

B U F F A L O S T A T E C O L L E G E

1300 Elmwood Avenue - Buffalo, New York 14222-1095

March 17, 1992

Sam Wakshull
Exceptional Education
Ketchum Hall 216

Dear Sam:

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed! Here are some questions which can be used as a starting point. Remember, these are suggested questions only! As you review them, feel free to delete, change, or even add some! This may happen especially in the area of your union work.

If they seem satisfactory to you, let me know so we can then set a date for the taping. Make sure you have sufficient time to study the questions to take down some notes for the session. The interview will be in the library conference room which is a very quiet area.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Sister Martin Joseph Jones
Archives/Special Collections
E. H. Butler Library

SMJ/lk

1. Could you give me some background information about yourself: your youth, family, education etc.
2. What influenced you into the education field?
3. Did you have professional experience before coming to SUCB?
4. How did you get to SUCB?
5. What impressions did you experience as you began your tenure here?
6. What was your goal as a professor here?
7. Could you share some reflections on the area in which you worked? Faculty?
8. How did you get involved in the Faculty Union?
9. As president of the local union, what do you feel was accomplished? Any particular incident you'd like to record?
10. What changes were made statewide under your leadership?
11. Do you feel that legislators and educational leaders were in support of your goals? What reactions did you receive?
12. What do you feel is the contribution you have made to the college?
13. Were you involved in other professional activities on campus?
14. Do you have plans after your retirement?
15. What are some reflections you have on the future of the college?

BUFFALO STATE COLLEGE

1300 Linwood Avenue Buffalo, New York 14222-1095

July 30, 1992

Sam Wakshull
108 Hamilton Blvd.
Kenmore
New York 14217

Dear Sam:


Yesterday, after our taping session, I took the tapes home and listened to them in the evening. I am very pleased with the result. There was just a bit of repetition on the side we had to re-do.

I hope you are as pleased as I am with the finished product. I'll mail the tapes to your campus office.

It was a real pleasure for me to tape this interview with you. I learned so much from this experience. Indeed, you are a very fine person.

Enjoy your retirement. Perhaps, I should say "your semi-retirement!"

Gratefully;


Sr. Martin Joseph Jones

SMJ/pag

SAM WAKSHULL

Personal Reflections
July 29, 1992

SMJ: This is July 29, 1992. I have here Sam Wakshull, and we are going to ask you some questions. May I call you Sam?

SAM: Sam will be just fine.

SMJ: I know that we have a lot of information about you, your resume, etc....but that does not tell everything. Many times beautiful thoughts are not expressed which can be known only through interviews such as this. That is the reason that we would like to add your reflections to the Archives Oral History Project here at Buffalo State College.

SAM: I am honored. I'm not sure it is really important...

SMJ: Well, you have been here for some time, and you certainly have contributed to the college a great deal, so we want to have some of your view points on it. Now, I know there is one thing that is not down in a resume. There are little things that make a great deal of difference in your life. It has to do with your family life, with your background, where you were born, your formative years, your siblings and your education. Can you tell me a little bit about these things?

SAM: Yes. I was born in NYC. My wife says in Manhattan as she was born in Brooklyn so she is not a true New Yorker. I was born on the lower east side in 1922. There were 7 children; 4 girls and 3 boys. Actually there were 8 of us but one child died in Europe before my parents came to the United States. They were from Poland. This is sort of a by-word but is amusing when people talk about how horrible a condition they lived under in public housing. I don't find that so terrible because we lived in a four room apartment. Not a four bedroom apartment, but a four room apartment. The toilet was in the hallway which you shared with a couple of other families. What people now think of being a terrible house, for us at the time would not have been so terrible, and I find that amusing. This bothers me especially when people talk about this as being a cause for not doing well in school. I find that a little bit at odds with my experience because my friends on the street with whom I grew up went to college or a nursing school or became some sort of professional. They all lived under those what we would now consider to be terrible conditions. In fact there was not even a bathtub in the house there was sort of a wash tub that you washed in, and I recall my mother used to wash our hair every Friday with kerosene and soap; the kerosene was to kill any lice that you may have met. In addition she used one of those fine tooth combs, and the beds were sprayed every week to make sure that there were no bed bugs that came in from outside.

SMJ: She was a good organizer and a good mother.

SAM: Well she had to be. She died when I was ten years old.

SMJ: How to you rank in the line of children? The oldest, the youngest?

SAM: No, I was the third from the bottom.

SMJ: So there were two who were even younger than you?

SAM: Yes, yes. The five of us went to a home, and my youngest sister was too little to go because she was only about five and you had to be seven to go there. My oldest brother was already married so he took care of her! The rest of us went to this home, and I lived there until I was about 15 yrs. old.

SMJ: Do you mean in an orphanage?

SAM: Well I don't know if you would call it that because it was called the Hebrew Shelter and Guardian Society, but it wasn't just for orphans because technically I did have a Father, so I wasn't an orphan. But there were also children there from broken homes who did have a mother and a father, but the family had broken up, so they were there also.

SMJ: Are you Jewish yourself?

SAM: Yes. So I was there for five years.

SMJ: That was good in a sense; you were with your own religious group. You were able to participate in all of the activities. Did you learn Hebrew?

SAM: No, I did not. I had learned Hebrew before I went there, even though we did not have very much money. My father sold ice and he would deliver it five flights for ten cents.

SMJ: Did you have your Bar Mitzvah there?

SAM: Yes, I did.

SMJ: Did you live at the home and go to public schools or what?

SAM: No, they had their own schools which was an annex from one of the New York City schools. So it was backed by NYC Public Education.

SMJ: Well if I may make an observation, it was almost like being in boarding school, wasn't it? Did you see your Father often?

SAM: Well he would come up to visit every couple of weeks.

SMJ: How did this affect you psychologically? Did this upset you?

SAM: No. People say that it would have to have affected me. It was an institution, and I suspect that it would have had some effect, but I looking back now, don't think deleterious about it. It was one of the first of the cottage institutions set up on the cottage plan. There were anywhere from 28 to 30 boys in the cottage, and there was a cottage mother and one of the staff people who would be more involved with the boys if they were to have any problems. Of course, my brother was there so we were not isolated. My sisters were also there, not in the same cottage of course.

