

Allan W. Anderson
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interviewed by Susan Resnik
for San Diego State University
102 minutes of recording total

SUSAN RESNIK: Today is Friday July 17, 2009. This is Susan Resnik. Today we're at

San Diego State University to interview Dr. Allan W. Anderson. This interview is funded by the John and Jane Adams mini-grant for the humanities.

Dr. Anderson, professor emeritus of religious studies, [whose] academic background includes philosophy, comparative religion and literature, studied at Columbia University. He has taught philosophy and religion for twenty-three years at San Diego State University, and beginning in 1969, he was involved in the establishment of the Department of Religious Studies. In 1970, he was awarded the California State Distinguished Teacher Award. In 1975, between January and April, he conducted 18 one-hour dialogs with J. Krishnamurti entitled, "A Wholly Different Way." Professor Anderson is a scholar, a teacher, and a poet. And to quote something I read, it says, "Accomplished academically, his soul is that of a poet, his pen and mind are happiest in verse."¹

I'd like to say good morning to you, and also to your colleagues Mary Hicklin and Bruce Hanson. Good morning, Dr. Anderson.

ALLAN W. ANDERSON: Good morning, Dr. Resnik.

SR: Let's start out by going right to San Diego State University, and then we can go on your journey. This is your oral history and your journey, and you can go backwards, forwards, wherever you want to take us. How did you happen to come to teach at San Diego State University? (aside re spelling of proper nouns)

¹ Source?

AWA: I was invited to apply, and I accepted the invitation. I was living in New York at the time, just across the street from Columbia University.

SR: I know it well. What inspired you to say, “Okay, I’ll go out west”?

AWA: I wanted to come to California.

SR: When you came here, what did you discover in this setting? Also, of course, what year are we talking about now?

AWA: Well, let’s see, I came here in ’62.

SR: Okay, so it was the sixties, which was, of course, an interesting time, and an interesting time in California in particular, I would think. So apparently that appealed to you, to come to California.

AWA: It reminds me of the Chinese best wishes, “May you live in interesting times.”

SR: Ah yes. And clearly you have, and we all are. So when you came here, who interviewed you, what happened?

AWA: I don’t recall being interviewed on coming here. What happened? Nothing dramatic—I just arrived.

SR: And you began to teach in the Philosophy Department?

AWA: Yes.

SR: Okay. And you brought with you, from what I understand in reading about your academic background up to that point, a combination of literature and philosophy and religion and whatever else you bring. And so did you enjoy teaching here when you started out?

AWA: I’ve always enjoyed teaching.

SR: Would you like to talk a little bit about how you view the role of a teacher? I know that you touched on this with your fourth dialog with Krishnamurti. He touched on it, and you kind of shaped what he was saying about the role of the teacher and the student. Would you like to talk a little about that?

AWA: Yes, I have a rather strong conviction that teaching, in the strict sense, doesn't really come to pass unless the student and the teacher operate together. The virtual classical role, where the teacher talks—and unfortunately many times down—to a student, is not, strictly speaking, teaching. It's just a species of announcing.

SR: Did you start to teach in any different way than other people were teaching here, do you know?

AWA: Well, I never attended any of their classes, so there's no way that I could compare.

SR: But apparently you must have been doing something to receive the Outstanding Teacher Award. And I also was reading comments at the tribute to you, from George Gross and other professors, talking about how really special you have been as a teacher and as a colleague—and inspiring. So tell me about the department, because you must.... When it started, it was 1969, and you must have nurtured it in certain ways.

AWA: No, it really started from scratch. It hadn't been pre set up. How it came about was simply that it seemed to some of us in the Philosophy Department that it would be helpful to the university's program as a whole, to have another department called the Department of Religious Studies.

SR: And by the Department of Religious Studies, can you elaborate a little more? Comparative religions? I know I've heard reference to the Eastern religions that you're so involved with. Tell me a little bit more about it, because I think that it may be different than other departments of religious studies, from what I recall hearing.

AWA: Really? I'm very interested to hear that.

SR: Or your own approach to religious studies, versus the historical approach.

AWA: Well, it seems to me that question goes to the heart of what underlies the activity of religious studies. I think what underlies it is essentially self inquiry.

SR: And what underlies it is the essence of what this department really was about, in other words.

AWA: It was my hope.

SR: Did you feel pretty happy about the way it was received? Or the students— clearly you've had students who feel they benefited very much from this approach.

AWA: Well, let's ask them! They were both there.

SR: As I mentioned, we are welcoming both Mary and Bruce. And this could be a little okay.

AWA: (chuckles) That's wonderful.

BRUCE HANSON: Well, Allan, why don't you elaborate a little bit in the way you approached teaching. You mentioned that if there wasn't a special relation between you and the student, then you didn't believe actual teaching was occurring. At other times you've mentioned that you never lectured from notes.

That's the case. But he also has mentioned he never taught what he hadn't undergone, what he hadn't experienced. Why don't you talk a little about that? I think that would be interesting.

