

Roberts, Carl L., Jr., 1926-
Colorado College Assistant Professor of Psychology, 1957-1961
Associate Professor of Psychology, 1961-1967
Full Professor, 1967-1987
Senior Status, 1987-

SIDE ONE - CASSETTE ONE

FINLEY:

This is tape recording number 53 of the Colorado College Archives Oral History Project. The date is December 10, 1986. I am Judy Finley, interviewing Professor Carl L. Roberts at Tutt Library. Roberts joined the Colorado College faculty as assistant professor of psychology in 1957. He became associate professor in 1961, and full professor in 1967. His particular fields of interest are the experimental analysis of behavior, behavior modification, learning theory, animal behavior, and the philosophy of science.

Professor Roberts received his B.S. degree in 1952 from Idaho State University, his M.A. in 1954 and his Ph.D. in 1959 from the University of Missouri. Roberts has published many professional papers in his field, and has also been active in community service. Especially notable were his service from 1964 to '71 on the Board of Education for School District No. 3 in El Paso County, as its president and vice-president from 1968 to '71, and his presidency of the Security Public Library Board from 1968 to 1971.

I'm happy to have you here with us this morning, Carl, to participate in our oral history project, and I'm going to be very interested to know how you, who have been at Colorado College since 1957, got interested in psychology in the first place. It looks as though you had a strong undergraduate inclination in that direction. What steered you toward psychology?

ROBERTS:

Well, thanks for asking me to do this, and I'm sort of looking forward to it. Well, I really haven't been thinking about how I first got interested in psychology, but now that you ask, there was a man who came to Idaho State University where I was as a beginning student. A fellow named Vernon Lytle, who was a very skeptical person; he was very, very

critical of all sorts of claims, and speculations and assumptions that people made about the causes of behavior. Most of those explanations turn out to be pseudo-explanations--a lot of circularity is involved. And it was he who pointed me in that direction. I think we hit it off because I, like him, was a skeptical person. We were temperamentally suited to each other, and he really got me interested in the field.

FINLEY:

Well, you had been--you entered college a little older than most people, didn't you? Hadn't you actually been in the Navy during the war?

ROBERTS:

At the time, it wasn't a little older than most people, but--yeah.

FINLEY:

You were a typical vet?

ROBERTS:

I don't know if I was typical or not. I got out of the Navy in 1946, and went immediately to Syracuse University, because I thought that I wanted to major in journalism, and I talked to the education officers at various Navy bases and such while I was in the Philippines, and had decided on that, had applied, and been accepted.

But I quit after a semester--I hated it. I hated it! And I didn't, you know, do any journalism--we weren't allowed even to think about that until you were a junior. And I took a course that all freshmen were required to take, called "Responsible Citizenship." [chuckle] I took intensive Russian; I took English and philosophy. And with the exception of the Russian and the English course, the other things were really terrible. Terribly taught; boring, and I forced myself to work hard so I wouldn't lose the semester, but at the end of the semester, I quit. And I sold life insurance for two years.

FINLEY:

Ohhhhh.

ROBERTS:

And quit that after two years, and took a job in the jewelry business back in Idaho. I sold life insurance for John Hancock in New York, and did okay, as a matter of fact. But--went home to Idaho for a vacation, and looked up a fellow for whom I had worked in high school, who now owned his own jewelry store in Boise, Idaho. He offered me a job

and an ultimate partnership with another younger man like myself.

And I took it, and discovered that I didn't like that, either! [chuckle] I don't know if that's typical! But it meant being in the store at 7:00 or 6:00 in the morning to put the diamonds in the window, and all that sort of thing; coming back and working then until 6:00 at night, inside all day. And I had been used to wandering about the city, you know, selling insurance to this family and that family and so on. And then coming back at 11:00 at night, taking the diamonds out of the window, putting them in the safe, and I didn't want to do that.

So I quit, and went back to college, to Idaho State, because it was convenient. My mother and father still lived in Pocatello, Idaho, and I stayed there for a time. And I didn't know what I was going to do--I just went back to college because I didn't know what else to do.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

And this is when I met Dr. Lytle, whom I mentioned, who really--[chuckle]--he was the hardest-nosed teacher I ever met! He would you, you know, for making an unsupported claim, and that appealed to me, I guess! [chuckle]

FINLEY:

So you--

ROBERTS:

So I went into psychology!

FINLEY:

Right! Then you went right on into graduate school--

ROBERTS:

Yeah. Yeah.

FINLEY:

You knew exactly that you wanted to go to graduate school?

ROBERTS:

Ummm . . . no, no. Actually, I went to graduate school because I thought that I wanted to be a clinician, and help people in the usual way.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

I went to the University of Missouri largely, however, because there was a man named Melvin Marx, who had edited a book which amounted to the philosophy of psychology--a philosophy of science kind of thing, called Theories in Psychology. But it had an awful lot of stuff that would be called philosophy of science. And that fascinated me, and I was not sufficiently sophisticated to make certain kinds of distinctions at the time.

So when I got to the University of Missouri, I became-- entered the clinical program, found out that that--to me, at least, was very unsatisfying, because again, as it turned out, people were doing they didn't quite know what, in ways they didn't understand, and with results which were at best equivocal. And I found that not gratifying at all--all sorts of weird theories about things that I thought were nonsense. And here across campus was Melvin Marx. So I went to see him, and explained my problem, and he said, "Well, go upstairs and grab a desk, you know, move in with us." [chuckle] So I did, and lived happily ever after!

FINLEY:

You went on then to get your Ph.D. also--

ROBERTS:

Yes, yes.

FINLEY:

--at the University of Missouri?

ROBERTS:

In experimental psychology.

FINLEY:

In experimental psychology. But meanwhile, somehow, you were attracted to Colorado College, and then came out here in 1957. How did that happen?

ROBERTS:

Never heard of it! [laughter] I really hadn't!

Well, that's an interesting story. I have spotty recall about a lot of things, but about that, it's as though it were yesterday. While I was working on my Ph.D., I taught at a girls' college, at a two-year girls' college across the town, across town from the university.

FINLEY:

What college was that?

ROBERTS:

A little school called Christian College--now it's called Columbia College.

FINLEY:

Oh, yes.

ROBERTS:

It's in the same town as Stevens College, not as well known, but academically, I think, much better--at least then.

A great many of the faculty at Christian College were graduate students from the university--several that I came to know quite well.

Anyway, one day--oh, I should say that in addition to teaching four different psychology courses, none of which I knew anything about [chuckle]--I also taught introduction to philosophy. That on the strength of my minor in philosophy as a graduate student.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

In any event, one afternoon, after an hour and a half, or whatever it was of that course--of that class, I came out of the classroom, and here leaning against the wall was this big, tall, gray-looking man with a crew cut. It turned out to be Lew Worner. And he introduced himself, told me where he was from, and he told me that he was the dean at Colorado College, and had been visiting his parents in Mexico, Missouri, and was on the lookout for an experimental psychologist who could come to Colorado College and clean up the act, and put the program on a sound and solid basis. He had called at the University of Missouri, where he had gotten his Ph.D. in history and visited Elmer Ellis, who had been his major professor, as I recall, but who was now president of the university.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

And while talking with President Ellis, Lew asked him who he should talk to about finding some people--someone who might be interested in a job in experimental psych. So Ellis put him onto Mel Marx--according to Lew, anyway--and Lew went to see Melvin, and Melvin sent him to me. Which was a very nice compliment--I was always genuinely touched by that.

And that's how he was where he was. I often have wondered what if I had had a bad day? You know--just think! What if I had been unprepared, or whatever?

