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Dr. Thompson:  Gordon, where were you born?

Alcorn:  I was born in Olympia.

Thompson:  Did you go to Olympia High School?

Alcorn:  No, we moved to Tacoma when I was quite small and I went to the old Whitman grade school and then Lincoln High School and then C.P.S., (in those days), and then the University of Washington.

Thompson:  What was your father's work?

Alcorn:  My father, originally, was a railroad man.  In fact, all of my people were railroad people.  My father was a master mechanic in the South Tacoma shops when I was a boy.  He got a piece of steel in his eye, got frightened and decided he didn't want to do that anymore, so he went into business--real estate, insurance, etc., and then retired quite a number of years ago.  When World War II broke out, though he was pretty old, he went back to work for a machine shop.

Thompson:  And what high school did you graduate from?

Alcorn:  Lincoln.

Thompson:  Where did you meet Rowena?

Alcorn:  Well, I met her at U.P.S. but she was on the art faculty, and I guess we met in a reception line--about 1930, maybe.

Thompson:  Then you went from Lincoln High School to the College of Puget Sound.

Alcorn:  Yes.

Thompson:  Did you plan to major in biology or botany?

Alcorn:  Yes, and I went on a music scholarship.

Thompson:  You did!  What was your instrument?

Alcorn:  I played the bassoon.

(Thompson:  Oh, for heaven's sake)
Alcorn: And at Lincoln, we had a real good band.

Thompson: Was that Worsing?

Alcorn: No, it was Wright—J. S. Wright. We had this real good band and Dr. Todd called about a dozen of us over there and said that we could come to C.P.S. for free (I think it was $50 a semester or something) if we played in the band, so we whipped up a little band for the College.

Thompson: You started out, then, in music but you planned to go into botany or biology.

Alcorn: Yes, I have always known I wanted to be in natural history.

Thompson: Did you ever have any interest in medicine?

Alcorn: No.

Thompson: Was Professor Slater your major professor?

Alcorn: Yes, I met him in 1925.

Thompson: Is that right? How do you remember him?

Alcorn: Well, I remember the very first time I saw him. He was sitting up in that little landing above the main floor in Jones Hall, and somebody pointed him out. He was supposed to sign my registration, and I went up there, shaking a little bit, and asked him to sign it. He looked at me and said, "What do you want to do with biology or what do you want to be in biology for?" I said, "I guess I like it and I have always liked it." He said, "That's good enough."

Thompson: He has been sort of beloved by generations and generations, hasn't he?

Alcorn: He's been popular to many, many students and has had many successful students.

Thompson: He tells me that he graduated from Rutgers, which, of course, now is New Jersey State University. Somewhere, someone told me that he had practically finished all of his work for an earned Ph.D. and then his major professor died. Did you ever know anything about that?

Alcorn: It was not quite that way. He went to the University of Washington and did a lot of work, and I guess he had most of the courses out of the way, but the thesis hadn't been started. He did most of it under Erne Gunther—or a lot of it.
Thompson: How do you remember C.P.S. when you were a student?

Alcorn: Well, of course, it was small. And it was rough—it was right out in the old second-growth trees all around and all the brush—no sidewalks—gravel road, from Lawrence right back of Jones Hall over to Union. Wooden sidewalk partly built around Sutton Quadrangle. Of course, no trees around the buildings. It was out in the country.

Thompson: About how many students do you suppose were there? 500 maybe?

Alcorn: Oh, my, no. I would say 250-300 at most—maybe 200.

Thompson: Who were the outstanding professors then?

Alcorn: Well, Dr. Weir.

Thompson: Yes, in education.

Alcorn: Professor Cheney in German. He was a fine scholar and we recognized it.

Thompson: Was that C-h-e-n-e-y?

Alcorn: Yes.

Thompson: Mrs. Cheney worked in the Registrar's Office.

Alcorn: Well, not till after Professor Cheney was killed.

Thompson: I see.

Alcorn: She became Dean of Women.

Thompson: How was he killed?

Alcorn: He was walking across Lawrence, at about 14th. He was a tall fellow and he walked real quickly, and I guess he wasn't looking and a car ran over him.

Thompson: Then after you got through at C.P.S., where did you do your graduate work?

Alcorn: I came here for about five years—no about three years—and commuted part time at the University of Washington and then for two years, and I guess two or three summers, I was there full time to finish up the degree. Then I went to the University of Idaho, but I came back to U.P.S. in the summertime. Then after I left Idaho—I was there only a couple of years—I went to Grays Harbor.
Thompson: You were teaching at Idaho?

Alcorn: Yes, in the Department of Botany.

Thompson: Is your degree in Botany or Biology?

Alcorn: It is in both. I had a major in zoology and a major in botany and then a minor in geology.

Thompson: Then you went to Grays Harbor and you were President of Grays Harbor Community College?

Alcorn: I went down there as Vice President and then I became President.

Thompson: How long were you there?

Alcorn: Five years.

Thompson: Do you remember the time that you told me you wanted to come up and teach for us?

Alcorn: I think I told you more than that. I think I told you I wanted to come back here and I wanted to work on the Museum and that I wanted to work on the campus. And that I didn't want to raise money!

Thompson: I recall the interview very well, and I thought it was great and, of course, we have been so thrilled with the years that you have been here. Now there were other aspects of your interests. Tell me about the Museum.

Alcorn: Well it started as kind of a hobby of Professor Slater's in about—I am going to say about 1927 or 28. I think I mentioned that in that history. Nothing had been done here on the herpetology (that is the cold-blooded vertebrates—frogs, salamanders and snakes—reptiles) so he just got sort of interested in it and started to collect them, because nothing had been done. I showed an interest in natural history, so I went on many field trips with him; and finally he just accumulated a real good collection of them. But nothing had been done on the mammals and birds and nothing done on the plants.

Thompson: Didn't he have boys in the service who sent him snakes from all over the world?

Alcorn: Yes, he has things up there now from the Philippines, Southeast Asia, and Europe.

Thompson: I know I have seen them and one day he told me that some of the men in the service had made it kind of a hobby and sent them to him. How would you rate our collection of herpetology?
Alcorn: Well, back in its hey day, it was probably number one in the West, but not much has been done to add to it in the last ten years, but size is not really the important thing—it's breadth of specimens, and there are specimens in our Museum that cannot be duplicated. In that sense, it is very valuable. First collections of things in certain areas. In point of size, I am not sure it's the big one any more, like the birds and mammals.

Thompson: Then, didn't you have your hobby in mammals and birds?

Alcorn: Birds, just birds. Originally, the collection was put up on the top floor of Howarth, in a room that was made for a dark room. It was just a bare room, the rafters were there; but it was painted dark and there was a sink, for developing films, but we never did a lot of that, so we just put shelves in there and filled this room up with bottles. About 1931 or 32, a year or so after I graduated in 1930, I started putting my bird skins up there and then about 1936, I persuaded Kitch to put his birds there.

Thompson: Now, Kitch was a collector.

Alcorn: Well, he was a businessman and birds were his hobby.

Thompson: Where did he live?

Alcorn: He lived down on North 35th, right down from the school a ways. Then about 1935 or 36 he put his skins there.

Thompson: How many would he have had?

Alcorn: He had about 1000 birds—no, about 1200 birds and maybe 700 sets of eggs. Not big, but again, very valuable because they were early things from here and of course we still have them. He had this collection in sort of an attic in his house, which was a fire trap. I persuaded him that he ought to put them up here because of the fire danger, among other things, so we had to take every drawer (he had old cabinets he had made, just scrounged out of boxes); we pulled the drawers out, carried the drawers down one by one, reassembled the cabinets on an old two-wheeled trailer that I had; he sat in the back and supported it and I drove it over and we carried them into Howarth and lifted those things up in the old elevator, where we had to pull a rope—about ten times for every floor. It was just a dirty little room, with rafters showing, and we persuaded Gerry Banks to seal it in, which kept tar from dropping down. When I came back in '45, I guess it was, I brought all of my collection.

Thompson: Your collection had been from this geographic area?

Alcorn: Mostly in the Northwest, and I had done quite a lot of trading with other ornithologists.
Thompson: How did you know where to trade or what to trade—I mean, do you do this by a magazine, or something?

Alcorn: No, it was what we needed to fill out our collections. We would need a certain kind of hawk eggs or certain kind of hawk skin, for example, and we would write around to the other fellows, or go to meetings, too, and we would talk it over and decide that we would trade you this for that. There was an old book put out quite a number of years ago, and it is a collector’s item now, putting a monetary value on skins for trade only (it has never been legal to sell them), so we used to look at that book—a red-tailed hawk would be at $2.50 for trade, and a set of eggs we needed would be worth $2.50, so we would trade one hawk skin for one set of eggs that we needed.

Thompson: What was this collection we got down from the Washington Historical Society?

Alcorn: It belonged to Bowles. Bowles was born and raised in Boston and he was a protege of William Brewster, who was one of the great ornithologists in America. Mr. Bowles was a very fine, courtly Boston gentleman, but he was a character. We never knew much about his early life, and he never married. He came here a few years before Kitch, and, of course, they were both interested in birds. They found out about each other and for many years—from about 1903 maybe till about 1906 or 7, Bowles was here alone. I think Kitch came about 1908-9. They got together and they were friends for years, until Bowles died in 1934.

Thompson: What was Bowles work?

Alcorn: He never worked. He never said much about money, but he did tell me one time (and I got to be very good friends with him as I worked many years with him in the field; he never had a car and I had an old jalopy of a car and we drove it around) that he was living on the proceeds of his book, The Birds of Washington, which was published in 1909—a beautiful set of books.

Thompson: What was Kitch’s work?

Alcorn: Well, Kitch was a business man but a very poor one. During the first World War, he owned a plant in the tidflats that brought fish from Alaska and froze it for Fort Lewis. When the War was over and the soldiers left and they were sick of fish so he went broke; went into bankruptcy. Then he became credit manager for Bellow & Wright, which was an automotive chain around the country, but he was miscast. The depression came and Bellow & Wright closed their doors and Kitchin was out of a job again. So then he went to Mount Rainier as a naturalist, and that was where he should have been all along. But he was getting quite old then. The second World War came and they put him over at Port Angeles, up on a mountain there, spotting airplanes. Of course, he loved that because he could do a lot of writing and also
spot animals. When the War was over, that job faded and he was just on his own. He got a little house in Port Angeles.

Thompson: Didn't I visit him and he had this house right on the beach?

Alcorn: Yes, he had an old shacky house on Carolyn Street.

Thompson: He had some of his collection there. I remember him very well from the dinners we had.

Alcorn: He used to bring you down a necktie once in a while! He was a very fine gentleman, and so was Bowles.

Thompson: Let's see, Kitch has been gone about ten years?

Alcorn: Well, he died in 1969--about that.

Thompson: What other collections does the Museum have?

Alcorn: We have a modest collection from Stan Warburton. Stan never did very much in later years--only a few skins.

Thompson: Didn't he have a heart condition in later years?

Alcorn: Yes, he did. Then we have a real fine collection from Jewett. Jewett was forty-five years with the Fish and Wild Life Service, and we got the remnants of his collection really, and a very good addition. He put most of his things down at the San Diego Museum, thinking that when he retired he would go down there and use them and they would give him an office, but when he retired he wasn't well enough to do that and didn't want to go anyhow. So what he had left, we got in his will and a lot of it we got before he died--he just put it up here.

