Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

University History Series
Department of History at Berkeley

William J. Bouwsma

Historian of European Culture in the Early Modern Era
University of California, Berkeley, 1956-1991

Interviews conducted by
Ann Lage
in 2000

Since 1954 the Regional Oral History Office has been interviewing leading participants in or well-placed witnesses to major events in the development of Northern California, the West, and the nation. Oral History is a method of collecting historical information through tape-recorded interviews between a narrator with firsthand knowledge of historically significant events and a well-informed interviewer, with the goal of preserving substantive additions to the historical record. The tape recording is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. The corrected manuscript is bound with photographs and illustrative materials and placed in The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, and in other research collections for scholarly use. Because it is primary material, oral history is not intended to present the final, verified, or complete narrative of events. It is a spoken account, offered by the interviewee in response to questioning, and as such it is reflective, partisan, deeply involved, and irreplaceable.

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It is recommended that this oral history be cited as follows:

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William Bouwsma, 2000
photo courtesy of William Bouwsma

William and Beverly Bouwsma, 2000
photo courtesy of William Bouwsma

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PREFACE TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AT BERKELEY ORAL HISTORY SERIES

The Department of History at Berkeley oral history series grew out of Gene Brucker's (Professor of History, 1954-1991) 1995 Faculty Research Lecture on "History at Berkeley." In developing his lecture on the transformations in the UC Berkeley Department of History in the latter half of the twentieth century, Brucker, whose tenure as professor of history from 1954 to 1991 spanned most of this period, realized how much of the story was undocumented.

Discussion with Carroll Brentano (M.A. History, 1951, Ph.D. History, 1967), coordinator of the University History Project at the Center for Studies in Higher Education, history department faculty wife, and a former graduate student in history, reinforced his perception that a great deal of the history of the University and its academic culture was not preserved for future generations. The Department of History, where one might expect to find an abiding interest in preserving a historical record, had discarded years of departmental files, and only a fraction of history faculty members had placed their personal papers in the Bancroft Library.[1]

Moreover, many of the most interesting aspects of the history--the life experiences, cultural context, and personal perceptions--were only infrequently committed to paper.[2] They existed for the most part in the memories of the participants.

Carroll Brentano knew of the longtime work of the Regional Oral History Office (ROHO) in recording and preserving the memories of participants in the history of California and the West and the special interest of ROHO in the history of the University. She and Gene Brucker then undertook to involve Ann Lage, a ROHO interviewer/editor who had conducted a number of oral histories in the University History Series and was herself a product of Berkeley's history department (B.A. 1963, M.A. 1965). In the course of a series of mutually enjoyable luncheon meetings, the project to document the history of the Department of History at Berkeley evolved.

In initial discussions about the parameters of the project, during which the varied and interesting lives of the history faculty were considered, a crucial decision was made. Rather than conduct a larger set of short oral histories focused on topics limited to departmental history, we determined to work with selected members of the department to conduct more lengthy biographical memoirs. We would record relevant personal background--family, education, career choices, marriage and children, travel and avocations; discuss other institutional affiliations; explore the

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[1] The Bancroft Library holds papers from history professors Walton Bean, Woodbridge Bingham, Herbert Bolton, Woodrow Borah, George Guttridge, John Hicks, Joseph Levenson, Henry May, William Alfred Morris, Frederic Paxson, Herbert Priestley, Engel Sluiter, Raymond Sontag.

[2] Two published memoirs recall the Berkeley history department: John D. Hicks, *My Life with History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968) recalls his years as professor and dean, 1942-1957; Henry F. May reflects on his years as an undergraduate at Berkeley in the thirties in *Coming to Terms* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

process of creating their historical works; obtain reflections on their retirement years. A central topic for each would be, of course, the Department of History at Berkeley--its governance, the informal and formal relationships among colleagues, the connections with the broader campus, and curriculum and teaching at both the graduate and undergraduate level.

Using the Brucker lecture as a point of departure, it was decided to begin to document the group of professors who came to the department in the immediate postwar years, the 1950s, and the early 1960s. Now retired, the younger ones somewhat prematurely because of a university retirement incentive offer in the early nineties, this group was the one whose distinguished teaching and publications initially earned the Department of History its high national rating. They made the crucial hiring and promotion decisions that cemented the department's strength and expanded and adapted the curriculum to meet new academic interests.

At the same time, they participated in campus governing bodies as the university dealt with central social, political, and cultural issues of our times, including challenges to civil liberties and academic freedom, the response to tumultous student protests over free speech, civil rights and the Vietnam War, and the demands for equality of opportunity for women and minorities. And they benefitted from the postwar years of demographic and economic growth in California accompanied for the most part through the 1980s with expanding budgets for higher education. Clearly, comprehensive oral histories discussing the lives and work of this group of professors would produce narratives of interest to researchers studying the developments in the discipline of history, higher education in the modern research university, and postwar California, as well as the institutional history of the University of California.

Carroll Brentano and Gene Brucker committed themselves to facilitate the funding of the oral history project, as well as to enlist the interest of potential memoirists in participating in the process. Many members of the department responded with interest, joined the periodic lunch confabs, offered advice in planning, and helped find funding to support the project. In the spring of 1996, the interest of the department in its own history led to an afternoon symposium, organized by Brentano and Professor of History Sheldon Rothblatt and titled "Play It Again, Sam." There, Gene Brucker restaged his Faculty Research Lecture. Professor Henry F. May responded with his own perceptions of events, followed by comments on the Brucker and May theses from other history faculty, all videotaped for posterity and the Bancroft Library.[3]

Meanwhile, the oral history project got underway with interviews with Delmer Brown, professor of Japanese history; Nicholas Riasanovsky, Russian and European intellectual history; and Kenneth Stampp, American history. A previously conducted oral history with Woodrow Borah, Latin American history, was uncovered and placed in The Bancroft Library. An oral history with Carl Schorske, European intellectual history, is in process at the time of this writing, and more are in the works. The selection of memoirists for the project is determined not only by the high regard in which they are held by their colleagues, because that would surely overwhelm us with

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[3] The Brucker lecture and May response, with an afterword by David Hollinger, are published in *History at Berkeley: A Dialog in Three Parts* (Chapters in the History of the University of California, Number Seven), Carroll Brentano and Sheldon Rothblatt, editors [Center for Studies in Higher Education and Institute of Governmental Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1998].

candidates, but also by their willingness to commit the substantial amount of time and thought to the oral history process. Age, availability of funding, and some attention to a balance in historical specialties also play a role in the selection order.

The enthusiastic response of early readers has reaffirmed for the organizers of this project that departmental histories and personal memoirs are essential to the unraveling of some knotty puzzles: What kind of a place is this University of California, Berkeley, to which we have committed much of our lives? What is this academic culture in which we are enmeshed? And what is this enterprise History, in which we all engage? As one of the project instigators reflected, "Knowing what was is essential; and as historians we know the value of sources, even if they are ourselves." The beginnings are here in these oral histories.

Carroll Brentano, Coordinator
University History Project
Center for Studies in Higher Education

Gene Brucker
Shepard Professor of History Emeritus

Ann Lage, Principal Editor
Regional Oral History Office
Berkeley, California
January 1998

INTRODUCTION by Elisabeth G. Gleason

My friendship with Bill Bouwsma began a very long time ago, when I was a senior at the University High School in Urbana, Illinois. Looking for a part-time job, I was steered by a counselor to the University of Illinois Library – an overwhelming place for a seventeen-year old. As a lowly page I entered a new world and began to learn how a great library is organized. In that process I met graduate students and professors whose books I carried to and from their study carrels. One of them was Bill Bouwsma.
I remember him well. He was a young assistant professor who came to the library every day, carrying piles of books in and out. Today I would probably call him shy, but then I attributed his taciturnity to his preoccupation with the multilingual works I regularly checked out for him. After a while he began to greet me in his serious way, neither cracking a smile nor engaging in small talk like others. Never having heard about Guillaume Postel, I of course had no idea what exactly he was looking for in the large Latin volumes he often hauled home at the end of the day. He struck me as an earnest scholar who kept the world at a distance. I continued to see him in the library throughout my three years as an undergraduate, and to stamp his books at the same desk.

Two years later, in the fall of 1956, I was beginning my graduate studies at Berkeley after finishing a master's degree at another large midwestern university. The first person whom I met in the library was the young professor from Illinois whose name I recalled with some difficulty. This time he stopped, just as surprised at our meeting as I was, and we shook hands. We chatted a bit and I learned that the Department of History at Berkeley had hired him. My focus was going to be medieval German history, and I vaguely registered that Professor Bouwsma was scheduled to teach a two-semester course in early modern Europe, a subject that at the time did not particularly attract me. But after some thought I decided to enroll in his course simply because I knew very little about the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

It is no exaggeration to say that Bill Bouwsma's course changed my life. From its first day I was completely caught up in something wonderful. With perfect, almost mathematical order and precision, Bill Bouwsma delivered the most elegant lectures, each opening a window on European thought from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment. I had some familiarity with French historical works and admired their architectonic quality but had never been exposed to such superb presentations. I discovered an immediate attraction to what used to be called intellectual history. Bill was its master, and I was not alone in my admiration for his teaching. Yet, despite structuring his material in a very individual way, his graduate students found him curiously unwilling to imprison anyone in his intellectual constructs. And for that we remained grateful.

Medieval history moved to the margins and became one of my minor fields. I wanted to study Bill Bouwsma's period and work with him on the Renaissance and Reformation. I was also his head teaching assistant in the survey of Western Civilization which he taught to perfection. In fact, it was difficult not to sound as a mere Bouwsma clone once I began to teach my own classes. As a graduate instructor he was most probing, offering careful critiques of our written work and stimulating us to do better. My papers that he returned to me with his neat, small handwriting in the margins are among my treasured possessions. Once I began work on my dissertation, Bill took a great interest in the details of my research, annotating every chapter copiously and commenting on every important point. He was encouraging but firm and willing to call a spade a spade. I was struck even in those days by his respect for his women students to whom he was unfailingly courteous and encouraging. In my case, he offered generous support for years in the form of many letters of reference he wrote gladly and punctually. I was extremely happy when later the American Historical Association chose him as the first recipient of its Mentorship Award, a well-deserved honor indeed.

Gradually he moved beyond being a mentor to becoming a friend. As I started my teaching career, he would invite me to lunch at the Men's Faculty Club every three or four months, and we would talk about our teaching and research. Our first common subject was the nexus of politics and religion in the history of Venice. Although I had a somewhat different approach to it, I treasured Bill's brilliant attempt to understand republican ideology and the role of Venetian thinkers like Paolo Sarpi in the history of modern European thought. Reading first the manuscript and then the book on *Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty*, I realized that Bill dealt with the major issues as both an historian and a philosopher. That is the distinguishing characteristic of his work. Then there was his writing—inimitable in its clarity and precision. I still go to an essay of his or a chapter in one of his books simply to enjoy his wonderful style.

For several years Calvin provided fascinating topics for our lunchtime discussions, and finally we debated the subjects of his last book, *The Waning of the Renaissance*. We both loved Huizinga and in some ways maybe dreamed of following along his path even as his work came to be considered old-fashioned, as for that matter did intellectual history itself. Bill was fully cognizant of changing fashions in his discipline. But rather than dismissing the work of younger historians, he grappled with their ideas and paid particular attention to works that employed very different methodologies from his. The curiosity and open-mindedness he always showed for the past was simply transferred to the present, to the surprise of nobody who knew him.

Reading the transcript of these conversations with Bill Bouswma, I cannot but be glad that it preserves at least some evidence of his human and intellectual qualities. But it cannot adequately capture what he was like in the classroom, as a thinker, a friend, a host, the husband of a wonderful wife, and an inspiration to his students. He could occasionally infuriate us by one of his impassive silences, but his affection for us was strong and lasting, as we all knew well.

Elizabeth Gleason
Professor of History Emeritus
University of San Francisco

August 2003
Tiburon, California

INTERVIEW HISTORY--William J. Bouwsma

The oral history with William Bouwsma, historian of European culture in the early modern period, is one of a series with faculty in the Department of History at the University of California, Berkeley. Bouwsma [Harvard, B.A.1943, PhD 1950] came to Berkeley as a visiting professor in 1956 and was appointed as an associate professor the following year. He taught at Berkeley for more than thirty years and served as department chairmen in 1966-1967 and again from 1981 to 1983. From 1967 to 1969, at the height of campus unrest during the Vietnam war, he was vice-chancellor for academic affairs under Chancellor Roger Heyns. His ordeal as an administrator amidst such turmoil led to Bouwsma's acceptance of an appointment at Harvard in 1969, but when Berkeley beckoned once again two years later, with an offer of the Sather chair in history, he happily accepted and returned to teach until his retirement in 1991. Bouwsma was the recipient of many honors and awards, and served as president of the American Historical Association in 1978.

The areas of Bouwsma's scholarship were the Renaissance and Reformation, subjects that allowed him, as he expressed in his oral history, "to explore in a scholarly way . . . the tensions between religious belief and intellectual liberation that were particularly prominent as a problem for understanding the Renaissance." These tensions, it is apparent in the oral history, were also prominent in his own personal life, coming as he did from a strict Dutch Calvinist family dominated by a problematic relationship with his father, a professor of philosophy at the University of Nebraska, and a scholar of Wittgenstein. As his colleague, Henry May says, "His historical thought was powerful, complex and profound. It was quarried, sometimes painfully, from sources that lay deep in his personality and experience."[4]

This oral history was recorded in the summer of 2000, just as his final and much acclaimed book, *The Waning of the Renaissance,* was in page proofs [Yale University Press, 2000]. I had been told by his colleagues that Bill Bouwsma often fit the stereotype of the absent-minded professor, but that his mind was active and his memory still good. So we launched our series of interviews in his home office with the highest expectations of creating an in-depth account of his professional life as teacher, administrator, and scholar. It became apparent during the course of the interviews, however, that he was entering a period of decline. His memory for boyhood and family seemed strong, and he returned frequently in our conversations to the tensions and conflicts in his personal and cultural background. Throughout the interviews there are significant recollections, insights, and reflections on his personal life, his historical works, the department, and the university. As we addressed each of his major works in turn in the final sessions of the oral history, however, it became apparent that his discussion of his scholarship was compromised by his loss of memory and capacity and do not do justice to the characteristic complexity of his thinking.

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[4] In Memoriam, William J. Bouwsma, by Gene Brucker, Randolph Starn, Thomas Brady, http://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/senate/inmemoriam/williamjbouwsma.htm

Professor Bouwsma reviewed the transcript of the oral history, making few alterations. His health continued to decline in the following years and he died in March 2004. Tapes of the interview sessions are available for listening in the Bancroft Library. Also deposited in the Bancroft is a small collection of Bouwsma letters to his colleague Gene Brucker, written in the years from 1964-1971. These include Bouwsma's description of his reaction to the Free Speech Movement in 1964 and the escalating antiwar protests in 1969. They also chronicle his decision to accept an appointment at Harvard, his observations of life at Harvard, and his subsequent acceptance of the invitation to return to Berkeley. These supplement an extensive collection (twenty-three cartons) of Bouwsma papers placed in the Bancroft after his death. Bill Bouwsma's wife, Beverly, was also interviewed for the Department of History at Berkeley series, in January-February of 2001.

The Regional Oral History Office was established in 1954 to record the lives of persons who have contributed significantly to the history of California and the West. A major focus of the office since its inception has been university history. The list of completed oral histories documenting the history of the Department of History at Berkeley is included in this volume. Many of the interviews in this and other subject areas can be found online at http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/ROHO/. Copies of all interviews are available for research use in the Bancroft Library and in the UCLA Department of Special Collections. The Regional Oral History Office is a division of The Bancroft Library and is under the direction of Richard Candida-Smith.

Ann Lage
Interviewer, Project Director

Berkeley, CA
February, 2008

March 2008

UNIVERSITY HISTORY SERIES, DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AT BERKELEY
SERIES LIST

Bouwsma, Beverly Hancock. *Observer of Campus and Community Culture, Berkeley Department of History Faculty Wife, 1956-2001*. 2008, 136 pp.

Bouwsma, William J. *Historian of European Culture in the Early Modern Era, University of California, Berkeley, 1956-1991*. 2008, 137 pp.

Brown, Delmer M. *Professor of Japanese History, University of California, Berkeley, 1946-1977*. 2000, 410 pp.

Brentano, Robert. *Scholar and Teacher of Medieval History, University of California, Berkeley, 1952-2002*. 2005, 370 pp.

Brucker, Gene. *Historian of Renaissance Florence, University of California, Berkeley, 1954-1991*. 2005, 211 pp.

Keightley, David N. *Historian of Early China, University of California, Berkeley, 1969-1998*. 2003. 163 pp.

May, Henry F. *Professor of American Intellectual History, University of California, Berkeley, 1952-1980*. 1999, 218 pp.

Malia, Martin Edward. *Historian of Russian and European Intellectual History*. 2005, 229 pp.

Riasanovsky, Nicholas V. *Professor of Russian and European Intellectual History, University of California, Berkeley, 1957-1997*. 1998, 310 pp.

Schorske, Carl E. *Intellectual Life, Civil Libertarian Issues, and the Student Movement at the University of California, Berkeley, 1960-1969*. 2000, 203 pp.

Stampp, Kenneth M. *Historian of Slavery, the Civil War, and Reconstruction, University of California, Berkeley, 1946-1983*. 1998, 310 pp.

Donated Collection:

Borah, Woodrow W. *Woodrow W. Borah interview : oral history transcript*, by James W. Wilkie and Rebecca Horn, 1983. Transcript in Bancroft Library.

In process:

Davis, Natalie, Early Modern Europe

Halperin, Tulio, Latin American history

Herr, Richard, Early and Late Modern Europe, Spain and France

Jordan, Winthrop, United States colonial history

Levine, Lawrence, United States cultural history

Litwack, Leon, United States history, African American history

Wakeman, Frederic, Historian of China

INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM BOUWSMA

I FAMILY BACKGROUND, CHILDHOOD IN NEBRASKA AND MICHIGAN, UNDERGRADUATE YEARS AT HARVARD, 1923-1943

[Interview 1: June 27, 2000] ##[5]

Dutch Calvinist Roots

Lage: Tell me where you were born, and we'll get the facts on the record.

Bouwsma: I was born in Ann Arbor, Michigan, when my father was a graduate student in philosophy.

Lage: What was the date?

Bouwsma: November 22, 1923.

Lage: Now why don't we get a little bit about family background, your parents, their origins.

Bouwsma: Both of my parents were brought up within the rather isolated Dutch community in western Michigan. Both Dutch Calvinists.

Lage: Were their parents immigrants, or were they immigrants?

Bouwsma: My father's parents were immigrants. My mother's were first-generation birth in America, but they both came out of the same general background.

Lage: What was the Dutch Calvinist community like? What does that background imply that I, and maybe others as well, probably don't know?

Bouwsma: It implies a high degree of ethnic solidarity welded together by common values, both religious and ethical. We have much appreciation for hard work, because these people had to make it on their own.

Lage: Were they in the farming world?

Bouwsma: No. They had come out of farming communities but had established themselves as small businessmen, pretty much within the Dutch immigrant communities of Grand Rapids, Michigan, and Muskegon, Michigan. Grand Rapids for my mother's parents and a somewhat smaller Dutch community in

[5]## This symbol indicates that a tape or tape segment has begun or ended. A guide to the tapes follows the table of contents.

Muskegon for my father's. But they were both products of the same general ethnic and cultural background.

Lage: Were most Dutch immigrants Calvinist?

Bouwsma: I think the majority probably had farming backgrounds or were quite lower middle class. Many of them had aspirations for more prosperity.

My mother's father had a small neighborhood grocery store, used to make deliveries himself. My father's father started off, I think, in a farm near Muskegon, but then became quite prosperous as a junk dealer. Muskegon was an industrial town, and there was a lot of useful junk to deal with. He eventually owned a lot of real estate. He was something of a venture capitalist and lost almost everything in the Depression. My father was brought up with expectations of a rich boy, and my mother married him with expectations of this kind.

Lage: But she herself didn't come from a wealthy family?

Bouwsma: No. Her father was a small businessman, a grocer. Corner grocery store.

Lage: You emphasize the closeness of that community and the ethnic solidarity. Do you think it was more so than other immigrant communities?

Bouwsma: I'm not sure since I have very little basis for comparison. Certainly the Dutch settled pretty close to each other in western Michigan. They had their own Dutch Reform Calvinist churches. They supported parochial schools within this tradition. My parents were both brought up in what they called the "Christian schools."

Lage: But meaning Dutch Reform Calvinists?

Bouwsma: That's right, largely supported by the Dutch Reform Calvinist communities. They met, I think, when my father was an undergraduate at Calvin College, which was the major consistently disciplined higher education place for the children of these families. I think my parents met then in Grand Rapids, where Calvin College was located. It's still very much a going concern and, in fact, has a big, new campus.

Lage: Is it still quite religious in its approach?

Bouwsma: I think it is. The religious element--I know very little about it directly now--but I suppose it was pretty much diffused over the years. On the other hand, the Calvinist Church is run by the particular sect that predominated in the immigrant community, the so-called Christian Reformed Church to distinguish them from the other un-Christian Reformed. [laughs]

Lage: So this was a sect called Christian Reformed?

Bouwsma: The Christian Reformed Church ran the college. It's still Calvin College, and it is now quite large and prosperous. The cohesiveness and the continuities within this community seem to me still remarkable, although my parents left it because my father was a graduate student in philosophy at the University of Michigan--that is, he made a transition from Calvin College in Grand Rapids to the University of Michigan for graduate study, which was very common. My father got his degree in philosophy.

Lage: It was a common course to take.

Bouwsma: It was common for the more successful students at Calvin College then to go on to the University of Michigan, and that's what my father did. Meanwhile, he had developed an interest in philosophy which at the time, I think, he regarded as an ally of the religious education that he had received. I don't think he felt that way for very long. He got a Ph.D. in philosophy at the University of Michigan, as a good many of these ambitious Dutch kids did.

Lage: They did go on to Ph.D. studies.

Bouwsma: A good many of them did. For them philosophy was a favorite subject because it was regarded as an ally of religion. My father was soon disabused of that conception.

Lage: Are you saying that he rejected his religion?

Bouwsma: No, he didn't. He never rejected the religion, but he rejected the notion that his philosophy was an adjunct to his religion, which I think a lot of the Calvin College students in philosophy believed. They then went on to the University of Michigan to do their graduate work.

Lage: Did the rest of them disabuse themselves of that idea?

Bouwsma: I think there was a high degree of continuity. Many of these Dutch kids went into philosophy because they thought of it as an adjunct to the religious traditions to which they tended to be quite loyal.

Lage: How would you characterize these traditions? Was it a religious philosophy, or was it a way of life?

Bouwsma: Well, it presented itself to its adherents as a more systematic ally to their religious beliefs, closely related. My father went on to become a professor of philosophy. It was very common for these kids to go to the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, do graduate work, and--.

Lage: And go on to the professoriate?

Bouwsma: He had a good many friends in the professoriate.

Lage: So the community didn't see this further education as a threat to its integrity?

Bouwsma: They didn't at the time, and I suppose their religious traditions were strong enough so that they were not easily dissolved.

Lage: Was part of the integrity of this community language? Did they retain the Dutch language?

Bouwsma: My parents knew a little Dutch. They knew enough when they wanted to speak privately to one another in the presence of their children--.

Lage: Don't parents always do that? [laughter]

Bouwsma: They knew enough. I don't think that either one of them was very proficient. My father knew a good deal more so that when he went to the Netherlands, he could get around in the language. My mother knew very little.

Lage: Did you have close relationships with your grandparents?

Bouwsma: The family connections were pretty strong and well-maintained, although they were--. See, once you had a graduate degree, then your options for where to go were somewhat limited. And my father was quite clear, I think, that he did not want to spend his life teaching in a church college. He wanted to go to a state university, so he took a job at the University of Nebraska.

Father's Aspirations and Accomplishments: The Effect on the Family

Lage: Do you know what your father's thinking was? Why he wanted to go to a state university?

Bouwsma: I think he was always torn between loyalty to the Calvinist orthodoxies and a freer, intellectual life, a kind of freedom that he associated with Socrates. He was a great admirer and disciple of Socrates, who lived the examined life which he developed by questions and answers. My father was pretty proficient in the Socratic method.

Lage: Did he turn it on you as you were growing up?

Bouwsma: Not very much. I have the feeling now--and it's probably exaggerated--but I have the feeling now that my father disappointed my mother, because he was not ambitious. He was willing to remain an unpublishing assistant professor of philosophy at the University of Nebraska for years and years and years. My mother was very restless in the situation. She wanted him to make a name for himself in philosophy, as eventually he did, became rather famous as a practitioner of the Socratic method in teaching and had quite a few good

students. Eventually. They admired him enormously, were very loyal to him, though my mother was disappointed that he was still only an assistant professor when I got my Ph.D.

Lage: Oh, goodness. That must have caused a few conflicts.

Bouwsma: She wanted him to publish and become famous, and he only started to publish and be fairly well known at about the time I went off to college.

Lage: Maybe you presented a bit of a challenge.

Bouwsma: Well, I don't think that would have deterred him very much from his way of life, but he became an ardent disciple of G. E. [George Edward] Moore and [Ludwig] Wittgenstein, without doing much publishing until about the time that I went off to college.

My mother was, I think, very disappointed in his career because she thought she'd married a winner, and he refused to become a winner, at least until he said he was ready. That wasn't until he was in his forties.

Lage: When you say a "disciple" of Moore and Wittgenstein, what do you mean by that?

Bouwsma: He followed their methods in philosophy, essentially based on questions and answers.

Lage: Was it a Socratic method?