SMJ: There was not a mixture, say of families living there? Was it the boys with the boys and the same with the girls?

SAM: It was built around a quadrant, one side was the girls cottages, one side was for the boys. When you went to school, of course, you saw each other all of the time. We had to do all of the housework, I learned how to cook. I don't really feel like a disciplined person.

SMJ: No, it was good. It helped you later on probably didn't it?

SAM: Well, I guess it helped me get acclimated to Army life easily enough.

SMJ: You finished school there and then went on to college from there?

SAM: I finished there when I was 15, and then I went on to a foster home for about one year before I went back to live with my Father. In the final two years I went to several different high schools, which were in Manhattan. So all of that was my early childhood. The reason I said about not having much time is because school was out at about three and you had about 1 1/2 hours before supper, clean up and then after that it was study time until it was time to go to sleep. Friday nights we met with other cottage members, and you could sometimes bring in girls. The weekends were pretty free. On many weekends we would just go home. If we made arrangements we would go into the city by bus.

SMJ: I still think from what you have said, it must have been very similar to living at a boarding school. You didn't have that terrible stigma you know of being in an orphanage so to speak.

SAM: No, because there were no uniforms. We wore regular clothes, and that was one of the modern things to do in institutions. You had your own choice of clothes. Once a year, during passover, you got some new clothes.

SMJ: You were with boys and girls of your own age also.

SAM: Well, the cottages ranged in age which was interesting - from I guess 7 to about 15. I think it was called the "Democratic System." You had three people who were elected by the cottage called commissioners who helped run the cottage and planned things. When I was about 12 I was elected to take care of the younger group. It was a dormitory set up. Ages 12 and under slept in one dorm and ages 13 and over were in another dorm. Everything actually was just separated by a hallway.

SMJ: I gather from what you have said you never really felt sorry for yourself, or pitied your position. Or if you envy the other girls and boys who had a home and all...

SAM: Well sometimes, but I felt pretty secure. And there were enough activities to keep you happy. During the summer, they had athletic competitions; one cottage against another, and in the afternoons they had classes of different kinds, like print shop.

SMJ: Of course, what you are telling me speaks very well of the people who ran the school or the home. Evidently they did a very fine job of making you feel at home and not feel intimidated or miserable.

SAM: No, I felt pretty good.

SMJ: When you finished high school, did you have ambitions to go on?

SAM: Yes...I had somewhat of a scholarship which came from the Jewish Philanthropies, and I went to the University of Wisconsin for a year and a half, and then I went into the army. Time for the army.

SMJ: And where did you go and where did you serve?

SAM: I was in the Combat Engineers. I was inducted in February 1943, went through basic training and after about six months or so, they asked if I wanted to go to...well they didn't ask...they told people who had above a certain score that you will go to the Army Specialized Training Program which was very nice because then you went right back to college! We were at Antioch College for three months, but that I think was a little too liberal for the Army. It worked on the honor system, and they were not going to change that for the Army. They gave exams that were on the honor system. If you went to get some milk or

something, you just put your money in, and everything was fine. They took us out of there after the first semester and broke up the unit. Half went to Purdue, and I was in the half that went to the University of Kentucky. I guess the Army was running out of personnel (so we are into 1944 now). That is when the Germans counter-attacked at the Battle of the Bulge and they broke up all of the units and I went overseas. I had been in the 101st Engineers which was part of the 26th Division, but they didn't send you back to your own division...they just sent everyone to where they were going to be needed. That was alright with me because I came out of the Engineers, and I went back to the Engineers. I felt sorry for people who were in the Air Corps and were non commissioned officers. They lost their rank to go to ASTP and when they broke up they went back into the infantry or engineers wherever. I then went overseas and just went from one replacement person to another. I was in England for about 5 or 6 months just going from one place to another. Then in December when they really got hit, I was assigned to the 103rd Combat Engineers with the 28th Division. I stayed with them until November of 1945 when I was discharged.

SMJ: You were in England all of that time then?

SAM: Yes, I was in England for approximately five months. When I was assigned to the 28th division, they had been wiped out. We formed a new division. At that time we went into France which was called the small bulge and Alsace Lorraine. From there, we went north up to Germany and Belgium and those areas.

SMJ: So you saw some battles then?

SAM: Some, yes.

SMJ: You were in some bombings in Britain then weren't you?

SAM: (Laugh) No, I was never bombed! I was in a house that had been bombed before...

SMJ: You missed it! You missed the show of the German planes coming over.

SAM: Right. Just as I was in California last week and missed all of the earthquakes. Didn't feel any ground shaking.

SMJ: When you came back, did you continue your education? You had the Bill...the GI Bill.

SAM: Yes, the GI Bill. I went back to school at the University of Wisconsin for a while, and then I went to NYU and graduated with my Bachelors from there and then with my Masters.

SMJ: Now had you already decided to be a teacher? What prompted you to go into the field of which you eventually became a part?

SAM: I guess I always did. Even when I first started, I was going to go into History. After the War, I switched to Engineering. I did very badly in Engineering.

SMJ: Well that certainly is an honest answer!

SAM: Oh yes, it was bad. So I went to the VA, and they said if you want to continue, you are going to have to take a battery of tests. I asked, "Why?" They asked me, "Do you know why you did badly in Engineering?" And I said "No, why?" Because you have practically no depth perception. If you look at a drawing you can't perceive it is three dimensional. To be an engineer you have to be able to do all of that.

SMJ: That is an interesting observation, isn't it?

SAM: Well I asked what did the tests show? And they said: "Have you ever thought of becoming a minister?" A minister, I never gave it a bit of thought. The aptitude tests all seemed to lean that way. Well I don't think I want to be a minister or a rabbi. Well you came out in the 99th percentile in Social Studies. So, it goes back to where I really should have been instead of Engineering which I guess must have seemed more glamorous to me!

