Dr. Thompson: I read in your column that you came from Brooklyn, is that right?

Dr. Ostransky: Yes, I came from New York. I was born and raised in Manhattan. I lived there for about thirteen or fourteen years, then my father moved to Brooklyn so I went along and lived about the same amount of time in Brooklyn.

T: You were by Coney Island, somewhere?

O: No, Brooklyn is so large that I used to enjoy telling people when I first came here that there were more people in Brooklyn than in the entire states of Washington and Oregon put together.

T: Is that right?

O: That's right. When I lived in Brooklyn, there were pretty nearly five million people there, so you know that it is monstrous.

T: I remember I used to drive through there going out to Long Island.

O: I was closer to Long Island than to Coney Island.

T: When did you first come to the College of Puget Sound?

O: I first came to the College of Puget Sound in the summer of '46.

T: You were stationed at Fort Lewis, weren't you?

O: That's right, in the service I was at Fort Lewis nearly 2½ years, so I got to know the area pretty well.
T: Were you in Special Services out there?

O: That's right. I was both in Special Services and, I don't think you knew about this but toward the end of my stay there, I was in Psychological Services. They had turned Fort Lewis into a Separation Center and I was still a private - I was the oldest private in the Army. I was working with a captain and I used to give batteries of psychological tests for returning soldiers to find out what they should do in civilian life. So I learned a little bit about psychological testing, but mainly, I was in Special Services.

T: Now, when you were there, you played in our symphony didn't you?

O: Well, on occasion, I would come in from the Fort. I got permission from the Commanding General. There were some of us who played instruments so apparently somebody from the College recognized that they had some instruments out there that they didn't have in the College orchestra. So, on rehearsal nights, on occasion, I would come in and play.

T: Was Louie Wersen director of our symphony then?

O: No, he was before. I never played under Louie Wersen. I can't remember really who was the director in '45 and '46. Of course, when I first came, I think John O'Connor was doing both the band and the orchestra.

T: Do you know John O'Connor is a personal friend of the new Director of the School of Music?
O: Oh, yes, when he came that was the first thing he said - that John said to be sure and look up Leroy Ostransky.

T: Do you remember when you and I first met?

O: Well, you know it has been so many years. I have heard you tell the story on occasion and I have no reason to doubt it. Apparently, you came up to me and said, "What are you playing in the orchestra? Are you still in the Army?" To me you were just another civilian. I probably said that I wanted to go to college and you told me that you were the president of the college. I could surely have said, "Well then, I'll see you."

T: I remember talking with you. John O'Connor had said that you were a very good musician and were from Brooklyn. I asked if you knew where such and such a street was and your eyes sparkled and from then on we were kindred souls. I remember that you said one day you would like to teach at the University. After you got out of the service you got your Master's Degree, didn't you?

O: Well, you know, I used to have this old joke that I told where I say that the reason I don't have a college diploma is because I don't have a high school diploma. I don't because I never went to high school. I just finished junior high. When I got out of the service I took the General Development test and was awarded a high school diploma by Clover Park High School. As an incidental piece of humor some years later, when I was already working for the College of Puget Sound, John O'Connor and I took both bands and
and played a concert at Clover Park High School. I remember, the principal, Mr. Gray, introduced me to the students as an alumni of Clover Park High School. So I passed the general educational development test with the kind of grade that permitted me to enter the College of Puget Sound as a sophomore, even though I didn't have a high school diploma. I started the summer of '46. It took about two or three meetings with Clyde Kuetzer to realize that just because I didn't have a formal education, that didn't mean I wasn't educated. I had been in music all my life. We had the GI bulge with lots of students at that time so Mr. Kuetzer asked me to assist. In the fall I came into your office - apparently he had talked to you and the concern was how I could come on staff without a bachelor's degree. You created what was called Lecturers in Music and it was my first contract - which I still have - I was looking at it the other day. I was a Lecturer in Music and was to teach one class. I got $900 for the school year. At the same time, of course, I was a student here. It took me two years to get my degree - two summers and two years - and all the time I was teaching.

T: Were you teaching The History of Jazz then?

