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Interview with Mary Margaret Stewart, December 18, 2013

Mary Margaret Stewart
Gettysburg College

Michael J. Birkner
Gettysburg College

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Interview with Mary Margaret Stewart, December 18, 2013

Description

Mary Margaret Stewart was interviewed on December 18, 2013 by Michael Birkner about her early life in California and Nebraska during the Great Depression, undergraduate experience at Monmouth University and graduate experience at Indiana University, and early career in the English department at Gettysburg.

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MICHAEL BIRKNER INTERVIEW WITH MARY MARGARET STEWART, December 18, 2013

First Interview

[The transcript that follows has been reviewed, corrected, and slightly amended in certain places. It retains the essential integrity of the taped conversation. MB]

Michael Birkner: This is Michael Birkner sitting in a basement study room in Musselman Library with Mary Margaret Stewart, emerita professor of English at Gettysburg College. It's December 18th, 2013, and we're going to have a conversation about Mary Margaret's life and career. Mary Margaret, as I said, we're going to start at the beginning. I understand you were born in California in the year 1931. Could you tell me how it was that you were born in California?

Mary Margaret Stewart: Yes. My father was an ordained Presbyterian minister, and his first church after he graduated from seminary in St. Louis, Missouri — he graduated from, I think it was called the Xenia Seminary of the United Presbyterian Church — [was] the church in Culver City, California.

Birkner: Culver City being a Hollywood kind of place.

Stewart: Yes, it is, it is. It's where MGM had its headquarters and all its filming stuff. So he had that church. In fact, MGM used the front of the church for one of Stephen [Stanley] Holloway's movies. It was a wedding and they exited from the church. My father never talked about it much, but he was an advisor to MGM. They had a rabbi, a priest, and a Protestant minister as their advisors.

Birkner: Do you think this had something to do with the Hays Code of making sure that nothing improper got into movies, or was it other things?

Stewart: I don't know, I don't know. He said that he was to advise them, for instance, if they were having a Protestant wedding or funeral, he would advise them whether what they were doing was proper, that sort of thing.

Birkner: They wanted to get it as right as they could get it.

Stewart: Right. A lot of it was during the Depression, and a lot of people had come from other parts of the country to work for MGM. They'd left their families. Dad said all these people worked there, all kinds of craftsmen, and nobody knew anything about their backgrounds or anything. As in all industries, there was a death every once in a while, or somebody wanted to get married or do a funeral or something. Dad would do that sort of thing.

Birkner: For that Hollywood community.

Stewart: Yeah.

Birkner: Now, of course you were only a baby so you wouldn't know who he was interacting with, but did he ever talk to you about the kinds of people he ran into when he was doing this work?

Stewart: The only story he ever told me was that he was on the set one time, and Joan Crawford came up to him and said, "Zip me up, honey." [laughter]

Birkner: That's pretty good.

Stewart: And so he did. [laughter] He didn't talk very much about it, but I do know he enjoyed working with them. Anyway, that's why we were in California. Both my brother and I were born in California, actually in Santa Monica.

Birkner: Is your brother older or younger?

Stewart: He's older.

Birkner: His name is Neil?

Stewart: Neil Sillars Stewart.

Birkner: Is he still living?

Stewart: Yes. He lives in Carlisle right now.

Birkner: Carlisle, Pennsylvania?

Stewart: Yes.

Birkner: That's nice to have a sibling not too far away.

Stewart: Well, 27 miles to drive.

Birkner: That's not too bad. Your mom's name and your father's name?

Stewart: My mother's name was Mora Jean Sillars, and my father's name was Archibald Karr Stewart. They both were from Scots backgrounds.

Birkner: I would've guessed that there was a Scots background with that "Archibald Stewart." Was your father born in the United States?

Stewart: Oh yes, he was, and his parents were born in the United States. It's his grandparents who came from Scotland.

Birkner: Was it a ministerial family?

Stewart: Not up to that point. My family is ministerial because Dad was a Presbyterian minister. His father started out as a lawyer. He had his law degree from the University of Nebraska in Lincoln, and he practiced for a while. He worked in Brookings, South Dakota. Railroads were among his clients. Then he heard the call of the Lord, so he went to some kind of Bible institute — McCormick Bible Institute in Chicago — and became a minister. My mother's father was also a Presbyterian minister. He was from Canada, and even though his whole professional life was here in the United States, he never became a citizen of the United States. He was always from Canada. He came from a little Scots community in Quebec, called Sillarsville, after his family name. He came down into Wisconsin, and met a Scottish

woman in his congregation in Winneconne, Wisconsin and married her, and they had their family. He had three sons and two daughters. One of the sons became a Presbyterian minister, and one of his sons became a Presbyterian minister, so there are lots of Presbyterian ministers.

Birkner: You probably spent a fair amount of time in church as a kid growing up.

Stewart: That's right. [laughs]

Birkner: Your family moved to Omaha, Nebraska, when you were very small?

Stewart: Yes, when I was three.

Birkner: Tell me what you remember of that.

Stewart: I remember going across the country. I do remember the trip. We had running boards at that time, and Dad built a kind of cabinet that went on one of the running boards, and he kept supplies in that. There really weren't motels, but there were little motor lodges and things across [the country], and we would stop at those. I have dim memories of that.

Birkner: What I'm thinking of is your first memories as a child in Omaha. Did you live in a parsonage, or whatever the equivalent of a parsonage is?

Stewart: No, the church didn't have a parsonage, so we moved frequently, which is odd for a Presbyterian minister. We started out in a little house on — we called them all by the

streets — 56th Street. That house had only two bedrooms, so then we moved to 55th Street [laughs], and had a bigger house. That one was sold from under us, so then we moved to another one, 720 55th Street, and then that one was sold out from under us, and we moved to Williams Street. When we were in Omaha it was the Depression, but we were also beginning just to come out of the Depression, because we left there in ’45, at the very end of the war. But things were moving, and Mother always had a really attractive house, and they sold well. So we moved from one rental to another. I think we moved five times in the 10 years that we were there.

Birkner: How did your parents treat you growing up? Were you expected to be a goody two-shoes because your father was a minister, or was it just a regular growing-up?

Stewart: Oh, no, it was just a regular growing-up. They were both wonderful. They’d both been preachers’ kids. They didn’t treat us [differently].

Birkner: So you did the things that a kid would do.

Stewart: Yes.

Birkner: Tell me what you remember as a six-, seven-, eight-, nine-, [or] 10-year-old. What were the kinds of things that occupied your time?

Stewart: We lived in a neighborhood on 55th Street where I was the only girl. The kids in the neighborhood, these little boys

— one was my brother's age, one was a year younger than my brother, one was a year younger than I [was] — we ran around together in a little gang. We sometimes got into trouble, but we weren't mean kids. We rode our bicycles a lot. We had freedom that children today don't have. We lived near a very large park in Omaha called Elmwood Park, and we were allowed to go down there, walk or take our bicycles down there, and just wander around. I remember there was a big underground drainage tunnel, and we could run through that, you know, jumping from one side to the other over the water, all the way through. We climbed, we did daredevil things like climbing the underpasses of bridges and that sort of thing. I was a tomboy, and I really had to be.

Birkner: Because of who you were hanging out with.

Stewart: Right, yes. My folks never treated me any differently than Neil. The only difference they ever made was that Neil was a little older than I [was]. But I can't remember anything that he could do because he was a boy that I couldn't do because I was a girl. That wasn't a part of their [thinking].

Birkner: That's a good thing. That may have something to do with you having the kind of career you did, because, as we'll get into, it wasn't the easiest thing to break into college teaching as a woman at the time you were doing it. But we'll get there. In growing up in Omaha, was it clear to you that you

were in a city? Did you know you were in a city, or was it as far as you were concerned just the neighborhood?

Stewart: No. We knew we were in a city because Neil and I were allowed to take the streetcar to downtown Omaha, by ourselves, and go to the library, which was down there. At that time Omaha didn't have community libraries.

Birkner: Right, branch libraries didn't exist.

Stewart: No. So we went downtown to the center of town, and we always had a little extra money with us, so we could go to Woolworth's, which we both liked.

Birkner: So it was a regular thing for you to take the streetcar to go get books out of the library?

Stewart: Yes.

Birkner: Did you do the same thing about going to the movies?

