

**Interview with Dr. Milton Plesur and Dr. Selig Adler,
SUNY Buffalo State Oral History Project, 1975-1995**

Interviewer: Sister Martin Joseph Jones

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Description

Dr. Milton Plesur was born April 15, 1927 in Buffalo. He attended Public School #21 and Bennett High School. Dr. Plesur graduated from the New York State College for Teachers at Buffalo in 1947. He received his Masters from University of Buffalo in 1949 and his Ph.D. from the University of Rochester in 1952. In 1955, he joined the History Department faculty at the University at Buffalo until his retirement in 1987. Dr. Plesur passed away in 1987.

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Transcript

Sister Joseph Jones: This is October 28, 1982. I have with me Dr. Milton Plesur, Professor of History, State University of New York at Buffalo and his guest also with us is Dr. Selig Adler, former professor at UB which I have already taped an interview.

Well Dr. Plesur, I know you that went to school here but before we get onto that very important topic I should like very much to have a little bit of information about your background. Your birth place, your family, are you an only child? Did you have any sisters or brothers? What do you have to say about your childhood reflections?

Dr. Milton Plesur [00:55]: Well, I was born in April 15, 1927, in the city of Buffalo. My parents at that time lived on a one block street called Camp [?] Street, which I believe is between Sycamore and Genesee. I was

born in the General Hospital, which is now, at least it used to be a nursing home.

Sister Joseph Jones: Is that right?

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:9]: And after living about a year on Camp Street, we moved to Linden Avenue which we thought, I guess from what I've heard, part of the pioneers of the Jewish people into the North Park section of Buffalo and then we moved to Lovering Avenue and then to Avery, and then about thirty some odd years ago to where we live now.

Sister Joseph Jones: Where is that?

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:41]: This is on Wendover [?] Avenue in the Town of Tonawanda. We were very smug having finally gotten out to the suburbs, albeit only two blocks north of Kenmore Avenue, not very far, not the golden suburbs. I am an only child. My father was a huckster, a junk peddler, one of the few that didn't make money I gather. The only time that we were fairly comfortable is when he worked Curtiss-Wright plant during World War II and my mother...

Dr. Selig Adler: World War I.

Dr. Milton Plesur [02:11]: Yes, World War I. He was born in Buffalo in 1896. His greatest memories are dealing with all of the [?] luminaries that stayed at the Hotel Iroquois when he worked as a bell boy among other types of jobs. My mother was born in Russia, we think in about 1900 and she came over to this country about 1910-1911. She was the only one of her family that actually received schooling, she went up to the 6th grade and hence she had no accent. Of course, we use to joke with her about that. Never told the truth crossing the Peace Bridge because you know she never received her papers until World War II, when there was that [?] for all aliens to become naturalized. And she worked after I got older in the Liberty Shoe store as a cashier clerk.

I went to Public School 31 on Hertel Avenue, regretfully now closed and then went to Bennett High School [and] took the general academic curriculum and began to work in the war plant Curtiss-Wright also in what they used to call the School Boy Shifts from about four until midnight twice a week and all-day Saturday. I graduated in three years in an accelerated program and came right to Buffalo State.

Sister Joseph Jones: Were you interested in history as you were growing up?

Dr. Milton Plesur [03:57]: Yes, I came under the influence of a woman who I thought was just a terrific teacher, Helen Gabriel, who later on I had in a workshop. So, we reversed roles and incidentally she got an A too. Selig Adler knows her very well, indeed. But she is a really fine teacher, she was out of classes a lot, kids use to always joke that she maybe liked the bottle a little too much.

Sister Joseph Jones: Was this School 31?

Dr. Milton Plesur [04:25]: No. This was Bennett.

Sister Joseph Jones: Bennett.

Dr. Milton Plesur [004:27]: And she would never finish the chronology of the course and we always had to rush at the end and we were more worried than she was. Oh, but I got a hundred on the Regents [Exam] for example. She made it very clear just because I got a hundred I didn't know everything in Ancient Medieval history.

Sister Joseph Jones: But you were just a natural historian, you just took to it?

Dr. Milton Plesur [04:44]: It was...yeah I had a woman from my seventh and eighth grade social studies, called Rebecca Shepard, she went on to become principal and I don't know what she is doing now, I think she is

still living. At any rate, I always had a fondness for history and just the opposite for mathematics, that always goes together.

Sister Joseph Jones: Well, was there any reason that you came here to school here other than?

Dr. Milton Plesur [05:07]: Yes, very definitely. I was very confused in my senior year, the draft was on and I didn't know whether I would be taken, as it turned out that was not an important point. My blood pressure took care of that. At any rate, I went up and had a conference with Dean Berkhamlemon [?], Dean of Pharmacy at the University of Buffalo and he asked me a few telling questions that convinced me that I ought to never be a scientist of any sort. My knowledge and my grades for math were pretty bad. I finally flunked Elementary Algebra. I was so freighted of it that I had cheated my way through the year and then flunked the final. I learned a lot of lessons out of that and I told...I share these with students a lot now. But I went up through Trigonometry, never went beyond that except for appreciation of math course here at State. Well, we didn't really have the money to go to UB. I can't cite you figures but it was, we thought too expensive, so I came to the state school. I didn't qualify for any scholarships and I don't think I ever took any exams because I was a graduate in January. And I started here in February of 1944.

Sister Joseph Jones: Now, before we get to the college, there is one more question that I have about your childhood, high school. Did you take part in extracurricular activities when you were in school? Or did you have...were in a gang with the boys, you know and that sort of thing? What were you interested in?

Dr. Milton Plesur [07:09]: Mostly political and certainly not sports, although I was on the track team for a little while along with it seemed hundreds of others. But I was never...I am a [??] moron basically, that's what they would call people like me. I was working a good deal of high school. I worked, I forgot to say, I worked in the basement of Sattler's on Broadway in the produce department breaking boxes for the same men that run the Park Edge-Bell store now.

Sister Joseph Jones: You certainly weren't a lazy boy, you were really ambitious to work!

Dr. Milton Plesur [07:43]: I was pretty active also in politics in our school. There was a young man, Burton Rabbins [?], do you remember that?

Dr. Selig Adler: ...spent some time up the river.

Dr. Milton Plesur [07:50]: No, that was Morton Seigel.

Dr. Selig Adler: No Burton Rabbins.

Dr. Milton Plesur [07:54]: Did he do it? Did he? Well, anyway, Burton is now living in Israel, he is a citizen.

Dr. Selig Adler: He got out, they won't take him [not sure?].

Dr. Milton Plesur [08:03]: Well, I have talked to you about that. I can't recall that believe it or not. Well anyway, Burton and I and a few others were sort of considered the radicals, but this Mrs. Gabriel was on our side. And when I say radicals today it is worth just a smile because what we were trying to do was just improve a few things here and there in the high school. But my major extra activities I guess besides working were with my temple. We were members of what used to be called Temple Emanu-El, now a masonic temple located on the corner of Tacoma Avenue and Colvin. Oh, I was one of the I guess leaders, you know helping to direct plays, being the handyman to the principal and that sort of thing. Eventually I became a teacher in the school system in the non-Hebrew speaking sections, Sunday School. I even came in from Rochester when I was doing my PhD to teach at Temple Emanu-El.

- Sister Joseph Jones:** So, looking back though your childhood was a happy one, well it was...normally wasn't.
- Dr. Milton Plesur [09:06]:** I guess so. We had a gang that we called the Lovering gang. We played ball in the streets and just paled around. There were three brothers living downstairs from us and their father had died just before we moved into the house, so my father was like their father to a large extent. It was like one sort of big happy thing.
- Sister Joseph Jones:** That's nice, that's good! Well, when you came to the college it was called State Teacher's College at that time wasn't it?
- Dr. Milton Plesur [09:30]:** I think it just had a change, there was always that feeling, you know, the teachers sort of downgraded it for some reason. They were trying to get away from it, I think it was called maybe New York State Teacher's College, or something like that and then they went through a number of quick changes.
- Sister Joseph Jones:** It's changed many times, I've got that somewhere. But, what were your impressions, immediate here? First impressions of the campus?
- Dr. Milton Plesur [10:05]:** Very comfortable. Well first of all, it was small, there were four buildings, plus the president's house and that was it. Where we are sitting now in a building that is considered one of the older buildings of the campus, this didn't exist either. I mean, we were all located near Elmwood Avenue, and we knew everybody. The faculty were very open it seemed, a lot of them were teaching out their area because there just wasn't a call for students.
- Dr. Selig Adler:** Well that was true at UB during wartime.
- Dr. Milton Plesur [10:36]:** Yes, sure.

