Millie Almy, Ph.D.

REFLECTIONS ON EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: 1934-1994

With an Introduction by
William D. Rohwer, Jr.

Interviews Conducted by
Dorothy Stewart
in 1991

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ALMY, Millie (b. 1915) Educator


Family background; scholarship to Vassar College, 1932; nursery school teaching experiences: Chautauqua, Guidance Nursery School at Yale, Vassar Institute of Euthenics; WPA nursery schools, Lanham Act child care centers; graduate studies at Teachers College, Columbia University, 1944-1948; National Association for Nursery Education (NANE) in the 1950s; research and writing on Piaget, Anna Freud, early childhood intervention programs, Uganda Project; move to School of Education, UC Berkeley, 1972; Interdisciplinary Day Care and Child Development Project.

Interviewed 1991 by Dorothy Stewart for the Donated Oral History Collection.

Introduction by William D. Rohwer, Jr., Dean, School of Education, UC Berkeley.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

On behalf of future researchers, the Regional Oral History Office wishes to thank Dorothy Stewart for initiating and carrying out this oral history with Professor Emeritus Millie Almy.

For six years, off and on, Dorothy Stewart, working closely with Professor Almy, planned, interviewed, transcribed, edited, and prepared the final manuscript. She and Professor Almy present it herewith as a gift to the University of California and to researchers in the history of early childhood education everywhere. Professor Almy's papers are housed at Pacific Oaks College, 5 & 6 Westmoreland Place, Pasadena, CA, 91103.
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Interview History

This oral history of University of California, Berkeley, Professor Emerita Millie Almy was conducted by Dr. Dorothy Stewart, a former student. Five interview sessions were held in the dining room of Professor Almy’s home in the hills of Berkeley, California during the summer and fall of 1991. Student and Professor shared a lunch and an occasional glass of wine as Dr. Stewart asked Professor Almy about her life. Professor Almy purchased her home on Grizzly Peak Blvd. in the Berkeley hills in 1971 when she came to University of California, Berkeley. She continues to have a lively social life in her home in the hills as her former students frequently gather there.

The impetus for this oral history was primarily Dr. Stewart’s recognition that Professor Almy’s life story would prove of interest to historians of early education and child development. Dr. Stewart’s research for her own dissertation *Preschools and Politics: an Historical Study of Early Childhood Education in California* (1991) alerted her to the importance of maintaining historical records of the lives of early childhood pioneers such as Dr. Almy.

The interview sessions began with an overview session from which Dr. Stewart culled the questions she eventually asked Dr. Almy during specific interviews focused on specific time periods. Questions for each interview were given to Dr. Almy in advance so that she would have time to think about her response. The audio tapes of the interview were transcribed by Barbara Nakahara of the School of Education at University of California, Berkeley. The transcribed interviews were then edited and reedited by Dr. Almy and Dr. Stewart. Additional editing, proofreading and other work involved in getting the manuscript in order was done by Dorothy Adle, Gina Spiers, and Jennifer Bracco. In addition Willa Baum, Director of the Bancroft Library’s Regional Oral History Office provided technical assistance, advice, and in the end final efforts to complete the project.

Dorothy Stewart
Interviewer/Editor

June 1997
Introduction

I first met Millie Almy, I believe, in the spring of 1970 during the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association. At that meeting she recalls in this oral history, I "interviewed" her in connection with the possibility that she might join the faculty of the University of California at Berkeley. But the way I remember the conversation, she interviewed me about Berkeley.

During that academic year: 1969-70, I was serving as Acting Associate Dean for the School of Education. Despite this title, I was a junior member of the School faculty, having joined it five years earlier, immediately after completing my Ph.D. Millie, of course, had already attained a position of international renown for the significance of her contributions to the fields of child development and early childhood education. So, I was more autograph-seeker than interviewer when Ted Reller, then Dean of the School, asked me to meet with Millie and explore her possible interest in Berkeley.

As the time of our meeting approached, I was excited by the prospect of talking with someone whose work I deeply admired, but also apprehensive about meeting the challenge of persuading her of the virtues of joining our faculty. The School and the University badly needed Millie. During this period, early childhood education was of paramount concern in the world of policy as well as of research, but the School had virtually no presence in this field. Millie's appointment to the faculty would remedy this problem in a single stroke. To me, then, she held all the high cards.

Because of this, by the end of our conversation I was both pleased and surprised by my impression that Millie was actually interested in the possibility of a faculty position in the School. I even allowed myself to think maybe I'd been an effective spokesman for the University. Now, though, having read this oral history, I see that the outcome of our meeting was due instead to Millie's own long-standing desire to move to Berkeley.

That meeting was my first experience of one of the geniuses of Millie Almy—her matchless way of being simultaneously gracious, tenacious, ingenuous, and shrewd. In the years since then I have been impressed repeatedly by her ability to combine these characteristics in varying proportions to disarm, persuade, and convince others of the merits of her cause.

These qualities were plainly evident in her contributions to the work of a committee appointed by the California Assembly to provide advice about whether the public schools should create a program for four-year olds. Members of the committee held a variety of prominent positions in the field, including teachers as well as university researchers, and none was shy about debating fundamental convictions about the development and education of young children. As I was also a member of the committee, I had the opportunity to observe Millie's contributions. Steadily but unobtrusively, she laid out her positions on each issue the committee addressed. As she did so, the depth of her commitment to the welfare of young children and the authority of her knowledge of how to enhance it were inescapable. By the time we had completed our work, it was plain that all of us looked to Millie for the final analysis that led to our ultimate recommendations.

Millie's expertise and effectiveness were equally evident in her contributions to the School of Education and the University. Undoubtedly the best example of her achievements is her success in creating the Interdisciplinary Day Care and Child Development Project. She created this program to provide doctoral level professional
preparation in a diversity of specializations to those who aspired to work with young children. To achieve this kind of diversity of expertise, it was necessary for the program to be not only interdisciplinary, but also interdepartmental, a comparative rarity on the Berkeley campus. In her characteristic way, Millie succeeded in eliciting the participation and the sponsorship of the program by faculty from four separate campus departments. The program proved to be an excellent one that stood at the forefront of the field.

Millie Almy is a scholar of the first rank, a beloved teacher, and a professional of unsurpassed effectiveness. But that is not all: her company is unfailingly pleasurable. Thus it is that I am honored indeed to provide this introduction to her oral history.

Dean William D. Rohwer, Jr.
School of Education
University of California, Berkeley
July, 1994
I. INTRODUCTION: EARLY LIFE: 1915-1935

[Interview I: July 26, 1991, with Millie Almy]

Family and Farm Life

Stewart: This is an interview with Millie Almy, Professor Emerita at UC Berkeley. July 26, 1991. Today we’re going to talk about her family and her early life.

Millie, when were you born? When is your birth date?

Almy: My birthday is June 19, 1915.

Stewart: Where?

Almy: In a little town with a population of about five hundred called Clymer, New York. It was named after one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. It’s in the southwestern corner of the state near the border of Pennsylvania.

Mother: Edna Almira Wood

Almy: My mother, Edna Almira Wood, was from that same area. She was born in an even smaller town called Stedman.

Stewart: Can you tell me a little bit about her background?

Almy: Her father, Frank Wood, would have said that he was a store owner. At one point in his life he owned three or four different stores, including a shoe store, and a grocery store. He also ran a boarding house at Chautauqua Institution called Grey Gables. He was the one who gradually lost practically everything he had. Apparently there was a recession at some point. I found a letter recently from him to his mother-in-law telling how great his wife had been to see him through this terrible time that they had had. Mother’s family had aspirations and had lived much better than my father’s family, but didn’t achieve any more than Dad’s family did.

Stewart: How many children were in your mother’s family?

Almy: My mother had two brothers who were older than she, one of whom, Martin, died shortly before I was born. The other one, William, died considerably later. After my own grandmother died fairly young, Grandpa decided to remarry. He asked the two boys and Edna, which of two women he should marry. One of them was a woman who drove a beautiful span of horses and had quite a lot of money, and the other was Cora Jones. Cora had come from Indiana. She had been the housekeeper when my own grandmother was ill. The kids said, Cora, Cora by all means. And so, he married her. She was not pretty, but she was a fine person. And then she and he had a child, Jane, so there was another person in the family.
Stewart: When did they come to this country? What is your heritage?

Almy: It goes back as far as I'm able to figure, and it has been figured by many people, maybe not to the Mayflower, but certainly to the Revolution, and on all four sides.

If I had wished, I could be a Daughter of the Revolution. When I was in high school there was a writing contest on the topic of why I am an American. My father said, "You're an American because there was a glint in your father's eye" (laughter). I wrote a paper for the contest, but that wasn't the way I developed the paper.

My mother came from a large family. The parents were Calvin and Marsha Field. The girls all had names that rhymed: Mary Lucina, Axcie Almira, Marcia Amelia (my grandmother), Sylvia Adelia, Ettie Serena and twins, Eva Eliza, and Addie Louisa.

Stewart: What sort of effect do you think your mother's family had on your own development?

Almy: They had in many ways, an effect on me. The youngest ones, the twins, at different times, because they couldn't get along together, lived with us. Aunt Addie took me through the Bible. She studied it for years. She and I read it together. Aunt Axcie who was with us later and lived to be eighty-six, I think, was a lovely old lady and made me appreciative of older people. She used to come into the dining room and say, "I don't see how you see." She had cataracts and they couldn't do anything about them in those days. Now I understand how Aunt Axcie felt.

Stewart: What kind of childhood do you think your mother had?

Almy: I think she was pretty well indulged as a child, because she was enough younger than her brothers that they really looked after her. And she was a great favorite, obviously with my grandfather, because her mother died. I think she was twelve then.

Stewart: She was a school teacher wasn't she?

Almy: She taught in elementary school. She had a year of preparation after high school in a teacher training class. She taught in several of the communities around. She taught at Falconer, and perhaps in Jamestown. Eventually she came to teach in Clymer, which was where my father lived.

The story about that is, by then she was thirty, she'd been around awhile, and people kept saying to her, "Edna, you ought to meet Bert Almy." She thought, "Oh, that farmer." She was coaching a play, and somebody dropped out and they said they were going to get Bert Almy to take his place. She was reluctant to have him come. But of course she couldn't say so. So, he came and read through the play once and the next night he had the role down pat. She sort of changed her view, I think.
Stewart: Well, let's move to your father then, his family.

**Father: Bert Almy**

Almy: My father was born in the house where I was born. The house was built in 1840, and most of the time Almys lived in it. I don't think they built it. Grandpa Almy, whom I never saw, was a soldier in the Civil War, a farmer, and also a cabinet maker. I remember a desk that he had made with a cupboard on it that was very, very good. He was evidently a very good workman.

He had three brothers, all of whom I knew. They were all, I think, all of them in the Civil War. I still have two wool blankets, thin, cream-colored wool, stitched around the edge with red wool, which Grandpa took with him in the Civil War. I do my yoga exercises with them.

Stewart: What do you know of your father's childhood?

Almy: His mother died when he was sixteen. He had one sister, Florence, age eighteen at that time. Both he and his sister were very bright people. A lot of reading, a lot of making music, but not much money. I remember Dad's telling, that at Christmas time, if they got an orange in their stockings, it was a good Christmas. Many relatives of his Mother, the Brightmans, lived in nearby towns. From my impressions as a child, I think it was traditional to meet together and to go calling on each other. I always remember the annual reunions they had.

Stewart: What sort of family farm did they have?

Almy: It was a hundred acre farm. Supposedly a dairy farm. But not a big dairy farm. We had, I think, twelve or fourteen cows, and then chickens and pigs, that sort of thing. Livestock. We raised corn, oats, alfalfa and buckwheat to feed them.

When my father's mother died, he and his father kept house on the farm, and his sister went to a teacher training class. I remember hearing this, not from my father, but from my mother, that the faculty said his sister, Florence, was the brightest woman that they had had. However, she taught for only two years and then came back to the farm to help my father look after Grandpa. Dad also taught in a one room school, and also he taught down state for a year or two. He never had special preparation for teaching. In those days if you finished high school, you could get a certificate to teach, which is what he had.

Stewart: Is there anything in particular about your father's family or childhood that you think specially affected you?

Almy: I think the idea of achievement was very strong in his family, although few of them went to college. They were great readers and all the kids did well in school. So, the notion of high achievement was built in early. My father always expected me to get good grades. Now if I didn't, of course I always did, so he never had to do anything about that.
Almy: One of the stories they told about me, took place when I was in first grade, in what was called a union school, it included first grade through high school. My father was on the school board for years until he married my mother. Then, of course, when she began to teach, which she did when I was in second grade, he had to resign. The principal came into the first grade where I was working and he looked down at me, he was a friend of my family, and he said, "Millie, you're sort of behind on that, aren't you? Others are ahead of you." And I said, "Oh, yes. I'm just like my father. My mother says he's slow." Of course, what she meant was, that he was a much more deliberate person than she. She was high strung, and he was very calm and not easily upset.

Stewart: We know when they met, they met during the preparations for the play. So what developed after that?

Almy: Well, I'm not sure really, because for some reason that I never quite understood, they were married in March, and that seems unusual because you would have expected they would have waited until the end of the school year.

I expect that it was that my father was very eager. The local newspaper said that they had a "honeymoon going west," I think. What that meant was, that they went to the next larger town, which was Union City, and stayed in a hotel. And I know from their laughing about it that they had an argument, and my mother wanted to go home, or wanted to leave him. (Laughter.) She didn't, obviously.

I also know, which is kind of fun, that Mother did not want to have a child close to the time when she first could have had a child, so I wasn't born until fifteen months after the honeymoon. They were married in March of 1913, and I was born in June 1915. It was no question of a hurry-up marriage. (laughter.)

Stewart: What were the circumstances of your birth?

Almy: I was born at home. I was a large baby and my mother was a small woman, she was smaller than I. It was an extremely difficult birth. Two doctors were involved, and she was in bed for a long time. I remember her telling - that when the birth started the tree leaves were just coming out. But when she got up and was about again, she just couldn't believe how much growth there had been in the trees.

Several people were involved in the birth. There was, I think, the old general practitioner, Dr. McCray, whom we generally had, but then there was another doctor and a practical nurse or two. It was a difficult birth, and my father said, never again. There will be no more children. I asked him later on, years later after my mother died, "Didn't mother want another child?" And he said, "No." But I wasn't sure at that point which one it was that really didn't want another, but I think it was kind of a combination. So that's how I was an only child.

Stewart: Your mother was thirty-one?
Almy: She was thirty when she was married, and thirty-two when I was born.

Stewart: Let’s talk about your early childhood. Was it just your parents then, or did you have one of your aunts living with you?

Almy: The youngest aunts (the twins) came and went. Each of them had a house at the Chautauqua Institution. They rented out their houses in the summer and that was the way they made their living. They often came to live with us mostly during the summer, but never together. So, I would say they came and went.

Another influence was that my grandfather and step grandmother came to live with us for a year or two, after my mother went back to teaching. I was in second grade. When I was born, somebody gave my mother a baby book, and my Grandpa (who was always a salesman and would have been in advertising had he lived today) wrote in the book something to the effect that, "I was an angel sent from heaven to brighten five lives and then several thousand more." So there again, is some kind of achievement motive coming through my grandfather.

I always felt that Grandpa was crazy about me. In some of my memorabilia that I have lost, I had a letter from him, apparently in response to something I wrote him, saying he would be glad to sell me some chickens so that I could earn money from selling the eggs.

With the possible exception, of the time of the birth of my step aunt's only child, Edna, when I was five, I always felt I came from a very warm and loving family.

Maybe one of the influences that might be mentioned here, began when I was three. Mother and Dad were friends of the proprietor of the local hotel. He called them to say that he was going to send them someone who wanted his son to have the experience of working on a farm. He was a well-to-do attorney from Oil City, Pennsylvania, just across the state line from us. His son Judson, was about to go to Princeton.

He was probably fifteen or sixteen. He came and stayed one summer, everybody loved him. He had his saxophone with him, and he used to sit on the porch and play the saxophone. But he worked hard and his family was pleased with what happened. Then to my father's surprise, Judson wrote and said he wanted to come back for a second summer; so he was there for a second summer. He was extremely fond of me. For years he sent me books at Christmas time. He brought me a beautiful doll. So again, here's this contact with a wider world.

There are many funny stories from my childhood and I remember one from Judson's time with us. They were doing the haying and I was still having a nap. I woke up from my nap and there wasn't anything to do, and mother wasn’t around, so I put on my shoes. In those days we wore something I think was called a panty waist, your stockings fastened to it. I didn't put on any pants, I just put on my shoes and went out to find them. Then I remember mother said, "Judson said, 'Oh my Lord,' and ducked down into the load of hay so he couldn't see me."
Stewart: So you had on only your panty waist and some shoes?

Almy: Yes. So, that was one of the things that Judson remembered about me. But I also remember, and I don’t know what influence this had, that I slept in a child size brass bed. The posts had knobs at the top, that came off. When I unscrewed those knobs, which I often did, I liked to put my tongue inside. They tasted wonderful.

I've often thought of that, as an example of the ways preschool kids explore their environments. I don’t know whether you want me to go on with these stories. Some of these things get to be apocryphal.

Another thing that I remember, and I think it’s a little bit prophetic, my mother belonged to a club which was called the Twentieth Century Club. They read books and gave presentations on the books, and sometimes they studied musicians and sometimes they studied writers or artists. They always had a banquet once a year, and this particular time my mother was to be toastmistress for the banquet. She was going around the house practicing whatever she was going to say. That interested me no end. So, I went down to where my father was milking the cows, and I practiced being a toastmistress and giving my speech to the cows.

One night I was addressing Diamond; we had only Holstein cows, but Diamond was for some reason kind of grey. I liked her very much. So, I stood in front of her talking. There was a great big washtub full of water by the side of her stanchion. All of a sudden, she reached over and butted me in response to my speech. I went down into the water, and then I ran shrieking to the house for mother. I remember I was furious, because I could hear my father coming after me, and he was laughing. He couldn’t help it, poor thing. (laughter) But, then, they did something which I thought was very nice. Dad was supposed to take mother to a rehearsal, or maybe it was the night of the dinner, I don’t know. But they dried me off and wrapped me up in a blanket and put me in the sleigh, and I went for a sleigh-ride.

My family often called me "Daddy's boy" because I spent so much time with him. He let me feel I was helping him, feeding the animals, collecting the eggs, fixing things that needed repair. Even when I was little, he showed me how to use tools, a good hammer, a good saw, a good screw driver. Of course I was also "Mother's girl". She let me help too, making and baking pie crust, shelling peas, husking corn, but I guess the outdoors was more dramatic. I loved best, being with my father. I was mostly outside with him.

**Life at School**

**Elementary School**

Stewart: What about your life at school?
Almy: Well, the school building, which I remember very well, had four rooms on the first floor for the elementary school, and four rooms and maybe an office on the second floor with the high school. That meant that first and second grade were taught in one room, third and fourth in another, fifth and sixth in another, seventh and eighth in another. Early on when I first started school, the toilets were privies out in back, there were no indoor toilets. I remember so vividly one of my friends, Sophie, wet her pants. That was a terrible thing to have happen. But I loved my teacher. Her name was Doris Buchanan. She had red hair and I thought she was the nicest person; I was just devoted to her.

Stewart: This is first and second grade?

Almy: Um hm. Somebody asked me how I learned to read. I haven't a clue. I can see the charts, they had words like acorn on them, pictures of an acorn on them, but all I know is that I could read very, very early. I don't know how I learned.

I think I was still in second grade when I was reading magazines like American Magazine, Colliers, and The Saturday Evening Post. I could read! I don't know how.

Then, when I was in third grade, (of course my mother had been teaching for one year) she was determined, that no one would think that she was showing favor to her own child. I really hated those grades because she really seemed mean to me. She wouldn't let me call her anything except Mrs. Almy. One day I made some snip remark to her, and she said, "Young lady, you go stand out in the hall." So I did, but things caught up with her, because the Superintendent came along, and she was really embarrassed to have Dorothy Connelly see her daughter out in the hall.

Mother was a very good teacher, really. She did projects. Now remember this was back in the early 1920's. She had been to summer school in Chautauqua and she'd gotten a lot of ideas that were basically ideas about progressive education. I remember especially a project she did on Japan. She had everybody in town, that had anything Japanese, bring it in. She had one of the boys, what would we call him now? I guess we'd call him developmentally disabled. She had him involved in making a rickshaw. Perhaps my father had something to do with that also. I'm not sure. Anyway, we used that in a parade down Main Street, pretending we were Japanese.

Stewart: How many children were there?

Almy: I would imagine there probably were about thirty altogether, maybe forty. Because there would be third grade and fourth grade all in the same room. Probably what she was trying to do...was do things...so that she could work with both groups at the same time.

Kids who were slow, like this kid that helped on the rickshaw, just never got anywhere. But I remember him saying, "Never had but one good teacher, and that was Mrs. Almy. I learned more in her room, than in anybody else's." She really was a devoted teacher.
I had, in fifth and sixth grade, a woman who was very back and forth in her teaching. Sometimes she was nice, sometimes she wasn't. One of the things I remember vividly, she called the fifth grade and then the sixth grade to come up to recite. And she would say sometimes, "Here comes my dumb, dumber, dumbest class." Which offended me even then. I remember, that there was a problem in the arithmetic book about planting corn. Bob Pitt was in a large family that lived fairly near us. He solved the problem in a certain way, and she said it was wrong. Well, it wasn't wrong. However, his way of going at it was not the way she wanted. Bob really was good at solving arithmetic problems, but also his father had practical experience, and she had only the textbook.

But of course, she and my mother were friends because they were teachers together. I skipped seventh. I had a teacher who was about my mother's age, and who was the same kind of teacher as my mother was, really a very fine person. That went well.

High School

Stewart: What sort of high school career did you have?

Almy: In high school, I remember a number of teachers. I had the same English teacher for three years. Her name was Elizabeth Bean. She stimulated an interest in learning. She was active with the kids and she supervised or coached class plays. She also had a group of girl guides that used to meet once a week and do different things together. The principal at that time was quite strict, but also, I suspect, for a small-town high school, a pretty good person. He went on to a larger school afterwards. He was important in my life because he was the one that got notice of a scholarship to Vassar, and sent it to my folks. I started trying for that.

You want a little social influence? Thinking back at it, I laughed at myself so, I remember sitting in the English class, (maybe that wasn't until after Elizabeth Bean had gone and Louise David came to teach) holding hands with one of the boys. That was mostly what I did during that English class.

Stewart: Oh, I see. You were distracted. And that was for all three years, or just one year?

Almy: Well, I don't know. I don't really remember. I was not popular with boys. I was well liked. I was a good comrade. My mother facilitated that in a way. She stopped teaching the year that I went into sophomore class. She did that, I guess, because she wanted to be at home when I was in high school, and did a lot of things for me. Our house was the center for activities of my class. We made popcorn balls to sell at Lyceum course. You probably don't know anything about Lyceum courses, but in those days, there were programs that would come, salesmen for them would come, and you would buy a series of tickets maybe to see somebody play marimba. Like vaudeville, only separate sessions. Then you sold those tickets and you made a profit on them, and then you sold popcorn balls and Christmas wreaths and things to earn more money. The dominating idea in my high school years was to raise money and get to go to Washington.
And did you?

