PHILIP KORTH

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Jeff Charnley,
interviewer

Charnley: Today is November 29, the year 2000. We're in Green Valley, Arizona. I'm Jeff Charnley, interviewing Dr. Philip Korth, for the MSU Oral History Project for the sesquicentennial of the institution, to be commemorated in the year 2005. As you can see, we've got our tape recorder today for this oral history, Dr. Korth. Do you give us permission to do this interview?

Korth: I certainly do.

Charnley: I'd like to start first with your personal and educational background, before you went to college. Where were you born and where did you grow up?

Korth: I was born in southern Minnesota, in Fairmont, Minnesota. We moved to another small town during the Second World War, and at the end of the war, '45, my dad got a job with 3M Company, and we moved to St. Paul. So I really grew up, insofar as I have ever grown up, in the Twin Cities, in St. Paul.

I went to the University of Minnesota, started briefly in engineering, and then left the university after one year, probably shortly ahead of an invitation to leave, and went in the Army for

three years, where I was trained and served as a linguist in the Czech language, was stationed in Germany, and returned to the university.

That was in 1958, I got out of the Army, returned to the university, still kind of wandering around, looking for a major, but finally decided on philosophy the last year I was there. Took all my philosophy courses for a major in one year, and as my wife says, permanently disordered my mind.

So that was 1961, I got a bachelor's degree, and I went to work for the American National Red Cross as an assistant field director. We trained at Fort Sill in Oklahoma, and then I was assigned down to Fort Bliss in El Paso, and I worked there for about a year, a year and a half.

I came home for Christmas vacation. A friend of mine was in graduate school. I'd never thought of going to graduate school. But he had a reasonable job, so I explored a job advising, and I would make almost as much money advising as I was making for the Red Cross. So I decided to apply for graduate school at the University of Minnesota in American studies.

I decided on that after talking to Mary Turpey [phonetic], who was certainly the heart and probably the soul of the American studies program at the University of Minnesota. I was still interested in going overseas, and that was partly what moved me in that direction. The Red Cross, of course, had military posts all over the world, but it was fairly clear that I was going to be in El Paso longer

than I wanted to be, and the American Studies program was an excellent preparation for the State Department.

So that was my thinking when I went to the university. I, of course, had taken very few American history courses and no American literature courses, so I had to audit some work to bring myself up to speed. So I began there in 1963, in the spring of 1963, and began advising in the College of Liberal Arts the next fall.

Charnley: Were you married at that time?

Korth: No, I wasn't. No, I wasn't. I met my wife that spring. I actually had known her since grade school, but we had gone separate paths. I ran into her at The Mixers, a local graduate bar just across the campus, and we were married in June of 1963.

I continued to think in terms of the Foreign Service, and made application. I took the tests and succeeded, did very well on the tests, and so there was an interview, which I did well in. Then they came around to the campus and did the background checks. I had been in the Army Security Agency when I was in the Army, so I had a top-secret clearance at that time, so it wasn't much of a background check.

One of the people they talked to was my advisor, historian, Hy Berman [phonetic], labor history at Minnesota, and he told them and subsequently told me that he hoped I wouldn't get the job because he thought that I should go into teaching. Well, that was really a new idea for me. Here I was, a master's degree in a brand-new

area that I had not studied as an undergraduate, and here's this fellow saying I should be a professor.

So I started thinking about that, and I still wasn't certain whether I wanted to do that, but it seemed like a nice option. He encouraged me to go on for a Ph.D. The State Department was not real happy with that, because I was on the verge of taking the physical for the appointment when I wrote them and said I had a continuing job as an advisor and I really wanted to complete a Ph.D.

The problem was, at that time you had to have your appointment before you were thirty-one, I believe, and I was approaching thirty-one, and that was really why I wrote the letter. They wrote back a real snippy letter, I thought, and said, "Well, if that's what you're going to do, forget it." I was really kind of annoyed, because up until that point, every single bit of correspondence was flattering and encouraging, and how I was a highly selected, valuable candidate for this job, and then here I get a letter that says "Buzz off." So then that kind of closed the door on the State Department, I decided.

So I went ahead and continued in my program, and then, lo and behold, I was just to turn thirty-one, and I got a phone call one morning from Washington. I said, "Yes, this is Phil Korth in Minneapolis." Well, it was the USIA, and they had a special program for highly recruited, selected candidates, and all of this stuff, and they could give me a reserve appointment in the USIA, if I would agree to join them after I got a Ph.D. I told them I was very pleased

to know that getting a Ph.D. did not disqualify me for the USIA. So I agreed, contingent upon that.

They made the appointment, and I accepted the appointment but I said I would have to make a decision once I got the Ph.D., and they accepted that. So the last year in graduate school, I was fairly comfortable, because I was assured of having a job when I got out. So that must have been in 1966 that they called. May have been the fall of 1966, yes.

So I had finished all my coursework that fall and was sorting around for a dissertation topic. Hy Berman had really been a powerful influence on a subject area. His specialty was labor history, and I decided first that I would try to do something in labor history.

The Industrial Workers of the World interested me. They'd had an organization in Minneapolis, the Agricultural Workers Organization, and I was hoping to find some records. There were some good general books done on the IWW already, but they had been raided during the Palmer raids and a lot of their records had disappeared, so it was kind of a scramble to try and find materials.

But in the course of looking over their record, what records I could find in Minnesota, I became more and more convinced this was not going to go anyplace. This was still boring. There just wasn't enough material to develop a dissertation. But one of the organizations I found, with whom they negotiated, was the Nonpartisan League of North Dakota.

Well, what was so interesting about that is that as a matter of philosophy and policy, the Industrial Workers of the World did

not negotiate with owners. The owners, in their ideas, were usurpers, had no legitimacy, and you don't sit down and negotiate with the devil. The IWW tactic was to declare what their demands were, and when the employer met the demands, they'd go back to work. So here they were, negotiating with this organization.

Well, the Nonpartisan League started to become interesting, and they had a lot of records. Minnesota Historical had all their newspapers, a lot of correspondence. Arthur Lesueur [phonetic], who was a prominent attorney in Minnesota, had been a major figure in the Nonpartisan League. I won't give you the whole history of my dissertation, but the materials were there. The Farmers Alliance materials were in Lincoln, so this was a lock.

So I had really started doing my research in probably November of 1966, and I took one trip to Lincoln, coordinated that with my daughter's birth, took my wife to the hospital in February, got on a plane and flew down to Lincoln, did about three days in the archives there, came back, picked up my wife and daughter from the hospital. The nurses were very cool to me, partly because my friends had come to visit her and they didn't know who the father was, and so here I showed up, you know, "You S.O.B."

Anyway, I finished my dissertation by early April, defended it in April, so I had graduated, I got the degree in June, so I wrote my dissertation in about four months, which kind of set a record in American studies at that time.

Charnley: I can imagine. So what year was it then you graduated?

Korth: '67. That spring, while I was finishing the dissertation, I, of course, started going around to the markets, and it was a very good year. There were several colleges and universities interested in me--Boston and Oregon State. It came down to Idaho State and Michigan State, and Idaho State was a history appointment. I didn't know much about Pocatello. I actually didn't know much about East Lansing, either, but Hy Berman, again, my mentor, had taught at MSU in the ATL department for a year or two, and he knew Ben Strandness [phonetic] quite well.

So I went down there to East Lansing for an interview. Ben Strandness was a crafty bugger. I stayed at Kellogg Center. I got there late in the day, and we had dinner and then he drove me around the campus at night, and here is this enormous campus, all lit up, obviously a world-class facility. He smooth-talked me and they made an offer before I left, and then I went back and here was an offer from Idaho State.

So my wife and I had several conversations about that, and I really wasn't certain that I wanted to be a professor, even then, but I knew that the State Department was off. I wasn't going to do that. We had two little kids. So we decided we'd go to East Lansing, and we'd give it three years and see if that's what we wanted to do. Well, the three years turned into thirty-two. So that's how I got to MSU. Ben Strandness was crucial in all of that.

Charnley: It sounds like Hy Berman was, too.

Korth: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. We're still in touch. He's still working, although I think he doesn't teach too much at Minnesota, but he's very active. He had a very strong political, left political background. He really made a home in Minneapolis. He was the guy who introduced me to the Minneapolis Teamsters strike, which, you know, I did an oral history and a book on that. He was an advisor to Hubert Humphrey and very active in the Iron Range studies, that [unclear]. That included oral histories. So he was a very fine man.

Charnley: Oral history wasn't part of your dissertation, though?

Korth: No.

Charnley: When you first got to Michigan State, what do you recall about some of your impressions when you first got here?

Korth: Well, one of the first things was going into a classroom with a spine that was alternately frozen and made out of jelly. I mean, it was not a comfortable thing to walk into a classroom. I had taught classes at Minnesota. I didn't teach a course, but I'd visited some American studies classes and made presentations. Of course, in graduate studies I'd made presentations on papers I'd written in literature courses and history courses and things of that sort. But walking in, knowing you had ten weeks, and it

met four times a week then, so you had forty sessions that you had to fill up with something that you hoped was halfway intelligent and interesting.