AWA: Well, I'm awfully glad Bruce mentioned what he has just pointed to in his last few remarks. I always felt that when you walk into the classroom as a teacher, you have an obligation to avoid simply announcing. And you have an obligation to sense the condition of the room. Each time you walk in, it's atmospherically different, and you had better meet that. So many times I would have a notion of what I thought would be timely, and as soon as I got inside the room, I knew it wasn't. You know how walls are atmospheric. (SR: Uh-huh.) So on the spot, I had to begin from scratch.

SR: Well, that's a very interesting approach, and that certainly leads to creativity in the classroom, rather than just something that's previously established. But the context of the time in which you were doing this was the 1960s, and there was a lot of change. Did you feel that that in any way affected the topics that you were talking about? I know you were discussing scriptures and the word. I wonder what kind of students came in, what was it like?

AWA: Well, those were interesting days. (chuckles)

SR: Yes.

AWA: Students always over-subscribed to my classes. In those days, many of them would come in and test whether they wanted to sign up to this class or not. So the room was overfull, and they would be sitting down on the floor, with their feet in

my face. (laughter) It was a strange time. Bruce and Mary would be able to tell you more about it than I would, because they are closer to that generation.

SR: Well, I was thinking today, as I walked across the campus here, on my way to meet you, that I noticed all the students walking around in shorts, and thinking this is also an interesting time, because we certainly didn't do that. (laughter)

BH: Allan, you might expand a little bit on how you felt that the preparedness of the student changed around the mid sixties, from when you first came on campus to around that mid decade point.

AWA: Yes. You mean about '65?

BH: Right.

AWA: I was in India in '65, and read the news that things had blown up. It rather shocked me, because I had never been in an environment of that order. But I tried, when I got back from India, to find my way as mercifully as I could in this new age—because everybody looked upon it as a new age. It was not an easy time. (SR: No.) And I must have been thought a bit of a petty tyrant, because as both Mary and Bruce will remember, I took a fairly hard line with respect to the responsibility of the student to study. And I've always kept in mind Saint Paul's admonition—I think it must have been in this case to Timothy—"Beware of those who are always seeking to learn, but are incapable of becoming taught." (laughs) I tried to bring home to my students during that virtual catastrophic time, what we refer to historically as the sixties, I tried to help the students see their responsibility for respect for the subject that they were studying. I have no idea

how much I succeeded, if at all, but Mary and Bruce might be able to show some light on that, because they studied with me.

BH: Well, this interview isn't of us, so we're trying to get you to expand a little on the way you presented, because you were, as you say, you would demand a certain respect from the student to the subject, a certain seriousness to it. But I think you could speak a little bit more in your own approach to scripture. Maybe you could relate that lunch you had with the various pastors and all here, and your reaction.

AWA: Yes. I'm sure you'll find this interesting.

SR: Good.

AWA: In a lunch that I had with the campus pastors, it occurred to me that it might be timely to ask them a fundamental question. I asked them about the incarnation. And I quoted the first chapter of Saint John's gospel. I asked them whether they believed it. They didn't say a word. Now these were campus *pastors*. Of course it was, I suppose, not the most tactful of questions, but I wanted to know what was going on. Well, I found out in a hurry, didn't I?

SR: Yes.

AWA: Here we have pastors whose relation to what it is that they are preaching is pretty wobbly! And what does that really come to? It greatly impressed me, I'll say.

SR: I'm sure they were surprised at being asked! But I think that's marvelous.

BH: Wouldn't you characterize the response that perhaps they *should* have made, "Yes, I believe, even if I don't yet understand what it means." That that fundamental volitional trust was this stance you took to the scriptures and to your

own subject (AWA: Yes.) that might have distinguished you from some colleagues?

AWA: Perhaps.

BH: Perhaps you could expand on *that*. (laughter)

AWA: Please, do go ahead.

SR: No, I would like you to expand on that, and talk more about the approach, based on what you were just saying, what your approach is. I've gotten *some* sense of it, but when you would be speaking with the students, for example.

AWA: I always brought the issue, let's say, home. I always brought the issue home to their own opportunity for self-inquiry—by which I had a reference to psychoanalysis or whatever. But just to start from scratch. In conferences in my office, I think virtually almost all students responded to that well, which was fortunate for me. I also promised my classes that I wouldn't bring anything forward that I hadn't undergone myself, that I wasn't just there to babble off the top of my head. I wanted them to have confidence that what I was saying was rooted in what I had undergone. I think on the whole they appreciated that, didn't they?

SR: Oh, I would think so. Yeah.

AWA: I don't think teaching occurs in any other context—not *genuine* teaching.

SR: Did you find some of the colleagues here—besides your meeting with the pastors—shared your sense of what you're describing philosophically in terms of the way to teach and relate to students? Over the years with colleagues here, were there any that you became close with and talked about these things with?

AWA: This is an embarrassing question—not because you’re trying to *be* embarrassing—but it’s embarrassing to have to answer it by saying no.

SR: Clearly you were admired by other professors. In the tribute that they gave, it seems they admired what you were doing, and I was just wondering if that [it?] shared, but apparently not.

AWA: Well, admiration is a strange sentiment. One can admire what one doesn’t feel one is at the time resonating with.

SR: True.

AWA: So I wouldn’t put too much stock....

