PRESERVING MEMORY: NEWARK AND RUTGERS
IN THE 1960’S AND 1970’S

An Interview with

JANE CHEPICH

Conducted by

Gilbert Cohen

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GILBERT COHEN: This is December 20, 1990. This is Gil Cohen. I’m meeting with Jane Chepich in her home in Summit, New Jersey, and we’ve been talking here. Well, in order to start off like I’ve been setting up most of these interviews, what the Newark campus was like. You were an undergraduate there in 1966 starting?

JANE CHEPICH: Yes, that’s correct. Mm-hmm.

COHEN: How would you describe the old Rector Street campus?

CHEPICH: At the time I came, there were the new buildings of Conklin and Boyden were ready for classes in 1966. And Ackerson Hall was just being dedicated. On Rector Street there was still chemistry, the mailroom, the theater arts department, and the art department. My classes—I was an evening student at University College. So the classes, most of the classes were scattered. We had classes at 103 Washington Street. We had classes at 18 Washington Place, which at that point was the Graduate School of Business as it was called in those days. The Campus Center was just starting to be built at that point. I remember that because I began work as a senior clerk stenographer to Marvin Greenberg, who at that point was the assistant vice president on the campus. And one of his duties was the responsibility for the building phases. And I remember going up to the Campus Center to meet with the director to talk about the plans and all this construction, all this mud and bricks and mortar being strewn over the street.

COHEN: You said the director. What director?

CHEPICH: I cannot remember her name. It was a woman at that point.

COHEN: Director of what?

CHEPICH: Of the Campus Center—of the Campus Center to be.

COHEN: What was it like working…well, involved in the planning of it?

CHEPICH: It was rather exciting because when I was first interviewed, one of the things that I remember vividly was they had this model of what the future campus was going to look like. And they brought it out, and they said, And this is going to be where our gymnasium’s going to be for the students. And this is where we’re going to have our administrative building. And, you know, we’re going to build a math building over here, and then an arts and sciences classroom and faculty offices building. And, you know, I looked at it; and being pretty naïve at that point, I said, “Oh, gee, this is great.” You know I mean I’m going to be here during this building phase. And, you know, about two years later I sort of laughed because we’re still looking at the same
model, and things have really not progressed that fast. You know the gymnasium was nowhere going to be built yet. And the administrative services building never came off because we moved into 15 Washington Street. But it was, I think, very exciting period in the history of the university, of how the Newark campus became a center, a real center, in the City of Newark instead of being scattered in all these buildings, some of which we were renting, some of which were becoming really dilapidated. And to see a unity flowing on the campus because of the buildings coming together and also the students coming together. In the beginning, you know, we would have to go from 103 Washington Street down to 18. So, you know, there was a lot of trooping of students along the streets of Newark. And when the campus finally did become built and centralized, then we were all there, and I think it helped students to interrelate with each other because you had time to sit in the lounge and talk to people. You had time to be outside in the corridors and talk to your fellow classmates or other people; where before you were running down streets from one place to another.

COHEN: And you were at University College?

CHEPICH: Yes.

COHEN: So most of the interaction was done, as far as students were concerned, was in the evening.

CHEPICH: Yes. Right. I mean, you know, in between classes. Unless you got involved in some of the organizations.

COHEN: That model, if you can recall—[Laughter] How does that model compare, well, let’s say now to what’s there now?

CHEPICH: I think the people had a lot of vision because I remember Mr. Talbott saying, “We are going to have housing for graduate and undergraduate students. And this is where we’re going to be placing it.” Which is in the place where the housing is now, which is between King Blvd and University Avenue. And they had talked about closing off the street and buying parcels of land. But, I mean, it’s taken over 25 years for that. And I’m sure they were speaking about even before I came. And I think the people on the Newark campus had a lot of vision. I’m not sure if the people in New Brunswick did.

COHEN: That’s an interesting point. Could you expand on that a little bit?

CHEPICH: I think there were times…. Well, there’s always been this I would like to say competition between the New Brunswick and the Newark campus for resources and for recognition. And I think there’s been…. I know when we came, when I came to the campus, we felt we were the stepchild of the New Brunswick campus. And they would, you know, give us a tidbit here and there. But we’re not really dedicated to unifying us or making us a real center for learning. And I think that changed in the seventies and the eighties when we did an awful lot of building on the Newark campus. And we’ve done building now. But I think we’re again seeing that cycle again where we seem to be more of a stepchild, and we’re not really getting the resources that we need to continue what we have started to build on the Newark campus.
COHEN: Who were the— In the beginning you were talking about the vision of the campus. Who are the—at least in your experience—who are the main visionaries?

CHEPICH: I was about to say that Mr. Malcolm Talbott was definitely a visionary of what the Newark campus should be for the students and for the faculty and the staff. And also Mr. Greenberg. I think they made a big push. I think Mr. Talbott, who had his influence in the community, both politically, religiously, and socially, with the leaders of Newark, had convinced them that this is what Newark needed to serve the students and the community. And the only way to do this was to have a building program so people could be together in one place.

COHEN: You said politically and religiously and—I forget your third thing.

CHEPICH: Socially.

COHEN: Socially. What contacts did he have? Do you remember what organizations or people or…?

CHEPICH: He had contacts. He knew the mayor. He was on firsthand terms with the councilmen. People at the Newark Museum. He belonged to the Episcopal Church in Newark on Broad Street; so he was connected with the religious leaders of all denominations. He ran a schedule from seven o’clock in the morning to 12 midnight every day, and on weekends it was almost the same thing, of either meetings or social events to promote the university and to serve the community. He was very involved with setting up the Committee of Concern after the riots occurred in Newark.

COHEN: I remember that, mentioning that, yes.

CHEPICH: And I can see the gentleman, but I cannot remember his name, who was also the co-chairman of that Committee of Concern with Mr. Talbott. He was a black gentleman. And he loved Newark, and he loved the university. And he did his best to promote both.

COHEN: Yes. Let me get back to it a little later. I’d like to maybe talk a little bit more about Malcolm Talbott. I want to go back to…What were your perceptions of Rutgers in Newark at the time that you were enrolled?

CHEPICH: I enrolled at the university because I wanted to continue my education after high school. And I went to Katharine Gibbs Secretarial School for a year before I came to the university. And one of the benefits, of course, is the free tuition, which was mentioned by Mr. Roger O’Connor, who had come to Katharine Gibbs to speak on employment opportunities at the university.

COHEN: Oh. Mm-hmm.

CHEPICH: And since my parents could not afford to send me to college, one of my goals was to obtain education. And so when I interviewed with Mr. Greenberg and he said to me, “Well, did
you know that, you know, there was a Rutgers University here?” I said, “Oh, yes. I knew.” I mean I had scouted this out. I mean, you know, I was already to go. He was quite surprised. He said, “I didn’t know….” I said, “Well, sure. I read about you in the paper and everything.” You know. And so as soon as I became employed, I immediately enrolled for classes.

COHEN: Mm-hmm. Did you consider any other schools, colleges for—

CHEPICH: No, because Rutgers was convenient for me because I was taking the bus, and I could go to class, take the bus home at night. And everything was fine. So it just worked out very well.

COHEN: Anything else in that early period? Any vivid recollections of events, buildings, plans, failures, successes, embarrassments, victories? [Laughter]

CHEPICH: Well, we all laughed because I worked at 53 Washington Street, which was the converted Y Building.

COHEN: Mm-hmm. Yes.

CHEPICH: And we had a swimming pool in the basement, which was for the physical education people.

COHEN: A small swimming pool.

CHEPICH: Right. And we used to laugh in the summer then because down by the swimming pool was the mailroom. So everybody would wander down to the mailroom to see who was swimming in the pool. Or, you know, if it was really hot, we would jump and say, “Going down to the mailroom. We’ll be back in a couple of hours.” And we’d go swimming for a while, you know.

COHEN: This is staff members?

CHEPICH: Yes.

COHEN: Who were working there.