The course at that time was designed by a faculty committee in the department, so the texts were chosen, the array, the syllabus was written, so you just kind of had to follow the program that was already laid out. There wasn't the anxiety of "What am I going to do next?" so much, in the sense of what document I'm going to choose, but it was, "What am I going to do with all these people?"

I had pretty good training in Minnesota, I thought, but it wasn't as broad as was demanded in ATL. There were probably a third of the names in that syllabus that I had never heard about, so I had to scramble around to find out who in God's name these people were and what did that do that was significant, and how was I going to handle this in the classroom. So it was not comfortable.

Then, of course, when I got this first set of papers, I looked at them, "What the hell am I going to do with these?" So there was some sort of in-service training. Bob Wright, I think, was in charge of that, and it was useful. It helped ease some of the anxiety.

After the first quarter there, I still was not sure this is what I wanted to make a career out of. On the other hand, I couldn't have asked for a more creative and dynamic and supportive faculty in any institution I would have gone to. ATL, at that time, had, I think, about ninety, eighty to ninety faculty, all Ph.D.s, with an array of backgrounds and interests that was just stunning, from Al Thurman, whose major was speech, to Perry Ganakas, who was

interested in millenialism and the late nineteenth century, and Bruce Curtis, who at that time was working in nineteenth century interests, too. Bruce was my age, but Perry was significantly older, and Al Thurman was older.

So there was really a spread of people, and one of the most interesting parts of the day was kind of your coffee break mid-morning, because you'd go into the lounge and, my god, there would be conversations about everything. You could just kind of pick and choose. This was a University College thing, so mainly ATL people were in the lounge there, but there were people from humanities who'd come up and have their coffee there, too.

Bessey Hall was in lots of ways what a scholar would just love to have, a place to test ideas, to talk about the stuff you're teaching and learn different approaches from people in an informal way, which I think sticks better than a lot of the formal presentations you might have. The people, the faculty there, really began to be a very important part of what I was interested in.

Charnley: You mentioned Bruce Curtis. Were there any others that were a core, that ultimately became your friends and colleagues? Not that everybody didn't.

Korth: Right. Well, yes. Originally, there were five of us. I wasn't terribly confident about my own writing and scholarship, and I liked the idea of kind of peer discussion and editing. That's what it came to be called later. At that time you just got together

in a kind of bull session. I put together a group--Bruce Curtis, Jim McClintock, Reid Baird, and Herb--oh, his last name escapes me. He was only there briefly and then went back over to Grand Rapids.

But there were five of us, and anytime anybody had a paper they were going to deliver, an article they wanted, a chapter, whatever, anytime we'd written something, we'd meet at somebody's house, and everybody would get it ahead of time, and then we'd have a critique. It was relatively informal, over wine and cheese, usually. When some of us were still drinking a lot, it got kind of lively. But it was a wonderful way to learn the impact of what you'd written. It got pretty detailed at times. We got to discussing words, not just structures. So I think my writing improved significantly just because of that interaction, and they remain--you know, Jim and Bruce I count among my best friends today. Reid, of course, died. Herb went back to Galvin College. So that was kind of a core group. We were mutually supportive and helpful that way.

Charnley: How would you describe the mood on campus, the students, when you first arrived?

Korth: I got there the year after the Orange Horse. The Orange Horse was a sit-in, in Bessey Hall, in support of, I think, of three or four faculty, ATL faculty, who had been fired. Bob Fogerty, I met him, I knew him. He was a fairly nice guy, went on to Amherst, I believe. Then there were two others. I don't remember the names because I didn't really meet them.

The issue had been--well, I want to say style, but it was a little more than that. In the view of the department leadership, they were using inappropriate language, a lot of sexual references, things that were not so much politically controversial, but remember this is the sixties, and sexual liberation and all that. Ben Strandness and Bern [Bernard] Engel and some of the older guys in charge were pretty uncomfortable with that. Of course, it generated controversy. Kids would go home and tell their parents that this guy had used certain four-letter words in class, and it came back to the university.

John [A.] Hannah was still president at that time. If it came back to John Hannah, you know, it came down to the department. So there was some discomfort about them. They were untenured, so it was a matter of not renewing their contracts, and they were very popular teachers. This happened just after I had had my interview there, so I really didn't know too much about it.

The other thing that was in the wind was the Ramparts article on MSU's involvement in Vietnam, and training of GM's police. So there were several sort of controversies on campus that way when I got there. Of course, the war was grinding on in Vietnam. There was more and more concern about that and opposition to it being expressed around on campus.

There was also talk of collective bargaining for faculty, and of course my ears perked up for that, because labor history has been a major interest of mine. But I'm a new, wet-behind-the-ears assistant professor coming in on campus, and I'm still trying to

find my way around, you know, and not quite certain the way things worked.

Then I was elected--well, first I was chosen to be on the University College Symposium Committee. That was a big deal. We'd bring in well-known figures to discuss some particular topic, and this was to be in 1968. This was in spring of '68, I believe, so this happened really quickly after I got there.

I was appointed to this committee. We decided on a topic, the city, and we had Saul Alinsky. I insisted that he be one of them. Eric McKittrick [phonetic]. Some of these names escape me. One, an editor of the architectural magazine, and a theologian, to come in and talk about the city.

It was quite successful, and I was delighted to meet Saul Alinsky, who was just a wonderful person. Although when I met him, he had flown into Detroit, and he was expecting to stay overnight there. Well, his secretary had arranged with us that he would come to an informal session that night over at Justin Morrill [Hall]. So there was some communication mixup on their part. I didn't go down to meet him at the airport, but I was going to meet him when he got to Justin Morrill. So I came there and I had his itinerary.

[Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

Charnley: When the tape ended, we were talking about Saul Alinsky and his arrival on campus.

Korth: Right. This was in the evening, probably eight o'clock at night, and here's Alinsky coming in. He's expecting to have a nice, quiet evening in a motel, and here he is, meeting a bunch of students. I'm standing there with his itinerary in my hand, and I introduce myself and shook his hand, and he says, "What's that?"

I said, "Well, that's your itinerary."

He looks at it and says, "Jesus, when am I going to have time to take a piss?" [Laughter]

So I figured there was trouble in River City, and did my best to smooth it over and discovered what had happened, and apologized for not getting the communication right. But he turned out to be just a terrific person. I was at several gatherings with him and of course I was most interested in hearing him.

It was a very successful symposium. Hannah was at one of the lunches, which just tickled Ed Carlin [phonetic] beyond belief. Alinsky and Hannah had served on the--I think it was the Civil Rights Commission. So that was a wonderful thing. So I felt engaged right away, not only in the classroom, with some help and terror, but engaged in what was going on in the university, and certainly in the college and in the university.

Then I was elected right away to the Department Advisory Council, and I still don't know why. I was brand new there, and as I recall, this was a general election. I don't know if they had by ranks or not, but at any rate, so then I became more engaged in the department, with the activities of the department and the management of the department. So the first year was really kind of an active year.

In the spring of '68, again, there were some meetings about unions for faculty. I recall one, a University College group, and Keith Grody [phonetic] was, at that time, an assistant professor over in labor and industrial relations, and he was there as kind of an expert. After discussions, I made the comment that I didn't that there was anything to lose in trying to organize, and his comment was, that was the way he looked at it, too.

Well, what's interesting about that is that Keith Grody was then hired by the university to defeat the organizing campaign. The first attempt, I think--do you want me to go through kind of the organizing stuff?

Charnley: Yes.

Korth: The first attempt really started, I think, in '69, it must have been '69, and the attempt, at first, to identify the University College as a bargaining unit, distinct from the rest of the university, and that didn't go anywhere. I think Mary Tompkins [phonetic] and Gladys Beckwith were the major forces in that. I didn't have much to do with that.

But then through '69, there were meetings. One of the moving colleges was the College of Education, in that particular movement. I remember John Seare [phonetic] was president. I would go to the meetings, but I really wasn't in a position, I didn't think, to take a very active role.

Then in 1970, while they were trying to collect cards and all, I went over to James Madison College. At that time the writing program in James Madison was staffed by ATL, and we had, I think, three people over there, teaching a special social science oriented curriculum.

Let me back up a little bit, because the other thing that was happening in 1969 was a great deal of resistance to the common syllabus. They were hiring in a bunch of young hotshot Ph.D.s from all over. We were hiring eight to ten people a year, and some of the people that came in, like Kate [Kathleen K.] Rout, Maise Laselle [phonetic], who are still here now, came in that year.

About a year later, Dick Thomas came in, and several more who finally left ATL, who really wanted, I think, to get into graduate teaching and went on to Carbondale and out to Evergreen College and Washington, D.C. College. So there was a lot of discussion about the curriculum at that time, and the first part of that movement was to, if not eliminate the common final examination, at least to add some writing to it, where the students would have to actually go in and write an essay.

Charnley: Was it multiple choice prior to that?

Korth: Yes. It was almost entirely a subject matter common final examination, in the auditorium. Part of your job was to monitor that. Well, hell, it was very difficult to monitor. Somebody could

come in and take the test for somebody else, although there were attempts to monitor. It wasn't just open.