Thompson: What was his work?

Alcorn: He was 45 years with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. He was instrumental in establishing, and I think he was the first director of, the Harney and Malbeas Lake Preserves in Eastern Oregon. He was a field man and a real good field man.

Thompson: When did Dr. Johnson come into this picture--Dr. Murray Johnson?

Alcorn: Before I answer that, I should add one more --we had Hurley's things. His collection wasn't big; we got a couple of thousand specimens--skins and eggs, everything elegant. He was a perfectionist in making skins. He had us in his will, but he had some kind of surgery and it left him crippled and he couldn't walk, so
finally he said we had better come and get it because he couldn't take care of it, so we went over and got it, eight or ten years ago.

Thompson: What was it that we got from the Washington State Historical Society when we had to take the mummy?

Alcorn: That was Bowles collection of eggs. Bowles, again, was mostly an oologist. That was his prime interest and he was a good one. Also nidology (which is nesting). Oology is eggs, not skins. He gave some papers, incidently, when he was 14 or 15 years old at the 1893 Chicago Exhibition. All he knew was birds and eggs. He didn't have any place to put them in his home. I don't know how many he had—how many thousand sets—but he had almost a thousand species, so it maybe came to a couple of thousand sets all together and he had no place to put them, so he persuaded W. B. Bonney at the Museum to give him space there at the Historical Society and they built these big cases with glass, slanted, and covered with black cloth to keep the eggs from fading.

Thompson: I remember seeing a whole bunch of them around a post.

Alcorn: Chapin Foster would never jar loose with them. I kept after them but when Bruce LeRoy came, he said they had no place in the Historical Society so we got them.

Thompson: I think we left enough for a representative show.

Alcorn: I was just up there this morning and they are in pretty bad shape, too, the way they are displayed—inaccurate and the labels are wrong on some of them.

Thompson: When did Murray Johnson come into the picture?

Alcorn: I would say 1948 or '1949.

Thompson: Was he one of your majors?

Alcorn: Yes, pre-med. Got interested as a hobby in mammals. Of course, he went to Oregon Medical School and he knew Jewett well, so he came back to Tacoma to start his practice in 1948 or 1949, somewhere in there, and started building up a mammal collection, and a good one. He has a lot of good mammals.

Thompson: Does he have a collection other than that at the University?

Alcorn: No.

Thompson: His interest is pretty wide-ranging. Doesn't he fly over around McKinley and count the deer and that sort of thing?

Alcorn: I am not sure of that specific thing, but he does have a lot of wide interests.
Now he is working with students through a grant on the study of seals, and he has worked for the National Park Service at the goat survey farm at Rainier, and that sort of thing. He is an active fellow.

Thompson: Is his approach really scientific?

Alcorn: Oh, I think so. He gets a little gung-ho.

Thompson: A little eager.

Alcorn: Yes.

Thompson: You and Rowena have done a lot of writing--mostly about Indians. How did you happen to be interested in Indians.

Alcorn: She has always been interested in them--even when she was in art school in Santa Barbara--she used to go out and paint the Navahos. Primarily, she is a portraitist and she likes the skin tones and the expressions. She likes to paint people, so when we were in Idaho we went to the Presbyterian Church and the preacher there was Cliff Drury, and he shook our hands at the door and he asked about us. Rowena said, "Gordon is at the University in biology," and he asked what she did and she told him she was an artist. The next Monday morning he was out at the back door and said he was doing a book on Henry Harman Spaulding, the missionary, and he needed some paintings and would she be interested, so she painted the frontispiece and the cover for that book and she painted things for his Whitman book and several of his other books she illustrated. We were right there at the back door of the Nez Percé so we went down to Lapuci at the reservation and talked to some of them--you have to break them down as they are pretty hard at first--got an interpreter and started painting the old ones. There were six of them there still alive who had been in the 1877 war (you saw that book she put out) well, six of those were painted from life--they were right in the war. So this interpreter became very much interested in getting it historically down so we made appointments and he would take us to their homes, talk in sign language, and she would sit there and paint them. She elaborated it more into a kind of a historical thing--not just the culture of the people but the history, so everything she did then (that was 35 years ago--it took her 20 years to get all the paintings done) was slanted toward the war.

Thompson: These paintings are on display at Dry Falls, is it?

Alcorn: No, they are at Rocky Reach Dam. The public utility has purchased them and they are permanently displayed there.

Thompson: This is how you people did your writings. Didn't I read where you people have over a hundred articles?

Alcorn: Way over a hundred.
Thompson: How many do you think you have?

Alcorn: I don't know. I've got about a hundred myself. She has quite a number on top of that.

Thompson: Now hers is mainly Indian interest, but yours would be birds, mammals, etc.?

Alcorn: Yes, but she did the Indian and history sort of thing. She likes that. I am interested in it, too, but I don't like to do much writing in it. But as far as the Indian is concerned, I was always interested in the biology of the Indian--their food, what plants they used to eat, how they prepared it. So her interest in the painting and the pure history fell right in with my interest in the natural history. That's why it went pretty well.

Thompson: The Indians of this area were considered to be lucky because they had seafood, didn't they?

Alcorn: Yes.

Thompson: Then, didn't the others have camas--weren't they roots or something?

Alcorn: Yes, the camas is widespread. So the coast Indian had camas. Locally, the Puyallups ate camas--it's a lily bulb. The Nez Percé, too, they ate camas, but they had another thing over there called kous--they called it kous-kous. It was like a little wild carrot and they found it in the fields and in the hard rocky fields of the Columbia plateau.

Thompson: You have been with us since 1930, more or less. Who were some of the unusual students who graduated under your jurisdiction?

Alcorn: Golly, I would have to think about that.

Thompson: Well, you had Irwin.

Alcorn: Yes, he's a good example. He's President of the New York Botanical Gardens.

Thompson: I remember that you came in and we actually had him on a contract. Do you remember?

Alcorn: Yes.

Thompson: Then he called me and he said he had this unusual opportunity.

Alcorn: You went down to see him, didn't you?
Thompson: Yes, I did. We had lunch there in Los Angeles. He flew up from Texas. I recall he said he had a daughter born without hands and this was one of the two states that had laws that would give the child hands as she grew up.

Alcorn: He was married only after he came here, though.

Thompson: He would be an interesting example of the kind of person you have had.

Alcorn: Yes, he is.

Thompson: You must have had fifty to a hundred.

Alcorn: I have had over 12,000 students in 47 years of teaching, counting the time in Grays Harbor and Idaho.

Thompson: You must remember a lot of very outstanding students.

Alcorn: I'll have to try to remember and put some of that down.

Thompson: Do you remember when we talked about building a new science building and do you remember the evolution of that?

Alcorn: Indeed I do. Well, Howarth Hall was originally built for physical sciences, not for biological sciences. There was supposed to be a companion building, where McIntyre is now, for biology. That is why we never fitted into that Howarth Hall— we did not have the proper sinks, the proper plumbing of any sort, the proper lighting. So you, and I think it was Gerry Banks, and I, in fact, you and Gerry Banks called me in one time and Phil Fehlandt (the old guys around) and said we ought to start thinking about a science building. The word around was to put it under the Sutton Quadrangle.

Thompson: You recall we had a lot of pressure from the federal government for bomb shelters and they had come to us and said they needed a bomb shelter in the North End and if you will put this underground we will contribute the major portion of the construction. The plans are there in the archives somewhere and it was a phenomenal thing. I never shall forget that I took those plans home one weekend and I remember you and Bob Sprenger and one or two others came to my office on Monday morning and I looked at you people and said, "Did you come to the same conclusions that I did?"

Alcorn: We did. It was absolutely not feasible. We would have had to pump everything out.

Thompson: Well, we would have had to raise all liquids 46 feet to get them up to the sewer outlets.
Alcorn: Dick Smith was in on that, too, with you. I went over to talk to Dick Smith about that one time and I told him we can't put that science building underground and he said, "I'm beginning to think the same thing. Have you any ideas?" I said, "I know exactly where it ought to go and I'll tell you exactly what shape it ought to be. It ought to be a square U and it ought to be back on Union." He said, "Let's go take a look, so we walked over there and I said, "That's where it ought to be, but you can't cut that tree down (there was a big old Sequoia tree)." He said, "I don't see any reason why we can't put it here. Go back and sell it to your colleagues." So Phil and I called a meeting and we got them all together. We didn't say, "Now this is where it ought to go." We just said, "This is where it is going to go."

Thompson: So you didn't have any problem at all.

Alcorn: No.

Thompson: In the original plan, you recall that where Howarth Hall is was to be the science quadrangle, and you also remember in Dr. Todd's plan that where the science building is now was to be the humanities quadrangle, and it was beautifully done --with a men's quadrangle and a women's quadrangle, etc. But I certainly appreciated an awful lot the fact that you people did a magnificent job on the basic planning for the science quadrangle.

Alcorn: We really had very few differences of opinion on it.

Thompson: McMillan wasn't in the picture then, was he? In Geology. I knew he was a negative on it but I didn't know . . .

Alcorn: No, he was retired, I guess.

Thompson: You people put a lot of expertise into that.

Alcorn: Yes, we really put in a lot of time. I don't know how many times we reviewed those things.

Thompson: Also, you said that we had to have a certain area for the Museum, do you remember?

Alcorn: Yes, yes. We had a little sweat on that.

Thompson: On paper it looked like it was adequate, but it soon became inadequate, didn't it? How much lead time did we have on that science building? It must have been three or four years.

Alcorn: It was more than that. More like ten years. In fact, I went out, at your suggestion and at Gerry Banks' suggestion, and I, alone, sat down with Cy Nelsen
Thompson: Once a month, for about a year, at his house—out there by Sixth Avenue. It was more like ten years.

Thompson: I knew the thing evolved and evolved, and that is the way you plan a good building.

Alcorn: That's right.

Thompson: You get all the inputs into it.

Alcorn: Incidentally, in that old Howarth Hall, to back up my statement that it was supposed to be for physical science, back when I first started to teach in the 1930's, we had a Norwegian student, a big, tall, awkward kind of kid, named Wilhelm Bakke, but he was an artist with a pocket knife. Dr. Todd hired him, gave him tuition I guess, to carve those names by hand in that main entrance. Do you know what I am talking about?

Thompson: Yes.

Alcorn: Down there, off of the quad. And you see not one biologist on there, because it was supposed to be just physical science.

Thompson: Now, tell me about the arboretum.

Alcorn: I can't tell you a lot because it just came as a surprise to me. I didn't know it was going to happen.

Thompson: I knew it was going to happen, but what I am really asking is about your years of back interest. Do you remember, for instance, when we landscaped Union Avenue and you selected the trees that would be used in each island.

Alcorn: The Kiwanis Club bought them.

Thompson: Didn't you select which ones would be used where?

Alcorn: Yes.

Thompson: Do you remember what ones you selected?