Stewart: I didn't like movies when I was little. But yes, I did, particularly when I was in seventh and eighth grade. I would go down with friends to the movies, and one of the things I loved was [that], at that time, they had orchestras in the movie houses. So between movies, there'd be this orchestra.

Birkner: That's pretty cool. I'm going to guess that those orchestras might well have been WPA orchestras, where they took musicians who were out of work and gave them the opportunity to play in circumstances like this, or schools. It was one of the Franklin Delano Roosevelt administration's initiatives in the

arts. Now, I may not be right about that, but it's a plausible theory, I think. So you enjoyed the orchestra part of that.

Stewart: Yes, we did.

Birkner: Did your father or mother give you an allowance to buy candy, or did you get the money by hook or crook?

Stewart: No, Neil and I were both always on an allowance, and we tithed. I don't know how much we started [with]. I remember the top one was a dollar. Sometimes we used that money, though, because we were in Omaha during the war, so even before the war they began selling defense [war] bonds and defense [war] stamps in the schools. In fact I have one I never cashed in — I'm going to give it to the library archives.

Birkner: That'll be wonderful.

Stewart: Yeah. I still have my sugar-rationing card, which I'm going to give to the library, [for] your students.

Birkner: We study it. Absolutely.

Stewart: So I remember the rationing, and I remember going to school — which is not part of your question — and using our allowance to buy defense stamps and defense bonds.

Birkner: They definitely were socializing kids to do that. It was a big deal in the schools, no doubt about it. Did you participate in salvage drives during the war, too?

Stewart: Oh yes, yes, we did. We had paper-salvage drives. More importantly, we had metal [drives]. We would go around

with our wagons, and get all this stuff and bring it back to school.

Birkner: [You'd] get some credit for it, I would assume.

Stewart: We did, yes. Neil and I always liked to be the ones who got the most. [laughs]

Birkner: You were competitive.

Stewart: We were.

Birkner: I don't want to rush into the World War II era before I ask you a question about your family life in the '30s. I want to establish a couple of things about your family and then about you. Did your mom keep house? Did she do the cooking?

Stewart: Yes.

Birkner: So the fact that she was the wife of the pastor didn't mean that she had a different life than somebody who was selling insurance or something like that, except that she had to show up for church? How did being the wife of the pastor affect the dynamic for her?

Stewart: Well, she was very active in the church. She was a remarkable woman because she could take leadership roles and not let people think that the minister's wife was running it. She was just one of the gang, you know, just one of the women running it. She enjoyed the Missionary Society and the auxiliary and all the various groups in the church. She always taught Sunday school, and of course we always went to church.

Not that it was a burden, we just always did. But she worked inside the home. She did all the cooking and baking. Wonderful baker. Wonderful baker.

Birkner: That sounds very nice.

Stewart: Yes, she was.

Birkner: Did your family talk over dinner, and if you talked, was it just about what you did in school, or what was going on in the church, or did you talk [about] other things? Do you have a memory of sitting around the table at dinner?

Stewart: Oh, yes. Dinner was something I think we all looked forward to as a time of sharing what we'd done in the day. Mother and Dad would talk about politics at dinner, and Neil and I were invited to participate. Dinners were very special in our house. We always had dinner, we always had a salad, we always had dessert, and it was served properly, and while we'd have breakfast and lunch in the breakfast nook in the kitchen, we always had dinner in the dining room.

Birkner: So this was an important space for you and your family on a given day. Do you have memories of reading the newspaper when you were growing up, and what was the paper that you read? It was probably the Omaha daily, right?

Stewart: It was the Omaha World Herald. Do you know that I had a student whose grandfather was part owner of that?

Birkner: [laughs] Small world.

Stewart: It is.

Birkner: That is amazing. I would assume you start reading the paper at age eight, nine, 10, and mostly for the comics perhaps, right?

Stewart: Yes, right.

Birkner: Did you have a favorite comic that you liked when you were reading the paper?

Stewart: Yes, I liked Terry and the Pirates, and I liked Li'l Abner, and I liked Mary Worth.

Birkner: Mary Worth I figured you would say. [So I'm] right in assuming that at that age that's what you were looking at. But during the war years when you were not quite a teenager, were you following any of the headlines in the paper?

Stewart: Yes. A lot of the young men that I knew from the church were in the service, and I wrote to one of them, who unfortunately died in the service, too. But we had a correspondence, and I had a correspondence with my cousin. My oldest cousin was a chaplain in the navy, and I wrote to him during the war. I was very much involved in knowing where our troops were.

Birkner: So you were paying attention.

Stewart: Yes, we were, and my brother was very, very interested in that, and so that helped me keep up to snuff better. His job

during the war was a civilian — ? They'd get on their bicycles and ride.

Birkner: Civil defense, probably.

Stewart: Yeah, I don't know that he ever had to do that.

Birkner: Of course, the Japanese were unlikely to bomb Omaha.

Stewart: But we had blackouts! [laughs]

Birkner: That's just one of those things. No matter whom you talk to or where they grew up, that was part of the world.

Stewart: We had a little rabbit and we called it Eddie Rickenbacker.

Birkner: Let me back up for a second here. As a child growing up in the latter part of the Depression, were you aware of poverty? Were you aware that some people had it worse than your family did?

Stewart: Oh yes, I really was. Mother kept a set of dishes and silverware and glassware at a certain place in the kitchen, because tramps came by asking for dinner. She never turned them away. They always had their own silverware and their own stuff.

Birkner: I picture [that] the tramps knew that your house was a place where food could be gotten, so they probably told others.

Stewart: Yeah, I'm sure they did. No matter where we lived — I told you we lived various places, so during the Depression we lived at three different places — they all found us.

Birkner: That's interesting. Your mother was willing to share your extras with them.

Stewart: Always. She never, never turned them away.

Birkner: What did you think of that as a kid? How does a child process that?

Stewart: I think this was wonderful on Mother's part too. One house [we lived in] was right next to the church, and you can imagine we had the most callers there; I think a lot of people just assumed that that's the minister's house, right there. There was an alley that went down between the church and our house, and our garage was sort of down the alley a little bit. The back yard was between our house and the garage. Most of the men who stopped for their dinner would take their dinner down and eat it by the garage. I don't know why, but they did. I would often go down there and talk to them.

Birkner: Seriously?

Stewart: Yes. When I look back at that, I think, "Mother was very trusting to let me do that." She trusted me and she trusted the tramp. That's another sort of thing I don't think would happen nowadays.

Birkner: No, it wouldn't.

Stewart: No. But I found them fascinating. I don't remember what I learned from them, but I just was fascinated by them.

Birkner: Of course, every story's different, so there was no perfect pattern you'd ever get about why they were there asking for food. But the fact that you had the moxie as a child to go and do that, and that your mom didn't want to have you think there's a different class of person we don't associate with is probably part of why she let you go down there. That speaks very well of her, as well as of you, I might add. Did your parents have a political viewpoint during the '30s? Were they Republicans or Democrats?

Stewart: Mother grew up in a Democratic family. Her father, even though he was never a citizen, was very liberal, and he was a backer of Roosevelt. My mother, as so many wives then, became whatever their husbands were. I don't think that would happen now. But she became a Republican, as Dad was a Republican, as his folks were Republicans. But we were very liberal Nebraska Republicans. We were like the Jacob Javits[es] and those people.

Birkner: George Norris was from Nebraska —

Stewart: Yes, he was!

Birkner: — and George Norris was a liberal Republican, right? So they were probably George Norris-type Republicans. He was a supporter of many New Deal programs. He ultimately got voted out because of that liberalism, but still, he represents what you're talking about, and I think he was still in as late as

1940 or ’41. [Norris had represented Nebraska in the U.S. Senate since 1913. He was defeated for re-election in 1942.] It’s very interesting. It sounds like you had a pretty nice childhood, and a childhood where you had opportunities to be independent, which may have shaped you. Were you a good student in school?

Stewart: Yes. Yes, and I wanted to be. We had a wonderful grade school. We walked to school, that’s another wonderful thing. We could walk to school, and walk home for lunch. I loved recess [laughs], and the lunch hour. Not that I didn’t like school, I did. We had eight grades, so I went one through eight. In Omaha, you would be sent to one of the four high schools in town.

Birkner: You didn’t have the chance to do that, though.

Stewart: Well, at the end of September 1945, we moved to Mt. Lebanon, right outside Pittsburgh.

Birkner: How did your father break it to you, and how did you take it?