Bouwsma: Yes, Socratic method. He refused to publish because he said he didn't have anything to say yet, and that, I'm sure, enraged my mother, although she was brought up in a community in which wives obeyed their husbands.

Lage: Did she retain that virtue? Shall we call it a virtue?

Bouwsma: She was very frustrated by a situation in which her husband refused to do what was necessary in order to make a better income and secure more prestige for the family. I think my mother was frustrated for many years, although eventually--after he became aware of Wittgenstein, and Wittgenstein's methods--he became fairly well-known as a philosopher. I think she was much relieved. He was able to get out of Lincoln, Nebraska, taught around as a visitor in more prestigious universities like Cornell and became rather well-known as a teacher because he was an expert in the Socratic method. He had some very, very good students.

Lage: You mentioned that his students were devoted to him.

Bouwsma: Yes.

Lage: And it was his method that they were drawn to?

Bouwsma: I think his method, his warmth, his humor; warmth to students that he didn't display in the family circle so much.

Lage: But you observed it?

Bouwsma: Oh, I was aware that he had many devoted, loyal students, and some of whom were very good, including Norman Malcolm, who became one of the leaders in analytical philosophy. Wint Farre at Cornell, Morris Lazarowitz at Smith, and there were others. My father steered clear of his colleagues. He didn't think well of them partly because unlike graduate students, he couldn't deal in a superior way with his colleagues.

Lage: So he liked that relationship of--.

Bouwsma: My father grew up feeling very isolated within his department.

Lage: And he didn't have a community with the other professors?

Bouwsma: No, just with his graduate students. They were in and out of the house for years and were very loyal to him.

Lage: What was it like to grow up in this family? What were you like, and how were you raised?

Bouwsma: It was a strange mixture. Engagement and isolation. I was always brought up to feel that our family was rather different and represented a better standard of values than most people around us in Lincoln, Nebraska. My father was contemptuous of his colleagues, most of them.

Lage: And you were aware of that.

Bouwsma: I was very much aware of it. He didn't try to conceal this. I don't think he could have, in any case.

Lage: Were his colleagues good scholars?

Bouwsma: He thought they were not. People of mediocre intellect. There was one who was pretty good but didn't share my father's kinds of interests. But the chairman of his department and most of his colleagues didn't interest him, and in fact increased a kind of pride in his own intellectual powers, which I think he was constantly aware of. About the time I went off to college, however, he began to publish and developed a considerable following among analytical philosophers of a certain type. He taught at Smith for a year or two; he was a visiting professor at summer sessions at Columbia and Cornell.

Lage: You said he went to Texas eventually.

Bouwsma: Eventually he went to the University of Texas, yes. For a regular position.

Lage: Did it have a good philosophy department?

Bouwsma: Well, certainly much larger and varied and different from that in Nebraska, where my father had only about three colleagues in philosophy, for whom he had no respect. His scorn for them was transferred pretty much to his students. He had some very good students who went on in philosophy. Malcolm was probably the most distinguished.

Nebraska to Michigan, and Back: ''We Lived a Strangely Nomadic Existence''

Lage: Your parents named you William James Bouwsma. Was the ''William James'' part significant?

Bouwsma: I have always been convinced that that was the case, but my father denied it. He denied he had any admiration for William James. I think he was worried that I might take pride in the name.

Lage: But you've mainly just used the "J," so I guess you haven't.

Bouwsma: The ''James'' part was never part of my identity when I was growing up.

Lage: It wasn't a family name.

Bouwsma: I was ''Little Billy''.

Lage: When you moved to Nebraska you were about five, weren't you?

Bouwsma: Yes, I was going on five. My first year in Lincoln was my kindergarten year.

Lage: Do you have clear recollections of those years?

Bouwsma: The early years we lived a strangely nomadic existence. I think it had something to do with this sense of alienation that my father always had as a believing and, as far as I could tell, practicing Calvinist, who never found a church in Lincoln, Nebraska, that satisfied him. He felt very isolated because of his religious tradition, had very, very few friends among his colleagues in any department.

Lage: So it wasn't just the philosophers.

Bouwsma: It wasn't just the philosophers.

Lage: What about neighbors and other churchgoers?

Bouwsma: Well, my father insisted always on affiliation with a church, so he went not to the First Presbyterian Church in Lincoln, but always to the Second.

Lage: Is that significant?

Bouwsma: An expression of humility, I think. He didn't want to seem a church climber or anything like that. But he disliked the atmosphere of the Presbyterian churches, which were adapting too much to the beliefs of the modern world. So eventually he found a little fundamentalist church that satisfied him more because the clergymen didn't make any pretensions to modern culture.

Lage: And were there certain prohibitions in the family regarding modern culture?

Bouwsma: We were supposed to keep the Sabbath. I was not--when I was growing up, even in high school--allowed to have lunch with my friends on Sundays. Some of them were employed and couldn't get away any other time. I was not allowed to do that. My father was rather rigid about these matters but never explained them very carefully.

Lage: How about your mother? Did she take a role in the religious upbringing?

Bouwsma: She would not have been much interested in the religious part of it, I think, but she had to go along with her husband like a good Calvinist's wife. She aspired to the more prosperous Presbyterian churches in Lincoln, and there were times when she would go to Westminster Presbyterian Church, which my father scorned because the minister made too many concessions to the modern world. But my mother defied him on that. She eventually had, as they say, her papers transferred to this church. But my father never wanted to go there.

Lage: Were there prohibitions against things like playing cards and dancing? Was that part of this tradition?

Bouwsma: Well, there was very little alcohol in the family because my father refused to publish, so we had a very limited income, to my mother's distress.

Lage: But it wasn't a religious prohibition.

Bouwsma: It was never defined religiously, and my father was prepared to invest in big bottles of beer for entertaining purposes and so on. There was no prohibition on alcohol. There was stuff around the house that I would sample as a high school boy; never developed much taste for it at that point.

Lage: You had mentioned when we talked last week about the moving back and forth every year and the sense of impermanence.

Bouwsma: That's right.

Lage: Tell me about that, because we didn't record it.

Bouwsma: During the years when I was growing up, my father would teach the academic semesters in the University of Nebraska, but as soon as his term was up, not necessarily when the children's terms were up, he would pile us all into the old Reo that he had been given by his father years before, and we went to Michigan for the summer.

Lage: Regardless of whether your school was over.

Bouwsma: Yes, that didn't matter to him, or he didn't take it very seriously. He would go back to Ann Arbor, where he'd done his graduate work, where he knew some people in philosophy with whom he could talk philosophy. He felt very lonely at Nebraska. There were only a few students with whom he could share ideas.

Lage: So he went back to that community around the University of Michigan.

Bouwsma: That's right. And every summer, really, my parents would rent a house just for the summer, and we would transfer there after a week visiting relatives in western Michigan, and then another week on the way back to Nebraska at the end of the summer. My parents never settled down. My father said he couldn't afford a house. My mother thought he could, but--.

Lage: So you would rent.

Bouwsma: But he would rent a house only for the school year, and regardless of whether the public schools were finished with the term, we would all pile into the old Reo and head for western Michigan, the home of the Dutch Calvinist community. [laughs]

Lage: You laugh at this now. At the time, were you offended by it, or did it just seem part of life?

Bouwsma: It seemed part of life, an exciting part of life. For one thing, western Michigan has a lot of lakes. My father's family was fairly prosperous and owned a fair amount of real estate, some of it on Lake Michigan. We would go there for a part of the summer, and I always enjoyed that, getting back.

Lage: That sounds very nice.

Bouwsma: The eastern side of Lake Michigan has wonderful sandy beaches, and I always looked forward to that.

Lage: Sounds like maybe a nicer place to be than Lincoln, Nebraska, in the summer.

Bouwsma: That's right, although we would spend a week or two along the lake at the beginning of the summer, and another week or two coming back. In between, there would be a period of renting a house in Ann Arbor so my father could talk philosophy with his old friends and colleagues. It was often in the neighborhood where my parents owned a house for a while, so I had a summer neighborhood and knew the kids and played ball with them. We would go back there.

Lage: So you had some continuity.

Bouwsma: Some continuity in the summertime, but it was a discontinuity with where I was growing up in Lincoln.

Lage: And a new school?

Bouwsma: I transferred from one school to another. I went to three different elementary schools in Lincoln, in different parts of town and with children from different strata of society. But I always enjoyed getting back to Ann Arbor. My parents kept their house in Ann Arbor for a long time. Sometimes we lived in it, sometimes elsewhere in the neighborhood. So I had a network of summer friends. Well, anyway, we lived in a good many different neighborhoods in Lincoln, Nebraska.

A Boyhood with Books ##

Lage: What kinds of activities did you like as a boy?

Bouwsma: I remember there was a lot of softball. I enjoyed that, but I was fairly precocious, having been pushed in this direction by my father, probably, who did a lot of reading to me, and I picked up the reading myself.

Lage: What kinds of things would he read to you as a young boy?

Bouwsma: He started off with Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, and indeed, once he had read me *Robinson Crusoe*, I picked it up and remembered it well enough so that I could read it to myself. Then I would go on from there, read other things. I was fairly precocious about my reading, but possibly also because I was encouraged to read a great deal. That was a good thing.

Lage: Both parents encouraged that?

Bouwsma: My father did.

Lage: And is that how you learned to read? Was all of this before school?

Bouwsma: Pretty much, yes. I was way ahead of where I was supposed to be in school because this reading had been done to me, and then I remembered it so well that I could read it to myself.

Lage: Do you remember books that were particularly important?

Bouwsma: Well, *Robinson Crusoe* I read over and over again. I still have my copy of that. *Robin Hood, Treasure Island.*

Lage: He wasn't having you read philosophy.

Bouwsma: Oh, no, no.

Lage: These were boyhood adventures.

Bouwsma: As far as professional philosophy was concerned, he was contemptuous of it. He thought that the only function of philosophical discourse was to show up the defects in it.

Lage: That's interesting.

Bouwsma: That was before he encountered Wittgenstein.

Eventually he became increasingly professional and became fairly well-known as a philosopher in the style of Wittgenstein.

Lage: Now, I want to get back to you, and what you did. You were a softball player but mainly a reader.

Bouwsma: That's right.

Lage: Anything else?

Bouwsma: Since we lived in a different house every summer there were different books to be read, so I spent most of my time reading. Occasionally, my mother would feel that this was not healthy and would force me out to play ball or something with the other kids.

Lage: But you were just as happy sitting alone.

Bouwsma: I was just as happy to read, yes. Not in the library, but there were all those books around the house.

Lage: In your own house. What about siblings? We haven't mentioned brothers or sisters.

Bouwsma: I had a brother who was two years younger than I, almost to the day. He was born on the twenty-second of November, and I was born on the twenty-first, which was also my father's birthday. I came eventually to be quite sure that I was the birthday gift that he didn't want [laughs].

Lage: Do you mean that?

Bouwsma: Yes, I mean that. I still think that that was true, because my mother was disappointed with his lack of professional ambition, his lack of achievement, his failure to rise in the academic world. I knew what pleased her, so I was very good in school.

Lage: He must have been pleased also.

Bouwsma: As I say, I have often felt that I was the birthday gift that he did not ask for.

Lage: I don't mean to argue with you. I'm just trying to get a good picture. He did spend the time and read to you.

Bouwsma: He read to me a lot, for a long time.

Intellectual Development: Father as Mentor and Rival

Lage: Did your father take an interest in your intellectual development?

Bouwsma: I'm sure he did. It was somewhat spasmodic that he was, on the whole, content to let me read to myself.

Lage: Yes. He didn't treat you like one of his graduate students.

Bouwsma: He did sometimes, but it made me very uncomfortable to be treated like a graduate student and therefore have my misconceptions revealed by his Socratic method. He was very acute at that.

Lage: Was the intellectual level of the high school high enough to keep you interested?

Bouwsma: The big, central high school for the whole community of Lincoln, Nebraska, 80,000 people, had over 3,000 students, and there were a lot of them who were very bright, very talented. I never felt that I was brighter than everybody.

Lage: Did you have any teachers there who molded you or encouraged you?

Bouwsma: My sense is that my father was rather contemptuous of the high school and the teachers there and did not encourage me to respect them.

Lage: And that rubs off, doesn't it?

Bouwsma: I think so. And in fact I think they were conscientious, female, and single, almost to a person. Like high school teachers used to be.

Lage: Yes. So that was not a molding experience.

Bouwsma: Not very much. I had an English teacher who was also the debate coach, who molded my critical spirit in ways that I think were not very healthy.

Lage: Now how is that?

Bouwsma: Wanted to debate everything.

Lage: I see.

Bouwsma: I'm not saying that's a bad idea, but to pick holes in other people was the main trick that I learned in high school. But my mother had friends who believed that I was very talented and pushed me to apply for scholarships. I was eventually successful, and I had a Harvard National Scholarship and spent my whole undergraduate career there. It was truncated by the war effort and the draft, but I managed to get through with my Harvard education in three years. I worked very hard. I reflected my mother's ambitions, which my father had frustrated.

Lage: Did you yourself feel those ambitions? Were you anxious to get out of Lincoln, Nebraska?

Bouwsma: Yes, I was.

Lage: So you were happy to go east?

Bouwsma: I was happy to go east to go to Harvard. I was a proud little bastard.

Lage: You don't sound as if you like yourself very well back then.

Bouwsma: I don't like what I remember of myself back then.

Lage: Was your brother a scholar as well?

Bouwsma: No.

Lage: What were his interests?

Bouwsma: He had more real boy interests, crafting things in the basement, athletics, and so on. He was two years younger than I, and my mother did not rest hopes in him of the kind that she had instilled in me.

Lage: Do you think that's because you're the first child, or because she saw something special in you?

Bouwsma: I think because I was the first child, and I hate to say this, but she thought I was the most talented. And it's true. I did very, very well in school.

Lage: What did your brother go on to do?

Bouwsma: He became a high school teacher.

Lage: And you had a sister.

Bouwsma: Yes. I still have both a sister and a brother.

Lage: Did you have a very close relationship with your sister?

Bouwsma: She was, I think, about ten years younger than I. Mostly I took pride in the fact that I was such a good babysitter, and my mother liked that very much.

Lage: Was your father pleased with the rest of his family?

Bouwsma: I think he was relatively pleased. He liked my brother better than me, because my brother played ball with him and was a much better athlete. I don't know that my father was such a great athlete, but I think he regarded me as a threat and a rival, especially since I was very good in school and my mother took enormous satisfaction in my grades and my Harvard scholarship.

Lage: So she sort of doted on you.

Bouwsma: That's right.

Lage: Was he kind of demeaning?

Bouwsma: Oh, he was a great teaser, and not one to recognize accomplishments, especially in a child whom his wife made into a kind of rival to him. I don't mean to be running my father down. He was a wonderful man in a lot of ways and a very effective teacher of philosophy at the university.

Lage: You said when we were talking last week that he was probably your main mentor as an intellectual force.

Bouwsma: He read to me a lot.

Lage: Did his thinking shape you in any way?

Bouwsma: Well, he also made me a little timid about expressing my own views about anything. He would be quick to see his own defects in what I said, my arguments.

Lage: Do you see this type of behavior as just idiosyncratic to him, or is it part of the tradition that he grew out of?

Bouwsma: I think it had more to do with the sense of rivalry that he increasingly developed.

Lage: Was this a family dynamic?

Bouwsma: The dynamic in the family was my mother was disappointed in his career and transferred her ambitions--she was very ambitious--to me, and my father was certainly sensitive to this. As I say, he was still just an assistant professor without any reputation.

Lage: Were you aware of this at the time, or is this looking back?

Bouwsma: This is mostly looking back. I don't know to what degree I was conscious of it at the time.

Lage: It's hard for a young person to put that all together.

Bouwsma: That happened later, I think. I revered and respected my father enormously. My mother built him up as an intellectual, and he was, in fact, I think.

Lage: And he published a number of papers.

Bouwsma: He published a number of papers that were pretty widely read and admired, and ridiculed my sort of work, because it resulted in books rather than papers. He had no respect--whether because of what I did or independently--for history. Never read it. I think he never read any work that I gave him. I know he didn't read my books.

Lage: My goodness. Did you read his papers?

Bouwsma: His papers were very technical, analytical, philosophical works. I was curious about them. I tried to look into them but just couldn't understand what was going on. It was not a popular kind of philosophical publication.

The Impact of the Depression: ``His Salary Was Twenty-Four Hundred a Year"

Lage: You were growing up in the midst of the Depression for the most part. Did it affect your family or community?

Bouwsma: It certainly affected my mother. My father, I think, went to the University of Nebraska in 1928 on a salary of three thousand a year. By the time I went off to college his salary was twenty-four hundred a year.

My mother was quite disappointed because she was aware that other people had bestirred themselves to publish and become famous, and my father was only making himself available to the better graduate students.

Lage: But it wasn't a time of great advancement among university professors.

Bouwsma: No, it was not.

Lage: There weren't a lot of jobs.

Bouwsma: There were not a lot of jobs, and my father always insisted that he was one of the lucky ones, because he had security in his.

Lage: How did your family's standard of living compare with the neighbors?

Bouwsma: We always lived in very middle class neighborhoods. I was not aware that we were impoverished. There was always enough food, and I knew families in which this was not always the case. My father had a regular salary, and he made a point of that, I suppose, partly in response to my mother's discontent that he wasn't exerting himself to rise high in the profession. He always had a regular income, and not only that, we always--this was partly a function of his alienation, I think--but we spent every summer in Michigan.

Lage: So that was really two households to maintain.

Bouwsma: That was the old house in the old neighborhood in Ann Arbor where my parents would rent a house for the summer. They only rented houses in Nebraska. It was a different house, and a different neighborhood, and a different school, practically every year. Sometimes there were able to rent for only a semester at a time, so there were two schools in one year.

Lage: You mentioned earlier your father's great sense of isolation. But did this kind of life give you a great sense of isolation as well?

Bouwsma: I think it resulted in a certain ambivalence. I've never yearned for the kind of isolation that he managed to work out for himself, and Beverly's always been a great community builder; I've been pleased by that. On the other hand, I suppose I've never felt very comfortable in any university community, following my father's pattern. I don't mean that I have ever felt as isolated as I think he was, and I have almost consciously rebelled against his kind of life. I've always felt that it was much better to settle down and put down some roots.

Lage: You've been here a long time.

Bouwsma: Partly in reaction to him.

Religious Affiliations

Lage: Is there anything else that you think we should talk about regarding that early life before Harvard? Was there any politics in the family, or in your own consciousness?

Bouwsma: My father was only contemptuous of politics and politicians. He always voted the straight Republican ticket, I think. But he wouldn't tell me what he was, what his political positions were. I think he wanted it to be felt that he wasn't trying to indoctrinate me in any way, except he would have liked to do it in a religious way, but that wasn't very successful either.

Lage: Let's pursue that just a bit.

Bouwsma: Okay. My father, as an exile from the Dutch Calvinist community, could only affiliate and had to affiliate with a Presbyterian church.

Lage: Did you go to church as a young person?

Bouwsma: I was sent to Sunday schools in the Presbyterian church, which I very easily came to realize that my father didn't regard with any respect at all. Nor did he regard the pastors in the Presbyterian churches that he insisted on affiliating with, with any respect. These churches were not like the Dutch Calvinist churches in western Michigan, which was the essential point.

Lage: Did you go to the Dutch Calvinist church when you went back to Michigan?

Bouwsma: We were never really members, and I think my father just gave up on that.

Lage: I don't know the Dutch Calvinist tradition as you do, so I'm wondering what--.

Bouwsma: A strong sense of right doctrine, which had to be maintained and enforced.

Lage: But doctrine, not behavior.

Bouwsma: Well, doctrine and behavior. This was a highly intellectualized kind of evangelical Christianity. I never understood it. I think my father was simply torn between his sense of what was the right thing to do about churches and his inability to find the kind of church that had seemed to him the right thing when he was growing up.

Lage: Highly intellectualized and evangelical Christianity.

Bouwsma: That was the Calvinist tradition, yes. The emphasis was more on what you believed rather than how you behaved, although it was assumed, without it ever being made clear, that one thing led to the other.

Lage: What did your mother want in terms of affiliation?

Bouwsma: She wanted to be a conventional, high church Presbyterian.

Lage: And you said your father--

Bouwsma: My father was only contemptuous.

Lage: He gravitated to a fundamentalist church. Did he take you along on that trip?

Bouwsma: By that time I was growing up. I was only home for vacations.

Lage: I see. But this is after you went to school?

Bouwsma: Really later. I would be expected to accompany my parents to this little fundamentalist church on the edge of town.

Lage: Was it highly intellectualized also?

Bouwsma: I don't remember. I didn't listen very carefully to what was going on in the services. I'm sure that these sermons did not satisfy my father.

Lage: You've mentioned that a lot of the Dutch young men went to graduate school and actually studied philosophy. Is that because they came out of this highly intellectualized religious tradition?

Bouwsma: I think their connections are pretty close. When you went to a state university to do graduate work, you couldn't obviously study Calvinist theology. You had to go to the closest thing to it, which was analytical philosophy, so a lot of these Dutch boys went to Michigan and studied philosophy.

Harvard as an Undergraduate, 1940-1943: Choice of Field of Study, Important Intellectual Influences, An Aside on Army Enlistment, 1943-1946

Lage: Now, let's take you from Nebraska to Cambridge.

Bouwsma: Yes.

Lage: How did you make that transition? It's a big change, it would seem.

Bouwsma: The transition was not the work of my father.

Lage: No. Was he contemptuous of your going there?

Bouwsma: He never expressed himself about this. I think he was pleased when I won the Harvard National Scholarship for Nebraska, but he never expressed any high degree of satisfaction in my going there. He once said that if he'd had the money he would have sent me to Calvin College.

Lage: Oh!

Bouwsma: But he couldn't afford that.

Lage: So it wasn't an option.

Bouwsma: I had to make my own way at Harvard. I don't think he ever was very enthusiastic about my education, especially as it became increasingly apparent to him that my career was going better than his.

Lage: That was not a good thing.

Bouwsma: That was not a good thing. It did not endear me to him.

Lage: When you moved to Harvard, where did you live? What kind of a setting?

Bouwsma: Harvard undergraduates are all housed in student quarters. In the freshman year, they were fairly sorry. The freshman year, the freshman dormitories were not very luxurious, but after that you were admitted to one of the Harvard houses, and they were quite luxurious. Two students would occupy a three-room suite, with separate bedrooms and a common living room, which you had to furnish for yourself, but there were enough old student furnishings passing around that that wasn't impossible.

Lage: Were your fellow students better off than you were?

Bouwsma: No, I had a very generous fellowship. The Harvard National Scholarship was supposed to take care of all reasonable expenses, with a little money leftover for transportation. I knew a lot of students who were in pretty much the same situation. The Harvard undergraduate student body is pretty well supported.

Lage: Financially.

Bouwsma: Financially. I was supported at least as well as most of them.

Lage: What were the backgrounds of most of the Harvard students at that time? Was there a kind of a class feeling?

Bouwsma: Certainly a large proportion of them had gone to expensive private schools, but there were increasing numbers of scholarship boys who had graduated from public high schools as I had. I never felt that I was disadvantaged because I had had that kind of preparation.

Lage: Did you find it a congenial atmosphere? Did you make connections with professors and fellow students? Tell me about those things.

Bouwsma: I had a few friends, but not many, among students. Mostly scholarship recipients like myself.

Lage: You arrived there in ‘40.

Bouwsma: 1940. That meant that I was the class of ‘44, and hardly any member of the class of ‘44 graduated in ‘44. Many of us were encouraged to accelerate, as I said, so I graduated in ‘43 with the help of a summer session or two.

Lage: So that wasn’t so unusual at that time.

Bouwsma: It was not unusual, no, and I graduated almost immediately into the armed forces.

Lage: Yes, as others did, too. Was that specter of war hanging over you during those times?

Bouwsma: I was certainly aware of it, graduating in ‘43. The United States was not very seriously involved before ‘44. I graduated in ‘43, went almost immediately into the army, spent--it’s embarrassing to describe my military career--but I spent three years in and around Denver, Colorado, the last two years of which I married and lived in a quite comfortable apartment. Beverly took a job at the local airbase and had to commute by a couple of buses to get to her job.

Lage: What did you do?

Bouwsma: I was a classifications specialist, as they called it. Even when I got out of the army, I was only a buck sergeant, but I’d spent the whole time as a classification clerk of one kind or another.

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Lage: That was basically office work, it sounds like.

Bouwsma: Basically office work. Much of it was interviewing recruits and making decisions about what kind of training school to send them to. Some became mechanics, some became armorers. It was a different process for officers.

Lage: And what branch was this?

Bouwsma: The Army Air Force.

Lage: Did you enlist then?

Bouwsma: Technically, I guess I did, because after I graduated from Harvard, I knew I was going into the army, and I didn't want to wait around at home for a long period of time. So I managed to accelerate my induction into the armed services.

Lage: Now we really gave short shrift to Harvard. How did you choose your discipline of history? There wasn't great tradition for it in your family, as you describe.

Bouwsma: Although there was a great tradition for the humanities. My father is a philosopher who had done graduate work in English--a lot of it--who did a lot of reading to me. It was quite natural for me, and I loved the history course I took as a freshman. I enrolled in a kind of elite program that combined history and literature. English history and lit was my undergraduate major, and I took probably more English courses than history.

Lage: And your major was this combined field.

Bouwsma: Combined field. It was a sort of elite field. It had a limited enrollment, and it made me feel good that I got admitted to it.

Lage: Was it small classes?

Bouwsma: No, not necessarily. You took the usual large lecture courses as an undergraduate.

Lage: Were there particularly memorable professors that you were shaped by?