Alcorn: Yes, I do, exactly. I'll tell you why I do. There is a city ordinance to prohibit planting of any native trees on a parking strip, so I had to rustle around and find some good, suitable non-native trees. That's right. It's still there. I went up to the City Council several times, when Slim Rasmussen was mayor, and maybe before him, and got nowhere with them about changing that ordinance. So we had to pick what would grow about the same speed and be hearty and be artistic.
We didn't want one of beech trees, for example, as they get sugar in them and just drop all over; so we had to pick them for speed of growth, and successive growth, so we didn't have a little one here and great big one here. Of course, the fraternity kids killed some of them, so they are this way a little bit.

Thompson: We had some people, who were not necessarily students, who drove their jeeps over them. Do you remember which were the ashes and the other species?

Alcorn: Well, there are catalpa, a beech or two, a birch or two. The Kiwanis bought them, bought fifty of them because they were fifty years old--the anniversary of the Kiwanis Club. But we were bound by the city ordinance and that handicapped us a little bit. I have always resented that, and I don't see any reason why we should go to Timbuktu and bring a tree back when we are hurting for native ones. I think we should, and this is what I have advocated and this is what I told you when I was interviewed back in 1945--that I thought the campus ought to be a laboratory and it ought to be good looking. And by being a laboratory, it ought to illustrate as many of the native things as we could get, and also get things that are not native but would show things that our natives don't show; for instance, fruit and leaves, etc. So I don't believe we should have everything native, by any means, but we ought to have enough native things that we can use the campus for a laboratory.

Thompson: Do you remember when you saved the big tree on Union Avenue, just on the edge of the campus? Wasn't it a cottonwood?

Alcorn: A black cottonwood, yes. When it is a double tree, the loggers call it a "school marm" cottonwood, I don't know why.

Thompson: Didn't it have a bad heart?

Alcorn: Oh, boy, did it ever. There was a hole in there big enough for you and me to crawl in.

It began to rot just above the ground line and Professor Slater and I went in there one Campus Day and thought we could dig it out in one day but we dug farther and farther to get all the decay out. There was a big cavity and we finally got all the dead wood out and then got a couple of gallons of copper sulphate and just threw it in there, to kill all the spores and fungi that was in it. Then we filled it up with concrete--put some little bars in there to support it. It is completely covered now. You cannot see... We made a little joke of it in this Arboretum Committee--said we better put something in the archives somewhere so that if somebody goes in there with a chain saw (laughter) and tries to saw that tree down, he'd better be careful.

Thompson: I looked at it not very long ago and you are right--it is completely covered over, and of course, the tree has been saved, hasn't it?
Alcorn: Oh yes, it would have been gone long ago.

Thompson: It is a beautiful tree there.

Alcorn: It is, isn't it.

Thompson: Why do you suppose those little evergreen that are along the Union Street side seem to go along fine and then all of a sudden die?

Alcorn: You mean the ones we got this year?

Thompson: No, in the last ten years.

Alcorn: Along Union?

Thompson: Yes.

Alcorn: That soil is very bad, so before we planted those a hole was dug down maybe four or five feet and filled it with sawdust and that was a mistake. I didn't know they were doing this; they just did it. The sawdust got sour and rotten down in there—to rot out is good but to get sour isn't. That settled and it got deeper and deeper and the trees got settled down there with it and they got down below where there was any air for the roots, and I think that was what did it. That's very poor soil there, because you know that's been all slicked off and that big hill has been taken out of there.

Thompson: Do you remember Huckleberry Hill?

Alcorn: Yes, I do—indeed I do.

Thompson: I remember how beautiful it was with dogwoods. I couldn't take it when that came down—I left town!

Alcorn: That used to be a goat farm there.

Thompson: It did?

Alcorn: Yes. When I first came here as a student in 1925, there was a farm house over in there, not a very big one, and a public speaking teacher named Holcomb and I guess he paid the college rent, but he had goats in there; so promptly, of course, the students labeled it "Holcomb's Agricultural College" (laughter) and as a result the broom and stuff in there (where the fieldhouse parking lot is now) you remember that, it was kind of a swamp.

Thompson: I remember I used to walk down there and there was almost a little stream.

Alcorn: Yes. Well, that was where the goats used to be.
Thompson: Did Holcomb teach for the school?

Alcorn: Oh, yes, he was a public speaking teacher before Teach Jones came.

Thompson: If you came in 1925, you must have come the first year after they moved to the new campus?

Alcorn: That's right.

Thompson: Were you part of the move?

Alcorn: No, they moved in 1924 and I came in '25. It was brand new--just raw--just Jones Hall and the Gymnasium--now the Girls Gym; and the farm house where the Music Building is.

Thompson: When we started to tear that building down, it was in the paper and some woman called me from Fox Island and said you can't tear that down--that's where my two sons were born. And, of course, there is still one apple tree out there from the original orchard. It's in very difficult, decrepit state.

Alcorn: Right back of Jones Hall.

Thompson: Yes. But I remember it took us about 260 loads of earth to fill that ravine in.

Alcorn: Where we had the little bell tower for awhile.

Thompson: Yes. I hope we never had to dig up that sewer because it must be down 20 or 30 feet.

Alcorn: It's way down there. Some of those lines, however, are up on little sticks.

Thompson: Yes, that's right, between Jones Hall and . . . .

Alcorn: Where the parking lot is now for the science building was a berry field and the farm there put all their compost out there and there was a compost pile up there almost as big as Jones Hall. And, of course, they came in there and just ripped it all cut and threw it away. It was gone. (laughter) Yes, it was a berry field.

Thompson: I was interested in the evolution of the 11th Street. It used to be, evidently, the whole hill and then didn't the city come through and put a sewer line or water line or something and then the kids went over on their motorcycles and then people got brave and went over in their Model T's and the first thing it evolved into a trail and then a road.
Alcorn: Yes. There were a lot of nice, native plants in there.

Thompson: Salall...

Alcorn: Oh, yes, and huckleberries and herbs, etc. It was a nice, little spot.

Thompson: I hated it. We had a problem because we had an 86 foot differential between the top of Huckleberry Hill and the area in front of Anderson Hall. You probably remember that in Dr. Todd's planning he had an artificial lake in front of Anderson Hall.

Alcorn: Yes. He had started to dig it. And ran into clay.

Thompson: Yes, we ran into clay, but there is also an outlet in the sewer that goes in front of Anderson Hall to Lawrence, so they could drain that artificial lake. And I remember that we discussed with the Trustees Long-Range Planning Committee whether to create that artificial lake or not, ever, and they decided it would be an attractive nuisance, and you'd have children problems, etc.

Alcorn: We have it now in the pool.

Thompson: It's a little different though, because theoretically there is a rule to keep them out, but on a hot day they are in there.

Alcorn: Yes.

Thompson: Well, that Huckleberry Hill was a very interesting experience and I remember Don Shotwell and myself standing there and looking over to where the fieldhouse could be located. He said, "I can take this hill and put it in that swamp and we can have the parking lot there, etc."

Alcorn: Back in the old days, where the baseball field is now, roughly where the track is, was all brush, too, and they slicked it out to be a playing field and then they didn't have any way to police it at all so one Campus Day--I remember I was chairman of Campus Day--it would have been about 1927 or '28--we called it Post Hole Day and we got several students who were taking Hanawalt's surveying class. We surveyed it and marked the spots and dug the post holes in one day. Then slicked it up on the inside and put a fence around it and that's where they used to play football.

Thompson: It was a little rocky.

Alcorn: It was just gravel.

Thompson: I know Eddie Annis and two or three others told me how rocky it really was. Now you mentioned Professor Hanawalt. Tell me about him.
Alcorn: He came from DePauw probably at the invitation of Senator Davis. Senator Davis came in 1907 and he brought Hanawalt out and I think the two of them probably persuaded Prof. Slater in 1919. But Hanawalt was a typical college professor (laughter) and he would never let you off the hook. I took a course from him, and you worked at a problem (you always worked at the board) and if you didn't finish your problem, you put the problem up at the top and drew a line around it and it stayed there all semester. I tell you literally, at the end of the semester, we were working with about that much board (about 18 inches) and you came in after school, or an odd hour or something, to show him you could work that little problem up there with your initials and then you could erase it off. And, by golly, you got it off of there by the end of the semester. He made thetas... and you will notice in Rowena's picture of him (I got from Paul a picture of Hanawalt standing against one of these blackboards) she put that in his painting, remember?

Thompson: Yes.

Alcorn: And he was noted for his theta. A theta is shaped like that, but it was just so skinny you could hardly tell it was a theta--just a idiosyncrascy he had, and we put one of these in his painting, too.

Thompson: A theta is a mathematical symbol?

Alcorn: Yes, it's a Greek letter but it's used in mathematics. It is almost circular but he made it pressed in. We used to laugh at him about that because it was so obvious--he had his crosses down here. So when she painted that picture of him, I said, "Now, let's put some symbols back there and be sure you put a couple of thetas on." And he used to laugh about his name. He got a lot of fun out of his name. Actually, he said it came from the German Hans in Walt--meaning "Hans in the woods." And he used to call himself, Dr. Hans in the Woods. His own little humor. He was a good guy.

Thompson: His son, Paul, graduated and his grandson, Frank, graduated and Frank's sister graduated.

Alcorn: Frank I think is...

Thompson: Frank is an administrator of a school...

Alcorn: In Seattle, yes.

Thompson: His interest was mathematics, pure and simple, wasn't it.

Alcorn: Absolutely.

Thompson: Now, tell me about Senator Davis.
Alcorn: Well, he came in 1907 from DePauw. That was before Dr. Todd's time. Dr. Todd came in 1913. Davis came in 1907. And, of course, he was very courtly, kindly gentleman—very slow acting—knew everybody—knew all his students by their first names; knew where they lived. I had several classes from him. We would go into class and he would kind of look at the back of the room and he'd say to some student back there, "Well, how is everything in Puyallup today?" He always called me the Audubon of the Northwest. That was my nickname. He was a very absent-minded fellow and a bachelor all his life. Very courtly and again very quiet and gentlemanly fellow.

Thompson: He went into the legislature, didn't he?

Alcorn: He was a senator in the State Senate.

Thompson: I wonder how long.

Alcorn: Oh, several terms—two terms maybe. And we all got invited down—his classes. And they would always give him the gavel when we were sitting up there watching in the old capitol building. They would make a great to-do about it—they'd give the Senator the gavel and he would preside when we were there and we'd stand up and take a bow, you know, and they would clapp. It was a big deal. But he had the touch with students—he had it.

Thompson: I once heard Dr. Brown—Dr. Ralph Brown—say that he came somewhere from the eastern part of the State and the Senator brought him down to Olympia evidently for one of these appearances before the senate and he said, "I came over the hill and saw how beautiful it was and decided this was where I was going to practice." So Dr. Ralph Brown went to Olympia because Senator Davis took him as a student down there, and, of course, we have had Harry Brown, George Brown and the whole Brown family—Mrs. Brown is an alumnus, too. She works in the University League.

Alcorn: Well, Ralph graduated in chemistry and I think went over to work for Hooker. Then he decided he wanted to come back and work in medicine, so he spent a year there and I spent a whole summer with him, tutoring him in biology. He had got a lot of chemistry but no biology.

Thompson: The Senator lived in a little house up on Sprague?

Alcorn: The old Conservatory of Music.

