

GORDON GUYER

April 6, 2000

Jeff Charnley,
interviewer

Charnley: Today is Thursday, April 6, the year 2000. We're in East Lansing, Michigan, at the Kellogg Center. I'm Jeff Charnley, interviewing Dr. Gordon Guyer for the MSU [Michigan State University] Oral History Project for the sesquicentennial of the institution, which we'll be commemorating in 2005.

As you can see, Dr. Guyer, we're tape recording this oral history today. Do you give us permission to tape?

Guyer: You bet. In fact, I think it's a great project. We need to make sure we capture all these important developments.

Charnley: Thanks. I'd like to start first with your personal and educational background. Where were you born, and how was it that you ultimately came to MSU? Start first with where were you born.

Guyer: Well, Jeff, I was a Michigander. I was born in Kalamazoo but lived in Augusta. Started to get involved when I was in high school at the Kellogg Biological Station there at the forest. So I worked there summers and got interested in biology and various things, and then was in the service and came out in '47. Immediately utilized that bill of rights which John [A.] Hannah and everybody else did, so I came up here in '47.

From there on, it was a fascinating development. I finished up my B.S. in '50, and I was already teaching a couple of courses in entomology. Started out with, I thought I was going to go into fisheries and wildlife, and I changed my major to entomology. Either one, I guess, would have been fine for me, but anyhow, I really hit entomology in the golden years. Like everything else, the university wasn't growing very fast then, and there were no young professors in entomology, so I started teaching a bit.

Then by the time I got my Ph.D. in '53, why, I had some nice job offers which would look awful good today. [Laughter] But I was having such a good time and my research was going so well, that I stayed on. Then I was department chairman in '63, which was a pretty young age, I guess. Then in '74, I took over the Extension Service as associate dean of ag. Did that until '84. I figured that was retirement, and I'd made my--

Charnley: Made your mark.

Guyer: Made my commitment. It's interesting, not one of those jobs did I ever apply for.

Charnley: None of them?

Guyer: None of them, Jeff. And then the interesting development was that Governor Blanchard was in power then, as a Democrat, of course, he invited me to take over the Department of Natural Resources. There were some rough challenges then. So I ran the department. I said I'd do it for two years. He tried to bend my arm for a little longer. I really enjoyed that. I knew everybody. I had, I think, over thirty-five of my students as employees. And then I thought that was the end.

Then Jack Breslin started to become ill. Jack and I was quite dear friends, so I helped him out. Then I got more involved as he got more laid back. So when he passed away, [John A.] DiBiaggio was here, and he talked me into taking over that vice presidency. I knew everybody from the legislature, so that was a fun job for me. It was a great time, actually. So I finished that up, I forget the exact date, but after about three years.

Then all at once, DiBiaggio was having his challenges from some of the board and athletics, so he decided to leave. So the board enticed me to come on there for that year of transition, in between DiBiaggio and Peter [McPherson]. So that was kind of a fun job. Again, I knew everybody from being involved with the vice presidency. So Mrs. Guyer and I moved over to the Cowles House and had a great rapport with the board and the

students. So I said, "That's it." Peter came on, which was a good appointment. Then I really figured at my age that was time to quit.

Then our Republican governor, John, he said, "I want you to run the Department of Agriculture." I loved agriculture, so I went down and ran that.

So now what's it been, two or three years now that I've had a little freedom. So it's been a unique and an unusual situation when you have every job you love and not one of them did you apply for. You know, Jeff, the interesting thing is that everybody almost consistently will ask you, "You worked for a Republican and a Democratic governor in a key spot where you saw them every week two or three times. Which one did you like the best?" And I always say the same thing. "They were both Spartans, so it didn't make a bit of difference." [Laughter] There were some differences, but I won't go into that.

Charnley: The transition was an easy one.

Guyer: Yes.

Charnley: Let's go back to your undergraduate years. You mentioned the issue of switching your major from fisheries and wildlife. Why were you interested in fisheries and wildlife initially?

Guyer: Well, I was an outdoorsperson.

Charnley: You hunted and fished?

Guyer: I hunted and fished. That's really how I got involved with MSU down there at the Kellogg Forest. I just enjoyed that, and thought I wanted to be a forester or a fisheries and wildlife or something, as a lot of kids do. And then I got up here and I took a couple of entomology courses. For some reason, it just clicked with me.

I remember it was a fascinating time, because the entomology department, as I said, was made up quite a bit of older faculty. E.I. McDaniel, which was an institution here, of course, I've always said that entomology had the best record of confirming women in academics, because we only had about seven faculty and we had Miss McDaniel, so we looked better than most of the universities.

But I went over, and somebody said, "Boy, she's a tiger." So I went in. This is kind of interesting, because this is more of the culture of the times. I had to get by her to get my major changed. She never even looked up. I was sitting across her desk, and she was moving critters around her desk like this, live critters.

Charnley: Live critters? [Laughter]

Guyer: Then she said, "What do you want?"

I said, "Professor, I'd like to change my major."

She says, "You know what these are?" God, I didn't even realize they were spiders instead of insects. She said, "Those are black widow spiders." They'd had just hatched out and she was putting them back in the bottle. So she asked me some questions. Actually, she and I became very good friends. There's a person that never really got her to-do, because she was one of the world's renowned taxonomists at that time, and worked on some groups of moths and so forth. It was interesting how dedicated and committed all of those faculty were. But I was so young compared to the rest of them.

I actually was writing my thesis for the Ph.D., and writing Walt Morosky's [phonetic], who had been here for thirty years, but they'd put on this new stipulation to the faculty, if they wanted to get raises, they had to have their Ph.D. They were told that; it never happened. Some of them went away and came back, like Bert Martin in entomology. But Walt was doing his own on a forestry project. You know, it's pretty tough to come back when you're in your fifties or sixties and write a thesis for a Ph.D. So anyway, I was writing both of them. But that's part of a culture, part of the times, you know. There were these folks that were hired in the early thirties and even

before, and the university all at once said, “If you’re going to advance or do anything, you’ve got to have a Ph.D.”

Very interesting.

Charnley: I’ve asked those veterans. Several people that we’ve interviewed have been World War II veterans.

Could you tell us just briefly about where you served and the duration, how long you served?

Guyer: I served two years. I was in the Air Force. I wanted to be a pilot, but the war was starting to wind down a little bit. I got in, and I was a radio operator on a B-17 and went to Europe just as it was over. So I spent about a year right on the base of Mt. Vesuvius in Italy. So I flew around the Mediterranean. It was a good experience for a young fellow. But you were so young, you didn’t realize what was happening. So the war was over in the Pacific by the time that I got out and finished there, and so I got out and got to school.

Charnley: So you were part of that large group?

Guyer: Yes.

Charnley: What was the campus like then?

Guyer: Oh, it was fascinating, because that was one of the most rewarding and creative things about John Hannah. He was so far ahead in the thought patterns of most administrators. Now that I look back, I see how. But he grasped right a hold of these thousands of students that were coming out. First, you know, he made a place for us. I spent a few nights there in Jenison [Fieldhouse], but they soon had housing. And then he brought in all this married housing, and he just hauled that cheap stuff away from the various--like Fort Custer and so forth. First he brought the darn trailers, and I’ll tell you a little about that.

Charnley: You were married at the time?