Um hm. I really think I had some very good teachers. I think my English teacher, Elizabeth Bean, was an excellent teacher. Louise David, who was the French teacher, was not such a good teacher, but she had a very good French accent, which I was grateful for. I had a wonderful history teacher, Florence Smith, a widow.

You said you had a love for history.

Yes. I did. I took ancient history and American history and three years of Latin with Florence Smith. She also loaned me money when I needed it, when I was going to college, which was nice. I don't remember who the teachers were, but I enjoyed very much general science and physics courses. I got a hundred in the New York State Regents' physics exam.

Were you always at the top of your class?

I'm afraid so. Well, almost always. I remember that I had to take intermediate algebra by myself because there was no one else that wanted to take it. Ethel Wassink, a teacher I liked very much, once said to me, "Millie, put your hand down. I know you know the answer."

Were you competitive academically?

I don't know whether you'd call it competitive. I don't think I was ever challenged very much. You have to remember that this was a school where relatively few people went on to college. In my class of 12 graduates, I think I was the only one. In the class before me there was one boy who went on to medical school and became a doctor. I remember in grade school, Lyle Johnson was right along where I was, but they moved. I didn't have any particular feeling about that. I always knew that I was expected at home to be at the top of the class. I don't know what would have happened if I weren't. I don't think my family were unreasonable about it, because I could do it.

Were you interested in dating?

It was funny. There was a family that had a boy who was my age, Wade, or maybe he was in the class ahead of me. I always thought he was bright. He had an older brother and an older sister. The family didn't have a particularly good reputation in town. Elizabeth Bean, who was the English teacher I liked so much, sometimes dated the older brother, David, in that family. She, I think, to some extent, encouraged Wade to invite me out, which he did from time to time. My family, bless their hearts, didn't object, although they let me know that he wasn't really right. He was awfully good to me because I was extremely naive. My mother was one of those who, when it came to sex, she talked in terms that nobody could understand. I just was very unsophisticated. Wade was very respectful of me, and I never had any problems with him.

I think what happened usually was, that if there was a class affair that everybody was expected to go to, I usually got an invitation. I never was a
Did you miss that?

I sort of missed it. I did. I remember in my book that I kept from when I graduated, there's a little statement in it from one of the girls saying that she wished me well. She said, "I'm sorry I've been so mean, but I envy you so because you get along well with everyone." Of course that would be my mother's influence. When I was little, like in third grade, the boys would tie up the girls at recess time, put a rope around them. They said, according to my mother, "Well, it isn't any fun to tie up Millie, because she just stands there." I didn't have the correct social response.

Perhaps those are the kinds of skills children learn from siblings and you were an only child?

Yes, it may very well have been. It was not an unhappy childhood.

Can you think of anything else about your childhood you'd like to share? What about your summer experiences at Chautauqua. I think a lot of people wouldn't know about it.

I'll tell about that - and there's also one other thing I want to tell about, another influence.

Chautauqua was an institution that was started in the 1800's by church people. I think there was some bishop, I believe he was Methodist, who started it. They had a large campground, huge really, with houses built on it. It wasn't a camp, in the sense of tents. During the summer they ran an educational and musical program. There would be lectures in the amphitheater and music. I remember once we went to hear Souza, who was a famous band director in those days. You could not go onto the grounds unless you were a resident and had identification or you paid a fee. You could go for the whole season, which was either 6 or 8 weeks. Actually, it was the beginning of something later on, in many communities where they had Chautauquas. They would bring the same kind of program, but they didn't have the institutional quality.

The Presidents would come to speak sometimes. Political candidates would come. After my first year in college, I had to have a thyroid operation, and I recuperated there and I hated it. Oh, I hated it; it was very dull.

You had heard it all?

No. I didn't have much energy. I don't think the ideas were as challenging as college.

I'd like to go back to the topic of influences on my life. My mother had a friend whose name was Laura. She was a nurse during World War I. When she returned, she came to our house wearing a suit which was lavender wool, it had a long skirt to it, and a big lavender hat. I thought she was beautiful and so interesting. I can still see her standing in the cow pasture enjoying being in the
country, and wearing this beautiful lavender color gingham dress. She never married. She moved ahead in her profession. She was always taking a new course, or getting a new certificate learning to do something new in nursing. I think she was kind of a role model for me.

Stewart: How interesting. You had a relationship with her for how long? Through college?

Almy: Yes. She died during the time when I was in graduate school.

Scholarship to Vassar

Stewart: Millie, lets move on to your application to Vassar. How did a farm girl from such a small rural high school get to Vassar?

Almy: Well, that’s kind of a long story, but an interesting one.

It all happened because the principal of my high school, Dana King, gave the announcement of the Annette Perry Coakley scholarship to Mother and Dad and encouraged me to apply. The scholarship was for full tuition and board; twelve hundred dollars a year, for four years, for a girl from a rural New York State high school. The scholarship was offered every four years and would be available in 1932, the year that I would be graduating from high school. So, I wrote my statement, the school sent my records, including my performance on the New York State Regents' finalists examinations. I presume a statement was also sent from my parents about their financial circumstances, and a statement from references, including one person who was a graduate of Wilson College.

After a while we began to get statements about the number of girls in competition. Finally came the notice, that I was one of sixteen finalists and that all of us would be interviewed in our homes, in our junior year, by the donors of the scholarship, Dr. Coakley, an otolaryngologist, and his wife, Louise Perry Coakley. They would be accompanied by a representative from Vassar, and that turned out to be a woman whose name was Zita Thornbury. She was the head of the vocational bureau at the college. You can’t imagine how much cleaning and polishing went on, or imagining what in thunder they were going to ask us.

Stewart: What sort of home did you have at the time?

Almy: It was a very typical farm home. It had started out as a rectangular house with a big fireplace in one end. In the beginning that room was a kitchen. That fireplace had been boarded up and eventually the house had two kitchens, one on each end. The reason for that was, when grandpa and grandma came to live with us, when mother began teaching, they thought it would be better if they had separate living areas.
In many ways, our house was typical of farm houses then. We had a privy and no bathroom. Water came from a pump in the kitchen. You took your bath in the kitchen, on Saturday night or whenever, getting the warm water from the reservoir in the wood-burning kitchen range. I remember when we had only oil lamps for lighting, but by the time my grandparents came, I think we had acetylene lamps or our own electricity. Farm life was hard then.

My mother had very good taste, and she made the best of everything that she could. The living-room had blue draperies and the dining room had pink, or the other way around. We had wicker furniture because that was cheaper. But we also had some nice pieces that had come from both my father's family and my mother's family. I think if you would have walked into it, you would have said, well this house is kept by a woman who cares about the home.

Stewart: What happened as the Vassar representative came in?

Almy: Well, when the great day arrived, they drove up, as I remember, with a chauffeur. Dr. Coakley, was a tall, rather heavy-set, imposing looking man with a goatee. Mrs. Coakley was a short dumpy woman, and Zita Thornbury, who had brown eyes and brown hair, was very animated and an extremely nice person. Later on, I got to know her quite well and I was extremely fond of her. She sort of set the tone, made people comfortable. They talked for awhile and talked to me about... I really haven't thought about this very much, but I assume about what I liked in school and so on. The thing I remember most about that interview was that Dr. Coakley said to my mother, "Mrs. Almy, if Millie doesn't get this scholarship, will she go to college?" My mother was furious. She said, and she said it exactly this way, "Most assuredly, she shall. We will find a way. She is going to college!" Afterwards she said, "I wonder if I should have said that."

So, they went away and left us wondering. The next deal was, that we got a letter that said... there were three out of the sixteen who were still in the running. I don’t remember whether we were given any details about the others or whether we were asked for more information. Eventually came the letter saying that I had it, and one of the three girls who had been interviewed had been given another scholarship and she would be my room mate. Her name was Barbara Parker. She came from Oxford, New York. The third person, I don’t know what happened to her. So there we were.

Stewart: Now, you had studied the catalogs by this time so you had an idea what Vassar was about?

Almy: Yes. That’s right. My father had discovered that Vassar had a farm, and that down on the edge of the farm was this smoking area. He said, "Well, now, if you want to smoke, there’s where you’ll have to go."

Seriously, the college arranged for me to meet with Mary Frances Bestor, a Vassar graduate then teaching in the Child Study department at Vassar. She was visiting her family at Chautauqua Institute. I think her father was president there. She gave me an excellent overview of the college and its life, and the different kinds of courses available. She did not promote Child Study. However, I do believe that after meeting with her, for some inexplicable reason,
I decided not to take a laboratory science course, but chose Astronomy instead. That was a mistake, for when I needed a background in anatomy for a Ph.D. thesis I wanted to do, I didn't have the necessary physiology and chemistry courses.

So, next the question was how to get me ready, what I would need, and all that sort of thing.

Stewart: What year was this?

Almy: I went in the fall of 1932.

**Life at Vassar**

Almy: It was really the depths of the depression. My grandmother was a great help because she was a very good seamstress, and my Aunt Laura, my mother's friend, not really an aunt, was very helpful because she sent me clothes that grandmother could make over.

So, I went off to Vassar wearing a brown Harris tweed, which is a very good suit with a little fur collar. Grandma was very clever. It looked all right, except that it was September and it was hot as Hades! I didn't need anything as heavy as that. I had to take the train. The train went through our farm about four o'clock in the morning. I changed in Buffalo, and that day train got into Poughkeepsie in the late afternoon. I remember I sat there just as stiff as a poker all the way, because I couldn't imagine what it was going to be like. I don't remember if I was met at the train, I probably had to take a taxi.

Stewart: Had you had much travel before that?

Almy: No. No, the only place I had been away from home... well, I'd been on the train because I used to go back and forth to my grandmother's and grandfather's, who by then lived in Corry, Pennsylvania, about a fifteen or twenty minute ride on the train. I used to do that by myself, so trains weren't strange to me, but to go that far was. Except that once, mother and I went to Cleveland to visit Aunt Laura and that gave me a little taste of what a big city was like; what it was like to go into a big city station and what not. Anyway, I did it.

We were met at the college gate by upper class Juniors and Seniors who took us to our rooms. I think that I got there before Bobbie, my room mate. Our class had over four hundred in it. The reason for that was, the college took more students than usual because they thought with the depression people would decline coming. But they didn't, they came. Our class just burst the seams. Some of us had to be put up in Main Building, mostly reserved for seniors, and the oldest building on campus, one that had been there since Matthew Vassar founded it in the 1860's.

We went into this room and it was certainly no wider than this dining room,
if that wide, and long, about two or three times as long. There were two beds in it. Two small beds, not ordinary beds. And not much else. Two desks and a couple of chests of drawers. I wasn't homesick I was just goggle-eyed!

I do remember the main hall when you came into the front of it, there were stairways going up on both sides. As I remember, you couldn't see both the stairways, but you learned there were two. I remember standing on one of those and being - I knew I was supposed to do something - but I was just so confused. And, then, the chit-chat of the other people was just beyond me, and of course the question was, "Where did you prep?" I had to say, "Clymer High School." When Bobbie came I think things got a little better because her father and mother were both college graduates. Her mother graduated from Wellesley. I forget where her father graduated from. She was much more sophisticated than I was. She could say "Oxford Academy" because the public school in Oxford where she lived was called Oxford Academy. (Laughter.)

But until classes got started, you needed something to get your teeth into. I think I was just in a state of shock, as you say. I think I can almost remember the classes I had. An English composition class, and a history class, a lot of European history with Mildred Campbell, who was a superb teacher, and hygiene, which I suppose is where they informed you about sex. They weren't very explicit. They weren't very helpful. And an education course. I guess that was sort of an orientation to college education, something like that, in those years.

**Friends at Vassar**

Almy: I met, shortly, Paulette, a life-long friend whom I've just returned from visiting. She's Jewish.

The college staff were extremely helpful to me in helping me to adjust. Zita Thornbury encouraged me to come and see her frequently. When I began to have problems with overload with the courses and how to do things, they referred me to a woman who was a psychologist. I thought I'd had a good high school experience. We hadn't had to go out and research something on our own, and get the stuff from the library and write it up, that sort of thing. The psychologist's name was Miriam Gould. She was not popular with the psychology department because she was psychoanalytically oriented and they were not. She was a very good counselor. She kept pointing out to me that I wasn't the only poor kid at the school, and started telling me what percentage of kids were on scholarship, and all of that.

I think also, before we took the break, that I'd started to mention that I had found Paulette. I thought she was marvelously sophisticated. Later on I found that she was probably just as scared as I was. There was another person, Ellie. Her father was Jewish and her mother was not, a Methodist or something. Also, there was Sarah, who was from some place in Pennsylvania. We formed a little clique of our own, and I always felt, in looking back at it, that I identified most with the minority. Now Sarah did not, and her mother certainly did not want to be identified as a minority. But I feel our little clique of people were.
We were speaking recently, when I was with Paulette... Do you know about the daisy chain at Vassar?

Stewart: No I don't.

Almy: The daisy chain is twenty-four of the most beautiful women in the class, the graduating class. No, not the graduating class. They're sophomores. There is, or used to be, this ritual where they go pick the daisies early in the morning and then they carry them on their shoulders, during commencement exercises.

Stewart: Who chooses them?

Almy: Well, that's a good question. None of us knew who chose them. What we did know, was that they were really the society girls, or they were at that time. Anyway, one Founders Day, which was in the spring, that would be in honor of Matthew Vassar who started Vassar College, we held our own little parade. Paulette and Ellie and Sarah and I and three students from the class after ours appeared as a daisy chain. We had me with a hockey stick as the sports girl, which is crazy, and Paulette in a ridiculous outfit with a hot waterbag, Sarah as a matronly soul and Ellie dressed like a prostitute. When we came back from our parade, Ellie said the president winked at her.

Anyway, that's the kind of relationships that we built. I had my first trip to New York with that group. No, it wasn't my first trip. My first trip to New York was at Thanksgiving, where I met a cousin who was with the Borden Milk company. I'd looked forward to it so, because I thought I'd get to see New York. But he promptly took me out to their home on Long Island, so I didn't see New York. Then later on I did.

There were quite a lot of people who went far in the world, who were at Vassar when I was. Mary McCarthy was living in Main Hall and also the poet, Elizabeth Bishop. They were seniors when I was a freshmen. Of course I didn't really get to know them, but I got to sit at table with them and that sort of thing. I remember writing home about dining with a Rockefeller, and Polly Thomas, daughter of Norman Thomas, the socialist. That was a broadening experience.

**Women's Options**

Stewart: You mentioned earlier the lectures you heard about the options women had in life.

Almy: Oh, yes. Right. We were told that there were three options. One, was that you would marry and have children, two, was that you would have a career, and the third, was that you would have both a career and a family. There was considerable emphasis on the fact that if you have a family, you are not supposed to just enjoy your family, you were supposed to be a contributing member of the community and be involved in volunteer activities and politics. It was a very community oriented school.
Academic Life

Going beyond freshman year, I began taking sociology. While the professor in sociology was not a particularly dynamic teacher, the material fascinated me and I took all the sociology courses that I could, not being a major. Now I suppose the next question is how did I happen to choose my major. I didn’t have to choose until sophomore year. By then I’d been thinking about it a bit.

Child study was a fairly new major and it was not in the psychology department. The psychology department was run by Margaret Floy Washburn, a very famous psychologist, but rather rigid. She didn’t believe that Freud had contributed much of anything to this world. I knew after taking my first psychology course, that psychology wasn’t where I wanted to be. Child study had the nursery school and it looked interesting. I was going over it with my friends on this visit I made recently. I can’t really understand why I dropped out of the science things that I’d been so interested in, in high school.

Stewart: As a woman, what sort of future could you have had, if you pursued the sciences?

Almy: That’s what my friends asked me, but many Vassar people did. Sarah was a zoology major, Barbara Parker, my roommate, I don’t know what she majored in, maybe zoology, maybe chemistry. She knew she was going on to medical school. She already had decided that. She is still practicing at Bellevue Hospital in New York.

I’m not very good at recapturing what it was. I do think, looking back at it, that sociology was a big influence. The courses were very practically oriented. They sent us out, for example, in the first sociology course that I had, to do a study in downtown Poughkeepsie. Downtown Poughkeepsie is poverty and difficulties. I interviewed people in their homes, so I was exposed to city poverty, which I’d never seen before. We went to visit Sing Sing prison. It wasn’t just a matter of book studying, you did whatever you were studying.

Stewart: That sounds like that was a politically galvanizing experience.

Almy: I think it was. When I finally was in child study, one of the first assignments I took was to assist in the WPA nursery schools that were just starting then. That was almost at the beginning of the nursery school movement really. I’d heard about that from the child study professor, Martha Reynolds Sherwin.

Stewart: And who were her mentors?

Almy: She did her doctorate at Teacher’s College, perhaps with Patty Smith Hill, or maybe child development with Lois Hayden Meek Stolz.

Stewart: I’m not hearing that you were particularly excited about child study. Were you?

Almy: That’s a very good question. Maybe not, because I remember thinking about history, which I loved, and I went around and visited all the departments that I
thought there was any possibility of my majoring in. Gradually it focused
down to child study. The push was to have something that I could do when I
finished. Not initially a lot of enthusiasm I think. Of course there weren't
many nursery schools. When I first began speaking about nursery schools,
people would look at me and say, "Trees? Something to do with trees?"

Stewart: What about your politics? Were you developing politics at that point?

Almy: I would have been, except I was scared to be very political because I didn't
want to offend the Coakleys, who monitored this scholarship quite closely. I
don't think that would happen anymore today. They came to visit from time
to time and they talked about what I was taking and what I was interested in,
and so on. For example, my roommate Bobbie went on a peace march in Albany. I
really wanted to go, but I thought, uh uh, I'd better not.

Stewart: I see. Did they suggest courses to take, or did you decide things on your own?

Almy: No, they didn't suggest course work. I mentioned Zita Thornbury as
somebody I consulted with. As she was head of the Vocational Bureau, she
knew what the opportunities were.

Stewart: Oh, that would be helpful. So, the Coakleys didn't actually influence your
vocational choices.

Almy: I knew that they were very conservative, especially Mrs. Coakley. Dr. Coakley
died while I was still in college or shortly thereafter. I got to know Mrs.
Coakley fairly well. She was almost bigoted against blacks and the poor.
Those were the days of the march of World War I soldiers to Washington; it
was the days of the bank holiday, Roosevelt's Bank Holiday. People who had
money were very skeptical about Roosevelt, and the Coakley's were also.

Although my social and political ideas about the world were being formed
during this time, they weren't being formed by the donors of my scholarship. I
was responding to what was happening in the world at the time.

I was interested in Russia. I did my paper for my course on modern
European history on some aspect of Russia. I was interested in the social
movements that were going on in this country and in the rest of the world.
Hitler became Reichsführer in 1934. Mussolini annexed Ethiopia that year. In
1935 Hitler denied Jews citizenship.

Stewart: In terms of your own social life then, were you feeling very class conscious at
Vassar? Was there much interaction between you and your friends and the
"society girls"?

Almy: Initially there wasn't too much, but as time went on, those divisions that I saw
began to melt away. For example, I encountered several of the child study
majors, who probably majored in child study for different reasons than I did, in
various places later on. They were always glad to see me. We worked
together. Nobody said to me after the first year, "Where did you prep?"
So much was going on around campus. The drama department under the director Hallie Flanagan, was producing widely recognized experimental theater. The lectures coming to the campus were broadening and challenging. I took a philosophy course from a professor Geiger who was a refugee from Germany, and all of that was very opening.

Stewart: Did you go home for Christmas?

Almy: It's a wonder that my family put up with me at all. I was such a twerp when I went home. I think they could hardly believe that this was their daughter. I remember I had bought a black wool suit, maybe it wasn't wool, but it looked as though it were. In those days I had lots of color and I thought it looked quite nice; I think they thought it did too. It was just so different.

I think there were considerable confrontations during the Christmas holiday, and differences in point of view. My father was Republican, always was Republican, and I was becoming something else. God knows what I was!

Stewart: What about your mother?

Almy: Well, from that Christmas I don't really remember. I think they were intrigued by the people I knew and their families and all the rest of it. Paulette, for example, had been brought up in England. Her father was an architect. At one point they had a chauffeur and a servant and were very different from my family. On the other hand, Ellie's father was a high school principal in the New York system. Her sister worked at Macy's in New York.

Stewart: Are there other memories of your first year at Vassar which you would like to share?

Almy: Not the first year, but shortly thereafter, the income from my scholarship went down. I'm still unclear about the reasons for this. Nevertheless, the college apparently decided that I would just have to get along on what was coming out of the fund. That meant that I had to supplement the scholarship by earning money myself. I was already working on several self-help projects, to pay for clothes, travel and that sort of thing. Well, of course when it had to go into tuition and board, that really pinched me, and so I had to work more. I should add that loans of one hundred dollars at various times, from friends of my family and also Mrs. Smith, my high school teacher, helped. I paid them all back eventually.

The major thing I did, was to work in the library. That was really a great help. Working with the reference librarian, I learned an awful lot about how to look things up and follow through on things. I also had a job in the president's office at one point. What I did was to review his correspondence, where people were asking him for contributions and support. We got a lot of appeals from the Appalachians; I think of Black Mountain College. I had to do some kind of appraisal of how solid they were.

I cooked for the basketball team. On Saturday, I sat in the nursery school office. I'd be there to open up and show the school in case anyone wanted to visit. Of course that was easy, because I could study and do that.
Stewart: Did you do that before you had an interest in child study?

Almy: No, that would have been afterwards. One of the things I did, I don’t know if I want anybody to know this. It really gave me a shock, and was good for me. The records were all there. Records on the children and records on the students. So I thought, well, it won’t do any harm if I look at my own record. They had a description of me with my oily hair and my shyness, and what not. It didn’t help a bit. It’s given me a certain degree of skepticism about what one does with records and the need for them. Really, if you’re going to do that kind of thing, then you must be sure they’re kept in a place where people don’t see them. They should never have left me with those records. I don’t recall, maybe I repressed it, I don’t recall looking at anybody else’s.

Stewart: Anything else about Vassar?

Almy: No. I’m afraid if I went on, I could take the rest of the time.

**Summer Camps and Children**

Stewart: I wanted to ask you one more thing about this time period before we leave the subject. Can you talk a bit about the summer camps that you worked in?

Almy: The first summer after I started college, I was at Chautauqua. That was the summer I was recuperating from the thyroid operation. The next year, in the summer, I got a job at Goodrich Social Settlement Camp outside of Cleveland. The way it worked was, we would take kids from the poverty area for two weeks. We lived in cabins with the kids. Two counselors would live in one room; there would be two groups in the next room. We each had a group.