Thompson: Division and Sprague.

Alcorn: Let me digress for awhile. The University has never given Clayton Johnson his due. He's still living and he was the old Conservatory of Music up there
and that little square house--I guess it is still there.

Thompson: No, it isn't. You mean, by the Church?

Alcorn: Yes. Did they rip it down?

Thompson: It came down four or five years ago.

Alcorn: That was where Senator Davis lived.

Thompson: Tell me more about Clayton Johnson.

Alcorn: I first heard of him but I was pretty small. It would be in the early twenties. I was still in high school and I graduated from high school in 1925. My brother was very mechanically minded and he built a radio, when radios first came out. Before vacuum tubes he told me one time and he called me up into the attic of our house one time and he said, "I'm getting the College of Puget Sound Conservatory of Music," and I put on these phones and heard Clayton Johnson playing the piano. Let me digress again for a second. Do you have old catalogues?

Thompson: We have them but I don't have them here.

Alcorn: I have a full range in my office from 1920 on, I guess, and I just keep them. So if you need them...

Thompson: We'd like to have them as I really have to work this history thing.

Alcorn: Well, you can borrow them. Clayton Johnson's name kept popping up and we'd listen to the music on the old radio and his name kept popping up--Clayton Johnson, Clayton Johnson, and you can see his name in these old catalogues--1920-21-22.

Thompson: He's an alumnus, too, isn't he?

Alcorn: Well, I rather suspect so--I'm not sure of that. He's an old faculty fellow.

Thompson: He plays for Rotary every Thursday.

Alcorn: He played at the Baptist Church for years and years.

Thompson: He played the organ. He must be in his eighties.

Alcorn: He must be pretty close to ninety. But he is still around and I see him over at the market. And I wonder, Dr. "T.", why has the College never given him any recognition.
Thompson: Well, they should. I'll write Dr. Phibbs a memo.

Alcorn: They ought to.

Thompson: There must be a tragic side to his life. I once said to him, when I found he was an alumnus, that we would like to have him help the University. He said, "Did you know that I had a daughter who was ill for many, many years?"

Alcorn: A diabetic.

Thompson: He said, "It took every dollar I could get to . . .

Alcorn: She lost her eyesight--she got blind.

Thompson: Is that right? Is she gone now?

Alcorn: Yes, she died six or eight years ago.

Thompson: Evidently that must have been a very great drain on him.

Alcorn: Oh, it was.

Thompson: And he is still teaching. I think he has a studio downtown here, somewhere. Well, I will follow up and see what we can do. What other professors do you remember? You mentioned Weir earlier?

Alcorn: Of course, he was a great scholar--Weir. He was in education. I would say his strong point, of course, was history of education, and he was a good, vigorous, tough teacher but a scholar. He stands out in my memory as a scholar, and old Professor Cheney, in German, he was a scholar. They were really, truly great scholars, in the literal sense. I think Davis and Hanawalt were great guys, but they were humanistic and compassionate, and they liked students and were thoroughly inspiring; perhaps not at the level of scholarship that Weir and Cheney were.

Thompson: What are some of the other aspects of the College or University you would like to discuss?

Alcorn: I don't know--again off the top of my head.

Thompson: How about Ray Powell--do you remember anything about him?

Alcorn: Oh, yes, Ray came maybe about 1940 and he was one of the later ones.

Thompson: He came from Coe College.

Alcorn: Yes, Coe College.
Thompson: You mentioned Fehlandt. He came from Wisconsin.

Alcorn: No...not Colby...something like that. Rollins...

Thompson: No, not that.

Alcorn: Of course, he took off during the War. I guess Ray did, too.

Thompson: Yes, both of them were in the War.

Alcorn: Perry was in the War.

Thompson: Was Warren Perry here when you came?

Alcorn: No. Warren came about -- I'm going to guess--about 1930. Of course, the library was on the bottom of Jones Hall.

Thompson: The lower side on the north end?

Alcorn: Yes.

Thompson: It must have had, say, about 40,000 volumes.

Alcorn: Not any more than that.

Thompson: I remember one of the first things we needed was another dormitory for men and we needed another classroom building and then we needed a library.

Alcorn: I remember Miss Crapser, too, in languages.

Thompson: What was she like?

Alcorn: I remember she was a very fine lady and a very fine teacher in foreign languages. And then there was...

Thompson: There was a Mrs. Whit...

Alcorn: Let me go back and look at some of those old catalogues and I'll put down some things.

Thompson: Why don't you -- you were talking about the hatchet and the tug of war.

Alcorn: Well, the hatchet thing started before my day, it was very popular during my day, and the seniors would always pass it along to the juniors, and the sophomores would try to capture it. It was a big deal with the students. As I mentioned awhile ago, this Wilhelm Bakke--well, I was president, I guess, of the senior class and we devised a way by which we would give it to the junior class by going up in the loft
above the stage in Jones Hall and dropping it in a basket and we would bring the hatchet up on the stage and we would pass it to the juniors and they would chuck it in this basket and haul it up real quickly and somebody way up on the top floor in the attic would disappear with it. Well, it was a good deal but it didn't work. (laughter) Wilhelm Bakke was there and he was going to get the ax real quick, so somehow, they struggled, he got the ax and jumped down off the stage and he ran over there to the left of the auditorium, facing on the side next to where McIntyre is now and jumped out the window—and he broke his leg. That disturbed President Todd very much. It really disturbed him, so he said we are going to have to take things a little easier. (laughter)

Thompson: I remember, of course, that the theory was that you put your years on the handle . . .

Alcorn: Etched it in there with acid.

Thompson: Yes, and when I was being considered for President, one alum said, "Do you have good teeth?" I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, when they passed the hatchet the last two times, poor Dr. Todd got caught in the melee, and he came out from under the melee with the hatchet in his teeth!" (laughter) Well, it went on and someone stole the handle and a new handle came.

Alcorn: I don't know—it kind of died.

Thompson: Well, in the War, I had a penny postcard come and it said, "Dr. T., don't worry about the hatchet. We have it and we'll take care of it." But it was not signed—there were just three little red dots and we've never seen it since then. So it's on somebody's beam up in an attic somewhere. I tried to get Mrs. Cooper to put a feature in the Arches and there is a picture of it in the 1948 annual.

Alcorn: There is an impression of it out there in the cement at the end of Jones Hall.

Thompson: She told me she was going to do that, and then Dr. Phibbs' priorities aced it out.

Alcorn: We ought to get it started again, maybe.

Thompson: It would be interesting to know where it is. How about the tug of war?

Alcorn: Well, that always came on Campus Day. Campus Day used to be pretty good but we got so big it has kind of lost it's meaning, or something.

Thompson: Well, you remember we used to cut out the weeds and put in fences, . . .
Alcorn: Then we got so big that a lot of kids weren't interested and it was just another holiday. We always had a tug of war between the freshmen and the sophomores and it was out there between the south end of Jones Hall and the north end of Todd—right in there. There was a gravel road and there is a big Madrona tree in there, and it still has the marks of that rope —around the bark of that Madrona tree. Then they had a fire hose that shot a stream of water right down the middle of that, and I tell you it was a badge of honor, if you were losing, you walked through that fire hose. Usually, there was a hankie tied on the rope, and if you got over four or five feet you lost. You had to walk through that water and it would knock you down. I got on the losing end of that one time and I had to walk through it. I walked right through that hose and then went home on the street car. That was a big deal and we had a lot of fun.

Thompson: I remember campus day. I guess it is more sophisticated now as Logger Day. They cut through trees and all that sort of thing. But I think it was a very meaningful thing because all the students got together.

Alcorn: Yes, and then we had a picnic lunch.

Thompson: It was faculty and students together. I remember it as a very interesting and precious time.

Alcorn: It was. And really, we got quite a bit of work done, too. We started that big, old tree out there on Campus Day—we couldn't do that today.

Thompson: What other plants or trees did you help bring to the school?

Alcorn: Oh, my gosh. I put a lot of them there. I put that big Sequoia out there and I made them move the science building ten feet. (laughter)

Thompson: Where is this one, now?

Alcorn: It's at the Chemistry end of the science building. Oh, it's a beauty. It's thirty or forty feet tall now.

Thompson: You mean the present science building?

Alcorn: Yes, the present one.

Thompson: And the Sequoia is located on the north side or the south side?

Alcorn: It's just (illustrating) — here's the chemistry wing, and it would be right here. Some friend of mine out on McKinley Hill said she had this little tree and would I like to have it, so I went out there and dug it up myself—about four feet tall. Also, I put that other meta sequoia in at the south end of the pool and the cercidophyllum and ginkgo there. Those are fossil trees.
Thompson: A ginkgo takes forever to grow, doesn't it?

Alcorn: No, no. I had it first in the cloister there between Howarth and Jones and then they put in a heat run, so I moved it across the street so it is now at the end of Todd. I came to class one morning, in that little 108 room there—in that hot room, and I looked out the window and some little boy with his little boy scout ax had chopped it down during the night. It was lying right on the ground. I went over and took a look at it, and there was a little bark still attached, so I got one of the guys from the Buildings and Grounds and we went out and very carefully lifted that thing up and we put copper sulphate on it again to keep it from rotting and we really put surgery to that—we splinted it, and tied it with rubber, and wired it and it grew. And you can still see, right now, a great big scar at the base. But it's pretty tall now.

Thompson: Where is this tree now?

Alcorn: It's at the north end of Todd Hall. There is a big Lombardy Poplar in there which I think we are going to have to take down.

Thompson: Why?

Alcorn: It's rooting up, breaking up the parking with the roots.

Thompson: Oh, well, you can fix the parking every five years.

Alcorn: If Elliott will do it! (laughter) Then there is another one down at the east end of the president's house—a ginkgo. Then there is a cercidophyllum. That is a beautiful tree. That's a fossil tree.

Thompson: Does that have a common name.

Alcorn: Dawn tree, or something. Then there is another one I put in—a native maple, I put in a ginkgo, an incense cedar—I put in a lot of those things. The idea being a laboratory.

Thompson: I remember talking to Rowena about the fact that there should be something on the campus to honor you for all your interest through all the years, and were were very thrilled when this arboretum thing came up. I'm not quite sure that that mound of rocks is exactly the sort of thing...

Alcorn: No, that doesn't look very good.

Thompson: It isn't the kind of thing that fits your personality nor fits the campus.
Alcorn: No, I don't know about the personality but it doesn't fit the campus. But everybody sees it, too. Larry Heggerness who was instrumental in a lot of it, and we were at that picnic and he said, "How do you like that?" And Rowena said, "Now, don't say anything--don't say anything." Because I just blew up to her--that's a monstrosity.

Thompson: What should happen is that they should take that plaque out, take the darn rocks away and just put that on the end of the library.

Alcorn: Well, if they didn't do that, they could cut it down about three-fourths on the back and side and leave it about so big--or they could put it on the edge of the building, if they wanted to. It's too monstrous.

Thompson: It doesn't really fit the purpose for which it was intended. I was shocked when Larry said, "What do you think?" I said, "I love Gordon Alcorn like a brother, and that doesn't seem to me like Gordon Alcorn."

Alcorn: I don't know about that aspect of it, but it's monstrous.

Thompson: I have a feeling it will be changed.