SMJ: So you went into teaching. Liberal Arts I guess wasn't it?

SAM: No, I went into teaching at NYU. It had always been an interest. My family always thought that I would be going into teaching ever since I can remember.

SMJ: Did you have any experience in teaching before you came here?

SAM: Oh yes, I taught for two years in Illinois and for 8 years in Connecticut.

SMJ: Now were you married during this time?

SAM: Yes, we got married in 1948, after the war.

SMJ: You were not married before? Had you met your wife before the War?

SAM: No, not until after the War.

SMJ: And how many children do you have?

SAM: Three. Two girls and one son.

SMJ: Are they all married now and have families of their own?

SAM: My daughter is married and is in Buffalo. She has three children. My son is married and living in California. They don't have any children yet. My youngest daughter who is going to be 30, I guess could be described as "Luftmensch." Right now she is in Paris some place.

SMJ: She is part of the modern generation I guess?

SAM: Well she bops around. She is supposed to be coming back in August I thought, but now my other daughter said she heard it would not be until September. But I won't hold my breath about it. (Laugh) She sort of flits all over the place. My granddaughter is just finishing up her first year at Michigan. So it makes you feel as though it really is time to retire.

SMJ: So how did you get here.

SAM: I started graduate studies at Boston University.

SMJ: This is for your Ph.D. you are referring to?

SAM: Yes, I never really finished it, but I was nearly finished yet it was time to get another job, or look for a job and there was one here. So I applied for the position here.

SMJ: When did you come?

SAM: In 1963.

SMJ: So Hank Mann was already here?

SAM: He was the Director.

SMJ: He hired you then?

SAM: Yes.

SMJ: I just interviewed him last week! So this works right in! You majored in what was it: Exceptional Education? And did you do that from the beginning?

SAM: Yes to both questions. My Masters degree was in Teaching Children with Retarded Mental Development.

SMJ: Now if I remember correctly, at that time it was rather new wasn't it? I understand Dr. Mann was about the first Doctoral degree person in Pennsylvania. Then he came here. So through the years it has developed more and more. You were almost in at ground level of this. You have been here of course 20 or 25 years.

SAM: I have been here for 29 years.

SMJ: Of course I want to ask you though what impressions did you have when you came here. Who was the President?

SAM: Dr. Bulger was President. The faculty was much smaller. The student body I guess was small and I kind of have to juxtapose it to how things are now, and have to look at it in that light. I think the faculty interacted more, and you got to know everyone for that reason. The students knew each other, certainly the department and they just did more things together, I find that much different from today. Now, I have students in student teaching but that is a rather small group. For example: if a student teacher is looking for a way to get to a particular school, I would say "Well you know that so and so is there, why don't you get in contact with him/her because there is transportation available." Then I would hear "But I don't know so and so (him/her)." And I would find an instance like this to be the case more often than not.

SMJ: You came just before the big boom didn't you? Because I came in 1969 and the bureaucracy had been set in 1966 when the Deanship, the Vice-Presidents were established. You came just before that. You were here for the last years of Paul Bulger weren't you?

SAM: Yes. I find a difference where the department used to have a party together every couple of months. That way everyone in the department became fairly intimate with each other. When I came back from _____ it had sort of like disappeared, the faculty never really met together again other than for a scheduled faculty meeting. And I found that to be a big change.

SMJ: Some have said that there is a dimension that is missing, and that is unfortunate. But that is the price you pay being with a large institution isn't it?

SAM: Yes, I think so. We used to have classes of no more than

SAM: Yes, sure.

SMJ: Where do you teach them? It would have to be in the Communications Building.

SAM: Yes, one person teaching that many students in a class in the Communications Building.

SMJ: Do you have assistants to help you teach, or assistants to help you grade papers, or pass out papers.

SAM: No. But to me that would be something that would lead to another bad habit. When I got classes of 50 or more I got into giving exams on computer based papers, using true/false, or a,b,c answers. Then I found that I was not giving papers to write, because to read a paper is probably going to take me 1/2 hr. per paper. It would take that long because I did like to check the references that were used for the paper. So this business I find is a very serious weakness in the education.

SMJ: What area of education is your specialization. Did you tell me that it was mental retardation?

SAM: Yes.

SMJ: All through the years you have continued to learn more and more by going to workshops and seminars?

SAM: Yes, oh yes. You also have to keep up with the literature.

SMJ: The literature really has increased hasn't it?

SAM: Yes, but some of it almost seems like fads of the time as it goes around. And I think that the faculty members have a different philosophy than Hank and I would have.

SMJ: Hank told me that you went out to the schools, not just one person would oversee the students. Each of you took a share in doing that.

SAM: Yes.

SMJ: And that helped you to get to know the students who were out there.

SAM: Oh yes. That was very important. I really felt that the severe lack in the educations process here when I have classes of 50 and sometimes more is that I never really get to know the students. I didn't give exams as to where I could probe what their thinking processes were and how they got to the answers they gave. I feel that is very poor. You really cannot properly teach in that way.

SMJ: As you leave you feel a little bit of sadness in that regard, that aspect is a weakness that you are sorry for. I suppose that was one of your goals being here was to teach the very best that you could. So that the mentally retarded people out there in the world could be helped.

SAM: Sure.

SMJ: That is just beautiful. I do think that it is a special gift that not everyone can do. Had you ever thought about that?

SAM: No, because I feel that anyone should be able to do that.

SMJ: But not everyone does! (Laugh)

SAM: You are right, not everybody does!

SMJ: Now how did you get, now this is interesting, you seem to be such a gentle person, how did you get involved with the union? I understand that you started the SPA?

SAM: No, I did not start SPA. SPA was the enemy.

SMJ: OK, so how did you get involved in this?

SAM: My oldest brother was a union organizer. He was considerably older than I. He was born in Europe. At the time, it was typical for the father to come to the United States to earn money to bring the family back to the U.S. with him. What happened is that WWI intervened. So he was in the U.S. and the rest of the family was back in Europe.

SMJ: Are you talking about WWI? Because you were in WWII weren't you?

