JOHN BROESAMLE SUDDENLY A GIANT: A HISTORY OF CSUN COLLECTION

TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH DR. JEROME RICHFIELD

October 16, 1989, at an unspecified restaurant
May 16, 1991, at John Broesamle's home

Interviewer: John Broesamle

Transcribed by: Cameron Takahashi, Student Assistant
Edited by: Philip Walsh

## PROVENANCE

This oral history of Dr. Jerome Richfield was conducted by John Broesamle on October 16th, 1989 in an unspecified restaurant, and May 16th, 1991 in John Broesamle's home. This interview was conducted by Broesamle as source material for his book *Suddenly a Giant: A History of California State University, Northridge* (Northridge: Santa Susana Press, 1993). The first transcription of this interview was completed by Cameron Takahashi.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Dr. Jerome Richfield, born in New York, New York, earned a doctorate from the University of Cincinnati and served as chair of the philosophy department at Northern Illinois University. He came to CSUN in 1959 to found its philosophy department. He served as dean of the School of Letters and Sciences from 1972 to 1974, and was Dean of the School of Humanities at CSUN from 1974 until his retirement in 1989. He passed away at age 71 in 1992.

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## DR. JEROME RICHFIELD ORAL HISTORY

## SUMMARY INDEX

TRACK #1

0:00-5:00 Richfield describes how he came to be hired at CSUN.

5:01-10:00 Richfield continues to describe how he came to be hired at CSUN, then discusses Delmar Oviatt as a person in a position of leadership.

10:01-15:00 Richfield continues to describe Oviatt's ability in a position of leadership, and recounts a story about the problems associated with Philosophy being a general education requirement.

15:01-20:00 Richfield tells more stories about Oviatt, and begins to describe the general development of the university.

20:01-25:00 Richfield describes his perspective on the growth of the university, then begins to discuss Cleary's leadership.

25:01-29:34 Richfield discusses the idea of early university commercialism and the for-profit motive that the administration had at the time.

TRACK #2

00:00-05:00 Richfield begins to describe the racial attitudes on campus at the time, narrating the Markham football scandal and beginning to discuss the political riots on campus.

05:01-10:00 Richfield talks about his involvement in a case where a student committed an act of political violence, and how Richfield sent a letter to the judge in an attempt to convince them that the student's actions were not for personal gain but rather political reasons.

10:01-15:00 Richfield tells a story about his interactions with Ronald Reagan, and then begins to discuss the conception of the ethnic studies departments on the campus.

15:01-20:00 Richfield points out the tendency of his colleagues to project their own flaws onto others, and then discusses the class and racial divisions on campus.

20:01-25:00 Richfield discusses campus reorganization and holding other faculty members accountable.

25:01-30:52 Richfield wraps up that particular vignette by describing the debate over whether or not the School of Letters and Science should be split up, then comments about how much some faculty play golf and shirk their responsibilities.

TRACK #3
00:00-05:00 Richfield discusses Mininberg, and how incompetent he believes he is.

05:01-10:05 Richfield finishes the Mininberg vignettes, then observes that he may or may not have further comments in the future.

TRACK #4, side a

00:00-05:00 Richfield begins to describe the Kienholz case, how the Kienholz piece came to the campus, and why he opposed the display of the Kienholz piece.

05:01-10:00 Richfield describes how the art department wouldn't vote on the piece at all, and the subsequent backlash of that series of events.

10:01-15:00 Discussion of the controversy surrounding whether or not the gallery owner was invited to bring the Kienholz piece to campus, and the work of art itself.

15:01-20:00 They discuss the vote itself, and then the art piece itself.

20:01-25:00 Richfield discusses Cleary's interview and subsequent hiring process, and then the contemporary events of the admin.

25:01-30:27 Richfield reflects how Cleary did and didn't deal with protestors, and how people viewed him. Broesamle and Richfield then continue to correct misleading or incorrect statements in articles presented within.

TRACK #4, side b

00:00-05:00 Richfield is correcting some linguistic errors in Broesamle's past interviews.

05:01-10:00 Richfield recounts one of the major arguments he used to persuade people to reorganize the university, and how procedures went after the split occurred in practice.