Dr. Selig Adler: I was thinking...

Sister Joseph Jones: When did you come here now?

Dr. Milton Plesur [10:40]: But I want to tell you, I avoided one man that I heard was just terrible...

Sister Joseph Jones: Well wait now, you came here when?

Dr. Milton Plesur [10:44]: Because he was an industrial arts professor.

Sister Joseph Jones: When did you come here?

Dr. Milton Plesur [10:46]: January 1944.

Sister Joseph Jones: January 1944, so the war was going on then?

Dr. Milton Plesur [10:51]: Yes.

Sister Joseph Jones: Okay, alright, now what man did you want to avoid?

Dr. Milton Plesur [10:54]: Irving [?] Perkins, he was the head of the Industrial Arts Division teaching Western Civilization. And I'll tell you one thing that many of us resented and that I could avoid coming in mid-year was the section system. At that time, there were sections whereby you took your classes with the same people, it was lockstep. It was high school age and it was, just dull a little, you know, just a little dull. But Irving Perkins was not known as a thrilling teaching and he pretty much read from the book. On the other hand, I had a trained historian that did the same thing, later on and if you want we can get into that too [Laughter]. But, my first teacher I think was one that made the most impression upon me and that's Lester Mason. I

didn't do well in that first course to my knowledge, as a matter of fact...well, not well meant a B, but he got me sort of excited. He was never a great presenter, he was not a great lecturer, but he was however well trained. He was a Becker PhD, from Cornell, and he fashioned himself a scholar. And he was in his way. He was provocative in some of his ideas and some of the things that he said and he always lectured in lists, "Five Reasons Ghandi did this," or "Four reasons, [?] did that," or whatever and that made it easy to study.

Sister Joseph Jones: Yes, it's all outlined.

Dr. Milton Plesur [12:45]: Yes, but he was always writing a book on German history and I think he gave one of the earlier courses in German history.

Dr. Selig Adler: [Unintelligible word]

Dr. Milton Plesur [12:52]: And the book is still to come.

Sister Joseph Jones: Oh my goodness!

Dr. Milton Plesur [12:55]: He's had a checkered career himself here, which I would suggest somehow you find out more about from maybe people like Professor Peterson or whatever. But he has been pretty much of a disappointment, I think you could say. He comes by the University of Buffalo and he's always got some project that he is researching and he works in the library. His son runs a gas station in this area. But yet, there were a few of us that were completely devoted to him and a lot of it was that there were very few scholars as such on the faculty. There was the rumor that a lot of people got their jobs because they were the favorites of Dr. Rockwell, he was a most controversial person.

Sister Joseph Jones: Now, when you came here it was as a student [?] you said and were locked in on this system of the classes?

Dr. Milton Plesur [13:50]: No, I could get out of it a little bit because coming in midyear I had to piece my way around a different way.

Sister Joseph Jones: Okay, so you avoided that.

Dr. Milton Plesur [13:59]: One of the courses I got out of that everybody had to take was Dean Katherine Reed's Orientation course.

Sister Joseph Jones: Alright, now, tell me a little bit about Dean Reed? What do you remember about her? Do you know?

Dr. Milton Plesur [14:11]: Yes, I remember a lot.

Sister Joseph Jones: I don't have anything about her at all.

Dr. Milton Plesur [14:16]: Well, that's too bad and its peculiar because she was here for God knows how long. Now we boys remember, freshman boys in college aren't a heck of a lot different from senior boys in high school and we had some thoughts sometimes that weren't very shall we say sophisticated. And she represented to a lot of people a stereotype of a dean of women and some of my friends who had to take her orientation course did say that she did tell girls what colors to avoid so as to not excite the boys.

Sister Joseph Jones: And the padded leather shoes.

Dr. Milton Plesur [14:56]: The padded leather shoes, yes, all of the stereotypes.

Sister Joseph Jones: [Unintelligible word] convents.

Dr. Milton Plesur [14:59]: Sitting on telephone books or big newspapers if you had to sit on a boys' lap or something like that I don't know. And she always seemed to wear her hat and she sat at a table in an office in Rockwell Hall now called, it wasn't a desk it was just a table, it was like a tea [table?] without the tea that she was presiding over. And she was very, very suspicious, it seemed to us, of the boys. There episodes that happened where she would she would call in her colleague, Raymond Frets [?], who was every bit as nice and decent and good guy-ish, she seemed to be very uppity. And if something went wrong or if something was found that shouldn't have been found, she would ball out Frets and he would call a meeting of a few men, boy students, and say, "Now, look, my life is hard enough working with her, take it easy would you fellas?" You know, he was the good guy. They both taught biology, when she taught she taught biology. And we...the boys made a big fuss about that because how could a woman this prim, this proper teach Zoology, you know. I never took it from her, I took it from Frets.

Sister Joseph Jones: Frets, yes, for goodness sake. I understand she didn't approve of smoking here.

Dr. Milton Plesur [16:29]: No, that was...she was in the traditional mold of the dean of women. Whatever that all meant.

Sister Joseph Jones: Well, she fell in line too with what Dr. Rockwell would expect to, I'm sure he was in favor in what she did.

Dr. Milton Plesur [16:43]: He ran a tight ship.

Sister Joseph Jones: Now, that's getting onto Dr. Rockwell. What were some of your impressions of him?

Dr. Milton Plesur [16:51]: Well, just a couple of quickies. Are you aware of the fact that there was an assembly twice a week? And attendance was taken?

Sister Joseph Jones: Yes.

Dr. Milton Plesur [17:03]: Including faculty attendance. Right in the middle of the orchestra section there was a faculty section. And one day, for example, I was talking with Dr. Mason in his office and it was beyond 10:30 which was I think the time for the assembly. You see, on Tuesday there would be a program done by the drama club or an outside group or whatever and on Friday Dr. Rockwell would always harang us, address us, on current events. In fact, he once taught an extension course on current events.

Sister Joseph Jones: He was quite a good speaker.

Dr. Milton Plesur [17:31]: Oh yes, very, very [?]. But any rate, the monitor came to Mason's office and said that we were due up at the assembly, it had already started. So, it went along with that section idea, everything was pretty flaxstepped or rigid.

Sister Joseph Jones: So, nobody contradicted that?

Dr. Milton Plesur [17:46]: No, I was in on a contradiction of something else, but I...which I'm sure you don't want to hear about. At any rate, I'm afraid we kids made a lot of fun behind Rockwell's back. I didn't have much to do with him, you would think that we would know each other better because at that time maybe there were forty male students in the college. We did make our presence felt and I think Rockwell went along with us because we didn't want our physical given by a female physician and our male physician, I believe a man by the name of Wadsworth, went off to war.

Dr. Selig Alder: Yes, Dr. Wadsworth. John D. Wadsworth, [unintelligible word] life insurance.

Dr. Milton Plesur [18:25]: Nice man.

Dr. Selig Adler: His brother was George Wadsworth, the famous compositor [?], in one of the Middle Eastern countries.

Dr. Milton Plesur [18:34]: Well, anyway we got a male substitute and I think Rockwell got to know a few of us that way. There were two other episodes, both relatively unpleasant, a bunch of the male students, and I was involved in it, decided to rebel against the cafeteria. In those days students tried to reform things that may have been reformable. There was a little lady named Mabel Gilbert who ran that cafeteria for many, many years and probably upon looking back with the advantage of maturity and hindsight, she was probably a nicer lady than we thought at the time. But we thought the prices were high and the portions were small, the ambiance is bad, it was in the basement of Rockwell. The strike was called and I was involved in it and it went on for maybe two weeks with mixed results. I remember her coming out and putting her hand on her [?] hips, she was a short stocky lady and say, "Oh come on! Easy, it's good for you! This is good food!" Things like that and that just caused us to roar in her face even more. It's a little embarrassing.

Sister Joseph Jones: You mean you bought your lunch there and everything?

Dr. Milton Plesur [19:57]: Oh yes, we bought our lunches instead. Many people did anyway. Finally, a group of us were called into Rockwell's office, I didn't know this would appear in Rockwell's manuscripts, but about five of us, including me, and he didn't keep us for very long he had simply threatened us with expulsion. He knew how to handle us [Laughter] and the strike was over. But while it was on, for that week and half or so, it was sort of interesting.