Guyer: Not yet. But then he brought the barracks, and everybody thought, “What’s this?” Then he found room for all of us, and the place just exploded.

Charnley: You were accustomed to living in barracks. [Laughter]

Guyer: Yes.

Charnley: It wasn’t much of a transition.

Guyer: But you asked if I was married then. No. I was doing graduate work. I was the only young guy available, so when they had a catastrophe, why, I went. So one summer they had an outbreak of white grubs in the Upper Peninsula, and it was really a tiger. So I went up to Menominee County and spent the summer there. You know, a young guy just out of the service, that was quite a nice summer. I caught a lot of bugs, but also it was kind of interesting. There was always a bunch of college-age kids around.

Then the next summer I went to Lake City to the experiment station, and that’s where I met my wife. So we got married in December. The reason I say that is that the most fascinating thing was that we got one of those trailers. It was only eighteen feet long, and colder than a--right in December. Not much insulation. A couple of wrestling athletes had been in there, and it was bad. I mean, I opened that door and I thought, “Oh god, no. We can’t go in there.” But we did.

Charnley: It wasn’t much of a welcome for your bride.

Guyer: No, there was no welcome. Then you had the restrooms and washrooms were about fifty yards up a wooden walk. Then you did your wash and hung it all up there. Well, the first basketball game, she hung up her wash and about all the clothes we had. We came back from the ball game, and all the women's clothes was gone. They finally found them in a garage out at Okemos [phonetic], but it showed you the culture that was.

But you know, John Hannah was so creative a thinker in regard to taking advantage of whatever was there. I've said this week, as we win this championship, you've got to go back to the late fifties when John was pulling every string he knew to get us into the Big Ten. Everybody thought we went in for athletics. Well, of course it was important, but I know John knew that academics would accelerate. He quickly hired Gordon Sebine [phonetic], and all during the fifties we were recruiting [National] Merit Scholars way ahead of Harvard or Michigan or anybody. Nobody could understand what was happening. But old Gordon Sebine and that group, they were contacting every Merit Scholar before anybody else. Our visibility as we went in the Big Ten was becoming quite prominent, so he knew exactly what he was doing.

I remember when we were having trouble getting in and Michigan was fighting it so hard, we never could get the votes. His friends down at Notre Dame twisted the arm of the folks at Northwestern, we got our final vote and went in. That was through the civil rights commitment, his commitment to civil rights. He'd gotten to be close with the Notre Dame president, and that's how we got in the Big Ten.

Charnley: Interesting. You mentioned some of your research in the early days. Your master's dissertation, what was that specific research?

Guyer: They were all on aquatic entomology, and that's what I was teaching. But my research I was getting in--and there again, I was the most fortunate rascal. Lately now, about the only regret is that I haven't had the time to write up what I call the renaissance and golden age and fall, really, of the whole pesticide area. But you see, as a result of the war--and most of this has just not been recorded, pieces of it--but, you see, by even '49 the materials that had been developed by Germany and the U.S. as a part of the war effort, chemical war effort, started to emerge,

things like DDT had been used, of course, during the war in the Pacific to keep GIs healthy from biting insects and lice and so forth, and then all the phosphates were mostly developed by the Germans. So you had this huge array of chemicals that we never had before the war.

So as I emerged with my degrees, these were all moving right along. I just happened to fall off the end of a log. We had a terrible outbreak of onion maggots in this state. Onions at that time were worth about nine million dollars annually. I found out very simply, no Nobel development, that some of these chemicals worked very good, so I worked on them. They were spraying huge quantities of DDT and other things to try to kill the flies, and it was less than successful. But I found a way to dribble a little granulated material with these chemicals on right in a row when you planted, and it just worked miracles. So everybody thought I was pretty hot-shot, but actually it was just luck. So then I got into the control business in a variety of ways.

Of course, as questions started to rise and the negative aspects of these pesticides started to show up, resistance, I suspect, Jeff, that if we could recreate it, we'd probably have the first resistance in probably the U.S., right here in Michigan, because the first DDT in the Midwest was used on the flies up at Mackinaw Island. It was miraculous. The only trouble was, there was a male and a female somewhere that had a resistant gene.

Charnley: To DDT?

Guyer: Yes. To DDT. Right. By the time I got involved, the boss sent me up there, old Prof Hudson was chairman, and said, "See what you can do." I said that summer, about half the raisins in the fudge was flies and people didn't know it. [Laughter] They were really thick. There was very little sanitation. They had one big landfill and all the manure and all the garbage and everything, and Judas Priest, it produced flies. So I switched over to some phosphate materials, and it did a pretty good job, but sanitation had to follow.

But then, you know, it wasn't long until we started spraying everything. We got the Dutch Elm Disease problem. We put DDT all over. We just put DDT on with airplanes for mosquito control all through the Midwest.

And then, of course, you know the history from there on. One, resistance developed. I suppose I saw on Mackinaw Island some of the very first, but we didn't really realize what it was going to do.

Then I'm sure I saw some of the first accumulation in the food chain, which, you know, later in the late fifties and early sixties, why, we had the catastrophe of the robins dying. Rachel Carson's book [*Silent Spring*]. Well, by that time I was department chair. I capitalized on that, because money was flowing like wine for this kind of research, federally, so I got the money to build the Pesticide Research Center. This put us out in front along with the University of California and Cornell and North Carolina. So it was a fascinating time.

That's never been put together in a single--somebody should write a book on the rise and fall of chemicals as a result of war, and Michigan's aspect. The same as the Civil War history. It would make a fantastic story.

Charnley: You were chair at the time of the robin study?

Guyer: Yes.

Charnley: Who did that? Were you involved in any of that?

Guyer: That was George Wallace. This is a fascinating story. There was a lot of bitterness. Cy Boyer was director of the Plant Industry Division, Department of Agriculture. He was a national hero. He wouldn't accept the fact that the robins were dying from DDT. Of course, it was so important in many of their regulatory programs. So there was this conflict.

George had--the technology was very crude, his analytical methods were still chemical. There wasn't any gas chromatographs. So George, even until he died, he never received the appropriate recognition. So when I was president--that's a long time in between--but I felt bad that George hadn't been recognized, so I gave George an honorary degree at commencement. His daughter came up from Texas, and we really gave George the visibility he deserved.

George was a laid-back guy, but there again, he was light years ahead of a lot of people. He fell in, and there wasn't a robin left on the campus there. It wasn't the agricultural use of DDT; it was the massive use we were putting to Dutch Elm Disease. Every tree in East Lansing and many other cities were sprayed with DDT, and we used tons of it for mosquito control right on the water.

Charnley: I remember as a kid, this would be 1957, '58, we spent the summer at a camp fishing in Six Lakes, Michigan, and they sprayed at the camp. They sprayed this fog. We kids just thought it was the greatest thing. We'd go out and play in it.

Guyer: I bet you it was DDT.

Charnley: I'm sure it was.

Guyer: Well, you didn't have any head lice or any problems.

Charnley: No. [Laughter]

Guyer: But actually, I always said, Jeff, that DDT was a tremendous asset to protection of humans during the war. I don't think there was ever any mortality or anything, any sickness from DDT in humans. It was really a shame that we probably overreacted in the demise of it, because today the best material going is DDT for kids' head lice and there's no problem with it, but you'd never get it back now. It was just the misuse of it, and that was an understandable situation because nobody had ever seen biomagnification or resistance or genes changing.