Bouwsma: I think the person whom I remember most admiring was F. O. Matthiessen. Does that name mean anything to you?

Lage: Yes, it does.

Bouwsma: He was involved in my tutorial my freshman year or my sophomore year, and I went on to take a number of courses with him. He killed himself when I was a--[pause]-- graduate student, but he was a very unhappy, very conscientious, very unhappy man. Jumped out of a fourteenth-floor window. I was a graduate student when this happened in Boston. Highly moral person. I think he was very upset by our engagement in the war.

Lage: Was he a pacifist?

Bouwsma: I don't think so. I think he was just deeply depressed by the war, which combined with a number of personal disappointments. He was homosexual. I didn't understand anything about that when I worked with him. He was homosexual and his lover had died, and he just went out of a fourteenth-story window.

Lage: Oh, dear. That must have been a blow.

Bouwsma: Well, it was a shocker. But I also had another tutor whose seriousness and feelings about literature influenced me a lot, had something to do with my going into fields of humanities and history.

Lage: And who was that?

Bouwsma: His name was Barber--C. L. Barber.

Lage: Was he a professor?

Bouwsma: He never had tenure at Harvard, and he died young. I have forgotten the circumstances, I regret to say.

Lage: How did he influence you? What was his contribution?

Bouwsma: By his seriousness, and his insights and practice into critical techniques of reading.

Lage: Was the tutorial the method of education in that program?

Bouwsma: It was for a large proportion of Harvard undergraduates. After the sophomore year they were assigned to a tutor, perhaps to more than one in the course of the last two years. I was compelled by the pressure of the situation to get through a little early.

Lage: You must have done a lot of reading quickly.

Bouwsma: I did. I did a lot of reading. I don't know that "quickly" would have been the right way to do it, but--.

Lage: What was History I, and why is it in my notes to ask you about?

Bouwsma: History I was a famous course in western civilization that covered two semesters, was taught by various hands, and the heart of it--well, I won't say the heart because that's what I taught myself--but the heart of it was a weekly section meeting, quiz sections, discussion and so on. As a graduate student I was selected to teach in that course, which I did for a couple of years, though in the last year I was given a choice between further teaching and a fellowship that would enable me to get through faster. Since I was married at the time and I wanted to get through and get a real job, that's what I chose to do.

Lage: Was this an important course to hone your teaching skills?

Bouwsma: Well, no effort was made to develop the skills of beginning teachers in the course. You were expected to develop that on your own. Just by being selected as a teaching fellow in the course, you were presumably--

Lage: You're ready to teach.

Bouwsma: Ready to teach. That's right.

Pacifist Leanings: Membership in Harvard Student Union

Lage: Did you take part in college life or political action?

Bouwsma: The Second World War was just getting started, and I was--I'm a little embarrassed by this --but I was opposed to our getting involved in it.

Lage: You shouldn't be embarrassed. There were lots of people who were.

Bouwsma: Okay. Anyway, therefore I became a member of what's called the Harvard Student Union, which was a left-wing political pressure group composed of students. I eventually dropped out of it because as soon as this country was involved in a war against the Nazis, the Student Union shifted in strong support of the war. I found that very disillusioning, as I was kind of a pacifist at the time.

Lage: I see. Did you know Henry May during these years?

Bouwsma: No. Never met Henry before coming here.

Lage: There must have been some overlap.

Bouwsma: I came back after my military service and was a graduate student in history when Henry was, I think, a tutor in the history department.

Lage: But you didn't--

Bouwsma: Didn't know him.

Lage: He was involved in some of these antiwar activities.

Bouwsma: No. Didn't know him at all. He was probably a supporter of our involvement in the war. I don't know. We've never discussed this, which suddenly seems to me a little odd since he and I have become such close friends.

Lage: So you got involved in the Harvard Student Union, and it sounds as if you came to it without much political involvement before.

Bouwsma: That's right.

Lage: Would you be considered a naive member of the Harvard Student Union?

Bouwsma: When I joined the Harvard Student Union it was a pacifist organization, and it was very disillusioning to me that it shifted wildly in favor of the war as soon as we were on the same side as the Soviet Union.

Lage: Did you understand the mechanics of it at the time?

Bouwsma: Oh, I think I understood very well that the Harvard Student Union was a communist front organization, and it would go wherever the party line went. I wasn't aware when I first supported it that this would be the case, but it became very clear when it made an abrupt, hairpin turn.

Lage: Where did your pacifism come from? Was this a long held belief?

Bouwsma: No. I'm not sure. Just an antiwar sentiment that probably went back as far as high school years, when I was opposed to our getting into the war. I find it all rather embarrassing now, but I was against our participating in the war, and--.

Lage: Did you change your views during those last years as an undergraduate? You did enlist after all.

Bouwsma: No, I was drafted but not against my will. I spent the better part of three years in the army, till the end of the war.

Courtship and Marriage to Beverly, 1944: "It Just Worked Out Extremely Well"

Lage: Any other extracurricular activities we should talk about? Did you date the young women in the history program?

Bouwsma: Not in the history program. I was very lonely. I made some not very successful efforts to get acquainted with Radcliffe girls and finally gave up because I never got close to one that I cared much for.

Lage: And you met Beverly during this time? Or had you known her?

Bouwsma: I had known her, and indeed, Beverly's father was our family pediatrician. Our mothers had known each other for many years. During one Christmas vacation, I was home from Harvard for the holidays, I was lonely, and I had heard about Beverly Hancock. In fact, I had taken her on a tennis date before I ever went to Harvard.

Lage: Oh, you did!

Bouwsma: She was several years behind me in school, but I remembered that I liked her. On a Christmas Day afternoon--it was snowing beautifully in Lincoln, Nebraska--I felt lonely and I called her up, asked her if she'd like to go for a

walk. She agreed, and we began a close friendship that has persisted ever since.

Lage: So that was a fateful walk.

Bouwsma: It was. I remember how beautiful the snow was. Then we came home and warmed ourselves in front of her fireplace, and I think I called her up again the next day. I saw her two or three times more before that Christmas vacation ended, then went back to Harvard, and we began a very regular correspondence.

Lage: Was she still in high school at this time?

Bouwsma: No. I was, in effect, a senior at Harvard. I knew it would be my last year. As an undergraduate, I'd be drafted at the end of it. She was, I think, a freshman in college.

Lage: Where did she go?

Bouwsma: She was attending the University of Nebraska at that time but didn't like it very much. Family and other pressures forced her into a sorority, and she hated that.

Lage: Oh, my.

Bouwsma: I had several weeks coming home after graduating from Harvard and going into the military, and Beverly and I saw each other quite regularly during that time. A year or so later we were married. I was still in the army.

Lage: Did your family like Beverly? And vice-versa?

Bouwsma: To tell the truth, I think my mother, at any rate, thought that Beverly was not enough like her [laughs], and was kind of soured by this relationship. For one thing, Beverly wasn't Dutch, and I was the first member of the family to go outside the Dutch community. In fact, my father had been the first member of the family to leave it.

Lage: To leave the area.

Bouwsma: To leave the area. So I don't think he was too surprised I didn't find a nice Dutch girl like my mother.

Lage: But your parents had some feelings about that.

Bouwsma: I think my mother did. She thought I was much too young to get involved with somebody who wasn't exactly like her, anyway.

Lage: Were they different in personalities?

Bouwsma: Oh, utterly different.

Lage: In what way?

Bouwsma: Beverly was far jollier and more outgoing than my mother could ever--and I think this was a question of traditional Dutch immigrants carrying themselves. My mother was not terribly pleased when Beverly and I decided we would marry.

Lage: Did they accept it, or did you have to defy them?

Bouwsma: My mother was never going to take a strong stand unless my father did, and my father was, I think, relieved to get me out of the family.

Lage: Did you see it as a big divide, as a way of breaking away?

Bouwsma: No, no, I didn't. I may even have persuaded myself that Beverly resembled my mother, which she didn't faintly.

Lage: Did Beverly's "jolly" attitude attract you?

Bouwsma: Oh, yes. She made me feel happy. When I was with her, I was happy. My own family had been rather dour. My father's notion of entertainment was teasing, and I wanted to get out from under.

Lage: Yes. Sounds like you made a good choice.

Bouwsma: Well, it certainly worked out well. I didn't make a good choice in the sense that I had thought things through and understood what was involved and appreciated the difference between Beverly and my parents. I didn't think of any of those things. It just worked out extremely well.

Lage: You just knew that you were happy when you were with her. People were less complicated in making their choices in those days about spouses.

Bouwsma: Of course, we were both very young. We felt we were committed to each other at nineteen and married at twenty.

Lage: Were you that young when you were married?

Bouwsma: Yes.

Lage: '44. Twenty-one, it sounds like.

Bouwsma: Not quite twenty-one. I was twenty-one the following November.

Lage: You did get out of college very young, didn't you?

Bouwsma: Yes, I got out of college--well, my whole generation was forced through quickly and in unusual ways, so that I graduated at the age of nineteen.

Lage: You started young, too, though.

Bouwsma: I started in at sixteen.

Lage: How did you finish up high school so early? Did you skip a grade?

Bouwsma: I had skipped a year or so in elementary school. The Lincoln, Nebraska, school system had certain principals--P-A-L-S--which involved the rapid advancement of selected students, and so I skipped a grade.

Lage: All your reading had done its work.

Bouwsma: I had done an enormous amount of reading. The only thing I had to make up was the long division, and I learned with relative speed. I was given a lot of problems to solve in long division, and I did. After that I had no trouble doing the sixth grade, because I had a very good sixth grade teacher.

Lage: It was more common in those days, I think, to accelerate.

Bouwsma: In some school systems it was, anyway.

Lage: Now shall we go on to talk about your Ph.D. period, or do you want to save that for next time? How do you feel?

Bouwsma: I think maybe it would be better if we saved it for another time.

II GRADUATE STUDY AT HARVARD, 1946-1950, TEACHING AT UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS, 1950-1956

[Interview 2: July 12, 2000] ##

Choosing the Renaissance: Exploring the Tensions Between Religious Belief and Intellectual Liberation

Bouwsma: Let's just plunge ahead, wherever you want to lead me.

Lage: Okay. We talked about your family upbringing: boyhood, Harvard undergraduate, military in Denver, marriage to Beverly, and I think this time we should talk about the graduate years at Harvard. Did you always know you would go on for the doctorate?

Bouwsma: It was pretty clear, and I had the advantage of a fellowship that was automatically renewed for graduate study at Harvard.

Lage: Oh, it carried you right through! So you didn't really have to depend on the G.I. Bill, it seems?

Bouwsma: I had that in addition, as the amount of the fellowship was adjusted to other resources. It lasted a long time.

Lage: That's good. Had you always known you wanted to get a Ph.D. and become a professor, or was there a moment of truth?

Bouwsma: There may have been a moment of decision at any rate. I toyed with other possibilities. I was in personnel classification in the army, and I thought for a while that I might go on in this kind of work. When it came down to the moment of decision, I knew I wanted to go back and do graduate work.

Lage: Was it always going to be history? You had said you had had a combined program of English and history as an undergraduate.

Bouwsma: It was certainly going to be in the humanities. Question was whether it was literature or history, and I decided that history afforded more opportunities for moving around, in case I was not entirely sure what I wanted to do.

Lage: You mean moving around intellectually.

Bouwsma: Intellectually, yes.

Lage: We're not talking about trips to Italy.

Bouwsma: Not yet.

Lage: [laughs] You went back to Harvard. Was it a different place after the war? Can you describe what it was like?

Bouwsma: It was certainly different to be a graduate student from being an undergraduate, where you lived with other undergraduates, you dined with them in the house dining halls, and so on. By this time Beverly, and I were in our second year of marriage, and so we were not living in one of the Harvard houses.

Lage: Where did you live?

Bouwsma: There was an enormous influx of married G.I.s in the Harvard graduate school, and special provision was made for them. Harvard took over the old hospital at Camp Devens. We commuted the thirty miles or so and back again on a daily basis, but that gave us a small apartment. We were quite comfortable as I recall and surrounded by other G.I. veterans. It was reasonably comfortable, and then in the second year of graduate school, we were able to move into an apartment in what had been the old Fort Devens Hospital, I think. At any rate, they remodeled that old hospital area. It was adjacent to the campus, and it was very convenient.

Lage: That's interesting. They put these military buildings to good use.

Bouwsma: Yes. Most of us were married by that time and had children. We had two children in graduate school, but we had a pleasant apartment in one of the old hospital wards.

Lage: Was it difficult to be the father of this young family while you were busy writing your dissertation and taking your exams?

Bouwsma: I don't know that I was much worried about that. It's hard to transport myself back those--it's half a century ago now. I didn't feel that there were competing--. See, Beverly was not working. My fellowship was adjusted in such a way that that wasn't necessary, so that we could start a family, which is what we did when I was in the army.

Lage: So Beverly did most of the heavy lifting for the family, I'm guessing.

Bouwsma: I would say so, yes. You can ask her that question too.

Lage: She'll probably have more vivid memories of it.

Bouwsma: She probably has. It was rather time-consuming to commute from Fort Devens by train, and then back again in the evening. I had a seminar that met in the evening, and I stayed courtesy of one of my colleagues in the seminar in one of the Harvard houses, which I knew well. I don't recall it as a period of

enormous difficulty, although there was a lot of pressure to demonstrate that I was good enough to go on and be encouraged.

Lage: Now how did you focus in on the Renaissance? Do you remember how that came about?

Bouwsma: It was because I thought I knew from an early point that if I worked in the Renaissance, I could explore in a scholarly way a lot of the problems and issues that had long interested me.

Lage: Such as?

Bouwsma: The tensions between religious belief and intellectual liberation, for example, that were particularly prominent as a problem for understanding the Renaissance.

Lage: Are you saying that these were things that you were interested in from a personal point of view?

Bouwsma: From a personal point of view, yes. Very much so.

Lage: In your own life.

Bouwsma: Well, the tensions between religious and intellectual motives and impulses.

Lage: So that was something that became a focus for you very early on.

Bouwsma: It was quite natural.

Lage: Given your background.

Bouwsma: That's right.

Lage: We talked a lot about your background last time, but I found myself wondering later: Did you have a lot of Bible study under your father? Did you read the Bible and talk about the Bible and have that kind of religious training?

Bouwsma: I think my father was beset with problems and tensions about what he ought to do, especially on behalf of his family, and what he was inclined to do. He was not very good on any sort of discipline or regularity. I think with him it was a matter of fits and starts. He would involve himself deeply in biblical studies, but he was, of course, a philosopher, so he could always place his philosophical interests in a religious context and vice versa.

Lage: You mentioned he never was quite happy with the ministers and the churches.

Bouwsma: Oh, he couldn't be. He was brought up, of course, in a rather closed community of Dutch Protestant immigrants, went to Calvin College as an undergraduate, and then on to the University of Michigan like many people of his background. I think his friends at the University of Michigan were much like himself, with interests in common. The Dutch community in Ann Arbor stuck together pretty much, too. They felt unusually comfortable with each other. My father had a sister who was married to an instructor in the English department who was a lot freer, and my Aunt Angeline and her husband had a much broader circle of acquaintances.

Lage: Was her husband not a Dutch Calvinist?

Bouwsma: Oh, he was, too.

Lage: That's right. You were the first in the family to marry outside the religion.

Bouwsma: That's right.

Lage: He was from that religion, but not quite as bound by it?

Bouwsma: That is very much the case. He was much less defensive, for example, and willing to experiment with other modes of thought. So was my aunt.

Lage: Did they have an influence on you?

Bouwsma: Not really. My father finished his graduate training in 1928, when I was five, and took a position at the University of Nebraska. Now it's my strong impression that he was always planning to move out of the Dutch community, which he was not really able to do in Ann Arbor, because it was a kind of haven for young men like himself. I think that's the circle in which my parents moved when my father was in graduate school. But he was very clear that he wanted to move out when he took a regular position.

Lage: And Nebraska did move him out?

Bouwsma: Nebraska gave him a state university. Now he also continued to feel isolated and lonely, and he never made close friends among other faculty members, for example. He was very much a loner. His closest contacts were with students who my father regarded almost as disciples.

Lage: This must have served some need that he had.

Bouwsma: I think his students were his primary social life, not other faculty members.

Lage: Does this have some relationship to not being able to break away from the Dutch community, do you think?

Bouwsma: I think it was a combination of being unable to break away and really choosing not to.

Lage: As a child, were you observing this? I'm very intrigued by your ability at that relatively young age to see the central problem between religious belief and intellectual liberation.

Bouwsma: My father went through a lot of the motions of holding together his tight little Calvinist family--prayers before meals, grace, Bible readings after you finished a meal--before you broke up for the day's activities. My father went through the motions, and when he accepted his position at the University of Nebraska he gravitated towards a Presbyterian church, which was the closest thing to what he was used to. But he was never very faithful or devoted, made fun of it because it wasn't quite the real thing. So I grew up being rather confused about religious attitudes.

Lage: Yes, I could see that would be a problem.

Bouwsma: He was always much happier when he could go back to Michigan. In fact every summer we would go back to Ann Arbor and my father could talk to people like himself, other graduate students from the Dutch community and so on.

Lage: Was his field of study Wittgenstein? Did that represent this other half of the equation, the intellectual liberation?

Bouwsma: I'm not sure how rapidly that shift of allegiance became. Wittgenstein represented a mode of inquiry that undermined the traditional study of philosophy.

Lage: What about Wittgenstein's religious beliefs?

Bouwsma: What my father told me was that although Wittgenstein had no religious beliefs, he was very respectful of those who did, so that comforted my father, I think, when he learned about Wittgenstein's kind of analysis, attached himself to that. I got the impression that his major reason for being a philosopher was that only in that way could he destroy philosophical foundations for belief.

Lage: And that appealed to your father.

Bouwsma: I think so. That's the kind of critical analysis of philosophy that appealed to him. It showed that traditional study of philosophy is nonsense.

Lage: He must have had very mixed feelings about his field in some respect.

Bouwsma: I'm sure he did. He also felt extremely isolated. He had almost no friends on the faculty. He had--especially in the philosophy department--his contempt for his colleagues which he made no effort to hide. I think he felt that their notions of philosophy were all nonsense.

Lage: So maybe this was Wittgenstein's appeal.

Bouwsma: Wittgensteinian analysis confirmed his ability to show up philosophy [laughter]. It was a rather confused intellectual stance.

Lage: What did you think of Wittgenstein? Had you already gone on your own path by then?

Bouwsma: No. I had not gone on any path of my own. I had a Harvard undergraduate national scholarship that also carried me through graduate study so I went to Harvard and I--what I believe now happened, and I can't verify this, but I'm quite sure it was the case--my father refused to publish because he thought that most of the work that philosophers did was nonsense. He made no effort to conceal his attitude towards his colleagues. They were a bunch of fools.

Lage: To their faces or to his family at home?

Bouwsma: To his family at home. He had no friends in the philosophy department. He surrounded himself with talented graduate students who were drawn to him because he had a kind of integrity that they valued, whereas the other people in philosophy did not. At least this is seen through my father's eyes. My father had some very, very good students, but he didn't allow them to stay on to work with him. Norman Malcolm was one of the most distinguished philosophers, eventually, at Cornell. It began with my father.

Lage: When you say "didn't allow them to stay on," what do you mean?.

Bouwsma: He didn't want them to do graduate work at Nebraska.

Lage: If they had promise, he would encourage them--

Bouwsma: Encourage them to go elsewhere, especially encouraging them to apply for fellowships in England. And he had some very good students. Norman Malcolm, who had a distinguished career at Cornell, was one. Morris Lazarowitz similarly at Smith, and I think there were others. I'm speaking of people who were around the house when I was growing up, so I knew about them.

Lage: They were older than you, though.

Bouwsma: Oh, yes.

Lage: Did you have any relationship with them, any mentor-mentee relationship?

Bouwsma: No. I was pretty young. I was sixteen when I left home, and I'm talking about connections with my father's students when I was not very mature.

Lage: So all of this is part of the background of your interest in these tensions between religious belief and intellectual liberation. Is that too tight a connection?

Bouwsma: No, I think that's quite an accurate way of putting it.

Lage: And the Renaissance seemed to be a kind of a venue where these things played out?

Bouwsma: That's right. The preoccupations of the Renaissance became my own preoccupations. I could deal with old family problems and tensions in intellectual ways by devoting myself to the study of the Renaissance, which, however, my father didn't respect at all.

Lage: The fact that you were doing this.

Bouwsma: That's right.

Lage: Did he let you know?

Bouwsma: He was simply quite indifferent.

Lage: He didn't turn his contempt on you. Or did he?

Bouwsma: Oh, he did when he could, yes.

Lage: That must have been very difficult for you.

Bouwsma: Well, my family situation was fraught with tension because my father refused to do what you needed to do to get ahead in a state university. He would say, with marked emphasis on what that meant about his colleagues, <u>he</u> had nothing to say yet.

Lage: This was as your mother was urging him to publish.

Bouwsma: Oh, yes! She was extremely frustrated. When I went away to college, he was still an unpromoted assistant professor at the University of Nebraska. Now once I left home, he ascended rather rapidly.

Lage: He was afraid you were going to catch up, maybe.

Bouwsma: I think that would be assuming too much responsibility for my father's success in his later years, but it is true that he made quite a reputation for himself as a teacher, and as even a publishing philosopher after I left home.

Lage: That's very intriguing.

Bouwsma: I'm not trying to draw a connection here, but--.

Lage: It's just the time sequence, not a causal relationship?

Bouwsma: That's right. After I left home, my mother could--well, she was terribly frustrated by his refusal to get ahead.

Lage: Maybe she turned her attentions from you to him.

Bouwsma: I think that's partly what happened, and once I left home, my father felt free, sort of liberated, to pursue his own career. But as long as I was at home during my elementary and high school years, my father refused to do what my mother wanted him to do, which was get ahead.

Lage: Did your family come to accept Beverly? You mentioned that they were a little taken aback because she was very different, didn't share the religion.

Bouwsma: What I think is that my father felt liberated by my transferring my affections from his wife, to a woman of my own. I think that liberated him to a degree.

Lage: That's interesting.

Bouwsma: This is all matter of surmise, but it's true that my father's reputation and his ability to publish, and so on, all came after I left home. He had no more responsibility for me.

Lage: And you had the scholarship. While you were at Harvard, did you keep in touch with your family, after you were married and before?

Bouwsma: I wasn't married when I was an undergraduate. I did go away from home, and over some time I wrote to my mother every day, I think. These letters gave my parents--now this is all seen through my mother's eyes--but it gave my parents some things to talk about at dinner. My father was really not very talkative, and these letters--I think, again, this is retroactive, I wasn't aware that my letters--I think these kept my mother going, and I think my father was quite bored by all this.

Lage: Were these letters you wrote as an undergraduate back home?

Bouwsma: Yes.

Lage: During the period when you were getting adjusted and feeling lonely, or were they about your studies?

Bouwsma: I suppose I was feeling lonely. I did not make friends quickly and easily.

Lage: It's a big change from Nebraska to Harvard, I would think.

Bouwsma: It was, of course, and it also coincided with my departure from the family circle. I was only sixteen, and I felt very lonely and displaced for a while.

Lage: I would think so. Did your mother tell you that the letters were part of the family circle?

Bouwsma: No. I think my letters were a kind of bond between my parents. I think they viewed them rather differently. [laughs]

Lage: It sounds like quite an interesting family.

Bouwsma: Well, it was loaded with tensions.

Lage: Where do your younger siblings fit in here? Did they not become the focus of as much attention, do you think?

Bouwsma: I was the academic success. I had both a younger brother and a younger sister. My brother went to the University of Michigan. He graduated there in music, which meant that he was not competing with my father for academic distinction. My sister, who was, I think, nine years younger than I, was almost in another generation.

Lage: Did she go to college?

Bouwsma: Yes. My father sent her to Calvin College. He said he could afford to then.

Lage: Did they stay within the Dutch Calvinist fold?

Bouwsma: No.

Lage: Neither one?

Bouwsma: My brother did. In fact, his career was mostly in teaching grade school children to sing and to play musical instruments in the Christian school system that was maintained by the Dutch community in Grand Rapids.

Lage: So he really stayed in the fold.

Bouwsma: Oh, yes. He was the pious son. Didn't raise religious questions with my father or tease him in any way.

Lage: And how about your sister, after Calvin College?

Bouwsma: She married one of my father's graduate students.

Lage: Did they live an academic life? Did her husband become a professor?

Bouwsma: Oddly enough, I don't really remember that. See, I was nine years older than my sister. I know that she married someone who started off as a philosophy student with our father, and then went on to Cornell, as I recall. She married him when he was a graduate student at Cornell. But he was not good enough. They dropped him, and he became, let's say--well, he had graduate work in physics, and he pursued a career along those lines, but not an academic career.

Lage: What about the Calvinism? Did your sister leave the religion or stay?

Bouwsma: Oh, I think pretty much. She was much more rebellious against it, because she was compelled to go to Calvin College.

Lage: That will do it every time!

##

Lage: That whole family configuration is so interesting that it's keeping us from going on to your Harvard graduate school.

Bouwsma: My mother, of course, was very proud of my accomplishment. My father was much cooler about it. My mother kept every letter I wrote to her, and there were a great many. I haven't tried to go back to them, but I tried to give a complete account of my undergraduate life.

Lage: Do you have those letters?

Bouwsma: I have those letters somewhere.

Lage: I bet there is a lot more in there than you're remembering to tell.

Bouwsma: Oh, of course, because I would write to my mother--I was desperately homesick for a long time--and I would write to my mother, well, to both my parents, really. My mother would reply to everything I wrote. My father was not very outcoming in--.

Lage: Would you ever hear from your father? Would he write you?