Stewart: I wasn’t very happy in high school. Going from a school where you knew all the kids, from one through eight, and into a high school where kids were coming from all over the city, and it was big . . . I was baffled. I was glad to leave it. My brother had it much harder. My brother was a junior in high school. That’s a hard time to have to [leave], and he

liked high school. So it was very hard on Neil, but it wasn't that hard on me.

Birkner: Is there a school called Mt. Lebanon High School, or is it a consolidated school?

Stewart: No, it was Mt. Lebanon High School, and they had a junior high, so I moved back from high school to ninth grade.

Birkner: I understand. I went to junior high school myself. So you went into the Mt. Lebanon junior high to do ninth grade. Did you find that the transition was smooth?

Stewart: Yes.

Birkner: I don't know a lot about Mt. Lebanon. My wife grew up in Penn Hills, which is another Pittsburgh suburb, but a very different kind of suburb. I get the impression that Mt. Lebanon was a reasonably affluent community.

Stewart: It was. We didn't live on a very affluent street. Ours was new construction, and it just wasn't a posh part of town. But I don't remember anybody really making a big deal about where people lived. I had friends that lived in Virginia Manor, which was the posh part of town. But we lived in various parts. There was one group of poor students literally from the other side of the tracks. I always felt sorry for them, because they really were poor, and everybody else was pretty wealthy. We couldn't have gone to a better high school. When I was there, it was ranked first or second in the state. I can't

remember the one in Philadelphia that was always vying with us. It was just a fabulous place.

Birkner: Apparently it's still a good place, from what I know. Why don't you tell me a little bit about what subjects you most gravitated toward at Mt. Lebanon High School? What did you do the best in?

Stewart: Oddly enough, I think my two favorite subjects were geometry and chemistry. That may have been the teachers. One was a woman, one was a man, but they were both just excellent teachers. I always liked literature, and I loved history. Even though I loved geometry and I loved chemistry, I did not care all that much for math, and you can't go far with either one of those subjects without getting into really sophisticated math.

Birkner: Did you take advantage of the culture in downtown Pittsburgh as a teenager? Did you go into the Carnegie Museum? Did you go into the various other cultural centers?

Stewart: Yes, we did. My father loved music, and we went to many of the symphony [concerts]. Fritz Reiner was the director of the symphony then.

Birkner: Big name.

Stewart: Yes. I remember going over near where Pitt is to that. Mother loved the theater, so we did some theater, but Pittsburgh at that time was not really strong in the theater. Much more so in music. We also went to the museums.

Birkner: So you were aware of the wider world beyond Mt. Lebanon. You were aware of the big city. Do you have a memory at all of how the sun was sort of blotted out by the factory smoke?

Stewart: Yeah. [There were] two shocks in Pittsburgh. To go from Omaha, where the topsoil is six inches deep, and all you do is put your shovel in, to Pittsburgh where you can't even get an inch. It's like our soil around here, it's full of shale. That was one shock. The other was the dirt. We'd never heard of washing walls. People in Pittsburgh when we first moved there washed their walls twice a year. We in Mt. Lebanon washed them only once a year.

Birkner: You were a little removed from the smoke.

Stewart: Yes, we were on the other side of the mountain, so to speak. But when I first moved to Pittsburgh, and the whole time I lived in Pittsburgh, the Bessemer converter of J&L was still spewing this stuff. We used to take our visitors to Mt. Washington, and we'd stand there and wait for the Bessemer converter to come up. It was beautiful. But it was horrible, too.

Birkner: My wife told me that as a girl she didn't realize that the Carnegie Library building wasn't black. She just assumed it was black. But it's yellow. They power-washed it a few years ago, and if you go past it, it's beautiful stone.

Stewart: All the buildings downtown were black. In those days, women still wore white gloves. Well, by the time you got back home, your gloves were black.

Birkner: Of course, that was the color of money, because it meant that men were employed because the steel industry was hopping.

Stewart: Right, and the glass industry up the Monongahela River was still doing very well, too. All along the river was.

Birkner: When you were in high school, were field trips part of the storyline? Did people do that, or did you just go to school?

Stewart: I just went to school. I don't remember ever going on a field trip.

Birkner: What were you active in when you were in high school, besides doing your schoolwork?

Stewart: I was active in intramural sports. I liked field hockey and softball, particularly those two. I was involved with the radio, making announcements, and we had daily devotions, if you can believe it.

Birkner: I can believe it.

Stewart: [laughs] Daily devotions. I worked on the yearbook. I was pretty active.

Birkner: Did you ever hold a part-time job when you were growing up?

Stewart: Well, I babysat, yeah. In high school, I worked in the summertime at the day camp at Mt. Lebanon Park, which was very close to where I lived, and very, very close to where Janet Powers lived. You know, she just lived up the hill from me.

Birkner: No, I did not know that.

Stewart: And Don Lindeman. All three of us graduated from Mt. Lebanon High School.

Birkner: Now that's an interesting little fact. I did not know that.

Stewart: At different times. Don first, and then Mary Margaret, and then Janet.

Birkner: All right, well, that's very interesting to know. I'm going to guess that you always assumed you would go to college. Is that fair to say?

Stewart: Oh, yes, yes.

Birkner: Even though you were a girl, you were going to have a college education.

Stewart: There was never any question. Mother was a college graduate.

Birkner: Now I'm going to extrapolate from a previous interview that was done with you. I came away with the impression that you could've gotten into Bryn Mawr and some other very good schools, but that in the scheme of things Monmouth College was

the natural place for you to go. Do you want to comment on that?

Stewart: Yes, it's true. My father left Omaha and went to Pittsburgh to leave the pastorate and become an administrator. The United Presbyterian Church had its headquarters in Pittsburgh. He was general secretary of the Board of American Missions. All the missions in this country — that is, Knoxville College, all the schools we had in the Tennessee mountains, all our work with the blacks in the South, all the beginnings of new churches — was what he did. The denomination was a relatively small denomination. In 1958, it joined with the big Presbyterian Church, but most of the time that I was growing up, we were the little one. The United Presbyterian Church had five colleges, and our mother had gone to Monmouth, my father had served on the board there, and they had also given him an honorary degree. Both Neil and I thought that we should go to a United Presbyterian college. I think Mother did, too. Dad didn't care, that's the strange thing. I was a very good student at Mt. Lebanon; I was valedictorian. So good schools visited and tried to recruit [me], and Bryn Mawr was particularly interested in me. The guidance counselor would ask some of us better students to go to the meetings of schools like Swarthmore, Bryn Mawr, Smith, Vassar, and the others, so that we could be representative of their good students. Nobody was

asking a question, and I never could sit in a group and not ask a question if I think that we're supposed to be participating. So I asked this woman from Bryn Mawr some question, and she was —

Birkner: She liked that.

Stewart: Yeah, she did. So they followed up on that and sent me things. My father really wanted me to go Bryn Mawr. But I went to Monmouth.

Birkner: You told my student that one of the reasons you chose not to go to Bryn Mawr — I realize there's not just one reason why you make a decision — but one of the reasons was that you thought that they were stratified by class at Byrn Mawr.

Stewart: I did.

Birkner: That bothered you.

Stewart: Oh, it bothered me terribly. The dorms were different prices, and I thought, "That's not right. That's just not right."

Birkner: That's an interesting thing for a 17- or 18-year-old to be aware of or pay attention to or care about. It says something about you. So you had a sense of what's fair. Monmouth was not going to be that kind of school, and you had of course the family connection. Did you visit Monmouth before you decided to go there?

Stewart: No.

Birkner: So you [matriculated] sight unseen. Did you feel that it was a good choice in the end?

Stewart: Yes, I do. I do feel it was a good choice. I was very uptight in high school. I really studied hard, and I needed someplace where I could just grow and relax. Not that Monmouth wasn't hard, it was. But it wasn't the same pressure. At Mt. Lebanon High School, at least the good students are told,they could do better. They could do better. They could do better. You felt this pushing by the school.

Birkner: You could never be fully satisfactory to anybody.

Stewart: No. You just could always be better. Which in a way is a good thing. On the other hand, they're saying this to kids that don't care that much, but when you say that to a kid that really cares, that can put pressure on that child.

Birkner: You internalize it.

Stewart: You do. I needed someplace where I could relax. So I was far more active in activities in college than I think I would have been anyplace else.

Birkner: Was Monmouth the same number of men and women, or was it, like Gettysburg [at the time], top-heavy [with men]?

