

## Edmund Peckham, Track 3

Tape 2, side A

JB: We're back on tape.

EP: Okay. Let me just pause a little bit from that, because I was just saying that, uh, we were being warned in a way, we had, in effect, scouts (slight laugh) just like the old days in the far West. We had scouts to let us know when a march was coming on the administration building, so there was nearly enough time for me to get out in front, to meet whatever group it was, if it was coming to the administration building. Or that group might be diverted to go out to, uh, the area toward Reseda Boulevard, and try to, uh, infiltrate or to take over Bank of America that we had at that time in the shopping area where now there's a mass of stores on the east side of Reseda. (pause)

JB: Uh. Who were the scouts?

EP: Well, I was just saying that there were people on the-in the-in this command post on the fifth floor of the administration building (both talking at the same time) with their binoculars. (laughs)

JB: I see you watching from there. (laughing)

EP: Although we, there were times that we went to the open forum. Remember, I was a lot younger then, John, and, uh, January eight was a day that was, uh, burned in my memory, and it was preceded by some events, too, that we must remember that occurred in December of the 1968, when we had a fire bombing in the administration building and most of the fifth floor suite that was occupied by the administrative vice president and president was totally, uh, consumed by flames. I lived just about a half mile away from the campus, which is a real blessing for me. So I could get to the school very, very fast and could still remember coming to the building and seeing the flames coming out of the fifth floor, and the blackened, uh, outside of the building that was there the next day. (Unintelligible) These were not good, happy days, where you were learning together. On January eight, uh, remember, I was really the university spokesman for most of these events and, uh, I tried to keep the president from having to spend most of his time confronting the groups, because really, after a certain time you know dialogue just wasn't really all that helpful. But January eight, uh, the police often times, uh, fill, coming with rumors of, um, great infiltrators, who are coming to our campus. These were professional agitators from the north from Berkeley and from San Francisco, who are here allegedly on our campus to create problems. Whenever that kind of report came from police intelligence, uh, the police would come en masse. Either they will mass themselves in battalion strength, uh, around Reseda Boulevard, or they would have large numbers of their officers inside the administration building. This particular day, January eight, that I am talking about, there was a large number of

students outside the administration building, a large number of police inside. I pleaded with the officer in charge of the police, "Please, let us just relax and let us try to deal with the situation." And they weren't listening to us. And just then, a tremendous crash took place, because a Black student, whom I later hired, incidentally, from our placement office, had picked up a great big urn, an ashtray urn, and flung it through the plate glass, plate glass windows, and taking along with it not only the glass, but also some of the (slight laugh) steel in between the glass. It just made a tremendous noise, and the glass, of course, shattered all through the front of the administration building, the area just, uh, where the (John coughs in background) cashiering office is now. And when that took place, you know, it was just as if, uh, a trigger occurred and, uh, out stormed all the officers, out towards the students. The students ran. Some of them were hit with batons, uh, the police knew which ones were the chief offenders, and they took after them, and they caught them, and arrested a number of them, but this was January eight and, uh, I didn't like what I saw uh—

JB: You were inside the building, as this ashtray was flying through---

EP: I, indeed I was (both talking at the same time) I was right there when the urn was—indeed I saw this young man, whose name, again, I'm not going to repeat, uh, picked up the urn and toss it in. Uh, so I was, uh, almost run over by the police as they went out, uh, (both talking at the same time) and there was a long line because the police had planned these arrests, uh, if I have not tried to intercede, they were going to make these mass arrests anyway. There were a number of vans that were along the campus street out here, um, where they were waiting to take, uh, arrestees to jail.

(00:05:24)

JB: And they knew who they wanted--

EP: Oh yes.

JB: Uh--

(both talking)

JB: The Black students complained that the white students were bypassed who were out there and the Blacks were particularly, uh, victimized by this all.

EP: Well, it was just not the, uh, Black students, though, who got hit by the police, uh, because they were after the SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] leaders just as much as they were after the Black student leaders, and of course there was some of both there. I think that the Black leaders were more visible, because remember, we are talking about a time that there were much fewer in number, John, and actually it was a Black student,

who picked up that urn and tossed it through the, uh, plate glass. He was one of the ones who was clubbed, uh.