But at any rate, people were taking writing more seriously, I think, and that was a growing movement in the department, a growing concern in the department. Then, of course, with that growing emphasis or interest in evaluating writing at the end of the course, there was also more interest in what was going on in terms of writing in the course. So there were a lot of discussions about that.

Then of course, as I say, there were a lot of people who had a divergence of interests in terms of the subject matter, so there was a movement to develop the track system with different subject matter focuses. All of this kind of the turmoil of late '68, '69, '69 to '70. Of course, there were dire predictions that the college would be eliminated, that all coherence would break down, and of course, these predictions were coming largely from the older faculty. Change is often uncomfortable.

But interestingly, the movement for this change prevailed. I remember Milt [Milton] Powell being very important in that. I guess the motto was to offer choices to the students instead of having a lockstep curriculum that everybody had to take, offer the students some choice in subject matter.

Well, one of the first ones was the "American Radical Thought," which I taught in spring of 1970. It took that length of time to get the curricular change through that way. I don't remember what the other ones were. I was just interested in that one. Of course,

there's the turmoil out in the streets and out in the country during this time.

It must have been maybe a month into the course, May of 1970, I'm teaching "American Radical Thought," and I'm in the classroom and the fire alarm goes off. We go out and the streets are filled. This was the shooting at Kent State [University], and the students are protesting and a lot of faculty. I went out and joined and we marched down Farm Lane and around Shaw Lane. There was just all sorts of--just turmoil.

I, in a sense, turned the course into a practicum at that point, and met with the students and we decided how we were going about handling this. I thought this would be pretty good subject matter. Here was a kind of incipient revolution in process, and they were supposed to report and write about what was going on and why it was going on and who was doing what, and all that, which, actually, I thought was pretty creative. I didn't just cancel class as several faculty did.

There were faculty meetings, good Lord, all over. Norm [Norman] Pollack surfaced. I, of course, had known him, had known his name. I had not met him. I had known his name because he had written about the populists. He was among the group. Bill Durman [phonetic]. There were others who were quite active in trying to draft a statement about the war in Vietnam and the responsibility of citizens and the role of faculty and the students and all of that.

So that was the student strike during the spring of 1970. I think Walter Adams was president at that point. I disremember that. I'm not quite certain. I think he was. It may have been.

Charnley: He was interim, and then followed by [Clifton R.] Wharton [Jr.].

Korth: Yes, he was interim between Hannah and Wharton. So he must have been president at that point, and handled it actually fairly well. Then that fall, I went over to James Madison College, fall of 1970. So that's part of the sort of track movement then. The reason I backed up was to explain that Madison had its own social science focus for the writing program there that had been accepted because of what was happening in ATL, generally.

So, 1970. I'll try not to go hour by hour here, Jeff.

Charnley: No, it's fine. I'm glad you remember it in detail.

Korth: But 1970, then, of course, I had my hair down over my shoulders and grew a beard. Since I'd come clean-shaven and in a crewcut, that was quite a change. James Madison was a very lively place. Very young faculty, quite supportive. A little elitist, I thought, but it was a good place to teach, and the students, of course, were terrific. Anytime you have students making choices of a program like that, I think you start with engagement, and so they were very nice to work with. Did the work, capable. Some of them picked up on the radical side. I think of John Royal [phonetic], who was very

active in SDS [Students for Democratic Society], and he was ultimately, I think, arrested and charged for obstructing ROTC. I can maybe come back to that, because I got involved that. And Meg Beagle [phonetic], who was active in SDS, she was one of the students I hired for the Auto Light research. There were several very good.

One of them who was one of the students I had a lot of contact with because he was quite torn by what was going on in Vietnam and what his responsibilities were, and whether he should go to Canada or whether he should just resist, I became a kind of informal counselor for some of the students that way. He surfaced about three or four years ago, and is on the staff of the National Security Advisory Council in D.C. When I say "surfaced" it was because he was interviewed for the alumni magazine and he remembered me and I certainly remembered him.

I held office hours at night. We'd have students over to the house. It was a very nice teaching situation. In the midst of it, near the end of it, then the first collective bargaining election was held. I was out of the department, yet in the department. It was a very strange situation, because I stayed on the advisory council, was elected to the advisory council, while I was teaching over in James Madison College. I was very engaged in the teaching and everything over there, so I really didn't play much of a role in that first election in 1972. That seemed, to me, to have a very heavy NEA presence.

Can we take a brief break here? [Tape recorder turned off.]

Charnley: We were talking about the first unionization effort in 1972.

Korth: Yes. I don't have many distinct memories of it, because I was not very actively involved. I was so busy in Madison. I was supportive and signed the cards. I didn't play much of a leadership role.

Charnley: Who was in leadership in that first movement?

Korth: I think that was when John Seare--I know Gladys and Mary Tompkins were quite active then. I think John [H.] Ferres was active, out of our department. Who the university-wide figures were at that time I don't really remember, but the election occurred, and it ran against organizing. I don't remember the vote but probably six or seven hundred votes for collective bargaining, all total. Then that just kind of went on a back burner.

There was still some interest. The Faculty Associates, which was affiliated with the Michigan Education Association, continued to exist. The AAUP, of course, had been around on campus for a long time. They were quite cool to collective bargaining. I was a member of AAUP and a member of Faculty Associates at the same time. The dues for Faculty Associates were very low.

The AAUP was really quite centrist about everything on campus. The free speech issues, the Garskov [phonetic] case, you know, I

thought they might have handled a little better. He was the fellow in psychology who gave blanket As. It was that kind of a time, though, where people did strange things. With the war in the background, the so-called liberation, you know, sexual liberation and all this, it was a time of some turmoil, but the faculty who were interested in collective bargaining, interesting to me, were quite focused on the campus and on the way decisions were made on campus.

There was the faculty governance, and I always thought it was very interesting. Words are often interesting, and "governance" is one of those interesting words. It's clearly short of "government." What it means is not altogether clear. That is, if you think in terms of power, and that is, power, who has the power to make a decision, the power to act, the power to determine the ways things will go, it was clear to me that the governance system did not have any of those powers. It was advisory in many ways. In most ways, it had the power perhaps to embarrass the administration. I was never really interested in running for university-wide offices, partly because it just didn't seem to be a very effective use of time.

To give AAUP credit, there were several members of the AAUP who were also concerned about this weakness in governance. This had come out of the John Hannah, period and John was a very strong president. The governance might be something like his kitchen cabinet, I would imagine, but he certainly felt free to accept or reject any advice that came his way.

There were some movements, though, in governance, at that time, to try and strengthen the hand of governance, and part of that movement, of course, was in response to the threat of collective bargaining, and so they tried to identify things that were absolutely the prerogative of the faculty and that the administration would have a great deal of difficulty overturning faculty action. It wasn't impossible, but it was difficult, so there were some revisions made in the tenure system, I think, first, and that was strengthened. There were some hearing panels set up, etc.

The other area of faculty determination was curriculum. I think the power of faculty in those areas was strengthened during this period, and, as I say, partly as a response to collective bargaining. Collective bargaining wasn't such a way-out idea on campus, and certainly not in Michigan, with its long union tradition. But Central Michigan had organized by that time. They were organized before the campaign at MSU. I'd say they must have organized in '67 or '68.

Charnley: I was there then, as a student.

Korth: So there was a union in place there that was working, and there was a movement nationally at that time. There weren't many major institutions that had chosen collective bargaining, but there were elections around--the California system and Rutgers. I don't remember all of them at the time. Of course, on campus it was viewed as a pretty damn radical idea.

I don't remember exactly when, but a year or two after the election, so it must have been maybe '74 or something like that, maybe '75, yes, it must have been '75, I was approached. I was doing fairly well then. I'd received a grant from Rockefeller for the summer of '73 and the summer of '74 to do research, first on the Auto Light strike in Toledo, second on the Minneapolis Teamsters strike. These were oral history-based projects. I'd hired two students from James Madison, Claude Zansky [phonetic] and Meg Beagle, to go down to Auto Light. We rented a place there and really got into the community and did several really good interviews with the important people, and that resulted in a manuscript and then a book.

Then in the summer of '74, I went to Minneapolis and hired two more James Madison students, Bill Fishman, whose father was the political head of the UAW in the state, although that didn't determine why I chose him. He was just very good. And Janet Zepolsky [phonetic], who was another student, and we went to Minneapolis and rented a place there and conducted interviews in Minneapolis.

And I was publishing some things. I guess my level of confidence was high enough that I--and by then I guess I had decided that maybe the academic life was a good life after all, which, in a way, makes it curious why I would begin to risk it, but I did. Mary Tompkins and Gladys Beckwith approached me, to recruit me to be the president of the Faculty Associates, which I thought over, and then I agreed to do, with in mind bringing about another and, hopefully, a more successful election.

That must have been about '75 or '76, because shortly after, we began circulating cards again for another election, and that time, as president of the Faculty Associates, I was, of course, there on the cusp, and I would write my Tom Paine letters, you know, points of view, and try to recruit people to work out in the faculty community, to see if we couldn't get enough support to bring about an election and, hopefully, then to win the election.