That was a wonderful experience for me, because other counselors came from all over. One woman was a teacher from near Chicago, who I still correspond with. There was one man from Haverford College, who I was very fond of. He later became an Episcopal priest. At that point he was exploring religions. There was this man from Wisconsin, and the director’s background was French, and his sister, Yvonne, was also there. It was just very stimulating, and we’d sit around and talk after the kids were put down.

At the end of two weeks, we had a long weekend at the Settlement House in Cleveland. I remember going to various churches, with John Diehl, this man from Haverford. This is kind of interesting I think. One of the counselors, his name was Rocco Motto, he was an Italian boy, still in high school, a senior at that time. We hit it off and he helped me do my records and I helped him do his. He’s now a retired psychoanalyst and Dean of the Graduate Center for Child Development and Psychotherapy in L.A.. That was a very profitable summer experience.
The next summer, I don’t know why I didn’t go back to Goodrich. It could be just as well. It might not have been as much fun or as interesting the second time. But that summer, the camp was run by the Day Nursery Association of Cleveland. It was sort of the same pattern, except these kids were preschool children. Anyway, I remember I had four white girls with long hair and four black girls. I was so glad that four of them were black because I couldn’t do a thing about their hair. The others with their long curls, it was too much.

Stewart: Preschool children? Didn’t they miss their moms? That’s young to go away from home.

Almy: No. Their moms came out, I think, for the weekend. For the life of me, I don’t remember whether they changed, or whether we had the same ones, but I think they probably changed. And I don’t remember the weekends. I was not as enthusiastic with that group experience as I was about the first one. It may have been that was the place - I think maybe it was. I think maybe there were older children there too. I did an independent study there, for my child study course. So I got credit. I wrote it up. I don’t think I got any great amount of kudos for it, but again, it was an example of Vassar’s willingness to have you have contact with real children in different settings.

The next summer, I had two more camp experiences. One was at a camp outside of Philadelphia. Sandy Beach, I think it was. I think we had only preschool children there. It was a privately operated camp and run by a woman and her husband. I don’t remember too much about it. The children were not poor, but they were not terribly wealthy.

Then the final year of that camping kind of experience, I was head counselor in a camp in New Paltz, New York, which is an hour or two out of New York City. This was run by Mrs. Bernstein, and the camp was called Norma B. Camp in honor of her daughter. All the children were Jewish, wealthy, and the staff, I think they were all women. I really didn’t know quite what I was doing, but I managed.

Stewart: What did they do? How did the children spend their days?

Almy: I know at the day nursery camp they had swimming. They did crafts, music, everybody had a skill, except I didn’t have any skill with music, and not a great deal of skill with crafts. I think Norma B. was fairly well equipped with things to do. One of the things that I remember most vividly, was that they had two children who were there with their nurses. I remember especially the children had to have, for some reasons, injections and the nurse couldn’t get Jamie, or whatever her name was, to accept it. Finally I said to her, "If you would leave, I think I could persuade her." As soon as I got her out of the way I talked to Jamie about something else for awhile. Then I said, "It’s something you’ve got to do and it’s going to hurt, but it won’t hurt for a long time." And it was fine.

The point was, if you knew how to calm a child down and then how to say, "Look here, this is something we have to do, you aren’t going to like it, because it will hurt. But it will only hurt a minute, then we can do something really interesting." I mean, children are so reasonable if you approach them reasonably. And if you’re not related to them.
Stewart: [laughter] Yes, right. That's a good point.

Stewart: Okay. I think that concludes our interview for July 26, unless you have more to add.

Almy: Well yes, I want to emphasize the intellectual excitement and stimulation so pervasive at Vassar in those days. It was an excitement tempered by reason. In reviewing old issues of the campus paper, I am reminded of my sense at the time of both the breadth of the issues discussed on campus, and Vassar's commitment to the presentation of evidence and continuing search for truth.
II. EARLY NURSERY SCHOOL TEACHING EXPERIENCES: 1936-1944

[Interview II: August 13, 1991]

The Guidance Nursery School at Yale

Stewart: Today you wanted to talk about your early nursery school teaching experiences. Let's begin with your work with the Guidance Nursery School at Yale.

Almy: That was the first one that I had any paid experience, because as I said on the previous tape, I participated in the WPA nursery school and had student teaching in the nursery school at Vassar. Yes, and that was a very important influence, I think. The Guidance Nursery as it was called, was in the Child Development Clinic at Yale. Dr. Arnold Gesell was the Director of the Clinic, and Dr. Ruth Washburn was the director of the nursery school. Dr. Washburn was very much interested in psychoanalysis, which was becoming important at that time. The first year I was there, we had as consultants for the staff, Dr. Marjan Putnam and Dr. Edith Jackson, both of whom you'll find mentioned in the recent biography of Anna Freud. Both women helped me to begin to see more deeply into children.

I taught two-year-olds, and I also had an experimental group of four children who were fifteen months old. I have wonderful recollections of some of those children. The second year I was there, Dr. Francis Ilg, who wrote with Gesell, came back from sabbatical, and the program in the nursery was quite changed, because Dr. Ilg looked at the children more in terms of where they were in terms of their relationship to normative development. He would often say, "I think he should grow more." The previous year Dr. Washburn would have been inquiring more about what was going on with his family. Just a very different kind of approach.

Stewart: Where was Dr. Washburn?

Almy: Dr. Washburn retired. I was again very fortunate because they kept me on for a second year and I was just an assistant. I wasn't anybody that had any real connections. It gave me a nice opportunity to see two different points of view on ways to do things with children.

Stewart: Did you feel conflicted or did they seem to balance each other out?

Almy: No. I think we often felt conflicted. The head teacher, Paulina McElwain was a Bryn Mawr graduate. She had a masters. She had been brought up in the tradition of Ruth Washburn, a much more dynamic way of looking at children. She was compatible with Dr. Ilg and later on she directed the New Canaan Country Day School, where Ilg gathered a lot of the material for the book, The Child from Five to Ten, with Gesell. She did say to me once, "I can't quite understand it. If some behavior of the child comes up that's a little bit different, and doesn't quite seem to fit, Dr. Ilg will often say, "Well, it doesn't fit the pattern. Let's forget about it." Isn't that horrible?
Stewart: What about Arnold Gesell? What is your memory of him?

Almy: I have very little memory of him. He was not one who put in an appearance very much. I remember being invited to his home for a social evening with other members of the clinic staff. I don't remember much about him except that he would not have liked it...if he had been aware of how much psychoanalytic approach was going on in the nursery.

Stewart: Why not?

Almy: I think perhaps that he thought it was not well based, scientifically. And for Gesell that was very important because he was gathering data on children all the time. You know he had both a Ph.D. and an M.D. I don't think I should try to appraise it because I think I'm too far away from it, to get what the real essence of that experience was. I remember much more about what Ruth Washburn said, and what Polly McElwain said or did. I was just an assistant.

Stewart: So you were there for two years: 1936 to 1938, right?

Almy: Um hum.

Stewart: What about the professionalism of the staff? Was there a feeling that nursery school was something that was on its way up?

Almy: Well, again, that's pretty hard to answer because I think there was the feeling that we were doing something very important, and that other people should be doing something of that sort. I didn't, but Polly did consultations with children and parents who were involved in other kinds of programs. I don't remember that we talked much about what the ultimate goals were going to be, or where we were going as staff members. We had some connection with other schools, but I don't remember if there was a nursery association, for example, in New Haven at that time. There may have been, but I don't remember it.

Stewart: How did the children's day go?

Almy: It varied a great deal. Say I had the two-year-olds and Polly had the four-year-olds. I had two's going into three's, and Polly had four's going into five, and they did not all come on a five day a week basis. As I remember I had the two's, three days a week, and on the off days, I worked with this group of fifteen-months-olds. It was much more a clinic in the sense that you came in for a period of treatment.

Each group had two or three children who were selected for their normality, and that would have been in terms of the Gesell standards that were emerging at that time. In fact, the book Infant and Child in the Culture of Today, was based on records that we kept about the children. So, I suppose in a sense that contributes to the notion of professionalism. In fact, that book has a detailed description of the Guidance Nursery and a piece about the qualifications of the teachers.

On other days, children might come in, and they might come for an
extended period, those whose parents were perhaps being seen in the Yale Institute of Human Relations. It was more of a psychiatric institute. Some children were referred. I remember one child was referred for some eating problem, who came only at lunch time to have a lunch with Polly, particularly. It was a very flexible program because you had the difference in days, and some children would come in at ten o'clock and some children would come in at nine o'clock, some children stayed for lunch, a few stayed for nap.

I remember one of the youngest ones I had was a little over eighteen months, in the two-year-old group. She was so independent. She had those lace-up shoes that they wore in those days, and she would insist on lacing her shoes but she couldn’t, of course. It was a play program and we had an outdoor play yard which didn’t go anywhere; it was just inside a cluster of Yale buildings but it was outdoors and we had a pebble pit and a sandbox and a climbing arrangement. Inside we had a pool that kids were always dumping things into. We had blocks and paints and the usual kinds of nursery school materials. All of the playrooms were surrounded by observation booths, so I learned early to be doing my thing in front of observers, although I didn’t know who the observers were, because the mirrors were one way. However, when they built a new booth in my little room, I could see through it, so I could tell who was in there (laughter). The second year particularly, I spent a lot of time in the observation booths myself, making records of different children’s behaviors, especially at nap or lunch. I think some of that material went into Infant and Child in the Culture of Today.

One of the stories I remember, is about Jay. Jay was a charming, lovely three year old that I had, and one day he said to me when we were outdoors, “I’m going in the bathroom.” I said, “O.K. Jay.” It was perfectly safe, I thought, to let him go by himself, because all the doors to the outside of the nursery were too heavy for children to open. After awhile he didn’t come back, so I went in to look for him and here was water coming from the bathroom. He came out smiling at me holding in his hand a sieve, which he had taken from the sandbox, and saying to me, “Water doesn’t stay in this.” (laughter) He had a little scientific exploration.

Stewart: Any other memories of that two-year period at the Guidance Nursery School?

Almy: Well, one thing I recall is a very difficult child we had, who was seen by various psychiatrists. She didn’t talk, and yet she seemed so expressive. The question was, is she an autistic child? Finally, it turned out that she couldn’t hear, and here she was four or five at the time. Well, the outcomes were not always successful, but I had a very positive feeling about what happened to children there. The fact that they usually did improve, and that the parents did appreciate what they got and found it helpful. I think parents were much more inclined in those days to accept early childhood education as science, based on child development.

Stewart: Why were they more inclined?

Almy: That’s a good question. I think the times were different. The times were open to science. Science was going to solve all our problems, and here was the new
science of child development psychology and they wanted the best for their
children. Of course, the core group, a lot of them, I think most of them, were
connected with the university in some way.

Vassar Institute of Euthenics

Stewart: Millie, I'd like to hear a little bit about your time at the Vassar Institute of
Euthenics.

Almy: That would have been two summers. It came after I had the summer camp
experiences that I described last time. The Vassar Institute of Euthenics, you
know euthenics means the science of improving the species through control of
the environmental influences, as contrasted with improving the species through
Eugenics, which changes the heredity. What they had was, in the summer they
took a couple of the dormitories, the newest dormitories on campus, and used
one for parents who came and lived in the dormitories, and the other for
children of those parents.

The first year that I was there, I was in the three-year-old group, and as I
recall, we did both the program that was in the nursery school, and the care of
the children. I've forgotten how we worked it out. Incidentally, you probably
know the name Evelyn Omwake. Evelyn was the director of the three-year-old
group or maybe the whole nursery school program, I'm not sure. I was
assigned three children, two boys and a girl, as I remember. It was an
extremely interesting program because you get a different feeling for children
when you're with them all day long, when you see them to bed and you get to
sit in the rocking chair and rock them a little bit before they go off to sleep and
that kind of thing.

The parents came in the afternoon, as I recall, and spent an hour or two with
them. The whole idea was to enhance family life by giving the parents a chance
to do things that they wanted to. They had lectures by people like Margaret
Mead, I remember her specifically, and then also they could do arts and crafts
and that sort of thing. Mostly mothers came, but fathers would come up for the
weekends so you had the whole family.

Stewart: Was this an expensive program for the families?

Almy: It must have been. I think probably there were scholarships, I'm sure. I think
probably they were well-to-do families, most of them moderately well-to-do. I
don't think that it was outlandishly expensive because I think probably the
parents were a lot of doctors, lawyers, teachers, that level.

Stewart: Did the children have any separation problems?

Almy: Some of them did, but again, you know it was a very benign atmosphere with
very skillful teachers and a skillful director. The director of the whole thing
was Mary Fisher Langmuir, later Essex. She was a very relaxed but caring
kind of person, again working out of psychoanalytic insights and helping to
find ways so that it wasn’t too hard for the child or wasn’t too hard for the
parent. But there were separation problems clearly, you know.

Stewart: Was professionalism an issue for the staff of the Vassar Institute of Euthenics?

Almy: Well they were all pretty much already established. For example, Evelyn was
teaching at one of the good private schools in New York. The second year I
was there, I worked with six year olds and I did not officially work in the
classroom but only in the dormitory. I spent a lot of time observing in the
classroom because I wanted to understand older children better. I remember the
head teacher from that group was a teacher, I believe, at City and County
School in New York. It was mainly a matter I think, of people from Bank
Street and similar schools in New York, staffing the summer program.
Outstanding teachers from elsewhere also came, like Docia Zavitkovsky, a
recent president of the National Association for the Education of Young
Children.

Stewart: Teachers had a minimum of a B.A. then?

Almy: Oh yes. Yes I think the head teachers all had Masters. One of the things I
remember, though was one Sunday afternoon I went to visit with a
pediatrician’s family, whom I knew in Poughkeepsie. When I came back, the
whole children's school campus was agog because one of the six year olds,
Billy, had disappeared. There had been all this discussion about, “Well, shall
we tell the parents?” and so on. I think it was Hazel Kytle who was the director
of the group who said, “Well we can wait another half hour but if we don’t find
him in that time, we must tell the parents.” Everybody was hunting frantically;
and finally, somebody came upon him in the nursery school yard sitting on the
roof of one of the storage places for the nursery school equipment. Hazel said
to him, “Billy, we worried about you. Why did you do this?” or something like
that. He said, “I just wanted to see the stars come out!” (laughter)

So you got a nice feeling for living with children, you did in the camps too.
But at the institute, it was more of an intellectual experience because we staffed
and studied the children and prepared reports for the parents and so on. It was
much more of an intensive experience than anything else.

Stewart: Now did the staff get to attend lectures too?

Almy: Yes. Yes, evenings particularly, and other times you might take turns while
someone was covering for you. You couldn’t all be gone.

Stewart: That sounds wonderful.

Almy: While I was at the Summer Institute, one of the people from the New York
State Department of Education, Ruth Andrus, was very closely tied into the
Vassar Program, she often spoke there, and also she was a Teacher’s College
graduate. Thinking about this, I think there was a whole cluster of people who
probably had worked with Patty Smith Hill and with Lois Meek Stolz and so
on, whose background was in Psychology at Teacher’s College. Anyway,
Ruth Andrus came by and told me that WPA was going to put on extra staff in Albany and they would like me to come and I agreed that I would. I arranged to have my clothes and what not sent to Albany at the end of the Summer Institute.

Stewart: This would be 1938?

**Burke Memorial Day Nursery**

Almy: This would be 1938, yeah. But before I got there, it turned out that politics had intervened and the job was no longer available. So I was left staying in New Haven with friends, without a job. Remember, this was still the Depression, and my family was still living on the edge of nothing. I considered a variety of things and didn’t get any of them, but finally did get a job as a teacher in the Burke Memorial Day Nursery in Newark. It was an old-fashioned day nursery, that had recently been taken over by an educational director. She was not professional but she had professional aspirations for staff and encouraged her staff very much. That’s where I had a group, if I remember correctly, of eighteen three-year-olds, or up to three, a couple of whom were not yet toilet trained. I had an assistant who was a baby nurse in training, at the Newark Children’s Hospital. I got a new one every three weeks. That was the closest that I came to really participating in something that had been custodial but was now changed to have an educational focus.

Both out of my own desire and out of the encouragement of our director, I began taking a course at Bank Street which was taught by Evelyn Byer and Jesse Stanton and Barbara Biber. It was a great course. It was basically a curriculum course, but it was also soundly, in my opinion, based in child development, as we knew it then. I went in every Friday to New York to go to that course, and looking back on it, I think it was a great influence. We took records and we had a very different experience from the experience at the Vassar Nursery School or the Vassar Institute or even Yale. The kids I was working with were really poor kids from a poor district in Newark, many of whose families were on welfare, although some of them were working. Yet, I didn’t see the children as being that different except for one thing. That was they didn’t seem to me, to play the same way as children I’d had previously. We had materials, we had blocks, we probably didn’t have as many blocks, but we had paint, clay and the usual kinds of things and pretty much the same kind of program, outdoors and indoors.

I recall I had a conference with Jessie Stanton and my question for the conference was, “Why do the children not play the way other children I have seen play?” Jessie said, “What do you know about their homes?” I said, “Well they’re poor.” She said, “Yes, I don’t mean that. I want to know, what do they do at home? How do they have their dinners? Do they all eat together, or does you know, kettle on the stove and they dip in? And what do they do when they’re not in school? And what kinds of associations do they have with the neighborhood? What festivals are important and so on?” She really set me off, so that I began to look at the kids differently and to ask different questions.
about them in their play. Their play began to make sense.

Stewart: How so?

Almy: Well, when I began to encourage them on the things that they knew about, you know, if we talked about having a cup of coffee, which I knew they did, rather than having a tea party, then they developed on it and they also developed some great ideas of their own. One of things they loved to do, and it was obvious why because the most exciting thing that happened in the neighborhood was the funerals. They played what happened with the procession, going to the church, and all the rest of it. They were mostly Italian. Some of them were Irish.

Stewart: How did they get into the Day Nursery? Did they have to pass certain means tests?

Almy: I’m not sure. I imagine there was a means test. This was a private charitable agency and I imagine the director had the final word. Some of the parents were working and some of them were not. I remember one family in particular there were three or four kids, all boys, and the mother, well now we would refer to her as developmentally disabled, I guess, but in those days we would say she was a low-grade moron. We didn’t say that, but that’s what we said to each other. A classic example of that, was the time that she came over to the nursery, which she regarded, I think, as a second home, and asked for help because she couldn’t find the baby. It turned out that she covered up the baby in the bed. Anyway, I don’t want to go on at too great a length because I’m going to make this tape go on forever, but Burke Memorial Day Nursery was a very important experience.

Stewart: And the beginning of your interest in play?

Almy: Yes, and your question on this reminded me of that.

Stewart: So you stayed there one year?

Chautauqua County Children’s Agency

Almy: Yes, and I was going back. The first year I said I had twos and threes. I was going back the second year to have the four-year-old group because I wanted that experience. Unfortunately, at that point, my father was ill and I decided that I could not stay there and I had to go home to Jamestown, which is near Buffalo. I didn’t have a job but a friend of the family's who was on the Board for Mothers' Pension, as it was called in those days, said, “I can get you a job at the Chautauqua County Children’s Agency.”

Stewart: Do you want to explain the Mothers' Pension?

Almy: Well, in those days, we thought, or people thought, that it was better for a
mother to be at home with her children than it was, assuming that she had been
widowed, for example, than it was for her to be trying to have a job and put the
children in a day nursery. Widows were given a certain amount of money,
usually not enough, and the board decided how much “Mrs. So-and-So” could
get and if “Mrs. So-and-So” was reported to have a male visitor, instead of
saying, “Well isn’t that nice, there’s a father figure or role model?” they said,
“Tsk tsk tsk,” and they cut her allowance a little, which seemed to me to be a
crazy kind of thing. I began during the changeover from county funds to state
funds and to what would eventually be the Aid to Families with Dependent
Children. I did Aid to Dependent Children, I did foster home placement and
supervision, I did adoptions, and I did work with the juvenile court for about a
year, and passed my civil service examination as a caseworker. I did not like
doing it. I hated it really, because it seemed to me that I was constantly trying
to patch up and I felt in early childhood education you were starting positively
rather than patching-up.

So when the word came from Albany that there was now a job available in
Buffalo, I said to my parents, with whom I was living, “I think I’ll take it.”
They said, “Well are you sure that’s what you want to do, because you’re on
civil service? And, of course, this WPA is an emergency program.” I think I
said, “But it’s what I was trained to do and I think I would like it so much
better.” So they didn’t stand in my way even though we always felt that
relatives to whom my family owed money said, “Isn’t that terrible! She’s
running off to do that job in Buffalo and she doesn’t know how long she’s
going to have it.” I did it anyway, and it was a very wise decision on my part.
(laughter)

The WPA Nursery Schools

Stewart: Then you became the regional supervisor of the WPA Nursery Schools?

Almy: Well, regional supervisor meant different things, depending where in the State
you were. I think the most nursery schools I ever had was nine, and that was
in the Buffalo/Lackawanna area. Most of the time, I had about seven; four of
them were in housing projects. That was when federal housing just began.
I had one where the parents were mostly Italian, another where they were
mostly, all in fact, black because there was really segregation in those days,
and another one, mostly Irish, and then there were a couple of settlement
houses. So again, you had great variety.

Stewart: Now, how were you offered this position?

Almy: That’s a very good question and one would wonder. If you could go back to
that time, you would realize that there were only a handful of people who had
had baccalaureate educations that were really focused towards nursery schools
and I was one of them. Not only that, but I’d been educated at one of the best
programs there was, one well recognized. Vassar’s Nursery School was one of
the first. Martha May Reynolds Sherwin, Professor of Child Study at Vassar
had been on the National Association for Nursery Education Committee that
worked with Lois Meeks Stoltz to get the programs started. So I was a natural for it.

Stewart: So someone called you and let you know about the job?

Almy: Yes. This was the same Ruth Andrus who had asked me when I was at Vassar in the summer. This time she said, “This time, it’s really going to happen. It isn’t going to be a political pull-out as it was before.”

Stewart: Now when you came upon the scene, weren’t the nursery schools already established or did you have to actually open them?

Almy: There were several that were already established. I know I opened one, Commodore Perry, and I think that was all that I opened. The rest of them were already in existence. But then, getting the equipment and everything together, selecting staff, not that you had a great deal of choice, but you did have in the beginning, when I first went. WPA was supposed to give jobs to teachers, and then, to provide food for children. That really was it’s focus. The jobs for teachers meant that teachers who were unemployed were eligible. Some of them, the last thing in the world that would have been appropriate for them, would have been to be with small children. There were a number of them who were extremely good and so when I started out I had some really good staff people, head teachers who were excellent. Some of the assistant teachers who probably had not had a teaching background were trained into it on WPA.