FINLEY:

Had he been listening to your class?

ROBERTS:

He had listened the whole time, yeah! [laughter] And I never knew he was out there. Suppose I had been doing poorly--he could have walked away, and I would never have known. But anyway--apparently, I didn't, and we--interestingly, we went and had coffee, and I told him that I had already arranged to go to DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana for an interview; that I had had an interview at Wittenberg College, which turned out very badly, because I didn't belong to a Protestant church. That's true. I was told that they didn't care which Protestant church I belonged to--they weren't narrow minded, they said--[chuckle]. But I told them to go to hell, and went away.

Anyway, Lew said, "Well, we don't have any problems like that at CC." So that's how I came to come out here.

FINLEY:

So you arrived then in the fall of 1957. You were married by that time, and had a couple of kids--

ROBERTS:

Uh-hum. Uh-hum.

FINLEY:

Who was in the department besides you?

ROBERTS:

Doug Freed.

FINLEY:

Doug Freed.

ROBERTS:

Had been here one year, and William Arthur Blakely.

FINLEY:

Professor Blakely was still teaching at that time?

ROBERTS:

Yeah, yeah.

FINLEY:

Just out of curiosity, what are your memories of Professor Blakely? I took a psych--my only psych course from him. [chuckle]

ROBERTS:

Well, Professor Blakely was one of the nicest, most decent men I have ever met. I think--I really can't say very much about his teaching, because I didn't sit in his classes and so on. My impression is that he had been out of it for a good while.

FINLEY:

He was at the college a long time, wasn't he?

ROBERTS:

Thirty years.

FINLEY:

He was the psychology department most of that time.

ROBERTS:

A lot of it, yeah. There were people who came and went, depending on what year.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

He was never, I think never the only person, but certainly there were often only two. The early years--by which I mean let's say, the nineteen-teens to 1955 or so, people taught an enormous number of courses--almost as many as we do in the block system. But they taught them, apparently, all at the same time.

FINLEY:

Simultaneously. Was Blakely about to retire then when you--

ROBERTS:

Yeah.

FINLEY:

He must have been in his early sixties, huh? Did he retire the next year after that, or--?

ROBERTS:

No. As I recall, the way this happened, I came in '57. The next year--yeah--by next year, 1958, July, Bill Arthur, as we called him--Art Blakely--was given a leave. This was

before we had sabbatical leave here.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

It may have been that they were instituted at about that time, such that six years later, I got one. But Blakely's leave was an act of generosity or obligation or whatever by the college. There was no need for him to have one, but they gave him one. And I think he was already 65 or thereabout. Then he returned--well, while he was on leave, I became acting chair of the department. When he came back, I remained in that capacity, and he stayed one more year, I think, or perhaps two, on part-time, half-time.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

But he was really a fine man, in many ways. His concern was real for the students. If there were problems, his first concern was for the student. First-rate!

FINLEY:

When you arrived at CC, where was the psychology department located--in Palmer Hall?

ROBERTS:

Yeah, it was the west end, second floor.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

Where the--[chuckle]--my office was where the ladies' room is now!

FINLEY:

And what were your impressions of the physical facilities when you first arrived?

ROBERTS:

It was a dump! An absolute dump! There were--you know, the equipment that they had for psychology consisted of things like a dead cat and a plastic bag, and formaldehyde and things, you know, that you cut up, a board with Christmas tree lights, an old black maze, and junky stuff. Not that it couldn't be made useful, but it was really Dark Ages stuff.

FINLEY:

[chuckle]

ROBERTS:

Resonators that I think came from [can't understand] lab. I wonder what ever happened to them?

FINLEY:

They should be put in a museum, I suppose! [laughter]

ROBERTS:

They were, actually, in a showcase. But it was, it was [can't understand]. And the budget, in the department's budget that year was, "I need 750 bucks, total." Pardon me--\$1500 total. Half of that went to a departmental graduate assistant, of which there was one, a fellow named Tom Gentry. He got \$750 for doing all sorts of paraprofessional kinds of work.

The other \$750 went for equipment and whatever. We had no calculator. I had a mass of data from my dissertation--I hadn't written it yet. I had collected all the data, but I had to write it, and analyze the data, so--. And there wasn't even a calculator. There was an adding machine that I think had come from a butcher shop--one of these giant things with a big handle on it, and a roll of white tape, and all that. So I bought a Frieden calculator for \$900, overspent the budget with one purchase. And Blakely said, "Do it. You've got to have it. Go do it, and I'll fix it somehow." [laughter]

Why I came to Colorado College, though, revolves around just this kind of thing. I was also interviewed, as I mentioned earlier, at DePauw. DePauw University had room after room full of beautiful stuff. They had bookshelves full of cathode ray tubes for television sets, and they had all kinds of stuff. They had beautiful tiled labs with intercoms between them, and it was beautiful stuff.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

And I thought, "Man! What a great spot, you know, to come and get students involved in research, you know--look at all the stuff we got here." I was interviewed by four, perhaps five faculty committees while I was there--just as here. Every one of those faculty committees was at pains to tell me, "Now you understand that we don't do research here. We are a teaching university."

Well, you know, I understand that colleges like CC and like DePauw, and Renow, and so on, are primarily teaching institutions. But to be told that, in effect, "We don't want

you doing anything, researching," really turned me off.

However, at Colorado College, Lew Worner said, "You bet! You know, we want to encourage it. You know, our major function is to teach, of course, but we really do want somebody who is alive and can get the students involved, and publish something now and again and so on." There was no big emphasis on it, but it certainly was encouraged. And the most important thing, Judy, is--there was nothing here!

FINLEY:

Were you disappointed?

ROBERTS:

No! [laughter] I thought, "What an opportunity to build in my age, and what I think psychology ought to be like. We can make a name for ourselves here. We can be first-rate, you know, if we get decent students to work with." And we did. We stood for something for at least 25 years.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

We have an enviable record of sending students to graduate school. We are in the upper five percent, in psychology at least, of 800 and--what is that--873 private--excuse me, not private, 873 primarily undergraduate institutions here in this country, in the percentage of Ph.D.'s per major in psych. We are fifth, I think, among the ACM schools. And this is since 1920, but it's been a lot better since 1955 [chuckle] than it was before.

FINLEY:

Right.

ROBERTS:

So we really have come a long way.

FINLEY:

Well, describe how you went about building up the department, the qualities of the department, say in the period--let's start first with the Benezet period. Because he left in '63, but he must have made some efforts.

ROBERTS:

We stole everything we could. I'm really serious about this. Nothing, you know, grand theft, but we scrounged for the first couple of years. We had a student named Dominic Fiferville, an Italian name, who was a major in the Army out at Fort Carson, and a psychology major. And we, without very much effort, persuaded him to join us on weekends at Fort

Carson.

We would take this big station wagon that belonged [chuckle] to this fellow Tom Gentry, and drive out to Fort Carson to the dump, where they really throw a lot of, you know, stuff that was scrapped, that was going to be buried, or whatever. And we just helped ourselves to hardware cloth, to metal rods, to things we could build cages out of.

One of our majors was a fellow named Kenny LeBow, who has since died, who was a woodworker, a cabinet-maker, a real craftsman, who decided he didn't want to do that all his life, and had gone back to college because he wanted ultimately to go into clinical psychology. But he had a job. He worked on weekends and late afternoons in a cabinet-making shop, and we went up there on weekends and built, with all his tools, all sorts of apparatus. Boxes for rats, and things like that.