SAM: Yeah. But my Father came over in 1913 or so. So there was a 3 or 4 year period and my brother came over and he was now about 9 or 10 years old. So there is quite a difference in the ages. There was 2 sisters and another brother in between. Then there was another year and a half between my brother and myself. If it weren't for that war, we would have a bigger family I'm sure! There would have been time there to have at least three more kids!

SMJ: A big belly laugh!

SAM: Anyway, he had been a union organizer, so I was very much influenced by him.

SMJ: You learned alot from him didn't you?

SAM: Yes, oh yes. I was active in the liberal groups more than the leftist groups in high school. We looked around at the lower East side at the conditions you would want to try and improve. Of course, you weren't just going to do it for yourself. That is sort of a background to it. I guess it was in 1966, Gene Welburn and Ben Steinzig were on their way down to a faculty meeting and they called me over to the side and asked me if I thought that I would be interested in starting a union. Naturally I answered, "Sure." So that is how I became involved in that.

SMJ: How casually sometimes big things get started.

SAM: I had been active in the AAUP at that time.

SMJ: Was Harold Petersen still involved at that time, or had he...

SAM: Ah, no, I think he had...Let's see, the President at that time was Marty Fried. Huela was the Vice-President or Secretary, and I think I was the Treasurer. The other thing that I was active in, was the grievance committee for the college.

SMJ: And you have been involved with the Union for many years. Now Sam, I am so sorry that we have spoken on the second side of this tape for about 10 or 15 minutes before either of us realized that it was not recording. So we will have to backtrack a little and continue on! We certainly will always remember this one.

(Very hearty laughing going by SAM at this point!)

SMJ: Now we were discussing your involvement in the Unions because when the Union is mentioned, so are you! Had we mentioned on the other side how you became interested through your brother or was that on this side? You know I asked "How did you get involved with the unions to begin with?"

SAM: I don't recall what side it was, but what I said before was that my brother had been a union organizer, and he did influence me quite a bit. He was much older than I and I think I did explain why. That my father had come to the U.S. earlier from Poland and my mother and he had been stuck in Europe because of WWI breaking out.

SMJ: Is that brother still living?

SAM: Yes, however he is very ill. That is why I went to California this week.

SMJ: What sort of work did he do? Did he continue on in union work?

SAM: No, his union was pretty much being wiped out because it was a left wing union. Subsequent to that, he went into the insurance field and had his own agency. He made more money that way.

SMJ: I see. As we said a while ago, you learned a great deal from your brother. And that was just meant to be, because look at the good that you have done. Now with the danger of repeating because of the error made in taping...you mentioned that Dr. LaMorte was the Head of SPA. Then you started the other team?

SAM: We started the State University Federation of Teachers and we had our own local here. At that time the campus had its own local, not that there was a local on every campus - there was only about four or five: Cortland, Brockport, Buffalo State and Geneseo, I think, was the other one. I suggested to Gene Welburn that he apply to the President. He sent the President a letter demanding recognition to the union. Of course the President deferred that to Albany, and Albany went to PERB saying that they want the community of interest to be the whole State University system rather than just each college. PERB agreed with that.

SMJ: Who or what is PERB?

SAM: PERB is Public Employment Relations Board.

SMJ: OK, thanks!

SAM: I'm sorry we use these easily. They are the State Agency that oversees all Public Employee Unions. They don't oversee the employees, they oversee the issues. They ruled that the State University was the community of interest, not each college, so that if you want recognition, you would have to have it for the whole State University. At that point, as I mentioned earlier, we only had about 5 campuses with any membership, and Buffalo State was the strongest with about 25 members. I filed under my name. I didn't do the actual filing to challenge that ruling in the courts, and there are about 13 volumes of testimony in Albany now. The entire thing lasted a long time. The purpose wasn't really to establish each campus as a local, (we knew that wasn't going to happen) but to stall for time, so that we could get organizations moving on each campus. In fact I used to have on this campus a fairly good organization by now and Gene Brunelle would do the typing for us. He was very good. He could type right on a stencil without making any mistakes.

SMJ: Of course. He was an English major remember, so he would also be a good writer.

SAM: I would take it over to the Newman Center and they would run it off for me. Then, I would take some over to UB to the various secretaries to distribute them in the boxes because we had no organization there at all.

SMJ: And you secured members in that way?

SAM: Yes.

SMJ: Now that work was done on a volunteer basis?

SAM: Oh yes, no one was paid for that. There were enough people who were interested. If you can get a half dozen people who are willing to get the work done it doesn't really take that much time. We would have meetings in Syracuse from the whole state group. It sounds impressive to say the whole state group but we had as many as 12 or 15 people show up. In fact Bruce Andrews would drive down with us while he was very active in the beginning. They would pay our expenses in so far as the hotel expense, and we received 5 cents a mile I think it was at the time. It didn't quite pay for everything, but when you want an organization badly enough you are not afraid to put out some time and some money as well.

SMJ: But it did take a lot of time didn't it?

SAM: Yes, it took a lot of time.

SMJ: Was there a lot of talking, engineering and research?

SAM: Yes, all of those things in addition to a lot of in-fighting. There wasn't that much of in-fighting at that time because none of us was strong enough for anybody to say "Gee, you know, I would like to be head of that organization." At that point when the election day was going to be set, and SPA (Senate Professional Association) came to challenge us, they challenged us because of the concern that we were associated with the labor organization. They didn't think that college professors should be associated with labor organizations. We did not get very much support from our organization as AFT or the Statewide which was in the Empire Federation of Teachers. It was really just a paper organization anyway. NEA bankrolled the SPA.

SMJ: It still is pretty big isn't the NEA?

SAM: In New York State it isn't. It is very small. They have Buffalo and a few smaller schools. NEA bankrolled SPA and they put it together. On the first election SEA won the plurality but in the subsequent run-off election SPA won. They got the CSEA people to back them, and they came out with the majority, so they won the election and they were recognized by the State of New York as well as the State University Bargaining Agent. There was

a lot of fighting on other campuses but on the campus Charles LaMorte called me and said you know this is crazy we should be fighting each other; we should be working together for the good of everybody. And I said "You are right." So we maintained our own organizations, but I would meet with his executive board, so that we confronted management. We would have a common front and they wouldn't be able to divide us.