One of the things that was interesting, I think, looking back, we had regular staff meetings probably weekly in each of the schools and then every so often, I don’t know whether it was once a month, perhaps, we had staff meetings to which everybody came. Because the parents were unemployed, there wasn’t any problem about closing the nursery schools. So every now and then we would have a staff meeting, where we would meet in one school and the others would come. Some days the program would go on in the school where we were meeting, and then we would consider what they had done and why and so on. So I thought, looking back, that the training in those WPA nursery schools in New York state was really very good. Then, on a fairly regular basis, the supervisors from all over the state, there were about eight or nine of us, would meet in Albany. We would have a couple of days together to consider what was going on, you know, the innovations and ways to meet problems and so on. That really was the most intensive training experience.

Stewart: In your in-service training, did you focus on child study or practice issues?

Almy: Both. How can you separate them? Sometimes we would take a particular child and discuss what was going on with him or her, it usually was the boys who were in trouble, bringing in the records the teachers had made. Also, we had on the staff two parent educators who met with the parents’ groups and who counseled with parents individually. If I remember correctly, also a nutritionist and sometimes we had, there was a position at one time for a nurse in each of the schools. As the economic situation improved the staff got less advanced than it had been before. Because you were not allowed to stay on WPA. As soon as there were jobs available then you had to get yourself out and get yourself a job in the public sector.
Stewart: So your teachers left?

Almy: Yes. I remember one teacher who left and got a job with a detective agency.

Stewart: How about the professionalism of the WPA staff?

Almy: I think there was a built-in professionalism that came from Albany down through Ruth Andrus, that this is a profession, that you can’t always work on WPA, that you have to go to school, and some people began taking courses at the University of Buffalo. We had a committee, an advisory committee, and the chair of that was a professor at State Teacher’s College, who was really a kindergarten person, but who took on the nursery school very easily and competently. The secretary was a woman who was a social worker and she was the secretary of the Buffalo Foundation so she knew the politics. We had a strong advisory committee and they pushed hard for our people to get themselves prepared for other jobs.

Stewart: Other nursery schools?

Almy: Yes.

Stewart: Did you have the sense that this was a field about to really blossom?

Almy: Oh, I think so. I think everybody thought so. Not that they all stayed in it. Some of them went back into teaching at the elementary school level, where the pay was better. In that Buffalo group of teachers I can probably name a half dozen that still talk together, one of them that just died was ninety, one of them is ninety-seven and was on television recently.

I’m sure I now see it with rose-colored glasses. I also know that what I’m describing did happen. I’ve forgotten the unpleasant aspects of it.

Stewart: Do you remember when you got the notice that you were to close down?

Almy: Yes, well, we knew it was coming before it did. By then we were really, this is not a nice way to put it, but we were scraping the barrel as far as keeping the programs staffed. I recall one person had started out as a cleaning person and ended up director of the program. Certainly those people, it’s very hard for me to put this properly, when you build a program on staff that really do not aspire professionally and you put them in professional jobs, they don’t do professional work. That’s where, in my opinion, we began the, “democratization of the nursery school” as my friend Ruby Takanishi at the Carnegie Foundation, calls it.

On one level that’s very good because it means more people get it. The highest standards are eroded because the people that you have are not able to function in that way. A lot of them, given sufficient training, could function, some of them couldn’t. That’s the facts of life, they simply couldn’t.

Stewart: As we entered the war, the Depression was lifting, you were scraping the barrel for staff...
Almy: And the other thing that was happening was that we were beginning to turn the program into child-care. One of the houses, Oak Street, it had been a settlement, we turned into the first child-care center. I don't recall whether we had Lanham Act funds for that, or whether we used what was left of the WPA. That was what happened.

In Buffalo, where this was, the Board of Education had never really supported the WPA nursery schools. When the war came along they applied to have Lanham funds and so they began their child-care center program. We also had in Buffalo, a couple of fascinating private programs that were started to meet the needs. Gradually they may have gotten some federal funds. One of them was run by a woman whose husband was one of the high ups in Curtis Wright's airplane factory. The other one was run by a woman whose husband was a judge. She turned almost her whole house over to child care, she took babies. The judge was always encountering potties where he didn't expect them. According to state and I think federal regulations, babies could not be cared for in a center. I don't remember whether she was licensed for family day care.

Stewart: Did your WPA job come to an end before you went to North Tonnawanda?

Almy: It's important to understand the relationship between the WPA and the Lanham programs in New York State. The state agency to whom both the WPA nursery school program and the Lanham Act program were responsible, was the Bureau of Child Development and Parent Education in the State Education Department. In the WPA program, my boss technically was the head of all WPA programs in Buffalo, that included construction projects as well as history, art, and nursery school education. In North Tonnawanda my boss was the Superintendent of Schools.

I was approached by North Tonnawanda when their Board of Education decided to start a Lanham program.

Lanham Act Child Care Centers

North Tonnawanda sounded very interesting because they wanted to start with a nursery school for the first time. It was to be an all day nursery school which they put in the basement of one of their elementary schools. They had a committee that was urging the establishment of the child care centers, and the superintendent of schools was very eager to have this happen. So we had this nursery school for fifty children.

I took the head teacher from one of the Buffalo WPA nursery schools with me as head teacher for the nursery school. Then we had three after school centers for school age children. They would come in and get their breakfast and then they'd have their lunch, and after school they would be cared for. I suppose there were probably twenty-five or thirty kids in each of the three schools.

The center where I had my office and spent most of my time, and where we
had the new equipment for the fifty preschool children, was open from six o'clock in the morning until six o'clock at night, maybe six-thirty. I remember very well, that I used to be there all of that time. Although I kept saying "No, I'm not going to be there so early." There was always something.

Staffing problems which had not been so acute at first, became acute later because you had to cover those long hours. So you staggered the staff hours and that made it hard for parents and hard for the staff. Also many women preferred to work in the factories where they were paid more, so we lost a lot of staff.

Stewart: Now, where were the parents working?

Almy: North Tonnawanda was a steel industry town. There were lots of jobs in the defense industry and both men and women were getting them. I think parents had to be in the defense industry to enroll in the program.

Stewart: Did you see a rise in emotional problems in the children? I imagine that many of their fathers were going off to war. It must have been traumatic for them.

Almy: Yes, that's a very good question and maybe I've repressed it. I can remember some very troubled children. I don't remember tying it in my head to their fathers being away. I can remember some fathers who were working in the defense industry and had deferrals. Many mothers were working in the defense industry. I remember one family who had three children in our program: the oldest was in fourth grade, the littlest one was three, and the middle girl was somewhere in between.

Stewart: What ages of children used this program?

Almy: Two years-nine months through fourth grade.

Stewart: I've read that within Lanham child care centers, staff felt a certain sense of deep patriotism that buoyed their spirits despite the long hours they were required to work. Do you think that was true in North Tonnawanda?

Almy: I guess we all felt patriotic, that we didn't really want to do this, but we had to. It was the part we could do. I'm sure that was the case. For instance, while I left to go to graduate school before the war was over, I labored over that decision because I wondered if it would be unpatriotic to leave the child care centers with the war still on. Although, I don't recall anybody saying, "Well, you have to do this because it's your patriotic duty." It was more a feeling that everybody was sacrificing something.

Stewart: Did you feel that this early wave of early childhood education was understood or accepted by the allied fields of social welfare and or psychology? Did they resist this new field cutting into their professional domain?

Almy: There were people, particularly social workers, who had been identified with child care, who had always been identified with custodial day nurseries. So, they didn't feel that the educational program was necessary. But of course I didn't have to cope with that in North Tonnawanda, because the Board of
Education had made its decision. We probably didn't use as much as we should have of the social work resources that may have been available to us, simply because we were under the aegis of the Board of Education.

Stewart: Did you feel a problem with the social work field in general? This is often the case with people remembering these times.

Almy: Yeah, it was a recurring problem. It was very hard to do anything about it. You asked about children whose fathers were overseas and whose mothers had to work - those tended to be the young mothers with the children under two. These children needed care the most, but the social workers who were in the system, and I think a lot of the psychologists too, believed that the mothers should stay home. What happened was that these mothers were working, they had to, and they were putting these little children in a lot of awful places. There just weren't many good choices. A lot of mothers used other families for child care, you know, you take care of my child and then I'll go to work. The compensation that the ones who stayed home to take care of children got, wasn't at all comparable with the salaries of the working mothers in the defense factories. So, there were lots of problems.

Stewart: What about your teachers' salaries in the Lanham programs?

Almy: Yes, now as I remember, the salaries for the teachers in the nursery school were not a problem. I don't know that they were the same as the kindergarten teachers got, but they were so much better than what teachers got in the WPA. I remember my salary looked tremendous to me. Something like $3,000 a year.

Stewart: But how did that compare to salaries in the defense industry for women?

Almy: Oh, it wasn't nearly equivalent to that. I think one of the things that the superintendent in North Tannawanda thought about this, was that this would be a way to give some teachers extra money, so that the discrepancy between their salaries and the defense industry salaries wouldn't be so great. Many teachers were leaving teaching to go into the defense industries. We used a number of teachers who taught during the day from nine to three or whatever, and then taught from three to five in the afternoon in the child care program.

Stewart: What about staff training in the Lanham program?

Almy: That was really difficult, because there wasn't time to do much training. Those teachers really didn't know, a lot of them, well some of them intuitively knew, what to do with kids when they are not in an academic school setting. I didn't really know. I hadn't had enough background in working with that age child. I just got so frustrated because I would go in, and find the kids just going wild in the classroom, and I couldn't figure it out. I didn't have enough theory or enough practice, or either one behind me. It was not like it had been in camp, where the whole setting was so different. Even though I'd had kids in camp who were older, it didn't help much.

Stewart: Did the teachers in the nursery school day care part have teaching backgrounds?
Almy: Yes, at least in that program they did. Ada, she was the head teacher, and by that time I think she had finished, or was about to finish, her master's degree I guess, and Genevieve Tricler who came in later was excellent, they all had at least bachelor's I think. We used a lot of part-time people, some of those had very good backgrounds but they weren't available for the full long day, so you pieced out as best you could.

Stewart: Now, were you aware of much of the national politics and the direction of the field at this time?

Almy: Yes, because I was still very much involved with the State Education Department people who had been running the WPA programs. Ruth Andrus who was still there, was the director of what was in the state called, the Bureau of Child Development and Parent Education. She was very political, very strong, and I think often raised hell in Washington. I was posted on what was going on because of that. I didn't get personally involved in it, but I knew about it. One of the things I should have mentioned, you asked about professionalism, we had a strong nursery school association in New York state. I think that slipped somewhat during the war because you couldn't travel, you couldn't have conferences and so on. Nevertheless, it was there and people belonged to it, and thought that was the thing to do. That would have been another way that I was kept on top of what was going on in Washington.

Personal and Social Life

Stewart: Before we leave this period of your life, can we talk a little about your personal and social life during this period? From 1936 to 1944 your homes, friends and views changed quite a bit?

Almy: You have to remember the times. During my time at Yale, 1936-38, the Spanish Civil War was going on. In some ways it was like Vietnam. There was a lot of political ferment in some colleges, as well as in the labor movement, as many people supported the Loyalists in Spain who were opposing France. Accompanying that, was a whole series of things to raise money: cocktail parties, parties of all kinds, mostly in people's homes. I met a variety of people during this time period. I had one influential friend, influential in my political views, who was an M.D. in Internal Medicine who lived across the street from me. (Incidentally, I lived in one room for which I paid four dollars a week and had a hot plate and shared the bathroom with the owners of the place. I had an icebox on my back porch. It was wonderful, just wonderful.) Anyway, my friend was a real radical, and he said that you might be afraid of the communists' influence on the Spanish loyalists, but you had to consider the current situation. Not to support the Loyalists would in effect be to support the conservatives and the fascists. His arguments were very persuasive.

I had a lot of friends in New Haven. I also joined a Sunday evening young people's group at a local church. I became very involved in that. They had social things and ran something called the Interprofessional Forum. They also planned religious services. I remember I did a service once, got very much interested in church ritual and that sort of thing. Another influence was the psychoanalytic influence. A couple of women, who lived in the same house,
were being analyzed at the time. We often ate together, and I listened to their discussions.

So you know, it was a very diverse kind of social life at Yale and I enjoyed it thoroughly. Now when I got to Newark, the social life was much restrained. I mostly went into New York and spent the weekends after I'd been to Bank Street. I'd stay with a friend of mine who had dropped out of Vassar at the end of her second year. She had a studio apartment down in the Village. I said to her often, "I don't know how you put up with me. I come in every weekend." Often she would cook supper or we would go out and have a bang up dinner for a dollar or a dollar-fifty, and poke around in the village and go to the art museums. Oh yes, and by that time I had another friend who had been one of the counselors in one of the camps. By then she was married and her husband was an artist. So, I had a connection through them with the art world, and then I went to the parties that my art friends gave. All pretty radical.

Stewart: What kind of parties did the artists have?

Almy: Well you know, quite a lot of drinking I would say. Also their ideas were quite different than any I was used to. I remember that I knew...that people sometimes lived with people without being married to them, but I think there was the first time that I actually met somebody who did that. Another friend, a Vassar graduate, lived in Little Italy, in a tenement. She worked at Dorothy Day's, Catholic Worker. So you see what I mean by diversity. Everybody has friends who are unusual, but I do think I had a pretty wide scope.

Stewart: Let's see, now you went to Buffalo?

Almy: Well, then I lived with my family in Jamestown before we moved to Buffalo. I did a few social things with members of the staff in Buffalo. One of the people I knew at Yale was living there and I did quite a lot of things with her. Although, I wasn't socially very involved while there. I did do a lot of things with a couple members of the WPA Advisory Committee who were both much older than I. Part of the reason for my lack of social involvement in Buffalo was that it was such darned hard work, especially the time that I got into the child care. I would come home and my mother would give me dinner and I would take a bath, or maybe take a bath before dinner, and go to bed with a mystery. Then I'd get up at five-thirty the next morning and go to work. So there wasn't much time or energy for anything else. It was quite discouraging. I guess one of the things I was thinking about in the decision to go to graduate school was, "Well, if I'm not going to get an MRS, I'm going to get an MA."

Stewart: That sounds like a big change after that incredibly enriched social life at Yale and within the New York environs. That must have been depressing.

Almy: Yeah, I taught Sunday school I guess for all the time I was there. I got a certain amount of money for it, but not much. It was a regular nursery school program on Sunday mornings with three-year-olds. I felt it was good for me to be doing some teaching myself.

Stewart: I see, so you didn't even rest on Sunday?
Almy: No, but I still did a number of things with my family. It was really nice as far as family was concerned.

Stewart: Now what was the situation of your family?

Almy: Well, my father during the Depression, sold or tried to sell, vacuum cleaners and Fuller brushes. Once in awhile he'd make a sale, but not very often.

Stewart: So did your salary go to help support your parents?

Almy: Yes, right.

Stewart: Well, that must have been depressing for your father also.

Almy: Oh, it was, it was terrible. He was sick and he lost a lot of weight. Looking back, I see that in the depression, he was in a personal depression. When I began living with them, he improved.

When I moved to Buffalo in the WPA program, I was in an office across the desk from the music supervisor and around the corner from the art supervisor. The art supervisor said to me that the Albright Art Gallery was looking for a night custodian. "Would that be something your father could do?" And I said "Why not?" The art gallery interviewed him and he got the job. My father was a very personable guy. Suddenly things were so much better. Not, you know, that he got a magnificent salary, but he did get a salary and you could count on it, and he got a little retirement out of it. Before he died he figured out how much money the city really owed him considering the amount of time he put in. He lived beyond his years, so everything he got after that was free. In the meantime, my mother was in and out of the Roswell Cancer Hospital in Buffalo because she had cancer. Initially we didn't think that was what it was. Roswell is a research hospital and so she had wonderful care and at no charge. Of course there were associated things that I had to pay for, but basically that was a free program. So, that was something.

Stewart: In North Tannawanda in 1942 to 1944, what was your family situation then? And your social life also?

Almy: Let's see. We moved. The housing that they lived in, in Buffalo, was really not very good. It was kind of an old house and we were upstairs. I remember my mother was so horrified because there were cockroaches and she had never encountered a cockroach before. But it was okay, really. By the time I was in North Tannawanda we were in a better housing area and we had a nice apartment there. By then, my father had been working for quite awhile in the art gallery. I'd been working and I'd got this beautiful $3,000 a year job. But socially, there wasn't that much happening.

Stewart: Tell me if I'm right here, I would imagine with these experiences of the Depression with your parents losing the farm, probably radicalized you further.

Almy: Oh, yes, it did. For years I just couldn't see any justice. There was no justice. Because why should my family, who were perfectly good people, who had never been selfish themselves and had always worked to make things better for
other people, why should they have to go through this? Why should anybody? A lot of the people that I had when I was a caseworker, why should they be up against what they were? I was concerned about people who really wanted to make it, and really were willing to work hard and there was nothing for them. And so you are absolutely right, those experiences did leave a deep impression.

Stewart: Your father had been a Republican, was he still a Republican after this experience?

Almy: (Laughing) Yes, I think so. He thought that a lot of the things that Roosevelt did were crazy. They just didn't fit with what he thought was apparent. I also think that he loved to tease me, and I suspect that looking back, at certain points he probably exaggerated his Republican stance in order to get a good argument going.

Stewart: I see. Now what did you think of Roosevelt? Did you see him as the hope?

Almy: Oh I saw him as the hope. I shall never forget being in New York on the Bank Holiday in 1933 and what it was like when there wasn't any money. He was doing something about it. Then I became very much interested in Mrs. Roosevelt and considered her really a tremendous leader. I got to know more about her when I went to graduate school but that was later. Most of my family and the more distant relatives were all pretty Republican.

**Decision to Pursue Graduate Studies**

Stewart: Let's talk about Teachers College, Columbia. You said that you had agonized for months over your decision to leave the child care centers and go to graduate school.

Almy: You see before I had graduated from college, I had gone to Teachers College at Columbia University and investigated the possibilities of doing a masters there. I had decided against it for two reasons: one, I didn't think I could put up with another year in which I wasn't getting a salary and paying tuition, although I would have had a scholarship. The second reason was, that I sort of knew intuitively that I would be better at whatever I did, to have some experience before I got there. Then my teacher at Vassar cooked up the assistantship for me at Yale. So I had thought about graduate school.

   I'll just talk in this interview about how I got to go there and why I got the kind of reception that I got. When I applied, I was immediately accepted and I was offered (and accepted) a fellowship. In the meantime, Roma Gans, who would be my major advisor there, invited me to come and be her assistant during the summer. I said, "yes, I would." After I arrived she took me out for dinner and she said, "Now you've applied only for an M.A. and you must go for a Ph.D." I thought yes, that is what I'd like to do.

   I think one of the reasons I received such a warm reception was because after Patty Smith Hill died, and Lois Meek Stoltz was no longer there, Teachers College was really short on people who knew the nursery school the way I did.
I think Roma may have felt just a slight bit of rivalry with me because of the breadth and diversity of my early childhood experience. Roma Gans was a very charismatic person but she had never taught in an early childhood setting. She had been a high school teacher. I think she and maybe the other powers that be, thought that if they could get me involved, then they would have what they lacked. So you see, she probably felt both welcoming and just a touch wary of me. This situation really helped create a place for me. I had been there but a few days when they offered me a half-time instructorship in the Department of Curriculum and Teaching. So, though I had come for a Masters Degree, with all the help and support I received, I was able to finish my Ph.D. in four years.
Let's talk about your graduate school career at Teachers College.

Major Influences

Almy: Oh, it would be a pleasure. Now your first question here was the influences on my decision to pursue an academic career and as I may have mentioned, those go back before I got to Columbia to the influence of Ruth Washburn at Yale and to Ruth Andrus in the state department of education in New York who both implied to me that I would be going on to graduate school. I was also very interested in older children and wanted to learn more about them. I really didn't know what to do with these older children who we had in the child care centers. So, it wasn't really an academic interest so much as it was a practical one plus the fatigue that I was feeling from going from six o'clock until six o'clock.

You asked about my intellectual influences. I think Roma Gans was really a very important influence. She was a very charismatic person and she had a number of interests that sort of fitted into what I was interested in. She was very people oriented. She was also very political, yet, she also was quite scholarly, in that she had an interest in what was going on in other parts of the university, such as linguistics, anthropology, and sociology. Teachers College is an affiliate of Columbia University, but it is not a school within the university. So it's different from Cal in that respect. One of the things that was very important was that I became an instructor along with three or four other people in early childhood education. We did team teaching. We used to meet together before class and plan what was going to happen in the next session. We had about ninety students. Towards the end of the war, children and child care were becoming important and people were getting interested in it again. They also came because they had heard about Roma. She was a very important influence on me in the development of my concern about how children begin to read. Reading was her specialty.

The other influences were more political and social. For instance, I took a course with John Childs and George Counts on the foundations of education, and a psychology of social change course with Goodwin Watson, another very charismatic teacher. I took as much psychology as I could get, although technically my major was in curriculum.

I've always viewed my thesis as interesting. I began with the notion that I wanted to pursue a topic that an earlier Teachers College student, Mary Gutteridge had studied, that four-year-olds were much more competent in their motor development than most preschool environments provided them the choice to demonstrate. They could climb on cables and whatnot, but most programs didn't have anything of that sort. I wanted to do a thesis where I would show
the effects of being in an environment that encouraged such exploration on the part of kids. I worked at it for a long time and the curriculum department thought it was great. Then I took it to Irving Lorge, who was an educational psychologist interested in many different areas of research. He said, "Millie, you can't do that unless you have a team of workers with you, because you don't have the background." I found out that I would need courses in anatomy, physiology, and chemistry to pursue that topic. That seemed too much, so I gave it up. I didn't feel like I could afford to spend so many years on the thesis.

Gradually I began to think about another topic, the relative influence of nature vs. nurture or heredity vs. environment. I picked up on Roma's interest in children's beginning reading and my own interest in children's play. Eventually I did my thesis on the question of children's experiences, prior to first grade, in relation to success in beginning reading. I really enjoyed doing it. It was an interesting thesis to do. Thanks to Irving Lorge, Arthur Jersild and Roma, I got it done in four years. I picked up a Master's at the end of the first year. When I finished my thesis Irving Lorge said, "Millie, join the American Psychological Association." I said, "Oh, I wasn't a psychology major." He said, "That's all right. You apply. I think it's very important." So I did, although I didn't understand at that point how important it was going to be to me later on.

Stewart: Your doctorate was in Education?

Almy: My doctorate was in Education, and the department was Curriculum. I did the advanced seminar and my qualifying exam in that. Largely because of Roma's advice, I did mostly psychology at Teachers College. I don't remember exactly what courses I did at Columbia. I do remember that the hurdles for the doctorate at Columbia were different from those at U.C. Berkeley. I think it was really a better situation. You had your orals after you finished your thesis, whereas at Berkeley it's the opposite. Anyway, I finished the thesis and was to go for my orals. At Columbia, you never knew who was going to be on your committee, except your own committee, which in my case was Lorge, Gans and Jersild.

Stewart: How many people would be on it?