Then there was a guy named Tony Johnson, who has gotten a Ph.D. as well, and he was something of an electrician. And he wired all that stuff up and, you know, I didn't know much about a lot of these things, so--you know, between the three of us, we got a lot done! I exploited those guys shamelessly, but they loved it, you know, and they both went on and got doctorates eventually.

But that's what we did. We scrounged everything we could, got bigger budgets, we made use of everything we could. It was exciting--it really was. You could see things taking shape!

FINLEY:

Happening, uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

And to tell the administration what a rotten situation we had over there, we had all these boxes for introductory psych, each of them operated by 110 volts. And I'd-- [chuckle]--from the wall, and we'd have 15 or 20 of these beautifully named little experimental chambers with levers with them, and light bulbs that light up, you know. And when--well, there were a lot of wires going from these boxes to multiple outlets. You've seen these things, you know-- [laughter]--plug upon plug!

Well, I had been talking with Benezet and Worner about the desperate need for better space in psychology, and more money, and better equipment. And I said, "You should come over and look." And so Lew one day said he would. So on that particular day, I saw to it that the wires we had on these cables were even worse than usual, so that we would practically fall down trying to get around in the lab. Did

things like that, you know--showmanship!

FINLEY:

[laughter] Well now, I found a letter in the file dated April, 1963, from Benezet to you, in which he's--well, he's not exactly putting a damper on your request for funds; he's just saying that what you're asking for is for more money than they actually had. And then the last paragraph says something about, "I notice that two of your colleagues have not yet returned their appointment letters" and he hoped this didn't have any relationship to the request for funds, because "that isn't the way we play games!" [chuckle]

ROBERTS:

Yeah, I remember that! You know, that--it didn't have any relationship.

FINLEY:

It really didn't? They weren't--

ROBERTS:

No, that was--I pointed this out to--it was Gilbert Johns and Don Shearn. And I showed them that, and if I remember, I think it was Gilbert who said, "Oh my God! Doesn't he realize there are people like us that never do anything until, you know, the deadline?" And something like that. No, it had nothing to do with that. And we got the money.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

What we had asked for is a large special budget so we could install a dozen experimental setups for working with pigeons for our introductory course. So it was a major outlay--it was about \$20,000 at the time.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

It was a lot of money. And we got it. He later said, "I don't know where I'm going to get it, but I'll get it."

FINLEY:

But he did get you the money?

ROBERTS:

Uh-hum. And I don't know where he got it.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum. I'm curious to know--

ROBERTS:

Fort Carson, maybe! [laughter]

FINLEY:

Who knows? Well, who knows? The--Olin Hall was being built about this time, in--what--1962, I think, Olin was built. Was there any thought of your department sort of wanting to move over to Olin?

ROBERTS:

Oh, yes, yes.

FINLEY:

And being able to get over there?

ROBERTS:

Not--yeah. That's then, as now, that is, to be candid, one of the biggest disappointments of my tenure at Colorado College, and one of the reasons why I am going on SSSI. I feel that I have failed at something that would have made a lot of difference to the future of psychology at CC.

Going back to Olin Hall, I argued, as did Don Shearn, that the proper place for a psychology department, which is, by the way, psychology is a branch of biology, involving the behavior of living things, the mechanisms by which those happen, and so on, and that we would be best served in the long run if our operation could be closer to biology--conventional biology.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

We could share animal colony spaces, cage-cleaning facilities and so, and in the long run, that would be cheaper than having to maintain two such facilities. It's basically like putting the boys' room and the girls' room in an elementary school back to back, so you can use the same set of pipes and so on for plumbing. It saves a lot of money.

Well, for whatever reasons, that didn't come off. What should have been built, period, didn't come off. Olin Hall was never adequate from the day they opened the doors for chemistry and physics and biology and so on. And it was known then that it was not adequate.

Well, anyway, water under the bridge. And here just in the past year or so, we have been engaged in the capital campaign, part of which is to raise piles of money to expand the science facilities, expand Olin Hall, add a wing and so

on.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

Again, I went to the wall on this one, you know. "For God's sake, it's a second chance, and it's not going to come again. Put psychology over there, or in it somehow or other, so that it can interface with the biology department." Because while nobody in the biology department today knows the first thing about psychology, and have not been supportive, in any real sense, of this move, times are a-changing. And my own opinion is that there shouldn't even be a psychology department--there shouldn't even be a discipline of psychology. Maybe once upon a time that made some sense, but I don't think it does now.

FINLEY:

You think it should be part of biology?

ROBERTS:

Sure!

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

I don't--you know, for all I care, it could be administratively separated if that made some convenience or something. But my God! What are we doing, except trying to find the causes of behavior, and those causes lie in the environment and in the genetic makeup, which itself, of course, has been selected for by the environment. And the interaction between those two classes of variables results in the development of living organisms, and the acquisition and development of their behavior. Where else should it be?

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

It got started as a discipline in 1879 in Leipzig, Germany, and was a discipline by stipulation. A man named Wilhelm Root [???] simply said in effect one day, "I am going to establish a department here called Psychology" or whatever he called it. And because no one else is worrying about these things. But today, we shouldn't be there.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

And, you know, in 15 or 20 or 30 years, it wouldn't matter. I think we made a serious mistake. I think we could have been on the forefront of something. Colorado College could have taken the lead here, and . . . we didn't.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum. So you're still in Palmer Hall, and probably will remain there for many years--

ROBERTS:

Yeah! We have superb facilities--better [chuckle]--more space, great facilities, and laboratories, and room for students to do almost anything they might want to do. So that in terms of the actual physical facility we're a lot better off than biology has been for the past whatever-it-is.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

But that ain't the most important thing!

FINLEY:

Right, right. Well now, when did you move up to the--I call it the attic--or the third floor of Palmer? When did that happen?

ROBERTS:

I don't remember, I really don't. It was the mid-sixties, I guess, or thereabouts.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum, about the time they were remodeling Palmer, and the museum went out?

ROBERTS:

Yeah, in that.

FINLEY:

Yeah, that period?

ROBERTS:

Yeah. We--you see, we had gotten a bunch of grants. I had gotten a--I had applied for two grants, one from National Science Foundation for \$20,000 for three years, and from the National Institutes of Mental Health, for four years, and I had asked for \$30,000 from them. The National Science Foundation grant came through. I accepted it. A couple of months later, I got a call from National Institute of Health, saying that I'd been granted the \$30,000 one, even though I

had written them a letter saying, you know, pull it, because I--

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

They said, "That's not how we work. We just go ahead and process it."

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

And so--I said, "Well, I accepted the one from National Science Foundation." Which was really preferable, because it obligated me only for two years, in case things didn't work out.

And the National Institute of Health people said, "Well, would you like some of it, you know [chuckle]--do you want any of it?"

I said, "Well, I could use another \$5,000."

And they said, "Okay." And that was that. So I ended up with \$25,000.

Don Shearn, at around the same time, got a \$30,000 grant which was then renewed for three or four more years at 10 or 12 thousand a year. Gil Johns came in with a \$23,000 grant, and we, I guess said in effect to the administration, "Look ye what we have done!"

No one had been getting grants like this. The biggest grant that was ever gotten at CC before these things came on was one by Bob Brown in the biology department, and it was for 12 grand. It was the biggest grant that anyone had ever heard of here at CC. I think.

Anyway--we like to believe that the college administration, seeing this initiative on our part, where we were buying tons of equipment, and didn't have to steal it all from the Fort Carson dump any more, said okay to our request. "We'll remodel your facilities."