Charnley: When Rachel Carson's book came out, you mentioned that you either took advantage of that to get the Pesticide Research Center on campus, do you remember what happened at the time on campus, was there anything in reaction to her book that you were involved directly?

Guyer: Oh, yes. That's a great question. It was starting to be the era of activism, anyway. Her book developed two camps, those like I mentioned of conservative folks like Cy Boyer and others who in their own hearts just didn't believe that these things were happening on this magnitude. You mentioned you interviewed John Cantlon. John was a creative and visionary fellow. So there was quite a confrontation. Today there would be excellent discussions and you'd work this out. At that time, the animosities were pretty heated. It was another five or eight years before we really had the data.

I remember some of our best scientists, one you could well interview and get a great deal from, and that's Dr. Robert Ball, who is still in excellent health and lives in Florida. He probably turned out more quality graduate students that have gone, with great reputations around the world, during that time. I remember Bob saying, once we discovered that what they thought was fourteen parts per million of DDT in Lake Michigan, the gulls were dying, and the eagles were gone, and all of that, he said, "It'll be a century before we see any demise of that, because Lake Michigan turns over water-wise about once every century."

Lord, in ten years--it shows you how little we knew about this--first we discovered it wasn't fourteen parts per million of DDT and [unclear], but about half of that. Seven. The other seven was PCBs, which were a part of the mechanical, industrial pollution. The DDT and those chemicals went out relatively rapidly. Today they're still visible, but very low quantity, and, of course, cripes, we've got way more gulls than we want. We've got the eagles back. So this is part of that. But Bob Ball would be a great guy to--

Charnley: Which department was he in?

Guyer: He was fisheries and wildlife. If you decide to contact him, if you've got any interviewing in Florida, I'd highly recommend it. That should be recorded for the history of this place.

Charnley: Yes, absolutely. Going back to the Pesticide Research Center, did you direct it?

Guyer: Yes.

Charnley: Was that part of your dual role?

Guyer: Sylvan Whitmore [phonetic] you mentioned you're going to interview. Sylvan was a great supporter. I developed a nucleus, I think there was about a dozen of us at the height of researchers who all had an interest. It probably wouldn't have worked, but I didn't have any personal gain, because I didn't have a lot of research in that area. I just coordinated it as chairman and I allocated the money.

So we started getting grants. There was federal grants available for centers of excellence. North Carolina State, and Texas A&M, and the University of California, and Cornell were the centers, along with us. So we got in those days which was a lot, four or five hundred thousand a year for research. And then we didn't have the facilities appropriately, so Sylvan and I put together a request and went to Washington. He put some money in from the experiment station, and we got enough money to build the center. That kind of brought everybody together. It was a unique situation, because nobody got into a hassle, as faculty do, about competing with each other, because I was allocating the resources and I didn't have any set agenda, see. We were socially close and we were academically together and technically together.

Charnley: So this was within the university, a cross-disciplinary approach.

Guyer: I would say it was one of the very successful first interdisciplinary teams that we had. A lot of those fellows, there's a few of them that are still active today, Dr. Reese, and several of them that were a part of that first term. They're retired, but they're still in their labs every day.

Charnley: The 1960s, you were chair of entomology at that time. What was the student climate like in the sixties?

Guyer: Well, there was a lot of--of course, the whole chemical situation was--but that was a time when activism was prominent. And then, you know, it was a whole different culture on the campus. I don't think those folks that were presidents then had a very good time. [Laughter]

Charnley: There were challenges to authority.

Guyer: Oh, yes. But there was still a lot of dedicated students who didn't--that were committed. In a discipline like entomology, they were much more conservative than the student body in general.

Charnley: Were you surprised when Dr. Hannah left, or when he resigned, when he went to Washington?

Guyer: No. No, I wasn't, because, you know, twenty-six years is a--somebody just recently, as smooth as things go, after five years or six years or so, I don't know, it depends on the president, but in any institution, whether it's General Motors or Michigan State, you get into some kinds of hassles. John had been super successful, and yet if you read the history, John had some challenges with his boards then, too.

I always said, and I say today--of course, I'm his greatest fan, and I think it's a fabulous family--but I said, "He only made one mistake in twenty-six years." That mistake was when he was so powerful with the constitutional convention that we allowed to have all of the trustees elected. I think if we'd elected half of them, but I don't care whether they're Democrat or Republican, I think that for institutions that you'd get some alums that would be

appointed that you wouldn't have had the rough edges that we've had. And I think that was already starting to show up in John's regime.

So I think, you know, first, he'd had twenty-six very successful and tough years here. I wasn't surprised. He was dedicated to civil rights, and he got into that because he believed in it. Everything, he was just the best at what he went to Washington for. So, no, I wasn't surprised.

[Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

Charnley: This is side two. When the tape ended, we were talking about Dr. Guyer's relationship with President Hannah.

Guyer: Jeff, you've got to realize that when I started, the university was relatively small. John had the ability to keep his finger on just about everything that was happening. He knew just about every faculty, I think. You'd see him wherever, and he'd say, "How's that pesticide work going? What's the latest development with these critters that are dying off?" He always just seemed to be in the right place at the right time, and, you know, he was always interested in what was happening agriculturally. He never, never, never drifted away from the fact that we were a land-grant institution. I hope we never do. I think sometimes we're sneaking away from it a little bit too far right at present, or in the last decade. But that's what made this university, the fact that we were close to people.

I've said that one of the greatest accomplishments with John Hannah was his wisdom, as we've discussed, getting us into the Big Ten academically and athletically. But the next one that was so creative that most people never think about, and it doesn't get much visibility, but we wouldn't have had the medical schools if we hadn't gotten in the Big Ten, in my estimation. Secondly, I can remember all of the discussion about a hospital. He put his foot down and he said, "No, we're not going to have a hospital. One, it's too costly. And, two, we're a land-grant institution, we want to serve the people. We're going to do our work."

So we made partnerships. First, he made a decision that we were going to be a primary care. Well, that was the smartest thing he ever did. He said, "We'll turn out primary care physicians. We'll let others specialize in heart surgery and so forth. Then we'll go out into communities in the U.P., Eskinabaw and Marquette, and we'll do Flint and we'll do Grand Rapids. We'll train our doctors there," which put us as a land-grant institution. Fortunately, we haven't drifted away from that. We take great pride. In fact, I see that just recently, this year, we're number eighth in the country and ninth in producing primary care physicians. Quality. And of course the osteopathic folks have always been primary care-oriented. Right now we're short of primary care.

I have to tell you a story that was probably the most fun I had, were these little--I always had a good relationship with the folks at the U. of M. from my other days. Well, Jack Breslin was a master, and I learned from him. Everybody said, when I took over vice president, "Jesus, I wouldn't take that. You're right there under the Capitol." Well, I knew that that was an asset, not a liability. I'm not sure today the U. of M. have really realized that, but it is, I can assure you, if you use it right.

You spoke about the sixties. They had the gosh-damned state news before they ever went to work. All the nonsense out here, they were translating, and it was tough. On the other hand, on a parade yesterday, they wanted to be a part of it. We just make sure you do it right.