Almy: Five. So, I had two people I didn't know about until the day before. I thought one of them might be Paul Lazarsfield and I was scared to death. He taught a course in the printed media which kind of fit my thesis, particularly dealing with advertising and communication through magazines. It was a very good course, but when I was taking it, I was also working on my thesis and I didn't have time to do any reading or anything. I just went to class. I thought well, I've been at this long enough I think I can write an exam. Instead, he had an oral exam. I think that maybe I went in with a couple of other people and I didn't think I did very well. So, I was terrified that he would turn up on my orals committee, but he didn't. In fact, I had never had a course with either of the two who did turn up on it.

One was Robert Woodworth, a famous psychologist, near retirement, or perhaps already retired. His questions were gentle and easy. The other one was Robert Lynd, who was the sociologist who did "Middletown." Lynd
asked a lot of questions. Finally I said to him, "Professor Lynd, if I had been doing a sociological study I would have done it differently." Afterward, one of the Teachers College faculty said that when I went out, he said, "Why did I hassle her so much?" That was kind of funny.

Stewart: You mentioned earlier in this interview that the foundations courses you took at Columbia were particularly exciting.

Almy: Well, the theme of the Childs/Counts course was social change. That we were moving beyond the kind of society we'd had previously, and that we needed to move beyond what traditions were, if we were to catch up with the direction of the world. Now, the Child/Counts course was excellent. They were a little bit out of date because changes were already taking place but they offered challenging questions. One of the features of Teachers College was that there were a lot of courses that were team taught and these courses often divided into discussion groups. We had a lot of contact with other students. I think that pattern spread to many other teacher's colleges for all foundations courses. Then I took a seminar with John Childs, on Dewey's pragmatism.

The students were all working on the philosophical basis for education and Childs was the group teacher. Childs sometimes used a kind of Socratic questioning method. As I think I told you, I was terrified in his class. I never said anything but because I was an instructor I often had lunch at the faculty table. He would sometimes sit down next to me and pursue questions with me about early childhood education's curriculum, whether or not I believed it should be based solely on child development. Of course what he was digging for was, what are the values of the society, and how do those values shape our children, and how should we do it? He was referring back to Counts' notion implied in his book, *Dare the Schools Change the Social Order*.

In the course in psychology and social change the instructor, Goodwin Watson, had us read the *New York Times* and *Time Magazine*. Every week he gave an exam on what was currently in the *New York Times* that referred to social change. He thought those two made pretty good background material. I recall that I wrote a paper for him, and he gave me a B on it. I thought it was a very good paper and I went in and said, "I don't understand why. What was wrong with this paper? What would you have liked me to have done with these?" And he said, "You wrote an ordinary paper. You should plunge into it more deeply. You should raise better questions than you did." In that course, he gave us maybe fifty principles of social change. Those have proven useful over the years that followed. How change takes place, through a process of advance and retreat. While I haven't saved those principles, I've found that when people are kind of pessimistic about something, I go back to thinking that way, and think that while the first wave of advance has given way to a retreat, it will eventually be followed by another advance.

Stewart: At that time did you view early childhood as a force for change in society?

Almy: I'm not sure. Certainly my first book with Gans and Stendler, *Teaching Young Children*, was quite political. In it we wrote about communities and sources of disagreement within them. We pointed out that the source of controversy between teachers and communities, was often between teachers from very
traditional kinds of backgrounds and people who were new in the communities such as immigrants and blacks. We described how white children might think that they would get a disease from touching a black child, this was in the days before there was much going on in terms of integration.

Roma Gans was committed to correcting discrimination against the black population. She taught a lot in the south. A lot of blacks came to Teachers College for summer study. In North Carolina, you couldn't get a Masters degree, but you could come to Teachers College and get it. I think that whole business of giving consideration to people who are different than you assumed that early childhood could change things.

Stewart: Let's move now to your personal and social life at Teachers College.

Almy: Well, I would like to talk about the personal, social and the political here. One of the reasons why, is that one of the happiest occasions that I used to have when I was there, was when Roma Gans would get a whole group of maybe fifteen or twenty people at her apartment for an evening, and we would sing hymns. Now she was Catholic. I don't know when she got into Protestant hymns, but there were a lot of professors and graduate students there who were from protestant middle, or lower class homes in rural environments like mine. They had all been brought up singing. We had wonderful times singing those hymns. Also, there would be a lot of discussion about what was going on outside in the community at large. So that was both the social and political.

I lived for three years with a Catholic woman from Boston. She had a wonderful sense of humor. We did a lot of things together. There were other people in the apartment building that I enjoyed also. During that time I had a friend I'd known since my summer camp days, she lived in New York and was married to an artist. I had another group of friends that had connections to art. It was a pretty rich kind of social life, also political because the Teachers College group by and large were liberal. Many of them later joined the liberal party, whereas among the artist group, they were much more radical and much more like the people I had known at Yale. These two contrasting points of view made life interesting. That was kind of fun. Then of course I loved New York, the theater, the concerts and the museums and what not.

Stewart: You had some money to spend on these things?

Almy: Well, it wasn't very much. Another expense was the money I borrowed for college for various aspects of my dissertation, but things were less expensive then and of course I was sharing living expenses. Also I went home to Buffalo, to my family from time to time. My mother was not very well. She had this skin cancer, originally it was on her foot and it never got better, it always got worse.

Stewart: You graduated in May of 1948? Did your parents come to see you graduate?

Almy: No, no, no. I didn't even go to graduation. It didn't seem terribly important to go to Columbia to graduate. I collected the diploma, but I didn't go to the graduation.
Stewart: Did you have any immediate plans when you got your degree?

Almy: That was funny. At one point I was assured by some Teachers College people that I was going to be on the faculty there when I finished. Then there was a lot of politicking going on in the college and it became clear to me that it wasn't going to happen. I went to talk to the placement officer and he said something very wise. He said, "You'd be much better off if you had a job elsewhere than Teachers College after you finish." He gave me the names of colleges where there might be openings.

**University of Cincinnati and its College of Home Economics: 1948-1952**

I went to two places. One was the University of Wisconsin, which in many respects I would have liked very much. It was a very good school. They took me to lunch and the Dean of Education looked at me and said, "Dr. Almy, what do you believe?" I was appalled and what went through my head was, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Jesus Christ, his only begotten son," but I didn't have the courage to say that. I don't know what I said. Anyway, it didn't work out. Then, I went to the University of Cincinnati and its College of Home Economics. They were so cordial and warm and interested in me. I decided that was the place I was looking for.

I think the main thing they were interested in was that they hire a Ph.D. Most of their faculty, in fact, I think all of their faculty were Masters Degree people. They had just lost a year or two before, Dr. Ada Hart Arlitt, who was a very well known child psychologist. They wanted to replace her with a Ph.D. because even then Home Economic schools' futures were very uncertain within many universities. Consequently, a lot of them began to emphasize human development or else they became more technical. That's why they were so eager for me.

I was there for four years. I always taught a course in child development which was required of all sophomores. I had about seventy-five students each year, and if I remember, it was a year long course. I taught it at one o'clock in the afternoon when often they were sleepy from lunch. Then I taught a course in family living, because my field was child development and family living. That course had, as I recall, mostly juniors in it, maybe sophomores, and that was a smaller class. I don't think it was required but it was very difficult for me to manage, because they were mainly interested in sex and I didn't really know very much that would really be helpful to them. But I did my darndest. I'd had classes in the sociology of family. That was a hard course to teach.

**The Nursery School**

The most interesting part of that job, was my job as Director of the Nursery School. The Nursery School was kind of an institution in Cincinnati, lots of upper middle class children went there. The head of the Department of Psychiatry in the University Medical School was very interested in it. He and the other parents from the Medical School wanted a different emphasis in the Nursery School.
In previous years the emphasis had been based on a particularly behavioristic model called "habit training" that was quite typical of the Nursery School in the twenties and thirties. Its emphasis was on physical hygiene. I recall calling the pediatrician attached to the school, and saying, "I just discovered that we have a huge supply of surgical soap. I guess it's for the children to wash their hands. Do you think that it is necessary for us to order more surgical soap?" He laughed and said, "No, but if you think that children need to wash their hands with surgical soap after handling toys, maybe you should order some tongs too, then they won't have to touch the toys at all." The students had been taught that if a child dropped a toy they were to put the toy in their pockets until it could be washed. Some told me they used to sneak them back on the shelves when the teachers weren't looking.

I brought a head teacher from Teachers College, one of the two best nursery school teachers I'd ever seen, to the nursery school. We turned it around in a number of ways. For one thing, we decided not to have strict age groupings. We had thirty-five children aged two to five. Because we had lots of student help we could be quite informal, letting the children's friendships and play interests determine the groups. Then, towards the end of the year we took the five-year-olds off into a separate group and prepared them for kindergarten.

Stewart: Did you get much resistance from the other staff?
Almy: No, no. There was one teacher who had been there under the old regime. She was pretty interested in the experimentation. Also, we worked quite closely with the Department of Psychiatry at Children's Hospital. We had a pediatric psychiatrist who came to us quite often, and provided consultations on kids. He sent us a new resident from the Department of Pediatrics at the hospital every month so that we had men in the program.

I had already started a strong emphasis on parents. I or the head teacher did parent conferencing at the beginning, the middle and the end of the year, and of course more informally when parents requested it or we thought it necessary. We changed the way of selecting children. Previously, it had all been a matter of if you'd been a graduate of the university and you got your name in early, which was about the time the child was conceived, then you were accepted. We established an admissions committee to make the final decisions after we had interviewed the children and their parents. The primary basis was age range, so that our students could see kids of different ages. We also took in the first, well, I think they had one before, but the first black child they had in a long time. We put in an observation booth because they had about one hundred students coming through for observation every week, and I thought that was too many people running around on the floor with the kids. That was about it.

Emily Cleaver, the head teacher, taught a course in nursery school and preschool methods for students majoring in Child development. We also established fairly close contacts with child care centers because a lot of the graduates were teaching in child care centers.

You had asked me about the professionalism of the students, about what they were working for. Home economics students could major in such diverse
fields as textiles and nutrition as well as child development. Those who were in nutrition did quite a lot of work in child development. Those who really majored in child development went on mostly to jobs in preschools or in child care centers. One job that we tried to encourage people to get into was in Children's Hospital, as director of the play program for children. That was quite a new development at that point, and a previous graduate student held the position.

Stewart: Can you explain more about that program?

Almy: Well, this is a person who sees to it...that children who come in for various kinds of care have just as much opportunity for play as they are able to have. You have equipment for them and you have to encourage them. A friend of mine who lives here (Berkeley, CA.) helped start that program. The other day she was saying that when the antibiotics came along it made a big difference. They didn't have to protect the kids in quite the same way that they had to previously. The children didn't have to stay as long in the hospitals as they did previously.

Stewart: Was there much of a change in the climate within the academic world and in the students after WWII?

Almy: At Teachers College, I remember that there were a lot of men and women particularly, who had just come back from the war and who were raising so many interesting questions. That's partly, I suppose, why there was such an interest in foundation courses. It was a very stimulating, intellectual environment because of that. Cincinnati was a women's college and I don't remember much influence growing out of the end of the war specifically.

Now one of the things that was happening there, was that the School of Education prepared students to teach kindergarten. Students from the School of Home Economics went over there and took a course in kindergarten education. I don't think that the School of Education students came over to us for anything. I knew fairly well what was going on, because there was a colleague of mine from Teachers College in the School of Education. They were part of my social life in Cincinnati. Anyway, I got to know what was going on in education fairly well. In fact, I remember the time the Education Dean called me in for a conference. He looked at me and he pulled up his sleeves a little bit. He said, "Dr. Almy, I have nothing up my sleeves." Of course, I knew that he did. Then he told me he wanted the Department of Child Development and the Nursery School to be incorporated in the School of Education, of course eventually it was. But not while I was still there.

Stewart: Did you view that with alarm?

Almy: Well, I guess I was more inclined to think it should happen, than it shouldn't. I was of two minds about it because I felt that the home economics program was much stronger in child development. On the other hand, I thought it was weak in some of the education areas. You know, I didn't feel I could encourage the Dean to take me in or to take the program in.

Stewart: What about your social life in Cincinnati?
Almy: Well, it was pretty good because so many people seemed pleased that I was there, like the people in the Department of Psychiatry and other people associated with it. For instance, I was practically adopted by the Ransohoff family. Mrs. Ransohoff had done parent education in the School of Home Economics, and she and her husband and family took me in. I remember once Nathan Ransohoff looked at me said, "Millie, you are almost nice enough to be a Jew." I didn't know how to answer anything like that.

I had another friend in foundations in the Education Department. His wife was a sculptor. I also started to develop more and more an interest in psychoanalytic things in a social way there. I had some interviews with a psychiatrist there and began to put together my relationships with my mother and my home. Also, Cincinnati is a great family town, lots of music. By then I was getting enough money so that I could afford to have a series of concert tickets which was really nice.

Stewart: Did you continue your interest in politics there?

Almy: Cincinnati is a very conservative community and I don't think I was quite as overt with my politics there...as I was in New York.

Stewart: What was the emphasis of your research and writing in Cincinnati?

Almy: Well, in one way there wasn't much. I kept wanting to do research but I didn't know what I wanted to do. I did quite a lot of observation of the children's play and that became part of what went into the work that I did. I imagine I was also beginning to think about my child development book. A lot of its illustrations came from my Cincinnati experience. Maurice Levine, who was the head of psychiatry there, invited me to be a lecturer. I also met with psychiatric residents from time to time and talked mostly about the kids and play.

**Mid-Century White House Conference on Children**

Stewart: Okay, so the next topic that we are going to talk about is your work outside academia. What about your work in the Mid-Century White House Conference on Children.

Almy: That was fascinating and was very useful to me for a number of years. I got a call in the fall of that year from someone asking if I would come to Washington D.C. to help with the writing of a book called, *Personality in the Making: The Fact Finding Report of the Mid-Century White House Conference on Children and Youth*, edited by Helen Leland Witmer and Ruth Kotinsky. Helen was a social worker and Ruth had a Ph.D. in social foundations and was also a social worker. She was in Washington putting together these reports from all over the United States. The University of Cincinnati said yes, I could have a leave and I went to Washington and worked there for a month or two through the conference. It was extremely valuable to me in a number of ways. One, was that I worked with Ruth Kotinsky. She would give me things to write or
rewrite. My style is quite lean and hers was very beautiful but very different, very full of subordinate clauses and long sentences. Mostly what I did with her was to sit by her and read her what I'd written. She would go over her stuff too and then she'd rewrite, so finely, and it would all come out differently. That's where I learned about editing. The eventual book was based on Erikson, who also participated in that conference. I learned a tremendous amount about writing and about philosophical views and so on. I also learned a tremendous amount about the politics of early education and children in the 1950's.

Stewart: Can you elaborate on those politics?

Almy: Well, the various groups were fighting with one another. All of the groups that were involved with the National Association for Nursery Education (NANE) and the other special education groups were fighting for what they wanted. Other groups such as churches, health services, recreational services, law enforcement agencies and so on, were also fighting for what they viewed as important. One of the major fights was over standards, whether you could ask child care centers to maintain certain standards.

Stewart: Was that an argument primarily between NANE and the Child Welfare Department?

Almy: No, well it was indirectly NANE and Child Welfare, but it was being fought in State Departments of Education vs. the Children's Bureau in Washington.

Anyway, Ruth Kotinsky was very good at finding ways to reconcile points of view, and pointing out on the one hand this, and on the other hand that. I remember some of the stuff that she wrote about possibilities for divisiveness between minorities and others. It's a beautiful book, it really is. That was an extremely useful experience for me.

Stewart: Where did the White House stand in all this?

Almy: Well, the White House sent invitations, and gave a reception at which Truman spoke. The White House Conference of course, had been going on since the early 1900's. This was probably the most comprehensive White House Conference ever. I think that the White House Conferences went steadily down hill from then on. It was supposed to come every ten years. They don't do it anymore. There was one that was focused on special education but the Mid-Century one was the only one I ever went to.

Stewart: So how did one get an invitation to it?

Almy: Political. Political, depending on where you were and who you knew. I think some people wangled invitations, and some people received them automatically because of their positions. Of course I wouldn't have been invited if somebody, I think it was Roma Gans, hadn't suggested to Ruth that I would be a good person to help her, because I wrote well even when I was writing my thesis.

Stewart: Did you find working in Washington on the conference disappointing or
disillusioning in any way?

Almy: Well, it was disillusioning, quite disillusioning, but it prepared me for being more disillusioned later on. You know, it was like a revelation. I didn't expect so much; I wasn't so naive as I had been previously.

National Association for Nursery Education (NANE)

Stewart: Millie, would you talk a bit about when you were President of NANE, that's 1952 to 1954?

Almy: Well, my association with NANE began in Buffalo with the New York State Association. I've refreshed my memory on that history from Sherry Boyd's dissertation. From 1943 to 1945 when I was working on my thesis, I became involved with Docia Zavitkovsky and Theo Reeve, who really started the NANE bulletin. Then there was the big San Francisco conference of 1947 which I was unable to attend. I felt terrible, but I was working on my thesis and just couldn't go. From 1948 to 1952 when I was in Cincinnati, I was a member of the Midwest Association and I was President of it at one point. I went to or did the program conference for the Nashville meetings. I think maybe that was the Midwest Association and not NANE, although I notice Sherry Boyle's dissertation refers to the Nashville conference of NANE. In 1951 in New York there was this marvelous NANE conference which was different from any other conference that had ever been held for NANE. It was built around themes that people were struggling with, and it was built on much more participation of individuals who came, not nearly so much being lectured to, the way that had been done previously. It was just a marvelous conference.

New York City, of course, had a large group of NANE people and they did it. It was really great. I went to one in Minneapolis, maybe when I was President of NANE. That was one of the poorest attended conferences that we'd ever had. That was sort of a preliminary to my being President and some of the things that happened when I was President.

Stewart: How many people were in NANE?

Almy: At that time I think about two hundred. When I was President, the persistent debate was whether we should associate more closely with the Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI). That goes back to the 1930's and continues all the way up, and to when I was President, and I think beyond. I kept pushing for association with ACEI. I worked on some committees for ACEI for awhile. At one time I called for a meeting in New York City of people who had been on the NANE Board. I proposed to them that since we had such a small attendance in Minneapolis, maybe it was time for us to do something else. In other words to close up shop on NANE. Jimmy Hymes said, "If you killed NANE today I guarantee you within six months, it would spring up again. It's just something in that group that keeps rising up again."
One of the things that I did, was to start anonymously, along with Judy Caumans or Frances Horowitch, what we called the "NANE tools and mechanics fund." This was a fund to look at the structure of NANE and find ways to better communicate with members, i.e. more regular publications and meetings etc. I think this was in one way a forbearer of the structure that developed later on such as the affiliate groups.

Now, you also asked about what were the issues of the day in terms of NANE. If I remember correctly, the issues were: day care, co-ops, proprietary nursery schools, how to establish program standards and how to keep these programs to those standards. There wasn't so much emphasis on standards for teachers at that particular time. Then somewhere along in there was child development.

At this time, a lot of interesting new ideas were coming into child development. I was asked to be the program chairman for the biennial NANE meeting in Boston, which I did. I wrote people I knew to be doing interesting research which I thought would hold some interest for preschool teachers. I invited these researchers to present their research. They did, and the conference was the biggest flop. It just was not what people wanted. Some of the researchers were excellent, but a lot of them didn't know how to present their stuff to teachers. Perhaps that was when I began to realize the importance of the teacher's involvement in research.

Stewart: What kinds of backgrounds did people in the early NANE years have? Were they from education schools or home economic schools?

Almy: I don't know that we knew.

Stewart: Did you enjoy these differences at NANE meetings and conferences?

Almy: We loved to go because each of us had a coterie of friends that we saw there. Mine were mostly people who had been on the board and people who were in the universities. There was as I will tell you later on, quite a bit of overlapping with developmental psychology.

**Back To Teachers College: 1952**

Stewart: Millie, lets move on to another part of your life in the academic world. In 1952 you returned to Teachers College as a faculty member there. Can you tell me the circumstances of your move back?

Almy: While I was at Cincinnati, I had been teaching at the University of Illinois in the summer. This time they, the Teachers College, asked me to come back to teach in educational psychology. As I tried to indicate to you, I'd begun to change roles and to be at least as much of a developmental psychologist as an early childhood educator. As I recall, I taught one course in advanced developmental psych and one course in early childhood education at the University of Illinois.

Professor Jersild from Teachers College called and said they wanted me for
the summer. I said "That would be very pleasant, I'd like to do that, yes I would." Several weeks went by and he called again and said "We would like you to consider coming back permanently." I was astounded because I didn't really consider myself as fully converted to the role of developmental psychologist. But I said "yes, I would."

It was a hard decision because I really was liking Cincinnati. I had made a real place for myself there and I could have stayed there and finished my career. Several of my friends said to me, "Well, the University of Cincinnati is a place where people teach for three or four years and then they go on to somewhere else." So I followed in others' footsteps and I left to go back to Teachers College. Then, as you know I was there for nineteen years.

Most of my associations were with Teachers College faculty. However, because Ph.D.s are granted by Columbia and Ph.D. candidates always have at least one Columbia member on their committee, I had a fair number of associations with Columbia faculty also. I taught...Child Development: Birth to Age Six...and Adolescent Psychology there. I think they were kind of desperate for somebody to teach the Birth to Age Six class, because the person they'd had was no longer there. After several years of teaching the adolescent course I finally said, "I do not want to do this anymore." Those are very hard courses to teach, and it took me into an area that I didn't know very well. Where I had seventy-five students in my Birth to Age Six class, I would have one hundred to one hundred-fifty in the adolescent courses. Sometimes I would have an associate. That would be easier but it was still hard. I learned an awful lot about human beings doing that, but didn't advance in early childhood much. So I switched to advanced developmental. By then I was beginning to do some research, so I could even things out.

When I first went back, the Education Psychology Department (later on it grew to be Psychology and Education and included clinical and counseling) had a faculty of forty. Eight of them were women. I think it's worthwhile mentioning that I never felt the slightest discrimination as a woman. I felt like I was treated like everybody else; they were very good to me. For example, when I started doing some research on Piaget for example, they had a staff meeting to give me leads and to help. Bob Thorndike the head of the department, worked to get me a raise when my mother was quite ill, and my father wasn't very well. Within that faculty I never felt any real discrimination.

Interestingly, just as in the curriculum department, we did a fair amount of team teaching in developmental psychology. Even when we weren't team teaching, the staff in developmental, which included some associates and instructors, met together once a week to talk about our classes. That was a big source of support to me, so much easier than teaching everything by yourself.