Bouwsma: He would write an occasional letter, and I think I was more devoted to keeping his letters, and probably more regular in keeping them than my mother's letters. My mother was much more chatty about daily life in the family. Remember, I had a brother and a sister who were still at home.

Lage: She would tell you about them, and that must have been comforting during that adjustment.

Bouwsma: That's right. She was very dutiful as a corresponding mother.

Lage: Now how about when you were a graduate student and married with your own children? Did that kind of communication continue?

Bouwsma: It didn't continue with the same intensity. I didn't have time to write a long letter to my mother every day.

Lage: I can imagine. But did you keep in touch?

Bouwsma: Oh, yes.

Important Teachers Myron Gilmore and Charles Taylor

Lage: Tell me more about your graduate studies. Were there important professors who helped direct the course of your studies or challenged you in some way?

Bouwsma: I certainly had some major teachers in graduate school. I eventually chose to work with Myron Gilmore, who taught the Renaissance and Reformation courses, which continued to be basic to my study and made me feel that I was continuing tendencies I had absorbed at home.

Lage: Was his approach one that you felt comfortable with?

Bouwsma: Not particularly. I always felt that I was working in the Renaissance and Reformation because this field of study dramatized lots of problems and concerns of my own, and I could study myself by working in the Renaissance and Reformation.

Lage: The most interesting study.

Bouwsma: That's right.

Lage: And you became an intellectual historian. Was Myron Gilmore an intellectual historian, or what was his emphasis?

Bouwsma: He certainly taught me a great many things that have been important in my personal and intellectual religious life. They were not necessarily that important to him, but I was able, in working with him, to study problems that I had absorbed from my family and home front.

Lage: But they weren't necessarily his choice of problems.

Bouwsma: No. Or at least he didn't choose them for the same reasons.

Lage: Did you see new things in the Renaissance because of this sort of personal focus that you had? Did that illuminate the Renaissance in a different way from the way others were talking about it at the time?

Bouwsma: I would say so. Myron was a very stimulating teacher about the period, but I don't think it had the same significant, personal, and dramatic quality for him that the period had for me. I could see the problems I had absorbed from my earliest childhood writ large by working in the Renaissance and Reformation.

Lage: Was there a circle of graduate students who were studying Renaissance and Reformation, or were you kind of on your own?

Bouwsma: I was pretty much a loner. Myron had some other students, of course, but--.

Lage: It wasn't a circle.

Bouwsma: There was no particular circle, no.

Lage: Were there other teachers who were important at the graduate level for you?

Bouwsma: Charles Taylor, who never published much, but was deeply engaged as a teacher with problems in medieval intellectual history. I learned a great deal from him. Especially he became a kind of model for me because he was so thoughtful. Myron was not especially thoughtful, I thought. [laughs]

Lage: Thoughtful in what way?

Bouwsma: I think that for Taylor, he simply loved the period, he loved the thinkers in the period, thought a lot about them, thought a lot about what he could say regarding them, and so on. What he lectured about did not have the kind of personal significance that it had for me from the beginning, and I didn't try to share these sorts of special interests or special motives I had for studying, didn't try to share that with either Myron Gilmore or Charles Taylor.

Lage: So they didn't know the personal connection.

Bouwsma: No. I wouldn't have dared expose myself to that degree. One didn't do that sort of thing around the Harvard graduate school.

Lage: That's intriguing. Now would one do that around any graduate school, or was Harvard particularly intimidating?

Bouwsma: Harvard had a sort of dignity about it. One wouldn't have tried to violate the dignity and go into the more personal ways of dealing with the material. I was pretty much on my own.

Lage: Was that also a factor of the times? It seems to me that in recent years the personal has been more accepted in scholarly work.

Bouwsma: I think that's probably true, but not generally true of the products of the Harvard graduate school.

Lage: We'll have to get more into the products of the Harvard graduate school as we go on.

Bouwsma: I think the whole atmosphere of the Harvard graduate school was much more professional, and I was kind of a freak because I realized and respected that, but there were also deeper vibrations for me in whatever I was studying.

Lage: That's very interesting. Then this isn't something that you realize looking back. It seems as if it's something that you actually were looking at and aware of at the time.

Bouwsma: I may be realizing things in discussing them with you that I hadn't realized before.

Lage: If it's possible to put yourself back into that time, were you so self-aware at the time about your personal connections to the themes of the Renaissance?

Bouwsma: I was pretty much aware that I had chosen to work in what was roughly regarded as Renaissance and Reformation because I could see, here, and more objectively, the things that were really on my mind as a person.

Lage: Yes.

Bouwsma: And it's always been that way for me, my scholarly work.

Recalling Graduate Dissertation on Guillaume Postel: "Receding Into the Dim Past"

Lage: Does that lead us to Guillaume Postel?[6]

Bouwsma: That's a little more complicated. One of the things that my father devoted himself to was James Joyce.

Lage: Oh! Now there's a twist.

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[6]*Concordia Mundi: The Career and Thought of Guillaume Postel (1510-1581*), Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1957.

Bouwsma: He loved Joyce. He loved Joyce's jokiness and his playfulness with language and so on.

Lage: That's interesting because your father doesn't sound like a very playful person.

Bouwsma: He was, though. He refused to take anything very seriously on the surface. He would make fun of most intellectual endeavors.

Lage: So the jokiness fit that.

Bouwsma: Yes.

Lage: So from James Joyce to Postel?

Bouwsma: I started reading Joyce as an undergraduate when I read *Ulysses*. I was mostly in English literature as an undergraduate, and my father would be reading Joyce, reading *Ulysses*, and then when I was in graduate school, he went on to *Finnegan's Wake*. I did the same thing, copiously annotated my copies of Joyce's works.

Lage: Did you discuss these with your father?

Bouwsma: No. My father frightened me. His way of dealing with younger minds was to tease. He teased me, to bring me down as my mother built me up. But he was far gentler with his students. I think that [his teasing manner] was one element in his success as a teacher of philosophy, which he devoted his life to.

Lage: So you wouldn't necessarily want to engage him in a discussion of *Finnegan's Wake*.

Bouwsma: No. I did that pretty much on my own, at a time when my father was copiously annotating his copy of *Finnegan's Wake*.

Lage: So you have both copies?

Bouwsma: I don't know why I happen to have it.

Lage: Is this your father's copy? [looking at *Finnegan's Wake*].

Bouwsma: No, this is my own.

Lage: Now that <u>is</u> copiously annotated. [laughter]

Bouwsma: The earlier chapters are. My annotations fall away, but I spent a large part of my time in graduate school reading and rereading, trying to figure out what Joyce was up to in *Finnegan's Wake*.

Lage: Did you do this because you were intrigued by James Joyce, or because you wondered why your father was intrigued?

Bouwsma: I would say for both reasons. I have inherited his Joyce volumes, and they're--.

Lage: Are they also annotated like this?

Bouwsma: Well, to a lesser degree, I would say.

Lage: It would be interesting to compare the notes.

Bouwsma: I was just trying to figure out what Joyce was up to, and I think that was mostly what my father was doing too. But I never tried to follow along with him.

Lage: So *Finnegan's Wake* and James Joyce. Now I'm mystified where you're going with this.

Bouwsma: I was just following up on interests that I had learned to respect and admire and wanted to share with my father.

Lage: I see. Did this have any relationship to your interest in Postel?

Bouwsma: The Postel that I invented for my dissertation, and eventually published, presented himself to me as a kind of sixteenth-century James Joyce.

Lage: Oh, how interesting. And also your choice of words--"the Postel that you invented." What do you mean by that?

Bouwsma: It's a long time ago since I worked on Postel.

Lage: But do you think that this is part of the historical process, that the historian reinvents the figure?

Bouwsma: Something like that, yes.

Lage: How close to the real man do you feel you got?

Bouwsma: Oh, I'm skeptical about getting close to personalities in the past. You know, one does what one can with them, but I read enough literary criticism to know that there are all kinds of differences of opinion, and differences in depth and insight.

Lage: What intrigued you about him? Your interest in Postel didn't pursue an interest of your father's, did it?

Bouwsma: The connections are pretty remote, but Postel was a great pioneer in comparative linguistics, published a volume which looked at a dozen different languages.

Lage: All of which he knew.

Bouwsma: All of which Postel knew, yes. He was a great linguist.

Lage: And was this an interest of your father's as well?

Bouwsma: Well, he was very unsupportive of any interest that I might develop on my own, so I did things that resembled much more closely what he did than I am quite comfortable with now.

Lage: It sounds as if you're not really valuing this particular work that you did. Am I getting the right impression or the wrong impression?

Bouwsma: No, it's strictly recreational. That is, when I was working towards a doctorate in Renaissance history, my father had no possible interest in that kind of endeavor. So I was strictly on my own as far as my own career was concerned.

Lage: But Postel again seems to illustrate the tension that you described.

Bouwsma: I think that's right, yes.

Lage: Do you think that's one of the reasons you focused on him?

Bouwsma: Yes, a little bit like things that interested my father. This is cutting closer to the bone now than I feel altogether comfortable with. [laughs]

Lage: Let's take a little break. [Tape interruption.]

Bouwsma: One thing my father did condescend to approve is a little essay I wrote on the conception of adulthood in Christianity. My father liked that and asked for reprints of it so that he could distribute them a little bit.

Lage: Do you know why he approved of that?

Bouwsma: It corresponded to his understanding of Christianity.

Lage: So you know that he was reading everything you--.

Bouwsma: No. I know that he carefully avoided reading anything I sent.

Lage: But he did read that.

Bouwsma: He read that, yes.

Lage: Do you think just the title intrigued him?

Bouwsma: He read that. He asked for off-prints of it that he could distribute, but he never said anything about it otherwise.

Lage: You don't think he read your other work.

Bouwsma: Oh, I'm sure he didn't. I think he assiduously avoided--.

Lage: Did your mother confirm that?

Bouwsma: Oh, she would not have read them either. But for a very different reason. My mother was intellectually very humble. My father saw to that, too.

Lage: He didn't promote her--.

Bouwsma: No.

Lage: Was that traditional in Dutch Calvinist families, that the woman wouldn't be as intellectually involved?

Bouwsma: Probably so. I have never put that question to it. I think that women brought up in this climate were ideally regarded as respectable, and pushed and so on, but in fact they were not.

Lage: So is this book on Postel and your work on it vivid in your memory, or receding into the dim past?

Bouwsma: It's receding into the dim past. I have no clear picture of what I had to say in the book.

Lage: He just seemed like such an intriguing figure.

Bouwsma: He was that, and I felt intrigued by him, and it's my effort to figure out the puzzle that he presented to me.

Lage: And did he have any tie to James Joyce? When I mentioned Postel, you brought up James Joyce, and I wondered if there was any connection.

Bouwsma: Perhaps. I've often thought of Postel as what Joyce might have been like had be been brought up in the sixteenth century, and taken himself very, very seriously. By Postel's time, Postel was taking himself as seriously as one could possibly do, much more seriously than we can take that kind of intellectual activity or gamesmanship or whatever.

Lage: So he had that same kind of gamesmanship as Joyce. Postel was interested in mysticism and in so many different religions, and didn't he investigate the Jewish religion and?

Bouwsma: That's right.

Lage: I don't want to ask you questions that call on memories which aren't vivid enough for you to answer, but was your approach in this book similar to your approach to history in later books? You mentioned an interest in social history as much as in history of ideas.

Bouwsma: Probably that was a somewhat misleading statement. I could no longer deal with a historical question aside from its larger ramifications in the times in which they were produced. I wasn't so much interested in that aspect of Postel when I was working on my dissertation, but of course my first concern in my dissertation was to produce something that was academically respectable. I wasn't playing around.

Lage: You wanted to get the degree.

Bouwsma: My whole career was at stake.

Lage: Did that make you approach it differently from the way you might have if you were a little freer?

Bouwsma: No. I think I would always have approached what I was working on with the same sobriety.

Lage: From the dissertation to the publication of this book, which was several years later, I think it was published in '57, did it change much?

Bouwsma: No. I think my approach was increasingly professional. That is, this first appeared as a dissertation in 1950, and half a dozen years or so went into refining, deepening, and so on.

Lage: But the direction didn't change.

Bouwsma: No. I would be embarrassed now even to look at the dissertation that I submitted. I'm sure that none of my mentors at Harvard read it with any care. They had so many good students.

Lage: But you were one of them, after all.

Bouwsma: Well, let's say none of these students was regarded as in need of any severe mentoring. Everyone was good, and all highly respected, and bound for distinguished careers.

Lage: It's nice to be a part of that path. I've heard a lot of horror stories about studying for the dissertation exams, and the orals and all that. Do you have any horror stories from your experiences?

Bouwsma: I don't think so. I didn't feel horror about preparing for the various hurdles along the way until finally the dissertation appeared. My feeling now is that earning an advanced degree in the Harvard history department was much easier, was taken much more readily for granted, and that everybody who tried would make it, unless something was obviously dead wrong. I don't think anybody--of any of my so-called mentors--read my dissertation with any care.

Lage: So you didn't receive a critique.

Bouwsma: No.

Lage: Were you about to compare Harvard to another place? Are graduate students treated differently here at Berkeley?

Bouwsma: I think graduate students at Berkeley are dealt with much more rigorously than graduate students were at Harvard in my day. But the Harvard history department was relatively small at that time. The Berkeley department is now about three times as large as Harvard was then. The work is distributed more broadly.

Lage: So Berkeley professors are able to guide their students a bit more?

Bouwsma: I think I've always aspired to provide more guidance to my graduate students.

Lage: At the time did you feel it as a loss, that you would have liked to have had more guidance?

Bouwsma: No, I just wanted to get through.

Lage: Well, you did get through quickly. Four years is pretty good for a history Ph.D.

Bouwsma: I was one of a huge class of former veterans who were in a big hurry to get through and make up for lost time.

Professor of History at University of Illinois, 1950-1956

Lage: Shall we talk about how you got to Illinois from Harvard?

Bouwsma: Well, it was the only serious job offer I had once I got my degree.

Lage: Were jobs hard to come by in that period?

Bouwsma: By 1950--see, this was four or five years after the war. Yes, jobs were hard, good jobs. Illinois was regarded as a very good job. The salary was not magnanimous, exactly.

Lage: But was it adequate?

Bouwsma: The sort of housing available at a big state university by 1950 was pretty awful.

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Lage: We were talking about the housing available.

Bouwsma: Large numbers of students were pouring into state universities in particular, and there was very little housing available. Beverly and I spent some years by this time--by the end of this period, we had three children. Three children in a three-bedroom structure that was part of a huge housing development for veteran students.

Lage: This was as a professor?

Bouwsma: Yes. We lived in that kind of housing for some time. We eventually bought a small house, which we learned to love and quickly outgrew.

Lage: Did you have your fourth child in Illinois?

Bouwsma: Yes.

Lage: So what was it like to move to Illinois and get established there?

Bouwsma: What was it like? I find it difficult to characterize it in a general sort of way since we were still living in these modified barracks-type apartments. By the end of that period we had four children. Things were very crowded. We were surrounded by other young families, mostly graduate students. It didn't feel very grown up. Eventually with the help of parental backing, though not a parental subsidy, we were able to borrow money from our parents' banking resources in Lincoln, Nebraska, and were able to buy a small house, and we moved from there to a larger one. And after one year I was invited to Berkeley.

Lage: So you escaped. How did you find the history department?

Bouwsma: At Illinois?

Lage: Yes. How did it compare with what you had left at Harvard?

Bouwsma: It was very mediocre. There were a few able people, but the ablest ones were frustrated that there were not enough good students and not enough able faculty members to make them feel that they were being sufficiently rewarded. No, Illinois was a very frustrating kind of experience.

Lage: For you. Or in general?

Bouwsma: Well, it was for me. There were not many good students.

Lage: Does this mean graduate students, or both graduate and undergraduate?

Bouwsma: Both. I had graduate students right from the beginning and some were pretty good. Nothing compared with what I came to Berkeley for.

Lage: So that's important. The quality of your students. Did you have the sense that Illinois was attempting to upgrade their faculty the way that Berkeley seemed to be doing during this time period?

Bouwsma: The faculty was a considerable problem because the older members had been there for a long time, and were in some complicated sense, hopeless. There were some good people.

Lage: Were they younger, the good people?

Bouwsma: Most of the other assistant professors were very unpromising. There was a long tradition at Illinois where everybody got kept on.

Lage: Got promoted to tenure?

Bouwsma: Not only that, but kept on. All jobs were tenured in effect, including the jobs that were given to--well, there was, for example, the former administrative assistant in the department, who had no intellectual interests or talents whatsoever. She was a fool, was promoted for life, and there were a half a dozen other people like that in the department, and I don't--including some men.

I'm not running down the women particularly, but everybody got promoted. That was the point. And this was very disillusioning for an ambitious, young assistant professor, to know that everybody got promoted. Everybody was kept on. Everybody was there for life. You had to face these academic nonentities as your colleagues for the rest of your life. And there were equal numbers of men.

Lage: Were there women in the history department as faculty?

Bouwsma: Oh, there were, yes. There were five women in the department.

Lage: How large was the department?

Bouwsma: Oh, thirty-five. Something like that.

Lage: Good size.

Bouwsma: But the women had all received tenure when there were just too many students to be taught, and everybody received tenure. Including the former administrative assistant in the department.

Lage: So she received tenure as a professor?

Bouwsma: Yes.

Lage: Did they get promoted and get tenure during this postwar period when there were so many students?

Bouwsma: Yes. That's right. They did. They could threaten to leave, should have been encouraged to leave.

Lage: So instead of taking this as a time when they could upgrade the department, they just sort of filled in their slots.

Bouwsma: That's right. And I don't mean to be attacking the women in the department. There were men in the department who were as hopeless.

Lage: Did you get a sense that there was a lack of leadership from the deans and the president of the university, or why did this happen?

Bouwsma: The dean of the college--well, the chair of the department--and there's a distinction between a chair and a chairman.

Lage: Tell me that.

Bouwsma: A chair simply runs the department without any consultation with his colleagues, and we had a chair who thought it was a great joke. He was himself a very good scholar and knew the difference between the good people in the department and the bad, but they all got promoted.

Lage: He didn't care.

Bouwsma: He didn't care. He had given up hope years and years before.

Lage: And then what about the upper levels? I have the sense at Berkeley you had people like Lincoln Constance [dean of the College of Letters and Sciences], and Clark Kerr [Chancellor] working to upgrade.

Bouwsma: That's right.

Lage: Was the dean at Illinois an old-timer also?

Bouwsma: I don't even remember who was dean at that time. But Lincoln Constance was so different, and although he had problems to deal with--for example, he couldn't simply make an appointment within the department--he telephoned me personally to come without a guarantee of tenure. But I somehow got the impression of him as an honest and ambitious administrator, which he clearly was. He invited me to come as a visitor. I knew that if I did that, I'd lose my tenure at Illinois, but I did it anyway, even though by that time we had four children and I had no promise of tenure at Berkeley. But I came. I'm appalled to think now of the recklessness in my jobsmanship, but I just wanted to get out of Illinois so badly. You know, nothing but cornfields a hundred miles in every direction from Urbana-Champaign, Illinois.

Lage: Now what had you been used to, growing up in Lincoln? I'm showing I don't know much about the Midwest, but my perception would be the landscape wouldn't be that different.

Bouwsma: Actually, the landscape around Lincoln was sort of rolling, and it was not this hundred miles of cornfields in every direction as it was in Illinois.

Lage: And that was oppressive.

Bouwsma: That was oppressive.

Lage: Was there much of an intellectual community there?

Bouwsma: No, no. There was essentially none. The department consisted of people who--well, the tenured people had just been there for a long time, and absorbed the hopelessness of a hundred miles of cornfields in all directions.

Lage: Did you have anybody that you could discuss things with as you were working on your book? Were there any people who felt similarly in the department?

Bouwsma: There were assistant professors in other departments who felt similarly trapped, and there were some people I liked a lot, none of whom stayed.

Lage: Like who?

Bouwsma: Well, Leonard Linsky, who was a philosopher who managed to leave for the University of Chicago a little after I left for Berkeley.

Lage: And Richard Current? Was he in your department?

Bouwsma: Current was in the department, and he was one of the funny, ironic malcontents that kept things stirred up. Yes, Dick Current was a close friend.

Lage: You mentioned Arthur Bestor at one point when we were talking. Now who was he?

Bouwsma: He taught American intellectual history.

Lage: Was he older, or your age?

Bouwsma: No, he was older. Not a great deal older. He died not very long ago. He also went to the West Coast as I recall. He got a job at Seattle. He was at Washington for many years, and we kept a little bit in touch.

Lage: Was he a reform-minded person, or was he a part of the old guard?

Bouwsma: He was very much a reformer, very much, very discontented at Illinois. In fact, all the good people were.

Lage: Has it changed at all?

Bouwsma: Illinois? Not much, I think. But I haven't kept in touch.

Lage: So you don't think it went through the kind of remodeling that the Berkeley department went through?

Bouwsma: No, I don't think so. No, the administrators were simply without ambitions for great improvements in anything. I'm probably being unfair, but--.

Lage: Well, this is the way you remember it. All right, here's a name you acknowledge in the preface to your Postel book: Ernest Dawn?

Bouwsma: Good old Ernie. We've kept in touch with Ernie, and he's been to visit us here. He was in near eastern history. A very able linguist. You have to be in that field. But he never wrote much. I liked him; I admired him; I respected him, and he visited us a year or two ago.

Lage: Did he stay at Illinois?

Bouwsma: He stayed at Illinois. I think he was unable to complete any scholarly work, and not ambitious to leave.

Lage: Another person you acknowledge, just to get a few more names in here, Walter Stone from Vassar?

Bouwsma: Oh, good old Walter.

Lage: [laughs] I can see I'm reminding you of some people you haven't thought of in a while.

Bouwsma: Well, Walter didn't live very long after that book appeared.

Lage: How did you connect with him?

Bouwsma: We both arrived at Illinois in the same year. We both managed the best accommodations that we could in the veterans' temporary housing facilities. We saw a lot of Ruth and Walter Stone for a while. Walter--we were both eager to get away. Walter went to Vassar.

Lage: What was his field?

Bouwsma: He was in English literature.

Lage: So he wasn't in history. It sounds like Illinois was a place where you were for a while and always looking for a way to move.

Bouwsma: That's about right. The atmosphere was just not conducive for an ambitious person to settle down and feel he could just do his own work.

Lage: Now you described yourself as an ambitious person. When did that ambition develop?

Bouwsma: It certainly developed before I left Illinois and had something to do with my willingness to abandon a secure position at Illinois and come to Berkeley without any promise of tenure.

Lage: I want to go into this job offer from Berkeley. Do you feel up to it today, or should we start fresh on it?

Bouwsma: Maybe I'd better start fresh on it.

Lage: Then let's end today, and next time begin with how the offer came, and then getting you to Berkeley. Does that sound good?

Bouwsma: I'd better compare notes on that with Beverly. It's been--well, since '56 now.

Lage: I know. It's hard work trying to draw this out of the past.

III THE BERKELEY YEARS, 1956-1991

[Interview 3: August 9, 2000] ##

The Berkeley Offer: "I Became the Symbol of the Revolution"

Lage: Today is August 9, 2000. We're on the third session of an interview with Bill Bouwsma, and we're starting today with how you came to Berkeley. I know we talked about Illinois, and something about your hiring at Berkeley, but now before we turned the tape on, you and I were talking about the sort of revolution in the department at Berkeley. Tell me how you understand that.

Bouwsma: Well, there was a major division in the department which involved a group of young Turks who wanted to get rid of most of the assistant professors, who had ordinarily all been promoted to tenure without much scrutiny. And I became--not for any qualities that were discerned in me at the time, because I was still an untested assistant professor at the University of Illinois--I became the candidate of the revolutionary party. It was pretty well described for me above all by Carl Bridenbaugh, who saw himself as the leader of a revolution and who left because the revolution was accomplished, instead of waiting around to enjoy his triumph. He was too combative to enjoy a triumph.

Lage: So you think he didn't enjoy it when things got quieter?

Bouwsma: No. He wanted to keep things stirred up, so he had a chance to leave, to go back to--I think it was Brown in Providence.

Lage: Tell me how he described what happened to you, or how you came to understand it.

Bouwsma: For reasons that had very little to do with any qualities that were yet discernible in my work, I became the symbol of the revolution. A couple of people, the younger people on that original list were mostly let go.

Lage: We're looking at lists of the department as it was when you were visiting professor here.

Bouwsma: That's right. There were some very good people among the group of assistant professors, including [Robert] Brentano and [Gene] Brucker. Tom Kuhn was here, but the others were--I'm not making any personal evaluation of them--the other people were destined to be let go. And the revolutionaries formed a united front to push my appointment in the department. That group had the support of Lincoln Constance, who was then dean of Letters and Science, and he supported them. He was one of the reform party, really.

Lage: Even though he was a botanist.

Bouwsma: Well, that's right. But he recognized that the department was mediocre and that the tendency among the majority of the tenured people was to preserve its mediocrity. So although there was not enough support for my appointment, and there was no reason why there should have been, because I was unknown, untested and so on, the reform group decided they wanted me, partly because I was an outsider and was not one of the people they wanted to let go.

Lage: You had no ties to the department.

Bouwsma: I had no ties to the department at that point, so Lincoln Constance took it on himself. He couldn't make a regular appointment in the department without major departmental support, which he didn't have, but he took it on himself to telephone me in Illinois, and invite me. He was very open, very candid. He was aware that I understood pretty well what the situation was here. He could invite me to come as a visitor without any promise for the future. Now I was at that point so fed up with the mediocrity at the University of Illinois that I was really quite daring, and although I already had four children, I, in effect, resigned at the University of Illinois with no--I'm appalled when I think of it.