Stewart: No, it was about equal, men and women.

Birkner: In that way, a more healthy, normal environment, wouldn't you say?

Stewart: Yes.

Birkner: I'm guessing it was smaller than Gettysburg. We're going back to the Fifties now, so you're probably what, 1,000, 1,200 students, something like that?

Stewart: Right, and then it got smaller, because when I first started in September of 1949, we still had vets in school. Now my brother was in school with real vets [laughs], I mean vets that had fought in the war. I was in school with those who had been in the occupying troops. Remember [them]?

Birkner: Of course I do. It is a different breed of cat.

Stewart: It is. Before I graduated students were being called up for the Korean War and many of the men with whom I graduated also went to Korea or Germany.

Birkner: It does change the dynamic just to have someone who's older in school. I'm assuming you gravitated to English as a major at Monmouth, is that correct?

Stewart: Yes.

Birkner: What was the quality of the instruction in literature and the fields you cared about?

Stewart: I can be very critical of my instructors. But this is why I've never really trusted evaluations. I had this one woman, Miss Kennedy, from American Literature. I thought she was awful, just awful, and if I'd had to have filled out an evaluation of her, it would've been devastating. But do you

know that I remember more from her classes than any of the others?

Birkner: It does happen.

Stewart: She just opened contemporary American literature to me in a way that had never been opened to me before.

Birkner: Why do you think you had that negative reaction?

Stewart: Well, she wasn't a very good teacher! But somehow. . . . She was a funny-shaped woman to begin with. You shouldn't judge that, but I have to admit that I do look at what people look like. She was funny-shaped, and she'd come in with her arms laden with books. She'd put them on the desk, and then she'd get her notes out, and she'd read lickety-split through her notes. You couldn't even take notes from them. Then, she would open these books and read to us. Read to us. I thought, "My God, we could be sitting in our own room reading!" [laughter] But that reading did it. Poetry and fiction.

Birkner: That leads me to this question. When you were at Monmouth, was there a teacher or teachers who you genuinely liked at the time and you said, "If I ever do this myself, I'm going to model myself on this person"? Did you have any of that?

Stewart: I had one English professor that was really good. He came to us from the University of Chicago, and he was all into the New Criticism. I hadn't had anyone like him before. Never

before did I have a professor that got a poem out there, and together as a class, we analyzed that. He really changed the way I looked at literature, the way I approached literature.

Birkner: Do you remember his name?

Stewart: Dr. Dale. He was wonderful. I saw him years later. We would meet up at MLA meetings. He was a tall, thin thing, and he'd sit up on the desk. He had us over to his home, and for the seniors in his class, he gave each of us a novel. I remember the one he gave me was Passage to India.

Birkner: Which is a pretty good choice.

Stewart: Yeah, it is.

Birkner: That's a really nice memory.

Stewart: Yeah, it is, and we had a very, very good history professor, too.

Birkner: You don't remember his name, do you?

Stewart: No, I don't, and I should.

Birkner: But you enjoyed his classes.

Stewart: Yeah.

Birkner: I'm going to work on the premise that you went to chapel.

Stewart: Oh, yeah, every day.

Birkner: How many of those days did the president talk to chapel, and how did the chapel work out?

Stewart: He opened it every day, and we had a joke, because it was the time of day we all saw each other. It was a wonderful moment, really. We'd all be together, and we all had assigned seats, because attendance was [laughs] always taken. We'd all be buzzing around, and Dr. Grier was this kind of funny-looking man who'd stand up there. The chapel would begin by the organ playing. He'd say, [slow, grave voice] *"Are you ready for the organ?"* [laughs] We just thought this was wonderful. But every day he said that.

Birkner: Did he introduce a different speaker? How did the chapel session work? It wasn't just organ-playing, obviously.

Stewart: No, there would be some devotion. There was always a little devotion. We didn't usually have a speaker. There was chorale. I was a member of the chapel chorale — [there were] 16 of us. We would sing, not every day but certain days. I don't remember why we did it on certain days and didn't do it on other days. We had a lot of announcements. That's mostly what chapel was for.

Birkner: So it was almost like homeroom for college.

Stewart: It was. [laughs] It was, exactly! Exactly. Particularly if you went to a homeroom in Pennsylvania where it started out with scripture and prayer.

Birkner: That's true, until 1962.

Stewart: Salute to the flag.

Birkner: Absolutely, I experienced that myself. It sounds like it was a good fit for you, really. You got enough intellectual stimulation but you didn't have the stress. Did you make lifelong friends at Monmouth College, people that you kept up with over the years?

Stewart: Yeah, mm-hmm.

Birkner: That's a factor in satisfaction with a school too. At the end of your time at Monmouth College, I understand you did not make the decision to go directly to graduate school. Tell me about your thinking as you approached the end of your college years.

Stewart: Well, I panicked my senior year, as many English majors do. "What am I going to do?" I hadn't taken the education courses. One of the nice things about a little school like Monmouth, and I think for a long time Gettysburg was like this, [was that] you could go to the head of the Education Department and say, "I really am not prepared. Is there any way I can take this course without the prerequisites?" What I wanted to do was take the courses that were prerequisites to practice teaching, because I thought that would be the hardest to get outside of school. The head of the Education Department said, "Sure." So I took two courses, and then I practice-taught in the Monmouth high school. Then, I thought, "Oh, I don't want to do this."

Birkner: You got cold feet about being a high school teacher?

Stewart: Oh, yeah, I didn't want to do that. But I didn't want to go to graduate school right away. My professors at college were pushing me to go to graduate school. But I didn't want to. I wanted to go into advertising, so I went around town to the department stores, and I was offered jobs, but as going into sales, not into advertising.

Birkner: You turned those down?

Stewart: Yes. Then, where we went to church, my father talked to this man who was a vice-president at Ketchum, MacLeod & Grove, which was a big advertising agency at that time. I was little horrified that my father would go up and ask Mr. [Emil] Hofsoos if he thought he could get me a spot, because I knew Mr. Hofsoos and I was in homeroom with his daughter, Nancy. Anyway, he said, "Sure. Send her down." So I went down, and I interviewed, and they offered me a job as an assistant account executive. I worked with an account executive, and the funny thing is, I worked with a man named Bill McIlhenny.

Birkner: McIlhenny's a Gettysburg name, of course.

Stewart: Yes. But I didn't know anything about Gettysburg. So I worked for Bill for two years, and I told him I was going to go to graduate school and he encouraged me to do that. I went to Indiana.

Birkner: Let's stop for a second there. Did you live at home during those two years?

Stewart: Yes, I did, because I made so little money.

Birkner: Were your parents OK with that?

Stewart: Yes. They wouldn't take rent, so I paid for someone to come in and help Mother with the cleaning. That's how we did it.

Birkner: During those two years, what, aside from doing the work you did, was the dynamic of your life? What did you get out of the two years in terms of going back as now a 22-year-old to Pittsburgh?

Stewart: Of course, I was a commuter. I took the Bridgeville bus into Pittsburgh, and there was a group of us that got on the bus together, so there was this little camaraderie of neighbors going downtown and then coming home again. I dated quite a bit during those years, and most of the men I was dating worked at Ketchum, MacLeod & Grove too. Some of them were account executives already. You know, [I] went to dances and movies.

Birkner: So you had a social life as well as a work life. It sounds like the right thing for a 23-year-old to be doing.

Stewart: Yeah, and I was active in the church.

Birkner: What was your brother doing at that point?

Stewart: He was in medical school. He graduated from college in ’51, and he went to Temple [University] Medical School and got his degree.

Birkner: Why don’t you say a word about what your daily routine was like for those two years? What were you responsible to do?

Stewart: Well, I don't know much about advertising agencies, because this is the only one I worked for. But somebody told me that in the bigger advertising agencies, my position as an assistant account executive would have been in what they call the traffic department. You would get this information about [what] the company or whatever wanted, some kind of ad or promotion or such. So I would take it to the copy department and talk to them about it, and they would produce the copy. I’d talk to the executive about it, but then it would be my responsibility to take it to the art department to see it, [and] they’d draw it up. Usually, the executive would then take it to the client, and go over it and get the client’s permission. At the end of my two years, Ketchum began sending me out. I think I’m the first female that did that. Ketchum was then experimenting, that early, in the Fifties — I graduated in ’53, so this would be ’54 and ’55 — with some of us to see if their clients would accept women as presenting [advertising copy and layouts].