It was an interesting process, partly because of the way the campus divided on this issue. I think, except for James Madison College, which was quite small, if you kind of do a line south of the Red Cedar and north of the Red Cedar, that would kind of divide the support and the hostility--not just opposition, but hostility--to collective bargaining. That is, the sciences, the ag school, all of those groups were really quite hostile to collective bargaining. At this point I have to include the College of Education as well, although there were still strong supporters there. But things had changed, and so the demographics of teaching in the state, this was when they were beginning to talk about the plethora of education students and no jobs.

The MEA had gotten into a kind of quota discussion, and MSU was--of course, Central Michigan, which produced teachers, was an affiliate of the MEA, so there were charges that they were receiving favored treatment. But enrollment was dropping off in the College of Education, and, of course, that meant jobs and etc., so there was a lot of anxiety and a lot of hostility to MEA. Even those who

might support collective bargaining were hostile to MEA, because they felt, I suppose, betrayed by MEA.

[Begin Tape 2, Side 1]

Charnley: This is tape two.

When the last tape ended, we were talking about collective bargaining at Michigan State.

Korth: Yes. So I went over to the College of Education, at their invitation, to talk about collective bargaining and about Faculty Associates and MEA. I walked into the room and it was very cool, and I said, "Well, I sort of feel like Daniel." Then this voice in the back of the room said, "Jonah." [Laughter]

What was very interesting about organizing, or trying to organize faculty, is that largely it was very civil. There were no shouting matches, no fisticuffs. We were all intellectuals, and faculty tend to intellectualize everything, and so however deep the feelings were, and there were some deep feelings, it was tense, you know, when I would go around to the less than friendly areas, but they were never rude or nasty.

But to give you a sense of how intense some of those feelings were, when I retired, I was looking through the booklet, little blurbs, 250 words on each retiree, and there was a fellow retiring the same year I did, who listed as his most significant contribution to Michigan State "the defeat of the faculty union effort." He was

out of mathematics. I thought, wow, what a legacy. That's your career?

I remember meeting over in physics, where Loren Beeber [phonetic], who was very active and one of the most active in opposition to the union movement, was a biochemist, was there. And again, it was all very civil. You know, hard questions, hard answers. I mention Loren because he became a hunting buddy of mine later on when I formed a Ducks Unlimited chapter here. It turns out he's a duck hunter. Of course, duck hunting transcends everything. You don't have to worry about politics when you're duck hunting.

We put together a really modest organization. I don't think Faculty Associates ever had even a hundred members, but we had some very active people, some very articulate people, and MEA didn't press us on any of these campaigns to do one thing or another. That was one of the nice things about working with MEA. They allowed us to run the campaign as we thought fit. They would give us some advice occasionally, but they were bankrolling a lot of this, too. This was MEA.

There were no national people who came in on that election, and I thought, and argued, that the heavy presence of MEA and NEA people on campus in the previous election had been a mistake, because it certainly looked like something external to the campus was happening. So we limited their role to advisory, we had meetings at MEA headquarters, that sort of thing.

These were always modestly attended meetings. It was, in a sense, you know, trying to lead a movement like this that was, quote,

a "mass movement" and it's a little discouraging when you call a meeting and you've got about thirty people there. But I figured, I kept thinking about John Adams, you know. A third of the people supported the revolution and a third opposed it and a third didn't give a damn, and I figured that's just the way it was going to be. So anyway, you work with what you have, and there were some very good people.

Charnley: What were some of the issues?

Korth: Well, one was faculty protection, a grievance procedure. In response to the initial union effort, governance did develop a grievance procedure and it was largely still advisory. Mike Harrison was the administrator, the faculty grievance official. I became engaged in one case there, as counsel, for a fellow over in sociology. I won't mention his name because, well, it's not necessary, and it still is kind of a private thing, I guess. But [Clarence] Winder was the dean of the college at that time, and this fellow, I think, very clearly had been discriminated against, and that discrimination had been made public when White and Bob Repas had published the faculty salary list, and that was kind of a--it wasn't a bombshell, but there was an explosion on campus when people saw what had happened not only to individuals, but what was happening from department to department, college to college. I mean, the inequities in salary were dramatic.

Of course, salary was always behind part of the movement for collective bargaining. I remember one guy coming in and saying, "Damn it, my wife, who teaches eighth grade, is making more money than I am," and you'd hear this. And the response was, "Damn it, your wife's in a union." So, just allocation of resources in a general way were always behind us, and faculty salaries were not keeping up. That was probably an underlying issue all along.

Charnley: Were benefits or retirement an issue then?

Korth: No, retirement was never really an issue. The TIA-CREF system, and I can tell you from my personal experience right now, is a wonderful system. There was never any question about that. In the second election, and I'll come to that, there were some other issues on benefits. But the grievance procedure was an issue and there were some fairly high-profile cases. I don't remember them all. You can probably check them.

We had this grievance in the sociology department and worked it through. I think I must have found every contradiction and flaw in the grievance procedure, because I think the department supported the chair and I then appealed it to the college and the college committee asked to be dissolved because they could not resolve the contradictions.

Winder then said, "Well, why don't you guys just go to lunch and figure this out." So we went to lunch and, as it turned out, I was not to have been invited to the lunch, but the guy whose grievance

we had prosecuted insisted that I come, and it probably was a good thing I did, because they were cool when they saw I was there, but we were having lunch, and then this friend of mine started making some proposals that were a little bit off the wall and they were beginning to get upset, the chair and all, because they interpreted this as attacks on their integrity. You know how that stuff goes. It can get pretty heated.

Charnley: Escalates.

Korth: I managed to calm him down a little bit, but that didn't go anywhere. That was an extra grievance procedure. Then finally, Winder had him in and talked to him individually, personally, and they worked out a salary settlement, and so it was a successful prosecution. But, boy, it really opened my eyes to the grievance procedure, and I refused after that, ever, because that took an enormous amount of time.

Yes, it worked in his favor, but it worked in his favor not because it was a grievance procedure. He could have done that just at the outset, and that was the way a lot of what happened at MSU was done. You'd go in and make an individual appeal to an administrator, and the administrator might help you out in some fashion. It was a very paternalistic kind of system.

We started going through this process, and then the AAUP began to see that they'd better get involved, too, and so they were not going to circulate cards, but they were preparing to enter, if we

were successful in getting the 30 percent, that they were preparing to be put on the ballot, too. All they needed was 10 percent.

Zolten Francy [phonetic] was the president of AAUP at that time, and I went over, he invited me over to an AAUP meeting, and it was a big meeting. They must have had forty people. [Laughter] I made a pitch for unity, saying, "Look, there's precedent. Out in California, the Education Association and the AAUP got together in a coalition, and put together a bargaining unit," and all this stuff.

Then Zolten and I went up to John Cantlon, together, to see if we couldn't get office space, and John was very clear about this. He says, "Well, you could probably find a room for the AAUP," but he'd never find a room for the MEA. So that kind of was stillborn. Zolten had the integrity of saying, "Well, no, we're not going to accept this kind of privileged relationship."

But John, he was adamant, and he made statements in the campaign that I thought were going to help us, that were quite clearly anti-union and probably could have been grounds for unfair labor practice if we had been closer in the result. But Keith Grody then was very firmly ensconced. He was handling the labor negotiations for the university and handled the campaign, and he's a skilled man. I don't like his ethics, but he certainly is skilled.

We got our 30 thirty percent of what we thought was the faculty, and the cards, submitted them. He submitted a list of about a thousand more than we thought were on the list, so we didn't have 30 percent according to his list. Well, that's the way this game is played. Then you have to define the unit, who you're talking

about, after this sort of shenanigans. We challenged the list that he had submitted, etc., and you get into some sort of legal maneuverings as to who is in and who is out. We met, and of course, by then Winder was the provost and we're getting close to 1978, which is a memorable year. I met with him, had an MEA rep with me, and met with Winder. Who was the attorney? A long-time attorney for the university, Republican attorney.

Charnley: Carr?

Korth: Yes. Lee Carr. Lee Carr, Lee Winder, Lee, Lee. We met off campus to talk about the composition of the bargaining unit and to see if we could come to some agreements on some of these issues before, rather than go through the whole process. And we did. It was amicable.

I'm trying to remember the timing on this. The election was in '78 and I don't recall now whether the dissolution of University College preceded that election or not. I do remember the result of the election, which was very close to what it had been in 1972. There were about eight hundred votes, split between MEA and AAUP, for collective bargaining.

We had attempted to cut the medical school out, because that's happened at several institutions. They were quite opposed. There was no point in having them in. They all had their own deals anyhow. We had hearings on that. That went to formal hearings with a judge and we were not successful in excluding them.

We were going to appeal that decision and so we did challenge the ballots from the medical school. At the polling place is where we had to do the challenge. One physician from the medical school, he was ready to duke it out with us over that. "What do you mean? I'll challenge your rights. You can't challenge the ballots."

But there was a referee there and he explained that all that meant was he would be able to vote, they'd be set aside until the determination was made on our appeal, about whether that medical unit would be in or out. But it was very clear, as I sat over there in that polling place, it was in Dem [Demonstration] Hall.

By then I began to recognize quite a few people on campus. Here would come the whole horticulture department. I mean, it would look like the chair had rounded them all up and said, "You will go and vote." But they'd come in in clusters, and I'd look at them and say, "There's fifteen no votes right there."