SR: But you nurtured this department, apparently, because it grew and expanded, so your particular way became what made this happen. And so everything that you bring with you probably contributed to this. I don’t know whether you’d like to go back, but I’m just curious, because I find it wonderful and fascinating that you studied literature and then philosophy. The expression in poetry, in relationship to poetry, is so central to you. I was just wondering how that—if you wish to—how you came upon this pathway leading to finally the doctorate in religion. But you started with comparative literature, and I wondered how that happened.

AWA: From a child I had always one huge question: What is it all about? When I was going to Columbia, I came to think that I ought to read those literatures that deal with that question, and particularly the wisdom books of the Bible do that. And even in the Catholic version, which includes the Apocrypha, the attempt to deal with the wisdom tradition is heartily present. But unfortunately, the wisdom

tradition is paid almost no attention to at all academically. The academy itself seems to me to be basically a strange [one?].

SR: So you focused on those literatures that related to the wisdom tradition. And then did that involve all the eastern philosophies as well?

AWA: Oh yes. Yes, my involvement with eastern thought, oriental thought, Indian and far eastern traditions, was always within the context of the wisdom tradition.

SR: I see. In the eastern tradition—and I am not very familiar with all of this, but I will try—I’ve read references to the I Ching. Could you tell me about that and how it relates to this?

AWA: Well, it’s the first of the Confucian classics. At least for the Chinese and Japanese, it’s revered, and it’s also an oracle. And if you ask a question, and, let us say, “throw the coins,” the answer will send you to a given hexagram within the I Ching. That gives you a reference for whatever it was that you were concerned to bring up. I often advise my students to start their day out with “asking the oracle.” It’s consular for their behavior for the day. And then I ask them to ask it when the day was over, to ask it for a grade how they made out. Many of them found that useful. Some of them *still* do it.

SR: You mentioned the oracle. Did you also explore and teach about oracles in different cultures, and have just tried to explore a little?

AWA: No, I didn’t take a historical approach to it, but rather an intrinsic one.

SR: Got it. So as the years went by at San Diego State, did you find that you changed the curriculum in different ways, or did it just evolve, or pretty much stayed as it was?

AWA: I didn't bring with me a preconceived, predigested package. I think it has to do with how you find yourself in the world. I tend to listen to what's coming toward me. The future to me is not something waiting to be met out there, but rather something that comes from out there to meet me. And my response to that is my responsibility.

SR: That's good. (recording paused) I would love it if you could go back a bit and talk a little bit about the date and place of your birth, and your experiences and your journey before coming to San Diego State University.

AWA: Well, I was born in New Zealand. I think of myself as half Maori. (chuckles) I grew up in England. I came here in 1936—that is, to the States. I came *here* by invitation to the Department of Philosophy. They wrote me and asked me to apply. There's something rather humorous in this event, because Alan Watts wanted to become a member of the department, and they wouldn't have him because he didn't have a doctorate, which struck me as a little far fetched. But even Union Theological Seminary has Reinhold Niebuhr, who doesn't have a doctorate either! So to make that the hallmark of whether you shape up or not seemed to me a little extravagant. But I'm not administratively prone, so I won't say any more about it.

SR: Well, before all that, you mentioned being born in New Zealand and then going to England. You said you came here in 1936....

AWA: I was born in 1922.

SR: Yes. And did you live in New York City, or....

AWA: No, I lived in a suburb of Washington, D.C. And it was a happiness for me,
because I had the Library of Congress available.

SR: Oh, marvelous!

AWA: Isn't that wonderful?

SR: Yes!

AWA: And I decided that I'd do a little research, because I had always—and still do—
deeply admired the “Gettysburg Address.” And it occurred to me, “Why don't
you check out speeches, and see after the ‘Gettysburg Address’ whether they
reflect any comparable greatness?” So I did. I was shocked. What I read was
dreadful, awful! I said to myself, “How can you open your mouth after the
‘Gettysburg Address’ and come along with this rubbish?!” Isn't it amazing?

SR: Well, the “Gettysburg Address” is spectacular, yeah.

AWA: Yes, I'm not suggesting that they come up to that standard, but don't fall *so* far
below it that it's a shock. It's a shock!

BH: And do you attribute that decline in the word, the use of language, to a decline in
the culture after the Civil War, or some other cause?

AWA: I've often wondered. That's a first-class question. I've always wondered about
that. I remember in the late thirties or early forties, Senator Dirksen.... Do you
remember him?

SR: Everett Dirksen.

AWA: Everett Dirksen. He could speak. When he opened his mouth, he had something
to say, and he said it beautifully. The other one was the southerner Alben

Barkley.² When he opened his mouth, he had something to say, and he said it beautifully. That wraps up Congress! (laughter) Isn't that dreadful?!

SR: Nothing else, that's it.

AWA: No, nothing else. No. One of the things that interested me very much when I first came to the States was the relative lack of expectancy on the part of the public—expectancy in, let's call it hope—that those who are running for office would at least be capable of using language in a manner that—this is going too far, I know—but hopefully edified, but if not, most likely not, at least showed some cultivation. Blmpff! (laughter) Just blmpff! Isn't it amazing?

SR: I think about things like that as well. I don't know if this has struck you, but sometimes there's an admiration for people that aren't that well educated. I mean, I can remember people stressing how they were afraid that Adlai Stevenson was too educated or whatever—or his language was above....