10:01-15:00 The topic of teacher evaluations gets brought up, specifically in terms of how it was voted on and then quashed by a staff member.

15:01-20:00 They describe the pros and cons of faculty evaluation from students, then begin the Neutra story, e.g. constructing buildings and their consequences.

20:01-25:00 They discuss the nature of students and other actors selling goods in public areas on campus, then describe how the architect of the buildings developed was also in charge of approving other things related to that. Described as a potential conflict of interest.

25:01-31:13 Richfield recounts topics that have already been covered, and briefly describes how the university was one of the lowest, if not the lowest, funded per capita school in the country and how they dealt with that.

TRACK #5, side a

00:00-05:00 Richfield describes how philosophy was removed from the general education requirements, then adds some detail in how Cleary ran the university.

05:01-10:00 Further discussion into Cleary's administrative performance, then introducing the topic of an instance of violating academic freedom.

10:01-15:00 Richfield describes Ted Carpenter and the background to the Carpenter-Woodress drama, and how Woodress handled the situation.

15:01-20:00 Richfield describes how he responded to the situation.

20:01-25:00 Richfield briefly goes over Charlie Kaplan, then describes how Richfield and Jim Peters worked together to get things done through the administration.

25:01-29:30 Final reflections on the administration and the people who work around them. A story about Cleary and a story about how the committees were seen as a voting bloc even though they weren't.

TRACK #5, side b

00:00-05:00 Richfield describes when Stelk speaks in a meeting, and then describes Prator deferring authority to another employee.

05:01-10:00 They discuss the issue of renting sea cargo containers as temporary classrooms, and then begin to discuss the faculty evaluations from students again.

10:01-15:00 Briefly mentions how Stafford killed the faculty evaluations, then describes how Cleary acted in meetings and determined what went on in there.

15:01-20:00 Richfield discusses how disruptive the various fraternities were and what the campus did about them, and what they didn't do.

20:01-25:00 Richfield discusses the nature of the SEG [Senior Executive Group], then about how Cleary exercised his political and administrative and presidential power. Finally, he begins to describe an event when the mail carriers tried to leverage authority they didn't have and the consequences of that.

25:01-29:37 Richfield wraps up his stories about Cleary and the priorities the administration had for the faculty, and then both participants in the interview briefly discuss non-interview related matters.

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INTERVIEW NOTE

Interviewer: Dr. John Broesamle, noted as JB

Interviewees: Dr. Jerome Richfield, noted as JR.

Date: October 16th 1989, May 16th 1991

Time: 3:11:12

Subject: CSUN History

JB: You came in 1959, what originally brought you here?

00:00

JR: Al Pierce.

JB: Al Pierce? How so?

JR: Let's see—I met Al in—Bucknell University when I was teaching, in fact, you remember B.J. Bluth?

JB: Mmhm.