SMJ: LaMorte was a very diplomatic man wasn't he?

SAM: Charlie? Yes, he was, but he was absolutely right on that issue.

SMJ: And then you became UUP, right?

SAM: Right.

SMJ: Who was it that you said was responsible for that name?

SAM: Mike Lillian. He was head of a Urology Dept at an upstate medical center. What happened was: When the NEA and the AFT merged in NYS, then all of the other locals had to merge. We merged into it and then the problem was "What name are you going to have?" We wanted SUFT and they wanted SPA. And to hold one name the others said we are not merging because you are submerge us to yours and it becomes...I realized then how important a name could be. At first its like "Come on, what's in a name?" A LOT! So we had to come up with a new name.

SMJ: Very good, and it is UUP. Everybody knows that now.

SAM: Yeah, UUP.

SMJ: I always thought it meant: United University Professors. But it isn't. It is United University Professionals.

SAM: That would cover the waterfront. Because then the professionals wouldn't say "Wait a minute, we are not professors. So this covered everyone. And it has really worked out well.

SMJ: When did you become head of the local?

SAM: I was elected statewide in 1975.

SMJ: That was statewide in 1975, but I am referring to the local here. Was that after 1975?

SAM: No, I was president before that, I think it was in 1968.

SMJ: How long did you serve, can you be re-elected, or can you just serve one term?

SAM: You are allowed to serve three terms, of two years each. I was elected statewide and elected for three terms.

SMJ: Are most of those who run and are elected, is it for the three terms. Because I suppose that you you are really interested in it, you are willing to give your sweat, blood and tears to it!

SAM: And just as in Congress the incumbent always has the advantage.

SMJ: Plus you have the experience my heavens! Now I have to repeat again: When you look back, what do you feel is your greatest moment? Or what was your greatest contribution to the union?

SAM: I think in just holding it together. When I became president I think we had about 3500 members out of about 20,000 which was not very strong. The first task was trying to build up the organization. When we started, I set up organizations on this campus so that...and i use the work steward which some people said I really shouldn't use, I should use the term representative because steward is a labor term. But steward is really a good term because the meaning of it is not that you have an obligation to people. So we called then stewards on this campus though other campuses don't. Then statewide we set it up as a steward system, so each department would have a representative. The only way I thought you were going to build a union is to have everyone feel as though they are included. You also had a means of getting to the membership.

SMJ: Do you have disappointments from your own viewpoint of what you failed to do or you wish you could have done?

SAM: Oh, well...

SMJ: Well you know you may not have any to express.

SAM: No, I think it could have been a stronger union. Let me go back a little bit to one of the things which I did accomplish which I feel was important. That was, we set a TIA CREFT Bill. That increased the pensions for people on CREFT considerably. At that time, and even now, the State pays in 15% of your salary to the Social Security base. No, it is 12% and 15% after that, so at that time the Social Security Base was \$14,000. I think. So they paid \$12,000 on that and as Social Security went up they were paying less money on your salary as your salary went up! When it went up to 16.5 and that's what it is now we asked the State Legislature to roll it back to 14, we are not going to do that they said. So we said that we would like a freeze on it. They said they would roll it back but that it would close at three million dollars. At that time, 3 million dollars was a lot

of money, now it is nothing. We got the State Legislature to pass that bill to freeze it at 16.5 and it was unanimous. We worked hard on it, and the Governor vetoed it! That was Gov. Carey. The next year, he was running for re-election and we introduced the bill again. At that time, it had gone up to 17.5 and the legislative person from NYSET said we could introduce the bill again. I said "Let's roll it back to 16.5." No one has ever thought of rolling things back. And my argument with the legislature was: If it was good enough last year at 16.5 and you voted for it, it should still be OK. And they did agree to roll it back. The problem was going to be Gov. Carey. I was on the executive board of NYCET and we were at a meeting and Carey was coming for support. I don't recall but my wife tells me that is what happened: Carey came over to me and asked "Sam why don't you like me?" Because I was opposing it and it is pretty hard for them to get support if were are one of the biggest locals who wouldn't support him. "Because I want the CREFT Bill passed and signed." And do you know, Sister Martin, that he didn't even know what I was talking about! But he turned to his secretary who was Hawaiian, (can't recall the man's name but he was the guy who really ran the State.) He said all of the necessary memos have gone forth, which meant that no agency was going to oppose this bill. Then he said "Oh sure, I'll sign it." At which time I said "Oh, I think you will make a great Governor!" And that is the story on how that bill went through! The other think that maybe even more important is the first bug cut was going to come. When we started the save SUNY campaign. No one really believed that was going to work. I think that took place around 1978. When we got word in November that the budget was going to be cut at the University, I felt it was very important that we oppose this very strenuously. My wife and I came up with the Save SUNY campaign. We had a PR person on our staff who came in three days a week, and he designed the big button. We put out posters saying we were going to have a big meeting in Albany. We decided to do it without NYSETS help because they really were a little leery about the entire thing. We had petitions going around on all of the campuses, and we involved the student body and the student organizations. They wanted to do their own thing, only we said NO. We will give you the money because they had none. I also learned that you have to control the purse strings. We told them that we would write the posters, because we knew what would happen if we give the students a free hand, and we did not want that to backfire on us with the legislature. We kept a pretty tight hand on them, paying for their expenses making the posters, so we could be sure the language was proper, etc. So when we ran this campaign we had to rent a room in Albany. We wanted a room that held 1,000 people. But the only one we could get close to was one for 3,000. That was quite worrisome, because what if people do not show up? I had a lot of sleepless nights on that one; I really did! We filled the room, actually it was overflowing. Then we were under attack by the NEA at the same time. There were cameras there ready to take pictures of this

empty auditorium. I'm not sure the people from NYSET even came down, but they called Tom Hoban. They said "You had better get down and talk because this whole place is full and it was overflowing," we had people standing around. We had papers prepared for people as to what they were going to say to the legislators and to hand them out. We also had the great big buttons. The legislators told us they had never seen anything like it before. They had never seen that massive a demonstration before. One legislator from NYC said it was the largest demonstration she had ever seen. It overwhelmed them enough that we got all of the money back at that time. We also said to the legislators "You know you can appropriate the money but the Division of Budget does not have to allocate it! And that is what has happened at times. The legislators say "Here is the money," and the Division of Budget says we are not going to give it out. It was the first time they had included the one sentence bill that went to the effect that "No program will be diminished/cut from the State University." That is all it said and that gave us the handle that if they want to lay anyone off, we would say that you are diminishing that program, and you can't do that. It was a one year bill but it was enough for us to keep things going. And I think that was the most important...