And I think it cost about 16,000 bucks to do that--the top floor, the attic, which we wanted because it didn't have any windows; it could be air-conditioned easily--we thought--it has never worked right. There was no traffic pattern, you know, people weren't traipsing by all the doors making a lot

of noise all the time.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

It was perfect for laboratory facilities for experimentation. And then subsequently, they remodeled the floor below so we would have decent offices, and so on.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

But that was--in that few years, we brought in an enormous amount of money, both from the colleges--we also were given good budgets by the college, after that first year or two, you know, \$1500. We got good budgets, and--it was always the game of "Can you cut it by ten percent?" But we always built in that ten percent so we could cut it. The silly games we would play.

FINLEY:

That's the way budgets are always formed! [laughter]

ROBERTS:

It seems. Why, I don't know.

FINLEY:

Well, besides building up the physical facilities in the department, you also built up its faculty. Don Shearn, of course, came in 1961; Gil Johns in '62, and then you added Jeff Eichengreen in the late sixties, I believe. So that built up your department to--well, five, wasn't it?

ROBERTS:

Uh-hum, uh-hum.

FINLEY:

Which was quite a change. Can you tell me a little bit about your colleagues, and how you all worked together, and a little bit about their individual preferences for research or teaching styles?

ROBERTS:

We have always meant to remain a small department.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

Believing--and I think all of us believing that to try and represent too many different approaches would end up

being a meaningless jumble of things.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

And . . . I still think that. I don't know that others agree. Don Shearn, who read an article of mine, and had written for a reprint, just at the time when I was beginning to look around to add a person--somebody in physiological psych, because that's what Blakely had taught, mainly. I mean, it had been his ostensible specialty.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

And we certainly needed somebody in that field, because it is one of the core areas in psychology. And so I corresponded with Don, and I wrote back to him--oh, he had said in his letter that he had been an undergraduate at Occidental--excuse me--

FINLEY:

Pomona, wasn't it?

ROBERTS:

Pomona, yes, Pomona College, and was pleased to see someone at a similar college doing research and publishing--not that I did very much of that. And he talked about some of his interests or whatever. I don't remember very well.

But anyway, I wrote him and asked him if he would be interested in a job, and--or maybe in his letter he asked if there were likely to be any openings. I really don't--this is the kind of thing I just remember at all. But we got together, in any event, by mail, and subsequently he came out and interviewed, and he took it.

But we couldn't hire him until fall, and he was finished by mid-year, so he and his wife took a South Seas cruise for awhile. I guess it was--we weren't going to have the opening until the following year. He had to wait a year, if he wanted to work at CC. And so he took the South Seas cruise--there was money that he and his wife had somehow saved as graduate students. God! Can you imagine?
[laughter]

And then he taught for a semester at the University of Indiana . . . like Fort Wayne, or someplace like that--I don't remember.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum. Didn't he get his Ph.D. at the University of

Indiana?

ROBERTS:

He did, yes. But this semester that he taught was not at the Bloomington campus.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

If memory serves, again. Anyway--so he managed to fill his year then, and he came here.

FINLEY:

Hmmm.

ROBERTS:

And I was really touched, too, by that. It was fun when he came out to interview me, for me. I had met him by this time at a convention, and liked him very much, and thought he would be a real asset. I think Doug had too. I think we went to that convention together--had a grand time!
[chuckle]

Anyway, when Don came out, I had saved some brook trout that I had caught and frozen, some venison--trying to do everything that I could to make him want to come here!
[chuckle] And whether that did any good, I don't know, but he--

FINLEY:

Came.

ROBERTS:

So he--I represented what you might call learning and motivation as an area, conditioned learning, and all that. Doug Freed was our quote clinical end quote fellow, who could handle the abnormal psych and related. And Don then made a third person with a strong physiological psych interest, as well as a very knowledgeable--he was also very knowledgeable in the area of learning conditioning and things like that. Taught me things that had happened since I had gotten my Ph.D.

For example, he taught me how to use electromechanical equipment, which I had never seen. But just about the time he came, I had gotten a grant for that, I talked about a little while ago, and with it I bought an enormous amount of electromechanical relay systems and [can't understand] chambers and so on, for work with rats. And I had never used it before--I didn't even know how relays worked. But that was the modern equipment, and Don had used it. He had understood it at the University of Indiana, so he was very helpful there. He has been a great asset to the department

through all these years.

FINLEY:

He certainly has! He certainly has! Now when Gil Johns came--wasn't Gil Johns also an Indiana--

ROBERTS:

Uh-hum. Yes, he was.

FINLEY:

--graduate? Was there some connection there?

ROBERTS:

Only that they knew each other.

FINLEY:

--or just [can't understand] to know? Oh, they had known each other.

ROBERTS:

Yes. We were ready for a fourth person, and we wanted someone to teach the history of systems of psychology and sensory processes. We needed someone that specialized in vision and hearing and all that sort of thing. And also Gilbert--that was Gilbert's area, hearing primarily.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

And he also had worked with a man named Cantor, Robert Cantor, who is a very eminent historian of psychology--a very difficult man to read, actually, but was at Indiana. And so--Don suggested Gilbert as a possibility. And these were the days, you know, when you didn't have to advertise in every journal in the world, and all this kind of thing, and it never even occurred to me to do it. I suppose that's a character defect on my part, but I really didn't think about it.

FINLEY:

Well, it is interesting how simple hiring was in those days, compared to procedures now.

ROBERTS:

I did--I did think about minorities, but I didn't think about women especially, and I didn't think--I mean, there wasn't any problem, I just did not say to myself, "Gee, we ought to try and find a woman." But I did think we ought to try to do something for minorities in the more conventional meaning of that term. I don't know why women are classed as minorities, anyway--maybe unfairly treated people, but they're not in the minority.

Anyway, nothing came of that particular inclination.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum. But now, didn't Gilbert Johns' wife Marcia do some lecturing in the department?

ROBERTS:

Yeah. Sure, uh-hum. She taught--

FINLEY:

For a year or two?

ROBERTS:

Yeah, off and on, when we needed a special course taught, or some help with the introductory course, somebody on leave--that sort of thing.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum. Did she also have an advanced degree in psychology?

ROBERTS:

Yes, she had a Ph.D. also.

FINLEY:

I didn't realize that.

ROBERTS:

From Indiana. She was--I think her primary interests were in mathematical models of the behavior of learning.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

I wouldn't swear to that, but she was very bright, very smart, and could do all sorts of things.

FINLEY:

Of course, Gilbert went on almost immediately into the administration as the director of the summer school in the mid-sixties, didn't he? I think it was 19--

ROBERTS:

When did he come?

FINLEY:

He came in '62, and I have him as director of the summer school by 1965, so he must have been pretty well tied up with that for a number of years.

ROBERTS:

Yeah. Yes, unfortunately, I have always thought. He called me--I was on leave in 1964, in the Fall. [pause] Gilbert came when--in '62?

FINLEY:

That's what it says, yeah.

ROBERTS:

Yeah, that's right, yeah. And in the Fall of '64 I was in Washington, D.C. at the Institute for Behavior Research. I got a call one night from Gilbert that he had been asked by Lew Worner to become director of the summer session. And he wanted to touch base with me, see what I thought and so forth.

And I said, "Well, you know, it's really up to you, if you want to do it." I don't remember that I said much more; it was not for me to tell him that I didn't think he ought to do it, although I may have! [chuckle] I think administration is a deadly thing to get into, if you're really serious about science--

FINLEY:

Teaching, uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

--or teaching, whatever. Very few people can--

FINLEY:

Survive!

ROBERTS:

Yeah! You know, to maintain it, at least, anyway.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum. Well, he didn't then teach a full load?

ROBERTS:

No.

FINLEY:

In the psych department at all during those years, did he?