I really got an interesting sense about the campus in that election. The supportive groups tended to be the teachers, so the College of Arts and Letters was one of the strongest colleges. Despite their problems with MEA, College of Education, there were long traditions of organizing and so there was some strength there.

Social Science varied. They tended to be more AAUP, but there was strong support there. Comm Arts was kind of mixed. Natural Science, you had to press to find somebody who was really enthusiastic. There was some support there. A lot of the support was probably explained more in terms of personal histories. When you get into the medical school, or maybe they came from working-class

families, who were not threatened by the idea of a union. They knew a little bit more about what a union was. There was a greater sense of commonality, I think, in the College of Arts and Letters, a common plight.

You get off into the sciences and the research faculty, many of whom are in science, and their identification with MSU was really not primary. Their identification was with the funding agency, and the PIs, they're the principal investigators, the money, yes, it came to MSU, but it came to MSU contingent on the PI being there. So these guys, if they went to another institution, they could take their grants with them. That may be a little simplification. I characterized them as sort of the last bastion of entrepreneurial interests on campus, because they really were operating in their own labs, their own little world, with their own funding, and what was in it for them for a union?

Even the system of evaluation in the colleges, in the sciences, led off campus, as your promotion or raise determinations frequently required testimonials external to MSU, and a letter of recommendation from somebody in the field saying he's doing quality research. So there's a whole network out there in the science areas that's national and not parochial to a university. When they get their grants, they are evaluated by peers in the field, in the country, or in the world sometimes. I understood it was a little better later, when some of my close friends, who were in the sciences, that I hunt with or fish with, we'd talk about the granting process and their evaluation processes. It became clear to me that they were voting their

interests just as clearly as the people who were north of the river were voting theirs.

The way salary determinations or promotions are determined, the College of Arts and Letters are fairly uniform through that college. If you look where the leadership of the union movements on campus, and I say movements because AAUP became more active later, they were from social sciences and humanities, certainly more than natural sciences. The most active one from the natural sciences I can think of AAUP was Jack Bass, who was a physicist and, I think, a New Yorker, and had a more liberal background than some others might have.

Charnley: Was there anyone in ag that worked with you? Ag econ?

Korth: Well, AAUP had some in ag econ. Colette Mosier [phonetic] was the president of AAUP, I think, or I think she was. In terms of active participation, I mean, the centurions, the one hundred that we might have had beating bushes, we really didn't have anybody in the sciences and in ag. There were people, individuals, who were supportive, and I understand fully they did not really want to be visible. There were some consequences to being--

Charnley: Did you have tenure at the time?

Korth: Yes, I did have tenure. I didn't have tenure in the first one. I did have tenure in the first one, because I was promoted

very quickly. I was promoted in three years, to associate professor. But then I think it must have taken between six and eight years to get to associate professor, during which time I'd gotten these Rockefeller grants and I'd published stuff. Bern Engel, in one of his more roundabout ways, as a matter of fact, let me know that I should be doing more time, spend my energies more on publishing than on other activities.

When they turned it down, I think at one time I decided, well, they had made me uncomfortable. They're going to be uncomfortable. So I didn't file a grievance, but I went, individually, I went to Bern and he kind of kicked it up and said, "Well, I didn't really make this decision."

So then I went to Ed Carlin, who was the dean. Well, he didn't want to be the guy--see, by then, I was so visible. I'd been writing stuff. He didn't really want to be the fall guy, either. They were a little afraid that MEA would come in behind me, that this was preliminary to a lawsuit, which it never was, in my mind. Then I went to Lee [Lawrence L.] Boger, who was the provost at that time. He followed Cantlon. He said, "Well, these decisions are made down below." [Laughter]

Charnley: Or somewhere in between.

Korth: So there was a crack someplace, but then I let it go at that. I could see this was not going to be worth pursuing. If they went on for ten years and everybody else was getting promoted, then I

might have a suit. I never did think of collective bargaining very personally, anyhow. I thought of it always as a system. There weren't any devils. We were looking for devils, because that's how you organize. If you can find some S.O.B. out there, and we thought we had. We thought we had in the third election, because that was '81-'82, that was that campaign, and that was the crisis on campus, the financial crisis on campus, you know, when they were going to eliminate colleges, the nursing program, Lyman Briggs [phonetic]. Who else was on the line? Oh, there were half a dozen.

They appointed a blue ribbon committee of--what did they call it? I think it might have been Committee of Assessment or something like that. It was UCA. I, of course, wrote another Tom Paine letter about the University Committee of Assassins. [Laughter] I turned up the rhetoric a little bit on that one, and it was shameless. A good friend of mine was on that committee, too, and I told him, "Jesus, what are you doing?"

And that's where I saw some really awful things happen, in those meetings with the trustees. This could go on forever. But in that campaign, I was not the president anymore. Bill [William L.] Ewens from sociology was the president.

I took on a particular task. The life insurance program at MSU had gotten into trouble, and they were going to raise rates. So Bob Repas, who kind of has a nose for good stuff like this, Bob Repas kind of pulled me aside and said, "We ought to look at this. There's something going on here." And we did. I learned more about

life insurance than I ever want to know. To melt it down, what had happened was that the university had established--

[Begin Tape 2, Side 2]

Charnley: We were talking about the 1981-'82 election.

Korth: Yes, and so I got onto the life insurance program, and it was an experience-based program. What that meant was, the university would just pass the money through. The university would collect the money from the faculty who enrolled and pass that on to the insurance company, which built up a fund to pay off claims based on the experience.

Well, faculty are crusty old birds who last forever. This fund was getting enormous, because there were no claims, but it was faculty money paid. It was not university contribution. So after the election in '78, the Faculty Affairs Committee raised the benefits without changing the premium. It was announced by Keith Grody, in his office, as an improvement in benefits sponsored by the university. It was a flat lie.

So we got all the information on this hummer, put together a package, met with the trustees. [Elizabeth P.] Howe and [John B.] Bruff were trustees at that time, and we had a public meeting and we laid out what had happened and how the faculty had been conned on this. Keith said, well, it had been a misnomer. It was a very good meeting with the trustees, and they said, "Well, we understand

what you're saying. We recognize what happened. Where do we go from here?"

And we said, "Well, you've got to put it out in bits." Well, they didn't like that. Keith didn't like that. Because they have their--you know, I understand, they have their relationships with the existing companies that are familiar with them, comfortable with them. Why change? They really wouldn't have had to change, except that they'd mucked it up so badly, and they knew it when they did it, because Gary Stolick [phonetic], from the business school, told them, said, "If you do this, you're going to bankrupt that fund."

So at any rate, so we had this enormous meeting. Well, it wasn't just faculty that we were in this. This was a big meeting. We were over in Miles. What's that office building where Grody is?

Charnley: Manly Miles.

Korth: Manly Miles. We were over there. And the unions were there, because they were affected by all this, too. The CT union, all of the operating engineers, everybody was there. They brought in this consultant and he started blowing smoke about all the complexities of all of this. I interrupted him, I said, "How do you write up a bid?"

So he went on and he explained how to write up a bid. I said, "You mean it's easy?" and he said yes. Then we got a bid on the life insurance policy, so we had the two dimensions to it. That

took an enormous amount of time, learning things I didn't care to learn.

Bob Repas was great in this, MEA was helpful in this, trying to explain some of this to us, and so that became what we thought was a big issue, and they clearly had manipulated this and had not acted in the best interests of the faculty.

Then at the same time we have the dissolution, or threatened dissolution, of colleges, and I thought, "Boy, this is going to be, you know, if we can't make it now, with [M.] Cecil Mackey [phonetic] there," who was kind of a cold fish. That characterization came to me from one of the trustees. That's the way he was seen.

The AAUP decided also at this point that the time was right, so they really became active in organizing a campaign, and, in fact, took the lead and we decided if they can get their 30 percent, fine, let them get 30 percent, and with our 10 percent we'll get on the ballot as well. They collected their cards and they announced how many cards they'd collected--800, 900, something like that. And lo and behold, Keith Grody came up with a list that was big enough so they didn't have 30 percent.

I saw Roy Matthews, who was very strong AAUP, right after that, and when we had been in that position, his comment to me was, "Can't you guys count?" So I was able to throw that one back at him, and he couldn't figure out how that happened. I said, "Well, you told them how many people to put on the list."

I thought that was a good campaign. Bill Ewens was a great job, I thought. But what hurt the--not the union effort. The union

effort was about the same, resulted in about the same. What hurt MEA--we wound up with the smaller portion this time--what hurt us was the AAUP assertion that if you wanted a union on campus, you had to vote for AAUP because the Faculty Associates people, in the end, felt stronger about a union than about the association, and in the runoff election, they would vote for AAUP rather than no.

On the other hand, the AAUP people felt stronger about AAUP than they did about union, and if Faculty Associates was in the runoff, AAUP people would not vote for them, and the union effort would fail. It wasn't inaccurate. I thought it was dirty.

At any rate, it was moot. If you look back over all three of those elections, I don't remember the numbers from the '72 election, but I'm confident they are the same, that there were about in the neighborhood of eight to nine hundred people who voted for union in each of these elections, which was, in fact, about 30 percent of the faculty. It was better than 30 percent of those who voted, in each case, but never enough to get to the 50 percent that would be needed to run off against. So, really, that last one, the circumstances were such that if it was going to happen, it was going to happen then, and that really ended the movement for a union on campus.