JR: I was invited to be an outside examiner when she took her M.A. there. She ended up out here, too. Said I scared her out of years of growth. The Sociology department in Bucknell sort of fell apart, and that was the year I was, sort of, the Dean's treasured object. And he sent me to a meeting at the Ohio Valley Sociology Regional meetings, to hire a chair for sociology. And when I got there, I was interviewed myself by the Dean of Northern Illinois, and offered me 100% increase in pay to go there and start the Philosophy department, which I took. And after a year in DeKalb, I discovered that if you weren't turned on by barbed wire, it was not a good place to live. And right around then, I remember getting a letter from Al Pierce, suggesting that I take an interest in this great new California state college, that it had a good reputation, and you didn't slip around on the snow and ice the way I did there, you get up in the morning in DeKalb, Illinois and it could be ten below and you weren't sure whether your car would start and you'd get to school or not, and so on. So, I decided to—Prator was coming to Chicago to interview people, so I agreed to meet him there. And I met him at some hotel in Chicago, and we talked, and he offered me the job of starting a Philosophy department here. And I say, Well, you know, I have a job, before I would say yes or no I'd want to go out and get a look at the place. So I flew out on my own to take a look around, and while I was here, there was a meeting at Hud Fleming's house that night, with beer and sandwiches, I should remember his name, I would recognize it, but somebody from math, one of the original people there, was giving a paper on Einstein, that night, to this group. And I met Paul Walker that night, and I took immediately to him that it was—I recognize New York, witness of sophistication and made me miss home, and so I enjoyed that. The guy giving the paper on Einstein didn't know too much about it, I had just finished developing a popular introduction to the philosophy of science, and my main objective with that course at Bucknell was that a student who didn't understand the implications of the nature of human knowledge, of the fact that there was a revolution of physics and couldn't—didn't have any sense of the difference between Newton and Einstein was simply an uneducated person, and you didn't need to know how to do tensor equations or
5:00 anything of the kind in order to get all that. So, I had been spending a lot of time working with relativity theory, and so on. So I held forth that evening, which is a disposition of mine anyway, and had a good time, and of course everybody here didn't realize that I had already been offered the job and it was mine to say yes or no, and they acted as if they were interviewing me, I wasn't wild about that. But, Oviatt had another candidate that he wanted, somebody who was fairly well-known, but Prator decided he wanted me. And, of course, Paul told me Prator came back all excited, he said to him, not that he hired a good philosopher or anything of the kind, but Jackie Gleason is who he hired, that's what he liked. At any rate, that's how I got out of the—Al told me, and he pointed out that the President let the faculty do what they wanted, he didn't tell me that Oviatt wielded great power, and was dearly loved by the faculty because he had the personality that was very attractive. I mean, I admit that if I had to go on a canoe ride with anyone in the administration, a canoe trip, I would rather go with Del, who was a witty and entertaining guy. But when it came to education, I thought he was a menace.

JB: Why was that?

JR: Why was he a menace? Del—Del's strengths were in his personality, he was a natural born orator. And his handling of interpersonal relations was excellent. But his ideas were

rudimentary, primitive, he was, after all, typical of traditional educationists with a capital E, and they're a bad bunch. I can remember Del saying to me, when I was talking to him about the problems of a twelve-unit load for serious faculty, and any faculty that aspired to be productive, and why a twelve-hour load was too much, and I start talking about the demands on their time, we talked about preparation time. He was very puzzled. And he said, Why do they need all this preparation for? They have their Ph.D's. And I mean, you just think about that. And I thought, Oh my god, what am I dealing with. Another example of what was wrong. Oviatt would—I remember when we were dealing with a question of having an academic senate. And Del made this wonderful speech about, Look, the faculty and administration together should make policy, and as administrators, the administration should merely execute what they together with the faculty have produced. And you shouldn't leave out of the senate, the people who have to administer and implement the policy that a different group produces, they'll understand it better if they're involved in its production. Well, I went for that myself. But a short time afterwards, I pointed out to Del, who was pushing a policy contrary to what a committee had just recommended—the faculty committee, and he said to me—I said, Well, Del, you know, look at this committee was unanimously against what it is that you want to do, and he said, Yeah, but look who was on that committee. Okay. Violation number eighty-seven. When I first got there, Joe Fordham, who made himself responsible for Philosophy until they got a Philosopher, had already gotten Philosophy 150, an introductory course as a universal requirement. Every student had to take it. And I thought, Hey, that's great that this institution thinks philosophy is important enough to require it for everybody. But when I saw the size of our classes, Philosophy was not a subject that you could teach simply by lectureship, by lecturing. And, I thought that the only thing you can do with fifty, sixty, seventy-five students, at
10:00
the end of the semester, was to enable all but the brightest to answer the fill-in-the-blank on an objective exam. They might know if it was Descartes who said, *Cogito, ergo sum* and not Hegel. Well, that isn't knowing anything. The ability to understand what significance that has, takes a lot of thinking, a lot of reading, and a lot of revising of the impressions you get. So I went to Del, and I said, Look, it's very flattering to have Philosophy be a required course, but it's a waste of time if I can't have smaller classes. I'd rather it was not a universal requirement and only the students who had some interest in the subject took it. Then we might succeed better with the kind of teaching that such large classes demand. Maybe you can teach history, essentially with lectures and narrative, and I think a lot of people could read history books and not be seriously misled by the way language is used, but not true with philosophy. Philosophy uses a lot of ordinary language in a technical way, rather than using technical language. And the advantage of technical language is people know at sight whether they're familiar with it or not. But when you use ordinary language and use it in a peculiar way, then people misled get the wrong impression, and you have to spend time in class unraveling and unpacking all this. At any rate, Oviatt's response to my request was to say, It's illegal. You can't have a smaller class. Now, he