O: No, I was teaching a course in dance band arranging, plus we created a workshop band. We were the second school in the nation to offer a course that had anything to do with jazz for an academic credit. The first was the New England Conservatory.
T: Do you remember we got some flack from some of the staid faculty members because you wanted to call it Dance Band Arranging? I remember we gave it a new title called Contemporary Arranging.

O: That's right. The same thing happened with the Workshop Band - we couldn't call it a Jazz Band but Workshop Band seemed acceptable.

T: You traveled a great deal with the band, didn't you?

O: Yes, we had a great program. John and I and, of course, many of the students played in both the concert and jazz band. These jazz bands were something new. All the schools were having the same problems. Then somebody dreamed up the name Stage Band, which became acceptable and is still used today. There are over 15,000 stage bands in high schools throughout the country today, whereas, in '46 or '47 when we started, there were none.

T: How did you get interested in jazz?

O: Well, gee whiz, I guess I got interested at the age of 13 or 14 just as in the '50s and 60's youngsters got interested in rock and roll. Our thing, you know, was Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey, and juke boxes. Of course, living in New York City, I could go to the New York Paramount for the morning show and see a movie and a stage show. The stage shows always included one of the big name bands. So I fooled around some and learned to write a little music and studied the fiddle very seriously.

T: Didn't I hear you say on occasion that your father was a pretty severe task master on your fiddle?
O: Terrible! Terrible! He was a terrible tyrant - of course, he was a tough guy anyway, a bootlegger - but he wanted me to be a great fiddle player and he did everything he knew - unfortunately he didn't always know the right things, but he managed some. He got me good teachers and forced me to practice, so as a kid I was a top notch fiddle player.

T: Jazz was the coming thing.

O: It was popular music - it was what the young kids were interested in.

T: Now, you have written a number of books, most of them have been on jazz, right?

O: Well, half and half.

T: Can you give me some titles?

O: You mean on the jazz books?

T: On the various books you have written.

O: Well, the first book I wrote, which is the classic in its field, is the Anatomy of Jazz. I wrote that right here at the College of Puget Sound. When did we become a University?


O: Well, then you see I finished the book in the summer of '59 so you could say the book was written at the College of Puget Sound.

T: Well, now that is still a standard text?

O: Oh, yes, it is still in print and still used. It is considered to be one of the top two or three books ever written on jazz.
T: It must have gone through more than one printing.

O: Oh, I don't know how many printings its gone through.

All I can tell you is that it is now selling for $14.50 for hard cover and it originally sold for $4.95. I think the paper back started out at $1.95 and it has kept going up and up. Anyway, it has been in print continually since 1959.

T: Now, what other books have you written?

O: Well, I wrote a couple of books, one called Spectrums of Music which was a text for an Introduction to Music class which I taught. After about five years that went out of print and I wrote another one called World Music which has been published by Prentiss Hall. Then I went back to Jazz and wrote a book called Understanding Jazz - which is now in print and has received excellent, excellent reviews. Last year I wrote a book called Jazz City which is a history of the five cities where Jazz grew up. In between I have written almost as many books that have not been published as those that have been published.

T: You mean you got rejected?

O: I wrote two novels that were rejected. Then I wrote one book - you probably know about that - How to Live in Tacoma, Washington and Love It. It was a best seller in the Northwest. I wrote a book in which it was pointed out to me that I could receive more money by publishing it in sections over a year's time in the New Tribune on Sunday than I could by having it published. It was called
Religious Men and Music. That's when Arthur Fredrick got me interested. I took a course from him called The Career of Jesus. He knew that I was on the faculty and knew also that I was greatly interested in the New Testament. There is a lot of religious music so I picked out five great men who were both great in religion and music - men like Schweitzer, Luther, and several others - and I wrote a book. Then Ernie Knight, you remember he was editor at the News Tribune, said he'd publish a large page of this every Sunday. It ran for about a year. He paid me $25.00 for each page. In those years, and this was in the very early fifties, to make a thousand dollars for a book was quite a lot of money. I have written a lot of stuff. I owe the University a lot.

T: Well, you've been one of the great productive faculty members at the University. Is that how you got started on the Tribune column?

