five senses." So that was sort of my watchword in medicine as a

physician, to understand the body as an aspect of something far beyond the obvious material, physical qualities of the body. I feel like I might be getting a little precious or ^{CUTE} ~~puce~~ [phonetic] here in answer to your question Laura. But given that risk, I would say the life of the mind, understood in that way, as mind being something, how shall I say, something large. Something very large. As Whitman said, "I contain multitudes." So a mind that is much more than the mental. If we're talking about just mental faculties, just certain types of thinking, just certain types of learning, that doesn't work for me so well. But that's not how I hear it. When I hear, the life of the mind, that's an entirely satisfactory descriptor for, it's a great emblem if that's an emblem of what Reed is aiming for as long as mind is big mind.

Ross: Do you think it is?

Levine: Well, I think it's rather different for any individual. But you know it takes all types to make a society. My way of approaching it is, I don't necessarily think everybody else needs to think of it that way.

McMahon: Your question again to Rick was what?

Ross: Whether he thinks the Reed notion of the life of the mind is something in the ballpark of big mind.

McMahon: I don't know what the Reed, as a generalization, when people at Reed say the life of the mind. I don't know. All I know is that the way it worked for us is something—here's maybe

the best summary that I can give to it. There's a very famous formula in Zen. Before enlightenment, mountains are mountains and rivers are rivers. Rick, correct me if I'm getting this not quite right. But in the process of practicing, mountains are not mountains and rivers are not rivers. I'll say after enlightenment, but really I mean maturity in following this way, mountains are mountains and rivers are rivers. So what I meant by the life of the mind, what I might have meant by the life of the mind as a freshman at Reed, the mind was the mind. The body was the body, but let's just say the mind was the mind. But in the process of practice, this is forty years worth, the mind as I had known it just kind of didn't relate at all. No mind. What Lloyd had called "stop thinking," was more like it. I think I can claim to some maturity despite the virtue of years, mind is mind again. It's the life of study. It's the life of scholarship. It's the life of conversation. It's the kind of conversation we've been having here. It's the love of reading. It's the love of writing. There's no two ways about it. I'm fully behind the use of the mind, but it's what Rick called big Mind. Mind with a capital "M." And I make no bones about it. No excuses about it. It's my way. And if gardening is the thing or athletics or whatever, well boy, those are all wonderful paths. My path is the mind. And loving it.

Ross: I'm sitting here thinking that this is one of those moments when I just feel so happy to work on this project, because I'll be in the middle of an interview like this one and somebody will say something, and I think, 'I'm so lucky to have this job and get to talk to Reedies all day.' It's such a wonderful thing.

McMahon: Well, you're well-positioned for it.

Ross: Yes. Very fortunate.

Levine: That's nice Laura. It's very nice to hear that. I think as Patrick is also indicating, I share the sweet pleasure of conversation with you.

Ross: Well, I'm trying to think of a good sort of overall reflective kind of wrap up question to throw out there and I think that question is somewhere along the lines of—and actually, Patrick, I think you may have just answered it—but what does it mean to you to be a Reddie? Or what does your association to Reed mean to you? Or something along those lines.

Levine: I, how can I say, I'm very pleased to have been at Reed. The course of study that I naively anticipated, that is to say to grow up to be a well-trained Beatnik, I think it worked. I think Reed educated me. I learned so much. How to, even in the narrow academic realm, I learned a little something about how to write and how to think. But you know, maybe I'll end by quoting one of our icons yet once again. Gary Snyder commented, and I think it was written in one of the Reed bulletins a few decades ago. He said four years of a college education? Yeah. Great. Just as long as you have four years to undo it afterwards.

McMahon: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Levine: That's a little bit cute, but the implication that a life focused on learning, thinking, reading, writing, meditating and other similar—

McMahon: Practicing medicine.

Levine: Perhaps. Yeah. Well no, I'm talking about for me pre-medicine days. Reed days of doing all that sort of stuff. Having, you know, like reading a book. It may be a useful practice when you finish the book to let it sit for a little while, take a walk, think about it and not just go onto the next book in some sort of greedy, rapacious sort of way. I think that's the spirit of that comment. But Laura just in short, let me say, though for me personally and culturally, it was an exceedingly difficult time of confusion, uncertainty and danger and you know Reed was not perfect for me. Somebody else may say it was for them. But I think for most people it's not perfect. But I'm very pleased to have gone to Reed and very grateful for what I learned there.

McMahon: Well, Rick I think now is an okay time to mention the camaraderie that you and Sam and I have had now for, it's going on four or five years, a renewed camaraderie Gosh, where does it begin. It begins with my memory of being with Rick at Tassajara and sitting in the study hall that we had following meditation and before breakfast and seeing him reading a book called "Remembrance of Things Past," by Marcel Proust. Now Rick wasn't supposed to be doing that. Nobody in that study hall was supposed to be studying a Western text. They should be studying sutras. So it just puzzled me, and puzzled me, and puzzled me, and I asked Rick about it one day. He said well Richard Baker recommended it to me, and my memory of it was as something to do with culture. A great way to study culture. Well, thirty years later I was still puzzling over it. It wasn't a satisfactory answer to me just what was up there. I was writing a piece on Proust. And I mentioned it to Sam. And Sam said, why don't you check in with Rick. I had lost contact with Rick. 'And do you know he lives just very close to you there in Oakland.' Said no, I didn't

know that. And then I got in contact with Rick. I asked him the question again, he gave me answer, I finished the essay I was writing, and one thing led to another and Rick and Sam and I started reading “Remembrances of Things Past” or “In Search of Lost Time.” This would be about three or four years ago. And we get together once a month Sam in Olympia and Rick and I here in Oakland and read a section of the book. We finish about a book a year. What I want to say about that and being a Reddie and what does it mean to be a Reddie? We have a way of talking that comes directly, I think, out of two places. One is the conference, the conference discussions we had like in Humanities, and the other is the bull sessions we would have in the dormitories and around campfires and passing the joint and so forth. All of that is the background to the way we talk now. And frankly, I don’t have those conversations with a whole lot of people. So here we are, just out of sheer pleasure, there’s no obligation to this at all, just the sheer pleasure of camaraderie and this very particular pleasure of the life of the mind that we may be doing this, we hope to be doing this for the rest of our lives.

Levine: Yep.

McMahon: Yep.

Ross: Well this has been really delightful. I’m going to have to bring it to a close because I’ve got to prepare for my next interview.

McMahon: Oh my goodness. What endurance. (Ross laughs)

Ross: Well, you know I'm getting ready to leave town at the end of the month, and I'm trying to pack 'em in before I go.

McMahon: Oh man.

Ross: But let me turn off the recorder and say a couple of practical things to you before we go.

Levine: Very good.

[digital recording ends, End of Interview]

Transcribed by Leah Beth Ward, Aug. 22-23, 2010; audited by Amanda Waldroupe '07, October 25, 2010; Final edit by Mark Kuestner, November 2, 2011.]