JB: Was he? (pause) He was one of the (said in union) one of the ones arrested.

EP: So, the, let me just continue then, because that day, afterwards, the aftermath, uh, we were just drained, the emotions were, uh, just terrible. Uh, it was the first time I had seen something like this, and it led the next day as you know to, uh, a mass sit in the open forum area. And again, I had been a part of the group in the morning, making plans, or at least listening to plans, and the plans were that we were going to face another big invasion of the administration building that day. This was the police intelligence, and so the police were out in really large numbers, and this was January nine. And then the decision was made that, uh, they should be given some warning, that is the group in the open forum area, and that if people did not disperse, they were all going to be arrested. (pause) And I can recall what I did, I left the administration building and walked over with just one friend, David Bell, who became a Dean of Students at Fresno. And I took the mic at the open forum area, and really, in complete sincerity, I pleaded with people, uh, "If you do not want to be arrested, or face the possibility of what happened yesterday, please disperse." (pause) Uh, a few did, most didn't, and so, uh, shortly afterwards the group was encircled by the police, and a large number were arrested, more than 269 or something like that, as I can recall the number. But I was, uh, and maybe that was one reason why people think of me of still as being that reasonable person because I was trying to prevent, uh, real disaster on our campus. (long pause)

JB: They certainly saw a good deal of you. They saw a good deal of you.

EP: Uh-huh.

JB: You were, your role, then, was to intercede between the administration and really the police on one hand, and the students on the other was, uh, (EP agreeing) on a day to day basis. That was your assigned responsibility.

EP: That almost became my daily responsibility, that's true. (both talking at the same time) We had, uh, a lot of other horrendous times, too, between, uh, student groups because, uh, I think that one thing people tend to think of is that all students were the same in those days, but they weren't. There were students who were just as staunch advocates for our foreign policy, as they were opponents. And trying to keep the two groups from open warfare, uh, sometimes was, uh, was a great difficulty. We had a system that I developed with the campus ministry, which always was a part of Student Affairs. I would call three or four, they would call three or four, and then we would then be able to get this cadre of, uh, hopefully of reasoned folk to come to school, to try to talk to people on both sides about the futility of, uh, armed combat and, uh, one time I can recall, this was on the roof top of Sierra Hall. Uh, where we were really afraid that people in were going to be tossed off the parapet, and, uh, they weren't, thank god, uh, but I think that

these things could easily have taken place. We had, I think, at least a dozen of our ministers there, together with Student Affairs folk, uh, trying to reason with students, and to get them back to the ground, because this particular thing had started with a rally of the pro-American cause on the roof of Sierra, and the anti-American cause, and the antis just dashed up the stairs, and there was mayhem for a little bit on that roof top. (pause) I don't think that people, uh, can believe all these things, uh, they still seem almost inconceivable when I start to let my mind to go back to them, because our campus today is so different, uh, it's still a live campus, a vital campus, and I think much of the emotion is still there, but it's not quite so close to the surface, certainly, as it was then. Students now are, I think, just as caring and just as likely to, uh, pick up causes, like South Africa, or the environment, or whatever it might happen to be, free speech. Uh, but at least they don't go to war with each other about it. (very long pause)

(00:11:09)

JB: (clears throat) Let me ask you a question deriving from the first uh—and ask you whether there was a change over time. (pause) What was the university's policy on bringing in or calling in the police, either some(??) police force, or—

EP: John (both talking) I am just thankful you asked that because that is a key point. The university did not call in the police, see, and that I think that was a real misunderstanding that we just couldn't get across to the students at that time. People don't understand that Northridge is not an island unto itself. We are a part of the city of Los Angeles, and as such we are totally under the jurisdiction of the city police. Even though we have our own university police as well, and the LAPD [Los Angeles Police Department] from Devonshire or Foothill, or from wherever, had absolute right to be here if they thought there was, uh, a danger to public safety. We did not call them in. Although they were here. Uh— (pause)