CHEPICH: Yes. Right.

COHEN: Okay.

CHEPICH: I think also at that period, the university was small enough so people felt a family atmosphere, that people really cared. I remember also we used to have summer hours because not all the offices had air conditioning. So we would only work until four o’clock in the summer, and they would let us go.

COHEN: This is ’66, is it?
CHEPICH: Yes. Uh-huh. Mm-hmm.

COHEN: Yes.

CHEPICH: Let’s see, what else is at that point? I can’t remember anything else right off that comes to mind.

COHEN: You’ve been explaining about the general campus and buildings and so on. It caused a big flap on the campus as far as design, as far as everybody else was concerned, was the Smith Hall business. Smith Hall and the concern about the pollution in Smith Hall.

CHEPICH: Mm-hmm.

COHEN: And I was wondering, what were your perceptions at the time about what was going on there? And how did you feel about it? And your fellow students and fellow employees, if you can.

CHEPICH: Well, I could never understand why they had put the Institute of Animal Behavior on the fourth floor because of just, you know, what could happen with any kind of leakage or pollution or…. I mean as far as I’m concerned, I thought that was always a stupid design, and I still think it is.

COHEN: Did you think that before the building was built? Or at the time that they first opened up? Or did that sort of occur to you as an afterthought?

CHEPICH: I think that occurred as an afterthought when all the problems started to occur.

COHEN: Yes, yes.

CHEPICH: Of course they had a problem with flooding in that building all the time, too.

COHEN: I don’t know about that.

CHEPICH: Oh, yes, because it’s built over an underground river, which also has caused problems with the foundation.

COHEN: I didn’t know that.

CHEPICH: Yes. So every time it really rained, the water level would come up, which is why they always had all the flooding in the basement down there.

COHEN: It was a high water table.
CHEPICH: Mm-hmm. Which is another thing I never really understood, why the architect decided to build that building on that piece of ground when they knew that that would occur. Or maybe they didn’t know. I don’t know.

COHEN: They’d take test borings and test the water table from above.

CHEPICH: Now one of the other things that I have always thought about our buildings—and I know that other people shared my opinion—was that we could never understand why they didn’t do underground parking, especially under the plaza or under the buildings that they were building so that we wouldn’t be in the problem situation we are right now. And that was suggested many times. But it was always shot down by the central administration.

COHEN: My understanding about that is that it was too expensive. It was considered, but the cost would have been prohibitive.

CHEPICH: But it would have saved us millions of dollars in the long run for what we have now have to pay for a piece of land in Newark to get a parking lot.

COHEN: I’m sure you’re absolutely right. I guess at the time they didn’t have that kind of money. I think that’s what I’ve been told.

CHEPICH: Oh, I think they had the money. I think they didn’t want to spend it on Newark.

COHEN: Oh!

CHEPICH: And such.

COHEN: The administration.

CHEPICH: Yes.

COHEN: Oh, I see. No, that’s….

CHEPICH: I mean I think they were being shortsighted. I think they did have the money. And even if they didn’t have the whole amount, I think they, you know, even if they did a few buildings, they would have saved in the long run.

COHEN: The watershed event was after the establishment of the campus. In 1967, July of ’67, were the Newark riots, which of course was a major.. for the campus, for the city, for the state, and it was national event, part of the whole national picture. Were you personally affected in any way at the time?

CHEPICH: I think everybody was personally affected. I don’t think you could avoid what was happening in the City of Newark because you worked there for one thing. But I vividly remember when the riots first started and we had to leave the city by six o’clock because they were opening all the bridges. So you had to be out of the city by six.
COHEN: That was the first day? Or was it the—

CHEPICH: I believe that was the second and third days and over the weekend. They were isolating the city. So you had to be, you could come in at a certain hour—I think they opened the bridges at six for people to come into work—and you had to be out by six. Being at 53, we were a little more isolated from what I would consider, you know, what was going on on Springfield Avenue. But we would be getting reports either from the radio or from people who were coming in. I also remember sitting at my typewriter. I believe that was on a Friday afternoon. And someone coming in and saying to me, “Well, the National Guard has arrived. And they are coming down Broad Street. And they have their bayonets fixed.” And I said, “Oh, well, this sounds very interesting here. I don’t know if I really want to stay around.” And I remember coming in after the weekend that Monday morning, and I guess being very young, you know, one does not really think that anything’s going to happen to yourself. And you’re sort of naïve about any kind of violence or….

COHEN: Youth is immortal, huh?

CHEPICH: Yes. And I remember getting off the bus, which was at Washington Park there, and walking through the park. And it was deserted. The street was deserted. And I’m walking down the street and I’m saying to myself, Jane, do you realize that somebody could be on a roof and, you know, take a potshot at you? But you, you know, you’re so dedicated to going to work. I mean the university was open. And we did not close. I mean life went on. And when I got to my desk, I said, you know, “Well, I’m not really sure I’m being too smart here coming over here.” But, you know, this is my first job. I mean, you know, I was going to go to work. And what was funny that day was that a faculty member—in fact it was Leo Troy—decided he needed something typed, and there was no one on the center campus who could type it. And Mr. Talbott volunteered our services to do this typing. So we were there late that night and still had to get out of the city. But we were typing Dr. Troy’s paper or whatever he needed. And, yes, it was really a time when Mr. Talbott and Mr. Greenberg became very involved with trying to keep the campus safe and also to help the city quell the riots by starting dialog on what could be done to help the people concerned.

COHEN: Do you know what dialog was…or have any ideas or memories or anything?

CHEPICH: Basically getting the business leaders involved from the city, and committing them to equality in hiring, to education of the youth, of black youth. And I think this was probably the opening wedge in the door for more minority recruitment for at least Rutgers-Newark. Because at that point, we still had an admissions system which was a waiting list for candidates, students that—yes. And, you know, mostly white students. And really blacks did not have the opportunity, at least through the standard admission process, of being accepted. And I think the riots started to change that.

COHEN: Do you recall where the meetings were held?
CHEPICH: They were held—Mr. Talbott had an apartment on Mount Prospect Avenue. A lot of the meetings were held at the university apartment. Many were held at the Chamber of Commerce. There were meetings at City Hall at that point. I remember one of the meetings, and Sally, I think, can vouch for this, where Mr. Talbott came in, and they said, “Well, we’re having a meeting tonight. And I want you to cook.” [Laughter] And we looked at him, and we laughed. Cook!? We don’t know how to cook! Forget it. You know, no way. Order out. Which they eventually did because we did not cook. [Laughter]

COHEN: That’s quite a little story. Who were some of the—do you recall any of the people who were involved, names of people who were involved in these discussions?

CHEPICH: I can’t remember right offhand. I’m sure, you know, if I saw some of the names in the people. The name Oliver comes back, and I think that’s the co-chairperson. And I cannot remember his last name, which is terrible.

COHEN: And other people were involved. So there was quite a bit of involvement at that level.

CHEPICH: Yes. Mm-hmm. High involvement.

COHEN: What did you and the other students feel or think about, their opinions about the causes of the riots?

CHEPICH: I think, at least for myself, that the people had a legitimate gripe about the way they were being treated and not having access to equal opportunity. I don’t think that I liked—The other students liked the action they had to take in order for that concern and problem to be brought to the forefront. I don’t think anyone wants to see firearms and the hurting of their own people, as far other people while trying to promote their cause. I think it did get the attention of the city and the nation. And I think it did focus us on what their concerns were and on helping them achieve what every American should have a right to at this point.

COHEN: Did it come as a surprise that it happened this way?

CHEPICH: I guess to me, yes, because I guess I never knew that it was boiling that close to the surface, that it was that bad. But I guess, you know, being white and maybe being sheltered too much, made us not realize the plight of other people or what people are going through if one has never experienced it.

COHEN: Alright so about the riots. How did the riots affect, you know, influence your perceptions about or expectations about the future of the campus?