had never shown the C schedule to anyone. Nobody, no department chair, nobody had ever seen the C schedule which determined class size, and so on, until Benson put it out. And even then, neither Benson nor the rest of us understood the full implications of it until Suzuki came and changed things around, getting reclassification. Oviatt seemed to have a great pride, that we were the cheapest institution for the system to support. He made no efforts to change it, nor did Prator. And we were on the bottom of the per capita cost in the system for the longest time. Now—

JB: Was Benson a part of that too? Just as an aside—

JR: Benson was an assistant to Oviatt, he learned his job from Oviatt. And he adopted lots of Oviatt's ways.

JB: Including running a team?

JR: I think so. In any case, when Oviatt said, You can't do it, it's illegal. I accepted that. But it was about two weeks later that I met this guy, Sid Albert, who was chair of the Philosophy department in L.A. State. And in the course of conversation it came out that in their Philosophy 150 course, which is, after all, where I started, they had thirty-five students. I said, How can you do that? He said, What do you mean, how can I do it? I said, Well, I asked to have smaller classes and I was told it couldn't be done. He said, Of course it can be done. So, believe it or not, I'm very naïve about lots of things. I mean, I assume people are honest, I assume they mean what they say, and there have been a lot of bitter lessons about that. But in any case, I came back and I naïvely told Del Oviatt, Hey Del! It isn't true that we can't have a smaller class in Introductory Philosophy. I said, At L.A. State they have a ceiling of thirty-five, they close the class at thirty-five. He said, Yeah, well, who's paying for it? I said, Well, who am I paying for? Basketball? And, of course, he flustered a little and turned on his heel and walked away. And that's when I realized, There's something wrong. I was involved in setting up, along with Jim Peters in Biology, the first research and grants committee, they didn't have one so we created it. I was elected its first chair. The first thing I did was go to Oviatt and say—The first thing I went to Warner Matthews [Masters] and asked for money to support people's research. And Warner gave me a reasonably intelligent statement, Look, we're just beginning to develop trust funds. If you start eating into that money now, it'll take forever for us to develop a meaningful sum. Let us invest this money, let us get a big return, and the time will come before too long when we'll be able to make meaningful support of the campus, but right now, the foundation can't do that. Okay. Seems to me I understood that principle and accepted it. So, I went to Oviatt and I said, Look, we can't get any money, but we might be able to get reassigned time to some people. Now we know there's lots of reassigned time around on campus, can you give me a listing of who gets it and for what? So, our faculty committee can have a sense of the relative importance of things so we know where in such a list we might fit in a request for a certain number of units to give people who have research proposals to make, to lighten their load, and give them time to do research. His answer to me was, I don't have any such list! I don't believe

in snoopervision, I give each division a certain amount of reassigned time, I don't know what the division chairman does with it.

15:00 Well, even if—if that were true, it seems to me to be irresponsible administration on his part. And even if it were true, there's no reason why, on behalf on research and his first research committee, he couldn't ask the chairs, the division chairs, to give him the data that we now have to give. There's a record of who gets reassigned time and for what, according to a code developed by the Chancellor's office. So you can't throw that stuff around for nothing, you can't just help your friends, I mean, actually you can, and it isn't that hard to get away with it, but there's some kind of a record of it. Okay, one more Oviatt story. After the senate was done, and of course, he lied terribly to the senate because when he said, let's make policy together, but his administrators will do no more than implement the policy that's made; What he didn't tell anybody, and what use—took a couple years to realize, was that some of the most important things, namely the division of the budget and the distribution of it, which really determines the institution's priorities, right? We can talk about planning, and all the priorities that we want to verbalize til' we're blue in the face: unless we control the distribution of funds to support those priorities, they're priorities in name only. And the priorities of the institution right now are Judy Brame and Robert Hegen. At any rate, the first senate meeting we had, Stanley Mackleberry, who was the librarian, nominated Dave Buck, who was the head of campus planning, campus—

JB: Plant operation?