JB: In terms of our own, uh, constabulary, uh, was there a policy on the—(pause) employment of that force and did it change over time? (pause)

EP: Yes. We have uh—we've had a long tradition with the campus police, and I know my attitude towards this differs from some of my colleagues in the administration now, but I've always, uh, advocated that the campus police be properly trained and obviously they need to be police people, but at the same time that there is a very different orientation that they must have. They are on the campus. They're a part of a university, uh, family if you will and they need to be much more open to students. I think part of the problem we've had this past year, up in the University Park Apartment area, has been the fact, and I'm not being critical of the individuals involved now, but there is a different mindset, uh, from the one I am talking about, uh, so that I always thought that campus police should be, uh, student advocates and be seen as, uh, as people who would try to help students, rather the ones who would be seen by many of them as trying to harass them. I don't think they do necessarily, but I mean many of them see

our campus police now in that vein. There is much more of a closeness between our university police and the Los Angeles Police Department. Many of the police people that we hire now have been former police people in the LAPD [Los Angeles Police Department] and I think this distinction is, uh, to me, it's a very meaningful one. Uh, this next year we are going to try to counteract some of the problems we've had involving the police, and students and outside gang members and so forth in our housing area by trying to keep out outsiders and also by making our university police more available to the students, more visible hopefully closer to them so that are students will se—will welcome the presence of the police, rather than react adversely to it. The police and also our community service officers who are our students. (long pause)

JB: In our next talk we are actually going to come back and revisit the events in the late sixties, we discussed and some of which we have touched on but not gone in a depth probably you would like to and I know I would like to. Uh, (pause) this will give me an opportunity to rethink some of the questions I've asked and pose fresh ones, start fresh. Before we move on, uh, as I was walking over here, I noted that they are just finishing the new ramp for disabled students that, uh, leads up that long slope from Sierra Tower to the(??) administration building. At what point did the university begin making accommodations for disabled students and where did the initiative arise for that? (long pause)

(00:15:45)

EP: I think that Northridge has always been a fortunate school because of its, uh, geography. We are accessible, much more so than most other schools are. We don't have the steep hills or the, uh, of other major grade difficulties that other campuses have had. Uh, the disabled student program has been a part of the Student Affairs area ever since I've been Dean of Students. In one stage it was consisted of a person who was a, uh, a clerical assistant, Pat Conklin, uh, whom I made a professional and she became our first disabled, uh, director. At least, we called her coordinator at that time. This was, uh, operating when I was still responsible for Admissions and Records and Pat was a clerk in that office. Uh, and we, at that time we were, uh, concerned about veteran students just as much as disabled, perhaps even more so, because we had a large number of veterans from the Korean War and soon from the Vietnam War, uh, to try to help so they would get their education benefits, and their financial benefits, as well, from the Veteran's Administration, but, um, little by little, Northridge came to have more disabled students. At first, this was not a deliberate effort on our part, at first. I think that the real deliberate effort came with the National Center on Deafness, which actually preceded our real thrust for the physically and learning disabled student, and the National Center on Deafness has evolved the same way, indeed, even the same pace that the, that our disabled program has, and of course I have always been very proud of the NCOD [National Center on Deafness]. It's a, anything I can find on our campus that is totally distinctive. I think it's great, and we are one of the most outstanding schools in the country, one of the three certainly, uh, our attitude towards the hearing impaired.