CHEPICH: I think, being in Newark, we were going to serve the people of Newark by opening our doors to the youth that had been disadvantaged and who were probably, some of them, very good college material. But because they didn’t have the proper schooling or, you know, were too poor to pursue their education, that we were going to give them an opportunity. And I think that that purpose was fostered by Mr. Talbott and Mr. Greenberg. And I think it still is our purpose today.
COHEN: Did you feel that way then or did this—is this sort of an….

CHEPICH: An afterthought?

COHEN: An afterthought, an interpretation that you then…or understanding that you came to years later? What were you thinking at the time?

CHEPICH: I guess I have always been for equality. So I guess when the whole concept was fostered and put forward, I agreed with it. And being in that office and seeing what had happened to the city and what we felt we could do, the university felt we could do, I think I agreed with it, even then.

COHEN: You know, to what extent would you say your thinking was influenced by the people you worked with, you worked for? On the other hand, how much of it do you think you just brought to it on your own? If there’s anything that we bring to these situations on our own.

CHEPICH: I think my eyes were opened a lot by what had happened to the city. And what the university could do. I think probably…I would say that Mr. Talbott had a great influence and the thinking that he fostered had on me. And I would say that, you know, I probably also believing in equality for people, you know. But I would think that Mr. Talbott’s influence had a great deal to do with what my thinking, you know, finally was focused on.

COHEN: Where were you living at the time?

CHEPICH: I was living in Kearny, which is right across the river, about ten minutes.

COHEN: Yes, sure. A hop, skip, and a jump.

CHEPICH: Mm-hmm.

COHEN: How do you think the riots affected—the immediate effect—on, and, well, let’s say into the early seventies, student recruitment either white students, black students, other minority students.

CHEPICH: I think there was an all-out effort to get minority students to come to the university. And help them, especially the establishment of the Equal Opportunity Fund. And setting up—a lot of scholarships started for students.

COHEN: How did it affect the recruitment of white students from—either from the city or from outside the city? How do you think—what was the short and long term effect, do you think?

CHEPICH: Well, I don’t think that Rutgers-Newark ever had the description of going for what I consider elite white students. I think any students who really had money, or came from families with money, went to New Brunswick. I think the student population in Newark has always been what I would consider lower middle-class or middle middle-class people. And people who’ve
also been poor and working themselves through. I mean even the student population in the evening, these were people who were struggling to make a living and were trying to better themselves to get a promotion or to broaden themselves as individuals in order to make a better living for their family.

COHEN: I have to remember that you were a University College student, and that is really a different population.

CHEPICH: …population all together. Yes.

COHEN: Let’s get into that, yes. I was asking, though, how did it affect recruitment of specifically white students. I was thinking of the day school, College of Arts and Sciences. Let’s make it a two-part question. Let’s go to University College.

CHEPICH: Okay.

COHEN: That’s what your closest experience as a student.

CHEPICH: Mm-hmm.

COHEN: How did it affect recruitment of that part of the population, the students who are going to the University College, after the riots, talking about…. Well, let’s say, starting with the white students. How did it affect their recruitment of white students in University College?

CHEPICH: Well, I think they always had a strong base for recruiting white students in University College. First of all because Newark was so convenient, there were a lot of people coming down from the companies right there. In fact we had a lot of people who even commuted in from New York because the tuition was so low.

COHEN: Is that so?

CHEPICH: Oh, yes. I had a lot of classmates who were from New York City. Who would come over on the PATH train and take the subway up and, you know….

COHEN: Has that trend, has that continued through the seventies—did it continue through the seventies? Is that still a fact today?

CHEPICH: I don’t know about today.

COHEN: Yes, yes.

CHEPICH: Because I’m not close to the situation.

COHEN: But in those days.

CHEPICH: Oh, yes.
COHEN: So you’re talking about late sixties—

CHEPICH: And early seventies.

COHEN: And early seventies.

CHEPICH: Oh, yes. A lot of people from the city who came over.

COHEN: How about the recruitment, again, at University College of black students and other minorities after the riots?

CHEPICH: I think after the riots, I think there was an active recruitment from companies. Because I know the admissions director would go out and go to Prudential, go to Bell Telephone, and they would actually, you know, target minority people. And the companies would have them come to a luncheon or whatever to recruit them. And I would say that by 1970’s we started having a very big population of minority students in our classes.

COHEN: How about the recruitment of—again the same two basic groups of students, white students, for the College of Arts and Sciences day school? How is that impacted by the riots? Compared to University College, let’s say.

CHEPICH: I think there was twofold, very interesting. We didn’t have a waiting list anymore. And I think part of that was a lot of parents were afraid to send their children to the Newark campus because of what had occurred. And in a way, I guess, it was maybe good that we didn’t have a waiting list because we started to accept some students and especially minority students. The seats were open for them to come in and take advantage of what we had to offer.

COHEN: Yes, yes. So there was a recruitment of black students and other minority students?

CHEPICH: I think it really started heavily because we were involved with the board of education at that point, trying to identify students in high schools who, you know, could come on campus. We had a program. I think it was Upward Bound, which also started in the sixties, late sixties.

COHEN: Before the riots?

CHEPICH: No, I think it started after the riots.

COHEN: Who was involved in that on the faculty and in the administration?

CHEPICH: People in academic foundations department.

COHEN: So that was the academic foundations department?
CHEPICH: Yes. And that’s when they started to have—to bring minority students to the campus in the summer. And they started to run programs for them to bring them either up to speed for college courses or even allow them to take some college courses during the summer to get a head start.

COHEN: Let me give you one of these what-if questions.

CHEPICH: Okay.

COHEN: If the riots had never occurred, how do you think the campus would have developed?

CHEPICH: I think it probably would have remained a mostly white campus. I think the riots opened a lot of people’s eyes. I know that the minority students wouldn’t have had the advantage to come up.

COHEN: Okay. So the riots occurred in 1967, July. And then in February of 1969, just a few years later, we have the occupation of Conklin Hall by the Black Organization of Students members. Okay. Students are being enrolled, but obviously things are happening. What conditions existed, in your opinion existed at the time, you know, to encourage such protests and militant action of that nature?

CHEPICH: I think one of the problems that was occurring was, yes, we were enrolling the students. Yes, we were giving them the opportunity to pursue a college education. But I think our retention of those students was really very poor. We weren’t giving them enough of the support system they needed in basic English, basic math. And some of the students we weren’t willing to take a chance on. I mean they were probably intellectually, you know, could handle the subjects, but maybe had made a poor showing in the SAT’s. You know just really weren’t getting the advantage of a little extra push, a little extra help. And I think that was frustrating to the students, the black students, who were there, and other minority students, that, yes, we were taking them in, but, you know, it was this lip service that, yes, we’ve taken them in, they’re admitted, and they’re going to classes, but they’re, you know, but what was the flunk-out rate? Was it 50 percent, was it 75 percent? I mean who was really—how many were really staying to make it through the four years? What kind of help are we giving them? And was there, you know, even enough money available in scholarships to support them if they weren’t making that perfect grade average?

COHEN: Now in the demands that BOS made at the time—I have document in front of me to refresh my memory….

CHEPICH: Refresh my memory.

COHEN: I’m trying to refresh my own memory, too. Is that admissions was—

CHEPICH: Was the key.

COHEN: —sort of the central demand.
CHEPICH: And still being too hard.

COHEN: And you seem to be saying that retention, the questions of retention and advisement and remediation and so on. Could you expand on that? What would you say about that?

CHEPICH: I still think that they felt admissions, that the standards were being too high.

COHEN: Admission standards were being.

CHEPICH: Were still too high for people to come in at that point. You know from what I remember. I think I’m going to have to read see what they actually said.

COHEN: Yes.

CHEPICH: At that point. And I think they were looking at the percentage of, you know, people who were being admitted. You know are we giving lip service again? Or are you going to allow a larger population to come in compared to what the white percentage was?

COHEN: What are the conditions that you think existed on the campus which would have driven people to have taken that step?