SMJ: That and the continuation of the union.

SAM: That legislative fight because that gave us statewide organization from herein after. We had each campus organize and meet with the legislators and have a legislative committee. We kept that going. It was not just that meeting that made them say it was great. We had to keep it going. What we did was to have each campus send down each week, three or four people which was not much, but we told the people from New York to go enmass to these legislators and put literature, only we use various colors of paper that it was printed on. So to them, it was something new. Of course, I realized that they probably weren't reading it any way. But just by having three or four different people from various campuses each week, it looked like a lot of people.

SMJ: But the fact that these people were leaving their campus and coming to see them every week meant they were very sincere about their interest.

SAM: And since they kept this barrage of paper up and these huge buttons all of the time.

SMJ: Now, your experience on the local campus certainly helped you on the State level.

SAM: Yes, because it helped me organize the local campus chapters. We used the same kind of system for stabilization.

SMJ: You mentioned in our cut-out tape that you were horrified by the experience you had when you talked with men and women who were laid off, even though they were tenured.

SAM: That was very difficult to have to deal with.

SMJ: Because it was the first time in the SUNY system.

SAM: And you are just so helpless because you really didn't believe you could lay off tenured people. They showed us they could be laid off. Tenure gives you a right to trial, you might say.

SMJ: Do you miss being involved...or are you still involved in this?

SAM: I am only involved on the department level. What happens is, just like in any political organization, this is a disappointment that can be hurtful. People are afraid that you are going to come back and try to usurp their progress on campus and what they have achieved. So, for example: When the second lay off came about six years ago, John Aiken called me and said "Why don't we sit down and see if we can come up with a plan on the campus to save peoples' jobs? I said sure. Bob DuBois was President then and I met with him. He said "No." Later people told me that he had said "No" because he wanted to know just what my motives were! Don Brennan asked me: "Do you think you have friends? Well you had better just watch out for some of them, because they are stabbing you in the back on your own campus." He said it was Nuala. Now I was used to some of the political problems from the Reform Corpus. They have their own agenda, and have the right to meet and try and impose, but to get the organization to accept their thoughts and policies. When we were under attack and we were still trying to build the union, they were often trying to destroy meetings that were going on, or rather disrupt meetings. For example we were going around to each campus and trying to set up a system where we (my wife and I) could involve new leadership, develop leadership from people who were not leaders on the campus, so that you have a cadre of people getting more involved, so we would meet statewide at the various campuses. We would ask them to give us the names of people who they thought would profit from a leadership meeting. We were at one in Syracuse; and I know they were trying to disrupt it, because I was in my room at night, and I heard talking in the next room. The voices were saying how we can do this, and how we can do that to so and so. They were really plotting, but they were not smart enough to realize that I was overhearing their plans. It was just fortuitous that I overheard what they were planning. Neither of us knew we were in adjoining rooms! But I was shocked to know that they were willing to disrupt meetings.

SMJ: Did they eventually learn that you had overheard them?

SAM: I told them, yes. I told them, if you want to plot, do it quietly so that other people don't know what you are doing.

SMJ: I bet they were shocked?

SAM: Yes, they were taken back a little. Even now, it still goes on, and in a way it reminds me of Bush saying that the riots in Los Angeles were caused by Johnson, ya know. He was the cause. I wondered what Bob's motives were in wanting to help out in this campaign. I felt that I had lots of experience in running a legislative campaign. In fact, I had run the most successful one. I also mentioned that Don Brennan said, "You know people so, you think, are your friends but are stabbing you in the back, back on the campus." I was aware that no one had asked me to join any of the committees on the union, and I thought this happens politically. Some people are out, and some new people are in, and they do not want to give up their power. But this was from my reception that was sent out to people and went to Phil Reems who interestingly enough was part of the other caucus. He said RSVP cannot attend, but sent best wishes to Sam. And then he said: "Sam is a dear person who has not in my opinion received fair play from his union friends," many of whom are still in leadership positions. He is a man of class and should be so wanted. I guess what he is saying is that there is still derogatory remarks being made. Of course, this is now 12 years later, so it doesn't make too much sense now.

SMJ: But you see, you felt you wanted to give the younger people some advice as the benefit of your expertise...they may not want it!

SAM: Well, I can appreciate that, but to still be making nasty remarks 12 years later makes very little sense. That part does hurt, especially when it is supposed to be his "friends" who are doing these things.

SMJ: I am sure you realize that you cannot let anyone else ruin your life, and I am sure that you have not.

SAM: Right. I know some of the problems, I think...because at one meeting (this was after I was president) and it was the first contract Nuala signed. That was the time they lost 700 members because the state wanted to take 700 people out of the unit. Charlie Hansen, who was then vice president of the union, said to me when I was at the meeting, "Well, you know she has been saying things about you." And I asked, "What? She said it was your fault that they had to give up the 700 members." "It wasn't my fault, I wasn't even there!" "When you were President you accepted _____, who was then the assistant director to the Gov. Office of Employee Relations. He was the one we dealt

with for negotiations. When he wanted to take out these 700 people where were quote "casual employees" which is a technical name, you said to him "Well do it, if that is what you have to do." I said "That is right. You do what you have to do, and I will do what I have to do." He knew exactly what I meant. That I was not giving them up. "You want to do it, do what you have to do and go to PERB. And we will oppose it." But Nuala did not give that part of the story. I think she was upset with me for many reasons, but mostly because I did not support her running for President of the Union, and I told people why! I said, "she came to me and asked if I would support her and I have known Nuala for many, many years. I asked her "Nuala, who do you want to run for President?" And she said, "There is nothing left for me at Buffalo State." And I said, "I don't think that is a good enough reason to run for President of the Union." I guess maybe I'm still out...