Lage: You were an associate professor by that time?

Bouwsma: I think I knew that I was going to be promoted to tenure, but it hadn't yet happened. So I resigned at Illinois in order to accept a visiting appointment at Berkeley, without any prospects for tenure, no promises. But Lincoln Constance, who was very honest and open and frank about the situation--he didn't make me any promises or commitments, but he did let me know that he was on the side of the insurgents in the department.

Lage: You were leaving a department you thought was mediocre, and you were coming to a department whose young Turks described it as mediocre. What made you think things would be better at Berkeley?

Bouwsma: They had the support of the dean for one thing. Lincoln Constance was a pillar of strength for the reformers who wanted--the idea was to let go rather than promote a number of these assistant professors.

Lage: And you also had some older ones on the eve of retirement, it looks like, Frederick Palm and a number of others.

Bouwsma: Yes, Palm was a person of known distinction and had been promoted in the old way, up the ladder all the way.

Lage: Ken Stampp tells about meeting with you to discuss your coming to Berkeley at a Mississippi Valley Historical Association meeting.

Bouwsma: That's right. It was held in Madison.

Lage: Tell me what you recall about that.

Bouwsma: Complete candor on his part. There was never any question of promising me a thing, except the support of the group that thought that the future lay with them.

Lage: Did you talk to Bridenbaugh also?

Bouwsma: Yes. Bridenbaugh was at that meeting in Madison.

Lage: And here they were Americanists.

Bouwsma: That's right. That was one of the grudges of the old guard, that here a group of Americanists were gathering their strength in order to reform and improve the European side of things, and that was resented for reasons that I could understand at the time. At any rate, that was the first contact I made with the Berkeley people.

Lage: Were there others that you met with? Did you meet Henry May at that time?

Bouwsma: I may have met Henry, but Henry had only recently been promoted to full professorship, and was not in any case a militant reformer. He supported the reformers all the way, but was not one of the ringleaders. Bridenbaugh was, if anything, the power on the reform side. He thought the department, especially in European history, was very mediocre. He was completely tactless in saying so, and he made it clear that, for reasons that are still to me quite obscure, I was the candidate of the reform party. They wanted to bring me in order to make a first investment in a better department on the European side. That was one of the things that the Europeanists resented, that the American people were so contemptuous of them, and unwilling to accept what they wanted, which was the promotion of the people who were assistant professors.

Lage: That's quite an interesting tale. Now were there any Europeanists who sided with him? Did George Guttridge take a stand?

Bouwsma: Guttridge was a very interesting case. He totally agreed with the reformers, but he was not a person with a distinguished scholarly career behind him. He was at that point chairman, and he was on the side of the reformers. So I came--I am appalled when I think of--. See, the Illinois department was quite generous. They knew what the game was, but they made as a condition of allowing me to come as a visitor to California, that I let them know by Christmas whether I was coming back.

Lage: So you did have a little safety net. Three months' worth.

Bouwsma: I had a little safety net, but things move very slowly in personnel matters at Berkeley. They always have, I guess, because the committee structure is so

powerful. There are review committees, review committees to review the review committees, and so on and so on. The Illinois people were generous enough to give me a leave to go as a visitor to Berkeley, but on condition that I let them know by Christmas whether I was coming back. Things move so slowly here that I had no way of telling what was going to happen, but given the circumstances, I felt honor-bound to make up my own mind whether I would accept a regular appointment at Berkeley or not. Things had moved much more slowly than I had hoped. By Christmas I didn't know, so I resigned at Illinois. I resigned with no prospects, no promises, except that I had the support of the revolutionaries in the history department.

Lage: Tell me what you found here when you came. What kind of reception did you get as a visiting professor?

Bouwsma: I had a very warm welcome by the reformers in the department. I was taken into their complete confidence. I knew exactly where I stood, which was going to be nowhere if I--. [laughs]

Lage: If you couldn't convince a few nonreformers.

Bouwsma: There were good people who were not reformers. There were people who were not prominent in the reform group. One was Paul Schaeffer.

Lage: He was associate professor of European history.

Bouwsma: Yes, but he had never accomplished anything. He was no scholar at all, but he was on the side of the reformers.

Lage: Interesting that not being a scholar himself, he could appreciate a need for change.

Bouwsma: Yes, and I appreciated him.

Lage: What was his area?

Bouwsma: He was a medievalist and had, I think, never published a word.

Lage: Had he come out of Berkeley?

Bouwsma: I don't remember that, whether he was a Berkeley Ph.D. or not. He might well have been.

Lage: Aside from not publishing a word, did he have a good mind, a historical mind?

Bouwsma: He had a sort of whimsical enjoyment of the situation, as I recall. But he was still just an associate professor. He had never been promoted, because he had never published anything on the basis of which he could be.

Lage: Were there others like that, who rallied 'round? What about James King?

Bouwsma: Jim King, when I came, was regular chair of the department. He was one of the opposition. He had done almost nothing in the way of scholarship.

Lage: We talked about Guttridge.

Bouwsma: Guttridge was a reformer and a chairman who had never done any scholarship himself. Delmer Brown was vice chair of the department. He was strong on the reform side. Bridenbaugh saw himself as the leader of the reformers and when it became clear he couldn't dictate to the others, he sort of lost interest and eventually left.

Lage: Now what about Woodbridge Bingham? Did he take a role in all of this?

Bouwsma: Woodbridge had never published anything. He was one of the people resented by the reformers. [George] Hammond had done nothing except to direct the Bancroft Library.

Lage: He was a Bolton student, I think.

Bouwsma: Larry Harper supported the reform group, although he had never done anything. [John] Hicks was strongly resistant. Hicks made the case that my father--an academic at the University of Nebraska, where Hicks had been--had never published anything either and never amounted to much.

Lage: That's an interesting argument.

Bouwsma: And therefore it ran in the family and I could never be expected--.

Lage: Did he make this case to you, or did you hear it from others?

Bouwsma: I heard it from the reform group. You know, there were lots of arguments in the halls, and at departmental meetings.

Lage: Now you didn't mention someone that I hear was very prominent in this controversy, and that's Raymond Sontag.

Bouwsma: [laughs] Sontag was sort of an enigma. He was not a party man, but he liked to throw his weight around. He was the senior Europeanist in the department, and when the time came for taking sides, he was, I think, more or less opposed to my coming. But the reform party had the backing of Lincoln Constance, the dean. In June the year before I came, Lincoln telephoned me, was very

candid about the situation. He understood all too well from his standpoint as dean, and he telephoned me to invite me to come as a visitor, which he had the authority--.

Lage: Very tenuous. [laughter]

Bouwsma: Yes.

Lage: When you got here, how did Raymond Sontag treat you?

Bouwsma: Like the gentleman that he was. He played his cards very close to his chest. In fact, he was quite candid about his opposition to my coming. He told me so.

Lage: He talked to you about it.

Bouwsma: Yes. But that was after he had made up his mind to support my appointment, although I think he did not do it actively in a departmental meeting. My understanding--and of course I was not party to the situation yet--my understanding is that my appointment as a regular member of the department, coming as I did as simply a visitor, was voted only because a considerable group of anti people chose not to come to that meeting. And I think Sontag managed to avoid committing himself. He was a wily old politician.

Lage: Now Ken Stampp tells about this. In fact, I copied a few pages from his oral history to leave with you, but his understanding, or conjecture really, was that Sontag opposed your appointment because he didn't want a Calvinist teaching the Reformation, he himself being a Catholic.

Bouwsma: I can't verify what was a guess. I was made to understand that Sontag would be opposed to a Protestant with close ties to Protestants. He didn't want such a person to teach the Reformation.

Lage: But did you have discussions with him about things like that, or about the teaching of the Reformation, or anything religious?

Bouwsma: He didn't discuss that with me at all, and you know, I was just a visitor and he was senior person in the European history staff. I couldn't broach the subject with him, so I was kept informed about the positions that he was taking in the department and in departmental meetings.

Lage: But you never got into details.

Bouwsma: I was privy to much that I shouldn't have been.

Lage: [laughs] Sounds like it. It must have been kind of exciting. Do you remember being anxious about your tenuous position at the time?

Bouwsma: What I recall is that I was insufficiently anxious in view of the gravity of the stakes and so on. I resigned at Illinois before I had any promise of an appointment at Berkeley.

Lage: Was Beverly supportive of this rash deed?

Bouwsma: I think that's a question you should ask her. I think on the whole she refrained from putting any pressure on me, and maybe she had more confidence in my future than was warranted by the present.

Lage: Do you remember when your appointment came through?

Bouwsma: Well, things moved very, very slowly in Berkeley. I do know that old campus politicians who were on my side, like George Guttridge, who had not himself published anything, were doing everything they could to make sure that the budget committee--. Guttridge, who was an old hand at subtle pressures and so on, though he was not much of a scholar--he had very high standards. But he was very much on my side and lobbied with the members of the budget committee to make sure that my appointment was approved by them. They were a very powerful committee at that time.

Lage: And Sontag also was powerful on campus.

Bouwsma: He was powerful, but not in the committee structure.

Lage: You had to give a public lecture as part of being a visitor.

Bouwsma: I did.

Lage: Do you recall that, or how it went?

Bouwsma: I recall it. I think I have copies of it. I've really forgotten what I chose to lecture on. It wasn't a very scholarly lecture.

Lage: It wasn't one that you published later.

Bouwsma: No, it wasn't. And my friends in the department assured me that I had made no more enemies than I already had by that talk. It was about the best thing they could think of to say.

Lage: I bet you're being modest.

Bouwsma: No, it was not a good scholarly performance. I would dread having to reread what I said on that occasion.

Lage: Maybe you should dig it out and take a look at it. I'd be interested.

Bouwsma: Maybe I should. I wouldn't know where to look for it now.

Lage: That must be very tension-producing, though. Is the public lecture sort of the judgment process?

Bouwsma: Yes. At least it was this occasion.

Lage: As much as looking at your written scholarly work?

Bouwsma: Yes, and indeed there wasn't much scholarly work to look at at that time.

Lage: You had the book in progress and any number of articles.

Bouwsma: Any number could mean zero.

Lage: [laughs] No, it wasn't zero.

Bouwsma: No, I had published an article or two, but that was about all. There was very little that the department--that is, the pro-Bouwsma group had very little to go on to support its case. But they did have Lincoln Constance's support.

Lage: Who must have read your work, because he didn't make these decisions out of thin air.

Bouwsma: And he was extremely conscientious. The department, of course, had my dissertation, and I imagine that Lincoln asked for it, read it, was impressed by it for reasons that I cannot fathom now.

Lage: Now once you were appointed, you were appointed to a tenured position. Is that right?

Bouwsma: My first appointment was as a visitor.

Lage: I know, but I mean once you got the permanent appointment.

Bouwsma: Yes. I was appointed as an associate professor.

Lage: Right. And then you yourself took part in the tenure committee deliberation.

Bouwsma: Yes, but not till I had tenure.

A Turning Point: Shifts in Power in the Department of History in the Late Fifties and Early Sixties

Lage: What do you recall about how the department continued to evolve? Everyone describes your appointment as a turning point.

Bouwsma: Yes, and I have that impression too, that the reform wing in the department--and there were some able historians who were not partisan--proceeded eventually to take over. It was responsible for terminating some of these--.

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Lage: [Looking at a listing of history department faculty in 1956.] [Robert] Kerner was emeritus by then.

Bouwsma: Walt Bean was conspicuous for his silence about everything.

Lage: About the politics of the situation?

Bouwsma: Yes. Joe Levenson was strongly supportive of my appointment. Paul Schaeffer was fairly close to retirement. He was a perennial associate professor. Brentano and Brucker welcomed my arrival. [Reuben] Gross--I don't know what happened to him. He disappeared. [Charles] Jelavich was hospitable but had no power. Kuhn was an old friend.

Lage: Oh, he was an old friend?

Bouwsma: We were in the same Harvard undergraduate class. We had known each other since undergraduate days. [Armin] Rappaport didn't last much longer. He was not promoted. I've forgotten what happened to him.

Lage: I'll tell you what Stampp says about Rappaport, that he was promoted as part of an unspoken deal that some of the reform group would vote for him if the old guard would vote for you.

Bouwsma: This is something I didn't know about.

Lage: But then he left and went to San Diego.

Bouwsma: That's right. He left. He felt he commanded no prestige in the Berkeley department anymore, and indeed I don't recall that he ever did much.

Lage: After this turning point, who do you recall as the strong leaders in the late fifties and sixties in the department?

Bouwsma: Well, Guttridge was either chair or soon to become chair after my arrival, and he was a very shrewd operator, though always on the right side of things.

Lage: He was British, was he not?

Bouwsma: Guttridge, yes. Not personally ambitious, but he was shrewd in assessing the department and what it needed, which meant letting go of quite a few of those who were not tenured, or encouraging them to go somewhere else.

Lage: There were a tremendous number of people hired.

Bouwsma: And very good people.

Lage: Do you recall any of those decisions, how to find people that would keep the department at the level of these young reformers?

Bouwsma: My impression is that the reluctant old guard sort of gave up after my appointment went through with the full support of the dean. [laughs]

Lage: And then the balance of power shifted.

Bouwsma: And it gradually became more and more decisive on the side of the reformers.

Lage: Do you have any more to tell about Carl Bridenbaugh and his role and his style of operating?

Bouwsma: Well, Carl was aggressive and outspoken. He did not conceal his contempt for the other side.

Lage: Was he amusing in all of this or tiresome?

Bouwsma: It depended what side you were on, I think. I think that for some years his influence was quite benign in reshaping the department, which is what he wanted to do. But he became gradually more and more overbearing, less and less inclined to pay attention to what anybody else thought, and finally he left the department in a considerable dudgeon, I think.

Lage: And then after he left the department, he made the infamous speech, shall we say, to the American Historical Society as its president.

Bouwsma: Oh, he was elected president before he left, but then did a bold presidential address which exposed his weaknesses.

Lage: How was that greeted at Berkeley?

Bouwsma: He had already resigned from the department, so it was regarded with sort of tolerant good humor. He had already gone, and it was the kind of no-nonsense Bridenbaugh --no-nonsense, no tact. I haven't looked at that for a long time, but he already submitted his resignation to the department, and it didn't matter anymore.

Lage: You mentioned knowing Tom Kuhn for so long. Tell me about him. He's certainly an important figure.

Bouwsma: He is. Tom and I knew each other as undergraduates at Harvard. We were in the same class. I had lost track of him, except that I knew that he had gone into history of science, and then we both turned up here.

Lage: What was he like as a colleague in history?

Bouwsma: I always got along very well with Tom. He did not intervene, I think, except in situations where he was personally involved or where his views were important.

Lage: His work has come to be so influential. Did people recognize his importance at the time?

Bouwsma: Oh, he was very highly regarded when he was here and regarded as a considerable loss when he left.

Lage: Do you remember why he left? Did he talk to you about it at all?

Bouwsma: I don't remember that he did talk to me about it. Didn't he leave to go back to Harvard?

Lage: Princeton.

Bouwsma: Princeton, that's right.

Lage: It had to do with the philosophy department apparently.

Bouwsma: That's right. Tom wanted to be regarded as an important philosopher as well as a historian of science, and the invitation from Princeton gave him status in both philosophy and science. My understanding is that that is why he left. See, he was thrown out of the philosophy department here and never got over that.

Lage: Why was that, do you think? Or do you know?

Bouwsma: I think the philosophy department was not friendly to a historian.

Lage: I see. They thought he was too much of a historian.

Bouwsma: I think so.

Lage: Sometimes in those days, I understand, when intellectual history hadn't come into its own, historians sometimes complained that the work of the intellectual historians was philosophy.

Bouwsma: That's right. My own work was once described as mere philosophy.

Lage: [laughs] By whom?

Bouwsma: By one of the people who regarded himself as a genuine historian.

Lage: What was your reception here as an intellectual historian?

Bouwsma: I came into what was still a very divided department, and I had my supporters and friends, who were most welcoming and hospitable, and I was ignored by others.

Lage: As a mere philosopher!

Bouwsma: Something like that, yes. [laughs]

Lage: Did you draw a line between philosophy and history?

Bouwsma: No. I've never been very sympathetic to drawing lines like that.

Lage: Tell me more about where you see the differences or the similarities between intellectual history and philosophy, given that your father studied philosophy.

Bouwsma: That connection was held against me by the opponents of my appointment, because my father had never bothered to publish anything. He, in his later part of his career, published quite a few essays, and one group of his essays was eventually collected and published as a separate book. But the opponents of my appointment pointed to my father's failure to publish as something that could be expected to continue in the family.

Lage: That's very amusing.

Bouwsma: Well, it seems so now. It was very early in my Berkeley career that my father became president of the American Philosophical Association, and that seemed to make it a little easier.

Lage: Okay, now let me see where we are here. A couple of things come to mind. Part of this change in the department, at least with Bridenbaugh and maybe others, seemed to be linked to comparing Berkeley to Harvard.

Bouwsma: That was constantly on Carl's mind. He wanted to show that the organizations to which he belonged were better than Harvard, which had never deigned to offer him a position.

Lage: But he came out of Harvard.

Bouwsma: Yes, yes.

Lage: And it seemed like a lot of the people hired also came out of Harvard.

Bouwsma: Well, that was one of the problems in the expansion of the Berkeley history department. Every new Ph.D. who came to join the department was a source of--. Well, it was bruising for a department that had been largely recruited from its own ranks. That is, there were a lot of Berkeley Ph.D.s in the department when I came.

Lage: And the ones that weren't, a lot of them came from Wisconsin. Hicks and Stampp and --.

Bouwsma: Yes, I had not thought of the Wisconsin connection as important. I think it became less and less important because Wisconsin was a source of very good historians of the United States and did not have a distinguished group in Europe.

Lage: So did you detect attitudes towards Harvard, or was there too much adulation of the Harvard Ph.D., or was this a good thing that happened?

Bouwsma: I don't think it made much difference in the long run. That is, the new recruits to the Berkeley department came from many directions and were not overwhelmingly oriented to Harvard.

Lage: So it wasn't as strong a connection as it might seem. There was yourself and Nick Riasanovsky and--well, I don't have the list so I can't say, but that would be an interesting thing to look at.

Bouwsma: It would be.

Lage: Thomas Kuhn.

Bouwsma: Kuhn, yes. But I don't think that the Harvard-Berkeley connection was especially strengthened during the years in which I was involved in shaping the department. We went through a big expansion.

Lage: You didn't give bonus points for being a Harvard Ph.D.

Bouwsma: No. If anything, that was a source of suspicion, distrust.

Lage: Even by the younger people?

Bouwsma: I don't think that a Harvard formation signified very much in our recruiting in those years when the department was essentially doubling in size. We didn't discriminate against Harvard Ph.D.s.

Social Life, Students, and Role As Assistant Dean of Letters and Science

Lage: I know I'm going to get to talk to Beverly about the social side of coming to Berkeley and settling in on the campus, but would you want to say something about friendships and social ties within the department or on the campus?

Bouwsma: As far as the department is concerned, we were welcomed by the pro-Bouwsma group and made a lot of friends, some of whom are still with us. The Bruckers and Brentanos, for example, are among our closest friends.

Lage: Were there social events associated with the department? Henry May has a wonderful description of a typical faculty dinner party. Do you recall?

Bouwsma: Well, I was not invited to those typical dinner parties, and by the time we became regulars at the departmental dinner parties, the old divisions had pretty well healed.

Lage: Were there regular dinner parties that bound the department together? Or did people have small gatherings.

Bouwsma: There were smaller groups that saw a great deal of each other. We were taken up particularly by the Stampps, though the Stampp marriage at that time soon broke up. By the Mays, and the Mays continue to be among our closest Berkeley friends.

Lage: The Stampp divorce was one of the first divorces in the department.

Bouwsma: Yes, it was. It was one of our first contacts with a broken marriage. Then they began to occur with more frequency.

Lage: Was it accepted, or was there a group that just couldn't accept that at that time?

Bouwsma: Oh, there were people who couldn't accept the breakup of the Stampp marriage. I remember Carl Bridenbaugh berating Ken very acrimoniously, and I think he refused to speak to Ken. They had been allies for a long time, but--.

Lage: That's kind of hard to put yourself back in those times, when it was so unusual that it caused a major disruption.

Bouwsma: That's right.

Lage: Now what about your students when you first came to Berkeley? I don't mean the very first year, but the first few years. Were the students notably different from what you'd had at Illinois?

Bouwsma: They were better. Not all were better, but the standards of recruitment, at least for graduate students, were much higher than at Illinois, where there were a few good students. In fact, one of my really good students when I was at Illinois was Charles Nauert [Charles G. Nauert, Jr.], who had a relatively distinguished academic career at the University of Missouri. I was very fortunate to have Charles as one of my first graduate students at Illinois, and he's quite recently retired.

Lage: I'm talking about undergraduate now. Did you have a similar set of classes to teach? Did you teach lecture classes or seminars?

Bouwsma: The undergraduates were better here because there were some standards. Not everybody who applied for admission was accepted, as has happened, basically, at Illinois. There were some very good students at Illinois, one of whom, Charles Nauert, went on to become quite distinguished in the same field as I was working with him in.

Lage: In Renaissance history?

Bouwsma: Yes.

Lage: Not too long after you came, five years or so, you became assistant dean of Letters and Science. How did that happen?

Bouwsma: Well, it was chiefly out of affection for Lincoln Constance. I became one of his baby deans.

Lage: [laughs] Is that what you called yourself at the time?

Bouwsma: Yes. We were assistant deans of the College of Letters and Science, and there were a half a dozen of us.

Lage: Did you have an area of responsibility? A subject area?

Bouwsma: No. What one did was try to straighten out the difficulties that some students had with their registrations, and with meeting college requirements.

Lage: Working with students rather than departments.

Bouwsma: Oh, it was entirely working with students.

Lage: That must have been Lincoln Constance's last year, maybe, as dean--'61, '62.[7]

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[7]Professor Bouwsma was actually assistant dean of Letters and Science in 1957-58, summer '59, and 1960-61.

Bouwsma: I don't remember how long--I remember seeing Lincoln come in to the dean's quarters with some regularity, but he dealt strictly with faculty questions.

Lage: And the assistants got the student problems.

Bouwsma: That's right.

Lage: Anything memorable from that experience?

Bouwsma: No. I regarded it as a chore, one that I was fairly effective at--judgment calls, students who had felt they had been unfairly treated, or lost credit, or needed to make up units--and tried to figure out how to help.

Lage: Was the attitude to be understanding and helpful or to weed out the problem students?

Bouwsma: No, I think generally speaking, we tried to be helpful.

Lage: It seems to me that the FSM [Free Speech Movement] which followed quickly upon those days was a watershed. There was more effort made to undo the bureaucracy and to allow more dropping of classes and making up incompletes and things like that.

Bouwsma: I don't have the impression that our task was to make it easy for students, but to work out reasonable solutions for student problems, as I think that's always been the case in the dean's office here.

Lage: Now, this is on a different subject entirely. In 1963, you were president of the American Society for Reformation Research. What did that involve?

Bouwsma: Very, very little. I think it must have involved giving a paper at the annual meeting of the Reformation group held in conjunction with the American Historical Association, but it really didn't involve any serious responsibilities. You gave a paper, that was all.

Lage: Is it more of an honor, or is it a duty?

Bouwsma: I think it has elements of both, although anybody who was halfway decent in his job would have his turn at the presidency of one of these associations.

Lage: Okay. I'm leading up to the outbreak of the sixties. I'm just trying to pick up a few things here that happened before 1964, and one was, you had a fellowship at the Center for Advanced Study in Behavioral Sciences at Stanford, on the Stanford campus. Was that a memorable year? That was '63-'64.

Bouwsma: It was a very important year because I managed to get my first book ready for publication.

Lage: Was there more to that year than working on your book?

Bouwsma: No.

Lage: Or was it pretty much time off?

Bouwsma: That was the essential point to it, yes.

Lage: You could have done that at home.

Bouwsma: I could have, but I would not have had more than my, oh, half-salary or something like that. You accept an appointment at the Behavioral Science Center, and it pays a proportion of your income for the year.

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Lage: You say it was not necessarily something your family looked forward to. You had four children.

Bouwsma: Four children who were all at that point in school, and they had to change schools. I don't know how they would presently regard that year we had to move down more or less to Palo Alto. It was not necessarily unwelcome in all respects. Beverly has a brother who teaches at Stanford now, and we were close to him. [Prof. Bouwsma excuses himself, break in the conversation]

Revisiting the Revolution: More on Changes in the Department of History Faculty

Lage: During our break I found a list of professors hired in the wake of the revolution that you represented in the department. Kuhn was already here.

Bouwsma: Kuhn came the same year I did [1956], except he had a tenure track.

Lage: And you were the visitor.

Bouwsma: I was the visitor.

Lage: Following upon the heels of your appointment, the balance of power seemed to turn. Would you comment on the effect of bringing those people in to the department? [hands Bouwsma list of names] Do you have any particular memories there?

Bouwsma: [David] Landes, of course, was a very able scholar who was on his way up and left here for Harvard some years later. In fact, he was already at Harvard

when I left for Harvard. Carl Schorske was a dazzling lecturer but published very, very little. In fact, at the time he was here, he published nothing and aroused the scorn of Carl Bridenbaugh.

Dick Herr, an able scholar in French and Spanish history, stayed here for the rest of his career. Hans Rosenberg was a distinguished German historian, and I think he's still alive.

Lage: Did he stay here for his career?

Bouwsma: He stayed here for the rest of his career, at least in the States. I'm not quite sure where he went in Germany. He went back to Germany. Nick [Riasanovsky], of course, came and stayed, and Martin [Malia] has been a close friend of ours ever since.

Lage: Both in Russian history.