Charnley: They wanted basketball tickets. [Laughter]

Guyer: You bet your boots. You bet. And they got them. [Laughter]

But the interesting thing, Duderstat [phonetic] was president when I was president and he was a great guy, very intelligent. But as a lot of folks there, they never had to really realize the public relations skills that were necessary, I think, because they were such a distinguished institution. So I said to him, "As long as I'm president, we're not going to have any problems." I said, "We'll be partners." I said, "Except for one day, on the gridiron, that's it."

Charnley: So there were limits. [Laughter]

Guyer: I said, "Especially in medicine, because we're much better." Nick got all red, and before he got all excited, I said, "Now don't misunderstand me. I mean in turning out primary care, land-grant traditional medicine."

And I said, "We'll turn out the primary care physicians that serve the citizens of Michigan out there, and you turn out the heart surgeons, and we'll just go together." So the first budget hearing, he says, "The nice thing about MSU, Michigan State, is that we're working together as real partners. Take medicine, for instance. They turn out primary care physicians, and we turn out the--"

Norma and I lived over there in the president's house. I'd come home late in the evening from the office, and the kids were out there with the band, so I'd go out there and unwind and visit with them. The game that year was at the U. of M., and he and I had been interviewed by WJR when we were coming up the tunnel before the game. We went by the Michigan band, nobody recognized us. We went by the Michigan State band and all those kids that I'd kidded with every night, they hollered and blew their horns. He said, "What in the world is this?" I said, "I know every one of them." [Laughter] He realized I was pulling his leg, but it worked out fine.

Charnley: How did we do that year in football?

Guyer: We won. That's the year that we won on the end zone with a questionable call.

Charnley: The right call.

Guyer: Yes, the right call. [Laughter]

Charnley: We're up to about 1973. You at that time became--

Guyer: Associate dean and director of Extension.

Charnley: Cooperative Extension Service. Who was dean of ag at that time?

Guyer: Larry Boger. That's an interesting story, too. Of course, I knew Larry real well from my entomology, and we were chairmen together. Then he moved into dean.

I had gotten--that's another story, but part of the Hannah tradition of international involvement--I was right along in the periods of years, in the fifties and sixties, when everybody realized that one of his big trump cards was his faculty being involved in international, particularly agriculture. We had people all over the world, outstanding people. We were head and shoulders above anybody else.

So anyhow, I had gotten really involved. I had helped build pesticide research centers in Brazil and Egypt. I traveled to China two or three times. I was relatively young, and really probably 30 percent of my time in international entomology.

So I was in Africa, working on the weaver bird, quella quella. It's the biggest pest of Europe. You think that the grasshoppers or cicadas are, but it's not. So anyhow, that was a pesticide-related project, because they were using parathion [phonetic], a really toxic phosphate. They'd spray in the jungle. Once a year these quellas nest in a nest just like an oriole. Pretty little bird. They'd spray those from the air in the jungle. They had dead lions and they had dead natives and so forth. So anyhow, they were looking internationally for another treatment. So I was over there for a month, and it was kind of a challenge. That was one of the periods in the history of Africa that was droughty, lot of deaths.

Anyway, I got a call from Larry. He said, "We want you to be Extension director."

I said, "Larry, I'm not even a candidate." I said, "I'm having too much fun." I said, "There's no way I want to do that. I just love entomology, and I don't want that."

He said, "Well, I want to talk to you." They were recruiting, and they had a list.

When I looked, I said, "I'm not even on the list, and I don't want to." So then I guess that was in Nigeria--

Charnley: You were in Nigeria at the time, when you got the call?

Guyer: Yes. When I got to Sudan, or I don't remember exactly where, I had another phone call. So I got back to the United Nations, and there was a phone message. So he called me again, and I said, "Larry, I'm just not."

He said, "Well, I'll see you." So I got home. He was waiting at the airport for me. Larry was a heck of a guy. He was a great dean. He kept twisting my arm. It was just impossible to say no.

I don't regret it. You wonder what your life would have been like, because I was right at the peak of my research and entomology career. And yet that moved me over into administration. I taught a little more, but you can't teach and do those kinds of things. But we had a heck of an Extension Service, I'll tell you. I don't think the institution ever had better employees in Extension than we had at that time.

Charnley: So at the beginning when you became director, how would you assess? Were there any special problems or challenges that you had to face right in 1973?

Guyer: Not really, because we had such competent county directors and mature leadership in Extension, folks that everybody loved out there, and so it was easy. See, you were recruiting money from three ways. That was a big part of my responsibility. You got the federal budget, and we started a program where we--I forget what we called it--but it started in Michigan. It moved to the Midwest and finally nationally. Lay leaders, and we'd take these lay leaders to Washington. We'd take eight or ten of our selected ag leadership, go down there and twist their arms a little bit on a budget, and usually it was 100 percent successful. Now the last ten years, they've had nothing but trouble, and the budget's been very disastrous. So we had a good federal budget. There were no problems.

We started where we got every state legislator into the county and made him visible with some of our programs. Of course, when it would come up for a vote on state, we did really well. We were getting more money

than the university general fund. And then the county money, I had these directors, and we had some sessions on how to get local folks involved.

My big job was to keep the institution healthy financially. It was a lot easier than it is today. So we had money coming in from the three different ways, and the three legs of the stool were really quite equal. Now counties put in a lot more than their share and the feds put in a lot less than their share, which is unfortunate.

Charnley: Were you surprised that that ability, how things fell into place in terms of fundraising?

Guyer: Oh, yes.

Charnley: The mid-seventies were kind of tough economic times.

Guyer: Oh, yes. It was just that I fell into the right--I'd had so much involvement with the public, and I knew that the way to a politician's heart was through his vote, and his vote comes from the local people. So if we want money for MSU, we wanted to see him visible with MSU projects out there. It worked. The U. of M. could never understand that. I love the institution, but they never understood this.

If I'd had stiff competition, and, of course, other schools like Grand Valley and Saginaw Valley, the only one that was really very competitive was Northern, and that was because Jacob Eddy [phonetic] was there.

Charnley: On Ways and Means.

Guyer: I got a friendship with Jacob Eddy in a variety of ways. I have to tell you this story, to show you what old Jake was--he loved Michigan State. Part of it was [unclear] took care of him. I don't remember if you ever remember, but every once in a while you'd see Jacob Eddy come out on the basketball field with the team. So we were doing something, upgrading Spartie, he called me and he said, "You need some money?"

I said, "For what, Representative?"

He was so damn powerful. He said, "For upgrading Spartie."

I said, "Well, yes, we are upgrading it."

So he said, "Well, I'll take care of it."

Next thing I knew, here come a check for ten thousand dollars. I don't know where it came from, but it was from state government. And we used it to upgrade Spartie.

It was a fun time for me, because it was nothing of rocket science, but it was just realizing that people make the difference, and a land-grant institution had the right philosophy. I guess I learned it from John Hannah. That's why I say, once we forget that, we'll be another Grand Valley or another institution where you're all competing for the same buck. We sort of competed for a different dollar, and it's paid off. A lot of those have got presidents now. Look at how fast Grand Valley's grown. [unclear] president, he's moved out, the land granters in Grand Rapids, various places. He's developed Great Lakes Institute, and all the things that we did fifty, sixty years ago.

Charnley: You were Cooperative Extension director when the PVB problem developed?

Guyer: Yes.

Charnley: Did that raise any special problems for you as director?