Alcorn: Oh, he said it was going to be changed.

Thompson: Dr. Phibbs said he didn't particularly like it either.

Alcorn: This is what I can't understand why they put it up there because everybody had a look at the plans.

Thompson: I don't think anybody saw the plans.

Alcorn: Oh, yes, they did. The whole committee saw the plans. Oh, Elliott was very careful. He had the plans xeroxed and sent them out to everybody.

Thompson: It must have been that it looked smaller on the plans than in reality.

Alcorn: Well, they couldn't read the plans. I was out to Russ Ziegler's place along maybe in May--he keeps a master chart on all new things that go on and he said they are getting at me to redesign that plaque for you, and I said, "Go ahead and do it," and they wanted him to do it in July but he said he did one and Elliott said no way would he permit that to go--said it looks like we got it in a graveyard. So he said, "What do you think of this?" He put these little rocks and he sketched it and he asked how big was the plaque and . . .

(cut off - end of a tape)
Thompson: Gordon, do you remember any unusual people on the campus or special events?

Alcorn: Well, one character who comes to mind is J. Stafford McMillin.

Thompson: Who was he?

Alcorn: He owned a lime kiln in the north part of Friday Harbor--San Juan Island--at Roche Harbor. He had Chinese people working for him. It was literally a fiefdom, because he took care of them if they got sick, he paid the hospital bills, etc. He took care of them as kind of a family. He was a strong, religious character; had a very strong . . . Mason, I believe--some lodge, it would have to Shriners or Mason or Scottish Rite, that's Mason, isn't it.

Thompson: Yes.

Alcorn: He had a lot of land up there--several hundred acres or more--and he started to build a mausoleum on Roche Harbor. President Todd used to have him come down to the College of Puget Sound and try to get money from him. Way back, maybe in the middle twenties, and it would be in my catalogue--my history, there--he gave him an honorary degree. But to the best of my knowledge, he never got any money from him. But this mausoleum has become quite a place and it is still there and you can see it. It is quite a deal. He built a great, big, long concrete table up on a platform, with big Corinthian columns with so many steps, and it is all symbolic of the four facets of life, whatever they are. It is a tremendous thing. One column is broken on purpose to show the imperfection of life and there are concrete chairs around the table and up on the back of the chair is the name of the person in the family whose ashes are in the seat. Finally, old J. Stafford himself died, and his ashes were put in his chair, and his chair faces northwest and there is a swath cut through the trees so that the sun of June 21 hits his chair.

Thompson: Sounds like Stonehenge.

Alcorn: Yes. A very similar thing only it's a mausoleum. All his family are there--his wife. He was a tremendous guy. He had entertained Theodore Roosevelt up there. He was a national figure. He ran for the U.S. Senate but didn't make it. He was really quite a fellow.

Thompson: Do you remember anything about the way by which the Howarth bequest came to the University of Puget Sound?

Alcorn: Howarth died before President Todd got it.
Thompson: Didn't Howarth leave it to the City of Tacoma with the idea that it should be used where it would do the greatest good?

Alcorn: You may be right on that--I'm not sure it was the City of Tacoma, but it was some agency or some foundation, yes. So that President Todd was able to persuade that organization or agency, and it might have been the City, I'm not sure, that this was the place to put it.

Thompson: I think it was the City, and I suppose I have had fifty people tell me that we turned that bequest to the University way back yonder when this decision was being made. I also went to see the Howarth family in Everett on a number of occasions and they were not very happy that it went this way, because of the fact that the present man there in Everett said well if you build a building you always have to renovate it about every 25 years.

Alcorn: When did you see them?

Thompson: Oh, that would be three years ago.

Alcorn: Oh, just recently.

Thompson: When we were renovating, after the moveout. Of course, Howarth Meadowcroft, who is on our Board of Trustees, --his mother was a Howarth and she was a daughter of the brother of the man who left the bequest. Of course, Howarth Meadowcroft is named for the Howarth family. Howarth is very enthusiastic and very good about it, but they have a foundation in Everett and the man there said everything in the foundation goes to something in Everett.

Alcorn: Well, President Todd put the bottom floor of that building up and then he ran out of money. In fact, when I first came here, we had biology and all the sciences in what is now the basement floor. One lab--toward the Lawrence Street end; then it became physics after we moved. The top of the building was what is now the first floor. It just had tar paper on it and we walked right out on it. Then he got this Howarth money about 1925 or maybe 1925, and finished it off. Rowena painted that picture of Howarth. Incidentally, you know that was vandalized and she had to redo it. She had to be very careful to see that she did not put Leonard Howarth's hands in it because he was all gnarled up with arthritis, so that is why the hands are hidden in that picture, and they asked her to do that. I think he was pretty well crippled and in a wheelchair.

Thompson: Did she paint it from life?

Alcorn: I'm not sure. I think she saw him once or twice only. There is a picture there and also a photograph.
Thompson: Yes, a photograph and also his textbooks. I think this is a part of the stipulation of the gift.

Alcorn: Yes, they must be displayed. Wilhelm Bakke carved that thing by hand at the same time he did this this up here.

Thompson: The thing over the top.

Alcorn: Yes. The frame around that picture of him and his math books.

Thompson: We have had about three of the Bakkes in the 35 years -- I wonder if they were any relation.

Alcorn: I don't have any idea.

Thompson: It would be interesting to see if they were. I mentioned earlier Professor Frederick McMillan. Do you remember him?

Alcorn: Oh, yes. A geology fellow. He started out in Chemistry.

Thompson: Yes, he started out in chemistry and then he started collecting rocks.

Alcorn: He established the geology department.

Thompson: I always kind of felt that he/ sort of a maverick, somehow or other.

Alcorn: Well, I don't know about putting some of this on tape.

Thompson: We will probably have to delete it.

Alcorn: Well, I think Mac was a real pleasant guy and a good guy but he was completely insecure. He had been to Willamette and got a maverick degree at Willamette way back and then they dropped the degree and he always felt that then he tried for a master's at the University but he couldn't hack it out; so Mac was a good guy but he was not really adequate.

Thompson: When I used to walk in his classroom and look at the blackboards, and in a sentence there would be three or four misspelled words, it just broke your heart, you know. At the same time, the students loved him.

Alcorn: Yes, as far as the teaching was concerned... He was too insecure.

Thompson: You mentioned Jim Slater.

Alcorn: Yes, I said, "How many deans do you remember?" He tried to think back and then he said, "How many do you remember?" When I first came, there was Cunningham, then there was Henry, then Lemon, then Drury, then Regester,
then there were two or three --Thomas, Bock, etc. I think I came up with 12 deans that I knew, but only three presidents. (laughter)

Thompson: I don't know how that happened. Well, I guess the deans were more vulnerable that presidents.

Alcorn: When Slater came, Marsh was dean. And Mrs. Marsh was a biology teacher.

Thompson: Did you know Marsh?

Alcorn: Yes, quite well, quite well.

Thompson: What was he like?

Alcorn: Very fine gentleman. A little fellow, a lively little guy; and after he left here he got active in the Washington Educational Association and became secretary or something and lobbied for them.

Thompson: I used to see him because he was president of the Methodist Men's Club in Edmonds and he'd have me up for breakfast with the Methodist Men at least once a year and they gave the money from the breakfast down here. The church finally established a memorial scholarship here in his name.

Alcorn: Oh, yes, the Arthur Marsh.

Thompson: I remember him very well--as you say, he was slight but he was very dynamic and even when he must have been 75 he had a lot of drive. And very much interested in the University and very loyal.

Alcorn: No doubt of it.

Thompson: I never knew why he left. Did you know Cunningham?

Alcorn: A little bit.

Thompson: What was he like?

Alcorn: I can't answer.

Thompson: Did you know Lemon?

Alcorn: Oh, very well. He was a very fine scholar but his judgment wasn't always good.
Thompson: You mean in dealing with people?

Alcorn: Dealing with people. He and President Todd, I think, sort of got on the outs and Lemon went to the University of Idaho and was still there when I went over there to teach after I finished my work, so I knew him here very well and then over in Idaho very well. But as I say, I think it was his judgment. I know, as students, we used to say—that’s a funny thing to do, or something. So he went over there. Drury was a disaster. He was completely and totally without finesse, without judgment at all; just a disaster. He lasted a couple of years.

Thompson: What was his major—what was his interest academically?

Alcorn: I think psychology. That was Lemon, too. Henry, of course, was chemistry.

Thompson: You knew John Regester, of course.

Alcorn: Oh yes, for many years.

Thompson: He was a wonderful dean.

Alcorn: Yes, a real scholar.

Thompson: A real scholar. Very astute. Knew how to handle people and faculty, and a great joy to work with him.

Alcorn: Yes.

Thompson: Bock, I think, was over ambitious.

Alcorn: He wanted to be president over night.

Thompson: Well, he said he would only stay five years in any institution, he didn’t care what it was.

Alcorn: He wanted to get there quick; he couldn’t wait. (laughter)

Thompson: He was willing to walk on anybody’s back to get there.

Alcorn: You know there are a few guys up there now that say Bock was a pretty good guy—too bad we lost him.

Thompson: That sounds like Ernie Karlstrom.

Alcorn: I don’t talk to Karlstrom—never see him anymore.
Alcorn: Lantz is still gung-ho for Bock.

Thompson: Of course, Lantz was always that way. Lantz was a fellow that when things were going smoothly he'd have to ask questions.

Alcorn: Think something was wrong! (laughter)

I don't know, if you think back, in generalities, you can't pinpoint a lot of things, and I suppose it is inevitable in the evolution of any organization or any university that times change, the atmosphere is not what it used to be--I'd say even back in the days when you first came--there is no rapport, less rapport, and I suppose that guys like myself, Prof Slater and some of those who have been there so long that have, in addition to loyalty and affection for the institution, the younger fellows and I suppose it is a natural thing, the medium guys that are 40 to 45 years old who have been there ten or fifteen years don't have it. I think that is a natural evolution.

Thompson: Well, I think so. We were all kind of a family; we thought we were building the place.

Alcorn: That's it.

Thompson: We felt we were pulling it up by the bootstraps.

Alcorn: We didn't have a lot; we weren't affluent; what we did accomplish by our own bootstraps meant more to us than just going out and buying it. If you earned the nickel for the ice cream cone, you enjoy it more than if someone gives it to you.

Thompson: That's right.

Alcorn: We don't have that now.

Thompson: I wonder if it's because we have a beautiful campus, nice buildings, the aura of things going along pretty well--or whether it isn't a whole psychological turn in teachers--you know, this idea of high school teachers striking, and all this sort of thing. We used to think this teaching was a great thing, you were giving kids horizons, etc.

Alcorn: I have to be careful about what I think and what I say, along this general line, because people say every old guy says it; and every old guy says he is right, too. But I can't see, but when the bell stops ringing, before the echoes are out of the hall, the guys are on their way home. Right now, we're in between and there is
nobody around--well, vacation's fine, they ought to take a rest, but nobody is around; the place is empty. I'm the only one up there. I go up there every day, I enjoy it, I like it, etc. There is a different spirit and I think it is partly what you suggested a moment ago--that we had it pretty tough up there for a long time--even before your day, but it didn't seem tough to us. It was fun. We all kept in there; we had the old literary society, and now it's different.