Birkner: Right, because it was definitely the Fifties. [laughs]

Stewart: Right, and if you're an advertising agency in Pittsburgh, you have mostly industrial accounts. We had some consumer accounts, but not very many. So I worked on Spang Pipe. That's another thing. If you were an industrial account, you would write your own copy. If it were a consumer account, the copy department was in charge of writing the copy.

Birkner: It'd give you more responsibility.

Stewart: Yeah, it did. Then once they said yes, they wanted this, then we'd take it to the production department to get the type set, you know, all that, get the ad ready and send it out wherever it went. One of the accounts I worked on under Bill McIlhenny was Allegheny Airlines, which is of course now USAir. We would say they were taking off in Pittsburgh and they were landing in some suburb right there, just these little towns up in northern Pennsylvania.

Birkner: What we'd call puddle-jumpers.

Stewart: Yes, yes. I'd be responsible for sending these little paper mats out to these newspapers, some of which were once a week, some were published twice a week, some were three times a week. So that was funny and also exasperating. But I liked working with Spange Pipe, and I worked with another man, who was

also a Gettysburg graduate, Chuck Little. I think he was in school with [George] Leader.

Birkner: Leader was the class of ’39, [though] he didn’t graduate. [Leader was the only Gettysburg alumnus to be elected governor of Pennsylvania. He served 1955-59] A man named Chuck Little. You liked working with him.

Stewart: Yeah, I liked working with him a lot. Then there was a man named Bill Gilliland, who was a vice-president. He was in our quarters. [laughs] We all were sitting together. But Bill Gilliland was in charge of [our] big Chevrolet account — for dealers, it wasn’t national, it was the Pittsburg dealers. He was a Gettysburg graduate. I didn’t even know about Gettysburg College then.

Birkner: That’s an interesting connection. Since we’re talking about the Gettysburg connection, what was McIlhenny’s connection with Gettysburg? Was he one of the Gettysburg McIlhennys? Is that what you’re saying?

Stewart: Yes. He was Harold Dunkelberger’s roommate in college.

Birkner: So he was a Gettysburg College graduate as well.

Stewart: Yes, he was. Bill said goodbye to me when I went off to graduate school and that’s the last we saw of each other until one Sunday, I came out of the [Gettysburg] Presbyterian church and across the street was Bill McIlhenny, his wife and

two kids. I said, "What are you doing here?" and he said, "What are you doing here?" [laughter] He said, "Oh, you must meet my aunt, Miss Mac. She's famous in town." She taught English in the high school and she was big, big, big in the Presbyterian Church. But he was born here, went to high school here, went to college here, he was Harold Dunkelberger's roommate, he stood up for Hal Dunkelberger's wedding, Hal Dunkelberger stood up at his wedding. I lived in a house that was known as the McIlhenny house.

Birkner: Where was that?

Stewart: That's where the parking lot of the Colonial Motel is.

Birkner: Right, on Carlisle Street.

Stewart: Carlisle and Water. There was a lovely house there that they tore down.

Birkner: Yeah, they tore down several beautiful houses on that street. That's a great little connection. You made a decision at the end of two years that you were ready to go to grad school, is that right?

Stewart: Yes.

Birkner: Again, drawing on what the student previously talked to you about, it sounded like you had a number of choices, and Indiana was for your purposes the best deal.

Stewart: Well, I've always wanted to go to Stanford. [laughs] This is funny because I've never been to Stanford, I didn't

really know much about Stanford. So I applied there, and I got admitted. But they didn't give me any money. Dr. Dale helped me when I was applying. He recommended Wisconsin as being strong and getting stronger, and Indiana as strong and getting stronger.

Birkner: Those are good recommendations.

Stewart: They were. I'm trying to think if there were any others. I know that Wisconsin gave me a small scholarship. Indiana gave me a $1,000 fellowship, and in-state fees. $1,000 doesn't seem like much, but it covered everything.

Birkner: In the Fifties it would've been a lot of money, and it had a reputation as a strong department. When you went there, how specific was your interest in literature supposed to be? Did you know you were going to do eighteenth-century studies, or did you just sort of gravitate there because of a professor you met there?

Stewart: Not only one professor but several professors. I thought I wanted to specialize in seventeenth-century literature — that's Donne and Herbert — because I love the metaphysical [poets]. I found the department was particularly strong in eighteenth. James Work was a Yale graduate, he was head of the department, and he was a big Fielding person and novel person. The one that I particularly liked was Phil Daghlian.

Birkner: What did he do?

Stewart: He was assistant chair of the department, and he taught Introduction to Graduate Studies, which I believe was my favorite course in the whole thing. He was just such a good man, and so kind. He's the kind of person — this is odd for me, because I procrastinate so — if you gave him a paper, the next day it was in your mailbox commented on and graded.

Birkner: That's a model that very few of us can match. You still haven't gotten me into the eighteenth century. How did that happen?

Stewart: He is eighteenth century. Irvin Ehrenpreis, the big [Jonathan] Swift person, was there.

Birkner: He wound up at Virginia when I was there.

Stewart: Yes. We became very close friends, Ehrenpreis and I.

Birkner: Did you take a course with Ehrenpreis?

Stewart: No, I never did.

Birkner: You just got to know him?

Stewart: Yeah, I got to know him personally. I was in graduate school four years. I went in in '55 and in '59 I got my degree. He was gone two of those four years. He was just beginning to publish his Swift biography, and so he was here and gone and here. So I never got to take a course from him, but learned a lot from him.

Birkner: Who did you wind up working with?

Stewart: Phil Daghlian.

Birkner: What was he known for? What had he done?

Stewart: Well, he's one whose career got really skewed. He graduated from Yale, got both his undergraduate and his graduate degree from Yale. William Wimsatt — did you know him?

Birkner: No.

Stewart: He was Phil's roommate, and he stayed on at Yale and became a big, big eighteenth-century person. Phil got involved in editing Horace Walpole.

Birkner: Which, of course, was being done at Yale.

Stewart: Yeah, at Yale, at W. S. Lewis's place in Farmington. Phil's assignment was to edit the poetry, and he discovered, among the poetry, something that doesn't surprise us but was horrifying to Lewis, and that is that one of the poems that he wrote to the Earl of Lincoln was clearly homosexual. So Phil edited it, and wanted to include it in the [edition]. W. S. Lewis wouldn't have anything to do with it. Even though very fine scholars like Fred Pottle, the Boswell scholar, came to Daghlian's defense and said, "We've got to do this" — and Irvin Ehrenprei and John Robert Moore, a Defoe scholar, came to Dalian's [defense] — it was squashed. The edition of poetry was not published.

Birkner: Lewis himself was probably a benefactor of that project, and so they were more willing to let him have his way.

Stewart: Yes. Phil Daghlian was, I think, the best scholar at Indiana. But he didn't publish that much. I couldn't figure out why Phil wasn't publishing. What was this? Ehrenpreis said, "Something happened [with] Walpole. Something happened." He wouldn't tell me. I don't even know if he knew. But he said, "Something happened that threw him off."

Birkner: It happens.

Stewart: Yeah. Now there is an edition, finally, coming out, of Walpole's —

Birkner: Which will include that poetry?

Stewart: Yes. George Hogarty has edited it.

Birkner: This is an age where everything goes. You studied with [Daghlian]. How did you gravitate to a particular topic?

Stewart: I took "The Age of Johnson" with him, and my term paper was on Boswell's religious beliefs and his interest in religion. I got that back, and then I was dating somebody, and I thought that we might get married and I would leave graduate school without any degree, because I wasn't in the master's program, I was in the Ph.D. program. So I went to Phil and I said, "What if took this term paper and made it longer. Would that do as a master's?" He said, "Yes." So that's what I did. One summer I fooled around with that. I handed it in, and I didn't hear from and I didn't hear from him and I thought, "Oh, my God, it must be awful." Then he said, "I hope you don't

mind, but I let Irvin Ehrenpreis read your paper." This is how and when Irvin and I became friends. [Daghlian] said, "I'm frankly embarrassed to turn that in as a master's thesis. It's far too much. Irvin and I think you should open your desk drawer, put it in, and take it out again when you want to get your degree." In the meantime, Bob Purdy and I [laughs] went our own ways, and so that's one reason I was able to get out of graduate school in a hurry.

Birkner: Explain the mechanics of turning what was meant to be a master's thesis into a Ph.D. thesis. Did you have to then further work on it?