Bouwsma: Both in Russian history. Carl Bridenbaugh, for whom such things mattered a great deal, was rather sardonic about Martin because he was very slow to publish, but now he's published a lot of distinguished work.

Lage: Did Bridenbaugh himself publish a great deal?

Bouwsma: Yes. Since he's in American history I haven't paid very much attention to the kind of thing he has done, though.

Lage: Would Bridenbaugh be openly scornful of somebody like Carl Schorske?

Bouwsma: Oh, he was. He was quite scornful of people who didn't publish a lot, as he did.

Lage: It must have been a kind of disruptive presence, I would think.

Bouwsma: Bridenbaugh?

Lage: Yes.

Bouwsma: Oh, he was. He was very outspoken, very contemptuous of a lot of his colleagues, and didn't care.

Lage: Did you find him amusing or disturbing? Was he one of your friends?

Bouwsma: Yes, he was a good friend of ours. He lived for a while right across the street from us on Arch Street. His wife was very nice, not abrasive as Carl often felt she could be.

Lage: I guess he was an important figure in the department, maybe not well-loved by everybody.

Bouwsma: He kept things roiled. He was a real troublemaker, and I think the department was somewhat relieved when he took himself back east, where he wanted to be anyway. Went to Brown, as I recall.

Lage: He didn't get back to Harvard but close by.

Bouwsma: No. He wanted Harvard very badly and had a sense of rivalry wherever he was that it should be better than Harvard, very important to him.

Lage: It takes all kinds to make a revolution, I guess.

Bouwsma: Well, that was his problem. Once the revolution of the Berkeley department was complete, and it was time for everybody to settle down and do some good work, he couldn't. He felt he had to keep things at a boil as much as he could and was bored if he couldn't. And so he left.

Lage: I wonder how he did at Brown. Did you keep in touch? Did he get involved in politics there, do you think?

Bouwsma: I'm sure he did. But of course he was getting older too. I don't know how his colleagues at Brown regarded him. Probably with mixed feelings, as we did here.

The Free Speech Movement, 1964: "An Extremely Uncomfortable Time"

Lage: Now our next topic, unless you have more to say about these fifties and early sixties in the history department, is moving us into the campus maelstrom, FSM and what followed. Are you ready to embark on that?

Bouwsma: I'm ready to embark on it. I don't know that I have much to say about it, except that it was an extremely uncomfortable time, disruptive of one's own work, and it was hard to settle down.

Lage: How did it affect you as a professor?

Bouwsma: It just took so much time and so much patience. Most of us felt that the future of the Berkeley campus was constantly threatened. One did anything that one could to calm things down, and I became involved with sensitive committees that were supposed to straighten things out.

Lage: Let's just look at the early years of the Free Speech Movement, which really has its separate existence from what came after, but I think it all gets merged together in people's minds. It looks like you were on a committee that I can't find out much information about. Maybe you can remember exactly what it

was. During this year of the Free Speech Movement, '64-'65, you were chair of the Faculty Judicial Committee on Political Activity. That's in your biobib.

Bouwsma: Yes.

Lage: And what was that?

Bouwsma: It turned out to be an utterly inactive committee so that there was not much involved. It was a committee with a pompous name. It was supposed to calm things down.

Lage: It was an ad hoc committee, not a standing committee?

Bouwsma: It was a standing committee. But it didn't have anything to do. See, there was a steering committee for the faculty at that time. Carl Schorske was an important member of that committee.

Lage: The Emergency Executive Committee.

Bouwsma: That's it.

Lage: What was this Faculty Judicial Committee on Political Activity?

Bouwsma: I accepted the chairmanship of this committee with the understanding that it would function simply by existing, but it was not expected to have an active role in keeping the campus quieted down. That turned out not to be the case. We were supposed to take evidence against students who broke the regulations for preserving peace on the campus and so on. I accepted the chairmanship of that committee with the understanding, which was quite explicit, that it would improve things on the campus because it would never be convoked, would never have any actual responsibilities.

Lage: [laughs] I can't quite grasp what you're saying here. Just the existence of having the committee--.

Bouwsma: The existence of such a committee would be so threatening that no one would ever break any regulations. That turned out to be not the case.

Lage: Was it a committee of the Academic Senate?

Bouwsma: Yes.

Lage: So did you have to meet and judge students' behavior?

Bouwsma: We did. In the case of a group of students who were considered to be ringleaders, or keeping things agitated on the campus--gee, I haven't thought of that committee for so many years now. In fact, I accepted the chairmanship

of the committee on the understanding that it would never be convoked. Its existence would be enough to deter students from trying to break up meetings and so on.

Lage: Do you know whose idea that was?

Bouwsma: I suspect that Carl Schorske had a fair amount to do with that. He was on the Emergency Executive Committee and I think was probably responsible for my appointment as chairman of the committee on student protests and so on.

Lage: Do you remember who else was on your committee?

Bouwsma: I must have some record of that, but I don't recall.

Lage: The other committee that you're listed on as a member was what came to be called the Heyman committee, I believe, the Ad Hoc Committee on Student Conduct [1964-1965].[2] Do you recall that?

Bouwsma: I don't recall such a committee, except that as the chair of this committee on student behavior and political matters, I was probably a member of that committee, but I don't think it ever was convened.

Lage: The Heyman committee was fairly active in making judgments on some of the students who broke the rules in October of '64, I think.

Bouwsma: And since I was the chair of the committee that dealt with political conduct, I accepted the chairmanship of that committee on the understanding, which was quite explicit, that it would help to quiet things down on the campus simply by existing. It was not expected ever to be convened.

Lage: So did you end up having to convene it?

Bouwsma: Yes.

Lage: And do you recall any of the occasions when you had to convene it?

Bouwsma: [brief pause] I haven't thought about this for so long.

Lage: It has been quite a while--almost forty years now.

Bouwsma: It's a long time to imagine myself back in that role. We did have a group of agitated, agitating students, and we interviewed them and then--I think this is

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[2]Member, Ad Hoc Committee on Student Conduct, 1964-65. In the biobib, he lists both of these as administrative committees.

correct--at some point in these proceedings the administration intervened, decided this was not a faculty responsibility. It was a question of student conduct, and that had to be dealt with by an administrative committee responsible to the chancellor. We were not an administrative committee but an arm of the faculty senate.

Lage: So maybe you were shunted aside at that point?

Bouwsma: Yes. The cases that we were supposed to deal with were, as I recall, taken from us and turned over to the dean's office, and I don't know what happened to them.

Lage: Okay. That's helpful.

Bouwsma: It's helpful if it's correct.

Lage: It gives us a clue, anyway. Now what do you recall about Chancellor [Edward W.] Strong? Did you have opinions about Chancellor Strong's leadership?

Bouwsma: His title, his name, was a total misnomer. He was not a strong leader. Of course, none of us who accepted responsibility on behalf of the faculty at that point was really prepared for the kind of ugly situations that actually developed. This was a time when student protesters respected nobody.

Lage: And you probably weren't used to that.

Bouwsma: No, we were ordinary faculty members whose contact with students had always been one of mutual respect and so on, and these characters didn't know the meaning of the word "respect."

Lage: Lincoln Constance seems to have been terribly disturbed by his contact with the students.

Bouwsma: I'm sure he was. I'm sure he was.

Lage: Did he bring you in on any of these, since you two had seemed to have a connection?

Bouwsma: He didn't involve me in that. I served as one of his baby deans.

Lage: Before these issues came up.

Bouwsma: Yes, that's right.

Lage: But you didn't help him out when he was vice chancellor under Strong? He went on after being dean to be vice chancellor under Chancellor Strong.

Bouwsma: I can't imagine Lincoln ever having had any respect for Strong as an administrator. Obviously, if he was subordinate to him, he had to accept his instructions. But I can't imagine Strong ever--Strong was not a decisive administrator. He simply didn't seem to know what was going on most of the time. He had no practical sense about the needs of the situation and how different this was from anything that he had ever come across as a member of the faculty.

Lage: Do you think the faculty recognized more quickly than he did then how different the tone had become?

Bouwsma: Well, I don't know. We were made to recognize matters of this kind rather quickly because students became just extremely obstreperous, and angry, and assertive.

Lage: Are you talking about your own students too? Students in your own classes?

Bouwsma: Not students in my classes, no. I never had to face that. But as chairman of this committee on student political activity--a position that I accepted with some reason to believe that it would never come into active existence, it would help to quiet things down simply by existing--that turned out not to be the case.

Lage: That sounds like somebody's wishful thinking.

Bouwsma: You know, it would have been true before that period. Generally, we could count on the respectful demeanor of students, but students during that period of the sixties were by no means respectful.

Lage: Do you have any explanation for this shift?

Bouwsma: I really don't know. I think there was a kind of explosion of behavior that under normal circumstances would have been inconceivable, students rejecting faculty authority in favor of the higher morality of their political views.

Lage: Did you draw correspondences between this and historical periods that you studied?

Bouwsma: No, I don't think I did. I didn't understand what was going on. I didn't try to sort things out given the tensions of the situation. It was not a period of calm, reasonable, behavior on the part of the faculty either.

The Tumultuous Late Sixties: Relationship with Chancellor Heyns and Role as Vice Chancellor

Lage: Now after the Free Speech Movement calmed down, and Strong resigned as chancellor, and Roger Heyns came in, we had further issues, the war, the People's Park incident in '69.

Bouwsma: Roger Heyns is a distant cousin of mine, and I had, until his recent death, great affection, warm feelings towards Roger. He was in a terrible situation. I think he was quite clear in his mind that he stepped into a situation that was far more intricate, far more difficult to deal with, than he had anticipated. I think he handled it about as well as anybody could, but my personal admiration and affection for him may now obscure my perception of that period.

Lage: Did you know him as a distant cousin from Michigan?

Bouwsma: He and I coincided in a church-sponsored boys' camp. He was five or six years older than I. I was one of the younger boys in the camp. It was a music camp, and I still remember that he played the saxophone at that time. I don't think he kept it up.

Lage: So you had just a slight acquaintanceship.

Bouwsma: Well, I knew who he was. I knew that we were distantly related, and I suspect that he knew that also and indeed greeted us very warmly. We went through a reception line with him. It was funny--I don't think Beverly would be pleased by my reporting this-- but when I became his academic vice chancellor he indicated to her that he was not satisfied with the way she was dressing. [laughs]

Lage: Does that happen frequently in the academic world?

Bouwsma: Oh, I think very, very rarely, but he knew what he was paying me, and he thought that we could use a little better wardrobe for Beverly for state occasions, at any rate.

Lage: So was there an adjustment made?

Bouwsma: I don't think Beverly did more than share her amusement with me.

Lage: That's very funny. Now how did you happen to become his vice chancellor? Why did you take that role on? You don't sound like a person who's thrilled with administrative duties.

Bouwsma: I wasn't, though I was very curious, and when he asked me to become his academic vice chancellor, he was very persuasive. When he asked people to do things, you did them. That was one of his many talents as an administrator.

Lage: Were you academic vice chancellor for one year or two years?

Bouwsma: Two years, as I recall [1967-1969].

Lage: What do you recall of these years? That was in the heart of antiwar protests, and strikes, and all kinds of activity.

Bouwsma: That's right. All kinds of untoward things would happen. For example, Beverly would be invited by Mrs. Heyns to various social events that the chancellor's wife was engaged in, and then the campus police would get word that demonstrations at the chancellor's house were being planned. And so the ladies no sooner got there than they had to put on their hats again and go home.

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Lage: Why did Roger Heyns appoint you as vice chancellor?

Bouwsma: I think Roger asked me to become his academic vice chancellor partly out of family sentiment. He knew that we had a distant relationship going back to our backgrounds in the Dutch community of western Michigan.

Lage: Did your backgrounds in the Dutch community in western Michigan condition you in any way that you saw the world similarly?

Bouwsma: It didn't. No, no. My father--and I never have been quite clear about why this was the case--but he wanted to get out of the Dutch community, so although he had a chance to stay on the faculty at Calvin College, he preferred to go west; that is, to Lincoln, Nebraska, and join the faculty of the state university. In many ways he felt like a refugee, displaced for most of his professional life outside the community where he always felt that he belonged, where his roots were, but he didn't want that.

Lage: Now what about Roger Heyns? Did he have a tie to the community?

Bouwsma: Oh, yes. His connection with it was a little different. His father, as I recall, was connected with the state bureau of prisons or something like that, and Roger got some of his training in dealing with difficult students by working with some of his father's difficult inmates. I may be getting this wrong, and there's no way of verifying it now because Roger died a few months ago.

Lage: Yes. When you were academic vice chancellor, did you have any responsibilities towards the unrest?

Bouwsma: Well, I was a member of the chancellor's cabinet, so to speak. I had to attend a lot of meetings where these things were being discussed. I had to participate in efforts to calm students down. I don't think I was of much use in those situations. There were other administrators who were closer to student affairs. I handled only academic problems, and those did not have much impact on the student behavior, but I had to participate in these cabinet meetings.

Lage: What do you remember of those?

Bouwsma: Boredom. [laughter]

Lage: Were there places where the academic issues overlapped with the student unrest? I'm thinking of the Third World liberation movement, the interest in an ethnic studies department.

Bouwsma: That was one, of course. The establishment of a separate, Third World office for--.

Lage: Did you get involved in that?

Bouwsma: A little bit, but basically my responsibility was the more academic side of the curriculum.

Lage: But that would include the academic side.

Bouwsma: Yes, but I don't recall that. I remember attendance at long, long, boring meetings which convinced me that I was not cut out to be an administrator. I had possibly some mixed thoughts about that for a while, but I was very, very glad when I was able to tell the chancellor that I didn't think I could handle this job anymore.

Lage: Had you thought you might go into a more active administrative role?

Bouwsma: Oh, yes. I had flirted with notions of this kind, of being useful and of exerting power, where these two notions were strangely combined. I sometimes thought that I might become a full-time administrator.

Lage: That seems so far from the world of the Renaissance and the Reformation.

Bouwsma: Yes, although as a scholar I was constantly involved with the tension between the active and the contemplative lives. I could see both sides. Eventually I was exposed to the temptations of becoming a full-time administrator, but I'm glad to say that these were never powerful enough to motivate me.

Lage: That's very interesting, and I like the way you described it as a temptation to be useful and to exert power.

Bouwsma: Yes. I couldn't possibly sort out those two rather different impulses.

Lage: Did you find that it was difficult to exert power in the midst of all the upset?

Bouwsma: I never thought I had any power. It never felt like a powerful position, even though I was, well, number three in the administrative hierarchy for the whole campus, never felt powerful.

Lage: Why is that, do you think?

Bouwsma: I think it's because I was too far removed from where things were actually happening, and, indeed, there was a hierarchy between me and the campus unrest. I had to be in on things, could participate in discussion, oh, how to handle them, but it never seemed to me that there were any issues of power involved.

Lage: Were most of the important decisions made in this collegial way? The cabinet meetings--.

Bouwsma: Yes.

Lage: Was that the kind of leader Roger Heyns was?

Bouwsma: Yes, I would say so. He surrounded himself with people who could give him good advice. [Earl] Budd Cheit was probably the most important member of his circle. Budd was--I've forgotten what his title was--assistant chancellor or something like that [vice chancellor].

Lage: Did you have any major points of disagreement with Heyns and Budd Cheit?

Bouwsma: No. I felt they had enough burdens without being criticized at the next lower level.

Lage: I know that Carl Schorske--he was an earlier member of the cabinet--was unhappy with a couple of incidents of calling in the police.

Bouwsma: Yes, well, Roger was very glad when he could dispense with any further advice from Carl. He had a very low opinion of Carl as an administrator, which he didn't hesitate sometimes to share with me.

Lage: Did the two of you see eye-to-eye over the years then? Did he like your administrative style?

Bouwsma: I admired Roger so much that I never felt any friction with him or any disposition to argue him out of a position he'd taken. I simply respected--you know, he had not only a quality of authority about him but a lot of administrative experience. I could only respect and honor that.

Lage: And a very difficult situation.

Bouwsma: Oh, very difficult, and he also carried out his responsibilities with a high degree of humor.

Lage: That helps, doesn't it?

Bouwsma: Yes.

Lage: Especially in those long, boring meetings.

Chairman of The Department of History, 1966-1967

[Interview 4: August 17, 2000] ##

Lage: Last time we talked a lot about the department, and we skipped your period as chairman of the department, which was 1966-67.

Bouwsma: I only lasted one year because at that point Roger Heyns made me his academic vice chancellor, so I was only chairman of the department for one year.

Lage: Could you make a comment about what the chairman does? What is the power of the chairman of the history department?

Bouwsma: The power of the chairmanship is very limited because what he chiefly administers is new appointments, and those have all to be reviewed and approved by the major professors.

Lage: The tenure committee within the department?

Bouwsma: The tenure committee, yes.

Lage: Does the chairman exercise a role in guiding that committee, or is he separate from it?

Bouwsma: As I recall, the chairman chiefly presided over meetings of the department, and those could be quite rancorous.

Lage: Tell me more.

Bouwsma: Well, there were lots of divisions in the history department when I joined it. There was an old guard, which resisted change. There was a group of young reformers who championed my appointment, which was a rather watershed development for the department. Then there were changes in the upper levels of the administration which favored the reformers in the department, as a result of which I was named chairman.

Lage: So you were named chairman about ten years after you came.

Bouwsma: That's right.

Lage: Was it still a rancorous department?

Bouwsma: Most of the resistance to change had collapsed. There had been many new appointments, and that tipped the balance.

Lage: Right. So did it function as a unified body?

Bouwsma: It functioned pretty well, yes.

Lage: I don't know other departments terribly well, but you hear a lot of stories about the anthropology department being very divided and rancorous, and sometimes political science, and sociology--.

Bouwsma: English--.

Lage: The history department at least likes to think of itself as a more collegial department. What is your impression?

Bouwsma: It was not when I first came into it as a junior member.

Lage: By the time you were in this leadership role, how would you describe it?

Bouwsma: Well, the reformers were in charge. The opposition had lapsed into silence. They were grumbling and--.

Lage: That would be expected. It was also in the midst of challenges that the student movement and the disruptions on campus must have presented, occasions for division among the faculty. Do you recall how people lined up, or did they line up ideologically?

Bouwsma: I think that the divisions in the student body had very little impact on the divisions among the faculty, which preceded them.

Lage: But were there new divisions between the group who were more likely to support students and protests and the group who were disturbed by it?

Bouwsma: My recollection is that there were not significant divisions within the faculty that paralleled divisions among the student body. The faculty tended to be quite jealous of its prerogatives, and they did not especially value student support.

Lage: So they had their own axes to grind. Were there divisions in what direction the department should take in terms of fields of study it should be offering, the type of professors who should be hired?

Bouwsma: I think the divisions were more political among the faculty, and there were many surprises about how the faculty divided. For example, George Guttridge, who had not made much of a name for himself or been much of a leader, was chairman when I came into the department, and he turned out to be, surprisingly, an ally of the young Turks.

Lage: Even though he himself was more of the old school?

Bouwsma: That's right. He'd been quite quiet and I think had been acceptable to all sides more or less for that reason. He was quite acceptable to the more conservative members of the department.

Lage: This is an interesting list; I think I sent you a xerox of this. It's the faculty dates of arrival, dates of departure. While you were chairman, '66, '67, the department hired Erich Gruen, Randolph Starn, Raymond Kent, Richard Kuisel, John Heilbron. Would you have had anything to do with choosing them?

Bouwsma: I supported some of them. I certainly supported [Frederick] Wakeman, Gruen, and Starn. Kent never amounted to much in departmental politics. He was something of an outsider. Kuisel was no help.

Lage: When you say "no help," what do you mean?

Bouwsma: He was no help to the champions of reform and improvement. Heilbron became one of the great stalwarts, and of course he went up in the administration too.

Lage: He ended up in the same position you had been in [academic vice chancellor], but many years later.

Bouwsma: [Raphael] Sealey didn't have a political bone in his body. He simply ignored all the things that went on. I don't remember about [Gerald] Cavanaugh. He could not have been very prominent. At least I deduce that from this.

Lage: He left, yes, in '73.

Bouwsma: Paul Alexander was quiet, but a supporter of the forces of righteousness. As a matter of fact, he became quite a good friend. He lived across the street from us, and we saw a great deal of the Alexanders.

Lage: He left after just ten years.

Bouwsma: He died.

Lage: Oh, he died!

Bouwsma: [Thomas] Bisson was a quiet ally of the forces of righteousness.

Lage: I'd like to know more about the forces of righteousness. How do you define them?

Bouwsma: They supported change without necessarily becoming leaders of it, as Bridenbaugh always fancied himself as a leader. But he exerted himself as a leader so vigorously that he lost his following. He was a leader without any

significant following. Bisson was quiet, but one of the good guys. I would say [Gerard] Caspary was the same. [David] Keightley, of course, became, in his quiet way, one of the stalwarts of the department.

Lage: By this, do you mean one's willing to take over administrative duties?

Bouwsma: That's right. That's right. Tom Smith, when he came into the department, was kind of old and tired. He was a very useful member of the department but very quiet. We brought him here from Stanford.

Lage: Did any of these people have to be persuaded on board? Does the chairman go out and recruit people?

Bouwsma: The chairman does not. In fact, the chairman was one of the weaker people in promoting support for an addition to the department. He presided over the discussions, but he did not really guide them.

Lage: Did you have problems with faculty leaving during this period?

Bouwsma: Well, Bridenbaugh left. [1962] He got disgusted because he couldn't be the leader.

Lage: Who left around the mid-sixties? Armin Rappaport left.

Bouwsma: Rappaport left because, well, we persuaded him that he'd be happier elsewhere.

Lage: Is that done in a sensitive manner?

Bouwsma: I don't know how sensitive that was. I don't think I had much to do with it, but as one of the reformers, I was glad he left because he did not show much promise as a scholar or take an active role in the affairs of the department.

Lage: I see. Hunter Dupree left in '68. Do you remember Hunter Dupree?

Bouwsma: Oh, I remember Hunter quite well. Let's see, when did he leave in relation to when Tom Kuhn left?

Lage: '64 for Tom Kuhn.

Bouwsma: Well, Hunter was also in history of science, and was so overshadowed by Tom that I thought he wasn't very happy.

Lage: So even when Kuhn left, he continued not to be happy, I guess.

Bouwsma: Hunter was a good scholar but not a very aggressive person or a very political person. I think he was relieved when he had a chance to leave.

The Hiring of Women in the Department

Lage: This is a list of the members of the department from 1950 to '69, and one thing that is very striking is that there's only one woman's name on this list: Adrienne Koch. She was here from '58 to '65, so she left in the mid-sixties.

Bouwsma: Well, I think you would find that fairly characteristic of most departments, especially in the social sciences. Departments in the humanities, like English, were different.

Lage: So you consider history more social science than humanities?

Bouwsma: It was in that respect. The issue of women in the department was not an important one for a long time.

Lage: You mean it wasn't in people's consciousness?

Bouwsma: We weren't looking for women. Later we certainly were and made quite a few hires of women in the department.

Lage: As you look back on it, now that there are quite a number of women in the department, do you have some thoughts about why women weren't considered?

Bouwsma: In the first place, there were not any large numbers of distinguished women whom we regarded as worthy of appointments in our great, glorious department. We were happy to bring Adrienne into the department, but she was unhappy in the department and a source of tension and turmoil within it.

Lage: Did this have to do with being the only woman, do you think, or were there other factors?

Bouwsma: Oh, well, she was by herself. She was brought into the department largely through the support of Henry May, who argued for her membership in the department and persuaded the rest of us to go along. He circulated her work and so on.

Lage: A kind of affirmative action.

Bouwsma: I don't think he felt he was--. [interruption to deal with hearing aid battery]

Lage: So it simply wasn't on people's minds.

Bouwsma: It wasn't on people's minds.

Lage: Do you remember any women brought up for consideration other than Adrienne Koch?

Bouwsma: I don't. The pool of able women historians was pretty limited at that time, and those who were available were pretty well-situated already. We did not make a concerted effort to locate such people.

Lage: Since we're on this subject, do you have some recollections of when there became more of a concerted effort to seek out women? Or did it not happen that way?

Bouwsma: It didn't happen during the period that we're discussing.

Lage: Right. But I'm thinking ahead now.

Bouwsma: Certainly it began gradually. I don't think that there was a very concerted effort to bring women into the department, although it gradually weighed on the department that it had too few women, and in view of the number of good graduate students we had who were women, that became increasingly important.

Lage: Now were there more graduate students who were women?

Bouwsma: Yes.

Lage: So you had a greater pool to draw from?

Bouwsma: We did. And gradually, the number of able women in the profession of whom we were aware--I'm not saying that we were aware of them immediately--but the pool of distinguished women who were able scholars in history certainly increased. My impression is that the department never made a very concerted effort to discover able women.

Lage: Even in the seventies and eighties?

Bouwsma: Even in the seventies and eighties, but they simply emerged.

Lage: And you couldn't overlook them.

Bouwsma: And could not be overlooked.

Lage: Did it change the department as you knew it to have more women?

Bouwsma: I don't think I ever felt strongly that the department was changed by this. I think we felt more comfortable as the numbers of women increased.

Lage: You did?

Bouwsma: Yes. There was never any overt resistance to bringing women into the department.

Lage: Just not a tremendous drive, it sounds like.

Bouwsma: We had no great drive, no.

Lage: Was there pressure from the administration?

Bouwsma: Yes, but it was gentle.

Lage: Was there a carrot-and-stick approach? Were positions opened up?

Bouwsma: I don't recall that this was true. We were encouraged to consider women, but we were under no pressure to favor the employment of women. Gradually, the situation--I won't say righted itself, there's still probably too few women in the department--but gradually things began to change, as I suspect happened all over the university, except probably in the physical sciences, maybe mathematics, where my guess is women are still in short supply.