CHEPICH: I still don’t think there was a lot of understanding among students who were not minorities of, you know, interaction and interpersonal relationships. I think people were sort of still segregated. You know people had not made friends with each other. You know it was like one culture which was entirely different from another culture was not blending, not being a melting pot, which I think has happened on the campus to an extraordinary degree.

COHEN: You think so?

CHEPICH: I think at this point, I think we’re seeing…again, everything is a cycle. I think we’re going back to some of that segregation again. Not only on the campus, but nationwide. And our campus is a reflection of what’s going on in the nation.

COHEN: Sure, sure. At that time, how much blatant racism was there before the takeover or at the time of the takeover?

CHEPICH: I don’t know if it was blatant. I mean I don’t remember seeing anything that is really blatant. I mean I know from the evening students, I mean you certainly had your hardcore conservatives who had, you know, nothing nice to say. And then you had your liberals who, you know, were all for.

COHEN: How did they convey the attitudes of the evening students someone… Oh, let’s say the white students in the evening to the white students during the day. Could you make any distinction in terms of maturity or anything like that?
CHEPICH: I don’t think I can at this point. I think, as I said, there were some hardcore people in both areas.

COHEN: Sure. Do you recall the closing of the campus on well the date I have here is Friday, March 14, 1969? Do you recall that?

CHEPICH: I recall that was…..

COHEN: It was after an incident on the campus. There was a bonfire in front of the Dana Library

CHEPICH: Mm-hmm.

COHEN: And then there were some words, and the campus …there were demand that the campus be closed, I think, from the BOS students.

CHEPICH: Students.

COHEN: Do you recall that episode?

CHEPICH: I remember the bonfire, but I don’t remember the whole thing about closing. I do remember the students coming to Mr. Talbott’s office.

COHEN: Oh, you do have a recollection of that…

CHEPICH: Oh, yes.

COHEN: How did that go?

CHEPICH: Well, we were informed that they were on their way. And Mr. Talbott came out and said that he did not want any violence to occur, that we should treat everybody with respect. You know voices were not to be raised. That he was here to have dialog with the students. And he did not want campus security present as such. And basically that, you know, he felt that he could handle the situation. And when they arrived at the office, they immediately went to Mr. Talbott’s office, and some of them stood on his desk.

COHEN: This was after Conklin Hall had been vacated.

CHEPICH: Yes. Mm-hmm. And he continued to talk. He always talked. And he persuaded them to go into our conference room and to sit down at the table and to have some kind of dialog on what was going on and what he could do and his perception of it. And I thought, you know, all in all, he handled it quite well.

COHEN: You were present?

CHEPICH: Yes.
COHEN: At this confrontation?

CHEPICH: Yes, yes. I was sitting at my desk.

COHEN: You were sitting at your desk?

CHEPICH: I was sitting at my desk, yes!

COHEN: Do you remember the names of the students who were involved?

CHEPICH: No, I don’t, unfortunately. No.

COHEN: And how did that resolve itself?

CHEPICH: Whatever they— After the meeting, they all left peacefully.

COHEN: They all left peacefully?

CHEPICH: Yes. There was no problem. It was exciting times you know, I mean…

COHEN: And after it was over, what were your feelings about that whole thing?

CHEPICH: I was not too thrilled about people standing on other people’s desks. But, you know, I assumed that they were upset enough. I think I thought that they had made their point. They knew where the university was coming from. And, you know, they listened at least. And they were willing to leave peacefully. So obviously something had been communicated on both sides, and had sunken in. I also remember them taking the building over at Conklin, especially the telephone area.

COHEN: Oh, yes, let’s go into that. I mean the recollections that you have of the actual takeover.

CHEPICH: I remember we received word that the building had been taken over. Mr. Talbott tried to communicate with them about their taking the building. And they’d taken over the telephone area. I remember we were calling back and forth to New Brunswick. And I was on with—I can’t remember who I was calling—but during the conversation, one of the students came in on the line to let us know that they were there. And, you know, whoever I was with, we both chuckled and told them that that was fine. They could listen to our conversation because we weren’t really saying anything of import at that point. And the student got off the line. So, you know, I guess we were in the forefront of people taking over buildings.

COHEN: Yes.

CHEPICH: Across the country anyway at that point.
COHEN: That wasn’t a typical situation.

CHEPICH: Yes.

COHEN: But it was a…. Yes.

CHEPICH: Not like it was to become later.

COHEN: What other recollections do you have of the actual takeover? And then the negotiations between the takeover and the students’ departure?

CHEPICH: I do not have really much recollection after that but most of it was dialog which I was not privy to on what was going on.

COHEN: Yes, yes. After the takeover, do you have any feelings on how it affected relations among black and white students on the campus?

CHEPICH: I think the white students were more aware of what specifically the black students’ problems were.

COHEN: Mm-hmm.

CHEPICH: And I don’t know if they sympathized with them, but I think there was more of an understanding and more of an acceptance of where the black students were coming from. I don’t know if they could relate to the experience, but they could certainly say, well, if I was in that situation, I would probably be just as angry as they were that I didn’t get this kind of education, I’m not being admitted, you know. I am not getting this opportunity.

COHEN: Right. Oh, were there any fears at the time of involvement of armed force, police or otherwise, in getting the students out?

CHEPICH: No, because we had always, from the vice president down, we always talked about nonviolence. That we could not use force. We did not think it was necessary. We did not want to provoke it. We did not want to make this situation worse.

COHEN: Yes.

CHEPICH: As long as we continued talking.

COHEN: Do you recall what was going on between the Newark administration and the New Brunswick administration at that time? Do you have any recollections of that?

CHEPICH: Oh, we were always in very close contact with the New Brunswick central administration. We were telling them what was happening with the situation, how we were planning to approach it, what we were going to do. And I think they concurred with us about not
using any kind of force, to continue the dialog. And to see what we could do for the students and what the university could promise them and what they could not promise.

COHEN: Who was calling the shots in the administration? That is, the two administrations? [Break in recording] So, we were talking about the communication between the Newark administration and the New Brunswick administration on this.

CHEPICH: Right. And it was basically Mr. Talbott talking to Dr. Gross because you have to remember that the organization at this point was very—still very simple. And, you know, you could call up and get right into the president’s office. He didn’t have to go through ten vice presidents or whatever [laughter] to get to the top person.

COHEN: Yes.

CHEPICH: And of course they were coordinating also with the public information office on how to handle the press who of course was always around. And basically it was just the people, you know, Mr. Talbott and Dr. Gross, and whoever his advisors were at that point with Dr. Gross.

COHEN: Do you think that the—what effect do you think that this need to consult with the New Brunswick administration had on the process of negotiations?

CHEPICH: Well, I think Mr. Talbott had to do a lot of explaining to them, because I don’t think they could envision the problem we were having since they’re not in a city like Newark. I don’t know what their minority population was in New Brunswick, but I’m sure it was nowhere near what we had. And it was probably difficult for them to understand where the students were coming from because they probably thought we were doing a good job. And they didn’t realize the concerns and maybe the anger that students had. So I think it was a learning process for them, too. And I think it opened up them to commit themselves to helping the disadvantaged students not only in Newark but also in Camden.

COHEN: New Brunswick was always…

CHEPICH: Well, that’s true because New Brunswick finally at the opening of Livingston College, which was basically in the forefront of a minority student college.

COHEN: Yes. I always forget. What was the date of that again?

CHEPICH: I can’t remember. Early seventies that would be. Had to be.

COHEN: Yes, yes. Did you have any sense of what way, if any, the takeover of Conklin Hall and the events on campus affected teacher performance?

CHEPICH: No. Because my teachers were very steady through that period, you know.

COHEN: How about student behavior in class? Did you get a sense there?
CHEPICH: Well, I don’t know. I can’t say for the day students because, again, the night students are a very dedicated group of individuals. Come hell or high water, they’re going to get to class, they’re going to do their homework, and they’re going to graduate. [Laughter]

COHEN: So they obviously weren’t messing around.