Now the other thing was a very sad situation and I'm looking at my own transcript now that [?] for help. It was in 1946, the summer, I was taking a required geography course, economic geography. We had a substitute teacher named Shiedler, I think his name was William Shiedler. And one of my good friends of that time was a fellow from New York named William Grossman.

Dr. Selig Adler: Not Abel.

Dr. Milton Plesur [21:05]: Not, well...this fellow was at Pearl Harbor, supposedly, and he showed me [Unintelligible word]. He was due to come back the next semester to do practice teaching and I had gotten a room right next door to where I lived on Avery with an elderly gentleman. He never showed up. I have found out since then he had been expelled, but what happened was this Shiedler was evidently a corruptuist [?] and he and this Grossman made a deal, supposedly, now this is hard to believe, whereby Grossman would use his good efforts to get Shiedler, the teacher, an airplane and then in return Shiedler would let him see the exam and make sure that he got an A. And you can imagine, you know, at a college like this, small, parochial, certainly. In those days, this was a scandal that really almost rocked that tower. And I was involved in it though I never saw the exam, I was a friend of Grossman's and he showed me the exam that he had and I said, "Get rid of it." I must admit I was holier than holy on this one, thank God. But I think the bell was sounded and the whistle blown by a couple of older school teachers who were taking courses including geography on the campus and they got wind of it and of course they reported it. Dean Horne [?] called us in and president Rockwell, Shiedler was removed and somebody else, I forget who, finished off of the course a few days and gave an exam that was completely unfair. [It was] not based on our text or anything like that and that was one of the few C's that I got. It bothered me, but not enough to do what kids today would do, we didn't know the word grievance for example.

Sister Joseph Jones: No, I was going to saw, you couldn't have done that.

Dr. Milton Plesur [23:21]: So, I guess Rockwell was not too fond of me, I was I guess guilty in his eyes by this friendship with Grossman.

Dr. Selig Adler: All of the Jewish students were [unintelligible words].

Dr. Milton Plesur [23:37]: Oh I can't recall, among the males, very few. Many more Jewish women students. I don't know, I would say that of all the students, there were about 900 girls at one time and about twenty to forty boys. Just a guess off the top of my head, maybe 150 total. I think it...I don't know, I get the idea that from research that I did on

your book and just general knowledge and living, that maybe earlier there were more Jewish students during the Depression thirties, for example.

Dr. Selig Adler: Of course, school teaching was a fewer [??] way of making a living than to get a job. [Hard to understand]

Dr. Milton Plesur [24:10]: Sure, that's where they would come.

Sister Joseph Jones: Did you have a sense of awe or respect or fear of Dr. Rockwell?

Dr. Milton Plesur [24:21]: Fear I think would be a better word. There were many stories that I heard while a student and many more later on about his intolerance, his biases, his ethnic and religious prejudices, especially. And there were at times where I did apply at this college for a job during the time when I was high school teacher or a part time teacher at the university and never could get anywhere.

Sister Joseph Jones: Did you have any contact with his daughters? Did you know?

Dr. Milton Plesur [25:04]: Not at all.

Sister Joseph Jones: Because the students...wait a minute...because one of them went to school here I think maybe.

Dr. Milton Plesur [25:12]: No, I didn't know. I don't think they went when...later.

Sister Joseph Jones: They must have gone another time, yes. So, what about the teachers? Do you recall any other teachers that you would like to mention?

Dr. Milton Plesur [25:21]: Oh yes, Selig Adler knows Mildred Slyrousser [?] very well, she died just...[unintelligible word] and she came and took a course of yours later on and I was your assistant. That was a touchy thing too, I had to grade her papers.

Sister Joseph Jones: What was her name?

Dr. Milton Plesur [25:36]: Mildred Slyrousser.

Dr. Selig Adler: I found [unintelligible words]

Sister Joseph Jones: Oh yes, -rousser [?].

Dr. Selig Adler: She died about a year and a half ago.

Sister Joseph Jones: Yes.

Dr. Milton Plesur [25:42]: She was my social studies western civilization teacher too. I had Mason for one semester and she for another. I got out of Perkins to get her as a matter of fact at that time I think. She was not a great teacher she was a little scatterbrained we thought, but she covered the ground. And she was pleasant. I had Mason for all of my social studies courses except for American history, I had Robert Dumond for one section. He was a very dull teacher, but we expected...he did one book on the Tories [?] of North Carolina that was well known. One day, not me but a couple of other people, hid his book because he had the textbook in front of him at all times, nothing else. And he would just read to us. I think he was just bored and tired. He kept going the day the book was taken for about ten minutes and then he dismissed class. Arnold [Turner] was the other history teacher, he was a Bennett High School teacher who was very loved and popular at Bennett and went on eventually to be the first social studies teacher at Erie County Community College that was located at the old Pierce-Arrow plant on Elmwood. He was a treat to have here. He was animated and fun, made it...

Sister Joseph Jones: He was [?], he wasn't here for very long.

Dr. Milton Plesur [27:01]: Just summer.

Sister Joseph Jones: The summer, yes.

Dr. Milton Plesur [27:03]: Then there was Robert Albright who taught sociology for many years. Now I will tell you, a teacher that made a tremendous impression on me was Reuben Ebert, a math professor. Now, in those days, they had one and a half math professors, the second one taught through the school of practice. And Ebert knew easily, figured out very quickly how weak my math background was and even in the course in what they called introduction math I managed to squeeze out a C. I didn't have the interest or that kind of mentality. In English, [unintelligible word] made a tremendous impression upon me. She was a seventh and eighth grade teacher in the school of practice and to my knowledge, still living. A delightful.

Sister Joseph Jones: A little lady.

Dr. Milton Plesur [27:59]: Oh she was just marvelous, she could just turn it on and off and the kids in the practice school to the college students. I enjoyed her course very much, even though we had to sit in those seats that the school of practice kids had to sit in. I had a course in English from a woman called Margaret Foster and she married a fellow named Charles LaClaire who taught at the art school. She was a tough woman who was very demanding and seemingly not very caring and very defeatist in that she wouldn't give you any help. You either had it or didn't. And I'm not a great writer at all as Professor Adler knows.

Dr. Selig Adler: But all that you've written would deny that.

Dr. Milton Plesur [28:48]: Well, I had help. At any rate, and you know that [Laughter] but at any rate, she just said, “You’ll just never amount to anything.” She gave me another one of my few C’s. Which I guess I deserved.

Sister Joseph Jones: Really? Well, doesn’t have to be...

Dr. Milton Plesur [29:01]: It was not [unintelligible words], Andrew Rabon [?] was a much nicer man and he is well-known here in the annals of the college, he wrote [Unintelligible word] of course. And it was pretty thrilling because I think it came out in 1946, just about the time that we were still here. He was teaching us speech one summer and he spoke in such a monotone, but he was such a fine man and what he said was so wonderful that you didn’t care about that monotone even though he would talk against monotone.

Sister Joseph Jones: He was a nice looking man. [Unintelligible words] wasn’t he?

Dr. Milton Plesur [29:33]: Oh very handsome, very famous family of course in Buffalo history. I think Jon Horton speaks about the Rabon’s all of the time. As I said...this is a side, I had a man named Charles Vail for physical science and it was in the summer and Vail wore a very lightweight linen type white suit and that meant that you knew he was wearing blue boxer shorts underneath and this of course took as much of our time making fun of behind his back as listening to him talk about geology and astronomy and whatever. The rest of my science was simply biology and that was Reuben [?] Fetz, he had so much trouble getting the girls specially to do dissections that he would just draft a few boys and I was just like any girl, I was sickened by doing dissections. Except for cats, which I don’t like, I did do well with cats.

Sister Joseph Jones: Along the same line with your faculty, Dr. Adler states that you were a rare assistant when he had you and that you didn’t have to train, that you were a natural teacher. Did the courses over here help you? Or were you just born that way?

Dr. Milton Plesur [30:59]: Oh, I don't know about the latter. As I said before, I sort of got interested in teaching on the high school level when Mrs. Gabriel was my teacher in high school and in the Mason experience, being the true scholar teacher here for the nearest approximation...

Sister Joseph Jones: So, Dr. Mason was the one who really influenced you more than anybody.