More on Role as Administrator: "I'm Instinctively Not a Radical Reformer"

Lage: A couple of things happened during your chairmanship that I thought might have affected the course of events, and one was the change to the quarter system, which occurred in '66. Do you remember what that change might have meant for the department?

Bouwsma: I don't recall it as a traumatic or dramatic event, or one that was accomplished with difficulty. We all had to make some adjustments. We had to redivide our courses or reorganize our courses and so on. I don't remember that as posing enormous problems.

Lage: Sometimes it's cited as a source of faculty discontent with Clark Kerr, that faculty were very grudging about having this quarter system imposed on them.

Bouwsma: I do recall that this was regarded as one of Clark Kerr's babies because he tied this in with going on year-round operation. His idea was that we would have a summer session that would rival the regular sessions. That never happened. Students didn't want to come year-round.

Lage: What about faculty? Did they want to teach year-round?

Bouwsma: I think the faculty were divided. Some were happy to do that because they got another quarter's salary. Others refused to do it because they used the summers for other purposes. I don't think there was strong feeling about that matter.

Lage: Another thing that happened during your chairmanship was that Clark Kerr was fired after Ronald Reagan came in as governor.

Bouwsma: That's right.

Lage: In January '67. Do you remember the response to that in the department and on the campus?

Bouwsma: I think that there was--now I'm sort of reinventing possible reactions to this--my feeling was that Kerr had by this time lost a good deal of his original popularity. People didn't care very much.

Lage: People didn't feel this was the end of the university as we knew it.

Bouwsma: No. I don't think so. I know I didn't. I don't regard it as a great watershed.

Lage: Were people concerned about political interference? I would think there would be a little sense of unease at having the governor so involved in the university.

Bouwsma: I don't recall that there was much anxiety on that score. It may be a sign of the complacency of the faculty. Who would dare to interfere with faculty prerogatives?

Lage: Is that a pretty strong strain in the Berkeley faculty?

Bouwsma: I think it's unusually strong, that the Berkeley faculty is a self-governing unit, and no one in the upper reaches of the administration is going to interfere with it. They would do so at their peril, and they would realize how much resentment it would create.

Lage: So this is a fact of existence.

Bouwsma: That's right. I think the Berkeley faculty feels very strongly about its autonomy and that the upper reaches of the administration respect it.

Lage: When you then became part of the upper reaches of the Heyns' administration did that seem like a two-edged sword?

Bouwsma: We were always hemmed in by faculty committees, and the Berkeley faculty is a very self-governing group, and very self-conscious of its autonomy.

Lage: Now is this a good thing from your perspective?

Bouwsma: On the whole, I think it's been a good thing. Certainly I never felt, although I had a relatively exalted position in the hierarchy, that there was any power connected with it.

Lage: Was that frustrating? Can you think of incidents where you tried to move the campus in a certain direction and weren't able to?

Bouwsma: Not really. I guess I'm instinctively not a radical reformer, and I'm prepared to allow things to continue as they have for a long time and make the best of them. But I think that's been pretty much the Berkeley way.

Lage: It seems like it. It might be more frustrating to some people than others, depending on where they are on the reform scale. Let's move back into the vice chancellorship. You were vice chancellor for two years, September '67 through June '69. They were pretty wild and woolly years on the campus.

Bouwsma: I remember mobs going through Dwinelle Hall, smashing all the windows out of all the offices and so on, including mine. I recall pulling my secretaries in further so they wouldn't be cut by the glass as it was being shattered.

Lage: This was in the history department offices?

Bouwsma: No, this was in the chancellor's office.

Lage: Was that in Dwinelle also at the time?

Bouwsma: Yes.

Lage: Do you remember the issues that were involved there? What were the students rampaging about?

Bouwsma: I think the issues were extremely obscure, especially to those who were participating in the demonstrations. They didn't know what they were doing this for, what the objectives of the movement were. There was an undercurrent of, oh, quasi-revolutionary feeling on some parts of some students, that they deserved more rights and responsibilities. Well, they had no organization. I seem to recall it as a pretty spontaneous demonstration of anger and resentment on the part of students who were angry and resentful for reasons that no one understood, including them.

Lage: Two of the things that this anger and resentment seemed to be tied to were the Vietnam war protests and the Third World liberation movement.

Bouwsma: Well, that's right, but there was never more than a tiny minority of students who really wanted changes in the student body, say, bringing in large numbers of ethnic minorities into the student body. I think most students were pretty certain that they liked being part of an elite student body, and they didn't want changes. There have never been more than a minority of student protesters on behalf of any movement. I'm quite sure about that.

Lage: How did you feel about the way discipline was meted out? Did you have anything to do with that?

Bouwsma: I didn't have anything to do with it. There was a special committee that handled what we call rights and responsibilities of students. I don't know what it decided about students who were caught smashing windows and so on. I didn't pay much attention to that aspect of the thing.

Lage: Earl Cheit was on board as administrative vice chancellor. Was John Searle still on board when you came into the administration?

Bouwsma: Not really. He had been handling student affairs.

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Lage: Can you think of some of the other people who were part of the administration at that time? Arleigh Williams was dean of students. Would he have had a role in the decisions?

Bouwsma: No, he wouldn't. He was not really brought into the conferences that went on in the chancellor's office.

Lage: Who were making the decisions on how to deal with this kind of extraordinary disruption?

Bouwsma: Well, Heyns and Cheit, essentially. I was maybe brought in on some of the conferences, but I never had much to do with what was decided.

Lage: Did you think that they had the right balance of discipline and police action?

Bouwsma: I supported them. I knew that I wasn't up to making the kinds of decisions that they were making, and I thought that they were on the whole reasonable. I had no objection. In fact, they were not very severe with student violators, what was regarded as the student code of conduct in connection with demonstrations. For example, when these student mobs were surging through Dwinelle Hall smashing windows, no one ever knew who they were.

Lage: So they couldn't be disciplined, really.

Bouwsma: And indeed, I think there was a tendency within the administration to feel that they weren't really students anyway. They were hoodlums from off the streets. Whether this is true or not, I have no idea.

Lage: Well, what was the feeling within the administration? I would think it would be extraordinarily difficult.

Bouwsma: It was pretty desperate. What do you do? Universities had not had to face this kind of disturbance and this sort of destruction and contempt for law and order. We were sort of just waiting for things to blow over. At least that's my

sense of it. Heyns and Cheit made all the decisions about this. I was not really brought in.

Lage: Do you remember feeling that the university itself was at risk? Or that maybe it wouldn't blow over?

Bouwsma: I don't think I felt that way. I know there were a lot of people who did.

Lage: Would you have had a special role in dealing with faculty issues that weren't academic necessarily but issues of conduct?

Bouwsma: There were some faculty who were regarded as inciting the students, but I didn't have anything to do with that.

Lage: That wasn't part of your role.

Bouwsma: No.

Lage: There were several things that came up during those years that were political but also academic, and I wondered if you had something to do with them. One was the independent study course in which Eldridge Cleaver was brought in. How is it described? A student-initiated course--.

Bouwsma: Yes. As I recall, I had very little respect for these courses, but they seemed to be a stopgap measure to help quiet things down. But I was not consulted about them.

Lage: You didn't get into that as academic vice chancellor.

Bouwsma: I think Heyns and Cheit made most of the decisions. They didn't bring me in on them. I think I was regarded as a weak sister anyway, which I was.

Lage: In what respect?

Bouwsma: I was not eager to take a strong position about them. I was sort of standing on the sidelines wringing my hands. I was not a good administrative leader.

Lage: Did you have any role in the ethnic studies controversy?

Bouwsma: Yes, I was theoretically in charge of this.

Lage: Apparently the students and various factions wanted a Third World college, and we ended up with an ethnic studies department.

Bouwsma: That's right. I had very, very little to do with it, and no responsibility over it. I didn't want any.

Lage: Did you negotiate with faculty? The Academic Senate must have gotten in on this.

Bouwsma: It must have, and I don't recall. Now, I think it was regarded with askance as far as the faculty generally was concerned, as a stopgap measure to tide us over a certain critical moment, as far as the university was concerned. But I was not a strong administrator. By temperament I think I'm inclined to be passive. I watch with interest. I may have opinions of my own, but I don't share them or try to make them influential.

Lage: Last time we talked, you said you had thought of perhaps moving into administrative work more heavily. Did you learn more about yourself during these years?

Bouwsma: Oh, yes. I was very clear that I did not want to be an administrator after that. Occasionally I might have little fantasies about it.

Views on the Vietnam War and Educational Reform

Lage: A lot of the activity on campus had to do with the antiwar movement. What were your own views about the war?

Bouwsma: I was opposed to it. I was really on the side of the pacifists. That did not interfere with my support for the efforts of the chancellors, Heyns, and Cheit, to maintain order on the campus, prevent the antiwar movement from interfering with the academic activities on the campus. I certainly supported all of that, although my sympathy was opposed to the war.

Lage: A lot of people wanted to get the university educational machine involved in antiwar activities.

Bouwsma: Not me. Not me. No, I was never sympathetic to the notion of changing the role of the university because these things were going on.

Lage: I understand your son was a war resister.

Bouwsma: Yes.

Lage: Did he go to jail, or to Canada?

Bouwsma: Eventually he did go to Canada. He participated in antiwar demonstrations, and I remember an occasion when I was sort of an observer of these things, and here he showed up in a leadership capacity, and I think it was Beverly who remarked that we both came home early that afternoon with headaches, having had this little personal confrontation that neither of us wanted.

Lage: Was your son a student at the time?

Bouwsma: Yes, he was.

Lage: That complicated life for you, I would think.

Bouwsma: It did a little bit. This was my oldest son.

Lage: And what is his name?

Bouwsma: John.

Lage: The Free Speech Movement and all those affairs seemed to promote some effort at educational reform. We had the Muscatine Report and there was the experimental college--did you have anything to do with those?

Bouwsma: I had nothing to do with that movement. I neither supported it nor opposed it. My feeling now is that the whole thing was a futile effort and a waste of time. That's my view now.

Lage: That this kind of experimental adjustment to the curriculum is not valuable?

Bouwsma: I didn't see how it was, no.

Lage: Well, some of the things seem to have stuck. Some of the Muscatine recommendations were very specific and they instituted freshman seminars and more independent study, and some pass-fail options, as the Muscatine report suggested.

Bouwsma: As nearly as I am aware now, none of those things persisted very long.

Lage: So it's difficult to reform the university?

Bouwsma: Oh, you can say that again. It's very, very difficult to make fundamental changes, of an educational kind anyway.

Lage: Why is that?

Bouwsma: Because universities are very, very conservative institutions. They're very, very difficult to change, and most efforts at changes, unless they're very, very small changes, are doomed to fail.

Lage: So slight adjustments this way and that, but nothing major.

Bouwsma: That's right.

Lage: Do you basically think that the way the university is set up, ours in particular, with lecture courses, is a good way to educate students?

Bouwsma: I don't know that it's a good way to educate students generally; it's not an ideal way, but the University of California has to deal with masses of students, and its large lecture courses, broken up into small sections taught by graduate students, I see no alternative to this given the numbers of students we're called on to deal with. This is not Haverford. I can think of all kinds of better ways of taking care of students than are possible given the numbers of students that we have to deal with. I think we probably do about as well as we can, short of at least tripling our funding. And I would hate to see huge additions to the faculty.

Lage: Because?

Bouwsma: Because the institution becomes increasingly cumbersome.

Two Years at Harvard, 1969-1971, and Then Happily Home to Berkeley

Lage: Let's talk about why you stopped being vice chancellor and went off to Harvard.

Bouwsma: I didn't like it. I didn't like it, and I'd known for some time that I always had an out, that Harvard was prepared to give me a job.

Lage: There had been offers to you from Harvard before, right?

Bouwsma: Yes, and as I recall now, the result of those earlier offers was that the people at Harvard let me know they were just waiting me out. I could come when I was ready. The job was going to be open. In '69, I decided I was ready to go.

Lage: Was there a specific last straw?

Bouwsma: It was, I think, probably because I got too much involved with the administration. I was an academic vice chancellor, and I hated all the meetings I had to attend. I hadn't realized that one of the reasons Harvard was interested in me was that Harvard was having troubles of its own.

Lage: Oh, great.

Bouwsma: But it wasn't nearly as bad there.

Lage: Couldn't you have just gone back to your role as professor and left the administration? Why didn't you pursue that?

Bouwsma: I just felt I had to get away altogether. As long as I was at Berkeley, I was fair game for trying to help the administration through its troubles.

Lage: Was it complicated by your respect for Roger Heyns or your relationship with him?

Bouwsma: Sure. I really always had enormous respect and admiration for Roger, and I was sorry to learn of his recent death. I admired him enormously, and especially his ability to keep calm in the most unlikely circumstances, keep calm enough to deal with situations as they arose. I was inclined to go to pieces. That's another thing that meant that I was not cut out to be an administrator, even though there were glories about running things that are always attractive to me.

Lage: You have a strain of liking to have a little power.

Bouwsma: That's right, I do.

Lage: But emotionally it was just--?

Bouwsma: I couldn't handle it. I would get too upset.

Lage: Tell me what you found at Harvard.

Bouwsma: Well, I found for one thing that one of the things the Harvard administration was interested in was my experience as an administrator under difficult conditions at Berkeley.

Lage: Were they having similar disruptions?

Bouwsma: Sure. They were going on everywhere. I don't remember too clearly what the Harvard experience was like. I remember the teaching was quieter.

Lage: When you say "quieter," what do you mean? You never think of teaching as not being very quiet.

Bouwsma: The atmosphere was less tense, shall we say.

Lage: How did you find the students, compared to Berkeley students?

Bouwsma: There were more serious students at Harvard. I liked that, but I missed Berkeley.

Lage: What did you miss?

Bouwsma: I missed the kind of openness that characterized Berkeley.

Lage: Can you give me an example? I'm not totally clear.

Bouwsma: Well, there's always a distance between faculty and students at Harvard. Even though those years were not quite so calm at Harvard as I remembered them when I was a graduate student and an undergraduate, there was a kind of guarded respect for the faculty. Classes were not likely to be broken up.

Lage: That sounds like something you might have welcomed.

Bouwsma: I did welcome it.

Lage: But what was the lack of openness? Was that among the faculty, or in relation to the students?

Bouwsma: In relation to students, certainly there was a distance always between faculty and students, about which I had mixed feelings. It was more difficult to teach at Harvard because one didn't live near there. I had to commute, and I didn't like that part of it. We lived half a block away from this house in Berkeley. I could keep an eye on the campus, as a matter of fact.

Lage: And you still do here.

Bouwsma: As I still can.

Lage: You were there for two years.

Bouwsma: I was there for two years.

Lage: And did they actually try to get you to do some administrative work, or did you do some there?

Bouwsma: No, I was left alone. At least that's what I remember.

Lage: How did you happen to return to Berkeley?

Bouwsma: I missed Berkeley.

Lage: Did your family also miss Berkeley?

Bouwsma: Oh, Beverly never wanted to go. I think she was very happy when I was invited back and agreed to go.

Lage: Would this have been something you would discuss with Beverly?

Bouwsma: I'm sure we did discuss it. We discussed everything. But you'll be talking with her.

Lage: I'll get her story. It's probably going to be fuller than yours [on the Harvard experience]. Who made you the offer to come back?

Bouwsma: The Berkeley department began to get reports, among others, from people who had visited me. I was not altogether happy at Harvard.

Lage: So they made their move.

Bouwsma: Berkeley invited me back, and I practically said yes over the telephone.

Lage: [laughs] You were glad to get the offer. Good! And you came back as Sather chair. Was it the Sather chair?

Bouwsma: That's right.

Lage: You'd had a chair when you left as well, had you not?

Bouwsma: I've forgotten which one, but I'd had a chair before, and I think that the Berkeley department decided that once the Sather chair was vacant, they should offer it. They could use it to invite me back.

Lage: When you got back, were you still glad you'd come?

Bouwsma: Yes. I've never regretted that.

Lage: Is that when you moved to this house?

Bouwsma: I've forgotten where we lived when we first came back. Beverly will remember.

Lage: So now we have you back in Berkeley. It's 1970. We're going to defer our discussion of the book on Venice till next time, but I just want to bring up something that you put in your acknowledgments, since we've been talking about the troubles on campus.

Bouwsma: I said something about that. I know that I did, and I'm trying to remember.

Lage: Here, why don't you read it? It's the last paragraph of your acknowledgments. [*Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty* (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1968)].

Bouwsma: "The later stages of my work were accomplished during the disorders that have agitated Berkeley since '64, and these well-publicized events have taught me a good deal about the realities that underlie political discourse. They required of me, as of other academic men, some direct participation in the *vita activa civile*, and they considerably deepen my understanding of the relation between political liberty and intellectual vitality, of the contradictions between idealism and political accommodation, of the tension between freedom and order, and the terrible anxieties this can generate in a crisis, and of the strain such anxieties impose on the sense of community. The relation between experience and work also taught me something about the nature of the historical understanding, even perhaps when it attempts to grapple with events remote in both space and time, as when you're involved, you realize what involvement is like, even in the past."

Lage: It's very intriguing. Did it affect how you approached some of the issues in this book?

Bouwsma: I'm sure it did, but it's very hard for me to put myself back in that frame of mind when the things I was writing about Venice were remotely connected with the things that were happening to me right here and now.

Lage: One of your themes overall in your work seems to be this tension between order and liberty.

Bouwsma: Yes, that's true.

Lage: And here you were dealing with it in the Heyns administration. Did your academic work and all the thought you'd given to this affect how you looked at the Berkeley scene?

Bouwsma: I'm sure that there are connections. What the connections are, I'm less sure about. The Venice book was completed before I took on the job with Roger.

Lage: I see. It was published in '68, but you'd already finished work on it.

Bouwsma: That's right, and I was working with Heyns between '67 and '69.

Lage: So maybe the real need to grapple with these things hadn't occurred yet, but you'd seen a lot of other disruptions on campus.

Bouwsma: That's right.

Lage: It's intriguing, the relationship between the themes that have always engaged you.

Bouwsma: I was always aware of the connection between the work I was doing and the kind of thing I was writing about.

Lage: Let's finish for today, then, unless you have more to say about these administrative and educational matters.

Bouwsma: I don't think I have more to say. I'm sorry I'm not more forthcoming here, but I often felt the fact that I had written about political responsibility in my Venice book had a connection with what I was trying to do within the chancellor's office.

Lage: The book affected the chancellor's office?

Bouwsma: Oh, sure.

Lage: Any more specifics on that idea?

Bouwsma: No, except that my experiences in the chancellor's office while I was completing bringing the book into publication were always close to my mind while I was working, and so different from my first book, which didn't have much to do with action and activity.

Lage: It's more than coincidental, maybe.

Bouwsma: May have affected my Calvin book. I don't know.

Lage: That will come up next.

Bouwsma: I'll have a look at that.

Lage: Yes.

IV SCHOLARLY WORKS, RETIREMENT YEARS

[Interview 5: August 24, 2000] ##

Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty

Lage: This is our fifth session with Bill Bouwsma, and we're talking about your scholarly work today, starting with the Venice book.

Bouwsma: There was no mystery about my choice of a book on Venice. It had to do with the fact that most Renaissance historians, and I always thought of myself as belonging to that group, worked on Florence, and there had been very little done with Venice. So I decided I'd do Venice, Florence being rather thoroughly covered by my colleagues.

Lage: Why had your colleagues overlooked Venice?

Bouwsma: Oh, I think birds of a feather tend to go in flocks. Florence was the favorite place for most Renaissance historians. There were many very competent historians of Florence, including some of my closest friends, like Gene Brucker, and I didn't want to appear to be competing with them. I wanted to do something that was fresh and mostly uncovered by other historians, so I chose to do Venice as the other great center of Renaissance activity and culture.

Lage: Did Venice seem to be a place where the dichotomy that you seem interested in between order and liberty was more in evidence?

Bouwsma: It was not in evidence to me when I chose to do it. I chose to do it because it was virgin territory. It's been subsequently pretty well covered.

Lage: Did your book open interest in this topic?

Bouwsma: I don't think it had much to do with that. I chose to work on Venice because other people had not done it. I would not be competing. I had a fresh field.

Lage: Now why did you zero in on Paolo Sarpi?

Bouwsma: I suppose I've always been attracted to significant individual figures with a considerable body of work that I could mine in some depth. At the time I chose to work on Sarpi, I was almost alone.

Lage: Was he a figure that people had paid much attention to?

Bouwsma: Not in the context of the standard Renaissance questions, and that's what I proposed to do, work on a Venetian figure with a substantial body of work. Sarpi, among others, was interesting to me because he was a historian, among

other things. I discovered that there was a considerable body of work. He was increasingly being recognized as a significant figure but not in the context of Renaissance studies.

Lage: You mentioned the questions that one asks in Renaissance studies. What is that framework?

Bouwsma: As far as Florence was concerned, it was the Florentine republic that attracted western historians, and that subject had been pretty deeply mined. Some instinct took me to Sarpi.

Lage: You mention in the acknowledgment that Hans Baron--

Bouwsma: Baron was a formidable and influential historian. He put a lot of people off because his personality was not attractive.

Lage: Where was he from?

Bouwsma: He was a German, like so many of an older generation of Renaissance scholars who worked in Italian things. This was also true in Florence to begin with.

Lage: Has this all been studied, why the German scholars were so interested in Florence?

Bouwsma: Remember, this was the thirties, and there were many German scholars, especially German Jews, who took up the cudgels for republicanism in the Renaissance, and they flocked to Florentine studies. One of the leading German Jewish scholars, refugees in the thirties who came to this country, was Hans Baron. I think it was Baron who suggested that I might work on Venice rather than Florence. He and I became fairly close friends, although I did not like to admit that I'd been much influenced by him.

Lage: Because he wasn't a popular man?

Bouwsma: Oh, he was very unpopular. He was personally ugly and difficult, a little fellow, highly polemical in his style, and he didn't have many friends among other Renaissance scholars, even German Jews.

Lage: Was he attached to a university?

Bouwsma: No, he never had a university appointment. He had the title of bibliographer, worked at the Newberry Library in Chicago, and I became acquainted with him when I would go up to the Newberry. He was very unpopular because he was a very angry, vindictive, bitter little man.

Lage: Towards his fellow scholars?

Bouwsma: Yes, because others had made it. Others among German refugees had made it and had good academic employment and so on. Baron never did. It was partly because he was not personally very attractive, so he did not have a teaching appointment anywhere. He resented this and resented other people who did have, like Theodore Mommson, Felix Gilbert. He was this lonely, unattractive little bibliographer at the Newberry Library in Chicago, without students.

Lage: Did you get to know him through your research or in the Society of Renaissance Scholars?

Bouwsma: In the Society of Renaissance Scholars. I was at the University of Illinois, which is only a hundred miles south of Chicago. I would get up there, and I made friends with Baron, and allowed myself to be somewhat guided by him. He suggested that I look into developments in Venice, since Florentine circles were pretty well populated by everybody else.

Lage: So you apparently could get along with him if he took the time to offer his guidance.

Bouwsma: I don't know that there was any particular skill on my part. I just fell into the role of being guided by him and guided into work. It was Baron, I think, who got me interested in Fra Paolo Sarpi. He didn't know anything about Sarpi, and I had no reason to follow his advice and work on Sarpi, but I became fascinated by Sarpi.

Lage: What fascinated you? I think that would be something for you to explain. You have to really live with the man, almost, to write a book focused on all of his work.

Bouwsma: That's right. Well, for one thing, no one else was working on Sarpi much.

Lage: You're so practical!

Bouwsma: Well, there's a practical side to one's choice of subjects to research.

Lage: But did he embody something that you saw as particularly interesting?

Bouwsma: I found Sarpi very interesting, an independent figure important as a historian, important in Catholic circles. No one else was working on him. I became deeply interested in him. His works were quite accessible in good modern editions. He was also a historian. He wrote a massive history of the Council of Trent from an antipapal standpoint.

Lage: Was it good history?

Bouwsma: It was solid, it was massive, it had an anti-Roman point of view, and I found all those things attractive.

Lage: Was Sarpi a Venetian through and through? Did he represent Venice well?

Bouwsma: Yes.

Lage: So is some of the antipapal thing a conflict between Rome and Venice?

Bouwsma: Yes, that was part of what attracted me.

Lage: I'm looking at your acknowledgments to get clues. You acknowledge your colleagues in the history department, and then also Juergen Schulz, your fellow Venetian at Berkeley? Who was he?

Bouwsma: Juergen was an art historian who worked on Venetian subjects.

Lage: Was he of help in the thematic part of the book or in the illustrations?

Bouwsma: I don't know. I think my acknowledgment to him was partly a matter of courtesy.

Lage: I see. Not a central influence on the book.

Bouwsma: No. Not an important influence on my own development either.

Lage: Now you mention in the book that you ended up focusing on the "powerful myth of Florence as the ideal combination of liberty and order." This again is a theme that seems to run through your books, and when you got to Venice you found this same liberty and order theme.

Bouwsma: It was Hans Baron who suggested that there was a continuity. Here were the two great Renaissance republics of Italy--.

Lage: And one hadn't been studied.

Bouwsma: One hadn't been studied, so I chose to do Venice and found it much more interesting than I would have believed possible.

Lage: It seems that you, in all of your work, like to focus on a person.

Bouwsma: I think that's quite true.

Lage: You focused on Sarpi as a symbol, I guess, of Venice, or as a way to get into what Venice was about?

Bouwsma: Yes.

Lage: And then your next stop was Calvin [*John Calvin: A Sixteenth-Century Portrait* (Oxford University Press, 1988)]. That's a big jump.