AWA: Undemocratic.

SR: Exactly. So I think we ran into that with this recent election, actually. Do you? With the recent election, [unclear], do you think?

AWA: Oh yes. Hm. I've wondered about—not having grown up in this country—I've wondered about how Americans really feel about their mother tongue. And there's no way that I could speak about that with any confidence, because I didn't grow up here. Had I been *born* here, maybe I could answer that question to some degree at least.

SR: When you studied literature as an undergraduate, did you feel that your professors were up to what you were hoping they could be?

² 1877-1956, American lawyer and politician, vice-president of U.S. 1949-53.

AWA: No.

SR: That's what I would imagine, from what you're saying.

AWA: No. No. I can't even remember *one* that I would have thought was a model.

SR: That's what I was wondering. I often ask that question: "Do you remember any teachers who were role models in your field?," whether the person is a physicist or chemist or whatever. And I think that's very telling and interesting in terms of the path, that you didn't stay just in English literature per se. The words and literature were a means to the subject that you were, the questions you were concerned with.

AWA: Right. Yes.

SR: When you were at New York University, were you involved in the English Department at all?

AWA: No, I was invited to teach at what was a separate activity of the university called the Reading Institute. When I was there—I think this was during the egregious sixties.... (laughter)

SR: Yeah, I think it starts.... As I recall, we have, let's see.... I think so.... NYU. Actually, both in the late fifties and in the early sixties.

AWA: Early sixties, right. Yes, because I came out here in '62. Right.

SR: So what was the Reading Institute? What did they do there? I'm just curious.

AWA: The program at the Reading Institute was twofold. On the one hand, the students were sent there by NYU, and also even as far away as Canada, to see if they couldn't be academically rehabilitated, because they had threatened to quit going to school. And their parents, of course.... And on the other hand, there were

those who were already “A” grade students who were concerned to become “A+.”

The Reading Institute catered to both. The first, of course, was a matter of salvation. And the second was really quite a joy, because those students meant business, they took their academic work seriously and worked very, very hard. And I gave them an I.Q. test before we started class, and at the end. And I think the average [increase] was about 15 points, which of course knocks into a cocked hat the notion that I.Q. is somehow pristinely unavailable for any change whatsoever. I remember at the time thinking to myself—I was working on my doctorate at Columbia at the time—that maybe I should try writing a paper on the wobbly character of I.Q. But since it wasn’t really my chief interest, I didn’t do it.

SR: So you were working at NYU, but studying at Columbia at the same time.

AWA: Right.

SR: I see. I didn’t realize that. That must have been quite a challenge to do both at the same time.

AWA: Well, the doctorate that I earned from Columbia is a joint doctorate from Columbia and Union Theological Seminary. So I’m an alumnus of both schools.

SR: Did you find it an enjoyable experience, doing the dual doctorate?

AWA: Yes, very much.

SR: Where is Union Theological Seminary in relation to the campus of Columbia University?

AWA: Just across the street.

SR: That’s what I thought, yeah. That’s not too bad.

AWA: Not too bad. No, it wasn't too bad. And of course, as you know so well,
Columbia has a marvelous library.

SR: Oh yes.

AWA: Isn't that fantastic?

SR: It is! And you know what's on the very top floor? Ah-ha! the oral history
project! That's where I was mentored.

AWA: Oh really?!

SR: Yes, that's where I learned to do this.

AWA: I didn't know that!

SR: Yes, it is a very special little wonderful collection and research project called The
Oral History Research Office.

AWA: For heaven's sake!

SR: And it was founded just after World War II by the historian Alan Nevins. That's
where it's hidden away. But it is a wonderful library.

AWA: How could I have escaped knowing that?!

SR: It was hidden. And it has expanded, I think. But I can recall going all the way
up.

AWA: Right. How fascinating. I didn't know about that.

SR: The library is marvelous, and certainly a marvelous place to study.

AWA: Oh yes. I've always said New York is a dreadful place to live, climate-wise, but a
marvelous place to work in.

SR: Yes, I share that opinion. That's why we're here. (laughter) However, I didn't do it until 1994. I moved to California. I was a New York City resident for many, many years.

AWA: I see.

SR: That's interesting. So when you were teaching at NYU, was the program that you were involved with down in Washington Square, or somewhere else?

AWA: No, Washington Square.

SR: So it seems that....

AWA: It was a very personal order of teaching in that program. Parents would be invited to come and consult and converse and so forth—sometimes with the student present, and sometimes not.

(lunch break)

SR: As we continue looking back to your early years, could you tell me how “The Owl and the Pussy-Cat” affected you in a special way?

AWA: Let me see about how old I was. I probably was around ten, eleven. After the poem had been read—I don't know what it's like over in England now, but in those days, the teacher, or as he or she was called, the master, read “The Owl and the Pussy-Cat,” because you'd hear at least one poem read a day, and you'd be sitting there scared to death that you'd be called up to recite. The first time I heard “The Owl and the Pussy-Cat,” I underwent what was tantamount to a religious conversion. And from that point forward, I was quite sure that “The Owl and the Pussy-Cat” had described the way things *really* are, and I accepted that. I've never changed my mind since.