Dr. Milton Plesur [31:27]: Yes, he was always disappointed that I went to UB because UB he said was always strong in American history and I majored in...took every course that he ever gave here in European history. Dr. Adler has always been too kind about me and too me, he was a pretty good teacher himself especially in assistance. And you always wanted to do your best when you worked with people because he pitched right in and worked too. Of course I do remember one story that has nothing to do with Buffalo State. I was taking an undergraduate course from him and assisting him in it at the same time as a graduate student because at that time there was the feeling really that our training in history at Buffalo State wasn't quite the equivalent that they wanted for their graduate students. So, I had to take two courses. This was, New Viewpoints In American History, and I remember us meeting during the Christmas recess, at that time, final exams were after Christmas and I was writing down the questions as he was dictating them, the objective questions for the final. And it took me a few minutes to realize that I was being tested, at least unofficially. Maybe Professor Adler forgets this, but he said, "What is the answer to that one Milton?" And here I hadn't even studied of course for the exam which we were doing and which in large part I was taking. Do you remember that Selig? It was old Hayes 78.

Dr. Selig Adler: No, I don't remember that but I could say that if we gave that kind of exam today fifty percent would fail.

Dr. Milton Plesur [32:52]: Indeed. Of course, I have just come back from giving my own mid-semester exam and [I'm] very disappointed.

Sister Joseph Jones: Were you able to answer all of the questions?

Dr. Milton Plesur [33:00]: Most of them, thank goodness.

Sister Joseph Jones: For goodness sake.

Dr. Milton Plesur [33:04]: But as far as the education courses here are concerned, let's be blunt, the woods [?] are full of students who make fun of education courses, maybe more than they should. Now, I will tell you, I had for my freshman education, a very interesting lady. Dr. Margaret Quail, one section. I don't know if you have anything on her, but it would be worth searching out. Somebody that really knew her well. She was a Southerner and she would shock people. Oh she would come right out, and this is out of context, and she said, "How many of you girls do petting?" "How many pet?" That's how she talked. Or she would asked the boys if they masturbated and or things like that.

Sister Joseph Jones: For heaven's sake, back in those days?

Dr. Milton Plesur [33:53]: Back in those days which is very interesting. Well, anyway, she taught freshman psych[ology], freshman education, child psych[ology]. And then my second teacher was a woman named Reisinger [?] who became I guess semi-prominent here as the one who introduced special education which is of course a big program now. But she gave one course in it, an elective, which I didn't take but I took her regular required course. I had professor Oscar Hertzberg a well-known psychologist, a very tough kind of a fellow. Sherman Kraten [?] who unfortunately had the stereotype of being the education professor, you know, he walked with his feet above the ground and not too practical. The things that I enjoyed the most were the practice teaching and before that the practicing. I knew then that I didn't want to stay with kids, with elementary kids, but I worked at it. I got pretty good evaluations from people, for example, like Dr. Mason's wife who taught sixth grade and I did practice teaching with her. The thing that I didn't do well was out in the country we had a rural situation and I just couldn't get that darn stove to work. I got an A minus and I don't

think I...I think I got denied the prize for the practice teaching because of that A minus and that damnable stove.

Sister Joseph Jones: But you really evolved way back you wanted to be to be a teacher.

Dr. Milton Plesur [35:21]: Yes, I've always wanted to be a teacher, right from high school. I went to see this Dean of Pharmacy in fact because there was family pressure. You know, a nice little Jewish boy, be a doctor or a dentist or a pharmacist and I knew that I just didn't have that kind of a [unintelligible word] or concern. But these were mine...I'll tell you another teacher that comes to mind is Paul Sloan. He taught a seminar in the Philosophy of Education and he was very caring and a delightful kind of a person. I had Stanley Sterels [?] who is still known.

Sister Joseph Jones: I was going to ask you that.

Dr. Selig Adler: I met him the other day.

Dr. Milton Plesur [36:02]: A nice man. I was in a program with him at Canisius just about a year ago. I didn't take art of course.

Sister Joseph Jones: But he knew everybody though.

Dr. Milton Plesur [36:17]: Yes, I took a course called, Workshop and Visual Education, and even then my motor moronic talents came to the floor and I couldn't thread those machines. I got an A in that course and I think it was because of my wonderful bulletin boards not because of my machine talent.

Sister Joseph Jones: Did you have any contact with Dr. Horne at all?

Dr. Milton Plesur [36:32]: Dean Horne?

Sister Joseph Jones: Dean Horne.

Dr. Milton Plesur [36:33]: Yes, I knew him fairly well.

Sister Joseph Jones: What were your reflections and impressions of him?

Dr. Milton Plesur [36:49]: Very fair. Just as nice a man, we talk about Rockwell was not...you remember Ralph Horne? Would that be your feeling too?

Dr. Selig Adler: Well I didn't know him that well, but...

Dr. Milton Plesur [36:49]: He cared about students.

Dr. Selig Adler: I knew Rockwell better.

Sister Joseph Jones: But you got the impression that Dr. Rockwell didn't care about the students?

Dr. Milton Plesur [37:00]: I don't know if that's fair to say, but I do know that he was uptight and always the authority figure and he made you realize that and that I thought was unnecessary.

Sister Joseph Jones: I think that he was interested in making the image of the college to the public to more than, he wanted to sell the college.

Dr. Milton Plesur [37:29]: He reminded me of my high school principal for a while. His name is [unintelligible word] who was a military man and who did go off in the service. And there's an interesting point here because Farrar [?] was the autocrat, the tough guy. Everybody respected him, but

mostly feared him. He was replaced by Ray Spear who was a principal also at Riverside High School. A really marvelous, wonderful, warm person who got the same things done nicely. And Ray Spear by the way was sometimes the summer teacher of physics.

Sister Joseph Jones: Yes, I remember that name.

Dr. Milton Plesur [38:00]: I never had him as a teacher, but we got to be pretty friendly and then one summer when I taught at Riverside, the only summer that Riverside ever had, school, Spear would come into my room and honest to God this is the truth, every other day almost, and just praise me, embarrassingly so in front of my students. He is just a lovely man.

Sister Joseph Jones: Lovely. How interesting. Well you had four years here and you finished here and...

Dr. Milton Plesur [38:23]: Three years.

Sister Joseph Jones: Three years, oh okay. That's right.

Dr. Milton Plesur [38:27]: We had a few more recollections for you.

Sister Joseph Jones: Okay! Oh, I beg your pardon, yes.

Dr. Milton Plesur [38:30]: One nice thing about going here was Delaware Park and canoeing. One of my recollections was of taking a tour with Dr. Whittemore in the first geography course.

Dr. Selig Adler: Alfred [?] Whittemore.

Dr. Milton Plesur [38:44]: And the star of our class had skipped that day and he was what we would call I suppose today, ‘making out,’ necking with a girl and she was showing us where olives were growing [?] and the contour maps because he was concerned with other contours [Laughter]. But anyway he didn’t get a good grade in the course. But we used Delaware Park as a kind of laboratory, both recreationally for canoeing. I went canoeing once in my life and never again because I got a wet [?] from a bad canoe. But we would walk around the rose gardens and all of that, the art gallery of course.

Sister Joseph Jones: What about Katherine Whittemore, did you enjoy her as a teacher?

Dr. Milton Plesur [39:32]: A no-nonsense teacher, we were quite frightened of her. Yes, I enjoyed her, she was very, very thorough. But the thing that did me in was the mathematical part of geography naturally. Now, there was somebody else that we knew about, a man named Harry Curtin [?] who was the chief custodian and he had an apartment in Rockwell and everybody looked upon it as a mysterious enclave. A real apartment, a house.

Sister Joseph Jones: You know the story of that, don’t you?

Dr. Milton Plesur [40:10]: No.

Sister Joseph Jones: That was meant to be Dr. Rockwell’s apartment and he absolutely refused and that is why they built the house.

Dr. Milton Plesur [40:18]: Oh, I guess I did/didn’t know. Well, anyway, nobody ever got inside Curtin’s apartment and he was not a very friendly man, much more friendly was George, whatever George’s last name was. George was the policeman, another maintenance type man, he was the outside person. We guys would be used by George to press down the old papers in one of those maintenance rooms in the basement of Rockwell so they could be bundled and shipped out. And everybody just loved George and wanted to help him.

Sister Joseph Jones: Press papers.

Dr. Milton Plesur [40:48]: And if there wasn't George there was Bill, the night watchman, who used to love to tell stories to us boys about how he caught this or that boy making out with this or that girl, right along where Rockwell road is now. So, these are the things you know, you remember.

Sister Joseph Jones: What was it like back here? Was it woods?

Dr. Milton Plesur [41:06]: We never even thought of it, nothing, there wasn't even an outside track area beyond the fence.