But the consequences, I think, of the union movement are still around on campus. I think the procedures are more open, the grievance procedure is markedly improved, the salary lists are published now. You know what's going on. The criteria for promotion and tenure are more clearly articulated. I think the tenure system has been

strengthened, faculty control over curriculum. I would say all those elements have been improved or strengthened because there was a union movement.

Zolten used to say, I suppose what every election winner would say, he'd look at the programs that were enacted afterwards and say, "Well, those were our programs. Who won the election? They may be sitting in the office, but who won the election?" I wouldn't go that far, but it was a worthwhile effort.

I don't regret any of the energies that I put into it, and they were considerable. Ultimately, it didn't damage me. I do know that when I became associate dean, I ran into Bob Banks. Bob took over the second campaign. He really was the academic one who ran the anti-union campaign, but he was not as aggressive or as--I count him as a friend today. But I must say, when I showed up as associate dean different places, here were all these people who had been sitting on the other side of the table in various circumstances, wondering what the hell this meant.

Charnley: Who sold out?

Korth: Yes. Whether they had to watch their Ps and Qs or something happened.

Charnley: Interesting. Could you talk a little bit about your scholarship in the 1980s or seventies? You were working on your oral histories.

Korth: Yes. First major project, of course, was my dissertation, and I got an article out of that. What was really interesting about that was, I think, the left wing sort of movement it purported to be. But the Auto Light strike had not really been done in a scholarly way. There had been some books written on it, and the timing was right and the money was there, so I could devote the whole summer and take two students down to Toledo and conduct interviews.

I wrote up the process for the *Labor History Journal* about what we did there, and got some nice notes about that. When the book was published, I got some very nice reviews of that, and several notes about the oral history, my description of doing oral history, that were very complimentary. These were quite welcome because this is the same time that I was getting poison pen notes from people who were opposed to the union.

I should back up to say that, in public, it was very civil. Man, you'd be amazed, in private, the scurrilous sort of shit that could come my way, unsigned. Nasty, nasty notes. And that was sustaining, to be able to engage in that sort of scholarship that really interested me.

The Auto Light movement was a very difficult book, because that was a new area, doing oral history. What do you keep, what do you cut. We didn't have money for transcribing, so I had to work out--I didn't have much money for it, so I had some friends do some of it here and there, and then transcribed some of it myself and typed it up. Man, this was well before computers and any of this stuff.

Charnley: A lot of work.

Korth: Yes. So you wind up with a thousand pages of manuscript, and then have to cut it down. I was getting kind of frustrated with it and I sent it off to Meg. She had gone on to the American studies program in Minnesota, the student who had worked with me. I sent it over there and said, "Why don't you take a hand at cutting some of this stuff," and so she did, and that helped, and I got back on track and got it down to a reasonable manuscript of three, four hundred pages.

I sent it around, I think, to a couple of places without much success, and then sent it over to Dick Chapin at MSU, and he called me up and wanted to have lunch, which I took as a good sign. So we went over to the University Club and he bought me lunch and he said that he didn't really approve of oral histories. I thought, "Oh, shit, he's bringing me over to tell me that he doesn't approve of this. There's something else going on." Well, he said, "But you know, I read your manuscript and you made a believer out of me."

So that's how that one worked out, and then he did a very nice job in putting it together. That one ran fairly well. It was picked up in a couple of courses, so it went to a second printing, which meant a full four or five hundred dollars, for the whole thing, in my pocket. But they got their expenses and it got published, and that was really the most important part for me.

Charnley: What do you remember about the interview processes that you went through and the workers that you interviewed?

Korth: You had to be very careful. The students were--well, let me back up. The first thing that was very clear is that I was a professor, and these were working-class people that I was interviewing, whether they were police, whether they were strikers, whether they were scabs. So there was a class and a social difference there, and so I had to think through how I was going to approach them so that they would be comfortable and trusting, how to establish rapport.

I had a different problem from the problem the students had, because the students had a certain advantage because they weren't supposed to know and I trained them in this, too. I said, "You don't know, and you've just got to continually ask for clarification. You're not telling them anything. They're telling you and they're explaining it to you, and you're this naive listener, and you want to know." And they did it very well.

Both Meg and--Claude was a little more relaxed at this, I think. Meg is kind of an intense person and she did know things, and I kept telling her, "You don't know." So I had the problem of being somebody who, they said, "Well, of course, you know," and I kept saying, "No, I don't know." So it was always a challenge to sit down with people and establish this sort of connection, where they would freely tell you what they recalled.

I always tried to do it in a setting that was comfortable to them--their homes or any place they chose. I had to play the naive listener, too, and I had to be even more careful about not offering things. What I chose to do was to use key words. I modeled this, really, after what a nondirectional psychologist does.

I would listen until they used a term that warranted some elaboration or that seemed to be charged, and I'd just repeat the term back to them, in a questioning way. If they said "scab" I'd just say, "Scab?" and then they'd go and tell you what that meant. That worked very well. That worked well.

I did two other books, one on the union carpenters in Michigan, and one on the Minneapolis Teamsters strike. The Teamsters strike was part of the second phase of the same research project that was funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, and so summer of '73, I went to Toledo.

Summer of '74, I went to Minneapolis. Again, with two students, undergraduate students with me, to conduct interviews and to help with all the paperwork and that sort of thing. Took me a while to get those things published, because it was a hand operation, getting the manuscripts together. Well, getting it transcribed and all that. So I was trying to fit that in while I was trying to organize faculty and teach courses and do other things.

Charnley: In your spare time.

Korth: Then the carpenters book, I was approached. I was very supportive of the Michigan Council for the Humanities. I'd known Ron for a while.

Charnley: Is this Ron Means?

Korth: Means, yes. I'd made some presentations for them, using some of these oral history materials, for their annual conferences, as a way to try and encourage people to do oral histories. I'd made some other presentations there. While I'm thinking about that, I was on a panel for the National Oral History Association, was here, and we talked about oral history, and I went down to Wayne State when the state oral history association began at the Ruther [phonetic] Library. I think Geneva [phonetic] was there.

Charnley: Justin, probably?

Korth: Yes. Yes, I think Justin Castlemount [phonetic] was down there, too, and the guy from Wall Lake.

Charnley: Glen Ruggles [phonetic].

Korth: Yes, Glen Ruggles was there, and people from the Ruther Library that had done some interviewing themselves. So the carpenters, for their centennial, were looking for somebody to do

something, and they had a little bit of money, so I agreed to do an oral history there, where I would interview retired carpenters.

The focus in that was--there were two foci. One was the union and how that had impacted the way they did their job and the way they lived, etc., and the other was the impact of changing technologies on the work.

That was a fun project. I went all over the state. I was up at Escanaba and Iron River and Alpina and, of course, the Detroit area, and Sioux St. Marie. The carpenters union is a very complex union. It's not just people who nail boards together. It includes pile drivers and machinists that install--or millwrights, who install heavy machinery and flooring and all of that.

I learned some things there and had some fun doing it, and produced a good book. The carpenters are happy with it. I think we sold out on that one. Union people bought it. It had a wider audience than the union people in Michigan, because I had some correspondence and some comments at conferences I went to, about it. People who'd read it thought it was okay.

Charnley: How was it that you got involved in administration within the college?

Korth: It really is the department. I had been active, serving on everything in the department. As I said, I was elected to the advisory council the first year I was here, so I was on and off one thing after another, all the way through. Then, of course, when

Henry Silverman, in what I recognize as very difficult circumstances--difficult being, Al Hollingsworth as the dean--tried to make some changes in the department that many of us thought were inappropriate, mainly an attack on the American studies curriculum at the core of a writing program.

That led, of course, to a revolution when he came up for review, and I was one of, oh, I don't know, three, four candidates in the runoff. Henry, Jocelyn [phonetic], Jenny Banks [phonetic], and I were all candidates. I think there may have been another one, too. I don't remember who.

But at any rate, it came down to a ballot with three of us--Henry and Jocelyn and I were on the ballot for the chair. Jocelyn and Henry were one vote apart. I think Jocelyn had one more than Henry, and I had probably half of what each of them had. When I went over to talk to John--he interviewed all three of us--and I said--

Charnley: This is John Edie [phonetic]?

Korth: Yes, John Edie, the dean of the college. I said, "If you appointed me, I'd have a lot of trouble, because it would be a minority candidate, but it's very clear from the split of the vote between Jocelyn and me that Henry no longer enjoys the [unclear], and if you're going to interpret the vote for me, a lot of that is personal loyalties, but they would, I'm sure, transfer to Jocelyn if I were not there."

So she was appointed chair. I never did tell her that, now that I think about it. She was appointed chair, Henry had a snit, so then she had to put together her administration. Milt had been in there. That's right.

Charnley: As one of the other candidates?

Korth: Yes, he had been one of the candidates, too. Fine guy. Think the world of Milt. So she chose Milt as the associate chair, and that was fine. I was very comfortable with that. Then she was having some trouble getting somebody to do the developmental, and she called and I said, "You know, this is not my cup of tea." She said okay. Then she called back and she said, "Well, if I help you brew it, will it be your cup of tea?"