SR: Wow. That's such a defining moment.

AWA: It was a *totally* defining moment for me. And it was for the conventionally religious. It was not only defining, but catastrophic.

SR: Hm. I'm trying to remember the poem about the owl and the pussy-cat. Do you remember it?

AWA: (recites poem by Edward Lear below)

*The Owl and the Pussy-Cat went to sea
In a beautiful pea-green boat:
They took some honey, and plenty of money
Wrapped up in a five-pound note.
The Owl looked up to the stars above,
And sang to a small guitar,
"O lovely Pussy, O Pussy, my love,
What a beautiful Pussy you are,
You are,
You are!
What a beautiful Pussy you are!"*

*Pussy said to the Owl, "You elegant fowl,
How charmingly sweet you sing!
Oh! let us be married; too long we have tarried:
But what shall we do for a ring?"
They sailed away, for a year and a day,
To the land where the bong-tree grows;
And there in a wood a Piggy-wig stood,
With a ring at the end of his nose,
His nose,
His nose,
With a ring at the end of his nose.*

*"Dear Pig, are you willing to sell for one shilling
Your ring?" Said the Piggy, "I will."
So they took it away, and were married next day
By the Turkey who lives on the hill.
They dined on mince and slices of quince,
Which they ate with a runcible spoon;
And hand in hand on the edge of the sand
They danced by the light of the moon,
The moon,
The moon,*

They danced by the light of the moon.

That's "The Owl and the Pussy-Cat."

SR: That is beautiful.

AWA: That really stamped my life. That was *my* religious conversion, you might say—except it wasn't a conversion *from* something else, it was a brand new beginning. And I never changed. So I'm not one who could be described as having what is called among Protestants, "a religious experience." But "The Owl and the Pussy-Cat" was, in effect, such for me.

SR: The power of words to express something very carefully, is something that I know that we want to look at, to jump from this to that. Rather than words just being utilitarian, I think you've expressed that you have to be careful about words. Is that what poets do more? How does that relate to....

AWA: I think a genuine poet lets the word measure him or her—which is very different from thinking of it utilitarianly. But of course 99&44/100% of the population would have a hard job understanding that.

BH: Allan, could I ask you, what is it in the nonsense lyrics of Edward Lear's "The Owl and the Pussy-Cat".... You just said that you felt that that poem described reality more accurately, closer to what is the case, than all the rational theologies that you have read. (AWA: Right.) Could you expand on that a little bit? How did that nonsense verse—how do you understand that as more accurately reflecting the character of reality?

AWA: Well, the first thing that occurs, if you're seriously listening, is that it checkmates any quantitative analysis that you might like to undertake, and leaves you

qualitatively—if you’re serious—open to the content of what you’re listening to.
And that’s rare.

SR: Yes.

AWA: People won’t make that move. I don’t know what prevents them from making that move. There may be any number of psychological issues that psychologists would like to fool around with. But no. No. Most people don’t relate to poetry that way, and certainly not to language that way—*word* they don’t allow to measure *them*. And if you don’t allow the word to measure *you*—this is going to sound harsh—but you haven’t heard or read anything. Because you’re occupying a position which Saint Paul cautions.... I’ve forgotten which of the epistles it’s in, but it refers to those who are always seeking to learn, but incapable of becoming taught. I remember the first time I read that. I felt twenty pounds lighter.

SR: In some of the eastern philosophies and religious beliefs that you have studied and learned about, do they express something similar, or very different, about the word?

AWA: Hinduism has a lot to say about the word. I think you could say that Daoism is very sensitive to language. It used to be the case culturally that when a priest or minister stood up to deliver a sermon or a sermonette—most of them were hoping it would be “ette” (laughter)—it used to be that it was hoped, if not expected, that what they would hear would be worthwhile having come to church that day for. I don’t know that that still obtains, because the attitude toward language has

changed. I doubt very much whether anybody could be expected to use language the way Lincoln used it in the “Gettysburg Address.”

BH: Allan, in relation to her question also, on Asian religions, how would you understand the Confucian doctrine of rectification of names? Would that fit in with what you’re saying now?

AWA: That’s a difficult question. I think Confucius perhaps had at least in mind that carelessness with language ought to stop. What he meant beyond that, I can’t be sure.

BH: When he gives as an example of it, that were a father to be a true father, a son a true son, then the words would be *rectified* in practice, as opposed to simply spoken.

AWA: Right.

BH: And wouldn’t you agree that what you said earlier about measuring up to the word, a man could fail to measure up to the name “father,” as a son could fail to measure up to the name “son.”

AWA: Absolutely. Right.

BH: Could you speak a little on that?

AWA: Well, I think culturally speaking we’ve reached an abyss with respect to the relation to language. I’m reminded of Saint Paul’s caution, “Beware of those who are always seeking to learn, but incapable of becoming taught.” I don’t know that anything can be done about that condition, the incapacity to become taught. It’s odd, isn’t it, that on the one hand, from the perspective of desire, they’re always

seeking to learn; but from the perspective of *readiness* to become taught, they're not ready.