Sister Joseph Jones: Was there trees?

Dr. Milton Plesur [41:18]: Yes there were trees.

Sister Joseph Jones: Like a forest or woods?

Dr. Milton Plesur [41:20]: It's the scenery part of the state hospital [??] off limits to us, whether it was legal [unintelligible word].

Sister Joseph Jones: There wasn't a fence or anything?

Dr. Milton Plesur [41:29]: I don't remember a fence, there might have been but I don't know.

Sister Joseph Jones: You just didn't walk through the woods or did anything?

Dr. Milton Plesur [41:36]: There was one part, you know, we weren't that patriotic where we all wanted to enlist in the service and there was a local draft board. Right at the end of the basement level of Rockwell on the North

End. We were so naïve and the man who headed the draft board wasn't a very nice person, but we tried to avoid going anywhere near there, thinking, "My God he might grab us and you know." But that sort of thing, it was part of our thinking.

Sister Joseph Jones: That's interesting. Well, the library now, this huge building right now, five and half million-dollar building. But in your day, it the second floor of Rockwell Hall where the Burchfield Center is now.

Dr. Selig Adler: It wasn't called Rockwell Hall then.

Dr. Milton Plesur [42:18]: No, it was called the Main Building.

Sister Joseph Jones: Yes, the Main Building.

Dr. Milton Plesur [42:18]: Or later on...

Sister Joseph Jones: The Administration Building.

Dr. Milton Plesur [42:20]: The Administration Building. Mrs. Hapenstall [?] was the librarian, a nice lady and she had a very, very pleasant assistant and that was the staff, to our knowledge, two people. We didn't do much of our work there, we weren't assigned that much in the way of research.

Dr. Selig Adler: Are we talking about Grosvenor?

Dr. Milton Plesur [42:36]: Yes, the Grosvenor, Buffalo Public. I must admit that it wasn't that tedious. Even Dr. Mason, I don't think assigned papers every course. But he did assign in his elective courses he assigned term papers. And most of my work for that was done in the downtown library. My remembrance of...my recollections of the library here are really very vague which means that I probably didn't use it that much.

Sister Joseph Jones: But, your impression though of your college years are happy ones, aren't they by and large?

Dr. Milton Plesur [43:15]: Oh yes. But, I knew pretty soon that I wasn't going to be content being an elementary school teacher and I made inquiries at the university. It's vague in my mind, actually, how I did it. I guess I did it formally as far as the application process and then [I] got to meet Dr. Pratt and Dr. Horton. Now, Pratt was the chairman when I got up there soon to be replaced by Dr. Horton. You see, I was at the University of Buffalo as a student from January 1947 until 1949.

Sister Joseph Jones: Now, did you want to go onto the college there, now I don't want to make the mistake I did a while ago you know jumping into the university. Was there anything else you wanted to say about the college before you go to the university?

Dr. Milton Plesur [44:12]: Well, you might be interested because this was wartime, in the social life of this campus, it wasn't very much. There were dances but they had to import soldiers in and around out here to make up [Unintelligible word].

Sister Joseph Jones: There was a lot of Red Cross business going on wasn't there?

Dr. Milton Plesur [44:32]: Yes.

Sister Joseph Jones: The wrapping of bandages because I did that myself in college.

Dr. Milton Plesur [44:38]: Oh yes, sure. And one thing, you know, you would think that some of the girls would be less than devoted to their boyfriends in the service, not that I was ever the type frankly to be that aggressive, but it seemed to us that the girls at State college were more boiled and maybe some of the stereotype "Dear John" letters that some of

them sent would indicate. So they were pretty subdued in their social life whether that is widespread...

Sister Joseph Jones: Typical yes.

Dr. Milton Plesur [45:14]: Typical or not, I'm not sure. So there were a few dances and when there were dances usually pushed by Dean Reed [?] under her ironclad supervision. They were a success only because of military men had to included.

Sister Joseph Jones: Where were there? [??]

Dr. Milton Plesur [45:33]: In the gym.

Sister Joseph Jones: No, but where is there an Army?

Dr. Milton Plesur [45:35]: Oh, Fort Niagara.

Sister Joseph Jones: Fort Niagara? Oh, they were there. There were a lot of faculty too, [unintelligible words]

Dr. Milton Plesur [45:42]: Oh yes. hat word is not known anymore. That word is not known anymore I guess, but faculty were much involved. I could tell you a few things about the physical education department. My diagnosis of having high blood pressure excluded me for a while from taking phys. ed., yet there was a phys. ed. requirement which I worked off my handling out towels in the men's locker room.

Sister Joseph Jones: [unintelligible words].

Dr. Milton Plesur [46:07]: Yes, we're not...morons. Well, anyway, one of my classes in phys. ed. was taught Gertrude Roach, a very sweet lady, a nurse, but she

gave me a C. I just was never able to measure up to her standards of teaching games of low organization to children and that was the brunt of our phys. ed. from her. The first college paper that I ever wrote, that was in the first summer that I was here, you see I was accelerated so I went summers and that was in 1945, and that was on high blood pressure. I had just had that diagnosis. And I can remember, she would teach use hygiene...

Sister Joseph Jones: [unintelligible word], high blood pressure.

Dr. Selig Adler: I have it and [unintelligible word].

Sister Joseph Jones: Really, goodness.

Dr. Milton Plesur [47:03]: Yes, anyway, I would listen to her tell about the evils of smoking, and then in between the break from the lecture to the phys. ed. part she would rush out and take a smoke herself. And of course, we boys, this was the first time we ever had a female teach us phys. ed. She would wear shorts and she looked very attractive, she was young, and of course that took away from our trying to conquer the motor moronic estate that we might have had, at least I had.

Sister Joseph Jones: You were in that smaller gym, too weren't you? Didn't they have the swimming pool in the bottom?

Dr. Milton Plesur [47:34]: Yes. There are some stories I could tell there, but I won't. That I will not commit. But, Hugh Coyer [?] was the male teacher.

Sister Joseph Jones: Yes, what was some of your impressions of Hugh Coyer?

Dr. Milton Plesur [47:47]: He didn't Rue Houston and that was public. Oh he spoke in class. I had him for...no I guess I had her for health protection.

Sister Joseph Jones: Oh that's hysterical.

Dr. Milton Plesur [47:53]: She was a nice lady, a very nice lady. But, she didn't come across that way to us males who were probably more than we should have been influenced by Coyer. There was a bad relationship between them.

Sister Joseph Jones: You don't know the reason for that?

Dr. Milton Plesur [48:05]: No, no. She was the boss, she was the professor.

Sister Joseph Jones: That's right and he was in charge of the Athletics?

Dr. Milton Plesur [48:09]: Athletics and there a lot of factors there that could have [Unintelligible word].

Sister Joseph Jones: Oh okay, but she was the head of the department though?

Dr. Milton Plesur [48:14]: Yes and really a very pleasant and sweet person. We would meet many times after I graduated and especially then she would be very solicitous and proud, [??] happened to me, and so forth.

Sister Joseph Jones: Yes, she loved the college and she was quite interested in it. That's interesting. But you enjoyed...what do they call him?

Dr. Milton Plesur [48:40]: Hube [?].

Sister Joseph Jones: Hube. He was quite a man.

Dr. Milton Plesur [48:45]: Oh he was an earthy person. He couldn't easily talk without a few swear words. He was what you would call, a marvelous after dinner speaker, some points of the evening.

Sister Joseph Jones: Yes. He was here a long time and there was a great deal written about him in the school paper I saw, and I know that the librarian who worked here a long time ago said that he was quite...he was a character.

Dr. Milton Plesur [49:16]: Yes, powerful.

Sister Joseph Jones: But very friendly, everybody loved him.

Dr. Milton Plesur [49:20]: Oh yes. And sort of a scholar in his way. He wrote an early book on soccer that we all had to read.

Sister Joseph Jones: He made the college famous didn't he as far as sports are concerned?

Dr. Milton Plesur [49:39]: Oh basketball coach. As far as I know and I don't know much about it, but Buffalo State was a basketball powerhouse.

Sister Joseph Jones: Yes, and it was [unintelligible word].

Dr. Milton Plesur [49:52]: And I remember when he went off to war, we got another man named Martin Rogers, who recently retired from Brockport. And the thing about Martin Rogers, who is really a nice guy too. You know how sometimes the male students can identify with a coach and so forth? He didn't seem to display the game that way Coyer did and emphasized the athletes, but he lost four fingers in an industrial accident. It was amazing to watch him throw the basketball just with the thumb and the stumps. Just amazing and that's something I never forgot.