Guyer: Yes, except we were sort of the pipeline of information and working out the details. The real conflict there was between the Department of Agriculture and, to some degree, the Department of Natural Resources, but primarily between Agriculture and the public, the Department of Agriculture. Of course, it was more a matter of how to get out of it. Of course, our folks did a world of basic things to send some right signals. Of course, the hysteria was sufficient that we probably overreacted. We buried all those cows, and along with it, PVB, we probably only buried a little tiny amount, but there was so much hysteria. Nobody knew the medical implications, and everybody saw

cancer coming and all kinds of human relationships, because some of those farm families were drinking that milk and had huge amounts of PVB in them. But it's proven that it wasn't a good thing, but it wasn't the human catastrophe that some thought it could be.

Charnley: Are we better prepared now as a result of it?

Guyer: Yes, I think so. Well, you've got so much more data on chemicals, both those that are part of our natural environment and those a part of agriculture. Of course, probably the greatest change in this whole state has been the changes in agriculture during this half a century that I've been involved. I mean, you've seen the rise and you've seen the decline of the use of chemicals. You've seen the tremendous rise in numbers of farmers and now the tremendous decline and the huge increase in size of farms. Right now you're probably seeing the most consolidation in the history of this state. That's fascinating. Who would have ever thought, when I first started, and I worked a lot with dairy animals in the first [unclear], you know, you might have twenty. If you had a seventy-five or hundred-cow herd, family herd, you were a big operator. Well, today, seventy-five or hundred-cow dairy herd can't support a family. You're looking right this morning, somebody probably just bought a farm and his minimum will be a thousand. We've got some three and four thousand-cow herds. Three years ago, we probably had three. I guess probably we've got ten, eleven now. Thousand-cow herds.

Charnley: My grandfather was a dairy farmer in Mecosta County, and he had twenty-six Guernsey.

Guyer: Yes. And that's the other thing. Nobody wants Guernseys now because they give such quality milk.

Charnley: Fat milk.

Guyer: Nobody wants that fat milk.

Charnley: It kept them going in the Depression, though. [Unclear] That was the thing that kept them going.

Guyer: You bet.

Charnley: And then my sister's married to a dairy farmer in the same county. They're milking 250.

Guyer: And then, of course, the other big changes have been in this whole problem of land use.

Charnley: Loss of it.

Guyer: I say it's important to farming, but it's more important to the state in general, tourism and recreation, because if you look at where the big--and I bet this census will really show this, the last census, the big counties of expansion, where the percentage of increase was the greatest, are ones like Roscommon, and so forth, where people are getting out of Saginaw and Detroit. It's not a matter of the problems, and that's serious, going all the way from Detroit to Saginaw with almost solid people now, you don't raise many crops or have much recreation or wildlife in that, but they're moving out where they can buy a ten-acre chunk. Every time you cut up a forty into ten acres, you're cutting up forestry, which is important to us, or you're cutting up somebody's potato field or something. So I'm not going to be the one who will solve it, and I don't see any solution on the drawing board, but every politician talks it. Nobody's got an answer.

Charnley: Did you get involved, in Cooperative Extension, where any of those issues came up, with state parks and tourism?

Guyer: Oh yes. But we were always compatible, and the state still is, because, you see, that was about the time--I don't remember which years it was--but we started a wine program here at the university. One guy has sort of brought us prominence there, it's Dan Howell [phonetic]. That fit in well with tourism. Look behind you. I'm the only office in the university that's got a bar. Those are all the wines that, when I was the director of ag, we won national recognition for the quality of the wine.

Charnley: Is that some of the Leland [phonetic] Orchards? Fenn Valley [phonetic]?

Guyer: Yes. Both those are up there. So you know, agriculture took advantage of the farm markets, the you-picks. Not as much as we should have, but ag and tourism fits well, because if you're going to have long-term quality tourism, you've got to have some open space and some quality environment. Everything can't be built up. But it scares me what the state might look like in another fifty years.

I've got a lot of interest in the U.P. I love the country and got quite a little property up there. I see the same thing happening. The prices of real estate and so forth are just going sky high. People are cutting it up into lots up there, it's forties and twenties.

Charnley: What part of the U.P. do you have?

Guyer: I'm over by Crystal Falls. I get more competition from Wisconsin than I do from Michigan. But I tell you, in my estimation, it's the number-one problem without a solution presently.

Charnley: Land use.

Guyer: Land use. It affects agriculture. It affects the quality of life. It affects tourism, and certainly recreation. The problem is, it sneaks up on you.

Charnley: All that fertilizer going into the lake.

Guyer: Well, that we've got pretty good control of. The problem is just cutting it up, rather than concentrating people. If I was a blue-collar worker--and that's what's happened, and you retire with a respectable retirement now.

It's cheaper. That family can migrate to Roscommon or Antrim or Alpena County, and get a forty, and have a nice home, and live so much more cheaply and have a nicer environment than he could, certainly, on the outskirts of Detroit.

Charnley: Macomb County, the prices there.

Guyer: Yes, yes. You've got it.

Charnley: Did you have any contacts with presidents of the nation, not just the university? President [Richard M.] Nixon, President [Gerald] Ford, [Lyndon D.] Johnson?

Guyer: No, no. Never. I did with [Jimmy] Carter, had a fascinating experience with Carter. When I was director of DNR, I got a call from one of my staff. He said, "I want to see you." He ran the Pigeon River place up there by Roscommon, and he said, "Director, what do you think about us hosting Mr. Carter?" Completely confidential. I won't go into all the details. He said, "He loves the out of doors, and he wants to come with a couple of his hunting pals and hunt grouse." Rough grouse, partridge. And he said, "He doesn't want to go into a commercial place."

I said, "Well, I don't see anything wrong with that." So I said, "Go ahead."

So then I got a call, and he said, "Mr. Carter would like to have you have dinner with him while he's there." So he said, "We'll have a steak cookout."

So you know me and my love for hunting. I was up in the Upper Peninsula with my son [Daniel E. Guyer] before that. So I said, "Okay, we'll be there." I said, "My son will be with me and another fellow."

We were having really good luck up there, and he said, "I want to hunt a little bit in the morning."

I said, "Okay." So we got a bunch of birds, and we had to clean them. We started, and it was nasty. I won't go into all the details, but I was driving and they were sleeping.

Come across 2, and I noticed the car wasn't running right. Then I realized that the power was getting down, the battery. To make a long story short, we got about to Engadine or somewhere along there. I finally pulled in and then stopped, and there was no power left, so the guy charged the battery. So then we were getting close to time. We got across the straits, and I said, "Well, we've got to get a motel." It's not going to go clear to Indian River," where we had another car. If you put the lights on, I know the battery was going to go right down.

So my son said, "Let's find a way to do it. Dad, we'll get right behind one of these ultra vehicles, with the lights on, and I'll drive with the lights off."

I said, "Jesus, Dan, we're going to Indian River."

To make a long story short, by gad, we pulled off the freeway, took a flashlight, [unclear] parked, changed cars, I left that there. We went down, and we were two hours late. It was just about quarter to nine. We pulled into Pigeon River, and it was dark. I figured there would be some Secret Service folks around, and so I introduced myself.

They said, "Oh, yes. The president's looking for you."

"We had a challenge. There was no way we could call you."

They said, "Well, we're just taking the steaks off."