CHEPICH: No. I mean you know wind, fire, storm, hail, they were going to be there. [Laughter]

COHEN: How do you think the takeover could have been avoided?

CHEPICH: I don’t know if it could have been avoided, because sometimes people have to make a dramatic statement in order to gain people’s attention. Because a lot of times you talk to people, but they are not really listening to what you’re saying or cannot relate to the problems you’re talking about. And sometimes to get their attention, this is what you have to do.

COHEN: Right. Now what do you think is—what do you think is the historical significance of the takeover in terms of, you know, the campus and the university?

CHEPICH: I think it opened the door even wider for minority students to come in and to receive the proper help they need in order to be successful in college.

COHEN: Now how has it shaped, do you think, the university—or how has it influenced the shape of the university?

CHEPICH: I think it has made, at least Newark campus, a real melting pot for the cultures of Newark, which now are black and Hispanic. And I think has given white students and even better understanding of people of all cultures; not only from Newark, but a lot of foreign students, which have are now in the campus.

COHEN: Oh, that’s….

CHEPICH: Yes. I think now that we’ve really opened the floodgates to students from China and Indian students. I think we are a diverse campus. Probably one of the most diverse campuses in the United States.

COHEN: That’s probably true. Okay. The next category is these are heavy times. How did the war, the Vietnam War, affect you as a student?

CHEPICH: Well, one way certainly it affected me was there were an awful lot of bomb scares.

COHEN: Really!

CHEPICH: And it was very difficult to get through a class without ending out on the street in the evening. And it also affected me where one semester we had to go to pass/fail because we couldn’t get enough classes in. They couldn’t even give us grades at that point. We’d be going to
take exams, and we would be interrupted by the various bomb scares because of the Vietnam War.

COHEN: And how did it affect you as an employee?

CHEPICH: It was again a time of student demonstrations on the campus. And I guess one of the first times that really hit home was I answered the phone, and someone said that there was a bomb in the building.

COHEN: What building was that?

CHEPICH: My building!

COHEN: Fifty-three?

CHEPICH: Fifty-three, yes. And, you know, I mean it was sort of scary. I mean you don’t really know if you should take it seriously or not take it seriously. And, you know, I believe that everybody has a right to protest. But I think when it started to affect other people’s lives, you’re carrying it a little bit too far.

COHEN: Was a bomb ever found in your experience?

CHEPICH: No, a bomb was never found—thank God! No. But I remember in the evening we used to laugh because sometimes we were beginning to really wonder, and a lot of the officials at the university, what was really a person protesting and another maybe he just didn’t want to go to exams. Who had us out on the street. So it became, after a while, that we sort of had to screen which ones we really thought were real and which ones weren’t. And a lot of them were, you know, we just figured crank calls, and people were not evacuated from buildings.

COHEN: Because it used to be at night we would get evacuated from the building, and they’d have to go and do whatever search or whatever they did. And we’d all be standing out on the street. And then we’d say ah! Let’s go down to the, you know, let’s go down to the local bar down here, and, you know, have class down there instead.

CHEPICH: Who was calling the shots on these evacuations?

COHEN: Campus patrol at that point.

CHEPICH: Not the city.

COHEN: Mm-hmm. Do you remember the campus was— there was a suspension of classes in 1970 after the killing of the Kent State students and the invasion of Cambodia. What recollections do you have of that episode?

CHEPICH: I think students as well as staff were shocked by the events that had happened at Kent State. The invasion of Cambodia really stirred a lot of feelings. And I think it was wise at
that time to suspend classes because there was so much emotion on both sides. And the university officials thought that a cooling-down period was needed.

COHEN: You said emotions on both sides?

CHEPICH: Well, I think there were…there certainly—and again, I’m referring to evening students—even to myself not understanding all the ramifications of what was going on over there; was either you go in and you either win the war and you do it right or you pull out. And I remember just taking also a graduate course where we were studying the era of Nixon. And of course we got very heavily into the Vietnam situation.

COHEN: Yes. Right.

CHEPICH: And, you know, the way to win the war was for us to really pack up our stuff and leave.

COHEN: How did the professors teaching the courses where the subject matter was history or related to what was going on, how were they dealing with that? Without necessarily getting into specific names. But how was that dealt with?

CHEPICH: Either of two ways: One was the professor would let you—would present both sides of the question, whether we should be there or we should not be there. And some of my other professors said, “You read the material. You form your opinion, and you come back, and you argue to me on where you think we should be.” So I think the professors were handling it very evenly. I did not have any professor ever come and advocate one way or another whether we should be in Vietnam or we should not be in Vietnam. At least not in the classroom.

COHEN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

CHEPICH: If they talked about their own opinion, it was outside of the classroom or after class.

COHEN: Outside of the classroom or after class, what seems to have been the consensus, if there was a consensus. I mean there was a drift among the faculty as far as this.

CHEPICH: Again we’re talking about evening classes.

COHEN: Yes. Sure.

CHEPICH: Okay? I think their consensus was that we should go in and win it.

COHEN: Is that right?

CHEPICH: Yes. You know. Why are we messing around? And then the consensus was that this was a political war: We weren’t really there to win it. And if that’s what we were going to do, then, you know, we’re losing lives for a cause that’s not really right.
COHEN: Do you recall the antiwar campus demonstrations that were from 1968 to 1971? Like the spillovers from demonstrations in Military Park? Do you recall police on campus? Any recollections of that?

CHEPICH: I don’t remember police on campus because, again, we were at 53, which is away from the main campus. I do remember people protesting in front of our building with signs, because of course we were administration. So they were again making their point to us of what was occurring and their feelings. No, I can’t remember police on campus at that point.

COHEN: Okay. I have a few questions about, you know, teaching on the Newark campus. And from your vantage point as a student at University College and as a graduate student, too. And how would you characterize the quality of the teaching in general?

CHEPICH: I think the quality is excellent. I think the Newark teachers that I had were dedicated professionals. And they loved to teach—most of them. I mean you always have your few who, you know, who are really, really boring and were the reading the same notes from, you know, from ten years ago. But we had other people who were very stimulating. And I know I loved to go to class. I mean I could sit there for hours and be involved in the discussion of whatever they were teaching. And I think they had a real feeling for the students. I mean I had many professors who invited us to their homes afterwards, after classes ended or even during class, to continue discussions or just to get to know your fellow classmates. So I mean I know I received an excellent education there. And I think most people who go to the campus and really apply themselves do.

COHEN: What were some of your happiest learning experiences if you can recall?

CHEPICH: My happiest— I had a Russian history teacher who loved to debate. And I would in fact just go in and try to, you know, ask him questions. And we would really sometimes get into a heated discussion about Russian history, since I am Ukrainian and had, you know, many stories from my mother and father coming over. Not my mother and father, my grandparents coming over. And I mean I just loved that class. And even my graduate classes. I did work with Dr. Kimball on the graduate level, the whole era of Roosevelt.

COHEN: Oh, that must have been interesting.

CHEPICH: And I think it’s just that the dedication of the evening students and are social activities. And we were all in the same boat, working all day. People had families that they still had to take care of but were putting in hours getting their homework done and doing their papers. It was a real feeling of pride when you got that diploma that you had made it.

COHEN: Was there much social life among the students, anyone, you know, visiting some of the homes, going out with each other, marrying each other?

CHEPICH: I would say yes because I met my husband at University College.

COHEN: Oh! Mm-hmm.
CHEPICH: And we went together five years before we got married. But we were fellow classmates in two classes. There were many activities. We also had a student newspaper.

COHEN: Wait a minute, evening?

CHEPICH: Yes, we had a University College—it was called Night Watch.

COHEN: Oh, that’s right..? But then it was discontinued, wasn’t it?

CHEPICH: When it merged with the Observer.

COHEN: Oh, it did merge.

CHEPICH: Mm-hmm.

COHEN: That was something I dropped or something. Okay.

CHEPICH: Okay. Because I was one of the editors on the newspaper.