But, uh, little by little it became more aware of the needs of the physically disabled and we tried to, uh, we created a disabled student advisory board, I did, a presidential board. I believed in order to try to give some significance to the disabled student, uh, we should have an academic dean, so I persuaded the first of the academic deans, we now have a tradition that the chair of the disabled student advisory board is to be a school dean, and this has rotated through the years and I was trying to buy this, to bring to the academic area, as well as the student affairs area, the need of the physically challenged. And we made our campus accessible, all sorts of doors, and drinking fountains, and lowered, uh, urinals, you know all the all the customary things, and until, little by little, uh, and this has been particularly true of the leadership of Harry Murphy, uh, we have, I think, the most outstanding disabled student program in the country. We're nationally and internationally known for the particular devices that we have, particularly the computer assisted devices, by which our disabled students can do absolute miracles. John, I hope that you've had a chance to see some of this for yourself, people who are almost absolutely immobile, but who perhaps can move their eyebrows, or their eyelids, or a toe, can still communicate and, uh, through the use of computers, uh, and, uh, even typewriters, and things of that nature, can actually turn out, uh, term papers, and become productive members of society. This is one of the most, uh, remarkable things, (unintelligible) I was talking about some defeats, but to me the—this is an absolute triumph that we had, and the reputation that our university has earned in this field, uh, and indeed, we were one of the pioneers in recognizing, and this again is something that Harry Murphy helped more than anybody else because Harry was a part of the original National Center on Deafness, the leadership training programs that they had. But to work with a learning disabled, and we now have nationally known conferences. Harry and his, uh, people have huge numbers of grant dollars that we have been able to generate. We are the best known school in United States in this area of the learning disabled and we, the numbers, of course, both in the physically and learning disabled populations have mushroomed, and we now have a huge number by far the largest population inside the state, and it may well be the largest in the country, or one of the largest anyway. Uh, we are hoping that we are going to be able to incidentally(??) in this time of budget short falls, to work with Harry, and to get the support of the president and the other two vice presidents to have an institute a, uh, disabled institute. We are not sure what we are going to call it yet, but an institute that will be able to generate funds from the outside, and utilize funds so will not have to rely on state dollars so much, which we can then can use in other ways. Uh, and enhance our programs for the students even at the time that the regular resources are much less available.

(00:21:33)

JB: The flagship. Perhaps I can use the phrase flagship of awareness as in the(??) NCOD, but by, is it safe to say, by the early seventies, the formation of the advisory board, is that about the time this occurs? (EP agrees) It's becoming a matter of campus policy. Are we ahead of(??), federal law, or are we operating, in effect, uh, (pause) in, regardless of federal law, it seems this, the fact that we move so far ahead of other campuses, suggested that

there is a momentum here that has nothing to do with the legislation of the early seventies, uh, that empowered the disabled, but in fact it has to deal with an ethic that's internalized here. Is that an accurate statement?

EP: I think so, John. You know, again, you know I have an enormous pride in, in all of our campus, and that includes the faculty. I think that there has been a sensitivity acquired here, in the total university, a sensitivity towards the needs of the disabled. It used to be that we had just a one or two wheelchair students on the campus, it's, uh, we now have dozens. Uh, it used to be that, I think, we use to shy away from disabled students because we all felt uncomfortable with them. We couldn't understand the things they were saying, uh, sometimes they couldn't hear what we were saying to them. Uh, but the faculty, and maybe the disabled student advisory board, has helped served this capacity, and I think that it has, too. We tried to broaden out that membership of that board to include all of academic areas, as well as all the other administrative areas, that might be deal with the disabled student. Have them all as voting members, or as experts to that board. It's one of the largest boards in our school, and yet at the same time one of our most successful ones. So that now the disabled students generally feel at home here, generally. Uh, they don't feel the same reluctance, uh, that many of them had. And that's one reason I think why we are getting more of them over the years, too, because they realize that just as, uh, we now have vans to help move them, special vans from place to place, and we've tried with these ramps that you were just talking about to get rid of the last vestige of un-accessibility, and the electric doors that we now have on virtually every single major entrance to every single major building on the campus. Uh, its, uh, this is something I think our entire university can take pride in. Not everybody, though, I'm, just should say this, not everybody has been quite so quick to, uh, recognize the learning disability side, as the physically challenging side. You could easily see the needs of physically challenged student, whether that person be like Joni the, uh, world (unintelligible) renowned uh, writer and painter, who paints beautiful Christmas cards, holding the brush in between her teeth, uh, and whom we, incidentally, through part of our university, were able to teach how to drive a car. I just don't understand how these people can manage, but they do, because there are people on our campus who care. But the learning disabled is something else again because they are externally just like everybody else. Uh, they may not be able to read properly, this dyslexia or the other difficulties that they have that make it hard for them to achieve as much, as fast, the same way, as other students can, but we now of course have laws and we make sure that each semester we get a proclamation printed by the president in the UIB [University Information Bulletin] calling the attention of everybody, the needs of the disabled, requiring the faculty to subscribe to the needs of the learning disabled, which means special exams, special proctors sometimes, and as a former teacher for so many years myself, I know it's not easy to say for somebody to say to you that you must do something that pertains to your classroom, because nothing more sacred than the faculty person and his classroom, but at the same time students have rights, there, too.