Sister Joseph Jones: You never forgot that. Now, you graduated from here in 1947?

Dr. Milton Plesur [50:34]: Yes.

Sister Joseph Jones: Alright and this is 1982. Now, have you been back to the campus many times since then?

Dr. Milton Plesur [50:41]: Well, I wouldn't say many times, the most recent time that I was back was just a few weeks ago. I'm a member of the general alumni board of the University of Buffalo. You see, I had my masters at UB so I'm an alumnus there. The alumni board here entertained our alumni board, so you heard all of the news, [?] Johnstone, so forth. But as far as relationships with colleagues in history.

Dr. Selig Adler: Never worked.

Dr. Milton Plesur [51:12]: Never worked, never much relationship.

Dr. Selig Adler: I couldn't have named outside of Peterson and Ed Brown, Richard Brown.

Dr. Milton Plesur [51:18]: And Mason. You knew Mason.

Sister Joseph Jones: Well, what is your impression now of the college? Compared to what you left.

Dr. Milton Plesur [51:28]: Well, it's a different school and one can't help but be proud of it.

Sister Joseph Jones: That's what I was going to say [?].

Dr. Milton Plesur [51:33]: It's a college and I think sometimes there's a tendency in the big University of Buffalo to still look down at a college which I think people forget which you can't forget was a teacher's college. Now, what's wrong with being a teacher's college? I don't really know that either, but there was a lot of shot at teaching and such. In that desire to be so well-focused as elementary school preparers. But I regret there isn't much more of a relationship and I know quite a few people, former students, that have taught here and I know about some of the people and you know you have personal friends like Professor Paul so you know from that point of view. But, it's a different school, physically and every other way.

Sister Joseph Jones: But your impressions are very complimentary, positive.

Dr. Milton Plesur [52:35]: Yes, well you know positive. I think there's room for everybody.

Sister Joseph Jones: Sure.

Dr. Milton Plesur [52:40]: And I don't take a standard exclusive status to them.

Sister Joseph Jones: That's very good. Alright now, are you ready to move on to the [unintelligible word]?

Dr. Selig Adler: [Unintelligible word].

Sister Joseph Jones: Yes, Dr. Alder just mentioned that he was indexing the newspaper clippings and he has come across so many articles dealing with art and music activities here at the state college, would you like to comment on that during the time you were here?

Dr. Milton Plesur [53:14]: I'm not very knowledgeable about art or even music. As I recall, I took a course from Kenneth Coghill [?], a recorded course, who was I think was destined for a very short life unfortunately, but we thought, he thought that he was dealing with musicians that

belonged in the seminary [?] and rather than a general teacher's college. And I got permission frankly from Dr. Horne to substitute the Art of Enjoying Music which I almost had trouble with too because what Silas Boyd wanted was us to follow symphonies which I thought took away from the art of enjoying music. So, I went to some concerts of course and the orchestra did play and the chorus did sing in the assemblance.

Sister Joseph Jones: Silas Boyd was in charge at the time.

Dr. Milton Plesur [54:14]: Yes, right. There was Coghill, Boyd, and Mary Louise McMahon. I never had her. Now, as far as art was concerned, I had a course with Kenneth Weinrib [?] whom most of us didn't like because he was just so dry and dull and obviously unhappy having teaching on harvest [?], he was happiest in his craft job, what he did was great work.

Sister Joseph Jones: Jewelry.

Dr. Milton Plesur [54:37]: Now as far as outside activities, the ones that made the most impression upon me were the productions of Casting Hall [?] directed by [Unintelligible word], I had [unintelligible word] for one course, we made tremendous fun of the peculiar English accent that she brought back from [Unintelligible word] after one summer in London. But she taught us the rudimentary things that you had to know and she was a great director and her little group in Casting Hall was an "in" group, just like the bookstore group, there was a bookstore group that was very exclusive as [unintelligible word].

Sister Joseph Jones: And what do you mean by bookstore group?

Dr. Milton Plesur [55:17]: Students that worked in the bookstore, I forget the name of the lady that ran it.

Sister Joseph Jones: Betterman.

Dr. Milton Plesur [55:23]: Charlotte Betterman.

Sister Joseph Jones: And then Mary Donor [?] and then became Mrs. Fontane [?].

Dr. Milton Plesur [55:33]: Right, I knew them both and got along with them, but if you weren't in the click you were treated a certain way. Politely, another customer, but as an [unintelligible word].

Sister Joseph Jones: I see. Did you have...not you mentioned that the Casting Hall group and the bookstore group, what about the library group? Was there a library group too?

Dr. Milton Plesur [55:55]: I didn't know of any.

Sister Joseph Jones: You didn't know of any, but you do of those two. That's interesting. Were there a lot of students who worked their way through school here?

Dr. Milton Plesur [56:07]: Oh yes, a group number, I suspect most. A lot worked in the war plant.

Sister Joseph Jones: In the what?

Dr. Milton Plesur [56:15]: The war plant. Curtiss-Wright.

Sister Joseph Jones: Oh really? Did you work while you were in school too?

Dr. Milton Plesur [56:20]: Oh yes, I think that contributed to the high blood pressure. Yes, I started in high school and continued through college.

Sister Joseph Jones: And continued through college, my goodness. That was hard.

Dr. Milton Plesur [56:34]: We did it.

Sister Joseph Jones: Now, you were still here after the war.

Dr. Milton Plesur [56:39]: Yes.

Sister Joseph Jones: Did that have any influence on the...the effect...

Dr. Milton Plesur [56:43]: I saw many of the male students coming back and they were generally very friendly and I am still friendly with some a few today and very, very supportive, full of interesting stories of course. Didn't seem to make much of a difference. They were of course among the more of serious students, I saw that at the university when I became an assistant. The next semester really, they were the best students that we have ever had. If [unintelligible word] were still here I think he would attest to that because they just wanted to make up quickly for lost time.

Sister Joseph Jones: Yes, the G.I. Bill of Rights, the bill to help, that's fantastic. So, then you went immediately...did you work a few years? Did you teach a few years before you went to UB?

Dr. Milton Plesur [57:26]: No, my teaching career was three years in high school education. Let's see, after I graduated here in January of 1947 I spent until February of 1949 at university, got my masters and spent one little extra semester until the end of the 1948-1949 year. Then, in 1949-1950 I taught at Fosdick-Masten Park High School which is an academic high school. Incidentally I taught my first college class on my own, I had been an assistant of course before then in the summer of 1949. Then 1949-1950 I taught at Masten, the summer of 1950 I taught at UB again and then in 1950 I began my two-year residency at the university of Rochester. I didn't have to do three years that was required because I had so many courses at UB that were equivalent to the ones taken with the Dr. [Adler].

Sister Joseph Jones: When did you come in contact with Dr. Adler?

Dr. Milton Plesur [58:25]: Dr. Adler was still a high school teacher but always connected with the university in one way or the other and he taught a graduate seminar in American Historiography, it was the second semester of 1947 at the Grosvenor Library. And that made a big difference because you could take us right from that little meeting room above the auditorium, all the way downstairs and across to the [unintelligible word] of the library and you could examine the congressional record and documents, public documents and so forth. Now that he is not here, I can say there was a main goal...the real cap on the bottle in wanting to go to college, teaching, he confirmed it for me. Between Helen Gabriel, Lester Mason, and Selig Adler, that's my story as far as inspirations.

Sister Joseph Jones: That's wonderful, yes. And that's how he came in contact with you and how he took an interest in you too because he saw, he told me that he saw in you what he was like, you know. You were an excellent, excellent teacher and just marvelous he came to say.

Dr. Milton Plesur [59:57]: He's a fair man, I got [Unintelligible word] with him once.

Sister Joseph Jones: Did you? He expects the ultimate. He gives it himself and he expects it from others. But he did say, be sure to tell him, ask him, if he got his inspiration or [unintelligible word] from the college because when he came to me he was one of those rare students who I didn't have to train and he knew already what he was supposed to do.

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:00:25]: And I think my Sunday School teaching must have helped, I taught kids. I taught a course for example on Palestine before there was an Israel, that was 1948, so it was just before that that I started teaching.

Sister Joseph Jones: And you have always enjoyed it, you enjoy teaching?

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:00:35]: Oh yes. It's a challenge, it's a delight, a lot of it is [Unintelligible word] of course, but then I think I'm good teaching.