SMJ: What did she mean by that though?

SAM: Well, she wasn't going to advance more. She really wanted to go into administration? Go on to deanships and stuff like that. There was nothing wrong with that.

SMJ: Did she get her latest honor based upon her work with the union?

SAM: I don't know! I don't know what it was based upon.

SMJ: You understand that she got it, don't you?

SAM: Yes, sure. Yes, but I think she never forgave me for that reason. Plus I said "if a person wants to be head of the union it has to be more than just because there is no place else to go. So, that was that!

SMJ: I may be repeating this, but do you feel that the contribution you made to the college has been that you have kept the union in business and also your teaching?

SAM: Yes. With the union, I felt it was important because we got a lot of money back, and it developed a strong political base statewide, so that you can get more from the Legislature than they would have at any other time.

SMJ: Has the membership increased a great deal?

SAM: Oh yeah! The membership is up to about 17 or 18,000 now.

SMJ: Is that on the local level too?

SAM: Oh, on the local level, I think it would be almost 100%.

SMJ: Do you know what convinced me? Of course as a religious, I came here in 1969, and there was no question in my mind that I was not going to be in the union. If I belong to any organization, I want to become involved in it, and I could not see myself as a nun being involved with the union. However, I read in an article written by you, I think, that if you benefit from all of the work that the officers and the union do for you; then you help by supporting your union. The union will fight for the raises, and I, as an individual, will benefit from that. That alone convinced me to support the union. If you are going to benefit in any way from this organization, then you better join and support it.

SAM: Besides, you are going to pay money anyway. They are going to take the money out just the same.

SMJ: They take the money out anyway? Now, how is that possible?

SAM: That is a state law.

SMJ: It is a state law?

SAM: Yes, and the law is an interesting one. It is called: Agency C Law. The reason for this is one thing: the public employees do not have the benefit the private employees have in the union, that they can strike. They got a law passed that said they could and it is interesting because all state employees would have to pay the agency fee even if they don't belong to the union. Public school teachers would have to negotiate that with their boards. I would think most school boards have agreed that if teachers don't want to join a union, they have to pay an agency fee, because the union must represent everyone whether they are union members or not. They must represent them fairly.

SMJ: That does seem strange though; you know, not to be a member yet be represented.

SAM: It is like paying taxes. I don't have to be a citizen, yet I must pay taxes. I may not be a citizen, yet if my house is on fire, I am going to call the fire department, and they are going to put out that fire for me!

SMJ: Now I understand. You are not a member, yet you are reaping the benefits. Same idea with the house!

SMJ: Why did you retire?

SAM: Well I am 70 years old.

SMJ: That is not a reason, because you didn't have to at age 70, did you?

SAM: No, I didn't have to, but my wife said, "You know that is not a good law, because how are the young people going to come in? People are graduating and they are not going to have jobs because the older people are going to say, wait a minute I want to keep mine." My wife really did convince me that it was the right thing to do.

SMJ: And it really wasn't necessary financially for you...

SAM: No. She said we don't really need the money financially, and all I am doing is keeping a younger person from a job.

SMJ: And you have said too in our former conversation that you are doing a great deal of travel now. Are you traveling? Is your wife still working?

SAM: Well she is retired but she is working on a part time basis doing mediations for the state.

SMJ: She is still involved with the union?

SAM: She is still with the union; she is in neutral now! She is doing a mediation in Niagara Falls now.

SMJ: Do you like to travel?

SAM: Not as much as she does.

SMJ: Have you been to Europe?

SAM: No, but I think she is planning something for Europe.

SMJ: Have you been to Israel?

SAM: Yes, I was there about eight years ago. That was in regard to a union conference, and was an international conference. It was an interesting trip.

SMJ: You have been out to California to see the children, haven't you?

SAM: Well, we went to California because my brother is very ill, so we wanted to see him. I have brothers and sisters out there, anyway, so it was fun to see all of them.

SMJ: How very nice, had you been there before?

SAM: We had been there about three years ago.

SMJ: It is beautiful country out there isn't it?

SAM: Yes. Although I do not care too much for Los Angeles, but we enjoyed it.

SMJ: I guess that is what nearly everyone says that they don't really enjoy Los Angeles. Now, what do you think about the future of this college? Do you think it is headed toward bad times? Do you think the SUNY system is going to go down?

SAM: I think the SUNY system was not well planned to begin with. It grew sort of like topsy. That is the only way I can explain it. I think they are going to have to be careful on admittance. Admitting students who are not going to do well is not a good idea. They really should be a bit more selective, even if it is necessary to close some of the campuses. Lowering the standards, does not help at all. It hurts everyone. I think the standards have dropped. When I was teaching the students said "Well you are not going according to the text." "I want to enlarge and expand on the text and supplement it." I ran into a lot of difficulty and some students went to the Chairman and said I was going by the text. You can read the text and you will be responsible for it. Good Lord, there is only one text and I used to give more...

SMJ: When you think of the College having to establish remedial courses that to me seems to be very detrimental to the school.

SAM: I think if they want to do that, they should use one of the community colleges. But that is not helping at all.

SMJ: Yes, I agree and I feel there is a lot of people who would agree with you in that it seems to be a lessening of the standards.

SAM: If you raise the standards, you get as many students and better students.

SMJ: So, "if I read you right" as they say, you feel there must be some study on the part of the state (SUNY system) to either reorganize and become a little more strict, cut here and there if need be but keep it high tone.

SAM: Yes I think, I recall when growing up, the City University was free.

SMJ: It isn't free now?

SAM: Not any more, no. It is really run by SUNY. The state pays all the salaries, they own all of the buildings.