Bouwsma: I was in Renaissance studies, but Renaissance studies were always closely connected with the Protestant Reformation in my mind, and Baron helped to confirm my sense of a connection there. So I moved from Florence to Venice, and in that way from the Renaissance to the Reformation. There was always a large component of my interest in the history of Christianity and its various twists and turns in the period of my specialty. I found in Venice a much richer vein to mine than I had expected. Venice was Catholic, but anti-Roman, and insistent on its autonomy as an ecclesiastical power.

Lage: Even as an ecclesiastical power.

Bouwsma: Even as an ecclesiastical power. And Sarpi expressed that sense of autonomy. Venice was Roman Catholic, but insisted on freedom from control by Rome. I was interested in the possibilities of autonomy, I guess.

Lage: Was Venice successful in this kind of delicate balance, or Sarpi himself successful?

Bouwsma: Well, Sarpi certainly gave expression to the sense of autonomy within the larger structure of the Roman Catholic Church, and that appealed to me.

Lage: When you say "history of Christianity," that you had an interest in this for a long time, were you looking at it politically, or as a body of thought, or a spiritual system, or what?

Bouwsma: "Spiritual system" probably comes closer than the other alternatives you've mentioned. I guess this has been a constant among my interests for many years.

Lage: Do you tie that to your own personal history?

Bouwsma: Yes.

Lage: Is it part of finding out your own schema?

Bouwsma: My parents were both brought up within the Dutch Calvinist community in western Michigan, but my mother was less influenced by this. My mother always wanted to be much more of a conformist in the communities to which she was introduced by my father when he went into the academic, and my mother didn't care so much about the influence of Dutch Calvinism. My father, however, was always very loyal to it and defended it, proclaimed his own identity with it, even though he preferred to leave western Michigan where he felt more comfortable spiritually and went out into the wider world. He was always very loyal to his Dutch Calvinist roots, but not quite to the

point of identifying himself as a Calvinist. He was--oh, he tried various Presbyterian congregations--hated them. They weren't nearly orthodox enough for him, but I don't think he was at all orthodox himself. I don't think he really faced the degree of his own alienation. He had the strong sense of that being where his roots were, but he always managed to avoid identification with the Dutch community.

Lage: If he were asked what his religion was, what would he answer?

Bouwsma: He might say he was a Calvinist.

Choosing Calvin: "Seeking Out My Roots"

Lage: And then you wrote the book on Calvin. Is there a connection there?

Bouwsma: Oh, sure.

Lage: Tell me about that.

Bouwsma: All of my historical activity, I think, has involved various kinds of searching for roots. I was not consciously, when I wrote my Calvin book, doing that, but in effect that was the primary motivating force.

Lage: Even though it wasn't conscious at the time?

Bouwsma: I don't think it was.

Lage: Do you remember when and why you picked Calvin as a subject?

Bouwsma: I think that's not too difficult to figure out. He loomed very large in--for my father, for the background in which I was brought up--the strange combination of deep roots and rootlessness in my father.

Lage: Did you feel the same sense of deep roots in Calvinism for yourself?

Bouwsma: I think I was seeking to understand better aspects of my own background and formation, but I think the effect of doing the Calvin book was more to assert my own independence of this area of my formation.

Lage: Now how is that? Can you expand on that, how that worked?

Bouwsma: I suppose much of my motivation in my historical work has involved seeking out my roots in order to understand them better and by understanding them, to make myself more independent.

Lage: Were you successful when you finished the Calvin book?

Bouwsma: Oh, I think so.

Lage: Interesting. So you're kind of doing two things at once when you're writing.

Bouwsma: Sure. I think that's always been the personal and the professional. I manage to combine them.

Lage: Because in your book you're talking about Calvin as a way to enter the sixteenth century and learn about the sixteenth century.

Bouwsma: Well, of course I am professionally a historian, and I always have to be conscious that I'm dealing with the past.

Lage: Yes. You mentioned in your introduction to that book that secular historians haven't been much interested in Calvin.

Bouwsma: That's right. Historians generally have been anticlerical, antireligious, anti-Christian, and I don't think that historians have paid much attention to my work on Calvin. They don't regard religious history as terribly important.

Lage: That seems to complicate your identity as a historian and your interest in things religious.

Bouwsma: In a way I'm simply dealing as a historian with things that interest me the most as an individual, as a person whose identity is formed by the past.

A Course on Christianity

Lage: Now didn't you launch a course in the history of Christianity in the history department?

Bouwsma: It was a new course. I think my colleagues--well, historians are an independent lot. They don't mess around with each other very much. I think there was some amusement in the department when I proposed this history of Christianity, which involved investigating very complicated and difficult questions, but the ones that interested me the most.

Lage: Were there objections to launching the course?

Bouwsma: No. My colleagues both at Illinois, where I started this, and at Berkeley--. Historians respect each other's interests or ignore it.

Lage: Have others taught this course?

Bouwsma: No. I invented it.

Lage: You invented it and taught it, but someone's teaching it now. Isn't Brady teaching it now?

Bouwsma: It's been a very successful course. Students are interested, and I demonstrated that, I guess, pioneered, transferring much of my attention in this direction. I don't want to protest too much about my originality and creativity, but other people have found the success of these courses with students to be useful for their own careers and stimulating to their own interests.

Lage: Did you have a sense of why students were so interested in the course? What kind of students did it attract?

Bouwsma: A wide variety of students. That is, there were always some pious students who thought of a course like this as like Sunday school.

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Lage: I think you got cut off here when you were saying there was a lot of serious interest in the history of Christianity.

Bouwsma: A lot of serious interest. I didn't try to explain this too much, but I profited from it because I had large enrollments.

Lage: Is that a good thing in the history department?

Bouwsma: Sure.

Lage: This was an upper division class.

Bouwsma: Yes.

Lage: What approach did you take?

Bouwsma: The approach of an objective historian as nearly as I could make it. It was not an effort in indoctrination, but helping a considerable group of students to understand their own roots, which I've always thought of as a major task, European history.

Lage: And you found that that was one of the reasons students came to the class?

Bouwsma: Yes, and a rich diversity of students.

Lage: Did you have some who were Campus Crusade for Christ members?

Bouwsma: I had some students like that, but on the whole I don't think that that was a major aspect of what attracted students.

Lage: When you say it was a rich diversity, did you have students from other religions who took it?

Bouwsma: Not really. Students with a variety of interests, a variety of backgrounds, many of whom had never been exposed to the history of Christianity.

Lage: Other than maybe Sunday school.

Bouwsma: Well, they never got anything like that in Sunday school.

Back to Calvin; and *The Waning of the Renaissance*

Lage: Now that took us away from your book on Calvin. We probably should get back to it.

Bouwsma: It's a more concentrated example of seeking out my roots.

Lage: Did your thinking or feeling about Calvin change as you wrote this book?

Bouwsma: No, I began with a considerable respect, and I emerged with a deepening of that respect.

Lage: To the uninformed, Calvin comes across as kind of a forbidding figure. Was he?

Bouwsma: Not to me.

Lage: Was he anything like your father?

Bouwsma: My father's adaptation to life was by way of jokes and humor. As a teacher of philosophy, he puzzled students because he didn't seem to be taking things very seriously. He was constantly challenging.

Lage: How has the book been received?

Bouwsma: It's been well received.

Lage: Was it of interest in the religious community as well as the historical community?

Bouwsma: I think not very much to the religious community. They had their own views about Calvin--some positive, some negative--a mix. But they weren't interested in taking him seriously as a historical personage, as someone who was important in their own formation, for example.

Lage: Or in the formation of our culture.

Bouwsma: That's right.

Lage: I'm interested in the importance you put on the personal in history because it seems to me that's what oral history is all about, trying to look at individual lives, and they always represent something broader, of course. You really do emphasize this, that by studying a person, we can enter into the life of an era.

Bouwsma: I hope that I leave that impression.

Lage: Before you wrote the Calvin book, I came across many references to the fact that you planned to apply the theme of your Venice book to the whole of European culture. It sounded as if you had in your mind a--

Bouwsma: I maybe had that vaguely on my mind, but that implication of my work was destined to fade. It was too big, and here I am in my later seventies. One is compelled to understand increasingly how limited the possibilities of one's life are.

Lage: But you did end up doing this book. The book that's in proof now seems to be the book that you were thinking about in the early eighties.

Bouwsma: Well, that's correct.

Lage: Why did your plan get postponed for so long?

Bouwsma: You know, I've always seen myself as a Renaissance historian, and now it seemed appropriate to call this book *The Waning of the Renaissance* as a phase in European history that in fact came to an end.

Lage: When do you see the Renaissance as waning?

Bouwsma: I'm rather old-fashioned in my approach to the Renaissance as a period of excitement, and innovation, and experimentation, and I think that by the earlier part of the seventeenth century, the experimentation, the innovations are waning.

Lage: Do you look at all of European culture in this new book, or do you focus on a place?

Bouwsma: I try to deal in very general terms in the new book.

Lage: So it really is a very broad synthesis?

Bouwsma: I think that's an appropriate description of it. It brings my work as a historian to a kind of climax, and that means a conclusion.

Lage: Is that pleasing to you that you ended with this major and very broad-based work?

Bouwsma: I would say that it does please me. The new book, of course, is in page proofs now, and I think it's an appropriate way to complete or bring my career to a climax or an end.

Lage: You mentioned to me when we talked last week--I was trying to get at how the times of unrest in the late sixties and early seventies might have affected your work--and you said, it didn't really affect your Venice work because that had been completed, but it did affect the Calvin work. Is that something you could explain? Was your choice of Calvin as a figure affected by the actual times you had lived through or your treatment of him?

Bouwsma: I think that my work on Calvin represents something of a departure from earlier studies of Calvin because I think that Calvin himself was fraught with contradictions and anxieties and so on, and that's not the standard view.

Lage: Oh, it's not?

Bouwsma: He's generally regarded as always very positive, authoritative, authoritarian.

Lage: Sure of himself?

Bouwsma: Yes.

Lage: And you found him not to be.

Bouwsma: No.

Lage: Did you look at different sources, or how did you come to this different view of him?

Bouwsma: I guess I was looking within myself.

Lage: That's very interesting. You understood him partly by looking at yourself?

Bouwsma: Yes.

Lage: Tell me how that went.

Bouwsma: Calvin has ordinarily been regarded as a very positive, authoritative figure, and I see in Calvin all kinds of tensions and conflicts and so on, so my Calvin is not the same as other people's.

Lage: What are your sources for the Calvin book?

Bouwsma: Well, reading Calvin.

Lage: Reading his own writing.

Bouwsma: I saturated myself. A large proportion of Calvin's writing that people think of is the institutes, but that's only one form in which his activity was expressed. Mostly, he was a biblical critic and wrote very extensive commentaries on the scriptures. I spent a great deal of my time going through these commentaries, which I found, contrary to most people's expectations, fascinating and exciting. I found all kinds of little things. Calvin let himself go.

Lage: What do you mean by that, "let himself go"?

Bouwsma: He was not rigid and systematic. A biblical commentary is a running commentary on the scriptures, and it makes possible all kinds of informal comments that pass through the mind of the commentator as he reads and allows himself to be stimulated by the scriptures themselves, so that most people would imagine that a biblical commentary must be very tedious and dry. In fact, you find commentaries full of surprises, little nuggets of gold.

Lage: Revealing of a person?

Bouwsma: Revealing of the person, and what he thinks about when he reads the scriptures. This can be a very private, personal, and stimulating experience if you go over a lot of biblical commentaries, and I did.

Lage: Why did he write the biblical commentaries? For whose eyes?

Bouwsma: I think first of all it was a way of stimulating his own thinking.

Lage: Were they of the nature of personal journals, or were they published in his time?

Bouwsma: My guess is that what happens when you do a systematic commentary on the scriptures is that you allow your mind to move freely instead of being cut and dried, which is what most people think a biblical commentary is like. You encounter all kinds of unexpected, surprising little nuggets of gold.

Lage: Did you find the vulnerability that you mention in the book? Did that come out in the commentaries?

Bouwsma: Oh, sure.

Lage: Were there inconsistencies or signs that he wasn't really sure of what he believed?

Bouwsma: I think that he did a pretty effective job of suppressing his insecurities, but it's a long time ago since I completed that part of my work.

"Sources of Wonder": Reflections on a Shifting Attitude Toward Human Complexity

Lage: As you look back, which of your books gives you the most satisfaction? Or which one did you get the most pleasure out of working on?

Bouwsma: I think my collected essays.

Lage: *A Usable Past* [*A Usable Past: Essays in European Cultural History* (University of California Press, 1990)].

Bouwsma: Yes. There's lots of diversity there. It's not a systematic work.

Lage: How did that come about? Had you planned to collect your essays, or did someone suggest that you do?

Bouwsma: I think the suggestions came from various directions, and I did not feel under any pressure. I felt quite good, spontaneous, in collecting my essays, and I had a lot of support from people who had read particular essays who encouraged me to pull them all together.

Lage: Do you want to mention people who encouraged you? Who within the history department do you consider your closest soul mate?

Bouwsma: I suppose I've felt closer to Henry May than to anybody else in the history department. Henry--well, you've spent a lot of time with Henry. You know how deeply serious he is, and he's always been encouraging to my sort of work, although I don't think he's spent much time with it.

Lage: He's an Americanist, after all.

Bouwsma: Yes, but his work in American history puts an emphasis on the kind of thing that I like to think about too.

Lage: What about Randy [Randolph] Starn? I read the introduction he did for the introduction to your body of work, and it was fascinating.

Bouwsma: Randy is a deeply empathetic person. I haven't looked at that introduction for a long time.

Lage: It would be interesting to know if you see yourself in what he says about you.

Bouwsma: It would be. That's a little assignment for the week ahead.

Lage: That would be interesting to reflect on how he's reflected on you. I thought it was fascinating, the things that he discerned in your work.

Bouwsma: I think I would be fascinated now more than I was originally.

Lage: There are a number of themes that I picked up in just a brief look at *A Usable Past* that I thought you might comment on, and one of those was you talk a lot about how the interest in intellectual history has changed and grown, changed and waned, like the Renaissance. When you came to Berkeley, they were still saying, "Intellectual history, is it really history?"

Bouwsma: Yes, and there was resistance to my appointment in the Berkeley history department on the ground that I didn't do real history.

Lage: But then it seemed to become a very popular form of history, for a number of years. And then I see in your essays here you're talking about the waning of interest. What happened?

Bouwsma: My own interest in intellectual history has gradually faded. It's partly because my perception of human beings has, I think, somewhat deepened and altered.

Lage: So how would you describe yourself as a historian now?

Bouwsma: I would say a cultural historian in a much broader sense. I suppose I began thinking of myself as an intellectual historian, a historian of ideas and so on. And it's gradually become something, I hope, deeper and richer, because I don't think of human beings as primarily intellectual anymore. That was a kind of late adolescent attitude, that I was thinking of myself as an intellectual historian. But now I think of human beings as far richer and more complex than the description of human beings as intellectual beings. I think of them as far deeper, richer, more complex, more mysterious, more wonderful.

Lage: I like the way you describe that--"more wonderful."

Bouwsma: Well, yes, sources of wonder.

Lage: You became interested in anthropological approaches and the web of meaning?

Bouwsma: Yes.

Lage: Tell me about that.

Bouwsma: My sense of human complexity has grown and deepened.

Lage: Does it grow and deepen because of your experiences, or because of your studies, for example, your reading in anthropology?

Bouwsma: I spent a year or two reading a lot in anthropological materials, and I think that that helped deepen my sense of human complexity and richness.

Lage: Do you recall when your interest in anthropological readings happened? Was it before the Calvin book or after the Calvin book?

Bouwsma: I would say before and during.

Lage: Whom did you read?

Bouwsma: Oh, I read the kinds of anthropological materials that were popular then. I read a lot of [Clifford] Geertz.

Lage: And that affected your approach to history?

Bouwsma: Oh, yes. Anthropologists seemed to have a much richer and more complex perception of human beings than most historians.

Lage: Now was your move--or shift or gradual change--similar to those of other intellectual historians? Was this happening in the discipline at large, or was it unique to you?

Bouwsma: I don't think it was unique to me. I wasn't paying much attention to what other historians were doing.

Lage: You weren't affected by trends in the field.

Bouwsma: I'm sure I was but not very consciously or deliberately.

Lage: So you don't really know if that was a shift in general.

Bouwsma: I think more and more historians were turning towards anthropology.

Lage: It seems in some of your essays, as well as in essays by others, that the events of the sixties are tied to the shift away from an interest in intellectual history. What was happening in the culture that affected how historians did their work?

Bouwsma: I don't know. At any rate, I became increasingly aware of the complexity of human beings.

Lage: Based on some of the experiences that you may have had in the real world?

Bouwsma: Probably.

Lage: Were there "aha!" experiences where you saw the effect of human action?

Bouwsma: My shift was much more gradual and undeliberate, unselfconscious.

Lage: I seem to be trying to make a nice, neat, tidy package here, and you're unwilling to have one. [laughter]

Bouwsma: Well, that would be an accurate reflection of what I see has been happening to me. I'm much less sure of myself or of my views, and I hope more flexible and adaptable.

Lage: Is that reflected in how you write your history?

Bouwsma: I hope so.

Lage: Are there other things you want to talk about in terms of your historical work that I've missed the boat on?

Bouwsma: You know, we've covered a lot of ground.

Lage: We have, I know.

Bouwsma: So I can't think that we've missed anything totally.

Lage: I feel ill-prepared to really plumb the depths of your mind.

Bouwsma: So do I [laughter].

Lage: Well, that's very kind of you. I think I need to pause here and see what we need to go on with. [brief pause]

Some Thoughts on Chairing the Department of History, 1982-1983, Minority Hires, and Teaching Graduate Students

Lage: Your presidency of the American Historical Association, '77-'78, tell me about that.

Bouwsma: This is an honorific, rather than a responsible assignment.

Lage: You're not supposed to take the association in a new direction?

Bouwsma: I don't know anybody who has ever tried to do that [laughs]. Some people feel that they've had careers of such distinction that they naturally succeeded to the presidency of the Historical Association. I never felt that there was any high degree of either responsibility or honor attached to it.

Lage: But you do give an important address as president.

Bouwsma: Yes. You have to.

Lage: And that's collected in your essays, *A Usable Past*. You were chair of the history department a second time, from '82 to '83. Do you recall anything of great import there?

Bouwsma: The chairmanship of a department on the Berkeley campus is maybe externally regarded as honorific, but I never felt that. It's a chore that everybody who can possibly be regarded as able to do that will have to do it sometime.

Lage: It's not something you look forward to, wielding the power of the chairmanship?

Bouwsma: There's no power in it. You preside over meetings of the department, but--

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Lage: You have said that departmental meetings are very boring. Tell me more.

Bouwsma: They're very boring, unless there is controversy, in which case they are sources of soul-searching, and conflict, and a sense of the tragedy of the human condition.

Lage: Is there any sense of pomposity in departmental meetings?

Bouwsma: I hope not. No, the departmental meetings are really quite informal. There are efforts to impose some sort of Robert's Rules of Order on them, but those never get very far.

Lage: Do people speak their minds if there are differences of opinion?

Bouwsma: Sometimes. But I don't regard my chairmanship of the history department as fraught with tension, or danger, or anything like that. You know, they're just something to get through with these meetings.

Lage: You don't recall any major controversies during that period.

Bouwsma: No.

Lage: You also chaired the personnel department several times in the period of the seventies and eighties, and we talked a little bit about recruitment of women faculty. What about recruiting minority faculty? Has that also been a problem for the department?

Bouwsma: The department has always been alert to any possibilities that might arise. We've had minority members. We haven't been very good at retaining them because a black member of our department attracts attention from other departments.

Lage: From other colleges.

Bouwsma: Yes.

Lage: So you've had minority members, and they often get recruited elsewhere.

Bouwsma: That's right.

Lage: We've talked about developing new courses, the history of Christianity. We haven't talked about any of your Ph.D. students. Would that be appropriate to discuss?

Bouwsma: I've had some very good students.

Lage: Elizabeth Gleason was one of your graduate students here.

Bouwsma: That's right. One of my first graduate students here.

Lage: And where did she go?

Bouwsma: She went first to San Francisco State and was then picked up at the University of San Francisco and spent most of her career there. She is a Catholic.

Lage: Do you have a considered approach with your Ph.D. students?

Bouwsma: When they're writing their dissertations, I play quite an active part in criticizing their work. After they've taken their degrees, well, you know, I occupy only a small niche in the history department, so I've not had huge numbers of students.

Lage: I was thinking more in terms of helping them choose a topic.

Bouwsma: Assign dissertation subjects. I've never tried to do that, and I'm opposed to it in principle. I think that the choice of a dissertation is more like the choice of a mate, and it ought to be a product of love and respect that can be developed only by the individual who is making the choice.

Lage: Would your students use you as a sounding board?

Bouwsma: I would hope so, and then I read the dissertation with considerable care.

Lage: Do you read it at various stages or the final product?

Bouwsma: I prefer to let them work things out for themselves first, and then I come in at the end.

Lage: What do you come in with? Suggestions big and small?

Bouwsma: Yes. I'm more interested in the larger problems that they occupy themselves with. Of course, if they make mistakes, I try to set them on the right path.

Lage: Have you enjoyed teaching?

Bouwsma: I have, yes.

Lage: You seem to give a lot of thought to it.

Bouwsma: I hope so.

Lage: Is that true of your fellow historians in general?

Bouwsma: My fellow historians have a very wide range of difference among how seriously they take various aspects of teaching, how seriously they take lecturing, for example. Crane Brinton at Harvard was one of the least responsible people I've ever encountered, though he was good in dealing with his own graduate students.

Lage: But not responsible in terms of lecturing?

Bouwsma: No. He didn't bother to prepare anything.

Lage: How common is that at Berkeley?

Bouwsma: I think preparation for teaching at Berkeley is pretty conscientious.

Lage: Is that the role of the chairman, to monitor the quality of teaching?

Bouwsma: The role of the chairman is whatever he chooses to make it.

Lage: Have any of the chairmen made that their priority?

Bouwsma: Not that I'm aware of. No, the academic departments at Berkeley rarely require much in the way of leadership. Mostly you have secretaries who schedule the meetings and let you know what needs to be accomplished at the meetings. I never thought much about the job of chairing the department. Things simply operated as committees would bring in reports. Appointment committees would bring in recommendations. These would be discussed at the meeting, but they rarely involved any burning issues.

Lage: It sounds like rather an ideal setting.

Bouwsma: Can be *very boring*.

An Examined Life: Final Comments on Retirement, Family, and Religion

Lage: You retired when?

Bouwsma: I retired about ten years ago, I guess.

Lage: Did that open up new vistas for you?

Bouwsma: No, no. It meant that I no longer had to teach a regular schedule of classes. I had more time for my own things.

Lage: You've written *The Waning of the Renaissance* in that period of time.

Bouwsma: Yes, I've continued to work.

Lage: It sounds like a very active retirement. Is there any other thing you would like to talk about in giving us a picture of you as a historian and a person?

Bouwsma: Well, I've never compartmentalized my professional work very effectively.

Lage: You mean separated out from your personhood?

Bouwsma: That's right.

Lage: Yes. It seems that way in the themes you choose and their treatment. You seem to be a person who leads a very examined life.

Bouwsma: I hope that's so. My father's influence had something to do with that. Ever since I can remember, he kept a journal, which, however, he did not keep very privately. I know my mother used to find out all kinds of things about him from reading his journals that he left open and I picked up this habit too and learned a lot from his journals when I was growing up.

Lage: Do you think he meant to leave them out for people to see?

Bouwsma: I think so. He found it difficult to communicate on an intimate level, especially with members of his own family.

Lage: Have you kept a journal?

Bouwsma: Off and on. Yes. Much the same format as my father's. My little black book. I haven't--well, I don't know--things I've jotted down in the last couple of years, I guess, because I haven't been going at it very systematically.

Lage: And do you leave yours about for people to read?

Bouwsma: I don't think there's anything much that people would be interested in, really.

Lage: Let me ask you about your own religious beliefs since you've given so much time and thought to the history of Christianity and also to your roots. How have your religious beliefs evolved throughout this process?

Bouwsma: I've always maintained a connection with organized religion. My convictions have fluctuated a lot. When I was in the army, I attended a Dutch Calvinist church in Denver, and made my profession of faith, as we call it. Then

Beverly entered my life, and she couldn't stand the Dutch Calvinism, so I took to going to the Episcopal church with her.

Lage: Was that her background?

Bouwsma: Yes.

Lage: Did you feel at home there?

Bouwsma: Why, you know, that's more than half a century ago now, and we have maintained our connection with the Episcopal church ever since and attend with some regularity. I don't regard my religious life as very satisfactory or very intense, but we go to St. Mark's Episcopal Church here. That is, I accommodated myself to what Beverly could endure.

Lage: Are you satisfied with that choice?

Bouwsma: More or less.

Lage: You haven't shopped around, or tried to find a more Calvinist church?

Bouwsma: No, and as far as I'm concerned, the Church of England was one of Calvin's own churches. He thought of it as one of his churches, and few Episcopalians realize this, but I know it. It gives me some satisfaction.

Lage: What about beliefs in the scripture and the teachings of Christianity? Has that evolved or fluctuated?

Bouwsma: It's fluctuated. There are times when my Christian fervor seems to be quite strong, and other times it practically disappears.

Lage: You seem to wed a certain skepticism with belief?

Bouwsma: Oh, yes. I think skepticism is built into genuine Christianity.

Lage: It makes you feel at home?

Bouwsma: Yes, that's right.

Lage: I think we should end on that note. A skeptical one.

Bouwsma: All right.

ANN LAGE

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