Sister Joseph Jones: That's right. Now, when you went to the university, it was independent, it was a private institution. Did you find the transfer from the college to the university difficult? As far as the numbers and the bigness of it all?

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:01:00]: It was big, but now today of course we consider it small. Yes, I did note it, but on the other hand what countered that feeling was the fact that we were all pretty much...well, I don't want to use this negatively, but we were parochial in the sense that we were all in the history department and there was a good camaraderie among the students and among the faculty.

Sister Joseph Jones: I must say too, this is on the Main Street campus, you have to be careful now that we have...because when I picture you at the university I was thinking of Amherst.

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:01:29]: Like for example today, you mentioned about the two campuses, I was teaching on the Amherst campus but I didn't even get to my office because I am a mile away from my office. So, even the Amherst campus alone is what? One thousand acres. So, I am ways from where my office is.

Sister Joseph Jones: The Amherst campus is a thousand acres?

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:01:49]: Yes, and the Main Street campus is 178 [acres].

Sister Joseph Jones:

Is that right? 178 [acres], that's what it is. That's interesting, I knew it was large but I didn't know it was that...

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:02:04]:

So, really, while I was at Rochester in the beginning of 1950-1952, I did my residency there, I always had a UB connection. I was teaching summers at UB for example, but it is interesting how Dr. Adler's career intertwined and helped mine because there was developed at UB a two-year division of General and Technical Studies, an associate degree division, and Adler went to Rochester as a visiting professor at the time that I left Rochester to come back here to substitute for him in those courses. And then he didn't want to go back into those courses when he came back from that year in Rochester and I stayed there teaching. In the meantime, from 1953-1955 I taught at LaSalle Junior-Senior High School in Niagara Falls, it was located on Buffalo Avenue and that's where the junior high school is now. And I was always teaching part time those division of general studies courses. Then eventually in 1955 I was offered an assistant to the directorship by my good friend Charlie Fogel who was the director of that division at that time and then after one year he gave up and I became acting director and presided over its dissolution and incorporation into a new division at the university called University College, the first two years, in general for everybody, which is no longer either. And that's how I got into the university, it was administration but then I started teaching history part time and eventually went up the ranks in history. I became a full professor in 1971. But at the University of Buffalo I have taught on the educational faculty, I've taught the methods course and so forth. I taught methods and teaching social studies in secondary school.

Sister Joseph Jones:

Had you ever been in administration?

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:04:12]:

At the university? Well, I was the acting assistant to the director, acting director, and then with this university college, I was assistant dean, associate dean, acting dean.

Then I left that undergraduate administration in 1966 or thereabouts and then a year later I was picked to be the director of the Master of Science in Social Sciences. Again, a job Selig Adler once had too. So, when you put all of my administration together from 1955 to the beginning of my full time University of Buffalo activities to the present, I have still been an administrator longer than I have been a non-administrator. But, I have always taught all the way through.

Sister Joseph Jones: You always taught while you were an administrator.

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:05:07]: Yes, never did not teach.

Sister Joseph Jones: Well, didn't you find that a conflict? Time?

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:05:11]: It was hard.

Sister Joseph Jones: Hard, yes, grading papers and seeing students and...

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:05:16]: And we had big classes. We had five hundred in the classes. I taught one of two sections of U.S. Survey and fairly often Selig Adler would teach the other one, we both had five hundred students.

Sister Joseph Jones: Well, how did you manage? Didn't the students suffer from it?

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:05:26]: Slavery [Laughter], called graduate assistants, they took attendance, gave exams, and I saw a great number of students.

Sister Joseph Jones: You gave the lectures.

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:05:39]:

And I gave the lectures.

Sister Joseph Jones:

I gather, except Adler said it too, you're just confirming what he has said. I think both of you are just natural teachers. And you like to teach, you enjoy...

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:05:52]:

Like to communication.

Sister Joseph Jones:

You like the communication. You loved your subjects first of all, you liked communicating.

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:05:56]:

Well, you know I went to Rochester, the head of the department was one of the great historians, we use to say that he knew more about the Monroe Doctrine than Monroe did and that was Dexter Perkins. He baby was that graduate program, which he, because he was the grandson of [?] farmer had the money to endow and it was a program in the teaching of American History and we got teaching training, both in sections and getting lectures. Some were very short notice, kind of simulate what was going to happen in real life. I got some good training there too. Plus, the assistantship, I taught sections for Professor Horton while I was in Buffalo in Western Civ., and I assisted Selig Adler in U.S. History Survey, very often filled in for him and so forth. So, I have had good training.

Sister Joseph Jones:

Do you find that...?

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:06:43]:

And I had good teachers.

Sister Joseph Jones:

Good teachers. I have two questions that I don't want to forget to ask you, number one, have you found that the student body has changed over the years?

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:06:52]:

Well, up until this mid-semester time, you know teachers are never satisfied, I thought that the students were a little bit better than they had been but basically speaking, I don't get as dramatic as perhaps Professor Adler and others. I don't see them as that different. I think that you have a certain group that are quite lazy, that are playboys and playgirls, and then the very fine people who just prefer working to schooling, and others that are just lazy. I just learned today something, maybe this will be [?] something about me, but I don't mean to sound conservative, but a young man that I adopted this past summer, he came to me and asked me to be my advisee, so he changed from somebody to me. He was in my seminar, undergraduate seminar and he squeaked out a very low A this summer but now he is managing a very middle D in a lecture course and I find that in another seminar that he is taking he has skipped three meetings, that means once a week and that's terrible, [unintelligible word], he was absent in my class today and since I teach in a popular culture course, a history course, we do a lot of music and he is never going to be able to catch that music, get some of these notes but of course he is not going to hear it. This bothers me and I guess maybe if you are a good teacher you are bothered or should be bothered, but yet there is not much you can do, he just wants to do it alone. He doesn't want the advice even though he certainly needs it and was well on his way in the summer to changing his motive. But, these are the kinds of things that bother me, I get over it of course, but then you do. I think students are pretty much the same. I think we have a less, because we are so big we don't see maybe the better ones the way they were so observable just as we don't see the really terrible ones because they were very observable when they were smaller.

Sister Joseph Jones:

I was going say, what about the discipline, what about their actions during class and finally changed over?

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:09:15]:

Yes, a little more frivolous. Now, I never had too much trouble in the 1960s, I was just talking about this with my

class last night in a course called U.S. Since 1945 which we were talking about the various so-called revolutions that were in the sixties. I never had stink bombs thrown in class. I had people come in one time [unintelligible words] students for a while, which I allowed as long as it didn't clear out my class, as long as they did it before class. So, I got along pretty well, pretty much ignoring the whole thing and just going on.

Sister Joseph Jones:

Dr. Adler...

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:09:45]:

Yes, but at any rate, the feeling that I had is that students...there is a little bit more of a tendency right now to be just a wee less respectful than maybe in the real olden days. In our Spectrum, the university newspaper, there was a letter about a month ago by a student chastising his fellows for being disrespectful to a professor of Economics, getting up fifteen minutes early, talking too much, fooling around in the back, eating their meals. Now, I've never had that, I'm very outspoken. In fact, I spoke, outspokenly last night to a young man who was reading the New York Times magazine while I was lecturing. He said, yeah but you know...he came up afterwards and he apologized and I acknowledged the fact that he apologized about it. I said I am a very sensitive person, I announced this the first day, "I think what I do is important and I think I do it interestingly and if you disagree then leave." There is no extra privilege. He said, "Oh no I like this course, it's my favorite." I said, "Fine, show it. And don't do anything else while things are going on." So, I had a few little matters like that, but not severe.

Sister Joseph Jones:

Yes, I am glad you brought up something because I was a teacher, I had taught...that if somebody were distracting or something was happening in class, I question myself, well what am I doing or am I as good a teacher as I should be?

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:11:34]:

Yes, you wonder.

Sister Joseph Jones:

Because if I were as good as I should be maybe that student wouldn't be doing something. I'm sure you got [Unintelligible words] something too, same thing. But there are some students, as you said that young man...

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:11:52]:

I think we serious teachers come out okay in our own evaluation, but we go through it, the evaluating. But I think these kids, some of them just don't...I had one student, he was a fine baseball player. His coach talked to me. He admitted, the kid, that he doesn't want to go to college, he wants a full contract and that's the way to get it. And he got a 34 on his first [unintelligible word], flunk the course, but he comes to class.

Sister Joseph Jones:

Now, you brought up something too, that Dr. Adler wanted to be sure that...I know you're sure of...you said you're not interested in sports or [Unintelligible word], but you are interested in sports?