So I agreed to do that, with some conditions. It wasn't really that complicated because what I saw immediately was that we were going to get graduate students and that that had to be handled very well and very carefully, or we were going to have a lot of trouble. I wanted to make sure that we didn't just hire them and say, "Go do it," that we wanted to have a system.

I'd had a conversation in my interview with the dean about that, too, about the use of graduate students, and so I shared that view with her and she said, "That's right. Will you do it?" So I said I would. So then I brought together the people who had been teaching in developmental, or who were process-oriented, the process approach to writing. Sherry Thomas and Maria Blaine [phonetic] and Mike

Steinberg [phonetic], and, oh, I don't remember who all. I said, "We've got to do this right, and you guys have been more involved in this than I have, so I want you to take the lead on putting together the pedagogy and the curriculum in this, and I'll support you. I'm going to monitor. I want to know what you're doing, and I'm still the one that's going to be responsible, so we're going to have to agree."

So they went along. I made the proposal that what we really needed was to have graduate students from the entire college, not just one department, that we needed a training program, and that we needed a retreat, to get this all together. My God, he funded it.

So we went up to Ketnan [phonetic] Center and John Smollens [phonetic], I remember he was there, too, and we had a terrific time, and really laid it out, and these were graduate students from history, music, English, of course, philosophy. They were from around the college. Art. I think we had one from art. Yes, we did. I think almost every department was represented. Then we had weekly seminars.

[Begin Tape 3, Side 1]

Charnley: This is tape three.

When the last tape ended, we were talking about the graduate seminars in American Thought and Language.

Korth: We began those--when did that happen? Do you remember when Jocelyn became chair?

Charnley: '88? '89?

Korth: No. It must have been before that. It must have been '87, because '88, I've got another program I got into then.

Just a side note on that transition. Henry had very hard feelings about all this, and ultimately he said he would only communicate with Jocelyn in writing, and I was around, so I was kind of de facto. I was the go-between. Henry would talk to me. Henry just left.

Charnley: Would talk with you and not Jocelyn?

Korth: Henry just left that summer, and Jocelyn didn't start until August or something, and I was there. I don't know why I was there. Oh, I know why I was there, because I was setting up the program, the developmental program for the fall.

Charnley: That would have been '87?

Korth: Yes, summer of '87. And so I was around. But at any rate, so it was a very successful seminar and the whole year just went swimmingly. I directed that and I taught a developmental course, which took me all the way back. I was glad to have the seminar,

frankly, because they had some very good ideas, and the things that worked. Frankly, the developmental had been kind of a stepchild and it had not been much of a program. It was really in disarray.

So it was an opportunity, with the influx of graduate students and the new system, to kind of bring some coherence and substance to it, and I think we did. So I did that and, let's see, that's '87. I did that four years, five years, four years. Five years.

I was going to take a sabbatical. Well, I was going to take a sabbatical. That's right. I was going to take a sabbatical until Jocelyn asked me to do the developmental thing. I said okay. So then I was going to take a sabbatical, and then Jocelyn nominated me for associate dean. I said, "Okay, I'd do that." I'd allow her to nominate me, but I wasn't sure I was going to do this.

So I went through the interview process, which was all conducted by the college council. Good interviews, it was fine. Then he called me up, he called me in and talked to me. He's an interesting guy. He had some interesting questions. He wanted to know what I would say if people thought this was kind of a payoff to ATL for behaving. I said, well, I hope they saw it that way, because it was about ATL was a central part of the college. But ATL might not have been terribly--you know, it was not admired entirely in the whole college.

What could I bring to it? I said, well, I had a standing in the department and the college as well. I was the first one from the department elected to the Graduate Council, and we had no graduate program. That shattered ice there. Well, you know how it is, you

know, that if you don't have a graduate program, you can't even get on the Graduate Council, let alone be on the University Graduate Council, coming from a department that doesn't have a graduate program.

So that was unprecedented, and he recognized that. So he asked me to come on for the three years, which I did. In retrospect, that was a very good appointment for me. It was just the right time. I'd finished all my books, and I was looking for a new research topic, but I didn't have one. A new dean, a new chance, maybe, and I really thought I could do a good service for ATL as well as the college there.

It really turned out that way. John Edie made his appointments on the basis of individual's qualities, not on their politics. By politics, I don't mean left or right, I mean who they're associated with. So it wasn't an ATL appointment, like he had to have somebody from ATL or he had to have somebody from [unclear]. It wasn't that.

All of his appointments, if you look at them, were people that he felt had qualities that would help in his administration. Pat McConahey [phonetic] was certainly that way, and Dan S_____. It was Pat Paulson [phonetic], the one who replaced me. But it was also true of the chairs. The only awkward position he got into was Henry, over in history department.

But Doug [Douglas] Noverr was certainly an inspired selection. I didn't think Doug would take it, and when he said he was going to ask him, I said, "Boy, more power to you. He is exactly the right guy to get." But that was all John's idea. This was not mine.

I mention that because he had a very good sense of who would be good in that job.

But going into the dean's office did give me an opportunity to change some views about ATL. I think the first meeting I went to with, who's the admissions guy, Bill Turner, talking about enrollment projections. He said, "Well, you know, you just add a few sections of ATL." I said, "Wait a minute. Do you know what that means?"

I came to appreciate the difficulty of projecting how many students you're going to have there, and all that. But I said, "That's not the way you look at it." There was a meeting when Jocelyn and Milt and I were under excruciating pressure from my good friend Jim Hamilton, nonetheless, from the provost's office, to increase class size, and we were sitting there kind of imaginatively writing out our letters of resignation, and the provost's office backed down on that one.

It never was that dramatic again. I could then be in places where comments like that would be made or where there was an opportunity to showcase not just the college but ATL and what they're doing and the important role they were playing. It gave me, it wasn't a bully pulpit, but it was a little lectern that I had, and I enjoyed that. The reason that we have an audit is because I pushed for that. I brought that up about the first year I was in the dean's office. "Oh, it can't be done."

Charnley: Financial audit?

Korth: No, no. Course audit. Transcript audit. When I brought that up, they said, "This can't be done." It took four years until they said, "Oh, yes, well here's how we can do it," and then I'm not sure they did it right. But there was nobody. I was a lone voice, and you can ask, what's her name, the one that replaced King Lou? In the registrar's office, she was acting registrar forever. I don't know if she was made full registrar or not.

Charnley: I don't know.

Korth: We had many, many meetings about, where I'd sit down and say, "So the student has a `what-if' capability. They can look at their own transcript and the curriculum and the course choices and all that." The online, the registration online, that, I didn't have anything to do with creating, but then putting that together, and that was part of the problem, putting that together with student access to their own records.

Charnley: The degree navigator.

Korth: The degree navigator. All of that. That was one of the things I was able to push until it happened.

Charnley: I know students find that tremendously useful now.

Korth: I mean, it seems so self-evident to me. Of course, I hadn't thought about it, and then I went to one of these associate deans meetings in the Big Ten. I don't know where it was. Penn State, I think. Yes, it was Penn State the first year that they were in the Big Ten.

Every year there was a meeting of associate deans from the Big Ten schools, and Ohio State was doing something then on degree audit. They had their own program they were trying to build up. But then others started talking about it and how they were moving toward doing something like that. I brought that back and, jeez, she thought that I had come from the moon. You can't do that.

Then it did become a terrible problem, because of the way the registration system was set up. They built their own here instead of buying a package, and then trying to get that to interface with the degree audit stuff was--that's where the problem was. That's why it couldn't be done.

Charnley: Because the software was proprietary rather than--

Korth: Well, and they couldn't get them to interface, either. So there were several things that, it gave me an opportunity. Being in administration that way gave me an opportunity. I was on the task force with John Hutsig [phonetic] to redo our whole international, our study abroad program, and I nominated him to be dean. Actually, I nominated to the dean to nominate him to be dean of international programs, and he is now, and a good one, I think.

Charnley: [unclear] or emphasis.

Korth: Yes. Well, it was that task force report that laid out a goal of 40 percent are going to have an overseas studies experience. We'd like it to be 100. Of course, he had [M. Peter] McPherson behind it, too, which made a big difference.

Charnley: Besides your own service overseas in Germany, and then your interest in foreign service, initially, did you have a Fulbright or anything, where you studied overseas?

Korth: Yes, I went overseas, but that was a special arrangement with Al Hollingsworth, who was dean of the college of arts and letters. I think he had been doing some research on the Taipei revolution or something of that sort, and he was studying Chinese, spoke Chinese. Developed a relationship with, was eager in developing relationships with Chinese universities. Had developed a relationship with [Chinese word], Northwest University, one of the key universities. This was in Shiyon [phonetic], in China, and had sent over there a graduate student in 1983-'84, and had brought to this country a young faculty member, all under college money.

The following year he sent Jim McClintock over there, and the third year, he called me and asked me if I wanted to go. I could afford to. My family was here and my salary continued here, and

then I went there and the Chinese paid me a lot more than the Chinese got, but not a lot of money, but enough so I could live there.