Stewart: Oh yeah, I worked on it some more.

Birkner: Was this on William Collins by any chance?

Stewart: No, no, this was on Boswell.

Birkner: This was on Boswell and his religious beliefs. Collins is later on. It does strike me as fast, to get a Ph.D. in four years. But you were working and working and you got it done.

Stewart: Part of it is that the first year I had the fellowship. The second year, I got the same fellowship. So I didn't have to teach. I could take four courses at a time in every term. Then, my third year, Phil said to me, "Don't apply for the fellowship again. You've got to get some teaching experience. Apply for an assistantship." So I did. So my last

two years, I taught, and because I was almost finished with my classwork, I got to teach literature courses as well as composition.

Birkner: Which is not the norm.

Stewart: No, so that was really good.

Birkner: So you had something that would really help you when you went on the job market. ’59 was a mixed year, wasn’t it, in terms of jobs? We think of the Fifties on first blush as being a boom time, because it was the Eisenhower era. But on the other hand, there had been a baby bust in the 1930s, and so I wouldn't imagine that they were hiring at high speed in ’59, right?

Stewart: Oh, no.

Birkner: It wasn’t just a slam-dunk that you were going to get a good teaching job, right?

Stewart: No. Uh-uh.

Birkner: Tell me about the process that got you to Gettysburg College.

Stewart: Well, I went to MLA in the [early] part of ’58-’59. I got two interviews. One was with Dr. [Richard] Geyer, and one was with some little Methodist college in the South someplace. I wasn’t interested in that place at all. I had sent letters out, most of which just either weren’t answered or they said they had no place. I did get a nice letter from the chair of

the department at Vassar, which said they didn't have an opening then, but to keep them in mind.

Birkner: Which was good for your ego.

Stewart: Yeah, it was. Very shortly after I got back to Indiana from Christmas vacation, Dr. Geyer called me — I think I told you this — and told me he had talked to Gen. [Willard] Paul [the college's president at the time], and Gen. Paul had said, "Hire her."

Birkner: No, you didn't tell me that. That's interesting. Why did Gen. Paul do that?

Stewart: I think he thought that I had credentials that they weren't likely to run across very frequently.

Birkner: You hadn't actually met Gen. Paul.

Stewart: No, I hadn't. I loved Gen. Paul, though.

Birkner: Tell me about your impressions of Geyer and whomever you met at Gettysburg College.

Stewart: Well, Geyer's the only one I met.

Birkner: He's the only one.

Stewart: The only one.

Birkner: So what did you think of him? [pause] Be frank.

Stewart: Well . . . I wasn't terribly impressed with him, and he was very embarrassed that he had to ask me if I was a Christian, which didn't bother me at all. But I can understand why, in hiring —

Birkner: I think through the Paul era they had to do that.

Stewart: Yeah. Yeah. Why?

Birkner: Because of the conventions of the college. Remember, Henry W. A. Hanson viewed Gettysburg College as a Christian college.

Stewart: That's true.

Birkner: Nobody ever repudiated that. I suspect Paul went along with it in part because, being a Presbyterian, he felt he was a little bit of an outsider at a Lutheran college, and so he didn't want to make any waves. So he supported chapel, [and] he supported questioning whether you were a Christian. I remember talking to Ted Baskerville about this, and Jim Pickering as well, and one of them said they didn't know whether to lie or not. [laughs] Bruce Boeneau, same thing. One of them said to me, "I just said, I'm just going to tell them what they want to hear, because it isn't important." But everybody's going to make their own answer. You had grown up in a Christian household and I don't think it was a terribly hard one for you.

Stewart: No, it wasn't.

Birkner: So you're telling me that you interviewed with Geyer. Geyer was impressed enough to want you to get the job. Gen. Paul looked at your credentials and thought they were good. But other than that, you didn't have any other direct connection to Gettysburg College before you came.

Stewart: No. I'd never seen it. Never been to Gettysburg, which is strange, because we traveled a lot when I was little. We took wonderful vacations.

Birkner: I want to ask you, Mary Margaret, did you get your job in part because a member of the English Department fell down the stairs and died?

Stewart: Yes. Yes. Freda Townsend.

Birkner: Tell me what you know about that. Here is a picture of her. [Hands her a photograph]

Stewart: All I knew was that a woman had died. It wasn't until after I got to campus —

Birkner: That you heard it was an English professor.

Stewart: Well, no, that I heard how she'd done it. She fell down stairs and died. It was terrible. Apparently she was a very good teacher and very popular teacher.

Birkner: I'd heard that too.

Stewart: I guess Dick must have talked to the people in the English Department about my credentials.

Birkner: I'm sure of that.

Stewart: Yeah. He went to see Gen. Paul because I guess you had to do this for the money. You'd go in to the president to see if you could pay to have me come to campus, and that's when Gen. Paul said —

Birkner: He said, "Forget that, just hire her." [laughter]

Stewart: "Just hire her," yeah.

Birkner: He didn't want to pay your way over to Gettysburg.

Stewart: That's right.

Birkner: That's pretty funny. So you had to obviously find a place to live and learn the ropes of what you were going to be teaching in the fall of '59. Tell me a little bit what you remember about the summer of '59 and how you were making that transition.

Stewart: Well, Dr. Geyer was very helpful and kind. My mother and I came down here just to look around and see it. It was a very hot day, and he invited us out to his house out by the car wash, that way.

Birkner: A little north of town.

Stewart: Yeah. Betty Geyer was charming to us. I had my dog with me and they of course liked dogs and the dog was welcome in their house, too. Then Dick volunteered to talk to some of the realtors and see if he could find a place for me, and he did. He found this apartment, and I got it from Bigham & Sites.

Birkner: I didn't realize that firm was that old, Bigham & Sites. You found an apartment on which corner?

Stewart: On the corner of Carlisle and Water. It was right across Water from the TKE House. I liked that. There was somebody up all the time over there. Swope's gas station was kitty-corner across from me, and that's where the state troopers

used to hang out at night, so I felt very safe, you know. It was a nice little apartment that had four rooms, living room, dining room, kitchen and bedroom. I used the living room as a study and the dining room as a living room.

Birkner: It was convenient to the college and to the town.

Stewart: Yeah. But I was there a very short time before Mr. Bigham and Mr. Sites visited me to tell me that they had sold this property and it was going to be torn down. Mrs. Bupp lived next door and her house was going to be torn down too, and that's where the Colonial Motel [was built].

Birkner: Did they offer to help you find another place?

Stewart: I can't remember. I found another place right away on North Stratton Street, right across from the Trinity Church.

Birkner: Right, I know where that is. You found a place to live. What were you given in terms of expectations? I assume you were facing a fairly heavy teaching load. Did you know what you were going to be teaching? Were you going to teach Comp and literature courses both? Do you remember any of that first year?

Stewart: Oh, that first year, yeah. Oh, it was a nightmare, because I taught four courses a semester. I taught two Comp and two Lit Found. Some of the stuff from Lit Found, I had never read.

Birkner: Because it went way back.

Stewart: Fortunately in college I'd had a course called Mythology. As textbooks, we used the Greek and Roman literature. So [I knew] some of that.

Birkner: You were teaching those basic courses. I once asked Jim Pickering what it was like teaching multiple sections of English Comp. He said to me, "It's like reading a bad novel written by a committee every week." [laughs] Which reminds me, before I get into some of this stuff in the classroom, let me ask you, what were your first impressions of some of the characters who were in the English Department when you arrived? There was Pickering and Baskerville and Lindeman and Kathryn Kressman Taylor and perhaps some others I don't remember.

Stewart: Dr. Mason.

Birkner: Francis Mason was still around. Tell me whatever comes to your mind about any of them.

Stewart: I found them all very intimidating. I didn't meet Ted, fortunately [at first]. [laughs] Ted and Mary were on sabbatical my first year, so I didn't meet Ted, who I think really would have intimidated me that first year. They were all very nice to me, very kind to me. The one who was the least warm was Kathryn Taylor. We never were close.

Birkner: Was that just a matter of chemistry, or do you think she didn't want another woman around?

Stewart: I have no idea. But we just never . . .

Birkner: You didn't click with her.

Stewart: No, I don't know why. I just didn't. Of course, Marie McLennand was there, there's a strange one, and Joe Wolfinger. He was odd, too. Don Lindeman. John Loose came the same year I did. He was more in the Lit Found thing. But what I found kind of a scary thing was [that] we had Lit Found staff meetings once a week, in the basement of the chapel.