O: No, the Tribune column I started in '55 when I came back from Iowa. When I went to Iowa to get my doctorate, I really had a double major - one in writing and the other in music. People here didn't know that - I didn't want them to know - because after all I was back there to get a Ph.D. in music but I spent considerable time in the Iowa Writer's Workshop and I had a lot of stuff that I had written. I don't like to waste it. You know, once you have written it you might as well get some money for it. So one day I went up to Ernie Knight and told him Tacoma was a great music town and we ought to have a
column in the newspaper. He said, "Show me a few things."
So, I brought him a few columns and when he saw them he
said, "I'll give you $5 a column." I started at $5 and
through the years it went up first to $7 then $10, $15,
$20, $30, $40, and so on. But that is how it all got
started.

T: You have a great following in that column, don't you.
O: Oh, yes!
T: It has opened many, many avenues of friendship, I am sure.
O: Yes, it has. I have received many letters and phone calls.
There is hardly anyone in Tacoma that wants to buy a new
piano, organ, or fiddle that doesn't call me up and ask
for advice.

T: Well, you have made a great impact on the town. Everybody
knows Leroy Ostransky and appreciates you. You must have
a very imaginative and productive mind to keep writing
like that.

O: Well, the people here at school have always been - you and
I have had our differences over the years, but I have
always appreciated (although I guess I have never really
expressed it, I didn't think I had to express it) that no
matter how you ran the school administratively, you always
let the people who were teaching for you teach the way they
wanted to teach and you never interferred with that. You
never said to me for example (and you very well could have),
"Don't you think maybe you are spending too much time writing
books and music. Time that could be more valuably spent in
in the classroom with students." You never said that to me.

T: I never did that because I felt I had enjoyed the freedom of teaching when I taught at the University and I didn't want anyone to feel that they were being censored. You people will never know how terribly, terribly difficult that budget was in those early days.

O: I know.

T: When I came, the highest faculty salary was $3,000. The Dean's salary was $4,000 and the President's salary was $5,000. The enrollment was going down but I kept pushing as much money as I could into faculty salaries because I thought there was a great need for it.

O: Do you remember? - not too many people around here anymore remember this but it might be a good thing to have in the history - about the second or third year you were here it came out that Leonard Jacobsen, the piano teacher, was making more money than you because he was working on a commission. His take-home pay was greater than the President of the school.

T: That's true. I remember one day the phone rang and it was the vice-president of Puget Sound National Bank asking to verify a faculty salary. He said that Leonard Jacobsen had come in to buy a house and he said that he got such and such amount of money. I said, "Good Lord, that can't be right! That is more than I am getting." Than I said, "I really don't have any reason to doubt Leonard's word so let me find out the facts." Well, I went in to Charlie Robbins
and asked if it were true. He pulled his file and noted that Leonard Jacobsen was teaching 121 students a week on commission. Well, it was incredible. It wasn't too long after that that he went into the service. I remember I took him to lunch before he left and said, "Leonard this is not right for you, it's not right for the students and it's not right for the University. When you come back you will be a regular member of the faculty on a regular salary." And we also had some others - Kokor, Kokor and Mrs. Smith who taught voice - she had been at Radio City and taught voice and sang in their chorus there. Yes, I had a problem getting away from the commission factor.

O: The commission idea in itself was not bad. It was just that the commission was too great. At that time it was 80 percent, which was outrageous.

T: We inherited that because Dr. Todd and the administration at that time was so desperate. They wanted to have music and were willing to pay for it.

O: But that was too much.

T: What we were really doing was having it as an adjunct, you know.

T: You are now one of the old-time faculty, aren't you, Leroy?

O: Oh, yes and I am sure you feel the same way. You are about nine years ahead of me. I am just discovering things that you have already discovered and I wish I had been able to recognize at the time you did.
T: Well, I don't think any of us will acknowledge the fact that we are slowing down because we always feel the same as we did twenty years ago.

O: That's right.

T: You have seen a lot of changes in the University. Have you ever thought about them?