JR: Plant operation! I mean, the garbage and the trees and the janitors and the electricity. Dave Buck nominated Mackleberry to be on the executive committee in the senate. Well, Oviatt and I walked into a parking lot after that senate meeting and I said to him, Del, the only thing that would've been worse than Dave Buck's nominating Mackleberry to be on the executive committee in the senate, would've been if Mackleberry had nominated Dave Buck to be on the executive committee in the senate. And Oviatt said to me, Jerry, every person on this campus has a right to a sense of participation. I said, But you'll deny on the real participation, won't you. And he didn't like that, but it was true. Here's the man who had all this talk about democracy when he's reminded that a faculty committee was unanimously opposed to something he's pushing in—in a—in PP and R, in fact. And he said, Well, the committee, look who's on it. And I mean, so there's a guy that says everyone's got a right to a sense of participation, he meant *sense*. It was obvious to me that Oviatt was one of these true red-blooded Americans who believed that effective administration was the successful manipulation of people. And I think that was too bad. And Prator left all that to him.

JB: He was charming, he was witty—

JR: Yeah.

JB: He was the sort of person you wanted to go canoeing with—

JR: Right.

JB: But he was paterfamilias?

JR: Yeah. Very much that: he was the kind of guy that you picture riding horseback from one primitive schoolroom way out in northern wilderness in Canada from one place to another to make sure they had chalk and erasers and write down, what do you need. He tried to do everything out of his hip-pocket in the most informal, charming way. But, the more we grew, and the more serious our problems became, the less apt was this hip-pocket way of doing things.

JB: He had a contingent.

20:00 JR: Yeah.

JB: The initial intent was that this would be a liberal arts institution of five thousand students. In fact, I heard Ralph Prator say that just the other day.

JR: Nobody ever followed that.

JB: So, it wasn't a significant or serious intent?

JR: No, no. The—I had occasion on more than—more than once, more than a few, to call attention to the difference between the support of the liberal arts at L.A. State, and the support at San Fernando Valley State, and pointed to the irony that they were not a liberal arts school and we were. And that meant nothing. That I fault the legislature with. As long as they're going to fund us per capita, and as long as our programs and our system is gonna be the Broadway department store of education, so that, like buyers, we go out and get whatever the public is interested in, we don't exercise any educational leadership and tell the students, This is what you should do. I mean, in those days, general education was a farce. Ralph Artick(??) was furious at me cause I wouldn't let go, until something was done about it. The idea that our p—our only required program gave the student an option in humanities, taking an introduction of Philosophy or marching in a Matador field band. Now I don't object to music, but there's no literature in band music, there's nothing meaningful there for students to learn, and, I mean, that was obscene and a laugh. But, they needed students so they gave them GE credit. Same as—the school of music had a jazz course, they had over two thousand students enrolled, most of them got A's, few of them went, and there were no written exams or anything, and they held a course in music 158 the choral room, which holds two hundred. They had two thousand, so where were the rest? But, by formula, the School of the Arts kept getting space based upon an FTE that they weren't observing. I once discovered that some 12% of the students there, 11%, did not get A's. And I wrote a letter to Benson demanding to know what basis those students didn't get an A, since there were no exams, and there was no keeping roll, and a majority didn't go, and the course was a laughable scandal among all the minorities, the ethnic departments knew about these courses right away and they signed up in droves, it was three units of either

nothing or fun. In class, the guy would play something, and then ask, Who is that? And if a student could identify them he would pick up the record and toss it out to them, so they'd get the record. Well, there were committees, and Harry Finestone was finally told to investigate it, and they came up with solutions, and no one ever paid attention, no one implemented any of that, it was a big fuss. Oviatt didn't care about that. So, you see, it's this business, we needed heads, the President, they're all intent on growth—growth. They talk about quality of education but they—they aren't interested in the things necessary to achieve that quality. The hardest thing—you want a computer? I could've gotten you a computer in five minutes. You want a student assistant for something? You want clerical help? Ha ha ha. Don't make me laugh.

JB: And the origins of this go right back to the beginning—

JR: They go back.

JB: —A tremendous emphasis on growth.