(00:25:10)

JB: This is fascinating. There is resistance to this, there is resistance to it now?

EP: There has been, sure. But I think that resistance has been virtually overcome. We have, uh, we have the largest and most well-known group of professionals in our field in learning disabilities in the country on our campus. Uh, and they take the gospel out to the schools. There have only been really two of the schools where I would say that the—this resistance has been particularly voiced. It has been voiced openly and honestly too because the faculty people failed, uh, the students, uh, just the same way the college board gives examinations, and you are expected to do the college board examination in a given timeframe, in a given set way, the college board gradually has changed that, and I think it's natural that the faculty have been gradual in their learning to this problem as well. I probably would be the exactly same way, even though I used to think that I was a student oriented person in the classroom, too.

JB: Did you find, earlier on, resistance, uh, to the physically disabled of a kind that's akin to what we are talking about with the learning disabled? That is, were the faculty resistant to the incorporation of wheelchair students, for example, into our student body? Would you detect the same kind of foot-dragging?

EP: Well, maybe some did, John. But I think, on the whole, our faculty were quite accepting to the physically disabled student, and I think the reason for that was that they'd been already acclimated to that by the hearing impaired, and the fact that, little by little, you know as a teacher, and indeed the many, many speeches I have given, it's always a little disquieting to have somebody standing right beside you, signing to the audience, while you're speaking to the audience. It's something that's a little strange there, but at the same time, our faculty have learned that you are likely to have these interpreters everywhere you go, and so no longer now do, I can sense these, uh, these interpreters. But the faculty have learned that they were going to be there, that the students have a right to having interpreters. The students have a right to, uh, the wheelchair special accommodations and so on. (pause)

JB: It's a heartening story, it's a story that has to be told, and is one we often overlook as such a commonplace here now. To, uh, (pause) to encounter disabled students, physically disabled students. One has to remind oneself that what one sees every day wasn't always the case. Let me ask you about, uh, an event that occurred in the mid-1970s (clears throat) when our students voted two to one to recall their AS [Associated Students] officers in the wake of charges of election irregularities. Do you recall what happened there? What was going on?

EP: Yes, I remember. The early 1970s were quite different from today so as far as student governance was concerned. Uh, we have had a tradition on our campus that's far different from many of the sister campuses inside our system. For example, San Francisco State, where students perennially are rioting and occupying buildings. They've



been occupying the office of President Corrigan for weeks, I understand, uh, just bringing the whole school to a screeching halt. But here, on our campus, and I must say that I give credit to the Student Affairs area and, uh, I guess indirectly to me, as an example, because I was, uh, an advisor to the student government personally for many years, of trying to work with student groups, and we do that now. The Associated Students and the university administration, uh, are helpers. I've tried to show the student government that the—that it's folly to, uh, tilt against the administration. What you really need to do is to get the administration to understand what you need and want, and support it. That's the way that you get things done, not by being hostile. In the same way, I consider my role to the administration is to try to express to the president and the other members of the administration what the needs and the points of view and the needs of the students are. So, there's a two way street and Student Affairs is seen by student government as friends and as allies, and I'm seen that way, I'm happy to say, by student leaders.

(00:31:13)

JB: I am going to pause this for a moment to change sides.

[END OF TRACK 3]