COHEN: Okay. I was asking about, you know, pleasant experiences. What were some of the less thrilling teaching experiences. [Laughter]

CHEPICH: People would bore you out of your mind.

COHEN: Was there much of it?

CHEPICH: No, not really. I mean I think—I can only remember maybe one class that, you know.... I mean, you know, people were really falling asleep. And I think that was another thing. They used to have classes on Friday nights.

COHEN: Friday nights!

CHEPICH: Oh, it was, I thought, one of the best nights to have a class because it was the end of the week. You went to class, you sort of could relax unless you were having a test. And you would gain this knowledge and still stay awake. And, you know, like nine o’clock or ten o’clock when we’d finish class, everybody would just go out and party because it was the beginning of the weekend. You didn’t have to go to work the next day.

COHEN: I never would’ve thought of that.

CHEPICH: Oh, yes. And I mean we hated when they decided not to have Friday night classes anymore.

COHEN: But if it was so much fun, why did they discontinue Friday night classes.
CHEPICH: Because the faculty didn’t want to come in and teach [laughter] Fridays.

COHEN: The obvious answer.

CHEPICH: Right. But there were many times, of course, there was some poor student who had probably worked all weekend who would end up snoring in the back of the class. The teacher would just leave them be. And that was fine with us too. But I remember one of my teachers, we would play the American—teaching early American history; and he decided we should play war and each of us have a kingdom to see how decisions are made during war, and who was the diplomat and who was the, you know…. It was a very interesting class because he would give us a certain situation: Germany is invading Italy, you know, what would you do? Blah blah blah. And it came down to the end, and we supposedly had a conference of the head leaders. And he said, “Well….“ He said to me—I was the last ruler he was going to consult with. He said, “Now what will you do? Will you do war or peace?” And I said, “I’ll do peace.” And he said, “This is unbelievable.” He said, “In most other classes,” he said, “now the classes are packed, everyone had always gone to war. And this is the only class who has voted for peace.”

COHEN: In this particular scenario.

CHEPICH: Mm-hmm. So that you know….

COHEN: Who were some of the outstanding teachers?

CHEPICH: Some of the outstanding teachers. For English I had Margaret Kelly. She was excellent, for English composition. She would give you also a lot of history. And she’s still working at the university.

COHEN: Is she still employed at—

CHEPICH: With Dean Stoffel [sp] as a part-timer.

COHEN: Oh.

CHEPICH: As a wages of labor person. But she has been trying for years to get the University College Honor Society to be recognized by Phi Beta Kappa to start a chapter.

COHEN: Oh, I thought there was one chapter on campus that would include the—

CHEPICH: No, it does not.

COHEN: Is that right?

CHEPICH: It does not, no.

COHEN: Oh, I didn’t know that. I hadn’t heard that at all. Who else stands out in your mind in the University College or the graduate school?
CHEPICH: Yes, there was John Chapman who was the brother of Harry Chapman. And he taught the history of the city, which was very interesting, in the evening. I cannot remember the name of my Russian teacher; he was very good. I had a lot of excellent teachers.

COHEN: Yes. Okay. What thoughts do you have—Well, the whole question of the use of student evaluations in tenure decisions have come up time and time again. Can you express any feelings about that? Like the utility of such evaluations?

CHEPICH: Well, I’m, you know, they use it for tenure supposedly. But I don’t think it plays a big part in the tenure process. And I’m not really sure if the faculty member really looks at the evaluation seriously. I don’t think administration does because if they did, they would certainly pay attention to what the student is saying in the evaluation of certain people or of the course in general, and changes would be made. And I don’t see changes being made in some courses that should be made.

COHEN: What do you feel about the opportunity to evaluate the faculty?

CHEPICH: Oh, I think the opportunity should always be there. I think that that is the only way…I think the faculty member should get feedback because they should know how they are presenting their material, if they are getting the material across, and just what the student thinks of them as a teacher, as a professional, and as a human being.

COHEN: I want to move on to curriculum.

CHEPICH: Uh-huh. That’s an interesting—

COHEN: Subject matter.

CHEPICH: Yes, subject matter, yes.

COHEN: By the way. I’m getting down to the real—

CHEPICH: The nitty-gritty.

COHEN: The nitty-gritty. [Laughter]

CHEPICH: Of the changes, yes.

COHEN: Okay. Alright. Maybe this is too general a question, but I’ll ask it anyway. How would you characterize the general curriculum?

CHEPICH: The curriculum then and now? Because the curriculum changed.

COHEN: Yes. Let’s say—good question. Its evolution. The evolution of the curriculum from let’s say late sixties when you started to—
CHEPICH: Right. Through the seventies when we had all the changes.

COHEN: Yes. What happened to the curriculum generally speaking? If you can analyze it. It’s such a big thing.

CHEPICH: Well, I guess, in my opinion anyway, when I started, there was a definite core curriculum which everybody had to take: a certain amount of English, a certain amount of math, foreign language.

COHEN: You’re talking about University College.

CHEPICH: University College, yes. Social studies, humanities.

COHEN: Right, right.

CHEPICH: With the advent of the Vietnam War and the various protests that were going on, one of the outcomes was a change in the curriculum. And with people really protesting taking all of this what they called hardcore curriculum, the amount of credits you had to take, and the lessening of the foreign language requirement, you know. Substituting the math maybe for science, the science for the math. I think it was a real loss to the students for the core curriculum to go. I think it was a good basis. I think we are seeing the core curriculum coming back again with the changes that the faculty have started to institute in the last couple of years. I think, in my opinion, it made it too soft for students. I don’t think we—we were not demanding the rigors of a college education.

COHEN: What was the link between the war in Vietnam and the changes in the curriculum? Why would the war affect the core curriculum?

CHEPICH: The curriculum. I cannot remember all the reasons for that. I know it occurred, and I’m trying to—my memory does not, it’s not being jogged on the evolution of why that occurred at that point. Do you have some recollection that you could….

COHEN: Well, I…..

CHEPICH: The linkage we have there.

COHEN: The linkage. Well, the linkage that I’m thinking of, and maybe if I put it in the form of a question, the terms that were abroad at the time were relevant and meaningful. Right?

CHEPICH: Of what was….

COHEN: Right. So what was relevant and meaningful at that time in your recollection? What was considered relevant and meaningful?

CHEPICH: For a—
COHEN: At the time that the war was going on.

CHEPICH: I’m not really…. I can’t really remember. It doesn’t—nothing is clicking at this point.

COHEN: Yes.

CHEPICH: And, you know, we also got into a lot of courses we wanted pass/fail. Courses you could take where you could indicate whether you wanted a pass/fail, too, also came into practice.

COHEN: Now how did pass/fail come into practice? What gave rise to that?

CHEPICH: That was also during the Vietnam War.

COHEN: Yes.

CHEPICH: That, you know, again I’m trying to remember why the students did not want to take…or did not feel that the core courses were relevant. Why they wanted a broader spectrum. And I think they also wanted more control over what they could take. It was like, you know, I’m coming to college, and there are certain things that I want to take. And I can’t take this because I’m taking the core requirement. And then I’ve got to take my major. So I can’t, you know, really do what I—or study what I really want to study.

COHEN: Yes.

CHEPICH: You know. I don’t know. I would have to really read back into what was going on at that point.

COHEN: I was just wondering, you know, what your recollection was of the time because you were in the middle of it.

CHEPICH: Mm-hmm. I was grandfathered into the old. Whatever curriculum you came in….

COHEN: Oh, I see. So you had to stick to your original….

CHEPICH: And if you had come in after whatever, 1970, the early seventies, then you went to the new curriculum which was more lenient.

COHEN: Yes. I see. Well, that’s a significant development. How would you characterize the changes in the curriculum in your major—history?

CHEPICH: Again, I was grandfathered. So I was under the old curriculum. So I really did not experience the new curriculum that much. And in graduate school, of course, it’s a whole different area anyway.
COHEN: What was the core in history at that time?