ROBERTS:

No. And in effect, we simply read him out of the department, partly, largely, in fact, because he could never do anything. We would try to have a meeting of the department to decide on this or that of a thing, and Gilbert could never come. He always had a lunch or a meeting with summer school, and we had--the others of us, the three of us,

Doug, Don and I, had to make our lives, three of us, revolve around his. And that got old in a hurry.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

And so we simply let him teach his history and systems course, or whatever it was at the time, and that was that.

FINLEY:

That was about it, yeah.

ROBERTS:

Yeah, there was no real option, you know.

FINLEY:

Right.

ROBERTS:

It was a major campaign every time we wanted to have a meeting.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

I was wasting a lot of time and so on. So I just said, "To hell with it."

FINLEY:

Is this what eventually led to hiring Jeff Eichengreen?

ROBERTS:

Yeah. Uh-hum, uh-hum.

FINLEY:

That you needed someone essentially to replace Gilbert?

ROBERTS:

That's right, right.

FINLEY:

Yeah. Yeah. Well, what changes did you see, if any, in the administration of Lew Worner versus Benezet in the psychology department? By then, it sounds as though you were rolling, with good equipment and then good facilities--

ROBERTS:

Yeah.

FINLEY:

--and perhaps things were on an even keel for all of you?

ROBERTS:

Yeah, I thought we had a good budget, good facilities, good department, good students. We had some superb students--not many. We've never had a lot of majors; we averaged 11, I think, over the long haul, 11 or 12 a year. It fluctuates from six to 32. But among those students, there were some superb ones.

FINLEY:

Name a few.

ROBERTS:

Oh, dear! The years--Joy Bailinger was killed by a drunk driver, after getting her M.D. Lee Ann Myers, Arlene Hayne--these are relatively recent. If I go back for many years, let me see if I can think . . . Jill Steinbrugge, Rosemary . . . who? [chuckle] Not Clooney! Rosemary . . . Barnes! Rosemary Barnes, Charley Garthwaite.

FINLEY:

Did most of these go on for advanced degrees?

ROBERTS:

Yeah, most of them, although Garthwaite did not. He did, but he quit. Sylvia Thorpe was another one. It's interesting that, in my judgment at least, for every truly superb male major we have had, we have had four or five women as good.

FINLEY:

Hmmm.

ROBERTS:

Much better female majors than [can't understand]

FINLEY:

Has your ratio of males to female majors in the department been more women?

ROBERTS:

Yes, I think so, but I wouldn't swear to it. I think so.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum. Uh-hum. Maybe it's a discipline that attracts women.

ROBERTS:

Maybe, but I think it's more likely that the women are smarter than the men at Colorado College generally. I think there's no question of that, frankly. I don't think our students are what they were, today, are not what they were yesterday.

FINLEY:

Well, I'd like to get into that in terms of describing the transition to the block plan. You taught here for quite a number of years under the semester system, and then when the block plan went into effect in 1970, as a psychologist, you must have a real interest in comparing the learning of students over the years. I'm just really interested in, first, how you were involved in the formation of the block plan, your initial reactions, and then after that, what it's been like over the years in terms of effects on students.

ROBERTS:

I think the first intimation of the block plan came from Don Shearn, who said one day, "We're always talking about how we have a student-faculty ration of 1 to 15. Give me my 15 students, and then let me have them for awhile. Let me own them."

And I think that we started talking about that. And I don't really know that that was what led to it, but I think so. Glenn Brooks, of course, took the--took the major role in getting the thing going, and talking it up, and discovering where the problems were, and working with everybody, and how we were going to do it, and all that kind of stuff. But my memory is that the initial idea for it came from Don. He had a lot of ideas, and many of them were good, over the years, I certainly think. Not all of them, but-- [chuckle]. We'd have good ideas, maybe, instead of a lot of ideas [not quite sure about this--hard to understand].

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

We dropped the ball on, with the block system, just as, in my opinion, we did on Olin Hall, in that we didn't get any baseline data before we switched. A big mistake in educational circles [can't understand] John Dewey, I suppose, or even before. What we might have done before we made the transition is develop a variety of tests of one sort or another--however crude--something against which to measure the effects of change. You know, the before and after kind of idea. But we really didn't, and so we don't know to this day whether our students do any better in given courses now

than they did then.

FINLEY:

Well, I hate to ask a psychologist to be subjective, but from your impressions--maybe it's not the block plan. Maybe it's just the decline of high school education in recent years that you say makes students perhaps not as good as they were in the old days. What do you think it is?

ROBERTS:

I really don't know. I--my impression is, in the last three or four years, that the quality of the students in my classes is not what it used to be. Now, not that it was ever Swarthmore-level people. We are not Swarthmore, I don't think we get the very best, except rarely. But we get some first-rate people, and I don't see them. I see students complaining about working; I see students not working. I'm giving more C-minuses than I used to.

You know, early on, in 1957, we didn't have all that many great students either. But things seemed to get better little by little, and now they're dying away again. These are impressions, Judy, I don't know. You know, maybe it's just this year, or you have a couple of bad blocks, you know--there's so much variation in the quality of students from block to block, from course to course.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

One block you can have some really first-rate kids in there, and the next block, you don't have any, and it all averages out. But I really don't know; I just don't. I think the block system is good for students. It--for one thing--this is a tangential point--our majors who go on to graduate school frequently say, boy, are they glad. They say it just that way, "Boy, am I glad that I went on the block system, because I get down to work, and I have my stuff ready, and the other students don't. I'm way ahead of things in graduate school." But we are not essentially in business to do nothing but pander to graduate schools. But I think it's a better way to teach, a better way for students to learn.

FINLEY:

Well, you have to--

ROBERTS:

But it's hard as hell on faculty! [chuckle]

FINLEY:

Did your curriculum change drastically when the block plan went in?

ROBERTS:

No!

FINLEY:
No?

ROBERTS:
No.

FINLEY:
Haven't you been one of the departments that's introduced a fairly large introductory course at one time-- under the block plan, with various sections?

ROBERTS:
Ummmm . . . yeah, yeah! Is that right? Was that how we did that? [chuckle] At one period we, for a long time, early in . . . early in the sixties, it would have been. It was after we got all this nice equipment that Benezet found the money for.

FINLEY:
Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:
We taught our introductory course in the following way. Two mornings a week we lectured. Tuesday and Thursday mornings. We took turns; each of us were responsible for five or six major lectures, and every afternoon, one of us had a lab section. So all the students met, 180 of them, in, all in one, two mornings a week for lectures. Then we broke them into five thirties, five . . . five groups of thirty-some students, divided 180 students into the five groups.

FINLEY:
Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:
And one group met Monday afternoon, one group Tuesday afternoon, and so on. And that's how we did that. But each of us were in there one day. And Marcia Johns took one of those.

FINLEY:
But that was before the block plan.

ROBERTS:
It was before the block plan, that's right. But I don't frankly remember when we stopped doing that. See, this is what I mean when I say I have spotty recall. I don't care about those things.

FINLEY:
Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

And so I don't think about them, I guess. But I really don't know. We kept doing that for a long time, and it may be . . . the first year of the block plan, was that '71?

FINLEY:

I think it was '70-'71.

ROBERTS:

Yeah, I guess I was--I did teach the first year. Then the next year I was in New Zealand, on a sabbatical. But I don't remember when we changed over. I--as far as the upper division courses are concerned, like the learning/behavior theory, physiological psychology and so on, real change in that.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum. Of course, the block plan is great for experimental work. You don't have to interrupt at the end of an hour or so.