I think there were some issues of professionalism being raised. You see then I was seeing myself not so much as an early child educator, but more as a developmental psychologist. Within the college, and I think it's true in many colleges, there was some tension between theory and practice. Most psychologists were getting Ph.D.s and most curriculum people getting Ed.D.s. Ed.D. had the emphasis on practice, Ph.D. on theory. I could see it both ways. There was also some tension between psychology and curriculum. Everyone in
curriculum, and in subject matter areas, had to take a developmental course: Birth to Age Six, or the Elementary School Years or Adolescent Years. We always called those service courses. That always made the curriculum people mad. (laughs)

Now you asked for the research and writing I did. I'll try to straighten that out as I go. The first book that I did that was clearly on early childhood education was Gans, Stendler, and Almy: *Teaching Young Children* (1952). You were asking about the history of play, and I just looked back at that and I am aware that I did a chapter on play. It's a strongly political book with emphasis on communities and minorities and so on. Interestingly enough, it doesn't have a great deal in it about parents, which is one of the things I think perhaps it should have had. When I got back to Teachers College, I finished my book, *Child Development* (1955) which I had started at Cincinnati. I wanted to do a book which could be used as a text on child development but which would show real children growing up, not just talk about the theory of child development. I wanted to draw on longitudinal studies of child development. I proceeded to contact the various longitudinal studies and finally I ended up at the Harvard School of Public Health. I used their data for case studies in that child development book.

In the meantime, a colleague of mine who later died, Ruth Cunningham, had been working on a book which she called, *Ways of Studying Children*. It was about children from kindergarten through adolescence. When she died I took her material and added to it, and put the focus more on younger children, although not completely in that book. I think that the theme of assessment, observation and assessment, is one of the important themes in my research and also tied into what was the next phase, and I think the most important phase, of my research. That was the Piaget studies, which I found in thinking about it, I had started a bit at Cincinnati.

**Piaget**

Almy: We had an assistant there, Carol Beener, whom I put to work reading some of the Piaget stuff. She couldn't make head nor tail of it, but when I got to Teachers College I began plunging into it more deeply. At that time, I was doing observation in various kindergartens and I thought that many of the programs were not very challenging intellectually. It seemed to me that you could introduce some science experiences to the kids and then see how their intellectual functioning and interest improved. See, it's still the maturation and learning and the nature or nurture kind of thing. I got into Piaget's ways of studying children's thinking, as a way of measuring changes in their thinking. I began collecting material with my graduate students which culminated in the book *Young Children's Thinking* (1966).

Stewart: Did you have any contact with Piaget during this time period?

Almy: I had a sabbatical in 1959. I wanted to go to Geneva and work with Piaget, so I wrote to Inhelder at the suggestion of one of our graduate students who had her
bachelor's from the Piaget group. She said to, "Write to Inhelder because she will respond. If you write to Piaget he probably won't respond." So, I wrote to Inhelder and I never heard from her. In the meantime, I was also interested in spending some time with Anna Freud in London and this same student said, "Oh, Millie, I really think you'd get much more out of Anna Freud than you will out of Piaget." And I, "Oh, but Piaget is right on what I'm working on, so I'll only go to work with him." I still didn't hear from the Piaget group so eventually I wrote to Anna Freud. She didn't want me to come because I was only going to be there for a short period, two months. Then I wrote to her again and explained why, that my mother had died recently and that my father was not very well. I didn't want to be away longer than two months. Of course Anna Freud could understand that, so she let me come. When I came back I was more interested in Piaget than ever, not that I wasn't interested in what I'd learned from her, but I didn't see any very direct applications, whereas I did see with Piaget. And that's how we got into that.

Anna Freud

Stewart: Well, tell me a little more about Anna Freud. Did you work in the Hempstead nursery? What did you do there?

Almy: I told her that I would not try to participate in the clinical work that related to children who were being treated therapeutically. I had heard a great deal about the nursery school and I regarded her book, *Psychoanalysis for Teachers and Parents*, as basic. I just wanted to spend as much time as I could there, getting to know the staff and the kinds of records they kept and so on. So she let me do that.

A wonderful teacher, M. Friedman, was in charge of that nursery school. In a way the Hempstead Nursery was a bit like the Yale nursery. They had a core group of children who were pretty stable, and then children who were mentally ill. The groups were small. Anna Freud believed that looking at normally developing children was helpful in understanding the development of the mentally ill. Eventually Anna Freud let me read the records on children who had been there and who were going out to, or had gone out to, infant schools (equivalent to our kindergartens and first grades). She suggested that I predict, from the records, what I thought would happen to the children, and then go out to the schools and see how accurate my predictions really were. I did that and really had a ball. She liked what I did and I learned a tremendous amount about kids and different ways of looking at them.

In our final conference, she asked me what I would have done differently in the nursery. I said, "I would have expanded more on the children's play, like giving them tickets for their bus play, etc." She said they just took the play at its face value and made a lot of it. Then she said, "I wouldn't do that but you know it's okay, yes you could, but we haven't done that." It pleased me that she was so open to it.

Stewart: Did you find her in general a warm, open person?
Almy: Yes, yeah, very warm, but not effusive. Somebody who had been there said, "Well, she won't invite you to tea at her house...", which was true, but she saw me at her office and talked with me and sent me a Christmas card the first year or two.

Stewart: Did she herself work in the nursery?

Almy: She observed there quite a bit, but she didn't work there as a teacher.

Stewart: After you returned from your visit there, what were you interested in pursuing?

Almy: I was determined to work more on the Piaget stuff and that meant studying more Piaget, also beginning research on *Young Children's Thinking* (1966). In this first book I tried to establish that using typical American methods, kids responded the way Piaget said they would. Not by using his really clinical method, but using standard questionnaires. I also incorporated into that book a number of studies, that by then, my students had done. I sent it to him at the suggestion of somebody or other and got what was ostensibly a reply saying he'd like to write the foreword to it.

It turned out that the foreword was actually written for him, by Mimi Sinclair who worked with him. Later on I met him. In fact, I met him several times and he always knew me, always spoke to me. We always joked a little bit about the fact that I couldn't get my French together and I would say in French, "I can't speak French," and he would say, "But you are!" It was nice.

Stewart: What other research and writing did you do during this period?

Almy: Well, the importance of *Young Children's Thinking* was that it was pretty well the first book that attempted to systematically study the application of Piaget to early childhood education.

My next book was an attempt to do a longitudinal study of his ideas. That was *Logical Thinking in the Second Grade*. It came out in 1971, which was just before I came out here. The logical thinking book was supported by the U.S. Office of Education. However, I received a lot of collegial support from other Teachers College professors who met together at the Horace Mann Lincoln Institute, a research arm for Teachers College.

Stewart: Of course early childhood education was being rediscovered during this time wasn't it? 1965?

Involvement with Pioneering Experimental Early Intervention Programs

Almy: I think the rediscovery began earlier. I don't remember the dates, but I got invited early on to participate in a couple of national programs. Head Start, I didn't participate much in, although I did attend one meeting in Washington and one training session in New York. I was leery of Head Start from the standpoint of its taking me too far away from what I was doing in the Piaget
stuff. You really have to concentrate on research when that is what you are doing, so I didn't get much involved in that. But I did get involved, in the Science Advisory Board of the National Program on Early Childhood Education and the National Laboratory for Early Childhood Education. I have not been able to sort the two out. I know that I was on one for 2 or 3 years and maybe on the other for 2 or 3 years and one turned into the other. Once my term had expired I couldn't be on them anymore. But in those years I had contact with a lot of the people who were running these experimental programs in early childhood education.

Stewart: Could you talk a little bit about those programs?

Almy: The first one I was very much involved in was the Institute of Developmental Studies which began in New York in 1958 by Martin Deutsch. I was a consultant to him. It was real funny because he really was quite the behaviorist. And I was giving him strong Piaget stuff. He knew it and these people knew it and sometimes we'd laugh about it. I worked with him quite regularly for I think 2 or 3 years.

Stewart: You worked with their teachers also?

Almy: Yes.

Stewart: Now did you believe that early intervention was going to work with those children?

Almy: Oh, I think everybody thought it would. Susan Gray of the Early Training Project, later called DARCEE in Nashville, Tennessee, was another one that I worked with early on. Martin Deutsch...used early childhood teachers...some of the teachers that I had known in some of New York's private schools. Susan Gray's project was staffed by her school psychology students.

Stewart: They had degrees? Masters degrees sometimes too?

Almy: Yes, uh huh.

Sue's program was derived from what she had discovered in her experience as a school psychologist. She focused on school tasks that kids were not able to do. So, she and her staff set about doing things with them that would teach the children very specific things.

I remember I went down there and spent two weeks with her after the program had developed more. One of the things people miss out in a lot of those early programs is that some of them are kindergarten programs and some of them were preschools—Sue's was kindergarten. They were older children and so the program was more appropriate than it might seem just off hand.

Stewart: Tennessee had no public kindergarten then?

Almy: Right. Now as time went on, the number of experimental projects expanded and research to compare the various program's effectiveness became more and more important. You know I wrote about this in my book, *The Early Childhood*
Educator at Work, 1975. Now my memory does not bring up all the details. But I remember being on what I think was called the National Laboratory with J. McVicker Hunt as chair. One of the people I got to know then, I think was David Weikart.

I remember Sue calling me before I went to a meeting, I guess she wasn't going, and said "Millie, talk to David because I think David understands our point of view." Although she was not a preschool teacher, I trusted Sue. I had respect for what she did. A lot of my interest, was sheer intellectual. I was curious as to how the kids would react to these different experimental programs. I always kept an open mind. I suspect that some of my early childhood colleagues were really horrified at what I was doing, my openness to some of this.

I think a great majority of early childhood teachers have always been so strongly convinced about something that is now called a "developmentally appropriate curriculum", that the idea that you might accomplish something by bringing young children in and doing something that was pretty formal and pretty directive was anathema to them. It was to me too but I just thought it was worth looking at because I think cultural differences are great and I knew that children from certain other cultures were taught much more rigidly than those in our typical white middle-class. As I used to say to some of my classes, why is it that the French children don't grow up to be in terrible shape, when they go through their rather rigid Ecole Maternelle? And I've always thought that we had a little tendency in early childhood to be too rigid about what was right and what was wrong and not open enough to see what some of the other possibilities were.

Stewart: And what were some of the other possibilities that were being explored or discovered at this point?

Almy: Well, I went to visit a lot of the programs and they didn't look as different to me as I had expected them to. Even the Bereiter-Englemann didn't look as rigid as I had thought it was, partly because when Engleman taught he was very charismatic and captivating and the kids responded to that. I didn't think that they were having a bad time. Now I think that very often that some of those rigid programs, when they were translated into programs where the teachers weren't equally involved, equally charismatic, declined and they weren't as useful perhaps as they could have been. As I recall however, Bereiter and Engelman's program didn't stand up very well over the long haul.

Stewart: You spoke earlier of meeting David Weikart. Did you visit his program?

Almy: You know, Constance Kamii worked for David Weikart and then they had a parting of the ways.

For the life of me I can't remember whether I visited his program or Connie's program or both of them in Michigan. What I do remember is probably David's. There was a lot of emphasis on home-based work, going into the parents' homes and showing them how to do certain things. I could see so clearly that it was largely a matter of who the teacher was and how the teacher fit into the way the family lived.
Stewart: What do you think of David Weikart's now famous High Scope curriculum?

Almy: Well, of course, as I said Connie Kamii has always been very critical of it and my friends Barbara Scales and Pat Nourrot are critical of it too. They think it's not really play-based and I think probably when the chips are down it's not either. But I think it does give teachers some very good training, something that they can go on from.

I think David (Weikart) has been criticized because he is seen as exploiting his research to get as much out of it as he could. He is really building almost a university out of it on his own. On the other hand, I think he is one of the people in the field who has had rather creative ideas. He's thought about the issue of professionalism a great deal and I think more realistically than some people have. I don't know that he has been able to accomplish the things that he has talked about but I've always been one of his supporters.

Stewart: Let's go back to your tenure on the National Laboratory and the Science Advisory Boards, 1965 to 1970. I know that some people at the time were concerned that early childhood was promising too much. Were you concerned about that?

Almy: That's a very good question. Um, I don't know. I've always been somewhat critical but perhaps more so since then than before. It's increasingly seemed to me that to teach with an eye on each child's development takes an awful lot of background and understanding of developmental research in addition to good intuition. I think from time to time we have overstated what we could do with the limited financial and human resources we've had available.

Stewart: You said J. McVicker Hunt was the chair of one of these committees. He certainly was one of the people who held out early childhood education as an extremely promising tool in the war on poverty. Was he very influential?

Almy: His book I think was, because although it drew on old material, it drew on Piaget, and Hebb and Montessori. He put things together in a new way. It was very stimulating to people who read it, and particularly so for people in psychology because he was a respected psychologist. I think he began with relatively little developmental knowledge, but he moved over in that direction.

Uganda Project

Stewart: Let's return now to your research and writing at Columbia. Tell me about the Uganda Project.

Almy: One of the exciting things about Teachers College, was that it has almost always had a lot of international connections. At that time the Institute of International Studies was supporting a lot of work in Uganda. Many students were coming from there and from other developing countries such as Kenya, Tanzania and Afghanistan.
Stewart: Why is that?

Almy: John Dewey's influence on educational theory at Teachers College and Columbia and New York City's prominence at the end of World War II, made Teachers College a major international center for education.

Anyway, the idea of the project evolved in the Center for Education in Africa, in the Institute of Educational Studies. David Scanlon, a Teachers College professor, and Senteza Kajubi, who was the director of the National Institute of Education at Makerere University in Kampala, were both on the editorial board of the International Institute. Kajubi's doctorate was from Columbia. The idea was that we would take child development to Uganda to show how you could study the kids and improve education there. Now this was not preschool, this was primary education. Almost all the teaching done there was by rote and in huge classes.

There were three of us who were invited to go from the Department of Psychology and Education. I was to do a demonstration on Piagetian methods, another colleague, a school psychologist, was to do a demonstration on certain aspects of children's learning. The third was a clinical psychologist, and he was to do something on the emotional aspects of learning. We were to demonstrate how you would go about gathering data.

I worked with two students, a man and a woman. We developed an interview to get at children's concepts of conservation. It was so interesting because I wanted the students to give me ideas but they were not used to working with somebody who wanted them to contribute. So they told me that it was very hard to work with me because I wouldn't tell them what to do. But we did work out a translation into Luganda of the Piaget interviews that I had used previously in the United States. I had somebody else translate it back into English so that I could see whether or not it really fit. Then we went out and they interviewed the children and I watched. I couldn't speak with the youngsters because they spoke Luganda. I wrote up the results as an example of developmental research. It never bothered me that it was a pilot study. I couldn't draw any conclusions about it except about some of the things that you needed to do when you worked in a foreign country.

Later, I had one student from Uganda who came back and did an Ed.D. with me. He gathered his data in Uganda and wrote very interestingly on why Ugandan children responded in certain ways.

Stewart: But you didn't get anything published on play in Uganda?

Almy: Well, yes, we did. We published the book *Studying School Children in Uganda* (1970) but it never circulated very much.

Stewart: Millie what kinds of other research and writing were you doing in the 1965-71 period?

Almy: Well, although they may not show up on on vitae, there were quite a few things that I did that gave me insight into what was going on in schools those
days. For example, there was a school in Norwalk, Connecticut where they wanted to study the effects of team teaching. After I'd seen the program in action, I arranged with two graduate students to systematically interview the children on their perceptions. I was able to pay the students and we developed a small study from which I learned a lot and they learned a lot too. I guess I would use that as an illustration of the fact that while I was doing developmental psychology it always had some relevance to education applications. It was never completely theoretical.

Stewart: Did you play a role in trying to bridge the psychological and the educational applications of developmental psychology at Teachers College?

Almy: I always had a fairly amicable relationship with the early childhood curriculum people while I was teaching developmental psychology. They were all required to take my birth to six class, and most of them seemed to like it okay. Anyway, about 1968, the Head of the division that curriculum was in, who was an anthropologist asked me if I would consider taking over as advisor of the early childhood program. At that point the program had a very fine federally funded leadership training program. And I said yes if I could draw on other departments and make it broader than early childhood curriculum or early childhood development. He encouraged me to go ahead. I had an advisory committee of perhaps eight faculty. Now I am sure of only one or two, but especially Myron Rosskopf in Mathematics who had done a number of Piaget studies. Unfortunately he died soon after.

We were no longer to be in curriculum, early childhood would be an interdisciplinary program. Two new assistant professors were appointed. One was Patrick Lee who had worked at Harvard with disadvantaged kids but he had basically been trained as a clinical psychologist. See at that point, there was this terrific interest in early childhood education but there weren't many people who had doctorates in early education or development. So Pat came, and the other was Joe Stevens from George Peabody College. He had come up from Susan Gray's program, to do a year post doc in school psychology. He was interested in Piaget so we had a connection. We worked out a half-time assistant professor position for him because he would also be directing a preschool program in New Rochelle. It was really quite exciting.

Teaching and Students

Stewart: Millie, what kind of people were students in the leadership program at Teachers College?

Almy: They were all graduate students. Some already had Master's Degrees and would get a year's professional work, some of them would go on for a doctorate and some of them wouldn't. Pat taught a course which I thought was just great. It was in research as it applies to early childhood. He worked right from the beginning with them, getting them to raise questions that they would like answers to, showing what kind of questions you could answer by research, which ones you couldn't and so on. It was a very stimulating program and I thought it was going to be great.
It was very challenging I thought, and it had a lot of support. In the meantime I went to Africa, that's when, as I'm sure I told you, I decided that New York was getting too much for me and that I needed to be in a place where I could be closer to the earth and have more quiet.

Stewart: So again did you see your work as falling more in the area of developmental psychology or early childhood education?

Almy: I guess you could say that I did really basically developmental work from 1952 to 1968. When I moved into the early childhood program, I continued to teach at least one developmental course. I think my basic appointment was in developmental all that time.

Stewart: Millie, could you compare your experiences in the field in the fifties to the sixties?

Almy: The fifties was a period when the war was over and people were recuperating. The tremendous emphasis was on families and women staying home with their families. I didn't find the excitement among the students that was there when I was a student, it seemed to me. They were much more inward. There was a lot of emphasis on all kinds of therapy—psychoanalysis, group therapy, and so on. Because I was in developmental psych and because my senior colleague, Arthur Jersild, was very much interested in doing research on the development of the self, I did a lot of reading and thinking in that area too. It was during those years from 1956 to 1959 that I was psychoanalyzed. So those were kind of more turning in years for me also.

Stewart: And the sixties?

Almy: I think two things happened in the sixties. One, the times changed. But also I think that after the analysis I was much more free to move around and to involve myself in different situations, not to get hooked in things in ways that I couldn't get out of. I was able to say no to things that I really didn't want to do and also to enjoy things more than I had before. Now somewhere along in there, perhaps in the early sixties, I put together a collection of readings on play because I couldn't find a book that included theory and research on motivation and cognition in play. I think I first taught that play course in the summertime.

Stewart: Do you have memories of your colleagues during this time period that you would like to share? Thorndike, Jersild?

Almy: Jersild was a very close colleague and friend during those years. He was in many ways a mentor. He read things that I wrote, critiqued them, we fought over them and what not. Thorndike I was not particularly close to, although he was extremely nice to me, as I said, and did nice things for me.
Personal and Social Life

Stewart: How about your personal and social life during that time?

Almy: Those were the years when I fell in love several times. Well, when you are having a love affair you are pretty involved, but when you look back, you can't really remember what you did. I remember going to the theater a lot and spending a lot of time talking. We once considered getting married. I was really a much more complete person than I was before.

Stewart: Would you like to say anything more about that? No?

OK, on your vitae during this time period is being on the Board of Directors for the Manhattanville Nursery Committee.

Almy: You know I lived in co-op housing apartments. Just north of us, at the beginning edge of Harlem, were two housing projects, one of which was Manhattanville. In Manhattanville there was a child care center that for many years had been a philanthropic day nursery. In the old days it had had a connection with the college. I got involved partly because in the developmental psych course we decided that we were getting some students who didn't have much experience with children and that they should have. So we began offering an observation/participation option to spend time at, among other places, Manhattanville. Part of my concern about kindergarten programs came out of the Manhattanville program where I saw so little intellectual stimulation. I thought the children were capable of more sustained intellectual activity. As I told you, I had become interested in exploring the effects of introducing a very simple science program. Trying to find a way to measure this got me deeper into Piaget. Being on the Board as I was for a while gave me easy access to the center's classrooms. It also kept me in touch with what was going on in the city—the rules and regulations and the problems that they had under the city. I did much practical work despite the fact that I was basically an academic.
IV. THE MOVE TO THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY: 1972

[Interview IV: September 22, 1992]

Stewart: Millie, when did you first become interested in UC Berkeley or have any contact with UC Berkeley?

Almy: I had contact over many years with The Institute of Human Development. I met several people from there at Society for Research in Child Development conferences. But the contact that led eventually to my coming here was with Robert Karplus who was a professor of physics. He was doing some experimental teaching in some school in Berkeley or Orinda. He was horrified at what his children, and he had 6 or 7 children, were bringing home from elementary school that related to science. The curriculum just didn't have any meaning as far as he was concerned. In 1963 I was invited to be the discussant of a presentation that he made at one of the science education conferences. By that time he had developed the basis for what became the Science Curriculum Improvement Study.

At this meeting he discussed his work and I listened and I enjoyed it very much. He was quite charismatic. When I got up to respond I said to him that I had absolutely no question that Robert Karplus could teach those concepts to kindergarten, first and second graders. I knew he could, but I didn't think most teachers could. I went on from there drawing from Piaget. He was also at that time interested in Piaget and reading a lot of it. He asked me if I would like to go to Minneapolis in the summer of 1964 under the aegis of the Minnesota Mathematics Program (Mini-Mast). He and the math program were bringing together a number of teachers and scientists from around the United States. So, I went and had a fascinating time. At the end of that he asked me if I would come out here and work in the Science Curriculum Improvement Study as consultant on the psychology of what he was doing.

I stayed at the Durant Hotel. Every morning it would be so cold and chilly and someone from the SCIS staff would pick me up and we'd go over the hill to Orinda where they were doing the experimental teaching. There it would be bright and sunny. Afterwards, we would drive back over the hill, over Fish Ranch Road and I just thought this was such a beautiful place.

Later, I got involved with testing out whether or not the various science programs would make a difference in the way children thought in second grade. So I did a huge Piagetian study involving some 900 children. I started with kindergartners who were in the special science program—not only SCIS but also the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), the Greater Cleveland Math Program and a group that had no special program. I followed them for 3 years and I had one group in Berkeley and another group in Orinda as well as groups in the East. David Elliot, a TC graduate, who was at the university at that time, supervised the Berkeley and Orinda study. I came out a couple of times, once or twice a year during the three year study. So that's how I got associated with Berkeley. I was very careful each time that I came out to say to someone, "Oh, you know this is such a nice place. I think I'd like to live here." And it got me in eventually.
So what happened next?