CHEPICH: Well, you had to take western civ, and you had to take—which was for a year. You also had to take a year of American as a core. And then you had...well, you had your basic core. You had to take two years of English, you had to take a language for a year, you had to take a year of math, and you had certain sociology course you had to take, certain psychology course you had to take. And then they had very organized, in those days anyway, they could send you a sheet of what courses would be rotated in the five-year period. So you could really plan out everything that you needed to take.

COHEN: Did University College have the same divisional arrangement that the College of Arts and Sciences had, with the humanities, the social sciences, and the natural sciences, where the students were required to take courses across that spectrum? Did you have to take a lab course or anything?

CHEPICH: Yes. You had to take a biology course or a geology course.

COHEN: Mm-hmm. From your vantage point, in those years if you could do it over, what changes would you like to see in the curriculum now? Or what would you have liked to have seen?

CHEPICH: In the curriculum now? I think they should go back to the core. I think it was a good basis. I think everybody started from the same point. And then you could go off to whatever area of interest. But I think it just made you a broader individual because you were being opened up to these really basic areas of knowledge, which a lot of students are not—did not—receive.

COHEN: Yes, yes. Well, what was the effect of race, class, and gender, diversity, the demand for diversity, on the curriculum during that period? How did you see that impacting on the curriculum?

CHEPICH: I did not.... Really in the University College, it did not impact as such. I think during the day there was much more impact with the beginning of the black studies department, with the beginning of the women’s studies, the urban education department also.

COHEN: Urban education or urban studies?

CHEPICH: Urban studies, urban studies department.

COHEN: Yes. Mm-hmm.

CHEPICH: That really did not spill over into the evening students; again, because the departments were very small. They did not have faculty members who could do both day and evening. And we really did not have the resources where you could hire a lot of people. In fact, sometimes I look back, and I say, well, I really should go back and take a course in black history and that culture because that was very interesting to me. And I did not have that opportunity as a student. Or even a women’s study course.
COHEN: Mm-hmm. Yes. Okay. Let me just stop this for a second. [Break in recording] Okay. We’re moving to the general area of administration, and I guess my question is, let’s start from the top. What can you say—how would you compare, if you can, the administrations of Mason Gross and Edward Bloustein as presidents of the university? What insights? What experiences have you had?

CHEPICH: I think one has to remember that the university under Mason Gross was small. And what I mean by small was that people felt more of a family atmosphere under Mason Gross. Times were simpler then. One could call up and reach Dr. Gross in his office. There was not a lot of upper organizational structure. And people could talk to each other. Everyone—and I think myself included—had a very warm feeling toward Dr. Gross. He was a very pleasant person. He was always very laid back. He was concerned about the students and about the teaching quality of the university. He always had a good rapport with everyone. He left at the time that I would say that the university was jumping off into its building program, both in New Brunswick and the Newark campus, and I’m sure to some extent on the Camden campus. I think people really hated to see him go. I think Dr. Bloustein was an individual with much energy. He was always on the go. He also had a vision for the university. And I think he started working on that vision when he came, of making this a center for excellence. And I think it took a long time because you had the building going on. We started to increase our enrollment. I think there was a lot of stresses and strains going on with the Vietnam War. The handling of the students in New Brunswick sometimes with police involvement, which Dr. Bloustein didn’t really want; but sometimes it was necessary, I think, just in order to keep some kind of control.

I think after a while, when it really became necessary for funds to be raised for the university in order to continue our excellence, that Dr. Bloustein was not involved with the everyday administration of the university. It was much harder to call his office and to talk to him directly. It was now an organizational structure was beginning to form.

COHEN: This is something you had to deal with in your capacity.

CHEPICH: Mm-hmm. Well, I also was involved because I was there in the office when Dr. Bloustein asked Mr. Talbott to take the position of director of the Rutgers Foundation, to really found it and to raise money. And I think I could honestly say at this point the reason he asked Mr. Talbott to do that was he felt that Mr. Talbott was too strong an individual. And that it was a political move.

COHEN: You’re leading into my next question, I guess.

CHEPICH: Oh.

COHEN: Yes. Is that why…I’m assuming that Talbott wanted the job as provost.

CHEPICH: Yes, he did.
COHEN: Okay. And why…. So you were just on it. I interrupted you, I’m sorry about that. Why didn’t Talbott get the job?

CHEPICH: He didn’t get the job because I think Dr. Bloustein saw him as a threat to his ability to govern the university because Mr. Talbott had many influential friends on the board of governors and board of trustees. He was well-known within the state and not just in the City of Newark, and had many political allies, people from the arts and other people socially. And he had a very strong reputation on the Newark campus. And I think that Dr. Bloustein coming in new did feel that he was a threat to him. And also Mr. Talbott had many political allies in the central administration because many people from the Newark campus had also gone down to central, Mr. Greenberg being one of them.

COHEN: Well, I’m obviously going to ask the first question: How was it working for Talbott? Well, you were working…you were reporting to Marvin Greenberg.

CHEPICH: That was his…. Well, when you say at that time, when I….

COHEN: Well….

CHEPICH: In ’66.

COHEN: Sixties and….

CHEPICH: No, I worked directly then for Mr. Talbott; I was his secretary. And probably after two years, ’69, ’70, I became Mr. Talbott’s secretary.

COHEN: Oh, did you become his secretary…then you were secretary before? Well, dating from the Conklin takeover? Or was that before or after? The takeover was in February ’69.

CHEPICH: I was not his secretary then because I remember that I was still working at the front desk. Probably then in ’70 I became his secretary.

COHEN: How was it working for him?

CHEPICH: It was probably one of the most exciting, interesting periods in my life because he was such an active man and involved in everything. I don’t think I would have met the people that I met, political people he knew, social people that he knew, the conferences he attended, the people who called him on the phone. As I said, his schedule ran from seven o’clock in the morning to 12 midnight. He worked on weekends. And he expected you to work just as hard. I was also pretty much his social director; I was taking care of his finances. I was out there buying gifts for people. And he was such a busy man that I even wrote his notes to his sister. [Laughter] And I remember one of his friends calling up, a woman friend, who[m I] had gone out and bought jewelry for for her birthday, called and said—she wanted to speak to him, but she wanted to thank me for picking out that lovely piece of jewelry. [Laughter] Which he knew that he had not done, you know. And at that point we also had the university apartments. So there were many
social affairs at the apartment. And dedications of buildings since we were into the building campaign. I mean there were people coming and going all the time.

COHEN: How was he as a boss?

CHEPICH: He was very demanding. In fact sometimes he drove you to frustration. It was, you know, either you loved him or hated him. And I remember plenty of times when I really hated him. I must admit that there were times he made me cry because I just could not fulfill whatever he was looking for. I just could not, you know, meet his expectations. And he demanded just as much from himself as he did of his staff.

COHEN: Do you recall, speak to the record, of any incidents such as that?

CHEPICH: I remember…well, I remember one time where he and Mr. Greenberg really got into a row. And they were in the office. I can’t remember what it was about. But I remember them yelling and screaming at each other. And they had to go to this meeting. And he said to me, “Call the taxi. Call the taxi!” So I called the taxi, and they both stomp out of the office. And they’re not talking to each other, and they walk down to the taxi. And they both got in on opposite sides. And I’m thinking, oh, my God! They’re going to this meeting, and they’re supposed to be talking at this meeting, but they’re not talking to each other, you know. God knows what’s going to go on. But I guess they made up on the way or whatever because everything turned out all right.

There was this one…Mr. Talbott was a very generous man. And he gave his money freely to many, many charities. And I remember this one time I had written out his checks for him. And he told me to deposit his check in the bank; I had to get him some money. And I knew he didn’t have any money. [Laughter] But he’s expecting to have money there for him when he was coming back. And of course they knew me at the bank very well. So I went over to the bank. So I went to this one teller, and she said, “He doesn’t have any money.” And I said, right. I’m like what am I going to do? He’s going to come back, and I don’t have this money, and he needs this money because he was going away. And I’m saying, oh, God! So I went to this other teller who didn’t really know me, and she cashed the check. [Laughter] And I ran back and gave him the money. And then of course Monday morning the bank was calling because he didn’t have any money.