BH: Would you see.... The beginning problem there, do you think is touched upon when you mentioned "The Owl and the Pussy-Cat," how its first effect is to stop the rational assumption and to wait upon what is to be revealed?

AWA: Yes.

BH: And so what they're unwilling to do is to drop their preconception (AWA: Exactly.) and be informed, if you will, in a way that would change and raise them.

AWA: Precisely. Yeah. Not living in a culture that values its mother tongue.

BH: Could you maybe take the 23rd Psalm—it's a psalm you love, isn't it?

AWA: Yes.

BH: Could you recite that from memory, and then sort of show us how you would understand that psalm at the level that you're referring to here, where we stop projecting and understanding or reading-in some theology on the lamb, if you will, and how we would be informed by the psalm? Can you remember that psalm?

AWA: Oh yes. *The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.* Marvelous! Such an utterance! *The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.* I think it's the case, isn't it, that sheep will not drink from running water. *He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yeah, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.* It's

a *marvelous* statement, because it includes *chastisen*, rod and the staff, comfort.
Marvelous statement. *Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a
table before me in the presence of mine enemies: And then that beautiful line, my
cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my
life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

SR: That's beautiful.

AWA: *Beautiful* psalm.

SR: That's so beautiful.

AWA: Isn't it?

SR: Yes.

AWA: And if you can listen to that with the heart open, it's such a beautiful and
medicinal statement. It has an effect.

SR: I have always felt that.

AWA: Yes. Well, I can understand that. So have I.

SR: Yes. I love it.

AWA: It's healing.

SR: Very much. That was a good idea.

AWA: How marvelous. You know, I had no idea that it would be so pleasant.

SR: I'm so glad. I think that I would really enjoy you sharing with us the children's
poetry in the book. Tell us about *your* book, because that would be a treat also.

AWA: You mean [unclear]?

SR: Yes. Would you tell us? *Songs from*—am I pronouncing it correctly—*the
Mifflinjer* or *Mifflinger*?

AWA: Mifflinger.

SR: ... *Mifflinger Sea and a little cove of Nonsense*, by Allan W. Anderson. And it's a beautiful cover, [for] which I hear you found the artist, Bruce?

BH: The illustrator, right. But I take no credit for her skills.

SR: Leslie Rhea Lewis. It's such a beautiful cover—rainbows and the lavender. It just makes you feel happy, looking at it, I think. Is there something in here that you could share with us?

BH: You know the poetry better.

AWA: Would you like to choose something?

SR: Why don't you? I'm looking forward to reading the whole thing after, Mary.

BH: "Ina," or "Hannah"?

MARY HICKLIN: I was thinking "Hannah."

SR: Hannah? That was my mother's name.

BH: Really?! Let's read that for her then, if that was her mother's name.

MH: Here's the illustration for it, too.

SR: Oh, let me see. Oh! The illustrations are *wonderful*. Please read it.

AWA: (reads poem "Hannah") [Tr.'s note: Audio file "1003.mp3", Minute 19:55-20:35. Cannot decipher proper nouns, prefer not to guess at punctuation and spelling. I do not have access to the book or the written poem itself. Please copy from book you have. Or maybe not—it is, after all, copyrighted work, and was just published six months before this interview.]

SR: Beautiful. Just beautiful.

AWA: I'm so glad you like it.

SR: I do. And the illustrations! Are there any others you'd like to share?

AWA: Anything you choose, I'll be happy to read.

BH: Why don't you read "The Mifflinger Sea" since it's the title poem, and maybe you can explain a little your form of nonsense as descriptive, and if you care to, relate it back to "The Owl and the Pussy-Cat" or nonsense generally. Would that be something you might want to do?

AWA: Yeah. Fine.

SR: Here's "The Mifflinger Sea." That would be good.

AWA: [Min. 21:25-22:56] (reads poem) [Ditto my comment on "Hannah." (Tr.)]

SR: That's beautiful. Lovely. Charming. Do you paint or draw at all?

AWA: Oh, once in a while I paint.

SR: Because you paint such beautiful pictures with words, that I was wondering.

AWA: Thank you very much, that's very kind of you. I like to mix ink and watercolor.

The relation between those two media fascinates me. Ink has a much harder edge than water. But if you gentle them as you bring them together, the effect is better than either.

SR: Hm. I just thought that that might be the case. (recording paused)

BH: The parable of the sewer.

SR: Back again to the relationship to scriptures, I've heard that you have a very unique way of expressing this. Could you talk about that, the parable of the sewer?

BH: How did you interpret the parable of the sewer and apply it to that inward self-inquiry? How did you interpret the seeds landing on the different terrain, in relation to the different temperaments and relation to receiving the word?

AWA: Yes. Each of us, individually speaking, have a qualified difference before scripture itself. The whole issue of openness, you might say, gapes before that issue. What does it mean to be in a state of readiness to hear and read scripture? What is required of the reader and hearer of scripture, so that it cannot be said of them that they “have ears to hear, but don’t hear; and eyes to see, and don’t see.” On the contrary, they have ears to hear and listen; and eyes to see and look and perceive. What is that all about? There’s the difficulty of being capable of becoming taught, which is an inward condition that you cannot presume everyone who enters the classroom is coming in with it. (chuckles) No.