Well, it's interesting. I was approached in 1969 with a phone call from Larry Lowery, as to whether I could be interested in coming to Berkeley. I also remember that Bill Rohwer interviewed me at an AERA meeting. Eventually, I got a letter which I took to be an offer from Dean Reller. But it turned out not to be a bona fide invitation. That is, not all the necessary paperwork had been done. If you are going to be employed by the University of California you have to go through a lot of review committees and whatnot, and I'd not yet been through the Budget Committee. Then some of my students went to a conference and heard that I was coming to California. So, I called Dean Reller and told him that I couldn't be in such a state of being uncertain and that I would have to give up being considered. Then the next year he called and said everything is clear. I came out for a day of meetings with the faculty and students in December of 1970. So, that was how I got to come, which I did in June of 1971.

You had friends here so that must have eased your transition to Cal.

Well, I thought I had friends here. But I found California is a very special place as far as friends are concerned. It takes time and I think that probably because I came as full Professor and because I didn't have family, I didn't feel socially involved for some time. Early on I felt welcome by the students but not so much by the faculty. UCB is quite different from Teachers College, Columbia, where there is much more interaction among the faculty. At TC people who were interested in a particular problem could meet together informally for discussion, often over a period of months. Also faculty members do a lot of team teaching there. Berkeley School of Education didn't do anything of that sort.

That's curious.

Well, I think partly it was because UCB School of Ed. was in a difficult situation at that time. For almost the entire 9 years, that I taught here, the University was looking at the School of Ed with a view to should it be closed? What should be done about it? Partly, because in the pecking order of the university the School of Ed was far down. The university was in a kind of steady state as far as numbers of students were concerned. So it was looking for places to cut. Unfortunately, we lost two Deans during that period. The first, Merle Borrowman, came at the same time as I did. I knew him from Teachers College and liked him very much. He was injured in a bicycle accident, and never regained his ability to be a good leader. Then there were Acting Deans for quite a while.

Eventually Robert Karplus became the Dean. Tragically, shortly after his deanship began, Karplus had a heart attack while running. A couple of nurses found him and did resuscitation but his brain never functioned properly thereafter. So that was the second major blow to the school of education.

Now had you had any idea about the problems in UCB's School of Education when you came?
Almy: Yes, I did, because I was at a party for Arthur Gates who had been the head of Ed Psych when I started as an Associate Professor at TC Columbia. He said to me, "I understand you are going to California" and I said, "Yes." "Really? You know that School isn't in good shape." And I said, "Well, confidentially, I am really intrigued with living in California and getting out of New York, and I think there is plenty of good potential at the UCB School. So I'm not worried about it." He said that he was a graduate of the UCB School of Ed. He knew that it had been excellent then and he hoped it would be good again.

Stewart: So you did have some understanding of the situation. Do you have any other memories of the faculty at that time?

Almy: Well, I remember especially people who were particularly friendly and helpful. I remember Herb Simons invited me to go to lunch with him and also to have dinner with his wife and children. It seems that going out to lunch just wasn't done at the School of Ed. Of course in time I got to know many of the faculty.

You know, I started out in the curriculum department and then early on they began formulating a Language and Reading Development program and I moved into that with Herb Simons and Paul Ammon. Paul was always one of my good friends. In fact, he wrote to me before I came that he would like to talk Piaget with me. That was an instance of group planning that I found very nice. Eventually as they restructured the school, I was moved into Ed Psych again.

Stewart: You preferred Ed Psych?

Almy: Um, well, I think I've always been divided between early childhood education in curriculum and child development. But curriculum has not been my very first love. I think intellectually that I always felt that I could get my teeth into psychology more than curriculum.

Research, Writing and Teaching at Berkeley.

Stewart: During your years at Berkeley what were your emphases in research and writing.

Almy: I wrote *The Early Childhood Educator at Work* which was published in 1975. In many respects it was like the child development book that I did exactly 20 years before. They were alike in that I wrote them both because I felt there was a need for them. In the case of the child development book, I felt there was a need for a book that had real children in it. In the case of *The Early Childhood Educator* I saw the field changing rapidly and I saw early childhood teachers facing new challenges and taking on new roles. Some were performing extremely well, and others really badly. At the same time, individuals who had been prepared for other professional fields were entering the field and I saw the need for someone to examine the various issues arising out of that increasing diversity. So I began to think about this book in the late 1960's although I didn't complete it until the end of 1973 in Berkeley.
I think a number of factors contributed to my desire to write this, I want to talk about them a little bit but I may overlap with what I talked about last time, so please forgive me if I do.

Almy: Although my base throughout the sixties was developmental psych, I maintained my connections to the experimental early childhood programs. Also in the sixties I was doing the Piaget research and Piaget was getting to be a very hot item.

Also, my service on the national committees gave me a picture that was broader than just what was going on in New York. In addition, my work at TC with the Leadership Training Program which brought about 25 supervisors or coordinators of early childhood from all over the United States to TC for a year's program for upgrading, gave me a chance to be in touch with classroom realities again. I also worked directly with incoming ECE teachers when I came to UC Berkeley and was involved for a couple of years in the early childhood education teacher ed program. Also I served on a state committee asked to recommend to the Assembly whether or not the public school system should take responsibility for 4 year-olds, and if so, the kind of program to be offered. That was a fascinating committee. Bill Rohwer from UCB School of Ed., Bob Hess from Stanford, Norma Feshback from UCLA and several others from universities and colleges and some skilled and creative teachers all met together. We had a lot of arguments about what we should recommend.

At that time the Riles Task Force on Early Childhood Education had just come out. It urged a strongly developmental program for kindergarten through second grade. My participation in the Assembly committee and my perusal of the Riles report, renewed my conviction that my book The Early Childhood Educator at Work was much needed.

When I wrote the book I believed strongly, and still do, that we needed greatly expanded programs for young children and their families. I also believed that the success of the programs depended on the availability of a special kind of early childhood educator whom I described as a double specialist, one who could both teach young children and assess their development, work equally well with adults as well as with children, think concretely as one must in dealing with children, but also think abstractly and formally as one must in planning and executing programs and researching them. From my own experience I knew that programs who have such individuals function better than those without. But I didn't have research evidence on that.

When I went back and looked at the book recently, I note that I say in the preface that the book was not intended as either a survey of the field or as a how-to-do-it book, but it was more concerned with issues. By the time it came out, of course, money for programs and research was less available. In the eighties Bud Spodek asked me to revisit the The Early Childhood Educator at Work in a chapter in his book with Saracho and Peter's Professionalism and the Early Childhood Educator. I wrote that I rather wish that I had teamed up with an economist and tried to cost out in some way, and perhaps also to test experimentally, what the effect of putting early childhood educators who fulfilled the role well, into early childhood settings. For a long time I had a suspicion that you could perhaps increase the ratio of children to teachers if you
had a well qualified person available for support and training. However, I was thinking about this just recently, and I remembered that it could have been a dangerous idea too, because what could have happened would be to increase the super structure without affecting practice. I remember that in New York City at one time in the child care centers they pulled out some of the teachers and made them directors who were supposed to have that kind of function. Some of them elected to move into their offices and sit there so who knows?

**Interdisciplinary Day Care and Child Development Project.**

Stewart: Millie, I know that one of your major interests during your early tenure at Berkeley was the Interdisciplinary Day Care and Child Development Project. Could you explain its background and your work with it?

Almy: Well, in some ways, that project grew out of the *Early Childhood Educator at Work* because I kept talking in that book about the need for information from diverse fields. Of course you have to remember that I came here in '71 and that was the year that Nixon vetoed the Child Development Act. At that point everybody thought well, it was one veto, the next time around it would pass. Everybody was convinced about it. And we thought, and I'll explain who "we" was in a moment, that if that passes there was going to be a great need for people who could work with other people, other professionals with the interests of children at stake, and also could collaborate with parents because it was very apparent even then I think that parents were not being taken sufficiently into consideration in the plans that were going on for them. So that was the larger circumstance out of which the program grew.

When I first came to Berkeley, I visited all of the people that I thought would be able to contribute to this problem of services for children, and particularly, day care. Day care was really one of the hot issues then. So I talked to people in Psychology, Criminology (we had a School of Criminology at that time), Environmental Design, Law, Sociology, the Institute of Human Development and Public Health and Social Welfare. I got a lot of positive reinforcement from people. Nobody told me the need wasn't there and everybody expressed interest and said something should be done about this rather nebulous area that I was talking about. Helen Wallace, who was a pediatrician and was head of Maternal and Child Health in the School of Public Health, immediately said let's do an interdisciplinary program. I had a connection with her because she had worked in New York City for the Health Department and in New York City the Health Department was the one that set not just health standards but education standards for preschools. So I latched onto that idea. In retrospect I think that it might have been just as well if I had waited awhile.

So I teamed up with Helen, Kermit Wiltse in Social Welfare and John Watson in Psychology. John was involved for about two years: he was worried about infants in day care.
You asked about the origins and the politics of the interdisciplinary program. So let me tell you what I see now as its politics. Kermit Wiltse used to say that what we needed to do was to look at the stake-holders in day care. Who were the people who would benefit from it and who would not? And essentially I think that's looking at who has the power. For instance, if you looked at the community of Berkeley then and now, it is very much divided between university and community and between black and white. Each group has a stake in the day care arena. In state politics the rivalry is between Social Welfare and Education. Each state department continues to hold prerogatives for setting particular standards, licensing, and so forth and so on. The same kind of thing went on nationally.

In the university all of the prerogatives, all of the powers seem to me to rest in departments—not in collaborative kinds of projects, although collaboration does happen in research.

Another important source of power is who has the money for graduate fellowships. You see at this time fellowships were beginning to decline. That's one of the reasons why Helen Wallace was so interested—she wanted fellowship money. Her group was used to having a lot of money for fellowships. Education and Social Welfare had never had much. Also I think one of the things to keep in mind was that Education was probably low man in the pecking order of the University, Social Welfare was close to that, Public Health probably not so low. These are just hunches that I made.

You wanted me to talk about the breadth of the project. To do that I had to go back to the proposal. In the abstract it's called an interdisciplinary training program. It was intended for individuals with backgrounds in early childhood education, social welfare, and pediatrics (that would be the School of Public Health, because those people were in for a Master of Public Health, but they already had their M.D.s and their pediatric specialty). The social workers were working for either M.S.W.s or B.S.W.s. The abstract explained that the program would prepare them for administrative consultant work, supervisory or top level positions in national, state or local public and private agencies.

The program was to include both academic education and practical field experience. The academic content was to be selected and shaped in accord with the realities of the day care field as represented in Berkeley and the Bay Area at the time. It was to be drawn primarily from the resources of the University of California at Berkeley. The practical field experience, in a variety of agencies and services, was to include activities essential to the development and facilitation of different kinds of developmental day care. Coordination of the academic and practical aspects of the program was facilitated by the faculty steering committee: the Almy, Watson, Wiltse, Wallace group. We also had an advisory committee that was much larger that consisted of representatives from faculty, students and the day care field. The interdisciplinary faculty and students in the program were to be available for consulting services for the day care projects. Now if that isn't breadth, what is?

Stewart: That's breadth. What was your experience with the different groups with whom you worked?
Almy: Well, the advisory committee had 16 people from local child care centers, Head Start, county agencies coordinating child care and early childhood education, community colleges, the State Office of Child Development, the regional offices of Head Start and also maternal and child health services from which we had a director and a pediatric consultant. The committee was very ethnically diverse.

Stewart: Did you seek the same kind of ethnic diversity in the students you accepted?

Almy: Well, we wanted to have that and I think we pretty well got it. Our interest in diversity was not a matter of what we could now call "political correctness" but in getting a better match between staff and families.

The field aspect of this program was tremendous. I think it is important to say that when we began the faculty thought mostly about topics that could be covered by lectures given by ourselves or visitors. As time went on we realized that the field work was equally or even more important. Its success I think is owed very largely to Glendora Patterson who did the coordination and who helped us to identify agencies that we could work with and who also showed us how to work with them. You have to remember that we were a group of academics.

Glendora's M.S.W. was from Columbia and she had had this year of special work at UCB. After that she had been Director of the Parent Infant Neighborhood Center in San Francisco. So she had wonderful background besides being a very steady and scholarly person, really. She got into the Ph.D. program as this program developed. The field projects were phenomenal. Originally, the first year each person was assigned to a field agency, but as time went on Glendora helped us to see that a better way to do it was to have the agencies propose a project that they wanted accomplished and then we sent a team to work on the proposed project. The evaluation was done by the team, the agency and our staff together. Nearly 20 agencies were involved with us in the course of the 5 years of the project. And we also ran seminars, open to the community, although we reached a point at which we realized we had to have some closed seminars because you can't wash dirty laundry in public. But those seminars drew a lot of people in from the community.

Stewart: I think I have to tell a little story here. The first time that I met you I was working at Head Start. We had an interdisciplinary team and boy, did that Head Start program put that team through a lot. I don't know how much you remember...but finally I told my supervisor please not to embarrass me any more in front of Millie Almy. I tried to explain to him your importance to me and other early childhood people. So, he said he would keep that in mind and I think actually he did lighten up a little bit after that.

Almy: Yes, well the interactions among team members and with team host programs were often complicated and very interesting. I had lunch the other day with one of the students who had been in the project. She was assigned with a pediatrician from Nigeria and a African-American social worker from San Francisco. She herself was white and a feminist, and the interaction within that group was hard to contemplate. They put on training sessions for family day care providers. I think experiences like that really did pay off in the long run.
Stewart: How long did the interdisciplinary project last?

Almy: Well, we were funded by the Carnegie Corporation and the Grant Foundation from 1974-1977. In the third year of the project the University was to fund the field coordinator—that seemed somewhat feasible at the beginning. Although I think the foundations thought that we probably wouldn't be able to do it. But we did get funding thanks to the School of Education for that final year to pay Glendora's salary. Then because we had been frugal we had enough money to extend the project on a smaller scale for another year. So in 1978 we had a smaller number of students and we changed the format. The seminars were run by each of the departments and it no longer really was interdisciplinary in that sense. So that was its demise. Of course what we had hoped would have been that the interdisciplinary seminar would have gotten built into the University structure somewhere.

Stewart: In hindsight do you think that that was a reasonable hope?

Almy: I don't know. I wonder whether the demise was really built in from the beginning. Perhaps it was in that the University was in a steady state at that time and departments did not see the program as essential for their students or their offerings. They did not, except for education, release faculty time for participation in the program. The faculty who were involved gave their time "out of their own hides" as faculty people would say. The same kind of thing happened with students. The students received relatively little academic credit, for a lot of time. They had to do the seminar, an academic paper, a field study and a field project. These things took a tremendous amount of time. Then there was this business of the difference in status between M.D.'s, and the other students. Everybody thought of the M.D.'s as the high status people on the teams. Interestingly, we learned in the course of the project that pediatricians are low in the pecking order of physicians in general.

So these things created a lot of problems. But they also produced a lot of insight. I looked at the evaluations that were done and most people felt the time, all of it had been costly to them, but also that it had been well spent.

Stewart: Do you have any final thoughts about the interdisciplinary program you'd like to share?

Almy: No, I think, I've given you the benefit of my hindsight.

Stewart: In 1978 you did a survey and wrote a paper entitled "Interdisciplinary Preparation for Leaders in Early Education and Child Development." What did you find in the process of researching this paper?

Almy: That was a study also funded by the Carnegie Corporation and the Grant Foundation of nine other institutions that were doing interdisciplinary preparation for early education and care. Six of them were training programs, two of them had coordinating functions and one of them was just research. I wanted to do the survey in order to see how other people used resources, and so on. In a number of respects we were trying to do more with human resources at Berkeley than most of these programs had. All the programs underscored the fact that traditional ways of preparing professionals for services
with children were inadequate and that workers needed information from
different disciplines. And in some instances they actually needed skills from
other professions.

The problems these other programs faced were very similar to ours at
Berkeley. There were problems in integrating theory and practice, and in
resolving university and community agency goals. Most of them also spoke
about the danger of the diffusion of roles. When you begin interdisciplinary
preparation, do you lose hold of what your base profession should be or is?
There was also concern about the problem of diluting knowledge: either that the
knowledge base of your base profession would be diluted by interdisciplinary
training or that the shared knowledge might be too diluted to be truly helpful to
those from other professions. For instance you might know a lot about a lot of
stuff but you don't really know solidly about much of anything. Other
concerns of interdisciplinary programs centered around the pressure of time and
the maintenance of programs within university structures.

So it was a very happy experience for me because it verified that we had
been doing something important in our program—and that our problems were
not unique.

Social and Personal Life at Berkeley.

Stewart: Should we move on? Do you have any thoughts that you'd like to convey
about your social and personal life at Berkeley? We've touched a bit on that
already.

Almy: Right. We've gone back and forth on that. In many respects it was a very rich
time partly because a lot of my friends, who were important to me, came to visit
me from the East and we did a lot of things together. I traveled with some of
them and it was all very satisfying. Also as I told you I renewed an
acquaintance with a woman whom I had known when I was at the University of
Cincinnati. Through her I met a network of social work people that I've
enjoyed very much. Also some of my students from those days have become
friends which is nice. One of the great things about Berkeley is that there is so
much to do here. You know thanks to Cal Performances at Berkeley, you can
do some of the same things that you'd do in New York—only its easier here.
So that makes a very happy time.

Stewart: You had mentioned to me before your feeling that if you were going to be
disappointed in anything it would be your disappointment that you couldn't start
a stronger early childhood department.

Almy: Right. That would be it. Looking back I can see how I could possibly have
played my cards differently. If I had concentrated on building a strong program
within education, and not pulled in so many different directions. However, it
wasn't a time when it would have been easy to do that because the school was
so caught up in the buffeting that it was having from the administration that it
was hard for people to get together and do things. You really need three
professors to commit themselves to a specific program. I had a list of people
Stewart: You said that you felt that your colleagues (not in education) were disappointed that you did not start a strong early childhood program.

Almy: Those colleagues were in developmental psychology and in the Institute of Human Development. I recall mostly that when I first arrived and was talking with Paul Mussen, then the Director of the Institute, he said, "We would be very glad to have you in the Institute if you can bring a funded research project."

Perhaps I could have gone back to my Piagetian studies but I wanted to focus more on early childhood education in classrooms. One opportunity did come up but didn't develop into a project, perhaps because I wasn't sufficiently persistent. A member of the Institute had been studying two year olds. She thought it would be interesting to follow them into the Child Study Center when they were three. One of the head teachers was also interested. I spent quite a bit of time working on a proposal for this. I can't remember the details but it was clearly focused on group interaction. The Institute researcher turned it down rather precipitously I thought. Later when it was too late to do anything about it she told me that she had discovered that someone at the University of Chicago had been using the techniques I proposed and she thought they could have worked.

In retrospect, I think that episode illustrates the difficulty of bridging between two departments, or two areas of interest at the University of California. I guess I could make a comparison to Teachers College here because I think that it would have been assumed that what I had proposed was okay but needed work at Teachers College. The attitude would have been let's get to work on it and see what we can do with it. The whole atmosphere at Berkeley was just so different: more competitive and less supportive.

Retirement.

Stewart: Can you talk a little now about your life during retirement? You took an early retirement didn't you?

Almy: At Teachers College you had to retire at 65 and when you retired you retired completely. There was none of this hanging about the way there is here, or was when I started here. So in my thinking about retirement, I had thought I would retire at age 65 because I felt I had worked like a dog for many years and hadn't done as much traveling as I wanted. Now the last year that I was here, I was half-time, as graduate advisor. My title was Assistant Dean I think. I was the person who rode herd on the graduate students to see that they were getting through their studies on time, and not dragging their feet.

Stewart: Right. I'm familiar with that.
I could have stayed on as graduate advisor or just teaching whatever I wanted to do, I think, but I had already made plans to retire and so I did so very handily and I was accepted for a Fulbright for Australia—that was very exciting.

Now what exactly did you do with your Fulbright?

It was a longitudinal project at Macquarie University which involved the Mt. Druitt community. Mt. Druitt was a community made up essentially of a housing project for disadvantaged inner city people. All the community had to offer was schools for the children. Unfortunately, the children were failing in school and the question that the project was trying to get at was why they were failing. They were looking for someone who was familiar with longitudinal research. So when I applied I wrote and told them what I could do and what I anticipated would be expected of me and so on.

Unfortunately, when I arrived I found that the Director of the project, who was not directly involved in doing the work, apparently never really explained what my role was to be to the field director who was directly in charge of the project. Consequently, I don't think they quite knew what to do with me. Eventually they asked me to develop a research study of my own choosing. So I did and had a ball doing it. I interviewed third graders about what they thought about school, about what they understood about the way they learned, and so on. I just took a lot of new ideas that were coming along in the research literature and played with them. I had a wonderful time, but I didn't feel that they really made the best use of of me—and I told them. But they were happy and I had a good time. The Director saw me off when I left, kissed me goodbye...so it all worked out okay. I got to work with a great staff, do an interesting study and travel a great deal. Fulbright policy is that its recipients should travel and get to know the people and culture. I spent about 20% of my time traveling and consulting with various educational groups.

I didn't go to the Ayres Rock or northern or western Australia. But I did go to all the other areas, including Tasmania and the Barrier Reef. I really enjoyed myself very much.

And after you returned from Australia, what was your next post-retirement adventure?

The next one that I had was in Israel. I spent a month at the Schwartz Graduate Program for Training Directors at the Hebrew University School of Social Work—one of the projects that I included in that study of interdisciplinary preparation. This project involved a number of child care centers. I acted as a consultant to the staff and had a great time visiting all kinds of centers and schools.

Did you find anything particularly startling? Or interesting?

I didn't have any hard evidence on this, but one of the main differences in their preschools and ours was the level of cooperation among the children—they were not nearly as competitive as our kids are. Also at that time they had a big Ethiopian group coming in and I was interested in observing how they were working with children and parents with very different backgrounds. I really
didn't have much responsibility. I went around with the Associate Director of the project, and visited schools and agencies and talked with staff. I did one open lecture. I guess I talked about interdisciplinary projects.

Stewart: Another post retirement interest of yours has been art. Would you like to talk about your involvement with that?

Almy: Oh. I guess I always felt my background in art was neglected. For several winters when I lived in New York I went down to the Metropolitan to hear Margaret Salinger lecture on renaissance art. I just loved it, although I sometimes went to sleep because it was the evening and I was tired. I think my interest in impressionism and modern art was influenced by the fact that when I first went to New York the Museum of Modern Art was just opening.

I remember very well Elsie Gee and Lynn Kranlich, my former students, once said to me, "Millie, when you retire what are you going to do?" and I said, "Well, I'm thinking about being an art docent." I decided to become a docent for the Oakland Museum. I graduated as a docent in '86, and was one for five and a half years. It was very rewarding until this last year when my eyes began deteriorating. I remember I was giving a tour to a children's group of a wonderful Betty and Alison Saar exhibit. It was a great exhibit, I loved it but it was spiritual and done in kind of a dark setting, the lights were low.

The experience just highlighted for me all the things that I had been having problems with. Namely, that I couldn't see the kids faces and I couldn't see the details in the art objects well enough to point them out, I couldn't see the kids name tags, unless they were very large. So it was sort of like all of the props were taken out. So I decided it was time to give up my docenting. I can still still go there for activities. You know, the only thing I can't do is give tours.