SMJ: That would be CUNY.

SAM: CUNY, right. Again, they own all of the buildings and SUNY pays all of the salaries. So there is another state university.

SMJ: It is not the City of...

SAM: Not any more. The city gave that up about 1978 and 1979, when they said they were not going to put anything into it any more.

SMJ: So the students pay a certain amount.

SAM: Yes, they pay about \$200, less than the SUNY students do. I remember when I was growing up, to go into CUNY when it was still city college you had to be pretty high up in your school to get in. The people who came out of there could go to almost any graduate school. When they made it an open enrollment, it really destroyed the entire institution. In talking to those people who were there then, and they see it now, they say it is just not the same.

SMJ: Do you leave the college with some happy thoughts?

SAM: I was very happy here. In spite of some of the things I thought were not done well and I guess that is what really almost led to the union, there were just so many inconsistencies. I can think of one with Carlton Bauer as acting Vice President. The Chemistry Department had not renewed someone, and they said, "Well, you know, you are president of the union so we didn't have official standing. You go and talk to him." So I went. He said, "Well you don't want me to go against the faculty who refused to renew him. I tried to make an argument that didn't work. When someone in my own department was not renewed, even though the faculty voted to renew him, I said "You know, in the Chemistry department you said 'I wouldn't want you to go against the faculty would I?' 'Not really, except there are extenuating circumstances.' But now the faculty voted for the person, and now, you are going against the faculty. How do you explain it? And he said, "Well, we know things about him that you don't know." I asked, "What?" And he said, "If we let it be known to the public, it may destroy his family." I asked, "Shouldn't he be the one to make that decision? - Whether it should be public or not!" He said, "Well you are right, but I am not going to do it anyway." It was that kind of thinking and there are things even now that go on that bother me. I got a call from someone in my speech department who said that he was asked to teach next semester (he is not retired), and they were going to pay him \$4,000. He agreed. Now the chairman called me up to say it is going to be \$3,000. To me, that is wrong. He doesn't remember if he has it in writing, and if he does then he thinks he may have misplaced the letter etc. Now, when I was president of the union, and I dealt with Government Office Employee Relations, we made an agreement and it wasn't necessarily in writing. I recall

one particular case where during negotiations the Director or OER and myself had reached an agreement on what the salary date would be. When I read the agreement coming out, someone had goofed and said that the increase, instead of being effective Sept. 1, would be effective to the date the closest, or the payroll closest to that date of Sept. 1. This meant that people were going to lose a couple days of increase money. It wouldn't be very much money, but that was signed off. I called Don Wallet and said, "Don, that was not the agreement that we had." He said, "You are right." That afternoon, I was at a meeting, and one of the secretaries came in and said we got a call from the legislature. They wanted to know if I was aware that the state was changing the money bill? I said "Yes I am aware of it." We didn't have it in writing but anything we agreed to, that was it. If you gave your word that was it! It bothers me that if they give someone their word that they are going to teach, and then three months later say, "Well we are going to cut your salary by \$1,000."

SMJ: Do you feel that it is because of the tension of the time, or the financial situation?

SAM: It may be both, but this was after the budget was set, so they would know what it was going to be. That has happened a great deal and not just here, either. There are people who used to write in the VOICE about it. We got one call from down state, Stonybrook I think, where the person filed a grievance on the 47th day. You are supposed to file by the 45th day. We said, "Well, you are too late you know!" I asked him "Why didn't you file when this first happened? Because the contract is very specific and if you are a day late they are not going to deal with it." And he said, "Well the vice president was a friend of mine and he said, "Don't worry, I will take care of it for you." By the end of 45 days the vice president told him there is nothing he can do for him now. That kind of shenanigans that go on all over really disturb me.

SMJ: There is one question which I did not ask you. Perhaps you will not want to answer it. In all of the years that you have been here since 1929, is there any person or persons who stand out in your mind as being really remarkable people on campus? You can name them if you care to do so. Any administrators, or professors that you highly respected?

SAM: Well there was Hank Mann with whom I had many differences of opinion, not so much professionally. Professionally, I think we were pretty much on the same plane, but administratively? This makes it sound as if there is no one, but really there were many.

SMJ: Yes, that is wonderful; that's good to hear. That is why I said I didn't give you a chance to even think about it. I didn't have that on my list of questions. Hank mentioned that also that there were many people who were so good. And I think that is great that you are leaving, and that you still have friends here and will be connected with it. There may be the emeriti; the group should be coming back. Is there anything else that you would like to add to this? Did I leave anything out?

SAM: I cannot think of anything. I think we have covered the waterfront!

SMJ: Well I hope that we did and I apologize for the breakdown of this machine at one point, because it may be disconnected. If you find that there is a gap in something, we still have part of this tape left, and we can make clarifications if need be. I surely do thank you.

SAM: I just want to add this final thing. A lot of people who are retiring almost seem bitter. That is hard for me to understand because I really enjoyed my years here, and I really enjoyed working with the students. I guess I can understand where administration comes from. They have their agenda and the things they have to do which may not be the things we like.

SMJ: Well, you know that I have talked with you so much this afternoon on your professional activities as the union and I didn't question you, perhaps wrongfully, about your interaction with the students. I'm sure you have met and learned much from the teachers of mentally retarded children.

SAM: Yes, and that is why I am going to be teaching part time next semester!

SMJ: Are you Sam?

SAM: Yes, my wife thinks that I am crazy but...I really enjoy it! I really enjoy working with the students.

SMJ: And you will be with student teachers?

SAM: Yes, I will have six in the fall and three in the spring. I will only be allowed to have nine hours.

SMJ: And I am sure that you have had many beautiful experiences in your years with teaching the students who are preparing a career in teaching mentally retarded children.

SAM: Yes, they come across well. They are excellent students.

SMJ: And they go out to teach in all of the institutions in our area, and all over the world for that matter!

SAM: All over the world is right.

SMJ: Well, I surely do thank you for giving up your entire afternoon for this interview.

SAM: It was a pleasure and I thank you.