So anyway, we sat around this big table. Of course, my son's eyeballs rolled. My son now is an associate professor over here in engineering. Anyhow, that was quite an experience.

He hunted two or three days there with us. Nobody ever knew he was in the state till he started back to Detroit and he stopped at a Wendy's to get a lunch, and somebody recognized him.

But yes, I did when I was Extension director, I have to remember. We took kids to the White House a couple of times when we had special events going. Extension gave you all kinds visibility.

Charnley: What about, in working with other president, besides Dr. Hannah you've mentioned? Let's talk a little bit about Walter Adams, even though his tenure in office was relatively short.

Guyer: Walter and I were always dear friends. I didn't have as much interaction with him when he was president. I would just go in my direction. But after he and I both sort of wound down, we were close friends.

I always liked [Clifton R.] Wharton [Jr.] very much. Wharton was here in a tough time, and I still say he handled it really well. I've kept track of the Whartons ever since then, because I like them as true friends. We've had some interesting presidents.

Charnley: [M.] Cecil Mackey.

Guyer: Yes. Cecil and I, too, that's interesting, we seem to get closer the more the years pass by. But Cecil and I have been--in general, each of them made an important contribution at a unique time. Wharton, it would have been tough on anybody, including Hannah.

Charnley: What were the key issues, or the tough issues during his presidency?

Guyer: Well, it was, the students were so intense on environmental issues and national concerns. That was the period when activism was at its peak, and the campus was alive with it.

Charnley: Would you say he was the right man at the right time?

Guyer: Yes, I think so. Probably didn't get enough credit for what he did. And you know, being a minority president, that was a unique feature, too.

Charnley: At a major university.

Guyer: There were a lot of people that couldn't quite accept that. He was quite a scholar. But those that knew him, I think, realized that he provided an important transition at a time when it might have been very difficult for anybody else. But so did Walter.

Then I remember well about--because what I was doing when Cecil was hired, they had all kinds of troubles with recruitment. They'd gone through a lot of names and a lot of people, and they weren't getting anywhere. Then his name floated up all at once, and I think as it happens a lot of times, the decision was made fairly rapidly, because the trustees were beginning to be looked at as, "Well, why don't you make a decision?" So he was there at Texas Tech [University], and he was here quick.

And sort of the same thing happened with Peter. They'd gone through everything. I won't go into all the details, but I was over there and I wasn't anxious to stay on any longer. I had to.

Charnley: You took office in September of '92.

Guyer: I think that's when it was. I can't remember.

Charnley: How long did you serve as president?

Guyer: A little over a year. I said, "I'd sure hope you could get it wound up in a year." Well, they'd gone through an awful lot of names, and they passed over--

[Begin Tape 2, Side 1]

Charnley: This is tape two of the Dr. Gordon Guyer interview.

We were talking, when the tape last ended, about his term as president of the university, and also the transition to the new president, Dr. McPherson.

Guyer: Well, Jeff, we were talking about how sometimes it's difficult to recruit outstanding people. I don't remember if I was on the search committee, but it doesn't make any difference for--I was on several of those for Mackey. As we said, it had gotten down to people getting restless because decisions weren't made. I forget who it was that went to Texas and saw Mackey there, or somebody brought up and he came back, one of the trustees, and said, "Let's take a look at him." All at once, he was president.

Then with Peter, it was sort of interesting, because they had gone through a lot of good names and hadn't made any decisions. Again, people started to get restless. I guess, actually Joe Ferguson and I had a little visit, and I said, "How come you overlooked Peter McPherson?" I'd known his father and the family, and I thought quite highly of him, and I still do and think it's great. But they reviewed that again, and all at once, Peter was our president, which was a good decision. So, picking presidents, sometimes it's a challenge, but both of those took that same route.

Charnley: President DiBiaggio, at the time that he was president, you were--

Guyer: Yes, I was working for him.

Charnley: What was your job at that time?

Guyer: I was vice president. I had the job that Jack Breslin had. I'd been there three years.

Charnley: You were his assistant initially?

Guyer: No. Jack had died, and I was vice president.

Charnley: You took over after he died.

Guyer: For quite a long time. I don't remember the exact dates. But I'd worked with John and did all the legislative and P.R. work and got along really well with him.

Charnley: I know one of the things, in looking at his presidency, or at least I understand that some of the reasons that he was brought was his ability to improve relations with the legislature, make sure the money we got from the state was good or better, his ability to rebuild those bridges. Did you have any role in that?

Guyer: Actually, that wasn't John's forte. John was a scholar. He really had a priority on building development relationships, getting resources. He made some significant developments there. He was very supportive, but as far as running the P.R. with the legislature, I had that almost free-handed at that time. Of course, the one place that he always seemed to find a challenge was the trustees at that time. Of course, a lot of it focused on what he believed in. Probably he was right, that the university should be run by the president and not the director of athletics. That's where he got into conflict with the board, and led eventually to his move, not at their commitment, but he just decided that there was better life at Tufts. And he's done very well. It's the perfect institution for him, because he's good with that kind of people.

Charnley: It's interesting, the interplay at the university, since entering the Big Ten, the importance of athletics. Could you talk a little bit about that? Are you a fan? What have you followed? What sports?

Guyer: Oh yes. Right now I'm tired. I said to my wife, and she's been such a great supporter, she just loves athletics, particularly basketball and hockey, I said, "After a month of this intensive schedule, playoffs, you just have to be tired. Think what those young men are." But athletics is a highway, if you use it correctly, to get to academic success. I think Peter McPherson realizes that as well as John Hannah did, and I think John Hannah realized it better than any other president in the United States. He never would have made such a strong pitch to get us in the Big Ten. Everybody, the general public generally, ties the Big Ten to athletics, but I tie it 50 percent to our successes in academics. So I'm a firm believer that this year's success is a good example. This will do more, not as much, but more for the university in goodwill, budgets, visibility, and academics, and I'll bet you that President McPherson will find a way to capitalize on it.

Charnley: Beats an athletic scandal, that's for sure. [Laughter]

Guyer: Well, it does. I remember so well one of my dear friends said when the Chariot issue--he came in here and he said, "God, I'm upset."

I said, "What's the matter?"

"Oh God," he said--and he doesn't work for the university--he said, "U. of M. gets all of this visibility." I just came through the airport. Cripes, they're selling memorabilia from U. of M. (that was after the Fab Five) by the truckload, and MSU stuff sits there. We just don't get the visibility."

I said, "Hey, listen. That's the power of athletics." I said, "We get back into prominence." It's true.

I had been running a little--while I was director of ag, I did this, I had all ninety-eight or whatever it is of the fairs in the counties. I remember during the highlights when we were so prominent there with the Bubba Smith era. You'd go to a fair, and you'd see--particularly you're talking about rural land-grant folks--and you'd see four, five, six caps of Spartans and teeshirts to every one of U. of M.

Well, it's gotten to where even at county fairs you were seeing four U. of M. teeshirts to every one, and that's why he was upset. So I said, "You know, that's the power of athletics." And nothing else.

He said, "I can't believe it. We ought to do something about it."