Stewart: Are there any other experiences you'd like to mention?

Almy: Well, one of the exciting things I did upon my retirement that I haven't talked about was my membership on an evaluation team for the Bush Centers for Child Development and Social Policy. Sheldon White, professor of psychology at Harvard, chaired the team. He has long been a proponent, critic and historian of early childhood education. The other member of the team was Gilbert Steiner of the Brookings Institute. His book, *The Children's Cause* brought me to terms with what policy for early education is really about. I learned a great deal from them and from the centers we evaluated. So I am glad I've had that experience.

Another thing I'm grateful, and pleased about is that I have had a friendship with a young Japanese scholar for the last 3 or 4 years. I've come to think of him as the grandson or great nephew I've never had. So you see for me retirement has brought new pleasures and adventures.
V. HISTORICAL VIEWS ON SELECTED ISSUES

[Interview V, October 23, 1991]

Stewart: Millie, let's begin by a discussion of the kinds of students who studied early education and child development in the 1930's.

Almy: Well in the 1930's I was a student myself. But before I talk about students then and later, I'd like to draw a distinction between early childhood education as a field and child development as a field. I think the meaning of the terms has changed over the years.

Early Childhood Educators: 1930-1980

Perhaps it would be well to consider the designations that the National Society for the Study of Education used for programs for young children. I believe they first reported on the status of kindergarten in relation to elementary schools in the early 1900's—then in 1929, preschools or nursery schools together with parent education were added. Not until the 1940's did the National Society consider early childhood education as a separate category. At that time it included preschool, kindergarten and possibly the primary grades of elementary school.

Now in the 1930's a prospective student who wanted to work with young children might have decided to go to a state teachers college for an elementary school teaching certificate and hope to be employed in the lower grades. Or she might have opted to go to a school or college specializing in teacher preparation for kindergarten. Some of these were beginning to include nursery school. But, if she was aware of new possibilities—remember that only a small number of nursery schools or preschools existed then—she might have decided to go to a college or university that had one. These were most often associated with departments of psychology or home economics, less often with education.

I think we have already talked about the support the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Fund gave to some of these. The fund, it seems to me, encouraged a scientific and interdisciplinary approach to children and families that was rather new and certainly intellectually challenging. If I recollect correctly, both Milton Senn and Robert Sears have described this period as one in which a new science, that of child development, was emerging.

As a student I was very pleased to be entering a field that was rooted in scientific investigation and that seemed to have so much potential. I think many of my contemporaries felt like I did. We were going into something that was different, more challenging intellectually than traditional teaching. Perhaps my assumption is supported by an early survey that showed that nursery school teachers had more advanced degrees than did teachers in any other level of the educational system except college.
On the other hand, I cheerfully admit that there must have been many students who chose child development not so much as a challenge but as a pleasant way to bridge the gap between college and marriage. And perhaps also a good way to prepare oneself for the demands of parenthood.

I imagine that most of the students who came into the field in the early 1930's came from upper middle-class homes. But many that might have been interested would probably have been unable to go to college because the Depression had so diminished family income.

Stewart: That would have been before the WPA?

Almy: Yes. Well, Roosevelt was elected in 1932, and some federal programs got underway in 1933 and there was a Federal Emergency nursery school program early on but I don't think it had a major effect until it became the WPA nursery school program probably in 1935. By then prospective students would have had an opportunity to read about nursery schools, to hear about them on the radio or to see them in the movie news, and perhaps also to visit one. Also a lot of people were employed in those nursery schools and they would have told their families and friends about them.

As I mentioned before, in the early days of the WPA, the teaching staffs were made up of unemployed elementary and high school teachers, or nurses, or others with college degrees or experience. The support staffs, consisting of aides, cooks, and cleaning people, might lack academic qualifications but a lot of them became intrigued with nursery education. When the job market began to improve and teachers had to give up their WPA jobs, support staff might take over the teaching. Some of them went on to qualify as teachers by enrolling in universities and colleges.

I imagine that if someone had done a survey of the characteristics of students at the beginning of the 1930's and again 1940's, they would have found much greater diversity at the later period. I suspect also that they would have found fewer who were motivated by a deep interest in child development as a science. I think this trend would have continued as the WPA nursery schools of the thirties were transformed into the Lanham Act Child Care Centers of the war years. Incidentally, I think the war years marked the beginning of the eventual rapprochement between child care and early education. But that is another story.

Stewart: What changes then took place after the war?

Almy: By the end of the war I think students in the field were beginning to present new concerns and new commitments. By then I was a graduate student but I was also an instructor in an early childhood teacher education program. Our program included both experienced teachers and novices. Some of them came mainly because they enjoyed young children but a lot of them came because they were convinced of the importance of early childhood in the establishment of democratic attitudes - I think of certain African-American teachers from the South but also of whites from the same area. I remember several refugees from the Holocaust and one Japanese-American who came almost directly from the relocation center where she and her family had been held during the war. I
think these women recognized and accepted the intellectual challenge implicit in reshaping early education to better serve the post war world. Perhaps some of their intellectual fervor was derived from the GI students who were raising questions throughout the college.

As the fifties got under way, I moved to teaching child development to undergraduates in home economics. There I encountered students with somewhat different characteristics. I am reminded of the way I heard nursery school teachers described recently—"warm, playful, creative, inventive, but not necessarily intellectual." I think that description would fit most students throughout the fifties. On the other hand, the fifties seem to me to be the period when some changes were taking place.

Psychodynamic theory was beginning to be popularized. Undoubtedly that meant that some students were beginning to look beneath the surface of behavior and to consider unconscious motivation. For most of the fifties I was teaching developmental psychology but I had many early childhood education majors in my 0-6 class. I think their major interests were with the effective aspects of development.

Another influence that eventually affected students emerged toward the end of the fifties. That was concern for widespread school failure among economically disadvantaged groups. This led to what has been called the renaissance of early childhood education. We have talked about the experimental nursery schools and Head Start as they became widespread in the sixties. All that would be seen as the further democratization of the nursery school bringing in students with much more diverse backgrounds. For the first time programs began really reaching out to economically disadvantaged communities, saying for example, "Here's a mother who has been active in Head Start. She has the necessary characteristics for becoming a splendid teacher." Unfortunately, Head Start's intent to create and support career ladders never fully materialized. Nevertheless, a lot of Head Start mothers and aides have moved on to qualify as teachers.

But these programs for the disadvantaged had another effect as well. In the early days of the renaissance many of the individuals influencing the field as well as entering it, were primarily concerned with children's intellectual development. They were less interested in other aspects of development, or in early childhood terms, in the "whole child." As time went on and as research about the programs evolved, I think that preoccupation with intellect shifted somewhat. People had to confront the reality of the complexity of children's development.

In many ways the decade of the sixties was an exciting one with many highly motivated, intellectually curious individuals entering the field. Many diverse programs including some designed to meet child care needs were funded. Early childhood education looked like a very promising field, except for the fact that the salaries of teachers in the renaissance remained distressingly low. I don't know the numbers of students entering the field in the seventies compared with those in the sixties but I suspect their characteristics were similar. Those I had in the seventies seemed very like those I had known in New York in the sixties.
One group that became involved in those two decades were feminists. They recognized that child care was essential for women's realization of themselves. But, at least initially, and I must be careful to put this correctly, some of them, while pushing hard for more child care, thought the kind of program did not matter very much as long as there was a place to put the children.

Stewart: Perhaps the focus was primarily on availability?

Almy: Yes, and that did impede our progress to some extent. But I think the important development during the 1970's was the field's increasing sophistication in terms of advocacy and public policy. We learned a lot from the Nixon veto of the Child Development Act in 1971. We learned from those who successfully opposed the Act that letters and lobbying can have powerful effects.

I recall talking with someone who had been a reporter in Washington at the time. She said Senators' and Congressmen's desks were piled high with letters opposing the act—from people who thought child development programs or early childhood programs would ruin the American family. On the other hand, very few letters or telegrams came from our side. But we learned from this defeat.

The point is that people in the field were beginning to see the importance of influencing public opinion and public policy.

Stewart: Did you at that point view this arena as an important focus for early childhood educators?

Almy: Well, I suppose in a way my views were formed back in the WPA. I understood then how changes in funding affected children and parents. Then again I had some experience with various national advisory committees in the sixties. But it wasn't until the seventies that I began to understand how national policy evolves.

Professionalism and Early Childhood Education.

Stewart: Millie, could you talk a little now about your view of the development of professionalism in the early childhood field?

Almy: First of all, I think that true professionalism involves a lot of knowledge and that it is very difficult for anybody to be designated a professional if they don't have both a depth of knowledge of development on the one hand and the practice of early education on the other. I also think they must have an understanding of adult development and learning. In my opinion one recurrent weakness in some early childhood programs is their failure to provide adequate training for students in collaborating with other adults who directly influence children's lives: this includes parents and other significant people.

But at all stages, in all of the eras we've been talking about, I think there were a few people who clearly had this kind of breadth and depth and a number of them held offices in the old NANE, and in NAEYC. Unfortunately, as the democratization proceeded, I think we were so intent on everyone in early childhood education making the most of themselves that we sometimes lost
sight of the need for leadership for individuals who could not only serve as role models, but also had the vision to see beyond currently accepted practice. Of course the push for professionalism is related to the unconscionably low economic status of child care workers. Ironically, it seems to have become an issue, at a time when the traditional professions such as medicine and the law were beginning to lose some of their luster.

So those are some of the problems I see with the professionalism issue in the field.

**Hopes and Fears for Early Childhood Education.**

Stewart: The next question I would like to ask you is an historical and philosophical one. What are your hopes and your fears for the future of early childhood education?

Almy: Well, that's a hard question, and I've really thought a lot about it. Let's start with the hopes. Of course I hope to see high quality early childhood education available to all children and families. I hope to see adequate pay and worthy wages for all staff.

I would hope to see play at the center of the curriculum. That's the title of a book by some of my former students. If play were so regarded and understood it would enable children to acquire the basics for the arts, math, literature, science and ecology, and enhance their zest for learning. All that could serve them well in the future.

It also seems to me that early childhood education has a wonderful opportunity to contribute to our understanding of cultural diversity. As one of my former students said, we need to focus more on cultural differences rather than so much on similarity. How different groups express joy or anger—it is still a human experience. I'm not sure that studying similarities leads to very much. What's interesting and instructive are the differences.

I think ECE can make an important difference to parents when it offers warm and genuine understanding of them, sets reasonable expectations for them and provides support—the kind of thing Ed Zigler has been describing with schools being centers of support services for families.

I would also hope that ECE can retain and emphasize as it has done traditionally, the unique individuality of each child and the promotion of the child's best potentials. These are wonderful assets and ones I hope we never lose.

On the other hand, one of my fears for the field is that we might encourage individualism at the expense of social responsibility. We shouldn't have everybody just seeking to realize his or her own potential; we have to foster a willingness to be responsible for others. I think this is one of the things that we need to work on as a field. I was struck by it when I visited in Israel. Israeli children seem much more oriented to the welfare of the group than our children seem to be.
I am also afraid that early childhood education will become an even more rigidly two-tiered system than it is today—with one group of children who have beautiful settings and wonderful care and another group who are essentially warehoused. That certainly is the direction we are headed. I'm afraid it will get worse but hopefully it won't.

I very much hope for but also fear the development of a national system for early education and development. Let me explain.

There are certain parallels to the situation that existed when I was a graduate student and an inevitable question for the qualifying examination for the doctorate was "Discuss the pros and cons of federal aid to elementary and secondary education." After visiting segregated schools in the south, I thought federal intervention was essential. For while I'd seen instances of superb teaching in the African-American schools in the South, it was clear to me that even the most dedicated teachers could not do adequate jobs without books, materials, equipment and wages comparable to the importance of their tasks.

I think a similar situation exists today with regard to early education and development. I am convinced that as a nation, poised on the brink of a technological revolution, we cannot afford to fail to provide equal opportunity for all young children. And as I see it, not only money but standards for quality will be required. In a way that scares me. I am proud of and generally pleased with NAEC's efforts in that direction. Imagine as is happening more and more often—congressmen and women discussing developmentally appropriate programs. NAEC's establishment of its own accreditation procedures, and more recently an institute to influence early childhood teacher education have tremendous importance.

Yet I worry a bit. Can standard setting exert a sufficiently powerful influence to promote quality and at the same time retain sufficient flexibility to adapt to changing situations? For example, to what extent can developmental appropriateness be adapted to increasing cultural diversity, or to new advances in child development, or curriculum research and theory?

Stewart: Those are extremely important issues.

Life as a Scholar.

Stewart: Would you talk now about your life as a scholar. You've spoken to me on this topic before—your feelings about the issue of depth and breadth in your academic achievements.

Almy: I think breadth is a natural outcome of a career that's included both early childhood education and developmental psychology. So, I'm not at all unhappy with the breadth in my career. In terms of depth, I have sometimes been unhappy, but I console myself that my Piagetian studies had considerable depth and that the interdisciplinary project, while not a scientific study in the usual sense, had considerable depth.
Within the academic world, I think there's always the question about whether you are going to learn more and more about less and less? Or are you going to know less and less about more and more? And I don't have a resolution of that except I know I'm happy with what I did.

Do you have any suggestions to those who come after you in terms of this depth vs breadth issue?

Oh, I think they should do exactly as I did. (Laughter.) There's your prescription.

Now again in reference to your life as a scholar, I'd like you to talk a little bit about discrimination in general. You've already mentioned that you didn't experience sexism. Were there other kinds of discrimination that you feel were more prevalent?

First of all, I think there could be two ways in which discrimination influenced my thinking. One would be my personal experiences of it. I think I've made it clear that I feel that I've not personally experienced much discrimination. On the other hand, I feel that I have had many experiences with or through other people, students or colleagues of mine which have made me well aware of its effects.

Now I would also like to make very clear that I think that in order to understand discrimination, you have to consider the historical context in which it is occurring. It seems to me that at different points in my life, interest in or knowledge of discrimination shifted. For example, I was in college in the thirties and that was the time when the overwhelming concern that I felt was for prejudice against Jews. I suppose the next concern was for racism particularly as expressed towards African-Americans and Japanese-Americans. I don't think it was until the seventies that I began to have concerns about sexism.

I want to say that I have several problems in terms of the question of discrimination in relation to scholarship. Scholarship is or should be the search for truth. It is very easy to do a lot of classifying and categorizing without coming to terms with the meaning of the behavior for both the person who is exercising discrimination and the person who is experiencing it. I think it is terribly important for individuals to come to terms with the meaning of discrimination in their own lives. I have had to look and listen carefully to others in order to understand some of the situations when I have unwittingly been the person who committed the discrimination.

I think that this is a terribly important problem for us to understand and operate on, particularly in ECE. I say that even though earlier on I said that early childhood education presents a wonderful opportunity to deal with diversity. I find it ironic, that in the years that I've been first a college student then an academic, that our knowledge of prejudice and discrimination and the processes that underlie it has increased so very much. We know so much more about it. I feel that a great deal of it has to do with economics. But not all and that is one of the reasons why I am so troubled by the tendency to label: "That's sexist or that is racist." We must come to terms with the underlying motivation of this kind of behavior. As I say I think it is often economic, but not always.
Stewart: Do you have more that you'd like to add in regards to your dual commitments to early childhood education and developmental psychology?

Almy: Well, not much, I've been saying quite a bit about that. I think that maybe I should say that I loved the early childhood education part of my career and even when I was mostly doing developmental psych I was also participating in early childhood affairs. I loved ECE for the warmth, the fun and the creativity I encountered within the field.

On the other hand, about the time I became a member of APA, the Division of Children and Youth became Division 7, Developmental Psychology. I found that group intellectually stimulating and competitive...although some of the individual presentations were quite boring. I was pleased to be elected a Fellow some years later. I also liked very much the meetings at the Society for Research in Child Development. When I came to California I was one of the early members of the AERA special interest group—Early Education and Development. That group really brought my interests together and I enjoyed it very much.

In terms of present entrants into the field of early childhood education, I do want to comment on a seminar I recently visited at Teachers College. I was impressed with the quality of the students and the quality of the discussion and it seemed to me that they were bringing together a deep knowledge of early education, practice, policy and developmental theory. I hope more programs will develop like that. They were terrific.

Stewart: Okay, now we come to your personal life. You never married but rather pursued an academic and professional career. Are you happy with the path your life took?

Almy: Well, I think that I would have answered that question differently at different stages in my life. For a long time I thought that marriage and children were what I very much wanted. Sometimes I was very mad that I didn't seem to get it. But now, from this perspective, I think I probably wasn't ready and I suspect that when I was ready circumstances were not just propitious for it. I had some very important enduring and loving friendships. While I've missed children I've come to see that my students and my books have been my children. I tend to think that I have been a better academic mother than I would have been a real mother had I married early, as I reflect on that.

Stewart: Is it your opinion...that women can and should have it all—career and families? Is that a reasonable goal for women?

Almy: I've thought about that a lot and I think, of course not. But in a way neither can men. I'm reminded here of those three choices we were given at Vassar as freshman: women could have careers, career plus family or just family. I think those possibilities are still there but there are obviously going to be few problems with each alternative.

Stewart: My last question—as you review your life to this point, what are you the most pleased about having done or been involved with, either professionally or personally?
Almy: Well, I think I would probably have to say the teaching, books and writing, are what I'm most pleased about. Probably teaching the most because it's brought me a lot of friends and because I can see that I have some continuing influence through it. I think it's been a wonderful life.

Stewart: Thank you, Professor Almy.

Almy: Oh, you're welcome.
VITA

MILLIE ALMY

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EDUCATION:

A.B. Vassar College, 1936
A.M. Columbia University, 1945
Ph.D. Columbia University, 1948

EXPERIENCE:

1980 Professor Emeritus, University of California
1981 Visiting Professor, Mills College, Oakland, California
1981 Fulbright Fellow, Mt. Druitt Longitudinal Study, Macquarie University, North Ryde, NSW, Australia
1971-1980 Professor of Education, University of California
1974-1978 Coordinator, Interdisciplinary Program for Day Care and Child Development, University of California, Berkeley
1948-1952 Associate Professor, Child Development and Director of Nursery School, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, Ohio.
1950, 1951 Visiting Professor, University of Illinois (Summer)
1944-1948 Instructor, Department of Curriculum and Teaching Teachers College, Columbia University
1942-1944 Director Child Care Centers, Board of Education, North Tonawanda, New York.
1940-1941 Regional supervisor, WPA nursery schools, Buffalo, New York
1939-1940 Case Worker, Chautaugua County Children Agency, Jamestown, NY
1938-1939  Teacher, children's unit, Vassar Institute of Ethnics
(Summer)
1936-1938  Assistant, Guidance Nursery, Clinic of Child Development, Yale University
1934-1937  Counselor, summer camps for preschoolers, social agency sponsored and proprietary.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


1976 Preschool Parent/Staff Development Project (with Kate Bagley and Bagley and Mildred Messinger). Final Report, July. (Collaborative research with teachers, Berkeley Unified School District, supported by Instructional Laboratories, School of Education, University of California, Berkeley).


1973c "Day Care: Pandora's Box." Journal American Medical Women's Association, Vol. 28, No. 5, May, pp. 252-255.

1972a "Language and Thought: The Relationship Between Knowing a Correct Answer and the Ability to Verbalize the Reading on which it is Based." (In collaboration with Lilly Dimitrovsky). The Journal of Psychology, 80, 15-25.


1970a  A Review: *Child-Centered Education* by Harold Entwhistle (London), *The Teachers College Record*.


1967c Psychological Foundations of the Science Curriculum Improvement Study.


1953  "Is Nursery School the Answer," Woman's Home Companion, September, 18-22.


1953b  "What Should We Teach Children About Mental Health."
       Progressive Education, 30, 102-106.


1951a  "Programs for Young Children," Educational Leadership, 8, 270-275.


1950a  "Are They Too Young For Problem Solving?" Progressive Education, 27, 148-151.


1950c  "Six is a Magic Age." National Education Association Journal, 39, 694-696.


MEMBERSHIPS:

- American Educational Research Association
- National Association for the Education of Young Children
- American Association for the Advancement of Science (Fellow)
- American Psychological Association (Fellow, Division of Developmental Psychology)
Millie Almy
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- Sigma XI, Scientific Research Society
- Society for Research in Child Development

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<td>Annette Perry Cookley Scholarship 1932-36</td>
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<td>Vassar College</td>
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<td>1944</td>
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SELECTED CONSULTANTSHIPS AND APPOINTMENTS

1950

1950-1952
Lecturer, Child Development, Department of Psychiatry, University of Cincinnati.

1952-1953
President, National Association for Nursery Education.

1957-1968
Research Associate, Horace Mann Lincoln Institute, Teachers College, Columbia University.

1961-1965
Consultant, Institute for Development Studies, Department of Psychiatry, New York Medical College.

1964-1970
Consultant, Science Curriculum Improvement Study, University of California, Berkeley.

1965-1970
Advisory Committee, National Coordination Center, National Laboratory for Early Childhood Education and later, Science Advisory Board, National Program on Early Childhood Education CEMREL, Inc.

1965-1971
Board of Directors, Manhattanville Community Centers, New York.

1968-1974
Advisory Committee, ERIC Clearinghouse on Early Childhood Education, University of Illinois.

1971-1972
Advisory Committee to California Assembly Committee on Education. Advisory Committee, Prison MATCH.

1978-1979
Chair, Special Interest Group, Early Education and Child Development, American Educational Research Association.

1977-1982
Member, team for evaluation of Bush Centers for Child Development and Social Policy.

1979
Editor (1985 Senior Advisor), Early Childhood Education Series, Teachers College Press.

1984-1986
Consultant, Hakaansson Associates (Computer Software).

1985-1986
Consultant, Young Astronaut Council, Washington, D.C.

1992
International Educational Advisory Committees, Bright Star Preschool Academy, Tokyo.

Editorial Advertisement (varying years)
Young Children
Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology
Children in Contemporary Society
Texas Tech Journal of Education
Post Retirement Presentations


The child's world; the teacher's world: living and learning in a challenging society. Kent State University, Kent, OH, September 25, 1982.


Defending play in the lives of children. Symposium, the social context of development in early childhood education, Child Study Center, Institute of Human Development, University of California, Berkeley. May 17, 1979.


INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE


1967  Researcher, Child Growth and Development Project, Makerera University, Kampala, Uganda.

1971  Advisory Committee on cross-cultural research in Early Childhood Education. Meeting in Stockholm.

1980  Researcher, Mt. Druitt Project, Macquarie University, Australia (8 months). Also speaker, consultant, in Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and Queensland.

1982  Consultant, Early Childhood Division, Schwartz Program. Hebrew University, Jerusalem.


1992  Member International Advisory Committee, Bright Star Preschool Academy, Tokyo, Japan.

Foreign Travel

Canada, England, Ireland, Scotland, Norway, Denmark, Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland, Germany, Italy, Greece, East Africa, Mexico, Guatemala, Singapore, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Bangkok, Japan.
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