ROBERTS:

Well, in a way that's true, but in the area of learning it's bad, sort of like a developmental something. It's--not much develops in three and a half weeks, and the learning often takes a lot longer. The sorts of things that I like to teach, and that were fundamental to the area of learning, we used to do over four months. We would be able to sit--to go the lab, let's say, in the afternoon, or in the morning, if we were doing it that way, in addition to the standard three hours a week lectures, or whatever you want to call them. We could meet in the afternoons for the first two or three weeks of the course, two or three afternoons a week for an hour or so and discuss possible experiments--design them together.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

There were never a lot of students in these classes. We might have eight or 10 or 12--something of that sort. And we would work out the experiment or experiments that we were going to do in the first two or three weeks. Then we would have three months to do it. Now, I have three and a half weeks, and they have to write as well, so it's much worse, I think.

My lab, the learning lab, the way I've done it anyway, is not nearly as satisfying as it was pre-block. Because I have to have everything canned. "Here's what we're going to do, and here's why. Go start running pigeons," or rats, or

the experiment, or whatever, the kids. And then they got to finish one in about a week, write it up, get started on another one. I have to read their write-up, criticize it, get it back to them so that the next week can be better. It's not satisfying--I hate it! [laughter]

FINLEY:

Do you feel that the college would be better off to return to the semester system?

ROBERTS:

I don't know.

FINLEY:

It's hard to say, isn't it? Pros and cons.

ROBERTS:

Sure! I could argue, or say that, you know, I hate it. I hate the lab aspect [can't understand--there is some pounding on the table] But I could change that, you see. I could do a different kind of lab. I could do short, quick and dirty experiments. But I don't want to, for other reasons. I'm caught on the horns of a dilemma.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

I don't know whether the college would be better off. I think we worked a lot less hard. I could carry out research by myself or with students in a more leisurely way, you know. Now, I get in here at 8:00 in the morning, and I run around for an hour trying to get some data collected, and sometimes I have good students who can help me in a consistent, reliable way. That's great! Then they're involved. If not, a student can be a lot of help for one block. The next block, they're taking another course, and they find they don't have any free time.

FINLEY:

Yeah.

ROBERTS:

It's tough. Well, you know, I probably sound like I'm whining and complaining, but I really don't mean it that way. I've had a first-rate life at Colorado College. I don't think that we've had a bad president since I've been here, or a bad dean. We all make errors, and you and I could sit here and point to things that we thought Lew Worner shouldn't have done, and Benezet shouldn't have done, or Loevy shouldn't have done, and Bradley as dean shouldn't have done, but, you

know, they were first-rate people. And I think I've been the luckiest of men to be here.

FINLEY:

Well, that is certainly a good way to face looking back on your career, which is--

ROBERTS:

Well, I don't consider it over!

FINLEY:

No.

ROBERTS:

But at this point, as you know, I have applied for and been granted special senior status.

FINLEY:

That means you'll teach part-time for the next--

ROBERTS:

Yeah! It means that you can quit and they'll still pay you 45 percent of your salary until you're 65, but none of us are going to do that unless we can also teach some number of blocks. And I have asked to teach at least four if I wish. And they've said "Fine." So I'm going to be here, working on research problems and teaching four blocks, off and on.

FINLEY:

That's great!

ROBERTS:

But with the things you asked me about, you know, I--I think of all sorts of tangential things, and personal things, and of course, human interest things that [chuckle] some of your questions I really didn't address very fully. It's amazing what this does, you know, to start the old recollections.

FINLEY:

Well, I'd be delighted. We're coming to the end of this first side. I would be delighted to turn the tape over and go on for another 15 or 20 minutes and let you tell some of those tales.

ROBERTS:

It would have to be--you know, you'd have to ask me something, because I just can't sit here and dredge them up without some kind of impetus or cue.

FINLEY:

[chuckle] Well, let me turn the tape over here, so it won't run out on us.

SIDE TWO:

FINLEY:

Carl Roberts of the psychology department. We were talking about the block plan, and comparison of teaching loads, and student quality over the years. I would like at this point to go on to something else, unless you have more you want to say on that, Carl.

ROBERTS:

Yeah, a little bit, if I may, Judy.

FINLEY:

Okay.

ROBERTS:

I think it's very, very easy for people like me to blame the block plan for any old thing. And of course, the block plan is different, and it imposes some restrictions on people's behavior that a typical semester system does not. But at the same time, there are a lot of other things that go along with it. When we first began the block system, it was exciting. Everybody probably was doing his or her best to fit his or her teaching style and subject matters and so on into it. And it was exhilarating. Like any novel or new, innovative move, after awhile, it gets old, and it isn't fun any more. You're also getting older.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

And other things happen to you. People have said, "I don't have"--and I've said this too--"very much social life among my colleagues."

And someone might say, "Well, you know, the block plan is very intensive, and you really go flat-out all week long and then on Friday night, you don't feel like going to a party or anything."

Right! I don't! But--then I ask myself, "Did I ever?"

I used to drink. I quit. That makes a difference. It's no fun going to cocktail parties when everyone's half in the bag, and you're sober. You know that feeling, and it's not really all that funny, George, but George has had a couple of liquid dynamites, and he thinks it's hilarious. And so that--things like that happen. People change their way of living. Aside from the block thing, we get older, and need perhaps a little more rest. Things like that, that are correlated with time in the block system.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

So I would simply caution people to be very careful about attribution here.

FINLEY:

Right.

ROBERTS:

Although I think it is--it is harder. I'm a great believer, if I can hold forth a minute longer, in something that I would call finding your own salvation. I teach my courses back-to-back. I teach two sections of intro to psych; I teach one after the other, so the preparation the second time is much less. And then you don't teach that again for a year. You have to sort of start all over again, and review all the materials; you've added new material. But then if you do it again right away, you minimize that. Then I do the same thing with learning and behavior theory. So that's four blocks right there, back-to-back, and you can do things like that.

I have not been in favor of the eight-block year, because I think that we're going to--it's going to cost us in ways that are undesirable. This isn't about that.

FINLEY:

[chuckle]

ROBERTS:

But there are things you can do. You find a way to do an independent research block each year, such that you may have only one or two students in it. But, I mean you have to work with them, but it's not the same thing as meeting 25 day after day after day.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

It's all very well, also, to talk about giving the students more independence, making them take greater responsibility for their own education. When you do that, you end up giving more no-credits. It's difficult. It might sound great, and in practice [chuckle] it's a lot harder than it sounds. Well, enough of that!

FINLEY:

When you spoke about--a little bit about faculty social

life, the faculty has grown so much in the last few years, I don't know half of them any more. What ways do you feel the faculty has best enjoyed, shall I call it collegiality? What particular aspects of the campus, specific aspects of the campus have encouraged collegiality? How do you spend time getting to know other faculty members, and enjoying it, as a specific?

ROBERTS:

I guess candidly, I don't very much time getting to know other faculty. I do three things: I have lunch in the Commons Room, and that, I think is, has been a major factor in improving collegiality, friendships, getting to know each other. However, I think the majority of the faculty do not have lunch in the Commons Room. I don't know where they do have lunch.

FINLEY:

What size group usually ends up there?

ROBERTS:

Well, there's a big table that's put together out of smaller tables, and there may be 15 or thereabouts around that table, and by the time some people leave early and others come late, maybe that's a total of 20. Then there will be other smaller groups, maybe a department having a lunch meeting. Most people who sit around the table are men. Women go out and sit by themselves, with a few exceptions. That's true. Charlotte Mendoza doesn't do that; she participates in the big group. [Can't understand the name] sometimes comes over and does that. What's . . . the new . . . person in mathematics . . . Kathy . . . Feary. She does. But as a group the female faculty members do not--I mean, they sit together and so on. It's funny, really. But that has been great. I love it. I love to have lunch up there, because it is fun, and you learn a lot, too.