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:12:22]:

Oh yes, I'm interested.

Sister Joseph Jones:

Not a person, a participant I meant to say. But, I understand from people that, Dr. Adler even, that you are quite obvious, I mean everybody knows you as you are quite interested in sports. Did you go to all of the games or...?

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:12:38]:

You know, I used to. I'll tell you, when I was Dean, I was in charge of declaring eligibility for the Freshman and Sophomores and anybody that was on a list, now this is going to sound self-serving and not having been married and my home didn't interfere until my mother took sick. But, I would call in various peoples that were on various lists, including good students, but also the bad students who were on probation, who were in trouble. I took very seriously that the declaration that the NCAA and the university requires as far as athletic eligibility and any

young man in those days wouldn't count I'm afraid because Title 9 wasn't around then. So, we would work with them. I would assign them tutors, we had that kind of a system, so I got to know...plus, I was on the athletic committee at the university for many, many years. The late athletic director Jim Peel [?] was a good friend of mine, so you know there were all kinds of those ties. Plus, I think it's good recreation to watch it, a contest.

Sister Joseph Jones:

Yes, do you know...you realize you're called Uncle Milty [??]?

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:1350:]:

Yes, I have heard that before. Of course, coming up with Milton [??] on television, naturally, whoever heard the name Milton before, except in literature [Laughter]. I remember one time in high school, there was [unintelligible words] you really love and trust. There was this one guy that walked by me and he said, "Hi Uncle Milty," so I just went out and got him in the belly. He said, "Why did you do that?" I said, "I'm just so tired of being called Uncle Milty." [Laughter] He was a good kid, I told him I didn't have much power.

Sister Joseph Jones:

Well, of course and Uncle Milty is said with love too, I mean respect because I don't think they would say it otherwise.

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:14:34]:

I'm sure it's still my nickname behind my back, I don't know much of it now.

Sister Joseph Jones:

Well, somebody I met just recently said, "Oh yeah, Uncle Milty!" And I said, "How do you know him?" Oh, everybody at UB, you know you're so well-known, they said [we call him] Uncle Milty.

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:14:47]:

Well, incidentally, you asked before, I just thought of this now, about context since I graduated college. I was pleased,

I had forgotten, I think I knew, but I had forgotten that your Dean of Graduate Studies was once my student.

Sister Joseph Jones:

Astetar?

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:15:03]:

Astetar. I met him at this alumni meeting.

Sister Joseph Jones:

Dr. Astetar. Well, there was another question that I wanted to ask you too. Why are you...what particular part of history are you interested?

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:15:23]:

Oh, that's a tough one. I was trained in diplomatic history under three of the best. Selig Adler, Julius Pratt in Buffalo, and Dexter Perkins in Rochester. I did my dissertation in what I call, they call Foreign Policy, I call it Foreign and Cultural Policy. It is about the reawakening in foreign affairs in the period of the late nineteenth-century when we were supposed to be very un-interested. At any rate, I am still reviews books for journals in Foreign Policy, but I have lost my main interest in that and as Selig Adler got into teaching Foreign Policy, as Pratt and his successor either retired or left, I filled in for him Twentieth-Century America, a course in which he developed. Then, I was looking for ways to show kids certain kinds of interest, you know, I came across all of these things that might be referred to as history from the bottom up, the history of everyday people, what we call Popular Culture really. And that's how I got into that.

Sister Joseph Jones:

Are you a part of the historical society of popular culture?

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:16:38]:

I used to be, but frankly I left it because a bunch of kooks took over, the comic book salesman types, and I don't decry them, but I'm not that type of a popular cultural historian. I have always been interested in movies which is part of the course and I began developing courses in that area. And my good friend Selig Adler said, "Milt, I don't

know why you're doing that movies course, but it must be alright if you're doing it." He loves movies himself and he is very knowledgeable about them.

Sister Joseph Jones:

Yes!

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:17:11]:

But the point is, popular cultural history has been again, decried by many because it is so obvious. I mean, sports, fashion, sexuality, lifestyle, movies, entertainment, general, these are things that we don't think of as history. But, my feeling is that there is of course more to history than just peace treaties and presidents, both of which I teach too.

Sister Joseph Jones:

Of course, and you have written a book on this haven't you?

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:17:43]:

No, lots of articles. I am working on a book.

Sister Joseph Jones:

You're working on a book, okay, I did know...

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:17:49]:

I have interviewed now, 201 personalities since 1976. And if Professor Adler were here at this moment, he would probably say, "When are you going to get it written?" I am going to be on sabbatical next term and the tapes are transcribed and I've got a lot of other materials with those tapes and what I am going to do is a [unintelligible word] survey of what these people thought of the motion picture profession if they were coming along in it. I have had some very famous people and some important, but not famous people.

Sister Joseph Jones:

Have you deposited some of your material into the archives at the university yet?

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:18:20]:

Oh materials yes, but not the tapes.

Sister Joseph Jones:

No, no, but you have deposited some?

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:18:27]:

Oh yes, I really should empty out my whole office because I have so little room. But I have my correspondence, much of the official correspondence is deposited. The material that is connected to my administrative life is all there. My personal correspondence, my recommendations, I don't feel comfortable about giving up yet. I don't retire until 1997, if I live that long. But I guess they will get it.

Sister Joseph Jones:

Here is a question that I talked with Selig Adler this morning and I put him on the spot, and maybe we could end the tape via this. If you were to just stand aside [unintelligible word], what would you say would be your main contribution at the university? In the history of the university.

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:19:32]:

Even now, as a teacher, that I think if the risk again, and do this twice before being self-serving, I have been called student oriented. I don't think being a scholar, being a good researcher, being a good teacher, being a good preparer concludes your being concerned with the individual student. Obviously, with large classes it is limited and the initiative must come very often from them. And the very fact that I have two awards, one a Chancellor's Award for the teaching excellence and the other is even more important because it was done, it was given by a student group at the Millard Fillmore College student association for an interesting student. I would say if I had any interest, that has been the main one. If I have had any success, that has been the main success. It pleases me to the point of getting goose pimples from even talking about it, frankly. When I meet students round and about saying, "Gee, you kept me in school an extra semester." Which meant that I guessed right in his case, or her case because I had that power. And even today I don't have that power of course. I am a professor, period. But, I still see an awful lot of

students on individual concerns that very often overflow the boundaries of just being in a classroom situation.

Sister Joseph Jones: Excellent. In other words, if I may repeat, summarize it, you feel that your contribution has been more toward helping students rather than contributing to the prestige of the college by your articles, or your professional...

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:21:19]: Well, I hope that is true.

Sister Joseph Jones: So, that's what you think.

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:21:23]: I hope the latter is true too. But, I look upon my human relationships as being paramount.

Sister Joseph Jones: That's beautiful. That's very nice.

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:21:32]: Thank you.

Sister Joseph Jones: Yes, I like that, that's very good. Is there anything else that you would like to add? Is there anything that I obviously left out that you...that should be included?

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:21:39]: Oh, no I don't think so. I don't know how much of my writings you have here in the library.

Sister Joseph Jones: I don't know either. You mean books?

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:21:49]: Books and articles and things like that.

Sister Joseph Jones: Well, if your articles are in...

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:21:55]: Probably not.

Sister Joseph Jones: Well-known periodicals then...we have the periodicals and they would be in the index. I wouldn't have a file on you, a personal file as I do Dr. Falk, he has one-fourth of a drawer because he has written so much, given me a copy of each...of articles.

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:22:20]: Well, since we are friendly rivals, let me tell you I have written more [Laughter] or at least as much.

Sister Joseph Jones: Do you send a copy of your articles to the archive?

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:22:33]: Not really, it has been mostly papers and manuscripts. In the library they have all of my stuff.

Sister Joseph Jones: Oh, I think that is interesting.

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:22:42]: I haven't written articles lately, I am trying to concentrate on that book.

Sister Joseph Jones: You're going to concentrate on the book, so if I can end this now, that is your next goal? You're going to have sabbatical next semester. And you hope to be able to finish.

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:22:55]: The first draft of that book.

Sister Joseph Jones: Do you have an author, I mean a publisher yet?

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:22:58]: A publisher, no, but I am told I should get an agent and this should be a hot item which is what we usually don't do in our field.

Sister Joseph Jones: Well, thank you very much.

Dr. Milton Plesur [01:23:10]: You're very welcome, you are very kind and very comfortable to talk with [?].