JR: Our leaders, and that goes all the way out to Dumke, and I—I haven't been an Ann Reynolds studier at all. That politics consisted of getting along with the people who were powerful. And you see, the leaders of the university system, they got cantankerous because instruction was being hurt, Reagan would cut 10% across the board off the top. Well, as soon as the university takes something across the board, then the good things suffer, and the bad things are treated the same way, and the mediocre things are treated the same way, so whatever is good gets worse and whatever is bad stays the same. And yet, who would ever make any of the decisions, because there'd be a climate. Prator prided himself on being a clean-desk man. You learn that in the Navy. Prator had some interesting ideas, but he never took the trouble to put them into effect.

JB: Why was he chosen president?

JR: Those were the days—when he was chosen president, it was purely a political act. And the presidents all negotiated individually with the legislature, we didn't have a system when he first came. So somehow, he had the connections, and the—he was president of Bakersfield Junior High, and they moved him up to be president of this new place. Over Oviatt's head , that everyone here wanted Oviatt to be president, but, Oviatt made the major decisions, anyway.

JB: Regardless of who was president.

JR: It's cause the president left it to him. Neither he nor Cleary, our educational leaders—I've known Cleary closely from the day he came, and what's that, twenty years now?
25:00 Something like that? If you ask me to name one educational idea he believes in, I couldn't tell you what it is.

JB: What does he believe in?

JR: He sees that, first of all, he does see that the university cannot amount to anything if its sole support is from the state budget. He believes in development, but he doesn't know how to go about it. The first fifteen years of development, they spent roughly two hundred thousand a year, and the only thing that ever came out of all of that, ten years, two hundred thousand years is two million, isn't it? Is my arithmetic right? Well, we finally got out of that, was the building donated for the deaf.

JB: Chisholm Hall.

JR: The Chisholm Hall. And I guess that amounts to as much, or more, than it costs, but in all those years, the development was a farce.

JB: Yeah, this was the great stress on the campus.

JR: Yeah, listen. That—It isn't that that was a great stress, but in taking two hundred thousand dollars off the top. You see, they—they divided that money according to the percentage that each of the areas got. Naturally, instruction, having the big salaries to pay within all of the faculty, got roughly between 82% and 86% of the budget. So, when Cleary took off two hundred thousand off the top in what was called the underfunded program tax, instruction was paying 86% of that two hundred thousand, and so on down the line. Now, when it got up to three hundred thousand, I can remember choking, and saying, Hey, we need this money, we don't have enough, we're not doing things right. And every time Cleary would talk about us being a major institution, cause we had twenty five-thousand students and twenty-two thousand now of course so he goes crazy because we have thirty thousand, and I would snicker and say, We're not a major institution, you don't get to be major because you're big, no major institution has a twelve hour teaching load, that is the prime thing that we have to change. No major institution has a small, meaningless graduate program. And, you know, when—if we ever wanted to be a major institution there, we would have to support faculty who can put out meaningful research. But that isn't how it went. He sees north campus, university park, Devonshire Downs, I don't know, whatever you want to call it, as being ultimately a meaningful source of a lot of extra resources to the campus. It's hard for me to judge whether he's right, I'm very doubtful. The picture that doesn't seem realistic to me, is that this big developer, Watt, who was putting up things. The agreement was that he would put up the things that he would profit first, and after those profits came in, then they would put up the things that wouldn't be so profitable, the things that had academic significance, the performance hall, the gallery, and, you know, they talked about having a big arboretum but of course that got cut down and cut down, the commercialism that goes on and is planned for was rampant. It may produce money, but whether it maintains the dignity of what a university should be might be a nice question. When Hal Bernsen, on behalf of the local citizens who were a little concerned about all that, reminded the administration that the use of the state land had to be for educational purposes here, Mininberg assured him that everything that was going on would be educationally related because our students would be hired. And as long as our students were working there, it was instructionally related. If we opened a whorehouse and our students are the girls then that's

instructionally related, we don't have courses in that. And, of course, if they have a cafeteria and a hotel that's gonna be up there and students work behind the fountain then that's instructionally related. Well, I think that those things are likely as not to come to pass. And for any red blooded American developer, to continue past the point where you're making profits, that's practically un-American.

JB: Let's pause just for a minute there—

[END OF TRACK 1]