O: Oh yes, all the time. There are so many things that come to mind, I don't really know where to start. Of course, the most obvious changes are those that are visual, which everyone sees. When I came we still had the old gray frame building which had been Dr. Todd's old house. I taught in a room about half the size of this room and in order to get into it I had to go through a room where somebody was teaching. Of course, kids nowadays and the younger faculty don't realize that we were once little more than a glorified country school and we are now an important medium-sized University - so there is that change.

T: We were kind of an academy really - almost a community college.

O: Right!

T: In 1942, that's right. Of course, we've seen a lot of things happen with the coming of the G.I.s which you mentioned earlier. Then do you remember we had those tremendous surges. First everyone wanted to be a scientist, then everyone wanted to be in physics.

O: That's right - that was a part of the Sputnik era. Of course, Boeing was important.

T: Then after that there was education. We had an enormous enrollment in education.
T: At one time we had sixteen full-time teachers in education. After that came Sociology.

O: Then there was the 50's and 60's - the tremendous social upheaval, the cold war, the hippies. Then the psychology department built up from one man to six now.

T: Yes, the students revolted against all kinds of authority, as you said a moment ago. The hippies were against any kind of authority - military or any kind of discipline.

O: Well, it was a great protest in all fields.

T: In many ways, I think when we look on this a hundred years from now, it will look like the Children's Crusades of the Middle Ages - a psychological immaturity that was incredible.

O: Right.

T: We were fortunate - we had some tensions but we never had any overacts as far as the University was concerned.

T: Who were some of the outstanding professors you have been associated with though the years?

O: Well, of course, I've made some very, very dear friends through the years. Obviously, it was from people who were roughly my age. The ones that come to mind (not necessarily in order of importance - I wouldn't want to rank my friends) are John Magee and Martin Nelson.

T: John Magee is an interesting person. He has a philosophical mind. He has been one I like to think of as a mediator in the faculty and the administration through the years. And he has paid a price for it - but he has been a very outstanding person with a kind of stability.

O: John has had his ups and downs. I remember many, many years
ago when I was a young person and I had a motion to present to the faculty and it would go over like a lead balloon. Later when I was talking to Dick Smith, whom I consider to be one of my closest friends, he said, "If someone else had made the motion, for instance, John Magee, it would have passed." The faculty had a great deal of confidence in him and he is well liked. They don't take you seriously, you know, except in your own field. Dick taught me that and I used it in years to come. If I had a serious proposal, I would go to a faculty member that I knew other faculty members took seriously. Now this doesn't mean that the faculty didn't take me seriously in my own field - but politically and philosophically, what is Ostransky? He is a musician, you know, he is an artist, and you know those guys. I had to learn that the hard way. Then, of course, there is Bruce Rodgers. Now we are talking about a period of about 33 years. Bruce, himself has been here about 25 years. In the years we have had many, many difficulties and fallings out but in the last 15 years we have become very, very dear friends. We have traveled together many places.

T: I never held a difference of opinion as a falling out - as a matter of fact, I always respected differences. Leroy, tell me about your association with Clyde Keutzer through the years. He was a director of ours for a while.

O: Well, Clyde and I, of course, were very, very good friends while he was with us. I used to see him on and off every
several years when my folks were still alive in New York. I would go to see them and also go to see Clyde. I always felt that, and I don't even know how to begin to say this because it is sort of personal and there are not too many people who know this besides you, me, and Clyde. Now this is my version of what turned out in later years to be the reason why the faculty felt there was a certain aloofness on your part. I am not saying this is gospel. I am just saying this is my view of it. You and Clyde started roughly at the same time and you both had a great deal in common - you both wanted to see the College of Puget Sound really become something. You were both at the beginning of your careers and there was a great rapport between you. It is my opinion that on the faculty Clyde Keutzer was your best personal friend. By personal I don't mean associates or acquaintances, I mean an equal that you could say things without having to worry what he would think about them and he could say things to you the same way. You had a true friendship and when the rift - which was kind of silly - came between you it was just over a ridiculous difference. It was because he and you were such close friends that you could not believe that he was serious and he could not believe that you were serious. He told me about it. Remember the old story as kids in school that went that because of the loss of a horeshoe, a kingdom was lost? This was over shoes. I don't know if you remember this.
T: I don't remember it at all.