I spent one year teaching English majors in Northwest University, American and English literature. English literature was a stretch, because I had never a taken a course in it, but then, it was really language training. But it was a most interesting time. That's a Chinese curse, did you know that?

Charnley: No.

Korth: May you live in interesting times.

Charnley: Yes, yes, right.

Korth: Well, it was interesting. I was never bored in China and you have not enough tape for me to tell you all the things that happened there. But I was lead faculty member there, from a major university. There was another guy from Oregon State there with his wife. There were two graduate students from MSU there, and there were a couple of other foreigners there, one from Canada, one retired woman from the United States, and the Chinese just made me the--first of all, they made me fifty. I wasn't fifty yet. But that's the cutoff for a senior status, so my age was fifty when I got there. I was forty-eight or something. So I was sort of the contact one, the one responsible for what all these Americans and foreign nationals did, which got to be interesting at times.

Charnley: So you were the head colonel?

Korth: Yes, I was. But we traveled. And then my wife came over, Nadine came over during their Chinese New Year, which was in the spring, and we spent five weeks, the two of us, traveling around in China. I met her in Hong Kong, and we went to [Chinese city] and [Chinese city], Kunming [phonetic], and then down in a beautiful area of southwestern China, in [Chinese city]. It's just idyllic. Then back to Kunming, Shanghai, Shiyon, for some time and then out to Beijing, so we got around.

Charnley: How was the reception of the people toward Americans at that time?

Korth: It was very pleasant. At no time did I feel threatened in China at all. You had to get used to certain things, because they're so very curious. Quite literally now, I mean this, literally, you could be standing there at a shop or a grocery store or something, and realize that there's a nose in your ear. I mean, they get right up in next to you. I was taller than most Chinese, so they were just crowded around.

When there are billions of people, I suppose they don't have the same sense of space that Americans do, so you had to become accustomed to that. The official reception and official treatment in the university was wonderful. There were a lot of difficulties,

but they tried very much to overcome them and to be helpful. There was never any hostilities. There was a lot of some anxieties. I passed a kidney stone there and that was not something you want to do. I had to ride to the hospital over a cobblestone street on a bicycle while I was passing this damn stone.

But they were very protective, did not want us to have bicycles. It took a long time for us to persuade them to allow us to buy bicycles. I realized how autonomous we are in this country. You just go out and get in your car and you go wherever the hell you want. Well, they didn't quite like us doing that. They weren't afraid that we would see something we shouldn't see, in the sense of some secret, but that maybe we'd see something that they didn't want us to see in terms of the conditions, or that we might be embarrassed in some way.

This was true in the classroom. Students were very reluctant to ask me questions. Coming from an American university, that took a while to get accustomed to. And I figured out the reason they were reluctant, was that if they asked me a question and I didn't know the answer, I would lose face and they would be the cause of me losing face, so it would be an embarrassment for them.

Charnley: They were protecting you, in a sense.

Korth: There was a lot of this indirection in China, but the students were just great. I'm sure I caused problems. There's no question in my mind that Tiananmen Square is a consequence of opening to the

West and having all these foreign experts in the country, because I had students who was a party cadre, you know, in the class.

We were reading John Stuart Mill's essay, *On Liberty,* in which he makes some very unhappy comments about Chinese culture, one, but he also talked about a liberal education. In China, a very small portion of the people get to college, 3 percent or something like that, and they go to a designed program, a designed curriculum, kind of like the first year of ATL when I got here.

They have their classroom, and the teachers come into their classroom. They maintain the classroom. They all have the same curriculum and they go right through this curriculum. There are no electives. So here we are, talking about choices, and this guy says, "I want to take a course in tourism, so I can be a guide. Why can't I do that?" I said, "I don't know why you can't do that."

I gave a lecture to the campus community on the credit system and how that works, because there was a growing interest in it. Their first reaction to a credit system, which I would argue, implies choice, because you accumulate, as Thurston Vehman [phonetic] said, a certain body of staple credits, and that's how you graduate. What the composition of that body is in an American university has a great deal of latitude.

Well, all they did was just assign credit hours to them. Same curriculum, same sequencing, no choice. Next step was going to be, now you may take one elective course, or two, or three. It's hard for them to change that system, but that idea of, you know, inherently, you're talking about American literature and American ideas and

American history and you're talking about democratic reforms and democratic movements and personal liberties and those always have been conspiracies.

Charnley: In looking back on your career at Michigan State, you mentioned that you and your wife were going to give it three years?

Korth: Yes.

Charnley: Did you have other offers, or was there any other point that you thought about leaving?

Korth: Yes. Yes, there were. Did I have any other offers? No. None of the interviews came to that. I went to Boston in 1970, at Christmas, to the AJ, three years after I had graduated from Minnesota and I was there for the advisory council. We didn't have any positions but we might get some positions, so I was there to--well, I was going down the elevator and I heard these guys talking about "the pit," you know, AJ [unclear]. I thought it might be a restaurant.

So Nadine and I, we went down, and I went into the ballroom down there and I'd been to the AJ in Chicago, I think it was, I don't remember where it was, when I was looking for a job. I went into a ballroom like that and there were three-by-five cards just all over the wall, all around the damn room, with the jobs. I went in there, and there was nothing. There was nothing on the walls.

Charnley: In a three-year difference.

Korth: And there were three-ring notebooks with vitaes. I said, "Whoa, I'm glad I got out when I did." The *New York Times* had an article about it, what had happened in the historical profession. It had just clamped down at that point. So I didn't really think much then about applying for another academic job.

I did think about other jobs, but MSU kept turning out to be a pretty good place to be. A certain inertia takes over and we were there with the kids, the circumstances were fine, Nadine got a job a few years later. But once the kids were gone, then--oh, I went to Northern Iowa to interview for a chair job there and they were intimidated. They really were looking for somebody who had been in a state system. They were a little worried that I'd come in with some research agenda and demands for them. It was not a good fit.

It was a nice enough place. I got to meet relatives I hadn't seen in years. My dad was born in Waverly and my grandparents are buried there, which is just a few miles away. Then after I had been in the dean's office for three years--it was a three-year gig. That was the way he put it, and I said fine.

Then at the end of the third year, Metropolitan State in St. Paul was looking for a dean, and the place was right, and all our kids are there, so I had Jocelyn nominate me, and I was a finalist there. But it was not a good fit there, either. I came in with a vocabulary that was giving them some trouble.

It's not a community college, but it relied very heavily on local resources for staffing--business people, like a community college. But it's a university, and also, they were hiring a lot of people from, graduate students, from Minnesota there, to teach some introductory courses. And they had a lot of long-term temporaries, and I said, "Here it is, folks. This is what your trouble is and what you're in for."

They'd already had one suit, of somebody trying to get a permanent job. They were talking about expanding, getting tenure-stream jobs and I was saying, "Okay, how are you going to do this?" You know what the problem would be. If you want to create now a core of permanent faculty, on the basis of a national search, you have a whole pool of people who have been here who have reasonable expectations that they can compete well for those jobs, and if you don't hire, you've got trouble. If you hire, you may still have trouble.

Charnley: That was something you were experienced in?

Korth: Yes, I had a lot of experience with that. No matter what they decided, there was going to be turmoil, and there was going to be a lot of tension, and so they'd better gear up for it. It was a good interview. After I got home and thought about it, I said, "No, been there, done that."

So when they called they wanted me to come back and talk to the provost and the president and we had--this was the assistant

provost I was talking to. We had a conversation. I said, "It doesn't feel right. I don't think you'd be happy with me and I don't think I'd be happy in that situation." So that was that.

But I told the dean that I was going there, so he, without knowing, he talked to the chairs and told them that he wanted to reappoint me, and that he knew it was a three-year job, but he wanted me to stay there. The chairs all unanimously agreed. Said fine, that's okay with us.

So then I stayed on and that's why I wound up. Then I knew he was going to resign and I told him, "No, I want off the first of the year," because he was going to be off in June, going to leave in June, and I said, "I want to serve until six months before you're off. I do not want to be in a position where I would have to work in a transition. That's all." He was very good about that, and he agree to let me resign.

[Begin Tape 3, Side 2]

Charnley: In looking back on your career, is there anything that stands out that maybe you see as most important? In your career at Michigan State.

Korth: I think, in a way, it's a credit to Michigan State that first they could tolerate me, and even though some of my early activities created significant discomfort for some of the administrators, among whom were John Cantlon and Lee Winder and Cecil Mackey. There was

every good reason to try to find some to shunt me aside, and there were opportunities.

When Al Hollingsworth asked me to go to China, the provost could have disapproved that. When John Edie asked me to be associate dean, Bob Banks, whom I sat across the table from, in negotiating stuff, he could have raised objection. Certainly Lou Anna, who was Lee Winder's assistant, could have--I'm sure she has some memories that were not so comfortable.

There were good reasons to obstruct, but they really ultimately did not and so I've had what I thought was a useful career. I always felt that when you go someplace, you ought to act like you're going to be there the rest of your life, whether you're going to be there or not, and when you leave someplace, they ought to know you were there. And so people knew I was there.

Charnley: I want to thank you for your time and the insights that you've shared.

Korth: You're quite welcome, quite welcome.

[End of interview]

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