Thompson: You know I can remember when we gave an honorary degree we said to the trustees, "Now, are you people going to contribute the $6.00 to buy the hood?" And I can remember when we had a dinner, Lucille went out and got the flowers out of the yard and decorated, and I remember she baked cookies until two o'clock in the morning in order to have them for the students--this sort of thing. And it was all part of it.

Alcorn: Maybe it's a natural evolution, I don't know.

Thompson: Well, and also the size of the school. Well, as I tell them, it's a great school and we made it great because all of us pulled as a team and we dedicated our lives to it, and there are thousands of people out there who rise up and call you blessed, Prof Slater blessed and the rest of them, so it is really wonderful.

Alcorn: Everywhere I go I see students.

Thompson: Yes, and they ask about you, and they ask about Rowena, and they ask about Prof Slater, and all.
ORAL HISTORY AGREEMENT
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I/We hereby grant to the University of Puget Sound all rights
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Trustees or their agent.

Interviewee

Gordon Alcorn

Date

May 17, 1978

Interviewer

Date
Thompson: Gordon, I wanted to talk to you about background. Were you a native of this section.

Alcorn: Yes, I was born in Olympia and grew up here in Tacoma. My father and mother moved here.

T: What was your father's work?

A: He was born in Virginia and came out here in about 1900. He was the first brewmaster for the Olympia Brewery—for the Schmidt family. He figured that in the brew cellar (or whatever you call it) he got rheumatism—that's what he thought. He had been with the railroads in Virginia. He was a hosler and a pretty young fellow, too. He was only 21 or 22 when he came out here: he was born in 1881. When he came here to Tacoma, he worked for the railroad at the old South Tacoma shops as a mechanic. He got a piece of steel in his eye and that sort of scared him so he quit and he went into business—real estate and insurance. He retired before the World War II but during the war, for patriotism, he went back to work as a machinist. He was a pretty old fellow but he worked four or five years.

T: Have you always had an unusual interest in natural history?

A: Yes. I really can't remember when I didn't. I was showing my class the other day some big colored prints of birds put out by the Winchester people to advertise shooting birds, ducks and shore birds. My mother gave me those when I was seven years old. I had a little note on it. I can't remember when I wasn't interested in natural history.
T: You came to CPS from Olympia?
A: No. From Tacoma. We moved here and I went to school here and I entered CPS in 1925.
T: Had you attended Stadium?
A: No, Lincoln.
T: Did Rowena go to Lincoln?
A: No, she went to Stadium! (Laughter)
T: Was she in the same class that you were?
A: No, she was about a year ahead of me-- about 1924 maybe.
T: If you came to CPS in 1925, that was the first year on the new campus, wasn't it?
A: They came in 1924.
T: Do you remember the move?
A: No, I wasn't in on it, but I remember it from the newspaper.
T: You weren't one of the ones that carried the trees up, the books up and the Color Post, etc.
A: No. The faculty paraded from Sixth and Sprague--that was Senator Davis, Professor Slater and Professor Hanawalt.
T: Do you remember those professors?
A: Oh, very well. I had classes from them.
T: Tell me about Davis?
A: He was a very kindly gentleman, very good natured, always a twinkle. Very popular with students because he knew his students. We would go to
class in the morning and he would kind of look at the back of the room and say, "How's everything in Puyallup this morning?" to a student who lived there. He was a very kindly fellow and a pretty good politician, too. He was in the Senate for a number of years.

T: He was genuinely respected by the political people as well as by the students.

A: He was highly respected. Remember old Senator Medcalf in the State Senate? He made kind of a valedictory to Senator Davis when he left the Senate and he said, "In all my experience, Senator Davis voted right more times than anybody I have ever known." Of course, he was a political crony of Davis'. He presided a great deal in the Senate and he would always bring his students down during the session and we would sit in the gallery and the lieutenant governor would always let the Senator preside while we were there. He would always look up and welcome the students! I used to pick him up in my old jalopy of a car on Sixth Avenue. He'd get off at Sixth and Lawrence and I'd pick him up and take him down Lawrence to school. He would write me a note at the end of the semester and thank me for picking him up. He would address his envelopes to me, "The Audubon of the Northwest." I still have one of those envelopes somewhere.

T: I recall that he used to take carloads of students down to Olympia. You know Dr. Ralph Brown, of course. He told me that he had never been to Olympia and the Senator told them all about Olympia. When they drove over the hill where they could see the capitol, Brown said right then to himself
"this is where I want to spend my life." And he's been in Olympia ever since and the Brown children have all gone to the University of Puget Sound. So the Senator was much beloved. He lived for many years in the little house that was the Music Conservatory.

A: Yes, right back of the church there.

T: I was in that once and he had books stacked everywhere and there was just a little trail so he could get around to the kitchen, etc.

A: I was in there many times.

T: He had a tremendous memory, I am told.

A: Yes, dates, people, . . .

T: Yes, page 93 of this book, etc.

In your notes you say that there was a student rumor that he was interested in Professor Crapser.

A: Yes, that went around.

T: She was a language teacher.

A: Yes.

T: What was she like?

A: She was very much the outdoors person. She belonged to the Botaniers and again a very friendly lady, a very fine teacher, highly respected. She ended up sort of tragically. For a long time, I guess many years, she was kind of an invalid with a brain tumor.

T: Oh, how sad. Professor Weir must have been at his peak when you were here. Is that right?
A: Now, he was the scholar and was always regarded as the scholar. He had a shock of pure white hair, very strict, very exacting, but again with good humor and highly respected and highly admired, but one did work with him! Education history—he knew about and all the rest of them—knew their lives and their contributions to education. I think of all the early people, along with Dean Regester when he eventually came, that he and Regester were regarded as the scholars.

T: Do you remember when Regester came?

A: Yes. He taught psychology when he first came.

T: Then worked over into philosophy?

A: He took a year off, I guess it was in Boston where he did his work. That was about 1928 or 1929, something like that.

T: He certainly was highly regarded. I never knew a person with whom it was easier to work, and yet a man who stood on his principles and gave distinguished leadership.

A: We had dinner with them a couple of Sundays ago over at Wesley Gardens.

T: His first wife was a tremendous person. I don’t know the second one as well, but I thought it was awfully nice that he married a second time because they were evidently friends many years ago.

A: They are very happy and very compatible and she kind of keeps him spruced up and keeps him busy.

T: He must be in his latter seventies.

A: He is 81.
T: Is that right? He certainly is very fine. There were other professors. Can you tell me about Professor Henry.

A: Yes. Henry was head of chemistry and just prior to that I guess he was dean. He had difficulty in teaching... he had some kind of...

T: Impediment?

A: No, it wasn't that. He had to have a handkerchief all the time. And his blackboard script, handwriting, was absolutely impossible.

T: He has two sons who are close by here, right?

A: Yes. Fred is out on Anderson Island and the other one I don't know. Then his daughter is Georgia Schwartz' wife.

T: He seems to have carried a considerable amount of influence and weight in the University.

A: Yes.

T: I thought that sooner or later I ought to get his sons on tape.

A: Yes, get Fred down here. He's retired on Anderson Island but he comes in every Monday to sing in the chorus here, so you could get him on a Monday.

T: Good. Did you know Reneau?

A: Yes, Georgia Reneau. She was very quiet, very gentle and again considered very scholarly. She was rather careless about her personal appearance. I think she had a little trouble with Dean Lemon; they had academic difficulties or something.

T: She lived, you know, just back of the fieldhouse and we bought six lots from her. I wanted her to give them to us but she had a nephew that she
thought she ought to protect. She was a little bit bitter about the University, and Dean Lemon and Dr. Todd. She thought Dr. Todd sided with Lemon rather than her and then she went to PLU and taught there for awhile. She seemed to be so highly regarded by so many students that I said to the Alumni Association maybe they would like to have her speak at the alumni meeting one Spring. Were you at that meeting?

A: No.

T: She went on for nearly two hours.

A: That was a few years ago.

T: That would be 15 years ago. Dick Wasson asked her to speak and she was thorough and it was an interesting time! She lived in this big house on 9th Street and she had 13 cats.

A: Yes, I've been there.

T: It was a very difficult place in which to visit--to sit down or take a breath!

A: That's right. And she always had trouble with her personal things--clothes, etc.

T: I think this is why Lemon and Dr. Todd felt it would be wise to have her go somewhere else, although she seems to have had the genuine regard and affection of many, many students.

A: She was pretty sharp on the literature and that kind of thing.

T: When did McMillan come?

A: I'm going to say about 1926 or 1927.
T: Was he a teacher when you were a student?
A: He was a teacher. He'd been at Willamette.
T: Did you take any of his courses?
A: A lot of his courses.
T: How was he as a teacher?
A: He was no geologist. He was not a trained geologist. He came as a chemist and he loved to fiddle around with geology and I guess he started the geology department, which was one room on the top floor of Jones Hall. He had an inferiority complex and wanted to bend over backwards to appear that he didn't have it. But he was no geologist and a very poor teacher and highly opinionated. He liked students or he didn't like them and there was a jealous streak in him (it's terrible to talk about someone who is dead), but he was difficult.
T: Yes, he was.
A: He was not the academic caliber and personality for the University.
T: I found that, too, and of course it was very difficult to handle. He had his champions, like Norm Anderson. Norm tells me that he actually started the geology department with a barrel full of rocks that he had in his room.
A: That would be pretty close.
T: Once I went in his classroom, after a class, and in one sentence on the board, there were five misspelled words.
A: He was no student or scholar.
T: But students were great champions of his because those who liked him he gave A's and those who questioned him got...
A: He was "Mac" to all the students and he kind of sponsored one of the fraternities and spent a lot of time with students. I spent a lot of time in his home in the evenings. His wife used to cook up the biscuits and .

T: He was popular and he was, of course, very eager to stay on and teach afterward but I didn't think his academic qualifications were such to merit it, and he caused quite a fuss.

A: I think she is still living in Lacey.

T: Yes, she is and we see her quite often. When you finished at CPS, you did graduate work. Where did you do that?

A: At the University of Washington.

T: Did you get a master's?

A: The master's in 1934 and the Ph.D. in 1935.

T: Your master's was in what?

A: Biology.

T: What was your thesis?

A: My thesis was in botany. I did an inventory and survey of the desmeds, microscopic green plants, algea, in the Puget Sound country.

T: When was your doctor's thesis?

A: Well, I did the master's thesis in desmeds and went on and finished it up for the doctorate.

T: Did the U of W have requirements of French and German for the doctorate?

A: Yes, I had both.

T: I remember working through that. I did the French because I took French
in college but I did the German because I dug it out.

A: You know, I took a lot of German from Professor Cheney and Maris at CPS because I liked the German. In fact, I had enough for a major in German. Then I just sort of thought at the University that why don't I get this German out of the way because then I could get the master's degree in August and I wouldn't have to wait until the next June. So I applied at the last minute to take the master's exam in German and I didn't bone up on it and I flunked it, but flat! Of course, after that I boned up on it and I had no problem.

I liked the German and I didn't look forward to French but I did it.

T: Tell me about Professor Cheney?

A: He was regarded as a great scholar and he was—he really was.