I was always impressed with the atmospheric of a classroom. It was never, ever repetitive. Every time I walked into the room, it was for the first time. And sometimes I’d have in mind something that I thought would be timely to bring forward, and as soon as I put my foot in the door, I said, “Drop it.” And we’d take off from here. So I never used any notes. My notion of teaching is not that it is a species of announcing, but I know that I’m not in the company of a large number with that view. But I can’t understand it in any other way, if we’re talking about teaching. The difficulty with teaching and learning is that on the one hand, there are those who are always seeking to learn, but there are those who while seeking to learn, remain incapable of becoming taught. That sounds pretty un-American, I know, because it has a hierarchical sense to it, but isn’t that the case? Can you think of in what sense or senses that’s false? (pause) Well, we have a college professor over there....

SR: And he has learned from you, so....

BH: Well, now, this isn't *my* history that we're doing! But Allan, because we've kind of come around this circle a couple times, let's go back to the parable, let's stick to that parable of the sewer. So you can remember the parable, right?

AWA: Yeah.

BH: Why don't you tell the parable, and then take the different terrains in which the seeds are sown, and explain how the first three types *are* incapable of learning, even though they may very well *seek* to be informed. So maybe we could start, and you could just tell us the parable, and then let's take each step in turn.

SR: I'm interested in it, because I'm not familiar with it.

BH: She'd like to hear the parable.

AWA: The parable of the sewer is about the way seed cast by the one who sews, falls.

On the one hand, it falls by the wayside, and the birds of the air come and gobble it up. Then it also falls among rocks and stony places, which don't give it enough soil in which to establish itself. It also falls where it's able to root itself, but unable to sustain itself. There's something terribly sad about that, at least to me. But there's also where the seed falls on what is called good ground, and there it establishes itself and flourishes. If I haven't misunderstood what Jesus was trying to teach, what is described in that parable of the sewer is states of readiness. And to be *really* ready is fairly rare. It's a pity, but.... There is the condition of seeking to learn, but being incapable of becoming taught.

MH: Would you relate that to seed cast on rocky ground, then? Is that the one in the parable that you would....

AWA: You could take any of them farther and say where it also falls simply by the wayside, where there's virtually no soil at all. Dreadful, isn't it?

SR: Uh-huh.

AWA: But I've always had the feeling, whereas my classes, mercifully I think, mostly paid attention when I spoke, but I used to think that maybe no more than 3% of them really grasped what I was driving at.

SR: But even if you reached 3%, I think that's....

AWA: Not too bad!

SR: That's not bad! (laughter) Really.

AWA: But Bruce, for instance, and Mary, both, are shining examples.

SR: That's what I was just thinking, just exactly that. Here they are. I mean, clearly you touched them and reached them, and here they are.

BH: Many students—the illustrations you admired, were from one of his students. He had another, Howard Mueller, who taught here for several years in the Philosophy and Religion Department. Many, many, many. Many, many, many.

SR: So the seeds that you sewed, some flourished.

BH: Although my life might be better described as the one that comes up with all the thickets, the seeds that fall among the thickets and thorns. (laughs)

AWA: He's pulling our legs. Bruce and Mary both are the rare examples of true seriousness, which is very rare.

SR: I feel that. That's marvelous.

AWA: It *is* marvelous. To me it's an *enormous* nourishment.

SR: Well, it looks like it's a mutual nourishment. (recording paused) Continuing to think about particularly pivotal or salient moments in your life, can you share any others?

AWA: Yes, let us stay with this violin story.

BH: Could you tell the story [again], because she didn't have the tape on.

AWA: This is about an event in England—my father had just come back from Switzerland, and he brought with him a violin that a young man had given him to sell for him, for the young man, because he knew that my father was very well-known among merchants of musical instruments and what not. My father was a very fine musician, and his father before him. His father before him, the poor baby was still in the crib, had to sleep with his fingers pried apart with corks so that he would be able to reach, as he continued growing older, tenths, instead of just the octave. But my father brought this violin back from Switzerland for this chap who wanted my father to sell it. I asked my father to buy it for me, because I played it, and it had such a beautiful tone. I know that the master craftsman doesn't complain about his tools, but there is a difference in your tools. Some tools are adequate, and some aren't. And no amount of all that moralization is going to make the tool better or worse, it's just the case. But my father was preoccupied with getting things together to come over here—it was just a day or two short of leaving England for here. I don't know whether he heard me. But I didn't want to make a nuisance of myself, so I didn't ask him again. I just left it alone. But, I don't think I was ever meant to spend most of my life in music, in any case. So something deep in me was not put off by his apparent *un*interest in

my concern. He was altogether preoccupied with finishing up packing and all the rest of it to come over here. But that was a case of a pivotal moment in my development, because if he had bought that violin for me, I would have practiced my head right off, because it was such a *lovely* instrument, *beautiful* violin. But I don't think I was ever, with reference to the higher governance, I don't think that I was ever meant to have it. I was never meant to spent my life primarily as a musician anyway. So everything worked out.

SR: Everything apparently did work out, and here we are on the day before your eighty-seventh birthday, listening to some of these wonderful recollections, as well as interpretations of what did transpire. And I'm so happy that you are sharing this, as will [be] the people who listen and read the transcript and listen to your words, because they will be shared.