Sometimes one of the people will get off on something, and you sit there, sort of fascinated by it. Bob Loevy one day talked about railroads that ran north and south through Colorado in yesteryear, and it was a charming and enchanting story! I never knew anything about that. Another time, Bill Weida, a new fellow in economics, talked about weapon-making, sword-making and things like that. It's something in which he has a great interest, blacksmithing, but--about making armor, and some Damascus blades and all that--fascinating stuff. So that's great!

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

Another thing--what I do, I have taken a personal interest in the mathematics department. I think mathematics is the worst-taught single subject in the history of man, and we, in the Colorado College, I think have one of the finest math departments ever. There's not one poor teacher among them, as near as I can tell.

And some years ago, when things began to change for the better, I made a point of going to the talks that candidates for jobs in math here give, and making my opinion known to whoever was chair. And I have been invited to continue that, and as a result have developed a lot of friends in the math department. I value Fred Tinsley, and Jim Henderson, and Marlow Anderson, just for example, and Dave Roeder among my best friends.

I certainly am as ignorant of mathematics as it's possible to get and still have a Ph.D., I think. I can get through it, but it's never, never easy for me. It's very hard. Calculus, in college, for example, was one of the [chuckle] subjects I ever had. So it isn't that we share a great skill, you know, it's that I blame my instruction earlier in life for some of the problems I've had--rightly or wrongly. But anyway, I have developed a number of friendships this way. I do know the people in math very well, all of them.

Another thing that we do, sometimes, Shirley, my wife and I, is have kind of an open house, on Sunday morning from, say 10:00 to 2:00. We buy a bunch of good pastries, and make up some juices and coffee and odds and ends like that and invite 65 to wander in and out, and include in them some of the newer people. We don't do this much. We don't entertain much. That helps. We should do more of that kind of thing. And of course, then, we go to the receptions and all that. But like you, I don't know most of the people on this campus any more, it seems--certainly half of them, I don't. And a lot of them come and go fast, too.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum. That's true. It's a real contrast to some of the reactions I got from--well, faculty people who I interviewed several years ago who are now long dead. They talked about the closeness of the faculty when it was very small.

ROBERTS:

Uh-hum.

FINLEY:

Right after the war, and before the war, and it's a real change, I think.

ROBERTS:

Well, it's a change--[both talking at once]

FINLEY:

--small college.

ROBERTS:

We're not so small any more.

FINLEY:

We're not!

ROBERTS:

When I came in '57, I think we were at 900--

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

--or something like that, and we sat around and got to know each other. If you wanted to talk to the president about something, there was a very good chance that you'd meet in the Hub, or whatever it was then, over coffee, and hammer it out. You actually saw the president on the campus.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum. Well, this brings me to the question of the--perhaps I should call it the committee structure of the college, and the way the business of the college operates. Have you felt much change in that--more complex--

ROBERTS:

Oh, yeah.

FINLEY:

Can you describe some particular instances perhaps that illustrate that?

ROBERTS:

Well, as a generalization, it's a pain in the ass, if you'll pardon my language!

FINLEY:

[laughter]

ROBERTS:

Things were a lot simpler--maybe not better, but

simpler--maybe not right, but simpler. Well, apropos of my remarks about hiring people. You went to the old boy network--that's how it was done. You looked, and you wrote, and talked to people you trusted at various universities where you'd been, or someone else had been, or you know somebody, and they put you onto likely people. Not, certainly didn't give everybody an equal chance. I wouldn't argue that for a minute, but it certainly was simpler, and probably wrong, I would agree, you know, today, with hindsight being what it is.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

Well, the committee thing is a little bit like that. I think--I frankly think that Gresham Riley runs a much more democratic college than Lew Worner did. Everything that I can see is out in the open. For somebody to get tenure or promoted is lots harder than it used to be, on a number of grounds. It used to be, seemingly, that as long as there wasn't anything against you, you got tenure. Now, there've got to be a lot of things for you.

FINLEY:

Can you describe the procedures just for the sake of the record like this?

ROBERTS:

I don't pay an awful lot of attention to the details, but once upon a time, and I was chair of the psych department for what--for 19 years--I would simply write a letter on behalf of the people in my department, and I think during that 19-year period, at some point we also began to include the Executive Committee, or maybe it was the Committee on Committees--I don't really know. But--because I don't remember whether the Committee on Committees was always involved in this kind of thing, I just don't remember. You see, these are the kinds of things that I just don't think about.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

But--

FINLEY:

You did have a third-year review procedure--

ROBERTS:

No, no, no, goodness, no! None of that.

FINLEY:

Oh. When did people get tenure? Did they have to be here for a certain period of time, or was it just a matter of when you felt they were ready and recommended them?

ROBERTS:

I don't remember. I'm sorry. I don't even remember how long I was here when I got tenure. I came as an assistant professor in '57, and began the '67 academic year as a full professor, so it took me ten years.

FINLEY:

That's a lot faster than it's done now.

ROBERTS:

Yes, yes. I'd like to believe that was because I did such a brilliant job, but I don't think that's the case! [laughter] It went faster, although that was not slow.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum. Well, now it's much more--tenure is much more, as you say, structured through various committees and procedures. It's much more formalized than this.

ROBERTS:

Yeah, well, now we--the chairman writes a letter.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

And the faculty member writes, makes a list of his own accomplishments. I used to ask my people to do that so I wouldn't leave anything out. But I wrote the letter which made the case for promotion or tenure or whatever. I don't remember what committees got this. But now, the chairman writes, and the faculty is supposed to, or asked to--doesn't have to--make a list of his own attributes that year. This all goes to the Executive Committee of the division; they forward it--their views to the Dean and I think to the Committee on Committees. The Committee on Committees has a look at all this. Dear me, you know! [laughter]

FINLEY:

Well, of course, we live in a society where lawsuits are much more prominent, and I guess everybody's trying to protect--

ROBERTS:

That's true!

FINLEY:

--and all the actions that I see, not only at CC, but in the city of Colorado Springs, which I'm quite familiar with, so much is done, so much paperwork is done because of protecting oneself from lawsuits.

ROBERTS:

Yes! Yes! I will not write letters for students on their behalf unless they sign that waiver. I don't know whether it's worth the paper it's written on, for that matter, the waiver, but I simply won't do it.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

And, you know, if it's a student that I would have to write a negative letter for, I simply avoid it entirely by telling the student that I'm not the person to do it, that he should find someone else, because I would have to say some negative things, and he doesn't want that. And that's all part of that same thing.

FINLEY:

I guess it is.

ROBERTS:

I was talking to a colleague the other day about--he's been here about as long as I have, maybe four or five years fewer, who said to me, "I still like to here, but I am so tired of being a manager. I have all this paperwork and all this stuff I've got to do, keep organized things, and manage this, and manage that, and stay on top of some other thing." He said, "I'm going to SSS as soon as I can. I can afford it."

FINLEY:

Well, it seems to be characteristic of society in general, not just Colorado College.

Can you tell me a little bit, Carl, about your interest sort of outside of the college? I know that you've been very actively involved in research, and there's a long list of your publications in our file here, so I don't think we need to go into that. But what have been some of your major personal interests in your years in Colorado Springs?