T: What was his field?

A: German. He knew the other languages so well and the value of his courses (and I can still remember them) was the comparison—he would say look at the cognate or look at the relationship between this and the French, or the something, or the something and he'd give us a string of them, you see. He was a great guy. But he didn't know anything else but that. You never saw him but what he was dressed I don't think he ever put on an old shirt, even at home. We used to be in their home a great deal and Mrs. Cheney was a very sympathetic lady to students. He was always dressed up and I think when he got up in the morning he put on his necktie for breakfast.

T: Mrs. Cheney was registrar after his tragic death.
A: Yes, and then she became dean of women.

T: She was certainly a dedicated person.

A: Yes, a fine woman.

T: She had some tragedy, healthwise, that made her lose her hair.

Was it scarlet fever?

A: Yes, it was way back. It was something like that. She wore a wig for a long time.

T: Two boys are living, one in Wenatchee.

A: Bob is in Yakima and Phil is in Wenatchee and now Margaret is in Yakima too and Marian is here.

T: Mrs. Cheney was a wonderful person. She used to spend endless hours in the registrar's office there, and everything was absolutely perfect.

After you received your doctor's degree, what did you do?

A: Went to the University of Idaho to teach.

T: That's where this botanist's herbarium burned down?

A: Yes, that was Henderson's. I saw him a few times. He was Peggy Strong's grandfather.

T: I appreciated your memorandum to me with the facts about Peggy Strong and the murals.

A: Down at the depot.

T: Yes.

A: They hoisted her up on a scaffold because she was in a wheelchair.

She had broken her back in a car accident.

T: It is interesting and when I write about the student center I'll have quite
a little bit about that.

A: She was one of Rowena's art students.

T: Is that where she learned to paint the blue hawks and other things?

A: She had done some work elsewhere and I don't know just where. I think she was on her way back east to school when a tire blew out and her car went over.

T: How long did you teach in Idaho?

A: Two years.

T: Did you teach botany or biology?

A: I taught botany and mostly systemic botany and mycology.

T: Were you and Rowena married at that time?

A: We were married in the summer of 1935, after I got my work done at the University of Washington.

T: Rowena was from Tacoma and where did you meet her?

A: I met her in a reception line in Jones Hall!

T: As a freshman?

A: No, that was when I first started to teach. You see, I graduated in 1930 in June and President Todd asked me to stay on right away for the summer school, so I got the degree yesterday and started teaching today in the summer school. I taught, I guess, maybe 30 or 35 summers. I always came back to UPS in the summer time.

T: So, that's where you met her in the reception line. Was she teaching art at that time?
A: Yes, she was teaching art with Mrs. Cochran.

T: Mrs. Cochran was head of the art department.

A: Yes.

T: Was that located on the third floor of Jones then?

A: Yes, right over your old office, looking out on Lawrence.

T: Rowena graduated from UPS, didn't she? — No

A: Yes, she took work for about five years, perhaps the years 1930 to 1935.

T: How would you compare the curriculum that you studied and the evolution of the curriculum, because you have been right in the middle of this thing for years. Could you talk about that?

A: You mean in the University or in the Biology Department.

T: I am thinking of when you were a student and then as you watched this evolve.

A: I don't know. I'd like to think about that a little bit. We've always been committed to so-called liberal arts, where we got something in depth. It pops into my mind that much of this goes back to Dean Regester. I think I see now, and I am sure you do, too, the return, the comeback, to the good old days. We go through the evolution—the young guys come along and they want to revolutionize it; we make a lot of changes and after a couple of years when it doesn't work we go back to where we were, roughly.

T: That's right.

A: We're about back to the liberal thing that we used to have. Somebody came up not long ago, some of these young gung-ho fellows in the faculty,
came up with the function and the strengths of the liberal thing and it was practically Dean Regester, word for word.

T: It is amazing how it evolves around.

A: We got rid of the final exam and then they decided it was good after all, so we are back to that.

T: We had all the pressures of the G.I.'s and the vocational aspects.

A: But basically, I don't think we change a great deal.

T: Basically, it really comes down to great teachers, doesn't it?

A: One thousand percent.

T: You will remember the one or two or three that just made a tremendous impression on you and set your mind on fire and gave you horizons and you put up with the dullards, because it had to be done. I never shall forget when I was in seminary I led kind of a little revolt about the fact that Greek and Hebrew were required, and I said to the dean, "The only reason they are required is because this is the way these two professors get a class." It wasn't very long until Hebrew wasn't required and now Greek isn't required.

Let me refer a little bit to Rowena's interest and your interest in Indians. How did that happen?

A: She has always been interested in Indians. Her father was in the gold rush in Alaska and he was up there nine years in the Klondike. Her mother wrote two very successful books, their diaries. In his diary, he wrote
about an Indian saving his life on the Trail up at Pass. This sort of stuck with Rowena because all through her girlhood she had heard the story. She studied at the Santa Barbara School of the Arts, which is an extremely fine school. She got onto the Navahos and she likes the rugged features, likes the color and the skin tones. One Sunday when we were first in Idaho we went to the Presbyterian Church and the preacher was Clifford Drury who is now the authority on early missionaries. He has put out 21 or 22 books. (I always thought we missed it because we never gave Cliff Drury an honorary degree.) He was starting his book on Marcus Whitman and Henry Harmon Spaulding and when we shook hands at the door after the service he noticed that we were new and we told him we were out at the University and he turned to Rowena and asked if she were teaching and she said she was an artist. At 9:00 o'clock the next morning he was knocking on the door and he said, "I remember what you said yesterday and I'm putting out my book on Henry Harmon Spaulding and I need some paintings. Would you be interested in doing it?" So she painted the frontispiece and she painted Timothy, which was Spaulding's first convert. That got her started. We went down to the reservation at Lapuci which was about fifty miles south of Moscow. We went to see one of the Indians there who was on the Council. She said, "I think I would like to paint the old warriors from the 1877 war." There were five of them still living, and this was Corbit Lawyer who was the grandson of Chief Lawyer who was in the war. He was a very fine scholar and they called him, in Indian, "The
Learned One" and it got to be "Lawyer". We got to know Corbit Lawyer very well and he said, "The only way you can do this is for someone of us to persuade them, and I'll be very glad to do this. I'll find you an interpreter."

So he got us an interpreter, and we went for ten years, I guess, every summer over there--I guess we went 35 years in all, just to see the old guy and get their story. We got the five of them and not any of them ever spoke a word. It was all sign language. Very important people in the war and we got the story, got notes on the colors, she borrowed some of the clothes of Joseph (Chief Joseph) and she had to do him from a picture, of course, but she had his clothes. She wound up with 25 of those pictures and those are the ones in her book.

T: That is her last book.

A: Yes, the first edition sold out and the second edition came out last Friday so she got another go around.

T: How many Indians has she painted?

A: It would be hard to say but there are 25 full large-sized in this book. She painted Navahos, some MicCaws and some.

T: Aren't some of these on display over in eastern Washington?

A: They are permanently at the Rocky Reach Dam. The PUD people own them. They were purchased by private sources and given to the Dam as a memorial to one of the fellows who floated the bonds for the dam--the Glenns. You know the Glenns.

T: Oh, yes. Along with this, you and Rowena have written a number of
books and magazine articles, haven't you?
A: Yes. We have put out, together, something over 100 articles and we put out one little book together and then she put out her good book by herself, and I have one now in press that will come out, I think, this Summer. This is on the birds and the eggs of the Northwest.

T: What are some of the journals you have published in?
A: Pacific Search, Montana Magazine, Pacific Northwest Quarterly, the Journal of the West, etc.

T: You two are really distinguished authorities in this area on Indians and birds, etc.
A: I would say, with modesty, that Rowena is on the Nez Perce Indians and she advises and is asked for help from all the authors now. She is given credit by in his book, and her paintings and credit lines in Drury's books, etc. I would say she is the authority on the Nez Perce.

T: Let's talk about the Puget Sound Museum of Natural History. This sort of evolved through the years. Do you remember when it started?
A: Yes, Professor Slater started it about 1926-27 or 28. He came in 1919 and nothing had been done on the herpetology--frogs, salamanders and reptiles. I don't think you could actually put your finger on it and say that it started on January 1, 1927. But right in there, he started collecting these things for the work in his classes. We had a little room, about the size of your office maybe, which was on the top floor of Howarth Hall. It
was darkened on the inside, just a rough room, which had been used for photography. He took that and put up shelves and put his things in there. I came along and I started putting my things up there, maybe about 1930 or 1931 when I first started to teach. Then we persuaded Kitch to put his stuff there in 1936, I believe.

T: His name was Kitchin.
A: Yes.

T: Where was he located?
A: He was in business here in Tacoma and then he retired. He lived here for many years, out on 35th at Proctor. We persuaded him to put the material up there because he had it in the attic of his house, and in those days it was legal to have a private collection and now it is not legal.

T: What did he collect?
A: Birds, and nests and eggs.

T: He had a very fine collection.
A: What he had was very good but it was not real extensive. He had about 750 sets of eggs and perhaps 1000 skins. The significance of it, however, was that it started the two of us, he and I, on the warm vertebrae, that is the birds. Other warm vertebrae are the mammals and of course Murray started that when he came about 1948 or 1949. All through the years, of course, before that and during that time, Prof Slater had been putting in more amphibian reptiles and I was putting in birds and finally
I put my private collection over the years, that may have been about 1945.

T: How large was your collection when you turned it over?

A: I had about 3000 birds and maybe 1000 sets of eggs.

T: What other collections have been added since?

A: About 1948, Murray came along and started putting in the mammals. Then about 1952, we got the Jewett material. Jewett was from Portland and he had a big collection because he was with the Federal Government for forty years and all he did was build up a collection.

T: Is this a collection of mammals or birds?

A: No, birds, just birds. No eggs; no mammals. I'm not sure, I'd have to check it out. There may have been 5000 skins. Then all the time we were all putting in and trading around and collecting, etc. In the middle sixties, we got Hurley's material. He had the last private collection in the State and we persuaded him that he should put us in his will, which he did. You visited him once in Yakima, I think.

T: He was the fellow working in a tin shop.

A: Yes, he was a tinsmith.

T: I never felt I made any impression on him whatsoever. (Laughter). He was fastening stovepipes and he just went on with his work. It was really fun. When I went out to make notes in the car, as I do after every call, I said to myself well I don't know that I did anything but I'm sure I didn't hurt anything!
A: We had been over there and I had seen him many times. I had seen him at meetings. I used to trade with him. We persuaded him to put this in his will and I got at him one time and he said, "I'm way ahead of you and it's been in there for two or three years." Then he had trouble with his back and he had surgery and it didn't work right and he became paralyzed so he called me one time (and it was a sad thing, really) that we had better come and get his collection before he died, which wouldn't be long anyhow. Professor Slater and I and a student went over and it took three days for us to pack it and we brought it over. He didn't live long after that, and I'll always remember the scene when we drove off in our rented truck with that collection. He stood there with his cane in the doorway, and he wept tears--55 years were going away in that truck!

That was a very great addition. He didn't have a big collection. He had about 1800 skins, but they were perfect. There were maybe 1500 sets of eggs--everything perfect.

T: Who was the man I visited in the little house in Port Angeles?