I said, "Got any ideas?" So it wasn't more than a week, he came to me and said he had an idea. It wasn't my idea, it was his. I get some credit for it, but it was his. Jim Goodheart [phonetic]. He said, "Well, we ought to have a charity. That's something that they can't copy. We're Spartans." Well, having horses and all of the challenges, and so I threw that out to some folks over in administration. And Russ [Russell G.] Mawby, he'll tell you. He was the greatest proponent of it. He's a great horse man. So Russ pushed it really hard.

It all goes back to the fact that U. of M. had such power as a result of their four or five to eight years of success. That just shows you. What it was probably worth, I don't know how many millions in sales of MSU products this year. I bet we'll outsell U. of M. two to one.

Charnley: We're on the way right now.

Guyer: We're on the way. That's why, and Peter will have more 3.8 scholars interested in this place. We'll have more applications and more good kids. If he finds a way to capitalize on this with some kind of academic forward-motion type of thing. It's unbelievable. But most people don't realize. They think athletics are athletics. Hell, that's not the case at all. And John Hannah really knew that.

Charnley: He did. Could we go back to your year as president? Who do you think brought your name to the fore? How did you become president?

Guyer: I'll have to tell you the story. I had been vice president and got along really well with the board, and got them involved quite actively with the legislature. I always tried to do my job and stay out of the way, as I do now. I believe you should do that. And so there had been all this commotion between John and the board, so when he

indicated abruptly that he was leaving, it left quite a void. The chairman was the hog farmer down there at Southern Michigan.

Charnley: Jack [John D.] Shingleton?

Guyer: No, no. He wasn't chair then. I'll get it in a minute. Well, anyway, he called me and said, "We want you to consider to be interim president."

I said, "Gee, I'm really not very excited about that."

He said, "Well, we're having a board meeting." He said, "Don't say you wouldn't."

And I said, "Well, I won't say I will. Mrs. Guyer and I are headed for the U.P. for our cabin tomorrow."

He said, "Where can I get you tomorrow?"

I said, "You can't."

He said, "Well, call me about one o'clock."

So I was wheeling along 2, and it was just like this morning, colder than a pistol and the wind was blowing. I had an outside phone, there along about Manistee. I called. He said, "Mr. President, can you come back tomorrow?"

I said, "No way. And what's this 'Mr. President' stuff?"

He said, "Well, we voted this morning. We want you to announce it tomorrow."

I said, "Jeez. I'm going to be in the brush, and Norma's with me. Well, maybe if I get up at quarter after three or so and drive to Escanaba, I can get an early plane and fly down and back."

Well, of all the things, it was the worst weather to leave my wife up there, three miles in the brush. I drove to Escanaba, flew down here, and flew back. In those two days, that all happened. And I sure didn't apply for it.

[Laughter]

So then we made the decision to move right over to Cowles House, rather than trying to do it. It all happened so fast that we just closed our house up for a year and moved over there. That was a smart move. And we did things different.

Charnley: More than just symbolic?

Guyer: Oh yes. I had a great rapport, I think, with the students, and a great rapport with the board. They'd had enough of that scrapping, and probably part of it was not my talents, but was their want for a more positive image.

So, one case in point is the students, I wanted to capture their support. So the senior class was diddling around looking for a project they always support. So they had three or four. They were good ones, but I said, Cowles House hasn't had any upgrading for a long time, and I said I couldn't put state money into making that handicap-accessible, but I really felt strongly about it. So I said, "Why don't you guys vote for working with me, and I'll make the bathrooms. If you'll gather (I don't know what it was) seventy, eighty thousand dollars, I'll make the inside handicap-accessible, and you make the outside." Well, if you remember, they did. They voted sixteen to one, I think it was. So, boy, I said, "We're getting that sucker finished while I'm president and having them in here." And if you look, there's a plaque there that recognizes that class, and then I had a big open house for the seniors and the handicappers. You can roll right in there now. That should have been done a long time ago.

But I had a lot of fun with the students. I enjoyed them. We made some significant progress, I think. Then I had the chance to be the catalyst for hiring Tom, so that wasn't all bad. But I knew Tom would be successful, but there again, there was an awful lot of alums said, "Oh, jeez, we've got to go out and get a name man." He hadn't had any hands-on experience.

Charnley: What did you see in him?

Guyer: I saw that guy, just what's happened, is that he was a real personable family man. I knew that he could do one thing like nobody else, and that's go into homes. I'll say this, Joe Ferguson was very supportive, too. He saw that. Go into homes and really recruit kids. That's proven. He's demonstrated he can coach, too. He's as creative as they come. But it's just like yesterday. The headlines today are, "He never lost his humility." That's tough in that position. God, with all of the visibility and pressure, not lose your humility. He's a typical land-grant blue-collared person.

Charnley: You see the U.P. connection important in his upbringing?

Guyer: Yes. The U.P. connection's important, but the important part of it is it casts him in the light of a homey type, blue-collared family man. You see, Lupey [phonetic] is always there. A lot of times, the young daughter's there. If you're sending this outstanding recruit to an institution, where he's going to at least have that fatherly counsel, this partnership that he plays up with Cleaves [phonetic] can't do anything but help him with moms and dads that want to make sure their kid doesn't go astray.

Charnley: Give some guidance.

Guyer: Yes.

Charnley: Won't get lost at a major university.

Guyer: Yes. Absolutely.

Charnley: What did your wife think about you taking the presidency?

Guyer: Oh, I think after that night in the woods, I got back, I don't know what time it was, way in the morning. Jesus, she'd been in there and it had been rain and lightning. [Telephone interruption.]

Everything happened so fast, and she was extremely supportive. She enjoyed the year very much. I'm sure she wouldn't trade that for anything.

Charnley: Obviously the presidential debates occurred on campus while you were president. How were you involved in that?

Guyer: I suppose that this has never been recorded.

Charnley: That's what we're talking about.

Guyer: I almost sunk the debates. What happened was that that debate was one of the most interesting procedures, and I have nothing but compliment for the group that we had on the committee that prepared our request and so forth, and then eventually won. But we never got around to sign the papers for the debate. Things happened so fast and there was so much confusion. This was no small project, and there were some rough edges. So everything was in order. Wharton Center [for Performing Arts] was all prepared. I kept pushing for more kids.

Charnley: More students to attend?

Guyer: I'd been with them, and, hey, they were talking about twenty, thirty kids. And they were ushers. So it was just an absolute coincidence; it wasn't any of my great wisdom. But I went over to look at the place two days before, I think it was. Lo and behold, the press was out there and asked me some questions. I said, "I'm not sure whether there's going to be a debate."

They said, "What?"

I said, "I'm thoroughly disenchanted with the fact that the students have committed so much and are so interested, and they ought to be a part of this historical event." Well, I got some press. They wouldn't open up the upstairs there because of security. I said, "That's nonsense."

So anyhow, it wasn't long until we got, I don't know how many more, but we got a hundred or more kids in there, and we got some handicappers in that we wouldn't have gotten in. The whole attitude changed, but it was wrong. Lord. If you're going to have it on a campus, kids, that's once in a lifetime.

It was fascinating. Somebody said, "Well, you want to welcome [George H.] Bush?"

I said, "Sure. Last time I was with him was in China." I had taken the first group of entomologists over in 1975 or '74. It was just the time I was changing over to director of Extension. There was a fascinating thing. He and his wife had just arrived, not as ambassador because they didn't have ambassadors, but as a liaison person. He could only travel, I don't know, twenty-five or thirty miles around Beijing, and we had pretty much a run of the country. We were there a month or more, and so first he had us, when we got there, over to this very modest house. So he said, "I'd like to meet with you fellows when you get back, to learn what you've seen."