Birkner: I understand that, and people would present what was going to be discussed in that particular class, right?

Stewart: Right, we would talk about it. But a lot of it, I thought at the time, was one-upmanship.

Birkner: Interesting. Whenever I hear these stories, I hear how warm and fuzzy it was, but you're suggesting it wasn't always that.

Stewart: Oh, no, I dreaded them.

Birkner: Really.

Stewart: I dreaded them.

Birkner: Were you afraid when you talked someone was going to pick on you?

Stewart: I was afraid they thought I was a dummy. I think a lot of them <u>did</u>.

Birkner: But you came out of a strong program and you had a good record.

Stewart: I know. But I didn't talk the ball game the way they did. In those Lit Found meetings, I'm not sure that I wouldn't have gotten much more out of it staying home and reading for an hour than being there. It was a strange group of people.

Birkner: You emphasize the strangeness. Tell me a little bit about the characters. You mentioned Wolfinger and McLennand. What made them a little off?

Stewart: Did you know them at all?

Birkner: Wolfinger died in '68, I think [actually 1967], and McLennand was denied tenure about 1970. So I never had either of them in class.

Stewart: Was she denied tenure?

Birkner: Yeah. I thought you had something to do with it.

Stewart: Huh-uh.

Birkner: Didn't she not have a Ph.D., and there was a to-do because students liked her? I remember I had a friend at the time who [campaigned for her], writing letters on her behalf and all, and I always heard through scuttlebutt that you were the one who had emphasized that a person needed to have a Ph.D. if they were going to get tenure in the English Department. You did that for the Roger Smith case too, didn't you? I thought you were holding up the standard that a place like Gettysburg College should have, at the minimum, Ph.D.'s as tenured faculty members.

Stewart: I did feel that way. But I don't know why, I always thought that Marie had tenure. What she didn't get was promotion.

Birkner: Well, she left.

Stewart: But not in '70.

Birkner: Yes, she did.

Stewart: OK, I thought it was after that. [McLennand taught English at Gettysburg College from 1955-1971. In reviewing the transcript Prof. Stewart observed that she believed McLennand had tenure but wanted promotion to Professor status, comparing herself to William Culp Darrah in the English Department, who lacked a terminal degree but who was a full professor. "I never wanted her terminated. I always knew she was good in the classroom but I had other misgivings about her."]

Birkner: In any event, I'm trying to get a character sketch of any of these people from you. Tell me what stood out about them. You mentioned this intimidation factor. What was Pickering like? [pause] You can be frank.

Stewart: I know. I know. I think the department, by and large when I first started, wasn't particularly welcoming to women. They were always good to me. I can't say that they weren't good to me, they were, but . . . Dick was a sexist, and he would say things that were embarrassing to candidates.

Birkner: Stuff you could never get away with today.

Stewart: Oh, no. Jim, I think, grew a lot. I think his attitudes and all changed. But both he and Ted were just very intimidating people.

Birkner: I've heard you say this before but I don't have a feel for it. Was it just the language that they used around you, or was it the way they behaved in department meetings? How did this get conveyed?

Stewart: Both, yeah, [and] a lot of it. You didn't want to be put down by one of those people. People in the department used to put down people. Marie McLennand and Don Lindeman used to go at it. We used to have a meeting to select the textbooks we were going to use. I remember a meeting at the Geyers' house. Jack Locher was there, and I was there, and Don Lindeman and Marie McLennand. Marie and Don were having an argument about something, and she put him down. It just wasn't pleasant to be around them. I was always so grateful that Jack was there. He was the only one that seemed sane and humane to me. [laughter] You know? One time she said to Don — and it was partly the way she said it, not just what she said — "Everybody knows you're younger than you look."

Birkner: That's kind of catty, isn't it?

Stewart: Oh! And it got him.

Birkner: What was he like? I never met him.

Stewart: Don? You didn't know Don?

Birkner: He was kind of a recluse by the time I was a college student.

Stewart: When I first came he had a following. He had a real following. The only other one in the department that I think had a following like that was Ted Baskerville. But I never felt that Ted encouraged a following. He didn't go out of his way. I think Don did. He wanted to be the "intellectual."

Birkner: [John] Loose was like that also.

Stewart: Oh, yeah, and the two of them taught a course together.

Birkner: They did. Thick as thieves. So it is interesting that they were two of a kind in that sense.

Stewart: Yeah, and they drank. Oh, my. Don Lindeman would come back from lunch — and this was later, this is when I was chair, which would've been in the '80s — and he'd almost knock me over.

Birkner: Was he like that in '59?

Stewart: No. Well, <u>everybody</u> drank too much then.

Birkner: Sort of straight out of <u>Virginia Woolf</u>, right?

Stewart: Right, it was. The parties were wild. They really were.

Birkner: Were you invited to them?

Stewart: Yes.

Birkner: Did you feel in any way out of sync because you were not married?

Stewart: No.

Birkner: That wasn't an issue?

Stewart: No. When I first came, Dick Davison — a nice young person — was in the English Department, and we dated. We went to a lot of these things together, and we chaperoned a lot, because the fraternity houses still had chaperones for their dances and stuff. I remember being with Dick over at the Phi Delt house particularly. I remember the Phi Delt house, and Phi Gam.

Birkner: What was it like being a chaperone?

Stewart: Well, it was kind of fun. People just sat around, they played cards, they danced.

Birkner: Did the students pay any attention to the chaperones?

Stewart: Well, we weren't much older than they were, Dick and I, at any rate.

Birkner: So you maybe fit in. You weren't like Dottie Bloom, you weren't older.

Stewart: No, we were the young ones, and I had just been at fraternity parties myself, and I'm sure Dick Davison had too. Dick turned out to be a really good scholar.

Birkner: Where did he go?

Stewart: He came here with just his master's, and then he went to, I think, the University of Washington, which was a very good school, in American Lit. Then he spent his career at Delaware. The Lochers kept up with him through the years, and I had a student once who was his daughter's best friend, which is nice.

Birkner: One of those "small world" things.

Stewart: Yeah. He was a nice, nice man.

Birkner: How long did he stay, just a couple of years?

Stewart: He was here just a couple years, yeah.

Birkner: I want to throw out an incident that happened and I'm curious to get your comment on, in regard to some of what we've been talking about. About 10 years ago, I sat on the Pennsylvania Humanities Council, and one of the other individuals on the council was an English literature professor at one of the state universities, a former teachers' college, out in the western part of the state. I struck up a conversation with her. She was a lively person, a bit older than me, and I asked her about her life. She says, "You know, I actually know your college campus a little bit." I said, "How's that?" She said, "Oh, I interviewed for a job. I was a Ph.D. student at Duke, and I thought pretty well of myself. I got an interview at Gettysburg College, and I'll tell you, it was one of the worst experiences of my life. It was like an old boys' club, and they just sniffed at me." This would've been in the

mid-to late Sixties. She said, "They just sniffed at me like I was a nothing. I looked at myself, and then subsequently looked at my record and compared it to what these guys did, and I've done a lot more than they ever did. But they acted as though I was really low-class. I've never forgotten it and never gotten over it." This was 35 years after the event. Of course, she was referring to Geyer and whomever else of the men she met. I'm sorry I can't tell you her name, but this exchange is vivid in my mind.

Stewart: What was her field, do you remember?

Birkner: She was English Lit. I'm just curious, does that ring any bells to you? Not her specific case, because you might have been on sabbatical or something at the time. But the environment where it was a boys' club?

Stewart: Oh, yeah. I think people walking in from the outside would see it as that.

Birkner: But what really struck me about it — and I have no reason to doubt her — is that she said, "They weren't as great as they thought they were. They acted like they were up here and I was down here, and they weren't that great." She wound up spending her career at a place that you would call lesser on the food chain. But a lot of good people don't necessarily wind up at the top places.

Stewart: That's true. That's true.

Birkner: It's all a matter of luck and circumstance. But I did want to get your reaction to that. You would say that that's plausible?

Stewart: Yeah, it is. It is.

Birkner: Let me follow that up with this. This is something I got out of an earlier interview that you did, and this I thought was one of the most interesting things that you said about your early years at Gettysburg College. You said you had to "steel" yourself sometimes to go to classes. "It was like a male locker room."

Stewart: Oh, yeah, that's true.