O: Well, the principal rift, of course, was that you were trying to balance the budget that year. The difference between balancing the budget and not balancing the budget turned out to be just the amount of money that was set aside for the Adelphians to go on tour.

T: I don't recall that.

O: Anyway, the whole thing could have been settled if Clyde had agreed not to do an extensive tour that year. He was agreeable to that except for one thing - all the kids in the choir had already bought certain shoes. I sat down with Clyde and said, "Shoes are shoes, they can wear these shoes anyway." But he said that that wasn't the case and all the girls had had to buy certain shoes and all the boys had had to buy certain shoes. I offered to put up the money and then have it returned from what we would get from the churches when the tour was over so that we could balance the budget. Anyway, as you know, this rift developed out of this little nothing and Clyde got on his high horse and started giving interviews to the newspapers and as a result, he left.

T: There are two sides to this. I don't remember your side - it is news to me. I remember that he came in to me and said, "I am a better professor than any professor you have and I have to have $2,000 more in salary than any professor you have." I said, "Now wait a minute, wait a minute, if I did this to you I would have to do it to everybody else
and I don't have the budget for that.

He said, "Well, if you don't do it, I will go to your individual trustees and talk to them and tell them what I have to have." He apparently did this because they called me up and said, "What the heck is going on up there?" So it was he was actually pushing his relationship in public for a much higher salary. I don't remember the shoe thing but I do remember that some of the faculty were saying that he came in at 10:45 a.m., had his Adelphians and then went home - that was all the time he was giving me. Even when he left, with all the rapport the faculty had one with another, I never heard any flack about Clyde leaving.

0: Yes, but I haven't made my main point.

T: O.K.

0: The main point I am trying to make and this is strictly my own opinion after having watched you for many, many years, is that after this thing happened with Clyde (and I am not saying that you actually sat down with Lucille and talked the whole thing over" but I am saying that a feeling developed within you that you had made a mistake by being too close to a faculty member and that it was not in the best interest of the University. I believe that from that time on, after Clyde left, you have maintained a certain distance between you and the faculty. Probably you have forgotten after years, that you had been hurt by this man because of a close personal relationship. You know, you
and Lucille and Florence and Clyde were in each others homes for dinner and there was a very, very close personal relationship.

T: Well, of course, the chief administrator is always a lonesome person. You have to have the same relationship with your Trustees because you are working for them and the faculty is working for you and it does come to a place where it is kind of a lonesome thing. That is one reason why basically I feel sorry for Phibbs because he can't relate either to the trustees or to the faculty - he is alone up there on top.

T: But it kind of surprises me because at the time I never really considered that we were closer to Keutzer than for instance, Magee, Albertson, or some of the others.

O: Well, you and Clyde were roughly the same age.

T: I suppose so.

O: Yes, you see the rest of us were about 8 to 10 years younger so that made a difference.

T: He still sends me his bulletin from the school in New York.

O: Yes, I get it also.

T: Now, you have been very much interested in the arts in the city of Tacoma. Have you taken an active roll in this or is it just natural, or how is it?

O: Well, I went at it very, very seriously for maybe about 10 years, and then about 2 or 3 years ago I decided I had done my share in the way of civic duty for the arts in Tacoma and slowly withdrew from this organization and
that in order to have time to write my books and music. The one thing that I don't have which I had years ago, of course, is tremendous energy and you know, now I think about taking a nap once in awhile or I work for an hour or an hour and a half and then take a little rest. I can't stay up any more until three or four o'clock in the morning. When I go out at night now it is just till about 11:00.

T: Which of the music that you have written do you like best?

O: Well, let me see, I've talked about the books. Since I have been at the University I have published over a hundred pieces of music and then I have all those that were not published. Here again, you may not know it, but you are responsible for the first piece of music I ever got published.

T: I didn't know that.