He wanted to fit so much into his schedule, and it’s just impossible, you know. And it was like, well, you know, fit this person in. But then I couldn’t fit him in, and why didn’t you fit him in? And, you know, where was I going to fit him into? And, you know, and the work was just, it was unbelievable.

COHEN: I was going to ask about that meeting that he and Greenberg went to. Was it an important meeting? What was the—can you recall what the issue—

CHEPICH: I can’t recall what the issue was, but they were going to talk about it. I mean I’m sure that—

COHEN: You saw the fireworks …[laughter]
CHEPICH: And I thought, oh, goodness. But I was saying before that he was a great believer in equality. And he would not have the university join the Essex Club because they did have a ruling that people who were of Jewish descent could not attend the club.

COHEN: Right.

CHEPICH: And he said very directly to them that if my assistant vice president, Mr. Greenberg, cannot come to that, the university would not join. And they did change their rules.

COHEN: That’s an interesting thing. So how would you, you know, sort of sum up, evaluate, Malcolm Talbott’s contributions to the university, to the university as a whole, to the university in Newark?

CHEPICH: I would say that he was always an advocate of the student, and he was always an advocate of the underdog. And I think he was a man of vision, and he knew what the Newark campus could become. And I think he laid the foundation for that, along with several other people from the campus. And he worked for that in whatever capacity. And when he was asked by Dr. Bloustein to become the director of the foundation, he felt that he would take this responsibility and do it to the best of his ability. And that he would not cause friction in not taking it because he would work for the university as a whole in order for its goals to be accomplished. Because at that time there were many people who were ready to rally to his cause, to stand up to Dr. Bloustein and tell them not to take him from the Newark campus.

COHEN: Marvin Greenberg was the assistant vice president.

CHEPICH: Yes. Mm-hmm.

COHEN: Before he went to New Brunswick as vice president—

CHEPICH: For budgeting.

COHEN: For budgeting. How would you assess his contributions to the Newark campus?

CHEPICH: I would also say that he was a man of vision. He was very closely involved with getting the construction of the Newark campus underway and heading in the direction that both he and Mr. Talbott thought was necessary for the university in Newark. Both of them always had visions of housing on the Newark campus for students.

COHEN: Now you worked for Greenberg first.

CHEPICH: Yes. Mm-hmm.

COHEN: And then you were working for Mr. Talbott.

CHEPICH: Mr. Talbott. Mm-hmm.
COHEN: How was Greenberg as a boss?

CHEPICH: Well, Greenberg was less demanding then Mr. Talbott. He was more even-tempered. And he is what I would consider…. [End of Tape #1]

COHEN: We were talking about…budgets and services and stuff. Was the commitment on the part of Talbott and Greenberg to the budgets, was this something that they just sort of picked up on their own? Or were they pushed by the directors? How do you think this came about?

CHEPICH: I think they came on it themselves because they really wanted to establish the university in Newark as a point of a good education and had the services to get that education to the students and to the community, and that we had to fight for every penny from New Brunswick. And, you know, we were being disadvantaged. And the only way to go in there was to keep fighting and to wear them down when they wouldn’t give us the money that we needed in order to serve our students.

COHEN: What are your recollections of the various directors of the Dana Library at times as far as their, oh, I guess, impact or contact with administration, at least from your vantage point?

CHEPICH: I guess the only person that really stood out in my mind was Shaughnessy, because he seemed also very dynamic about trying to get his views across. I remember him coming to a lot of meetings and trying to get more for the library.

COHEN: Mm-hmm. Okay. Any other topics that you want to get into?

CHEPICH: Well, I think the vision for the buildings and everything had, as I said, came a lot from Mr. Greenberg and Mr. Talbott. But the landscaping of the university, I would have to attribute to Dr. Greenfield, who worked very closely with Mr. Talbott. And maybe did not always agree with him about everything. But really wanted to beautify the campus. And if it was not for him, I’m sure that a lot of the trees and some of the plants that we have would not be in place today. And unfortunately some of the stuff has been ripped down for the new construction.

COHEN: Yes, yes. Your vision of the Dana Library.

CHEPICH: Yes. Also the Newark Science Center.

COHEN: Yes. Right. That’s right.

CHEPICH: Some of those trees that were there and everything, which is unfortunate.

COHEN: Yes, yes. Anything else that….

CHEPICH: Not right off hand I can’t think of anything.

COHEN: Anything we should be going back to that maybe we should have picked up?
CHEPICH: I think these students…. One of the things that I have observed is that the student newspapers in the sixties and seventies were what I would consider a real newspaper. That the students went out, got the facts, and wrote hard-hitting articles.

COHEN: Sixties and seventies.

CHEPICH: Yes. I don’t think I have the respect for the paper today that I did then. A lot of it is—it’s not completely accurate. I think it was much more accurate during the sixties and the seventies about what was happening on campus. There was a real dedication of the students to put out the best newspaper.

COHEN: Why do you think that change has come about? That’s interesting.

CHEPICH: I don’t know. I’m not really sure. I don’t know if it’s, again, with the education, people have received in high school and are now receiving in college. I think the students wrote better then than they do now. It’s just something that has struck me over the years.

COHEN: Mm-hmm. How about student governance, the Student Government Association?

CHEPICH: I think that they were much more forceful in the sixties and seventies than they are today. I think they were really dedicated. I think if they had an issue, they could come and speak to the administration in an intelligent way. They always had things laid out and were looking for alternatives. They were well prepared. They were really involved with the campus. And in those days it was much harder to be involved because we were a commuting campus. With the dorms, I think, the atmosphere of the campus is going to change again. It’s probably changing even right now.

COHEN: What is that saying about the relation of the student body then, what you just said?

CHEPICH: I have—and I think as everyone has said—that, you know, you have to have a good base, and I don’t think the base that is being offered in our grammar schools and high schools is the same or is as good as it was in the, I would say, fifties, sixties, seventies.

COHEN: You’re attributing it to the preparation they had…?

CHEPICH: Yes.

COHEN: Preparation.

CHEPICH: That they have before they even get here.

COHEN: Do you have any sense then of….

CHEPICH: And I also—
COHEN: I’m sorry.

CHEPICH: And I was also going to say I think we also went through the phase which was the me generation, concerned only about themselves and not really concerned about the social issues in the later period here.

COHEN: But if the preparation is poor, is that saying that the admissions standards now are lower than they were in the sixties and seventies?

CHEPICH: I think—

COHEN: I don’t know.

CHEPICH: The admissions standards, well, we are raising our standards again. As I said, I think we’re going back into a cycle where when I first came there the standards were very high, and it was hard to get in; people wanted to get in. There was a waiting list to get in.

COHEN: Yes, yes.

CHEPICH: To the Newark campus.

COHEN: Yes, you were saying that before.

CHEPICH: And then we opened our doors, and I think our standards were lowered to allow more minority people to come in to give them the opportunity because of being disadvantaged. And I think we went through the whole phase in the seventies and eighties where standards were not as high. The curriculum changed. I think the curriculum became a little softer than it was before. And I think again we’re starting to change back into our core system. I think the nation again is demanding more of the students and more of what’s being taught in the grammar and high schools.

COHEN: Yes. It’s difficult to try to make generalizations on this. Any wrap-up statement? You want a general….

CHEPICH: I’m glad I’ve worked at the university, and it’s given me an opportunity to receive my B.A. and M.A. degree. It’s an atmosphere of openness at times and an atmosphere of closedness at times. And the people have been great to work for and to go to school there. It’s been a good time for me. It’s been a good part of my life.

COHEN: Okay. Jane Chepich, thank you very, very much.

CHEPICH: You’re welcome.

[End of Interview]

Edited by Gideon Thompson