Birkner: Tell me about that.

Stewart: That's true. Those were the days we had a general literature requirement for students, so about the only time I saw non-majors was if I was teaching Lit Found, or if I was teaching Introduction to Literature, which was a short-story course. I never felt that way about Lit Found, because it seemed to me that for Lit Found the audience was a good mix of men and women. But for some reason, these 200-level Introductions to Literature were sometimes just men, and with a couple of women in it. But I actually would just sort of stand outside the door and bring myself up and walk in there. It was so male. So male. This campus was so male, you know? But I didn't find it [that way] in any except that one particular

course. They never were impolite, it wasn't any of that. It was just — I'd never sensed it before — a maleness. My grade school was split, my high school was split, [and] at Monmouth you had half-and-half. When I was in graduate school, there were a lot of us women. You never felt you were in a boys' club. But particularly when the guys were wearing their uniforms, [laughs] and you walk in and half the room would be army and half the room would be air force, you were just very much aware that you were with men.

Birkner: Were they willing to meet you halfway on the learning side of things?

Stewart: Oh, yes, they were very nice. One of the things I think that I always felt about Gettysburg students is that they are good people. Maybe one or two students were snarky and all, but most of them, they want to be nice, they're polite people, and they cooperate.

Birkner: The job market began to improve in the Sixties quite noticeably. You were young, you had ambitions. Did you ever think about leaving Gettysburg College?

Stewart: Yes, I did. But I think I was content here.

Birkner: So there was enough good that cemented you to the town and the college, and you had enough in the way of friendships and peer relationships that were rewarding, and enough [inside] the classroom that was rewarding.

Stewart: The school also got better and better, as you know, about supporting research, and supporting our going to conferences. It was kind of fun to be with an institution you thought was moving forward.

Birkner: I'm assuming you did not have much in the way of expectations thrust on you as far as publication before tenure. Is that correct? Geyer didn't say to you, "You have to publish two or three articles," did he?

Stewart: No. But I was promoted faster than most people.

Birkner: OK, and that was because you were publishing? So they were recognizing publication in that way?

Stewart: They were.

Birkner: What was your publication interest in? What were you doing your work in?

Stewart: It was mostly Boswell.

Birkner: Did you pull [out of] the dissertation for some articles?

Stewart: I pulled some things from the dissertation and some things that were beyond the dissertation. But my first article was in PMLA.

Birkner: Which is a big journal. Did you ever meet Frederick Pottle?

Stewart: Yes. He read my dissertation and made notes in it, and Daghlian said, "If you'll send me your copy, I'll send you the copy he made notes in."

Birkner: [laughs] So you have that to this day.

Stewart: Yeah. When I was working on my dissertation, I went to Yale. Boswell had written an autobiography for Rousseau, and this had never been published. Pottle was planning to use it as the very beginning of his first volume of Boswell's biography; that's a two-volume work. But he told Phil Daghlian that if I would come, I could read it, and I could use it in my dissertation, but not to publish it before he did. It was all word of mouth.

Birkner: How'd that work out?

Stewart: Fine.

Birkner: So you did Boswell work for the first couple of years, and that was sort of the basis for your early scholarly output and tenure. Were you getting any kind of "Way to go," "Nice job" kind of responses, or did people not talk about your successes?

Stewart: They didn't talk. I don't think we ever talked in the department about that.

Birkner: I don't get the sense that many people in the English Department were actually publishing.

Stewart: They weren't.

Birkner: I know that Geyer wasn't. I know that Pickering wasn't. Baskerville didn't even finish his dissertation until '67.

Stewart: Neither did Jim. Jim didn't finish his —

Birkner: Until much later. So they came up in the Fifties where it was sort of a different milieu, I understand that, and they were teaching very heavy loads.

Stewart: Yeah, they were, and they also went to Columbia, which was a very big — [laughs] Jim told me [about] when he went in to see his advisor [at Columbia]. Here's Jim, married, two kids. This man says to him, "Now you just need to take time off and read for two or three years." Now, what kind of help is that?

Birkner: It's oblivious to the real world.

Stewart: I know. Phil Daghlian used to tell us, "Your dissertation isn't to be a published book. It is to be the last exercise in a series of exercises." But Columbia . . .

Birkner: Of course, you realize that the profession has moved completely in the direction of Columbia.

Stewart: I know.

Birkner: Because of the imperatives of publication for getting a job, and the difficulties of getting a job without it.

Stewart: When I needed help in my [publishing], I went to Bill Darrah.

Birkner: In what sense did you need help?

Stewart: I submitted an article to Studies in English Literature, and they sent it back, and they had some suggestions. They were essentially accepting it, but they wanted —

Birkner: Right. "Revise and resubmit."

Stewart: Mm-hmm. I didn't agree. I didn't have anybody in the English Department [to talk to]. I was, from near the beginning, close to Jim, but I didn't talk to him about that stuff. So I went to Bill Darrah, and I said, "Bill, what should I do?" He said, "Look over what they say carefully, consider it carefully, and if you think they're wrong, you stay with your own [version]." I did that, and they published it.

Birkner: That's a good ending. That's a good story. It shows that he gave you good counsel.

Stewart: Yeah. He was wonderful.

Birkner: I've heard many good stories about him. I just got an article in the mail about a month ago from an alumnus from the class of '70, who wrote about his relationship with Bill Darrah and what a great impact Darrah made on him. He's a high school teacher, and he writes regularly for a magazine of photography, and of course Bill had been a pioneer with stereography. His comments about Darrah are flattering to Darrah, because he made such an impact on that young man, now a man who's older than me.

We're going to come to a close in a minute because I've been holding you for quite a while, and we can pick up the story in another interview.

[Description of future questioning not transcribed.]

Stewart: I'll try to get into words what I mean about how [my colleagues] intimidated me. I think part of it is that probably I'm never very sure of myself, although I probably act it. These intellectual people. That's the funny thing. I came from an intellectual home and all, but they didn't talk the way Ted and Jim did.

Birkner: What's also interesting is that your reputation in the department going back 45 years [to] when I was a student was of somebody who was both rigorous and exciting to study with. That's the best possible constellation of responses by students. It wasn't like you were somehow, "Oh, Pickering's hard, Mary Margaret's easy." That wasn't at all the storyline. I think what you're talking about is something you internalized.

Stewart: Yeah, it is. They always made me feel inferior.

Birkner: Did it ever get better?

Stewart: Oh, yes. It got better, of course, with Jim and Ted. The longer I knew Ted, the better I liked Ted, and he was so kind to me. He could be so kind, you know? I don't think people think of Ted as kind, but he really was. Now when I shared that office with Joe Wolfinger and Marie McLennand,

there's where I would really stand in front of the door and say, "I will not be depressed today. I will not be depressed." I didn't talk to Ted in a one-to-one sort of way, you know? When he was ready for sabbatical, he went in to talk to Geyer, and he said, "As soon as I go on sabbatical, you've got to move Mary Margaret down to my office, with Jim Pickering."

Birkner: Which was a kind thing to say. I really can't leave this hanging: What was it about Wolfinger and McLennand that made it hard for you to go into that office or [that made you] feel uncomfortable?

Stewart: Well, it was McLennand. [laughs] She [was always] just sort of overwhelmed, and she was always kind of on a downer. She was a professor that I can't stand, pulling out stories from her students about themselves. I don't think that's any of our business. That's not our business. Our desks were honestly as close as you and I are here. She was a good teacher. She really was. She was an excellent analyzer of literature, and she could make it very exciting for students. A lot of people analyze well but they can't make that interesting to students, but she could. But she'd kind of hover over you, you know. You'd think, "Oh, my God, what if somebody walks in this office." [laughs] Joe Wolfinger used to say that. He'd say, "Mary Margaret, she gets over me and I back up, she gets over me and I back up, and pretty soon I'm in the corner and

she's over me, and I think, 'Oh, my God, what if a student walks in?'" [laughs]

Birkner: Of course, a young faculty member, or whomever reads this, or someone in the future, wouldn't even understand how you could have three faculty members in the same office, right?

Stewart: I know, I know!

Birkner: I remember in '68, Ken Mott and Don Tannenbaum and Joseph Scheer all were in the same office, and in those days that's how it worked.

Stewart: When I started, I was in the office with the chair, Dick, and two other people. There were four of us where the elevator is now.

Birkner: It's hard to imagine.

Stewart: It is. It is.

END INTERVIEW