So we said, "Sure." I was chairman of the group.

We decided during the month that we'd have a nice thank-you for the Chinese. We got back to Beijing, and we decided we'd have it at the Szechuan restaurant rather than the famous Beijing restaurant, the Peking restaurant where the Peking duck was so famous, because we all liked that hot food. So we invited him. In that four weeks, he'd learned quite a few words and phrases. They loved him. It was a great evening. The dishes, almost all of them had some insect name in it. Ants crawling up and down the noodles, and all of this. They weren't all insect, but the names were. He loved that. The Chinese, you know, the fact that we went a little bit out of the normal, diplomatic, they liked that.

And then Perry Atkinson [phonetic], who eventually became the chancellor of Texas A&M [University] and an entomologist, knew him. As we were breaking up that night, he said, "Anything you guys need, you got it."

We had another four or five days. Perry said, kind of as a joke, “Yes, we ran out of whiskey a couple, three nights ago.” [Laughter] And he laughed. So the next morning, we got up and the cars were waiting, and we looked, and there was a box of American whiskey that he’d sent over.

And so he came in the back of the Wharton Center with the security folks, and Mrs. Guyer and I were there. I said, “You probably don’t remember me, do you? Gordon Guyer. Last time I saw you, you hosted the entomology group in China.”

He said, “You were with Perry Atkinson and you ran out of whiskey.” That was ‘74 to ‘93, almost twenty years, and he remembered that one thing. [Laughter] But anyway, it was a great event for the university, I think.

Charnley: Did they have a reception or anything where you met [H.] Ross Perot?

Guyer: Oh yes. But you know, that was one of the things we did extremely well, the security thing. They said we did the best job organizing they’d had. Also, that’s typical. We knew how to do it. That was part of our Extension heritage, the P.R. and the security. You didn’t see any rough edges to that project. It was done well. Yes, the picture there.

Charnley: You’ve got their signatures on there, too?

Guyer: You forget about those things.

Charnley: Anything else during your term in office, that you could point to that were highlights?

Guyer: No. I hope in what you’re doing here, that you’ll look carefully. I mean, we talked a lot about the changes here on the campus, and the changes and decisions that relate around people, but certainly we need desperately to make sure we keep our eye on capturing the historical significance of the changes since 1855.

A case in point, I do quite a bit of hunting, as you know. I go down here by Flint to a pheasant preserve to keep my dogs sharp. This guy that runs this is a farmer who has turned his farm into this. He's a graduate, I forget the exact year, but he's eighty years old, plus or minus. His dad was a graduate in 1889. There was nineteen in his class, and there was one lady. Last time I was down, god, he went to the safe and pulled out the old list, yellow. I said, "My god, man, that's worth--" Then we got to talking. He's got three grandchildren here now, so that makes four generations.

Charnley: At the university?

Guyer: Yes. Thirteen of his relatives have all graduated from Michigan State. Well, you know, this is the kind of thing. And of course, that's one of the areas where metropolitan development has encroached on, so he's turned his farm into a profitable shooting preserve.

Well, what I'm saying is, we desperately need to make sure that we maintain first our land-grant heritage. There's something unique about land grant. I felt a little bit uneasy that we don't see it on the sign anymore. The new signs you put up, there's no reference to the fact. And that makes us not only different, but different in a very positive way, and it doesn't have anything to do with agriculture. That just happens to be how it originated.

I think Peter's so absolutely right in expanding the horizons of these kids with priorities for internships, international travel. The world's getting so small. John Hannah would be pleased. He saw that in 1945. To me, we not only must capture the history and the implications of our land-grant responsibility, it shows up in everything we do, but we need to make sure that the next century, it continues, because that's the only thing that separates us creatively and uniquely. It's part of our serving people. That's all it is; it's not a matter of us serving farmers. It's a matter of whether you're in medicine, we're serving people with primary care, whether you're in business and we're out there helping people establish and run better businesses, not just training kids in the classroom. So I worry. That's why I think historians have got a great opportunity to, one, not only capture what was the past, but keep us on the course for the future.

Charnley: What was the name of the person that had the hunting preserve?

Guyer: His name is Harold--I'll have to get you that.

Charnley: Okay. He sounds like he'd be an interesting interview.

Guyer: Oh, he'd be a gem.

Charnley: Especially to capture some of the student perspective, which we want to try to do.

Guyer: You know, it's a case study. I'll think of some other good names for you, too, because I go along now, I know exactly what you're doing. Because I run into people, and I think, "Oh, man, somebody should talk to them." I hope you continue your interest in this kind of maintaining, because as I said, it's just a shame that we hadn't had somebody that recaptured the renaissance, the rise and fall of the whole pesticide era, because Michigan State was so prominent in there. I mentioned Bob Ball.

Charnley: Several that we should talk to.

Guyer: Yes. You're on the right track.

Charnley: Maybe one last question deals with the issue of loyalty. Why did you stay at Michigan State University, from being a student? It seems as if many of the people we've been talking with, Walter Adams, another is an example who came here, anticipated staying a year or two and then leaving, but a whole career. Why did you stay at Michigan State?

Guyer: Well, I stayed, one, because I was having such a good time and enjoying professionally what I was doing. It would have been more profitable, probably, and I might have been more successful if I'd have jumped when some of these offers came along, but I was really intrigued with what I was doing.

Secondly, the university was such a great place, so creative in the areas that I wanted. I didn't need to go to industry or somewhere, because I was so satisfied and so interested here. I personally now look back and realize that I really believed in the land grant of serving people. So that fit well, whether I was out there with the legislature, building friends. So it was just what my personality meshed with and my interests meshed with. One thing fell in line.

As I told you, it's kind of nice to be able to say you've never had a day you didn't want to get to the office, and you never applied for anything you got involved with. So I was just a very fortunate person. I still keep my interests, but I have a firm belief that once you're finished with a job, whether it was presidency or director of the Department of Ag, I still stay interested in all the subject matter, but I stay away. I told Peter that my philosophy is, if you ever want me, I'm over in the Kellogg Center, but that's as close to the campus and involvement in politics as I want to get.

Charnley: I want to thank you very much for your time. I appreciate your contributions to the oral history project.

Guyer: I can see that Fred [Honhart] did well with you. We've had some great ones like Madison and others, but we've really lost some of that.

To finish answering your last question, which I intended and I got off base. One of the things that bothers me in the--

[Begin Tape 2, Side 2]

Guyer: Well, Jeff, one of the things as we finish this, that I think historians and individuals like you can be so helpful in, the last question you asked me about, loyalty. One of the things that bothers me, and I think it's because we don't have enough historical visibility, but, you know, when faculty members came during the Hannah years, they seldom left. A case in point, of course, myself, who enjoyed everything we were doing. But part of it's more than enjoying it. I saw a disturbing change in that during the more recent years. Faculty will jump at a few thousand dollars and other opportunities. I don't know if there's anything we can do about that. But continuity and loyalty is so important, proven in athletics, but it's just as important in academics. If there's something that historians can do that not only captures that but encourage it, so you've got a good job.

Charnley: Again, thank you very much.

Guyer: You're sure welcome.

[End of interview]

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