ROBERTS:

Well, for about eight years, I was on the Board of Education of School District 3. I was president and vice-president of that for four years. At the same time, or just

prior to my becoming a board member, the School District 3 School Board founded a public library. My wife was actually instrumental in that; she found a state law that allowed school districts to do that. And she and Roberta Walski and Jean Knight, who subsequently worked for the college, were the three sisters, if you will, who talked the school board into doing this. And this was long before I was on it.

So subsequently, the school board also ran a library, so I was also president of the Security Library Board and all that stuff. Later I was active in much the same way in Sigma Xi [can't understand] society a Pikes Peak chapter of that. I was president of AAUP at one time--you know, the usual things and we all do that stuff in one form or another. Is that what you had in mind?

FINLEY:

Well, yes, and also just--well, what do you like to do in your spare time? What are your favorite sort of leisure time activities?

ROBERTS:

I am a passionate fly-fisherman.

FINLEY:

Aha!

ROBERTS:

Along with a few others at CC, like Max Taylor and Dirk Baay, and now Dick Storey, and others whose names escape me at the moment. A lot of that.

FINLEY:

Does your wife fish, too?

ROBERTS:

Yes, yes. Not well, she says--[laughter]--but eagerly! We fish together now and then. I fish almost entirely catch-and-release waters.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

Any more.

FINLEY:

Do you go with other people from CC?

ROBERTS:

Oh, yes, sure! Dirk Baay and I are old fishing

buddies. I was--first introduced him to fly fishing, as I did Dick Storey, and I have created monsters! [chuckle] But that--I read a lot . . . tie flies, paint a little.

FINLEY:

You paint a little?

ROBERTS:

A little.

FINLEY:

What kind of painting do you do?

ROBERTS:

Oil.

FINLEY:

Oil? Have you ever taken any art courses--

ROBERTS:

No, no.

FINLEY:

--or you just like to paint, huh?

ROBERTS:

No, no. Well, yeah, no--yes! [laughter] I have a little ability.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

One of the things I'm going to do as soon as I go on SSS is take art lessons from somebody, I hope at CC, you know, really take a course in how to use oils and other things. I would love that.

FINLEY:

What size canvasses do you paint--large, small?

ROBERTS:

Very few. I have one large Indian woman, and I have painted some small things, playing around. Very little--well, maybe six real paintings in my life. It takes me years--you know, I don't have time, or I don't take time. When I have time I don't feel like it, and when I feel like it don't have time. I'm not good, you understand. [chuckle] I just love it, and I would like to become better.

FINLEY:

That could be a great passion, you really can get involved in art.

I guess--you know, it's always hard to close these interviews, but it seems that the most important question for a long-term teacher to answer, and one that I'm sure you've thought about, is what do you really feel is your philosophy of teaching? How have you approached the teaching-learning situation over the years? Your relationships with students in your discipline?

ROBERTS:

I think my relationships with students have on the whole been good. My reputation appears to be something like, "Roberts is very demanding, but fair. You really work your butt off in his courses, but you will really learn a lot." I've heard this said any number of times.

The other day, I got a book in the mail that was dedicated to me, and tears came to my eyes, they really did.

This was by Gary Martin, who was a 1962 psych graduate. He went and got his Ph.D. at Arizona State and is now very eminent in Manitoba. He's Canadian; he was a hockey player, a varsity hockey player who made good in academe. And I spent some time with him last summer, or a summer ago, when I was on leave, to go up and pick his brains and things like that about some areas. And I was really tremendously touched by this. That's the first time, I think--I don't know how common it is, but I--[chuckle]--I must have been doing something right.

My philosophy is to work the students hard. I try to devise study guides, sequences of questions about the material which require the students to develop something. For example, "Contrast the delay reduction hypothesis with the expectancy theory according to Rockland with respect to some kind of claim or prediction." This means the student has to write, has to write something, has to construct an answer, not just fill in the blank, or say "true" or "false" or something like that.

In my course in learning and behavior theory, for example, there are a number of chapters and articles and so on, and for each one, I have devised a study guide like that, and the exams are taken from those questions, or from those guide items. Not all, but the majority are. So if a student has mastered that sort of thing, then they know what that chapter is about. These are items that require that. So I teach on the whole from a mastery point of view. The goal is to master this material.

Now that is typical of my disciplinary courses within psychology.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

In the general studies area, where I also teach, as most of us do one or two of those, that's going to vary more.

My approach will vary more with subject matter. The course I teach, or whatever you want to call it, in creativity and problem solving, is a very different sort of thing. It's a connaitre--you know, French savoir means to know, and connaitre means to be acquainted with. Well, within psych, I teach savoir courses and in this particular general studies that I just mentioned, I do a connaitre approach.

They read a lot of stuff, starting with Plato's Eon [???--that's what it sounds like] and ending up with stuff from Skinner and other current [can't understand] in this area. So we examine the concept of creativity from then to now, and we look at what has been said about its sources from then to now, and it's appalling how far we have not come.

You know, really, you know, in Plato's day, or at least if we take Plato seriously, and Socrates seriously, Socrates suggests that a major component of creativity is infusion, or inspiration by the gods. That's where we get the word inspiration. The gods actually were said to breathe into the person, Rhapsode for example, some special quality which made him so much better than he would normally be. Today, it's commonly, what we would call creativity, attributed to the unconscious. This is just putting God somewhere else, you know.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

Well, I try to disabuse the students of this kind of thing, and make them look at variables like hard work-- [laughter]--sweat! You know, and most people who are true--oh, eminent creators--composers, the great artists, the great scientists and so on--that is a major thing. I mean, they just work at it all the time, from [can't understand] on down. And that is not very well understood by a lot of people.

But this is tangential. The point I was making is that I have them read a wide variety of viewpoints, and then write papers in which they try and show the commonalities, the feelings, the parallels, the differences, and so on. And we also do problem-solving, which is basically the same kind of thing. But I teach that very differently.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

It's in a way a kind of vacation for me, from having to read these interminable exams that I give [chuckle] in my other courses, and to just take a different approach.

FINLEY:

Uh-hum.

ROBERTS:

So it's mixed. But mainly, I've long been a believer in what we might call a task system. Again, Don Shearn was the first to start doing this at CC. It was in the literature, personalized systems of instruction, programmed instruction, mastery courses were around because they were largely the brainchildren in one way or another of Fred Skinner, whose work we have emphasized and stressed, whose approach we have stressed for many, many years in one way or another at CC.

Anyway . . .

FINLEY:

Well, that's a very good summary, really. It strikes me that in a way you typify what is best in a liberal arts education. You balance the mastery of the subject with a broader look at great issues over a period of time, and I appreciate your analysis.

Just as a final kind of wrapup here--this is going to hit you, and you have to say it right off the top of your head--[laughter]--you can be flip if you want--whatever comes to your head. What advice do you have to the chairman of the psychology department 100 years from now that's going to be listening to your tape? [laughter] We hope.

ROBERTS:

[pause] I don't know. I'm sorry. "Hang in there" I suppose!

FINLEY:

Hang in there!

ROBERTS:

I have no profound thought on that. I would hope that there wouldn't be a psychology department, as I said earlier, a hundred years from now. I would hope that what is now real psychology, serious mainstream psychology, would be integrated into a sensible biological science. Whether that

will be, I don't know. The things that I don't consider real psychology--you know, the humanistic stuff--put that in the philosophy department, or in English or someplace--where it belongs, you know! [laughter] Fun! You know, it's fun to interpret things this way, but--

FINLEY:

It's not psychology.

ROBERTS:

It's not real.

FINLEY:

Right.

ROBERTS:

It doesn't get us anywhere in the prediction and control of human behavior.

FINLEY:

Well, thank you very much. I very much appreciate this.

ROBERTS:

My pleasure! My pleasure!

THE END