AWA: Remarkable. (recording paused)

SR: Please share with us another pivotal event, after you were in England and you came for the first time to California.

AWA: I asked my father to speak to the manager of a very large cattle company here in San Diego County.

BH: Temecula Valley?

AWA: Temecula, yes. I asked my father to ask the manager of this ongoing cattle operation if I could ride—that is to say, if I could drive cattle. The manager, being a friend of my father's, readily accepted that—not exactly a persipificatious saint. (laughter) I remember the first day, when I mounted the horse, as soon as I put my foot in the stirrup, the horse took off. So you can imagine how I landed on

the ground. So one of the men, who was employed to drive cattle there, came over to me and said, “Well now look, this won’t happen if you turn the stirrup this way and you put your foot in going backwards, rather than forward, and then you can just bring yourself right over.” So I did that, and I fortunately did go clear over. It taught me a big lesson, and from then on I have never mounted a horse without turning the stirrup around. It was a pivotal lesson, and a timely one.

BH: Tell us how they had you riding all day.

AWA: Yes, they had me riding for eleven hours. I developed a large blister on my calf.

Didn’t faze them one little bit. The following day, I had to ride again.

SR: Oh boy!

AWA: I learned a lot from that encounter.

SR: Sounds like you didn’t follow the pathway to going on to being a cattle driver cowboy!

AWA: No.

BH: Tell the story about your first morning at the mess hall.

AWA: Oh yes, about 5:30 in the morning I walked in with some of the other cow punchers. And there was on the table about this high up, a pile of scrambled eggs. So we were all eating this, and they wolfed down the whole business, and I was left alone. And the cook came out and said, “What the hell are you doing here?!” I said, “Well, I haven’t quite finished.” “Well dang it, finish!” It was the first time I’d ever been in the company of chaps like this. The cook was angry with me. “Why the hell can’t you keep up with these people?!”

That's one of the strange things about my life, speaking chronologically. I have gone through a lot of disparate experiences—more so than you would expect. But maybe with respect to higher governance, there was a reason for that. I'm not sure. It was a strange feature of my life. Born in New Zealand, and leaving when I was four, for Australia, and living in Australia for three years, and then to England and living in England until I came over here four years after that in '36. Strange odyssey.

SR: That's very interesting. When I was a little girl, my favorite book was a book called *Susan Who Lives in Australia with All of Her Paraphernalia*. (laughter)

AWA: Isn't that lovely?!

SR: I can remember the illustrations with the kangaroos, and I was fascinated by it. I still have not been to Australia, but want to go. Did you remember enjoying being in Australia, or do you have any sense of....

AWA: Well, I left there rather young. I left New Zealand, my birthplace, when I was four, and moved to Australia where I lived for three years, and from there over to England where I grew up.

SR: Oh, there was something that I think Bruce mentioned about when you were in England, about a park and swans?

AWA: Oh, yes, yes. I was fortunate enough to live across one of the main highways across from Gunnersbury Park, which had this rather large small lake. My favorite bird, the swan, was always swimming around with that air that they have. Swans are fantastic in the way that they bear themselves. And I was always absolutely totally fascinated by the swans. And I would go after school over, as

fast as I could get across the street, to the park, to watch them. They had a strange habit which fascinated me. There was a little bridge in the park, and the swans often left the small lake and traveled under the bridge to some other water area. The behavior of them totally fascinated me, because two or three of them would swim abreast. Every once in a while, while they were swimming, one would turn around like this and grab the other one by the neck and hold. And the one that was being held didn't seem to find this annoying. And then after a while, the one that was doing the grabbing let go and turned back [unclear]. And this absolutely fascinated me. I used to love to watch this nonsense. There was something about it that was magical. Why didn't the one who was nabbed make a fuss? I couldn't answer that question. It was strange. The one that was doing the nabbing was *very* accurate. And the one that was nabbed didn't seem to be put out by this. And I was unable to satisfy myself that I could account for this behavior. So after school I beat it over to the park as fast as I could so that I could see these babies again.

That's one of the beauties of London, is a number of parks, as you know.

SR: That's why I mentioned Gramercy Park, because I've been to London, and that's one of the wonderful things that we tried to emulate a little bit in New York with one little park! No, actually, we have Central Park as well, which is really quite beautiful. But it was emulating the parks in London, just such a wonderful.... It helps the city.

AWA: It does. It does—very, very much.

SR: Well, since you love lambs so much, I'm sure you remember Sheep Meadow in Central Park. Sheep Meadow was the beautiful area where actually by the time that we were all there, there were no sheep. But years ago, there were, and they kept this area right in the middle of Manhattan, for sheep to graze. But then, no more. But they still call it Sheep Meadow. Parks are wonderful.

AWA: Aren't they?

SR: Yes. I very, very much have enjoyed sharing this morning and our lunchtime together, and with Mary and Bruce and you as well.

AWA: Well, you're very kind. Speaking for myself, I'm so happy to have met you.

SR: Well, thank you. It's very, very mutual. I know that San Diego State University will be very happy that you shared this time with everyone.

[END OF INTERVIEW]