A: That was Kitch.

T: He had moved from here to Port Angeles.

A: He went during the war, and he was pretty old, to be a lookout for airplanes. Preston Macy (you know him and he is pretty feeble now--I saw him Saturday) was Superintendent of the Parks and he gave him a job spotting. Then he gave him a little something to work on the natural
history of the park and Kitch retired at Port Angeles and lived in that little house looking over the bay.

T: I always liked him and we had a lot of fun and he had a good sense of humor. He was the man who gave me the neckties, wasn't he?

A: Yes, he always brought you new neckties. (Laughter)

Then he got pretty feeble and he had to go into a nursing home and he died maybe about 1969. He was way up his 90's then—maybe 93. Well, he was born in 1875, so you can see he was up there.

T: What was the significance of the addition to the Museum that we got from the Historical Society?

A: That belonged to Bowles—J. Hoover Bowles. I think I gave you a little history on him which you can review, if you like. Bowles was a Bostonian. He came out to Tacoma, I think, about 1903. He was kind of a mysterious fellow. We never knew where he got his money but he never worked. He didn't live affluently; he lived very simply and he never married. But his life was nothing but birds. He gave a paper in 1893 at the Chicago World's Fair. He was born in 1875 (he and Kitch were the same age) so he was pretty young then. He came here and this was virgin territory for birds. He wrote with Dawson (Dawson did a lot of the writing and Bowles knew the birds) a two-volume set of classics on the Birds of Washington. They put out 1200 sets and then they destroyed the plates so it could never be reprinted. I have a set. There were 19 of this edition
and they are worth $2,000 now. He wrote these books and he told me not long before he died (and I was with him for years through high school and college) that he was living off the income from his book. He was no millionaire but he had a lot of money—enough to live. He never married and he was kind of a hypochondriac and a very nervous fellow. He went through a nervous breakdown and killed himself. There was no place to put his big collection in his apartment. He lived up in the Berg, where M comes into Division. No room in there, so we persuaded W. P. Bonney to put them in the Museum. When I came back to CPS in 1945, we went down to see Chapin Foster to persuade him that he ought to put them in our Museum. Bowles told me one time, "I would like to see my exhibit at CPS." So I went down to see Chapin Foster and he was vigorously opposed—he said, "Over my dead body." When Bruce Leroy came along, he sort of changed the idea. In fact, I had an old pickup truck and I moved that thing by myself—I mean, all by myself I made that move and there were a lot of eggs there. There were over 900 species represented.

T: We traded Leroy, you remember, some manuscripts that he wanted very badly, and he said, "If you take the eggs, you better take the mummy," and I wasn't very interested in the mummy.

A: Well, it turned out not to be too bad, really, having that mummy up there. It's a little trouble with neighborhood kids but there are a lot of cultural and academic rewards. I don't believe the history or the art
people use that mummy enough. The art is tremendous on it.

T: What other additions have been given? In Murray's work with mammals, how many mammal skins would you have?

A: Well, he is way up there --20,000 now.

T: How did he get 20,000? Trading?

A: No. You see there is a difference between birds and mammals. Birds you have to go out and shoot, or get the ones that hit the window, etc. It is very difficult now to collect birds, and I still have permits to collect and I collect a few. But the conservation thing has come along now. And I see no reason to have duplicates, duplicates, duplicates. We have a lot of duplicates and I don't see any reason for me to go out and shoot some pictures, etc., so I don't do it. But mammology concerns field mice and moles and shrews and the stuff you see, little varmints, and there are no restrictions on them, so his classes go out and he goes out and they set traps and they come back with 100 mice or 50 mice. They are probably duplicates. I don't know how many Peromyscus (that's the little field mouse) he has but it must be two or three thousand from here, and here, and all around. That's not putting it down; that's not denigrating it; it is simply to collect mammals is a different ballgame than collecting birds. There is practically no place now that you can go out and collect birds by shooting them. And this is what we have to do if we need them.
There are so many preserves and so many people, and you go out and shoot and it's perfectly legal to collect if you have a permit but in a half a hour the sheriff is down there because someone has turned you in. So it is difficult.

T: Do you shoot a bird with a very fine shot?
A: It depends on the bird. That's another thing. It's not easy to get a bird. You have to get there and wait for them and sit around so it's a time-consuming thing where it formerly wasn't. In the days back when Kitch and I and Bowles were out collecting a lot of things we would just go anywhere--just pull off the road and nobody was around and we could collect. There is a different feel, too, a different atmosphere. There is no point in building up a great massive collection that would just be duplicates and duplicates. Even though we don't have anything, if we have need for some special study, we can always borrow it.

T: How many sets of eggs do you suppose we have in the Museum?
A: We have about 4500 sets catalogued. We have about 500 sets uncatalogued.

T: Will they be catalogued?
A: No. They are sets where one egg has been broken, perhaps, or the data have been lost or something. Those are used for teaching.

T: How many eggs would 4500 sets be?
A: They would probably average (some birds with one clutch and some with two and some with three--then they take off and some ducks have 20) somewhere between five and eight, so five times 4500 would be 24,500.
T: How many mammal skins do you suppose the Museum has?
A: Over 20,000.
T: How many bird skins?
A: About 11,000.

I remember when we were working on the science building we asked you people to design the Museum and you did a beautiful job on it.
A: We didn't make very many mistakes.
T: I guess you outgrew it pretty fast.
A: Yes, we are starting three deep now.

T: You have done a phenomenal job in training premedics. Tell me a little about that.
A: The medical people themselves, in the medical schools, have long believed that the liberal training for the premed is desirable. They used to tell us, "You give them the basic sciences; you make cultured gentlemen out of them; and we'll make doctors out of them." Consequently, we always did that in our students--told them to get over into the other buildings and out of the science building. I know personally I always demanded that my premed students take history and literature, beyond the basic requirements. Those two especially. The literature and the advanced composition we stressed. The medical people would tell us, "The big problem we have with medical students comes in the third year of medical school when they can't write the prognosis or a diagnosis." So we used to demand that they
check up on their English. I think, in general, we were very careful about the liberal tradition. Then there was a second thing. We were always scrupulously honest in our recommendations. If a fellow didn't check, we would say so. As a result, we had very few, comparatively, rejections, and we had a very small attrition rate. Not many of our fellows dropped out. Those who did, usually, didn't drop because of academic problems but because they found they didn't like it after all. It was a glamorous thing before and now it wasn't. So I think the success was because we studied it and we put time on it and we demanded things.

T: How many students do you suppose you trained in premed?

A: I don't really know.

T: Five hundred?

A: I would think so. I haven't been with that, you see, in the last ten years . . .

T: Tell me, now, as you think back who are some of your distinguished alumni who come to mind?

A: A lot of them in medicine, for sure. Ralph Brown is one of them, if you want to go way back. I think maybe Donald Dudley is a good man in medicine. We have had a lot of them in the teaching business. I could go through my old class books . . .

T: You would have Charles Arnold and Irwin.

A: Yes, Irwin is President of the New York Botanical Gardens—a big job.
T: Do you remember when you came to me and said let's hire this man?
A: Yes, we tried to hire him.
T: Actually had him signed to a contract.
A: Yes, I know and then he couldn't resist ...
T: Well, he called me long distance and said an opportunity of a lifetime had come along and I said, "Bless you, Howard, take it." We couldn't stand in his way in a situation like that. I recall that he had a little child born without hands, do you remember.
A: Yes, his daughter had one joint out there, on one hand and the other thing was just . . .
T: He said the State of Washington was one state that would furnish prosthesis, the artifical hands and they would change them as the child grew, etc. He was very outstanding.
You have had over the years a great, great many. Why don't you tell me the story about Bob Armstrong, the photographer.
A: He was at CPS about 1958 or 1959. He took field biology. In field biology, I tried to acquaint the students with the obvious wild flowers and wild plants and birds--the obvious ones you see; secondly, to relate those two, because one is dependent upon the other. You had to know the plants to understand, for example, what flowers and what stems and what leaves went into what birds' nests. You had to know
the plants because when you examined the stomach contents to see what
the birds had been eating, so those two went together. Bob took the course
and he told me when he came in that he was color blind. I think, incidently,
that his mother was in some of Rowena’s art classes and she was color blind.
Rowena worked with her the same way and Mrs. Armstrong could come
up with some very, very beautiful paintings and colors, even though she
was color blind.

Working with Bob in the field and I guess just showing him and the
students what there is about the beauties, and esthetics, and the classics
in wildlife, he got turned on. He went to Juneau, he is there now and teaches
in a school there. He came down last Monday evening at the invitation of
the Tacoma Photographic Society to give a slide lecture on native birds
of Alaska. We went, Rowena and I, and the President of the Society
said that Bob was glad that one of his old professors had come and then
he introduced me as the "one individual who had turned him on". After
the lecture, we went up and shook hands and told him how glad we were
to have him there and he said to me, "You will never know what you did for
me." I guess that is the pay for teaching...

T: It really warms the heart!
A: It is nice to have.
T: It makes all the long and dreary hours meaningful.
A: The thing of it about fellows like that--they weren’t difficult to teach.
T: No, they were eager.

As I go over my outline, we didn’t talk about your being president
of Grays Harbor.

A: I went down there as vice president and in those days the community colleges were private. I was there for a couple of years and we persuaded the legislature not to take them over as state schools but to subsidize them in part, so we got a fund, I have forgotten what it was but something like $50,000 a year. Then that was the foot in the door to making them public schools. In the first go around in the legislature, they went in under the local school district and they asked me then if I would become president during the time of the change over from semi-private to public. I said I would do this but I didn't want to stay very long because I didn't want to be in administration. I just liked the teaching, the kids and the field trips, but they persuaded me to stay and I said I would stay a couple of years to get it squared off. I kind of reneged on that; I only stayed one year and then came back to CPS.

T: Do you remember our talk about coming to CPS?

A: Yes. I remember I came up to talk to you about it in your office and you were an hour late for the appointment.

T: I was? I'm sorry. (Laughter)

A: I forgive you for that. I sat there and talked to Olive Brown Seward and she was a little nervous about it because you weren't there and I was taking up her time. But what I didn't like and I guess it was a little traumatic to me because I was constantly being called to Olympia to sit down and talk to Pearl Wanamaker about things we'd have to iron out. She'd call
me in the morning and say, "Can you come up this afternoon?" I'd have
to rip-snort up to Olympia and I didn't like the nuisance of it. I liked the
teaching.

T: I remember our interview very well. I thought to myself, good heavens,
this would be wonderful, wonderful, because you were an alumnus, you
were well-trained with a Ph.D., you were a natural teacher. I went home
and said to Lucille, "I had an interview with Gordon Alcorn and he'd like
to come up and I think this would be one of the finest things that could
happen to the University.

A: I took a cut in salary to come to CPS.

T: I remember you did.

A: If I had stayed there I'd have been making $35,000 or $40,000 now,
as that's what those people get. But I've never regretted a day of it.

T: You and Rowena have been two of the greatest additions that the
University could ever possibly have. You are held in such high esteem in
the lives of the alumni and your peers. It has been a great experience.

A: I have never been sorry I came back.

T: You have really invested your life in young people and they have appre-
ciated it very, very much.