O: One day you caught me next to the mailboxes, you remember when they were next to the cashier's box. You asked me if I would do a favor for you. You said that one of the wives of the trustees had written some poetry - you didn't know if it was any good or not - but she had asked you about it and you had said you would ask me to look at it. I could tell you were saying to me, "It may be absolutely nothing, but you know, a trustee's wife...." Of course, it was Francis Martin Johnson and a short time after that a stack of stuff arrived. I looked
through the things and found two poems that were
good. One was called, oh something like My Brother -
anyway, it was about "we are all brothers" - I've
forgotten, it has been so many years ago. Another
one was called Joy is My Song. I took the two poems
and set them to music for the Adelphians. I think
Clyde was still here - yes, that's right - and they
sang them. I sent them off to a publisher and didn't
hear a thing for about a year and then when I was at
New York University in 1949, out of the clear blue
sky comes a letter of acceptance. I had never had
anything published before and I was in seventh heaven.
That was the first thing I ever had published - those
two choral pieces by Francis Martin Johnson. You know,
Frank, Jr. is still my accountant.

T: Is that right?
O: Yes, I see him every year, of course, at the first of
April.

T: She lives out on Day Island.
O: Talking about New York University, do you remember
the luncheon we had in Greenwich Village? That was
some luncheon.

T: It was fun. I enjoyed it. I was so hard pressed for
money and the budget was so tight. I think you kept
hoping that I would up your salary and I didn't dare.

O: We the story goes, you know, and I have told it many
times because it is really hilarious. We sat there
for over two hours. You were waiting for me to mention how much I would come to the school for and I was waiting for you to mention it - neither one of us would mention a price. Finally after two hours I said I had hoped to get $4,000. You said that no one was getting $4,000 and full professors were getting $3800. You offered me $3600. I said, "Okay, that's fine." That was that. we could have done it in 5 minutes.

T: I always felt I knew you much better after that. You are one of our outstanding faculty members. You are looked upon by the student body with great regard and affection. It is really wonderful what you have done. You have given your life really to this work.

O: I think for the sake of the University, I've never kidded myself. You know, I owe the University a lot. Through the many little things that I have mentioned.

In 1977 People's Magazine picked me as one of eleven great American professors. Obviously, I was tremendously proud. They had a man from Harvard, a man from MIT, a man from Princeton, a man from Yale and here I was from the University of Puget Sound. I thought it was really worth quite abit.

T: Well it was wonderful and it greatly acknowledged your ability and your reputation. How did you happen to get picked?

O: Well, they did have stringers in all the major cities and my guess is that they decided to pick
two from each of the six regions in the United states. They called whoever was their person in Seattle and started with one hundred names. Then the editorial committee in New York knocked these hundreds of names down to the finalists.

T: You know, of course, Leroy, that you are one of the most colorful professors we have ever had. It is also your versatility, your wide perspective, and your good Brooklyn accent.

O: You don't remember what it was like 33 years ago.

T: Oh, yes I do. You must remember I lived on Long Island and was subjected to Brooklyn.

O: Gee whiz, when I occasionally hear some kid from Brooklyn I say to myself, "Is that how I used to talk?"

T: Now, we haven't said anything about your lovely lady and your daughter. What is Sonya doing?

O: She has one great job. She is doing so wonderfully well. Let me tell you. She is going to be 27 next week and is making more money at 27 than I made at 57. Not only that, she writes better at 27 than I wrote at 57. We gave her a great education. We tried to raise her right and we are very, very thrilled at what she is doing.

T: What is her work?

O: She is a business development manager for the largest architectural firm in Seattle. They built the Kingdome, Sea-First Building, and just got the job
for re-doing the Olympia Hotel - 37 million for remodeling. They have a billion dollar job in Saudi Arabia. The firm has 60 architects and 60 engineers. They have tripled her salary in two years and if she continues doing as she has been, they are thinking of making her a partner.

T: Now where did you meet your wife?

O: I met her while I was in the service. I was sent from New York to Fort Custer, Michigan, near Battlecreek (the Kellogg's Cornflakes place). She was born in Battlecreek. I met her one Saturday afternoon downtown. We came out here and got married.

T: She has been a great companion.

O: She is my good right arm.

T: Now, Leroy, we will transcribe this and get a copy to you. You can edit it as you like and it will be kept as a part of the History of the University of Puget Sound. You have been a very great and large part of the history and we have appreciated it very, very much through the years.